



A growing fitness sensation, **CrossFit** — the system that takes functional training to the extreme — isn't for the weak. Follow along as an M&F staffer plunges into the fray

Damn that whiteboard.

As I stagger ignominiously from station to station at Petranek Fitness in Santa Monica, California — my lungs screaming for recuperative oxygen, my palms blistering before my eyes — it's the whiteboard that pushes me harder, farther, heavier. Whatever pride I walked in with has long since been crushed by a pathetic, labored set of 50 pull-ups. Sweat is literally pouring from my brow, the sting rendering my eyes tear-gas red.

One foot in front of the other — it's work as I plod toward a 95-pound barbell. As I make an effort to find a steady pace on my thrusters (front squats with an overhead press at the top), I get light-headed and drop the bar.

Legs heavy, vision blurred, I drag myself out for an 800-meter run. On the way out, the whiteboard gently reminds me that I'm still only halfway through the workout. Exhausted, aloof, barely vertical — I won't remember a single one of these 800 meters 10 minutes from now. On my way back in, the board beckons once more, this time pointing out that the workout will conclude in the same sadistic fashion in which it started — with 50 pull-ups.

Eventually, mercifully, I complete my last pull-up and collapse to the floor, a soaked, quivering, bloody mess. Folds of skin are ripped from my hands, my lungs are struggling to find their cadence. But this is what I signed up for. This isn't about working up a light sweat, or getting a few "pump sets" in. This is about fitness for performance. This is about getting better *today*, and the omnipresent whiteboard, which catalogs my workouts for better or for worse, is my new accountability czar. **This is CrossFit.**

By Eric Velazquez | Photos by Michael Darter

Beyond Aesthetics

CrossFit, unlike traditional gym practices, isn't just about *looking* good. It's about actually *being* good. While it's billed as a core strength and conditioning program, CrossFit is designed to bolster 10 different domains of fitness: cardiorespiratory endurance, stamina, strength, power, flexibility, speed, coordination, agility, balance and accuracy.

CrossFit does this in a punishing, if immethodical, manner six days a week with a brutal three-on/one-off schedule. The workouts are randomized — I never did the same routine twice in six weeks — and can include any and all combinations of plyometrics, sprints, Olympic lifts, gymnastic moves and kettlebell work. On occasion, CrossFitters even find themselves turning back the clock with archaic, brute-strength moves such as the Turkish get-up. The bottom line: With CrossFit, you're never comfortable. Yet this haphazard style of programming may have more of a payoff than you might think.

"The reason it works is known technically as undulating periodization," says M&F Senior Science Editor Jim Stoppani, PhD. "Bodybuilders have always known it as the Weider Principle of Muscle Confusion. By keeping your body guessing, you allow yourself to continue making gains."

With CrossFit, those gains come not only in the form of new lean muscle mass but in complete athleticism. Though its lack of structure may seem more geared toward the fitness generalist, there are myriad benefits to be had by more physique-minded individuals like you and me.

"CrossFit isn't really for the specialist," says Andy Petranek, a former U.S. Marine and owner of Petranek Fitness, where I put myself through the paces for six weeks last fall. "But a specialist — whether it's someone looking to bench more or run a faster 5K — will still gain something in those areas while simultaneously improving in other ways."

And how do CrossFitters measure improvement? Well, I'll tell you how



CrossFitters at various stages of distress during the Filthy 50



(Left) 500 reps of pure hell. (Right) CrossFit gets the most out of empty barbells



Gym owner
Andy Petranek
does jumping
pull-ups

they don't: with the looking glass. CrossFit gyms — Petranek's included — are conspicuously devoid of mirrors. They don't want you focused on how good you might look, they want your focus where it belongs: on the work. If your thoughts are on anything else, you won't make it — period. People quickly learn that ego has no place inside the walls of a CrossFit gym. Petranek's thoughts on vanity lifting follow thus: "I've been known to kick people out for doing curls, crunches or lateral raises," he admits. "There just isn't room for that type of training here or in the CrossFit philosophy."

