

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

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WEIGHT A SECOND: PERFECTING THE JERK, PART 1

Mike Burgener offers quick tips to correct footwork in the jerk.

BY MIKE WARKENTIN

The jerk really comes down to a fraction of a second.

Time it perfectly and the bar seems to stall in the air while a lightning-fast athlete wedges himself between the steel and the ground with perfect balance. The lift looks easy and natural, full of agility and grace. It's like watching a gymnast stick the landing.

Miss the correct moment by a fraction of a second and the lift looks sluggish and ugly. It even sounds wrong, with the crisp report of a solid, confident jerk replaced by odd skidding sounds, staggered steps and the awkward crashing of bumper plates.

"It's such a meticulous lift. And the beauty of it is that you win weightlifting contests and heavy-duty contests, you win with the clean and jerk. You don't win with the snatch," said Mike Burgener of [CrossFit Weightlifting](#).

He continued: "They should always be able to jerk what they clean. A lot of times you'll see that a guy will have a humongous clean, but they'll have a shitty jerk. If you can clean 400 lb., you've got to be able to jerk 400 lb."

And that comes down to perfect timing—a product of balance and footwork.

While athletes can afford some errors at light loads, very heavy loads require a near-perfect bar path. The dip and drive must be exactly perpendicular to the floor, but it's very common for athletes to put too much weight in the forefoot or to swing the bar around the natural obstacle provided by the chin. In the set-up for the jerk, the chin should be moved out of the way, and the athlete should be flat footed with more weight on the mid-foot and back toward the heel.

Burgener watches the bar from the side and notes any deviation from a vertical path. Depth of dip is variable, but deeper dips tend to result in forward movement of the weight in the foot,

especially if the athlete hits the end range of ankle dorsiflexion in the dip. Horizontal movement of the bar is disastrous with heavy loads—it affects acceleration and timing, and it can send the bar to an unsupportable position in front of the athlete.

Burgener encourages shallower dips, though he realizes many athletes have trouble understanding how a shorter stroke can result in more speed. For those athletes—often lifters who are very strong or very good at the push press—it seems strange not to use a longer stroke to allow the legs as much time as possible to drive the bar upward. But the jerk is not a thruster, and the deeper the dip, the more joints move out of alignment, which limits speed in the drive and often negatively affects bar path.

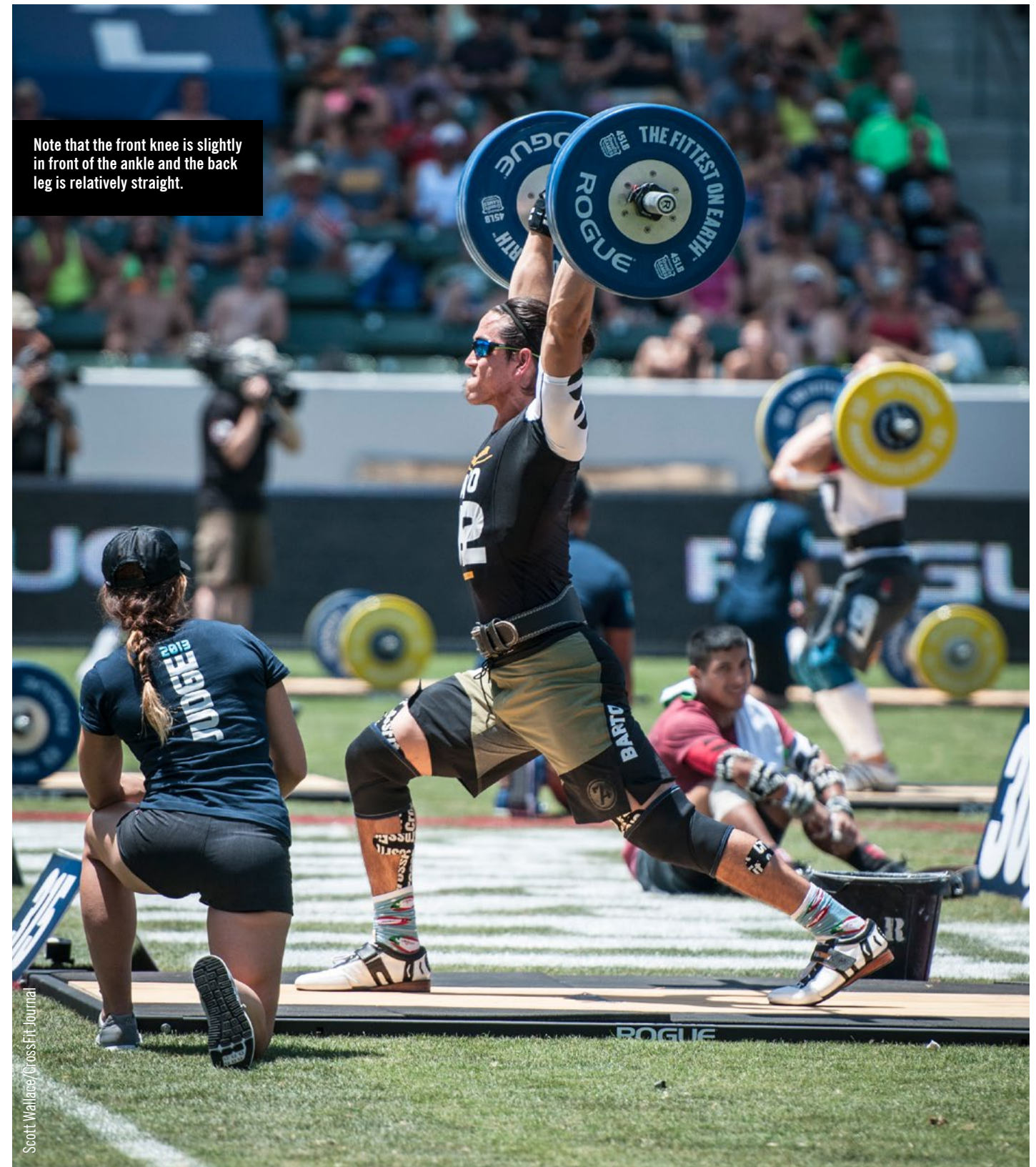
"I like to think of it as a very short, quick dip to get more explosion, but it's extremely hard to teach, and intuitively it's hard to get somebody to do that," Burgener said.

He noted that shallow dips are often second nature to those with great vertical leaping ability: They're accustomed to very quickly generating power over a short distance.

Athletes who employ the short, fast dip with hips stacked under shoulders must maintain the proper balance in the foot while ensuring the bar neither slips down nor loses contact with the shoulders. The former error will result in a loss of power transferred from the legs and torso to the bar, and it will usually send the bar forward as it leaves the shoulders. The latter error results in a bar that crashes on the athlete as he or she hits the bottom of the dip and begins to drive back up into still-descending steel.

In terms of receiving the bar, Burgener looks for five points of performance, with proper footwork essential:

1. The front foot hits flat and pushes back.
2. The front shin is vertical or angled slightly back toward the lifter.



Note that the front knee is slightly in front of the ankle and the back leg is relatively straight.

Scott Wallace/CrossFit Journal



Take a close look at the front foot: The forefoot is off the ground.



If athletes are very strong and loads are submaximal, they can often get away with footwork errors such as taking a short step or placing the back heel on the ground.

3. The chest is perpendicular to the floor with hips under shoulders.
4. The back knee is slightly bent.
5. The ball of the back foot contacts the ground and pushes forward.

“I’m pushing back with the front foot. The shin is vertical, perpendicular to the ground—that allows the chest to be perpendicular as well. That back leg bent brings my hips more under the bar, which gives me added support, and then my back foot is pushing forward so I’m wedging my body under the bar,” Burgener explained.

The footwork needs to be precise. Perfect balance in the dip and drive allows the athlete to move under a properly placed bar at exactly the right time, and perfect footwork in the receiving position ensures he or she can receive the load overhead and recover to complete the lift.

Burgener recommends the following steps to determine ideal foot placement:

1. Draw a straight line and put your toes on it.
2. Draw a line behind your heels.
3. Move your feet to their receiving width (about shoulder width).
4. Take your lead foot and place its heel just ahead of the front line. Draw a line at the midpoint of your foot, and then draw a U on that line. That is where the front heel should land.

5. Place the toe of the back foot on the back line. Draw an inverted U around the forefoot. That is where the back foot should land.

6. A coach should evaluate the final position, making any slight changes necessary to create the ideal position for that lifter.

For another way to determine the receiving position, read [“The Split Jerk: Start to Finish.”](#)

“We mark their feet according to what their anatomical properties are, and then we practice their feet in that jerk position to make sure that all five points of performance can be met,” Burgener said.

From there, Burgener said, repeated practice is needed to set patterns that will remain when a PR clean is on the shoulders.

“I’m going to drill, drill, drill the fundamentals and the basics.”

In Part 2, Coach Burgener will discuss the drive under the bar with the arms. ■

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

A female CrossFit athlete is captured in the middle of a jerk lift. She is standing on a wooden platform, holding a barbell with blue weights above her head with both arms. She is wearing a red sports top, black shorts, a black headband, and knee braces. The background shows a blurred crowd of spectators in bleachers and a blue banner with the Reebok logo.

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WEIGHT A SECOND: PERFECTING THE JERK, PART 2

Mike Burgener offers quick tips for turning push presses into jerks.

BY MIKE WARKENTIN

The jerk is a lot like Nobuyuki Kayahara’s “Spinning Dancer.”

Some see the **silhouette** spinning clockwise, while others see counter-clockwise movement. The effect of the optical illusion is so profound that the brain struggles to grasp how the opposite movement would even be possible. Look at the silhouette again and you might see that the movement has somehow reversed.

The jerk is all too similar.

Some athletes intuitively understand that the jerk is about moving the body around and under the barbell. Other athletes perceive with certainty that the bar must be driven upward. In reality, both are correct to a degree—just as the illusion spins both ways. The problem comes down to timing.

Look at almost any slow-motion heavy jerk—here’s **264 kg** courtesy of Aleksey Lovchev, doping violation notwithstanding—and it’s clear the bar is driven up and received above the height of the rack position. Watch again, and it’s clear the lifter’s body is driven downward in a lunge that’s lower than his standing height.

With reference to the Lovchev jerk linked above, pausing the video at the rack position and the receiving position reveals that the bar indeed goes upward a few inches—but the lifter moves downward to a much greater degree. Indeed, it would be pointless to use the dip-drive if it didn’t elevate the bar at least a little. But comparing distances of travel shows downward movement of the athlete is more critical than upward movement of the bar with heavy loads. And watching the jerk in **slow motion** shows that most of the upward momentum on the bar is imparted by the legs long before the arms come into play. Essentially, the leg drive buys time for the athlete’s arms to push him or her under the bar.

“You never push the bar up. That’s the point I’m trying to make. The acceleration of the drive is what keeps the bar up, and then you push your body down with fast hands,” Mike Burgener of **CrossFit Weightlifting** explained.

The principle is as follows: An athlete drives with the legs to accelerate the bar as it moves upward and off the shoulders. When the athlete’s feet leave the platform to move to the split position, it’s impossible to add significant additional upward force to the bar. Watch Lovchev’s head: It starts to descend with speed the moment his feet leave the floor to move to the split position, meaning his arms are driving him downward rather than driving the bar upward.

Imagine you’re standing in a canoe next to a large yacht. You take a pole and push hard against the yacht. The yacht might move imperceptibly, but your canoe will move several feet away from the yacht. It’s the same with the jerk.

“It’s the idea of creating acceleration through the dip and drive and then not pushing the bar up. I’m off the ground. How can I

push something up if I’m off the ground? It’s not a push press,” Burgener explained.

If athletes don’t understand the concept—and many do not—they’ll routinely alter the mechanics and timing of the jerk in an attempt to push the bar higher. At lighter weights, the lift will be successful, if ugly, but heavier loads will require a press-out to achieve lockout—illegal in weightlifting competitions. At the heaviest loads, the jerk will be impossible as the athlete simply won’t be able to generate enough height to accommodate poor mechanics and timing.

Most coaches are familiar with athletes—often very strong pressers—who see no point in dropping under a bar. These athletes fixate only on upward movement of the barbell. Their light jerks fly off their shoulders, their heavier jerks are pressed out, and their heaviest jerks fall to the floor as the athletes fail to put themselves in a position where they can get under the weight.

At its root, the error is conceptual: The athlete wants to drive the bar upward only. Mechanically, the error starts with footwork. Athletes who want to drive the bar upward treat the jerk like a push press, keeping the feet in contact with the floor far too long in an attempt to employ the arms to elevate the bar. The split under the bar is an afterthought that happens far too late. The critical moment of weightlessness missed, the athlete’s feet are now bearing too much load to allow them to come off the floor to properly jump to the split receiving position with speed.

“Most people who don’t move their feet, they’re going to be pushing the bar up more. When you move your feet, you’re driving your body down, and that’s the key,” Burgener said.

With the barbell moving straight upward—even to a very small degree—courtesy of hip drive, the lifter is unloaded for a brief second and can remove the feet from the platform to swiftly place them in the receiving position. When the feet are off the platform, the lifter has a heavy object—the bar—for use in pushing him- or herself downward. But heavy bars succumb to gravity very quickly, so the upper body must be even faster to push the athlete into the right position.

“You want them to think, ‘Hands and feet at the same time.’ ... Most times people will have too slow of hands,” Burgener said.

Athletes who snap their feet into position but are slow with the arms fall prey to several errors. Press-outs and missed lifts are common with slow hands, and sometimes bars will crash on athletes whose arms are straight, causing a re-bending of the elbows on reception. This last error is tricky: The athlete indeed beat the bar down and got the elbows locked out, but the lockout was facilitated more by the speed of the lunge than by active pressure of the hands against the bar. In extreme cases, the athlete might even be pulling the bar downward to a degree, making reception very challenging. The solution: faster hands.



Agust Sigurjonsson/CrossFit Journal

When the feet are off the ground, the athlete pushes hard against the bar to drive downward into the split receiving position.



Thomas Campitelli/CrossFit Journal

Solid lockouts are the product of great timing and fast hands.

“It’s just a timing issue,” Burgener said. “They’ve got to learn to drive the elbows out and meet the bar. ... We’ve got to teach him how to meet that jerk.”

Burgener uses the tall jerk to fix slow hands and help athletes understand they must move down rather than push the bar up.

In the tall jerk, Burgener has the athlete stand flat-footed with a very light bar held at the forehead, about a half-inch above the hairline. With no dip whatsoever, the athlete must move the feet to the split position while driving the body down with the arms. Most will want to cheat the movement by sneaking in a dip that allows them to drive the bar upward.

“They don’t want to engage the arms. What I’ll do to prevent that from happening, I’ll make them go up on their toes and do the same thing. Now it’s very, very hard for them to dip.”

With no upward movement of the bar to assist the athlete, he or she must use the arms only to drive down under the bar at the right moment. The hope is that the athlete begins to understand how fast hands and elbows drive the movement while the feet are off the ground.

