

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

October 2010

TITLE	AUTHOR(S)
Mile-High Hybrid	Warkentin
Light Weight?	Warkentin
New Friends	Warkentin
Living the CrossFit Life	Belger
Worst. WOD. Ever.	Grimes
Sub-Failure Injuries	Zimmer
Warming Up and Stretching: The Neglected Disciplines	Starr
Blood, Blisters, Sexism and Pull-ups	Larsson
The Afghanistan Games	Lopez
Planning for a Win	Everett
The Silence of the WODs	Jones
Coaching for Competition	Estrada, Chang

THE CrossFit JOURNAL SPECIAL

Mile-High Hybrid

The story from Day 1 at the
CrossFit-USAW Open in Colorado Springs.



By Mike Warkentin Managing Editor

October 1, 2010



All images S.Dy/CrossFit

Colorado Springs, Colo.—Call it a new era of sport, one featuring official Oly platforms and pull-up rigs side by side.

1 of 4

The USAW-CrossFit Open kicked off this morning, pairing a judged Olympic-lifting competition with a CrossFit triplet. The order of the day: three snatches, three clean and jerks, and as many rounds as possible in 10 minutes of 6 squat cleans (55/30 kg), 12 pull-ups and 24 double-unders.

Yes, the competition forced CrossFitters into singlets, but it also brought together two sports that aren't as far apart as many would like to think.

"I think it's fantastic," said Natalie Burgener, who just returned from a 12th-place finish in the 63-kg class at the World Weightlifting Championships in Turkey. "It's kind of like joining two favorite things all in one space. It's great because it's an actual USAW-sanctioned meet, but it's geared towards the CrossFitters. It's not just geared towards the strong ones. You still have to be fit."

Natalie, a 2008 Olympian, is married to Casey Burgener, son of CrossFit Oly coach Mike Burgener, so she's had the chance to compete at the highest levels of weightlifting as well as experience the intensity of CrossFit. Overall, she was very impressed with the performance of the CrossFitters on the platforms.

"They're lifting good weight, overall I'd say very cleanly," Natalie said after the first session of the day. "There were a couple of things that overall CrossFitters need to work on. I saw a lot of power lifts instead of going all the way into a full receiving position. That's not something that they have to do but something that is going to help them increase their total."



Five minutes after the Oly half of the event ended, athletes attacked a 10-minute CrossFit triplet requiring power, gymnastics ability and stamina.

Still, the Olympian was happy to see many CrossFitters experiencing the strategy and planning of an Oly contest for the first time.

"I thought they chose good weight," she said, "Sometimes it looked light. A lot of times I was like, 'That was way too easy for a first attempt or way too easy for a third attempt.' But that just comes from being in the sport a little bit longer, knowing how to gauge your attempts, knowing how you respond on the platform."

In the first session, Chris Spealler responded very well to the pressure of the platform before ripping through a met-con at his signature non-stop pace to win the 62-kg class. He saw a few red lights along the way to the podium, which is something very new for a guy who spends most of his time lifting in a CrossFit box.

"I think I knew what I needed to get, but things that I would have counted for myself, things that I would have assumed were a lockout, weren't. My snatch went well, but my clean and jerk, my left elbow was a little soft. It was, 'No lift!' where I'm like, 'It's over my head. It counts,'" Spealler laughed.

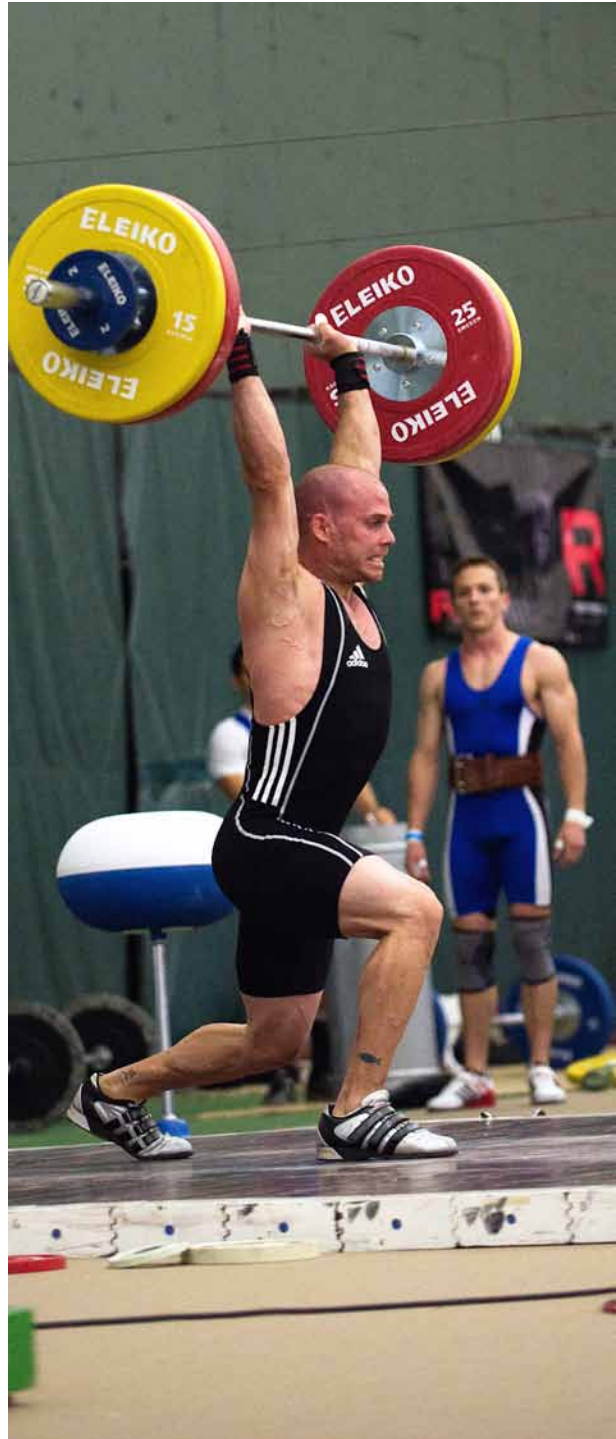
Even with a red light or two, the friendly athlete from Utah topped his class with a 91-kg snatch and a 109-kg clean and jerk. He went on to crush the triplet, scoring 359 reps—almost 50 more than any other competitor.

Spealler has competed in all four editions of the CrossFit Games and likened this hybrid contest to the inaugural event in Aromas in 2007.

"This kind of reminds me of the first Games," he said, "and I think it's going to do the same thing the Games are doing ... I think it's going to be big for both communities, maybe even more for Olympic lifting because I can see more CrossFitters dabbling in Olympic lifting than I can see Olympic lifters dabbling in CrossFit."

Elyse Umeda was another Games competitor who stepped onto the platform, and she said it was a little different to actually know the events beforehand, unlike the 2010 Games, where athletes had no idea what workouts they'd perform at the Home Depot Center.

"We knew what we were going to do," she said. "There were no secrets, but on top of that, you've got a lot of rules and regulations that are unfamiliar for a normal CrossFitter. For me that was the most nerve-wracking part ... The AMRAP was standard, and I had a lot of fun in that."



Chris Spealler totaled 200 kg in the Oly portion of the event, then knocked out 359 reps in the triplet.



Elyse Umeda came close to PRs in the Oly lifts on her way to a win in the 58-kg class.

Umeda won the 58-kg class with a 55-kg snatch and a 77-kg clean and jerk, both of which were just under her PR weights. She scored 295 reps on the triplet. She only saw one red light for an obvious miss, but proper form was on her mind all day.

"It's just a matter of constantly practicing hitting the lockout, not just getting it overhead but really getting those elbows locked out in the catch," she said.

When asked if she would recommend an Oly competition to others, Umeda was emphatic:

"That's what CrossFit's about. It's about trying new sports, trying new things, testing yourself at different sports, and for me it was a ton of fun."

To close out the day Dave Lipson and Josh Everett mounted one platform for a face-to-face Isabel: 30 snatches at 135 lb. Incredibly, the beastly strong Lipson and the powerful Everett tied with 1:06. Both will lift tomorrow—Lipson in the 105-kg class and Everett in the 85s.

To watch the rest of the weekend's competition, visit live.crossfit.com.

For complete results, visit the [USAW website](http://USAWeightlifting.org).

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

SPECIAL

Light Weight?

Day 2 of the CrossFit-USA Open:
Olympian Chad Vaughn takes the platform.



By Mike Warkentin Managing Editor

October 2, 2010



All images S.Dy/CrossFit

"I was just planning on starting out really light."

1 of 4

That was Chad Vaughn's strategy for the 85-kg competition at the CrossFit-USA Open. Vaughn asked for a pedestrian 130 kg for his first snatch attempt and locked it out without difficulty before nailing his next five lifts for a total well over 300 kg.

Vaughn, of course, is an Olympian who finished 20th in the 77-kg class at the recent International Weightlifting Federation World Championships in Turkey, and he was the class of the lifting field in the afternoon session. Taking weights above and beyond the rest of the competitors, Vaughn was left alone on his platform to perform three consecutive snatches and three consecutive cleans after the other lifters had exhausted their attempts.

The athlete from Oklahoma is a Pan Am Games gold medalist who boasts a top competition snatch of 152 kg and a top clean and jerk of 195, and even though he didn't go near those numbers, he held the crowd silent as he moved heavy bars with relative ease.

Vaughn had a sizeable lead going into the CrossFit half of the event, where he had a very respectable showing in what was only his second real WOD.

"More than the physical aspect of an Olympic-lifting competition, for me anyway, and I think for most lifters, is the mental focus that it takes," he said. "That really wears you out more than the physical. ... After that last clean and jerk, I had a little bit of rest and I felt drained and like, 'Oh man, I'm about to go do this stuff for 10 minutes.'"



Vaughn quickly learned about the classic CrossFit recovery position after the triplet.

Vaughn's coaches had him prepared for the triplet of cleans, pull-ups and double-unders, and the Olympian showed perfect form on every single squat clean.

"They (my coaches) told me, 'Stay calm, take your time, and go a little bit slower than you think you need to,'" he said. "I figured I'd burn out really quickly on the pull-ups, so they stayed on top of me to break those up from the beginning and not burn myself out too quick. I had no idea what to expect as far as rounds. I was hoping to get at least three, so I'm pleased with getting three and a half or so."

Vaughn's impressive performance wasn't enough to hold off Josh Everett, who had a fine showing in the Oly lifts and then completed just over six rounds in the triplet to take gold. For Everett, one of the original CrossFit stars, the win marks his first victory in a major event after reaching the podium in both the 2007 and 2008 CrossFit Games.

Earlier in the day the 77-kg men preceded the 63- and 69-kg women. In the latter session, Lindsey Benson gave the crowd at the Cheyenne Mountain Resort a special moment by power-cleaning 91 kg—just over 200 lb.—before jerking it overhead. She followed the lift with a leap and a scream, and she certainly deserved a celebration after fighting through a back injury last year to notch a competition lift only 5 lb. off her clean and jerk PR. She finished with a 160-kg total that was 23 kg better than anyone else. Benson gave a few points back in the triplet to finish third behind Jasmine Dever and Michelle Benedict.

Heather Bergeron, who finished eighth at the CrossFit Games, had a disappointing day after missing all three snatches and failing to post a total.

"I don't know what happened," she said. "I felt great warming up until I got to 121 for some reason, and it just didn't feel good one time and I let it get to my head. I can do a lot more than that, but in this setting it just gets confusing and chaotic, and then if you miss you only get two minutes."

Nevertheless, Bergeron came back to clean and jerk 78 kg, and despite her disaster in the snatch, she's not done with Oly meets.

"I'd like to come back and try it again because I know now what I'm getting into and how to prepare for it," she said.

Michelle Benedict, a 2009 Games competitor, had a previous Oly meet under her belt but found the CrossFit-USAW open even more challenging than her first competition.



Lindsey Benson jerks 91 kg in one of the day's best moments.



CrossFit star Josh Everett had a solid performance on the platform and in the triplet to win the 85-kg class gold medal.

"Your body's warmed up but your adrenaline is fatigued, and adrenaline is half the workout," she said of following the lifting with a triplet. "Your body knows what it's supposed to do because you've been training, but your adrenaline has already been taken in your six lifts, so you don't have that to use in your favor in the triplet."

Benedict expected to do better but still improved on her first judged meet, where she was called for press-outs on every lift.

At press time the 94-kg men were just starting the triplet that would wrap up Day 2 of the Open, which represents a historic union of weightlifting and CrossFit. For his part, Vaughn couldn't be happier to see the two sports linking up.

"No one in America is interested in Olympic lifting, and I was just pleasantly surprised how well the CrossFit community took us in ...," he said. "They're really eager to learn from us and I'm really eager to teach them, and I'm actually learning a whole lot from them on everything."

"I'm so excited. I can't wait to see what the future is going to bring with this weightlifting and CrossFit relationship."

To watch the rest of the weekend's competition, visit live.crossfit.com.

For complete results, visit the [USAW website](http://usaweightlifting.com).

THE CrossFit JOURNAL SPECIAL

New Friends

The first CrossFit-USAW Open is a hit with Oly lifters and CrossFitters alike.



By Mike Warkentin Managing Editor

October 4, 2010



All images S.Dy/CrossFit

On Day 3 of the CrossFit-USAW Open in Colorado Springs, Coach Greg Glassman was standing in the back looking out over the indoor tennis courts at the Cheyenne Mountain Resort.

1 of 5

On his right, a crowd of CrossFitters in singlets were warming up on Oly platforms. On his left, a pack of bare-chested men were attacking a CrossFit triplet featuring squat cleans, pull-ups and double-unders.

"This is a sport that's in trouble, and it doesn't deserve to die," Glassman said, gesturing to the lifting platforms. "We're in the heart of a renaissance in weightlifting, and I'm really proud of that."

He continued: "There's another thing going on here that's significant, and that is taking the purity of the weightlifting events and infusing it with a decidedly CrossFit component. So here we have a USA Weightlifting event, but what are the kids doing? They're doing CrossFit out here."

Bridging the Gap

The first event of its kind, the CrossFit-USAW Open paired a classic Oly competition with a CrossFit workout, bringing together two groups that had once stood apart. In perhaps the best example of the union, two-time Olympian and PanAm Games gold medalist Chad Vaughn competed in the 85-kg men's class, dominating the lifting portion and putting in a very respectable performance in the triplet.

Throughout the weekend, elite USAW athletes such as Vaughn, Natalie and Casey Burgener, and Kendrick Farris milled about and spoke with CrossFitters, shaking hands, talking technique and making new friends. For their part, CrossFitters reluctantly donned singlets and then jumped wholeheartedly into a judged USAW competition where press-outs were not allowed and dropping the barbell was forbidden.



D.J. Wickham has been a force at the last two CrossFit Games and finished second to Matt Chan in the 94-kg division.

Just after lifting in the 105-kg class, CrossFit Games vet Dave Lipson summed up the event:

"I think CrossFit has done a really good job. Everyone came in here with really small egos and a very respectful attitude. I think the Olympic-lifting community has also embraced us very well.

"I think the biggest take-away from this is exposing Oly lifters to CrossFit and CrossFit to Olympic lifters, and I think that this relationship is going to be great or both USAW and CrossFit because you'll find some great Oly athletes who are going to want to get more into this CrossFit thing, and you'll find some CrossFitters that are going to pick up Olympic lifting and might turn out to be phenomenal O-lifters."

Indeed, Courtney Kulick, events and operations manager for USA Weightlifting, had compliments for the CrossFitters who braved the platform.

"I was totally impressed by all of their form and technique, and they lifted some really good weight, so it was really impressive overall," she said. "I can say that we saw probably at least five CrossFitters that you'd want to bring them over to weightlifting. They were under 25 and they had really good form. We could hopefully train them and maybe something could happen with weightlifting."

Kulick was also pleased with the event itself:

"I definitely think it was the most exciting weightlifting event we've had probably ever," she said. "I know we've gotten a lot of good feedback from a lot of the CrossFitters and weightlifters and definitely hope to do it again."

Just about every CrossFitter would welcome another hybrid event, and most competitors said they would absolutely enter another Oly contest. The first event, of course, was a learning process for most.

"What's knowable is the movements, but the process of getting there is sort of up in the air ...," said James Hobart, who finished just off the podium in the 85s. "There's this whole process of when you start warming up and how much you warm up to. It depends on how many attempts you are out from lifting, and I guess there's a lot of mind games lifters will play with each other. At the last minute they'll change their weight to give themselves more rest or maybe make another lifter have to go sooner. That was a really interesting thing. It certainly made it a little more stressful that I thought it would be."



Matt Chan put together impressive lifts and a strong performance in the triplet to post the top overall score of any competitor in the CrossFit-USAW Open.

Friends ... (continued)

Austin Malleolo, who finished sixth at this year's CrossFit Games and fourth in the 77s in Colorado, agreed with Hobart.

"It was very different. The Olympic-lifting part of it, there's so much strategy and game-planning and unknown in when you were going, so that was a whole new avenue that I hadn't learned—and also the kilos that I've never trained in. So there was so much.

