

GrappleArts.com Presents

Four Days of Fitness



By Stephan Kesting

Four Days of Fitness

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DISCLAIMER

The author and publisher disclaim any liability for any injuries or damages that may occur by attempting these exercises. The exercises described are for informational purposes only, and the reader assumes all responsibility for their safety and proper execution of the described exercises. Readers should consult a physician before starting this or any other exercise program.

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PREFACE

This ebook chronicles a week when a combination of work and family commitments prevented me from stepping onto the mat. Here is what I did to stay in shape during that period of time, and preserve my emotional and mental equilibrium.

The Core Principles of my Workout:

1. Do both aerobic and anaerobic training.
2. Use multi-joint movements (squats, benchpress, pull-ups).
3. Keep it under an hour.
4. Mat time comes before conditioning. It's better to be tired from actually training your sport and not be able to lift as much or run as fast rather than the other way around. If you have enough time to recover from your conditioning, or if you won't be going to class at all in the near future, then knock yourself out and go hard!
5. Evolve your training. As you age, deal with injuries, and evolve your training goals, your training should change too.

“SHOULD I BE COPYING THESE WORKOUTS?”

NO! You should be using my workouts to give you ideas about how you might structure your own workouts and to give you ideas for both new exercises, and to be able to combine them.

Keep in mind that everyone is different. Everybody has a unique combination of:

- Age
- Injury
- Athletic needs
- Available time to train
- Available resources to aid recovery (e.g. sleep quality)
- Personal preferences: if you just hate running then what OTHER exercises are you going to do to build serious aerobic and anaerobic endurance?

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Please keep in mind that this is what works for me — every person reading this will be younger or older, lighter or heavier, and more or less fit than I. Every person will have different genetics and fitness goals as well. What I'm getting at is that the exercises YOU need to be doing might be quite different from what I'm doing.

WHY SHARE THIS INFORMATION?

Over the years, quite a few people have contacted me, asking what I personally do stay fit (despite the fact that I'm NOT an MMA fighter and that I'm now 40 years old...).

The answer is that I do a lot of different things, and my routine changes a depending on what I'm experimenting with and what I'm trying to accomplish. This week I'm doing a lot of conditioning, because between putting in a few extra shifts at the firehall (which is my job in real life) and some family commitments, there is just no way that I'm going to get onto a mat this week. My grappling fix will have to get filled by watching an instructional video or two, as well as doing a lot of conditioning.

My philosophy is that If I can't train grappling then at least I'll work out so that when I return to the mats all I'll have to work on is timing and not conditioning per se!

This eBook is an illustrated chronicle of some of my workouts. My hopes in sharing this are that some of you might get a few good exercise ideas, or be motivated to work on your own fitness and conditioning. Conditioning is critical in grappling, because if you're tired then all your technical knowledge, timing and fighting spirit go right out the window.

Voyeurism and competitiveness is part of human nature, and I think that that is why I often feel frustrated when reading about other people's workouts. A vague description of someone's exercise routine, something like "he stays in shape by running, biking and lifting weights," doesn't really tell me anything at all. Instead I want to know exactly what exercises they do, what kind of weight they use and how many sets and repetitions they manage to achieve. Knowing details allows me to gauge my fitness relative to them.

That is why I've been sharing my workout routines this week in such detail. I'm not saying that you should do the exact same routine as I, but if knowing what my numbers are motivates you to to exceed me at everything then some good has come of these posts. As a sidenote I'm guessing that after I share the exact details of my workouts from this week, half of you will think that I'm incredibly strong, and the other half will probably think that I'm pretty slow and weak.

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“WHERE ELSE CAN I FIND SOME IDEAS?”

