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Shabazz Muhammad: Top Basketball Prospect, CrossFitter

Considered one of the best young basketball players in the country, this teenager got bigger, faster and stronger through sport-specific CrossFit training. Dan Edelman explains.

By Dan Edelman

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The mayhem of March Madness is long over, and if you're into college hoops, you probably watched the Kentucky Wildcats defeat the Kansas Jayhawks for the NCAA title. Some of you have also probably heard of Shabazz Muhammad.

Muhammad is a senior at Bishop Gorman High School in Las Vegas and has committed to play basketball at UCLA next year. By most accounts, he is considered one of the best high-school basketball players in the country (2,3,4).

1 of 5

What caught the interest of CrossFit Kids HQ was the fact that Shabazz has been CrossFitting since 2010 at [CrossFit 702](#) in Las Vegas under the guidance of box owner Jared Glover.

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Glover's background in basketball as a standout in high school and a coach at Nevada Basketball Academy, where he began learning the art and craft of training adolescent athletes, made him an ideal CrossFit trainer for Muhammad. Glover generously took the time to shed some light on the training of a teen athlete who seems bound for the professional level.

Glover says "one of those six degrees of separation deals" brought Muhammad into CrossFit 702 where, after introductions, Glover was chosen to be his local trainer. Shabazz and his brother, Rashad, receive private training from Glover. The 702 owner also trains Muhammad's sister, Asia, a professional tennis player, and the basketball star's parents also work out at 702.

About Jared Glover

Glover graduated in 2005 from Bonanza High School in Las Vegas. He was a star basketball player and also excelled at track and field. Glover attended the University of Nevada, Reno and began honing his coaching skills at the Nevada Basketball Academy under the tutelage of his uncle, Jason Glover, a former coach for the Minnesota Timberwolves and current associate head coach of the Reno Bighorns. Among other things, Glover learned how to assess middle-school, high-school, college and professional athletes. After graduating from college, he returned to Las Vegas and opened CrossFit 702 with the goal of developing young athletes for collegiate and professional sports.



Courtesy of Jared Glover

Glover schooling his athletes on the art of the mixed-grip deadlift.

In 2009 and 2010, Glover trained the semiprofessional Las Vegas Blackjacks rugby team, which went on to win a national championship. He now runs a robust wrestling-specific program for a top-notch local high-school team. Despite this—and the fact that he also trains other basketball, tennis and lacrosse players—Glover says Las Vegas prep athletes receive a surprisingly small percentage of college scholarships. He notes that local high-school-level strength and conditioning is well behind the curve, and he sees his job at CrossFit 702 as helping young athletes achieve their goals of becoming top performers.

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The Programming

Glover prefers to keep the details of Muhammad's programming under wraps, but in general he designs CrossFit-based WODs that feed the teen's insatiable appetite to improve his basketball game. This includes a strength component, plyometric work and Olympic weightlifting.

Glover's program is divided into "in season" and "light offseason." Although it should be understood that between high school and AAU basketball, Muhammad never sees a true offseason, a common circumstance these days. Given that, Glover's goal has been to prepare Muhammad for important tournaments and games, particularly key showcases against the best athletes in the country in front of top college coaches.

In Season

During the high-school season, Shabazz hits two to three 5 a.m. workouts a week, depending on his game schedule. Glover considered this a maintenance phase centered on linear progression for strength using a variety of lifts and shorter workouts to minimize fatigue. The rower figured importantly during these sessions given its low impact and ability to sustain Muhammad's conditioning.



Never trust a smiling CrossFit trainer.

Light Offseason

Following the 2010-2011 high-school season, Glover implemented a hybrid conjugate-linear program with a focus on dynamic lifts. Glover's reasoning is that for Muhammad, heavy one-rep maxes won't serve him as well as being fast and explosive for 5 reps at lighter weight. A centerpiece to this module is a metabolic component mixing cardiovascular and mental conditioning that Glover refers to as "fourth-quarter training."

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Glover drills into his athletes the importance of being able to perform their particular sport while fatigued. For Muhammad, that means being at 85 to 90 percent in the fourth quarter. Glover's philosophy is that Muhammad and other athletes stand the best chance at achieving this if they have "been in the fourth quarter 100 times before the season has even started." In general, fourth-quarter training comprises a workout followed by a 1,000-meter row. Shabazz has 30 seconds to transition to the rower and complete the 1,000 meters under 3:40.



