



HEAVY BAG SELECTION*

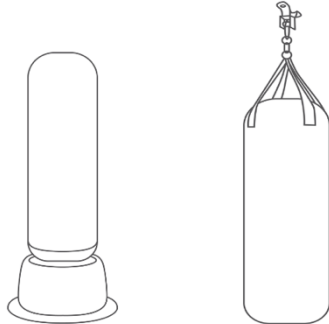
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We will be going through a lot of different elements associated with bags. Although I will share my personal thoughts throughout, the choices you make have to be right for you and your athletic goals. Heavy bags are also referred to as punching bags or punch bags.

FREE STANDING VS. HANGING BAGS

Different people will find their rhythm on different types of bags:



Freestanding Bag

Hanging Bag

- **Free-standing** bags sit on a heavier base (often filled with sand or water) and the bag is mounted on top of this. Different programs will promote these, and even individuals who traditionally train on hanging bags might find the experience interesting (just like using a double-ended bag or speed bag is a different challenge).
- Free-standing bags bend in a downward motion and then snap back. This can feel artificial.
- Free standing bags are also more prone to tipping over and movement along the floor. This movement maybe just a little with each hit, but it adds up.

Hanging bags do exactly that, they hang from a wall, ceiling or stand. For most who have used both free-standing and hanging bags, most people I am aware of prefer hanging bags. The feel when you are hitting seems more natural, and there is a cadence that develops during the workout as it swings.

- For the balance of this document we will only be considering hanging bags. Moreover, we will only be talking about “traditional” heavy bags used in boxing-related heavy bag routines, not contoured or specialty bags (e.g., head shot bags, aqua bags, etc.).

* **Heavy bag workouts have incredible properties!** Heavy bag training is an amazing exercise on almost every front, given that they: (1) work every muscle group; (2) provide strength training, power development and cardio; (3) improve agility and reaction time; and (4) enhance stability/balance and coordination. While obviously linked to boxing as a training method, it is an exceptional exercise in its own right – many of the people who prosper physically from it have never stepped in a ring or intend to. It is also a sport for all ages. Indeed, some of the agility and stability components are incredibly important as we age.

CHAINS VS. STRAPS

Let me be clear from the outset – whether we are talking about straps or chains for a bag, you NEED a swivel above it. For some reason, I have seen a lot of forums recommend one versus the others based on the ability of the bag to turn during use (e.g., “because the bag is hung by two straps it might not turn as easily”). If hung properly from an appropriate swivel, both strap and chain bags spin equally well.

- **Bags with chains** are definitely more “old school” and a number of reputable manufactures still make them. There are four separate chains that come up from different points on the bag and they are usually joined with a carabiner/link at the top. The carabiner then connects to a swivel and the swivel attaches to the hook.
- One pro I have heard regarding chains is that their length can be altered, whereas straps cannot. To date, this has not functioned into my decision making.
- Chains can be more noisy. There are so many links that heavy strikes may cause the chain to rattle a little. Not the end of the world.
- Some people will say that chains suffer more from greater wear because of metal-on-metal grinding. There is some truth to this and one of the key things to try to reduce in heavy bag applications is metal-on-metal contact. However, the greater truth is that the chains themselves do not really wear, and the carabiner at the top wears little/can be replaced inexpensively.

Bags with straps are a common and, in many ways, more preferred option.

- The bag is still harnessed at four points, but efficiency is gained because one strap will attach to two different points with a D-Ring in the middle. Hence, there are only two points to connect at the top, not four.
- I saw one bag manufacturer suggest that nylon/vinyl straps stretch. Perhaps they might in some ever so minor way, but this has never been an issue for me.
- Although people talk about metal-on-metal with chains, the straps with D-Rings are actually the ones you need to be more worried about from a wear perspective. This is because the rings are integral to the design and if they wear out prematurely you will either have to replace the D-Rings. This would require taking apart the stitching, putting new D-Rings in place and sewing the strap back together).
- Some suggest using a nylon strap to go through the D-Rings, and then hang on a carabiner. This is definitely a great idea in terms of removing metal-on-metal contact, however, this can add an additional 6” or more to the length between the hook and the bag.

As such hanging from many ceilings and most stands (Steadystrike's included), will result in the bag dropping too low and, for many, out of the optimal hitting range.

Steadystrike recognized this issue and sought to develop a linkage projection system that would take care of this issue without adding too much distance between the hook and the bag. This also protects the hardware and reduces noise. It involves sacrificial clips on the swivel and avoids metal-on-metal contact. Two versions are available, one for bags with straps and one for bags with chains. A small amount of lubricant periodically applied at the junction between the hook and the swivel will also reduce squeaking that would otherwise occur.



MATERIAL USED FOR OUTER SHELL

There are a number of different options out there, and within each category there can be some variation.

