

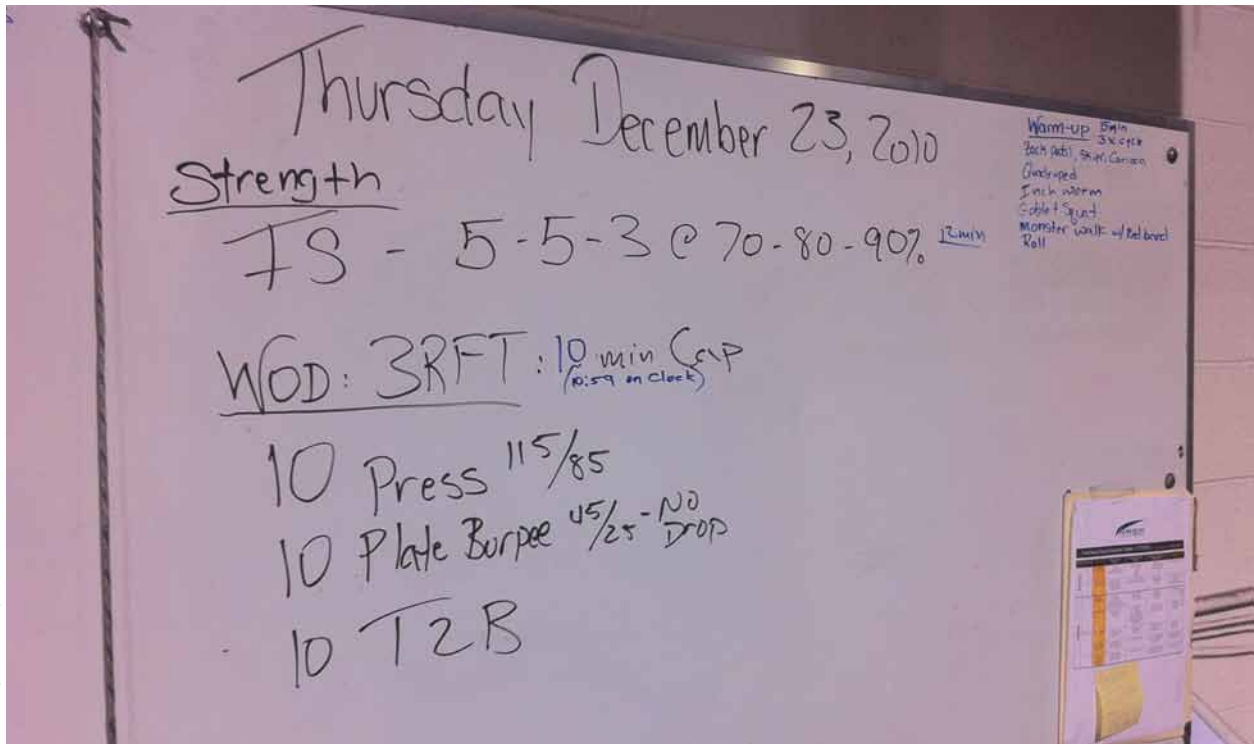
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

CrossFit Field Trip

After doing CrossFit for six months, Michael Melillo took time out of the holidays to visit affiliates near his parents' home. He encountered several differences but always found the same supportive community.

By Michael Melillo CrossFit Santa Clara

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When I realized I would be visiting family for the holidays this year, I was excited for a few reasons. It would be the first time I would get to spend Christmas with my family in four years since moving to California. It also would be the first time I would have the opportunity to check out some CrossFit affiliates in New England. I love working out at CrossFit Santa Clara because of the great trainers and amazing community, but I wanted to know how others places got down.

I remember watching the live stream of the CrossFit Games and hearing how often the announcers spoke the words “CrossFit New England,” whether in the affiliate competition, the women’s competition or the master’s competition. I told myself I needed to drop in at [CFNE](#) the next time I came home.

Because I had a few months from the time I booked my flight until I would be visiting, I had a lot of time to plan my drop-ins. Over the course of that time I was able to research all the affiliates in the Connecticut and Massachusetts areas and figure out which ones I thought would be best to visit. One thing that is so great about the CrossFit community is how easy it is to connect with affiliates. Obviously all affiliates have websites with their daily WODs posted, but social-media sites like Facebook and Twitter give athletes another means of communicating.

After doing my research and putting the data into a complex weighting algorithm based on location, trainer experience, drop-in fees, class schedule and how cool their T-shirts looked, I came away with my preliminary list of boxes to hit. In all honesty, the biggest take-away from this process was just how many options a CrossFitter has in New England. Living in California, I was used to the idea of having lots of affiliates nearby, but I didn’t know how much CrossFit had spread across the country.

