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# THE CrossFit JOURNAL

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## Lords of the Realm

Medieval combat fighters from the U.S. take seven of nine gold medals at world championships held May 1-4 in Spain.

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By **Andréa Maria Cecil**

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All images: Jay Vera/CrossFit Journal

In a sport based upon the unforgiving, brutal armored battles of medieval Europe, it was Team USA who proved winningest at the International Medieval Combat Federation world championship.

But what some call irony, team members quickly dismiss.

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*Wielded with skill, the polearm is as effective in 2014 as it was in 1414.*

The modern—if you will—pastime of medieval combat attempts to recreate the sport, not the societies of the Middle Ages, Team USA member Scott Stricklin noted via email.

“And hey, isn’t chess from ancient China? Yet the Russians have mastered it,” he wrote.

Europeans settled the U.S., added fellow team member Dale Saran.

“It is easily forgotten now in the days of voluntary military service by a select few that our country was birthed by warrior-statesmen,” Saran, who also is CrossFit Inc.’s general counsel, wrote in an email.

Steve Schroeder, another man on the team, stated it simply:

“The draw of the sword is universal!”

### Rolling Back the Clock

At the inaugural championship—following a split from the Battle of the Nations organization over allegations that Eastern European countries weren’t playing

fairly—Team USA took home **seven out of a possible nine gold medals** earlier this month in Belmonte, Spain. In the other two categories, Team USA took silver. For complete results, visit the [International Medieval Combat Federation website](#).

When the newly formed squad fought in 2012 at the Battle of the Nations worldwide championship in Poland, it won few fights. Last year, the improved team placed fourth in two events.

And so it appears the Americans are **coming into their own**. At least eight of them have been training with CrossFit—some for years, most for months. CrossFit Inc. sponsored six team members who live in Northern California.

“Being able to let loose and have complete confidence in my body being up to the challenges I am putting it to? Yes, please. With CrossFit, I know I can get there,” wrote Schroeder, who lives in San Jose, California.

The 46-year-old started at NorCal CrossFit’s San Jose location in August. The first day at Castillo de Belmonte in Spain, he was part of four consecutive fights.

“My core is far stronger than it was in France. I have a more stable base and have been much harder to take down,” Schroeder wrote.

He went on: “I feel fantastic. Mind you, I still felt I went (through) some scraps, but I feel physically strong and could have fought much more. Last year it was a matter of convincing yourself that you could go out and do one more fight. This year I wanted more!”

For Stricklin, a software engineer who lives in Virginia, three years of CrossFit gave him the strength and endurance

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—Scott Stricklin

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needed to take opponents to the ground.

“I think it actually leveled the field between a 41-year-old computer nerd and a bunch of 20-something European fighters,” he explained. “It didn’t give me an edge so much as roll back the clock on age. I feel stronger and more capable now (than) I have in my entire life.”



*Members of Team USA say improved fitness helped them stay on their feet even when battling younger foes.*

Stricklin wrote the 2013 “CrossFit Journal” article [“To the Pain.”](#) A few days after it was published, Saran left a comment, asking how he could try the sport: “Shit. I never should have read this. I could get addicted to this kind of nuttiness.”

Even though Saran only took up medieval combat less than a year ago, he’s been doing CrossFit since late 2005. The 44-year-old said those years of improving his fitness have proven key in his new hobby.

“You need a baseline of fitness that’s hard to describe and if you haven’t spent years in harness adjusting to that, then you’d better at least be fit,” he wrote via email.

Fighters will wear from 70 to 100 lb. of armor and carry historically accurate—albeit blunted—weaponry that includes swords, maces, axes and polearms. The goal is to knock your opponents off their feet. Wearing the medieval helmet can feel like waterboarding, said Saran, who lives in Massachusetts.

“You’re breathing in your own exhaled CO2 every breath so it feels like slowly suffocating.”

He continued: “The physical and psychological demands of fighting in armor are unlike anything I’ve ever done—and I’ve played ice hockey since my childhood, wrestling,

baseball, football, track in high school, competitive Brazilian jiu-jitsu, rugby in college and law school, and on and on. Armored combat is harder than all of them. There is no ‘taking a play off’ or ‘coasting.’”

### **In Shining Armor**

Ask medieval combat fighters what stokes their fire for figuratively burying a sword into an opponent and they will answer that it goes beyond the violence. Instead, they talk of chivalry.

Put plainly: “the way the fighters treated each other,” Saran said.

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**“I believe that chivalry isn’t dead.”**  
—Steve Schroeder

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The values shared on the grounds of Castillo de Belmonte transcend combat, Schroeder said.

“I think many people in modern society yearn for the idea of knights and knightly pursuits because it’s such a





*Jeff Galli won the Men's Polearm category, and the U.S. team won seven events total.*

powerful representation of men (and now women) being the very best version of themselves, on or off the field," he wrote. "It's important to me that our American knights never lose sight of that. I believe that chivalry isn't dead. New seeds were planted on the field in Belmonte."

Chris Wemmer, a Team USA rookie, said one of his most memorable moments of the championship was when he was knighted.

"The depth of feeling in accomplishment is deeper than anything I have felt before," the 25-year-old said via email.

Team USA fought well this year. And for that it is proud.

"We didn't lose sight of what was truly important: Our fights were clean and approached with deep respect for every one of our opponents," Schroeder said.

He added: "Children and adults alike approached to have their pictures taken with all the fighters. Seeing children waving American flags and cheering for us—that was powerful."



#### **About the Author**

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