"It was a lot harder than the Games. (At the Games), you don't know what you're going to do, and when you go out you just do your best and go as hard as you can and lift as much as you can. Here you have to be smart in what weights you pick and how good you feel and your confidence level, so there's a lot in play. It was a very unique experience. Although it was known, it was very unknown."

For spectators including Mike Brei of Nebraska, the event represented a new way of looking at both sports.

"It looks very interesting to me," he said. "You can't just be one-dimensional. You have to be multidimensional, so it's really good."

Brei's daughter Amanda finished ninth in the 75s.

Stronger, Faster and Better

Overall, the weekend can certainly be considered a very a successful first date, and one that will warrant a follow-up. It offered both CrossFitters and the Olympic-lifting community a chance to get to know one another and realize that both groups can indeed help each other.

"This is awesome," Lipson said. "It's very cool to see the guys who are Olympic lifters and how honed in their technique is. They give us kind of an idea of the gap between an elite CrossFitter and being an elite Olympic lifter. These guys, they are very talented. I loved seeing Chad Vaughn compete yesterday. He's as elite at Olympic lifting as our guys at the Games are at CrossFit, and it's cool to see the difference in weights they can put up and how fast they are."

CrossFitters, of course, will be happy to take the lessons of the weekend back to the box, where they'll refine their technique and get stronger and faster. Then they'll move their whiteboard numbers up, crush some workouts and return to the platform in search of new PRs. After all, CrossFit is about taking the best parts of other sports and ultimately improving human performance.

When it comes to speed and power, could you ask for better instructors than some of the world's top Olympic lifters?



The Weekend's Whiteboard

Women

Best snatch: 75 kg
Sarah Veress/Kelly Allen

Best clean and jerk: 91 kg
Lindsey Benson/Katie Hogan

Best total: 164 kg
Sarah Veress/Kelly Allen

Best triplet score: 302
Kristan Clever

Best overall score: 451
Kristan Clever

Men

Best snatch: 141 kg
Chad Vaughn

Best clean and jerk: 172 kg
Chad Vaughn

Best total: 313 kg
Chad Vaughn

Best triplet score: 359
Chris Spealler

Best overall score: 563
Matt Chan

Medal Winners

Women 48 kg

1. Natalie McClain: 95 kg (43, 52) + 255 reps = 350
2. Christina Mailloux: 73 kg (30, 43) + 144 = 217

Women 53 kg

1. Megan John: 114 kg (50, 64) + 260 reps = 374
2. Gayle Shalloo: 107 kg (40, 67) + 261 reps = 368
3. Rosanne Allen: 108 kg (45, 63) + 210 reps = 318

Women 58 kg

1. Elyse Umeda: 132 kg (55, 77) + 295 reps = 427
2. Shannan Simpson: 115 kg (48, 67) + 257 reps = 372
3. Mie Greenberg: 119 kg (54, 65) + 220 reps = 339

Women 63 kg

1. Kristan Clever: 149 kg (64, 85) + 302 reps = 451
2. Colleen Maher: 112 kg (48, 64) + 259 reps = 371
3. Emmalee Moore: 116 kg (49, 67) + 253 reps = 369

Women 69 kg

1. Jasmine Dever: 137 kg (58, 79) + 259 reps = 396
2. Michelle Benedict: 136 kg (61, 75) + 228 reps = 364
3. Lindsey Benson: 160 kg (69, 91) + 201 reps = 361

Women 75 kg

1. Sarah Veress: 164 kg (75, 89) + 212 reps = 376
2. Robin Lyons: 135 kg (55, 80) + 226 reps = 361
3. Laura DeMarco: 136 kg (57, 79) + 210 reps = 346

Women 75+ kg

1. Katie Hogan: 156 kg (65, 91) + 213 reps = 369
2. Caity Matter Henniger: 150 kg (65, 85) + 216 reps = 366
3. Kelly Allen: 164 kg (75, 89) + 178 reps = 342

Men 56 kg

1. Kevin Wu: 145 kg (63, 82) + 211 reps = 356
2. Thai Tran: 122 kg (54, 68) + 137 reps = 259

Men 62 kg

1. Chris Spealler: 200 kg (91, 109) + 359 reps = 559
2. Robert Sirkis: 178 kg (75, 103) + 174 reps = 352

Men 69 kg

1. Russell Berger: 197 kg (85, 112) + 315 reps = 512
2. Deric Maruquin: 206 kg (93, 113) + 254 reps = 460
3. Richard Trujillo: 160 kg (78, 82) + 294 reps = 454

Men 77 kg

1. Kevin Montoya: 203 kg (89, 114) + 337 reps = 540
2. Gary Baron: 230 kg (105, 125) + 296 reps = 526
3. Ryan Stitt: 187 kg (80, 107) + 303 reps = 490

Men 85 kg

1. Josh Everett: 267 kg (117, 150) + 259 reps = 526
2. Pat Burke: 225 kg (100, 125) + 295 reps = 520
3. Gabe Subry: 208 kg (90, 118) + 296 reps = 504

Men 94 kg

1. Matt Chan: 257 kg (113, 144) + 306 reps = 563
2. DJ. Wickham: 250 kg (115, 135) + 264 reps = 514
3. Mike McGoldrick: 247 kg (108, 139) + 265 reps = 512

Men 105 kg

1. Nick Branting: 242 kg (110, 132) + 262 reps = 504
2. Spencer Hendel: 256 kg (116, 140) + 226 reps = 482
3. Chris Dozois: 213 kg (88, 125) + 253 reps = 466

Men 105+ kg

1. Cody Fleming: 260 kg (120, 140) + 228 reps = 488
2. Wesley Kimball: 246 kg (111, 135) + 180 reps = 426
3. Paul Beckwith: 250 kg (115, 135) + 126 reps = 376

For complete results, visit the [USA website](http://usa.crossfit.com).

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Living the CrossFit Life

CrossFit has become an integral part of the lives of athletes, coaches and affiliate owners. Dr. Allison Belger interviews CrossFit athletes from different walks of life to find out just how much CrossFit affects us.

By Dr. Allison Belger

October 2010



C.J. Rendic

Ever notice that we CrossFitters tend to talk about CrossFitting a lot? Do you ever find yourself wondering what you used to talk about before you started CrossFitting?

1 of 8

Do you have any friends you've made through CrossFitting about whom you know surprisingly little given the amount of time you spend together? You could probably recite their Fran time and Oly numbers but don't know where they grew up or what they do for a living. Do you ever long for conversations that don't involve CrossFit at all but then somehow tend to find yourself talking about it?

Ever since CrossFit gyms have gained a certain level of notoriety in our communities, I find that, no matter where I am, people end up asking me about CrossFit. Sometimes I make a concerted effort to steer the conversation in different directions, but ultimately it is often steered right back to CrossFit. And, in the end, I'm usually fine with that.

I've thought a lot about the allure of CrossFit as a conversation subject or point of interest from a psychological perspective. I've found myself wondering what it is about CrossFit that makes it so all-consuming at times and so intriguing to those not yet involved. I've pondered what it is about my own CrossFit involvement that keeps me thinking about it so much despite my very full life outside of being a CrossFit athlete and affiliate owner. Clearly there is much about being a serious CrossFitter that allows it to be such a presence in our beings.

I've written before that I think CrossFitting with consistency and intensity both requires and evokes emotional commitment. For many, it is too challenging and transformative to engage in casually. It makes us vulnerable and forces us far beyond our zones of comfort. It makes us reckon with decisions we make about eating and sleeping. It makes us consider all our excuses for not being as fit as we'd like. It gets our competitive juices flowing and encourages us to set higher goals for what our bodies can do.



C.J. Rendic

Marcus helped TJ's Gym to a 33rd-place finish at the 2010 CrossFit Games.

Well, it's no wonder we can't stop talking about it.

I decided to explore some of the psychological aspects of CrossFitting with three athletes who are part of my CrossFit community at TJ's Gym in Northern California. I interviewed these three very different people, asking questions about their experiences as CrossFitters and about how their lives outside of CrossFit connect with their performance in the gym.

Marcus is a 25-year-old single male who completed a year of medical school before deciding that his studies were not leading him down the path he desired. He has since immersed himself into our community as an outstanding coach, athlete and affiliate team member. Margie is a 45-year-old married mother of two young girls and has a full-time job in marketing. She has been coming to TJ's Gym for over three years, starting during its pre-CrossFit days and continuing after our conversion. Kirby is a 17-year-old college-bound athlete who has been coming to the gym for many years, first as part of a teen group and for the past two and a half years on her own as a CrossFit athlete.

Creating the Foundation

Marcus, Margie and Kirby all suggest CrossFit creates the foundation for much of what they do in their lives.

"The amazing thing to me is that one year ago I was struggling to fight my way through medical school so I could hopefully one day, many years down the road, do what I get to do now *each day*."

—Marcus

Margie explains that the confidence she has gained from CrossFitting makes her more likely to take on new challenges outside the gym. She realizes now that she can tackle obstacles, whether intellectual, physical or relational, with a greater acceptance of herself and an understanding that time and effort will be involved. She has a more effective problem-solving approach and knows how to break down challenges into manageable steps without becoming overwhelmed by the big picture. This is analogous, she says, to the way she breaks down a particularly daunting workout or the way she approaches learning a new CrossFit movement.

Marcus's life outside of the gym has also been significantly affected by his CrossFit pursuits. In the fall of 2009, he was beginning his second year of medical school at the Ohio State University College of Medicine. The vision that had led him to medical school in the first place was of "helping people to reach a higher level of wellness in their bodies and minds." However, after a challenging first year, Marcus found himself struggling to make sense of how the coursework he was studying would actually translate into this provision of health and wellness to the masses once he earned his M.D. Midway through his second year, he decided to take a leave of absence to re-evaluate his goals. It was during this time that Marcus found his calling through CrossFit.

Marcus had been introduced to CrossFit during the summer of 2007, after graduating from college, when a friend had told him about the classes he was taking at San Francisco CrossFit. Marcus, a Gold's Gym member at the time, gave it whirl and was intrigued by his trial class. He incorporated aspects of CrossFit into his routine at Gold's and soon after embarked on a four-month trip to Asia, where he did what he could to keep up his fitness with body-weight met-cons. During his first year of medical school, Marcus educated himself via online videos and the main site, and he spent the following summer taking classes at our gyms. Once he made the decision to leave medical school, there was no turning back.

Marcus earned his Level 1 Certification in January 2010 and began coaching full time, both as a class coach and with private clients. He has since attended Olympic Lifting and Mobility and Recovery certifications and has plans to continue his CrossFit education. He also has aspirations of competing in the CrossFit Games as an individual. While he qualified for the Southwest Regional via the NorCal Sectional this year, injuries prompted him to choose to participate on our affiliate team instead.



Courtesy of Dr. Allison Belger

Marcus competed in the Northern California Sectional and finished 10th.

Ultimately, the more Marcus immersed himself in CrossFit and the TJ's Gym community, the more he became convinced that his mission of providing tools for people to live healthier and more fulfilling lives was not one he would accomplish as a physician, but rather as a practitioner of CrossFit:

"The amazing thing to me is that one year ago I was struggling to fight my way through medical school so I could hopefully one day, many years down the road, do what I get to do now *each day*," he says.

Kirby has had the benefit of navigating her early adolescence with CrossFit behind her. While she has, of course, experienced many of the ups and downs that all teens face, she has also maintained a level-headedness and sense of calm that come from her CrossFitting practice and her roots in a larger community with a shared passion, focus and grounding.

"I sincerely believe that everything I do in my life is better because of my CrossFitting," Kirby states. "I am a happier person all day when I have worked out, which helps me do school better and just plain everything better . . . I have also made more responsible decisions throughout high school because of my CrossFitting. I do choose not to drink or party on the same level as most of my friends, because many nights out, though I am having fun in the moment, I am always thinking of the WOD I will do in the morning. Most of my friends don't really understand this part of my life, but I am happy that CrossFit has helped me to make good decisions in high school, and I am confident it will help me to make the same good decisions in college."

Commitment and Passion

Most dedicated CrossFitters know that feeling of gratitude for being able to CrossFit and for the many positive changes it brings to life. However, being so committed to a personal pursuit can pose challenges in one's relationships with those whose goals are different or whose lives do not involve CrossFit, or fitness in any form for that matter. Margie has to deal with this unfortunate reality every day.

Margie's husband does not do CrossFit. She credits him for being extremely tolerant of her dedication but also acknowledges the struggles that can come with one partner's commitment. She acknowledges that her husband must find it difficult to put up with her attention to nutrition, her obsession with going to bed early, and her need to read the TJ's Gym blog every night before going

to bed so she knows the WOD for the following morning. She doesn't fault her husband or other non-CrossFitters in her life for the shakes of their heads or the rolls of their eyes when she enthusiastically recounts a workout. Margie realizes that she and her CrossFit companions can "come across as cultish to someone who does not do CrossFit—we have a crazy enthusiasm for CrossFit, use a different language and, when together, want to talk about it a lot."

In a somewhat reciprocal way, Marcus acknowledges that it is he who does the judging of those who do not do CrossFit or at least lead lives involving movement and the pursuit of health. His commitment to health and wellness and his personal investment in his own fitness and athletic endeavors have made it very difficult for him to accept the ways some of his friends and family members treat their bodies. The more committed he becomes, the greater the



Courtesy of Dr. Allison Belger

Margie, a mother of two, finds herself checking the WOD online every night before bed.

"We have a crazy enthusiasm for CrossFit, use a different language, and when together, want to talk about it a lot."

—Margie

number of close relationships he has with people who also CrossFit. Still, he concedes that his family members, those with the least CrossFit understanding, often have to bear the burden of his CrossFit experiences, both good and bad. Aches and pains, fatigue or frustration while learning a new skill, these manifestations are noticed and felt by those closest to him. The overall experience for Marcus, though, much as it is for Margie, is of having found a community of people whose goals and desires are consistent with his own, and whose understanding of what he does is a given.

Likewise, Kirby acknowledges the role that the TJ's Gym community and the larger experience of CrossFit have had in her life. She knows that most of her friends and family members would consider her "obsessed" with CrossFit.



Courtesy of Dr. Allison Belger

Kirby has a CrossFitting mother, and the two push each other to new heights in workouts.

While she used to feel self-conscious about her passion, she is now more comfortable with the level of importance of CrossFit in her life, and she no longer feels ashamed.

Kirby and her mom work out together, which has added an entirely different component to their relationship, and they are closer for having this shared passion. While people such as Margie can't yet share their passion with CrossFitting family members, Kirby has strong support from her mother. She feels that they push each other harder than most workout partners because they know each other so well.

Although Kirby has become open with most of her other family members and friends about her level of commitment to CrossFit, she still feels that she connects most with other CrossFitters. Only they can truly understand her drive and appreciate what she does. This shared bond is, overwhelmingly, the most powerful part about CrossFitting within a thriving gym community, and it appears to be a driving force for all three athletes, much as it is for CrossFitters around the world.

Dreams of CrossFit

Have you ever dreamed about CrossFit? CrossFit is such a part of our waking lives that it often haunts our dreams.

Margie has had recurrent dreams about rushing to a WOD and knowing she's going to be too late. She has also lain in bed agonizing over whether Fran would be the workout the next day or whether she would be able to do ring dips in a competition. While Margie says she doesn't spend all that much mental energy thinking about CrossFit outside of the gym most of the time, she does have that addiction to the TJ's Gym blog. If the workout is posted unusually late, she will get up in the middle of the night to check the blog on her cell phone. This, she says, is "my only example of CF insanity."

She continues: "If there is something I cannot do that is really important to me—for example when I was first learning pull-ups, and now I'm trying to get ring dips—I think about it a lot. I obsess over getting it, think about it at the gym, look up content online sometimes about how to do it, think about it as I fall asleep."

Marcus says that he doesn't dream much about CrossFit as far as he knows, but he has definitely lost sleep over aspects of it. He recalls the night before coaching his first class as being sleepless. He anticipated teaching the snatch to the early-morning advanced crew at our gym,

worrying about filling the role of coach for our old-timers. He has also lost sleep on the nights before competitions, be they local throwdowns or more serious competitions like the NorCal Sectional and the Southwest Regional.

Typically, though, Marcus says he doesn't think much about his workouts once they are done. While there are occasionally performances that stand out in his mind, he tends to leave behind the particulars of a workout. However, with regard to educating himself about CrossFit and immersing himself in the larger community, he says it is "embarrassing how much time I spend ... thinking about CrossFit. I'm on the main site, *Journal*, Games site, affiliate sites, and more every day, multiple times a day Goals I have right now in life are to find more outlets that have nothing to do with CrossFit.

"However, it doesn't bother me at all that I spend as much time with the subject as I do. I've always felt like my life, work, passions and relationships would be built around a common purpose or thing. I'm grateful that I found something to guide much of my life, and the constant pursuit of excellence in what I do is appropriate in my book."

Kirby has two kinds of CrossFit dreams.

"In the first, all my WODs are unbroken, I can do every workout in record time, and I am an amazing CrossFitter," she says. "In the second, the clock starts, and for some reason I cannot do anything, whether it be pick up a bar or begin pull-upping. Obviously, I like the first dream much better. I never have trouble falling to sleep because of CrossFit, or anything for that matter!"

