
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

The Best of the Best

Mike Warkentin visits with CrossFit's finest coaches at the recent Trainers Summit.

By Mike Warkentin Managing Editor

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Mike Warkentin/CrossFit Journal

"You folks are the best trainers I've got," Coach Greg Glassman told the 90 or so HQ Seminar Staff trainers assembled at the Marriott in San Diego, Calif., on Oct. 26, 2011.

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Looking around the room, you'd be hard-pressed to disagree with him.

Adrian Bozman, Pat Sherwood, Chuck Carswell, Todd Widman, E.C. Synkowski, Aimee Lyons, Jenn Hunter-Marshall—the roll call was a laundry list of the very best of the CrossFit community that extends from North America into Europe, Australia and beyond.

You'd also be hard-pressed to find a better group of athletes outside of the CrossFit Games themselves. The Seminar Staff includes two Games champs in Annie Thorisdottir and Jason Khalipa, as well as perennial Games competitors Heather Bergeron, Chris Spealler, Lindsey Smith, Austin Malleolo, James Hobart, Matt Chan, Pat Barber and more.

In the world of CrossFit, you won't find a more talented and passionate group of individuals, and they were all gathered in San Diego for several days of team building, professional development and workouts.

Seminars: Then and Now

Hollis Molloy was one of the early adopters who wanted to become a trainer, and doing so was a bit different when the original CrossFit HQ was a very small box—the only one of its kind—on Research Park Drive in Santa Cruz.

Molloy had been training with Coach Glassman and the original HQ crew, and when he wanted to start training himself, he was given keys to the gym. To try and drum up some business, Molloy offered to train five of his buddies for free for a month. After the month was up, all his freebie friends became clients and Molloy was in the business of training.



Hollis Molloy (foreground) was a member of Coach Glassman's original Santa Cruz crew long before he was a member of the Seminar Staff.



Michael Brian

Coach Greg Glassman addresses the Seminar Staff on Oct. 27 in San Diego.

When a group coaching slot opened up at HQ, Molloy jumped at the chance to take it. Like rock 'n' roll, the CrossFit thing really caught on and spread around the world, with new boxes opening first in North America and then all over the globe. The rest, of course, is history, and Molloy is now on the Seminar Staff and runs CrossFit Santa Cruz with his sister, Danielle Edmundson.

**“You folks are the best
trainers I've got.”**

—Coach Greg Glassman

The Seminar program originally featured one head coach doing all the lectures and instruction. Luckily, that coach was pretty good. In the early days, Coach Glassman did the seminars himself, with Nicole Carroll demonstrating the movements and Greg Amundson and Josh Everett doing workouts. There's a reason Coach will often tell people he's “just a trainer” at heart.

At a special dinner on Oct. 27 with the training staff dressed to the nines after washing off the dirt of the afternoon's obstacle-course WOD, Coach recalled some of those seminars, where he had to manage a large number of athletes with a small staff and limited equipment. When asked about once running a seminar himself with a few sets of dumbbells and now having a group of over 100 outstanding trainers doing up to six seminars a weekend, Coach just smiled—broadly—and looked around the room with pride.



Mike Warkentin/CrossFit Journal

Jenni Orr solves a problem the CrossFit way: with explosive power.

The CrossFit Seminar program is a hugely important part of the CrossFit community. At Level 1 Seminars, aspiring athletes will have their form adjusted and critiqued, but they'll also learn how to teach the movements to others. The Level 1 is just the beginning of the CrossFit trainer's journey toward excellence and virtuosity. It's no accident that at the close of the course, aspiring trainers are told to educate themselves with experience by grabbing a broomstick and teaching a neighbor how to deadlift, working with other good trainers in their area, digging into the *CrossFit Journal*, and participating in the myriad other courses CrossFit provides.

The key to it all is the Seminar Staff. They are the best examples of Coach Glassman's concept of virtuosity, and they are the ones who head out into the community and answer that most challenging of questions: "What is CrossFit?"

