

## Ship Shape

How CrossFit gave a carousing, cruise-ship golf pro the body he wanted  
and fairway drives he never dreamed of

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Roger King

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I may not be the world's greatest golf pro. I may not even be the world's greatest golf pro who works on a cruise ship. But I am pretty sure that no one can touch me on this: I am most likely the world's only — and therefore greatest — golf pro who works on a cruise ship and is a CrossFitter who hits his drives a whopping ten percent further than he did a year before. If you think that's a long and winding mouthful, wait until you hear about my journey, a booze, broads and broken-hearts odyssey of golf and fatness and fitness that has taken me around

the world on various vessels with names such as *Carnival*, *Holland America*, *Celebrity*, *Princess* and *P&O* for about a decade now, with no end in sight.

Bear with me for a few minutes here. To understand someone, I think it's important to know where they've been. So, here's a brief history about yours truly.

I have been golfing since I was eight years old, but not seriously until I was 13. It was during this glorious

time in my life that the local country club in Nashville, Tennessee, became my parents' form of daycare. They would drop me off before they went to work in the morning and pick me up on the way home after work. I shot par for the first time at age 15.

I spent hour after daylight hour playing golf, and I didn't stop at night, hitting pitch shots at a tiny tree in the front yard. I spent tons of time reading every kind of golf magazine, watching miles of golf videos, listening to golf pros on TV, and seeking out local pros. Collecting all this information took many years. I really had no social life in high school, as I spent all my time on golf.

If you know golf, you'll know the feeling. The golf swing is so complex (easily as complex as Olympic lifting) that you have to try everything you hear. Get rid of the bullshit and keep what works, and that takes time. It's kind of like reading *Muscle and Fitness* magazine and realizing it doesn't work. (Oops. I'm getting ahead of myself).

By the time I was 19, I had a full ride to a junior college in Tennessee on a golf scholarship. I graduated 44th in my senior class in high school. No applause, please. There were only 44 in my class. I'm not proud of this. I am smart. I just decided to apply myself to something else.

Fast-forward a bit. I played golf for six months for the college, partied my ass off and decided college wasn't for me. I spent the next seven years working mini-tours off-and-on between sponsors and doing odd golf jobs. I had a horrible marriage during this time and went from a skinny-my-whole-life 185 pounds (I'm six-foot-three) to a svelte 255 pounds — in one year. That's pretty impressive. You have to eat a lot and not move very much.

After a two-year marriage and one-year separation before my soon-to-be-ex finally signed the papers, I came to a realization: wow, I am sooo fat and out of shape. It's time to go to a gym.

Now, believe it or not, I had never, ever worked out. Didn't know shit from shinola. The only thing I was told was, "If you lift weights, your golf game will suffer because you will become big and bulky."

So there I was, 26 years old and single and fat, and with no clue how to get fit.



### In the Gym, Out to Sea.

I joined a globo gym and shyly went to the very back of a "body sculpting" class. Yes, we are talking the green and pink steppers and the light weights. I did this class three times a week.

You already know my history of obsessively studying everything ever said, filmed or written about golf, so what do you think I did next? Yep, I bought every kind of muscle and fitness magazine and nutrition book I could find, and I dug in.

I spent more than seven months doing all kinds of exercises every morning. Think yoga at 5:00 a.m., kickboxing at 6:00 a.m., sculpt at 7:00 a.m., treadmill and other machines at 8:00 a.m. and free weights at 9:00 a.m. By 11:00 a.m. I had started my workday as a club pro in Nashville, having left 3,500 calories in my wake.

I did this every morning. My diet consisted of protein, not many carbs, no sugar (the Antichrist) and lots of water. It was chicken, green beans and maybe some oats in morning. Strict? You bet. But I went from 255 pounds to 178 in seven months. Hey, I know what to do to get skinny. Object achieved!

After a while, I decided that I wanted to look like the big, buff dudes. Yeah, bring it on. I wanted to be super-fit and I wanted more muscle. But instead I spent the next few agonizing years working out and barely getting to 190.

Big? Nope. Not even close.

During this time of frustration, I met the most wonderful woman of my life. We dated for three months, never leaving each other's side. We were ham and eggs, peanut butter and jelly. Yep, we belonged... until she got colon cancer. Eight months later she was gone.

I sort of went numb for a year. I trained, but not as much. I ate a bit more. And boom, I weighed 195 pounds. It kinda stuck there.

