
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

The Banality of Elitism

Dan Edelman urges parents and grown-ups everywhere to resist the urge to adult-erate youth sports.

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June 2012



All images: Danell Marks/CrossFit Kids

As a CrossFit Kids trainer, what do you do with a larval-stage firebreather?

Before answering, remember that this is CrossFit, which, as we know, forges elite fitness. “Stronger, faster, better” is our credo, but only if we are pushing the envelope of our comfort, programming, experience. Taking a broader cultural view, this is the U.S. This is our postmodern, digital world. A 10-year-old with a butterfly kip and muscle-ups? Ho-hum. Examples of the ever-more incredible, extreme and, in some cases, disturbing are at our fingertips at all times. We are fast becoming numb to instances of the common executed uncommonly well. And significantly, instant gratification is the status quo.

This sort of cult of the extraordinary manifests in, among other ways, the idolization of the celebrity athlete-entertainer, exacerbating flaws within our youth sports system, which has been subject to critical scrutiny almost since its inception more than a century ago (24,34). An accelerating trend toward early sport specialization (24,30,37,39,49,53,55)—marked by highly competitive, intensive year-round participation—characterizes a system that dangles promises of turning our children into superstars by way of a feeder system comprising “elite” club and travel teams and exclusive secondary and higher education athletic programs.

Even some of those parents who recognize that specialization's opposite—sport sampling—is the way to go are perhaps even more excessive by pushing their kids to participate in only select programs, which essentially amounts to highly competitive, intensive year-round participation in multiple sports. This ever-earlier quest for elite-level athleticism more often than not fails to produce truly elite athletes. What we have developed is a dysfunctional youth sports caste system biased toward early bloomers and those families that can afford to pay for these types of programs. Meanwhile, we fail to properly identify genuine talent or foster long-term physical fitness in the vast majority of children (24).

It is within this environment that the CrossFit Kids program unveiled the Teen Challenge, a first-of-its-kind team exhibition involving adolescent CrossFitters, ages 13 to 18, that occurred at the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games. In October 2011, Jeff and Mikki Lee Martin, the founders of CrossFit Kids, followed up with the first Gauntlet competition. The one-day event saw individual teens competing in novice, junior-varsity and varsity divisions for bragging rights at CrossFit Kids Headquarters' home box, CrossFit Brand X, in Ramona, Calif. The second Gauntlet went down Jan. 28-29, 2012, at the Los Angeles Fitness Expo. The third was March 4 at the Arnold Sports Festival in Columbus, Ohio. As of this writing, two more events are scheduled for the year. CrossFit Kids HQ hopes to see this expand internationally in scope and magnitude. We envision these teen competitions as someday evolving into a full-blown youth sport with recreational and prep-school organization.

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At CrossFit Brand X, we have seen tremendous growth in all our classes, including an influx of enthusiastic adolescents to the Teen/Advanced class, many of whom participate in other sports—some at advanced levels—and who have become hooked on CrossFit. We love that. And we love that a lot of the kids and a lot of the parents are as excited about the Gauntlet as we are. Many of our young clients are chomping at the bit to compete. My son included.



The author's firebreathing son, sporting very festive socks.

Here's where we need to step carefully.

That's Entertainment

The temptation to "open 'er up and see what she can do" with a talented preteen CrossFitter is a strong one. That inclination is consonant with the common wisdom to "start them young," an idea with empirical roots in the "10,000-hour rule" (21,28,48) and one that certainly fits with the deeply entrenched sentiments guiding youth athletics as alluded to above; to wit, the earlier kids are immersed in sports, the better they'll get.

In general, the idea of early exposure makes sense to me. It makes sense to CrossFit Kids, too, as the existence of the Preschool class indicates. And we are aware of what Infant Swimming Resource (35) is accomplishing. Very young children are highly capable of learning stuff, of skill acquisition, of accomplishment. It is entirely natural at that stage of development. The problem is qualitative in the sense that what children can learn—are supposed to learn during the course of normal development—differs markedly from what adults—particularly us as often-overzealous if well-meaning sports parents—often expose them to (e.g., 27,46).

Chronologically speaking, my son is 10; he's prepubescent, which means, when we're talking about sport-specific skill acquisition or general physical preparedness, his body will respond to only certain kinds of stimuli (17,23,27). For example, in terms of resistance training, his body is not ready to benefit from heavier loading (23), despite his ostensible technical capacity to handle heavier loading.

Physically, cognitively and psychosocially, children are not adults. Duh, right?

