

Good Housekeeping Matters

Spending a few minutes on Set-up, Counting, and Active Rest can yield free gains in a CrossFit workout's effectiveness and speed

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Excuse me if I seem a little obsessed with my CrossFit workspace set-up and pre-training planning, which often take me longer to do than the workout itself. You see, I'm a federal agent in an organization that I'm not legally allowed to name. And when your job involves catching bad guys who can put your life in jeopardy at a moment's notice, you better have all your i's dotted and t's crossed at all times. That means before I turn the ignition key on my vehicle in the morning, I've already spent several minutes methodically loading my weapon and setting it at same place on my belt, angled just so; I put the gun's magazines in exactly the same spot every time, so I can reach them blindfolded if need be; and I secure my rifle in the back seat exactly where it has to be. Because when a situation goes down, it's 3, 2, 1, bam: you're suddenly on auto pilot, focused on the task at hand, operating on pure muscle memory. And if there's a split-second delay while you have to feel for a slightly misplaced weapon, you not only lose efficiency, you could get shot and killed.

Okay — so you don't normally have that kind of risk in CrossFit. But if you want to get the most out of your training, you do have an identical need for good housekeeping, standardized organization, and a well-thought-out workout strategy. After all, CrossFit is all about intensity, and to maximize intensity, you have to pay attention to technique and smooth workflow between various exercises. Disrupt those for a few seconds here and there by, say, forgetting where the chalk is, searching for your water bottle, or being mispositioned for the next exercise, and your time, training, and fitness will suffer.

That's why, as a long-time CrossFit competitor and coach, I took a page from my law enforcement training and refined three simple concepts I would like to describe in detail here: proper set-up of your workout space, positive counting, and active rest. Do all three, which are outlined here in the context of the classic "Jackie" workout, and I guarantee you will make significant improvement fast.

1. Workout Space Set-Up

In early 2003, after Josh Everett and I faced off in "Fran" during a Level One Certification, Greg Glassman noted that we'd taken more time and thought to prep our work spaces than to do Fran itself, and that this was typical during advanced stages of CrossFit training. When he said what I'd already had drilled into me by my job, it inspired me to give even more thought to the way I prepared my environment and surrounding space.

For instance, I noticed in my training that I preferred to move in a linear line from one station to the next. Mentally, I was able to keep my focus and attention moving straight

ahead towards my goal of finishing the workout. As Dave Leys and I used to battle it out during the early morning "Team Six" workouts, I noticed that properly setting up the workout space could save precious seconds that in the end would make the difference between first and second place.

Let's look at how I would set up "Jackie" for myself or a client I was coaching. The first step is to put everything together as tightly as possible. I don't want to have to walk from the rower to my barbell or from my barbell to the pull-up bar. Secondly, from the moment I sit down on the rower, I want to be able to see my final station. Mentally, this allows me to always be thinking one step ahead and preparing myself for what's to come. I also like to pre-chalk the pull-up bar so I don't have to divert between stations to prep my hands. To accomplish this, I will put a thick layer of chalk on my hands and then grip the pull-up bar to exchange the chalk into the exact place I will grip during the workout.

Although 45lbs. is not a lot of weight, I still prefer to use a rack to prepare the weight in the position I want to first take it. At advanced levels of CrossFit performance, a PR (Personal Record) can come in increments of one second at a time. Taking the bar off of the rack as opposed to picking it up off the ground could easily make the difference in setting a new record. On my final repetition, I have found it is much faster and more fun to drop the weight rather than returning it to the rack.

2. Count Down

After setting up the work space, the next concept is to manage how you count repetitions. "Jackie" is a great workout to explore this concept because of the high number of repetitions required at each station. Let's start



with the 1K row. I know from previous training that it takes me 9 strong pulls on the Concept Two rower with the damper level set at 7 to row one hundred meters. In my mind when I start rowing, I count down the number of pull strokes from 9 to 1 approximately 9 times to finish the 1K. Counting down from 9 is over before it even starts, and mentally it allows me to accomplish a small goal several times in a row at one station. The same concept is repeated when I start my thrusters and pull-ups. My goal on the thrusters is to complete all 50 repetitions in a single set. However, I don't want to count from 1 to 50 during the thruster station. Instead, I might do the entire set in my mind in increments of 10. Although someone watching might be thinking, "Gee, that's a lot of reps to do all in a row" in my mind it's pretty easy because the highest number I went to might have only been ten.

I also like to count down instead of up. I have found that no matter how exhausted I might be, I can always do at least three more of an exercise. Therefore, I might count in my mind from 1 up to 7 and then for the last three repetitions, count down in my mind, "three, two, one." Clients enjoy the mind-trick as well and have been amazed to find renewed strength when I say, "You've only got three more to go!"

3. Active Rest

The 50 thrusters is a great opportunity to put another key strategic concept into practice. When going head-to-head with a training partner on a workout like "Jackie," the key to victory is to never stop to break up a set. Nothing is worse than having to put the barbell down while your partner continues to bang out repetitions. I have found that even slowing the pace and achieving what I call "Active Rest" is better than stopping completely. My definition of Active Rest is to continue to perform an exercise at a sustainable pace to allow recovery to perform the same exercise at a blistering pace.

Here is how Active Rest might be put into practice during the thruster station: When I'm fresh, I know that I can perform approximately one thruster with a 45-pound barbell every 1.5 seconds. However, I am not able to sustain that pace for 50 repetitions. Coming off the rower, I will immediately start on the thrusters. I will need to perform them at a slower cadence until I am recovered enough from the row to increase my pace. The first 10 repetitions immediately following the row would be performed at a pace of one thruster every 3 seconds. Following the top position of the thruster, I might choose to hold the barbell overhead or racked in the front squat position for an extra

second while breathing deeply. As soon as I feel myself start to recover, I will immediately increase the cadence and sustain it as long as possible. This process is repeated over and over until the entire set is completed.

Bottom line

The housekeeping and strategic concepts of Set-Up, Counting and Active Rest work independently and in harmony with each other. They work for elite and beginner CrossFitters alike. They keep you psychologically motivated and physically efficient as they speed you up and help maximize the benefits of your workout. If you implement them, don't be surprised to set new CrossFit PRs quickly. After all, everything being equal, efficiency wins.



Greg Amundson served seven years with the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office as a SWAT operator and Sniper. He currently works in Federal Law Enforcement and is a 1LT in the US Army National Guard. Greg started his CrossFit training under Coach Glassman at CrossFit Santa Cruz in 2001 and has been coaching Crossfit since 2002.