Don't worry, though — while muscle groups aren't specifically targeted the way they are in traditional programs, they don't exactly get overlooked, either. Delts are blasted by overhead squats, thrusters and handstand push-ups, and biceps get more than their fair share of work through various versions of pull-ups. You work your abs to some extent every day, whether it's through dreaded "knees to elbows" (see photos on page 150) or full sit-ups, or just as stabilizers in any of the heavy full-body lifts that fall under the curriculum.

"When I first started training this way, I had a real problem with doing abs maybe only once a week," Petranek says. "But after a few months of CrossFit, my abs had never been stronger or looked better."

Aesthetics, then, are just a pleasant byproduct of your physical investment in the totality of CrossFit.

Doing the Impossible

So no mirrors. No iPods. Just a stopwatch and that unholy whiteboard. However truculent your relationship with these two things may be at the outset, you'll come to love, appreciate and insist upon having them close for every single workout.

"There's a competitive element to CrossFit," Petranek says. "People are constantly motivated to outdo themselves or outdo the person next to them. There's always room to improve and get better. You see your old time



Conquer the pull-up by learning how to kip



diers who have fallen in defense of our country. The Murph, for example, is named after Lt. Michael Murphy, a decorated Navy SEAL who was killed during counterterrorist operations in Afghanistan in 2005. His session, which he nicknamed “Body Armor,” is included in your one-week initiation course here (see “Hell Week” on page 152). JT, Josh and Badger are just a few of the other routines that fall under CrossFit’s “Heroes” category. It’s only natural that bravery is something of a prerequisite for these sessions.

The workout that the Santa Monica gang is lumbering through in these photos is called the Filthy 50. Ten up-tempo exercises, each more demanding than the one before it, each requiring 50 near-perfect repetitions. Today, Petranek leads the way and finishes in 20:43 — besting his previous record on this by nearly eight minutes — then crumples to the floor, struggling to catch his breath.

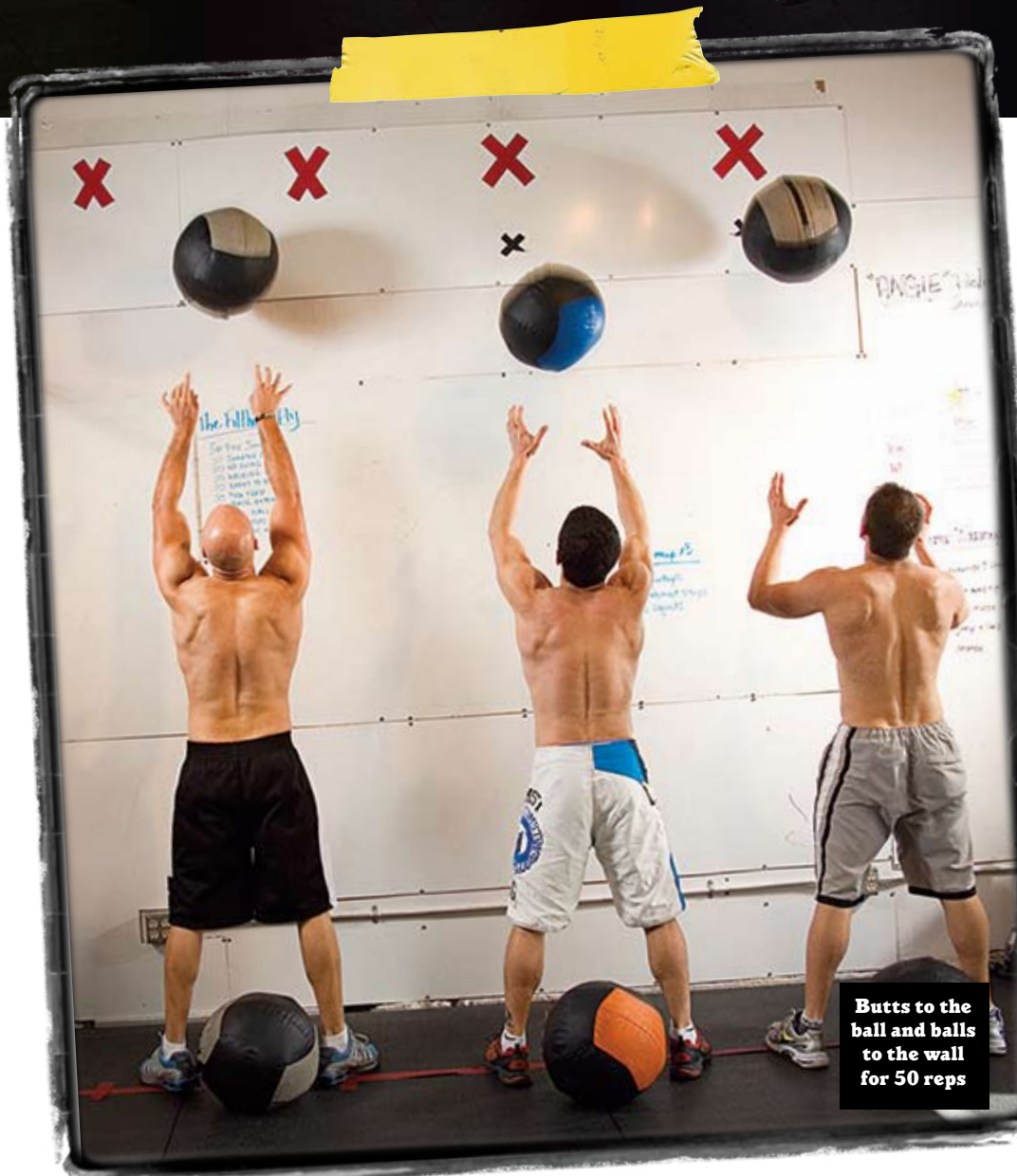
>> To the edge of the cliff. Seeing Petranek working to right himself after the Filthy 50, I’m reminded of one of the slogans you’ll find on CrossFit T-shirts: *I do the impossible*. Every time I set foot into Petranek Fitness and took inventory of the whiteboard’s workout of the day (WOD), I contemplated turning around, going home

