

Full Mission Profile

Capture. Death. Destruction. A radical new training philosophy uses the threat of (fictitious) dire consequences to motivate the "Warrior Athlete" to push the workout envelope

Rob Ord



It's not hard to grasp the importance of mental and physical preparation for individuals in areas where physical abilities make all the difference. Occupations such as military, law enforcement, fire, or emergency rescue fields all require a great deal of physical and mental toughness.

However, as a trainer, I have sometimes found it difficult to find the words necessary to inspire those in such physically demanding professions to reach deep enough, breaking down all personal barriers, to find that part I call the "Warrior Athlete." Sometimes, mere words are not enough. Sometimes, what is required to push someone beyond their perceived limits is to introduce an element of harsh reality.

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“Great men rejoice in adversity, just as brave soldiers triumph in war.” ~Seneca

It has been my experience that adversity is required before triumph can be realized. As a mentor and coach to potential SOF warriors, I utilize a number of “tools of adversity” to prepare candidates for the physical and mental demands of their training pipelines. Many of these methods can be seen in the CrossFit Journal series of articles on Pre-SOF Training. In this article, however, I want to introduce a powerful element of reality: **the Full Mission Profile.**

The Full Mission Profile (FMP) is a real-world test of mental and physical toughness. First, I introduce a real-world, life-and-death scenario. Then I provide a plan and a hard timeline. Lastly, I give you a workout to complete. The prescribed workout attempts to mimic the physical skills necessary to complete such a mission in real life and real time. It’s important to note that the plan is not based on the “best case,” but the “worst case” scenario, because we all know “hope for the best, but prepare for the worst.”

This is not just another beat-you-down workout. This is a real-world scenario with real, and sometimes dangerous, consequences. When doing your favorite CrossFit workout, you can try to beat your best time, your buddy’s time, or your gym’s highest score, but if you fail, there is little lost. If you attempt a Full Mission Profile and fail, you will know that your (admittedly fictional) team is compromised. The diplomat you were to rescue was killed in the failed evac attempt. The boat exploded with you still onboard. The hikers died on the mountain. When I run an FMP and someone quits or is unable to finish, we all take a moment, during the debrief, to reflect on our fallen brother, because in a mission he would have died.

The CrossFit community is full of warrior athletes, some of whom have been tested on real battlefields at home and abroad. These are men and women that love the challenge of pushing themselves to new limits, the experience of intensity that goes well beyond what many consider “exercise.” Ask them why they do CrossFit, and they’ll often explain that they just love the pain. Do a Full Mission Profile and you’ll have the real answer.

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FULL MISSION PROFILE - PSD AMBUSH
PRESENT DAY - BAGHDAD, IRAQ

SITUATION :

WHILE IN THE PROCESS OF TRAVELLING FROM THE AIRPORT TO A MEETING WITH IRAQI GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, AN AMERICAN DIPLOMAT AND HIS PERSONAL SECURITY DETACHMENT (PSD) WERE AMBUSHED IN A BAGHDAD SUBURB BY A GROUP OF HEAVILY ARMED INSURGENTS. ALL VEHICLES WERE BADLY DAMAGED BY RPG AND SMALL ARMS FIRE, AND ARE NO LONGER VIABLE. HELO SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE BUT WILL TAKE APROXIMATELY 45 MINUTES TO ARRIVE ON THE SCENE. THE INSURGENTS, BOLSTERED BY THEIR SUCCESS AT STOPPING THE CONVOY, ARE BECOMING MORE AGGRESSIVE AND ARE INCREASING IN NUMBER.

OBJECTIVE :

BREAK CONTACT WITH THE AMBUSH, SAFELY ESCORT THE PRINCIPAL TO A SECURE LOCATION NEARBY AND CALL FOR HELO. PROVIDE DEFENSIVE PROTECTION UNTIL HELO RADIOS THAT THEY ARE INBOUND. MOVE TO THE PICKUP LOCATION, RENDEVOUS WITH HELO AND EXTRACT TO BASE.

MISSION

PHASE I - BREAK CONTACT:

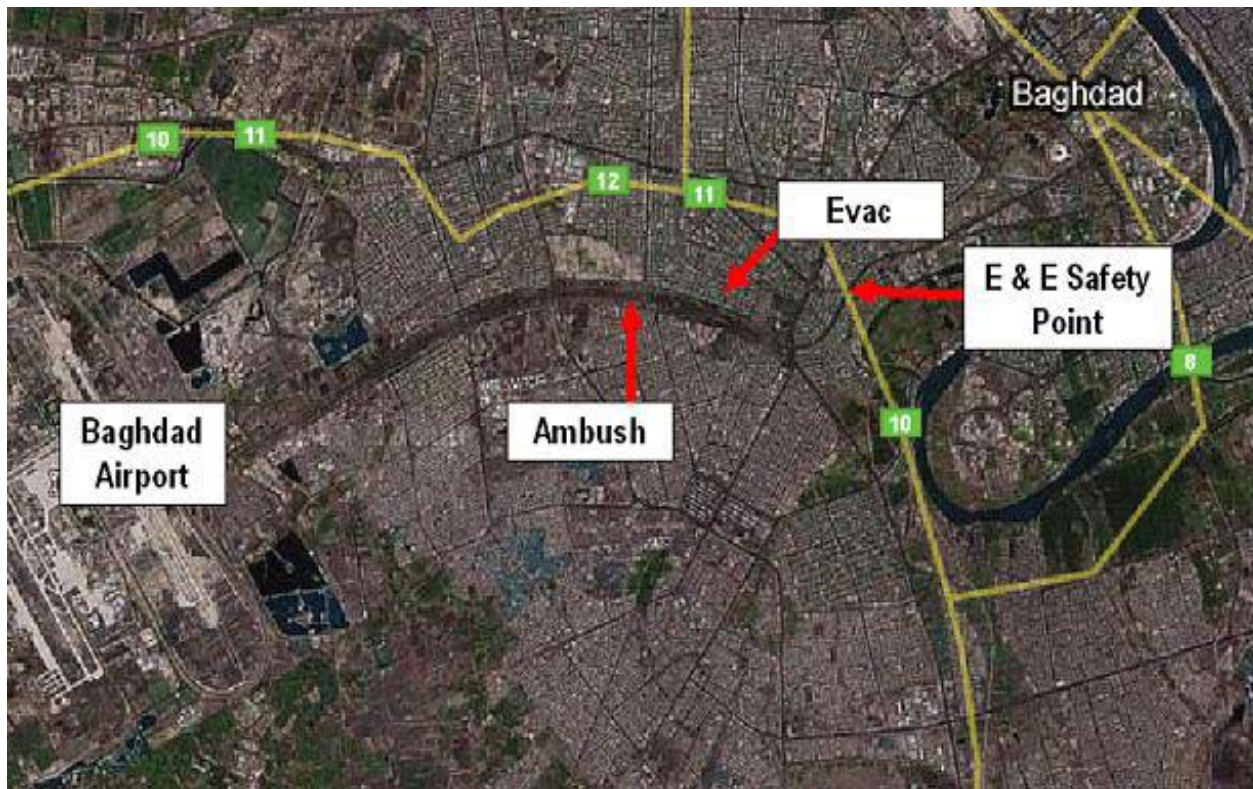
PROVIDE DEFENSIVE FIRE AND TACTICALLY MOVE TO A STRUCTURALLY SOLID BUILDING NEARBY THAT PROVIDES THE BEST PROTECTION FROM FIRE.

PHASE II - DEFEND PRINCIPAL:

ONCE IN THE BUILDING, ESTABLISH DEFENSIVE FIGHTING POSITION AND CALL FOR HELO. ENEMY INSURGENTS ARE EXPECTED TO BE EXTREMELY AGGRESSIVE AND WILLING TO RISK THEIR LIVES TO GET TO THE PRINCIPAL. DEFEND PRINCIPAL AT ALL COSTS. MAINTAIN POSITION UNTIL ENEMY WITHDRAWS OR HELO IS INBOUND.

PHASE III - MOVE TO PICK-UP POINT:

HELO WILL NOTIFY WHEN THEY ARE 10 MINUTES OUT, AND WILL RADIO EVERY TWO MINUTES OF STATUS. THE EXTRACTION POINT IS ON THE ROOF OF A BUILDING APPROX 500 METERS TO THE NORTH EAST. IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT ONCE THE HELO MAKES CONTACT, THE TEAM PREPARES TO MOVE OUT QUICKLY TO MINIMIZE THE TIME THE HELO IS IN DANGER OF SMALL ARMS AND RPG FIRE.



THE WORKOUT

PHASE I - BREAK CONTACT:

4 ROUNDS OF:

- RUN 400 METERS
- 10 MOUNTAIN CLIMBERS (4 COUNT EXERCISE)
- 20 PUSH UPS
- 30 SQUATS

PHASE II - DEFEND PRINCIPAL: - 45-MINUTE TIMELINE BEGINS
DECK OF CARDS (WITH JOKERS)

- | | | |
|----------|---|--|
| HEARTS | — | BURPEE |
| DIAMONDS | — | DUMBBELL SNATCH - 35LBS(M)/20LBS(F) EACH ARM |
| CLUBS | — | DB CLEAN - 35LBS(M)/20LBS(F) |
| SPADES | — | PULL UP (KIPPING) |
| JOKERS | — | RUN 400 METERS AND DOUBLE THE NEXT CARD |

NUMBERED CARDS ARE WORTH THEIR FACE VALUE.

- | | | |
|--------|---|----|
| JACKS | — | 11 |
| QUEENS | — | 12 |
| KINGS | — | 13 |
| ACES | — | 14 |

EXAMPLE:

- 4 OF CLUBS = DO FOUR KIPPING PULL-UPS
- JACK OF HEARTS = DO 11 BURPEES
- 8 OF SPADES = DO 8 DUMBBELL CLEANS
- ACE OF DIAMONDS = DO 14 DUMBBELL SNATCHES



*MUST COMPLETE ALL CARDS PRIOR TO MOVING TO PHASE III.

PHASE III - MOVE TO SECURE LOCATION:

3 ROUNDS OF:

- RUN 400 METERS
- 30 SQUATS
- 20 PUSH UPS
- 10 MOUNTAIN CLIMBERS (4 COUNT EXERCISE)

TIMELINE:

45 MINUTE TIMELINE BEGINS WITH 'PHASE II - DEFEND PRINCIPAL' AND ENDS UPON SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF 'PHASE III - MOVE TO SECURE LOCATION'.

FAILURE TO MEET THE TIMELINE WILL RESULT IN TEAM HAVING TO CONTINUE STREET BATTLE AND MOVE TO NEW SAFE LOCATION FOR PICK UP.

E & E - ESCAPE & EVASION:

IN THE EVENT THE TEAM FAILED TO MEET THE DEADLINE, COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING:

4 ROUNDS OF:

- RUN 400 METERS
- 25 BURPEES

Rules of Engagement

1. **Do it right!** Accuracy matters more now than ever. In a real-world scenario, you would not disregard the way you have been trained to clear a room or shoot with your eyes closed. So it is with the elements of the workout. Do it right or go home.
2. **Fire teams move together.** It is OK to get ahead of the rest of the team while in a phase of the operation, but one member cannot move on to the next phase until all members are finished and can move together. This means that if you're the last to finish a phase, you are putting your teammates and the mission in jeopardy. It also means if you are the first to finish, then you should be motivating your teammates.
3. **Mentally get into it.** Work from the perspective that it's a mission, not just another workout. Your enemy is waiting for you to stop to catch your breath in order to take advantage of you and your team. With my trainees there is a saying: "Train harder than your enemy thinks you can."
4. **The timeline cannot be modified.** Maintain awareness of where you are and how much time you have. If you need to pick up the pace, do it!
5. Laggards die. If you fall behind in the workout, you fall behind in the mission. What would you like written on your headstone?

**FAILURE IN ANY OF THESE ELEMENTS CONSTITUTES
FAILURE OF THE MISSION.**



Rob Ord has trained hundreds of individuals seeking entrance into the Navy's elite special operations communities. On his website www.brassringfitness.com, he also provides balanced, highly effective training regimens for those seeking to achieve the disciplined mind and body of the Warrior Athlete.

This Full Mission Profile was conducted alongside CrossFit H.E.L [www.crossfithel.com] Head Coach, Kevin Aillaud in his world class training facility in Portland, OR.

How to Pick Up Women

Want to see more female CrossFitters? A successful ladies' man has the secrets.

Josh Bunch



Ever heard of the phrase "perception is reality"? I vigorously disagree. Just because I perceive black as white, for example, doesn't make me right; it just makes me ignorant or colorblind. A similar illusion is often at play when it comes to women and fitness training. If your perception leads you to believe women are the weaker sex, you're not only missing reality, you're probably not a CrossFitter (and if you're a guy, you're probably single).

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In my little CrossFit world, women are the majority vote. I own Practice CrossFit in Troy, Ohio, which currently has a membership ratio of 80% women to 20% men. While I would like to believe it's because I am such a stunning specimen of human perfection and font of knowledge that women clamor to be trained by me, a pretty face only goes so far. The females I have the pleasure of working with every day come here because they get results.

That makes me wonder: "What exactly is it that I'm doing differently from other gyms that brings such a high percentage of chicks in here?"

The answer, I think, starts with admitting that you don't know it all. This is a learning process. Surely, you've witnessed the train-wreck of a guy who approaches a woman like he has all the answers, and he is just about to bless her with them all that very instant—that supreme bravado that shouts, "I have you all figured out, and I'm about to show you how much you want my company right now." Let me introduce you to the 20-year-old version of me.

After many failed conversations, and derailed, cheap-ass one-liners, I did manage to learn one thing: I knew nothing about women.

Fast-forward about eight years and I own a CrossFit facility with attendance, as I mentioned, mainly of women. While I may still be an amateur in relationships and matters that go deeper than human performance, when it comes to training the opposite sex, I think I've leaned a tidbit or two that could be useful to the CrossFit box looking to increase its girl-to-guy ratio.

How To Turn Women On

Number one, realize and respect the fact that women are tough—easily as or more resilient than men—but that context is important. The line "drop and give me 20 burpees" only works on women while you're training them—not at dance clubs. .

From what I have seen at the gym, women are like caged rabid dogs with a piece of meat hanging just outside the locked cage. They kind of pace about in circles waiting for the cage door to be flipped open. Then, all that's left is a path to get the meat. The meat is their future goal. The path is CrossFit. The lock, of course, refers to the wall of societal expectations about women and hard-core exercise that's keeping them from being the best they can be.