While Kirby spends a great deal of time researching and thinking about CrossFit, she has been limited in this regard by the other important things in her life, including spending time with friends, doing school work and getting ready for college. She has found a good balance and has some concerns about how she will continue to keep up with it all during her freshman year in college. Determined to make CrossFitting a priority, Kirby has already scoped out a CrossFit gym near school, and she plans to come back to TJ's Gym during vacations.



Courtesy of Dr. Allison Belger

Margie has a passion for learning new skills and will spend extra time online searching for instructional videos and information that will help her succeed.

Sense of Self

All three athletes have clearly experienced great change in their lives as a result of their pursuit of fitness in our CrossFit community. All three have developed a sense of themselves that is influenced by what they can do in the gym and how they manage the challenges of a workout.

As a middle-aged woman, Margie appears to be most changed in the way she views her body and what it is capable of doing. Although she is realistic and knows she is slower and has to work harder to recover than the athletes who are much younger than she is, she also knows she gets stronger with every workout.

"I compete every day against people who are 10, 20, 25 years younger than I am," she says. "Since starting CrossFit I have just worked hard and believed that as long as I kept working hard, I could do well, regardless of how old I was. I am going to continue to do so until someone gives me a very good reason not to. At that same time, I'm not unrealistic about what I can accomplish. I know that my body will get slower. I will need to be more careful. I'm working now on developing an appreciation for what I can do, and to always do better—regardless of what others around me are doing."

Margie is also proud and driven to be a role model of strength and health for her two young daughters.

About 10 years older than Margie's daughters, Kirby embodies just what Margie hopes for her own daughters when they grow up. Kirby notes, "Physically, I am happier and I have a better body image because of CrossFit. I am strong, and I look strong. At school, I am known as the girl who can lift logs over her head, and though I am sometimes self-conscious about my strength, I have learned to love it."

**We may not always be better
wives, husbands, children or
parents, and we may not be
better at every aspect of our jobs,
but then again, we just might.**

Every day when I do CrossFit, it is the hardest part of my day. I can do anything after a WOD, which is an amazing feeling!"

Marcus also finds great inner peace and an enthusiasm for each day through his CrossFit experiences. Much like Kirby's navigation through adolescence, Marcus has benefited from CrossFit and a larger community at a time of transition: "I found myself at TJ's Gym at just the right time in my life. I found myself surrounded by the right blend of people to motivate me back to my pursuit of health and wellness."



Courtesy of Dr. Allison Belger

***Kirby says challenging CrossFit workouts
help her believe she can accomplish anything.***

The CrossFit Life

While CrossFit is neither a cure-all for emotional struggles nor a panacea for relationship issues, it seems abundantly clear to those of us who live it that this thing we do has significant positive implications for other aspects of our lives. We may not always be better wives, husbands, children or parents, and we may not be better at every aspect of our jobs, but then again, we just might.

We might access that inner confidence that comes from having tackled a difficult workout alongside our friends at the gym. We might be able to think through problems in ways we never would have if we hadn't broken down a workout into manageable steps. We just might be able to dream bigger dreams and approach life with a greater sense of self. So why wouldn't we talk about CrossFit all the time?

Indeed, why shouldn't we?



Courtesy of Dr. Allison Belger

About the Author

Allison Belger lives with her husband, TJ, and their two young daughters in Marin County, Calif. They own and operate *TJ's Gym*, with three CrossFit affiliates: CrossFit San Rafael, Corte Madera and CrossFit Novato. Allison is a clinical psychologist specializing in assessments of children, adolescents and young adults. She juggles management of the family business, her private psychology practice and her role as mom. Although Allison recently began fitness coaching after finding CrossFit in 2008, she has a long history of involvement in athletics, as both a player and a coach. Allison played soccer at the Division I level in college and has since coached a number of youth soccer teams in the Bay Area. Allison has a bachelor's degree from Dartmouth College, a master's in learning disabilities from Northwestern University, and a doctorate in clinical psychology from the Wright Institute in Berkeley, Calif.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Worst. WOD. Ever.

CrossFit has no shortage of grueling workouts, but Richard Grimes goes in search of the most unpleasant WOD ever devised.

By Richard Grimes

October 2010



Courtesy of Nadia Shatila

A CrossFitter, an endurance runner and a triathlete sat in a bar drinking and telling stories about the hardest workout they'd ever done—the one they never wanted to do again. The endurance runner started.

"Endurance running is the toughest sport there is. For one workout, I ran a hundred miles through the desert with only a bottle of water. Twice, I was bitten by rattlesnake and had to suck the poison out of my own leg before continuing my run. That's the workout I never want to repeat."

The triathlete wasn't impressed. "That's nothing. I once did a double Ironman workout—a five-mile swim, 250-mile bike and two marathons. It took two days and I lost one of my testicles when it snapped off during the second half of the bike ride. I never, ever want to have a workout like that again."

They both turned to the CrossFitter, who had remained silent the entire time.

"So," asked the endurance runner, "if you had to choose, what CrossFit workout is so painful, so difficult that you never, ever want to do it again?"

The CrossFitter considered this for a second.

"Pretty much all of them," she answered.

Oh, the Memories

Every sport wants to be the toughest sport there is. Even yoga practitioners beat their hairless, sunken chests every now and again and crow about how hard downward facing dog is. But CrossFit is a special kind of fitness hell. CrossFit has WODs, workouts so intense that the toughest have names—so you can hate them more easily.

And everyone has stories about that special workout, the one that hurt so bad that you can still feel the phantom pain in your body years after you finished the workout. The *CrossFit Journal* went looking for those stories.

We found one workout so intense that years later a single song could pull out the painful memory of the workout. We found a CrossFit trainer and champion with one WOD that she has never beaten. And finally, we found a story of a CrossFitter who decided to take one of the hardest WODs ever and make it harder ... by adding cheese.



Courtesy of Nadia Shatila

Nadia Shatila wasn't smiling at the end of Pat Sherwood's Front Squat Medley.

Boom Boom P-Oww!

Nadia Shatila is a CrossFit HQ trainer, a former gymnast and the owner of CrossFit Belltown. As an HQ trainer, Nadia flies into gyms around the country to perform two-day certifications with other trainers. And sometimes the trainers will do a WOD together during lunch.

"It's not mandatory, but it's a great bonding experience and a chance for those of us who usually work out alone to get a chance to work out with a group of excellent athletes," Shatila says.

In August of 2009, Shatila worked a certification at FirePower CrossFit in Milton, Ontario, with fellow trainers Chuck Carswell, Pat Sherwood and Dennis Marshall. Sherwood suggested a WOD. Actually, according to Shatila, it wasn't really a suggestion.

"Pat sent out a message to us before the cert saying this: 'The Front Squat Medley is going down.'"

The Front Squat Medley:

Max reps at 185/135 lb.

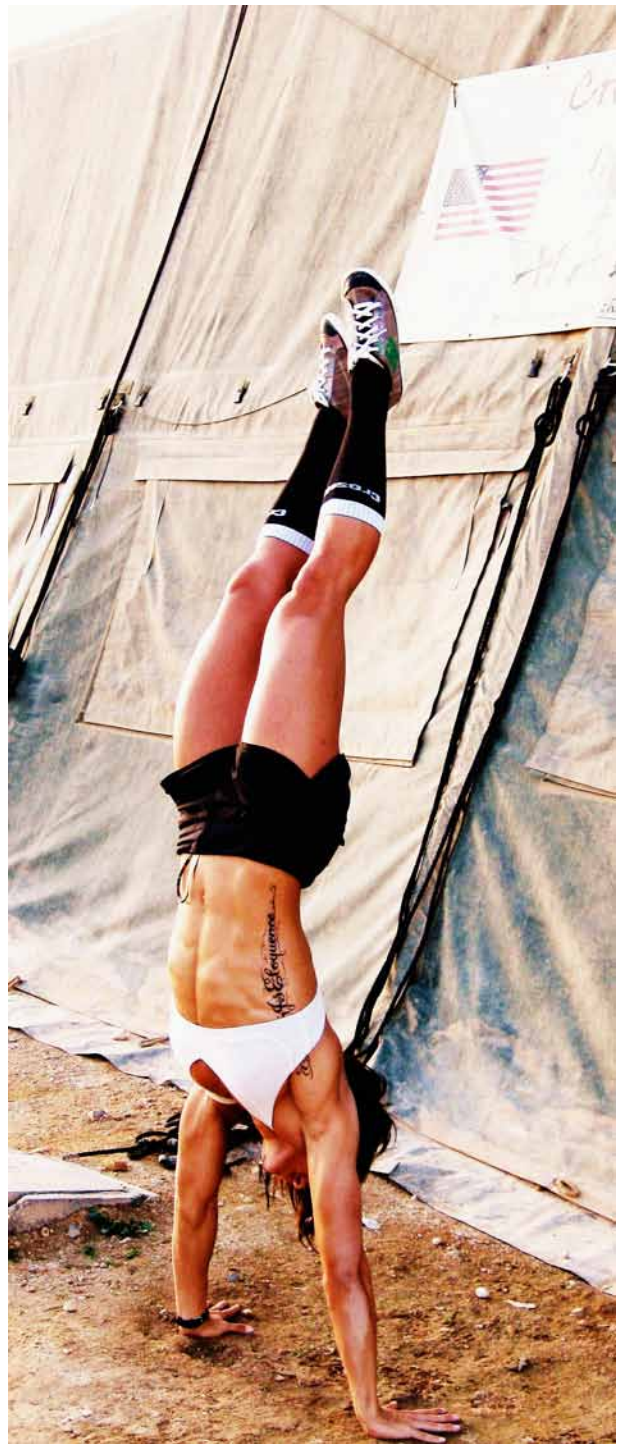
Max reps at 135/95 lb.

Max reps at 95/65 lb.

"I walked outside and was shaking, breathing so hard I was almost hyperventilating and crying."

—Nadia Shatila

Shatila cranked out 18 at 135, dropped the bar and waited for her second set. On her second set, she managed to hoist 95 lb. 32 times before depleting her muscles. By now, the crew was surrounded by trainees who were whooping encouragement and taking pictures. The only thing left was the last set at the lightest weight.



Courtesy of Miranda Oldroyd

Miranda Oldroyd is pretty good at most CrossFit workouts, but Barbara is one of her goats.

Courtesy of Miranda Oldroyd



No rest for the wicked? Oldroyd actually finds workouts with programmed rest to be more crushing than the no-break grinders.

But here's the thing about the Front Squat Medley and maxing out at the lightest weight: it's harder than the heavier sets because it never ends. Shatila says it best.

"Heavy is just heavy. There is only so much you can do. But light weight? You can go forever ..."

As Shatila started the last set, the song *Boom Boom Pow* by the Black Eyed Peas started rocking in the background. And she used the song.

"I just told myself, 'Keep moving to the beat of the song.'"

That worked until she hit the 40s, when she started doing single reps and concentrated on just hitting 50. Then she hit 60 and kept going.

At 68, she maxed out and collapsed.

"I walked outside and was shaking, breathing so hard I was almost hyperventilating and crying."

And the pain didn't stop there, says Shatila.

"I did not recover for one full month. I'm not exaggerating."

Even the music from the workout haunts her.

"Every single time I hear *Boom Boom Pow* I text Chuck (Carswell) ..."

Fear of Rest

Sometimes, your worst workout beats you.

Miranda Oldroyd, another CrossFit HQ trainer and the co-owner of Utah's CrossFit 801, is no slouch. Peruse her stats and you'll see great numbers for punishing workouts like Fran, Elizabeth and Grace.

But you won't see one name there.

"Barbara," Oldroyd says.

**"Barbara and I don't
get along ..."**

—Miranda Oldroyd

Twice Oldroyd has attempted Barbara—5 rounds of 20 pull-ups, 30 push-ups, 40 sit-ups, 50 squats with each round followed by three minutes of rest—and twice Oldroyd has been stymied before she reached Round 4.

“Stymied,” by the way, is a polite way of saying that Oldroyd ended up dizzy, sick and, in the case of her first attempt at Barbara, holed up in the bathroom for 45 minutes.

“Barbara and I don’t get along ...,” she says, “and when we fight ... she wins.”

Oldroyd’s nemesis has one thing in particular that makes the workout especially hard, according to the athlete: scheduled rest.

“Anytime, as a seasoned CrossFitter, you see scheduled rest ... you know to be afraid,” explains Oldroyd.

“Very afraid,” she added.

“The reason is that the rest in the workout gives you just enough time to recover enough to go at each round 100 percent. If there weren’t the scheduled rest in Barbara, you would have to pace the effort and it would be more of a slow and steady WOD rather than five all-out sprints.”

When Fran Isn’t Hard Enough ...

Of course, there are some people who want to have the worst WOD ever. They seek it out, maybe adding more weight or reps to the WODs to increase the difficulty.

Other people add cheese.

If you go to YouTube and look for CrossFit videos, search on the words “Fran,” “In” and “Out.” You’ll find [Gabe Rinaldi’s video](#) of a WOD he created by combining the Fran workout and In-N-Out burgers. Yep, 3 rounds of thrusters and pull-ups, 21-15-9 reps. But first, you eat a 3x3 In-N-Out burger.

For those not in the know, a 3x3 burger at In-N-Out means a hamburger with three pieces of meat and three pieces of cheese.

Eat that burger, then do your first Fran round. Followed by a 2x2 burger. Followed by another round. Then a 1x1 burger garnished with your final Fran round.

According to Rinaldi’s rules, no water is allowed. He also outlaws puking, although it’s unclear on just how you would enforce that rule.

Now, here’s how you know that Rinaldi is a genius:



S. Dy/CrossFit Journal

WOD Fuel?

“The element of eating the burgers makes this workout an interval workout.”

—Gabe Rinaldi

He convinced three other people to do the workout. He's never done it himself.

He has, however, clearly thought this through.

"The element of eating the burgers makes this workout an interval workout," Rinaldi muses with tongue in cheek.

"I'm guessing it is hard to breathe eating the burgers quickly while trying to recover from the thrusters and pull-ups," he adds later.

Rinaldi originally posted his video in the hopes that someone would take up his challenge and also attempt the Fran In-N-Out WOD. He seems genuinely surprised that no one else has done it.

Of course, one reason may be the 1,800 or so calories the one YouTube commenter calculated that each athlete consumed during the course of the workout. The Fran In-N-Out may be the only CrossFit workout in which you gain weight.

This modified Fran is, of course, not something you'll ever see on CrossFit.com, but it's definitely challenging.

Gluttons for Punishment?

Here's the thing about enduring the worst CrossFit workout in the world: apparently, it's like giving birth. As more time passes, you remember only the reward and forget how bad the pain was. Or maybe the competitiveness of CrossFit makes athletes less susceptible to giving up.

Miranda Oldroyd? She's already plotting a rematch with Barbara. And Nadia Shatila ends one e-mail about her Front Squat Medley by pairing two sentences that are seemingly at odds:

"... It's the worst workout I have ever done; you should try it."

You have to admire the courage of CrossFitters. On the other hand, if you enter your gym one day and see Gabe Rinaldi standing next to the pull-up bars with a bag of burgers, you should probably run.



About the Author



*Richard Grimes started CrossFit a year ago and lives in south-eastern Florida. He has written for newspapers, websites and magazines. He also writes under the name Grim Richard, and his *The Book of Gabriel* is available on Amazon.com or by visiting www.bookofgabriel.com.*

More of his writing can be found at www.grimrichard.com.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Sub-Failure Injuries

Dr. John Zimmer takes a closer look at subtle injuries that might limit your performance.

By Dr. John Zimmer

October 2010



All images courtesy of Evan and Erica Saint Clair/Saint Clair Studio

What is “sub-failure”?

Is that like taking a test and getting a D+?

1 of 8

Sub-failure, when it comes to injury, is common. There is usually pain or discomfort involved, but there is not an acute failure of the tendon, ligament, muscle, disc or bone. It is more of a disruption in the fibers of the connective tissue. This causes a problem in the way these fibers line up and work together.

Imagine a forest full of trees. If a significant portion is cut or burned down, that would be a failure. Now imagine that none of them is cut or burned down, but the ground underneath is so soft and the trees are so big that some of the trees are almost uprooted and are leaning on other trees. We do not imagine a complete failure here, but we do imagine a major structural and functional problem. This could be considered a sub-failure in the forest system.

The traditional model of injury is flawed and outdated.

Now imagine a muscle full of hundreds of thousands of muscle fibers. You might imagine that a complete failure might include a tear in the muscle or a tear of the tendon that attaches the muscle to the bone. Instead, what if no fibers are torn but are rather pulling each other in different directions, causing pain, spasm and discomfort? An MRI or CT scan would reveal the joint “WNL” or “within normal limits” but the person might feel pain, discomfort, spasm and decreased strength. We do not imagine a complete failure here, but we do imagine a structural and functional problem. This could be considered a sub-failure injury.

The Subtle Side of Injuries

The traditional model of injury is flawed and outdated. For example, several different studies reveal that an estimated 85 percent of patients with low-back pain do not have a definitive diagnosis (1,2,3,4). When we take a step back to see the forest, we can see that sub-failure injury is a common problem in these cases.

