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The Lunatic Farmer

Internationally known for his agricultural practices in Virginia, Joel Salatin calls it like he sees it—and there's a lot he's calling out.

By Chris Cooper

August 2013



All Photos: Chris Cooper

Joel Salatin is possibly the most influential farmer in America.

He doesn't work for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Calling himself a "lunatic," he's most famous for his central roles in *Food, Inc.* and *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, as well as several speeches on the TED stage. Salatin abhors many commercial farming practices, concerns himself with "the pigness of the pig" and says the "organic" label is a scam.

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He calls his methods, among other things, “exercising ecology.”

“Isn’t it incredible,” he asks, “that the people who put Froot Loops and Pop-Tarts at the base of the food pyramid, who tell us that feces in our food is OK as long as it’s irradiated, that GMO food is safe but raw milk isn’t—these are the people in charge of our food?”

They’re also the people in charge of food labeling, and according to Salatin, the “organic” label just ain’t what it used to be.

Welcome to Polyface

Salatin’s farm—Polyface, or the farm of many faces—rests in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley. Three generations of Salatins live here, and neighboring farms are tended by relatives and former interns. Tours cost \$30, are limited to 100 people per day and are sold out for the next three months.

A typical tour—two hours of hayrack riding with some lecture time—will host folks from all over North America. Farmers, apartment dwellers and folks who want to buy their first chicken are there; signed photos from visiting musicians and politicians dot the walls.

**“I’m just a Christian-
libertarian-environmentalist-
capitalist-lunatic farmer.”**

—Joel Salatin



On Salatin’s farm, chickens have far more room than in concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs).

Even on a rainy day in June, Polyface doesn't stink. Because animals are moved daily, manure doesn't accumulate in any single area. This is one small—but pungent—difference between Salatin's methods and big agro.

Salatin's methods are both revolutionary and remnant. His cows are tightly penned with electric fencing to minimize trampling of their pastoral "salad bar," and they are moved daily. Chickens follow the cows a day later. Rabbits sleep in cages hung above the heads of turkeys; their poop contains an amino acid that turkeys crave. His business model is wide open: if interns have an idea for a new service, Salatin lets them try it on his farm. He uses constantly varied functional movement of crops and animals to produce a system more closely aligned with the natural history of his turf. Sound familiar?

His idea of "chicken tractors"—portable chicken houses that move every day—has been copied thousands of times by farmers around the world. He boasts that his methods are intelligence-centric, not infrastructure-centric. He has no secrets; there is nowhere at Polyface that a camera isn't allowed.

The Salatin family settled in Virginia when Joel was 4 after a political coup in Peru "repatriated" its farm and forced the family to return to the United States. As Salatin has written in several of his books, the family took over 550 acres of pasture that had been over-farmed. The soil was depleted from too many sequential harvests of annual crops; the forest was wild. His parents were considered crazy for purchasing the farm.

**A proud libertarian, Salatin
dislikes government
over-regulation.**



"Chicken tractors" that move every day are a stark contrast to the high-density cages of industrial chicken farming.



Visitors from all over the world come to Polyface to hear Salatin speak and learn about his methods.

Fifty years later, Salatin claims to have built several inches of soil, re-fertilized the land and created a sustainable form of agriculture that can support several generations' nutritional and financial needs.

A proud libertarian, Salatin dislikes government over-regulation. He believes the "organic" label is hurting the small farmer, aiding in the dangerous centralization of our food supply and making us less healthy.

At precisely 10 a.m., four hayracks are loaded behind two tractors to carry the farm tourists. Salatin, wearing his trademark floppy white hat, steps out to address the crowd. His Virginia accent charms his visitors, and his voice drops an octave while he mixes down-home country talk with high science.

"You're going to see things today that will look old-fashioned. We get accused of being anti-science," Salatin says. "But science is not objective. It's limited by its own paradigm: how we set up the experiments. What's the essence of a cow? It's not eating dead cow.

We didn't buy into this idea of feeding dead cows to living cows. Not because we're anti-USDA or anti-science; there's just no template in creation in which herbivores eat carrion. Now we have bovine spongiform encephalopathy, and this worldwide collective 'maybe we shouldna-oughta-dun-that!'"

Many on the wagon have heard this speech before. Like a true media personality, Salatin frequently reverts to well-worn sound bites.

"I'm just a Christian-libertarian-environmentalist-capitalist-lunatic farmer" is his usual self-introduction. On the hayrack, some passengers even mouth the words as he's saying them. The man dubbed "the high priest of the pasture" by *The New York Times* is leading his flock.

Earning the Organic Label

Because all living things are, by definition, "organic," the USDA labeling of "organic" food carries weight primarily as a marketing tool. It might not be a reliable way to predict food quality, Salatin says.

"Intuitively, people understand that the historical use of the word 'organic' identified an idea and a paradigm rather than a visceral list of do's and don'ts. And now that the high prices have attracted unscrupulous growers who enter the movement for the money, people realize that no system can regulate integrity," Salatin says.

What is regulated? According to the [USDA](#), several different levels of "organic" food qualifications exist:

1. 100 Percent Organic: All ingredients are certified organic. So-called processing aids must be organic. Product labels must state the name of the certifying agent on the information panel.
2. Organic: All agricultural ingredients must be certified organic, except for those nonorganic ingredients specified on the National Exclusions List. Salt and water are allowed without limitation.
3. "Made With" Organic: Seventy percent of the product must be certified organic ingredients excluding salt and water. Nonagricultural products must be on the National Exclusions List.
4. Specific Organic Ingredients: May only list certified organic ingredients as organic in the ingredient list and the percentage of organic ingredients. Remaining ingredients are not required to follow the USDA organic regulations.

The aforementioned [National Exclusions List](#) allows food producers to include nonorganic ingredients when an organic equivalent isn't available, up to a percentage of total product mass.

Chicken packagers, for example, can claim their birds are "raised without antibiotics" if the drugs were injected before the animals were hatched.

Ethanol, newspaper, PVC, pheromones, aspirin, potassium bicarbonate, tetracycline, vaccines, iodine and glucose are on the National Exclusions list. And producers can petition the USDA for exclusions.



The old adage "don't panic, it's organic" might be a thing of the past, with many organic farms taking advantage of government loopholes and exclusions.

For example, Anheuser-Busch petitioned the Agriculture Department for permission to use nonorganic hops in two beers: Organic Wild Hop Lager and Organic Stone Mill Pale Ale, *The New York Times* reported.

Even these loopholes aren't enough for some.

Chicken packagers, for example, can claim their birds are "raised without antibiotics" if the drugs were injected before the animals were hatched. Similarly, raising the total mass of a chicken breast by injecting salt and water can allow for a higher quantity of nonorganic materials.

Earning an organic label can be prohibitively expensive to a small-scale farmer. Salatin believes this contributes to the centralization of the U.S. food supply.

"More and more people are aware of the compromise and adulteration within the government-sanctioned organic-certified community. They're wary of 6,000-hen confinement laying houses with a three-foot dirt strip



According to Salatin, the “organic” label is little more than a marketing ploy.

being labelled ‘certified organic.’ So patrons latch onto the ‘beyond organic’ idea. It resonates with their disappointment over the government program,” Salatin says.

Although he’s not against buying food labeled as organic, Salatin believes the label has become the marketing foil of the same players responsible for confinement houses, antibiotic overdosing and bovine encephalopathy. He believes there’s a better way.

Common-Sense Farming

The tour stops at the foot of a path leading into the forest. Salatin leads his flock toward a wooden gate: the only solid piece in his fencing system. The rest is a single strand of white electrified wire—highly portable, very effective and cheap.

With rain smacking the broad leaves of black walnut trees, Salatin beckons the masses close but not too close.

“This is a question for the kids,” he yells over the rain. “What does ‘herbivore’ mean?”

Mostly prompted by their parents, a smattering of small voices answers, “Plant eaters.”

“Good. What’s ‘carnivore’ mean?” Salatin bellows.

“Meat eaters,” responds the congregation in unison.

“Good. Go to the head of the class,” Salatin jokes. “Now, what’s ‘omnivore’ mean?”

“Go get raw foods, whole foods.”

—Joel Salatin

Out of unison, the crowd responds, “Eats both meat and plants.”

“Right.”

He nods, then looks down at a little girl resting her hands on the fence.

“Watch your fingers, there, honey. Pigs are omnivores, and you’re made of meat.”

Lunatic Farmer ... (continued)

For the next 30 minutes, Salatin explains the historical role and habits of pigs. He talks about “the pigness of the pig,” his methods and his rationale. He answers questions about how frequently they’re moved to a new area of forest, how they’re bred and why he calls them “pigaerators.”

Through the Virginia winter, cows like to stay close together. Salatin places the cows in open-sided pole barns, where they can herd up like buffalo for warmth, eat hay and “do cow stuff.” Like cows everywhere, they tramp straw down for bedding and then drop urine and manure all over it. More straw is added every week, creating what Salatin calls “a carbonaceous diaper.” And ears of corn are pushed down into the straw at the same time. In the spring, the corn ferments, releasing a scent that’s irresistible to pigs. They dig down into the straw, aerating the manure and creating a highly usable fertilizer. Thus, “pigaerators.”

Through the spring, summer and fall, cows are moved daily in portable pens. They’re placed on grass that reaches their knees, which they mow down to the 3-inch level. The

next day, they’re moved and the egg mobiles arrive on the same turf. Chickens claw apart the cow patties searching for grubs and bugs, which pushes the poop into the soil. Within two days, the chickens are moved into the next area of cow-trimmed pasture to follow the cows.

This outside-the-freezer-box approach is so rare that many visitors to Polyface credit Salatin with the concepts. But he demurs, claiming his methods simply follow the natural system established before the arrival of Europeans and their grain-based tillage ideas.

