
THE CrossFit LIFE

Bouncing Back

Hilary Achauer reports on a Reebok CrossFit Games Open athlete who's competing after doctors told her she would never do strenuous exercise again.

By Hilary Achauer

March 2012



All images: Justin Metts

Elise Metts was just out of college when her life changed. A competitive cheerleader in high school and college, Metts spent most of her life training for three hours a day, seven days a week. One night, when she was riding in a car with friends, a drunk driver hit the car. The driver of Metts' car died, and Metts herself ended up in the hospital with serious injuries. Five bones broke off her spinal column, she had seven fractures in her spine, she broke her tailbone, and she had a punctured lung.

1 of 3

Bouncing Back ... (continued)

Metts didn't walk for six months. Once she started walking—slowly—she found she couldn't walk or sit for more than 30 minutes without severe pain. Doctors told her she would never run again, she could never do strenuous exercise, she could not lift anything over 15 lb., and if she got pregnant, she would not be able to carry a child full term or deliver it naturally.

Still in a fair amount of pain and 30 lb. overweight, Metts started working out about a year after the accident. She followed the advice of the doctors and stuck to slowly pedaling on the stationary bike and walking on the treadmill.

Even though she was exercising, she wasn't satisfied.

"I didn't have any quality of life," Metts said. "My friends went skiing, and I couldn't go with them. I was in pain, and I was overweight."

In 2008, Metts was on the elliptical machine at a Globo Gym when her husband, Justin Metts, heard someone talking about CrossFit. When Elise and her husband got home, they went online and found CrossFit.com. Most of the movements were foreign—she had to Google them to figure out what they were—but she decided to give it a try.

The couple's Globo Gym was equipped with just weight machines and treadmills. No dumbbells. No barbells. No pull-up bars. Elise and her husband did the main-site WODs at home. They had no equipment there, either, so they had to get creative, using boulders for kettlebell swings and substituting for most of the barbell movements. Soon after the Metts started doing CrossFit at home, Desoto CrossFit, in Southaven, Miss., opened nearby.

"I was instantly hooked," Elise said. "I loved having access to the equipment and doing workouts with other people."

Mindful of her doctor's words, Elise took it slowly, terrified she'd hurt herself lifting weight.

Under the watchful eye of her trainer, Elise slowly started adding weight to her WODs. She worked out five times a week, gained muscle and lost weight. After four months of doing CrossFit, Elise ran a 5K in under 25 minutes. Within a year she lost 30 lb., and after working hard at CrossFit for two years, she could deadlift 260 lb., back-squat 200 lb., and front-squat 130 lb. She did double-unders, pull-ups and push-ups.

Then, in 2010, Elise found out she was pregnant. She was thrilled but anxious, remembering her doctor telling her she'd never be able to carry a baby full term and that she'd have to go on bed rest and then deliver by C-section.

Elise followed CrossFitmom.com during her pregnancy and felt energetic and strong all nine months. After carrying her baby to full term, she delivered her infant boy naturally in April 2011. No bed rest. No C-section.



After a terrible car accident, Elise Metts was told her career as an athlete was over.



Once unable to walk without pain, Elise Metts now squats 200 lb.

Elise and her husband moved to Alabama in 2011 and started working out at CrossFit Eastern Shore. Justin got his certificate and started teaching classes.

When the Open came around this year, Elise wasn't sure she wanted to join in. No other women in her box were registered, and she didn't feel ready to compete.

It would also be her first CrossFit competition.

"I was really intimidated, but thought I'd try it," she said.

Elise was so unsure about participating that she tried out 12.1, the burpee WOD, before she registered. She did better than she expected, so she registered, did the WOD again and put up a score of 79.

For 12.2, the snatch WOD, Elise did 60 snatches.

"I like seeing where I'm at," she said. "I feel like I'm doing better than I thought. I didn't think I'd get that many burpees." Elise paused, and said proudly, "I guess I didn't know my own strength."

Elise's goal going forward is to make regionals next year. She's increasing her strength workouts and combining them with met-cons. But more than anything else, she's doing something she didn't think she could.

"I've beat everything the doctor told me I couldn't do," she said. "I'm not limited by anything now."



Tell us more stories behind the numbers on the Reebok CrossFit Games Open leaderboard. Send stories to crossfitlife@crossfit.com.