
THE CrossFit LIFE

Politics and Pull-Ups

Mike Brown is using his CrossFit work ethic and business philosophy in a campaign to win a seat in the Iowa Statehouse. Hilary Achauer reports.

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All images: Courtesy of Mike Brown

Mike Brown starts every weekday before the sun is up, heading over to CrossFit Des Moines to coach the 5:30 a.m. class. After teaching classes for a few hours, Brown throws on a sportcoat and a tie and spends the rest of the day shaking hands, meeting with advisors or—his least favorite task—fundraising.

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Brown is running for state representative of Iowa, his first try at a political office. This former Air Force pararescue jumper owns and runs two CrossFit affiliates (CrossFit Des Moines and CrossFit Waukee), and he might seem an unlikely politician. However, he says it's exactly his experiences as a CrossFit athlete and affiliate owner that inspired him to run for office and serve as the foundation of his political message.

Brown graduated from the University of Iowa in 2002 and immediately enlisted in the Air Force. Always one to seek out a challenge, Brown joined the ranks of the pararescuemen, the most highly trained and versatile personnel recovery specialists in the world, serving alongside other U.S. and Allied special-operations forces.

Brown discovered CrossFit while stationed in Afghanistan in 2005, and he continued to do CrossFit workouts in his garage when he finished his service in 2008 and worked as an EMT. A friend encouraged him to start his own CrossFit affiliate, but Brown didn't have enough money to get the business off the ground.

The idea took hold in his mind, though, and Brown started gathering second-hand equipment from garage sales. Soon he was training friends in his garage, using milk jugs and sandbags and learning technique from videos he found online. In January 2010, Brown made the leap and opened his first CrossFit affiliate: CrossFit Des Moines. He poured his heart and soul into the business.

"I worked really hard, was passionate, and the word spread. About two years later I opened a second location," Brown said.

Brown opened his second affiliate in December 2011. Running two CrossFit affiliates would be enough for most people, but Brown says he's happiest when he's busy. Running for office was something he had been contemplating, and in February 2012 he decided to take the plunge. There was an open seat for state representative of Iowa because the incumbent resigned, so Brown decided it was time.

"I felt that I would be a good leader for the community," Brown said.

Although Brown was busy running his affiliates, he felt that it was exactly his experience as a small-business owner—particularly a CrossFit affiliate owner—that would make him a good candidate for public office.



The Mike Brown WOD: secure votes for time.



Suit off, game on!

"I built a business from my garage," Brown said. "I created seven part-time jobs, and I believe that if you work hard, you will be successful. Greg Glassman says that the best will rise to the top. He doesn't tell us how to run our affiliates. The market will decide. The customer will decide."

Running for office is something completely new for Brown.

"Each day, I'm outside of my comfort zone," he said. "But given my paramedic and CrossFit training, I'm ready for anything that comes my way. Whether I have to call and ask people for money or stand up in front of a group of lobbyists, I do well, because even though it's out of my comfort zone, I can still do it."

When asked about the hardest part of running for office, Brown said, "The biggest challenge is finding time to spend with my wife!"

Brown and his wife are actually expecting their first child in July—just when his campaign will be heating up. Other than keeping peace at home, Brown said the other challenge has been asking people for money.

"In the world of CrossFit, you strive for excellence and trust that the money will follow," Brown said. "It's different in politics. You have to ask people for money."

Brown not only draws inspiration from CrossFit for his platform of small business and American exceptionalism, but he also draws strength from his own CrossFit workouts.

"My CrossFit WODs keep me sane," Brown said. "I couldn't do this if I didn't work out."