

# Large-Group CrossFit Training

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In the relatively short time that it has been available to the public, CrossFit has been proven to provide the highest level of physical fitness for those whose lives or livelihoods depend on being in top physical condition—whether in the arena or on the mountain, in the streets or on the battlefield. Individuals doing CrossFit on their own and bringing their new abilities to their profession or event have achieved this success. As the program spreads, however, CrossFit is making headway in places where physical fitness training is conducted in large groups, not individually—places such as the military unit, police recruit depot, and fire academy.

The “Team Workouts” *CrossFit Journal* issue (#14) lays an excellent basis for team physical training (PT) with groups of ten. This article is intended for trainers who wish to use CrossFit as the fitness program for a larger group, and it is based on the experiences of military and law enforcement personnel who have successfully integrated CrossFit into their PT program. The aim of this document is to present ideas for physical training with a large group, with a view to setting up the group trainer for success at integrating CrossFit into a group PT program. The article will address the advantages and disadvantages of training a large group with CrossFit, principles of group training, logistics and equipment issues, group scoring, and dealing with injuries. This article will use the military as its example, but the lessons are applicable for any large group, including police and fire academies, athletic camps, and even high school physical education classes.

## Advantages of implementing group CrossFit PT

### More fit operators

Having performed CrossFit yourself, read all the journals, hung around the message board, and perhaps even attended a certification seminar, you know that CrossFit is the best program available for creating fit individuals. This article will not

reiterate material available to you in forty-five *CrossFit Journal (CFJ)* issues; suffice it to say that for the same reasons CrossFit makes the fittest individual athletes, law enforcement agents, and soldiers, it will also turn out the fittest groups of athletes, law enforcement agents, and soldiers. There should be no reason to discuss why these types of people need to be as fit as possible.

**“CrossFit has been proven over and over in the sporting arena, clinical trials, and the battlefield to be more effective than traditional PT programs.”**

### Variety inherent in CrossFit training

One of the major challenges you will face as a leader taking command of a military unit is trainees who think “I’ve seen it all—at least ten times.” There may be soldiers in your unit who have up to twenty years of experience, and they will have seen ten platoon leaders come and go—all of whom have utilized the same type of PT program. What you have to remember is that while this group and the PT program may be fresh to you, it may well be their tenth iteration of the same program and you their tenth platoon leader. CrossFit can provide your soldiers with a new and interesting stimulus during PT periods. Learning the new skills inherent in CrossFit will provide fun, challenging, and rewarding workouts for years for several reasons. First of all, the workouts change daily (across every parameter: type of movements, intensity, duration, metabolic demand, scoring method, and so on), and the same workout might not be repeated for months. Second, there are always new skills to learn and practice. Should some of your soldiers master one move—such as the handstand—they can always move

on to other, differently challenging moves—such as the freestanding handstand push-up or the front lever.

### Physical training as sport

If you take two people separately and ask them to complete, for example, their maximum number of push-ups, and then put them together, with the same instructions and the additional information that the winner will get a medal, it is virtually guaranteed that, in the second case, they will do push-ups until their arms fall off in order to win, and they will have more fun while completing the task. Why? The onerous, boring task of completing push-ups has become sport. This is what CrossFit does—it turns PT into sport. The military has known the utility of this for hundreds of years; hence Friday-afternoon intercompany sports, the goal of which is not to become great touch football players but to create group cohesion through competition. Instead of limiting this to Friday afternoons and separating it from the unit’s day-to-day work, however, why not harness the beneficial effects of competition daily through group CrossFit? Completing “Michael” with the group will develop considerably more mental toughness and group cohesion than standing out in right field while playing softball.

Unfortunately, there has been a disturbing trend in Western society recently to label competition as bad (hence the trend to stop grading children in school, for example). This is one of the most nonsensical notions that has ever been promulgated in the history of human civilization. Attila the Hun stated, “A leader without a sense of competition is weak and easily overcome by the slightest challenge,” and he was right. If there is anyone we want infused with a competitive spirit it is the person who will stand up and head toward the sound of gunfire when needed—the soldier or law enforcement officer. Combat is the ultimate competition, except instead of receiving a silver medal for coming in second you

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get a flag-draped coffin. So develop this sense of competition during group PT with CrossFit.

### Maintain fitness in austere environments

A major challenge to achieving maximum fitness in a military unit is one of logistics. There is just no way that you are going to get a whole brigade of soldiers into the base weight room for PT every morning. Even more of a challenge is staying in shape while deployed. When the C-17 is bringing in ammunition, defensive stores, and fuel, the Hammer Strength pectoral machine is not going to achieve a high priority on the loading manifest. CrossFit is the solution to training for the highest level of fitness in an environment of limited facilities and equipment. It is the movements and programming that garner the results, not the equipment. Think about a group "Fran" workout, for example. Do you think the body knows the difference between thrusters performed with a barbell, dumbbell, ammo can filled with sand, or rock? All that is needed to perform effective CrossFit workouts are some sticks (i.e., lengths of wooden dowel or PVC/ABS pipe), objects to provide weighted resistance, and something to do pull-ups on. With a little ingenuity, CrossFit can be performed in any environment, no matter how large the group, at very little cost. (For additional ideas, see "Training in Austere Locations" in *CrossFit Journal* issue 43).

