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It's Not About the Numbers

Jay Rhodes finds something in CrossFit beyond a big deadlift and a great Fran time.

By Jay Rhodes CrossFit Altitude

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All photos: Gary Hills/www.fizzbucket.com

Through a friend, I first became aware of CrossFit in February 2009 and was immediately welcome to the idea of getting in and out of the gym in well under an hour.

I came from a long history of track and field as a 400-meter runner but had been out of competition for quite some time due to multiple stress fractures in my feet. Not only had I struggled with keeping a level of fitness I was satisfied with, but I also had to find something new because continuing to run would be somewhat akin to beating a dead horse.

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Dabbling Then Dedication

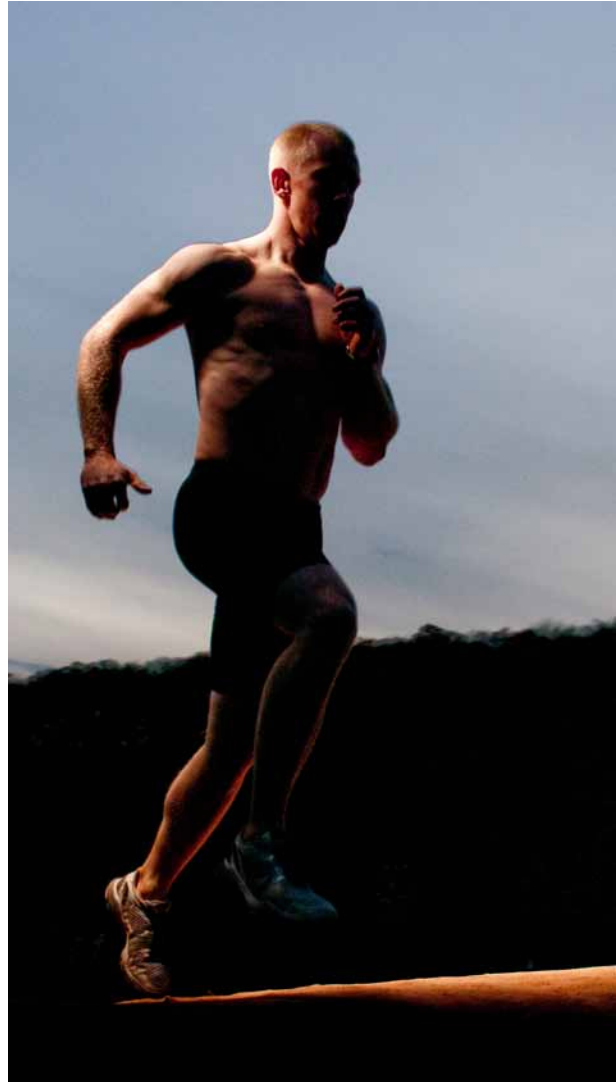
I wasn't quite sure how to follow CrossFit.com, but I managed to find a few workouts I wanted to try. I jumped right into them as RX'd and went as hard as I could. I got my ass handed to me, and I liked it. I hadn't had that feeling of exhaustion since running 400-meter repeats.

Though I loved the workouts, I was pretty inconsistent with the frequency. By the time summer came around, I had gotten myself into respectable shape—the kind that would probably allow me to be competitive at most affiliates—but I took my foot off the gas and decided to play golf and drink beer for a few months. It seemed easy to get away from the workouts at the time. My idea of fun was not compatible with waking up on a Sunday morning to hit a WOD. I really had no idea of what CrossFit was all about. All I knew was there were a bunch of workouts with names that you were supposed to do as fast as you could.

Fast-forward to October 2009. I had started to work out again, albeit inconsistently and with no real direction. I wasn't sure I'd be able to get back into it the way I was before summer. It was homecoming weekend at my university, and parties were everywhere. My parents were planning to visit but had to cancel at the last minute. My dad had gotten sick. It sounded like it was probably the flu or something. It wasn't.

He had somehow contracted a serious blood infection, and abscesses had formed and woven around his spine. I spent the next few weeks back and forth between London and Kingston, Ont., to visit him in the hospital. To this day, I still find it hard to comprehend how close he was to dying. He wouldn't let that happen. At the time, I don't think either one of us considered it an option.

