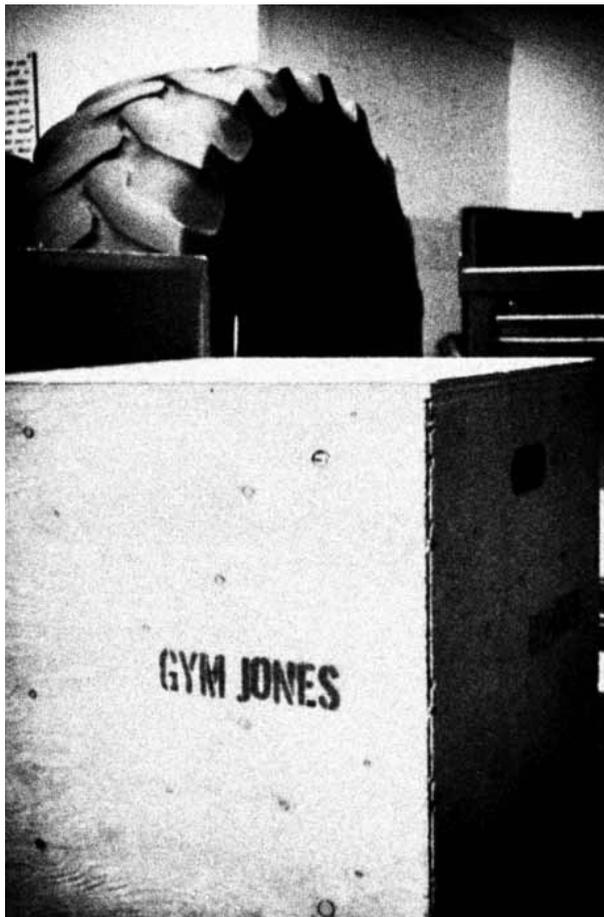


INSIDE GYM JONES

One of CrossFit's top athletes attends a Gym Jones seminar and tries to keep an open mind. But he's left wondering about the substance of the program.

Russell Berger



This is the story of my experience at Gym Jones, but the real story is a lot bigger than me.

The first time I heard the name "Gym Jones," I was waist deep in the swamps of Fort Eglin Air Force Base in Florida. I was in Ranger school, an Army leadership course that leaves most of its participants starved and hallucinating from sleep deprivation.

"Wasn't Jim Jones some kind of cult leader?" someone asked. "Didn't he eat people or something?"

"Not *Jim*. It's not a person. It's the name of the place: *Gym Jones*."

This also happened to be the first time I heard the word "CrossFit." I didn't even know what a power clean was, but I was willing to talk about anything that took my mind away from giant mosquitoes and jungle-rotted skin.

All anyone knew at the time was that CrossFit.com and GymJones.com were both fitness websites that had produced ass-kickers with impressive regularity. I wasn't fond of the wax-covered-skeleton look I had recently developed, and I wanted to try something new. A few months later, I looked up CrossFit.com and did something called "Murph."

Tasting *Their* Kool-Aid

The story of my love affair with increased work capacity is pretty typical. I started following the main-site WODs and saw astounding results within a few weeks. But it wasn't long before I again ran into that *other* website: GymJones.com.

Gym Jones is owned by Mark Twight, a 47-year-old veteran mountain climber of considerable accomplishment. Twight's resume includes success on some of the most dangerous and difficult routes in the world and the authorship of two well-received books. Twight now trains U.S. military special operations forces in mountaineering. He may be most famous for having trained the cast and stunt crew of the movie *300*. For a time, Gym Jones was a CrossFit affiliate. After a falling out, Twight separated from the CrossFit community. You can read Coach Glassman's account of what happened in comment No. 85 [here](#). He wrote about Twight [again here](#).

At first, I could only guess what Twight was really up to with his training methods. The Gym Jones website was dark, minimalist and intentionally cryptic. The only thing that was obvious from the site was that Twight didn't train many athletes. I later learned the number was even smaller than I suspected: fewer than 30.

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Maybe something about leaving the Army and enrolling in a public college made me appreciate Twight's unapologetic elitism. Or maybe I just dug the stark black-and-white photography. Whatever it was, Twight's intentional concealment of his methods added to the attraction. I quit following the CrossFit main-site WODs in the summer of 2007 and began my own regimen based on the few clues Twight disclosed on his website. I started a blog about my progress. In short order, I received an encouraging e-mail from Twight himself.

Soon after, I started having doubts about my new methods. A few of my clients started showing minor overuse injuries, which compounded my concerns. But was I really using anything close to Twight's methods? Twight handcrafts individual workouts for members of his tiny band. My own interpretation of his training was still just a guess. I downgraded tire flips and slosh pipes to the category of "fun but less effective" and began sticking to the CrossFit main site.

A year later, I still couldn't answer a basic question: "What is Gym Jones?" By that time I was the owner of a CrossFit affiliate in Huntsville, Alabama. But I was still curious about Gym Jones. When the *CrossFit Journal* offered to pay my \$1,800 registration fee for a Gym Jones Athletic Development Seminar, I jumped at the opportunity.

