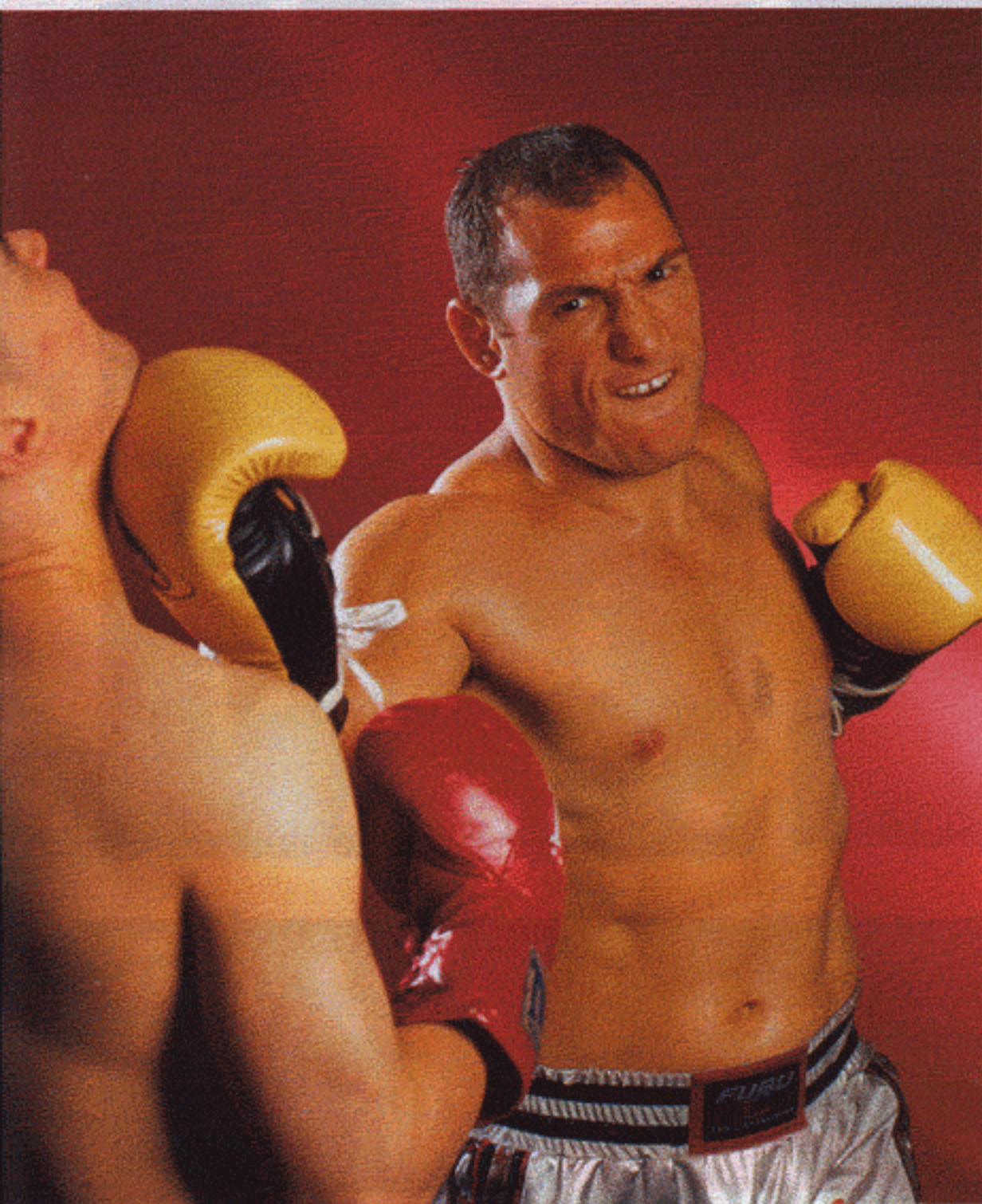


# Power Up Your Punch

Everyone in martial arts can benefit from the ability to hit hard. Here, strength-coach and martial artist Matt Jones delivers a well thought-out conditioning program that will certainly add some sting to your strikes.



