



## INCORPORATING VARIETY WITH BULGARIAN BAGS

BRIAN JONES, PHD, CSCS, NSCA-CPT, AND JULIE BOGGESS

Personal trainers are required to constantly challenge their clients physically and mentally. In order to retain customers, trainers must improve or maintain their client's fitness levels while keeping them interested in the process. For this reason, incorporating variety into the training program can be an invaluable tool. Research has found that a major predictor of whether people continue to exercise is how much they enjoy it (1,7,9,13). Results simply are not enough motivation if they are not having fun. The Bulgarian Bags, developed by Bulgarian wrestling coach Ivan Ivanov, provide a unique way to add interest to any client's workout program (8,11).

These bags are similar to sandbags and have many of the same benefits, but the unique shape allows for the performance of some movements that are difficult to perform with most weighted bags (2,4,10). The unique shape of the bag combined with the different grips and handles make it an extremely versatile tool. It allows for many different rotational exercises that are often not possible with other exercise equipment. The bags are portable enough for travel workouts and ideal for personal trainers who travel to their clients' homes.

Many of the same movement patterns popular in kettlebell training can be done with the Bulgarian Bags. This means that clients can learn proper kettlebell movement patterns using the Bulgarian Bags with less potential injury risk and the bags may be less intimidating than kettlebells for some people. Currently, there is no direct research on the effectiveness of the Bulgarian Bags, but several studies have found similar training with kettlebells to be effective for developing strength, power, and cardiovascular endurance (1,3,5,6,12).

### LOWER BODY TRAINING

Nearly any lower body training exercise, including squat and lunge variations, can be loaded effectively with the Bulgarian Bag. The crescent shape is ideal for front and back squats (Figures 1 and 2). A client can perform squats, squat jumps, lunges, or step-ups just as they would when using other types of resistance or loads. In addition, the front hold position (Figure 3) is excellent for developing core stability and teaching clients to maintain a more upright trunk position.

More dynamic total body work includes the swing and the swing squat. The technique for the Bulgarian Bag swing (Figures 4 - 6) is much the same as for the kettlebell swing, but with a wider stance to allow the bag to clear the knees. The swing exercise may be useful in helping to develop hip and core strength, power, and endurance. Only advanced clients should perform the swing squat (Figures 7 - 9). To start the exercise, the client should grip the bag by bringing the handles together. They should swing the bag between the legs while extending the knees, then they should drive the bag forward using the hips while descending into a squat. Maximal depth in the squat should occur just as the arms and bag are parallel with the floor.

### UPPER BODY TRAINING

Nearly any upper body barbell or dumbbell exercise can also be performed with the Bulgarian Bag, including presses, rows (Figures 10 and 11), and cleans. The different handles allow a variety of single and double handed grips for both unilateral and bilateral training. Additionally, two bags can be used by having one held in each hand.

Push presses (Figures 12 and 13), jerks (Figures 14 and 15), high pulls, and snatches can be performed with the Bulgarian Bags as well. These exercises teach power transfer from the lower to the upper body and are an efficient means of total body training. With higher repetition sets, full body exercises such as the push press, jerk, and thruster can act as effective conditioning training exercises.

## CORE WORK

All of the standing exercises previously described create a strong training stimulus for core stability. More direct core work can include weighted sit-ups, side bends, Russian twists (Figures 16 and 17), and the more advanced Bulgarian Bag spin exercise. The Bulgarian Bag spin (Figures 18 – 22) exercise involves a strong rotation with the core as the arms lock the bag into position. The client should pivot using the hips and move the bag in a circular motion around the head keeping the spine fairly neutral throughout. The client should perform equal work in both directions to ensure even development.

## WORK CAPACITY EXERCISES

These bags can also be useful for performing “finisher” exercises that come after the primary exercises are completed. Finishers should involve the whole body and can be incorporated into the program during higher intensity days or when the client wants to push themselves harder at the end of a workout. Finisher exercises can be done for a certain number of sets or timed intervals.

Two excellent finisher exercises are bag slams and bag throws. To perform Bulgarian Bag slams (Figures 23 - 26), use a heavy bag, tire, or other rebounding surface to slam the bag onto. The client should hit the surface as hard as they can with the Bulgarian Bag by using a coordinated upper and lower body effort. As it rebounds, the client should have the bag circle around their head and come to rest in the starting position.

