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# THE CrossFit JOURNAL

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## Being There: The 2009 CrossFit Games at Aromas

E.M. Burton hadn't done a CrossFit workout when she went to the Games in 2009. Here's what she found when she reviewed her photos from The Ranch.

By E.M. Burton

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All images: E.M. Burton

While CrossFit had been on my radar for years, in July 2009 I hadn't yet done a CrossFit workout when a friend took me to the CrossFit Games at The Ranch in Aromas, Calif. I wore heels.



*Whether it's the Home Depot Center or a dusty ranch, CrossFit is still CrossFit.*

My good friend and architecture colleague Otto Lejeune had designed the CrossFit.com main site—amazingly still in use these many years later—and he'd scribbled up a cartoon called "Pukie." Of his first-pass site design in 2000 for clients "Greg and Lauren," I only remember seeing images of beautiful women doing Olympic lifts, though it's not my practice to objectify people that way. My reaction was simply, "Wow," but that was followed quickly by, "Those people are exercise freaks."

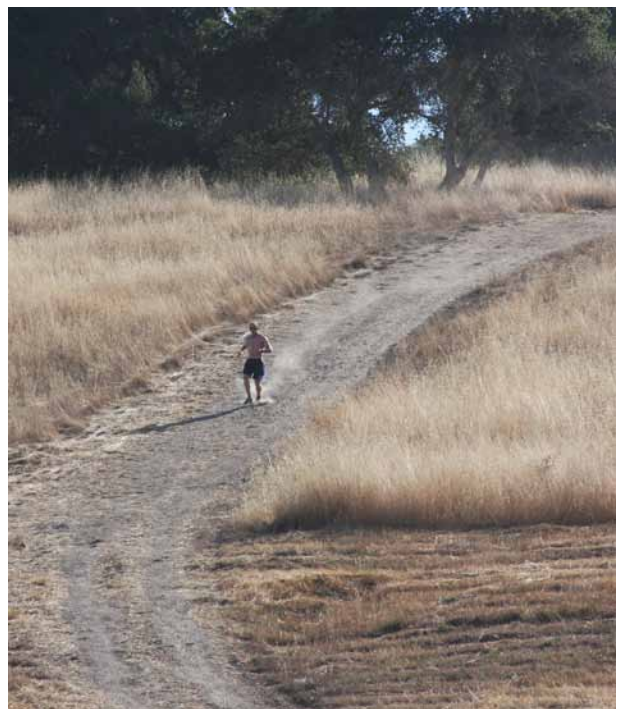
I told myself I would "never" do those workouts.

Well, you know what they say: Never say never.

As I was taking some pictures at the SoCal Regional in May, there was a lingering feeling that reminded me of my first Games and the experience I'd had there. So I took another look at some shots I'd taken during the 2009 event at The Ranch.

I was graciously allowed access to the barn, which was transformed into the "media hut" and athletes' warm-up area. It was most likely because it was shady and they were worried about me in the 109 F heat, what with heels and all, but I was allowed to shoot freely. I knew no one. I'd only ever photographed buildings, interiors, works of art and toddlers, but I set my camera on automatic for fast-moving subjects, tried out a new zoom lens with varying degrees of success, and started to shoot.

While those in the crowd regularly checked online for scoring updates, I paid no attention to who was winning or losing. It didn't seem to matter. It was like a handshake competition between friends, somewhat at odds with the grueling level of the events. I picked a few athletes who seemed to me to be quietly compelling, and whose warm smile and laughter in their toughest physical moments struck me as being full of grace, and I clicked away.



*Clockwise from top left: 2009 winner Mikko Salo; 2009 champ Tanya Wagner and future champs Annie Thorisdottir and Kristan Clever (from left); Chris Spealler alone on The Hill; Blair Morrison on his way to a seventh-place finish.*



***Tanya Wagner was dominant in 2009 and finished 18 points above second-place Charity Vale.***



***Familiar faces Mikko Salo (left) and Jason Khalipa (right) alongside Tommy Hackenbruck.***

Looking back at these images, I see that I was drawn to certain aspects of the experience. They make me smile now that I see all my friends and colleagues as I met them for the very first time doing what they all do so incredibly well.

- That hill! I'd seen Sevan Matossian's *Every Second Counts* on the plane on the way down, so I knew the beautiful natural backdrop. But climbing it repeatedly in 2009 must have been crippling.
- The "campground" area for those who'd driven thousands of miles in RVs to hang out all weekend had a Grateful Dead feel to it.
- The beautiful crowd! The majority were fit and healthy themselves. I doubt you will find anything similar at other sporting events.
- I noticed a lot of text-based imagery on Ts and banners—unique, I thought, in the sporting world. In CrossFit Land, your T-shirt expresses everything they need to know about you right there in that moment. The competitors' shirts were often emblazoned with the names of the people who had trained them.
- One also couldn't help notice all the hard work and serious dedication behind the scenes. The vast majority of the Games staff were hard-working volunteers who put in 12-hour days in extreme heat. The judges seemed to be working as hard as the competitors. Everyone, in every image, is so very focused.

As I was writing up this piece, I learned that the spectator tickets for the 2012 Reebok CrossFit Games at the Home Depot Center in Carson, Calif., have sold out. These images speak to how much things have changed in such little time.

To watch a video of assorted images from the 2009 CrossFit Games at The Ranch in Aromas, click one of the links below:

[MOV](#)   [WMV](#)

