THE

CrossFitJournal

March 2014

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Kipping Pull-Ups for KIPP School

Knowledge Is Power Program school relies on Los Angeles affiliate owners to help bring CrossFit to new East L.A. junior high.

By Laura Bruner March 2014



Students at Camino Nuevo Charter Academy have been doing CrossFit since 2012 thanks to Candace Ryu.

Paul Austad, Candice Ryu and Shirley Brown didn't know each other until recently, even through the three grew up in the same rough area of East Los Angeles and have been exposed to much of the same adversity.

But now they're banding together for a greater cause. Along with a woman named Alice Lai, the three will be instrumental in helping make CrossFit part of a new junior high opening this fall.

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Lai is an advocate for bringing education and CrossFit to kids who need it most. Through the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP), Lai is opening a new junior high school to serve the East L.A. area. Located around the country, KIPP schools are free and have a track record of helping students in underserved communities achieve success in academics and life.

What sets the East L.A. school apart from other KIPP institutions is CrossFit, which Lai will be implementing into the curriculum.

Education at Its Finest

To prepare, Lai went through the Fisher Fellowship Program, which she said is a one-year course that assists educators in the development of a new KIPP school. Through the program, she learned the five pillars of the KIPP approach—high expectations, choice and commitment, more time, power to lead, and focus on results—and Lai said she felt prepared for the task ahead. But there was one thing missing: a physical-education program that would stack up next to the academics.

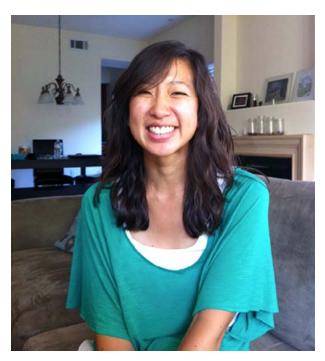
"Every CrossFit representative I met warmly welcomed me and offered to help in any way possible to start my school with a CrossFit P.E. curriculum."

—Alice Lai

"I first heard about CrossFit a few years ago when some friends of mine raved about the program," Lai said. "At the time, I thought it was just for adults and a very intense and intimidating workout for a normal, non-athletic person such as myself."

That all changed, though, when she learned of other schools that use CrossFit for physical education.

"This past summer I learned about how the Noble Network of Charter Schools incorporates CrossFit as the backbone of their P.E. program," she said. "I saw the impact it has







The Knowledge Is Power Program has 141 schools around the U.S., and Alice Lai (top) will be adding to that number.



Students at host of charter schools, including those at Camino Nuevo Charter Academy (above), are doing CrossFit as part of fitness and leadership education.

had on the students' self-esteem, teamwork and growth mindset. All this and so much more are critical environmental factors that can increase student achievement."

A trip to the CrossFit Games in July of 2013 reaffirmed her decision.

"When I visited the CrossFit Games, I was struck by the deep sense of community and commitment to the CrossFit way of life," she recalled. "Every CrossFit representative I met warmly welcomed me and offered to help in any way possible to start my school with a CrossFit P.E. curriculum."

Bonding Through Burpees

As soon as Lai returned home, she got to work to open the KIPP Academy of Innovation, and she was confident the CrossFit community would help her implement CrossFit as a health, fitness and leadership program at her school.

"At the KIPP Academy of Innovation, students will participate in CrossFit-oriented P.E. classes two to three times a week," she said. "We will partner with an existing CrossFit box to create a tailor-made middle school, CrossFit-oriented P.E. curriculum teaching physical fitness and nutrition and building a deep sense of team and a growth mindset to conquer our biggest challenges," she said.

To get things started, Lai reached out to three local affiliate owners. All responded and met with her to set goals, establish lesson plans, help with curriculum development and create a solid support system.

That's where Austad, Ryu and Brown come in. Austad is the owner of CrossFit Eagle Rock and jumped at the chance to work with Lai.

"This is an opportunity to teach healthy lifestyles from a young age and shape the future of these kids," he said. "It

goes beyond CrossFit to create a special community that can help kids thrive."

Ryu also had experience working with kids. In 2012, she brought CrossFit to Camino Nuevo Charter Academy and started Camino Nuevo CrossFit Kids.

"In this stage of life, many kids are apathetic, but I have seen a total shift," Ryu said. "They are now showing ownership of their fitness and health, a desire to be better and a sense of empowerment. That's huge for junior-high students to see that."

Brown, owner of CrossFit LA, also has a CrossFit Kids program, and she recently started an after-school program at Westside Neighborhood School.



While traditional physical eduction focuses on rules of sports, CrossFit-based programs give children the tools with which to remain fit and healthy.

"I have seen many kids gain confidence in life and more awareness about health, fitness and nutrition, which is exciting," she said. "CrossFit Kids allows everyone to participate and is an encouraging environment. I hope it helps kids learn to love to move their body."

Lai's dream will become reality in the fall of 2014, and the school will serve students from Grade 5 to Grade 8—primarily Latinos and English-language learners, who will receive free lunch or reduced rates for lunch.

High Fives and Helping Hands

"At the KIPP Academy of Innovation, we strongly believe in the power of the mind-body connection," Lai said. "We believe that daily aerobic exercise physically remodels the brain for peak performance. We believe in the power of physical fitness to maximize learning in the classroom."

With that philosophy guiding them, Lai, Austad, Ryu and Brown believe the East L.A. community will benefit from the school and CrossFit. The three affiliate owners plan to be involved.

"The overwhelming positive responses, willingness to help and openness to share ideas (reflect) the genuineness of the CrossFit community."

—Alice Lai

"My plan is to be active all the way through the school's initial planning, first day of school and beyond by helping with lesson plans, programming and even coaching, if needed," Austad said.

He knows the impact the school can have on the district and is well versed in the success of KIPP schools through his past experience with other KIPP teachers.

"The KIPP program proves you can achieve goals—even if they're outside of your means—with support from the community and passion to make a difference, and I am excited to be that support system for Alice and this school," he said.



At CrossFit Eagle Rock in Los Angeles, Paul Austad works with young athletes through the affiliate's CrossFit Kids program. He'll be using that experience to help the new KIPP school in East L.A.

"My interactions with local Los Angeles CrossFit affiliates have been a transformative experience as I begin my school," Lai said. "The overwhelming positive responses, willingness to help and openness to share ideas (reflect) the genuineness of the CrossFit community."

What's Next

Lai is confident in her plans and excited for what's to come when the school opens. For their part, Austad, Ryu and Brown are inspired and hope to help other teachers see the impact CrossFit will have on the students—physically, emotionally and cognitively.

"If we can get even just a handful more teachers to implement CrossFit, we will be making a huge difference in the lives of so many kids," Austad said.

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About the Author

Laura Bruner works for CrossFit Inc. to bring CrossFit and education together through her work with schools, teachers, administrators and affiliates. She is also a trainer on CrossFit's Level 1 Seminar Staff and a coach at NorCal CrossFit in San Jose, Calif. Email Laura@CrossFit.com with questions or thoughts about CrossFit and education.

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Crashing the Party

CrossFit athletes increased their presence at this year's CRASH-B event, helping the sport of rowing grow and change its image.

By Andréa Maria Cecil

March 2014



When Syn Martinez walked into the arena, he didn't notice the stares. As a 6-foot-2 tattooed black man who often wears T-shirts emblazoned with the words "Afro Brutality," a guy gets accustomed to things.

Beside him was Sarah Grey, an athlete at Martinez's affiliate, CrossFit Harlem. She's a 5-foot-7 native of Sweden who is heavily tattooed, and she was there to row.

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Knee socks and CrossFit Ts are an increasingly common site at the annual CRASH-B competition.

It was the 2011 CRASH-B World Indoor Rowing Championship in Boston, Mass. And while rowing might be described as brutal, it most certainly isn't described as urban or gritty. Instead, its stigma oozes of Ivy League institutions and rich folk.

Martinez and Grey symbolized change, with CrossFit athletes increasingly becoming involved in the CRASH-B competition and the sport of rowing.

CrossFit Harlem was "one of the first groups to take it upon themselves to start racing," said Greg Hammond of rowingmachine maker Concept2, based in Morrisville, Vt.

This year's competition, held Feb. 16 in Beantown, saw more than 85 athletes who indicated membership at a CrossFit affiliate, he said. In total, more than 1,880 athletes competed. Although Hammond did not have numbers of CrossFit athletes who had raced in previous years, he said, "(I) know it was less."

Hammond has worked at Concept2 for 15 years. He began working closely with CrossFit Inc. in 2006. And for the past several years, Hammond has been back at the CRASH-B competition to spectate after a hiatus.

"I started going back down there because all my CrossFit buddies were doing it," he said.

If it's not the shirts or hoodies pledging allegiance to their boxes, it's knee-high socks or minimalist shoes that reveal CrossFit athletes, Hammond added.

"I'm a little biased when I say it's made it more fun for me," he continued.

When it comes to actual performance, CrossFit athletes finished in the middle to upper middle of the pack for their respective age groups at the competition, Hammond said.

Andrew Stewart-Jones posted the top time in the men's open division: 5:47.7. The 22-year-old Canadian has a wingspan of 6 feet 8 inches and dreams of rowing in the 2016 Olympics. Maddie Turbes, a 6-foot-2 sophomore rower at Gonzaga University in Washington, finished in 6:41.8 to win the women's open division.

Cady Hart, a CrossFit trainer at Green Mountain CrossFit in Berlin, Vt., finished ninth among heavyweight female masters aged 30 to 39 with a 2,000-m time of 7:37.5. She's also a former collegiate rower from the University of



Product testing: Peter Dreissigacker, co-founder of Concept2, rowed 2,000 m in 6:55.2 at the Feb. 16 CRASH-B competition. He's 62.

Connecticut and coaches CrossFit at Concept2. The last time she competed at CRASH-B was 12 years ago, and it was only because the rest of her team was racing.

"I wouldn't have even dreamed of doing CRASH-Bs again if it weren't for CrossFit," she said.

Hart added: "It's just cool to know that I could still hold my own even if I'm not rowing every day."

And, she noted, it's cool that fellow CrossFit athletes are willing to compete in rowing and "(put) yourself deep into that pain cave."

Among the affiliates with the most competitors at CRASH-B was CrossFit South Brooklyn. The box sent 19 athletes under the watchful eye of coach and 2000 Olympian Nick Peterson, who was part of the U.S. team that placed seventh in men's quadruple sculls in Sydney.

Two South Brooklyn athletes—Katie Mears and Sarah Marquez—finished in the top 10 among heavyweight female masters 30 to 39 years old. Mears posted a time of 7:29.9 and Marquez recorded 7:34.6, making them sixth and eighth. Anna Lewis posted the top time: 7:03.6.

CrossFit South Brooklyn athletes have competed in CRASH-B since 2010. This year, Peterson readied them with a 16-week training program. The connection between CrossFit and rowing is "obvious," Peterson said. He added that CrossFit has been "amazing" for the sport.

"A lot of it is just a stigma change," Hammond explained. "Indoor rowing has made rowing ... more accessible to people."

Ted Noyes agreed.

At 69, the rower of 14 years pulled a 7:04.2, putting him in third place among heavyweight veteran men 65 to 69 years old. Noyes also is a four-year member of Flatirons CrossFit in Boulder, Colo. By comparison, Noyes could row 2 km in the high 6:50s when he was in his 50s.

"They say you lose about three seconds a year when you get up into your 50s," he said. "I'm not as fast as I used to be, but I'm not slowing down as much as my peers are."

That 7:04 is Noyes' fastest time of the year. He credits time on the rower but also his affiliate.

"I'll attribute a lot of that to being willing to go in and not be the best guy in the CrossFit workout—just showin' up and doin' the work."



About the Author

Andréa Maria Cecil is a **CrossFit Journal** staff writer and editor



The solitary-confinement cell at Florence State Prison in Florence, Ariz., is 8 feet by 5 feet. It contains a bed and a toilet. Prisoners in the hole are permanently shackled, and they spend 23 hours a day in the tiny cell. They are allowed showers a few times a week, and occasional exercise takes place in an 8-by-15-foot recreation yard, similar to a dog run, with walls 20 feet high. The opening at the top is covered by a green tarp that blocks out the sun.

Michael Gonzales spent five years in that cell. He lost 60 lb. and got so pale he could see his veins through his skin.

As far as Gonzales was concerned, prison was his life. He was serving a 36-year sentence, he'd been using drugs since he was 9, and he'd been in gangs since he was 12. Addicted to meth and heroin, deeply committed to gang life, he was a lost cause. History, statistics—everything—pointed to failure.

Few longtime addicts escape the clutches of addiction for good. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), the relapse rate for drug abuse is 40-60 percent; some studies report relapse rates as high as 70 percent. Gonzales was a lifelong addict, and gangs—the criminal life—were his entire community and support system.

EXERCISE ON ITS OWN IS NOT A CURE FOR ADDICTION, BUT GROWING EVIDENCE SUGGESTS IT PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN HELPING ADDICTS RECOVER AND AVOID RELAPSE.

This year will mark seven years of sobriety for Gonzales. He's been out of prison for five years. He kicked meth and heroin on his own in prison and hasn't relapsed once. He has steady employment and a family.

