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Three Days in Haiti, Part 1: Meet Julie Roberts

This three-part series profiles Julie Roberts and her work in Haiti since a devastating earthquake in 2010. From amputating infected limbs to investing in pay-it-forward microcredit loans, Roberts is dedicated to helping Haitians recover.

By Emily Beers **June 2013**

Courtesy of Emily Beers

It is January 2010.

Julie Roberts finishes a long run in training for the Vancouver Marathon and rushes home to cook dinner for her four children.

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She turns on the TV to find ubiquitous breaking news about a devastating 7.0-magnitude earthquake that just hit Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas. The country's capital, Port-au-Prince, was hit especially hard. And because of poorly built infrastructure, buildings crumbled like sandcastles, taking tens of thousands of lives in the process.

The death toll is rising with every second. It will eventually number more than 200,000.

CNN's Anderson Cooper is stationed outside of a hospital in Port-au-Prince, telling the story virtually from the epicenter of the quake. In the background, Roberts can see the rubble and the injured bodies, and she can feel the devastation.

Courtesy of Julie Roberts

Courtesy of Julie Roberts

The Haitian government estimates the earthquake destroyed 250,000 residences and 30,000 commercial buildings.

A part-time paramedic, she feels a sudden obligation to help, and not in the dollar-a-day sponsorship-program kind of way. Roberts feels the obligation to get involved. She heads to her computer to research flights to Haiti. Ten minutes and CA$1,000 later, her flight is booked for the following morning; two nannies are arranged to look after her children.

The next day, Roberts packs her bags, raids a few ambulances at work for medical supplies and hops on a plane with a black rolling suitcase full of IVs, wound-care items, antibiotics and other first-aid gear.

On the plane she's a bit nervous about the situation she's flying into. Planes aren't landing in Haiti because of the earthquake, so her flight is actually touching down on the other side of the small island, in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, roughly an eight-hour drive to Port-au-Prince.

She's not exactly sure how she's going to cross the border into Haiti, but she's confident she'll find a way to get to ground zero.

2010: Hitchhiking to Haiti

In the Dominican Republic, Roberts meets an American couple at the airport; they tell her she's crazy and should head back home. Other than her suitcase full of medicine and first-aid supplies, Roberts has no concrete plan. She has only three bottles of water, enough granola bars to last a week and some hard candy. She has nowhere to stay once she gets to Haiti.

Roberts tells the couple she's going to Port-au-Prince. They're heading into Haiti, too; she begs them for a ride. At first, they're reluctant to help but finally agree to take her as far as the border between the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

"We don't want to be responsible for you after that, so we'll leave you at the border to catch a ride," the man tells her.

Relieved, Roberts hops into their van and they take off for Haiti.

She is hoping the border will look like the one between Canada and the United States: a bustling place with restaurants, buses, taxis and duty-free stores. As she nears the border crossing by a gorgeous bright blue-green lake and white sand banks, there are no buses and no taxis. The place is deserted.

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The couple order her out of the van. Grateful for their help this far, Roberts gets out, and with the exception of one or two border guards, she finds herself abandoned in what feels like the middle of nowhere. She considers walking the rest of the way, but Port-au-Prince is still an hour and a half away by car. Reluctantly, she starts walking. She starts to wonder whether she should give up and return home when the couple's van starts backing up.

"Hop back in," says the man.

An hour and a half later, Roberts arrives in Port-au-Prince.

The physical destruction, the injuries, the death, the horror are worse than she could have ever imagined. Buildings everywhere have been reduced to rubble. The streets are chaotic and filled with frantic-looking people with blood oozing from their various wounds.

She looks over and sees a large pick-up truck carrying lifeless bodies. The truck heads to an area a few miles outside the city to dump the bodies into a mass grave; thousands of unidentified corpses are left to rot.

Soon, Roberts meets some other aid workers: two doctors from Portugal and two untrained nurses from Atlanta, Ga. Together, they set up a temporary hospital next to the remains of Haiti's government buildings—The National Palace—that were flattened during the earthquake.

Around them, 50,000 homeless people are camping under tarps—about 700 miles from Miami, Fla.

Living off granola bars and some hard candies she bought from the bulk section of the grocery store, Roberts doesn't sleep for more than half an hour at a time for an entire week. A never-ending flow of people arrive at the makeshift hospital with missing limbs, wounds that won't stop bleeding and infections of all kinds.

She administers countless IVs. She delivers a baby. And she tries to treat a young girl with maggots living inside one hole above her ear and a second on her forehead. Despite Roberts' best efforts, the girl dies.

Roberts has never seen such necrosis in her life; infections are so bad that the victims' skin dies and turns black, leaving medical personnel no option but to cut it off. She goes into what she calls "paramedic mode"—she stops thinking, puts her head down and gets to work, cutting off parts of fingers, arms and legs.

Courtesy of Julie Roberts

Courtesy of Julie Roberts

Roberts spent her first visit to Haiti treating hundreds of wounded people, many of them newly orphaned children.

"I need to keep it together and treat patients so I'm not going to allow myself the luxury of crying or even processing how massive the carnage is until I get back on that plane," Roberts thinks to herself.

She holds it together better than she expects, though treating children with split-open heads screaming for dead mothers almost pushes Roberts' emotions over the edge as she starts to imagine they are her own children suffering.

After running on sheer adrenaline for seven days, Roberts knows it's time to go home. She has four children waiting for her, missing her. But on the plane, she can't stop thinking about Haiti. She cries her way through the 3,500 miles back to Vancouver.

She knows she has to go back. Soon.

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Courtesy of Julie Roberts

Roberts' four children, three of whom are adopted.

2013: You Can Do It All

Although 35-year-old Roberts is a Canadian citizen, her father did relief and development work in Africa, so she spent much of her childhood living in Tanzania and Kenya, where she learned how to speak Swahili.

She moved back to her homeland as a high-school student and spent her adolescent years living and going to school in Winnipeg, Man. She graduated and began university at the age of 16 and was married by 18. She has been divorced for four and a half years. Roberts admits she's always been independent and somewhat ahead of her years.

At 25, she became the president of Community Builders Group (CBG), a successful nonprofit organization based in Vancouver. She still holds the title today.

Her job is to run the business end of CBG, which owns and operates five rooming houses in infamously drug-ridden Downtown Eastside in Vancouver. The rooming houses provide transitional housing for addicts or poor people looking to get their lives back together. Their work extends beyond just Vancouver; they also fund projects in a number of countries in Africa and Haiti.

Roberts isn't sure why she has always felt a strong connection to helping the underprivileged in Vancouver but thinks it might be related to her time in Africa.

"I never forgot about Africa," she adds. "In fact, sometimes I think I'd rather live in Africa or Haiti. It's a much simpler life."

She concedes that life in Canada with four kids and two jobs is demanding. When she is home, she embraces the North American life; she's addicted to her phone and she drives her four children around to school and various sports in what she calls "my mom vehicle," a Mazda CX9.

She only gave birth to one of her four children, a boy named Shanan.

In 2006, there was a knock at Roberts' door. It was Carey, one of the women from the women's shelter where she worked at the time. She knew Carey, but not well. Carey asked for a favor: "Will you take my baby? I mean, will you adopt her from me?"

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Roberts was stunned but barely hesitated. Carey, a heroin addict, looked so unhealthy, so desperate. Within 40 seconds, Roberts became the mother of a beautiful daughter named Aila.

Her third child, Kiviuk, was adopted in a similar situation.

"I had all three babies, all a year old or younger, lined up in a row on my couch. All three of them stared at me helplessly, innocently," Roberts said. "I wondered what I had gotten myself into."

About 18 months later, Roberts adopted Kiviuk's biological sister, Sura.

Roberts has always felt the need to be more than a mom who works full time and works out five days a week. She has always needed something more to help her feel useful and fulfilled. This need is what drove her to get involved in work overseas.

2013: The Village of McDonald, Haiti

The images from her first trip to Haiti continue to haunt Roberts today. They also compelled her to return to Haiti and continue to help in any way she could.

"If I didn't keep going back and trying to help, even in a small way, I think the enormous injustice and inequality of it all would overwhelm me," Roberts says.

So after returning to Port-Au-Prince a second time to do post-earthquake relief work in 2010, Roberts started looking for a way to become involved in the country in a more long-term way.

She was soon introduced to a woman named Barb McLeod, originally from Vancouver. McLeod explained how she was guided to Haiti spiritually and has been living in McDonald for the last 10 years. McLeod allowed Roberts to get her foot in the door with the locals of the village. The

Courtesy of Emily Beers

According to World Bank estimates in 2005, more than half of Haiti's citizens live on less than US$1 per day.

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Courtesy of Emily Beers

It's been three years since the earthquake, and many villages still lack basic sanitation facilities.

locals have, in turn, been the ones to guide her.

"I never want to make decisions for them," Roberts says. "It's their village, so they have directed me in areas where I can help."

In the last two years, Roberts has funded latrine-building projects and the construction and operation of a pharmacy in McDonald. But some of her most successful projects have been pay-it-forward (PIF) microcredit loans: recipients of the small loans—usually US$200—are expected to pay the loan forward to another family in McDonald once they make their return on the investment. These microcredit loans have gone a long way in helping families develop self-sustaining small businesses.

Since 2010, Roberts has returned to Haiti a dozen times, for no more than one week at a time.

"I can't go longer than that because I hate leaving my own children," she says.

But she has a small army of nannies, as well as her parents and her ex-husband, who ensure her children are safe when she is away.

Her long-term plan in Haiti is to continue to make trips to McDonald three times a year, to generate and raise more funds for microcredit loans, to build latrines, and to offer medical assistance where possible. And eventually she hopes to spread the economic development that is helping to transform McDonald to surrounding areas, which are also extremely impoverished.

Roberts made her 13th trip to McDonald this April—this time with an entourage of CrossFit athletes including this author—to check on her projects, as well as to look into potential new projects. The experience was eye-opening for those who saw Haitian poverty up close for the first time.

Courtesy of Emily Beers

Building enough latrines for the people of McDonald will help improve some of the worst health problems in the village.

Haitian Reality

Bumpy gravel roads littered with foot-deep, crater-like potholes lead to McDonald, which feels too small to hold a population of 6,000. That's probably because most of the tiny, one-room houses are home to 10 to 12 people. The houses themselves are made of more sand than concrete because concrete is too expensive.

You can't walk through the village without stepping on garbage. The beach next to the village is covered in tin cans, dirty Styrofoam, water bottles and every other kind of litter imaginable. There's so much garbage that the rocks on the beach are barely visible. It's a far cry from the beautiful beaches that draw tourists to both countries on the island, but Roberts says it's better than it used to be.

To the left of the beach house Roberts rents, barefooted children play soccer. They don't look like they've been washed in weeks. One of them has a big lump in his stomach.

"That lump in his navel means he has worms living inside him," Roberts explains.

One of the boys takes off from the group and walks over to the beach. He rummages around for a container and finds a tin can amongst the waste. He picks it up and sits on it, defecating into the can. The odor wafts into Roberts' backyard.

"Most of the people here don't have any kind of bathrooms," she explains. "This is why CBG has been funding latrine building over the course of the last year."

Roberts adds: "It is getting better. We're building two more latrines for a few families right now."

The boy finishes up and finds himself a piece of scrap paper, which isn't too difficult on "garbage beach." He wipes himself, shoves the paper into the can, walks over to the water and hurls the can 15 feet in the air. It lands in the water with a splash.

It's the ocean's problem now.

Parts 2 and 3 will take an in-depth look at Robert's most-recent efforts in Haiti.

About the Author

Emily Beers is a ***CrossFit Journal*** *staff writer and editor. She competed in the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games on CrossFit Vancouver's team, and she finished third at the Canada West Regional in 2012. In 2013, she finished second in the Open in Canada West.*

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Rider on the Storm

Former pro cyclist Jeff King recounts the spread of cycling's drug culture from Europe to North America.

By Jeff King **June 2013**

All pihotos: Coutesy of Jeff King

Jeff King winning a pair of races in New York's Central Park in 2006.

The first thing I noticed in Belgium was the speed.

We were racing at a pace at least five miles per hour faster than anything I had ever done in North America and not taking the usual rests that would allow me to survive three-hour races like this. I was getting my legs ripped off.

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I had arrived in Brussels the day before, fresh off a season of national-level professional races around the U.S. The weekend before, I was still the team captain for the University of Colorado cycling team that won the collegiate national championships. I was named to the all-American team. I was in top form, winning races and confident I would win more, which is why I decided to move to Belgium and compete as a professional cyclist.

The day before I arrived, I was on top of the world; the day after, I was near the back of the pack.

It was 1998, and if you wanted to race bikes seriously, you raced in Europe. The European circuit was to bike racing what the National Football League is to football and the National Hockey League is to hockey. It was where the greatest athletes in the sport from around the world competed for the biggest prizes, the most money and the greatest prestige. Europe was where the stakes were the highest, and I had decided to go all-in.

It was my first race and I was already thinking, "Man, these guys are fit."

> In the late 1990s, there was a drug renaissance going on in European biking.

We were blasting through 80 miles of narrow brick streets at speeds approaching 30 miles per hour. There was no chatter between riders, no smiles, no encouragement; just a peloton of lowered heads with the occasional punch thrown if a rider wasn't taking his turn at the front.

A Belgian kermesse in 1998. King is on the right.

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This was a nothing race, a low-level *kermesse*, which is a popular Flemish-style bicycle race held on the same day as the town festival. The streets were lined with fat, drunken Belgians screaming at us in Flemish. Before the race, gamblers poked and prodded us like racehorses before placing their bets. There's no start money at a kermesse; if you don't win, you don't get paid. You eat what you kill.

At the time, I laughed at how seedy cycling was at this level. But I was naïve; I had no idea how just how squalid the sport actually was.

In the late 1990s, there was a drug renaissance going on in European biking, where the drugs and doping technology were ahead of the cyclists. But we pedaled hard, and it didn't take long for us to catch up.

What the sport of cycling is today was being developed in labs and refined on the roads of Europe in 1998.

King at 18, after the New York State Championships in 1993.

Welcome to the Big Leagues

I was a three-sport athlete in high school in Rochester, N.Y., playing tennis and basketball and running cross-country. I sat down next to my black-sheep uncle at a birthday party for my grandmother. He had just lost his driver's license after another DUI but explained to me how he had finally gotten his head straight. He worked at a garage and was now biking back and forth to his job. He enjoyed his time in the saddle and eventually bought a better bike and entered some races. He told me to try it, said I'd be good at it.

My parents didn't like me talking to this guy in the first place because he had a foul mouth and was always putting stupid ideas in my head. By the time I got home, the newest stupid idea resulted in me convincing my dad to loan me enough money for a bike.

