



The Quick and the Deadlifts

At the CrossFit Games, 16 competitors completed the WOD 2 deadlift ladder, creating log-jam at the top of the standings.

Tony Budding of CrossFit HQ explains the rationale behind the workout.

Mike Warkentin



Picture: Jordan Holland

"Lightweight!" an energized Jeremy Thiel screamed at the end of the deadlift ladder, borrowing one of Big Ronnie Coleman's better catch phrases. The crowd burst into cheers as the Texan bounded out of the Stadium after completing the WOD with a lift of 505 lb.

Jordan Holland boosted the final bar with ease and held it for a moment at lockout with a giant grin across his face, savoring the achievement.

Deadlifts ... (continued)

Jerome Perryman (PR: 606 lb.) got to the end of the WOD with a slight trickle of blood running down his left shin. The big athlete from Portland, Oregon, gripped the bar and ripped it off the ground with ease.

"It was pretty easy, yeah," he said afterward. "I wish they would have gone up a little higher to separate us more."

Thirteen other competitors completed the workout that came hard on the heels of the treacherous and gruelling 7.1 kilometer hill run that opened the CrossFit Games. Peter Egyed, Spencer Hendel, Rob Orlando, Josh Everett, Lance Mosley, Scott Lewis, David Lipson and Jason Neago all made it through by pulling a high percentage of their 1RM. Moe Kelsey, Jason Khalipa, D.J. Wickham, J.C. Nessa and Graham Holmberg also finished the WOD—setting PRs in the process.

Sixteen competitors were rewarded with only one point for the workout, giving them a large lead in a scoring system with points assigned by placement. The lowest score at the end of eight WODs decided the CrossFit Games champions. Eventual overall winner Mikko Salo—who got 505 to mid-thigh but couldn't lock it out—and Patrick Burke both pulled 495 in the ladder but received scores of 17.

Shortly after the results were posted, the web was filled with people who were curious about how the 16-way tie would influence the overall scoring.

"I don't know if they were expecting that. They could have had 5 more bars to differentiate the real hulks," one commenter wrote on the Games site.

"That deadlift workout has kinda screwed things up. Who would have known so many guys were so strong?" wrote another.

Some got more aggressive: "Its (sic) ridiculous that 16 guys get a '1' when one guys (sic) max DL might be 505 and another's might be 600. Just absurd."

After the Games, Tony Budding of CrossFit HQ explained the rationale behind the WOD.

"Here was our assumption: there's absolutely no way that you're going to be able to pull a high percentage of your 1RM deadlift in that format to begin with—every 30 seconds—and especially after a seven-K hill run," he said. "We just made the assumption that your best lift in that environment is going to be a percentage of your



Pictured: Jerome Perryman



Pictured: D.J. Wickham



Pictured: Jason Khalipa

max lift, probably between 70 and 85 percent. What we saw instead was that people were pulling at 90 to 110 percent of their previous PRs."

He added: "If we knew then what we knew today, we would have either started at 375 or we would have gone up by 20 lb. instead of 10, or we would have just had more bars."

The assumption that the WOD would be harder on the athletes wasn't pulled out of thin air, and 505 lb. wasn't just a random number.

"We had decades of competition information to know that the way you set your PR is to rest three to five minutes between max attempts, and you try to do as few warm-ups as you can," Budding said.

On the women's side, things went according to plan. Only Cyndi Frieling was able to complete the ladder that topped out at 375 lb. Jenny Olson and Caroline Attmore tied for second at 355. Lauren Pryor was fourth, and Tamara Holmes was fifth. Eventual champ Tanya Wagner, Laura DeMarco and Joceyln Forest tied for sixth with 325. For the most part, the women were spread out in the standings, with the leaders clearly defined.

According to the stats submitted by the male athletes before the competition, 15 could pull over 500, while three could break 600. Of the 15, fully nine of them were below 529 lb. Only six were over 550. The average deadlift of all male competitors was 454 lb. All told, the athletes who completed the ladder lifted 20 bars in 10 minutes for a total of 8,200 lb.

Who would have thought Graham Holmberg would notch a 35 lb. PR shortly after a trail run that all but ruined Jason Khalipa, the defending champion? The feat is even more impressive when you consider Holmberg finished 56th in the run. He didn't have much time to recover between WODs because the athletes at the bottom of the run were fed into the deadlift ladder first via a system that rewarded performance with rest.

Maybe the best way to score a deadlift PR is to annihilate yourself on a trail run first—but probably not. So how did so many athletes complete the workout?

"You attribute it to the crowd and the competitive environment," Budding said. "The conclusion you have to draw is that the human mind and body are much stronger than what we access on a daily basis. There's no way, if you just look at their pure physicality, that



Pictured: Cyndi Frieling

Deadlifts ... (continued)

running a seven kilometer hill run and then lifting every 30 seconds, that you are in ideal physical condition to set a PR. You're physically taxed. You're not fresh.

"Call it adrenaline—call it whatever you want—but there's got to be a lot of adrenaline going in (powerlifting) competitions, too. Speculate all you want. It doesn't really matter. What happened from our perspective was these fuckers are so much more competitive and more capable than we possibly imagined."

As for the leaderboard log-jam created by the 16 men who completed the WOD, Games organizers weren't about to change the scoring system on the fly.

"That's just the way the scoring was, and we stuck to it," Budding said. "It was just built in. Nothing was changed. They earned a tie—it just happened to be 16 people."



About the Author

Mike Warkentin is the staff writer for the CrossFit Journal. He does not do deadlifts after trail runs.



Pictured: J.C. Nessa



Pictured: Jenny Olson



Pictured: Jeremy Thiel