

the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

A Nonprofit Affiliate in a Military Context The Case of CrossFit Cherry Point

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Providing CrossFit training to those that do not otherwise have the means to do CrossFit is something I wanted to do. My target audience was the active-duty Marines and civilian Marines aboard Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Cherry Point, North Carolina. For others, a nonprofit CrossFit affiliate might serve an individual military unit, or underprivileged youth, or perhaps senior citizens; it may be for a group within a corporation or other organization or, as in my case, a chance to incorporate CrossFit into a military unit's physical training program. Regardless of the participants, setting up and operating a nonprofit CrossFit facility can be a realistic proposition. This article walks through the steps I took to incorporate CrossFit training methodologies and to establish a nonprofit affiliate aboard MCAS Cherry Point, North Carolina.

MCAS Cherry Point is home to the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing. Unlike military units that conduct mandatory scheduled “unit PT” (physical training), in the “wing” training and fitness are largely left to the individual due to the operational tempo of the majority of units. A squadron schedule often will begin at 0800 and may not end until well after midnight. To support this schedule the Marines are working separate shifts, and CrossFit is a perfect prescription: it is quick, effective, hard hitting, and easily implemented.

At first I was doing CrossFit myself in what was largely an individual effort. There are no affiliates within three hours of me and no group sessions that I was aware of. I wanted to be able to expose the other Marines aboard



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MCAS Cherry Point to this incredible methodology, but I was on my own and I lacked formal training, equipment, and space to train groups. Our base gyms are modeled after Globo gyms—stuffed to the gills with the wrong equipment, lacking open space, and inadequate for the volume of daily traffic.

Several months later I had the opportunity to do two things that would permanently alter the course of my CrossFit life. I CrossFitted with Ahmik Jones of CrossFit SoCal and I attended a Level I certification in Irvine, California. These experiences showed me how CrossFit was being implemented in some different affiliates around the country and started me down the path of coaching. During the Level I certification, Coach Glassman explained how to start a grassroots CrossFit gym, outlined coaching fundamentals, and described the measures of a good coach (in addition to other things that I took about ten pages of notes on throughout the weekend.)



After completing the certification and armed with all the back issues of the *CrossFit Journal*, I began to read. There are scores of articles about coaching, opening a gym, and group exercise. I studied the videos, and I applied my newly acquired training to my first “client,” my Executive Officer (XO). As I continued my training, I continued to read the back issues of the *Journal*, and found the “Monster Mash” (November 2004) article written by a Level 3 trainer located in Quantico, Virginia. The article prompted an idea for me: unit physical training (PT) based on CrossFit methodologies at my base! Because of the small size of my organization, physical training is organized at the small-group or individual level. This turned out to be the perfect proving ground for introducing CrossFit to MCAS Cherry Point. I used *CrossFit Journal* issue 14, “Six Weeks of CrossFit for Ten” to develop a plan.

Implementation

I spoke with other affiliates about their experiences. Based on my research and conversations, I made a plan with three distinct phases:

- 1) Start a “grassroots” PT session based on CrossFit fundamentals and methodologies. (Certification seminars, the website, and the *Journal* are the source for fundamentals and fuel for programming.)
- 2) Start an official nonprofit CrossFit affiliate on MCAS Cherry Point.
- 3) Build a cadre of Level I certified instructors that would “carry the torch” after I moved from Cherry Point.

I met with eight Marines from my unit on Tuesday and Thursday mornings and later expanded to Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Next I put up a web page (at first using a name that did not include “CrossFit”) that served as an information exchange. I found a Marine on the base who was also conducting CrossFit PT sessions. We combined forces and were able to offer two classes a day. By applying the coaching methods I acquired at the Level I certification and the lessons learned through personal application and hands-on coaching, I watched as the Marines became as hungry as I was, and I watched their general physical preparedness improve.

A Nonprofit Affiliate in a Military Context (continued...)

