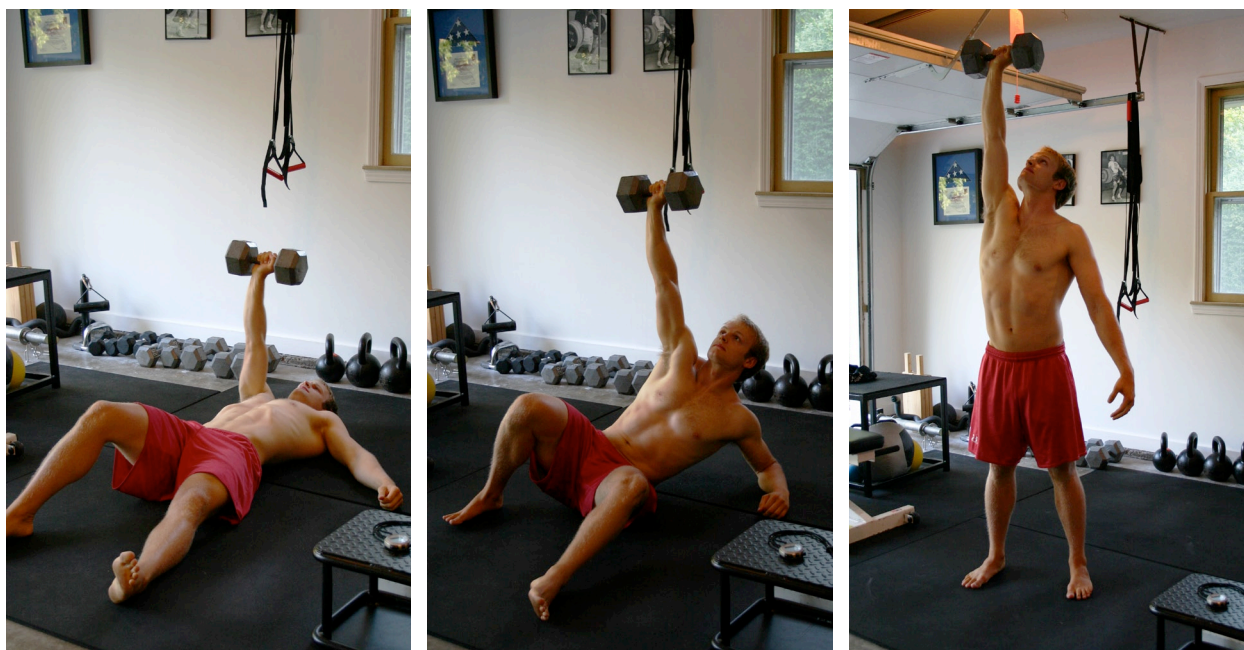


the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

A Large-Group Workout Solution

Michael Rutherford



The group workouts I offer have now taken on a life of their own. I'm frequently pulling in upward of 30 athletes in my 6:00am group. The more I say "Sorry, no more room," the greater the requests become. At the least, this has been an interesting sociology experience.

Before you spit up in your mouth or fly the bird at the page, thinking I'm honking my own coaching horn, let me explain. I tell you this because as this CrossFit culture grows, other trainers and affiliates will be faced with some dilemmas. Your groups will verge on the unmanageable. Trust me, they are coming.

As I have matured in this fitness coaching profession, I've learned that the simplest of movement combinations yield the greatest results. The Rutherford Postulate states, "As the group increases in size, the complexity of the workout diminishes." Unless you have associate trainers all around you, or a group of very experienced, well trained, and skilled athletes, it is difficult to coach complicated movements and unwise (and often impractical) to orchestrate a workout that involves five, six, or seven different exercises and/or pieces of equipment. For me, the dumbbell continues to be the tool of choice for these kinds of groups.

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A Large-Group Workout Solution (continued...)

This month I provide a super-simple yet potent example of a dumbbell couplet that works great with large groups and in limited space. It also works with a wide variety of fitness levels and will be accessible to much of the masses. You can use it effectively, for example, with the neophyte as well as the longtime-CrossFitting Army Ranger. (I say this because this exact scenario presented itself at my place one morning.)

In the lexicon of CrossFit templates, this workout is a combination of a weightlifting exercise and a simple gymnastics movement: the dumbbell get-up and the push-up. Ouch, you say?

