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SQUAT BETTER TODAY

Your ego has cursed you. Break the spell in three steps.

BY MIKE WARKENTIN | FEBRUARY 2016

*“There is a compelling tendency among novices ...
to quickly move past the fundamentals.”*

—Greg Glassman, CrossFit Founder and CEO

Read that quote twice. Maybe three times.

Now admit that you—yes, you—are afflicted by the novice's curse.

Far more powerful than the Madden Curse combined with the Curse of the Hope Diamond, the novice's curse is utterly indiscriminate: It affects 99 percent of people who do anything.

Luke Skywalker succumbed when he brushed off the last of his training and went to fight Vader. Your partner bowed to the curse when he or she tried to assemble the new barbecue without reading the instructions. Your kids got a taste when they fired up “Guitar Hero III” and tried to play “Through the Fire and Flames” on expert mode before they mastered easy mode.

You're burdened by the curse when you squat.

I'd bet this is true no matter how long you've been squatting.

In fact, the longer you've been squatting, the more certain I am that you've neglected the fundamentals.

At a recent CrossFit Level 1 Certificate Course, I learned that I've lived under the novice's curse for some time. After sinking into the bottom of a squat first learned at a seminar in 2009, I was quickly reminded that a technically sound air squat is way more difficult than it seems.

Instead of drilling the air squat every day for the last seven years, I've viewed it only as “some shit I need to do before I load up the barbell and max out.” Similarly, I tried to snatch more than I could overhead squat, and I tried to walk on my hands before I could hold a handstand.

As I sat in the bottom and worked to hold the best squat I could, it became clear that I haven't struggled to achieve the position in years. Nevertheless, I hoped I was in the sort of glorious air squat that would coax a single tear from the eye and draw slow, deliberate clapping.

“Shift your weight back a little,” instructor Rory Zambard said. “Squeeze your butt.”

I shifted and turned on lazy hamstrings and glutes, and the squat became even more difficult—but it felt stronger and more



If you haven't reviewed the fundamentals and practiced air squats recently, it's high time to do so.

balanced. As I performed more reps with the right muscles engaged, I had a revelation: I miss PR back squats because I let the weight shift toward my forefoot, which is a real problem when you have a decent load on your back.

And there, of course, is the laser beam that shoots through 5,000 bad reps to connect a single good air squat at a Level 1 course and the PR back squat I keep missing.

If you recommit yourself to mastering the fundamentals, I'm certain you'll hit new PRs in the back, front and overhead squat.

So how do you squat better today? I'll lay it out in three simple steps:

1. Shake off the novice's curse by reading "[Virtuosity](#)" and "[Squat Clinic](#)" by Glassman.
2. Spend a full hour working on the air squat with a skilled coach or film yourself and ruthlessly identify each error. Fix as many as you can in 60 minutes—and you won't get all of them. Revisit this step regularly.
3. Try to perform every single warm-up or workout air squat with virtuosity.

Sure, drilling the air squat isn't as sexy as trying to hit a 300-lb. overhead squat, just as driving piles into the muck is boring compared to stacking more and more floors on a skyscraper. But one leads to the other, and it's foolish to think otherwise.

If you recommit yourself to mastering the fundamentals, I'm certain you'll hit new PRs in the back, front and overhead squat. Probably the clean and snatch, too. So get back to the basics and pursue perfection in your movement.

Or you can ignore all this nonsense, load up the bar, and get buried under the weight of a bunch of iron and the novice's curse. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mike Warkentin is managing editor of the CrossFit Journal and founder of [CrossFit 204](#).



Try working with a skilled trainer who won't stop nagging you until the form is solid, then load up the barbell and chase some numbers.

THE

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KITCHEN



KICKIN' LIKE VAN DAMME CHICKEN FINGERS

By Nick Massie

Overview

Nick Massie of [PaleoNick.com](http://paleonick.com) calls this dish “the bigger brother” to his [bacon-wrapped jalapeño poppers](#). Each mouthful mingles chicken, bacon, bell and jalapeño peppers, and parsnips. This is a meal you can gobble now or freeze and enjoy later.

ingredients

- 2 large boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- 2 red bell peppers
- 12 slices of bacon
- 1 jalapeño, cut into 36 slices
- 3 tbsp. Massie Mayo
- Cilantro, to garnish
- Olive oil, as needed
- Kosher salt, to taste
- Black pepper, to taste
- 5 parsnips, peeled and chopped into uniform 2-in. chunks

directions for the chicken fingers

1. Cut the bell peppers and chicken breasts into 12 finger-sized slices.
2. Season the chicken with kosher salt and pepper on both

3. sides, and place one piece of chicken inside each piece of bell pepper.
3. Place 3 slices of jalapeño on each piece of chicken.
4. Wrap each bell-pepper slice with a piece of bacon and perform the “double tuck” technique, where both ends of the bacon are tucked to ensure it doesn’t unravel when cooking.
5. Heat a 14-in. skillet over medium-high heat and add a teaspoon of olive oil. When the pan is hot, add the chicken fingers, seam-side down.
6. Cook, turning regularly, until the chicken fingers are caramelized on all sides and reach an internal temperature of 165 F. Cut the heat and remove the fingers from the pan.
7. Make a bed of parsnip puree (see below) on a plate, top with 2-3 chicken fingers, drizzle with Massie Mayo and garnish with cilantro. (For added flavor, fold some chipotle puree into your Massie Mayo.)

1 of 2



directions for the parsnip puree

1. Place parsnips in a pot and cover with cold water to 2 in. above the top parsnip.
2. Bring to a simmer and cook until fork tender.
3. Strain parsnips and transfer them to a food processor or mash them with a whisk. If using a food processor, puree until smooth, adding enough water to the bowl to get them to puree completely.
4. Transfer to a plate or food-storage container and top with chicken fingers. Enjoy!

This is a great meal to prepare and freeze. If you're freezing it, leave the mayo off until after you've thawed and reheated the dish. Pre-made meals will store in the fridge for up to 5 days or in the freezer for up to 6 months.

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LINES OF COKE

Food-industry watchdogs: “Exercise is medicine” just a platitude designed to distance Big Soda from chronic disease.

BY ANDRÉA MARIA CECIL | FEBRUARY 2016



At first blush, it seems like a harmless statement: “Exercise is medicine.”

Exercise, after all, is good.

“It’s plainly true,” said Gary Ruskin, co-founder and co-director of U.S. Right to Know, a whistleblower nonprofit targeting the food industry. “Physical and mental health indicators are improved through exercise. In general, it’s a great thing.”

Exercise Is Medicine (EIM)—registered trademark—as promoted by the **American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM)**, however, is not a great thing, Ruskin noted.

“ACSM is an organization that is somewhat **aligned with Coca-Cola**, so this is a part of Coca-Cola’s effort to **deny its responsibility** for the epidemic of soda-related diseases that have plagued our country,” he said.

EIM is one of the ACSM’s major initiatives. The Coca-Cola Co. is the program’s first founding partner, noted ACSM CEO and executive vice president Jim Whitehead in 2012.

If it weren’t for Coca-Cola, “EIM would not have been able to touch the public to the extent that it has,” Whitehead was quoted as saying in an **article** published on Coca-Cola’s Journey site.

The ACSM—neither a college nor a medical body—is a nonprofit that describes itself as the world’s largest sports-medicine and exercise-science organization. Coke is among its **official corporate partners**.

Through the EIM scheme, the ACSM offers a **credential** it bills as providing “the skills and knowledge necessary to safely and effectively develop, implement and lead exercise programs—and, you’ll know how to navigate the health care system in order to create and cultivate patient relationships.” The cost to take the ACSM’s EIM exam is US\$50.

Central to the EIM initiative is the notion of **doctor-prescribed physical activity**.