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Phase 1: Connecticut

I grew up in New Haven, Conn.; my parents still live there. So my search for my first box started with the Connecticut listing of affiliates on the main site. I had about a week in Connecticut to get all my visits in, but it was the week of Christmas and I knew a lot of places would have limited workouts. So without further ado, the first box: [Elm City CrossFit](#).



Working on the deadlift at Elm City CrossFit.

I chose ECC because it was the closest box to my parents’ house—just 2.5 miles. It was the perfect location to bang out a workout in between last-minute Christmas errands. We try and squat twice a week at CrossFit Santa Clara, and I needed to get mine in. So 5-5-3 front squats was perfect.

ECC is a good example of a CrossFit box that makes the most of what it has. It’s organized so well it could support much larger classes without needing to expand. Like many CrossFit boxes, efficiency is what makes for a killer layout. I had a great workout with Vin Lindsley, Mike Eglinton and Tom Briggs. We all worked our way to 195 lb. on our last set of squats and ended up on the ground after the workout.

Three rounds for time of:

- 10 presses
- 10 plate burpees
- 10 toes to bar

The next day was Christmas Eve, and things were pretty quiet around the house, so I had a little extra time for travel. I decided to go to an affiliate that I remembered watching in the affiliate competition of the 2010 Games: [CrossFit Milford](#).

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I chose CrossFit Milford because it finished 54th in the affiliate competition at the 2010 Games and hosts seminars. I figured it had to be one of the top CrossFit locations in Connecticut. The WOD seemed like a fun one.

WTF

Two rounds for time of:

100 double-unders

50 overhead squats (I substituted hang power cleans because I had squatted a day earlier)

50 pull-ups

50 box jumps

50 sledgehammer swings on a tire



CrossFit Milford's collection of gear in Connecticut.



Colin Geraghty of CrossFit Milford.

CrossFit Milford is a huge place. I don't know exactly how many affiliates out there have more square footage than CrossFit Santa Clara, but I'd guess most don't. CrossFit Milford definitely does. It's an amazing facility. I would have loved to come in on a normal day when the place was full of people, but even with a small class, Colin Geraghty kept the energy level high.

Phase 2: Massachusetts

I had hoped to make it to three or four affiliates during my week in Connecticut, but Mother Nature threw a wrench into those plans with a blizzard that led most of the area affiliates to cancel classes. Because I had to drive to Massachusetts to visit my mother-in-law, I decided to leave Connecticut behind and head north.

The most anticipated drop-in I had of my trip was at CFNE. I was almost giddy and star-struck at the same time. I was so impressed with what the affiliate did at the 2010 Games that I began to cheer for CFNE athletes at subsequent

competitions: the CrossFit-USAW Open and the Rogue vs. Again Faster Throwdown in Tahoe. After watching some *CrossFit Journal* videos, I was impressed with everything CFNE co-owner Ben Bergeron said.

The box had great athletes and coaches and a great WOD.

Deception

Seven rounds for time of:

10 front squats

10 L-pull-ups

The facility is nice and big with locker rooms and amenities above and beyond the average box. Despite all the snow, a ton of people were at the gym, bringing a lot of energy to the place. I introduced myself to Ben when I arrived, took care of the waivers and headed to the locker room, where I saw HQ trainer Pat Sherwood. I warmed up a bit on the rower, and then Mel Ockerby led the class through the Burgener Warm-Up. Due to the sheer numbers of people, the workout was going to be done in two heats.

I don't know how many people are lucky enough to be surrounded by some of the top athletes and coaches in our sport when they do Fran for the first time, but I'd guess it doesn't happen very often.

We partnered up, gathered our weights and claimed some space on the pull-up bars. My partner was going first, and moments before the workout started, Mel shouted out, "You aren't doing Decepticon, you are doing Fran. Ready? 3-2-1 ... go!"

I had been doing CrossFit for about six months but had never done Fran. I had a few minutes to prepare while my partner flew through it. I'm sure most people will tell you they remember the first time they did Fran. Even Greg

Glassman remembers how he created the workout one day in his garage. You can add me to the list of people who will always remember their first.

From the moment I started, the encouragement was incredible, and as I went on it only increased. My partner was hovering around the puke bucket, so Ben counted my reps. A few stations in front of me, Pat was doing his set, and behind me Heather Bergeron was doing her set. As they finished, they gathered around me and screamed encouragement. I don't know how many people are lucky enough to be surrounded by some of the top athletes and coaches in our sport when they do Fran for the first time, but I'd guess it doesn't happen very often.

