Training the whole body with CrossFit

Work Out Until It Hurts

CrossFit is considered the world’s toughest workout. An increasing number of people enjoy the merciless grind, and love their community.

Put on a ten-kilo vest, run 1.6 kilometers, do 100 pull-ups, 200 push-ups and 300 half-squats, then run another 1.6 kilometer – all part of “The Murph”. The “Annie” set entails a 50–40–30–20–10 sequence, alternating double-rope-jumps and crunches; starting with 50 repetitions of each, followed by ten less each round.

Fitness trend from the USA

This is not training for elite squads; this is a fitness trend from the USA. The initiators of the world’s toughest workout want to turn the fitness industry upside down.

US gymnast Greg Classman developed the concept during the Eighties. At first, only police and military applied the energy-sapping training. Today, CrossFit gyms, also called “boxes” are sprouting up like weeds all over the world.

Fitness enthusiasts exert their energy with gymnastics, climbing, weight lifting and strength
triathlon exercises in former warehouses or garages. The boxes are managed under a franchise system; anyone can open one in return for a licensing fee payable to CrossFit Inc.

**Combining store and fitness studio**

Adidas’ subsidiary Reebok also wants to do business with CrossFit. The company has been cooperating with CrossFit Inc. for the last three years. A special collection with shirts and shorts is slated to increase sales as well as revamp the image.

In addition, Reebok works with the FitHub concept, combining store and fitness studio under one roof. According to company information the brand is planning to manage a total of 30 FitHubs worldwide by the end of 2013.

There are already two of these Reebok stores in New York, one each in Nuremberg and London, and another FitHub recently opened in Boston.

**Training for the whole body**

“The goal of this training is to develop general fitness to an extent that one can respond to any challenge. The training affects the entire body and almost all muscles,” explains Elli Hachmann, who opened the first box in Hamburg in 2011.

The “Work of the Day” (WOD) is changed daily, as well as the focus: “One day we focus on strength training, the next day on speed, and on the third day on endurance.”

The physical therapist and personal trainer discovered CrossFit in 2009 during a semester abroad in San Diego. “I was on my way to the university and just walked into a box. I was thrilled, though I completely underestimated the exertion. I was exhausted after my first class. And I thought that a few push-ups wouldn’t bother me.”

**Hachmann became a passionate CrossFit athlete**

Hachmann did not get discouraged. On the contrary, pushing herself until it hurt motivated the young woman even more. She continued with the training and became a passionate CrossFit athlete.

Lifting dumbbells, pull-ups, push-ups, duck walking across the garage. After ten minutes of CrossFit: heart rate racing, breathing hard, and sweat pouring out in buckets. Why all this torture? “It’s about performance and fun. This is an extraordinary combination,” enthuses Hachmann.

Contrary to isolated workouts on a treadmill in a fitness studio, often with music playing loud on one’s earbuds, CrossFit encourages training and competing in small groups. “It makes you feel connected. You live and breathe this sport and meet your friends while training. It is like a club.”

**CrossFit is incredibly effective**

She claims to know every one of her 250 members personally by now. “People stand in line in front of our box at 6.30 in the morning. They want to train before going to work and try to come three to five times a week.”

According to the sport’s followers, CrossFit is incredibly effective. Fat starts melting away quickly and bodies become toned and strengthened. Endurance athlete T. J. Murphy, for example, wanted to try on himself whether this extreme sport would be able to heal his sports-damaged
After many years of intense running training the 47-year old was hardly able to walk properly, and decided to take his chances with CrossFit. “This type of training was exactly what I have been looking for my whole life,” he writes in his experience-based report “Inside the Box”.

**CrossFit deliberately provokes competition**

He states that CrossFit deliberately provokes competition with others and oneself, to develop untapped strengths, allowing the athlete to endure high levels of exertion.

Yet is this sport really suitable for the public? Those who want to try it need to be at a considerable level of endurance and fitness, or risk injury.

“People are burning themselves out: CrossFit is very dangerous. I can’t recommend it to anyone,” Till Sukopp criticizes. “The spectrum of injuries covers everything from kidney failure to muscle breakup.”

**Don’t underestimate the risk of injury**

The many repetitions and the you-better-get-it-done mentality create additional problems, according to the sports expert. And it is an open secret that CrossFitters tend to “polish their alleged performance and results when communicating with each other”, and not only online.

A quarter or half squat is not considered a full repetition. Though many in the scene tend to consider it as such, promoting sloppy training, which, in turn, paves the way for discomfort and injuries caused by excessive stress. Surkopp’s recommendation: “Reign in your ego and get fit the healthy way – no matter what the guy next to you or others are doing.”

**Criticism from sport science**

The sports researcher also finds fault with the fact that it is possible to get a trainer certificate within two days – even without any athletic prerequisites. A responsible CrossFit trainer should offer exercises in three different levels of difficulty and focus more on the technically correct execution of an exercise rather than on the number of repetitions, he states.

Hachmann emphasizes that in her box every athlete is trained according to his or her skill and performance level. “We test the fitness of our members before they start, and offer progressive classes.” Sounds logical; we doubt that many would be able to start CrossFit training with “The Murph”.