
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

A Brief Letter From a Representative of the Silent Masses

Backyard CrossFitter Aaron Carr sends a message to the affiliate community.

By Aaron Carr

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All images courtesy of Aaron Carr

Dear friends,

About three years ago, I decided I wanted to “get in better shape.” With previous fitness experience in competitive swimming, track-and-field decathlon, and some long-distance running, I was in good shape then, but I felt I could still improve my fitness level and maybe lose 10 lb.

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As I was searching for exercise equipment online, I stumbled into the Crossfit Message Board. I was curious and started to read the articles in the *Journal* describing the CrossFit philosophy and methodology. Intrigued, I watched a few videos and was very interested but rather confounded. The workouts didn't look that hard, so I thought I would give CrossFit a shot.

The Family That Works Out Together ...

My first endeavor happened to be Michael. I didn't have any equipment, so I hooked my feet under the couch for a sit-up, and my wife sat on my legs so that I could do back extensions over the side of the couch. Needless to say, when I could barely move my midsection the next day, I went back to the site, read everything I could get my hands on and watched every video available (although I was somewhat cautious about watching Nasty Girls).

I acquired a door-jamb pull-up bar and a set of adjustable dumbbells and began as a CrossFit weekend warrior. A funny thing happened: I started to enjoy my workouts. I didn't feel bored out of my wits and didn't need my MP3 player to pass the time. This might be because I was struggling for oxygen and desperately trying to avoid meeting Pukie the Clown. I was dumbfounded as I started trying movements and exercises I had never previously considered. What kind of a sadistic person created weighted pull-ups? They're hard enough without adding weight!

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My "garage gym" grew as I continued to pick up equipment on Craigslist, including a used rower (\$150), 600 lb. of weight and an Olympic bar (\$200), a Roman chair (GHD substitute, \$40), "purse" rings from Seattle Marine (gymnastics-ring substitute, \$15), and a giant tire (free). I even built my own pull-up bar.

Energized by the results of my workouts, I started trying to get other people to join me. (My wife is fairly certain I am insane, and she may have some valid evidence.) I get really funny looks as I passionately express how my last workout destroyed me and how I was able to take 4 minutes off my Fran time. I talk about CrossFit with a fervor usually reserved for cults. I know of at least nine people in five different states who have gone to a CrossFit gym and at least 100 people who have looked at CrossFit.com on my encouragement.



Hooked on CrossFit, Aaron Carr outfitted his back yard with everything he'd need to get fitter.

When my 11 year-old son came home sad one day because some of the other kids in the neighborhood could climb the walls around the park and he couldn't, I invited him to work out with me. In six months, he increased his physical capacity from zero pull-ups and 5 push-ups to 2 pull-ups and 55 push-ups in a minute. Now he jumps up the wall much faster than any of the other kids, and he walks and talks with a confidence he never had before.

Even my three-year-old joins us, and he is my intensity gauge. Whenever I pause for a break in a WOD, he is right there to yell, "3, 2, 1, go! Dad, I said, '3, 2, 1, go!'"

My workouts have become a bonding experience with my boys as they push me on in my workout and I give them workouts from the CrossFit Kids site.

"Dad, are we work outing tonight?"

Between their workout and my workout, we are usually done in about 30-45 minutes. I used to take an hour for an average run, and the only way I could participate with a member of the family would be if my son rode his bike beside me. Now that I'm getting a better workout in half the time and I'm working out with my boys, I have more time with my family on a daily basis.

I am just getting to the point where I can do some of the WODs as prescribed. I've seen an amazing improvement in my physical ability. I went from having very minimal strength overhead and not knowing what a clean and jerk was to being able to clean and jerk 10 lb. over my body weight. I went from being able to do 10 pull-ups to being able to do 23 before my grip gives out. I went from never considering a weighted pull-up to doing a pull-up with a weight of 90 lb. I had never tried a deadlift and now I can



Family time at the Carr residence.

