



# FOUNDATIONS TO LEVER BELL TRAINING

10 WORKOUTS  
OVER 30  
MOVEMENTS



## **Disclaimer**

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After almost 15 years of being known as the “sandbag guy”, it can be really weird to have people see us use other equipment. While we always wanted to change how people thought of, used, and saw the potential of “sandbag training”, the reality is we never thought about making it the ONLY tool people would ever use. In fact, our very first educational certifications ever were known as L.I.F.T. programs (loaded integrated functional training).

Jessica and I thought the change to DVRT was needed because we were simply giving people too much. Let’s face it, all of us do worse when we are presented with too many options. With that in mind, we always believe that other tools would work well with our DVRT system and Ultimate Sandbag Training.



That is largely why you have seen us build programs with other tools from kettlebells, to bands, to a variety of body weight tools. In every scenario though, we have tried to avoid the common mistake of replicating the same exercise, just with a different piece of equipment.

Sadly, this is how most professionals approach implementing various training tools. They get bored, decide they need some variety, and pretty much do the same thing with another piece of equipment. How do I know this? Because this is EXACTLY what I did in my first years with sandbags. Back then, I took my homemade sandbags and tried to simply replicate what we would do with a barbell. It was THIS mistake that almost led me to leaving the idea of sandbags well behind.

Why?

When you approach your training tools in this manner, you don't find a whole bunch of value to them. I find it quite ironic when people call their equipment "toys", because most professionals do approach their training like children do with a new toy. They see a new exercise or piece of equipment and they LOVE it!!! Everything they do is based around the equipment and it is the solution for everything, well, that is for about a week.

If we don't establish value beyond being a distraction, our tools do become toys that we lose interest in and more importantly, end up having a very bad return on investment.

My experience with creating DVRT Ultimate Sandbag Training changed my approach to all equipment. When I do look at another tool, or get asked about this or that, my first reaction is, "does this do the job better than anything else?" That is my simple, but really effective way of judging which tool do I use and the overall value of the tool.



When I use an Ultimate Sandbag versus a kettlebell, or dumbbell, or even barbell, it is because I believe it does the specific job better.

Same thing when I don't use an Ultimate Sandbag and do use one of these other pieces. Rarely though are we taught in this industry to think in this manner.

## Enter Lever Bells

Believe it or not, the idea of maces and Indian clubs was not a new thing for me. There was no bandwagon for me to jump upon because back in 2008 I was already using these tools in my training and those of my clients.

I had become fascinated with some old time methods of fitness, not because of the cool stories (although there was a few), but more so because there seemed to be something different about older methods of strength training.

During this time, I found that having well rounded qualities such as stability, mobility, fluidity, coordination, and 360 degree movement strength wasn't something that was really being discussed. We had those that believed in lifting as heavy as possible, others that stood true to just mastering their body, and a lot of in between. There wasn't too much in the form of balance of all these ideas that we use to see in the early years of physical fitness.

Having a physical education background, I am intrigued to what exercise can teach us in the form of movement education. How can deliberate, thoughtful, and progressive exercise build much more than just a physical component to the body. As I looked at how many of the old time tools, such as maces, were being used by old time athletes, I found their ideology matched much more of what I wanted to bring to people.

So, if I was using maces ten years ago, why did I stop? To be very honest, I ran into the same issues I did with my homemade sandbags. As far as I knew, the maces were good for a small handful of drills, but they didn't solve any major issues and many clients found them challenging to use for such exercises. They simply fell to the back burner as until I could find solutions for some of these issues, it was going to be hard to justify dedicated use to them.



*Funny footage to look back upon almost a decade ago!*

When Perform Better introduced the concept of Lever Bells, I chuckled a bit as I am sure some of you have. C'mon, it is a mace, why call it a Lever Bell?! That is until I listened to renowned strength coach, Mike Boyle, speak about how he was implementing them at his facilities.

Coach Boyle, never shy to go against the grain, outwardly talked about not wanting to use the Lever Bells for the classic mace exercises. Oddly, him saying this and speaking to taking advantage in other ways the unique leverage of the weight, all of a sudden opened my mind as well.

While I like some of the classic mace exercises, these were also some of the reasons I found them very limiting to whom I could use them with. I also found that other tools could accomplish similar goals, but thinking about how we could use this old time tool for more modern needs did intrigue me quite a bit. So, the name change to Lever Bell was more of a call to ask us to think differently about this old time tool!

