#### THE

# CrossFitJournal

## April 2013

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THE

# CrossFitJOURNAL

## Older, Wiser, Fitter

More and more seniors are using CrossFit to ensure the golden years are rich with vitality. Marty Cej reports.

By Marty Cej April 2013



Ted Gough is one of many seniors who are using CrossFit to preserve a high quality of life.

First, Lu Quast talks about about the cancer and the knee surgeries. Then she talks about about the back injury, which happened first but so long ago the accident can be told with a smile slipping into her voice.

She fell from a ladder when painting a ceiling. She picked herself up and carried on but was left with chronic back pain for years afterwards.

She can't remember exactly when she fell because it was more than 40 years ago, and since she began focusing on her deadlift, squat and kettlebell swing, the pain is a memory, too. Quast, who turned 78 on Feb. 19, is almost certain she's the oldest athlete at Bayou City Crossfit in Houston, Texas.

"Being physical is just part of being well," she says. "I do CrossFit because it makes me feel better. Not just physically, but emotionally and psychologically as well."

Quast is just one of many seniors who are discovering something perhaps best summarized by Aaron Carr in the *CrossFit Journal* article A Brief Letter From a Representative of the Silent Masses:

"CrossFit will likely add years to my life from the health and fitness perspective, but in the here and now, CrossFit is adding life to my years as I have the physical capacity to perform and compete to my heart's desire."



Quast refuses to let age get in the way of her health and fitness.

#### **Passing on Decrepitude**

Jean Perkins was in her early 20s when Quast was painting ceilings, falling from ladders, performing chamber music on the harpsichord and raising two children in Guatemala. Perkins is a photographer and director of the Kehler Liddell Gallery in New Haven, Conn. And she's pretty certain she's the oldest athlete at Shoreline CrossFit in nearby Branford.

Perkins says she came to CrossFit after years of being physically inactive, years in which she moved from New York City to Wichita, from Wichita to Chicago, and from Chicago to New Haven. Her photography career took off in the early 1990s, but so did her eating and drinking.

"I ended up in Chicago in 1997, and I was overweight," she says. "I was unhappy with my life. I was depressed. I tried dieting but it didn't work."

"I don't want to go to the Games, unless it's to take pictures. I want to be fitter and stronger."

—Ted Gough

The transformation was strange to her, almost inexplicable to someone who had been so active as a child and young woman. When she was in the third grade, her family moved from her tiny farm town in Michigan to a slightly bigger farm town. Nearby, the construction of a paved highway left behind great towering mounds of dirt.

"I ran up and down those hills all the time just to see how fast I could do it," she says, "just to feel my heart beating."

By the mid-2000s, she had a new and satisfying job but many of the same bad habits. Then everything changed in 2008 when she lost that job.

"It was devastating, but I realized that I had to get a hold of myself, that I could control something: I could control my body and everything that goes into my mouth," Perkins says. "I saw the name 'Shoreline CrossFit' on a coffee mug, asked some questions, and I think I was one of the first 10 members."

The decision to change her life may have saved it or, at the very least, improved her quality of life when a stroke nearly killed her a few years later.

And while Perkins was shuttling between cities and careers in the mid-1980s, Ted Gough, 62, was building a career at Xerox in Rochester, N.Y., first as a transportation manager, then in information technology.

Gough, now retired, has taken up professional photography and laughs when he says his greatest athletic achievement was once bowling a score of 300. His only exercise was jumping up and down on the sidelines as his son, Matthew, wrestled in high school. Ted is older now, but much stronger, and his and his wife Roberta's expectations have changed thanks to CrossFit Rochester.

"Lifting a 40-lb. bag of dog food with no effort is a good feeling these days," he says. "I'm 219 lb. now and I want to get down to 200. But I don't want to go to the Games, unless it's to take pictures. I want to be fitter and stronger."

#### The Golden Years of Fitness

Gough, Quast and Perkins are among the too few of their generation who refuse to reduce their expectations for an active and productive life with the flip of a calendar page or yield their independence to the widely held belief that advancing age and decrepitude are one and the same.

"Some of the best of fitness is wasted on the young," says Greg Glassman, Founder and CEO of CrossFit Inc. "The commitment on the other end of the spectrum simply isn't there."

Indeed, while people in the most-developed nations are living longer, a greater number of them are spending their last decades in illness. A study released in early February by the *Journal of the American Medical Association Internal Medicine* found the Baby Boomer generation suffers more from chronic sickness and disability than the previous generation.





Perkins started CrossFit in 2008; she was one of the first members of Shoreline CrossFit.

The study shows that Baby Boomers—some 78 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964—are more sedentary, more obese, and consequently more susceptible to diabetes, hypertension and illnesses related to high cholesterol. Americans are getting sicker at a younger age and suffering longer.

## Americans are getting sicker at a younger age and suffering longer.

"The decrepitude monster starts coming after you after the age of 30, and you can push it back or let it take you over," Glassman explains. "You need to fight decrepitude, not surrender to it."

The decision made by Quast, Perkins, Gough and thousands of other Boomers sweating alongside athletes a quarter of their age in CrossFit boxes around the world is not unlike the decisions they made as teenagers and young adults when they first demanded and embraced their independence and began taking responsibility for their actions.

"I probably was born with some sort of independence gene," Quast says. "I like handling my own affairs, deciding the paths I'll take, the schedule I'll keep, and how I'll spend my time."

Since January 2010, Quast has had two major surgeries and two courses of chemotherapy to combat ovarian cancer. She has continued to work out through her treatment, something she says has sped her recovery and helped her counter the affects of neuropathy—a condition that sometimes arises from chemo and causes tingling or numbness in the extremities, or sharp shooting pains and difficulty with balance.

"It made me feel better, kept my spirits up and gave me a sense of normalcy; health rather than sickness, business as usual," she says.

Quast has welcomed the support from her family and friends, but at no point has she questioned her own independence and self-reliance.

"At some point in my life, it occurred to me that I'd have to stay physically fit to stay independent and keep assuming responsibility for myself," Quast says. "I remember thinking I wanted to be able, at any age, to run if a car came bearing down on me or something started chasing me. That, and the fact that I feel better when I work out is probably the driving factor in maintaining my exercise program."

Gough, who wants to pedal in a cross-country bike ride for cancer research when he is 90—like his father does now—has a slightly different sentiment towards motor vehicles.

"If I can do it at 90, that's a good goal," Gough says. "I may still get hit by a bus before then, but the bus will have a bigger dent in it."

Perkins echoes that sentiment.



Gough with his son Matthew, who is now 27. Matthew encouraged Gough and his wife to start CrossFit, and now they can't imagine life without it.



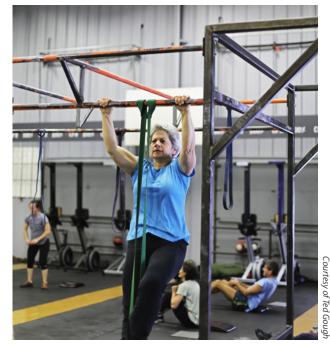
With CrossFit, many seniors find they surpass levels of fitness held when they were much younger.

"I refuse to crumble into old age," Perkins says. "I loved running over the dirt hills when I was a girl, and I wanted that glorious feeling again."

## "I refuse to crumble into old age." —Jean Perkins

Having lost that feeling once, Perkins says she won't do it again. She remembers when a friend in the media industry invited her to a studio to watch the legendary Italian actress Sophia Loren shoot a commercial.

"I watched Sophia Loren rise off a deep sofa, and she was just so graceful and beautiful," Perkins remembers. "I went back to the set once everyone was gone, sat down, and I couldn't do it. I couldn't get up."



She continues: "I was afraid, and I was embarrassed and mortified."

Then she joined Shoreline CrossFit.

And she refuses to let the clock turn back even after suffering a major stroke in August 2012.

It happened at 3:30 in the afternoon while on a 42-foot sailboat she pilots with her partner, Ralph, but she didn't act on it until the next morning, mistaking the blinding pain and lack of vision in her right eye for a migraine.

With her balance off and unable to see the right side of the television without turning her head, she called a doctor, who ordered her to a hospital where doctors began treating her for a severe migraine but also ordered a CAT scan.

"By the time the doctor came back, I had some of my vision back and no pain," Perkins recalls. "As I was saying thanks and how successful this treatment was, his face began looking more and more peculiar."

"My posture, presentation and ease of movement are tools of deception, and fitness makes that possible."

—Lu Quast

The specialist informed Perkins that the CAT scan revealed a major stroke and that she needed to transfer to the neurology floor of Yale-New Haven Hospital by ambulance. It was there that she started passing all the tests and puzzling the medical team further.

