

ITOA News



The Journal of the Illinois Tactical Officers Association



CrossFit 101

By Sergeant Brian Melvin

The need for a high level of physical fitness among law enforcement responders is well established. Unfortunately, little progress is being made to establish a requirement for the line officer to maintain a certain level of physical fitness. This is not true for the tactical officer. Every modern tactical unit operating in the United States with any semblance of professionalism or true operational readiness requires each operator to pass a fitness test periodically. The content and effectiveness of these tests varies greatly, but each should have the goal of motivating and requiring each operator to maintain a basic level of fitness.

Preparation for the test (typically conducted quarterly or yearly) is often accomplished on off-duty time. While this results in a great deal of variety in individual training programs, the goal of the training should be uniform—and it should go beyond simply passing the test. Each individual operator's training should focus on the functional application of fitness to work requirements and expectations.

The concept of functional fitness has received a great deal of attention in the realm of tactical law enforcement and military special operations. Numerous articles have been published on this topic. The purpose of this article is to outline the CrossFit methodology for functional fitness, working on the assumption that functional fitness is an accepted principle.

What is CrossFit?

CrossFit is a training program based on the concept of functional

fitness. Established by Greg Glassman in a small gym in Santa Cruz, California, CrossFit has grown to include over 300 affiliates in the United States and several foreign countries. Thousands of individuals utilize www.crossfit.com, a website where a “workout of the day” is posted each night. The website includes hundreds of videos demonstrating the

exercises, a message board and daily affiliate videos.

CrossFit utilizes gymnastic exercises (pull-ups, push-ups, dips, L-holds, burpees), Olympic lifting (cleans, snatches, presses, jerks) and various aerobic/anaerobic exercises (sprinting, rowing, distance running) to create a fitness program that “specializes in not specializing.” As



Officers at World SWAT Challenge rescuing a dummy.

Photo courtesy of Rick McFarland, Arkansas Democrat Gazette.



Officers on a course requiring respirators.

Coach Glassman points out, real life (and certainly tactical law enforcement work) tends to punish the specialist. The specialist may be the operator who focuses on marathon running, but neglects fitness essentials such as upper body strength, anaerobic output, vertical leap and explosive strength. The specialist may also be the operator who bench presses 400 pounds, curls his body weight and looks good on the beach, but cannot run a moderate distance, touch his toes or pull himself over a wall. Tactical operators cannot afford to waste limited training time on these traditional "specialist" exercise programs.

CrossFit trains the operator to be equally prepared for a short sprint across a threat area, a climb over a brick wall in full gear, a moderate jog from the staging area to an assigned position, or a two-minute struggle with a suspect. Attaining this level of fitness is the goal of CrossFit's system of "constantly varied, functional exercises executed at high intensity."

Is Cross Fit the only effective system for attaining tactical fitness? No. It is, however, one of the most user-friendly and accessible programs

available today. The CrossFit website is 100% free, which includes the daily workout of the day (WOD) and demonstration videos. Subscribers to the message board can even post personal exercise videos for critique by trainers and enthusiasts in the CrossFit community. The overall effectiveness of the training program, the tremendous support of the CrossFit community, and the adoption of CrossFit by numerous military and law enforcement special operations training programs are the main reasons CrossFit continues to grow and expand in popularity.

Beginning a CrossFit Program

Again, the purpose of this article is to outline and summarize CrossFit principles and training for tactical officers. This assumes that each operator maintains a basic level of fitness that allows him to complete push-ups, pull-ups, short or medium distance running and basic weight training. **Do not begin any exercise program without consulting with your physician regarding your work capacity.** This disclaimer is especially true with CrossFit, as there are several

documented cases of life-threatening incidents of rhabdomyolysis (a condition where muscle tissues break down rapidly and poisons the bloodstream) among individuals beginning the program too quickly. As with any effective and relevant firearms, defensive tactics or vehicle training, the CrossFit training system carries with it a certain amount of risk. It is incumbent on the individual operator to heed these warnings.