Day 1

In February 2009 I drove through a parking lot in suburban Salt Lake City, Utah, scanning numbers on tinted glass doors until I found the one I was looking for. There was no sign and no apparent life forms. Maybe I should have expected this sort of seclusion. After all, Twight's website says:

Gym Jones is not a cozy place... The support of a like-minded group, dedicated to The Art of Suffering, provides a safety net. Individuals push harder and risk more in the company of trustworthy peers. It's one reason the gym is not open to the public...

I pulled open the dark glass door and walked in. This was it. The tires, barbells, ropes, rings and high ceilings gave Gym Jones the signature bare-bones decor of a CrossFit affiliate. The place was strictly business, right down to the drab concrete walls. I walked toward the back of the gym. A cluster of chairs held nine other students, all signing liability waivers and flipping through thin white binders.

I introduced myself to Twight as a trainer and CrossFitter but didn't mention I was an affiliate owner (information easily available via an Internet search). Twight was a relatively small guy with the wiry build I would expect from a serious endurance athlete. Maybe I had assumed from his harsh, stern and often confrontational writing style that I was going to be shaking hands with a real hard-ass. But Twight's demeanor surprised me. He was soft-spoken and calm. He even showed a hint of shyness while trying to break the ice with our group.

First on the agenda was getting to know each other. Twight asked us to give our names, fitness backgrounds and reasons for attending. One student was an American soldier who had paid a great deal of money out of his own pocket to fly in on leave from a mechanized unit in Germany. Another was from the Australian military, and two were squad leaders from the 3rd Ranger Battalion in Fort Benning, Georgia. The rest of the class was made up of a few general fitness enthusiasts, including an aspiring climber. I felt at home to have some guys from Battalion present, but I was a little awkward when it came to our introductions. Everyone else seemed to have a beef with CrossFit. They variously called CrossFit “too random” and “too dangerous” and complained of overcrowding at CrossFit Level 1 Certifications.

Twight seemed unsurprised at the criticism. He got right to the point: “What we do, and what CrossFit does, it’s the same stuff. But training must be *individualized* or after a certain point you make no progress.” Then Twight dove into his training philosophy. He was assisted by his two trainers, a mountain-bike racer named Josh and UFC fighter Rob MacDonald.

The key points:

1. The mind is primary
2. Outcome-based training
(train “for an objective”)
3. Functional training
(high degree of transferability)
4. Movements not muscles
(transferable training does not isolate muscles)
5. Power-to-weight ratio
(you must carry your engine)
6. Train all energy systems, emphasizing
the most important (individual choice)
7. Training is preparation for the real thing: do
something with your fitness
8. The mind is primary II
(confidence, chemicals, carriage)
9. Nutrition is the foundation
(outcome-based eating: eat “for an objective”)
10. Recovery is more than 50 percent of the process



The Gym Jones training manual defines fitness as “the ability to do a task.” That’s it. And it’s pretty simple when compared to “increased work capacity across a broad range of time and modal domains” (IWCABTMD). At Gym Jones, athletes engage in what Twight calls “outcome-based training.” He explained that Gym Jones athletes don’t train to win in the gym. They train to win races, fights, combat or any other individualized task they might dedicate themselves to.

What exactly does that mean? Twight uses the phrase “optimal fitness” to explain the different needs of specialized athletes. The optimal fitness needed to win a fight, for example, might not be the same as the optimal fitness for winning the Tour de France. Unlike IWCABTMD, his definition allows athletes to have substantial troughs in work capacity and still be considered fit.

I’m a junkie for solid, measurable definitions. That’s part of why I love CrossFit. Twight’s definition of fitness seemed attractively concise but not exactly bullet-proof. CrossFit measures the ability to do a task across a broad range of time and modal domains. CrossFit calculates fitness as the average of these measurements for a given athlete. The definition never changes. Twight’s definition of fitness, on the other hand, is measured against a hypothetical ideal created for each athlete, making his definition of fitness infinitely variable.

Nothing is wrong with setting specific goals for specific athletes. If you’re in the business of winning races, that’s really all that matters. Letting your work capacity become deficient in one area to highly specialize in another? No complaints. But here is my problem: fitness, even when poorly defined, suggests an inherent breadth in ability. Twight’s definition willingly ignores that breadth.

