

The Most Wonderful Time Of The Year

The Open is a CrossFit athlete's favorite time of the year. Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's are fun, but when Dave Castro's smug face appears to kick off the CrossFit season, that's when the real fun begins. For five consecutive weeks, as new workouts are announced, athletes gather around gym TVs to talk strategy, while gym owners plan "Friday Night Lights" events to bring the entire gym together for the five Open workouts. No matter if these athletes plan on going to the CrossFit Games or not, the Open workouts are a crucial point in determining an athlete's fitness level, and fueling their fight for the rest of the year.

Testing Your Commitment Since 2011

The CrossFit Open marks the beginning of an athlete's quest to determine if their year of training has paid off. Hopefully they made enough of the right choices to make it to the next stage of competition: Regionals. However, since the introduction of the Open, the number of competitors in the field has increased, thereby making it that much harder to move on in the competition. Regardless of their performance the year before, every athlete must earn their spot.

The Open first began in 2011. Before that time, athletes competed in Sectionals, then Regionals and, if they were lucky, the CrossFit Games. These events were only attended by a select few, as CrossFit was not as widespread then as it is now. However, with the introduction of the Open, the limited number of competing athletes exploded. Suddenly, anyone could participate. Even if you had never competed in CrossFit before, you had as much of a chance at winning the Open as a veteran Games athlete.

This inclusion caused CrossFit's popularity to increase exponentially. Athletes all over the world were suddenly united, excited to suffer together to see where they stacked up against their peers. Over the course of five weeks, as the five workouts are released, these athletes compete and test the limits of their fitness. For many, personal records (PRs) are set during this time. With so much adrenaline in the air, it's near impossible to make it through the Open without some sort of PR. However, even if no achievements of this sort are made, the Open is hardly a waste. There is always more to learn from failure than success.

Be Confident In Your Weakness

The Open has the unique ability to expose weaknesses in an encouraging way. This may seem like an oxymoron, but it's true. The Open gives those who truly want to improve their fitness the feedback necessary to do so. Risks taken in training will finally play out, allowing athletes to see the holes in their plan and the weak links they need to get rid of. In the world of CrossFit there is no place for deficiencies, and the Open is all too happy to expose and exploit weaknesses.

Dave Castro's mind is apparently a very dark place. The sadistic workouts that he comes up with are unrivaled in their ability to destroy an athlete physically and mentally. The movements are often simple, which means they will be the most painful. Last year's couplet of thrusters and double-unders was especially taxing. Athletes had a hard time catching their breath during that one, which let them know they needed to do more high-volume thrusters and double-unders. Throughout the rest of 2017, these movements were no doubt practiced on a regular basis and have become more efficient. This is only because most athletes spent the better part of twenty minutes suffering through their inefficiency. By allowing their weaknesses to teach them, these athletes grew ten times stronger than they were before.

All of the top athletes know that if they ignore their weaknesses, they will never win the CrossFit Games. Castro loves to wait until the last second to announce workouts. If you have a glaring weakness that he's all of a sudden chosen to exploit, you're screwed. Rich Froning experienced this at the 2010 CrossFit Games. With one event left to go, Rich was sitting in first place. The last event involved rope climbs and, by the time he got to the rope, he found his arms were shot and wouldn't pull. He didn't know how to use his legs to climb so he just kept pulling and, unfortunately, it didn't end well for him. He lost his first place position and ended the season in second place. However, even though he beat himself up for a while afterward, he came back the next year and proved to everyone that he had learned from his weakness and built it into a strength.

Even though the Open may give you nightmares for a few weeks, it's undeniable that it encourages you to be a better athlete. After it chews you up and spits you back out, it pats you on the back and says, "Don't worry, you'll do better next time." Once you've seen how you need to improve, it's very hard to give up. Becoming a better athlete is what everyone works towards. You can only do that if you first know where your deficiencies lie. A good athlete is confident in their skills, but an exceptional athlete is confident in their weaknesses. You can never be too prepared and you can never learn too much.

Fuel For The Fire

How an athlete performs during the CrossFit Open sets the tone for the rest of their year. It can set them up to make it big in the world of CrossFit, or derail their entire plan. When an athlete fails to achieve their goals, they have one of two options: disown the barbell, or get their ass into gear for next season. For many, failure is only fuel for the fire.

For the average person, where they land among their peers during the Open is of little consequence to the rest of their lives. But for a professional athlete, who hopes to make the sport their career, they have a lot riding on their performance. Their livelihood is at stake. If they fail, they will be forced to reevaluate their training, diet, coach, or even career choice entirely - which is always a last resort. Sitting in a cubicle staring at a computer is not the ideal life for these people. They've found their passion and are

fighting for it. The problem is, they're competing against thousands of others who feel the same way, and not everyone can go to the CrossFit Games.

In the past few years, we've seen quite a few athletes fail to qualify or simply withdraw from competition for various reasons. In 2015, Brooke Ence competed in her rookie year at the Games. She impressed everyone with her tremendous strength and we were all excited to see her compete again. However, she failed to qualify at Regionals in 2016. Then, before the Open in 2017, she announced her withdraw from competition due to an unplanned but necessary surgical operation. She was incredibly disappointed, but not in the least discouraged. She vowed to make it back to the Games in 2018 and personally, I am tremendously excited to see her again.

Brooke could have quit. She could have said, "To hell with it all," and never entered a gym again. Setbacks like the ones she's had to deal with are hard to handle for anyone. I'm sure it wasn't easy to go back to the gym after Regionals in 2016. And I'm sure it wasn't easy to work around her injury and modify her training after surgery. But she overcame these obstacles because she saw "failure" as an opportunity to learn. She saw where she needed to put in more work and was eager to do it. Instead of being overwhelmed by a two-year sabbatical from the Games, Brooke has put in the time and effort to make sure she's stronger than ever when she competes again.

This mental fortitude is why CrossFit and the Open are so important. Failure happens and is part of life, but quitting is unacceptable. Giving up is not the proper way to deal with defeat. Rather, CrossFit athletes learn to use their failure as a tool to help them improve, and the Open is kind enough to give everyone this opportunity. An athlete can accept a loss gracefully, then train like a mad man all year to make sure it never happens again. These are the kind of responses we need to have when faced with setbacks in life, and these are the kinds of people that CrossFit produces.

Freaks Of Fitness

The Open is the only time of year when the whole world unites in order to fail and learn together. Competition is rough. CrossFit is rough. But the truth is, as CrossFit athletes this is what we live for. If it were easy we wouldn't have any interest in it. We love the challenge, the learning, the communal suffering that brings our gyms closer than any party ever could. Because of the intense, competitive nature of our sport, we know how to get back up after being knocked down. We know we will come out of the experience a stronger athlete. The Open provides a yearly opportunity for this. Athletes go through the ringer and come out stronger on the other side. They're ready for another year of training, and they're ready for whatever life throws at them.