

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

July 2011

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THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Underloading Equals Reloading

Mark Bell explains how you can lift more weight by lifting less weight.

By Mark Bell Super Training

July 2011



All images: Mark Bell/Super Training

When you first get into strength training, it's to get chicks or to make the football team—which could also lead to chicks.



By learning about lifting, you can continue to improve after others have stalled.

Some of you may reject the idea that you picked up heavy stuff to impress girls. Look, man, don't deny it; embrace it. In addition, you also realized that with a better and stronger body you can probably kick the crap out of that jerk who punted your New York Jets football into the woods and then ride off into the sunset with *his* girlfriend. Everyone knows that having a big bench will increase your street cred.

When you first got into lifting, you got some results from doing a lot of basic training, like 3 sets of 10 reps. Maybe you took it a step further and started out overloading with more weight from one week to the next. I bet you started to get into everything you thought would make you better: forced reps, super sets, negatives and so on. The effects of your early training go a long way.

After a year or two of training hard, the gains started to slow down. The fun hammer was coming to halt your progress in its tracks. So how does a person continue to make progress and not get hurt? How do the pros like Shawn Frankl, Dave Hoff and Donnie Thompson make any progress after they have reached such a high level? What is their secret?

Pro secrets

I hear many lifters talk about de-loading. When I asked Donnie Thompson about de-loading (or backing off), he laughed.

"I do all my heavy stuff the last three weeks leading into a meet," said Big D.

Dave Hoff and many of the Westside boys do similar things by using various forms of a "circa max." Frankl uses kind of an old-school, Ed Coan approach where he adds more gear and weight from one week to the next running into a meet. Frankl seems to be able to handle heavy weights for a long time with no de-load. Brian Carroll manages his volume and keeps himself from going too heavy in training by using a lot of doubles.

I hate seeing people write the word de-load in their training logs or hearing that they had to shut it down because of severe forearm pain—or whatever. Stop being a bitch! But just because I hate the term "de-load," I'm not going to tell you that de-loading is totally worthless. However, I will argue that it's probably not needed if you're training optimally and not maximally all the time. If you are training heavy and doing overload work every week, then you will most likely need a de-load.

**Deloading is probably
not needed if you're
training optimally and
not maximally all the time.**

The amazing athletes I mentioned are in tune with how their bodies feel and how they react to a certain training stimulus. Plus, many top lifters have a trick up their sleeves. I call it "underloading."

Underloading?

You may be asking, "What in God's name is underloading? And is it free? Because every time I turn around Mark Bell is reaching into my wallet." Underloading is indeed free—for now. Underloading refers to using less weight to lift more.

"Wait, time out! Coach Bell, you're trying to tell me I can use less weight to get better results?"

Yes, that's exactly what I'm saying. This means you don't *always* have to go heavy and kill your whole face to make progress. There are ways to trick your body into training maximally and optimally without overdoing it. Using underloading will help you go into your next workout fresh without feeling like you overdid it.

Underloading will work for you because it:

- Uses similar but varied exercises.
- Allows you to stay fresh and keeps you ready to kill shit at all times.
- Allows you to pack on muscle.
- Controls volume and intensity.
- Prevents injury by using less weight.
- Allows you to get stronger with less.

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There are ways to trick
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The Underloading Method

This is a method that will force you to use less weight but still make outstanding strength gains. Keep in mind that underloading is a method, not a training system. Underloading needs to be utilized within a sound training system like the one used at Westside Barbell. Implement this method for one- or two-week cycles, then resume your regularly scheduled programming.

One of the simplest examples is to do something for reps instead of a max. Doing a set of 3-5 reps will still give you enough weight to get stronger, but it will also be light enough to keep you from destroying yourself. Remember, the athlete who can handle the most work wins. You can't handle the most amount of work over time if you destroy yourself in one day. You need stimulation without annihilation.

Forms of Underloading

Most forms of underloading should be done in the 1-5-rep range. No gear, no belt, deep-ply squats, deficit deadlifts, using a fatter bar ... You follow? You're making lifts harder by adding range of motion or taking away supportive gear. All the above methods will force you to use less overall weight, but you can still go for a max on them. You may find yourself five, 10, maybe even 15 percent weaker on these lifts, but it will force you to work hard.

Let's say your best squat is a 450-lb. box squat with a belt for 1 rep. Try doing a low-box-squat (about 3 inches lower than your normal box) max double with no belt. You may end up with around 330-360 lb., which is about 75-80 percent of your 450-lb. max. After you try this, you'll see how demanding using 75-80 percent can be.

At this point in the workout, you can add the belt and see what you can get for a double. You may end up with 380-400 lb., which is about 85-90 percent. The weights are still about 10 percent lower than your best. Congratulations: you just dipped your hand into the strength bucket and extracted a lot of points without being bitten.

Dynamic-effort work, also called "speed training" or "compensatory acceleration," has protocols suggesting the use of 50-70 percent of your 1-rep max for multiple sets (8-10) for multiple reps (2-3), but you are moving the weights as fast as you possibly can. You are working on becoming more explosive by producing the most force possible. Although you are using less weight, you are producing similar amounts of force or even more force on this day than you would with a max lift.

Bands and chains allow for speed work to become even more effective by providing accommodating resistance. Bands and chains will force your body to accelerate throughout the entire movement. The weights are lighter at the bottom of the lift, where leverages are poorest. As you finish the lift, the bands are stretched as you get into positions with better mechanical advantage.

The dumbbell bench press is a great example of underloading, as even a 600-lb. raw benchner will only use 150-200 lb. in each hand, which is 300-400 lb. total—about 100 lb. less than what he'd normally train with using a barbell. I like using 10-20-rep sets for dumbbell work. I mainly use the dumbbell bench as an assistance movement, but it can also replace the main movement for max effort or dynamic effort every four-to-six weeks.



Training optimally means you might not always be training heavy.

Try using increased ranges of motion for lifting, like dumbbell bench presses, deadlifts while standing on mats or low box squats onto a 10-12-inch box. The greater range of motion will make the lift harder and force you to use less weight.

Change from a stronger stance to a weaker one, or change to a weaker grip. For example, try doing a wide-grip bench press when you rule at close grip, or vice versa. Ultra-wide sumo pulls would be another example.

Add reps to an exercise. Try sets of 10, 8, 6 or 5 instead of what we normally do: triples, doubles and singles.

Add tempo to the exercise. Use pauses, eccentric and concentric tempos. This refers to moving the weights slower to increase time under tension. An example would be counting to four on the way down in a bench press.

Finally, have the guy who is lifting off to you teabag you on the bench. Underwear is optional. This approach is probably overused at Super Training. Or have a pit bull chew on your undercarriage while doing sumo deadlifts. This method, on the other hand, may need to be used more often at Super Training.

More Details on Underloading

The underloading method can be used by lifters of any level. However, a newer lifter may need to focus on handling heavier weights in order to prime his or her body for bigger weights. A more experienced lifter will be able to draw upon more muscle mass when using sub-maximal or lower weights.

The idea of underloading stems from years of training using Louie Simmons' Westside Barbell method. Simmons advises using the lightest weights to lift the heaviest weights. He often talks about getting a big carryover. For example, at Westside they will smash a big squat off a box with bands in briefs and their suit, but they will do so with the straps down and no knee wraps. This forces their athletes to use less weight. However, at the very top of the lift, because they have a band on the bar, the weight may be about equal to what they do in a meet. When they do go to the meet they have extra gear to lean on for those world-record attempts. Basically, you want to find optimal weights to get the best results.

Some say a workout is only as good as how well you can recover from it. Using 100 percent too often can cause problems that can actually make you weaker or, even worse, leave you injured.

An example would be when Jonny Knuckledragger says, "I do deadlifts out of the rack with 655." Then he goes to the meet and pulls 555 full range. Knuckledragger is already the man at rack deadlifts, right? He likes doing them because the veins in his shoulders pop out when he holds the weight at the top and screams. Knuckledragger loves getting the attention of the ladies, but they are only looking at him because he turns bright purple when he lifts.

What he fails to realize is that he is working on something he is already good at when he should, instead, focus on something much harder. He should focus on a weak point—something that will make him use less weight and work harder. Maybe he's slow as dogshit off the floor. Deficit speed pulls against bands would help a ton in this situation. Deficit deadlifts are performed while standing on 1-3-inch mats. This exercise increases the range of motion, thus making it more difficult. The more difficult the exercise, the less weight that will be used.

**Some say a workout is only
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can recover from it.**

Knuckledragger can make some great gains by training with less weight rather than more weight. Another option, if you are good at a lift, is making it more difficult by adding reps, bands or chains. Knuckledragger could try 555-575 lb. for a set of 3 in the rack if he is really that obsessed with rack pulls. The bottom line is don't let your ego paralyze your progress.

Points of Difference

To better understand underloading, let's look at the difference between overloading exercises and underloading.



Underloading Rules

1. No missed reps. Ever.
2. Leave something in the tank. This leaves something to the imagination and keeps you intrigued. Kind of like how a chick in a skirt is sometimes hotter than a naked chick. Leaving a little strength in the tank also keeps you in a positive frame of mind at the end of the workout and going into the next one.
3. Wrap. If you're not in the gym to get jacked or to get strong, then what are you doing there? Even those of you who want to lose body fat or get skinny, that is done out of the gym, not in the gym. You lose body fat and keep body weight in check by controlling the foods you eat, not by burning an extra 300 calories on an elliptical. If you want to go from dud to stud, then you may as well train properly to get the fastest results. Use the underloading method and feel yourself get reloaded for future workouts. The next time someone says, "Hey, how much can you lift?" you don't have to give 20 excuses on why you suck. You'll be able to look them right in the eye and say, "A lot more than you!"



Dumbbell work is a great way to apply underloading to your bench press. You'll have to use less weight, but you'll still have to work hard.

Underloading should be used with forms of overloading, which consists of exercises that allow you to use about 100 percent or more of your max. Conversely, in underloading we are looking for exercises that force us to use at least 10 percent *less than* our best.

A quick example: I did 675 lb. with the Zercher harness a while back. The next time I did the Zercher harness, I got up to 500 lb. for 6 reps with no gear off a lower pin. The 675 lbs. for 1 rep was more like a strength test and the 500 for 6 was more like a strength builder. I personally use underloading on my max-effort days. I flip-flop back and forth between under- and overloading as I see fit. Normally, I do two weeks of some type of underloading followed by one week of overload. I use overloading less because it's more demanding. I choose to either overload or underload based on how I feel, what I did the workout before and what I did the week before.

I'm looking for a solution that's optimal. Oddly enough, bands and chains do a little bit of both under- and overloading. Again, weights are lighter at the bottom and heavier at the top. They allow you to overload the top of

the lift but also force you to use less overall real weight on the bar, which is important when using a method like underloading. Bands and chains can be demanding but, in my opinion, they allow for a safer way to get to bigger lifts due to the fact that you're not just loading tons of iron on the bar.

A.J. Roberts recently hit an 1,140-lb. squat, and the heaviest squat he did in training was 935 lb. with the cambered bar (underloading). Roberts also hit a 695-lb. squat with 440 lb. of bands. That equals 1,135 lb. at the top of the lift (overloading), which is needed as a meet gets closer. Both squats were done to a parallel box in gear.

**“Just because you can doesn't
mean you should.”**

—Donnie Thompson

Five-Week Underloading Pulling Cycle or How I used Underloading to Put 60 lb. on My Deadlift

Week 1—Speed pulls on a deficit, 8-9 sets of 3 against bands or chains at 50-60 percent of my contest-best 760. Work to a heavy set of 3 sumo pulls in briefs.

Week 2—Speed pulls on a deficit, 8 sets of 2 reps against bands or chains at 50-60 percent (raw lifters may need to use 70). Complete 8 sets, then pull the mats and work up to an easy single in a suit with the straps up. The single will be about a Level 8 or 9 out of 10 on Mike Tuchscherer's rate of perceived exertion (RPE) scale. No missing! The work up is to focus on form while having heavier weights in my hands.

Week 3—Suspended good mornings for a max set of 5 with about 200 lb. of chains.

Week 4—Conventional speed pulls against bands, 10x2—no gear or belt.

Week 5—Sumo fully geared reverse-band deadlift, max single overload.

Finish all workouts with a lot of reverse hypers, static sit-ups, side bends and glute-ham raises.



The same is true with A.J.'s 50-lb. deadlift PR. Roberts did a block pull with 800 lb. for 2 reps, which is 98 percent of his 815 in the meet—but with a partial range of motion. The partial-range movement allowed him to go heavy, handle a big weight and not over-tax himself. Could he have done 800 lb. for 2 from the floor? Maybe, but who cares? Just because you can doesn't mean you should. (That statement of awesomeness was made by my fat little world-record-holding buddy, Donnie Thompson.) The rest of the time Roberts worked on skills, form, explosive strength, speed and mental prep. All his hard work combined led to an unheard-of 175-lb. increase on his total.

I recently did a 1,003-lb. squat in a competition (measly compared to Roberts, Hoff and Carroll, but hey—I'm trying) and pulled 760 lb. The heaviest weights I handled were on a reverse band lift, which is a form of overloading—and that was done only once in eight weeks. The heaviest squat I did was about 940 lb., and the heaviest pull was 635 or 655 and some chains.

The rest of the training time was spent on being fast, becoming more mobile (a.k.a. "building the supple leopard") and keeping the best form I could. In addition to that, I am constantly learning and adapting.

Powerlifting legend Thompson came and trained with Super Training for four weeks and, in that time, I saw the 390-pounder use 515-550 in the deadlift for sets of 5 while maintaining an 800-lb. raw pull. Thompson likes using sets of 5 as a form of underloading. He's using more reps to limit the amount of weight he can use but still build up the proper muscle stimulation needed to pull 800. Super D. also squats 500-550 lb. raw on his dynamic/recovery day for sets of 3, while doing kettle snatches for sets of 6 to raise his work capacity and force the muscles to work hard with weights that are measly compared to his 1,260-lb. world-record squat.

Both over- and underloading have their place in making a bar-bending, ass-kicking power athlete. Underloading is a fantastic method for building strength the old-fashioned way. Overloading is effective in many ways as well, but it can kick your ass if it's overdone. Overloading for geared lifters is how they can be so strong when they take the gear off. Now, here me out on this before you raw peeps jump down my throat: powerlifting gear allowed Scot Mendleson to bench over 1,000 lb., but Mendy also holds the raw world record with a bench of 715 lb. By

using powerlifting gear (or my Sling Shot), you can get in some great overload training, which over time can make you stronger.

The Great One

The great Ed Coan used a lot of underloading in his training. He'd use reps, paused squats and stiff-leg deads to allow him to train optimally—but not maximally—too early in his training cycle. Coan trained his ass off to be the best, but do you recall seeing him do lifts that were at 100 percent in the gym? Maybe he did, but most of the videos show him leaving a little something for the next training session—and, even more important, for the next meet.

Do the things you suck at.

As a meet got closer, Coan would begin to start to “overload” his body by using lifts and gear that would allow him to lift the most. I put overloading in quotes because Coan told me recently that he never took maxes in the gym. Think about that for a minute. He also said he never missed a weight in training. Wait a second. Really? That tells us that even The Great One left a little in the tank when he was training.

In addition, underloading-type methods early in the cycle helped Coan lay down the bricks for a bigger foundation going into the heavier training sessions.

“Look How Strong I Am!”

This phrase normally means you're probably telling a lie somewhere else.

“Look how strong I am with my 700-lb. rack pull!”

Then it comes time to do 700-lb. full range in a meet and you can't budge the damn thing off the floor.

Louie Simmons says that if you're about 10 percent stronger on an exercise, it's time to flip over a few more rocks and find the next one that'll take you to the next level. I'd go as far as to say you should try to find exercises you're 10 percent weaker at and utilize them two or three times per month on your max-effort days.

Let's face it, doing things we are not good at sucks—but sometimes it's necessary, right? I hate reading, but I love lifting. Well, you can't get better at lifting unless you're educated. I hate to write; I practically finished high school at a fifth- or sixth-grade reading and writing level. But here I am, writing to help spread the word. Do the things you suck at, and get ready to go from dud to stud. Remember, it's what you think you already know that prevents you from learning. Do not let your ego paralyze your progress.



About the Author:

Mark Bell is the editor-at-extra-large of *Power* magazine, owner of *Super Training Gym* in Sacramento, Calif., and the inventor of the *Sling Shot*. He is a Westside Barbell certified coach and professional powerlifter. His best lifts are a 1025-lb. squat, an 854-lb. bench and a 755-lb. deadlift.

THE **CrossFit** *kitchen*

K I D S



Sweet Cheeks Headquarters

SLIME SOUP

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

overview

Sometimes with kids it's all about the presentation. Observe:

"Hey, sweetie. Here's a bowl of chilled cucumber soup for lunch." Boooring!

How about this? "Hey, sweetie. Here's a big bowl of cold slime for lunch that I got when a slime monster attacked me last night when I took the trash out!"

What? Whoa!

Awesome.

Recipe makes 2 bowls.

blocks

Per bowl:

2 carbohydrate blocks

3 fat blocks

ingredients

1 large cucumber, peeled and deseeded

1 cup plain almond milk

1 large ripe avocado, cubed

1 tablespoon chopped fresh cilantro

1 tablespoon chopped fresh green onions

Pinch of sea salt

Pepper to taste

notes

Serve this slime with 2 oz. of chicken breast on the side or add 3 oz. of shrimp directly in it for a balanced Zone meal.

directions

1. In a food processor, combine all ingredients and process until pureed.
2. Garnish with cilantro and serve immediately or chill in fridge.



THE CrossFit JOURNAL

North and South

Andréa Maria Cecil trolls Reebok HQ during the Northeast Regional, while Hilary Achauer soaks up the sun in SoCal.

By Andréa Maria Cecil and Hilary Achauer

July 2011



Staff/CrossFit Journal

The 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games featured 17 regional competitions going on in very different areas. Up in Canada West, the athletes competed in a hockey rink. In Northern California, the athletes competed in the rain. They had a streaker at the Australia Regional.

1 of 8



Travis Bagent fires up the crowd at the Northeast Regional.

In the last weekend of regional competition, we sent Andréa Maria Cecil to the Northeast Regional at Reebok International world headquarters in Massachusetts and Hilary Achauer to Long Beach State in Southern California. Here's what they saw on the same weekend in June, 2,600 miles apart.

The Voice of the People

The crowd of roughly 1,000 watched as the final group of male competitors neared the finish of the infamous 100s workout on the second day of the Reebok CrossFit Games Northeast Regional.

The heat included well-known names within the CrossFit community: David Charbonneau, Dave Lipson, Austin Malleolo, Mike McKenna, Rob Orlando and Daniel Tyminski.

At about 18 minutes into the workout, event emcee Travis Bagent—34, 6'3", 265 lb.—sauntered by the competitors, microphone in hand, leaning in to hear an athlete's judge call out the rep number.

"Austin Malleolo, 10 reps left," he announced and continued his walk to the athlete just behind Malleolo.

**"The race is right here, ladies
and gentlemen!"**

—Travis Bagent

"Daniel Tyminski, 10 reps left!" he exclaimed into the microphone. "The race is right here, ladies and gentlemen!"

The crowd erupted in a roar. With that, both athletes plowed through their last reps. Tyminski finished first with a time of 18:40. Malleolo, 18:43.

Afterward, Bagent made his way back to the athlete-entrance tent for some shade and joked, "I made that race." Then he let out a big laugh.

Bagent's self-assessment wasn't far from the truth.

"I Love Travis"

Outdoors at Reebok HQ in Canton, Mass., the competition field was flanked by a 400-meter track, a basketball court and glass buildings that almost looked like inverted obelisks. Music that included everything from dance songs to Saul Williams' *List of Demands (Reparations)* and the Foo Fighters' *All My Life* blared from the speakers on both sides of the screen. There, athlete standings were displayed along with current regional workouts, heat competitors and even videos of Miranda Oldroyd, Jason Khalipa and Mikko Salo doing workouts.

The athlete village included reclining outdoor chairs, a fan that blew a mist of water into the area and warm-up equipment for competitors. Over the course of the three-day event, Bagent excited spectators, motivated athletes and kept everyone informed—rep by rep.

"I love Travis," HQ trainer, athlete and regional head judge E.C. Synkowski said with a smile and a chuckle just after Bagent told the crowd to give it up for another HQ trainer during the final women's heat of the weekend.



Austin Malleolo gets ready for muscle-ups at Reebok HQ.

"Put your hands together, workin' crazy hard all weekend long, Jennifer Hunter-Marshall!" Bagent said.

That day had started with Amanda, and its muscle-ups and squat snatches separated Games contenders from the rest.

Bagent provided a play-by-play.

"And she's up. She's up again! She's a beast! In Lane 4, CrossFit Providence!" he excitedly boomed into the microphone during the first affiliate heat.

Moments later: "Let's go, Shoreline. You've got the hang of this now. Get up!"

But the second affiliate heat is when the action became practically nail-biting.

"We got a leader. In Lane 4—that's CrossFit Route 1!"

But the duo of Mat Frankel and Heather Bergeron caught up.

"We have a new leader back in Lane 1! CrossFit New England!" Bagent announced.

The crowd roared.

As Bergeron expressed visible disappointment over a couple of missed muscle-ups in the final round, Bagent's voice enveloped the 450-square-foot outdoor competition space: "CrossFit New England, CrossFit Route 1, head-to-head. CrossFit Route 1—they want a ticket to California. You can get it right here!"

The crowd yelled. Then Bergeron finished her muscle-ups.

**"CrossFit New England,
CrossFit Route 1, head to
head. CrossFit Route 1—they
want a ticket to California.
You can get it right here!"**

—Travis Bagent



After borrowing a pair of shorts from Magnum, P.I., Daniel Tyminski snatches like it's 1985.

"The race is on. Squat snatches for the male athletes!" Bagent said, speeding up his cadence, as the men from both teams headed into the final round of squat snatches.

In the end, CrossFit New England bested CrossFit Route 1 by two seconds with a time of 13:51.

"We're probably on our way downhill from that event right there," Bagent said and then laughed into microphone, rubbing his head.

An Emcee Is Groomed

Minutes into the final affiliate workout of the weekend, HQ Director of Training Dave Castro, beneath the athlete-entrance tent, told Bagent, "Travis, this is the last stretch of the day. Let's see what you got. Don't give up on me now."

The two men shook hands—in the way that only men do—and Castro gave Bagent a big smile. Bagent strutted onto the competition field.

"Look at Lane 2, CrossFit Shoreline, unbroken, no problem," he announced as a male athlete pushed out 40 dumbbell ground-to-overheads.

Aside from his jovial and grounded demeanor, Bagent's raspy voice is part of the charm. It personifies CrossFit.

But Albany CrossFit—not Shoreline—saw its first athlete cross the finish line.

"Let's give it up for Shoreline CrossFit," Bagent told the crowd. "Come on. Go, go, go! You got a chance!"

And the crowd erupted yet again.

"He's been doing good," said Castro, who arrived for the third day of the regional.

"He needs to get more familiar with the athletes," he added. "He'll get there by being around. Once he understands the athletes and their histories, that'll take him to the next level."

The next level comes soon.

Bagent will be the emcee for this year's Games, to be held July 29-31 at the Home Depot Center in Carson, Calif.

"Dave Castro groomed me to announce the Games," said Bagent, a 20-time national arm-wrestling champion and an eight-time world champion sponsored by Rogue Fitness. Bagent was also the man with the mic at the Central East Regional.

Increasingly, Castro will be stepping back from announcing.

"I'm staying in his back pocket," Castro said with a smile. "I needed to develop someone."

Emotionally Involved

By almost all accounts, Bagent was a hit at the Northeast Regional.

He only heard one complaint, he said, from a female spectator who said, "My son placed third and you didn't say anything."

He shrugged.

Aside from his jovial and grounded demeanor, Bagent's raspy voice is part of the charm. It personifies CrossFit.

"Friendly but tough," said Ben Bergeron, Northeast Regional director and co-owner of CrossFit New England.

"He brings a ton of energy," he continued. "He does a good job of informing the crowd and the athletes. He's done a phenomenal job."

He added: "And he's a CrossFitter."

As CrossFit 908 owner Tim Carroll exited the competition field after finishing the final workout of the regional, he put out his fist for a bump from Bagent.

"Good job announcing this weekend. You did an awesome job," Carroll told him.

The moment was characteristic of the three-day event, where Bagent made many moments memorable.