Canvas

- Some people like these, but they may be poor choices for a couple of reasons: (1) the increased abrasion created by the fabric is hard on both hands and gloves; and, (2) the greater rate of wear and tear. In my opinion, leather and vinyl options are much better.

Real Leather

- There can be a lot of variation with leather. In general, it wears really well. Granted, it also tends to be a bit more expensive.
- Many will talk about how softer leathers have a more natural feel when being punched. The downside is they tend to be more expensive.

- Conversely harder leathers are more common and wear extremely well. However, depending on the bag and the filling, you may feel like you are punching the cow itself.
- Some manufacturers will try to offset this with a foam lining inside, but when the leather is thick and harder, there is only so much that can be done.
- Leather bags are almost always hung by chains. If you prefer straps, this will be an issue.
- I will say this much – I used a leather bag (harder leather) for about 4 years – everyday it took a pounding. When I took it down, other than some sheen/gloss where it had been repeatedly hit, it was as good as new.

PU Leather/Faux Leather/Vegan Leather

- PU leather is different than Vinyl. PU stand for polyurethane, and the texture and feel tend to be more like leather.
- On the upside, it is not as easy to get dirty as real leather and is easier to clean.
- It tends to be used for a lot of the lower-end bags, but I have seen some reputable manufactures use it for larger (but relatively inexpensive) bags as well. The concern with PU is the the top layer peeling, revealing the mesh underneath.

Vinyl

- My initial thought when purchasing vinyl was that it might be low in terms of quality and would wear/damage more easily than leather. However, I have generally found vinyl to be a fantastic material for a heavy bag.
- Buying from a reputable manufacturer who uses quality vinyl will result in a product that will be with you for years.
- The strength provided relative to leather, means that the shell can be thinner. This, in turn, means that your impact is influenced more by the quality of fill than the rigidity of the shell.
- Cost tends to be less than leather (though not always).
- Vinyl bags will typically use straps instead of chains.
- Vinyl is harder to get dirty than leather (no sweat/blood absorbed).
- Vinyl is also easier to clean and will not dry out/require as much care.

INNER FILL

Filled vs. Unfilled

- When purchasing a bag, you will often see “filled” versus “unfilled” options. After a while, you may want to customize your bag feel by choosing the material to fill it with. There is no question that buying unfilled is a lot cheaper – both outright as well as in terms of shipping. Of course, you are then stuck trying to figure out what to fill it with. You will see different ideas online, including foam chips, old clothing found at a thrift store, shredded cloth, sand,...and the list goes on.
- There are two key issues when filling your own heavy bag.
 - First getting the right materials is not as easy as it sounds and if you are planning on using sand, it will feel like you are hitting a rock. It is too firm for my preference and will add a lot of weight. Heavier bags are not necessarily better bags.
 - Second, while foam chips are easier to pack in, they still need to be compressed. Shredded cloth is worse. Old t-shirts and thrift store clothes...book some therapy sessions ahead of time.
- Companies who manufacture/fill heavy bags have special equipment that compress the bag as it is filled. YouTube will tell you to take a stick and tamp things down as you go. It is not the same.
- It will be more expensive in the short-term to purchase a filled bag, but having had the experience of stuffing heavy bags in the past, I cannot foresee a situation where I would do so again.

TYPES OF FILLING

In terms of filling options, some have already been mentioned, but let us go a bit deeper.

- Sand. Cheap and available, but really heavy and creates a very dense bag. I have heard people adding sand to shredded cloth. Although this may reduce the overall weight and density, relative to sand itself, but I am not really for it. Regardless, I would recommend you stay away from a bag that is filled 100% with sand.
- Foam Chips. Here you are usually talking about foam chips like the kind you find in carpet padding. This is readily available online, but it is not cheap. I am aware of one company that sells boxes of shredded foam.

- Old Clothes. Here we are talking about t-shirts and other softer clothing with zippers, buttons (anything sharp) removed. Because you are stuffing an entire garment into the bag, it may not fill evenly compared to shredded cloth.
- Shredded Cloth. Shredded cloth is a relatively common stuffing component from heavy bag manufacturers, and is a preferred type of filling by many. For those people wanting to use this to fill their own bags, it is less commonly available than many forums would suggest. Most of the bags I have owned have used this as a primary filling agent. Sometimes shredded foam is added to this.
- Foam Lining. Some heavy bag manufactures will line the inside of the bag with a foam lining. This can do two things. First, it tends to even out the surface of the heavy bag. Second, it may create reduced impact on contact.

SIZE

The size is going to be a function of height, weight and diameter (circumference).

Height

- Other than shorter specialty bags, discussed later, heavy bags typically start at 42" (3.5') and move from there. The Most common would be 4' - which is generally an excellent size for boxing style workouts. If kicking is involved, 5' and even 6' bags are popular.
- Are longer bags better? In my experience no. My heavy bag routine is boxing oriented. As bags get longer they will tend to swing less (I have an optimal level I like to experience) and depending on the filling, they can feel like they are buckling every time you hit them. There is a reason that 4' bags (I will group 3.5' bags in here too) are the most popular ones sold - they work well for the broadest range of people.