## Forget What You Have Seen

There is of course in both knowing and appreciating the history of a training tool. Ignoring the history is to only be ignorant to some of the wonderful ideas that have surrounded the tool as well as the history can serve as giving us new ideas as well. What we want to avoid though is being a slave to the history of a training tool.

Yes, implements like the Lever Bell have been a popular training of Indian and Persian wrestlers for centuries. The circular patterns that were primarily used with these tools have obvious applications to shoulder mobility/stability/ and strength while having a large emphasis on both grip and core strength as well.



More circular patterns were fundamental to strength training for many years prior to the 21st century. They may have not had the science of fascial lines or functional anatomy, but our ancestors did realize that circular motions were foundational to many sporting, war, and life actions.

This is reflected in the fact the first Olympic games revolved around events like wrestling and throwing competitions like javelin and discus. One could quickly see where circular motion would play a large role in all these activities. It

wasn't until we started looking at the body as isolated parts did our training become far more linear in nature!

There is a great advantage for the Lever Bell to provide us the ability to produce these circular motions in many different ways. However, doing so requires some already good mobility, body control, and stability. If we ONLY saw the Lever Bell for these drills we would miss the opportunities to use them for other solutions in training as well.

## Shoulders, Core, and Building Better Mobility

If someone was going to ask what are the best benefits of using the Lever Bells, we would have to boil them down to the integration of shoulders, core, and hips. Not bad right?! Lever Bells can be great tools in teaching how to teach the connection of these chains that are largely responsible for how well we move and how strong we can become.

You may wonder how though and what makes using a Lever Bell special compared to anything else? The leverage of the Lever Bell gives constant feedback upon one's movement and ability to create appropriate tension. If you don't have the right positioning, if you aren't creating tension from the right areas, if you aren't trying to make proper connections, you simply won't be able to keep the Lever Bell in the proper position. Gray Cook calls this "self-limiting exercise".

A lot of the benefits of the Lever Bell begin by the fact that grip plays such a fundamental role to everything you do with these tools. If the grip is not being applied appropriately, you simply won't be able to balance the weight. Grip is important because research shows a strong correlation to shoulder and rotator cuff health with strong grip (1).

This is a big reason that exercises such as kettlebell bottom's up drills have become popular. In several ways, I believe that the Lever Bells make such training even better.

That is because missing to grip the Lever Bell properly doesn't cause the "whack wrist" that missing a kettlebell bottom's up can cause. Additionally, you will see we have many ways to apply these gripping exercises that clients can adapt and progress to rather easily.

The grip of the Lever Bell also provides us to better engage the lats which is our door to connecting to the core more effectively. There are several chains of the body that have connections of the shoulders, core, and hips, therefore, activating the first two (upper body and core) makes adding in the lower body that much easier.



The hips become essential as a stable foundation for us to efficiently and with fluidity move the Lever Bells. Unlike most familiar forms of strength training, Lever Bells are best optimized by not being typical grinding exercises, but working in more fluid and rhythmic motions. There will be times for these grinding actions, but the higher level movements definitely rely on more of these coordinated and athletic patterns.

## The 4 Primary Grips

Since grip does play a big role in using the Lever Bells effectively, it is worth discussing some of the key ways we will grip these tools. While there are many options, most of what our foundations will be based upon are these three grips.

**Hand Over Hand:** We could have a cool name like the “torch” position, but I don’t know if that is really helpful for clients to understand what we want them to perform. Some of our naming is simple and literal so that clients can easily pick-up on what we would like them to do in their training and spend more time actually training.

The hand over hand grip is what we will use to add control over the Lever Bell for movements like chops, 360’s, and several press out variations. Having both hands engaged in the same position allows us to create tension by trying to break the handle apart and engaging the lats while keeping the upper traps from becoming dominant.



A wider hand over hand grip will obviously increase stability of the movement and provide better control. The more narrow hand over hand increases the stability demands and takes advantage of the instability of the Lever Bell by emphasizing the distance of center of mass to the hands. This is an easy way to increase or decrease intensity depending upon the goal of the exercise.

**Mixed Grip:** As the name implies, this is where one hand is underhanded and the other is overhand. This is to give more control over the Lever Bell when it is more in a horizontal position and leverage is working more against our movement. Typically, the underhand will be closer to the ball and the overhand will be by the end of the handle.