**W**hile technique is one of the biggest factors in hitting hard, it would be foolhardy to ignore the benefits of strength training in improving striking ability. This article features an honest, no-frills approach to developing your muscles for hitting harder and preventing injury. There are many conditioning methods promoted as the holy grail for martial arts fitness and while some are quite good, others are not so good — buyer beware!

I have designed the following program for people who only have a couple of hours available each week for conditioning training and have limited access (or none at all) to a gymnasium.

Do these considerations compromise on the benefits? No. I'd even say that many people could actually benefit more from the alternative exercises I've incorporated here than if I gave you gym-based exercises. And don't worry that you're not spending hours under the weights each week; I have trained Olympic athletes who actually made better progress on strength programs that only took between one-and-a-half and two hours per week.

You may also wonder why my program for improved striking is focused on increasing the strength of the whole body rather than just the chest, shoulders and arms. The reason is because the primary contributor to a powerful punch is hip-drive and a strong core. The contribution made by the upper body is certainly worth noting but should not be the sole focus of a striker's strength training. This fact has been observed both in the real world and in research studies. If sports performance is your goal, don't get hung up on bench-pressing and pectoral work.

Bench-presses are absent from this program because I've seen more athletes suffer from this exercise than prosper from it. If you have busted shoulders then you won't be able to throw a decent punch, let alone improve your hitting power. Your deltoids and arms will get all the work they need from

the exercises provided in this program.

I've named this program the Striker's Mongrel, because it consists of several different concepts and methods in one robust little package — just like a good mongrel dog. The program itself is also quite demanding and can be a bit of a mongrel to perform. But don't be mistaken, this is not some ad-hoc cocktail of ideas. Every detail has been thought out to deliver a great program.

#### **The Strikers Mongrel workout consists of:**

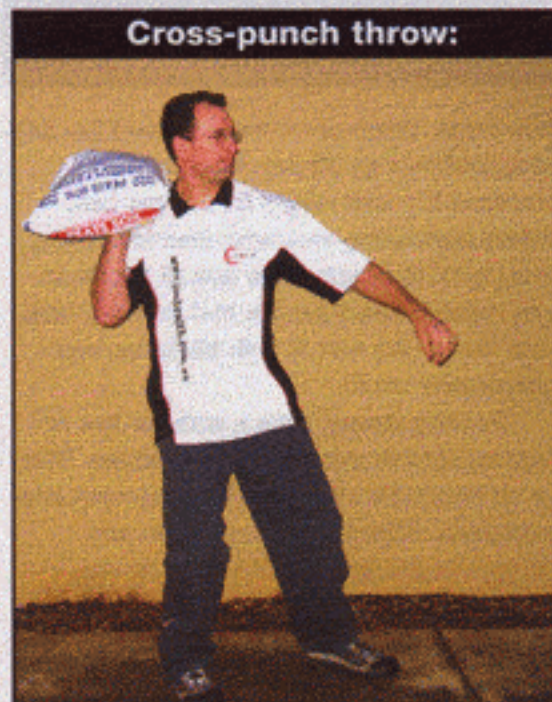
- Cross-punch throws, to develop whole-body power movement
- One-arm, standing dumbbell-presses, to develop deltoids, triceps and core strength
- One-arm dumbbell-rows or chin-ups, to develop lats and biceps strength
- Deadlifts or tyre-flips, to develop quadriceps, hamstrings, glutes, spinal erectors and core muscle strength
- Retro sled-pulls, to develop whole-body strength movement.

This program can be performed a minimum of three times per fortnight or a maximum of three times a week. Try to keep the rest between session as evenly spaced as possible and avoid performing the program two days in a row.

#### **Sample schedules are...**

- Three times per week: Monday, Wednesday, Friday or Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, etc.
- Twice per week: Monday and Thursday, or Tuesday and Friday, or Monday and Friday, etc.
- Three times per fortnight: Week one — Monday and Friday, week two — Wednesday, or similar.

