

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

November 2013

TITLE	AUTHOR(S)
Journey Behind Bars: Part 2	Beers
CrossFit Kids: An Administrator's View	Spurlock
CrossFit Curmudgeon Cares?	Sherwood
Fight Gone Right	Achauer
Wives of CrossFit SolaFide	Cecil
After Their Last Battle	Beers
Banishing the Boogeyman	Sherwood
Hope in a Box	Achauer
The Truth Behind Lulu's Lemons?	Beers
Riding With the Reaper	Sherwood
No Squats for Coal Miner's Daughter	Cooper
"Snatch a Dumbbell? Madness!"	Sherwood
Daniel Rodriguez's Big Win	Cooper
Thanksgiving: Judgment Day	Achauer
Charting a New Course in the Classroom	Cooper

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Journey Behind Bars: Part 2

After getting caught with a suitcase of cocaine in November 2011, Karl Thorson was sentenced to 30 months in prison. From a penitentiary in California, he talks about finding fitness during two years behind bars.

By Emily Beers

November 2013



November 2012: It's moving day for Karl Thorson—though the move will last three weeks.

After spending four months at a Willacy County prison in Texas, he's been transferred to a new penitentiary and is traveling 2,000 miles from the southern tip of the Longhorn State to Lompoc, Calif. Once in California, Federal Correctional Institution (FCI) Lompoc will become his new home until he's released in February 2014.

1 of 10

Sunlight and food are scarce on the uncomfortable three-week journey that has Thorson traveling in shackles. Riding in stuffy buses and uncomfortable airplanes, he can feel himself losing weight with each passing day.

Discomfort aside, Thorson is excited. Not only was it challenging being one of the few English-speaking inmates surrounded by Spanish speakers in Texas, but he also didn't have access to a gym at Willacy. He heard that his new home in Lompoc has a weight pile and a nice yard for workouts.

Whenever he can, Thorson finds an excuse to talk about CrossFit, a training program he has recently been reading about.

So far, fitness is the only thing that has made his first year in prison bearable; it has been the dominant force in motivating him to start transforming into a better human being.

**Fitness is the only thing
that has made his first year
in prison bearable.**

On the journey to Lompoc, Thorson meets a Croatian man from Kentucky who turns out to be an avid CrossFit athlete. The Croatian is traveling from a different prison, a place where inmates competed in inner-prison fitness throwdowns.

This new Croatian friend is the first confirmation to Thorson that others in the prison system know about CrossFit. Thorson gets excited as he visualizes the prospect of competing in throwdowns at his new home in Lompoc.

Although his obsession has been growing over the last year, Thorson doesn't know that much about CrossFit yet. He hasn't had Internet access since his arrest, so he's been relying on resources sent by his best friend, Errol Clark, one of the principals of Rocky Point CrossFit in Coquitlam, B.C.

Along with a hard copy of the *CrossFit Level 1 Training Guide* and a printout of some of the Hero and Girl WODs, Errol recently sent books such as Louie Simmons' *The Westside Barbell Book of Methods* and Jim Wendler's *5/3/1*.



Courtesy of Karl Thorson

Without access to a gym or equipment, Thorson spent his first year in prison reading about CrossFit, imagining what it felt like to snatch and clean a barbell.

Thorson can't get enough; he's been spending his days reading about clean and jerks and snatches, deadlifts, and overhead squats, but he hasn't had the chance to get his hands on any barbells to actually try the movements. Bored of doing burpees, push-ups and other body-weight movements and inspired by the promise of iron, Thorson embraces the long journey, knowing it will eventually lead to a pile of iron in Lompoc.

Seeds for Change: 2011 to 2012

When a judge in Seattle sentenced him to 30 months in prison, Thorson was angry—angry he was arrested, angry at the world.

Before he was transferred to Texas, he endured a month in solitary confinement in Seattle, living in darkness and utter silence with only his thoughts and one book to entertain him. In that tiny, stuffy cell, Thorson had to find a way to ease the boredom. The one thing he could take control of was his body.

A year and a half later, Thorson calls his time in solitary confinement a “significant point of change.” Or at least it planted the seeds for change.

Before Thorson was arrested, Clark had encouraged Thorson to try CrossFit. Reluctantly, Thorson attempted three introductory classes at Rocky Point CrossFit, but that was it. He didn't even manage to finish the fundamentals program. For one reason or another, taking care of his body wasn't a priority at the time. But in solitary confinement—lonely and bored—the one thing he could take control of was the fate of his body. So he started doing burpees, push-ups and sit-ups in an effort to maintain his sanity.

Soon his mood started to change.

“I honestly think there was a little seed of change in every squat, every burpee, every pull-up and every push-up from the beginning,” Thorson said of the gradual process.

“As I got physically stronger, so did my desire to focus my life on something more positive. I went from being

frustrated and angry to being overwhelmed by a sense of purpose that I never felt before. I just felt good about being involved with fitness,” he said.

Although he knew little about CrossFit, he remembered some of the concepts he learned at Rocky Point, and he started wracking his brain to conjure up everything he could. He had never gotten a chance to try any of the Olympic lifts, but he had learned to deadlift and squat.

**“I honestly think there was a
little seed of change in every
squat, every burpee, every
pull-up and every push-up.”**

—Karl Thorson



Courtesy of Kim Bellavance

Originally from British Columbia, Canada, Thorson was arrested, charged and sentenced in the United States, serving time in Washington, Texas and California.



Courtesy of Errol Clark

Thorson's friend Errol Clark introduced him to CrossFit and regularly sends him resources to help him train while incarcerated.

"I remembered a few things about the deadlift, and to stay back on my heels in the squat, and to use my posterior chain. I didn't know what (posterior chain) was at the time. I just thought ass and hamstring," Thorson said.

"And I remember Errol telling me about my rack position during the front squat. I remember being inflexible and thinking Errol was crazy to think I could lift my elbows up more," he said.

While in Seattle, Thorson made it his mission to learn as much as he could about fitness during his time behind bars.

"It's difficult to learn those skills and lifts without the Internet," said Thorson, who started learning the old-fashioned way. Books became his new best friend.

"I've had to piece a lot of things together and go through a lot of trial and error to learn what I've learned," he admitted.

More than anything, though, through the learning and the trial and error, Thorson has found a new purpose in life.

"I started to become excited, really excited about the things I was learning and how good I felt physically and mentally from the training I was doing. I started to see other options on how to live my life," he said.

"Little by little, crime became less of an option ... I hung onto little ideas for a while, never really ruling them out, until gradually I didn't even consider them anymore," he said.

Society's Dilemma

When Thorson—a Canadian citizen—was sentenced, the judge in Seattle told him that after he served his time and was sent back to Canada, he would never be welcome in the United States again.

Travel is just one of the difficulties Thorson will experience once he is released in the early months of 2014.

In fact, many ex-prisoners have a hard time adjusting to freedom once they're released. While programs exist to help newly released prisoners adjust, the social stigma they face often makes it difficult for them to stay on a good path.

Dr. Jennifer Reiss is a psychologist in Thorson's hometown of Vancouver. She works at a remand center with pre-sentenced individuals awaiting trial.

"A released prisoner's transition moving from a structured and regimented life—where three meals a day are provided for him, where lights out happens at a certain time ... —to go from a structured, institutionalized environment like that to one that is much more fluid when he is released can make it really hard for him to cope," Reiss said.

Once prisoners are released, coping with their newfound independence is only the beginning.

"There's a societal bias, a stigma against people who have been in jail, and this can affect their ability to get a job," Reiss added. "So often when they're having a hard time coping, it's easier just to go back to their old ways, to hang out with their old friends and go back to making easy money."

Reiss thinks released prisoners need two things to adjust to life on the outside: a job and a support group. She admits, though, that it's not that simple. Society has a bit of a moral dilemma on its hands when considering how to treat ex-prisoners. Do we give them the benefit of the doubt and forget about their pasts completely? Or do we make them prove themselves over time? What about when it comes to employing someone who has spent time in prison?

Society has a bit of a moral dilemma on its hands when considering how to treat ex-prisoners.

You can't blame an employer for not wanting to hire a released prisoner, said Reiss. Yet, hiring a former prisoner might be the best thing an employer can do for both the prisoner and for society, as former convicts who quickly get jobs and successfully adapt to life after prison are more likely to live honest lives, which benefits everyone.

In a 2012 article published in *Verstehen*, a sociology journal put out by McGill University, Rebecca Greenberg makes a similar argument to Reiss.

In *Out from Behind Bars: Canadian Ex-Prisoners' Perspectives on the Transition from Prison to the Community*, Greenberg lists family relations, community support, education and the ability to get a job as key points in helping prisoners successfully reintegrate.

"Research shows that employment is the largest concern for prisoners in the pre-release period with 88% of inmates reporting that they need either more job training or more education in order to become employable upon release," Greenberg said in the article.

She added that "productive education directed to postrelease employment helps to mediate individual levels of stress and anxiety."



Courtesy of Kim Belandance

Thorson went to school in North Vancouver, and friend Errol Clark remembers him as a "shit disturber."

Arguably as important as education is community support. “When released offenders feel isolated from the community and blocked from society’s opportunities and freedoms, they are more likely to return to a life of crime,” Greenberg wrote.

In Thorson’s case, educating himself behind bars has been his priority. He can’t wait to become a free man again in February 2014. He’s already thinking about eating a good steak and drinking a cold beer, and he’s stoked to finally be able to get his hands on a pair of gymnastics rings and bumper plates.

But more than anything, he’s eager to get involved with CrossFit for youth at risk. He can’t wait to use the knowledge he has gained in prison about strength and conditioning—and CrossFit specifically—to help others avoid the path he chose.

For the most part, Thorson thinks the adjustment will be relatively fast and smooth. He has a supportive family

and friends to turn to, and he has an education and employment plan.

That said, Thorson knows there will be challenges. He knows there is a stigma; he knows people don’t always embrace ex-prisoners; he is expecting people might judge him. Ultimately, Thorson knows some people won’t look past his mistakes

But he’s hoping some will.

“I hope that those that have strong opinions of the law can look past people’s mistakes and keep in mind that many have the ability to effect positive change,” Thorson said.

He’s serving his time. He’s learning. He’s changing. And he’s hopeful he’ll be a different person this time around. He’s also hoping the CrossFit community will understand, hoping it’ll recognize the power of fitness in terms of its ability to change someone.



Courtesy of Kim Bellavance

Thorson hopes his newfound focus on fitness and health will keep him out of trouble when he returns home to Canada.

"The real magic of CrossFit is not how it improves your performance. That's a bonus," Thorson said. "The real magic is how it makes you feel when you come home to your families, how you feel playing sports with your kids."

He continued: "It's in the healthy example you set for them; it's in the eyes of your husband or wife as they look at you. People who have found themselves behind bars need that, too."

That's where the change begins, Thorson believes. "Don't lump all inmates into one category," he pleads.

That's all Thorson is asking for when he is released: a chance to prove that he has changed.

Arriving

November 2012:

The minute I arrive (at Lompoc) I make it clear to everyone that training hard is my priority. I came here for the weight pile; not much else concerns me. Once I'm settled in, I start to explore the yard. It's bigger than I'm used to. It has everything I need. Now all I have to do is teach myself how to lift.

I'm told it's difficult to get your hands on weights. I'm told it's better to join a workout "car." But it will take time for me to be accepted.

My time is now. I'm not here to wait to be accepted.

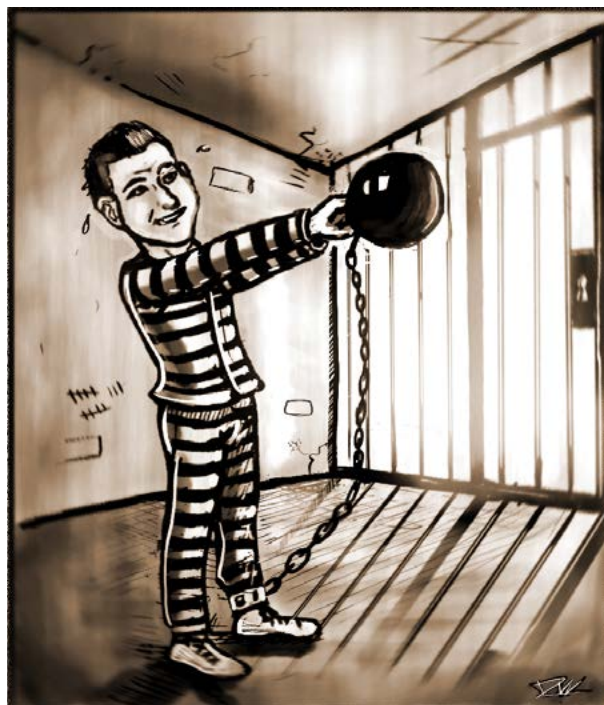
"One guy sprints while the other skips, and then they switch. I can tell they're two of the fittest guys on the yard."

—Karl Thorson

I just start hanging out by the weights, watching for an opening. Eventually I fit myself in. I decide to test my strength.

I test my deadlift, my push press, my squat, and my bench press. I'm not as strong as I thought I'd be. It's time to try the O-lifts—the clean and the snatch—but I'm not 100 percent sure which is which. I think I need more reading material.

I thought I would be stronger, but really, I'm lean at 170 lb.



Donovan Winters/CrossFit Journal

and have been doing mostly burpees for a year, so I guess I should expect it.

I've been reading so much about power lifting and it starts to influence my programming. I feel I need to get stronger so that I can get closer to the prescribed weights in the CrossFit WODs I've been reading about. I'm not sure how to scale things down.

I ask a few people what they know about CrossFit. Some ... know about it, or they talk about another group that does it, but I'm not sure they really know what CrossFit is.

Soon, I notice two guys training together off in the distance near the baseball field. I haven't seen them on the weight pile yet, but I can tell they're in good shape. They're doing 100-meter sprints mixed with skipping.

One guy sprints while the other skips, and then they switch. I can tell they're two of the fittest guys on the yard.

I asked a few people about them and they all respond respectfully by saying, "Yeah, that's so and so—they go hard." I make a mental note to get to know them if I can.

Not everyone is friendly here at first.

One day at lunch, I find myself sitting beside one of two guys I saw sprinting and skipping and decide to bring up CrossFit. He tells me he got WODs sent to him and started doing it a few months ago. He says he loves it.

I tell him my best friend co-owns Rocky Point CrossFit. I tell him I will explain everything I (know) about it, including my limited experiences in his box before I was arrested.

He instantly asks if I wanted to do some workouts with him and we set up a time.

I don't know it at that moment but this man is about to take my training to the next level.

Day-to-Day at Lompoc

In an eight-man room on the third floor of his building, Thorson sleeps on the top of a two-man bunk beside a pair of small windows with bars on the inside. His room looks down on a courtyard. Steel tables and benches line the yard.

He has his own locker; it's five feet tall and a foot and a half both wide and deep. Other than his body and his books, his locker is the only thing Thorson can really call his own.

Breakfast, which is served at Chow Hall, starts at 6 a.m. Breakfast for Thorson is usually coffee and oatmeal.

Then it's time to shower in one of the two bathrooms on his floor. In each bathroom, there are six individual showers, sinks and toilets to serve the 90-man dorms on each end of the hall, as well as the 10 eight-man rooms, one of which is Thorson's.

After breakfast, Thorson usually reads or watches the morning news on one of the TVs near the courtyard. When watching TV or sitting at the tables in the courtyard or Chow Hall, Caucasians sit with Caucasians, blacks with blacks, Mexicans with Mexicans, and so on.

Sometimes Thorson hits an early-morning workout. But usually he works out in the afternoon or evening.

He could go to the education department in the early mornings, but it's usually too busy, so he saves that for



Space is limited in correctional institutions, and many prisons don't have weights. For about a year, Thorson trained with body-weight exercises while dreaming of barbells.

the afternoon. This is where he reads the strength-and-conditioning books Clark sends him.

Lately, afternoon workouts involve pull-ups, dips, push-ups and maybe some skill work or light conditioning. He always has to keep track of the time, though, because at 4 p.m. he is called back to his unit for the daily count. This is also when mail gets handed out. Mail's a big deal to Thorson right now.

Dinner is served at 6 p.m. Each floor is called separately, and Thorson has to wait until it's his floor's turn. Then it's time for another workout. He usually hits the weight pile from 6:30 until 8:30 p.m. But there's a lot of standing around waiting for weights.

After his post-workout shower, he eats a late dinner of rice and tuna or mackerel—food he buys from a commissary at the prison. This is also where he buys powdered milk for his post- or pre-workout drinks. He adds some chocolate to sweeten it up.

By 9:30 p.m., it's back to his room, and at 10 p.m. it's lights out.

Thoughts on Happiness

August 2013:

In a way, I'm happier than when I was free. I'm happier with who I am.

Lompoc isn't a place that is designed for comfort, so it's difficult to be really happy here.

Your freedom, privacy, contact with friends and loved ones, are all taken away. That's been the hardest part.

Confinement is a constant stress that just sits under the surface waiting for some kind of release that never comes.

It's hard to judge my actions at the moment because, well I'm in prison, and this is a different world all together. It doesn't translate well to the outside world.

That being said, I feel good about my prospects for the future.

I have a different mindset; I have more positive motives.

So when I ask myself what my motives are today, what my plans are, they are different than before, more positive, and that's something in itself. That's a change in the right direction.

I was really confused before coming here; I don't think I had much direction. Or at least, I think my direction was twisted, and it feels like I have found a better path to follow.

The Sounds of the Iron

April 2013:

I woke up this morning and literally had to drag myself out of bed. I'm rarely in a good mood when I'm woken up at 5:30 a.m., and today was no exception.

I ate my breakfast and prepared myself for the walk to our weights. It was a little cold, but the blue sky and morning mist promised me beauty and I forgot my disgruntled disposition.

As I walked closer to the weight pile, the sound of iron clanging filled my ears.

Our weight pile isn't your average weightroom. There are no clamps for the barbells, no rubber weights, no machines—there's just iron. The weights clap together as they're being lifted, and bang the ground hard with finality when sets are done.



Courtesy of Kim Bellavance

Upon returning to Vancouver, Thorson will look to his friends and family to support him as he reintegrates himself into society.

As I watched the sun rise, I realized that the sounds that my workouts make are different than most of the other guys. The sounds that my plates make as I lift, push, pull, are louder and faster.

The sounds of my workout are distinct—they form a pattern.

First, I can hear the explosion of power cleans. The force from the pull vibrates through the plates, rattling them together. Then they crash down hard as gravity pulls them to the ground.

“The other guys know what these sounds mean. They can hear the intensity. They may not know what CrossFit is, but they respect the work.”

—Karl Thorson

There is a pause of silence as I do pull-ups, an echo from the hollow box during box jumps, and finally the snapping sound of double-unders, to be repeated round after round after round.

The other guys know what these sounds mean. They can hear the intensity. They may not know what CrossFit is, but they respect the work. They know that whoever makes those noises is headed somewhere.

Anyone that works hard on this yard is respected.

Thorson's Plea

Thorson believes fitness is one of the only hopes for many prisoners to reform.

“I’ve heard about policies being implemented in the BOP (Bureau of Prisons) and other prison systems that have begun to take away exercise equipment or ban upper-body workouts. I don’t believe this will solve any issues,” Thorson said.

“It will only limit the positive affects programs like CrossFit can have,” he added.

Recently, Thorson met an inmate who has been behind bars for 18 years. And over the course of his incarceration,

the inmate has noticed something remarkable: the guys who spend all their time in their bunks watching TV, the ones who don’t commit themselves to a fitness program, are the ones most likely to find themselves back in prison.

But the guys who dedicate their time in prison to getting fit, the ones who test themselves every day through intense workouts, they never come back, the man explained.

Weightlifting in prisons has been an issue at times, partially due to budget concerns and a desire to limit prison “frills.” The 1996 Zimmer Amendment addressed public concerns with supposedly luxurious recreation options of inmates, and some have questioned whether allowing criminals to become stronger and more powerful is actually a good thing for both corrections officers and the general public after the inmate is released.

“Too many criminals spend their time in prison becoming even more violent, criminal machines. We need more books in prison and less weight-lifting equipment,” Rep Steve Chabot (R—Ohio) said in a 1995 article [Laws Target Prison Weightlifters](#).

Those views, dated as they are, are not uncommon, and budgets have only grown tighter as the number of American inmates has increased dramatically over the years. In California in 2008-2009, it cost over \$47,000 to hold an inmate for one year, and the total expense of the California corrections system is in the billions. Recreation as a means of rehabilitation is far from a pressing concern.