The difference between women and men in this analogy, I think, is that men start with no lock on the cage, but lack the urgent rage to get out. Once they do, they choose to stay in with the rest of the pack—either out of fear of losing, or embarrassment over not showing any competency. Women, however, will suck at it, lose, cry, and still come back for more at about a ratio of 10-1. Once whatever external motivation breaks her lock, and she decides to change her ways, she becomes a juggernaut going after that meat.

The job of any good CrossFit trainer then becomes how to turn her on to CrossFit.

Rule #1: Set High Expectations for Them

When a female newbie enters my box, I will expect more out of her than a male. In fact, I believe it monumentally disrespectful to expect any less from a woman than of any male.

As a male it's kind of expected of me to be at least proficient at doing some of the stuff we as CrossFitters do, even if it's my first time through the door. What I seem to notice is the sheer amazement on the face of each woman new to our box when I say, "let me see your pull-up." The bewilderment on their faces excites me to no end because I know how that look will change the

first time their chin gets over that bar. It will be a look of supreme self-accomplishment.

I am just a facilitator of proper training technique, cues, and motivation—nothing else. I make it my business to ensure my clients know they are the ones doing the work every day, so all the kudos go to them. I have heard it said that the best manager has a team who will continue to perform equally or higher even when that manager is on vacation. My PCF clients are the team that I manage; they're great—and would be that way even without me standing next to them.

My point is this: Returns tend to mirror your expectations. Therefore, I recommend that you memorize this equation:

Expect low = Achieve low, Expect high = Achieve high.

Simple, huh? In fact, you should take it even further with CrossFit women: Expect perceived unattainable or outlandish goals—goals that the untrained individual might consider to be bordering on crazy. The reason they'll seem that way to untrained individuals, ironically, is simply because they are untrained. Being unchallenged, uneducated, and uninspired, they've usually had less than optimal faith placed in them by others, or by themselves.



When an “unfamiliar” woman arrives at PCF, her blood may begin to boil with intimidation. In the presence of no machines, rubber weights, and pull-up bars, she may immediately begin to rationalize why committing suicide might be easier than a workout with us. This female probably has never done a pull-up or a handstand or ever touched a weight that wasn’t colored. Even more challenging, though— and what I believe is the real difference at our box— is how we view her. I will look this proverbial newbie in the eye and expect what others, including her, have never expected. I do this because in my time as a trainer, it has been my experience that most women will continue to surpass most males on any given aspect of fitness. I must say, even in the dark days before CrossFit, back before baptism by bloody-handed pull-ups, and before evangelical seminars from a man some call a cult leader, women were still the most hardcore even when trained, what I call, “the old way.” If you want to attract more females, you have to tackle their reality of CrossFit.

**Rule # 2:
Feed Their Tendency to “Do it for the Team”**

As you may well know, CrossFit classes breed competition, a give-it-your-all magic while training with others that is hard to duplicate all lonesome-like. What I have observed is that “competition” means different things to men and women. Men push hard to beat the other guy, or not to lose. Women push hard because they want to help the team. So, competition and community are closely linked for women.

So, there is a definite expectation that females will place upon themselves while working out alongside other females. They have almost an unspoken respect for each other while engaged in brutal physical activity that makes them push harder when in a group setting. Don’t get me wrong; guys push hard during the same settings, but not at such a different level.

Prior to opening PCF over a year ago, I trained mainly private sessions. None of my clients witnessed the other training. One female client of mine trained frequently for quite some time, looked good, but just didn’t hit the marks a proficient female should. Miraculously, when PCF opened and she was forced to train alongside many other women, her skills jumped by leaps and bounds. My expectations never changed, nor did my respect for her. What appeared to change in her was the expectation she had for herself.



I believe that, to some extent, she felt as though she would be letting others down if she couldn't be the best she could be. Competition was there, of course, but also an innate sense of togetherness.

Wow, rereading that makes me want to pick flowers and watch the sunrise and then puke, but that's how guys are wired. We don't do that. Males perform at their utmost in front of other guys usually because we just don't want to lose, and we want to improve our skills. Women do the same, but with an added sense of communal responsibility that is inherent within them.

When the aforementioned women felt as though she was letting other women down by not performing at her best, she got good, and she took everyone else with her. In turn they continually help each other grow as athletes, and individuals working at accomplishing challenges far greater than they may have ever believed they could.

**Rule # 3:
Women Can Handle Honesty (In the Gym)**

While we all strive for honesty in every relationship, be it trainer/client or husband/wife, I have found it much more rewarding when you're honest with your clients than with your significant other. Let me clarify that little gem. If one of my female clients looks softer than she did a week ago, I tell her. I doubt, however, this would work as swimmingly with a girlfriend (not married), because

telling her she has gained a few pounds would probably lead to a slew of discussions (arguments) I really don't want to have. Women can spot a lie from a man light years before we have even thought of it. So if one of your female CrossFitters asks you why the back of her thighs is the only place she cannot see results, then tell her it's the late night trips to Ben or Jerry's house. Hold her accountable, tell her to stop, and leave her to her own vices, because all she needed was for someone she respected to tell her wrong is wrong.

The same goes for her performance. If she sucked today, tell her. Hopefully you would tell a male CrossFitter if he was performing sub-par, but I have witnessed some male trainers harp on guys while making, or accepting, the excuses of their women CFer's. Females will figure this out. Realize you are not being the best trainer you can be, and she will look for someone to be honest to her. "Good job," "you did great," and all the other clichéd crap you can come up with to tell her during and after a workout doesn't mean squat to any women I have ever worked with if it's not the truth. A little whisper to her that you really feel she didn't do her best today, said with honesty, of course, not manipulation, and she will respect you for it. Then, more than likely, she will scare little children with the ferocity she will demonstrate during her next WOD.

Rule #4: Don't Try to Teach Attitude

I can teach proper CrossFit mechanics all day. Programming is a snap. Nutrition is a breeze. Attitude, however, is not teachable. If any client standing in front of you doesn't have the right attitude, the desire to work harder than they ever have, the need to go against the generally accepted grain of the false fitness atmosphere, then there is no need to continue the relationship. I throw 80% of the fish that enter PCF back in the pond. The 20% I keep are workers. They are ready. It doesn't matter how old they are, how they look, what walk of life they arrive from. As long as they are ready to be a hard working positive addition to PCF, they can come in from off the porch. At PCF, the ones who enter are typically female; the ones who leave get beat by these girls, and are males.

Attitude is what helps to keep that "perception is reality" crap in check. And it starts with the belief that there is no difference between males and females when it comes to expectation-setting. Reality: CrossFit is hard. Wrap your hands all day. They are still going to bleed. Enjoy it. Wear white. It'll be black when you leave. Complain. And watch me leave you hanging from the bar after I remind you of how lucky you are to have the ability to train at all. At PCF you'll get this exact same attitude whether you're male or female. And if I'm not mistaken, this is the exact way each and every WOD is prescribed. There is one Rx'd weight. If you scale it, the workout may still remain super intense but it's not recommended. If the weight is attainable for the client, female or male, they must do it.

My first exposure to CrossFit was over the internet a few years back. I had been training out of a globogym for nearly five years prior to that, and during that time trained a wonderful stock of female talent. Most of my clients were women, and I expected the world from them. I, like everyone else, I'm sure, remember the first time I watched "Nasty Girls." I thought, "My girls can do that." Certainly, I don't mean they were all at the level of the fantastic females featured in that video. I'm saying that my first thought was of the ability at which I thought my female clients could train. I have never doubted a female's ability, much less questioned their tenacity with regard to fitness. For this reason, it's my opinion that attitude—both mine and that of every one of my female clients—is a huge part of the female training equation.



Rule #5: Ignore the Media and the Misconceptions

I'm positive my viewpoint is not unique as a CrossFitter when I say how disenchanted I become over the expectations the media sets for all of us all, but mainly for women—the catalogues, commercials and advertisements parading around skinny-fat chicks, not super-fit women. It would be hard not to be sold by all the dribble spouted by big name franchises, corporations, and fitness monarchs with mammoth facilities that show smiling females conversing as they workout.

I say, deliver us from clever lingerie advertising. Deliver us from commercials with pretty music, and puppies meant to provoke emotion. I say, let us get dirty while we train. Let us challenge ourselves harder than what we ever have. I say, you are not your %&%%\$ing handbag; sorry to go all "Fight Club" on you, but Chuck P. has a good point when it relates to conglomerates ruining the beauty already inherent to the world. A healthy woman who can work hard and outperform a man is almost frowned upon in certain places. In CrossFit, it's common.

The worst thing to do is play into the propaganda. I'm sure most CF's don't do this, but even more so, don't go out of your way to separate yourselves from the pack. Don't go over your marketing plan looking for a way to advertise to women. At PCF, we don't even have a marketing plan. Instead, deliver training that makes your current members your best recruiters. One woman, who loves the program equals hundreds who hear about it. Don't go out and buy little pink-ass weights or 5lb

resistance bands. Don't put flowers in the women's restroom (although it's a nice touch) but do, no matter how hardcore you are, keep your damn showers clean. And, most importantly, don't set up your WODs with some kind of mindset that says the workouts need to be more pleasing to a girl. When a future CrossFit woman arrives on her first day, get her dirty. Make her sweat. Make her CrossFit. Have no more love for her than anyone else. If your WODs are at all gender-biased with respect to the level of difficulty expected of the so-called "fairer sex," you can bet they will soon be leaving very unsatisfied. If, on the other hand you expect them to flip that same big-ass tire as the guy before them, then stand back. I guarantee she will try harder than any male even if she only moves it an inch. And here's the kicker: She will keep trying until it's two inches... then end-over-end, baby.

Erase the atrocities of the American fitness Reich. Show them the truth. Choke them with the Kool-Aid, whatever you want to call it. Destroy the misconceptions from day one by examples, and truth, and she will bleed CF blood for you, and bring in other future all-stars.

Summary: Clean the floors and Set the Bar High

Sure, there is something to be said about the impact of the "you can't do that, you're a girl!" stuff, but that only lasts so long. Walk that brand new female CrossFitter to the pull-up bar and say "Let me see your pull-up." Hand her that 45-pound bar when it's time for overhead squats and watch her get it. Make the 100-pounder deadlift 225 pounds. In short, if you're an affiliate wanting or needing more female attendance, consider whether or not you're creating the kind of reality at your box that attracts women waiting to unleash the sleeping lion within them; a reality that says, "Yeah, this is tough but you're ready for it." If you feel you've already been doing this and yet still have poor female attendance, try cleaning your showers and vacuuming your floors every now and again.

As an affiliate owner and, therefore, a representative of the best fitness program on Earth, I feel the need to constantly spread the fitness gospel to the misinformed. So to the female reading, wishing, or wanting to CrossFit, or even the CrossFitter pushing herself less than optimally today I say you—more so than most males—are a walking, breathing waste of potential. I say that in the sweetest way possible, of course, because I know what you're capable of doing.

For males, it usually takes a true fire-breather with the desire. In my experience, females are already all that; they just may not know it.

Women: I guarantee you can begin CrossFitting or begin CrossFitting at a level you thought impossible, and quickly surpass the "you" of old. It may only require you to relinquish old expectations of yourself, and females in general, and adopting true CrossFit mantra: The clock loves no one, male or female. What matters is who calls time first.



About the Author:

For the last 10 years, Josh Bunch has been immersed in the field of fitness. He began managing a big box facility, and then about eight years ago, began a personal training business. He holds many certifications...."which don't really matter unless they have CrossFit attached to them," he says. Currently a Level 1 CF trainer, Josh has worked with many athletes concerned about aesthetics, or performance. An amateur competitive bodybuilder for the stage, he made CrossFit his program of choice to get ready for stage, and hasn't looked back since. In January 2008, Josh opened [Practice CrossFit](#), and would love to open another location. "The goal is to saturate the community with so much CrossFit dogma they cannot bear to train any other way," he says.



SWAT Shapes Up

For this Illinois cop, it was a long road from one-pull-up wonder to Fran-tastic fitness

Louis Hayes



The author tackles one of his toughest O-Course events, the commando line

It all started with some trash-talk in a police locker room. Three officers were discussing their pull-up abilities. I conservatively guessed I could do two or three. Another officer said he could do seven or eight. Another bragged he could do over 20.

So into the workout room we went. I watched the first officer hang there, unable to kick his way up to a single pull-up—not the seven or eight he had so arrogantly

predicted. I watched the second officer rip out 28 as fast as he could and stop before any single repetition looked even remotely challenging. Then, I jumped up there and, after some ugly twists and convoluted turns, finally managed to get my chin over the bar. It was pretty embarrassing for me, a SWAT operator and the police department's physical fitness coordinator.

One pull-up!

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That was about five years ago, in 2004. I wish I knew the exact date, for as I now look back at that pitiful episode, I recognize it as a crease in my life's tickertape. It was one of several events sculpting my newfound approach to physical fitness.

Go, Team, Go

Just before I entered into the police academy in 1998, I played college rugby. I always liked the team atmosphere, being a part of something bigger than me in a sport which has a small, cultish following in the U.S. But after playing on a Chicago Super League team and finding my 6-foot-2, 230-pound frame bumped and bruised week after week by (believe it or not) players who dwarfed me, I hung up my rugby career.

I got back my sense of belonging to a team in 2000, when I was selected for a position on a multi-jurisdictional SWAT unit, something I'd always longed for since becoming a police officer. SWAT was regarded as the pinnacle of policing—reserved for those with the highest standards of fitness, firearms proficiency, and professionalism. SWAT meant working alongside people who pushed themselves to the highest performance levels, going against the toughest challenges: hostage rescues, high-risk search warrants, dignitary protection, barricaded gunmen, and suicide interventions. These were missions that would test every facet of a man.

As the years progressed, I immersed myself in the SWAT culture. I learned that many regional teams did not actually keep to their own standards of fitness. On paper, they had policy standards, and to be selected to the team one must meet them. But why didn't veteran SWAT Operators have to maintain this level of physical fitness? Why were team commanders willing to overlook these failures? I was disheartened by this revelation, especially since my team had strictly adhered to the retention policy that veterans must pass the regular fitness testing to stay on the team. I saw respected and experienced senior Operators asked to leave due to slacking fitness.

