

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

January 2013

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THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Caveman Vs. Zone

E.M. Burton prepares an athlete's meaty dream dinner, then shows how to put it into the Zone.

By E.M. Burton

January 2013



All images: E.M. Burton

"We're all just one meal away."

Someone said this to me early in my training. I found the idea quite heartening. No matter what you ate yesterday, you're only one meal away from having balanced blood-sugar levels. It was oddly reassuring and hinted at the idea of redemption.

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The idea that each and every meal could be so important struck me. I wondered if we thought that way more often, wouldn't we put in more effort to make each meal special? This was all more of a daydream, really, and might have stayed that way if I hadn't started making videos about meals.

Each episode in the Kitchen Disaster Film series is based on taking someone's absolutely favorite, drop-dead-tomorrow-last-supper-tonight meal and—if necessary, and with slight modifications—bringing it in line with CrossFit nutritional guidelines for athletic performance.

And yet, while several of the videos have appeared on CrossFit.com and in the *CrossFit Journal*, only one of the published videos has retained that special-meal characteristic of the series' original intent. This Kitchen Disaster Film episode is true to original intent and shows how you can tweak someone's favorite meal to make it adhere to CrossFit's nutrition guidelines.

Where's the Beef?

I had already made about five episodes in the series when I asked a friend—let's call him a "power athlete"—what his all-time perfect meal would be.

"Sixteen ounces of bone-in fillet, grilled coconut and a glass of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir," he said without missing a beat. The devilish smile on his face exposed the fact that he knew all too well that it would be impossible to balance this last supper without really cheating on the Zone blocks.



The makings of a power athlete's dream dinner ... excluding the vegetables.



Increase the veggies and decrease the quantity of meat to make the meal Zone-friendly.

Not about to shy away from that challenge, I made the meal and the video anyway, and I made it with a suggestion as to how one might go about preparing a meal much like this while keeping within the CrossFit nutritional guidelines.

Caveman Vs. Zone: [.MOV](#)

Pure Paleo-Style Dinner

Per person:

16-oz. bone-in fillet

Young coconuts, raw

Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

Salt and pepper

Heat your grill to high. Salt and pepper both sides of the beef. Place one side down on the grill without moving it for 4 minutes. Turn the meat once and grill for 4-6 minutes, depending on thickness. Remove fillet to a warmed oven (150-200 F) for 10 minutes.

Reduce heat on the grill to medium-low and cook the coconut in a grill pan. Stir frequently, watching for the flesh to caramelize. Remove from heat when it is golden brown.

Old or young coconuts? Your preference. I would suggest that the flesh of young coconuts has a more refined taste.

A Five-Block Fillet Dinner With Grilled Coconut and Pinot Noir

Per person:

5-oz. bone-in fillet or top sirloin (5 protein blocks)

Flesh of about 2½ young coconuts, raw (approximately 5 blocks of fat)

3 blocks of vegetables for grilling (peppers, squash, broccoli, cauliflower, etc.) (3 carbohydrate blocks)

8-oz. glass of pinot noir (2 carbohydrate blocks)

Olive oil, salt and pepper

Heat your grill to high. Salt and pepper both sides of the beef. Place one side down on the grill without moving it for 3-4 minutes, depending on thickness. Turn the meat once and grill for 3-5 minutes, again depending on thickness. Remove fillet to a warmed oven (150-200 F) for 10 minutes.

Reduce heat on the grill to medium-low, cooking the coconut in a grill pan. Stir frequently, watching for the flesh to caramelize. Remove from heat when it's golden brown.

Raise heat to medium, toss grilling vegetables with a small amount of olive oil, salt and pepper, and grill, tossing them in the grill pan for 5-6 minutes, stirring frequently. Top with grilled coconut.



About the Author

*E.M. Burton is a **CrossFit Journal** staff writer.*

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Make Your Life Better: Get Horizontal

Sleep expert Rowan Minnion suggests getting more sleep could pay off in PRs.
Emily Beers reports.

By Emily Beers

January 2013



Dave Re

When it comes to getting to bed on time and staying in dreamland long enough each night, it seems many of us suffer from retrospective bias.

Retrospective what?

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Retrospective bias is a term used in psychology to explain the phenomenon that describes why people tend to remember the past differently than it actually played out, often by romanticizing it into something it wasn't.

It might explain why people continue to booze hard: they forget how bad a hangover feels. And it could be the reason the elderly often refer to the "good" old days.

Right, the "good old days"—when everyone died of tuberculosis.

Retrospective bias is probably also the reason people continue to order sweet-and-sour pork.

In the case of sleep, we often forget how lousy we feel when we don't get enough. So our retrospective bias keeps us up at night staring at computer screens and TVs, getting second and third winds when our bodies should be sleeping. All of a sudden it's 2 a.m. and the chances of getting six—let alone eight or nine hours of sleep—are slim to none.

In the case of sleep, we often forget how lousy we feel when we don't get enough.

But if we drill it into our minds that proper sleep does more important things than just make us feel refreshed in the morning, maybe we'd make it a bigger priority.

Much of the science of sleep is still unknown, but there are emerging theories that connect good sleep not only to overall health but also to improved athletic performance.

Here's what you need to know about sleep.

Rowan Minnion: Sleep Expert

Rowan Minnion is a sleep expert. And not one of those poser experts, like the salesman trying to sell you a pillow-top mattress. Minnion is an exercise physiologist who studied at both the University of Glasgow and Iowa State University. Upon graduation, he ran the sleep lab at Imperial College in London, England, where he worked as a research scientist.



Courtesy of Rowan Minnion

Rowan Minnion, sleep expert.

Minnion explained that the science of sleep is complicated.

"Sleep is a big mystery to most," he said.

Despite the unknowns, research shows there's an obvious connection between sleep and physical recovery. Rowan believes this mostly has to do with hormonal changes that occur in your body during the night. Three hormones Minnion said are especially connected with sleep are growth hormone, leptin and the ever-dreaded cortisol.

Sleep and Growth Hormone

Growth hormone aids in bone and muscle recovery. Without it, your body just doesn't repair as well.

So what does this have to do with sleep?

Minnion explained: "Growth hormone is released when you sleep. Fifty to 60 percent of the growth hormone released by your body is released at night when you're asleep. And most of the growth hormone released happens in the first half of the night."

This is, of course, particularly important for CrossFit athletes, who are constantly working to repair the muscles they damaged during training. And if improved recovery isn't a big enough sell to a CrossFitter, there's a second reason you want your body to be releasing adequate amounts of growth hormone: it stimulates the release of triglycerides from fat cells.

"In other words, we use more energy from fat if we are getting adequate growth hormone," Minnion said.

Sleep and Leptin

Let's say you eat your last meal of the day at 7 p.m. and then your first meal the next morning at 7 a.m. That's 12 hours without food—a long time to go without eating. So why is it that most of us don't wake up at 2 a.m. desperate for a feast?

The reason is because of a hormone called leptin. Leptin does a couple of important things. For one, when you're asleep at night, your fat cells repress your appetite by releasing leptin. Two, leptin regulates insulin.

"So if you don't sleep properly, you don't release leptin, and it messes with your cravings and your diet," Minnion said. "Often people who don't sleep well will wake up at 1 a.m. or 2 a.m. and they're hungry—their body is telling them to eat," he said.

Minnion suspects that this could be one reason there's such a big connection between poor sleeping habits and obesity.

"In the long term, people who don't sleep well enough put on a lot of weight," he said.

**"So if you don't sleep properly,
you don't release leptin,
and it messes with your
cravings and your diet."**

—Rowan Minnion

He added: "Cravings are the biggest risk in having a good diet. If we didn't have cravings, it would be much easier to maintain a healthy diet. And those cravings are more frequent in people who don't get good leptin release during the night."

Sleep and Cortisol

Unlike growth hormone and leptin, we don't want huge amounts of cortisol in our bodies.

"Cortisol is seriously bad for our system; we're only meant to have small doses of it during an adrenaline fight-or-flight response," Minnion said.

Two things that raise cortisol levels are stress and overtraining. And one thing that reduces cortisol levels is sleep.

**"Good sleep is basically a way
of reducing cortisol level."**

—Rowan Minnion

"Good sleep is basically a way of reducing cortisol levels. Sleep resets your levels, especially if you're juggling a stressful job or if you're an athlete and you're flirting with the overtraining line," Minnion said.

And what happens if your cortisol levels get chronically high?

"Cortisol is the worst thing to have in your body in the long term. It stops you from using the energy from food properly, and it causes you to put on weight and break down muscle tissue," he said.

Sleep and Athletic Performance

Minnion insists that getting proper sleep, and lots of it, will improve athletic performance. And he's not the only one who believes this.

The Stanford School of Medicine published a story in 2011 called [Snooze you win? It's true for achieving hoop dreams, says study](#). It was based on research done by Cheri Mah, a researcher at the Stanford Sleep Disorders Clinic and Research Laboratory. According to Mah's research, college-level basketball players were able to improve their on-court performance by increasing the number of hours they slept.

Many general studies in the past have shown that sleep has an impact on cognitive function, mood and physical performance, but Mah's research was one of just a few studies that looked specifically at the effect of sleep on high-level athletes.

"Intuitively many players and coaches know that rest and sleep are important, but it is often the first to be sacrificed," Mah said in the story.



“How can I get a Helen PR if I don’t sleep? But I can’t sleep because I’m obsessed with my Helen PR.”

Mah’s research, on the other hand, went beyond simply telling athletes to “get a good night’s sleep.” She worked with 11 healthy male basketball players, essentially getting them to sleep for 10 hours each night for five to seven weeks. If they couldn’t get 10 hours of sleep during the night, they were allowed to nap in order to reach the required amount of sleep.

“I think the most important thing is for people to get into a routine. Going to sleep and waking up at the same time every day is the most important thing.”

—Rowan Minnion

When the results were examined, players ran faster on their suicide sprints and their shooting percentage increased significantly. On top of this, their levels of fatigue and daytime sleepiness decreased.

In the story, Mah called sleep an “unrecognized, but likely critical factor in reaching peak performance.”

Minnion agrees with Mah. An as an interesting addition, he noted that according to the ESPN.com article [Sleep tracking brings new info to athletes](#), professional athletes like tennis star Roger Federer, basketball star LeBron James and sprint king Usain Bolt all sleep for 10 hours each night—or more.

And even if your schedule doesn’t accommodate 10 hours of sleep each night, Minnion said all is not lost.

“I think the most important thing is for people to get into a routine. If you make sleep a priority, you’ll probably be glad you did.”

He added, “It’s the easiest way to up your game.”



About the Author

*Emily Beers is a **CrossFit Journal** staff writer and editor who 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 **WOD HOG**, a not-always-PG publication of the CrossFit Vancouver School of Fitness. She ruptured her Achilles tendon in December 2010 and served as the Canada West Regional Media Director while recovering from surgery. Beers also competed in the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games on CrossFit Vancouver’s team. She finished third at the Canada West Regional in 2012.*

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Dark-Alley Defense

CrossFit Defense fuses fitness with effective self-defense, teaching physical and psychological strategies for surviving an attack or a tough workout. Hilary Achauer reports.

By Hilary Achauer

January 2013



All images: Staff/CrossFit Journal

Many years ago, before kids and CrossFit, I was an amateur boxer. I competed from about 2001 to 2004, and during that time one of the most frequent comments I got was, "Wow, I bet if someone tried to attack you on the street, you'd destroy them."



Tony Blauer demonstrates a palm strike on CrossFit Games athlete Jeremy Kinnick.

"Yeah," I'd answer, "I totally would if I could first get my headgear, gloves and mouthpiece. They couldn't hit below the belt or behind the ears. I'd need the fight to stop every few minutes so I could sip some water and strategize with my trainer. And the whole thing would have to end after six minutes."

In other words, I have no idea how to defend myself.

Boxing is a sport. Other than the fact that I'm more comfortable than most women with the sensation of getting hit in the face, I knew even at the height of my boxing training I'd be fairly useless in a street fight. Boxing is not self-defense.

CrossFit is not self-defense, either. It certainly helps to be strong, fast and agile, but your 200-lb. snatch and flawless butterfly pull-ups are not necessarily going to help if you are taken by surprise in a dark alley.

That's where CrossFit Defense, taught by self-defense expert Tony Blauer, comes in. My boxing training had taught me how to throw a punch, and CrossFit had made me an athlete. It was time to learn how to defend myself.

Managing Fear

I made the drive from San Diego to Valley CrossFit to attend the day-long CrossFit Defense seminar on the first Saturday in November. Our group of about 20 attendees included firefighters, CrossFit coaches, five-time CrossFit Games athlete Becca Voigt, and a man who had never heard of CrossFit. He had come because he was familiar with Blauer's work and ended up getting a crash course in everything CrossFit over the course of the day.

At the beginning of the seminar, the participants shared why they were attending the class.

"I want to take my mental game to the next level," Voigt said.

A female paralegal said she frequently visited clients after hours and wanted to feel safer when she walked through dark parking garages.

Another woman, Christine Shen, had just started CrossFit a month ago.

"I'm a small person, and I want to learn how to protect myself," Shen said.

I chatted with Shen during one of the breaks, and she told me a specific incident had driven her to sign up for the course.

"A colleague of mine was in her apartment at night, and the property manager, who was high on drugs, let himself into her apartment," Shen told me.

"He was naked, and he got on top of her and tried to rape her. He was over 6 feet tall, and she is 5'1" Shen said. "She fought him off until he gave up and left, but she was black and blue from head to toe. I thought if she could defend herself, I could, too. I'm 5'1" also. A lot of it is psychological."

Shen told me that if she ever got into a similar situation, she wanted to know how to defend herself, even against someone twice her size.

After the introductions, Blauer started the seminar by talking about the psychological side of self-defense and any stressful situation, including CrossFit. Helping with the class that day were Marine veteran and LAPD officer Cliff Byerly and four-time CrossFit Games athlete Jeremy Kinnick.

**“On competition day,
you can’t be a better athlete,
but you can manage your
fear better.”**

—Tony Blauer

“Most self-defense focuses on the physical,” Blauer said before explaining that it’s just as important to be prepared mentally.

“It’s all about fear,” he told us, whether the test is CrossFit or any athletic endeavor.

“On competition day, you can’t be a better athlete, but you can manage your fear better,” Blauer said.

“Every single victim of violence said afterward, ‘I knew something was wrong. I had a bad feeling.’ If you have a bad feeling, stop and address it. That includes a CrossFit WOD. The less stressed you are about surprises, the more focused you are on your task,” Blauer said.

Blauer has a background in wrestling, martial arts and boxing and has been working with law enforcement and the military for years. He’s a natural, engaging speaker with a quick wit and easy warmth. Over the years, Blauer developed a self-defense strategy called the S.P.E.A.R. (Spontaneous Protection Enabling Accelerated Response) System. It sounds intimidating and complex, but the basic idea of the S.P.E.A.R. System is to turn the body’s natural startle-and-flinch response into effective self-defense. It’s about using your body’s instinctive reactions to your benefit.



“Come at me, bro.”

After Blauer's introduction, Kinnick stood in front of the group and talked about how he came to be involved in Blauer's course.

The basic idea of the S.P.E.A.R. System is to turn the body's natural startle-and-flinch response into effective self-defense.

"I have no martial-arts training," Kinnick said. "I wanted to learn ways to protect myself and my family. I'm bringing these techniques to my athletes, trying to spread it around. You can apply these techniques to your life right away. I've also been using the techniques in my CrossFit classes, helping my athletes get ready to go."

Whether it's a fight or a tough WOD, managing fear is a key to success, and the best way to manage fear is to have a strategy.

"Every fight is the WOD," Blauer said. "Every WOD inspires fear and requires a strategy. A bad guy is the whiteboard."

Outside 90, Fingers Splayed

In CrossFit, we constantly practice core-to-extremity movements. Blauer told us we can use those skills when practicing self-defense.