All that stands in contrast to the story of Karl Thorson, who’s found a new path through fitness.

“Sport has the ability to teach us so many things that form the foundation of a fulfilling life,” Thorson said.

He added: “These things transcend a government’s laws and delve deeper into the core of our own humanity.”



About the Author

Emily Beers is a *CrossFit Journal* staff writer.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

CrossFit Kids: An Administrator's View

Assistant principal Chris Spurlock reviews the effects CrossFit Kids had on the P.E. program at Savannah Christian Preparatory School.

By Chris Spurlock

November 2013



All: Savannah Christian Preparatory School

In the 2013 school year, our school undertook a major change in its physical-education department: we implemented a CrossFit Kids curriculum for kindergarten to Grade 12.

The results were immensely rewarding and stimulated much learning. While I learned many things, three in particular have become very apparent from an administrator's point of view: CrossFit Kids works perfectly in the general population (i.e., the classroom), teachers of all subjects could benefit from CrossFit education and seminars, and CrossFit Kids can save physical education.

Fitness for All

As taught at the CrossFit Level 1 Trainer Course, and as we experience in the WOD, we are all weak at the edge of our experiences. As we increase our exposure to new things, our weaknesses become strengths and we find new weaknesses that need to be addressed. This concept applies not only to individuals but also to groups.

What we found is that by bringing CrossFit Kids into a general population or classroom, we are promoting participation in physical activity by students who would never consider going to a gym. By including these students, we bring in new sets of strengths and experiences to the group, which increases the total experience of the group.

Students from all physical-fitness backgrounds learn from each other's strengths—and typically at a faster rate than adults. We have found over the last year that a large, diverse body of experience and the ability to learn quickly create an environment in which student weaknesses are improved at an accelerated rate.

We started an advanced class at our middle school in January, with 22 students and two teachers who are CrossFit Kids trainers. These kids brought diverse fitness and athletic backgrounds to the group, but 30 percent had little or no fitness or sports experience. None of these students had been doing CrossFit for more than six months. By the end of the school year, each member of the class could do butterfly pull-ups, handstand push-ups and Olympic lifts with proficiency.

To mark how far members of this group had come during their first year of training, we had them participate in the Teen Gauntlet. It was an amazing experience. Five of our advanced CrossFit students competed, and all five finished in the top 20 in their age group. Josh Kelley won his age category and was invited to the Kids Gauntlet at the CrossFit Games.



Teachers found that improvement was very rapid as students who struggled with movements learned from those who were proficient.

I attribute most of our success this year with CrossFit Kids to having fantastic instructors who have bought into the CrossFit Kids methodology and live it every day, and I think all teachers in all subjects could benefit from becoming CrossFit trainers.

"Differentiated instruction," "higher level thinking" and "learning styles" are all catch phrases in education right now. CrossFit Kids seminars not only address all the principles behind these phrases but also teach educators how to apply the principles.

Encouraging learning based on teaching cues and student engagement sets CrossFit Kids apart as an educational model.

Using these ideals is referred to as "best practices" in education. One of the most difficult things about teaching is trying to figure how to implement these best practices in the classroom. The CrossFit Kids program is, in fact, set up just like a classroom based on best practices, and encouraging learning based on teaching cues and student engagement sets CrossFit Kids apart as an educational model.

What we were not necessarily expecting to see was CrossFit Kids providing a reordering of the physical pecking order in gym class. Our school is located in an area in which football reigns supreme: Georgia is in the heart of college football's Southeastern Conference. We love football, and we think of large, powerful bodies when we think of "athletes."

CrossFit Kids and the CrossFit program as a whole punish any specialization to excess, which is why we have slightly built tennis athletes who are more than holding their own in CrossFit workouts with large, powerful and physically dominant football players. What I think I see as a result is that the larger students begin to see the limits of their ability and appreciate other abilities. Strength alone, for instance, is not enough. In that process of discovering strengths and weaknesses, our athletes, through CrossFit Kids, are finding they can admire the work of those traditionally considered "less talented" just as much as the work

of those regarded as "most talented" in P.E. classes. This has been a welcome but unexpected result.

Some have been fearful that a CrossFit Kids implementation would create a hyper-competitive environment that might exacerbate the exclusion of the less athletic students. My experience was the opposite: as my kids were counting each other's reps and had the chance to cheer for success, they became more equal.

The Future of P.E.

All these elements of our kindergarden-to-Grade-12 CrossFit journey have shown me that CrossFit Kids can save physical education.

As we all know, today's physical-education programs are widely ineffective because of a lack of student involvement and engagement, discipline issues, and a lack of value in the eyes of students and administrators. These issues feed off of one another to the detriment of fitness.



CrossFit does not reward size and strength alone, which means smaller athletes can compete against the larger football players.



When the teachers and administrators at Savannah Christian got excited about P.E., the kids did too.

Case in point: to address the lack of student involvement, dancing-style video games and parachute games have become mainstays in physical-education programs, but neither will significantly improve fitness, though they might be considered better than nothing. Still, their inclusion in a fitness program leads administrators, as well as students, to view the P.E. classes as low in impact and of little importance. P.E. then becomes little more than a babysitting service, and the schedule makers place more students in P.E. not because students want to be there but because it's an easy class. This leads to increased discipline issues and less student involvement. The factors in total create a reinforcing loop that's difficult to interrupt.

What we have seen with our CrossFit Kids implementation is that kids recognize the value in the program and, just as they do in math or English, they treat their P.E. time like it matters. Interestingly, functional movement is possibly the only thing you can learn in school that you will utilize every day for the rest of your life. It is something that can be

taught, improved and measured, just like the curriculum aspects of any other class, and functional movement could be applied to meet any state standards.

Because the functional movements of CrossFit Kids can create instant value in the eyes of students and administrators, I believe it will change how P.E. is viewed wherever CrossFit Kids is successfully implemented.

This has been an eye-opening year. CrossFit Kids has changed the attitude toward physical education and has improved the expectation of what it can do for students at Savannah Christian Preparatory School. Our kids have learned things like goal setting and how to deal with adversity, which they can now apply not only in the traditional classroom but also in every aspect of their lives. We have students who have found new strengths and are beginning to realize that their potential is limitless—and this is just year one.

We are excited about where we are headed and what the future may hold.



**Functional movement is
possibly the only thing you
can learn in school that
you will utilize every day for
the rest of your life.**

About the Author

Chris Spurlock is an assistant principal, baseball coach, husband and soon-to-be father of three. He has a passion for athletics, and he completely changed his body after doing CrossFit for only 11 months. He considers being part of bringing CrossFit Kids into classrooms one of the most exciting things he's had the privilege of doing.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

CrossFit Curmudgeon Cares?

Pat Sherwood will start the WOD while you're in the bathroom, but deep down he really loves working out with you.

By Pat Sherwood

November 2013



Staff/CrossFit Journal



I hate competing in CrossFit.

When my daily workout becomes a competition with someone other than myself, all the fun is gone for me. I do CrossFit for selfish reasons. It is my daily escape from the stresses of life. It's my hour to decompress, play my music, push myself, strengthen both body and mind, and enjoy the company of some close friends. It is a bit of a sanctuary for me. I like to keep it simple. The more moving parts involved, the less fun I have.

"Hey, we're going to do this great WOD ... you just need to find 85 percent of your 3-rep max ... blah, blah, blah."

No, I'm not breaking out a calculator to work out. I will simply choose a weight that is light, medium or heavy.

"Hey, we're going to hit three WODs today. Wanna join?"

No, no I don't.

If we have to rush warming up to work out at a specific time, it pisses me off.

If I get warmed up and I'm ready to hit it only to find that a couple more people just showed up and now we need to fart around for another 15 minutes while they get ready, it pisses me off.

I like to show up, turn on some beats, warm up, hit the WOD, stretch my damn hip flexors, high-five whoever happened to be working out at the same time and leave the gym.

More times than I can remember at the CrossFit HQ gym, four or five of us decided to work out at a certain time. As often happens at work, it's easy to get delayed by a project and be 10 to 20 minutes late for the WOD. Many of my buddies have walked into the gym to find me already working out when this happens.

"Dude! Are you already hitting the WOD?"

"Yes, yes I am."

I did not want it to turn into a production or eat up my entire day. I showed up, warmed up, hit it, and now I'm leaving. Nothing personal. I'm just doing CrossFit the way I like to do it. And no, I don't want to do any "accessory work." CrossFit was truly designed to allow me the fitness to live my life and do whatever I want outside the gym, and that's how I use it.

I now find myself in a unique situation. It is Day 70 of a motorcycle trip through Mexico and Central and South America. The purpose of the journey is to highlight the CrossFit community in Latin America. So far, we have ridden through the U.S., Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia and Ecuador. In each country we've hit multiple cities, and in each city we've hit multiple CrossFit affiliates. I've met more members of our amazing community than I can even remember. We've hit WODs together, laughed together, enjoyed food and drink, visited homes, crashed on couches, met families, learned about lives, and made tons of new friends. I owe so many CrossFit athletes in Latin America so many favors I will never be able to repay. The hospitality and kindness they have shown us is truly humbling.

However, one thing has been a huge struggle for me personally: I have had to put aside all of what I wrote above.

Before we show up to an affiliate, I try to send the owners an email stating that the intent of our trip is to highlight them, not us. We want to capture business as usual and regular classes at their box. I often ask them not to do anything special for our arrival. We just want to be casual

observers. They always respond in the affirmative, and then when we arrive, the emails have been disregarded.

We have shown up to affiliates that literally had a camera crew ready to film our arrival and everything we did. This is bizarre to me and immediately makes me uncomfortable. I don't like that much attention on me. It makes me self-conscious and uneasy. In my eyes, there is no reason for it. I don't feel I've done anything that merits such attention or interest. I did not create CrossFit. I don't think I've done anything that had a revolutionary impact on the CrossFit community, nor am I an elite athlete. My life in CrossFit has simply been about helping spread the methodology, concepts and ideas of Coach Greg Glassman.

But when I take a step back, I get it. They are not super excited about "me" per se but excited about what I represent. I'm a representative of CrossFit HQ, which to their minds is all wrapped up in the same bundle as Coach Glassman, Nicole Carroll, Greg Amundson, Tony Budding and all the other OGs. However, just because I might understand it does not mean I like it or have an easy time dealing with it.

There is another part to this story.

It involves my precious daily workout. Everywhere we go, tons of people want to work out with us. My workout of the day evolves from my simple training and daily escape into a massive production with lots of different people showing up at various times to join in as text messages are sent from the gym rallying the members to join in. It's like the Bat-Signal going up in the sky, calling everyone and turning the WOD into a very big deal.

This gets me thinking about what people like Rich Froning, Jason Khalipa or Chris Spealler must have to deal with. At times it must be exhausting to be them.

Most of those who come to join in my workouts are genuinely excited and just happy to throw down. However, every now and then someone shows up with the intention of assassinating me in the workout. I'm the gringo from HQ. It seems in their eyes that I must be a superhuman athlete. Suddenly, there is a huge target on my back and I can feel them gunning for me. All eyes are on me. The sidelines of the gym are filled with people eager to film or snap hundreds of pictures on their phones as the clock ticks down. The pressure is on, I need to perform, and it's "go time."

My daily escape has now become a pressure cooker that robs me of what I enjoy about CrossFit.



Sherwood (left) overlooking Medellín with Luis Giraldo, owner of Fuerza CrossFit.

But in times like these I need to take a step back and see the big picture. If these situations are uncomfortable for me, then I need to suck it the fuck up. I'm here to make sure that members of the CrossFit community get what they want and deserve. My personal preferences should not matter. I usually do a pretty good job about pushing my anxiety into the back of my mind, hitting the WOD, and just trying to enjoy the incredible experience of being where I am and doing what I'm doing.

But I'm human. Every now and then I'm just too tired or worn out from the road, and I can't seem to put a smile on my face. I miss the simple workout I used to hit back home. When we meet new people, they don't know if we are well rested and happy or just spent 11 hours without food riding our motorcycles in the freezing rain and can barely keep our eyes open. If I happened to be at your affiliate on one of my miserable, grumpy days, I apologize.

I'm sure some people will read this dispatch and their gut reaction will be, "Wow, you have a great job and people are happy to see you—and you're complaining?"

I'm not complaining, nor am I looking for sympathy. I'm just being honest about some demands of this trip and offering a glimpse into what some of the competitors in the limelight of the CrossFit Games must face on a frequent basis.

I worked CrossFit Level 1 Seminars for many years, and I can tell you the staff is exhausted after doing a weekend seminar. During those two days, the Level 1 crew has to be 100 percent on. You put your own wants, desires and needs aside and put the needs and wants of the participants at the top of your priority list. The cost of this focused attention is a group of very tired trainers heading to the airport once the course ends.

I feel like I'm on Day 80 of a Level 1 Seminar, and every now and then I just crash and burn. But I wake up the next day with a new perspective after having met yet another amazing piece of the CrossFit community. I throw my leg over the bike once again. Rain or shine, we ride on.

I may be tired at times, but I love every minute of it—the easy days and the tough days. Just like my WODs back in the Media Office, they all serve their purpose.



About the Author

Pat Sherwood works for CrossFit as a flowmaster and member of the Media Team. He's done just under 200 seminars all around the globe for CrossFit HQ and competed in the 2009 CrossFit Games. He hates HSPU and loves ice cream.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Fight Gone Right

CrossFit Striking combines punches and kicks with traditional CrossFit movements to introduce new elements into training.

By Hilary Achauer

November 2013



All: Scott Wallace/CrossFit Journal

I closed my eyes and spun in a circle, around and around, until I felt a tap on my shoulder.

"Knee strike!" someone shouted.

I opened my eyes and dizzily threw three unsteady knee strikes into a focus pad held by Martin Aherne, a taekwondo instructor. Before I could finish the third one, I felt another tap on my shoulder.

1 of 10

"Palm-heel strike!"

I whirled around and slammed my palm three times into the waiting focus pads held by Blanca Rodriguez, a border-patrol agent who earned her black belt when she was 18.

"Elbow strike!"

I turned again and faced Neal Abrams, one of the instructors, who has been practicing martial arts since 1996.

Each time I finished one set of three strikes, I'd feel a tap on my shoulder, hear a shouted command and throw another three strikes while the people surrounding me yelled and hooted, making the whole experience more confusing.

Then George Ryan, the CrossFit Striking Trainer Course leader, yelled, "Stop!" and it was over. The whole thing lasted about 20 seconds. I was left panting and disoriented.

**"Add CrossFit and fighting
together—wow, that's powerful."**

—George Ryan

As CrossFit athletes, we pride ourselves on facing the unknown and unknowable. The truth is that after a while, things can get familiar around the box—the barbell, the pull-up bar, the box, the rings, even they can become routine if you fall into a programming pattern.

There are many ways to get fit, but as Ryan said on the first day of the seminar, "Fighting is a different type of fitness. Add CrossFit and fighting together—wow, that's powerful!"

Rotational Power

I traveled to CrossFit Central in Austin, Texas, in the last weekend of September to attend the course. As a former amateur boxer, I know a few things about punching, but my martial-arts arsenal has a gaping hole: I don't know how to kick. Also, I couldn't quite picture how punches and kicks could be used in a CrossFit workout. Up until this point, I've kept boxing and CrossFit in separate corners.



***Athletes learning the rear straight, or punch No. 2,
which Ryan calls the "goodnight big right."***

Of the 20 people gathered at the gym on a humid Saturday, our group included eight border-patrol agents, not surprising given that Texas is adjacent to Mexico. A number of participants had extensive martial-arts backgrounds, but quite a few of them had never thrown a punch.

Leandra Bevans just started CrossFit in January.

"I was 247 lb. at Christmas," she said, "I was turning 50 and didn't want to be a fat Hawaiian chick in a muumuu. I was taking nine pills a day for cholesterol and high blood pressure."

Even though her doctor told her not to, she started CrossFit. She's since lost over 80 lb. and feels like a completely different person—the kind of person who travels from Arizona to Texas for a weekend of punching and kicking with complete strangers.



Ryan (right) demonstrates a right uppercut on fellow instructor Neal Abrams (left).

The CrossFit Striking course has many objectives, and they vary in importance depending on the goals and background of the participant. One of the primary objectives is to add yet more variety to CrossFit workouts. The two-day course teaches both coaches and athletes how to combine strikes and combinations with CrossFit movements to create workouts that improve core strength and rotational power.

Fighters get a lot of their power from rotating the body when throwing a kick or a punch. There's not much rotational movement in many standard CrossFit workouts, a fact that became abundantly clear to me by the end of the second day. I've been doing CrossFit consistently for three years, but after two days of punching and kicking I felt an unfamiliar soreness through my obliques. This was an area I was not reaching on a regular basis.

The course does not turn you into a fighter, and it doesn't involve any sparring. Punches and kicks are thrown against focus pads, kick shields and heavy bags. Participants learn how to throw strikes and combinations, how to teach

the proper striking mechanisms and self-protection techniques to clients, and how to increase the speed and power of strikes.

The Beginning

Ryan was introduced to striking in third grade, training with his dad, a former boxing coach.

"My first heavy bag was an old Air Force duffel bag stuffed with clothing, and it hung from a beam in my basement," Ryan said. "I would hit that every day for hours while listening to oldies on my mom's record player. My dad didn't want me competing and sparring in boxing due to potential head trauma, but I loved doing drills and workouts. Growing up, I also played sports all the time. This was until I met Billy Blanks when I was about 16 years old. Billy and his cousin George really encouraged me to do martial arts."

After training with Blanks for almost three years, Ryan started training with one of Blanks' first black-belt students. Then Ryan moved to California and attended

the police academy, when he shifted his focus to self-protection.

For the last 15 years, Ryan has taught his system of self-protection to police officers. He is a member of LAPD SWAT, one of the lead defensive-tactics instructors for his SWAT team and an inductee in the martial-arts Masters Hall of Fame. He's been doing CrossFit since 2005.

"As for my workouts, I've consistently added striking elements to them to promote skill work, fight conditioning and rotation," Ryan said.

This dual perspective gives Ryan—who maintains a noticeable Boston accent despite years in Los Angeles—a strong sense of how CrossFit and martial arts benefit each other. He understands both deeply.

Many martial artists use CrossFit to train for their fights, but very few CrossFit athletes incorporate striking into their training. Ryan thinks that should change.

Many martial artists use CrossFit to train for their fights, but very few CrossFit athletes incorporate striking into their training. Ryan thinks that should change.

"Striking is at a higher tempo, a different frequency, than CrossFit. A pro fighter can throw four strikes in a second. You can't swing a kettlebell four times in a second," he said.

Ryan started CrossFit when T.J. Cooper took one of Ryan's hostage-rescue classes in 2005. Cooper told Ryan about what CrossFit Founder and CEO Greg Glassman was doing and how he said, "If you're working out more than 20 minutes a day, you're doing something wrong." That resonated with Ryan.

"I was mixing striking with most of my workouts anyway," Ryan said, so combining CrossFit with kicking and punching was a natural concept.

"It was what I was doing with the tactical community already," he said.

The Basics

The focus of the two-day course is how to teach the fundamentals of striking to CrossFit athletes, so the first day started off with a basic concept: how to make a fist. This approach also makes the course suitable for martial-arts neophytes.

Giving a reference point most CrossFit athletes can understand, Ryan told the group to place the tips of our fingers just below our calluses, and then fold down our hands. He reminded us to keep a straight wrist and hit with the first two knuckles, locking up the wrist before striking.

Then it was time to throw some punches. We started with the lead straight, or jab. It's punch No. 1. If you're right handed, the lead straight is thrown with the left hand. As a boxer, I was accustomed to using the jab as a way to keep my opponent at bay, to prevent her from setting up



Pull-up bars are an excellent place to hang a heavy bag. Ryan recommends placing a towel on the bar to avoid scraping the bar with the metal attachment.

and getting close, but Ryan reminded us that the primary purpose of our punches was fitness, so we'd be putting a bit more power into the punch. After practicing the lead straight, Ryan took us through the rear straight, punch No. 2, which he affectionately called our "goodnight big right."

The rear straight is the power punch: "It's the No. 1 technique to protect yourself," Ryan said.

When throwing the punch, the entire posterior chain is involved. In addition to being useful for self-defense, "It's an amazing movement for fitness," Ryan said. "It uses the entire body."

Ryan showed us how the proper technique for throwing the rear straight uses the same biomechanics as throwing a baseball, football or a javelin.

