

**A STUBBORN ATHLETE IS FINALLY READY TO LISTEN. NOW WHAT DO I TELL HIM?**

**YOU**

**#4**

**Be The Trainer!**

**A CLIENT CRUSHES GRACE BUT HATES PULL-UPS. HE'S STRONG, BUT HIS MOVEMENT IS POOR AND HE'S BEEN UNWILLING TO CHANGE. HE'S FINALLY COME AROUND—SO HOW DO YOU CHANGE HIS BAD HABITS?**

**SAMMY IS A BIG GUY WITH YEARS OF BAD MOVEMENT UNDER HIS BELT. HIS REPS ARE ALWAYS QUESTIONABLE, AND HE'S NEVER BEEN RESPONSIVE TO YOUR COACHING. HE FINALLY WANTS TO MOVE BETTER AND HAS BOOKED A ONE-ON-ONE.**

**THE SCENARIO...**

SAMMY IS A LARGE MAN. HE'S 6'4", 255 LB. AND 38 YEARS OLD. HE PLAYED TWO YEARS OF DIVISION 2 COLLEGIATE FOOTBALL (INSIDE LINEBACKER) BACK IN THE DAY. HE'S BEEN PART OF YOUR CROSSFIT GYM FOR JUST OVER FOUR MONTHS. BEFORE THAT, HE WAS A MEMBER OF THE TOWN'S LARGEST GLOBO GYM FOR 15 YEARS. HIS ROUTINE WAS A WIDE VARIETY OF WEIGHT TRAINING FOUR DAYS A WEEK (LOTS OF BACK AND BIS, CHEST AND TRIS, BUT ALSO INCLUDING THE POWERLIFTS AND THE OCCASIONAL POWER CLEAN), WITH RACQUETBALL EVERY WEDNESDAY AND PICK-UP BASKETBALL EVERY SATURDAY.

## **THE DETAILS**

As you'd expect from looking at him, Sammy is strong. None of the RX'd loads are too much for him, especially in the first round. He has decades of bad habits, and he's pretty committed to them. He never argues with you, but getting him to move properly through a full range of motion is a major challenge. He's not openly defiant at all, but your cues just don't make much difference in how he moves. He hits the workouts hard, even when he's one of the slowest.

He *hates* body-weight workouts. Grace is by far his favorite workout, and he definitely does better with shorter WODs. The high-volume stuff really works him. He doesn't mind running, but he keeps the same pace whether it's 200 meters or 5K, first round or fifth. You've tried several techniques to get him to push harder in the runs. He just laughs and keeps on going.

His workouts so far this week:

## **SUNDAY**

Rest

## **MONDAY**

Grace: 2:53 (as RX'd)

## **TUESDAY**

5 rounds of:

15 deadlifts (185 lb.), run 400 m

Time: 15:10

## **WEDNESDAY**

Rest

## **THURSDAY**

The workout was Murph, so Sammy started to leave. As a compromise, you prescribed a "Running Cindy": Run 400 m, 5 rounds of Cindy, run 400 m, 5 rounds of Cindy, run 400 m

Time: 28:00 (because you made him repeat so many reps due to partial range of motion)

## **FRIDAY**

Max push jerk: 285 lb. (sort of)

Sammy doesn't push jerk. They're all push presses. His shoulder flexibility is so bad that he even finishes the presses too far in front and you're not sure you should count them.

On Saturday morning, he calls you and says he finally gets it. He needs to move better, and he wants to pay for a one-on-one later that day. You have a free hour for the private session. It's on. What do you do with your session?



**MATT SWIFT**  
**CROSSFIT BRISBANE**

I'm excited. Sammy is the guy I've been waiting to get my hands on. He's been frustrating me in groups, and I know I can sort him out with a bit of quality one-on-one time.

Sammy has been training for four months and is past the intro stage, so I can safely push him without worrying about rhabdo. At 38, he's no spring chicken, but I'm confident he still has a lot of training in him, and while he's probably thinking it's time to slow down a bit, I want him to rediscover intensity. I think if we can do that he'll rekindle the enjoyment he used to get from his football days. I want him to love training again so he sticks with CrossFit for the rest of his life.

As a former linebacker, Sammy might have some running speed he's unaware of, and I want him to feel what it's like to push the envelope again when he's running. I know Sammy likes to work

because he hits the workouts hard and has a smoking Grace time. I don't care how strong you are: you still have to want to hurt to go sub-three on 30 reps of 135 lb. clean and jerks.