Buffalo once roamed these prairies, followed by wild birds. Grasses were so thick and tall that early settlers worried about losing young children on the prairie. After a herd of thousands of buffalo passed through, smaller animals could forage in the shorter grasses. The pioneer-led shift from perennials (grasses) to annuals (grains) changed that cycle and depleted the soil as years of crops were removed, taking the nutrients and leaving nothing behind, Salatin says.



Salatin says open-air processing introduces less bacteria than the methods used by big agro.



Salatin says chickens produced from his farm actually have less bacteria than those from industrial farms.

Beyond Organic: Finding Your Farmer

Industrial agriculture—which Salatin refers to as “big farma”—often raises animals in “confinement houses,” better known as concentrated animal feeding operations, or CAFOs. Animals are penned tightly together with little room for movement. Often featured in “food horror” films like *Food, Inc.* and *Fresh*, CAFOs provide a perfect storm for disease, infection and contamination. Animals are given antibiotics and steroids, which make their way into the water supply—and our food.

Salatin and regressive progressives like Wendell Berry, author of the 1977 book *The Unsettling of America*, say the only way to avoid the many pitfalls of modern agriculture is to find a local farmer.

“Go get raw foods,” Salatin says. “Whole foods. Get rid of the television and take that time and energy that you’d spend recreating, and go find your food network in your area. Go patronize them. Get it raw, get it cheaper.”

Although the sight of mud, roaming animals and manure around their food can make some purchasers wary, Salatin

says there’s nothing to fear from open-air slaughter or processing.

“Our laws were written primarily for the 1880s, prior to understanding hygiene, bacteria, before we had indoor plumbing, indoor refrigeration. Every time you go to some bureaucrat who wants to license and have multiple gauntlets for every piece of food, they show you these pictures from the 1880s,” Salatin says. “They show you some guy hand-milking a cow in a filthy spot. That’s how they created the current climate. But those laws are outdated because now we can have hot water, soap, stainless steel, all these cool things.”

Conversely, visitors aren’t allowed at confinement houses, ostensibly because of infection risk.

“We had bacteria tests done on our chickens and a supermarket, government-inspected chicken. The government-inspected chicken had 25 times the number of colony-forming bacteria,” Salatin says.

Other studies have found that government-inspected turkeys had irradiated feces mixed into the meat.

According to a June *Consumer Reports* investigation into the poultry-processing industry, "More than half of the packages of raw ground meat and patties tested positive for fecal bacteria."

"To say that inherently you need a \$500,000 processing plant in order to produce a safe chicken is nonsense."

—Joel Salatin

A visitor to Polyface can see chickens being processed outside. A small team of six efficiently kills, plucks and washes the birds over stainless steel. A web of PVC pipe overhead delivers flowing water to the processing table through spouts above each bird, cleaning them as they're processed.

"Clearly, we can do this in the sunshine and the open air, but we do it slower. We don't do it every day. We do it carefully. We do it on clean ground every day. We're not bringing manure into the system in the feathers because the feathers are clean. We're not contributing to the pathogenicity of food. To say that inherently you need a \$500,000 processing plant in order to produce a safe chicken is nonsense," Salatin says.

Although critics of his methods argue small-scale farming can't feed enough people and can't provide enough income for a family, Salatin argues his method of farming, which he calls "beyond organic," creates economies of scale.



Salatin describes his farming method as "beyond organic."



Salatin encourages consumers to support local farms—for our health and the health of the planet.

“Just because we farm ‘beyond organic’ does not mean that we throw out frugality or good business practices,” Salatin says. “We don’t have to buy fertilizer or medications. We have virtually no vet bills. Sickness and disease and fertility cost a lot of money on the average farm. Since we don’t have those costs, we spend more money on management. Our labor costs may be higher, but our overall costs are lower because we’re not having to remediate pollution. The taxpayer doesn’t have to clean up after us.”

The driving force for an improved food supply—and the health of the world—is the consumer, in Salatin’s opinion.

“Get in the kitchen. Rediscover the joys of simple eating. You’ll cut off at the knees all the patronage of the evil food empire. At the end of the week, ask yourself: which movement have you fed?” he asks.

A Better Way?

On an average Saturday morning, chickens eagerly await rotation into the day’s “salad bar.” Cows are transferred into fresh, knee-high grass. Pigs trim back the undergrowth beneath black walnut trees and laze in the shade. If a human will ever see a pig smile, it will happen at Polyface.

And Joel Salatin, lunatic farmer, will be the first one to see it.



About the Author

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THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Training in the Heat

Bill Starr offers advice to athletes training hard in the dog days of summer.

By Bill Starr

August 2013



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This is the time of year when all athletes have to deal with temperatures soaring close to or over the century mark, as well as extremely high humidity in some areas. It's also when many sports teams begin their training for the upcoming season.

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Football is the most notable, but there are lots of other sports in which athletes work out diligently through the hot summer months. There are training camps, clinics and summer leagues for a host of sports: lacrosse, soccer, tennis, field hockey, track and field, and running. And this is also the heart of baseball and softball seasons. So these athletes have to deal with a relentless sun and heat.

Others train indoors, and the heat and humidity may be even greater than they are outside. Volleyball and basketball players and wrestlers have to go through their paces in stuffy, poorly ventilated gyms. So do those who compete in powerlifting and Olympic lifting. Add in those athletes who are striving to get stronger and refuse to allow the hot temperatures to keep them from their scheduled workouts and you have a multitude of people sweating an ocean of fluid every day all summer.

Some geographical parts of the United States have it rougher in this regard than others. The South and Southwest get much hotter than the Northern states,

but that doesn't mean that those who live in Illinois, Pennsylvania or Connecticut have the luxury of mild weather during July and August. I know from experience that a workout in Boston or Chicago can be just as stifling as one done in Dallas or Phoenix when conditions are right.

Heat can put you down for the count if you don't adhere to some rules.

Extreme heat can be debilitating to any athlete, regardless of age, if he or she does not take the proper precautions. Even very fit athletes have succumbed to the effects of the



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Athletes in many sports train in warm weather, but football players facing two-a-day training-camp practices are perhaps most in need of a plan to battle the heat and humidity.

sun when they ignored the signs and continued to push through a planned session. The main reason most end up on the short end of the stick is they just do not take the time to do what needs to be done when the temperature soars.

The majority of athletes who attempt to train as usual in hot weather don't end up passing out, but they do end up completely exhausted from a workout that was a piece of cake when the weather was milder. Many of them stop training when it's extremely hot and voice the intention of starting back up once cooler weather arrives. This is not the right way to deal with the problem. One of the basic tenets in strength training is consistency. Miss a session for any reason and it makes it easier to miss another. Pretty soon, training ceases altogether because no progress is being made. Then the athlete gets weaker. And fast.

It would be nice if we could build up an account of all the work we do in the gym, like a bank account, and be able to draw from it when we stopped training. A sort of retirement fund. Sadly, it doesn't work that way. It's no secret that detraining can occur within weeks, and its effects can be more pronounced on elite athletes.

Instead of ceasing training, athletes should make some adjustments and use some common sense. Quitting is not the answer; being smart is. There is no question that extreme heat makes it more difficult to get in a solid session. Even if a gym is cold and drafty, you can bundle up, and once you get in motion you can keep your body temperature at a comfortable level—especially if you move quickly through the workout.

Training in extremely hot conditions is another matter because you can only take off so many layers of clothing, even in the most liberal of fitness facilities. So it's very essential that you know just what to do when you're faced with getting in a workout in a hot, humid gym. It's not just a matter of having a productive workout; it's actually a heat issue. Heat can put you down for the count if you don't adhere to some rules.

Hydrate!

Water is the key. This nutrient, which we all take for granted, is crucial to every function in the body—temperature regulation, nerve-impulse conduction, metabolism, immune system, eliminative process, and all the rest of the workings of the body.



Staff/CrossFit Journal

Athletes at the CrossFit Games are often tested by the Southern California heat as well as the events themselves.

Two misconceptions get people in trouble:

1. It takes a large amount of dehydration to bring on negative reactions.
2. You can depend on thirst to inform you when you're at risk. It takes a surprisingly small amount of fluid loss, just one percent, for your body to become dehydrated, and you can't depend on your thirst to tell you what's happening.

Researchers have found that even a tiny shortage of water disrupts biochemistry of the human body and **can limit performance**. Water balance is the single most important variable in athletic performance. Besides affecting overall strength, dehydration causes the brain to shrink slightly, which in turn results in an impairing of the neuromuscular system, coordination, concentration and thinking.

It doesn't take a Rhodes Scholar to be able to figure out you're not going to be able to perform at your best when these things begin to happen in your body during any form of physical exertion.

Water is your best friend when dealing with very hot weather.

"But what about Gatorade and those high-energy boosters that have recently flooded the market?"

After all, Gatorade is loaded with electrolytes. Yes, and that's a good thing, but at the same time, it contains sugar, and sugar slows the assimilation process. And those high-energy drinks contain a huge amount of caffeine, which promotes rapid water loss. So no cola or coffee. I typically use coffee to get me kick-started for my cardio and weight workouts, but I have to do without that caffeine jolt when it gets hot. I'll come back to this discussion a bit later on.

Overheating and resulting deficiencies in fluids and vital nutrients can come about amazingly fast when temperatures climb to 100 degrees and humidity gets extreme. As much as three quarts of sweat can be lost in a single hour. When this happens, blood volume drops appreciably. If it drops too low, circulation becomes impaired so that the brain and other vital organs are deprived of oxygen.

Water is your best friend when dealing with very hot weather.

Heat illnesses fall into three categories: heat fatigue, heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Heat fatigue sufferers will experience cramps, usually in the legs and abdomen. If these symptoms aren't dealt with right away and the athlete continues to push himself, the next step is heat exhaustion. This is a more serious response to the heat and results in fatigue, weakness and collapse. An athlete suffering from heat exhaustion may have the following symptoms: normal temperature; pale, clammy skin; profuse sweating; nausea; headache and dizziness.

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Bill Starr recommends drinking more than six ounces of water for every 20 minutes of activity in warm weather.

