



THE
CrossFit JOURNAL

FIVE FROM THE ARCHIVES

Affiliate owner Chris Sinagoga talks about two articles and three videos that made him a better trainer.

BY CHRIS SINAGOGA



Longtime Seminar Staff member Chris Spealler addressed blending sport-specific training and CrossFit in a 2011 video.

When you first watched “The Shawshank Redemption,” the ending probably left you wondering how Andy Dufresne bested the warden and his crew.

Because you wanted to relive that excitement, and because Morgan Freeman’s voice brings serenity to life, you watched the movie several more times.

Then a few months, years maybe, go by in which you don’t watch the movie, until one day you see it’s on TV. For old time’s sake, you flip it on and catch it right at the perfect part: After spending 60 days in the hole, Andy is talking to Red about hope and moving to a place that people still don’t know how to spell.

Then you catch something Red says that you missed before: “Those are just shitty pipe dreams, Andy.”

“Oh my God!” you scream at the television screen. “How did I miss that?”

Then, while watching the movie again a few weeks later to remind yourself how stupid you were for missing the foreshadowing, you notice the warden opens the Bible to the book of Exodus to find the place where the rock hammer was concealed.

Somehow, the movie was better the sixth time through because you were able to notice and appreciate so many more nuances.

* * *

My first CrossFit workout happened in late 2005, but I started to read the CrossFit Journal around June 2006. Ten years later, I can’t remember what day of the week it is or what I had for lunch, but for some odd reason I can remember just about every video or article that has come up over that time.

Now I’m an affiliate owner who has seen hundreds of kids and parents come through our doors, and I can’t help but notice the direct influence the videos and articles have had on my coaching. I really consider that a plain old lucky advantage; if you weren’t up on the Journal right off the rip, it’s really difficult to know where to start in the 4,000 pieces of content. To help you dive in, I’d like to share a list of my favorites from the archives.

“Virtuosity” by Greg Glassman

Yo!

That is my response every single time I read this article. How can you read it and not want to go coach somebody—anybody—right away?

For me, and for many affiliate owners, being in business without previous experience can be overwhelming at first. So many suggestions are thrown at you daily, with each thrower claiming he’s right and everyone else is wrong. You never know whom to listen to; it’s still something I struggle with. Thankfully, the words of CrossFit’s Founder and CEO help me keep complete focus on the course to success:

“What will inevitably doom a physical training program and dilute a coach’s efficacy is a lack of commitment to fundamentals.”

Everything in CrossFit comes back to the movements.

CrossFit affiliate owners are not in the friendship business, the networking business, the advertising business or the apparel business; we are in the business of delivering fitness. We make people move better. Building networks and friends and the like can certainly help, but coaching movement is at the core of what we do.

The bottom line is you are not a good coach unless your athletes move well without your presence. You might know a lot and be able to engage a group and come up with creative workouts, but if your athletes’ habits don’t reflect your ideals, then you are not doing your job.

Everything in CrossFit comes back to the movements. If you are looking to make your gym better, look no further than how your athletes move relative to those who move the best.

“Seasons, Sport and CrossFit”

This video filmed at a Coach’s Prep Course actually isn’t from the Journal, but it was posted as a clip on a random rest day in **June 2011**. On top of coaching, I was still playing college basketball at the time it came out, so Chris Spealler really had my attention. And to this day I have never seen so much great info packed into a few short minutes.

“In-season your sport takes precedence. CrossFit’s maintenance. Out of season, CrossFit takes precedence. Sport takes the back burner and we work on the skill,” Spealler says.

I struggled with keeping a consistent in-season training routine both as an athlete and when coaching. Spealler’s fish-shaped diagram was a game changer for me because it helped keep

priorities sorted. Blending CrossFit and sport-specific training still involves a lot of experimenting and tweaking from athlete to athlete, but the principle Spealler details here is sound. In fact, I still use the chart when explaining to new athletes why I want them to continue CrossFit training in season.

Spealler also touched on a subject I feel pretty strongly about: programming—specifically the lack of certainty around it.

“We know so little about the human body, and all of us are so different, that’s it’s impossible for us to program for an entire team, or even an individual, for them to peak at the perfect time.”

He also shared his views on two-a-day workouts and how he thinks they actually make him “less fit.” It was a big relief for me to hear this. I still get complaints from a few gym members and outside coaches who think we need to bias programming or do more workouts. We have followed the workouts posted on CrossFit.com since we started as a school club in 2010. Programming can be debated to no end, but movement is much more concrete. I need a program that allows me to focus on coaching movement while exposing any weakness our athletes might have. I think CrossFit.com provides as close to an unbiased version of that as possible. It also gives a coach the flexibility to modify for each individual, such as an in-season athlete.

“CrossFit Kids Trainer Course: The Three Pillars” by Todd Widman

Any time I feel stuck as a coach, I always go back and read “Virtuosity” as a reminder to dig back through the CrossFit Journal archives for coaching videos relating to movement. Theory videos are great to help me to organize my thinking, and the live-coaching clips give me a great visual of how the theory looks when it’s taken from the whiteboard and applied to an athlete or class.

