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# THE CrossFit JOURNAL

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## The New Good Old Days of CrossFit

Old-school CrossFitter Darrell “Bingo” White explains why Bob Harper reminds him how much he loves CrossFit.

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By Darrell “Bingo” White

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All images: Staff/CrossFit Journal

Bob Harper is my new favorite CrossFitter. Seriously. That Bob Harper.

How can that possibly be, you say? How can you possibly consider Harper your favorite CrossFitter? It's easy, actually. Harper is my new favorite CrossFitter because he is experiencing the “good old days” in CrossFit, and who didn't love the good old days?

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### Back in the Day ...

Do you remember what it was like when you discovered CrossFit? Man, I sure do. I was bored and lonely in the gym, making tremendous headway toward spending the middle of my life in a perpetual state of “skinny fat.” I stumbled upon the December 2005 issue of *Men’s Journal* and an article about this wacky fitness program from Santa Cruz, Calif., and the crazy ex-gymnast leader everyone called “Coach.” Not satisfied to try the “CrossFit lite” program in the magazine, I went to the website noted in the sidebar, CrossFit.com.

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My first workout was Jan. 1, 2006: Angie (100 pull-ups, 100 push-ups, 100 sit-ups, and 100 squats). What a revelation! It was 45 minutes of heavily scaled work followed by 45 minutes in some state of comatose repose—and I was hooked.

What followed was months and months of total CrossFit immersion, or at least as much immersion as one can achieve over a 2006-vintage Internet connection 2,000 miles from Santa Cruz. At the time there were some 100 CrossFit gyms and maybe 5,000 people in the world doing CrossFit, most of them first responders or military personnel. The CrossFit.com comments and the message board were like the Wild West, and Coach Glassman himself participated almost every day.

Those were the days. Those were my good old days.

Were you around back then? Do you remember those days? The coolest of the cool CrossFitters were those lucky couple of hundred folks who had a CrossFit gym where they could work out with other CrossFitters. No place was cooler than the original box in Santa Cruz, though. The Nasty Girls—Eva Twardokens, Annie Sakamoto and Nicole Carroll—were all working out in the same place at

the same time every day. Can you imagine? Tony Budding, now CrossFit’s Director of Media, was only a few months removed from a job teaching English at a small private school and was going to Coach Glassman’s gym to work out. Back then the director of media had a camera strapped to his back. The good old days ...

For the rest of us it was all about CrossFit.com. There was no Facebook or Twitter, no Instagram. Nope. The “main page” was where the rest of us went to get our workouts and to tell everybody how we did. The comments section was filled with people who were just as larger-than-life as the superstars at CrossFit Santa Cruz: Larry L., Eugene, the super-cop Dan Silver. Jeff Martin from Brand X (the fifth CrossFit affiliate gym) posted his results every day—the original inspiration for every masters CrossFitter.

That’s where the newcomers would show up, there on the CrossFit.com comments and over on the message board. Everybody asked the same questions at the same time about the same stuff, but you know what? For the most part everybody got answers and helpful advice. CrossFit was still new, and even still so new to many of that original crew that everyone could remember his or her excitement of discovering CrossFit. We were all pioneers, kind of like being in a dingy club in Seattle when the guys in Pearl Jam didn’t need to shave. Heck, if there was a fight, or if someone was taking shots at CrossFit, the world was so small that pretty much everyone in the fight was on a first-name basis.



**Look closely and you’ll see a few familiar faces in this shot from a seminar at Coach Glassman’s original CrossFit gym.**

I think the music analogy really works when I reminisce about those early days of CrossFit around 2003 to 2007 or 2008. It strikes me that CrossFit as it relates to the fitness world has much in common with those edgy, obscure bands and music known once upon a time by only the coolest of the hipsters. The elite, a type of musical cognoscenti, were like those of us who were early into CrossFit. There was a sense of discovery and an ownership of sorts associated with this world of non-commercial, indeed anti-commercial music and fitness. It was hard to find these musicians, and it was hard to find CrossFit; folks who did had a certain “first flag planted” explorer mentality (I might have been the first CrossFitter in Cleveland). Finding the new, hip band conferred a sort of hip-by-proxy on those who did. There’s no doubt that a part of the appeal of CrossFit back then was the renegade, rebel atmosphere that surrounded everything about it, everything about us.



**Bob Harper does Griff at the Fort Worth CrossFit Tour stop in March 2012.**

## The Next Generation

Fast-forward six years from my good old days, and where are we? Whoa! Over 4,000 CrossFit gyms spread across the entire world. Terabytes of information on CrossFit.com, where once we celebrated passing the gigabyte mark. There are now hundreds of thousands of newly minted CrossFitters, and it seems like there are hundreds more every single day.

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**There’s no trouble finding CrossFit now. Heck, my 60-plus-year-old patients light up when CrossFit is mentioned in the office.**

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Every year for four years we have had a newly minted Level 1 CrossFit trainer in the White house. This year it’s my better 95 percent, Mrs. Bingo, who got her Level 1 in March. Each year, CrossFit has been new and wonderful chez Bingo, filled with all kinds of things for our new CrossFitter to discover. We’ve each traveled largely the same path, a kind of CrossFit Groundhog Day if you will. Each one of us has gone through essentially the same journey, watching videos every night and reading the comments on CrossFit.com. For each of us already there, it’s been kinda fun to watch all the light-bulb moments and milestones. The only difference is that no one is stealing nuts off of Beth’s plate to screw up Zone calculations like a certain son did to his dad six years ago.