Equipment Issues

The majority of the core CrossFit workouts require little equipment. Access to a pull-up bar, a barbell and bumper plates (iron weights may suffice, but plan on dropping the bar frequently as you progress), a few dumbbells and a medicine ball will prepare you for the majority of the workouts. A rowing machine, various kettlebells, climbing rope and a tractor tire are nice additions but are not necessary for most of the workouts.



Session of WallBall with 20lb medicine balls.



Four SWAT Officers participate in the team "Trevor Workout" in honor of Army SPC Trevor A. Win'E.

The CrossFit Warm-up

Many CrossFit workouts are short and intense, often completed in less than twenty minutes. A comprehensive warm-up should precede each workout of the day. The recommended CrossFit workout consists of 2-3 sets of 12-15 reps of the following exercises:

- Pull-up
- Squat
- Back extension
- Sit-up
- Samson Stretch (Find the description on the website under exercise videos)
- Push-up
- Various

It is recommended to vary the number of repetitions based on the workout of the day. For example, if the workout calls for 100+ pull-ups for time, it may be wise to limit the number of pull-ups completed in the warm-up. Adding jump rope, rope climbs or a short run or row is often beneficial.

The Workout of the Day (WOD)

Log onto www.crossfit.com and

glance at the workout of the day (WOD) listed for that date. If you are overwhelmed or confused with the particular workout, scroll down the page and find a WOD you are comfortable beginning with. A few critical points to consider when performing the WOD:

- Each exercise should be "scaled" to the individual. The WOD is listed generically for an athletic male. Scale each exercise as needed. This is good advice regardless of how fit you think you are. An exercise may be scaled by reducing the load for a particular lift, using a device for assistance (such as rubber assist bands for pull-ups) or simplifying the movement (beginning a thruster from the rack, as opposed to cleaning it off the floor).
- Modify the WOD if you are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with a particular movement. Choose an exercise that works a similar function. For example, substitute bar dips for ring dips if you cannot stabilize on the rings (or you do not have access to gymnastic rings).
- Focus on function, not muscle groups. The basis of CrossFit is to

provide functional fitness to be applied in real life situations. True functional movements typically involve multiple muscles and complex body movement. You will never see a "back day" or "bicep workout" in CrossFit. Isolating a particular muscle group does little to prepare the body for real life or combat action. Bicep curls, leg extensions and tricep pushdowns may have their place in preparation for bodybuilding beauty pageants, but have no place in training for tactical operations.

- Take the WOD instructions literally. If the WOD calls for 50 squats, they mean air squats. If the WOD lists body weight bench press, use your body weight (subject to scaling). And if the WOD demands 100 pull-ups, complete 100 pull-ups prior to moving on to the next exercise, unless otherwise stated.
- The WODS are generally executed "for time" (with the exception of the "heavy days"). Start the timer and push through each WOD with as little rest as possible. This is a major departure from the typical "3 sets of 10-12 with 3-5 minutes of rest in between."
- Record your results. Most WODS are randomly repeated at least one or twice per year. This allows you to review and assess your progress.
- Remain as consistent in the execution of the WODS as possible. This is especially true when running short time trials (200M, 400M, 800M). If you can use a track, try to use the track each time the particular WOD comes up.
- Do not routinely skip the WOD. It can be demoralizing when the particular WOD just "isn't your thing." Skipping the exercises you are least comfortable with, however, diminishes the results and reduces your operational capability. Following the WOD will round out

your game and strengthen the movements and activities you enjoy and prefer.

- Never quit. Make a commitment and stick to it. Finish each workout, even if you need to take a break, reduce weight, or substitute (begin with strict pull ups and end with jumping pull-ups). The resulting mental and physical benefits cannot be understated.
- Find a coach or training partner to assist with unfamiliar exercises. Seven CrossFit affiliates are operating in the Chicago area. Contact your local affiliate and inquire about a “foundations” or “fundamentals” class. Most affiliates offer a substantial discount to law enforcement. Check the affiliate section on the main page or contact CrossFit Tri-Cities (www.tricityscrossfit.blogspot.com). Mark Reinke and Jason Homesley with CFTC offer the best law enforcement discount among the CrossFit affiliates in the area.
- Constantly learn and play new sports or activities. Adding CrossFit to your normal running, biking, jiu jitsu, adventure racing, or bodybuilding routine will prove beneficial, assuming you are maintaining adequate nutrition and rest.