I bought a bike magazine and found a local racing club. I made some calls and found a race over the border in Canada. My stepfather drove me a few hours north to enter the race in the under-18 category. What I didn't know was the Canadian junior national team was also racing. They left me behind after less than a mile.

I came close to quitting right then but found the sport interesting enough to try another race. This time, I found a race at my level, and I finished. I spent that first year racing around upstate New York, never doing all that well but improving with each competition. You can't just show up and succeed in bike racing. The sport rewards dedication, hard work and long miles. At least that's all I thought was required.

I had committed to playing basketball my first year at Allegheny College in Pennsylvania, but my heart was on the road, not the court. I dropped out after a year to move to the University of Colorado, where serious racers went to become pros. My parents were furious but there was no turning back. I needed to see this through and was already in too deep.

Of course, it wasn't until I got to Europe that I saw just how deep someone could really go in the sport.

It only took a matter of weeks in Belgium before I knew the drill: mornings were spent watching MTV Europe and speculating on who was taking which drugs. In the afternoon, we raced.

King's team cars at the start of a race in France in 1998.

The older riders told us how to spot users. The everyday drug of choice was amphetamines. It was effective for a short period of time and out of your system within a day or two. If a rider was at the back one day then riding erratically at the front with his eyes bugged out the next, it was amphetamines. It usually took a day or two to recover from an effort like that, so they trailed from the back during the next race.

If a rider was at the back one day then riding erratically at the front with his eyes bugged out the next, it was amphetamines.

The Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) banned amphetamines after the great British racer Tom Simpson died while riding up Mont Ventoux during the 1967 Tour de France. He was 29 years old when a cocktail of amphetamines and alcohol stopped his heart. They say he travelled with one suitcase for his clothes and one for his drugs. Riders still pay homage to him at a roadside monument placed where he died.

But as far as the Belgian racing community was concerned, racing on amphetamines was still considered racing "mostly clean," while any drug that required a needle was deemed a "real drug." Rumors of newer, more effective drugs were being talked about on our team. People would say the real pros were blood doping—removing oxygen-rich blood during rest periods that was later transfused back into the rider during long, exhausting events—or using EPO (erythropoietin), a hormone produced by the kidneys that stimulates red-blood-cell production and increases the amount of oxygen carried by the blood to the muscles.

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The International Olympic Committee and other international sports federations banned EPO in the early 1990s, but a reliable testing method wasn't developed and implemented until the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000.

Police raids at the 1998 Tour de France uncovered large caches of doping products used by multiple teams. The find forced a reappraisal of the fractured and disparate anti-doping policies and agencies around the world that were clearly failing to deter, much less eradicate, doping. The World Anti-Doping Agency was established in late 1999. Most famously, in 2012 Lance Armstrong was stripped of seven Tour de France titles won between 1999 and 2005, and in 2013 he admitted to Oprah Winfrey that he had used performance-enhancing drugs in competition.

But that was in the future, and we had races to ride, win and throw in the present.

The Director

Our team director was obsessed with getting riders onto the top-level pro teams and into the biggest races. He was paid through our team sponsorships, so the more riders he could place with the best teams, the better riders his own team could attract and the more sponsorship money it would receive. He did whatever he needed to do to get us to perform "clean." At first I was relieved to learn that we would be racing clean, until I learned what "clean bike racing" meant in these parts.

If one of us was able to attract attention from a higher-level pro team, the first question they would ask our director was whether we were racing clean. It's not that they insisted on drug-free riders but rather wanted to know if there was another level we could quickly achieve with them on a more sophisticated program.

My first weeks in Belgium made it perfectly clear: if you were going to race bikes competitively in Europe, you were

In his interview with Oprah Winfrey, Lance Armstrong said he did not feel his use of performance-enhancing drugs was "cheating" at the time, and King says most riders in Europe in the late '90s would understand.

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going to race on drugs. From aspiring amateurs to entry-level pros to the celebrity athletes in the biggest races, drugs were simply part of the kit, like a spoke wrench, a pump and extra tire tubes.

Our team director was a local legend in Flanders. His role was to take care of everything. From the moment he picked us up at the Brussels airport, he told us where to live, what to eat, what to drink, when to sleep and where to ride. I knew nothing about Belgium and would learn nothing about Belgium other than bike racing.

The team that the director selected to race on any given day would step into the windowless team van, close the door, wait for it to stop a few hours later, get out and race.

I was the best field sprinter, so I was sent to a lot of races across flat, windy stretches where I would eventually develop gum disease from the cow shit splattering up into my face from the riders around me. My job was to stay in the race with the leaders until the end. At speeds up to 35 miles per hour, it was no easy job.

After a couple of weeks of racing, I learned that the director was also helping me get to the front.

A typical *kermesse* started in the afternoon with as many as 120 starters pedaling for 100 miles, but just 25 to 30 racers finished. The prize money went 20 places deep, so there was no point racing for 40th. If a rider or a group lost contact with the leaders, a motorcycle would pull alongside and take them out of the race.

A 100-mile bike race requires more water than you can carry on a bike. Sections of the race were designated as feed zones where team staff could hand us food and water. I was the team's field sprinter, so my race didn't really start until the last mile. My teammates would lead me to the front, where I would take on the European sprinters.

After a couple of weeks of racing, I learned that the director was also helping me get to the front. As the race progressed, the water bottles I snatched from our director's hand turned from a sugary water mix to something gritty and metallic. When I asked another rider about the bottles, or *bidons* in French, I was told to shut up and be thankful, that they would help me win.

After falling in love with cycling as a young man, King later had his heart broken and decided to never race again.

We called them "mystery *bidons*." I learned a week later that our director was grinding up amphetamines and putting them into the bottles. Just a helpful little kick after three hours of racing. A teammate gulped three mystery *bidons* at the end of one race and was rushed to the hospital with tremors and dehydration. He was later told by the director to be more professional.

Another teammate had been told by his father, a former pro racer, that he wasn't welcome back home in New Zealand until he had made something of his riding career. Before a race, he took a handful of pills, downed half of them, put the rest in his pocket and sped off. I thought he'd OD on this mixed bag of unidentified drugs, but he was our top rider that day.

Belgian fans wanted fast racing not suspended riders, so avoiding detection was easy and fell mostly to the director. But the public pitched in, too. A few minutes into one race in rural Belgium, a loudspeaker in town started blaring Flemish over and over again. The old drunk men, team staff, girlfriends and family were screaming at us from the sidelines. I had no idea what was going on because I couldn't understand the language.

The director was unfazed, gave us a now-familiar fist pump, his sign for "Go," and smiled. Over the next five miles, 50 of the 85 or so riders pulled over and dropped out. I was confused but kept racing, finishing in eighth.

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King at the start line of the college national championships in 1998.

I learned after the race the Flemish announcer had been warning riders there would be drug testing after the race. The director hadn't given us the mystery *bidons* yet, so we were good to go. An English rider wasn't so lucky; he failed the test and was banned for two years. A brief story ran in the paper next day decrying the doping by international riders and praising the clean-racing Belgians.

The Belgians looked after each other. The director always knew beforehand which races would be tested, so we were never at risk. With some 25 races a week in Flanders, we had plenty to keep us busy.

Racing in other countries was always more of a wildcard, but we still took chances.

Selling the Race

One teammate was an immensely talented young guy who bounced around from team to team in Europe while looking for a bigger payoff. While he was with us, he won a lot of races during the day and went on huge cocaine and booze benders at night. We'd find him the next morning face down on the floor of his room, and we'd wake him up and get him into the van for the next race.

He had big, powerful legs but his head was a mess. After one race he won, I saw him pinned against a French team's van. While he led a breakaway from the main peloton, he had struck a deal to sell the race to some of their riders for a share of their winnings. But he went back on his promise, won the race and then wouldn't give up the prize money. I had to run over, push through some puny French riders and save his ass. I was so amped up from the race I was looking for a fight and tried to make eye contact with all of them to see if they would challenge me. But they quickly retreated into their team vans. Our teammate deserved to have his ass kicked for what he did.

Selling races was common. When a break formed, the few riders at the front would negotiate with each other to see who would give up the win for a share of the money. There were several burned-out ex top pros in their 30s and 40s who made a living by making breaks, riding hard, taking fifth place and collecting a share of everyone's prize money after the race. These were some hardass mother-fuckers. They never smiled and were always screaming at the young guys like me, smashing me on the top of my head with their fists if I didn't understand what they were yelling or wanted me to do.

When a break formed, the few riders at the front would negotiate with each other to see who would give up the win for a share of the money.

Other riders would get doped to the gills, ride like crazy for 75 percent of the race, take all the intermediate sprints—called primes—and prize money, then drop out. The logic was simple: no drug testing if you don't finish the race. Sometimes the primes were set before a race and other times a judge would ring a bell to kick off a sprint. If you were a sprinter like me, you lived and died for that bell. The crowd loved it; they could even call for a prime, like some kind of circus.

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I went off the front with one break before I understood how primes were run and races were fixed in Europe. I sat behind the leader in his draft and didn't pull through to take the lead even once. He rode at 30 miles an hour for 40 miles, building a five-minute gap on the main group, when he suddenly sat up and dropped out with 20 miles to go. I thought, "Fuck ... I'm screwed." I knew I wouldn't be able to stay away from the field by myself. After the race, the director was furious with me, and I was so cooked from the effort that I couldn't even get out of bed the next day.

As the season wore on, many of my teammates grew less excited about racing. Many had been there for several years and were still at it because they had no other options.

Toward the end of the season, it was clear that a few of our teammates had upgraded their diet. It was a competitive environment, and not much love was lost between any of us. Syringes were lying around the house, but vitamin B12 or iron was always the explanation.

My closest friend on the team and I pressed one of the other riders about what was going on. He told us to go ask the pharmacy, which is exactly what we did. We walked down the street, stopped in the first pharmacy and asked the guy behind the counter if he was selling steroids to cyclists.

He looked at us and said, simply, "Yes, but they're expensive if you don't have a prescription." Mystery solved, we went back to the house and stopped asking questions.

At this point, after just four months in Europe, my longtime dream of racing bikes in Europe was officially dead. I didn't want the lifestyle, and I couldn't take the relentless pain of the races anymore.

I mentally checked out of my last 10 races or so, waited for the season to end and moved back to America. I wanted to create a life for myself that was as far away from cycling as I could get. I found a job in finance and took up bowling. Really.

Racing in the U.S.A.

Four years after Belgium, I was completely removed from the sport. I didn't ride, I didn't hang out with racers, and no one I worked with knew I had ever raced. It was a part of my past that I completely left behind. I even suffered minor panic attacks when I thought about getting back on a bike.

But that changed in 2002 when my wife, who was finishing school at the University of Colorado, decided to race for the college team and I was offered the head-coach position for the men's team. I decided it would be fun to whip some young guys in shape, and I was back in America, where racing clean meant racing clean.

I trained them the way I'd been trained: 300 to 400 miles a week in the saddle in the fall and winter, then adding speed and intensity before the racing started in February. We dominated the early season races with our excess of talent. We pretty much did whatever we wanted in any of the college races. We kept the peloton together when we wanted to keep it together and blew the race apart when we wanted it blown apart.

A couple of weeks before the national championships in Vermont, we went down to southern Colorado for a two-day, three-stage race in Durango. The first stage was

King (in front) during the 1997 college national championships in San Diego.

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an uphill time trial. Riders started one at a time and raced against the clock straight up the mountain. I told our guys to crush the field.

It started as it always did, with our riders putting up times around 20 to 21 minutes while the competition was riding closer to 24 minutes. Then I got word that Tom Danielson, a rider from another school, put up a time in the mid-18s. I went completely berserk, ran straight to the officials and insisted that he had cheated, had taken a short cut or the clock was wrong. They insisted that his time was legitimate. I drove the course looking for short cuts, but it was just one road straight up the mountain.

Our team was shaken and in disbelief. This guy was a mountain-bike racer with almost no road-racing experience.

We had a criterium race that afternoon, one hour of racing around a one-mile loop. I told our team to hold no punches. We attacked the race the moment the gun went off. The race narrowed to 11 guys from 65 almost immediately: our 10 riders vs. this one guy who beat us to the top of the mountain. I was screaming at our guys to attack every time they rode by. We would get three or four guys out in the lead, trying to draw Danielson out. If he followed, our riders would sit up, wait for the other riders and then attack again. If he didn't follow our break, our guys would work together to ride away. But this guy would slowly bring our guys back. He was relentless, and I was losing my mind. He was the strongest college racer I had ever seen, and he had come out of nowhere. Finally, we broke him and won the race, but it took its toll on our riders.

The coach of the other team was not happy with me for racing so aggressively, but I hadn't broken any rules, so I just brushed him off.

When we got back to Boulder, I was notified by Rick Crawford, the head of the college cycling association, that I was being written up for losing my shit and forgetting the spirit of college bike racing.

Years later, in December 2012, Crawford was fired from his job at Colorado Mesa University. Earlier that month, he had admitted to supplying EPO to pro cyclists Levi Leipheimer and Kirk O'Bee between 1999 and 2001. The spirit of bike racing, indeed. Crawford was initially allowed to remain in his post after agreeing to 500 hours of community service in anti-doping education. However, an unnamed accuser came forward after Crawford's initial admissions regarding Leipheimer and O'Bee, and the university fired Crawford.

Once doping took over cycling in the U.S., King left it behind forever.

Danielson eventually turned pro, signed with the top U.S. pro team, won pro races and competed in the Tour de France. But he, too, fell prey to the dark side of cycling. In 2012, Danielson publicly confessed to using drugs as a pro, including during his time on Lance Armstrong's team, U.S. Postal. His confession voided all his race results between Mar. 1, 2005, and Sept. 23, 2006, and resulted in a six-month ban. Danielson currently races for Garmin-Sharp in Europe.

For the Fun of It—Or Not

We moved to New York City in 2004. I was working 80 hours a week on Wall Street and massively out of shape. I didn't know of any other way to exercise—I hadn't heard of CrossFit yet—so I got on my bike and went off looking for the George Washington Bridge to escape Manhattan for a few hours. I soon bumped into three racers out for a ride and tagged along with them. By the end, I had agreed to try some early morning amateur races in Central Park as part of their team.

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King staying fit without at bike at Tidal CrossFit in Toronto.

The next two years were some of the most enjoyable in my racing career. The races were just good clean fun. I even managed to get in good enough shape to enter a high-level pro race in 2006 that went through my town of Rochester, N.Y.

> It was clear that sophisticated doping had jumped the Atlantic.

But I was instantly rocked by memories of Belgium. This race wasn't like the U.S. pro races I left behind in 1998: it was clear that sophisticated doping had jumped the Atlantic.

Even the weekend warriors were involved. At first it was just finger pointing at particular guys who had made huge gains in a short period of time. I didn't pay much attention because I didn't want it to be true. Then names were being dropped about where to get the drugs if we wanted them. The main supplier was a guy I used to race with as a 17-year-old. He had raced internationally, learned the tricks and come back to start his own online business of supplying drugs to U.S. racers.