I promised myself I would not become a fitness tragedy on my team. Some of us younger Operators decided to maintain our fitness by entering into SWAT team competitions.

The O-Course Wake-Up Call

In 2005, I was selected to a squad of officers representing my tactical team in a regional SWAT competition. The Indiana SWAT Challenge was a balanced competition. Many team events required sprinting 75-to-100 yards down the firearms range, sometimes in full-face respirators. Some of the courses included a 4-story rappel tower, requiring multiple climbs and rappels, sprints, and scaling 4-foot walls with weapons, rescue dummies, and battering rams. And most events involved shooting weapons. Snipers had to hit small 3-inch circles at 100 yards after getting through an exertion course. Tactical Officers had to shoot pistols, rifles, shotguns, or gas launchers at various targets. Missed shots resulted in strict time penalties. Few of the events took more than five or six minutes for even the slowest of teams.



The last event of the last day brought the highlight of the Challenge: The O-Course—the 20-element obstacle course. I cannot think of a single competitor who began the O-Course in peak shape; we were all beat-up after several days of fierce competition. The O demanded technical skills while negotiating obstacles that included a rope climb, a cargo net climb, 4-foot walls, a 10-foot wall with a hanging knotted rope, an inclined monkey bar, and a 20-foot A-frame made of telephone poles.

I knew that the toughest elements of the O-Course for me would be the commando line, where the competitor had to slink across a horizontal rope with hands and

SWAT Shapes Up (continued)

ankles, and the Attic Entry, an 8-foot elevated deck with a 2-by-4-foot cutout simulating the entry of an attic. You had to jump up, grab through the hole, and lift your feet into the hole, and get your body into "the attic." To be competitive, you'd have to be technically proficient and in great physical shape.

Hard, yes, but I wasn't really worried. After all, I ran and lifted weights. Despite my 1-pull-up resume, I still figured that my workout program was above what most police officers did.

Well, my wake-up call came quickly. While other competitors were effortlessly scaling the varied hurdles, mastering the rope climb and acrobatically flipping through the Attic Entry, I lagged and struggled from the very first practice session. I failed miserably during the event. Worse, how could I so inadequately represent my entire SWAT team back home?

The SWAT games were a resounding wake-up call. More than merely bruising my ego in a sporting contest, it had proven that my hours and hours of training simply had not prepared me for the O-Course job simulation tasks. And that meant that I was not adequately ready for some of the tasks that might be asked of me as an Operator.

As a veteran SWAT competitor, I had participated for three years in team challenges. However, none up to this point required this new type of short-duration, high-intensity, all-out-sprinting fitness demanded in the O-Course. I analyzed my fitness routine: circuit program weight-lifting two to three times per week, including bench press, leg extensions, cable rows, seated dumbbell shoulder presses, leg curls, bicep curls, and sit-ups. I ran a half-marathon every spring. I regularly climbed stairs in a local high-rise. I competed in adventure races lasting six to ten hours. But the O-course destroyed me nonetheless.



How did I deal with it? Of course, at first I blamed someone else, not me. How dare this course be so difficult for someone in such good shape! I thought indignantly. I simply wrote-off the rope climb as “not my thing.” At 230 pounds, I told myself these O-Courses were skewed to the little guys. The problem couldn’t be that my current program was not very results-driven.

When I got over my denial, I decided be logical. To prepare for a regional competition a couple months away, I focused heavily on several of the O-course elements. I analyzed the movement patterns required for each of the 20 obstacles. I practiced the weighted exercises that mimicked those movements. While still not doing pull-ups, I did start to increase my time spent on the lat-pulldown station, the seated row station, and other “pulling” exercises. I did cable pull-downs at higher loads and kept that motivating image of the rope climb in my mind during each of those repetitions. I also added more weighted and bodyweight abdominal exercises to help with that Attic Entry (if only I had known about hanging knees-to-elbows back then!)

Enter the Kettlebell

In January 2006, at my police/fire department gym, I stumbled across what I later learned to be a kettlebell. A firefighter demonstrated two or three exercises blending weightlifting and anaerobics. Sure, the swing and Turkish getup are goofy-looking, but I was gradually selling myself on the concept of blurring the lines between strength and cardio training.

Kettlebells were tough for me—physically and mentally! My body felt the same as when I struggled through that O-Course in Indiana. My mindset clicked with the idea of complete, functional, practical fitness—the type cops and firemen need.

I blindly jumped into the water, abandoning all other resistance training (except a few abdominal exercises) for that single KB at the firehouse. No more dumbbells, barbells, machines, or cables. I promised myself I would spend a 12-week shift rotation doing the couple of KB exercises I learned. I did them 3-to-4 times per week, as the winter cold kept me from outside activities. I was working out inside a room filled with thousands of dollars worth of top-notch equipment, but only using one \$50 iron ball!



And it was working. After the 12 weeks, I felt great—much stronger in my shoulders and core, more spring in my step. As I added more advanced movements, I felt as if I was working muscles completely neglected by the isolated and singular movements of my circuit training. My body had morphed into a complete package, not groups of muscles separated by joints. So I kept kettlebelling, running, climbing stairs and hills, and ignored most of the cable and weight machines. My running times were dropping, and my strength was increasing. My appetite was craving more information about functional training.

The next SWAT competition came, and I did noticeably better during the nasty O-Course, especially at the obstacles struggled with before. I was now one of the competitors who could hurl himself into that attic! I was even almost able to get up that rope by myself.

Bottom line: My plan worked! Resistance exercises that replicated reality had pushed my performance to a new level. In the words of a true friend: I didn’t suck as much. I knew my kettlebelling sessions, plus some changes in my lat-pulldown and abdominal exercises, had been the root of the achievements. But I knew I still had barely seen the tip of the iceberg of functional fitness.

CrossFit, Faster Frans, Rapid Running

Within a few months, I got bombarded by CrossFit from all angles.

First, my teammate Brian Melvin gave me a copy of “What is Fitness,” the introductory CrossFit Journal article. It contained much of the theory I loosely believed in already due to preparing for my SWAT competitions. I soaked up all I could, cherry-picking WODs, learning the new language, method, and philosophy.

Secondly, I met with a friend and respected police trainer George Demetriou, who was simultaneously retiring and opening CrossFit Suffolk in New York (<http://spartanperformance.typepad.com>). Ka-boom! If George believed in CrossFit, it had to be the next step for me. He listened to my SWAT tales of victory and pushed me in the right direction.

Thirdly, my state’s SWAT organization published two journal articles by Coach TJ Cooper of CrossFit EAST (<http://www.crossfiteast.com>). After a few more of these creases in the tickertape, the functional fitness fire was raging.

It was clear: CrossFit was the next step in functional fitness. After learning more WODs, new movements and exercises, scaling and partitioning tricks, I set goals for some of the benchmarks— like Fran.

Fran was a problem. I handled the 95-pound thrusters alright, but was still stuck at that 1-pull-up plateau. It was embarrassing. Fran took me 45 minutes.

In early 2007, I scaled Fran by using a pull-up counter-balance station. By that summer, I was up to half-assisted, and half-unassisted pull-ups. This was a huge motivator. I got up to six or eight straight pull-ups—major progress. That winter, I finally finished a real Fran in 23 minutes.

This was a true accomplishment—another crease in my tickertape.

When an acquaintance of mine, Army Sergeant Rob Miller, was killed in Afghanistan, some friends decided to host a Murph in his honor. The 100 pull-ups was no longer an unattainable pipe dream. I was going to do it if it took all day.

By March '08, I dropped my Fran time to 13:59. And in April, I did a sub-hour Murph.

I was so proud of myself, knowing that 12 months prior I couldn’t imagine getting my chin over the bar even a second time! Here I was completing 100 pull-ups!

An unexpected treat came next: Enormous gains in my running times. My 3-mile dropped from 29 minutes to sub-22. I was stunned. With so much time dedicated to preparing for Murph and other WODs, I hadn’t run nearly as frequently as before. When I looked down at my stopwatch at one 3-mile run and saw 21:23, I thought for a second that I’d inadvertently hit the stop button a couple minutes early. But the numbers were still moving. It was real.

Another example is less dramatic, but maybe even more telling. Even as a younger SWAT operator entering my 30’s, I began experiencing some lower back pain from wearing all the extra weight. A typical load-bearing vest can tip the scales at 40 pounds. During and after 8-hour training drills, my back and shoulder girdle would be aching. However, after months of kettlebelling and CrossFitting, my aches nearly went away. I had much more energy and “spring in my step” when moving around in my gear, especially getting up off the ground from kneeling or prone shooting positions.

Of course, these are but selected personal examples of my successes with CrossFit.

Little by little, more and more of my teammates began to take notice of the rising performances by those participating in CrossFit. And because of a few up-close anecdotal successes, the CrossFit infection has spread within my team.

My team has plenty of officers who might be seen by outsiders as “physically fit” — as it should be. Three times a year, we must pass fitness tests regular cops could not —with some standards more stringent than those imposed on young academy recruits. This is one reason why SWAT officers maintain our “academy physiques” well into our careers.

Historically, my team was composed of specialized athletes— marathoners, adventure racers, triathletes, and bodybuilders. Many lift-and-run, much like I did

when I incorrectly assumed I was fit. Others, merely blessed with good genetics, do little to stay “in shape.” But recently, I see fewer specialists and more well-rounded athletes. Specialties do not fare well in the new climate of physical fitness.

Randy the Operator

Our team mascot is Randy, a drag dummy dressed as a SWAT Operator, complete with helmet, uniform, and load-bearing vest. He demands the highest of well-rounded, fully integrated physical fitness. Randy comes out with us on most every training day. He serves as a reminder why we keep ourselves in a top level of preparedness. He is our brother and sister in law enforcement. With a quick change of clothes, he is the citizen or hostage we have promised to protect.



Randy is heavy. He is awkward. He is realistic. And for brief moments in time, he becomes any of those men who stand next to me on a SWAT mission. Randy always finds himself in need, in the line of fire. He must be carried or dragged to safety, sometimes over great distances and over or through obstacles. Whether Randy is out on the firearms range with us, or in some abandoned building we're using for training, he has the worst luck. He always needs to be rescued.

New team members quickly learn that unless they subscribe to a functional fitness program, Randy is a burden. Regardless of Randy's predicament, the simulated rescue tasks demand abilities in anaerobic,



stamina, strength, speed, agility, balance, and coordination— aspects of fitness rarely addressed in non-CrossFit programs. Randy likes CrossFit because CrossFitters tend to be the best rescuers! And CrossFitters like Randy, because he gives them an opportunity to test their true fitness: the ability to perform a physical function on demand, such as the immediate rescue of a downed teammate.

In addition to Randy, my team frequently finds itself mitigating other obstacles and tasks: heavy bags, sandbags, walls, ammo cans, fences, breaching tools, stairs, kettlebells, and the occasional real-live teammate in a medical litter. These simulated tasks realistically test for shortcomings in any of the 10 general physical skills addressed by CrossFit.

After conquering all these physical tasks, there is weapons shooting. My team takes every advantage to integrate firearms drills into job simulation tasks. There are two main factors that get tested. The first is whether or not an Operator can distinguish “threats” and accurately fire with an elevated heart rate. The second is how quickly the Operator can recover or lower a heart rate after physical exertion, and then fire a weapon.

We use both live fire and simulated fire (using realistic paint munitions) depending on the environment. This meshing of physical exertion and firearms is a true test for what can be asked in the reality of a SWAT mission. Failure can literally mean death.

Since Randy the drag dummy “joined” the team, less of my teammates have struggled with maintaining physical fitness levels required to pass our regular fitness tests. Those team members who used to barely meet the standards are now passing almost effortlessly. They have identified deficiencies in their previous training and conditioning methods and turned to something more practical. Each has changed “something” within their personal systems; and that “something” looks a lot like CrossFit.



Randy has forced members to examine their fitness programs. The changes have allowed those older operators with marginal fitness levels to continue to use their knowledge, training, and experience into the upper years when many of them have to consider leaving that assignment.

Lastly, my team has a new culture and a new climate. My team commander has us participate in regular fitness sessions after tactical or firearms training that typically include something similar to Cindy, Murph, or The 300. Other times, he leads sessions of gymnastics including burpees, push-ups, pull-ups, sit-ups, air squats, tuck jumps, mountain climbers, and running. I cannot overstate the influence of a commander who regularly scores at the top and leads from the front. His performance sets the standard.

While my team has not officially endorsed CrossFit, a vast majority of the team members participate in CrossFit-inspired workouts. Like me, they have seen drops in their running times, completed Fran or Murph despite poor initial pull-up abilities, lost fatty weight, made their bodies leaner and more efficient, and seen lower-back pain (from wearing the protective equipment) disappear. New recruits enter a CrossFit culture steeped in functional fitness. Fueled by testimonials left and right, they immediately jump on board.

There has been a dramatic increase in participation and enthusiasm for physical fitness since CrossFit-style high-intensity, high-variety, minimal-equipment, short-duration workouts became the norm.

Our current commander is committed to increasing team fitness. He pledges to raise the fitness standards for selection and retention. Our current SWAT standards require operators run 1.5 miles in 12:51, do 32 unbroken push-ups, do 37 sit-ups in one minute, and bench press 89% of bodyweight for one repetition. This battery of tests is far easier than what most of us Operators desire, but we accept there are a lot of outside-the-team factors that go into the testing procedure. These are our minimums, not our goals. (Much like firearms testing, qualification is merely a piece of paper, not the goal. Our weapons training brings us well beyond a mediocre O-course.) We acknowledge these physical standards to be far from what many CrossFitters might seem as respectable. However, as a team, we must not lose sight that there are still many traits of a balanced top-rated Operator, with physical fitness being just one. Elevating more exclusive benchmarks will cause any team to lose solid, dedicated men and women, who for one reason or another cannot meet them.

The fact remains that, for the first time in team history, a majority of operators do not oppose raising standards. Many Operators ask for a test that includes more functional movement and gauges work capacity. CrossFit has given those operators the tools to break from their teetering position on the edge of pass-fail.

Conclusion

After a few creases in my life's tickertape, my personal fitness has changed forever. Along with it, so has the fitness climate within my SWAT team. The infection is even beginning to spread into the ranks of our police departments. Due to the performance increases of CrossFit, police officers cannot argue against its efficiency and practicality.