I think the problem is Sammy's definition of hard work. Fifteen years of Globo Gym have taught him he's only working if his muscles are contracting hard ("Feel the burn, baby!"). He's only done "cardio" for fun (racquetball and basketball). After so much strength training, he has poor strength endurance and lactate tolerance, so body-weight exercises seem unachievable. He never develops the capacity because he doesn't believe he can, blaming it on his size.

Sammy's range of motion is poor. Some people cheat range to get out of work, but that doesn't make sense with Sammy. He stuck with the repeated reps on the modified Cindy workout and didn't walk away. This shows he wants to do it right. I know he's horribly tight in his shoulders and is also probably tight in the hips and thoracic spine. Getting full range of motion is likely to be an incredible battle for him, and I think his lack of flexibility is the basis for his cheat reps.

Sammy needs a new way of thinking and a better strategy to approaching the workouts if he's going to hit his potential. At the beginning of the session, we're going to discuss some truths. I'm going to challenge Sammy to approach every workout the way he approached football: he needs to give 100 percent or he's letting the team down.

I also want him to know that being big is not the reason he gasses out on the body-weight stuff. He just hasn't built up capacity. In addition, he needs to understand that his poor mobility is making his training more awkward than it needs to be. Basically, I want him to stop using his size as an excuse. If big John Welbourn can do chest-to-bar pull-ups and handstands, I'm sure Sammy can, too.

Starting in this session, he's going to approach body-weight exercises differently: no wasted reps, full range of motion and better management of lactate. A better strategy will lower his frustration levels and give him some success to use as a foothold. Most importantly, he has to get with the program.

After our talk, we're going to start the session by working through the basic body-weight and foundational movements using the broomstick. I'll tell Sammy we're doing this to make sure he knows where he has to get to for full range of motion, and also to find out exactly where his mobility is lacking. During this assessment, I'm going to manhandle him into the best position we can achieve and make him strive for every bit of mobility he's got. I'm going to use whatever physical cues I need to get full range: bum balls, overhead targets, etc.

When we hit genuine mobility limitations, I'm going to break out and show Sammy the warm-up exercises he can do to start improving mobility (thoracic rolling, triggering, rehab exercises, stretches). We're going to repeat this until he has a rehab plan for every limitation. I want him to walk away realizing that when he really tries, his range is better than he thinks, and for every limitation he has, he can do homework to improve it. I want him back in control of his body. The whole time, I will reinforce the idea that better mobility will improve his movement and help him get stronger.

After the assessment, we'll work through a new approach for body-weight exercises. We'll play with the push-up, and I'm going to get him to do as many good push-ups as he can, as fast as he can, to failure. After he recovers, I'm going to get him to do three slow push-ups, then rest for the same amount of time it took him to do them. We'll repeat this for as long as he can, and then we'll compare totals. This is going to be a physical demonstration of how managing his

tempo and work-rest ratio will allow him to get through a lot more work and avoid blowing out. This is going to be his new strategy for all body-weight exercises. I'll leave him with a challenge to do use this strategy to do Murph later in the week and report the results.

Now the good stuff: I'm going to use a workout to teach Sammy about running intensity. Given the week he's had, he's good for a short, hard met-con gasser. Sunday will be a rest, so I'll tell Sammy that he has absolutely no reason to hold back. I need to kick into coaching hyperdrive here and link back to his previous experience on the football field. Did he ever go soft on the field? My aim is to get Sammy to push himself in the run and feel how hard he needs to push all the time. I want him to know that running is real work and is just as intense as strength training.

Assuming that in Tuesday's WOD he was completing the deadlifts in under a minute (they were light for him), he was running each 400 in over two minutes—way too slow. I want to get him down under 2:00, and ideally in the 1:30-1:45 range. Most importantly, I want him trying as hard as he can on the run. I know he'll always choose heavy lifting over body-weight exercises, so I'm going to use this as incentive to get him to push himself. He previously ignored me when I tried to push him, so I want him to choose to do it himself.