"The word the neurologists used most often when commenting on my case was 'perplexing' because I was passing all their tests, signifying there was no major damage, which they expected given the CAT scan and the MRI," she says.

They asked her if she exercised.



Improved fitness is a buffer against the effects of aging.

"'Oh, yeah,'I said.'I CrossFit! You want to see me deadlift 170 lb.?" she asked. "They said I shouldn't have come through it like this, that it was only because of my fitness."

Perkins was out of the hospital in 24 hours, back in the gym within a month and hiking through the mountains of northern Spain by the end of September.

"That's what happened to me because of CrossFit," she says. "And all I ever wanted was to rise from a sofa like Sophia Loren."

#### **Living Well**

The advantages of fitness in recovery from physical trauma are well documented, as are the psychological and emotional benefits of exercise in general, but less well examined are the positive effects that come simply from working out with like-minded people, whether or not they are the same age.

"Something important happens in a gym when our older athletes work out," Glassman says.

Paul Wirtz, who coaches classes for more mature athletes at Shoreline CrossFit, agrees.

"It's not so much what they do in the gym but what they take away from the gym for the other 22 hours of the day," Wirtz says. "The camaraderie is amazing. Sometimes they are standing around chatting so much that I can't even get them to warm up. C'mon, people!"



Fit for life: 67-year-old Ron Nigro, Ted Gough and his wife, Roberta (I-r).

"I may not have a handstand push-up yet, but I can pull the lines on a 42-foot sailboat, and not many can. And my ass still looks pretty good, too."

—Iean Perkins

At CrossFit Rochester, Gough, who sports a beard, was asked to play Santa Claus at the Christmas party last year.

"On the Monday after the party, the mother of one of the little girls said her daughter thought Santa was a whole lot skinnier this year," Gough says. "She had to explain to her that Santa's been doing a lot more CrossFit, and that was good."

Gough explains: "I traveled a lot in my career and had a lot of 'talking' friends, just people I was friendly with. Now we have a lot of real friends. The friendships are the most important."

In the gym, the performance expectations for seniors may be more modest than some of the younger athletes, the volume and loads less heavy, but the practical application of fitness is perhaps more evident in the lives of the older athletes.

"In my daily life, I generally don't reveal my age to clients or employers. I'm not sure they would hire a 78-year-old if they knew," Quast admits. "My posture, presentation and ease of movement are tools of deception, and fitness makes that possible."

Perkins doesn't fret too much over what she can't yet do in the gym but revels in what she can do outside of it.

"I may not have a handstand push-up yet, but I can pull the lines on a 42-foot sailboat, and not many can," Perkins says. "And my ass still looks pretty good, too."



#### **About the Author**

Marty Cej is a contributing editor to the **CrossFit Journal** and the managing editor of Business News Network (BNN) in Toronto, Canada.

# **CrossFit**JOURNA

## Lego-Mania

This is a Lego-themed game that uses the classic toy to get your kids both moving and thinking.

By Mikki Lee Martin CrossFit Kids

**April 2013** 



- Players ages 5-8: Task is to create the tallest square building possible using an even number of Lego
- Players age 9-12: Task is to create the tallest square building possible using a number of Lego blocks that is either a multiple or a factor of the number 8.

Choose a time domain for the WOD, such as 5, 7 or 10 minutes. In the given time, players must complete a physical task as well as a Lego-building task. Use creativity when coming up with Lego-building tasks.

## Game Play

- Lay out the Lego in piles of 3 at one end of the field of play.
- Players complete a 100-meter run or 30 meters of broad jumps (or whatever physical task you choose to give them) to cover the distance to the piles of Lego.
- 3. Once they reach the Lego, they have the remainder of the time to complete the assigned Lego-building task.

This game was originally published in CrossFit Kids Magazine, Issue 60, Nov. 15, 2010.

## Set-Up

Equipment

A boatload of Lego building blocks

Mark off an area that will appropriately accommodate either 100-meter runs or 30 meters of broad jumps for your class size.

### Purpose

To complete a Lego-building task. The task will depend on the age of your players. Examples of tasks:

Players ages 4-5: Task is to create the tallest Lego building possible.

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## **Dieter's Room**

In B.C., Canada, 71-year-old Dieter Stamm invests in the sport of weightlifting and the young athletes he coaches.

By Emily Beers April 2013



It's a Saturday morning at Semiahmoo High School in White Rock, B.C.

It looks like an ordinary day at a weightlifting club. A dozen or so athletes, aged 9 to 25, are cleaning and snatching in a very unspectacular, almost beat-up weight room. The white walls are nearly barren, the weights look worn and abused, and the smell of chalky must fills the air. It looks like your typical underfunded sports club. And it is.

An older man, the head coach, is dressed in casual, almost sloppy attire. He circulates the room and gives cues to every lifter. He looks excited to coach each athlete he approaches.

"Finish the pull," Dieter Stamm yells to a young athlete in a genuine but firm voice, mimicking the shrugging motion to demonstrate what he means. The 9-year-old boy nods and tries the snatch again. Stamm smiles and tells him, "Good job. That was a good lift." The boy looks pleased.

Stamm moves on to the next athlete, and the next, treating each one with as much care as the previous. The energy and the rare sincerity in his voice give the impression that it's his first day on the job, that he has big plans to revive this beaten-down club.

The truth is it's not even a job at all. Stamm certainly isn't getting paid to be here.

## The last time Stamm missed a day of training was in the spring of 2000—13 years ago.

The 71-year-old has been coaching at Semiahmoo High School for 43 years. The last time he missed a day of training was in the spring of 2000—13 years ago. And despite his humble working environment, the club—his club—doesn't need reviving.

Today, membership is made up of 30 devoted athletes. The club's largest enrollment was in 1994, when it had 125 lifters.

Stamm doesn't care that membership is down today. It's not about the numbers to him. And it's certainly not about the money. It's not really even about Olympic weightlifting. It's about watching young athletes become stronger and more successful human beings.

And when you take a moment to really look at Dieter's room, you'll see the success stories. Every athlete, every bar, every rusty plate has a story. And Stamm knows them all. When you spend a bit of time with Stamm in his

unspectacular room, you'll discover something spectacular is actually going on in there—and has been for 43 years.

#### A Quick History

On property looking out at the Pacific Ocean in White Rock, Dieter's front yard is littered with weightlifting equipment. From benches to rusty bars to something that looks like an old-school lat pull-down machine, the pile of beaten-up lifting paraphernalia looks like it's been there for years.

"A friend of mine had a home gym with all that equipment. When he died, I bought it all off him. But it's all custom designed, and I can't figure out how to put it all back together," Stamm says, laughing. "Maybe one day someone will have use for it."



For 43 years, Stamm has taught young athletes the value of lifting heavy things.



The shoes don't make the lift.

Stamm knows it's unlikely the pile of weightlifting gear in his yard will ever be put to use, but he doesn't like wasting things. That's also why he still uses 1990s-style printer paper with holes on the sides; he sees potential in everything and everyone.

Upstairs, Stamm takes a seat on a very worn couch and starts talking about his life and how he eventually got involved in the relatively obscure sport of weightlifting.

"I was born in Poland in 1942," he begins.

During World War 2, his family escaped to Austria, and after the war they settled in Germany. Stamm's father knew opportunities would be greater in North America, so he uprooted the family when Dieter was just 10 years old.

"When I left Germany, my uncle said to me, 'You're going to be a teacher one day.' I still remember that," Stamm says.

A high-school student living in Canada, Dieter decided he wanted to become strong.

"I was 6-foot-2 and 125 lb. When I turned sideways, I disappeared," he says. This led him into bodybuilding and eventually Olympic weightlifting.

Stamm started coaching Olympic weightlifting when he was a student at the University of British Columbia in the 1960s.

"I worked with track-and-field athletes. It was actually a study about the effects of weightlifting on track-and-field athletes," Stamm says.

The study involved two groups. The control group trained strictly on the track, while Stamm worked with the experimental group, which added weightlifting on top of sport-specific training.

"It still astonishes me. After a few months, the experimental group was leaps and bounds ahead of the control group," he says.

The results only made Stamm a bigger believer in the weight room.

After studying education at UBC, Dieter was hired by Semiahmoo High School in 1970, where he started teaching chemistry and opened the school's weightlifting program.

"I damn near remember everyone's personal bests."

—Dieter Stamm

"I knew within two months of being at Semiahmoo that it was exactly what I had been looking for," Stamm says.

Forty-three years later, Stamm looks back with nothing but happiness: "When people ask me how many children I have, I say, "I have three biological ones, and 11,000 to 12,000 others. And I can tell a story about each of them."