Shortly afterwards, local amateur riders in New York City started failing drug tests. This was no easy feat considering the lack of testing and oversight at local races, but they still managed to fail and continue to fail today.

I decided to hang up my bike for good and never race again. If you couldn't even race with your friends, getting some exercise and a little competition on the weekends, I wanted no part of it.

It took a decade or so for European cycling culture to saturate even low-level amateur cycling in the U.S., but it happened. And that's where it is today. Whether it's entry-level beginners or retired pros racing in the masters events, drugs are now part of cycling, and cycling is drugs.

I've witnessed the sport I once loved erode beyond recognition. I wish I could say I made different choices than my friends who went on to the biggest races like the Tour de France, but the truth is I made some terrible decisions, too. Now, at 38, I worry what my 22-year-old self might have done to make it to the top.

Cycling takes great sacrifice. You give up friends, family, education and any semblance of a normal life just to get the chance to line up for a European race where the scouts are watching. For many of these guys, doping wasn't a choice at all, just another sacrifice in the long climb to the top of the mountain.

Bike racing has broken my heart twice, and I won't give it another chance.

I guess I just can't handle the speed.

✦

About the Author

Jeff King was team captain of the University of Colorado cycling team in 1998, when it won the collegiate national championships, and he was named to the all-American team the same year. He was later named head coach of the team in 2004. He discovered CrossFit three years ago while living in New York City and looking for a more efficient way to work out. Because of his endurance-sport background, Jeff took over a year to do his first pull-up and push-up. Jeff travels a lot for work and has dropped into roughly 40 CrossFit gyms around North America since 2010. He moved to Toronto with his wife, Kathy, in 2011 and is now a member of Tidal CrossFit, and he represented Tidal as a team member at the 2013 Canada East Regional. Embittered by his experience in cycling, Jeff ignores his friends' repeated requests to go riding and quickly changes the channel whenever it shows up on TV.

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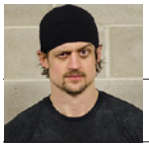
Lingua Fran-ca

Mike Warkentin collects a list of terms that will help you communicate in boxes all over the world.



Uncommon Sense

By Mike Warkentin Managing Editor **June 2013**

All Photos: Mike Warkentin/CrossFit Journal

CrossFit communication takes many forms.

Throughout history, people of different mother tongues have communicated via lingua francas, or "bridge languages" that developed to allow commerce and trade.

In the Renaissance Era, Lingua Franca was used for trade and diplomacy in the Mediterranean. In the fitness renaissance were are currently experiencing, we've developed terms that can be understood whether you're doing CrossFit in Paris, France, or Paris, Texas.

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I am more correctly librarian than originator of these terms. Credit really goes to the people who invented the terms, as well as those athletes who created a glaring need for them.

A guy like that (n): A person at another affiliate whose odd but not uncommon behavior mirrors that of the weird guy at your gym.

"Why's dude taping his hands for a 5K run?"

"No idea. He always does that kind of stuff."

"We have a guy like that."

Anti-kip (n): An affliction in which pull-ups or ring dips actually require more strength when a mistimed kip is added to the movement.

"Whoa, back off for a sec. You've got anti-kip. You might as well just do them strict till we sort this out."

Backchannel (v): To contact members of another affiliate to find out a rival's unposted Open score.

"Fucker still hasn't posted his 13.4 score. I'm going to backchannel and dig it up."

Blackout king (n): A trainer who participates in a class and coaches the session immediately afterward, potentially resulting in a 10-minute period of complete incoherence.

"What's the warm-up?"

"Let's just row for a while till the blackout king starts making sense again."

Bleeder (n): An athlete who's almost guaranteed to tear his or her hands during a pull-up workout no matter how many precautions are taken.

"Why are you wearing rubber gloves?"

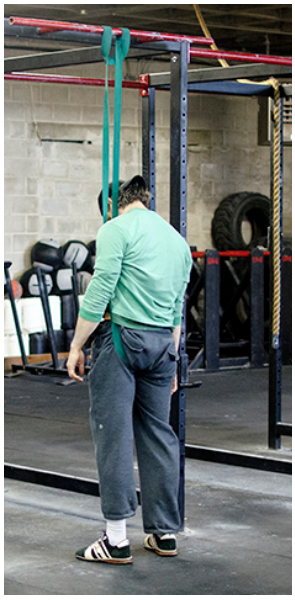
"It's Cindy and we've got a few bleeders in the class."

Chalk monster (n): An athlete who frequently has chalk on his or her face.

"Hey, chalk monster, I can still see some skin."

Clothespin/rubber wedge (v): To let a band slide off your foot and into your crotch during assisted pull-ups. Dropping off the bar turns a clothespin into a rubber wedge.

"Can someone help Justin? He's clothespinned himself. Oh wait. Now it's a rubber wedge. Get the camera."



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Corner 30 (n): Stopping to rest as soon as you are around the corner and out of the coach's line of site.

"Your last lap time was terrible. Did you take a corner 30?"

"Totally."

Fake (n): During a hard met-con, aggressively gripping a barbell with no intention of picking it up for another 20 seconds or until after an unnecessary trip to the chalk bucket.

"I thought you were going to pick it up and finish under 4 minutes."

"Yeah, I hit you with a fake there."

Foreign loot (n): The gear you got at the CrossFit Games that no one else has at home.

"You have the neon-yellow gymnastics grips with camo trim? OMG!"

"Yep. It's foreign loot. I almost had to sneak it across the border."

Gameboy (n): Someone who spends more time analyzing previous times on the whiteboard than warming up.

"We'll start the WOD whenever John is done playing gameboy at the whiteboard."

Gandalf (n): An older member who is far more powerful than he or she seems.

"I thought I had that one, and then fucking Gandalf comes out of nowhere with 30 unbroken snatches."

Gazelle (v): To attempt a workout with little to no warm-up.

"You need a few minutes?"

"Nah. I'll just get my shoes on and gazelle this thing."

Hydrate (v): To slowly and purposefully replace depleted electrolytes in the third minute of a five-minute met-con.

"I would have PR'd if I didn't stop to hydrate."

"You mean rest?"

"Uh, yeah."

Jackhammer (v): To take a med-ball to the face while performing wall-ball two-for-ones.

"How long was I out for?"

"About a minute. You jackhammered yourself but good. I can see lace marks on your face."

Juggernaut (n): An athlete who utterly obliterates the best score on the whiteboard by more than 2 minutes or more than 50 lb.

"The best clean of the day is 245?"

"Except for the juggernaut who came in and put up 315 without a warm-up."

Kimbo Slice (n): An athlete who specializes in particularly brutal workouts but suffers when things get technical.

"Who did the most burpees in 4 minutes?"

"Kimbo Slice over there did, like, 300."

"How'd he do on the max snatch afterward?"

"Just the bar."

Lunch-pail (v): To keep a bucket nearby after eating a large meal directly before a conditioning workout.

"What's with the bucket?"

"I'm lunch-pailing this one. I had four burgers 'cuz I thought it was squat day."

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Make-up reps (n): The reps you tack on to the end of a WOD after you feel guilty for a few sketchy ones you shouldn't have counted during the workout.

"What was your Helen time?"

"It was 9:58, and then 5 extra pull-ups."

"So 10:15?"

"I … guess so."

Plan B (n): Everything that happens after your strategy to "just go unbroken" fails miserably.

"Dude. It's time for Plan B. Just put the kettlebell down for a minute before you puke again."

PR stakeout (n): Friending someone on Facebook for the sole purpose of stalking his PRs before a competition.

"How do you know John Smith's best 3RM deadlift?"

"I'm on a PR stakeout on his Facebook page."

Quantum Leap programming (n): Programming secretly copied from another gym—but only after a period of time has elapsed so it's harder to notice.

"I feel like I've seen this workout before."

"Yeah, I think it's a Quantum Leap to CrossFit New England in September."

Rain Man (n): An athlete who displays impressive memory and math skills even deep in a conditioning workout.

"What the hell round are we in?"

"We're in Round 12, and if you maintain your current pace, you'll finish at 35:43, give or take 10 seconds."

"Thanks, Rain Man."

Schadenfriend (n): Someone who intentionally slows down in a tandem workout to make a partner suffer more.

"Dude, what took you so long on the pull-ups?"

"I was a schadenfriend to give Karl more time to enjoy his burpees."

Shin (v): To draw blood from the lower leg during barbell pulling movements.

"It looks like a slaughterhouse in here."

"Yeah. Six dudes shinned themselves during Grace."

Shinned but good.

The not-so-subtle shifty.

Shifty (n): Looking at someone's C2 monitor either surreptitiously or blatantly. Also a frequent behavior at urinals.

"Why did you slow down at the end?"

"I pulled a shifty and knew I was ahead."

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Simple leopard (n): A breed of athletes who believe their mobility is the only aspect of fitness limiting their performance.

"Behold the simple leopard flossing his quads in hopes of breaking his squat PR by 150 lb. today."

Sniper (n): An Internet user who feels the need to point out form errors in any lift greater than his or her own PR.

"Who's this Craig Jones asshole talking about early arm bend on your 250 snatch?"

"I checked his Open profile. Sniper snatches 115."

Stalker (n): An athlete who stays two reps behind another with the sole goal of beating that athlete by one rep via a last-second sprint to the finish.

"He's a stalker. Try taking 3 minutes on your first round of Cindy and see what he does."

Taking it as it comes (v): To have no plan for a workout.

"What's your strategy?"

"I'm just taking it as it comes."

"Good luck with that."

Threat analysis (n): Only cheering for athletes who have no chance of beating you.

"Why don't you cheer for Ken?"

"Threat analysis reveals he might beat my time. Go, Carl!"

T-rex (v): To lose the false grip and stall in the muscle-up with the hands and rings directly in front of the shoulders, removing all possibility of completing the rep.

"Dude, you're T-rexxing it all to fuck. Come down and try again."

Uppercut (n): Taking a barbell to the chin during a thruster, press, push press or jerk.

"Why's he bleeding?"

"Took an uppercut on the push presses."

Upselling (v): Avoiding direct competition with a rival by altering the workout in some way.

"Who won the Elizabeth showdown?"

"No idea. Sean had the best time, but Chris upsold it and did squat cleans at 145."

The T-rex is not extinct. Not by a long shot.

Victor's rights (n): The right to cheer for someone in a workout, but only after you know he or she won't beat your time.

"Why is that girl suddenly cheering so loudly?"

"She's got victor's rights."

Video immunity (n): An elite level of CrossFit where you never have to post a video of your PR because other people do it for you.

"Did you see Froning's Fran all over Facebook?"

"It was everywhere. Dude has total video immunity."

Viking (n): An athlete who doesn't care which heat he or she goes in and will probably put up the best time regardless.

"You're going to volunteer to go first?"

"Yep. Come at me, bro."

"Good luck, Viking."

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"Wait-wait-wait! I have to pee!"

Walrus (n): A male wearing compression tights without having the decency to put shorts overtop.

"Where's your deadlift bar?"

"Behind the walrus."

"Whoa. That's rough."

Warm-up warrior: An athlete who considers it essential to "win" the warm-up.

"Warm-up warrior just set a PR in the 600-meter warm-up jog. He's vomiting outside."

Water works (n): A group of athletes most likely to need a pee break directly before the WOD.

"Are we really starting in a minute?"

"No. I just said that for the water works. You've actually got 3 minutes."

✦

About the Author

Mike Warkentin is the managing editor of the ***CrossFit Journal*** *and the founder of CrossFit 204.*

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The Written Word

What does it take to write a book? Hilary Achauer talks to Samir Chopra and bestselling novelist Eleanor Brown about the joy—and pain—of writing.

By Hilary Achauer **June 2013**

Tanya Northrup Photography

When all she wants to do is stop, Eleanor Brown breaks her task into manageable parts.

"Small goals are important. You have to make it achievable," Brown said.

Samir Chopra doesn't enjoy the process, but knows he'd be even unhappier if he stopped.

"I wish I could stop, but if I stopped, I'd be miserable," he said.

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They're not talking about CrossFit. They're talking about writing.

Brown is a *New York Times* bestselling author. Chopra has published four books. Both are CrossFit athletes.

Writers are a strange bunch. Most could never dream of doing anything else. They need to write. And yet writers procrastinate. They drag their heels. They talk about how difficult it is to face a blank page. At times, they hate writing.

Writers are a strange bunch. Most could never dream of doing anything else. They need to write.

In *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, Anne Lamott puts it this way: "I know some very great writers, writers you love who write beautifully and have made a great deal of money, and not one of them sits down routinely feeling wildly enthusiastic and confident."

It's never easy. The journey is filled with detours and roadblocks in the form of self-doubt, uncertainty and distractions.

Like most authors, Brown and Chopra have developed techniques and strategies for being productive, for overcoming obstacles and for getting to the final period.

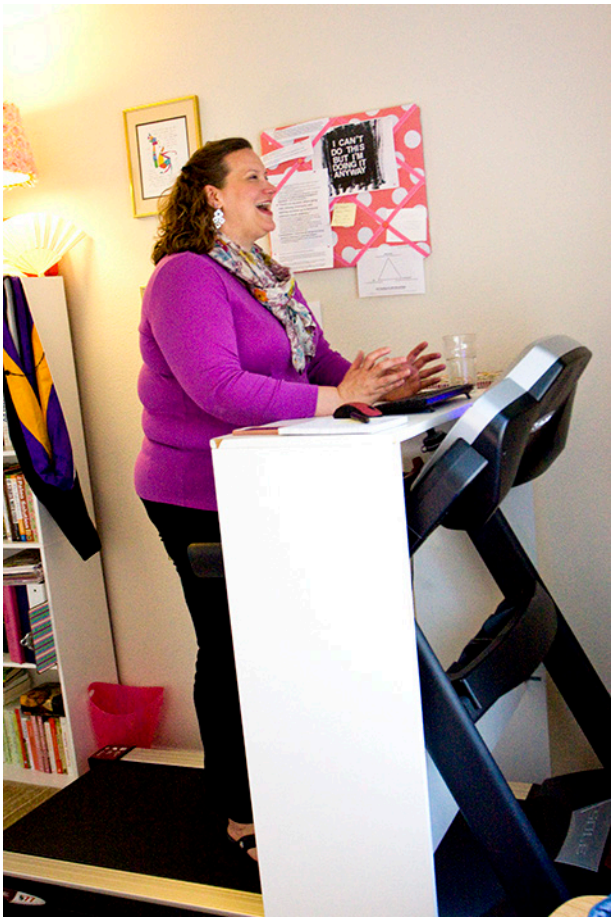
Becoming a Writer

Before she became a full-time, professional author, Brown said she did everything else, from working as a wedding coordinator to taking a job as an executive assistant at an investment firm. At one company, Brown's job was Y2K compliance.

