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“Above-the-Neck Fitness”

CrossFit King of Prussia finds success with SAT-prep program.

By Andréa Maria Cecil

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Tatiana Lumiere Photography

He arrived a shy teenager. Skinny, hunched over, head hung, knees caving.

Today, things are different.

“Now he’s head high, ‘I can squat, I can lift weights, I can hold my own,’” Aimee Lyons said of Carter Buce. Lyons owns CrossFit King of Prussia in Pennsylvania.

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Aimee Lyons

At CrossFit King of Prussia, tutors help students with subjects such as math, but they also address topics such as time management and test-taking strategies.

But the 17-year-old is not just physically improved. He's also mentally improved. After participating in CrossFit King of Prussia's SAT-prep program, Buce gained 250 points on his SATs to finish in the 98th percentile. A percentile indicates the percentage of other test takers with lower scores, and scoring in the 99.93rd or 99.98th percentile indicates a near-perfect score.

"He was able to ... see that putting in the work pays off," said Nate Rieder, Buce's tutor who helped him prepare for the standardized test via two-hour sessions at the affiliate.

Initially, Buce—who had already scored in the 89th percentile on the SAT—had the mindset that he knew the material, only got a few questions wrong and couldn't do much about it, Rieder indicated.

After working together, Rieder said Buce "began to see that with experience comes even better results."

Buce was one of two teenagers who took part in CrossFit King of Prussia's SAT-prep program, which emerged in 2012 at the encouragement of CrossFit Inc. Founder and CEO Greg Glassman.

Glassman has said it's equally important to be physically strong and possess "above-the-neck fitness."

The New Program

The affiliate introduced the program simply: word of mouth and via its blog. Its first unwitting participants came from Upper Marion High School's male crew team. The team was already taking classes at CrossFit King of Prussia to supplement its sport-specific training, so Lyons decided it would be a good option with which to start the program.

It began just with post-workout homework help.

"We basically had them stay after (and told them), 'So this is part of the program now,'" Lyons recalled with a laugh.

That encompassed 45 minutes dedicated to the CrossFit class, followed by one hour of tutoring. With the help of CrossFit King of Prussia's first tutor, Patrick Burling, members of the crew team got help with vocabulary, math, study skills, time management, memory skills, stress management and test-taking strategies, as well as SAT and ACT prep when needed, Lyons said.

As expected, the teenagers weren't exactly elated at the prospect of lengthening their day for additional schoolwork. Still, a handful stuck around for the help. Eventually, Lyons began asking who was preparing for the SATs. Buce and his friend Austin Chui showed up to work with Burling, a school counselor at Phase 4 Learning Centers, an alternative school in Philadelphia; he was the boyfriend of a CrossFit King of Prussia member. Both teenagers were part of CrossFit King of Prussia's Steve's Club program for at-risk youth.

"I was pretty excited for it because the first time I took the SATs, I didn't have that high of a score," Chui said.

The 18-year-old first scored in the 30th percentile on the test. After the tutoring at CrossFit King of Prussia, he gained 160 points to raise him to the 50th percentile.

"I saw it as a way to help myself get ... further in the future, I guess," Chui added.

For Buce, it was a sure-fire way to get him to prepare.

"I knew that if I didn't have a designated class to go to I wouldn't end up studying on my (own). And I thought that

if I want to get to a good college, I would need some sort of help with my SAT scores."

Thus far, the high-school senior has applied to three schools: Carnegie Mellon, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in New York and Rochester Institute of Technology in New York. He plans to major in computer science.

Like Buce, Chui is a senior who graduates in June. He's planning on college and has applied to one school: Rochester Institute of Technology. He plans to apply to more and, once there, likely major in computer science, as well.

**"I definitely saw an
improvement in my scores."**

—Carter Buce



Tatiana Lumiere Photography

Austin Chui's SAT scores rose from the 30th to the 50th percentile after he was tutored at CrossFit King of Prussia.



Aimee Lyons

CrossFit King of Prussia's SAT-prep program confronts two prevalent problems: childhood obesity and high-school dropout rates.

"It was fun and helpful," Chui said of CrossFit King of Prussia's SAT-prep program. "It helped build my strength, and I guess it sort of helped me in school."

Buce said as much, too.

"I definitely could tell I was getting stronger 'cause I started getting a lot better ... rowing times," he said. "It made me kind of feel better about myself because I was more confident and it made me have fun in exercising."

And, Buce added, "I definitely saw an improvement in my scores and ... learned to study better."

Better Students, Better People

For his part, Rieder—an athlete at CrossFit South Philly—said CrossFit King of Prussia's SAT-prep program tackles two pervasive problems: childhood obesity and high-school dropout rates.

"Education and fitness are two things that kids are lacking," said Rieder, who came to be CrossFit King of Prussia's second tutor after attending a Level 1 Certificate Course in early 2014 at the affiliate. By the spring of the same year, he was tutoring Buce and Chui.

He continued: "It just seemed like a great pairing of services. ... You talk about the benefit that people get from CrossFit other than working out, the community outreach, all that—Aimee wanted to help them."

And, Rieder noted, although it was Lyons leading the efforts at her affiliate, the program was voluntary. No one forced Buce or Chui to show up.

"They definitely came around to it and put the effort in," Rieder said.

The environment helped, Lyons said.

"It's a testament to the community that we have here, too, that has kept them coming back."



About the Author

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