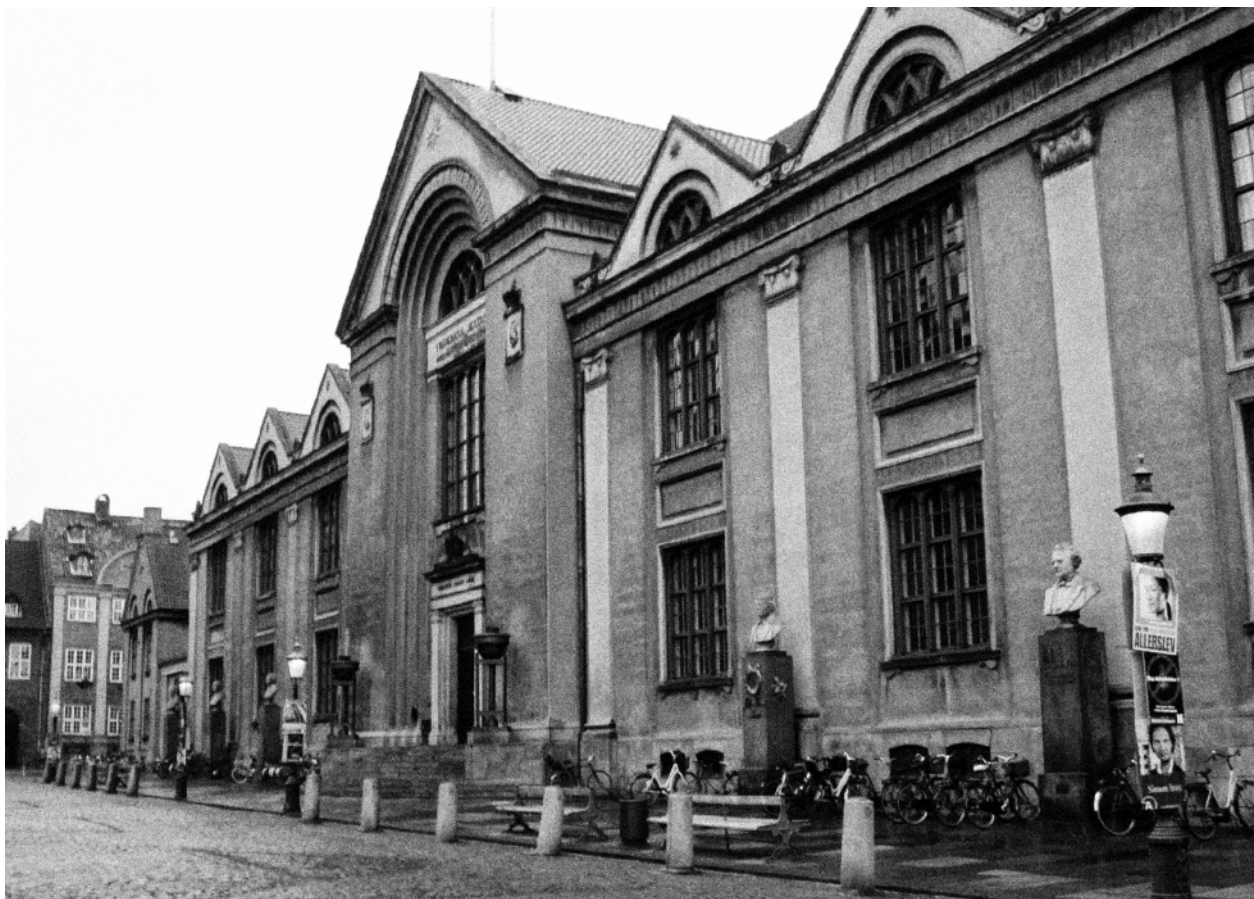

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Denmark: Land of CrossFit

In Part 4 of his CrossFit Europe series, Blair Morrison visits four boxes in Denmark and reports that CrossFit culture is thriving in the land between the Baltic and North seas.

By Blair Morrison

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All images courtesy of Blair Morrison

If there is a CrossFit capital in Europe, it's Copenhagen. And if there's one place that I would want to train, it's here.

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In 72 hours, I visited four gyms, did five WODs, and left the city with a true appreciation for its people, its culture and its fascination with fitness. They're nuts for it! The members were strong, motivated, and welcoming everywhere I went, and the facilities were top-notch. I really feel that this place has the opportunity to become CrossFit's central hub for training, learning and growth, not just for Scandinavia, but for all of Europe.