There’s no trouble finding CrossFit now. Heck, my 60-plus-year-old patients light up when CrossFit is mentioned in the office (and trust me, it’s mentioned a lot). CrossFit is mentioned a lot everywhere, and a day doesn’t go by where a dozen blogs don’t take potshots at CrossFit. Many of the shots seem to be taken by “reformed” or “recovering” CrossFitters, as they call themselves. These folks, many of whom have moved on to other athletic pursuits that they discovered through CrossFit, almost universally lament the passing of the “good old days.”

Are they right? Have we indeed left the good old days behind? As CrossFit has grown, gotten bigger, become a commercial success, has it somehow become less "CrossFit"? Is the number of posts in the comments section when Fran comes up somehow an indication that CrossFit has lost its way?

I like the music analogy again here. Now, it's almost the polar opposite in the music and fitness worlds when we compare them to those days of small groups of hipsters and cool cats in the know. Twenty-first-century connectivity is so vast that it's almost impossible to remain "indie" or outside some sort of mainstream. There are just so many outlets on the Internet and so many social nets in which to be caught. This in turn has created a sort of musical egalitarianism. The downside of this is that everyone now has a chance to like what you like, and what might have set you apart is now either part of the general awareness or bubbling just below the surface, ready to break through.

The upside, for a musician, or for CrossFit, or for fans of either, is that something really good can now be found and enjoyed by the masses and not just the elite, the hip, or the in-the-know. We who once might have measured ourselves by our inclusion in a tiny tribe of the similarly tasteful or adventurous must now make room for the person who streams download number 1,000,000 or becomes a member of affiliate number 5,000.

There is no longer any honor in fitness obscurity, of practicing a program about which no one knows. Coolness now lies in doing something everyone likes. The more people who like our CrossFit, the cooler we—and it—become. Does this phenomenon, this growth, this commercial success, mean the good old days are over as so many critics of CrossFit (and music) have alleged?

Nah. I call BS.



***Even though Coach is no longer teaching in Santa Cruz, that doesn't mean the good old days are over.***



*Harper loves CrossFit, and his enthusiasm is infectious.*

### **Fran Is Still Fran**

Jimi Letchford of CrossFit HQ put it really well: we are growing so fast that every day is the “good old days” for someone in the CrossFit world.

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**Do you remember what it was like? How excited you were to go to your box and see the WOD?**

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Today is a day of discovery and wonder for someone, just like it was for me six or seven years ago, and for you ... whenever. It doesn't matter when you discover something. What matters is that you did discover it and it's really good.

That's why I like Bob Harper so much. The guy is just thrilled to be a CrossFitter. Watch the video [Bob Harper Talks CrossFit](#). Read his Tweets. Watching him reminds me of what it was like when I first became a CrossFitter.

Do you remember what it was like? How excited you were to go to your box and see the WOD? To refresh CrossFit.com over and over again, so anxious to see tomorrow's dose? I do.

Sure, at some point CrossFit just becomes a part of what you do or who you are, and it becomes so natural and comfortable to do the CrossFit prescription that you might have time to spend thinking and talking about some long-lost good old days. But really, that's like discussing the most recent Steven Tyler bad-hair night instead of how good the *Idol* music was. Mourning the end of the old days dims the glow for the “younger” CrossFitters. As OGs of some sort, we have a responsibility to them, the newcomers, to let them create their own good old days.

It's the same thing with new trainers and new affiliate owners. Isn't it interesting that it's now the expectation, almost the demand, that every trainer in every gym start out at the level of Jeff Martin? Pearl Jam was just a few guys with access to electricity when they started out. Heck, Jeff Martin wasn't Jeff Martin right out of the chute, and he'll be the first one to tell you.

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Why, for heaven's sake, is everyone all up in whatever about Bob Harper's squats? Your squats looked just like that in the beginning. Mine did.

I love Harper. He's like every one of when we first became CrossFitters. The guy just loves CrossFit. Just like you did. He's learning how to be a CrossFit trainer as he trains his athletes. Just like Coach did as he developed the program we love.

It's the good old days in CrossFit right now for Harper. That's part of the fun of being a CrossFitter: seeing the excitement of the newcomers, feeling the enthusiasm of the new trainers, watching the affiliate community grow. No matter how long you've been riding this runaway train, all this can be a source of renewal for you, for CrossFit.

It's not only the good old days for all the newest CrossFitters; it's still the good old days for all of us. We still do CrossFit. We eat like cavemen (and women) and, yes, some of us still count our almonds. The original CrossFit gym is no longer with us, and Tony Budding no longer carries a camera. Jeff and Mikki Lee Martin have moved the CrossFit Kids program from the fringes to the center, soon to become part of the CrossFit experience at the vast majority of affiliate gyms.

And the CrossFit OGs? Well, they're still around for the most part, even if they don't spend as much time in the comments on CrossFit.com.

I doubt you'll see this, Bob, but you are my favorite CrossFitter because these are your CrossFit good old days. Welcome aboard. Fasten your seatbelt.



### About the Author

*Darrell White, M.D., aka Bingo, has been CrossFitting for almost seven years. His sons, Dan and Randy, and his "better 95 percent," Beth, have graduated from stealing food off his plate to mess up his Zone calculations to opening Comet CrossFit near their home just outside Cleveland, Ohio. Writing as Bingo, Darrell offers Sunday musings each week and the "Newbie Chronicles" in January on CrossFit.com.*