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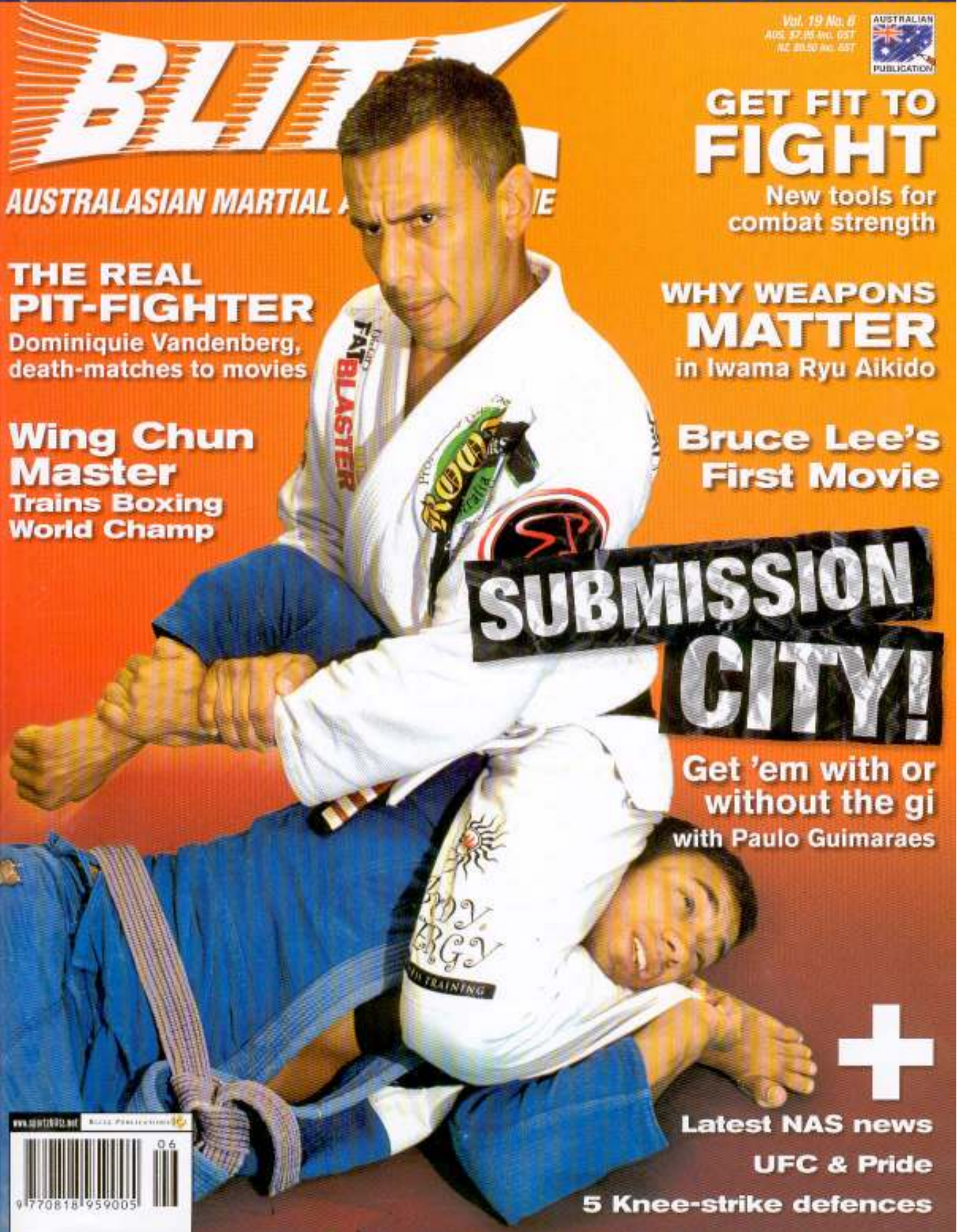
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By Matt Jones

Combat

UFC Champ Andrei Arlovski considers them an important part of his training regimen; two-time BJJ World Champ and MMA fighter Egan Inoue replaced all his other weight-training exercises (even his Olympic lifts) with them, and kettlebell guru Mike Mahler said, "I'm sold on the value of having them in my training arsenal". So what is it that these guys are so impressed with? The answer is the Clubbell. Here, our fitness expert Matt Jones makes the case for using Clubbells to build strength for martial arts and joint-health.

Throughout history, club-swinging has formed a major part of the training regimens of many strongmen and wrestlers. The Great Gamma was one of many famous Indian wrestlers who swung clubs as an integral part of their wrestling training, while their Iranian counterparts also conditioned themselves with club-swinging (most of us are familiar with the famous wrestling maxim, "conditioning is the greatest hold"). European strongmen and athletes also became big advocates of heavy club-swinging and exercising with clubs became so popular that there was even a time when the British army made the practice a mainstay of its fitness regimen.

