

The History of Kettlebells

There is much confusion about the history and origins of the kettlebells, some people believe they originated in ancient Greece, where it is understood that people used weights with handles. Another school of thought believe the germination of KB's began in Scotland where villagers would use old church bells or cast iron kettles filled with anything, from water to lead shot. Other groups argue KB's began in Russia and other 'Eastern Bloc' countries, where in recent times, it has developed into a competitive sport in its own right.



Where the ambiguity seems to end is that, in all countries, it appears that people would swing, throw, press or juggle the kettlebells as a form of both exercise and enjoyment. These 'drills' were then passed down throughout the generations.

It is reasonably well accepted by all parties that it is in 18th century Russia and the other Eastern Bloc countries where KB's were adopted at that time, kettlebells just happened to be used as weights to measure grains and other goods. Eventually, during festivals and fairs, vendors started swinging and lifting these kettlebells to show their strength, and quickly recognized the health benefits related to this activity. to develop both physical culture and sport.



The early scientific principles of Kettlebell training were laid down by Dr. Vladislav Kraevsky who introduced the use of kettlebells to the wider Russian public

Early in the 20th century, physical culturists, strong men and circus performers such as Arthur Saxon, Edgar Mueller and Eugene Sandow,

travelled extensively around the world and were exposed to Russian kettlebell training. Subsequently these Strongmen included kettlebells in their training and performances, introducing a wider audience outside of Russia to the cannonball shaped weights.

However, history took its toll on the humble kettlebell, stopping its rise to popularity in the west as the Soviet revolution and 2 World Wars caused Russian sports and traditions, to retreat within the Russian borders.

Nevertheless, kettlebells continued to flourish in the former Soviet Union. Training with kettlebells became common practice for people in rural areas, the military and Olympic athletes. In addition to their training program, Soviet Olympic weightlifters utilized kettlebells unilaterally in order to strengthen their weaker side.

In these countries kettlebells have been used for many years, in partnership with the more traditional Olympic lifts, in developing the following attributes to enhance their training programmes:

- Power
- Muscular Endurance
- Muscular Strength
- Injury Prevention
- Aerobic Endurance
- Functionality
- Flexibility
- Motor Skills

Whilst the amount of weight lifted across Europe varied to a degree. The most commonly used KB's amongst males are 16kg, 24kg and 32kg.

Due to the relatively low cost and general accessibility of kettlebells coupled with its excellent conditioning properties, the Russian general public were encouraged to join training groups as a way of developing their physical culture.



This is how kettlebell training evolved into a competitive event in its own right or as the Girevoy sport as it is more commonly known.

The first regional event took place in Russia in 1948 with its first national championships being held in 1985. The drills performed in these events are the overhead press, clean and jerk and the snatch.

As if to prove the effectiveness of kettlebell training in a sports specific capacity, the USSR team, during the 1980 Moscow Olympics, had a clean sweep of the gold medals in all the throwing events.

Due to the development of the trunk and rotational movements in kettlebell training they were considered an integral part of their Olympic preparation.

Today Kettlebells continues its popularity surge, with Kettlebell Sport becoming a major player, kettlebell users across the globe compete at Kettlebell competitions.

With this popularity it is hoped that one day Kettlebell Sport can enter the Olympic arena in its own right.

What an amazing fairy tale story that would be.