"I worked on the Y2K project," she said of the late-'90s fear that the world's computers would simultaneously crash when the calendar changed over from 1999 to 2000. "I stopped it from happening. You can thank me," she joked.

Brown said all the jobs she had in her 20s were great preparation for being a writer, but teaching seventh grade and planning weddings were the most instructive.

"There's a lot of drama in those jobs," Brown said. "People get drunk and act like idiots (at weddings)."



Tanya Northrup Photography

Brown at work on her treadmill desk.

Through it all, Brown kept writing, but she kept most of her work to herself.

When she was 25 years old, Brown went to graduate school and got a master's degree in English literature. She said it was time to "feed her soul," but even then she didn't think she would ever make a living as a writer.

She thought teaching would be it.

Even though Brown wasn't a writer with a capital "W," she was always writing short stories, articles and what she calls "really terrible novels."

Brown would devote her summers to long days of writing, and it was during one summer break that her first novel started to take shape.

"That's the glorious thing about teaching: the long breaks," she said.

This book, which took her about a year to write, eventually became *The Weird Sisters*. It was published in 2011 to glowing reviews and quickly became a bestseller on several lists including that of *The New York Times*. It tells the tale of three sisters who come from a family heavily influenced by the works of William Shakespeare.

"(The book) was much more successful than I thought," she said. "It put me in a strange position. I have shared something personal. People have expectations."

In December 2011 Brown quit her day job and became a full-time writer.

Many people think the life of a writer is filled with dreamy days lounging in front of a computer, either in a book-filled office or in the corner of a cozy coffee shop, easily cranking out genius prose. But talk to any professional writer and the words that most commonly come up are "panic," "anxiety" and "fear."

This is why Brown finds CrossFit so helpful when she's immersed in the writing process.

"In both writing and CrossFit, there's this moment where I'm in the middle and I think, 'I can't finish this,'" Brown said.

"It seems like I started a century ago and I have another century to go. But in both cases, it's really just a matter of steeling my resolve and pushing through until the end. Writing and CrossFit both require a certain kind of mental toughness and quixotic optimism, a belief that it can be done, no matter how impossible it looks on the board or on the page.

"CrossFit is my reward for hitting my daily word-count goal. It's also the place I go to work out problems in my writing. CrossFit requires a kind of fundamental focus that is a pleasure in contrast to the wide-open potential of writing," Brown said.

Tanya Northrup Photography

CrossFit is Brown's reward for hitting her daily word count.

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In *On Writing*, Stephen King's classic book, King breaks down the craft. He says that writers not only need to build their own toolbox and fill it with tools for writing—like vocabulary and grammar—but must build up enough muscle to carry the toolbox around.

"Then, instead of looking at a hard job and getting discouraged, you will perhaps seize the correct tool and get immediately to work," he wrote.

> Talk to any professional writer and the words that most commonly come up are "panic," "anxiety" and "fear."

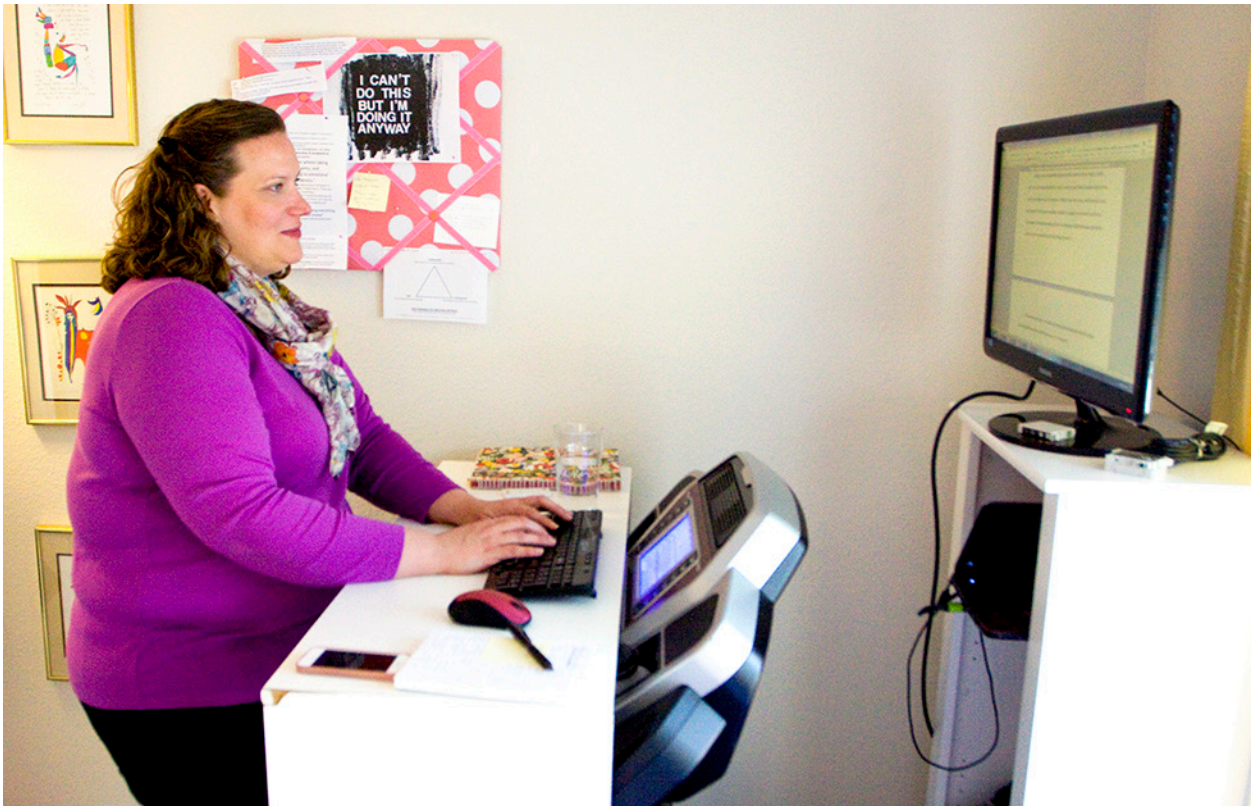
While talent is important, it will get you nowhere without hard work.

"I believe large numbers of people have at least some talent as writers and storytellers, and that those talents can be strengthened and sharpened," King wrote.

Substitute almost anything for "writers and storytellers" in that sentence—athletes, cooks, public speakers—and it still works. The greater the initial talent, the greater the potential for mastery, of course, but few pick up a tool of the trade and find instant success.

Ira Glass, host of NPR's *This American Life*, said that all aspiring creative types share one thing: good taste. When a person with good taste starts out attempting to create work, there's this awkward phase when he or she recognizes the work is no good.

"Your taste is why your work disappoints you," Glass said. "A lot of people never get past this phase; they quit. Most people I know who do interesting, creative work went through years of this."



Tanya Northrup Photography

To cut down on distractions while she writes, Brown uses an app that blocks the Internet.

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Glass said the only way to close this gap is by sheer volume of work—building the muscle King talked about.

"It's gonna take awhile. It's normal to take awhile. You've just gotta fight your way through," Glass said.

The Routine

For Brown, the routine is important. Although she and her partner, author J.C. Hutchins, both work from home in a suburb of Denver, Colo., they go to separate offices in the morning.

"I go left, he goes right, and we don't see each other until lunchtime," Brown said.

Brown starts her day writing three pages longhand, with a pen and paper, a technique recommended in *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron.

There are no expectations or goals with these pages.

"Sometimes, when I have nothing to say, I just write 'la la la la la' for three pages," Brown said.

It's like a pre-workout warm-up: Brown limbers up and lubricates her creative mind before getting down to business. Once she's done with her pages, Brown turns on her computer, activating Freedom, an Internet-blocking productivity software. Then she gets to work, writing most often from her treadmill desk.

"The motion of walking stimulates my brain," Brown said. She has a regular desk but prefers to write and walk, with the treadmill set at its lowest speed.

"I listen to classical music because I once read that we can only use different channels in our brain: visual, audio and verbal."

Brown feels music with words interrupts the verbal channel of her brain.

Once set up with her music and her treadmill desk, free from the distraction of Facebook and Twitter, Brown works for two and half to three hours. That's as much as she can stand.

She sets easily achievable goals for each day; in her case that means 1,000 words a day.

"Goals are important," Brown said. "I could not do 5,000 words a day. If I didn't meet that goal I'd feel like a failure. You do have to be forgiving."

Even her 1,000-words-a-day rule can be changed.

Once, when she was in the midst of a particularly bad patch, Brown told a friend she didn't think she could make 1,000 words.

"My friend said, 'OK, can you do 500?' I didn't think I could, so she said, 'Can you do five?'"

That day, Brown wrote five words.

After a few hours of writing, Brown heads to CrossFit Modig in Highlands Ranch, Colo. She's done with writing and CrossFit before lunchtime.

"Then two hardest parts of my day are over," Brown said. "Everything else by comparison seems easy."

Once she's done with the writing portion of her day, Brown spends her afternoon being an author—as opposed to being a writer.

Once she's done with the writing portion of her day, Brown spends her afternoon being an author—as opposed to being a writer.

"Neil Gaiman said in a commencement speech, 'I'm a professional email answerer,'" Brown said.

She spends her afternoon answering emails, participating in social media, calling in to book clubs—handling all the business associated with being a professional author whose debut offering became a bestseller.

Daily Discipline

Samir Chopra writes nonfiction, but the professor of philosophy at Brooklyn College said the writing process is no less painful than writing fiction.

Chopra has written or co-written four books: *The India-Pakistan Air War of 1965* (2005, with PVS Jagan Mohan), *Decoding Liberation: The Promise of Free and Open Source Software* (2007, with Scott Dexter), *A Legal Theory for Autonomous Artificial Agents* (2011, with Laurence White), and *Brave New Pitch: The Evolution of Modern Cricket*

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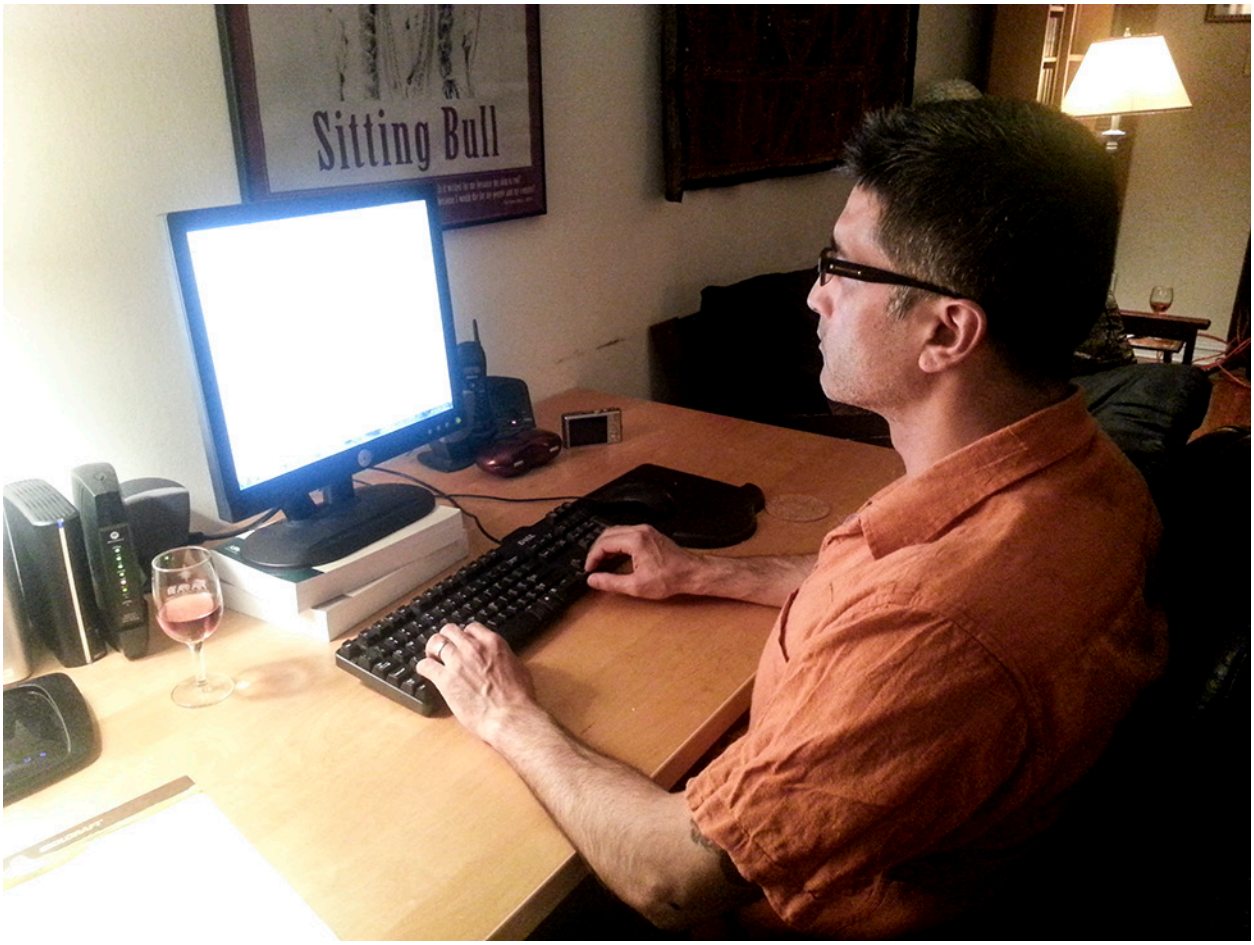

Courtesy Samir Chopra

Chopra writes his blog posts at night, when the house is quiet.

(2012). He writes a cricket blog for ESPNcricinfo.com and a personal blog combining his diverse interests.

Chopra is at work on his next academic book, the bulk of which he will write during an upcoming teaching sabbatical. Chopra has tried writing in the library and in coffee shops, but he prefers to write at home.

"I like my keyboard," he said, "I don't like writing on a laptop."

Now that Chopra and his wife have a baby at home, being productive is much more difficult—especially because his desk is in the corner of the main living space.

"Just being at home is distracting," he said.

Making things even more difficult, Chopra will be taking care of the baby when his wife goes back to work in a few months. He plans to work while the baby naps but recognizes he might need to arrange for childcare as his deadline approaches.

> In order to make progress, Chopra practices what he calls "Internet fasting."

In order to make progress, Chopra practices what he calls "Internet fasting." It's a self-imposed version of the Freedom

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software Brown uses. Chopra gets up, pours himself some coffee and doesn't so much as check his email until he's written for an hour.

"It makes me unhappy how addicted I am (to the Internet)," he said.

Chopra said the most important thing for him is just getting in front of the computer with his hands on the keyboard.