Heat stroke represents the most serious heat illness because it can end in death. Every year, we all read reports of athletes, usually football players, taking part in two-a-days, who died from heat stroke. The symptoms include high body temperature; hot, red and dry skin; rapid, strong pulses; and in most cases unconsciousness.

All are preventable.

If You Can't Take the Heat ...

I had to learn how to deal with extreme heat at the very beginning of my quest to gain strength. My first duty base was at West Palm Beach in Florida, and the weight room, if it could be called that, was in a metal building with no fans or cross ventilation. When summer rolled in, it was difficult to breathe in the building, and I would be drenched in sweat by the time I did my warm-up set of leg raises. I was the only person to use the weights. Everyone else had better sense, but I was determined to be regular with my training regardless of how uncomfortable I was.

What I did when it got severely hot and humid was take salt tablets. This was what we gave the airmen who complained of heat exhaustion in the ER where I worked. Later on, I read they were of no value because they didn't dissolve fast enough, yet they kept me from cramping. I always took the salt tablets about an hour before I trained and drank a great deal of water to help dilute them. And because I only had an hour to train (the gym closed at 4 p.m., and if I wanted to lift, I had to do it during my lunch hour), the salt tablets were enough.

I also used salt tablets a few years later when I was roofing houses for my father-in-law in Wichita Falls, Texas. It would be hot as Hades, and my primary job was to lug the shingles up a ladder to the roof. I gulped water and ate salt tablets like candy the entire day and was able to have enough energy left to train at the YMCA after I got off work.

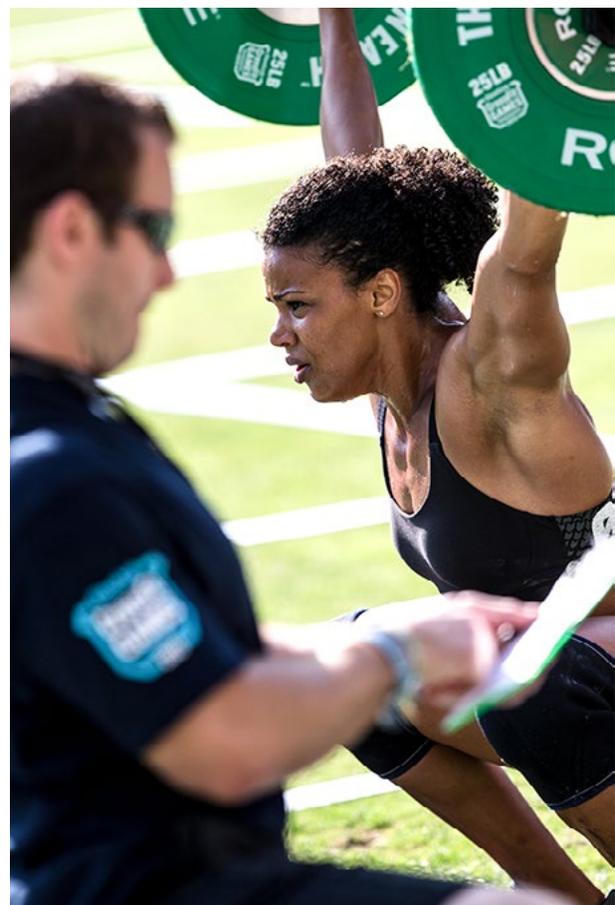
I don't, however, recommend salt tablets to my athletes. There are much better ways to deal with extreme heat. I didn't learn about minerals until I did my research for the nutritional section of *The Strongest Shall Survive* when I lived on Oahu. It was some of the most valuable information I ever came across, and I put it to use many, many times when I found myself having to train in an extremely hot gym.

Two places come to mind when I think about training in a sweltering weight room. During the summers when I was working at Johns Hopkins, I worked out in Sam Fielder's Shed on his dairy farm in the Northern part of Maryland.

Because I was the newest addition to the athletic staff, there was no money in the budget to pay me to coach the athletes who stayed in the area over the summer. The Shed was close by and free. It was a small, concrete building with a door and two small windows that seemed determined not to allow the slightest bit of air inside. On the days when the temperatures hit 100 degrees or more, it had to be 15 degrees hotter inside.

I never missed a session. Was it fun? Not by a long shot. Was it worth it? Absolutely, because I always made some progress and was able to hold onto whatever gains I had made in the winter and spring.

The second gym was even worse than the Shed. It was Billy Neel's combination gym and dive shop in Clute, Texas, right on the Gulf Coast. The gym part of the operation started out as a small collection of equipment for his younger



Staff/CrossFit Journal

You can't control the heat, but you can control the minerals and fluids you ingest pre- and post-workout.

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Competition is cutthroat at the elite level, and even slight dehydration can cost you seconds.

brother to use, but he kept adding more and more stuff and enlarged the workout space until he had the best gym in the area.

The biggest problem was that there was a swimming pool right next to the workout area where he taught scuba classes. When it got really hot, as it does in July and August, and the humidity levels equalled the temperatures, even the air-conditioned buildings were muggy. Billy's place did have a few fans, but with all the moisture rising out of the pool, the damp air felt like you were standing next to a furnace. The mirrors were always fogged over, and within minutes of being in the gym, your entire body was soaking wet. After someone finished his set, he would rush to the doorway and suck in some of the outside air, which was also hot but not as humid.

But they were hearty souls that trained at Billy's Gym. It was sort of a challenge to them to stick it out through the hottest parts of the year, and as a result they made considerable progress. Those who bailed slipped way back.

Billy's Gym and Fielder's Shed are what I call "three-T-shirt facilities," because that's how many T-shirts I would go through at every workout. Plus, I carried a towel to wipe the sweat off my hands and arms so that the chalk wouldn't turn into a messy paste when I used it. By the end of the session, the towel would be soaked as well.

I called them "three-T-shirt facilities," because that's how many T-shirts I would go through at every workout.

Starr's Supplement Recommendations

First, I'll go over what supplements you need to take in hot weather to allow you to get in a productive session, and then I'll provide some tips on programming.

Most people are well aware of the importance of drinking lots of water in hot weather, but few understand that water alone is not enough. In fact, drinking high volumes of water can actually create nutritional deficiencies. Whenever you're sweating profusely and gulping down lots of water, you're rapidly flushing the water-soluble vitamins and minerals out of your body—specifically, the B vitamins, vitamin C and all the minerals. Without an adequate supply of these vitamins and minerals, your body cannot function properly.

Most important are the minerals. Life itself depends on minerals. There are over 60 trillion cells in your body, and every one needs a wide array of minerals. Every cell is composed of five percent minerals. They are what propel and perpetuate the various metabolic processes as well as provide structure and support for the cells. When they are not supplied in adequate amounts, muscles cannot contract maximally, and there is a general feeling of fatigue. Early warning signs that you're deficient in minerals include cramps, muscle tremors, lightheadedness and extreme tiredness.

The other two water-soluble vitamins are also essential for a solid workout. The Bs help convert the foods you eat and drink into energy, so they are extremely valuable to anyone trying to get stronger. Vitamin C helps recovery and rebuilding. Of course, both do a great deal more than this, but a brief description is sufficient for the purpose of this article.

My point: if you want to have a good training session, make sure you take a generous amount of these water-soluble vitamins and minerals throughout your workout—especially the minerals. Take all the minerals together rather than separately because



Staff/CrossFit Journal

When competing in the heat, it's important to replace the vitamins and minerals you lose through perspiration.

Simple Shake

If the cost of commercial brands of protein powder is keeping you from making shakes, do what I do: buy dried milk solids. They can be found at grocery stores and cost a quarter of the price of the products at health-food stores. A carton of packets lasts me six weeks and runs right at US\$10.

The formula that I use is this: a half or full packet of dried milk, eight ounces of whole milk, a half cup of blueberry yogurt, and some ice cream. Sherbet also works. Don't throw in anything else, like fruit. It makes the shakes too thick. They need to go down easy.

One right after you finish your workout and another at bedtime will provide you with right at 100 grams of high-quality, easily assimilated protein, and they will do wonders to help you maintain your body weight and recover from the workouts.

they work together in a synergistic fashion. How many tablets should you take? It depends on how hot it is and how much you sweat, as well as your individual requirements. Everyone has different needs in this regard. What you must do is listen to your body. It will inform you when you should take a couple more multiple-mineral tablets.

The signal I need comes when my fingers start cramping. If I don't do something right away, I know my calves will be next. I've had sessions at Fielder's Shed when the heat and humidity were overwhelming and I had to take over two-dozen mineral tablets before my body would finally stop trying to cramp.

What you must do is listen to your body.

Load up on the Bs prior to training, about an hour before the workout. And eat a banana. The fruit will provide you with 400 mgs of potassium, the mineral most responsible for muscle contractions. Also take vitamin C before you lift, while you lift, and after the workout. It will help you recover from the exercises, and the faster you recover from any form of physical exertion, the better.

One other supplement that's very beneficial is a combination of calcium and magnesium. It will help you get to **sleep more easily** and stay asleep. Sleep problems are common during extremely hot weather, and those cal-mag tablets are a blessing. Be sure to check that the product contains twice as much calcium as magnesium or it will not be as effective.

Keep in mind that all these supplements are water soluble. You cannot overdose on them. If you take more than your body actually needs, the excess will be flushed out. You may waste a few cents, but in my opinion, I'd rather take too much than too little.

One of the problems that many athletes have during the hotter months is maintaining body weight. They have poor appetites, so they don't eat as well as they did when it was cooler. When body weight drops appreciably, so does strength. For those training to get ready for summer camp

in any sport, but particularly football, this is not the time to slip backward.

The solution: protein milkshakes—several a day. Drink one as soon as possible after your workout. It will do wonders for your recovery. Drink another at bedtime, along with some fruit or a peanut-butter sandwich. Those additional calories and protein will help you maintain your body weight and rebuild the muscle tissue that you've destroyed during your training session.

