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# THE CrossFit JOURNAL

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## Beyond the CrossFit Games: Part 1

Emily Beers explains why human beings are more interesting than elite athletes.

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By **Emily Beers** CrossFit Vancouver

May 2011

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**Dec. 7, 2010**

I am sprawled on the floor holding my right leg.

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"Are you OK? Is there anything we can do?" ask a handful of people who have suddenly crowded around me.

"Yes, can you Google 'Achilles ruptures' for me? Find out what the surgery is like and how long the rehab is," I say.

"Relax, Em. You don't know what you've done yet. It might not be anything serious," a friend says to me.

I hope he is right, but I know what I've done. The unmistakable pop. The squishy tendon. I know I have ruptured my Achilles. I know I am done for the season.

I feel like my world has just crumbled beneath me.

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### March 2011

One week. One workout. Nine rounds and 25 double-unders.

Those are the numbers that have just launched Langley, B.C., native Robert Perovich onto the CrossFit map. His score ranks him fifth in the world. But nobody has ever heard of him.

His name quickly becomes a buzzword in Canada West.

"Who the hell is this Robert Perovich dude?" people keep asking me.

"All I know is that he's really good-looking," says Dan Rogers, last year's Canadian Regional champion.

"I think he's a male model," says two-time individual Games competitor Andrew Swartz.

"He's new around here, and I don't know too much about him yet, but as far as I can tell he's the real deal," says Chris Harrison, owner of CrossFit Lions in North Vancouver, B.C.

If my own memory serves me correctly, Perovich is the guy who showed up at my Level 1 last December. He didn't yet know how to do a kipping pull-up, but he still managed to bust out a three-minute or so Fran with strict pull-ups.

As the media director of the Canada West region, I am urged to get on this dude ASAP. So I call him up. We chat a bit about the workout. I discover he is indeed a male model, one of the most highly paid ones, to be specific. And athletically, he is obviously the real deal.

We talk a bit about the second workout. He sounds stoked.

I wish him good luck, and that's that. Overall, the conversation isn't particularly enthralling. I hang up and I still don't really know anything about him.

### February 2010

I compete at the B.C. Sectional competition. I win two of the workouts. I come second in the other two. Being an ex-university rower, I'm thrilled that the last workout of the first day is a 2-kilometer row. I don't push myself very hard, just enough to win the event. My score is a good 20 seconds lower than my personal best from my rowing days.

I get off the erg unfazed. I learn absolutely nothing about myself. I don't grow as a person. In fact, I may have digressed after sectionals. CrossFit is about winning, and I take my goals up a notch. My new CrossFit goal is to win regionals and compete at the Games.



CrossFit Vancouver

***In December 2010, a ruptured Achilles tendon forced Emily Beers to the sidelines (sort of).***



CrossFit Vancouver

*Beers won the B.C. Sectional in 2010 but described her performance at the Canada Regional as a "meltdown."*

### May 2010

I am having a total meltdown at regionals. I'm out for dinner with my crew, stressing about the weekend. I spend more time scrolling the standings on my friend's iPhone than I do focusing on the workouts.

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**I screw up a couple of workouts and fail to qualify for the Games. I'm devastated.**

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I screw up a couple of workouts and fail to qualify for the Games. I'm devastated. I fly back to Vancouver. My endlessly helpful teammates put up with my erratic emotions. They know what I need: they get me drunk on the plane and take me to the ocean to scream at the top of my lungs.

I start thinking about next year's Games, what I have to do differently to make sure I get there in 2011. CrossFit is about getting to the fuckin' Games, damnit.

### November 2010

I do my first 200-lb. squat clean and my first sub-10 minute Zoe. I am sure I am increasing my work capacity with every passing day and can't wait to compete this year. CrossFit is undoubtedly about making it to the Games.



CrossFit Vancouver

*Many CrossFitters dream of winning the Games, but at its most basic level, CrossFit is about making people fitter.*

### December 2010

As I lie in bed with my leg elevated, on painkillers, fresh out of surgery, unable to let my leg dangle vertically for even a second without a surge of pain, all I want is to successfully shuffle to the toilet without pain and to climb into the bathtub without slipping.

CrossFit is now about having a body that functions in life.

### January 2011

I climb out of my wheelchair and attempt to demo a push jerk to my client. I stumble. I call another coach to demonstrate and resume my seat in the wheelchair.

CrossFit is about getting off my crutches. CrossFit is about being able to walk again so I can grocery shop and carry a coffee by myself.

### Monday, April 4, 2011

I check my inbox.

There's another e-mail from Perovich.

"So, here it goes. I have bad news. Like you, I have ruptured my Achilles. Fuck! While doing the WOD, going on to my 11<sup>th</sup> round on the box jumps with 4:32 left, my second box jump felt like I landed on something, and a pain entered my heel of my foot. I thought it was my ankle, but so painful ...," he writes.

My heart immediately goes out to him. I can feel the devastation in his e-mail. I feel his pain.

We write back and forth a few times.

"Does the surgery hurt? What's it like?" he asks.

"No, it doesn't hurt. You'll be in and out super fast. Mine took less than 40 minutes. I woke up and felt great ... I woke up hungry, actually," I write.

I tell him he'll be on the mend in no time and send him a video of me doing a wheelchair workout to show him there is still lots he can do with this injury.

"Thanks for your kind words. You have helped me a lot, and seeing you in the wheelchair in that video will make me go and get one and head to the track to do some cardio," he writes.

