CrossFit athletes talk about their shift from aesthetic to performance goals and how they learned to be happy with the results.

BY HILARY ACHAUER
In June 2016, a group of athletes ran hill sprints as part of Reebok CrossFit One Training Grounds, an invite-only camp for CrossFit Games qualifiers.

It was hot that day. At the top of the hill, after the sprints were done, seven of the women posed for a photo. Six of them had their shirts off. Ben Bergeron, one of the coaches in attendance, took the photo and posted the picture on Instagram.

Jamie Hagiya, a first-time Games qualifier, saw the photo, and instead of looking with pride at her place among an elite group of athletes, she only noticed one thing: her stomach.

“I’m standing next to Jen Smith, and Katrin (Davidsdottir) is in the photo, and Christy Adkins, and all these women and their abs are crazy,” Hagiya said.

“I look disgusting,” this Games athlete said to herself. Then she stopped.

“This is ridiculous that I’m comparing myself to these girls,” Hagiya said she thought next. “It doesn’t mean that I don’t work hard.”

A few days later Hagiya took to Instagram herself.

“My body does not look like all the other @crossfitgames female athletes with crazy ripped abs and zero body fat on their stomachs. I wish I could look like that, but I’ve come to the realization that this is my body. … But the bottom line is I need to eat to perform. I can’t worry about trying to look like a Games athlete because having a six pack doesn’t always make for the best athlete.”

Many people join a CrossFit gym hoping to make aesthetic changes but then discover it’s much more interesting to learn how to do a muscle-up or increase squat numbers. However, this newfound focus on performance rarely means athletes completely abandon aesthetics.

We all care about how we look, and our feelings about our appearance can vary depending on the day, our mood, and the Instagram post.

**Bikinis to Bar Muscle-Ups**

Hagiya said she’s had body-image issues for as long as she can remember. The former collegiate basketball player at the University of Southern California was always bigger than her sister and all her friends growing up.

“When I found CrossFit, I was like, ‘Oh, (look at) Camille Leblanc-Bazinet. We have a similar body type, and everyone thinks she has a beautiful body and she’s strong, and that made me feel a lot better about myself and embrace being strong,’” Hagiya said.

That didn’t mean her body-image issues vanished. It’s never that easy. “I remember my very first CrossFit competition,” Hagiya said. “I was going head-to-head against this other girl … and she looked so ripped it was crazy, and I was like ‘I’m going to lose so bad,’ and then I ended up beating her, but I was still like, ‘Oh, wow.’ … Just by the way she looks, I was intimidated by that.”

Hagiya continued: “I’ve always been self-conscious of that. I don’t really work out with my shirt off in competitions.”

Not everyone feels the pressure to get smaller. Starrisha Godfrey-Canada has been doing CrossFit at StrengthRx CrossFit in Los Angeles, California, since April 2015. She originally joined because she had planned a summer trip to Brazil.

“And what I know about Brazil are the beaches, (the Brazilian women) are confident, the bathing suits are barely there, and I was like, ‘Oh my goodness,’” Godfrey-Canada said.

“I’m naturally very petite and thin, and I’ve never been comfortable being as small as I am,” she said. “I wanted to be curvy, and I wanted to be confident in a bathing suit and not have it hanging off me, and all these things. That’s why I actually stepped foot in a CrossFit gym.”

At first, Godfrey-Canada found CrossFit frustrating. An athlete in high school, she was usually the fastest one on her team, but she found she could barely get through her first CrossFit workouts.

“When did this happen? When did I get so out of shape?” she asked herself.

Godfrey-Canada’s trip to Brazil fell through but she kept going to StrengthRx, increasing her attendance from three to four times a week to five or six.

“(I got) more into the strength, really being a part of the community.
That’s when my goals shifted.” —Starrisha Godfrey-Canada

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Jamie Hagiya's fans at the California Regional, where the 31-year-old athlete placed fifth.
April Zusman, 44, started CrossFit in 2014 at CrossFit LVI in Port Hueneme, California. Zusman stopped eating processed foods, started cooking for herself, and lost about 25 lb. She felt herself getting stronger and faster and mentally tougher.

Zusman said it felt good to lose weight and feel healthy, but over the last two years she realized that’s not what motivates her.

“I used to be more concerned with wanting to look like a certain body type,” she said. “Then as time passed and I dropped all the weight, I realized I don’t even care about looking like that body type. I want to look like me, I want to be strong, I want to look strong, I want to feel strong. I stopped worrying about being a specific body type because, you know, I’m just not built to be tiny and I’ve definitely embraced being thick and muscular.”

Zusman has been a belly dancer for close to 16 years. She said she used to get out of breath at the end of her performance, but after going to CrossFit classes four to five days a week for two years, her routine feels like a warm-up.

“My endurance has definitely increased,” she said, “and my muscle control is much better.

“Every body is beautiful. It doesn’t matter what size you are.”
— April Zusman

Because of her CrossFit experience, 44-year-old April Zusman said she cares more about performance than aesthetics.
looked at the other four qualifying women and noticed she didn’t look like any of them, but still she felt like she belonged.

Hagiya has been posting more photos of herself in a sports bra to reinforce the idea that this is the body she has, she worked hard for it, and she’s proud of it.

Her advice to other CrossFit athletes who aren’t completely satisfied with their physiques is not a new diet plan or specialized programming.

“Be yourself and (accept) what you have. Embrace it and love yourself and your body and be proud of how hard you work,” she said.

The trick—and it’s a difficult one to pull off—is to eat well and exercise regularly, then accept the results, which might not be exactly what you imagined. It’s unlikely you will stop caring about aesthetics, even with a performance focus, but you can make an effort to accept and celebrate the results of your consistent hard work.

About the Author: Hilary Achauer is a freelance writer and editor specializing in health and wellness content. In addition to writing articles, online content, blogs and newsletters, Hilary writes for the CrossFit Journal. To contact her, visit hilaryachauer.com

“Love yourself and your body and be proud of how hard you work.”

— Jamie Hagiya

Starrisha Godfrey-Canada went from wanting a bikini body to improving her deadlift and bar muscle-ups.

Jamie Hagiya said she’s come to embrace her body for what it can do—not how it looks.

Dana Honbo used to frequent the globo gym. Today he does CrossFit for health and longevity.

Since starting CrossFit, April Zusman said she no longer gets winded during belly-dancing routines.