Somehow, Gonzales beat the odds. So what's his secret? Other than an iron will, it's a combination of intense daily

exercise, a strong community and 12-step meetings. Exercise on its own is not a cure for addiction, but growing evidence suggests it plays an important role in helping addicts recover and avoid relapse.

Tim Harrington, co-founder of Sustainable Recovery, an addiction-recovery and treatment program, said he uses fitness as a way to reintroduce the chemicals that have been depleted during addiction, including serotonin and endorphin.

"When you take away the drug, you have to replace it with something," Harrington said. "You need to create some sense of well-being. Talk therapy takes too long."

"CrossFit gives me an outlet," Gonzales said. "It means the world to me. Without it, I would be using and back in jail."

THE ROAD TO SOLITARY

If you came across 34-year-old Gonzales in a dark alley, odds are you'd cross the street. He's covered in menacing-looking ink, including a teardrop tattoo under his left eye and another that covers his neck and goes all the way under his chin.

Gonzales' personality is nothing like his appearance. Despite spending 15 years—almost half his life—in prison and using, he's warm and gentle. Enthusiastic and friendly, he projects an undercurrent of calm that comes from experiencing some of the worst life has to offer.

Growing up, Gonzales never met his real mother. He moved around a lot and never felt like anywhere was home. The lack of family and community was difficult for him. He wanted to belong, and it wasn't long until he found his community by joining a gang. With the gang came drugs—and trouble.



His fellow gang members taught Gonzales how to survive in solitary by using meditation techniques that let him escape, mentally, from his tiny prison cell.

Gonzales first went to juvenile hall when he was 14, and by age 18 he was in prison, serving a two-and-a-half-year sentence for drug-related charges. He was free for a brief moment, and then in 1997 he got hit with a 36-year sentence for drugs, guns, assault and aggravated assault: 21 felonies in all.

Prison didn't reform Gonzales. He kept using and stayed committed to the only community he knew: gangs.

"I made a name for myself," Gonzales said. "Prison is like the army. You do what you're told. You never second-guess it."

As a good soldier, Gonzales volunteered for the more unpleasant jobs handed down from the gang bosses, such as hurting people and collecting drug debts. He had resigned himself to a lifetime in prison, so he saw no need to behave or play it safe. Gonzales thought he had reached the bottom.

He had no idea how much worse it could get.

In 2000, Gonzales helped start a prison riot. He was sentenced to five years in solitary confinement.

"For five years, I spent 23 hours in lockdown," Gonzales said. "I was never un-cuffed, I was always shackled. I went from one cage to another."

For Gonzales, the worst part of being in the hole was the social isolation. Gonzales craves human interaction and community.

"Mike walks in and makes eye contact with everyone, says hello to everyone, and if he doesn't know the person, he makes a point of introducing himself to them," said Robert Schrimpf, who regularly works out with Gonzales at 6 a.m. at CrossFit Pacific Beach in San Diego, Calif. "When he finishes, he will stay and encourage everyone until every single person is done."

Although he lives in Florida with his family, Gonzales spends extended amounts of time in San Diego working as a sober coach—living with his clients and modeling a healthy, sober lifestyle.

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The hyper-social Gonzales survived his time in solitary by mentally removing himself from his environment.

"I would run in place, and in my mind I was somewhere else," he said. He would picture the streets near his home and felt like he was actually running outside in the sun.

Eventually, Gonzales got out of solitary and finally got some good news. Early in his sentence, Gonzales had put in an appeal, claiming the judge had made an error during the trial. He won his appeal, and his sentence was significantly reduced. In 2007, Gonzales got out of prison.

He wasn't free for long.

"I didn't make it six months," Gonzales said. Not only did he end up back in prison, but he also found himself in the exact same cell as before.

Gonzales was incarcerated for internal possession—"basically for being high," he said.

THROUGHOUT HIS TIME IN PRISON AND IN THE EARLY DAYS OF RECOVERY, GONZALES WAS ALWAYS IN THE GYM.

When he walked into the cell, he saw two things: the same cot and a 12-step recovery book.

"My body was tingling because I was coming off of drugs, and I thought, 'This is it. Turn it around.'"

Gonzales calls that day a spiritual awakening. He left his gang, and he stopped using drugs. He hasn't used since. As soon as Gonzales got out again in 2009, he immediately became involved in the recovery community. He started working in a treatment center in Prescott, Ariz., then worked at a sober-living home. Finally, he began sober coaching and acting as a sober escort.

Throughout his time in prison and in the early days of recovery, Gonzales was always in the gym. The close-knit recovery community took the place of the camaraderie he found with gangs. Gonzales began to repair his life. He daughter.

Then the happiness and good fortune threw Gonzales into a tailspin. He was in San Diego working as a sober coach, and he took his girlfriend (now his wife) and daughter to the beach at Windansea in La Jolla, Calif.

"I felt healthy but mentally broken," Gonzales said. "I wasn't sure if I wanted to be sober."

Holding his infant daughter while standing on the rocks overlooking the ocean, he felt enveloped by love—an unfamiliar feeling.

"I was surrounded by love. I was so used to not having it, I was fighting it," Gonzales said.

It was then he decided to embrace the love around him and stay sober. Gonzales avoided a relapse and started CrossFit not long after at CrossFit Pinnacle in Ocala, Fla. He lost 50 lb. in less than a year, and he found an entirely new community.

"CrossFit made it to where I have an outlet." Gonzales

Recovery is his work and his life.

"I eat, sleep and shit recovery," he said. "CrossFit is my release ... it makes me feel good."

EXERCISE AND THE BRAIN

Many treatment centers use exercise as part of their treatment, and there's science to back up their approach. Scientists have found that intense exercise causes a release of endorphins and endocannabinoids (eCBs), a marijuana-like substance that enhances the natural high. ECBs do not increase following low-intensity exercise such as walking.

A 2012 Frontiers in Psychiatry report summarized several recent epidemiological studies that found people who regularly exercise are less likely to use and abuse drugs. What's more, the studies found that exercise produces an effect that helps the brain recover from a substanceabuse disorder. Just as drug abuse often leads to a cascade of destructive, negative behavior, regular exercise has a positive ripple effect. Once they start exercising, recovering addicts feel better and look better, and that encourages them to improve their nutrition, guit smoking and get adequate sleep. The role of exercise in recovery is a complicated mix of behavior and neurobiology, but scientists have found evidence that exercise affects the moved to Florida, got in a relationship and in 2011 had a brain in many of the same ways as stimulants, opioids and alcohol.

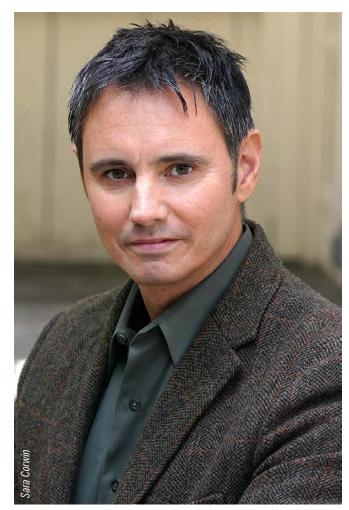




Gonzales yells in celebration when a workout is going well, and he yelps in pain when he's struggling.

5 CROSSFIT JOURNAL MARCH 2014 6 The recovery community is taking notice, and exercise is an integral part of many treatment programs today. For example, Ron Gellis, himself a recovering alcoholic, detailed aspects of a 12-step program combined with CrossFit in the 2012 *CrossFit Journal* article Addiction, Recovery and CrossFit. Recovering addict Shari Keener similarly offered perspective on using exercise to battle drug problems in the August 2013 video Meet Shari Keener: Changing the Pattern.

Sober since 1989, Ken Seeley has been involved in the recovery community for more than 20 years. He started his own company in 2000 and was a featured interventionist on the A&E show *Intervention* from 2004 to 2009. Now Seeley runs Ken Seeley Communities, a sober-living facility in Palm Springs, Calif. He also provides intervention services through his company, Intervention 911.



On the TV show *Intervention*, Ken Seeley tried to convince addicts to get sober and enter rehab.

When Seeley got sober in 1989, exercise wasn't part of the recovery process.

"They didn't push exercise," he said. "It was not as important."

Today, Seeley said he views exercise as one of the life skills—like creating a resume, volunteering or attending meetings—recovering addicts need to learn in order to get back on track. Seeley's approach is to focus on the spirit, mind and body. Focusing on the spirit refers to finding a higher power, whether through prayer or meditation, while focusing on the mind refers to dealing with trauma: the issues that may have contributed to the addiction in the first place. Work on the body includes both exercise and nutrition, and the piece is considered so essential that residents of Ken Seeley Communities have access to their own personal trainer.

"It's about the whole package," Seeley said, "finding the balance. When you're a drug addict, you're off balance. (Exercise is) a really important part of recovery; it's about finding that balance. Whether it's walking, going to the gym or swimming, it's important to get the endorphins going, to get the cells opening up."

MOST ADDICTS HAVE DEEP-SEATED EMOTIONAL ISSUES THEY MUST ADDRESS, BUT EXERCISE HELPS MANY ADDICTS GET THROUGH THOSE EARLY, DARK DAYS.

However, Seeley doesn't think exercise works on its own. The other components—the mind and spirit—have to be there for the recovery to work, he said. Exercise by itself is not enough. He thinks there must be some type of therapy to address the underlying mental and emotional issues.

"About 10 percent of the population gets addicted to going to the gym," Seeley said. He can tell too much focus on the body is a problem if the person is going to the gym two to three times a day and won't focus on getting a job.

In the case of the recovering addict, balance is everything. And someone who is spending that much time on the body is most likely neglecting the spirit and the mind. For an addict, this can have disastrous implications. In the long run, most addicts have deep-seated emotional issues they must address, but exercise helps many addicts get through those early, dark days.

"I've noticed the people who are successful in early recovery are ones who exercise regularly," said Zachary Buschman, the trainer at Ken Seeley Communities. "I believe exercise is a healthy substitute for compulsive behavior."

Buschman said: "Exercise releases neurochemicals that mimic the chemicals released by drugs. It helps the body get back into homeostasis and combats depression associated with recovery." According to Buschman, once a person has found exercise helps him or her feel better, the recovering athlete wants to be in the gym every day.

"It's a healthy high, and they start to see (good) changes in their body," he said.

It only becomes a problem when people use exercise as a substitute for treating underlying issues.

"The hope is recovery is holistic," Buschman said. "They need to work on mind, body and spirit."

CROSSFIT AND RECOVERY

Most of the existing studies looking at the role of exercise in addiction recovery treat "exercise" as fairly generic: raising the heart rate for a period of time. As stated above, studies have shown that high-intensity exercise provides benefits not found with moderate exercise, but is there something about CrossFit that makes it particularly effective for recovering addicts?

John Kim, a therapist and CrossFit athlete, thinks so. Kim, who has been doing CrossFit for four years, uses exercise as a central part of his practice and as a therapeutic tool. Instead of meeting patients in an office, Kim conducts his sessions outside, in coffee shops or in online hangouts via his website, The Angry Therapist.

"I come as I am, with my Rogue shirt," Kim said. "I'm redefining the role of a therapist. It doesn't have to be in an office."

Kim believes exercise is helpful when recovering from addiction, but he, too, thinks it has to be paired with something that addresses the mental and emotional causes of addiction.



John Kim thinks the community aspect of CrossFit is enormously helpful for recovering addicts.

"Many people do drugs because of low self-esteem," Kim said. In CrossFit, they are confronted with movements and workouts that seem impossible. Then, one day, the impossible becomes possible. When this happens, a mental shift occurs, Kim said.

"You are proving yourself wrong; you're proving your self-worth," Kim said. "Recovery is about feeling whole, and CrossFit helps build self-worth."

In addition to intense exercise, CrossFit also provides a community, Kim said: "It pulls you out of yourself. You're part of something bigger than you."

But even with the self-esteem boost and community that come with CrossFit, it's important that recovering addicts address their emotional scars.

"The flip side of high-intensity training is the danger of getting addicted," Kim said. He compares it to holes in

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a water balloon. Addiction is one hole, and exercise can easily become an additional leak.

Kim said it's easy for recovering addicts to take a nosedive and bury themselves in an attempt to "fill the hole with CrossFit," which can bring all the old issues to the surface if someone has to take some time off or gets so competitive that training ceases to be fun. He believes using exercise as part of addiction treatment is all about balance and asking the right questions. For example, he runs what he calls a "mental stretch" after classes at CrossFit Hollywood, in which athletes are encouraged to discuss their mental dialogue during the workout.

"RECOVERY IS ABOUT FEELING WHOLE, AND CROSSFIT HELPS BUILD SELF-WORTH."

—JOHN KIM

"Everyone keeps (their thoughts during the workout) a secret," Kim said, "but a lot of our stories overlap."

By sharing your thoughts, you might find the firebreather next to you is fighting the same demons.

"You have to know what you want out of CrossFit," Kim said. "How is it affecting you emotionally? If it makes you angry, that's feeding your addiction. Fitness and mental health are not separate."