My personal graduation into CrossFit was a slow one. So was my team's shift. But I can already see the future when all policing units fully accept and support functional fitness as their model. Momentum is gaining within the law enforcement community. CrossFit has produced too many positive results to be ignored. My team continues to send squads of Operators around the region and country to participate in SWAT competitions. And my team's representatives succeed time and time again.

Yes, SWAT competitions are sport. But SWAT missions are life. In preparing for sport, we are honing our skills to protect those we have sworn to protect, rescue those who need rescuing, and dominate those who need dominating. CrossFit is a critical component of reaching a constant state of readiness.



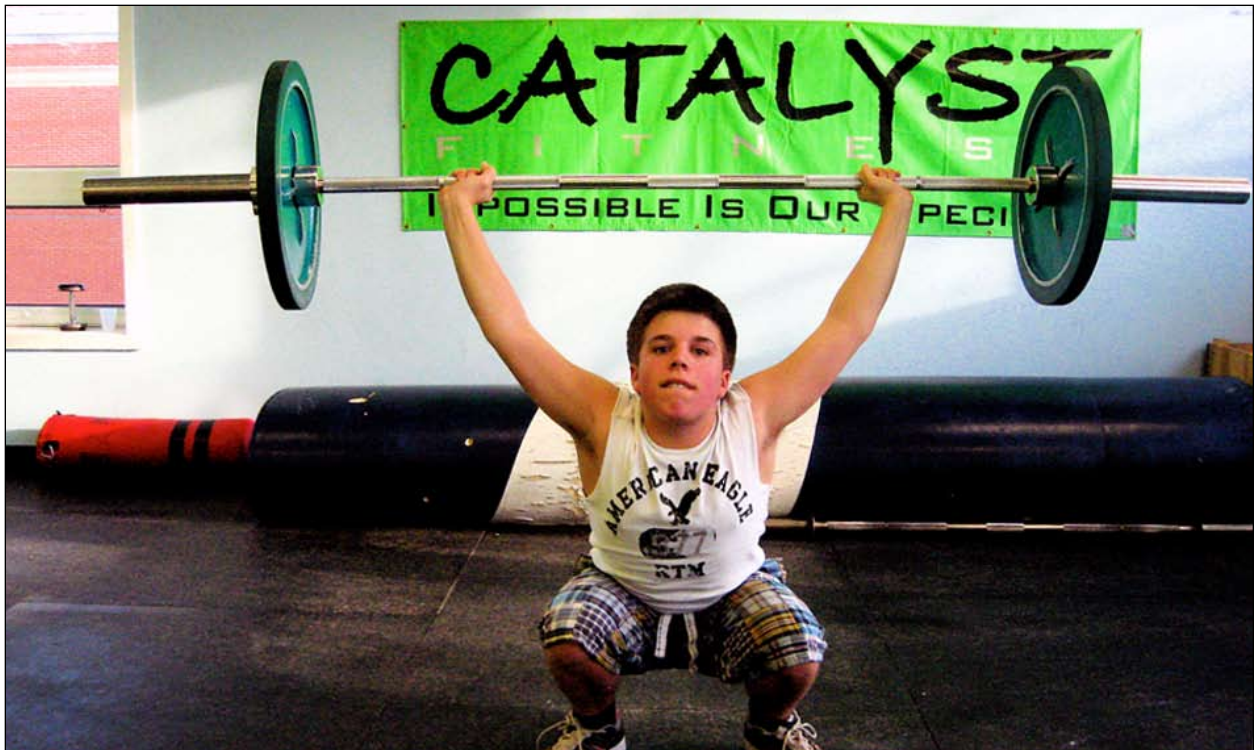
Louis Hayes (pictured below, center) is a Police Officer with the Hinsdale, Illinois, Police Department, assigned to the FIAT SWAT Taskforce as Team Leader and Primary Firearms Instructor. His formal education has absolutely nothing to do with physical fitness, and he takes a smidgen of pride in not having any capital letters to post after his name. Louis sits on the Board of Directors for the Illinois Tactical Officers Association. He is a Bears fan by birth, an adventure racer by choice, and a Christian by both. He also contributes to a for-the-good-of-mankind blog called Trinity Training Group at <http://trinitytraining.blogspot.com>. Louis can also be reached at louis.hayes@comcast.net or through the CrossFit message board.



"CrossFit Today!" says Sebastien

How CrossFit's task-linked physical training is helping make an autistic teenager better socially, verbally, and athletically.

Chris Cooper



Sebastien Wetzel is a star around these parts.

Called 'Baba' by his friends, the typical French diminution of his given name, Sebastien has gone from a distracted 12-year-old to a powerhouse athlete in a few short years. He plays football; he plays basketball; he powerlifts. He does CrossFit.

And he's autistic.

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Sebastien and I became friends when he started with Catalyst Fitness (our box), here in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, three years ago. Back then, Catalyst was a non-CrossFit personal-training-only facility, set up on the top floor of a dumpy office building, and Sebastien's verbal skills were limited to one- or two-word questions and requests. "Toilet now" while tugging at my sleeve was a big one. He was also prone to bursting out into laughter, or doing little shrieks as if he were testing his voice, without warning. He was emotionally confused. He'd stop and stare at construction sites when we were on our way to the park to work on balance. Sebastien couldn't coordinate his feet well enough to use a slide board. He couldn't focus long enough to answer questions about his pets. He only wanted to talk about toilets.

*Three years ago, this was Sebastien: Pulling wallpaper off the entire house, breaking glass, obsessed with toilets. Then he began visiting **Catalyst**...*

A hallmark of autism is the 'blank' face: The uncaring disconnect of those to whom the world just isn't registering. Even kids at the edge of the autism spectrum routinely show a lack of ability to judge people's responses to their actions. "Will this make mommy sad or happy?" is a question that a child with autism just can't answer.

Three years ago, this was Sebastien: Pulling wallpaper off the entire house, breaking glass, obsessed with toilets.

Then he began visiting Catalyst twice per week for personal training.

I was his trainer and coach. We'd work on "task-linking" activities thought to engender functional learning in autistic people. These involve following (linking) a lengthy set of instructions (tasks) in sequential order, recognizing patterns of movement, and moving through exercises in a linear motion without losing focus. The goal was fitness training that served to help Sebastien

function better: socially at first, and eventually in a workplace setting.

This project was all started at the behest of his very forward-thinking parents. When Baba was 8, doctors recommended institutionalization because they didn't think he'd ever speak; nothing coherent came out of his mouth. Of course, Sebastien's father, Dr. Luc Duchesne (a shareholder in Catalyst), didn't pay any heed. As our other gym business partner noted, Sebastien, one of three kids, couldn't have been born into a better family. "Physical activity is the way young boys socialize," says his mom, Dr. Suzanne Wetzel. Not surprisingly, both she and Luc are quite athletic themselves.

The couple started Sebastien in ABA (Applied Behavioral Analysis) therapy. It works on the principles of analyzing behavior based on what comes before, and trying to modify the outcome by looking at its antecedents.

It's a science. It's good teaching. It's a system of reinforcement and less reinforcement. In the old days, it involved punishment, but not anymore. Luc and Suzanne saw the potential to increase Baba's education through physical endeavor and an increased work capacity.

"At the very worst," Suzanne said, "he'll lose his pot belly."

Step 1: Discovering that CrossFit-style Methods Made Exercise Stick

CrossFit didn't enter the picture at Catalyst until 2007.

Our staff was just ending a two-year study on exercise adherence, and we were struggling to make sense of the results. After manipulating variables in different groups, using double-blind procedures at the beginning, and measuring thousands of workouts, we were facing a contradiction. On the one hand, our own research was suggesting that constantly varied, short, intense workouts with a comparison-based scoring system greatly increased adherence to exercise. On the other hand, our collective University degrees (Bachelor and Graduate) all strongly pushed for the "3-sets-of-8 reps-to-near-failure" paradigm.

What started out as a short experiment in workout delivery had morphed into a huge project illustrating the need for constant variety, a higher degree of challenge, comparison to one's peers and one's previous best, and reprimand for missing workouts. We had shifted

our average adherence rate from under 50% of people doing their physical 'homework' to 83%. We were doing complex movements with people we'd never met. We were doing powerlifts and Olympic lifts and Tabata, because that's what kept people exercising. We were doing CrossFit.

We knew about CrossFit as early as 2005. We knew there was a growing fan base. We knew there were full-on disciples and addicts. But we were skeptical from the start. Yet every step of the way, every time our research finished a short phase of manipulating one small variable, we'd be pushed toward a CrossFit-style model.

We kicked a bit. We didn't believe it. We threw a couple of our trainers under the CrossFit bus for a month. Then we threw ten poor souls into the mix. They were all former clients, and we gave them space and minimal coaching for free to try CrossFit for a month. At this point, we were still 50/50 on the idea of bringing CrossFit into our little personal training practice. We used former PT clients so we'd have nothing to lose if they didn't like it. Two weeks in, we had enough requests to form another 'trial' group. After our third 'trial' group, we started the affiliation process. This was March 2008.

Step 2: Putting Sebastien in the CrossFit Mix

Also in March '08, we saw the value of linking complicated patterns together for Sebastien. He had begun to show signs of improvement at linking small patterns together physically, but there was usually a unifying object (for instance, he couldn't put the bar down until he'd cleaned the bar, caught it, stood up, dipped again, exploded upward, and dipped to catch a jerk.) Now we decided to start linking big movements together, and then add the time element.

"When Sebastien first started with me, the goal of his parents was to unleash the use of force," says Tyler Belanger, a personal trainer at Catalyst, and Sebastien's coach. "We started with drills like pushing over a heavy bag, pushing a box on rubber flooring and throwing med balls to different heights. We wanted him to be able to lift weight that was 'too heavy,' as Sebastien put it. Once Sebastien really started using some force, we started introducing him to CrossFit workouts.

"Workouts that take a beginner CrossFitter seven minutes to finish would take Sebastien 30-40 minutes,"



continues Belanger. "He had difficulty focusing when moving to another exercise and would take frequent breaks when he visibly was not tired. He loved working out—that was obvious. So we started to use the white board and wrote down the WOD. After he completed it, he was allowed to erase it.

"At that point, we started to see Sebastien really start to approach the workout as a task to be completed. CrossFit felt like sport to him, and that really helped."

At first, external rewards were necessary; we had a system of tokens to earn and prizes for good behavior. One morning a few weeks ago, for instance, Sebastien's first comment to his mom was, "CrossFit today!"

Today, Sebastien's a long way from that kid who walked in the Catalyst door three years ago. Now, at 5-foot-9 and 180 pounds, Baba is nearly as wide-shouldered as his CrossFitting father; and he's 20 pounds heavier than his brother, who's two years older. In his first powerlifting meet, a push/pull at our monthly Virtualmeet in January, he had a 115-pound bench press and 235-pound deadlift. He's no longer frightened by fast-moving footballs; he can throw a pattern or receive; he can stick a snatch or survive a closely-judged bench press. He says he'd like to compete in the Special Olympics someday.

And here's the real kicker: he CARES. [Watch the video of him at the Virtualmeet](#) (password: CATALYST) and you'll see, as the weight goes up, the beaming rays of pride pierce through the fog of autism. In his mom Suzanne's words: "It's given him something to be proud of. Every kid needs a strong skill like that, something to take pride in."

Sebastian's progress, as hoped, shows big gains in social and verbal function. Now he speaks in staccato sentences. "Chris-can-I-go-to-the-bathroom-NOW?" is typical. The emphasis may be on the wrong word, but he's not just memorizing text; he's putting it together. I imagine this is how I sound speaking French, which I took until the 10th grade.

Tyler is trying to get him to showboat a bit with the football like other guys his age (until now, he'd make a brilliant over-the-shoulder catch in the gym, and then drop the ball and go look out the window, or he'd rip through Fran and say, "Tyler-can-we-play-footBALL?" without pausing for breath.) So he'll do something cool, then climb up on the wrestling mat, flex his pipes, and say, "You-can't-handle-THIS." It sounds funny, but

braggadocio is part of the 15-year-old's social makeup, and Baba has none. We're trying to instill a sense of pride in accomplishment, and this is the first step. It's working: look at the end of the bench press video, and he clearly 'gets it.' This wouldn't have happened a few months ago.

A few weeks ago, my wife Robin and I took Sebastien out to a hockey game. We had a box for the game, and he came in, hung up his coat, looked at me, and said, "Hi-Chris-nice-hair-CUT," clearly trying to rib me over my messy hair. I started laughing. Robin, said, "Hey!" pretending to take offense. Baba grinned his way to the seats up front of the box. We went to sit in front of him. He rubbed my head and said, "Nice-hair-CUT." I shook my fist at him, and he chuckled until his popcorn arrived.

Just like a normal 15-year-old.



About the Author

Chris Cooper is President of Catalyst Fitness in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. Split between two facilities—a private personal training centre, and a CrossFit Box—Catalyst Fitness is engaged in research, athletic development, and the pursuit of all things fitness. Chris has two small kids, a 14-hour workday; a 2:51 Diane; a 520-pound deadlift PR; an incredible staff of trainers, therapists, and coaches; a probable case of mild ADD; and a VERY patient wife. Reach him at catalystfitness@yahoo.ca or check out [Catalyst Fitness on-line](#).

A CrossFit Startup Guide: Part 2

Learning more of the basic functional movements, plus the art of scaling

Todd Widman



Welcome back! Now that we have some capacity in the squat, the subject of [Startup Guide, Part 1](#), let's push forward into a few more of CrossFit's fundamental movements. There are nine total: squat, front squat, overhead squat; shoulder press, push press, push jerk; deadlift, sumo deadlift high pull, and medicine ball clean. These nine movements are foundational to CrossFit because capacity and sound mechanics in these nine form the essence of physical competence in three dimensional space. They translate readily to all other athletic movement.

Why are we doing this?

The goal of CrossFit is fitness. Fitness, as we define it and as explained in Part 1, is increased work capacity across broad time, modal, and age domains. The goal is to get as good at as many physical endeavors as possible, over as many time durations as possible, throughout our entire lives. He or she who is best at the most skills and drills pulled from an infinite list of sports, workouts, and activities, is most fit.

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We say that CrossFit is the most effective fitness program in the history of the industry, and we have the numbers to back that up. No other program is producing athletes capable of greater work capacity in more domains at all age groups. Our prescription is constantly-varied, high-intensity, functional movements.

For any one of us to achieve the results we want, we have to work hard. We have to develop skills we did not know we were capable of. We have to be consistent. And, we have to eat well.