### April 5, 2011

I look through the e-mail thread between Perovich and me.

My e-mails with a pre-injured Perovich from just a week ago are dull and apathetically brief, more or less logistical e-mails about double-unders and deadlifts.

Who he was as a person, I had no clue.

Our e-mails since his injury are much different.

I now know that the 34-year-old Perovich, a father of two children, is a passionate, sincere, vulnerable, full-of-life human being.

I can picture him watching the video of his last box jump over and over, "100 times," says an emotional Perovich, his eyes welling with tears each time we watches.

I know that Perovich drove the 25 miles home with a torn Achilles, with a ball of muscle in his leg, replaying the box jump over and over in his mind. He was so upset that he didn't even notice the pain.

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**I know that Perovich drove the 25 miles home with a torn Achilles, with a ball of muscle in his leg, replaying the box jump over and over in his mind.**

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I know that he quit modelling, a career where he made easy money—but which forced him to leave his wife and kids for months at a time—to challenge himself physically every day as a CrossFitter.

I know that Perovich gives a shit, that he is planning on helping judge his teammates during the next four weeks of the Open.

He speaks highly of his friends in the CrossFit community.

“They’re real people, not some back-stabbing fashionista. Although some people in fashion are nice, 95 percent suck,” he adds.

I know that he is committed to the sport. He is already talking about his rehab, about getting back into the sport he loves.

“The competition is what keeps me going every day. It’s my drug,” he writes in an e-mail where he opens up in a way he hasn’t normally been able to.

“I needed to be careful (in the modeling industry) because all the shit that people would spread, so I learned not to talk and just to listen,” he continues.

“It feels good to be able to do this, so thanks ... . It’s strange how outcomes in life invite new people into your life.”



Courtesy of Rob Perovich

**Robert Perovich (left) traded high-fashion photographs for CrossFit photos used to check for form faults.**



Courtesy of Rob Perovich

*Perovich faces a period of rehab after his injury, but you can bet he'll be back.*

"Oh and yes, I have a ball in my lower calf and it fuckin' hurts. I need some wine or something," he says.

One week ago, all I knew about Perovich was that he's a great athlete who happens to be marketable in a photogenic sense. Big fuckin' deal.

Today, there I was e-mailing back and forth with a friend in a hospital gown who was about to have surgery.

"I wasn't nervous until now," he wrote from his iPhone, just moments away from being taken into the operating room.

I'm not saying it's a good thing Perovich got injured. I wouldn't wish that on anyone. In fact, I prescribed that he feel sorry for himself for a bit and let out primal scream.

"Go to the beach, stand on the edge of the dock and scream as loud as you can," I said.

But these things have a way of bringing people together, and of teaching us things we wouldn't otherwise learn.

I'm not sure why Perovich got injured, but I know there has to be a reason.

There was for me.

#### **April 6, 2011**

Physically speaking, I'm about 25 percent worse than I was in November 2010.

I still can't run. I still can't jump, but I'm ecstatic to be able to work out and feel my daily high.

I look over and see my dad, whom I just got into CrossFit this month, doing a ring dip. Although he pretends he's not that into it yet, my mom tells me she caught him doing a pistol in the living room. I couldn't be happier when I see him, at the age of 58, ripping out pull-ups.

I used to do this because I happened to be good at it. Now, although I'm still a gimp doing one-legged burpees, I actually enjoy the freedom a workout gives me, a freedom I didn't know existed a year ago.

I'm not saying I still don't think about the Games. I would do anything to be a part of the competition season this year.

But it's no longer why I go to the gym.

I'm still planning on working my ass off in an attempt to get to the Games in 2012. But if I don't make it, you won't find me sitting on the ledge of the conveyer belt at the Vancouver airport after regionals, half-drunk, screaming a high-pitched screech that echoes deep into the baggage claim.

*Editor's note: After keeping herself in the competition by completing at least one rep in each of the first three Open workouts, Emily managed 99 reps in Workout 11.4. It was the second-best score posted by any athlete in Canada West. The next week, she posted a top-five regional score in Workout 11.5.*



### About the Author



CrossFit Vancouver

Emily Beers finished a master's degree in journalism at the University of Western Ontario in the spring of 2009. Upon graduation, she worked as a sportswriter at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games, where she covered figure skating and short-track speed skating. Currently, she hosts [Bathroom Graffiti](#), a not-always-PG publication of the CrossFit Vancouver School of Fitness.

*As an athlete and CrossFitter, Beers started out as a gymnast, competing to the national level. After growing too tall for gymnastics, she played NCAA Division 1 basketball for the University of Idaho, then returned home and played for the University of British Columbia. After three years of playing basketball, she started rowing, competing at the varsity level at the University of Western Ontario for two years. While trying to make the National Rowing Team in 2009, she discovered CrossFit and became utterly addicted. Soon, CrossFit was meant to be a way to cross-train for rowing but became her greatest passion. She moved back to Vancouver in September 2009 and found CrossFit Vancouver, where she now both trains and works as an apprentice coach.*

*In her first season competing in CrossFit she won the B.C. Sectional competition in 2010. Regionals were less kind to her, but that's only made her more determined to get to the Games. She had her sights set on 2011 but ruptured her Achilles tendon in December 2010. Recovering from Achilles surgery has given her more time to pursue her passion for journalism. It has also allowed her to be a part of the 2011 CrossFit Games in a different capacity: she is the Canada West media director for CrossFit HQ.*