
THE CrossFit LIFE

From Tragedy to Triumph

Patrick Whaley's life almost ended when he was assaulted, robbed and shot in the chest. Thanks to hard work, an ingenious invention and CrossFit, Whaley is still alive and stronger than ever.

By Patrick Whaley

August 2012



Courtesy of Patrick Whaley

When I was a little kid I was really skinny. As a way to build up muscle, I would carry around extra books in my book bag. I started thinking, "What if I could have normal clothing be weighted, heavier than the average clothing?" I did some sketches, which evolved into a prototype and then a patent. It morphed into TITIN (formerly OmegaWear), a form-fitting compression shirt with flexible gel inserts.

1 of 3

Courtesy of Patrick Whaley



A 9mm round tore through Whaley's lung and liver and grazed a major artery before exiting his back.

In college, I took the money I made from a paid internship and sunk it into this project.

But in 2009, I nearly lost everything. I was a student at Georgia Tech, and on May 4, 2009, I was assaulted, robbed and ultimately shot in the chest during an armed robbery in downtown Atlanta. Three masked assailants approached me from the back and robbed me at gunpoint. When I refused to get into their vehicle, one of the guys pulled the trigger and I heard the click of the safety. With his second attempt, I was able to deflect the barrel of his gun from my face, but I had no time to get away. As an Eagle Scout, I knew remaining calm was vital for my survival, but as I called 911, I noticed the other two victims and all the assailants had fled the scene, leaving me for dead in a pool of my own blood. Not a great ending to my first day in my new apartment.

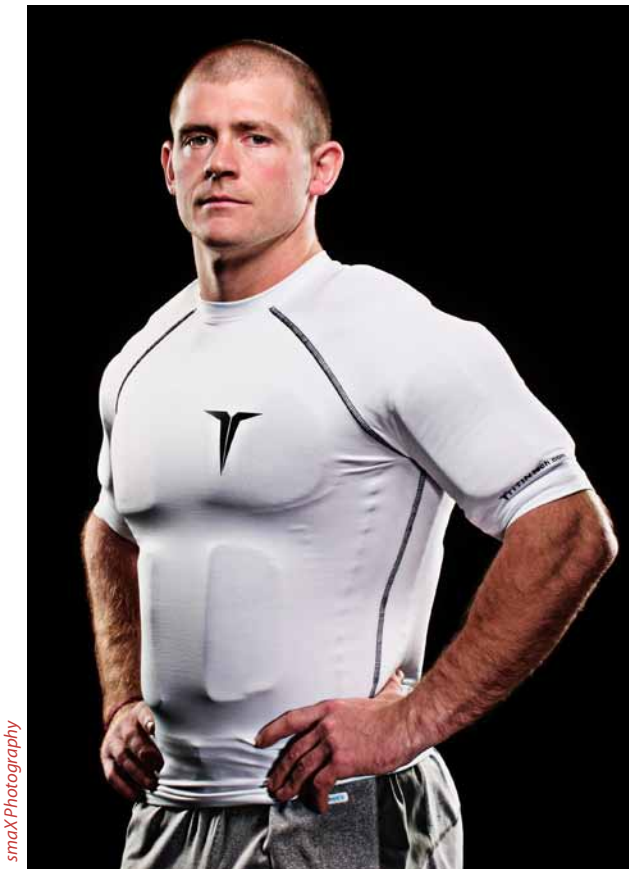
At this time, I was an active amateur bodybuilder, weighing about 220 lb. at 6 foot 4. I felt invincible. From the time I began playing football as a middle-school student, I was consumed with building muscle, staying physically fit and eating healthy. I remember my high-school swimming coach warned against drinking soda, so from that day forward I drank only water. As

an award-winning high-school swimmer, I worked out for four to five hours per day both aquatically and with additional workouts in the weight room.

Upon my return to senior classes at Georgia Tech after I was discharged from the ICU, my physical limitations were evident as I struggled to carry my full book bag on campus. However, I was committed to return to my workout schedule, albeit understanding that performing any degree of weight training was not in the cards for me, yet. I was determined to get back into shape, no matter how long it took, but that was easier said than done.

While I was in the midst of extensive physical therapy, it occurred to me to use my weighted shirt to recover my strength. I wore the shirt while I did day-to-day tasks, and it made a big difference. However, I still had a long road to recovery.

In 2011, about two years after the accident, I met Chris Fischer at a local gym, and he introduced me to CrossFit, or what I would later refer to as "pseudo CrossFit." I began my CrossFit training in a traditional gym using yoga mats under the loaded barbell to make up for the fact we did not have bumper plates. We made it work.



CrossFit Games athlete Brandon Phillips, wearing Whaley's weighted shirt.

I soon met another CrossFitter, Rodney McClure, who, after knowing me for less than a week, joined my last-minute trip to Carson, Calif., for the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games. I found myself knee-deep in a crowd of “the best of the best.” As a young entrepreneur, I was financially broke, but with my last dime I rented a vendor booth and began an extraordinary journey with the fittest people on Earth—CrossFitters of all levels. TITIN was featured live on ESPN the second day of the competition as a Canadian equipment distributor came over to demo the product, saying he felt like “Captain America” on camera.

My exposure to CrossFit opened my eyes to a whole new world. Learning more about CrossFit training changed my perspective and improved my focus as it introduced me to an entirely new and exciting fitness regimen filled with seriously dedicated athletes who were completely devoted not only to fitness, but also to living their lives to the fullest while focusing on their health, communities and faith. Those involved in CrossFit training live their lives with genuine integrity, profound ethics and unquestionable morals, and they do so without excuses and regrets. I was then, and shall forever be, absolutely hooked by CrossFit.

Feedback from the CrossFit audience was critical to my research and development of TITIN. Our athlete customers include CrossFit athletes Rich Froning and Brandon Phillips, as well as NFL players Eric Berry and Tim Tebow. The shirt is also used by soldiers in the British Royal Air Force and the Springboks (National Rugby Team of South Africa), along with many collegiate athletes.

CrossFit training has not only become a critical segment of my personal exercise routine, but it has truthfully brought me back to life. I was always devoted to my own physical fitness routine but, for me, experiencing the CrossFit world has provided the specific incentives I needed to hold my head up high once again, the consistent variety I needed to pique my interest, and the results I wanted to prove to myself that I can, and will, exceed my own expectations against all odds.

CrossFit improved all aspects of my life: emotionally, physically and mentally. CrossFit has humbled me, motivated me and has made such a positive impact in my life that I believe everyone deserves a chance to benefit from this training regimen. Although I lost a third of my right lung and 70 percent of my blood the day I was shot, CrossFit has given me much more.