It was during this time that my best friend Chip gave me a book called *Rich Dad, Poor Dad*. It's basically all about how to make money and how to save money, and about life. As I was studying this book, working at a golf course, and still feeling numb, I began looking for ways to make and save money. One day, I stumbled upon an ad for a cruise-ship golf pro.

I made a call to Carnival, and they contacted me regarding Elite Golf, an instructional program they run on their ships. With a recommendation from my great head pro, they offered me a job that day, a Tuesday. I joined the ship on Sunday. Talk about a fast change of life.



My first ship was the *Carnival Imagination* — a party ship. Enter my drinking, chasing-getting girls, partying phase.

I mean, jeez, I deserved it. I didn't do any of this growing up.

So, for the next five years (it took a while to get it out of my system), it was bar hopping and port hopping. One six-month contract after another full of drinking and eating. One day, tipping the scales at 205, it dawned on me that I'd better hit the gym. OK, cool. Soon, I'm back to 195, with a six-pack. The girls say, "Yummy." Good enough for me.

So, after about five years, I slow down. And instead of different girls each, um, night or two, I would pick one for the cruise. Progress, I know. Later on, I'd meet a crewmember and just date her until gangway do us part.

Yes, I was fun to be with but a jerk by many standards. Cruise-ship life is a different reality. It doesn't mix with the other world most people live in. And getting out? It's just like the famous line from *The Godfather, Part III*, "Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in!"

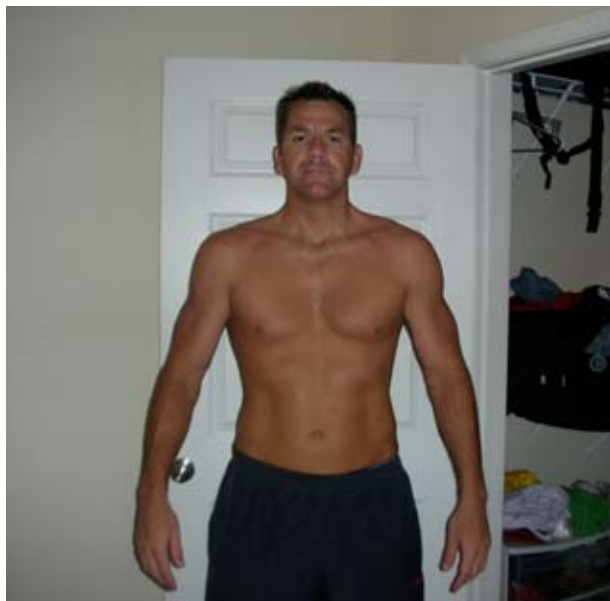
The ease of this life, for me and the entertainers, is hard to beat. We get room service — a cabin steward cleans your room for \$10 a week — and free food, free gym, cheap drinks (our own crew bar), free shows, warm weather and great ports. The things you miss are family and, at some point, a real relationship. It's hard to find ships that allow for anything long-term, anything normal. Eventually, it eats at you.

### Back on Land: Discovering CrossFit

A couple of years ago, I left ships for what I thought was the last time. I decided it was time to grow up, spend more time with family, get one of my own — the 3.2 kids, the house, the two cars, the picket fence.

The last year before I left the ship, I was into fitness again, hard and heavy. I had found a pretty good book called, *The Men's Health Hard Body Plan*, which, among other things, said to eat more carbs. Quickly, I went up to a muscular 212 pounds, which was a big goal of mine.

Encouraged, I went home and decided to become a trainer — get a license, work at a gym, the whole nine yards.



I spent the next four months studying for International Fitness Professionals Association certification and took the test. I passed with an 82, got a job at a globo gym, and boom: suddenly I am a trainer.

“Congrats! You just won a job that has clients, and you start work at 5 a.m. and leave at 9 p.m. — if lucky.” That’s a far cry from five hours of golfing on ships. But I did it for two months. I taught bodybuilding lifts to a good client base. We did little to no machine work. I quickly realized that free weights and sprinting were better options.

After my first few paychecks, if you can call them that, I said, “Nope, I’m killing myself for no money. I can do this myself.” So I trained people out of my apartment.

I had time to study and search for new ways of training. My advertising was Craigslist. I found a pretty good system that got OK results: P90X. But after 60 days, it took me three hours of training to feel any kind of pump. I was lost, looking for new anything. Then I watched the movie *300*. Holy cow! Let me look like that!