A LIGHT IN THE DARK

Purely by instinct, Gonzales managed to pursue two elements that aid sustained recovery: community and exercise. He beat the odds, but he made the odds much easier to beat by forging positive, supportive relationships and by making exercise—specifically intense exercise—part of his daily routine.

Now Gonzales is spreading the word and trying to encourage his clients to make exercise a part of their recovery.

Gonzales says he achieves his spiritual recovery by helping others.



Gonzales just earned his CrossFit Level 1 certificate, which will help him model a healthy, fit lifestyle for his clients.

"I was an animal at one time in my life," he said. "(I was) developed that way by the system, so when I was released, I learned a whole new way of life, but it didn't help my mind. When I help people and they get better—or a little hope is brought to them—a piece of my mind heals."

He said his mind is ravaged by his past mistakes, but he's starting to find peace through prayer, meditation and helping others.

Gonzales' harrowing life story has contributed to his success in the recovery community. He's proof that a person can recover from even the darkest, most hopeless place. He said his story provides people with much-needed inspiration, and he tries to lead by example.

"They are looking for hope," he said. "If I can change, anybody can."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hilary Achauer is an award-winning freelance writer and editor specializing in health and wellness content. In addition to writing articles, online content, blogs and newsletters, Hilary is an editor and writer for the *CrossFit Journal* and contributes to the CrossFit Games site. An amateur-boxer-turned-CrossFit-athlete, Hilary lives in San Diego with her husband and two small children and trains at CrossFit Pacific Beach. To contact her, visit hilaryachauer.com

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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



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.

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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



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.



As something grows in popularity, criticism is often inevitable.

Is it fair? Not always. It is 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-daboutit! 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, overzeal-ousness, 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

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

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

THE

CrossFitJOURNAL

Building Behemoths: Part 1

Bill Starr offers simple strategies for anyone training for strongman competitions.

By Bill Starr March 2014



The Pig, seen at last year's CrossFit Games, challenged athletes to move an odd object similar to the implements seen at strongman competitions.

The various Iron Man events, and particularly the most popular one of all, The World's Strongest Man, came along in 1977 and became more popular with TV audiences than either Olympic lifting or powerlifting.

The idea came from Bart Frank, who was in the entertainment business and believed a great many people would enjoy seeing extremely strong behemoths perform unusual feats of strength. He was right. Viewers, most of whom never lifted anything heavier than a case of beer, embraced the shows, which drew millions of viewers through the years.

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As could be expected, the success of the World's Strongest Man brought forth knock-offs that used different lifts to determine the outcome of the contests, yet the World's Strongest Man is still considered the best of the lot.

It didn't surprise me at all that the contests were so popular. The concept was really based on what happened at the very beginning of weight training in the late 1800s. Contests of strength between such men as Eugen Sandow and Cyclops (whose real name was Franz Bienkowski) drew packed houses all across Europe. The Highland games in Scotland always included strength events, the most popular being the carrying of the Dinnie Stones, named for 19th-century strongman Donald Dinnie. Dinnie's 1860 carrying of two stones totaling 775 lb. across the Potarch Bridge is part of Scottish sporting lore, and that sort of contest is still seen as farmers walks. In the event known as Fingal's fingers, long poles have to be flipped, and it's not that different from tossing the caber. And pulling planes and trains has been around since, well, there have been planes and trains to pull.

All athletes, including strongman hopefuls, need to do a lot of exercises that are dynamic.

So, in essence, what we are seeing in the various "strongest" competitions is simply an upgrade to an older idea—nothing wrong with that. And all the strength contests that I have seen or read about always include at least one test of overhead strength. That, too, grew out of early weight-lifting, which consisted of several feats of elevating heavy dumbbells or barbells overhead. These were the tools that early strongmen used to gain their extraordinary strength.

As it so happens, dumbbells and barbells are still the tools of choice for the top strongmen in the world. Bruce Wilhelm won the first two World's Strongest Man contests by using the dynamic strength he developed through doing the Olympic lifts. Wilhelm had competed in the Olympic lifts when they still tested the overhead press, so that was always a part of his training regimen.



Versions of the original Husafell Stone are commonly used to test lifting and carrying strength.

In contrast, three-time winner Bill Kazmaier came out of powerlifting, as did George Hechter, whom I helped get started on strength training when he was a teenager. And that brings up the inevitable question: should a person getting ready to take part in a strongman contest concentrate on pure strength movements or should he spend more time on the more explosive lifts?

In my mind, the best program is a combination of both ideas because both enhance functional strength, and that's what every athlete in any sport is really looking for. The formula for a strongman athlete is really no different than it is for a football player or someone wanting to improve his tennis game: increase overall strength by 40 to 50 percent and practice the skills needed in his chosen sport, and he will perform at a much higher level.

While I think that deliberate movements such as deadlifts and back squats are most useful in the process of gaining

overall strength, I think all athletes, including strongman hopefuls, need to do a lot of exercises that are dynamic. There's no doubt that explosive movements build a different type of muscle and attachment strength. Also, there is the often-overlooked fact that when a muscle is exercised dynamically, it and the tendons and ligaments associated with that particular muscle can withstand much more stress than when they are exercised statically.

This is only common sense, because many strongman events require a huge amount of explosive power and are highly stressful to numerous parts of the body. Of course, the most dynamic of all lifts are the two Olympic movements: full snatch and full clean and jerk. While some strongman athletes are able to do these two lifts without any difficulty, not all can. Many of the male contestants are exceptionally large, and quite often they do not possess the flexibility needed to rack a heavy clean. In fact, some cannot rack a power clean. So having to take the time to gain the needed flexibility and learn the high-skill

movements is not something they care to do.

Fortunately, there are several other dynamic exercises that can be done, even with poor shoulder-girdle and hip flexibility, and when these movements are done aggressively, the results will be significant. I'm talking about power snatches, which take very little flexibility in the shoulders and elbows, snatch- and clean-grip high pulls, and shrugs done explosively. Push presses and jerks help build explosive power in the upper body, and they, too, require little in the way of shoulder flexibility.

When designing a program for strongman competitions, keep in mind strength must always be balanced between the three major muscle groups in the body: shoulder girdle, back and hips/legs. This balance should be established at the very beginning and maintained as overall strength improves. The idea that an athlete is only as strong as his weakest body part is as true for a strongman as it is for a wrestler or swimmer.



Many strongman lifts, such as moving kegs and Atlas stones, involve violent hip extension, which is why Bill Starr recommends using dynamic movements in training.



To train both strength and power, Starr uses a small number of main exercises in his introductory strongman program: power cleans and power snatches, jerks, and back squats.

Simple Steps to Building Strength

As most readers know, I am a staunch believer in simplicity. With this in mind, it should come as no surprise that I think any athlete who is planning on competing in a strongman event should embark on the quest by doing just three basic exercises per session: one for the upper body or shoulder girdle, one for the back and another for the hips/legs.

Once a solid strength foundation has been established, other exercises can be inserted into the routine, but at the beginning, less is better than more. This is because recovery is a key element at every level of strength training. Move too fast and come face to face with the reality of overtraining, which can set an athlete back weeks or even months. Recovery is achieved by moving ahead slowly—baby steps—and making certain an adequate amount of rest is obtained and all nutritional bases are covered every single day.

The three exercises that I give all aspiring strongmen are power cleans or power snatches, jerks and back squats. Two of these are very dynamic movements, and it goes

without saying that every strength program absolutely must include the king of lifts: the back squat.

However, if an athlete already knows how to do full snatches and full clean and jerks, I will have him continue to do those lifts, alternating them at every workout, along with back squats. These will be done three times a week. That's enough when starting out on this program. There will be time later on to add in more work. If the athlete can handle both power cleans and power snatches and doesn't want to learn the two Olympic lifts, then he can alternate these two explosive exercises at every workout.

While using ideal form on all of these lifts is certainly preferable, it doesn't have to be nearly as precise for someone training for strongman tests as it is for the athlete who plans on entering an Olympic contest. For example, he may not be able to lock out his snatches on the full or power versions. That's OK. He's still working the target muscles. Same for the full and power cleans. Adequate technique is all right, although it's always a good idea to try and improve the form on these lifts for the simple reason that when form is perfect, more weight can be used, and that converts to getting stronger faster.



Junk to some, these implements give strongmen the chance to test their might.

The farmers walk—a classic strongman movement.

Because almost all the competitors in strongman contests are very large men, many have difficulty racking the bar across their frontal deltoids when they try to perform a clean or power clean. If flexibility cannot be obtained and there is undue stress being placed on the shoulders, elbows and wrists, stop doing those exercises and switch to power snatches. What the athletes are really trying to learn on both power movements is the correct line of pull. When that is accomplished, they can do high pulls better, and high pulls are the lift that will help them gain a great deal of strength in their backs. And it's functional strength because high pulls are a dynamic movement. Plus, high pulls overload the muscles and attachments, and in order to gain strength in any muscle group, they must be overloaded.

Recovery is a key element at every level of strength training. Move too fast and come face to face with the reality of overtraining.

Do both snatch- and clean-grip high pulls. These can be alternated every other week, but because the two variations of the lift hit the muscles of the back in a slightly different manner, doing them both adds to the strength gains throughout the back. This is still a good idea even if the athlete only does power snatches. High pulls should be done right after the power cleans or power snatches. Some of the York lifters liked to do clean-grip high pulls after power snatches and snatch-grip high pulls right behind power cleans. Try both ways and decide which works your back the best. This can be determined by how sore your back muscles are the day after you attack your back with one of the power movements and high pulls.

One thing that every lifter has to understand about high pulls: they are very difficult to do perfectly. It takes a lot of reps before the movement is done smoothly without any pausing through the middle. The lift is really no more than a deadlift followed by a shrug, but learning to pull the bar through that transition phase takes time and practice, practice, practice.

Mike Warkentin/CrossFit Journal

Only do high pulls once a week. Work them hard and push the numbers up. Your goal is to handle at least 75 lb. more than you use for a power clean or 125 lb. more than you can power snatch. Do 3 to 5 sets of 3 reps. Keep the reps lower so you can concentrate on using correct form. If the lift starts resembling a tough deadlift and partial shrug, you're not going to get much out of it. As always, form is more important than numbers.

Shrugs are the other dynamic exercise for the back. They have to be done with heavy weights in order to create the desired effect. Again, you can use both a clean and snatch grip. Straps are necessary, as they are with high pulls. The key to attacking your traps is to pull the bar just as high as you can on every rep from the first to last set. This may mean that the first couple of warm-up sets soar above your head. Great! That's what you want because that sets the line for the following sets.

The goal I set for my athletes is to ultimately use six 45s on each end of the bar for their final set—585 for five reps. While the bar may not move very far, that form of overloading will really stimulate those traps, and strong traps are the keystones of the shoulder girdle. You can never make your traps too strong.



Few strongman movements don't involve the whole body, so a training program needs to hit all the major muscles.

Do dynamic shrugs once a week. Fridays are best because that will give you two full days to recover. And if you fully apply yourself, your traps will definitely be sore for the weekend. If they aren't, you're not using enough weight or pulling the bar high enough. Five sets of 5 works best.

The next primary exercise for the back is not a dynamic one. In fact, good mornings must be done in a deliberate fashion because a great deal of stress is being placed on the lower back. There are three variations of good mornings: rounded back, flat back and sitting on a bench. I don't recommend the bench good mornings for strongmen because it's the easiest form of the lift. Whether an athlete chooses to do good mornings with a flat or rounded back is determined by how each lift feels when he handles heavy weights. Most big men can get away with doing the lift with a rounded back, but some experience a great deal of discomfort. In that case, go to the flat-back version. Both are productive when worked hard and heavy, so use the form that feels the most comfortable. Not that either one of them is actually "comfortable," but you get my meaning.

I like to alter the set and rep count every other week on good mornings. One week, do 4 sets of 10. Next week, do 5 sets of 8. The change may seem insignificant, yet my athletes tell me they can feel the difference. Always do 5 or 10 lb. more on the 8s than you do on the 10s. For most of my athletes, I set a limit on how much weight is used on good mornings. This is 225 lb. x 10. I do this because I have observed that when the athletes handle more than 225, they alter the movement considerably because they have to balance the bar on their backs to keep it from falling off.

But in the case of powerlifters and strongmen, the sky is the limit. I've had several who used 405 for 8 and it helped them move some big numbers.

The final exercise for the back is the deadlift. While the heavy high pulls, shrugs and good mornings are actually enough to improve back strength to a high degree, deadlifts should be included in any strongman's program simply because he is going to be tested on that lift in competitions. But deadlifts do not have to be done every week. Once a month is enough, and the reps should be 3 to 5. Singles are not necessary. That effort can be saved for competitions. Sets of 5 and 3 will inform you where you stand on that lift, and you can then project what you're capable of for a max single. It's much easier to recover from a workout of 5s and 3s than it is from a limit-single session.



Lifting the Pig is somewhat similar to flipping Fingal's fingers, and both movements show why lunges are useful in strongman training.