When Less Is More

Besides the nutritional support, there are other things you can do to help you get in a productive workout in extremely hot weather. Do what I did and carry several extra T-shirts. Change after you've done all the sets on an exercise. A dry T-shirt can make a huge difference between having a crummy set and an excellent one.

If possible, change your training time to early in the day or later in the evening to avoid the intense heat of midday.

Concentrate on working the large muscle groups and leave the smaller ones alone. You can bring them back into the routine when the weather cools off. Do three primary exercises for your shoulder girdle, back, and hips and legs, then leave the gym. It's often the hanging around for another 30-40 minutes working the arms that gets people in trouble in hot weather. That bit of extra work taps into the reserves and has a negative effect on the next workout.

By dropping all auxiliary exercises, you can cut your time in the gym by 20-30 minutes, and that will do wonders for your recovery.

Slow your pace. Don't push through your routine when it's extremely hot.

This is also a good time to alter your routine by doing lower reps. Nothing over 5 reps, and for the final sets, do doubles, triples and singles. Drop some of your warm-up exercises or only do half as many reps. There is really no reason to



Staff/CrossFit Journal

There's no need for a lengthy warm-up in hot weather—you're already warm.

spend 10 or 15 minutes going through a warm-up session in hot weather. In cool and cold weather, absolutely—but not when just strapping on your belt makes you sweat.

You can also drop some of the intermediate sets and go right to your work sets. Always put the most demanding exercise in your routine up front. That's when you're going to have the most energy. Slow your pace. Don't push through your routine when it's extremely hot. At Fielder's Shed, I would step outside after a set and walk over to the fence and watch the cows for a few minutes, then go back in and do my next set. That brief break did wonders.

All the while you should be paying attention to how your body is reacting to what you're doing, and keep supplying it with minerals and vitamin C.

As soon as you finish, drink a shake with more minerals, then try to lower your body temperature as quickly as you can. Getting under a cold shower or jumping in a pool will do. When I worked with the Baltimore Stallions of the Canadian Football League one summer at their training

camp at Towson University, the trainers had set up a terrific way for them to lower their core temperatures. In the shower room they had filled three large trash cans with ice and water. Thirty seconds in that frigid mixture and you had not only cooled off but you were also shivering. It worked great.

Mentioning my short stint with the Stallions brings to mind a question I'm always asked at clinics and coaches conventions. Can athletes still lift during two-a-days? Yes, they can, and that's what the players did at summer training camp. They practiced in the morning and late afternoon, then came directly to the weight room and lifted after both sessions. I had them do but one primary exercise after the morning practice. One day, an exercise for the upper body, the next day, one for the back, and finally a lift for the hips and legs. Five reps for 5 sets and they were done.

After the afternoon practices, they would do something for the smaller groups, such as calves, arms, midsection. Again, 1 or 2 sets, but the reps would be much higher—15 to 20 reps of exercises such as curls, presses, or standing

or flat presses with dumbbells. It was nothing strenuous, yet it allowed them to get in quite a bit of weight work because they were training six days a week. It helped them maintain the strength they had worked so hard to achieve leading into the camp and gave them a head start on their opponents at the beginning of the season. They won the Grey Cup that year. I'm not sure how much the weight training helped, but I am positive that it didn't hurt.

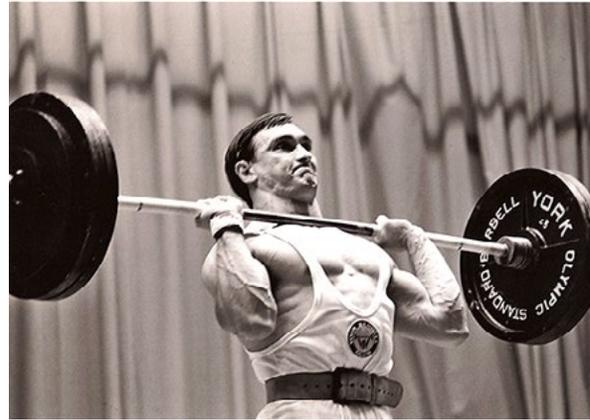
Train Smart

To summarize, if you pay attention to the small things, you can make progress during the brutally hot times of year. Carry lots of water. Robert Voy, the former chief medical officer at the U.S. Olympic Training Center, recommended six ounces of water for every 20 minutes of activity. Take a bit more just in case.

Put the bottles of vitamin C and B plus the multiple minerals in your gym bag so you'll have them if you need them.

Pack two or three extra T-shirts and fill a container with a protein shake. Condense your workout so you're only training for an hour or an hour and 15 minutes. Only work the larger groups and move at a slower pace than usual.

Getting stronger in hot weather is simply a matter of planning and making small adjustments to your program. Dealing with the heat can set you back, or you can overcome it just like any other challenge. It all depends on just how much you really want to get stronger.



Jody Forster

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 Asgaard Company Bookstore](http://TheAsgaardCompanyBookstore.com).*

THE
CrossFit JOURNAL

THE **ANGRY** SURFER

CAN THE UPTIGHT EVER HANG LOOSE? HILARY ACHAUER EXAMINES
HER COMPLICATED RELATIONSHIP WITH SURFING.

WRITTEN BY HILARY ACHAUER | PHOTOS BY RICHWELL CORREA





IT WAS 2001 AND I WAS LEARNING TO SURF ... AGAIN.

My first attempt at surfing happened five years earlier. My husband, Dave, and I had recently moved to San Diego, Calif. A college friend came to visit and asked us to set up a surf lesson for the three of us.

“If I’m coming to San Diego, I’m going to learn how to surf,” he said.

“I thought you had to grow up surfing,” Dave confided in me before our lesson. He grew up in inland Massachusetts and said he didn’t think surfing was something you could learn as an adult.

I grew up in Southern California but spent my summers on a boat or a bodyboard. None of my girlfriends surfed, so it wasn’t in the realm of possibility for me, either.

How hard could it be?

I started off the lesson full of confidence and hope, which lasted right up until we got in the water.

In order to actually surf, you must first paddle your board through the breaking waves to get to a place where you can ride the waves. When picturing myself surfing, I had glossed over that part. I was sure I’d get out there, and the hard part would be catching a wave.

After some instruction on land, the three of us headed out to the water with our instructor. I lay down on my board and started paddling. I had only managed a few strokes before a wave came right at me, knocking my board sideways. I got back on the board and started paddling again when another wave hit me. Then another. By the time the first set had passed through, I was exhausted—and no further out than when I had started.

I DECIDED I HATED SURFING AND DIDN’T GET ON A BOARD AGAIN FOR FIVE YEARS.

I was severely out of shape at the time, with almost no strength or endurance. I don’t know how long I fought with those waves, but I know I gave up several times over. Every time I’d start to make forward progress, a line of waves would march toward me, each one tearing the board from my hand, shooting water up my nose and in my ears, and dragging me back to shore.

The more I tried, the more exhausted I got. The surf instructor seemed baffled by my inability to make forward progress and kept yelling at me to stop brushing the hair out of my face and just paddle.

I finally made it out to the rest of the surfers, but by that time I had nothing left. I made a few half-hearted attempts to catch a wave, but mostly I sat grimly on my board, waiting for it all to end. Dave and his friend finished the lesson energized and enchanted. I was discouraged and miserable.

I decided I hated surfing and didn’t get on a board again for five years.

— FROM THE OCEAN TO THE RING —

I was done with surfing, but it remained a big part of my life. Dave and I live in Pacific Beach (known as PB), a beach town in San Diego. In PB, surfing is a social activity. People go surfing together, chat while they’re waiting for waves, then all go out and get coffee or fish tacos afterward.

This was before kids, so our weekends were endless savannahs of time. Instead of trying to fit everything in, we tried to fill the time. Dave and I would head to the beach in the morning, and then Dave and our friends would grab their boards and go surfing.

I sat on the beach, reading and waiting for them to finish.

“What did you guys talk about?” I’d ask Dave when he came in after spending two hours in the water.

“Huh? Oh, I don’t know.”

We’d walk home, him tired and blissed out, me bored and restless.

I was miserable. I didn’t see myself as a beach-chair kind of person. My mom had gone trekking in Nepal, climbed Mount Kilimanjaro and gone helicopter skiing in Canada. My great grandmother was a real-life Rosie the Riveter, helping to build airplanes at the Douglas Aircraft plant during World War II.

HERE I WAS SITTING ON THE BEACH, TOO BORED TO EVEN READ MY BOOK.

And here I was sitting on the beach, too bored to even read my book.

For a few years, I looked for something to do. First, I tried to get back into rowing. I rowed crew in college, so I took lessons on a single scull. It was fun, but it wasn’t something I could do on my own. I lost interest after a few months. I took a volleyball class, and aerobics, then cardio kickboxing. I discovered I really liked the punching part of the class.



Finally, I got up enough courage to try out a nearby boxing gym.

The first class left me as wrecked as that surf lesson, but at least I completed the basic requirement of the sport: I hit the bag. I left with sore knuckles and some hope.

I stuck with the group classes at the boxing gym, hitting the heavy bags for a few months until Dave gave me 10 private training sessions for my birthday. For the first time, I ducked in between the ropes and stood in the ring, facing another person—my trainer—and tentatively poked out my glove in a whisper of a jab.

Soon I was regularly sparring with other women in the gym. The better I got, the harder they hit. After a few months of sparring, I drove to a boxing gym in downtown San Diego for my first amateur boxing match. When the referee raised my arm after the match, announcing that I won, I felt something shift.

I was in shape. I was no longer a beach-chair person.

One day I looked at the surfboards in the garage. If I could get into a ring and face down a woman with a blue Mohawk and tattoos, I could certainly figure out how to stand up on a surfboard.

— STANDING UP —

The wave built behind me, gathering size and speed as it approached. I turned the board around, lay down on my stomach and started paddling. I felt the wave pull me back slightly as it crested, then, suddenly, I was shooting forward, my board picking up speed.

