

# the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

## **CrossFit Training for Law Enforcement** Jacksonville Five Years Later

TJ Cooper and Phil Canto



After several years of providing CrossFit training to law enforcement personnel at varied stages in their careers, I have picked up a few things that might be beneficial to those among you preparing to do the same. I would like to share with you the process of CrossFit implementation, sustainability, and improvement that we use for training recruits at the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office. Much of what I have to say may be what you are already doing. If that is the case, then see this as confirmation of your approach. For those of you hoping to implement similar programs at your agencies, I hope this description of our program and principles will be a useful example.

1 of 7

## CrossFit Training for Law Enforcement (continued...)

### History

In 2001, Greg Glassman came to Florida to give a CrossFit seminar for the Florida Police Corps at the request of Training Specialist Derek Ray. At the time, as a sergeant in the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, I had been running a parallel program in the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office and Florida Community College's Basic Law Enforcement (BLE) Program. The CrossFit program I was implementing had been quietly supported, tweaked, and tested via correspondence and advice from Coach Glassman; recruits in both programs were showing remarkable results. (See "Police Training" in *CrossFit Journal* issue #3 [March 2003].) In fact, the program was indeed "forging elite fitness" among our recruits, just as its founder promised. Now, in 2007, the program continues. This article describes our current implementation and standards for recruits from day one to graduation.

As reported in the March 2003 issue of the CFJ and recorded in our internal documents, CrossFit led to a reduction in injuries among recruits. The Florida Police Corps Program was seeking training protocols that produced fitness and performance results above average compared to what was being used in traditional training programs. From the academy and agency standpoint, we had three additional requirements:

- Reduction of injuries
- Adaptability to all tenure periods
- Recruits' successful completion of the program physical fitness exit exam.

The results of the program in 2003 were better than expected. Injuries in my programs were down 80 percent in the first year. The few injuries that did occur happened under fill-in (i.e., non-CrossFit) instructors when I was not present. In these instances, the substitute instructor "freelanced" and used unstructured protocols inconsistent with CrossFit's standards. Since that first year, we have had no physical training injuries related to our model of conditioning. None.

We have trained BLE classes since 2001, encompassing approximately 970 recruits for the college and an additional 375 hired police recruits for the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office. During training at our agency, I observed an increase in skills and abilities and an acceptance of conditioning by our agency personnel at all levels. More importantly, it forced us to realize that our "traditional" standards were not as demanding as they could have been. The fitness exam being used at the time required



very little in the way of functional fitness. The exam was essentially one minute of push-ups and sit-ups, a one-and-a-half-mile run for time, and, finally, the Job Task Obstacle Course. The existing program was in need of adjusting if the officers we wanted to produce were to be fitter and more capable than the average citizen we swore to protect.

Since the implementation of CrossFit, academy graduates who have been recruited by outside agencies have been lauded specifically for their physical and mental combat readiness and "can-do" attitudes. The top performers in our physical training programs have moved on to tactical assignments where they publicly credit their survival in deadly force engagements and extended stressful incidents to their "CrossFit mentality."

### Jacksonville's three-phase program

During Florida Community College's Basic Law Enforcement (BLE) Program, and the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office Recruit Academy, our CrossFit implementation was introduced to recruits in a three-phase process. During the three phases, we lecture on fitness, teach new exercises, and mete out a variety of workouts. With this focused introduction of the basic CrossFit principles, our goal is not only to prepare recruits for the immediate demands of the job but also to give them the tools to



## CrossFit Training for Law Enforcement (continued...)

continue their training and progress after graduation and remain involved in an ongoing pursuit of better performance and lifelong health.

In Phase I, recruits are introduced to our training program with a 4-hour foundations lecture. We explain the concepts of fitness, discuss nutrition, and explain how the program will prepare them for patrol and specialized unit training. Recruits are given forms that they will use to record their food, sleep, and activity for three days. We use this to make it clear that the program is broadly based and requires solid foundations across the board, including a proper diet. It is not an isolated once-a-day PT session. We expect them to integrate it into their lives.