A better squat translated to a stronger defensive position on the court for Muhammad.

Glover also makes a lot of use of bands via banded box jumps, band sprints and lateral band sprints. He says Muhammad grasps the more technical movements with relative ease; his favorite lift is the power clean. And as you might expect, plyometrics are right in Muhammad's wheelhouse. A warm-up might involve seated box jumps that have him sitting on a 12-inch box and jumping up to 56 inches.

At 6 feet 6 inches, Muhammad is challenged by squats. Early on, he had a hard time achieving depth without a profound pitching of his knees over his toes. Glover recognized the correlation between the basic air squat and a basketball defensive stance and knew that getting Muhammad to squat correctly would allow him to sit lower in his defensive stance, which would allow for more speed and agility against opponents. Glover used a variety of stretching, mobility and core-focused exercises to increase Muhammad's range of motion and improve his movement; in particular, better hip and hamstring flexibility has greatly enhanced Muhammad's squat and translated to a stronger defensive position on the court. The teen understands the importance of flexibility and has become pretty familiar with the foam roller and MobilityWOD.com. He takes care to warm-up and cool down with various stretching and yoga movements, which not only help his squat but also support injury prevention and post-game recovery.

Nutrition can be a vexing issue for any client, and Glover understands the importance of not overwhelming young athletes with a lot of dogma and detailed explanations.

He addresses small aspects of Muhammed's diet that can be easily adjusted when on the road and in season. For example, Muhammad has switched from Gatorade to coconut water during games and has found he is no longer troubled with cramps or dehydration. He also tries to steer clear of fast food and soda and eats more protein at his meals. It remains an ongoing project that Glover works on step by step.

Glover said he is pleased with the progress Muhammad has made since training began in 2010. At the outset, Muhammad managed 3 pull-ups in a max set and 8 reps of a 135-lb. bench press in a max set. A retest seven months later saw an improvement to 13 strict pull-ups and 20 reps of bench press. Muhammad's proficiency with the power clean allowed him to move from 75 lb. to 155 lb. in workouts in eight months, and his weighted squat has increased from 115 lb. for 5 reps to 205 lb. plus 50 lb. of chain for 8 reps. Muhammad box squats because of his hip flexibility and in deference to the amount of stress his knees are subjected to on the basketball court.

To reiterate, because of their lack of utility for Muhammad, Glover does not allow the teen to attempt 1-rep maxes. But Glover suggests that a good indicator of increased sport-specific power and explosiveness might be discerned from the fact that Muhammad arrived at CrossFit 702 at 185 lb.; eight months later he weighed 225 lb. and accumulated 10 dunks in a single game.

What the Trainer Has Learned

CrossFit Football creator John Welbourn impressed upon Glover the responsibility of a trainer when it comes to identifying and addressing deficiencies of long-standing clients before they get injured on the field of play. Glover says he approaches the training of all his young athletes with that in mind and asserts that it is central to his approach with Muhammad. This is certainly in line with the CrossFit Kids principle of "first, do no harm" when it comes to training kids—whether an exceptional athlete like Muhammad or your typical weekend rec-leaguer.

Training an athlete of this caliber has refined Glover's coaching eye in that he has had to focus on every aspect of the young star's basketball game to gauge the intensity of his workouts and determine what he needs to reach his potential. Glover says, "It's those fine points that mean the difference between being the best and being the other guy."

Calling CrossFit “a phenomenal fitness program, the best out there specifically in regards to results and community,” Glover acknowledges he must take care to pull from the program only those elements that benefit Muhammad in terms of upping his basketball game. He must leave behind things that might overly tax the muscles and joints that Muhammad uses most on the court, whether practicing or competing. Further, Glover has had to expand his knowledge base and build on his programming experience to find creative ways to motivate an athlete who is already highly self-motivated.

“It’s those fine points that mean the difference between being the best and being the other guy.”

—Jared Glover

For Glover, the most gratifying part of coaching athletes is watching them at their chosen sport and seeing the direct connection between their performance and their training. This season, in his senior year, Muhammad helped his high school win the Nevada State Championship, was selected as the McDonald’s Player of the Year, and played in both the McDonald’s All-American Game and the 2012 Jordan Brand Classic. He was named MVP of the former event and co-MVP of the latter.

With Muhammad, there is every chance Glover might someday watch his young client playing at the highest levels.

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Courtesy of Dan Edelman

About the Author

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