That is a problem, noted Greg Glassman, CrossFit Inc. Founder and CEO.

“When exercise is medicine according to Coca-Cola, then CrossFit is nothing short of medical malpractice,” he told an audience on Nov. 12 at CrossFit Downey in Southern California when touring affiliates as part of the “**California Invasion: Rally to Fight Big Soda**.”

Lon Kilgore detailed many other flaws in the EIM program in “**Exercise Is Medicine: Imprecision and Impracticality**.”

Coke—alongside Dr. Pepper Snapple Group, PepsiCo and the American Beverage Association—is also behind a similar effort called **Mixify**. Aimed at youth, Mixify ads can be seen on public-transportation vehicles, bus stops, vending machines and billboards, and as exhibits in filings related to **the beverage association’s lawsuit** against the City of San Francisco over its legislation requiring warning labels on ads for sugary beverages. Mixify promotes the EIM idea that one simply has to **balance calories in with calories out** to lead a healthy lifestyle.

Science has shown otherwise.

“It really bothers me that the industry is trying to spread this notion that ... you just balance with exercise and you can eat whatever you want,” said Kimber Stanhope, associate research nutritional biologist in the Department of Molecular Biosciences at the University of California-Davis.

“I think it’s a complete fallacy that ... you get to pick a life of exercise or a life of healthy eating but not both.”
—Kimber Stanhope

She continued: “I think it’s a complete fallacy that ... you get to pick a life of exercise or a life of healthy eating but not both.”

By placing a spotlight on exercise rather than diet, Big Soda diverts attention away from itself, explained Dr. Kevin Strong, a pediatrician and founder of **Dunk the Junk**, a nonprofit focused on educating youth about the dangers of eating junk food.

“They’re trying to create a distraction from the real cause, which is overconsumption of sugar mainly through sugary drinks,” he said. “That’s clever. That’s what I’d do if my paycheck was dependent on how much sugar I could sell—and if I had no ethics.”

Sugary drinks—due to their high sugar content and their rate of ingestion—are the leading cause of chronic disease, Strong added.



Mike Warkentin/CrossFit Journal

Exercise and health care are not inherently at odds, but it’s a problem when Coke-sponsored programs try to convince people they can erase poor nutrition with exercise.

“There’s no question what’s causing weight gain and the Type 2 diabetes epidemic. It’s very closely tied to sugar consumption. ... Sugar doesn’t create satiety and it’s addictive.”

Studies showing soda’s impact on obesity, as well as the benefits of removing soda and fructose from the diet, are strong, Ruskin said. Unfortunately, Coke acts like a megaphone, finding professors, doctors and scientists willing to toe the “Taste the Feeling” line and state with certainty that sugary beverages can indeed be part of a healthy lifestyle.

“Nobody will believe it when Coke says their products are not a public-health danger ... so they absolutely need—crucially need—scientists who look independent who say, ‘Pay attention to exercise. Don’t pay attention to food, and especially don’t pay attention to the soda stuff,’” Ruskin said.

In short, Coke’s support of the ACSM’s EIM initiative is simply a way to **shift the focus** away from its products and onto consumers’ responsibility to exercise lest they suffer metabolic derangement.

“They’re trying to evade responsibility, ... redeem their name with many members of the public,” Ruskin said. “(Soda is) rightly seen as a public-health danger and a vehicle for the slow poisoning of our nation.” ■

About the Author

Andréa Maria Cecil is assistant managing editor and head writer of the CrossFit Journal.

“THE KNEE SLEEVES DO NOTHING!”

Mike Warkentin reveals the real secret to thriving in the CrossFit Games Open.



MIKE WARKENTIN | UNCOMMON SENSE | FEBRUARY 2016

“Everything is OK.”

The words were written in black marker—large block letters about an inch tall running down the inside of her forearm from elbow to wrist.

My friend, an artistic, freethinking woman with an occasional affinity for “consciousness expansion,” was very matter-of-fact when I asked her about the sentence staining her skin on a Sunday morning.

“I took mushrooms last night, and I needed a reminder in case anything got weird. You know, giant demon goats with flaming horns coming through the floorboards. Stuff like that.

“When I started to panic, I just looked at my arm.

“These goats are terrifying, but everything is OK.”

Open Your Mind

A psychedelic romp into the weird might seem unrelated to fitness, but it's become clear to me over the years that the CrossFit Games Open can be a mind-altering experience that causes paranoia where none is warranted.



You'll be fine. Really. Just walk it off and start cheering for someone who's still working.

You've probably seen it, too: A woman who runs a million-dollar company while raising kids and caring for an elderly parent becomes totally unhinged by seven minutes of burpees. A guy who thinks nothing of managing the air traffic over a major city suddenly can't figure out how to arrange his barbell and box. A cop who spent the day kicking doors in the inner city fearfully walks into the gym looking like he's about to swim 50 yards in a shark tank with steak in his pockets.

You might even be one of these people—totally fit and competent in every way but shaken like a Bond martini the second an Open workout is announced. It's neither uncommon nor abnormal.

Strange rituals and behavior identify those who are feeling too much self-applied pressure. Chalk is ceremoniously and liberally applied to equipment and body parts. Athletes gravitate toward

“lucky barbells” and favorite pull-up bars. Wrist wraps, knee sleeves, belts and compression tights show up on athletes who didn't own them before the Open. A fine mist of pre-workout supplement powder fills the air like a scene out of “Narcos.” And the bathrooms, of course, are always full.

With the Open almost upon us and 16.1 on the horizon, I'll offer the one thing you need to remember in order to bypass the tension and truly thrive in the Open:

Everything is OK.

You're a fine, hardworking human being. You've trained all year, and you're ready. You don't need to worry, so just have fun proving your fitness among friends. Relax, give your all, smile while you suffer, and cheer for your buddies. Then come back to the gym tomorrow and keep training.



Alex Tibbbs

“You said everything would be OK! Why the hell would you say that?”



Andreane Fraser

Even if you're rattled and having trouble focusing, remember this: Everything is OK.

No matter what's announced on Feb. 25, remember that everything is OK. You will come through the workout just fine, and someone will give you a hearty fist bump before allowing you to work on your sweat angel.

As you lie relieved and writhing on the rubber, you'll ask yourself why you were worried in the first place—yet you'll start fretting about the next workout an hour later.

So remember this: Everything is OK.

In the calm before the burpees, take a minute to write it on your arm now. Touch up as needed and refer to it any time you feel nervous.

Be sure to take a good look at it right before you do 16.1. Then draw in a big breath and grab your demon goats by their flaming horns. ■

About the Author

Mike Warkentin is managing editor of the CrossFit Journal and founder of [CrossFit 204](#).

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THE BATTLE FOR MEXICO

Government and CrossFit affiliates fight against Big Soda in a nation where sugary beverages are part of the culture.

BY HILARY ACHAUER



In Chiapas, Mexico, Coca-Cola has become a part of religious and cultural rituals.

“The average family in Mexico (eats) breakfast with soda,” said Pablo Romo, owner of CrossFit Lava in Mexico. “They eat (lunch) with soda, they eat dinner with soda. Soda all the time.”

In 2011, Mexico led the world in soda consumption, with an average per capita consumption of 43 gallons per year. Unsurprisingly, the country also leads the world in adult obesity. As of 2014, more than 70 percent of adults in Mexico were overweight and 32 percent were obese, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. The country has the world's highest death rate from chronic disease caused by sugary drinks, and Mexico City's secretary of health, Armando Ahued Ortega, expressed concern that the high rate of diabetes is causing Mexico's health system to collapse.

A few years ago, those concerned about public health in Mexico saw disaster looming and fixed their sights on soda.

