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Kate Foster: Tiny but Huge

Kate Foster fights cancer and wins. Now she wants your help.
Emily Beers reports.

By Emily Beers

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Sevan Matossian

The goal of the CrossFit Games is to find the fittest man and woman on Earth.

But when Kate Foster took the microphone and addressed the crowd at the Home Depot Center on July 14, it became clear that CrossFit is about something so much bigger than that.

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The 13-year-old, who was diagnosed with leukemia last year, proudly marched to center stage at the Home Depot Center. A hush came over the crowd as the tiny girl with a prosthetic leg talked confidently in front of thousands of people about the importance of CrossFit for Hope, of donating to help children with cancer.

The physical stature of the 13-year-old might have been tiny, but her smile, her confidence and the command in her voice were anything but.

"3, 2, 1 ... Go!" Foster declared, as she officially opened a fresh year of CrossFit for Hope fundraising.

Kate in 2011

Kate, a competitive gymnast and a long-time avid CrossFitter, was diagnosed with cancer in the spring of 2011.



Sevan Matossian

Kate was a CrossFitter before she was diagnosed with cancer, and doctors believe her good health and strength are what helped her survive.

"May 20, 2011," said Kate, who remembers the exact moment she was diagnosed. "And I had a bone-marrow transplant on Oct. 12. And it's sort of all gone from there."

**"Her heart got her through it.
She has the heart of a giant."**

—Lynn Foster

Kate's dad, Lynn Foster, also remembers the feeling he had when he found out his daughter had leukemia. Needless to say, it was devastating.

"Kids don't deserve to be sick. They're so innocent. And especially when it's something that can take your life. It really hits home that they're so helpless," Lynn said.

Helpless is how Lynn felt for most of 2011. Helpless, but hopeful. In fact, despite the fact that the odds were against his daughter's recovery, he never for a moment believed she wouldn't make it through.

"Her heart got her through it. She has the heart of a giant," he said. "And I can count on one hand the amount of times she broke down and started crying, through all the rounds of chemo, from the time she was diagnosed to when she had her leg amputated."

He added: "She's a strong-willed girl, and you don't tell her no because she'll find a way to show you she can."

The Fosters and CrossFit

Physically, Kate believes CrossFit is the reason she's still alive.

"The doctor said had I not been a gymnast and a CrossFitter and in such good shape, I would have died. Period," she said.

And for the whole Foster family, their CrossFit community is what helped them through the year emotionally.

Kate spent a lot of time at UW Madison Children's Hospital through her sickness, and the Fosters didn't have any family in the area.

"So our family became the gym. They were the people who took care of us. Anything we needed, they just took care of us," Lynn said.

Kate, who is once again CrossFitting at CrossFit Rockford and is also hoping to get back into gymnastics soon, credits CrossFit as having helped her emotional as well as her physical recovery.

“I’ve got one leg, so people are like, ‘You can’t do this.’ I’ll show you I can.”

—Kate Foster

“CrossFit and gymnastics—they have been the things that have been pushing me through this,” Kate said.

“Once I’m done with this, I can go back to that. It’s what has kept me going,” she added.

April 2, 2012

Kate sat by the phone, waiting patiently for the most important call of her life.

“There’s a six-month mark after the bone-marrow transplant, where you have to wait and see if the transplant worked. We called it ‘house arrest’ because I couldn’t leave my house because of all the germs,” Kate said.

“The sixth-month mark actually fell on my birthday. We were at home; we knew the phone call was coming, so every time the phone rang I was kind of tensed up, ready to hear the worst or the best,” she continued.

And finally, the phone call came.

“I was so excited. They told me I was good to go,” she said.

Since Kate was told the magic words in April, she hasn’t wasted any time making the most of her young life. Within one month, she was back in the gym, refusing to miss out on life, refusing to give in to what others expect of her.



CrossFit Rockford

Kate returned to the gym as soon as she could after her bone-marrow transplant, eager to get back to doing what she loves.



Staff/CrossFit Journal

Where others see tragedy, Kate sees an opportunity to help other children.

"I've got one leg, so people are like, 'You can't do this.' I'll show you I can," Kate said.

"She just appreciates life so much." said Lynn, who is completely inspired by his daughter's wisdom and maturity.

"Her purpose is to show people you don't need to sit on the couch and be a dead ass."

—Lynn Foster

"She was in the discussion when we had to make the decision to amputate her leg. And she got the fact that it was her leg or her life. For her to comprehend that at 12 years old, it's amazing for a kid that age to be able to get that," he said.

A Silver Lining

It's hard to imagine accepting the fact that you're a 13-year-old cancer survivor who's missing a leg, but Kate has managed to not just accept her situation but also find a silver lining through her struggle.

Even Lynn has found a way to accept his daughter's fate.

"Who knows why all of this happened? But you can't second-guess it. And one thing we've gotten out of it is that this is her purpose now. Her purpose is to show people you don't need to sit on the couch and be a dead ass," he said.

Kate added: "I remember one day I was in the hospital, and I said to my mom, 'I know this is such a horrible thing to have, but I never would have gotten to do this many things if I hadn't gone through this.'"

One of the things Kate got to do while at the Home Depot Center was meet her favorite CrossFitter, Camille Leblanc-Bazinet.

"She signed my shirt. I was so excited. It was just kind of amazing. You hear stories about these people, but you never think you're actually going to get to meet them," Kate said, grinning from ear-to-ear.

"It kind of just feels like it's not real. This is too good to be true," she said.

As Kate reminded the teary CrossFit Games crowd at the Home Depot Center, CrossFit for Hope was a huge success in its inaugural campaign, but the fight isn't over. To help Kate and other children like her, visit Hope.CrossFit.com.



About the Author

*Emily Beers finished a master's degree in journalism at the University of Western Ontario in the spring of 2009. Upon graduation, she worked as a sportswriter at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games, where she covered figure skating and short-track speed skating. Currently, she hosts **WOD HOG**, a not-always-PG publication of the CrossFit Vancouver School of Fitness. She ruptured her Achilles tendon in December 2010 and served as the Canada West Regional Media Director while recovering from surgery. Beers also competed in the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games on CrossFit Vancouver's team. She finished third at the 2012 Canada West Regional.*