

# AN INTRODUCTION TO STEEL MACE TRAINING



BY DAN CLAY

## What Is A Steel Mace?

The mace is over 1000 years old and has been used as a fighting weapon in many cultures.

From the Hindu and Persian warriors of the 13<sup>th</sup> century to skilled European fighters using weapons like the pole axe.

The mace is an ancient weapon that has been used with devastating effect.



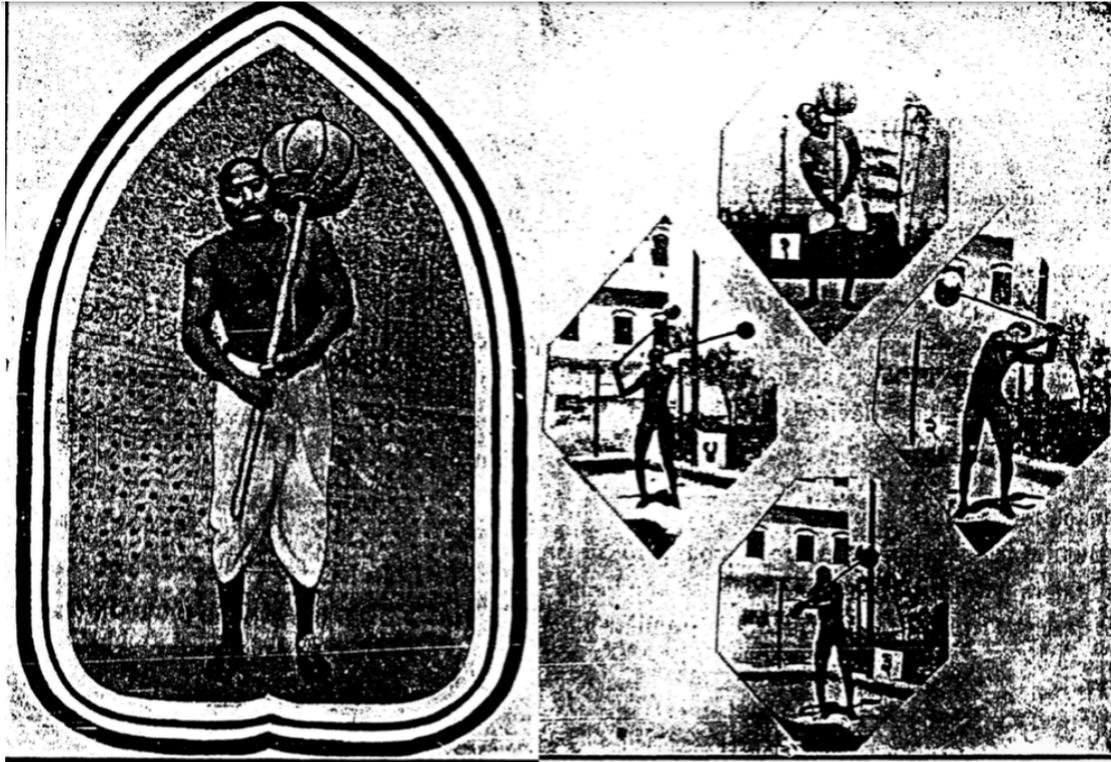
It's also one of the very first strength and conditioning tools, as warriors would train with heavy maces to develop strength for battle.

The Great Gama (pictured) of then British India was the first athlete to popularise the mace. In his European tour of 1910 the Great Gama defeated many of the top wrestlers of the time, many of the other best wrestlers of the day simply refused to fight him. For the next 30-years the Great Gama beat everyone he fought before retiring in 1952 undefeated. The mace was one of the Great Gama's secret training tools and in 1922 the Prince of Wales presented him with a Silver Mace.

The Steel Mace, also known as the Gada in India, is still widely used by the Pehlwani wrestlers for strength and conditioning in the wrestling gyms (Akshara).

In India, the Gada is made from a bamboo stick set in concrete.

Gada swinging competitions are popular with the Pehlwani wrestlers; competitors will perform as many reps as possible of the 10-to-2 exercise within a specified timeframe.



