

FIGHTING TALK

COMBAT SPORTS & CONDITIONING

IN HIS FINAL COLUMN FOR **MUSCLE&FITNESS**,
MARCO LOOKS AT **THE BENEFITS OF ROPE TRAINING**

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I am constantly amazed by new training methods, which highlight how amateurish and basic my approach was when I competed.

If someone watched one of my conditioning sessions at the end of my career ten years ago and compared it with what I do now they would be astonished by how much it has changed.

Progress is good and particularly important in combat sports where sports science and advanced training methods are relatively new and untested. It's not enough to copy conditioning methods from other sports. Modern fighting is versatile and three-dimensional; if you want to improve you need to adopt unconventional training methods.

Skills training is important but it won't get you far without excellent conditioning. I've seen many technically gifted fighters beaten by less talented but better conditioned ones.

This being my last column, there is one more piece of unconventional conditioning equipment I want to discuss: the rope. For a long time I didn't particularly rate ropes but in the last few years I have become a keen advocate of their conditioning benefits. There are two types we can use:

CLIMBING ROPES

Rope climbing can really boost your muscles' pulling ability, thicken your forearms, and improve your grip, core stability, strength, lactate management and endurance.

They are essential for grapplers and wrestlers but the varied skills required in mixed martial arts nowadays make them useful for all kinds of fighters. They can massively increase the strength in your arms, which can stun your opponents. Thai boxers, for example, will find themselves much stronger in the clinch if they train with ropes.

BATTLING ROPES

These ropes require you to constantly pound your arms, trunk and core in a variety of motions. An added benefit is that they enable you to change direction suddenly like you would in a fight. They are a complete conditioning tool and will build explosive power and core strength.

The first time I saw battling ropes I was amazed by the dynamism and energy. Watching them was like being hypnotised by a snake but then my scepticism prompted me to investigate their usefulness.

At first I thought they would only be good for cardio purposes but now I am a total convert. Both types of rope can be used efficiently as sport-specific or general conditioning tools, depending on your training phase.

Any training is beneficial if it uses the same energy systems that you require when competing and mimics the speed and movements of competition. I am confident that if you read this article and look at some rope training videos online you will be convinced of the

benefits. Few conditioning methods will strengthen your forearms as well or give such great overall conditioning benefits.

ROPE EXERCISES

I like to use ropes at the beginning of the season to build stamina and work on tissue capillarisation. But they're also beneficial during fight camps when I need to add dynamism to properly balance a circuit.

CLIMBING ROPES

FULL LIFT: Start from a supine position with a rope hanging above you. Try lifting your own bodyweight without using your legs to help. Keep your whole body fully engaged. Pull yourself up and down as many times as you can. The first time I did this my arms started to give up after only one rep. I was amazed how much strength the exercise needed (and I lacked).

This movement helps to develop grip endurance (essential for a good choke technique and grappling) and pulling skills. With a seven-metre rope and a crash mat you can also attempt a full climb of the rope in a set time or for reps.

ROPES ARE GREAT FOR GRIP STRENGTH



POWER CLIMBS: Sit on a mat with the rope hanging above you. Stiffen your whole body, engaging your core and legs. Forcefully grab the rope and lift yourself up with one or two quick pulls, remaining in a sitting position. Haul yourself up as high as you can, then let yourself down and try again. Repeat as many times as you can.

This will develop explosiveness, core strength and pulldown activation, which is great for the clinch in Thai boxing.

Too many fighters miss out on submission victories because their arms are not strong enough to hold on to the end. They might have mastered the skill, but their grip can't cope with the changes of tension and length of time it can take to finish an opponent. You have to train your muscles specifically.

BATTLING ROPES

TWO-HAND SLAMS: Holding a rope in each hand, lift your arms and extend your knees before forcefully slamming the rope into the ground, bending your legs as you do so to transfer more power into the movement. Repeat the motion, creating waves with the ropes. Your lungs, shoulders and core will feel it in no time.

ALTERNATE ARM BIG/SMALL

WAVES: Holding a rope in each hand, assume a squat position. Ensure your erectors and abs are engaged and keep your back flat. Move your arms up and down in an alternating manner, creating two patterns of waves. To change the size of the waves, adjust your knee extension. You can add lateral movements or side bounces if you want to make it more difficult.

DOUBLE UPPERCUT WAVES: Holding a rope in each hand, perform an uppercut motion with each arm. The waves will start to form before hitting the floor.

HORIZONTAL WAVES: Holding a rope in each hand, keep your arms at your sides with your elbows bent at approximately 90°. Begin moving your arms inwards and outwards in a quick movement to create horizontal waves. You can change the height by adjusting your knee angle.

The length of time you do each exercise will be determined by your training phase and purpose. Battling ropes are great for exercises lasting for more than 30 seconds so you can use them in any part of a periodised programme.



Rope exercises are not for the faint-hearted. You'll soon learn to respect them because they will make your arms and lungs burn like few other things can. But who jumps into the ring if they're afraid of a good workout?

There are many more rope drills involving things like torso twists, but I'll leave it to you to experiment and find new ways to use ropes.

Many thanks to all of you readers, and to those who have made my time writing for *Muscle&Fitness* such an amazing adventure for the last 16 months. **M&F**

Marco Mastrorocco is a strength & conditioning coach. He is a former pro fighter (WAKO) in the S.A.M Fragale (Pisa, Italy) who won 4 Italian titles and the Bronze medal at the European Championships (2004). He currently runs international seminars for ring sports and conditioning. Director GIFT-Academy (www.giftacademy.com) and Head of Performance for www.ultimateconditioningcoach.com.

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