#### **To perform the Strikers Mongrel routine**



**Cross-punch throw:**

#### **you will need the following equipment:**

- An adjustable dumbbell (for the presses and rows) — 40 kg worth of weight will be plenty for most people. Make sure you purchase a few 0.5 kg weight plates so that you can make small jumps in resistance. If

## **The primary contributor to a powerful punch is hip-drive and a strong core... If sports performance is your goal, don't get hung up on bench-pressing and pectoral work.**

you want to be able to make jumps of only 0.25 kg at a time then just weigh out a few washers and tie them together with some string, they'll do the job nicely. If you decide to do chin-ups, many playgrounds have some sort of monkey bars or swing set that can be a good chin-up bar substitute.

- If you choose sprinting as your key hip exercise then all you'll need is a grass oval where you can perform a 40-metre sprint. If you choose to do deadlifts then you'll need a barbell set. If you decide to perform tyre-flipping instead of deadlifts then you'll need a heavy truck or tractor tyre (get a couple tyres of different weights if possible). My personal choice would be to alternate between deadlifts and tyre-flips each workout, but I appreciate that many people are not going to be able to access appropriate instruction on how to safely perform deadlifts or tyre-flips. If you cannot safely perform deadlifts or tyre-flips, I recommend you choose sprints as your key hip-exercise. Sprinting actually serves as an excellent way to strengthen the whole body and believe it or not, the muscles of your lower back even get a workout from sprinting.

Old tyres can often be found at various

tyre factories and farms. You may be given them or charged a small fee, but be sure to ask around. If you're just starting out then a car tyre or light truck tyre (like those used on tray-top trucks) will do the job. If you're fairly fit and strong then you'll need a truck tyre

from a semi-trailer. If you're quite strong then you may want to get a heavier truck tyre like a 'super single' — an extra fat and heavy truck tyre. If you think you're a real "strong axe", use a tractor tyre. If the

tyre is pretty wrecked and has steel poking out of it, either don't use it or wear very strong protective gloves. Duct tape around the torn sections can also help. I worked in a tyre factory while in high school so I know that the steel radial belting from a trashed tyre can easily slice up your hands.

- For the sled-pull, you need a tyre and a strong rope. To add weight to the sled (tyre), there are a few options. You can put bricks inside the tyre, you can get a heavier tyre, or you can build a platform on the tyre on which you can add weight as needed. You can buy purpose-built pulling sleds but with a bit of ingenuity the tyre can be as effective, if not more so.

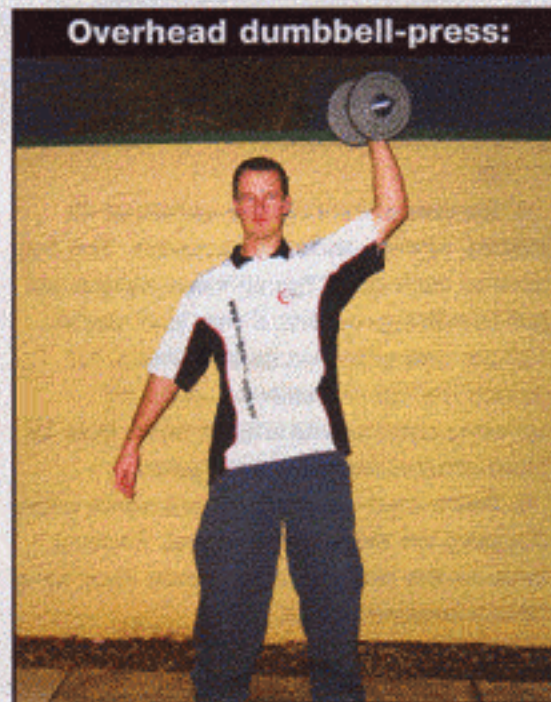
- For the punch-throws you'll need a sandbag that can be adjusted in weight to be roughly 60 per cent of the weight you use for your one-arm standing dumbbell presses. To make your own sandbag, fill a sack or duffle bag with 0.5 kg bags of sand. Fill some sandwich bags with sand then tape them up with duct tape. Take 0.5 kg worth of sand-filled sandwich bags and duct tape them up in some bigger freezer bags. Place as many of the 0.5 kg bags of sand inside the sack as required to get your desired weight. Seal up the sack, but make sure you can undo it to add weight to your sandbag as you get stronger.

