
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Heart of a Warrior

Wounded Warriors inspire on Saturday afternoon
at the 2012 Reebok CrossFit Games.

By Emily Beers

July 2012



All images: Danielle Concepcion

At the 2012 Reebok CrossFit Games, Ali Barrera from Alamo CrossFit is holding a sign that says "Crush Fran, Stomp Hope." She's in California to cheer on Mike Gallardo, an athlete from her affiliate in San Antonio, Texas.

Gallardo is a war veteran who lost his leg while serving with the United States military, and he's part of the Wounded Warriors demonstration at the Games.

1 of 3



Mike Gallardo finishing Fran in 5:03 during the Wounded Warriors demonstration at the 2012 Reebok CrossFit Games.

Barrera competes against Gallardo at her box all the time. It's hard not to notice the fact that he's missing his left leg. And although she can imagine, Barrera has no idea how and when Gallardo's injury happened.

"I'm not even sure if he served in Afghanistan or Iraq," she said. "I've never asked him about it."

Rick Martinez, the man who got Gallardo into CrossFit a year ago, is also foggy about Gallardo's war history.

"I was an army nurse and worked with so many amputees for a big portion of my career, but their service in the sandbox is service in the sandbox for me. So I couldn't tell you where he served. All I can tell you is the guy was blown up, lost a leg while serving our country, so I don't ask anything else," Martinez said.

It's not that Barrera and Martinez don't care about Gallardo. They care a great deal about him, but they put their curiosity aside for Gallardo's sake to allow him to be just another gym member.

"CrossFit is that common language, and so he's just another guy in the box," Barrera said.

Then she looks over, and there's Gallardo doing Fran. He does 21 thrusters in a row and then hits the pull-up bar and does 21 unbroken pull-ups. He completes Fran in 5:03, with one good leg.

Suddenly it's impossible to call him "just another guy at the box."

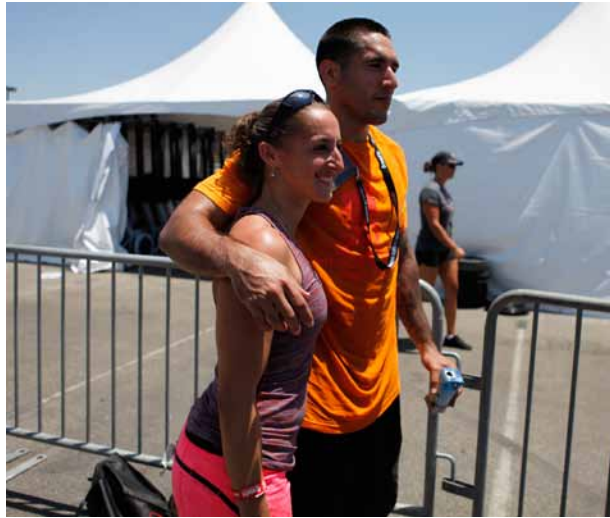
Wounded Warriors Video: [.mov](#) [.wmv](#)

Wounded Warriors Audio: [.m4a](#)

CrossFit as Therapy

Barrera admits that it's hard not to be inspired by Gallardo.

"He's got such heart," she said. "He's inspiring to say the least. When you're doing box jumps and you feel like, 'Oh crap, I can't finish,' and you look over and he's going like a rabbit, you think, 'How can I stop if he's still going?' He's got a spirit and drive like no one I've ever met."



Gallardo says CrossFit is both physical and emotional therapy.

It's time for the second event of the competition. The WOD is Hope. The announcer speaks to the lively crowd: "Today, these warriors are out to prove to themselves that they can continue to live a healthy lifestyle."

The crowd cheers.

Gallardo gets through the burpees and the snatches and moves to the box jumps. On a prosthetic leg, he bounces up and down, even able to cycle his jumps with impressive coordination. At the end of the 15-minute workout, Gallardo collapses to the ground in a heap.

Then he gets up and explains why he's working out in front of the crowd at the Home Depot Center.

"I just want to help other warriors and to show people that adaptive athletes can do this," Gallardo said.

Gallardo, who served in Iraq and lost his left leg in 2007, admits that he went through a period of post-war depression.

"I was always depressed after the amputation, always thinking that God wanted me, but I know now that there are people out there worse than me, so I want to be a good role model," he said.

CrossFit has helped him become exactly that.

"It's emotional and physical therapy," Gallardo said. "Mentally, it helps you every day. You gain confidence as you get physically stronger, and as you get physically stronger, you get mentally stronger."

Both Barrera and Martinez have witnessed Gallardo's growth in the last year, watching him transform into one of the best role models they know. And the wounded warriors' presence at the CrossFit Games is a perfect showcase for the cause.

"I think it's inspiring to our members to see these guys. You know, they served our country. They've had a traumatic experience, and they have found a way to believe that life goes on, and that you just have to do it differently," Barrera said.

She added: "And I think that transcends just working out in the box. That's everyday life."



About the Author

Emily Beers finished a master's degree in journalism at the University of Western Ontario in the spring of 2009. Upon graduation, she worked as a sportswriter at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games, where she covered figure skating and short-track speed skating. Currently, she hosts WOD HOG, a not-always-PG publication of the CrossFit Vancouver School of Fitness. She ruptured her Achilles tendon in December 2010 and served as the Canada West Regional Media Director while recovering from surgery. Beers also competed in the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games on CrossFit Vancouver's team. She finished third at the 2012 Canada West Regional.