Back squats are the only lift the strongman needs to do to gain leg strength. Do them three times a week, using the heavy, light and medium concept. However, should the athlete want a bit of variety in his leg program, I substitute lunges for squats on the light day. I especially like lunges because they force both legs to work equally hard. This is not always the case for squats. Lifters often get in the habit of putting more weight on their stronger leg when the going gets tough, but this is not possible with lunges. Each leg must carry its own weight, and this makes for more balanced strength.

But like every exercise in this program, lunges must be attacked. Staying in the comfortable range just doesn't feed the bulldog. I also encourage powerlifters and strongmen to alter the sets and reps in each lunge session and run the numbers way, way up. Four sets of 10, followed by 5 sets of 6, then 6 sets of 3 will help any athlete climb right up the strength ladder. I've had athletes handle 315 for 3 going very deep.

Front squats are also great for building leg strength, but not very many strongmen can rack the bar across their frontal deltoids properly enough to allow them to use a lot of weight, so I rarely include that lift in their programs. It's really not necessary if they work the back squat hard enough.

For all my collegiate athletes, I have them fix the bar high up on their backs when they squat. This forces the glutes, hamstrings, adductors and abductors to get in the act more. But again, I make exceptions for strongmen and allow them to set the bar lower on their backs, just as powerlifters do. That method lets them squat more weight and thus get stronger. The reason why I have all other athletes squat with their torsos upright is because they all do a great deal of leaping when they participate in their chosen sports. There is no leaping in strongman events—at least none that I know of—so powerlifting-type squats are more beneficial to them.

You may be thinking there isn't a dynamic exercise for the legs in this program. Oh, but there is. It comes as part of a primary exercise for the shoulder girdle: the jerk. In push jerks, in which the athlete doesn't move his feet, and split jerks, in which he does, the legs must be contracted in an explosive manner in order to succeed with the lift.

When you drive the bar off your shoulders to jerk it, you must fully extend before you dip under it or split under it. This, like any other high-skill lift, takes time to learn. Again, practice is the ticket. On push jerks, the line has to be more precise than when you split. If the drive is shot out front, you're not going to be able to save it, so time must be spent making the start the same on every rep and learning when to dip under the still-moving weight. On the split, time must be spent practicing where the feet must land. I have my athletes make marks with chalk where they want their feet to end up, and that helps them become consistent with their foot placement.

Everyone loves to talk about core exercises. Nothing works better than holding a bar overhead and pushing up against it.

Learn how to fix the bar at the finish so it's directly over the back of your head if you extend a line vertically. As you stand up after a split or push jerk, send energy up into the bar and hold it there for a second or two. Holding a weight overhead for a few extra seconds on every rep builds strength from your neck right down to your feet. Everyone loves to talk about core exercises. Nothing works better than holding a bar overhead and pushing up against it.

Threes work best for jerks because the bar will invariably slip off the frontal deltoids just a tad on every rep, and you don't want it to get too far from the ideal starting position. If it starts to slip a lot, just do doubles and add in extra sets to increase your workload.

The other shoulder-girdle exercises strongmen should do are military-style presses, push presses and inclines. I don't include bench presses unless the athlete feels he must do them. Overhead work and inclines provide more strength in the direction most of the events force the athlete to move heavy objects: vertically.

Military presses work the groups in the shoulders and back very thoroughly, and they can be followed up with push presses to overload those muscles and attachments. Do 5 sets of 5 military presses, then move to triples for the push presses. They are very similar to push jerks, except you only drive the bar almost to full lockout, then proceed to press the final 3 or 4 inches. The combination of these two exercises will really give your upper body a strenuous workout.

Should you feel the need to include flat benches in your program, do them as an auxiliary exercise rather than a primary one. Five sets of 8, for example. The inclines, on the other hand, need to be worked diligently. The strength they generate converts very directly to any overhead movement, just like the overhead presses and push presses. Vary the sets and reps on inclines at every session you do them. Triples one workout, 5s the next and doubles or singles the third time around. Then repeat.

Addressing Specific Weaknesses

There are a few ancillary exercises that are useful to those preparing for a strongman contest, although many find these are not necessary because they're doing so many primary movements. The main reason to include them is to strengthen some weaker area.

Standing or seated dumbbell presses are great for improving strength in the deltoids. Straight-arm pullovers and triceps pushdowns on the lat machine are helpful if the triceps are lagging. There's really no reason to do any additional work for the biceps. All the heavy pulling exercises take care of that group much better than any form of curling. When heavy weights are moved, the two prime movers of the arm—brachialis and brachioradialis—are overloaded and get extremely strong. So curls do little to enhance biceps strength any further, although they will aid in shaping that group. However, most strongmen have arms the size of hams, so it is sort of a waste of time. Better to spend the time on some body part that needs it—such as the calves.

It may not seem that the calves are all that important to a strongman, yet they are—very much so. Carrying massive weights in the farmers walk, pulling a boat, elevating a stone upward to deposit it in a barrel and driving the bar upward to start a push press all require a great deal of strength in the lower legs.

Then time must be spent improving endurance and flexibility and practicing the various skills needed in the events.



As evident here, an athlete's calves are an important part of strongman movements.

In the next installment, I'll cover all those aspects of training and provide some ideas about how to assemble a program to include all the exercises I have mentioned in this article. In the meantime, there is something you can do to help your cause right away: if the presses are going to be done with a thicker-than-standard Olympic bar, find one that size and practice with it. If you're going to be pulling a thick rope on some event, work with one of sufficient size and roughness so your hands will get used to it. Otherwise, you might find yourself having to drop out of the competition because of blisters or severe abrasions.

In the same vein of thought, find out how much weight is being used in the farmers walk. If it's 120 lb., practice with 130- or 140-lb. dumbbells. If you're scheduled to lift the Atlas stone, find one larger and heavier and wrestle with that. Find out the dimensions and weight of the caber or Fingal's finger, and practice with something a bit heavier and larger. A dead tree limb would work.

Overloading the specific events isn't a new idea. In Athens, Greece, at the first modern Olympics in 1896, Robert Garrett, the captain of the American track team, proved that practicing with a discus heavier than the one used in competition paid nice dividends. He didn't intentionally make his discus heavier. He thought his homemade

model was exactly the same shape, size and weight of a regulation discus. But, in fact, it was considerably heavier.

As a result, he outdistanced the odds-on favorite from Greece by a whopping 7 inches.





About the Author

Bill Starr coached at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, the 1970 Olympic Weightlifting World Championship in Columbus, Ohio, and the 1975 World Powerlifting

Championships in Birmingham, England. He was selected as head coach of the 1969 team that competed in the Tournament of Americas in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, where the United States won the team title, making him the first active lifter to be head coach of an international Olympic weightlifting team. Starr is the author of the books The Strongest Shall Survive: Strength Training for Football and Defying Gravity, which can be found at The Aasgaard Company Bookstore.



CrossFitJOURNAL

From Mud to Mortar

By Dallin Frampton

Over three years, CrossFit Inc.

and affiliates around

the world have literally

changed the landscape in a

handful of villages in Kenya.





CrossFit Inc. has been involved with changing lives along the eastern seaboard of Kenya for the past two-and-a-half years.

Taking the early initiative, CrossFit stepped up in 2011 and sponsored the construction of a school building in the village of Dzendereni after learning about US\$10,000 builds two rooms large enough to hold an entire elementary-school class.

After construction and dedication of the new building, CrossFit saw the impact the school made in the small community and united affiliates to sponsor similar projects through the Hope for Kenya fundraiser, which raised more than \$300,000 in February 2013.

To date, CrossFit and its affiliates have built a total of eight two-room school buildings, four water cisterns, 400-plus desks and a handful of latrines. Two more cisterns and another two-room school are well on their way and will be completed by the time the CrossFit Games crowns champions in July.

With each school sponsored by a CrossFit affiliate, we stamp the name of the gym across the side of the building to solidify the bond between village and box. The schools and cisterns change the lives of rural Kenyans dramatically and stand as a testament to the CrossFit tradition of helping others in need.

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Dzendereni

When CrossFit first arrived in the village of Dzendereni, the elementary school students were meeting at was built with nothing more than a combination of sticks and mud. Thousands of holes in the roof and walls made learning nearly impossible at times. During the rainy season, large streams of water would literally cut through the class-room and soak anything in their path.



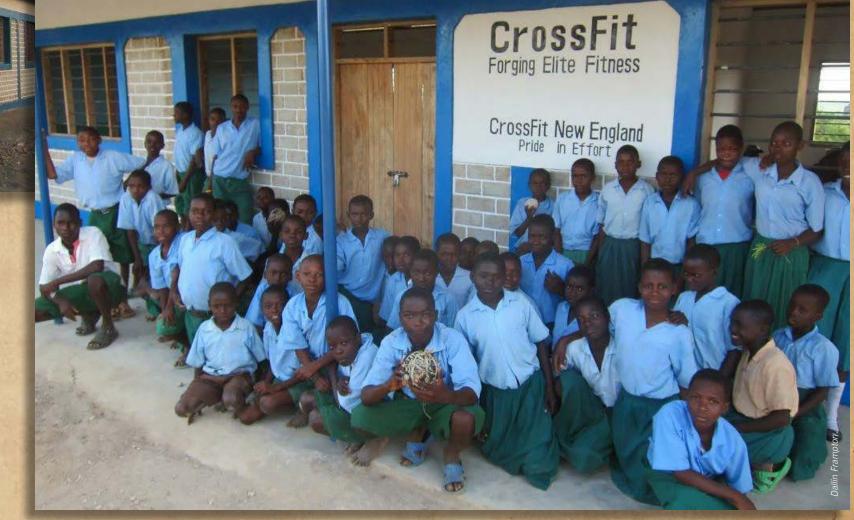






The students and teachers are eager, and a few rundown classrooms were built through domestic fundraisers.

But the village was still in desperate need of another two rooms. Members of CrossFit New England stepped up and provided an amazing new school building in Guro.



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Mabesheni

In Chiduruma, the local dialect of the

Duruma people, Mabesheni means "place
of fish." This village is the home to many
different people and native animals, with
fish being the last thing you would find.

Nestled about 10 miles from CrossFit's
home base in Kenya, Mabesheni is an
example of the hardship and neglect
Kenyan people experience in nearly
every aspect of their lives.



It took the entire community the better part of a year to raise the required 10 percent of the building costs, but once the funds were raised, the villagers were anxious for construction to begin.

Rogue Fitness donated the funds required to build this school, which now houses the seventh- and eighth-grade students who are studying for high school.

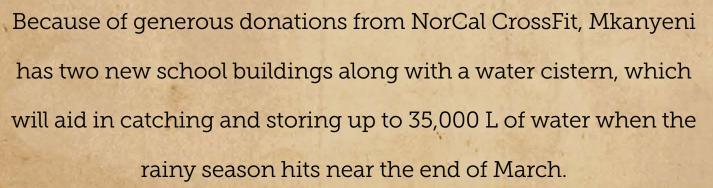


Mkanyeni

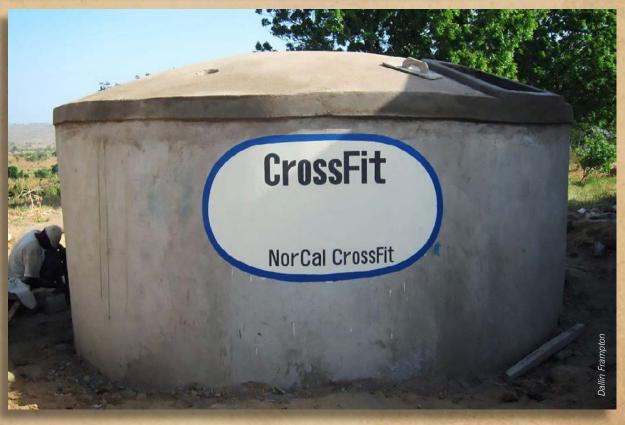
The village of Mkanyeni, tucked behind two different villages and nearly forgotten, was another candidate for a CrossFit school building. A few school structures were built in the village, but they simply weren't enough to house all the students. Because of the village's meager resources, locally organized construction projects resulted in a few mud-walled school buildings with half-finished roofs that left the children at the mercy of the elements.











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Dzendereni Phase 2

The constant commitment of the people of Dzendereni to the Hope for Kenya initiative resulted in a total of six elementary classrooms. Four were sponsored and built by CrossFit Inc. in 2011 and 2012, and CrossFit Morristown funded construction of two more.

Construction ended in May 2013.



Dzendereni Primary School Principal Seif Mwanchanyika (in red) and his vice principal pose where the CrossFit Morristown school was to be built. It was nearly completed three weeks from when ground was broken.





Because of the new facilities and newfound motivation, four eighth-grade students scored high enough on their exams to be accepted to a provincial high school, with one student, Loice Mwaka, going on to a national high school.

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Majengo

Majengo is one of the smallest villages we've worked with. The elementary school houses students in kindergarten to Grade 4, and children prep for grades five to eight at an elementary school in another location. Even with the small student body, the lack of classrooms was an issue. The kindergarten shared a mud structure with a thatched roof with the local church. The students had neither desks nor a chalkboard, and there were barely enough books to go around.