"The quicker you can decipher it, the quicker you can get it out to the people," said Bagent, who referred to CrossFit New England's Mel Ockerby as "The Ockerbeast" throughout the weekend. "You could be out there thinking you know what's going on and someone could say, 'Time!' and you're like, 'What?'"

"Ninety percent of people know what's going on here," he said. "But we're getting bigger. There's people watching who don't know as much about CrossFit. (They) have to be emotionally involved."

As the final men's heat of the weekend wrapped up, Bagent was out on the field, shaking hands and giving hugs to sweat-soaked competitors. That, he said, is how a CrossFit emcee should be.

"It's gotta be a guy who can give some love to the guy who's all bloody."



Staff/CrossFit Journal

Full ROM? Hell, yeah.

Bring on the “Jorts”

In true SoCal style, the scene at the Southern California Regional was big, fast and loud.

Held outdoors at Long Beach State’s Jack Rose Track in the shadow of a giant 18-story blue pyramid, the competition field was under the flight path of the Long Beach Airport, and planes flew directly overhead throughout the day as athletes put up blistering, world-record times.

The competition started off on Friday with the region’s famous June gloom, as the teams hit the rowers and handstand push-ups under cloudy skies. The event was barely underway when the first world record was set—22:55 in Event 1—by the newly opened Outlier Crossfit.

“We had practiced this enough and weren’t shocked when we set the record,” said Adam Stevenson, one of the owners and team members of Outlier.



Staff/CrossFit Journal

Never-nude syndrome affects hundreds worldwide, perhaps including Ronnie Teasdale.

Nothing could top Ronnie Teasdale and the parade of jeans shorts—the much-maligned “jorts.”

The sun came out in time for the thruster ladder. As Katie Hogan and Lindsey Valenzuela battled it out over the 190-lb. thruster, kids played nearby in the track’s long-jump sand pit. Among these potential future CrossFit champions, two sported mohawks and matching red sweatbands as they soaked in the atmosphere of athletic excellence. The hair and accessories were just a few of the many fashion statements seen on both participants and competitors.

Cesar Flores of Brick CrossFit showed his dedication by shaving the shape of a kettlebell and the word “brick” into the side of his head. Twenty-year-old competitor and original CrossFit Kid Connor Martin wore a purple weight belt, bright green knee socks and a backwards hat throughout the competition, but nothing could top Ronnie Teasdale and the parade of jeans shorts—the much-maligned “jorts”—that he wore to compete in all weekend. His flashy style peaked on the last day with a pair of jorts completely ripped up each side, Incredible Hulk-style, which flapped open and put his legs on full display during the overhead lunges.



Hilary Achauer

Affiliate T-shirts are so last year. Cesar Flores represents his box with new style.



Staff/CrossFit Journal

"Down, down. Do your dance, do your dance!"

But the vibe at SoCal wasn't all bright colors and statement-making outfits.

"We have a very tight community, and it feels like family," said CrossFit Marina's Denise Serrano, one of the organizers of the event. "I've been impressed by the number of spectators this weekend—many of them have never witnessed a CrossFit competition. A lot of the teams here are the old-school affiliates, but it's great to see so many new people coming out to support these athletes."

On Day 2 of the event, the sun came out and the crowds swelled. As the athletes and their jaw-dropping performances made headlines, the intensity was just as high off the competition field. Tight, close-knit communities are a hallmark of CrossFit, and the crowds at the SoCal Regional were an important part of the competition. CrossFit Invictus and Brick CrossFit had supporters in the hundreds cheering on their athletes, and as the Brick team finished up Workout 3, the brutal deadlifts and box jumps, the orange-clad Brick crew shouted out each of the last nine box-jump reps, urging their team on to a first-place finish for the workout.

It wasn't just the winners who got love from the SoCal crowd. With Fugazi blasting from the speakers, the entire crowd gathered to cheer on Tina Angelotti, the last woman in her heat to finish up Event 3.

"The crowds are very dedicated here," said Darren McGuire, a judge at the event. "The level of competition in this region is intense, and the crowds are responding. We all can't achieve the level of the top competitors, but they inspire us to do better."

The CrossFit Los Angeles team, the big surprise of the SoCal Regionals, best demonstrated the power of team spirit. Their squad entered the regional competition in 30th place, and going into the weekend the most they hoped for was a strong showing. The team came prepared to do work and put up strong and consistent performances, but their enthusiastic fan base set them apart. Clad in matching baby-blue V-neck CrossFit LA shirts, the CrossFit Los Angeles crew broke into a choreographed *Cupid Shuffle* dance and organized chants throughout the weekend.

This tradition came about during the Open competition. Right before the first Open workout, the tension in the gym was palpable, so to loosen everyone up, coach Kenny Kane—a stand-up comedian and hip-hop dance instructor—put on the *Cupid Shuffle* and taught everyone the dance. This dance became the warm-up for every Open workout, "and soon it was an indicator that it was 'game on,'" said CrossFit Los Angeles owner Andy Petranek.



Staff/CrossFit Journal

So you think you can dance, CrossFit LA?

Heather Scaglione dislocated her shoulder in the Amanda workout and rammed it back into joint against the pull-up rig during the first round to take second in her heat.

Knowing they would have to step it up for the last day, the team asked the organizers of the event if they could take over the P.A. before Event 6. They performed the dance on the sidelines, which inspired a third-place finish overall and secured a spot in the Games.

The final workout of the day turned out to be one of the most gutsy and dramatic performances of the weekend. Heather Scaglione dislocated her shoulder in the Amanda workout and rammed it back into joint against the pull-up rig during the first round to take second in her heat.

As she strapped her feet into the rower for the final workout, the crowd watched in disbelief as she began rowing with only one hand. The rest of the athletes surged ahead of her, but she finished the row and continued on with one-handed burpees. She got to the two-arm dumbbell ground-to-overheads, where she was faced with lifting two 35-lb. dumbbells overhead 40 times with a dislocated shoulder. As a medic crouched in front of her, she looked at the weights, took a deep breath and slowly, with gritted



Heather Scaglione knows no quit.

teeth, raised both arms overhead. Each lift took maximum effort just to raise her right arm, but she kept going, the judge shouting encouragement.

To the disbelief of the entire crowd, Heather finished the 40 ground-to-overheads and moved on to the toes-to-bars. Lauren Andrade and Jacquie Anderson, who had both finished their workout, gathered around, shouting encouragement and urging the crowd to cheer on the astonishing performance.



About the Authors

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Courtesy of Andréa Maria Cecil

Hilary Achauer is an award-winning freelance writer and editor with a background in marketing and communications. An amateur-boxer-turned-CrossFitter, Hilary specializes in health and wellness content, focusing on emerging fitness trends. Her writing has been featured in a leading online parenting magazine as well as a number of travel and lifestyle publications. She is an editor for Frommer's travel guides and writes websites, brochures, blogs and newsletters for universities, start-ups, entrepreneurs, accounting and financial service organizations, and management consultants. She lives in San Diego with her husband and two small children and spends most of her free time at CrossFit PB. To contact her, visit [HilaryAchauer.com](#).



Courtesy of Hilary Achauer

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

CrossFit Kids Goes to Middle School

Dan Strametz and Debbie Rakos take the CrossFit Kids program out of the box and into the education system.

By Debbie Rakos and Dan Edelman

July 2011



All images: Debbie Rakos and Dan Strametz

It's raining in Ramona, Calif.

Used to be not so common an occurrence. Used to be tinderbox dry for months on end. And then the Santa Ana winds would kick up, a spark would be struck and the county would burn.



Slowly, CrossFit is becoming a part of P.E. classes around North America.

At Olive Pierce Middle School (OPMS), such musings are far from the minds of the kids working the machines packed inside the Body Shop, the campus' weight room. Trainers Debbie Rakos and Dan Strametz ensure proper usage of the machines and bide their time because, in just about a decent Fran time, a familiar hue and cry is raised: "We're bored. We wanna do CrossFit!"

Neither Rakos nor Strametz is particularly surprised. After all, the program is called "CrossFit Kids in the Body Shop." And this pilot program's success bodes well for CrossFit Kids' expansion into school districts elsewhere.

Persistence

Rakos runs the day-to-day at CrossFit Brand X. She spent the better part of a year nudging Ramona Unified School District about starting a high-school-level sports/team-conditioning program centered on CrossFit Kids. Her impetus was the success Jeff Martin, Brand X's co-owner and head coach, had with high jumper Tyler Jordan, who

trained under Martin for about a year and went on to win the state meet and had a seven-foot season record (1).

In July 2010, Rakos met with the district programs director regarding a training program for the continuation high school. Although the plan did not pan out, Rakos was referred to OPMS' afterschool Teens program director Jamie Nelson. She loved the idea of CrossFit Kids.

Rakos cites persistence as the key for affiliates to get their

**Rakos cites persistence as
the key for affiliates to get
their CrossFit Kids programs
into local schools.**

CrossFit Kids programs into local schools. She just didn't quit; "Tenacious D." would be an apropos nickname for her. But doggedness is only part of the equation. School decision-makers will not necessarily be swayed simply when confronted with a determined and even passionate CrossFit Kids representative. Providing administrators with clear evidence of program success is critical to making the case. To drive the point home, Rakos arrived at meetings armed with *CrossFit Kids Magazine* articles written by teachers who had integrated CrossFit into their programs, as well as additional published studies linking exercise and improved test scores.

Nuts and Bolts



Making kids fitter will produce fitter adults down the line.

OPMS's afterschool Teens program comprises around a dozen academic, athletic and enrichment programs each semester, engaging some 300 students. It is grant based, but parental donations and fundraising supplement the cost. The Teens program is considered exemplary, and CrossFit Kids in the Body Shop has proven one of the more popular offerings, consistently meeting its participation cap and maintaining a waiting list.

Packed with machines, the Body Shop would strike most as a state-of-the-art facility, particularly for a middle school. Obviously, as CrossFitters, Rakos and Strametz have little use for machines in their programming, which initially came as something of a shock to school administrators. That said, the students do find the machines overly tempting—to a point.

"The kids as a whole do not like the machines in the sense that we make them use them properly," Strametz says, "and two to three minutes of that is boring to them. Their concept of working on the machines is playing on them ..."

That's part of what you get with eleven-to-fourteen-year-olds. So to quash their inclination to climb and swing from the machines, and to allow them to expend some of that nervous shotgun energy accrued during a regular school day, Rakos and Strametz give the kids 15-20 minutes to talk and use the machines. That may seem like a lot of wasted time, but CrossFit Kids in the Body Shop runs four afternoons a week from 2:15 to 4:30. Over two hours. A veritable eternity by CrossFit standards.

Rakos and Strametz fill the time using the standard CrossFit Kids class structure. Following the 15-20 minutes of decompression and administrative duties, they gather the kids around the whiteboard to explain the skill work, focus work for a new movement, a WOD that applies either the skill or focus work or both, and a game or two. WODs and games are often done outside and incorporate various things found on the campus; e.g., walls and benches. Games end at 4 p.m. and the kids are brought back in for discussion. The kids are cut loose at about 4:15, at which time the school provides them with a snack (students are to remain in the school's care until 4:30).



According to CrossFit Kids protocols, form is drilled before weights are increased.

**In terms of equipment,
the needs are minimal;
CrossFit Kids programming
is adaptable to the
available environment.**

In terms of equipment, the needs are minimal; CrossFit Kids programming is adaptable to the available environment. However, some gear can make life easier:

Safety cones—for borders, start and end points or obstacle courses.

Medicine balls—for warm-up drills, weighted movements, wall-ball WODs and games.

PVC pipe—for safe training of movements.

As far as instructor qualifications, it goes without saying that Rakos and Strametz hold Level 1 and CrossFit Kids certificates; the latter includes a background check. In addition, the school required that they have a live-scan fingerprinting done through the Department of Justice, a physical exam and a drug screen. Both needed to pass a general-education written exam.

However, these prerequisites, while necessary, are insufficient to qualify a trainer for a CrossFit Kids program outside an affiliate. At the very least, one of the chosen trainers should have extended experience running CrossFit Kids classes at your affiliate. You want to ensure that any staff sent out into the world to represent CrossFit and your box possess the right temperament and skills to work with children.

In terms of programming, Rakos and Strametz draw on CrossFit Kids Preteen/Teen Lesson Plans and the [CrossFit Kids](#) main page.

“Also, we are very lucky to have CrossFit Brand X, which has such an active Teen program,” Rakos says. “We can glean a lot of information on WOD programming.”

AMRAPs with a non-specified time have proven most effective with this age group. With no knowledge of the time frame, the kids are less apt to watch the clock and tend to be more honest about rep counts than they might be with task-driven WODs.

Here are three WODs Rakos and Strametz have used:

WOD 1

Warm-Up: Machines/stretching

Skill: Kettlebell swings

WOD

AMRAP with teams of 4:

At the top of a grassy hill, log-roll down the hill

20 single-unders

Climb 3.5-foot wall onto stage

10 kettlebell swings

Sprint up hill and tag teammate

Game: Powerball

WOD 2

Warm-Up: Machines/stretching/50 jumping jacks

Skill: Overhead squats (with PVC)

WOD: Partner Jeremy

21, 15 and 9 reps of:

PVC overhead squats

Jump-over-hurdle burpees

(Partner A does the WOD while Partner B counts—then switch)

Game: Dodgeball

WOD 3

Warm-Up: Machines/air squats

Skill: Dumbbell push press/medicine-ball cleans

WOD: Stairway to Heaven

2 teams perform 3 rounds

Stairway is split by a railing—Team A on left, Team B on right

One team member goes at a time:

5 10-lb. dumbbell push presses

Run up about 6 steps

5 medicine-ball cleans

Run up about 6 steps

5 push-ups

Run down stairs without jumping

At bottom, perform 1 perfect squat

Tag next teammate

Game: CrossFit Poker



Outside the box, CrossFit Kids workouts can integrate a host of unique environmental features.



With large groups, maintaining focus and control is essential. Rakos and Strametz have used the freeze-on-command rule with great results.

Challenges

"Trying to teach 40-plus kids the basic movements of the squat, even using the awesome cues provided during the CrossFit Kids trainer course, was quite a challenge," Rakos says.

At the outset of the school year, with over 40 young teenage students, the program exceeded the ideal trainer-to-student ratio as prescribed by CrossFit Kids. Rakos prefers to teach the movements to small groups using breakout circles. However, outside a CrossFit affiliate, and particularly when dealing with public schools, trainers cannot expect to have a say in class size or staffing.

"We did establish firm rules right from the beginning, and that has aided in class control," Rakos says.

She and Strametz immediately put in force one fundamental directive from CrossFit Preschool: freeze on command. From a safety perspective, this instruction is critical for any size or age CrossFit Kids group using weights

or other implements. In the spring semester, the program was capped at 20 students—far more effective for two trainers, says Strametz.

Strametz also recommends having a male and a female trainer for middle-school-aged kids. This is a squirrely, highly distractible age group—prepubescent and pubescent children—and having both gender perspectives represented on the staff can really aid in addressing the kinds of emotional and behavioral issues that might arise, including spontaneous tears and bullying.

Successes and Outcomes

Although some kids tried and did not care for the CrossFit Kids program, and others moved on to different programs, the kids who continue each semester want to be there and want to get better. And they have. Several parents have indicated that CrossFit Kids in the Body Shop has improved their children's sports performance, and Rakos and Strametz can share many success stories from the OPMS program.

One young man survived brain cancer as an infant, but the battle left its mark, including a brain shunt that drains into his abdomen, extreme mood swings, and impaired gait and balance.

"I spoke with his mother after the first semester had ended," Rakos says. "She told me that his physical therapist and doctor had both commented on the improvement of his movements and that the amount that the shunt had been draining was dramatically reduced."

A young woman came into the program a little overweight, lacking coordination, and with little prior exposure to sports or physical activity. She is now always one of the top three finishers of a workout. She has lost weight, and there is a noticeable difference in her demeanor; she carries herself with more confidence.

Anecdotal evidence makes for interesting conversation, but CrossFit Kids prefers more substantial proof of its efficacy.

Anecdotal evidence makes for interesting conversation, but CrossFit Kids prefers more substantial proof of its efficacy. Rakos and Strametz conducted fitness assessments at the beginning of the school year and then again mid-year using the testing documents from the CrossFit Kids Preteen/Teen Lesson Plans. The assessments include basic movements and some skills; e.g., pull-ups, push-ups, squats, a 100-meter sprint, and an L-sit hold.

Tangible evidence of their progression and improvement excited the kids while offering some empirical confirmation of the program's effectiveness. Table 1 offers selected assessment data from students who have participated in the first two semesters of CrossFit Kids in the Body Shop. Rakos and Strametz will assess again at the end of the school year, collecting data primarily from the core kids who stick with the program through the final semester.

Name	Month	Squats	Sit-Ups	Push-Ups	10-Meter Sprint
T.D.	Sept. '10	18	30	19	12
	Apr. '11	35	36	30	12
J.C.	Sept. '10	19	24	NA	11.02
	Apr. '11	30	38	NA	10.5
D.C.	Sept. '10	21	35	NA	11
	Apr. '11	31	43	NA	10.5
J.P.	Sept. '10	32	30	26	11
	Apr. '11	45	47	33	9.9
B.A.	Sept. '10	23	32	30	11.08
	Apr. '11	43	40	34	10.03
M.I.	Sept. '10	20	28	26	12
	Apr. '11	37	37	34	10.03
N.M.	Sept. '10	32	33	22	12
	Apr. '11	39	50	47	10.56
T.G.	Sept. '10	21	23	25	10.02
	Apr. '11	40	37	40	9.56
N.C.	Sept. '10	31	39	26	11
	Apr. '11	43	43	37	10.63
J.S.	Sept. '10	23	25	20	15
	Apr. '11	45	38	32	11.94
S.S.	Sept. '10	22	28	24	12
	Apr. '11	60	34	32	11.19
A.G.	Sept. '10	33	37	NA	13.02
	Apr. '11	35	45	NA	11.44
K.A.	Sept. '10	28	35	18	12.03
	Apr. '11	42	43	35	10.28
E.I.	Sept. '10	35	32	27	13.11
	Apr. '11	42	43	34	11.22
T.S.	Sept. '10	40	34	22	11.15
	Apr. '11	44	47	32	11.09

Table 1: Select Assessment Data.

Last Words

CrossFit Kids' goal of linking fitness and fun—broad, inclusive, general fun—is intended to ultimately shape the lives of children in a positive way. This can be pursued from within the confines of CrossFit's hundreds of affiliates; however, expansion into the education system is a logical next step to achieve this objective on a broader scale.

Although nothing formal has been announced, given the program's popularity, Rakos feels pretty confident that CrossFit Kids in the Body Shop will be renewed for next year.

References

1. Martin J. California high jumper Tyler Jordan wins state. *CrossFit Kids Magazine* 55: 4, June 2010.



About the Authors



Debbie Rakos has been with Brand X almost since the beginning, being the first student to go from white belt to black belt in the gym's kenpo karate system. She earned her CrossFit Level 1 certificate in 2005 and is a member of CrossFit Kids HQ.

She helped develop the CrossFit Kids Preschool program and assisted in the writing of the CrossFit Kids Preschool Lesson Plans. In addition to teaching CrossFit Kids Preschool and Kids classes and helping with the Teen and adult CrossFit classes, Debbie manages the day-to-day affairs at CrossFit Brand X.



Daniel Strametz is a CrossFit Level 1 and CrossFit Kids trainer at CrossFit Brand X. He is a fifth-degree kenpo black belt with over 30 years in the self-defense field, more than half of which has been working with children.



Joan Edelman

Dan Edelman is a CrossFit Level 1 and CrossFit Kids trainer at CrossFit Brand X.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

The Face of Battle

Jeff Barnett explains how facial expressions can give good trainers valuable insight into each athlete.

By **Jeff Barnett** CrossFit Impulse

July 2011



Jeff Barnett

When the fog of war permeates the field of battle, nothing is easy.

1 of 6

I took the name of this article from a book by John Keegan. My commanding officer once assigned the book as required reading for his officers, and I think I know why. The book describes three epic battles: Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme. For me, the centerpiece was the Battle of Agincourt, a 15th-century English victory over the French during the Hundred Years' War. Keegan's message about Agincourt was clear: war is ugly. It's full of mud and rain and broken wagons and body parts and shit and piss and blood and dead animals and dead people—stacks of dead people. Friction assails you at every opportunity, making the easy difficult and the difficult seemingly impossible.

Yep, sounds a lot like CrossFit.

As a trainer at CrossFit Impulse, I get to witness a different face of battle every day as my athletes attack the WOD. I can tell much about an athlete's expectations and mental state during a WOD by his facial expressions, mannerisms and actions. Expectations and mental state are large drivers of performance in competitive and high-intensity activities. If I can perceive what an athlete is thinking or what he is feeling, then perhaps I can coach him in the right direction. Furthermore, it gives me insight into an athlete's psyche: how the athlete views himself, the WOD, the world—everything.

**If I can perceive what
an athlete is thinking or
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in the right direction.**

This is more useful than just interesting conversation. Coaches can use this knowledge to improve their athletes' performance. From our unique position outside the WOD, coaches can identify and correct mental patterns that bleed away performance. And much like developing kinesthetic awareness aids the athlete in maneuvering his body, mental awareness can help him maximize his efficiency during the WOD.

Below, I've taken my observations and rolled the messy business of human emotion into nice, neat packages with a bow. In this arena almost nothing is concrete, but I am confident you'll see some familiar faces.



Jeff Barnett

***What does this athlete need to hear from
her trainer right now?***

Tired Terry

Tired Terry is born of some messy combination of fear, uncertainty, pain and being overwhelmed. I often see athletes take on his persona as they hold a melancholy stare at the equipment in front of them. Kettlebell, pull-up bar, barbell—they're all equally likely to get a look that says, "I know I'm supposed to pick you up and do something, but I think it might kill me, and that makes me a little conflicted." As with many of my cues, I begin by refocusing the athlete's attention back on the task at hand. Regaining focus will be a common theme, because focus is the embodiment of putting the voices and feelings aside to concentrate on a difficult task.

Desperate Dora

Desperate Dora displays a look of pure desperation and exhaustion. The athlete feels like she hasn't a drop of gas left in the tank, yet she is expected to continue. Hands go to knees, sometimes knees go to floor, and sometimes even backs go to the floor—during the WOD. The look of Desperate Dora says to me, "You don't understand. I really am dying, and I've got to rest before continuing, so please understand that your cry of, 'Pick up the bar!' may go unanswered. Kthxbye." If an athlete has mentally checked out to this degree, then a firmer cue is usually required. "Stand back up! You're stronger than that!" is a useful lead-off. Follow up by re-focusing her attention and getting her in motion once again.

Desperate Dora displays a look of pure desperation and exhaustion.

Couldgiveashit Carla

I rarely see Carla, but she does exist. She usually bears an apathetic half-smile with a subtle lip-clinch that says, "You're so cute trying to motivate me, but today I just don't give a fuck. So you can keep doing what you're doing or you can read to me from *The Iliad*. It doesn't really matter. My heart rate is about 120 beats per minute, and that's where I like it, and that's where it's going to stay." She doesn't show up often, but I'd be disingenuous if I didn't include her in the lineup. She's also pretty difficult to coach. If applicable, I might give some positive feedback on her technique and then use that idea to encourage her to move faster. Most people will push themselves pretty hard under the direct observation of a trainer, so if I stick around long enough I can at least ensure she's hitting the right intensity before I depart.

Reluctant Roger

Reluctant Roger lacks confidence and has one signature move in particular: staring at the pull-up bar, possibly with hands extended and ready to grasp it but unwilling to take hold and begin. Roger's unique position says, "I'm done resting and know I should begin reps again soon, but that idea scares the hell out of me." This isn't unique to pull-ups, but pull-ups showcase it more than anything else because a deliberate jump is required to mount the bar and begin. You can put your hands on a barbell, and then 5 seconds later get into your starting position, and then 5 seconds later start your movement. But the moment you jump onto the pull-up bar, it's go time.

Roger's lack of confidence is straightforward to correct. Reassure him that you know he can keep going—that you know he's capable. But more importantly, tell Roger that he must believe it. Only by changing the way Roger views himself and his capabilities will you inspire him to action. You can also ask the athlete to trust you enough to jump onto the pull-up bar and start pulling before they think they're able. When he starts linking pull-ups and proves to himself that he was indeed able even though he didn't believe it, that's very powerful. It will change his performance forever.