and Grace. One lady, Fran, is particularly daunting.

“The only workout that strikes fear into my soul is Fran,” Petranek says. “The first time I did it, I just wasn’t right for about three hours. It’s just a six-minute workout, but it knocks me on my can for hours.”

Fran is one of the benchmark routines that involve completing sets in a 21-15-9-rep sequence. In this case, you go back and forth between 95-pound thrusters and pull-ups in superset fashion, completing 21 reps of each, then 15, then nine. Quads, glutes, delts, traps, triceps, hamstrings, biceps, lats, forearms — obliterated. Six minutes and out. Fran just upped your workout efficiency IQ.

Other workouts are named after sol-



Butts to the ball and balls to the wall for 50 reps

MASTERING THE KIP

LEARNING THE KIPPING PULL-UP WILL HELP YOU MAXIMIZE YOUR PERFORMANCE TIMES WHILE ALSO HELPING YOU CARVE NEW DETAIL INTO YOUR LATS

Despite all of its muscle-building benefits, the pull-up is one of the most dreaded — and thus avoided — exercises in the gym. Most of us, however, are slaves to traditional “dead-hang” pull-ups, where you perform the exercise in a slow, deliberate manner. Some of us call it a “dead hang” because at full extension, that’s what we are: dead.

But since CrossFit is based on volume and performance, adding a little calculated body english to the exercise is not only helpful but it’s recommended. Far from cheating, “kipping” pull-ups allow you to complete far more reps than their stricter cousins and in far less time. So what you sacrifice in form, you more than make up for in total volume. The swift cadence also forces you to engage more of the growth-prone fast-twitch fibers in your lats. CrossFit Santa Monica’s Andy Petranek explains and demonstrates how to properly execute a “kip.”

1) THE SWING
Hang from a bar and swing your shoulders forward and your legs back, so that your body looks like a bow. Then swing your shoulders back and legs forward, so that your body forms a reverse of the first bow. Practice this until you can swing in and out from the bar repeatedly without bending your elbows.

2) THE KICK
Kick up your knees when you’re at the back of your swing to move toward the bar. Timing here is critical — if you don’t do it at the right time, you’ll lose momentum and power.

3) THE PULL
Pull your body toward — and chin over — the bar. A kipping pull-up isn’t counted unless your chin clears the bar. Without hesitation, push yourself away from the bar with your arms to begin the whole process over again.

>> For a video demo of Andy doing the kipping pull-up, visit petranekfitness.com and click on Videos.



