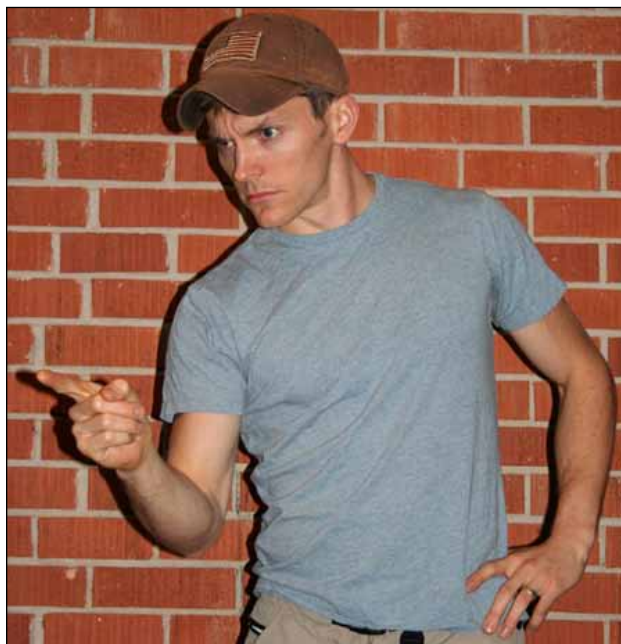


## The Politics of CrossFit

Does CrossFit's unique workout philosophy change minds as well as bodies?  
Russell Berger says yes. Dan Freedman isn't sure.

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Russell Berger makes his Point



Dan Freedman's Counterpoint begins on Page 2

### It Makes You Libertarian by Russell Berger

I started paying attention to the CrossFit website four years ago. From the very beginning, CrossFit was built on mold-breaking, counter-culture methodology. One of the cornerstones of CrossFit was its analytical and objective approach to fitness. Establishment, theory, and speculation were cast aside and replaced with workouts that produced results. Recently, I've noticed more and more complaints about the less-noticeable information posted alongside the Workout of the Day. Right-leaning political commentary, articles, and studies are occasionally popping up on rest-day postings. To some this is a perverse and offensive combination. How could partisan journalism be anything but awkward when used as a garnish on a fitness website? If it was anything but CrossFit.com it wouldn't be, but strong conviction to the tenets of individualism and responsibility make CrossFit look less like a fitness program and more like a course in Libertarianism. Not only do these articles "fit the mold" of CrossFit thinking, they embody it.

### Counterpoint: Conformity is whack by Daniel Freedman

Contrarian provocateurs are my kind of people. They make you think. Even their excesses can build character. (The same could be said of burpees.)

My beef? Some CrossFitters have a reflexive prejudice. They are in love with simple-minded perversity. They seem to think that if most people favor something, it must be wrong. But it ain't necessarily so. Here's the ultimate bit of contrarianism: sometimes the conventional wisdom is right. Sometimes expert opinion is well founded. And maybe CrossFit isn't always and everywhere the right program for all people in all circumstances.

In the fitness realm, who could argue against hard work or individual responsibility? But does it really follow that lax regulation of financial markets is a good idea? Could isolation exercises have a place in rehab programs? Might it be okay to eat bananas after all? Could raising taxes on the top 1% be sound economic policy?

The POSE running technique and privatizing social security are both unpopular. Both may be good ideas. Or not. Or maybe one is a good idea and the other isn't. The connection between a fitness methodology and a political philosophy remains unclear to me. How can CrossFit be said to be "Libertarian?" There are plenty of left-leaning CrossFitters who work hard, accept individual responsibility and voted for Obama. Are they somehow less pure? Or are they okay as long as they have tattoos, swear, and do their workouts without shirts? Just asking!

I do like the CrossFit community. The quality of debate on the rest day articles exceeds what's generally found elsewhere online. (Admittedly, that's not a high bar.) The easily offended should just move along. Or they can approach it as I do Fox News: skipping O'Reilly, but tuning in on Sunday morning for Chris Wallace. In other words, pick and choose when to engage with the rest day articles. If at all.

When you walk into your local CrossFit affiliate for the first time, you have your entire perspective of work, diet, health, and fitness turned upside down within half an hour. First, you are told by some 25 year-old CrossFit trainer that the National Academy of Sports Medicine, Food and Drug Administration, American Heart association, and the American Medical Association, are all wrong. On top of this, he tells you that your vegan sister-in-law, your stack of low-fat diet books, Cheerios commercials, *Runner's World* magazine, and even your own doctor are selling you short on facts.

