

## **Intensity, not Volume (to a point)!**

By Ricky Frausto, CrossFit Omaha

In the beginning, those that are new to CrossFit become addicted to CrossFit because of the way it challenges them both physically and mentally. It challenges them to a point they are not normally used to. Because of this, they come back for more and more. When they fail they find a way to scale it so that they can push through for as many rounds as possible as a way of punishing themselves for not being good enough. It is almost sadistic in nature. They love it and somehow unknowingly that is why they love CrossFit, because it reveals a side of them that is weak and they don't know why that weakness is there but they will do anything in their power to rid themselves of that weakness. This way of thinking, in the beginning anyways, is okay. It reveals that CrossFit can be the avenue that helps them become stronger, fitter, more mobile, the avenue that helps them destroy that weakness that is lurking within, both physically and mentally. Once you are no longer considered a beginner, it is time to remove yourself from this line of thinking. It is detrimental to your overall fitness. You become an athlete that pushes workouts to a point where they resemble distance events. To some extent this can be helpful with developing mental toughness but understand that mental toughness can also be developed with workouts lasting much shorter in duration by pushing intensity. Another drawback with this line of thinking is the possibility of injury.

Pushing beyond the limits of muscular strength into muscular endurance can at some points prove to be costly as muscular endurance is weak. Most of the movements within CrossFit demand strength and power, most times to a greater extent than endurance (muscularly, anyways). The ranges of motion and complexity of the movements are much more advanced than those of your typical gym/boot camp circuit classes. Pushing the energy system within the body to the point that it primarily uses oxygen to fuel your muscles on a regular basis can be dangerous. CrossFit was not produced for this and is the sole argument that its detractors focus on (too much volume and getting hurt because of this). CrossFit is a strength and conditioning program that demands each of its participants to exquisitely learn each fundamental motor pattern of movement to a point that they themselves can teach it or at least prevent injury while watching a peer perform the movement. And although CrossFit puts a clock to its workouts for the fact that it encourages competition, at some point an athlete must shift his focus so that faster times are a goal for the lone fact of not working out beyond 20 minutes and eventually 15 minutes at most. Workouts should be designed and of course scaled so that each individual has the opportunity to keep intensity high. This is and should be the reason why we scale movements other than not being able to perform them such as the case with kipping pull-ups. In this example, if I prescribed a workout that called for Cindy, and I had an athlete who could only do 5 kipping pull-ups and maybe 10 pushups but not for the duration of 20 minutes, the appropriate scaling would be to have her do 1-3 kipping pull-ups and 3-7 pushups while keeping the squat reps as prescribed. This will allow him/her to get practice at pull-ups and pushups without introducing an environment where injury may occur due to fatigue and/or strength

loss. On the other hand, if an athlete exists who can achieve 20 to 25 rounds or more (because they are considered a fire-breather or due to not properly scaling) he or she should include the wearing of a weight vest or increase the reps within each set in order to bring him or her back from that extreme.

All in all, we are looking to produce an athlete that is good in the middle not at either extreme. You shouldn't want to be a person who is not strong enough with loaded movements but with bodyweight movements (where less strength is required) can last a long time or at the other end you shouldn't want to be a person who is super strong but can only last a few seconds. That is not human. Your workouts should resemble the same. Don't 1 and 3-rep max all the time and don't participate in endurance events all the time. Dabble a little in both but place a majority of your time in the middle. An example of this would be workouts lasting no longer than 10 to 15 minutes that are round driven and workouts that are time driven lasting between 10 and 15 or 16 rounds and no more. If the workout prescribed is one that would cause you to workout longer than this time frame then scale down the movements accordingly. On the other hand if it is one that would allow you to get more than 15 or 16 rounds then scale the movements up accordingly. This applies both ways in each situation. Again, this doesn't mean stop practicing back squatting for a 1 to 3-rep max or does it give you the right not to engage in running a 5K. You must do both but not at the expense of the middle ground but rather as a compliment to and a strengthener of the middle ground. Try doing heavy loaded met-cons or utilizing workouts that involve sprinting rather than jogging a mile.

Working out within the boundaries of CrossFit is about learning how to move properly as a human. Power-lifters and marathon runners are not in this category, as goes the case with how long and how many rounds your workouts last in either direction of the middle ground. You must be able to go long enough and be strong enough but no more. In the end, if you must do a workout as prescribed, do it with the time limit or round limit mentioned above in mind. If you do not complete it within this time frame the workout is over and you go back to the drawing board and figure out what weakness (es) caused you to fail. You don't get to finish the workout, the reps you missed. That is your punishment. If you can't reach the lower end or surpass the upper end of the round limit then the workout of course was somewhat for naught, because you were either not strong enough or you didn't challenge yourself appropriately. Yes, CrossFit is an elite fitness program but its not elite because of the changes that come about your body or because it kicks your ass. Its elite because our athletes actually learn to move, build strength, and can endure as humans should and rid themselves of weaknesses in the body that keep them from reaching this necessary mobility, strength, and endurance (respiratory). This is the case in most instances and I say this because there are a few people that don't succumb to this necessity and they either never improve or end up getting injured. Something that CrossFit alone cannot bring about.....