The list to the right gives a better idea of the proliferation of the program in Copenhagen and its surrounding areas. Note that the oldest affiliate has been around for less than 18 months, and that most have come into being within the last six. Given this fact, the numbers are staggering.

Obviously, people here are drinking the Kool-Aid.

My weekend in Copenhagen saw me visit a few of these boxes, meet many of the people revolutionizing this city's fitness standards and get a physical beating the likes of which I can't remember. Drawing on daily notes and blog posts, this article details those visits and the cumulative impression they left on me.

Nov. 13, 2009: Paideia Gym

I arrived in Copenhagen around noon on Friday. Sarah Lindasdatter Troelsen Krarup, my host and friend from the Scandinavian Challenge a few weeks before, met me at a metro stop near the city center. From there, we proceeded on a 3-km walking tour of the city and grabbed a bite to eat at one of her local spots. Soon after eating, we headed to our first box of the weekend, Paideia Gym, for a strength session.

**Obviously, people here are
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Erik and Fred, two of the owners, were there to greet us. They, along with one other, broke away from another affiliate to open this place just a few months back. The space is big and unique, consisting of two large rooms,

CrossFit Butcher's Lab (Copenhagen)

Members: approximately 600. First affiliate in Denmark (2008). Has hosted CrossFit challenges and weightlifting competitions for CrossFitters.

CrossFit Copenhagen (Copenhagen)

Members: 800. Affiliated since June 2008. Hosted a local challenge in August 2008 and participated in the Affiliate Cup at the 2009 CrossFit Games.

CrossFit Denmark (Hellerup)

Members: approximately 100. Affiliated since 2008.

Paideia CrossFit (Copenhagen)

Members: 100. Affiliated since August 2009.

CrossFit Royal Danish Guards (20 km north of Copenhagen)

Members: approximately 230. Affiliated since June 2009. (Military base affiliate.)

CrossFit Royal Danish Defence College (Copenhagen)

Affiliated since October 2009. Implements CrossFit in the Danish military.

CrossFit CTC (50 km south of Copenhagen)

Members: approximately 500, including MMA athletes. Affiliated since November 2009.

CrossFit OBBC (Odense)

Members: approximately 300. Affiliated since November 2009.

Aarhus CrossFit (Aarhus)

Members: approximately 200. Affiliated since August 2009.

CrossFit Aalborg (Aalborg)

Affiliated since 2009.

one designed specifically for CrossFit classes and the other for open gym and MMA. The gym is littered with cool toys, including club bells, sandbags, maces, kegs, chains and parallettes. It was apparent right away that this was an intelligent gym, both in its design and personnel.

Sarah and I were joined by Anders, a former Dutch national-champion weightlifter, for our workout. Obviously, Anders has a strong background in Olympic weightlifting and boasts a 95-kg power snatch. This blew my mind because he probably only weighs 150 lb. Picking his brain was pretty fun, and having him around is a huge advantage for Crossfitters in Copenhagen.

WOD:

Back squat 4, 4, 4, 4, 4

Back squat 1x20 at a 1-breath tempo (stand and take one breath between each repetition)

4x1-minute rounds of elevated handstand push-ups, with 2 minutes of rest between

Using full depth, my weights were 100 kg, 110 kg, 120 kg, 130 kg, 130 kg. I repeated the final set at 130 kg because I knew I would not be able to bump the weight and still get

4 reps going that low. With the exception of my right knee leaning in a bit on some of the movements, my technique looked very good and was dissected for constructive criticism by a few of the guys present.

For the super squat set (of 20), I dropped the weight to 90 kg and made it through without much trouble. In retrospect, I should have kept it at 100 kg as I had originally intended. Chalk one up in the wuss column.

The handstand push-up sets were tough. I set up the parallettes at about 30 inches of width and stacked a couple of plates underneath, leaving approximately an 8-inch deficit to overcome. I've been gradually working the depth lower and lower in an effort to build strength in both my press and in the HSPU movement. The first minute I did 5 repetitions. The second I did 4. The third I did 6. And the fourth I did 4. With Sarah's help (she's an ex-gymnast), I concentrated more on tucking my pelvis and locking my hips, and on pushing my head through my hands to lock the scapula. These tips helped for sure. Nineteen repetitions over 4 sets is nothing to write home about, but the deficit was significant and I felt I had improved.