Mexican Success

Soda was an audacious target: Sugary beverages are an important part of Mexican culture. Vicente Fox, Mexico's president from 2000 to 2006, drove a Coca-Cola delivery truck in 1964 and later climbed the ranks to become president of Coca-Cola Mexico and head of Coca-Cola's Latin American operations.

Coca-Cola controls 73 percent of the market in Mexico, as compared to 42 percent in the United States. Many areas of Mexico don't have access to a reliable source of clean drinking water, but soda is everywhere. Due to the low price of Mexican sugar, soda is often less expensive than bottled water. Even worse, Coca-Cola is cheaper in rural areas than in urban areas, and it has become part of religious and cultural rituals in regions such as Chiapas (see cover photo). The result: rising rates of diabetes among indigenous people in Mexico.

Despite Big Soda's economic and cultural stranglehold on Mexico, obesity and diabetes are hard to ignore. The solution suggested by most global health experts was a soda tax. Soda taxes have three main effects: they create increased prices that influence consumption, they generate revenue, and they put soda in the same category as cigarettes. The last point is key: Changing public perception is an essential part of changing habits, especially in a nation in which soda is deeply ingrained in culture.



Pat Sherwood (center) of CrossFit Media is flanked by Gaby Espinosa and José Arce of Clovis CrossFit.

Groups such as the Alianza por la Salud Alimentaria (Alliance for Healthy Food) and El Poder del Consumidor (Consumer Power) had been working with government officials and research scientists on a soda tax for years, and then, in 2012, a breakthrough: Bloomberg Philanthropies donated a total of US\$16.5 million to the cause, according to New York University professor Marion Nestle in “Soda Politics: Taking on Big Soda (and Winning).”

Changing public perception is an essential part of changing habits, especially in a nation in which soda is deeply ingrained in culture.

With the help of the Bloomberg money and extremely effective advocacy, Mexico successfully passed a tax of 1 peso (about 6 cents) per liter on sugary drinks and an 8 percent tax on junk foods in 2013. The taxes went into effect in January 2014.

In “Soda Politics,” Nestle wrote that soda sales immediately dropped by 10 percent after the tax went into effect. By the end of 2014, soda sales were down 12 percent, and in the poorest regions of Mexico, soda consumption fell by 17 percent, according to [TheGuardian.com](#).

Exercise Isn't Everything

Reducing soda consumption is an important start, but the next step is challenging the beverage industry's current PR campaign, which suggests exercise can erase a bad diet.

Staff at Clovis CrossFit in Hermosillo, Sonora, said every person who walks in believes exercising will allow him or her to eat anything.

“One hundred percent. All of them,” said Gaby Espinosa, manager of the affiliate and wife of owner José Arce.

The Global Energy Balance Network (GEBN), a now-defunct nonprofit organization secretly funded by [The Coca-Cola Co.](#),



Clovis CrossFit

Gaby Espinosa (right) said it's very difficult to convince new members to address their diets because they think exercise is enough.



CrossFit Lava

Pablo Romo (right) changed his diet and started CrossFit in 2012. He said he experienced dramatic results in just a month.

spent millions to promote one idea: If you exercise, even less-than-healthy foods and beverages can be part of your diet. It was a canny marketing move because no one is going to oppose exercise.

While it's true that exercise is important, experts are clear that exercise cannot negate the effects of excessive amounts of sugary beverages and foods laced with added sugar.

“When you look at the data from research on obesity and exercise, there's no compelling evidence that exercise has any effect on weight,” award-winning science journalist Gary Taubes told [Reader's Digest](#) in 2011.

The so-called “energy balance”—calories in versus calories out—is overly simplistic because all foods are not created equal, and the same quantities of different foods have different effects on the body.

Consider a small, balanced meal containing 500 calories of fat, protein and low-glycemic carbohydrates as opposed to a beverage containing 500 calories derived from refined sugars. The nutritional value of the balanced meal far outweighs that of the sugar-laced soda that's devoid of fiber, vitamins and minerals.

“Refined carbohydrates raise your insulin levels,” Taubes told [Reader's Digest](#). “Scientists have known since the early 1960s that insulin is the primary hormone that regulates your fat tissue.”

The GEBN is gone after its ties to Big Soda were revealed, but [Exercise Is Medicine \(EIM\)](#) survives. EIM is a global organization focused on promoting exercise as the key to good health. Managed by the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), EIM is closely linked to Coca-Cola, its “first founding partner.” Lon Kilgore outlined the program's many flaws in the [CrossFit Journal](#) article “[Exercise Is Medicine: Imprecision and Impracticality](#).”

“We tell them training hard every day is not going to (balance) the ... quantity that they drink.”

—Gaby Espinosa



CrossFit Lava opened in 2013, and owner Pablo Romo said fitness culture is growing in Mexico.

Arce has owned Clovis CrossFit since 2013.

In 2008, Arce and Espinosa owned an advertising agency. An unhealthy diet and the pressures of raising their two daughters while running a business had taken their toll, and Arce found himself out of shape and overweight. To get in shape, Arce began training and competing in triathlons. He lost 90 lb. over three years, but in 2011 he had a bike accident that resulted in a minor injury. When looking for rehab exercises online, Arce discovered CrossFit. He attended a Level 1 Certificate Course in August 2012, and by June 2013 Arce and Espinosa had closed their agency and opened a CrossFit affiliate.

After owning Clovis CrossFit for three years and preaching good health and nutrition to their members, Arce and Espinosa decided they needed to make a change at home. In 2015, the family stopped drinking soda.

“(We stopped drinking soda) because we really want to live a healthy lifestyle and teach our daughters that it is a correct lifestyle for them,” Espinosa said.

They cut out soda and sugar, hoping their results would inspire their members.

“For us, (after giving up soda) the performance got better, and (our) health, and we really look better now,” Espinosa said.

“Our clients notice this,” Arce said. “And they say, ‘What are you doing?’ ‘I’m doing what I (told) you yesterday or last year,’ and they say, ‘OK, I’m going to start doing that.’”

Few actually follow through.

“They still are drinking (soda). They fight (us) every day. We talk to them. We tell them training hard every day is not going to (balance) the ... quantity that they drink,” Espinosa said.

Long-term habits influenced by relentless marketing are not easily broken, and Espinosa said she hasn’t seen the behavior of their members change as a result of the soda tax. On the other hand, five members followed Espinosa and Arce’s advice, and they’ve seen positive changes in their weight and health.

“The others are seeing their changes and asking them (about the results), and they answer, ‘I’m doing what José is doing,’” Espinosa said.

She said the members complain it’s hard to give up soda and sugar.



CrossFit Lava

Pablo Romo (right) said Mexico's soda tax isn't having the desired effect on its own, so he works hard to teach clients about nutrition.

"It's hard, but you can do it," Espinosa said she explains. "And we tell them, 'This (does) not have an ... (expiration) date ... it's for all of your life.'"

Espinosa added: "Really, we want to help people. We want to make a difference in their life like we experienced a difference in our lives."

Simple Changes, Drastic Results

Like Arce and Espinosa, Romo, the owner of CrossFit Lava outside Mexico City, came to CrossFit from the corporate world. He worked at Hewlett-Packard, spending all day sitting in front of the computer. He always exercised, but his poor diet was taking a toll.

"I used to eat junk food because I didn't have time to eat healthy food," Romo said. He gained weight and felt unhealthy.

"I used to drink a lot of soda," Romo said. "Coke, every time Coke and Coke and Coke and Coke. That's why I gained too much weight."

Then he discovered CrossFit in 2012. He gave up junk food and soda.

"In a month, I have muscles that I have never seen in my life. I did gymnastics and I did swimming and kickboxing and many sports, but (I've) never seen that kind of results that CrossFit gave me," Romo said.

"Coke, every time Coke and Coke and Coke and Coke. That's why I gained too much weight."