(XVII) Gada (Mace)

We hear and read many descriptions in Ramayan and Mahabharat about mace-fighting. Hanuman, Bhima, Duryodhan, Balaram, and others were the champions of mace-fighting in the age of Puranas. Mace fighting as such is not now in existence. Mace exercises however are current in Northern India. Mace includes a long handle and at one end, a heavy iron ball or stone ball is attached. Maces of varied heights and weights are devised for the use of persons of varied heights and strength.

*From The Encyclopedia of Indian Physical Culture (1950)*

In recent years, the mace has gained popularity in the Western World where you'll hear it referred to as a steel mace or macebell.

Strength and conditioning coach Jake Shannon introduced the mace to the United States where the wrestling community embraced it.

Now, martial artists, functional fitness pro's and kettlebell enthusiasts have begun incorporating mace training into their workouts for the dynamic, high-intensity full body workouts that build strength, power and develops cardiovascular improvements.

## The Anatomy Of A Steel Mace

There are two parts to the mace;

1. Mace head
2. Mace handle



The mace holds nearly it's entire weight in the mace head, which creates an uneven and very challenging leverage disadvantage.

This leverage disadvantage is what makes the mace totally unique, and after swinging the mace no other fitness tool will ever feel the same.

When starting we recommend you begin with a lighter weight until you're familiar with the movement skills, correct technique and offset weight distribution of the mace.

## Buying Your First Mace

The length of the handle makes a big difference to how heavy the mace feels and how it swings.

The longer the handle the longer the leverage, which will make the mace feel heavier.

If you're just getting started look for a mace with a handle that is between 70cm to 100cm (30-40 inches) long. Once you're confident with your technique, then you can experiment with training with a longer mace handle.

The mace handle should have a knurled grip helping you to grip the mace, chalk can also be used if you find you need extra grip.

Maces with a plastic cap on the handle will also give you extra grip.

If you need to purchase a mace we offer steel maces on our online shop:

Click here: <http://www.steelmace.com.au/shop/>

(Note: We only ship to Australia).

Use this table as a guide for recommended weights.

Ability	Weight
Female Beginner	4kg (8lbs)
Female Intermediate	6kg (13.2 lbs)
Female Advanced	8-12kg (17-25 lbs)

Ability	Weight
Male Beginner	4-6kg (8-13.2 lbs)
Male Intermediate	6-8kg (13.2-22 lbs)
Male Advanced	10-16kg (22-35 lbs)

## Maces Vs Sledgehammers

The mace handle is generally longer than a sledgehammer handle and has a knurled handle for extra grip.

A sledgehammer handle is usually made from wood or fiberglass, whereas the mace handle is made from steel, this adds extra weight to a mace.

Maces are casted as one solid piece, whereas a sledgehammer has the head glued on and can be a potential training hazard with heads flying off from poorly made hammers.

In conclusion, for the health and safety of your clients and for people within close proximity of you're training area we highly recommend you use a quality made steel mace over a sledgehammer.

## Picking Up The Mace

Place one hand at the very end of the Steel Mace, hinge your hips and use your other hand to grip the handle as close to the mace head as possible.



## Gripping The Mace

Where you grip the Steel Mace can make a huge difference to the difficulty of the exercise. If you grip the handle with a wide grip with one hand at the end of the handle and the other hand close to the mace head, the weight is evenly distributed and relatively easy to control.



## Offset Load

However, the more you move your hand away from the mace head and towards the end of the handle the more challenging it becomes on your grip. This is due to the uneven load of the mace head being off balance and requiring more stabilization and strength to control the load.



## Rack Position

When holding the mace in the rack position it's important to have your shoulders packed down and your hands close to your naval.

Whenever training with a new tool your body's nervous system will try to overcompensate by tensing the wrong areas, try to stay as relaxed as possible and focus on using the correct amount of tension and the right muscles.



## Choking Up

If you struggle to control the mace during an exercise, move your hands towards the mace head to reduce the leverage thus making the exercise easier. This is referred to as 'choking up' on the mace.



# Breathing

## Biomechanical Breathing Vs Anatomical Breathing

### Biomechanical Breathing

Most strength movements require biomechanical breathing where inhaling is performed during the eccentric phase of a movement, and exhaling is performed during the concentric phase.

For example with a kettlebell swing you would inhale during the drop, then exhale during the hip drive.

In biomechanical breathing, the breath is used to IAP (increase intra-abdominal pressure), and maximize force production through a rigid core. This breathing pattern works well with ballistic movements when external loads are high, and when a lot of tension is needed for a short amount of time.

