
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Prodigal Son Returns Less Fit

After four months of following the yellow line and trying to preserve his fitness, Pat Sherwood invites you to join him for one month of CrossFit.com programming to get him back on track.

By Pat Sherwood

December 2013



All photos: Staff/CrossFit Journal

It's time to pay the piper—the fitness piper, that is.

I'm cringing as I type, but this is my public commitment: I will follow the programming on CrossFit.com at least for all of January, and I will post my pathetic results in the comments each day. I'm writing this article so all of you hold me accountable, and that is just the motivation I need.

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Let's take a step back so I can explain why I'm doing this.

Since beginning CrossFit training in August 2005, I have harvested workouts from many different sources. I followed CrossFit.com for my first several years, and I also hit workouts from affiliates that had a style I enjoyed. However, for the last few years I have largely programmed for myself. I love creating workouts. I find it therapeutic to go to a coffee shop, put my headphones on, listen to some beats and create page after page of nasty, beautiful workouts.

In December 2012, I decided to put my fitness through an unbiased evaluation. I wanted to find out if I had been neglecting anything. So, beginning on Jan. 1, 2013, I made a commitment to follow the three-days-on, one-day-off cycle on CrossFit.com for two or three months.

My job with CrossFit Inc. allows me to see behind the veil of mystery surrounding the programming of the workout of the day. I'm lucky enough to see the effort, thought, research and discussions that ensure the program meets its aims. The workouts that get posted on CrossFit.com play no favorites, they test all aspects of fitness in a host of time domains, and they have no regard for your preferences. If you have a weakness, it will be exposed. The goal of the program is straightforward: fitness. It has been defined and it can be measured. If you have not read [What Is Fitness?](#) in a while, I recommend you do.

Because I knew the CrossFit.com workouts would provide me with unbiased variance, I decided they would be the perfect evaluation of the programming I had been doing for myself. So how did it go? The result was that I got my ass handed to me, and I learned the hard way that I indeed had some gaping holes in my fitness.

After a few humbling months of doing the three-on, one-off cycle, my "well roundedness" returned. Following CrossFit.com again improved my general physical preparedness but also my mental toughness. Strength of mind and body is created by committing to attack whatever shows up on the screen when you nervously click on CrossFit.com each evening to see the new workout of the day. Soon, I felt like I was bulletproof, and I feared no workout.

But little by little I began programming for myself more and hitting CrossFit.com workouts less. Undoubtedly, my programming biases crept back into my life.

As I write this I'm in a markedly different situation than I was last year at this time. I'm in Santiago, Chile, and it is Day



Though Sherwood was able to visit boxes such as CrossFit PTY in Panama, his road workouts were skewed toward body-weight movements due to lack of gear.

117 of our trip through the United States and Central and South America on motorcycles. I will be back in Santa Cruz, Calif., in less than a week. As we close in on the final days of the trip, I can say with certainty my fitness and nutrition have taken some hits. I have been doing my very best to stay in shape on the road, and while I'm surviving, I'm not setting PRs all over the place. I'm keeping my head above water, but that's about it.

Truth be told, I thought my fall from fitness would have been much more severe during this adventure. While I'm not in top form at the moment, I've unquestionably maintained far more work capacity than I thought I would. Due to the nature of this trip, a heavy barbell rarely crosses our path, so I've admittedly had a bias toward body-weight movements. Hell, I even went for a run once or twice.

My diet is another area that has been—shall we say—less than ideal. However, I expected it to be much worse. I thought one of two things was going to happen: I was either going to come back skinny fat or just plain fat. Although most of the definition I had in my midline has faded away, I can still comfortably button my jeans, so I'm going to call that one a victory.



Sherwood sustains himself on fried chicken at a Chinese restaurant in Mexico. When he gets home, he'll be weighing and measuring again.

In four months we have eaten a home-cooked meal perhaps 10 times. Every other meal was at a hotel, restaurant, gas station, mall, street vendor, etc. It has been a challenging environment to say the least. And at every stop we made, we had to try the local tasty treats offered to us by the members of the CrossFit affiliate, right? We certainly didn't want to be rude and say no to local cuisine served by new friends.

Of all the things I'm looking forward to when I get home, weighing and measuring clean food for a few months is high on the list. It is going to be a detox of sorts, and I can't wait to feel "clean" again.

Put all these factors together, and I'm expecting a rough re-entry when I rejoin my crew at the CrossFit Media office and start hitting workouts again. And I know myself: if I get back and start programming my own workouts, there will be temptation to take an easier path because I'm slightly out of shape. I would have a tendency to be nice to myself and program a bunch of movements, loads and rep schemes that play to my preferences.

However, what I like and what I need are two different things. So, once again, I find myself looking to the one source I know for a fact will be dishing out unbiased fitness in large doses: CrossFit.com.

My times are going to be slow. My lifts are going to be low. I'm going to feel like I'm wearing ankle weights on the runs. But all I need to do is stick with it. Consistency and lack of ego will be the key. Little by little, my times will come back down and my strength numbers will go back up. It's going to be a road paved with suffering, but I know the payoff is worth it. I've been there before.

I'm dragging as many people as I can into this with me. I invite you to put your own fitness to the test and join me in the January workouts. Misery loves company, right?

Here's the link to CrossFit.com. Click it, and I'll be in the comments every day starting Jan. 1. See you there.



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.