

Combat Conditioning Five Months Without Weights by Mike Mahler

If you're serious about living the Testosterone lifestyle, then you know you're going to have to train for the rest of your life. No excuses. It's a fact that we've all welcomed and accepted. But if you're going to be working out your whole life, then you're going to have to try some new stuff occasionally. If you don't, not only will your progress stop, but you'll soon be bored out of your skull.

Most of us are willing to try just about any new weight training program that comes down the pipe. But would you be willing to try something so different that it doesn't even involve using weights? One of our loyal readers, Mike Mahler, did just that. And you know what? He got in the best shape of his life. Believe it? You be the judge.

I'll be honest with you; I love lifting weights! When I look back at how fast my body changed from weight training and what it's done to improve my health, energy, confidence, and overall outlook on life, it just blows my mind. Bad habits I thought I could never give up quickly fell to the wayside as I progressed on my journey through what old-timers called *physical culture*.

Ever since I was 18 and became serious about lifting weights, I've been constantly looking for ways to make my body more efficient. I wanted to become super strong without getting too bulky and cumbersome. I saw the value in bodyweight exercises such as dips and chin-ups and also incorporated power cleans and deadlifts into my routine. However, I never would've guessed that a routine that consisted exclusively of bodyweight-only exercises would be of any value to me. I mean, come on, push ups are easy, right? Bodyweight squats? No problem! Why waste time with either when I have access to a weight room?

Well, after I got into martial arts and watched several fighters in no-holds barred events such as the UFC, Pride, and K-1, I soon realized that the complete fighters and champions had strength, heart, skill, and lots of muscular endurance. Guys like Frank Shamrock and Royce Gracie blew me away and revealed a hole in my shield of armor. I realized my strength program was incomplete and I needed something to enhance my endurance. I began scanning the net for info. One name kept coming up in my search: Matt Furey.

Furey is a martial arts world champion, the first American to ever win a gold medal competing in China, and a no-nonsense authority when it comes to disseminating quality information on grappling. When it comes to whup-ass, Furey has cases of it, and he isn't afraid to open up a can in competition. Moreover, Matt has immense knowledge on both mental and physical conditioning. When Matt released his book on bodyweight conditioning exercises entitled *Combat Conditioning: Functional Exercises for Fitness & Combat Sports*, I immediately ordered a copy. I was amazed that one of the world's toughest men used mostly bodyweight exercises!

I got the book and started on the exercises immediately. Wow, what a variety of bodyweight-only movements! Some of them looked pretty basic; however, some (such as handstand pushups) looked nearly impossible! Always ready for a new challenge, I got excited and went to work.

I started doing what Matt refers to as the "Royal Court," which consists of three exercises: Hindu pushups, Hindu squats, and the king of all exercises, the back bridge. In the beginning, I just incorporated the exercises into my weight training routine. However, as I progressed in the Royal Court I decided to give the weights a break for a while and start doing bodyweight exercises exclusively.

In the beginning, doing 25 Hindu pushups was a real struggle. However, I quickly improved and got up to 100 in about a month. Soon after, I got up to 200, then 300. As I progressed, my confidence went through the roof and I started getting noticeably leaner. In addition, my energy and overall sense of well-being went up several notches and I felt much more limber and lighter on my feet. After I did 800 Hindu pushups and 1100 Hindu squats in one workout (no, that's not a misprint), I decided to start working on some of the other exercises in the book such as reverse pushups, wall walking, fingertip pushups, and jumper squats.

All the exercises offered new challenges and once again my muscular endurance and confidence went through the roof. My body fat went to an all time low of 6%. (I was on a fat loss diet as well during this time.) I started working with a heavy bag again and was amazed at how much easier it was to keep going without getting fatigued.

So, what the hell are these exercises and how do you do them? Well, let's stop messing around and jump right into the Royal Court and a couple of my other favorite exercises guaranteed to kick your ass!

The Back Bridge

Tired of that nagging back pain and that stiff, weak neck? Well, this is not only the best exercise for your neck, it'll also help keep your back pain-free. Lie on your back and put your hands beside your head. Push up off your feet and push your chest back at the same time. Rest on your forehead. Now rock back and forth, decreasing the distance between your legs and head. Keep your body really tight and flex every muscle from your chest, neck, back, all the way to your legs and feet.

