
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

On the Bubble

For some, it came down to one rep or a second's rest. Hilary Achauer reports on athletes who just barely made—or missed—the top 60 cut in the Reebok CrossFit Games Open.

By Hilary Achauer

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Bill Smith

On Sunday, March 25, Mark Ptasnik, a CrossFit trainer and aspiring professional wrestler, spent most of the day in front of his computer.

It was the final day of the 2012 Reebok CrossFit Games Open, and Ptasnik had entered the week in 54th place in the North Central region. He had done workout 12.5, the combination of thrusters and chest-to-bar pull-ups that also closed last year's Open, on the preceding Friday and got 111 reps—two less than his score of 113 in 2011.

As men in his region sent in their final scores on Sunday, Ptasnik saw his name drop in the rankings. By 6 p.m. EST, Ptasnik was in 65th place. Doing some quick math, he realized he needed 118 reps to crack the top 60 and perhaps qualify for regionals.

Ptasnik called his coach, who would be his judge, and headed into the gym. He warmed up, started the clock, and pushed himself as hard as he could for 7 minutes: 116 reps.

Ptasnik sent in his score at 7 p.m. EST, an hour before the deadline for submissions. His name jumped to 56th place.

**“I went to the next page
and saw I was in 61st place.
If I had done one more
burpee”**

—Mark Ptasnik

“People started texting me, saying, ‘Congrats,’” Ptasnik said. “I saw some names missing, people who hadn’t yet submitted their scores, so I wondered what was going to happen.”

The deadline to submit the workouts arrived, and Ptasnik refreshed the leaderboard one more time. He scanned the first page and didn’t see his name.

“My heart dropped,” he said. “I went to the next page and saw I was in 61st place. If I had done one more burpee, one more snatch, or two more chest-to-bar pull-ups, I would have made it.”

At the end of the Open, only the top 60 athletes in each region earned a spot in the regional competition. The final placement was calculated using all five Open workouts, but the difference between 60th and 61st place often came down to the smallest detail—a missed snatch, an extra second of rest, a stumble on the box.

So what was it like to go through the five weeks of competition right on the edge?

Down to 1 Point

Vanessa Chanez’s first CrossFit competition was the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games Open. She took 34th place in the SoCal region—earning a spot at regionals—but decided to compete with her Resolution CrossFit team. The box had opened its doors in early 2011, and Chanez spent most of 2011 and early 2012 getting her new gym up and running. She admits her training wasn’t optimal.

“I didn’t prepare my body for the Open this year,” Chanez said. “Our athletes were more important to me, and my training did suffer.”

Chanez did 106 burpees on 12.1, putting her in 138th place, but she shot up the rankings to 59th after snatching 100 lb. 18 times in 12.2. By the end of Week 4, Chanez was in 55th place. However, her mind was not on her individual ranking but on her Resolution CrossFit team. The team, competing in the SoCal region, had been hovering around 25th place for most of the competition. They had started out in 44th place and slowly climbed their way up to 23rd by Week 4.

The first time Chanez did 12.5, she was not at all happy with her score of 96.

“I felt like I was mentally giving up, which is not typical of me,” Chanez said.

She did the workout again the next day and got one more rep. It was still not good enough to secure her spot and guarantee a place for her team at regionals.

So, Chanez steeled herself to do the thrusters and pull-ups for a third day in a row. This time, she prepared correctly. She warmed up. She got her head together and finished the round of 15 plus 12 thrusters, for a score of 102. Those extra reps contributed to a total score of 436, putting her in 60th place, just one point ahead of 61st place. Resolution CrossFit finished the Open in 24th place, and Chanez will join her team in May at the Southern California Regional.

Open Surprises

For everyone who started the Open with dreams of regionals and beyond, there were those who had more modest goals. Carol Clingan, a 42-year-old athlete competing in the North West region, just wanted to do all the 2012 Open workouts RX’d and was hoping she didn’t have to scale the weight.



In 2011, Carol Clingan was unable to do the Open workouts RX'd, but she spent the last year building up her strength.

Clingan teaches middle-school math during the day and coaches at Rain City CrossFit at night, an affiliate she co-owns.

In 2011 Clingan did the Open “behind the scenes,” as she puts it. She didn’t register and couldn’t do all the workouts with the prescribed weight. A smaller athlete, she spent the year getting stronger but still wasn’t sure she would be able to make it through every workout if the weights got heavy.

Clingan did well on 12.1, with 113 burpees, but faltered on 12.2. Her 1RM snatch is 83 lb., and she wasn’t able to get the 100-lb. barbell overhead after snatching 75 lb. 30 times. After Week 2, Clingan was in 137th place.