"So many of the movements you do in CrossFit are used in fighting," Blauer said. He brought Kinnick to the front of the room and shoved his hand in Kinnick's face.

"Kinnick is a med-ball. You grab his head and do Karen," he said, referring to the CrossFit WOD consisting of 150 wall-ball shots. "Do Karen like it's Rep 149, and turn him into a human Pez dispenser."

According to Blauer, many common CrossFit movements can be turned into self-defense tactics.

"You've done push-ups many times," Blauer said. If someone is moving toward you in an aggressive manner, "You can put your hands up and do a vertical push-up," Blauer explained.

The simple movement might just be enough to catch your attacker off guard, giving you a chance to escape.

"Stun and run is our objective," Blauer said.

Blauer then got the attendees up and introduced us to the concepts that form the foundation of the S.P.E.A.R. System.

"Your arm is weaker with a fist," Blauer told us. To prove the point, Blauer had us divide into pairs and try to bend our partner's arms first with their hand in a fist, and then with their fingers splayed. The second position was markedly stronger.



Blauer demonstrate the Outside 90 concept. Note the position of his right arm and the angle at the elbow.

The other concept Blauer taught was that when the arm is outside 90 degrees (think arms up in front of your face, but with your forearms extended so the upper and lower arm form an angle greater than 90 degrees), it is much stronger.

Just as you could never learn Olympic lifting without touching a barbell, practicing these moves is essential to learning self-defense.

In our next exercise, we pulled our partner close using a bear hug. The defender experimented with keeping the attacker at bay with both positions: arms inside 90 degrees and outside 90 with fingers splayed. The second position worked even when the attacker considerably outweighed the defender.

Much like the CrossFit Level 1 Course, the CrossFit Defense Course is a mix of lectures and hands-on practice. In this case, “hands-on” is literal. You won’t get punched in the



Time to get up close and personal while drilling Blauer's self-defense techniques.

face, and emphasis is always on safety, but you will be asked to practice escaping from bear hugs and headlocks, and you'll even practice (gently) pushing someone's face away with your palm. Just as you could never learn Olympic lifting without touching a barbell, practicing these moves is essential to learning self-defense.

One of the women I talked to said she had been to a self-defense course where they practiced only using focus mitts and dummies. She told me they weren't really supposed to touch the other people.

While it might seem awkward to meet someone and then give them a bear hug a few minutes later, Blauer said getting comfortable with this feeling is as important as learning his techniques. In a sense, we were being inoculated against the shock of unexpected human contact. Spending a day experiencing what it feels like to have a stranger come in close contact helps lessen the surprise if it should ever happen on the street. As Blauer mentioned at the start of the course, mental preparation is equally as important as physical preparation—in any endeavor.

It's a lot to think about, especially amidst the fear and confusion of a real attack. Fortunately, you don't have to think. Arms outside 90 degrees with fingers splayed is the body's natural flinch reaction.

To prove this point, Blauer showed a photo taken at a baseball game. The baseball bat had broken apart when the player hit the ball, and a large chunk of the bat went hurtling into the crowd. A photographer had captured the moment when most of the crowd realized a sharp piece of wood was headed for their faces. Every person, from senior citizens to young children, had their hands in front of their face, fingers splayed, arms outside 90 degrees.

“We all flinch the same way,” Blauer said, “and our hands come out to push away danger. We protect the command center, our head. You don't need to practice. It's in your physiology.”

What Blauer teaches is what to do after flinching, and how to use the body's natural response to your advantage.

A Plan of Attack

Fear is part of our lives, whether we are ever attacked or not. We experience fear at work, in our relationships and, frequently, in CrossFit. Think Fran-on-the-whiteboard fear.

“You have to manage fear,” Blauer said. “If you can't, you won't have the neuromuscular skills to manage movement.”



"I need a volunteer for this next drill ..."

Blauer told us on the days we don't want to work out—when the WOD includes our most hated movement, when we feel tired or unmotivated—those are exactly the days we need to push through. While we might not make any great strides in our physical development on those days, we're learning important emotional lessons.

In a fight, the stakes are higher. You have to give everything you have, no matter how you feel. This is where it's essential to have a plan.

A fight or attack is like a WOD filled with your most hated movements.

"Nobody wants to get into a fight," Blauer said. However, CrossFit gives us practice pushing through fear and exhaustion.

In a fight, the stakes are higher. You have to give everything you have, no matter how you feel. This is where it's essential to have a plan.

Kinnick teaches the early-morning class at his box, and he has a habit of leaving the whiteboard empty until after the warm-up so his athletes never know what to expect. One day he went up to the board and started writing, "21, 15, 9." Before he could write "thrusters and pull-ups," his athletes started freaking out, panicking about the prospect of doing Fran.

Realizing his class was giving in to fear, Kinnick brought them together in front of the whiteboard. He spent time talking to all of them about making a plan. If the idea of 21 thrusters was too much, he told them to think of it as 3 sets of 7. He worked with each athlete to come up with a plan that fit his or her abilities.

"We saw incredible PRs," Kinnick said. "A number of people took their Fran time from 8 minutes to 4 and a half minutes. If you have a plan, the brain relaxes."

Blauer put it another way: "It's the difference between not being at your destination and being lost."

Putting It all Together

After discussing the mental aspects of self-defense, we got up from our seats again and moved on to the physical side of things.

There's no weight class in self-defense. Just like Shen's colleague, you might find yourself fighting off a person twice your size. Luckily, it only takes a little force to generate a lot of pain. To illustrate this point, Blauer had us take our partner's elbow and strike it to our own temple. Even fairly gentle taps hurt like hell.

"Women can defend themselves," Blauer said. "You don't have to be big and strong. An elbow can cut you up."

Now with our partners holding medicine balls, we practiced throwing elbow strikes and then moved on to knee strikes. Again, CrossFit experience came in handy.

"If you've done knees-to-elbows or box jumps, you can do this," Blauer said.

At this point, we had a number of easy yet effective defensive positions and moves in our arsenals: arms outside 90 and fingers splayed to escape close-contact clinches, and palm, elbow and knee strikes. We had learned how each of these movements flowed from our body's instinctive flinch response—and how to use that to our advantage.

Because it was a CrossFit course, it was time to turn all the training into a WOD.

Up until this point I had been paired up with women, but for the final drill I partnered with a bearded man taller and bigger than me.



Fingers splayed, arms outside 90 degrees at the elbow: your body's natural position of defense.

Blauer explained the workout. We would stand close to a pole and throw a medicine ball at the pole so it bounced back toward our face. After deflecting the ball with our open palms, it would fall on top of a box, which was set up to be about waist high. Then we were to strike the ball with our elbow, give it a knee strike, then turn around, where our partner was waiting to grab us in a bear hug, then a headlock. Our job was to escape and sprint a few yards to the end of the room. Then we would switch roles and keep repeating that for three minutes.

It wasn't equivalent to defending myself from a surprise, dark-alley attack, but that three-minute WOD gave me a taste of the anything-goes nature of self-defense.

The women I had worked with before were not only smaller than me, but they were also reluctant to put any force into the role-playing. My partner for the WOD had no such reservations.

Blauer counted down, 3, 2, 1 ... go! and I slammed the medicine ball into the pole, gave it a sharp elbow strike, then slammed it with my knee. I turned around and was immediately engulfed in a strong bear hug. I barely had a chance to fling my arms to the proper Outside 90 position and was so taken aback by the firm headlock that followed that I found myself trapped, my arms hanging uselessly at my side. I somehow managed to squirm away and ran to the end of the room, my heart pounding.

"Oh, it's on," I thought grimly.

The next few minutes passed in a blur. Byerly yelled out corrections every time I made an error—which was often—but occasionally I got it right and made a rapid escape. I tried to be as formidable in the bad-guy role as my partner, and when time was called we were both panting and sweating.

It wasn't equivalent to defending myself from a surprise, dark-alley attack, but that three-minute WOD gave me a taste of the anything-goes nature of self-defense. I saw how quickly everything happened, even when I was expecting every move. Early on in the course, Blauer had said that practicing self-defense builds up a psychological defense, like a metaphorical callus. Each drill or workout or practice session toughens the psyche for the challenges to come.

Fighting That Works

After it was all over, I asked Voigt what she thought of the course.

"The gym has tried to have me do jiu-jitsu, but it didn't feel like a position I would be in. It felt like the bedroom," Voigt said with a laugh. "I really liked the WOD at the end because the more tired I got, I had no time to think."

"The whole course was really well put together. I'm really happy I did it. It's one of the better courses to go to. I don't have a fighting background, and so this is just more tools in my toolbox."

Ken Cervera, an experienced martial artist who now trains at CrossFit Eagle Rock, said the CrossFit Defense course threw his martial-arts training out the window.

"It's simple, quick and efficient," Cervera said. "This is functional fighting, fighting that works. I really think this is the next step of CrossFit. It's the future."



About the Author

*Hilary Achauer is a freelance writer and editor specializing in health and wellness content. In addition to writing websites, brochures, blogs and newsletters, Hilary is an editor and writer for the **CrossFit Journal** and contributes to the CrossFit Games site. She lives in San Diego and coaches and trains at CrossFit Pacific Beach. To contact her, visit HilaryAchauer.com.*



Gary Allard

THE CrossFit LIFE

A Day With Coach B.

You'll have to drive to Bonsall, Calif., if you want to train with Coach Mike Burgener. But you can't park in the garage. That's reserved for lifting.

By Hilary Achauer

January 2013



Hilary Achauer

"Way to go! That really lights my ass on fire!"

Being coached by Mike Burgener is a singular experience. Not only is he one of the best Olympic-weightlifting coaches in the country—he coached the Junior World Women's Weightlifting Team and runs the CrossFit Olympic Lifting Trainer Course—but Burgener also has a way with words.



Athletes including two-time CrossFit Games champion Annie Thorisdottir regularly travel to Mike's Gym to train with Coach B.

Colorful language and incisive, targeted coaching cues flow effortlessly out of Burgener's mouth. He's tough but full of warmth and genuine enthusiasm, regardless of the weight on your bar.

Burgener is so good that CrossFit athletes from around the country drive for hours to remote Bonsall, Calif., just to hang out in his two-car garage and soak up his wisdom.

He doesn't charge for these sessions. All he needs is advance notice to make sure he's in town.

"I choose not to charge," Burgener said. "I'm blessed. It all comes back," he said.

Tough Love

Bonsall is a small town of about 4,000 people, full of rolling hills and wide-open vistas. I made the 45-minute drive from Pacific Beach with two friends to check out Mike's Gym and pick up some weightlifting wisdom.

When we first arrived at Mike's gym, he was finishing up what he calls the "Geezer Workout." The Geezers are a group made up of Burgener's friends in the neighborhood. The only rule is you have to be over 60 years old to join in.

"We do a workout, and we bullshit each other," Burgener said. "We get together every Monday, Wednesday and Friday I'm in town. We're done at 9:30, and they usually stay until 10 or 10:30." After the workout, they spend some time hanging out and drinking coffee.

While the Geezers were finishing up, Burgener told us to go on a short but steep warm-up run around his neighborhood.

"I call the route 'the Hillary Clinton,'" Burgener said, because he dislikes it so much. "Boss Hoss calls it 'the George Bush.'"

"Boss Hoss" is what Burgener calls his wife of 30 years. Her name is Leslie, but according to Burgener, "Shit, she's Boss Hoss."



Miss your footwork too often and Coach B. might have some motivational consequences for you. Yay, burpees!

Their marriage has lasted despite their differing political views. "We're on either side of the boat," Burgener said. "That's how we've been married for so long."

The run was steep but mercifully short, and once we got back, Burgener told us to do the **Junkyard Dog Warm-Up** and then work up to a heavy front squat before snatching.

In addition to our group of three, there were about seven other people lifting in Burgener's garage that day. One of them, Anneke Marvin, owner of CrossFit Temecula South, has been coming to Burgener every week for years.

"When I qualified for (the CrossFit Games Southern California) Regionals in 2010, I couldn't snatch 95 lb.," Marvin said. "I hated Olympic lifting. Now I love it."

Marvin can now snatch 135 lb.

"(Burgener) is just so good at what he does. I was in the Marine Corps, and I like his tough love," she said. Burgener himself also served with the Marines.

Our group was by no means lifting heavy weights, and in fact we spent much of the time with the bar, as Burgener carefully corrected issues with our form. When we got it right, he exploded.

"Girl, you are a junkyard-freaking-dog!" he yelled when I correctly followed one of his cues.

Burgener manages to combine the right amount of tough love and encouragement with cues and corrections that get to the heart of your errors.

He spent almost two hours with us working first on snatching and then squat cleans. By the end, he said we might be able to lift some real weight.

"I'm not talking about little sissies in the pool. I'm talking about heavy weight," Burgener said. "Excellent job!"

How It All Began

After everyone finished lifting, I asked Burgener how his two-car garage became such a mecca of Olympic weightlifting.

"That's a good story!" Burgener said.

In the 1980s, Burgener was the strength-and-conditioning coach at Rancho Buena Vista High School in Vista, Calif. He had four young kids at home, but he was working until 6 or 7 at night and felt like he never got to see them. He loved his work and needed to keep his job, and he wasn't sure what to do until one day he had an idea: if his athletes came to him, he could coach and see his kids at the same time.

"I built a gym in the garage, and the athletes came to my house at 4 p.m.," Burgener said.

In addition to spending time with their dad, Burgener's kids received an extraordinary education in Olympic weightlifting. One of Burgener's sons, Casey, broke the national record for the snatch at the 2004 Olympic Trials and won gold in the 2008 Pan American Championships.

Burgener became a USAW Senior International Coach and coached the Junior World Team from 1996 to 2004. Then, in 2004, he got a call from another coach: Coach Greg Glassman. CrossFit's founder wanted Burgener to certify CrossFit trainers through USAW—and Burgener's work was cut out for him.

"When I started, nobody could overhead squat," he said. Now the overhead squat is very familiar to almost every CrossFit athlete, and Burgener's Olympic Lifting Trainer Course is sold out well into 2013.

As we talked, Burgener gave me a tour of his property. Next to the garage gym is a pool.

"We use this more in the wintertime," he said.

When I asked why, he got a mischievous look in his eye and said, "Because then people have to jump in 45-degree water."

Burgener's house is on top of a hill with views of the surrounding farms, equestrian trails and avocado groves. He pointed out a red-tailed hawk flying by.



Anyone who's worked with Coach B. will tell you he has a knack for always finding the right cue to get the result he wants.

"We're birders," he said. They built an owl box, and for the past five years owls have returned to lay their eggs on the Burgeners' property.

Now that Burgener's kids are all grown and out of the house, he spends much of his time traveling around the world to lead the CrossFit Olympic Training Course. When he's in town, however, he doesn't stray far from his property. Just like when Burgener was a high-school strength-and-conditioning coach, the athletes come to him. After everyone leaves, Burgener works through the items on his to-do list from Boss Hoss.

Then, at night, Burgener and Boss Hoss sit together, "Paleo margaritas" in hand.

"Here's to having no adult children living with us," Burgener said they often toast, clinking glasses in the quiet night.

Of course, Burgener's daughter Sage delivered a baby in late November, and Coach Burgener's enthusiasm on Facebook was as infectious as it is in the gym: "OMG!!! ... I AM A PACHA!!!! YAHOO!!!!"

Loving Life

After I returned home, Burgener's weightlifting cues stayed with me, but what made an even stronger impression was the fact that Burgener is clearly having the time of his life.

Whether it's spending time with Boss Hoss—"My best friend," he said—or coaching Olympic weightlifting in his garage, Burgener loves every minute of it.



THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Lengel's Legacy

Dr. Michael P. Morran explains how murdered affiliate owner Joe Lengel taught him what to look for in a coach.

By Dr. Michael P. Morran

January 2013



Staff/CrossFit Journal

On Nov. 19, 2012, Joe Lengel was murdered in a morning robbery before opening his box, CrossFit Toledo Intensity Fitness.