Unfortunately, like most things that require hard work, heavy club-swinging eventually lost favour with the masses and was carried on only by those truly devoted strongmen who held particular interest in the training methods of yesteryear. Fast-forward to the present and club-swinging has seen a huge resurgence due to the efforts of Scott Sonnon and his newly developed Clubbells and Circular Strength Training (CST) system. Sonnon developed CST largely to meet his own needs as a world-class Sambo wrestler and coach of the USA Sambo team. He felt that although his strong foundation in conventional strength training was useful, conventional methods were not able to fulfill

the need for strength in extreme ranges of motion, or dynamic grip strength, both of which are vital elements in martial arts and grappling. Using the knowledge he'd gained through his time living and training in the former USSR, Sonnon began a massive project of research and experimentation that eventually led him to formulate his philosophies on CST and in turn led to the development of the Clubbell.

The need to develop the modern Clubbell, as opposed to simply using the old style of clubs from the past, was a matter of safety, exercise selection and convenience. Sonnon found that the wooden clubs of old had to be huge in order to be heavy enough to

Reverse-Parry



clubs

impose the desired resistance. A wooden club big enough to stimulate the gains Sonnon was seeking ended up being so big that it couldn't be used for many of the most valuable exercises Sonnon developed. Additionally, people of small stature would almost need to stand on a step-ladder to swing the old-time heavy wooden clubs, which were often as tall as the user. These old-style clubs were also inconvenient. Their size meant that using them indoors would be out of the question and transporting them to the local park for a swinging session would require the user to own a ute or station wagon. In looking for an alternative design, safety was an even bigger concern. Sonnon experimented with various forms of metal and concrete clubs but they either broke at the neck, were too slippery, or too jagged to swing safely (I myself experimented with many homemade designs and I sustained some interesting injuries as a result of my experiments). So the Clubbell was born!

Clubbells range in weight from 5lb up to 45lb and there is also a limited-edition 80lb Clubbell, which was produced more as a tribute to physical culture history than as a regular part of the Clubbell arsenal. Exercises can be performed with a single Clubbell held in one hand, a single Clubbell held in two hands (think of a baseball bat or an axe) or with a pair of Clubbells (one in each hand). Almost every conventional strength training exercise has a Clubbell equivalent and there's also a huge array of exercises exclusive to Clubbells. This means that with the appropriate choice of Clubbell and the right program, you can train for basically any attribute you can think of: strength, power, endurance, weight-loss and even muscle-mass gains. Additionally, Clubbells enhance co-ordination, mobility and extreme-range strength that simply can't be achieved with other weight-training methods.

Clubbells provide a method for developing what Sonnon refers to as Three Dimensional Strength via tri-planar movements — wow, that's a mouthful! In simple terms, this means that Clubbells help you gain strength in an

unlimited range of motion and directions whereas conventional strength training tends to only develop strength in very specific straight line/linear planes of movement. Don't get me wrong; gains in linear strength are certainly nothing to sneeze at. However, Sonnon's motivation in the development of CST and Clubbells was about optimising every part of one's physical performance and this meant finding a way to train our strength in every possible plane of movement (hitting the attributes that conventional training tends to miss). Increased performance and reduced risk of injury are two of the biggest benefits of CST via Clubbells.

You'll also find your grip-strength will improve with regular Clubbell training. Kettlebell guru Mike Mahler commented that after a few weeks of adding Clubbells to his training, his shoulders felt "better than ever" and his bottom-up presses with the two-pood (24kg) kettlebell had substantially improved due to the improvements in grip-strength imparted by the Clubbell training (he also said this had led to improvements in his military presses and rows).

Before I go on any further, I feel it's important to clarify one thing regarding CST and Clubbells. The term CST actually encompasses a range of training philosophies and programs. Clubbell training is just one of those programs. The programs that make up CST are:

- 1. Warrior Wellness:** This program focuses on joint-health, injury-prevention and rehabilitation, improving mobility (and in turn flexibility) and reducing muscular tension.
- 2. Clubbells:** These are the resistance training component of CST and correct use of Clubbells encompasses all the other concepts and philosophies that reside in the other CST programs. A sound footing in Warrior Wellness is strongly recommended before people start Clubbell training, as the great foundation in joint health and mobility serves to make the Clubbell training even safer and more effective than it would be on its own.
- 3. Be Breathed:** This is the breathing system



Clean and Press



that underlies all movements in the Circular Strength Training.

4. Body-Flow: Body-Flow is the ground-based agility program of CST. Body-Flow largely evolved from Sannon's video series, *The Grappler's Toolbox*, a video series of solo grappling exercises that led to him being inducted into the International Martial Arts Hall of Fame.