Many of these stories find their roots in his weight room.

"I damn near remember everyone's personal bests. And if I don't remember, then I can look it up. I have it written down somewhere," Stamm says.

Stamm smiles and begins recounting one of the countless stories of personal triumph he has witnessed over the years:

"A 13-year-old girl named Shiloh came in once. She weighed 200 lb. She didn't have the easiest upbringing. She didn't even know her own dad. She walked in and said, 'I've come to join the weight-losing club," Stamm laughs.





A little like a Canadian Mike Burgener, Stamm welcomes anyone who wants to lift.

"I said, 'Sweetheart, this isn't the weight-losing club. It's a competitive weightlifting club. But if you join and you train hard, you'll probably lose weight."

Dieter looks up and smiles: "And she did. She lost about 20 kg."

He adds: "She went from an insecure Grade 8 student to a confident young woman—physically, mentally, emotionally and socially. And she ended up winning the gold medal at the 2004 Canadian Junior Weightlifting Championships."

Stamm admits it's harder to get kids to sign up for weight-lifting these days than it was 20 yeas ago.

"Young people then, they were much more eager to try new things. Kids today are more reluctant," he says.

### "You have a credit-card vertical. You need to do some squats."

—Dieter Stamm

"I try to recruit volleyball and basketball players sometimes. I tell them, 'You have a credit-card vertical. You need to do some squats," Stamm says.

But whether he has 125 kids to coach or just a group of six, Stamm doesn't care. He focuses on the people who are there, and he teaches them everything he knows. And the kids can feel the culture, the traditions and the years of stories when they step into Dieter's room.

#### **Beyond the Call of Duty**

It's one thing to show up and coach every day, especially if it's both your passion and your livelihood. It's quite another when you coach an underfunded sports team in Canada.

Dieter doesn't earn a cent from coaching; in fact, he's paying to keep the club afloat—out of his own pocket.

He leaned in and whispered: "I need to whisper because my wife is upstairs and she doesn't know this. From 1970 to 2006, I put in CA\$60,000 of my own money that I'll never get back."



Great coaches have many different characteristics, but they all share a passion for sport.

He continued: "Since then, I've put in another \$30,000."

He explains that every lifter who joins the club has a cash account and is expected to put \$50 into his account each month. That money accumulates and is used directly to cover that athlete's costs—things like plane rides to competitions, entry fees, lifting shoes and uniforms.

If cash is tight, an athlete might skip a month or two of payments. And if cash is really tight, then Dieter steps in and helps fund that athlete's costs. This is something he is happy to do.

Contributing his own money "has been worth it because I've never left an athlete at home," Dieter says with a proud grin.

Jason Noel, a CrossFit athlete who trains with Stamm, explains that this is just who Dieter is.



Stamm's style is characterized by short, simple cues learned over four decades of coaching the Olympic lifts.

"He's so generous," Noel says. "He doesn't care who you are. He'll invest time coaching you if you express interest in his sport."

"He doesn't care who you are. He'll invest time coaching you if you express interest in his sport."

-Jason Noel

Despite Stamm's willingness to coach anyone who walks through the door, Semiahmoo has seen the likes of many great Olympic weightlifters over the years. Canada's Christine Girard—a bronze medalist at the 2012 Olympic Games—trained at Semiahmoo for a while leading up to the London Games.

But the big world-championship events aren't what Stamm's all about, explains Noel. Stamm's about the day-to-day happenings.

"Dieter will call you on your birthday, take you to the symphony, and if you've ever lifted for him, you're a member of Semi for life," Noel says.

This nurturing side of Stamm is also present when he coaches, which Noel loves.

"Too many coaches want to tell you everything they know about the history of Olympic lifting in a 30-minute speech, and then give you advice on every single lift, and honestly you just want to tell them to shut up," Noel says.

He continues: "Dieter keeps things very simple."

Stamm isn't convoluted and overly technical. Instead, he opts for simple cues like, "Finish the pull," "Hit hard" and "Lock tight."





The Semiahmoo uniform hasn't changed in decades because Stamm won't fix something that isn't broken.

"He lets you learn through the movements and your mistakes, which are vital in the sport," Noel adds.

Kane Morgan is another of Dieter's athletes.

He attended Semiahmoo High School as a teenager. A former university rower, Morgan began CrossFit last year, and he knew he needed extra Olympic-weightlifting coaching. He immediately remembered Stamm.

"He welcomed me with open arms and gave me a pair of Olympic-weightlifting shoes. They're blue suede lifting shoes imported from Poland," Morgan says. "They're awesome."

Morgan's not the only one who sports the blue suede; in Dieter's room, every single athlete wears the same shoes.

"People make fun of our shoes, but they also recognize that they're the best shoes out there," Dieter says. "They don't make them like that anymore."

Stamm's athletes' competition uniforms are also steeped in tradition. Employing the "if it's not broken, don't fix it" mentality, Stamm has been using the same seamstress since the 1970s. The small dance and gymnastics company in East Vancouver has hand-sewn more than 200 uniforms for Stamm's lifters in the last 43 years.

"Many of our younger athletes complain because they're not Adidas, they're not the top brands, but we're not going to change. Those suits are us," Stamm says.

Twenty-six-year-old Morgan loves his suit. To him, getting his competition uniform felt like a rite of passage. He didn't care that the bottom part of the uniform is white and pretty much transparent. Wearing it and representing Semiahmoo makes him feel part of something special.

"It's such an amazing environment at Semi," says Morgan, who travels two hours each way on the bus and train from Vancouver to White Rock just to train with Stamm twice a week.



There's no reason to retire when you love what you do.

"Dieter takes coaching to a holistic level. The movements themselves are just a medium to create something more long lasting," Morgan says.

"The movements themselves are just a medium to create something more long lasting."

-Kane Morgan

Recently, this "holistic" coaching meant that the astute 71-year-old coach set Morgan up with his new girlfriend.

Stamm explained his clever matchmaking endeavor: "We were at a competition in Port Alberni. This girl was at the other end of the gym, and I could tell Kane noticed her. He was looking at her," Stamm explains. "So I grabbed him by the hand and took him over to her and said, 'Rachel, do you have a boyfriend?' She didn't. So I introduced them. And now they're dating. That's all it takes," he says with a satisfied grin.

#### **Retirement Plan?**

Stamm tried to retire one time back in 2006. But it didn't work out for him.

"I hired a coach from Ontario, but it was a nightmare. He lasted for about a month and then he got rid of himself," Stamm says.

"I realized that I can't give this club to anyone else," he says.
"I can't quit."

"If you know something, you have to share it with others."

—Dieter Stamm

The reason he can't quit is simple: "What kind of a man is a man that doesn't make the world a better place?" he asks. "If you know something, you have to share it with others."

And so Stamm will continue to share his knowledge as long as he's able, accepting no financial compensation in return.

And now with the growth of CrossFit, Stamm has another reason to stick around and continue to coach. In the last few years, Stamm has had a number of eager CrossFit athletes show up at his door looking for coaching. And he welcomes them all with open arms.

"The Olympic-weightlifting community is 100 years old. And CrossFit is a new community. And they enjoy learning from the Olympic-weightlifting community. They want to do it like us, but they don't know how, so I feel it's my obligation to help CrossFit athletes," he says.

Noel remembers the first time he stepped into Dieter's room.



Old-school apparel for old-school strength.

"I started at the bar. It took me five long and agonizing months to work up to a 60-kg snatch and a 100-kg clean and jerk," he says. Today, Noel can snatch 90 kg and clean and jerk 125 kg.

These small improvements are the reason Stamm shows up every single day.

"One small step in a positive direction, one more kilogram excites me," Stamm says.

"Everyone has the talent to improve. You can't tell people they don't have any talent. There's a saying that quitters never win and winners never quit, but if you never quit and you never win, then you're an idiot," he laughs. "If someone really never improves, I might tell them to join the table-tennis team, but in 43 years that hasn't happened yet."

That's why retirement isn't in his near future.

"I'm there every day. Training starts at 5 p.m., but I'm usually there early—by 4:30 p.m.—because I'm so excited," Stamm says.

What about the days he doesn't feel like coaching?

"I haven't had one yet," he smiles.

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#### **About the Author**

Emily Beers is a **CrossFit Journal** staff writer and editor who finished a master's degree in journalism at the University of Western Ontario in the spring of 2009. Upon graduation, she worked as a sportswriter at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games, where she covered figure skating and short-track speed skating. She ruptured her Achilles tendon in December 2010 and served as the Canada West Regional Media Director while recovering from surgery. Beers also competed in the CrossFit Games in 2011 on CrossFit Vancouver's team. She finished third at the Canada West Regional in 2012.