You might be thinking to yourself, “A sore shoulder or a sore back or a sore whatever ... so what? Athletes are sore every day.” Yes, it can be a fine line between soreness and injury. And working with athletes and injury is often more of an art than a science. If you have joint soreness that is not going away, is getting worse and is starting to affect your performance, don't wait for a full-blown injury to get help.



***Injuries may not always be visible,
but they can limit performance.***

Pain is a poor indicator of health. By the time we see pain associated with sub-failure injury, poor motor patterning and uneven joint strain have set in long ago. Changes in soft tissue commonly include muscle spasm with trigger points, stiffness and guarding in the surrounding connective tissue.

We also see functional changes in a joint involved in sub-failure injury. We can see loss of range of motion, agility and coordination. By the CrossFit definition, there is a loss of fitness. A range-of-motion abnormality, most commonly restriction, would be accompanied by asymmetry or misalignment when compared to the opposite side. Chiropractor Arthur Croft has pointed out that apparently normal joint range of motion may involve joint instability or ligamentous laxity that is compensated by muscle guarding (5).

For a joint to be stable, the surrounding muscles must have timing and coordination to move the joint properly through its range of motion. In some cases of sub-failure injury, we see greater muscle pre-activation to stabilize the joint. Here the muscles surrounding the joint are more stiff and guarded with less potential to do additional work. In other cases, the muscles are less pre-activated to put less pressure on the joint in a manner of pain avoidance. In this instance the muscles surrounding the joint do not fully contract when doing work to keep joint pain to a minimum. In either case, the joint is not performing at its maximum work capacity (6, 7).

Loss of agility and coordination occur due to damage and irritation to the nerve endings that detect motion and position of the joint. Specialized nerve endings in the joint, the proprioceptors and mechanoreceptors, are handy when you are trying to move heavy loads quickly over long distances. These specialized nerve endings tell your brain where a part of your body is in relation to space, as well as how quickly that body part is moving. Damage or irritation to these nerve endings leads to poor form and uneven joint strain. This can lead to a downward spiral of further damage and irritation.

For example, sub-failure injury to ligaments of the spine can damage the embedded mechanoreceptors and lead to chronic muscle dysfunction and chronic back pain (7).

A little pain is no big deal. We wouldn't be CrossFitters without it. But when pain is a result of poor form, inefficiency and strained performance, then it is a big deal. For example, if your right knee is sore, then your body will instinctively bend away from it to reduce the strain. It reduces the workload on one area and adds it to another area. This could lead to increased strain on the low back or the opposite ankle, knee or hip. Your right knee might stop hurting, but you are left wondering why your Fran time has gotten worse and why your left hip is suddenly bothering you.



***Your body will find ways to compensate for any imbalances.
That can create inefficient movement patterns and limit performance.***

This type of compensation can help you to finish a tough job on a long day or finish a particular workout with reduced strain on the involved joint. If this becomes a long-term solution, then this type of instinctive compensation can cause more problems than it solves. In some cases, the pain in the involved joint goes away, and the muscles pattern a compensatory motion that stiffens and guards. The involved joint is weaker and causes other problems in other areas.

Whether we call this a sub-failure injury, joint-subluxation complex, joint strain/sprain, or a “tricky” knee/shoulder/back, the question remains, “What is the best way to deal with it?”

Another person who can help your body heal from sub-failure injury is your friendly neighborhood CrossFit coach.

Many health-care practitioners who work with athletes can help with sub-failure injuries, including chiropractors, physical therapists, massage therapists, acupuncturists and medical doctors. Ask around and find a good one. You can also, as Bill Maher recommends, “Ask your doctor if getting off your ass is right for you.” (Your health-care provider will also rule out more rare and serious causes of joint pain.)

Another person who can help your body heal from sub-failure injury is your friendly neighborhood CrossFit coach. They do not diagnose or treat injury, but they do teach you to move your body with proper position and form through optimal ranges of motion in order to train your muscles and joints to work together. The goal may not be to find the picture-perfect form but to find what Kelly Starrett refers to as “best fit, best position.” A coach will help, but he or she cannot do it for you.

To Rest or to Work Out?

One common question is, “When should I work out with an injury?” I am a fan of getting back into the gym as soon as possible. I know that “as soon as possible” will mean “the same day” for some and “weeks” for others. Resume a modified workout schedule as soon as you can, and choose a routine that gives you the best workout without aggravating your condition.

Exercise can improve the circulation to help the healing process by removing damaged cells from the injured area and by sending new cells for growth and repair to the injured area. It can aid in stimulating the body’s natural growth-hormone release and improve the healing rate.

Exercise can help to correct compensatory muscle patterns due to muscle guarding associated with pain and injury. I would rather see someone back quickly at a highly modified workout with less weight, fewer reps and modified movements instead of someone staying at home on the couch. Inertia plays a mighty role in recovery, and an object at rest on a couch can stay there for a long time.



Great coaches can help athletes improve their mobility, which will usually result in less pain and improved performance.

Every athlete is different, and every injury is different. Take it one step at a time. First of all, it may be impossible to rehab an injured area without pain or discomfort. A sub-failure injury may have little or no pain and merely exhibit stiffness, guarding or loss of range of motion. An acute injury may involve resting the affected joint and doing a modified workout. As soon as you are able, start with taking the joint through range of motion without weight, or with only a broomstick or PVC pipe. Strive for excellent form with focus on proper positioning and range of motion for each given exercise.



During rehab, strive for great form in every movement you do.

Early on in rehab, or re-training, high reps with low weight are helpful. If you begin to add weight and form breaks down, reduce the weight! We are not trying to merely add strength to poor motor patterning. If exercise results in sharp or severe pain, then stop. Rest and ice the injured area for 20 minutes out of every hour at the minimum of two times.

(Contraindications to ice may include a previous history of frostbite, conditions or diseases of decreased circulation such as Raynaud's disease or diabetes, metabolic conditions such as gout or rheumatoid arthritis, or if you are really, really cold.)

Even as you begin to feel better and perform better, do not rush your rehab or training. Rehabbing an injury or re-training old habits can take a long time.

Always see your doctor if your problem becomes worse.

Even as you begin to feel better and perform better, do not rush your rehab or training. Rehabbing an injury or re-training old habits can take a long time. This can't happen at maximal loads. Focus on form and technique through complete ranges of motion with light weight and high reps. Focus on form first, and then build intensity. Depending on the person and the injury, this may take days, weeks or even months.

When you are back in the gym, get feedback or coaching during this phase of your training. It is important that you keep good form and dial back the intensity. Modifications will be necessary. This may involve deadlifts instead of squats, or step-ups instead of box jumps, or any of the millions of scaling variations. Sometimes training without a coach is like being a boxer in a fight without a corner man. A fighter always wants to keep fighting, but a good corner man knows when to throw in the towel. As CrossFitters, we are often chasing performance, and sometimes we need someone to tell us when to slow down and focus on form and technique. Even with excellent coaching and good form, exercise can aggravate injuries. Take your rehab and re-training seriously, in and out of the gym.

Don't forget rule No. 1: If you don't have time to warm up, you don't have time to work out! A proper warm-up will prepare the tendons, muscles and ligaments and make them less likely to tear. It will help warm up the joint surfaces and work in the synovial joint fluid that helps lubricate the surfaces of the joints. It will also help train the nerves, muscles and joints to work together. A good warm-up may include 5 minutes of foam rolling and 10 minutes of skills involving mobility, dynamic stretching and lifting mechanics. Even if you are short on time, spend at least 5 minutes warming up. Take this warm-up time to physically and mentally prepare yourself for the workout.

Every CrossFitter should own a foam roller and an ice pack.

Two Secrets to Rehab

Last but not least, you should include at least two things in your arsenal for rehab and recovery. Every CrossFitter should own a foam roller and an ice pack. In true CrossFit style, these two items are incredibly effective, widely available and very affordable.

Foam roll before stretching and it will be time well spent. Foam rolling helps to break up fibrous adhesions. If you foam roll before stretching, you can work out more areas of muscle tightness and get a more effective stretch.

(Contraindications to foam rolling may include fracture, bleeding, burns, broken bones, cancer, osteoporosis, acute infectious disease, open lesions or sores, blood clots, or varicose veins.)

Think of having a knot in a rope and then trying to stretch the rope. You could still increase the relative length of the rope without taking out the knot. But, if you took the knot out before stretching the rope, then you would be able to stretch the fibers along the entire length of the rope. You could have muscles with trigger points and spasm and stretch some of the fibers around these "knots." If you massage or foam roll these areas before dynamic warm-up or stretching, you will get a much more effective warm-up or stretch.

Here are two helpful videos from Jon Gilson of Again Faster:

[Foam Rolling Part 1](#)

[Foam Rolling Part 2](#)



Foam rolling before stretching can take the kinks out of muscles and allow you to really work on your flexibility.



Ice can be a CrossFitters best friend, especially after a hard workout.

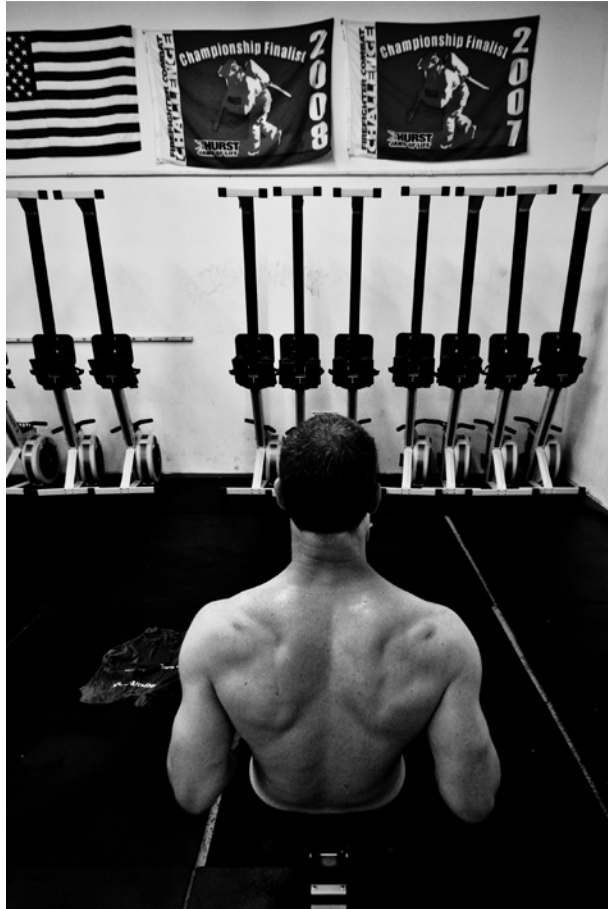
Next to your foam roller, your ice pack should be your best friend. Ice is probably the best “drug” in the world! It is incredibly cheap. It provides pain relief and anti-inflammatory effects without harmful side effects to the stomach, liver or kidneys. It will not increase your risk of stroke or heart attack. It is not addictive and won't make you sick. It does not cause cancer. It is good for most acute injuries and post-workout recovery.

There is no billion-dollar ice company. You will not see an ice commercial every 30 seconds on TV or an ice advertisement on every other page in newspapers and magazines. You are lucky if your doctor recommends it or even mentions it at all.

Ice, however, is not perfect, and it is not a cure-all. It is not recommended for areas with poor circulation, it can give you frostbite, and it won't fix a crappy diet or make up for lost sleep. But, if you have reached a plateau in your workout results, try using ice with your post-workout recovery. Ice baths are wonderful, but logistically they may be difficult for you to incorporate as a regular part of your recovery.

Here are three different tried and true methods:

1. **Big flexible gel pack.** This should set you back about \$10 at most stores with a pharmacy or first-aid section. I recommend using these for 20 minutes at a time, and then 40 minutes off. Do this once or twice for post-workout recovery, or more often for acute injuries.
2. **Ice massage.** Fill a small paper cup with water and set it in the freezer. After it is frozen, you can peel off a strip of paper around the rim of the cup to expose the top surface of ice. Use this area to rub on any sore areas. Keep the ice in motion and do not use for more than five minutes at a time. This is better for small areas with acute injuries.
3. **Cold shower.** Run cold water on sore arms and legs after a workout for a few minutes. This one is the best-kept secret in post-workout recovery.



**Your muscles move you.
You owe it to yourself to take care of them.**

It's on You

The No. 1 person who helps you heal and recover from a sub-failure injury is you. You eat the food. You get the rest. You do the exercises. Whether or not you ask for help, you work through your own rehab and recovery. How you do each one of these is up to you. Don't be afraid to take a step back in your training by dialing down the volume or intensity. Modify your workout as needed. And don't wait for a full-blown injury before you start to make improvements in your form and posture. Focus on form and technique through proper range of motion. Focus on form first, and then build intensity. The results will be astounding.



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About the Author

John Zimmer is the team chiropractor for Gentle Giant Moving Company, where he works with CrossFitters, rowers, runners, climbers, rugby players and martial artists who also happen to move furniture. In his spare time he can be seen hitting the WOD at Crossfit Boston.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Warming Up and Stretching: The Neglected Disciplines

If you don't warm up or stretch, you aren't optimizing your performance.
Bill Starr explains.

By Bill Starr

October 2010



S.Dy/CrossFit

Getting considerably stronger and staying that way is largely a matter of taking care of the details, such as training consistently, designing a program that fits your individual needs, eating wholesome foods, taking nutritional supplements, getting plenty of rest and so forth.

1 of 10



Staff/CrossFit Journal

***Warming up and stretching are two different things.
Learn the difference!***

Most serious strength athletes take care of these tasks diligently, yet at the same time they're negligent when it comes to two other disciplines that are most important to success in the weight room: warming up and stretching.

Are You Lazy?

I've watched athletes in a wide range of sports spend 20 minutes or more stretching out their muscles and doing various drills to warm up their bodies before a practice session or game. But when they walked into the weight room, they started lifting without doing anything to prepare themselves for the stress of moving heavy poundages in a wide range of exercises. And when they finished their sessions, they never bothered to stretch out those fatigued muscles. Rather, they picked up their gym bags and left.

Sound familiar? It should, because it happens in nearly every fitness facility in the country on a daily basis.

It's a mistake too many aspiring athletes make simply because they do not understand the importance of the two disciplines in terms of making steady gains and avoiding injuries. A proper warm-up will help anyone have a better session with the weights and greatly reduce the

risk of injury—which might be no more than a slight ding in the hamstrings, but even that curtails progress until it heals. Stretching the muscles and corresponding attachments after a strenuous session helps to improve overall flexibility, lessens muscle soreness and enhances recovery.

**It's my opinion that
most who ignore
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because they're lazy.**

In some cases, the two disciplines are skipped because the athlete has never been taught their value, and because no one else in the gym does any warm-ups or flexibility work, why should he—even though an abundance of evidence shows how beneficial stretching and warming up are to a hard-training athlete. However, it's my opinion that most who ignore doing any warm-up movements or stretching do so because they're lazy. There's nothing difficult about either of them. All it takes is a bit of time, and if someone is serious about his training, he will make the time to do both.

Then there is the confusion about how warm-ups and stretching benefit the athlete. Many are of the opinion that if they do some stretching prior to a workout, they have also warmed it up. Not true. Merely stretching out your hamstrings before squatting is not enough. It may be sufficient preparation if someone is about to walk or go on a slow jog, but not even close when a 400-lb. squat is on the agenda. Because a great many stretching and warming-up movements are closely related, it's often assumed that they do the same things for the body. Another misconception. While both are useful for every athlete, they're two different activities and provide very different benefits.

Warming up is just what the name implies: doing an exercise that helps to elevate your body's core temperature. This needs to be done before anyone proceeds to

more strenuous physical activities. An effective warm-up routine need not be complicated. Just the opposite, in fact: the simpler the better.

Warming up activates the enzymes responsible for the many chemical reactions that occur during physical exercise. The body's energy system depends on those enzymes and, until they're released, the energy system will not function properly. This is why an athlete feels sluggish at the beginning of a workout if he's failed to warm up properly. In addition, a warm-up routine helps the body deliver more oxygen to the muscles. Hemoglobin is responsible for transporting oxygen to the working muscles, and it's able to do the job more effectively when the muscle fibers are warm. The slightly higher temperature creates a positive pressure between the muscles and bloodstream, allowing more oxygen to go where it's needed. An elevated body temperature enhances the entire cardiovascular system by helping the arteries, veins and capillaries deliver nutrients and carry away waste products more expeditiously.

One of the real pluses of warming up that is frequently overlooked is that it also benefits the nervous system. Research has shown that a higher core temperature clears the way for the body to be able to read and receive nerve impulses. This is of particular importance to anyone doing high-skill exercises in his or her program, such as Olympic lifters and those who include power cleans, power snatches, high pulls or any other dynamic exercises in their weekly routines.

Warming Up Properly

A complete warm-up involves two stages, and the second stage consists of two parts, so some contend that there are three stages. The first stage is basic. Do an activity that elevates the overall body temperature. Nothing complicated here. Calisthenics are good, as is riding a stationary bike or skipping rope. A number of the Olympic lifters at York Barbell preferred skipping rope because it not only elevated their body temperature but also helped them get their foot speed, coordination and timing tuned up for the coming workout.



S.Dy/CrossFit

Stretching before a workout or competition can help you achieve the range of motion critical for success. This can be key in sports like Olympic lifting, where flexibility is essential.