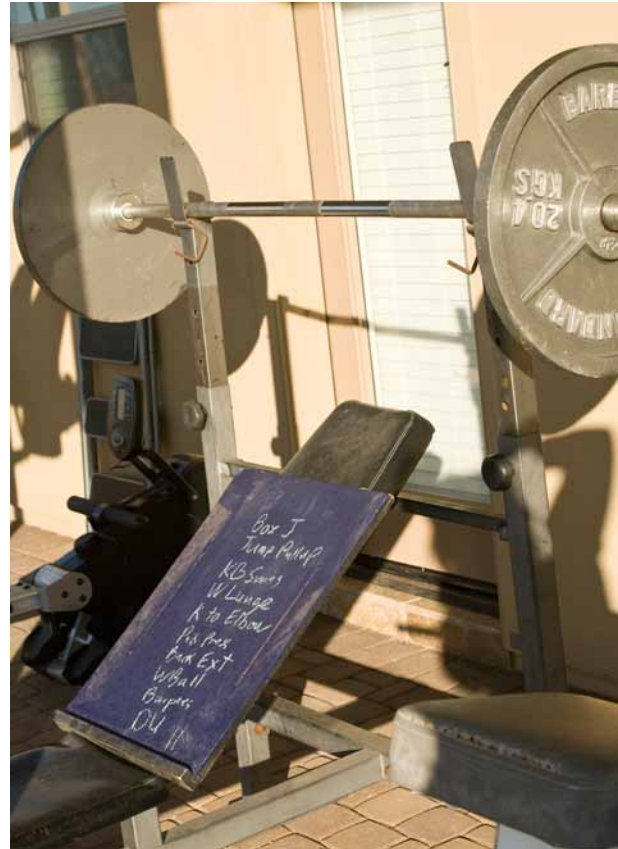
deadlift twice my body weight. I have lost 20 lb. of body weight and I can feel a shift in my body composition. Even now, improvements and new personal bests come almost every other week, and that continuous progress keeps me motivated and excited.

I remember in one of the affiliate conference videos Coach Glassman was invited to a gym where they had been following the CrossFit WODs and movements. He was less than impressed with their form and actually thought it was horrible, but their improvement in performance and capacity was surprising. I'm probably similar. I don't doubt that when I snatch it might be one of the ugliest things in existence and would probably give Coach Mike Burgener nightmares, but my capacity continues to increase even better than I could have expected.

Much of the CrossFit site and videos are geared around the elite CrossFit Games athletes, as well they should be. I love watching their performance and the amazing capacity they demonstrate. It inspires me to push myself harder to be faster and stronger each time. I am only a little embarrassed to admit that once when I saw a vertically challenged gentleman with a shaved head and big headphones—a la Chris Spealler in the 2009 Games—I got a little giddy that I might get to introduce myself. Fortunately, I realized it was a case of mistaken identity before I made too much of a fool of myself.

I am astounded to see the raw power demonstrated by Dave Lipson and Rob Orlando. I am amazed to view the athleticism and heart of Graham Holmberg, Pat Barber and Rich Froning Jr. I am dumbfounded by the capacity of Mikko Salo, and if I wasn't familiar with Finnish stoicism, I might be concerned he was a cyborg.

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***Just like you did, Carr found that a little gear
can go a long way.***

CrossFit is, from my understanding, at its essence open-source, evidence-based fitness. And while I can let individuals smarter than I am continue to refine, improve and study the metrics and methodology, I can enjoy the fruits of their passion. It is easy for me to see and appreciate the improvement in the numbers that represent my performance, but the most valuable benefits I've received from CrossFit have been qualitative differences.

I spend active time with my boys. I feel healthy, and I have the energy to do whatever I want without being sidelined. I can play in the turkey bowl and keep up with my brothers who are 13 years younger than me and high-school star athletes (their opinion is that CrossFit is helping me devolve back to a gorilla state). I can go waterskiing, snow skiing or compete with the scouts in their triathlon and enjoy it all without debilitating soreness the next day. Most of my soreness now comes from the WOD I did the day before, like when JT destroys my triceps.

CrossFit will likely add years to my life from the health and fitness perspective, but in the here and now, CrossFit is adding life to my years as I have the physical capacity to perform and compete to my heart's desire.

Pass the Kool-Aid

A huge percentage of the population lacks meaningful fitness. We hear in the news about the income gap and the wealth gap. But, I see a much larger gap in the health and fitness landscape. There may be a performance gap between firebreathers and your average CrossFit athlete, but from my perspective, that gap pales in comparison to the gap between a CrossFitter and the average couch potato. There are other fitness programs that have components of the constantly varied motion and high-intensity intervals, but they miss the broad time and modal domains aspect.

The affiliates and trainers do a visibly impressive job, as you can see in everything ranging from the performances of elite Games athletes to the testimonials of the cancer survivor on an affiliate website. But there is also a large population, like me, that will never get to work out next to a Games competitor or even be in the same room as a firebreather. I enjoy the five-step walk to my exercise area in my back yard and am far too attached to working out with my boys to likely attend an affiliate on a frequent basis. But the beauty of CrossFit's open-source fitness is that whether we work out in an elite gym or a makeshift backyard gym, we all progress and improve. You continue to build and improve the tsunami-like growth of forging elite fitness.

I am excited to have witnessed the growth in the Games and how far they have come and how quickly they are growing and expanding. I will continue to drink the Kool-Aid and share what I have with people I meet. In the meantime, until we get to meet in person, know that you inspire the silent masses and that some of the people showing up at your affiliate are sent from some of the silent backyard CrossFit addicts.

Sincerely,

Aaron Carr



About the Author

Aaron Carr is a financial planning manager with Phoenix Children's Hospital, with a master's in accounting from Brigham Young University. He volunteers as a Cubmaster and officially considers himself a CrossFit junkie.