Copenhagen's Paideia CrossFit boasts the regular complement of kettlebells, as well as a number of toys not often seen in the box.

Nov. 14, 2009:

CrossFit Denmark and CrossFit Copenhagen

Our first stop today was at CrossFit Denmark with Oliver, Nicholas and Mathias. Together, they've carved out a space in the midst of one of Copenhagen's poshest health clubs, Well-Come. Their facility is two rooms, each of decent size, complete with ergs, GHDs, barbells, bumper plates, kettlebells, jump ropes, climbing ropes, rings, Dynamax balls and all the usual trappings. Just outside their doors are an aerobics classroom, a health spa and a shopping mall. It's really a unique situation, and it's a testament to their ingenuity that they've found a way to do CrossFit in an atmosphere that otherwise does not seem to welcome it.

Such an environment has its advantages. They get complimentary usage of the health spa, which includes a steam bath, a sauna, an ice pool, an enormous jacuzzi, fresh fruit, sparkling water and massage. We were treated to this experience after our training and I can say without hesitation that it was worth it.

WOD:

Taken from James Fitzgerald's Big Dawg's blog (Part 4 of the November OPT challenge):

50 walking lunges

20 clean and jerks (60 kg/40 kg)

30 ring dips

25 wall-balls (20/14 lb.)

30 GHD sit-ups

30 kettlebell swings (1.5/1 pood)

75 double-unders

This was a good sprint chipper originally intended to be done after three other short met-cons, but we had the advantage of relatively fresh bodies (though I will say that my and Sarah's legs were pretty heavy from Paideia the day before). I finished this routine in 9:10, Oliver in 12:16, Nicholas in 15:07 and Sarah in 17:07.

After this we went directly to the spa, spent 10 minutes in the steam room, 30 seconds in the ice pool, 10 minutes in the sauna, two minutes in the ice pool, and 10 minutes in the jacuzzi. When I tell you this was amazing, I am not exaggerating. However, we had to turn around and do another workout in less than an hour, so this was a mixed blessing.



CrossFit Copenhagen: 800 members strong and growing.

We left the spa, slammed some food and headed across town to CrossFit Copenhagen. This is the biggest affiliate in Denmark, with a membership of over 800 and growing. Although it's not located in the best neighborhood (part of the charm), the space makes up for it—and more. Built in a 19th-century church, CrossFit Copenhagen has two floors of very large workspace. The upper floor is especially cool because the upper balcony is still intact and as we did the workout people were viewing from above, videotaping and cheering us on.

Built in a 19th-century church, CrossFit Copenhagen has two floors of very large workspace. The upper floor is especially cool because the upper balcony is still intact and as we did the workout people were viewing from above, videotaping and cheering us on.

For the workout, Sarah and I were two among 10. The presiding coach for the night was Asger, and he wrote a really cool group WOD for us to do. In teams of two, split between floors, we did the following for time:

3 rounds each of:

300 meter row/max burpee chest-to-bar pull-ups
(continue until row is finished, then switch)

3 rounds each of:

3 body-weight clean and jerks/max weighted lunges
(32/24 kg) (continue lunging until clean and jerks are finished, then switch)

3 rounds each of:

30 wall-balls (20/14 lb.)/ 30 push-ups

For the burpee chest-to-bars and the lunges, each repetition was worth one second. At the end of the workout, we subtracted the seconds from our time to give us the final total. I can't say what every team's time was, but Sarah and I finished in 15:18 (after our subtractions) and I was whipped. I wound up doing 166 weighted lunges during that portion of the routine, and my hamstrings were quivering while sitting on the stage afterwards.



As in North America, CrossFit is making its way into the Danish military as well, thanks to military affiliates such as CrossFit Royal Danish Guards.

Nov. 15, 2009:

CrossFit Royal Danish Guards and Butcher's Lab

Sarah and I woke up at 7:30 a.m. and were met outside by our friend Jess to head over to the Rosenborg Castle, home of the Danish crown jewels and the Royal Guard barracks. Jess and Lars, our two Royal Guard alumni contacts, arranged for us to do a WOD in front of the castle in the presence of armed guards! This was unbelievable. The place is beautiful, first of all: manicured gardens, ancient architecture. And it was such a perfect morning. Even though it had been raining all week, the sun rose to clear skies for us.