Each time he introduced a new strike, Ryan would give us just three things to work on at a time.

"Most people can only learn three things at once," Ryan said.

After getting the basics of the lead straight and the rear straight, we practiced putting them together. Then it was time to pair up and start hitting focus pads.

Working with the focus pads used to be one of my favorite parts of boxing training. A well-thrown punch makes a decisive "thwap," and after you've been doing it for a while, you fall into a rhythm; it's a dance between trainer and athlete. Jab, thwap. Right, thwap. Left hook, thwap. Right uppercut, thwap.

After the class got the hang of the focus pads, Ryan added an interesting element to our focus-pad training, one he uses with his tactical officers. To simulate a real-world situation, he had the person throwing the punches lie on the floor while the partner with the focus pad stood across the room. When Ryan gave the signal, the person punching jumped to his feet, ran across the room and threw a combination: one-two, one-two.

Then Ryan made it even tougher. The striker lay down on his belly and closed his eyes. His target—the partner



The author (left) and Bevans (right) practice training with focus pads.

with the focus pad—moved somewhere else in the gym. The striker's task was to stand up, locate the target and strike. The group made as much noise as possible while the strikers tried to locate their targets. It was surprisingly disorienting to open my eyes and search for my partner while 10 people hooted and yelled.

Throwing punches at focus pads is great training for boxing, but this was great training for life.

Fight Night

Then it was time to throw CrossFit in the mix for a pre-lunch workout. (This is not a course for those looking to sit in a chair for two days. Ryan kept us moving, and learning, almost constantly.)

To make it easy on us, Ryan had us do a shortened version of his Fight Night Workout, which he called Mini Fight Night. It was two rounds, with a minute rest in between rounds. The first round consisted of 30 seconds of throwing

punches at the pads, 30 seconds of kettlebell swings, 30 seconds on the pads, and 30 seconds of push-ups. Then, after the minute rest, we mixed the pad work with 30 seconds of burpees and 30 seconds of pull-ups.

As Ryan had warned earlier in the day, striking moves at a different pace than most CrossFit movements. I felt the power drain from my punches each time I returned to the pads, as I tried to preserve my form and keep moving.

**Just like most movements in
CrossFit, striking rewards good
body mechanics and technique.**



A well-thrown punch recruits the entire body to deliver an explosive, powerful strike.



Multi-year Regional competitor Ingrid Kantola (left) works next to Blanca Rodriguez, who earned her black belt when she was 18.

Another challenge during the workout was getting used to wearing MMA striking gloves while swinging a kettlebell or doing push-ups. (All participants must bring their own striking or bag gloves to the class.) My gloves don't have an open palm, so I struggled to remove them before the pull-ups at the end. I was so tired at that point I didn't mind the break, but I'd recommend finding gloves with an open palm for those planning on combining striking and CrossFit.

Four minutes of work left me gasping but exhilarated. Just like most movements in CrossFit, striking rewards good body mechanics and technique, and the challenge is to uphold those standards while exhausted.

Aherne is a fifth-degree black belt and a trainer at North Austin TaeKwonDo and Jui-Jitsu. Even though he's been teaching taekwondo for 25 years, he said he was learning from the course.

"It's good to hear new ideas, different ways to explain concepts," Aherne said.

Participants who had never thrown a punch were also seeing the value in learning striking techniques. Ingrid Kantola, who has been doing CrossFit since 2009 and placed fifth at the South Central Regional competition in both 2012 and 2013, was already thinking about how she'd introduce CrossFit Striking to her women's class, who are still reeling after trying to implement Carl Paoli's headstand progression.

"I'll see what I can get them to do," she said. "I could get them to strike a medicine ball."

Kantola said many of the correct body positions in striking are similar to Olympic lifting.

"I've seen parallels to the jerk—keeping the chest up," she said. "I also really like (Ryan's) three-prong approach, that you can only (focus on three cues) at a time."

Under Pressure

After a lunch break, we returned to learn hooks, uppercuts, palm-heel strikes, elbow strikes, and finally, what I had been dreading: front kicks, roundhouse kicks and knee strikes.

"We're going to start exploiting the lower half of the body for fitness," Ryan said. As in Olympic lifting, a well-thrown kick incorporates the hips and the posterior chain for a burst of explosive power.

It turns out learning how to kick from an experienced martial artist is completely different than flailing away in a cardio-kickboxing class, which is how I originally learned how to kick. Ryan and Abrams broke down the kicks the same way they did the punches, and soon I was confidently throwing knees and kicks, getting a thrill when my foot made contact with the kick shield.

Once we had learned all the strikes, it was time to put them to the test. We ended the day with the pressure drill. That's how I found myself standing in front of 20 people with my eyes closed, spinning in a circle.

I opened my eyes and faced three opponents who took turns tapping me on the shoulder and calling out a strike, which I threw to the focus pads they held. To make it even more exciting, the rest of the class was encouraged to make as much noise as possible during the drill.

"I want to create the intensity of a real fight," Ryan said about the pressure drill. He told us the drill tested our skills in an "asymmetrical environment," meaning our targets would be unpredictable and constantly changing. The noise of our fellow participants would force us to home in on the instructions from the pad holders, negating "auditory exclusion," a temporary loss of hearing that occurs under high stress.

It was fascinating to watch the variety of reactions to the drill. Some people exploded immediately, throwing strikes with ferocious intensity, driving the pad holders across the room. Others took a moment to collect themselves, fighting against the challenge of using a new skill in a disorienting, high-pressure environment.

However, much like a CrossFit workout, once it was over everyone smiled and laughed, feeling a mixture of adrenaline and relief.

Ryan said the drill was to let us experience the feeling of giving everything we've got.



Ryan showed the class how to use common equipment, such as bands, to practice striking techniques.

"Plus, it's fun," he said with a grin.

Bringing It to The Box

On the second day of the course we learned how to teach the strikes we had learned the previous day. Like in the CrossFit Level 1 Seminar, we took turns correcting our fellow participants, developing an eye for common errors. Ryan told us techniques for enforcing good mechanics, such as holding a focus pad next to a person's arm so his or her elbow doesn't flare out, or using a wall or a PVC pipe to correct technique.

Ryan recommends structuring a CrossFit striking class much like a regular CrossFit class, starting with a warm-up and then moving on to skill or strength work. The skill can be one of the strikes the athletes will use in the workout. Then, the session finishes up with a conditioning workout.

"AMRAPs work best," Ryan said. The class can be run in two heats if there is limited equipment, and Ryan recommends a 15-minute time cap on the workouts. An easy scaling option is shadow fighting, in which the fighter punches the air instead of a bag or focus pad.

Ryan includes a number of CrossFit striking workouts in the manual that accompanies the course, including some of the benchmark Girl workouts with striking substitutes.

Striking Fran is 15-12-9 (for novice or intermediate) or 21-15-9 (for advanced) reps of 95-lb. thrusters and a four-strike combination. Each four-strike combination counts as one rep in all striking workouts. Even as the athletes get more accustomed to striking, Ryan said there should usually be no more than five or six strikes per rep.

Michael Leigh, a martial-arts instructor who is also opening his own CrossFit affiliate, said the best part of the course was the teaching breakdown.

"It's great learning how to break down the movements for non-martial artists," Leigh said.

After we worked on our coaching skills, Ryan addressed the question on most people's minds: how does all of this fit within a CrossFit gym?

First, Ryan talked about the equipment needs. They aren't extreme: a few heavy bags, focus mitts and kick shields. Ryan said a mass email or Facebook post will often uncover heavy bags and focus mitts languishing in garages and basements all over town. Participants will have to invest in their own MMA or striking gloves, because the health code in many states forbids sharing gloves.

The next issue is how to get people up to speed on the basics of striking. Many affiliates have had success with two-hour foundations or introductory classes over the weekend. Once people get the hang of the movements, trainers can introduce a weekly class and work on refining the skills in class—much like they handle any other CrossFit skill.

Ryan admits the hardcore CrossFit enthusiast might not like striking at first.

"They don't know what they don't know," Ryan said. "But once they get a taste of it, they are gonna love it."



The skill portion of a CrossFit Striking class is a good time to practice the strikes athletes will use in the workout.



Bevans (middle) said she didn't feel comfortable floating down a river in an inner tube a year ago. Now she's lifting weights and punching heavy bags.

Abrams, who taught the course with Ryan, runs a popular CrossFit Striking class at CrossFit Rep Scheme in Northridge, Calif. The hardcore CrossFit athletes "are always watching" as he teaches the striking course, Abrams said. He said they're intrigued but intimidated. Once you get comfortable with something, even with something as difficult as CrossFit, it's hard to get out of your comfort zone and try something new, even if doing so is part of Greg Glassman's *World Class Fitness in 100 Words*.

Many affiliates have had success with "Friday fight night," with everyone going out to dinner together after the CrossFit Striking class.

On the plane ride home from Austin, I thought about my kids' reaction whenever I pull out my boxing gloves. I have a 5-year-old boy and an 8-year-old girl, and when they catch sight of the gloves, they lose their minds a little bit with excitement. If I let them play with the gloves it's highly supervised, of course, because things can get out of control very quickly, but they understand the visceral joy that comes from striking.

Then I thought about Bevans, the woman who lost 80 lb. since starting CrossFit in January. I was paired up with her when she figured out how to land a solid rear straight to the focus pad. Her gloved hand made that satisfying "thwap," and a huge smile spread across her face.

"Wow, that was fun!" she said.



About the Author

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

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Wives of CrossFit SolaFide

Nicole Spitzack started CrossFit when her husband was deployed to Afghanistan. When she invited friends to train with her—also military wives—she created an irreplaceable support system.

By Andréa Maria Cecil

November 2013



Manivanh Lindeman

Military spouses Silvia Curro (left) and Judy Rutherford after completing Murph.

In 2005, the U.S. Army deployed Cole Spitzack to Afghanistan for 12 months.

"That's a long time," he said. "I missed the whole first year of my daughter's life."



Monivah Lindeman

Soldier Dave Thompson (left) cheers on his wife, Andrea.

That kind of time is hard on a marriage, too. The Army recognizes that fact, offering soldiers and their loved ones Family Readiness Groups for mental and emotional support. The only problem is those groups aren't for everyone. And they weren't for Spitzack's wife, Nicole.

"I didn't really make any connections. I have found that I personally didn't have a lot in common with the women that were in my particular group at that time," she explained.

Sharing her enthusiasm for exercise and nutrition with the group elicited strange reactions rather than words of encouragement.

That's when Nicole got into CrossFit. Her husband discovered it overseas and suggested she give it a try. Nicole spent roughly a year doing CrossFit out of some friends' garage over the course of several of her husband's deployments. Then she started training in her own garage. She invited friends whose husbands were also deployed.

"We just got to the point where we were hanging out all the time," she said. "As we kept doing that, more girls would tell their friends about what we were doing in the garage, and so everyone just kind of became interested, and one thing led to another and we had 20 women coming."

That is, until the elderly neighbors complained about the multitude of parked cars in the cul-de-sac and the shirtless women working out.

"I was just crushed because so many of us really relied on this. Not having this wasn't going to work," Nicole recounted.

That was four years ago.

Today, Nicole owns CrossFit SolaFide, a Clarksville, Tenn., affiliate with 500 members.

With its proximity to Fort Campbell—the Army base is about 18 miles northwest of the box—the gym has strong

ties to the military. It provides a place to relieve stress as well as to find support and understanding.

“You need a strong group of women to help build you up. And military wives get that.”
—Nicole Spitzack

“The majority of the regular world, they don’t get—when our husbands are gone, (we) don’t get to talk to them. You’re back home taking care of everything yourself. You need a strong group of women to help build you up. And military wives get that,” explained Nicole, who also has a 14-month-old son and is pregnant with the couple’s third child.

“We just have created this environment where the women, especially, can come and kind of love on each other.”

CrossFit SolaFide’s 28 coaches—21 of whom are either active-duty military or a spouse of a military member—continually track whose husbands are deployed as part of an effort to ensure wives don’t feel alone.

“We really make an effort to throw our arms around those ladies,” Cole said.

And the original 20 women from the Spitzacks’ garage still train together during CrossFit SolaFide’s 9- and 10-a.m. classes, he noted.

“It’s just a unique vibe,” Cole said.

These days, the affiliate even attracts women whose husbands have started CrossFit overseas. Training apart, though not ideal, can provide another connection.

“Some CrossFit gyms are really performance oriented. And that’s great. We encourage that,” said Cole, whose deployments have changed to stints of one to three months now that he’s in the Special Forces. “But our primary thing is the community. That goes back to the military side, to the women’s side, and to change our community through CrossFit and allow people to come in and feel a part of something and feel loved and embraced.”

About the Author:

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



Manivah Lindeman

Military spouse and coach Nicole Geraths (left) during a competition workout. Twenty-one of CrossFit SolaFide’s 28 coaches are military members or military spouses.

AFTER THEIR LAST BATTLE

On Nov. 11, nations around the world take a moment of silence to honor the sacrifices of those who served. **BY EMILY BEERS**

He also said some recent Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have a sense that their country isn't taking care of them the way it promised. For one, Sanders' tuition assistance was recently stripped away.

"Tuition assistance always seems to be the first thing dropped when there is even a possibility of a fiscal worry," he said.

Indeed, tuition-assistance programs have been discontinued twice this year: once in March and also during the October U.S. government shutdown. But Sanders is one of the outspoken ones. He fought to have his tuition assistance restored, and he was successful, but he says he is still owed US\$2,500—for a combination of things like travel and housing allowance, as well as for unpaid workdays—and he blames "inept organizations" for this.

Sanders hopes civilians and members of the military will continue to connect beyond Veterans Day, and he believes Nov. 11 is a good time to start the relationship.

Two days after he turned 17, Richard Sanders joined the United States Army.

"It was just always something I wanted to do," said Sanders, now 23.

Three years later, he went on to serve in Afghanistan from March 2010 to March 2011.

For Sanders, Veterans Day is a time to form a connection between veterans and civilians. Last year, he did this by participating in the Goruck Challenge, a 12-hour team endurance event that mimics Special Operations training.

"It's a great way to bridge the gap between military and civilians. It's about people pushing themselves, and it raises money for the military," said Sanders, of New Jersey.

Sanders hopes civilians and members of the military will continue to connect beyond Veterans Day, and he believes Nov. 11 is a good time to start the relationship.

"When soldiers come home (from war), there's a very large cultural gap between military and civilians, especially lately with government shutdowns and how they're looking at cutting payouts to military," Sanders said.

He knows he's not alone. His fellow Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are having similar problems receiving the money and veteran benefits that were promised to them. As reported on [CNN.com](#) and elsewhere, the government shutdown threatened to cause a host of problems for many veterans who rely on benefits payments.

"This isn't us feeling entitled like the rest of our generation. We just want what was contractually promised to us," Sanders said.

The biggest obstacle Sanders sees is organizational. There is so much "red tape" involved in order for a veteran to even gain access to benefits, and it can be tough to navigate the system. For instance, [Marketwatch.com](#) reported that the majority of veterans are not well informed about the choices they can make to maximize Social Security benefits.

"Paperwork seems to 'get lost' a lot," added Sanders, who also blames outdated processes for system inefficiencies. "Most of us, we're in our 20s. They want us to fax things to them. Who faxes anymore?" he said with a laugh.



Sanders (top, in red) during the 12-hour Goruck Challenge in 2012, and with his new wife (below).



In short, Sanders doesn't feel the system is set up to help veterans; instead it brings them more challenges.

That said, paperwork challenges pale in comparison to the emotional baggage many veterans endure. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicide are two of these challenges.

"Twenty-two American veterans are killing themselves every day ... primarily Afghanistan and Iraq veterans," said Sanders, who suffers from PTSD.

"And most people have no clue," he added.

The Dept. of Veteran's Affairs' **Suicide Data Report, 2012** estimated that more than 20 veterans a day committed suicide in 2008, 2009 and 2010. From 1999 to 2007, the estimates were between 18 and 20 veteran suicides per day.

*The Dept. of Veteran's Affairs' **Suicide Data Report, 2012** estimated that more than 20 veterans a day committed suicide in 2008, 2009 and 2010.*

The report, which mined data from 21 states and estimated national numbers, stated, "Among cases where history of U.S. military service was reported, Veterans comprised approximately 22.2% of all suicides reported during the project period. If this prevalence estimate is assumed to be constant across all U.S. states, an estimated 22 Veterans will have died from suicide each day in the calendar year 2010."

Sanders doesn't expect civilians to understand what it's like to be shot at, and he doesn't expect everyone to be inclined to join the military or be willing to go to war, but he believes civilians can show real support, they can help raise money, and they can learn about what it's like to be in the military.

This Veterans Day, Sanders is participating in an event called Ruck for the Fallen. It will involve wearing a pack and participating in a 12-hour ruck march. He's hoping as many non-military people as possible will participate on a day he knows will be rough for many veterans.



Christopher Nolan

Nov. 11, and Sanders' moment of silence, is what he calls "a double-edged sword."

"It's good to know that we're honoring their lives, raising awareness," he said.

But on the flip side, there is the belief that veterans aren't always cared for properly, and there are painful memories.

"November as a whole is rough and bumpy. One of my closest friends, my mentor, was killed in action in November. I wear him on a bracelet around my wrist," said Sanders.

Ideally what Sanders would like to see is for more people to be like Greg Killian and Amy Yuschak of CrossFit Killfit in New Jersey. They offer free memberships to anyone who was deployed to Afghanistan or Iraq.

"Greg's actually putting his money where his mouth is. I know he actually cares. He's not doing it just for cool points," Sanders said of Killian. "I can see it in his eyes; he's very grateful for what I've done serving this country."

In short, action like this is what Sanders is after.

Killian decided to act after he saw a Wounded Warriors commercial on TV.

"I wanted to donate but funds are low. So I thought, 'How can I give back to these guys and girls who are willing to sacrifice life and limb for our freedom?' Then I thought, 'I can't donate money, but I can give my time, energy and expertise,'" Killian said of his decision to provide free memberships to war veterans.

Currently, Killian has eight veterans taking advantage of his offer.

"It's working out great. These guys come back home not knowing what they're going to do, and it gives them a positive outlet where they can release endorphins, have a sense of accomplishment and be a part of something positive," he said.

Sanders is one of the eight veterans.

"The biggest thing I can hope for is for people to be informed. It is our civic duty to be informed You can make a donation or write a letter to Congress. You can give to a laundry list of charities. Or if you can't afford to give your money, you can give your time," he said.

He added: "Be willing to make a sacrifice beyond just putting up a yellow ribbon."



Nicole Bedard



Christopher Nolan

JOHN'S STORY

Two years ago, John Sorrelli's children gave him a hat that says "WWII United States Navy" on it.

"I've been wearing it for two years now, and whenever I go places people approach me," said the 88-year-old veteran. "Even last week, I was wearing the hat in a coffee shop, and the owner came up to me and said, 'Thank you for your services. And then I wanted to pay my bill, but the owner wouldn't let me.'"

"People haven't forgotten. They just have to be reminded sometimes," he said.

Sorrelli certainly hasn't forgotten his stint with the U.S. military; he served with the Navy in the South Pacific from 1943 to 1944.

"I was a carpenter at the time. But there weren't any openings for carpenters or electricians, but there was an opening for a cook. And I thought, 'If I'm a cook, then at least I know I'm going to get to eat.' And I didn't want to be a deckhand," Sorrelli said of how he ended up being a cook on board the USS Inaugural AM-242 minesweeper at the age of 17.



For those who served, Veterans Day is a chance to connect with the public and remember fallen comrades.

Sorrelli didn't know it at the time, but the USS Inaugural would become one of the most successful U.S. mine-sweepers of WWII. And after the war, the ship became a floating museum in St. Louis. Sorrelli had no idea that his wartime ship had been turned into a museum until he visited St. Louis years after the war and happened to walk by.

"I saw the number and said, 'That's my ship.' We ran over there and met the owners," Sorrelli said.

After that, the owners invited Sorrelli's old World War II crew onboard.

"We had a convention on there, on our old ship. All the old fellows got together," he said.

After surviving the War in the Pacific, the ship met its end in 1993, when the Mississippi River flooded and the ship broke loose from her moorings, floated downstream and took on too much water. The Inaugural remains partially submerged in the Mississippi. But when Sorrelli thinks of his ship, he remembers the way she was during the war—full of vitality.

A resident of New York, he explained what it was like for a Navy cook in the Pacific Fleet: "We cooked everything from chicken to Spam—you name it. Most of the people on my ship were from the south so they taught me to cook meals they like. I never had a complaint. Nobody said they weren't happy Every time it was someone's birthday, I would cook a big cake. It worked out pretty well."