**What we do, and what
CrossFit does, it’s the
same stuff. But training
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make no progress.
—Mark Twight**

The Gym Jones Training Principles

Two hours into the seminar, it was time for some specifics. Twight spelled out his training guidelines:

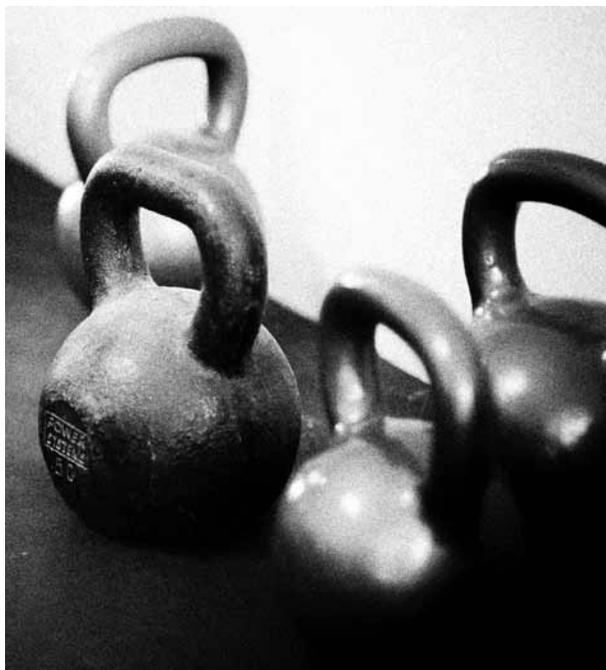
1. Don’t train to muscle failure
2. Intensity isn’t always the answer
3. Don’t rely on circuits
4. Don’t rely on stopwatches

This was a big departure from what CrossFit teaches. Twight said, “You can’t throw people into intensity that quickly.” He expressed concern about the safety of the CrossFit methodology and went on to say that CrossFitters “talk about rhabdo like it’s a badge of honor.” Twight also said constant high-intensity work isn’t sustainable and “it’s also chemically addictive, which makes it easy to trick yourself into thinking you are improving endurance.”

Twight holds that CrossFit methods lead to decreases in performance after a few years. He has seen this in himself and in athletes he trained. Training to muscle failure broke athletes down and prevented proper recovery. So did the constant high intensity. The heavy reliance on circuits trained them to accept decreased performance over the course of a workout. Twight concluded that running a stopwatch all the time and going hard all the time eventually stopped working.

He shared some of his solutions, including “The Ladder,” an exercise in which two athletes rotate through work-rest intervals. They accumulate reps on a sliding scale to prevent hitting muscle failure. A ladder workout using pull-ups might look like this: I do one pull-up, you do one pull-up. I do two pull-ups, you do two pull-ups. We go to six and start over. Rather than working as fast as possible, the focus of the ladder is on consistency and rest.

The “breathing ladder” is like a sick, oxygen-deprived cousin of the ladder. Twight had written an essay on his website describing the breathing ladder, and I was more than familiar with them from my time spent experimenting with his training. The athlete first picks a “big” movement, like a kettlebell swing or power clean, and then chooses a rep scheme. After one rep, he or she takes only one breath. Two reps: two breaths. Three reps: three breaths. And so on. The result is a more stressful version of the regular ladder, usually ending with failure after uncontrollable respiration causes you to breathe more than the scheme calls for. Twight calls this “panic breathing.”



Tackling a Gym Jones Workout

It was time to put the Gym Jones training philosophy to work. After another short break, we moved around the corner to the main room. It was a black, rubber-floored area about the size of a tennis court. MacDonald began leading us through the first practical exercise of the seminar: the air squat. The Gym Jones teaching points for the squat were virtually the same as those of a Level 1 CrossFit Cert: squat below parallel, keep your weight on your heels, keep spinal extension, and maintain an upright posture. The movement was well explained, and the student-teacher ratio of around three to one was vastly superior to a CrossFit cert. But I did see a few rounded backs that went uncorrected.

After some work on squat variations and kipping pull-ups, it was time for some real fun. Twight and his trainers started pulling down Concept2 rowers and grabbing kettlebells. "Partner up!" someone said. "We're about to do a workout called 'Tailpipe.'"

Though he tried not to mention CrossFit by name, Twight's position was abundantly clear: high-intensity, time-priority workouts don't work for long. I was surprised by his claim. How was it that thousands of athletes across the world had followed CrossFit with great success but Twight's own crew of fewer than 30 had run into burnout and decreased performance?

The answer turned out to be simple. During its time as a CrossFit affiliate, Gym Jones hadn't followed the main-site WODs. The workouts posted on Twight's website looked, smelled, tasted and felt just like CrossFit workouts. But Twight's experiment with CrossFit, much like my own experiment with Gym Jones, was woefully inadequate. Both were based on subjective interpretations of methodology, complete with the possibility of self-induced regressions and shitty programming.

Twight might be dead-on in naming too many high-intensity circuits as the reasons for his poor results. But he was the one calling the shots, designing the workouts and setting the schedule. If he thought he could do it himself because he knew better, he was wrong and was blaming CrossFit for his own mistakes.

Twight holds that using CrossFit methods leads to decreases in performance after a few years. He has seen this in himself and in athletes he trained.

