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## Spencer Hendel's "Freaky Coincidence"

Spencer Hendel snagged third place at the North East Regional on the final workout of the weekend. At 23, he'll make his fourth appearance at the CrossFit Games this year. Andréa Maria Cecil reports.

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By Andréa Maria Cecil

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All images: Staff/CrossFit Journal

Spencer Hendel was entering his fourth Regional competition.

If he made the top three, it would be his fourth consecutive qualification for the CrossFit Games. Not too shabby for being 23.

But things didn't begin well.

The three-day North East Regional started with Diane, exposing one of Hendel's weaknesses: handstand push-ups.

The 6-foot-2, 210-lb. athlete struggled at the wall, finishing in 3:48 and tying for 19th place in the opening event. It was nearly 2 minutes behind David Charbonneau, who managed to stay ahead of Hendel and sit in third place throughout most of the weekend—up until the competition's final workout.

It was then that Hendel was able to edge out Charbonneau in almost-identical fashion to how he beat A.J. Moore at last year's Mid Atlantic Regional. In 2011, Hendel came from behind to secure the third spot at the Regional, so he was in familiar territory.



**Spencer Hendel competing in the 2010 CrossFit Games. He finished 17th in his second trip to the Games.**

"It seems as though I planned that out," Hendel said nearly two weeks after the Regional ended. "I guess you can just call it a freaky coincidence. Déjà vû."

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**—Spencer Hendel**

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### **"I Just Caught a Break"**

Roaring back from a poor finish in the weekend's first event, Hendel finished first in the day's second workout—a 2,000-meter row, 50 pistols and 30 225-lb. hang cleans—with a time of 12:30. It was 11 seconds faster than second-placer Daniel Tyminski and nearly 2 minutes faster than Charbonneau, who finished 10th.

Still, the performance wasn't enough to put Hendel at ease or in contention to qualify for the Games.

Although he finished Day 2's workouts in second and third place, respectively, he still hadn't cracked the top three overall.

"I was confident. I was a little worried. I needed something to happen," Hendel said.

And so it did.

Eric Magee withdrew after Day 2's second workout, and Charbonneau suffered a heat stroke after the event only to be further plagued by ripped hands from the 120 pull-ups he had just performed.

"I just caught a break there, so to speak," Hendel said. "Had either one of those athletes not broken down ... that would have been the end. I would have been buried."

So, he explained, it wasn't so much his stellar performance as it was luck.

"It was the other athletes giving me the opportunity," Hendel said.

Magee's withdrawal and Charbonneau's injured state—not to mention Hendel's known prowess in the Olympic lifts—made the men's event on Day 3 anything but boring.

Heading into the last day, Charbonneau decided that if he didn't perform well on the snatch ladder event, he would withdraw from the competition for safety reasons.

"People (were) trying to pull me out. A couple of coaches and a couple of the event coordinators were talking to me," Charbonneau said. "I had a lot of people come to support me. I didn't want to let anybody down. I was still pretty close. If I didn't give it a shot, I would have regretted it."

The 26-year-old snatched 235 lb.—a 10-lb. PR that allowed him to finish the event in sixth place and keep him at the No. 3 spot overall. Only one event remained between him and a trip to California.

Meanwhile, Hendel snatched 265 lb., a good 35 lb. lower than his PR. His goal was to complete the snatch ladder that topped out at 295 lb.

Still, he was the only man to snatch that much weight at the Regional, finishing the event in first place.

That, his father said, was the point: not to PR the snatch ladder but to win it.

"It worked out perfect," said Andy Hendel, owner of CrossFit Charlotte in North Carolina. "That's the experience of not panicking."

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**—Spencer Hendel**

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As the final workout approached, four points separated the region's top four men.

"I have a game plan for Event 6," Hendel told CrossFit Media at the Regional. "I'm going to stick to it and see what happens."



*Hendel competing in the max-snatch event at the 2009 CrossFit Games at The Ranch. He finished 12th overall as a Games rookie.*

The workout was not for the faint of heart: 3 rounds of 7 deadlifts at 345 lb. and 7 muscle-ups, followed by 3 rounds of 21 wall-ball shots and 21 toes-to-bars, then a 100-foot farmer carry with two 100-lb. dumbbells, 28 burpee box jumps, another 100-foot carry with the dumbbells and, finally, 3 muscle-ups. There was a 17-minute time cap on the workout.