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## **Five Important O-Lift Drills**

Bob Takano recommends five drills perfect for anyone learning the snatch and the clean and jerk.

By Bob Takano April 2013







"Drill" is not a term we use very much in the weightlifting community.

If we think of drills as exercises or activities performed to learn and refine technique, then it is appropriate to discuss those exercises, but it's more important to know how and when to implement them into the technique training of a weightlifter.

I've developed a list of favorites that I've found to be quite effective. They may not be the same ones other coaches use, but they work for me as I teach technique to new lifters.



The jerk balance teaches athletes to keep the torso erect and drive forward under the bar.

I'm going to digress a bit here and address the issue of exercise selection by coaches. It is perfectly natural and normal for many coaches to address their own shortcomings or strengths while designing training, especially during the early days of the coaching career. Coaches who had poor lockout may have their athletes training to improve lockout even when it's unnecessary to do so. On the other hand, there might be coaches who were excellent pullers and so design training that overemphasizes pulling. Both extremes are incorrect. Coaches mature when they learn to solve the shortcomings of each athlete they are coaching.

Now, on to my selections. I wouldn't call these essential, but I do use these movements most frequently, so I believe they apply to the most universal shortcomings. The number of times they are employed in training is strictly individual.

#### **Jerk Balance**

Many athletes find it difficult to conceptualize supporting a weight directly overhead and stepping forward into a lift to do so. This movement helps to remediate that situation, which is particularly prevalent with people who have a strong bench-pressing background. There are two reasons for this:

1. Their shoulder mobility is often limited so overhead support is difficult.

2. They're used to looking up at the bar they're lifting, which causes a bending of the torso away from the line of support.

The first variation of the jerk balance is to perform the movement with the bar resting on the shoulders behind the neck. This will make it easier to position the bar directly overhead. The feet should be positioned with the lead foot approximately 30 centimeters ahead of the hind foot. The hind food should be balanced on the ball of the foot with the toes pointed inward or straight ahead.

The movement commences with the athlete bending the knees to dip and then driving up so that the bar is driven overhead. At the peak of the leg drive, the front foot steps forward into a standard lunging distance and the bar should travel upwards to a locked-arm position.

When this exercise becomes comfortable and the athlete is familiar with the finishing position, the movement can then be practiced with the bar resting on the shoulders in front of the neck. The same movement pattern and dynamic are employed, but this version places more stress on the torso to maintain an erect position and is more similar to the actual jerk. It also forces the shoulders into the most proper position of overhead support. Furthermore, it places an emphasis on maintaining a rigid torso during the drive, drop and overhead-locking phases. It also teaches the athlete to push forward off the back foot, the lack of which is often a cause for jerks being lost forward.

Four sets of 2 to 4 reps at appropriately taxing weights are prescribed.

#### **Halting Deadlifts**

The snatch and clean variations of this movement are both exceptionally valuable for teaching the most difficult phase of the pull, and they can also be employed throughout the training of the athlete to increase strength in the correct motor pathway once technique is mastered. Halting deadlifts should be employed early in the technique-training process in sets of 2, 3 or 4 reps per set with a weight that taxes the weakest muscles employed in that particular phase.

The first variation is the halting deadlift to the knees. This phase teaches the simultaneous rising of the shoulders and hips until the bar reaches knee height, where it is stopped for 3 seconds on each rep. An emphasis should be placed on "pushing the floor down with the feet" and keeping the bar close to the body by forcibly contracting the latissimus dorsi muscles. Coach the athlete to perform this movement as slowly as is necessary to maintain form. Doing so will teach the rippers to learn to control the first pull.

The shoulders should remain above or in front of the bar. The pressure on the foot goes from the ball of the foot to the front of the heel. Some athletes may have seen

world-class athletes starting with a low hip position and then raising the hips to a more conventional starting position in an attempt to generate more momentum early in the first pull. This is an advanced technique and should not be attempted until the conventional first pull is thoroughly mastered and the physical development is balanced.

The second variation is to continue further and lift the bar to the power position. This requires performing the first variation correctly, and then shifting the knees and hips forward while slightly extending the hips and keeping the shoulders over or ahead of the bar. Simultaneously, the pressure on the foot shifts from the front of the heel to the ball of the foot. The latissimus dorsi are extremely important in maintaining the proper angle between the torso and the arms.

After the first variation is mastered, the second variation should be practiced until it is performed nearly perfectly. From this point of accomplishment, the lifter is ready to proceed to learning the entire pull.

#### **Push Press**

Although at first glance the push press appears to be a pressing movement, it is actually a jerk-driving movement. If sufficient jerk drive does not propel the bar above the top of the head, the pressing portion cannot be completed.



The push press develops driving power in the legs and pressing strength in the arms.

Notice the bar is supported on the shoulders in Frame 1, allowing the legs to transfer momentum through the torso to the bar.

The bar must be supported on the shoulders so that the shoulders and torso are supporting the weight, and not the wrists and forearms. The elbows must be raised to the front sufficiently to prevent the bar from rolling off the shoulders. The knees should be unlocked.

The athlete bends the knees, keeping the torso erect, with the pressure on the heels. The knees bend until power-position depth is reached, and then the athlete drives upward by extending the knees and hips until both are straight. This should provide enough momentum to drive the bar above head height. At this point the arms and shoulders begin pressing the weight to a locked position overhead.

Four to 5 sets of 2 to 4 reps should work well. After its use during the technique-learning phase, the athlete can continue to use the push press in training to develop jerk-driving power and pressing strength.

#### **Muscle Snatch**

Much emphasis is often given toward pulling the athlete under the bar in the completion of the full snatch, but little attention is given to the role of the arms in aligning the body under the bar. Great snatches are also the result of the lifter pushing the body under the bar once the bar has reached a sufficient relative height. Most experienced lifters will tell you that they achieved the lowest squat they ever got into by pushing themselves lower off the bar while performing a snatch.

The correct pathway for pushing under the bar in the snatch is learned by performing muscle snatches, either from the floor or the hang.

The pull is the same as for a typical power snatch, but once full extension is reached, the knees do not re-bend. The torso remains erect, and the elbows come from a pulling position forward to a pressing position. The movement is completed by pressing the weight overhead without any lowering of the torso. This pressing movement is the one that is employed to push the body under the bar at the bottom of a squat snatch.

Four sets of 2 to 4 reps are recommended. Although not used extensively in advanced training, the muscle snatch is an excellent warm-up movement for top-level lifters.



Practicing a muscle snatch during your warm-up will drill correct arm positioning and help you practice aligning your body underneath the barbell.



Notice the position of the athlete's torso remains unchanged, even as the bar travels overhead.

#### **Snatch-Grip Squat Press**

This movement forces athletes to sit more upright in the overhead-squat position, allows them to position the shoulders so that they can press under the weight, and teaches the stabilization of the scapula by contracting the rhomboids. All of these three aspects must be mastered in order to become a proficient snatcher.

Some athletes with tight hip flexors may have a difficult time maintaining an erect torso while overhead squatting. Others have tight hamstrings, weak gluteals, weak spinal erectors or any combination of these conditions. The snatch-grip squat press will force all these situations to improve.

The athlete should support the weight on the shoulders behind the neck and take a snatch-width grip. Squat into a flat-footed bottom position and commence the movement by pressing the weight overhead while staying in the squat. If an erect torso is not maintained, the movement is difficult if not impossible to perform. If the athlete does not know how to contract the rhomboids to stabilize the scapulae, the arms cannot be placed in a position to press the weight overhead.

Four sets of 3 to 5 reps will work well, especially if performed before snatching. This exercise is not a Sots press. Sots presses are performed from in front of the neck with a cleanwidth grip and serve an entirely different set of functions.

#### Know When to Move On

Well, there you have them: my five favorite drill exercises for beginners learning the technique of the snatch and clean and jerk. In the art of coaching, one of the truly important skills is knowing when not to use an exercise. If these exercises perform the functions they're supposed to, they may have to be de-emphasized in the continuing development of the athlete. Figuring out the degree of de-emphasis is one of the important tasks of the coach.



#### **About the Author**

Bob Takano has developed and coached some of the best weightlifters in the U.S. for the past 39 years. A 2007 inductee into the U.S.A. Weightlifting Hall of Fame, he has coached four national champions, seven national record holders and 28 top 10 nationally ranked lifters. Fifteen of the volleyball players he's coached have earned Division 1 volleyball scholarships. His articles have been published by the NSCA and the International Olympic Committee and helped to establish standards for the coaching of the Olympic lifts. He is a former member of the editorial board of the NSCA Journal, and an instructor for the UCLA Extension program. He is currently the chairperson of the NSCA Weightlifting Special Interest Group. He is a member of Mike Burgener's seminar team for the CrossFit Olympic Lifting Trainer Course.. Website: www.takanoathletics.com.

