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CrossFit country

A NEW WAY OF WORKING OUT IS CHANGING THE LANDSCAPE OF COMBAT FITNESS.

Three sets of 10. That phrase is probably the first thing most of us learned about working out. Just like the rest of the wisdom we thought was irrefutable when we were seventh graders, we now know that the 3-sets-of-10 concept is pedestrian, inefficient and ceased returning major dividends some time back in high school.

So what's the answer to the fitness riddle? Yoga? Chi-gong? Hundreds? Slow reps? Kegels? The answer is not one thing, it's a little bit of everything mixed in with a lot of sweat, pain and intensity. The answer is CrossFit.

HOUSE OF PAIN

"It is hard to describe CrossFit in a sentence," says Andy Petranek, a former Marine who holds a number of prestigious training and coaching certifications and is the founder of Petranek Fitness, a CrossFit affiliate in Santa Monica, Calif. "It puts such a world of hurt on your body, and the changes you see take place in your body so rapidly from the type of training we do almost makes everything else feel like a complete waste of time."

Suffice it to say, CrossFit workouts typically combine total-body compound exercise with high-intensity cardio, often performed against some degree of time element to increase motivation and output while decreasing rest. The exercises are

Top Left: Certified CrossFit trainer and Muay Thai and BJJ enthusiast Becca "Ring Girl" Borawski leads a CrossFit workout. Above: Box jumps can be a brutal interval.



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cherry-picked from the entire realm of physical culture. Gymnastic moves such as pull-ups, ring dips, handstand push-ups and rope climbing are combined with Olympic lifts, powerlifting techniques, plyometrics and Russian kettlebell training. If it is brutal, CrossFit has adopted it. Additionally, any and all sports are encouraged to round out your physical curriculum. (Looking through the CrossFit lens, gymnasts are at the top of the sports/fitness pyramid while bodybuilders reside just above couch potatoes, since their ability to punch, jump, throw and climb are about the same.)

CROSS PURPOSES

“The goal of CrossFit is to create the world’s best general athlete. Not to be the best of one area, but pretty damn good in 10 different areas of fitness,” says Petranek, who personifies that ethos as a veteran of the Eco-Challenge and several ultra-endurance events. “If you took 10,000 different exercises, from cycling to running to lifting to any crazy exercises you can think of, the CrossFit guy may not win any of the events, but overall will come out on top. He will be pretty good at everything.”

“It is difficult to do a CrossFit workout in a [regular] gym. We get kicked out for jumping or dropping a weight. A lot of gyms won’t let you drop weights so you can’t really practice the O-lifts,” says Petranek.