WOD (20-minute AMRAP):

1 kettlebell burpee complex (close-grip push-up on the handle, sumo deadlift high pull, swing)

100 meter kettlebell run

2 kettlebell complexes

100 meter kettlebell run

3 kettlebell complexes

100 meter kettlebell run—etc.

Jess and Lars, our two Royal Guard alumni contacts, arranged for us to do a WOD in front of the castle in the presence of armed guards! This was unbelievable.

Going in, I expected this to be predominantly a cardiovascular challenge, but that was not the case. I used a 24-kg kettlebell, while Jess used 20 kg and Sarah used 16 kg, but none of us could maintain a running pace much faster than a jog. Our arms were so quickly exhausted by the complex that controlling the weight during the run was practically impossible. This turned out to be much more of an upper-body-dominant workout.



Butcher's Lab: totally hardcore CrossFit.

In the end, I completed 14 rounds plus 5 kettlebell complexes, Jess did 13 rounds and 2 complexes, and I think Sarah did 10 rounds and 2 complexes. All of us had long arms after this one.

After a quick shower, Lars and Jess escorted us through the barracks museum, which showcased much of the Royal Guards' history since 1660. We saw old uniforms, modeled battlefields and weapons, and we got to meet a few of the young men now serving.

Then, as is a popular Danish custom, we followed the march from Rosenborg to the Royal Palace for the changing of the guard. The adherence to tradition and discipline this process entailed was impressive. Perfection is the only word to describe the meticulousness of their uniforms, the tightness of the formation, and the focus of each soldier.

After grabbing a quick bite, the four of us headed across town to the meat-packing district for the final stop on my tour of Copenhagen's CrossFit elite: Butcher's Lab. This box is carved from the remains of an old butchery and is every bit as raw as it sounds. Exposed tile, big spaces, tons of rooms packed with ropes, tires and sledges—this place was awesome. It's funny how the location of a workout arouses a different kind of emotion or motivation based on its unique personality. In the morning the scenery provided an inner calm. This afternoon was like exposed nerves. I could not have been more sore, tired and uninterested in doing another workout, but when we walked into Butcher's Lab, I couldn't help but be energized.

We were greeted by Kenneth, the owner; Anders, our workout partner from Friday; and about 20 other members.

WOD:

- 10 muscle-ups
- 20 inverted burpees
- 30 snatches (45/25 kg)
- 40 pull-ups
- 50 pistol squats (total)
- 60 deadlifts (45/25 kg)
- 70 atomic sit-ups (full extension to knees to chest)
- 80 half-moon med-ball slams (total)
- 90 meter bear crawl
- 100 double-unders

I finished in 27:10, 30 seconds behind Sarah's best time of 26:40. She wasn't happy in the slightest (my attempt at irony).

Afterward, Anders led the "bonus," something they apparently do after every WOD in varying forms. Today's was an isometric group push-up. Carefully aligning us facedown in a circle, Anders placed one individual's legs on the person behind until we were all connected. Then, on the count of three, we raised the entire group and held for 45 seconds. This was repeated twice more, and I'm serious when I say I don't think I could have done a fourth. It was like a prolonged stalemate during a tug-of-war.

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Copenhagen, in Sum

In addition to the sheer numbers of boxes this area boasts, it also offers incredible diversity. Often, CrossFit gyms look pretty much the same. (There's a reason why they're called boxes.) Typically built in old warehouses or office space, they tend to take on a similar shape: four walls, high ceilings and floor space. They're uncluttered, minimalist and, many times, lack an individual character. Such is not the case in Copenhagen. Of the four gyms I visited, none is comparable to the other.

Paideia Gym is on the ground floor of a large concrete building accessible through the loading-dock door. Inside it has two rooms (one for classes, one for general use); a unique multi-purpose steel grid for heavy bags, rings, etc.; two proper Olympic platforms and a power rack for heavy squatting; and tons of non-traditional fitness tools like sledges, maces, club bells, and sandbags. Contrasting the torturous instruments stocking the floor are the art-covered walls. Paideia is the only gym I have been in that sells genuine canvas paintings, photography and other art right off their walls.

CrossFit Denmark (Hellerup) is in one of the wealthiest areas of Copenhagen. It exists as a world within a world, a CrossFit haven amidst the health and wellness aura of the fitness spa from which it rents space. Their "box" is glass-walled, well lit, completely stocked and exposed to the curious view of many a treadmill worshipper. They're bringing the elite fitness mentality out of the warehouse and into the Globo Gym.