THE

# CrossFitJOURNAL

## Suffer the Children

CrossFit unites its global community in the fight against catastrophic children's illnesses. Chris Cooper reports.

By Chris Cooper April 2013



When you're 6, you don't usually know much about steroids.

A 6-year-old mind is drawn to Barbies—plastic perfection and flowing hair. When confronted by baldness, hemoglobin and transfusions, the young grow up pretty quickly.

Dexamethasone is a steroid used during long treatments of chemotherapy. It prevents inflammation around tumors, which allows other chemotherapy drugs to penetrate more efficiently. It reduces dizziness and fatigue but can cause mania and mood swings. Though six times as strong as the common steroid prednisone, it's viewed as the preferable alternative for children because it doesn't make them as nauseous.

Emma just calls them her "crazy pills."

#### **Bad and Good News**

At age 3 in 2009, Emma began having joint pain and diarrhea. Her parents, Marcy and Mark Heppner, thought it was a growth spurt. Her doctor thought it was strep throat.

Two months later, Emma had become too lethargic to get off the couch. Her legs hurt.

"We rushed her to a pediatrician. They took some blood. Her hemoglobin was 2.7 out of 10," said Marcy. Thanksgiving 2009 was spent in hospital. Emma was trussed up and given six consecutive blood transfusions. She was finally released on a Thursday but scheduled for blood testing the following Monday, and then, because her white-blood-cell count was elevated, for the Monday after that. And the next Monday. And the next.

Alarmed, her doctors scheduled a bone-marrow aspirix. Three days after her fourth blood test, Emma had a needle pierce her bone to remove some marrow for testing.

"We were told we'd find out within a week," Marcy said. "Ninety minutes later, our doctor came in and said, 'I have good news and bad news.""

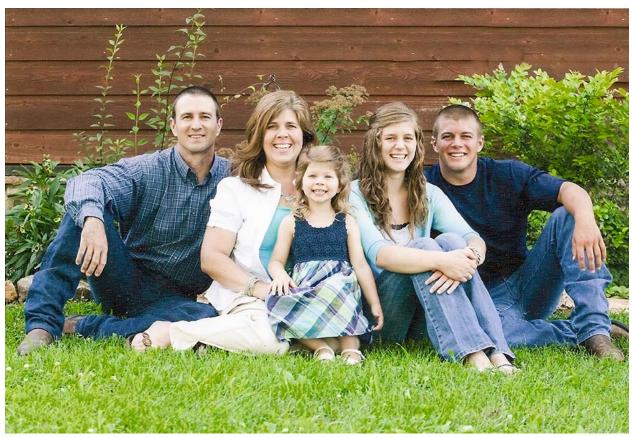
The bad news: Emma had acute lymphoblastic leukemia.

"We cried for 10 minutes and then remembered that there was some good news," Marcy said.

The good news: a free children's research hospital was only four hours away.



At the age of 3, Emma was already in a fight for her life.



The Heppner family is whole thanks to the kindness of those who donate to fund the battle against childhood illnesses.

#### The Price of Recovery

After her diagnosis, Emma and Marcy had only hours to prepare for a move to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

"They sent an ambulance to get us. It was too critical for us to drive ourselves," Marcy said. "I came home to take care of the animals, and to break the news to our son, and to pack our bags for eight weeks to travel to Memphis with Emma. You're packing up everything—your bills, your clothes, your computer. At 1:30 a.m., Emma and I got into the ambulance and drove to Memphis."

It was Dec. 17. At 5:30 a.m., Marcy and Emma were greeted by a full team.

"Within an hour, we had 10 different doctors and nurses coming in. It's a research hospital; they want to know detailed information on every symptom," Marcy said.

The constant attention was almost a relief: there simply wasn't time to worry between visitors. One of the most memorable, though, wasn't a doctor.

"Within 24 hours, I had a social worker come in and ask if I had a minute to talk," Marcy said. "She explained about St. Jude: that their sole purpose is to take care of Emma. We wouldn't have to worry about receiving a bill. We didn't have to worry about anything."

"Emma's our very expensive child, but we've never paid one cent."

—Marcy Heppner

The average treatment period for childhood leukemia is 2.7 years.

"At a regular hospital, they bill your insurance company, and whatever's left is on you," Marcy explained. Emma would need a blood transfusion every month, at US\$10,000. She'd have additional issues: a blood clot in her bladder, plus the high-dose chemo and the daily testing.

"We have two kids in college," Marcy said. "You're thinking, 'My kids are going to have to drop out of school."

She added: "Emma's our very expensive child, but we've never paid one cent. They never stop to think what the cost is. If it's important, they do it."

Jacob is Emma Grace's big brother. A football player at Central Methodist University, he was introduced to CrossFit while doing an internship at Fort Leavenworth, and he was hooked.

He was playing football when he received the news about Emma.

"When the diagnosis first occurred, I didn't have the adult mentality to think a couple steps ahead of the game," Jacob said. "First off, I didn't know about the cost of medicine. I don't think it was until a week later that we realized that this was going to drill us—hard. I might not be able to finish college. I was getting good scholarships, but it wouldn't be enough. Would my dad be able to go back and forth to Memphis to visit?"

The no-cost treatment meant Jacob and his sister, Sarah, could finish school and start their careers. Sarah is studying political science and national security and intelligence at Fairmont State University in West Virginia.

"I would have had to choose between my little sister or furthering my education. What would any big brother choose? It took about a year for me to realize what a huge opportunity I had," Jacob said.

So where does the money come from?

#### **CrossFit for Hope**

It costs \$1.9 million to turn the lights on every morning and run St. Jude for a day. Some celebrities contribute, but the majority of donations are just from average folks around the world. Incredibly, 70 percent of all donations made to St. Jude are for \$30 or less.

Thirty bucks isn't much, and it certainly doesn't buy much in a hospital. That's where the global CrossFit community comes in. There are now more than 6,000 CrossFit affiliates. Imagine if 10 members in each affiliate decided to donate

just \$30 to CrossFit for Hope. That's the price of a skipping rope. Do the math, and you've suddenly got \$1.8 million. If you get 20 members per affiliate, the number doubles to \$3.6 million.

## CrossFit for Hope is the umbrella for several initiatives all designed to help people in need.

CrossFit's goal last year: to raise enough money through the Hope fundraising campaign to pay St. Jude's costs for a single day.

The community succeeded.



St. Jude was just one beneficiary of the CrossFit for Hope campaign that unites the global CrossFit community.





The charity of others takes the financial burden off families and allows them to focus on caring for sick members rather than worrying about money.

This year, the goals are loftier.

CrossFit for Hope is the umbrella for several initiatives all designed to help people in need. In 2012, St. Jude was a major beneficiary. Almost \$300,000 has been raised through the Hope for Kenya initiative, which funds health and education improvements near Mombasa. Already in 2013, CrossFit for Kenya raised an additional \$60,000

through \$5 donations made during athlete registration for the CrossFit Open. That money will fund the building of four new schools in a country where education adds years to life expectancy.

"We have a bunch of fit, intelligent, caring people in this community, and they rally," said Jimi Letchford of CrossFit HQ.

Indeed, the global CrossFit community is quick to take up the fight when called upon.

"Most foundations spend the majority of their time trying to attract donors," said Josh Murphy of CrossFit HQ. "We don't have that problem."

The best part is that every dollar raised through CrossFit for Hope goes straight to the charity.

"At the end of the day, it's a dollar in, dollar out. If we raise a dollar, it's going to the cause," Letchford said. "CrossFit HQ salaries the people working on Hope, pays for travel, covers all the administration. If a dollar comes in and it costs us 30 cents to earn that dollar, HQ pays that 30 cents. We're not taking it back. HQ believes in Hope and contributes out of its operating fund to make sure we have a high efficiency."

Letchford added that covering the overhead to get donated funds to where they're needed is simply how CrossFit Founder and CEO Greg Glassman approaches charity work: "It's always been like this."

Albany CrossFit was the top affiliate fundraiser for CrossFit for Hope in 2012, raising almost \$30,000.

"We just talked about it incessantly: before every class, on our Facebook group, on our blog," said Jason Ackerman, owner of Albany CrossFit. "We ran five events that were specific fundraisers. We auctioned off training with coaches, held raffles, ran a talent show. We have cash jars. We ask if people want to add a dollar for St. Jude when they buy supplements."

Ackerman's fundraising goal in 2013 is \$100,000.