—Pablo Romo

After about a year of CrossFit, Romo opened CrossFit Lava in 2013 and quit his job at Hewlett-Packard. Since then he's focused on the health and fitness of those around him.

Romo sees a growing culture of fitness in Mexico, but he said he hasn't seen a big shift in attitudes about nutrition or a noticeable change in soda consumption after the tax.

"The regular family, they drink too much Coke, and they don't care if they have to pay much more for that. I think they drink too much alcohol, and obviously sodas and junk food. They don't care if they have to pay more. That's the drink they are used to. They don't drink water. They don't drink healthy drinks," Romo said.

A year ago, Romo was getting coffee in Starbucks and ran into a former customer from Hewlett-Packard, José Luis Dominguez, who goes by Pepe. Romo noticed his friend had put on quite a bit of weight. In Mexico, as in many other Latin American countries, commenting on another person's weight is not the taboo topic it is in the United States, so Romo didn't hide his surprise.

"I say, 'Pepe, you are very fat! What are you doing?'" Romo remembered. Pepe told Romo he had been working too much. Then he looked at Romo, fit and muscled, wearing shorts and a T-shirt in the middle of the day, and asked him what he had been up to.

"I started a business, a CrossFit box. I teach people like you," Romo replied.

That was enough for Pepe. A few days later he showed up at CrossFit Lava with his son, Joey. At 18, Joey was overweight and suffering from asthma and frequent headaches. The young man was shy and physically uncertain. The entire family regularly ate junk food and drank soda, and they were all tired of being overweight and feeling unhealthy.

Once he got them in the gym, Romo began teaching Pepe and Joey how to move. He started slowly, keeping the weights light. After class, Romo would talk to Pepe and Joey about nutrition. Soon, Pepe's wife and daughter showed up at the gym. Now a team, the family cleaned up their nutrition. They ate more fruits, vegetables and protein and stopped eating junk food and soda.

A year later, Joey doesn't have asthma or headaches. He's lost weight, but more importantly he's gained a physical confidence and found joy in movement.

"A whole family changed their lives," Romo said.

The Future

Overcoming decades of advertising influence and changing cultural habits is like turning an ocean liner—it's a slow, gradual process. Reduced soda consumption is the endgame, but first comes the groundwork of changing the public perception of

soda from a fun, harmless drink to a dangerous substance with serious health consequences.

The soda companies are not going down without a fight. In October 2015, aggressive lobbying led Mexico's Chamber of Deputies to agree to cut the soda tax in half for beverages with 5 grams or less of added sugar per 100 milliliters. This shift would have opened the door for soda companies to focus on low-calorie drinks. Public-health advocates reacted immediately, and the Senate [cancelled the tax reduction](#).

A recent study published in [The BMJ](#) evaluated 6,000 households across the country and reinforced the effectiveness of the soda tax one year after it was implemented: Sales of taxed beverages were down 12 percent and sales of untaxed beverages—mainly bottled water—were up 4 percent.

It's a drop in the bucket for a country with the highest rates of adult obesity and soda consumption, but the soda tax is a necessary first step in bringing the country back from the brink of an overwhelming health crisis.

The next step is for health and fitness professionals to influence and educate their clients and continue the conversation about the role of nutrition in overall wellness. People who walk into a CrossFit affiliate have already made a decision to change their lives for the better. Talking with members about reducing sugar and giving up soda is just another way to help them improve their health.

"Our job in the gym is part coaching the CrossFit method and the other part like a therapist," Espinosa said.

She said members often have positive emotions and memories associated with soda—the drink reminds them of family times and celebrations.

A cultural change is needed in Mexico, and the hope is that the soda tax and education efforts at the grassroots level will replace soda-filled memories with an understanding of the true dangers of sugar-sweetened beverages. ■

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ACORN SQUASH MOLCAJETE

By Nick Massie

Overview

Nick Massie of [PaleoNick.com](http://paleonick.com) takes his inspiration for this dish from the molcajete, a lava-rock mortar and pestle common in Mexican cooking. He uses acorn-squash halves for his "mortars," filling them with juicy carne asada, shrimp and tomatillo salsa and baking them until bubbly.

ingredients

- 1 lb. wild shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 2 lb. carne asada, diced
- 8 c. tomatillos, peeled and quartered
- 4 c. onions, diced
- 5 acorn squashes, halved and seeded
- 4 tbsp. Cheechako Tako spice blend
- 10 cloves garlic, smashed and minced
- ½ bunch cilantro, chopped (as garnish)
- 1 avocado, diced (as garnish)
- ½ red onion, diced (as garnish)
- 1 tsp. olive oil, plus some for drizzling
- Water, as needed
- Kosher salt, to taste

directions for the molcajete

1. Place the squashes, flesh-side up, on a foil-lined sheet pan. Drizzle with olive oil, season with Cheechako Tako and roast at 375 F for 15-20 minutes or until about half-cooked.
2. In a large bowl, mix together the carne asada and 3 tbsp. Cheechako Tako. Add the shrimp, 2 c. of onions and the tomatillo salsa (see below). Mix well.
3. When the squashes are cooked halfway, remove from the oven and fill each "molcajete" with the meat mixture.
4. Return to the oven for an additional 25 minutes or until the filling is bubbling and the squashes are soft.
5. Remove from oven, plate and garnish with avocado, cilantro and red onion. Enjoy!



directions for the tomatillo salsa

1. Add olive oil and garlic to a hot saucepan and stir until garlic is toasted.
2. Add the tomatillos and stir to coat with garlic and olive oil.
3. Cook for 3-5 minutes over high heat in an effort to caramelize the tomatillos as much as possible.
4. Add 2 c. diced onion and fold into the tomatillos.
5. Add 2 c. water, bring to a simmer and cook until tomatillos are soft.
6. Puree the mixture using a blender or immersion blender.
7. Season with kosher salt to your liking. Set aside.

These vegetable creations freeze and reheat very well. Allow them to cool, then wrap in plastic. Refrigerate for up to 5 days or freeze for up to 6 months.



THE **CrossFit** JOURNAL

PHYSICIAN: “HE’S BASICALLY CURED HIS DIABETES”

Doctor explains how 48-year-old Pete Katz used diet and CrossFit to stop taking medications for diabetes, high blood pressure and anxiety.

BY ANDRÉA MARIA CECIL



First he changed his diet. Then he started taking classes at CrossFit Painesville. Six months later, Pete Katz was off his medications.

Days before Pete Katz's visits to his primary-care physician, he would go on a diet. It was his vain attempt to nudge his health markers in the right direction.

But the short-lived change had little effect on an increasingly grim reality.

"Pete was in a common situation for many patients in that his weight was not ideal. And early on he did not have significant health problems from that," said Dr. J. Harry Isaacson, Katz's physician of roughly 15 years. Isaacson is also assistant dean for clinical education at the Cleveland Clinic Lerner College of Medicine in Ohio.

"Many people end up crossing a threshold ... where they start to accumulate different health problems from their weight."

For Katz, that threshold was a Type 2 diabetes diagnosis at the age of 41.

"That's a whole different ball game," Isaacson said.

To treat the disease, the doctor prescribed oral medication. After three years, it wasn't enough. So Isaacson prescribed an injectable drug. This was in addition to Katz's treatments for anxiety and high blood pressure.

Injecting himself with medicine and constantly monitoring his insulin put enough fear into Katz that he finally heeded the advice Isaacson had long been giving him: Change your diet and start exercising.

