

**HOW CAN I GET A FIREBREATHER TO THE GAMES SAFELY?**

**YOU**

**#2**

**Be The Trainer!**

**A HYPOTHETICAL CLIENT WANTS TO SET A PR ON CINDY WITH TORN HANDS. WHAT WORKOUT WOULD YOU PROGRAM FOR THIS SCENARIO?**

**THE SCENARIO...**

TONY BUDDING'S LATEST CREATION IS A CLIENT WHO'S TRAINING HARD TO GET TO THE CROSSFIT GAMES. THE QUALIFIER IS COMING UP FAST. WHAT ARE THE PITFALLS?

JENN HAS BEEN DOING CROSSFIT FOR JUST UNDER A YEAR. SHE HAS HER HEART SET ON COMPETING IN THE CROSSFIT GAMES. HER QUALIFIER IS IN FIVE WEEKS. JENN HAS TREMENDOUS GAS AND TONS OF HEART. SHE'S EXTREMELY COMPETITIVE.

At 28, Jenn is five-foot-seven and 140 pounds. She is a quick learner but has several bad habits she's mostly broken. Six years ago, Jenn was a Division 1 field-hockey player in college, where she had some mediocre weightlifting training—all power cleans.

Jenn's squat is plenty deep, but she is quad dominant and tends to cantilever forward. Pull-ups are her self-proclaimed nemesis. It took Jenn three months to get her first one, and now she can do about 15 in a row when fresh. Her Fran time is just under eight minutes as RX'd but 2:28 with jumping pull-ups. Ironically, Jenn's pull-ups are slightly better than her ring dips, muscle-ups and handstand push-ups.

Jenn is strong. She has a 275-pound deadlift, a 200-pound back squat, a 175-pound power clean and a 165-pound squat clean. Her max overhead squat is 120 pounds, but she can do 20 reps at 95 pounds. She can press 105, but her best jerk is 130.

Jenn trains exclusively at her local CrossFit affiliate. She comes in at least five times a week, and on several occasions she's been forced to take a rest day after training nine days straight.

Here is the breakdown of Jenn's training so far this week:

**SUNDAY:**

Rest

**MONDAY:**

Six 400-meter sprints with a timed 2-minute break. Her times (in seconds) were 72, 79, 74, 76, 73 (threw up), 96.

**TUESDAY:**

Three sets of overhead squats: max reps at 110 pounds, max reps at 88 pounds, max reps at 65 pounds. She got 6, 29 and 46 reps, respectively.

**WEDNESDAY:**

The pull-up ladder (1 pull-up in the first minute, 2 the second, etc., until you can't complete the required number within 60 seconds). She failed at minute 11 but kept doing as many pull-ups as she could each minute. She went 25 minutes until she ripped her right palm badly. She left very frustrated.

**THURSDAY:**

Ran 5 kilometers in 21:03.

**THE PROPOSED WORKOUT ON FRIDAY:**

Cindy (max rounds in 20 minutes of 5 pull-ups, 10 push-ups and 15 squats).

Jenn showed up with her hands taped up, eager to break 20 rounds for the first time. What do you do? Do you let her go for Cindy? If so, what kind of coaching do you give her to help her set a PR? Or do you program something different for her? If so, what do you program? Why?

Post your opinion to comments and read on to compare your answer to those of top CrossFit trainers.

**3-2-1... GO!**

**ANDY STUMPF**  
**CROSSFIT HQ TRAINER**

Five weeks is not much time to make a huge difference, but I believe it is enough time to work on weaknesses and hopefully improve mechanics that could make a difference at the qualifier and the Games.

Looking at Jenn's numbers, I think we have a pretty good athlete on our hands. The bottom line is she is very competent with lower-body stuff and pretty weak up top. This doesn't surprise me based on her sports background. Her last week of training is re-enforcing her lower-body bias: two days of running, one day of squats with light load overhead, and some pull-ups. The difference in Fran times speaks to this as well—she crushed the thrusters.

If she came to me with five weeks until the qualifier, I would train her differently: Cindy on Friday? No. Best-case scenario she gets her PR and sustains no further injury to her hands. Worst-case she tears even further and will be limited leading up to the qualifier. Second, she doesn't need a PR on Cindy to prep for the qualifiers. She has other areas that need work.

Instead of Cindy I would program something like as many rounds as possible in two minutes of two push jerks at 115 pounds, five ring dips and 15 squats. I would choose that type of workout to highlight her deficiencies but still give her a good met-con challenge. Saturday and Sunday would be mandatory rest days, and then we would begin training again Monday. On Monday I would put her on a three-on, one-off routine for three weeks, then a two-on, one-off routine for the two weeks leading up to the qualifier.

Every day I would warm her up with squat therapy and the Burgener Warm-up. It's essential that she work on fixing her quad-dominant squat and perform Olympic lifts at least once in every three-day cycle. With improvements in her squat and O-lifts, all her numbers are going to improve. They are good as it is, and they will only get better.

I would devote two days of the three-day cycle for hard training, with the third designated for mostly skill and technique work. The skill day would not necessarily fall on the last day but could fluctuate based on the previous day's training. I would work on her kip, handstands, Oly mechanics, running mechanics, ring work, etc. At the end of the practice day would be a five- or seven-minute met-con WOD. Time domains for the other two days of the cycle would hover around the 15-minute mark and not exceed 20 minutes.

Once we split to the two-on, one-off plan, one day would have both a strength component as well as a WOD. The other day would be a 12-to-15-minute WOD. I would train her up until two to three days before the qualifier, then have her rest until the event. Her performance at the qualifier and the time to prep before the Games would determine the route my coaching would take.