There are a number of different ways to throw a Bulgarian Bag, for example: push throw, underhanded throw forward, twisting throw to the side, or overhead backward throw. The client could throw the Bulgarian Bag for maximal distance with good form, walk or run to the bag, and then repeat. Using either repetitions or time intervals work well for Bulgarian Bag throws.

## PROGRAMING

Bulgarian Bags can be used as a stand-alone training tool as they are made in weights ranging from 6 – 85 lb. They also make excellent additions to existing training programs that utilize more traditional methods. Table 1 provides a sample workout for a client using only Bulgarian Bags and bodyweight resistance exercises. The repetition ranges listed are basic guidelines and sets should continue only as long as the client can maintain proper form. Table 2 demonstrates how the Bulgarian Bag exercises can be incorporated into a weekly strength training program. For this routine, the Bulgarian Bag exercises are prescribed in time intervals with the goal of muscular endurance and metabolic conditioning.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian Jones is an Assistant Professor of Exercise Science in the department of Kinesiology and Health Studies at Georgetown College in Kentucky. He has worked as a strength coach for several different D-I athletic teams at the University of Kentucky and has strength coaching experience with high school and professional athletes. Jones has authored three books, two book chapters, and numerous articles on strength training, supplementation, and other exercise science topics. Jones has served as the NSCA State Director for Kentucky and currently sits on the Advisory Board for Kentucky and the Great Lakes Region. He has a 2nd degree black belt in Brazilian jiu-jitsu and is the owner and head coach of Valhalla Academy, a jiu-jitsu school in Frankfort, KY.

Julie Boggess is President and Head Coach of the Louisville Kettlebell Club in Louisville, KY. She is a certified kettlebell and Bulgarian Bag instructor, and a Kettlebell Sport competitor in which she earned the title of Candidate Master of Sport in 2014. Boggess is a life-long athlete, having played scholastic softball and field hockey, and currently maintains a 4.0 rating by the United States Tennis Association. Her clients include active competitors and those just interested in improving general fitness. Boggess enjoys working with clients of all backgrounds and abilities to bring out their best.



FIGURE 1. BULGARIAN BAG BACK SQUAT – START



FIGURE 2. BULGARIAN BAG BACK SQUAT – FINISH



FIGURE 3. BULGARIAN BAG FRONT HOLD POSITION



FIGURE 4. BULGARIAN BAG SWING – BOTTOM OF SWING



FIGURE 5. BULGARIAN BAG SWING - MIDDLE OF SWING



FIGURE 6. BULGARIAN BAG SWING - TOP OF SWING



FIGURE 7. BULGARIAN BAG SWING SQUAT - BOTTOM OF SWING



FIGURE 8. BULGARIAN BAG SWING SQUAT - MIDDLE OF SWING



FIGURE 9. BULGARIAN BAG SWING SQUAT - TOP OF SWING WITH SQUAT

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FIGURE 10. BULGARIAN BAG ROW – START



FIGURE 11. BULGARIAN BAG ROW – FINISH



FIGURE 12. BULGARIAN BAG PUSH PRESS – START



FIGURE 13. BULGARIAN BAG PUSH PRESS – FINISH



FIGURE 14. BULGARIAN BAG JERK – START



FIGURE 15. BULGARIAN BAG JERK – FINISH



FIGURE 16. BULGARIAN BAG RUSSIAN TWIST - RIGHT

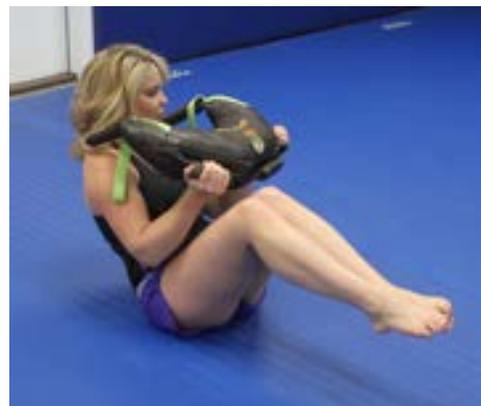


FIGURE 17. BULGARIAN BAG RUSSIAN TWIST - LEFT



FIGURE 18. BULGARIAN BAG SPIN



FIGURE 19. BULGARIAN BAG SPIN



FIGURE 20. BULGARIAN BAG SPIN



FIGURE 21. BULGARIAN BAG SPIN

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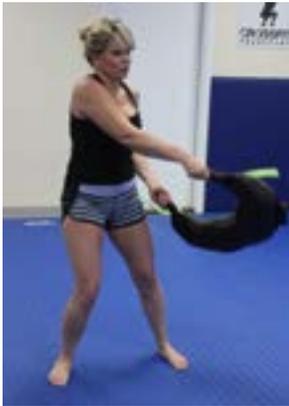