I have covered several topics on grapplearts.com which may come in useful in shaping your workout:

Tips:

[Archive of Grapplearts Tips](#)

[I Can't Run](#)

[Going Anaerobic, Part 1, Part 2, Part 3](#)

[Balancing Mat Time with Conditioning](#)

[19 Pull-up Variations for BJJ & Submission Grappling](#)

[GSP's MMA Conditioning Coach: Jon Chaimberg](#)

[Why I'm Training Like A \(Strikeforce\) Girl](#)

[My Default Cardio Workout](#)

[Keeping the Will to Fight](#)

Articles:

[Archive of Grapplearts Articles](#)

[Cardio for Martial Arts](#)

[Perfect Peaking Part 1: Overtraining in Mixed Martial Arts](#)

[Perfect Peaking Part 2: Tapering and Peaking for MMA and BJJ competition](#)

[Basic Weight Lifting for Martial Arts and Grappling](#)

[Kettlebell Training for MMA](#)

Videos:

[My Mixed Martial Arts with Denis Kang](#)

[Dynamic Kneebars the Definitive Video](#)

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DAY 1: NO GRAPPLING, WHAT TO DO NOW?

Tabata sprints (slow and steep).



With the treadmill set at 6 miles per hour and a 15% incline I did 10 sprints, each sprint lasting 20 seconds and taking only 10 seconds of rest before getting back on the treadmill. This feels easy for the first couple of repetitions, but then it really starts to suck towards the end!



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Circuit 1: Complex Pulling



My first circuit consisting of pull-ups with 30 lbs of extra weight (four reps), then ten medicine ball slams, and then 15 plyometric reclined pull-ups.



For this last exercise I grabbed a thick rope slung over a bar, laid back almost horizontally, and then pulled myself up towards the bar 15 times, as fast as I could, using a bouncing action at the bottom of the movement. I repeated this circuit 4 times.

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Circuit 2: Complex Pushing

My second circuit was simpler and consisted only of two exercises: Benchpress using dumbbells (of various weights and repetitions) followed by 10 clapping pushups. I repeated this four times, resting for a minute or two between circuits.



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I often finish my workouts by working on my abdominal and lower back regions. Today I did: Hanging Ab knee raises, touching my knees to my wrists, 12 reps.



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Back Hyperextensions, 30 repetitions, holding a 20 lb dumbbell in each hand.



Crunch sequence: 25 x straight legged crunches, 20 x bent legged crunches, 15 x straight, 10 x bent, 5 x straight.



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DAY 2 : ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER CIRCUIT.

This being my second day without grappling I was determined to go hard today. Since yesterday's workout focused on the upper body, I started today with a crossfit-style workout that I call 'Reid' (in honor of my friend with whom I dreamed up this torture sequence).

