

How to Speak Martone

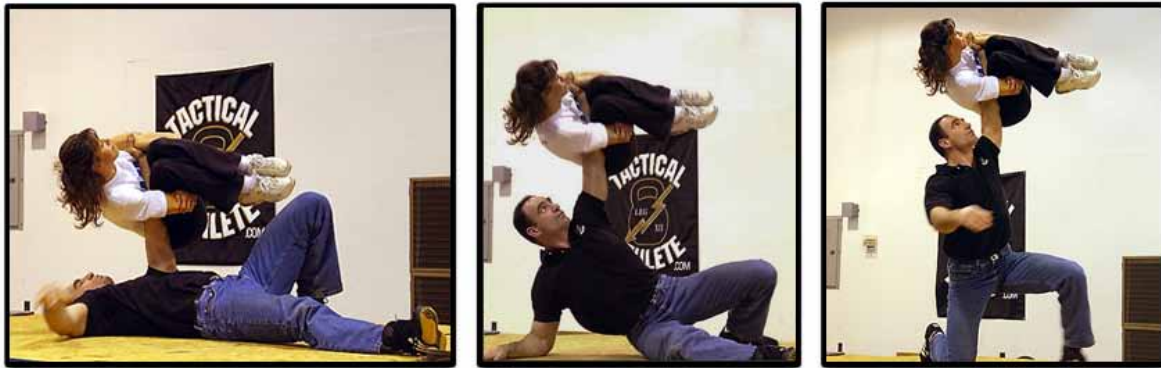
Turkish Get Ups and the Auditory Artistry of a Kettlebell Master

Larry Gallagher



So you wanna learn to speak Martone, to speak Martone. You find a subject, you know. And you dance around it, dance around your subject, say it once, say it twice. Then, Boom, you add another word, naam sayin? Boom, an adjective, adverb, whatever, you know, it's all good. You don't stop talking, no good will come of that. Keep on sending words out there until you got your predicate dialed in. Dude, pretty soon you got, like, a whole sentence and you're ready for the next. Youguyswitme on that?

Of course, it takes a lifetime to truly master the dialect, but if you attend one of Jeff Martone's Kettlebell Certs you will learn enough to be able to teach the basics to all your friends and associates. Martone, the language, borrows heavily from East Coast Sicilian-American, but even amateur linguists can recognize it as a specific



Jeff Martone does a "Wifey" Get Up. Jeff suggests you start with young offspring before attempting a spouse.

sub-dialect, with its own unique grammar and syntax. As it's lone native speaker, Martone, the man, acknowledges the challenge that his "non-regional accent" presents to Anglophones, even bringing along a translator to help get his message across. Oh, yes, and while you are absorbing the language, he will show you how to use those familiar blobs of cast iron to build strength, stamina, and flexibility all at once, develop stabilizing muscles you didn't even know existed, and even repair your aging and banged-up body.

Jeff Martone himself is a walking testimony to the healing power of the kettlebell. Before he began the workshop, in the gym of the New Mexico Law Enforcement Academy, he called us into a huddle, three civilians and twenty-five law officers, to hear his tale of woe and redemption. It started in high school back in the 80s, where years of abuse on the football fields and the wrestling mats left him with shoulders that popped out of their sockets like a tortured GI Joe, a condition that two shoulder operations didn't fix. "The 90s were a bad decade for knees and elbows," he continues, dryly. By the time the 21st century rolled around, Martone, who was at the time working to train the tactical teams that escorted nuclear convoys, was looking down the barrel of a third shoulder operation, seriously thinking about finding a second career that would not put his body on the line.

Ironically enough, the second career with which he was experimenting was blacksmithing, which provided him the tools and the skills to fashion his own crude kettlebells out of steel rods, lead weights, and a couple of old bowling balls. This was long before the days when you could walk into any Target and walk out with a shopping cart full of them. Working under the guidance of Russian Kettlebell

godfather Pavel Tsatsouline, Martone began to incorporate more and more of the strength and conditioning exercises into his routines. Fast forward seven years and here he was, shoulders in sockets, repaired ACL intact, juggling 50 pound hunks of cast iron all day long for a living.

Hearing Martone's story and watching him demonstrating made it easier to plunge into the two-day program. For all that it physically prepares you for, CrossFit training does not prepare you mentally to do two straight days of anything. "My favorite part of working with kettlebells," quipped one prominent CrossFit wit, who shall remain unnamed, "is the part where you put them down and pick up the barbell." This had not been my experience. I had always found the motion physically compelling, the subtle dance of timing and balance required to keep from being pulled around like a midget chained to a Newfoundland. Still, my time with kettlebells had been confined to swinging them two-handed as part of a larger CrossFit routine.

But this American swing, as it is called, is just the entrée into the world of kettlebells, much as a muscle-up is just the first baby step on the rings. Over the next two days Martone took us through the range of foundational kettlebell repertoire, the cleans, the snatches, the presses, all of the moves sharing basic ergometrics with the corresponding moves on the barbell or dumbbell, but all offering slightly different challenges in terms of balance and coordination. As to what it was about a kettlebell workout that made it possible to both strengthen and repair damaged body parts, Martone believes it is the element of stretching that the movement requires.

The king of all kettlebell maneuvers is the Turkish Get Up. Joining a long list of anomalously named phenomena—

How to Speak Martone... (continued)

French Toast, Canadian Bacon and the Utah Jazz—it is a chain of moves that allow you to raise yourself off the ground with a weight in one hand, all the while keeping that weight elevated above your body. On the surface, the TGU strikes one as a fantastically practical skill to have in one's arsenal. (Although the more I thought about it, the more trouble I had imagining a situation in which you would need to raise yourself up and keep a hand above your head. Standing up in a flooded basement with a baby in your hand? Lifting a serving tray of Champagne glasses from a prone position? Getting up off the ground while waving a white flag?) But there is no denying that mastering this combination of strength, coordination, and balance contributes immensely to one's overall ability to navigate the three-dimensional world. According to old-school weightlifting lore, before they would let you touch a barbell you had to perform the Get Up with 100 pounds in hand. Martone capped off this section of the cert with a move that he helped make famous, enlisting the services of smallest person in the room to act as a human kettlebell, demonstrating that, if an emergency required it, he could stand up with a 95-lb. female law enforcement officer attached to his left hand.

Throughout the training Martone made sure to emphasize the practicality of kettlebell training for all the officers around me, how good it was for building strong, quick hands, and how useful that was for dealing with perps in close quarters. So I was surprised when he showed us a simple trick—letting go of the weight in mid-air—and admitted that the main benefit that it offered was to keep your routine from getting boring. This turns out to be a crucial point. I would be lying if I said that swinging these hunks around for two days was unmitigated joy from beginning to end. Because, after all, if there's no fun in it, if it's just another tedious grind that you

have to do because somebody says it's good for you, then it's only a matter of time before you see them out there in the garage next to the Nordic Trak and the Abdominizer, or used as a doorstep for the back door of your gym.

At the end of the training, the class was able to cajole the modest Martone into doing a bit of showing off. For a few short minutes he executed a perfect series of flips and juggles, between the legs, behind the back, eyes closed, tricks you could never do with a barbell or any other weight, a kind of poetry in cast-iron that made the case for kettlebells better any words could.

I thought to myself "Now you're speaking my language."



Larry Gallagher (pictured below, red t-shirt) practices his kettlebell cleans and his Martone at [San Francisco CrossFit](#).

