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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

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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.

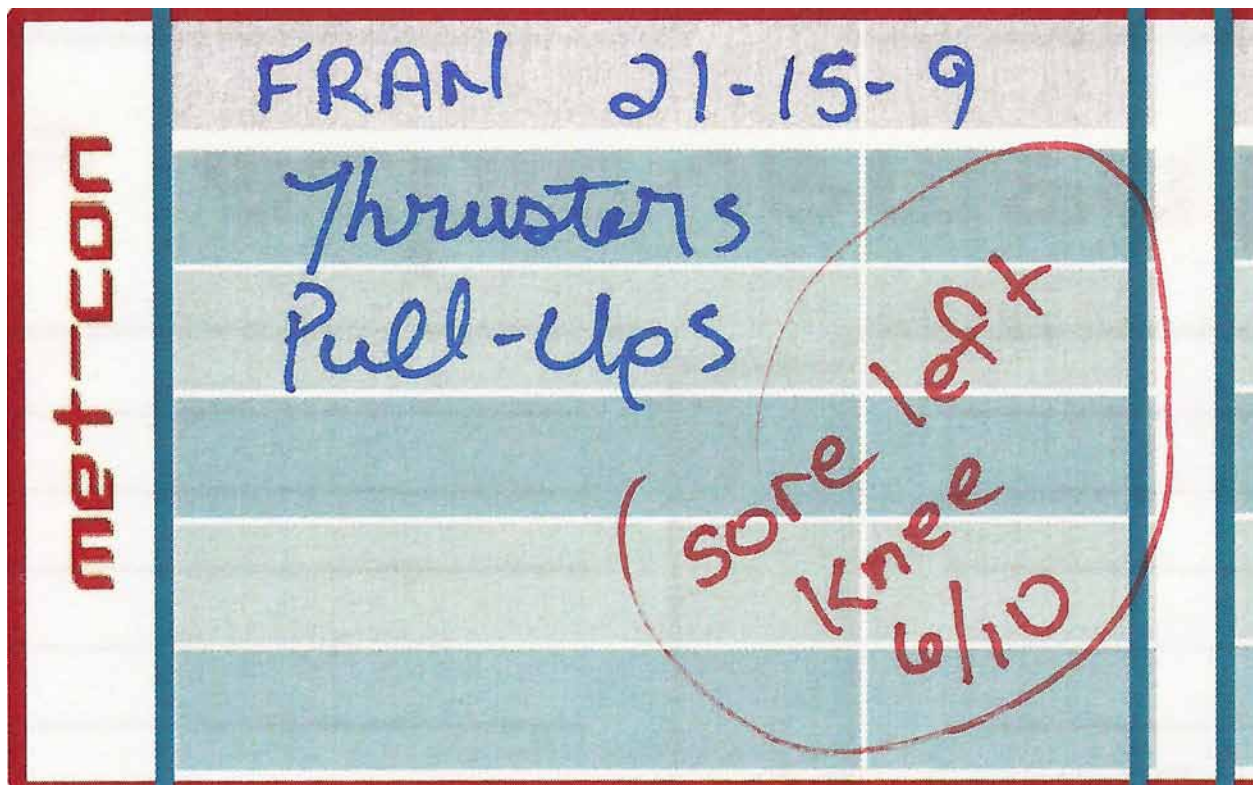
Injury Diagnosis and Treatment

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

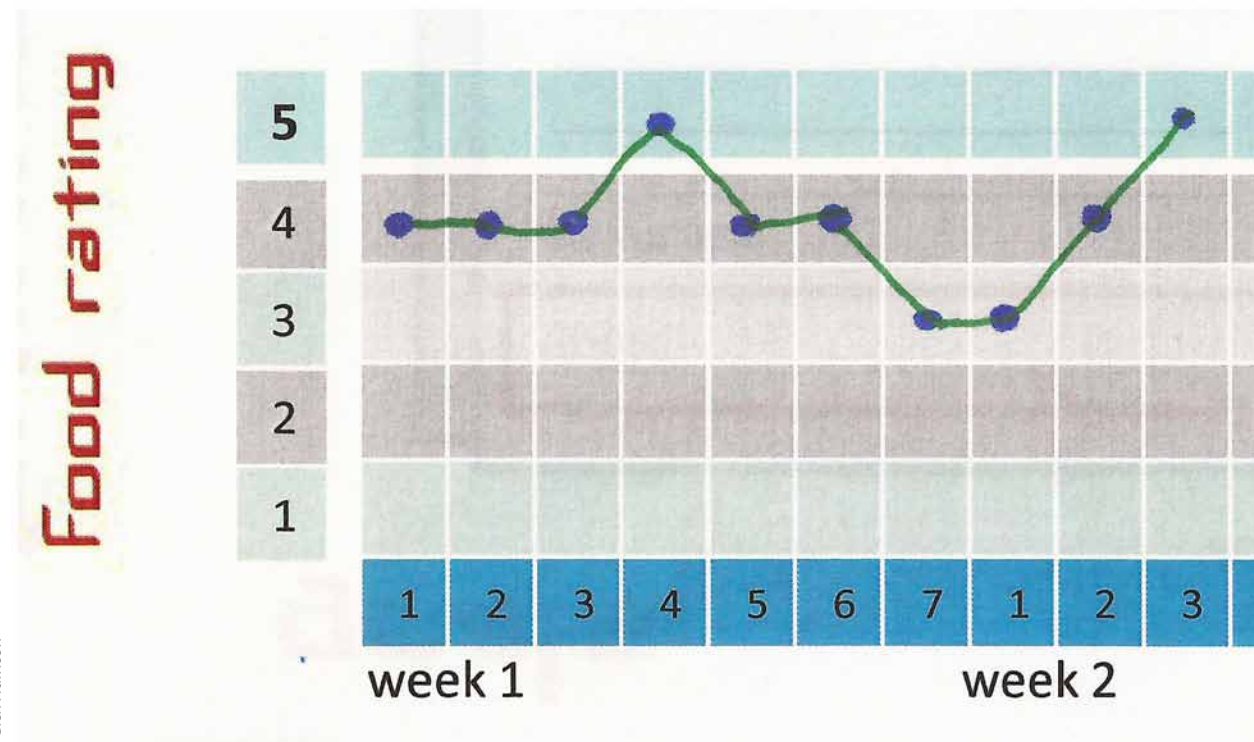
many different types of stressors. These chronic injuries also happen to be the most difficult to diagnose, as well as the most troublesome from which to recover.

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.



Glen Harrison

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	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

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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

Glen Harrison

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.