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Competitive Bodybuilder Becomes CrossFitter... and Wins

Josh Bunch



Eighteen hours. That's how much time I spent physically working out each week before finding CrossFit. No joke—I used a calculator. "Why?" you ask. Well, this was all I knew. I am a competitive bodybuilder. I show off muscles in front of a crowd and judges, and let them critique me, ridicule me, or applaud me. It depends on the day. I do this for no other reason than that I like being judged. I like doing things that others may not ever want to do, and I like a sport that is entirely mine—if I screw up, it's my fault; nobody else gets blamed, and I like that responsibility.

If you are not aware of how a bodybuilder prepares for a show, keep reading, if only out of sheer morbid curiosity. You can at least laugh at me. How I prepared may be different than how some others do, but generally it's similar. First, I began dieting about 16 weeks out from the show at

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a bodyweight of 220-230 lb., with 14-15% body fat. (Just as a reference, I'm 5' 8" tall.) I would perform lots of moderate pace, long duration cardio two or, sometimes, three times a day. These tedious sessions lasted anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour. Toss in a daily weight-room workout lasting about an hour, and you have one pissed-off pre-contest bodybuilder who would step on your throat for a pizza. I used to think that was the price you had to pay to compete.

Diet was, and still is, the deciding factor. My caloric intake is meticulously logged and weighed. It may differ slightly from day to day, but is generally around 3900-4100 calories per day. Read it again: it for real says 4000+ calories. I can eat all that and still get to a caliper-measured body fat of 5%. The secret is activity. You can support this level of activity if the calories are there. You can't really over-train with this methodology—you just under-eat. I have trained with athletes consuming 8000+ calories per day, and they were super lean and ripped out of their minds. I will say it now, just so you know that I know: these athletes were all show and no go—including myself.

When I employed these techniques I was strong—well, kind of. I was what I thought was strong. I would do marathon workouts of each body part, attacking each and every muscle with 30-40 sets. I would also perform almost three hours of aerobic activity each day, but if I

did "Fran" I would stroke out. I would continue at this pace right up to the week before a show. At that point I would not do a lot of anything, due to inflammation and water retention from working out in general. I would begin to manipulate my water and sodium intake until I was super dry and ripped out. Then I would get onstage—and lose. It's irrelevant which place I got, because it wasn't number one. Who the hell gets up in the morning and says, "Damn, if I could just be second today I would be happy"? This went on and on until one day my best friend said, "You are going to love this new site I found."

"Is this really free?" That was my first thought when I started looking at the wealth of information just given away. Sure enough, CrossFit.com was free, and still is. My second thought was, "Why the hell you would give this away when there is money to be made?" Obviously, I was looking at it through the eyes of a guy who had been personal training out of a big box for the last six years. After being kind of pissed off that I hadn't found this earlier, I started studying everything I could about CrossFit and its philosophy. I wanted to know how I could benefit from this, and pass it on to my clients. I will save the entire story for another time. Suffice it to say that about two years later I opened my own personal training studio, which became a CrossFit Affiliate two months after opening. I was certified about a month before that.



Sounds great, I know. Sad thing is, I still didn't CrossFit. It was good enough for my clients, but not for me. After all, I'm a bodybuilder, and there is no way CrossFit builds big show muscles, right? I had lost show after show doing it my way, or at least the way people had been doing it for years. I loved watching my clients do their workouts and kick ass at them, but became jealous because I couldn't get in on the fun. I just kept doing the same thing, expecting different results.

Inevitably, I began to theorize. Why not modify CrossFit to fit a bodybuilder? Last April I began my first real attempt at CrossFit/bodybuilding. I soon gave in, and leaned almost entirely on CrossFit programming. The programming, however, was my own. For instance, if legs were on the bodybuilding agenda, I would program my morning workout as a met-con, with upper body dominant weightlifting movements. In the afternoon, I focused on bodybuilding movements for acute muscular hypertrophy in my legs.

I believe CrossFit is easily the best program ever manufactured, but I also believe it's foolish to ignore any knowledge you can glean from other camps out there, be it bodybuilder, swimmer, runner, whatever. Everybody's got something to say—might as well listen. I enlisted the help of CrossFit-style self-programmed workouts for their all-out hormonal response, fat burning effects, and incredible intensity that keeps everything fun. CrossFit workouts stimulate the necessary hormones to get big by moving large loads quickly over long distances, incomparable intensity, and constantly varied activity through every realm of fitness. But to get those bicep peaks, the teardrop of the vastus medialis, the lateral head of the deltoid, I incorporated purely aesthetic movements with no adherence to functionality.