The issue of equipment is ongoing, but we have overcome capacity shortfalls through creativity. I have a user agreement with the base gym; they actually allow me to check out a small number of weight bars and weights for short periods of time and remove them from the building (an hour is all I really need.) Additionally, I have managed to carve out small spaces at the base's gyms to accommodate our group on lifting-specific days. I scour the Internet regularly for low-priced gear (I recently found an Olympic bar and 200 pounds of plates for \$40). When we need gear, we buy in small quantities and communicate our situation to equipment vendors. I have found that many vendors are generous with nonprofit affiliates and sometimes can offer equipment at a reduced rate. In return, we provide a link to them on our website.

Storage of our meager gear provided another issue. When we started, I would bring whatever I had from my personal garage gym in the back of my car and bring it home at the end of the day. As we began to accumulate gear this was no longer reasonable. It is one thing to transport five or six kettlebells, but it is an entirely different matter to move four Olympic barbells and 400 pounds of weight every morning. We resolved this issue by working with the command and getting use of a Conex box (storage container) on site. This allowed us to store our gear when not in use on a semi-permanent basis. In the future we hope to find a building we can use to both store our gear and perform our workouts.

With phase I complete—a CrossFit PT program in place—I set about legitimizing what we were doing by seeking nonprofit affiliate status. Being an official affiliate provides a number of advantages. For one thing, it makes us visible to, and a full part of, the CrossFit community at large. It also provides credibility as we leverage our needs against programs already in place on base in our fight for space and equipment. Most importantly, it makes other fledgling CrossFit athletes aware of our presence, providing them the means to train. Finally, it provides displaced CrossFit athletes a home away from home.

Establishing ourselves as an affiliate went very smoothly. I submitted an application and was quickly approved. I received great support and assistance from the affiliate program directors and the larger community that helped us find our way. I changed the domain name of

our web space to www.crossfitcherrypoint.com, and CrossFit Cherry Point became official.

The final piece of the plan is now in process: building a cadre of instructors to help with my efforts now and to keep the program going when my inevitable change of duty takes place. To date, two additional trainers have been certified, and they will help carry the load. We hope to be able to host a Level I certification on MCAS Cherry Point in the near future to further expand the CrossFit knowledge base and visibility and, in turn, draw both more trainers and more trainees into the mix. We recently held a two-day gymnastics seminar with Jeff Tucker of GSX Athletics in Fort Worth, Texas. His instruction has already proven invaluable to the physical preparation of our athletes. In October we are holding a [CrossFit Basic Barbell Certification](#) with Mark Rippetoe at Cherry Point to provide more focused training on the barbell lifts for our athletes and trainers.

For other CrossFit athletes who aspire to “pay it



forward,” you might consider the model that I stumbled upon. I learned some things in the process that I can pass on in the form of advice from one aspiring affiliate to another:

- Don't underestimate education. Immerse yourself in the CrossFit methodology, scour the website and message board, purchase and read the back issues of the *CrossFit Journal*. If possible, attend a Level I and specialist CrossFit certifications.
- Draw on the community. Contact other affiliates and ask for help. This great community has a reputation for being willing to help one other, and it is richly deserved.
- Next, just do it! Start small and let demand and your local community determine your growth. Start a program with a few folks, and before you know it, you will be blessed with the problem of too much participation, and looking for ways to support your new growing demand for “Again! Faster! Better!”
- Seek affiliation. With official status comes more support and more clients. We welcome the opportunity to need to find more ways to support more athletes. Be creative about tools and, if you are in a military context, ask your local base gyms to check out equipment for an hour or so, find areas that support groups of the size you are training, and go for it.
- Finally, spread the love. Train the next generation of trainers that will continue to support your effort as you grow and can help sustain and grow your affiliate and, over time, expand the reach of CrossFit.

Providing CrossFit training to people who otherwise do not have access to it is something I hope many of us

aspire to do. Whether these people are active-duty or civilian, soldiers or athletes, professionals or amateurs, the needs are the same. Getting started on something like this may seem a daunting task, but, whether you're looking to start a nonprofit service, a garage gym, or a professional business, just take small steps and let it generate its own momentum. Educate yourself, accumulate experience, start small, and grow as your coaching skills and schedule allow.

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