The trainers are ambassadors for CrossFit, and they're carefully selected for their character, personality and unique abilities to connect with athletes and trainers

and make them better. There are now over 100 of these individuals, and they're scattered around the world, from Los Angeles to New York to London to Brisbane. Despite the distance between them, they're united by a passion for teaching others about CrossFit.

Finding Passion in Every City

At breakfast, Chris Spealler asks the serving staff at the Marriott for some ketchup for his eggs. Some of the other trainers laugh as "Speal" smiles and sits down with a bottle of Heinz, as he does at many meals. Seated at the same table are Lily Cosgrove and Tracy Cooper, both from Australia. When asked about what it's like to meet their trans-global colleagues for breakfast, they laugh and point to Spealler.

"It's a bit overwhelming," Cooper says. "The fact that I'm with Chris Spealler at breakfast is kind of weird. We always joke, 'Oh my God! That's someone from the Internet!'"

Most of the Seminar Staff is based in the United States, and the ladies from Down Under are excited to meet the rest of the crew, rub elbows, share stories and learn. Both mention they were inspired by the fiery, confident and vibrant female trainers like Miranda Oldroyd and want to take that fired-up attitude back home, where they say many women are making the transition from laid-back to firebreathing females.

"I want to take away the passion these guys have for what they do, and we want to learn from that," Cosgrove says.

Cosgrove and Cooper do about six to 10 seminars a year right now—numbers that will no doubt increase as the sport of fitness catches on in Australia and the Far East. Compare that number to five-time CrossFit Games competitor Spealler, who runs his own affiliate, CrossFit Park City, and has done about 50 seminars a year for the last two-and-a-half years.

"There are times I forget where I'm going when I get to the airport," Spealler says. "There are times when I've landed and not known where I am."

The Utah athlete recalls phoning his wife to say he landed in Kansas City only to have a stewardess shake her head and correct him: "You're in Columbus, sir."

As one of HQ's "flowmasters"—the lead trainers who direct the seminars—Spealler has met many of the Seminar Staff members. Standing in the middle of a ballroom and waiting in line to receive some new staff apparel, Spealler says the whole Trainers Summit is a little "like a family reunion without the weirdness."

"Every HQ trainer is someone who is passionate about teaching people CrossFit. That's the common bond."

—Chris Spealler

Despite being surrounded by a host of people from a host of different places, Spealler finds it easy to nail down a theme.



Mike Workentin/CrossFit Journal

Lindsey Smith and Christmas Abbott plan an escape during a team-building exercise.

"Every HQ trainer is someone who is passionate about teaching people CrossFit," he says. "That's the common bond here. When someone is passionate about something, there's no faking it, and it's easy to find that common ground."

Standing near Spealler, Russell Berger laughs about the travel schedule, too. Berger relocated from Alabama to the travel hub of Denver and is now on the road for much of the year. That can cause some stress, he says, but every single weekend he's reminded of why he stands shoeless and beltless in airports around the world while people grope him, scan him and rifle through his bags.

"The travel side and the human-interaction side are very different," he says. "You meet so many people who want nothing more than to meet you and learn about CrossFit that it more than makes up for the difficulties. At the end of Saturday (at a seminar), it's always like, 'Wow. What a great job!'"

Another Kind of WOD

Lindsey Smith is tied to Christmas Abbott. The former towers over the latter.

They're linked together by two lengths of rope hooked together and attached to their wrists.



Michael Brian

There's always time for feats of strength at a CrossFit event.

Around the room, about 45 pairs of trainers are in the same situation. They've been instructed to find a way to separate the ropes without removing the loops from their wrists, and most of them are contorted in strange positions.

It's all part of the Mobile Team Challenge workshop, in which the trainers are presented with challenges that require thinking, planning, sharing and cooperation.

Burly Jason Khalipa is tied to Andy Hendel and looks as though he might just flex his arms and snap the ropes. Instead, he and Hendel dance around, getting the ropes more tangled with each attempt. Nadia Shatila and Kurtis Bowler are in the same boat. Widman somehow escapes from his partner almost instantly.

Smith and Abbott let out a whoop and raise free ropes in the air, triumphant. The facilitator asks them to do it again, and the women, laughing, try to replicate the feat without success.

