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# THE CrossFit JOURNAL

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## No Rep?

Adrian Bozman and Chuck Carswell talk about the finer points of judging the CrossFit Games.

By Mike Warkentin

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Staff/CrossFit Journal

Competing in the CrossFit Games is hard, but judging the competition might be just as challenging.

Put yourself in a judge's shoes for a minute: It's the last event of the CrossFit Games, and it's anybody's race to win. The sun is beating down on you and some classic Metallica is pumping out of the speakers at 100 decibels. Cameras are everywhere. Thousands of fans are screaming. Dave Castro says, "Go!" and one of the world's fittest athletes is a blur in front of you.

Did you catch that last rep?

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### Enforcing the Standards

Judging isn't for everyone. You must have a keen eye for movement, and you must be able to make split-second decisions. Being able to count doesn't hurt, either.

Adrian Bozman and Chuck Carswell are two HQ trainers who served as judges in 2009 and will be reprising their roles in 2010. Both are expert trainers who can spot a muted hip from 100 yards on a hazy day, and it's their job to make the competition as fair as is humanly possible for the athletes.

And these athletes aren't run-of-the-WOD CrossFitters; they're the strongest and fastest athletes in the world. If you've only got a fraction of a second to judge squat depth at a weekend cert, that interval is almost non-existent when you're judging Jason Khalipa, Mikko Salo, Kristan Clever or Lindsey Smith.

"The movement just happens so freakin' fast, man," Carswell says. "You've got a split second to see it, and then a split second to figure out if it was what we are looking for as far as the standards go or if it was off. And then, beyond that, you've got to decide what you're going to do with all that information . . . . If I had to equate it to anything, it would probably be like that leap of going from high school to college and the leap of going from college to pro. Every level, it just dramatically changes."

Carswell, of course, made those leaps himself and ended up in the Miami Dolphins system as a defensive back in the early '90s.

Boz, a beast in his own right and a trainer at San Francisco CrossFit, agrees that speed is the greatest challenge for the judging team.

"Every year it seems we find something that presents its own challenge compared to the other movements," he says. "Every move has a set of pretty easily defined standards, but when the tempo picks up for a lot of movements, that's where it gets difficult . . . . For example, a push-up, really, the standard on a push-up is not that difficult to see, but when you start cranking up the speed as most people do on push-ups, it can be pretty hard judging-wise."



Susannah Dy/CrossFit Journal

***Judges at the CrossFit Games have one ultimate goal: making sure the athletes meet the movement standards.***

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Staff/CrossFit Journal

*Chuck Carswell (left) judges Jason Khalipa during the triplet WOD at the 2009 CrossFit Games.*

### The Big Picture

Some movements, of course, are trickier than others. CrossFit is based on compound movements, so judges can't just focus on one body part. For instance, judging biceps curls would be pretty simple compared to a kettlebell swing.

"I think anything where you have a combination of something being overhead and where a hip is fully open, those types of movements are probably the toughest," Carswell explains. "Where the hip has to be open and something has to be overhead, you're talking about the thruster scenario, you're talking about the kettlebell, the snatch—all that stuff where you have to see a single straight line."

Both Boz and Chuck use a "big-picture" approach to evaluating compound movements. Rather than looking at the hip and then the upper body, they take a step back and look for clean lines in the overall movement.

"The strategy is kind of a periphery look," Carswell explains. "You just have to see the whole picture. You can't get stuck focused on any one part. It's almost like you have to gloss it over and make sure he ends up in a straight line. In your mind's eye you have that perfectly straight plumb line that you're looking for that athlete to make. If they hit it, great, and if they don't, then we've got to redo it."

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Staff/CrossFit Journal

**Boz briefs the crew of judges at the 2009 CrossFit Games.**

Redoing reps is every competitor's nightmare, but it's part of the game at the elite level. Even eventual champion Mikko Salo had reps taken away on his way to the overall title. In fact, Boz remembers Salo losing between 30 and 50 reps on the snatch/wall-ball couplet that ended Day 1.

"Every time he got something taken away, it wasn't a big deal," Boz says. "He just looked at his judge, gave a thumbs up or a head nod and did another one. He just did what had to be done, so I think it's all about being clear with your movement, and if you're prepared, it's not a big deal."

While a few athletes always push the standards right to the limit in an attempt to shave seconds, most missed reps are due to physical failure. A competitor is simply too gassed to meet the standards.

"A lot of time it's like coaching," Boz says. "You can tell (a cue) to the athlete a number of times and there might not be any sort of change in the results, and I think that has less to do with you as a judge and more to do with them just being at that point where they're so fatigued that that's it."

Taking away a rep is a tough thing to do, but it has to be done. Judges are put in challenging situations, but they know exactly what they're getting into when they accept the job.

"I'd be lying to you if I told you I didn't feel it (when I deny a rep), but at the same time, my job is to make it fair for everybody regardless of who's standing in front of me," Carswell says. "We want the standards to be the same all across the board, and so when you're looking at a guy that's maybe not hitting the reps and you're trying to communicate No. 1 that he missed the rep and No. 2 what he needs to do to get it right, it can get pretty frustrating, but you've just got to make that call."

Neither judge feels the need to motivate competitors, either. While athletes at a box might need some encouragement from time to time, the world's fittest are usually far beyond driven when it's time to compete. The judges simply stand back and decide if the movements make the grade.

And for athletes preparing for the Games, Boz offers this advice:

"Just be as clear as possible and realize that the judge is there ultimately for their success. I think sometimes the judges are viewed as not necessarily the bad guy but (someone who's there) to hinder progress, which is not the case. It's the other way around. If you're clear with the judge, you'll get through that workout monster-quick."



**About the Author**

*Mike Warkentin is the managing editor of the CrossFit Journal.*