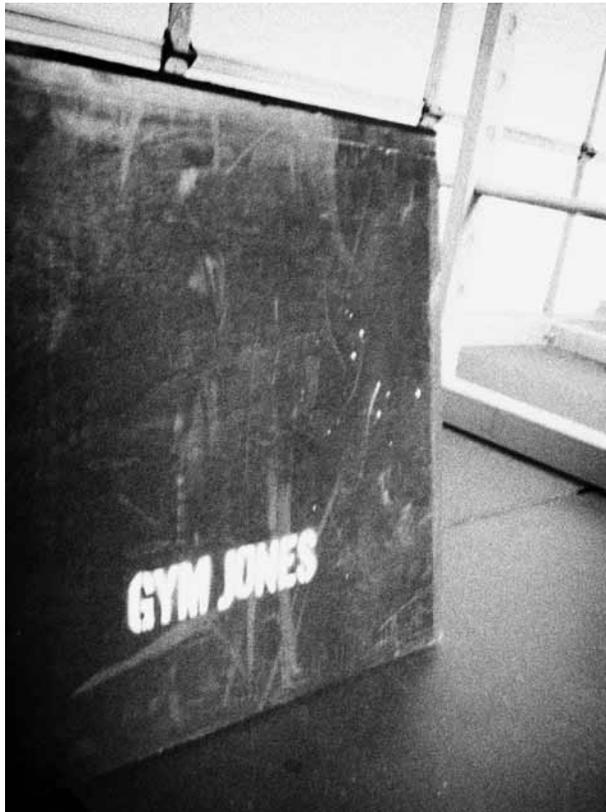
Finally. I was ready for a little brain de-frag.

I partnered up with a guy about my size, and we were given a pair of 45-pound kettlebells. Just before we started, someone asked where the name Tailpipe came from. "When you're done," Twight explained, "it feels like you've been sucking on the tailpipe of a car."

I strapped into the rowing machine and pulled a fast 250 meters while my partner held our two kettlebells across his chest in a rack position. As soon as I was done, I scrambled off of the rower, cleaned the kettlebells and waited. The psychological stress of keeping 90 pounds across my chest after a hard row was unique. I wasn't doing anything with the weight. I was just holding it and trying to breathe. Just holding, holding, holding...

We switched and repeated this for three rounds. Tailpipe didn't exactly fit CrossFit's "large loads over long distances quickly" principle. Nor did it lend itself well to measurement. The workout wasn't terribly difficult. Even rowing as fast as I could, the amount of power I could exert was limited. I thought back to one of the first guidelines of the Gym Jones training philosophy: "all training programs must include psychological stress."

Tailpipe seemed to be a Gym Jones version of a who-can-eat-more-wasabi contest. The winners are those who can suck it up more and hold their kettlebells longer. By design, this workout was really just a suck-fest. Physical adaptation was taking a back seat to psychological stress. This was a big part of what Gym Jones was all about: training mental fortitude. But what's the benefit of having athletes suffer without accurately measurable, productive output? If I was going to have a hard time getting oxygen, why not swing that kettlebell instead of just holding my diaphragm down with it? The event seemed at odds with one of Twight's first comments from earlier in the day: "Just because it's hard doesn't mean it works."



Day 2

Day 2 began with a session on diet. The advice was pretty solid. The Gym Jones folks showed an understanding of hormonal response. They advocated small, balanced meals and paleo foods and openly ridiculed the food pyramid. The twist came when they condemned the Zone Diet. Twight said: "Weighing and measuring food is as much an eating disorder as sticking a finger down your throat. There is no reason to be neurotic about food... It's easy to get high-centered on the details of eating, and if it's complicated, no one will do it. So keep it as simple as possible." After hearing a few snide comments about CrossFitters counting almonds, I started to get the feeling that what really bothered Twight about the Zone was its unofficial marriage to the CrossFit community.

Things seemed to be getting back on track when Twight moved into his lecture on rest. He said, half-jokingly, "There is no such thing as overtraining, only under-recovery." His litmus tests for poor recovery included:

1. Increased waking pulse
2. Higher resting pulse
3. Weight loss
4. Increased fluid intake
5. Progressively later bedtime
6. Fewer hours of sleep
7. Needing an alarm to wake up

Next was a list of useful "regeneration tools" for speeding the recovery process. Twight made some good suggestions: foam rollers, deep-tissue massage, contrast showers and getting eight or nine hours of sleep every night. But he also pushed acupuncture, "Rolfing" (structural integration of soft-tissue manipulation) and a number of bizarre therapies I had never heard of. One, "percutaneous electrical neural stimulation," sounded like something from the interrogation room of a KGB prison. The process involves electrically charged needles stuck deep into muscle tissue near nerves to relieve muscle pain. I decided I'd be sticking to contrast showers and the occasional rub-down.

It was then time for another practical exercise. We migrated into a big circle and watched as MacDonald began teaching the deadlift. His instruction was accurate and effective: weight on the heels, chest high and back

extended, with the bar under the shoulders. He covered all the basics of a good pull with one exception: he made no mention of holding the breath during the lift, something all coaches I've trained with believe is absolutely necessary.