The importance of this is more than just the physical benefits to you as an athlete; it's the experience itself. Being told that accepted standards are wrong, collapsing your faith in experts and establishment, and asking you to make drastic changes to your lifestyle while the majority continues down the "safe path" can be life-changing. To quote the movie, "Fight Club:"

***"It's only after we've lost everything  
that we're free to do anything."***

The intellectual impact of this experience to the CF newcomer is huge. The idea that professionals and academics can be outpaced by a group of fitness nuts in their garage is empowering to say the least. In short, CrossFit shapes minds, and forces its followers to question *all* established opinions and standards. This healthy skepticism is paired with an understanding that there are often empirically right and wrong answers, waiting to be determined through sound reasoning.

CrossFit works because it has always been an open-source program. Debate and discussion have a vital role in determining its course. In a conversation about the benefits of a high-fat low-carb diet, the subject of coronary heart disease, cancer, and stroke will inevitably arise. Why is it that CrossFitters can so easily make controversial judgments on the prevention of deadly disease, tactical shooting, and techniques used in street fights, but issues of economic and social policy-making are taboo?

What political direction CrossFit.com chooses to take isn't of much consequence. CrossFit is not a public facility. It is not a democracy. It isn't a club, and there are no share-holder rights. It's a concept based on using *what works best* for the desired adaptation. It is the creation of an individual and has been adopted by the masses as a privilege, not a right (much like voting in federal elections). The most defining characteristic of CrossFit's existence is

I've sometimes been able to score a few points in rest day debates. It's even possible I've helped a few people see old issues in new ways. In the process, I've taken a few punches. That's fine. No one forced me into the ring. And no one is forced to read the wacky right-wing rest day articles. CrossFit should keep posting them. They keep things lively.



### *About the Author*

*Daniel Freedman is a reformed marathon runner, recovering TV News Director and former PBS new media dude. He now consults to non-profits on social networking. He has been CrossFitting in Toronto for 18 months.*

even begin CrossFit, you must choose to take a different path than the majority of your peers. You must choose to change your perspective on fitness, diet, and work. You must put in the effort as an individual to improve your ability. You must acknowledge your own responsibility to do the exercises correctly and safely. When you fail, it is no one's fault but your own. When your diet starts to slip, it is no one's fault but your own. You rely on yourself for your effort, your results, and your initiative.

If an ideological affiliation had to be applied to CrossFit, it would almost certainly be the "Libertarian method" of fitness. Individual responsibility reigns, and everyone is held to the same standards of performance.

Can you blame Coach Glassman for extending ideas that work so effectively in the fitness world to a larger model? Is it CrossFit's fault for seeing the parallels between a grass-roots fitness methodology and a free and effective society? The concepts that we discuss here are exactly that: concepts, and just as CrossFit makes no attempt to shove its principles down the throats of others, the political articles posted on its site are optional reading material. I have heard three different types of complaints on this subject more than any other, and I will address them separately:

### **1. You read an article and completely disagree with its content and viewpoint.**

Please notice the text below the link to the article: "Post thoughts to comments". This is written under every article for a reason. CrossFit isn't trying to run off those with differing political viewpoints. It is encouraging the same analytical and effective debate you don't see in the mainstream media about fitness or politics.

### **2. You read an article and are offended by it.**

Get your panties out of a bunch and go take a Pilates class. By its very nature, CrossFit is not politically correct. We are extremely competitive, we swear, we take off our shirts in public places, tear up our hands, and make fun of people when our girls can deadlift more than they can. What else do CrossFitters do? We offend people. We have opinions that we have forged through experience and hard work and we are not afraid to share them with others. Get used to it.

### **3. Regardless of your opinions, you would like CrossFit to focus on fitness and leave out divisive issues.**

This is completely possible... *for you*. You can do the W.O.D., never even click the link to the article, and no one will ever bother you about it. That's why the site is set up the way it is. If this isn't good enough for you, keep reading:

The most important part of this is that the site belongs to an individual and is provided to you only because that person chooses to do so. You have the choice to do whatever you want, react however you want, and say whatever you want. In a way it's the model of a perfectly free society. This is the Libertarian answer, the CrossFit answer, and the link between politics and fitness. Take it as you will.



### *About the Author*

*Raised in Atlanta, Russell Berger spent four years in 1st Ranger Battalion and saw numerous combat deployments. After starting CrossFit in 2004, he left the military, moved to Alabama and opened CrossFit Huntsville. Currently he splits his time among work, school, arguing politics, and practicing poses just like the one in the attached picture.*