The wave was in control. I was just a passenger. I placed my hands on the side of the board, awkwardly got to my feet and immediately fell off. Again.

I looked at Dave in frustration. This was the eighth time we had gone out surfing together, and I had yet to stand up on the board.

Now that I was in better shape, my arms strong from hours of throwing jabs and uppercuts, I could paddle out. I could sit on the board. I could even catch waves. But I could not figure out how I was supposed to jump up on a moving board, putting my feet in the perfect spot, and then just stand there, all casual. Most of the time I rode the wave on my belly, not even having the courage to jump up. When I did try to stand up, I fell over as soon as my chest became vertical.

It was not going well.

I was aware this process was taking me much longer than most, but I wasn't surprised. I've never been a natural athlete. I'm strong and determined but not extremely coordinated. Dave was patient, but I was losing hope.

In fact, I got so frustrated by all the factors out of my control that I earned a nickname from Dave: "The Angry Surfer."

Why was this stupid sport so popular, anyway? We had to get up early before the crowds grew and the wind ruined the surf. The water was usually cold, seaweed got tangled in my leash when I paddled out, and just getting into a spot where it was possible to catch a wave was a workout.

Those ads in surfing magazines of girls in bikinis effortlessly cruising along the wave, relaxed and smiling, had to be staged.

I was in too deep to give up, though. Not this time. I decided to try something a little different.

The movement from lying on the board to standing on your feet is called a pop-up. Most beginning surfers try to slowly work their way up to their feet, sticking their butt in the air, but this takes too much time and throws off your balance. The wave is unforgiving. You've got to get on your feet fast.

WHY WAS THIS STUPID SPORT SO POPULAR, ANYWAY?

I was having trouble with my pop-up. I decided I was going to practice them on my living room floor. Twenty at night, before bed, and 20 in the morning.

The next morning I set my alarm for 5:30 a.m., a few minutes earlier than usual. In the dim early morning light, I lay down on the floor on my stomach. I put my palms on the ground and then jumped to my feet, landing in a half crouch. I did 20 in a row.

Then Dave woke up, and it was time to go.

The waves were small that day, which made paddling out easy. It was a clear summer day with no wind, so the waves held their shape as they peeled onto shore.

Dave and I paddled out and waited. He caught a few waves right away. I tried for one but didn't catch it. Another wave came through, and I set off again, paddling hard. Then I felt the wave take my board. I held onto the rails, took a breath and popped to my feet.

Suddenly, there I was, standing on the board, moving swiftly toward shore. I looked down at my feet, astonished. The effort of paddling and the chill of the ocean were gone. Now it was just me, the surfboard and the wave.

Movement without effort or sound. It was like flying.

Then, almost as soon as it started, it was over. The wave petered out and I fell off.

I came up from under water to see my husband cheering for me from his board, and I burst into tears.

I was a surfer.

— THE STOKE —

We all have our reasons for being out there, but everyone is after the same thing.

Surfers call it “the stoke.”

It's that moment when the wave takes control. You're on the board and the board is on the wave. It's up to you to stay in the sweet spot for as long as possible, ahead of the breaking wave, using the power of the ocean to go faster, ride a little longer.

Ask surfers what they find so addictive about the sport and they struggle to put the feeling into words.

Kim Pedersen, a CrossFit athlete from Australia, said the secret to the stoke is the ocean.

“The ocean is like nothing else, not earth or snow. It constantly moves and when you sit on your board you feel like you are a part of it,” Pedersen said.

“This might sound silly, but getting to the beach, not really knowing if the waves are going to be good or not, looking at the ocean and paddling out, it's such an amazing experience, just sitting in the water waiting for a wave,” he said.

Out there, nobody wants anything from you. There are no lunches to be made or emails to answer. There's just the next wave.

But surfing isn't easy. Especially when you try to learn as an adult.

“It was so hard!” Pedersen said about learning to surf when he was 24.

“I had no one to teach me and had no idea what the ocean was doing, so in the beginning I was just trying to figure out when and where a wave that was surf-able would break. I was paddling in circles, not catching any waves.”

Like most surfers, he clearly remembers his first wave. He was in Currumbin on the Gold Coast, out with some friends. They'd all been trying to learn to surf together without much luck.

“I paddled into a wave, having no idea if it was good or not. Popped up on my board, stood up, and the wave just pushed me along for probably 20 meters, but it felt like a 100 meters!” he said.

NOBODY WANTS ANYTHING FROM YOU. THERE ARE NO LUNCHES TO BE MADE OR EMAILS TO ANSWER. THERE'S JUST THE NEXT WAVE.

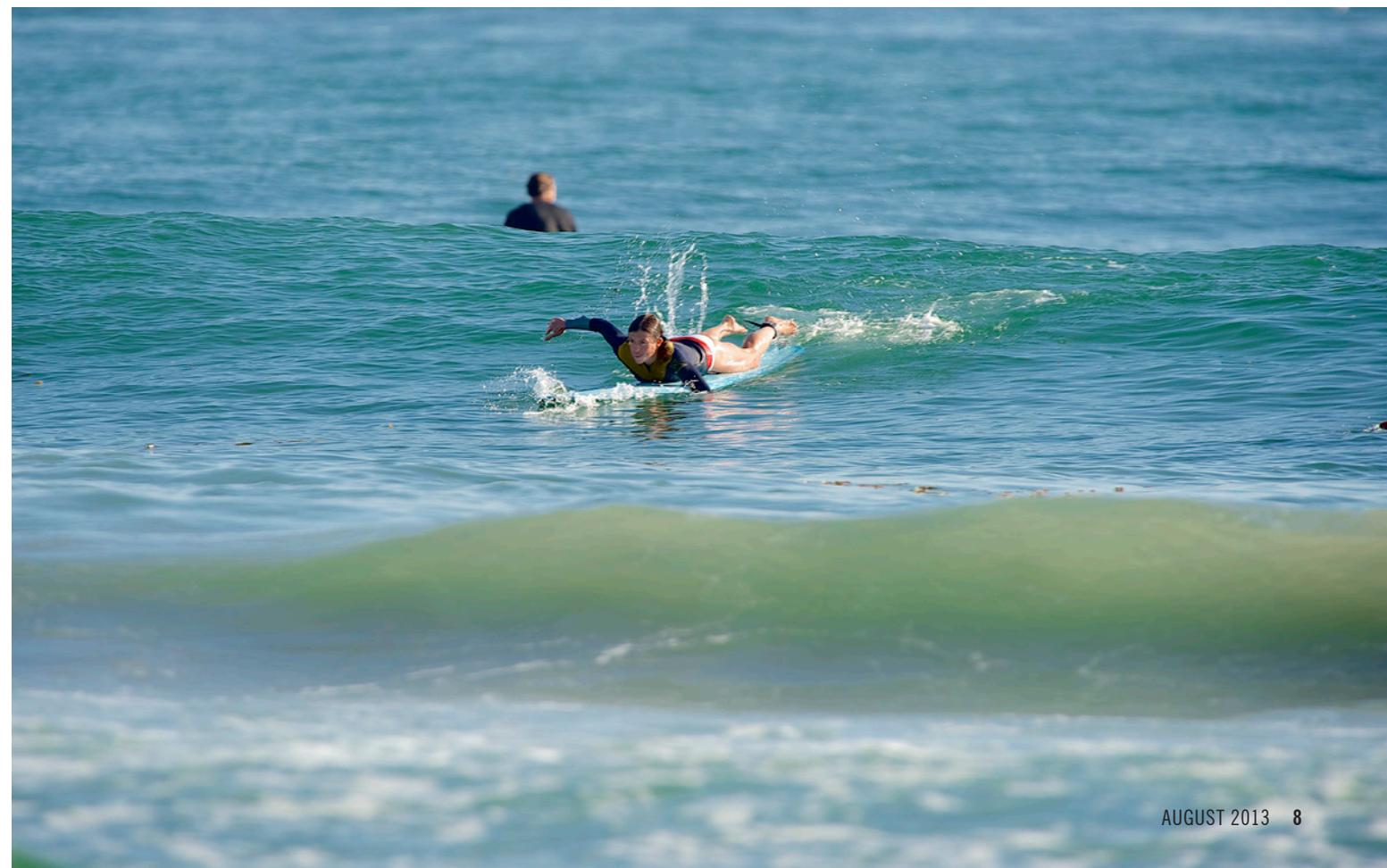
Pedersen didn't really understand what was happening, and he had no control of where he was going. The wave just kept pushing him along. That didn't matter.

“It was probably one of the biggest highs I've ever experienced,” he said. “When the wave let me off, I remember the first thing I thought was, ‘What was that?’ And from then on, all I wanted was to catch another one. And another one.”

— RETURN TO THE WAVES —

After that first wave, I spent the next four years dividing my time between boxing and surfing. Dave and I went on a surf trip to the coast of Mexico, north of Zihuatanejo, spending eight glorious days sleeping in a hut, surfing twice a day, and eating homemade tortillas and fresh-caught fish. I grew more confident, catching bigger and bigger waves, chasing the rush I had felt on that first day.

Then came the kids. Our daughter was born in 2005, and our son in 2008. Surfing was something I always did with my husband—it remained a social activity for me—and it didn't seem right to pay a babysitter so we could surf. We went out now and then, but my surfing basically stopped until 2013, when I decided it was time to get back in the water.





I don't know what I was expecting, but I certainly didn't anticipate getting no waves the first two times I went out. Sure, the conditions were terrible, and I was obviously rusty, but I felt the familiar frustration build.

This is the thing about surfing: there's so much out of your control. The waves, the tide, the wind—all come together to create rideable waves. If you're a great surfer, you can usually make it work in even the worst conditions. But for an already shaky surfer, miserable conditions significantly raise the difficulty level. There's no scaling in the ocean. You surf what's there.

Many people will tell you they are happy to be out in the water, and it doesn't even matter if they get waves. It's just the salt water, the air, the birds, the sky.