**This is his workout:**

**3 rounds for time of:**

**Run 400 m**

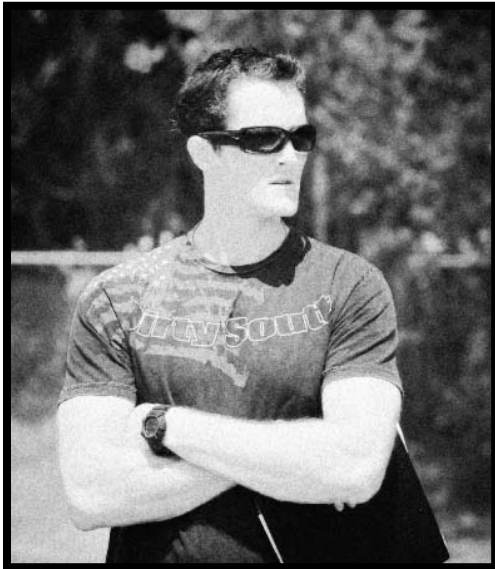
**Rest 2 minutes or**

**5 power cleans (185 lb.)**

**or 50 squats (bum to ball)**

Here's the rub: on each round, if the time for the 400 is faster than 1:30 he gets his choice of rest, power clean or squat for the second exercise. If the time is between 1:30 and 1:50 he gets his choice of power clean or squat for the second exercise, and if his time is slower than 1:50 he has to do bum-to-ball squats.

Sammy has a choice: work hard in the run and get rewarded with rest or go slow and be punished by his least favorite exercise. My expectation is that he'll hurt in the run to avoid having to do the squats. Any increased 400 time is a win, and I'm going to jump all over it. After the workout, I'm going to talk him through what he's learned; he can get into better positions than he thinks, he can improve his mobility, he can attack the body-weight exercises with a better strategy, and he can go fast when he tries. The take-away message for Sammy is to stop being a pussy. Sammy wants to work hard, and he's going to walk away fired up. I'm confident he'll hit the next WOD with a new attitude.



**JUSTIN BERGH**  
**CROSSFIT SS**

Sammy saw the light and wants to move better right away. I dig the enthusiasm!

Priority No. 1 is keeping that momentum going and starting to make him better today. However,

it's unlikely I'm going to take a big, tight, thick-skinned guy and turn him into well-rounded fire-breather in an hour. We're going to tackle some weaknesses in his warm-up, then break down a semi-familiar lift and roll it into his WOD. I want him to go home knowing he made a big step in the right direction, and I want to leave him with a game plan for continuing down that path.

We're going to start our session discussing where Sammy stands. He played football, powerlifted and can push-press a house—he knows how to open his hips and push. However, his inflexibility through the hips and shoulders is a major liability. He has a strength surplus, and it's limiting him in other areas (from the Oly platform to the racquetball court). Lastly, we're going to draw our power curve on the whiteboard and show him what his area looks like (cliff diving comes to mind). He has to start developing capacity in those middle domains, and beyond.

For his warm-up, we're going to dive into some of the foundational movements and start drilling for consistent mechanics. I'll demo each movement, hit the major points of performance and hold him to them. We'll throw in some runs at different paces so he has to mentally change gears.

**Warm-up - 3 rounds of:**

**Run 200 m (Round 1: slow jog.  
Round 2: run. Round 3: sprint)**

**Squat therapy x 8**

**Med-ball clean x 8**

For the WOD, I want to choose a technical lift I know we can improve today. We're not going to jump into a snatch or jerk because I don't want to fight his tight shoulders for an hour. I want him in a positive state, and I can't fix his shoulders today.

We'll settle on squat-clean therapy because he went heavy overhead yesterday and hasn't done any major pulling or squatting in the last few days. We'll start off with front squats and nail the main points. I'll drive home the rack position and make sure he keeps the bar on his deltoids and off his wrists. It's super important to receive the bar low and tight in the clean. Next we'll work from the top down, starting with a hang squat clean, then having him pull himself under the bar rather than pull the bar to him.

We'll start light and focus on mechanics and range of motion, but we'll get some moderate weight in the air before scaling down for the WOD. The key take-away points are going to be: "Full extension at the top, and stay low and tight at the bottom." As he ties those together, we'll start working on speeding up the turnaround, but I want to drive home the movement pattern, even if it's a little choppy today.

**For the WOD:**

**5 individually timed rounds of:**

**5 hang squat cleans**

**10 wall-ball shots**

**Sprint 200 m**

**Rest 90-120 seconds between rounds**

Each round is individually timed so he can force himself to finish the run beyond his comfort zone. We'll use a med-ball as a depth gauge on the wall balls. With these types of workouts, athletes can usually shave valuable seconds off their first round. I want Sammy bearing down and gunning for a faster time each attempt.

When he's done, we'll hit 20 PVC pass-throughs, then get his big body on a foam roller and start digging into those hips to loosen things up. This is important, and it leaves us with some floor time to talk about how things went and potential next steps. I'd encourage him to set his sights

on Nancy. Proficiency at the overhead squat-run couplet would be a big benchmark in his pursuit of fitness. In the meantime, his homework is going to be to roll, stretch aggressively and start looking for some fast breaks in his next pick-up basketball game.