How long should this first phase last? That depends on a number of factors, with the weather being the biggest one. In very warm or hot weather, the body doesn't need much in the way of warming up. In contrast, in severely cold weather the warm-up activity might take 15 minutes or longer before the body is ready for heavy lifting. And some days, it just takes longer than usual to get the body to respond. This may be due to a poor night's rest or because of an extra hard workout at the previous session. The rule of thumb I follow is when I start huffing and puffing from the exertion of the warm-ups, I'm ready to move to the next step.

But before I go into that, I'll lay out a warm-up routine that has served me well throughout the years and requires little in the way of equipment. I start out with 202 sit-ups, quickly followed by 50 back hyperextensions, and then I go to work with a stick. Usually, I found a broomstick in a closet and that was all I needed. I would place it behind my neck, bend over and do 100 twists, then raise it over my head with my arms straight and bend side to side for another 100 reps. By the time I was finished, I was breathing hard and I had not only elevated my body temperature, but I had also made sure that my core groups were ready for whatever was ahead.

I think it's critical to have the abs and lower back primed and ready for an upcoming workout.

I think it's critical to have the abs and lower back primed and ready for an upcoming workout. Some people have criticized me on using sit-ups instead of crunches because sit-ups involve the legs to some extent. But that's exactly why I prefer them over crunches as a warm-up exercise. I want the legs to be part of the movement because I'm going to be working my legs very soon thereafter.

When I found myself in a situation where I was still not warm enough after this routine, as when it was in the teens in Fielder's Shed in the dead of winter, I would do jumping jacks until I started sweating. Only then did I move to Phase 2 of the warming-up process.



S.D./CrossFit

Some athletes don't believe in warm-ups, but the smart ones know proper prep improves performance.

This part should be specific to the first exercise in the program. I'll give a few examples. Back squats come up first, so do 1 set of 20 reps on the adductor, leg-curl and leg-extension machines. If the gym is cold, do 2 sets. These will not tap into the leg strength but will get blood into those large muscles quite nicely. For any upper-body exercise, do a set of overhead presses, and lateral and frontal raises with dumbbells for 20 reps each. Still don't feel ready? Do another circuit.



Can't rack it? Stretch it.

For power cleans, full cleans, jerks and front squats, do the exercises I just mentioned to warm up your shoulders, then spend time stretching them out so you'll be able to rack the bar across your frontal deltoids without any difficulty. To do this, lock a bar in a power rack or load up a bar on a staircase squat rack with more weight than you can budge, then grip the bar with one hand and elevate your elbow as high as possible. Hold that top-most position for an 8-10 count. Do the other arm, and do as many sets as you need to feel the muscles start to relax. Now grip the bar with both hands and elevate them at the same time. Have someone assist you because that will help you lift your elbows higher than if you did the movement by yourself.

In this same vein of thought, spend a few moments stretching out your hamstrings before you move to the squat rack, and loosen your shoulders by grasping the upright of a power rack and twisting your torso away

from the upright. While you're doing the various forms of warm-ups, use that time to think ahead to the workout you plan to do. Picture yourself doing each set and what you must do to succeed with that final work set. Focus on the form points for the exercises you're about to do and you'll discover that you will be much more confident as you move through the session.

I also believe it's a smart idea to stretch out your hams and shoulders even if you're not going to be doing an exercise that directly involves them first in your program. During my vagabond period when I traveled around the country and stayed with friends in Hawaii, California, Texas, North Carolina and Maryland, I got to train in gyms with a lot of powerlifters. When the weather got colder, a large number of them would come to me complaining of severe pain in one or both of their shoulders. I would always ask, "Are you doing anything to warm them up?"

"Absolutely!" they would declare. "A good warm-up, extra sweatshirt and even some muscle rub." Then they would add, "But the funny thing is I don't feel any pain when I'm benching. It only hurts when I squat."

Eureka! A clue. I explained that their shoulders were very much a part of the squat, especially the way they did them with the bar set low on their backs. The shoulders were being placed under a tremendous amount of stress when they did those low-back squats with heavy weight. They were, of course, skeptical, but when they did as I suggested—spend 5-10 minutes warming up their shoulders with light dumbbells—the pain went away. Doing heavy squats without warm shoulders is much like doing a maximum isometric contraction on cold muscles. That's why it's a good idea to make certain all the major muscle groups are primed and ready for the work ahead.

Starting Light

The final stage is really no more than an extension of the second one. It consists of using light weights for the first few sets of an exercise. This is no more than common sense and is built into most routines. The lighter poundages allow you to concentrate on your form and set up a tight pattern for when the weights get heavier, and they let the body get better prepared for the harder work just ahead. Yet I am amazed at how many people in gyms ignore this concept and try and start right out with weights that are close to their max. Their rationale? Doing all those light sets taps into their top-end strength. Let me state this, if an athlete is in such sad condition that he can't recover from 3 or 4 warm-ups sets, he needs to do something about his endurance.



Staff/CrossFit Journal

Start light and work up to heavy weight. Jumping right into the big numbers can have disastrous results.



Staff/CrossFit Journal

A broomstick or piece of PVC can be your best friend when loosening up for a workout or competition.

How light should the first few sets be? It depends on the weather and on the individual. I once trained with a man in his mid-40s who had a history of shoulder problems. He would stay with the empty Olympic bar for as many sets as he deemed necessary before adding any weight to the bar. And he was pound for pound one of the strongest benchers I ever came across who never used steroids.

On the flip side, I've watched aspiring Olympic lifters use 132 on the clean and snatch for 8 or 9 sets. They told me it was to make sure they had the form down perfectly before

running the numbers up, but that's a bit much. While it's true that if you can't clean, snatch or jerk a light weight correctly, you're not going to be able to do any of those lifts correctly with heavier poundages unless you start moving up the ladder when you still have enough gas in the tank to handle some bigger weights.

Naturally, some lifters can jump from a very light weight to a very heavy one. Dave Sheppard could go from 135 to 315 in the snatch in a single bound. When we gave exhibitions at York, I watched Bill March press 225, jump to 315 and finish with 350 in quick order. And I saw Bob Bednarski do a warm-up with 225 and proceed to clean and jerk 425 on his next set. They learned how to do this because at an exhibition the audience didn't want to see a lot of warm-ups. They wanted to see the heavy stuff, and Bednarski and March always delivered.

**The tried-and-true axiom
in weight training is this:
you can start too heavy,
but you can never
start too light.**

Of course, they were the exception. As a general rule, starting with a very light weight works best. The tried-and-true axiom in weight training is this: you can start too heavy, but you can never start too light.

I was working with Ken Patera at the 1970 World Championships in Columbus, Ohio, and watched to see how the Russian powerhouse Vasilyi Alekseyev warmed up for his attempts on platform. He always started with 135, even though it was as if he was playing with a child's set of weights. On his quest to be the first man to clean and jerk 500 lb. he still began with 135.

While you're working your way up on the sets of an exercise, stretch out the muscles that are involved in the movement in between sets. I discovered early on that if I stretched out my hamstrings right after I finished a set of front or back squats, the next set went much easier and I was better able to achieve my goal for that day because my leg biceps were not allowed to tighten up. While I was waiting for my

next turn at the squat station, I would put my foot up on a bench and do a hurdler's stretch for both legs. That little bit of extra stretching paid huge dividends, and I wasn't doing anything else during that rest period—except running my mouth, and that I could do while I stretched. The simple act of stretching a muscle that is being exercised vigorously is beneficial in that it helps to remove lactic acid and makes the muscle more prepared for the next set.

The same idea applies to benching, inclining, snatching, jerking and cleaning, or any exercises in the routine for that matter. Stretch out your triceps after a straight-arm pull-over and the next set will be easier. Some groups absolutely need to be stretched after every set. Such as the calves. Fail to stretch them well after a set and you will pay the price. If not right away, somewhere down the road.

After the Lifting

After you finish your workout, you need to do yet more stretching. It helps alleviate muscle and attachment soreness and facilitate recovery, which is one of the keys

to making steady progress. With the muscles warm and flushed with blood, stretching right after the session is the ideal time for this discipline. But in real life, this seldom happens, primarily because most people are on a rather tight schedule and have ended up training longer than they had planned to, usually because they got to talking with friends or hitting on the opposite sex. Regardless of the reason, they just grab their gym bags and leave right after their last set.

I confess that I am also guilty of this, but I didn't forsake my stretching. I did it after I got home and showered or later on that night. The latter worked best for me. I would wait until I calmed down from the workout and had a few Millers to help relax, then I would start moving around: squatting, twisting, turning and bending to find what groups were tight. Once I identified them, I would stretch them out as best I could. I would do the stretching while watching TV or while taking a break from my reading or artwork, and in the course of a few hours, I might go through a stretching routine two or three times.



S.Dy/CrossFit

The post-workout period is the best time to stretch.



S.Dy/CrossFit

Take care of your body, and it will take you to new records. Neglect it and your progress will be slowed by soreness and even injury.

If I got lazy and didn't bother doing any stretching, I always had to spend a much longer time getting my body ready for the next workout. And even then, I wasn't nearly as sharp as I was when I took the time to stretch. Everyone has certain areas of their bodies that tighten more than others. For me, it has always been my hamstrings and calves. If I don't stretch them immediately after working them, they generally cramp during the night.

I need to point out that even though someone stretches the various muscles in his body religiously, it doesn't mean he's doing it correctly.

I need to point out that even though someone stretches the various muscles in his body religiously, it doesn't mean he's doing it correctly. What every strength athlete needs to know is there are three types of stretching, and there is the stretch reflex. The three types of stretches are: passive, ballistic and static.

A stretch is passive when someone assists you with the stretching movement. For example, your training partner pushes against your back while you're sitting on the floor to stretch your back and hamstrings. Or he pushes up against your elbows while you're locked onto the bar to improve flexibility in your shoulders and elbows.

Ballistic stretching is a rhythmic, bouncing motion and shouldn't be done because it's potentially harmful. Static stretching is the way to go and consists of placing some body part in a stretched position and holding it there for a length of time. Some recommend holding a static stretch for 20 seconds, but I believe longer is much more productive: 45 seconds to a full minute. Static stretching is done gently and never forced.

That brings us to the stretch reflex. It's a built-in safeguard to keep you from doing harm to the muscles by overstretching them. Whenever someone forces a stretch, he activates the stretch reflex. If you experience pain during a stretch, that's the stretch reflex checking in and telling you to back off. Ease off a bit and allow the stretched muscle or muscles to relax, then continue to hold in that more comfortable position for the desired count. Stretching should not be painful. It should be soothing. If any of your stretches hurt, you're doing it wrong and need to change your approach to the discipline.

Those who have a large number of high-skill exercises in their routines need to pay closer attention to stretching regularly than those who only have a few, or none at all. For instance, an Olympic lifter needs to be much more flexible than a powerlifter, and both need to stretch more than a bodybuilder.

Stretch for Performance

Of course, flexibility is a tremendous asset in every sport, from wrestling to volleyball to tennis to baseball. Here's something else to ponder: artery walls are made up of the same components—smooth muscle cells and connective tissue—as the muscles in your hips, back, legs, shoulders, chest and arms. So when you stretch out those groups, you're also making your arteries, veins and capillaries more pliant. A recent study has shown that adults who went through a systematic stretching routine significantly increased the flexibility of the walls of their carotid artery, the vessel that supplies blood to the brain. In addition, regular stretching helps soothe the nerves, and this is always a good thing.

Yet at the same time, you must stretch correctly and not go nuts over the discipline. Several studies have revealed that excessive stretching can actually loosen a joint too much, and when done improperly stretching can cause muscle damage, both of which will have an adverse affect on your performance level in the weight room.

Obtaining a fuller range of motion will aid you in having a more productive workout, reduce the risk of injury to your muscles and joints, and facilitate recovery. In a nutshell, warming up properly will help you have a better workout, and being more flexible allows you to do more lifts correctly and is important in the recuperation process. Both are free. All you have to do is supply time and energy.

I call that a good deal.



About the Author

*Bill Starr coached at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, the 1970 World Olympic Weightlifting World Championship in Columbus, Ohio, and the 1975 World Powerlifting Championships in Birmingham, England. He was selected as head coach of the 1969 team that competed in the Tournament of Americas in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, where the United States won the team title, making him the first active lifter to be head coach of an international Olympic weightlifting team. Starr is the author of the books **The Strongest Shall Survive: Strength Training for Football** and **Defying Gravity**, which can be found at [The Aasgaard Company Bookstore](#).*

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Blood, Blisters, Sexism and Pull-ups

There's no need to rip your hands up in everyday training. Pär Larsson explains a pull-up technique that might hurt your ego but not your hands.

By Pär Larsson

October 2010



Courtesy of Pär Larsson

"Do No Harm"

—First rule of medicine

I don't mind calluses. No one particularly cares what my hands look like. I personally don't care who does more pull-ups faster than I do in a generic WOD at CrossFit SoCal as long as I'm having fun and getting a good workout consistent with my goals. I do, however, care if I'm doing a pull-up test for work or a competition—and I really mind if my hands are bleeding or if pieces of them are missing. Blood makes a mess that eventually has to be cleaned up, and call me a sissy, but pain hurts.

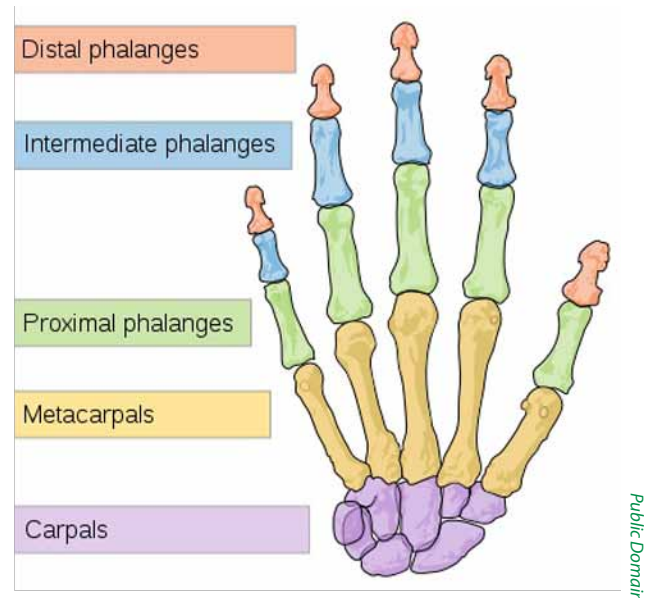
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Thirteen years of doing pull-ups, rock climbing and being tested on max consecutive pull-ups for Navy special programs taught me how to avoid busting up my hands with a minimum of effort and no fancy gear, gloves or tape. I don't want to go off on a rant here, but judging by the number of CrossFit athletes I see with bloody hands and ripped blisters, plenty of people can learn from my mistakes, and this might be something worth watching for if you're a trainer.

People who don't have a history of upper-body strength training or rock climbing are at comparatively greater risk for palm injuries when they start getting into CrossFit more seriously. They get excited about newfound strength and skills, and their consecutive and cumulative pull-up numbers per day or week increase dramatically. Part of this is due to a sexist society at large that discourages young girls in particular and regular people/cubicle-dwellers in general from climbing trees and rocks or developing

upper-body strength. Anorexic-looking teenage role models also contribute to young girls in general not wanting to be strong or able to do basic fitness exercises. Some of those same people later discover CrossFit and the fun of being able to do pull-ups, and they go hog wild on the WODs and rip their hands to pieces.

Training



The bones of the hand. Keeping your metacarpals and proximal phalanges in line during pull-ups can prevent hand tears.

For training purposes when doing pull-ups, keep your metacarpals in line with your proximal phalanges; i.e., your hand bones and the first bones in your fingers. This sucks because it's harder to do pull-ups with your center of gravity an inch lower, and it takes more finger/forearm strength. The first week or two or five, you might have to go back to using a band sometimes, or doing jumping pull-ups on a box, or using an easier band. I understand this might hurt your pride, your ego and your self-esteem like it did mine, but as long as I get the workout I need I see no need to care much if I beat my friends in an everyday training environment. At least I don't care as much compared to when my job or future career in the military is on the line. Plus, I don't have to worry about caring for ripped and bleeding hands. Go rock climbing a few times and you'll learn a ton (I did)

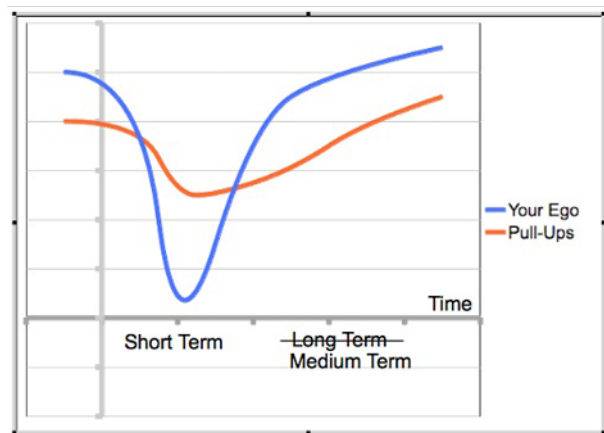


Your "no-tear" training grip.

Courtesy of Pär Larsson



The training grip in action.



