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Jeff "Big Frog" Curran (top) used almost every joint in his body trying to tap out Stephen Ledbetter at WEC 29 in Las Vegas.

# Attack of the Killer Knees

SIX SIMPLE MOVES TO KEEP YOU IN THE GYM AND OFF THE OPERATING TABLE.

**In Greek mythology,** Achilles was the greatest warrior of Homer's "Iliad," invincible except for one small area of vulnerability on his heel.

For most mortals, however, the "Achilles heel" is located two joints upward at the knee. While walking down the street, our knees bear three to five times our body weight with each step. When climbing stairs, that force can multiply to seven times our body weight. Now just imagine what your knees go through when trying to lift or kick your opponent, not to mention grappling, when your knee is twisted and turned like a pair of socks in a washing machine.

### JOINT CUSTODY

The knee is really two joints: the patellofemoral joint, where the large bone of the upper leg connects with the kneecap; and the tibiofemoral joint, where the upper

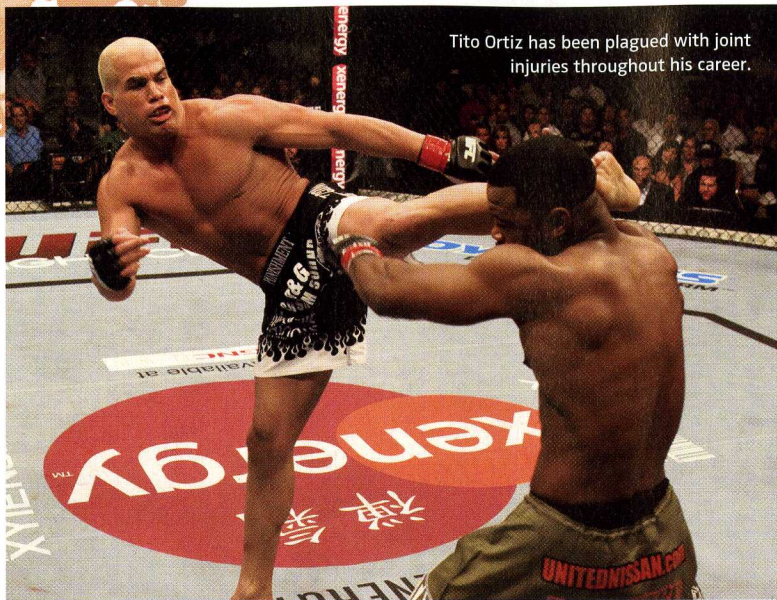
leg bone hinges with the large bone of the lower leg.

These bones are held in place by an intricate system of fibrous ligaments. The knee is further supported by tendons, while cushioning is provided by pads of cartilage, called menisci, that help stabilize the joint. When the knee is overstressed in sports, any of those structures can break down, and knee injury occurs.

Doctors have known for many years that having weak quadriceps muscles increases risk for cartilage damage. It's also been proven that athletes with weak hamstrings and poor deceleration mechanics are more susceptible to the dreaded ACL rupture.

Strengthening the muscles that support the knee (quads, hamstrings and calves) will slow down knee-cartilage damage, help resist ligament injuries, improve knee function and increase sport-specific function and power.





Tito Ortiz has been plagued with joint injuries throughout his career.

WHEN USED PROPERLY WITHIN A STRUCTURED ROUTINE, THESE SIX EXERCISES WILL STRENGTHEN ALL THE CRUCIAL MUSCLES THAT SUPPORT YOUR KNEE JOINTS.

## The Program

*When it comes to injury prevention and performance enhancement, the six key strength-training exercises for mixed martial artists are the squat, the deadlift, the lunge, hip flexion, the leg extension and the Russian lean. When used properly within a structured routine, these six exercises will strengthen all the crucial muscles that support your knee joints.*

### The Squat

- 1) front squat
- 2) back squat
- 3) split squat

- Keep your back tight with a strong natural arch at all times.
- Squat to parallel or deeper each rep of every set.
- Control your descent and explode up through the ascent.