Though I am fairly new to CrossFit and have only practiced its principles for the past year, I can truly say that Joe defined to me what a great CrossFit coach is. That November morning, the people who set out to rob Joe of some quick cash ended up robbing a box, family and community of a great individual.

It's hard not to feel selfish sometimes worrying about your own personal needs when you know how hard his family must be hurting, but I now face the same problem as many others practicing CrossFit for the first time: how to find a great coach who works for me?

Luckily, Joe provided me with everything I need to evaluate a coach, and I believe his memory will be honored by sharing that knowledge with the CrossFit community.

Traits of the Great

When I first met Joe, he did not have to sell me on the concept of CrossFit. I was well aware of its success and principles, but I needed to find someone who could join me in a mutually beneficial relationship. In any relationship, finding someone who is happy and passionate makes anything you do with them an easy process. Joe was a two-time CrossFit Games athlete in the master's category, so his knowledge and dedication were given, but just because you're good at something does not mean you can coach it.

Great coaches do not even have to say anything and you know what they're thinking.

A great coach has to be in love with what he or she is doing. Finding a coach lovesick with Fran, Angie and Diane is mandatory because eventually his or her enthusiasm

will transfer over to you. Without realizing it, the coach's energy will become yours—and sometimes even vice versa. Finding someone with enthusiasm even for dreaded movements means you have found someone special who will push you out of your comfort zone, and we all know that doing something you're bad at only makes you a better person.

In physics, power refers to the rate at which energy is used or transferred. In social terms, power refers to the ability to influence others without resistance. The power of influence is an indispensable trait of any great leader or mentor, and believe me when I say that Joe had power. Great coaches do not even have to say anything and you know what they're thinking. They can give you a look during a WOD that tells you to get those damn elbows up or to keep pushing and just keep moving.

Great coaches influence athletes by making them hold themselves accountable for their actions. They guide their athletes but do not force change upon them. Great coaches influence and educate their athletes to a higher sense of accountability and self-worth, thus prompting change within the individual by his or her own means.



Jake Grollee

Joe Lengel was particularly proud of his gym's performance in a fundraising truck pull.



Taylor Jesko

Great coaches usually find themselves surrounded by great people.

As an athlete, you have to be open to influence, and one cannot enter into a coaching relationship without respect for the mentor. Trust and respect are interconnected. Clients must respect and appreciate the knowledge of the coach in order to trust that his or her programming will yield the results the clients need. The coach must respect the needs of the athletes and work to bring results for each and every client.

The day of my first WOD I was excited and nervous. Though I was in pretty decent shape, the idea of the unknown scared the hell out of me. Before CrossFit, I was the Globo Gym rat doing isolation exercises mixed with body-weight conditioning, so I thought everything was going to be no sweat. As soon as I walked in the door, Joe said to leave my ego at the door. It's funny to think back to his comment, but he was right.

In CrossFit, you need to realize your limits and be humble. This is how I knew I could trust Joe. From Day 1 he was honest, insightful and very protective. The WOD was a triplet of burpees, kettlebell swings and box jumps, and he scaled everything for me, even the reps. At first, I took

his actions as an insult, but after the WOD I thanked him for looking out for my well-being. He reassured me that my numbers and workouts would progress rapidly, and he was right. I was hooked and loved every minute of it.

Joe was not all about performance; he was actually more about the longevity of his athletes. He always made sure to talk with us about the dangers of over-training and the importance of taking days off. For me it was easy to trust Joe. I was a complete stranger, but he treated me with the compassion of a family member and pushed me through that first week of hell.

One of the most important roles of any coach is being a great a motivator. Figuring out how to keep an individual or group of 10 people on task and motivated is difficult, and at some point almost everyone needs outside motivation. Motivation comes in a number of forms, but often it comes in the form of a person everyone compares himself or herself against. You know who I am talking about. This is a person you honestly respect but secretly want to outperform—if even for just one day.



Few young men could keep up with Lengel, a two-time CrossFit Games masters competitor.

Sadly for Joe, he was the man we all loved to try and outperform. Realistically, who knows a 57-year-old man who can usually physically outperform most athletes half his age in any task? If Joe happened to join you during a WOD, undoubtedly you tried harder, pushed more and kept your standards tight. That is motivation, plain and simple.

**The ability to motivate
someone to return to fight
another day is the mark
of a great coach.**

With a great coach, the joy and benefits of competition are multiplied. I often heard Joe describe this to individuals hung up on their performance after a WOD.

"The reality of the WOD and the competitive aspects lies more in the fact that you are competing within yourself and not with others. Every day you cannot be your best. Getting hung up on the negative aspects will not allow you to see what you have accomplished," he would say, highlighting the successes hidden in apparent failures.

The ability to motivate someone to return to fight another day or find positives in an off day is the mark of a great coach. In CrossFit, you have your entire life to work on bettering yourself. Hitting PRs is an undertaking, an investment in one's self, and a good coach will help every athlete see that.

The community a great coach establishes extends outside the box and creates an environment where individuals trust each other and respect each other's efforts regardless of fitness level. Great coaches establish a community where athletes are invested in each other. They help create a group of people willing to push aside differences and come together for the common good if even for only an hour a day.

Great coaches are good at juggling the needs of their clients as a whole but also as individuals, and Joe had a knack for determining what an individual needed in order to motivate him or her. There is definitely a gift to making someone feel special even when he or she is battling through difficulty inside or outside the box.

Similar to other boxes, we perform team or group WODs once a week. We call them our Saturday Suck Fests, wherein the usual 60-minute class is replaced by an extended WOD often full of expletives and loud noises usually only produced by animals in the wild. Whether the workout causes excitement or even fear, a well-coached box has a feeling of security and confidence about it because the athletes support each other and trust that everything is well organized. Great coaches give their athletes the tools to determine how to approach the task in front of them and accomplish it.

It is hard to describe the community aspect of a box to someone outside its walls. You must experience the community to realize the power it has on people. Joe always tried to compete in every team WOD, and he would usually pair up with a novice athlete to push and help him or her during our Suck Fests. He just made everyone happy, and that is hard to do.



Matt (left) and Aaron Lengel introduce a WOD dedicated to their father.

Joe also tried to get us all involved in various fitness events. Even the community barbecues and cook-outs were preceded by a team WOD or group-building events. I think the one event outside of the box that Joe was most proud of was a fundraiser for the Ronald McDonald House. It was called the Big Mac Truck Pull. Teams competed against one another in a tug-of-war type of competition, where a team of athletes pulled a semi truck for time. I remember showing up the day after the event to see pictures, a trophy and Joe sporting an ear-to-ear shit-eating grin. He never failed to mention that while our team was not the heaviest or largest, we sure generated the most power overall. He was so proud of everyone involved. I remember Joe saying after the final heat was over he was never so excited to give Ronald McDonald a high-five.

I think everyone who knew Joe is still in shock now that he's gone. Everyone is looking for an answer that will help with our pain, yet there is none. Three days after the incident, Joe's two sons, Matt and Aaron, put together a tribute WOD for their father at a local box called Black

Swamp CrossFit. Over 150 people showed up to honor Joe. His sons programmed the WOD based on some of Joe's best and worst movements, and I can honestly say the WOD was filled with pain and love and is something I will never forget. We were all in pain but were just happy to be around people who felt the same connection.

Joe

- 10 rounds for time of:
- 10 thrusters (95/65 lb.)
- 10 bar-facing burpees
- 10 pull-ups
- 57 double-unders

All the surrounding boxes have extended their hands to help any member of our gym in our time of need. CrossFit Intensity has since re-opened its doors to members and is trying to rebound from the loss. New trainers have stepped in to aid in programming and any other duties.

I still feel so much regret for Joe's family and wife. We read daily about new developments in the investigation into Joe's murder. Justice may be served, but nothing can undo what those scumbags did.

Good coaches are good people.

It's still an eerie feeling to be sitting in the same parking lot where the incident took place, yet I know Joe would not want any of us to stop working toward any of our goals in life.

It's worth mentioning that the police say Joe resisted the attempt to rob him. As of press time, four men had been arrested in connection with the murder, while a fifth had not been located.

Farewell, Joe

In the simplest terms, a good coach could be defined as a well-educated, patient individual who aids others in reaching a goal. Good coaches are good people. Though at times they may be brutally honest and tell you exactly what you do not want to hear, you never seem to hold any ill will towards them. They are best friends who are not afraid to tell you your ass looks fat in those jeans. If you really think about it everyone in your box in one way or another is a coach of sorts, and in most cases they reflect the character of the official head coach.

While plenty of good coaches exist, great coaches are hard to find. Great coaches have the power to unlock the athlete in the elderly or tell the middle-aged housewife "to flip her bitch switch" and transform into a powerlifter. Great coaches see the potential in everyone to accomplish and achieve what was once thought impossible. Furthermore, they possess the power to bring this enlightenment to an entire community on a daily basis.

These select individuals are highly educated and well versed in their craft and readily share their knowledge to allow others to progress. They are some of the most self-sacrificing individuals you will come across and put the needs of their clients before their own. In actuality, they revel in our accomplishments both big and small like proud parents watching kids cross the stage on graduation day.

Though our time with a great coach was tragically ended for me and my community, Joe Lengel's lessons and integrity will live on in all of us who trained under him. Though I'm saddened by the loss, I know finding a great coach will be easier for me because Joe showed me what to look for.



Courtesy of Michael Morran

About the Author

Dr. Michael P. Morran is a research scientist working at the University of Michigan Medical School. His research focuses on both Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes, and he seeks to identify biomarkers to determine if someone is predisposed toward the progression of diabetes. Michael has been actively involved in CrossFit since October 2011 and seeks to obtain a Level 1 Trainer Certificate this year.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Born of Lunacy

Gary McLean tells his humorous story of how he discovered CrossFit and why it's always good to be strong.

By Gary McLean

January 2013



All images: Courtesy of Gary McLean

At a young age I knew it was going to be better to be strong.

When I was 13 years old my mother forced me to go to a theme park under the "you'll enjoy yourself and meet new people" promise.

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It's hard not to PR with blue gorillas cheering you on.

It was lunchtime in a large open-air picnic area where there were more people than blades of grass. A number of disabled visitors were there that day, and I distinctly remember a very affectionate Down-syndrome child attempting to hug everyone he could reach as I dodged him on the way into the bathroom.

At the urinal trough with my pants undone and in mid-unstoppable flow, I heard the words that still give me chills today: "Huggy, huggy!" The overly affectionate Down-syndrome boy grabbed me in a bear hug from behind and swung me away from the urinal with my hands stuck down on my sides and my dignity on show for all to see.

After being paraded around the picnic area for what seemed like forever, I sat eating my sandwiches with everyone snickering, and I knew my life was going to be better if I was stronger.

The last comment I remember from that day was from my mother, who said, "At least he was a nice boy showing you around."

Yup, stronger was going to be better.

Training With the Lunatics

Years of training in front of a mirror with the incomparable belief that anyone can be the same size as Arnold with the right genetics, dedication, diet and supplements was brought to a crushing end when the realization that chemists had a big part to play in bodybuilding hit me square in the eye.

Left in the wilderness of training, caught between some weights, some cardio and just moving without purpose, I picked up training with my step-brother and his band of lunatics. These lunatics talked of Thomas Inch dumbbells, kettlebells, bear crawls and grip strength. My first invite: "Meet us in my garage and have a crueller!"

Flashback: I'm into my third one-minute station, which is jumping in the air with a 10-kg medicine ball, and I'm panicking big time that these strangers and my step-brother are just about to see me hurl all over the garage floor. OK, it's not a "huggy moment," but it could end badly.

Someone has planned this and knows why the pain feels so good.

The lunatics are all martial artists and training for functional fitness with high intensity, and the endorphins following are high! This shit is off the chain and I am hooked.

I stand in the shower following my first functional fitness workout with soap replacing skin that the kettlebell stole from my hands and start shaking like a shitting dog and wonder, "Why the hell do I love this feeling?"

How do I contribute to this group of mindless pain freaks? How do I keep up with them? Why do they all run up and down sand dunes and swing kettlebells and don't have any desire to take a mirror out with us? I needed to do research because I was onto something.

After watching hours of MMA circuits, Mountain Athlete clips and high-impact interval training on YouTube, this woman appears on the screen, standing in a parking lot with a barbell and a rack. The amount of bumper plates on the bar suggest a back-squat-in-a-parking-lot scene is about to start, and I'm just about to click on the next clip when this woman push-presses the bar and starts to overhead squat it! Lord, help me—this woman is possessed by the devil. And just as I'm getting to grips with this high-intensity training, this shit happens!

Nicole Carroll and her clips of amazing physical feats and cerebral conversations in front of a whiteboard straighten me out. There is a grand plan out there and not just sand dunes and tire flips. Someone has planned this and knows why the pain feels so good.



McLean thinking about ways to get stronger.



Inside CrossFit 365—the epicenter of strength.

To London

Almost seconds later, I'm preaching to the group of unconverted lunatics about WODs and recording our progress to understand if we are actually getting fitter. "Measurable, observable and repeatable" just rings my bell.

These WODs had put my friend—who thrived on his own fitness—on his arse and had shaken his world.

Those lunatics are still on the sand dunes and absolutely smashing their bodies to within an inch of death every day and loving life. Good luck, guys. I love you for the intro to pain and the true meaning of a workout, but there's a higher calling for me.

So I invited the one I deemed to be the traditionally fittest person I knew around for a WOD at my garage. The person I selected coaches a rugby team and had a long history of training with some seriously switched-on coaches, and my thought process was to test my own abilities to see if these WODs I'd been doing for some nine months made any difference.

Twelve minutes later, Helen was done and [CrossFit 365](#) was born! These WODs had put my friend—who thrived on his own fitness—on his arse and shaken his world.

Before I break for completion of the first chapter of my story, I want to share an excerpt of the next with a story from my trip to London to take the Level 1 Trainer Course. While I was waiting to go through to the restaurant for breakfast, I had a quick nose to see if anyone else looked like he or she might be at my seminar to save me going to CrossFit Central London on my own. I saw Tomas in a matching shell suit like a giant baby romper, which said to me "European." I was right: He was from Denmark.

I wished I'd gone to the seminar on my own because whoever taught Tomas English must have been Welsh! His English lessons must have come from MTV or the Sky Movies because he finished and started every sentence with the expletive "fuck." So here's our first exchange after introductions in the queue for breakfast, surrounded by families.

"Hey Tomas, you eating Zone or Paleo?" I ask.

"Nah, mate, as long as it's fucking clean, I fucking eat the fucking stuff!" Tomas says.

Tomas didn't make as many friends at the seminar as I did.

At the London Level 1, there was a room full of nervous athletes expecting the unexpected and also the air of excitement as to which superstar would arrive. Could it be Mikko Salo or Annie T.? Could we be seriously blessed and have Karl Steadman?



Respect the tea cozy.

This little dude—too little to be an athlete—asks if I had a safe trip to London. He's wearing a tea cozy on his head for a hat, so I quickly maneuver away from this little fella and think, "Between tea-cozy head and potty-mouth Tomas, what the hell have I gotten myself into?" Besides, I didn't want to get bogged down with a nobody when there might be some super athletes in the room. The stranger next to me says, "Can you believe Speal is at our cert?"

An awesome weekend later and I realize I've just become addicted to something for which I didn't and don't have the antidote.

So I leave you for now with three pieces of advice:

1. Never judge an athlete by his or her headgear.
2. If someone takes your back when in full flow at the urinal, turn toward that person fast, so at least the world gets your ass and the assailant gets a piss of their own medicine.
3. It's better to be strong.



About the Author

Gary McLean lives with his fantastic partner, Hayley Thomas, and three awesome children, Chloe, Drew and Bradley. McLean and Thomas own an engineering company. To help relieve the stress of work and have a healthy distraction, they started a gym doing functional workouts in 2008/2009 and affiliated with CrossFit in 2010 after falling in love with the program and its community aspect. McLean was born in Rhodesia and moved to the U.K. in his early teens. His initial sporting years involved representing his country in swimming until he left for the U.K. He, unfortunately, let swimming go because training in indoor pools didn't really suit him, which was just as well because all the better swimmers grew tall while he did not.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Define Yourself

John Doole takes a philosophical look at the things that make us who we are.