### Anatomical Breathing

With anatomical breathing it works the exact opposite, this breathing pattern is far more economical and suited for endurance rather than power.

For example, during a kettlebell swing you would exhale during the drop and then inhale during the upswing.

This type of breathing pattern is most commonly used in the kettlebell sport where longer rounds are performed and for activities such as yoga, pilates and some martial arts.

With Steel Mace training, we generally use the biomechanical breathing pattern.

## Types Of Movements

Exercises are generally categorized into three groups; ballistic movements, grind movements and hybrid movements (also referred to as combination movements).

Ballistic movements are by nature dynamic, explosive and multi-joint exercises. These movements are not only demanding on the muscles but will quickly elevate the heart rate and provide a great cardiovascular workout. Ballistic exercises require you to control your breathing patterns and your body tension, with each repetition your body tension changes, 'tight-loose-tight'. Exercises include; swings, 360's and bullwhips. Ballistic exercises have been proven to increase athletic performance over traditional strength training exercises.

Grind movements are slower, more controlled, require constant muscle tension and a breathing pattern similar to power lifting. Grind exercises include; squats, presses, deadlifts and Turkish get-ups (TGU).

Hybrid movements or 'combinations' include both ballistic and grind elements. These movements are demanding for both the aerobic and anaerobic energy systems and require you to perform exercises with fluctuating tension and within a wide range of movement patterns. Exercises include; thrusters or clean and press.

## **Benefits Of Steel Mace Training**

Listed below are some of the many benefits you'll achieve with Steel Mace training.

### **Improve Grip Strength**

Grip strength is one of the most overlooked aspects of strength training. Good grip strength is the foundation of good healthy shoulders and is required every day for real life situations.

Basic tasks like carry shopping bags, sports such as rock climbing or wrestling and foundational strength exercises like pull ups, deadlifts and rows all require good grip strength.

For many people grip strength is their weakest link, and an improvement in grip strength will oftentimes yield greater gains elsewhere in their training.

Most Steel Maces have thick handles, which is effective for building forearm and grip strength. Any exercise with a Steel Mace automatically turns into a grip exercise.

Due to the dynamic nature of exercises like the 10-to-2, 360, bullwhip and mills, the forearm flexors and extensors are constantly challenged in a tight loose-tight-loose fashion.

Even basic strength exercises like bent over rows or military presses will lead to gains in grip strength because of the uneven load.

### **Increase Shoulder Strength And Mobility**

The shoulder is not a single joint, but a complex arrangement of bones, ligaments, tendons and muscles that make up the shoulder girdle. This makes the shoulder girdle susceptible to injury.

All upper body push/pull exercises require good strong healthy shoulders. Injury to any parts of the shoulder girdle will significantly restrict a persons training regimen.

Therefore building strong healthy shoulders are paramount to a trainee's long-term success.

Swinging the Steel Mace through the full range of motion with good technique will strengthen the ligaments, tendons and muscles whilst improving shoulder mobility.

### **Builds Rotational Strength And Total Body Strength**

By utilizing big push/pull multi joint exercises the Steel Mace can be used to condition every muscle. Just like the Steel Mace, the Steel Mace is highly versatile and can be used in a variety of ways to challenge the entire body.

Due to the large swinging cross-body rotational exercises the Steel Mace is excellent for rotational strength and anti-rotational strength through acceleration and deceleration of the Steel Mace.

## **Cardiovascular Conditioning**

Steel Mace workouts performed for time with traditional exercises like the 360 and 10-to-2 will elevate the heart rate and boost your cardiovascular health.

The versatility of the Steel Mace lends itself to flow workouts where combinations of three or more exercises are performed in sequence one after another without rest.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you for taking the time to read this report, the steel mace is a fantastic tool and you will have lots of fun training with it.

If you would like more information on how to train with the mace, or if you would like to attend a live workshop or one day course please visit: <https://www.steelmace.com.au/certification/>

Our Steel Mace Certification is accredited with Fitness Australia for 9 CECs and recognized Worldwide by the International Confederation of Registers of Exercise Professionals (ICREPS).

Wishing you the best of health,

Dan Clay

[www.steelmace.com.au](http://www.steelmace.com.au)