Although Sorrelli said that he generally felt safe aboard his ship in the middle of the war zone, it was at least somewhat of an illusion.

"We didn't know if we were going to hit a torpedo, and then there were the kamikazes, you know, the Japanese suicide planes that would come down. Our job was to shoot them down," he said.

The Inaugural was awarded two Battle Stars and spent a great deal of time in dangerous Japanese waters during the 1945 Battle of Okinawa. The battle was one of the bloodiest of the Pacific War, and the Inaugural spent its time sweeping for mines and fending off kamikaze attacks as the U.S. forces worked to take Okinawa in advance of an

attack on the Japanese mainland. The U.S. lost 28 ships, and more than 4,900 sailors were killed.

"Were we scared? For sure," Sorelli said. "You never knew what these guys were going to do coming down with their planes. Twice, they missed us. One time, we picked up two American pilots. Unfortunately, one of them was already dead. It was heartbreaking, but we were just doing our jobs."

It was a tough job, but Sorrelli didn't feel like he had a choice.

"People haven't forgotten. They just have to be reminded sometimes."

—JOHN SORRELLI

"I couldn't stay home. All my buddies were going to war. I thought, 'What am I going to do here?' My mother was upset when I joined, but I tell you the truth: it was the best thing that ever happened to me," he said.

Almost 70 years after the war, Sorrelli is matter-of-fact about his country's role dropping nuclear bombs on Japan on Aug. 6 and 9, 1945. Japan surrendered on Aug. 15, though the official end of the war came when Japan signed the Instrument of Surrender on Sept. 2.

"When we dropped the atom bomb, we had to cover our eyes to make sure we wouldn't get splashed. But I don't know of anyone in my group that was affected by the bomb. But you could feel the vibrations because we were right near Japan," he said.

"It was sad to see, but it happened, and it had to be done. It had to be done or else we would have lost another 200,000 men. But it was war I look back and think, 'Why did we do it?' But we had to do it. We were losing too many young boys. Men were dropping like flies."

Today, Sorrelli feels much the same as his fellow servicemen grow older and pass on.

"There aren't very many of us left," he said. "I'm very fortunate. I'm one of the only fellows left from WWII. God has been good to me."

Sorrelli will take a moment this Veterans Day to appreciate this fact, and to remember the great friends he met through the military.

As usual, he'll head over to watch the Veterans Day parade, and he might even check out the party at the Legion. He will, of course, be wearing his hat.

THE NATURE OF WAR

In a waterfront apartment on the shores of the Pacific Ocean, two large modern upholstered couches surround a contemporary glass coffee table in the living room.

A large flat-screen TV is mounted on the wall, while an iPad sits on the large dining-room table in the next room. Nothing about this apartment looks like it would be home to a 93-year-old man.

And when you talk to the apartment's tenant, Walter Tyler, he hardly seems 93.

"I cook all my meals still. I'll make shepherd's pie, or fry some fish, or a steak with salad," Tyler says of some of his favorite meals.

Tyler does all his grocery shopping, and he doesn't hesitate to attack the highway and drive to visit one of his two daughters and his grandchildren in White Rock, 40 miles away from his home in the prime neighborhood of West Vancouver, B.C.

"And I drive to New Westminster every Tuesday to volunteer at the museum at the (Royal Westminster) Regiment," adds Tyler, whose wife of 66 years passed away one year ago at the age of 90.

Tyler stands up with ease for a man of his age, leaves the room for a moment, and returns with a photo album.

"These are my great-grandchildren. They live in the United States," he says pointing to three children with white-blond hair, his wrinkled finger shaking a little bit as he turns the pages.

He puts the photo album down and picks up another book. This one is a large hard-covered copy of the history of Canada's Royal Westminster Regiment, in which he served. He opens it up and points to a picture of himself as a young man in military uniform escorting the future Queen Elizabeth II on her first visit to Canada back in 1951.

"She was actually still a princess back then," Tyler says.

At that moment, Tyler suddenly seems 93 years old. His modern apartment, his iPad, his flat-screen TV, his good

health and his perfect hearing hide his long, rich life, a life that included serving with the Canadian Army in World War II.

Tyler, whose family immigrated to Canada from England when he was just four years old, joined the military in 1938 at the age of 18. It was a good option for many young men of his generation.

“Life was a lot different back then. We were just coming out of the Great Depression. There weren’t a lot of sports activities or clubs to join. And I wasn’t that great at sports anyway,” Tyler says.

When he first joined the military, he was part of a machine-gun battalion, but when hostilities broke out, his battalion was re-designated and became a motor battalion, meaning they were essentially in charge of protecting 100 vehicles and tanks.

“Motorcycles, jeeps, small trucks, large trucks—we worked with the armored division to protect the tanks,” says Tyler, who was deployed to Italy during the war.

“The thing was most people couldn’t even drive back then,” he adds with a laugh.

“Back then, people were away from home for five years. I left in 1941 and I didn’t come home again until 1945.”

—WALTER TYLER

“We didn’t expect much in those days. Today is much different. People go to Afghanistan for two or three months. Back then, people were away from home for five years. I left in 1941 and I didn’t come home again until 1945.”

“We had nothing. The entire Canadian military had 23 Bren Guns—23 for the whole Canadian Army You need more than 23 to outfit just one company. And there are five companies to one regiment,” he says, shaking his head with a laugh.

“And we didn’t talk about post-traumatic stress back then. The closest we came to talking about it was—” he says, pausing for a moment to think. “What did they call it? Kind of like a nervous breakdown. Some people just couldn’t take it anymore, and they had nervous breakdowns.”



Tyler still remembers World War II, both the friendships he made and the hardships he endured.

Kim Bellavance

Like many other veterans, Tyler said returning to civilian life was challenging.

Kim Bellavance



Kim Bellavance

Tyler escorting the future Queen Elizabeth II in 1951.

Tyler admits that returning to civilian life after the war was difficult, but he was one of the lucky ones who managed to carry on and live a long, fulfilling life.

When Tyler did return home, he remained part of the military as a reserve member, and he also spent some time working for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Almost seven decades since his return from European battlefields, Tyler says the military is still a part of his life today. He volunteers once a week at the Regiment museum, talking and giving tours to young, eager grade-school students.

"Kids are funny. They always ask, 'What was it like? What was it like?' And I always tell them, 'In your school studies, you're going to read a book called *A Tale of Two Cities*. It takes place during the time of the French Revolution. The first sentence in the book says, 'It was the best of times, It was the worst of times.' And you know, the war was kind of like that."

But as time passed, he began remembering more of the good.

"Your mind plays tricks on you. You always remember and think about the good things that happened," he says, pointing to the friendships, the traveling he got to do and the many responsibilities he was given in the military.

"There aren't many of us left, but when we used to get together, it was always a good time with lots of laughs," he says.

Laughs aside, Tyler hasn't forgotten the other side of the war. And when he digs deep enough, he remembers—clearly.

He remembers the hot summers sleeping uncomfortably in fields. And he remembers the cold, muddy, snowy, wet winters and the scarcity of food.

"When I think about it, I spent a year and a half without sleeping in a bed," he says.

And he remembers the loss.

"It was Dec. 11, 1944. My sergeant and I were standing at the corner of a building deciding how we were going to take the tanks out. We were just standing there and we were attacked from another direction. A shell just came out of nowhere. When I came to, I was 40 feet from where I had been standing," says Tyler, whose leg, hand and arm were wounded by the blast. He spent six weeks recovering in General Hospital Number One.

"My sergeant was killed. Thrasher was his name. He was a good man," Tyler says.

He looks out toward the ocean, takes a moment to catch his breath and continues:

"Being in a war is no fun. It's not glamorous in any way, shape or form. I don't give a darn what anyone says.

"And people ask if I was scared. Of course. Everyone was scared. You're always dealing with the unknown. You could be in a cozy area, but there were always shells coming out of the blue. People would be resting and could get killed. You're on your toes all the time. You never can let your guard down."

Even today, Tyler believes this.

"I'm not a warmonger. But even today, we can never let our guard down. In the last 1,000 years, there have been about 990 years where there is a war taking place somewhere. You don't get away from it," he says.

"We have peace movements, and that's fine, but we can't get away from war. I don't think we'll ever get away from war," he adds. "It's just people."

And it takes courageous people to fight those wars and serve their countries in uniform. Veterans Day in the United States—Remembrance Day in the Commonwealth countries—is an opportunity to honor those people, both alive and dead, for their sacrifices. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Beers is a *CrossFit Journal* staff writer and editor. She competed in the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games on CrossFit Vancouver's team, and she finished third at the Canada West Regional in 2012. In 2013, she finished second in the Open in Canada West.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Banishing the Boogeyman

Pat Sherwood puts the lie to suspicions about all the evil people in other countries.

By Pat Sherwood

November 2013



While making our way from Big Sky, Mont., to Nogales, Ariz., Ian Wittenber and I stopped for fuel at a gas station in Jackson Hole, Wyo. One look at our bikes confirmed we were not just out for a day's ride to Starbucks.

Our side cases were packed to the gills, a big waterproof duffel of camping supplies was strapped to the rear, a bag on the gas tank held even more gear, and a GPS was mounted to the handlebars. The bikes look unusual: they are an on-road and off-road hybrid. All these factors came together to spark interest and curiosity whenever we stopped in any area.

1 of 4

Such was the case at the gas station in Wyoming. An old dude in a tank top and his weather-beaten female companion eyeballed us from another pump. They were fueling up a massive, white Honda Gold Wing. As Ian and I checked some gear on our bikes, the couple walked over and struck up a conversation.

"Where are you two heading?" the gentleman asked.

"We are riding to Chile, but our immediate goal is to get into Mexico," I said.

His response to my answer was not shocking. I hear it often, and it's always disappointing: "Mexico? Are you kidding? Have you ever been there before? Those Mexicans are going to see your California plates, and all they are going to do is rob you and take advantage of you. It's terrible down there. Those people are such a big problem."

I stood there and listened to his rant. I smiled, informed him that I had indeed been there before. Several times actually. I mustered up some strength and refrained from calling him an idiot and telling him to fuck off. I simply thanked him for his concern and told him and his lady to enjoy the rest of their day.

Several days later, we were enjoying an iced coffee somewhere in the southern United States when we met a very interesting woman who had actually climbed Mt. Everest. As you would expect from such a person, she had done a fair bit of traveling. She asked about our trip and we gave her the lowdown. She was utterly shocked that we planned to ride through Guatemala and Colombia.

"Do you know what they do down there?" she almost shouted at me.

"No, I guess I don't. Could you please tell me?" I asked her.

She responded: "They run ropes across the roads and they knock people off their motorcycles and they rob them!"

I was not expecting to hear this as her first reaction to learning about our trip. I told her that I would duck if I saw a rope. She did not laugh. I thanked her for her concern and informed her that I had actually spent about three to four months of my life in Colombia without so much as a single negative incident.

If you assume this irrational fear of foreigners exists only in the U.S., you are dead wrong. It has come to my attention



Middle of the desert in Peru. There is literally nothing for hundreds of miles in the deserts of Peru that run along the coast.

that many countries do not particularly get along with their neighbors. It is actually a running joke amongst travelers on journeys similar to ours that in order to make a border crossing go smoothly, you should talk shit about the country you are leaving and sing the praises of the one you are entering. The chances are pretty good the border agent will laugh or agree with your sentiments, whether they are true or not.

Here's an arbitrary example: let's say we are leaving Costa Rica and entering Panama. When the Panamanian border official at the immigration office asks you how long you plan to stay in Panama, you could say something like, "Shit, I want to stay in Panama as long as I can. I could not wait to get out of Costa Rica. They think they have nice beaches? The beaches suck. The beaches in Panama are way better!" Then you just sit back and watch the official nod in agreement and stamp your passport.

Speaking of Panama, we met one very vocal Panamanian woman who had nothing but negative things to say about Colombia. She was appalled we would even want to visit such a country.

"You need to watch out for those Colombians," she warned us. "Watch out for them. They are smart and tricky. They will get you!"

I took the moral high ground once again and tried to convince her that Colombians were great people. She refused to believe me and simply kept repeating her gloom-and-doom predictions about the next part of our journey.

We have met men and women of all ages and races who have advised us against going to certain other countries. The best thing you can do is ignore these people. They are part of the problem, not the solution.

Now, there are obviously places in this world that are more dangerous than others. However, you can live in Los Angeles, Calif., in relative peace and harmony, or you can easily find trouble if you go looking for it. The same can be said for Bogota, Colombia, and other places in the world.

Over the course of our trip, we have received useful advice about areas to avoid or things to look out for. This info is not the lunatic paranoia described previously but rather accurate, actionable recommendations from locals. For example, we had to ride through the area of Mexico best known for being the home of the Sinoloa Drug Cartel. This was a real threat, not make-believe hysteria. One of

the local box owners told us if we were in a certain area and saw some extremely attractive women, the chances were quite good they were cartel members' girlfriends. He recommended avoiding them.

We found ourselves in the exact area and went to a very nice breakfast joint. Sitting at the table across from Ian and me were about a dozen women who were insanely gorgeous and clearly well taken care of. Because of the warning we had received from the affiliate owner, I at least felt in control of my own fate. I understood the situation and the danger involved, as well as the possibility of getting killed by a cartel member. So, I sat there during breakfast, smiling and flirting with any one of them who would look my way.

Some things are worth the risk, right?

We know the dangers and risks, but what have our actual experiences been? Today is Day 90. So far, we have gathered our data by riding through the U.S., Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama and Bolivia. Here is my quick synopsis: The people in Latin America are amazing.

The evil boogeyman does not exist.

Once, we were fueling up at a gas station in the middle of nowhere in the Mexican desert, sweating our asses off. A Mexican family walked up to us from their car and offered ice to us to cool off.

A guy we met while lost in Cali, Colombia, at about 10 p.m. stopped what he was doing and walked us to a hotel where we would be safe.

In Palenque, Mexico, the battery in Ian's bike died. The hotel staff made phone calls, found mechanics, and even ran into town to buy us food because the hotel restaurant was closed.

Taxi drivers in Colombia, Bolivia, Guatemala and Honduras (among others) gave us tips on what places to avoid, as well as what taxi drivers should and should not charge us to make sure we were not taken advantage of while in their country.

We have been lost in every country. Any time this has happened, I just walked up to the closest person and asked for help—cops, military personnel, old people, teenagers, store clerks, you name it. My requests for help have been met with 100 percent genuine kindness and concern.



Puno, Peru. We arrived on the birthday of Arequipa so there were masses of people partying outside in the rain.

We pulled into a small hotel in Ibarra, Ecuador, in the pouring rain after a hard day of riding. We were dirty and disgusting. The hotel owner (a motorcycle rider himself) upgraded us, for free, to a bigger room so we could be comfortable and well rested for the next day's ride. The hotel restaurant did not open for several more hours, so Ian and I were going to wander into town for a snack even though it was still raining. The hotel owner did not want us to go back out into the cold and get sick. He opened up the restaurant just for us so we could have a warm meal.

We have stories like this from everywhere we've been.

We have had mostly positive experiences everywhere we've gone. The word "positive" does not do justice to the overwhelming kindness, generosity, warmth and hospitality of Latinos.

And this would blow the minds of those naysayers: my top two countries for the nicest people on Earth are currently Mexico and Colombia. Yet those are two of the three countries we repeatedly heard horror stories about.

The lesson? Don't listen to the negative trash the news displays on your TV every day. Visit these countries. You will fall in love with the people, the culture, the food, the cities, the traditions—everything.



About the Author

Pat Sherwood works for CrossFit as a flowmaster and member of the Media Team. He's done just under 200 seminars all around the globe for CrossFit HQ and competed in the 2009 CrossFit Games. He hates HSPU and loves ice cream.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Hope in a Box

A breast-cancer diagnosis brings CrossFit HD members Lauren Beard and Carrie Belmore together for a new challenge.

By Hilary Achauer

November 2013



All Photos: Donald Yeh

"Jess told me you're an infusion nurse at Emory."

When Carrie Belmore heard those words, her heart sank. She looked at 26-year-old Lauren Beard, who had approached Belmore after a workout at CrossFit HD in Atlanta, Ga.

"That's the last thing I thought I'd hear," Belmore said.

Belmore had seen Beard around the gym, but they had never really talked. They were Facebook friends, but as Belmore said, "You can be Facebook friends without knowing each other."

Belmore looked at the young, vibrant woman in front of her. As an oncology nurse in the cancer center at Emory, she knew nobody would ask that question out of idle curiosity. Their first conversation was not going to be about the workout or what they were going to do over the weekend.

They were going to talk about cancer.

This, however, is not a story about cancer but rather two people who happen to work out at the same box.

Accidental Diagnosis

On May 14, 2013, a few days before her 26th birthday, Beard was diagnosed with breast cancer.

She found out she carries a BRCA mutation, the same gene mutation that caused Angelina Jolie to have a preventative double mastectomy. Beard will need six

cycles of chemotherapy, a year of biotherapy and a double mastectomy.

**The doctors told her
she was being paranoid.
It was probably a cyst.**

Beard is so young and in such good health that she was only diagnosed through a set of strange circumstances. A former competitive gymnast, cheerleader and diver, Beard had been doing CrossFit since December 2011. While completing the Open workouts in spring 2013, Beard noticed an unusual soreness in her left breast, particularly when she did push-ups and burpees. It annoyed her enough that she went to the doctor.



Members of CrossFit HD, Belmore (left) and Beard knew each other by sight only but became close friends after Beard's cancer diagnosis.

The doctors told her she was being paranoid. It was probably a cyst. They were 99 percent sure. She was young and had no family history of breast cancer. They told her there was no need to even get an ultrasound. She believed them and tried to forget about it.

A few months later, Beard went to the doctor for a tetanus shot.

"I asked the nurse if she would do another breast exam, as it was still bothering me," Beard said.

The nurse refused. She said Beard was too young and could make another appointment to see the doctor if she insisted. Chastened, Beard went home without another exam.

"Ironically, the biggest blessing came in the form of an unrelated allergic reaction to that tetanus shot," Beard said.

She continued: "This took me to a different doctor the next morning, who took me seriously when I mentioned the tenderness in my breast. I otherwise probably wouldn't have ever brought it up again after being told it was nothing twice—but I just had a nagging feeling about it. I got an ultrasound and biopsy that same day, being told the entire time they were sure it was nothing because I was so young."

Less than 12 hours later, Beard got the call. She was lying on the couch, still recovering from the allergic reaction to the tetanus shot. The radiologist opened the conversation with a series of questions that made Beard catch her breath.

"Where are you? Are you alone or is with someone with you? Are you in a good place to talk?" the woman asked.

And then, "We are floored, but you have cancer."

Beard was so young and fit and she appeared so healthy that the first words out of the oncologist's mouth upon meeting her were, "This isn't supposed to be happening to you, is it?"

The Binder

It was soon after her diagnosis that Beard approached Belmore after a workout. One of Beard's friends from CrossFit HD had told her that Belmore was an oncology nurse. Although she didn't know Belmore personally, the atmosphere at the gym made it easier for Beard to ask for help.

"Our members are like family: dysfunctional yet wholesome,"

Andre Urquiza of CrossFit HD said. "We provide our members with an environment of unity, so that regardless of fitness capability, we are all seen as equal. Our members willingly give back in the same manner we give to them, proactively. It's an extension of home for many of us."

An oncology nurse in the cancer center at Emory University, Belmore works mainly with Phase 1 clinical trials, which involves researching new drugs and testing the response of the patients.

It's not an accident Belmore is a nurse. She's just one of those people who is driven to help others. Even though she works full time as a nurse, competes as a triathlete and faces a long commute from her house to CrossFit HD, Belmore sprang into action to help the woman she knew by sight only.

"I do feel like I have a worse day if I haven't helped someone," Belmore said. "I just love to make someone else's life better. It's empowering."



Beard has continued to do CrossFit during her treatment, scaling back when she's tired and ramping up when she has the energy.



Whether it's at the hospital or at the gym, Belmore keeps an eye on her friend.

The nurse said she felt honored to be in a position to help Beard.

"A lot of people can give hugs," Belmore said. She knew she could do more. First, Belmore put together a treatment binder for Beard. In it, she included every single side effect Beard might experience and what to do to alleviate them. She explained exactly why Beard would feel sick after treatment and what to do about it. The binder was almost two inches thick.

