
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

All for One

Tevita Ngalu's incredible effort sends a CrossFit affiliate owner to the Olympic Games in weightlifting. Emily Beers reports.

By Emily Beers

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All images: Courtesy of Richie Patterson

The Scene: The 2012 Oceania Olympic Weightlifting Championships in Apia, Samoa.

One more clean and jerk and New Zealand native Richie Patterson will qualify to the 2012 Olympic Games.

The 29-year-old Patterson feels powerless. The truth is, he is powerless. In fact, Patterson is sitting in the stands with his girlfriend watching the competition. His fate is in someone else's hands.

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That someone is Tevita Ngalu, Patterson's teammate, who severely tore his quadriceps muscle five days prior. The 39-year-old Ngalu steps up to the platform with an unmistakable limp.

Considering the severity of the injury, Patterson can't believe Ngalu is going attempt the lift in the first place.

This is horrible to watch, thinks Patterson, who can see the pain on his teammate's face.

“My hopes of going to London are over.”

—Richie Patterson

Ngalu sets up for his first attempt and successfully cleans 157 kilograms (345 lb.), letting out a shriek of sheer pain as he stands up with the bar. He takes a couple of breaths and goes for the jerk. He misses.

It's over ... There's no way he's going to try again. There's no way he can. The sheer pain you can see on his face, Patterson thinks.

Patterson is ready to accept his own fate.

My hopes of going to London are over, he thinks.

Generally, Olympic weightlifting is thought of as an individual sport. And normally this is the case.

However, when it comes to Olympic qualification, if a country doesn't qualify any athletes via the World Championships, it gets a second chance through the continental qualification system.

This meant that in order for New Zealand to send its top male lifter—Patterson—to the London Olympic Games this summer, New Zealand needed a strong showing at the Oceania Championships that were held at the beginning of June. More specifically, the country had to place in the top five, which meant that all six of the men on the team had to have strong performances to earn enough points to send Patterson to his second Olympic Games.

So the bottom line was New Zealand—and Patterson—absolutely needed Ngalu's 157-kilogram clean and jerk or it was game over.

The Connection

Patterson first met Ngalu 11 years ago, one year after Ngalu competed at the Sydney Olympic Games for Tonga, his birth country. Patterson was just getting into the sport at the time. The two met in the gym during a training session. It was Patterson's birthday.

“I was training with Tevita for the first time, and I remember saying, ‘This is sure a boring way to spend your 20th birthday,’” remembered Patterson.

“He looked at me and said, ‘Same. It's my birthday, too,’” Patterson recalled.

The two lifters, who are born exactly 10 years apart, laughed at the coincidence, and there began an 11-year training partnership.

Even on that first day, Patterson was impressed with Ngalu's attitude.

“He always just went about his training. Never any flashy business, and no arrogance. He just enjoyed weightlifting,” he said.

Patterson has learned a lot from the more experienced Ngalu over the years.



Richie Patterson has been one of New Zealand's best lifters for years and hoped to qualify for his second Olympic Games.

"When you're young, you're bright-eyed and bushy tailed. And he was super calm. Training around Tevita and the other Olympians in the gym made me learn how to train and approach weightlifting," Patterson said.

Enter CrossFit

When you're a CrossFitter, if you manage to lay hands on someone who knows something about Olympic weightlifting, you grab onto him or her and you don't let go.

That's exactly how Patterson got roped into CrossFit.

"CrossFitters kept approaching me to help them with their weightlifting," he said. "Slowly, I became more and more involved with the CrossFit community, giving people advice and coaching a niche group who wanted to work on O-lifting a lot more."

Eventually Patterson, who was already a personal trainer at the time, decided to open his own affiliate. He opened Functional Strength CrossFit, which is based out of the Millennium Institute, an elite fitness facility in Auckland that also has indoor and outdoor tracks, an Olympic-sized swimming pool, a rock-climbing facility, as well as a traditional public gym.

"It's basically a hub for elite sports," explained Patterson, who coaches Olympic weightlifting classes at his box.



Tevita Ngalu might be the best teammate in the world.

As for Patterson's own CrossFit career, he competed during the first two workouts of the Open competition this year, but with the Olympic trials approaching, he opted out of the last three weeks to focus on getting to the Olympic Games.

Patterson says that CrossFit has been nothing but positive for the sport of Olympic weightlifting.

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"Our sport has gained publicity because of CrossFit. Before that, we had no exposure to the general public. Nobody followed Olympic weightlifting. But now our numbers have doubled, and everyone seems to know what a clean and jerk and snatch are," he said.

"CrossFit has brought to New Zealand weightlifting a vehicle for promotion," he added. "It's awesome."

The One-Legged Clean and Jerk

Patterson can't believe Ngalu is stepping back onto the platform for a second attempt at 157 kilograms.

At the same time, he knows that if anyone would do this, it would be Ngalu.

"Give it everything! C'mon!" echoes from the stands. And then the crowd is near silent.

As in his first attempt, Ngalu hits the clean, letting out a similar roar of pain.

He goes for the jerk. He catches it but looks unstable because all his weight is on his healthy leg. He takes a couple of tiny hops trying to regain his stability, still essentially balancing on one leg. Finally, he shows enough control. The white lights go on. The lift is good.

Patterson is speechless in the stands.

He's going to the Olympic Games, but he isn't sure what to say.

"I can't believe he just did that," says Patterson to his girlfriend before rushing off to find his teammate.

He has no idea how to thank Ngalu.

"You can't really go and say, 'Thank you.' How do you thank someone for that?" says Patterson. "It doesn't seem like enough."

Patterson finds Ngalu in the warm-up area.

"I don't know how you just did that," he says to Ngalu. "Are you OK?"

Ngalu has tears running down his face.

"It hurt so much," he says.

More Memorable Than a Medal

After the competition, Ngalu told a local TV news station in New Zealand how he found the courage to push through the pain.

To watch the 3News video *Lifting for a Mate*, click [here](#).

"At the same time that I felt the pain in my leg, I thought about my team ... and him. And I thought, 'I have to put pressure on myself because I can't let them down. I can't come to Samoa and do nothing,'" said Ngalu.

"Before I walk onto the platform in London, there will be a moment of recognition of why I'm there."

—Richie Patterson

He added: "I stepped onto the platform ... and I turned my head up and looked at my team, and they were 100 percent focused on me. And then I thought about myself. I have to take one minute. Just one minute. The hurt and the pain is just one minute, and that's it."

Ngalu's coach, Adam Storey, couldn't be more proud of Ngalu. In the same television news piece, Storey added: "I said to Tevita, 'In one year's time, in 10 years' time, no one will ever remember whether you got a medal. But they will never, ever, ever forget the lift you did, mate.'"

Storey continued: "He's immortalized himself within our sport."

Patterson agreed.

"It's just amazing. He did this completely selfless act for someone else. I still don't know how to put it into words. It makes you speechless," he said. "But I do know that before I walk onto the platform in London, there will be a moment of recognition of why I'm there."

Patterson added: "I wouldn't be going to London without him. There's no one else in the world that would have done what he did."



CrossFit Vancouver

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 was the 2011 Canada West Regional Media Director and competed in the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games with CrossFit Vancouver. She finished third in the 2012 Canada West Regional.