
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 second-place Games finisher 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.

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

—Brendan McDonough

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.