"CrossFit has allowed me, my coaches and our athletes to live better lives. When the opportunity came to do something that (CrossFit) felt strongly about and was backing, it was really important for me to get behind it, and then our coaches got behind it, and all of our athletes as well," Ackerman said. "When you get 200 of your members to raise \$500 each ... that's how you get to \$100,000."



The value of research: 50 years ago, Emma would have had a 4 percent chance of recovery.

The survival rate for leukemia is now 94 percent.

#### **New Hope**

"Every doctor and nurse was happy when they declared Emma to be in remission," Marcy said.

That was 50 days into treatment. The next two-and-a-half years were a waiting game; without an immune system, Emma was sick often and couldn't undergo chemotherapy. She was put on steroids so she would be strong enough to survive the other medicines. It was a constant balancing act, with some medicines propping her up to take others.

On July 10, 2012, Emma's chemo port—a hole in her chest through which medicine is delivered—came out.

"They have a no-more-chemo party. The doctors came in and sang a song. They threw confetti on us. We had a cake," Marcy said.

After her last dose of dexamethasone, "Emma put the bottle in a plastic bag and slammed it with a hammer," Marcy said.

Though finished treatment, Emma won't be declared cancer-free until five years after her remission date. She'll continue with yearly checkups until she's 18, when she can elect to remain in the research cohort into adulthood.

After her last dose of dexamethasone, "Emma put the bottle in a plastic bag and slammed it with a hammer."

Emma, at 6, has lost seven friends to cancer and is now a vocal advocate.

"She would see a child looking at her when she was bald. She would literally walk over and say, 'Let me tell you why. I have cancer and it made my hair fall out, but it's going to grow back," said Marcy.

And the rest of the family is on board, too.

At college, the Heppner kids are the first to sign up for any blood drive.

"Those saved their sister's life," Marcy said. "Jake did a bone-marrow drive on campus."

Jacob is paying it forward by participating in communityservice programs, earning him a selection to the Allstate AFCA Good Works Team (CMU's Heppner Selected to 2011 Allstate AFCA Good Works Team).

Jacob also volunteers to coach at Iron Major CrossFit, inside Fort Leavenworth.

"We have a not-for-profit affiliate, and I help out there daily. It's a good opportunity to enlighten some of our officer candidates about fitness so they can go back to their brigades and teach them," he said.

You can bet there will be a CrossFit for Hope event at Fort Leavenworth this year.

"It's not just us lifting. It's us contributing. That's what makes it awesome," Jacob said.

#### A Comeback Victory

In 50 years, leukemia went from a 4 percent to a 94 percent survival rate.

Go beyond the percentages: 50 years ago, 96 out of 100 kids with leukemia would perish and leave gaping holes in families. In 2013, 94 out of a hundred can expect to survive.

"We're within the final few yards of the largest come-frombehind underdog victory in history," Marcy said.

"We're within the final few yards of the largest come-from-behind underdog victory in history."

-Marcy Heppner



Emma, alive and well.

CrossFit is part of that comeback, and it will be part of the victory in the fight against catastrophic children's illnesses.

When Jake saw the poster for CrossFit for Hope, he was thrilled and told his mother about it. Marcy felt obligated to find out more about CrossFit.

"If they're going to donate to save my daughter's life, I have to know all about it," Marcy told him.

She's not shy to share credit with anyone who raises funds to support the fight.

"When you as a community give, you provide hope and a cure and you take ownership of a child. Then you're a part of Emma's treatment and a part of her cure. You should take ownership of that," Marcy said.

To find out more about, CrossFit's fundraising efforts, visit CrossFit for Hope.



#### **About the Author**

Chris Cooper is a writer for CrossFit. He owns CrossFit Catalyst in Sault Ste. Marie, Ont.

THE

## CrossFitJournal

### from the BENCH

## What's in a Name?

CrossFit HQ General Counsel Dale Saran explains why a local throwdown is not a "CrossFit competition."

By Dale Saran March 2013



CrossFit's growth has produced a number of interesting side effects, most of them positive.

One byproduct of CrossFit's spread and the continued business success of CrossFit affiliates has been the growth of the Sport of Fitness. This has significant consequences for CrossFit Inc.'s intellectual property, all CrossFit affiliates and the entire CrossFit community.

There is a significant amount of confusion about the use of the CrossFit trademark and the distinction between "CrossFit the strength and conditioning program" and "CrossFit the Sport of Fitness." As a result, Internet geniuses spout off about what the confusion means for the trademark, companies advertise "CrossFit competitions," and many affiliates and athletes remain unaware that an issue even exists.

#### CrossFit Isn't Baseball

One of the more common refrains is that a sport can't be a protected trademark; for example, baseball or football. This is patently wrong.

It's important to remember that CrossFit was a company and then a registered trademark before it ever became a sport, with the first CrossFit Games taking place in 2007, well after "CrossFit" was the name of the company as well as a federally registered trademark.

It's important to remember that CrossFit was a company and then a registered trademark before it ever became a sport.

Baseball was not a registered trademark, nor was any other sport. However, "Major League Baseball" is sure as heck a protected trademark, as is "National Football League." In both cases, all each league did was add two commonly used words to the name of the sport, but what really happened was that the registration and protection of the terms created secondary meaning in the mind of the public.

Other sports outside the Big 4—basketball and hockey are the others—are trademarked. Take the well-known X Games. The trademark for the X Games consists primarily of the letter X, along with the words "the" and "games." Yet it is both a registered and protected trademark, and, most importantly, it has secondary meaning to the public. None of the events in those Games are "protected" either, yet there is no confusion that someone is "doing the X Games" because he or she is riding a half-pipe on a snowboard.





CrossFit was well established as a company and trademark before the first CrossFit Games were held in 2007.



Just like NFL and MLB, CrossFit is a trademark that must be protected.

#### The CrossFit Games: Our Sporting Event

So what is and isn't a "CrossFit competition"?

"CrossFit" is a fanciful word that has no meaning in any language and is thus entitled to protection under federal trademark law. Protection under trademark law does not mean someone cannot use the term CrossFit to describe his or her workouts; trademark law protects the owner of a mark from having someone else use the mark in commerce to trade off of the goodwill CrossFit Inc. has built up and acquired through hard work and promotion of the brand.

CrossFit is a brand of fitness services, all conducted under the watchful eye of Level 1 trainers every day at more than 6.000 locations around the world.

The only CrossFit competitions are those directly organized and authorized by CrossFit HQ, such as the events of the CrossFit Games season and out-of-season events such as the CrossFit Invitational.

There's a difference between playing baseball in your back yard and playing second base in Major League Baseball, just as there's a difference between doing Fran and doing Fran at the Home Depot Center during the CrossFit Games.

There's a difference between doing Fran and doing Fran at the Home Depot Center during the CrossFit Games.

So what about some of the events that happen in our affiliates the world over—throwdowns, challenges and just plain old competitions where one person tries to beat someone next to him in the WOD?

These are not "CrossFit competitions."

Affiliates are licensed to use the CrossFit name in a very specific manner by CrossFit Inc. They are allowed to host events that help grow their boxes and businesses and develop camaraderie and community, but those events cannot be called a "CrossFit competition" any more than a local basketball game at the YMCA can be called an NBA game.

Further, affiliate events have guidelines, including a requirement that affiliates only use their own name without addition of the terms "Games," "Open," "Regionals" or any other term that would imply a link to the CrossFit Games or sanction by CrossFit Inc.

I know there are a bunch of companies, people and, yes, sometimes even affiliates, that call a day devoted to some workouts and beer a "CrossFit competition." Those events are not "CrossFit" competitions because they are not sponsored, endorsed or licensed by CrossFit Inc. These events are fitness competitions, just as the CrossFit Games are the premier fitness competition to determine the Fittest Man and Woman on Earth.

An unfortunate perversion of the term "fitness" means many fitness competitions involve minimal or singular aspects of fitness, as well as a lot of bikinis and oil.

One of the ancillary benefits of CrossFit Founder and CEO Greg Glassman's creation has been returning meaning to words. CrossFit has precisely defined fitness, as well as what it means to be fit, and then provided events to determine who is actually the fittest. The CrossFit Games and their qualifying events are the best known of these events, and the winners of the CrossFit Games are declared the Fittest on Earth.



Local competitions can be "throwdowns," "beat-downs" or "challenges," but they can't be "CrossFit competitions."