Physically, cognitively and psychosocially, children are not adults. Duh, right? Well, we adults have a tendency to chuck that obvious understanding out the window when it doesn't suit our particular agenda. And this sort of agenda is often found in the world of youth sports, a realm of sociocultural dysfunction and deep psychodramatic poignancy for adults, and a realm that CrossFit Kids has gingerly entered.

Enemy Mine, Enemy Me

What do I mean by "sociocultural dysfunction and psychodramatic poignancy?" Let's look at it this way: what is the No. 1 problem in organized youth sports?

Us. Adults.

That's idiotic; where would youth sports be without adults?

Some might argue that kids' sports would be right where they ought to be: in backyards, parks and sandlots. I don't know that I agree with that idea entirely—I think there's a lot of good in organized youth sports—but I get the sentiment. Kids should be having fun. Sounds pat and politically correct and just a bit saccharine, but ultimately I believe it's true. And I believe the vast majority of adults involved in organized youth sports buy into that as well. So what's the problem?

Well, despite promises to ourselves not to forget what it's like to be a kid, as we age, an inexorable creep seems to open a gulf between adulthood and childhood. And so? And so check this out:

My son's 10U travel baseball team is currently ranked No. 7 in the nation. The team was No. 1 for a moment, having earned that distinction on the strength of a tournament championship over the 2011 Thanksgiving weekend. The victory also secured the team a berth in the USSSA's prestigious [Elite World Series](http://www.usssabaseball.org/the_elite_world_series.htm) (http://www.usssabaseball.org/the_elite_world_series.htm) at Disney World in Orlando, Fla., wherein the top 32 (i.e., the Elite 32) will vie for a spot in the USSSA's week-long MLB-sponsored and nationally televised National Youth Championship in Cordova, Tenn. Winning, right?

Well, soon after that my son's coach told us to hold our horses. Looks like he'd prefer to participate in [TravelBall Select's](http://www.travelballselect.com/) (<http://www.travelballselect.com/>) first annual invitational National Travelball Championship, which promises not only national television, Web and other coverage, but also, in consideration of the "financial impact" on parents and coaches of such a tournament, a six-game minimum and as many as 10 games in four days. Got pitching? Holy overuse, Batman.

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My son's coach told the kids in a pre-practice pep talk that they are going to win. There's too much money at stake, so they had better win every game, and playing time will be according to a player's ability to contribute to wins. And, just to be fair, he thought it right to mention to the parents who pay more than \$1,000 a year—not including tournament fees and attendant costs, including upward of \$3,000 for the Travellball Select (TbS) trip—that the roster is not frozen; if he can find a new kid who will help the team win, he's going to grab him. Oh, by the way, TbS provides team rankings. Did I mention my kid's team is No. 7 in the nation? At least according to TbS and at least for this week; USSSA has the team ranked 50th.

Getting the picture?

Process v. Outcome

Travel baseball has hollowed out our local rec league in Ramona. In fact, a sister league in a nearby community has been so gutted it has to send its three teams up to our league to have a season at all. I don't know about other sports, but I figure the situation is similar; see, for example, [AAU Boys Basketball](http://www.aauboysbasketball.org/) (<http://www.aauboysbasketball.org/>) or [National Soccer Rankings](http://www.nationalsoccer-ranking.com/) (<http://www.nationalsoccer-ranking.com/>).

The professionalization of youth sports is a symptom of adults imposing their idea of fun on children.

You look at these sites and your first impression might be, "How cool! A little like the pros." A little too much like the pros. The professionalization of youth sports is a symptom of adults imposing their idea of fun on children. Resorting to a bit of wordplay, one might characterize this

professionalism as an "adult-eration" of youth sports in America. Adults think they're making youth sports more fun. The question is for whom?

The Hebbian (33) idea of fostering an auto-association between activities and fun is a simple notion that is in play everywhere. It's certainly given lip service with respect to my son's team: "As long as the boys are having fun." But such parental utterances are accompanied by a certain dissonance haunting the eyes. From where I'm sitting, it becomes difficult to ignore the sense that, at this so-called elite level, the overarching goal is to pair baseball not with fun but winning. Why is this problematic?

Winning = Outcome

The CrossFit Kids Trainer Course's most important takeaway is the linking of fitness and fun—and not just fun but broad, inclusive, general (BIG) fun (43). At first blush, the notion seems clever, maybe even a bit facile. But I'd like to put a finer point on the fitness-fun connection. Really what the Martins are after is a link between BIG fun and the pursuit of fitness; that is, to guide children toward a lifetime interest in understanding fitness and being fit or, if we think in terms of the fitness continuum (below), in seeking out and holding onto super-wellness. The implications are obvious.



