

PUT YOURSELF THROUGH THE RINGER

Take your training to the next level with this issue's Marcus Masterclass using Olympic Rings.

BY MARCUS BONDI

The global bodyweight training phenomenon has reignited a passion for hardcore gymnastic-style strength training. You can forget about complicated and expensive high-tech machines in stuffy, sterile, air-conditioned gyms - fakery has been forsaken for breezy outdoor bar training, rope climbing and traditional bare-bones exercises like push ups, pull-ups, hill sprints and jump squats.

These old school techniques have their genesis in a simple philosophy that's grounded in discovering nature and optimising your body's natural dynamics in a healthful, functional and fun manner.

One of the most skillful disciplines, at the pinnacle of extreme bodyweight training, is the Olympic rings. Once the exclusive domain of elite gymnasts, ring training is now hugely popular all over the world amongst all those who want to take their strength levels far beyond the norm, just like you!

When you are on the rings, highly precise mental concentration is crucial

in order to engage and activate your nervous system to be in optimal tune with your fingers, hands, arms, shoulders, back, muscles and tendons! Say 'NO' to mindless mechanical bench presses and say 'HELLO' the elevated, elegant and extreme synchronisation of your mind and body.

The dynamic instability and perpetual tension of ring training forces you to focus all your senses and strengths on achieving precise stability control within every single muscle fibre during every single millisecond.

Gold Medal Olympic gymnasts have thrilled spectators and elite athletes all over the world with phenomenal ring routines which include heroic moves such as the Iron Cross, Maltese Cross and Victorian Cross. The spine-tingling awe generated by these feats of supreme strength and critical control is unequivocal and undeniable, and it's all due to the rings!

Ring training builds incredible strength quickly and efficiently throughout every strand of your muscles and this benefit

cannot be simulated in conventional, stable, on-the-ground weight training. In fact, the multi-dimensional intensity of ring training will make you much stronger, in every conceivable way, for all traditional strength exercises and sports.

When you first try a simple exercise on the rings, like assisted push-ups, (with your toes on the ground), you will immediately appreciate the total body control required to complete a single repetition. Your arms will quiver in perturbing new ways as you nerves, muscles and brain scramble to stabilise your trembling torso. But that's fine; it's a sign that your body is adapting to a new, more complex dynamic. So, smile when you wobble, you will soon get stronger and more controlled and your body and mind will be the winners!

Used creatively, ring training is incredibly versatile and can be easily adapted to the needs of the full spectrum of strength and agility levels of all individuals – from 'bodyweight beginners' right through to Olympic Gold Medal standard gymnasts.

RING TRAINING OVERVIEW – BASIC TO BRUTAL

Assisted Push-Ups

If you are a beginner to ring training, the best exercise to start with is assisted push-ups. If you can already complete about 10 regular push-ups on the ground, adjust the rings to be about 30 cm off the ground and begin push-ups— be sure your shoulders and heels are in straight line along your body. At first it feels awkward and wobbly, but as you practise, your body will adapt and you will develop strength and control very quickly. Nice! As you get more proficient, raise your feet on a platform (or step) to increase intensity.

Dips

Your first set of dips on a set of rings can be a humbling, bumbling experience, mine certainly was! Balance, strength and agility must be delicately combined to achieve that first sweet rep. So, jump yourself up onto the rings into straight-arm position and start lowering with a short range of dipping movement, extending the R.O.M as you become more undeniably awesome, as you surely will. The next step is to perform your ring dips in L-sit position (legs straight, at a right angle from your hips); rather difficult at first, but a necessary progression on the journey to an Iron Cross. (Yikes!)



Pull Ups

Rings are great for all pull-up exercises as they allow you to greatly vary the angles of your wrists and hands in order to engage every conceivable muscle fibre combination. Practise transitioning from supine hand grip (palms facing you), to pronated to hammer (or neutral) grip and you will feel your arms shredding. From the pull-up position you can experiment with a variety of static holds and L-sit exercises. Once your L-sit pull-ups are going OK, invert your body, feet to the sky and hold yourself up in a vertical, 'upside down' dip position.

Muscle-ups are also fun on the rings; start with your palms in hammer-grip position and elbows bent with feet in front of you and as you flip up, keep your elbows close to your body and twist the rings outward and 'dip up'. Focus on getting your shoulders over your hands on the transition up. It's OK to use a big kip or swing in order to get the feel of the movement required.



Levers

The next step is to seamlessly fuse your body into a single synchronised muscle by achieving a front-lever hold. To achieve a front lever, start with a pull-up hold, proceed to L-sit and then extend one leg at a time while pulling your other knee back to your chest and pushing your hips and core up; alternate extending one leg at a time and hold as long as you can. This technique moves your centre of gravity back towards your arms and enables you to 'program' all your muscles for a full front lever. You can also try 'front-lever pull-ups' by tensing your core and levering your straight body and legs using your arms/lats into horizontal position and then lower back down again. As you progress, feel free to add ankle weights (0.5-2 kg) to fortify your progress.



Iron Cross

If you've come to the stage of wanting to bang out an Iron Cross, well, congratulations! The trick is to have the rings almost at wrist level and to really curl your wrists over the rings, to 'shorten' your arms. Then you must turn your shoulders as far forward and down as you can, which brings in your bicep strength. Practice with your feet on the ground in front of you and gradually raise the rings higher as you get stronger and then BAM! Iron Cross! **FM**



Marcus Bondi is the Official Guinness World Record holder for the 5-metre rope climb and has shared his strength-training techniques with over 6 million people, including Olympic gymnasts and Special Forces units. www.marcusbondi.com Marcus uses and recommends rings and equipment by www.ironedge.com.au.