
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Fittest on Earth

Graham Holmberg and Kristan Clever claim victory at the CrossFit Games.



By Mike Warkentin

July 2010



D. Re/CrossFit

With fans cheering in the California sunshine, an exhausted Graham Holmberg and Kristan Clever were crowned the champions of the 2010 CrossFit Games on July 19 at the Home Depot Center in Carson, Calif.

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For Clever, it was a dominant performance and an improvement on a fourth-place finish in 2009. Holmberg, who finished 19th in 2009, used a steady performance and two big event wins to bring the Fittest Man on Earth title back to the United States.

Crane Kicks and Rope Climbs

Three weeks before the Games, Holmberg gave an off-the-cuff Games-site interview in which he was asked about his resemblance to Johnny Lawrence, Daniel-san's nemesis in the original *Karate Kid*.

Holmberg has been compared to Johnny for years and has even convinced some people he was in the movie. Graham's a good sport, so he played along.

CrossFit Journal: "If you had to fight Ralph Macchio right now, who would win? And yes, you're allowed to sweep the leg."

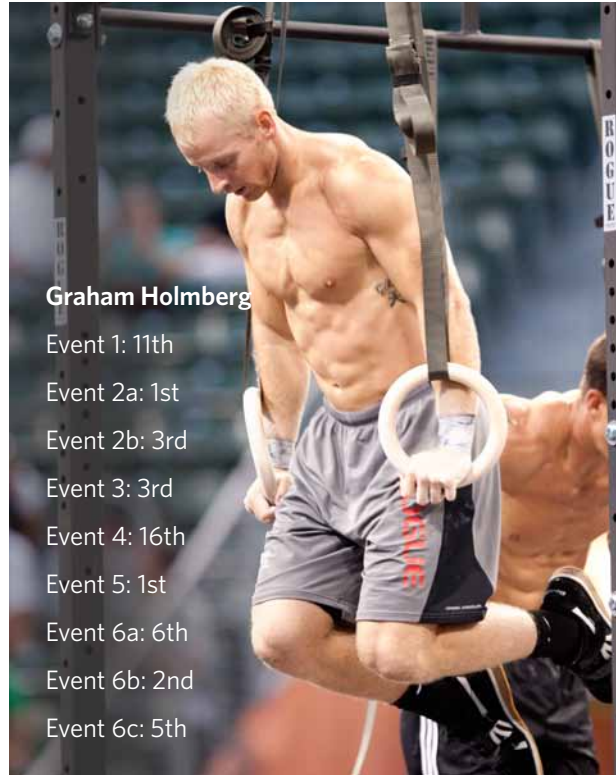
Holmberg: "Don't bet on Ralph this time around. My training partner wants to make a T-shirt for me to wear at the Games that reads, 'In this movie, Johnny wins.' But I won't wear it though."

In this movie, Johnny *did* win.

Holmberg was solid across the board through eight workouts, setting himself up for a shot at the title in the final event. Rich Froning Jr. was the overall leader at that point and looked poised for the title when Holmberg was much slower in the first part of the three-workout challenge. In fact, he finished last in a heat that was won by Froning Jr., who was the only person of either sex to complete the entire workout.

"It was so sucky going into that first WOD and climbing over the wall, and I was in last place, at least out of our heat," Holmberg said. "Just in my mind I kept telling myself, 'Two more WODs. Just keep chipping away. Just keep getting as many reps as you can. There's two more WODs.' I knew those rope climbs were going to get nasty at the end. It was so weird how fatigued I felt on that very first workout. It was unreal. And I'm like, 'This is going to be a dogfight.'"

Gritting his teeth for a battle, Holmberg made up the points on the next two events.



Graham Holmberg

Event 1: 11th
Event 2a: 1st
Event 2b: 3rd
Event 3: 3rd
Event 4: 16th
Event 5: 1st
Event 6a: 6th
Event 6b: 2nd
Event 6c: 5th

D. Re/CrossFit



Kristan Clever

Event 1: 1st
Event 2a: 2nd
Event 2b: 1st
Event 3: 2nd
Event 4: 20th
Event 5: 1st
Event 6a: 1st
Event 6b: 1st
Event 6c: 2nd

S. Dyl/CrossFit

"And then I kinda started creeping ahead on the toes-to-bar and ground to overhead, so that was nice. That final workout, man, I should have paid attention more to that parkour video that came on the main site a long time ago, because it taxes you so much. Climbing over a wall is tough."

Holmberg had no idea what he would face when he left the isolation room the athletes had to wait in before they discovered and attacked the final movements, but he felt pretty good about the ropes that were hanging above the flooring at the HDC. He stuck to the plan of chipping away at Froning Jr.'s lead and actually finished second in the second part before taking fifth in Part 3.

As the numbers were being crunched, Holmberg had no idea he had won until his rival saw the name on the winner's check.

"We were standing there, and they had some checks, and Rich and I were standing there talking, and they moved a check or something and he was like, 'There it is man, you won it.' And that was crazy.

"I knew going into it that I was a few points behind him. And I knew it was a little bit of a longer gap from me to the next guy, and he was even talking in the locker room before. He was like, 'I haven't done really rope climbs.' ... That's amazing that he got two without his legs at all, because I don't even know how I finished that because of how gassed I was using my legs too."

When Holmberg did find out he had won, the drained athlete from New Albany, Ohio, was amazed.

"Every workout that kept popping up, I was like, 'All right, I've been working on this stuff.'"