**PAT SHERWOOD**  
**CROSSFIT HQ**

The fact that Sammy finally understands he needs to move better is an amazing step in the right direction. Although he's astoundingly strong, he'll soon plateau in his fitness without proper mechanics. Now is our opportunity to set him on the right path.

One key point needs to be addressed before we start: how do we approach a client like Sammy? Up until he asked for personal training, he was not listening to any of the cues for proper technique or range of motion. He'd simply laugh them off. That is not acceptable. Sammy would attack the WODs hard and push himself (not on the runs), but he never pushed himself to try and achieve the range of motion or mechanics.

I truly believe "problems" like this can be addressed the first time someone walks into your gym. As the trainer or owner of your box, you are in 100 percent control of the culture

that develops in that environment. Attention to the fundamentals and basic standards for all movements starts the first time you open your mouth to instruct or demonstrate a movement.

I've met some trainers who feel a gym will wind up as one of two different extremes. On one side is the gym where trainers never correct clients on range of motion and do not hold them to a standard. The trainers don't harp on them because they feel it would make the gym less fun. The other extreme is the "form nazi" gym. This is what the first group fears becoming and why some of them don't hold their clients to a high standard of movement. They feel that if they're too strict, the gym won't be fun and the clients will leave.

As many of you already know, a gym can have a perfect blend of both. It's possible to have clients who move well, listen to cues, execute full range of motion and have a complete blast while doing it. This is the culture I believe every gym should strive for. Range of motion is non-negotiable.

Trainers need to educate their clients on why moving properly is important. Clients need full range of motion because it's what life demands. It is the standard for the movement, and it will give them the ability to move the load a greater distance and elicit more power. More power is more intensity. More intensity equals faster results. The "results" are work capacity or fitness.

As CrossFit trainers, we are in the business of improving our clients' lives through increasing their work capacity. This is accomplished in many ways, but two key aspects are technique and intensity. Sammy is bringing plenty of intensity to his workouts, but he needs to do it with proper range of motion. Also, he was not concerned with proper technique. Sammy is a big, strong guy. He's so strong that he was able to do relatively well at many WODs simply

through brute strength. Regardless of how strong the athlete is, everyone will plateau eventually. This plateau will only be overcome through technique.

Even though Sammy can push press a tremendous amount of weight overhead, he'll eventually reach the limits of his push press and won't add one more pound to the bar until he learns the technique for the jerk. So Sammy (and all athletes) will never maximize work capacity without technique. Sammy needs proper technique to keep him safe and to increase his efficiency so he can maximize his power, his intensity and, ultimately, his fitness.

This all starts on Day 1. Educate your clients as to why these things are important. The principles that underpin CrossFit were established for a reason: they work. Make your clients intelligent athletes in the pursuit of elite fitness.

Lastly, with a client like Sammy who is simply not listening, take away sub-standard repetitions during WODs and use the whiteboard to your advantage. It's a powerful tool. If Sammy's movement was not to the standard you uphold in your gym, simply write "scaled" or "modified" or "not as RX'd" next to his name and time on the WOD if he did not listen to you. He'll soon be striving to move properly. Good behavior from clients is contagious in a gym, as is bad behavior. Make sure you have your gym and your athletes going down the proper road. You are in control. You are the trainer.

That said, let's dig into the session. We have to know that one hour with Sammy is only going to scratch the surface of what needs to be accomplished with him. But an hour is all we have, so let's get to work.

Sammy will not be happy with what I have planned for him. The main reason for his unhappiness is that the heaviest thing he'll touch during the session will be a PVC pipe or wooden

dowel. We need to get this athlete back to the fundamentals of the movement. By looking at what Sammy has been up to, the way he is built, and his likes and dislikes, we can make some educated guesses about what would greatly benefit him.

After warm-up, we'll focus on three moves: the air squat, the overhead squat and the push jerk.

We would start off with the air squat simply because it's the absolute cornerstone of everything else we're going to teach Sammy. If he's not moving properly in the squat, then we're doing our client a disservice. Also, judging by the fact that he's 6'4", 255 lb. and hates body-weight movements, I'm guessing he's not a big fan of going below parallel. Three out of four WODs he did this week did not take him below parallel. The one that did (running Cindy), took him far longer than it should due to sub-standard reps that did not count. While I'm sure some of his pull-ups and push-ups needed work as well, I'll bet many of the air squats were very high and not rooted firmly in his heels.