### All benefit and suffer equally

Although it is a favorite of military programming, there are not many group activities more overrated in terms of developing group morale and fitness than the group run. The fast guys are bored and untaxed by what they consider a slow pace, the average guys are getting a pretty decent workout, and the slow guys are frustrated and dejected as they fall farther and farther behind. What is essentially happening is that the fast guys are losing fitness, the medium guys are staying about

the same, and the slow guys are getting fitter (albeit just in one specialized domain). On average, however, the fitness of the group overall is staying about the same. In terms of morale effects, the fast guys are pissed off by the lack of challenge and may resent their slower counterparts, and the slow guys are pissed off as well and feel singled out when they fall behind. Overall, the ubiquitous group run comes out a bit of a loser.

There is a better way to train a group, and as you can guess it is CrossFit. Instead of just the slow guys getting somewhat fitter, the scalability of the program means that all will improve. Once again consider a group doing "Fran." The firebreathers will blast through the workout using 95 pounds and kipping pull-ups in five minutes or less, and be left quivering on the floor. The average guys will use 75 pounds and broken sets or jumping pull-ups, finish in eight minutes, and be left quivering on the floor. The weak guys will use 55 pounds and partner-assisted pull-ups, finish in ten or fifteen minutes, and be left quivering on the floor. So what happened? Every single person in the group was challenged, worked hard, and thus improved their personal fitness. Unlike the group run, this raises the overall fitness level of the group. What else happened? Every single person suffered equally and was left quivering on the floor. It is this equal group suffering that creates team cohesion. Moreover, the smaller guys probably found the thrusters particularly challenging, and the heavier ones probably hated the pull-ups, individual weaknesses were exposed, and no one was singled out for a deficiency in a single domain.

### Disadvantages of implementing group CrossFit PT

#### More dangerous than "dumb PT" if done incorrectly

CrossFit has been proven over and over in the sporting arena, clinical trials, and the battlefield to be more effective than traditional PT programs. This is not what

is holding the program back from wider military implementation: who would not want to institute a more effective, clinically proven program? One of the main rationales for not implementing CrossFit more widely is the perception that the program can be dangerous. This perception has some merit if implementation is done in an unthinking manner. There is no doubt that having soldiers attempt bodyweight snatches on their first day of CrossFit training will lead to injuries. But that's not the fault of the program itself. And there's an obvious solution: Be smart about program implementation, and treat the introduction of CrossFit as you would the introduction of a new weapon.

You would not hand a new recruits loaded weapons and tell them to stack up and perform a live-fire room clearance wearing night vision equipment. You would start with weapons classes to teach them the parts of the weapon and how to assemble and disassemble, how to load and fire, and how to clean it. They would then fire the weapon static, fire the weapon in movement, and then perform group fire and movement. Once deemed effective at all these tasks, the recruits could then move on to the advanced live-fire nighttime room clearance. The same progression holds true when introducing a skilled CrossFit movement such as the snatch. The students will receive a lecture on the squat. They will learn how to squat with no resistance and then move on to an overhead squat with a stick. Once this is perfected they will advance to snatch assistance exercises such as the hang snatch and snatch balance with a stick. Once they can perform these safely, they will move on to a full snatch with a stick. Eventually they will graduate to a bar and increasing weight, and the truly dedicated may someday perform a bodyweight snatch.

This is how risk is mitigated—by smart training progression and implementation. For another military training analogy, see the "Club vs. Rifle CrossFit Analogy" chart on the next page. For those unfamiliar with the term, "dumb PT" refers to the repetition of unskilled movements in an unvaried rotation: e.g., the insidious run

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	Club	Rifle	Dumb PT	CrossFit
<b>Skill level</b>	low	high	low	high
<b>Time to learn</b>	low	high	low	high
<b>Supervision necessary when learning/executing</b>	low	high	low	high
<b>Effectiveness</b>	low	high	low	high
<b>Chance of battlefield success</b>	low	high	low	high
<b>Danger to the user if incorrectly taught</b>	low	high	low	high

As you can see, the rifle and CrossFit come out on top, with the exception that they are more dangerous to the user if incorrectly taught. Yet no military unit would think of issuing clubs instead of firearms in anticipation of a battle, despite the fact they are potentially dangerous to the user. Why? The efficacy of the rifle and the advantage it confers make it clearly superior, and the risk to the user has been mitigated through proper training. The argument that CrossFit is dangerous and therefore soldiers should do “dumb” PT instead is analogous to arming our fighters of terrorism with clubs.