There was one point when he did not move for nearly four days, terrified that the slightest movement could put pressure on his spinal cord and leave him paralyzed. After sitting there in a hospital chair holding the hand of the guy who had taught me to play sports and nearly everything else, and with him immobilized and in severe pain, I made a decision that I would do my best to get absolutely everything I could out of my body. I had proof that it could be gone in a second. After all, he was in better shape than he'd been in over 10 years. He was never a gym guy but had recently taken a liking to cycling and was going for 20 kilometers nearly every day.



A one-time track athlete, Rhodes found new challenges in CrossFit workouts.

From then on the workouts were easy. Actually, maybe “easy” is not the right word. They were hard as hell, but it didn't matter. Compared to the pain my father was in, what I had to deal with was inconsequential. I was willing to accept whatever pain was associated with pushing the physical limits of my body. I welcomed it. My hands were constantly torn up, and I was sore all the time, but I didn't skip a day. Of course, there were days when I didn't want to do it—probably the majority of them, in fact. But that was no longer an option for me.



New Goals, New Mentality

Fast-forward again to October 2010. My dad is doing much better. His mobility may never quite be the same, but he's around, and that's what matters. Experiences like the one we went through usually end up bringing you closer in the end anyway. I've been able to see a softer, more emotional side of him that I never knew as well.

For me, after one year of training, the strength numbers are up, the met-con numbers are down, and I've done some pretty extraordinary physical things that I would have never expected a year ago. But that's not what it's about. I've hit some pretty respectable times among the CrossFit community and have a realistic goal to qualify for the 2011 CrossFit Games, but that's not what it's about either.



Helping others believe in themselves has become a passion for the author.



Despite seeing great personal numbers, Rhodes discovered CrossFit is less about PRs and more about people.

In January 2010 I became a trainer and began helping others. That's what CrossFit is about. Sending my dad video of my WODs to motivate him for his rehab, the client weeks away from the operating table who six months later was pain-free and crushing workouts, the couple who lost a combined 30 percent body fat and gained unparalleled confidence, the e-mails and messages I get almost daily from people asking about CrossFit and how to get started or how to improve their nutrition—that's what it's about. When you push someone to their limit and they realize right before your eyes that they can accomplish something they didn't think was possible, that's what it's about. It's not about your Fran time, Fight Gone Bad score or how much you can clean and jerk. Outside of competition, the actual numbers are almost irrelevant.

CrossFit has absolutely changed my life. I've never known of a community of such kind, driven and humble people. If you want a day pass to a Globo Gym, it will cost you upward of \$15. If you want to try CrossFit, all you have to do is ask. You'll probably even get some special attention and coaching that first day. If you're on the road traveling, CrossFit gym owners are normally more than willing to save a spot for you if you give them a heads up. At competitions, there is no trash talking but rather mutual respect because the competitors know what one another go through on a daily basis to get there.

In the gym, day in and day out, ordinary people are doing extraordinary things. Every day we get an opportunity to go in and get better, to do something we've never done before. Personally, I am not satisfied with doing something I did last week. This is what CrossFit has become to me and why I am so obsessed with it. After all, there are much worse obsessions than chasing elite fitness and helping others achieve their goals.

The other day I woke up very early and was unable to turn my brain off. For some reason this story was all I could think about. Some of it is admittedly hard to talk about, but I figured it's a story worth sharing.

If you have taken the time to read this, please leave your thoughts.



About the author

Jay Rhodes is a high-school physical-education, biology and special-education teacher, as well as a Crossfit Level 1 trainer at [Crossfit Altitude](#) in Burlington, Ont. He holds degrees in kinesiology and education from the University of Western Ontario, where he also captained the track-and-field team for two years. He is a former eight-time provincial champion in track and field and holds a 400-meter personal best of 48.9 seconds. Jay grew up in Kingston but now lives in Stoney Creek with his girlfriend Lacey, who is a former gymnast and now avid Crossfitter, as well as their Boston terrier/French bulldog mix Harley.