Knees to elbows: hanging knee raises on creatine

and firing up my DVR. Maybe it was the specter of the board that made them more off-putting, but every routine looked impossible. Before doing the Daniel WOD, I hadn't done more than 20 pull-ups in a single day. The board on Oct. 8, 2007, read:

DANIEL

- » 50 pull-ups
- » 400m run
- » 21 thrusters (95 pounds)
- » 800m run
- » 21 thrusters (95 pounds)
- » 400m run
- » 50 pull-ups

Imagine my dismay when I saw that the workout began *and* ended with 50 pull-ups. But I'm just as competitive as the next guy, and I gutted it out. I posted a class-worst time of 37:31 and couldn't straighten my arms for a week (seriously). But I finished it, and to this day it's one of my proudest physical achievements.

"CrossFit helps people blow past mental and physical boundaries,"



Kettlebell swings build total-body power

CROSSFIT SUPPS

CROSSFITTING FOR THE FIRST TIME? THESE SUPPLEMENTS CAN HELP FIGHT FATIGUE AND HOLD ONTO MUSCLE

Most CrossFitters take the holistic, whole-food approach to fuel their training. But a solid supplement stack doesn't hurt the cause when you're competing against yourself at a breakneck pace day in and day out. Here's how I built my supplement schedule around my noon classes for Weeks 3-6, with the help of M&F Senior Science Editor Jim Stoppani, PhD.

TIME	SUPPLEMENT	DOSE	MAIN BENEFITS
7 a.m.	Caffeine + green tea	600 mg	Strength, energy
11 a.m.	Whey protein	1 scoop (20 g)	Muscle preservation, energy
11:45 a.m.	Creatine Taurine Arginine Beta-alanine Leucine	5 g 3 g 5 g 1 g 5 g	Strength Power Blood flow Endurance Muscle preservation
Noon	CrossFit		
1 p.m.	Creatine Whey protein	5 g 2 scoops (40 g)	Strength, recovery Muscle growth, recovery

HELL WEEK

THIS ONE-WEEK CROSSFIT PROGRAM WILL GET YOU STARTED ON YOUR WAY TO GREATER STRENGTH AND STAMINA, ONE PUNISHING WORKOUT AT A TIME

Each time you lace up your shoes for a CrossFit workout, you're getting ready for battle. Unrelenting and high-intensity, each session will help you redefine your physical limits, leaving you looking better — if winded — for the effort. This one-week sample, provided by CrossFit Santa Monica's Andy Petranek, gives you a healthy initiation into this type of training and offers some benchmarks for success. Take note of the beginner times, but see how long it takes you to work up to the advanced-level marks. CrossFitters generally train on a three-days-on/one-day-off schedule, and this workout follows that split. Beginning with the baseline routine, you'll progress into increasingly tougher workouts, each with its own unique demands and payoff.

Average Time (minutes)

Day	Workout	Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced
1	"Baseline" 500m row 40 squats 30 sit-ups 20 push-ups 10 pull-ups	8:00 or more	4:01-7:59	4:00 or less
2	"Helen" 3 rounds: 400m run 21 kettlebell swings 12 pull-ups	12:00 or more	9:46-11:59	9:45 or less
3	4 rounds: 400m run 50 squats	17:30 or more	11:31-17:29	11:30 or less
4	Rest	-	-	-
5	Deadlifts: 8 sets x 10,8,6,4, 3,3,3,3 reps	-	-	-
6	"Fran" thrusters/ pull-ups superset: 3 sets x 21,15,9 reps	9:00 or more	5:01-8:59	5:00 or less
7	"The Murph" 1-mile run 100 pull-ups 200 push-ups 300 squats 1-mile run	40:00 or more	32:01-39:59	32:00 or less

>> Petranek offers some guidance on several of the workouts, based on experience.

