

# the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

## CrossFit-Powered U.S. Kettlebell Victory

Kelly Moore



In about May of 2003 I discovered CrossFit when I typed “pull-ups” into an Internet search engine and, no surprise, it appeared high in the results list. I read through the workouts posted on the CrossFit site and was both amazed and skeptical. Who does 100 pull-ups in a workout?! Anyone capable of doing ten was considered a superman in the gym. And who combines lifting with “cardio” for rounds for time? That wasn’t what I read in the bodybuilding magazines, and it sure wasn’t what the powerlifters in my gym did. I was intrigued and figured I had nothing to lose.

I had joined a gym in 1981 when I finally got sick of being obese and weak. I started with “20 sets per body part” *Muscle and Fitness*-type bodybuilding workouts, and then moved into competitive powerlifting when I realized I had actually become fairly strong. After sustaining several shoulder injuries and becoming disillusioned with the use of support gear, I stopped powerlifting and was again going through the motions of non-productive lifting routines until CrossFit changed the way I thought about what a workout could be and the results I could get.

In the beginning, I picked through the posted CrossFit Workouts of the Day (WODs), attempting the ones I thought I could manage and posting my results. Here’s my comment several days after my first CrossFit workout, which was the June 27th, 2003, WOD of 50 pull-ups, 200 squats, and 75 push-ups, done in the blazing time of 14:10: “I am in agony! I could use a break from these pull-ups for a couple days.” For comparison, I did the same workout today, after a six-minute kettlebell snatch set and a CrossFit Total—in 7:27. My pull-up technique is

1 of 3

## CrossFit-Powered U.S. Kettlebell Victory (continued...)



doing full ten-minute sets in competition and her numbers were impressive. Better yet, she lived within driving distance of me, so personal instruction was possible. She was trained by Valery Fedorenko, undefeated kettlebell sport champion in his weight class and the head of the AKC. His bell-handling technique is what allows for high-rep snatch sets without injury.

My first lesson with Imes was in December of 2006. I told her I was interested in doing kettlebell competition (known as kettlebell sport or girevoy sport), and she agreed to be my coach. She asked me to do a four-minute snatch set, with one hand-switch at two minutes, at whatever pace would allow me to go the entire four minutes. I barely made it. My hands were close to a callus tear and were cramping up. Imes had a lot of work to do, as it became clear that I really had no idea what I was doing. She spent that day and many more correcting my technique, with special attention to grip and the overhead position. Proper grip and overhead position are critical to preventing

now much, much better (my first couple years of pull-ups were of the half extension variety), and I am now able to do the set of fifty non-stop.

After several years of extremely avid CrossFitting, I became interested in kettlebells, both as a training tool and as a venue for competition. I pursued kettlebells first on my own and then with several trainers, and I eventually became a certified trainer for both the RKC (Russian Kettlebell Challenge) and AKC (American Kettlebell Club) organizations.

In December of 2006, I contacted AKC coach Catherine Imes for kettlebell training advice because I was totally frustrated. Despite having received personal training from several kettlebell instructors and even becoming an RKC-certified instructor myself, I was still unable to do more than a couple dozen kettlebell snatches without ripping up my hands. I searched several kettlebell forums and noted that torn hands were common and almost seemed to be an expected result of the exercise.

I did notice that there was one person—Imes—who was not always tearing up her hands despite completing sets of 100+ consecutive reps per hand. Even more impressive, Imes's training logs indicated she was doing that kind of volume four to five days a week. She was

tears and to being able to complete highrep sets. She instructed me to work on the technique corrections for timed sets at a 15 reps per minute (rpm) pace.

As often as I could, I traveled to St. Louis for more coaching from Imes. Each time, she fixed more faults and slowly increased the length of time per snatch set in my training, while keeping the rpm the same. I had trouble with the concept of working for length of time rather for total reps, but Imes insisted that working slower under time would expose technique flaws that would hold back future progress if we didn't fix them up front. She was right. I could complete 20-rpm sets, but I couldn't last very long and my hands would tear. The slower, longer sets forced me to work on improving my technique.