Jeff Barnett

A look of determination says a lot about an athlete's mindset during a WOD.

Scatterbrained Scarlett

Scatterbrained Scarlett lacks focus and shows up when things get tough. Perhaps something unexpected happens. The athlete's grip slips on the bar, the bar hits her in the nose, one foot misses her box on a box jump, her double-unders keep failing The opportunities for setbacks are endless. Setbacks will always occur, but Scarlett emerges when an athlete allows setbacks to slow her down. If lack of focus is mixed with fatigue and self-pity, she will rest by walking far away from her equipment. She might even visit the chalk bucket. Who among us hasn't meticulously chalked hands like Michelangelo painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel? Much like Dora, Scarlett may need a more assertive cue to bring her back to reality. Calming and re-focusing is the next step, followed by supervising that she has returned from Crazy Town and is moving efficiently once again.

**If lack of focus is mixed
with fatigue and self-pity,
Scatterbrained Scarlett will
rest by walking far away
from her equipment.**

Agonizing Arthur

Arthur is in pain. You can see it on his face and in the way he digs his fingernails into the steel pull-up cage. This isn't pain from injury or simple metabolic discomfort. He genuinely wants to keep moving, but he's overcome by pain when he tries. I have actually noticed a trend with this behavior and athletes who don't eat enough fat. They seem to hit a wall after 3 or 4 minutes and move slowly for the remainder of the WOD. In contrast to most of my methods, I usually tell Arthur to take it easy and relax a little. I can't make him move any faster. In Arthur's case, if he could, he would. I try to calm him and encourage him that the WOD is completed one rep at a time, and he will eventually get there, albeit slowly.

Afterwards, I usually initiate a conversation to find out the problem, and often it's lack of quality fats in his diet. In this case I start with a simple solution: just eat some fat with every meal. An avocado, some mixed nuts, some olives—something. And I don't care if you weigh and

measure—just eat some fat with every meal. My results with this method have been overwhelmingly positive. One athlete remarked, "Since I changed my diet, I've noticed a huge difference. Usually I would have been out of gas after the first round (of the WOD), but tonight I was on fire!"

Dangerous Danny

Dangerous Danny is an unfortunate byproduct of a supremely motivated athlete. Danny's fatigue, motivation and competitive drive push him into unsafe movement patterns. Some WODs are simple enough that you can slog through them half-conscious. But some maneuvers, like deadlifts, muscle-ups and handstand push-ups, require mental focus simply to keep you out of the ER. You can identify Danny by a grimaced look on his face as he pounds through the WOD with no regard for life, limb or intervertebral discs.

You absolutely must slow him down and get his technique back into an acceptable range. Pause him, explain how he's being unsafe, and insist that he slow down a little and correct the problem. Stick around for a minute to make sure he's consistently moving safely again. Athletes invariably give positive feedback on this after the WOD is over. After all, this is training, and the purpose of training is to better ourselves, not to die during the training itself.



Jeff Barnett

What the mind believes, the body achieves.



Jeff Barnett

Your athletes may show you several faces during a battle. How will you deal with each one?

Optimal Performance

It's funny to reflect on these feelings and behaviors because they seem to be universal, transcending every time and place. Another critical step in developing our athletes is accepting that no one can escape these feelings; athletes can only seek to control their actions despite them. As a clichéd example, courage is not the absence of fear but acting despite the presence of fear. All normal men and women feel fear, but some shrug it off so effortlessly that you'd never know. Given that premise, here are three instructions for your athletes that will improve their performance:

1. Prepare

Get your mental game right before you begin the WOD. Use positive self-talk and an accurate assessment of your capabilities to prepare your mind for what's to come. You can take this as far as having a complete plan for work and rest. You might say, "Last time I performed Fran, I rested after 17 thrusters. This time, I'm going to complete the set of 21 unbroken. Then I'll take 5 breaths and begin my pull-ups." Certainly, the plan will change. Unexpected things will happen. But the act of planning and having a baseline from which to improvise is profound.

2. Be Deliberate

In everything you do, be it work or rest, do it deliberately. If you are working, then perform reps. If you are resting, then rest. But whatever you do, don't muddle in the middle with half-hearted reps that won't count but will drain your energy. Be disciplined enough to start working when you know you should, and don't let yourself create distractions that you'll use for "unplanned" rest. Everybody needs chalk, but nobody needs chalk every 3 pull-ups. And don't make out with the water fountain.

3. Filter and Focus

Filter out every sensory input that isn't beneficial to the work you are performing at that very moment. Don't listen to the myriad voices in your head and distractions around you. Focus on exactly what you are doing. When you have your current action well under control, you may want to start thinking one movement ahead, but don't overwhelm yourself. You get through a WOD one movement and one rep at a time, so make that one movement and that next rep your object of focus.

Every WOD is fought despite immense friction, but you and your athletes are always in control. They may feel frustrated, tired and full of any combination of other feelings, but they always have the ability to regain control of their WOD. Coaches are in a unique position to help athletes regain that control through the power of calm, objective, outside observation.

The trainer's job doesn't end with teaching and correcting movement patterns. Fostering proper mental technique can be just as helpful—but doubly difficult.



Leslie Ann Barr

About the Author

Jeff Barnett is a mechanical engineer and co-owner of [CrossFit Impulse](#) in Madison, Ala. He served as a United States Marine officer from 2003 to 2007, including combat duty in Fallujah, Iraq. He has been a guest op-ed columnist for the New York Times on their [Frontlines](#) and [Homefires](#) columns. When he's not training clients or training himself, you might find him wakeboarding, eating meat off the bone or finishing an MBA at the University of Alabama Huntsville.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

All About the Peak?

Most athletes train to be their best for a certain event—but does “peaking” work?
Brian MacKenzie and Anthony Roberts don’t think so.

By Brian MacKenzie with Anthony Roberts

July 2011



Staff/CrossFit Journal

One of my most vivid high-school memories was swimming at Belmont Plaza each year for CIF, although only one of my top performances came at this meet. Most of the people I swam with (20-plus kids went to CIF each year from my school alone) rarely set a personal record (PR) or even posted a season-best (SB) performance. And those who did turn in their best performances of the year often weren’t strong swimmers in general. This year, two kids from Wilson High School set personal bests and school records—but didn’t win a single race.

Most of us, kids to coaches, look at this race as the premier competition of the season, yet our times didn't reflect this. Although plenty of folks I swam with and plenty of kids from other teams would hit PRs at the final meets of the season, it was so few and far between that some questions on peaking need to be asked.

Ready For a Day or Ready for Anything?

Every year, there's a two-week break between the final set of NFL playoff games and the Super Bowl, during which the coach of each team dutifully trots out in front of a battery of microphones to tell us that his team is peaking at just the right time to win the big game. Peaking. And why not? These guys are professionals and they have the some of the best coaches in the world. Plus, they've had all year to reach this peak.

I remember watching the 1984 Olympics in Mission Viejo, Calif., with my old man. The bike course was set up in and around Lake Mission Viejo and the surrounding cities. It was my first real memory of watching Olympic sport. Mark Gorski brought home gold in the 1,000-meter individual sprint, a rare American victory in a sport dominated by Europeans. The Olympics are incredible—the highest level of sport—and we should expect peak performances all around.

And why not? These guys are professionals, and they have some of the best coaches in the world. Plus, they've had four years to reach their peak. Gorski explained his victory in the context of European dominance in the sport:

"There's a big difference between Americans and the Soviet Bloc athletes. After the Games, we tend to relax and then work toward a peak. The East Germans and Russians have to stay up all the time. If they have one bad night, there are 10 guys waiting in their place."

**With all the razor-thin victories
seen at the Olympics, have
you ever wondered how many
professional athletes actually
set a personal best or season
best at the Games?**



CrossFit Affiliation

Do you train for one event or for life's many events?

So even though Gorski took the gold, he had some interesting comments on peaking vs. constantly being able to perform. He even seemed to be—dare we say it?—praising the idea of staying “up” all the time as the reason Soviet Bloc athletes were able to be so dominant for so long.

Still, America was the big winner in the '84 Games in overall medal count as well as total golds. Short track events saw Carl Lewis winning numerous medals (some by less than a 10th of a second), and on the field side we took a bunch of medals, including both the silver and bronze medals in the shot put, an event won by Italian Alessandro Andrei with a 21.26-meter throw. Our silver medalist missed gold by less than 0.3 meters, but don't feel too bad for him: Michael Carter went on to win three Super Bowls as a nose tackle with the San Francisco 49ers.

With all the razor-thin victories seen at the Olympics, have you ever wondered how many professional athletes actually set a personal best or season best at the Games? Surely it must be a high percentage. How about state championships or even nationals or worlds? I didn't question this for five Olympic Games. Granted, I was only 10 years old in 1984, but because all these athletes are peaking at the same time, they're probably all running and throwing a personal best when it counts.

In 1984, in that first Olympics I watched, the winning throw in the shot put was 21.26 meters, impressive by any standards but almost a meter less than the best throw of the season (22.19 meters). In other words, in 1984, the guy who threw the shot put the farthest was not the guy who won Olympic gold. But wait—what about hitting that magic peak? The truth is that what we see every Olympic year—and I mean literally every year—is the season's best throw is never the one that takes home the gold (see Table 1).

Year	Best Olympic Throw	Season-Best Throw
1984	21.26 m	22.19 m
1988	22.47 m	23.06 m
1992	21.70 m	21.98 m
1996	21.62 m	22.40 m
2000	21.29 m	22.12 m
2004	21.16 m	22.54 m
2008	21.51 m	22.12 m

Table 1: Gold-medal-winning shot-put throws vs. season-best throws in seven Olympic years.

We understand that a lot of these athletes are more concerned with big-money events and have perhaps focused their “peaking” on them, but bringing home an Olympic gold medal (or silver or bronze) will almost always result in a lucrative sponsorship deal.

If these guys, professional athletes with great coaches and four-year periodized training schemes, can't peak for a single two-second event, what happens when we look at events that take longer than a couple of seconds? Surely the statistics on shot-putting are just an anomaly.

Win Once or Win Often?

In the 2004 Olympics, the men's 100-meter sprint final comprised 10 of the fastest men on that day, not in the world. Eighty dudes qualified for a spot in the Games, all

hoping to get to the finals. That's four years of training, eating and sleeping for a single shot at Olympic gold. Ten guys made the final for a shot at the medals, and how many of those 10 do you think peaked or PR'd? Justin Gatlin (U.S.A.) hit a time of 9.85 for a PR and took gold. Maurice Greene (U.S.A.) had an SB time of 9.87 for third, and Kim Collins (St. Kitts and Nevis) had an SB of 10.00 for sixth.

But at the World Championships in 1999, Greene ran a 9.80, which would have been good enough to beat Gatlin had he run it at the Olympics in 2004. He followed the 9.80 up with a 9.82 in 2001. In numerous other instances throughout the years, he had run times that would have won gold in 2004. So while we count him among those who managed to peak for that event (that season), the Olympic final still wasn't a PR.

Three men from the top 10 were able to run SB times for an event they were all training to PR in. The math shows us that 30 percent of the programs worked, and 70 percent did not deliver. This is being incredibly giving, as it gets much, much worse if you take a look at the entire field of 80 who qualified: 12 of them managed to run an SB (for themselves), and a total of seven ran a PB (and four of those were in last place in their heats). So we're left with seven out of 80—8.75 percent of the field—having a legitimate peak for the 100 meters, and more than half were the absolute slowest guys in their heats.

To add insult to injury, Greene actually beat Gatlin in the United States Olympic Qualifier. If a potentially gold-medal-winning runner can't peak even when he needs to compete for about 10 seconds and is given four years to peak, how is it this system is still in place?

**The majority of people
trying to peak will fail, and
the majority who stay
consistent will eventually
turn out championships.**

I'm not saying people don't get PRs or SBs at big competitions or that you can't plot a timeline where you see an athlete doing consistently better; I'm saying that the majority of people trying to peak will fail, and the majority who stay consistent will eventually turn out championships. Going back to team sports, I've coached a team, and that team has won huge tournaments and championships more than once. But some of the kids still had bad games in those victories. So did I peak the whole team except for one kid? How in the world did I manage to accomplish that?

We can even point to sports where entire teams compete as individuals in various events (swimming, running, take your pick) and see one or two players who did poorly on the day, while another may have had a great day. But they all trained on the same track or in the same pool together. Why did some appear to peak and some hit a valley? The answer is that the ones who have been more consistent are usually the ones who appear to peak more often. It's just a matter of consistency.

If we take a look at the current Hawaiian Ironman course record, we will see that Luc Van Lierde crushed Kona in 1996. With a time of 8:04.08, he has yet to be touched. How many pros every year show up at Kona with dreams of setting a PR or even winning? Of those professional athletes, how many hit a PR for that year? This is the biggest event of the year for triathletes, and one who has a pro card and shows up at this race would want to do well

so that sponsorship money and relationships stay healthy ... right? Maybe they are preparing for a different race? The results are the same wherever we look: these athletes hit about about 30 percent of the time and miss about 70 percent of the time (the same percentages as for our top sprinters in the 2004 Olympic final).

And who's dominating the Ironman at the moment? Chris McCormack won the 2010 Ironman in 8:10.37, five minutes faster than his 2007 victory but only two-and-a-half minutes faster than his 2006 second place. The lesson here is consistency.

McCormack is an amazing athlete, and his consistency has put him at the top of the pack more than once. But imagine if he were even more consistent? If we take his second-best result (8:13.07, which earned him second place in 2006), we find that if he were to turn in that time for every Ironman since then, he'd have won 100 percent of the time, as opposed to 50 percent (and only one of those wins was actually a faster time). Hitting a peak performance instead of repeating his personal best was actually counterproductive, even if we argue that he successfully peaked. And his third-best time would be good enough to win 70 percent of the Ironman championships over the past decade.

More often than not, we find this to be the case, where athletes who stay consistent are standing at the top of the podium. Intuitively, good coaches know that consistency is the key. Why bother peaking, even if you can, when it only brings you a couple of victories and consistency will bring you two or three times as many? Even if it worked (which it doesn't), wouldn't you prefer running your third-best time and winning seven of 10 races (McCormack) than running your second-best time and bringing home Olympic gold (Greene)? Shouldn't training be geared towards producing consistently great performances rather than one or two outliers?

Take a look at the NFL Combine. Every year we'll see a guy bench-press 40-plus reps, and when they talk to his coach, he'll say, "Yeah, I knew he could do that. He's done it in training." In other words, the coach is saying that he expects to see what he's already seen. The great performance, therefore, is a result of consistency. We never hear a coach say, "I figured he could do 41 reps because he's done 35 in training."



CrossFit Endurance

Would you rather be great once or good every single time you compete?

We get better results betting on consistent performance than trying to shoehorn our training into a peak. It's the difference between being a great player and having a great game.

Does peaking for two weeks after preparing for an Ironman over six months make sense? Yet this is a routine thing that we run into when talking to people. I have friends and athletes who have been doing, marathons, ultra-marathons, and Ironmans for decades, and in looking back on their programming we see so many misses on "A" races that something still doesn't add up.

Prepared at All Times

Some people will argue that peaking is a necessary part of optimal performance. But is that really the case? Can you imagine a United States Marine arriving in Afghanistan out of shape but telling the rest of his platoon that he'll be in shape by the end of the war, when it matters? That's absurd. Members of our fighting units are expected to be in optimal shape, year round, for the duration of their service. They don't get a second chance, and they don't get an off-season.

Can you imagine a United States Marine arriving in Afghanistan out of shape but telling the rest of his platoon that he'll be in shape by the end of the war?

A study was done out of the University of Nebraska at Omaha on training methods and cross-country and 10,000-meter running performance (1). Fourteen teams were studied in a single season to see which program provided the most effective training. When we looked into this study, there was a direct correlation that the lower-mileage (per run) teams that utilized intervals to "peak" were those that qualified for the national championship. The higher-mileage-per-run teams didn't make it



Staff/CrossFit Journal

Heather Begeron is consistently a top athlete in any CrossFit competition. What is she doing right?

into the postseason. And the guys who did make it were doing more speed training as opposed to distance, and the better placings were highly correlated with a greater variety of training methods, with less repetition of the same types of workout. Strange? We think not, as it is basis for our programming.

Here is the frightening part of this type of thinking (as if it weren't bad enough already): no matter how you evaluate the information we present here, you cannot argue that the percentages do not add up against the peaking approach. If we cannot peak an individual correctly, how in the world is a coach going to take the members of an entire cross-country team, an NFL football team or any team and get all of them to peak? No coach in his or her right mind would try to do this after looking at the abject failure of the paradigm, yet year after year, contract after lucrative contract is given to those who create programs that are based on a failed system—a system that only works 30 percent of the time.

Remember, folks, C is a passing grade, and a C is 70 percent and above.



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About the Authors

Brian MacKenzie is the creator of *CrossFit Endurance*. He has worked directly with CrossFit for the last five years in developing the *CrossFit Endurance Seminars*. He has worked with athletes from every facet of athletics. Brian has been in the fitness industry to some degree for the last 20 years, from power-

lifting to ultra running and everything in between. He and his programs have been featured in *Competitor Magazine*, *Triathlete Magazine*, *Men's Journal*, *ESPN Rise*, Tim Ferriss' New York Times best-seller *The 4-Hour Body*, *Men's Running U.K.*, *L.A. Sport and Fitness*, and *Rivera Magazine*.



Courtesy of Anthony Roberts

Anthony Roberts is a CrossFit Level 1 trainer and holds a CrossFit Endurance certificate. He is also a USARFU Level 1 coach.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL KIDS

CrossFit Kids Warm-Up: Making Ant Food

Mikki Lee Martin says you'll need a box of crackers for this warm-up—but your young athletes won't be eating them.

By Mikki Lee Martin CrossFit Kids

July 2011



Staff/CrossFit Kids

In keeping with teaching our kids about good food choices, we advise parents to give healthy snacks to their kids (sausage and apples) rather than empty carbs like crackers. Focus work that follows this warm-up should be about better snack choices and defining “empty” carbs.

The warm-up requires one bag of Goldfish Crackers.

Using an outdoor area measuring 50 x 50 meters, place goldfish at each corner in small groups of about 12. Each goldfish should be spaced out enough for little feet to stomp without hitting more than one.

On “Go!” kids stomp a single goldfish in one area and move quickly to the next. Kids should keep count of every goldfish stomped. Do not expect accurate counting.

Once all goldfish are stomped, kids write their numbers on the board. With a trainer leading, add the numbers

and multiply the total by 10 to arrive at an approximate number of ants fed. Some of the kids will understand the addition, and the older kids will help with multiplication.

Expanding the Concept

When using this Warm-Up and Focus, serve a nutritious snack after the WOD and Game.

Or, in addition to stomping the goldfish, provide a nutritious snack to “find” one piece at a time, placing small pieces of that snack on a dish somewhere challenging to access.

To expand the cross-curricular aspect, have kids subtract the number of good snacks from the number of stomped goldfish.

Have fun!



THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Today's WOD: A Half-Marathon

To Anders Varner, a half-marathon is "just another workout."
Hilary Achauer reports.

By Hilary Achauer

July 2011



CrossFit Invictus

It came out of his mouth before he thought about what he was saying: "I bet I could run a half-marathon using only CrossFit as my training. No running."

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Hilary Achauer

Anders Varner wanted to know if pull-ups and box jumps would make him fit enough for a half-marathon.

Anders Varner, co-owner of CrossFit PB in San Diego, Calif., was talking to Patrick, a member who regularly runs marathons and triathlons. Anders was describing how the CrossFit philosophy of weightlifting and short, explosive exercises is much better training than going out and logging 10 miles a day, and he got a little carried away. He wasn't prepared for what Patrick said next.

"You're on. The Carlsbad Half Marathon, Jan. 23. We'll do it together."

Just Another Workout ...

Anders is not a runner. In fact, he hates it. A former competitive ice-hockey player, Anders is strong, coordinated and flexible. He will happily back-squat 385 lb., can clean 285 and can easily do a 2:37 Fran, but ask him to run a mile and he grimaces and offers to do 100 pull-ups instead.

However, Anders believes in CrossFit. He discovered CrossFit four years ago, received his Level 1 certificate in April 2010, and opened CrossFit PB with Bryan Boorstein in June of that same year. He's passionate about the effectiveness of CrossFit as a foundation for any athletic endeavor.

"CrossFit improves performance in every sport. It provides a base of speed, coordination, power and stamina that every athlete should possess," he said. "When an athlete is well rounded, not only will the performance improve, but he or she will be prepared for the unknown and the unknowable. And I bet most distance runners and triathletes couldn't come in here and kill a three-minute Fran."

Much has been written about combining CrossFit with running to improve performance in endurance events. However, Anders wanted to know what would happen if an athlete did almost no running in preparation for a half-marathon but simply treated it as another WOD. This would be a true test of the effectiveness of CrossFit, as well as its broad applicability across a variety of sports.

Before Anders agreed to run the half-marathon, the longest distance he had ever run was four miles.

Before Anders agreed to run the half-marathon, the longest distance he had ever run was four miles. Other than a six-mile run about two weeks before the half-marathon, Anders kept to his usual training schedule, which included an hour and a half of Olympic lifting and one or two short conditioning workouts. His philosophy is that as a true athlete, you should be prepared for whatever challenge comes your way.



Theodora Valovska

Without a lot of running experience, Varner went out too fast when the half-marathon began.

In addition to an Olympic weightlifting program three days a week, Anders fits in a traditional CrossFit WOD five to six days a week. Early in the month he hit Bulger, which is 10 rounds of a 150-meter run, 7 chest-to-bar pull-ups, 7 front squats of 135 lb., and 7 handstand push-ups. A few days later he did a 15-minute AMRAP of 5 muscle-ups and 10 70-lb. kettlebell swings. In order to increase his strength and flexibility, Anders asked a member who is also a gymnastics coach teach him how to do a backflip. For Anders, every day brings a new way to push himself, and he tackles every new challenge with a grin.

"I wanted to approach this challenge as if I had come in one day and the WOD on the whiteboard was 'run a half-marathon in under two hours.'"

When it came time for the race, Anders was in the midst of preparing himself for the Reebok CrossFit Games Open. Because his strategy was to approach the workout like another WOD, he didn't deviate from his training plan the day before the race. He completed a heavy day of his Olympic-lifting program, including 3 reps each of a 200-lb. snatch and a 235-lb. clean and jerk, and 2 305-lb. front squats 3 times.

When race day dawned, Anders wasn't nervous.

"People find their comfort zone in odd ways," he said, "and mine just happens to be challenging my body physically. When you have done Fran or Helen 20 times in your life and you realize you aren't going to die, most challenges become more of a mental test than a physical one. I was more concerned that I wouldn't be able to handle the mental side of running 13.1 miles than having my body break down on me, but I was excited to see how I would do and put my training to the test."

When Anders arrived at the starting line, instead of shirtless men with baggy shorts and women in tiny Lycra shorts and knee socks, he saw people in high-cut running shorts, visors and, most surprising, runners huddled under trash bags, which they would then shed, like a second skin, once they started running and warmed up.

Then the race began. Anders started out fast, and the first five miles were relatively easy for him. Anders was running 7:15 splits, which, in retrospect, he thinks was too fast a pace for that long of a race.

"As Greg Glassman says, 'You fail at the margins of your experience,'" Anders said. "My experience was with short, intense CrossFit WODs, not two-hour-long road races."

**"As Greg Glassman says,
'You fail at the margins of
your experience,'"**

—Anders Varner

He ran with Patrick for about four miles, and then Patrick pulled ahead, telling Anders he should have paced himself.

The Carlsbad Half Marathon is a down-and-back course, so when Anders hit the halfway point and turned around, his mental game started to slide. It suddenly hit him that he had to run all the way back to where he had started. His body felt fine, his heart rate came way down, and he experienced a sense of calm. However, he was used to workouts that lasted, at the most, 30 minutes. He was used to loud music, clanking weights and sweaty people shouting encouragement. He wasn't sure if he could continue without some sort of mental stimulation.

Anders turned on a podcast to distract himself but found it slowed him down. His mind wasn't focused on running.



Hilary Achauer

"I had to turn the iPod off so I could keep a decent pace," he said. "I really felt fine through 10 miles, especially considering this was significantly longer than I had ever run in my life. I was having a hard time without any mental stimulation, but the physical side was exactly how I wanted things to be."