**"I do feel like I have a worse day
if I haven't helped someone."**

—Carrie Belmore

"She included information about nutrition and recipes," Beard said. "There was a letter from a patient and a symptom journal—more information than you could imagine."

Belmore was just getting started.

Her unit is part of the chemotherapy infusion center at Emory, but it's a separate unit within the larger infusion center. It's a relatively calm place because the clinical trials involve fewer people than the general treatment area.

The general infusion center at Emory is crowded and chaotic. Patients wait hours for their treatment. They are only allowed to bring one person with them. Most of the people receiving treatment are decades older than Beard and in the later stages of cancer.

It's a scary place, and Belmore knew this. When Beard headed to the hospital for her first chemotherapy infusion, Belmore told her come to her unit. She told Beard she could bring as many people as she needed.

Beard was going to need extra help because she was trying something unusual: she wanted to keep her hair.

Beating the Odds

When Beard got her diagnosis, her first question to her oncologist was, "Am I going to lose my hair?"

His answer was simple. "Yes, you are," he said.

Beard didn't accept that as an answer.

"I'm about beating the odds," Beard said.

She wanted to keep being a normal 26-year-old as much as possible. For her, keeping her hair was a big part of that. Not knowing who else to ask, Beard reached out to Belmore, who immediately started doing research.

Belmore found there was something Beard could try. It's a technique used mainly in Europe, and it's not cheap. The patient wears a "cold cap" on her head, which freezes the hair follicles to -50 F. The cold prevents the chemo from damaging the hair on the head.

The treatment requires keeping the cold caps in coolers on dry ice. The caps have to be changed every 30 minutes. If she was going to try to keep her hair, Beard would need space for the cooler and help changing the caps.

Belmore was on hand that first day, when Beard arrived with her boyfriend and parents, dragging a cooler full of dry ice.

"We joked that she and her mom and dad and (boyfriend) were like a circus. They just had this parade of stuff," Belmore said.

Belmore had set aside a room for Beard and her family. In the room was a brand-new Lululemon outfit and a jacket Belmore had purchased for Beard to keep her warm and comfortable.

"I feel like I should bring *you* something," Beard said to Belmore, wondering how to repay her kindness. Recalling that day, Beard is still floored by Belmore's generosity.



After the shock of the cancer diagnosis faded, the two women discovered they share a sense of humor, a strong faith and a love of college football.

"She's the most unselfish human being I've ever met," Beard said.

Even though she was working, Belmore checked in every 30 minutes to help Beard change her cold cap.

Now, many rounds into chemotherapy, Beard still has her hair. The hair on her head, that is.

**"She's the most unselfish human
being I've ever met."**

**—Lauren Beard
on Carrie Belmore**

"I don't have any body hair," Beard said with a laugh. "I can't believe I paid all that money for laser hair removal."

Feeling Normal

In those first few terrifying weeks, the two women focused on Beard's cancer. However, as time wore on and they spent more time together, they discovered they actually had a lot in common.

"We've become really close friends beyond disease and sickness," Belmore said. "She's taught me a lot."

"They are inseparable now," Urquiza said about Belmore and Beard. "Just yesterday I came in to the gym and they were doing the Filthy Fifty together, and they were doing rhythmic box jumps. It was a bond created through CrossFit."

"We're both athletes, both obsessed with college football. I'm a few steps ahead of her in life," said Belmore, who is married. "She can talk to me about her boyfriend, and I can



Belmore (left) never thought twice about jumping in to help Beard. It's just who she is.

share things I've been through. We have the same humor, which is rare. She cracks me up. We both have a big faith background."

As a fellow CrossFit athlete, Belmore understands Beard's desire to work out—even in the midst of chemotherapy treatment.

"It makes me feel normal," Beard said of training at CrossFit HD.

Although Belmore usually starts her day at 5 a.m., then heads to the gym after work and finishes working out by 5:30 p.m., she sticks around until Beard comes to the gym around 6.

"She'll stay to make sure I'm OK," Beard said. Belmore keeps an eye on Beard during the workouts. One day, the WOD included a 400-meter walk with a barbell on the back, interspersed with burpees over the bar.

Weakened by the chemo, Beard struggled to put the bar on her back after finishing her burpees. When Belmore saw her friend struggling, she walked over and lifted the bar onto Beard's back. She stayed by Beard's side during the entire workout, encouraging her and helping her when necessary.

"(We've) become so close," Beard said. "We have a lot in common—the way we grew up and our faith. She gets it."

A New Perspective

Beard is a different person than she was before the diagnosis. That phone call changed everything.

"Every single CrossFit WOD, I'm thankful," Beard said. "It's given me a different perspective. I'm more sympathetic now. I have a more positive outlook on every aspect of life. Everybody has their own struggle. I appreciate every little thing that I never even gave two thoughts before. The things people take for granted, like working out, have become my little victories."



Despite all she's been through, Beard is able to recognize the good things that have come out of her diagnosis: patience, perspective and a life-changing friendship.



**Beard already has her eye on the 2014 Open.
She wants to be ready.**

Beard used to get frustrated when she was driving and a pedestrian took too long to cross the road. She doesn't anymore.

"I know what they're going through," she said.

Beard said it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking, "Why me? What did I do wrong?" but she's always reminded that the terrifying and exhausting ordeal brought something wonderful.

"It's given me a friendship with Carrie," Beard said. "That's irreplaceable."

Belmore agrees.

"It's a friendship that will last a lifetime," she said.

Belmore said watching Beard fight cancer with courage and grace has been an inspiration.

"It sucks, but she wants to find every possible positive she can (out of the experience)," she said.

"We work with each other, and for each other, whether it's a 400-meter prowler-push WOD or moving furniture, exchanging professional services, and even health care in the case of (Belmore) and (Beard), where the bond was taken to the next level," Urquiza said about the members of CrossFit HD.

And there has been some good news. After two rounds of chemotherapy, Beard discovered the lump had shrunk so much the doctor couldn't find it. Her body is responding to the treatment.

"My goal is to be recovered for the 2014 Open," Beard said.

She still needs three more rounds of chemo and will go through with the double mastectomy. She'll be undergoing treatment until July 2014, and after that she'll have to take a pill for five years.

"It's funny looking back ... because I've grown so much stronger as a person and in my faith since (the diagnosis)," Beard said. "I've never had as much peace and joy as I have now, even in the midst of the hardest few months of my life. I wouldn't trade any of this journey for the world."

"Cancer may try its best to weaken me physically, but emotionally, mentally, spiritually, I'm stronger than I've ever been."

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

The Truth Behind Lulu's Lemons?

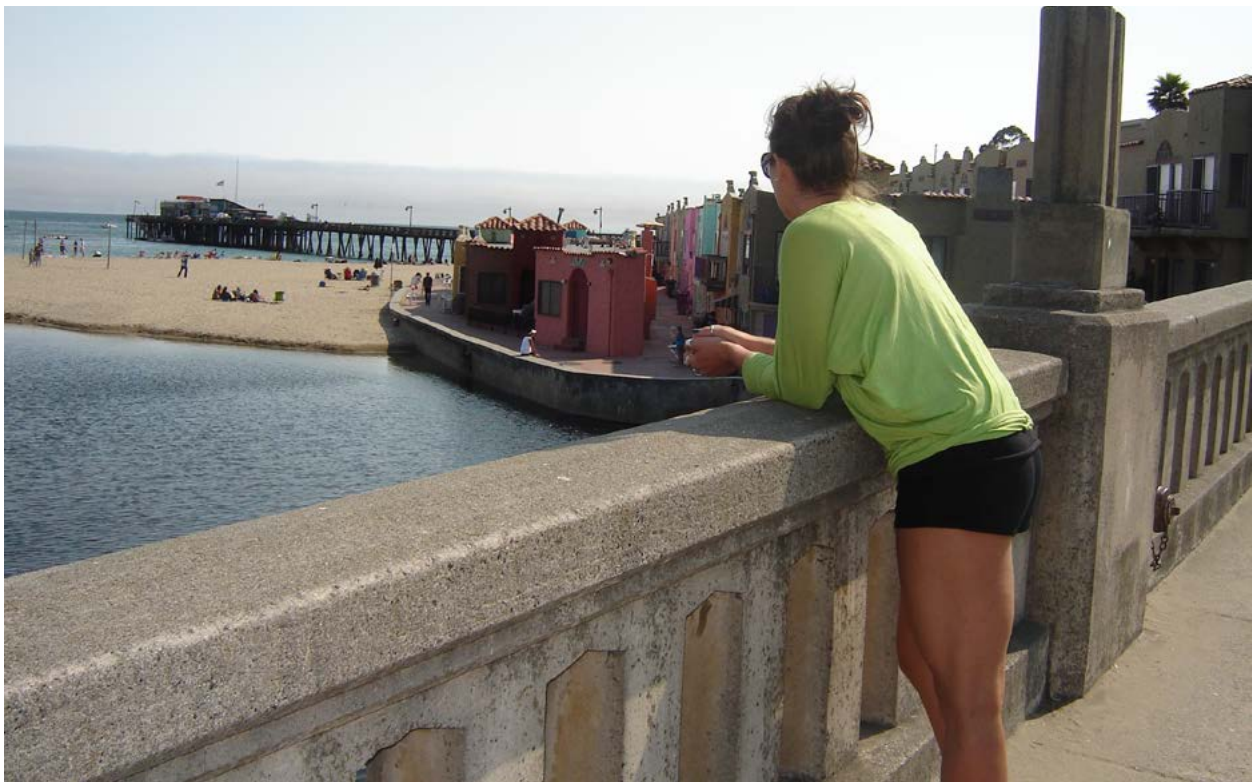
No yoga pants can contain Emily Beers' legs. And she's fine with that.



Beers and Shots

By Emily Beers

November 2013



Courtesy of Emily Beers

Chip Wilson of Lululemon said sheerness and pilling in yoga pants can be caused by rubbing. Emily Beers' legs agree.

I have boobs. Bigger boobs than most women. I'm a 36D. But I generally wear a C, which promotes more enthusiastic cleavage.

Last summer, a skinny, flat-chested friend of mine was rocking one of those flowing, cute summer dresses—the kind of dress in which a bra is optional.

I'd love to be able to prance around braless in one of those dresses, but I can't. Well, it's not that I can't. But I choose not to wear garments that I hang out of, or at the very least, garments that would expose a serious and unfortunate case of side boob.

I'll never wear the same dress as my scrawny, flat-chested friend, and she will never pull off all-star cleavage in a sexy halter dress.

C'est la vie.

**I throw heavy shit around
all the time, sometimes at
the expense of my pants.**

Our genetics are not the same, and the life choices we make that shape our bodies are as different as our genes.

Some have shapeless stick legs, some have thunder thighs, some have serious cases of cellulite, while others still have Miranda Oldroyd-style beautifully sculpted legs.

Is it so wrong to point out facts?

Apparently.

Recently, Lululemon Athletica founder Chip Wilson was reprimanded by mainstream media, Facebook users, angry Tweeters—you name it—for comments made during a Nov. 8 interview on [Bloomberg TV](#).

In March, Lululemon recalled yoga pants due to "a level of sheerness in some of our women's black Luon bottoms that falls short of our very high standards," according to a [release](#). In the Bloomberg interview, Wilson admitted the company had made an error in the pants, but his comments suggested other reasons for the issues with the product.

When Bloomberg host Trish Regan asked him about the problems with the popular pants, Wilson essentially said large-legged females cause the issues.

He described what he thinks are the real causes of sheerness and pilling: "It's really about the rubbing through the thighs, how much pressure is there ... over a period of time and how much they use it."



Richwell Correa

***The face of a woman who expects some pilling when
a barbell is dragged over her shorts or pants.***

He added, "The thing is that women will wear seatbelts that don't work, or they'll wear a purse that doesn't work, or, quite frankly, some women's bodies just actually don't work for it."

Since making his statements, Wilson has received a ton of criticism.

"Ladies—you're too fat for my yoga pants #Lululemon Chairman tells me," Regan tweeted.

"Lululemon founder Chip Wilson blames women's bodies for yoga pant problems," read the [ABC News website](#).

Others on Facebook and Twitter accused Wilson of "fat-shaming" and of being "clueless and sexist."

A few days later, Under Armour founder and CEO Kevin Plank and skiing superstar Lindsey Vonn appeared on Bloomberg TV to offer their opinions.

"Doesn't matter what size you are, Under Armour is that brand for you," Vonn stated, capitalizing on Wilson's blunder.

And as these things always go, Wilson reacted by putting out an [apology video](#) saying how sad he was for "the repercussions of my actions."

He added: "I'm sad for the people of Lululemon who I care so much about that have really had to face the brunt of my actions."

Critics were quick to point out that it seemed he was apologizing to Lululemon employees rather than customers.

What kind of politically correct, scared-to-offend world do we live in where people actually can get their pants in such a knot over this?

Let's review what happened here:

Chip Wilson pointed out a truth.

I know this because I'm one of these big-legged customers of whom Wilson spoke.



Courtesy of Audrey Tannant

Pro tip: Burned-out patches on the pants can indicate whether an athlete is keeping the bar close to the body while lifting.

Sometimes, my pants start to wear out sooner than those owned by my skinny-legged friends. When I purchase a pair of Lululemon pants, I don't expect them to last a lifetime. Generally, they last between four to eight months before they start looking somewhat worn around my quads, my hamstrings and my thighs. I know that my Lululemon pants are here for a good time, not necessarily a long time.

The problem isn't the pants. The problem is my build and the lifestyle I choose to live: I throw heavy shit around all the time, sometimes at the expense of my pants.

Despite the fact I frequent Lululemon more often than most to buy a new pair of pants, I've tried other yoga brands. Lululemon is by far the best quality yoga pant out there. Lululemon also has one of the best exchange policies I've ever encountered in the retail industry. I have returned pants on multiple occasions and have been handed a new pair for free with no questions asked.

My legs are big. When I measure my thigh circumference against men, I usually win.

I have worked hard to build my hamstrings, glutes and quads, and I'm proud of them.

I can squat 275 lb. and deadlift 350 lb.

I go places and get asked, "Where did you get your legs from?"

I have a hard time finding jeans, so I often resort to dresses—a great alternative.

Some men think my legs are sexy; others are scared and run for the hills.

And, unfortunately, I have to replace my Lululemon pants more often than my skinny-legged friends.

Offensive? No.

First World problem? Yes.



About the Author

Emily Beers is a *CrossFit Journal* staff writer and editor. She competed in the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games on CrossFit Vancouver's team, and she finished third at the Canada West Regional in 2012. In 2013, she finished second in the Open in Canada West.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Riding With the Reaper

Pat Sherwood and Ian Wittenber come face to face with death on the treacherous mountain roads of Ecuador.

By Pat Sherwood

November 2013



All images: Staff/CrossFit Journal

Oct. 18 was Day 67 on the moto. The odometer read 8,500 miles.

After filming a community piece in Quito, Ecuador, the goal was to ride to Guayaquil. Google Maps said it would be 5.5 hours, so we figured 7.5 hours. We have learned that Google Maps cannot predict rain, potholes and broken roads, animals in the road, police checkpoints, old 18-wheelers barely doing 10 mph on twisty mountain roads, etc. We add two hours for every five listed on Google Maps.

My bike started right up, but Ian's was still starting and then immediately dying. I had no idea why this was happening. We had literally just gotten the bikes out from the Kawasaki Dealer in Quito two days prior. Whatever the problem, it was bound to bite us in the ass at some inopportune time.

After some stops, we got on the road at about 10:30 a.m. Getting out of Quito was quite a pain in the ass. The traffic was thick. The roads were bad. There was zero signage as to where in the hell we were going or what road we were on. The roads constantly split into multiple directions, and we had to make a random guess several times. Finally, we got the hell out and onto the main "highway" we needed.

Things started to deteriorate. There are several ways to get from Quito to Guayaquil. Some are faster than others. None are clearly marked with any signs, and one is more likely to miss the proper turn than to make it. This is what began to happen. After realizing we missed the most direct route some time ago, we continued on the second most ideal route. No drama.

We were in middle of nowhere when it was time to eat lunch. We gassed up, and the shitty little store had zero protein and zero fat. Only sugar. So I bought a big bag of animal crackers with a bottle of water. As it would turn out, I was lucky I ate something. We would not have the opportunity to eat again for a long time.

The scenery was breathtaking. Ecuador is jam-packed with mountains and vistas galore. At times it looked like we were riding through a pine forest high in the mountains of Northern California or Oregon. The roads constantly gained elevation, dropped, and then climbed again, and all roads going up and down the mountains are hairpin right turns followed by hairpin lefts ... mile after mile after mile.

On these steep, twisty mountain roads, buses, trucks and other vehicles struggle to climb the grades. The already slow speeds are reduced to a crawl. Thirty mph becomes 15 mph, and you can be stuck behind slow vehicles for 50 miles. So you have to pass—on hairpin turns with nothing but blind corners and no guardrails. We must pass 100 vehicles every day on roads like this. That is not an exaggeration. Some passes are sketchy and some are not. However, our most risky flirtation-with-death pass on a blind corner would not even register with the locals, who pass vehicles like they have a death wish.

Ecuador might be near the equator, but there was a very strong chill in the air and the temperature kept dropping rapidly. Soon, we were flat-out cold and the clouds rolled in. The sun was gone, and we pulled over and I put on a thermal-underwear top.

We were looking for another major Y intersection—our next best opportunity to take a slightly more direct route



Rain can be inconvenient on city roads, but it's dangerous when you're riding a motorcycle on twisting mountain roads without guardrails.



Sherwood traveling roads that may or may not exist according to various maps.

to Guayaquil. As it turned out, this major Y did not exist. We stopped on the side of the road with Google Maps on my iPhone alongside paper maps. No dice. Our little blue dot showed that we were right at this major Y and needed to go right. However, there was no Y. We were on a straight road with no options to turn. We rode up the road and then down the road to see if we had missed something. Nope. It was just wrong. We now needed to modify our route to become even longer and less favorable. The curveballs just kept coming.

We rode for a bit longer, and then the cloudy sky turned gray, the temperature dropped more and the wind picked up. That meant we were about to get dumped on. We pulled over again and donned our rain gear. We could actually look down the road and see the rain hitting the ground and approaching our position, and we got kitted up just in time. What hit us was not rain but hail. Our speed was reduced because of the weather, and our supposed 7.5-hour journey was looking much longer.

To add insult to injury, we hit the thickest fog I'd seen in a long time 40 minutes later. I could see 50 feet in front of me. Then it got even darker, and our speed was once again reduced to a crawl.

It's tough to explain how dangerous this was. Oncoming traffic just suddenly appeared out of the fog, usually going faster than appropriate. Or even better, cars appeared in our lane while executing dangerous passes. All of this on hairpin roads in thick fog in the mountains in a hailstorm.

The visors of our motorcycle helmets fogged up constantly, making our visibility even worse. I was constantly wiping the water away in hopes of improving the situation. Plus, we were shaking from the frigging cold.

The only option was to reduce speed to something manageable, press on and try to get to the other side of the weather. If we pulled over in the dense fog with our hazards on to wait it out, our chances of not being seen and hit by a car were high.

Ready for the Murphy's Law part of the story? Unbeknownst to me, my headlight was out. I did not realize it because it had worked the night before and we had been in daylight until we hit the fog. So, I was riding up front thinking that oncoming vehicles would see my headlight. Thank God nothing happened. When we later realized my light had been out the whole time, it gave me chills.

Finally we broke through the fog, but the bone-chilling cold remained along with the crazy roads. We rode and rode. Progress was slow for several more hours. It was getting dark, and we were not near Guayaquil. This is when a trip sucks and nothing about it is fun. Your body is exhausted from shivering in the cold. You are sore and aching from being on the motorcycle so long. You keep shifting around, trying to find a comfortable position, but there isn't one. But mostly, you are just mentally spent. Riding in these conditions requires intense and sharp focus every second of every minute, hour after hour.

The frigging map said we needed to make a right turn in about an hour. As the previous turn didn't even exist, we weren't holding our breaths. But against all odds, after an hour, we actually found the turn—but it was closed and blocked. The road was not passable. Are you shitting me? Fuck!

We were cold, hungry, borderline lost and far from Guayaquil. Fuel was beginning to become a serious concern. We had no choice but to press on.

After another 90 minutes of painfully slow zig-zagging up and down cold mountain roads, we were directed by the map to a right turn to Guayaquil. As you can guess, we were not hopeful. But the turn existed, and we were ecstatic to find the road was open.