The get-up movement has been presented multiple times in this Journal, with a variety of tools (dumbbell, barbell, kettlebell, small child, etc.). I'll keep it brief as not to insult your intelligence. Remember, simple is important with a large group. You can't make it too difficult to follow or they will be lost, frustrated, and, most likely, only short-term participants.

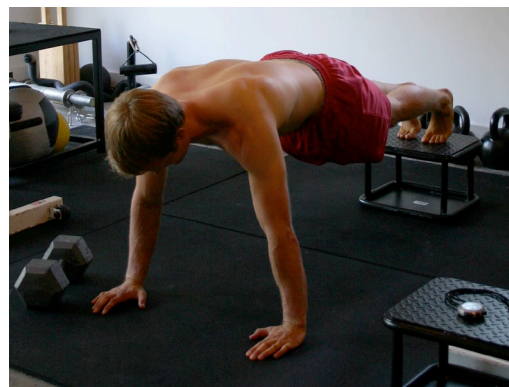
Here is how I coach it in 60 seconds

1. Get on your back with the dumbbell extended straight up in one arm.
2. At all times keep your eye on the dumbbell, with the arm extended vertically, meaning toward the ceiling, at all times. (When you can, coach the heck out of this aspect. All the other elements seem to fall into place when they keep an eye on the dumbbell and the arm stiff as a clothesline.)
3. Roll to the opposite side using that arm for assistance.
4. Pull the legs and feet underneath you as you move into a position to squat the weight up and stand on your feet.
5. Reverse the movement to return to the starting position, lying on your floor with the dumbbell pressed above you.

Now, I am demonstrating this movement as I coach it. If I have an able participant I will pull them to the front of the group to demonstrate for me.

I will typically assign a rep range of about five per arm, as this generally hits the center of the bell curve for participants in the class. I set the upper load limit at about 25 percent of body weight for most people. Since biomechanics are paramount, one of the technique points I emphasize and try to enforce early on is that the arm is staying straight and vertical. Some athletes will struggle with this no matter what the weight. And, for some, immobility from lack of use or injury history just won't permit a straight arm in certain planes.

At the conclusion of the get-ups, the athletes perform 10 push-ups. All the usual requirements of good technique for push-ups and their variants (e.g., knee push-ups) apply.



A Large-Group Workout Solution (continued...)

When I'm dealing with masses, I will typically write this as a time-oriented workout, which allows the newbies to get comfortable with the workout without the pressure of hitting a number against the studs. It also automatically scales the volume of work to the individuals' abilities and keeps everyone to the same time domain for the workout—so you don't have some people struggling to finish a task-oriented workout long after others are done and sitting around. I'd do something on the order of "how many rounds of 10 get-ups and 10 push-ups can you complete in 20 minutes?"

If you have firebreathers in the group, you can modify their push-ups by elevating the feet or advancing them to handstand push-ups, as well as increasing the dumbbell weight for the get-ups.

On occasion, you will have an athlete with physical limitations that will make full get-ups impossible or painful. In these instances, you can have them perform the half get-up. Have them stop as they elevate the shoulder and sit up and then return to the supine position. These folks may well need modified push-ups too. This achieved by pivoting on the knees rather than the toes. A straight spine position ("plank") is still the rule.

If you are running short on dumbbells, you can partner up the participants for a team challenge, where one does push-ups while the other does get-ups. The pair completing the greatest number of rounds in 20 minutes is declared the champions of the day.

However you want to slice it up or modify this workout, your participants will enjoy the session while getting a good dose of functional exercise.



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Michael Rutherford (a.k.a. Coach Rut) is the owner of [CrossFit Kansas City/Boot Camp Fitness](#). He has over a quarter-century of fitness coaching experience with athletes of all ages. He has also worked in hospital wellness environments and rehabilitation clinics. Coach Rut holds academic degrees in biology, physical education, and exercise physiology and sports biomechanics. He is a USAW-certified Club Coach and is a CrossFit level 3 trainer. He is also the current national Masters Champion in weightlifting at 94 kg. You can learn more dumbbell exercises from his DVDs [Dumbbell Moves Volume 1](#) and [Volume 2](#).