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# THE CrossFit JOURNAL

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## There's Something About CFNE

CrossFit New England placed first in all six workouts at the Northeast Regional. Andréa Maria Cecil investigates what makes the affiliate excel.

By Andréa Maria Cecil

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All images: Staff/CrossFit Journal

On the third day of the Northeast Regional, some of the roughly 1,000 spectators grew weary of three words.

"There's people out there who are tired of hearing me say 'CrossFit New England,'" said Travis Bagent, the event's emcee, as he sat down for some shade beneath a tent at Reebok International's world headquarters in Canton, Mass.

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The solution to the problem is simple, he said at the time: Beat 'em.

But that didn't happen.

Not only did CrossFit New England place first in all six workouts June 17-19, but it was also the first team in the world to break the record in the first event—4 x 750-meter row, 50 handstand push-ups, 4 x 750-meter row—with a time of 23:36. Outlier CrossFit later finished the workout faster with a time of 22:55 at the Southern California Regional.

The New England team's success is attributable to many factors, said Heather Bergeron, who co-owns CrossFit New England with her husband, Ben.

"It's a lot of stuff that coaches and athletes don't think about ... (those things) buy you a lot of points and time," she said nearly two weeks after the regional.

Faster transitions, a team approach and mind coaching are three pieces comprising CrossFit New England's success, the Bergerons said.

### Fast, Smooth Transitions

Leading up to the regional, CrossFit New England members watched videos of something some might describe as mundane: changing bumpers and collars on barbells.

Some teams did it in 15 seconds, and others took 1 minute, Heather Bergeron said.

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"That literally has nothing to do with physical capacity. It's a stupid thing that people don't think about ahead of time," she explained. "Those are things that we practice in training. Those things don't just happen organically. Those are things you have to practice a lot of times."

She and her husband have experience with transitioning from their triathlon days.

Ben competed in the 2007 Ironman Florida Triathlon, the 2008 Ironman Lake Placid Triathlon and twice ran in the Boston Marathon. Heather competed in the 2007 Ironman Lake Placid Triathlon and has run eight marathons.

Plus, this will be CrossFit New England's third year competing as an affiliate at the CrossFit Games.

"It's pretty easy to see that there's so much time to be gained or lost in those transitions," said Ben Bergeron, who was the Northeast Regional director. "It's easy. There's no fitness involved. ... Smooth out the transition and you go faster."

Another part of fast transitions is communication.

"When one athlete is about to finish their reps that they're doing, (they're) giving the other teammate a heads-up ... so there's no lag time between," Heather Bergeron said. "Because if there's 50 transitions, all that time adds up."



**CFNE athletes during one of the six workouts they won at the regional.**

## A Team Sport

By knowing the regional workouts—unlike years past—CrossFit athletes all over the world were able to practice them leading up to their respective regional.

“That changed things a lot ahead of time (in terms of) being able to game plan,” Bergeron said.

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Because she was to compete in the thruster ladder, the Amanda workout and the “250s” event—250 chest-to-bar pull-ups, 250 kettlebell swings (24/16 kg), 250 double-unders, 250 overhead squats (95/65 lb.)—Heather did pre-regional training that focused on specific movements.

“All I was doing was working my thruster and working my muscle-ups and snatches,” she said.

And Ben programmed additional non-regional workouts for team members as well.

“We ran through everything so there (were) no mysteries or questions at all,” he said.

But CrossFit New England didn’t stop there.

“We really approached it as a team event. We really practiced these things,” he emphasized.

The idea, Bergeron said, was to create the tightest knit community possible.



*A little rain didn’t stop CFNE from winning Event 1 by almost a minute.*





*Two-time Games competitor Heather Bergeron knocks out muscle-ups.*

"The way we approach this is not six individuals who are really fit. We approach this as a team. We have meals together every week. People who eat together bond," he said. "We do all these things together that you do on a college sports team."

Bergeron added: "It's the six best teammates—not athletes."

### **"Programming Is Overrated and Coaching Is Underrated"**

As far as programming, the couple said CrossFit New England is the same as any other affiliate.

"I look around at other gyms' programming, and it's not that different. We essentially do CrossFit and work on our weaknesses," Ben said. "If someone's programming Cindy and one day of heavy deadlifts and one day of Helen, it's the same at every gym."

But, he added, "I think coaching is the underrated part of that."

"I think that the programming is overrated and coaching is underrated," Bergeron said.

Greg Amundson lit a fire under him, Bergeron said. Known as the Original Firebreather in the CrossFit community, Amundson gives motivational speeches in which he uses a version of one of Mahatma Gandhi's quotes, "Your thoughts will become your words. Your words will become your actions. Your actions will become your habits. Your habits will become your character. Your character will define your destiny."

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Likewise, in addition to showing members how to become better at certain movements, "we also do a lot of mind coaching, how to mentally support other athletes," Bergeron said.

"It's not the obvious either," he added. "It's small stuff like, 'Don't quit,' 'Keep going,' 'Go faster,' 'Finish stronger.' We spend a lot of time with our athletes—every member—on that stuff."

Heather Bergeron agreed.

"I don't think that we've ever pushed people more than (any other affiliate has)," she said.

CrossFit New England encourages athletes who can perform high-skill movements, such as handstand push-ups, and provides those who can't with "the tools to get there," Heather said.

"We don't assume that just 'cause they're older that they need to do a modification for the rest of their life," she added. "I think we do a good job with providing them progressions."



*Thrusted with authority.*

### Next Up: The Games

In preparation for July 29-31 at the Home Depot Center in Carson, Calif., CrossFit New England has planned Saturday workouts with CrossFit Route 1 and CrossFit Fenway, which placed second and third in the Northeast Regional, respectively.

“(They) train with our team, train against our team,” Bergeron said. “They’re winning some, we’re winning some. It’s close. It’s not like a gimme that we’re gonna win every single workout.”

She continued: “It’s good to know ahead of time. I want to know right now what we’re not good at.”

Ben said he believes his box has a strong chance of walking away with a first-place finish at the Games.

“I think we’re a top-five team. Anything could happen on game day,” he said. “We’re shooting for podium spot; we’d love to win it.”

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**“I try not to get too cocky about it. The competition gets harder every year.”**

**—Heather Bergeron**

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It's almost impossible to accurately predict Games winners, said Eric Siegel, manager of CrossFit Fenway and captain of his affiliate team.

"It's whoever is having their best day and who does well at the workouts," he said. "I think we have the best region (in the world) here in the Northeast. You never know. Anything can happen."

And CrossFit New England has "a group of great athletes that train together and work hard and represent the gym well," he said.

Heather Bergeron remained reserved.

Her affiliate must think of how it not only matches up against other boxes in the country but also in the world, she said.

CrossFit Invictus of San Diego and Front Range CrossFit out of Denver are two strong competitors, she said.

"Invictus, definitely. (They) have a really cool community, and that says a lot about (their) character," she said.

"I'm very hesitant. We're going to prepare as much as we can and eliminate our weakness as much as we can, and whatever happens happens. We're all certainly hoping we're going to walk away with a first-place medal. I try not to get too cocky about it.

"The competition gets harder every year."



Courtesy of Andrea Maria Cecil

#### About the Author

*Andréa Maria Cecil, 33, is managing editor at the **Central Penn Business Journal** in Harrisburg, Pa. Andréa is a native of New Orleans who now lives in York County, Pa. There, she's been doing CrossFit since 2008 at [CrossFit York](#). Additionally, she dedicates three days per week to training in Olympic weightlifting at [McKenna's Gym](#).*