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Beyond the CrossFit Games: Part 4

Jack Goodson talks to Jennifer and Katelyn Haynes about competing in the Central East Regional as mother and daughter.

By Jack Goodson

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Katelyn Haynes did not take CrossFit seriously. Not at all.

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The idea of an active lifestyle had always been appealing, sure. Her parents, Chris and Jennifer, lifelong exercisers themselves, opened CrossFit Rutherford (Murfreesboro, Tenn.) in 2009.

The competitive side of fitness, however, and all that accompanies it, was never really a priority for Haynes. That perspective changed about a year ago, when Jennifer competed at the sectional level of the 2010 CrossFit Games.

Haynes accompanied her parents to Huntsville for the Alabama Sectional and was blown away by what she discovered. The environment was jolting. The feeling, the energy surrounding the place was unavoidable. Haynes was hooked.

“Once I got there and saw the atmosphere, I knew this is something I wanted to do,” Haynes said. “Going to that was honestly life-changing, as cliché as that sounds. I changed my mind about CrossFit. I was ready to train and be at sectionals myself.”

Fast-forward to June. Katelyn got her wish—and then some. The fiery, outspoken 19-year-old not only competed in the Reebok CrossFit Games Open, but also, in her first full-on taste of the competition, qualified for the Central East Regional.

Not to be outdone, mom was there as well. And, wouldn't you know it, she also scored a regional berth.

Talk about establishing a healthy family tradition.

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Katelyn lifts in the foreground, while her mother, also in green, lifts in the background during the Central East Regional.



Jennifer Haynes: one fit mother.

The Mother, the Catalyst

Jennifer Haynes doesn't have much free time on her hands. She's a mother of four. Three boys aged 6, 10 and 14 join oldest sibling Katelyn.

A lifelong devotee to fitness, as previously mentioned, Jennifer Haynes is not only co-owner of but also a full-time trainer at CrossFit Rutherford. Husband Chris splits time as a trainer with his full-time job as a lieutenant with the Rutherford County Sheriff's Department.

Oh, and Jennifer Haynes is 41 years old. Not that you could tell.

"I love showing my mom off," Katelyn Haynes said. "She is a badass, no doubt. Not many people at all can say their moms do this type of stuff."

The Hayneses' journey into the world of CrossFit was a swift one. Jennifer first came across the methodology in June 2008 at the suggestion of a friend. Chris joined the fray that December, and, less than a year later, CrossFit Rutherford swung open its doors.

"I had seen changes in my body and was doing exercises that I had only ever heard of," Jennifer said. "I knew that if I could do it, anyone could. I really wanted to offer this type of exercise to all types of people with all different skill levels. That's how CrossFit Rutherford pretty much started."

Her sojourn to the Games, meanwhile? Genuinely unexpected—particularly for her.

Christmas 2010: Chris surprised his wife not with jewelry or perhaps a trip to a remote island in the Caribbean. No. Neatly wrapped and nestled under the Fraser fir instead was registration for the Alabama Sectional. Truly the gift that keeps on giving.

"I had never in my entire life competed in anything, so, needless to say, the Christmas gift was not something I had asked for," Jennifer joked.

Perhaps not, but she wasn't about to turn down the opportunity to get herself involved. Jennifer placed 18th out of 21 competitors in Huntsville, a highly admirable showing for a first-timer.



Leading by example, Jennifer got her daughter hooked on CrossFit too.

She did it all with her family cheering on from every conceivable angle. And it wasn't just about the encouragement she received or the competition itself. Perhaps more significant was what grew from the adventure.

It proved, really, to be the springboard for what developed a year later.

"It was a huge eye-opening experience for me," Jennifer said. For Katelyn, too, obviously.

An Open invitation

Mom laid down the marker. Katelyn was now ready to follow.

The two began training for the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games early on, though the significance of competing together wasn't exactly at the forefront of either's mind when they made the decision to sign up.

Scheduling conflicts made it difficult for mother and daughter to see each other. School, for Katelyn, and work, for Jennifer, meant shared training sessions were limited. That's not to say the two of them weren't conscious of the potential there.

Before long they began making time for each other.

"We did this together because it's something we both love to do and we can do it together," Katelyn said. "It just kind of ended up that way, but we were happy it did."

We may not have worked out together all the time, but we pushed each other day in and day out. We make each other better just by being around each other."

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Jennifer was simply interested in being a part of the Open. Anything more was a bonus. Katelyn, meanwhile, her competitive fire kindling, was intent on qualifying for the regional competition. Whatever the cost.