What distinguishes the mixed grip from hand over hand is the position of the lever bell. Hand over hand typically will imply the Lever Bell is held vertically in relationship to the body. Mixed grip will reflect more of a horizontal position of the Lever Bell with the hand closest to the ball end having a supinated grip.

As with the hand over hand version, changing the distance of hand to the Lever Bell ball will increase intensity of the movement.

**Double Overhand:** This position is also used for more horizontal based drills, but typically not as stable as the mixed grip and won't be used to make some of the transitions into some of the complexes we will demonstrate.

The double overhand will help us control over some unique movement patterns of the Lever Bells that don't have the weight moving in a true linear pattern. Like the other two grip positions, the goal is still to try to break the handle apart to keep lat and core engagement.



**Single Arm:** When we can maximize the leverage of the Lever Bell is where we see its uniqueness really shine. That of course can be found when we try to do anything single arm with the Lever Bell. The weight of the Lever Bell and the leverage it creates requires us to not just resist motion up and down, but from side to side as well.



It is in the single arm grip position that we can really find a connection of the hand to shoulder to core. This is quite an intense position so manipulating where you grip along the handle plays a very large role in introducing these movements. Even slight movements will challenge the ability of the lifter to keep the connection of the grip, shoulder, and core. What looks easy is a very deceiving challenge!

Generally, this will also mean having proper alignment of the elbow. We are recommending looking to start with about a 90 degree angle in the elbow to ensure proper lat activation in the movement and avoid the desire to use the upper traps to create stability in the movements. This is a tremendous way of making light weight Lever Bells heavy!

## 10 Foundational Lever Bell Workouts

We wanted to show you two different forms of bringing Lever Bells into your training. The first is using them exclusively. While it is possible to use them in a workout by themselves there are limitations in doing so. Every piece of equipment has some limitations and understanding them allows you to choose the best tool for the job!

The tradition of Lever Bell type training was never meant to be a total body workout. They were traditionally used in conjunction with other movements and tools because they excelled when their focus was on core, grip, and shoulder strength and mobility. While we have progressed and evolved some of the ways they can be use it can be simply hard to achieve other specific goals.

For example, even with the leverage, loading the lower body during squats and lunges is difficult. Using lower body patterns with the Lever Bells is another way to bring some instability and challenge to the core integration. However, loading the lower body is going to require some other means. Additionally, pulling movements can be difficult because the structure of the weight.

Meaning, even in doing rows, grip more so than the upper back becomes the limiting factor. Especially the closer we end up grabbing towards the ball, the less of the bell you are actually rowing. This isn't to devalue the Lever Bells at all, rather to help you excel in implementing them and using them for what they offer in a unique manner.

You will find that both stand alone Lever Bell workouts below and integrated workouts. Each are meant to be performed as a circuit and links of the video for each exercise is provided below. This by no means exhausts what can be accomplished with these great tools, but gives you some ideas how we can expand our functional fitness goals with great solutions.

### Workout 1

Exercise	Sets	Repetitions	Rest Intervals
<a href="#"><u>A1. Side Plank with Flye</u></a>	3-4	10-12 per side	30 seconds
<a href="#"><u>A2. Squat Climb</u></a>	3-4	45 seconds	30 seconds
<a href="#"><u>A3. Rotational Shovel</u></a>	3-4	8-10 per side	30 seconds
<a href="#"><u>A4. Lateral Lunge with Flye</u></a>	3-4	6-8 per side	30 seconds

### Workout 2

Exercise	Sets	Repetitions	Rest Intervals
<a href="#"><u>A1. Shinbox Press Out Extension</u></a>	3-4	5-7 per side	30 seconds
<a href="#"><u>A2. Lateral Band Walk with Joust</u></a>	3-4	60 seconds total	30 seconds
<a href="#"><u>A3. Forward Step Lunge Lift/Chop</u></a>	3-4	10-12 per side	30 seconds
<a href="#"><u>A4. Double Swings</u></a>	3-4	15-20	30 seconds

### Workout 3

Exercise	Sets	Repetitions	Rest Intervals
<a href="#"><u>A1. 360</u></a>	3-4	10-15 per side	30 seconds
<a href="#"><u>A2. Lunge Rotating Press Out</u></a>	3-4	8-10 per side	30 seconds
<a href="#"><u>A3. Skiers</u></a>	3-4	30 seconds	30 seconds
<a href="#"><u>A4. Half Kneeling Torch Press</u></a>	3-4	6-8 per side	30 seconds