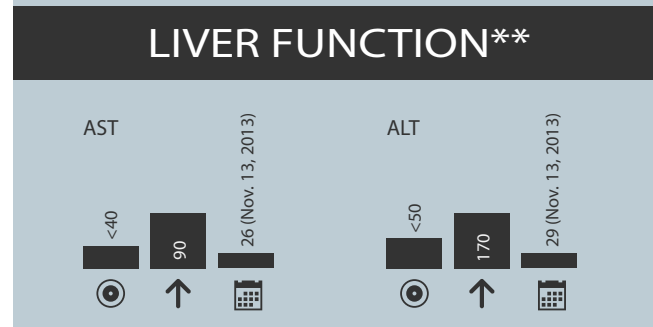
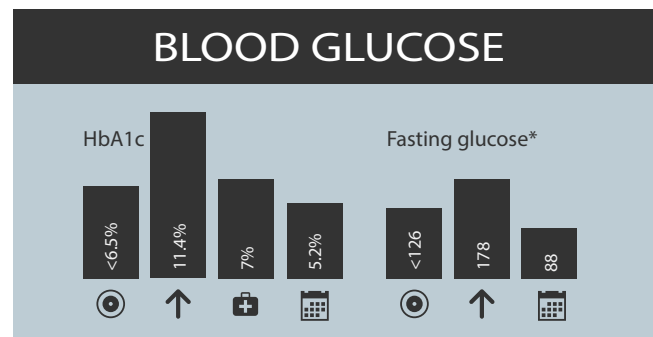
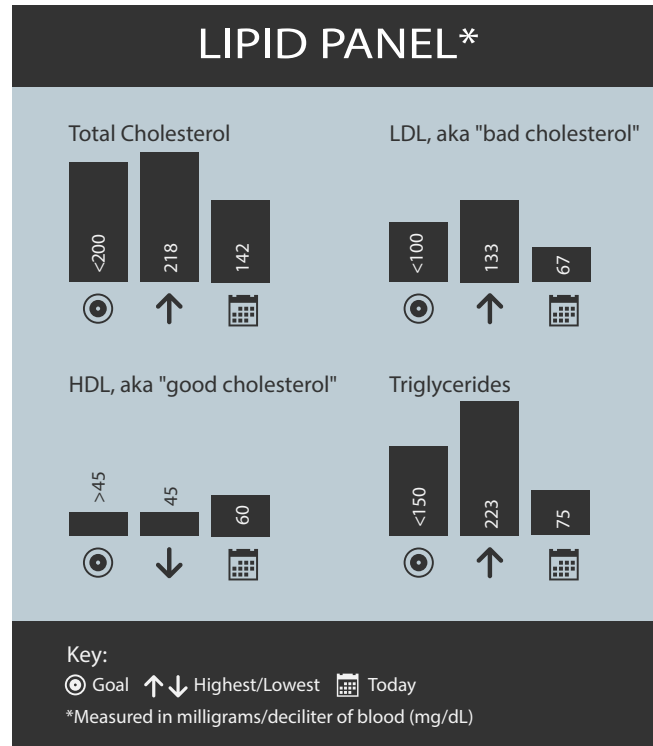
Before then, Katz had tried multiple diets and exercise programs over the years; nothing stuck. This time, he started following the Paleo Diet. About a month later—in November 2012—he had his first class at CrossFit Painesville in Ohio.

Six months after that, Katz was able to discontinue all of his medications.

"He's basically cured his diabetes with his attention to lifestyle," Isaacson said.

He added: "For someone to go off medications and control it, it's quite uncommon, actually."

The doctor called Katz's ability to affect his own health "remarkable."



Key: Goal Highest/Lowest Today While on medication

*Measured in milligrams/deciliter of blood (mg/dL) **Units per liter (U/L)

All markers were taken on June 2, 2015 unless otherwise noted.

Source: Pete Katz and Julie Foucher, medical student, Cleveland Clinic Lerner College of Medicine

Health Markers

Lipids

Cholesterol—Measurement of total cholesterol being transported in the blood.

LDL—Measurement of “bad cholesterol”; higher levels are associated with higher cardiovascular risk.

HDL—Measurement of “good cholesterol”; can transport cholesterol from body tissue and return it to the liver.

Triglycerides—Measurement of triglycerides being transported in the blood. Triglycerides store unused calories and form the major component of the body’s fat tissue.

Blood Glucose

HbA1c—Long-term measurement of glucose circulating in the blood.

Fasting glucose—Short-term measurement of glucose circulating in the blood.

Liver Function

AST—Measurement of the enzyme aspartate aminotransferase in the blood. Can be released into the blood when excess accumulation of fat in the liver injures liver cells. AST measurement is compared with ALT to determine the extent of liver damage.

ALT—Measurement of the enzyme alanine aminotransferase in the blood. Can be released into the blood when excess accumulation of fat in the liver injures liver cells. ALT measurement is compared with AST to determine the extent of liver damage.

Source: Julie Foucher, medical student, Cleveland Clinic Lerner College of Medicine



Courtesy of Pete Katz

Before changing his lifestyle, Pete Katz suffered from anxiety, high blood pressure and Type 2 diabetes.

“The big message is that if you’re faced with a health problem like this, you have an opportunity as a patient to ... have a significant impact.”

Today, Katz is working toward 15 percent body fat and is a coach at CrossFit Painesville.

Julie Foucher, a former CrossFit Games athlete and a medical student at the Lerner College, has known Katz for three years and attributed his success to the accountability he found at his affiliate.

“He has tried a lot of other programs,” she said. “One of the big reasons he was successful was the community.”

Today, 48-year-old Katz looks forward to his visits with Isaacson.

“It is fun to take those tests now.”

The last time he saw the doctor was June 4, 2015. All of his health markers were considerably improved since they were at their worst.

“It works. It’s good medicine,” Katz said.

When asked if he was referring specifically to diet or CrossFit, he replied quickly.

“Both. Like I said, it’s hard to say which it is. But I wouldn’t stop either one ever.” ■

About the Author

Andréa Maria Cecil is assistant managing editor and head writer of the CrossFit Journal.



THE **CrossFit** JOURNAL

NEW YEAR'S NEWBIES

Affiliate owners offer advice on how to handle the rush when January and February bring prospective clients with fitness goals for 2016.

BY ANDRÉA MARIA CECIL

“But I’m always honest with them that it’s a long ride. It’s not for one or two months.”

—Gabriel García Merlos



At CrossFit Delmon in Bahrain, Ahmed Al-Sharaf tries to get new members to become part of the community as soon as possible.

New year, new you—now at a discounted rate!

It’s a phrase global gyms around the world know well as they seek to draw New Year’s resolutioners who have pledged to get in shape.

Many CrossFit affiliates, however, take a different approach.

“I learned from experience I cannot lower the price ... because it attracts the wrong person,” explained Juria Maree, owner of Reebok CrossFit Enduro in Singapore and a member of CrossFit’s Seminar Staff.

The same is true at CrossFit Meek in Mexico.

“We don’t do promotion,” said affiliate owner Gabriel García Merlos. “We feel like it will attract the wrong type of people.”

Still, a new year brings new clients with goals of being more active.

For Maree and Merlos, what’s most important is ensuring new athletes are a good fit for the community.

“Honesty is the first part, but the second part is that you have to connect with that person, and that’s why the ‘why’ is so important,” Maree said.

So when new members say they’ve joined because they want to lose weight, she digs deeper: “Why do you want to lose weight?” she asks.

“You have to have the courage to have the dialogue with that person instead of telling them everything’s going to be OK—having a dialogue with that person that is heart to heart instead of just opening their wallet and (saying) ‘give me your money.’”

At CrossFit Meek, Merlos has been known to give prospective new members free trials that are as long—or as short—as they wish. This method, he explained, operates as a filter.

“Some of them figured out for themselves that CrossFit is not what they are looking for,” explained Merlos, also a Seminar Staff member. “But I’m always honest with them that it’s a long ride. It’s not for one or two months. Some of them get it, some of them don’t.”



