

the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

Combining Wrestling and CrossFit Training

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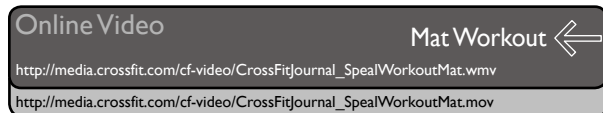
In my past four articles, I have talked about some of the basics of wrestling, such as stance, shots, takedowns, escapes, reversals, nearfalls, and pins. That was all information on performing quite specific wrestling moves. Now, the broader question is: How can and should wrestlers use CrossFit to complement our wrestling?

One of the useful things about CrossFit for wrestlers is the amount of mental toughness it can develop. Anyone can do a workout like “Murph” scaled or over the course of a day. But when you put the clock on it and maybe even a time cut-off, it becomes an entirely different thing. Another aspect of CrossFit that carries over so well to wrestling is the short and intense workouts that are its mainstay (e.g., “Fran,” “Diane,” “Helen,” and the like, which I’d say usually take somewhere around ten minutes for the average, moderately experienced CrossFitter). A wrestling match in college can last anywhere from seven to nine minutes, depending on whether it goes into overtime. It is imperative that a wrestler be able to continue pushing through a match right up until the end. If you back down at any point, you are giving your opponent the advantage both physically and mentally. CrossFit provides a similar experience and response in this regard.

Workouts done in the wrestling room are typically limited to bodyweight/gymnastics movements unless you are fortunate enough to have a weight room right next to the wrestling mat. Most of us don’t have this kind of setup, so what can we do for a WOD and when can we do it? For competitive wrestlers, skill training and mat time are the priorities in season and that’s

where your efforts should be concentrated. A short and intense bodyweight WOD would be a great way to finish off wrestling practices that involve technique drills or live wrestling work.

One example of what one might do is a wrestling-movement bodyweight workout (see the CrossFit Mat Workout video):



- 10 “In and out the windows”
- 10 “Gut-wrench cleans”
- Bear drag down
- Regular drag back
- Buddy carry down
- Wedding carry back
- Wheelbarrow push-ups down
- Wheelbarrow walk back

You could do this as either task-oriented (complete a certain number of rounds in as fast a time as possible) or time-oriented (complete as many rounds as you can in a set period of time—say, ten or fifteen minutes). The possibilities are many for this kind of workout. It just takes some creative thinking and, if you have a pull-up bar, which most wrestling rooms do, your possibilities are even greater. Another possibility (and one that doesn’t require a partner) would be something like a jumping sit-up and burpee combination. The important

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thing here is to emphasize the practice work on the mat being wrestling-specific training and use the follow-up workout at the end of the practice as a means of improving physical conditioning and, especially, mental toughness and perseverance. I know that if I could be done when I completed a certain number of rounds, I would be working super hard and fast just to get it over with at the end of a tough practice.

In the weight room, obviously, the opportunities for strength and conditioning WODs increase dramatically. Access to equipment also opens up more of the benchmark workouts, which alone can be motivating. Workouts can even incorporate some traditional conditioning exercises for wrestling, or wrestling-specific movements, within CrossFit-style parameters. One of the best things we can do in this situation, which doesn't require a mat, is handfighting or pummeling with a partner—and it doesn't necessarily have to be someone close to your weight class. Smaller guys are usually faster, which makes them different and challenging partners for the bigger guys, and the big guys have the strength and weight advantage over the smaller ones, which requires different skills and responses than usual from the small guys as well.

Here's one example of a nice combination workout you can do with a partner and good equipment access (see the Weight Room Wrestling Workout video):



Online Video

Wrestling Workout ←

http://media.crossfit.com/cf-video/CrossFitJournal_SpealWorkoutWeightroom.wmv

http://media.crossfit.com/cf-video/CrossFitJournal_SpealWorkoutWeightroom.mov

- 30 seconds: power snatches for reps (at maybe 65 pounds, or somewhat heavier for bigger, stronger athletes)
- 2 rope climbs
- 30 seconds: fast pummeling
- 30 seconds: high box jumps for reps
- 1 rope climb
- 30 seconds: battle pummeling

This workout takes just a little more time than the first period in a college-wrestling match (three minutes). It involves both anaerobic and aerobic systems and high- and low-power moves, while keeping the metabolic



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conditioning level high throughout. The power snatch, box jump, and battling involve our power aspects and the rope climbs and fast pummeling keep the heart rate high and challenge us to continue moving while we are tired. Wrestling has similar demands, in that you are always working, but there are “sprints” or “flurries” that demand bursts of power and speed in order to defend against an attack or score on an attack. Other wrestling-oriented moves you can incorporate in the weight room are shadow wrestling (be careful with the penetration steps if the flooring is not ideal) and some light drilling.

I also want to emphasize the importance of heavy lifting and strength training for wrestlers. We all know that CrossFit includes heavy lifting, and it's very important that wrestlers not neglect that part of our training. Heavy squats, deadlifts, presses, and Olympic lifts provide a critical stimulus and adaptations both in season and out of season.

In my opinion, the most important thing here is that you get creative. Limited space or equipment are no impediment to CrossFit training. You don't have to be doing “Fran” to be getting effective CrossFit workouts. Walking lunges, gut wrench cleans, pull-ups, push-ups, squats, sit-up variations, and bear drags—put together in intelligent programming—are CrossFit. They are full-body, butt-kicking functional movements, and if you do them at high intensity, you get a great response from them. Don't be afraid to explore those options both in the wrestling room and weight room. It's meant to complement and improve our wrestling, not replace it.



Chris Spealler, a.k.a. “**Speal**,” runs [CrossFit Park City](#) in Park City, Utah. He was a Division I college wrestler at Lock Haven University in Pennsylvania. Graduating in 2002, he finished two matches away from becoming an All-American at nationals. Speal now enjoys feeding the competition bug with CrossFit and is expected to make another [good showing](#) at this year's CrossFit Games.