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## Virtuosity 5: Therapy

Ryan Saunders explains how CrossFit principles help him work past post-traumatic stress disorder in his garage.

By Ryan Saunders

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Ryan Saunders

There isn't a couch, a clipboard or a computer. There's not even a counselor, a psychiatrist or a stack of medication prescriptions.

For combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), my preferred setting for therapy is my own garage. Here, the typical scene of a therapist's office is replaced with a crude assortment of steel and iron strewn in front of a whiteboard.

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While there are many forms of treatment available for PTSD, the one that keeps me going each day is CrossFit. It provides a positive and productive means to deal with the unsettling effects of combat. For me, I've found the therapeutic value of CrossFit lies in its most basic definition: constantly varied functional movements performed at high intensity.

The constant variation has helped me deal with some of the lingering effects of combat. In a war waged against a faceless enemy, the danger lurks in the shadows and not on the open battlefield. The fight often feels one sided; sniper fire, IEDs and mortar attacks often come from unseen enemies. Still haunting me are the feelings of anticipation and the confusion of an unknown threat.

As those memories and emotions surface, I find peace in the fact that CrossFit provides me with the opportunity to step into my garage and confront a specific challenge—to prove myself against it by putting my physical and mental strength to the test. The constant variation assures that I am testing myself fully. In a way, it drags the enemy from the shadows and lets me face it head on.

The functional movements of CrossFit have become the tools I rely on to satisfy my need to continually improve my physical ability to perform. The unpredictable nature of combat has instilled this need in me, and CrossFit has proved

to be a positive form of post-combat transition. While the time it takes me to place a breaching charge is less relevant to my life today, my functional ability is just as important now as it was in hostile territory. Any opportunity to create healthy links between then and now is welcome.

Performing at high intensity helps me to release trapped emotions and built-up stress, but it's CrossFit's approach to it that has been most beneficial. With CrossFit, proper technique always precedes an increase in intensity. This places a demand for control—a level of steadiness within the rage of the storm. When transferred to everyday life, this serves as a lesson of tremendous value for me.

Through constant variation, functional movements and high intensity, CrossFit has transformed my workouts into invaluable therapy sessions. It gives me the day-to-day strength needed to move forward. It promotes confidence despite the destructive potential of PTSD. It gives me hope.

From a perspective forged with CrossFit, PTSD is just another benchmark Girl taunting me from the record board—calling me out to improve, to stay focused and to keep fighting.

While the couch, clipboard and psychiatrist have value, nothing compares to a therapeutic garage session.



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### Submission Guidelines

To be considered for publication, authors must satisfy the following:

1. Articles must be original, unpublished works. Authors of selected submissions will be supplied with legal documents to be filled out prior to publication.
2. Articles must be submitted in Word documents attached to an email. Documents should not contain bolding, italics or other formatting. Please submit in Arial font.
3. Articles can be 500 words maximum.
4. Each article must be accompanied by at least one high-resolution photograph to illustrate the story. The photo can feature the coach, the affiliate, the community—anything that illustrates the article. Photo guidelines are as follows:

- A. Photos must be original and owned by the person submitting. Photos taken by others may be submitted provided the owner has given permission.
- B. Photos must be in focus, well lit and free of watermarks. Minimum file size is 1 MB. Please review your camera's settings to ensure you are shooting high-resolution images. Cell-phone photos and thumbnails are not accepted.
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Virtuosity@crossfit.com is open for submissions. Tell us why you train where you train, and do it uncommonly well.