Juria Maree of Reebok CrossFit Enduro in Singapore said she works hard to form connections with new members to ensure they're a good fit for the community.

“People really want to change, but sometimes it’s hard.”

—Gabriel García Merlos

In Bahrain, a small island country in the Persian Gulf, Ahmed Al-Sharaf sees CrossFit Delmon’s absentee members reappear at the start of the new year.

“They usually drag one or two of their friends to come in,” said the affiliate owner and Seminar Staff member. “That’s usually where we see the newer members.”

What follows is a simple definition of CrossFit, a physical assessment and then a short workout.

“So we don’t try to be too aggressive with anybody coming in,” Al-Sharaf explained.

If all goes well, he tries to integrate the new athlete into the community “as soon as I can.”

He added: “The sooner I get them integrated with everybody else, the more likely they are to commit.”

This involves simple actions, such as insisting athletes stretch together rather than separately.

At Reebok CrossFit Enduro, Maree has a handful of members who voluntarily act like Sherpas for the newbies. They check in with them after workouts, providing something as simple as a fist bump or lending an ear for whatever is on their minds.

“We might have some people leaving, but it’s highly unlikely because of the results they’re seeing,” Maree said.

High intensity might be too much for them, she continued, but the number of people who stop coming because of that is significantly smaller than the number of people who stop coming after being given a discount.

When it comes to the New Year’s crowd, the bottom line is to be honest and understanding, affiliate owners said.

“People really want to change, but sometimes it’s hard. ... We have to realize that,” Merlos said.

Also essential: having a good time.

“The most important thing for the coach with an affiliate is to (create) a fun hour ... that’s going to make it easier, way easier to stick with the training.” ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andréa Maria Cecil is assistant managing editor and head writer of the CrossFit Journal.

EXPERT REPORT?

The very best of Richard A. Kahn, author of a 60-page report supporting the American Beverage Association's lawsuit against San Francisco.

On Jan. 12, Richard A. Kahn gave a 60-page expert report as part of the American Beverage Association (ABA) lawsuit seeking to strike down a City of San Francisco ordinance that requires ads for sugar-sweetened beverages to include health-warning language.

Kahn is the former chief scientific and medical officer of the American Diabetes Association. He was also a board member for [Smart Choices](#), a now-defunct food-industry-backed group whose goal was "developing a single, trusted symbol that could help consumers make smarter food and beverage choices."

In 2009, the Smart Choices checkmark was affixed to Froot Loops and Cocoa Krispies, among other products.

On Feb. 23, attorneys for the City and County of San Francisco opposed the ABA's motion for a preliminary injunction. The filing—which included reports from professors at Harvard Medical School, the University of California-San Francisco and the University of Waterloo—specifically questioned Kahn's expertise:

"Dr. Kahn's opinions should be taken with more than a few grains of salt. His CV discloses little original research or clinical experience in the field of SSBs (sugar-sweetened beverages) and obesity or diabetes. ... His opinions are contrary to the current views of his former employer, the American Diabetes Association, which has endorsed a mandatory warning that drinking SSBs contributes to obesity, diabetes, and tooth decay, ... and which recommends that people at risk for diabetes 'avoid sugar-sweetened beverages.' ... Dr. Kahn's views on nutrition thus seem unlikely to reflect those of mainstream nutrition scientists."

A diabetes prevention program "would be a waste of resources."

—Richard A. Kahn

Sweet Deal

Corporatecrimereporter.com: How much money did Cadbury Schweppes give to the American Diabetes Association?

Richard A. Kahn: They gave us a little over a million over a three year period.

CCR: But you do take money even from candy companies.

Kahn: No, I don't think we do take money from candy companies.

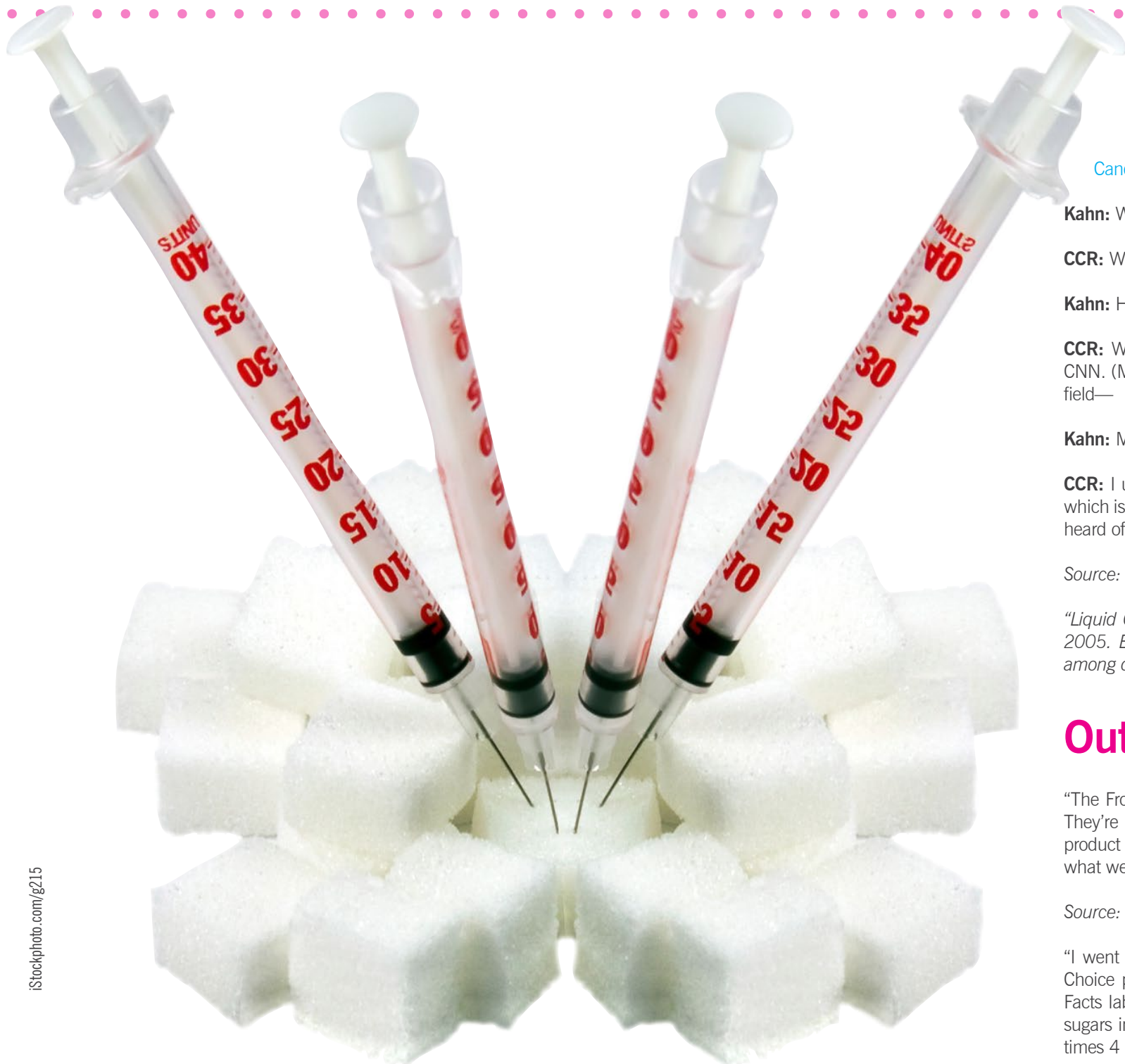
CCR: Well, Cadbury Schweppes is a candy company.

Source: [Corporatecrimereporter.com](#), 2005

"In the confectionery business, Cadbury Schweppes is the world's fourth largest supplier of chocolate and sugar confectionery."

