
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

The Learning Curve

CrossFit presents a host of new challenges to athletes who think they're "fit," but Melissa Saccoccia explains that the program both requires and rewards patience.

By Melissa Saccoccia

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Susannah Dy/CrossFit Journal

CrossFit movements can be challenging to learn, but there's magic in them when they're done properly.

I'm always on the lookout for new workouts and workout ideas. So when something really catches my eye, when something really stands out, I jump on it.

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My friend Umar is probably the most fit person I know. And, like me, he's a total insomniac. We have very similar workout styles and tastes and, for the most part, live the same lifestyle—right down to 3 a.m. wake-up calls and 5 a.m. training sessions. So when he told me that he almost threw up after the first time he went to a CrossFit class at CrossFit Toronto, I was even more excited. I love putting myself through physical torture because I love the feeling of accomplishment that goes along with it. I live for that rush. The gym, rollerblading, running, swimming—it's an addiction, and I'll do anything to satisfy it.

CrossFit was very different than what I had expected. It wasn't the most intense hour of my life, and I didn't almost throw up after. If anything, I kind of regretted not staying back at my gym after my run so I could have done my own resistance training. At least there I can measure my progress. At least there I know how to push myself, how to improve from the day/week/month/set/rep that came before. At least there I know where my limits lie, so I know how to test and push them.

Now, I'm not saying the CrossFit workout was easy. Trust me: I am quite aware of how pathetic I looked compared to other, more experienced members. But it was frustrating. I'm usually pretty good at maintaining proper form, partly because I've always been active and partly because I'm a physical person. So it burned me when I couldn't get into a position that would allow me to really push myself. It burned me that I had to start at the bottom, that I had to walk while the others ran. It burned me that I couldn't give it my all, that I couldn't and wouldn't get that high.

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Susannah Dy/CrossFit Journal

Compound movements challenge the entire body and therefore require more concentration and practice than traditional weightlifting movements seen in the Globo Gym.

I felt inadequate and incompetent—until the next day came, that is. As soon as I woke up, I could feel it. Or I couldn't feel it, I should say, because I couldn't move. Literally. My abs, my back, my biceps, my triceps, my chest were killed. Without even realizing it, I had worked muscles that even the most intense workout I do on my own can't touch. And I had worked them in a way that was completely foreign to them. I hadn't been that sore since ... since I don't even know when. Sure, I'm always completely exhausted when I leave the gym, but not like that.

Time to Learn About CrossFit

Sometimes it's easy to give up on new things before giving them a proper chance. People don't like feeling uncomfortable, out of their element, unsure, afraid, vulnerable or weak. No one likes the feeling you get when you're standing there and everyone is watching you, waiting, because you can't seem to grasp what they can so easily. No one likes the feeling you get when what you're doing goes against everything you've ever known, how you've been programmed, so much so that you cannot, for the life of you, figure out how to adapt to it, how to change, how to just let it wash over you as you go with it.

I'll let you in on what it's taken me a lifetime to learn, and what I still struggle with daily: it's not always about trying or forcing. Sometimes it's about allowing. You have to allow yourself that time to learn. You have to allow yourself the opportunity to make mistakes and the opportunity to work through them. You have to allow yourself to be patient. You have to allow yourself the chance to adapt. You have to allow yourself to be open. You have to allow yourself to be.

It's not about being able to run the fastest or lift or squat the most or stretch the deepest. It's being a jack of all trades and a master of none.



Susannah Dy/CrossFit Journal

Determination and perseverance are essential in CrossFit. Those athletes with both qualities inevitably find success and fitness.

I went to the gym the next day, as usual. I ran. I cycled. I used the elliptical. But 10 minutes into my resistance training, I left. I was bored. It was easy. I didn't feel uncomfortable or unsure or out of my element or afraid or weak. But I also knew what it was to feel all those things, to push through them and to become stronger for it. I knew what it was like to wake up the next day and feel it—to really feel it. So I got in my car and drove downtown again. And I did better: I pushed myself a bit more and I improved.

On that first day, we did some exercises on the rings. When you watch someone else demonstrating, it looks easy enough. But then when you try yourself? Holding yourself upside down with nothing but your hands to support you, doing backward and forward flips essentially in mid-air? Not easy. But, like the owner of the studio explained to me, it's our fear that makes us hesitate. Nothing else. The rings aren't going anywhere. The rings will move with us, not against us. Worst case scenario: it's not that far to the floor. All we have to do is hold on. The rest will come naturally, if not at first, then soon enough. It's not that it's hard, perse. It's just new.

It's not about being an expert at one thing. It's not about being able to run the fastest or lift or squat the most or stretch the deepest. It's being a jack of all trades and a master of none. It's about being able to perform well at all tasks, not expertly at one. It's about learning to respond and react to everything that can be presented to us. It's not just about working out. It's about being fit.



Courtesy of Melissa Saccoccia

About the Author

Melissa Saccoccia is a teacher from Toronto, Ont., but is currently living and working in the U.K. She stays fit by running, weight training, swimming, rollerblading, cycling and doing anything else that gets and keeps her heart rate up. She attributes all of her fitness-related progress to her iPod.