Turns out there's a simple solution, and it has a message of cooperation behind it.

In another group, the members are trying to pass a small ball around the circle. The catch is that you can only use a body part once. Use your hand and hands are out for the rest of the circuit. In one group, Bozman bites a ball. In another, Cherie Chan and Nicole Christensen are getting to know each other very well while passing the ball with an "advanced technique." Carswell looks like he's getting choked out by Karianne Dickson.

Around the room, CrossFit's best trainers—the masters of our movements—are trying to coach each other through new movements by inventing creative cues.

Everyone is laughing wildly, with Spealler's characteristic giggle louder than any other.

Another group is trying to get each member to touch a ball in order in the shortest amount of time possible. Jenni Orr stands resolute in the middle of the circle, holding the ball as if she's going to do a max clean.

Around the room, CrossFit's best trainers—the masters of our movements—are trying to coach each other through new movements by inventing creative cues based on outside-the-box thinking.

After a short break, most of the athletes are banished to the hallway while a few "captains" are given specific instructions. When the teams are led back in, they're blindfolded, and the captains have to lead them through an obstacle course without speaking.

One chain of CrossFitters messes up on an obstacle and actually no-reps itself, going back and trying it again. The facilitators nod their approval.

Another group randomly picks up a few bags that were lying around, probably itching to move large loads long distances quickly.



Mike Warkentin/CrossFit Journal

The monkey bars at the SEALs obstacle course didn't slow down Austin Malleolo, who finished seventh in the Killer Kage event at the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games.

In the end, the chains make it to the final goal, and high-fives and hugs are exchanged.

Everyone learns a little bit more about solving problems as a group.

Sharing Passion With Others

Cosgrove and Cooper wanted very much to hang out with some of the CrossFit "OGs," and Josh Everett certainly fits the bill. One of the early Internet stars, Everett is a down-to-earth, friendly guy who's been a huge part of the spread of CrossFit because of his character, training talent and athletic abilities.

Standing on the obstacle course at Naval Special Warfare Group 1 in Coronado, Everett is watching the training staff climb cargo nets, vault over logs, swing on ropes and hit the monkey bars that usually confront Navy SEALs.

He looks a little like a proud father.

"It's unbelievable," he says as he watches Dave Castro, Andy Stumpf and some active-duty personnel guide trainers over the 30-foot cargo-net obstacle. "I don't think I could have imagined it would grow into this.

"What I'm really impressed with is the quality of the trainers on the Level 1 staff. There's a lot of common traits. Passion for CrossFit and a commitment to the lifestyle CrossFit represents, all our trainers embody that."

"What I'm really impressed with is the quality of the trainers on the Level 1 staff."

—Josh Everett

Everett has been involved with CrossFit seminars since back in 2004, so he's one of the elder statesmen in the group. He says he really enjoys learning new cues and new ways of presenting things from the newer members of the Seminar Staff, and he says the energy of the Level 1 crew keeps him fired up for every seminar.



Michael Brian

This bridge isn't in Burma but rather Coronado, Calif., and it tests Navy SEALs on a regular basis.

Echoing Coach Glassman's sentiments from earlier in the day, Everett talks about a feeling of pride he gets from the Trainers Summit.

"It's a complete honor to be a part of this group," he says. "Not a lot of people get a chance to be a part of a championship team at the highest level, and this is a championship team at the highest level of fitness."

Beside him Australia's Doug Armstrong has the same feeling, even if he's been a part of the team for about a year.

"Everyone just has a passion for life," he says with a grin as Khalipa lumbers away from the cargo net and receives congrats from his buddies. "They're happy. There's a lot of leadership within the group, and everyone's a team."

And he's right.

If the trainers themselves select the word "passion" as the one that might best describe them, those outside the group might select a few others.

"Talented" and "enthusiastic" spring immediately to mind. "Dedicated" and "creative" too.

Coach Glassman, for his part, calls the Seminar Staff "the best."

They are indeed that, and they're bringing CrossFit to your city soon.



Michael Brian

About the Author

Mike Warkentin is the managing editor of the CrossFit Journal and the founder of [CrossFit 204](#).