***Varner craving deadlifts
during his long run.***

Then Anders hit the last three miles. Right after Mile 10 his running form fell apart. He began running with an awkward shuffle step, and his joints began to ache. It brought home how bad running form will quickly wear down your body, and he understood firsthand how people who run a lot of races have the potential to suffer from injuries due to poor form and overtraining.

"I think the first 10 miles were a direct result of my physical conditioning. CrossFit allowed me to run 10 miles without pain and at a pretty solid pace. The last three miles were the equivalent to the mental strength one needs to push themselves through the last mile of Murph," said Anders. "Because of the mental and physical strength I've gained through CrossFit, I don't think there is an amount of work that can break me.

"As CrossFitters, we push ourselves every day to our limits. You have to have a mentality that nothing will break you. No matter what someone throws at me, I will finish, and I will find a way to succeed. I may lose the race because I lack the sport specificity or experience, but it is going to be tough to get me to quit. I have yet to encounter many things that are harder than your first Fran—or a 2:37 Fran."

As hard as the last three miles were, Anders says they were not as hard as a 20-rep back squat or a regular afternoon session at CrossFit PB.

"CrossFit is the best way to train the mind and body I have ever found in my life," he said.

Anders kept going, and he finished with a time of 1:49:58. The race was over, and he felt terrible. Although he had a base level of training that allowed him to finish, he didn't have the sport-specific training to make running 13.1 miles anything but brutal. When I asked Anders if he had an endorphin rush at the end, the famed runner's high, he said, "No. All I wanted was some protein, fat and fruit, but they only had sugar-filled energy bars. Drinking water is good to rehydrate, but it wasn't going to help me recover. I didn't get to eat a normal meal for over an hour after the race. This was terrible planning, and I really beat myself up even worse not having proper nutrition ready for the end of the race."

In the days following the race, Anders felt an overall flu-like illness. He was used to being sore, but his body didn't know how to recover from the stimulus of a two-hour run. He took the next day, Monday, off, but on Tuesday he went back to Olympic lifting and set a snatch PR of 210 lb. On Wednesday it was back to conditioning work.

"Because I was also in the middle of CrossFit Open prep, I wasn't able to take a full week off," he said.

**"The reason we kill ourselves
in the gym is to go out and
have the ability to experience
life to the fullest."**

—Anders Varner

Anders is glad he ran the race, but he's not signing up for any marathons—or half-marathons—anytime soon.

"I think my motive to prove our training works and should be used by all athletes, no matter the sport, was confirmed," he said. "The reason we kill ourselves in the gym is to go out and have the ability to experience life to the fullest. Without CrossFit, I doubt I would have the ability to do something like this on a whim."

Learn and Play New Sports

It's easy to get wrapped up in the competitive side of CrossFit, especially as the 2011 CrossFit Games get underway. Competition is good, and it brings out the best in many people, but it's also important to enjoy the experience as much as the result. To look for new challenges, to see what our bodies can do—that's what lies at the heart of CrossFit.

Back in the safety of his CrossFit box, sitting on a 30-inch plywood box on a chalk-smeared floor, Anders talked about what the experience meant to him. He looked around at members in the midst of a WOD, hauling weighted barbells over their heads again and again, and he said, "The purpose of all of this is the experience and the journey. Going outside of our comfort zones and still succeeding at some level—that is why we're here. Any of the feelings, emotions, sickness, triumph and pain that go into a race or a WOD are just small steps in one's lifelong pursuit of fitness."



Courtesy of Hilary Achauer

About the Author

Hilary Achauer is an award-winning freelance writer and editor with a background in marketing and communications. An amateur-boxer-turned-CrossFitter, Hilary specializes in health-and-wellness content, focusing on emerging fitness trends. Her writing has been featured in a leading online parenting magazine as well as a number of travel and lifestyle publications. She is an editor for Frommer's travel guides and writes websites, brochures, blogs and newsletters for universities, start-ups, entrepreneurs, accounting and financial service organizations, and management consultants. She lives in San Diego with her husband and two small children and spends most of her free time at CrossFit PB. To contact her, visit HilaryAchauer.com.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Why Use a Training Log?

Glen Harrison says the benefits aren't just about seeing shorter WOD times but creating a record of information that provides answers.

By Glen Harrison

July 2011



Mike Warkentin/CrossFit Journal

Although it might not be as fun or sexy as a 500-lb. deadlift or a two-minute Fran, taking time to log workout details can go a long way in helping you become a better CrossFitter.

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We all inherently understand the benefits of keeping a training log. However, many of us are either not maintaining one or simply going through the motions by scribbling our WOD times in a notebook or spreadsheet.

A well-maintained training log can provide a wealth of historical data. It can contribute valuable clues about what might have precipitated an injury or what little things you might have done differently the last time you were setting PRs at a feverish pace.

What follows are just a few powerful reasons to take the extra time to keep a purposeful training log and some tips to get the most out of using one.

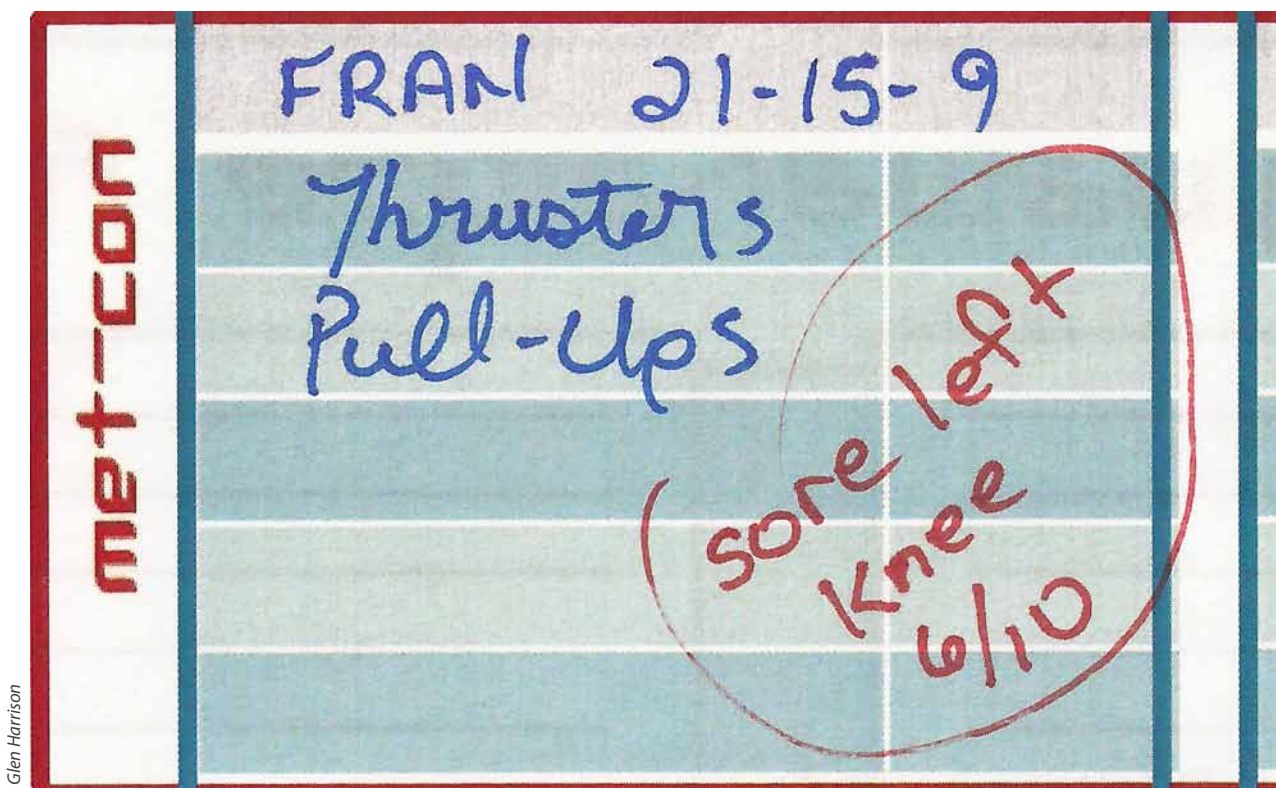
Injury Diagnosis and Treatment

The most pragmatic reason for keeping a detailed training log is to identify the root cause of a particular injury. While acute injuries leave little doubt as to their cause, most injuries happen over time and are an accumulation of

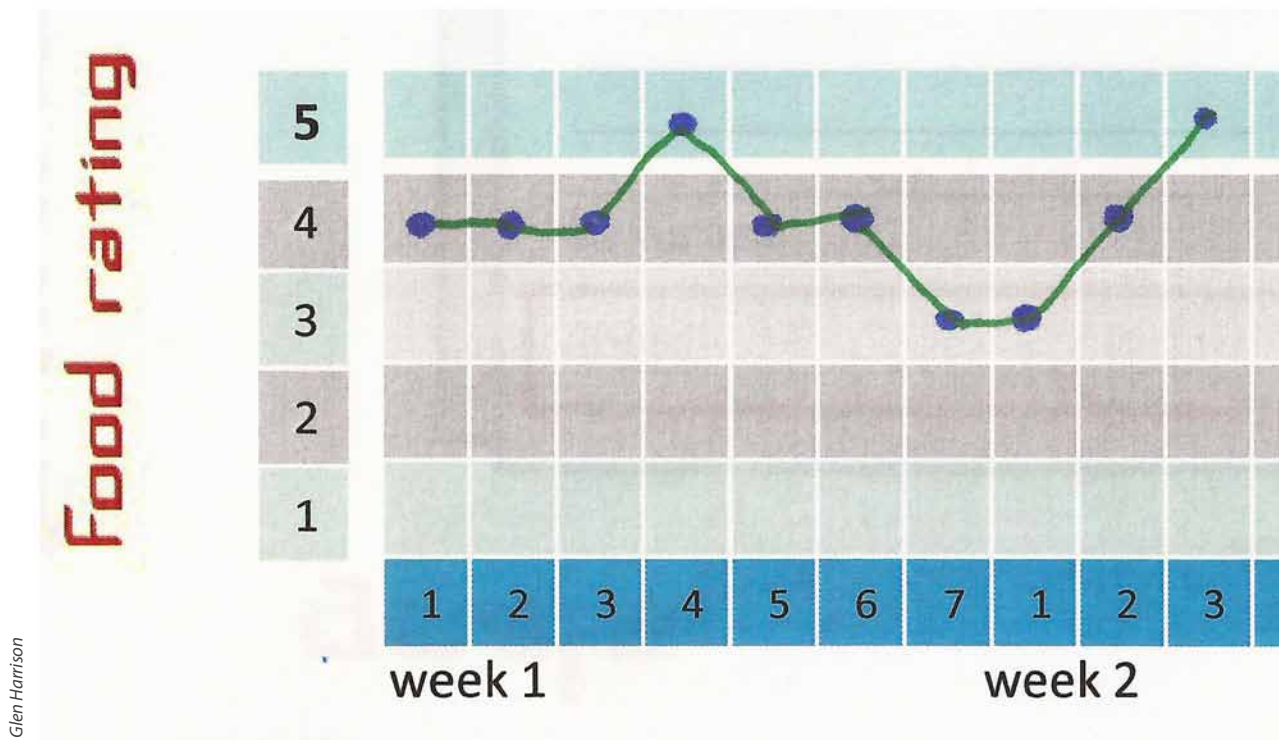
many different types of stressors. These chronic injuries also happen to be the most difficult to diagnose, as well as the most troublesome from which to recover.

Imagine for a moment visiting your physician or therapist with a detailed history of things like specific increases in your training volume, stretching and mobility practices, how much you have added to your squat, and notes on days when a specific movement bothered you. How much more helpful to diagnosis and subsequent recovery would this be than simply telling him or her, "My knee hurts"?

A well-maintained training log can provide a wealth of historical data.



Logging how you felt during workouts can help you diagnose and treat injuries.



Information about your diet can help you understand why you performed better or worse.

As you progress toward recovery, the training log will continue its usefulness by providing information on what movements aggravate your injury and what movements aid the rehabilitation. The log can also help us learn from our training history so we do not repeat the same errors that caused the injury.

Quick tip:

- Jot down a note if anything hurt or didn't feel quite right before, during or after training. It can end up being an important clue should you sustain an injury, no matter how insignificant it might feel at the time.

Setting PRs

Think of the last time all your training just clicked. Looking back at a training log can provide insight into more than just what program you were following, WOD times and the amount of weight lifted. Keeping track of details like overall training time, eating habits, mobility, recovery and

weekly training volume will provide just a few metrics that can give you insight into the ideal conditions for maximizing your progress.

With so many variables having the potential to affect your success, a training log provides a great way to isolate and track PRs and provide guidance for replicating what works for you.

Quick tips:

- Keep a month or longer "at a glance" page where you simply plan and track your training at a high level (days on and off, strength vs. met-con, time domains, etc.).
- Note how you perform when you train at a different time of day than usual.
- As an alternative to keeping a detailed food journal, record a simple numeric rating of your daily eating habits. For example, give yourself a 5 if you ate clean all day (see above).

Formally recognizing and celebrating personal accomplishments is how you stay motivated in the long term and continue to progress and grow.

SQUAT		
1 rep max	3 rep max	5 rep max
400	goal	330
date / weight	date / weight	date / weight
		270 / Apr 10
340 / apr 17		260 / Mar 17
340 / apr 10		265 / Mar 7
335 / apr 3		260 / Feb 26
330 / mar 24		260 / Feb 19
325	current	255
MAR 17	date	FEB 10

Glen Harrison

Setting goals will keep you focused and highlight your progress toward them.

Celebrating Success

For those of us not at the top of the Games leaderboard or members of our box's elite, it's sometime easy to lose sight of progress made. A 185-lb. back squat may not be impressive when compared to some of the monsters in the CrossFit community until you look back and recognize you were squatting 100 lb. just a few short months ago.

Formally recognizing and celebrating personal accomplishments like these is how you stay motivated in the long term and continue to progress and grow.

Quick tips:

- Track progress on specific movements and WODs on a separate page so you can easily view long-term progress and trends on how you are progressing each time you tackle them.
- Make a point of logging and celebrating achievements on a monthly, quarterly and annual basis.

Goal Setting

I remember seeing a video of CrossFit Games athlete Ben Smith, who had a piece of paper pinned to his garage wall that listed his goals. The [video](#) shows Ben crossing off a 265-lb. snatch among a long list of other goals, most of which he had already accomplished.

What do you think has more to do with Ben's success: an incredible work ethic or that piece of paper on the wall? The answer is both. The act of writing down his goals made them real and immediately increased the probability he would reach them. Success in CrossFit—or anything, for that matter—is about doing a bunch of small things consistently over a long period of time. Keeping your goals at the forefront and highlighting details of progress toward these goals are powerful motivators.

Quick tips:

- Set specific and measurable goals with a target date (e.g., "Add 50 lb. to deadlift by Aug. 31").
- Dedicate a page in your journal for major performance goals and make a habit of reviewing them frequently.
- Schedule a specific day at three-, six-, nine- and 12-month intervals to review these goals, close the loop and ensure accountability.

planning

block 1						
from 04 / 10 / 11 to 04 / 30 / 11				training phase PREP		
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
Recovery	STRENGTH metcon 18:13	metcon 40:53	SKILLS metcon 10:23	Recovery EZROW FOAM ROLL	metcon 11:55	STRENGTH metcon 17:42
Recovery EZROW MOBILITY	metcon 49:11	metcon 11:19				
Recover						
Recover					← TRIP HOME →	

Glen Harrison

Using a journal will also allow you to plan your training. Remember, "constantly varied" does not mean "random."

Planning

Many people use a training log as a place to record and track workouts. It also can serve as a convenient planning tool. Scheduling in advance days to train and days to work on your goats are two uses that come to mind. Using your training log as a short- and long-term planner will help establish a consistent and purposeful approach to doing all the little things right. Scheduling your training time in advance will also protect that time when other competing demands arise.

Using your training log as a short- and long-term planner will help establish a consistent and purposeful approach to doing all the little things right.

Quick tips:

- Schedule blocks of time a week in advance for your CrossFit training.
- Take into account any upcoming events or demands that might represent conflicts and plan training around them.
- Schedule specific days in advance for "goat work" and/or skill training, as well as the specifics of what you will do on those days (e.g., 3 sets of 10 handstand push-up progressions on Tuesdays and Thursdays).
- Schedule recovery days in advance to avoid the temptation of squeezing in an extra WOD.

Accountability

One of the most notable benefits of being involved with a local affiliate is the accountability membership demands. The combination of a CrossFit coach and fellow CrossFitters being invested in your success makes it impossible to hide in the shadows and provides an extra push. While certainly no substitute for affiliate membership, a training log can provide that measure of accountability for those who lack access to a CrossFit affiliate.

Benchmarking and recording your fitness level and formally scheduling frequent re-tests and recording results will provide an objective evaluation of your fitness over time. The training log also effectively shines a light on your performances, whether good or bad.

Quick tips:

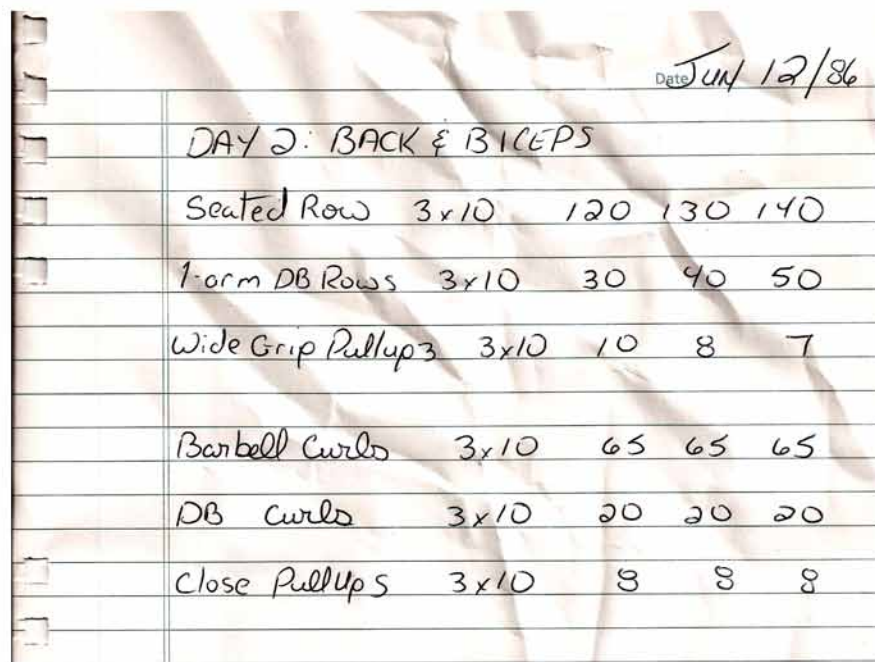
- Select a measure for each of the 10 CrossFit General Physical Skills.
- Create and record an initial benchmark for each measure.
- Schedule a re-test of each measure quarterly.
- Track all results on a single page.

Nostalgia

The jury might be out on what impact the nostalgia factor has on your performance. With that being said, I find it motivating, intriguing, entertaining and even sometimes depressing to look back on training logs from as far back as 25 years ago. Having old training logs from my first few years of training brings me back to the days of working

out with my first starter weight set. The walls of my gym/garden shed were covered with pictures from *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issues and one prized poster of Olivia Newton-John in Spandex and a headband (not one of my proudest moments, but I was only 14, it was the '80s, and, in Olivia's defense, it was pre-Lululemon).

Benchmarking and recording your fitness level and formally scheduling frequent re-tests and recording results will provide an objective evaluation of your fitness over time.



		Date Jun 12/86		
DAY 2: BACK & BICEPS				
Seated Row	3x10	120	130	140
1-arm DB Rows	3x10	30	40	50
Wide Grip Pullups	3x10	10	8	7
Barbell Curls	3x10	65	65	65
DB Curls	3x10	20	20	20
Close Pullups	3x10	8	8	8

Years later, your training log will help you see exactly how far you've come over a long period.

All kidding aside, the fun part of looking back at old training logs is it instantly brings me back to a time when, despite not having a clue what the hell I was doing, I still managed to make some ridiculous gains seemingly with every 3 sets of 10. It also helps rekindle my teenage attitude of being capable of anything instead of using age as an excuse for not expecting more.

I am fairly confident, however, that replicating the training I did back then would not reproduce gains at the same rate for a variety of different reasons. So, maybe it was just that Olivia Newton-John poster.

What Now?

I doubt anything written in this article pushed back the frontiers of exercise science for any of you. However, I do hope it gets you thinking about how an extra few minutes and a simple paper and pen can help you achieve your goals of elite fitness. The benefits I have outlined above are just a few things that reinforce the value of recording more than just your WOD time on the whiteboard. What we ultimately get from the data we record is as unique and personal as the reasons why we all CrossFit.

**What we ultimately get from
the data we record is as
unique and personal as the
reasons why we all CrossFit.**

If you are driven and motivated by data, then spending a few minutes a day with your training log can provide as much rich and relevant personal data as you can put in it. Like anything, I recommend starting small; for many of you, that will be simply writing something down. As keeping the log becomes more of a habit, begin to record more variables like warm-ups, mobility and skill work. Over time, you will realize what extra information is important for you to record, how to use it to set goals and stay accountable, and what impact it will ultimately have on your progress.



Courtesy of Glen Harrison

About the Author

Glen Harrison is owner of metcon5.com and creator of the Met-Con5 training journal. He has a six-year-old daughter who loves doing burpees and leaving her toys in his gym and a wife who refuses to trade running for CrossFit.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

“Dude, This Is a League Game”

James Hobson starts a rec league for athletes in the Atlanta area.
Jack Goodson reports.

By Jack Goodson

July 2011



All images: James Hobson/CrossFit Addiction

James Hobson was frustrated.

CrossFit Addiction, Hobson's own slice of sweat and dreams in the Atlanta, Ga., suburb of Kennesaw, had enjoyed good success in its first year of operation. Yet its owner felt CrossFit, as a sport, could offer so much more to its audience.

Hobson wanted to act. So he sat down and wrote.

He emptied his frustration into an article-turned-e-mail later sent to affiliate owners across Atlanta. He spoke of developing CrossFit at the grassroots level. He stressed interaction, not only with clients but also—and particularly—among gyms.

How then to move forward? His plan was simple but audacious. In the vein of, say, parks-and-recreation softball or basketball, Hobson envisioned a CrossFit sports league that would span the greater Atlanta area.

That was three years ago. Fast-forward to the present, and Hobson has transformed his dream into a reality.

The Atlanta Affiliate League is now live. And thriving.

A Foundation

Hobson's emotion-filled piece of digital prose slowly began to make its way across the Big Peach. People were talking. Affiliates, it seemed, understood his position.

Hobson grew up a multi-sport athlete in Augusta, Ga. His love for amateur athletics continued at the University of Georgia, where he fittingly met his future wife during intramurals. It made sense to him, then, to approach CrossFit from a similar point of view.

**“Like any other sport,
you have to develop it at
the grassroots level and
with youth.”**

—James Hobson



Local grassroots competitions are thriving in the Atlanta area thanks to James Hobson's affiliate league.

"I didn't think the future of CrossFit was a 20-minute workout. I still don't," Hobson said. "So many people have misconceptions when it comes to CrossFit. I spent much of my first two-plus years as an owner educating people on the methodology.

"Like any other sport, you have to develop it at the grassroots level and with youth."

It was from this ideology that the idea for a competitive league was born. Hobson longed for more people to be involved in the competitive aspect of CrossFit. He also understood that, while the CrossFit Games were, and are, a bona fide success, the event could be reaching a far larger audience.

"We have the Games, but that's only once a year. What about the other 90 percent of CrossFit athletes who would like to compete?" Hobson asked.



Beers after the game? How about bacon and almonds instead?

His goal was to begin branching out via his own community.

Hobson's e-mail was just the tip of the iceberg. Word was spreading, but there were many, many questions. People were, after all, still ignorant to the concept. So he began making trips to nearby affiliates, hanging out with members, mingling with interested parties, explaining exactly what he had in mind and why it would prove beneficial. Hobson was, in a sense, a door-to-door evangelist spreading his own version of the CrossFit gospel.

An affiliate sports league, with the purpose of encouraging and nurturing small-scale competition for regular CrossFit athletes, was the promised land.

"Your normal CrossFitter is intimidated by the Games. This is my fourth year doing CrossFit, and I'm intimidated," Hobson said. "We have to get those that are scared to compete doing so at a local level. Once they do, the gloves are off.