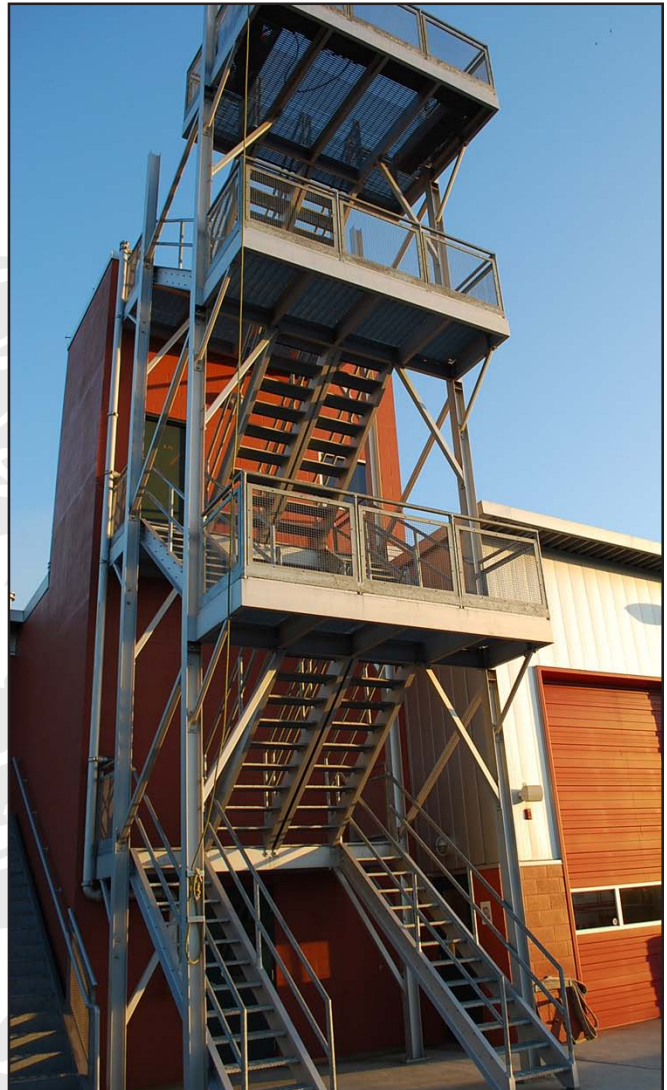
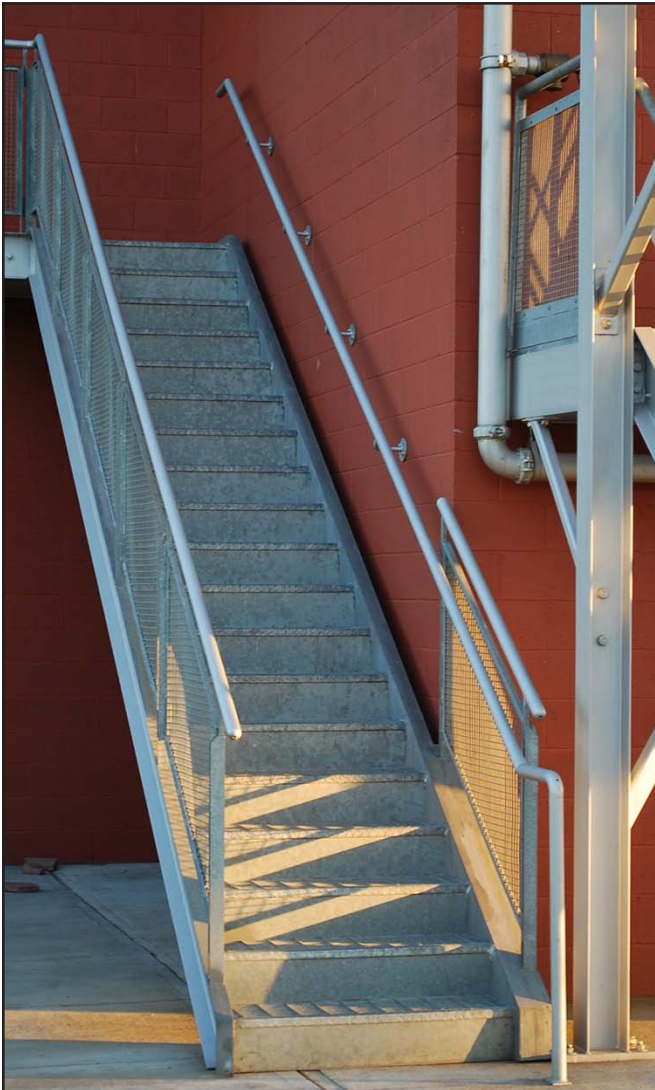
In the 'Reid' circuit you combine barbell squats with running stairs. I usually aim to complete 10 circuits in 20 minutes or less. Today each circuit consisted of:

1. Barbell squats: 8 repetitions with 225 lbs on the bar.



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2. Stair jog, 7 1/2 flights of stairs up, 7 1/2 flights down



I went directly from the squat rack to the stairs, and from the stairs back to barbell. I finished 10 circuits in 18:58, which is a personal best!

After lying on the floor for 5 minutes to recover from the Reid, I moved on and did two sets of kettlebell swings.

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For the first set I used a 24 kg kettlebell and swung it from between my legs up to head height with a straight arm 10 times using my right hand, 10 times using both hands, 10 times using my left hand, and then 10 times with both again.



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For the second set of swings I used a 32 kg kettlebell, and did 32 repetitions (8 with each hand, 16 with both hands).

I like kettlebell swings because they are basically rhythmic and repetitive Olympic lifting, without having to catch the bar at the top of the movement. As such I think one gets a lot of the benefit of Olympic lifting, especially the explosive hip movement, without being forced to learn all the difficult technical details of the Clean and Jerk or the Snatch. Many kettlebell exercises can also be done with dumbbells if kettlebells aren't available to you.