Indeed, this program can become a painful endeavor with seemingly insurmountable requirements of mental, physical, and emotional hardship. To avoid getting overwhelmed, go back to CrossFit's charter of mechanics, consistency, and only then intensity. You must first garner a capacity in the technique of functional movements. Next, you must be consistent in both performing the specifics of the movement and participating in CrossFit workouts. Then, and only then, do you ramp up the intensity.

So why does this have to hurt so much? Simply stated, we need intensity. As you may remember from Part 1, intensity is what gives us all the things we want from a fitness program in the shortest amount of time. Absolute intensity is simply average power; and average power is force times distance divided by time. Absolute intensity is a mathematically substantiated, empirically defined term.

Relative intensity, however, is subjective, depending purely on the individual's physical and psychological tolerances. Relative intensity means you have to work as hard as you can without overdoing it.

Both absolute and relative intensity, though very different by definition, must be pursued in the same manner: with steady progress. Intensity is best built up gradually over time. We need intensity to garner the unprecedented benefits of CrossFit, but we also need to begin at a very moderate level and steadily build upon that foundation.

Enough Philosophy. Let's Continue Moving with the Front Squat

The next step in the progression of squats after the air squat is the front squat. The overhead squat is the king of squats, but it requires a solid understanding of, and capacity in, both the air squat and front squat. It is one of the benchmarks from Part 1 because of its unique difficulty and unparalleled physical benefit. We will cover the overhead squat in Part 3.



Watch: Front Squats, the main page video example of the movement. [[wmv](#)]

And: Front Squat Good/Bad Bi-panel, for an excellent visual depiction of good and bad form on several different athletes. [[wmv](#)][[mov](#)]

As you can readily see, the front squat is exactly like the air squat in set-up, performance steps, and execution, save the fact that we have now added a weight to the front of your body. Fight hard for a solid front rack position (holding the bar with a fingertip grip just outside of shoulders, elbows parallel to each other and up, weight supported on your shoulders) and from there execute a squat, all the while keeping the weight supported on your shoulders in the rack position (not your hands and wrists!) and pushing your elbows up through the full range of motion.



The front squat is applicable for both effectively squatting with a weight at our chest as well as leading us toward the capacity to catch weight in a clean, a more complex fundamental movement that will be addressed in a future article.

Again, work hard for your front-rack position, and understand it takes time to garner the flexibility and kinesthetic awareness to keep the weight on the front of the body while maintaining proper squat mechanics.

Next, Going Overhead: Shoulder Press and Push Press

Watch:

- 1) <http://journal.crossfit.com/2008/11/the-overhead-series---part-1-the-press.tpl> and <http://journal.crossfit.com/2008/11/the-overhead-series--->

[part-2-the-push-press.tpl](#) by Adrian Bozman, Nov 13, 2008; a fantastic clip of top HQ instructor Adrian Bozman going through the primary points of performance in the push press with fellow HQ instructor and elite athlete Chris Spealler.

- 2) Shoulder Press/Push Press/Push Jerk tri-panel from the main page, for a single example of all three overhead lifts contrasted. [[wmv](#)]
- 3) Shoulder Press-Push Press-Push Jerk from the main page for why we will learn more than just the shoulder press. [[wmv](#)]

How does your push press look? This is the most important of all pressing movements; we must garner a capacity here before moving on. Practice the movement with PVC pipe and light dumbbells, for if you cannot approach excellent technique with negligible weight you will never be able to safely, efficiently, or effectively push a weighted bar. Fight hard to keep your body locked in position and jump the weight overhead. It's essential that you practice keeping the torso straight up and down so that the bar or dumbbells are driven straight up. Dipping forward is a very common flaw, and it will greatly limit your performance because the weight will be driven too far out in front to control effectively.

The push jerk is the granddaddy of overhead movements. In it, there is a powerful jump and land. It cannot be done slowly, and it both demands and develops high levels of coordination, accuracy, agility, and balance. It will be covered in Part 3.



Finally, Picking Weight Up Off the Ground: The Deadlift

Like all of our other functional movements, the deadlift is a natural (not contrived or manmade) and an essential (to life, living, and the quality of life) part of everyone's existence; we all pick things up off the ground. This, however, does not mean that we do it properly. Learning the deadlift takes time, energy, effort, and study to perform correctly.



That being said, please remain patient with building capacity in the deadlift. Working with significant loads before you can complete innumerable reps with excellent alignment and mechanics is simply an unnecessary risk. Capacity comes quickly with good practice. Even if you start with 10lbs and were to add 10 more pounds each week you would be at 520 pounds at the end of a year. Of course, that linear progression is unrealistic for most athletes. The point is that regular baby steps quickly become significant.



The deadlift is a back exercise. Your musculature needs to fight hard to keep the spine aligned and rigid through a full range of motion. In the beginning, just maintaining proper mechanics even with PVC can be a challenge. Managing heavier loads requires immense kinesthetic awareness and lots of practice.

It is imperative you garner solid technique in the primary points of performance for the deadlift using minimal load (PVC pipe) long before attempting any weight. There are concerns in popular culture that the deadlift is not safe. The reality is that it is unsafe not to do them. For your back to be healthy, it must be strong enough to lift reasonably heavy objects off the floor.

Watch:

- 1) Deadlift examples with Greg Glassman giving an introduction to its importance [\[wmv\]](#)[\[mov\]](#), and a discussion to where the bar placement should be [\[mov\]](#)[\[wmv\]](#)
- 2) *Deadlift Alignment* by Mark Rippetoe Part 1 and Part 2 for proper set up of the deadlift. Part 1 [\[wmv\]](#)[\[mov\]](#); Part 2 [\[wmv\]](#)[\[mov\]](#). And for anatomy of the start up position from the same lecture [\[wmv\]](#)[\[mov\]](#).
- 3) *Double Bodyweight Deadlifts*, Dutch and Boz from the main page, showing two top CrossFit athletes lifting some serious weight. [\[wmv\]](#)[\[mov\]](#)

Read:

- 1) <http://journal.crossfit.com/2003/08/the-deadlift-by-greg-glassman.tpl> by Greg Glassman, Aug 1, 2003; what better place to start than with the founder of CrossFit breaking down an elemental lift?

What does your deadlift look like? Remember the primary points of performance of the deadlift, in order of importance: 1) lumbar curve maintained; 2) weight on heels; 3) shoulders slightly in front of bar in the setup; 4) bar stays in contact with the legs throughout the movement; 5) hips and shoulders rise at the same rate until over the knees with the bar; 6) at the top the hip is completely open, chest is up, and knees are straight. Again, practice with PVC, if done correctly and fighting for perfect technique there is nothing easy about having an un-weighted bar for the lift.



The deadlift is called one of the “slow lifts” because speed is not a critical component of a successful lift. You can lift the object as quickly or as slowly as you want; as long as you get the load to your hips, it is considered a successful lift.

This is not true for the sumo deadlift highpull, the clean, and the snatch. These movements start with the barbell (or other object) on the ground and bring it higher (to the shoulders or directly overhead). These lifts require that you accelerate the object faster than gravity. This is more dynamic than the deadlift, but they all begin with the same basic principles. Midline stabilization and keeping the combined center of gravity over the base of support (the feet) are essential. Competency in the deadlift at light-to-moderate loads is an absolute prerequisite for all of the more dynamic lifts.

Now What?

Go back to the list on page six of Part 1. Are you ready to start scaling workouts? If those skills are still out of reach, you should practice squatting, front squatting, push pressing, and deadlifting. As previously discussed, start with and continue to use a PVC pipe, working up to minimal loads, all the while keeping the repetitions high. Only after you are consistently able to maintain solid mechanics with minimal load should you experiment with adding weight (in small increments). As long as your mechanics do not deteriorate you are safe to progress.

Now, how is your fuel intake coming? Are you working to balance your macronutrient intake? Never lose sight of the fact that you will not reach your potential without minding what you eat. You may be in the gym for about an hour a day, but what you do the other 23 has a lot to do with your capacity for fitness. Start giving those hours more focused attention.



How to Scale, Part 1

At some point, you will have developed enough basic competency in a variety of functional movements to graduate to working off the main site WODs. We have discussed mechanics, consistency, and intensity in both Parts 1 and 2. The same approach should be followed for the workouts.

As stated in Part 1 of the Guide, these workouts are designed by Coach Greg Glassman to exceed the capacities of Olympic-level athletes. They are made to be very, very difficult. This is because almost all

of them have a time component. The quicker you do the workout, the harder it is. In fact, any differences in the time of completion for the same workout are quantifiable measures of fitness.

You should always measure the time of your workouts, but for now you should not worry too much about minimizing your time. In the beginning, just completing the workouts will be accomplishment enough. Over time, though, you will use those times as benchmarks that you will want to beat.



Scaling workouts is not an automatic process. It requires you to pay attention and think about the various goals of the workout. CrossFit's general prescription is to perform a wide variety of functional movements at (relatively) high intensity. We do a wide variety of different kinds of workouts in order to fulfill that prescription. Matching the flavor and intent of a workout is the key to scaling.

The first and easiest method of scaling main-site WODs is to reduce the load and the repetitions. For example, if the workout calls for 50 push presses at 75 pounds, you could scale that to 30 push presses at 30 pounds. The second method of scaling is to substitute easier variations of an exercise within the workout. For example, if the workout calls for handstand pushups, you could do regular pushups or you could do strict presses with dumbbells or a barbell.

Do not be too worried about getting the perfect modification of a workout. The "constantly varied" aspect of CrossFit applies to scaling also. In the above example, if you subbed regular pushups for the handstand pushups in one workout, you should probably substitute dumbbell presses the next time it comes up.

Also, a very important fact that must be remembered, scaling does not mean that the workouts become easy. Far from it. In fact, the scaled workout should be as hard as you can reasonably tolerate.

Let's get specific. Say the prescribed workout is CrossFit's benchmark workout, Diane. We'll look at the different components and break it down using the two separate scaling methods.

Diane as prescribed is written as:
Three rounds, of 21-15-9 reps, for time of:
Deadlifts, 225 pounds
Handstand pushups.

The first method is to scale the load and the repetitions. This would be appropriate if you could safely perform a number of handstand pushups. One example (there are infinite possibilities) would be to perform 15-12-6 rep rounds of 95-pound deadlifts and handstand pushups, completed for time.

The second method is to scale the movement. In this case, only the handstand pushup would be substituted for because the deadlift is one of those core movements that anyone doing these workouts should be able to perform with at least light weights. Any scaling here



would be in load. For the handstand pushup, any of the above recommendations would apply. So, one scaling option (of virtually infinite possibilities), would be to keep the 21-15-9 rep scheme, but do them of deadlifts at whatever weight is appropriate for you and strict standing dumbbell presses with 20lb dumbbells (obviously, the weight of the DB can be adjusted according to your capacity). The shoulder press mimics the same movement as a handstand pushup, but is much lighter and does not require the balance and inverted coordination a handstand does.

Again, these are two examples of infinite possibilities for scaling one CrossFit benchmark workout. You can use one or the other, or both combined, to scale the workout to fit your physical and psychological tolerances. A final word of advice on scaling: in the beginning, scale more than you think you have to. You will complete the workout faster and with better technique, thus giving you more benefit with a reduced chance for needless injury, either to the ego or the body. Preserve the stimulus, scale the load and intensity, and you will be on the perfect track to elite fitness.

Additional Video:

- 1) A fantastic clip of Mark Rippetoe speaking about breathing for a heavy lift. [[wmv](#)][[mov](#)]

Additional Reading:

- 1) <http://journal.crossfit.com/2005/09/the-lifting-shoulder-by-greg-g.tpl> by Greg Glassman, Sept 1, 2005; an easy-to-follow article describing where the shoulder should be and what its role is in several different movements.
- 2) <http://journal.crossfit.com/2008/11/overhead-is-rising.tpl> by Bill Starr, Nov 7, 2008; a comprehensive article describing some reasons of the decline and vilification of overhead lifting, as well as information on and how to improve going overhead with weight.
- 3) <http://journal.crossfit.com/2008/03/on-the-safety-and-efficacy-of.tpl> by Mark Rippetoe, Lon Kilgore, and Kelly Starrett, March 1, 2008; a masterfully written article on the safety, efficiency, and efficacy of overhead lifts.
- 4) <http://journal.crossfit.com/2007/01/dumbbell-vertical-press-by-mik.tpl> by Mike Rutherford, Jan 1,

2007; an article by CrossFit's leading dumbbell trainer showing the importance of and performance steps for going overhead with something other than a barbell.

- 5) <http://journal.crossfit.com/2006/11/a-new-rather-long-analysis-of.tpl> by Mark Rippetoe, Nov, 2006; a consummate deadlift article by one of the best in the business.
- 6) <http://journal.crossfit.com/2006/07/slow-lifts-5-the-deadlift-by-m.tpl> by Mark Rippetoe, July 1, 2006; another excellent deadlift article breaking down the deadlift.
- 7) <http://journal.crossfit.com/2007/03/popular-biomechanics-by-mark-r.tpl> by Mark Rippetoe, March 1, 2007; an excellent article taking the complicated biomechanics and the set-up of lifts and simplifying them.
- 8) <http://journal.crossfit.com/2007/03/suitcase-deadlift-dumbbell-sty.tpl> by Michael Rutherford, March 1, 2007; an article on how to pick up things besides a barbell in the deadlift.
- 9) <http://journal.crossfit.com/2006/12/the-yin-and-yang-of-the-back-b.tpl> by Michael Rutherford, Dec 1, 2006; another excellent article on deadlifts with dumbbells.
- 10) <http://journal.crossfit.com/2007/11/spine-mechanics-for-lifters-by.tpl> by Tony Leland, Nov 1, 2007; an article discussing the anatomy and kinematics behind the regularly used cue of keeping a lumbar curve.



Todd Widman is a former Marine, and one of CrossFit's top trainers. He spends a significant portion of his time traveling around the country (and world) working the CrossFit Level 1 and Level 2 certification seminars. Todd is also a coach at [CrossFit Flathead](#) in Kalispell, MT.

Zone Gone Bad

It's easy to take a healthy concept—like the Zone Diet—and twist it in an unhealthy way. Here's a 5-step plan back to good eating.