**MAGGIE DABE**  
**CROSSFIT FAIRFAX**

I'd force Jenn to take a rest day. I'm concerned about her not getting enough recovery. This week she has been training hard for four days straight. She definitely needs a day off. With a ripped hand, and after having done at least 55 pull-ups two days ago (10 minutes on the pull-up ladder plus whatever number of extra pulls she got in the next 15 minutes), letting her go for Cindy would not be a wise decision.

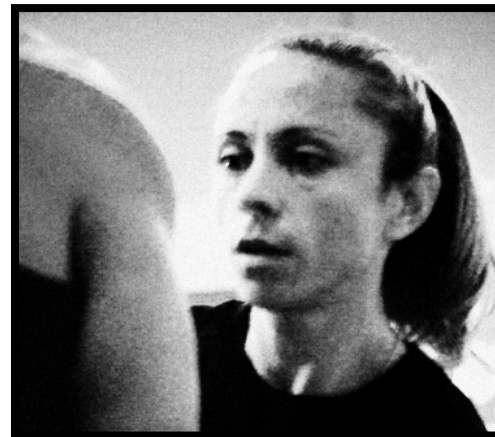
Jenn seems to be determined and wants to improve her performance. She's willing to work hard. However, she needs to understand that rest is as important as training and dieting. My job as a coach is to help my clients understand the role recovery plays in athletic development and the effects insufficient rest will have on their bodies. A lack of rest will not allow her complete regeneration, and her training will see a decrease in performance. With adequate recovery, Jenn will be able to train more and her performance will improve.

With the qualifier coming in five weeks, I would advise her to take two days off during the week. I wouldn't recommend she train more than three days in a row. Also, she needs to focus on her weak areas (not only pull-ups). She's obviously a strong athlete, but it looks like she needs to work on her technique to improve her jerk as well as her overhead squat. I'd have her come back to the gym on Monday to work on her jerks (3-2-2-1-1-1-1). With a 105-pound press, she should be able to jerk heavier than 130 pounds. Either postural or mechanical faults need to be addressed and fixed—set-up, dip, timing, transition from the dip to the drive, pressing too early/waiting too long, catch, etc.

**THE TRAINERS**



**ANDY STUMPF**  
**CROSSFIT HQ**



**MAGGIE DABE**  
**CROSSFIT FAIRFAX**



**LISA RAY**  
**CROSSFIT FLAGSTAFF**

Jenn is a strong, athletic girl.

But staying the current course will result in overtraining and possibly overuse injuries, which will not benefit her training over the long haul. I would like to sit down with her and have a conversation about the benefits of rest days in her training, as well as smart training while she's in the gym. I would at this point also like to talk to her about her diet, encouraging her to fine tune that with as much competitiveness and heart as she gives her physical training. If her diet was/is dialed in, it would help her recover better from her hard training, and I also believe her pull-up numbers would come up.

At the moment, she has badly torn hands, again creating a detriment to her training, especially something she really wants to get better at. I really feel that there is a time and a place for going to the point of destroying yourself. Intensity is important, and occasionally pushing yourself to the brink of injury is totally acceptable.

Think of Chris Spealler going for 100 pull-ups in a row as a PR, or giving a maximum effort in competition. I have absolutely no issue with that.

But ripping her palms to the point that it will make further training difficult and painful or impossible isn't helpful to Jenn's goal. She only has five weeks to competition and could be building her pull-ups, but now she is very likely not going to be able to do them well or for very long. She likely won't be able to PR on Cindy and will be very disappointed. She will very possibly cause further tearing in the process, inhibiting her chances of pushing hard and setting PRs on other workouts in the next week. Her goal should be getting ready for competition, not knocking herself dead beforehand with overtraining and injury.

Today, I would strongly encourage Jenn to do Cindy with jumping pull-ups, thereby saving her hands. I would have her go as hard and fast as she can to get over 20 rounds of jumping Cindy. Doing so will still allow her to work out with the rest of the group and push hard for a goal, and it will preserve the metabolic stimulus and some of her pride.

I would then literally bar her from the gym for two days straight with the homework of watching three movies of her choice, reading [CrossFit Journal No. 21](#) and healing her hands.



**THE LAST WORD**  
**TONY BUDDING, CROSSFIT HQ**

All three trainers recognize Jenn is at risk for overtraining. Some athletes have to be driven hard to reach their potential. Others, like Jenn, need to be reined in to achieve their maximum performance. Why is this? Because intensity is the key to optimizing results. Without adequate rest, no one can maximize workout intensity.

Andy and Maggie point out the need to improve Jenn's mechanics on the fundamental movements. Lisa and Maggie also focus on the psychological. They want to improve Jenn's understanding of balance, nutrition, rest and when to push really hard. Jenn is a former collegiate athlete, so she knows how to push.

The trainers point out that she doesn't need to work harder—she needs to work smarter.

Andy suggests a very specific approach for Jenn leading up to her competition, including an increasing number of rest days

and a conscious balance of maintaining strengths and improving weaknesses. He doesn't specifically suggest educating her about why. Is this a difference between male and female trainers? Or does Andy determine that in this case the best way for Jenn to break her overtraining is to simply follow directions and experience the difference?

Some coaches are soft and sweet. Others are loud and harsh. Some try to educate their clients about why they should train a particular way.

Others just provide commands. Good training is about getting the best real-world results for your clients. The only way to do this is to consider and manage all the factors that contribute to success. Among the most significant are technique, intensity, nutrition and rest.

How do you know if you're doing it right? Success is obvious: increasing numbers of clients getting better and better results.