My next exercise was dumbbell curl and press for arm and shoulder strength. To do this you first curl dumbbells up to shoulder height, and then press them overhead. I did two sets of 8 repetitions with 40 lb dumbbells.

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Then I did some abdominal work, doing 12 hanging ab knee raises (knees to wrists, just like yesterday).



Followed by two minutes of twisting crunches.



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My last exercise was to strengthen the back of the neck: I used a neck harness with 45 lbs attached to it, and lifted my head up and down about 20 times.



It sounds like I did a lot of stuff today, but the core of the workout was definitely the Reid circuit; I kept everything after that pretty easy. The combination of barbell squats and running stairs is an absolute killer! If you don't have a long stairwell or tower near your gym you could always try using a steeply inclined treadmill or a stairmaster instead.

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DAY THREE: FEELING SORE AND TIRED

It's day three of my four day fitness blitz. I'm hitting the conditioning hard this week because I want to be ready to get back to the mats next week. I've often said that conditioning is critical for grappling, because if you're tired in a match then all your technical knowledge, timing and fighting spirit goes right out the window. In fact this topic was among the very first blog posts four years ago:

www.grapplearts.com/2004/05/all-else-being-equal-work-on-your.htm

I've already done lots of anaerobic and muscular endurance exercise this week, but strength is important too, so today I shifted gears. Today's goal is to increase (or at least maintain) my strength and power, so that means doing a few multi-joint exercises with heavier weights, fewer repetitions, and more rest between sets.

When it comes to conditioning, I often feel frustrated when reading about other people's workouts. I think it comes down to voyeurism and competitiveness. A vague description of someone's exercise routine. something like "he stays in shape by running, biking and lifting weights," doesn't really tell me anything. I want to know exactly what exercises they do, what kind of weight they use and how many sets and repetitions they manage to achieve.

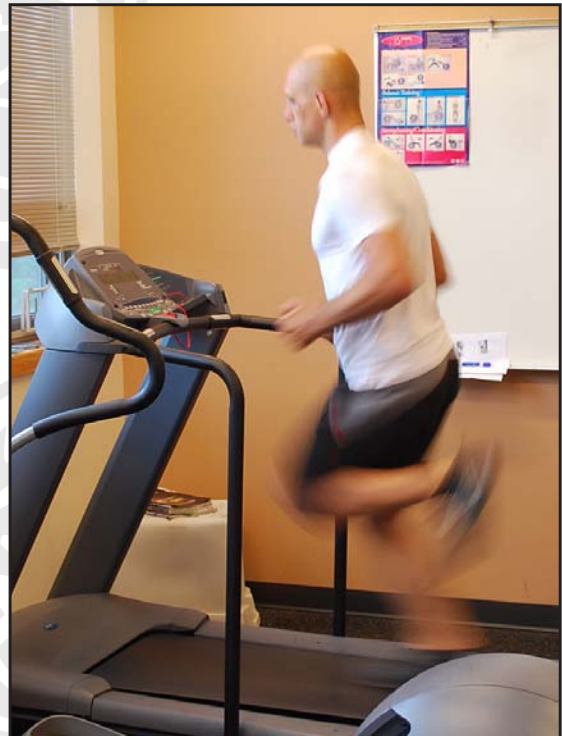
So that I'm not guilty of the same sort of vagueness I've been sharing my workout routines in detail this week - go ahead and be competitive and voyeuristic. I'm not saying that you should do the exact same routine as I do, but if knowing what my numbers are motivates you to exceed me at everything then some good has come of these posts.

As a sidenote I'm guessing that after I share my workouts from this week, half of the readership will think that I'm incredibly strong, and the other half will probably think that I'm pretty slow and weak.

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Tabata Sprints (fast and shallow)

I started with a gentle jog for 3 or 4 minutes. Then, with the treadmill set at 1.5%, I did 12 sprints of 20 seconds on the treadmill, taking only 10 seconds of rest between sprints. I was trying to maintain a constant level of effort throughout, so I dropped the speed of the treadmill every 3 sprints. My treadmill speeds today were 11.5, 11.5, 11.5, 11.0, 11.0, 11.0, 10.5, 10.5, 10.5, 10, 10 and 10 (miles per hour).