I'm not one of those people.

Pedersen understands: "Surfing can be so frustrating! I'm not Zen at all. Sometimes I can't even paddle out to the

break 'cause the current is so strong. If I'm alone it's easy 'cause I just paddle back in. But if I'm with a friend, and he—or worse, she—manages to paddle out, obviously I have to get out too, even if it kills me."

Pedersen tries not to be competitive, "But if your friend gets a really good wave, you want to get a better one," he said. "You get jealous and stoked at the same time for your friend's waves, I guess."

Still, as a team CrossFit Games competitor in 2011 and 2012, Pedersen said surfing is a good rest-day activity and a way to shake off the stress of training.

But this time around, in my second shot at learning how to surf, I wanted to jettison some of my anger. CrossFit provides me with more than enough competition, struggle and pain. Could I silence my inner critic and become a soul surfer? Could I tap into the stoke? I wasn't sure, but I knew who I needed to talk to.



— THE ZEN SURFER —

I've known Dana Vaughn for about 10 years; we met working at a walking-tour company in the early 2000s. Our lives have changed a lot since then—we now both have two kids and struggle to balance motherhood and work—and we lost touch. When I found out she had started to learn to surf again, I reached out.

I'm competitive, have Type A tendencies and am performance motivated.

Vaughn approaches life with optimism and wonder. She's 34 but seems younger, which is heightened by the fact that she doesn't wear makeup and often puts her dark hair in two ponytails. Vaughn is determined to find the good in every situation. She is also unfailingly kind to herself. She cuts herself slack.

I am relentlessly hard on myself. I get no slack.

Vaughn is all about the process, not the outcome. I'll never forget when she told me about her approach to running, which she calls "flow running."

"I just go out and run for as long as it feels good," she said. "Sometimes it's 20 minutes, sometimes it's an hour or more."

"How does she compare her performance against the previous run?" I thought. "How does she know if she's getting better?"

Vaughn started to learn to surf in 2005, "But I never really learned how," she said.

"Then I started having kids," she said, and like me, surfing was off the table for a while.

In May of 2013, Vaughn got back in the water.

"I'm not sure what made me go back out," she said. "Finally, the kids are sleeping more, so I had a little freedom."

The husband of her kids' preschool teacher agreed to help Vaughn in the water. A lifelong surfer, he also windsurfs, kayaks, bodysurfs and sails. He's a true waterman. Vaughn referred to him as her "sea teacher."

The first few times she went out, Vaughn couldn't stand up on the board. She kept going out.

I told Vaughn about when I first learned to surf, and how all those feelings of anger and frustration were returning now that I was learning again. I felt The Angry Surfer coming back. I felt discouraged and frustrated. I let the bad thoughts wash over me, close over my head and hold me down.

"SURFING BRINGS ME BACK TO A MORE PURE VERSION OF MYSELF." —DANA VAUGHN

"Don't you ever get frustrated?" I asked Vaughn.

"I don't," she said. "I like being in the water. I like the challenge of it. I know I'll eventually be able to (catch a wave), and the moment of not being able to do this is not permanent."

If she's having trouble catching waves, Vaughn said she looks at the sky, watches the pelicans swooping down or looks for dolphins.

"Surfing brings me back to a more pure version of myself," she said. "I'm in the moment, and everything else is gone. I reach the core of myself, go back to the person I used to be, before all these things happened."

"These things" are work, stress, bills, disappointments, failure, loss, uncertainty.

The ocean plays a big role in helping Vaughn stay in the moment.

"It takes pure concentration, trying to coordinate with something out of my control," she said.

The unpredictability of the ocean is what I find so frustrating about surfing, but Vaughn said she finds the ocean helps her reach a deep level of concentration.





The author and her kids (left) and Vaughn (right).



“I stop thinking so much,” she said. In these moments, she is trying to be like the ocean, to understand it. “Thoughts of negativity and judgment drop away.”

She loves catching waves and said surfing feels like flying, or gliding, and that it’s always over too soon. But for her, surfing is about the whole experience, not just catching waves. If she misses a wave, or two, or three, she figures the next one will work out.

“It’s a lot easier to not blame yourself while surfing. You just blame it on the ocean,” she said.

— KEEPING SCORE —

After going surfing once with Dave and once with Vaughn, I decided to go by myself.

The tide was heading toward its high point for the morning, which meant the reef break I had been surfing wasn’t going to work. As a result, the beach break was more crowded, with everyone pushed together in more or less the same spot.

That’s another thing about surfing, especially in a highly populated area like PB. In addition to negotiating the waves, you have to stay out of the way of the other surfers and make sure you don’t accidentally steal someone’s wave. The thing is, surfers all congregate where the waves are the best. If you don’t feel like you can hang with the veterans, you’ve got to do what you can on the outskirts.

The paddle out was easy that day. I didn’t even get my hair wet. I sat on my board with my dry hair and forced myself to look at the ocean, at the sky. I looked at the people walking on the beach and made up little stories about the surfers around me.

For 15 minutes I tried for the smaller waves that came through. Nothing. I fought back feelings of discouragement, of inadequacy. I looked at the sky again, saw a bird dive for a fish.

A little wave popped up on the horizon, and I decided to give it a shot. I paddled hard, digging my hands in the ocean, careful to keep my fingers together to increase the resistance.

Then I felt it.

My board started moving faster. I stopped paddling, and the board kept moving. This was it. On the last few waves I had tried for, I had popped up too early, so this time I forced myself to take a breath and wait. Then it was time.



I popped up on my feet, and I was riding the watery roller coaster.

I turned the board parallel to the shore, staying ahead of the breaking wave. I felt my board slow down, so I walked to the nose a few steps, trying to make the small wave last longer.

Then it was over. I jumped off, grabbed my board and pointed it back out to the ocean.

— THURSDAYS —

I have a standing weekly surf date with Vaughn on Thursday, my rest day after three days of CrossFit workouts.

On Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, I keep track of everything. I know exactly how much weight is on

the bar and if it's more or less than I've done before. I know how those around me are doing and if I'm ahead of someone who normally beats me or if I'm falling behind. I know my score at the end, and so does everyone else—it gets written on the whiteboard next to my name.

I POPPED UP ON MY FEET, AND I WAS RIDING THE WATERY ROLLER COASTER.

This measuring and competition have done great things for me. They've pushed me to do things I never thought possible. That, in turn, has given me confidence in other areas of my life. My physical and mental worlds have expanded.

On Thursdays, out in the water, I'm trying not to keep track. I went surfing last week and I don't know how many waves I got—I had some fun rides and I missed quite a few.

When I came home, my 5-year-old son said, "Mommy, did you catch lots of waves?"

"I had fun," I said.

"And guess what? I saw three dolphins!"

The Angry Surfer has to count something. ■

— ABOUT THE AUTHOR —

Hilary Achauer is an award-winning freelance writer and editor with a background in marketing and communications. An amateur-boxer-turned-CrossFit athlete, Hilary specializes in health and wellness content, focusing on emerging fitness trends. Her writing has been featured in a leading online parenting magazine as well as a number of travel and lifestyle publications. She is an editor for Frommer's travel guides and writes websites, brochures, blogs and newsletters for universities, start-ups, entrepreneurs, accounting and financial service organizations, and management consultants. She lives in San Diego with her husband and two small children and spends most of her free time at CrossFit PB. To contact her, visit HilaryAchauer.com.

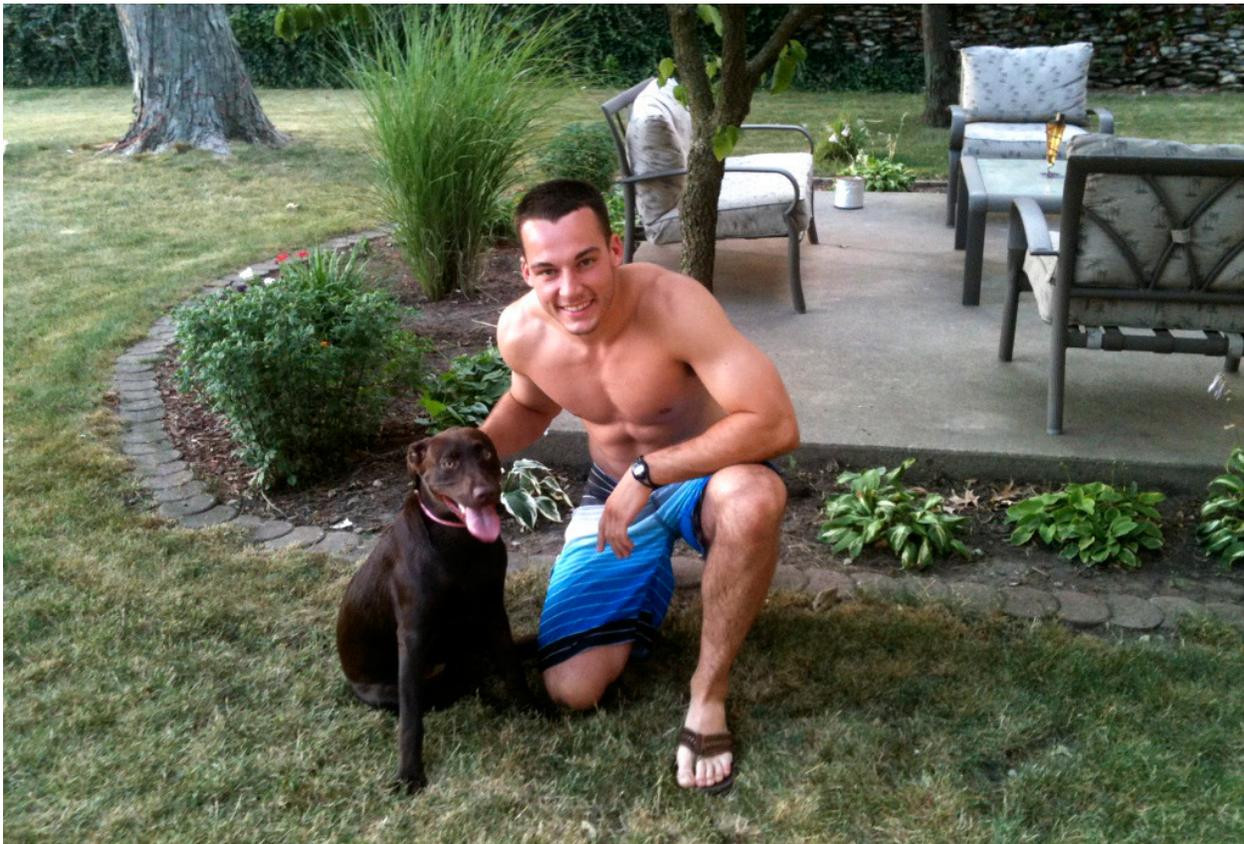
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Destiny, Choice and Struggle

Patrick Miller is a typical kid from a working-class Midwestern town. This is his coming-of-age story—and the ending has yet to be determined.