Source: [Businesscasestudies.com](#) (In 2008, Cadbury Schweppes split into Cadbury and Dr Pepper Snapple Group.)





iStockphoto.com/g215

What Report?

CCR: You say you have never seen the report “Liquid Candy.” That indicates that you don’t want to look at it.

Kahn: Why is that an indicator?

CCR: Well, it is a famous study.

Kahn: How many people have seen it? Why is it famous?

CCR: When they released the report, it made news, it was on CNN. (Michael) Jacobson gets a ton of press. So, at least in your field—

Kahn: My field is diabetes.

CCR: I understand. Jacobson puts out a report on liquid candy, which is directly related to childhood weight gain, and you haven’t heard of it.

Source: Corporatecrimereporter.com, 2005

“Liquid Candy” was published in 1998, and it was updated in 2005. Both The New York Times and The Washington Post—among other outlets—wrote about the report.

Out of the Loop?

“The Froot Loops of yesteryear are not the Froot Loops of today. They’re actually better because the company reformulated the product so that it could get the Smart Choices (label). And that’s what we want them to do.”—Richard Kahn

Source: ABCnews.go.com, 2009

“I went grocery shopping last week and bought my first Smart Choice product: Froot Loops! ... A close look (at) the Nutrition Facts label of Froot Loops shows that it has 12 grams of added sugars in a 110-calorie serving. That’s 44% of the calories (12 times 4 calories per gram divided by 110).” —Marion Nestle

Source: “Smart Choices: 44% Sugar Calories,” 2009

In 2009, the Food and Drug Administration expressed concern that Smart Choices labels could *mislead consumers*, and the program was discontinued.

What a Waste!

Kahn: A diabetes prevention program “would be a waste of resources.”

Source: Medicalconsumers.org, 2012

“In a statement released today by Joslin Diabetes Center in Boston, physicians at the Harvard Medical School-affiliated research and clinical care center strongly disagreed with comments made recently by Richard Kahn, M.D., a former executive of the American Diabetes Association. ... In response, Osama Hamdy, M.D., Ph. D., Medical Director of the Obesity Clinical Program at Joslin Diabetes Center and Assistant Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School stated, ‘Saying that physicians should stand by and allow patients to proceed to a diagnosis of diabetes is a disservice to patients and constitutes a surrender in the face of one of the greatest threats to public health the world faces today.’”

Source: “Joslin Replies to Dr. Richard Kahn's Statement: 'Diabetes Prevention is a Waste of Resources',” 2012

“Comprehensive education appropriately delivered to someone with diabetes can make a huge difference in their long term health. We should all be shouting the praises of diabetes education from the roof tops Education is never a waste of time or money!!! Call me. I’ll bore you with our success stories.” —Kathleen Siciliano

Source: “Readers Respond to Dr. Richard Kahn's Statement: 'Diabetes Prevention is a Waste of Resources',” 2012 ■

SAN FRANCISCO TO ABA: SUGAR-DISEASE LINK IS CLEAR

City attorneys offer strong opposition to American Beverage Association motion for a preliminary injunction seeking to strike down an ordinance requiring warnings on sugary-drink ads.

BY ANDRÉA MARIA CECIL

The debate over whether sugar-sweetened beverages cause a host of metabolic derangements is akin to the one on global warming, said Harold Goldstein, executive director of the [California Center for Public Health Advocacy](#).

“You might be able to find somebody that says global warning isn’t man made ... but they probably are the only person,” he joked.

When it comes to linking sugary drinks to health concerns, scientists are no longer choosing the word “contribute,” Goldstein noted, but “cause.”

“The best scientists in the country are now clear that sugary beverages cause diabetes, obesity, tooth decay, heart disease. It’s now [met the scientific criteria](#) to show that it’s a direct cause.”

Attorneys for the City and County of San Francisco [know as much](#).

On Feb. 23, they filed a legal opposition in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California to the American Beverage Association (ABA) motion for a preliminary injunction on a [San Francisco ordinance](#). The municipal measure requires health-warning labels on ads for sugary drinks. The label reads, “WARNING: Drinking beverages with added sugar(s) contributes to obesity, diabetes, and tooth decay. This is a message from the City and County of San Francisco.” The ABA—the trade group that represents the country’s nonalcoholic beverage industry—on July 24 [filed suit](#) against San Francisco. Joining the suit are the California Retailers Association and the California State Outdoor Advertising Association. They claim the ordinance violates the U.S. Constitution’s First Amendment, which guarantees multiple freedoms, including speech.

In its opposition, the city flatly refuted the association’s claim that the ordinance defies the First Amendment.

“Because this simple warning is factual and accurate, and because it serves San Francisco’s very strong interest in promoting the health of its citizens, sugary beverage advertisers have no First Amendment right not to display it on their commercial speech, and cannot show they are likely to succeed on the merits of their claim,” reads the city’s filing.

The document also took to task [Richard A. Kahn](#), whose “expert report” was included in the ABA’s Jan. 12 motion.

In his submitted report, Kahn emphasized, “There is considerable debate over whether sugar-sweetened beverages uniquely contribute to obesity or diabetes.”

However, Kahn has “little” original or clinical experience in the field of sugar-sweetened beverages, obesity or diabetes, the city noted. And his opinions are at odds with the American Diabetes Association—

Kahn’s former employer—which has endorsed a mandatory warning that drinking sugary beverages contributes to obesity, diabetes and tooth decay.

Kahn is the former chief scientific and medical officer of the American Diabetes Association. He might be best known as the man who defended the now-defunct Smart Choices program on [ABC News](#) in September 2009. The processed-food industry underwrote and funded the initiative that gave a nutritional seal of approval to many sugar-laced products, including Kellogg’s Froot Loops.

Although there have been similar legal challenges to other government public-health initiatives, this is the first involving sugar-sweetened beverages, said Julie Ralston Aoki, staff attorney with the Minnesota-based [Public Health Law Center](#). The center was among more than 20 organizations that filed an unsolicited brief in support of San Francisco’s health-warning requirement.

“The industry plaintiffs are trying to kind of muddy the waters in terms of how you interpret scientific evidence,” Aoki said of the ABA and its lawsuit cohorts. “When you know how scientific research is done and how it should be used, the city and county are on very solid (legal) ground.”

Plus, lawmakers have proposed [similar measures](#) to warn consumers of added sugar in beverages in Baltimore, Maryland; [California](#); Hawaii; New York and Washington state.