By John Doole

January 2013



All images: Courtesy of John Doole

Changing the timing of when I was pulling the bar in a clean was incredibly difficult.

Cleans, like golf swings, are difficult to perform consistently well. Lats engaged, butt up, load the hamstrings, move the bar past the knees, slight re-bend, explode with the hips, shrug and bend the arms to move your body under the bar, elbows through, catch, and recover.

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If you bend early, you're robbing the bar of momentum and cheating yourself out of a new PR. I guess. Or so I'm told.

The only immediate deliverable of CrossFit is the freedom to confront ourselves, to find out who we are at our core—exposed, raw, uncensored.

Cleans are a great example of something we could all spend a lifetime trying to master but few of us will perfect. Getting better means practice, good coaching, lots of video and a willingness to change. I've only been in CrossFit for about a year and a half now, but I've seen a lot of important changes in my workout abilities, in the athletes around me and within the greater CrossFit community. Some positive changes, others not so much.



No, it's not a fashion statement. It's a brain-surgery scar.

CrossFit training promises nothing to the athlete and expects everything in return. The only immediate deliverable of CrossFit is the freedom to confront ourselves, to find out who we are at our core—exposed, raw, uncensored. It's during this time of confrontation when we can seize the opportunity to change. It comes at a cost, as change is not easy and it's always painful. How painful depends on how much we want to change.

One Life Ends, Another Begins

I spent July Fourth, 2011, in the same manner I had for the past five years—celebrating the birth of this country and mourning the death of my cerebellum. On July 2, 2006, I suffered a massive embolic stroke that lasted 18-plus hours, resulting in emergency brain surgery and removal of half of my cerebellum. I was 29 years old. My prognosis was poor to quite poor. Before the surgery, the surgeon told my father that if I survived, I would not be able to walk or talk very well. That's tough news for any parent to hear.

Before the surgery, the surgeon told my father that if I survived, I would not be able to walk or talk very well.

Luckily, I survived and I am able to walk and talk very well. In fact, if it weren't for the perfectly straight vertical scar in the back of my head, you probably wouldn't know that such an event occurred. Sometimes, I curse the brain surgeon for making such a straight line. Do you know how many times I've had to answer the question, "Do you shave that line in your head on purpose?" It's so straight. I guess if I could ask for something, I'd ask for it to be a little more jagged so people would say, "Something happened and it's not a haircut design!" I'm kidding. I do feel like—and resemble to some degree—Harry Potter, except my scar is in the back of the head. Oh, and I don't have an owl and no wizards are trying to kill me. I can, however, do magic. Just ask the ladies. Just kidding. Kind of.

Anyway, back to the story.

After I was discharged from the hospital on July 11, 2006, I found out the reason I had a stroke at such a young age was because I previously had an undiagnosed patent foramen ovale, or PFO—a hole in my atrial septum in my heart (congenital) that allowed the embolism to slip through and up to my brain. I had heart surgery in September 2007 to implant a device to close the hole. After having brain then heart surgery, I started my long road to recovery.

My recovery included physical, mental and emotional rehabilitation. I met the surgeon who performed the life-saving brain surgery in 2008. I couldn't thank him enough. I was reduced to tears. Speechless. The only thing that came out was "thank you" over and over again. I was much more composed with the heart surgeon, though just as thankful, for if not for his hands I would not enjoy the liberties I have today.

I spent another year recovering from the heart surgery before I was cleared to do physical activity again. After two years of inactivity, I needed to get back into a gym. I have been an athlete all my life and was a regular at my Globo Gym before the stroke, so it had been difficult to remain dormant for so long.

We can all change the way we think about anything or, like a good movie, suspend our beliefs for the time while we are at the gym.

In 2008, I went back to some light lifting at the Globo. I was scared to go heavy, so I spent more time running. I started running 5Ks and set a goal to run the Boston Marathon in 2010 for Tedy's Team for the American Stroke Association.

Tedy Bruschi, a retired New England Patriots linebacker, suffered a stroke secondary to a PFO when he was 31, three days after winning the Super Bowl in 2004. It was during my training for the marathon that a great woman, Linda Winfield of CrossFit Boston, introduced me to CrossFit. I was immediately hooked but had to wait to start full time because I was on a conventional marathon training program. I ran the race in April 2010. It was my



The author (right) with fellow stroke survivor and former New England Patriots linebacker Tedy Bruschi.

second Boston Marathon, and I PR'd by 10 minutes at 4:28. My first Boston Marathon, in 2005, was pre-stroke. The race was more than a marathon to me. I had something to prove to myself. I also needed closure on the last three and a half years of my life. Finishing the race was the start of my new life.

Defining Me

I have a background as a clinical pharmacist and have worked in intensive-care units in Boston hospitals, so I was familiar with caring for stroke patients. It is a different feeling being on the other side of the coin. I was constantly reading and being told by friends and colleagues what to expect as far as my limitations. Here are a few relative to working out:

- Loss of coordination of motor movement.
- Inability to judge distance and when to stop.
- Inability to perform rapid alternating movements.
- Poor balance.
- Weak muscles.
- Neil Diamond-type sex appeal.

OK, I made up the last one. After I started at CrossFit New England full time in June 2010, I constantly had to prove that I was not the person defined by the above characteristics—that I was capable, that I was not weak. Running the marathon was a step in the right direction but didn't answer all the questions about how much the stroke really changed me. It's kind of pompous I'd ask the questions in the first place. Who did I think I was? I certainly didn't



A successful lift requires holding onto the bar while letting go of your doubts.

think I was above anyone, especially other stroke survivors. I didn't want to believe I was limited. But I had my doubts.

I never used my "expected limitations" as an excuse for why a workout didn't go the way I wanted. But I would look at a WOD and place expectations on what I would struggle with because of my "disadvantage" and be able to explain it away to myself.

This was a mistake.

I think we all look at WODs and pick out our goats or strengths and maybe game it a little. After we've been CrossFitting for a while, I think we all have an idea about how things might go. I was doing something entirely different, something even more hurtful. I was deciding how the workout was going to go before even lacing up. Instead of being conscious and living in the now, I was living in the future and placing expectations on what should occur based on what's written in textbooks and told to me by experts. This is not a knock on medicine or clinicians. Obviously I would not be here if it were not for the amazing care I received.

To progress in CrossFit, you must live in the now to be able to make it through the WODs. This is one of the most attractive qualities of CrossFit. We turn down the noise outside, focus on what's inside and, remarkably, 20 minutes become an eternity. Exhilaration turns to pride, but not for long because the next WOD that's debilitating and humbling is right around the corner.

How do we change our mental approach to a workout? I don't know. Here's something that is helpful to me. Maybe it will be useful to you.

Here's an abstract, overly elaborate but hopefully useful illustration:

Zeno's dichotomy paradox: Suppose Kevin Daigle wants to do Fran. Before he can finish, he must get halfway there. Before he can get halfway there, he must get a quarter of the way there. Before getting a quarter, he must get an eighth; before an eighth, a 16th; then a 32nd ... to infinity. Yet, we know Daigle has a sub-3-minute Fran. How is this possible?

Stop.

Really think about the paradox.

Take out a piece of paper if you need to, but make sure you understand what is being proposed before you continue. This is purely brain candy and probably annoying to think about if you're not into philosophy, but stick with me for a second.

With Zeno's dichotomy paradox, you have to come to one of two conclusions:

1. You accept that the way we think about movement and the way we experience it are two different things.
2. You accept that motion is, in fact, an illusion.

If you can come to a third conclusion, that would be amazing. Please post it in the comments for this article!

I have yet to meet someone who really believes the second reason to be true, but it certainly would be an interesting conversation. And, no, this is not *The Matrix*.

My point is we can all change the way we think about anything or, like a good movie, suspend our beliefs for the time while we are at the gym. Think about the first conclusion in the context of doing a movement at the gym.

Your brain talks you through what you think you are doing while your coach is witnessing something entirely different. We think about the motion one way but experience it in a different way. What if there is any truth to the second conclusion? It's incredibly liberating to think about that when you feel overwhelmed by something as complex as an Olympic lift. Motion is something we rarely (consciously) think about but yet obsess about every day at the gym. Get more depth, move under the bar, move your feet faster, chest touches the ground, so on and so forth. We all think about CrossFit movements, but when was the last time you thought about what motion is and how we experience it?

CrossFit tests your physical, emotional and psychological condition. It took me a while to realize that.

Physical Freedom

Of the many alluring traits of CrossFit is the refreshing autonomy the athlete experiences when learning the ropes, literally and figuratively. Take a moment to reflect on your first experiences in a CrossFit gym. Think of how great it felt to not be constricted by a machine, to not be confined by the same rep schema, workout rotation. Being placed in a more natural, demanding environment that CrossFit provides, we realize that most of us are bound by something, whether it's physical or mental, age or inexperience. No one should be judged for his or her limitations, but some are judged for how they confront them. Obstacles can occur at any point in our lives in and out of CrossFit and can be temporary or lifelong.

If you have been around CrossFit long enough, you have seen the many inspirational videos and stories of veterans who might have been handicapped or others who might have been born with a congenital defect that physically or mentally put them at a disadvantage. Yet, they persevere and achieve amazing physical feats. Not every story of courage and inspiration has to come from dramatic physical impairments—for example, Mel



Discussing strategy and which is a more impressive fashion statement: a singlet or plaid shorts.

Ockerby's incredibly inspiring performance at the 2011 North East Regional. Mel experienced extreme, bloody hand rips while doing pull-ups. All of CFNE was so proud of her for continuing through the rest of the events with wrecked hands.

Passion drives all athletes, especially those with either a permanent or temporary impairment. What happens when passion isn't enough? You want it so bad, but there's something still standing in your way. CrossFit tests your physical, emotional and psychological condition. It took me a while to realize that. I really wanted to progress in the sport but wasn't cognizant that I had created a mental model of what I was physically capable of doing.

With a combination of physical training, re-training my mind, amazing friends and coaches, I am not limited by any of those characteristics I thought I was. The only real limitation I had was the space between my ears. Changing my mindset was the crux to my development as a CrossFit athlete and is still a work in progress. I am by no means declaring I am an enlightened athlete and everything is sunshine and lollipops. I certainly still have my struggles.

Training the Mind

We are blessed to live in a country where we are born with the freedom to think, act and choose who we are or how we want to experience life. We are free to change as a person, and when we do, it has an effect on those around us. As we change as a group, we affect the larger community. Results in each setting have a sensitive dependence on the original conditions. CrossFit breeds metamorphosis. We as CrossFitters encourage it and are empowered by it.

We all go through personal change. In my case, I was moved by change. I had no choice. I resisted and denied the powerful transformation in my life. I tried to be the person I was before the stroke, which was impossible as it was an event in the past over which I had no control.

**Forgive the semantics, but
once I learned to move with
change, I was able to regain
some control over my life.**

Forgive the semantics, but once I learned to move with change, I was able to regain some control over my life. I was conscious of the present and not focused on the past. When confronted with something new, we can refuse, get run over, or work with what we have and re-sculpt or re-direct the outcome.



About the Author

John Doole is a doctor of pharmacy who works at Partners Healthcare as a clinical informatician and at Massachusetts General Hospital as a pharmacist. He also serves as adjunct clinical professor at Northeastern University. He trains regularly at CrossFit New England and competes in local throwdowns. He enjoys steak, Guinness, chess, snowboarding, surfing and bacon. He lives with his two cats, Wilson and Chairman Mao, in Natick, Mass.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL KIDS

The Five-Point Squat Drill

Many CrossFit Kids see the air squat, front squat and overhead squat as three very different movements. Dan Strametz presents a drill to help kids understand the relationship between the squats.

By Dan Strametz CrossFit Kids

January 2013



All photos: Staff/CrossFit Kids

Getting the CrossFit Kids program into schools is one thing, but effectively running it with large classes of children—especially in classes where half the kids would rather be elsewhere—is another thing.

Time is always of the essence when training kids (7), and we are always looking to maximize the time we have to teach our young clients. This is especially so in a school setting.

Everybody Must Squat

The squat: The foundational movement. We can't work on it enough. And because time is often so limited, the front squat and overhead squat are often trained independently of the air squat and become—in the minds of the kids—distinct movements of their own. And when kids don't see the compatibility between these different kinds of squats, the possibility for movement inconsistencies often arises.

Despite concerns regarding time constraints, when it comes to training kids, we are in no rush for them to lift heavy loads until they can consistently demonstrate excellent mechanics (1,7).

Taking things slowly in no way thwarts or delays children's strength development. Pre-adolescents make strength gains primarily through neuromuscular adaptation (e.g., motor unit activation and changes in motor unit coordination, recruitment, and firing, rather than hypertrophy) (3,6,9,10). In fact, evidence suggests that strength gains in children are best attained by focusing on higher repetitions, rather than on higher loads (e.g., 2,4,5,8).

So applying the kind of resistance training that results in hypertrophic strength development to children is—as far as we are concerned—wasted effort and time, not to mention potentially unsafe for children.

Squat Drill ... (continued)

And from our end, time and time again at CrossFit Brand X—when we have trained children to move well consistently over time—their strength gains as adolescents are steady and fast, sometimes even astounding.

Keeping all this in mind, I came up with the five-point squat drill as a way to reinforce the points of performance of these three foundational movements in an efficient manner that allows trainers to easily spot and correct some of the most common mechanical flaws, keeps children engaged so they remain in the bottom of the squat longer than they might otherwise, and demonstrates to the kids the continuity between the air squat, the front squat, and the overhead squat.

To begin, the three squats are broken out and taught as separate movements. This allows kids to better absorb the differences in each movement. Once the kids have been introduced to the air, front and overhead squats—and this does not have to occur during the same class—the movements are brought together in the five-point squat drill.

Have kids assume the air squat starting position: heels shoulder-width apart and hands held out in front of them at eye level.



The kids then perform the following on the trainer's count:



On “one,” kids squat and remain at the bottom, hip crease below the top of the knee, hands high.



On “two,” kids bring their hands to their shoulder tops, elbows straight out, in the front rack position.



On “three,” kids raise their arms, shoulders externally rotated with their elbows locked and their palms up in the overhead squat.



On “four,” kids bring their hands back together in the air squat position.



On “five,” kids stand up in the finish position, hips and knees fully open.

At each point in the drill, the trainer has the opportunity to identify and correct form faults that are sometimes lost during focus sessions that have large classes performing repetitions, even when they do it on a trainer’s count. Kids (and their bodies) learn that the fundamental positions and dynamics of the three squats are essentially the same, and they spend more time in the bottom of a good squat.



About the Author

Dan Strametz is a Level 1 and CrossFit Kids trainer at CrossFit Brand X, where, among many other things, he runs the affiliate’s after-school CrossFit Kids program at the local middle school.

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THE CrossFit JOURNAL

The Snatch Is a Bitch

Champion weightlifter Donny Shankle addresses the true character of the world's fastest lift.

By Donny Shankle

January 2013



Staff/CrossFit Journal

The snatch is one of two exercises in the sport of weightlifting. It involves lifting a barbell from the floor up and over your head in one motion.

The word “snatch” means “to quickly seize something,” and weightlifters spend years refining their technique to optimize their strength on the exercise. This enables them to move the bar as quickly and as efficiently as possible. Many hours are spent in the gym practicing the snatch and trying to get as close to perfection as possible. Because the movement is so quick, there is little room for error. The slightest mistake will cause you to miss the lift, especially once you are lifting near maximum effort.



Every weightlifter eventually develops a style unique to his or her body type, strength proficiency and skill competence. Yet, despite all the necessary physical tools a weightlifter needs in order to snatch well, the exercise becomes very much a mental test once the weight becomes heavy. As the name “snatch” implies, you must move as quickly as possible during the exercise. Any hesitation during the lift will almost always cause you to miss.