Well, now you know what Clubbells and CST are, why they were developed and the sort of benefits they offer, but what about all the questions that pop into one's head when they hear about "another new training phenomenon"? I understand your healthy skepticism, I too was skeptical until I started using CST and Clubbell training, so what follows are some questions and answers about Clubbell training and CST (if you don't find the answer to your question here, check out the CST Forum at www.circularstrengthmag.com/forum, where there are plenty of qualified

CST instructors willing to give out a great deal of free advice, no strings attached).

Q: Many of the Clubbell exercises are very dynamic and involve momentum, are they safe?

A: When used correctly, Clubbells are very safe. As is the case with any form of exercise, safety has less to do with what exercise you're doing and more to do with how you're doing it. Correct form — coupled with leaving your ego at the door — will all but guarantee safe and productive training. Warrior Wellness is encouraged as a precursor to Clubbell training, as the joint-health it provides will allow you to perform movements you may have previously thought were beyond you.

Q: Clubbells seem like they are really only suited to upper-body and grip training, what about leg training?

A: I can assure you that Clubbells and CST provide excellent leg workouts. I now use Clubbells alone for all my strength workouts

and I never perform pistols (a type of one-legged squat), yet at a recent workshop when I was challenged to perform a pistol, I was able to do one while holding a 20kg Clubbell — not too bad for someone who never does pistols. With Clubbells you can strengthen your legs with the usual cleans, snatches and swings, plus there are also some very nasty leg-specific exercises.

Q: The heaviest Clubbell is only 45lbs, is this enough weight to help augment strength gains?

A: Yes! Remember, the challenges that force your body to get stronger and more powerful are the ones that force you to produce high levels of tension and force generation; it's not necessarily the actual weight being lifted that is the deciding factor in this equation. Clubbells provide a challenge far above a conventional implement of the same weight due to its displaced centre of gravity and the leverage forces involved. This

Inward Pendulum



is particularly apparent in pressing and casting exercises. Also, consider that to clean a 45lb Clubbell, one must generate a great deal more force than is required to clean, say, a dumbbell of the same weight (this is due to the head of the Clubbell having to rotate around the handle in order to successfully complete the clean). I was skeptical about the whole-body strength gains Clubbells could provide until I put them to the test. For one month I ceased all other forms of strength training and only performed two-handed swings and cleans with a 45lb Clubbell. I then re-tested myself on my one-arm, dead-hang dumbbell power-snatch and it had jumped from 75lb up to 100lb in that one month of Clubbell training. It made a believer out of me!

Q: Are Clubbells just for men?

A: Absolutely not! Many women are now using Clubbells and with the Clubbells starting as light as 5lb, there's no reason why women can't reap the benefits they provide.

Q: What about different training effects such as getting bigger and stronger, increasing one's power-to-weight ratio, gaining strength endurance, changing body composition, etc? How can Clubbells cover this wide range of training effects?

A: There's little doubt that the biggest factor in determining the specific training effect you receive from any workout is the loading

parameters (sets, reps, rest periods, frequency, etc.) used in your workout. A heavy Clubbell can help you build strength, muscle or both, but remember that what is heavy to one person may be light to another; it's all relative.

Q: Do Clubbells allow you to vary the resistance?

A: First off, yes, Clubbells provide a great variety of weight adjustments via the micro-loading concept of the handle length. This is simplicity at its best: hold the Clubbell at full choke (right up close to the weighted end) to have the lowest resistance that Clubbell can provide. As you get stronger and want to incrementally increase the resistance, you can just slide your hand further towards the end of the handle and leverage will take care of the rest. Progression can be further facilitated by increasing the sophistication of the exercise – basically, this is a way of making the exercise more challenging while still using the same basic movement and muscle groups. Last but not least, if you become so strong that you exhaust all these variables, you can splash out on a heavier Clubbell.

Q: Are Clubbells meant to be used by themselves or are they supposed to be an adjunct to ones regular strength work?

A: There really is no right or wrong in this instance. Some, like myself, use Clubbells as their sole tool for strength training, while others integrate Clubbell training with other methods. One of my good friends in the USA likes to combine both Clubbells and kettlebells in his workouts, while another friend uses Clubbells and dumbbells. Others use Clubbells with a mixture of sandbag exercises and tyre-flipping. I originally planned for Clubbells to be a key adjunct to my regular training, but once I started reaping the benefits – such as the fun and joint-health they provided – I decided to use Clubbells and nothing else. It really just comes down to what your goals are, what feels right for your body and what you enjoy the most!

So there you have it: the low-down on one of the most exciting new-but-kinda-old strength-training tools around. Now what are you waiting for, grab a Clubbell and get some cave-man (or cave-woman) moves happening!

*Matt Jones is an accredited strength and conditioning coach, personal trainer and Pilates instructor with 10 years' experience in the fitness industry. He is the founder of ISO Health's Exercise and Natural Therapies Clinic in SA. For more info, see the classifieds section of this issue. **BLITZ***

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