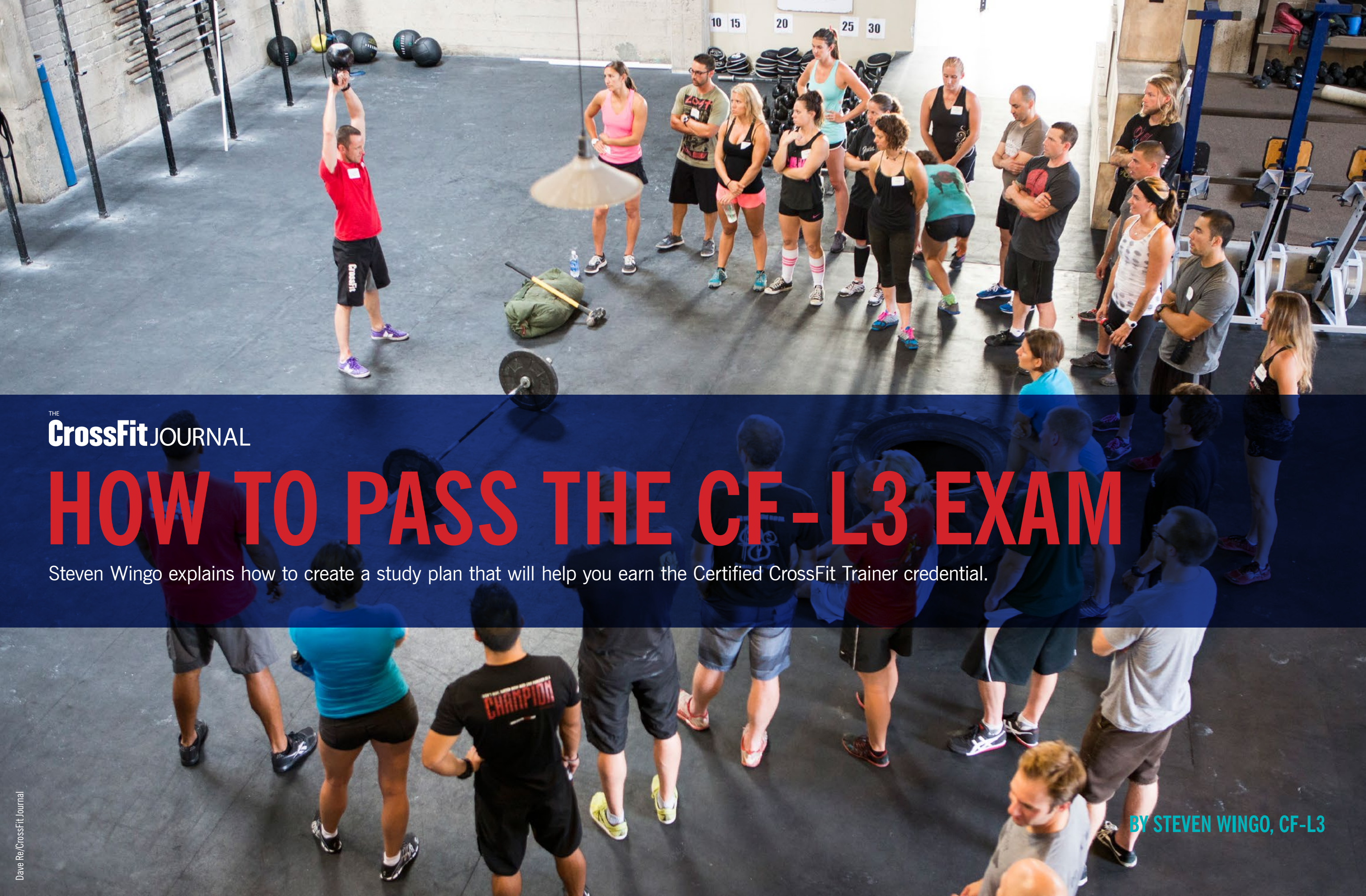
Burgener said he’s looking for the ah-ha moment in which the athlete finally begins to understand the finer points of the lift.

“It’s like, ‘Holy shit!’” ■

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



“If you can clean 400 lb., you’ve got to be able to jerk 400 lb.”
—Mike Burgener



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HOW TO PASS THE CF-L3 EXAM

Steven Wingo explains how to create a study plan that will help you earn the Certified CrossFit Trainer credential.

BY STEVEN WINGO, CF-L3

My experience is important because of who I am not.

I'm not a CrossFit Seminar Staff member or longtime coach from one of the original CrossFit affiliates. Other than the CrossFit courses I've taken, I have not been mentored on a daily basis at any of the well-known boxes teeming with master coaches. I don't have a degree in exercise physiology or kinesiology, and didn't play collegiate sports. I'm not one of the household names you see all the time in CrossFit instructional videos.

Instead, I'm a 47-year-old attorney with a full-time law practice, a wife, two college-age daughters, and a host of other time-consuming and stressful responsibilities wholly unrelated to CrossFit.

And I'm a Certified CrossFit Trainer, CF-L3.

CrossFit Training: L1 to L4

Video: "CrossFit's New Training and Certifications"

Article: "CrossFit Trainer Education and Certification: New Programs and a New Structure"

My CrossFit journey began in earnest in late August 2012, when a box opened close to my home. I was a beat-up, ailing week-end-warrior endurance athlete who showed up with virtually no knowledge of gymnastics or weightlifting. I weighed 132 lb. and could run a mean 5K, and I could ride mountain and road bikes uphill pretty damn well for a middle-aged guy. But from an overall fitness perspective I was in terrible shape.

Like many of you, I quickly fell in love with CrossFit, attending more frequently and starting to see real results. My wife then joined me because she liked the changes she saw in me both physically and mentally. Less than a year after starting, we were on the edge of our seats listening to Chuck Carswell introduce himself as flowmaster at a Level 1 Certificate Course.

In July 2014 I watched a video in which Nicole Carroll, CrossFit Director of Certification and Training, described the new Certified CrossFit Trainer (CCFT/CF-L3) and Certified CrossFit Coach (CCFC/CF-L4) credentials.

There was no hesitation or doubt regarding whether I would pursue the CCFT/CF-L3. I reviewed the requirements that morning and set my plan.

Check the [CrossFit Trainer Directory](#) and you will learn few hold the CCFT credential. That is a shame and a problem I want to help remedy. On social media and message boards, I've heard some discouraging talk that the test is too hard, isn't fair, isn't worth it, is just another way for CrossFit to make money, and so on. None of that is true. CrossFit has provided everything you need to turn yourself into an outstanding coach and earn the CCFT designation [here](#). You are going to have to bust your ass, but it is worth it.

If you have a passion for coaching or own an affiliate, you should pursue the CCFT credential. It is the counterpart to board certification in any other profession. It signifies you have moved beyond the basic requirements to engage in a profession and taken the responsibility to develop a higher level of proficiency.

To help you prepare for and pass the CF-L3 exam, I'll describe how I prepared for it and hopefully offer some guidance. Here is your blueprint.

1. Follow the Plan

Unless you are already a very experienced trainer who has worked at the collegiate or professional level, the path goes through the CrossFit Level 1 and Level 2 courses. Think of it like progressing athletes to a first muscle-up. You don't just stick them on the rings right away and watch them struggle. It is a process, and there are no shortcuts.

The same is true in building your knowledge base and skills as a coach to a level of proficiency sufficient to pass the certification exam. You can't will it to happen overnight. You have to put in the effort, plain and simple.

If you haven't checked recently, understand that CrossFit has continually improved its training materials and procedures over time and has done so through years of experience and feedback. The materials are now outstanding, so if you already have the CF-L1 credential, go back and study the materials again to get ready for the Level 2. If you don't have a Level 1 certificate, that will be your starting point. Once you have the credential, coach for a substantial period of time and learn on the job before attending the Level 2. This is part of the process. Your experience at the Level 2 will be far more rewarding with 500 or more hours of coaching under your belt, and CrossFit recommends candidates complete the Online Scaling Course and acquire at least six months of coaching experience before attending the Level 2.

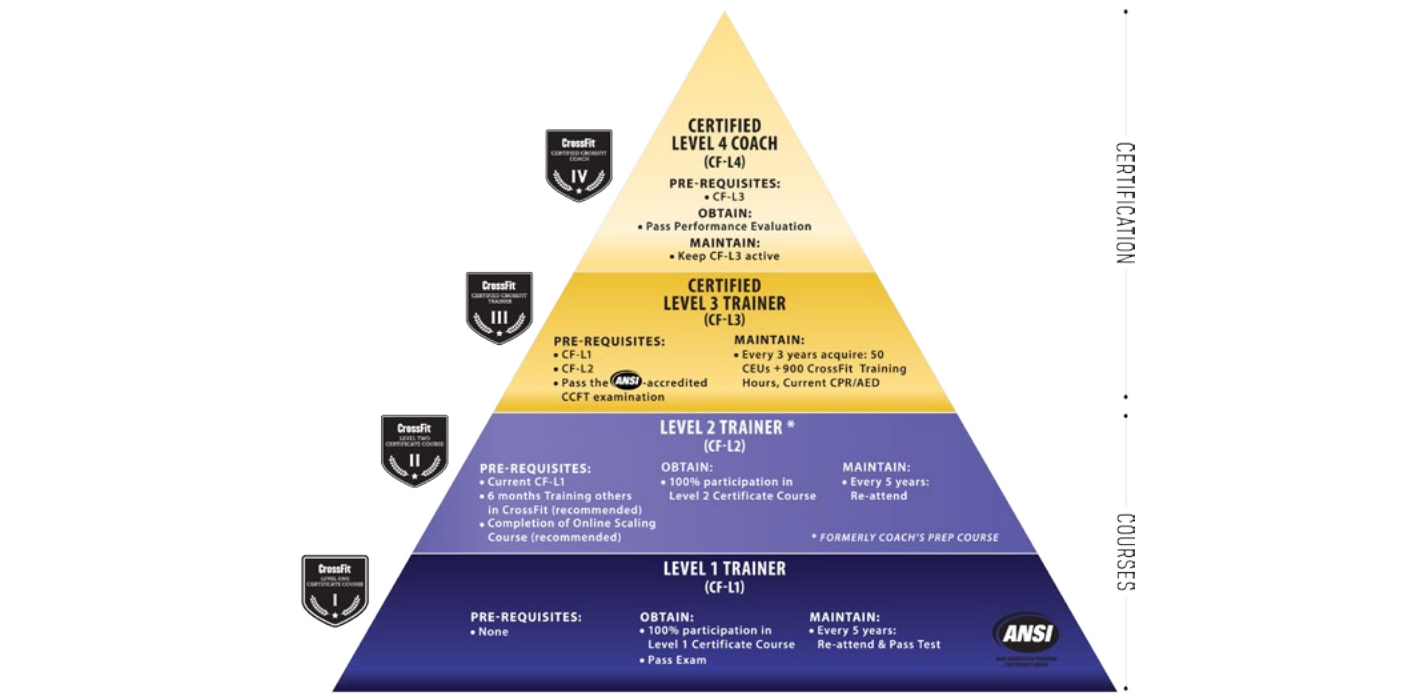
Once you have a Level 2 certificate, don't attempt the CF-L3 test right away unless you've been training athletes for multiple years. Get your butt back to the box to work on the skills you learned at the Level 2.

Those who follow the progressions to prepare for the CF-L3 exam will build the base needed for success, just as an athlete who follows the mechanics-consistency-intensity progression is set up for success.

2. Study the Reference Materials

I've read comments from a discouraged coach who took the test and did not pass even though that coach asserted to have read each article and watched each video twice. Reading or watching is not enough. You must study.

This is where past experience helped me—I spent four years in



The CrossFit Training path includes both certificate courses and certifications.



At CrossFit Level 1 and Level 2 certificate courses, Seminar Staff coaches ensure trainers acquire the tools they need to improve fitness.



Develop your coach's eye by watching movement and reviewing the points of performance. Spot errors and create a strategy for correcting them.



Technical knowledge isn't enough. Great trainers are also masters of group management who inspire their clients daily.

college and three years in law school, and I had to study for the bar exam and many other tests. If you have a degree or degrees, particularly in a rigorous program, you know how to study. Those who haven't had that experience might be surprised just how much work is required when really studying.

What does it look like to really study? Download every written article referenced in the [Study Material Reference List](#), including the “[CrossFit Level 1 Training Guide](#)” and the “[Level 2 Training Guide and Workbook](#).” You can print them or read and highlight the PDF documents on the computer.

Reading or watching the reference materials is not enough. You must study them.

You might be shocked at the volume of material—more than 100 written articles. You are not going to read and study them in a fortnight.

You should also save a hard copy of the Study Material Reference List so you can systematically make your way through all the videos.

Once you have gathered and organized the materials, my recommendation is to peruse every article—even those read previously—and underline key passages. I did this, then went back and reviewed every article a second time, always striving for a greater understanding of the material. In this pass I created typewritten notes of the critical points in each article.

I watched every single video—most of them multiple times—and created typed notes for those videos that addressed movements or issues for which I needed reminders. Don't fool yourself into thinking you can skip supposedly “easy” things such as a foundational movement. If you think any movement is easy, treat that as a warning sign that you are missing something.

Admittedly this is a lot of work. It took me about eight months, and I had to make the time to study. My routine was to read and underline articles every day at lunch, some weekday evenings and on weekends. I watched videos primarily at home on the weekends. When it came time for my final preparation after I had scheduled my exam date, I went through and read the underlined portions of the articles again and reviewed my own typewritten notes multiple times.

This is what it looks like to study. If you are a genius or already a master trainer, maybe just reading everything will be enough. But 98 percent of us will need to study the materials as I did, not

just read and watch them.

3. The Six + Eight Rule

There is no Six + Eight Rule in CrossFit. I made this up as your most critical study tool. I believe the Six + Eight rule should always be at the top of your mind in your coaching, your development as a coach and your preparation for the CF-L3 exam, at least until it becomes second nature.

The Six: teaching, seeing, correcting, group management, presence and attitude, demonstration.

The Eight: midline stabilization, core-to-extremity movement, balance about the frontal plain, posterior-chain engagement, sound hip function, active shoulders, full range of motion about a joint, effective stance and/or grip.

These six critical areas of competency and eight common themes of quality functional movement serve as the crux of the “Level 2 Training Guide and Workbook.” They are also introduced as key parts of the “Level 1 Training Guide” and are the heart and soul of improving as a coach. These elements should serve as your guideposts when studying for the exam—and in your everyday efforts as a coach.

Merely memorizing the Six + Eight and their exact definitions will get you nowhere. Effective coaching—and passing the exam—is mostly about applying the Six + Eight in real coaching situations. Some pure memorization is necessary, but being able to apply the Six + Eight to coaching situations is the real key.

With every movement you study, athlete you coach, article you read and video you watch, keep the Six + Eight top of mind. You must be able to teach each movement—meaning clearly explain all the points of performance. You must be able to see movement faults—any violations of the Eight—and understand why they are faults. You must be able to correct faults in many simple but effective ways. You must be able to demonstrate movement or at least see and understand movement well enough to know whom to use as your example. You need to develop the presence and attitude to accomplish all this in an engaging, positive manner and be able to organize a class and group of athletes so you can keep them engaged and see all of them. In everything you do, always consider the Six + Eight.

How does this apply in your studying and coaching? Let's take one example movement: the push-up. Where should an athlete's hands be positioned? Should the athlete apply any forces with the arms, hands or fingers to create a safe and solid base for pushing? Where should the elbows be positioned throughout the movement? What does a good hollow body really look like? What part of the body should touch the deck first? What specifically constitutes full range of motion at the finish position? How do you scale down or up?

When you can answer all these questions, and when you can see and correct subtle faults when working with an athlete, you are developing the depth of understanding and attention to detail it takes to be a superior coach who can pass the CF-L3 exam.

That is an example with one movement. Your task is to develop a similar depth of understanding for every movement you come across in the reference materials.

4. Strive for Excellence Every Day

Something became obvious to me during the Level 2 seminar: If you can't spot a fault or an area for improvement for virtually every movement for every athlete at your box, you must get better at seeing movement. And you are probably not yet ready for the CF-L3 exam.

The focus of the weekend was learning to spot movement faults and cue athletes to correct those faults, and even though all attendees at the Level 2 were Level 1 trainers, most with substantial experience as athletes and coaches, the Seminar Staff trainers were able to pick our movement apart. Most of us had trouble doing so at that stage of our development. Obvious faults were not apparent when watching our fellow coaches. But the staff trainers saw subtle—and not so subtle—faults all over the place and cued every single one of us. It was a humbling wake-up call.

If you can't spot a fault or an area for improvement for virtually every movement for every athlete at your box, you must get better at seeing movement.

When preparing for the CF-L3 exam, I made an effort to use what I was learning about the finer points of movement every single day at the box. My focus was trying to improve my ability to see movement faults. Assessing movement is now so ingrained in me that I can no longer watch any athlete without automatically critiquing his or her movement.

If you don't see something that can be improved when watching an athlete, ask yourself what you're missing. Think through the eight themes of quality functional movement. Use the tools acquired at the Level 2 to help your athletes and improve as a

coach. When you can walk by every athlete and identify a cue to help each one, you are approaching readiness for the test.

5. Assess Your Own Weaknesses

Although I had no formal training, I came to CrossFit with extensive knowledge of exercise physiology and nutrition/dietary issues. As a runner and mountain biker/cyclist, I read dozens of books on training and nutrition, so these subjects were clear strengths for me. I did not take them for granted and made sure to read and watch all the related reference materials, but I knew I didn't need to devote extra time to those areas.

