

Before the Competition Takes Over

Emily Beers has a “CrossFit moment” on the eve of the CrossFit Games.

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All images: Staff/CrossFit Journal

Two years ago, Peter Mansbridge, a journalist who is somewhat iconic in Canada, said something to my journalism class that has stuck with me ever since.



Stars in their own box, many athletes are completely humbled when they're suddenly surrounded by the very best of our sport.

A wide-eyed journalism student at the time, I and my peers were starstruck by Mansbridge's giant presence in our little classroom in London, Ont. We must have looked like a group of 12-year-old boys watching a live NHL game, each one more eager than the next to be the one to high-five one of his hockey idols.

"Who has been the most interesting person you've ever interviewed?" asked one of my classmates.

We were all expecting Mansbridge's answer to be someone like the Dalai Lama or Michael Jordan.

Mansbridge smiled. "You know," he began. "Ordinary people have the most extraordinary stories."

We hear it all the time: CrossFit isn't like other sports. CrossFitters are always proclaiming that what truly epitomizes CrossFit are the ordinary people living out their own extraordinary stories every day in every box around the world.

But when you get a group of elite athletes together, like at the reception on Wednesday, July 27, sometimes our instinctive competitive human nature takes over, and the CrossFit message gets temporarily lost in the shuffle.

When I arrived at the reception on Wednesday evening, it felt kind of backward. It looked suspiciously like an NBA all-star game, a room filled with extraordinary athletes suddenly feeling pretty ordinary, a basketball court hosting a team of top scorers who are about to have a mediocre game because their teammates are so exceptional.

Even the person who comes dead last in the standings in this year's Games is a star in his or her own box. And even the members of the team that will finish last are amazing athletes. In their regular CrossFit lives, these people are used to being admired and asked for diet and training advice. They are a group of people who regularly defile WODs with uncharacteristic ease.

From Jason Khalipa to the unknown affiliate team member from Texas, these people are used to being stopped by inquisitive and obviously impressed latte-drinkers in their local coffee shops and asked what sport they play (I witnessed just this when I was in line behind Khalipa at Starbucks yesterday).

My ultimate favorite: Just the other day, a man tapped me on the shoulder as I walked down the street and asked me quite seriously, “Where did your legs come from?”



The Games bring the best of every region together, and the collection of elite athletes is truly impressive.

And there we were in L.A. Suddenly, the 25-year-old former college-football star on the affiliate team from Virginia, the one who gets props on a daily basis for boasting the heaviest deadlift in his box, is mediocre at best given the quality of athletes in the room. Yep, there was certainly an element of the reception that felt like a middle-school dance: humbling and downright intimidating.

But then Reebok took the podium. Chris Froio, VP of fitness and training, spoke to the crowd. He gave props to a woman sitting nearby who had been with Reebok

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for many, many years. She recently got into CrossFit and has proudly lost 30 lb. The woman is a diabetic, and her doctor just told her that if she keeps doing what she’s doing, she will be off her insulin by the end of the year.

Genuine applause swept through the room. An ordinary person with an extraordinary story—this is the CrossFit I’m used to having in my day-to-day life.

Then someone pressed play on the projector and Reebok’s CrossFit anthem began. I was expecting another CrossFit firebreather video, footage from past Games perhaps, a video of the ultimate stars of the sport.

Instead, what played out in front of us was footage of CrossFitters from around the world, faces we had never seen before—old, young, average CrossFitters doing handstands, running, swinging kettlebells on beaches in California, on mountaintops in Europe, on the streets in China.

The anthem had an Olympic theme to it, intent on bringing unity to the competitors.

Don’t get me wrong. We need the Games. We do. We’re human beings, and it’s only natural that we like to compete. And also just like the Olympics, fierce competition will soon play out in the battle to find the fittest. I think this is healthy and positive, and I’m not trying to take the intense competition away from CrossFit. It’s an amazing sport, at both the “lifestyle” and the elite level.

All I’m saying is that I was so relieved that the company that is sponsoring the Games gets it.

They get CrossFit.

Thank you, Reebok.

Emily Beers is competing on CrossFit Vancouver’s Affiliate Cup team and will be writing from ground level throughout the competition.