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# THE CrossFit JOURNAL

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## Tough for Whom?

CrossFit York competed in the first Tough Mudder—and team members found they were over-prepared for “the toughest one-day endurance race on the planet.”

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By Andréa Maria Cecil

June 2010

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All photos Anthony J. Topper

“We don’t need to do any special training for it. We could do it tomorrow.”

That's what CrossFit York owner Rusty Mirasol repeated in the two months leading up to the **Tough Mudder**, billed as "the toughest one-day endurance race on the planet." He got the occasional skeptical look from various members competing in the race as part of the so-called CrossFit York and the Snatch-A-Licious Team 4. The inaugural Mudder promised to challenge all the squats, pull-ups and muscle-ups this group of 14 CrossFitters had been practicing at the York, Pa., box for months.

### Just Another WOD?

British Special Forces designed the course at Bear Creek Mountain Resort near Allentown, Pa., "to test all around toughness, strength, stamina, fitness, camaraderie, and mental grit," according to the event's Web site.

"Forget about your race time. Simply completing the event is a badge of honor. Not everyone will finish," the site boasts.

Nearly 5,000 participants would have to make their way up and down steep ski runs best negotiated by using feet and hands, avoid getting caught in low cargo nets, snake through corrugated plastic pipe, crawl through rock-filled mud beneath wire eight inches off the ground, traverse an ice-cold pond via two rickety ropes, jump off a plank about 10 feet above frigid water, submerge themselves in a chilly pond to move beyond floating plastic barrels, and run between two 60-foot-long rows of hay bales set ablaze. The obstacle-filled course ended up being roughly 5 miles, according to organizers.

About 10 minutes after the last CrossFit York team member stepped over the Mudder finish line Sunday, May 2, Mirasol declared, "I don't see any reason why everyone can't train tomorrow."

Everyone nodded.

The next day, more than half the team showed up at the box for three rounds of 10 kettlebell swings, 20 push-ups, 30 sit-ups and 40 double-unders.

"Either the Mudder was easy or (because of) the nature of our training, we could have handled a lot more," said Mirasol, a Level 1 CrossFit trainer, the day after the race. "Our daily training is harder than that."



*Just one of the many obstacles that dotted the 5-mile Tough Mudder course.*

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**"Road-running may give you a healthy set of lungs, but will leave you with as much upper body strength as Keira Knightley. At Tough Mudder, we want to test your all-around mettle ..."**

**—ToughMudder.com**

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## Mudder ... (continued)

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Non-CrossFitter Mindy Ascosi also competed in the race. The 29-year-old already had been training for a May 22 triathlon when the opportunity to participate in the Mudder arose in February.

"I've been biking, swimming and running," said the marketing coordinator for Design and Integration Inc. in the Baltimore, Md., area, "and I've been trying to do more conditioning with push-ups and sit-ups ... and doing stadium running."

Ascosi said she runs no more than 4 miles twice a week, swims 3,000 yards once a week and bikes 50 miles once a week. She also is training for a 100-mile bike race slated for July 24.

"I was actually expecting it to be harder than it was," she said of the Mudder.

Still, Ascosi took two days off of working out after the event.

"I will say that I was very sore the next day. My upper body was really sore," she said. "I was using muscles that I don't normally use."

Back at the box, the most discomfort any members of the Snatch-A-Licious team had to report was sunburn.



*Unknown and unknowable obstacles didn't slow down the progress of the 14 athletes from CrossFit York.*





*WOD: Slog through mud for time, conquering any and all obstacles. Drink beer after.*



## Muddied but Unbowed

Members of CrossFit York and the Snatch-A-Licious Team 4 offer their thoughts before and after the Tough Mudder.

**Trey Beasley**, 32, electrical engineer  
*CrossFitting since: May 2009*

**Before:** I think it will be tough and muddy or else I will sue for false advertising.

**After:** A total blast to run with your friends, but not near as hard as some CrossFit workouts.

**Lisa Martinelli Beasley**, 32, university faculty  
*CrossFitting since: May 2009*

**Before:** I don't need a sentence, just a word: tough!

**After:** The Mudder felt like a Sunday WOD.

**Susan Boyer**, 50, owner/operator of cleaning business  
*CrossFitting since: Fall 2008*

**Before:** Scary, fun, nerve-racking and very dirty, but a lot of fun with others.

**After:** Had loads of fun, but some of our CrossFit workouts are as tough, if not tougher, than the Mudder.

**Andréa Cecil**, 31, journalist  
*CrossFitting since: February 2008*

**Before:** It's a competition that ends with beer and free tattoos—it's going to be a blast!

**After:** It was a lot of fun and silliness but not as difficult as I anticipated.

**Ron Dyer**, 57, school district assistant superintendent  
*CrossFitting since: 2008*

**Before:** At this age, I still want to prove to myself that I'm capable of meeting this challenge!

**After:** The Mudder was the biggest challenge I've faced thus far in my fitness quest, and I have a great sense of accomplishment after having completed it.