"I just wanted to make it to regionals when I started the Open," Katelyn said. "I am pretty hard on myself, and I was going to do whatever it took to make it to regionals. For example, I did a lot of the WODs twice in a day. Worn out and fatigued, I still pushed myself to make sure I qualified."

Jennifer, meanwhile, opted for a more measured approach: "I signed up for the Open just to see where my name landed. I really didn't think I would end up in the top 60. I knew Katelyn would do really well. She always pushed me to do better."

A generational gap? Maybe. Nevertheless, both performed extremely well in the qualifiers—above expectations, even for Katelyn. Each was comfortably inside the top 60, Katelyn finishing 20th and Jennifer 28th.

Columbus, Ohio, was the next stop.

Motivation

Central East Regional, Day 1.

Katelyn and Jennifer found themselves in the same heat of the first event, a workout featuring running, handstand push-ups and rowing. Handstand push-ups, of course— one of Jennifer's self-proclaimed weaknesses.

Worried, nervous? Sure. Added pressure competing alongside her daughter? Not in the least. In fact, Jennifer reckons it was the best possible thing that could've happened.

"It was comforting to have (Katelyn) there with me," she said. "I was very nervous, and to look around and see her face made me feel more at ease."

Katelyn offered a near-identical perspective.

"Competing beside my mom was very comforting," she said. "We were in the same heat for the first workout, and it put my mind at ease knowing she was there. Of course I still had nerves, but looking over and seeing your mom doing the same crazy workout you are helps a lot.

"I couldn't help but smile. Also, hearing her cheer me on motivated me and fired me up. She was a competitor but still my mom."

Katelyn was 20th after the first event. Jennifer sat 24th.

Event 2, a thruster ladder, severely tested the Hayneses. Katelyn managed a respectable 11th (130 lb.). Jennifer, meanwhile, thrived on the atmosphere. After completing her first attempt, which also happened to be her one-rep max up until that point, finished in 20th with a new personal-best lift of 115 lb.

It was simply down to motivation, she said.

"When I succeeded and got that first thruster, I was so happy," Jennifer said. "I knew I was going to get to work out Saturday."

As the competition shifted to its second day, Jennifer ran into a problem. Not so much a problem, really, as a motherly habit.



Katelyn managed to beat her mom at the regional level, but only by four places.

"I was just so excited that I was there with Katelyn on the competition floor, and my boys were very proud of me. That is what motivated me the most, the fact that my four kids were happy and excited that I was competing in the regional!"

As the competition shifted to its second day, Jennifer ran into a problem. Not so much a problem, really, as a motherly habit.

She found herself more than once focused on how Katelyn was doing rather than her own performance.

"I really wanted Katelyn to do well," Jennifer said. "I found myself yelling at her while we were out on the competition floor doing our WODs. I just couldn't help it. I would look over and see her struggling or breaking for a second, and I would just yell for her to relax or get moving."

A top spot and a ticket to the international competition in Carson, Calif., were not in the cards, but Katelyn closed the Central East Regional in 19th. Mom, meanwhile, closed in 23rd place.

The Hayneses had come so far in such a short amount of time. The journey, now, was over.

Disappointed? Never.

"The regional was a crazy, amazing experience," Katelyn said. "It was a great. I thought I was motivated when I got there, but going there and seeing some of the most elite athletes in the world fired me up even more.

"I learned so much and it was definitely a growing experience. I can't wait to take what I learned and use it to go even further next year."

Just Getting Started

Next year.

It's a commendable but novel idea to suggest you will be back among the world's fittest, in the pain and sweat, mere days after the end. So many variables can come into play over the next months.

That's not stopping the Hayneses, though. Jennifer plans to compete next year and says she looking forward to competing alongside her daughter once more. Katelyn, meanwhile, was far more up front when asked about the idea of returning to the floor in 2012.

"Of course we will be back next year," she said.

Look out.

Katelyn wasn't finished speaking her mind, either.

"CrossFit has changed my life," she said. "I look back and can't believe I went as long as I did without it. My mom and dad took a leap of faith opening a gym, and it's changed our family for the better.

"My mom—my parents—have inspired me. Even though regionals are over, I'm already training for next year. I know mom will be right there with me, too."



Courtesy of Jack Goodson

About the Author

*Jack Goodson, 29, is a professional journalist located in Northeast Tennessee. A graduate of the University of Richmond, Jack has been a member of the sports staff at the **Kingsport Times-News** since 2004. Additionally, his musings about the English Premier League can be seen on a variety of national websites, including [The Offside](#). Jack began his CrossFit journey in June 2009 and has since been satisfying his addiction daily.*