After CrossFit workouts I would perform non-functional isolation movements. These workouts typically only lasted about ten minutes or so, and only involved one or two exercises, 6-12 reps for two sets, each as heavy as possible. My gym time was cut by more than 50%, I felt great, and I looked different, but a better kind of different.

While I overhauled my training, I remained on about the same diet I had been using for my previous shows. I continued my 4000+ calorie diet of fish, turkey, eggs, and oats, with about 200 grams of greens per meal. This calorie count is far more than the zone prescribes, and yet I was super lean. In fact I leaned out quicker than ever, and I was only doing half the activity. I normally remove all starches four weeks out from a show, but

with this new experiment I was able to keep starches in until five days prior to the show. So, not only did I get to do less work, I got to eat more food.

For myself, and others with similar goals, I believe we need to adhere to a bigger, cleaner calorie count than the zone provides. The food, all unprocessed, must of course be weighed and measured. Tons of greens, lots of super-lean protein, little starch and no sugar, not even fruit. It must be eaten by the clock, and divided into six or eight meals a day. The goal is maintaining proper insulin levels, adding (or at least retaining) muscle, and staying super functional.

On June 28, 2008, I won the Great Lakes Legacy Fitness and OCB Bodybuilding Regional Qualifier in Cincinnati, OH. (I qualified for an international competition in August, but was unable to attend as my best friend was having a baby. This was a way cooler experience than parading around on stage in your underwear.) I don't know how many athletes out there have tried this approach as methodically as I have, but I have to tell you it worked, and it worked well. I took my sport at the top of the pyramid, did mainly CrossFit workouts, and dominated my competition.





lifting program along with the .com workouts, because there isn't a whole lot that's cooler than snatching and cleaning correctly.

As for bodybuilding, I only target my upper chest and legs for purely aesthetic work. I believe any CrossFitting bodybuilder would do well to do the same. It may be entirely non-functional, but the extra work is necessary in those areas if you want to win shows or just want to have big muscles for their own sake.

Even if we view bodybuilding as non-functional, inefficient, or just useless, it doesn't mean everyone else does. Bodybuilders never claim to be functional. They just claim to look good. With proper education, I believe we can give them both: big muscles **and** functionality.



Now, you could argue it's not a sport because you get judged. Or, there is no time element so there is no consistent tool of measurement. Do whatever the hell you want with it after you put in 16 weeks of prep time to look cute for less than an hour on stage, and then tell me it's not a sport. Or better yet, don't drink any water for two straight days, then flex every muscle at once for minutes on end, but make sure you're smiling when you start cramping.

I believe the reason I won wasn't just being a little leaner than at previous shows. It was the musculature, which had a different look after CrossFit. At below 5% body fat you see a lot of stuff. I looked denser. I believe CrossFit not only makes you stronger, but it makes your body **look** stronger. This opinion was consistent with everyone who had seen me compete previously. Even nationally revered bodybuilding trainers, to whom I go for posing practice, all said the same thing: "The muscles just look better."

Since I won the show, I came to a final realization: CrossFit just isn't the same if you're choosing your own programming. You will inevitably do what you like, and that's what I was doing, all the while using bodybuilding as a crutch to get out of the stuff I didn't want to see come out of the hopper. Starting July 1st I began doing .com WODS entirely. Let's face it. There is no damn way I would ever run more than 400 meters if someone wasn't making me do a 5k. I also began doing an Olympic

Josh Bunch has been the owner of [Practice CrossFit](#), a CrossFit affiliate in Troy, Ohio for nearly a year. Prior to finding CrossFit, Josh worked for over eight years at a local big box gym in the area. Josh has been immersed in the fitness field for nearly 9 years, and only plans on getting bigger. Josh holds ACE, Parrilio Performance, and most importantly, CrossFit Level 1 certifications.

At 28, Josh has been a competitive bodybuilder for 5 years. His future plans include competing in as many competitions as possible, opening at least 1 more CrossFit affiliate, and finishing the fitness/motivational book he is writing.