"This is where a competitive league makes sense. Imagine five years from now how big the Games could be if people are ready and willing to compete."

What he preached, the unconverted bought. Before Hobson knew it, 15 teams from seven metro-area CrossFits—84 competitors in total—had signed up for the inaugural season of the Atlanta Affiliate League.

The AAL's tagline is "a league designed for everyone."

And, you know, it is.

How It Works

Ever played recreational-league kickball? Softball? Perhaps something similar?

If so, then you probably have a pretty good idea how the Atlanta Affiliate League operates.

The AAL's debut season, which began the week of June 4, consists of a four-week regular season and two-week postseason single-elimination tournament. Tournament play commenced on July 9.

Teams consist of four to six members. Affiliates may register as many teams as they wish, and teams can employ athletes from more than one affiliate. At least one member of each team must be female. Train by yourself? No worry. Free agents who register will be assigned to a team near their home base.



Everyone can compete in the Atlanta Affiliate League regardless of ability.

Teams are then placed into a conference—North, South, East, West—according to their location. Conference teams play each other during the regular season to limit travel.

A team entry fee of \$200 is required to pre-register. The fee is slated to rise to \$300 come Sept 1. That breaks down to at or around \$50 per team member; it really is a fairly affordable extracurricular activity. Most, if not all, of the proceeds are pumped back into the league, Hobson says. He's working toward potentially covering the cost of travel for teams in future seasons.

Much like your local rec league, teams are broken into divisions based on ability.

Much like your local rec league, teams are broken into divisions based on ability.

The Mixed division is applicable for athletes of all levels, save for those brand new to CrossFit. Most CrossFit movements are included (no muscle-ups or handstand push-ups), and scaling is permitted. The Elite division, meanwhile, is designed for those with significant experience within the sport—firebreathers, if you will. All workouts must be done as prescribed and include everything in the CrossFit repertoire, from Olympic lifts to gymnastics and, of course, double-unders.

Teams compete in two home and two away matches during the regular season. Home team judges away, for repetitions and range of motion, and vice versa. WODs for all four weeks are posted prior to the start of the season, a key component to the design, according to Hobson. While the ultimate athlete will be ready for any test, Hobson is hoping his approach will provide an on-ramp to competition.

"A big problem with participation for the CrossFit Games is that people don't know what the workouts will be," Hobson said. "We post the workouts from Day 1. You know if you can do it or not. If not, you can train for it."

Hobson explained that two specific types of workouts are used in the league: individual, where the best four scores are recorded, and team WODs with a set number of rounds or repetitions. Team scores are determined by a sum of all WOD times or weight lifted. Round-based workouts are scored by total rounds plus extra repetitions completed.

For example, Week 1 featured Spinal Tap, which is 21, 15 and 9 reps for time of deadlifts and kettlebell swings. Prescribed loads for Mixed were 185 lb. on the deadlift (135 lb. for females) and 55 lb. for kettlebell swings (35 lb.). Elite, meanwhile, competed with 225 lb. on the deadlift (155 lb. for females) and 70-lb. kettlebell swings (55 lb.).

CrossFit Garage, from nearby Woodstock and home to the popular Garage Games, crushed Spinal Tap in 14:03 during the opening week and collected a pair of Elite Division wins in the process. CrossFit Atlanta, the oldest affiliate in Georgia, and Perimeter (Sandy Springs) scored victories in Mixed, with times of 14:19 and 14:24, respectively.

"People want to win. It's pretty friendly prior to the workout but war during it."

—James Hobson

Hobson described the atmosphere as "cutthroat"—and that might have been him just being nice. As it turns out, the atmosphere and the competitive nature surrounding game day are Stanley Cup Game 7 intense.

"People want to win. It's pretty friendly prior to the workout but war during it," Hobson said, somewhat jokingly. "What surprised me is that we hadn't even figured out everything, and I was already getting calls from people ratting out other affiliates. We are athletes, after all, and people think their reputation is on the line when they compete."

"No one likes losing. You wouldn't be doing this if you did."



Grassroots or not, these competitions get intense!

The Next Step

Though the debut season of the Atlanta Affiliate League has yet to draw to a close, work has already begun on enhancing the experience for years to come.

A fall season has been confirmed, to begin Oct. 1. Several new affiliates are joining the fray, too, many of which began registering as early as the first week of Season 1.

News of the AAL, it would seem, is spreading like wildfire—even out of state.

Hobson, in addition to adding new divisions such as masters and kids, is very much interested in expansion. He has his eyes set on extending the league's reach to Alabama and Tennessee, perhaps even Florida.

"We were very proactive at the start, but now we are reactive," Hobson said. "We have a lot of stuff we'd like to add. We really want to see where we can take this."

"One of the points of the AAL is to get people involved, to spark interest. If we can get leagues going across the nation, that would be amazing."

The AAL, as stated on its website, has three main goals:

- To continue increasing the amount of competitions in the Atlanta area.
- To allow people of all fitness levels to compete on a small scale.
- To build the community and allow affiliates to interact with other affiliates.

These pioneers—Hobson the foremost figure—are well on their way to adding checkmarks beside each of those three bullets if they haven't already.

Success. It's a term that gets bounded about far too easily in today's reality-television age. It's safe to say, however, that the Atlanta Affiliate League is right on the cusp of being referred to as a success. In a few years' time, perhaps the scale of that success will be national or even global.

For more information on the Atlanta Affiliate League or to register a team, visit the league's official website at Atlantaleague.com.



Courtesy of Jack Goodson

About the Author

*Jack Goodson, 29, is a professional journalist located in Northeast Tennessee. A graduate of the University of Richmond, Jack has been a member of the sports staff at the **Kingsport Times-News** since 2004. Additionally, his musings about the English Premier League can be seen on a variety of national websites, including [The Offside](http://TheOffside.com). Jack began his CrossFit journey in June 2009 and has since been satisfying his addiction daily.*



THE **CrossFit***kitchen*

KIDS



Sweet Cheeks Headquarters

HANDY SNACKS

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

overview

Everyone loves eating foods with fingers, right? This snack is as easy to make as it is to eat, and involving the kids with the preparation makes them even more excited to eat it. Have the kids roll up the snacks and use leftover roasted, steamed or sautéed vegetables—or cook up a new batch.

Makes one serving

blocks

½ carbohydrate block

1 protein block

1 fat block

ingredients

1 ounce deli-sliced turkey breast

2-3 asparagus spears

⅓ red bell pepper

⅓ tsp. olive oil

Salt and pepper to taste

notes

The carbohydrates used in the handy snack roll are low-density carbs. If your snack needs more carbohydrates, you can stuff the turkey with more asparagus and peppers or serve it with apple slices to balance the snack.

directions

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees.
2. Wash and dry asparagus and red pepper.
3. Trim base off asparagus and cut pepper into thin strips.
4. Coat asparagus and red peppers with ⅓ tsp. olive oil. Add salt and pepper to taste.
5. Spread vegetables evenly on cookie sheet and bake for 10-15 minutes or until soft. Remove and let cool.
6. Take 1 piece of turkey and roll 2-3 spears of asparagus and a portion of bell peppers inside. Cut in half and serve.



THE CrossFit JOURNAL

A Hippie Lifts Heavy

By matching strongman Rob Orlando in the thruster ladder, T.J. O'Neill helped the CrossFit Southie team place fourth at the Northeast Regional.

By Andréa Maria Cecil

July 2011



All images: Staff/CrossFit Journal

On the second day of the Reebok CrossFit Games Northeast Regional, T.J. O'Neill walked into the venue wearing a green, yellow and red Rasta hat, a fabric anklet, and sandals.

On the third day of the event, the CrossFit Southie team athlete walked onto the outdoor competition floor wearing an American-flag bandana with part of his shoulder-length hair pulled into a ponytail atop his head. He sported black Converse high-tops that looked like they had seen better days, and he had a toothpick in his mouth.

But what might be most important to mention is O'Neill's first day at the regional. That's when he became the only person to match Rob Orlando in the thruster-ladder workout at 275 lb.

"I honestly think that if he really wanted to, he could win the CrossFit Games."

—Amy Ferro

The 6'2", 225-lb. former linebacker and defensive end for The College of William & Mary only started CrossFitting three months before the regional, held June 17-19 at Reebok International's world headquarters in Canton, Mass.

Twenty-six-year-old O'Neill, who looks like he wrestles mountain lions and "is a complete hippie," has the potential to be the world's fittest man, said CrossFit Southie co-owner Amy Ferro.

"I honestly think that if he really wanted to, he could win the CrossFit Games," she said.

"I heard you guys got bumper plates"

The first time O'Neill showed up at CrossFit Southie, he was noticed.

"T.J. is pretty hard to miss. He's pretty striking. He was 250 or so pounds at the time," Ferro said. "I was thinking, 'Who is this guy? I need to have him at my gym.' He looked like a professional athlete. Who wouldn't want that type of athlete at their gym? He was literally the biggest person I've ever seen."



Strongest hippie ever?

That day's workout was Fight Gone Bad: 3 or 5 rounds of 1 minute at each of the following five stations, with 1 minute of rest between rounds:

Wall-ball (20 lb., 10-ft. target)

Sumo deadlift high-pull (75 lb.)

Box jump (20")

Push press (75 lb.)

Row (calories)

In Fight Gone Bad, the clock is continuous until all exercises are completed in the round. Athletes' scores are based on reps—one point for each rep, except on the rower, where each calorie is one point.

"He ended up putting up 385 as his total," Ferro said. "We were like, 'That's just crazy.' He was able to move his body weight. He did everything correctly ... He killed it."

She added: "We had done Fight Gone Bad probably the first or second week we were open, so we had all the scores up on the whiteboard, and he tied the second (place) person. We had people who had been doing (CrossFit) for three years, and T.J. comes in and he's enormous and he has one of the highest scores."

O'Neill remembered it a bit differently.

"It definitely kicked my butt," he said.

With that, he was sold, said the native of Duxbury, Mass.

"He was literally the biggest person I've ever seen."

—Amy Ferro

Since his college-football days, O'Neill craved competition, he said. During O'Neill's time at William & Mary, strength-and-conditioning coach John Sauer introduced O'Neill to Olympic weightlifting, which was a regular part of the football team's programming, O'Neill said.

"We clean, we snatch, we push-jerk ... for the reason that those are the exercises that are found to be for the powerful, explosive athlete," said Sauer, who has been in his position at the college for 24 years.

Those movements also require coordination and balance — "that's going to apply to every sport, I feel," he added.

Through a friend, O'Neill heard of CrossFit.

"The only thing I really knew about it is they had bumper plates," O'Neill said.

So when he heard about CrossFit Southie, which opened in late September, he stopped by.



O'Neill attempts to rip handle from rower during the Northeast Regional.

He walked in and said, “I heard you guys got bumper plates; I’d like to work out,” O’Neill recounted. “Chris Gosler, who owns the box that I work out at ... was like, ‘We got a little bit more going on than workouts and bumper plates.’”

And so O’Neill was competing once more.

At first, he was competing with others in the same class, then with others on the whiteboard, then with the box’s top performers.

“It’s not just the competition but the camaraderie. It’s really what drew me into it all,” O’Neill said. “It was definitely something missing in the last couple years in my life—something that was challenging but I still found fun.”

A Regional Competitor

CrossFit Southie finished in fourth place at the Northeast Regional, bested by CrossFit Fenway, which finished the competition with two fewer points and, thus, a spot at this year’s CrossFit Games.



**Free with your CrossFit Journal subscription:
tickets to the gun show.**

“I wish I could have been prepared a teeny bit more,” said O’Neill, who became part of the CrossFit Southie team a week before the regional. “But I was really happy with how I performed with being there for the first time.”

Originally, O’Neill was an alternate on CrossFit Southie’s team. He finished the Open in 1,728th place.

**“It was definitely something
missing in the last couple
years in my life—something
that was challenging but I
still found fun.”**

—T.J. O’Neill

But things changed a little more than seven days before the competition.

“We were training for three weeks before regionals, and that last week before we did a one-rep-max jerk ... and he put up 375 for the jerk,” Ferro said of O’Neill. “It was the most beautiful jerk. He made it look like it was 135 lb. It was ridiculous.”

Mark Urso, who finished the Open in 1,183rd place and who was on the team, wrote Ferro an email explaining why he thought O’Neill should compete on the team in his place.

And so O’Neill became a regional competitor.

“He just came and he just dominated,” said Ferro, captain of the affiliate team.

“Now he’s becoming more interested in all the gymnastics work. ... I just hope that he grows as an athlete.”

Sauer described O’Neill as strong, powerful and explosive and said he “could run like crazy.”

“By the time he graduated, he was quite ... a physical specimen, I would say,” Sauer said. “T.J.’s a hard-working kid, and I don’t have any doubt in the world that he’s going to be successful in this competition (CrossFit). He’s got the ability to do very, very well at it and the mentality to do very, very well at it.”

Finding the Common Bond

O'Neill, who is a coach at CrossFit Southie, said he hopes to improve high-skill movements, such as muscle-ups, and looks forward to future challenges.

"I've always been a person who does better in competition. I don't shy away. I absolutely want to try to compete more. It's kind of my nature once I start something," he said. "I'm really an all-or-nothing person ... balls to the wall or I'm not going to do it at all."

O'Neill added: "With that being said, after seeing what CrossFit's all about ... it's definitely affected me in a positive way. I'm eating healthier, feeling better."

He was struck, he said, by the friendliness of fellow regional competitors.

"I was really impressed by the entire scene. I thought it was really cool to see all these people that had worked so hard and this is where they can see the fruits of their labor, but everyone's got time for everyone else."

**"You really feel that
community aspect to it—
people going out of their
way to connect with other
people vs. other competitions,
where people are sizing
each other up."**

—T.J. O'Neill

He saw competitors warming up together, sharing a bar, talking about where they were from, the next competition.

"You really feel that community aspect to it—people going out of their way to connect with other people vs. other competitions, where people are sizing each other up," O'Neill said. "They work hard and (they want to) win, but at the same time they're not getting so caught up in it. It's the common bond of CrossFit."

And O'Neill seems to fit right in.

"He's just so cool," Ferro said. "Every girl wants to be with him. Every guy wants to hang out with him."

"At regionals, he made so many friends in, like, five minutes," she continued. "He remembers details. He's not playing Mr. Cool. He really cares. He's just a really good guy. The fact that (he) can lift heavy shit is just a bonus."



Courtesy of Andréa Maria Cecil

About the Author

Andréa Maria Cecil, 32, is managing editor at the *Central Penn Business Journal* in Harrisburg, Pa. Andréa is a native of New Orleans who lives in York County, Pa. There, she's been doing CrossFit since 2008 at [CrossFit York](#). She dedicates three days a week to training in Olympic weightlifting at [McKenna's Gym](#).

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Taking Age Out of the Equation

Hilary Achauer explains how the oldest and youngest athletes in the Southern California Regional approached the competition.

By Hilary Achauer

July 2011



All images: Staff/CrossFit Journal

If you're a CrossFitter over the age of 30, it's likely that at some point you've given yourself a little extra credit for your years.

Yes, you've played the age game.

After getting demolished in a workout, you allowed yourself to think, "Yeah, I didn't get as many rounds as I thought, but I'm 10 years older than her! I'm doing fine."

As a 38-year-old in a gym filled with mostly twentysomethings, I was happy giving myself a pat on the back for my extra years until I met 42-year-old Bill Grundler at the Southern California Regional. I didn't even think about the effect of being 10 years *younger* than most of the competition until I watched Connor Martin, age 20, compete at that same event.



Bill Grundler, 42, does Amanda at the 2011 SoCal Regional.

Good at Everything

A former wrestler, Grundler runs CrossFit Inferno and works as a captain at the Shell Beach Fire Station in Pismo Beach, Calif. He has been in and around CrossFit since 2001, but he didn't start to get serious about it until 2007. Up until that point, Grundler had been doing CrossFit-style workouts at a regular gym, and he had the guys at his fire station doing circuits that incorporated CrossFit skills, but he wasn't focused on his fitness goals.

In 2007 he took a long look at his workouts and thought, "What am I trying to do?" He went back and read Greg Glassman's classic article [What Is Fitness?](#), and a spark was ignited. He didn't just want to be strong or fit. He wanted to be good at everything. He wanted to be better at his job. He wanted to have the strength to save someone's life by blowing through a wall on his way out of a burning building.

"At the fire station, everyone thought I was a freak," Grundler said. "I didn't have the ability to explain to them what I was doing and why, so that's why I became a student of the movements." He began using CrossFit to help train his firefighters, and he opened CrossFit Inferno in 2008.

It wasn't until his blistering performance in the 2010 Southwest Regional qualifiers that everyone realized the guy was 41 years old.

Bill first competed in the 2009 Southern California Regional competition and finished in 10th place. He never made a big deal of his age; he just went out and competed. He so effortlessly crushed men half his age that most people didn't know how old he was. It wasn't until his blistering performance in the 2010 Southwest Regional qualifiers that everyone realized the guy was 41 years old. "Once everyone found out how old I was at the 2010 regionals, Tony Budding came up to me," said Bill.

Budding, the media director at CrossFit Headquarters, told Grundler that he hoped he made it to the Games. However, if he didn't, everyone at headquarters was so impressed by his personality and presence that they wanted Bill to do commentary for the live webcast of the Games. Bill took seventh place in the Southwest Regional in 2010, which meant he attended the Games as a commentator, not a competitor.

He enjoyed the experience, but for 2011 he had his sights set on the Games.

"I'm pretty excited about it," the firefighter told me a few weeks before the 2011 Southern California Regionals, "This is the first time I've made a concerted effort to train for a CrossFit competition."



Fit past 40.

The Original CrossFit Kid

Grundler was not the only SoCal competitor completely undaunted by the date on his birth certificate. Connor Martin, known as "The CrossFit Kid," competed in the very first CrossFit Games in 2007 when he was 15. Although he didn't finish the first workout, he proudly did everything as RX'd, including pull-ups and pushing 135 lb. from his shoulders to overhead.

After all, he had been doing CrossFit since he was 12. Connor's parents, Jeff and Mikki Lee Martin, are the founders of CrossFit Kids. Jeff used Connor to test out CrossFit Kids workouts, which started just as scaled-down versions of the main-site workouts. After researching the types of exercises that would most benefit kids, Jeff and Mikki began creating workouts specifically designed for young athletes. Connor competed as a wrestler in high school and did CrossFit for fun and as a supplement to his main sport.

Connor competed in sectionals in 2008 and 2009, but he began to seriously focus on training in 2010. He worked hard all year, and then the week before sectionals he dislocated three ribs and didn't compete. After finishing 60th in the Southern California Region following the Open competition, Connor scaled back his training to avoid aggravating his back, which he hurt wrestling.



Fit since 12.



Connor Martin competed in the very first CrossFit Games in 2007.

"My goal is to finish in the top 14," Connor told me the week before the SoCal Regionals, "but I'm worried about the deadlift/box-jump workout. My back is not as strong as it should be."

The Competition

Although Bill and Connor entered the SoCal Regional at either end of the leaderboard and the age spectrum, they shared a similar mindset. After the first workout, the two met for the first time and began talking about their perspectives on the competition.

"We got to talking about our approach to the competition," Connor said. "Bill took the same stance about age as I did, which was that we had to separate age from the equation. Both of us could easily walk away saying that what we had already done was 'good enough for our age.' But in competition, good is the enemy of great, so we couldn't become complacent with what we'd accomplished."

Most of us engage in some version of the age game—whether it's giving ourselves a break for our age or not sleeping well or not working out at our normal time ... the list goes on.

Wearing a purple weight belt and neon-green socks from his sponsor, Life As Rx, Connor started the deadlift/box-jump workout with the goal of simply finishing and preserving his back so that he could continue to compete. He ended up completing the workout with a two-minute PR, and more importantly, he walked away feeling good.

"Although I didn't beat most in the competition, I did accomplish exactly what I wanted to," said Connor.

Grundler placed 15th in the second workout and 19th in the third workout, meaning he was dangerously close to finishing below the top 14 by the end of Day 2, which would have put him out of the competition.

The last workout of day two was the infamous 100s: 100 pull-ups, 100 kettlebell swings (24 kg), 100 double-unders, and 100 overhead squats (95 lb.). Not satisfied with good, Grundler began the fourth workout determined to be great. He worked steadily but quickly, moving through each of the elements with confidence and determination.

The reports from that day all focused on Josh Bridges' world record. It was an astonishing feat: Bridges finished in an amazing 14:09. However, what was lost in the world-record noise was that Grundler came in second with a time of 19:57, beating everyone else who ended up on the podium at the end of the competition, including Jonathan Pera and Jeremy Kinnick.

The 42-year-old finished the SoCal Regional tied for sixth place with Ronnie Teasdale, and Connor tied for 41st place with Paul Castaneda. Neither made it to the Games, but both proved to be fierce competitors and tough athletes.

When I asked Grundler what he thought about the experience, he was typically humble and enthusiastic:

"The Southern California Regionals were an amazing mix of extraordinary athletes. Where else in the world can you have ex-Games competitors, the Original Firebreather (Greg Amundson), the original CrossFit kid, the winner of the Open, some old names, some new names, the fittest woman in the world (Kristan Clever), the CF Valley girls, and me with new tennis balls on my walker? It was a great event."

Most of us engage in some version of the age game—whether it's giving ourselves a break for our age or not sleeping well or not working out at our normal time ... the list goes on. Watching Grundler and Martin compete, and talking to them about the experience, I realized that all those thoughts don't have any place in CrossFit.

The great equalizer, CrossFit respects hard work, sweat, and tenacity. Everything else is secondary.



Courtesy of Hilary Achauer

About the Author

Hilary Achauer is an award-winning freelance writer and editor with a background in marketing and communications. An amateur-boxer-turned-CrossFitter, Hilary specializes in health and wellness content, focusing on emerging fitness trends. Her writing has been featured in a leading online parenting magazine as well as a number of travel and lifestyle publications. She is an editor for Frommer's travel guides and writes websites, brochures, blogs and newsletters for universities, start-ups, entrepreneurs, accounting and financial service organizations, and management consultants. She lives in San Diego with her husband and two small children and spends most of her free time at CrossFit PB. To contact her, visit HilaryAchauer.com.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Beyond the CrossFit Games: Part 4

Jack Goodson talks to Jennifer and Katelyn Haynes about competing in the Central East Regional as mother and daughter.

By Jack Goodson

July 2011



All images: Staff/CrossFit Journal

Katelyn Haynes did not take CrossFit seriously. Not at all.

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The idea of an active lifestyle had always been appealing, sure. Her parents, Chris and Jennifer, lifelong exercisers themselves, opened CrossFit Rutherford (Murfreesboro, Tenn.) in 2009.

The competitive side of fitness, however, and all that accompanies it, was never really a priority for Haynes. That perspective changed about a year ago, when Jennifer competed at the sectional level of the 2010 CrossFit Games.

Haynes accompanied her parents to Huntsville for the Alabama Sectional and was blown away by what she discovered. The environment was jolting. The feeling, the energy surrounding the place was unavoidable. Haynes was hooked.

"Once I got there and saw the atmosphere, I knew this is something I wanted to do," Haynes said. "Going to that was honestly life-changing, as cliché as that sounds. I changed my mind about CrossFit. I was ready to train and be at sectionals myself."

Fast-forward to June. Katelyn got her wish—and then some. The fiery, outspoken 19-year-old not only competed in the Reebok CrossFit Games Open, but also, in her first full-on taste of the competition, qualified for the Central East Regional.

Not to be outdone, mom was there as well. And, wouldn't you know it, she also scored a regional berth.

Talk about establishing a healthy family tradition.

Talk about establishing a healthy family tradition.



Katelyn lifts in the foreground, while her mother, also in green, lifts in the background during the Central East Regional.



Jennifer Haynes: one fit mother.

The Mother, the Catalyst

Jennifer Haynes doesn't have much free time on her hands. She's a mother of four. Three boys aged 6, 10 and 14 join oldest sibling Katelyn.

A lifelong devotee to fitness, as previously mentioned, Jennifer Haynes is not only co-owner of but also a full-time trainer at CrossFit Rutherford. Husband Chris splits time as a trainer with his full-time job as a lieutenant with the Rutherford County Sheriff's Department.

Oh, and Jennifer Haynes is 41 years old. Not that you could tell.

"I love showing my mom off," Katelyn Haynes said. "She is a badass, no doubt. Not many people at all can say their moms do this type of stuff."