The next week or so, I picked up my local fitness magazine and, lo and behold, in it I see the 300 workout and a reference to its creators, Mark Twight and the people at Gym Jones. So, I go to their site. It was intense, freaky stuff, and it was like Christmas. I dug in. 300 workout, here I come!

I didn’t make it through in 30 minutes. I hurt for four excruciating days afterwards. I hadn’t been sore from anything else I had done in so long. I was hooked.

I started searching Google, typing in “Gym Jones 300, a CrossFit-style workout.” Insert *Scooby Doo* noise here. When I saw the reference to CrossFit, I thought, “Oh my, look how deep the rabbit hole goes.”

Now get this: I was training four to 10 clients, max, out of my apartment — literally in a spare room. Then in February 2008, enter CrossFit workouts, and boom: 20 clients. What the heck? I kill them and they tell others. Another month later, it’s up to 30 clients.

Damn — I gotta move to a bigger box. I wasn’t even certified. But qualified? Hell, yes.

I read every CrossFit Journal article, watched every video and immersed myself in it all. My best friends were Coach, Mike Burgener, Nicole, Greg, Eva — you name them.

And I was busy. In between the clients and moving to a new box (an apartment with a two-car garage), I had been dating a girl I met at a globo gym when I first moved home. But nothing stood in the way of my thirst for knowledge. I read and studied everything about CrossFit as obsessively as I had studied my golf swing.

Then, I decided to re-enter my selfish-jerk phase — and head back to the water.

### WODs in the Waves

I had a serious problem. I had to train so many clients that I ended up overtraining. I mean seriously messing myself up. From swings to deadlifts to muscle ups to handstand push-ups — I had to demonstrate for clients. I never could get any rest. Really, to slow down and get the family life I was so close to, all I had to do was get officially certified and get some investors on board for a bigger box. I’d have been the CrossFit facility in Nashville.

But reality struck. I started to have serious troubles with my girl (we were engaged by now), and it made me remember that I had been in an unhappy marriage before and was about to do it again. So I just split. Hopefully, she’ll thank me in the long run.

Remember that I said “selfish-jerk phase” a little earlier?

My job at Elite had always been there for me. They took me back, and here I am. It took me well over four months to get injury-free again. Now, I’m as healthy and CrossFit-fit as I’ve ever been.

Since being back on ships, I have trained and taught CrossFit. I brought some rings, an adjustable pull-up bar, a few bands, and a six-foot rope from [www.againfaster.com](http://www.againfaster.com). I train with a few crew members who show me they really care about fitness.

If you’re a CrossFitter and a cruiser, I recommend the *Carnival Sensation*, which has a running track and plyo boxes, pull-up bars, parallel bars and homemade weight hand-built by the chief engineer. The captain is Vittorio Marchi, and he is a great man. You can probably train with him.



I am currently the golf pro on the British flagship *P&O Ventura*, where I train a CrossFit class in the evening in the crew gym. It’s not the *Sensation*. All the ceilings are so low that I’ll punch a hole in the ceiling if I raise my arms with weights, which limits me to cleans, squat cleans, drop snatches, half swings and sumo deadlift high pulls. So, I had to train outside under a bulkhead to get anything done — not good news for the crew, because management wouldn’t let me keep my adjustable pull-up bar outside. Passengers might use it and hurt themselves, goes the reasoning. The repercussions were severe the one time I did leave it up. I was able to train with the bar and rings but had to put it down after each use.

Unfortunately, all my overhead stuff was put on hold when I recently got banned from outside training after the clean and jerk 1-1-1-1-1-1 WOD. I got up to 190 lbs and had to drop the weight. It shook the whole floor of the ship. All kinds of officers came running.

I am currently training with a bridge officer each morning from 5:15-6:30 a.m., before the passengers do their “walk a mile” at 7 a.m. Concept 2 Rowers are the only functional gear in our so-called state-of-the-art gym. The crew gym does have some Olympic bumpers with a lousy lightweight bar, but it’s enough for my intermediate CrossFit status — and enough to send my golf game to a whole new level.



## Screamin' Clubheads and Super Drives

CrossFit can help anyone. Even golfers.

After doing CrossFit for a year, learning all the moves, doing the best I can in WODs and just getting generally, non-specifically more fit, it hit me like a ton of bricks one day: I have been golfing all over the Caribbean for over nine years and played these golf courses many, many times, but have never played like this before. On every course, I knew exactly where my ball would end up after my drives, but I suddenly started hitting the ball in places I have never been.