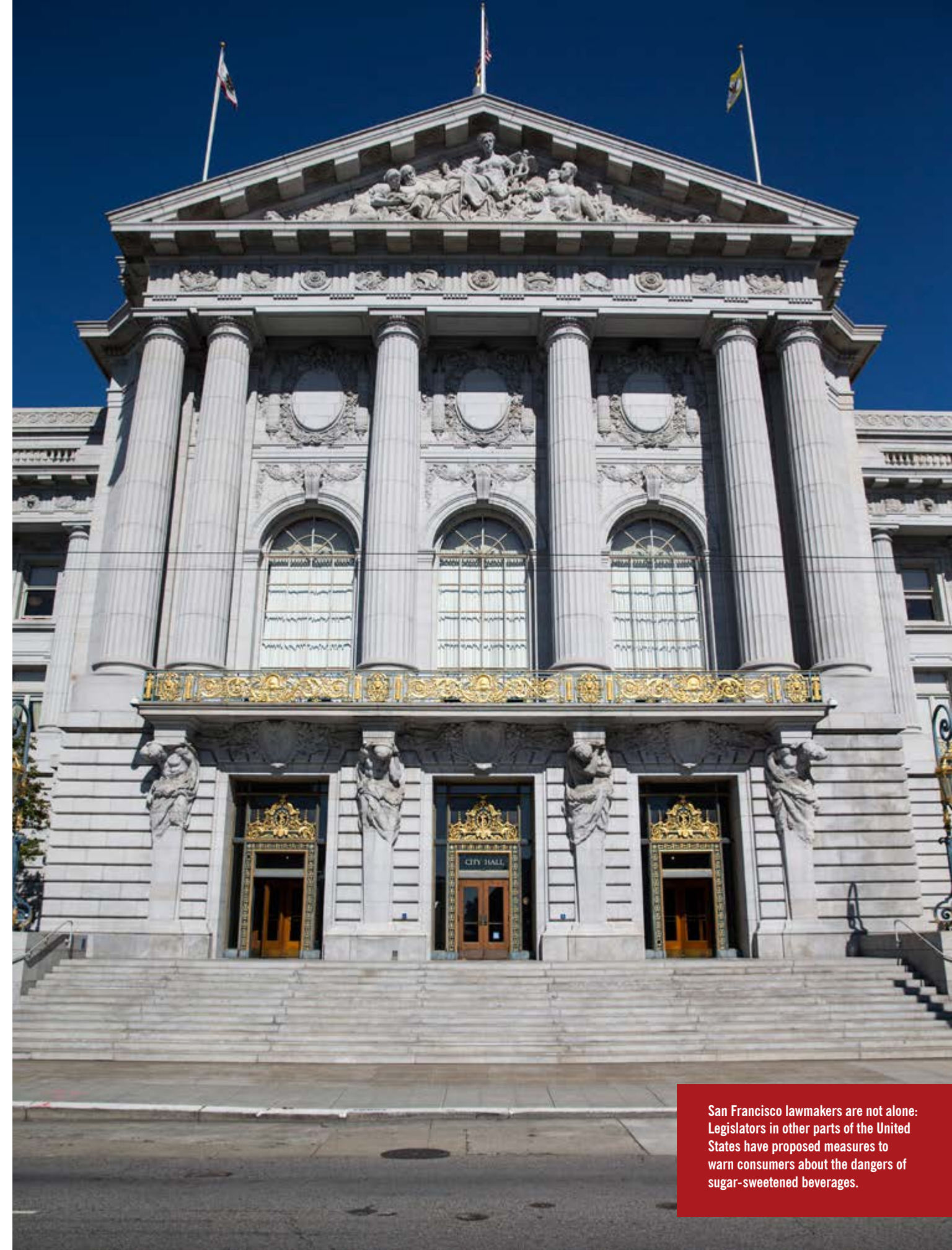
“It’s beginning,” Goldstein said.

The ABA et al. have until mid-March to reply to the city’s opposition filing.

“In sum, San Francisco’s warning is constitutional ... whether all [calories](#) are the same as Dr. Kahn would have it, or whether liquid sugar poses special risks,” the city’s attorneys wrote in their opposition filing. “Under either view, there is no serious dispute that the warning—as opposed to Plaintiffs’ straw men versions of the warning—is accurate. And there can be no question that it is valuable information for consumers to have when they decide what drink to buy.”

About the Author

Andréa Maria Cecil is assistant managing editor and head writer of the CrossFit Journal.



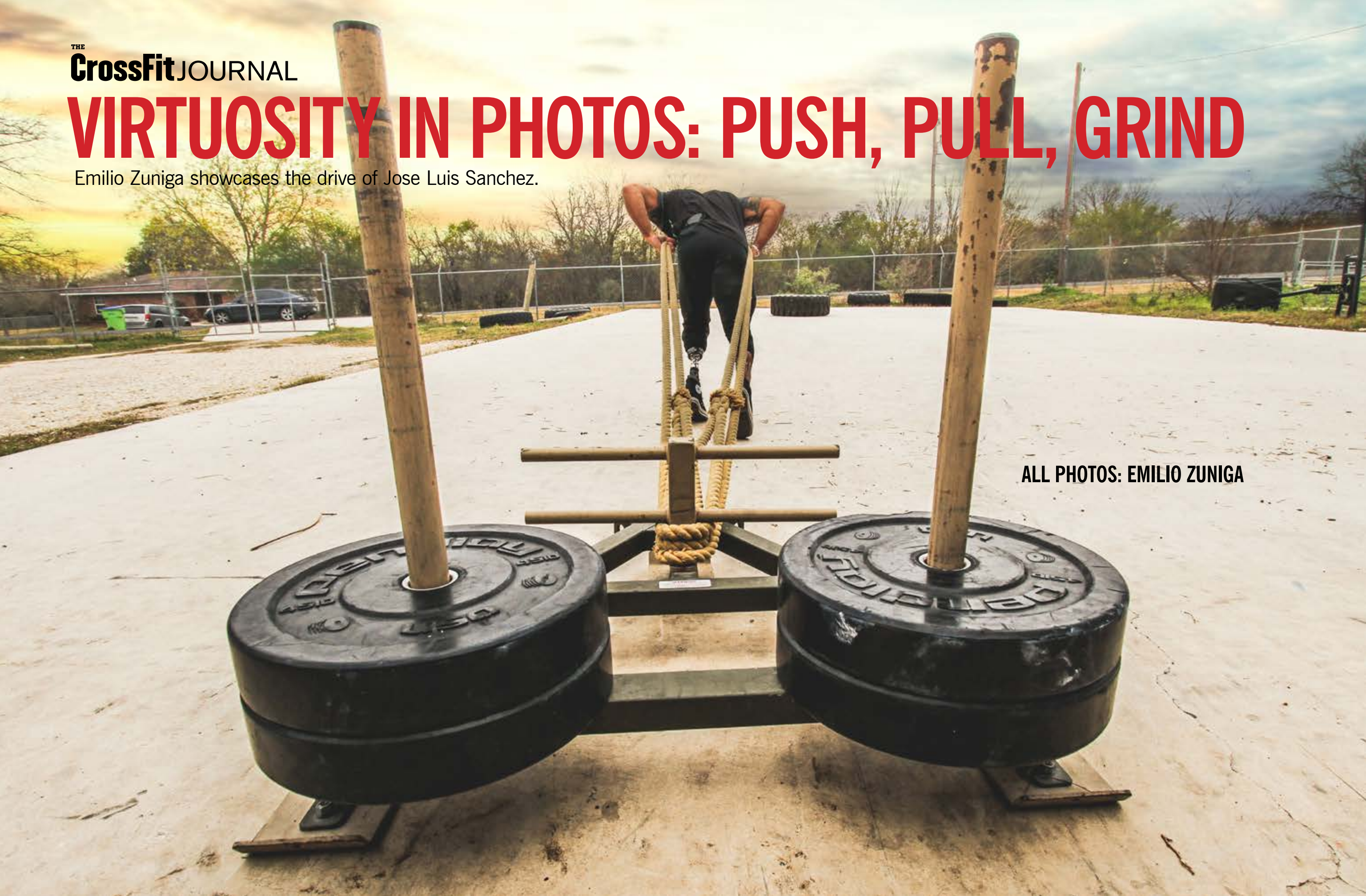
San Francisco lawmakers are not alone: Legislators in other parts of the United States have proposed measures to warn consumers about the dangers of sugar-sweetened beverages.

THE
CrossFit JOURNAL

VIRTUOSITY IN PHOTOS: PUSH, PULL, GRIND

Emilio Zuniga showcases the drive of Jose Luis Sanchez.

ALL PHOTOS: EMILIO ZUNIGA





Photographer Emilio Zuniga met Jose Luis Sanchez the day these photos were taken. “He just showed up and started working. I was at the gym at the right time that day,” Zuniga recalled. Sanchez is a retired U.S. Marine who was wounded by an IED in late 2011 in Afghanistan. “Since then I have become an [Adaptive Athlete](#) hoping to inspire and motivate others,” Sanchez wrote on his [Facebook page](#).