Dzivani

Dzivani is one of the most beautiful villages in the entire CrossFit service area. Built on a plateau looking over the Indian Ocean, this amazing community rallied together to build two schoolrooms in its dilapidated school compound. Nearly nine years ago, the government built the community a block of four classrooms, but when CrossFit arrived, the buildings were only barely standing. The children of Dzivani Primary School were in desperate need of a proper school building, and a group of affiliates along the Gold Coast of Australia jumped behind the village.







About the Author

Dallin Frampton is a 23-year-old resident of Salt Lake City, Utah, who works for CrossFit Inc. as the Project Manager of its philanthropic division. He is also the owner of CrossFit SpearHead located in Holladay, Utah.

CrossFitJournal STYLE

by HILARY ACHAUER photos by DAVE RE

MARCH 2014

FOR THE

STYLISTS HELP FEMALE CROSSFIT ATHLETES CONQUER THEIR FEAR OF DENIM AND FIND THE PERFECT PAIR OF JEANS.

ring up the subject of jeans around a group of CrossFit athletes—male and female—and you will get an earful.

"They are tight in the thighs and butt but loose in the waist."

"I can't find anything that looks good, so I just wear workout clothes."

"I have no idea what size I am."

Spandex is great, but sometimes a lady wants to rock a pair of jeans. The squatting in CrossFit is known for developing a well-shaped rear—it seems a shame to subject that booty to a pair of ill-fitting jeans.

As with any problem, the best thing to do is go to the experts for advice. In the quest for quality denim that fits the CrossFit body, the CrossFit Journal gathered three powerhouse female CrossFit athletes: six-time Games athlete

Becca Voigt, rising star and former USC basketball player Jamie Hagiya, and two-time SoCal Regional competitor Pam Eamranond.

The women gathered at The Blues Jean Bar in Santa Monica, Calif. The store, which has 11 locations throughout the United States, specializes in fitting denim. Instead of wandering confused through the racks, you belly up to the bar and tell the "jeanstenders" what style you like—skinny, straight, boot cut—then the type of wash you like and the size you typically wear.

The stylists look at the wall of denim behind them and pick some options. They don't stop until they find a pair of jeans perfect for you.

But were they up for the challenge of fitting the CrossFit body?

A GUIDE TO **DENIM TERMINOLOGY**

BOOT CUT: When the leg opening is wider than the knee in order to accommodate a boot. The size of the leg opening in boot-cut jeans varies, usually from 17 to 20 inches.

STRAIGHT LEG: In straight-leg jeans the leg opening is the same width as the knee.

SKINNY JEANS: In this style, the jeans taper in from the knee, narrowing at the ankle. This style is ideal for tucking into boots.

RISE: The rise is where the jeans sit on your waist and hips. Low-rise jeans usually sit at or below the hips, and high-rise jeans sit close to the belly button.



WASH: This refers to the shade of denim. The more the manufacturer "washes" the denim, the lighter it gets. Washing can also introduce distressed features, such as whiskering, or faded lines formed by creases.

BECCA VOIGTVS. "MOM BUTT"

First up to the bar was Voigt. She told her stylist, Julia Choi, that her favorite brands are Guess and Silver, but she has a terrible time finding jeans that fit.

"Last time I went shopping for jeans, I tried on 50 pairs. I couldn't find anything," Voigt said. "The butt never fits right. I can never get pants on all the way."

Voigt is 5 foot 9 and said she doesn't have a lot of curves. For her, the ideal pair of jeans would fit in both the thighs and waist and give her some curves. Voigt doesn't like high-waisted jeans, and she said she'd prefer a boot cut as opposed to straight-leg or skinny jeans.

DL1961, NICKY, MID-RISE CIGARETTE CUT, APPROX. \$177

The first pair Voigt tried on illustrated the classic problem of fitting the athletic figure. The jeans seemed to fit fine in her thighs, hips and rear but were huge in the waist. Choi pointed out that the pants were baggy in the knees—another sign of a poor fit.

Thinking perhaps Voigt just hadn't found her size, Choi brought out progressively smaller sizes. Still, the waist was too big. Eventually, Voigt went down five sizes, and although the jeans were tighter in the leg, they still gaped at the waist. Not a good look.



DOES ANYONE MAKE JEANS THAT FIT THE CROSSFIT BODY?

JAMES JEANS, HUNTER HIGH CLASS, APPROX. \$194

The stylist's next approach was to bring out jeans with a higher waist, much to Voigt's dismay. She is not a fan of high-rise jeans.

"They give me 'mom butt,'" she said.

Not only did Voigt dislike the waist, but the jeans also did not fit in her crotch.

"There's too much space there. I feel like Justin Bieber!" Voigt said. Away with those jeans.

Voigt went back to the dressing room. Choi brought out pair after pair of jeans, and none of them were even close. The dressing room was filling up with discards, begging the question: Does anyone make jeans that fit the CrossFit body?

Sensing a challenge, store manager Sarah Crane joined the search. Crane started pulling jeans from behind the counter and handing them over. Each time, Voigt would go into the dressing room full of hope and come out wearing another pair of ill-fitting jeans, a look of despair in her eyes.



PAM **EAMRANOND:** IN SEARCH OF **SKINNY JEANS**

Pam Eamranond has a very different body type than Voigt. Eamranond is 5 foot 2, and like most CrossFit athletes, she has a small waist and a muscular butt and thighs. Unlike Voigt, who prefers a boot-cut jean, Eamranond gravitates toward skinny jeans that fit tight at the ankle.

HENRY & BELLE, SUPER SKINNY ANKLE, APPROX. \$148

Initially, Eamranond had the same trouble as Voigt. Jeans that fit in the thigh were too big in the waist.







HUDSON, KRISTA SUPER SKINNY, APPROX. \$189

Then she found a pair that fit her waist.

"I don't feel like my thighs will explode," she said. "They have a good crotch height."

Looking at the jeans, Crane said the pocket placement was ideal (see sidebar), and there was no puckering in the back of the thighs, which can indicate that the jeans are too tight. However, Eamranond did not fall in love with the jeans, so she went back to the dressing room. Like Voigt, Eamranond knew exactly when she found the perfect pair.

"I have to wiggle into these, but they aren't sausage-y," she said. "I'm not spilling out, and I like where the waist is."

Like the DL1961 jeans Voigt found, the Hudson jeans favored by Eamranond are made with a 360-degree stretch fabric, which allows the jeans to move with the wearer, even at the bottom of a pistol.

Crane said jeans with stretch should never be put in the dryer—the heat will destroy the stretch fabric. Wash them in cold water and hang to dry and the jeans will retain their fit and stretch much longer.

FIT TIPS FROM SARAH CRANE

Always try on jeans with shoes, because your eye focuses on the feet. Shoes complete the outfit. Going barefoot is like doing your hair with no makeup.



Pay attention to pocket placement on the back of the jeans. You always want the pockets to sit on the butt (as opposed to down low) with no more than a hand width in between the two pockets.

How do you know if the jeans fit your waist? Don't judge by the back of your waist. Look at your hip. If you can fit two fingers between your hipbone and the waistband of the jeans, it's a good fit. If you love the jeans

> and they fit at the hip but there's a gap at the waist, a tailor can pinch the back so they

You want jeans that sit above the hip bone. If the jeans are too low, you will get a muffin top no matter how skinny you are.

<u>JAMIE</u> HAGIYA: **AVOIDING** THE FLAT

Jamie Hagiya, who is 5 foot 3, has the same issue as Voigt and Eamranond: most of the jeans she tries on fit in the quads and hamstrings but are too big in the waist. Like Eamranond, Hagiya likes the straight-leg, skinny look.

JOE'S SKINNY ANKLE, APPROX. \$158

The fitting process was easier for Hagiya, because Choi and Crane were quickly learning what type of jeans fit the CrossFit body. It wasn't long before Hagiya found a pair of jeans that seemed to fit well at first glance. It was only after Choi looked closely at the jeans that she discovered a terrible problem.

These jeans fit Hagiya in the waist and thighs, but the fabric did not have much stretch and managed the impossible: it made a CrossFit woman's butt look flat.

"There's no stretch. It traps your butt," Choi

"I can feel them making my butt flat," Hagiya confirmed.

On closer inspection, Hagiya found that the crotch of the jeans was too loose, and they were baggy at the knees, indicating a poor fit.

(THE FABRIC) MANAGED THE IMPOSSIBLE: IT MADE A CROSSFIT WOMAN'S BUTT LOOK FLAT.





"You want to have lines there," Crane said. "It will smooth out after you wear them for a week

or so."

FINDING YOUR PERFECT JEANS

It's a fine balance finding jeans that fit. They should be tight enough to show off your hardearned muscles but not so tight that they cut off circulation to your feet. The only way to find a pair that fits is to get in the dressing room.

Don't be discouraged if you have to try on 20 to 30 pairs before you find the perfect jeans. If you don't have access to a stylist, see the sidebar (Page 7) with some fitting tips from the Blues Jean Bar experts. Keep them in mind when shopping on your own.

Finally, a word about price: The jeans featured in this article range from about \$150 to \$190. That's a hefty chunk of change to spend on a single item of clothing, but there is nothing more versatile than a good pair of jeans. Premium denim lasts longer and holds its shape better than cheaper jeans. It's certainly possible to find a good-fitting pair of jeans for \$50, but if you've struggled to find jeans that fit, you might want to make an investment in quality denim.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Plank Ball

This simple activity is based on the classic game of hot potato and works well as a warm-up for young athletes.

By Mikki Lee Martin CrossFit Kids

March 2014



Aikki Lee Martin

Equipment

- Large inflatable physio ball (ideally 30 inches in 2. diameter). This will act as the hot potato.
- Music source

Game Play

- 1. The athletes must hold a plank position in a circle about 10 to 12 feet in diameter, depending on the class size.
- 2. While the music is on, the players must maintain the plank position and pass the hot potato with a single hand or a head butt.
- 3. When the music stops, the player who touched the potato last must go to the center of the circle and perform a designated exercise for 3 to 5 reps.
- 4. Once the exercise is complete, play resumes.



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Ninjas by Nature

American Ninja Warrior brings sudden fame to previously unknown parkour athletes and freerunners who are only in it for the love of the sport.

By Chris Cooper March 2014



The challenge is offered 10,000 times every day: "Watch me. I can do it. Can you?"

The universal language of children is spoken the world over. Every kid has performed a "tightrope walk" on a curb at the grocery store, and many adults can recall youthful days of climbing a chain-link fence, swinging a leg over, dropping to the ground.

What if that was your job?

1 of 8

The television show American Ninja Warrior has bridged the gap between simple street tricks and sport. It has promised—and delivered—a measured degree of mainstream fame for popular YouTube antiheroes such as David "Flip" Rodriguez and Drew Drechsler. Hopeful contestants now train year round, building their own obstacles in garages and backyards, climbing gyms, and CrossFit boxes. Kids recognize them on the street and buy clothing on their websites.

And it could all go away tomorrow if the show becomes unpopular.

"The No. 1 rule of being a ninja: make it look cool," Brandon Mears told a starry-eyed young pupil at a workshop in Columbus, Ohio.

If it doesn't look cool, no one will watch.

Made famous by a sport invented for television, the top American competitors risk their asses without promise of a paycheck. None are paid to be on the show. There's no multi-season contract, no sponsorship, no quarter given or asked. Their only link to fame is through television; without the show, there is no sport.

What becomes of a ninja without a cause?

Sasuke and Its Spinoff

American Ninja Warrior is the U.S. spinoff of long-running Japanese game show Sasuke, in which contestants race along a four-stage obstacle course called Mt. Midoriyama. Each stage becomes progressively harder; the course is so difficult the winner is the athlete who survives the most challenges, not the fastest to finish.

An American has never stood at the top of Mt. Midoriyama. Since 1997, only three competitors have completed the course. One, Yuuji Urushihara, has completed it twice. "Total victories," as they are called, generally result in modifications to the course to make it more challenging. According to Sasukecentral.net, prize money used to be about US\$20,000 for victory but was increased in 2007 and is now around \$40,000.



Forced to adapt, ninjas recreate elements of Mt. Midoriyama wherever they can, and online blueprints make the process easier.

In 2007, Americans Colin Bell and Brett Sims made their *Sasuke* debut after qualifying on the G4 Network's *Attack* of the Show competition. They had submitted YouTube videos of their freerunning (parkour) tricks, and G4's audience selected them through an online vote. When the competition proved popular, G4 replayed highlights of the Americans' performances in Japan on an hour-long special called *Ninjafest*.

By 2009, G4 had expanded its broadcast. The renamed *American Ninja Warrior* put 300 eager ninjas-to-be through an obstacle course that resembled *Sasuke's* Stage 1; the 10 fastest qualified for Mt. Midoriyama in Japan. None of the Americans finished Stage 3.

Three years later, as interest and the volume of competitor applications soared, G4 (which had been acquired by NBC) began to air regional qualifiers for its main event: a competition featuring a full-scale copy of Mt. Midoriyama in Las Vegas, Nev. The fastest to finish the course would win cash and the title American Ninja Warrior. Prize money shot up



Many Ninja Warrior obstacles demand a combination of gymnastics ability and climbing skills. Upper-body strength is key, as is aqility.

to \$500,000 in 2012, and though the top 100 competitors from its regional qualifiers get to attempt the final course, none have yet finished to claim the prize. Once again, Stage 3 eliminated every competitor who reached it.

