

JACKIE NOLAN'S ROAD TO CROSSFIT GLORY

BY LOYD MCINTOSH

Few people can credibly claim to be among the five best in the world at... well... anything. However, Chelsea resident Jackie Nolan can.

Nolan recently finished fourth place in the 2025 CrossFit Games, an annual international competition designed to crown the *"Fittest on Earth."*

At 67, Nolan qualified for the games for the first time in 2025 after a dozen attempts. Competing in the women's 65-69 classification, Nolan outperformed CrossFit athletes from all over the globe, no small feat for someone who discovered her love of athletics and a competitive spirit later in life.

"I never imagined I'd be competing at this level in my sixties, but here I am," says Nolan, reflecting on her accomplishments. "CrossFit gave me something I didn't know I was missing: strength, community, and confidence."

A retired software engineer, Nolan is now an instructor, known as "Coach Jackie," teaching several classes each week at CrossFit Chelsea. She initially joined CrossFitChelsea on the recommendation of a neighbor's son, part-owner of the facility. It didn't take long for her to realize the gym was more than... well... a gym; it was a community. "That was about 13 years ago, and I got absolutely hooked on it," says Nolan. "It took one class and I was sold."

Nolan grew up in Huetown, home of the Hueytown High School Golden Gophers' proud and successful athletics programs of the 1970s and 80s. However, despite her hometown's love of sports, Nolan did her best to avoid breaking a sweat in her youth.

"If you auditioned and made it to the show choir, your PE period was spent with the show choir," she continues. "So I did everything I could to get out of being active



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PHOTOS COURTESY OF JACKIE NOLAN



or participating in sports when I was in high school.”

Nolan eventually got caught up in the jogging craze of the 1980s, and, like many runners of the era, developed jogging-related injuries. By this point in her life, Nolan had become hooked on physical activity, taking up swimming on the advice of her orthopedist. It was at this point that Nolan started to notice a competitive itch that needed to be scratched.

“About two or three weeks later, I was beating my then-husband in the pool,” says Nolan with a hint of good-natured gloating in her voice.

Now swimming and running for fitness, Nolan eventually added cycling to her repertoire and, before long, the urge to compete was too hard to ignore. She poured her energy into triathlons for two decades, initially participating in road events before evolving to the grueling, off-road Xterra triathlon series, which combines open-water swimming, mountain biking, and trail running.

Nolan found success in Xterra events, eventually earning podium finishes at regional races and even qualifying for the USA Xterra National Championship, where she placed third in her age group. Nolan would go on to compete four times in the Xterra World

Championship in Hawaii, a course that included a mile swim, 20-plus miles of mountain biking, and a six-mile trail run, claiming third in her division.

Despite her success, the grind of off-road racing began to take a toll. “When I hit my early 50s, crashing on a mountain bike just wasn’t really attractive to me anymore,” she recalls. “If you’re going to mountain bike, you’re probably going to crash at some point.”

Looking for a new challenge that would satisfy her competitive drive without the same risks, she found her way to CrossFit, a discovery that would set the stage for her greatest athletic achievement.

“It’s interesting because with road triathlons, I said, ‘I’m just doing this for fun,’ and then I got competitive at it. I left the road triathlons and went off-road and said, ‘I’m not putting a computer on my bike. I don’t want this to become competitive,’ but I got competitive at it,” Nolan admits. “Then I started CrossFit and told myself, ‘I’m just going to do this for fun. I’m not going to get competitive.’”

“I didn’t realize it, but I think I just have this competitive nature, and it’s something that I have to accept,” she adds. “If I am going to pursue an athletic venue, my competitive nature is going to come out, and I’m just going to turn it into

something that I’m trying to get better at.”

The road to the CrossFit Games was as demanding as the competition itself. Each February, athletes worldwide enter the CrossFit Open, submitting workout videos completed at their local gyms. In 2025, more than 1,100 women competed in the 65-69 age group with the top 200 advancing to the semifinals, where every rep must be filmed and judged. Nolan finished 15th, finally earning her first Games berth after 12 years of trying.

In August, she traveled to Columbus, Ohio, for the pinnacle event. Over four days, athletes faced eight grueling workouts testing strength, endurance, and skill. After two days, the field of 20 was cut to 10, and Nolan advanced. One highlight came in an event of handstand push-ups, bike calories, and jump rope double-unders, a skill she dominated.

When it was over, Nolan finished fourth overall, just off the podium but thrilled with her effort. She also gives much of the credit to her CrossFit family for her success.

“The whole gym has been so supportive, from adjusting schedules to getting certified as judges,” Nolan says. “It really has taken a village to get me here.”