My weakness was clear: seeing movement faults. It is damn hard to see subtle faults in dynamic movement, and I'd suggest seeing movement faults will be a critical area for most taking the CF-L3 test due to the simple fact that it takes hours upon hours of watching and coaching to develop a great eye. So that is where I spent my time: studying and working on my ability to see movement.

For all my reading, underlining and note taking, my most important preparation was just flat-out busting my ass at the box trying to become a better coach. For a long time I felt I could never develop the expertise of Seminar Staff trainers. I'm still not at their level. But with work, conscious effort every day at the box, video study, and constant focus on the Six + Eight with every movement you study and coach, you can develop a great coaching eye and become a damn-good CrossFit coach—good enough to become a CCFT.

One way to address your identified weaknesses is to attend an appropriate CrossFit specialty course. I had put the Weightlifting and the Gymnastics courses on my short list after the Level 2 and was fortunate enough to have the latter come up just an hour's drive from my home, so I signed up. What a stroke of luck that turned out to be.

Going in, I had no clue just how much the course would help me learn to understand and spot very subtle faults in movement. Back at the box, I began coaching a twice-weekly gymnastics class featuring basic CrossFit body-weight movements. My coaching eye started to really come alive.

I doubt I would have benefitted from the course so much if I had taken it three weeks after the Level 1, but combined with the work and struggle I had put in up to that point, the Gymnastics Trainer Course proved critical for me. My trainers from the gymnastics course, Chuck Bennington and Sean Velas, received a heartfelt thank-you message the morning after I passed the CF-L3 exam.

Actively look for opportunities—any opportunity—to address your weaknesses.



Once a flaw has been spotted, great trainers use a combination of visual, verbal and tactile cues to correct it.



Elite coaches work to improve their presence and attitude, knowing they have the ability to motivate athletes to accomplish great things.



Learning never stops: Watch other coaches and athletes to see what they can teach you.



Strive for excellence in every class. Did your athletes improve?



Steven Wingo, CF-L3.

6. Be Passionate About Learning

Those who are likely to be successful with the CF-L3 exam are the ones who have a passion for learning and coaching. There is a reason Glassman incorporates an excellence-based business model directly into CrossFit’s foundational materials and methodology.

If his videos on the pursuit of excellence and his 2005 CrossFit Journal article “[Fundamentals, Virtuosity and Mastery: An Open Letter to CrossFit Trainers](#)” strike a chord with you, you’ve probably got what it takes to turn yourself into a great trainer. If you are not interested in learning, in pursuing excellence, in being the absolute best you can be, I suggest you are missing some of the most critical lessons CrossFit teaches us and are not likely to be successful with the certification exam.

The bottom line is there are tens of thousands of you out there with the necessary passion, and based on that passion, there should be many, many more CF-L3s than we currently see.

Dedicate, or rededicate, yourself to excellence in your coaching journey.

How do you strive for excellence and virtuosity on a day-to-day basis? For me, in addition to busting my ass at the box, striving for excellence has always meant trying to learn and absorb everything I can. Shortly after taking up CrossFit and falling in love with it, my morning ritual became checking out [CrossFit.com](#) to review the workout of the day and see what new CrossFit Journal article/video/news link was up.

I researched movement and coaching videos to learn about movements giving me trouble, and I read books written by CrossFit specialty gurus and experts outside CrossFit. Studying CrossFit, different programming and human movement became a passion—something fun and rewarding.

Become passionate about improving your own air squat and how well you coach the air squat. Really work on it. Remember Glassman’s advice: “Training will improve, clients will advance faster, and you will appear more experienced and professional and garner more respect if you simply recommit to the basics.”

Don’t just recommit to the basics—become passionate about them, too.

Coaching CrossFit has become a source of fulfillment and meaning for me, and I have developed a passion for coaching as a result of what I have seen in CrossFit. If you have that passion, ask yourself if you want to be an average coach or an excellent one.

Dedicate, or rededicate, yourself to excellence in your coaching journey—and in everything else you do.

7. Enjoy the Process

When I first signed up for the CF-L3 test, I had a very strong fear of failure. That was a good thing. I did not take the test lightly, and I studied my ass off. But when it finally came time to schedule my exam and take it, my outlook had changed dramatically. Having put in the time, I went to the exam with the satisfaction and comfort of knowing I was a far better coach than when I first began preparing.

In most respects, my mission had already been accomplished. Sure, I very much wanted that passing score and to see the CCFT/CF-L3 designation by my name. That was still important, but it was no longer so important. I had put in the work and knew the journey had been worth it.

Conclusion

There is one point where I disagree with Carroll’s comments in that initial video on the new CrossFit Training hierarchy. She said CrossFit put the path there not as a necessity but so that those who wanted to demonstrate a higher credential could do so.

Having gone through the process, I would say all coaches should in fact pursue the CCFT/CF-L3. The reason is that doing so is the perfect road map in your endeavor to strive for excellence as a coach. CrossFit should expect nothing less from each and every one of us. More importantly, as CrossFit coaches, we should expect nothing less from ourselves.

Fortunately, things worked out for me when I sat for the exam. If you have the passion and are willing to put in the work and use my suggested blueprint as a guide, I believe it will work out for you, too. ■

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THE
CrossFit JOURNAL

A SIP BECOMES A DRAG

The anti-sugary-drink movement grows as an increasing number of lawmakers propose measures similar to those used to curb smoking.

BY ANDRÉA MARIA CECIL

San Francisco is currently fighting the American Beverage Association in court to ensure billboards like this feature warning labels in the future.



Soda is going the way of the cigarette.

The number of cities, states and countries considering a legislative measure targeting sugar-sweetened beverages is growing. From taxes to health-warning labels, the efforts mimic the American anti-tobacco movement that began in the 1950s. And while soda and cigarettes aren't identical, comparing the two is an easy task.

"They're not equivalent, but they share similarities in that neither of them are necessary, and both of them have been marketed heavily and (disproportionately) to minority populations," said Michael Long, assistant professor in the Department of Prevention and Community Health at The George Washington University's Milken Institute School of Public Health.

Nearly 20 jurisdictions worldwide levy a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) in some way, shape or form—or have recently passed tax legislation, such as the U.K. Of these places, Mexico might be the most well known. It implemented its so-called soda tax on Jan. 1, 2014, in an effort to curb its soaring rates of overweight, obesity and diabetes, among the highest in the world.

But despite all the publicity, Mexico wasn't the first jurisdiction to pass an SSB tax. Finland, France, French Polynesia, Hungary, Mauritius, Norway, Samoa and Tonga all had a form of such a tax before 2014. And following Mexico's lead were a host of other places, including Berkeley, California, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

"There's movement throughout the world to do soda taxes," said political strategist Larry Tramutola, based in Oakland, California.

Tramutola helped Berkeley pass its tax and is helping San Francisco renew its efforts after the city failed to pass such a tariff in the past.

“There’s movement throughout the world to do soda taxes.”
—Larry Tramutola

Policy makers also have proposed health-warning labels for SSBs, though in far fewer numbers than those who have proposed taxes. Both approaches bring similar ire from the beverage industry. San Francisco is in the midst of a year-old lawsuit brought by the American Beverage Association over its ordinance requiring warning labels on ads for sugar-sweetened beverages: "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."

At the state level, California Sen. Bill Monning has introduced legislation three times that would have required labels directly on the beverage. Each attempt failed. He's vowed to continue pursuing the effort, the first of its kind in the country. Both New York state and Baltimore, Maryland, have modeled similar proposals on Monning's bill.

"First off, I don't think this issue goes away. I just don't see that," Tramutola said. "More and more people ... are going to look at this as something that should be done and discussed. The whole dialogue around this is worth all the effort (being) put into it."

History Foretold

As cigarette smoking in the U.S. increased throughout the 1950s, so did lung cancer. Per capita consumption of cigarettes skyrocketed from 54 in 1900 to 4,345 in 1963, according to the American Cancer Society.

"Lung cancer, a rare tumor in 1900, would be the most common cancer diagnosed in American men by 1950," wrote four doctors led by American Cancer Society Chief Medical Officer Otis W. Brawley in a 2013 commentary published in CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians.

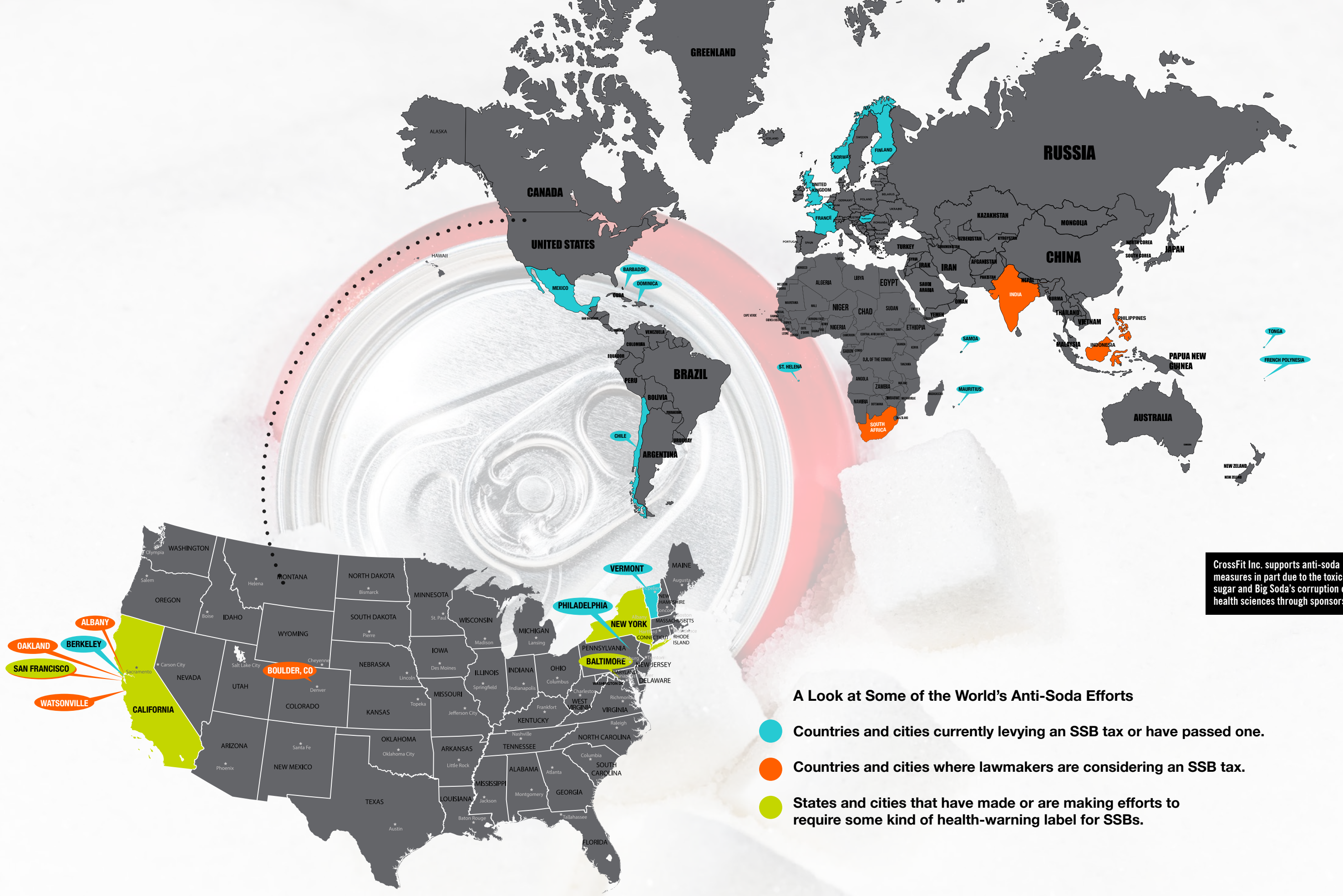
Small-scale studies conducted from the late 1920s through the late 1940s suggested there might be a link between smoking cigarettes and lung cancer but did not show causation. Larger-scale studies published in the 1950s did the same. It wasn't until 1952 that two scientists working for the American Cancer Society embarked on a study in which they tracked the smoking habits of 187,766 men aged 50 to 69 in 10 states.

After following the men for 20 months, Drs. E. Cuyler Hammond and Daniel Horn published their findings in 1954 in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

"We are of the opinion that the associations found between regular cigarette smoking and death rates from diseases of the coronary arteries and between regular cigarette smoking and death rates from lung cancer reflect cause and effect relationships," the scientists concluded in "The Relationship Between Human Smoking Habits and Death Rates."

Five years later, Hammond went on to lead another study on the same topic, this time including more than 1 million men and women in 25 states. The "Cancer Prevention Study" provided further evidence that regular cigarette smoking caused lung cancer and is also credited with being a major contributor to the first "Surgeon General's Report on Smoking and Health," published in 1964.

The report led to policy changes, including the surgeon general's warning label on tobacco products, as well as taxes. In the years that followed, nonprofit organizations and government agencies have commissioned anti-smoking campaigns that manifested



CrossFit Inc. supports anti-soda measures in part due to the toxicity of sugar and Big Soda's corruption of the health sciences through sponsorship.



“There is very clear evidence in the literature that consuming SSBs increases your risk of excessive weight gain.” —Michael Long

themselves across various media platforms.

“With tobacco, we had multiple interventions,” said Jim O’Hara, director of health promotion policy at the Center for Science in the Public Interest, based in Washington, D.C. “There were obviously taxes, there were warning labels, there were efforts at limiting billboard placements. There (was) the focus on reducing the industry’s uses of trinkets and trash for marketing.”

As the anti-SSB movement expands further, more interventions will come into the fray, he added.

And what’s important to remember is that reducing cigarette and tobacco consumption was an endeavor more akin to a marathon than a sprint, noted Ian McLaughlin, senior staff attorney and program director at Oakland-based ChangeLab Solutions.

“That didn’t happen overnight. That did take time,” he said. “I think we’re developing that same evidence right now (for sugary drinks).”

ChangeLab focuses on law and policy surrounding multiple initiatives, including prevention of childhood obesity and tobacco control. The organization worked with Monning to create the legislation calling for warning labels on sugary drinks in California.

“What mattered most for tobacco control was the taxes, and that same thing is likely to be true for SSBs,” said Long, the assistant professor at The George Washington University. “A warning label allows (for the creation of) a broader campaign.”

Laying Groundwork

The scientific evidence that sugary drinks, in particular, rapidly increase overweight, obesity, diabetes and a whole host of other metabolic derangements has been mounting to a near fever pitch.

“There is very clear evidence in the literature that consuming SSBs increases your risk of excessive weight gain and cardiovascular diseases,” Long said.

However, unlike tobacco, there is no surgeon general’s warning for sugary drinks.

“A lot of this foundational work is going on right now,” McLaughlin said.

That includes media campaigns, public-education efforts, removing sugary drinks from schools and children’s menus at fast-food restaurants, and encouraging hospital staff to talk with patients about the dangers of flooding their organs with liquid sugar.

“The next wave of policies—warning labels—just builds upon that,” McLaughlin continued.

Already, voters in California have overwhelmingly said they sup-

port warning labels on sugary drinks. A recent statewide poll found 78 percent of them support such a label—a slight increase from 2014, when 74 percent of California voters supported such a measure.

And in January the journal *Pediatrics* published research saying warning labels on SSBs improved parents’ understanding of the harmful health effects associated with over-consuming them and “may reduce parents’ purchase of (sugar-sweetened beverages) for their children.”

Still, taxes are the go-to proposal for lawmakers worldwide. “Taxes tend to make this conversation about sugar-sweetened beverages become much bigger,” Tramutola noted.

Why?

It’s easier to get people riled up about stickin’ it to Big Soda where it hurts most: the bottom line.

“Everybody feels that the warning-label thing is good and it should be done—and that’s not to say that the industry won’t fight it—but in some ways it’s harder to get people excited about a warning label as opposed to trying to tax the soda industry,” Tramutola said.

Plus, the beverage industry’s public disdain for taxes warms the hearts of public-health advocates everywhere.

“Nothing generates opposition from the soda industry like soda taxes. It really does. They go ballistic over it.”
—Larry Tramutola

“Nothing generates opposition from the soda industry like soda taxes. It really does. They go ballistic over it. So when they go ballistic, it adds fuel to the fire to be able to talk to people about how much sugar there is in Cola-Cola or Gatorade or soft drinks,” Tramutola said. “The money generated can be used to do educational programs. ... That just drives the (beverage) industry crazy.”

