

---

# THE CrossFit LIFE

---

## Boxes and Bars

Hilary Achauer explores what happens when your CrossFit box is surrounded by bars, tattoo parlors and tanning salons.

---

By Hilary Achauer

December 2011

---



All images: Quinn Myers

Like most boxes, the warm-up at CrossFit Pacific Beach (CFPB) starts out with a 400-meter run. What you'll encounter on that run is a bit unusual.

"The first time I did a warm-up lap, I was really skeptical," said Quinn Myers, a member who has done CrossFit all over the world. "I didn't think it would work. I thought I wouldn't like it. I was used to doing CrossFit in a warehouse, with not much else around."

CFPB is in the heart of Pacific Beach, a beach town in San Diego that's the top destination for college students and twentysomethings looking for a good time.

The warm-up run first goes through an alley, then passes by two bars, a hair salon, a Trader Joe's, a sushi restaurant, a tanning salon, a tattoo parlor and a few shuffling homeless people. It is the beach, after all.



**Robert Schrimpf after a workout, with one of the local characters passing by.**

If the workout involves a longer run, you'll find yourself running through an obstacle course of shoppers, restaurant goers and—if it's after 4 p.m.—tipsy bar crawlers.

The morning classes have their own special scenery.

"The 6 a.m. class is when the homeless people start to wake up," member Robert Schrimpf said. "We see a lot of meth hangovers."

Smack dab in the middle of one of the highest concentrations of bars per capita in San Diego, CFPB opened in June 2010, replacing a defunct record store. After a few months, the owners installed sliding garage doors that open out onto the sidewalk. CFPB embraces the urban environment rather than blocking it out. Passersby get a heavy dose of angry music, clanging weights and painful-sounding grunts on their afternoon stroll.



**The urgent-care clinic shares a wall with the box, which sometimes causes conflict when the music gets loud and the weights get heavy.**

It's a different experience doing CrossFit surrounded by bars and restaurants. A few weeks ago, I did a workout that included 5 rounds of a 400-meter run holding a medicine ball (mixed in with wall-ball shots and medicine-ball burpees). It was noon, so that meant I had to run past the Trader Joe's shoppers, people getting a sushi lunch and the guys having a cigarette in front of the tattoo parlor five times. Carrying a medicine ball. Most likely with a look of pain on my face. Their looks of bemused concern deepened each time I passed.

The good news is that after the third round, you don't care if people stare. All you can think about is finding a way to carry a medicine ball that doesn't hurt like hell.

One of the Yelp reviews of the bar next to CFPB, the Tap Room, mentions the joy of sitting and drinking a beer while watching CrossFit athletes huff and puff past the window. Exactly as I thought: my awkward stagger with the ball was providing amusement for others.

"Now I love the location," Myers said. "It almost motivates you more to work out in front of all of these people. Especially when you run past a cute girl."



*A nighttime class in full swing.*

Owning a CrossFit box right next to a bar does have other unexpected benefits. One Friday night last year, a guy stumbled by the box on his way out of a bar. Something about the austere-looking space filled with barbells, weights, rings and a pull-up bar awoke his competitive side.

"So, what do you guys do in here?" he asked.

Anders Varner, one of the owners, started to explain CrossFit, but the guy didn't listen. He began bragging about how he could beat everyone in the place.

His eyes locked onto the pull-up bar.

"I bet I can do more pull-ups than you. How many can you do in a row?" he asked.

"About 50," Varner said.

"Fifty! No way. I don't believe it!"

Smiling, Varner told the guy he would bet him \$50 that he could do 50 unbroken pull-ups.

Bryan Boorstein, the other owner of the gym, said that was when the guy got worried he was being tricked.

"He insisted that Anders had to come all the way down with straight arms each time, and that his chin had to go over the bar," Boorstein remembered. "Of course Anders agreed."

Any CrossFitter knows exactly what happened next. Varner chalked his hands, jumped up on the bar and executed 50 butterfly kipping pull-ups.

The guy watched, open-mouthed.

"Hey, that's cheating!" he sputtered when Varner finished.

"My arms locked out at the bottom and my chin went over the bar. Where's my \$50?" Varner said.

The guy paid up and stumbled back into the night.

Despite its location—or maybe because of it—the athletes at CFPB are serious about CrossFit. Matt Lodin, a trainer and high-school science teacher and football coach, placed fifth at the SoCal Regionals and has been tearing up local competitions.

The gym recently won \$300 for having the most athletes qualify for the OCF Throwdown in three punishing workouts. Nine of CFPB's athletes will participate in the January competition; five men and one woman in the Elite division and three women in the Advanced division.

CrossFit can be done anywhere, with very minimal equipment, but sometimes it's nice to have some interesting scenery along the way.

*What's the most unusual CrossFit box you've seen? Post stories to comments!*