**Jackie Fullam**, 44, physical therapist  
*CrossFitting since: Spring 2009*

**Before:** The ultimate challenge.

**After:** It was not the toughest but still lots of fun and could have had more difficult obstacles—more like a CrossFit WOD would have been better!

**Joe Fullam**, 44, director of professional services  
*CrossFitting since: March 2010 (regularly)*

**Before:** It will be a brutal 7.1-mile run up and down a ski slope with killer obstacle courses intermixed, and I pray I will survive and cross the finish line!

**After:** Running, climbing, jumping, swimming, crawling, lugging, slipping, sloshing, falling, sweating, laughing, cheering—did all that and more, I'm sure. All in all, the Tough Mudder was an absolute blast!





**Donald Golden**, 40, power generation/atom splitter  
*CrossFitting since: November 2007*

**Before:** Challenging, dirty, fun and a story that I'm sure will be embellished over time.

**After:** Other than the uphill runs, I thought the obstacles could have been tougher. I liked the mud.

**Michael Guerrini**, 42, insurance agent  
*CrossFitting since: Winter 2008*

**Before:** Hangin' with my fellow CrossFitters ... and Dogfish Head beer.

**After:** Tough Mudder was great, but our WODs are tougher!

**Carolina Kelley**, 25, military  
*CrossFitting since: Summer 2008 (off and on)*

**Before:** I think its going to be a painful/wonderful experience. It's going to be a real gut check, and I wouldn't miss it for the world!

**After:** I thought the race was a little easier than they made it out to be, but the best part was the team building and camaraderie that it helped us make in those two muddy hours!

**Rusty Mirasol**, 36, affiliate owner  
*CrossFitting since: February 2008*

**Before:** The Tough Mudder exemplifies the true spirit of CrossFit: Do something hard as hell that no one else would ever imagine doing, then share beers afterwards.

**After:** CrossFit is raising the bar as to what is considered average.

**Kelsey Rebert**, 28, registered nurse  
*CrossFitting since: June 2009*

**Before:** The Mudder is a challenge embodying all things CrossFit: constantly varied functional movement, competition, camaraderie, and beer drinking. I'm in!

**After:** There was never a point in the two-hour-and-12-minute course that I thought I was going to fail or be unable to finish. I attribute that to my CrossFit training and my Snatch-A-Licious teammates. (Although) it was certainly a test of my endurance, there have been times during WODs that I have been pushed (closer) to my limit than what the Mudder offered. It's satisfying to realize I have that drive in me and awesome to know the camaraderie of CrossFit is applicable to anything.

**Brittney Russell**, 31, fitness professional/CrossFit trainer  
*CrossFitting since: July 2009*

**Before:** I love a challenge, so I think it will be a perfect opportunity to test my strengths both mentally and physically.

**After:** I thought that the Tough Mudder was challenging to some degree but definitely could have been more intense.

**Allan Shultz**, 54, machine designer  
*CrossFitting since: Winter 2009*

**Before:** Tough Mudder will be a grueling experience that I can say I did.

**After:** The Tough Mudder was a fun and somewhat challenging event that probably would have been tougher if I wasn't a CrossFitter.



## Athletic at Last

### Andréa Maria Cecil

I knew the feeling well: hesitation, fear and the sensation that this time I might really throw up. Indeed, the moment before the May 2 Tough Mudder was much like the moment before a WOD.

Even the two months leading up to “the toughest one-day endurance race on the planet” resembled CrossFit: most everyone who wasn’t doing it thought I was nuts. And just like CrossFit, I didn’t easily arrive at my decision to compete in the Mudder.

When I started CrossFitting with consistency in fall 2008, I would drive to the box with butterflies in my stomach, nearly making myself sick and thinking I was incapable of the athletic feats I saw there. But for whatever reason, I kept showing up.

Then, one day, I finally got a kipping pull-up. That was March 2009. That pull-up gave me confidence to keep CrossFitting. CrossFitting gave me confidence in my athletic abilities. My athletic abilities gave me confidence to compete in the Mudder.

Sure, the race wasn’t nearly as difficult as I—or the rest of the CrossFit York team—anticipated. But it makes me proud to know that just two years ago I would have cowered in the face of the Mudder and been too intimidated to scale 10-foot walls or negotiate rickety ropes over frigid pond water.

For the first time in my life, at 32 years old, I can say, “I am an athlete” and believe it.

### Early Adopters

CrossFitters have adopted what most in the fitness world still see as an unorthodox training methodology, so it's no surprise that when Mudder organizers first announced the atypical race months ago, CrossFitters were down.

"We knew this was going to be big with CrossFit," said Will Dean, Tough Mudder CEO (formerly known as the "Tough Master"). "The first blogs we saw were on CrossFit sites. They were early adopters."