I had good club-head speed before. I was clocked at the Fujikura plant at 119 m.p.h. and carried an average distance of 292 yards. But after CrossFit, I started driving par fours anywhere from 320 to 340 yards. And it wasn't just the driver. All my irons were longer as well.

I had become way more efficient. I was clocked at 132 m.p.h. on max effort and averaged 127 m.p.h. Mind you, that's slow compared to long-drive champions but light years faster than the average pro's 112 m.p.h. and the amateur's 95 m.p.h.

I teach the golf swing on sea days and play golf with the guests from the ships in the ports. We use the V-1 video analysis software program, and this feedback, plus watching one of Coach Glassman's video lectures about better movements, has helped me figure out why I've gotten so much better.

The video showed me that my shoulders have gotten much wider and my swing has gotten a bit shorter. Coach's lecture put it all together for me: CrossFitting had made both my lower back and midline stability stronger, allowing my body to hold angles in the swing that it couldn't before.

I had been practicing clean and jerks. I worked my way up to Grace and completed it in just over 5:30. I was jazzed. I started at 65 pounds, went to 95, and worked my way up. I can finally do most WODs with the prescribed weight. I learned to recruit more muscle fibers from kettlebell experts Jeff Martone and Pavel Tsatsouline. I learned how to be tight. Doing swings, snatches, overhead squats, handstand push-ups, muscle-ups and everything in between made me more flexible and stronger.

All this affected the way I teach golf now, converting everything to a functional movement pattern. I don't know if anyone else teaches this way, but they should. My students sure seem happy. (For a free lesson on how I teach now, see the video links below.)

I'm pretty happy, too. Improving as a coach and as an athlete is a huge boost, no matter where and how you live. How long I can maintain this lifestyle, I don't know. But I do know that I love golf and I love CrossFit. And if I ever decide to return to terra firma for good, I know exactly what I want to be doing for a living.



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## A Free Golf Lesson from the Cruisin' CrossFitter

Your body, with proper posture, is designed to move one way. Your wrist bones move optimally one way, your head moves one way, and your arms follow where the body goes.

The golf swing, you may be surprised to find, is a very functional movement. Like CrossFit, its movement is based on what the body is designed to do. And you can improve fast, whether you hit a little round ball or clean and jerk a heavy weight, as in the Tosh does Grace video. Tosh is great, but looking at the video you can see that he could have used his hips more, jumped more, and did it even faster, theoretically giving him more power, speed and intensity.

Golf's no different. You can't have high intensity without a certain amount of technique. Most people's technique is about 50 percent correct, so they can only apply so much force.

Example: If you deadlift a 45-pound bar and five-pound training plates, you can round your back and have the bar go out away from you, bend your arms a bit, stand up and not seriously mess yourself up. But if you try this with 135 to 200 pounds, you are seeing a chiropractor.

Same thing with golf. You can keep your left arm straight, your head still, and swing in a linear (correct) fashion, and you will be somewhat OK. But there won't be a snowball's chance in hell of you ever reaching 130 m.p.h. club-head speed. If you somehow did, you'd end up in the hospital.

### The Lesson

OK, enough preliminaries. It's time for the fun stuff.

The hands cock up and down with a full range of motion. The angle is the same as they hang from the side and the speed at which you move the relaxed muscles and joints.

The arms hang from the side in an extended but not rigid position. You should have the same tension level as if they were hanging down from the sides of your body. They go where the body goes.

The head rotates with the spine, The eyes will track while the head moves with the spine.

The knees keep the same bend and flex throughout the swing. There are two ways you can mess this up:

- 1) The right leg straightens
- 2) The right hip gets higher than the left and the hip goes out.

The big picture: The golf swing is the body moving in a circle, with the hands controlling the club face and the swing arc. It's a single, circular line with no up and down in the swing. Check the video to see how it's done by the world's greatest CrossFitting cruise-ship golf pro.

### Video Links

[http://media.crossfit.com/cf-video/CrossFitJournal\\_RogerGolfSwingInstruct.mov](http://media.crossfit.com/cf-video/CrossFitJournal_RogerGolfSwingInstruct.mov)

[http://media.crossfit.com/cf-video/CrossFitJournal\\_RogerGolfSwingInstruct.wmv](http://media.crossfit.com/cf-video/CrossFitJournal_RogerGolfSwingInstruct.wmv)



Roger King has been a professional golfer since age 19 and has been teaching golf on cruise ships for the last nine years. He is an avid CrossFitter and will be going to a Level 1 Cert soon.