

the
CrossFit
JOURNAL ARTICLES

Youth Strength & Conditioning Programs

Jeremy Thiel



Currently CrossFit Central (Austin, TX) operates eight CrossFit classes, two kettlebell classes, three corporate wellness programs, and ten boot camps in seven locations, coached by six CrossFit-certified trainers. Two years ago, this wasn't the case. Then, I was just a young man in a new town with big dreams and one non-paying training client. In that two years, I have gone from training people for free to training hundreds of people, creating unique opportunities inside corporations, and making a living at training. How did I attract so many

people to my boot camps? I based the CrossFit Central Boot Camp on a high school strength and conditioning program called [PowerPlant](#).

I was first introduced to intense training in high school. I experienced power lifting, Olympic lifting, plyometric jumps, and sprints, with a few bodybuilding movements mixed in. Inside the weight room, our coach placed a trash can in all four corners and one strategically in the center of the room—just in case. This was called Off-Season Football.

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In 1999, the youth athletics program PowerPlant was started by two high school athletes who had experienced the same off-season football training. The principles of PowerPlant were based on the high-intensity training these former athletes had learned. In order to get a summer strength and conditioning program started, they contacted their alma mater's head coach and a group of upcoming lead athletes. That summer, they organized 35 teammates, and we experienced our first PowerPlant summer. In 2000, after graduating from high school, I began coaching for them in the summers.

In 2003, the founders decided to pursue other opportunities and, with the support of my high school mentor, Coach James Morton, and a few close friends, I took over PowerPlant. Coach Morton runs a first-rate program at Monterey High School in Lubbock, Texas. He is a highly talented individual who is truly invested in the future of young athletes. Coach Morton instilled this vision in me, taught me belief in myself, and helped build my leadership ability. Monterey High School was essentially the Petrie dish and the catalyst for PowerPlant. This is where we set out to determine whether or not a strength and conditioning program such as this would work. Other than my personal achievements in fitness, I had little previous experience, but I had to come up with a dynamic way to instruct and train 12- to 18-year-old kids. The workouts used kettlebells and dumbbells for swings and snatches—and back then I would throw in some biceps curls. We soon shifted our focus to building team unity; this became our focal point inside the program. The first year we ran 135 athletes through programs. The second year we added a 5A school and trained roughly 400 athletes.

The PowerPlant Summer Strength and Conditioning Program operates four days a week in the summer, combining strength and conditioning training with speed and agility work. Each day begins with a ten-minute warm-up and ends with a ten-minute cool-down. On a daily rotating basis, we do 45 minutes of lateral or 45 minutes of linear movements. Below is an example of what one week looks like.

Day 1

45 minutes: Multi-joint movements

Power clean

Bench press

Four auxiliary movements:

- Reverse sit-ups (on glute-ham developer)
- Renegade rows (with dumbbells)
- Pull-ups (kipping)
- Power skaters (single leg)

45 minutes: Speed & agility training

Linear day

Day 2

45 Minutes: Heavy lifting

Deadlift

Squat

Press

45 minutes: Speed & agility training

Lateral day



Youth Strength & Conditioning Programs (continued...)



Day 3

45 minutes: Multi-joint movements

Push jerk

Pull-ups

Dynamax medicine ball “big wheel” (partner workout)
(link to WMV video)

45 minutes: Speed & agility training

Linear day

Day 4

45 Minutes: Competition day

CrossFit workout in a competitive setting

Scores are tallied and awards are given at the end of the program

45 minutes: Speed & agility training

Lateral day



Although the workouts vary from week to week, there are elements that remain constant. This includes the warm-up, the cool-down, and how the athletes are positioned through the duration of the program. On the first day, participants are divided into units labeled North, South, East, and West. Each session of PowerPlant has up to fifty athletes divided into the four units. The athletes remain in their unit through the entirety of the program. These units compete against one another, allowing the athletes to work together as a team and to challenge opposing units. Each unit has three leaders who make up the “leadership council.” These leaders are picked by their peers to meet and set the agenda with the coaches of the camp. The athletes select these leaders to voice their opinion to the coaches. Typically there are nine to twelve kids in this position each session. The remainder of the athletes are randomly assigned to each unit. Throughout the duration of the program, coaches observe the units and are able to determine whether or not the units are balanced. It is up to the coach’s discretion to alter the units. When the registration numbers for female athletes is less than twenty, the girls join the second program. When there are twenty or more female athletes attending the program, we form a female-only session. PowerPlant also attempts to staff female coaches to accommodate the number of female athletes.

When operating a youth strength and conditioning program for a local junior high or high school sports team, the program is an extension of their off season conditioning. We take the time to learn the local coach’s system and incorporate elements of their system into the PowerPlant program. This allows the summer

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program to include fundamentals that the athletes are familiar with.

Attendance is taken on a daily basis, creating accountability for the individual athlete, as well as his or her unit. The athletes begin to encourage each other and operate as a solid force versus fragmented individuals. Each day, each athlete finds their unit and steps into their “spot” or “position” for the morning workout. This creates familiarity and a comfortable setting for each young athlete and prepares them to focus on the day’s work.

We stabilize the environment by using verbal cues and whistles. During the warm-up, the athletes get in front of a medicine ball in squat position as the coach yells, “Down! Up!” The athlete’s body obeys the command and collectively the group sounds the count: “One!” In this controlled environment, verbal cues and responses are symbolic of the group mentality as everyone operates as part of a team.

Coaches of the strength and conditioning program are well versed in the training and the goals of the program. This creates a baseline experience, so that even though each coach has his or her own personality and coaching style, the athlete always experience a similar approach and level of excellence from all coaches. By consistently following these systems, the program can push individual athletes while collectively challenging the team to work together. The result is the forming fellowship and team unity. Participants range from 12 to 18 years old, and the workouts are scaled to the age level. As always in CrossFit, the load and intensity are appropriate to the athlete’s ability.

When I initially moved to Austin after running PowerPlant programs in west Texas towns such as Lubbock, Midland, and Shallowater, I had every intention of immediately running youth programs at local Austin high schools; however, I had not yet established credibility in the Austin community. Because there was no initial interest from the high school coaches, I decided to apply the PowerPlant model to adults. I implemented the strict systems that made PowerPlant successful into a new adult boot camp program. Soon the boot camps were growing in number.

The training in a CrossFit Central boot camp is intense and will get you fit for sure. However, the focus, as in the PowerPlant program, is on building team unity. This has created a tightly-knit community inside each camp, with

strong trust and fellowship among participants. This is found both in the coach/client relationship and in the clients’ relationships with their fellow boot campers.

We are now operating PowerPlant strength and conditioning programs in several high schools in the Austin area and continue to maintain our youth programs in west Texas. The systems remain constant. We produce exceptional athletes with full range of motion and good technique. Most importantly PowerPlant creates team cohesiveness, accountability, leadership skills, and an understanding of what it takes to be a champion both on and off the field.

For more information on how we structured and systematized PowerPlant, read “Building Champions: How to Start a Youth Strength and Conditioning Program” in the March issue of the [CrossFit Kids](#) magazine.



Jeremy Thiel began Olympic weightlifting at the age of 12, power lifting at the age of 15, and kettlebell training at 22. Jeremy is the co-founder of [CrossFit Central](#) in Austin, Texas, and has over eight years of experience training large groups. He is a level-3 CrossFit trainer, an Olympic weightlifting coach, and a Trigger Point Ultimate practitioner. Jeremy has trained thousands of high school athletes through his youth strength and conditioning company, [PowerPlant Athletics](#). ([video](#))