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**“On game day, the kid still amazes me—that’s a good competitor.”**

**—Andy Hendel**

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Hendel didn’t finish the event first or second, but he did finish third—almost an entire 2 minutes faster than Charbonneau, whose ripped hands made it painful to carry heavy dumbbells. It was enough to get Hendel on the podium.

“Can’t be too unhappy with it,” he said in the weeks following the competition. “I’m going back to the CrossFit Games. I’m extremely happy about how I did.”

### **“A Good Competitor”**

Hendel doesn’t have a dedicated coach, per se.

But he does have something most other competitors don’t: a former Miami Dolphins linebacker as a dad.

Andy Hendel was also a special-teams-leading tackler/short-yardage specialist with the Dolphins. He knows a thing or two about training.

“Every chance I get I try to talk to him on the phone,” Spencer said.

They talk about workouts and how they went. Andy advises his son to keep his workouts as varied as possible and to run.

“Running is a weakness for him,” said Andy, who programmed his son’s workouts in the weeks leading to the Regional. “Between now and the Games, I want to make sure he gets running.”

Other than that, Andy encourages Hendel to work out with Austin Malleolo, Hendel’s fellow coach at Reebok CrossFit One at Reebok International headquarters in Canton, Mass. Malleolo works with Hendel most often.

“Austin’s more of a coach than anything because he watches me every day,” Hendel said.

Still, there are times when Andy said he wishes Hendel would mind him better.

“I’ll bite my lip so damn hard it bleeds,” Andy said. “On game day, the kid still amazes me—that’s a good competitor.”

### **“The Best of Spencer Hendel”**

Hendel’s goal for this year’s Games is simple: be better than last year.

“Every year my goal as an athlete is to make it to the Games, so to get through Regionals. Everything after that is bonus,” he said. “Obviously, I’d like to do well.”

Doing well means anything better than ninth place, which is where Hendel finished last year. To do that, he’ll keep his training regimen relatively the same and add in a few other components, he said.

“I like the way I felt during the Regional, and I think all I need to do is work on my weaknesses and continue building my upper-body strength,” said Hendel, citing handstand push-ups and pull-ups as two weaknesses.



***A stronger, faster Spencer managed to snatch 265 in the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games. He finished ninth overall in his third Games.***

Typically, he works out six days a week, two to three times a day, depending on his coaching schedule. Hendel adheres to a three-days-on, one-day-off routine.

"There's an occasional time that I'm just not feeling it, so I take a second rest day or run or a row," he said.

With a 300-lb. snatch and a 335-lb. clean and jerk, Hendel said he's not focused on the Olympic lifts in his training.

"I try to focus more on the met-con side of things 'cause that's what's at the CrossFit Games," he said.

Andy said his son has made more gains in the past year—since graduating from college—than ever before.

Before that, Hendel was "just kind of keeping up," Andy said.

This year, he said, will be different.

"I think they're going to get the best of Spencer Hendel," Andy said.

Nonetheless, he conceded that there are many variables at the Games.

"Everything has to fall into place," Andy said. "Going into the Games, I'm not a big believer of guessing what Dave Castro's going to have in the workout."

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**—Andy Hendel**

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Castro is CrossFit's Director of Training and one of several people who collaborate to program the events at the CrossFit Games.

Aside from handstand push-ups, pull-ups and running, Hendel generally struggles with body-weight movements, Andy said.

Still, he noted Hendel's maturity, calling him a game-day competitor.

"Whatever anxiety he has, that energy is focused on the workout. He won't fall apart," Andy said. "I'm very fortunate to have a son like him. It's been a blessing, that's for sure."



Courtesy of Andréa Maria Cecil

### About the Author

*Andréa Maria Cecil* was the North East Regional Media Director for the 2012 Reebok CrossFit Games. She spent nearly 13 years as a professional journalist—most recently as managing editor of the **Central Penn Business Journal** in Harrisburg, Pa. Cecil has been a freelance writer and editor for the **CrossFit Journal** since 2010. The 34-year-old is a native of New Orleans who lives in York County, Pa. There, she's been doing CrossFit since 2008 at **CrossFit York**, where she coaches Olympic weightlifting as a USA Weightlifting Level 1 Sports Performance Coach. Additionally, Cecil dedicates three days a week to training in the Olympic lifts herself at **McKenna's Gym**.