"In the long term we are all dead."

— John Maynard Keynes

about the 10 million ways you can use a handhold. This "training grip" eliminates tons of friction on the top inside of your palm muscles and skin, which is what causes the ubiquitous blisters there. Rock-climbing bonus: the sport can also teach you how to get yourself and your friends out of a canyon when a thunderstorm rolls in and people start getting scared.

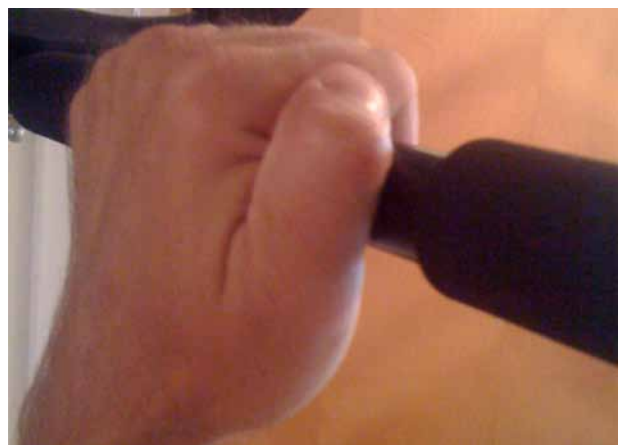
Business

For competition or tests (i.e., business purposes), you rock out with a full grip, surprising all your friends and making your competition cry. This is the grip the vast majority of people unfortunately use on a regular basis, as it puts your center of gravity as high as possible relative to the bar, gives you maximum grip strength and also regrettably leads to blisters, blood, bomb craters/gunshot wounds in your hands and a usually false sense of badassness.

Don't use this grip unless it really, really matters that day how many consecutive pull-ups you do. This approach would be best for:

- Competition.
- Various military/fire-rescue/police physical tests.
- When you're running from the mob/cops/mafia/werewolves/someone's angry husband/your ex-wife and need to clear a few high fences quickly.
- When you want to impress someone.

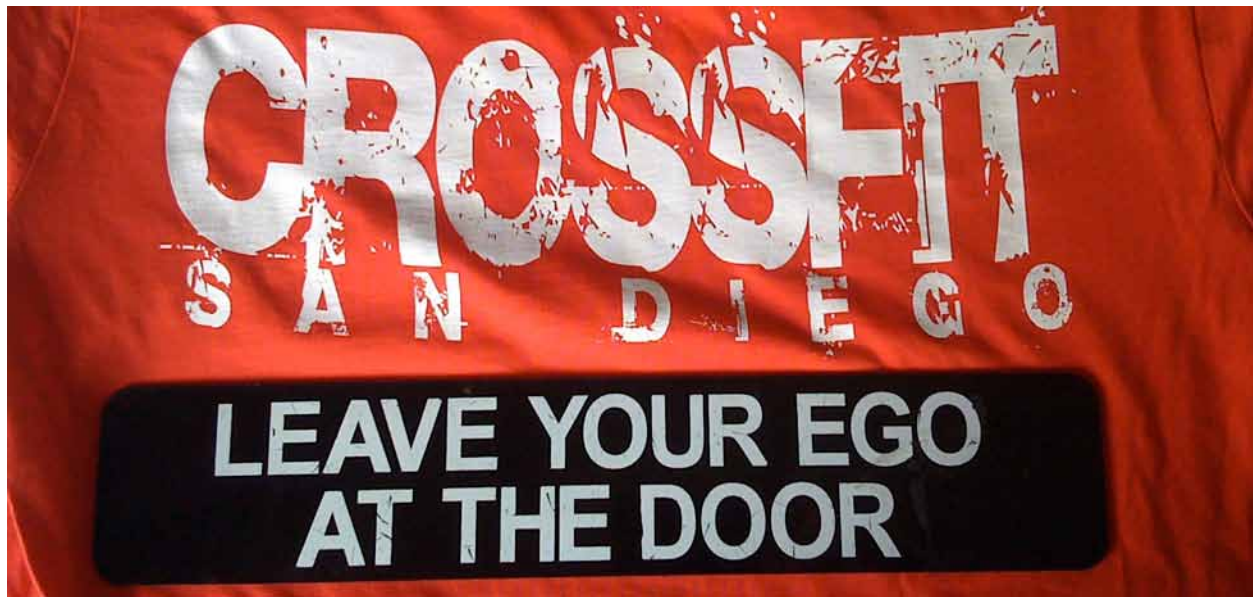
In those cases, do what you have to do, and when the blisters rip ... well, suck it up, buttercup.



Courtesy of Pär Larsson

The "business grip" for all-out pulling.

Courtesy of Pär Larsson



The shirt is full of wisdom. Bloody hands and missed workouts are not part of smart training.

Counter-Arguments

"Easy for you to say! You can actually do pull-ups hanging from your fingers, you condescending jackass." But I was not always able to do this. I sucked at it for years, then started climbing and figured it out. Just trying to help.

"Train like you fight and fight like you train. Hoo-yah! Ooh-rah!"

Feel free to always use live ammo in training. Feel free to beat me in the WOD every day. Feel free to always go 100 percent in training so you're tired and all beat to hell when they bang on the door at 0200 and tell you to get in your wet wetsuit in the middle of winter to get guys out from underneath our own frickin' submarine in 10-foot seas. Feel free to go for that one-rep max every day at the gym, especially the week before the CrossFit Games or before the big job interview/vacation/deployment. While you're doing that, I'll be the old guy in the corner with an emphasis on having fun, safety and constant mission readiness.

"I heard about this one guy who does this thing and never rips his hands."

I heard the moon is made of cheese.

"But for chest-to-bar pull-ups, I'm not gonna be able to hang from my fingers."—CrossFit SoCal athlete.

You might not be able to, or to do as many as you're used to right now, but you can work up to it. Once you've done that, you no longer have to worry about bleeding palms or putting on gloves, and you will have much better grip strength plus the option to make your pull-ups marginally easier on tests or in competitions whenever you feel like it.

Pull-ups

Pull-ups are by far the biggest culprit when it comes to ripping hands in a CrossFit environment. Your ego is guaranteed to take a bit of a hit while learning how to save your palms from blisters and blood, and your workout partners may make fun of you for not being able to do as many as you usually do or having to use a band or box while your grip and forearm strength gradually adapt to the increased workload in your regular everyday WODs.

Kettlebell Swings

Kettlebell swings can occasionally cause blister issues and palm injuries. The same principles as for the pull-up grip apply, with the added concern that you absolutely cannot allow that load to slip away from you in mid-swing (or overhead) if people or kids are running around. You want the fingers to do most of the gripping, with the top "meaty" part of your palm doing as little rolling/rubbing/moving as possible. This involves your fingers making contact with the handle first, then sliding down toward the kettlebell so that your palm is just barely touching the handle.

Olympic Lifts and Deadlifts

These lifts have their own grip requirements beyond the scope of this article (see the *CrossFit Journal* article [Learning the Olympic Lifts: The Grip](#)), and few of us have the kind of grip strength to allow us to deadlift normal WOD loads with our fingers only. You can still pay attention to how that top meaty part in your palm is contributing to your overall grip, though. As long as it's not being doubled over by the force of the bar pressing into your palm and then sliding toward the fingers, your palm should be all right even when doing fast, medium-heavy lifts for time.

Caveat: WODs that include "deadlifts for time" or similar moves at a significant percentage of your maximum load capacity will jar your grip and can easily rip blisters. You should pay attention to all things equally, but this is one of those things you should pay attention to more equally than others if you have pre-existing blisters/calluses and don't feel like dealing with bleeding hands that day.

Weighted Pull-Ups

Weighted pull-ups are generally the bane of blistered hands. Witness Amy H. of CrossFit Salem, who did Murph with a 40-lb. weight vest at a Globo Gym. The Globo Gym people freaked out when they saw the blood. The results of Amy's workout are featured on the cover of this article.

"Dyno pull-ups" count as stupid CrossFit tricks and find the athlete completely letting go of the bar and either

reconnecting with the same or another bar, either above or below, with the same or a new grip style. (The Swedish Special variety: do a normal palms-forward pull-up, let go completely at the top and catch in a reverse chin-up grip before you hit the ground or anything else, then repeat and switch. This is not recommended for people with elbow/shoulder/wrist issues or who aren't already very bored with regular pull-ups.) For these types of exercises, as well as muscle-ups and weighted pull-ups, you're generally SOL as far as saving your palms. Even thinking about doing something like this should tell you to watch out and be careful, no matter how BA everyone in the gym thinks you are. *Caveat athlete.*

Gloves, Leather Grips, Etc.

[Newgrip.com](#), [American-gymnast.com](#) and [Ragefitness.com](#) sell some excellent solutions for those days when you want to really max out on pull-ups and save your palms at the same time. Your gym-mates might giggle a bit, call you Sally and tell you to put the handbag down, but if you're ripping out a set of 20 weight-vested pull-ups on the morning of your wedding, then you're OK in my book. For more details on purpose-made gear, how to tape your hands if needed and also on how to deal with hand wounds once you do have them, see gymnastics and CrossFit coach Phil Savage's excellent *CrossFit Journal* article from 2008, [Hand Rips: Causes, Treatments and Preventions](#).



Courtesy of Pär Larsson

***Does this make you cool? Perhaps, but it also means you can't train for a few days.
By altering your grip, you might be able to bypass the blood.***



Courtesy of Pär Larsson

The middle ground between training and business grips.

Other Grip Techniques

There exists a middle ground between the training and business grips, with the distal thumb phalange supporting your fingers on top of bar, which might require you to slightly cup your hand so that your middle knuckle is actually raised off the bar.

This grip will give you calluses and/or blisters if you use it as your normal training grip. It's also a bit harder to achieve, but it gives you a more secure grip that puts your center of gravity almost as high as the business grip while still somewhat lowering the risk of injury to your palms. Experimentation in a safe environment is highly recommended. Just make sure that the top, meaty part of your palm isn't rolled against your fingers but pushed down towards your wrist as much as possible. Don't experiment on the side of a cliff unless you're roped up, please. Also don't do pull-ups hanging off the outside of a merchant-marine vessel underway in the Persian Gulf (long story).



Courtesy of Pär Larsson

Have fun in the shower, dude.

Calluses

Calluses aren't necessarily a bad thing. You can file them down with a small file or a pumice stone, which may very well be a good idea if you happen to have significant calluses and a big competition or test coming up where you know you'll be placing an unusual and disproportionate demand on your palms. Less bloodstains on your clothes and other people's equipment is generally a good thing and leads to people not considering you a crazy cult member/endorphin addict.

So where's the sexism part? That was the part about a sexist society at large not encouraging young girls growing up to do anything that develops upper-body strength or climbing trees, rocks or buildings. Not to mention the idiotic prevailing stick-thin-and-weak female beauty ideal. Or you could accuse me of sexism when I say the vast majority of ripped hands I see in CrossFit gyms belong to otherwise smart women who just got carried away when they got good at pull-ups and discovered it's fun and cool to be strong. Plus it let me put the word sex in the title to grab your attention.

Murph happens. Accidents happen and can become funny Facebook profile pictures that your "normal" friends are guaranteed to ooh and aah over. But there's no real need to rip your hands apart in a training environment. Of course, that's just my opinion. I could be wrong.

Courtesy of Pär Larsson



Give the author's techniques a try and this carnage might be a thing of the past.

"Don't mess yourself up worse than you were before you started."

—First rule of working out with Pär



Courtesy of Pär Larsson

About the Author

Pär Larsson is a Level 1 CrossFit trainer and recovering Ironman triathlete who has been Ironman-free for almost two years with the loving support of his friends. He's afraid of deep, dark water and became a Navy deep-sea diver/2,000-foot atmospheric dive-suit pilot. He's also afraid of heights and so he naturally became a rock climber. He's currently addicted to cookies and drives past five other CrossFit gyms every day to get to CrossFit SoCal.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

The Afghanistan Games

Deployed U.S. Army troops experience the intensity of CrossFit competition.
Sgt. 1st Class Rafael C. Lopez reports.

By Sgt. 1st Class Rafael C. Lopez II

October 2010

All images courtesy of 1Sgt. 1st Class Rafael C. Lopez



We are an aviation unit that is deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. For people who are unfamiliar with us, you can view our history in the CrossFit Journal article [APFT A-OK](#).

1 of 5

Our soldiers work a 12-hour day for 13 days straight. During deployment, they have experienced climates and higher altitudes the majority of them have not seen before.

We started our CrossFit program about five months ago and have been going strong. Our soldiers have found a new motivation and drive at all physical-fitness sessions and have become better-rounded soldiers overall because of it. I cannot express enough that since we began CrossFit, not only have our soldiers improved their physical fitness but they have also become mentally stronger as well. When soldiers start mentally working through WODs, they are actually conditioning their brains to push through the pain that we normally feel on a daily basis as soldiers. When you can mentally prepare yourself to make it through a gruesome WOD, then you can push yourself through the long missions of combat.

We decided about three months ago to hold our own CrossFit competition here in Afghanistan. We wanted to create something that would increase both unit cohesion and boost esprit de corps within the ranks. Initially we were going to use a hopper-style WOD creator for the event, but we later decided to do our own programming.

We decided about three months ago to hold our own CrossFit competition here in Afghanistan. We wanted to create something that would increase both unit cohesion and boost esprit de corps within the ranks.

We wanted to have the competition span two days, with two WODs per day, but due to mission requirements we could only afford to perform one physical-fitness (PT) session per day, so we expanded the event to four days. I was concerned about soldiers not really experiencing the physical and mental toughness to survive two workouts in a day, but I knew they were going to be exposed to an



The CrossFit event in Afghanistan gave soldiers a chance to experience the thrill and intensity of competition.



Based on the Affiliate Cup, the competition encouraged teamwork and group cohesion, both of which are essential to a military unit.

intensity level in PT sessions that they were not used to because I usually scale things down for the soldiers and they also only performed PT every other day.

In the end they definitely had a run for their money, and they were feeling it more and more as the days went on.

3, 2, 1... Go!

We designed the event to work like an Affiliate Cup competition. The main reason why we went this way instead of singles' competitions was a lack of judges and a lack of equipment. We formed groups of four soldiers to compete in an all-out war against each other. We published the idea of the competition about a month and a half out, but the WODs remained a secret to allow for the unknown

and unknowable. We informed all teams that they would find out the workout the morning of and no sooner.

Smack talking began quickly, with all explaining why their team was better than other teams, and we knew this would be the fuel that would keep everyone burning for the battle. When Day 1 arrived, the talk was at its peak.

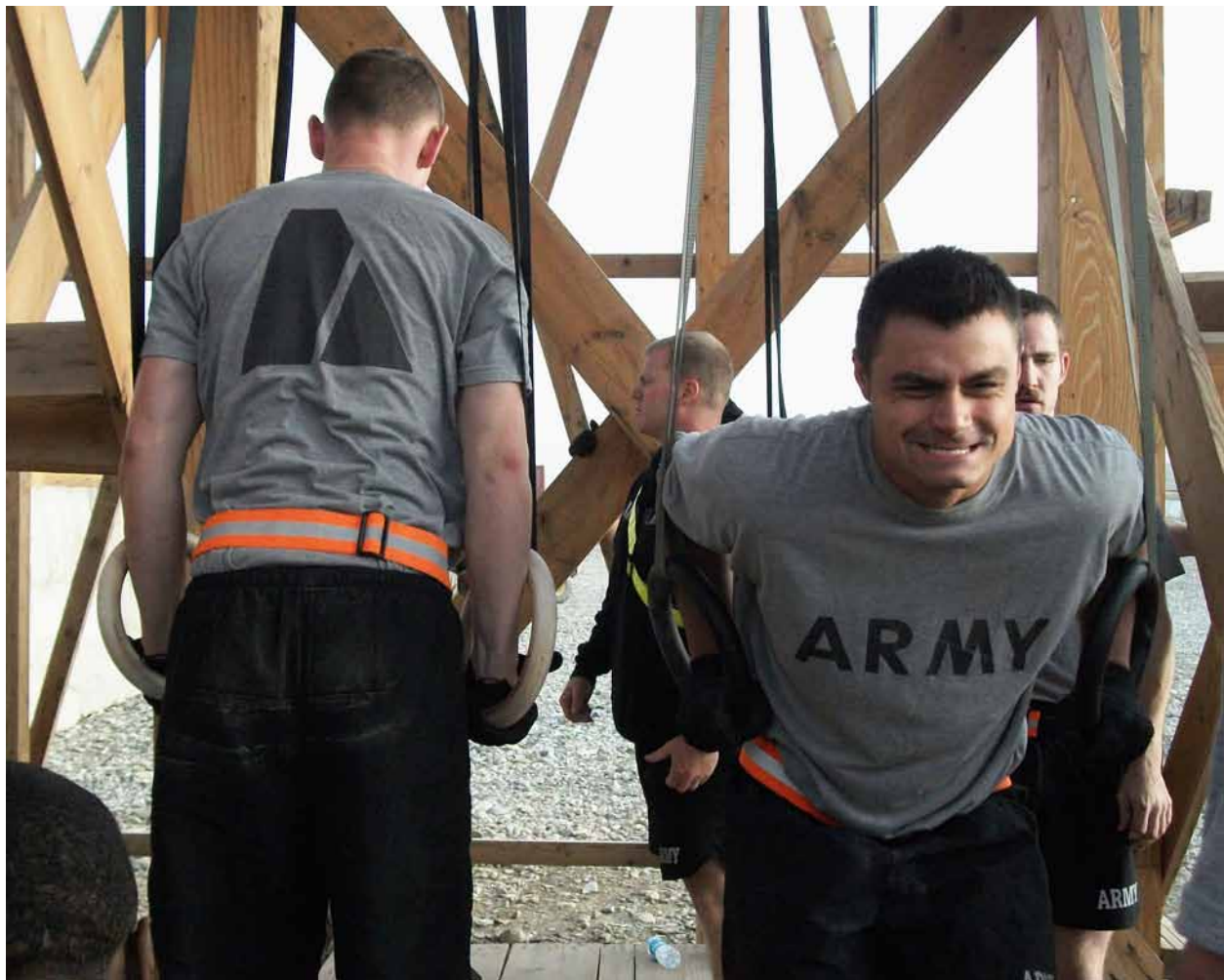
The WODs would be completed as a team effort, with one individual performing the work at a time. Points would be awarded for what place they came in, and the team with the lowest score on the fourth day would be deemed the best team in the company. We gave the teams the opportunity to dissect the WOD and figure out how they would tackle the workout to give them a touch of multi-tasking and problem solving.

