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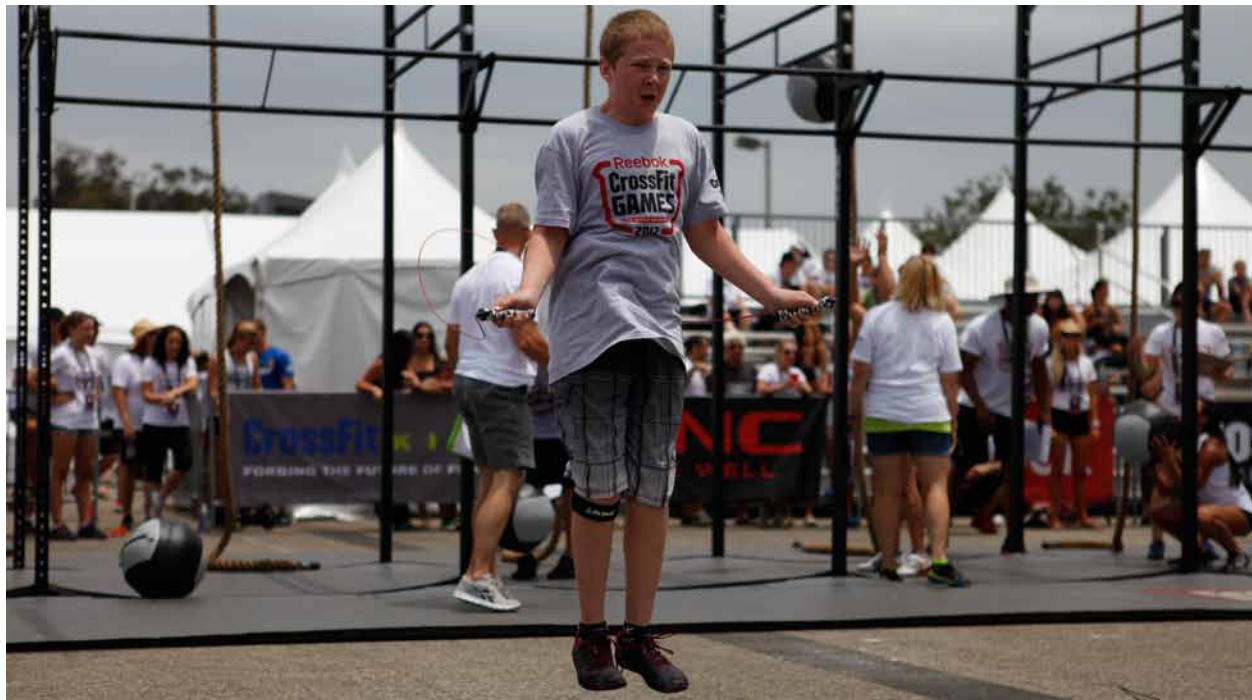
## CrossFit Teens: The Healthiest in the World

The CrossFit Kids Gauntlet at the Games proved that having fun with fitness is a very good thing for North American youth. Emily Beers reports.

By Emily Beers

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All images: Staff/CrossFit Journal

On more than one occasion, British comedian Ricky Gervais has joked about overweight people and the so-called “obesity epidemic.”

Politically incorrect and blatantly offensive, Gervais purposely provokes.

“Leprosy is a disease. Obesity is not . . . . What’s the disease? Everything tastes good?”

Whether Gervais’ humor makes you nod and laugh or whether it stings and offends, he gets you thinking about a politically incorrect subject: the concept of obesity as a disease.

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Then as soon as you turn to the world and see hundreds upon thousands of overweight children waddling around—especially in North America—it’s suddenly hard not to consider fatness some sort of epidemic.

However, in July at the Home Depot Center, a group of teenagers helped prove to the world that the disease is beatable, preventable even.

These teens are not your pizza-pocket-eating, weed-smoking, obsessive video-game-playing television addicts. Instead, these kids get excited when they see salmon and vegetables, and they get their high when they head to the gym after school to hit a grueling workout.

For this group of adolescents, playing video games is a rarity, and if they do watch TV, they do Tabata burpees during commercial breaks.

These teens are part of the first generation of CrossFit Kids to graduate into the world.

CrossFit Kids audio: [.m4a](#)



**Where would you be if you had started CrossFit at 15?**

### Kids of the Gauntlet

Duncan Martin from Ramona, Calif., was one of 18 teenagers who qualified for the Gauntlet event at the CrossFit Games, a competition for CrossFitters 13 to 18. Martin is the youngest son of Jeff and Mikki Lee Martin, founders of the CrossFit Kids program.