Our assumption is that if everything we can measure about health will conform to this continuum then it seems that sickness, wellness, and fitness are different measures of a single quality: health.

To put this objective in another more basic way: CrossFit Kids' mission is to make kids move better for life. For children in particular, better movement requires that trainers be staunch devotees to teaching mechanics.

Mechanics = Process

Training of any kind that focuses heavily on winning now is wrong for youth athletes, athletic development and American sports.

Why Is Winning Losing?

I'm not naïve: winning is way better than losing. And competition is an important dimension of athletic and child development. But training of any kind that focuses heavily on winning now is wrong for youth athletes, athletic development and American sports (8).

Anxiety tied to competition is a rich research area (29), having been identified in youth sports since their early-20th-century organization (29). We understand that simply competing against others generates some stress. Take that competitive stress and parboil it in a win-win-win culture, and you have the fixings for withdrawal or burnout (27, 32, 42).

"When the desire to win—to be successful—dominates the thoughts of young-adult athletes, it can create performance anxiety or a sense that all the practice and preparation are mere drudgery" (27).

The authors of that sentence are referring to collegiate athletes here, but I see these dynamics working at younger ages because adults bring all the trappings of higher-level athletics to the junior elite stage, including a culture centered on winning. This kind of culture situates performance only and ever in the now. 3, 2, 1 ... win or fail!

Bases loaded, two outs, full count, down by a run, 0-2 on the day, the No. 9 hitter desperately waves his arms at a little bender on the outside corner, no hips, completely flat

footed, and chips a dying quail over the outreached glove of the first baseman to drive in two runs. The parents go wild. Tournament champs. Hero.

Bases loaded, two outs, full count, down by a run, 0-2 on the day, the No. 9 hitter is fooled by a little bender on the outside corner, but he executes the active take he's been working on all month, keeps his elbow and hands in, stays behind the ball and rips a rocket line drive—right at the second baseman. Game over. Tournament runners up. The parents groan—there goes the team ranking. Goat.

Now I guarantee you that more than one person told that second kid, "Nice try." And those people might actually have meant it, having recognized the quality of his performance. But I also guarantee you that, if a culture of winning prevails, the kid feels like he failed. And if asked, he would say he'd rather have fisted a tepid little flare into right field for the win than hit the ball with technical excellence for an out.



We must be careful not to destroy the sense of joy kids feel as they try new things.

Along similar lines, in the CrossFit competition context, most reps are scored by satisfying the range of motion as set forth in the standards; that is, the athlete need only be effective. A competitor is not typically held to any efficiency standard. I get it, it's go time and issues of efficiency should've been resolved in training—otherwise, a flare off the end of the bat gets 'er done. Valid reasoning in the heat of battle for experienced athletes. Valid, too, in a winning-centered culture.

To children and teens, fitness means what CrossFit Kids trainers say it means.

But significant in the quote above is the idea that when winning is first and foremost, practice and preparation can become a chore. How counter to the CrossFit Kids culture is that? Utterly. Because when you think about it, the soul of CrossFit Kids is practice and preparation over time (43).



The overarching goal of CrossFit Kids is to pair fitness with fun.

Why Is Process Better?

We know CrossFit is referred to as the sport of fitness. Efforts to establish it as a legitimate competitive sport in the eyes of society are ongoing and accelerating. I see this as positive growth that adds breadth and depth to the community—generally speaking.

A CrossFit Kids program that becomes preoccupied with the sporting side of CrossFit will subvert the Martins' long-standing and meticulously tended culture of pursuing fitness. If we allow that to happen, the sport of fitness, despite all its current momentum, can fail.

Foundational to the CrossFit Kids methodology is the principle of mechanics-consistency-intensity, or MCI, which is essentially a practice-and-preparation approach to any activity. MCI affords the program an opportunity to define success in terms of stepwise goals and incremental gains. Over time. The sweetness of the eventual victory is tied to the hard work and persistence applied along the way. Kids learn that short-term setbacks are not failures or losses but a normal part of any worthwhile pursuit.