Now affectionately called "the church of pain," CrossFit Copenhagen's home is incredible. Two floors with very high ceilings give this place an enormous feel and a very unique look.



Sarah Lindasdatter Troelsen Krarup was Blair Morrison's guide in Copenhagen.

CrossFit Copenhagen operates out of a different place of worship: a church. Now affectionately called "the church of pain," CC's home is incredible. Two floors with very high ceilings give this place an enormous feel and a very unique look. It's really two boxes in one. They have tons of equipment, tons of space and stairs. The fact that they use both floors in the same workout means you have to climb stairs constantly. I love it.

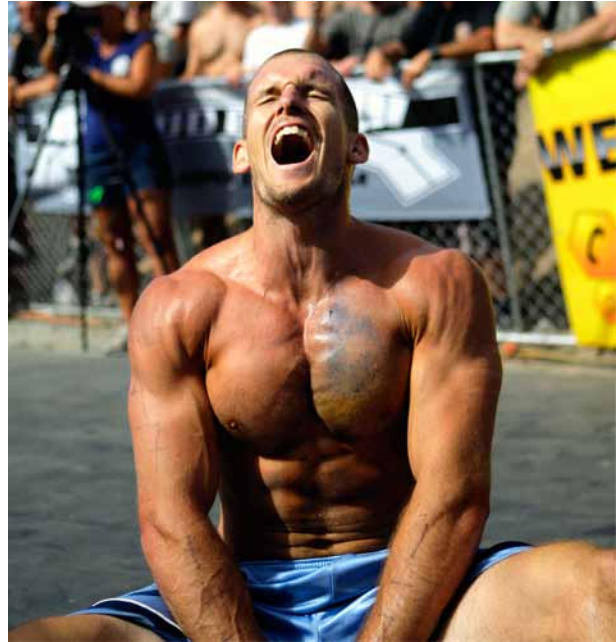
Butcher's Lab is, as the name would indicate, housed in an old abattoir. It has a bunch of rooms, all of which have tile walls and big, hazy windows, giving this place a great raw quality that you can't help associating with a slaughterhouse. Sounds morbid? It works. They also use neon colors for their logo, so the place has flashes of bright green, pink, blue and orange depending on which room you are in. It's certainly one of the most original places in which I've trained thus far.

The uniqueness of these gyms gives them character and personality, thus differentiating them from other boxes. In my opinion, this gives their memberships a stronger sense of identity, ownership and pride. These are qualities that hold communities together and serve to draw in new members.

Nevertheless, it's the quality of the people that really makes Copenhagen a CrossFit mecca. The owners and coaches are well-educated, thoughtful program designers who understand the importance of balance and variety. The athletes are eager, tough and tuned in to the greater community. Perhaps the only area in which the city is lacking is the coordination between gyms. They're all so close together, but at the time of my visit it didn't seem like one group was interested in the actions or development of the others. This is too bad.

The exception to this is to be found in my host, Sarah Lindasdatter Troelsen Krarup. This woman is a machine. In addition to being a great athlete with a serious motor, she knows everyone, everywhere. It was through her connections and knowledge that I was able to experience as much as I did during my visit. While she has founded the Royal Danish Defence College affiliate and is an original member of CrossFit Copenhagen, she continues to train everywhere and maintain relationships throughout the community, essentially creating a link between parallel worlds.

Ideally, it would be great to see a truly cohesive network of affiliates, members and owners loosely tied together by their common goal of building fitness everywhere. Perhaps with the cooperative challenges and events that are now popping up all over the city, and with people like Sarah continuing to connect the dots, this will become a reality. In any event, Copenhagen has grown into a breeding ground for elite fitness in a very short span. I can't wait to see where time will take it next.



Staff/CrossFit Journal

About the Author

Blair Morrison is 27 years old. He was born and raised in Sacramento, Calif., where his family still lives. He received his undergraduate history degree from Princeton University and is now studying European history through Europaeum Masters Programme at the Universiteit Leiden. Formerly a personal trainer at Balance Gym in Washington, D.C., Blair placed seventh in the 2009 Crossfit Games. He is dedicated to the pursuit of the physical challenges and the mental fortitude that comes from the ability to overcome them. Follow Blair's travels at [Anywherefit](#).