### Overcoming resistance

There is always resistance to something new, and this is especially true in an institution. Convincing others to accept CrossFit is not even as easy as getting them to accept something new; it is convincing them to accept a complete paradigm shift in the way PT is perceived and conducted. Your superiors in the chain of command, raised on a steady diet of run on Monday/Wednesday/Friday and do upper-body isolation exercises on Tuesday/Thursday, will be reluctant to accept the premise that everything they did was wrong and that the whole organization is in fact “unfit.” Introducing CrossFit to a unit that has been doing things the same way for years is tough. Ever try to convince a forty-year-old combat veteran that he should be doing

gymnastics? There is no easy solution for this problem, but it is your problem. If you believe in the program enough, you will find a way to break down these barriers. Many have been in your shoes before and have been able to convince our superiors to give the program a shot through logical briefings and presentation. (If you contact Coach Glassman, he can give you access to a multitude of these presentations in electronic format, and 95 percent of your work will be done for you. Also see relevant articles in back issues of the *CFJ*, including “Police Training” [issue 7], “Combat Gymnastics” [issue 39], and “Validity of CrossFit Tested” [issue 41].)

### Supplementing with long-distance work

One of the main advantages of CrossFit is that, because of the high intensity, workout time is shortened. With time a resource always in short supply, military personnel can achieve high fitness levels with workouts that generally last approximately twenty minutes. After following CrossFit for several months, however, you may find something strange happening to you when a long monostructural metabolic workout comes up in the workout of the day (WOD) rotation. At about the 35th minute of a 10k run you may look at your watch and find yourself extremely...bored. Accustomed to the frenetic pace and

exercise variety of most WODs, the long duration and low intensity of the long-distance effort may leave you feeling frustrated and unpracticed when these types of efforts appear. For a civilian this is not a big issue. For a military type in certain trades, however, such as infantry/SF, maintaining the both mental and physical ability to conduct the long slog is an absolute necessity. CrossFit is the best general physical preparedness (GPP) conditioning program by far, but, as with all specialized physical endeavors, there is nothing that can prepare you mentally and physically for a fifteen-mile rucksack march better than rucksack marching. The WODs will ensure that soldiers have the ten general physical skills necessary to complete the march; actual marches will toughen the feet, back, and the mind for these types of events. A good solution to this challenge is to take out one of the workouts in every second three-day WOD rotation posted on the Internet (so, every six workouts, or about once a week), and replace it with a march.

There is another way to use the CrossFit program to mimic field conditions. Consider what may happen to soldiers on operations overseas. They may go on a ten-hour foot patrol, carrying approximately forty pounds of gear, not knowing whether a contact will occur—or whether it will occur at the beginning, middle, or end of their long-distance walking effort. Should the contact occur, the soldiers will require enough energy to

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perform a mixed-modality high-intensity variable operation using functional movements. (Notice how the description of combat approximates the definition of CrossFit?) In order to train for this event, take your soldiers on a weighted march. Somewhere en route, make sure you go by some pull-up bars. When you reach the pull-up bars, whether at the beginning, middle, or end of the march, have them stop and take off their rucksacks. Now, announce: "Remember 'Fran' we did last week? Your rucksack is the thruster weight. Begin." You have now roughly approximated the physical demands of combat duty.

good idea unless you are incredibly foolhardy. Imagine subjecting your recruit platoon to a 95-pound "Fran" on their first morning. No knowledge of the squat, overhead lifts, kipping pull-up, correct lumbar spine position, and hip activation would constitute an unmitigated disaster, and the only message that would be sent was that you were out to injure everyone. Instead, use a smart approach and spend the appropriate time learning and perfecting the basic movements before launching into an actual WOD. The table below lays out on possible plan for the first week of CrossFit PT in a recruit course.

and point out to you the salient features you explained. Correct as necessary.

- Go outside with the sticks. Demonstrate a perfect deadlift at each phase, highlighting the salient features.
- Break the recruits into partners and have one deadlift while the other points out faults. This proves extremely beneficial, as you develop coaches at the same time as athletes. You as the instructor correct both coaches and athletes.
- Every ten minutes or so bring the group in and explain the common faults you are seeing. The faults are always the

Day	Activity	Remarks
Monday	PT Test	Standard operating procedure on a recruit course. Repeat this at the end of the course to chart progress.
Tuesday	CrossFit introduction; The air squat	Mixed lecture/practical class.
Wednesday	Squat variations (front/back/OHS)	Practical class using sticks (dowels). These are indispensable and should be issued to recruits, who will bring them to every PT period.
Thursday	The deadlift	This will be a mixed lecture/practical class. Use sticks and a light bar.
Friday	The overhead lifts (press/push press/push jerk)	This will be a mixed lecture/practical class. Use sticks and a light bar.