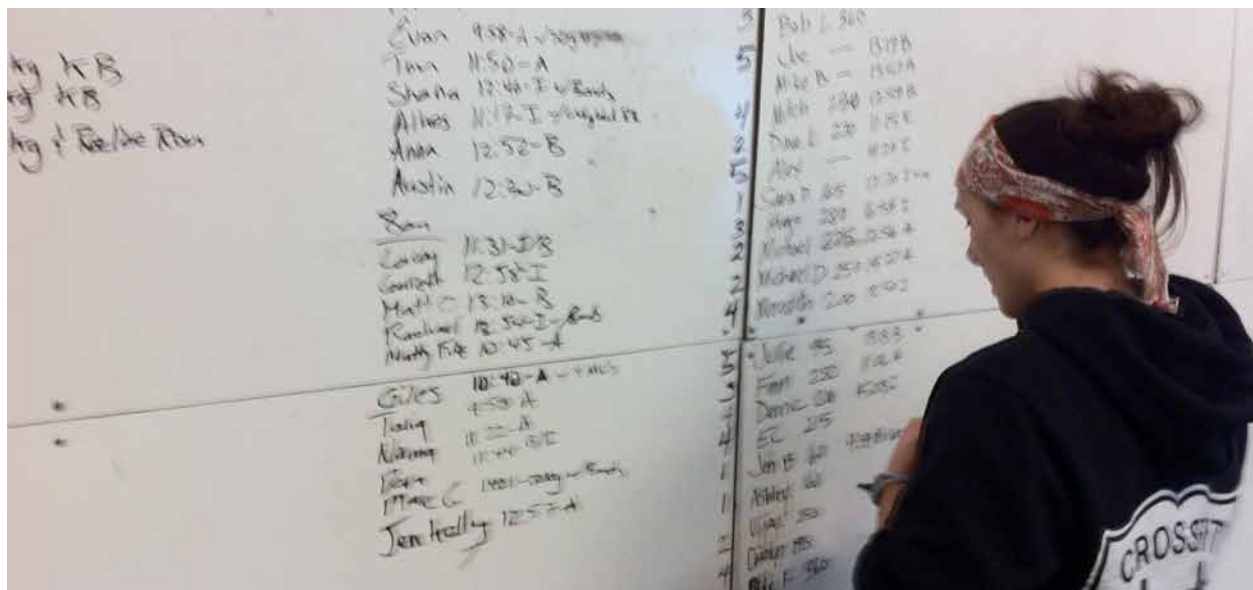
Next up was [CrossFit Boston](#). It was the last box I visited. I could have picked any number of boxes and probably had a great experience, but in the end I picked CrossFit Boston because of its location and its WOD that day.

3x5 deadlifts

then:

Helen Rows a Boat

CrossFit Boston is a smaller-sized box with an awesome set-up—a running theme of my trip, for sure. But CrossFit boxes know how to fit their equipment into small spaces



The whiteboard at CrossFit Boston. It's blurry to replicate the hazy post-WOD condition of your vision.

without feeling crowded. Jen Kelly ran the warm-ups, and while the class was going through it, she split us into groups for each platform based on our max deadlifts. This saved a lot of time and kept the weights for each set similar—a really good method for keeping a class moving.

The community aspect of CrossFit was showcased at each affiliate.

Helen is one of my favorite workouts, so I was looking forward to this variation on it. Much like every other box I visited, the energy was awesome, and everyone who finished the workout encouraged others to finish. I even found myself giving cues to a guy that was working on his kipping pull-up.

Final Thoughts

It was great to experience different trainers, different warm-up methods, different everything. We know the phrase “constantly varied” is a big part of the CrossFit definition, and experiencing the same or similar workouts in different environments with different members of the community felt like something that should almost be a requirement.

The community aspect of CrossFit was showcased at each affiliate. Although the first two I visited had small classes and the next two had larger classes, the spirit was the same at all of them: encouraging, welcoming, inspiring.

These four affiliates—and really all affiliates I researched in the New England area—did a great job of being accessible. All of them quickly responded to e-mails about dropping in, they all have Facebook pages and responded to messages there as well, and their websites all had great information beyond WODs and directions.

I had such a great experience with these drop-ins that I am now looking forward to other opportunities to do it again. I have an upcoming trip to Austin, Texas, and plan on dropping in at [CrossFit Central](#).

Do you have a business trip or vacation planned in 2011? Do a little research before you go and you might come back home with a few new T-shirts.



About the Author

After spending the first 30 years of his life in New England, Michael Melillo relocated to Silicon Valley, Calif., for a shiny new job at Apple Inc. He was in and out of Globo Gyms since high school but never could keep a routine. One Saturday he got up the courage to head down to CrossFit Santa Clara. He's been hooked ever since. He has a blog of progress, thoughts and other random things at www.perfectmike.com.