When CrossFit York member Don Golden first proposed forming a Mudder team, nearly everyone who would comprise the team agreed to the challenge without seeing so much as a map of the race. When asked what attracted the group to the Mudder, Mirasol said, "You're actually asking about the nature of a CrossFitter ... we look for challenges."

"We want that above-and-beyond. I don't know if you want to call it an adrenaline rush or a challenge," he continued. "At any one point (during the Mudder we all) felt something that didn't feel comfortable but we kept going, whereas the non-CrossFitter would say, 'Oh, fuck this.'"

That scenario was borne out during the Mudder's "Cliffhanger" obstacle, where participants had to scale a black-run ski slope. There, dozens of men and women—looking like they had just done Murph with a 20-lb. vest for the first time—made their way to the outskirts of the slope, stopping to sit or puke. The Cliffhanger was sixth of the Mudder's 17 obstacles.

Every member of the CrossFit York team—from the 57-year-old who questioned whether he should even compete in the Mudder and the 44-year-old guy who started CrossFitting only two months ago to the 50-year-old firebreather grandma and the 25-year-old Army chick—made it to the top without incident.

"CrossFit stresses strength through full range of motion and core-to-extremity muscle recruitment, so we have fewer—if any—weak spots that can give out if faced with an awkward movement like crawling through a tube/mud, crawling under a cargo net completely crouched over, downhill running, etc.," Mirasol said. "We can also perform these awkward movements much more efficiently because we train to move the body as it is intended."

### CrossFitters in the Mud

CrossFit affiliates that registered to participate in the inaugural Tough Mudder on May 2, 2010:

CrossFit 908: Berkeley Heights, N.J.

CrossFit Dover: Dover, Del.

CrossFit Energy: Bath, Ohio

CrossFit KOA: Cranford, N.J.

CrossFit Long Island City: Long Island City, N.Y.

CrossFit MPH: Washington, D.C.

CrossFit Prime: Philadelphia, Pa.

CrossFit Providence: Providence, R.I.

CrossFit Queens: Astoria, N.Y.

CrossFit South Brooklyn: Brooklyn, N.Y.

CrossFit York: York, Pa.

Elm City CrossFit: Hamden, Conn.

NEPA CrossFit: Wilkes-Barre, Pa.

RedShed CrossFit: Netcong, N.J.

CrossFit Explode: West Chester, Pa.

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**"The CrossFit guys and girls  
that came and did our event  
are some of the fittest out  
there."**

**—Tough Mudder CEO  
Will Dean**

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*Fran is worse.*

### Too Easy

Dean conceded that, for some, the Mudder didn't live up to its tagline as the "toughest one-day endurance race on the planet."

"We had to be careful ... that we didn't create something that people would get halfway through and have a heart attack," he said.

Still, about 10 people who arrived for early registration the day before the race asked for a refund, saying the course was too much for them.

"The CrossFit guys and girls that came and did our event are some of the fittest out there," said the 29-year-old Dean. "You guys have the CrossFit Games—we're not trying to compete against that." He went on: "For most other people, it's all about a challenge. ... We're trying to create something that's as much about camaraderie as it is about competition."

And the CrossFit York team certainly had a good time.

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**"I don't see any reason  
why everyone can't train  
tomorrow."**

**—Rusty Mirasol**  
immediately after finishing the  
Tough Mudder.

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"We still enjoyed it. It wasn't like it was a disappointment," Mirasol said. "It's a good fit because it's not just about the teamwork through the race ... . The CrossFit community goes a lot broader than just the event."

As an example, Mirasol cited the fact that he and a couple of other team members gave rides to strangers who were forced to park at a lot more than 6 miles away from Bear Creek. Oddly enough, the strangers turned out to be from affiliates in Montclair, N.J., and Baltimore, Md.

"We didn't know they were CrossFitters when they got in the van," Mirasol said.

### **"Bigger, Tougher, Longer and Harder"**

The Mudder series will finish out the year with three races: October in the San Francisco area, November in the Dallas area, and November in the Englishtown, N.J., area. The organizers plan to step it up for next year's events.

"It will be more of a challenge next time," Dean promised.

He continued: "We're going to make it bigger, tougher, longer and harder. That's what people want. These are all easy things for us to fix."

To that, Mirasol responded: "Would we train any differently? No."

In fact, the 36-year-old stood by his statement from February that his box's team didn't need special training for the Mudder.

"Everyone finished" and no one got injured, he said.

"We never ran 5Ks. We never did any crawling. ... None of us swam," Mirasol added. "If we did it tomorrow, we'd still get it done."



### **About the Author**

*Andréa Maria Cecil, 32, is managing editor at the **Central Penn Business Journal** in Harrisburg, Pa. Cecil is a native of New Orleans but now lives in York, Pa. There, she's been CrossFitting for more than two years at [CrossFit York](#).*