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# THE CrossFit JOURNAL

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## Tour de Force

Europe's vibrant CrossFit community was out in full effect at the CrossFit Tour stop in Copenhagen, Denmark. Mike Warkentin reports.

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By Mike Warkentin Managing Editor

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All images: Mike Warkentin/CrossFit Journal

In 2009, CrossFit Games competitor and Princeton grad Blair Morrison told the *CrossFit Journal* that he was moving to Europe to pursue a master's degree.

That was shortly after Mikko Salo had won the CrossFit Games and young Annie Thorisdottir had served notice that she'd soon be a very elite CrossFit competitor.

We leaned on Morrison because we viewed him as our man at ground zero of the fitness revolution that was about to happen, and we named his first article [CrossFit Europe—Part 1: Adaptation to a World Without Boxes](#). The subhead continued: “CrossFit Games competitor Blair Morrison is living in Europe and trying to stay fit on a continent that’s just discovering CrossFit.”

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“This community is very,  
very special.”  
—Greg Glassman

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If the CrossFit Tour stop in Copenhagen, Denmark, proved anything, it’s that Europe has very much discovered CrossFit. In fact, CrossFit in Europe is thriving.

CrossFit founder and CEO Coach Greg Glassman definitely agreed. When addressing the assembled crowd after Day 2 of the Regional, he was very clear that he viewed Europe as one of the key areas for CrossFit, and he specifically singled out Denmark as a prime nation in the development of the sport.



**Coach Greg Glassman addresses the crowd after Day 2 of the Europe Regional.**

“This community is very, very special,” he told the crowd of about 700 at the Ballerup Super Arena.

### Competition and Celebration

The CrossFit Tour first visited Australia in February and then Texas in March, and the third stop coincided with the Europe Regional, which found a host of nations gathered in the Danish capital from May 25 to 27 to select its representatives for the 2012 Reebok CrossFit Games. Looking through the athlete list was like flipping through an atlas: Italy, England, Hungary, Sweden, Iceland, Denmark, Netherlands, Germany, Finland, Norway, Greece, Slovenia, Slovakia, Ireland, Spain, France, Switzerland, Belgium and Malta were all represented, and many North American expatriates could be found on the roster as well.

The diversity was on full display at the afterparty on Sunday night at Pakhus 11, where CrossFit staff mingled with athletes, coaches, spectators and Tour attendees from a host of countries. With a DJ playing and well-earned celebratory drinks flowing after a buffet dinner, Europe’s best athletes hung out and discussed the sport they love as part of the international relations of fitness.

Jonny and Helzy Smyth from CrossFit Northern Ireland, “doublefisting” Tuborg beers, explained that a pair of beverages is simply a requirement.

“It’s the bare minimum!” Jonny said with Irish mirth.

The party, of course, had only just begun, and it ended well into the wee hours as athletes who train for the very peak of fitness allowed themselves a rare night of excess.

“You only speak one language?” a European asked an American incredulously. She spoke no less than four different tongues, but most people didn’t have a lot of trouble making themselves understood throughout the weekend. Many Euros spoke English very well, and those who didn’t knew a few key words like “burpee” and “snatch.”

Indeed, the sport is spreading around Europe, and while countries such as France don’t have a huge CrossFit presence yet, countries like Denmark and Iceland are packed with athletes who are well acquainted with Fran, Cindy and Murph.

Salo himself, injured this year and unable to compete in the Regional, works for Rogue’s European arm, helping to get equipment to the new affiliates that are springing up across the region.



*Defending CrossFit Games champion Annie Thorisdottir (left) was the guest of honor at the afterparty at Pakhus 11.*

"I'm fired up," Salo said before the Regional. "Today when we were talking with the athletes before the start, I was like, 'I should be there.' Of course I want to be on the other side of the wall. That's my stuff," he said while gesturing at the athletes warming up inside the railing. "CrossFit is my life."

The good news is that Salo had surgery on his knee late last year, and while the Finn is avoiding running and box jumps for the moment, he's back in the gym testing his legendary work capacity.

"Things are really good, at the moment. I've been training really hard," he said in what is probably an understatement for the stoic Games champ.

Salo might be Europe's first face of CrossFit, but others are turning heads as well, and many are from Iceland. Annie Thorisdottir, the smiling 2011 CrossFit Games champion, competed in the Europe Regional and won for the fourth year in a row. She'll be heading back to the Games to defend her title, and she'll be accompanied by a strong Icelandic contingent. The nation qualified three individual women, one individual male and two teams.

After his team won five of six events, Evert Viglundsson of CrossFit Reykjavik said, "Watch out, L.A.! Iceland is coming for you!"

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**—Paula Gravatt**

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Similarly, Numi Snaer Katrinarson, who qualified only after an unbelievable come-from-behind win in Event 6, was thrilled to have a chance to compete in the Games and see Los Angeles.