For *Ninja Warrior* contestants, the challenge of climbing to the top of their sport far exceeds the reward.

The challenge of climbing to the top of their sport far exceeds the reward. No one has finished the Mt. Midoriyama course in Vegas, which means the prize remains unclaimed. If two contestants finish in 2014, the fastest will win half a million dollars; second place won't win anything.

Season 6 will air starting May 26, 2014.

A Family That Bleeds Together

A ninja training workshop feels a lot like a meeting of CrossFit athletes circa 2005: homemade T-shirts, top athletes sleeping overnight in the gym, a private language that's unfamiliar to outsiders. They collaborate to make their challenges harder, share solutions, experiment with new tricks and tape each other's wounds.

Michelle Warnky, a *Ninja Warrior* competitor in 2012, hosted a workshop in Columbus, Ohio, on Feb. 17, 2014. Top competitors from across the country assembled at Vertical Adventures, the rock-climbing gym where Warnky is a personal trainer. Warnky has a deal with the owners of Vertical Adventures to build and store various ninja obstacles. Upon arrival, the visiting ninjas began to drag a jigsaw puzzle of two-by-fours, steel bars and bolts from a storage bin into the gym. By midnight, they had set up a "warped wall," a "salmon ladder" and several other obstacles between the climbing walls. Then they played before crashing for the night.

Video: Salmon Ladder Tutorial With Drew Drechsel, by Mike Koslap

Obstacles vary widely between gyms and backyards. Many are rough copies of the apparatus on Mt. Midoriyama, built close to scale. Sometimes they're built higher or wider. Warnky's warped wall—one side of a halfpipe, on which athletes sprint upward before leaping to grab the lip at the top—is 15 feet tall; she speaks with reverence of a friend's 17-foot wall. Other obstacles look as if they came from sketches in Leonardo Da Vinci's notebook: large wheels made of wood, boards dangling from ropes, wedge-shaped boxes tied together at the base. None makes obvious sense on its own, but when a ninja kid sets his grip and swings from one obstacle to the other, the thought behind the construction is obvious.

Ninja Warrior enthusiasts find blueprints and samples online, grab a drill, and knock together their rigs. Like many early CrossFit affiliates, they scour the Internet for discussion on the ideal pipe diameter for pull-ups. When someone, like Warnky, has amassed a collection of homemade toys, athletes are drawn from afar.

Despite the pressure to be first to finish the Mt. Midoriyama course, competitors are only too happy to help others overcome obstacles.

In 2011, the four ninjas to reach Stage 4 in Japan all failed at the "ultimate cliffhanger" event: a fingertip shuffle along a narrow board, then a fingertip leap to a higher board, and another leap of faith down to a short, narrow board. At the Columbus workshop, several ninjas leaped onto the cliffhanger mockup and progressed through with ease—backward and forward. Veterans have shared their strategies with rookies, and the community has become better at the obstacle as a result.

"Experience is a huge aspect of *Ninja Warrior*. You could be one of the fittest athletes, but if you don't know the obstacle well, you'll fall off," Warnky said.

Ninjas who bow out earlier in the course cheer loudly for those who continue, knowing the lessons learned will be passed down to them. It's trickle-down experience, and it's



The salmon ladder is completed by using a sort of kipping pull-up to elevate the athlete and allow him or her to quickly move the bar up a rung.

the only help they'll get: a hand up from the guy who's climbed a little higher.

Most *Ninja Warrior* enthusiasts don't make a dime from their sport. They deliver pizzas, wash cars or do any other job that will allow the flexibility to train. A very few work at small gyms as coaches.

To cover their travel to Ohio, ninjas taught a kids class in the morning and an adult class in the afternoon, and they staged a "competition" on the final evening. They trained as they coached, demonstrating methods for overcoming popular obstacles. Attendees were treated to tiny coach-to-athlete ratios. Kids and parents had full access to the athletes at the top of their favorite sport, and the *Ninja Warrior* competitors didn't have a moment's rest. Between sessions, many quickly hopped onto an obstacle to practice; over the course of the 12-hour day, they performed dozens of short challenges each, with most lasting 30 seconds or less. It looked like play, but make no mistake: it was training, and it took its toll.

One of the athletes at Warnky's event was Paul Kasemir, who failed on the cliffhanger obstacle in *American Ninja Warrior 3* (2011). Kasemir describes the "community feel" of



An athlete practices on a contraption designed to replicate the challenges of the "rolling escargot" obstacle on Mt. Midoriyama.

Ninja Warrior as the best part of the sport. He trains at Apex Movement in Longmont, Colo. When he talks about his gym, he could easily be speaking of a CrossFit box:

"The community is really strong. A lot of the people who take the classes with me, they feel like a family. They're always at the gym, always having fun together, several even live together," he said.

Ninjas who bow out earlier in the course cheer loudly for those who continue, knowing the lessons learned will be passed down to them.

"I have fun doing it, and that's why I'm really good at it. I can always get better at it. There's no upper limit. You can always get closer to the impossible," he said.

He also does Argentine tango dancing once or twice every week.

Outside of *Ninja Warrior* competition, Kasemir only sees other top-level competitors once or twice per year. He hopes for more special events like the 2013 USA vs. Japan team challenge in which he competed last summer.

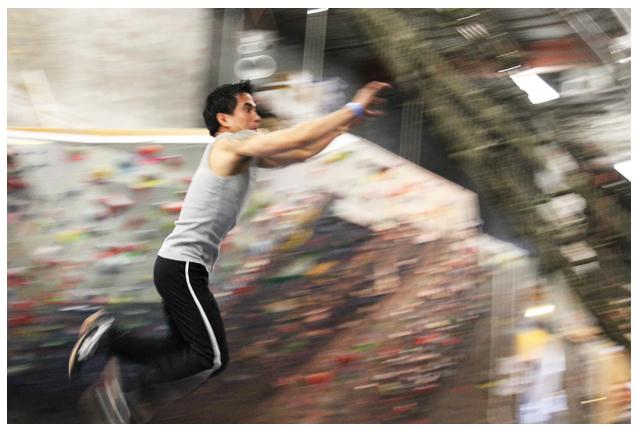
Possibly the most recognizable ninja is oddly the man with the obscured face: David "Flip" Rodriguez, who wears a black-and-white mask when he competes. Kids dress up as Flip for Halloween, and their parents write him letters, thanking him for the inspiration. While in Ohio, Rodriguez made a first-time revelation about his troubled past and said he had been physically abused by his father.

Video: The Man Behind the Mask, by Mike Koslap

He credits the abuse with making him stronger.

"If I had to do my whole life again, I wouldn't change it. I'd go through it all again to become who I am now," he said in February.

Kasemir and Rodriguez both hope to finish Stage 3 and Stage 4 in 2014.



Some obstacles, such as the "jump hang" from trampoline to cargo net, require a literal leap of faith.

An Easy Transition

Rex Alba came to *Ninja Warrior* after he found CrossFit. He lost 20 lb. training at Ohio Krav Maga and Fitness (a CrossFit affiliate), and he believes his workouts help with his *Ninja Warrior* training, and vice versa.

"I've never been athletic," he said. "They're very complementary."

Alba continues to use CrossFit to train and hopes to qualify for a *Ninja Warrior* event this year or next.

Popular CrossFit Games athletes are also attempting to make the show. Kenneth Leverich, who finished 28th at the CrossFit Games in 2013, submitted his video application on Feb. 18, 2014. Other CrossFit athletes are testing their transition potential and posting their application videos on YouTube daily.

Qualification for the Vegas championship course begins with the submission of a video. One hundred athletes are chosen for each regional event from among the applicants.

Most freerunners and *Ninja Warrior* enthusiasts train on homemade equipment in parks or backyards. Where gyms exist, they look a lot like CrossFit boxes.

Jamie Rahn is co-owner of one such gym: Pinnacle Parkour in Cherry Hill, N.J. Though he doesn't do CrossFit, he's familiar with the workouts, and his rock-climber's body would fit in at any affiliate: broad shoulders, narrow waist and powerful legs. In Columbus, his performance is brighter even than his chartreuse hair.

Pinnacle's membership structure is similar to that of many CrossFit affiliates: unlimited memberships, twice-per-week memberships and open gym. They have an intro program that serves the same function as a CrossFit on-ramp or foundations course, and they have kids programs.

So why aren't more ninjas doing CrossFit? Or, for that matter, why aren't more CrossFit gyms adding *Ninja Warrior* obstacles?

One huge reason is the specificity of training: though *Ninja Warrior* obstacles are exciting and novel, the conditioning





At the seminar in Columbus, ninjas including Jamie Rahn practiced in between instructional sessions.

potential of each is low. Climbing and hanging require localized muscular endurance that may well build a better athlete, but the risk-to-reward ratio of some things isn't ideal for safety. Storage of a 15-foot halfpipe can also be difficult.

Training science hasn't yet penetrated into the underground parkour culture, either. CrossFit Tour stops, weekend courses and competitions are full of quality food; ninjas ate everything available, including Egg McMuffins, pizza and pretzels.

Nonetheless, the parkour movement was popular in earlier days of CrossFit, and for good reason. Kinesthetic awareness, balance and agility form the base of all parkour skills, and using *Ninja Warrior* obstacles or climbing walls make training more fun. Ex-gymnasts are drawn to parkour because the ends—just get to Point B—justify any means necessary. Good form is encouraged, but controlling the body through three planes of movement requires uncommon positions. Rahn says this helps prepare the body for everyday physical stressors.

Kinesthetic awareness, balance and agility form the base of all parkour skills, and using *Ninja Warrior* obstacles or climbing walls make training more fun.

"I think body conditioning is a big part of parkour and CrossFit," he said. "One of our instructors does strongman stuff, and we do these 'meathead challenges' all the time: 10 muscle-ups, salmon ladder, roulette wheel, handstand walking, farmers walk, and do that over and over for conditioning," Rahn said. "We do a lot of quadripedal movements. It sounds like there's a lot of commonality."

Many CrossFit gyms have climbing holds. Building quad steps (see Page 8) might be an easy task for gyms that routinely build plyometric boxes, and ideas such as a sliding rope for climbing may make life easier for CrossFit coaches. Kids flocked to the obstacles at Vertical Adventures and swung with unfearing ease from ring to rope to board.



Variations on the "steps" obstacle have challenged competitors over the years. If you can build a plyo box, you can probably build a set of steps to start your own ninja career.

Video: Modified 70-Foot Rope Climb With Michelle Warnky, by Mike Koslap

Each of the ninjas in Ohio was impressed by the growth of CrossFit. Nationwide, Rahn estimates that fewer than 20 parkour gyms are successfully running programs. While the sport is exciting, there's a missing element: lack of an affiliate infrastructure is its Achilles heel. Gymnasts, freerunners and street kids with a taste for risk are drawn to the sport but lack a place to train, a centralized portal for knowledge and a coaching hierarchy.

While the CrossFit Games reward top performers, CrossFit affiliates provide a "home base" for athletes. Boxes are collaborative centers, with members cross-pollinating ideas, and CrossFit seminars teach world-class technique all over the globe on any given weekend. The CrossFit Level 1 course provides a common jumping-off point for all coaches. And communities united in the pursuit of virtuous movement attract hundreds of thousands of newcomers each year.

That crucial middle layer between the athlete and the big event is absent in for ninjas: there's the show and the crazy kids, and nothing in between. When ratings dip and ninjas receive a roundhouse kick to the curb, where will they wind up?

In the meantime, the two communities can learn from one another. Ninjas can teach CrossFit athletes how to fall, how to leap, how to rekindle joy in the simple act of movement over, around and through obstacles. CrossFit athletes can teach ninjas how to survive.



About the Author

Chris Cooper is a writer for **CrossFit Journal**. He frequently finds himself upstream without a salmon ladder.



ALL ACCESS: PART 1

IMPROVED PROSTHETIC TECHNOLOGY AND USER-DRIVEN INNOVATION ARE OPENING NEW AVENUES FOR ADAPTIVE ATHLETES WHO REFUSE TO ACCEPT LIMITATIONS.

BY CHRIS COOPER

n Dec. 22, 2013, vigilant U.S. Transportation Security Administration agents pulled Kendra Bailey out of a screening line.

Bailey's carry-on contained a length of hollow pipe, a short chain, a leather strap and various connectors. She wasn't up to trouble; Bailey was hoping to do power cleans while visiting a gym on the West Coast.

arm just below the elbow. She attaches her "stump" to the bar using the leather strap, chain and pipe.

"I use it for kettlebell swings and barbell movements," Bailey said. "The metal pipe is put over the chain to act like a forearm. It works."

Adaptive technology is improving. Still, athletes are pushing the envelope by modifying high-end appliances adding chains, ropes, cuffs and belts. They make it work through experimentation, guts and spit.

Bailey is an adaptive athlete who was born without her left The tools Bailey packs in her carry-on serve one purpose: tearing down any barrier between her and fitness.