This is the approach taken by Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney, who proposed a tax on sugary drinks without ever framing it as a public-health issue. Instead, the money would be used for popular city projects, he said. The American Beverage Association **has threatened legal action.**

Still, those doing work surrounding the policy all said the same thing: Health-warning labels on SSBs are an inevitability.

Warning labels are only affixed to things that are dangerous: al-

iStockphoto.com/Stephanie Phillips

cohol, cigarettes, rat poison.

For his part, CrossFit Inc. Founder and CEO Greg Glassman’s **vigorous support for such a label** goes deep. It’s about the toxicity of sugar, Big Soda’s corruption of the health sciences and its targeting of CrossFit affiliates by funding organizations that seek legislation to make CrossFit training illegal.

“I believe that a warning label will address all three of my concerns quite magically.”

The Fight Continues

Regardless of the proposal, the American Beverage Association and its members—including The Coca-Cola Co. and PepsiCo Inc.—have the money and marketing savvy to fight it.

Between 2009 and 2015, Big Soda spent US\$106 million to defeat public-health initiatives at the local, state and federal levels, according to **“Big Soda vs. Public Health,”** a report published by the Center for Science in the Public Interest.

Not only has it sued San Francisco, threatened legal action against Philadelphia and **called the U.K.’s tax a “distraction”** as the nation prepares to leave the European Union, but it has also taken to dubbing any sugary drink tax a “grocery tax” and stopping just short of calling it an action of a communist dictatorship.

“Well, ya know, I’ve never considered soda a grocery,” Tramutola said sarcastically.

Such tactics, he continued, demonstrate the beverage industry is losing this fight.

“When they start defending poor people, you know we got them on the run,” Tramutola said.

That’s because Big Soda has disproportionately marketed to minorities in low-income neighborhoods, as well as in Third World countries with scarce potable water.

Lower-income black and Hispanic neighborhoods were home to more outdoor advertisements for SSBs than lower-income white and higher-income neighborhoods in 2009, **according to the Center for Science in the Public Interest.** In 2013, Hispanic youth were 93 percent more likely to visit beverage-company

websites when compared with all youth, according to the center.

“We know that 86 percent of the growth through 2020 for Coca-Cola’s youth-target market will come from multicultural consumers, especially Hispanic, and focusing on this segment is critical to the company’s future growth,” Bea Perez, then-chief marketing officer for The Coca-Cola Co., **was quoted as saying in 2011.**

Yet, for all Big Soda’s money and influence—and despite its claims—the anti-soda movement is working.

Mexico’s 10 percent tax on sugary drinks was linked with an overall 12 percent reduction in sales and a 4 percent increase in purchases of untaxed beverages one year after implementation, according to **“Beverage Purchases From Stores in Mexico Under the Excise Tax on Sugar Sweetened Beverages: Observational Study,”** published in January in The BMJ.

“Given that the tax on sugar sweetened beverages is approximately 10% of 2013 prices, the reduction of more than 10% in the last quarter of 2014 shows that the demand was price elastic (at least in that quarter), and that even a relatively small tax can make some difference in the demand for beverages (with potential substitution to plain bottled waters),” the authors wrote.

Last year, researchers with the Childhood Obesity Intervention Cost Effectiveness Study (CHOICE) at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health **found** that an excise tax on sugary drinks was among three interventions that would “more than pay for themselves by reducing healthcare costs related to obesity.” The study, **“Three Interventions That Reduce Childhood Obesity Are Projected to Save More Than They Cost to Implement,”** was published in the journal Health Affairs.

Meanwhile, in Baltimore, city leaders are pushing for legislation requiring stores that sell sugary drinks to post health warnings.

“It is the easiest thing we can do with public health,” said Dr. Leana Wen, Charm City’s health commissioner.

And while the beverage association—and its members—has billions of dollars to spend on lobbying lawmakers; marketing to minorities, low-income neighborhoods and children; and on creating faux grassroots groups to counter such efforts, Wen said she feels optimistic.

“There is ample evidence, hundreds of studies that demonstrate the problem of childhood obesity right here in Baltimore City,” she said.

Wen continued: “We hope that legislators will stick with us, stick with the side of the community.”

In its effort to fight passage of Baltimore’s proposal, the beverage industry has claimed posting sugary-drink health warnings in stores will drive out jobs and hurt businesses, Wen said.

It’s all rubbish, she noted.

If customers enter a store to buy a drink because they’re thirsty, those people are not going to change their minds about being thirsty just because they see a health warning posted, Wen emphasized.

“They will choose something else.”

Wen added: “We’re not asking for much. We just want unbiased, evidence-based information to be present at the point of sale so it empowers the consumer, empowers parents to make the best decision for themselves.” ■

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

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LOOK YOUR PERSONAL BEST

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



BY HILARY ACHAUER



Jamie Hagiya placed 18th at the 2016 Reebok CrossFit Games—despite proudly not having six-pack abs.

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.

A low point was when the workout involved overhead squats and snatches. Godfrey-Canada had 2.5-lb. weights on the 35-lb. barbell, and the coach told her to take those off. Then, after watching her perform a few reps, he told her it would be a good idea for her to switch to a PVC pipe.

“I understand it’s a progression and a personal journey, but that threw me off. I’m the only person in here doing overhead squats and snatches with the PVC pipe. I can’t even use the training bar,” she said.

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

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 com-

Jamie Hagiya's fans at the California Regional, where the 31-year-old athlete placed fifth.





Because of her CrossFit experience, 44-year-old April Zusman said she cares more about performance than aesthetics.

munity. That's when my goals shifted. I made a commitment to continue to go on a more regular basis," Godfrey-Canada said.

Now, more than a year later, Godfrey-Canada can deadlift 240 lb. and do three bar muscle-ups in a row.

Inspired by the community and the excitement of achieving new goals, Godfrey-Canada spends so much time in the gym that members often think she works there. She doesn't stay after class and cheer on the other members because she's in pursuit of a better bikini body. She stays for other reasons.

"I just love being here," she said about StrengthRx, "I've built such a community."

This isn't to say Godfrey-Canada has cast aside her aesthetic goals. She said she still thinks about aesthetics, but it's no longer her only focus.

"It's a part of my fitness goals," she said.

In Pursuit of Health

Dana Honbo has been working out at StrengthRx for two years after getting frustrated with not seeing results from his traditional gym workouts.

"My main goal was to get a better physique, but I never really got it," Honbo said about his time in a globo gym.

Once the 35-year-old started CrossFit he began eating better.

"When I started off I was subpar, couldn't Rx any (workouts), but as I started to develop strength and form it started taking off. I lost 30 lb., and I'm in the best shape of my life," he said.

Then he turned his attention to the whiteboard, trying to be one of the top five in the gym every day. A minor wrist injury forced Honbo to take a step back and think about his long-term goals.

He said his goals have shifted again.

"Now it's for my health. I want to be able to play with my (2-year-old) daughter," Honbo said.

April Zusman, 44, started CrossFit in 2014 at [CrossFit LVI](#) in Poway, 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**

Zusman's focus on performance over appearance is not just for her own benefit. She has a 10-year-old daughter, which causes her to think a lot about the implications of an aesthetics-focused life.

"I don't want her to feel like she has to be a certain body type to feel beautiful," Zusman said about her daughter.

"She is an athlete and she has really started to get into CrossFit because of me. And the environment she's around, there are all different body types. I'm constantly telling her, 'Every body is beautiful, it doesn't matter what size you are, you don't have to be this way because that's not realistic,'" she said.

Zusman tells her daughter to stay active, eat a healthy diet and avoid worrying about achieving a certain body type.

"What's realistic is how your body is. What your body composition is," she said.

Acceptance—Finally

Through hard work, talent and dedication, Hagiya has reached the height of performance in the sport of CrossFit, but she doesn't have the defined six-pack abs that have become the aesthetic ideal in the CrossFit community.

"I don't look like these girls," she said of fellow competitors like Davidsdottir and Smith, "but I think it's just come to the point where ... this is how my body is and if I wanted a six pack I'd have to lose about 20 or 30 lb. and I probably wouldn't be able to perform."

The point of her Instagram post, she said, was to let everyone know that "it's OK that you don't have a six pack. If you think you have to look a certain way to make it to the Games ... you don't, because I made it and I don't look like that."

When Hagiya placed fifth at the 2016 California Regional, she



Courtesy StrengthRX CrossFit

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



Shaun Cleary/CrossFit Journal

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



Courtesy StrengthRX CrossFit

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



Courtesy April Zusman

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

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

— Jamie Hagiya

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 hilarryachauer.com

“This year is going to be the most challenging,
physically and mentally, that you guys will
ever encounter at the CrossFit Games.
... We are gonna ask a lot of you guys.”

—DAVE CASTRO

CrossFit Media photographers document the many tests of the 10th edition of the CrossFit Games.



RANCH TRAIL RUN

For the individual athletes, the 10th edition of the CrossFit Games began at the sport's birthplace: The Ranch in Aromas, California. There, 80 competitors faced a 7-km trail run shortly after Games Director Dave Castro unveiled the event. Modeled after the

course athletes ran in the 2009 Games—except harder—the run had athletes climbing 1,200 feet, negotiating steep drop-ins lined with sharp boulders and managing an incline of 50 degrees all while being watchful for mountain lions along the dusty path.





RANCH DEADLIFT LADDER

It pays to be first, especially when a deadlift ladder is involved. For this event at The Ranch, competitors lifted in the reverse order of their trail-run finish. No rest for the weary. The Ranch Deadlift Ladder also harkened to the third edition of the Games,

when a single rep was performed every 30 seconds through a series of ever-heavier barbells. Again, Castro upped the ante to meet athletes' improved fitness over the course of seven years by increasing loading. The men's weight topped out at 615 lb.

and the women's ended at 415 lb. In 2009, the heaviest barbells were 505 lb. for the men and 375 lb. for the women. Exactly one man and one woman were able to clear all 20 bars in 2016.





RANCH MINI CHIPPER

In 2009, it was a straight sprint—as much as one could sprint such a thing—up the infamous hill at The Ranch with a sandbag in hand (two if you were male). But seven years brings much adaptation. So at this year's Games, that sprint was preceded by 50 wall-ball shots (30/20 lb.) and 25 med-ball GHD sit-ups. And the sandbag was

replaced with the med ball. Despite the years that had passed, the women's victor was the same—Annie Thorisdottir from Iceland, who had earned her first muscle-up on that very same piece of land years earlier.





OCEAN SWIM

The athletes made up all sorts of stories, not believing it could be just a simple swim. A popular theory was a helicopter would fly competitors out into the ocean, where they would have to jump in the water and swim back to shore. In the end, Castro was

practicing full disclosure. It was the simplest of events: a 500-meter ocean swim for time. All 80 athletes—both men and women—started on the beach, swam around two buoys, then finished back on the beach.





It was an appropriate test in 2015, and it was an appropriate test in 2016. For some athletes, Murph was the last thing they wanted to see as a Games event. But for competitors such as Kara Webb and Annie Thorisdottir—both of whom required

medical attention after last year's Murph event—it was a welcome opportunity to prove their mettle. The event—and CrossFit.com Hero workout—honored Lt. Michael Murphy, a Navy SEAL who died in combat in June 2005. Athletes still wore weighted

body armor (20/14 lb.) this year and began and finished the event with a 1-mile run. However, the middle was partitioned as 5 rounds of 20 pull-ups, 40 push-ups and 60 squats. Webb finished 7th, while Thorisdottir finished 13th.





SQUAT CLEAN PYRAMID

Sometimes events are so fun they need to be repeated. But differently. Such was the case for Squat Clean Pyramid, similar to this year's first regional event, in which athletes had to squat-snatch increasingly heavy barbells for descending reps over

the course of five stations. For the men at the Games, the bars began at 245 lb. for 10 reps and ended at 325 lb. for 2 reps, while the women started with 165 lb. and finished with 215 lb. The event was a crowd favorite as it played out on the floor of

the StubHub Center's tennis stadium, with roars given for athletes who demonstrated virtuosity under load with the clock ticking.





DOUBLE DT

At last year's Games, the fans voted: Heavy DT. Little did they—or competitors—know they also were voting for Double DT. Forgoing it as a regional event, Castro opted

instead to make it a Games event beneath the lights of the tennis stadium Friday night. There, athletes faced not 5 but 10 rounds for time of 12 deadlifts (155/105

lb.), 9 hang power cleans (155/105 lb.) and 6 push jerks (155/105 lb.).





CLIMBING SNAIL

Rogue's Caity Matter Henniger compared it to a bale of hay. At 500 lb. for the men and 400 lb. for the women, it was one big bale of hay. It's called the Snail, and it was

among the new implements Castro introduced to this year's competition. Athletes first faced it during Saturday's Climbing Snail, which also included a 500-meter berm run

and ascents on a rope hanging roughly 5 feet above a crash mat.





THE SEPARATOR

July 18, 2010—the date of the most recent Games event that included ring handstand push-ups. It was time. Castro included the gymnastics movement as part of The Separator, a medley that also featured ever-more-difficult versions of squats, as well

as burpees. Men hoisted themselves atop the rings via a muscle-up, while women worked off low-hanging rings. For men, the workout began there and moved on to the squats, then the burpees. Women, however, performed the workout in the reverse

order: squats first, then burpees, then ring handstand push-ups. More than half the 40 women didn't finish all the reps, and only nine men reached the finish mat.





100%

No strategy required. Unless “keep going fast when it hurts” counts as a game plan. For 100%, it was all accelerator, no brake. Two movements in a chipper-style event to end the fourth day of competition. Athletes started with 40 box jump-overs (30/24

in.) then attacked 20 D-ball cleans (150/100 lb.). The time cap was 5 minutes. If you blinked, you missed it.





HANDSTAND WALK

Soccer players know the difficulty of kicking the ball from one end of the field to the other. Sending the ball roughly 280 feet is no small task. When it happens, the crowd roars with excitement. It was no different during Sunday morning's handstand walk

that kicked off a trio of events. For time, competitors had to walk from one end of the soccer-stadium floor to the other. Only the reigning Fittest Woman on Earth did it unbroken—despite running right into a lane marker.





SUICIDE SPRINT

It's a rare treat when spectators get to see an athlete go full throttle, much less nearly 80 of them. For Suicide Sprint, competitors didn't have to leave anything in the tank for another movement; they just had to run hard. It was an 840-ft. shuttle sprint for

time—they ran one-third of the way down and back, then two-thirds of the way down and back, then sprinted the full length of the field to the finish line.





THE PLOW

Reminiscent of the farming implement, another new piece of equipment at this year's Games closed out the trio of events Saturday morning in the soccer stadium. It was straightforward grunt work: Drag this plow down the field and back again. Loaded

with 235 lb. for the men and 190 lb. for the women, the plow had athletes winded for several minutes after they dropped the handles at the finish line with 560 ft. of labor behind them.





ROPE CHIPPER

The final implement surprise at this year's Games was small in size but large in effect: a jump rope with weighted handles. Shortly before the event, athletes were fitted for their ropes before stepping out onto the tennis-stadium floor. A chipper awaited: 200

meters on the SkiErg, 50/40 double-unders, a 200-m row, 50/40 double-unders, 0.4 miles on the Assault Air Bike, 50/40 double-unders, a 200-m row, 50/40 double-unders, another 200 meters on the SkiErg and, finally, a 90-ft. sled pull

(310/220 lb.). The weighted handles were just enough to fry athletes' grip in time for the Games' final event, which required grip strength, of course.





REDEMPTION

When the pegboard first appeared at the Games—in 2015—only three women and 17 men were able to finish all the reps in the event that featured the apparatus. It only made sense for it to return, an opportunity to show the world how CrossFit's elite

continually adapt and improve. The aptly named Redemption called for 3 pegboard ascents, 21 thrusters (135/85 lb.), 2 pegboard ascents, 15 thrusters, 1 pegboard ascent, 9 thrusters. This year 10 women completed all the reps, along with 26 men.





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THE
CrossFit JOURNAL

FITNESS, LUCK AND HEALTH

Fitness can prevent chronic disease—the cause of 70 percent of deaths in the United States.

