

the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

The First CrossFit Games

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Arrival—June 29

I drop my bags in my hotel room and decide to head back out to get something to eat. It's getting late and I've been traveling since 0430. As I pass the desk, I see a group of people walking out to the parking lot, as well, a loose mix of men, women, and kids. I am almost certain they are CrossFitters. The CrossFit Games begin tomorrow morning, and the women in this group look fit—not Swiss Ball, step-aerobics, Kate Moss-type fit, mind you, but pull-up, clean-and-jerk, kettlebell-swing fit. Nice.

After dinner I get lost on a reconnaissance of the Games' location—I drive right by the road that the games are on. As I run out of sunlight, I finally find the site and get a brief glimpse of where the Games will be: the giant pull-up bar station on the side of a warehouse-looking building is the giveaway. My hands itch involuntarily. My calluses aren't where they need to be, as I've taken a few weeks off due to some injuries and a jiu-jitsu tournament a week ago. Darn.

Back in my hotel room, I'm a little anxious as I lie in bed staring at the ceiling. I really should relax. I have no illusions about winning anything. I have been doing CrossFit and posting on the WOD blog for over a year and a half now, and these same people that I have been watching on video clips, reading about in workout time posts, and learning from, are a class above me in fitness. I just don't want to embarrass myself. Please let me not finish last, I think as I doze off.

Day 1

I arrive about 45 minutes early and register. I recognize a number of CrossFit luminaries; these are people I feel that I know in some way, but I suppress the urge to address them by name. Eva Twardokens checks me in. We've met once before at Mike Burgener's gym. She is friendly and asks me about my CrossFit Total. I'm a bit taken aback. I look at the sheets of paper to find out which heat I will be in for the first event, the Hopper workout. I can't help myself and I look through every

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name on the men's list—Josh Everett, Brendan Gilliam, Brett Marshall (aka “AFT”), James Fitzgerald (“OPT”), Connor Martin (son of BrandX owners Jeff and Mikki Martin), and more. I note that I am not in the same heat as most of these guys and breathe a little sigh of relief.

I see Nicole Carroll, introduce myself to video guru Tony Budding, and say hi to Josh Everett. It is a slightly surreal experience to meet someone who does not know you but whom you have watched over and over again, studying their form, marveling at their intensity and athletic accomplishments. In this same vein, I manage to get a case of athlete's mouth when I start talking about Brett Marshall's 2:19 “Fran” to a guy a little smaller than me (and I'm only 5'6”) and his wife and daughter—only to find out that it is Mrs. Marshall and her husband Brett himself.

I hate being stupid.

At the first opportunity, I introduce myself to Coach Glassman. I try to shake his hand, but he hugs me as if we are old friends and I turn red and stammer. I am trying to thank him, but I can't because he keeps thanking me for coming. It is this spirit that dominates the Games.

The “crusher”

Dave Castro has been acting as the “proctor” for the Games and ensuring everyone gets the instructions and information necessary. When the colored ball gets pulled from the hopper (an improvised peanut roaster), Dave announces “Push-Jerks, Heavy.” For me, not too bad. Concept 2 has donated eighteen model “D” rowers for the Games, and the sturdy bars on the cement platform make clear what the other events will be—rowing and pull-ups. The numbers go up on the board: row

1000 meters, followed by rounds of 25 pull-ups, and 7 push-jerks with 135 pounds for men and 85 pounds for women. I'm fluid with numbers and I immediately think of the symmetry of 4 rounds, which would round out to an even 100 pull-ups. When a “5” goes up next to the rounds, my mouth gets a little dry. When Dave announces that there is a 20 minute maximum-time cutoff, it gets drier. Anybody got something to drink?

A play-by-play of the events and results wouldn't do justice to the intensity of all of the competitors, male and female, young and old. Ripped hands were a given from the pull-ups, as were people slumped over gasping for oxygen, and others trying to shake out their arms for just one more push-jerk or pull-up. I can say that the strongest impression I have of that event is that oft-overused (but actually apt here) word that is a mantra for Coach Glassman: intensity. No one quit—or even went easy—on that workout.

The trail run

After a few hours to rest and to let the heat of the California sun dissipate a bit, the next event is the trail run, a roughly 5-kilometer test of will (and leg) power. The run begins with a long straightaway on a road, to allow people to spread out before returning to the base of the hill for the first of four brutal ascents. The run goes up the face of the hill, down the back side, then up the back and down the face, rinse and repeat until unable to move legs. Then finish with the same gentle incline on the road and back to the finish/start line.

By the end of the day's second event, the truly elite men and women had made their mark in both of the first two events. A spirit of camaraderie and friendly competition dominated both events. I drag myself back



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to my hotel room for a hot shower, dinner, and a trip to the pharmacy for something to hold my hands together for the next day's CrossFit Total.

Day 2 – The CrossFit Total

Mark Rippetoe, co-author of Starting Strength, creator of the CrossFit Total, and all-around friend of CrossFit, provides instructions for the day's events. There are multiple lifting stations, both indoors and out, and the top ten finishers from day 1 will lift inside under the watchful eye and quick wit of Coach Rippetoe. Volunteers do an excellent job of swapping plates and setting up the bars, while outside things are decidedly less formal. Nicole Carroll "judges" while at the same time jumping up and down and screaming for someone to complete a lift. "COME ON! PUSH!" Too bad they don't do more of that at other competitions.

Camaraderie and fun are the primary impressions I have of that day. People are helping each other, cheering each other on, urging each other to bigger lifts, sharing chalk, offering tips for both the new and the more veteran lifters. And some big weights get lifted. I am a spotter for a back squat of more than 500 pounds (Man, am I glad he made that!) and an over-500-pound deadlift.

A fitting culmination of the event is Josh Everett as the last lifter, with everyone else having completed their lifts and watching, as he attempts a deadlift in the vicinity of 575 pounds. It is a truly monster effort. Ultimately, he doesn't make the lift, but the build-up, the excitement,

Josh pacing and having the weights switched, is one of the great moments of the weekend. Awards and rewards do not want to give short shrift to the winners, but neither do I want to simply list their accomplishments, which have already made the rounds in the CrossFit family and speak for themselves. Those who finished in the top are, without argument, truly "CrossFit" and elite athletes. Their performances and results were awe inspiring. No less awe inspiring for me, however, were the efforts put in by every CrossFitter there, new and veteran, young and old, female and male. Every single competitor gave their absolute all and distinguished themselves by their competitive spirits, their easy smiles, and their zeal for the pursuit of elite fitness. My congratulations to everyone—to all the athletes who participated and, especially, to the volunteers, trainers, coaches, and family members who came to support the athletes and ensure that the first-ever CrossFit Games was a tremendous success. Hope to see you all there again next year!



Dale Saran has been a Marine officer since 1991. He is a Cobra pilot and Judge Advocate, now a mobilized Reservist, and will return to private law practice this coming October. He lives in New England and has been CrossFitting since November 2005.