The Couture Combat Complex

At the latest Arnold Sports Festival, I was lucky enough to be part of a seminar hosted by Randy Couture. Steve Cotter (http://fullKOntact.com) and I helped demo all the movements in Randy’s arsenal of conditioning methods, and the one that did me in the most was Randy’s barbell complex, a 7 movement, 80 rep set, for 10 reps of every exercise.

The complex movements, 10 reps of each, in their exact order were the following:

1. barbell row
2. military press
3. upright row
4. split squat x 10 ea. leg
5. good morning
6. back squat + behind the neck press combo
7. Romanian dead lift (RDL)

The complex begins with 5 lbs on each side of the bar for the first set. On our 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} set you add 5 lbs to each side. If it’s too easy, add 10 lbs per side for each set.

Set 3 and 4 are performed with the same weights, and on set 5 you remove one plate per side, and once again for set 6, remove another plate per side.
The first set didn’t feel too tough for me, the second set was tougher at about the halfway point, and the third set really kicked my ass. The weight is obviously not heavy, but, performing so many reps really shocked my body into an area I was not accustomed to.

Above, that’s me and Randy after the seminar. I was sweatin’!

Most of my barbell and kettlebell complexes get 6 reps per movement, which totals around 36 reps per complex. When performing the Couture complex, you are basically doubling those reps!

I believe BOTH are beneficial and I can’t say one is better than the other. A heavier complex with less reps is great for strength endurance, the lighter weight and higher reps also helps strength endurance but really improves lactate tolerance which is something that combat athletes must be able to tolerate. It is not uncommon to see a fighter “lock up” or “shut down” due to all the lactic acid build up in their muscles!
Here are a few samples of complexes that I have used with heavier loads using various tools. I have found these moderately heavy complexes to not only improve strength endurance and conditioning, but they also help put on muscle!

The good ol’ Kettlebell Combat Complex, which you can see me go through in our DVD at http://KettlebellsforCombat.com

I usually perform this complex with a 53 or 62 lb Kb, but have seen a few beasts go at it with a 70 lb Kb!

Above, even our Football players go through an occasional combat complex to get them away from too much heavy training and to spur on some muscle growth through high reps!

NOTE: 5 reps on all one arm / one leg movements, 10 reps on all two hand / two leg movements

1A) snatch x 5 L / R

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1B) clean and press x 5  L / R
1C) 2 hand lunge (any variation) x 5 each leg
1D) 2 hand squat x 10
1E) 1 arm high pull x 5 L / R
1F) 1 arm row x 5 L / R
1G) 2 hand swing x 10

Some brutal variations you can add are:

- Include the Turkish get up in the beginning
- Finish with a burpee, push up, high pull and catch combo for 10 reps
- If outdoors, perform walking lunges and walking swings

The barbell complex

I love the BB complex, not just because it is tough, but man does it work the entire body unlike dumbbells or Kb’s and your forearms / grip get FRIED!

I like to go with 6 reps per exercise, and usually I perform 3 sets. A common progression would be 95, 115 and 135 lbs, or one warm up with 95 lbs and 2 sets with 135 lbs.

1A) hang clean and press x 6
1B) bent over row x 6
1C) Dead lift x 6
1D) RDL x 6
1E) Reverse lunge or split squat x 6 each
1F) high pulls x 6
1G) shrugs x 6
Variations can be:

- Perform thrusters in place of clean and press
- Add a burpee combo to any of the pulling movements, i.e.: burpee + push up + high pull (these are brutally fun 😊)

And, here is a recent favorite for conditioning our combat athletes using the **D Ball Combat Complex**:

10 reps per movement is the norm, with 5 for unilateral movements

1A) burpee + push up + shoulder (alternate shoulders) x 10
1B) thrusters x 10
1C) lunge variation x 10
1D) swings x 10 (squeeze the ball with hands, **do not** hold hands under ball!)

The combo movements really punish the body and test the conditioning and toughness of the athlete! We have a 40 lb D Ball and it’s a tough complex, I can only imagine using a 60, 80 or 100 lb D Ball!

D Balls are quite pricey, and to duplicate this same combat complex, one can use a sandbag or a stone and perform all the same movements as shown in the D Ball Combat Complex!

Last but not least, for no money and to be done anywhere, anytime, you can do the **bodyweight complex**:

Ok, sometimes we use stability balls and we always use pull up bars, so being at a playground or having bars for pulling will be a great benefit.

1. Suspended or stability ball push ups x 20 reps
2. squats x 20
3. forward lunges x 10 each
4. pull up / recline row variation x 10
5. abdominal movement x 20
6. burpees x 10

Above, a football player cranks out high rep stability ball push ups during a high rep workout.
Above, weighted V Ups for the athletes who still want to use some “weight” when performing bodyweight complexes!

If you’re training heavy most of the time I recommend getting in some circuit work with complexes of any type. The high reps have always been something I encourage for muscle and strength gains, and, something I feel is very important, they develop mental toughness.

Heavy weights and light weights can BOTH require mental toughness, but in a different way. It takes serious guts to get under massive, heavy, scary weights, and it takes pain tolerance and mental toughness to keep digging when you’re half way through a complex and your body wants to quit, but your mind knows there is no quitting!

I suggest trying a 3 day program for the next 4 – 6 weeks. An upper body day, a lower body day and a complex day (full body). On each complex day utilize a different tool and different movement, shoot for 3 – 4 rounds and if you want to step it up to Couture’s level, feel free to kick ass and go for 6 rounds of a complex!

Let us know how you do by posting on the forum!

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