#### **Program Outline**

Warming up: Take a four-to-five-minute jog (preferably on a soft surface such as a grass oval), perform any stretches you feel you need to do and then do a few bodyweight squats and some light punching for a minute or two.

\*NOTE: There is no need to train to muscular failure on any of these movements — in fact, it should in fact be avoided. Always keep one perfect rep left in you. This does not mean train like a wimp! You can still train tremendously hard without reaching muscular failure.

1. Cross-punch throw: 10 sets of one rep on each side. Rest 30 seconds between



**Overhead dumbbell-press:**

**Retro sled-drag.**



each throw.

**For example:** Do your first throw using your right hand with your left foot forward, then rest 30 seconds. Then do a throw using your left hand with your right foot forward, then rest 30 seconds. Repeat this until you've performed 10 throws on each hand.

To calculate your required sandbag weight, simply use 55-65 per cent of the weight you are using for your standing one-arm overhead dumbbell-press.

**2. Standing one-arm overhead dumbbell-press:** Three sets of three reps on each side. Rest for one minute between each set.

**For example:** Do your first set using your left hand, then rest one minute and do a set with your right hand, then rest another minute and repeat to complete the desired number of sets. Use the same weight for all three sets of three reps. When you can complete three sets of three on each arm with perfect technique, you can then increase your weight by three-to-five per cent for the next training session.

**3. One-arm dumbbell-row:** Three sets of three reps on each side. Rest for one minute between each set.

**For example:** Do your first set using your left hand, then rest for one minute and do a set with your right hand. Rest another minute and repeat to complete the desired number of sets. Use the same weight for all three sets. When you can complete three sets of three reps on each arm with perfect technique, you can then increase your weight by three-to-five per cent for the next training session.

OR

**3. Chin-ups:** Three sets of three reps. Rest three minutes between sets.

Use the same weight for all three sets of three reps. When you can complete three

sets with perfect technique, you can then increase your weight by three-to-five per cent for the next training session.

**4. Deadlifts:** Three sets of three reps. Rest for three minutes between sets.

Use the same weight for all three sets of three reps. When you can complete three sets of three reps with perfect technique, you can then increase your weight by three-to-five per cent for the next training session.

OR

**4. Tyre-flips:** Perform three sets of 30 seconds, flipping the tyre as many times as possible during that time. Rest for three minutes between each set of flipping. Pace yourself to do the same number of flips in each 30-second set.

**For example:** If in each 30-second set of flipping you manage to do five flips, then your next increase would be to aim for six flips in each 30-second set. Once you achieve the same number of flips in all three sets for two consecutive training sessions, you can then aim to increase your flips per set on the next session.

OR

**4. Sprinting:** Perform five sprints of 40 metres, running as fast as possible. You may have to work up to this as many people will pull hamstring muscles if they start out at 100 per cent effort on sprint training. To reduce the risk of hamstring pulls, try sprinting uphill or into a head-wind. Rest for three minutes between each sprint.

**5. Retro sled-drag:** Walk backwards while dragging the sled (or heavy tyre). Perform three-to-five drags of 30 seconds. Rest for a minute between drags.

Use the same weight for all drags and measure your total distance covered for all of

**Tyre-flipping**



the drags. When you have increased the total drag distance by 20 per cent, you can increase the sled weight by five per cent. When performing your retro sled-drags you may want to attach some sort of handle to the rope, as many people find their grip fails well before the rest of their body has been adequately taxed.

**Cooling down:** Take a walk for five or ten minutes to unwind and cool down. This is an important step in recovering from your workouts. After the walk, perform any stretches you feel are of benefit to you.