"It's like the famous Roger Ebert quote: 'The muse only visits while you work,'" he said.

Like Brown, Chopra finds it's best if he keeps his daily goals modest.

"I just write for one hour. I set my sights low."

Chopra's blogs add to his workload, but just as working out frequently makes a person stronger, he believes the daily practice of writing ultimately makes him more productive.

Asta Fivgas

Chopra trades typing for tires in Brooklyn, N.Y.

"When I'm blogging I'm using my writing brain," Chopra said. "I have to think of ways of making a critical point and making people think."

He said his writing disciplines—blogging and book writing—feed back into each other.

Chopra's first book was inspired by his father, who was in the air force during the India-Pakistan air war of 1965. Chopra's dad died when Chopra was 12 years old, and the book was an effort to engage in what he calls "personal archeology."

His co-author on *The India-Pakistan Air War of 1965* "had a website dedicated to this topic. I told him, 'Maybe I can help you,'" Chopra said. The two collaborated long distance, sending each other drafts and editing each other's work.

"We did not meet until the book was finished," Chopra said.

Next, Chopra wrote about the relationship between open-source software and freedom, as well as about legal theory for autonomous artificial intelligence. His most recent book, *A Brave New Pitch*, is about the evolution of the sport of cricket.

"A deadline and the expectations of a co-author forced me to get moving," Chopra said of these projects.

He says another key to his success has been CrossFit, which he started in 2009 at CrossFit South Brooklyn. He was burnt out from the regular gym scene and decided to give CrossFit a shot. He's been going consistently ever since.

"(CrossFit) helps impose a structure in my daily life," Chopra said. "I have to get out of my house and work out for an hour."

Chopra said the values of patience and humility he has developed in his almost four years of doing CrossFit have helped as he works through difficult ideas and concepts.

"The steadfast application of the life of the mind is helped by the pursuit of CrossFit," he said.

Olympic lifting, in particular, has made him more patient with incremental progress.

"I've heard it takes 2,000 to 3,000 reps to get a clean right," he said. "I'm still working on that."

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Asta Fivgas

Chopra reflects on his squat, and perhaps his next blog post.

Inspiration

So let's say you carve out a time to write, manage to ignore the easy distractions of the Internet and sit down at the computer only to find you have no ideas. The infinite possibilities of the blank page are mocked by the flashing cursor.

Where do writers get all their ideas, anyway?

> "It doesn't ever get easier.
> The only way out is through."
>
> —Samir Chopra

"Every writer writes about the things they wonder about, the things that are eating at them," Brown said.

"Inspiration can come from anywhere," Brown explained. "I was looking at a gossip magazine, and I saw a photo of Jennifer Aniston and her realtor."

Brown began to wonder about that relationship. What was it like? She hasn't turned this idea into a book yet, but it's an example of the kind of thing that starts her wheels turning.

Some concepts that fascinate her are what it means to be a grown-up, and why, when we're around our siblings, do we act like we're 12 years old?

Brown finds that some of the same issues are coming up in her latest book.

"It's a belated coming of age," Brown said. "Some of the issues are: do you control your own fate?"

Ideas also come from reading, and most authors are unapologetic bookworms.

"Being a good writer begins with being a good reader," Chopra said.

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Brown agrees, and she feels being a reader is essential if you want to be a writer.

"Any sort of writing is a conversation," Brown said. "You cannot be a part of the conversation if you aren't listening."

Both authors agree that reading is essential, but it must be combined with putting words on paper. At some point you have to stop reading and start writing, no matter how painful it might be.

> "Talent doesn't hurt, but the world is full of talented people who never made anything happen."
>
> —Eleanor Brown

"Talent doesn't hurt, but the world is full of talented people who never made anything happen," Brown said. She said it's all about practice and habit.

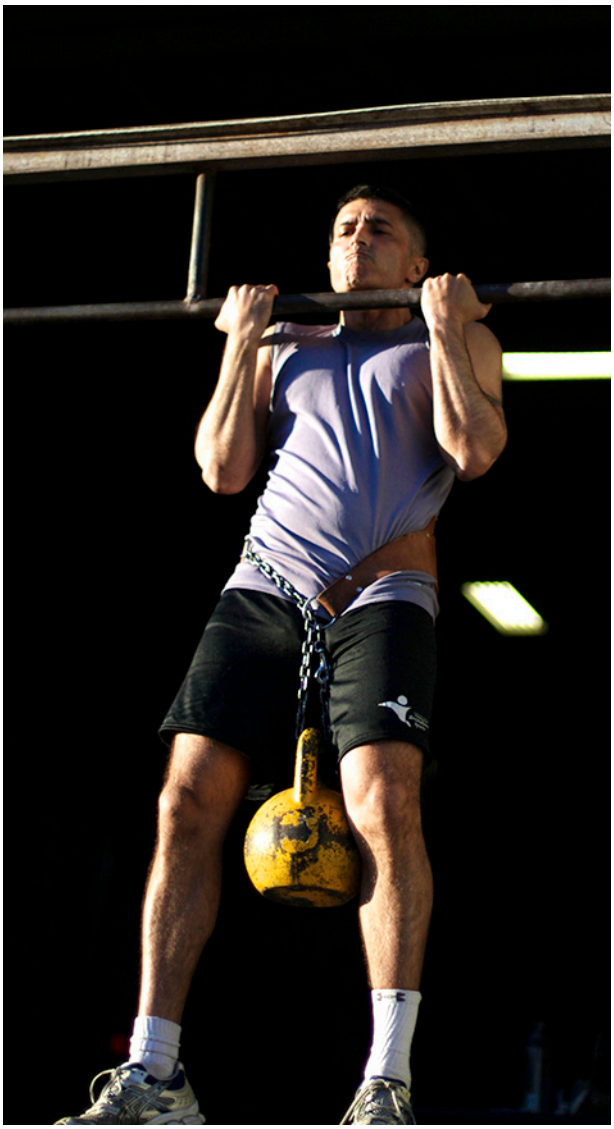
Chopra agrees that there are no detours; you simply have to write.

"It doesn't ever get easier," Chopra said. "The only way out is through."

Open-Door Editing

In *Timequake*, Kurt Vonnegut wrote about two kinds of writers: "Swoopers write a story quickly, higgledy-piggledy, crinkum-crankum, any which way. Then they go over it again painstakingly, fixing everything that is just plain awful or doesn't work. Bashers go one sentence at a time, getting it exactly right before they go on to the next one. When they're done they're done."

Process aside, both types of writers have to put something on the page, and fear of failure, of producing bad work, stymies some would-be writers. Many successful writers know just getting words on the page is the first step, even if what they write is messy, even embarrassing. It's a first draft. To possess the audacity to get words on a page, the usual standards have to be momentarily put aside, at least for the "swoopers." For the "bashers," those standards must be met—perhaps after repeated bouts of self-censorship and self-editing—before a word gets onto the page. For them the revisions happen internally, and the editors are often vicious with the red pen.



Asta Fivgas

"It doesn't ever get easier. The only way out is through."
—Samir Chopra

King puts it succinctly in *On Writing*: "Write with the door closed, rewrite with the door open."

What this means is that the first draft is for the writer's eyes only. Those words provide a foundation upon which the writer can build. Many times it's an invisible foundation—as nothing remains from the first draft in later versions—but plans for the support structure are still there.

Asta Fivgas

Like a good CrossFit coach improves movement, an editor helps a writer fine-tune his or her words.

Once the first draft is done, then comes the exhaustive (and exhausting) revision process.

Chopra says he enjoys the initial editing process, which he says is a relief from the "utter panic" of the writing stage.

"My writing process remains the same as it ever has: I make a lot of notes and then I work them into shape. I have never worked with outlines. This has always meant that the intermediate stage of my writing—from notes to a draft—is acutely anxiety-and-panic provoking," Chopra wrote on his blog.

It's in this initial editing stage that the writer often discovers the value of what he or she has created. Revisiting one's own work can sometimes hold pleasant surprises. It's here the author discovers the work isn't terrible but might even be good.

It's not unlike drilling the parts of the snatch—the pull, the shrug, the reception, etc.—for months on end and then one day finding it all comes together. The previously heavy bar soars overhead and the lift is completed.

Once the work has been shaped into a draft that might actually make sense to another person, it's time to get someone else's opinion.

This can be an extremely nerve-wracking experience, especially for an author who has poured his or her soul onto the page, and many writers rely on a trusted reader who offers feedback in the early stages of the writing process.

Brown said she's tried out writer's groups and writing classes and found them helpful when she was starting out. Now, she writes on her own, relying on her boyfriend as her trusted first reader.

"My boyfriend is a writer, and he is my first reader. He's my most trusted resource," Brown said. "He is the person I want to read (my work) first."

Hutchins, Brown's boyfriend, is skilled at writing compelling plots and is best known for his *7th Son* series, published in print and podcast. Brown said she's more into character development.

In fact, when her editor bought *The Weird Sisters*, the editor's feedback to Brown was, "You have written a beautiful book. Something needs to happen in it."

For Chopra's blog posts, his trusted reader is his wife. He says it's a bit more challenging to find people to read his academic books, because the subject matter is fairly esoteric.

"You want someone who is sympathetic and critical," Chopra said.

The final editing stages are just as agonizing as the initial stages, he says.

"You are just so sick of your work," he said. "'I have read this fucking book 20 times,' you think. 'I just want to be done with it.'"

At present, Brown is deep in the editing stage of her second novel. She said it took a year to write and just as long to edit. Her first effort was such a success—more than she ever imagined—and now Brown feels the pressure for her second novel to be just as successful.

"You want something you are proud of," Brown said of why she's taking so long to revise her current project.

"Being an artist, you have to have incredible optimism in your own work and an ability to be objective and honest with yourself," Brown said.

"Failure is where we learn. All those projects in a drawer, I learned something," she said. "A successful artist will look at those failures and figure out how not to repeat them."

About the Author

Hilary Achauer is an award-winning freelance writer and editor specializing in health and wellness content. In addition to writing articles, online content, blogs and newsletters, Hilary is an editor and writer for the ***CrossFit Journal*** *and contributes to the CrossFit Games site. An amateur boxer-turned-CrossFit athlete, Hilary lives in San Diego with her husband and two small children and trains at CrossFit Pacific Beach. To contact her, visit hilaryachauer.com.*

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THE CrossFit JOURNAL

SHAVE ME

BY E.M. BURTON

Cover Photo: E.M. Burton All others: Dave Re

"Go ahead, shave me."

It takes a certain amount of temerity to say it. But you probably should.

GRANTED, SHAVING IS PRETTY COMMON.

For many, it's an essential part of daily grooming. They say three-quarters of all men shave their faces every day without giving the act much thought.

But when it comes to having someone else do the work? It can be a little daunting.

A rather discerning friend recently mentioned he'd just had the best shave of his life. Not a fan of shaving his face, he was quite impressed with one he'd had at a boutique shop offering the service.

A quick glance at The Art of Shaving's website and you'll quickly see that the company caters to a masculine market. If you're into having great-looking legs, you will likely have to look elsewhere.

Based on the anecdotal evidence, I already accept that a professional shave is going to be good.

But is it going to be great?

SHAVE AND A HAIRCUT…

THERE'S NOTHING NEW ABOUT IT.

Men have had a love-hate relationship with their facial hair since, well, shortly after evolving. We have been trying to remove body hair ever since we figured out that doing so makes us look a lot less like the animals from which we wished to be distinguished.

Young men coming of age might desire the mark of maturity that facial hair bestows only to discover there's a worm in the core. At least we're no longer using sharpened rocks or shells to scrape hair off or pull it out.

Technology has made grooming easier, and relatively recent advances have worked out most of the kinks, but as to the tools and general principle, not much has changed in a hundred years. And despite our best R&D, sometimes dealing with facial hair can be a real drag.

BARBERING

BEFORE THE FALL, WEALTHY AND ARISTOCRATIC ROMANS HAD barbers on staff. Around 300 BCE, a Greek businessman brought barbers to Rome via Sicily and, for a small fee, Romans without a large household could have the same services—and the professional shave was born.

Early barbers were also described as surgeons, as you were just as likely to see them for tooth removal, blood-letting, cauterization or a tonsillectomy as you were for a shave and a haircut. The barbershop pole retains the trace of this identity, with the intertwining stripes reminiscent of the barber's tools of the trade: bandages for tourniquets and dressings.

Gradually liberated from these responsibilities, barbering emerged as an art of good grooming and as such fell prey to the whims of fashion. Technological advancements in the past few centuries have also altered the way we shave. Copper alloys, bronze and iron were long used to produce shaving blades, but the 17th century saw the first straight razor developed in Sheffield, England.

This development was followed closely by cast steel, and men began to shave themselves instead of having to rely on relatives or barbers. Real shifts came in the mid-19th century, when the first "hoe-type" razor was developed. Rotating the handle 90 degrees to the blade created a very different grip. This, in turn, created a whole new need and market, and men saw the rise of "the product": creams, salves and balms, all designed to aid the new DIY-er.

In 1901, King C. Gillette developed the removable, disposable blade, and by the onset of World War I, every U.S. soldier was equipped with one. Riding the wave of the clean-shaven trend, the Gillette name became synonymous with shaving. Almost three decades later, in 1927, Col. Jacob Schick developed the dry razor, which did the same thing for his family name.

For all the innovation of the ensuing years, not much has changed, though Gillette—the company—spent about seven years and $750 million in the '90s to secretly develop the Mach3 as an all-in push to dominate the market. Compared to our forebears, we inhabit a culture that doesn't think twice about triple and even quintuple blades on disposable razors.

But still, Old Spice became the world's best-selling brand of aftershave before World War II, and it still holds the title to this day.

FREED FROM SURGERY DUTIES, PROFESSIONAL BARBERS HAVE been able to elevate their service to that of high art. And facial barbering has emerged in the last decade as a service that more and more men are willing to pay for.

The average man, Razor-gator.com informs us, "will spend 60 hours shaving each year," which is a good thing as, they note, "a man removes over 27 feet of hair in his lifetime through shaving alone." That facial horsetail might not cut it in the office or during a workout.

However, unlike centuries past, the barbershop shave is currently not that common. The oldest barbershop still in existence is Truefitt & Hill, established in 1805 on Saint James Street in London, England. Their services are simple yet luxurious. They continue to hold a British Royal Warrant and now have select locations all over the world. Despite T&H's continued longevity and international presence, the number of small-town barbershops offering shaving services waxes and wanes depending on cultural tides.

Men's grooming has experienced a return to importance since the '60s—probably the decade that nearly killed it off—but up until the last 10 years or so, you were more likely to get a shave in a really old-school barbershop—if you could find one that still offered shaving services—or to find yourself sitting in a salon specifically designed for the grooming needs of women.