"The venue is fantastic," Tour organizer Paula Gravatt said on Day 1 of the event as the athletes were attacking Event 1. "It's wonderful to mix the Tour with the competition. Coach Glassman had that in his mind. People are very excited to see us here."

When asked about the differences between the people at the Tour stops so far, Gravatt laughed.

"It's actually not different," she said. "We intuitively know this, but everywhere we go in the world, we find the same great people. Different languages, same community."

### **Primal Movement, Primal Food**

Before the event, CrossFit staff went to boxes in Sweden and Denmark, including CrossFit Malmo and CrossFit Butcher's Lab. One of the latter gym's members is Thomas Rode Andersen, who's a renowned chef—and a CrossFitter.

Andersen is the head chef at Kong Hans Kaelder, and he's kind of a big deal. Actually, he's a celebrity chef in a country that cares a great deal about food, and like anyone in the service industry, he knows what happens when a fast-paced job combines with stress and late-night partying to leave you something less than fit.

"My story is that I met a beautiful girl ... 14 years younger than me, and I was living the celebrity-chef rock-star life: too much alcohol and a little too little sleep and too much coffee—no focus on nutrition whatsoever," Andersen recalled. "Just doing these beautiful dishes for the guests. And I found that she was so much younger than me and I wanted to be attractive to her, so after watching my nipples jiggle in front of a mirror while brushing my teeth, I thought, 'I've got to do something.'"



*Numi Snaer Katrinarson (third from left) celebrates qualifying for the Reebok CrossFit Games after a dramatic come-from-behind win in the Regional's final event.*



***Martin Moller (right) flexes a giant calf alongside Kasper Hansen. Both will compete at the Reebok CrossFit Games with Team Butcher's Lab.***

When a friend came back from the United States with dreams of opening a CrossFit gym, Andersen became a guinea pig, and it wasn't long before he was chasing performance in WODs.

"After two or three months of pain and soreness, finally I come to the progression where I felt I was in better cardio shape and I was getting stronger slowly," he said.

After more training, he became one of the better athletes in any group and regularly held his own against special-forces soldiers and firebreathers who were far younger. In 2008 he started working out at CrossFit Copenhagen and now trains at CrossFit Butcher's Lab and CrossFit Butcher's Garage.

Now, at 43, he's in the best shape of his life.

"Actually, I gained 20 lb. and lost three sizes in the waistline," he laughed.

Andersen was connected with the CrossFit Tour through Regional Director Oliver Amdrup, and Andersen said it was important to him that he provide attendees with something other than a burger and fries. He is, after all, a CrossFitting Paleo chef who's also behind the primal fast-food restaurant [Palaeo](#).

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**"To be able to serve a nice meal for the man who actually started all this was a great honor."**

**—Thomas Rode Andersen**

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"For me it was important that on an occasion like this people could get something nice to eat rather than the usual shit," he said on Day 3 of the Regional, after serving Danish beef jerky, nuts, a *fiskefrikadelle* (Danish fishcake), coleslaw with pulled beef brisket, and *Skyr* (an Icelandic yogurt) with blueberries and coconuts to the attendees shortly before Coach Glassman spoke to the crowd at the end of Day 2.

Andersen also had a chance to host Coach Glassman at the Kong Hans Kaelder during the Regional, and he served CrossFit's founder an all-natural meal free of flour and starch. On the menu were steak, lobster, oysters and sugar-free Paleo dessert.

"For me it was like the perfect circle to be able to serve a Paleo meal for the man who actually brought me into all this," Andersen said. "And I've been a gastronomical geek for 25 years, and then suddenly all my friends are CrossFitters. They train. All the chefs who drink alcohol and go out all night, I don't see them anymore.

"To be able to serve a nice meal for the man who actually started all this was a great honor."



*By 3 a.m., the food tables had been replaced by dancing CrossFitters.*

Andersen plans to get more good food out into retail because he's passionate about fitness and he's discovered that working out is only half the battle.

"I'm very committed to this Paleo lifestyle, and it's a big concern of mine," he said.

### **Europe: CrossFit Hotspot**

If the Europe Regional and the CrossFit Tour stop proved anything, it's that CrossFit is growing fast in Europe on the strength of an outstanding community. For three days, that community came together to compete, cheer, eat Paleo and then have a few Tuborgs to celebrate a year of hard training.

And now European CrossFitters will be invited across the Atlantic for the next CrossFit Tour stop, which is set for July 13-15 at the CrossFit Games, where Iceland Annie Thorisdottir, Frederik Aegidius, CrossFit Reykjavik and company will compete.

After the amazing Tour stop in Denmark, North America is going to need to step up in Carson. Copenhagen certainly knows how to party, and we can't let the European community down in July.

For more info on the CrossFit Tour, visit [Tour.CrossFit.com](http://Tour.CrossFit.com). The fifth CrossFit Tour stop is Aug. 10 to 12 in Big Sky, Mont.



### **About the author**

*Mike Warkentin is the managing editor of the **CrossFit Journal** and the founder of **CrossFit 204**.*