Weight

- A lot of the information in this article is about my preferences/experience. For reference, I weigh 215 lbs. and stand at 5' 11". I hit the bag daily as part of my training routine.
- One recommendation I have seen is to choose a bag that is half of your weight. There is some truth to the idea that one should consider adjusting the weight of the bag to one's hitting power (partially based on weight), however, this is a rough estimate.
- Excessive swinging is often a sign that you are using a bag that is too light for your needs. There is an optimal level where it feels like the ebb and flow of an opponent coming at you. A bag that swings too much is likely going to feel lousy at point of impact. Also, it can create a very strange cadence if you are trying to practice rapid punches.

- On forums, I have seen some individuals boasting that they need a 200 - 250 lb. bag. If you have a specific application where you find this valuable, have at it. For most it is overkill.
- For many, assuming one stays in the 4' length region, a 75 lb. bag is great, a 100 - 125 lb. bag may be optimal, and 150 is likely as big as you need to go.
- For the one of my stands, I like to change the bag out from a standard heavy bag to an angled bag. While safety suggests that there should always be another person present, even here, hoisting a 100 lb. is challenging and 150 lbs. can be a cardiac moment! In this application, I will often use a lighter (80 lb.) bag, because it is that much easier to change out. It probably swings a little more than I would like, but I find acceptable. In a context where I am not changing the bag out very often, I typically use a 100 - 120 lb. bag.
- Note, the weight on the a retail website for a heavy bag may differ from the actual weight (e.g., it says 100 lbs. but it is actually 120 lbs.). Holding the height and diameter constant, the actual weight associated with the bag is a function of the fill material and the extent of compaction. Usually this is not drastic, but I have seen it vary by as much as 25% from the listed value, and usually on the heavier side.

Diameter

- Heavy bags are sold based on the diameter (width) of the bag.
- Diameter becomes important for a couple of reasons. First it may impact feel of the hitting experience. Second it will influence the overall weight of the bag, holding height constant.
- In terms of the hitting experience, when a bag is too narrow (e.g., narrow bags used for kicking sports, 12 - 13") it tends to buckle more.
- For traditional boxing applications, ask yourself the question, "what is the width of the typical opponent you would be fighting?" This may serve as a good starting point for consideration.
- Extra-Wide bags (e.g., 18") seem to have become more of "a thing" lately - while some people might love them, they do not do a lot for me. Although this is partially personal preference, it is more about the decreased movement of the bag. I own a 4', 150 lb. bag (18"). In my experience with this bag, the punches tend to hit with a bit more of a thud and the bag does not swing as much as I would like. So for this reason, my personal preference is a bag that is 14" to 15" in diameter.

D-Ring at Base

- This D-Ring is used to weigh the bag down and prevent excessive bag. A strap, cable or bungee cord is attached with a clip to the D-ring and then the other side is attached to a weighted base to the floor.
- With stands, a D-Ring can also be used to reduce the likelihood of the bag overswinging and potentially tipping the stand over.

Shapes

- There are a wide variety of shapes and sizes out there. If you only have one heavy bag and/or it is hard for you to change bags out, my strong suggestion would be a standard heavy bag. These tend to be the most versatile in terms of what you can do with it, as well as the range of people who will be able to use a given bag.
- Specialty bags do exist to assist with upper cuts, head shots and the like. A more detailed review is beyond the scope of this article.

How Much Should I Spend?

- There are some adequate bags out there starting around \$150. This will give you a bag you can work with to experience the sport. Your preferences may evolve with your progress.
- You can certainly go higher to \$250 or more but just buying something expensive does not make it right for you. It might be too heavy, too wide, too firm and so forth.

Personal Recommendation

All of these features can be overwhelming. Here is where I would start in terms of considering what type of bag to get, based on feel, durability and ease of cleaning. From here you can adjust your requirements accordingly.

Weight and Size

- Youth: 40 – 60 lb. vinyl bag, 42” (3.5’) in length.
- Adults: 75 – 125 lb. vinyl bag, ~ 4’ in length.
- There may be some applications where you want a very heavy or wide bag, but for the vast majority of people, a bag in the neighborhood of 100 lbs. is ideal.

Filling & Density

- The density should be moderate – enough to provide some cushion, but not so much that you feel like you are punching a sofa cushion. You want a “firm but slight giving” response.

Concluding Thought

I shared information and ideas in this article to be helpful, but I also recognize that I do not hold the monopoly on good ideas. In this realm, where personal/individual preference is so key, there are no definitive gods or rules, just advisors. You are the athlete, and this is your fitness journey.