By Andréa Maria Cecil

August 2013



Courtesy of Gerry Miller

I am writing this brief article for a writing class that I am taking through a community college in my home town of Pontiac, Illinois. This is somewhat of a brief insight to the love and pation for the sport I have, but unfortunately this is all the time I have to complete this assignment on time.

1 of 5

I currently work forty plus hours a week for my father cleaning carpets at his professional floor care business and have been doing so for the past three years. Honestly, my life is a little overwhelming at times, being a 23 year old young man, owning a car, renting a house, raising a dog, and most importantly making it all worth my while, while continuing my education so I do not have to keep cleaning carpets for the rest of my life and do something that I love and have a true passion for.

CrossFit fires me up inside, and pushes me like nothing else has ever done, and it is truly my passion and something that I want to have part in for the rest of my life.

—Patrick Miller, October 2012

A Humble Life

You could describe it as a quintessential American blue-collar town.

Pontiac, Ill., sits less than 100 miles southwest of Chicago and is the seat of agriculture-heavy Livingston County. Historic Route 66 runs right through the city of 12,000; the Route 66 Association of Illinois calls Pontiac home.

"Everybody knows everybody, which sometimes is good, sometimes is bad. It's a farming town. It's a worker's town," 25-year resident Gerry Miller said. "It's definitely not big-city living."

Caterpillar, the maximum-security prison, RR Donnelley and the new medical center are where most people work. Everyone else has jobs at retirement communities and nursing homes.

"It's pretty much those major businesses, and we have a Wal-Mart. And other than that, there's not much," said Miller's son, Patrick.

Cheri Lambert, president and CEO of the Pontiac Chamber of Commerce, described the town as "small" and "quaint" with a vibrant downtown that attracts tourists.

"We certainly are doing well when it comes to a community. We are a very supportive community of each other," she noted. "It's normal to walk into a place and people are asking about your kids—by name."

Yes, most who are born in Pontiac stay in Pontiac.

Patrick Miller has worked with his dad cleaning floors since he was 10.

"It's some long days, and there's got to be easier ways out



Courtesy of Gerry Miller

Patrick Miller (left) grew up helping his father clean carpets but is now dreaming of something more.

there than killing yourself every day," Gerry said. "I knew it was never his passion."

Patrick knew it, too. The problem is he didn't know what his passion was.

After making a name for himself playing high-school football in Pontiac, he went on to receive a partial scholarship to Monmouth College. The Division III school is roughly 200 miles southwest of downtown Chicago. There, he played football for one school year—until he was "academically dismissed."

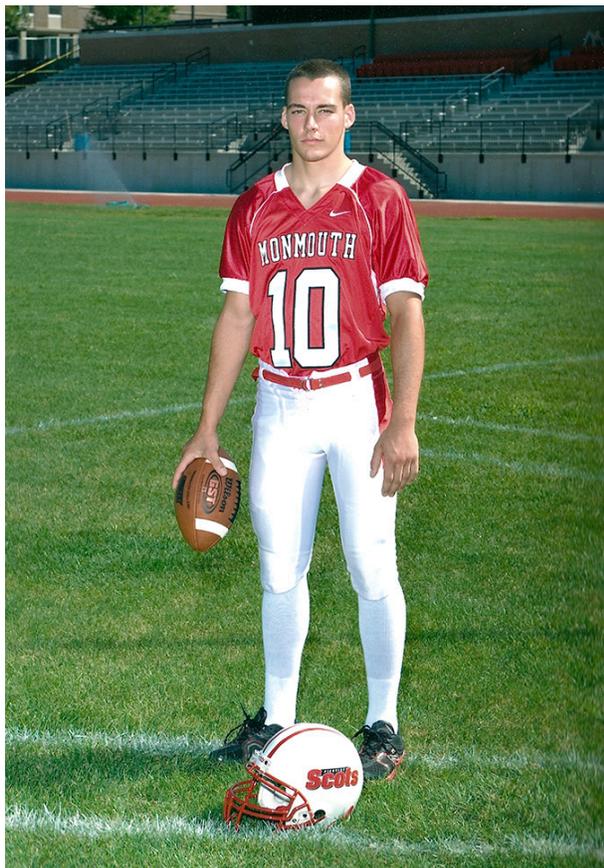
"My grades the first semester, they were pretty decent, and the second semester I was kind of trying to find myself and didn't take school very seriously, and my grades fell below where I needed to be," he said.

He added: "For the most part ... school was something that wasn't for me. I figured I was just gonna stay in Pontiac and take over my father's business."

But Gerry had advice for his son. He needed to be "showing people to do stuff."



Courtesy of Kelli Trainor



Courtesy of Kelli Trainor

Patrick grew up playing sports and received a partial scholarship to Monmouth College.

"I told him, 'Patrick, you're so much smarter than I am. I'm just a doer. I'm lucky I got out of college,'" Gerry said.

Still, Patrick seemed destined for an almost identical path.

"When I graduated high school, I loved sports and I loved business, so I went to Monmouth to play sports and study business as well. ... that didn't really work out with me," he said. "I didn't really know what I wanted to major in."

After leaving Monmouth at the end of the 2008-2009 school year, Patrick was back in Pontiac. He started working for his buddy who had just opened a food stand called Chillin' n Grillin'. He also kept working with his dad. Later in the year, he became a student at Heartland Community College's Pontiac campus. His education can best be described as fits and starts.

"I enrolled in classes and dropped classes and enrolled in classes and dropped classes," he explained. "It was kind of rocky."

Patrick's main objective was to get back to school to play football. Then he and his Chillin' n Grillin' buddy thought about buying a van and driving around to college campuses as food-truck vendors. The idea didn't take off.

"I was making good money with my dad. I was thinking I didn't need to go to school because I could make good money with my dad," Patrick said.

He could take over his dad's business and then comfortably retire in Pontiac to live a perfectly fine, normal, unadventurous life in his hometown.

Lost, Found and Lost Again

Then, as most twentysomethings are prone to do, he started partying a lot. He was drinking more and hitting the gym less, and for a year this was life.

Eventually sense caught up to Patrick.

"Man, what am I doing with my life? I'm 21 years old, I'm not going to school, I'm not working out," he thought.

That's when he found Six Pack Shortcuts, a workout program that promises to burn belly fat and build abs by "maximizing" the so-called "afterburn effect." Mike Chang, identified as its creator, hawks the program in an infomercial style on YouTube.

Patrick bought six months of the program, dedicating himself religiously.



Courtesy of Gerry Miller



Courtesy of Patrick Miller

After a year of heavy drinking and partying, Patrick rediscovered fitness.

When a friend told him in August 2012 about CrossFit, he found CrossFit.com, read all about it and wasn't particularly impressed.

"I can do this. Whatever."

Patrick's first workout was seven rounds for time of:

- 7 handstand push-ups
- 7 135-lb. thrusters
- 7 knees-to-elbows
- 7 245-lb. deadlifts
- 7 burpees
- 7 1.5-pood kettlebell swings
- 7 muscle-ups

He did it at Champion Fitness, a local gym in Pontiac.

"I almost died," he joked.

But that's where Patrick's seemingly typical CrossFit story ends.

He continued following main-site programming at Champion Fitness without any coaching experience and

without anyone's trained eye. Four months later, he took the CrossFit Level 1 Seminar.

"I kind of threw myself into CrossFit," he said. "I thought, 'Man, I can just take the test. It's not that hard.'"

Patrick failed the test by two questions.

Before the year ended, he took it a second time and failed again.

Patrick blames his poor study habits.

"For me, everything was pretty much new and it was just kind of confusing because I'd never been coached on the movement," he said.

But this story isn't about failure. Patrick started studying. Like a distant parent whose lessons are heeded from afar, CrossFit provided an intangible discipline Patrick hadn't known before.

"I've never really studied until now," he said.



Courtesy of Gerry Miller

Patrick's future is full of uncertainty. It's also full of hope.

A Path to Somewhere

Patrick's newfound confidence was a game changer.

"He was always telling me during work all about it and what he's going to do to change his life," recounted Gerry. "It's changed him 180 degrees."

Not only did Patrick change the way he thought about fitness and nutrition, but he also started to change his attitude. He began, in earnest, working toward his associate of arts degree at Heartland.

"He's in a better frame of mind," Gerry said. "This has really put him on a course of what he really wants to get into. He's matured. His time-management skills have kicked in because of this."

And then Patrick met a girl. Kathryn Golden was the University of Illinois veterinary student assigned to the case of his dog, Gracie. The chocolate lab needed surgery on both of her hind legs. The chance meeting would end up taking Patrick more than 700 miles away from Pontiac.

After Kathryn graduated from veterinary school in May, the couple of about nine months drove to North Carolina. Kathryn had an internship there, and Patrick planned to apply to the University of North Carolina at Greensboro to pursue a bachelor's degree in kinesiology.