**After you are introduced
to the snatch and become
familiar with her as an
exercise, you eventually
see the dark side of
the bitch's character.**



***Sometimes you beat the bar, and sometimes
the bar beats you.***

Whenever you are trying to do something well, repetition results in understanding. For instance, every one of us practiced behind the wheel of a car before we studied the DMV booklet for our test. The repetition of opening the door, sitting behind the wheel, closing the door, starting the ignition, feeling the engine rev up, etc. is what relaxed us. We all feel a bit of anxiety whenever we drive a new car, and this is normal because it is not our car. We do not know this car. This looks new, the door closing sounds new, and the engine feels different. It is only driving in it a few times that causes us to be comfortable. The snatch is the same way, and you must commit a great amount of your time to become stronger at anything.

Time devoted to hard work in the gym lifting weights expands your comfort level with the exercise. Your muscles become stronger and more flexible. The positions you need to be in to snatch well begin to make sense to you. Most importantly, you develop the coordination requisite as a beginner to eventually break free of naive appreciation. After you are introduced to the snatch and become familiar with her as an exercise, you eventually see the dark side of the bitch's character.



Once you have the physical tools for the snatch, the mental battles begin.

Of the two exercises in weightlifting (the other being the clean and jerk), the snatch responds at first with decent results. This is due to the lift being an awkward movement. Your grip on the bar during a snatch is much wider than shoulder width, so the muscles and joints are not used to holding things over your head like this. One of the fundamental concepts behind improvement in weightlifting is adaptation, and it does not take long for anyone who starts snatching to gradually build this type of specific overhead strength by way of adaptation. Either your muscles become stronger or you inevitably drop the bar on your head or upper back—which, I can confidently tell you from experience, does not feel good.

A weightlifter's arm lockout is important during a snatch: the straighter the arms the better. Does this mean not everyone will be good at the snatch? Absolutely. Not everyone is willing to put in the hard work essential to snatching well, and of those who are willing, not all of them will be able to lock out their arms completely.

A good arm lockout is not all you must have. The golden rule in weightlifting is being able to hold your back straight. So, if you have lived your life practicing poor posture, you will not be good enough at the snatch (or weightlifting for that matter) to be competitive.

Good lockout and holding a straight back are the two physical traits that are a must to snatch well. A few other physical traits that help are being able to get your hips low, having flexible wrists and ankles, and being light on your feet.

Now some physical limitations can be overcome with consistent training, and this is important because physical limits are not as difficult to overcome as mental limits. Besides, overcoming physical limitations is part of the journey in becoming a great weightlifter. You may not have all the tools necessary to reach perfection, but you know what? Perfection in this sport is never attainable.

Where is the fun in that? If you were flawless at the snatch you wouldn't be able to live moments like the one below.

A Game of Inches

Michael pulled the straps of his singlet up and over his shoulders as he waited for his turn to lift. He was ready to go five minutes ago but the guy in front of him missed his opening attempt and had to follow himself again. Michael's coach came over and gave him a firm slap on his upper back.

**All he kept thinking as
he covered his hands in chalk
was not to hit his dick on the
bar like he did at his
last competition.**

"Get out there and move, Mike!"

"Am I up?"

"Yes, the clock has started."

It was Michael's opening attempt in the snatch. Both he and his coach had agreed earlier in the week his opener would be 135 kilos, just shy of 300 lb. This was Mike's fourth competition, and all he kept thinking as he covered his hands in chalk was not to hit his dick on the bar like he did at his last competition. That's why he had the faintest grimace of a smile on his face as he approached the bar. The audience probably thought he just exuded confidence and was about to attack the bar like a bull running down a matador. Little did they realize Mike's legs were shaking and for some reason he had trouble taking in a full breath.

Earlier, while on his knees in the bathroom beside a toilet, he had promised to God to quit smoking if He helped him go six for six.

The audience came to quiet once Mike grabbed the bar. The clock just reached 30 seconds and the halfway buzzer went off. Mike liked to let the clock run down halfway because the buzzer going off as he pulled the bar distracted him. His coach stood by the opening of the entrance to the platform and shouted one last time.

"Keep your chest up!"



Mike Warkentin/CrossFit Journal

The exact moment where you really get to know the snatch.

Michael positioned the first eyelets of his shoes directly under the bar and dropped his hips low. The moment he felt his body weight on his heels and saw the judge in front of him as he raised his head, he pulled as hard as he could. As the bar travelled past his knees, he fought hard to keep his chest up and over the bar. For a split second, he remembered all the hang work below the knee his coach had made him do to fix this problem.

He slid the bar up his singlet so close that you could hear it drag along his legs. The weight felt light. It felt so light that it took Michael by surprise, and he brought his hips to the bar too soon, which shifted him onto his toes. As he went under the bar, it was way too far out in front and he ended up missing.

The judges each raised a red flag to signal a failed attempt. He never understood this practice for misses like that.

"Ya, it's a miss, you fuckheads. I think that should be plainly obvious," Mike said under his breath as he walked off the platform.

His coach told him the same thing he always does. On this occasion, it just went in one ear and out the other because Mike was infuriated with himself. He had worked himself up so much he completely forgot the weight always feels lighter on competition day. Three months of training to make this opening attempt easily so he could actually try for a competition-total personal record just went right out the window in less than a second.

**The snatch on occasion
can feel like a quagmire of
zombies pulling you down
while they gnaw on your face.**

The two-minute clock that had started after his miss was now down to a minute. Without waiting any longer, Mike got up from the chair he was sitting in and walked back to the chalk box. He dusted his hands, pulled the straps over his shoulders close to his neck and tucked down his dick.



Mike Warkentin/CrossFit Journal

***The most explosive of all movements, the snatch is also
the most unforgiving.***

This time he wasn't thinking about anything and murdered what was on the bar for his second attempt. The judges gave him three white lights as the audience gasped.

"Fucking snatch," he thought to himself as he walked off the platform this time.

Hatred, Courage—and Desire

This situation is all too familiar with weightlifters at some point in their career. No matter how hard they train or how hard they apply what they have learned, sometimes that damn lift is so uncooperative.

You train to stay on your heels off the floor, and somehow get pulled to your toes. You train to keep the bar close to your body during the pull, and somehow it gets away from you. You train to get under the bar as fast as possible after you reach the finish of your pull, and for some reason it feels like you're moving so slowly you could recite the goddamn preamble to the Constitution. The lift on occasion can feel like a quagmire of zombies pulling you down while they gnaw on your face.

To this day, I hate that lift, and any weightlifter who tells me it is his favorite of the two I want to slap in the face and ask, "What kind of psychotic nitwit are you?"

The snatch is the most explosive movement in all of sport. When done successfully at a heavy weight, it is a beautiful thing to behold—but that doesn't take away from it being a pain-in-the-ass exercise. It is the lift weightlifters look forward to being over so they can move on to the clean and jerk, which is less tricky.

Now don't get me wrong: this vehemence I have for the lift does not take away from my understanding or appreciation for the snatch's intricacy. Weightlifters who are good at the lift are very great athletes who have undoubtedly worked hard, and the image of a weightlifter at the bottom of a snatch is an esteemed distinction found only in our sport. Not everyone can do it, most people are not willing to go there (I don't blame them), and those who are good at it have just put in the time.

You have to move during a snatch with a type of speed that is difficult to put into words. The exercise lasts but for a split second, and if you let the bar get away from you for any number of those milliseconds, it is an almost guaranteed miss.

There is a courage factor that accompanies weightlifting, which the greatest of weightlifters overcome. This courage is clearly visible in the snatch during the time between the bar's rising and the bar's falling. In that time frame, the weightlifter must not hesitate and must move his feet as quickly as possible. Any lapse in your confidence or break in your concentration will cause you to pause in your movement, leading you to flop.

Weightlifting is an unforgiving sport that tests your willpower against a cold piece of steel, and the snatch loves to probe at your uncertainty.

Let us get one thing straight: for those who are thinking of training the snatch heavy, be as decisive as a general yelling orders to his troops. Move once, like you mean it, and get to the point—the point being get your ass as low to the ground as possible. In the process of things to come, be prepared to drop the bar on yourself hundreds of times, develop aches in places you didn't know existed, and go through countless rolls of tape to keep the flesh on your thumbs from ripping off. Weightlifting is an unforgiving sport that tests your willpower against a cold piece of steel, and the snatch loves to probe at your uncertainty.

For this reason, weightlifters who are great at the snatch tend to be egotistical paragons who can flip the switch from passivity to hostility at breakneck speed. They ought to be able to do this considering they have spent years nearly breaking their necks.

The snatch may look awkward and dangerous, but it isn't. It is no more dangerous than doing somersaults on a four-inch beam, and no more awkward than cramming yourself into a bobsled with three other guys ass to nuts.

What gets you great at the snatch is your confidence. A coach can tell you a thousand times to do this or that, but, if you still do not grasp the gravity of moving with conviction, then all your reps in gym are for nothing.

One of the best pieces of wisdom I ever received that has stuck with me to this day comes from my time in the service: Move from A to B with a sense of purpose. That resonates with me as a weightlifter today just as much as it did yesterday when I was not. Don't dilly-dawdle when it comes to the snatch for the same reasons they teach you not to dilly-dawdle during combat. You may end up going home in a body bag. OK, maybe your penalty will not be that severe, but you can rest assured that if you do not move the way the name "snatch" implies, you are not uncovering how much you can really lift.

As much as I abhor the snatch, when it is done right at the right time, it feels great. Making all your snatches in competition quite often gives you a great lead going into the clean and jerk. Take each lift one at a time and trust in the training you have put in.

The snatch will beat you up if you let it and cause you a world more frustration than its cousin the clean. Don't let it get the best of you, though. A personal-record snatch is waiting for you right around the corner.

How fast will you move to get it?



Courtesy of Donny Shankle

About the Author

Donny Shankle is a five-time U.S. national champion in the sport of weightlifting. In 2007, he was awarded the most inspirational lifter award at the annual Arnold Classic held in Columbus, Ohio. Donny is a Marine Corps veteran and resides in Fort Mill, S.C. Today, he is in pursuit of the Rio Olympics in 2016.

THE CrossFit LIFE

Food for Thought

Nutrition is a key part of CrossFit, but many trainers shy away from discussing eating habits. Chip Johnston thinks that's a huge mistake.

By Chip Johnston

January 2013



All images: Chip Johnston

We often say in CrossFit, "Nutrition is the foundation."

Everyone—even people who don't do CrossFit—has experienced a situation where nutrition positively or negatively affected his or her physical or psychological performance.

We ask our athletes a host of questions when they enter our affiliates. Do you have any injuries? What is your previous athletic or fitness experience? What are your perceived strengths and weaknesses? Why did you join a CrossFit affiliate? What are your goals? It only makes sense that we would ask some questions about our athletes' eating habits.

Two Extremes

I grew up in a situation that represented extremes supported by archaic, unfounded assumptions about nutrition, and it showed through my eating habits. My mother grew up as one of the middle children in a family of six children, and she watched as her two older sisters grew obese during adolescence and into adulthood. Terrified by the physical prospects presented by her older siblings, she quickly developed anorexic habits as a teenager and has continued them even to this day.

Some view food as pleasure, others as fuel, and she grew to view it as something bad. When I was a child, I remember her going weekdays without eating very much at all and then sleeping through an entire weekend to recover from exhaustion. I knew it wasn't right, but I was too young and uninformed to understand why.

The other extreme I witnessed came from my father, who viewed food and other poor health habits as a source of pleasure and thus indulged as often and as much as he could handle. He smoked, he drank, and more than anything he ate what he wanted when he wanted it, and he ate as much as he wanted. The effects of these habits were delayed because when he was younger he led a very active lifestyle and for much of his career he worked in jobs that had large physical components. When I was a child, I didn't even think his eating habits were bad because I saw my father as a man with many active hobbies and a job that included manual labor.

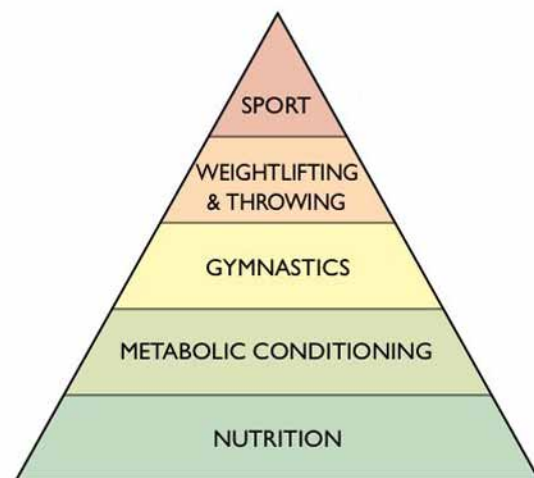
The eating habits I developed from watching my parents were a combination of theirs: a steady mix of starvation and gluttony. Unless I was hungry, I ate and drank nothing, but if I was hungry, it was a feast every single time. In addition, there was no critical awareness as to what I was putting in my body. Like my father, I viewed all food as equal in nutritional value. It made no difference what I was eating just as long as I was eating when I was hungry.

The effects were subtle at first, most likely due to the fact that I was young and an athlete, but as I grew older they slowly became magnified. Having had no education with regard to diet, I still lacked the understanding that my nutrition was likely having a significant effect on performance in many aspects of my life. Then I found CrossFit and an introduction to nutritional awareness.

Start the Conversation

There are so many different analogies that can be used to explain the importance of nutrition in terms of performance: fuel for a car; soil, water, or sunlight for a plant; or memory for a computer. But it remains that seeing a pyramid with nutrition as its base—with metabolic conditioning, gymnastics, weightlifting, and sport all stacked on top of it—makes it even clearer. Even more impressive is how much it makes sense after you've experienced it.

After participating in CrossFit for an extended period of time, my progress in terms of performance reached a plateau. It wasn't until I made adjustments to my nutrition that progress resumed. What happened next is a repeat of what thousands of athletes and average individuals have already experienced: I looked better, I felt better, I had more energy, and my performance improved. I'm sure you're not surprised, and I am aware that you knew this is where this story was going. But my point is something slightly different.



Everything comes back to nutrition.



Nutrition is an essential part of health, but many CrossFit coaches avoid discussing it with their athletes.

We understand that “nutrition is the foundation,” but we need to make nutrition one of the foundations to our approach as coaches. We all understand that nutrition lies underneath performance in all the movement modalities and sport itself, but the problem is it remains secondary to people when they begin CrossFit, or any form of athletics for that matter. I understand that nutrition is a sensitive subject, and I understand that it can be controversial, but it should still become one of the entry points for those beginning to train and compete as athletes.

Making nutrition a foundational component to our approach to coaching athletes can be as simple and straightforward as other introductory components of CrossFit. Furthermore, these questions can be free of controversy and not a marketing scheme for any specific diet. Regardless of your nutritional approach, it will be helpful from a performance and nutrition standpoint to know how much a person eats a day, what percentage of that food is processed, if he or she drinks soda or other soft drinks, or how much water is consumed. This

information provides us with enough information to begin a non-confrontational discussion with our athletes about nutrition and how it might benefit their training and help them reach their goals.

Basic information about an athlete’s nutrition can provide us with the opportunity to create something as little as nutritional awareness or something as grand as a complete diet overhaul.

The amount of time you spend with your athletes will normally range from two to seven hours per week, which means you can’t monitor their eating habits during every waking moment. For this reason, the size of the nutrition base for any athlete will depend on motivation. Even if athletes lack motivation to make changes to eating habits, just asking the questions and teaching nutritional concepts will help athletes develop an awareness of the quality of the things they are putting into their bodies. Those questions will reveal small opportunities for an athlete with some motivation to make positive changes to his or her nutrition.

Eliminating a single poor nutritional choice can be the first step in creating a larger and more comprehensive change in the future. For the athlete who is highly motivated and completely invested in making a lifestyle change in terms of nutrition, the same information that is used by the less and moderately motivated will be used to create a path of nutritional change. You can recommend many resources that can help improve nutrition.