Workout	Directions
HELEN	
Beginner	Use a 16-kg kettlebell and do jumping pull-ups
Intermediate	Use a 20-kg kettlebell and do twice as many jumping pull-ups
Advanced	Use a 24-kg kettlebell and do unassisted pull-ups
FRAN	
Beginner	55-pound thrusters and jumping pull-ups
Intermediate	75-pound thrusters and do twice as many jumping pull-ups
Advanced	95-pound thrusters and unassisted pull-ups
THE MURPH	
Beginner	Do half of everything (50 pull-ups, 100 push-ups, 150 squats)
Intermediate	Break the pull-ups, push-ups and squats into 20 rounds of 5-10-15
Advanced	Perform as written, completing the prescribed number of each exercise before moving on

>> To continue your CrossFit crusade on a daily basis, visit crossfit.com or petranekfitness.com. For exclusive action footage from our photo shoot, featuring the CrossFit Filthy 50, visit muscle-fitness.com.



On day 5 of Hell Week you'll find your 3RM on the deadlift



Petranek (center) and his team of "fire-breathers" post-Filthy 50

Petranek says. "And in a class setting, something may look impossible, but you see everyone else going through the same thing and you think, *Hey, maybe I could do that.* We want people to go right up to the edge of the cliff."

To quote the good people of Adidas: "Impossible is nothing." At least not in CrossFit.

CrossFit Culture

At times, CrossFit can seem an impenetrable fraternity of strong-minded, fiercely competitive fitness zealots. But ultimately, that's a pretty shallow perception. During the six weeks I spent at Petranek Fitness, I shared the gym with hardcore devotees ("fire-breathers"), prodigal CrossFitters, beginners and even expectant mothers — everyone is on equal footing once the clock starts. Classmates root for one another and shout encouragement through the bleakest moments of physical exhaustion. Misery truly does love company here.

Though once considered an underground fitness cult — think *Fight Club* meets *Pumping Iron* — CrossFit now has

a deep-rooted and ever-growing following. With more than 200 sanctioned affiliates worldwide, CrossFit is sprinting out of the shadows of the fitness periphery and into the mainstream. CrossFit Qatar, anyone?

Brian Decker, who CrossFits at Sierra Fitness Gym just east of Los Angeles, completely reinvented his physique at age 38, going from a doughy 205 pounds to a rock-hard 193 at 8% bodyfat. "And my diet was pretty far from strict," he admits. "I was always unhappy with my bodyfat numbers, but CrossFit has enabled me to keep it under 10% consistently."

Decker represents the much broader swath of CrossFitters who apply their newfound athleticism into other careers or hobbies. "I'm an alpine climber, and I can do routes of 20 hours or more without getting wrecked because of CrossFit," he notes.

Several groups of our homeland defenders, including some of the baddest men on the planet — the Navy SEALs — have made CrossFit their exclusive form of physical training. You can visit navyseals.com and see what these elite operators are putting themselves through today.

But CrossFit isn't the exclusive property of dues-paying members. CrossFit affiliates — like *Fight Club's* Tyler Durden — have a simple credo: "This doesn't belong to us." Anyone can direct his or her web browser to crossfit.com or an affiliate site for the WOD, video demonstrations of unfamiliar exercises and intensity tips, all for free.

"CrossFit is an open-source model — anyone can do it, at home or at a gym, with minimal equipment," says Decker, who also devises workouts on his own that he can do at a local park. "You don't need a trainer or coach because every bit of help you could possibly need is available online."

If you're one who strives to best the man next to you, just find a gym to call home. In the end, CrossFit isn't really exclusive at all. It may, in fact, be more *inclusive* than most other forms of exercise around.

Fitness Earned

This is fitness earned: No one finishes a CrossFit workout wondering if they made any progress. The ache from yesterday's session and the burn from today's are evidence enough of that. CrossFit workouts are comprehensive — calves to clavicles, so to speak. Experienced CrossFitters are extreme athletes. They aren't in it for the pump or the physique perks — they're after strength, skill, precision — but they end up leaner and more muscular for the effort, anyway.

I got through workouts that I was certain would leave me searching for the door (or the trash can). After being exposed to CrossFit, I really wonder if there's any form of exercise I couldn't handle. In only six weeks, I dropped from 176 pounds at 10% bodyfat to 173 pounds at 7% bodyfat and improved my baseline workout time from 4:37 to 4:08, nearly half a minute better than I did as a CrossFit rookie.

Take that, whiteboard. M&F

For the author's full workout journal, as well as exclusive video from our Filthy 50 photo shoot, visit muscle-fitness.com.