The Hayneses' journey into the world of CrossFit was a swift one. Jennifer first came across the methodology in June 2008 at the suggestion of a friend. Chris joined the fray that December, and, less than a year later, CrossFit Rutherford swung open its doors.

"I had seen changes in my body and was doing exercises that I had only ever heard of," Jennifer said. "I knew that if I could do it, anyone could. I really wanted to offer this type of exercise to all types of people with all different skill levels. That's how CrossFit Rutherford pretty much started."

Her sojourn to the Games, meanwhile? Genuinely unexpected—particularly for her.

Christmas 2010: Chris surprised his wife not with jewelry or perhaps a trip to a remote island in the Caribbean. No. Neatly wrapped and nestled under the Fraser fir instead was registration for the Alabama Sectional. Truly the gift that keeps on giving.

"I had never in my entire life competed in anything, so, needless to say, the Christmas gift was not something I had asked for," Jennifer joked.

Perhaps not, but she wasn't about to turn down the opportunity to get herself involved. Jennifer placed 18th out of 21 competitors in Huntsville, a highly admirable showing for a first-timer.



Leading by example, Jennifer got her daughter hooked on CrossFit too.

She did it all with her family cheering on from every conceivable angle. And it wasn't just about the encouragement she received or the competition itself. Perhaps more significant was what grew from the adventure.

It proved, really, to be the springboard for what developed a year later.

"It was a huge eye-opening experience for me," Jennifer said. For Katelyn, too, obviously.

An Open invitation

Mom laid down the marker. Katelyn was now ready to follow.

The two began training for the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games early on, though the significance of competing together wasn't exactly at the forefront of either's mind when they made the decision to sign up.

Scheduling conflicts made it difficult for mother and daughter to see each other. School, for Katelyn, and work, for Jennifer, meant shared training sessions were limited. That's not to say the two of them weren't conscious of the potential there.

Before long they began making time for each other.

"We did this together because it's something we both love to do and we can do it together," Katelyn said. "It just kind of ended up that way, but we were happy it did."

We may not have worked out together all the time, but we pushed each other day in and day out. We make each other better just by being around each other."

Competing was a shared desire. Their goals, however, were very much at different ends of the spectrum.

Competing was a shared desire. Their goals, however, were very much at different ends of the spectrum.

Jennifer was simply interested in being a part of the Open. Anything more was a bonus. Katelyn, meanwhile, her competitive fire kindling, was intent on qualifying for the regional competition. Whatever the cost.

"I just wanted to make it to regionals when I started the Open," Katelyn said. "I am pretty hard on myself, and I was going to do whatever it took to make it to regionals. For example, I did a lot of the WODs twice in a day. Worn out and fatigued, I still pushed myself to make sure I qualified."

Jennifer, meanwhile, opted for a more measured approach: "I signed up for the Open just to see where my name landed. I really didn't think I would end up in the top 60. I knew Katelyn would do really well. She always pushed me to do better."

A generational gap? Maybe. Nevertheless, both performed extremely well in the qualifiers—above expectations, even for Katelyn. Each was comfortably inside the top 60, Katelyn finishing 20th and Jennifer 28th.

Columbus, Ohio, was the next stop.

Motivation

Central East Regional, Day 1.

Katelyn and Jennifer found themselves in the same heat of the first event, a workout featuring running, handstand push-ups and rowing. Handstand push-ups, of course—one of Jennifer's self-proclaimed weaknesses.

Worried, nervous? Sure. Added pressure competing alongside her daughter? Not in the least. In fact, Jennifer reckons it was the best possible thing that could've happened.

"It was comforting to have (Katelyn) there with me," she said. "I was very nervous, and to look around and see her face made me feel more at ease."

Katelyn offered a near-identical perspective.

"Competing beside my mom was very comforting," she said. "We were in the same heat for the first workout, and it put my mind at ease knowing she was there. Of course I still had nerves, but looking over and seeing your mom doing the same crazy workout you are helps a lot."

"I couldn't help but smile. Also, hearing her cheer me on motivated me and fired me up. She was a competitor but still my mom."

Katelyn was 20th after the first event. Jennifer sat 24th.

Event 2, a thruster ladder, severely tested the Hayneses. Katelyn managed a respectable 11th (130 lb.). Jennifer, meanwhile, thrived on the atmosphere. After completing her first attempt, which also happened to be her one-rep max up until that point, finished in 20th with a new personal-best lift of 115 lb.

It was simply down to motivation, she said.

"When I succeeded and got that first thruster, I was so happy," Jennifer said. "I knew I was going to get to work out Saturday."

As the competition shifted to its second day, Jennifer ran into a problem. Not so much a problem, really, as a motherly habit.



Katelyn managed to beat her mom at the regional level, but only by four places.

"I was just so excited that I was there with Katelyn on the competition floor, and my boys were very proud of me. That is what motivated me the most, the fact that my four kids were happy and excited that I was competing in the regional."

As the competition shifted to its second day, Jennifer ran into a problem. Not so much a problem, really, as a motherly habit.

She found herself more than once focused on how Katelyn was doing rather than her own performance.

"I really wanted Katelyn to do well," Jennifer said. "I found myself yelling at her while we were out on the competition floor doing our WODs. I just couldn't help it. I would look over and see her struggling or breaking for a second, and I would just yell for her to relax or get moving."

A top spot and a ticket to the international competition in Carson, Calif., were not in the cards, but Katelyn closed the Central East Regional in 19th. Mom, meanwhile, closed in 23rd place.

The Hayneses had come so far in such a short amount of time. The journey, now, was over.

Disappointed? Never.

"The regional was a crazy, amazing experience," Katelyn said. "It was a great. I thought I was motivated when I got there, but going there and seeing some of the most elite athletes in the world fired me up even more.

"I learned so much and it was definitely a growing experience. I can't wait to take what I learned and use it to go even further next year."

Just Getting Started

Next year.

It's a commendable but novel idea to suggest you will be back among the world's fittest, in the pain and sweat, mere days after the end. So many variables can come into play over the next months.

That's not stopping the Hayneses, though. Jennifer plans to compete next year and says she looking forward to competing alongside her daughter once more. Katelyn, meanwhile, was far more up front when asked about the idea of returning to the floor in 2012.

"Of course we will be back next year," she said.

Look out.

Katelyn wasn't finished speaking her mind, either.

"CrossFit has changed my life," she said. "I look back and can't believe I went as long as I did without it. My mom and dad took a leap of faith opening a gym, and it's changed our family for the better.

"My mom—my parents—have inspired me. Even though regionals are over, I'm already training for next year. I know mom will be right there with me, too."



Courtesy of Jack Goodson

About the Author

*Jack Goodson, 29, is a professional journalist located in Northeast Tennessee. A graduate of the University of Richmond, Jack has been a member of the sports staff at the **Kingsport Times-News** since 2004. Additionally, his musings about the English Premier League can be seen on a variety of national websites, including [The Offside](#). Jack began his CrossFit journey in June 2009 and has since been satisfying his addiction daily.*

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

There's Something About CFNE

CrossFit New England placed first in all six workouts at the Northeast Regional. Andréa Maria Cecil investigates what makes the affiliate excel.

By Andréa Maria Cecil

July 2011



All images: Staff/CrossFit Journal

On the third day of the Northeast Regional, some of the roughly 1,000 spectators grew weary of three words.

"There's people out there who are tired of hearing me say 'CrossFit New England,'" said Travis Bagent, the event's emcee, as he sat down for some shade beneath a tent at Reebok International's world headquarters in Canton, Mass.

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The solution to the problem is simple, he said at the time: Beat 'em.

But that didn't happen.

Not only did CrossFit New England place first in all six workouts June 17-19, but it was also the first team in the world to break the record in the first event—4 x 750-meter row, 50 handstand push-ups, 4 x 750-meter row—with a time of 23:36. Outlier CrossFit later finished the workout faster with a time of 22:55 at the Southern California Regional.

The New England team's success is attributable to many factors, said Heather Bergeron, who co-owns CrossFit New England with her husband, Ben.

"It's a lot of stuff that coaches and athletes don't think about ... (those things) buy you a lot of points and time," she said nearly two weeks after the regional.

Faster transitions, a team approach and mind coaching are three pieces comprising CrossFit New England's success, the Bergerons said.

Fast, Smooth Transitions

Leading up to the regional, CrossFit New England members watched videos of something some might describe as mundane: changing bumpers and collars on barbells.

Some teams did it in 15 seconds, and others took 1 minute, Heather Bergeron said.

**"It's pretty easy to see
that there's so much time
to be gained or lost in
those transitions."**

—Ben Bergeron

"That literally has nothing to do with physical capacity. It's a stupid thing that people don't think about ahead of time," she explained. "Those are things that we practice in training. Those things don't just happen organically. Those are things you have to practice a lot of times."

She and her husband have experience with transitioning from their triathlon days.

Ben competed in the 2007 Ironman Florida Triathlon, the 2008 Ironman Lake Placid Triathlon and twice ran in the Boston Marathon. Heather competed in the 2007 Ironman Lake Placid Triathlon and has run eight marathons.

Plus, this will be CrossFit New England's third year competing as an affiliate at the CrossFit Games.

"It's pretty easy to see that there's so much time to be gained or lost in those transitions," said Ben Bergeron, who was the Northeast Regional director. "It's easy. There's no fitness involved. ... Smooth out the transition and you go faster."

Another part of fast transitions is communication.

"When one athlete is about to finish their reps that they're doing, (they're) giving the other teammate a heads-up ... so there's no lag time between," Heather Bergeron said. "Because if there's 50 transitions, all that time adds up."



***CFNE athletes during one of the six workouts
they won at the regional.***

A Team Sport

By knowing the regional workouts—unlike years past—CrossFit athletes all over the world were able to practice them leading up to their respective regional.

“That changed things a lot ahead of time (in terms of) being able to game plan,” Bergeron said.

**“We approach this as a team.
We have meals together
every week. ... We do all these
things together that you do
on a college sports team.”**

—Ben Bergeron

Because she was to compete in the thruster ladder, the Amanda workout and the “250s” event—250 chest-to-bar pull-ups, 250 kettlebell swings (24/16 kg), 250 double-unders, 250 overhead squats (95/65 lb.)—Heather did pre-regional training that focused on specific movements.

“All I was doing was working my thruster and working my muscle-ups and snatches,” she said.

And Ben programmed additional non-regional workouts for team members as well.

“We ran through everything so there (were) no mysteries or questions at all,” he said.

But CrossFit New England didn’t stop there.

“We really approached it as a team event. We really practiced these things,” he emphasized.

The idea, Bergeron said, was to create the tightest knit community possible.



A little rain didn’t stop CFNE from winning Event 1 by almost a minute.



*Two-time Games competitor Heather Bergeron
knocks out muscle-ups.*

"The way we approach this is not six individuals who are really fit. We approach this as a team. We have meals together every week. People who eat together bond," he said. "We do all these things together that you do on a college sports team."

Bergeron added: "It's the six best teammates—not athletes."

"Programming Is Overrated and Coaching Is Underrated"

As far as programming, the couple said CrossFit New England is the same as any other affiliate.

"I look around at other gyms' programming, and it's not that different. We essentially do CrossFit and work on our weaknesses," Ben said. "If someone's programming Cindy and one day of heavy deadlifts and one day of Helen, it's the same at every gym."

But, he added, "I think coaching is the underrated part of that."

"I think that the programming is overrated and coaching is underrated," Bergeron said.

Greg Amundson lit a fire under him, Bergeron said. Known as the Original Firebreather in the CrossFit community, Amundson gives motivational speeches in which he uses a version of one of Mahatma Gandhi's quotes, "Your thoughts will become your words. Your words will become your actions. Your actions will become your habits. Your habits will become your character. Your character will define your destiny."

**"I look around at other
gyms' programming, and
it's not that different. We
essentially do CrossFit and
work on our weaknesses.
... I think coaching is the
underrated part of that."**

—Ben Bergeron

Likewise, in addition to showing members how to become better at certain movements, "we also do a lot of mind coaching, how to mentally support other athletes," Bergeron said.

"It's not the obvious either," he added. "It's small stuff like, 'Don't quit,' 'Keep going,' 'Go faster,' 'Finish stronger.' We spend a lot of time with our athletes—every member—on that stuff."

Heather Bergeron agreed.

"I don't think that we've ever pushed people more than (any other affiliate has)," she said.

CrossFit New England encourages athletes who can perform high-skill movements, such as handstand push-ups, and provides those who can't with "the tools to get there," Heather said.

"We don't assume that just 'cause they're older that they need to do a modification for the rest of their life," she added. "I think we do a good job with providing them progressions."



Thrusted with authority.

Next Up: The Games

In preparation for July 29-31 at the Home Depot Center in Carson, Calif., CrossFit New England has planned Saturday workouts with CrossFit Route 1 and CrossFit Fenway, which placed second and third in the Northeast Regional, respectively.

"(They) train with our team, train against our team," Bergeron said. "They're winning some, we're winning some. It's close. It's not like a gimme that we're gonna win every single workout."

She continued: "It's good to know ahead of time. I want to know right now what we're not good at."

Ben said he believes his box has a strong chance of walking away with a first-place finish at the Games.

"I think we're a top-five team. Anything could happen on game day," he said. "We're shooting for podium spot; we'd love to win it."

"I try not to get too cocky about it. The competition gets harder every year."

—Heather Bergeron

It's almost impossible to accurately predict Games winners, said Eric Siegel, manager of CrossFit Fenway and captain of his affiliate team.

"It's whoever is having their best day and who does well at the workouts," he said. "I think we have the best region (in the world) here in the Northeast. You never know. Anything can happen."

And CrossFit New England has "a group of great athletes that train together and work hard and represent the gym well," he said.

Heather Bergeron remained reserved.

Her affiliate must think of how it not only matches up against other boxes in the country but also in the world, she said.

CrossFit Invictus of San Diego and Front Range CrossFit out of Denver are two strong competitors, she said.

"Invictus, definitely. (They) have a really cool community, and that says a lot about (their) character," she said.

"I'm very hesitant. We're going to prepare as much as we can and eliminate our weakness as much as we can, and whatever happens happens. We're all certainly hoping we're going to walk away with a first-place medal. I try not to get too cocky about it.

"The competition gets harder every year."



Courtesy of Andréa Maria Cecil

About the Author

*Andréa Maria Cecil, 33, is managing editor at the **Central Penn Business Journal** in Harrisburg, Pa. Andréa is a native of New Orleans who now lives in York County, Pa. There, she's been doing CrossFit since 2008 at [CrossFit York](#). Additionally, she dedicates three days per week to training in Olympic weightlifting at [McKenna's Gym](#).*

THE CrossFit JOURNAL KIDS

Move the Mess!

You'll need to pull out all your gym's equipment for this game. Alison Patenaude explains.

By Alison Patenaude CrossFit Kids

July 2011



Number of players

Unlimited.

Equipment needed

Three cones per group, any type of equipment found in a gym; i.e., kettlebells, plates, bumpers, kicking pads, med-balls, weights, bars, PVC, clips, sandbags, D-balls, chalk buckets, boxes, tires, etc. Each group, or team, must have the same amount of equipment.

Facility

30 x 30 feet minimum.

Set-Up

Three cones lined up 20 meters apart.

Object

To get the "mess" from one cone (side of playing area) to the next.

Rules

Kids work in groups of 2-6. All equipment (the mess) must be moved from the first cone to the second, then from the second cone to the third. Only one object/piece of equipment may be moved from one cone to the next at a time. All group/team members must be back behind the original cone before another piece of equipment can be moved. Once all equipment is moved from Cone 1 to Cone 2, do the same from Cone 2 to Cone 3.

The team that moves all equipment from the first cone to the third wins.



Staff/CrossFit Kids

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Who Will Win the CrossFit Games?—Part 1

Tony Leyland examines what makes the ideal CrossFit athlete.

By Tony Leyland

July 2011



Staff/CrossFit Journal

Many of us want to know what makes an elite CrossFit athlete in terms of physical attributes, and as the Reebok CrossFit Games approach, more questions arise.

What type of athlete can win the Games?

What factors will determine the winner?

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I am indeed going to be silly enough to attempt to discuss the factors that will determine the winner on July 31.

To a some degree, it's going to depend on what comes out of the hopper. Even 10 WODs deliberately picked to challenge all 10 physical skills will throw a slight advantage to one athlete compared to another. If we then picked 10 different WODs (again trying to challenge all 10 physical skills), we might have a different winner. Such is the incredible combination of human movement patterns and power outputs that we literally have an infinite number of options when creating CrossFit WODs.

However, the Games are programmed to provide the broadest possible test of fitness and select the best athletes for the podium. With enough events, the hopper has less influence. And even if the programming should favor one individual over another, a host of other factors will help decide who is fittest. We'll examine some of those factors here.



In CrossFit, strength is important, but so is technique, endurance, heart, nutrition, mental preparation

Before I get into this discussion, I want to review some simple definitions and their relevance to the Games WODs.

Terms to Remember

Work—This is force multiplied by the distance the force acts. Most WODs require the athlete to move an external load, or several loads, a given distance (e.g., ground to overhead) and to move body weight, or a portion of it, a certain distance (e.g., toes to bar). Therefore, an elite CrossFit athlete is one who is able to do a prescribed workload quicker or sustain a very high power output and do more work in a prescribed time period than the vast majority of other CrossFit athletes.

Power—This is work divided by time. Elite CrossFit athletes can sustain high power outputs for longer periods than other CrossFit athletes; that is, they can do the prescribed work in the WOD faster. Another factor, of course, is maximum-effort WODs like the thruster ladder (Regional Workout 2). There, the requirement isn't about sustaining high power for an extended period of time, but rather about the maximum power output you can generate executing that particular movement.

Strength—This is the maximum amount of force a muscle or muscle groups can produce. Strength is clearly related to work and power, but you can have very strong athletes who do not have the central-nervous-system training (or innate ability) to generate very high power outputs. Power can also be thought of as force multiplied by velocity. Some very strong individuals who perform well in exercises like the deadlift do not have equally as good performances in high-power activities like the snatch.

Bodies of the Best

It has taken amazing efforts from eight amazing athletes to win previous Games titles, as it will this summer. However, there are some basic mechanics at play that mean an amazing effort from an amazing athlete may not be enough. The laws of physics effectively dictate that while a 6'6" athlete could win a particular WOD, he or she would probably not be able to string together enough results to win the Games. Let us look at the past eight winners in simple terms of athlete height and weight.

Year	Male Winner	Height	Weight	Female Winner	Height	Weight
2007	James Fitzgerald	5'10"	168 lb.	Jolie Gentry	5'4"	125 lb.
2008	Jason Khalipa	5'9"	205 lb.	Caity Matter	5'9"	165 lb.
2009	Mikko Salo	5'8½"	176 lb.	Tanya Wagner	5'6"	145 lb.
2010	Graham Holmberg	5'11"	185 lb.	Kristan Clever	5'2"	133 lb.

Table 1: Heights and weights of previous CrossFit Games champs.

Although the above table shows quite a range of weights on the male side, we can see a very tight range of heights. Why is this? Although the ranges of heights and weights are fairly varied on the female side, we can suggest that the 2008 Games WODs favored the larger athlete as that was the year the heaviest male and female in the above table won the Games.

In terms of physics, the two fundamental factors in completing the met-con WODs are work required and athlete work capacity (his or her ability to produce high power outputs for the duration of the WOD).

The external work required is not conceptually hard to understand. However, the actual energy cost to the athlete is incredibly complex. Nevertheless, let's start with the obvious: height and weight.

1. Body dimensions—I am going to refer to "height" as "body dimensions" because limb-length ratios are a factor. However, given an average proportion of limb and trunk lengths, it's safe to say taller athletes will generally do more work moving an external load. They have to move the bar, kettlebell or dumbbell through a greater distance. Even during a push-up they will move their body weight a greater distance than someone with shorter arms. So typically the tall athlete has to do more work moving his/her body weight and any prescribed external load.

For any given height, heavier athletes will do more work.

2. Body weight—Even performing a clean and jerk means performing work moving your body mass up and down against gravity. Obviously, air squats, pull-ups, burpees, etc. are all about moving your body weight. For any given height, heavier athletes will do more work.

Therefore, the actual calculation of the external work done is largely dependent on load weight, athlete weight and athlete height. With fixed loads (e.g., Grace), the tall and heavy athlete will do more work, as he or she will on burpees, pull-ups and also thrusters. I should point out that a short, heavy athlete, if he or she is sufficiently heavier than a tall, lean athlete, might in fact be doing more work.

I think movements like handstand push-ups are particularly tough on the tall and heavy athlete. If you look at the amazing performances of an athlete like North Central's Phillip Kniep (6'0", 205 lb.), you can see he crushed most regional workouts with the exception of the first one (he was 14th in that region's Workout 1 and yet first in the thruster and chipper WODs). I wasn't there, but I would imagine his rowing is awesome, and although his running may only be average for the CrossFit elite, I would speculate it was handstand push-ups that slowed him up on the WOD.

With maximum-effort WODs, however, heavy, well-muscled athletes are at less of a disadvantage, as they will likely have more muscle mass (simply put, they are stronger and, if trained correctly, more powerful). Note that I say the "heavy, well-muscled athlete"; the best performances will still not necessarily be from a tall athlete due to the distance the bar has to travel. On the thruster ladder, Rob Orlando (5'8", 196 lb.) reached 275 lb., Jason Khalipa (5'9", 205 lb.) lifted 285, and Danny Nichols (6', 230 lb.) lifted 325 lb. On the women's side Katie Hogan (5'9", 165 lb.) of the Southern California region lifted 190. Granted, Katie is quite tall for a female, but you are always bound to have a few slight exceptions. I say "slight" because a 6-foot female will really be at a disadvantage in most WODs. The bottom line is that unless there are several WODs favoring strength, the tall, heavy athlete is going to find it tough to win.

Another body type to discuss is the short and heavy athlete. I believe there is only so much muscle mass you can pack onto a smaller frame and still be mobile and agile enough for CrossFit. Elite powerlifters are often short and heavy as this is the ideal body type to lift heavy weight (lots of muscle mass and shorter distances to move the bar). However, it isn't the ideal body type to row, run, perform burpees, etc.

The bottom line: I believe the male winner will be under 6 feet tall and more likely under 5'11". The lower limit? That's harder, but I would say 5'6" or 5'7" would probably be the lower end. Body weight is harder still, but I think between 155-195 lb. is the likely range.

Yes, I know Joshua Bridges is 5'5" and 160 lb. However, his thruster ladder at regionals ended at 225 lb., so if we assume a few WODs at the finals will have very heavy weights or require a 1RM effort, I think he might be too small. He will be in the mix for sure because he's an amazing athlete, but athletes like Bridges and Chris Spealler (5'5", 139 lb.)—arguably the best on a pound-for-pound basis—are up against some equally amazing athletes who have

a little more size and muscle mass. On the men's side, many regional winners were on the small side, but over the course of the Open, regionals and finals, I believe the averages will favor someone between 5'7" and 5'11".

Many small athletes (including Bridges) crushed the deadlift/box-jump WOD, but keep in mind the deadlifts, although heavy at 315 lb. for males and 205 lb. for women, did not require the bar to move much distance, and the lighter athlete then had an advantage on the 30-inch box jumps. Despite the heavy look of this WOD, the results showed it actually balanced out, with lots of different body types posting great times. If anything, it favored the shorter, lighter athlete.

Regional winners on the female side were quite varied. I think the range between Kristan Clever (5'2") and Annie Thorisdottir (5'6½") would present a reasonable guess as to the height of this year's winner. As for weight, I will speculate it will be between 125-150 lb. Those ranges would suggest an athlete the size of 2008 winner Caity Matter is not going to win.

Additional Factors to Consider

Height doesn't tell the whole story. For example, consider the deadlift. Athletes with long legs must start the lift with the back more horizontal, while those with short legs and relatively long arms and torsos can deadlift (or start the clean) with the back more upright. This will be advantageous, especially after multiple lifts. Technique often does start to break down in high-speed WODs, and the more horizontal back position will experience more shear force. Therefore, the back musculature will have to work harder.

The actual muscle force required to move a fixed weight, even for two athletes of the same height and weight, may be different due to differences in body proportions.



2008 Games champ Jason Khalipa is a heavier athlete who always finds his way near the top of the leaderboard.



Kristan Clever's compact stature helps her with gymnastics movements but can be a disadvantage when rowing or doing wall-balls.