---

*We emphasize the very real importance of fitness for saving one's own life and protecting others.*

---

In this phase, we introduce recruits to several of our general fitness standards, beginning with a proper warm-up, body mechanics, and movement standards. It is here that we begin their metabolic conditioning and strength training. We also give the first standards exam to set a benchmark we can use to gauge progress throughout the training cycle. These standards run alongside the still-required standard entry/exit fitness exam, which is still required of law enforcement candidates for acceptance into the training academy (at both the college and the sheriff's office). The candidates also must pass the same exam to complete program, as mandated by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (the state governing agency and certifier of police and corrections officers). In our program, the CrossFit benchmarks are required exit exams as well, and these are the instruments we care most about, since they better assess the adaptations that officers actually need for work assignment. We recognize, however, that recruits have widely varied degrees of fitness upon entry into the program, and the benchmarks are designed to allow everyone to participate fully.



## CrossFit Training for Law Enforcement (continued...)

During the training phases, the recruits are exposed to a regimen of CrossFit workouts that we take from the current list of benchmark workouts known as “the girls.” We essentially break these down and focus on their components, building smaller exercise cycles that end in the completion of the corresponding full benchmark test. As an example of how we incorporate the benchmark into the phase, we use “Angie” (100 pull-ups, push-ups, sit-ups, and squats, for time) as the first benchmark. This test requires an understanding of mechanics for proper pull-ups, push-ups, sit-ups, and squats. During this phase, we discuss proper structure for each of the benchmark components. In addition, we introduce skills needed for job performance. After instruction and initial exposure, the exercises are repeated in various formats that change up the duration, frequency, and load, or, in some cases, that drill familiarization and skill practice. At the end of this phase, the benchmark is retested. The benchmark for the next phase of training is also introduced, as is the Tabata protocol. Each process is layered over the previous phase, which allows for a constantly varied but progressive theme in the workouts. These phases are structured to provide better detail in the program of instruction and allow for increased intensity and understanding of CrossFit methodology.

### Phase 1 (4 weeks)

Cycle: 2 or 3 days per week, alternating

#### Exercises and stretches

- Samson stretch
- Squats
- Pop-ups
- Overhead close-in stretch
- Overhead squat stretch (PVC)
- AbMat sit-up
- Rollbacks
- Push-ups
- Pull-ups
- Deadlifts

Gymnastics standards: handstand, hollow rock

Body mechanics standards: push-up, pull-up, air squat

Weight mechanics standards: deadlift, front squat, thruster

Metabolic conditioning: 1-mile run, 1/4-mile run

#### Phase 1 equipment

In general, the first round of equipment collection should include obtaining the basic equipment needed to complete Phase 1-style WODs. The goal is to have

the needed equipment available for each participant, but working at 1:3 ratio with the average class size is more than acceptable. This equipment will get you started with a large variety of movements and workouts. Many of the listed items can be readily found, even at the most archaic of facilities (1:1 indicates items we try to supply individually for each participant).

- Pull-up bars (1:1)
- 6-foot lengths of 1-inch PVC pipe (1:1)
- Jump ropes (1:1)
- 30- or 35-pound dumbbells (1:1)
- Parallettes
- Plyo boxes
- Dynamax medicine balls
- AbMats



### Phase 2 (4 weeks)

Cycle: 2 or 3 days per week, alternating

Gymnastics standards: L-sits, burpees

Body mechanics: jump rope, box jump, sumo deadlift high pull

Weight mechanics: press, push press, overhead squat

Metabolic conditioning: 2-mile run, 1/2-mile run

Benchmark 3: Tabata squats

Benchmark 4: “Fran” (For time: 21, 15, 9 reps of thrusters and pull-ups)

