

KingKinggg KongKonggg

A CrossFitting strongman thought a King Kong video was so mind-blowingly nice that he just had to do it twice.

Rob Orlando



Wednesday morning, October 15th, I woke up, checked my email, and then made the second stop of the day: CrossFit.com. It's a ritual that is years old, but today was different. The video for the day was of a man, a large man, doing a workout called "King Kong." Right away I knew this had to be something different. You don't call your workout "King Kong" unless you mean business, right?

I clicked on the video and watched "Big O" perform 1 deadlift at 455, 2 muscle ups, 3 power cleans at 250, and 4 handstand pushups for 3 rounds. It took him 7:37. Impressive no doubt. But at the end of the video a tag ran across the screen that read, "Anyone else care to try?" The trap was set and I took the bait.

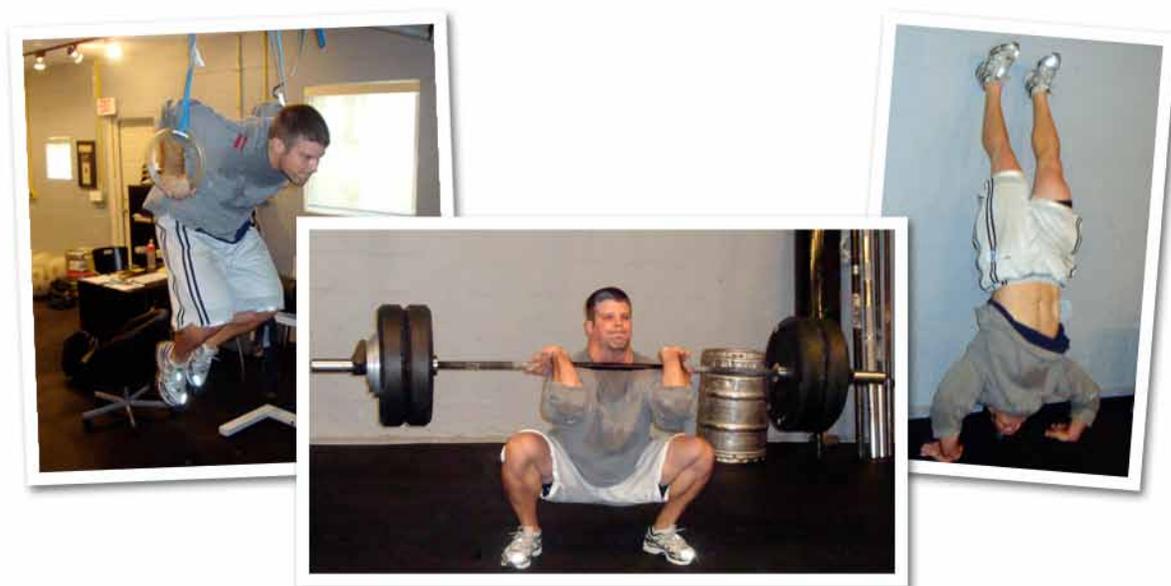
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My CrossFit journey started years ago when a client of mine turned me on to the site. My ritual of checking the site to see the latest concoction was immediate. One of the things that turned me on most about CrossFit was the competitive spirit that seemed to ooze from its participants. These people took fitness to a new level and they turned it into a sport with scores, winners, losers, and stats. Case in point: the first video I saw was Annie and Greg doing "Fran" and I thought, "How hard could that be?" I'm not the first or the last to think that, by the way. The following day I was in my basement working out and decided to perform "Fran" with 135 pounds instead of the prescribed weight of 95 pounds. It took me about 6 minutes to finish the workout. It took me an hour to pry myself off of the floor and stop wheezing like an asthmatic squirrel. I was hooked.

Although I checked the site each day for workout ideas, I didn't fully embrace CrossFit until the last 6 months. My sport was competitive strongman so, foolishly, I refrained from doing any of the WOD's that contained cardio. I also refrained from doing almost anything that would take my time past 2 or 3 minutes of work because strongman events are never more than 90 seconds long. My single rep strength was good and my conditioning mediocre at best but I was still competitive and placing in the top 3 in most of the shows that I entered.

It all changed when I opened up my own gym in Stamford, CT in May of 2008. I would post workouts on the board and clients would inevitably ask, "How fast do you do this?" The response usually was embarrassing because I didn't train myself the way I trained my clients. Wanting to be the example, I started training like a beast. CrossFit programming with strongman equipment. It made perfect sense to me and the changes to my performance were immediate. My "Fran" time went from 4:30 to 2:48. My "3 Bars of Death" time went from 50+ minutes to 23. What I found most interesting was the very small drop on my "Total" from 1294 to 1274. Those gains took place while I lost 30 pounds of excess body fat. (My weight is now 200 pounds).

"King Kong" lit a fire similar to Greg and Annie doing "Fran." I had to try it and I actually lost sleep between Wednesday night and Thursday morning. Thursday afternoon I got a text message from my partner Stefanie Tropea that read, "Is that King Kong thing still making you mental?" The answer was most definitely. I was torn because I had done the "Total" on Tuesday and I wasn't sure how my body would respond to the deadlift and cleans in Kong. I knew that I could do it faster than 7:37 but my partner challenged me to do as many rounds as possible in 7:37. I took it one step further and decided to double the work to 6 rounds and try to finish under "Big O's" time.



Thursday night, after running a mile at 7pm with a group of hockey player clients, the gym was empty and quiet. No music, no distractions, no cheerleaders....just me and King Kong. This would be a test run to see how fast I could complete Kong as prescribed. 3...2...1...GO!! I charged through the first round in less than 45 seconds, but on the second round, I got too far back on my heels during the catch on one of the cleans and fell flat on my ass. That cost me at least 10 seconds. After the fall, it went smoothly and I finished in a decent 3:01.

Feeling good about my score, I decided that I would try again in a week or so. Monday, October 20th, I was in the gym alone around mid-day. After watching Coach Burgener work with Dutch and Nick Hawkes, I began my oly workout. First the snatch. I performed a bunch of sets and never quite got into a rhythm. After 25 minutes of trying to get something going and failing, I threw in the proverbial towel. I was so distracted by the question mark of Kong that I loaded the bars and said, "Screw it." I don't need to wait another minute....it's on!

3...2...1...GO!! I flew through the first 3 rounds in 2:45 and then settled in for the hard part: rounds 4, 5, and 6. My lungs burned going into round 5 and my stomach started to churn when I got into the cleans on round 6 but I thought, "Work now, rest later." The cleans were done and the last 4 reps of HSPU were a cake walk compared to everything else. Kong had been slain but how long did it take? I didn't have anyone to pace me so I had to watch the video back and time it that way. After watching the video I decided that my 7:15 score was good but could have been faster if I had spent less time panting like a race horse and chalking up. It's possible to do in less than 7 minutes and someday I will try again.

There is no doubt that someone in the CrossFit community will shatter that time. That's the beauty of CrossFit: the competition drives the machine. Someone will see my video and think, "I can crush that." Then it will be their turn to lose sleep wondering what the outcome will be when they make their attempt.



Rob Orlando runs [Hybrid Athletics](#) in Stamford, CT.