I talked to a few athletes who found the limiting factor for them in Open Workout 11.1 was that their back fatigued during the power snatches. Therefore, the actual muscle force required to move a fixed weight, even for two athletes of the same height and weight, may be different due to differences in body proportions.

Clearly, long arms are not your friends in those handstand push-ups. However, some body-proportions advantages and disadvantages can cancel each other out, as the athlete with the shorter arms might have to do less work in handstand push-ups compared to an athlete of similar height and weight who has short legs and long arms.

Another factor in body proportions is something like broad vs. narrow shoulders. In addition to the male hormone testosterone stimulating more muscle mass, males develop broader shoulders during their adolescent growth spurt. This combination of broad shoulders

and the ability to pack muscle onto this larger frame is beneficial. This is the reason males have on average twice the bench-press maximums of females; they have better leverage in addition to more muscle mass. However, when we look at an activity like the leg press, we do not see as large a discrepancy because females have broad hips, and that improves leverage with this lift. I used the leg press as an example here because the benefit of broader hips does not necessarily mean the average female's 1RM back squat will be closer to the male's, because as we all know the shoulder and core musculature have to stabilize the bar. Another reason is, of course, that more subjects get studied performing exercises like leg presses.

I do not think body-proportion differences will be much of a factor in the Games. As stated, it may explain why some athletes have a slight edge in one WOD, but this factor will often average out over the course of several events.

Technique

Obviously, a huge factor in the work the athlete actually does is technique. For example, if the bar moves only up and down during a deadlift, you will do less work than an athlete who is less skilled and exerts forces on the bar that cause some horizontal motion. The same is true of a clean and jerk, and although there is some horizontal movement even with elite athletes, less skilled athletes will move the bar less efficiently, performing more work. To simply think it is about getting the bar from the ground to overhead anyway possible is too simplistic.

Less-than-ideal movement can cause the bar to move further away from a joint pivot point, resulting in the muscle having to produce more torque to rotate the joint.

At the Canada West Regional, I witnessed Andy Swartz of CrossFit Vancouver squat-clean every thruster attempt including 255 lb. Many athletes didn't do that because they needed to rack (control) the bar after a power clean, were not flexible enough to risk racking in a deep squat, or simply did not have the skill. However, this is a good example of technique saving you work. If you power-clean, you raise the bar and your body center of gravity higher than a squat clean (i.e., you do more work). You still then have to drop down with the bar under control into

your full squat and then thruster the bar back up. Athletes with good O-lifting technique simply did less work per lift. This reduced the cumulative fatigue (muscular and nervous system) of having to do a thruster every 30 seconds. That interval is no problem when the bar is light, but as the athletes reached high percentages of their 1RM, 30 seconds was too short a rest period for optimal results.

Technique can also save you time as well as work done. Athletes who scored well in Open Workout 11.3 (five minutes of squat clean and jerks at 165/110 lb.) would have performed squat cleans. If you use a power clean then a front squat, you would do more work than necessary per lift and be slower per lift.

All else being equal, you want to expend as little energy as possible to get a good score, and good technique will help with that.



Austin Malleolo is incredibly strong, but at the CrossFit-USAW Open in 2010, he was working on eliminating an early arm bend that cost him power in the clean.

Now we all see the occasional “poor” technique in a firebreather who kills a WOD. I am not suggesting it is always about doing less work. For many WODs, it is simple: every second counts. If you have energy to burn and you have a quicker method of doing something, it may be useful to go for it even though it may cost more energy than if you use another technique. However, remember the Games comprise many events over several days. I witnessed an athlete burn out after Day 2 of a regional, and although he hung on to claim a spot in California, he nearly lost that place due to being very tired on Day 3. All else being equal, you want to expend as little energy as possible to get a good score, and good technique will help with that.

Isometric contractions against gravity will also cause a waste of energy. Hold your arms out to the side for a bit. Are you doing any external work? No. Is there a metabolic energy cost to the body? Yes. So even a momentary pause, often when the bar is traveling in a path you realize isn't optimal, causes an extra energy cost. In many ways, poor technique will cause lots of muscles to do extra work to stabilize the body and the bar.



Sarah Spealler

Chris Spealler's mastery of the pull-up is an asset in any competition.

Unnecessarily high accelerations will also cause you to burn excessive energy. It is amazing how many people driving in our cities fail to understand this. Have you ever seen anyone accelerate toward a red light? If I move my 5,000-lb. SUV 30 miles in the city and then 30 miles on the freeway, I have done the same amount of external work. Nevertheless, my gas usage is much poorer in stop-and-go city driving. This shows there is a large extra energy cost in stop-and-go movements vs. continuous movements. Basically, you need a burst of power to get your momentum back to where you want it.

An example would be to run 400 meters on a standard track and compare that to running 400 meters by shuttling back and forth over a 20-meter track. As in the car analogy, the same external work is done: moving your body weight 400 meters. You would cover more distance and do more work if you “circled” at the end of each 20-meter shuttle, but maintaining momentum is going to save you energy, and you would find this technique easier. This is one of the reasons that fitness tests like the 20-meter shuttle (beep test) specify you must stop and pivot.

Apply this thinking to kipping vs. butterfly pull-ups. While we all know kipping is better than dead-hang pull-ups, I do think this needs a bit of explanation. Why can I do more work in kipping pull-ups vs. dead hang? In my August 2007 *CrossFit Journal* article [The Stretch-Shortening Cycle and Plyometric Training](#), I discuss this in more detail. Simply put, the traditional kipping pull-up elicits a stretch-shortening cycle, and a considerable amount of the kinetic energy gained from the down swing (due to gravity, not your energy cost) will be stored in the muscle and tendon and subsequently returned as energy in the up phase. So in terms of metabolic energy costs (which is ultimately what you feel), it costs you less energy to kip pull-ups vs. performing dead-hang pull-ups. Your shoulder extensors and elbow flexors aren't suddenly stronger.

The preference for the butterfly kip is therefore due to the cyclic motion being more efficient. Despite the return of energy from the forceful stretch-shortening cycle of the kipping motion, you are stopping and swinging back, and that isn't ideal if you can avoid it. There is some stretch-shortening cycle in the butterfly as well; it is just not as forceful as during a traditional kip.

Good use of the stretch-shortening cycle is required in numerous CrossFit movements. The push press or push jerk use a stretch-shortening cycle, and the skill of timing that drop down and drive up is essential for an elite CrossFit athlete. The stretch-shortening cycle requires explosive, high-velocity, small-amplitude movements; any delay at the turnaround point is inefficient at maximizing energy return.

As CrossFit focuses on multi-joint functional movements, you need an excellent ability to effectively time the contraction of muscle groups.

As CrossFit focuses on multi-joint functional movements, you need an excellent ability to effectively time (sequence) the contraction of muscle groups. This is referred to as the "kinetic chain," where larger muscles are contracted first (core to extremity). A good example of poor technique would be pulling with the arms on a snatch before the large leg musculature has driven the body and bar upward to finish with a powerful hip extension prior to the pull.

The above discussion should have clarified why we will see performances from some athletes that don't seem possible based on the simple mechanics of their height and weight. You have to understand that when 140-lb. Chris Spealler clean and jerks 235 lb., he must be using good technique.

Mechanical Advantage?

Could you construct the ideal CrossFitter from the information above? Perhaps.



Taller than most, Lindsey Smith had an outstanding performance at the 2009 Games in Aromas.



Annie Thorisdottir doesn't fail at muscle-ups very often anymore.

You might come up with a 5'5", 140-lb. woman with spectacular strength packed into a fairly compact frame. She would be neither too tall for gymnastics movements nor too short for wall-ball, running, rowing or any of the movements that tend to favor taller athletes. She would carry limited body fat and would be light enough to be agile but strong enough to compete in the heavy events. Her limbs would be proportioned so as to allow the most efficient movement in the greatest number of modalities.

Nevertheless, elite CrossFit athletes come in many sizes.

Matt Chan and Jason Khalipa are heavier. Austin Malleolo is smaller. Tommy Hackenbruck is tall. So is Rebecca Voigt. And Lindsey Smith. Kristan Clever and Camille Leblanc-Bazinet are very compact. All have different limb and torso measurements.

Similarly, all have varying levels of technical proficiency. Some elite CrossFitters, like Spealler, for instance, have incredible skill that makes up for small stature. Malleolo, on the other hand, is brutally strong and can deadlift three times his body weight though he's still working on the high skill and power required for Olympic lifting.

In 2009, Annie Thorisdottir challenged Tanya Wagner for the overall title and was the only woman with a chance to beat her in the final event. Then Iceland Annie ran into muscle-ups, a movement she had never done. Her technique let her down then, but in 2010 she finished 12th in Amanda (muscle-ups, snatches) though she did not complete the workout under the time cap. In the 2011 regionals, she completed the same workout in 11:49. Annie's height and weight haven't changed much, if at all, but her technique has certainly improved, proving that skill can be just as important as any other factor that goes into creating an elite athlete.

But there's more.

What's inside an elite athlete? How do their energy systems work? How are they fueled? Do they have the software to use their elite hardware? Can they recover fast enough from one event to the next?

In Part 2, we'll look at the physiology that goes into creating the ultimate CrossFit athlete—the one who will stand atop the podium on July 31.



About the Author

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THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Who Will Win the Games?—Part 2

Tony Leyland examines what makes the ideal CrossFit athlete.

By Tony Leyland

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All images: Staff/CrossFit Journal

In the first article, I explained the mechanical factors to look for during the finals. I like Rich Froning's size (5'10", 195 lb.) when it starts getting a little heavy. On Open Workout 11.3 (165 lb. squat cleans and jerks), he completed 46 squat cleans and jerks and one additional squat clean to come first overall in that WOD. The female winner of Week 3 was Sarah Mass (5'9", 170), who completed 45 squat cleans and jerks.

But hold it a second: we all know many athletes Rich and Sarah's size who could not even come close to these performances. Although being within an optimal range of size, body proportions and muscle mass—and having good technique—is vital to winning this summer, it clearly isn't the whole picture.

What is going on inside the body?

Mechanical Efficiency

The first thing to understand is the mechanical efficiency of human muscle. Mechanical efficiency is defined as the ratio of the mechanical work output to the total metabolic cost. The actual energy cost to humans to do 1,000 joules of external work (approximately 240 calories) is considerably higher than that.

Human metabolic efficiency is actually very complex. To keep things simple, I would say the average efficiency of converting metabolic (chemical) power to mechanical power (output) is around 21-23 percent. There are a few factors that result in this low efficiency (losses in energy converting food energy into ATP, losses in converting energy from ATP into mechanical work inside the muscle, and mechanical losses inside the body). This energy loss is affected by the type of exercise and the type of muscle fibers being used (fast twitch or slow twitch), so it has been measured as ranging from 18 to 26 percent.

A simple way to understand this is to think about why you heat up considerably when working out. The heat energy generated didn't do any external work. It didn't contribute to getting that damn bar overhead! Therefore, heat energy generated during the mechanical work of muscle is, in effect, wasted energy. Your automobile also wastes lots of energy, evidenced by the very hot and noisy engine.

Are elite CrossFit athletes able to generate more mechanical work for a given metabolic cost?



Rob Orlando is a strong athlete who's trained to increase his endurance significantly.

So the question is this: can you improve your mechanical efficiency? Are elite CrossFit athletes able to generate more mechanical work for a given metabolic cost? The answer is yes, of course. It is reported Lance Armstrong increased his efficiency by eight percent between the ages of 21 and 28. However, this is overall efficiency and is related to many factors such as technique, as discussed in the previous article. For example, you cannot improve the way you convert food to ATP by a whopping eight percent because the chemical process will always remain the same.

Most studies look at the oxygen cost of a given amount of work. If, for example, you perform a bike test and over years of training you are able to produce the same power output during the test duration (total work) for less oxygen cost, or for a given oxygen cost, you perform more work; you have become more efficient. You improved the ratio of your mechanical work output to the total metabolic cost.

The Heart and the Circulatory System

What makes a fast car? A good engine, good fuel (and enough oxygen to burn that fuel) and an efficient fuel pump. Not that different from the human body. The heart is our fuel pump, and all elite CrossFit athletes must have large stroke volumes (and hence large cardiac output), large blood volumes, optimal hematocrit (percentage of red blood cells), and the ability of all of their muscles to accept a large blood supply (high muscle capillarization).

How important is this? Many people would look at CrossFit athletes and conclude they are high-power athletes, anaerobic beasts like football players. Although they can handle themselves in anaerobic events, make no mistake, CrossFit athletes are aerobic beasts as well. Given most CrossFit WODs will last several minutes, aerobic power is as important as your muscle mass. What's the point of having a Ferrari engine with a lawnmower fuel pump? Although high muscle capillarization, blood volume, blood composition and cardiac output are irrelevant for a single maximal power output, this isn't the largest component of CrossFit Games competition WODs. Single Olympic lifts, maximal throws and short sprints do not depend on the delivery of oxygen and substrate to the muscles, so these factors would not be an issue for a CrossFit Total WOD. It is possible that one or two WODs at the Games will be very short maximal power events requiring 100 percent power output, but the majority will probably take several minutes, so you need a great heart and circulatory system.

I should very briefly review the three energy systems. Table 1 below shows an estimate of the relative contributions of the three energy systems during maximal physical activity of various durations. For example, if I work at a power output for 30 seconds, and that is the maximum time I can sustain that power output, I will be predominantly using the glycolytic system (approximately 65 percent of the energy). Obviously, the figures in the table are averages and will vary slightly between individuals.

It is vitally important to realize that when determining which energy system you are using, intensity (power output) is the key. When you look at Table 1, there is a danger of thinking time is the crucial factor. If I engage in an activity that requires such a high muscular power output that I could only sustain this power output for five or six seconds (e.g., a max-wattage row), most of the energy will be supplied by the phosphagen system. However, if I walk from my front door down the driveway to my car in five or six seconds, the predominant energy system will be the oxidative system. Why? Because I can sustain the power output required to walk to my car for hours. This is a key point, and one that is often confused. Although time is discussed and is an issue, it is power output that is the determining factor as to which energy system you use.

Approximate Power Output	Duration	% Energy Phosphagen	% Energy Glycolytic	% Energy Oxidative
100%	5 seconds	85	10	5
80%	10 seconds	50	35	15
50%	30 seconds	15	65	20
40%	60 seconds	8	62	30
	2 minutes	4	46	50
30%	4 minutes	2	28	70
25%	10 minutes	1	9	90
	30 minutes	Negligible	5	95
	60 Minutes	Negligible	2	98
20-25%	120 Minutes	Negligible	1	99

Table 1: Percentage usage of three energy systems by duration. Data adapted from McArdle WD, Katch F, and Katch VL. *Exercise physiology: Energy, nutrition and human performance*. Baltimore, MD: Williams & Wilkins, 1996. p. 129, and Coaching Association of Canada. Physical preparation. In: *Coaching Theory Level 3, National Coaching Certificate Program*. Gloucester, ON: 1990.

So given that the Open WODs were AMRAPs from 5-20 minutes, and that, with the exception of the thruster ladder, the regional events lasted between 3 and 20-plus minutes, you needed to generate your power via the oxidative system

Whenever the general fitness public/media talk about high $\dot{V}O_2$ maximums, they are usually talking about marathon runners, triathletes, cyclists, etc. These elite single-mode athletes do have great $\dot{V}O_2$ maximums in their activities. To be able to sustain a power output for, say, 10 minutes or more, you are probably only working at 25 percent of your maximum power output. This may seem to be a low power output, but all things are relative.

The world records for the 5,000 meters are 12:37.35 (male) and 14:16.63 (female). To think that a man can run 5 kilometers at a pace of 2 minutes and 31 seconds a kilometer and that this is a moderate power output for him (perhaps only 25 to 30 percent) is sobering. Similarly, it is hard to look at some of the work done in CrossFit WODs and understand the requirements are nowhere near peak power outputs for that athlete.

What sets CrossFit oxidative-system challenges apart from the single-mode aerobic beasts is that CrossFit athletes need a high $\dot{V}O_2$ max in a very broad range of activities. What is your kettlebell-swing $\dot{V}O_2$ max, your rowing $\dot{V}O_2$ max, your toes-to-bar $\dot{V}O_2$ max, etc.? To win this summer, the athletes will have big hearts and a way to get that blood to all their muscles. Basically, an incredibly wide range of high $\dot{V}O_2$ maximums is required.

Table 1 also shows us that CrossFit athletes must be training the phosphagen and glycolytic energy systems also. We all know that even with elite performers, some of the work in the WODs will be broken. With handstand push-ups, they may have to pause, recover a little and then attempt another set. Clearly, they do this because they have worked the glycolytic system and become fatigued. Any WOD that is only 2-4 minutes long will also require a considerable contribution from the glycolytic system. Obviously, any max-power-output WOD, like a max Olympic lift, is stressing the phosphagen system.



Few CrossFit events will challenge only one of the body's energy systems.

I think my favorite Greg Glassman quote is this: “Strive to blur distinctions between ‘cardio’ and ‘strength training.’ Nature has no regard for this distinction.”

It is all, of course, very complex when it comes to CrossFit WODs, and I discuss this in my July 2008 *CrossFit Journal* article [Human Power Output and CrossFit Metcon Workouts](#). I think my favorite Greg Glassman quote is this: “Strive to blur distinctions between ‘cardio’ and ‘strength training.’ Nature has no regard for this distinction.”

Similarly, did the thruster-ladder WOD exclusively target the phosphagen system? Definitely not; approximately 27 seconds of recovery is not enough to replenish ATP after a high-intensity effort. Therefore, this WOD used both phosphagen and glycolytic systems.

Before discussing other factors, I want to emphasize the importance of capillary density in all muscle groups (capillary-to-muscle-fiber ratio). You just cannot have a chink in your armor on this component. This is in part the reason the powerlifter walks into a CrossFit gym and only gets 12 reps on Tabata squats. There’s nothing wrong with his or her quad strength but plenty wrong with his or her quad capillary density. Obviously, the powerlifter’s stroke volume would not be adequate either.

Muscle Fiber Types and Motor Control

Briefly stated, there are three categories of muscle fibers. Type IIx fast-twitch fibers are recruited for very short-duration, high-intensity bursts of power such as maximal and near-maximal lifts and short sprints. (Note: these are also referred to as Type IIb, but we now know Type IIb fibers only occur in other animals, not humans). These fibers produce high force levels quickly, but they fatigue quickly as well. Type IIa fast-twitch fibers are more fatigue-resistant than Type IIx fibers, but they cannot produce force as rapidly. They are used more during sustained-power

activities such as sprinting 400 meters or doing repeated lifts with a weight below your maximum (but not with very light weights). Finally, Type I slow-twitch fibers are used in lower-intensity exercises such as very light resistance work aimed at muscular endurance and long-duration aerobic activities such as 5- and 10-kilometer runs.

Muscle fibers are organized into motor units, and each unit is controlled by a single motor neuron (nerve). All the muscle fibers in a motor unit are the same type of muscle fiber. The cell bodies of Type I neurons have a lower threshold of excitation, which means that if the activity has a relatively low demand for power, only Type I fibers will be stimulated. If the need for force and power development becomes greater, increasing numbers of Type I motor units will be recruited by increasingly larger waves of excitation by the central nervous system (CNS). Eventually, all the Type I fibers will become involved. This would be at the point where the athlete is reaching his or her maximal aerobic capacity.



The thruster ladder was a heavy WOD that tested both the phosphagen and glycolytic systems.

Once the demand for power reaches approximately 20 percent of maximal, the CNS stimulation is strong enough to recruit some Type IIa fibers. Evidence of Type II fiber activity is provided by the presence of lactate in the muscle and blood. As the demand for force increases, larger waves of excitation from the CNS eventually result in the recruitment of Type IIx fibers (these have the highest threshold of excitation). To produce maximal force, the CNS produces the largest possible stimulation, and all available motor units serving the muscle are recruited (all three types). Note that only trained athletes are actually able to recruit all the available motor units. This is one of the reasons we see very fast gains in strength with novices to strength training, as they “learn” to recruit more existing fibers.

Athletes with similar muscle mass may be quite different in their ability to handle fast, short WODs vs. grinder WODs.

Elite CrossFit athletes will have differences in fiber type distribution and in CNS recruitment of muscle fibers. Athletes with similar muscle mass may be quite different in their ability to handle fast, short WODs vs. grinder WODs. A workout like Murph requires more-slow twitch activity than a WOD like Grace.

There will also be differences in the effectiveness of the sequence in which athletes recruit muscle groups, as well as the total number they can recruit. In kinetic-chain activities like the clean and the thruster, the timing of muscle recruitment is essential. This is in effect a technique issue, as discussed in Part 1 of this article. So like your fast motor car, you not only need a good engine and fuel pump but also a good control system.

Recovery Nutrition

Discussing the importance of good nutrition could be a book, and I know everyone reading this already understands the importance of quality daily nutrition. Therefore, I will just touch on the topic of recovery nutrition, as the physical demands of multiple WODs over the three days of competition are going to challenge the athletes’ ability to recover from day to day and between WODs. Getting their nutrition correct during competition days is vitally important.

The nutrition topic is actually where the car analogy breaks down. This is because in a car, the fuel pump (heart) is the only way to get fuel to the engine (muscles). However, in humans there is energy stored in the muscles (ATP, PC and glycogen), and the heart is delivering some fuel and the oxygen required to effectively convert (burn) food energy to ATP.

Although I discussed three energy systems, many researchers and coaches view human energy metabolism in terms of four. Table 2 ranks the power and capacity of these systems. The problem with ranking systems is that you don’t get a sense of the differences between the variables, but I will mention that the phosphagen system can produce ATP approximately four times faster than the oxidative system and slightly over twice as fast as the glycolytic system.

	Power	Capacity
System	Rate of ATP Production	Capacity of ATP Production
ATP-PC (phosphagen)	1	4
LA (anaerobic glycolysis)	2	3
Oxidation of carbohydrates	3	2
Oxidation of fats and proteins	4	1

Table 2: Rankings of rate and capacity of ATP production (1 = fastest/greatest, 4 = slowest/least). Source: Baechle TR and Earle EW (eds.), *Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning* (2nd ed.), Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2000. p. 83.

The reason I have included Table 2 in this article is to point out that in terms of oxygen used, it is more efficient for human muscle to use glucose rather than fatty acids. In fact, it is about eight percent more efficient to burn glucose vs. fats. This glucose can be supplied by the blood or from glycogen stored in the muscle. As exercise intensity increases from rest toward $\dot{V}O_2$ max, a progressively greater proportion of energy production comes from carbohydrate. At 20 percent of $\dot{V}O_2$ max, approximately 60 percent of the energy comes from fat; at 50 percent of $\dot{V}O_2$ max, only about 40% of the energy comes from fat. At work levels above 95 percent $\dot{V}O_2$ max, carbohydrate is used almost exclusively. In addition, glucose is the only fuel the glycolytic system can use, so given most CrossFit WODs force you to be at or above $\dot{V}O_2$ max, you would be using carbohydrate.



In 2010, Graham Holmberg proved to be the athlete with the fewest weaknesses.

Research has shown that eating 100–200 grams of carbohydrate within two hours after endurance exercise is essential to building adequate glycogen stores for continued training. Waiting longer than two hours results in 50 percent less glycogen stored in the muscle. The reason for this is that carbohydrate consumption stimulates insulin production, which aids the production of muscle glycogen. Remember, insulin will increase the rate at which blood sugar is stored. It is also important to consume carbohydrate (possibly sports drinks) within 15 minutes post-exercise to help restore glycogen. The research has admittedly focused on recovery from endurance events lasting 90 minutes or more because these types of events severely deplete glycogen. While a four-minute WOD will not severely deplete glycogen, we do have to remember that there will be multiple WODs over three days, and the athletes will be working at or above $\dot{V}O_2$ max. This will require carbohydrate replenishment, but the actual amount may be slightly different than shown in these studies on endurance athletes.

Research shows that combining protein with carbohydrate within two hours of intense endurance exercise nearly doubles the insulin response, which results in more stored glycogen. The optimal carbohydrate-to-protein ratio for this effect is 4:1 (4 grams of carbohydrate for every 1 gram of protein). Eating more protein than that, however, has a negative impact because it slows rehydration and glycogen replenishment. One study found that athletes who refueled with carbohydrate and protein had 100 percent greater muscle-glycogen stores than those who only ate carbohydrate. Insulin was also highest in those who consumed a carbohydrate-and-protein drink. I just want to remind you here that insulin spikes post-exercise are good—it is chronically elevated insulin levels that are bad.