## Performance Tips

On all of the above exercises you should aim to:

## Power Up Your Punch

- Keep your abdominals braced and your glutes tensed (as though squeezing a coin between your butt cheeks).
- Focus on keeping a long spine. Wing Chun practitioners who are familiar with the concept of tai gong can use that as a guide to the concept of keeping a long spine. If you are proficient in Pilates, those long-spine concepts will also be helpful.
- Aim to keep a neutral spine position. This means maintaining the natural curve of our spine as opposed to letting it arch excessively or round out into a hunch-back posture.

### On tyre-flips, deadlifts and the retro sled-drag, it is also beneficial to:

- Keep your knee in line with your hip and foot (don't let it wobble inwards and outwards).
- Keep your hips as level as possible (try not to let them squirm and tilt/lean side to side). On the Retro Sled Drag your hips may rotate but they should still be fairly level.
- Avoid excessively arching your back.
- Keep your shoulders down and back (don't let them round forward and droop).
- Imagine pushing your feet through the ground rather than thinking of lifting or pulling with your upper body.

### On tyre-flips:

- Drive through the ground and forward at an angle, don't just deadlift the tyre. Think of it less as a lift and more as a forward drive/tackle.
- Once the tyre is up high enough, switch your hands immediately to a pushing position (think of pushing a car) and push the tyre over.
- Start off slow but you can increase your speed of movement once you feel confident that your technique is very safe.

### On punch-throws aim to:

- Drive through your heel, leg, hips and shoulder as opposed to just pushing with your shoulder muscles.
- Imagine pushing your feet through the ground and your arm through the sky.

This is true strength-training; let your focus slip and you could end up causing a major injury. This training is very safe if performed properly but it is not for the undisciplined or impatient. So train hard and eat well. If you have any questions or want to share your progress, feel free to email me at [info@isohealth.com.au](mailto:info@isohealth.com.au)

Matt Jones is an accredited strength and conditioning coach, personal trainer, Pilates instructor and masseuse. He has 10 years experience in the fitness industry and is the founder of ISO Health's Exercise and Natural Therapies clinic in SA. The above exercises, the equipment required and how to make it is explained in detail in Matt's upcoming video and manual Primal Fitness. **BLITZ**

## Deadlifts – Do it right

1. Stand with feet approximately 1.5 times shoulder width apart, shins almost touching the bar, feet at about 45 degrees. Keep your chin in and lengthen your spine by imagining your hips sinking toward the floor and the crown of your head drifting up into the ceiling. If in doubt about your spinal alignment, it is better to have a slight arch in the back (as seen here) than to be slumping or rounding the spine.

Brace your abs as though about to take a punch in the stomach. Also engage your pelvic-floor muscles by imagining you are trying to hold in the contents of your bowel and bladder. Sit your butt back, as though you are sitting down on a chair. Your shins should be almost vertical as you grab the bar. Keep your weight over your whole foot, but mostly through your heels. Maintain your 'long spine', your abdominal bracing and your pelvic-floor activation as you take a shoulder-width grip on the bar.

Ensure your arms are straight (no bend in the elbow) and you are looking straight ahead. Squeeze your glutes (buttocks) like you are trying to crush an almond between them. Your hips should be just a little higher than your knees.



2. Maintain the above form through the entire lift. To commence the lift, think of keeping your upper body at the same angle while you push your feet through the floor rather than pulling the bar up off the floor. You must be sure to initiate the lift slowly by a gradual application of force and exhale smoothly.

As the bar clears your knees, you can begin to extend your hips and straighten up your torso. If you try to straighten up too early, your knees will block the bar. The bar should basically travel in a straight line from the beginning to the end of the lift.



3. If you need to inhale at the top of the rep, do so, but let some of the air out before you begin the descent. To lower the bar, tilt forward at the hips until the bar is about to clear your knees. As the bar clears your knees you can then start bending your knees to finish lowering it. Exhale slowly and smoothly as you go.

Stand up straight and take two deep breaths (around five–10 seconds) between reps to unload your spine and ensure perfect technique can be maintained.