#### Workout 4

Exercise	Sets	Repetitions	Rest Intervals
<u>A1. Lateral Band Walk with Upper Cut</u>	3-4	30 seconds per side	30 seconds
<u>A2. Squat Shoulder Press Out</u>	3-4	8-12 per side	30 seconds
<u>A3. Single Leg Deadlift</u>	3-4	10-15 per side	30 seconds
<u>A4. Lunge with Flye</u>	3-4	6-8 per side	30 seconds

#### Workout 5

Exercise	Sets	Repetitions	Rest Intervals
<u>A1. Bird Dog</u>	3-4	5-7 per side	30 seconds
<u>A2. Press Out Get-up to Rear Step Shovel</u>	3-4	4-6 per side	30 seconds
<u>A3. Lateral Lunge Joust</u>	3-4	12-15 per side	30 seconds
<u>A4. Rotational Torch Press</u>	3-4	8-10 per side	30 seconds

#### Workout 6

Exercise	Sets	Repetitions	Rest Intervals
<u>A1. Side Plank Flexion/Extension</u>	3-4	6-8 per side	30 seconds
<u>A2. Rotational Deadlift and row</u>	3-4	8-10 per side	30 seconds
<u>A3. T-Spine Rotation to Crossover Lunge Press Out</u>	3-4	4-6 per side	30 seconds
<u>A4. Mountain Climber</u>	3-4	15-20 slow	30 seconds

### Workout 7

Exercise	Sets	Repetitions	Rest Intervals
<u>A1. Glute Bridge with Rotation Press &amp; Chop</u>	3-4	8-12 per side	30 seconds
<u>A2. Half Kneeling Alternating KB Press</u>	3-4	4-6 per side	30 seconds
<u>A3. Front Load MAX Lunge</u>	3-4	8-10 per side	30 seconds
<u>A4. LB Plank Flyes</u>	3-4	5-7 per side	30 seconds

### Workout 8

Exercise	Sets	Repetitions	Rest Intervals
<u>A1. Bird Dog Drag</u>	3-4	5-7 per side	30 seconds
<u>A2. Bear Hug Squat</u>	3-4	8-12	30 seconds
<u>A3. Archer Rows</u>	3-4	8-10 per side	30 seconds
<u>A4. LB Lunge Cleans</u>	3-4	10-15 per side	30 seconds

### Workout 9

Exercise	Sets	Repetitions	Rest Intervals
<u>A1. Shinbox Press Out Extension to Chop</u>	3-4	4-6 per side	30 seconds
<u>A2. Lateral Lunge to Arc Press</u>	3-4	8-10 per side	30 seconds
<u>A3. Forward Step to Cross Body Lift</u>	3-4	8-12 per side	30 seconds
<u>A4. KB Alternating Rows</u>	3-4	8-10 per side	30 seconds

## Workout 10

Exercise	Sets	Repetitions	Rest Intervals
<u>A1. Shoulder Leg Threading</u>	3-4	4-6 per side	30 seconds
<u>A2. LB Alternating Press Out Lunges</u>	3-4	6-8 per side	30 seconds
<u>A3. Rear Slide Deadlifts</u>	3-4	8-12 per side	30 seconds
<u>A4. Around the World</u>	3-4	10-15 per side	30 seconds

### About Josh Henkin, CSCS



**Josh Henkin has been in the fitness and performance industry for over 20 years. For the past 15 years he has been known for his innovative Dynamic Variable Resistance Training system (DVRT™) and Ultimate Sandbag™.**

**This has made him a highly sought after consultant, coach, and teacher in over 13 countries worldwide. His work has been featured in mainstream media such as Men's Health, Muscle & Fitness, The Wall Street Journal, SHAPE, and many more. Coach Henkin has presented at top industry conferences such as Perform Better, NASM & NSCA national conferences, DCAC, IFPA, to name a few.**

**Josh has worked with the U.S. Army Special Forces Recruiting Battalion and U.S. Marines HIT program as well. He has extensive experience in teaching the concepts, principles, and systems of functional training. You can reach him at [info@ultimatesandbagtraining.com](mailto:info@ultimatesandbagtraining.com) for more information.**

### References:

1. Horsley I, Herrington L, Hoyle R, Prescott E, Bellamy N. Do changes in hand grip strength correlate with shoulder rotator cuff function? *Shoulder & Elbow*. 2016;8(2):124-129. doi: 10.1177/1758573215626103.