“I’ve been CrossFitting for nine years,” says the 14-year-old, who couldn’t be more excited to be competing at the CrossFit Games, just meters away from his childhood idols, men like Jason Khalipa and Chris Spealler.

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**—Duncan Martin**

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Duncan is sitting in the stands with three other boys who will be competing against him. The first of three workouts is about to be announced. All four teenage boys are trying to keep their nerves in check as they discuss what the workouts could be.

“I’m not as strong as the other competitors, but I like the agility stuff and the gymnastics movements ... I’m hoping there are handstand walks,” Martin says to his rival and friend from Texas, a boy named Nicholas.

The two boys have a friendly rivalry brewing.

“My goal is to beat Duncan,” Nicholas says, smiling. “I’m kidding.” Both boys let out a laugh.

As much as they like competing against each other, for Martin it’s less about beating each other and more about the experience.

“I like competing, but the most fun is being around your friends. It’s fun to have friends in CrossFit from all over and to get to see them at different competitions and compete against them,” Martin says.



*Fourteen-year-old Duncan Martin is one of the original CrossFit Kids, and he's coming for your PRs in a few short years.*

### Teenage CrossFitters and Self-Esteem

Kelly Brown is the owner of CrossFit Agoge in Colorado. Two of her athletes—Tyler Wallace and Ella Lowenberg—competed at the Home Depot Centre in the Gauntlet competition.

Brown has watched Lowenberg, now 16 years old, transform in the last few years.

“Ella didn’t used to be into sports. She was overweight when she started four years ago, and she walked around dragging her heels,” Brown said. “Ella went from being the kid that sits in the back and tried to be invisible and disappears to the bathroom when it’s time to do rope climbs to the kid that’s demonstrating movements,” she said.

Lowenberg’s mother, Kelly Lowenberg, agrees that fitness has contributed to her daughter’s personal growth in the last few years.

“Emotionally, I think she can handle disappointment a bit better, and she has had to get mentally tougher,” Lowenberg said.

“It has given her some confidence where she didn’t have any before. Where she used to think, ‘I don’t think I could do that,’ now she knows she can if she works hard,” she continued.

For Brown, watching kids and teenagers gain self-esteem is one of the most rewarding aspects about coaching adolescents.

“We’re looking for the physical gains, but also we’re looking to see those intangible gains—their ability to value themselves by what they can do with their bodies instead of what their body looks like,” Brown said.

And, of course, when their performances go through the roof, so does their physical health, reflected in fit as opposed to the overweight bodies that characterize so many of their peers.

Lowenberg explains that this is a comforting thing for a parent.

"As a parent, it's awesome because when I go grocery shopping I just see all these poor kids who are overweight and don't exercise. And to know there are healthy kids out there who are doing something ...," she said.

She added: "And it builds so much character beyond the physical health. It builds emotional character. And I think CrossFitters in general are just good people, and that's encouraging for a parent."

### **CrossFit Next Generation**

In the stands next to Duncan and Nicholas is a little 10-year-old, bursting with energy.

"I wish I was competing, but I'm only 10," says the youngster, who started CrossFit when he was just 6 and who today can string five muscle-ups together.

He says CrossFit has helped him in the other sports he plays.

"In basketball, it helps you get faster and stronger than most people. And in baseball, you have more power when you're hitting," he says.



***Kids who work out and have fun doing it are an obvious solution to the obesity epidemic.***

The 10-year-old, who looks so light and compact that he'd probably fly through the rings, says his favorite workout is Fran. His best time is 4:28 with 27-lb. thrusters.

He may only be 10, but this long-time CrossFitter, whose goal is to compete at the CrossFit Games one day, already understands the importance of pushing himself to the limit. And he embraces the pain.

"I like how it makes you want to throw up," he says with a big grin.

That, of course, is not the goal of the CrossFit Kids program, even if miniature Firebreathers enjoy suffering just like older CrossFit athletes. The true goal of CrossFit Kids, and the Gauntlet, is fun—BIG fun, as in broad, general and inclusive fun.

When young athletes are having fun, everything else follows—fitness, health, self-esteem and, yes, elite performance at some point. But fun comes first. The Gauntlet at the CrossFit Games might have been a showcase for the abilities of some very impressive young CrossFitters, but it's more accurately a showcase of what can happen when you help kids discover the joy of fitness. Once kids are having fun doing squats instead of playing video games, the obesity epidemic will be a thing of the past.



### **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.*