#### Recruit Complexes:

Complex 1: pop-up, burpee, rollback, bear crawl or handstand

Complex 2: sit-up, leg lift, hollow rock

Complex 3: overhead squat, sumo deadlift high pull, push-up, med ball high toss, med ball broad jump



## CrossFit Training for Law Enforcement (continued...)

### Phase 2 additional equipment

Olympic bars

45-lb Olympic-size plates

25-lb rubber bumper plates



### **Phase 3 (4 weeks)**

Cycle: 2 or 3 days per week, alternating

Warm-up: traditional CrossFit [warm-up](#)

In Phase 3, we begin to implement the CrossFit WOD, scaled as needed. We also begin to have squad events, and begin using the white board for recordkeeping and competition.

### **Sustainability**

One component of our programs success has been our willingness to open the doors for others to watch and question. Successful sustainability allows management to see your work and the accompanying documentation. We're always available to answer questions and respond to suggestions when presented. We use several of the better students to show proper form and attitude. The administrative staff is also invited to look at the

structure of the program. We offer weekly early-morning, lunchtime, and after-work programs for continued and enhanced learning. Lastly, we use the websites (ours and CrossFit.com) and the posted white board to help provide information and foster esprit de corps.

The program has also utilized the SWAT team members for feedback and program enhancements where appropriate. This has allowed us to develop more intensive programming suggestions for the more physically capable and those performing at higher levels of physical and mental acuity.

### **Looking forward: Betterments**

As we continue to grow, we are looking for ways to have our own space. The existing gym has slowly allowed us dedicated space, and our equipment requirements are now built into the budget. In order to accomplish this, we tracked our equipment use, class sizes, and student performances. These reports include meal plans, student feedback and testimonials, and instructor profiles, as well as information on the potential for further lectures, training, and certifications. This emphasizes our perspective that teaching is about more than physical performance alone. Forcing students to think is critical. The instructors need to be able to do this as well.

### **Keys to implementation**

When you begin your process of introducing the CrossFit program, be sure to prepare a summary of your ideas and how they relate to functionality. Part of our initial problem was egos and the "us vs. them" mindset. Your summary should include a list of other agencies that use the program and contacts within each of them—a functional reference list, if you will. The contacts should include officers at every level in their respective agencies. Of course, your summary should describe the highlights of your program and explain the fresh perspectives behind your approaches. (Information from the CrossFit "Foundations" and "What Is Fitness?" documents will be helpful.) This summary should also discuss how you will implement the program, the timeframe, and how you will support future training. Finally, the bigger picture in your summary should show how simple an approach to super

---

*We have seen raw recruits enter  
with little or no physical prowess,  
commit themselves to the program,  
and later exit as top-tier performers.*

---

## CrossFit Training for Law Enforcement (continued...)

wellness this is and how the foundations are based on well-grounded, thoughtful, field-tested principles.

An important part of making CrossFit work at your agency is having the right people, with the right attitude and approach in implementing the program. Here are some key concepts that we make sure are understood by everyone involved in implementing the program.

### Check your attitude

Often during training, we tend to single out subjects based on our perceptions of their attitudes. “Breaking a student” is a term often used to make a point about the ability of an individual who has either too much or not enough ego. However, a coach is responsible for the needs of a team, and if you single someone out, it must be purposeful, not spiteful or personal. The flip side of assessing ability based on attitude is assessing mental fortitude and character through the physical training itself. Your trainees need to be challenged, but they must also be enabled by the trainers to feel they are capable of accomplishing the goals. The phase system seems to aid in this process and prepare trainees to complete the WODs, if not outright excel in them. If you throw a full WOD at them too early in the process, a percentage will be lost to you. The phase system builds both skills and confidence—and does so incrementally. We have seen raw recruits enter with little or no physical prowess, commit themselves to the program, and later exit as top-tier performers.