Tabatas are a funny exercise. If you're doing them right the first couple of sprints feel relatively easy, and you start thinking that you're going to breeze through the whole thing. Then, at about the fourth or fifth sprint, it's like "whoa! I hope I'm going to be able to make it through to the end". This feeling of worry takes me by surprise every time I do Tabata sprints.

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Bench Press

Having already warmed up from the sprinting so I did only one light set, doing 12 repetitions with a 135 lb barbell. I then increased the weight to 205 lbs and did two sets of 5 repetitions. I tell myself that it's my long arms that makes me such a crappy bench presser...



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Squats

With a 225 lb barbell I did 10 squats, just to get in the kinesthetic groove. I then increased the weight to 335 lbs and did two sets, each consisting of 3 repetitions.

I took plenty of time between sets, because the goal of this part of my workout was strength and power, not bodybuilding or the development of muscular endurance.



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Weighted Pull-ups

For the first time in the workout I loosely put on a weightlifting belt and tucked 60 lbs of dumbbells under the belt. I then walked over to the pull-up bar and managed to squeeze out 4 parallel grip pull-ups. After a few minutes of rest I managed a second set of four pull-ups.

I don't normally use that much additional weight for weighted pull-ups, but today I had a good reason. I was working out with a friend, and he managed to crank out 6 bodyweight pull-ups, which is quite respectable given that he is about 270 lbs heavy and 6' 6" tall. With a full stomach I am only about 210 lbs, so we agreed that I had to put on another 60 lbs of weight before we could compare my pull-up numbers to his. While I think that this logic was a bit faulty it was still a good inspiration to really go all-out on my pull-ups.



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DAY FOUR: WORKING OUT IN THE OUT OF DOORS

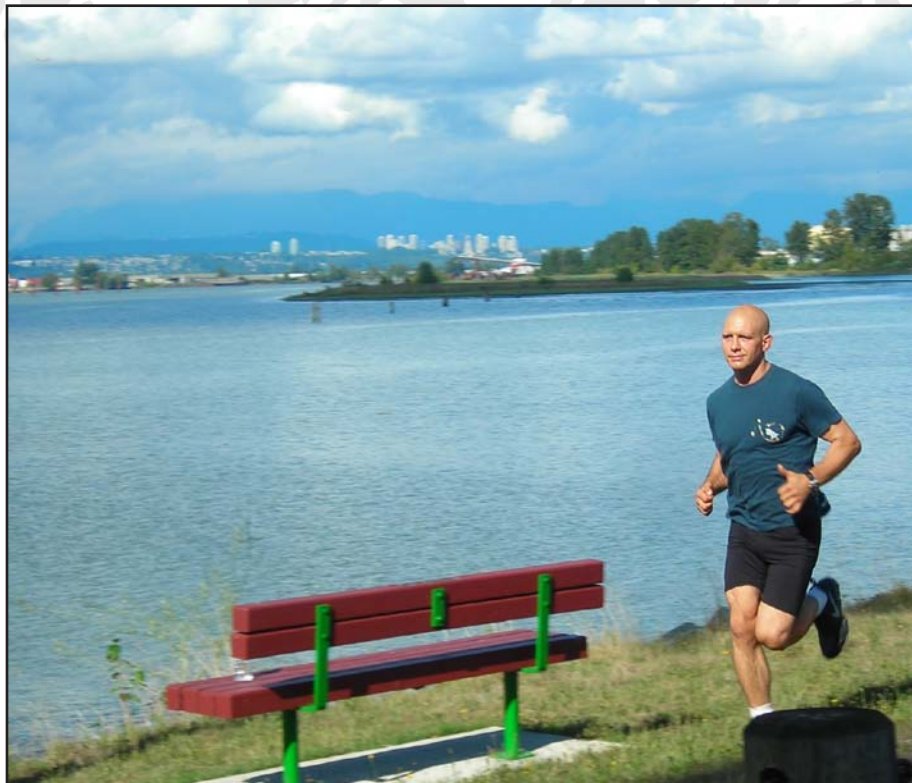
A lot of experts training MMA fighters and BJJ competitors recommend against doing aerobic (i.e. extended duration) training and say that you should only do sprint work, but I don't find myself in agreement with them. I've found that aerobic work really helps my grappling, as I've previously discussed in this tip:

www.grapplearts.com/2006/06/hiit-of-lsd.htm

On the first three days of my four day fitness blitz I did a lot of anaerobic and muscular endurance training. Today I wanted to do some aerobic work, some 'cardio' in the purest sense. And I wanted to do it outside.

