
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Worst. WOD. Ever.

CrossFit has no shortage of grueling workouts, but Richard Grimes goes in search of the most unpleasant WOD ever devised.

By Richard Grimes

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Courtesy of Nadia Shatila

A CrossFitter, an endurance runner and a triathlete sat in a bar drinking and telling stories about the hardest workout they'd ever done—the one they never wanted to do again. The endurance runner started.

"Endurance running is the toughest sport there is. For one workout, I ran a hundred miles through the desert with only a bottle of water. Twice, I was bitten by rattlesnake and had to suck the poison out of my own leg before continuing my run. That's the workout I never want to repeat."

The triathlete wasn't impressed. "That's nothing. I once did a double Ironman workout—a five-mile swim, 250-mile bike and two marathons. It took two days and I lost one of my testicles when it snapped off during the second half of the bike ride. I never, ever want to have a workout like that again."

They both turned to the CrossFitter, who had remained silent the entire time.

"So," asked the endurance runner, "if you had to choose, what CrossFit workout is so painful, so difficult that you never, ever want to do it again?"

The CrossFitter considered this for a second.

"Pretty much all of them," she answered.

Oh, the Memories

Every sport wants to be the toughest sport there is. Even yoga practitioners beat their hairless, sunken chests every now and again and crow about how hard downward facing dog is. But CrossFit is a special kind of fitness hell. CrossFit has WODs, workouts so intense that the toughest have names—you can hate them more easily.

And everyone has stories about that special workout, the one that hurt so bad that you can still feel the phantom pain in your body years after you finished the workout. The *CrossFit Journal* went looking for those stories.

We found one workout so intense that years later a single song could pull out the painful memory of the workout. We found a CrossFit trainer and champion with one WOD that she has never beaten. And finally, we found a story of a CrossFitter who decided to take one of the hardest WODs ever and make it harder ... by adding cheese.



Courtesy of Nadia Shatila

Nadia Shatila wasn't smiling at the end of Pat Sherwood's Front Squat Medley.

Boom Boom P-Oww!

Nadia Shatila is a CrossFit HQ trainer, a former gymnast and the owner of CrossFit Belltown. As an HQ trainer, Nadia flies into gyms around the country to perform two-day certifications with other trainers. And sometimes the trainers will do a WOD together during lunch.

"It's not mandatory, but it's a great bonding experience and a chance for those of us who usually work out alone to get a chance to work out with a group of excellent athletes," Shatila says.

In August of 2009, Shatila worked a certification at FirePower CrossFit in Milton, Ontario, with fellow trainers Chuck Carswell, Pat Sherwood and Dennis Marshall. Sherwood suggested a WOD. Actually, according to Shatila, it wasn't really a suggestion.

"Pat sent out a message to us before the cert saying this: 'The Front Squat Medley is going down.'"

The Front Squat Medley:

Max reps at 185/135 lb.