CrossFit JOURNAL

INNOVATION CHASES NECESSITY

According to CrossFit Inc. Founder and CEO Greg Glassman, "The needs of Olympic athletes and our grandparents differ by degree not kind." The same is true for those using prosthetic devices: a missing or malfunctioning limb does not erase the need for intense exercise.

Video: Kate Foster Uneven Bars

If there's a bright spot to the wars in the Middle East, it's been the increased funding for research into prosthetic technology. Elite athletics have benefitted from the resulting prostheses, as have thousands of everyday patients who just want to get on with their lives.

Scott Forrester is a CrossFit athlete and owner of Forrester Prosthetics. He's been building custom prostheses for veterans who do CrossFit, and he'd like all his patients to meet Fran and Grace. His love for the program pushes him to try new combinations of prosthetic devices, and government interest in prosthetics is helping him and others get more and more creative.

"THE MONEY COMING INTO PROSTHETIC RESEARCH IS FIVE TIMES WHAT IT WAS A DECADE AGO."

—SCOTT FORRESTER

"The money coming into prosthetic research is five times what it was a decade ago," he said. "The government has taken an interest in getting these veterans back on their feet. They want these guys to have the best of the best. Some of them are even returning to combat duty after amputation. It's incredible."

The technology allows for microprocessors in joints, more advanced materials and devices that simply fit better. The processors calculate rate of flexion, pressure and joint angle through the amputee's gait. Some will lock the knee during the swing phase; others will signal dorsiflexion in the foot. Resistance inside the joint is created through a series of pneumatics, hydraulics and magnets working together. But the high-tech, self-regulating joints may not be suited to the constantly varied challenges of CrossFit—yet.

"For CrossFit, a guy with an above-the-knee amputation might be using a microprocessor for the knee, but the hightech feet just aren't robust enough. You'll bust it. But it's amazing what's coming up," Forrester said.

Onboard microprocessors can't keep up with the demands of CrossFit, but mechanical modifications can help a great deal, according to Forrester. Creating a balance between agonist and antagonist muscles during knee flexion and extension is critical, and the requirements are different for a CrossFit athlete with a prosthesis. A full-range-of-motion squat requires a lower "shelf"—a stabilizing bar on the back of the prosthesis—to allow for more knee flexion.

"You have counterpressure between your patellar tendon and the back of your leg; that counterpressure is supposed to be about even. But that limits how much you can bend. So by lowering the point of counterpressure on the prosthesis, you can get down to a full squat, drop for burpees or do knees-to-elbows," Forrester said.

The high-impact aspects of CrossFit also make shock absorption a concern.

"You need something that has an inch or two of vertical shock absorption," Forrester said. "As you put your energy into the foot, it's stored and returned when you jump or step.... A regular prosthetic would feel like you're walking on a brick or a piece of wood."

While lower-limb prostheses are designed to bear weight, most upper-limb devices aren't, creating problems in deadlifting a heavy weight or suspending the body from a pull-up bar.

"Upper-limb prosthetics are traditionally designed to hold only the weight of the prosthesis and maybe a bag of dog food. They're not built to hold a 300-lb. deadlift." Forrester said. "You really have to look at the suspension mechanism and how it's held onto your body, and then come up with thicker straps or some auxiliary suspension to add

While imperfect, prosthetic science has come a long way in the last 10 years, Forrester said, and clever engineers are starting to find ways to adapt to the demands of functional fitness.

"You can get custom attachments that attach to barbells, dumbbells, medicine balls—you name it. These attachments have a little button, like a quick-disconnect wrist. You press a button and the attachment pops out, and you just click in the next one. You could go from pull-ups to wall balls and not even slow down."

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SIMPLE MOVEMENT. ENDLESS ADAPTATION

Two athletes with similar conditions might attempt the same WOD with different prosthetic devices, or none at all, forcing coaches to create modifications on the fly. Objective measurement and standardization can be challenging with different modifications, but it's also created the need for innovation. Competition simply forces coaches, athletes and equipment manufacturers to find solutions.

A leader in the field of competition for adaptive athletes, Concept2 started making modifications to its rowing ergometers to help veterans. Now it sponsors and hosts armies of adaptive athletes at events including the CRASH-B World Indoor Rowing Championships.

When rowing became a Paralympic sport in 2008, its popularity increased. That same year, Rep. Bob Filner of California introduced a bill to fund athletic programs for disabled veterans returning from the wars in the Middle East. Indoor rowing was central to the \$US40-million proposal, and Mark McAndrew of Concept2 was the first coach for many of the veterans.

"We'd set up erg (rowing ergometer) challenges, and an eclectic group of disabled vets would show up at the Olympic Training Center for a week at a time," McAndrew said. "We had fixed (unmoving) seats and standard seats, and we'd have to ad-lib on the spot to figure out how to make it work for them. I'd bring a bunch of different accessories—whatever we could do to get these guys the most exercise."

The International Federation of Rowing Associations (FISA, based on its French presentation) is the governing body for on-water rowing, and it bases its classifications for Paralympic athletes on the boats used in races: trunk and arms only (TA) for three athletes; leg, trunk and arms (LTA) for four athletes; and arms and shoulders only (AS) for individual men and women.

"TA rowers need to row from a fixed seat; they have control of their trunk and core and have at least one good arm and hand. They can hinge at the waist," McAndrew explained. "LTA means they can sit erect in a regular (sliding) seat and have at least one working arm. AS rowers are only able to use the big muscles at the top of their back; they're



oftentimes spinal-cord injuries or bilateral-hip-disarticulation patients. They don't have the use of their legs or any core strength."

He continued: "Because these categories were developed relative to the boats used in international events, they were somewhat unfair. Since erg racing just measures individual ability, we could further subdivide some of those groups and make it more fair."

The electronics on an indoor rower also allow for some equalization between categories. Meters rowed can be multiplied against a weighted factor depending on disability. This allows a disabled veteran to compete with any other rower or add to a team total in online challenges.

COMPETITION SIMPLY FORCES COACHES, ATHLETES AND EQUIPMENT MANUFACTURERS TO FIND SOLUTIONS.

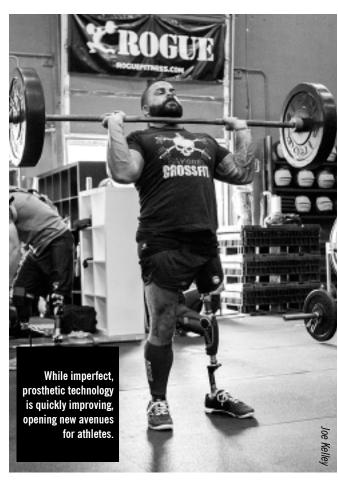
"We took LTA and pulled out a single-leg-above-the-knee amputee, and that's a separate category. It's not fair to have that guy racing someone who's blind," McAndrew said. "Above-the-knee is a separate group. Intellectually disabled is a separate group. Near-blind and blind are a separate group. 'LTA' acts as a catch-all. It's not perfect, but it's fair."

Further classifications can be found on the Concept2 Adaptive Classifications page.

As the sport of indoor rowing continues to grow, some adaptive athletes are even earning sponsorships to the CRASH-B event in Boston.

"Even if you know you have a disadvantage, it's still rewarding to give it your all. At least the opportunity is there to race," McAndrew said.

For their part, some CrossFit gyms attach a single-arm handle to a rower for those who can't use two arms. Other athletes use only one leg. The fixed path of movement on a rower makes it an ideal tool for experimentation. Try this, then try something else, then work to improve it. Repeat for each individual.



CREATING A COMPETITIVE STANDARD

Can fitness events offer adaptive athletes the same opportunities to participate and compete by creating factoring formulas? McAndrew believes that as more data is collected, mathematical factoring will become better and better. At CrossFit Rubicon, David "Chef" Wallach and his crew are collecting that data.

When Wallach was planning his Working Wounded Games, his simple desire to provide competition for injured veterans brought him to face a daunting task: creating fair movements for athletes with a host of modifications.

CrossFit Rubicon, owned by Wallach, is a testing ground for adaptive athletes. Soldiers from Walter Reed Army Medical Center are frequently referred to Wallach after their therapy is complete, and his adaptive athletes do the same workouts as every other CrossFit athlete, though their membership rate is different.

"It costs a dollar a month (for adaptive athletes)," Wallach said. "We don't take quarters."

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When Wallach began looking for comparative data, he was immediately stonewalled.

"There wasn't anywhere to find that data, nowhere to go and exchange workouts," he said. "Where's the community where athletes from any adaptive sport can get on and say, 'This is how I do it,' or say, 'I'm a left-leg-above-the-knee amputee and use a Cheetah Foot (a popular orthotic) when I run'?"

A consummate fixer, Wallach started his own database, called the Crossroads Adaptive Alliance.

"MY VISION OF CROSSFIT AND WHAT WE DO WITH THE WORKING WOUNDED GAMES WAS ABOUT INCLUSION NOT EXCLUSION."

—DAVID WALLACH

"My vision of CrossFit and what we do with the Working Wounded Games was about inclusion not exclusion, integrating not segregating, leveling the playing fields," Wallach said.

Wallach worked for months to build a tool that would measure the output level of various athletes with a wide array of injuries. But eventually, he threw it out. Trying to compare athletes with traumatic brain injuries (TBI) to athletes with upper- or lower-extremity injuries produced obvious challenges.

"If you have one prosthetic vs. another prosthetic, is that two categories of athletes?" he said. "That's not competition. It's like the old dude at the bodybuilding show who always wins because he's the only one in his category. It's great, but it's not competition."

Wallach's solution was to let each athlete more or less choose his or her workouts, a novel concept for fitness competition. He created five to 10 workouts that favored upper-extremity amputees, another batch suited more for lower-extremity amputees, and yet another group that would work for athletes with brain injuries. The workouts

for the latter group were characterized by minimal changes in blood pressure and limited movements that had athletes getting up off the ground. In the end, he had about 19 events.

Next, Wallach varied loads, time domains and rep schemes for each adaptation to equalize work output. Each event was tested by Rubicon athletes. Able-bodied athletes attempted the workouts using only one leg or one arm, fixed seats and sliding seats, and partial and full ranges of motion. Men and women did the same events using different loads and time domains until Wallach was sure he could deliver a series of fair events.

"What's the horsepower *this* workout is generating?" he asked. "What's the total? How do we change the workouts between athletes so that all of them, regardless of adaptation, are putting out the same work?"

He continued: "We had a few hundred athletes doing this stuff for weeks, collecting data to come up with these multipliers. One-handed deadlifts, versions of Helen, anything we could do to come up with comparative math. How do we compare your efforts at X movement?"

Wallach then presented the full list of events to the athletes who were registered for the Working Wounded Games. They were given only outlines, not rep schemes or time domains and other details.

"We said, 'Here are X number of workouts. You need to choose the ones that are in your toolkit. Which would you want to see come out of a hopper to showcase what you can do?" he said.

Athletes were allowed to choose five of Wallach's events that played to their strengths. From those, Wallach chose three for each. Each athlete didn't know which three he or she would perform at the Working Wounded Games, and the competitors didn't know the time domains or the loads. Wallach also created a giant finale workout for everyone to perform at once.

"We had the workouts planned for the day, as chosen by the athletes, and one finale that they would all do," he said. "It was an 8-minute AMRAP row for calories on a Concept2. The seat didn't move. We called it the No-Slide-Row—no one could use their legs."

By allowing the athletes to choose between workouts that had similar outputs, Wallach could crown a winner.

"We created a broad enough spectrum of movement that if I picked A, B and C or D, E and F, I'm still putting out the same output but maybe not the same workouts. I came





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up with some multipliers from all of the age and gender classes within international rowing," Wallach said. "That leveled the playing field between men and women, height, age."

For example, Wallach could multiply the calories of a woman of one height by 1.29 to rank her against a male of a certain height and age.

"And it worked out pretty good; we're still learning," he said.

Wallach's Wounded Warrior Games are inspiring because he's not scared to try new things. As long as the athlete is safe, he allows him or her to guide the process of exercise discovery.

HOW TO BUILD AN ADAPTIVE PROGRAM

The desire to train adaptive athletes isn't lacking in CrossFit gyms. CrossFit's broad array of movements frequently requires formulating new approaches to exercise for a variety of athletes, and CrossFit coaches have become adept at finding solutions on the fly. The key, most say, is in the assessment.

"First, ask the athlete, 'What do you want to do here? What can you do now? Do you use crutches or a prosthetic? How do you function in normal life?" Bailey said.

"A WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE ATMOSPHERE MAY BE AS IMPORTANT AS THE PHYSICAL WORK."

-DAVID WALLACH

"There's nothing that supplants an open and honest conversation with the athlete. Talk to their physician, their orthopedic surgeon," Wallach echoed. "Be willing to fuck it up. Be conservative and ambitious at the same time (when trying new things)."

Learning is key, as is leaning on experts around you and your athletes.



"Try to educate yourself about their condition," Bailey continued. "Reach out to Shriner's Hospitals, veterans' hospitals. Don't try to come up with the answers yourself if you don't know them."

Common sense is also an asset.