Training Errors

Any coach can train his or her athletes so that they will not be excessively fatigued coming into the Games. At this level of training, they will also be unlikely to injure themselves. Equally, any coach can over-train athletes with the “more is better” philosophy. The quarter-million-dollar prize will go to the athlete whose coach trained him or her to full potential by balancing hard training with required recovery.

Regionals are long over. Who got it right in terms of peaking again on July 29?

This is clearly not an exact equation but is very pertinent to the Games:

Performance = Fitness – Fatigue

What everyone should realize is that come July 29-31 at the Home Depot Center, the athletes and coaches should not be 100 percent focused on who is the fittest. Yes, I know that sounds like blasphemy. After all, the finals crown the Fittest on Earth, but fatigue is a big issue. Come July 29; it is about who *performs* the best, and obviously the “fittest” athlete is going to have a strong chance, but theoretically an athlete who should have won might not have tapered properly and might come into the Games fatigued. It may not be easily discernable—often it isn’t—but sometimes an amazing athlete just doesn’t quite have his or her A-game on a given day. Getting the blend of training and recovery correct is the hardest thing to perfect in athletic conditioning. Performance on demand is a big part of fitness, and Games athletes must “prove their fitness” during the event.

I do not discuss this factor lightly. Even full-time professional coaches and governing bodies will get this wrong. Swimming Canada fired its national-team head coach after the 2004 Olympics. In those games, Canada failed to win a swim medal for the first time since 1964, and, overall, Canadian Olympians swam 28 times in Greece yet achieved only four personal bests. The problem many believe was placing the national trials too close to the actual Olympics. What is worse than performing badly at the games? Not being at the show! The athletes peaked to make the Olympic team but then were not able to taper down and re-peak for the Olympics. Many of us believe it wasn’t a problem with the coaching per se but rather the timing of the national trials.

So regionals are long over. Who got it right in terms of peaking again on July 29, and did those pre-qualified athletes find the right blend of rest and intensity to climb back into the top ranks again?

Warm-Up Errors

Long static stretches reduce muscle stiffness, which sounds like a good thing. It actually is if you are involved in a stretching/flexibility session. However, if you are about to go out and perform multiple 30-inch box jumps, it isn’t a good thing. The effectiveness of the stretch-shortening cycle I mentioned in the previous article is diminished if muscle stiffness is lower. In addition, static stretching has been shown in numerous studies to weaken the muscle. Fowels and colleagues showed 13 maximally tolerable passive calf stretches reduced maximal voluntary contraction by 25 percent (1). This is due to both neural factors (diminished activation) and disruption to muscle fibers.



As the Games went on in 2010, athletes had to be able to recover from previous tests in order to perform at an elite level.



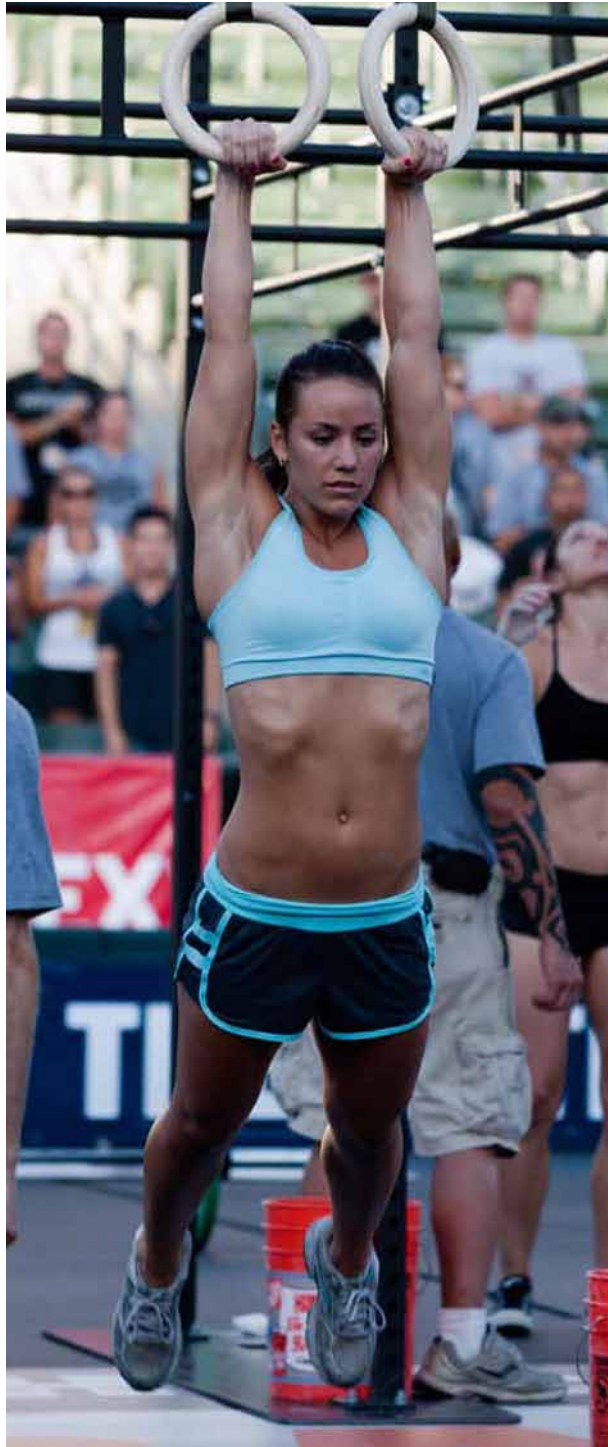
Jason Khalipa used an ice bath to recover in 2009. After a brutal opening event, he came back to finish fifth overall.

Another potential problem is not being adequately warmed up. The only exception to the rule of power output determining energy-system usage (see Table 1) is when you start exercising from a resting state. In this situation, even at moderate power outputs, you will work anaerobically until your cardiorespiratory system “ramps up” to deliver enough oxygen to the working muscles. So although you may have the ability to deliver enough oxygen to work aerobically at a given power output, you cannot just “flick a switch” and attain that cardiac output immediately. This is one reason why warm-ups are so important—you do not want to start working anaerobically during a WOD before you absolutely have to. If you do, you will start burning glycogen when fatty acid could have provided the fuel, and obviously anaerobic glycolysis does result in high muscle acidity and local muscle fatigue. You have a limited amount of glycogen but

relatively unlimited amount of fatty acids. However, if you partake in too extensive a warm-up, you could deplete fuel substrates and fatigue both muscle and central nervous system. Tricky isn't it?

Recovery

How the CrossFit athlete envies the marathon runner (not really, but you'll see what I mean). If your sport is a one-time event and you may not have to peak again for a few months, your recovery process is effectively simplified. If you are a soccer player and you play weekly and occasionally twice per week, it is a little more complicated. A tennis player has a bit more of a problem as he/she may play the next day. The CrossFit athlete competing in the Games may have two or three or more WODs in one day—that's a major issue.



Will another dark horse show up at this year's Games, as Camille Leblanc-Bazinet did in 2010?

CrossFit athletes must be as ready to go as possible prior to each WOD. They need to address hydration, replenishment of electrolytes and glycogen. I mentioned this in the nutrition section, but massage and other techniques like trigger-point therapy and/or contrast baths/showers can help with muscle recovery.

Placebo Effects

We cannot forget the mind here. Many athletes perform rituals that seem to be physiologically and mechanically irrelevant. However, placebo effects are very powerful—if the athlete thinks it will work, it may indeed help. There are limits to this effect. If you do something clearly detrimental, it will be a problem. Nevertheless, many studies show the beneficial effects of “sugar pills” (imagined drugs with no pharmaceutical agent).

The Winner Is ... ?

So at the end of all this, am I going to predict who will win the Games? No.

However, I hope I have discussed many of the factors that come into play for the main event in Carson. Quite possibly, I might have missed additional factors; it is very complex, and that's why we hold the competition.

Obviously, I cannot predict the winner because of several factors:

- I do not know what the WODs will be.
- I don't know differences in technique efficiency between Salo's and Spealler's clean and jerk or Clever's and Thorisdottir's kettlebell swing, and even if I did take the effort to study this biomechanically, there are hundreds of other movements added into the mix. I couldn't finish this work in my lifetime.
- I do not know the training status of each athlete; mistakes will be made.
- I do not know the nutritional status of the athletes going into the Games.
- I do not know their warm-up routines.
- I do not know how well they will use nutrition, massage and other techniques to enhance recovery between WODs.

It would be a lifetime's work to measure all these components, and even if I did, I still wouldn't be able to predict the winner because of a factor in which I have no academic expertise.

That factor is motivation. Although I am not a psychologist, after 45 years in this field as an athlete and coach, I do have a lot of personal experience regarding motivation, as do all of you reading this article. We could find many good, young CrossFit athletes who cannot win because of the mechanical factors discussed. However, when you get to the elite athletes—the ones whose bodies are of an optimal size and the ones who are technically gifted, well nourished and are supremely trained across broad time and modal domains—then it is the X-factor that will win it. Who can endure the most pain, and whose brain can override the messages telling them to stop?

This is why the Games exist: nobody can predict the results on paper.

I'll leave you with a couple of quotes I like:

"Gold medals aren't really made of gold. They're made of sweat, determination and a hard-to-find alloy called guts."
—Dan Gable, U.S. Olympic gold medalist (1972, wrestling)

"Pain is temporary. It may last a minute, or an hour, or a day, or a year, but eventually it will subside and something else will take its place. If I quit, however, it lasts forever."
—Lance Armstrong

Let the Games begin.



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About the Author

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Before the Competition Takes Over

Emily Beers has a “CrossFit moment” on the eve of the CrossFit Games.

By Emily Beers CrossFit Vancouver

07282011



All images: Staff/CrossFit Journal

Two years ago, Peter Mansbridge, a journalist who is somewhat iconic in Canada, said something to my journalism class that has stuck with me ever since.



Stars in their own box, many athletes are completely humbled when they're suddenly surrounded by the very best of our sport.

A wide-eyed journalism student at the time, I and my peers were starstruck by Mansbridge's giant presence in our little classroom in London, Ont. We must have looked like a group of 12-year-old boys watching a live NHL game, each one more eager than the next to be the one to high-five one of his hockey idols.

"Who has been the most interesting person you've ever interviewed?" asked one of my classmates.

We were all expecting Mansbridge's answer to be someone like the Dalai Lama or Michael Jordan.

Mansbridge smiled. "You know," he began. "Ordinary people have the most extraordinary stories."

We hear it all the time: CrossFit isn't like other sports. CrossFitters are always proclaiming that what truly epitomizes CrossFit are the ordinary people living out their own extraordinary stories every day in every box around the world.

But when you get a group of elite athletes together, like at the reception on Wednesday, July 27, sometimes our instinctive competitive human nature takes over, and the CrossFit message gets temporarily lost in the shuffle.

When I arrived at the reception on Wednesday evening, it felt kind of backward. It looked suspiciously like an NBA all-star game, a room filled with extraordinary athletes suddenly feeling pretty ordinary, a basketball court hosting a team of top scorers who are about to have a mediocre game because their teammates are so exceptional.

Even the person who comes dead last in the standings in this year's Games is a star in his or her own box. And even the members of the team that will finish last are amazing athletes. In their regular CrossFit lives, these people are used to being admired and asked for diet and training advice. They are a group of people who regularly defile WODs with uncharacteristic ease.

From Jason Khalipa to the unknown affiliate team member from Texas, these people are used to being stopped by inquisitive and obviously impressed latte-drinkers in their local coffee shops and asked what sport they play (I witnessed just this when I was in line behind Khalipa at Starbucks yesterday).

My ultimate favorite: Just the other day, a man tapped me on the shoulder as I walked down the street and asked me quite seriously, “Where did your legs come from?”



The Games bring the best of every region together, and the collection of elite athletes is truly impressive.

And there we were in L.A. Suddenly, the 25-year-old former college-football star on the affiliate team from Virginia, the one who gets props on a daily basis for boasting the heaviest deadlift in his box, is mediocre at best given the quality of athletes in the room. Yep, there was certainly an element of the reception that felt like a middle-school dance: humbling and downright intimidating.

But then Reebok took the podium. Chris Froio, VP of fitness and training, spoke to the crowd. He gave props to a woman sitting nearby who had been with Reebok

An ordinary person with an extraordinary story—this is the CrossFit I’m used to having in my day-to-day life.

for many, many years. She recently got into CrossFit and has proudly lost 30 lb. The woman is a diabetic, and her doctor just told her that if she keeps doing what she’s doing, she will be off her insulin by the end of the year.

Genuine applause swept through the room. An ordinary person with an extraordinary story—this is the CrossFit I’m used to having in my day-to-day life.

Then someone pressed play on the projector and Reebok’s CrossFit anthem began. I was expecting another CrossFit firebreather video, footage from past Games perhaps, a video of the ultimate stars of the sport.

Instead, what played out in front of us was footage of CrossFitters from around the world, faces we had never seen before—old, young, average CrossFitters doing handstands, running, swinging kettlebells on beaches in California, on mountaintops in Europe, on the streets in China.

The anthem had an Olympic theme to it, intent on bringing unity to the competitors.

Don’t get me wrong. We need the Games. We do. We’re human beings, and it’s only natural that we like to compete. And also just like the Olympics, fierce competition will soon play out in the battle to find the fittest. I think this is healthy and positive, and I’m not trying to take the intense competition away from CrossFit. It’s an amazing sport, at both the “lifestyle” and the elite level.

All I’m saying is that I was so relieved that the company that is sponsoring the Games gets it.

They get CrossFit.

Thank you, Reebok.

Emily Beers is competing on CrossFit Vancouver’s Affiliate Cup team and will be writing from ground level throughout the competition.

Only in America

Canuck Emily Beers learns a few lessons from her American neighbours/neighbors.

By Emily Beers CrossFit Vancouver

07302011



All images: Staff/CrossFit Journal

I grew up believing—call it assuming, even—that the United States was the greatest country in the world. And I'm not even American.



Enthusiastic fans greeted the competitors as they entered the stadium for the opening ceremonies.

As a child, I always thought of the United States as that friend you couldn't seem to beat at anything.

I'm a proud Canadian; I really am. But there are two things I think we could learn from our neighbors that would make us more successful, as individuals and as a nation.

1. How to Embrace Athletics

I've been an athlete my entire life, and it has always frustrated me that, other than hockey, Canadians don't embrace sports the way Americans do.

I played basketball at the University of Idaho in my first year of university. Our football team was mediocre at best. But every Sunday, thousands of people flocked to the stadium, turning the little city of Moscow, Idaho, into a ghost town. Trumpets sounded, cheerleaders tumbled and the people genuinely cared how their team did.

The following year, I transferred home to the University of British Columbia. The stands were sporadically littered with our parents and the odd great-aunt who was likely guilted into attending. My teammate's mailman was the closest thing to a "super-fan" that we had. We won the national championship that year, and nobody took notice.

As I marched in to the opening ceremonies at the 2011 CrossFit Games, I thought to myself, "Only in America."

It was even worse as a university rower. Suddenly, I was paying fees to be a part of the university's varsity team.

It's just not in our culture to support athletics. I hate to say it, but if Canada tried to host the CrossFit Games, nobody would show up.

So as I marched in to the opening ceremonies at the 2011 CrossFit Games—amidst the corporate sponsorships, the waving of flags, and the stands packed with cheering fans—I thought to myself, “Only in America.”



At press time Andrew Swartz and his CrossFit Vancouver team were in 10th overall.

2. How to Have Self-Belief

Last year, I worked as a reporter at the Vancouver Winter Olympic Games. As I covered figure skating and speed skating, I discovered that the American athletes were by far the best ones to interview.

They spoke with confidence; they spoke with ease. They didn't smile and spout out modest clichés about just going out there and trying to do their best. They told you boldly and proudly what their expectations were for the weekend. They weren't scared to put on a show; they weren't scared to win.

When my team arrived in L.A., I had modest expectations. My team was 14th last year, and we pretty much brought the same team with us this year. We knew the competition would be much stiffer this year.

I hate to say it—maybe it's the Canadian in me—but I didn't arrive here with exceptional confidence in my team. I started to make excuses.

“I'm recovering from Achilles surgery, and Andy (Andrew Swartz) is suffering from a couple of nagging injuries, as well,” I thought. I didn't want to feel pressure, and I figured if we were in the top half we'd be doing pretty well.

But as the “3, 2, 1” sounded this morning, we put our heads down and worked our asses off, and all of a sudden we had managed to win our heat, which eventually placed us sixth overall in the event. Same thing with the rope-climb event: another top-10 finish.

Suddenly, I believe. Why not us? Why can't we place in the top six and move on to Day 3?

It feels good to believe. Maybe it's the American athletes wearing off on me.

Emily Beers is competing on CrossFit Vancouver's Affiliate Cup team and will be writing from ground level throughout the competition.

Outside the Games Bubble

Some people don't do CrossFit, and Emily Beers discovers what they think of us and our antics.

By Emily Beers CrossFit Vancouver

07312011



All images: Staff/CrossFit Journal

The path to becoming a CrossFitter looks similar to most of us:

We rapidly get fitter, stronger, faster. We cut out gluten and sugar (although I'm still working on eliminating Skittles from my diet). We suddenly have more energy. We become addicted to personal bests.



Drinking the Kool-Aid.

Soon, we find that most of our friends are CrossFitters. We start dating a CrossFitter. We even develop a sort of CrossFit humor and jokes that make only CrossFitters laugh.

And sometimes we forget that our CrossFit bubble is just that: a world in a bubble. With a million dollars up for grabs this weekend and ESPN broadcasters on site, it often feels like CrossFit is officially mainstream. But there's still a big world out there, and it's full of people who haven't heard of a thruster.

Never does this become more obvious than when you saturate one city with hundreds of CrossFit athletes, like this weekend in L.A.

From cab drivers to waitresses to bystanders on the street, people have noticed our group of tanned, ripped, spandex-wearing athletes, and they want to know more about us.

"What sport are y'all here for? Cross what? What's that?" I've been asked countless times.

I'd like to share a few moments I've had this week with regular people, people who, when surrounded by CrossFitters, become confused and bewildered by our behavior.

The Heavy Whipping Cream Confusion

Setting: A coffee shop near my hotel, which is currently flooded with Reebok-wearing athletes.

I order an Americano and ask for heavy cream to top it off.

The barista, a plump woman who was just as wide as she was tall, says, “OK, that’s enough. I have to ask. What is with all you fit-looking people drinking this high-fat, heavy whipping cream in your coffee? There have been so many of you here this week asking for this high-fat cream. I would think you would ask for skim milk or soy milk. How y’all remain so fit?”

I didn’t want to get into a nutrition talk with this woman. There was a lineup, I was in a rush, and I am in no way a poster girl for the 100 percent Paleo lifestyle, so I came up with a quick answer.

“Fat doesn’t make you fat. I ate bacon for breakfast this morning, too,” I said.

“So you’re telling me I should start eating bacon and I can look like you?” asked the woman, an excited sparkle in her eye, clearly visualizing the bacon she was going to fry up as soon as her shift was over.

I got the distinct feeling I may have set this woman off on the wrong track and immediately regretted my careless bacon promotion.

The Leftover Bagel Mystery

The hotel I’m staying at serves a continental breakfast in the morning. When they were told a group of athletes was coming, they upped their bagel quota.

“Usually when we know sports teams are coming, we know athletes like their bagels. We always seem to run out when the football teams stay here,” said one of the hotel employees.

This weekend bagels are going stale.

Oddly enough, this weekend bagels are going stale.

“Y’all are more into the sausages,” laughed the same hotel employee, shaking her head in what looked like confused disgust. “We’ll remember that for next year—CrossFitters like sausages.”



CrossFit stuff: part of the ritual.



Bacon does this?

Shoes With No Support

Setting: Albertson's grocery store. I was wearing a pair of barefoot shoes when a fellow shopper stopped me to ask about them.

"I keep seeing people in here with those CrossFit shirts with the numbers on them and those shoes ... what kind of shoes are those?" asked the intrigued shopper.

"They're a barefoot shoe," I said.

"Are they more supportive than regular sneakers?" he asked.

"No, there isn't any support in them," I tried to explain. "It allows you to feel your feet a little better when you move, so it sort of forces you to walk and run more correctly," I said.

"No support? So you don't put no orthotics in those?" he asked. "You CrossFit people have some different ideas."

Pitching a Tent

Setting: Just outside the stadium

While it seems like 90 percent of the spectators at the Home Depot Centre are CrossFit athletes themselves, I came across at least a pair of local males watching the event who were obviously new to the sport.

One young man says to his friend: "I can't believe how hot those girls are out there. I didn't even know which one to look at."

His friend replies: "Seriously. I've been pitching a tent in the stands all day. I couldn't even get up to go to the bathroom."

Friend replies: "No shit, dude. I've never seen hotter asses in my life. We should start this CrossFit shit."

Ladies and gentlemen, it looks like we have two new recruits to our sport.

Emily Beers is competing on CrossFit Vancouver's Affiliate Cup team and will be writing from ground level throughout the competition.

Team Taranis: Canada's Team

With Iceland Annie the fittest woman on Earth, Emily Beers talks about the international flavor of the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games.

By Emily Beers CrossFit Vancouver

07312011



All images: Staff/CrossFit Journal

Palms sweating, heart beating. I look over at a teammate.

"I'm nervous," she says.

"I know. Me too," I reply.



Sara Stamm Bergland of Team Taranis does Fran in the team final at the CrossFit Games.

No, we aren't about to compete. In fact, we're sitting in the stands with an afternoon beer in hand. We are about to watch our fellow Canada West team—Team Taranis—in the Sunday afternoon team final of the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games.

I look up at the screen. Next to five of the six teams are little American-flag icons. Needless to say, it's not hard not to feel pride for my country when I see one maple leaf amidst the stars and stripes.

Surrounded by others from my own affiliate—CrossFit Vancouver—as well as Canadians from CrossFit Whistler, CrossFit Kitsilano and Fitness Town, cheering for Taranis felt a bit like cheering for Canada in the hockey gold-medal game at the Olympics.

As much as my team would have loved to have qualified for the final day of competition, the next 30 minutes is about Taranis. It is about their six athletes—Rachel (Rocky) Siemens, Myriam (Burrito) Barreda, Sara

(Flash Dance) Stamm Bergland, Dan (Boom) Atkinson, Tyson (Tuna) Takasaki and Andrew (Focker) Roodbol.

As the event begins, CrossFit New England steals the early lead, a lead they continue to increase as the event wears on. But Taranis has their moments of brilliance: Siemens absolutely blasts through Isabel, and Roodbol's Diane performance puts Taranis in second place heading into the final leg, Karen.

When all was said and done,
Taranis found themselves on
the podium, becoming the
third-fittest team in the world.



Taranis vs. Elizabeth.



Tyson Takasaki gives it everything on Grace.

When all was said and done, Taranis found themselves on the podium, the third-fittest team in the world.

Siemens and Stamm Bergland agree that they could feel the Canadian energy, which helped them push that much harder to get to the podium.

"You could feel the energy from the people here from Canada West. It's a special bond we all share as Canadians. We wanted CrossFit Vancouver to be here with us today, too. We all just want to see a Canadian flag up there, no matter who it is," said Siemens.

Stamm Bergland adds: "I have been getting texts and Facebook messages all weekend long from people saying they're watching, they're cheering ... it's amazing, all this support."

Takasaki said being a part of Team Taranis at the Games offered him some kind of redemption after missing out on qualifying for the Games as an individual by one point at the Canada West Regional.

"To be honest, I was kind of crushed after missing out qualifying as an individual, but I got rebounded by this team Training with them for the past couple months has been great. It has brought us closer and closer, and the whole thing has been an awesome experience," he said.

Although Takasaki, Stamm Bergland and Siemens all said that they entered the final event hoping to take the title, they're thrilled with their podium finish.

"Originally, we came here hoping to make it to the final event on Sunday. Our goal was just to get to Sunday," said Siemens. "So coming third is like a cherry on top of the weekend," she said.

It certainly was a cherry on top for our little section of Canadian CrossFitters, who immediately started handing out high fives to any Canadian in the area.

"So awesome. We were third. We medaled," said one of my CrossFit Vancouver teammates.

Watching Taranis today really did make us feel like we placed third.

At the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games, Emily Beers competed on CrossFit Vancouver's affiliate team, which placed 19th.