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## Christine Girard on Olympic Bronze

Christine Girard was the only Olympic weightlifter from North America to win a medal at the London Games, and she fired up the Canadian CrossFit community in the process. Emily Beers reports.

By Emily Beers

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Courtesy of Christine Girard

When Christine Girard placed fourth at the Beijing Olympics in 2008, people treated her as if she had failed.

“People reacted like it was a huge disappointment because I didn’t win a medal. It was as if they were saying to me, “You’re almost good,” Girard said of her fourth-place finish in Beijing.

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1 of 4

Now that Girard has an Olympic bronze medal around her neck, reaction to her recent Olympic performance at the London Games has been night and day.

"It's been a world of difference, yet it's only one ranking higher. After being third this time, people talk to me like I won the gold. It's amazing to see how different their reactions have been this Olympics," said the 62-kg lifter.

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**"Our whole gym paused  
and watched each of her  
lifts on a laptop."**

**– Dave Kitchen**

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And while the 27-year-old insists she wasn't disappointed with her fourth-place finish in Beijing, she admits that her London performance was much more satisfying. Standing on the podium this summer, after a 103-kg snatch and a 133-kg clean and jerk, was one of the most memorable moments of her life.

"It was an amazing feeling ... to actually live your dream. It's hard to describe ... The pride I had on the podium is hard to describe," said Girard, who is originally from Quebec but now lives with her husband in British Columbia.

The other thing that was different in London this summer—whether Girard knew it or not—was that she had an entire community diligently watching her from home and admiring her lifts from afar: the CrossFit community.

### **CrossFit and Oly Lifting**

Dave Kitchen, who owns CrossFit North Vancouver, followed Girard closely in London. Kitchen is the host of an annual CrossFit Olympic-weightlifting competition in British Columbia and has met Girard on a number of occasions. He explained that watching her compete at the Olympics was like cheering for one of his own athletes.

"Having a personal attachment to the person meant a lot to me ... Our whole gym paused and watched each of her lifts on a laptop," Kitchen said. "Myself and our gym identifies with the sport, and with Christine."

Kitchen believes there's a connection between the CrossFit community and the Olympic-weightlifting world.

"CrossFit is the biggest driving force behind Olympic weightlifting in B.C.," he said. "Without CrossFit, I think they would be struggling even more to get lifters."

Now that CrossFit has exploded, Girard, too, can feel that more people are aware of and maybe even follow her sport. That echoes the sentiments of top U.S. lifters such as Chad Vaughn, who noted back in 2010 that CrossFit was helping to revitalize the sport of Olympic weightlifting.

"I definitely feel like people understand it better now. Most people now know what I'm talking about when I talk about a snatch. Before, people were like, 'What? A snatch?'" said Girard, who plans to get more involved helping coach CrossFitters now that the Olympic Games are over.

As for her CrossFit fans across Canada, Girard humbly said she was mostly unaware of their dozens of Facebook status updates wishing her luck, cheering her on and congratulating her efforts.

"When I was at the Games, I was so much in the bubble of the Olympics, so I wasn't that aware. I didn't have time to look around," she said.



Julie Lacasse

**Girard snatched 103 kg (227 lb.) and clean and jerked 133 kg (293 lb.) to win a bronze medal at the 2012 Olympics.**



Courtesy of Christine Girard

***Girard's balance, speed and strength were on full display in London, were she missed a silver medal by only 2 kg.***

But they were there: dozens of CrossFitters watching Girard, amazed by the beauty of her lifts, inspired by her movements.

Kitchen added: "Watching Christine snatch is like watching a snatch-grip deadlift and then all of a sudden after she passes her knees she is in a squat with the bar overhead. I have never witnessed anyone else that fast. Ever."

## **Making History**

What's most impressive about Girard's Olympic bronze medal is the fact that she was the only North American weightlifter—man or woman—to reach the podium, and she was one of only three athletes from the Western Hemisphere to medal and challenge domination of the sport by European, Asian and Middle Eastern lifters.

What makes this especially impressive is that Olympic weightlifting is a sport marred with doping cases. Indeed, Albanian lifter Hysen Pulaku was the first athlete ejected from the 2012 Games for failing a drug test.

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**"I actually competed against a girl with a beard who spoke like a man this summer."**

**—Christine Girard**

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"The Chinese and the Russians, those countries haven't always been clean. I actually competed against a girl with a beard who spoke like a man this summer," Girard said. "And I actually beat her," she added, laughing.

She continued: "The thing is, the doping tests are based out of Montreal, so Canadians have a lot of tests. But some of the other countries might only have one test every four years. One girl in my weight class, she didn't compete for the last four years, so she couldn't be tested for four whole years, and then her country just brought her in for the Olympics."

Keeping drugs out of sports, of course, is very difficult, and clever cheaters can find ways around the rules.

"Some of the other countries, they hide their athletes until the Olympics, but in Canada, since I was 14 they have come to my house at any time, 6 a.m. or 10 at night," said Girard, who was drug tested pretty much every month for the last year leading up to the Olympics.

So after Girard won her bronze medal, many people from other countries approached her to say congratulations, recognizing that she is a clean athlete.

"People know we don't use drugs in Canadian weightlifting. We train for real with everything we have," she said.

### Girard's Training

One of the biggest changes Girard made in her training between Beijing and London was taking her training into her own hands.

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**"I'll be an athlete for my whole life. I can't go without."**

**– Christine Girard**

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"I was my own coach, so I was doing everything—all of my programming and my nutrition," Girard said.

This included doing eight sessions per week, and three days a week she did two training sessions a day. Sometimes she trained out of her garage, and sometimes she trained at her weightlifting club. While Girard trained herself, she did bring a coach with her to competitions, and she also bounced ideas off her husband, a former Olympic weightlifter. But Girard primarily took the lead.

This allowed her to combine all the knowledge she had gained about Olympic weightlifting—a sport she began when she was just 10 years old—and pick and choose the best methodologies.

"I pretty much had tried all the high-level coaches in Canada, and so in the end I picked all the best things all of them taught me and made my own plan," Girard explained.

She feels that maturity and knowledge are what helped her land a spot on the podium in London.

"I read a lot of books. I learned a lot and grew up a lot in the last four years," she said. "Four years ago, I just followed my coach and did what he told me to do. I just understood everything better this time."

And lucky for the CrossFit community, Girard is also incredibly passionate about coaching. She has already worked with a few local CrossFit boxes and plans to get more into it.



**Girard has been weightlifting since age 10.**

"I want to get more involved with CrossFit. I'm interested in everything that touches my sport," Girard said.

She added: "Hopefully weightlifting clubs can start in every CrossFit gym."

As for her own weightlifting career, she's still training and can't imagine stopping.

"I don't think I'll ever retire. I'll be an athlete for my whole life. I can't go without," she said.



### 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.*