"Start with a basic assessment," Forrester said. "Walk them through all the motions. See what they can and can't do. If they say it hurts, stop. The last thing I want is a guy coming in with a big sore on his leg, because then he has to take four weeks off while it heals."

Wallach suggests three main principles for training an adaptive athlete. The first is communication and identification: finding out what the athlete wants to do and what he or she can do at present. Wallach recommends regular conversation and evaluation, but he has a very CrossFit measure of success: "If you're able to carry a heavier weight (a) long distance quickly, it's working. If any of those metrics aren't working, reassess."

Second, Wallach recommends keeping records and collecting data—no problem for CrossFit athletes used to logging workouts and tracking their progress.

Third, Wallach says it always has to be fun.

"As zealous as we are about the data, as adamant as we are about the structure of the format and mobility, the geometry of the athlete, a lot of adaptive athletes are coming from a place where they weren't accepted. A welcoming and inclusive atmosphere may be as important as the physical work," he said.

Bailey agreed: "Even though I've lived with this (challenge) my entire life, I still have those days of, 'Why me? This sucks.' But then I have that reminder that people see what I do and draw some kind of passion from me or inspiration; it's all worth it."

Rather than trying to plan substitutions for movements in advance, all three agree that the simplest approach is to

ask the individual athlete. Simple questions can often yield the best result.

"What should we do in place of wall ball today?"

COURAGE NEEDS A COACH

When an adaptive athlete visits a CrossFit gym for the first time, it would be nice to have a simple database of recommended movements and scaling options. A standardized list, an equation or a bolt-on solution would be ideal.

So far, none exists.

But Bailey, Wallach and scores of other coaches are compelled to find solutions to the many challenges posed by adaptive athletics. And with those solutions come the rewards of seeing people access their athleticism.

"People say that talking to me or training with me has helped them, (and) it helps me to know that people are doing way more incredible stuff than I'm doing—people motivating me by figuring out how to do stuff that I haven't yet. It's been the best gift ever," Bailey said.

Wallach, too, has found great personal reward: "I've never felt more fulfilled. My capacity to bitch has been reduced to nothing. That's an extraordinary life change. My capacity for change is their fault."

He added: "This is what I'm doing for the rest of my life."

Simply, it's about giving strong people a chance.

"I don't want someone of fortitude to be put in a corner," he said.

For these athletes and coaches, courage isn't fleeting; it's born of a long process of trial, error, retrial and growth. Many adaptive athletes on the sidelines already possess the fortitude of which Wallach speaks and require only an outlet. When creative, dedicated coaches and athletes collaborate to find solutions, CrossFit can be that outlet.

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Lessons From the Level 1

Teacher Eric LeMay takes the CrossFit Level 1 Certificate Course and reflects on what he learned.

By Eric LeMay March 2014



Each morning, over the blurry steam of a second cup of coffee, I open my email, braced against the small fires I'll find in my inbox. What didn't get done? What needs to?

The more emails I have, the more quickly I go hunting for the one from CrossFit, the one with the WOD and daily image.

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When he attended a CrossFit Level 1 Certificate Course, Eric LeMay found out why everyone looks so sweaty in the group picture on CrossFit.com.

Sometimes it's eye candy: a cute kid pushing a sled, a firebreather hitting a handstand on a beach in Thailand. Sometimes it's more inspiring: an athlete kicking ass in a wheelchair, a fallen hero.

Mondays always throw me off. If you get the email, you know that Monday's image is always a composite of a dozen or so group shots from CrossFit seminars held all over the world. About 50 people are in each picture, and their faces are so small you have to squint to see them.

These are the folks who spent the weekend doing a CrossFit course: the Coach's Prep Course, the CrossFit Kids Course and the Level 1 Certificate Course, CrossFit's biggest draw. The Level 1 introduces you to CrossFit's methodology and foundational movements. It's the one to take if you're interested in coaching, opening a box or just want to add depth to your training.

All those faces used to make me cranky.

It's Monday. Give me a pig-tailed toddler with toy dumbbells or a tastefully athletic nude. Monday is not a day for fuzzy group photos.

But after months of looking at those group shots, I became curious about the faces in them. As a teacher, I'm fascinated by how and why people learn. What motivates us? What challenges and changes us? To my mind, CrossFit indeed challenges us and changes us. It isn't just a training program; it's also a highly effective teaching and learning program.

So I began to wonder what all these athletes—Monday after Monday—took away from two days of immersing themselves in CrossFit.

Then, one weekend, I did it: I became one of those faces.

Theory and Practice

One thing I learned about all those group photos with big, cheesy smiles: they're in the aftershock of a workout. Those faces aren't cheerful so much as dazed.

Just before our group shot, we did a smoker of thrusters and burpees. The rep scheme might have been 15-12-9—I can't quite recall.

We'd reached the end of the first day. We'd been ticking along, taking in the lectures and practicing our technique, but then that familiar pre-WOD mix of dread, excitement and adrenaline descended upon us.

"It's gonna get weird in here," flowmaster (head trainer) Joe Westerlin said just before we started.

Then the cheering started up, the clock ticked down, and it was on: a bunch of athletes who'd been relative strangers throughout the day were sweating and spitting and screaming.

A minute afterward, we were all cracking beers and talking about the workout. The community-building formula CrossFit Founder and CEO Greg Glassman has touted so many times—"agony coupled with laughter," a quote from Capt. Michael Perry—had done its trick again. We felt like a



At the Level 1, those who suffer and learn together become fast friends.

group. On a snowy day in January, people had come to Columbus, Ohio, from across the Midwest, and there we were, kicking back at the epicenter of rigs and racks and steel: Rogue HQ. Things had gone from weird to warm.

All the trainers shared that contagious glow of folks who love their jobs.

I ended up chatting with another of the Level 1 Seminar Staff trainers, Donavan DeGrie, who'd come up from Hendersonville, Tenn. He's one of those athletes chiseled out of steel and light. When I found out he travels across the country almost every weekend for CrossFit courses, I felt tired for him.

"Man, that must be exhausting," I said.

"Naw," said DeGrie, shaking his head with a wide smile. He explained meeting new people and sharing his love of CrossFit doesn't wear him down. It revs him up.

He was easy to believe. All the trainers shared that contagious glow of folks who love their jobs. I felt that energy from the first.

A lot of us came in worried about the test that concludes the seminar. It'd been decades since I'd filled in those little bubbles with a No. 2 pencil, and I figured that, as a teacher, it'd be my luck to bomb the test.

"Don't worry about the test," Westerlin assured in his opening talk. "If you're worried about the test, you're not in the moment, and we want you to be with us in the room."

Westerlin figured out how to keep us with him. He threatened to make us do the first workout from the 2012 Open: seven minutes of burpees. We all went wide eyed. The guy next to me started stretching in his chair. Another started quivering.

Westerlin let an anxious beat pass before he let us know he was joking. "You know what's in the room right now?" he continued. "Emotion."

Sure enough. Our heart rates were up. We were in the now, and we launched in.

Building Movements

Conversation, beer and tachycardia aren't the only things you get at the Level 1. The course combines lectures on everything from work capacity to nutrition along with small-group work on CrossFit's basic movements.

You also do a workout each day. For the first one, you get coached "under intensity." For the second, you coach another athlete, and your coaching is coached. If you want, you can also take the test at the end of the weekend and try to earn your CrossFit Level 1 Trainer certificate.

The effect is cumulative, not unlike a workout. Run 400 meters—not so intense. Swing a 53-lb. kettlebell for 21 reps or do 12 pull-ups—not so intense. Put all these things together for three rounds, and hello, Helen. You are very much under intensity and will probably walk stiffly the next morning.

The seminar builds in a like way. It's one thing to study the foundational ideas of CrossFit. It's another to focus on the minutia of your squat or push-press technique. And still another to go all out in a workout or guide another athlete through that sort of effort. But put all these things together and you see the deeper connections. Macro and micro, theory and practice, it all comes together.

Take the deadlift. Compared to, say, the snatch or the clean, it's not the most technical lift. Basically, you stand up. So after a lecture on the finer points of the deadlift's setup, execution and common flaws, I thought we'd gone into deadlift overkill.

And yet, when we broke into small groups, our trainer, Doug Chapman, smiled at us like we'd never picked up a sack of groceries. Chapman's training style is a mix of military sergeant and Groucho Marx.

"Butt up! Butt back! Bow like a samurai!"

Half his cues were classics from Westside Barbell and the other half were from cheesy movies such as *Austin Powers*, but the barrage kept us focused on the movements and keyed us into the lecture we'd just heard. The links



The Level 1 Certificate Course is broken up into lecture and practical sessions, with a few workouts thrown in for good measure.



In small groups, trainers drill athletes on the finer points of movements including the deadlift, squat, push press and more.

continued into the workout later that day. As I was doing med-ball cleans, I suddenly heard Chapman bellow, "Butt back, Eric!"

"Shit! Butt back!" I thought. And through that cue, I was able to access the technique work we'd done earlier in our group.

Chapman made no secret of the fact that everything in the seminar builds on everything else.

"Progression," he said, "is the word you'll keep hearing."

Here is a basic definition of fitness. Here is a basic movement. Now let's build from there.

Day 1 obviously built on Day 2, but all the lectures built on one another, starting with the foundational ideas of CrossFit and ending with how you'd implement them into your programming if you opened a box.

The practice we did on the basic movements also started simply. Over three breakout sessions, we began with the squat, the press and the deadlift, then we gradually built to the overhead squat, the jerk and the clean. In variation after variation, we always worked through a progression that started off simply.

In fact, quite a few times during the course, the trainers would half-apologize for the simplicity of their instruction, as though they were wasting our time if they weren't expounding recondite theories from exercise science.

"Simple doesn't mean easy," we'd hear.

"Simple doesn't mean less important," they'd stress.

What became clear is that CrossFit doesn't really start with simple. It starts with basic. The difference matters. Simple suggests that something is easy and self-evident, but basic means it's essential. Whether you're talking about basic training or basic hygiene, you can't—at least you shouldn't—do without the basics.

And as complicated as the science behind CrossFit gets, it's a program founded on basics. Here is a basic definition of fitness. Here is a basic movement. Now let's build—let's progress—from there.

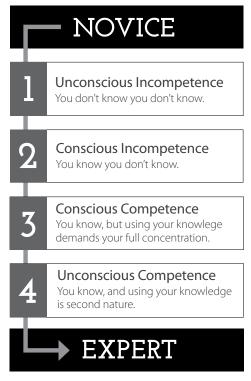
Commitment to Fundamentals

Throughout the course, one particular progression kept popping into my mind, and it's not one we learned at the seminar. It comes from my work as a teacher, but it helped me see one reason CrossFit is so effective.

The progression is often called the Four Stages of Competence, and it was first described by Noel Burch in the 1970s. Essentially, it's a model for how people learn a new skill. Here's the gist: every time you attempt to learn a new skill, whether you're a toddler learning how to walk or a middle-aged man or woman learning how to deadlift, you have to progress through four stages (see graphic on Page 6).

The progression is fairly simple. And by that I mean it's basic.

If, for example, I'm a beginner learning the deadlift, I won't know about engaging my posterior chain or where I should position my feet or hands. I'm ignorant of what the lift requires and I certainly can't do it correctly. I'm unconsciously incompetent.



The Four Stages of Competence.

But then Chapman comes along and shows me that I'm leaning forward, my butt is too low and my grip is too wide. I try the lift and feel my weight rock forward. I'm still incompetent—Chapman doesn't need to tell me I'm a "dishonorable samurai"—but this time I'm conscious of it. I know I don't know.

So I try again. I focus: butt back, back flat, bar into shins. And this time I do it correctly. Chapman is smiling. I, however, am mentally fried from deadlifting a PVC pipe. I'm competent. I know I can do the lift correctly, but it takes my full concentration—my full conscious effort—to do so.

And I'm still a long way off from the singular focus that an athlete like Elisabeth Akinwale displays when she pulls 425 lb. She's not thinking about every fine point of technique. She's thinking about making the lift. For her, a highly technical skill has become as "natural" as walking is for most of us. She's unconsciously competent—and a total badass.

Those four stages of competency lead from novice to expert. Of course, I've described them much more neatly than they show up in the gym. Usually, when you attempt

to refine a skill, aspects of that skill which you've already mastered go to shit. Your mind overloads as you struggle to incorporate new demands, and even movement patterns you've mastered break down, which sucks, but that's what it takes to improve.

To move forward, you have to go back to the basics.

So you start again. You rebuild the movement better than it was before. To move forward, you have to go back to the basics.

Back at the basics, you're at the very core of CrossFit. Another word for what's basic might be what's common.

That's how Joe DeGain described it in the final lecture of the course. He brought up the ideal of virtuosity. When you're aiming for virtuosity, you're aiming to do "the common uncommonly well," he said, paraphrasing Glassman's words in the *CrossFit Journal* article Virtuosity.

The common uncommonly well—that, to me, captured the heart of the seminar. As we filed out of Rogue's gym for our long drives home, I realized I'd never found the common so inspiring.



About the Author

Eric LeMay is a writer and teacher in Athens, Ohio, and a member of CrossFit SEO. Find him at ericlemay.org.