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# THE CrossFit JOURNAL

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## Get Some More

Former NFL player Michael Houghton found CrossFit and then went back to strength training. Now he's come full circle and believes CrossFit is the best program for him.

By Michael Houghton CrossFit 951

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Courtesy of Michael Houghton

Over the past year, I have been experimenting with all sorts of programming besides CrossFit.

I started off going to the CrossFit Football Certification. I learned a ton there. I watched at lunchtime both days as the top people of the CrossFit world did their Olympic lifting. Sean Waxman of Pure Strength was there as well. At the cert, I got this itch to try some Olympic lifting. I got some shoes and started off into this new world.

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Why did I do this? I am always looking to challenge myself. For eight weeks I did nothing but Olympic lifting and a little bit of conditioning. Soon, my body began to ache. I thought I would get used to the pounding on my joints, but it got worse and worse. I then decided to get back to CrossFit for a while.

After this, I looked at the CrossFit Strength Bias stuff and Mark Rippetoe's stuff. I decided I wanted to work on my strength once again because it was lacking. I put together an eight-week program and got two whole weeks into it before I was wrecked again. The heavy lifting day after day was just killing me. I kept with it because I thought that being strong was the single most important aspect of being fit.

I also figured that if I continued, my body would get used to the pain again. Maybe it would have, had I continued long enough. All I know is that during this time, I was irritated and hurting. I realized that what I didn't take into account was that I had already lifted for a good 11 years while playing football at three different levels. The linear progression just wasn't going to work for me anymore. I looked into Jim Wendler's 5/3/1 stuff and wrote a program for myself. Again, it just wrecked my joints.

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The whole time I was doing this, my wife kept saying to me, "Just do CrossFit. That's when you were the happiest." I didn't listen, of course.

By the way, I did get stronger during this time. Another thing I did really well was gain weight. I was at 265-270 lb. before I started Olympic lifting. By the time I got done with the 5/3/1 experiment, I was back up to almost 290 lb. Part of this was diet, but I have been stuck above 280 for a while now, and it doesn't seem to be going anywhere even though I'm back to a strict Paleo/Zone diet.



Susannah Dy/CrossFit Journal

***More and more athletes are discovering that constantly varied high-intensity training is the real key to fitness.***

During this time of experimentation, I started reading a ton about different programs, and I found a bunch of negative press about how bad CrossFit is. We all know certain Web sites out there make it their job to trash CrossFit all the time. As I learned more, I started trying to program my own stuff, with some strength thrown in. I think it worked. My clients liked it. I liked doing the shorter met-cons as well.

I started feeling pretty good about myself and how much I knew. I started thinking, "Wow, people just get hurt too much doing CrossFit. There's no way to keep doing this for the long haul." It got easier and easier to skip workouts I thought were "stupid." What is that all about? Why is it that it's so easy to skip workouts? The longer you go not doing CrossFit, the easier it is to think bad things about the program.

I finally came to the realization—just yesterday after Tabata This—that the only thing that works for me and will work for me in the long haul is CrossFit. I am back down a few pounds, my body has been changing in the two weeks that I have done [CrossFit.com](http://CrossFit.com) programming, and I feel great.

### Returning to CrossFit

The first few times back I had serious doubts about whether I wanted to do it anymore. I remember thinking about walking away from the workout because it was so hard. I am now back to my old self, the self that wants to challenge me and see what I can do. It was like starting over again.

The first time I looked at CrossFit, I thought it was BS. There is no way people are doing that much work that fast. A couple of weeks ago I was doing the pull-up/wall-ball WOD, and I almost quit. I haven't almost quit a workout in a very long time. In the second round of that one, I just about quit. All these thoughts ran through my mind about how stupid it was, how hard it was, and how much I just wanted to stop. But I made it through. Two weeks later, I'm sitting here and wondering why I ever got away from doing CrossFit in the first place.

I realized that I am relatively strong compared to most people out there. Westside Barbell guys are way stronger than me, and strongmen are as well. That's OK with me. I did my time of heavy lifting and gained weight, and I did a bunch of that stuff. For me, for my goals, I don't want to lift as many weights as I did in the past. I have come to the realization that it is OK to think that way.



*As a former NFL player, Mike Houghton has lifted heavy weights for years. He's now convinced that the CrossFit program works better for him than a pure strength program focused on moving big weight.*

CrossFit is not about being the strongest. CrossFit is about being pretty good at a little bit of everything. Some people out there criticize CrossFitters for boasting about squatting, because CrossFitters are really weak when compared to strongmen and powerlifters. But CrossFitters aren't comparing themselves to those guys. CrossFit is about making yourself better.

By the way, if you've never lifted before and manage to gain the strength to squat over 200 lb., that's a pretty good start.

The other thing that's great about CrossFit is that it allows formerly sedentary people to get active, get fit and lose weight. It also helps them try new sports. Naturally, when people get fit, most want to explore the ideas behind fitness and sport. This is where one of CrossFit's main ideologies has, I believe, been overlooked. It's right there in World-Class Fitness in 100 Words: Regularly learn and play new sports.

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Some would say CrossFit is a sport. It is. However, I firmly believe people should look into other sports. Doing so gives them more appreciation for what the world out there is like. As much as I am disappointed that I stopped CrossFit for that long, I think I grew immensely during that period. I competed in a triathlon, and I wrote up a couple of programs for myself and others. I learned more about the Olympic lifts. I am now better at those lifts, though still not great or even good by any means. Most of all, I explored other ideologies and theories about strength and fitness.

I have also learned that you have to take time to rest. People say doing too many met-cons causes overtraining. It does if you never take a week or two off. The basic standard that should be followed but is often forgotten is

that you have to take a half-intensity week every month and an entire week off every two months. This keeps the body from being overtrained and also helps keep people hungry for more.

What did I learn? There are a ton of theories and thoughts on strength and conditioning. Everyone thinks he or she has all the answers. Everyone thinks his or her system is the best. Is it?

I think the program that gets people moving and off the couch is the best system. So far, CrossFit is better than a lot of programs in getting people off the couch and moving. It may not be the best for everyone, but it certainly is for me, and it will continue to be for a long time to come.



#### About the Author

*Mike Houghton, 30, is a P.E. teacher at Hans Christensen Middle School in Menifee, Calif., and he has been a CrossFitter since 2007. He coaches the varsity offensive line at Heritage High School. Mike and fellow teacher Sean Murray run [CrossFit 951](#), which holds CrossFit classes in Mike's garage and bootcamp classes in the park in Menifee. He lives in town with wife Sara and kids Cody, 6; Kylie, 4; and Hunter, 6 months. He is the author of the [CrossFit Journal](#) articles [CrossFitters](#), [Be Nice](#) and [Mental Strength](#).*