—Graham Holmberg



S. Dy/CrossFit

By the time he got to the burpee wall-climbs of the final event, Holmberg was exhausted, but he had put himself in position to pass Rich Froning Jr. and win the CrossFit Games.



S. Dy/CrossFit

Rich Froning Jr. and Holmberg go head to head in event 6b, in which Holmberg made up a lot of ground with a second-place finish.

"It's just been a heck of a weekend There's just so many good guys out here, and it just showed in how tight a race it was," he said. "And I was talking about it with my dad last night, and if you just look at the top 10 guys and how much it just kept shuffling back and forth, it was anybody's race.

"Every scoring system is crazy, and going onto it I was like, 'I've just got to stay in the top 10 in everything, and I had a couple of big wins with first-place points, and that's so huge to get one or two of those. The weekend itself has been surreal. I just feel like my training led up to it just right, and it was just crazy. Every workout that kept popping up, I was like, 'All right, I've been working on this stuff.'"

As for the check

"I have no idea right now," he smiled. "I recently got engaged, so that's that new theory where my money is our money. I mean, I've got some school loans. I don't know what I really plan on doing with it. I definitely want to help repay, I mean my parents were huge supporters out here Hopefully maybe get a few new cool things for our gym. I feel like money burns holes in my pockets, so who knows?"

Clever Dominant

Clever was nearly unbeatable in the first events, amassing only six points and a sizable lead before Event 4. Then disaster struck and she lost control of her wheelbarrow in the sandbag event, putting her in danger of being overtaken. Undeterred, the cheerful athlete from Valley CrossFit bounced back to win Event 5 and set herself up for a big win in the overall standings.

And she didn't stumble again, taking first, first and second in the last three events to beat Annie Thorisdottir by 12 points.

"It's amazing," Clever said shortly after receiving a medal and a check. "It feels awesome. I don't think it's quite set in yet."

That's probably because she was still recovering from a grueling final event that had her racing Thorisdottir in continuation of a theme seen in almost every event throughout the Games.

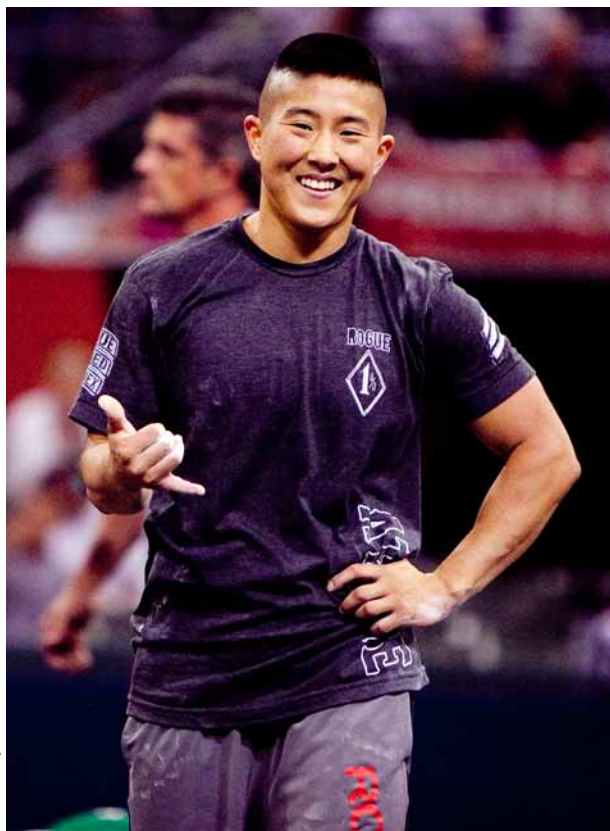
"I had no idea what was going on," she said. "I was trying to not die on that last thing over there, and I knew that Annie had already finished, and I was like, 'Good for her. She blasted that one out. That was great.' And I was just trying not to die on the last rope climb, and after I was done I was trying to make sure everybody else didn't die."

"My plan is always to keep training as hard as ever, and next year, well, I don't know. We'll see."



R. Lucas/CrossFit

Finishing lower than second in only the wheelbarrow workout, Clever proved she has no weaknesses in her skill set.



A. Anthony/CrossFit

The Champions

Clever's win comes a year after she just missed the podium in Aromas due to a tiebreaker with Carey Kepler. This year, the veteran athlete didn't seem stressed or worried at any point—even after the wheelbarrow disaster.

"Shit like that happens all the time," she said with her signature bright grin.

Indeed, she was the picture of relaxation the entire weekend and did it all with a smile.

Holmberg, for his part, did it without sweeping the leg.



About the Author

Mike Warkentin is the managing editor of the CrossFit Journal.

When asked about the hardest part of the finals, Clever laughed: "Just trying to keep going, just wanting to stop the whole time, like 'I'm so tired, and my grip is not listening to me and my arms ... I can't press or open my hand either,' but I had everybody yelling at me."

Just like Holmberg, Clever isn't sure what she'll do with the cash but might gift a little to her parents.

"Yeah ... I don't know. No idea," she said. "I might pay my parents back some money. That would be nice. They've done a lot for me and they've been really supportive through all this stuff, so maybe give them back some cash."

The powerful SoCal athlete will not slow down, either. She'll recover from the Games, but then she'll start working out again.

"I don't have much of a plan right now, but the plan is always to keep training," she said. "I don't know about next year, so yes, my plan is always to keep training as hard as ever, and next year, well, I don't know. We'll see."