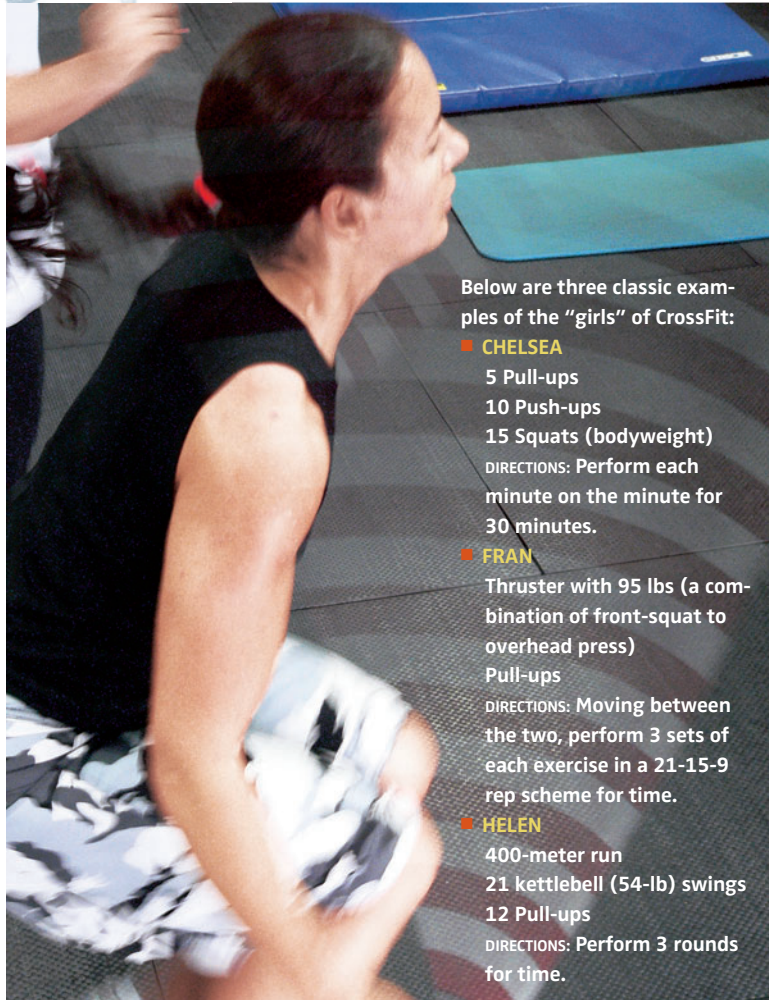
CrossFit in 100 Words

Eat meat and vegetables, nuts and seeds, some fruit, little starch and no sugar. Keep intake to levels that will support exercise but not body fat. Practice and train major lifts: deadlift, clean, squat, presses, clean and jerk, and snatch. Similarly, master the basics of gymnastics: pull-ups, dips, rope climbs, push-ups, sit-ups, presses to handstands, pirouettes, flips, splits and holds. Bike, run, swim, row, hard and fast. Five or six days per week, mix these elements in as many combinations and patterns as creativity will allow. Routine is the enemy. Keep workouts short and intense. Regularly learn and play new sports.

—Taken from www.crossfit.com



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Below are three classic examples of the “girls” of CrossFit:

■ CHELSEA

- 5 Pull-ups
- 10 Push-ups
- 15 Squats (bodyweight)

DIRECTIONS: Perform each minute on the minute for 30 minutes.

■ FRAN

Thruster with 95 lbs (a combination of front-squat to overhead press)

Pull-ups

DIRECTIONS: Moving between the two, perform 3 sets of each exercise in a 21-15-9 rep scheme for time.

■ HELEN

- 400-meter run
- 21 kettlebell (54-lb) swings
- 12 Pull-ups

DIRECTIONS: Perform 3 rounds for time.

It is this well roundedness and the CrossFit devotion to high intensity and short intervals that have made it a hand-in-glove match for mixed martial artists. John Hackleman, owner of The Pit fight gym and Chuck Liddell’s long-time trainer, runs a CrossFit affiliate gym in Arroyo Grande, Calif., known as CrossPit.

MMA stalwarts such as BJ Penn and Paul Buentello favor CrossFit workouts, and Tait Fletcher, of “The Ultimate Fighter, Season Three” fame, trains at Petranek’s gym.

“Traditional weightlifting workouts can potentially hurt you for mixed martial arts, because if you are a fighter you don’t need a strong bench or curl,” says Petranek. “Those are bodybuilding moves. You are trying to create real strength through your entire body: your hormonal, limbic and neurological systems. That is CrossFit’s specialty. Typical bodybuilding workouts just don’t do that at all.”

Petranek is quick to point out that crushing a CrossFit workout in record time doesn’t mean you know how to fight. CrossFit is meant to be the strength-and-conditioning piece of your overall fight-training pie.

The Girls of CrossFit

The blood-and-guts of CrossFit is the Workout of the Day (WOD). Published each day on www.crossfit.com, members of CrossFit’s online community religiously complete, report and track their performance. The WODs are the perfect place to begin incorporating CrossFit into your regimen. The WODs are affectionately given girls’ names, but these aren’t the kind of girls you bring home to mother. “It comes from the fact that hurricanes used to be named after women and these workouts leave you wrecked,” explains Andy Petranek owner of CrossFit affiliate Petranek Fitness in Santa Monica, Calif. The exceptions to this rule are three workouts titled “JT,” “Michael” and “Murph,” named after three CrossFit aficionados and members of the Armed Forces who fell in Afghanistan in June of 2005 while serving their country.



“CrossFit doesn’t take the place of your skill development,” he says. “It would never take the place of practicing your jiu-jitsu or spending hours on your bike in a pack getting used to riding in a peloton. It doesn’t eliminate that need. But in terms of creating that extreme level of fitness, it is a pretty potent punch.”

Whether you are a fighter, a serious athlete of another breed or just looking for something new out of your fitness routine (“Ninety percent of the people who come in are completely bored with what they are doing in the gym,” affirms Petranek), CrossFit might take your game to a new level. Everything needed to start is available for free at www.crossfit.com. The only thing you risk is a little bit of soreness.

Or you can go back to doing 3 sets of 10. 🖊️