We started the competition with a simple couplet that would warm the bodies up for what was to come: 60, 45 and 30 50-kg squat cleans and ring dips. "That's it?" was heard a lot when we made the announcement, but we knew the majority of the competitors had not been exposed to a lot of squat cleans, and nearly all of them had never performed a ring dip. Needless to say, "That's it?" was not heard much after the workout.

On Day 2 we revealed another couplet: two rounds of a 1K run followed by 400 sumo deadlift high pulls with a 1.5-pood kettlebell. This time no-one commented on whether it was going to be easy or not, and when the workout started the soldiers were lumbering through the pain of the high reps after the run. They took off after the

first round running on tubes of Jell-O instead of legs. But they kept pushing on through the pain to finish the WOD.

Day 3 consisted of a 20-minute AMRAP of 9 reps of 100-kg deadlifts, 8 muscle-ups and 9 reps of ground to overhead using 50 kg. Because many of the soldiers could not perform muscle-ups, we set the rings just below arms' reach and allowed teams to perform jumping muscle-ups. However, if a team member could do a strict muscle-up, we would count that as two reps. Teams would have to change their own weight as they would be using the same bar for the deadlifts and the ground-to-overhead lifts.



The soldiers quickly learned that a ring dip is far harder than a regular dip, especially after a series of squat cleans.

We were stuck with a two-way tie for reps on Day 3, so we decided to go for a single attempt at a one-rep-max deadlift. We wanted to be fair, so they had a best-of-three rock, paper and scissors competition to decide who would lift first. The winning deadlift came in at 480 lb.

Following the completion of the reps, the team had to administer intravenous fluids to a team member before the clock would stop.

On the final day, everyone was waiting for the workout until they saw the chipper. We wanted to go out with a bang, so we put as much as we thought we could put on the soldiers to see how they would handle the final WOD: 100 40-kg thrusters, 200 burpees, a 400-meter walk with 60 kg overhead, 300 box jumps, 100 30-kg overhead squats. Following the completion of the reps, the team had to administer intravenous fluids to a team member before the clock would stop. With a second-place tie at the end of the competition, we gave them a quick WOD of total team time for 100 pull-ups, 100 GHDs and 100 air squats. The tiebreaker was won by two air squats.



The final evolution of the competition: administer an IV.

A Ringing Success

The soldiers complained about the complexity of the WODs and the pain in their bodies up until the end. Once all was said and done, we heard nothing but, "That was fun! Thanks for the good time!"

Believe me: I would never take anything away from the soldiers in terms of the effort they put forward during our PT sessions, but this competition really motivated them to give 125 percent in their workouts.

Now the only question is when they will physically be able to perform their duties again!



About the Author

Rafael C. Lopez is a platoon sergeant in an Aviation Unit Maintenance Task Force in the United States Army. SFC Lopez has dedicated his time to developing combat-effective soldiers through CrossFit by implementing it in his physical-fitness training after his Level 1 Certification course. He aspires to continue studying CrossFit and obtain his Level 2 Certification, and he wishes to open his own CrossFit gym.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Planning for a Win

Josh Everett reveals the six-week training program that earned him a victory in the 85-kg class at the CrossFit-USA Open in Colorado Springs.

By Josh Everett

October 2010



Staff/CrossFit Journal

When I first heard of the possibility of a CrossFit weightlifting championship from Dave Castro, I was excited. Weightlifting is one of the four sports I have seriously and specifically trained for and competed in (the others being track and field, football and CrossFit).



Staff/CrossFit Journal

Scoring 259 in the triplet, Everett edged out Games competitor Pat Burke by six points overall to win the 85-kg class.

My first question to Dave was, "How can we be sure that the event is competed in by CrossFitters and weightlifters don't come in and dominate?" Dave wasn't sure at the time but eventually came up with an AMRAP triplet where reps completed would be added to your snatch and clean-and-jerk total to produce a final score.

This seemed like a great idea to me until I found out an old foe of mine (double-unders) would be part of the triplet. The double-under addition made me seriously think about not competing, but I decided I had plenty of time to become competent at them and go and give it the old college try. I knew I'd regret not competing in this inaugural event, so it was time to develop a plan!

Known and Knowable

Those who know me well know I'm a very routine-oriented person. I like having a schedule, and I like sticking to it. The constantly varied part of CrossFit is the part of the program I like the least. Well, I'll go ahead and admit it: I hate it. I'd really like to be able to tell you what workout I'll be doing three weeks from now on Tuesday, and at what time.

"Blasphemy!" you say. Not really. I don't disagree with constant variety philosophically, and it's necessary for fitness, but it doesn't make it any more comfortable for me. I think that's the point, though.

Anyway, knowing the exact movements, time domain and day/time of the competition was right up my alley. It wasn't all gonna be peaches and cream, though. I was also asked to perform an Isabel competition/exhibition with my friend Dave Lipson. Isabel would go off Friday night, then I'd need to come back on Saturday and compete in the CrossFit-USA Open against a tough field of competitors who would be well rested. That was another group of circumstances to consider in my preparation, but I was confident I'd be ready for the task.

As I mentioned earlier, weightlifting was a sport of mine. I had previously qualified for and competed in three USAW national-championship meets, placing as high as ninth. My coach during this time was none other than Mike Burgener. It had been years since Coach B had done my programming, but he is the best and I knew I needed his guidance to prepare for this meet. I had always felt well-prepared training under Coach B. He hooked me up with a training plan, and away I went. Here's what my five-week training program looked like:

Mondays

Week 1

1. 3-position snatch (high hang, below knees, floor): warm-up sets as needed, then 3 sets of 3-position snatches with 75 percent 1RM
2. Snatch pull: 1 set of 3 with 90 percent, 2 sets of 3 with 95 percent of snatch max
3. Snatch push press: work up to a heavy single (today that was 115 kg)
4. Super-set strict pull-ups (5x10) with hip extensions (5x10)

Week 2

1. 2-position snatch (high hang, floor): warm-up sets as needed, then 3 sets of 2-position snatches with 85 percent
2. Snatch pull: 2 sets of 3 with 100 percent
3. Snatch push press: heavy single (made 110 kg, failed at 120)
4. Super-set strict pull-ups (3x12) with hip extensions (3x15)

Week 3: Unloading Week

1. Snatch: warm-up sets as needed, then 3 sets of 3 reps from high hang (70 percent)
2. Snatch pull: 3 sets of 3 reps with 100 percent
3. Obstacle-course workout

Week 4

1. Snatch: warm-up sets as needed, then 3 sets of 1 with 90 percent
2. Snatch pull: 3 sets of 3 reps with 105 percent
3. Snatch push press: work up to a heavy single (117.5 kg)
4. Strict pull-ups 2x15, hip extensions 2x15

Week 5

1. Snatch: warm-up sets as needed, then 3 sets of 1 with 90 percent
2. Snatch pull: 2 sets of 3 reps with 100 percent
3. Snatch push press: work up to a heavy single (120 kg)
4. Strict pull-ups 2x15, hip extensions 2x15



CrossFitters have always been impressed with Everett's Oly skills, and the Open gave him a chance to showcase his power on the platform.



Everett snatched 117 kg on his way to a 267-kg total that was second only to Olympian Chad Vaughn's 313.

Tuesdays

Week 1

1. Muscle snatch: work up to max for the day (85 kg)
2. Back squat: warm-up sets as needed, then 6 sets of 3 with 75 percent
3. Front squat: warm-up sets as needed, then 3 sets of 3 with 70 percent
4. 3 rounds for time: 10 power snatches (60 kg), 30 double-unders—5:40

Week 2

1. Muscle snatch: work up to max for the day (90 kg)
2. Back squat: warm-up sets as needed, then 6 sets of 2 with 85 percent
3. Front squat: warm-up sets as needed, then 3 sets of 3 reps with 70 percent
4. 15, 12, 9 power snatches (60 kg), ring dips (clock malfunction)

Week 3

1. Muscle snatch: work up to max for the day (80 kg)
2. 3 rounds for time: 10 power snatches (60 kg), 30 double-unders—3:38

Week 4

1. Muscle snatch: work up to max for the day (92.5 kg)
2. Back squat: warm-up sets as needed, then 6 sets of 1 with 85 percent
3. Front squat: warm-up sets as needed, then 3 sets of 3 with 70 percent
4. 15, 12, 9 power snatches (60 kg), ring dips—3:53

Week 5

1. Muscle snatch: work up to max for the day (90 kg)
2. Back squat: warm-up sets as needed, then 1 set of 1 with 90 percent
3. 3 rounds for time: 10 power snatches (60 kg), 30 double-unders—3:16

Wednesdays

Week 1

1. 3-position clean: warm-up sets as needed, then 3 sets of 3-position cleans with 75 percent
2. Behind-the-neck jerk: work up to a medium single (130 kg)
3. 1 clean deadlift plus 3 shrugs from mid-thighs: 2 sets of 4 with 85 percent

Week 2

1. 2-position clean: warm-up sets as needed, then 3 sets of 2-position cleans with 85 percent
2. Behind-the-neck jerk: work up to a medium single—135 kg
3. 1 clean deadlift plus 3 shrugs from the mid-thighs: 2 sets with 90 percent

Week 3

1. Cleans from the high hang: 3 sets of 3 with 70 percent
2. Behind-the-neck jerk: 3 sets of 3 with 70 percent

Week 4

1. Clean: 3 sets of 1 with 90 percent
2. Behind-the-neck jerk: work up to a medium single (140 kg)
3. Clean pull: 2 sets of 3 with 100 percent

Week 5

1. Clean: work up to 1 set of 1 with 90 percent
2. Behind-the-neck jerk: work up to 1 set of 1 (140 kg)
3. Clean pull: 2 sets of 3 with 100 percent

Thursdays

Week 1

1. Muscle snatch: work up to a medium single (80 kg)
2. Front squat: work up to 6 sets of 3 with 75 percent
3. Back squat: work up to 3 sets of 3 with 70 percent
4. 3 rounds for time: 10 handstand push-ups, 20 sit-ups, 30 double-unders—5:20

Week 2

1. Muscle snatch: work up to a medium single (80 kg)
2. Front squat: work up to 6 sets of 2 with 85 percent
3. Back squat: work up to 3 sets of 3 with 70 percent
4. 3 rounds for time: 50 double-unders, 21 kettlebell swings (24 kg), 12 pull-ups—6:36

Week 3

With a 15-minute time cap: 200 double-unders, then rounds of 10 power cleans (60 kg), 15 pull-ups—6 rounds plus 10 power cleans

Week 4

1. Muscle snatch: work up to a medium single (80 kg)
2. Front squat: work up to 6 sets of 1 w/ 90 percent
3. Back squat: work up to 3 sets of 3 with 70 percent
4. 3 rounds for time: 50 double-unders, 21 kettlebell swings (24 kg), 12 pull-ups—6:04

Week 5

1. Front squat: work up to 1 set of 1 w/ 90 percent
2. 3 rounds: 100 double-unders, 50 hip extensions, 50 sit-ups—12:36



Everett uses the split style for snatching and cleaning. It's a less-common technique, but it works well for Josh.

Fridays

Off

Saturdays

Week 1

1. Snatch: max for the day (112 kg)
2. Clean and jerk: max for the day (143 kg)
3. Rounds in 10 min: 6 squat cleans (135 lb.), 12 pull-ups, 24 double-unders—5 rounds plus 18 reps

Week 2

1. Snatch: max for the day (110 kg)
2. Clean and jerk: max for the day (140 kg)
3. Rounds in 10 min: 6 squat cleans (125 lb.), 12 pull-ups, 24 double-unders—6 rounds plus 15 reps

Week 3

1. Snatch: max for the day (112 kg)
2. Clean and jerk: max for the day (140 kg)
3. Rounds in 10 min: 6 squat cleans (125 lb.), 12 pull-ups, 24 double-unders—6 rounds plus 10 reps

Week 4

1. Snatch: max for the day (115 kg)
2. Clean and jerk: max for the day (142 kg)
3. 4 rounds for time: 6 squat cleans (125 lb.), 12 pull-ups, 24 double-unders—4:54

Week 5

1. Snatch: max for the day (112 kg)
2. Clean and jerk: max for the day (142 kg)
3. 4 rounds for time: 6 squat cleans (125 lb.), 12 pull-ups, 24 double-unders—4:28

Sundays

Off

Week 6: Competition Week

I only worked out on Monday: rounds in 10 minutes of 6 power snatches (60 kg), 12 pull-ups and 24 double-unders—6 rounds plus 18 reps

The Method Behind the Madness

As you can see, I began my taper two weeks out. At two weeks out, I still hit it pretty hard, keeping the intensity up but dropping my volume quite a bit. The week of the event was basically spent resting and allowing my body to recover from the training. Remember: you don't get better while working out; you make your physiological adaptations during recovery.

Met-con: During this six-week preparation period, I was very specific to the events I was training for. I needed to be prepared for Isabel, not so much for my actual performance on Friday night but to have my body conditioned to high-rep power snatches with 60 kg so I wouldn't have a "fitness hangover" come Saturday morning. Therefore, Tuesday's met-con workouts always had snatches in them.



Staff/CrossFit Journal

Josh Everett loves a routine, so he was very happy to know the events going into the CrossFit-USAW Open.

In addition to the snatches, I also included ample low-back work. I've done Isabel twice before and know the low back is where I feel tight the next day. I wanted to be conditioned for this to mitigate any soreness that might come.

As for the double-unders ... I had gotten decent at double-unders in preparation for the CrossFit Games regional competition in the spring but had not done any since, and they had gone away. I got them back, though, with a fairly simple plan: each day I warmed up with 50



Everett's met-con training paid off in Colorado, where he was forced to deal with thinner air. Josh finished seventh in the triplet.

singles followed by 50 doubles. Some days took longer than others! In addition to my warm-up, I included double-unders in most of my met-cons.

As for time domains, I kept Tuesday's WODs pretty short to prepare me for Isabel, Thursday was intermediate for the most part, and Saturday's met-cons were very specific to the competition.

Speaking of Saturdays, Coach B's orders were to do the event triplet every Saturday. The workout is pretty brutal, and boy did it get old fast. I was never a fan of the workout, but by the time the event rolled around, I loathed it. Practicing it multiple times had its advantages, though. I got very familiar with when the pain would begin to set in (properly managing pain is a very important aspect of CrossFit success).

I was also mentally prepared for when the double-unders went away for a moment or two. I learned that a missed double-under wasn't as dire a situation as I had originally thought. While surely negative, broken sets were an opportunity to take a few deep breaths, recover, refocus and get back in the WOD. I learned not to panic, get frustrated or tense up, and this paid off at the meet.

The Results

Friday was the Isabel competition with Dave. We ended up tying at 1:06, but I had a huge 5-second PR! Now the true test of my training plan: how would my body respond and perform on Saturday?

I felt pretty good when I woke up on Saturday, then felt amazing during the snatch. I went 3 for 3, making 117 kg. It was my best snatch in several years, and I was good for more. During the clean and jerk, I missed my opening attempt due to lack of concentration but came back to make my next two lifts, finishing with 150 kg—again, my best lift in recent memory.

As for the triplet, I kept my head about me when I struggled with doubles, left everything I had on the court and finished with 6 rounds plus 7 reps—right about what I was hitting in training. That's pretty good considering I literally train at sea level and the air was very thin in Colorado Springs!

My efforts were enough to edge out a victory in the 85-kg weight class. In the immortal words of Hannibal from the A-Team, "I love it when a plan comes together."



About the Author:

One of the original CrossFit stars, Josh Everett has competed in three CrossFit Games, reaching the podium in both 2007 and 2008. Everett is a coach at Level 1 Certifications and CrossFit Olympic Lifting Certifications. He is the head strength and conditioning coach of the Tactical Athlete Program, Naval Special Warfare Group One.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

The Silence of the WODs

Dealing with angry neighbors complaining about the noise? Ahmik Jones shows you how to build a lifting platform that'll keep athletes and neighbors happy.