Melissa Byers



Eight weeks ago, my sister Kelly, a 31-year-old public relations executive, went to a seminar at CrossFit Virtuosity in New York City called "Dialing in Your Diet." There, she learned all about making good food choices and how to work the Zone diet principles. She wrote a glowing review of the course for my blog the following week, and began to immediately apply what she had learned to her daily eating habits. Over the next few weeks, she emailed me lots of Zone questions, sent over sample meals for review, and shared her daily food log. She was weighing, measuring, and tracking...and seeing quick improvements in her energy level, training performance, and physical appearance. She loved the Zone, and what it was doing for her fitness.

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Fast forward to last week, when I received this email from Kelly:

“This Zone thing is getting out of hand, and I am really am frustrated with myself for not being able to keep it in check. Bagels, cereal and pasta terrify me. I’m afraid to put any kind of cheat in my mouth, much less a sweet. I agonize over everything I can’t measure (like when I go out for dinner). And I’m CONSTANTLY checking myself out in the mirror – for what? It’s taking over every thought; every meal and snack. Journaling my food intake has become an obsession, not a healthy tracking tool. Help.”

Kelly has always been a very healthy eater, with a strong self-image. She has never been one to starve herself, crash diet, or obsess about appearance. Yet after spending just a few weeks working the balanced and sensible principles of the Zone diet, Kelly found herself trapped in an unhealthy cycle—with what some might refer to as “disordered behavior” related to food. The Zone was no longer a healthy dietary lifestyle, but a set of self-imposed rules that somehow became associated with serious (if vague) consequences if not followed.

Her experience mirrored my own. When I first started with CrossFit and the Zone in December 2007, I enjoyed the precision of weighing, measuring, and tracking my intake. There was no guessing or estimating; the plan was well outlined and easy to follow. And I saw positive results quickly. My energy was better, my workouts were strong and I was continuing to build muscle. But unlike Kelly, I do have a history of unhealthy eating behaviors, and those behaviors began to rear their ugly head just a few weeks into my Zone experience. Slowly, my brain began to take the healthy activities associated with the Zone diet and twist them back into my prior disordered behaviors. I stopped eating anything unless I could measure it. I spent hours on FitDay (a free online diet and fitness journal), plugging in different food choices to arrive at the perfect balance of ratios. I began to obsess over my body composition, spending far too much time in the mirror. Food began to rule my life, and before I knew it, what had started as Zone had morphed into a Zone-inspired eating disorder.



I've seen this very scenario unfold with more than a few women. It's a phenomenon I call "Zone Gone Bad." Something that starts off as healthy and balanced slides into dangerous territory, where diet defines you, food is the enemy and self-worth comes straight out of the mirror. How does this happen, why does it happen, and what can other CrossFitters stuck in this pattern do to break out of it?

Beware the "Some is Good, More is Better" Syndrome

From personal experience, I don't know a single woman who has not, at one time or another, had body image concerns, or at least flirted with harmful eating habits. Most likely, these habits were born out of an inherently healthy desire to feel and look better—to become more "fit." Some women just go about approaching this fitness quest in an unhealthy way: eating too little and training too much.

CrossFit, in particular, is going to appeal to the women looking to reconnect with healthy fitness and dietary practices. CrossFit promotes a functional, balanced, wholesome approach to fitness, focused on performance instead of appearance. It is the polar opposite of other fitness programs, geared around six-pack abs or losing three dress sizes. Those programs do nothing but feed a woman's unhealthy behavior: hours on the treadmill and starving in the name of "skinny." Often, women who are trying to break those unhealthy patterns are drawn to CrossFit in an effort to achieve the same end (feeling better and looking good) via a healthier mechanism.

In addition, I suspect that CrossFit tends to attract "Type A" perfectionist personalities. Those of us who fit the bill enjoy the strict structure of the workouts, the attention to perfect form, the weighing, the timing, the counting, and the tracking of statistics and results. The dedication and passion the program inspires naturally encourages us to apply the same principles to our eating habits, since we know about the importance of diet to achieving training and fitness goals. So we read, research, and practice what we think to be the very best dietary principles. The phenomenal results that the Zone has produced for CrossFitters cinches the deal.

Unfortunately, past ingrained, unhealthy behaviors can rise again when a Type A and/or eating-disordered woman starts CrossFit and the Zone. First, our personalities and old habits tend to drive us in one general

direction: *if some is good, more is better.* How many new CrossFitters have you seen come into the program in a sensible fashion, following the main website, scaling to their abilities, taking rest days... but quickly venturing into overtrained (or worse, injured) territory? I hear about it all the time in my conversations with new CrossFit women. We think, "if one WOD a day is good, then maybe two would get us more fit. If three rounds is good, then five is stronger work."

For many of us, whether we have a history with "real" eating disorders or simply have had issues with food, diet is a sensitive subject.

What's happening here is that our old history of unhealthy habits is overriding the new, healthy CrossFit habits. Despite the fact that CrossFit is about becoming functionally fit (which has *nothing* to do with how your stomach looks), the sneaky unhealthy part of your brain may tell you to spend another 15 minutes on the rower and burn a few extra calories. And it certainly wants to tell you that you shouldn't be eating quite that much food.

These ingrained impulses can be even more compelling when we start venturing into a new diet. For many of us, whether we have a history with "real" eating disorders or simply have had issues with food, diet is a sensitive subject. Old habits are hard to forget, and some of those habits may still play a part in our diets today.

Over-Analyzing Almonds and Eating Interventions

At my worst, I had a lot of rules around my food. Jelly and mustard were okay, because they had no fat, so I covered everything in one or the other. (Egg whites went with jelly, carrots went with mustard.) I avoided eating in front of other people, and when I had to, I would eat everything with a fork and knife—even things like bagels and apples—because you can hide how little you're eating if you cut everything up. I knew the caloric content of every single food I ate, and always kept a detailed mental tally of calories consumed and calories burned. My behavior

was certainly “disordered,” even if I never quite ventured into a clinical category.

When many women like me (the old me, that is) start to Zone, the practice feels familiar and comfortable. The “rules” of the Zone may be easy to follow, because they aren’t that far off from the self-imposed restrictions of your past behaviors. Weighing, measuring and tracking come second nature to you, both as a product of your CrossFitting (isn’t that what we do with every workout?) and as the result of your past eating habits. But in this instance, you assure yourself, these rules are followed in the name of HEALTH. You get to apply the same stringent behaviors to your diet—but this time, it’s actually good for you, as the Zone is designed for optimal weight, energy, and fitness.

But remember: Some of us have a *long* history of unhealthy eating habits lingering in our brains, and it may be hard to shove them aside when we first start to Zone. So while your focus may be laser-sharp at first—weighing, measuring, and eating exactly as much as you should be—it’s easy to allow those past behaviors to

creep into your daily Zone-related tasks. Your brain may start to twist the counting and tracking, and the Zone may begin to make you feel the way you used to feel, back when food was the enemy.

In my case, it started with the almonds. I was counting almonds during every snack; I would eat exactly 18. And then one day, I decided to eat only 15. Because if 18 was good, then if I cut back just a tiny bit, I could probably lean-out just a little quicker. Logically, I knew this not to be true, but my brain was trying to push these new habits into those old, sick (yet comfortable) behaviors. In my brain, more (in this case, more restriction) was better. So I dropped to 15 almonds at a time. Then 12. And then I started wondering what would happen if I cut back on other things I was eating. I spent hours on FitDay plugging in different foods to see where I could land my calories. If I arrived at 1,452 calories for the day, I would think that 1,400 was a much nicer number—so I’d skip a portion of my last meal. I don’t know when or how the switch got flipped, but before I knew it, I had dropped muscle, my performance was suffering and I simply could not break the cycle of this Zone Gone Bad.



Friends and family noticed, too. I became more withdrawn, not wanting to eat in front of anyone else in case they noticed my strange food behaviors. I was on my laptop before and after every meal, plugging away at my stats. And I spent an ungodly amount of time in front of the mirror, checking out my abs, my legs, my arms, looking for miniscule body changes. But when my friends would express concern, I was able to fall back on the Zone. “No, it’s fine—this is all part of the Zone. The Zone is healthy. It’s supposed to make me a better CrossFitter.”

One night, after watching me analyze every almond out of the jar and estimating whether it was “medium” or “large,” my husband Scott held a one-man food intervention. He confronted me with how much time I was spending on my diet, how food had become a barrier to social interaction and how I was irritable and stressed all the time. And he was worried about me, because he was pretty sure that this *wasn’t* how the Zone was supposed to work... despite what I’d been telling him.

At that point, I had become so exhausted with the rigidity of my diet that I confessed all, sharing with him how much time and energy I was *actually* spending on food. It was worse than he had imagined, probably because I’d had years of practice hiding my messed-up behaviors from others. He didn’t know about the calorie cutting, or the FitDay fanaticism, or how often I flat-out lied about what I was eating or how much I was eating. (This was well before I started keeping a CrossFit Board training log and definitely pre-blog. I was keeping my food issues as quiet as possible in those days.) Once I confessed, I immediately felt better. But I had no idea how to move forward.

Scott and I talked about how I could stop the madness that had become my current diet and still work towards improved health and fitness. The idea of backing off what I was calling “the Zone” (and what he was calling “two steps away from an eating disorder”) was terrifying, but I was exhausted mentally and physically, and he was determined to help me break the cycle.

The 5-Step Plan to Get Back in the Right Zone

So, if you find yourself stuck in a Zone Gone Bad, what can you do to come back towards good health, without abandoning a diet plan altogether? Here’s what worked for me:



Step 1: Stop weighing, measuring and counting.

Right now, just stop. Not necessarily forever—but for a week or two, until you get yourself in check. Chances are, you’ve been Zoning for long enough that you know how much food you need to eat to meet your prescribed blocks. So start eyeballing it. No counting almonds, no measuring broccoli. Just prepare your food, and eat.

Step 2: Make sure you keep your diet clean.

Now is not the time to start making bad food choices; that will only wreak more mental havoc. You’ll feel terrible, you’ll gain weight and your performance will suffer, and you’ll end up blaming the abandonment of Zone principles instead of the pizza and ice cream. Follow the CrossFit prescription of “meat and vegetables, nuts and seeds, some fruit, little starch, and no sugar” and avoid too many cheat meals.

Step 3: Get out of the mirror and off the scale.

Impose a moratorium on weighing yourself for at least two weeks, and don’t allow yourself to stand in front of the mirror, turning, pinching and analyzing. Just let it go. Of course, you were spending an awful lot of time in front of the mirror, scrutinizing your physical appearance—so what should you do with all that extra energy? Take it to the gym.

Step 4: Get serious about measuring and tracking your workouts.

Keep a detailed log of how much sleep you are getting, the workouts you perform, your times and weights and results, how you felt and how you compared to a prior workout. Look for progress here, in the gym, where it matters. Treat every shaved second, every added pound on the bar, as a victory. And think about how those victories are possible because you are fueling yourself with all that good, healthy food.

Step 5: Repeat the cycle as you improve.

If you focus on performance, you’ll want to make sure you are eating for performance. And if your performance continues to improve—if you are getting stronger and faster—then your body WILL fall into line. It HAS TO. And those body composition changes will help to encourage you to work harder, eat more, and get stronger.

In my case, I completely bailed on the Zone and simply started eating Paleo. I also changed my focus to a strength-based program, and began to eat a lot more than I was used to. I forced myself to gain weight—even if it wasn’t all “clean” weight—to remind myself that I am

NOT my six pack and to see what, if anything, the extra pounds did for my training. Not surprisingly, I quickly began to feel better. I had more energy, I was training harder, and most importantly, I was able to enjoy my food again. I saw it for what it was—fuel for my growing muscles—and spent all the extra time I used to spend on FitDay reading up on new training principles. I’m still eating Paleo, and I’m still not Zoning, but every once in a while I log my intake to make sure I’m still on track. So far, so good—and I have the training stats to prove it.

If you find yourself in a Zone Gone Bad, cut yourself some slack. You may be trying to retrain your brain to forget about years of unhealthy behaviors in favor of new, healthy habits. It’s going to take time, and dedication, and maybe more than a few slips before you start permanently heading in the right direction. The Zone diet can be a valuable tool in your CrossFit arsenal, but it’s not for everyone. In the end, the only thing that matters is that you are moving towards improved health and fitness—both physically and mentally.

As for my sister, she’s still Zoning, but has eased up on the constant weighing and measuring. She has also taken some CrossFit classes at a local affiliate in an effort to get her focused back on training. I saw her this weekend for the first time in a few months—she looked great, and said she’s never felt better. And neither of us counted any almonds, all weekend long.



About the Author

Melissa Byers is a CrossFit Level I Trainer and Certified Kettlebell Instructor from Tilton, NH. She is currently in the process of affiliating, and she opened CrossFit 603 in March. You can read more about her CrossFit adventures on her blog, [Byers Gets Diesel](#). Melissa still puts jelly on her eggs, even though it’s not technically Paleo.



CrossFit's Right on Target

Newfound fitness helps a Practical Shooter move up in his sport

Dave Re



In September of 2007, I completed a major competitive goal. [The United States Practical Shooting Association](#) awarded me the highest classification they offer: Grand Master. Attaining GM status was a major milestone, but I knew that I was a long way from being able to consistently win against the best. Beyond a few local wins here and there, I'd never won a major match—and it gnawed at me. I was really no more than just a big fish in a small pond—and I literally mean a big fish. At 212 pounds, I was simply too slow to get off enough shots in a game that scored on quality and quantity. But I had hope that I could turn around that weakness in my game due to something I'd started a month earlier: CrossFit.

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Most people might not think that fitness would have anything to do with accurately aiming and firing a handgun, but then they probably don't know anything about the sport of Practical Shooting. Originally developed by Marine Lt. Colonel Jeff Cooper, a World War II and Korean War veteran considered to be one of the 20th century's foremost experts on the use and history of small arms, Practical Shooting started as a way to give shooters a venue on which to practice and develop self-defense skills. Today, it has evolved into the "X Game" of the shooting sports—a contest of speed, accuracy, and power.



With the clock running, we shoot full-power handguns at cardboard silhouette targets or falling steel plates 50-plus yards away. Scoring boils down to "points per second"—he who gets the most, wins. Matches are comprised of several stages, or "scenarios." We may shoot up to 36 stages over a 4- or 5-day match, although the typical local match will be a one-day, 8-hour match of four to six stages. A stage might involve from one to 32 shots fired from one or more positions, on targets that can appear, disappear, or move in various ways. The stage will usually involve drawing the gun from a holster, and can require reloading the gun one or more times. Missing a target, or shooting what is referred to as a "no shoot" target, incurs a scoring penalty. We never shoot the same stage twice, although we do have some benchmark stages (called "classifiers") that are used to assign classifications (sound familiar?). Some variants of the game involve shooting rifles and shotguns. (For more information, check <http://re-gun.blogspot.com/search/label/Video>).