### Treat the student like an athlete: Pain is part of the game

Performance is directly linked to training. Athletes preparing for game day must be prepared to face all the challenges of their game. Serious athletes know and accept that pain is an unavoidable part of the game, and therefore it is also part of the training. Preparation of a law enforcement officer for winning “game day” performances should include this concept. I don’t mean unreasonable or debilitating damage, of course, but realistic physical stress the accompanying discomfort. In the past, students have been trained as if they had no requirements with regard to actual performance, and because of this, sometimes the guy on the bench has had to step in and save the day. The student must understand the differences between discomfort and injury, and be prepared to “push through” the pain to win. Experiencing and tolerating pain in the gym can

make a real difference in how they experience and cope with pain and stress on the street. We emphasize the very real importance of fitness for saving one’s own life and protecting others.

### Understand the training environment: Keep it functional

Ensure that students understand the mechanics of their environment. Make the training environment and the tools applicable to the “real world” that the students will be working in. This means you will need tools for training a variety of functional movements at high intensity (Not a room full of the latest shiny equipment and individual isolation machines for every individual muscle fiber known to man). Fortunately, even if all you have are a floor, a wall, pull-up bars, or free weights, you have all you really need to get started (see the “Garage Gym” issue [#2] of the *CrossFit Journal*). Yes there is plenty more you can use to enhance performance, but you can grow with the simplicity of what you have. Once again the phase system aids in this process.

### Be consistent

When preparing your students, it is important to have them work at an intensity that will allow them to reap the benefits of CrossFit. The training norm of 70-percent effort may be acceptable for the general population seeking mediocre fitness of the conventional variety, but if your standard of fitness is essentially your people’s ability to live and respond in times of crisis, this level of output is not acceptable. You must then rethink your efforts and recalibrate your standards accordingly. The workouts you program should involve all three of the body’s metabolic pathways. Ninety percent should primarily involve the first two (phosphagen and glycolytic) metabolic pathways. Remember, the timeframe for these workouts often varies considerably from conventional standards (the old “30 minutes of cardio”). Most workouts will consist of one to six exercises and take approximately ten to thirty minutes for an individual to complete.

### It has only just begun

The success we have so far achieved in our local training arena is essentially just the beginning of what we set out to accomplish. The core mission has always been and will continue to be the production of high-caliber functionally fit police officers, irrespective of innate athletic talent,

## CrossFit Training for Law Enforcement (continued...)

fitness background, or other uncontrollable factors. The CrossFit model has given us the foundation and freedom to accomplish great things with our public-service employees. One must understand these foundations, be prepared to defend them, and then have the willingness and flexibility to flow with the needs of a changing and dynamic profession. Persistence and strong focus on the goal—as well as a set of instructors with a strong understanding of CrossFit principles, a virtually egoless mentality, and the ability to be flexible enough to change as needed—will assist with each step of this process.

CrossFit's creed has always been to “forge elite fitness.” As you prepare to design and implement the program at your training center, hold true to this concept. The notion of truly functional fitness is what makes CrossFit the best option for public safety employees. Nothing else is like it. We are all forging the future of fitness at our institutions.



---

*The training norm of 70-percent effort may be acceptable for the general population seeking mediocre fitness of the conventional variety, but if your standard of fitness is essentially your people's ability to live and respond in times of crisis, this level of output is not acceptable.*

---

TJ Cooper is a certified CrossFit trainer, an LEO/mil instructor in the tactical arena, particularly on high-liability topics, a 20-year law enforcement officer (17 on the SWAT unit), and the Basic Law Enforcement Lead Fitness Instructor at the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office. He is the owner of [CrossFit East](#) and [Control Concepts International](#); his work at these companies allows him to be humbled regularly by some of the best athletes and shooters in the world.

Both authors exclusively employ CrossFit for individual and group fitness development.

Phil Canto is a state-certified law enforcement instructor in several high-liability areas. He holds a B.A. from the University of South Florida and a Master of Public Administration from the University of North Florida and is a level-3 CrossFit trainer. Phil's research focus lies in the functional applications of fitness and its dynamic relevance in law enforcement, athletics, and lifelong health.