Types of WODS

The Girls: All of the WODs with female names are benchmark workouts. These workouts are typically multi-faceted and many follow the 21-15-9 format (three sets of each listed exercise, 21 reps of each exercise the first set, 15 the second and 9 the last set). These workouts are executed for time.

Heroes Workouts: These WODS are established and named to honor the memory of a fallen warrior. Unfortunately, the list of Heroes WODS continues to grow. Completion of these exercises should never be taken lightly. These WODS contain various formats, similar to many of the “Girls,” but also include formats of extended length, such as “Murph” and “Tommy V.” These exercises are executed for time.

Technique/Heavy Days: These WODS typically focus on a single exercise, such as deadlift, weighted pull ups, or cleans. Follow the stated format. “1-1-1-1-1” calls for one repetition at maximum effort repeated five times. Rest as needed between reps. “3-3-3-3-3-3” and “5-5-5-5-5” are also common formats. Make sure to warm up properly and build to the maximum weight prior to beginning the repetitions recorded in your log.

Chipper Workouts: Chipper WODS typically combine multiple exercises. An example would be “Fight Gone Bad,” which incorporates wall ball, box jumps, rowing, push press and sumo high dead pull exercises, one after the other. These workouts are executed for either maximum repetitions in a standard time limit, or for time.

Running/Rowing: Run distances typically range from

200M time trials to 5k, 10k, and 15k timed runs. Isolated rowing WODS range from 500M to 2500M time trials.

Various: “Constantly varied functional movements executed at high intensity,” CrossFit’s defining statement, mandates a constant variety of exercises in various configurations and formats. The result is frequently painful, but always interesting and beneficial.

Trial Workouts

Years of comfortable training may be a hindrance for many operators who “feel good” about their training. I challenge you to try this system on a trial basis and use the result as a gauge of your overall fitness and operational readiness. The first few workouts are typically an eye-opening experience, especially for those operators who thought they were in good shape. Here are a few of the benchmark workouts I have found to be useful in gauging overall operational fitness:

Cindy

Maximum number of rounds in 20 minutes of:

- 5 pull-ups
- 10 push-ups
- 15 squats (air squats)

The above three exercises, combined, form one round. An “average” score would be 18-22 rounds.

Advertising removed



DEA-Chicago hosted a snow-covered "Maltz Challenge" in honor of US Air Force PJ Michael Maltz.

build a solid level of physical and mental capacity, thereby increasing their operational capabilities. 🌟

About the author

Brian Melvin is a Patrol Sergeant for the Warrenville, Illinois Police Department. He spent seven years as an operator, sniper and team leader with the FIAT SWAT Team and maintains instructor certification in numerous tactical disciplines, including a CrossFit Level 1 Certification. He has competed in numerous SWAT competitions, IDPA and NRA matches, adventure races and is a reformed distance runner. He is an active member of the Chicago Church of Christ www.chicagochurch.org. He can be reached at bmelvin@warrenville.il.us.

Fran

21-15-9

- 95 lb. thruster
- Pull-ups

Complete three sets of thrusters and pull-ups, 21 first set, 15 second set, 9 third set. An "average" time would be 6-8 minutes.

CrossFit Total

One repetition maximum:

- Deadlift
- Back squat
- Shoulder press

One point is awarded for each pound. Combine the three exercises for the total score. An "average" score would be 600-800.

Murph

- Run 1 mile
- 100 pull-ups
- 200 push-ups
- 300 squats
- Run 1 mile

Pull-ups, push-ups and squats can be portioned as needed. Begin and end with a 1 mile run. This workout is named after Lt. Michael Murphy, the Navy Seal posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions on 28 June 2005. This was one of his favorite workouts, completed while wearing body armor. An "average" time would be 40-50 minutes (without body armor).

The requirement of a tactical operator to maintain an optimal state of physical and mental "readiness" is apparent and well established. Operators frequently have limited training time to hone the core skills required for the successful execution of their duties. Functional fitness programs, such as CrossFit, allow an operator with limited training time to

Advertising removed