ADAPTED FROM LECTURES BY GREG GLASSMAN



“(CrossFit affiliates) are the only effective, successful and growing response to chronic disease in the world today.”
—Greg Glassman

Dave Re/CrossFit Journal

Adapted from CrossFit Founder and CEO Greg Glassman’s Level 1 Certificate Course lectures Feb. 27, 2016, in San Jose, California; March 27, 2016, in Aromas, California; and April 24, 2016, in Oakland, California.

In 2002, we observed that almost any health parameter sits well ordered on a continuum of values that ranged from sick to well to fit. Take high-density lipoproteins (HDL cholesterol), for instance: At less than 35 mg/dL you have a problem, 50 mg/dL is nice, and 75 mg/dL is a whole lot better. Blood pressure: 195/115 mm Hg you have a problem, 120/70 mm Hg is healthy, and 105/50 mm Hg looks more like an athlete. Triglycerides, bone density, muscle mass, body fat, hemoglobin A1c (HbA1c, aka glycated hemoglobin)—all can be plotted relative to these three values.

The significance is that these are the predictors, the cause and the manifestation of chronic disease. Chronic diseases include obesity, coronary heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, stroke, cancer (to include breast, colon and lung, but my theory is this will include all the positron-emission-tomography-positive cancers eventually, which is 95 percent of all cancers), Alzheimer’s, peripheral artery disease, advanced biological aging, drug addiction, among others.

It is very likely that if you have any chronic disease, you have deranged markers. If you have Alzheimer’s, you would see your HDL suppressed, your blood pressure up, your triglycerides up, your body fat up, your muscle mass down, your bone density down, your HbA1c high, etc. The same is true with diabetes. The same is true with most cancers.

The CrossFit stimulus . . . can give you a pass on chronic disease.

Medicine has no effective treatment for chronic disease: It is symptomatic only. The doctor gives you a drug to bring your cholesterol down, a different drug to raise your bone density. You might need bariatric surgery if you have morbid obesity. If you have paved-over coronary arteries, they can do bypass surgery. If you become glucose intolerant, the doctor can put you on insulin. But all of these are not fixes. They are masking the problem. If you have persistent malignant hypertension, you should take an antihypertensive if you cannot get your blood pressure down otherwise. But how would you get it down otherwise?

CrossFit Inc. holds a uniquely elegant solution to the greatest problem facing the world today. It is not global warming or climate change. It is not the worst two choices imaginable for president.



CrossFit trainers provide non-medical health care. By focusing on work capacity, clients can avoid chronic disease.

It is chronic disease. The CrossFit stimulus—which is constantly varied high-intensity functional movement coupled with meat and vegetables, nuts and seeds, some fruit, little starch and no sugar—can give you a pass on chronic disease. It is elegant in the mathematical sense of being marked by simplicity and efficacy. It is so simple.

Seventy percent of deaths in the United States are attributable to chronic disease. Of the 2.6 million people who died in the United States in 2014, about 1.8 million died from chronic disease. This pattern of increasing deaths due to chronic diseases also holds in countries that are ravaged by infectious disease. The numbers are rising, and when we finally add the positron-emission-tomography-positive cancers in, the number might be 80-85 percent in the United States. It is estimated by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) that the United States could have up to a hundred million diabetics in 2050. That will affect everyone. You will not go into the emergency room for something as simple as a broken arm: You will be seeing heart attacks on every corner. Medicine has no solution; you do. CrossFit—with meat and vegetables, nuts and seeds, some fruit, little starch and no sugar—will help you avoid all of this.

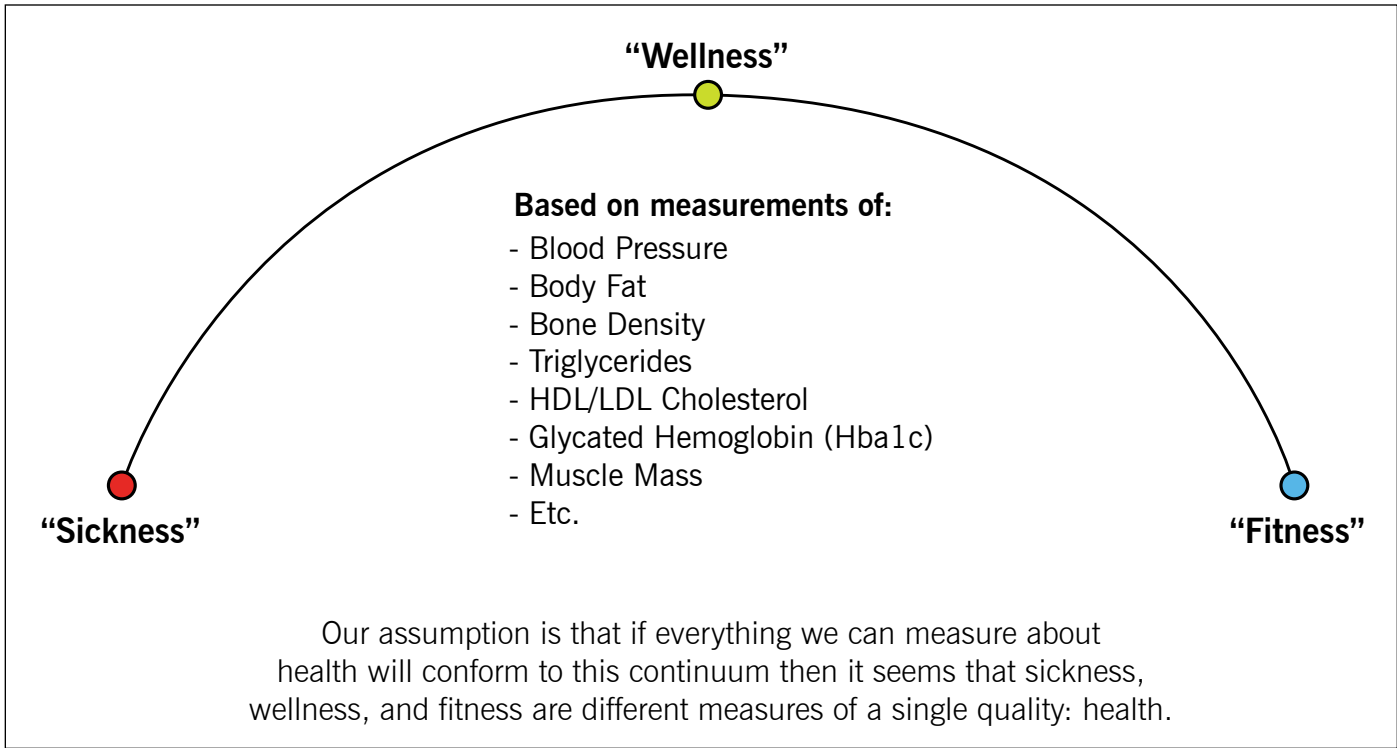
The other 30 percent are dying from accidents that come in four “-ic” variants: kinetic, genetic, toxic and microbic. Kinetic: physical trauma, car crash, hit on a bike. Toxic: environmental toxins, such as lead poisoning. Genetic: genetic disorders like cystic fibrosis, you are born with it. Microbic: virus, bacteria, prions.

This is where treatment can be symptomatic. This is where the miracles of medicine are. If you have got a genetic disorder that is making you sick, you need a doctor. If you have been poisoned, you need a doctor. If you caught a nasty virus or a flesh-eating bacteria, you need a doctor. You do not need to go to the gym, and you do not need burpees.

Doctors are like lifeguards; CrossFit trainers are like swim coaches. When you are drowning, you do not need a swim coach. You needed one, and you did not get one. What you need is a lifeguard. We will teach people how to swim, and when they do not pay attention and they go under, the doctors take care of it.

Accidents are largely stuff you can do nothing about, but there is one exception. Be fit. Kinetic: We hear stories from war of CrossFitters who survive things that people have not survived previously. Toxicity: Someone who is fitter is more likely to survive the same poisoning than someone who is not. Genetic: There are genes you have inherited that will or will not express because of your behavior through diet and exercise. Microbic: Who is most vulnerable to viral pneumonia? The frail, the feeble. So fitness offers a protection here.

But assume there is no protection from fitness because what you need in terms of preventing accidents largely is luck. Luck—there is no “good luck” versus “bad luck”—looks like not having



The Sickness-Wellness-Fitness Continuum.

these things happen to you. Seventy percent of what kills people can be addressed by what CrossFit trainers do, and the other 30 percent of deaths occur based on luck, so get fit and do not think about luck. If you stand around worried about germs, worried about the tire that is going to come through the windshield, worried about breathing toxic air and worried about your genes, you are wasting your time. It will not make you happy. It will not make you better. It will not make you safer. You are not going to live any longer.

**Make it to the gym, eat like we tell you,
and enjoy yourself.**

This sums to my “kinetic theory of health.” The singular focus on kinematics—increasing work capacity, increasing your fitness—is how to avoid chronic disease. Just get a better Fran time, better deadlift, better Diane time, and do all the things that would support a better Fran time—like eating meat and vegetables, nuts and seeds, some fruit, little starch and no sugar; getting plenty of sleep; and maybe taking some fish oil. After that, we are out of stuff that matters.

With that singular focus on work capacity, we can avoid chronic disease and there is nothing really to worry about. You have the lifestyle answer. Make it to the gym, eat like we tell you, and enjoy yourself.

We have hacked health. Here is the magic formula for you:

$$\text{Fitness} + \text{Luck (bad)} = \text{Health}$$

It is the part you can do something about plus the part you can do nothing about that sums to your outcome. So make the most out of fitness and you will not be part of the seven out of 10 who die unnecessarily due to lifestyle. In the end, chronic disease is a deficiency syndrome. It is sedentation with malnutrition.

The cost of chronic disease is such that U.S. medical expenditure is now about \$4 trillion a year. In 2008, Price Waterhouse Cooper estimated that roughly half of all U.S. medical expenditure was wasted on unnecessary procedures, administrative inefficiencies, treatment of preventable conditions and so on. Add in **fraud and abuse** and we are wasting well more than a trillion dollars. We also know 86 percent of overall health-care spending goes to treating the chronically diseased ineffectively. Of the remaining 14 percent, half goes to the stuff that medicine can actually do something about. That means seven percent of health-care spending is not wasted. The amount spent on chronic disease is a waste.

What CrossFit trainers are providing is non-medical health care. When doctors treat those affected by accidents (the 30 percent), that is medical health care. If you are confused about the two, it is easy to distinguish by methods and tools. If someone is cut open, given radiation, prescribed pills, injected with syringes, it is medicine. It is treatment by a doctor.

On our side, it looks like CrossFit. We have rings, dumbbells, pull-up bars, our own bodies—and the prescription is universal. It is not to treat disease. It does not matter where you fall on this continuum: You get put on the same program. If the prescription is universal, it cannot be medicine. If it is something everyone needs—like air or oxygen—that is not medicine.

Without vitamin C, you can get scurvy. Should physicians control orange and lemon groves, onion and kale production because they have vitamin C that you cannot live without? We do not want them doing that to food. We cannot let them do that to exercise, and there is a powerful movement with a lot of funding afoot to do exactly that. Millions of dollars are being spent to bring exercise into the purview of the medical arena so that it falls under the Affordable Care Act.

We have 13,000 gyms with 2 to 4 million people safe from chronic disease right now. This community is doing a lot of good things on a lot of fronts. Yet our gyms are thriving not because of our impact on chronic disease. They are thriving because the end users, the customers, are extremely happy with the transformation. And it is part physical, part emotional, part health markers, part relationships.

That is the miracle of CrossFit: people are getting something that they did not even know they wanted or needed. ■

Aug. 29, 2016—Corrects stats for chronic disease in the United States and worldwide, 2014 stats for deaths in the United States due to chronic disease, and CDC estimates on the number of diabetics in 2050. Clarifies the costs of medical expenditures related to treating the chronically diseased.

THE
CrossFit JOURNAL

CROSSFIT AFFILIATES: GLAMOUR VS. GRIT

BY BRITTNEY SALINE

Some clients prefer polished brass pull-up bars, while others like a little rust on the barbell.



Nearly 5,000 miles and an ocean apart, two classes of CrossFit athletes are doing work.

Their lungs are searing, but all that matters is the last few reps—and getting them in before the minute turns over.

As the last barbell settles at CrossFit Fifty, an open-air garage gym in Honolulu, Hawaii, the athletes lie on the sun-stricken pavement, heaving as they stare up into the electric-blue sky. At CrossFit Below Zero/I.C.E. NYC, tucked inside a luxury condominium in Manhattan, an athlete rests against a marble column, chalk dust trickling from the brass-coated pull-up bar above.

Once they can breathe again, CrossFit Fifty athletes report to the whiteboard one by one to scrawl their scores next to a list of mantras—“don’t panic” among them. CrossFit Below Zero athletes sign on to Wodify, broadcasting their efforts on bright flatscreens mounted in a neat line on the wall.

One group leaves sweaty and sun-kissed, hiking the 400 meters to their cars down the block. The other crew stops for a shower in a gleaming spa-like bathroom where high-end shampoos, hair spray and body towels big enough to camp under return the New Yorkers to normal before they step back into the Manhattan streets.

Both leave a little fitter than they were before.

Bait and Snatch

Izzy Levy, a personal trainer of nearly 20 years, owned a globo gym when he did his first CrossFit workout in 2011.

“It was Memorial Day Murph, and it just completely destroyed me,” he said.

Hooked, he began following [CrossFit.com](#), eventually joining CrossFit by the Sea in Avon, New Jersey. Soon, he was dreaming of owning his own affiliate. But as he shared his excitement with friends and globo-gym clients, he noticed a problem.

“Everybody had these preconceived notions (about CrossFit),” he said.

Many imagined a dungeon full of meatheads and drill sergeants, and they feared getting hurt or growing bulky. Though Levy knew skilled coaching and good programming—2014 Reebok CrossFit Games champion Camille Leblanc-Bazin eventually became his director of programming—would assuage these fears, the first challenge would be getting people in the door.

“So we wanted to do things a bit differently,” Levy said. “What we wanted to do was to build a beautiful gym, not just basically a basement or a warehouse with cinder-block walls and rubber floors and scary-looking people throwing kettlebells on the floor. So we built what I consider to be an aesthetically pleasing gym, so now people are going to come in who were not going to come

into a box before.”

That was the business model Levy brought to his partners and investors. To demonstrate, he brought them to five different affiliates across the city.

“And I said, ‘I can guarantee you if you join this (gym) for two months, you’ll be in the best shape of your life. Just accept that as a fact,’” he said. “And then I walked into some of the more successful boxes in the city, and I said, ‘Would you join here?’”

They wouldn’t, the investors said.

“And the reason was because it’s dirty and grungy and there’s scary-looking people throwing weights around, and there’s no showers and there’s no amenities, and it plays right into the stereotype,” Levy said.

Part of the issue, he continued, is the fitness market in Manhattan, where many New Yorkers are accustomed to boutique operations.

“If you opened up a bare-bones CrossFit gym, these people will not walk in,” Levy said. “They may step foot in, but they’ll quickly turn around and walk out because they’re used to having towel service and laundry service and shampoo and conditioner and hair blowers and pretty aesthetics.”

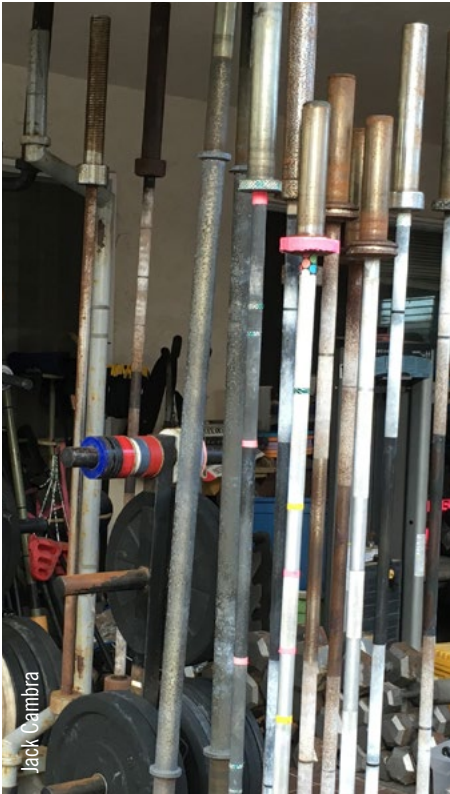
“What we wanted to do was to build a beautiful gym, not just basically a basement or a warehouse.”
—Izzy Levy

After securing a 4,500-square-foot space in the basement of a luxury apartment building in Tribeca, Levy hired an architect to make his gym sparkle. On the building’s ground level, a blue reception desk sits in front of a wall speckled with slate-gray hexagonal tiles, mirroring the I.C.E. logo. The ceiling and doorways are sheathed in brass, and just beyond the reception area, 20-foot mirrors framed in brass create a kaleidoscope effect.