Discussion shifted to the back squat, which Twight said is "too easy to do wrong" and can cause knee and back injuries. Instead, Twight's training emphasizes the deadlift and the front squat. MacDonald then incorrectly explained the role of the weightlifting belt, referring to it as an unnecessary support that doesn't really help—which is actually true if the lifter isn't properly holding his breath during the lift. I began to get the feeling that strength training wasn't exactly a strong point of Gym Jones.

I'd guess that strength giants like Mark Rippetoe and Dave Tate would say that Twight's mistaken ideas were simply a result of his not teaching back squats correctly (though Rip might not use such pleasant phrasing). Sure, poorly executed back squats can get you injured, but how could they be more dangerous than poorly executed deadlifts or front squats?

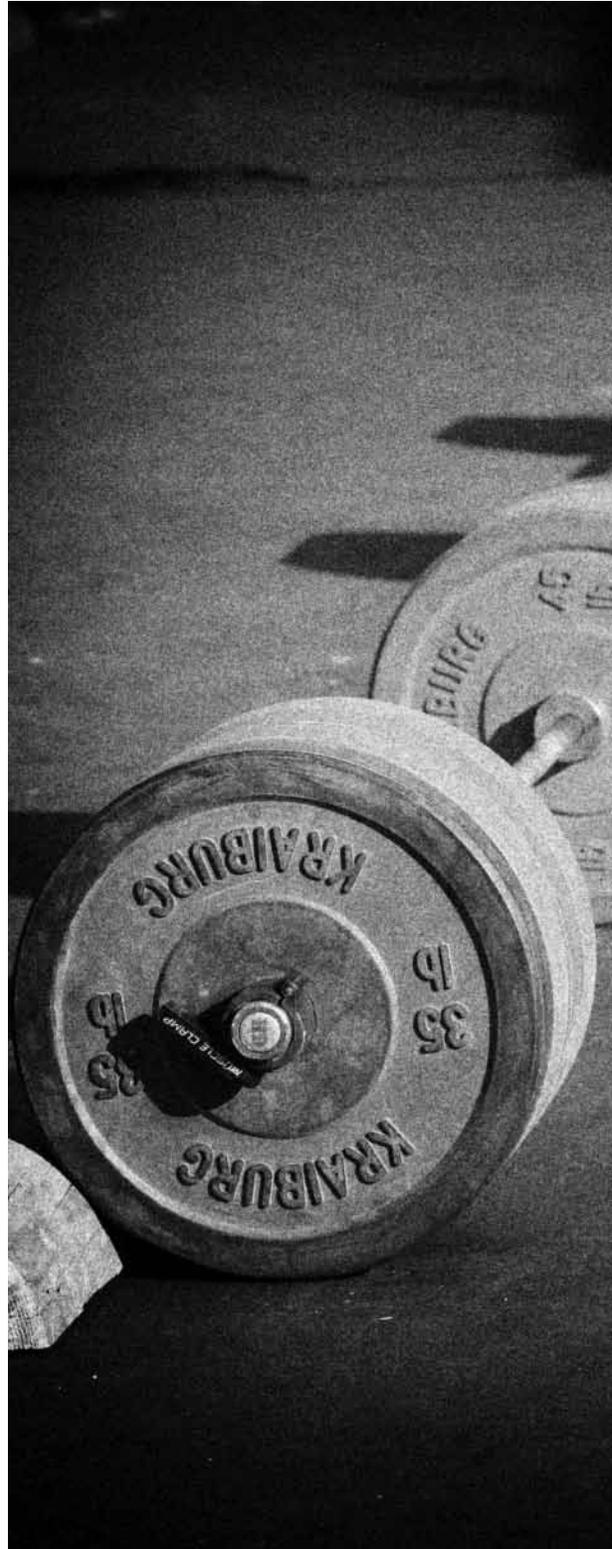
Regardless, we ended up getting a pretty effective lesson in the deadlift. The class split up into small groups, each with its own coach, and we began working up to a one-rep max. Our trainers were careful to prevent anyone from pulling with a rounded back. They successfully coached a number of students to new PRs.

When Doing More Work Is Wrong

Next up was a workout called "Jonescrawl": three rounds for time of 10 deadlifts at 115 percent of bodyweight and 25 box jumps to a 24-inch box.

Twight explained again that pacing ourselves through this workout would allow for superior times compared to "going all out." He advised us to step down from every box jump. But I still wasn't buying Twight's theory. I believe that his own faulty programming had led to his problems, and that his athletes just weren't capable of sustaining the all-out pace Twight advised against.

Twight watched me warm up by jumping into full hip extension after landing on the top of the box. He told me I was doing "bullshit CrossFit came up with (for athletes) to get faster times." I pointed out that not only was I technically doing more work, but I was also exceeding Twight's range-of-motion requirements by jumping upward off of the box. He agreed to let me try.



