
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

From Pain Comes Pleasure

The S&M community meets the CrossFit crew at the Taranis Winter Challenge.
Emily Beers reports.

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All images: Kim Bellavance

Twisted sisters: The ladies of CrossFit Vancouver, including Emily Beers (left), camp it up after attending a CrossFit throwdown and sharing a hotel with an S&M crew.

When CrossFitters from different boxes gather together, it usually becomes one of those rare moments in life where strangers feel like friends.

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But for the people around us, our presence can be overwhelming.

We check into our hotels and immediately get noticed. Some people look intrigued, others intimidated, and others confused. They start asking questions as if we belong to some distant Amish community:

“Who are you?”

“What is CrossFit?”

“Your people aren’t vegans, are they?”

“Where did your legs come from?”

This wasn’t the case in Victoria on Nov. 4-6. Our group of CrossFit athletes came from all over British Columbia, Alberta, Washington and Oregon for the Third Annual Taranis Winter Challenge, a competition of 180 competitors that sold out in just 36 hours.



She will make you do Fran, and you will enjoy it.

When we checked into the host hotel, we were immediately overshadowed by another community, a group draped in black leather and fishnet stockings, a group holding ball gags and chains.

The Safe Word Is “Thruster”

“Sagacity” was the name of this group. Officially, they identify as being an “alternate lifestyle society.” This is, of course, the politically correct way to describe Sagacity. As an ignorant layperson, I would call Sagacity a “sexual fetish community,” and Sagacity’s presence at the hotel created a few unfamiliar moments for the CrossFitter—humbling ones, even.

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There I was in the lobby: I looked over and saw three or four CrossFit women in long socks and tiny spandex shorts. Usually, heads would turn and eyes would automatically stare. But nobody was looking at them.

Instead, the onlookers in the lobby were drawn to a woman in black jeweled stockings and a gaudy collar around her neck. She was being strung along on a leash held by a man twice her age. Next to them was a third woman tagging along for the ride; I’m unclear what her role was, but I could wager a guess.

The most awkward moment came when I was riding in an elevator with three Sagacity members and an elderly man. The women were talking in what I interpreted as some sort of sexual code (or maybe my head was just in the gutter because of the shirt one of them was wearing. The shirt pictured an eagle, his feet tied to a post, while another eagle stood directly behind, wings spread wide).

“Two is good,” said one of the women.



Good form is a must—even in six-inch heels.

"Two is good, you're right. But three is better," the other woman said with a smirk.

The women got out of the elevator on the fourth floor, and I was left with the elderly man.

"What's Sagacity?" he asked. "I keep seeing those Sagacity T-shirts."

I was uncomfortable with the thought of talking to a man my grandfather's age about sex, but I thought I should help him out, so I manned up. I was tempted to use the words "dominatrix" and "submissive" because I had just learned from one of the fetish woman that the official name for a submissive is a "pro sub," which stands for "professional submissive." I didn't want the man to have a heart attack in the elevator, so I chose my words wisely.

"They're part of some sort of sexual fetish community. They have a convention here this weekend," I said.

"Oh my," said the man, looking more bewildered than anything. "And what are you here for?" he asked, clearly wanting to change the subject.

"A CrossFit competition," I said.

He looked me up and down. My hair was a mess and chalk was spattered across my face after the day's three workouts.

The bewildered look on his face only grew.

"What has this world come to?" he shook his head and left the elevator.

I wasn't sure whether or not to be offended.

But then I got to thinking and realized that to the average person, our group of CrossFitters at the hotel—a group that sees one out of every one girl wearing Lululemon and one out of every one man decked out in compression gear—is possibly just as obscure as the pansexual community that dominated us.

In fact, as strange as it might seem, we have a lot in common with Sagacity.

CrossFitters from all over the northwest, 180 of us plus spectators, took airplanes and ferries to Victoria to meet up, socialize and battle against each other for three days. Sagacity members, 200 of them, also came from Alberta and all over B.C. to socialize and battle with likeminded individuals. And at the end of the day, we all ended up incredibly sore with mystery bruises all over our bodies.

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CrossFit prides itself on humbling you so badly that you have no choice but to behave respectfully, whether you find yourself at the top or at the bottom. Similarly, one of Sagacity's official rules of etiquette is to "behave politely and respectfully, whether you're a top or a bottom."

That said, to give us our due credit, one glaring difference separates the CrossFit and Sagacity communities. I mentioned to one of my male teammates that all the Sagacity girls, despite their open sensuality, were hard sixes or soft sevens out of 10—at best.

"Are you kidding?" he said. "I sat in the car watching them leave the hotel, and not a single one of them was better than a five. Maybe a drunk five out of 10," he said.

In all seriousness, though, I think the real point I'm trying to make is about community.

As CrossFitters, we're connected by our community, bonded by the comfort it gives us. We love the fact that we can show up at any CrossFit box around the world and be instantly welcomed. It makes us feel like we have a home anywhere in the world.

The Sagacity community, a group that has members all across North America, didn't seem any different.

When I was checking out of the hotel on Sunday, I overheard one of the Sagacity woman say, "What a weekend! Great people, and personal growth, for sure!"

Those words could just as soon have come from the mouth of a CrossFitter who competed at the Taranis Winter Challenge.

He or she just wouldn't have had to remove the ball gag to say them.



About the Author

Emily Beers finished a master's degree in journalism at the University of Western Ontario in the spring of 2009. Upon graduation, she worked as a sportswriter at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games, where she covered figure skating and short-track speed skating. Beers now hosts [WOD HOG](#), a not-always-PG publication featuring Canada West's CrossFit community. She ruptured her Achilles tendon in December 2010 and served as the Canada West Regional media director while recovering from Achilles surgery, and she competed in the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games with CrossFit Vancouver. She was also on the CrossFit Vancouver team for the Taranis Winter Challenge.