A former endurance athlete, Clingan was hoping for something a bit longer, and her wish came true with 18-minute 12.3.

“I like the longer ones,” she said, “the warm-up is so important, especially as we get older.”

Clingan’s score of 346 put her in 106th place in her region, and she was happy she had managed to complete all the workouts. Although she was slow out of the gate, Clingan had a secret weapon that was revealed in 12.4, the wall-ball, double-under, muscle-up workout. Clingan got through 14 muscle-ups, which gave her an astonishing second-place finish and put her in 77th.

Now that the top 60 was in reach, Clingan began to change her mindset. She did the last workout on a Thursday and got a score of 108, beating her score of 100 from 2011.

“My friends told me to do it again,” Clingan said.

Knowing she was so close to the top 60, Clingan did the workout again on Saturday, making sure to warm up and prepare her body for the challenge. The clock started, Clingan hit the thrusters and pull-ups, and finished the seven minutes with a score of 115. It was just what she needed. When the leaderboard was finalized on Sunday night, Clingan had grabbed 60th place, just five points ahead of number 61, and the woman who just wanted to complete the workouts RX’d is now headed to the North West Regional.

**“I woke up, and I was still
in 60th place.”**

—Christopher Carter

Christopher Carter, competing in the Mid Atlantic region, has been doing CrossFit for just about a year—he started after buying a Groupon to CrossFit Manayunk. As opposed to the athletes who live and breathe everything CrossFit, Carter eats fast food, doesn’t follow a Paleo diet, and often misses workouts due to his frequent business trips. When Carter did 12.1 a second time, he admits he was hung over. Despite this, he improved his score by 2 reps.

“But I was surprised by how low I was,” Carter said. He did 118 burpees, which put him in 191st place.



Christopher Carter, who started CrossFit in February 2011, has already competed in four local competitions.

A score of 72 on 12.2 jumped Carter up to 65th. After moving around the leaderboard, by the end of 12.4 Carter was back in 65th place.

"I'm good at lower-body stuff, so I'm good at the thrusters," Carter said, "and my chest-to-bar pull-ups were not as bad as I thought."

Carter got a score of 130 and then left town for work. On Sunday he boarded a flight home.

"At 6:45 p.m. I was in 56th place, and my name kept dropping. I was getting nervous as people submitted their scores."

Carter considered rushing from the airport to the gym and redoing the workout but decided to let the chips fall where they would. At 8 p.m., Carter was in 59th place, and when he went to bed he was in 60th.

"I woke up, and I was still in 60th place," Carter said. He plans to compete with his CrossFit Manayunk team but is pleased to have made the individual cut and played a role in helping his team qualify.

The Zen Competitor

Tyler Belanger, an athlete in the Canada East region, qualified for the 2011 Canada East Regional, but he wasn't able to attend because he had a seminar scheduled for [Ignite!](#), a training program he founded with Chris Cooper to provide cognitive enrichment through exercise. This year, Belanger had high expectations for himself.

"As the top athlete at the gym, I set the bar high," he said. "I really wanted our team to qualify."

Belanger noticed a big difference in the level of competition between this year and last year.

"I couldn't believe how many people entered the middle-to-top range (this year). It was a big motivator for us," Belanger said.

As is appropriate for someone who works on the connection between the brain and exercise, Belanger took a relaxed, Zen-like approach to the Open. He did the first workout twice for a final score of 114 burpees, but he did the next three workouts only once.

"These are training sessions as well," Belanger said of the Open workouts. "I just gave it my all and let the score decide. If I didn't perform the way I hoped, instead of doing it again I looked at my nutrition and training. I would think, 'What do I need to change?'"

**"I knew I could kill two birds
with one stone by getting in
the top 60 and helping
my team."**

—Tyler Belanger

This philosophy served Belanger well, and at the end of workout 12.4 he was in 61st place, working his way up from 159th place after 12.1. Belanger's team, Catalyst Green Army from CrossFit Catalyst in Sault Ste. Marie, Ont., was in 27th place going into the last workout.

Belanger was planning to compete on his team, but "making the top 60 was a huge motivator," he said. "I knew I could kill two birds with one stone by getting in the top 60 and helping my team."