This is critical. CrossFit Kids' overarching aim to pair fitness with fun is itself inextricably tied to its core mission of making kids move better over the entire life course. We do this by emphasizing mechanics. MCI might more accurately be MMM—mechanics-mechanics-mechanics. Even in the Teen/Advanced class, when competition becomes an intrinsic component of the fun for kids, we remain, for all intents and purposes, in a practice-and-preparation mode to ensure fidelity of movement. CrossFit Kids goes to great lengths to normalize this for our young clients. We have to if we are to execute our main mission.

To children and teens, fitness means what CrossFit Kids trainers say it means. If your program de-links fun from the pursuit of fitness and links it to competition—i.e., the pursuit of victory—you end up sacrificing technical excellence on the altar of intensity. In this environment, kids will never attach a value to learning movements no matter how much lip service is paid to points of performance prior to starting the clock. Critical opportunities to influence the quality of movement (4,6,7,9,12,46,51,55) will be lost. CrossFit Kids' critical mission will be a loss.

The Sport of Fitness Has Arrived

Let's imagine an established nationwide year-round youth CrossFit competition circuit with local throwdown leagues; sectional, state and regional qualifiers and/or invitationals; and a prestigious national and even international championship that coincides with the CrossFit Games. Imagine this circuit has developed into a CrossFit Games feeder system with CrossFit Kids programs in affiliates or schools acting as the main engines of talent development. Imagine a multi-tiered ranking system for these programs and the emergence of an interlocking directorate comprising regional sanctioning bodies that dictate the nature of the circuit. Imagine the concomitant political-economic forces coming to bear to drive down the age of participation such that divisions from 7U to 18U exist.

Imagine that.

The pairing of fitness and fun is eschewed for the pairing of the sport of fitness and fun.

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CrossFit Kids classes are CrossFit practices. Clients, or should I say team members, learn how to competitively CrossFit during class time. Given the year-round competition schedule, trainers focus on game-day preparation; that is, teaching kids to meet the movement standards so they can go as hard as they can without getting dinged with a "no rep." Each program boasts a "team," but these young athletes all must compete against each other for a starting slot, and you never know when the trainers will bring in a new firebreather; the program will only put the best out on the field on game day when rankings and qualifications are at stake. The best are the fastest and the strongest. So CrossFit Kids trainers turn their attention to identifying and cultivating talented CrossFitters at younger and younger ages.



What would happen if CrossFit Kids became as competitive as many other youth sports, with national rankings and travel teams?

Enthusiastic parents perceive that the only way their talented kids can become corporate-sponsored professional CrossFit athletes is for them to specialize in CrossFit.

These proud parents huddle together and commiserate about the costs of year-round competition: program fees, event fees, equipment and attire, nutrition, travel, sport and injury-rehab massage, private sessions. They discuss fundraising and fret cliquishly about the new kid who might bump theirs from the team for next month's elite invitational in How-Cool-Is-This-Even-Though-We-Can't-Afford-It, Calif.

Game-day sights and sounds might include a leaderboard, an 11U kid in tears as her hand gets taped up after ripping on the first WOD, a mother berating a judge for stealing a rep, a father screaming at a 10U kid to "get on the bar!"



CrossFit Kids is built on the idea that all children should have an opportunity to be active—no matter their athletic ability.

BIG Mission Failure

Dissecting this scenario exposes a couple of all-too-familiar problems:

1. Overtraining, overuse injury and burnout are the three horsemen of year-round participation and early specialization (3,10,11,13,14,25,36,37,40,41,45,55).
2. The best right now are selected out. The rest are excluded (8,16,24).

None of this bodes well for youth sports in general, but these issues are absolutely anathema to CrossFit Kids. See, the program is evolving into a unique entity within the realm of athletics as both a strength-and-conditioning program and a sport. It is poised to address these problems from within the U.S. youth sports system because its principal strength-and-conditioning role allows it to operate on the frontlines of injury prevention while its secondary role as a burgeoning sport means kids can get into a new game that will also help improve their main sport. Both dimensions soften the negative physical, social and psychological impacts of sport specialization.

CrossFit Kids can't do that if it takes on the structural model prevalent in U.S. youth sports and becomes a part of the problem.

But on a more fundamental level, allowing the program to decouple fun from the pursuit of fitness and turn its attention toward CrossFit competition and talent development directly violates the spirit of the program. The fact of the matter is that talent identification is problematic (1,2,54). The U.S. system of talent development is deeply flawed (24), as reflected in the scenario above. Pressures to build a winning team right now will likely drive CrossFit Kids trainers to privilege the naturally athletic and, more disturbingly, the early bloomers over other kids. Broad, inclusive, general fun? Not so much.