After placing your athletes in categories of low, moderate or high motivation for nutritional focus, you can begin to gather, organize and apply resources to help them build awareness or make the appropriate level of change.

For those athletes who are less inclined to make changes, have them keep a record or log of everything they eat and drink and then review it with them regularly to help build some awareness of the quality and quantity of their consumption. For those more motivated to make some changes, you can use the food log to identify low- or no-quality nutritional choices, such as soft drinks or processed foods, and have them start to incrementally eliminate them. Finally, for those who are completely invested in a change in their nutritional habits, you can recommend or provide them with the books, websites and other resources that are the core of nutritional discussions at most CrossFit courses and seminars.

In order to remain sensitive and free of controversy with those wishing to make more dramatic changes, you can use these resources to provide them a range of appropriate nutritional options to choose.

A Part of Every Class

The most practical way to regularly include nutrition as part of your coaching is to make it a part of the conclusion of your classes or sessions. Having short, reflective discussions about the efforts of your athletes surrounding their nutrition is a very similar discussion to reviewing technique and points of performance for movements. This can be entirely voluntary in order to respect your athletes' right to keep those efforts as private or public as they would like. Also, given this order, it logically places the discussion surrounding nutrition closer to when they are going to have their next meal, just as we discuss technique and points of performance before we have athletes work out.

If "nutrition is the foundation," we should strengthen our efforts to truly make nutrition one of the foundational components to our practice as coaches. Starting this practice doesn't require a coach to start teaching entire courses on nutrition but rather to consistently include at least some focus on nutrition for every level of athlete.



As your athletes are stretching and cooling down after class, spend a few minutes asking them about their nutrition.



THE CrossFit *kitchen* K I D S

Sweet Cheeks Headquarters



SPAGHETTI AND MEATBALL CUPCAKES

by Shirley Brown and Alyssa Dazet
[Sweet Cheeks Headquarters](#)

overview

With words like “spaghetti” and “cupcake” in its title, how can this recipe be Paleo-friendly? There are always sneaky (ahem), I mean, smart ways to make fun foods healthier. There’s nothing cake-y about these cupcakes, but your kids will love calling them cupcakes. And spaghetti? No way! But spaghetti squash? Yes way.

makes approximately 10 cupcakes

ingredients

- 1 spaghetti squash
- 2 cups of tomato sauce
- 1 lb. ground beef
- 1 egg
- 2 tbsp. water
- ½ cup of almond meal
- ½ tsp. salt
- ⅛ tsp. pepper

supplies

- 10 cupcake wrappers

directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 F.
2. Cut the spaghetti squash in half, length-wise. Scoop out the seeds. Place it in a 9 x 11-inch pan, cut side up. Add 1 inch of water to the bottom of the pan. Bake for approximately 45 minutes, until the squash is tender and can be scooped out of the shell.
3. As the squash cooks, combine the egg, water, almond meal, and salt and pepper in a large bowl. Add the ground beef and mix everything together. You may have to use your hands to thoroughly combine these ingredients. Form the mixture into meatballs about 1 inch in diameter and place them in a baking dish.
4. Once the squash is done cooking, place it aside to cool. Pop the meatballs into the pre-heated oven and cook for about 20-25 minutes, until cooked through.
5. As the meatballs are cooking, fill the cupcake wrappers with spaghetti squash and cover them with a tablespoon of tomato sauce.
6. Once the meatballs are cooked and cool, top each cupcake with a meatball and serve.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

The Parent Trap

Emily Beers convinces her mother to try CrossFit and experiences the trials and rewards of raising a new athlete.

By Emily Beers

January 2013



Kim Bellavance

Conception

I'll never forget the moment her CrossFit life was conceived.

My mother phoned me up, hesitated a moment, and then blurted, "Em ... I think ... I think I'm ready to try CrossFit."

I had been trying to get my mother to try CrossFit for months, but to no avail. At one point, I was so desperate I tried more artificial ways to get the ball moving—this involved Tabata squatting in her living room and doing sit-ups with her while watching a movie, our feet tucked under the couch to hold them down.

1 of 5

But this wasn't satisfying to me. I needed her at my gym, attempting pull-ups and box jumps with the other 57-year-old women.

Needless to say, when she finally popped the question, my heart was filled with warmth as feelings of happiness and relief shot through my body. Following this was the morning sickness and nausea, as I feared the journey ahead.

"Do I really want her at my place of work? Will she even enjoy it? Am I capable of raising my mother into a CrossFitter?"

I knew I was in for one challenging adventure.

The Birth

Her birth induced massive labor pains.

"When is the gym empty? I don't want to come in when anyone else is there," she said to me firmly.

"Our quiet time is between 9 and 11 a.m., generally," I replied.

"So nobody will be there at 9 a.m.?" she persisted.

"Well, not necessarily nobody, but it'll be almost empty," I reassured.

"No bloody way."
—Angela Beers

"Who's going to be there then?" she asked, continuously insisting she needed an empty gym.

"Mom, we don't rent out our 10,000-square-foot facility to someone just because they're scared to work out with others," I said.

I started to wonder if she'd ever come in.

After enduring painful conversations like this for what seemed like weeks, my mother finally decided it was time.

And then one Monday morning in early January, with a patch of freshly fallen snow covering the ground, she tentatively walked through the doors of CrossFit Vancouver. She looked as if she was seeing the world for the very first time.

Toilet Training

"Em, hold me," she insists, clinging onto the GHD machine for dear life.

"Mom, you're not going to fall. The GHD machine isn't going to flip. Let go and lower your body. Your core is strong—you'll be fine. Only lower as far as you're comfortable," I say.

"No bloody way," she screams, insisting that I guide her down with both hands firmly on her back, supporting her entire body weight in my arms.

Time for box jumps.

She stands staring at the box, afraid. Paralyzed.

She swings her arms and chickens out. And again. Then she turns her back on the box and walks away.

"I'm going to go for a walk around the gym to gather myself," she says.



Angela Beers trying to ignore the 20-inch box looming on her left.

Kim Belavance



Emily Beers

Slowly but surely, Angela Beers got to know the CrossFit movements, and then of course she was hooked.

She's ready. I hold her hand as she finally makes the 18 inch-leap. She lands with a thud.

Little by little, she gains the confidence she needs to jump onto the box alone. Her early box jumps have no grace to them. The amount of effort she puts into each jump makes it look like a max attempt, and she lands so hard on her heels she sends echoes across the gym.

But the look of satisfaction on her face makes me so proud I don't bother telling her to try to land softly, that the neighbors don't need to know she's doing Kelly this morning.

The Endless-Questions Phase

After a few months of one-on-one personal training, my mother's interest in CrossFit starts to grow, and the millions of questions begin.

It really forces me to learn patience because, while her questions seem obvious to me, I forget sometimes that she is still a baby when it comes to this stuff. Sometimes

she reminds me of my little 4-year-old cousin, who, while at an NBA basketball game, once asked, "Emily, whose ball are they playing with?"

My mother's questions are as such:

"Why are those thrusty things we do so hard?"

"What are the ones called where you go like this?" she asks, her question accompanied by a continuous shoulder-press motion but done with speed in a way that looks more like cheerleading—"Go, Tigers!"—than any recognizable CrossFit movement.

**"Did you see I did 15 burpees
unbroken today?"**

—Angela Beers

"What do you think I'm sore from?" is another common question she asks.

"Probably from the sumo deadlift high pulls," I reply, after she does Sasquatch for the first time.

"Oh no. Those were the easy part. I think I snatched a couple of those high pulls right over my head," she replies, satisfied.

"No mom, you didn't," I sigh.

Gaining Confidence

My mother's CrossFit idol is two-time Games athlete Alicia Connors. She can relate to Connors.

"Em, if I were in my prime, I think I'd be like Alicia Connors," she says one day. "I'm the same kind of athlete."

"Oh yeah, mom, how is that?" I inquire.

She changes the subject.

"Did you see I did 15 burpees unbroken today?" she boasts.

"And I'm down to a thin band on the pull-ups?"

"And your double-unders looked pretty good too, mom," I say. "You were stringing them together this morning."

"Oh those I mastered a while back," she replies.

Kim Bellavance



"No rep, mom!"

Rebelling

"That rep doesn't count," I say.

"Why not?" she asks, annoyed.

"Because you didn't get full depth on that squat," I reply.

**"They're called
Turkish get-ups, not
Turkish get-downs."**

—Angela Beers

"But it's way harder when I squat deeper," she says.

"That's kind of the point, mom," I sigh.

She ignores my coaching and moves on to the Turkish get-ups.

"You have to go back down for the rep to count," I say.

"You never told me that. Going up is good enough for me," she says. "They're called Turkish get-ups, not Turkish get-downs."

Gaining Independence

It has been a year since she first walked through the doors, intimidation dominating her face.

She insisted on doing one-on-one personal training for the first five months because she was too scared of group classes. When she had enough confidence, she began group classes but would only show up to my quiet 8 a.m. class on Tuesdays.

But when she saw how much more fun and bustling the 7 a.m. class looked, pretty soon she found herself socializing like a normal person as she sweated it out with the 7 a.m. crew.



Kim Bellavance

Emily's mom may be an independent CrossFit athlete now, but she still needs her daughter to help her perfect the clean.

Despite her big gains, after 12 months she still refused to show up to any class that I didn't coach. Until one morning.

It's Friday. I don't coach the early-morning classes on Fridays, and I give my mom a ring at 6:30 a.m., knowing she will be up and about.

"Mom's not home," says my dad.

"What do you mean? It's 6:30 a.m. Where is she?" I ask.

"She's at CrossFit," he replies.

"What?" I yell. "Does she know I'm not there this morning?"

I start to panic, wondering if she'll be OK on her own. I feel compelled to drive down there and make sure she's all right. I even get into my car.

And then I stop myself.

This is exactly what I have been trying to do in the last year: help her grow into a confident, independent CrossFit athlete. However, now that she's fully capable on her own, I feel almost abandoned, like a lost empty-nester.

At 8:10 a.m., my phone rings. It's my mom.

I don't even have time to say hello before she starts speaking excitedly.

"I just did the 12 Days of Christmas workout, Em. My time was 35 minutes. Everything was good, except those cleans slowed me down. I need some more help on them."

I smile to myself. I might be a CrossFit empty-nester, but moments like this remind me that my mother still needs me.



About the Author

Emily Beers is a *CrossFit Journal* staff writer and editor who 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 **WOD HOG**, a not-always-PG publication of the CrossFit Vancouver School of Fitness. She ruptured her Achilles tendon in December 2010 and served as the Canada West Regional Media Director while recovering from surgery. Beers also competed in the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games on CrossFit Vancouver's team. She finished third at the Canada West Regional in 2012.

THE CrossFit LIFE

Down but not Out

When Sharon Schuh's husband was laid off from his job, they had to give up their CrossFit membership. Fortunately, they didn't have to give up CrossFit.

By Sharon Schuh

January 2013



Courtesy of Sharon Schuh

My son, Eric, started CrossFit at CrossFit Pacific Beach in 2010, and he immediately began using a variety of tactics—including begging, shaming and demanding—to get me and my husband, Tim, to try it out. Eric was convinced we'd love it. And while I hate to admit my child knew more than me, he was right.

We finished the introductory classes, joined, and embraced the CrossFit lifestyle, diet, community, competition, and physical changes we were seeing in our bodies.



Sharon Schuh

The beauty of CrossFit is in its simplicity, and the garage gym is an important part of CrossFit culture.

I had such a love/hate relationship with CrossFit. I was always nervous before each workout, always intimidated, but that high I got after each workout was so addicting. I loved working toward a common goal each night with a group of people who were so supportive and genuinely excited for each new PR and milestone I achieved.

My son had started a new life outside the family home with his new apartment and new friends, and now Tim and I were able to be a small part of that through CrossFit. We were able to get to know his friends in and out of the gym, take pride in the lifestyle choices he was making and, in a wonderful turn of events, learn from our son. We found a better way of working out, a better way of eating and a better way to incorporate fitness into our everyday life.

After eight months of working out at CrossFit PB, Tim was laid off and we had to give up our CrossFit memberships. We vowed to keep up with the workouts; we were both so thrilled with the changes we were seeing in our bodies

and overall fitness. And one of the best things about CrossFit is having the WODs available online and being able to scale them not just to your ability but, in our case, to our equipment. Tim had the typical metal weight set and bench as well as a set of dumbbells and a free-standing pull-up tower. Our garage floor had already been covered with rubber mats.

Our first purchase was a second barbell. We found one at a sports-equipment resale store for \$75. This would enable us to perform the WODs together. Part of what we loved about CrossFit was the competition, and, luckily for us, Tim and I are very competitive with each other.

Bumper plates are expensive, but let's face it: there is something fun about being able to drop the weights. Not to mention Tim had some concerns about me dropping the metal weights on his epoxy concrete floor, even if it was covered in rubber. We bought a pair of 10-lb. bumper plates at Amazon for \$35 each and used them with the metal weights.

Kipping pull-ups are not possible on our free-standing tower, but because Tim can already perform strict pull-ups and I have yet to accomplish my first pull-up at all, we make do with the tower for now. I use a small step box to perform jumping pull-ups. When the WOD calls for pull-ups, we try to rearrange the order so we don't have to wait on each other.

For several weeks, we would write out and tape the workouts to the garage cabinets. This actually became a good way to track our progress, as we would write down our results and then put the papers into a binder. Eventually, we did go high tech and pick up some whiteboards for \$8. These are especially handy for tracking our max numbers and PRs.

We found several great free timer apps for our iPad. Speakers attached to the iPad and Pandora's dubstep and workout stations helped complete our at-home experience. My neighbors, however, are not completely thrilled with some of our new taste in music.

Next up, we really needed some boxes for box jumps. I'm embarrassed to say I was using my old aerobics steps. It's a toss-up as to whether I'm more embarrassed about using a 10-inch box for WODs or that I actually own those steps. Either way, we needed to get our own boxes. My father is a carpenter, so we found a free set of plans online for 20- and 24-inch boxes, and my father helped Tim build two boxes.

Christmas brought me a kettlebell, an AbMat and a customized jump rope. Without rings, scaling muscle-ups and ring dips are not fun, but we will get there eventually.

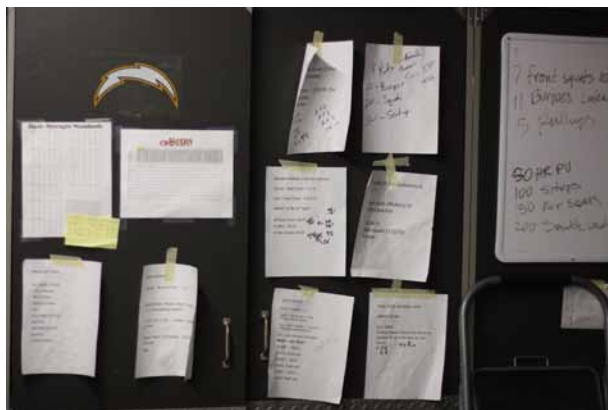
The coaches at CrossFit PB have been wonderful in responding to our Facebook requests for scaling help. The Internet and YouTube are invaluable when we need to double-check the mechanics and correct form for the various Olympic lifts. Most weeks, we are actually getting more workouts in because of the convenience of being at home, although we still miss all the friends we met at the box.

Tim is currently in the interviewing process for new job. If he gets it, we definitely want to get another membership.

Fingers are crossed!



Sharon Schuh



A bit of whiteboard and some WODs taped to the wall instantly turn a garage into a gym.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Face the Fear: Lessons From Newtown

CrossFit subject-matter experts George Ryan and Tony Blauer explain how fear-management and positive action are the keys to any crisis situation.

By Hilary Achauer

January 2013



Courtesy of Tony Blauer

Combatives expert Tony Blauer teaches fear-management strategies and believes preparation is key to success in any stressful situation.

