

# the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

## A Lighter Take on “Fran”

John Hovey



While there is definitely something to be said for having the best equipment for a task, there's also value in being able to improvise. In my case, as an outdoor guide and traveling teacher, every two weeks sends me to a new city where I often have to approximate exercises or even whole workouts. Sometimes I'm lucky enough to have access to a gym, but usually I have to make do in a hotel room, a city park, or on the side of a mountain somewhere. But that's part of CrossFit, isn't it? That's kind of the point: you make do.

That said, there is one piece of equipment I absolutely need. That's my workout "uniform": old red shorts, green throwaway t-shirt, and smelly running shoes. They never let me down. Last month I wore the outfit for a whole three-week backpacking trip through New Mexico, gutting through a WOD every day with rocks, logs, whatever.

And when I came back I cut my “Fran” time by seven minutes! That's a bold claim, I know, so let me explain.

In the field, my secret weapon is thrusters with odd objects, such as my backpack or heavy rocks. I often end up doing a *lot* of thrusters. I did enough rock thrusters in New Mexico that when Coach prescribed “Fran” last week and I was in Corvallis, Oregon, teaching at OSU and had access to the campus fitness center, I was psyched. I knew I could crush my previous best time of 9:15. Of course, I still feared and respected the awesome suck of three rounds of 95-pound thrusters and pull-ups, but my last “Fran” was so ugly, I knew I could crush that time now. I just knew it.

After class I get changed and head over to the “fitness center” in Dickson Hall. It's a typical college gym, loaded with bodybuilding machines, clueless undergrad Stairmaster girls, and clueless undergrad biceps-curl guys. I will show these people what work looks like, I think, and I might even get myself thrown out of here. For extra motivation I crank up the *Drowning Pool* (remember that garbage?) that I recently downloaded to my iPod. I warm up and then pace around the gym a few times to prepare myself for the wanting-to-puke sensation and hacking cough that I know are to come.

There is actually a sign on the wall next to the power racks that says No Olympic Lifts. Oh yeah? I load a bar to 95 pounds and set it on the floor. I start to stomp my feet because it will help me feel angry. I start to hate this place. Ooh, I am mad now. I crank the crappy, crappy music, hit my stopwatch, grip the bar, and just 3-2-1-GO! I feel awesome.

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## Lighter Take... (continued)

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*C'mon, Fran. Bring it on.* I have my hands at just the right width on the bar, I am breathing right and my head is right. I know that this is good. I clean the bar, squat down, then explode upward and start counting the thrusters to myself: *One. Two. Three. Four.* My wrists feel good; I am keeping my elbows in proper position. *Five. Six. Seven.* My legs are fresh and I am popping off the ground. And I am still going! *Eight. Nine. Ten. Eleven.* Usually I have set the bar down by now. Hell, yeah! *Twelve. Thirteen. Fourteen.* This is unbelievable. *Fifteen. Sixteen. Seventeen. Eighteen.* I am going to make it to twenty one! I am going to make it! *Nineteen. Twen—*

R-R-R-Rip!

At that instant, at the bottom of the twentieth rep, my trusty red shorts, the ones I've lugged around for the past five seasons, my favorite pair of shorts that have propelled me through every single CrossFit workout to date—well, they blow out. And not just a little bit either. I am talking about big-time scene-stopping seam split and shred, and then cool gym air thrustering across my exposed sweaty Fran-ass. I stand up in instant horror and alarm and survey the scene. Those who have seen the event are pretending not to have. There is no way I can bend down to pick up the bar for that last rep of round one—and definitely no decent way to execute midair kipping pull-ups in this condition. I pull my shirt down over my butt as far as it will go and then slowly, gently edge my way over to the door and right on out of that gym full of college kids. So much for teaching them a lesson.

I cut seven minutes off my “Fran” time, all right, but it took a wardrobe malfunction and a DNF. Three weeks of backcountry thrusters were just too dang much for the old red shorts. Maybe there is some value in having the best equipment, after all.



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