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Lifting to Save a Pair

Zionna Munoz has started a new program to support the fight against breast cancer. Robert Wilson explains how Amazing Grace: Barbells for Boobs got its start.

By Robert Wilson

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The CrossFit community is no stranger to fundraisers. And CrossFitters are no strangers to going against the grain, even if that means putting themselves on the line.

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So much of CrossFit training embraces the ideals of focus, concentration and working through those toughest of moments. That's when it's best to have a community of supporters around you. The benefit from tough mental training that comes from CrossFit spills over into everyday life, including when dealing with the hardships faced by family and friends. This is one of the reasons CrossFit is more than just a gym, and CrossFitters are never more a true community than when they stand by one another to support a cause. Whether they're supporting firefighters, soldiers or a loved one, CrossFitters step up and get things done.

One of these CrossFitters is Zionna Munoz, founder of Mammograms in Action, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing funds to women who have trouble gaining access to mammograms. Many in the CrossFit community know Zionna simply as "Z." She's been involved with CrossFit since 2007 and was co-owner of CrossFit Next Level Performance in Lake Forest, Calif. What everyone is coming to know her for now, however, is her quest to save boobs—and lives.

Fired up to Fight

Many of us have in some way been affected by breast cancer. According to the American Cancer Society report [Breast Cancer Facts & Figures 2009-2010](#), "Excluding cancers of the skin, breast cancer is the most common cancer among women, accounting for nearly 1 in 4 cancers diagnosed in US women."

While it's often our mothers, sisters, wives and friends who contract the illness, we all live with it, and we can all do something about it. Two women—one who's a CrossFitter—and one organization made possible through CrossFit are doing something about it right now.

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Zionna (Z) Munoz is the link between CrossFit and the fight against breast cancer.

Zionna met her friend Cecy nearly 10 years ago in Long Beach, Calif. They stayed close over the years, and both women were committed to keeping fit. As young, healthy women, cancer wasn't an issue that was foremost in their minds. Not even the doctors were worried when Cecy mentioned she felt something in her breast that clearly wasn't right. During her appointment with her doctor, she was told that she was young and not in need of a mammogram. She was told to come back when she was 40. Cecy was 26 at the time. The issue wasn't a lack of insurance. Cecy had a good job with good health coverage, but it was clear that a mammogram wasn't something the doctor wanted to order.

Over the next several months, Cecy's pain and discomfort hadn't subsided. While the physical problems persisted, the worry and the mental pain only grew stronger. She finally made the decision to return to the doctor and demand a mammogram. When the results came back, Cecy was diagnosed with Stage 0 DCIS breast cancer.

As Zionna would find out one late night after recently opening her new gym, Cecy was scheduled for a mastectomy just two weeks later. Zionna sat quietly that night reading the message from Cecy, which asked only for the support and presence of her close friends. She felt shock. Cecy wanted her friends with her, but Zionna realized that Cecy was worried more about her friends and family than she was about herself. Zionna also asked herself why a message was sent to everyone so matter-of-factly.

As she sat and thought and worried, she began to understand why.

"Who wants to talk about that subject, the subject of losing your boobs?" she asks.

It isn't completely clear how much the disease progressed in the time between Cecy's first visit to the doctor and her actual diagnosis, but the point of Cecy's story, and the mission statement of Mammograms In Action, is that women, regardless of age, financial status or ability to produce a health-insurance card, should be able to be screened for breast cancer.

As she learned more about what her friend had gone through and about how difficult it is for a woman *without* money or insurance to get any help with screening, Zionna began to get angry. The helplessness was the worst part of it for her.

"Family and friends shouldn't have to go through that," she insists.

What ate away at her was knowing that there really wasn't anything she could do aside from trying to make her friend feel a little more comfortable. This is where Mammograms in Action began. And this is where CrossFit helps make things happen.

Amazing Grace Is Born

Zionna knew she needed to take some action, either that or go insane.

"I'm a fixer," she says, "I needed to do something."

She knew CrossFit was big on fundraisers. She had seen plenty of them over the years, but she realized that they were almost always geared towards men. The anger she felt over her friend's situation fueled her drive to take action and create her own fundraiser with the help of her CrossFit family.