I blew through the first round. The deadlifts felt like I was working with a PVC pipe, and I knocked out all 25 box jumps without pause. I could feel the eyes of every trainer in the room watching me. The second round was harder. I felt my lungs burning in response to the Salt Lake City altitude, the phlegm catching in my throat from a nasty case of bronchitis I'd been trying to get rid of, and the burn of quickly accumulating jumps.

After a short struggle, it was over.

Under Twilight's watchful eye, I had beaten everyone in the room and matched the best time ever recorded at Gym Jones for Jonescrawl.

But here is my problem: fitness, even when poorly defined, suggests an inherent breadth in ability. Twilight's definition willingly ignores that breadth.

I had achieved my score by using "bullshit" CrossFit box jumps and refusing to pace myself, so the reaction to my performance wasn't exactly warm. Twilight was the only trainer to congratulate me as I stood bent over, coughing my lungs up onto the floor. By the time I was moving again, Twilight and his instructors were using my performance as an example of what *not* to do.

First, I had gone straight to the ground after my last box jump. Twilight instead teaches that athletes should row or ride an Airdyne directly after finishing a workout in order to "actively recover." Next, they pointed out that my rounds had become progressively slower, something I could have prevented with pacing.

The most important point, however, was that my fast finish didn't mean I was fit. MacDonald explained the stopwatch is "just a cue to ask questions." This was something I was going to need them to explain. Twilight elaborated.

"Getting a faster time on a workout doesn't necessarily mean the person doing it has gotten fitter. There are many other factors to account for." He said these factors included

range-of-motion deterioration, proximity of stations during a circuit, and increased movement efficiency. Twilight claimed any of these factors could decrease an athlete's time without actually improving their fitness—another big deviation from CrossFit philosophy.

Gym Jones vs. The Real World

We say that improving your measurable performance, whether it's adding 10 pounds to your clean or cutting a few seconds off your Elizabeth time just by "improving your technique," does, in fact, demonstrate improved fitness. On the other hand, improving your time by allowing range-of-motion deterioration is different. You are doing less work, so it is not a measurable improvement in fitness.

I understood Twilight's point that there was no *organic* change in the body when technique was improved, but I couldn't agree with his conclusion. After all, by his own definition, fitness is just "the ability to do a task." Increased technical ability, efficiency of movement and even skill are all things that would improve the ability to do any task. How do you measure fitness otherwise? Was there some way of separating "legitimate" improvements in fitness from increased technique and skill?

I raised my hand and asked, "How does improved technique on the clean, and that improvement's ability to produce a faster circuit time, not improve your fitness?" I even threw in an example that seemed to fit Twilight's definition of fitness: "Wouldn't that improved technique help me clean an incapacitated soldier off the battlefield?"

Twilight answered: "Improving your technique at cleaning a bar doesn't improve your efficiency cleaning any other object." He was arguing for an extremely literal interpretation of training specificity. While I would agree wholeheartedly that specific tasks like moving a wounded person must be trained just as specifically as mag-changes and first aid, my personal experience told me Twilight was dead wrong. More importantly, if nothing done in the gym transferred into real-world results, then what the hell were we doing?

MacDonald went on to criticize CrossFitters for posting YouTube videos with fast work but poor form. I started to get the feeling that the dislike Gym Jones trainers showed for running stopwatches and the Zone was mostly just dislike of CrossFit.

Name	Weight 1	Weight 2	Weight 3	Time	Other
Tom	455#	195#	225	3:20	
John	425#	185#	215	3:53	
Darren	365#	168#	195	4:48	
Jeff	335#	160#	185	5:14	15
Justin	425#	195#	225	5:46	15
Wes	385#	145#	165	4:16	
Adam	215#	140#	160#	5:19	21
Russel	405#	148#	170#	3:38	3.70 2.45

The Program

The seminar was drawing to a close. We had only one more topic to cover. It was the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow: the hidden methodology Twight uses to determine his programming. After years of staring at white-on-black font and scratching my head, I was finally going to learn how—and why—Twight was doing what he was doing.

The why turns out to be pretty simple. Twight's methodology is based on his primary critique of Crossfit-style training: "Random stuff eventually stops working." Eventually, Twight explains, this system causes athletes to plateau.

In order to combat this inevitable barrier, Twight teaches that athletes must "send the body consistent messages." What does this look like? Rather than working on every aspect of fitness continually, Twight's athletes spend short periods of time (usually four-to-six weeks) on specific aspects of training—the equivalent of a "CrossFit bias" period.

To explain, Twight drew a large diagram on the whiteboard, breaking all training down into five basic categories:

1. Foundational Period
2. Strength Period
3. Power Period
4. Power-Endurance Period
(short, long and intermittent)
5. Endurance (if necessary for sport)

Yet Another Contradiction

The Gym Jones training system relies on a form of periodization leading up to an athlete's event, season or, in the case of soldiers, deployment. Training is planned in reverse, up to a year away from competition.

To start, all athletes go through a foundational period focused on improving general physical preparedness (GPP). This period fixes imbalances, rehabilitates injuries and builds strength. It develops "the base fitness needed to begin more focused and intense training," according to Twight's manual.