In the beginning, just work on being comfortable in this position and becoming more flexible. Once you can touch your nose to the mat, try holding it there for 30 seconds. Once you can do that, hold it for a minute, then two, then three. Once you can hold it for three, take your hands away and fold them in front of you across your chest. Work up to three minutes. To make it more enjoyable, try listening to music while bridging.

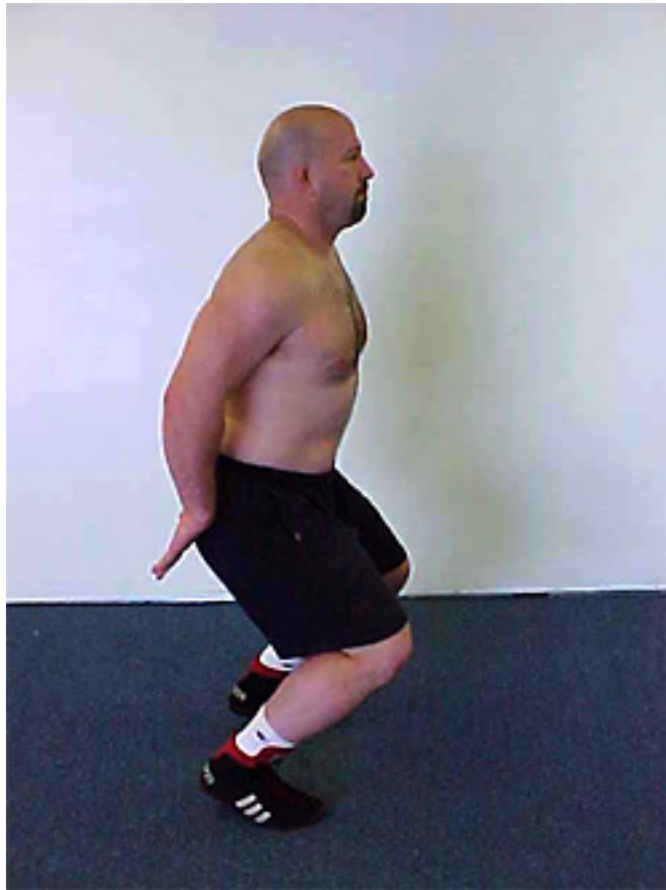


Alternatively, you can count to 200 or set a stopwatch for three minutes. Try not to relax any part of your body while bridging and really focus on keeping your body tight. The longest I've ever held the bridge is fifteen minutes. Man, what a rush! Several *T-Mag* forum members have started doing this exercise and are raving about how their neck and back pains have vanished. Join the club and get started on bridging.

The Hindu Squat

I know, I know, most of you out there squat with hundreds of pounds so this exercise needs no explanation, right? Wrong, this exercise is much different. First stand upright and keep your hands to your sides. As you're squatting down, raise your heels off the ground and go down until your ass touches your calves. From there, explode up and swing your arms forward. Once there, pull your arms back into your sides as if you were rowing a boat.

Also, make sure you breathe out on the way down and in on the way up. That's not the way you'd normally breathe doing squats, but believe it or not, it seems to work great for bodyweight squats. You'll find this helps you keep your balance, stay tight, and gets your upper body involved in the workout. Really focus on breathing deeply and you'll be surprised when your chest gets pumped up after a hard set.