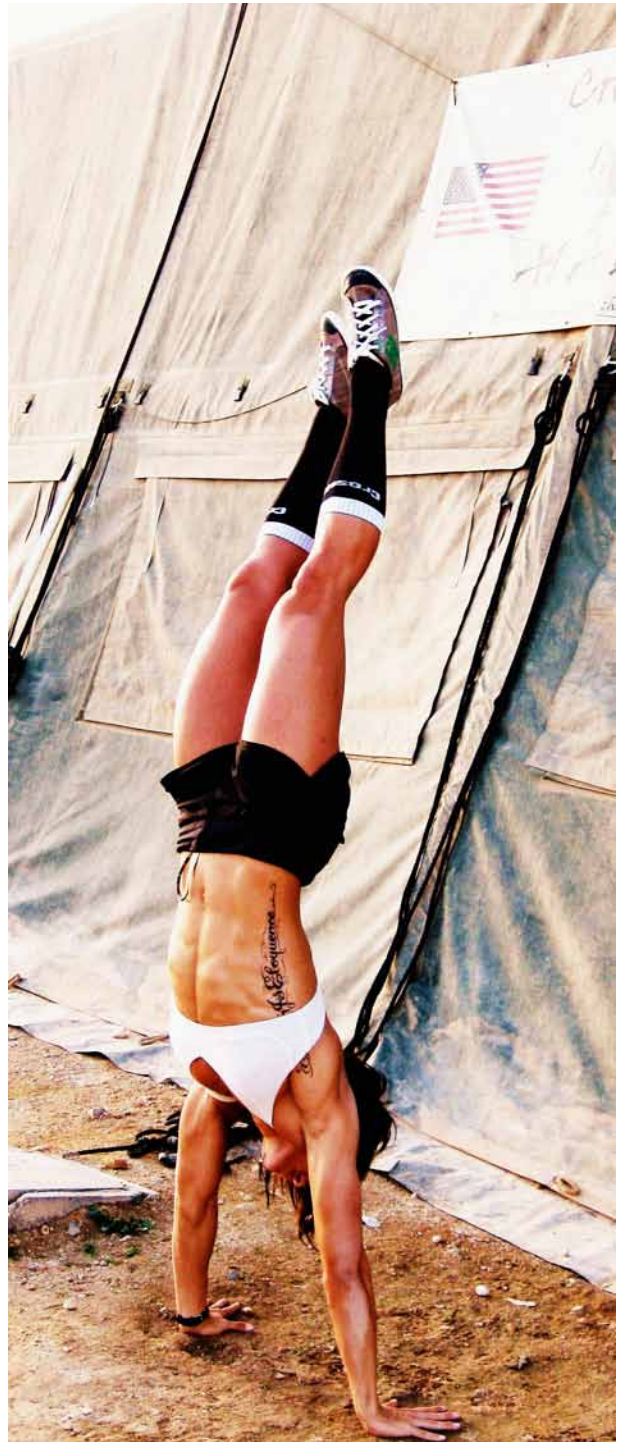
Max reps at 135/95 lb.

Max reps at 95/65 lb.

"I walked outside and was shaking, breathing so hard I was almost hyperventilating and crying."

—Nadia Shatila

Shatila cranked out 18 at 135, dropped the bar and waited for her second set. On her second set, she managed to hoist 95 lb. 32 times before depleting her muscles. By now, the crew was surrounded by trainees who were whooping encouragement and taking pictures. The only thing left was the last set at the lightest weight.



Courtesy of Miranda Oldroyd

Miranda Oldroyd is pretty good at most CrossFit workouts, but Barbara is one of her goats.

Courtesy of Miranda Oldroyd



No rest for the wicked? Oldroyd actually finds workouts with programmed rest to be more crushing than the no-break grinders.

But here's the thing about the Front Squat Medley and maxing out at the lightest weight: it's harder than the heavier sets because it never ends. Shatila says it best.

"Heavy is just heavy. There is only so much you can do. But light weight? You can go forever ..."

As Shatila started the last set, the song *Boom Boom Pow* by the Black Eyed Peas started rocking in the background. And she used the song.

"I just told myself, 'Keep moving to the beat of the song.'"

That worked until she hit the 40s, when she started doing single reps and concentrated on just hitting 50. Then she hit 60 and kept going.

At 68, she maxed out and collapsed.

"I walked outside and was shaking, breathing so hard I was almost hyperventilating and crying."

And the pain didn't stop there, says Shatila.

"I did not recover for one full month. I'm not exaggerating."

Even the music from the workout haunts her.

"Every single time I hear *Boom Boom Pow* I text Chuck (Carswell) ..."

Fear of Rest

Sometimes, your worst workout beats you.

Miranda Oldroyd, another CrossFit HQ trainer and the co-owner of Utah's CrossFit 801, is no slouch. Peruse her stats and you'll see great numbers for punishing workouts like Fran, Elizabeth and Grace.

But you won't see one name there.

"Barbara," Oldroyd says.