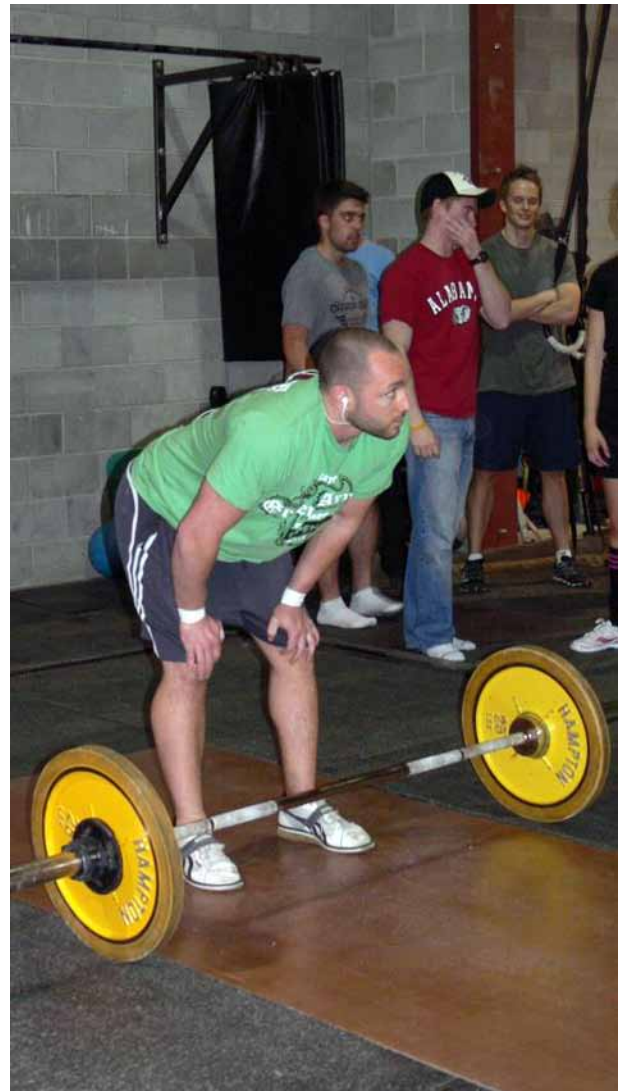
Belanger did 12.5 once and got a score of 105.

"I knew I was stronger than that," he said, and so he did the workout again a few days later and improved his score by 10 reps, for a total of 115. That was Belanger's all-out effort, and he hoped it was good enough.

On Sunday night, Belanger checked the leaderboard and saw he was in 61st place. His team was in 28th place, which was good enough for regionals, but Belanger admits he was disappointed.

I contacted Belanger for this article a few days after the Open was over, looking for people in 61st place. When he got my email, he joked later that he thought, "Maybe all of us in 61st place could form a nice support group on Facebook."

Just before I was due to call Belanger on April 2, I checked the leaderboard to review his scores. It was then I noticed something strange. His name was on the first page for the Canada East region—he had jumped to 60th place.



Stephanie Pamiak

Belanger often uses the songs on his iPod to pace himself throughout the workout.

Belanger had recently found this out himself. He thought it was a mistake at first, because he didn't get an invitation to regionals. Then, by chance, he checked his spam folder.

"The invitation to regionals went into my junk email box," he said with a laugh.

Belanger has no idea why or how he got bumped up to 60th place. He's going to compete with his team anyway, but he's happy his relaxed, methodical approach earned him a place in the top 60 in his region.

Metro Pro Wrestling



Ptasnik's villainous pro wrestling character often yells, "I'm an elite athlete!" at the crowd.

Moving On

Ptasnik, the pro wrestler in 61st place in North Central, loves CrossFit so much his professional-wrestling character incorporates CrossFit into his act. He plays a villain, "the Fittest Pro Wrestler on Earth," who enters the ring holding a kettlebell and challenges people to push-up contests. Behind the scenes, Ptasnik has inspired many of his fellow pro wrestlers to do CrossFit.

On Sunday night, the same night he found out he had just missed a spot at the North Central Regional, Ptasnik went to the gym. He did some heavy overhead squats and hit a PR. Then he did some skill work and a few weighted pull-ups, and he finished with 30 muscle-ups for time.

Many people would have drowned their sorrows in food or alcohol or would have taken a much-needed break from working out. When the leaderboard didn't shake out the way he wanted, Ptasnik's response was to get back in the gym and work harder.

"I love CrossFit," Ptasnik said. "It's such a positive thing in my life."



About the Author

*Hilary Achauer is an award-winning freelance writer and editor with a background in marketing and communications. An amateur-boxer-turned-CrossFitter, Hilary specializes in health and wellness content, focusing on emerging fitness trends. Her writing has been featured in a leading online parenting magazine as well as a number of travel and lifestyle publications. She is an editor for the **CrossFit Journal** and writes websites, brochures, blogs and newsletters. A Level 1 Trainer, she lives in San Diego with her husband and two small children and spends most of her free time at CrossFit PB. To contact her, visit HilaryAchauer.com.*



Gary Allard