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Crashing the Party

CrossFit athletes increased their presence at this year's CRASH-B event, helping the sport of rowing grow and change its image.

By Andréa Maria Cecil

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Courtesy of CrossFit South Brooklyn

When Syn Martinez walked into the arena, he didn't notice the stares. As a 6-foot-2 tattooed black man who often wears T-shirts emblazoned with the words "Afro Brutality," a guy gets accustomed to things.

Beside him was Sarah Grey, an athlete at Martinez's affiliate, CrossFit Harlem. She's a 5-foot-7 native of Sweden who is heavily tattooed, and she was there to row.

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Courtesy of CrossFit South Brooklyn



Knee socks and CrossFit Ts are an increasingly common site at the annual CRASH-B competition.

It was the 2011 CRASH-B World Indoor Rowing Championship in Boston, Mass. And while rowing might be described as brutal, it most certainly isn't described as urban or gritty. Instead, its stigma oozes of Ivy League institutions and rich folk.

Martinez and Grey symbolized change, with CrossFit athletes increasingly becoming involved in the CRASH-B competition and the sport of rowing.

CrossFit Harlem was "one of the first groups to take it upon themselves to start racing," said Greg Hammond of rowing-machine maker Concept2, based in Morrisville, Vt.

This year's competition, held Feb. 16 in Beantown, saw more than 85 athletes who indicated membership at a CrossFit affiliate, he said. In total, more than 1,880 athletes competed. Although Hammond did not have numbers of CrossFit athletes who had raced in previous years, he said, "(I) know it was less."

Hammond has worked at Concept2 for 15 years. He began working closely with CrossFit Inc. in 2006. And for the past several years, Hammond has been back at the CRASH-B competition to spectate after a hiatus.

"I started going back down there because all my CrossFit buddies were doing it," he said.

If it's not the shirts or hoodies pledging allegiance to their boxes, it's knee-high socks or minimalist shoes that reveal CrossFit athletes, Hammond added.

"I'm a little biased when I say it's made it more fun for me," he continued.

When it comes to actual performance, CrossFit athletes finished in the middle to upper middle of the pack for their respective age groups at the competition, Hammond said.

Andrew Stewart-Jones posted the top time in the men's open division: 5:47.7. The 22-year-old Canadian has a wingspan of 6 feet 8 inches and dreams of rowing in the 2016 Olympics. Maddie Turbes, a 6-foot-2 sophomore rower at Gonzaga University in Washington, finished in 6:41.8 to win the women's open division.

Cady Hart, a CrossFit trainer at Green Mountain CrossFit in Berlin, Vt., finished ninth among heavyweight female masters aged 30 to 39 with a 2,000-m time of 7:37.5. She's also a former collegiate rower from the University of



Greg Hammond

Product testing: Peter Dreissigacker, co-founder of Concept2, rowed 2,000 m in 6:55.2 at the Feb. 16 CRASH-B competition. He's 62.

Connecticut and coaches CrossFit at Concept2. The last time she competed at CRASH-B was 12 years ago, and it was only because the rest of her team was racing.

"I wouldn't have even dreamed of doing CRASH-Bs again if it weren't for CrossFit," she said.

Hart added: "It's just cool to know that I could still hold my own even if I'm not rowing every day."

And, she noted, it's cool that fellow CrossFit athletes are willing to compete in rowing and "(put) yourself deep into that pain cave."

Among the affiliates with the most competitors at CRASH-B was CrossFit South Brooklyn. The box sent 19 athletes under the watchful eye of coach and 2000 Olympian Nick Peterson, who was part of the U.S. team that placed seventh in men's quadruple sculls in Sydney.

Two South Brooklyn athletes—Katie Mears and Sarah Marquez—finished in the top 10 among heavyweight female masters 30 to 39 years old. Mears posted a time of 7:29.9 and Marquez recorded 7:34.6, making them sixth and eighth. Anna Lewis posted the top time: 7:03.6.

CrossFit South Brooklyn athletes have competed in CRASH-B since 2010. This year, Peterson readied them with a 16-week training program. The connection between CrossFit and rowing is "obvious," Peterson said. He added that CrossFit has been "amazing" for the sport.

"A lot of it is just a stigma change," Hammond explained. "Indoor rowing has made rowing ... more accessible to people."

Ted Noyes agreed.

At 69, the rower of 14 years pulled a 7:04.2, putting him in third place among heavyweight veteran men 65 to 69 years old. Noyes also is a four-year member of Flatirons CrossFit in Boulder, Colo. By comparison, Noyes could row 2 km in the high 6:50s when he was in his 50s.

"They say you lose about three seconds a year when you get up into your 50s," he said. "I'm not as fast as I used to be, but I'm not slowing down as much as my peers are."

That 7:04 is Noyes' fastest time of the year. He credits time on the rower but also his affiliate.

"I'll attribute a lot of that to being willing to go in and not be the best guy in the CrossFit workout—just showin' up and doin' the work."



About the Author

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