At least heading somewhat toward our destination, we were aware that fuel was a critical issue. We needed a gas station ASAP. We finally started to drop in elevation. Down and down we rode on wet, twisty mountain roads, and it was now nighttime. With my low beam out, Ian rode up front and I rode behind him with my high beam on. The road turned to gravel, then dirt. It was under construction but passable.

Then it happened: I thought I blew my rear tire again when the rear wheel of my bike lost traction. I felt the ass end of my bike slide left, then right. It felt squishy and simply wrong. I slowed down to assess what was wrong and realized it was not my bike. My tire was fine; it was the road.

The road construction crew had dug up huge piles of dirt and lined the sides of the road with them. The rain had turned the dirt to an incredibly slick thin film of greasy mud. This slick substance had washed onto the road surface, which might as well have been covered in olive oil. Our bikes were literally sliding, and were on a steep downhill gradient at night with no headlight. You just can't make this shit up.

Ian was creeping along just ahead of me at about 5 mph trying to fight the slippery surface when his bike just kicked out from under him and fell onto his left side. I parked, and along with some locals who stopped to help, we righted his bike. Walking over to help him, I almost slipped and fell. This was a shit show, and we still had more than two hours to go under ideal riding conditions. These conditions were the polar opposite of ideal, and we had no idea how long the rest of our journey would take.

Just as we got his bike up and I walked back over to mine, an 18-wheeler came hauling ass around the corner, obviously unaware of the slippery conditions. Ian's bike was in the same lane as the truck, and I stood there watching. It happened so fast. I said to myself, "Well, this is where Ian gets killed." The truck tried to slow down and could not. Its red brake lights lit the night sky, but his speed did not change. The driver was committed to the line, and as luck would have it, he just missed Ian. Holy shit! We needed to get the hell out of here!

We proceeded to ride down this slippery mountain road very cautiously until finally the conditions changed back from deadly to just normally dangerous. We pressed on, damn near out of gas and running on fumes, until we rode through a tiny little town and found a gas station. We fueled up. I bought a bottle of water and some vanilla Oreos. We were starving.

In the dark night, in this small dirty town, the gas station did not look inviting, but we had no choice. There were about five rough-looking guys all sitting in the dark playing cards between the pumps at the crappy little store. As it turns out, they were cool dudes. They loved our bikes, and we started a conversation about our trip. This happens time and time again. People in Latin America have been amazing.

Now about 90 minutes outside of Guayaquil, we mounted up and kept riding through some shitty, sketchy towns. We hit yet another closed road, but I saw a motorcycle ride around the barrier, so we did, too. It worked out fine. Gotta love the locals.

After riding and riding, we finally saw Guayaquil on the horizon. We were starving to death but in the distance saw the Golden Arches! We rode directly to McDonald's. It was now 10 p.m. It had taken us 11.5 hours to get to Guayaquil. We were utterly spent in every sense of the word.

Say what you will, but after the day we had just endured, a double quarter-pounder with cheese tasted like heaven.



About the Author

Pat Sherwood works for CrossFit as a flowmaster and member of the Media Team. He's done just under 200 seminars all around the globe for CrossFit HQ and competed in the 2009 CrossFit Games. He hates HSPU and loves ice cream.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

No Squats for Coal Miner's Daughter

What if everything we “know” about resistance training for children is based on myth?
Chris Cooper investigates.

By Chris Cooper

November 2013



All: Chris Cooper

In 1842, England's Children's Employment Commission observed a disturbing trend, according to [Causes of Short Stature Among Coal-Mining Children, 1823-1850](#) by Peter Kirby. It seemed children working in coal mines were notably shorter than other British children. This was cause for alarm. In their rudimentary version of the Sickness-Wellness-Fitness Continuum, 19th-century British scientists used height as a primary indicator for health. A short child was, by definition, unhealthy.

1 of 8

The commission blamed the laborious nature of coal mining for stunting the growth of its child workers. The heavy loads, it rationalized, permanently compressed the skeleton. To achieve “normal” height, therefore, children should remain unburdened by external load until they reached physical maturity.

Though now thoroughly discredited by sport science, stories like these from child-labor hotspots worldwide resonate with parents, coaches and nervous onlookers alike. Position papers from leading scientific authorities now advocate resistance training but still shy away from “heavy” or “repetitive” lifts. All espouse the benefits of a “properly designed training program” implemented by an “expert,” but none seem confident enough to actually recommend a program.

Is resistance training dangerous for children? If a little is OK, where’s the line? What’s best for our kids?

The Sticky Myth

“A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes.” —Mark Twain

The young miners, called “colliers,” received a lot of attention from physicians and other 19th-century “experts.”

“Colliers who have been habituated, from childhood, to work in pits where the veins of coal are thin, and the workings consequently contracted, have certainly a remarkably stunted appearance, and the boys are commonly of low stature for their respective ages,” according to a report from the Forest of Dean coal field.

Another, from West Yorkshire, noted that coal miners were “notoriously a diminutive race of men,” and a Wigan surgeon claimed that coal-mining children were “smaller, and have a stunted appearance.”



While some parents still believe training can harm children, many other parents now understand its value in keeping their children fit and healthy.

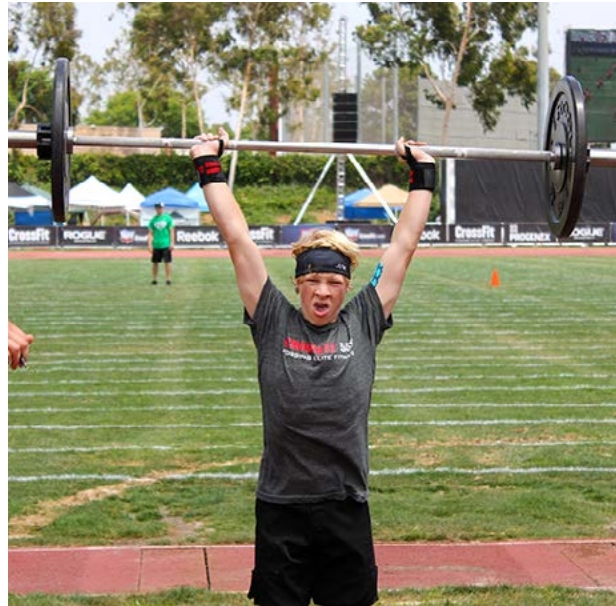
The truth: selection, inadequate nutrition, little access to daylight, high anxiety and the depression of growth hormone caused the child miners' stunted appearance. The shorter kids were chosen to work the mines because they could fit better. And contemporary surveys of rickets—a frailty of the bones caused by inadequate sun exposure—show drastic spikes of occurrences in mining towns, where kids might not see the sun all day in the wintertime. Violence and a high rate of mortality among fathers in mining towns caused a high level of childhood anxiety, which represses growth hormone. The children of the mines weren't tramped down by the weight of their load: they had rickets or were starved or depressed. These were Kirby's conclusions, and they were published in the *Economics History Review* in 1995.

The truth: selection, inadequate nutrition, little access to daylight, high anxiety and the depression of growth hormone caused the child miners' stunted appearance.

The young miners also received some positive attention from the Children's Employment Commission. "In Yorkshire, a contrast was drawn 'between the broad stalwart frame of the swarthy collier ... and the puny, pallid, starveling little weaver, with his dirty-white apron and feminine look,'" Kirby wrote. Though child weavers in Yorkshire probably had better access to daylight and food, their long days of sitting apparently led to a waifish appearance.

Sub-Commissioner James Mitchell thought "the colliers, as a race of men, in most districts, and in Durham amongst the rest, are not of large stature, but they always appear strong and vigorous."

Thomas Tancred, of the Midland Mining Commission, in 1843 said the child miners of West Bromwich had "a development of the muscles of the chest, back and arms, which could not have been surpassed in the athleteae who won the laurel-wreaths at the Grecian games."



In a weird twisting of logic, many parents will not allow their children to lift weights but won't think twice about registering them for contact sports like football.

And Jelinger Symons thought "the strength and robustness of the children is owing, first to their ample and nourishing food; secondly, to their work, hurrying in the pits being a healthful gymnastic exercise, where not carried to great excess."

If the hard work of carrying, towing and pushing ore contributed to a stronger, more robust child, why do we remember only the myth of the stunted, shortened child working underground?

In the book *Made to Stick*, Chip and Dan Heath recount the necessary parts of a long-running urban legend. For a myth to have staying power, the Heath brothers write that it must contain "credible, emotional stories." The colliers' story is emotional on its own; for a while, 20th-century science seemed to lend credence. In the early 1900s, doctors worried that repeated stress to the epiphyseal plates (often called "growth plates") could stunt a child's growth.

Growth plates are found at the end of long bones like the femur. When cells—called "chondrocytes"—in the growth plate divide, they stack together, making the bones longer. Osteoblasts harden the stacks to make the bones rigid. During puberty, chondrocyte activity stops, and the epiphyseal plates thin to a small scar and eventually disappear entirely.



A child's age is sometimes a poor indicator of readiness to lift. A better indicator is often the ability to follow instructions and maintain concentration during activities.

When the epiphyseal plate is gone, the potential for bone lengthening—and therefore height—goes with it. A kid's only opportunity to get taller occurs when the growth plates are active. Anything that damages the growth plate can limit potential maximum height.

What damages growth plates? Joint injuries from impact sports, frostbite, falling from high places, crashing a bicycle. In short, anything that can break a bone can fracture an epiphyseal plate. **Injuries reported from resistance training**, on closer inspection, almost always occur when a child falls from a piece of equipment, drops something heavy on herself or pinches something.

Weight training doesn't damage growth plates, but paired with an emotional story like that of the child colliers in England, the myth seems believable. The real risk of injury to growth plates isn't resistance training at all. It's lack of skill training.

"I'd say it remains the No. 1 question we get: 'Should my kid be lifting a load?'" said Dr. Jon Gary of CrossFit Kids. "But

age doesn't tell you everything about a kid's development. How's their skeleton developing? How's their mental status? Can they concentrate long enough to maintain concentration on a five-second lift? Can they listen to instructions?"

Dr. Jon Gary believes attention to detail and the ability to focus are the most important indicators of readiness for weight training regardless of the child's chronological or emotional age.

Gary believes attention to detail and the ability to focus are the most important indicators of readiness for weight training regardless of the child's chronological or emotional age.

"It depends on the child. We talk about mechanics and consistency, and then well down that path is intensity, speed and load," Gary said. "For a 5-year-old, that might take years."

Technique and consistency take longer for a child to develop, but Gary believes there's plenty of time.

"What's the rush?" he asked. "We're coming to CrossFit Kids for general physical preparedness, not sport-specific training. No one's going to a NFL camp at age 9. We're going to matriculate your kids up slowly, and it's going to be amazing."

The Reality of Resistance

The fear of overtaxing a child is both new and geographic.

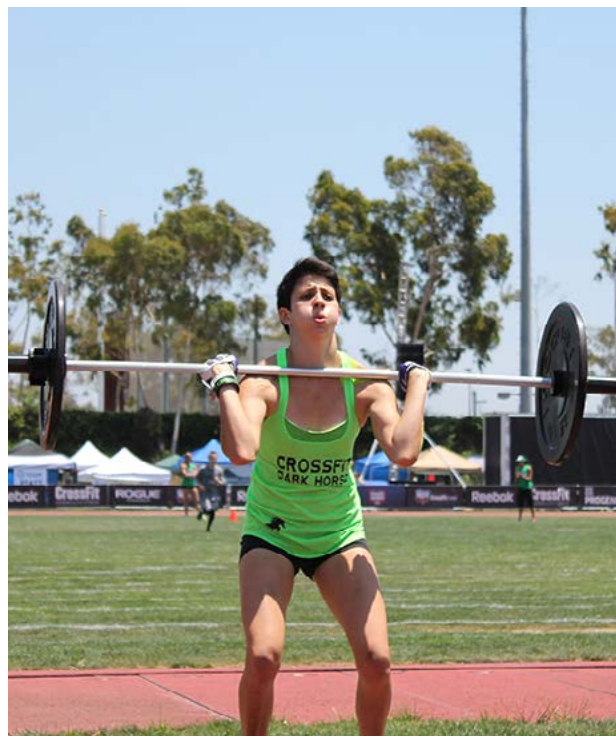
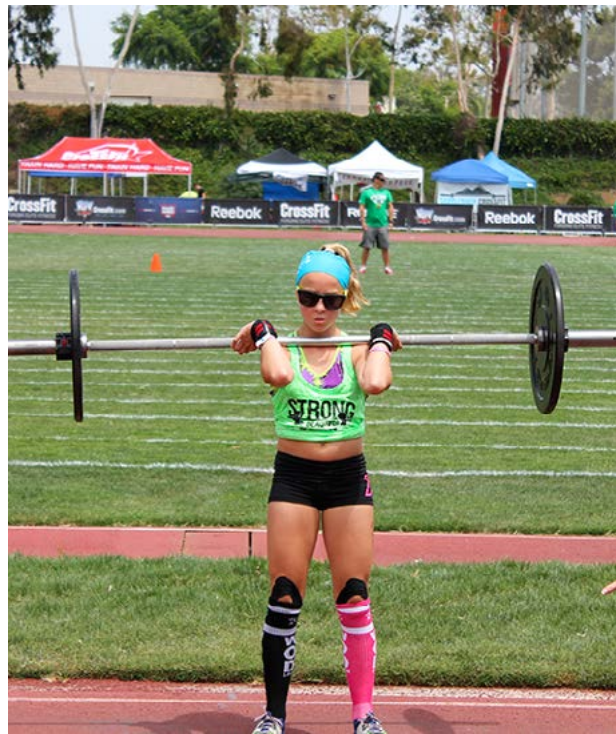
In developing countries, kids tote water on their heads and in their hands, they drag a hoe over unrelenting dirt, and they carry smaller brothers and sisters on their backs. They hunt, they transport firewood, and they even carry rocks on which to sit.

When a child jumps from a snow bank, off a hay bale or out of a tree, the eccentric force upon landing can be estimated mathematically. In a laboratory setting, researchers have had children jump and land on force plates to measure the load at impact and compare it to a percentage of their body weight.

Seventy students from grades four, five and six in the Richmond School District of British Columbia volunteered to perform 12 different jumps. Many of these exercises would be familiar to CrossFit Kids coaches: AF (alternating feet) is a jumping lunge, DJ_{50} is a rebounding box jump to a 20-inch box, and JJ_{SUBMAX} indicates jumping jacks.

When children drop from a 20-inch box, they absorb about 4.7 times their body weight at impact. When they split into a jumping jack, it's about 3.7 times their body weight; even landing a jumping lunge, or a split jerk with a piece of plastic pipe, results in forces around 2.1 times body weight. What if a 50-lb. child was loaded with 102 lb. and asked to do a jumping lunge?

Interestingly, the researchers in the study weren't looking to predict the damage caused by these activities; they were trying to see which built the *most* bone. They were trying



In CrossFit Kids programs, children are monitored carefully, and intensity is only added after good mechanics and consistent movement patterns are seen regularly.

to find the jump that caused the highest stress because they hypothesized that it would be most beneficial—not growth stunting but bone enhancing.

Hopscotch, skipping and even running are plyometric by nature, and parents don't pull their kids from the playground or push to ban sidewalk chalk. Ask their children to perform actions requiring the same muscular forces in a gym, though, and perceptions of risk change. The barbell draws fear and criticism like a lightning rod, though simple play might actually create more strain than an external weight.

"I'd refer to the 2001 American Academy of Pediatrics definition of resistance training," Gary said. "It's the use of any external object—a band, a load, a machine—with which to push against your muscles for the purpose of increasing strength. Anything that provides a resistance to your muscles—a jug on your head, a stretch band, two dry-erase markers substituting as dumbbells—(is) means of resistance. They carry some type of load."

Supporting Science

Over the last decade, research has piled up in support of the safety—and necessity—of resistance training for youth.

The National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) published the first position statement paper on youth resistance training in 1985. Initially, the association advocated only high repetitions and low weights but **amended its position in 1996** in light of overwhelming supporting evidence that even heavy resistance training is safe and effective for youth.

In 2007, the **President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports** went further, recommending resistance training as a better option for overweight youths than aerobic activity.

"Regular participation in strength-building activities gives obese youth a chance to experience success, feel good about their performances, and gain confidence in their abilities to be physically active," the authors wrote.



As science dispels the myths around children and strength training, more parents begin to understand how programs such as CrossFit Kids can set children up for a lifetime of success on the playing field.

The [Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology](#) took the position, in 2008, that “There is no minimum age for Resistance Training for children ... exercises can include more advanced movements such as Olympic-style lifting, plyometrics, and balance training, which can enhance strength, power, coordination, and balance.”

Across the board, research supports that resistance training—even one-rep maxes—can be safe for kids. The only difference between a safe and an unsafe program is the presence of a skilled coach.

Smooth is Fast

At the Gauntlet event during this year’s CrossFit Games, spectators were awed by teenagers’ heavy lifts. Eighteen-year-old Jesse Lopiz (pictured on Page 1), stood out in winning the varsity division.

After 93 burpees in 10 minutes—some of which ended in pull-ups or muscle-ups—he took a short rest and then ascended a max-clean ladder like it was a gently sloping mountain trail. He moved smoothly through 245 lb., 275

lb., 295 lb. and 305 lb. At 315 lb., he caught the weight easily but failed to stand up with it. He rested, then tried again. Same result: a beautiful pull, a flawless catch, a vertical torso and great rack position. He got stuck in the bottom anyway. It was the same result on the third attempt.

Lopiz doesn’t follow programming with a “strength bias” or do extra weightlifting work.

“I don’t do any of that stuff,” he said. “I just do CrossFit.”

He’s been doing it for almost eight years, starting with CrossFit Kids, learning and practicing for a year with PVC pipe. He then moved to 15 lb., and then to 25, getting very good at 25-lb. lifts before moving to 45 and becoming a master who could execute perfect cleans 10 times out of 10.

“Jesse Lopiz matriculated up slowly,” said Gary, his judge on the clean ladder. “He’s got 315. He can handle the technique, just not the weight yet. A PR clean should look just as close to perfect as your first clean, and your mental state shouldn’t change either.”



For kids, the load on the bar is often irrelevant. Great coaches will evaluate form instead and add weight only when the movement is sound.



Under the close supervision of a trained coach, kids can become stronger and learn movement techniques that will benefit them for decades.

But Think of the Children!

At Gauntlet events, coaches and judges choose the weights and competitive category for the kids. No athletes are asked, "How much can you handle?" Instead, they are required to demonstrate proficiency. If a teen moves well with a 65-lb. thruster, that becomes his prescribed weight for the event. Movement fluency comes first.

When a child struggles to float, parents don't push to ban swimming. They register for classes.

When a child struggles to float, parents don't push to ban swimming. They register for classes. With research now supporting the need for children to lift weights, parents should seek the best way for their children to participate. Education is the real myth-buster.

"The point of the CrossFit Kids course is to keep your child safe," Gary said. "Hundreds of thousands of kids every year go to the pool for the first time. If they can't swim, there are issues with severe consequences. Parents still take the kids to the pool anyway; there are lifeguards and swim coaches. I have the same responsibility in my CrossFit Kids class."



About the Author

Chris Cooper is a staff writer for CrossFit. He owns CrossFit Catalyst in Sault Ste. Marie, Ont. Both of his children lift weights.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

“Snatch a Dumbbell? Madness!”

Pat Sherwood confesses to a history of biceps curls before detailing favorite WODs that have helped him stay fit on an epic motorcycle trip.

By Pat Sherwood

November 2013



All photos: Staff/CrossFit Journal

I know I'm butchering the saying, but it goes something like this: "If you view the world today the same way you did 10 years ago, you have wasted a decade."

I'm in full agreement with that statement, especially when it comes to how I train today compared to a decade ago.



Sherwood 2005 would have been all over chest flies, but Sherwood 2013 used this hotel-gym gear for 100 over-the-bench burpees.

Bumper plates, lifting platforms, GHDs, rings, ropes, tires, prowlers, yokes, Airdynes, medicine balls, boxes and other items that are common in CrossFit affiliates are often not present when we need to hit a WOD. No problem. We just scan our environment and find a way to perform a variety of functional movements with intensity.

Below are some of my favorite workouts we have done with zero equipment or in normal hotel gyms. A good hotel gym usually has a dumbbell rack that goes up to 50 lb.