“It’s where everybody takes a selfie,” Levy said.

The workout floor is tiled with Ecore. Several marble pillars framed in brass support the ceilings, brass pull-up bars etched with the I.C.E. logo linking them. A pair of benches dotted with throw pillows featuring motivational messages sit against the back wall. But the real gem is the bathroom.

“If you walk into a bathroom that has dust bunnies in the corner and there’s no toilet paper and it’s disgusting, you wouldn’t feel comfortable in there,” Levy said.



Jack Cambra



Jack Cambra

CrossFit Fifty: A rugged outdoor affiliate where the workout goes down rain or shine, hot or cold, windy or calm.



Gustav Lillquist (photographer) and DesBrisay and Smith Architects



Gustav Lillquist (photographer) and DesBrisay and Smith Architects

CrossFit Below Zero/I.C.E. NYC: Perhaps home to the poshest pull-up bars in the world.



The glittering “selfie staircase” at CrossFit Below Zero: Stare off into infinity and get your mind right for the workout.

Gustav Lillquist (photographer) and DesBrisay and Smith Architects



Jack Cambra

Forecast calls for deadlifts, sweat and effort, also known as “fitness.”



Crush a workout, then relax in the spa-like showers at CrossFit Below Zero

Gustav Lillquist (photographer) and DesBrisay and Smith Architects

The bathrooms at Below Zero are so nice that sometimes members come to the gym just to shower, Levy said.

A jet-black tiled backsplash set in the white marble wall surrounds a row of sinks—also white marble—with brass faucets. Neat stacks of hand towels and jars of cotton swabs dot the counter, and a lit mirror, framed in brass, spans an entire wall. Next to a bank of black day lockers sit a wicker hamper shaped like a penguin and a basket of full-length body towels. The showers are stocked with every soap, shampoo and conditioner, and Levy keeps the women's bathroom supplied with a variety of free feminine products.

“All it does from the onset is bring people in the door and make them feel comfortable,” Levy said. “Once they become members, then it's just an added value.”

But gleaming facilities and free hairspray aren't Levy's main maneuver. The majority of his CrossFit members, he said, are converts from I.C.E.'s barbell-less, bootcamp-style high-intensity-interval-training (HIIT) classes, which are purposely scheduled between CrossFit classes.

“When you have 25 to 30 people waiting for the HIIT class to start, they're seeing the aftermath of a CrossFit class,” Levy said. “People dying on the floor, shaking and then smiling and everybody getting together and cheering each other on, and they're thinking, ‘I don't look like that at the end of my workout. Nobody's patting me on the back and cheering me.’ They see the aftermath of a CrossFit class and then they're willing to try it.”

Thirty-two-year-old Jenny Trang was one such convert. For years, her friends had tried to convince her to try CrossFit. A former college lacrosse player, she wasn't at all afraid of hard work.

“It looked like a meathead sport,” she said. “It was intimidating. I didn't want to get injured, and I thought no one cares about form probably because there are no mirrors, and they're just gonna yell at me to do more weight.”

Trang discovered I.C.E. after participating in a free bootcamp-style workout Levy led at a popular athletic-clothing store in April. An aficionado of group fitness classes, she signed up for Levy's HIIT class and was impressed from the moment she walked in the door.

“It was really nice,” she said. “And it was clean, which was awesome. My biggest complaint is always when it's super dirty, because you're rolling and doing burpees and everything on the floor.”

The spa-like bathroom was a welcome surprise.

“It was a big draw,” she said. “If there were no shower, I wouldn't try to spend time hanging out (after class). I'd rather just go home and shower. And (at I.C.E.) you don't have to

pack a bunch of stuff either. As a woman, you're already carrying two to three bags walking around New York, so it's nice that I don't have to bring a ton of stuff. I have everything I need here.”

Trang signed up for I.C.E.'s CrossFit classes after her first HIIT class. Though the amenities were nice, they weren't what made her come back for the barbell.

“What made me feel more comfortable was how welcoming and supportive everyone at I.C.E. was, and particularly their focus on correct form and injury prevention,” she said. “And I love the camaraderie of it. It's really more a sense of family than just even a community. Everyone's invested in you improving and doing well.”

Levy doesn't believe that the comforts of his gym detract from the physical and mental benefits of CrossFit, which are usually derived from being comfortable in the uncomfortable.

“Try a workout and tell me if you get the same exhilaration and the same endorphins at the end,” he said. “If the stimulus is the same, anything else that's an improvement is just added value. If (clients) prefer to inhale dirt and dust then that's great. ... There's nothing wrong with that, but I don't think you're gonna be able to convert new people with that model.”

The Gym That Time Forgot

Like Levy, Jack Cambra fell in love with CrossFit after “getting my ass whooped” in his first workout—a mash-up of single-arm deadlifts, push presses and Turkish get-ups—at CrossFit Hawaii/Hardass Fitness in 2010. At the time, he'd been competing as a submission grappler.

“I thought, ‘Man, if I wrestle anyone who's doing this, I'm gonna get murdered,’” he recounted.

Though he did not join the gym, Cambra became obsessed with CrossFit gym blogs, piecing their challenges and CrossFit.com workouts together with equipment he had at home. After reading articles from the CrossFit Journal featuring people who had started their own affiliates, Cambra began to dream of being a gym owner.

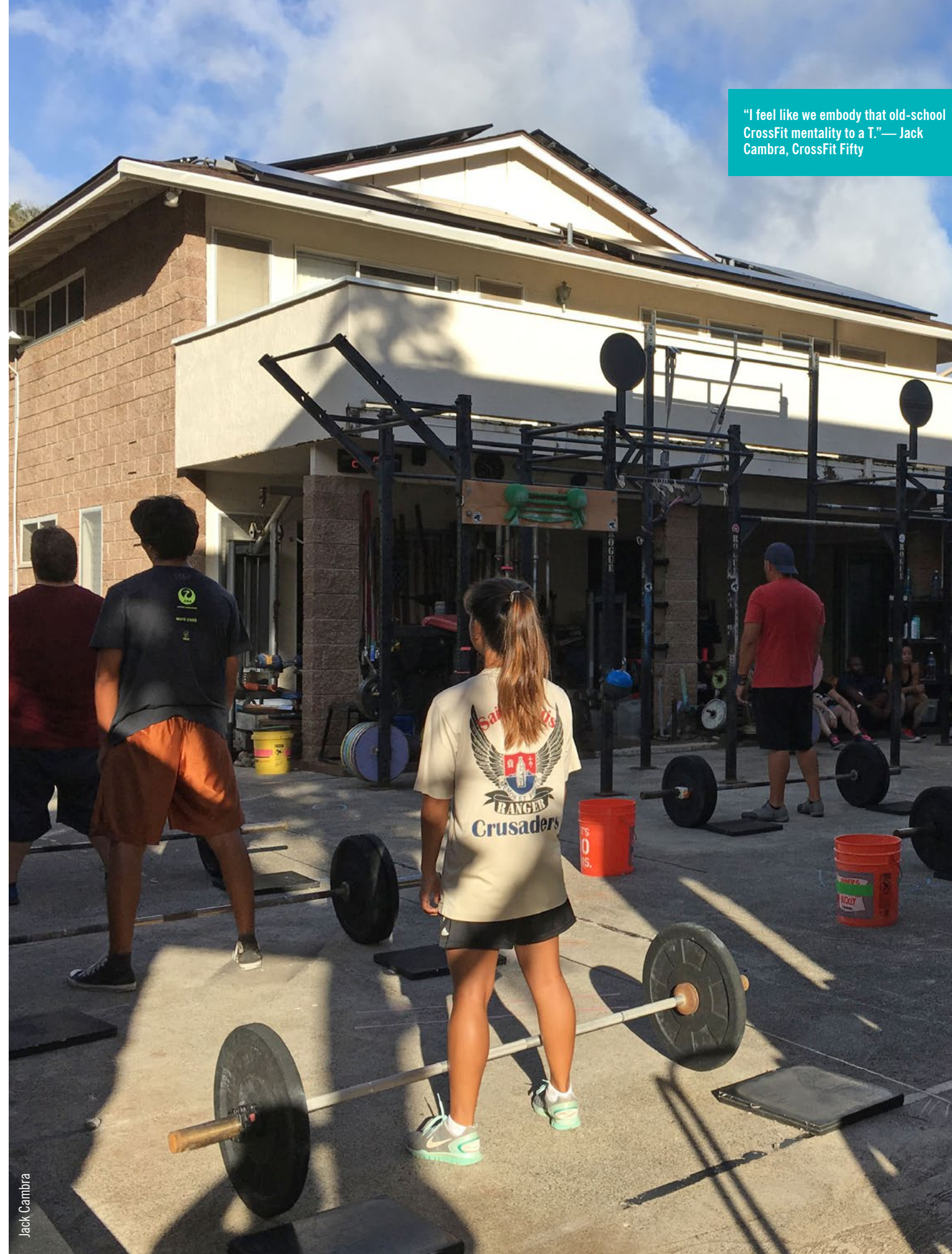
“They were just talking about how their life changed running the gym and I was like, ‘Man, I want a CrossFit affiliate,’” he said. “I kinda said it to myself like how a kid would want to be president. I didn't think it would actually happen.”

Three months later he attended a CrossFit Level 1 Certificate Course and began turning his garage into a gym. The first thing he bought was a set of bumper plates.

“I got (plates to total) 95 lb. and 65 lb., because that was the Rx weight back then,” he said.

He lost himself in the CrossFit Journal and CrossFit.com Message Board, picking up advice such as buying stall mats instead of expensive fitness mats and learning how to make **medicine**

“I feel like we embody that old-school CrossFit mentality to a T.”— Jack Cambra, CrossFit Fifty



Jack Cambra

balls out of basketballs filled with sand. Add in a few kettlebells and a homemade pull-up bar made of metal piping and he had the makings of a gym.

His 64-year-old mother and the parents of his girlfriend at the time were his first clients.

The motley crew did their workouts in the driveway, and more people trickled in as word spread. To make more room to train, Cambra parked the family cars on the street.

“After a little while the cars stopped going back in because we had class,” he said.

In 2013, Cambra affiliated his garage, and today CrossFit Fifty has about 50 members in addition to a thriving powerlifting program.

Nestled in the Kuliouou Valley, the gym is surrounded by lush, low, green mountains. The affiliate has a rig and more equipment than it did at the start, but not much else has changed. With the garage packed to bursting with all manner of equipment, athletes train in the 25-by-40-foot driveway.

“The gym kept growing until we had world-class equipment, but the grit stood,” Cambra said. “We still (train) in the elements and in the rain.”

“It’s the gym that time forgot, and I like it.”
—Jack Cambra

There’s only one part of CrossFit Fifty where you won’t find a speck of dust—the bathroom.

“We’ve really done the bathroom up because Coach (Greg) Glassman put up that [\(video\)](#) about what tells him that an affiliate is serious,” he said, referencing CrossFit Inc.’s Founder and CEO. “It’s not about how well (its) members are doing their cleans or their snatches; it’s about how clean their bathroom is.”

The bathroom, which Cambra painted baby blue and decorated with chalkboards so members can leave notes for each other, is part of Cambra’s home. An extra door leading to the outside makes it feel separate from the house, and athletes can shower there if they wish.

“We make sure to keep it clean, because you never know if Coach Glassman will walk in your door at any moment,” he said.

Average summertime temperatures in Honolulu range between

85 and 90 F with 65 percent humidity. But CrossFit Fifty athletes train on beneath the noontime sun.

“Saturday class is brutal,” Cambra said. “It gets so hot sometimes you feel like you can’t even breathe.”

But even cloudy days bring their share of challenges. The island typically gets showers at least once a day, so rain-slicked barbells turn even the best hook grippers into butterfingers, and the salty ocean air rusts the spin out of the barbells within months.

“We throw towels on the bars, but there’s only so many towels you can throw on, and they all get wet,” Cambra said. “So you gotta adjust your weight. Chalk doesn’t work when it’s raining.”

Still, Cambra doesn’t worry about whether conditions at CrossFit Fifty might turn new members away. He rarely thinks of marketing at all.

“We don’t try to attract anybody at all because popularity is a dangerous thing,” he said. “Our gym attracts the kind of the athlete that ends up sticking to the program and letting us help change their lives. You don’t like the sun? Don’t waste your time here, because you’re not gonna like it.”

For competitors, Cambra said, CrossFit Fifty offers “the most realistic training you can get,” he said. “The CrossFit Games happen outdoors, (some) regionals happen outdoors, and almost every damn sport I train people for happens outdoors.”

But it’s not just the competitive athlete he thinks benefits from a little grit and grunge.

“If you take the hard road for everything you do ... little things in life actually become easier,” he said. “A last-minute report you gotta do, or deadlines, it kinda makes you harder to where everyday things become not so bad.”

Not everyone who shows up at his door makes a long-term commitment at CrossFit Fifty, he said. But those who do tend to find their self-confidence growing as much as their fitness.

“A lot of people think, ‘I’m never gonna be able to train like this, in the rain or in the sun, and they end up doing it and they kind of overcome all these doubts,” he said. “So then you walk in a gym where all the little baby things that people usually worry about—when you don’t worry about it them, your attitude molds towards being not so sensitive to (challenging) situations.”

Jamie Cambra, Jack’s 46-year-old sister, was one such convert. For more than a year after Cambra opened his gym, she refused to train.

“I’d walk past and I’d be like, ‘Hell no,’” she said.

But the more times she walked by, the less she noticed the conditions and the more she saw the community.

“Everyone’s working, everyone’s sharing the grind together,” she said.

Today, she trains four to five days per week, and she doesn’t care about getting dirt on her knees when she does burpees on the ground.

“You realize that you’re a lot tougher than you think you are when you choose to be out there even if it’s cold or the rain’s all over your face and you’re in the puddles doing burpees,” she said.

Nineteen-year-old **Stacia-Al Mahoe**, a CrossFit and powerlifting athlete who holds junior and open United States Powerlifting Association records in the 97-lb. weight class, left a new 5,000-square-foot affiliate—complete with weightlifting platforms and a roof—to train at CrossFit Fifty in 2012.

“I liked it better—it was outside, you get the breeze and a tan while you’re working out,” she joked.

More seriously, she said the conditions at CrossFit Fifty help her train her mental toughness while boosting confidence.

“When it rains, you take some weight off what you normally can do for a deadlift, and so I feel like knowing if you can pull X in the rain, you can pull so much more when it’s dry,” she said. “I think it makes you mentally tough and have a mindset like you’re unstoppable.”

For Cambra, CrossFit Fifty is an homage to the early days of CrossFit.

“I feel like I got to learn about CrossFit when it was still raw,” he said. “And I feel like even though main site has changed, even though the blogs have changed, even though the flavor has changed a little bit ... I feel like we embody that old-school CrossFit mentality to a T. I feel like we’re stuck in time. It’s the gym that time forgot, and I like it.”

Fitness for All

After the clock stops for the last class of the day, the sun setting behind the mountains, Cambra stows the barbells in their racks in the garage and sweeps the chalk dust off the driveway.

Stateside, Levy wipes down the brass pull-up bars before the cleaning crew arrives for one of two daily scourings.

Though their affiliates may look a little different, the fitness doesn’t.

“I get people who never played sports a day in their life and they become athletic, they become strong, they become something,” Cambra said. “And in the end, I’ll tell you right now, helping somebody get up the stairs (when) they couldn’t before is way more satisfying than my record lifter setting another record.”

Levy has a similar outlook.

“I had a member come to me yesterday (with) rheumatoid arthritis, and he told me for the first time in years he didn’t have to take prednisone because he’s moving properly,” he said. “I have



Rust never sleeps in the ocean air at CrossFit Fifty.

another member ... who’s no longer prediabetic, and we have other people that are off insulin already. That’s the driving force: people improving their lives. And it’s not a tagline, it’s the best feeling in the world.” ■

About the Author: Brittney Saline is a freelance writer contributing to the CrossFit Journal and the CrossFit Games website. She trains at **CrossFit St. Paul**. To contact her, visit britneysaline.com.

