
THE CrossFit LIFE

CrossFit at 60

Craig Nelson shares his views on CrossFit after discovering the program at age 60.

By Craig Nelson

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All images: Hannah Catherine Wydeven

Birthday milestones never meant much to me—30, 40, 50 years old—bah, who cares? But 60? That's a serious number. One can no longer claim to be middle-aged, and Social Security, Medicare and other indices of old age are looming realities. Thus, as my 60th birthday approached, I found myself contemplating how I could whip my body into shape and get an additional decade or two of use out of it.

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Craig Nelson not quite succeeding in snatching 105 lb.

I wasn't exactly a couch potato ... more like a treadmill potato. I had for years, almost daily, dutifully descended to my basement, climbed onto my treadmill and cranked out as many miles as I could endure. It used to be 5 to 6 miles a day. And it used to be at a rate of 7 to 7.5 miles per hour. Now it was 3 miles at less than 6 mph. My waistline was expanding, my endurance diminishing and my strength eroding.

I found TwinTown CrossFit primarily because it was located two blocks from my home. I talked to Teddy Kim, the owner, who told me his own before-and-after story. Before: 5 foot 7, 245 lb., pre-diabetic, micro-fractures in his feet from carrying all that weight. After: the chiseled hunk of granite I saw before me. I did the baseline workout, and, of course it was brutal. Sign me up.

That was six months ago. Since then I've celebrated my 60th birthday, and except for a 3-to-4-week injury timeout, I've been a conscientious CrossFitter, getting in at least four WODs per week. It's not even worth commenting on whether this has produced results. What else could

possibly happen when an out-of-shape person subjects himself to, say, 90 WODs in six months' time? It would take a very deliberate effort to not achieve significant changes. No, it's not the same as being 30 again, but I can say this—at 60 years of age, I am stronger than I've ever been in my life.

Joining CrossFit has represented two shocks to my system, one physical and one cultural. The physical shock is obvious enough—burpee pull-ups, handstand push-ups, Fight Gone Bad—what sort of sinister mind comes up with this stuff?

And then there's the cultural shock. I haven't exactly lived in a cave these last 40 years, but I am old enough to have gotten drafted during the Vietnam War. For me, the music died with Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison and Janis Joplin. It's been fascinating spending all this time in this social setting—a very intimate social setting—in the company of my fellow CrossFitters, most of whom are young enough to be my children.



Learning the snatch at age 60 from coach Teddy Kim.

Both shocks have ultimately been very rewarding. There's been only one downside (as noted by my wife) that I've noticed: my already vestigial fashion sense has decayed even further. The example set by my fellow male CrossFitters has reinforced my own belief that a ratty T-shirt, shorts and sneakers constitutes an actual wardrobe.

And so, let me share with you a few things

Observations, Lessons and Questions After Six Months of CrossFit

1. If you've not done any sit-ups, push-ups or pull-ups in a quarter-century, they will have become very, very difficult.
2. I have never uttered the phrase "That was a lot easier than I expected" with respect to a WOD.
3. Women have gotten a lot stronger since I last observed the gym scene.
4. My own mode of exertion is an open-mouthed, slack-jawed gasp that looks like a bottom-feeding carp.
5. I'll never take my shirt off in the gym.
6. I'm really good at one thing: holding a plank. What's that about?
7. It doesn't look like Ella Fitzgerald will make the gym's playlist anytime soon.
8. The interest in talking about CrossFit by people who don't do CrossFit is quite limited.

9. There is a unique satisfaction to be had from performing a kipping pull-up.
10. An F-bomb will add 2 to 3 percent to any 1RM.
11. Do I need a tattoo?
12. The intersection of people-who-do-CrossFit and people-who-are-not-sore is an empty set.
13. RX is for sissies. (No, wait, I dreamt that.)
14. CrossFit wardrobe expenses are extremely low: ratty T-shirt, sneakers, shorts (laundry whenever prudent).
15. Double-unders require a specific lobe of the brain which I appear to be lacking.
16. I am still employable as a ditch-digger, stevedore or loading-dock worker should such become necessary.

And the most important thing I've learned after six months of CrossFit: There are very few problems that cannot be solved by simply making sure that you get your ass back far enough in a squat.