### The Deadlift

- 1) conventional stance
- 2) Romanian
- 3) sumo

- Squat down to the bar on the conventional and sumo.
- Always keep the bar over your shoelaces; don't let it get too far out in front of you.
- Emphasize pushing your feet down into the floor and extending your hips as you raise the weight up.

### The Lunge

- 1) forward lunge
- 2) backward lunge
- 3) angled lunge

- If you've never done these before, start out with dumbbells.
- Keep your chest up and back tightly arched.
- Take a strong initial step, plant your foot, get your balance, then explosively drive yourself back up to the starting position.

### Hip Flexion

- 1) hanging knee raise
- 2) hanging straight-leg raise
- 3) banded single-leg hip flexion

- Focus on pulling your legs upward explosively as though you were driving your knee into someone.
- For the banded variation, hook an elastic band around your ankle and fasten it to an immovable object. Step forward so the band is lightly stretched and your weighted leg is behind your hip. Execute a rep by explosively kicking your knee as high as possible.

### The Leg Extension

- 1) weight on ankles
- 2) weight on feet
- 3) single leg

- Snap out the last quarter of each rep as if kicking someone.
- Control the lowering (eccentric) phase of each rep.

### The Russian Lean

- 1) eccentric emphasis
- 2) concentric emphasis
- 3) isometric

- Kneel on a padded surface on the floor.
- Have a partner hold your ankles to anchor you.
- Keeping your torso and hips tight, lean out from the knees.
- Slowly lower yourself down until you're lying facedown on the floor.
- Use your hands to push off if needed to propel yourself back up to the starting position.
- Emphasize a controlled lowering phase on all reps, and explosively contract your hamstrings to pull back up.



## The Routine

**The key to strength training while continuing to train for fights is to never make strength training your most exhaustive activity. It is a tool to help make you a better fighter, but it must not take away from your ability to train for fighting. With this in mind, your strength workouts should be brief and to the point: get in, get it done and get out.**

**Cycle through the three variations for each of the six key exercises. Go from 1 through 3 before returning to 1, without repeating the same variation two workouts in a row. (The correct variation of each exercise is indicated in brackets.) Push to increase the weight or do an additional rep each time you cycle back to the first variation.**

### MONDAY

- 1. Jump Rope:** 6 x 1 minute on and 20 seconds off (stretch during the off time).
- 2. Front Squat [1]:** Warm up with a light set of 10 reps, and then do 3 x 5 with a challenging weight.
- 3. Hanging Knee Raise [1]:** 3 x 10. If you use ab straps, bring your knees up to your elbows. If you hang from a pull-up bar, pull your knees as high as possible into your chest.
- 4. Russian Lean [1]:** 3 x 5. Use a five-second eccentric (negative motion).

### WEDNESDAY

- 1. Jumping Jacks:** 6 x 40 seconds on and 20 seconds off (stretch during the off time).
- 2. Conventional Deadlift [1]:** 5 x 5. Start with a light warm-up set and then work your way up to a 5-rep max on set 5.
- 3. Forward Lunge [1]:** 3 x 5. Start with the weight you used Monday on your warm-up set of front squats; do 5 reps on each leg. Work your way up to a challenging set of 5.
- 4. Leg Extension [1]:** 3 x 5.
- 5. Straight Leg Raise [2]:** 3 x 10.

### FRIDAY

- 1. Jump Rope:** 6 x 1 minute on and 20 seconds off (stretch during the off time).
- 2. Back Squat [2]:** 3 x 10-8-6 (light, medium, heavy).
- 3. RDL [2]:** 3 x 10-8-6 (light, medium, heavy).
- 4. Leg Extension [2]:** 3 x 10-8-6.
- 5. Russian Lean [2]:** 3 x 6-6-6. Emphasize concentric phase, coming up explosively. 🖊️



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