Many competition shooters are law enforcement officers or military tactical operators, but most aren't. I manage a software development group for Sun Microsystems and am a semi-professional photographer on the side. I grew up fascinated with the gun collection of my grandfather, a competitive trap shooter in the 50s, 60s, and 70s, then found I had some natural talent while getting a Boy Scout shooting merit badge. I legally purchased a handgun at age 21, and went right down to my first USPSA match.

While I avoid discussing tactical issues, I think cops and soldiers will find that, when it comes to the mechanics of shooting and the physical challenges associated with operating a firearm at high speed in a stressful situation, our spheres of operation have quite a bit of overlap. Shooting is shooting. And whether you do it for sport or for life-and-death, I discovered that CrossFit can help you do it better.

The Need for Strength and Speed

Due to the way the 2007 match calendar worked out, my competition season was over for the year by mid-summer. While finishing my work on attaining my GM classification, I took a hard look at my game, as I do every year in the off-season, identifying weaknesses and solutions to them. One thing in particular stood out glaringly. I was extremely slow on my feet, a major disadvantage when you're playing a game of speed against guys 15 years younger than you are.



Most high-level competitors understand that the best way to get better is to find your weaknesses, and attack them until they become strengths. I got confirmation that my lack of physical speed was a major impediment to meeting my other major goals from other top shooters who had watched my shooting. "You're too slow and fat" was a predictable, recurring theme. At the time, I weighed in at 212 pounds and 22% body fat, and what physical activity I got through shooting was about the limit of what could be called "working out" for me.

Granted, you don't necessarily need to be Superman to do well in our sport. Many of my competitors will quickly point to examples of extremely successful shooters who've been obviously out of shape. If 10-time champion Rob Leatham, the most dominant practical shooter in history—who jokingly refers to himself as "a fat old guy"—can win without being in shape, why can't they? When it comes down to it, it's a shooting game, and being able to drive the pistol quickly and precisely is paramount. We have a saying that is all too true: you cannot miss fast enough to win. If you can't shoot, the rest has little bearing on the outcome. Leatham can SHOOT, and he wins in spite of his physical disadvantage.



But for those whose shooting is merely very good, and not at Leatham's level, being fit would certainly confer advantages. The need for foot speed is obvious, but there are other places that speed comes into play. Practical Shooters are often required to get into and out of awkward positions, shooting under low obstacles, or leaning hard around walls or barriers. Getting into these kinds of positions quickly requires speed, agility, coordination, accuracy and balance, and shooting from them requires strength for a solid shooting platform. Getting out of them and accelerating away adds the additional requirement of power. Shooting on the move quickly and accurately over uneven ground requires a similar physical skill set. Bottom line: General physical fitness can have a profound impact on the shooter's ability to apply shooting-specific skills.



Another big issue in training is recoil management, which often confuses the shooter. We shooters would like this to be a strength issue, and it is, but in a counterintuitive fashion. Recoil management in a proper shooting platform starts from the feet, and involves the shooter's whole stance and grip. Proper use of body mechanics allows the shooter to manage the gun's movements in the most efficient way possible. Where most folks get into trouble is in trying to dominate recoil through sheer muscular effort. This leads to a gross over-tensioning of the arms and shoulders, ruins trigger control and fluidity of movement in the whole body, and actually enhances the gun's ability to move the shooter under recoil.

On top of raw foot speed, set-up stability, and recoil management, good practical shooters must have numerous sport-specific shooting skills. I'm talking about things like trigger control and manipulation, drawing from a holster, reloading the gun at high speed, providing a solid base for the upper body while grounded in awkward positions, and maintaining a strong "triangle" that will support the pistol for an extended period of time without losing stability.

Finally, a day on the practical shooting range involves several short, intense bursts of activity, interspersed with longish periods of helping to prepare the stages in between shooters, including bending over to lift steel targets. Obviously, all of that is done in whatever weather Mother Nature decides to bless us with that day – heat, cold, wind, rain, or snow. Being on your feet, remaining upright in the weather, exacts a surprising toll on the body and destroys your mechanics. It becomes hard to stay focused later in the day, as the body simply runs out of energy. You begin to feel sluggish. Your shooting performance can suffer horribly.

I know. It was happening to me.



CrossFit Meshes Well with the Anaerobic Demands

Serendipity led me to CrossFit Central in Austin, Texas, in August 2007, a month before I was honored as a Grand Master. The changes were almost immediate.

In a CrossFit story that will resemble the successes that so many other people have had, I dropped 30 pounds and got down to 10% body fat in a few months, improved my eating dramatically, and just flat-out felt better. I have a "before/during/after" picture on my blog – as you can see, a big change, but nothing unexpected for those experienced in how CrossFit can change your life.

At the 2008 U.S. Nationals, although I finished 14 places worse in '08 (39th) vs '07 (25th) mainly due to a very poor first day in pouring rain, I placed quite well in several other major matches (two 5ths, 7th, 10th, 11th) and won a total of three stages at two of them—my first major match stage wins! My wins at locals became more consistent, too.

What happened? The stamina, strength, flexibility, power, speed, coordination, agility, and balance that I got from CrossFit were put to use immediately. Sprint speed is the most obvious outward benefit of CrossFit for the practical shooter— I'm noticeably faster on foot, though I'm still learning how to incorporate and use that newfound ability. And I've found there are many more subtle benefits. CrossFit's effect on my shooting accuracy has been dramatic. It certainly provides a solid foundation upon which to place one's shooting skills.

In executing the sport specific skills, it greatly benefits the shooter to have strong anaerobic metabolic pathways, as a shooter's aerobic pathway never comes into play during the course of shooting a given stage. After reading the October 2002 CrossFit Journal article entitled "What is Fitness?", it's easy to almost believe that CrossFit was formulated specifically with the sport of Practical Shooting in mind.

It may not seem intuitively obvious that CrossFit will directly enhance the shooter's ability to execute these fine motor skills under pressure. Certainly, doing CrossFit alone will not suddenly supply you with a sub-one-second reload on demand, or magically give you enhanced trigger control to execute tight shots on long range targets. Executing complex fine motor skills

subconsciously under pressure results from many, many repetitions of those skills in practice. Consider this, though: The vast majority of the stages we shoot are over in less than 30 seconds. They may involve sprinting short distances, sometimes 30-50 yards, throughout the stage. So the more that the physical demands of the stage tax your fitness abilities, the less precise your fine motor abilities become.

It's quite common to see shooters out of breath after a short physical exertion during a stage— even those who engage in lots of “long slow distance” fitness activities and appear to be quite fit. We execute stages solely utilizing the anaerobic metabolic pathways, and weakness here leaves you breathing hard mid-stage, with a high heart rate. This is not an optimal condition under which to attempt fast, accurate fine motor execution.

The conclusion, given these circumstances, is quite clear: Improve the shooter's anaerobic capacity, and you enhance the shooter's ability to execute complex skills under pressure during a very physical performance.

Another point where CrossFit comes in handy is an increase in general stamina, which greatly improves the shooter's ability to simply stay upright throughout the day and conserves your available energy. I see a lot of shooters “dropping out” in the heat; the CrossFit practice of working out in open garage-like settings conditions the shooter to the weather. When combined with proper nutrition and hydration (a good rule of thumb is to drink until you reach one-urination-per-hour pace; and grazing on Zone balanced snacks all day long has helped me maintain energy levels without bloating), it has the effect of inoculating them to the stresses of heat, humidity, and intense sun. I have only found one downside in this regard: a lower body fat percentage equates to less onboard insulation for cold environments, requiring warmer dress!

In addition to CrossFit workouts, I do find some benefit in adding exercise elements specifically targeted at my sport. The class I participate in at CrossFit Central meets three times per week. On the days in between, I engage in CrossFit-style workouts, supplemented with work on the agility ladder, medicine ball exercise, short interval sprinting, and other activities that resemble the specific physical challenges of the sport. The agility ladder further enhances balance, coordination, agility, accuracy,

and foot speed. For practical shooting, using a medicine ball for rotation work improves the shooter's ability to quickly and accurately move the gun between targets. This includes various rotational throws against a wall and seated “core” work like Russian Twists. The shooter will also benefit from various sprint drills, like suicides, that require rapid acceleration and deceleration, and include changes of direction and/or stopping accurately in specific locations. I will sometimes do sprint drills with a light dumbbell acting as a surrogate for my handgun, setting up in a shooting platform on each end of the sprint.

I also use CrossFit-style exercises in my shooting practices to emphasize performing under physical pressure. A simple shooting drill becomes quite a bit more difficult when you do 10 or so burpees immediately before the drill!

I've been involved with Practical Shooting almost half my life at this point. Technically, I ought to be past my prime. Instead, with my ever-better CrossFit fitness, I'm looking forward to my greatest achievements ever in the 2009 season.

Find more information on Practical Shooting at the [USPSA website](#), and search for “practical shooting” or “USPSA” on YouTube .

All images courtesy of [Peter Tsai Photography](#)



Dave Re began his shooting career in 1993, and has a total of 10 years experience with competitive shooting sports. In late August, 2007, he started training at CrossFit Central in Austin, Texas, and has used CrossFit as his primary fitness program since that time. About the same time, Dave hung up his shingle and began teaching practical shooting to motivated students in the U.S. (DR Performance, Performance Shooting instruction and coaching; dave@drperformanceshooting.com . He has been happily married for 12 years, and is owned by three miniature dachshunds and a horse.

Pulling a Sub-7 minute 2k Row —without Rowing?

In the best lab-rat tradition, an erg-shy CrossFitter/lifter puts a scare into sport-specific stars.

EvaClaire "EC" Synkowski



Apparently, I was built to row. I wish someone had told me that in high school, when I was running around bent over field hockey sticks that were inevitably too short for my 6-foot frame. But it was not until a 2007 CrossFit seminar, five years after graduate school, when a fellow trainer was aghast to discover my rowing "experience" was limited to a single 5k pull at CrossFit Boston (CFB). He encouraged me to go to the infamous Concept 2 "Crash-B" race in Boston that following February, an indoor 2,000m race on Concept 2 ergometers ("ergs") that attracts international collegiate and Olympic athletes. I said I'd do it, but to be honest, the event slipped my mind after that seminar.

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I was reminded a few months later when Ewen Roth, a CrossFitter out of the Black Box in NYC, asked me if any CFB members were competing a few weeks prior to competition. At that time, I had yet to pull a 2k. Like all CrossFitters sizing up an untested WOD, I thought it didn't sound "that bad" and I decided to throw my hat into the ring. Since it was so close to the actual event, there was no preparation, save for a 2k pull to determine my approximate time to register for the event.

At my first Crash-B event in 2008, I pulled a 7:11 (a 15-second PR from my time two weeks prior) and finished 24th out of 222 women. That's when I learned that I had a competitive row time, and decided that I wanted to pull a sub-7 minute 2k at the 2009 event. But as the days passed since the 2008 race, this quickly became a backseat to improving my Olympic lifts and times in the benchmark WODs.

When registration opened for this year's event, I quickly remembered how little row-specific training I'd done over the last year. Nevertheless, I still wanted to give a sub-7 2k a shot and registered. Plus, some other CrossFit Bostonians decided to compete and we were to have a post-race social. So, the event would be "fun." If you have not rowed a 2k, I can assure you, however, the pull itself is not fun.

2008 Strategy: Zero Prep, Good Form, and Save it for the Finish

If my preparation for the 2008 event was minimal, my preparation for the 2009 event was non-existent. Not only had I not pulled a 2k since the 2008 Crash-B, but I had not pulled a single distance for max effort on the rower the entire year! Sure, I had rowed in various WODs (e.g. Jackie), but never a max 500m, 1000m, 5k, etc. I'm guessing the memory of discomfort from the 2008 event was enough that I have a subconscious aversion to the erg. And to be honest, I have so many other "goats" to work on that I consider rowing a strength, relative to, say, bodyweight metcons or gymnastics.

My workouts over the last year were a mix of my own and others' programming: heavy on the Olympic and slow lifts 3-to-4 times a week, with CrossFit WODs 1-to-3 times a week. My "strategy" for this year was that I was stronger than last year; I just couldn't gas. "Gassing," however, was a real possibility as I had recently wrapped up a Bulgarian (high percentage relative to 1 RM, but low volume) Olympic lifting cycle from Catalyst Athletics, with CrossFit WODs dropping to 1-to-2 times a week. Needless to say, I was confident that the combination of sound mechanics in hip extension (i.e., almost every movement in CrossFit and the Olympic lifts) and my increased strength would be enough.



Race Strategy for the Untrained

We asked C2 to comment on EC's performance. Here's some insight from Oar Specialist Chris Wilson, a long-time rowing coach.

Rowing competitors in training for spring or summer 2000m races on the water take many different approaches to their Crash-B preparations. Some focused on using the Crash-B event as a marker in a structured training program, an opportunity to reach for a PR for 2000m on the machine, while many others competed at the event for the experience of performing under pressure at a big time indoor race.

If you are an on-water competitor, why would you want to race over 2000m at the world indoor rowing championships and not be fully prepared for a personal best? Because there can only be so many tapers and peaks in a training program, and for these rowing athletes, the Crash-B result is not the ultimate goal. The majority of rowing athletes who competed in Boston are ultimately reaching for a league, regional or national championship that will be held on the water in May, June, or August. These are performance opportunities that will allow their teams' collective work for the year to reach a pinnacle, and these races measure boat speed.

In general, rowing training is categorized into six levels of intensity, and a program will be periodized to prepare an athlete for improved performances on the machine and ultimately on the water. Target goals are set and training plans are built by working backwards on a calendar from championship event dates.

What did Eva Claire have in common with many of the athletes who raced in Boston? She allowed her competitive instincts to get swept up in the event, and she did not stick to a sound race plan that reflected what she was capable of doing on the machine on that day.