- 10 rounds:
 - 1-minute treadmill sprint
 - 1 barbell complex: 3 strict presses, 3 push presses, 3 push jerks with 120 lb.
- 200 snatches for time with a 50-lb. dumbbell, alternating arms
- 100 thrusters with 35-lb. dumbbells, with 5 burpees at the top of every minute
- 5 rounds:
 - 400-meter treadmill run
 - 15 45-lb. dumbbell thrusters
- Death by 5-meter sprints (zero equipment needed)
- 150 burpees for time
- 10 burpees every minute on the minute for 20 minutes

- 100 over-the-bench burpees with 50-lb. dumbbells
- Accumulate 5 minutes in a handstand against a wall, and every time you kick down, do a certain number of air squats (I did sets of 15 squats because I suck at handstands and had to kick down about 300 times)
- 4 rounds for time:
 - 400-meter treadmill run
 - 20 one-arm 50-lb. dumbbell snatches (alternating arms)
 - 20 front squats with both dumbbells
 - (I would change the snatches to 30 per round)
- In a hotel with six floors, 20 minutes of stair sprints and bunny hopping up the stairs
- 5 rounds:
 - 40-meter treadmill run
 - 15 hang power cleans at 135 lb.
- Monkey-bar Cindy in a park at night

Before CrossFit, I would not have viewed many environments the same way. As far as I was concerned, dumbbells were for hammer curls, concentration curls and flies. If I had seen someone snatching a dumbbell, I would have assumed he was a psychopath who had just escaped from a mental institution.

CrossFit has changed my view of fitness and how to achieve it, and the new perspective has been a tremendous asset in staying in shape during our motorcycle trip.

So when you find yourself far from home because of work or play, avoid the temptation to skip training because of a lack of equipment or the absence of a gym. Analyze your environment and apply what you have learned with CrossFit, and I bet you'll be able to create challenging workouts with relative ease.

Live life. Train hard. Have fun.



About the Author

Pat Sherwood works for CrossFit as a flowmaster and member of the Media Team. He's done just under 200 seminars all around the globe for CrossFit HQ and competed in the 2009 CrossFit Games. He hates HSPU and loves ice cream.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Daniel Rodriguez's Big Win

Chicago student wins charter-school "education lottery" and earns full college scholarship.

By Chris Cooper

November 2013



All photos: Alexander Calatayud

Daniel Rodriguez won the lottery when he was 13.

A kid from Chicago's inner city, Rodriguez faced a bleak outlook. His mom is from Puerto Rico, his dad from the Dominican Republic, and English is not the first language of either parent. Rodriguez struggled in elementary school, and his parents feared for his future in high school.

1 of 4

"I was so far behind as far as classes and learning," Rodriguez says. "You're influenced by the people you're around all the time. Even if you want to do really well, it's harder because the other students don't want the same thing. So public high school wasn't an option."

Though it would be hard for the Rodriguez family to afford a private high school, they were prepared to make any sacrifice to help Daniel succeed. That's when they heard about Chicago Bulls College Preparatory High School, one of 14 institutions in Chicago's Noble Network of Charter Schools.

Charter schools are public but exist outside of public school boards and receive only 75 percent of the funding of a normal public school. Though students are held to the same standards as their peers in non-charter schools, charter institutions have more freedom in how they get students to meet and exceed those standards.

Noble charter schools are open to any student living in Chicago who has graduated from eighth grade, and while they have a smaller budget than most public schools, they consistently score highest in the city on test scores, in graduation and college-placement rates, and in degrees earned. Noble schools are free, just like other public schools, but their high success rate puts them in such demand that admittance must be done through a lottery system.

"We regularly receive more applications than slots available," says Angela Montagna, director of external affairs of the Noble Network. "Every student's name is entered, and we pull them out according to the seats available at each school. There's a waiting list, and we go right down it until all the slots are filled."

Rodriguez graduated in Chicago Bulls College Prep's first senior class, and 100 percent of the senior students were accepted to four-year university programs. A figure like that means that if a student misses a seat in the lottery, she might be missing her best chance to attend college. She might also miss the rigorous but character-building discipline of the charter school and lose out on learning in a building free of metal detectors.

"Most schools around here have them," says Montagna. "We, on principle, will not allow it. We're not training our kids to go to prison. We have zero issues with weapons and maybe one fight per year across all 14 campuses. If you go to high schools that are two blocks away, there are metal detectors, there are police processing centers in the

basements, there's police presence everywhere. They're more violent places. We're less chaotic and safer, and we don't have any of those things."

David Oclander is principal at Chicago Bulls College Prep. He left the military to pursue a career in education at the Noble Network.

"There's a difference between security and safety," Oclander says. "Schools with metal detectors and police officers might be secure, or they might not be, but that doesn't necessarily make them safe. We're safe."

If a student misses a seat in the charter-school lottery, she might be missing her best chance to attend college.

Rather than being confined by the strict rules at Noble, students seem able to relax in the atmosphere of consistency. No gum chewing. Shirt buttoned to the top. Arrive early—one second after the bell is a demerit. And so on. In some cases, school might be the only oasis of stability in the lives of Noble students.

"The discipline culture is really strict," says Rodriguez. "But each rule did make sense if you look at our students. It works."

For Rodriguez, the alternative may have been a disaster. Some of the kids from his neighborhood are on drugs; some are in jail. Most are no longer in school.

"Unfortunately, some dropped out because either they have a child on the way, or other family situations, and now their resources are very limited," he says. "None earned scholarships. That's the norm. I don't want to think about that, but it might have happened to me."

But it didn't happen to him.

These were the two worlds available to Rodriguez: stability and rigorous discipline on one hand, and a chaotic danger zone on the other. Rodriguez didn't enter the Noble lottery lightly.

Luckily, he won.



CrossFit was an important part of high school for Rodriguez, and it influenced his decision to study kinesiology in college.

Forward Focused

"Ninety-five percent of the kids here live in poverty," Oclander says as he leads a tour between classrooms. "A lot of them stay here until 5 o'clock at night because they just don't want to go home."

He knocks on a classroom door, and a student in khaki pants, crisp blue polo shirt and shined shoes comes out. She introduces herself, makes eye contact with each adult and invites us in. Chosen at random from her classmates, Brenda Vega is practicing to interact with adults when it matters most: at intake interviews for university.

Inside the classroom, kids from the inner city, dressed in their best, are sitting up straight and reading *The Catcher in the Rye*. The book's protagonist, Holden Caulfield, is an alien to these teens: a white kid who unravels is a foreign concept to a minority kid who's working hard to hold everything together. Students discuss the book and prepare for the teacher to ask them pointed questions about its content. They may not care about Caulfield, but they care about being ready for entrance interviews.

"Many of these kids come from families where they're the first generation to go to college," Oclander explains. "So we built a class called College Seminar where the whole first semester is dedicated to finding schools that appeal to them. Then they apply to those schools. The second semester is dedicated to applying for scholarships."

**Holden Caulfield is an alien
to these teens: a white kid who
unravels is a foreign concept
to a minority kid who's
working hard to hold
everything together.**

The Noble Network leverages federal aid, Reserve Officer Training Corps scholarships, private scholarships and university funding for its graduating students to the tune of US\$53 million per year.

"At a single school last year, Pritzker Prep, we had \$17 million in scholarships for a graduating class of 150 kids," Oclander says. "These families can't afford college. That's why we put so much work into providing counselors and giving students daily help to get in."

"Everyone at Noble knows the goal is to finish high school, finish college, get out there and make everyone better," Rodriguez says.

And Rodriguez is on that path.

At first, he struggled to adhere to the level of discipline required of Noble students. Eventually, though, Rodriguez found his rhythm and began to excel within the consistent environment.

"One of the pillars of Bulls Prep is fitness, and CrossFit was for the students who are serious about fitness."

—Daniel Rodriguez

After graduating from Chicago Bulls College Prep in June, Rodriguez began his post-secondary career at the University of Wisconsin in September, studying kinesiology. He's receiving a four-year full scholarship from the [POSSE Foundation](#). When he graduates, he wants to be a physical therapist. But first, he wants to find a CrossFit gym around Madison; Rodriguez did CrossFit as a senior at Chicago Bulls College Prep.

"I'm going to adjust to school a little and then start a membership there. I have to get myself in there," Rodriguez says. "One of the pillars of Bulls Prep is fitness, and CrossFit was for the students who are serious about fitness."

Bulls Prep brought CrossFit into its physical-education curriculum in 2012. Jason Ronai, the assistant principal of

Bulls, attended a CrossFit Level 1 Seminar and began to replacing his P.E. classes with CrossFit workouts. In 2013, Ronai added burpees and shuttle runs into his study-hall sessions, and students talk about the CrossFit model in their business classes.

"I can tell you that, in that class, the environment was ridiculous. No embarrassment, no fear, everyone wanting to get better. The encouragement was crazy. If someone was struggling, everyone would motivate them. You just don't see that everywhere," Rodriguez says.

A year later, CrossFit has been adopted as the physical-education program in five Noble schools. Some, like Pritzker Prep, use CrossFit to instill leadership and accountability lessons in the students.

Given a Chance to Succeed

The Noble Network in Chicago gave Rodriguez a way out. His friends took a different path, but the discipline and focus of the charter school gave Rodriguez a way to get into college. His obvious maturity, intelligence and strength of character were allowed to flourish in a safe environment. But for chance, things could have gone very differently.

"Noble was like my game-winning shot," says Rodriguez. "I was nervous to take the opportunity because I didn't want to fail. But I took the chance at the shot because I knew I had what it took to become successful in an institution like Noble. I am lucky and fortunate to have been a part of the Noble mission, but that all came with the hope, risk and hard work to become better."



About the Author

Chris Cooper is a staff writer for CrossFit. He owns CrossFit Catalyst in Sault Ste. Marie, Ont., and is a member of the CrossFit For Hope team.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Thanksgiving: Judgment Day

Holidays force many CrossFit athletes to leave the comfort of their boxes and face questions about their workouts, eating habits and bloody shins from friends and family who think they're completely insane. Hilary Achauer reports.

By Hilary Achauer

November 2013



Donovan Winters/CrossFit Journal

"What I've been doing lately is kickboxing, which is, uh, a new sport, but I think it's got a good future." —Lloyd Dobler, Say Anything (1989).

In the classic '80s movie *Say Anything*, John Cusack's character, Lloyd Dobler, is sitting at the dinner table and trying to explain his commitment to a sport nobody has heard of.

It doesn't go well.

Each time I try to explain CrossFit to a confused relative, I think of Dobler, who flounders while John Mahoney's eyes bore into him.

CrossFit is growing by leaps and bounds, and even though it's appeared on ESPN outlets, CrossFit is still an unknown to many people. More mysterious still can be the eating habits, clothing choices and workouts of CrossFit athletes. Our antics appear strange and cult-like to the uninitiated, which is why we surround ourselves with like-minded people or at least spouses, family and friends who tolerate our obsession. However, life cannot—and should not—be lived inside a CrossFit bubble. Sometimes we have to take our coconut oil and knee socks into the great, wide world.

All over the country, CrossFit athletes are leaving the comfort of their boxes and venturing out into the wide world.

I recently found myself in Austin, Texas, for a CrossFit course. The two-day seminar included workouts, so when I dressed for the day I put on my standard CrossFit gear: Spandex shorts and tank top.

I ran down to the hotel's dining room to grab some coffee before the course, and when I turned the corner I saw the breakfast room was packed with a group of about 20 men. They were all in their 60s and 70s and wore jeans and

matching red polo shirts with a Ben Hur Shriner's Club logo on the front.

My tight shorts, modest in the context of a CrossFit gym, suddenly felt like they had shrunk. I tiptoed in on my minimalist shoes, trying to unobtrusively make my way to the coffee maker. The room got extremely quiet as I filled up my cup. Conversation stalled out. I think a number of them thought I had forgotten to wear pants.

In that moment, I was reminded that the world is not a CrossFit gym and that context is everything.

Thanksgiving marks the beginning of the holiday season in the United States, and all over the country, CrossFit athletes are leaving the comfort of their boxes and venturing out into the wide world.

And it doesn't always go well.

The World Outside the Box

Strange things can happen once relatives find out you do CrossFit.

Nicole Scott Smith, a trainer at CrossFit SoMo in West Plains, Mo., has been doing CrossFit since 2008. She is known as "the strong one" in her extended family. It's not uncommon for her to show up for Thanksgiving in heels and fancy clothes only to hear a relative say, "Do something strong! Show us how to squat!"

When anything requiring any sort of strength comes up, Smith and her husband are of course called into action.

Donovan Winters/CrossFit Journal



"You can eat turkey? What about turducken? Is turducken in the Zone? Why are your hands so rough? Are your shins bleeding?"

Smith recalled that she and her husband “had to slice the turkey once because the electric knife broke.”

The focus of Thanksgiving is food, and while carving up a big bird suits many protein fiends just fine, some of the other dishes on the table end up being a source of contention for many a CrossFit athlete. Confusion reigns.

Smith and her husband eat well for most of the year but treat Thanksgiving like a cheat day. She said she and her husband look forward to Thanksgiving dinner for weeks.

“We’re like addicts,” she said. “We can’t wait to eat the green-bean casserole. We look forward to this one meal.”

Inevitably, Smith will approach the table groaning with food, getting ready to load up, and a relative will say, “You probably can’t eat any of this.”

One year, a confused relative of Smith’s pointed to the turkey and said, “Now, can you eat that?”

Smith has heard other gems:

“This casserole is healthy. It has corn.”

“You might want to bring something that you’ll eat.”

“You won’t like this. It has fat in it,” from her mom.

“We’re not really in a cult,” Smith said, though she also admitted her eating habits seem incomprehensible to most people. But on Thanksgiving she just wants to be left alone to pig out.

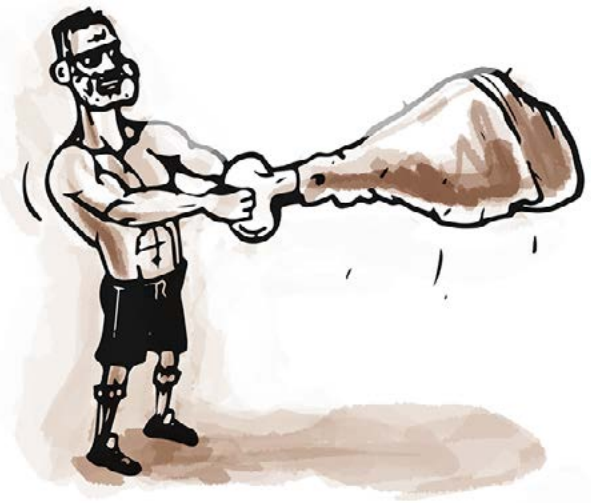
“Our plates were bigger than anybody (else’s),” she said with a laugh as she recalled a recent Thanksgiving feast. Apparently her holiday cheat meal never fails to confuse her relatives.

“They said, ‘Wow, I wish I could eat like you,’” Smith said. “It’s just one meal for us. We normally wouldn’t eat all of this stuff.”

Smith was lucky she had so many delicious—if not entirely healthy—choices. Other CrossFit folks have run into issues at the dinner table, and it got more than a little weird.

Anders Varner of CrossFit Pacific Beach in San Diego, Calif., showed up eager and hungry at a Thanksgiving dinner only to be confronted with a vegan, raw “turkey” made of nuts, seeds and herbs and molded into the shape of a holiday bird.

“It was made of crushed almonds, green-bean purée, and a host of other ingredients that have never amounted



Donovan Winters/CrossFit Journal

Don't be surprised if you're called in to do some heavy lifting on turkey day.

to a 400 lb. back squat. To think someone would eat this concoction was embarrassing,” he said.

Jennifer Tan works out at CrossFit Singapore in Singapore. Chinese New Year—Jan. 21 in 2014—is their equivalent to Thanksgiving. It’s a time for family, friends and food. It’s the food that causes trouble for Tan.

By now, she’s used to the strange looks from her family. She doesn’t eat noodles, she uses coconut oil (“Isn’t that fattening?” her family asks) and eats eggs with abandon.

“While visiting a relative, I skipped the rice, popped some pork belly on my plate and braced myself,” Tan said.

The comments started almost instantly.

“Trim off the fat—you don’t want to put on weight.”

“No rice at all?”

“Yolks are bad for you; try to just eat the whites.”

“If you don’t want Coke, we have soy milk.”

And, finally, “Weightlifting?”

“If it’s not questions about marriage and babies, it’s concerns over your lifestyle choices,” Tan said. “I’m not sure which I prefer.”

Donovan Winters/CrossFit Journal



Relatives may not understand or appreciate your burning desire to get a workout in before dinner.

Rock It—Or Not

Once CrossFit athletes sort out what to eat over Thanksgiving, there's still the matter of fitting in a workout away from home. CrossFit affiliates are springing up in every corner of the globe, but many traveling CrossFit athletes still find they need to work out someplace other than a CrossFit gym.

Carmen Abramian, who trains at CrossFit Metropolis in New York City, said she frequently finds herself going to a hotel gym and trying to cobble together a workout with the tools available when on the road.

"I slowly pick out all the other CrossFitters in the room who are trying to do box jumps on an incline bench or some other stupid adaptation," she said.

The experience does not always go as planned.

"I nearly decapitated a lady with my rope trying to do double-unders in a small hotel gym in Northern California and then—mortified by the near miss—went outside to finish and totally destroyed the cable of my rope on the cement," Abramian said.

Smith will never forget the year she went home to rural Ohio for the holidays. When Smith's mom comes to visit, she goes to CrossFit with her daughter, so Smith thought she would return the favor and accompany her mom to Curves.

"She wanted to share her workout with me," Smith said. So Smith and her mom headed off to the gym.

Smith attracted attention almost immediately.

**"I nearly decapitated a lady
with my rope trying to do
double-unders in a small
hotel gym."**

—Carmen Abramian

"They told me I was working too hard, that I was going into the red (zone)," Smith said. "On the overhead press, I guess I pressed overhead too hard. The second time around (the circuit), they told me not to use it."

Then one of the trainers started following Smith around, keeping an eye on her.

"They told me I was squatting too low and doing everything too fast," she said. In between stations, the trainers instructed Smith to stand on a pad and "rock it."

Smith did not rock it. She decided to do some air squats. Finally, when the circuit was over, Smith's mom spoke up. "My daughter can do a pull-up!" she said proudly. "Nicole, do a pull-up!"

"This used to be a nice neighborhood, but I heard there were these weird people squatting with a rock."

—Frightened villager

Smith walked over to the pull-up bar, kipped back and ripped the anchored station off its platform.

The trainer rushed over, horrified.

"That's a pull-up bar for stretching!" she said.



Donavon Winters/CrossFit Journal

"Yes, I can open that jar. Time me. And get more jars."

Smith never returned to Curves. Smith's mom still goes, however, and every now and then the trainer asks, "How's your daughter?"

And then, nervously, "Is she coming in?"

Smith didn't fare much better outside the gym. One year, she and her family spent the holidays with relatives in a small town in Kentucky. Her husband mapped out a 5-kilometer route and went for a run while Smith stayed back with the kids. He returned and reported there was a big rock at the turnaround that was perfect for front squats.

So Smith took off, and when she reached the turnaround, she did some front squats with the boulder. While she was squatting, she noticed a car slowly drive past her.

Later that day, Smith's sister-in-law came in with the latest gossip: "This used to be a nice neighborhood," she said, "but I heard there were these weird people squatting with a rock."

Opting Out

Not everyone leaves town for Thanksgiving. Josh Bunch, owner of Practice CrossFit in Troy, Ohio, elects not to make the six-hour drive home from Ohio to Tennessee for turkey day.

"Thanksgiving is a worthless, fake holiday," Bunch said. "I don't want to eat a bunch of bad food."

Because Bunch is always around for Thanksgiving, he's found a variety of ways to celebrate the holiday in his own way.

In 2008, his affiliate had just opened its doors, and he hosted a workout Thanksgiving morning.

"We had 100 people show up," Bunch said. "We didn't even have that many members at the time. It was tons of out-of-towners."

The next year, Bunch hosted a month-long nutrition challenge called "Wait for the Bird." The idea was that participants in the challenge would clean up their diet from Nov. 1 until Thanksgiving, at which point an epic cheat day would commence.

To celebrate the end of the challenge, one of the members, who owned a local McDonald's franchise, brought cinnamonets with him. In retrospect, Bunch said the mistake was eating the cinnamonets before the workout.

Courtesy of Josh Bunch



Practice CrossFit's pre-Thanksgiving feast.

"That was a horrible idea," Bunch said. "It made everyone sick."