A feeling of helplessness tormented most Americans in the wake of the school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Conn. In the face of so much horror and injustice, some argued for more gun control, while others called for a heavier gun presence in our schools. Many brought up the need for better mental-health services.

Our country has been locked in debate on these issues for years. Change, if it comes at all, will be slow and incremental. While we wait, is there anything that can be done to make our children safer? Can the average person defend him or herself against a determined killer with gun?

When Nidal Hasan opened fire on the Fort Hood military base in 2009, he killed 13 people and wounded 29, many of them members of Lumberjack CrossFit. Military personnel attempted to stop Hasan but were shot and killed in the process. How can we expect our teachers to do better?

Courtesy of Tony Blauer



Schools don't need to get this realistic with their scenario-based training, but Blauer says they should have a plan of action.

There are no easy answers, but there are some strategies that can help.

CrossFit works with two experts who teach civilians, military personnel and law-enforcement officers how to deal with attacks. Tony Blauer, the self-defense expert who runs the CrossFit Defense course, has spent his career teaching fear management and personal-defense readiness through his company, Blauer Tactical Systems. George Ryan, a full-time SWAT officer and creator of the CrossFit Striking Trainer Course, has been teaching law-enforcement officers around the country about proper responses to active-shooter incidents since 1999.

Both Blauer and Ryan think there are things we can do. And they say the CrossFit mindset is an important piece of the puzzle.

Start With a Plan

Blauer said the first time he saw the workout Cindy written down, he thought it was a joke. It was before Blauer did CrossFit himself, and when he saw the workout was 5 pull-ups, 10 push-ups and 15 air squats for 20 minutes, he said, "Are you guys kidding me? You're having trouble doing this?"

It wasn't until he started CrossFit and repeated those seemingly simple movements at high intensity for 20 minutes that he understood what it felt like.

**"Prevention and preparation
have made a tremendous
difference in the case of fires.
These key principles can be
applied to school shootings
as well."**

—George Ryan

It's the same with any kind of disaster or survival situation. Teachers and students know what to do in the event of a fire because they practice three times a year. In the midst of the panic and confusion, the brain latches onto the plan and relaxes.

"Statistics show that no children have died in a fire at a school in over 50 years," Ryan said. "This proves that school fire-safety measures—including the right equipment, training and drills—are working. Prevention and preparation have made a tremendous difference in the case of fires. These key principles can be applied to school shootings as well."

Ryan feels that teachers and school administrators should participate in scenario-based training that replicates an active-shooter scenario.

"They should involve local law enforcement and use role players. Afterwards, everyone who participates in the training should conduct an honest and thorough debrief to see where they can improve. Such training needs to be ongoing, as it will help develop proper conditioned responses to an actual active-shooter event," Ryan said.

What about the concern that preparing for such an awful occurrence would upset the children?

"As for drilling the children, schools have long since found a way to put children through fire, lock-down and natural-disaster drills without causing the children fear and worry," Ryan said. "The children simply learn do 'this' when your teacher says 'this' or when you hear 'this kind of bell.'"

In most cases, there is very little time to react. Everything happens quickly, and if the teachers and students know exactly what to do, they will be able to execute the plan without discussion.

"Doing nothing ensures that the worst will happen," Blauer said.

"You can have all the skills in the world, but most people don't shoot well in an ambush," Blauer said. He believes the reason the military suffered so many casualties at Fort Hood is that they were taken completely by surprise. Blauer said this is a lesson that even people in the military need to learn.



Courtesy of Greg Amundson

George Ryan (right) believes schools can use scenario-based training to prepare staff for gun-related incidents just as they prepare for fires or earthquakes.

"Just because someone is wearing a uniform, it doesn't mean they are ready for this type of attack," Blauer said.

The element of surprise is a huge factor, he said. The shooter in Fort Hood opened fire in a soldier-readiness processing center. Not one person expected that, and the surprise took them all off guard.

"Why was Mike Tyson able to bite Evander Holyfield's ear two times?" Blauer asked. "Because of the element of surprise. Holyfield was expecting a punch, not a bite."

He added: "The first assault is on the emotional system."

In his seminars, Blauer teaches people to use the body's natural startle-and-flinch response and adrenaline rush to create action.

Survival Mindset

If we are able to train teachers and school administrators to keep cool heads and turn fear in to action, what should their response be if a gunman enters a school?

Ryan says that school employees must be willing to call 911 even if something just doesn't look right. Then, if shooting is taking place, he says the teachers and children should run in the opposite direction of the deadly activity if it's possible.

"After making a quick assessment, the teacher should give the children concise, easily followed instructions such as, 'Run past the office and then to the crosswalk.' It is best if teachers have pre-planned options and instructions for such a response," Ryan said.

**If schools have a plan,
then teachers and children
can spring into action
and follow that plan.**

However, if the deadly activity is close to the classroom, teachers need to lock and barricade the door. The children must then be instructed to move away from the entry point, stay low to the ground and keep quiet. If there is time, they should draw the blinds and call 911.

Blauer agrees. He says that teachers and children should be taught to run away from the threat if they can.



Courtesy of Tony Blauer

The key is a plan of action, whether that means running away, hiding or playing dead.

"You, me and Rich Froning, we can all sprint out the door equally as fast," Blauer said.

The key is to act quickly.

"The cavalry will rush in," Blauer said. "The question is when? You have to make sure the fear loop doesn't get you."

Freezing and being unsure of what to do or where to go can cost valuable seconds. If schools have a plan, then teachers and children can spring into action and follow that plan.

"You need to act," Blauer said, but action does not necessarily mean playing the hero.

"Maybe the solution is to play dead," Blauer said. "You have to combine instincts and intuition. It's not about charging the threat. However, if he does come in the door, you have to be ready. The survival mindset must precede the survival skill set."

Ryan and Blauer agree that if a worst-case scenario occurs and a gunman does gain entry into a classroom occupied by children, the plan needs to be to take action.



E.M. Burton

Blauer advises that teachers and administrators spend time at a shooting range to give them an idea of the sound and speed of gunshots.

"The form of action will be completely dependent upon the circumstances, the physical space and the ages of the children," Ryan said.

For instance, he said teachers and children can throw anything and everything within their reach at the gunman, including staplers, chairs and coffee mugs.

"The intent is to overwhelm and startle that person," Ryan said. "The key is to do something—anything—other than being a target. This tactic may seem a little farfetched for some, but doing nothing is an unacceptable alternative."

Both Blauer and Ryan think teachers and parents can take steps to mentally prepare themselves for an attack. Ryan says that teachers, staff and administrators can educate themselves about taking action in the face of fear. Instead of being overwhelmed and paralyzed by the adrenaline, teachers can learn how to use the body's natural kickstart for positive action. The huge surge of adrenaline during a crisis is overwhelming for people who've never been in a violent situation, but your response can be tempered with adrenaline-managing techniques. These techniques can be used for any situation that provokes fear—including a CrossFit workout.

Ryan has a four-step process he teaches to help people remain calm in panic-inducing situations:

1. Welcome the adrenaline into your body—Think of the adrenaline as a power surge and tell yourself your body is preparing for success.
2. Replace negative thoughts with positive ones—If you hear your inner voice suggesting the situation is too daunting, replace those thoughts with positive ones immediately. Tell yourself to take positive action and repeat it.
3. Positive repetitive mantra (PRM)—Choose a simple, positive mantra that you silently repeat in your mind during a crisis situation to keep you focused. Examples include, "Let's go" or "I can do this."
4. Deep Breathing—Use deep breathing to help reduce sympathetic-nervous-system activity. Deep breathing will not totally eliminate the symptoms, but it will make them more manageable for improved performance during a crisis event. Breathe deeply in through your nose for a four-second count. Be sure to begin filling your lower lungs first, then the middle and finally the top portion of your lungs. Hold for four seconds. Then exhale through your mouth for a count of four seconds while letting the air out from the top, middle and finally the bottom of your lungs. Then repeat. The four-second count can be changed to a different time period if necessary.

The four steps are simple but require constant effort to fight against the body's natural inclinations.

Essential Life Skills

In addition to mental strategies, both Blauer and Ryan have more concrete suggestions to prevent and manage attacks.

"Ideally, school employees should be able to electronically lock all of the outside doors, and no one should be able to enter the school grounds without checking in and showing ID," Ryan said. "All classroom doors need to remain locked from the inside when children are in the rooms. Doors that automatically lock when closed but then automatically unlock via a push bar on the inside are one such defensive option. Master keys should be made available to teachers, administrators and law enforcement."

After talking to one school principal, Blauer thinks administrators and teachers would be well served by going to a range and practicing shooting a gun. This is not because he thinks teachers should be armed but because “they need to know the operating system,” Blauer said. If the school’s plan is that the principal should access an app on her phone in the event of a shooter, Blauer thinks the principal needs to know exactly how quickly everything happens when a gun is involved, as well as what actual gunshots sound like.

**“Dealing with fear,
coping with panic and
taking action in a crisis
are essential life skills—not
just school-shooting skills.”**
—George Ryan

“We are so weighed down with policy and procedure. When you’re three feet away from the bad guy, you need to fucking move,” Blauer said.

If the school does not have a plan in place, should parents talk to their kids about what to do in the event of a gunman at school?

“One of the many tragedies to arise from these horrific incidents is the fact that it now seems inescapable that we must educate and prepare our children about school shootings,” Ryan said. “Parents should talk to their children about past incidents without overwhelming them with detailed information. These talks should, of course, be tailored to the age and individual temperament of the child.”

Ryan says that the emphasis should be on helping kids visualize proper responses to a crisis. Then, he said, children can think about how they would distance themselves from a gunman on the school grounds or barricade a classroom by summoning help from their friends. In addition, parents should instruct their children to be leaders when a crisis happens.

The discussion can take on a broader context, because the reality is that school shootings are thankfully still quite rare. Moving beyond weapons in schools, parents can use this opportunity to talk to their kids about taking charge of their own safety in general.

“Dealing with fear, coping with panic and taking action in a crisis are essential life skills—not just school-shooting skills,” Ryan said. “These skills can be taught, reiterated and practiced during life’s littler crises so that children can have some sense of empowerment in a larger crisis.

“If nothing else, parents can teach their children two essential mantras: ‘3-2-1 ... breathe,’ because taking a breath helps to control fear and panic, and then ‘3-2-1 ... go!’ This mantra will remind them to always take action,” Ryan said.

Blauer believes that everyone—teachers, office workers, CrossFit athletes—should have the basic tools to be his or her own bodyguard. He calls it indignation or the “how dare you?” state of mind. Rather than freezing when threatened, learning a few basic techniques can help you spring into action.

“You have to take on the fear and deal with it,” Blauer said.



Gary Allard

About the Author

Hilary Achauer is a freelance writer and editor specializing in health and wellness content. In addition to writing websites, brochures, blogs and newsletters, Hilary is an editor and writer for the **CrossFit Journal** and contributes to the CrossFit Games site. She lives in San Diego and coaches and trains at CrossFit Pacific Beach. To contact her, visit HilaryAchauer.com.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Building the New School

Mission Vista High School in California teaches CrossFit to 500 athletes a day. E.M. Burton reports.

By E.M. Burton

January 2013



All images: E.M. Burton

"We built the old school. Now we're building the new school."

CrossFit Brand X produced that great slogan a while ago for its T-shirts and wall art.

There's an actual manifestation of what can be called the "new school," CrossFit-style, in a high school in Oceanside, Calif.

The Future of P.E.?

Mission Vista High School (MVHS), very recently chartered in August 2009, is indeed new in more ways than one.

A “dual magnet school,” MVHS draws students from all over the region, some from as far as 20 miles away. It attracts them (that’s the magnet) with its unique curriculum that specializes in the dual areas of arts and communication and science and technology.

CrossFit programming forms the foundation of MVHS’ general physical-education classes.

In its first year, MVHS enrolled 500 students in two grades—9 and 10—who were temporarily accommodated on the campus of a neighboring middle school. MVHS relocated to its new, permanent location in Vista in its second year, where the current cohort of 1,200 students spend the better part of their days. The beautiful campus contains a commons space filled with light, and a great view of the local landscape and mountains makes for a lot of outdoor warm-ups. With many parents and family members picking their kids up at the end of the day, the atmosphere is friendly and very community oriented.

MVHS is also the only school in its district to offer a unique “4x4” schedule, a different way of breaking up the academic year. Classes are scheduled to afford students the option of having more elective classes in their areas of interest and to allow them to complete an accredited high-school term-length course in just eight weeks. It’s this unique 4x4 schedule that affords MVHS staff the luxury of programming CrossFit workouts for the students 90 minutes a day, five days a week, for 18 weeks.

CrossFit programming forms the foundation of MVHS’ general physical-education classes, which are quite distinct from what we might expect of typical high-school athletics departments. In the CrossFit classes, the focus is on technique first, and then students progress to light weights, which are scaled for each student. They do the Burgener Warm-Up, work out with PVC pipe and focus on movements that take advantage of their body weight.



MVHS has a unique schedule that allows students to do CrossFit workouts for 90 minutes every school day for an 18-week period.

Using dumbbells and kettlebells, they do complexes, as well as cleans, snatches and deadlifts. The emphasis is on quality over quantity. Students have the freedom to scale their own workouts by reducing reps or rounds. They do the benchmark workouts and follow the CrossFit Kids PreTeen and Teen Lesson Plans.

The school is very committed to collecting and assessing data points on its students. To begin with, all high-school students in the state are tested in physical fitness. MVHS does pre and post testing including assessments of body composition; height and weight; and level of capacity in push-ups, sit-ups, pull-ups or flexed-arm hangs, and 1-mile runs.

The data is also collected in preparation for continued accreditation as an educational facility in the California. The school is currently under review by authority having jurisdiction, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, which has motivated staff to evaluate all the ways in which they assess their students.

The students enjoy the activity, being there by choice. They like the variety of the challenging workouts. They have noticed big changes in their level of fitness and their scores on the statewide fitness tests. They improve their mile times, with many knocking two to four minutes off previous times. Two students in the current class had already lost 25 and 26 lb. before the end of the current term.

Even more encouraging is to hear how they feel fitter and want to continue with the workouts. They're excited about CrossFit in general and are looking into local boxes. They know the workouts by name and they watch the CrossFit Games on ESPN2. They want to take the class again. One of their assignments was to design a workout that included a warm-up, WOD and cool-down.

This doesn't happen without a committed staff, all of whom have the goal of earning CrossFit Level 1, CrossFit Kids and CrossFit Olympic Lifting certificates.

"Mission Vista is not the first high school to offer CrossFit programming, but it's unique in San Diego County due to its thorough integration into the physical-education curriculum, as well as the number of students (500) who CrossFit daily. It's very well programmed, with a minimum of three trainers who have attended both (CrossFit) L1 and (CrossFit Kids) training," said Mikki Martin, CrossFit director of youth programs.

Jeff and Mikki Martin—who also own and operate CrossFit Brand X in Ramona, Calif.—assisted MVHS with implementing its training program.



Instructors get creative to work around large groups and limited equipment.

CrossFit Kids PreTeen and Teen Lesson Plans

Roll

Run one lap

Speed and agility work

Plyometrics—met-con

Skill—demo/practice (stay with skill until they get it)

WOD—Focus on strength and conditioning (constantly varied functional movement done at high intensity)

Results

Stretches

Announcements

Activity

"We did a training day to help with implementation this past year. We went with staff who do after-school programs and who also teach CrossFit in physical-education departments in San Diego County. We focused on the needs of school settings, including pairing low-skill (movements) with one complex movement so coaching can be focused within large groups, for example," Martin said.

Instructors and coaches Mike Abruzzo, Roger Gutierrez, BriAnna Raphael and Chris Findell all hold numerous certificates and certifications from CrossFit and other organizations. Raphael played volleyball in college, and Findell played rugby at the international level. Their enthusiasm is palpable. They collaborate daily, continually assessing progress of the program.

"We have a living lab before our eyes each day," Abruzzo says.