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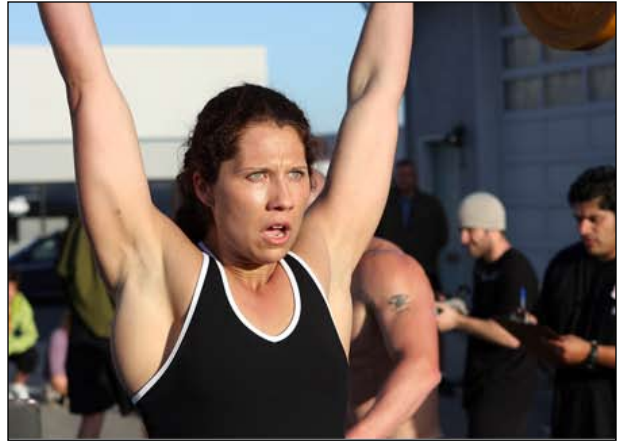
Similar to last year, my race time was in the late afternoon. Seeing that it was too late for any last-minute preparation, I spent most of the day at brunch and shopping until a couple of hours before race time. I showed up at the arena about 45 minutes prior to the event, registered, and linked up with fellow CrossFitters, including Lisa Lugo, CrossFit Affiliate Director. She told me how competitive my heat was: There were members from the Chinese Olympic Team in my race line! It was at this point I began questioning my strategy.

About 20 minutes from the race start, it was time to warm up. Each athlete is permitted to bring a "coxswain" or coach to the race floor with them. Thankfully, I had found Jon Gilson and dragged him onto the floor. Jon, owner of [Again Faster](#) and head trainer at CrossFit seminars, is a more-than-competent coach for proper pulling mechanics. I wanted him to help keep my form as true to sumo deadlift high pull mechanics as fatigue would allow. I did some dynamic mobility, about 400m on an erg, and a few sets of air squats (I was definitely the only one doing those!). I told Jon that I wanted sub-7, so I thought I'd shoot for 1:44/500m splits. He thought that was a little aggressive and suggested 1:45-1:46 splits, and if possible, go for broke at the end. I remembered the lack of rowing I had done that past year, decided Jon's advice was sound and agreed. We headed over to the race line.

Whether someone is running a marathon or a 5km race, or preparing for her first or final 2000m piece of the season, it is critical to run or row your own race. There will always be energy to draw from at these events, but if your own adrenalin and the machines spinning around you take you to a place and pace you have never been before, get ready to fly and die.

Despite every CrossFitter's ability to push through pain, accumulating lactate in the first 1000m of a 2000m piece on the erg will take any one down who goes out too hard. There is no shame in going out too hard, but it is a lesson the best competitors should only learn once.

What is a sound strategy for a 2000m piece on the erg? Target pace +1.5-to-2 seconds for the first 500m, target pace +1 second for the second 500m, pace for the third 500m, and GO for the last 500m.



We've all been there in a CrossFit WOD: I thought about just letting go of the handle and stopping. Thankfully, I remembered the 10-plus CFB members in the stands yelling and decided I had to, at least, finish.



2009 Strategy: Go for Broke

I don't remember the 2008 2k to be nearly as uncomfortable as the 2009 event. Almost from the onset, this year was a struggle.

I came out of the gate hard with the plan to settle into a row pace 10 strokes in, but I could not find an even pace—jumping between 1:42-1:48 split times. I knew Jon was concerned about me gassing and encouraged me to slow down the splits, but I struggled to find a steady pace. From there, it just got worse. I was leading my heat, but my legs began to feel so heavy—and even though I thought I was pushing harder, the split times drifted to 1:45 and above. I distinctly remember how surprised I was when I saw the countdown with 1200 meters on my monitor. I couldn't believe how uncomfortable I was with more than halfway to go. We've all been there in a CrossFit WOD: I thought about just letting go of the handle and stopping. Thankfully, I remembered the 10-plus CFB members in the stands yelling and decided I had to, at least, finish.

The second 1000m were brutal. I could tell my form was fading as Jon was giving me tips—"chest up," "fast hands"—with almost every stroke. With about 800m to go, I lost my lead in the heat and dropped off over the last 500m. Jon was encouraging me to push harder, and I thought I was—but was so defeated seeing 1:55 split times on the monitor. I wanted to catch the woman who overtook my lead, but her lead kept increasing. I was surprised how little I had left with 100m and had to hold on just to finish. I remember Jon counting the last couple of pulls and I didn't even see my time when I finished. I knew, however, my split times on the home stretch were not good enough for a sub-7. I immediately pointed to my feet, strapped into the erg, repeating "help" until Jon undid the straps and then rolled onto the floor. My legs and lungs were burning, but I don't need to describe that feeling. We've all been there.

Jon had me at 7:03, but I was skeptical based on my final fade. When I found out my actual time after the results were finally posted, I was pretty bummed out—shocked, in fact: 7:15. This was four seconds slower than my time in 2008 and placed me 36th out of 246 women.

2010: I'll be Back

Not bettering my 2008 time was rather disappointing, but I have since decided that it is relatively unrealistic to think that one could improve drastically on



a competitive time in an event without any specific training. And, looking on the bright side, I figure my time was pretty good. After all, my heat was littered with Olympic and collegiate rowers—most of whom had likely put in significantly more rowing than I had. Without making too many excuses, I also realized that race day was my fourth workout day in a row and also fell at the end of a brutal two travel weeks, flying to a different city on eight of the 14 days prior. Poor planning, perhaps, but I was competing in the event for fun. I am also somewhat comforted that I was not “fresh” for the event. That is, between results in 2008 and 2009, I have a 7:15 2k in the bag without any specific training. This reaffirms three things: 1. The efficacy of CrossFit training as a general physical preparedness program; 2. The potency of the WODs’ hip-driven functional movements as a transfer to all sport mechanics; and 3. The metabolic conditioning from CrossFit provides an above average ready-state to also be able to compete in a rather untested event.

Therefore, I’ve got my eyes on a sub-7 for 2010. And I’m willing to train for it this time.

My plan: I’m not giving up the Oly lifts or CrossFit, which I love and provide a good base. I will incorporate some rowing-specific training starting a few months out from

the 2010 event, when it will become my focal point. I am not planning on becoming “a rower” to achieve my goal; while rowing is fun, it’s too monotonous to train all the time—AND it’s painful! That’s why I didn’t specifically train for it in 2009. I am doing the event for fun. However, because I’m so close to a sub-7, I am willing to put in some time—within reason—to achieve this goal. That’s a pretty good benchmark for women, and I think I actually have a shot!



About the Author

Eva Claire “EC” Synkowski is an assistant instructor at CrossFit Boston and a head trainer at CrossFit Level I certifications. Her athletic ability, dedication, and exact attention to mechanics is legendary among the locals and has given her the ability to lift loads beyond the level of most female athletes. She has extensive knowledge of proper dietary practices and holds CrossFit Level II, Olympic Weightlifting, Gymnastics, and Barbell certifications. She received her B.S. in Biological Resource Engineering from the University of Maryland at College Park in 2002, graduating summa cum laude, and received her M.S. in Natural Resource Sciences there in 2004. Contact EC at ecsynkowski@gmail.com.



The CrossFit Risk Retention Group Insurance by and for the CrossFit Community

Russell Berger with Lisbeth Darsh and Lynne Pitts



Imagine you have the best, most well-equipped CrossFit affiliate on the face of the Earth. Gleaming Olympic bars, dedicated platforms, all the climbing ropes and pull-up bars and bumper plates anyone could ever need or want. There are hundreds of people dying to join your affiliate, but you'd be a fool to open your doors and let them in. Why? Because if they hurt themselves and sue you, the result will bankrupt you. You will lose everything and your life's work will be destroyed. Because no standard insurance company will provide the coverage and defense a CrossFit affiliate needs.

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But wait: Doesn't CrossFit already require insurance prior to an affiliate opening its doors, and doesn't every sensible personal trainer obtain liability insurance? Well, sure. But it turns out that's not really enough. CrossFit is so different from every other kind of fitness-related entity that our insurance needs are different too. What on earth do we do now? Well, in the case of CrossFit, we form a "Risk Retention Group."

What the Heck is an RRG?

A Risk Retention Group is a form of self-insurance. Unlike a traditional insurance company, an RRG is formed and owned by its policyholders, and covers specific liabilities and actions, as defined by the RRG, which are most likely not covered by any insurance you're going to be able to get. As mysterious as that might sound, RRGs are common practice for law enforcement officers, doctors practicing emergency medicine, contractors, medical product manufacturers, and a variety of other professionals in high-risk industries.

The CF-RRG was designed to fill a dangerous chink in our armor, and in doing so it serves an even more foundational goal: defense of our reputation.

Like a traditional insurance company, the CrossFit Risk Retention Group (CF-RRG) will be capable of paying claims to its policyholders should the need arise, but, unlike traditional insurance, will do so by drawing funds from an entity called a "captive," because it only insures the risks of its owners. The captive, which is funded by the members of the RRG (and is really just a fancy word for a pot of money), is also then used to purchase additional insurance to protect against catastrophic claims (which as related to CrossFit, may be any cost above \$100,000) that might exceed the value of the captive while we are building our war chest.

The important part of all this insurance jargon is that CrossFit will form its own independent company. This company will not be owned by CFHQ; it will be owned by YOU—the community, our affiliates and trainers. The owners will participate in underwriting,

risk management, claims administration, and finance committees, all chaired and populated by people from our own community. We will have complete insight to and control of all facets of the RRG operations.

Benefits of The CrossFit RRG

Most CrossFit trainers and affiliates aren't covered as thoroughly as they think they are. Most liability insurance is geared towards physical accidents and your premises, not the claims of rhabdo and injury deemed to be caused by trainer decisions that could arise in our community. The CrossFit RRG will write its own policies, effectively eliminating these dangerous omissions and allowing CrossFit to appropriately insure and defend affiliates, trainers, and HQ against these specific, unique situations.

In addition to the specific coverage of the RRG for the non-standard claims, you will also be able to purchase your standard general liability insurance through the insurance broker that is administering the RRG, providing a comprehensive package of insurance through one source. Now you won't have to lie to get coverage. More and more companies insist you put "personal training" but NOT mention CrossFit on your application to be covered. They balk at covering "home-made equipment" (your lovingly crafted plyo boxes, paralettes, and the like). You will, with the CF-RRG, be able to be accurate and honest in your policy application. Never mind that most insurance company agents couldn't tell a squat clean from a dumbbell curl, they see CrossFit as a dangerous fad, and *if* they are willing to cover it, the premiums you will pay are going to be high enough to ease their fears.

If you find yourself in need of the RRG, you will find the lawyers assigned to your case are from the RRG, and they are CrossFitters—much more willing to and capable of defending you than a generic insurance company lawyer likely most interested in mitigating losses to the insurance company (read that as "very likely to settle at your expense").

The CF-RRG was designed to fill a dangerous chink in our armor, and in doing so it serves an even more foundational goal: defense of our reputation. Think of the CF-RRG as our war chest, providing the resources to protect our community, methodology, and the trainers and affiliates whose livelihood depends on CrossFit's success. It was also designed to guarantee that affiliates

and trainers will be able to obtain insurance, and that insurance won't be cancelled when the insurance company gets skittish about what it's read in the media about "the dangers of CrossFit."

Great. What Do I Do Now?

On the 1st of April, you'll see significant coverage of the RRG launch. On the main site, the affiliate blog, the message board, and here on the Journal page, you'll find a link to register for the RRG and make your initial contribution. Click that link!

The capital needed to start the CF-RRG must come from the owners of the company, which means the affiliates and trainers who wish to become policyholders. Initial capitalization of \$500,000 is required in order to legally establish the RRG . That means that we need \$1000 from participating affiliates, and \$200 from individual trainers. A \$250 "placeholder" deposit, followed by the remaining \$750 due by May 15th from all participating affiliates (trainers will need to make a single full-amount payment), will supply the funds for our initial investment. The "buy-in" is critical to the success of the entire program, and the CF-RRG simply can't exist without it. This initial buy-in, or capitalization, is in addition to premiums, which will be managed and controlled by the RRG—which is to say, by us. That means no guaranteed 10-12% increase every year, "just because." It means a careful analysis of risks and costs, with premiums set accordingly.

The CF-RRG will not exist to make money. The buy-in required for starting up the RRG is a personal investment in your security, and that of CrossFit. The investment not only supplies the RRG with the capital to function, but is in fact each affiliate or trainer purchasing a small percentage of the company.

The buy-in gives policyholders rights to shareholder meetings, and the right to vote for members on the board of directors. More importantly, the CF-RRG will offer re-reimbursement in the form of dividend checks in the event of a profit margin. If claims against CrossFit are low enough that there is an excess of money in the captive, that cash goes back to the policyholders. Does your current insurance company do that?

So What if I Don't Join?

Purchasing insurance from the RRG will be completely optional, and won't be required for affiliation. That

being said, the real risk comes from *not* taking part in this program.

Maybe you think you might join the RRG but you would rather wait until your current policy expires before you contribute, or maybe you are actually satisfied with your current insurer.

Keep in mind, if an affiliate or trainer does not join at the inception of the RRG, they can join at a later date but they must make capital contribution payment prior to the time we bind their insurance.

Regardless of the reason, let's consider the possible effects of not joining.

The CF-RRG is another branch of our community, and not supporting our community could have consequences for us all. Imagine for a moment the effects of a multi-million-dollar claim against CrossFit Inc. when the RRG had not quite met its operational quota. Not only would this threaten your own livelihood, but the success and reputation of our entire community.

Whatever the reasoning, we expect to see some affiliates who won't be interested in joining the CF-RRG. They are free to make this decision, and I believe they should be encouraged to do so. They will be singled out by the opportunists as unprotected and separated from the herd. As in the Makimba Mimms trial, they will be devoured in the courtroom, stuck between an indifferent insurance company and omissions and errors in their insurance policy. When the time comes, they will be as valuable to the CF-RRG as the affiliates who do support it. By serving as sacrificial lambs, they will demonstrate the importance of being inside the castle wall.

The CF-RRG represents our strength and initiative as a community, and will take aggressive action in the defense of our reputation. This line of defense will be formidable if we can properly fund it, and should help to discourage lawsuits against CrossFit entirely. If we are the target of a wave of legal battles, CrossFit will have the opportunity to defend itself and its trainers with a barrage of its own CrossFitters: medical professionals, expert witnesses, and seasoned lawyers. The CF-RRG is a win-win proposition. Affiliates and trainers will benefit immensely, but it cannot function without active participation and support from us all.