"There aren't too many of them around anymore," notes Jerome Arthur, Santa Cruz local and owner of Surf City Barbershop and Social Club. Arthur will cut his friends' hair, but the social part of the space is more important to the artist and writer.

"Most barbers are only cutting hair now, and not shaving," he adds, "Johnnie's Barbershop is one of the last in the city offering shaving services."

F.S.C. Barber founder Sam Buffa noted the disparity between the $10 and $100 haircuts available to men and decided to offer them something in between. But it was after a trip through Italy in his 20s—where he noticed the barbershop's social function in men's lives—that Buffa returned to the States and opened a small shop on Freeman Alley on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. It was only natural that they would offer shaving services, as well.

SHARKS' TEETH AND SHARPENED ROCKS

The health benefits of hair removal have long been intertwined with other social and aesthetic concerns.

For most of their 5,000-year-long culturally significant period, Egyptians seem to have abhorred any form of hair, removing every trace of it from their bodies and almost all of it from their heads by scraping it off and using arsenic creams. This practice likely started as a means to deal with nasty pest infestations, but the Egyptians opted instead to wear wigs, which is indicative of the importance of fashion in the equation right from earliest recorded history.

Hair removal has never been exclusively about health and comfort. Nor was it culturally specific: pre-Common Era Britons shaved all hair off except their moustaches and the hair on their heads, and ancient Indians shaved their chests and pubic hair. Fifth-century BCE Athenian men let their beards grow as a sign of maturity, masculinity and virility, shaving or pulling the hair out only in time of mourning. Beard cutting was a frequent and severe punishment and shaming ritual.

Later, more concerted shaving efforts might well have been a military development, as proto-shaving accoutrements have been found buried with soldiers among their personal arms. We know that men began shaving during the period of Alexander's great swath across the European continent to avoid the impediment of beard pulling, which was seen as a soldier's weak spot. Personal grooming would seem to be linked to battlefield efficiency in Alexander's times.

It was different for athletes. Athletes in Greek society seem to have been clean-shaven. To better to appreciate the beauty of the athletic body, workouts were often done naked, and hair might spoil the view.

The Romans shaved, in contradistinction with the Greeks, and had all the rituals associated with the act, including hanging their first adulthood shearings on a particular tree, the "tree of hair," or *capillaris arbor*.

Later Rome would be invaded by bearded foreigners. The Latin word for beard is derived from "bar-bar-bar," an interpretation of the linguistic sounds the bearded "savages" made, which also gives us the root of the modern word "barbaric."

The concept has expanded to include more stores in New York and one in San Francisco. F.S.C. also offers products for sale in their shops, including imported goods such as the well-reputed Edwin Jagger razor sets from the U.K.

In larger centers the tides are turning. Now, men's facial barbering services are experiencing a resurgence of interest, with specialty shops opening up the world over as the last decade has seen increased interest in the barbershop shave.

And this is good, because there are times when it's necessary to deal. Ever since we heard the word "manscaping" and cut loose a mental "Yes!" suppliers of goods and services have risen to meet the increased need and interest, opening up these avenues for men who, justifiably, want to depilate.

HEY, WANNA GO FOR A DRIVE AND LET ME SHAVE YOU?

I wrote this: "'Go ahead. Shave me,' he said."

But it really didn't start out that way. To be honest, it was more like, "Hey, you, can I shave you?" or "Hey, will you drive into the city with me to get yourself shaved?"

To my relief, he was a very good sport about it; a colleague with a beard would be my first data point.

It turns out my colleague has never really enjoyed the shaving experience—it's amazing what you learn about men when you ask them. It sounds so simple: shaving is the removal of hair by cutting close to the skin with a blade. But within that simple act lies a huge range of

experience, and for all that technology and historical development, many have horror stories they're really not telling.

Most will know someone who refuses to shave purely due to the discomfort of doing so, and having someone else, a professional, do it can be a viable option, or at the very least it can be an interesting experience.

The Art of Shaving began in New York, a start-up in a sliver of a location on the Upper East Side in the mid-'90s. Today, they have over 90 boutique shaving-product shops located in over 20 countries, some complete with Barber Spas, where modern athletes can feel it as close as it comes. In the U.S., the majority of people who are well served by a Barber Spa live in the state of California.

It started out with a single, simple product: a facial oil to be applied prior to shaving. A solution devised by founder Myriam Zaoui to ease partner Eric Malka's difficulty with shaving due to skin sensitivity, it was also a good idea at the right time. Only six months after the pair sold their car to open a retail space in 1996, *The New York Times* ran a full-page story on the small business, which catapulted it to a position where it could reach a much bigger market.

They were swamped, but they handled it. They opened a second shop and expanded their product line to round out the shaving experience, but they continued to keep it simple with a four-part system: to prepare, lather, shave and moisturize the skin during the daily shave. The company was acquired by industry giant Proctor & Gamble in 2009. P&G had previously merged with Gillette in 2005, giving the company significant assets in both realms of the shaving industry.

The Art of Shaving's Barber Spas provide very specific individualized services for men—"shave and a haircut." And why not a haircut, too? Why have a beautifully smooth, groomed face and the rest of your head whispering "Hobbit"?

For the most part, however, it's just about the shave.

Our visit to their shop at Union Square in San Francisco was a success. Carefully appointed and well lit, the spa environment was elegant without being ostentatious. Two chairs for Barber Spa services were separated from the retail space, ensuring that the ambience felt more intimate, exclusive. The shop felt like a fresh update on an old-school barbershop without resorting to linguistic nostalgia inherent within phraseology like "apothecary." They prefer metaphors such as "brotherhood," which implies that we're all in this together and might as well make the best of it.

Master barber André greeted us with a confident and friendly manner and graciously explained his services. I wondered if perhaps taking off that much hair, as the "before" photos of my friend's heavy beard reveal, was out of the ordinary on a typical day for André, but he was relaxed and calm, and that was reassuring. We ordered up The Royal Shave.

There's taking good grooming to the next level, and then there is the importance of the experience itself. For a surprisingly small sum—$55—my friend was treated to an effective and simple service, one that was executed with such care and skill even I was impressed, and I was only watching. Thoughts of fear may have flashed through his mind as he lay back and slowly exposed his throat, but they didn't show. I can only tell you what it looked like.

André trimmed away the excess hair and prepared the beard by applying a pre-shave oil to soften the hair and ready the skin for extreme exfoliation. A towel wrapped all over the face released the scent of essential oils with the hot, wet heat. Next, he lathered the face with a proprietary formulation, a cream containing coconut oil and glycerin, and with the badger brush he lightly whipped it into foam. Then the blade came out.

An experienced barber will get the job done extremely well with as few passes over the skin as possible. Quality for time. My friend seemed beyond relaxed. I imagine any

“GO AHEAD, SHAVE ME.”

concerns he may have had about the past evaporated the longer he lay in the chair. Perhaps it was all the hot towels. André was generous with his time.

Then essential oils were applied, lemon first, followed by a mask to purify the skin. Then another towel, cold this time, infused with a lavender oil. I would wager it would be a pretty indulgent experience, all these towels, for most of the men I know. Then toner and a balm were applied to act as a protective barrier for the newly shorn skin. My friend sat up and smiled. He looked amazing.

Despite the popularity of a shave with the well-heeled, the goal at this shop remains constant: to bring a bit of excellence to the personal shaving experience of every man. You can find similar services and products at higher prices elsewhere, to be sure, but the prices are quite reasonable compared to most of the competition.

Ritualistic—perhaps it would feel that way, being on the receiving end of this tradition that’s bound up with the very definition of early masculinity. And the ritual is possibly even better when it’s over. The experience restores and rejuvenates and can make a man feel refined and composed, so he can better get on with the business of forgetting about it.

From my privileged, distanced position of someone who can only watch, I have to say, this is something you should do, at least once. Have someone else shave you.

Say it: “Go ahead, shave me.” ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

E.M. Burton is a CrossFit Journal *staff writer.*

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Training the Brain

Dr. John Ratey, author of *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*, on movement, the mind and CrossFit.

By Chris Cooper **June 2013**

Danell Marks

Can burpees help with math homework?

Dr. John Ratey thinks so.

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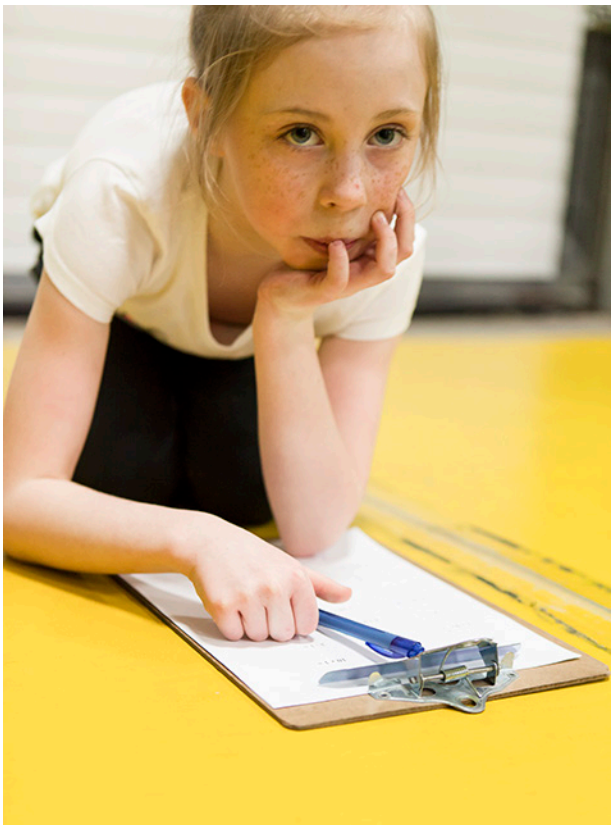

Andreane Fraser

Andreane Fraser

Dr. John Ratey is convinced that physical activity can improve brain function in young students.

In 2008, the associate clinical professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School wrote the book *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain* based on the outstanding example of the Naperville School Board. The book summarized the experience of physical-education teacher Phil Lawler, who had implemented a before-class fitness program at the Illinois school.

"He threw out the balls. No more sports. Just getting fit: running, strength training, CrossFit-type activities for the junior-high-school kids," Ratey explained. "He had this brilliant idea to use heart-rate monitors, which was a paradigm shift for phys. ed. Nineteen thousand kids in the district and only 3 percent were obese. Seventy-five hundred in the high schools and they couldn't find a single obese kid. Not one. So this was astounding."

Just as impressive: the school's test scores.

"Two years before I learned about it, they had participated in the International Science and Math Test, which is given to every country in the world every three years. The U.S. is always in the low teens. The school district lobbied to participate as a country and came No. 1 in science and No. 6 in math," Ratey said. "The low obesity rate piqued my interest. The test scores got me on a plane."

Ratey realized that lessons learned in Naperville could have a profound effect on education worldwide.

"This was like magic. Boom: here's my new mission in life. This was the glue that really led me to sit down and go through 1,000 articles and translate those into *Spark*," he said.

The book was an unqualified success and stirred the gelatinous bureaucracy of elementary-level academics. Many teachers, coaches and parents shared a collective epiphany: when kids run around more, they generally do better in school.

Now Ratey is back with more. The learning experience can be optimized, he said, and CrossFit might be the answer.

"Miracle-Gro for the Brain"

Spark brought no surprises for Jeff and Mikki Martin, who created the CrossFit Kids program in 2007.

"In our gym early on—2004 to 2005—we started realizing that kids who are more fit do better in school. Our GPA in the gym was above the average in the district, but no real light bulbs went off. In 2006, we started realizing that this body of research was out there that brain function was

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influenced by exercise. In our gym, we had five valedictorians come out of the gym and two salutatorians," Jeff said.

"When the CrossFit Kids course was first delivered, Ratey and (Dr. John J.) Medina were foundational to the ideas we taught. We brought their ideas into the course and talked about how we use study hall immediately following our teen classes. We've been running that program for four years. The evidence is clear: There's a window of opportunity to learn right after exercise."

Medina authored *Brain Rules: 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home, and School* in 2008. He is the director of the Brain Center for Applied Learning Research at Seattle Pacific University. A developmental molecular biologist, Medina focuses his research on the genes involved in human brain development and the genetics of psychiatric disorders.

The core lesson taught in Ratey's *Spark* was the neurochemical response to exercise. When we move, we secrete a neurotropin called brain-derived neurotrophic factor, or BDNF, which helps make neural connections stronger. Ratey famously dubbed BDNF "Miracle-Gro for the brain."

> "We started realizing that this body of research was out there that brain function was influenced by exercise."
>
> —Jeff Martin

CrossFit Kids is now involved in the curriculum for 400 schools. And Ratey believes we're just getting started.

Andreane Fraser

Some CrossFit Kids workouts involve strategy, planning or even math, blurring the lines between classroom and gym.

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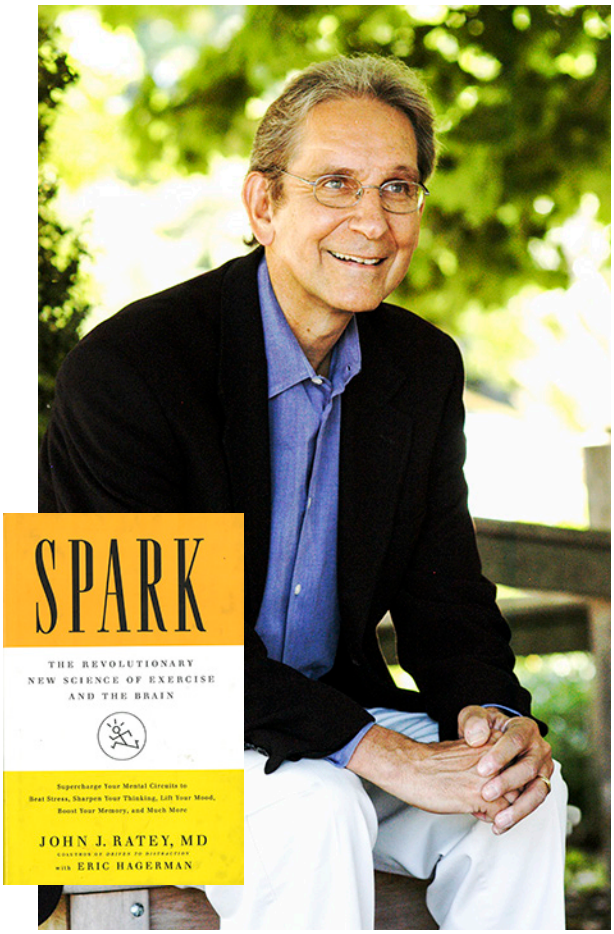
The Play Aspect

Harvard University's campus isn't immune to trends. Students matriculating at one of the world's most prestigious schools still look and dress like kids anywhere else. But in the periphery, game-changing research is being driven by professors in mathematics, sciences, the arts and education. Much of this research will create trends for future study.