Each teacher has a certain WOD he or she uses as a benchmark, to be repeated several times during the term to assess progress. Abruzzo's is Barbara.

What's really amazing is how they are able to accomplish so much and sustain such variety and enthusiasm with the little equipment they have to work with. Their programming is challenged by class size, facilities and equipment.

"We have become very good at designing workouts using body weight and maybe one implement," Abruzzo said.

He continued: "Our weight room is still relatively barren. ... We were able to buy a rig, and we have a few bars. But we operate primarily with eight sandbags, 10 boxes, 24 sets of dumbbells, 25 medicine balls, 24 kettlebells, 15 truck tires and 96 jump ropes. With that, we train 500 students daily."

"The variety and versatility of CrossFit workouts enables us to accomplish our goal of a fitness-based physical-education program with very little equipment."

—Mike Abruzzo

Abruzzo understands very well the economic realities of all schools in 2012. Like any good CrossFit trainer, he focuses on what he can do, and CrossFit allows a lot of creativity.

"The variety and versatility of CrossFit workouts enables us to accomplish our goal of a fitness-based physical-education program with very little equipment," he said.

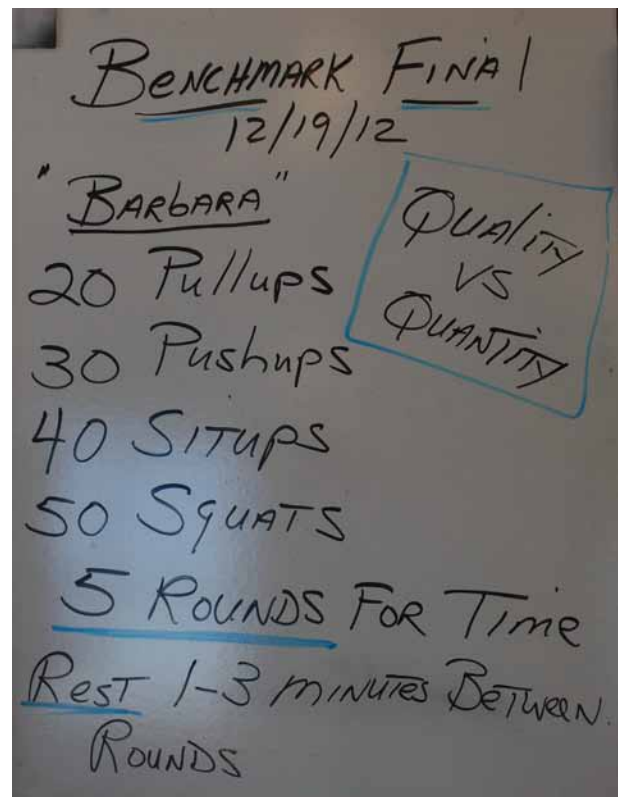
My Buddy Burg

The MVHS program probably wouldn't exist without Abruzzo. In 2007, he started using CrossFit programming in general physical-education classes for middle-school students at the Vista Academy for the Visual and Performing Arts for grades 6 through 8. He began by teaching an elective class that started as a weight-training and fitness class and evolved into CrossFit.

The more he learned by watching his son Matt, now 14, train at Brand X, the more Abruzzo integrated what he learned into his elective class. From there, he expanded the application of new concepts and techniques to all his middle-school classes. He transferred to MVHS last year.

"A good friend who is well known in the CrossFit community, Mike Burgener, exposed me to CrossFit," Abruzzo said. "We taught at Vista High School together in the early '80s, and Mike has been a friend and mentor to me for 30 years. It was Mike who encouraged me to pursue strength training, and because of his encouragement over the years I looked into all aspects of training."

He continued: "In 2005 and 2006, Mike kept telling me to check out Brand X in Ramona, where I lived at the time. My son was playing little league with Jeff and Mikki Martin's son Duncan, and that led to conversations with the Martins, which led me to take my son to a (CrossFit) Kids class. From there, my involvement grew."



Your exam: Barbara.



What if CrossFit was taught in your child's school?

"I started doing the workouts myself, modifying them due to a neck fusion and the need for a knee replacement. Six years later, I'm still doing air and dumbbell squats on that knee and enjoying my old-man workouts."

Abruzzo has lost 25 lb. and said that both exercise and nutritional changes were the key. For Abruzzo, however, watching his son's progress has been the real privilege.

"He's extremely strong for his age," Abruzzo said. "As he blossoms, his training becomes more evident in his success at basketball and baseball."

He added: "It is my hope that someday there will be a CrossFit certification for educators. The public-school classroom is a very different environment than a box. Accessing the school environment will address a significant need on the part of students," he said.

Abruzzo also believes the interest on the part of schools and teachers is very real.

"Schools in my district are looking for grants to send their teachers to certs," he said.

Spreading the Seeds

Even while training 500 young athletes daily, Abruzzo and his team are not content to rest. In January 2013, MVHS will host a professional-development day for all the secondary-school teachers in the district. The day will be dedicated specifically to introducing CrossFit to roughly 35 P.E. educators. Alison Patenaude of CrossFit Kids is scheduled to present.

"Even though we will only have four to five hours with them," Abruzzo said, "it's a step in the right direction. It will show educators how to integrate CrossFit principles into their P.E. classes and show them where to go to learn more about it."



About the Author

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THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Prodigal Son Returns

Six years after CrossFit helped him lose 210 lb., Johnny Di Gregorio abandoned the training methodology to become a competitive weightlifter. After several injuries, he's back to CrossFit, saying it's the healthiest choice for him. Andréa Maria Cecil reports.

By Andréa Maria Cecil

January 2013



All images: Courtesy of Johnny Di Gregorio

At 23, Johnny Di Gregorio was 425 lb. Three years later, he lost nearly half of that weight by following CrossFit.com programming. But that's not the most interesting part of Di Gregorio's story.

In January 2011, two years after he competed on Team CrossFit Academy's squad at the 2009 CrossFit Games and opened his affiliate, Di Gregorio decided to forgo the training methodology that changed his life for the better. Instead, he purposely regained 100 lb. to be more competitive in the sport of Olympic weightlifting.

1 of 5

"I resolved to spend two years doing everything, no matter what, to see how far I could take weightlifting," he explained.

At his best, Di Gregorio snatched 286 lb. and clean and jerked 363 lb.

In 2011, he won the Cal State Games in his weight class. In 2012, he took home the silver medal at the Cal State Games in his weight class and qualified for the American Open.

But Di Gregorio became "riddled" with knee and shoulder injuries.

"I realized that weightlifting is not about health and longevity," he said. "It's about being strong enough to lift the weight."

Becoming a Lifter

Shortly after taking the CrossFit Level 1 Seminar in July 2008, Di Gregorio signed up for the CrossFit Olympic Weightlifting Trainer Course the same year.

"I felt like when I looked at weightlifting for the first time, I was like, 'Wow, these lifts look really difficult and technical.' I didn't want to try them," he said. "I kind of don't like to do things blindly."

"He was very heavy and not lifting a lot of weight, but he had a good movement pattern. He was fast and explosive."

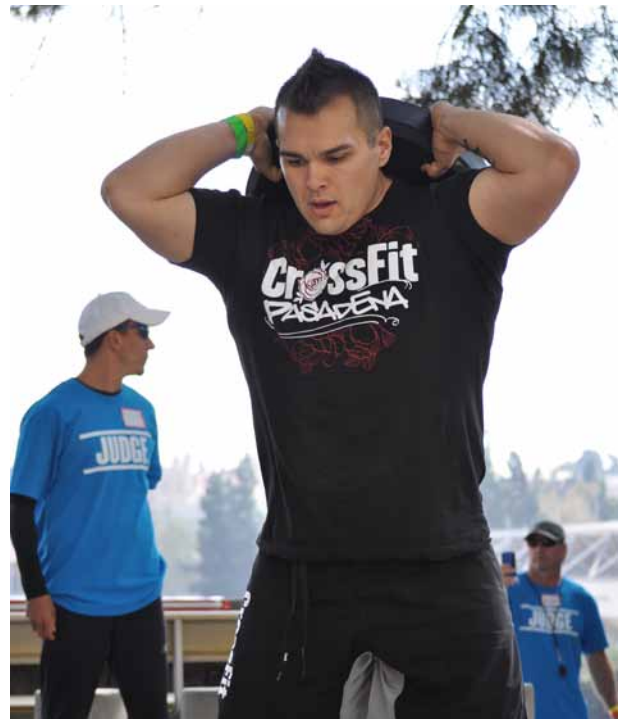
—Bob Takano

Di Gregorio neglected snatches and cleans until after he attended the Trainer Course with longtime Olympic-weightlifting coach Mike Burgener.

"After that, I started really enjoying it," he said.

As a 231-lb. lifter in his first meet, Di Gregorio snatched 154 lb. and clean and jerked 176 lb.

"It was really bad," he said with a laugh.



Di Gregorio admits he didn't start off with impressive Olympic-weightlifting numbers, but he was fast and explosive with a good work capacity.

USA Weightlifting Hall of Fame Coach Bob Takano was at the same meet.

"I just noticed that he was very heavy and not lifting a lot of weight, but he had a good movement pattern," the coach recalled. "He was fast and explosive."

Di Gregorio continued training on his own and occasionally working with Burgener as an athlete and a coach, assisting with CrossFit Olympic Weightlifting Trainer Courses.

"I got to a point where I could snatch 225 lb. and clean and jerk 265 lb., and I knew there was an issue with that because it wasn't a proper ratio," he said.

After Di Gregorio met Takano while they both were assisting Burgener during a Trainer Course, Di Gregorio began attending the lifting sessions Takano coached at CrossFit High Voltage in Burbank, Calif.

"He needed some technical work. He wasn't too bad," Takano said. "I noticed that he got strong very easily, that he still had good speed and he had a decent work capacity, and that's kind of rare in the bigger guys. They tend to take a little bit longer in the longer sets."



Ultimately, Di Gregorio discovered that CrossFit's constantly varied functional movements were going to be the key to long-term health.

And when Takano put Di Gregorio on a platform with a smaller guy who could move fast, he kept up.

"I was impressed by that," Takano said.

"I couldn't let go of the CrossFit aspect of things, where I should be able to do anything. I couldn't. That was depressing."

—Johnny Di Gregorio

At first, Di Gregorio's wife, Tiffany Wong, thought her husband's focus on weightlifting was another example of him "trying things out."

"He does like to experience other things before teaching it," she explained. "He loves the idea of being an expert in his field. (And he) wanted members to move better."

Likewise, Wong fully supported her husband.

"I was really gung-ho at first. I even started doing lifting with him and Bob," she said. "He was getting really strong really fast, and I was really excited about that. And then I got a little leery because he kept getting injured."

Plagued by Injury

At the 2011 Cal State Games, Di Gregorio dropped a 350-lb. barbell on his collarbone, which led to an injured shoulder. In September 2012, after qualifying for the American Open, he became injured again. Eventually, he discovered he had hamstring tendinitis and a torn medial meniscus. Both injuries stopped him from training.

"I started thinking, 'There's nothing healthy about being this injured.' I couldn't let go of the CrossFit aspect of things, where I should be able to do anything," Di Gregorio said. "I couldn't. That was depressing."

To be competitive at the international level, he would have had to invest another five or six years of training, he noted.

"It's just not gonna happen. I liked the ability to clean and jerk almost 400 lb., but at what cost? I couldn't do a strict pull-up anymore. It wasn't functional," said the 30-year-old. "If I want to have a family and play with my children, I couldn't be a weightlifter."

**"If I could have gotten him,
say in his mid-teens, ...
I don't think he would have
the same injury situation
that he's got now."**

—Bob Takano

Wong said his injuries took a toll on their relationship.

"It was difficult on our marriage for a while because he wanted to have children, and we started to talk about it, but we weren't really (able) to plan that out with him always being hurt or not being able to move," she said.

Olympic weightlifting has its place, Wong emphasized. But for her husband, a 100 percent focus on it wasn't the healthiest choice.

"It wasn't a good balance," she said. "He was getting winded much easier."

At that point, Di Gregorio was roughly 330 lb. and able to regularly back squat 500 lb.

"It was getting easy to get that way," he said of his body weight. "I was like an athletic version of my former myself."

That's when Di Gregorio put an end to his competitive weightlifting career.

"I decided that I wanted to get healthy again," he said.

A Decision Already Made

That meant telling the coach with whom he had invested so much time that he would no longer pursue weightlifting as a sport.

"It was just as much of an investment of two years for him as it was for me," Di Gregorio said.

Takano seemed relatively unfazed, matter-of-factly stating that Di Gregorio's decision had been made for him.

"It's probably better for him in the long run," said Takano, who coaches at Di Gregorio's affiliate. "It's not like I had somebody who was going to be an Olympian or a national record holder."

He added: "I think he would have been qualifying for national-level competitions and maybe at that level placing in the middle of the pack. And part of that was just because he got a late start. I think if I could have gotten him, say, in his mid-teens, I think I would have gotten him further along, and I don't think he would have the same injury situation that he's got now."

Takano explained that the fact that Di Gregorio's muscles got very strong very easily was partly to blame for his injuries.

"If you get into the game late and you haven't had a chance to develop the circulation around the connective tissue, then the connective tissue doesn't develop at the same rate," he said.



Now it's back to the bar—the pull-up bar.

When Di Gregorio made his most-recent comeback to lifting, his muscles responded, but his connective tissues didn't.

"And he was putting more pressure on them," Takano noted.

"The other thing I think I should emphasize is if someone doesn't want to be a weightlifter, then they're probably not going to be very good at it. It's a sport that takes a lot of passion."

**"It's nice because now
I have my partner back
to do what I want to do."**

—Tiffany Wong

Back to the Burn

Still, Di Gregorio's return to CrossFit hasn't been easy.

After his first workout in late October, he got chills.

"I remembered how much it burned to do CrossFit," Di Gregorio said.

To keep him accountable, he has two training partners—a coach and a CrossFit Pasadena member—and frequently posts his workouts on his Facebook page.

His long-term goals: squat 500 lb. while weighing 250 lb., snatch more than 300 lb., clean and jerk more than 400 lb.—all while being able to do 40 consecutive kipping pull-ups and 100 unbroken double-unders.

"I'd like to be a CrossFitter where you can do all those things and obviously have my niche," Di Gregorio said. "I want to be the healthiest I can be, and I know that means not being anything near 300 lb."

He added: "I'll always clean and jerk and snatch for the benefits of them for strength and conditioning. As far as competing in the sport, it just takes too much demand."

Wong, for her part, is excited about her husband's return to CrossFit.

"To be honest, I was relieved," she said. "I love that he can come back home and he can tell me he broke some double-under record he had."

Di Gregorio, Wong said, has more energy and is less sluggish.

"It's nice because now I have my partner back to do what I want to do," she said.

Although he was taking an approach with Olympic weightlifting that most affiliates weren't, he wasn't a good example in the CrossFit community, Di Gregorio said.

"I'd call on somebody to do demos for pull-ups when I was teaching a class (because I couldn't)," Di Gregorio said. "If you're gonna be in the CrossFit world, you have to CrossFit in one way or another way."

The last thing he wanted was for members to question his authenticity and say, "This guy's not very fit. Why would I want to train with him?"

Being a better example is his motivation.

"I want my community to see I'm lying on the floor next to them after a workout," he said, adding, "I feel better about myself when I CrossFit. That's the stuff that really changed me and helped me reform my life. I really missed it. These two weeks (in November), I'm sorer than I've ever been. I'm really happy."



Courtesy of Andra Maria Cecil

About the Author

Andra Maria Cecil works for CrossFit Media. She spent nearly 13 years as a professional journalist, most recently as managing editor of the **Central Penn Business Journal** in Harrisburg, Pa. She's a native of New Orleans who lives in York County, Pa. There, she's been doing CrossFit since 2008 at [CrossFit York](#), where she coaches Olympic weightlifting. Additionally, Cecil dedicates four days a week to training the Olympic lifts herself at [McKenna's Gym](#).