Basically, the organization of the current system is designed to tell the less athletic and the late bloomers that sports ain't for them (24). It is a kind of disenfranchisement that can lead to a life-haunting choice of physical inactivity, improper nutrition and poor health (for some, super-unwellness). These are the very public-health and social problems on which CrossFit Kids sets its sights. These disenfranchised are the very children CrossFit Kids exists to serve. A properly run CrossFit Kids program offers all kids a safe and encouraging place to be active, discover athleticism and bloom.

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Eliding Elitism

Of course, my scenario above reaches quite a bit, but as the Gauntlet competition series matures, we expect local CrossFit Kids throwdowns and other competitive events to become commonplace, and the expansion of the sport becomes less farfetched.

Fun might change over time, but expressions of fun are universal in the sense that children seeing adults enjoying themselves will want in on the action. Just because an enthusiastic 10-year-old tells you she wants to CrossFit like the grown-ups doesn't mean she ought to. However, at CrossFit Brand X, one way we allow all the teens in on some of the adult fun is to program scaled versions of the CrossFit Games Open WODs during Teen/Advanced class.

We must take care to keep younger yet talented children engaged in class. Allow them to demonstrate movements during the WOD explanation and focus/skill work, let them work out front and center with the varsity-level teens, and/or challenge them with increased reps or difficulty in movements in the WODs rather than increasing loads no matter how tempting that sounds. If your program has the resources, provide these hard chargers with extra skill work; e.g., gymnastics progressions.

Enthusiastic teen CrossFitters and their parents must learn early on about the importance of rest and recovery.

Within the framework of the class, we need to downplay some of the advanced sport moves like the butterfly kip for pull-ups or the kipping muscle-up and stress the importance of basic strength development. For example, we should definitely train the standard kipping pull-up, but the butterfly kip should be reserved for occasional WODs and only for experienced varsity-level kids. Remember, children see something cool and they want in on it. But allowing kids to learn the butterfly—which they do very easily—and rely on it exclusively in every workout can short circuit sound development of the shoulder girdle. The strict pull-up can appear in any segment of a class as a way to build basic strength in the shoulder girdle, which will translate to a higher capacity for CrossFit's default kipping pull-ups and provide a solid foundation for the muscle-up, while also playing an important role in injury prevention.



Kids often learn new skills when playing around before and after class. Great things can come from this low-pressure, try-anything atmosphere.

But here's the thing: my young son learned the butterfly kip through observation. This occurred before and after class when he and the other kids were hanging out. Same as his muscle-up. Essentially playing. Before and after class are great times for the kids to explore things freely with minimal structure. They play on the monkey bars and rings, practice their double-unders, and get upside-down and work on handstands and handstand walking. Casual achievements—and authentic athletic development—spring from intrinsically motivated fun with peers. The obvious caveat is that this cannot be wholly unsupervised; safety must be considered (e.g., maybe no first attempts at a ring handstand push-up suspended over the concrete floor).

As CrossFit Kids trainers, few things are as satisfying as hearing that a child client loves CrossFit so much that he has chosen it as his main sport. It's a stroke to the ego seeing such a client at every Kids class you offer. That might mean six days a week. That might be too much—and too much like what troubles American youth sports. Enthusiastic teen CrossFitters and their parents must learn early on about the importance of rest and recovery and that while CrossFit Kids strongly encourages children to explore all kinds of sports, we do not advocate early specialization or anything resembling year-round intensive participation in a single athletic activity.

CrossFit's growth as a sport in the mainstream means new clientele and the emergence of some tangential issues for a CrossFit Kids program. At the Teen/Advanced level, such growth might manifest in an influx of non-Cross-Fitting parents who take for granted that their all-star-club-soccer-travel-baseball-playing kid will breathe fire by default, whose perspective derives from their child's lifetime of "elite-level" sports participation (and the kid might assume the same thing). These parents might first cheer on and coax their kids; then there might be a bit of chiding if their children are not "winning" the WOD. The worst-case scenario has these parents coaching their kids at home. This can be handled beginning with up-front and clear communication to incoming families regarding the CrossFit Kids mission. Those who don't appreciate the message or find it onerous to watch their offspring not be exalted as all-stars might pull their kids, or the kids themselves might not like starting as a novice. It is an unfortunate occurrence, but we're dealing with powerful forces (adult psyches) that must be met with firm adherence to the CrossFit Kids mission.

CrossFit Kids encourages all kids to level up to the highest division in which they can safely handle the RX'd weights and movements.