GYMNASTICS: WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO WITH YOUR BODY?

The CrossFit Gymnastics Trainer Course sets athletes up for a lifetime of strength and movement.

BY MIKE WARKENTIN

“I’ve got a 70-year-old man who took our course eight years ago who’s almost got a full iron cross,” said Jeff Tucker, [CrossFit Gymnastics](#) subject-matter expert. “He’s 70-plus years old now, and he’s still working his iron cross.”

Just as the septuagenarian has strived for years to perform an iron cross, Tucker and his team have worked to improve the 16-hour CrossFit Gymnastics Trainer Course over the last nine years.

Tucker explained that the course has grown organically since its creation in 2007. The two-day seminar constantly but quietly evolved as Tucker and his staff evaluated ways to improve, and significant adjustments have been made over the last year in response to post-seminar feedback from attendees.

The course has always focused on basic strength and how to coach, spot and scale gymnastics movements performed on the floor, parallettes, rings or bars. That hasn’t changed, but Tucker recently reviewed the flow of the entire weekend and looked for ways to make adjustments based on self-assessment and community feedback from surveys of the course. Currently, he and his team are reworking the syllabus for future courses.

For instance, the planche is one element that is now demonstrated but not instructed in great detail, allowing the CrossFit Gymnastics trainers to spend more time on other movements requested by the community in the past year.

“Rather than spending a lot of time on what frankly is an advanced movement, we’re going to kind of use it as a piece to show where all of our course (content) can go. ... We’ve decided to put more information into handstand development, handstand walking, handstands on elevated platforms like parallettes,” Tucker said.

“It’s about strength and form development before speed.”
—Jeff Tucker

The seminar will also place greater emphasis on pistols/one-legged squats, rope climbs and additional kipping progressions, including progressions for butterfly chest-to-bar pull-ups.

While many people immediately skip ahead to the end of the progression and want to bang out large sets of butterfly pull-ups, the key is where the progression starts. You lay the tracks very carefully before racing a train across them at speed.

“Any movement we do in gymnastics, it’s always going to be



At the CrossFit Gymnastics Trainer Course, attendees learn how to develop strength and body control as athletes, and they also learn how to instruct and spot when coaching.



Learning how to activate the correct muscles is a basic step many athletes bypass, but it is fundamental to success in gymnastics.



Kipping progressions are a part of the CrossFit Gymnastics Trainer Course, but the focus is always on strength and form before speed.

rooted by the basics—how do we coach the basics, how do we cue the basics, how do we develop the basics?” Tucker said. “Furthermore, it’s about strength and form development before speed.”

Recall the novice’s curse, as detailed in “[Virtuosity](#)” by CrossFit Founder and CEO Greg Glassman, a former gymnast. Far too often, athletes try to snatch before they can perform a good overhead squat, and the gymnastics world is no different: How many people who are trying to walk on their hands can hold a solid handstand for 30 seconds?

With that in mind, the CrossFit Gymnastics Trainer Course is designed to give athletes the solid foundation they need for long-term success.

“Before you even lift a barbell, what do you have to do?” Tucker asked. “You have to know how to address the bar before you put weight on it, before you lift that bar and drop your ass under it and stand up with it. There’s so many nuances.”

In gymnastics, it starts with little things such as how to grip a bar properly, how to engage the right muscles, how to achieve the correct positions, how to build strength for strict movements and how to add momentum. For athletes who have a good foundation including the required strength, Tucker and his staff will find ways to ramp things up and build more strength in body-weight skills.

For example, an athlete who can’t perform a pull-up will be taught exactly how to work toward a first rep, while an athlete who can do 50 pull-ups will work on strict reps in a hollow-body position. If that’s too easy, he or she can work on pull-ups in an L-sit. And so on. Difficulty can always be increased by tweaking the movement’s load or leverage requirements, making athletes stronger over time.

“The movement is the same for the beginner and it’s the same for the individual that’s been competing. The difference is going to be how we load it or the length of time spent in an isometric hold, along with repetition of any skill,” Tucker explained.

“There’s always going to be something more to learn and improve on.”
—Jeff Tucker

Overall, the weekend is designed to lay or reinforce the ground-work and point athletes in the right direction for constant improvement. And in gymnastics, the wealth of movements and the near-endless variations ensure athletes can spend a lifetime getting stronger and learning to control their bodies with skill.

“This is their beginning journey. You don’t come in a weekend and—boom!—you’re a gymnast or gymnastics trainer,” Tucker said. “This is your beginning journey towards body-weight training and body-weight movement, and there’s always going to be something more to learn and improve on.”

He added: “My hope is that by the end of the close on Sunday that everybody has a better understanding of how to do the basics, how to spot the basics, how to cue the basics, and how we ramp that up.”

For an older athlete who took the course in 2008 in Australia, ramping things up meant spending more than 2,900 days working on an iron cross.

What gymnastics skills could you learn over the next eight years? ■

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

THE
CrossFit JOURNAL

SUPPLEMENTS AND SNAKE OIL

Sports-nutrition experts share their thoughts on performance supplements for CrossFit athletes.

BY HILARY ACHAUER



A wall of nutritional supplements can be incredibly seductive.

The little jars with multisyllabic, unpronounceable technical names that often combine letters and numbers: CoQ10, L-carnitine L-tartrate, methylsulfonylmethane. The pictures of molecules and all the trappings of science. The cartoon-sized tubs of protein powder and the aggressive packaging. The tanned, rippling, bulging models. The delicious pictures of guilt-free “healthy” cookies and candy bars. The promise of massive gains.

The nutritional-supplement industry—which includes vitamins, minerals and supplements—produced US\$32 billion in revenue in 2012. According to the Nutritional Business Journal, that figure is expected to **double by 2021**.

Everyone wants an edge, something a little extra. If you train hard, sleep well and eat right, why shouldn't you also take supplements?

The problem is many of the claims made about supplements are not supported by science, and we don't yet understand how our bodies interact with all the nutrients in whole foods.

“We don't know probably 80 percent of some of the nutrients—and not just nutrients but flavonoids and phytochemicals—that exist in whole foods that add to health benefits,” said **Karen Freeman**, a registered dietitian, nutritionist and sports-nutrition expert who is a volunteer clinical instructor at the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine.

And if you rely on supplements, Freeman said, “the 80 percent that we don't know you're missing out on.”

Protein Powder: Essential or Excessive?

After the last rep is finished and the weights are put away in neat stacks, many CrossFit athletes head straight for a shaker bottle, mixing a scoop of powder with water for a post-workout protein hit.

Is there anything wrong with that?

Matt Fitzgerald, an endurance-sports coach, nutritionist and author of several books about diet and nutrition, said ingesting protein powder immediately after training does have a few advantages: It's a fast and efficient protein source that has been shown to accelerate the recovery process and potentially enhance adaptation to training.

However, protein powder has some disadvantages, Fitzgerald said.

First, he said protein powders aren't necessarily more effective than natural protein sources for recovery and training adaptation.

“The benefits you are really looking for with protein powder, there is no evidence you can't also get (those benefits) from regular food, and of course (protein powder is) not as economical as

real-food protein sources,” Fitzgerald said.

He also said many people are consuming much more protein than they need.

The recommendations on protein intake vary depending whom you ask.



Matt Fitzgerald

The most recent information from the **Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion** recommends 5.5 ounces of protein for a person following a 2,000-calorie-per-day diet (one ounce of meat contains about 7 grams of protein, so 5.5 ounces equates to about 38.5 grams of protein per day).

According to **Hammer Nutrition**, an endurance-sports nutrition company, a 165-lb. athlete “in high training mode” needs 128 grams of protein each day.

“It's ironic because people who have big, strong muscles, they actually need less protein than smaller people because they become really good at retaining it,” Fitzgerald said.

“So they actually need less protein, but often they consume a lot more because that's the myth out there: You need scads of protein to maintain large muscle,” he said.

Fitzgerald said the average U.S. diet contains lots of protein, so unless you are in the process of a dramatic physical transformation from scrawny weakling to muscled ruler of the beach,

Fitzgerald said you don't need huge amounts of protein.

“Once you've completed that process, one of the adaptations you've made is that your body retains protein, specifically nitrogen, better so that you just don't need to worry about (additional) protein anymore at that point,” Fitzgerald said.

A 2006 **study** found dietary requirements for novice athletes were lower, not higher, after a 12-week training program. In 2000 the **Annual Review of Nutrition** reported that no evidence confirms protein requirements increase with habitual exercise: “Protein metabolism may become more efficient as a result of training.”

“The protein industry is doing lots of advertising convincing them that they need this product. And the food industry is not doing as good as a job fighting back.”
—Nancy Clark

Nancy Clark, a registered dietitian specializing in nutrition and exercise and the author of the bestselling “Nancy Clark's Sports Nutrition Guidebook,” agrees with Fitzgerald that most people—athletes included—consume more protein than they need.

When asked why people take protein powder, Clark gave a simple answer: “Because the protein industry is doing lots of advertising convincing them that they need this product. And the food industry is not doing as good as a job fighting back.”

She also said she thinks very few athletes need a protein supplement.

Clark said she's perplexed by people who try hard to avoid processed foods—buying grass-fed beef and pastured eggs—but spend money on protein powder.

“It's such a highly processed food,” she said about protein powder.

“The same people that go to great extremes to shop at Whole Foods and buy all this organic stuff, nothing with additives or whatever, and then they eat this processed protein ... that's strange,” she said.

Clark compared protein powder to white bread, then went further.

“It's like ‘less than white bread,’” she said.

Supported by Science or Salespeople?

In 2008, Michael Pollan—author, activist, journalist and professor of journalism at the University of California, Berkeley—compared the state of nutrition science to surgery in the year 1650.

“Which is to say very interesting and promising, but do you really want to get on the table yet?” **Pollan asked**.

Freeman confirmed the confusion and uncertainty in the industry regarding supplements.

“If you ask 25 different sports dietitians (about supplements) you will get 25 different answers,” she said, “but given that my professors at Columbia University (had us) read the ‘Farmer's Almanac’ as part of our master's degree, I will always choose whole foods first.”



Nancy Clark

Fitzgerald said he evaluates supplements on a case-by-case basis, and he distinguishes between supplements for general health and ergogenic supplements (supplements for performance).

“There are people who have an ideological stance on supplements ... either it's all a scam and they are all bad or you've never seen a supplement you don't like,” he said.

For proof, you need only question the efficacy of a supplement near someone who swears by the product. The debate is often incredibly heated and full of anecdotal evidence, with hard science conspicuously absent.

As for performance supplements, Fitzgerald said the list of clearly beneficial products is actually very short.



Protein powders are convenient, but they're highly processed, and no evidence confirms they're better than natural protein sources.

Mike Wakentín/CrossFit Journal

“For the CrossFit type who are doing high-intensity type of training, it would be creatine and possibly also beta-alanine. Those would be the only two where I would say the evidence clearly indicates it’s worth your hard-earned money,” he said.

Fitzgerald explained that creatine enhances muscular adaptation to resistance training.

“So if you are doing multiple sets of some type of weightlifting movement, thanks to creatine you will be better in the third and fourth set than you would without it,” he said.

However, not everyone **responds** to creatine, and creatine also causes your cells to **retain water**, which can lead to weight gain.

Beta-alanine is the other supplement Fitzgerald said is backed up by sound science. It’s an amino acid that has been shown to enhance performance in high-intensity efforts such as intervals.



Courtesy of Karen Freeman

Karen Freeman

“If you have someone like a swimmer who swims a 400-meter freestyle, an event that lasts a couple/few minutes but not longer, you would get a better performance when you supplement with beta-alanine,” Fitzgerald said.

The possible side effects of beta-alanine are temporary paresthesia—a sensation of tingling, pricking or burning on the skin.

Clark agrees with Fitzgerald that good science supports creatine and beta-alanine.

“Creatine is a viable supplement,” Clark said. “Some people

respond more than others, as with any supplement of that type. It helps with recovery so that you can do more reps, and that can help you build more muscle. Creatine doesn’t build muscle but it allows you to exercise, and (exercise) builds the muscle.”

Clark also said good research supports the claim that beta-alanine helps with short bursts of exercise. She cautions that teenage athletes should not take any of these supplements because safety has not been established for children.

Like Fitzgerald, Clark said most supplements should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Trust Your Body

The science on nutritional supplements is murky, and companies who stand to profit handsomely from the sale of these products make most of the health and performance claims.

For example, consider how the **questionable claims** of the beverage industry were roundly rebutted by actual research by independent scientists.

Not all supplements are worthless, but Clark made a point that might be interesting to athletes who are considering adding supplements into their regimen.

“Don’t you really want to know what your body can just do?” she asked. “There are plusses and minuses to everything, but psychologically ... if you start taking creatine, do you always have to take creatine for the rest of your life? Is that what you really want to do?”

Ultimately, in her mind, it comes down to this question: “Do you trust your body to be good enough?” ■

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.



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THE WILL TO WALK

A year-and-a-half ago, Cole Bernier was pursuing his dream of qualifying for the CrossFit Games. After a construction accident left the 2015 West Regional competitor a paraplegic, the sport he loves is now part of his fight to walk again.

BY EMILY BEERS

WEIGHTLIFTING

Power Cleans
65%-5x3reps

Snatch Pulls off blocks
above knee (hang)
75%-3
80%-3x3

Snatch
above knee
60%-3x3reps
65%-3
70%-3

Snatch above off blocks
100%-3x3
110%-2x3reps

Back Squats
70%-5x6reps

* If you aren't confident to do it from the hang



Cole Bernier was injured in a 2015 roofing accident, but he's determined to train and work to regain the use of his legs.

It's July in Kelowna, British Columbia.

Ordinarily, athletes at Bodyshop CrossFit in West Kelowna would be working out diligently. Today, they're visibly distracted.

The 2016 Reebok CrossFit Games are playing live on a big-screen TV in the weightlifting area of the gym, so the athletes take uncharacteristically long breaks between sets of squats to catch a heat of Squat Clean Pyramid.

One man in the corner of the gym isn't paying any attention to the Games. He goes out of his way to avoid turning his head toward the screen.

"It's too painful to watch," explains 24-year-old Cole Bernier.

The athlete who finished 21st at the 2015 West Regional is at the gym today to stretch his hip flexors, to practice standing—with assistance—and to rebuild core strength and stability that deteriorated rapidly after a construction accident left him a paraplegic in September 2015.

Bernier hopes working his core and putting his body through the motion of standing up will help him if the day ever comes that he can walk again.

The Accident

Exactly 10 months after her son's spinal injury, Cole's mother Kate remembers every moment of the day she received the devastating phone call about her son.

Kate was at work at her advertising sales job when the roof Cole was working on gave way, leading to a traumatic fall that broke his spine at his first lumbar vertebrae (L1) and 12th thoracic vertebrae (T12).

"I had this really weird feeling that something was wrong," Kate said. "I left my phone in the car because I didn't want to be interrupted during a meeting. ... Eventually I just got this feeling like I knew I needed to get out of there. I didn't have anywhere I needed to be, but I just had to get out of there. I felt uneasy. Sick to my stomach."

At that very moment, her son lay fully conscious with a punctured lung, paralyzed, his body folded in half under a 5,000-lb. pile of roofing material.

"My face was in my thighs underneath 70 sheets of plywood and about 10 to 12 trusses," Cole said.

"I could hear the guys saying, 'Stay awake. You're going to be OK. We're coming for you.' I was under there for 30 minutes before they could get everything off me."

"I could hear the guys saying, 'Stay awake. You're going to be OK. We're coming for you.'" —Cole Bernier

He wasn't sure what his injuries were, but he knew something bad was going on in his body. He was having trouble breathing.

"I was fighting for air. It felt like I was drowning. I knew something bad had happened."

For a moment, he thought about giving up.

"At one point, I was like, 'I don't want to do this anymore.' I wanted to give up. To just stop. So I tried to not breathe," he said.

"It didn't work."

Accident Aftermath

After he was extricated, Cole faced a three-month hospital journey that started with surgery at Vancouver General Hospital (VGH) to put his dislocated L1 back into position and to insert rods into his back—from T10 to L3—to maintain stability in his spine. T12 was shattered, so it was fused to L1.