Relying on the tightly knit CrossFit community, Munoz is using Amazing Grace to get mammograms for the women who need them.



A small event that started in Corona Del Mar, Calif., is now a global phenomenon.

During the summer of 2009, the germ of an idea began to grow in Zionna and led to an event that was nameless at the time. She explains that she got some friends together and “loaded a bunch of weights up in the truck and headed down to the beach.” This was how the “fundraiser” began. Zionna describes it as being a very organic and somewhat confusing process to get underway, but she also describes it as an absolutely amazing experience.

All throughout October, which is breast-cancer awareness month, CrossFit gyms around the globe will hold their own Amazing Grace fundraising WOD event.

The workout? “Amazing” Grace. Yep, 30 clean and jerks for time. After realizing that it was too overcast to hold the event at Corona Del Mar beach as planned, Amazing Grace was moved to a nearby gym, Shape-Up Fitness Center, also in Corona Del Mar, Calif. They didn’t really know what to expect that day, but with nearly 50 people participating they were able to raise \$2,000. The event was professionally taped and photographed, T-shirts had been printed and were handed out, and the sun poked through as well. Some impressive times were put up, making it quite a competitive event. The topper came when Coach Greg Glassman put up a matching grant, bringing the total raised to \$4,000.

The amazing thing about the matching grant, and the entire day, is that with the money raised Zionna was able to fully realize her vision of a non-profit organization dedicated to helping women avoid the horrible events Cecy had endured. Zionna is now gathering a truly staggering amount of support from the CrossFit community. As of this writing, there are already over 150 affiliates worldwide committed to sponsoring this event. She has also gathered a good number of sponsors, including Reebok, the *CrossFit Journal*, Lululemon Athletica and Spike Sales LLC, the later of whom redesigned Zionna’s website.

It’s also important to mention that the fundraiser has been named. The celebration after last year’s event took Zionna and several friends to a local bar near the gym, where after several pints someone blurted out, “Barbells for Boobs!” And it stuck. This year, the Amazing Grace—Lifting Barbells for Boobs fundraiser, the first CrossFit fundraiser geared specifically toward women, will be held across the world, and for an entire month. That’s quite an amazing journey in a short time.

All throughout October, which is breast-cancer awareness month, CrossFit gyms around the globe will hold their own Amazing Grace fundraising WOD event with 100 percent of the proceeds going to Mammograms in Action, which will “provide funding for qualified women who need screening and/or diagnostic procedures in the prevention of breast cancer.”



CrossFitters, like anyone else, go through every emotion imaginable during everyday life, sometimes even within a particularly killer WOD. While anger and frustration fueled Zionna's drive to make a difference in the lives of women and those who love them, determination and perseverance saw her project through to completion. She wants young women to be proactive with their health and their fitness. She wants women to educate themselves about their family medical history and to research what they aren't sure of. She strives to encourage everyone, especially young women, to get involved, whether it's with their health and fitness or any other important aspect of their lives. And Zionna is determined to empower young women to put their foot down and insist they get the screening and treatment they deserve.

Mammograms for the Masses

At the helm of Mammograms in Action, Zionna is already making a difference. After raising funds last year, they have already begun funding mammograms.

According to 2010 breast-cancer statistics as reported by breastcancer.org, "About 40,170 women in the U.S. were expected to die in 2009 from breast cancer, though death rates have been decreasing since 1990. These decreases are thought to be the result of treatment advances, earlier detection through screening, and increased awareness." Raising awareness and helping to provide the means for screening are the primary goals for this fundraiser.

In explaining the choice of workouts for this event Zionna says this: "Grace, to me, is one of the hardest workouts. You have to have a lot of strength and courage to finish it. Every single woman that has breast cancer is an amazing grace to me."

As the Mammograms in Action team travels to visit some of the participating boxes around the country that are participating, you can follow along with them at their newly redesigned website barbellsforboobs.org.



About the Author

Robert Wilson is the lead copywriter at Spike Sales LLC and was instrumental in developing Spike's new division, Forging Elite Marketing, an all-in-one web and marketing solution created specifically for CrossFit affiliates. Robert is a local lacrosse coach, hockey player and avid runner and lives with his wife and two kids in Southern California.



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