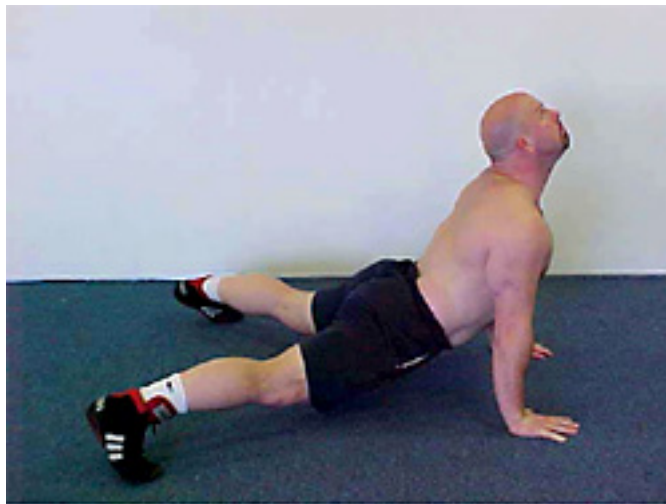




Have a short term goal of doing 100 straight reps and a long term goal of doing 500 in one set. However, in the beginning, just focus on form and getting used to the breathing. Shoot for 25 straight squats with perfect form and breathing and then build it up to 100. Also, don't do these in "super slow" mode. Instead, work on doing these as fast as possible without compromising form. When you can do 500 squats in sixteen minutes, you'll be in awesome shape and ready for combat.

The Hindu Push-up

This is a kickass exercise and one of my favorites. In addition to being a great upper body exercise, it's great for increasing flexibility in the spine and is a fantastic pick-me-up whenever you feel lethargic. Get on all fours and press your butt in the air. (Insert your own sex joke here.) Bend your back as if you were trying to make a triangle. Your head should be aligned with your back facing towards your feet. Take a deep breath and then sweep down in a circular arc motion and bend back looking up at the ceiling and breathing out. From there, push back toward your heels and start over.



Shoot for 25 straight reps in the beginning. Some of you will find this easy, others will find it awkward and 25 will be a real challenge. Don't worry about your form too much as that will improve as you make progress and get more comfortable with the exercise. Shoot for a goal of doing 100 continuous reps. Be sure that you make deep breathing a part of this exercise to reap the full benefits.

Handstand Push-ups

This is by far my favorite upper body exercise. Imagine doing a standing shoulder press with your own bodyweight and you'll get an idea of how hard this exercise is. Moreover, you're putting your body in a position that most people would find very uncomfortable. This one takes a while to get used to. However, I'm telling you, once you make some progress and you start seeing the growth in your arms and shoulders, you'll be hooked.

There are several variations of this movement, but I'll focus on the "easy" version. Find a bare wall and get about two feet away from it. Take your shoes off (you might not have control in the beginning and putting a hole in the wall would probably not make your day). Get on all fours and place one knee under your chest (and let that leg support your weight). Take a deep breath and kick up with the other leg until it touches the wall. Let it support your weight until you can lift the other leg up into the same position. Bend both legs slightly and keep them there while you do the movement.

Adjust your position until you feel comfortable and then take in a deep breath. Keep your body tight and lower yourself slowly to the floor. Touch your nose gently against the ground and push back up as hard as you can.

Don't feel frustrated if you can't get even one. Just look at it as a growth opportunity and build upon it. Once you can do ten in a row off of the floor, you can increase the range of motion by using two chairs and dipping in-between. You could also drill a hole in the floor large enough to insert your head into, but that might really piss off the people in the apartment below you. I'd just get some chairs or even a couple of books. Just don't attempt to increase the range of motion until you're confident doing handstand pushups off the floor. You can really hurt yourself if you don't have the necessary control.

I used these bodyweight exercises and a few others for about five months. I never touched a weight during this period. Even though I was dieting at the time to lose fat, I never lost any muscle during my combat conditioning experiment. Of course, my strength and endurance in these movements went up dramatically.

The first two months of my experiment I did Hindu pushups, Hindu squats, and bridging everyday, but I never trained to failure. Instead I just worked on doing more reps each week. The last three months I still did the squats and bridging every day, but I performed the Hindu push-ups and a few other push-up variations I learned from Matt every other day. Some days I'd go for a personal best, others I'd just do a minimum of 250 Hindu pushups and 500 squats. I've since added weight training back into my routine, but I only focus on functional strength exercises like power cleans and deadlifts.

Well, that'll wrap it up. You now have some powerful tools to make your strength and endurance more complete. What you decide to do is up to you. Keep an open mind and try adding a few of these exercises into your weight training program. Who knows, maybe you'll get hooked like I did and try doing them exclusively for a while. Either way, I'm sure that you'll benefit tremendously from these exercises. Give'em a shot!

For more info or to purchase Matt Furey's book, go to MattFurey.com or call Matt at (813) 994-8267. Incidentally, that's Matt in the photos.

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