The spinal injury and ensuing paralysis from the waist down meant Bernier lost all feeling and control of his bowels and bladder. The injury also affected his blood pressure, and his core stability instantly deteriorated, Cole explained. He wasn't able to sit up without passing out for a number of days—all **normal symptoms** of spinal injuries, he said.

"It took a long time for me to learn how to sit up and not have to lie down again without feeling like I was going to pass out," said Cole, who was also dealing with a bruised heart and **rhabdomyolysis** because his body was compressed for so long.

Kate, who stayed by her son's side for three months during his initial rehabilitation process in Vancouver—a four-hour drive from her home in Kelowna—said one of the most heartbreaking parts of the experience was watching her son's once-muscular legs wither away.

"It's not like I was worried about (him) not looking muscular," Kate said. "But it killed me to watch. I could see his legs dying. It happened so fast. I could notice a difference after just a matter of days."

Watching his legs **atrophy** before his eyes was admittedly one of



Cole works with trainer Ryan Stokes of Bodysnap CrossFit. The two research and experiment to find the movements that will help most.



Cole trains his upper body with clean and presses while step-father Mark Kohlen spots.

Emily Beers/CrossFit Journal

the hardest parts for Cole, too.

“It took a really big hit on my confidence,” Cole said. “I don’t really care anymore, but coming from being a CrossFit athlete when people always tell you, ‘Oh wow, your ass. Your legs!’ CrossFit athletes are used to being specimens. They’re unreal to look at. And going from that to nothing was a hard hit for me.”

Going to the bathroom and learning how to use a catheter was another hard hit for Cole.

“As a guy, you’re not supposed to be sticking a tube up your penis and into your bladder. It doesn’t feel like the right thing to do,” Kate said.

Cole added: “Other guys at the hospital often just refuse and say, ‘I’m not doing that.’”

But he knew if he didn’t learn to take care of his bladder and bowel, the hospital wouldn’t release him.

“So I got it all dialed in,” said Cole, who has to empty his catheter every three or four hours.

The moments of desperation in the days and weeks immediately following his accident often made Cole feel like his life was all but destroyed, he said. But at the same time, there was an element of relief.

“As much pain as I was in, I was super grateful to be alive,” he said.

Kate added: “Everyone that saw him said there was no way he should have lived. Doctors said that his health and physical condition were the only reason he survived.”

Adaptive Training

Bernier arrives at Bodyshop CrossFit in his pick-up truck.

“I got it modified so I can drive it with my hands,” he explains as he wheels into the gym, throws himself out of his chair and onto a mat, where he starts stretching with the help of his coach, Ryan Stokes.

“It’s important for him to keep stretching his lower body because he’s in the chair every day,” Stokes says. “He’s in flexion all the time, so the hip flexors are really important to stretch.”

* * *

Much of what the two of them do together at the gym three days a week they have discovered through trial and error, as well as through websites such as [WheelWod](#), Cole explained.

The medical system offered little direction when it comes to fitness, he said, even as a patient at the [Spinal Cord Injury Program at GF Strong Rehabilitation Centre](#) in Vancouver, where he spent two months after he was released from acute care at VGH.

“The medical system has basically given me zero direction,” Cole

said. “It was like there were just a bunch of generic checkmarks or milestones you had to reach. That’s all they looked at. Could I get in and out of my chair? Could I go from a chair to a bed? Into a car? And once I hit those milestones, I was allowed to go home.”

Even when Cole expressed keen interest in pushing a bit harder at GF Strong, he was shut down.

“There was this bike there that straps you in. And I thought it might be worth trying to keep myself moving as much as I can. But they basically just said it’s pointless because I don’t have function because I have a [complete injury](#).”

He added: “I fuckin’ hated being in the hospital. I just wanted to get out of there. So when I had done everything I needed to do, I told them, ‘I can do everything I need to be able to do. Can I leave now?’ And they were like, ‘Uh, I guess so.’”

* * *

After stretching his hip flexors and legs, Cole and Stokes move on to standing drills.

Cole wheels his chair close to a squat rack, and Stokes attaches a weight belt with a chain hanging from it to Cole’s waist. Then he straps two AbMats between Cole’s legs with a Thera-Band.

“This will keep his knees in place when we get him standing,” Stokes explains.

It’s time to stand up.

Cole holds onto a barbell Stokes firmly attached to the rack, while Stokes faces Cole and grabs onto the chain. On the count of three, Cole pulls himself up with his arms while Stokes tugs on the chain until Cole is upright on his feet.

“If he can keep putting weight on his bones and his muscles, even if he can’t feel it, it’ll help prevent atrophy and will keep his bone density up,” says Stokes, still hanging onto the chain. “It’s important he keeps practicing standing or he’ll become frail.”

A [2006 article](#) in the Journal of Spinal Cord Medicine, “Bone Loss and Muscle Atrophy in Spinal Cord Injury: Epidemiology, Fracture Prediction, and Rehabilitation Strategies,” explained science is conflicted as to whether weight-bearing activities such as standing drills affect muscle and bone strength—as well as atrophy—in patients with spinal-cord injuries. Regardless of the murky science, Stokes says common sense tells him these exercises are useful for Cole’s rehabilitation.

“When he’s able to walk again one day, it will be easier for him if he keeps practicing standing up. His brain is telling him to stand up straight even without him being able to feel it,” Stokes says.

Between panted breaths, an upright Cole adds: “I couldn’t do this a few months ago. The hardest part is the core stability. It’s really hard to stop my hips from just giving out and falling over. Ryan



For conditioning, Cole often uses a SkiErg, but he finds his shoulders and triceps often burn out before his lungs.

is helping keep my hips in place with the chain.”

Cole’s next goal is to be able to stand up on his own.

“It would be nice if I could stand up when I go for drinks with friends at a bar so I’m not having a conversation with someone’s butt all the time,” Cole says before calling out to his stepfather, Mark Kohlen, for help.

“Can you come over here and twist my foot forward a bit?” he directs Kohlen, who walks over and straightens Cole’s foot.

“It’s a huge confidence booster when I do something I couldn’t do before. It’s what I have always loved about CrossFit.” —Cole Bernier

After about three minutes of standing, he rests. Cole’s core is fatigued.

It’s time to get his heart rate up a little bit—admittedly one of the hardest things for him to do.

“I haven’t been able to figure out a way to get a really good cardiovascular workout yet. When you take your legs out of it, it’s hard,” Cole says. “Ski-erging is good, but it’s still the shoulders that burn out first, and triceps, more than the lungs. I haven’t been challenged cardiovascularly for a while. It kind of sucks.”

For now, the SkiErg is the best tool he has discovered, so he wheels himself across the gym and logs 500 meters. By the end, he’s breathing pretty hard.

“I usually do things like Tabata sprints or something like one minute on, 45 seconds’ rest, for five sets,” Cole explains, still out of breath.

Next on the agenda are muscle cleans and presses.

He spends a few minutes warming up his lats and shoulders with Crossover Symmetry bands. Then he grabs a dowel, stretches his rack position and works on his overhead position by holding the dowel overhead for about a minute.

While Cole is warming up, Kohlen sets up two 15-inch Rogue jerk blocks. Stokes lays a barbell across the blocks. Cole wheels over and does some warm-up clean-and-press sets with the empty barbell. Today, his working sets are sets of three muscle clean and presses at 65 lb.

“He couldn’t do this the last time I was here,” Kohlen reveals. “When he first started coming to the gym after the accident, he couldn’t even hold a barbell over his head. His core was too weak. He’s come a long way.”

Today, 65 lb. looks like no problem for Cole, who finishes his sets and then looks to Stokes to figure out what the last piece of the day will be.

On the menu for Bernier are four rounds of 10 shoulder presses and 10 pull-ups. Pull-ups are done with Stokes holding Cole’s feet, while Cole pulls his chin over the bar 10 times without taking a break.

“I use Wheelwod.com a lot to find conditioning workouts. It’s pretty good. There are always scaling options on there, too,” says Stokes. The trainer notes he isn’t an expert in adaptive fitness but has learned a lot working with Cole in recent months.

“Most people just aren’t knowledgeable about people in chairs, so we’ve had to figure a lot out on our own,” Cole says.

“It just comes down to being self-motivated, I guess When I came back to Kelowna, I met a guy who was three years post-injury and he couldn’t even transfer out of his chair to the floor and back again. I mean, it was a hard thing to learn, and it took me a while, but he should be way further along than me after three years.”

Though he’s no longer training for CrossFit Games regionals, Cole explains the feeling of accomplishment he gets at the gym is the same as it always was: He still feels the high of knowing he has improved.

“It’s a huge confidence booster when I do something I couldn’t do before. It’s what I have always loved about CrossFit, and although it’s different now, that part of it is still there.”

Dating and Relationship Reality

Although his gym routine is like therapy, Cole said he’d be lying if he said working out has prevented moments of great despair in the last 10 months. One of the concerns that has eaten him up is dating and starting a family.

“One of the worst parts after the whole shock of everything settled down was not having feeling in my genitals, not knowing if kids will be a possibility,” Cole said.

“I think about things like teaching my kids to play sports, about kicking a soccer ball with them, or teaching them to ride a bike. You know, doing stuff dads are supposed to do, and being someone your kid can look up to in those physical ways. That has been one of the biggest barriers for me. I’ve had a lot of breakdowns about it because I have always looked forward to being a dad.”



Emily Beers/CrossFit Journal



Emily Beers/CrossFit Journal

Workout partner: Cole with his Staffordshire terrier, Titus.

Cole knows now becoming a dad is still very possible for him; it just might not look like what he envisioned.

“I know there are a lot of ways you can have kids—natural or otherwise. But (it) wasn’t just that. I also became really worried for a bit about meeting someone and dating. That was huge for me.”

He paused, then added: “I mean, I’m a 24-year-old guy: The physical-intimacy aspect of a relationship was always really important to me. It was always really important to me to make my girlfriend happy in that way. So going from the shape I was in and being confident in my body when it comes to dating to being a guy in a wheelchair who can’t have sex—that was a tough pill to swallow.”

In recent months, though, Cole has learned **sexual intercourse** is still possible.

“I have a pump now (that can help bring on an erection), but I mean I’m living at home again, so I haven’t played with it too much yet,” he said.

He still hasn’t dated since his accident, but he said he’s confident that he will meet someone when the time is right.

“Now if I meet someone and they’re not OK with me, then I’m not OK with them. It’s a smaller dating pool now, because some people just wouldn’t want to date someone in a wheelchair, but at the same time I think my ratio of someone I might make a connection with (within that dating pool) is higher,” he explained.

“So I’m not worried about it anymore. It will just help me weed out people I don’t want to date.”

Looking Back, Looking Forward

At his parents’ house in West Kelowna, Cole, his mother and Kohlen gather around an island in the kitchen, snacking on veggies and hummus, meat and cheese. Cole’s three-month-old puppy—an English Staffy—sits on his lap. The three chat about the last 10 months and what the future will look like.

“Cole and I were just talking about this the other day. It will be 10 months (since the accident) tomorrow. It’s crazy how insanely fast it has gone by,” Kate says.

“The last few months have been a lot easier now that he can drive again and we’ve finished with all the house modifications.”

The family installed a wheelchair stair lift so Cole can get to and from his bedroom downstairs, as well as a lift to help him get into the house from the garage.

Kohlen turns to Cole: “Just watching you get around the house now, and in and out of your vehicle—you do it every day, so you probably don’t notice the improvement as much as we do, but you’re getting around so much better now.”

Cole nods and agrees things have gotten easier. He’s in a much better place than he was just a couple of months ago, he says, which has allowed him to start thinking about the future—of going back to school and returning to work.

Recently, Cole accepted a role at CrossFit Vernon—a 45-minute drive from his home box in West Kelowna—to be an apprentice coach under Jeremy Meredith and Deanna Fester.

“I like coaching a lot, so I’ll see where it takes me. I’m still not 100 percent sure what I want to do long term in terms of a career. But I’m really enjoying coaching right now and learning from (Meredith and Fester).”

Another part of Cole’s one-year plan is to venture into adaptive sports: Basketball, sledge hockey and downhill skiing are high on his list.

“I’m just going to try a whole bunch of different sports and see what I like,” he says.

Although Cole is taking great strides making the most of his situation, he’s adamant he hasn’t accepted his paralysis as permanent.

He believes he will one day walk again.

“I don’t think I’ll ever really accept it. It still feels temporary to me,” he says.

“And I’ve always found doctors very negative about injuries, but there are stories left, right and center where doctors were wrong, where five or 10 years post-injury people make full recoveries. And with research and technology, there are so many new procedures coming out. Nothing is ever for sure.”

Part of what’s keeping his hope alive is that he’s been experiencing pins-and-needles tingling in his legs and feet in recent days—that and the dreams he has at night.

“(In my dreams,) I’ll be lying on the couch still paralyzed or getting out of my truck, and I’ll just be able to walk out of nowhere. But it’s not a normal walk. Either it will really hurt, or it’s kind of sketchy. My balance is off, or one leg doesn’t fully work, so that’s how I know it’s realistic and not just a fantasy dream,” he says.

“I have no doubts I will be able to walk again unassisted in my lifetime.” ■

About the Author: Emily Beers is a CrossFit Journal contributor and coach at **CrossFit Vancouver**. She finished 37th at the 2014 Reebok CrossFit Games.



THE
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MOVIE REVIEW: “CITIZEN SOLDIER”

Point-of-view combat footage offers a dramatic look at the National Guard in Afghanistan.





Sgt. Allen Huey of the South Carolina Army National Guard provides security in Orgun District with help from a member of the Afghan National Army.

“It’s jammed again. I hate this thing!”

The same words are likely spoken hourly near printers and copiers in offices all around the world.

In this case, the words were uttered by an American soldier struggling with an Mk 19 grenade launcher mounted to a combat vehicle in Afghanistan.

“Oh, fuck me!” a soldier yells as rocket-propelled grenades explode nearby and rounds whiz past.

The soldiers in the vehicle are waiting for another element to arrive on foot, and they’re sitting ducks with a number of attackers hidden in an adjacent cornfield that can’t conceal regular muzzle flashes.

The scene is truly intense and characteristic of the tension-filled “Citizen Soldier,” which is presented mainly through footage collected by combat photographers and helmet-mounted GoPro cameras. For just over 100 minutes, viewers are essentially given the point of view of a soldier in the Oklahoma Army National Guard 45th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, which was deployed to Afghanistan in 2011.

The film’s opening explains that most of these soldiers train about 40 days a year and have full-time jobs but serve their country nonetheless as part of a rich tradition dating back to 1636 in the pre-United States colonies. Because National Guard units are under the dual control of state and federal governments, deployment overseas is common in times of war.

The film succeeds on the strength of gripping footage, and the stories are well told as video and audio clips are cut together to create a narrative, such as when radio intercepts reveal the enemy is arming while the Americans are approaching through very rugged terrain that leaves them open to ambush.

In another incident, soldiers frantically search for an enemy by peering into dark dwellings, leaving the viewer waiting with bated breath for a sudden flash and a fight.

“There was a saying,
‘There’s no stronger bond than shared
pain.’ Couldn’t be any more true.”
—Capt. Tyler Brown

The film’s challenge is that it’s hard to balance all the dramatic footage with character development that would truly bring home the citizen-soldier aspect. That’s not to say you don’t get to know some of these soldiers to a degree. Tender or light moments in Afghanistan or interviews filmed back in the U.S. offer perspective and fill in some back story, but the wealth and quality of the combat footage is totally immersive and overwhelming. For the majority of the film, war is dramatically laid bare, with the courage, leadership, bravado, fear, panic and confusion of its participants on full display.

It’s borderline impossible to remember a combatant is a motorcycle-riding corrections officer when you can hear and see bullets sending chips of rock into the air while he’s completely exposed to enemies concealed above and around him. The intensity of the engagements is such that you perceive these men only as soldiers: Unstable helmet-cam footage puts you right next to them as they sprint for cover amid staccato bursts of gunfire.

The bookends that remind us the soldiers are also citizens are very necessary because our connections to the men come almost entirely from experiencing their emotions as they take part in a firefight or navigate roads on which any bump might be an IED that will flip the vehicle. I imagine the soldiers themselves feel that same detachment from civilian life when they’re under fire in a foreign land.

Overall, the tension and drama throughout are more than worth the price of admission. “Citizen Soldier” presents a gritty look at the war in Afghanistan and the people who set aside their full-time jobs to fight it. ■

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