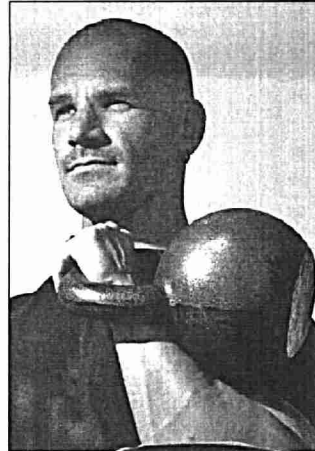
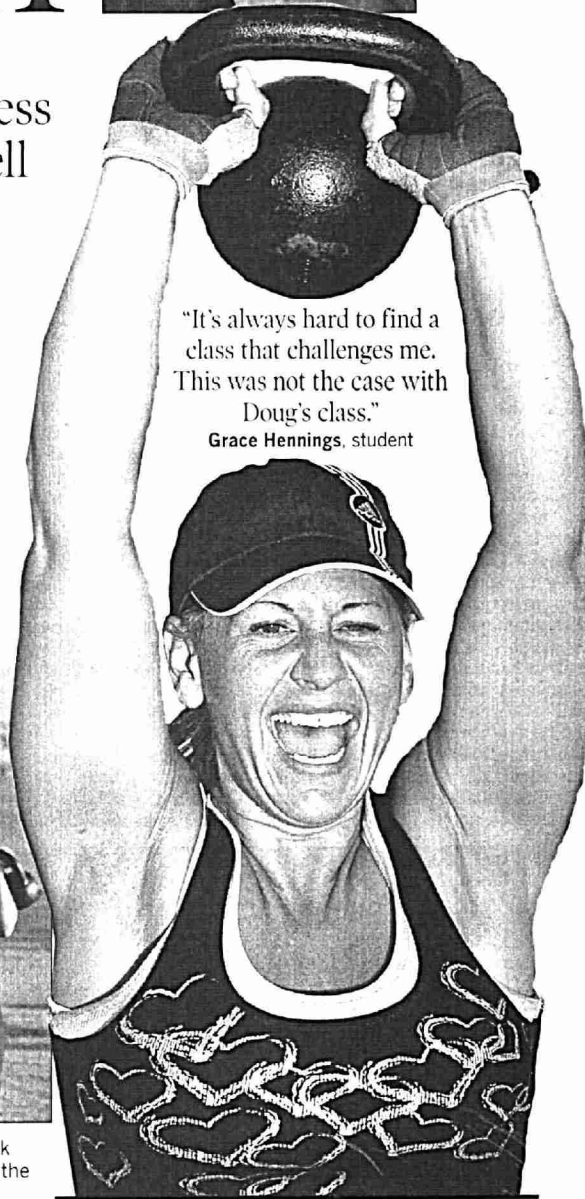


Russian Secret Weapon

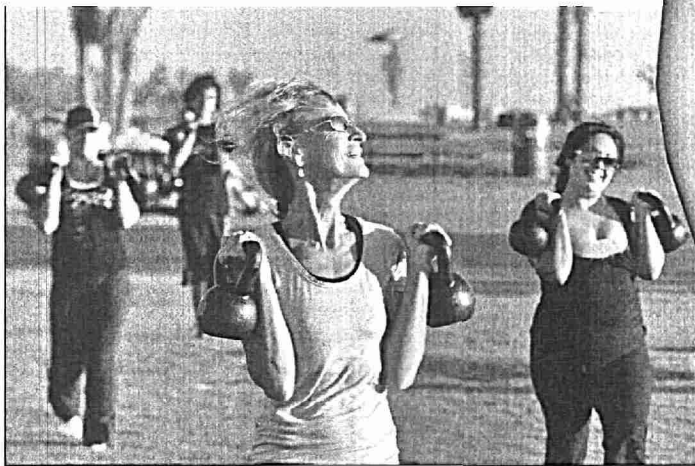


Doug Nepodal, who uses kettlebells in his fitness class, is a Russian Kettlebell Challenge-certified instructor. Nepodal said he trained three years before he earned his certification.