**"Barbara and I don't
get along ..."**

—Miranda Oldroyd

Twice Oldroyd has attempted Barbara—5 rounds of 20 pull-ups, 30 push-ups, 40 sit-ups, 50 squats with each round followed by three minutes of rest—and twice Oldroyd has been stymied before she reached Round 4.

“Stymied,” by the way, is a polite way of saying that Oldroyd ended up dizzy, sick and, in the case of her first attempt at Barbara, holed up in the bathroom for 45 minutes.

“Barbara and I don’t get along ...,” she says, “and when we fight ... she wins.”

Oldroyd’s nemesis has one thing in particular that makes the workout especially hard, according to the athlete: scheduled rest.

“Anytime, as a seasoned CrossFitter, you see scheduled rest ... you know to be afraid,” explains Oldroyd.

“Very afraid,” she added.

“The reason is that the rest in the workout gives you just enough time to recover enough to go at each round 100 percent. If there weren’t the scheduled rest in Barbara, you would have to pace the effort and it would be more of a slow and steady WOD rather than five all-out sprints.”

When Fran Isn’t Hard Enough ...

Of course, there are some people who want to have the worst WOD ever. They seek it out, maybe adding more weight or reps to the WODs to increase the difficulty.

Other people add cheese.

If you go to YouTube and look for CrossFit videos, search on the words “Fran,” “In” and “Out.” You’ll find [Gabe Rinaldi’s video](#) of a WOD he created by combining the Fran workout and In-N-Out burgers. Yep, 3 rounds of thrusters and pull-ups, 21-15-9 reps. But first, you eat a 3x3 In-N-Out burger.

For those not in the know, a 3x3 burger at In-N-Out means a hamburger with three pieces of meat and three pieces of cheese.

Eat that burger, then do your first Fran round. Followed by a 2x2 burger. Followed by another round. Then a 1x1 burger garnished with your final Fran round.

According to Rinaldi’s rules, no water is allowed. He also outlaws puking, although it’s unclear on just how you would enforce that rule.

Now, here’s how you know that Rinaldi is a genius:



S. Dy/CrossFit Journal

WOD Fuel?

“The element of eating the burgers makes this workout an interval workout.”

—Gabe Rinaldi

He convinced three other people to do the workout. He's never done it himself.

He has, however, clearly thought this through.

"The element of eating the burgers makes this workout an interval workout," Rinaldi muses with tongue in cheek.

"I'm guessing it is hard to breathe eating the burgers quickly while trying to recover from the thrusters and pull-ups," he adds later.

Rinaldi originally posted his video in the hopes that someone would take up his challenge and also attempt the Fran In-N-Out WOD. He seems genuinely surprised that no one else has done it.

Of course, one reason may be the 1,800 or so calories the one YouTube commenter calculated that each athlete consumed during the course of the workout. The Fran In-N-Out may be the only CrossFit workout in which you gain weight.

This modified Fran is, of course, not something you'll ever see on CrossFit.com, but it's definitely challenging.

Gluttons for Punishment?

Here's the thing about enduring the worst CrossFit workout in the world: apparently, it's like giving birth. As more time passes, you remember only the reward and forget how bad the pain was. Or maybe the competitiveness of CrossFit makes athletes less susceptible to giving up.

Miranda Oldroyd? She's already plotting a rematch with Barbara. And Nadia Shatila ends one e-mail about her Front Squat Medley by pairing two sentences that are seemingly at odds:

"... It's the worst workout I have ever done; you should try it."

You have to admire the courage of CrossFitters. On the other hand, if you enter your gym one day and see Gabe Rinaldi standing next to the pull-up bars with a bag of burgers, you should probably run.



About the Author



*Richard Grimes started CrossFit a year ago and lives in south-eastern Florida. He has written for newspapers, websites and magazines. He also writes under the name Grim Richard, and his *The Book of Gabriel* is available on Amazon.com or by visiting www.bookofgabriel.com.*

More of his writing can be found at www.grimrichard.com.