Following this, if you are running an extracurricular event, CrossFit Kids mission integrity can be maintained through a strict lower age limit of 13 for judged competition. The preteens and younger children can get the opportunity to shine with CrossFit Kids trainer oversight in WOD demos, obstacle courses and low-skill challenges such as sled drags or bag carries where kids can try to beat their own times.

We want it understood that the Gauntlet—and by extension any extracurricular event related to CrossFit Kids—is not about elevating teen CrossFitters to rock-star status or inflating children's egos under false pretenses. On one level, our interest is demonstrating the program's capabilities—mechanics-consistency-intensity; effectiveness-efficiency-safety. On another level, we want to showcase individual

achievement under rigorous competition conditions. CrossFit Brand X has a couple of highly experienced 13-year-olds who could dominate the novice division; we won't allow them to compete at that level. We want them to view the Gauntlet as all about the battle, not the score. CrossFit Kids encourages all kids to level up to the highest division in which they can safely handle the RX'd weights and movements. Frankly, it's all about keeping it real, about trying to teach kids that the reward is in the process, the hard work, the genuine accomplishment, rather than in the appearance thereof (18).

Process trumps outcome because process produces outcome. What outcome do you want?

The Banality of Travel Baseball

A couple of years ago, my son was on a local "travel team" comprising most of the top 9- and 10-year-old players in Ramona. A couple of disgruntled dads whose kids were not part of that team put together their own club to feature their two boys. Whenever I ran into them at the fields, they'd be scheming about this new team. I remember them being particularly stoked about the color of the team's uniforms. They built a team around their sons and went "down the hill" to play in a Friday-night league for travel clubs. Looking sharp under the lights in their crimson-and-gold colors, and with their sons batting and fielding in key spots, they lost every game by double digits. The team folded following the league, and some of those kids don't even play baseball anymore.

In Southern California, baseball is year-round, so it's no surprise that my son's current team participated in a Christmas tourney. These tournaments cost a team anywhere from \$475 to \$600-plus. I believe this one cost the team \$660. Their second game of pool play was against a team calling itself the So-and-So Elite. The team hailed from a well-to-do community of San Diego. They showed up in style—top-drawer uniforms, warm-up jackets and custom gear bags in team colors. Most of the parents were sporting So-and-So Elite hoodies.

The So-and-So Elite just came off a 15-0 defeat, getting mercied in two innings. My son's team took exactly two innings to mercy them 17-0. So for all that money, the So-and-So played four innings total that day, gave up 35 runs and managed never to bat through their complete lineup across two games (their two opponents likewise only got two innings out of the debacle). But they looked the part with "Elite" emblazoned across their jerseys.



Forget about elite—to the author's son, CrossFit Kids is pure fun.

By the way, my son's team used to be known as the San Diego Whatzits North. Recently, the coach declared that the team would henceforth be known as the San Diego Whatzits Elite. The team has not won a tournament since the name change.

**To my son, CrossFit is pure.
Baseball, however, has come
to mean too much to him.**

Loaded Fun

One time, when trying to help my son with a case of pre-game jitters, I suggested he think of how he feels just before starting a WOD. With a little fire in his eyes he stabbed me with an incredulous look and snapped, "How is that going to help? CrossFit doesn't mean anything!"

Wow. I've thought about that for some time, and I want to take an idea out for a spin:

To my son, CrossFit doesn't mean anything, just like whiffle ball on the driveway doesn't mean anything, like pickup basketball on a Saturday afternoon doesn't mean anything. To my son, CrossFit is pure. Baseball, however, has come to mean too much to him. I would venture to say—though he might not be aware of it—for my son, the game has been adult-erated. And my heart has maybe broken a little bit.

So I'll ask again: As a CrossFit Kids trainer, what do you do with a larval-stage firebreather?

You never forget that you are dealing with a preadolescent, prepubescent child.

You never forget the physiological significance of that from a strength-and-conditioning standpoint.

You never forget that safety always comes first in a CrossFit Kids program.

You never forget that although CrossFit Kids' overarching goal is to pair fitness and fun, such fun belongs to the kids, not the adults.

You never forget the CrossFit Kids mission is making kids move better now so they move better throughout their lives, embrace a healthy lifestyle now so they embrace a healthy lifestyle throughout their lives, and pursue fitness now so they pursue fitness throughout their lives.

You never forget that CrossFit should never mean anything to a child, and in that way it will forever mean something.

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