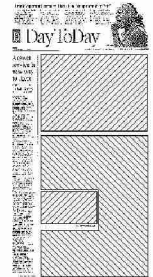
Trainer teaches little-known fitness phenomenon called the kettlebell



"It's always hard to find a class that challenges me. This was not the case with Doug's class."
Grace Hennings, student



Kris Hennings, front, and others in the fitness class perform a rack walk while carrying a kettlebell in each hand. Instructor Doug Nepodal says the exercises provide both a strength and cardiovascular workout.



By Alicia Doyle ■ Correspondent

A personal trainer for 12 years who has done everything from power lifting to bodybuilding, Doug Nepodal found his fitness niche when he discovered a "Russian secret weapon" called the kettlebell.

"I held personal training certifications from five different nationally recognized groups; then I found kettlebells in 2002 and I was hooked," said Nepodal, 36, of Ventura, who became a certified kettlebell instructor in 2005.

"I have never looked back," he said. "It has been the turning point in my training career."

Nepodal recently moved to Ventura County from northeast Ohio at the encouragement of his mentor, Pavel Tsatsouline, a former physical training instructor for the Soviet special forces and a nationally ranked kettlebell lifter in that region.

"In 2007, Pavel appointed me to the position of team leader; since then

I have had the opportunity to train people all over the world," said Nepodal, who met Tsatsouline for the first time in 2003 at the Arnold Classic annual bodybuilding competition (yes, fellow Californians, it is named for that Arnold) in Columbus, Ohio.

Nepodal is now among about 25 people in the world who work as a teacher for Tsatsouline and his company, Dragon Door. Nepodal's most recent excursion over the summer took him to Denmark, where he spent a week teaching fitness with kettlebells.

"It was one of the greatest times of my life," he said.

He now teaches fitness classes on the beach at Marina Park in Ventura at 7 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays and at 6 p.m. on Wednesdays.

"I have been using them with my clients since 2002 with great results," Nepodal said.

"Kettlebells work both cardiovascular conditioning and strength at the same time," he said. "I have had great success with my female clients because they lose weight, tighten their abs and gain strength without gaining

any size. So you will fit better in your clothes, your abs are flat and you are stronger than your husband."

Cannonball with a handle

In Russia since the 1700s, the kettlebell is a traditional Russian cast-iron weight looking somewhat like a cannonball with a handle.

The kettlebell has become a popular exercise tool in the U.S. due largely to the efforts of strength and flexibility coach Tsatsouline.

"It ... can weigh anywhere from 18 pounds up to 106 pounds," Nepodal explained. "They have been used by the Russian special forces, FBI, Homeland Security, and SWAT teams all over the country."

Anybody can train with kettlebells: "Young, old, male, female — you name it, they have trained with me," Nepodal said.

The best part about kettlebell training is that the workout incorporates strength and cardiovascular conditioning at the same time, he emphasized. "So we get the benefits of both in one session; no need to run off and get on the treadmill. To do this, we swing it, press it, squat it, throw it; anything you can think of, we do it. It is the ultimate handheld gym."

Students say ...

Alan Daniels of Ventura learned about kettlebells on the Internet and purchased one from DragonDoor.com.

"When I read on the Web site that Doug was going to be offering classes in Ventura, I was very interested," said Daniels, 57. "The workout itself is very tough but it's great fun.

"There is something about controlling the moving ball of iron that is very

satisfying," Daniels said. "The setting at the beach is a great added plus."

Nepodal is a first-rate instructor who pushes clients hard but not beyond their current abilities, Daniels continued.

"Some of the exercises are very technical," he said, "and Doug is masterful at explaining the moves and fixing what you are doing wrong.

"The Russian kettlebell certification system seems to be a complete, well-thought-out, demanding program for physical transformation. I enjoy it very much."

As a tae kwon do practitioner, Daniels is always looking for ways to increase his strength, endurance and mental toughness, he added.

"In just a few months of attending Doug's classes, I've noticed improvements in all three areas," he said, adding, "with a small adjustment to my diet, I've lost body fat and increased muscle."

'Immediately intrigued'

Grace Hennings of Oxnard has heard about kettlebell training a few times. "but I never really knew what it was exactly," said the 28-year-old.