I love running outdoors. Most of the time when someone who tells me that they find running boring I find out that they actually mean that they find running on a treadmill boring. If I'm running on a treadmill I have about a 20 minute attention span – any more than that and I'd better have some really good music on my iPod. Running outdoors, however, is an entirely different situation, and I'm happy to go for an hour or more and never feel bored.

If you can pull it off, running outdoors on gravel or soil as opposed to asphalt and cement is also a lot easier on the joints. Better shock absorption characteristics and slight variations in the angle of the terrain make running on natural surfaces much more joint friendly.



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Part 1: 40 Minute Run

For this workout I picked a nice park that is located on my way to work. I ran for about 40 minutes at a moderate pace on the trails along the river and through the forest. Although I wasn't running with a partner today I went at an intensity that would have allowed me to speak in short sentences, but not paragraphs. For me this translates to keeping my heart rate at about 140 to 145 beats per minute (I measure my carotid pulse for 10 seconds and multiply that number by 6).



Part 2: Bodyweight Exercises

After this run I found a good place to do pull-ups, and did 12 bodyweight pull-ups followed by 30 bodyweight pushups. I did this twice, for a total of 24 pull-ups and 60 pushups, just enough to get a little bit of a 'pump'.



If you're a grappler but think that running isn't for you, then do yourself a favor and check out the following post before you give up on running entirely:

[I Can't Run, the Excuse List](#)



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DAY 5: TIME TO TAKE A BREAK.

I rested! My body was getting sore, and I've learned from painful experience that more is not always better!

Have a look at this article for information on overtraining: [Perfect Peaking](#)



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SUMMARY OF EXERCISES

DAY ONE

1. Jog 5 minutes, then Tabata sprints, 10 reps at 6 mph and 15% incline
2. Four circuits of:
 - Weighted pull-ups
 - Medicine ball slams x 10
 - Reclined plyometric rope pull-ups x 15
3. Four circuits of:
 - Bench press (4 to 6 reps)
 - Clapping pushups x 10
4. Hanging ab raises x12
5. Back Hyperextensions x30 + 20 lbs
6. Crunch sequence: 25 x straight legged crunches, 20 x bent legged crunches, 15 x straight, 10 x bent, 5 x straight.

DAY TWO

1. The 'Reid': 10 circuits of:
 - Barbell squats, 225 lbs x 8 reps
 - Stair run: 7 1/2 flights up, 7 1/2 flights down
2. Kettlebell swings
 - 24 kg kettle bell, 10 x right hand , 10 x left hand, 10 x both hands
 - 32 kg kettle bell, 6 x right hand , 6 x left hand, 12 x both hands
3. Dumbbell curl and press
 - 2 x 8 reps at 40 lbs
4. Hanging Ab knee raises
 - 12 reps
5. Twisting Crunches
 - 2 minutes

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6. Neck lifts
 - 20 reps at 45lbs

DAY THREE

1. Tabata sprints
2. Bench press
 - 135 lbs x 12 reps
 - 2 x 5 Reps at 205 lbs
3. Squats
 - Bench press (4 to 6 reps)
 - 2 x 3 reps at 335 lbs
4. Weighted Pull-ups:
 - 4 reps x 2 at 60 lbs

DAY FOUR

1. Forty minute run at moderate pace.
2. Two circuits of:
 - Bodyweight pull-ups x 12.
 - Bodyweight pushups x 30.

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Stephan Kesting is a black belt in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, an instructor in Combat Submission Wrestling and a lifelong martial artist.

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