FIGURE 22. BULGARIAN BAG SPIN



FIGURE 23. BULGARIAN BAG SLAM



FIGURE 24. BULGARIAN BAG SLAM

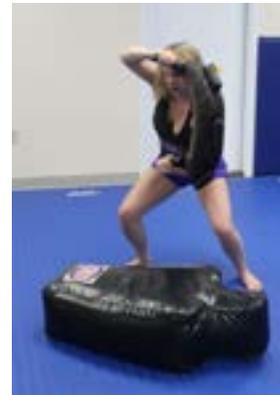


FIGURE 25. BULGARIAN BAG SLAM



FIGURE 26. BULGARIAN BAG SLAM

TABLE 1. SAMPLE BULGARIAN BAG PROGRAM

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Joint mobility warm-up  “Basic bag protocol” (4 sets or for time) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 spins (both sides)</li> <li>• 10 snatches</li> <li>• 10 shoulder throws (both sides)</li> <li>• 10 push-ups</li> </ul>	Rest and mobility work	Joint mobility warm-up  Tabata circuit (8 rounds per exercise; 20 s work and 10 s rest) rest 1 min between exercises <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alternating front lunge (bag on shoulders)</li> <li>• Snatch</li> <li>• Overhead press</li> <li>• Straight-arm front raise</li> <li>• Front squat</li> <li>• Triceps extension</li> </ul>	Rest and mobility work	Joint mobility warm-up  “The 500” (4 sets: 1st set x 10 reps per exercise, 2nd set x 20 reps, 3rd x 15 reps, and 4th x 10 reps) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spins</li> <li>• Swing snatch</li> <li>• Romanian deadlifts</li> <li>• Side bends</li> <li>• Jumping split squats</li> <li>• Front raise</li> <li>• Halos</li> <li>• Triceps extensions</li> <li>• Hammer curls</li> <li>• Push-ups</li> </ul>

*\*Maintain a consistent repetition count for each time interval*

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TABLE 2. SAMPLE BULGARIAN BAG PROGRAM TO INCORPORATE WITH RESISTANCE TRAINING

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<p>Warm-up</p> <p>Back squat (5 x 5 reps)</p> <p>Romanian deadlift (3 x 8 reps)</p> <p>Weighted sit-ups (5 x 10-15 reps)</p> <p>Bulgarian Bag circuit (3 rounds with 1 min rest)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Squat swings (x 20)</li> <li>• Spins (x 10 each way)</li> <li>• Forward push throw (x 10)</li> </ul>	<p>Warm-up</p> <p>Bench press (5 x 5 reps)</p> <p>Weighted pull-ups (5 x 6 – 8 reps)</p> <p>Neck work</p> <p>Bulgarian Bag routine (minimal rest)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Snatch (x 20)</li> <li>• Bag slams (x 20)</li> <li>• Thrusters (x 20)</li> <li>• Russian twist (x 20)</li> <li>• Turkish get-ups (x 10 each side)</li> </ul>	<p>Rest</p>	<p>Warm-up</p> <p>Power clean (5 x 3 reps)</p> <p>Front squat (5 x 5 reps)</p> <p>Hanging leg raise (5 x max reps)</p> <p>Bulgarian Bag track circuit (minimal rest)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carry bag while jogging (2 rounds with 2 min rest between rounds)</li> <li>• Swings (x 20)</li> <li>• 200-m walk/jog</li> <li>• Burpees with bag (x 10)</li> <li>• 200-m walk/jog</li> <li>• Bag rows (x 20)</li> <li>• 200-m walk/jog</li> <li>• Triceps extensions (x 20)</li> <li>• 200-m walk/jog</li> </ul>	<p>Warm-up</p> <p>Standing push press (5 x 5 reps)</p> <p>Row (5 x 10 reps)</p> <p>Neck work</p> <p>Bulgarian Bag circuit (3 x 5 min with 1 min rest; max rounds for time)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jerk (x 10)</li> <li>• Front squat (x 10)</li> <li>• Overhead throw (x 5)</li> <li>• Underhand throw (x 5)</li> </ul>