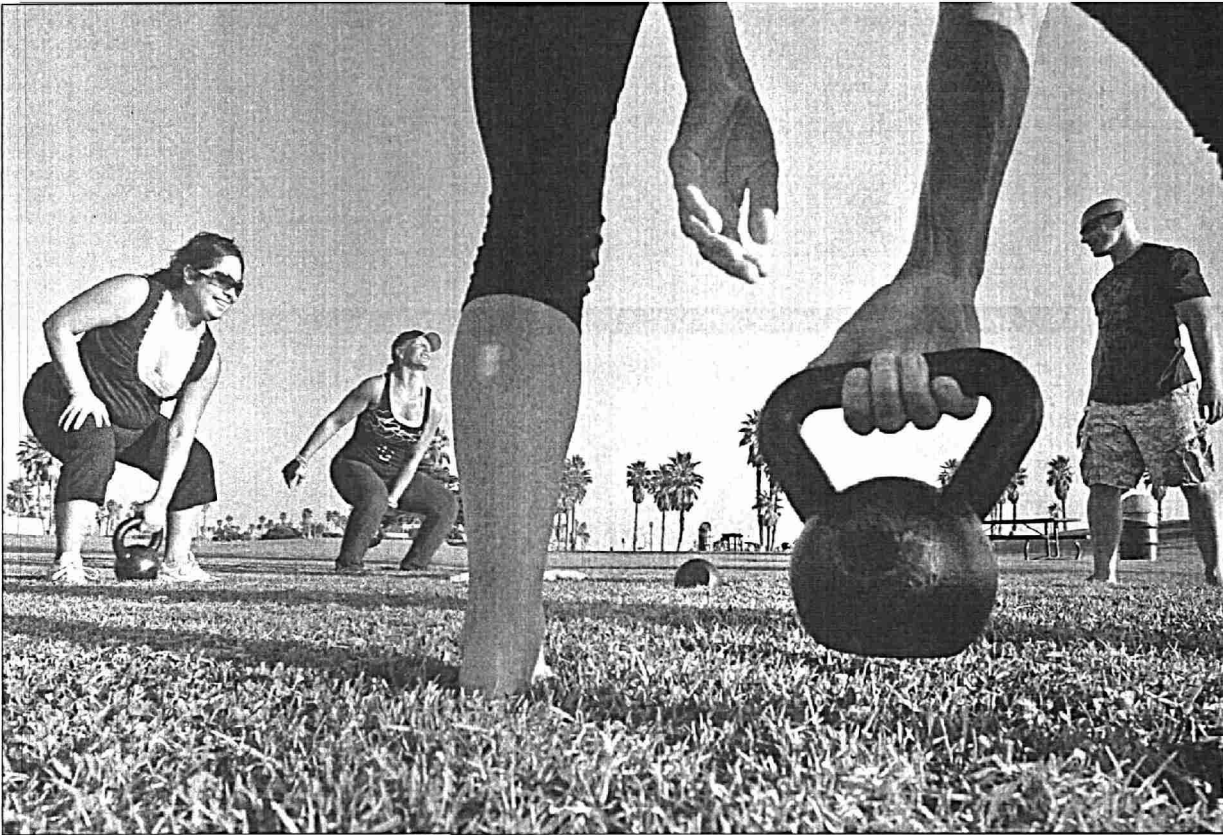
"I was immediately intrigued," she said. "I Googled it online and it seemed interesting and different. ... I do weight training regularly, so for me it's always hard to find a class that challenges me. This was not the case with Doug's class."

That's because during a kettlebell workout, "you are forced to focus on stability and flexibility due to their shape and weight," she said of the implements. "It really

forces your entire body to turn on, whereas regular weight training does not."

Anybody at any fitness level could do this, Hennings added. "I have brought many of my friends, and I even have my mom coming now and she loves it."

For more information, e-mail classicironkb@gmail.com or visit <http://www.dougnepodal.blogspot.com>.



Photos by Joseph A. Garcia / Star staff

Andrea Denati, left, Grace Hennings and others perform a kettlebell swing during a fitness class with trainer Doug Nepodal, right, who has been using kettlebells with his clients since 2002. Nepodal was conducting his fitness class at Marina Park in Ventura.