Ratey's office is the top floor of an old home converted into office space. A bookshelf sits below a small skylight, and comfortable couches and chairs round out the domain of a man who has been interviewed often in the last five years. His speeches on TED stages have been viewed millions of times, he's quoted weekly by news publications, and his research has spawned thousands of academic papers.



Courtesy of Dr. John Ratey

Dr. Ratey's book provided the science to explain the academic success many educators were seeing in active children.

"After *Spark* came out, I began to speak all over and make connections with other Ph.D.s who were interested. All of them read *Spark* and said, 'This is really something: we're lowering health-care costs, getting people more motivated and fit but also keeping brains working better, more focused, less depressed, less stressed … all those things we know that exercise does," Ratey said. "I put together the science behind it to prove what we knew was happening on the ground. That's why it became so popular. It led to studies here (at Harvard), there and everywhere to look at how exercise really was impacting students and the elderly."

Although *Spark's* focus was on students, he added, "The elderly was the first area of interest in academic circles because that's where the money was, and preventing Boomers from developing Alzheimer's is still an important area. Sixteen hundred papers were published last year looking at exercise's effect on cognition. All were positive in the direction of preventing cognitive decline and Alzheimer's disease. That's pretty conclusive proof."

> "CrossFit is great. It provides the play aspect, certainly the exercise aspect, the connections and the small groups."
>
> —Dr. John Ratey

It's not just the exercise. With so much new research focusing on learning, Ratey is widening the aperture to consider elements beyond simply raising the heart rate. CrossFit, he said, is helping the brains of its athletes far beyond increasing BDNF.

Some of Dr. Ratey's theories are based on speculation about how our ancestors lived. Science has yet to reveal everything about early human history.

"We got our genes when we were hunter-gatherers over 100 million years ago. We were coded to move a lot, to

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play, to have the right kind of diet. To sleep. To have an experience with nature because we weren't living inside in those days. To have a mindfulness: a centeredness of who you are and where your being is. You had to be attentive or you're cat food. We're wired for these things. We're genetically programmed to expect these things. Our brains perform at our optimum when we have these things involved. Then you have connection with another person or a small family group," Ratey said.

"CrossFit is great. It provides the play aspect, certainly the exercise aspect, the connections and the small groups. When it's possible, CrossFit classes go outside. They get an element of nature in there … . All of these things are critical to proper brain development."

Ratey will expand on each of these ideas in his forthcoming book, *Human 1.0*, expected in 2014.

"One of the things someone said to me recently is, 'We're really not born to run; the human person is like the Swiss Army knife.' We have lots of different possibilities that we need to explore and develop physically as well as cognitively. CrossFit might be thought of as muscular, but it actually is so much more than that, and so I think that's really a big plus. I certainly have interviewed people for my new book about how CrossFit has helped them, and it's been remarkable for some people. The novelty of CrossFit WODs leads not just to greater interest but also challenges the brain to develop more fully," Ratey said.

The group ethos of CrossFit, he added, can help create better cognitive function.

"We're geared to be working in small tribes—everyone is supportive, moving together, pitching in, helping those lagging behind to catch up. In hunter-gatherer times, you didn't want to leave anyone behind, because they had to help out. You needed everybody's participation," Ratey explained. "We're genetically geared for that, and that's why I believe—what's happening in our schools that are successful—is they're using small tribes. They're using tables instead of desks, working together in units. We're genetically programmed to do that. We become suboptimal when we're on our own."

Chris Cooper

Ratey believes CrossFit's constantly varied workouts and group training can create an environment where kids can thrive mentally and physically.

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The Group Ethos

CrossFit's SAT program, led by Laura Bradrick, is leveraging the power of the tribe.

"At this point, it's gone beyond just SAT prep," she said. "CrossFit gyms can help students—and adults—learn anything. Look at your members, find someone who loves teaching. They might be a history or math teacher who knows how to present material to kids. Look for a piano teacher. If we can show them that whatever their specialty is is worthwhile, it's good. Who's to say that being good at math is more important than being good at piano?"

By incorporating exercise and academic tasks into one session, students have the opportunity to shine among their peers—even if they're better with numbers than with thrusters.

The group dynamic is also useful as a behavioral transformer.

> "CrossFit gyms can help students —and adults—learn anything."
>
> —Laura Bradrick

"It helps with modifying behavior because you want to be a member of the group, so you just can't throw tantrums all the time. You'll be sat upon; the group can't tolerate it. If you're feeling depressed, they'll want you not to be depressed because they're getting less of your activity, thoughts, participation, foraging, getting game—they can't have you that way. If you're spooked too much, too anxious, depressed, panicky, they want that to settle down. The group demands that just by the 'groupiness' of it," Ratey said.

Jeff Martin believes a CrossFit Kids group atmosphere can also provide children with an opportunity to be leaders.

"We have teens lead the 'focus' portion of the class for the younger kids. They learn valuable public speaking within the class," he said. "In the long run, the kids who do speak

Chris Cooper

Chris Cooper

CrossFit's SAT-prep program provides "above-the-neck fitness" that can help children get into the rights colleges.

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Chris Cooper

The brain is part of the body and can be trained just like the hamstrings can be trained to move greater loads.

Chris Cooper

Perhaps most importantly, CrossFit Kids makes fitness and learning fun.

well publicly may get the better jobs because they can stand in front of a board and make a case for whatever they want."

The group collaboration effect is powerful. But competition, Ratey noted, is just as important.

"It's natural. It's in our genes. Look at being a good hunter-gatherer: you wanted the fastest one to finally get the damn antelope. You needed that person to be the one to finally make the kill, but you needed other people to chase the antelope and wear him out so the sprinters could go in there and make the kill," he said. "There's a need and natural tendency for that competitiveness, but it can also be seen as something that leads the group or has a specific group function. And so it's not just the best athlete or greatest Mudder or Spartan of the year. The smartest is as important as the fastest."

These specialties are best discovered through play, Ratey said, and play is on the decline in schools. His email tagline reads, "It's time to take play seriously."

"Play helps you learn the social rules and emotional regulation," he continued. "We're talking about interactive play. Sometimes you lose, but then you get up and do it again because there's an inherent feeling of it being fun.

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You also cheat and you learn that you'll get exposed by the group, which is an important thing to learn. Physical interactive play teaches those lessons and also how to support one another, how to get the most out of your group. You want everybody to be at their best. You don't want people just thinking about what's straight ahead. You want people to think of new ideas and break the rules."

Unstructured play, then, is critical for brain development.

"Recess may be as important as gym class," Ratey said. "I think it's really vital. People need to recognize that."

Recess also frequently takes children outside, another important element of learning.

"Being in nature is very important," he said. "It's a whole chapter in the new book. Being outside helps to get the brain ready to learn."

> "Recess may be as important as gym class. I think it's really vital. People need to recognize that."
>
> —Dr. John Ratey

In Denmark, "outside schools" have children engaged in outdoor education for the majority of their day. Kids come in for brief periods to use the washroom or change into dry clothes—an inverse of the traditional North American model. It begs the question: is more time outside better?

"There's no good study showing a minimum or maximum of any of these—aerobic activity, mindfulness, green time—but I think the more, the better," Ratey said. "You can have the weather to consider, and the capacity to shift inside is probably more ideal."

A Different Kind of Classroom

While Ratey doesn't believe it's possible to create a one-size-fits-all template for the perfect environment, he does see certain common elements.

"You can't come in with a package," he said. "You have to adapt it to every situation. There's a lot of different environments that are conducive to learning. The best is supportive, challenging, more 'you can do it,' more goal-oriented. It shouldn't come from just the teacher but the students you're participating with—more or less the group ethos."

Transferring from the CrossFit Kids class to study hall carries the group approach from the physical to the academic realm.

"I think all CrossFit gyms should have a classroom right in there," Martin said. "Other people have to argue with their kids to do their homework; ours do it because they know that's what needs to be done. They don't see hard work in the same framework that other kids their age do. To develop correctly, we have to have obstacles and hard work, and we have to overcome those obstacles."

Andreane Fraser

"I think all CrossFit gyms should have a classroom right in there." —Jeff Martin

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While most research has students exercising before school, Ratey thinks we can do even more.

"This morning, I visited a school in Lawrence, Mass. They're the worst school in the state, all these kids who speak English as their second language," he said. "They just started a new program where they have P.E. twice per day. Before lunch, they have a 30-minute recess break, so the kids get 'play' time. Then class, lunch, another class, another recess, and then go home. They also have 'brain breaks'—that's what I call them—where they do burpees or star jacks for two minutes in the middle of class. Two minutes makes a difference. They're motivated, awake and aroused."

Bradrick said she's heard of similar models in CrossFit gyms.

"Some are doing CrossFit or CrossFit Kids and putting math right into the workout," she added.

> "Other people have to argue with their kids to do their homework; ours do it because they know that's what needs to be done."
>
> —Jeff Martin

This "intervention" idea is a popular one at CrossFit Catalyst in Sault Sainte Marie, Ont. There, coach Tyler Belanger's Ignite program shows teachers how to use "interventions"—short exercise breaks during class—to maintain a level of high engagement and arousal during class. Specialty programs like move-a-matics, drama, creative writing and money matters are popular with children and parents.

If a physical game involves a cognitive task, Ratey said, a child can get even greater benefit.

"Your brain is on fire because it's being used for the aerobic part, but some parts are being asked to 'search and switch,'" he said.

And then there's the burpee.

"It is really one of the best exercises you can do for your brain. There's plenty of evidence to show that aerobics is the best exercise bang for your buck. But aerobics with some coordination component—that's probably the best exercise you can do," Ratey said. "If you want to construct the ideal exercise, it's this: something with someone else (a partner or small tribe) outside for up to 20 or 30 minutes. It's fun, people are competing with one another and helping one another. That is what we know from the evidence. Not just running, but running in open spaces or playing games or doing physical challenges outside."

The implications of training the brain and body together reach far beyond the classroom.

"The cerebellum—responsible for balance—is activated when you activate the 'core.' The cerebellum is also involved with memory, learning, social skills, emotion and very much with attention," Ratey said. "All the learning skills are very much involved with the cerebellum. We used to think it was just about physical coordination, but it's really coordinating all of our higher functions. If you are 'discoordinated' physically, some things are going to be out of whack intellectually and emotionally as well."

Ratey is using exercises—like burpees—that require interhemispheric coordination and recruitment of core musculature with a group of autistic students.

"I'm setting up training to teach them coordination, and this will have a payoff: being more focused, less aggressive, less self-destructive, more social. They are very uncoordinated—that's a big problem. Their cerebellums are off. But you can train the cerebellum, which is what you're doing all the time you're working on the core exercises," he said. "Even thinking of CrossFit, doing rowing—there's a core component to that and certainly most of the other exercises we do in a WOD. That's training the cerebellum—it's not just standing on one foot and doing the yoga pose, which is also great."

He added: "We don't know all those constituents or parts of the puzzle, but we know that exercise can help. Before you get into a retraining phase, using neurofeedback is essential.

"Exercise will promote your ability to learn, plain and simple."

✦

About the Author

Chris Cooper is a writer for CrossFit. He owns CrossFit Catalyst in Sault Sainte Marie, Ontario.

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THE CrossFit JOURNAL KIDS

Healthy Food/Junk Food Game

Kill two birds with one stone by teaching kids the difference between healthy food and junk food while they work out.

By Crisa Metzger June 2013

All photos: Christian Dickinson

Equipment

- Toy food set consisting of healthy foods and junk food; the more sets the better (these sets can be found in the toy section of most big-box stores)
- Large blanket
- 1 paper grocery bag

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Set-up

1. Mark the start point (Position 1) at one end line of a large area (at least 20 meters by 20 meters).
2. Mark the paper bag containing food (Position 2) at the midpoint of the game-play area.
3. Mark the picnic blanket (Position 3) at the far end of the 20-meter space. Reserve one half of the blanket for "healthy food" and the other half for "junk food."
4. Divide the players into two or more teams, depending on the class size.

Warm-up

1. Kids line up facing the trainer, while the trainer pulls pieces of food from the bag (a child can also be assigned to do this).
2. As the pieces of food are pulled from the bag, the kids perform predetermined movements, depending on whether the food is "healthy" or "junk." The movements can be varied for optimal warm-up time.

Game Play

1. On "3, 2, 1 ... go," one player from each team sprints to the bag, reaches in without looking and pulls out one food item. He then runs to the picnic blanket and places the food on the correct side of the blanket, depending on whether it is a healthy food or a junk food.
2. The same player then does a predetermined movement (burpee, squats, etc.), sprints back to the start, and tags another player. To make it harder, the other players can hold a plank while waiting for their turn.

Notes

1. The game time can be fixed, or the game can run until all the food has been placed on the blanket. Consider the age and number of players when deciding how to run the game.
2. After the game ends, the trainer reviews the foods on the picnic blanket, confirming that they have been placed on the correct side (incorrectly placed food earns a one-burpee penalty). This can lead to a discussion about each food's characteristics, as well as its impact on the body:

   Chicken is a _____? (protein)

   It helps your body build _____? (muscle)

   Repetition of the same questions and answers can help kids understand the effect that different foods have on their body.
3. This game also provides an opportunity to teach proper plank position using food metaphors. For upper-body position (arm placement), you might tell the kids to stack their wrist, elbow and shoulder like a sandwich—without the bread, of course. Or tell them to make their bodies look like a crunchy carrot—not a wet, wimpy noodle.

   One other way to stress proper form is to turn your back to the kids and count from five to one while they get into a perfect plank position. You can acknowledge the "super plankers" and coach everyone else, making small adjustments so they can learn what a proper plank feels like.

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TO THE PAIN

BY SCOTT STRICKLIN

PHOTOS BY AMY RIPTON AUTHOR PHOTO BY PAUL LOVEKING

TEAMS OF WARRIORS IN MEDIEVAL ARMOR GATHER IN FRANCE TO TRY TO INJURE EACH OTHER WITH AXES AND MACES.

We grappled, spinning and hacking at each other, until we both ended up slamming against the fence. In a flash, the Belarusian was gone and I felt the weight of another opponent on my back.

Against the fence and immobile, I leaned into the barrier and threw one arm around a post to keep from being borne to the ground. The dead weight of at least 200 lb. on my back threatened to bring me down, but I was secure for the moment.

This situation is what we call "deep water"—when escape is impossible and defense is diminished to a reliance on armor and stubborn determination. Some fighters find themselves under the tender care of two, three or more pitiless enemies, each using weapons to tee off with impunity.

You can watch a bit of deep water here.

For me, this unfriendly treatment began almost immediately as a stocky Belarusian leaned over and started throwing mighty sword blows into my thighs. I didn't see any friends nearby and just hoped that my disadvantage was going to remain merely two against one.