MacDonald referred to this period as "WTF" work, or "whatever the fuck." (Basically, it's the very same random stuff Twight discovered quits working after a while.) Once an athlete plateaus in the foundational period, he or she is ready to begin "real training" at Gym Jones.

This real training begins with a strength period, proceeds to a power stage, and then goes on to a power-endurance stage that mixes long- and short-duration "steady-state" efforts. These periods are tweaked based on each athlete's primary needs. During the strength phase, an athlete would spend two out of three days in the gym doing heavy deadlifts or front squats. On the non-strength day, she would pick from another domain (power endurance, for instance).

Twight says his method of "sending a consistent message" allows better focus and faster progress than just doing "random stuff." He acknowledges that this type of short-term specialization typically results in a loss of ability in other areas, so he makes sure athletes finish a phase with

greater ability than they need. The excess will be shed during the next phase, and the athlete will be right on target come game day.

Hard Work—But for What Purpose?

Twight went on to create an imaginary training schedule for MacDonald and started plotting his first strength-focus day.

The result looked like this:

- Generic warm-up
- Specific warm-up
- Work up to a 1RM deadlift

So far, I was on board. But we weren't done.

After completing the strength workout, MacDonald would also do Jonescrawl—the deadlift/box-jump circuit to which I had donated my lungs the day before. Two workouts in one training session? I asked about the purpose of the second workout. MacDonald answered nonchalantly: "It's to make you feel like you worked hard." Were they serious? A 1RM attempt on the DL wasn't enough hard work?

Twight had said earlier that you could only really go "truly hard" two or three times a week. Now, I raised my hand again. "Couldn't you train hard more often if you did Jonescrawl the next day instead of packing two or three different efforts into the same workout?" MacDonald looked irritated. He knew where I was going with this. "Now you are getting into three days in a row, and that just doesn't work."

Three days on and one day off made a lot more sense to me. But that was a CrossFit thing. And like the other CrossFit things we had encountered at the seminar, it seemed to rankle Twight and his trainers.

**I'm still convinced that
Twight's plateau is likely
the product of his own
bad programming.**

To be fair, maybe three days of training in a row doesn't work for some people. As a fighter who trains other fighters, MacDonald has to incorporate sport-specific training into his overall plan. But the two men were painting with a broad brush, drawing sweeping conclusions from a tiny pool of data.

Criticism of CrossFit—Without Evidence

And what about Twight's other claims? Twight had said that CrossFit "throws people into high intensity too quickly." I'd heard this claim before, and it was just as hollow coming from Twight. Like so many before him, Twight seemed to have missed the obvious "Start Here" button on the CrossFit.com homepage and its straightforward advice:

In any case it must be understood that the CrossFit workouts are extremely demanding and will tax the capacities of even the world's best athletes. You would be well advised to take on the WOD carefully, cautiously and work first towards completing the workouts comfortably and consistently before "throwing" yourself at them 100 percent.

Twight's other big beef with CrossFit was its supposed lack of individualization. But a group of 20 average CrossFitters, all doing the same WOD, could be doing as many as 20 completely different workouts. Take the benchmark Diane, for instance. The process of scaling and substitution that goes on beforehand individually identifies what weights, exercises and ranges of motion each participant can effectively work with.

What's more, the workouts themselves change based on the individual weaknesses of each athlete. For anyone strong enough to muscle through the reps, Diane is a short, brutal, lung-burning circuit. If strength is your weakness, you might spend 45 minutes pulling single deadlifts and grinding through handstand push-ups.

And what about the claim that CrossFit just stops working after a certain point? There is simply no evidence for this. All across the country, CrossFit athletes are regularly setting PRs. But more importantly, the performances of the world's fittest today are significantly better than they were just two years ago. And that is from pure CrossFit programming.

But one more time (with feeling), I'm still convinced that Twight's plateau is likely the product of his own bad programming. I raised my hand and explained to him that after years of CrossFit, I had set a 20-pound PR on the deadlift the week before attending his seminar. He pressed me to be serious with him and seemed genuinely skeptical that such a feat could be possible.

More Contradictions and Confusion

The way I see it, the huge diversity of skills, movements and exercises used in CrossFit gives athletes the ability to improve indefinitely. They can focus on a plethora of individual tasks. They can focus on the same skills during warm-ups, attend specialty certs, try new sports or just practice, practice, practice.

Early in the seminar, Twight had given us some sound advice: "Make sure objective measures stay objective." He explained that if a workout isn't measurable, it's useless. "Fuck perceived exertion," he concluded. I couldn't have agreed more. But how exactly do you measure workouts without a stopwatch? And weren't all the workouts we did, with the exception of the deadlift, measured by a stopwatch? Twight discouraged reliance on high-intensity circuits and competition, but all our workouts were timed, competitive, high-intensity circuits.

