
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Keeping It Clean

Strength and conditioning coach Josh Everett offers up his advice for any athletes who plan to compete in competitions with drug testing.

By Josh Everett

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The overwhelming majority of the CrossFit community supports and wants drug testing of the athletes who participate in the CrossFit Games, but what does this really mean for our athletes? And how do CrossFitters prepare for any other events where drug testing is in place?

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Having worked about a dozen years as a strength and conditioning coach at the NCAA Division 1 level, I became very familiar with the drug tests, the banned-substance list and the strategies for avoiding accidentally consuming a banned substance. At the universities I worked for, our student athletes were subject to random testing for street and performance-enhancing drugs two to three times a year. In addition to those random tests, NCAA athletes are also tested at NCAA championship events should they or their team make it that far.

At the collegiate level, there is a continual education and awareness campaign for the student athletes regarding supplements and drug testing. I'm going to share some of these strategies and some ideas of my own that will help CrossFitters avoid consuming a banned substance and having an embarrassing positive test that could cost placement, prize money, sponsorships, etc.

It's All on You

The main idea I want to drive home is this: you alone are responsible for anything and everything that goes into your body.

If you're going to take anything beyond normal food items, you need to put in some footwork. Do your due diligence. Read labels. Do an Internet search. Compare the ingredient list to the banned-substance list. For the CrossFit Games, the banned-substance list is provided on the Games website. Other events will have their own lists.

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Even identifying the banned substances can be problematic at times as substances can have multiple names and forms. If you're not sure, don't take it!



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A CrossFit veteran and an experienced strength coach, Josh Everett knows you have to be careful what you put in your body.

A big advantage collegiate and professional sports organizations have over the CrossFitter (for now) is the major sporting institutions have access to agencies that will help identify products with banned substances. For example, when I worked in college athletics I could go to Drugfreesport.com, type in our school's password, enter a product name or ingredient, and access if the product had been reviewed and if it was in the banned class or not. As college coaches, we repeatedly asked our athletes to bring in any supplement they wanted to take so we could approve it before they took it.

CrossFitters don't have this luxury, so what can they do? I'd suggest contacting an NCAA strength coach or athletic trainer (sports medicine) and ask for help. They have access to these databases, and you can offer to pay them for their time. Along with finding and asking for help from professionals in major sporting organizations, you may also try consulting with a naturopathic doctor. Many have strong backgrounds in supplementation, but some are pure snake-oil salesmen.

Another word of warning: not all banned-substance lists are the same from one sport organization to another. For example, the product that cost CrossFit New England a top spot in the 2010 CrossFit Games Affiliate Cup was not specifically banned by the NCAA even though it contained a banned substance. Generally, these banned-substance lists are more than 95 percent the same across organizations, but you are also responsible for the 5 percent of the list that might be different.

For the CrossFit Games policies on performance-enhancing drugs, visit Games.CrossFit.com.

The quality of the products you take should be another concern. A big problem with the supplement industry is the ingredient labels don't always match what's in the bottle. The supplement industry can be both shady and sloppy. Manufacturers will omit items that are on the label to save money, they are often sloppy in processing and create cross-contamination of products, and they will even go so far as to purposely put a banned substance in a product to increase its effectiveness. Choose your supplement company wisely. A few well-known and respected brands guarantee their products. Stick to those products.

Furthermore, beware of supplements that make outrageous claims. CrossFitters laugh at the outrageous claims made by infomercials selling goofy fitness products and programs, but many of those same CrossFitters fall hook, line and sinker for the same outrageous claims when they're made in bright, shiny colors on a supplement package.

Another big concern is that just because a product is sold at 7-11, GNC or in the corner-store vending machine doesn't mean it's legal for competition. Supplement stores are packed with products containing substances banned from many competitions.

Perhaps less obvious but just as important are the ingredients in "energy" drinks. These are everywhere. At one time, the athletic department I worked in had a SoBe vending machine not 20 feet from the weight-room door, and the vending machine contained two drinks that had banned substances!



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Drug testing was introduced at the 2009 CrossFit Games, and now it's just a standard part of the CrossFit competition season.

CrossFit athletes generally run into drug testing at the CrossFit Games, but the CrossFit Performance-Enhancing and Banned Substances Testing Program states athletes can be tested at any time. Most of the banned substances contained in energy drinks and stimulants in general clear your system very quickly, but you're still running a risk. It might be best to avoid "energy" products altogether, but you should definitely and stick to water or Gatorade-type products during competition.

Do Your Research!

Keeping up with all the various supplements and energy drinks can be daunting, but if you're an elite CrossFitter entering competition, it is now part of the process.

Be responsible for what you put in your body. Never randomly eat or drink a product, particularly at competition. Dial in your nutrition and supplement plan early on in the training year. Plan, practice, and dial in your competition nutrition, hydration and supplement strategies. Nothing should be left to chance in competition. This requires some research at the front end, but research is what elite athletes do.

An elite athlete's nutrition, hydration and recovery plan doesn't rely on what the event host provides, what is being given out as free samples at booths, or what is at the store on the corner. It's researched, planned and practiced in advance with the help of knowledgeable advisors.

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And if you put in your work ahead of time, at competition it will help with stress and mental preparation as you'll have one less thing to think about and you'll have a routine to fall back on.



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About the Author

One of the original CrossFit stars, Josh Everett has competed in three CrossFit Games, reaching the podium in both 2007 and 2008. Everett is a coach at Level 1 Seminars and CrossFit Olympic Lifting Seminars, and he is a strength and conditioning coach employed by the U.S. Navy.