Many times in the months leading up to the moment I had wondered what it would be like in this situation, knowing that it's where the worst injuries tend to occur. When those blows started falling and my thick leg armor took the damage without failing, I was suddenly filled with relief and, surprisingly, joy. A man I'd never met before was pounding on me with a sword with all his strength, and I started laughing. Loudly. I couldn't help myself.

I laughed right in his face.

STRIKES, PUNCHES, KICKS

For a software engineer from Virginia, it was a long road from never having swung a steel sword to getting pummeled against a fence in Southern France by two Belarusians.

It was 2009 when the captains of four national teams—Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Poland—got together and unified their rule sets into a single international tournament called Battle of the Nations. It was to be a full-contact combat sport using historically accurate 13th-to-17th-century armor and weapons.

FOR A SOFTWARE ENGINEER FROM VIRGINIA, IT WAS A LONG ROAD TO GETTING PUMMELED AGAINST A FENCE IN SOUTHERN FRANCE BY TWO BELARUSIANS.

Those weapons mean just about everything from the ankles to the top of the head needs to be encased in steel or leather reinforced with steel splints. Beneath this heavy gear is a layer of padded cloth to distribute the force of blows. Over the armor is worn the uniform of the fighter's home country, displayed in a historical or heraldic style.

Although the tournament has taken place for only the last four years, it has grown into an event that includes as many as 23 nations—from Russia and Australia to Israel and Quebec, which is actually part of Canada. It has become the Olympics of armored combat. Most teams are relatively small, barely meeting the eight-member minimum to compete. Others, like the United States and Russia, bring a full team of 50 fighters.

Beneath the steel armor and chain mail is a layer of padded cloth, which comes in handy when being struck by a six-foot-long sword.

In 2010, the distant tournament caught the attention of some fighters in the United States, and a small group of them decided to form a team, though they didn't have any experience with the European style of battle. The first year the U.S. participated in Battle of the Nations was 2012. As enthusiastic newcomers, Team USA had a valiant showing but fell well short of victory. Still, wiser and more determined from the experience, the team came home with an intense desire to form a larger, more powerful team to threaten the Russians, who have won every tournament so far.

Most of the fighting in the tournament is done in groups, with a team from one nation pitted against a team from another nation. The goal is to throw, strike or slam everyone on the opposing team to the ground, or to force them to submit through sheer physical violence. Valid weapons include steel swords, axes and maces—all dull, of course.

Some weapons are as long as 6 feet and hit with a degree of force that can shatter wooden shields or punch a hole in steel armor. There are a few locations on the body that are forbidden, such as the throat and groin, the back of the knee and the base of the skull. And for the sake of safety, thrusting is not allowed. Otherwise, almost anything goes.

Weapon strikes, punches, kicks, grappling and full-speed charges are the tools of the trade. Strikes to the head and

As in CrossFit, there is kinship among combatants.

face are not only allowed but preferred. All the better to knock an opponent off balance or to convince him that surrender is better than permanent injury. In the team fights, there is no counting hits like fencing. If an opponent is standing, he's fair game, and fighters attack as fast and as hard as they can until victory is obtained. The armor usually does a good job of protecting the wearer. Still, injuries are unsurprisingly common.

For Robert Roach, 2012 Team USA member, his first experience with Battle of the Nations was a shocking vision of what lay ahead.

"We had seen three guys get carried off on backboards already, and shuttled off into the three ambulances they had on rotation. The fight just before ours finished, and they moved one of the ambulances to the entrance. The fourth guy they pulled off wasn't moving. At all. They were rushing to shove him in the ambulance so they could get it out of the way for us to take the field. You know those gladiator movies, where they plunge the hook into the dead guy to pull him off the arena? Yeah, that's what it felt like," he recounts.

KINETIC ENERGY AND RAGE

There have been armored stick-fighting leagues in the U.S. for many years, but this particular style of combat, with steel weapons and a level of brutality beyond anything we've experienced in North America, presents a unique combination of challenges.

While wearing 50 lb. of armor, a fighter might at one moment be in a desperate wrestling match, trying to keep his feet. The next, he might need to sprint across the battlefield to keep his buddy from getting chopped in the back of the head by a giant axe. The fence around the field becomes a kind of death trap as three or four fighters might gang up on a loner, beating on him with all the weapons and fury at their disposal. Chaos and confusion reign as historically accurate helmets restrict both vision and breathing.

I watched the 2012 tournament online, waking up early in the morning to catch the live feed coming out of Poland. It was then I decided to start training so I'd have a shot at getting on Team USA the next year. We are all amateurs, and because the Armored Combat League—which sprang up to support this new sport in the United States—has existed for less than a year, each fighter is more or less on his own. There are no organized training programs, only far-flung fight clubs scattered here and there, doing the best they can with whatever and whoever is at hand. With a sedentary job and a busy schedule, I knew a lifestyle change was necessary, and that there would be more than a few sacrifices down the road.

CHAOS AND CONFUSION REIGN AS HISTORICALLY ACCURATE HELMETS RESTRICT BOTH VISION AND BREATHING.

In February I attended the final qualifying tournament for Team USA, and a week later they released the names of everyone who made the cut. The news was good. In May I flew to France with my brothers in arms to represent the United States and take the field against fighters from all over the world. I was assigned to the section of the team that would be participating in what they called the "mass combats"; that is, 21 fighters of one nation against 21 fighters of another.

Our first bout against the veteran Belarusian team was a stinging loss followed by two days of frustration to ponder our mistakes before getting another chance. Our captain called it snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. When we finally faced the Belarusians again, Team USA came armed with an arsenal of kinetic energy and rage. We were a coiled spring that unleashed a blast of violence that tore the Belarusian line to shreds. This victory tied the best-of-three match and earned us a third bout to decide the winner.

What the Belarusian team lacked in size against the massive fighters of the American team it made up for in experience. Its adjustment to our onslaught was well constructed. In the third bout, it concentrated its strength on our right side and stalled for time on our left. The play was slow to develop, but one by one, Americans were falling. Sensing our right was getting thin, the whole Belarusian line advanced. Suddenly a fighter bounded through our line, and he and I were toe-to-toe.

I can hardly remember the sequence of events that led me to being held against the fence by the two Belarusians. It all happened too fast. What I do remember with perfect clarity is the sound of that sword against my leg armor and the elation of suffering such violence but being immune to its effects.

After a few seconds, one of the Belarusians give me a last frustrated look before walking off, perhaps seeking better opportunities or maybe just someone who would give a more satisfying reaction to his expression of violence. Left with just the one fighter clinging to my back, I decided enough was enough. I couldn't get free, so at least I could take us both out.

WHAT I DO REMEMBER IS THE SOUND OF THAT SWORD AGAINST MY LEG ARMOR AND THE ELATION OF SUFFERING SUCH VIOLENCE BUT BEING IMMUNE TO ITS EFFECT.

I reached back and grabbed his shoulder. Turning toward the fence and throwing my head down toward my left foot, I threw the Belarusian across and over my back. We both fell into the dirt and onto a pile of bodies—Belarusians and Americans who had already been knocked out of the fight. Someone grunted something at me in a language I didn't understand as we tried to disentangle ourselves.

For us, the bout was over. We sat up and watched the rest of the match. Three of my teammates remained, pinned against the fence by eight Belarusians, much like I had been a moment before. Tough bastards, the Americans just stood there and took it. But the writing was on the wall. The referees called an end to the match, and we picked our sweaty, dust-covered bodies out of the dirt.

BROTHERS IN ARMS

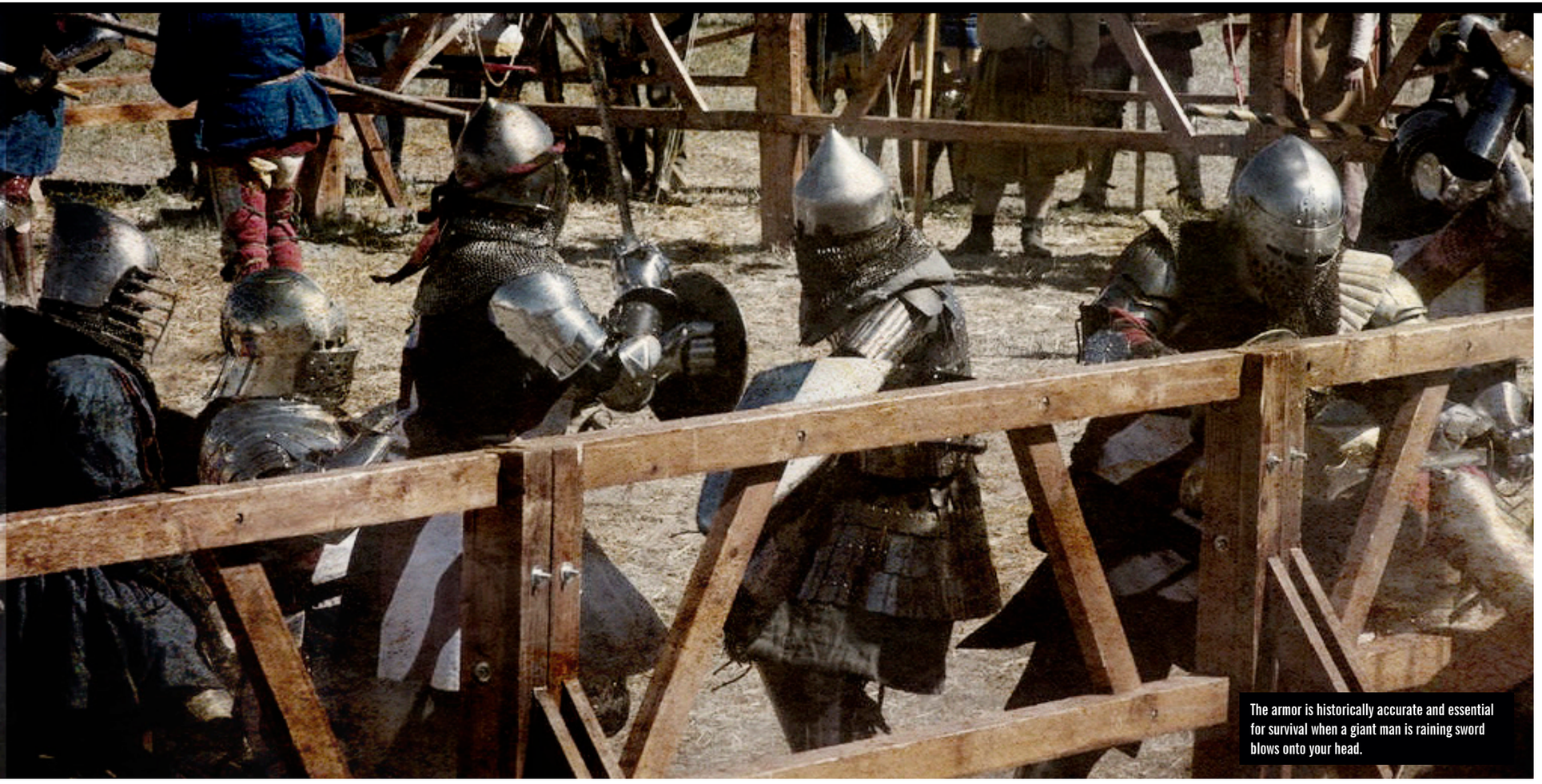
Home to four days of hard fighting, our grassy field near the Mediterranean had been turned into a sand pit. Everyone moved in a cloud of dust as we walked forward in a ragged line to face the Russians. The world champions had been trouncing everyone all week, including Team USA. Our left flank hit first and in the scrum a Russian fighter came spiraling into our line, unbalanced and out of control. He hit the dirt and didn't move. One down, 20 to go.

Suddenly, inexperience and enthusiasm took hold of our team. Bob Dionisio, Commander of the Eastern Division of the U.S., on the left, charged into three Russians, who immediately shoved him into the rail and started dropping 6-foot axes onto his head and shoulders. The sudden urgency of a friend in danger rippled through our line and we surged forward. Our formation disintegrated instantly, with the left and middle blasting into the Russians while our right remained tethered to the nearby fence. It was an open brawl, with pairs of fighters striking and grappling all over the place.

Discipline went out the window. Two of my fellow flankers must have seen an opportunity; they tore through the middle of the sandy battlefield to parts unknown. A Russian fighter turned to strike one of them in the back of the head as he passed, and I sprinted toward him. Luck was with me and I made contact just as the Russian completed his turn. I hit him in the back of the head with my steel shield and the guard of my falchion simultaneously. Weight and momentum sent him tumbling forward into the dirt. Fully expecting that someone was about to do the same to me, I swiveled my head from side to side, scanning for attackers while I backpedaled.

Our right was still tied up against the fence in a group wrestling match. I saw a lot of undefended American backs. I put my own back to them, turning to face the center of the field. I intercepted a young, strong, svelte Russian by interposing myself and bracing for the impact. He decided to turn it into a boxing match. Good. He was bigger than me and a friend quickly joined him. Had they chosen to grapple, I might have been thrown to the ground and out of the fight quickly.

Face-off: Medieval style.



The armor is historically accurate and essential for survival when a giant man is raining sword blows onto your head.

I FELT MY HEAD GET KNOCKED AROUND BY SWORD BLOWS AND FAST JABS TO THE FACE FROM THE RUSSIAN.

I felt my head get knocked around by sword blows and fast jabs to the face from the Russian's punch-shield as his friend peeled off to find other targets. He definitely had an advantage in reach, so I spent some time taking damage, hoping one of my teammates would break free and give me a hand. My jaw ached, but the weight of my helmet absorbed most of the impacts.

We traded blows for about 20 seconds before a big axe came over my shoulder and hit the Russian's shield. Finally, a few teammates had emerged from the scrum on the fence and joined my little fight. We were winning locally, but the rest of the field did not look good. Exhausted and full of adrenaline, I stumbled after my sparring partner. I made the mistake of breaking formation, and the Russian pulled me right into two of his comrades. A swift leg sweep finally sent me into the dirt. I sat up, mouth full of French sand, and watched the last of our team get surrounded and assaulted by packs of Russian fighters.

Our opponents had fought with great skill and energy. Although we lost to them, we could be proud of our performance. And we were. It was only our second time at Battle of the Nations, and no one had given the Russians such a hard fight. We are fast learners, and the battlefield—with all its brutality and swift violence—is an earnest teacher.

I rose and shook some of the dust from my surcoat. My sparring partner emerged from a crowd of fighters and headed straight for me. We embraced as brothers and I couldn't help but smile.

The adrenaline of the fight turned into elation at having survived and joy for the bond of fellowship with a brother in arms. ✦

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Scott Stricklin is a software engineer living in Fairfax, Va. He's always had a passion for history and physical challenges, so armored combat feels like a natural extension of that. His lovely wife, Amy, generously consents to his participation in violent hobbies on condition that he wear really good armor. Stricklin started CrossFit in April 2011.