The dinner was so popular he's continued the tradition. "We get about 70 percent of the members," Bunch said.

"The food is a million times better (than a traditional Thanksgiving)," he said about their healthy potluck turkey day.

"The first year it was just lots of meat, but now it's Brussels sprouts with bacon, sweet potatoes wrapped in bacon. Everyone brings their best paleo meal."

Then, on Thanksgiving morning, Bunch hosts a big group workout. He encourages people to bring their out-of-town friends. In the early days, the visitors were mostly people who had never before tried CrossFit.

"So many people do CrossFit now," Bunch said, so now it's mostly CrossFit athletes looking for a pre-Thanksgiving workout.

Bunch does something different every year: "We like to do team workouts and incorporate odd objects like tires and sledgemarkers."

Just like the hardworking pilgrims would have wanted.



About the Author

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

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Charting a New Course in the Classroom

Noble and Empower charter schools find CrossFit fits their mandate to pursue excellence in education.

By Chris Cooper

November 2013



Chris Cooper

"The greatest threat to our nation is no longer overseas. It's an uneducated population that can't be contributors to our democracy and our future."—David Oclander, principal fellowship, Noble Network of Charter Schools

In a June 2012 article, the U.K. publication [Daily Mail](#) reported that the number of people shot dead in Chicago from January to June 2012 was greater than the number of U.S. soldiers killed in Afghanistan. According to the article, Chicago fatal shootings numbered 240 during the period, while 144 U.S. service people lost their lives in Afghanistan in the same time frame.

1 of 10

The Noble Network of Charter Schools has institutions located in the worst neighborhoods of Chicago: Englewood, Garfield Park, West Humboldt Park. Ninety-five percent of its students live below the poverty line, and many of the schools in the neighborhood are equipped with metal detectors to curb violence. When students enter Noble schools in the ninth grade, they're usually reading, writing and doing math at a third- or fifth-grade level. Four years later most qualify for college. In fact, among open-enrollment public schools in Chicago, kids from Noble score among the top students every year.

A charter school is a public school: students don't pay to attend, and it's funded based on enrollment. Though a charter school operates outside of public school boards, students are held to the same state and federal academic standards as their peers. Charter schools are non-sectarian and are required to accept any student regardless of race, religion or creed.

Funding for charter schools is less per student than schools within local school boards, so opening a charter school carries both financial and professional risk. Administrators and teachers are also paid less at a charter school and lose their tenure when they leave the traditional system. Starting a charter school, or teaching at one, requires taking a chance.

Even with these hurdles, dozens of new charter schools are launched every year in the U.S. The rewards are rarely financial, but operating a charter school allows for longer school days, an adjusted curriculum, new and dynamic teaching opportunities, and the chance to pursue diverse learning models. Charter schools have the freedom to experiment and adapt.

"We've broken the code on great academics. And the code is based on a really disciplined culture and hiring incredible talent to deliver the great academics to the kids," said David Oclander, principal fellowship at the Noble Network of Charter Schools.



Charter schools such as Chicago Bulls College Prep offer teachers and administrators more flexibility than institutions governed by local school boards.

It's not the pursuit of money that makes administrators want to open charter schools. It's the pursuit of excellence. And CrossFit fits that model perfectly.

Oclander was introduced to CrossFit at Fort Bragg around 2006 while serving in the military, and CrossFit was introduced to the Noble Network by Jason Ronai, assistant principal at Chicago Bulls College Prep, in 2012. Oclander retired from the military in December 2012, and he pressed the Noble Network to have its P.E. teachers attend the CrossFit Level 1 and CrossFit Kids courses. Now five Noble schools have adopted CrossFit. When Oclander opens a new Noble school in 2014, CrossFit will be central to its curriculum, both in and out of the gym.

**It's not the pursuit of money
that makes administrators
want to open charter schools.
It's the pursuit of excellence.
And CrossFit fits that model
perfectly.**

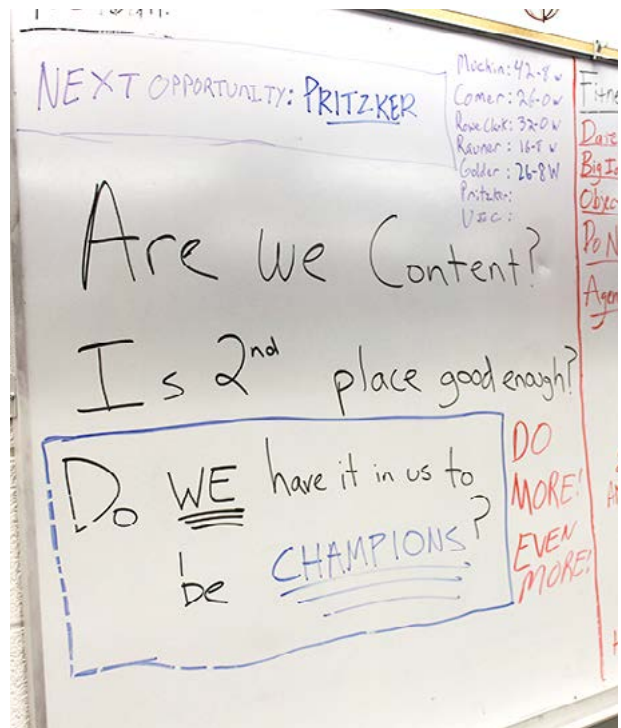
The Noble school system was launched by Mike Milkie in 1999.

"We give a lot of autonomy to the Noble campuses," Milkie said. "A lot of these great ideas (like CrossFit in gym class) can bubble up, and the principals know that if they come up with a great idea, they're going to be able to implement it in almost all cases. If it works really well, it will be shared with other campuses. Then other principals can use it, tailor it to their campus, or come up with something completely different."

"Ten of our campuses make up the top 10 schools on the ACT," said Oclander, referring to a national college admissions examination. "Of the top four, two use CrossFit as their central fitness program."

Collaborative Competition

"There are two main things that set Noble apart," said Milkie. "First, the quality of the adult that we put in front of the student: principals, teachers, office staff, maintenance. Second, a really structured school and learning



The culture of excellence is everywhere in Noble schools.



*Expectations are high at Noble schools,
but impressive college-placement rates indicate
students are rising to the challenge.*

environment. Students have very high expectations, not only academically but in terms of their personal behavior. I think that allows teachers to teach and allows students to develop habits of self-discipline that last a lifetime."

Some of the rules seem strict: arriving 10 seconds late for class is one demerit, and arriving a minute late is two demerits. But those familiar with the **Broken Windows Theory** will recognize the "signaling effect" in students: a solid foundation creates opportunities for positive growth. Students dress the same to deconstruct financial hierarchy, and the "no embarrassment, no fear" policy means that students can speak up in class or correct one another without feeling defensive.

The rules also mean Noble schools don't need metal detectors at their front doors. Many other schools in their neighborhoods do.

Visitors to a Noble school will notice spotless floors and well-dressed kids. No one chews gum; the top button of every polo shirt is buttoned. Students arrive early for class and immediately begin working. None doodle or stare out the window blankly. They're too busy.

"Our classrooms run off discussions, so we go into class and never know what we're going to discuss that day," said Josh Hernandez, a senior. "You have to have your notes



Chris Cooper

David Oclander (right) left the military in 2012 to join the Noble Network.



Chris Cooper

Shining floors, shining minds. Noble schools have high standards for academics and cleanliness.



Noble schools strive to create a culture of success, where high levels of achievement are expected rather than surprising.

prepared. You have to be able to analyze any piece of evidence from the text and break it down. In the fitness component, if you're not fit, you fail the exam and wind up in summer school. You're accountable."

Milkie believes that one of the largest catalysts for growth is competition, and Noble Schools improve through competition at every level—principals, teachers and students.

On average, teachers at Noble are paid slightly less than at other area schools, but there's still nationwide competition to be hired.

"That's because of our cultural element," said Angela Montagna, director of external affairs for the Noble Network. "We attract high-performing educators who are interested in maximizing impact, and they can do that in the culture that Noble creates."

The philosophy fosters an atmosphere of collaborative competition. Dr. John Ratey, author of *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*, says this sort of environment can create the best possible learning experience in the classroom, too.

"You want everyone in your tribe to be at their best," Ratey

said. "Competing is fun, and you want your team to win. One natural element of competition is exploration. You want that because you don't want people just thinking about what's straight ahead, or just following the rules. You want people to think of new ideas and break the rules."

"One of the strengths of the Network is that we have really strong people, and they're encouraged to compete against one another," Milkie said. "We have data on discipline, academics, and fitness, and they compete on those core elements. I think that makes everyone better. We reward them based on improvements against previous years, so there's a lot of cooperation: they're not competing against each other in that year but against their own past performances."

Milkie is talking about high-school principals, but he could be talking about one of more than 8,000 CrossFit affiliates worldwide.

On each Noble campus, teachers also compete against one another to produce the best results.

"Some stuff you can't measure, but a lot of it you can," Milkie said. "Whether it's scores on ACT exams or results on a fitness test, teachers compete against other teachers

across the network, and then everyone shares best practices. Which campus has the most students doing the highest average number of push-ups? We want to know. And we do."

Kyle Feuerach teaches CrossFit at Pritzker Prep, a Noble Network school. He pitched CrossFit to his principal as a good way to combine physical education and leadership lessons. It was so effective the school rearranged its schedule to include CrossFit in the middle of the day rather than after class.

"We're working on leadership curriculum and tying in standards," Feuerach said. "In most CrossFit workouts, there's a minute where you want to stop. It's a natural reaction: *this is crazy*. The beauty is when you don't stop; you keep pushing through, and you learn that resiliency, that you're capable of more than you believed. In a CrossFit gym, that just happens, but here we're pushing it. They hold each other accountable for it."

Accountability can sometimes mean punishment in the form of demerits at Noble, but Feuerach won't use burpees as a reprimand.

"We don't want them to associate exercise with punishment," he said. "One example is when they leave trash in the change rooms. We have great students; they're all good people. The only reason they'd leave trash for others to pick up is when they're so tired that they can't pick it up themselves. Our job is to get them into the kind of shape where they can pick up after themselves. It helps them to think about growth in a positive way."

Feuerach knows he's competing with other teachers and puts the success of his CrossFit program on his own shoulders.

"I know that we have a long way to go," he said. "Our success will be based on my own growth curve."

Like, Feuerach, Hernandez accepts responsibility for those around him.



CrossFit is well suited to an environment that already emphasizes excellence, measured results and friendly competition.

"I'm an amateur boxer. One of my lifelong goals is to open my own boxing gym for the community, get kids off the street," the 17-year-old said. "As you know, Chicago's become known for violence, and that impacts me."

He continued: "I've noticed, at my young age, that people come into the gym and turn their lives around. I want to study entrepreneurship to build my leadership. I enjoy making others better. That's the environment that Bulls (Prep) offers you, and to continue that environment, entrepreneurship was a strong study for me in college."

At the student level, competition has an impact in academics, fitness and discipline.

"Students are proud when they do well individually, and they're proud when they do well as a campus," Milkie said. "One of the best things we can teach them is that life is full of obstacles, that they can overcome them, and that they can learn the important elements of life as they overcome them. We have targets—academic, fitness, discipline—that they need to reach. A lot of times they don't. The lesson of how to deal with defeat is one that lasts a lifetime."

For William Washington, a senior at Bulls Prep, these lessons are now transparent.

"Phys. ed. is not predominantly about fitness and health," Washington said. "It's about going through real-life

situations to better yourself and be prepared for anything. For example, my gym class is more about working together as a group and reacting to problems, learning from failure."

One of Washington's strongest lessons has come from study time before an exam.

"Phys. ed. is not predominantly about fitness and health. It's about going through real-life situations to better yourself and be prepared for anything."

—William Washington

"We're working out at the same time," he said. "Like we'll have one minute to go over the test material, and then do push-ups and burpees, and then go back to studying. It's very effective. It's taught me to multitask. If I fail at a push-up, the class will tell me what I need to work on to prepare me for next time. It's the same with the test."

Last year, the Noble Network's graduating students qualified for US\$53 million in scholarships. At Pritzker Prep alone, 150 kids split \$17 million in scholarships.

One of the scholarship programs sought by Noble students—Questbridge—offers full-ride scholarships to prestigious schools such as MIT and Columbia. On Oct. 22, three students at Chicago Bulls College Prep received notice that they had qualified for the final round of consideration for the scholarship. Hernandez was one.

Empowering Students

Noble has much of the puzzle figured out, but across the country in San Diego, Demi Brown and the Empower program are just starting to piece it together.

Brown's personality has never fit in her body, even when she was much larger. At four feet 10 inches and 190 lb., Brown found herself in the same predicament as many of her students: out of shape, unmotivated and mentally sluggish at school.



Principal Oclander offers new meaning to the term "squat suit."

Chris Cooper

Brown currently teaches at another charter school but wanted to create a new model around CrossFit. Though only 31, she's acquired the administrative credentials required to be a principal in California. She acquired her love of CrossFit from CrossFit Mission Gorge.

Five years ago, Brown saw Oprah Winfrey perform a few push-ups against a wall on her television show, and then she tried them in her classroom. Though heavy herself, Brown knew the kids in her class needed physical activity.

"Even though I wasn't a role model, I knew how to guide my students," Brown said. "When I found CrossFit, I started thinking, 'How can I get my students to work this hard? There's a chance to chunk the two together.'"

Ian McHugh, owner and coach at CrossFit Mission Gorge, offered to help.

Brown recalled "seeing the connections and camaraderie, seeing them groan in a good way when Ian showed up. They really loved it."

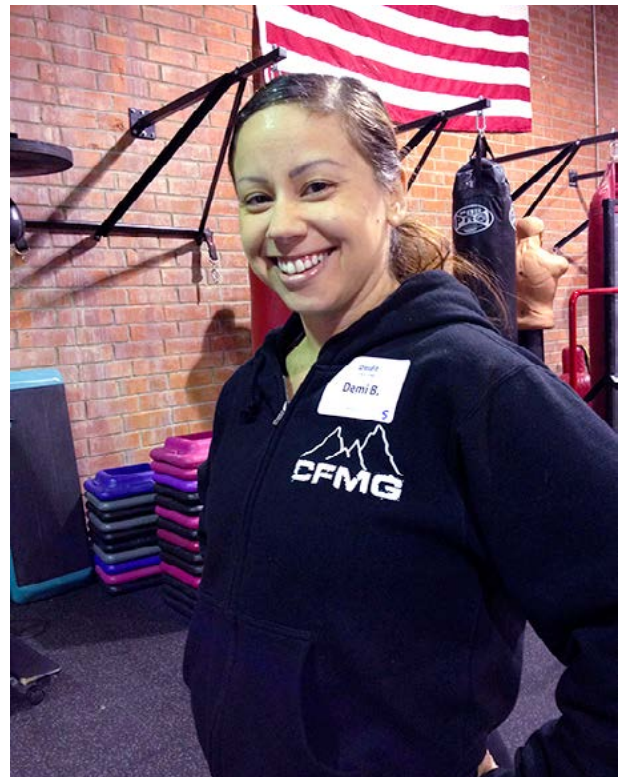
She added: "That's when this whole crazy idea (of opening a charter school) was born."

Though they receive some government funding, charter schools often require additional fundraising to operate. Before they're up and running, charter schools in the formative stage still need funding to navigate through the bureaucracy and red tape of the approval process in the company of lawyers.

"We raised a little over \$7,000 and spent it all on legal fees," Brown said.

In California, a charter school starts with a charter petition. Though funding is available for charter schools throughout the state, it's not easy to get. There are 16 required legal elements to a charter petition, which can take a year to write. Proposals must include a five-year budget. Petitioners must project their startup enrollment and then get half that number of teacher and parent signatures to match. Next, a board of trustees decides which charter petitions are upheld.

Brown's institution will be called Empower Charter School, and it will reach the final step in the process on Dec. 3. Brown hopes to build the first school and then offer the template to other schools through the creation of her own charter network.



Courtesy of Demi Brown

Demi Brown found CrossFit at CrossFit Mission Gorge and believes it will create fitter students at Empower Charter School.



Courtesy of Demi Brown

Empower Charter School has received a great deal of support from the CrossFit community, including Katie Hogan (center).

To help with fundraising, the CrossFit community is stepping forward. As in starting a CrossFit box, Brown is relying heavily on word of mouth and the reputation of other CrossFit coaches. On May 11, Brown held a Fitness and Field Day at a local park to raise awareness for the Empower project.

"Over 60 people showed up, representing affiliates from all over San Diego," Brown said. She's also received financial contributions from CrossFit Mission Gorge, CrossFit 858, CrossFit Elysium, CrossFit Ocean Beach, CrossFit Fortius and Pete's Paleo, as well as an online fundraising campaign.

"Katie Hogan was the first Games-level athlete to make a donation," Brown recalled fondly.

After approval, a school isn't paid its annual budget up front. Part arrives in October, after most schools have been open (and teachers paid) for weeks. The rest is deferred over the course of the year, making fundraising critical to the early success of a charter school.

Empower's school day will include CrossFit workouts at several points. In the morning, students who arrive early will participate in volunteer-led games. They'll focus on skill acquisition during gym time and talk about functional movement in biology. Several teachers will take the CrossFit Kids course and work movement into their curriculum.

It's another step forward for CrossFit within an educational setting. Hundreds of schools already use curricula written by CrossFit Kids in gym class, and a few dozen—such as Noble schools—incorporate a leadership component. Empower will be the first to name CrossFit in its petition for charter, and the program is included alongside other big concepts: nutrition, character, goal setting, integrity, ownership—and play. Classrooms will have personal-record boards, and nutritional discussion will be part of science classes.

In a section titled "Comprehensive Fitness Program That Incorporates Health and Character Education," Empower's petition for charter says, "The exercise program will be



Courtesy of Demi Brown

On Dec. 3, Empower will find out if its charter is approved, and local CrossFit athletes will be at the meeting to show their support.

based on the CrossFit Kids curriculum. The CrossFit Kids PE curriculum is aligned to the National Standards for Physical Education, and ECS will ensure that lessons are also aligned to the Physical Education Content Standards for California.”

The petition continues: “The CrossFit Kids curriculum will empower students to be well-rounded children who embrace fitness early in life and choose to continue healthy habits as adults. CrossFit Kids is easily scalable and differentiated to meet the needs of all children from a variety of fitness backgrounds. This accessibility allows every child to participate and experience success.”

**Empower will be
the first school to name
CrossFit in its petition
for charter and build its day
around workouts and
active play.**

“We have a clinical psychologist as our board chair,” said Brown. “She advocates for a lot of recess time. We’ll have morning recess, lunch recess and another at the end of the day in addition to phys. ed. and an organized CrossFit Kids program.”

Brown continued: “They all go together. We have PR walls and goal boards in my classrooms. They can set PRs in math or language or phys. ed. It can all be embedded in the curriculum as part of the character aspects.”

In a typical day, students will start with guided play before any classroom time. Games are rolled into the classroom: if the students are studying whales, they’ll play games about whales and then present what they’ve learned to other students within the same hour. In language class, they’ll talk about whales in Spanish, and then write creatively on the same subject before P.E. begins.

The nutrition component is still in the idea stage, but Brown imagines a student trying kelp (a seaweed) with lunch and learning about its high iron content. After lunch, children may attend class in Spanish and then switch to English for journaling about the day.

Brown is happy to be among the first charter schools built around a CrossFit curriculum but wants to see the movement grow. Long term, Brown is aiming to launch a charter management organization and replicate Empower’s model in other areas.

“We want to replicate what we’re doing across the country,” she said. “We have the highest density of CrossFit in the country in San Diego, but we want to help others too. People are already contacting us through our [Facebook page](#) asking, ‘How can we get one of these in our neighborhood?’ We can make that happen.”

Brown’s first reward will come if Empower’s charter is approved on Dec. 3. She hopes to have a packed courtroom because she believes public opinion will help carry the vote, and CrossFit Invictus has promised to send athletes to help fill the board-of-trustees meeting.

Stepping outside the common ground of local school boards is expensive and could be career-ending for teachers who give up tenure to teach in charter schools. But principals and teachers make the leap for the freedom to experiment with new teaching and learning strategies, and many students are eager to follow in hopes of attaining elevated levels of education. The pursuit of excellence means pushing away from the average in order to pursue the excellent, and it’s no surprise some charter schools are finding the CrossFit program suits their needs very well indeed.



About the Author

Chris Cooper is a writer for the CrossFit Journal. He owns CrossFit Catalyst in Sault Ste. Marie, Ont.