#### Naming 101

When naming a fitness competition, consider the following examples of acceptable names:

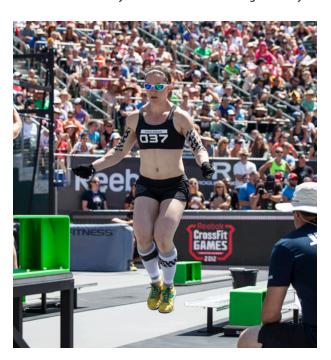
- Fitness Throwdown hosted by CrossFit Anytown
- CrossFit Anytown presents the Fitness Beatdown
- CrossFit Anytown's Ultimate Athlete Competition

The following names are not acceptable:

- CrossFit Anytown's CrossFit Throwdown
- The CrossFit
  Anytown Games
- The CrossFit
   Anytown Open
- The CrossFit Anytown Regionals



 $Only\ events\ authorized\ and\ organized\ by\ CrossFit\ HQ\ can\ be\ called\ "CrossFit\ competitions."$ 



Stated again, only CrossFit Inc. can decide which events are "CrossFit Competitions."

As for the rest of the events happening out there? Hopefully our community will get the word out and we'll restore some precision in the language surrounding the CrossFit trademark.



#### **About the Author**

Dale Saran is CrossFit HQ's General Counsel. CrossFit Inc.'s Legal Team are the "Defenders of the Faithful."

THE

# CrossFitJournal

## Welcome to the Fold

CrossFit affiliates have many options for integrating new members. Emily Beers talks to five gym owners who explain what they do and why.

By Emily Beers April 2013



CrossFit affiliate owners are free to run their businesses any way they like as they pursue excellence and bring fitness to their clients.

They can make their own decisions as to how they integrate new clients into the gym, whether they're going to offer specialty programs, how they'll develop and compensate coaches, how much they're going to charge, what hours they'll be open, whether they'll install showers and so on.

CrossFit's "least rents" model of affiliation is the entrepreneur's dream, where a gym owner pays a relatively low annual fee (\$3,000 for most gyms) for the use of the CrossFit name but is free to run the business as he or she sees fit. In more than 6,000 businesses around the world, affiliate owners are taking advantage of the opportunity to decide for themselves what works best, and the result is a constantly growing community of healthy people and businesses.

This series looks at the business of running a CrossFit box and examines what different CrossFit affiliates are doing to create excellence in their clients, their coaches and ultimately their gyms. The affiliates in this series have been around for some time and have implemented the results of successful experiments and learned from the things that didn't work. Interestingly, different affiliates are having similar levels of success with opposite approaches.

The first installment in this series looks at three contrasting ways to integrate new clients and keep them around for the long haul.

Will these approaches work for your gym? That's for you to decide

#### In With the New

New clients: Do you put them right into group classes? Do you host beginner classes? On-ramp programs? Group fundamentals classes? One-on-one personal training? How much do you charge them? The list of questions goes on.

Dan MacDougald from CrossFit Atlanta; Marc Wheeler from CrossFit StPete in Florida; Alex Cibiri from Element CrossFit in Mississauga, Ont.; Robert Sax from CrossFit Amped in Bellevue, Wash.; and Dan Gallagher from CrossFit Strongtown in Connecticut have completely different ideas about how to bring new clients into CrossFit.

While MacDougald emphasizes one-on-one personal training to teach new clients the movements—charging them premium prices for a personal coach—Gallagher keeps his entry-level classes easy and affordable in order to bring in as many people as possible.

On their end, Wheeler and Cibiri opt for a short fundamentals period followed by an open-gym model without scheduled group classes at all, while Sax's model falls more in line with CrossFit Atlanta: charge more money for a longer, in-depth introduction period. He even gets some clients to pass a test before they graduate to group classes.

While all of these approaches look dramatically different from each other, all five of these affiliate owners have created flourishing communities with fit, happy and healthy clients and coaches.

#### **Up Close and Personal**

After years of trial and error, MacDougald, a former defense attorney, is convinced that the best way to intake new clients is to charge them premium prices and put them through 10 to 15 one-on-one personal-training sessions—sessions cost \$500 for 10.

Once clients are competent in the movements and have a base level of fitness, they are graduated to group classes, which has almost become a rite of passage.

MacDouglad didn't always do it this way. At first CrossFit Atlanta had a free trial session on Sunday and then put new athletes right into group classes. He reported that it didn't work for his affiliate and increased the stress on his coaches. Retention wasn't great either, he said. But since implementing personal-training intros at CrossFit Atlanta, he believes all the pieces of the excellence puzzle are now in line: client excellence, coach excellence and affiliate health.



Some affiliates require all new members to go through one-on-one sessions before graduating to group classes.



Some gym owners report the connection forged during one-on-one intro sessions endures long after the athlete has graduated to group classes.

MacDougald explained that one of the best outcomes of personal training has been improved client retention. He attributes this largely to the fact that his classes run more smoothly now. The reason for this is two-fold. For one, clients who attend group classes have been through 10 to 15 personal-training sessions, so their knowledge of the CrossFit movements is greater and they don't require as much handholding by the coach during group classes.

Secondly, MacDougald's coaches don't have to spend disproportionate energy on the newbie while spending less time with the veterans.

"There's less disruption and less wasted time," MacDougald said.

Another reason he believes personal training has helped retention is because it gives coaches a chance to really connect with their clients, to find out their personal goals, and, perhaps more importantly, to find out what's going on in their lives.

Damon Mosely, a coach at CrossFit Atlanta, said the personal sessions are great from the trainer's perspective, too.

MacDougald believes personal training has helped retention because it gives coaches a chance to connect with clients.

"As a coach, personal training allows you to find different people's struggles," he said. "No two people are alike. Some move well, some don't get it, and when you come across someone who is struggling, you're forced to go into your bag of tricks and make them better. It challenges you every time."

Once clients graduate to class, their coach remains their personal coach for life. And their personal coach is compensated financially by being given a percentage of each client's monthly fees for group classes. This ultimately means MacDougald's coaches are incentivized to retain their personal clients. Having more clients results in greater financial compensation.

In short, retention is up in Atlanta because confident clients who have personal relationships with their coaches are likely to be loyal and stick around for the long haul, reaching their fitness goals in the process.

And the final piece of the retention puzzle has to do with MacDougald's belief that making people earn things the hard way results in greater appreciation and satisfaction.

Thus, paying a premium for a great service, where a client receives one-on-one care for 10 to 15 hours, and where he has to work his butt off in order to reach a certain level of fitness before graduating to group classes, leads to clients who are more invested than they would be had it come easily.

#### Free-Range CrossFit

Both Wheeler and Cibiri have a different way of cultivating loyal clients and happy communities.

Wheeler runs a foundations program for new members. It's made up of six one-on-one training sessions where members get introduced to all the main CrossFit movements. Unlike MacDougald, who prides himself on being the most expensive steakhouse in town, Wheeler's foundations program is included as part of the client's monthly fee.

Wheeler kept the price low for a reason, and it's working for him

"I want to get in as many people as possible .... It makes it easier for people to sign up this way," he said. He's found that since adding this program two years ago, his revenue has skyrocketed.

Cibiri of Element CrossFit runs a similar on-ramp program in that he doesn't charge a lot for athletes to get started in CrossFit. His on-ramp, which is run in a small group, costs \$100 for two weeks of intro classes that are held in the evenings.



In group on-ramp classes, members have a chance to bond with other new CrossFit athletes.



In the open-gym model, clients work out on their own schedule under the watchful eye of trainers.

Cibiri's philosophy is similar to Wheeler's: "Honestly, for us, we just want to get people in to sort of try it. We want them to get a feel for it first," he said of why he keeps his prices low.

At CrossFit StPete, foundations programs are included as part of the client's monthly fee.

Why Wheeler and Cibiri feel their systems really work is because of what happens after clients finish their intro sessions. Unlike MacDougald, who graduates his clients to group classes once they reach a certain fitness level, neither Wheeler nor Cibiri runs official group classes. They opt instead for an open-gym model.

Cibiri explained: "There's a misconception with the term 'open gym' sometimes. People tend to think we just have people coming in and doing their own thing without getting coached. This isn't the case."

In fact, Cibiri believes clients get more coaching in his system than in the normal group-class model. Wheeler, whose Florida box has 225 members, agrees.

"There are two or three trainers on the floor at all times, and we keep a clock that runs all day. When an athlete shows up, they do the warm-up and mobility on their own, and when they're ready to do the workout on the whiteboard, they let a trainer know, and they start the workout at the top of the next minute," said Wheeler, who has three full-time and six part-time coaches.

"So it's not just one person coaching 25 people," Wheeler explained. "And it allows the coaches to roam and focus on who needs the most help .... As coaches, we like it better than class time. It tends to allow for more one-on-one attention," he said.

Cibiri's model looks similar. He divides his box into three sections during open-gym times. About 2,000 square

feet is dedicated to a warm-up area, while another 2,000 square feet is for strength or lifting, and 3,000 square feet is reserved for the met-con of the day.