We were also told that intensity was a drug. When overused it produced mediocre results. But in our programming lecture, MacDonald had said, "Intensity is the key." I started to wonder if I needed to have my hearing checked.

During the last workout of the seminar, we moved between six separate stations, with a different exercise at each one. We worked as hard as possible for 45 seconds, with 15 seconds to transition to the next station. After three rounds, I asked Twight if this type of workout should involve counting reps at each station to accumulate a

score. "This was a Fuck-You Friday," he responded. He said that measurement wasn't really the point because "the idea is to just go as hard as you can."

Another contradiction. I was at a loss.

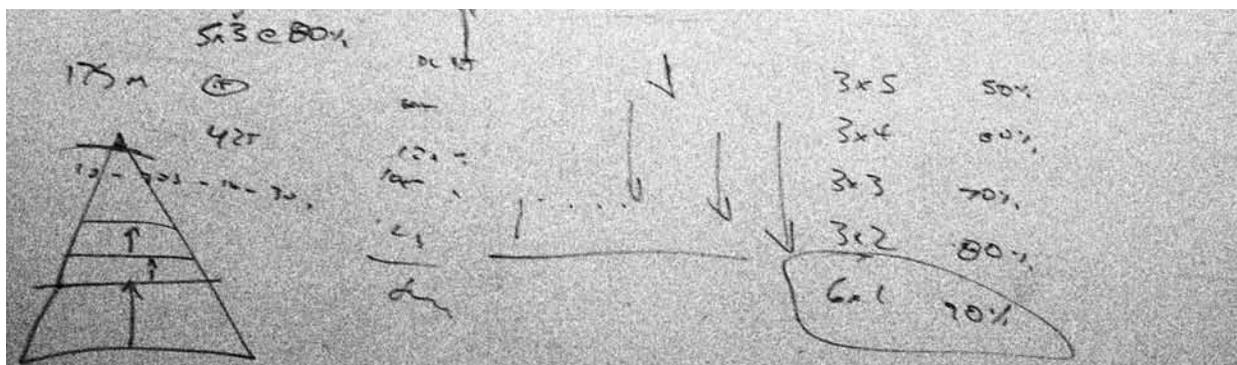
Gym Jones: Prove Your Point

The Gym Jones Seminar wasn't a bad event. It was by no means poorly taught, though I would have preferred less time spent teaching push-ups and some instruction on the Olympic lifts, which were never even mentioned. But Twight and his instructors know more than a little about fitness.

Twight himself was personable, helpful and extremely eager to answer military-specific questions. He even stayed for two hours after the scheduled end of the seminar for a Q&A session on endurance efforts, refueling and training for difficult selections.

Sadly, Twight's better qualities were frequently overshadowed by his animosity. The result was a seminar mired in bitterness, sarcasm and hostility to all things CrossFit.

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Another contradiction.
I was at a loss.**



Reasonable people can disagree about fitness philosophies. But Twight and his trainers seemed to me to have formed conclusions about the nature of fitness based more on pride of authorship than on science.

The word “CrossFit” never appears in Twight’s training manual even though Twight had called Gym Jones and CrossFit “the same stuff” early in the seminar. But Greg Glassman is No. 55 of 64 individuals on Twight’s list of influential sources (far below Mike Boyle and just above “listening to punk rock”).

Twight and his trainers have a good grasp of functional fitness. Their work with highly specialized athletes is intriguing. But the military applications struck me as dubious. Twight was advocating individually specific training and individually specific goals. The students in the room were mostly soldiers, whose duties require the most universally demanding fitness needs of any demographic: the ability to deal with the unknown. What they need most is general physical preparedness (GPP).

Twight’s pitch was simple: CrossFit has problems. We found them, and we can show you how to get around them. Unfortunately, I’d never noticed these problems. If Twight’s system really does produce higher levels of GPP and more successful athletes, he only has one thing to do: show the world. So far, he hasn’t.

Maybe Twight is onto something I’m just not aware of. Maybe I’m not yet ready for “real training.” Or maybe Gym Jones just doesn’t have much to offer. One thing I’m sure Gym Jones does offer is the allure of elitism.

Members of the special-operations community and professional athletes have a lot in common. They are usually competitive, type-A personalities. When you’re a specially selected badass (or like to think you are), it’s not hard to convince yourself you’re above getting workouts from a free website available to the general public. For me, Gym Jones had seemed like the secret monastery at the top of the mountain that shared the world’s greatest fitness knowledge only with those determined enough to make it to the top. The idea that the value of knowledge is equal to the difficulty of attaining it is wildly flawed. But it’s seductive. I fell for it.

Does this mean that Gym Jones doesn’t improve the performance of their athletes? Not at all. But until Twight or someone else can produce athletes with greater GPP than their CrossFitting peers, I’ll be sticking to the CrossFit main-site WODs.



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. He currently splits his time between running his gym, training, writing for CrossFit and spending time with his family. He won the 2009 Dirty South Regional Qualifier and finished third in the trail run that opened the CrossFit Games.