Many of the mobility, movement and skill-transfer videos in the [Reference](#) category of the Journal provide a great balance of theory and live coaching, but [Kids](#) is another favorite category. CrossFit Kids content has always hit home in a gym in which we coach mostly middle-school, high-school and college athletes. One of the best theory videos (linked above) shows Todd Widman explaining the challenge of coaching different age groups.

So many great quotes can be found in this video—“End what you’re doing before it’s done,” “Fun changes over time,” “Do less better”—but my favorite part is when Widman details the second pillar: quality movement.



Nicholas Romanov (right) coaches Dan Bailey in Montana in 2012.



Todd Widman (right) explained quality movement is an essential part of training young athletes in the 2012 video “CrossFit Kids Trainer Course: The Three Pillars.”

The three major factors in movement quality at this age are the coach’s ego, the child’s ego and the parents’ egos. These are constantly at play every time I walk into my gym, and it’s helpful to hear that a coach as great as Widman experiences the same challenges.

Widman mentions good form takes time, and it is our job to create better movers. Everything else takes a back seat. I think this should be applied to every CrossFit class, not just kids classes.

“Unweighting: A Universal Concept” by Nicholas Romanov

Something about running really drew me into CrossFit. Coming from a track background, I loved the idea of mixing in 400-meter repeats with overhead squats. It was the equalizer that helped scrawny kids like me compete with the big, strong guys—like my trainer, Brian Hassler.

Mike Collins was featured in “[Intro to the Pose Method for Distance Running](#)” while I was still in high school, and I was able to use parts of the video to improve my mile and 400 times.

By the time the Journal released videos featuring Romanov, I was coaching the Champions Club and extracting every detail I could out of those clips to make our kids better runners. But over time it felt like running was the outlier: All these movements were taught with a bunch of cues and techniques, while running was simply pose, fall, pull. I was starving for a demonstration of the Pose concept with other movements, and on Oct. 15, 2012, my wish was granted.

I must have watched the video of Romanov working with Dan Bailey on snatches 10 times in the first week of release as I tried to see the difference between shrugging and unweighting, how the poses matched up, and how Romanov corrected subtle errors with minimal talking.

For the past three years since its release, that 15-minute video is still all I’ve had to go on, but we have actually worked our entire teaching around the Pose Method. Cleans, pull-ups, sumo deadlift high-pulls, rope climbs and box jumps are all taught through this lens.

But it all comes back to running. The Pose concept is simply understanding the gravity hierarchy and applying it to human movement, and running is just the easiest and most transferable way to communicate the concept.

Pat Sherwood (right) is currently an analyst on the CrossFit Games Update Show, but he also competed in the Games in 2009.

divined through competition, not debate.



“On Elegance” by Pat Sherwood

As an affiliate owner, dozens of things are running through your mind at once. In any given two-minute period, I am contemplating how to modify a workout for an injured athlete, what mobility drills everyone will need before the workout, if we have enough 15-lb. bars for the group, how well the athletes will move the weight in later rounds, and whether or not a client will leave the gym if I stop him one more time for bad form. Everything piles up.

The simpler I can keep things, the easier it is to keep track—and I need constant reminders of this. I often get ahead of myself with individual athletes, their parents or our gym as a whole. Thankfully, Pat Sherwood gave everyone a reminder in 2013:

“Next time you need to solve a problem, explain a concept, define a term or program a workout, don’t seek an unnecessarily complicated solution when an elegant one would suffice. Pursue elegance in everything.”

“Don’t seek an unnecessarily complicated solution when an elegant one would suffice. Pursue elegance in everything.”
— Pat Sherwood

If you only know Sherwood from his role on the CrossFit Games Update Show, you are missing out on arguably the best personality in all of CrossFit. I don’t know if anyone has a more practical and realistic sense when it comes to fitness. Sherwood just gets things. His article helps me take a step back, see what’s at the core of what I am trying to accomplish and simplify.

I use this approach while coaching movement, when thinking about programming in general and also when writing articles. The more I simplify, the quicker I see results.

Dig Deeper

You might have been involved in CrossFit when these articles and videos came out. Or you might have done your research. But can you recall all the key points of each? If not, I guarantee you are leaving something on the table.

Coach Glassman carefully contemplated every single word in



“Virtuosity.” Romanov just drew on a wealth of experience to improvise on the spot while coaching Bailey. Both feats are incredible and show true mastery of craft. To be as good as the greats, we need to get inside their heads. Many of us don’t have the luxury of being in their presence all the time, but the CrossFit Journal gives us an unbelievably valuable glimpse into their brains with every video and article. It is not enough to just watch or read once; we need to study the material the same way we studied for exams in school.

Study will allow you to find small details, and those details make all the difference—just as they did in “The Shawshank Redemption.” Remember, the core of what we do is perfecting human movement. Studying the videos and articles above—and digging up others that speak to you—will give you the blueprint for doing so.

And in the process, you might stumble across other hidden gems. ■

About the Author: Chris Sinagoga is the owner of the Champions Club/CrossFit Athletic Group, and his obsession with coaching CrossFit is only surpassed by his obsession with the game of basketball. Chris is heavily influenced by MGoBlog and hip hop, and he writes for the [Champions Club website](#). Among other prestigious credentials, he has achieved certified master status in both “Pokémon” Red and Gold versions.