
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Success and the Bull's Eye

Journalist Jon Friedman offers his views on why CrossFit has become an easy target for media criticism.

Guest Column

By Jon Friedman

March 2014



Alicia Anthony

Members of the media are always looking for an easy target.

Throughout history, there is one other constant in addition to the inevitability of death and taxes: It is the principle that the media love to build you up and then knock you down. You can chalk it up to the price of success.

This syndrome affects politicians, rock 'n' roll stars, athletes, movie icons and, yes, fitness companies. Just look at CrossFit Inc., the corporation founded in April 2004 after the program was developed throughout the '90s by CrossFit Founder and CEO Greg Glassman.

1 of 4

I know what you're thinking. CrossFit? Wait. Oh, yes. Got it. Isn't that some sort of cult built around the notion of fanatical fitness workouts? Aren't its acolytes a collection of robotic, unsmiling dweebs?

No, and no.

CrossFit is actually a strength-and-conditioning program carrying the objective of enhancing strength, cardiorespiratory endurance, flexibility and a host of other athletic attributes. The program promotes an ever-changing mixture of aerobic exercise, gymnastics (body-weight exercises) and weight training.

The idea of improving your fitness through workouts sounds about as time-honored as Jack LaLanne, right?

And yet, the media have often produced pieces that call into question the core of CrossFit.

When you succeed beyond people's initial expectations, and when you have more than 9,000 affiliated gyms scattered around the world, you're bound to get targeted.

A quick scan of CrossFit's Wikipedia entry underscores this point. Wikipedia noted that one university professor had suggested the risk of injury from some CrossFit exercises "outweighs their benefits when they are performed with poor form in timed workouts." The entry pointed out that there are similar risks in other high-intensity exercise programs but noted that CrossFit's online community enables athletes to follow the program without proper guidance, increasing the risk of improper form or technique.

"Articles on many websites criticize CrossFit for its lack of periodization, lack of quality-control accreditation standards for trainers or affiliates, and illogical or random exercise sequences," Wikipedia noted. "Some publications



Tom Nugent

The endlessly misunderstood Pukie has been confusing journalists for years.

have raised concerns that CrossFit promotes a potentially dangerous atmosphere that encourages people, particularly newcomers to CrossFit, to train past their limits, resulting in injury."

One piece, pointedly titled "CrossFit's Dirty Little Secret," smacks of a cheap shot because it appears to connote the hidden existence of some sort of scandal—when that is not the case at all. By publishing that type of headline, a publication is merely trying to pull on Superman's cape and get some cheap publicity of its own, perhaps.

It is not as if there is a conspiracy in the media to single out CrossFit and pounce on it. This is a fact of life.

When you stay under the radar, you tend to be ignored. But when you succeed beyond people's initial expectations, and when you have more than 9,000 affiliated gyms scattered around the world, you're bound to get targeted.



Alicia Anthony

As something grows in popularity, criticism is often inevitable.

Is it fair? Not always. Is it deserved? Not always. Is it inevitable? You betcha.

You could suggest it's more a media problem than a CrossFit problem.

There are five fundamental reasons to explain much of the media's ever-present criticisms of CrossFit:

1. The death-and-taxes stipulation: As I noted, the media are notorious for building up the new kid on the block until they have nowhere to go and then proceed to chip away at the very mystique the journalists themselves have constructed. It seems that when the media complete the process of inevitability, you almost get that the feeling they press their hands together, as if their work is done.
2. Arrogance: You say you like CrossFit and want to make it part of your workout regimen? Or you say you've heard a lot about it from your friends, relatives and colleagues and now you're curious to give it a try? Well, fuhged-aboutit! Media members will tell you they know better

than the program's participants, and then they serve to throw cold water on the public's fascination. Listen to us.

3. Laziness: I hate to admit it, but journalists often practice their craft as a collection of sheep. They seem content to repeat one another's rhetoric, all the while passing it on to the general public as expert opinion. Many critics, whose attacks seem one dimensional, don't mind taking one point of view and avoiding the effort to present a more balanced argument. This, in fact, is a one-way debate.
4. Ignorance: We are often afraid of what we fail to understand. This precept exists at the core of prejudice of every despicable kind. People would rather accept destructive talk as gospel instead of taking the time to find out the truth.
5. Sensationalism: There is a tendency in society for us to believe in the worst-case scenario and accept it as the truth. That is because journalists often like to sensationalize a subject. You know the old saying: Never let

the truth get in the way of a good story. This is all too common at times because journalists want to create a splashy headline, which, in turn, will produce increases in newspaper circulation, magazine readership, television and radio ratings, and online page views. Rather than offer accounts of satisfied customers, the media will frequently opt for sensationalist descriptions.

The Easy Targets

Nobody should expect journalists to take a fawning approach to their coverage of CrossFit. Are there dangers? Absolutely. Any time someone participates in a sport or an exercise activity, he or she is bound to take a chance that something could go wrong because of intensity, overzealousness, recklessness at the enterprise or bad luck.

History will note that when I joined a gym in my hometown many years ago, I discovered the running machine. Though I was new to it and a trainer had urged me to “take it slow,” I shrugged off his advice. I hit the machine like a maniac—and within a few weeks, I had a severe foot

injury that eventually required a cortisone shot to treat my discomfort. I only had myself to blame because I foolishly overdid it.

There is an expression familiar to weekend warriors: Listen to your body. This implies that even amateur athletes can figure out how to go about carrying out a sensible workout. When you feel pain from a new injury, you understand that it is time to cut back or cut out the exercise program.

It is a fact of life that upstarts who have made it big are bound to be criticized by pretenders to the throne. This is true in every aspect of life. People criticized The Beatles at the height of Beatlemania, after all.

Look at sports icons as well. No matter how much Peyton Manning achieves, year after year, critics scoff at him and say he should have won more championships. The same is true of LeBron James and Wayne Gretzky—and every other icon. That is another fact of life: Whatever you accomplish, someone will inevitably demand you do more.

Is it fair? No.

Is it even logical? Hardly.

Chalk it up to the price of success.



About the Author

*Jon Friedman is a freelance journalist and media consultant. He writes the [Media Matrix](#) blog for Indiewire and has written about the media for such companies as **The New York Post**, **Newsmax** and **The Fiscal Times**. He has also appeared numerous times on television networks ranging from the Fox News Channel to CNN.*



Darrin Warren

Images like this are fuel for the fire when lazy journalists remove context and add sensationalism.