We would go step-by-step through the points of performance for the air squat. I would have Sammy bright red and sweating from simply working on technique. I would not be concerned with intensity at all. I would set high standards for his movement and be relentless in its pursuit. We would do as many good, slow reps as we need to improve his air squat. We could probably burn up the whole hour with this, but it would kill him and he would grow bored and lose interest.

With Sammy good and loose, we'd move into the overhead squat. This guy hates going below parallel, hates moving his body mass around and has tight shoulders. I can't think of anything he needs to do more than overhead squat a PVC pipe. I believe this move would have tremendous benefit for him.

We would build off the good squat mechanics that are fresh in his mind and add in shoulder flexibility, an overhead position and active shoulders. Of course we'd start off with some pass-throughs to warm up his shoulders and help out his mobility. Sammy may be collar-to-collar due to tightness in the shoulders. If that's where he is, then so be it. It would only further reinforce how crucial it will be for him to develop capacity in this movement.

If the air squat was not his friend, the overhead squat will be his worst enemy. However, this is exactly where he needs to be. On top of doing 15 good, slow air squats as part of his daily warm-up, I would recommend he do pass-throughs and 15 overhead squats as well.

The final move I would spend time on is the push jerk with PVC. I know he's strong. The guy push-pressed 285. Apparently he can drive some substantial weight overhead with his hips. The problem for him lies in the fact that he cannot or will not retreat back under the bar (not to mention his shoulder flexibility).

We would do the push-jerk progression, walking through it step by step. I need to get Sammy aggressively opening his hips and then quickly pulling himself down into that partial-squat receiving position. Once I got him opening his hips and quickly diving back under the load I would focus my attention on his overhead position. We would get that PVC pipe truly over the middle of his foot, get those shoulders active, and make sure he is not over-arching to get into that position. I need to have Sammy tighten up his abs and lock those ribs down.

I have no doubt that this will be a tremendous struggle for him. Inflexibility took decades to creep in, and we're not going to fix it in one day, let alone one hour. But we need to show Sammy the path he needs to be on. This is the path he should have been on from the start: mechanics, consistency, and then intensity.





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

Sammy is a creature of habit. He loves his routine. Unfortunately, this routine makes him highly resistant to change. He's physically and mentally rigid, though he's a great guy with a very pleasant disposition. He's worn you down over the past few months because nothing changes with his movement quality no matter what you do.

Matt and Justin know Sammy's request for the private training is the window of opportunity they've been waiting for. They jump on it hard, knowing it's going to take much more than just one session to make any real changes.

I love Pat's response. He's a former Navy SEAL, and no one in his gym is going to get away with bad movement. When Pat opened up CrossFit Virginia Beach, he was the first affiliate to have an official "Asshole Clause" in their waiver—if you're an asshole, you will be told to leave—so he takes 100 percent control of the culture of the gym.

The main challenge here is to get Sammy to experience at least one quantum leap. He has to move far enough out of his comfort zone that he can see just what he's been missing. Everyone wants him to squat and work his shoulder flexibility. These are essential. Matt and Justin are going to force him to break his running pace to feel that difference. Matt's strategy of time rewards is brilliant. I've seen approaches like this work miracles when done right.

Justin is using rest intervals to help Sammy pick up the intensity, and he's designed the workout brilliantly. As Sammy breaks some bad habits, his movements will become more efficient, and he can actually improve his time in subsequent rounds. This has a potent effect on a client's mindset and drives home one of CrossFit's most significant training points: we train proper technique in order to improve performance. Discussing it is one thing; proving it in the middle of a workout is totally different.

Pat takes a very different approach. He's going straight at the problem without a "workout." He's just going to manhandle Sammy until he makes progress in the quality of his movements. The overhead squat and push jerk are perfect for this. They exaggerate existing issues, and making improvements in the movements also forces the underlying issues to correct themselves. This is the majesty of these movements. Not all trainers can pull this off, but Pat can. He's immensely competent in training these movements and has helped thousands of athletes learn them. Sammy is stiff, not injured. He needs to get uncomfortable and push into natural positions that are far from normal for him.

Sammy has a strong will and can be stubborn, but he's no match for Pat Sherwood. Pat is the kind of trainer who can bring a grown man to tears and then have him be grateful for it. Pat has complete confidence in the efficacy of these movements and knows the effect these changes will have on Sammy. Sammy will resist, but once he gives in just a little, Pat will show him the way, and Sammy will appreciate it. Matt and Justin rely more on finesse, but both approaches can work miracles. In either case, this is no time for hesitation. Be bold, be confident, and change your clients' lives.