In March of 2007, I went the full 10 minutes (the maximum set length in kettlebell sport competition) at a NAKF (North American Kettlebell Federation) Cross World competition held at the Monkey Bar Gym in my hometown of Madison, Wisconsin. My numbers were just barely enough to achieve the AKC's Master of Sport (MS) ranking, the highest available ranking for women at that time. (The ranking tables have since changed.) My technique had a long way to go, but my years of consistent CrossFit training allowed me to achieve high reps after only three months of sportspecific training.



## CrossFit-Powered U.S. Kettlebell Victory (continued...)

In preparation for meets in 2007, I repeated the process Imes had outlined for me: start at a slightly higher rpm pace for six minutes and slowly increase the time while maintaining the rpm, until I could complete a full ten minutes at that pace. Increase the pace incrementally, then rinse and repeat. Simple and effective.

Before November of 2007, women could compete only in the snatch. AKC head coach Valery Fedorenko asked for female volunteers to attempt a 10-minute jerk exhibition set as a test at the NAKF Nationals in May. Several of us participated in the exhibition and expressed interest in including the jerk as a competition event for women. Shortly after, the World Kettlebell Club instituted the one-arm jerk competition for women. After the Nationals competition, I added one-arm jerk training to my snatch training, again using timed sets at a predetermined pace and working up to ten continuous minutes.

I competed four times in 2007: in March, May, July, and November. At the November World Kettlebell Lifting Championships, I became the first U.S. athlete to achieve the rank of Master of Sport World Class (see video of the event [here](#)). This is the highest possible ranking in the sport. Other than altering a few of the posted CrossFit WODs a month before competition to prevent hand issues, and stopping the workouts just prior to the meets, I continued to do the CrossFit WODs the entire time I was training for kettlebell sport competition.

My training schedule for the kettlebell competitions was simple: one timed kettlebell snatch set followed by the CrossFit WOD in the morning at home, and then one timed kettlebell jerk set in the shower room during a break at work. (I had attempted multiple jerk sets

throughout the day but quickly found the pain of the bell resting on my forearms unbearable). I work ten-hour days as a police/911 dispatcher, so a few minutes away from the stress to do something enjoyable and constructive was a welcome break! I usually snatched and jerked five times a week. This conservative amount of time under the bell seemed to work with my recovery ability.

The timed-set training that Imes and Fedorenko outlined is straightforward and works well. I will be using the same training schedule for the upcoming 2008 20-kg competitions. (The AKC plans to bump the women's competitive kettlebell weight from the current standard of 16 kg to up to 20 kg).

I owe several people big thank yous for making my progress possible. Many thanks to Catherine Imes. She is an amazing kettlebell sport athlete and an outstanding coach. To Lynne Pitts, thank you for always listening and bolstering my confidence when I was frustrated. I owe you big-time for your therapy sessions. Thanks as well to Lorraine Patton, Steve Cotter, Valery Fedorenko, and all the other AKC coaches and athletes who organized meets and offered encouragement (and heckling) throughout the year. And, of course, my special thanks to Coach Greg Glassman and the CrossFit community. My years of CrossFit have given me a tremendous strength, endurance, and mental toughness advantage that I was immediately able to apply to kettlebell sport training to achieve significant results in a very short time. I am deeply in your debt.



### Kelly's CrossFit stats

CrossFit Total: 650  
"Fran": 3:15 (65-pound thrusters)  
"Diane": 4:30 (225-pound trap bar deadlifts)  
"Lynne": 42, 42, 42, 42, 40 kipping pull-ups & 18, 17, 16, 13, 12 bench presses, with a 3-minute break between couplets.  
Max pull-ups, single set: 62 (33 strict)  
  
Height: 5'0"  
Weight: 114 pounds (109 when she earned the Master of Sport World Class rank in November 2007)



Catherine Imes & Kelly Moore

Kelly Moore lives in beautiful Madison, Wisconsin, where she is a 911/police dispatcher, part-time artist, and full-time cat mom.