By Ahmik Jones CrossFit SoCal

October 2010



All images: Courtesy of Ahmik Jones/CrossFit SoCal

We had a problem that has unfortunately been very common among affiliates. Despite the fact that we had brought our new landlord and neighbor over twice to observe workouts prior to signing our lease—and we had dropped heavy weights from overhead right in front of him—and despite his assurances that similar sounds would not be a problem next to his accounting office, we had been threatened with legal action if we did not stop dropping weights during business hours within a few months of moving into our new space.

After some heated discussion, we offered to cut the slab between our spaces in the hopes of stopping the transmission of the sound. Our landlord was not willing to try this, and we later learned that this method has failed to solve the problem with other affiliates.

Our landlord suggested that we somehow pad the whole floor in order to eliminate the vibrations, which unfortunately would have been prohibitively expensive. Therefore, we started researching sound-damping platforms in hopes of stopping the vibrations at the source. We found plans [here](#). However, it looked like some of the design was overkill, and we wanted an 8 x 8-foot platform so there would be room for a squat rack or stand. Because I needed to build several, I had to have an efficient design. I consulted my brother-in-law, an architect, and he agreed. He recommended some places that the design could be changed, and I made some changes of my own.

I drew up some plans and built a prototype, experimenting with various types of padding. The addition of 3.5 inches of carpet padding stopped the sound and vibration completely. However, the plates sank into the padding, causing the screws holding the horse-stall mats in place to bend and break. It was also annoying to lift off of this surface because you could not adequately control the starting position. We tried mixes of carpet and carpet padding. While this improved the situation, it was still far from ideal. We tried floating a piece of plywood on top of the carpet padding to distribute the load, much like the stiff top layer of a rock-climbing crash pad. This worked beautifully until the first time someone dropped 400 lb. on the platform from shoulder height and shattered the floating plywood.



With a few modifications, a standard Oly platform can ensure your neighbors don't threaten you with violence after listening to 1RM clean and jerks all day.

After several iterations, the final design includes a center piece that's 3 inches narrower to better distribute the forces onto the padded area, two pieces of plywood sandwiched together over the carpet padding below the horse-stall mats, and horse-stall mats attached only on three sides, with the center edge left free to move when the weights are dropped.

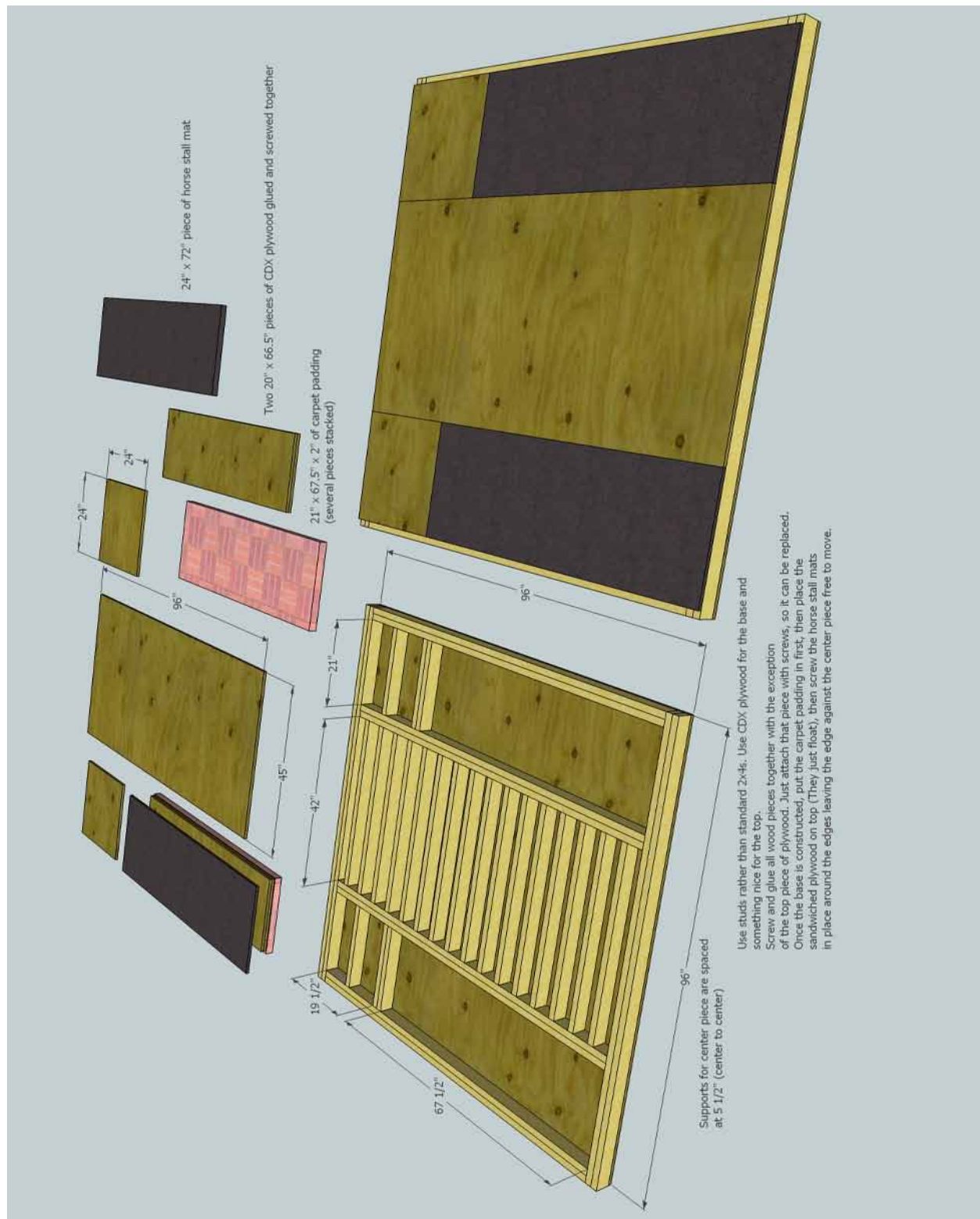
The final design has been serving us well for six months of heavy use. With the double sheet of plywood distributing the weight, lifting on the platforms is nearly the same as lifting on a standard weightlifting platform or the ground. The platforms are also very effective. You cannot feel the vibration of 155 lb. dropped from overhead from even a few feet away. Deadlift vibrations are also eliminated, and we have not received a single noise complaint since we installed the platforms.

If you have the hardware store cut the plywood for you, the only tools required are a circular saw, a power drill and a utility knife to cut the horse-stall mat. If you are good with a circular saw, you can cut the plywood yourself.

I recommend drilling pilot holes when framing the 2x4 studs to avoid splitting them. I also recommend framing in the inner part of each double 2x4 and attaching the cross pieces before attaching the outer pieces. Use the bottom pieces of plywood as a guide for putting together the 2x4s, then flip the whole platform, attach the bottom plywood pieces, flip it over again and add the padding and top pieces.



By putting carpet in the side channels of the platform below plywood and matting, you can eliminate vibrations when heavy barbells are dropped from overhead.



Each Platform Requires:

4 sheets of CDX plywood, two cut into
66.5" x 20" pieces (\$30 each)

1 sheet of sanded or hardwood plywood for the top piece
with 3" cut off one long edge (\$40)

2 pieces of 24" x 24" sanded plywood (\$10 each)

22 - 8' 2 x 4 studs (\$2-\$3 each)

1 bottle of wood glue (\$5-\$10)

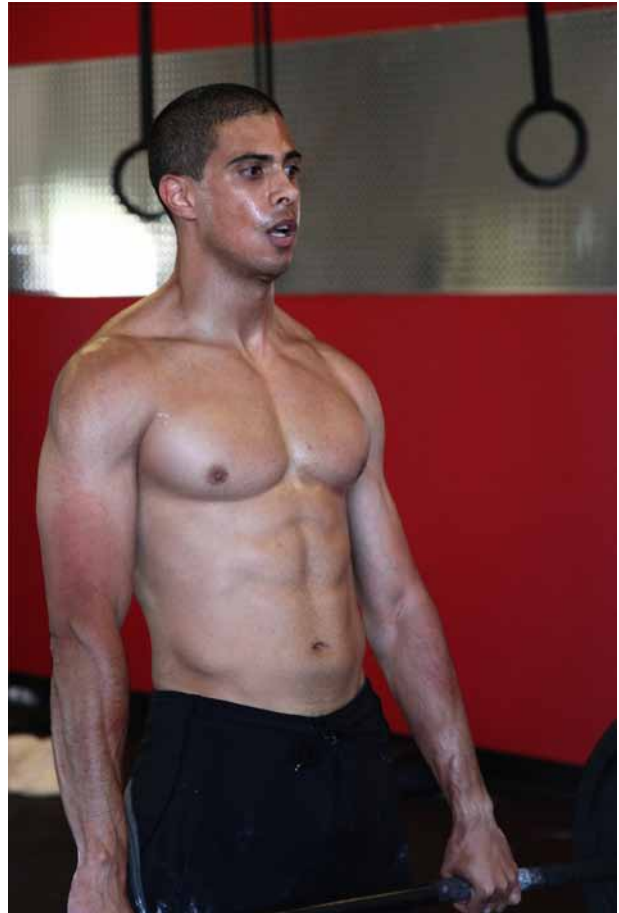
1 large box of 2.5" coarse-threaded drywall screws (\$20)

1 small box of 1.25" coarse-threaded drywall screws
for screwing the 2 pieces of floating plywood together
(\$10 approx.)

½ roll of carpet padding (\$30, or \$60 for the whole roll)

1 horse stall mat, cut in half lengthwise (\$50)

Total: \$350-\$380 each.



About the Author

Dr. Ahmik Jones has been CrossFitting and training others for six years. He is currently in his final year of radiology residency and is one of the owners of [CrossFit SoCal](#). He also works with Rogue Fitness and has been a CrossFit equipment enthusiast for years.

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Coaching for Competition

How do you turn good athletes into firebreathers?

Paul Estrada and Leon Chang coach a group from CrossFit Elysium through their first competition.

By Paul Estrada and Leon Chang CrossFit Elysium

October 2010



All images courtesy of Leon Chang/Paul Estrada/CrossFit Elysium

"All coaching is taking a player where he can't take himself."

—Bill McCartney

1 of 5



Grassroots events like the Left Coast Invitational allow all athletes to experience the thrill of CrossFit competition.

Several months back, Paul was approached by CrossFit Mission Gorge about putting together a competition between us, them and a few other affiliates. It was only a few weeks since our members had watched Paul compete at the 2010 CrossFit Games California Regional, and a fair number of them thought it would be a lot of fun to compete in something like that.

Our goal was to put together an event that would be open to beginner through intermediate athletes—people who might be the big dogs at their local affiliate but weren't at the level needed for sectionals. These people also wanted to experience CrossFit as a sport and know the feeling of competition.

Paul went down to CFMG to discuss the details of the event and what we wanted the athletes to get from it. We knew that we wanted a competition any athlete could compete in and have fun with. We came up with three events that would test all levels of fitness but were not too complicated for newer athletes.

The Workouts

Event 1

10 minutes to establish a max-effort deadlift. We knew this would favor the bigger, stronger members over the smaller, lighter athletes.

Event 2

15-minute Cindy. Here, we wanted an event that favored the lighter athletes who might not fare so well on the deadlift event.

Event 3

The Equalizer: 5 rounds for time of run 200 meters, 5 thrusters (115/80 lb.) and 10 burpees. This was the workout that could potentially determine the overall winner, someone who had good capacity in multiple components of fitness.

Each athlete would be assigned points based on order of finishing, as in the 2009 and 2010 CrossFit Games, with the lowest point total determining the overall winner.

Competition for Rookies

With the workouts designed, we picked a date and were underway. Within a week our team was excited, dedicated and looking forward to the event. The competition was called the Left Coast Invitational and was to be hosted by CrossFit Mission Gorge. The other affiliates were CrossFit Elysium, CrossFit La Jolla and CrossFit San Diego. All the affiliates agreed not to release the WODs beforehand, and our members continued to train just as they had been with no special modifications. Additionally, the affiliates had a “gentlemen’s agreement” that athletes with prior sectional or regional experience would not enter. After all, our primary goal was to allow the newer athletes to compete in a less-intimidating environment.

**“Success is the peace of mind
which is a direct result of
self-satisfaction in knowing
you made the effort to
become the best you are
capable of becoming.”**

—John Wooden

Two months flew by, and suddenly it was the day of the competition. For most of our athletes, it would be their first competition of any kind. Leon had a lot of experience coaching youth swimming and soccer, but coaching athletes during a competition was new to Paul. It remained to be seen whether we would be effective coaches in a competition setting. We were looking forward to this experience, both for ourselves and our athletes.

Our main concern was that the event remained about having fun. We didn’t want to turn into “little-league dads” who are only concerned about winning and take the fun right out of the event. Our second concern was helping the athletes mentally prepare for the events ahead and helping them plan in order for them to place as well as possible. We don’t know who was more nervous—our athletes or us.

We weren’t competing. Our bodies were not being put on the line and tested. It was probably similar to watching a child in his or her first music recital or first big game. We knew that once they started it was all up to the athletes. Our job as coaches was essentially done. Had we designed the right workouts to prepare them? Had we talked to them enough about how to mentally stay sharp during the WOD? We would soon find out.

For the max-effort deadlift event, we talked with each athlete, getting each to visualize what the 10 minutes would feel like. The strategy was individualized for everyone. All they had to wait for was, “3,2,1 ... Go!” Once the workout began the place exploded, and PRs were being set left and right. We had athletes setting new PRs ranging from 2 lb. all the way up to 80 lb. After each rep, we gave them the exact amount of time to rest and how much to add to the bar (most of the time our athletes didn’t even know what was on the bar).



***As hard as they are, CrossFit workouts are
also a great deal of fun.***



Ben Beal from CrossFit Elysium lifts 485 lb. for a 40-lb. PR and a first-event win.

Our top male, Ben Beal, pulled 485, which was a 40-lb. PR. Our top female, Tiffany Gilmartin, pulled 285 lb., giving our affiliate a victory in both divisions. In addition, Brian L. tied for second with a 455-lb. pull, and we had two ladies, Stacie Beal and Danielle Saunders, also tie for second with 275. Karla Wagner pulled a 30-lb. PR, and with only 40 seconds left Paul told her to throw on 5 lb. extra to go for one last attempt. She quickly slid the weight on and got her hands on the bar. The whole room was yelling as she locked the weight out just in time.

**We'd like to think in some
small way our coaching
helped the athletes achieve
more than they could have on
their own.**

At this point in the day, we found our particular coaching style was something that our athletes were responding to. We weren't telling people that a workout was going to be easy. We found ourselves telling people, "You know this is a strong suit of yours. You know you can do really well on this one, so don't let yourself do less than you know you can." Every member went into the event expecting great things from himself or herself.

Additionally, we provided specific movement cues for athletes who needed them or reminded them of specific strategies we had discussed beforehand; i.e., "Don't push the run." We'd like to think in some small way our coaching helped the athletes achieve more than they could have on their own.

For the second event, both our men and women again claimed the top spots in the WOD, with honors going to Brian and Karla. Our other athletes also performed very well, in particular our ladies, who turned in many of the top performances. Karla had the distinction of outperforming every athlete, male or female, other than Brian.

After the second event, there was a break for the officials to tally the scores and regroup the athletes in order from lowest to highest ranking. Two of our ladies were tied for first, and one of our men was sitting in first. As coaches, we were already proud of our athletes for working so hard, but after getting that information, we were ecstatic. There's an extra little bit of pride that comes when you see your athletes give their all and it carries them to the summit of victory.

After the final event was finished and the points were counted, CrossFit Elysium had taken first (Karla) and second (Stacie) place for the women and first place (Brian) for the men. Brandon Verdon and Alessandra Wall each claimed fifth place, making it five of the top ten slots overall.

Awards and Rewards

After the awards were done we made sure to go around to our athletes and ask them if they were happy with the day. All of them had nothing but positive things to say. They were all proud of their efforts and knew they had worked to the limits of their capabilities. This was music to our ears—hearing our athletes talk about how much fun they had and how they would love to do it again. All of them expressed thanks for our coaching, and almost all of them told us that it made the event better. They said they felt very prepared for every event and had a confidence that helped them perform better than they thought they could.

Several of us grabbed drinks after the event, and Paul couldn't wipe the smile off his face. He told our athletes that he was more proud of them than he had ever been of himself. There is something so special about helping other people find an internal fire and drive and watching them turn it on and unleash what you always knew they were capable of. The feelings and memories we have of this weekend will remain forever and will bring smiles to our faces every time we remember them.



About the Authors

Paul Estrada (top) and Leon Chang (bottom) are both Level 1 certified trainers. They founded and opened [CrossFit Elysium](#) this past January after Leon's garage gym became a bit too crowded. In the past year, they have loved every minute of working with athletes of all levels to help them advance within the CrossFit program. With their experience in this recent competition, they are absolutely thrilled and looking forward to taking some of these athletes to sectionals next year.