"We're extremely proud of him for figuring out what he wants to do for life. He's on the road for very good success," Gerry said as Patrick and Kathryn were en route to their new home state.

"Between CrossFit and Kathryn, I think that's ... really helped him get motivated with life."

CrossFit, he said, pointed Patrick in the right direction. Kathryn did, too.

"She just finished up her doctorate. She's been going to college for eight years. If it wasn't for CrossFit ... he probably would not have met her," Gerry said. "Before, he'd work, didn't really care about a lot of stuff. He didn't really know what he wanted to do. He was lost."

Kathryn was happy, too.

"I'm feeling really good," she said while driving to North Carolina. "I'm mostly excited. It's an honor to be able to get the position that I have gotten out here and I'm really excited that Patrick's coming with me."

Life, finally, was perfect.

But weeks after Patrick and Kathryn arrived on the East Coast, the couple parted ways. And in the last weekend of June, Patrick and Gracie found themselves living alone with no income.

"My life is kind of spinning around right now," Patrick said after the breakup.

As for CrossFit, it may or may not be in his life in the future, he said. With no Level 1 Certificate, no regular training routine and no money for joining an affiliate or paying a coach, creating a career out of CrossFit seems unlikely.

Still, Patrick has been accepted to UNC-Greensboro and will begin the road to his kinesiology degree in August. And although life—right now—is not what he had hoped, he concedes that both CrossFit and Kathryn served their purposes.

"Without CrossFit, per se, I wouldn't be where I'm at right now."



About the Author

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THE CrossFit JOURNAL

“This Is CrossFit”

CrossFit community comes together to commemorate the Hotshots 19 and raise funds for their surviving family members.

By **Andréa Maria Cecil**

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Prescott, Ariz.—Brendan McDonough paused frequently when he talked.

“It’s hard to describe (how I feel),” he said. “I’m up and I’m down.”

The 22-year-old is the 20th member of the elite firefighting group Granite Mountain Interagency Hotshot Crew, based in Prescott, Ariz.

In other words, he’s the one who survived.

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In Memory Of:

Jesse Steed, 36
Wade Parker, 22
Joe Thurston, 32
William Warneke, 25
John Percin, 24
Clayton Whitted, 28
Scott Norris, 28
Dustin Deford, 24
Sean Misner, 26
Garret Zuppiger, 27
Travis Carter, 31
Grant McKee, 21
Travis Turbyfill, 27
Andrew Ashcraft, 29
Kevin Woyjeck, 21
Anthony Rose, 23
Eric Marsh, 43
Christopher MacKenzie, 30
Robert Caldwell, 23

Brendan McDonough (right) paid tribute to his fallen comrades on Aug. 31 in Prescott.

He stared off between sentences, at moments staying silent, twice touching his eye and swallowing hard.

Still, Aug. 31 was “a good day,” McDonough said.

“Like the gentleman over in the wheelchair—I mean, holy shit,” he said, pointing to the man who had limited use of his legs and modified the Hotshots 19 memorial workout with a resistance band, kettlebells and a rower.

“There’s lots of love.”

On June 30, 19 members of the Hotshot team died fighting a fire that grew to more than 2,000 acres about 34 miles south of Prescott in Yarnell, an old gold-mining village with a population of roughly 650.

To commemorate the fallen and raise money for their surviving family members, CrossFit Inc. held a memorial workout at Captain CrossFit in Prescott: six rounds for time of 30 squats, 19 135-lb. power cleans, 7 strict pull-ups and a 400-meter run that took athletes past the makeshift memorial that is the chain-link fence surrounding Prescott Fire Department Station 7. As of press time Saturday afternoon, more than US\$128,000 had been raised for the families via Hotshots19.crossfit.com. At the Prescott event alone, \$21,671 was raised from attendance, T-shirt sales and food.

The workout was created with a rep scheme and movements specifically honoring the 19 Hotshots, who were required to perform seven strict pull-ups and to run, said Tony Budding, CrossFit’s Director of Games Media.

"The intent behind Hero workouts is for CrossFitters to honor the memory of the fallen," he said. "It's not just about fitness but the struggle and the misery. Most Hero workouts should make you want to quit—but you don't."

McDonough was in the VIP heat along with other friends and family of the fallen, as well as the likes of three-time CrossFit Games champion Rich Froning Jr., the legendary Chris Spealler, 2013 second-place Games finisher Lindsey Valenzuela, and 2007 Games winner and firefighter Brett Marshall.

Minutes before the VIP heat started, butterflies were released in honor of the deceased, landing on spectators and athletes afterward. Eighth-place Games finisher Dan Bailey then led the group in prayer.

**"This is what it's about.
This is CrossFit."
—Chris Spealler**

Cooper Carr wiped away tears before he started the workout.

He spent six years as a Hotshot with a different agency and now is a firefighter in Sedona. Several of the 19 men were his friends.

"A big reason why I came is because the guys I knew loved this stuff. It's the best way to remember them," he said. "It crossed my mind a couple of times that they'd love to see me suffer right now."

Becca Voigt, who finished 11th at her sixth Games this year, said Saturday's memorial workout was not about winning or losing but suffering and sharing in the grief of the survivors.

"My heart goes out to them. I can only imagine what they're feeling," she said.

When she thinks of losing one of her own family members, it "touches me deep to my soul."

"I'm happy to be a part of it," said Voigt, the first woman to finish in her heat.

For Spealler, a six-time Games competitor, the experience was "refreshing."

"This is what it's about," he said. "This is CrossFit."



Before the VIP heat, athlete Dan Bailey led the group in a prayer.



In tribute, Conrad Jackson wore 40 lb. of gear during the workout.

“The Appropriate Thing to Do”

The night of June 30, Conrad Jackson sat in disbelief.

His boys were gone.

“It was all surreal,” he said.

When they were in high school, he taught Andrew Ashcraft and Travis Turbyfill their first firefighting class. They went on to join the Granite Mountain Interagency Hotshot Crew and perished in Yarnell. Ashcraft was 29. Turbyfill was 27.

“To see ‘em yanked away,” Jackson said and then paused, “I don’t just feel like a teacher; I feel like a dad.”

Jackson was one of those who pulled the bodies out of the fire. He also participated in Saturday’s workout along with his 14-year-old son. The exception was Jackson did the workout in all of his firefighting gear, totaling more than 40 lb.

“It seemed like the appropriate thing to do to honor my friends,” he said.

“What I think is really important is that we, as CrossFit, are here for these families five years from now.”

—Greg Glassman

Jackson took his rhino blade with him on the 400-meter run, which turned into a fast walk after the first round.

“It’s heavy. It’s hard to run in,” he thought during the first round. “It gets you thinking about what those guys are doing out there.”

Jackson finished his fourth round of seven pull-ups right at the 40-minute time cap.

“My goal was just not to quit,” he said.



CrossFit is infinitely scalable, even during a tough Hero WOD.



Top athletes including Rich Froning Jr. traveled to Arizona to honor the fallen.

CrossFit Founder and CEO Greg Glassman has spent nearly seven years living in Prescott. When news of the 19 men's deaths circulated, he didn't recognize any of the names. But when he saw their pictures, he realized he had spent many mornings chatting with one of them at Starbucks. All he knew was that the man was a firefighter.

"This is a very natural thing for our community," Glassman said. "We're really good at events. We're really good at caring."

He continued: "What I think is really important is that we, as CrossFit, are here for these families five years from now."

Glassman said he doesn't want to hear about any of the men's children not being able to go to college because they can't afford it.

"We're gonna cover college for these kids."

60 Days Later

The T-shirts are almost too numerous to count: Los Angeles City Fire Department, Anaheim Fire Fighters, Plymouth Fire & Rescue, Saginaw City Fire Department, New Orleans Fire Department, Alaska Fire Service.

Then there are the stuffed animals—mostly bears and puppies—countless American flags, angel figurines, crosses bearing their names, baseball hats, flowers, boots, toy fire trucks, and photos with their family—wives, kids, moms.

And then there are the simplest things, whose mere number says everything: 19 water bottles neatly clustered together, 19 shovels, 19 stuffed-animal dogs no bigger than your hand.

All these things are strung through the chain-link fence surrounding the Granite Mountain Interagency Hotshot



CrossFit Founder and CEO Greg Glassman was present as butterflies were released before the VIP heat.

Crew building, also known as Prescott Fire Department Station 7.

“We’re today 60 days,” Prescott Mayor Marlin Kuykendall said on Aug. 30. “Prescott has been affected, you bet, but Prescott has been a community where ... everyone cares about everybody.”

Indeed, everywhere in the town of about 40,000—the streets, the restaurants, the bulletin boards—the signs read the same: “Prescott, everybody’s hometown.”

“When you take 19 people out of your community in one fell swoop, it’s a pretty big event,” continued Kuykendall, who has lived in Prescott for more than 50 years.

Few residents, he said, will have memory of any local tragedy as devastating as this one.

The deaths of the 19 men left Prescott without 25 percent of its firefighters. By comparison, New York City lost 9 percent of its firefighters—343—during the 9/11 terrorist attacks, according to information provided by mayoral spokesman Pete Wertheim.

Until June 30, Arizona had recorded 22 wildland firefighting deaths since 1955, according to the National Interagency Fire Center.

The Hotshot deaths represented the country’s worst wildland fire tragedy since Oct. 3, 1933, when 29 firefighters died in the Griffith Park wildfire in Los Angeles, according to the National Fire Protection Association. It was the worst loss of first responders since 9/11.

“This town’s torn. It wasn’t just a fire department. It was family,” McDonough said. “It’s a huge loss.”

For Carr, a lifelong resident of Prescott, said he was grateful to be able to do the “brutal” workout remembering his friends.

“As a fireman, I’ve never felt more loved in my life,” he said. “I’m proud of the town.”

McDonough agreed.

“We’ll bounce back.”



About the Author

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

“This town’s torn. It wasn’t just a fire department. It was family.”

—Brendan McDonough