"There's usually one trainer in each area, and people cycle through as they see fit," Cibiri said. "We can run way more people through in an hour this way."

He added: "And we try to cycle coaches around during their shift so they don't get bored of teaching the same thing over and over."

One of the main reasons Wheeler and Cibiri think the open-gym model has been so successful for them is because clients can show up at their own convenience. With scheduled hourly classes, if clients are 15 minutes late they usually have to wait for the next class or they rush through warm-up and mobility work to jump into a class that's already in progress.

"For some people who come straight from work, it can be difficult to make a class on time, and when people show up late they're usually waiting around for the next class to start," Wheeler said.

With the open-gym system, a client who arrives at 20 after the hour can just start warming up on his own and hit the workout when he's ready to go.

Wheeler thinks the open-gym model works is because it allows for a more social box.

"I measure my success based on how well my community does. With our model, people spend more time talking and chatting at the end of their workout because they don't have to clear space to make room for the next class," he said. "There's a constant ebb and flow of people, and people tend to hang out longer than just the classic one-hour class model."

As for labor costs, both Wheeler and Cibiri admit it probably costs them more in resources to run their gyms this way, but they feel it's worth it to provide better service.

"It's about the members," Wheeler said.

#### Jump Right In

Dan Gallagher opened CrossFit Strongtown a year and a half ago, and like most new affiliates, his goal for the first year was simply to get people through the doors.

This means he allows any new recruit to try a class to make sure CrossFit is for him or her.



At CrossFit Strongtown, anyone can try a class for free before joining.

"We did try to do more fundamentals for a while, but at first it just seemed to turn people off," Gallagher said. But the group classes got people excited.

> At CrossFit Strongtown, anyone can come in and try a class to see if he or she likes it.

The group environment kept drawing people to the gym, so Gallagher has always maintained that anyone can come in and try a class to see if he or she likes it. And this "soft sell" is working for him.

"Our sales rate is better when we let people try a class first," Gallagher said.



Instead of a fundamentals class or one-on-one sessions, CrossFit Strongtown makes sure an extra coach is available to help new members as they learn in a group setting.

The other reason for letting new athletes join classes right away is that Gallagher has found CrossFit is mostly spread through word of mouth. And when a friend of a friend comes in, he usually wants to work out with his friend, and Gallagher's system allows a new athlete to do just that.

"I want them to understand what we do before they join," he added.

Gallagher isn't set in his ways, though. He does have a fundamentals option available for people who aren't so confident in their ability to jump right into classes. These people do one or two introductory sessions prior to joining group classes.

But just because Gallagher lets inexperienced CrossFit athletes join classes right away doesn't mean he isn't concerned about good movement. Over time, Gallagher has developed a way to ensure a new athlete in class gets taken care of properly.

"When we know there's going to be a new person in class, we make sure we have an extra coach in the class who stays with him," he said. "So that coach gives the new athlete a lot of individual attention—the coach is basically assigned to that person for the hour. And sometimes it'll

mean giving them a simpler movement if the workout is more complicated that day."

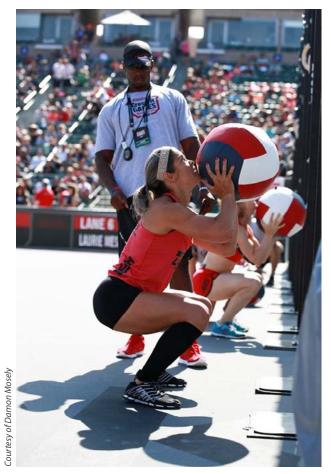
On top of regular group classes, Gallagher also hosts Olympic-weightlifting sessions and a barbell club at CrossFit Strongtown, both of which are included in his monthly membership fees.

Gallagher's philosophy is simple. He wants to give his clients what they want and not burn holes in their wallets in the process.

"We don't charge extra for fundamentals or Olympic weightlifting or barbell club because we feel like people pay enough to be here," he said.

He added: "We want to make sure the gym and our members are in a good place before we start charging way more."

Overall, Gallagher is happy with where his box has come in just a year a half. When he opened up, he and his brother, Mike Gallagher, did all the coaching, and they had just 20 members. Today, a year and a half later, Dan has half a dozen coaches and 175 members.



Trainer Damon Mosely, judging at the CrossFit Games, is a big fan of one-on-one intro sessions.

#### Ramping Up

Robert Sax opened CrossFit Amped two years ago. Today, he has more than 250 members.

When he first opened, he didn't run an intake program at all; athletes went right into classes. His goal was just to get people through the door, and he was scared to charge more money for an intro class.

"I thought it might be a deterrent," Sax said.

At the time, he was able to do throw people off the street right into class because his classes weren't busy.

"We were just trying to get people through the doors, and the classes weren't full yet, so I could take the time to diagnose squat mechanics and go over the three pulls in a clean. I had the time in class," he said.

But as classes got busier, things had to change. Sax explained that he grew some balls, started to believe in his business a little more and began charging more money. It was also time to break up the new clients from the veterans.

## CrossFit Amped uses a one-month group intro program that cost \$300 for 12 sessions.

This led to his one-month intro session that costs new members \$300 for 12 sessions. Typically, an intro session is a group of 10 to 20 people.

Since implementing his intro class, Sax said both revenue and quality of coaching have gone up.

"You can't make someone perfect in 12 sessions, but at least they get an idea of what the movements are, and they develop proper movement patterns before they join group classes," he said of his intro class.

Sax has a second option for people who can't fit the intro class into their schedule: eight one-on-one personal training sessions for \$400.

He's so intent on good movement that even if someone comes through his doors claiming to have CrossFit experience, Sax puts that person through a rigorous test to make sure the person's movements are up to their standards before releasing the new athlete to group classes.

Sax admitted that asking people for more money had a lot to do with confidence.

"We demand more now. But I know we're worth it .... We're strict, but we're consistent in our ability to make sure people are safe, and that they have a base knowledge of what they're getting themselves into. By the time they get to group classes, they're walking and talking the CrossFit language," he said.

He added: "In my mind, with our coaches, our gym, our equipment, our community, you're paying for more than just a workout," he said. "It's like buying a car. If I pay for a Mercedes, I expect it to do a little more than a Honda. So you have to ask yourself, 'Is your gym a Mercedes or a Honda?""



There's no right way to run a CrossFit affiliate, and you'll be able to tell if your method is working by the satisfaction of your members and the success of your business.

#### **Infinite Options**

While MacDougald doesn't think it's necessary to train people in a strictly one-on-one environment when they begin CrossFit—if people don't have the money, you can team them up and train them with a friend at a reduced rate, for example—he said having personal training as CrossFit Atlanta's backbone has been nothing short of invaluable for his clients, his business and his coaches. It's led to more committed clients with a sound technical knowledge of CrossFit, smoothly run classes, and better coaches with more free time and energy to give to their clients. This has led to a better affiliate, where everyone is physically, emotionally and financially healthier.

On the other side of the fence, Wheeler in Florida and Cibiri in Ontario have found that low-cost group intros work for them, and they use an open-gym model with no scheduled classes to accommodate busy clients. Unlike the high barrier of entry in the personal-training model, their focus is on bringing more people through the doors.

At CrossFit Strongtown in Connecticut, Gallagher also believes in a lower barrier of entry and has found that immediately exposing new athletes to the group class sells them on CrossFit.

And over in Washington, Sax of CrossFit Amped believes a more in-depth, higher-priced, month-long group fundamentals class is the best way to get new athletes up to speed before graduating them to group classes. Since adding this intake component to CrossFit Amped, he has seen tremendous growth in both numbers and revenue.

### Each affiliate owner can make choices and create the perfect model for his or her box.

These four totally different models are producing similarly successful results in all four cities. Wheeler believes this entrepreneurial freedom is the beauty of owning a CrossFit box.

"That's the awesome thing about being an affiliate. Nobody is dictating to you how to run your business," Wheeler said.

With fewer rules, people can make their own choices and create the perfect model for them, their location and their clients.

What's the perfect model for your box?



#### **About the Author**

Emily Beers is a **CrossFit Journal** staff writer and editor who finished a master's degree in journalism at the University of Western Ontario in the spring of 2009. Upon graduation, she worked as a sportswriter at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games, where she covered figure skating and short-track speed skating. Currently, she hosts WOD HOG, a not-always-PG publication of the CrossFit Vancouver School of Fitness. She ruptured her Achilles tendon in December 2010 and served as the Canada West Regional Media Director while recovering from surgery. Beers also competed in the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games on CrossFit Vancouver's team. She finished third at the Canada West Regional in 2012.