

# the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

## CrossFit

### A High School Physical Education Program

Tony Budding

CrossFit is the ideal foundation for a high school physical education program. It is malleable, scaleable, great for large groups, fun, and effective. At Mount Madonna School in Watsonville, CA, we are able to accomplish a tremendous amount with very little space, time, and equipment. Our success, as measured by the kids' enthusiasm, commitment, and progress, has been tremendous.

#### Workouts

I've adapted the CrossFit approach and workouts to fit the high school environment, while preserving CrossFit's incredible diversity and self-motivated intensity. The first few weeks are designed to orient the kids to the core CrossFit movements, especially squats, pull-ups, push-ups, jumping, running, push presses, handstands, and kettlebell swings. Gradually, we will work in broomstick cleans and snatches. My hope and expectation is to have the advanced group doing standard CrossFit workouts by the end of the second month and to have elite students competing in the Olympic lifts within four to six months.

I usually spend some warm-up time on squat technique, and I try to introduce one new movement per workout. I spend a lot of time correcting their form while they are working out. My favorite workout so far was Deadfest 04. I lined up 9 bars along the wall, weighted incrementally from 35 lbs to 185 lbs. The kids moved from light to heavy, deadlifting each 10 times until they couldn't complete a set with proper form. Because there were so many kids lifting at the same time, I taught them how

to check each other's form. This works really well and I will continue to use it more and more. They correct and monitor each other, as well as themselves, taking responsibility for their own safety. There is a difference between pain and discomfort, and only they can know when they approach that line. My experience is that if you support everyone equally, the kids mimic you. The mutual support becomes contagious and things really begin to fly.

There are so many options for workouts. I've used several timed circuits with a variety of exercises that are great for large groups because better athletes will do higher reps in the same time. I like team exercises like jiu jitsu sit-ups, spotted handstand push-ups, and team pull-ups. Handicapped races also work really well, especially if the handicapping is fair.

#### Equipment

Starting off, we had no equipment except for a gym and some lightweight medicine balls (10 lbs and under). We got a start-up donation of \$8,000 and bought 20 heavy-duty rubber horse stall mats for the floors plus 9 Olympic bars (various lengths and weights), about 1200lbs of rubber and metal plates, a rubbercoated dumbbell set, a few kettlebells, plus five plyometric boxes, a pair of benches, two racks with dip attachments, two sets of rings and a variety of Jump Stretch bands. I'm still trying to get a pull-up station built, so we have to do pull-ups off the basketball backboard supports, both with and without rings. With just this, we can run almost the entire spectrum of CrossFit classes for 20-

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## A High School PE Program (continued...)

25 students at a time. But I'm confident I could run effective and varied classes of 50 kids at a time with even less. We have to share the gym with all 12 grades, so except for our stacked plyometric boxes and the row of mats along one wall of the gym, we store all of our equipment in a closet. We bring out what's needed for class and put it back every time.

### Motivation

The key is to have everyone successful. The Jump Stretch bands are huge boons. With them, anyone can do pull-ups and dips. We'll also do team pull-ups with one person underneath pushing the other up. In groups of three, the kids can all do handstand push-ups (one spotter pulling on each leg). These are incredibly satisfying exercises for the kids.

Another key component is a positive group mentality. Anyone who has been to CrossFit HQ knows the impact of feeling welcome and supported in their efforts. Feeling safe but not coddled is essential for the CrossFit experience. A big part of this is that everyone needs to believe that their hard work will pay off, so I tell them almost every class why this kind of working out is the absolute best way to get into shape. On the first day, one kid asked me the standard question, "What about cardio?" I told her to ask me again in 20 minutes. Halfway through their circuit workout, I asked if anyone was still wondering about cardio. It hasn't come up again.

I also demand a supportive environment in which everyone wins whenever one person gets stronger. I tell them that we can have a lot of fun in class, but we



have to respect each other and all the equipment. They get one warning. The second incidence of non-respect gets them expelled from the class. This may seem harsh, but it actually makes everyone safer. It's also absolutely essential that I show each of them a high level of respect. So far, so good. The importance of this type of community for CrossFit should not be underestimated.

Right now we have almost one-third of the high school showing up voluntarily before classes three days a week to workout. They get PE credit, but they also have the option of doing a normal PE class during the day.

Such a high percentage is especially impressive given that most kids have a 15 to 45 minute drive to get to our rural campus and arriving early is a huge challenge. From what I hear, we would have 50% more kids if we could do it during the day or right after school.



I first approached the folks at CrossFit because the Athletic Director asked me to teach the varsity volleyball players how to clean and jerk, and they were the only ones in town I knew who taught it. What I discovered was a life-changing approach to fitness that immediately became the foundation for our high school PE department. And we're all better off for it.

Tony Budding is the Media Guy for CrossFit, Inc., and a trainer at [CrossFit Santa Cruz](#).