Remember, the workouts that are posted on the Internet are just a basic construct, and you can and should modify the program as necessary to ensure success in your given endeavor.

## Principles of group CrossFit

### Train the movements before performing actual "workouts"

The tradition in military basic training has been to "send a message" to the recruits in the very first PT period. The instructors, also known as the alpha males, normally take the recruits out for a run at a torrid pace, stopping periodically to provide "rest" with push-ups and leg lifts. If you are planning to use CrossFit as your military group PT program, this approach is not a

Here are some suggestions for managing this five-day introduction:

- In the lectures on the movements, explain why the lift is important using real-world practical examples (e.g., deadlifting an ammunition palette).
- Show the movement broken down into its distinct phases using photos. For the deadlift, show the starting position, bar at the knee, and end position. PowerPoint and pictures from the CFJ have been used with success for these lectures. (If you wish to use any of these lectures for this purpose, contact Coach Glassman.)
- Point out the salient characteristics of the movement at each phase. For the deadlift starting position, for example, emphasize heels down, lumbar spine curve, hips just above knees.
- At the end of the lecture have the recruits come up to the photos at each phase

same no matter what group you are working with, and this will save you from repeating yourself fifteen times. Training a large group is not like personal training; you have to find ways to maximize your efficiency.

- At the end, highlight the key points of the period.

With this five-day introductory schedule you will be ready starting the following week to tackle about 50 percent of posted WODs from the Internet site. The trainees will not have achieved what could be termed "mastery" of the movements, but they at least should be safe and somewhat effective. Now, this all may be a little tough for experienced recruit instructors to follow. The recruits will likely not throw up during these periods, and they will be learning something and probably even having a little fun. As well, since these

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periods will not be executed at high intensity, how will they be ready for the field training portions of the course? Well, don't worry. The gut checks will start next week when the WODs start, as will the fitness improvement that comes with high intensity. Look at it this way: although the intensity has not been high, you have in fact increased their fitness much more than five days of "dumb PT gut checks" ever could. You have taught the recruits how to safely and efficiently pick objects off the ground, lift them overhead, flex and extend their hips, and maintain proper spine position in movement. These skills will serve these recruits for their whole careers. These five days *are not wasted*.

## As the group leader you are now the coach

If there is any leadership principle that gets drilled into our military officers and NCOs in the school system, it is *lead by example*. If you expect your subordinates to do something, you had better be prepared and capable of doing it yourself. On PT, this means setting the pace on group runs, calling out the count while performing push-ups, and in general doing whatever you order the recruits to do, but trying to appear less stressed by the effort. This is possible with "dumb PT." With CrossFit it will not be as easy. Back to the high-skill firearm analogy: when acting as the range officer for a live fire attack, you would not grab a machine gun and provide fire support to the assault group attacking a fortification. Instead, you would be ensuring the safety and proper execution of the range. The same holds true as a CrossFit instructor. If you are performing "Fran" with your group, you are concentrating on getting air into your lungs and not dropping the bar on your head, not on correcting the technique and monitoring the intensity of your trainees. This is going to take a mind shift for the "alpha male" who needs to show how fit he is in front of his troops. Here are some suggestions for overcoming this challenge:

- Do the exact same workout the recruits are going to do, but do it before they show up, or the day before at lunch. Tell them your time before their WOD starts. Now the troops know you lead

by example and share their suffering, and it gives them something to strive for. Who doesn't want to beat the boss? If someone does manage to beat you (or—even better—if no one does), reward the whole group with wall-ball shots or burpees. They will appreciate the care and concern you are showing them.

- If the workout is a "lower skill" one, such as "Chelsea" (pull-ups, push-ups, squats) you could go ahead and throw yourself in the mix, although even here, there is ample coaching and correcting to keep you busy. During your rest breaks you can correct improper form.
- If you have another qualified instructor in your cadre, you can switch off supervision duties daily. One can supervise while the other gets in and works out.
- A final point on this principle: if you are going to be teaching and correcting these CrossFit movements, you had best be competent at them yourself. It's just another facet of leading by example.

## Spend your limited funds on lots of simple, effective equipment instead of one piece of fancy equipment

### Packages

#### "Fancy" Package.....\$2,500

- High-speed elliptical trainer
- Cybex-type chest thing

#### "Simple" Package.....\$2,500

- Ten Olympic bars with spring collars
- Twenty 10-pound plates
- Twelve 25-pound plates
- Sixteen 30-pound dumbbells

If you manage to convince your superior to supply you with some funding for your "crazy new PT program," you have some choices to make. Having been giving \$2500 (if you're lucky), and armed with your shiny new fitness catalogue, you narrow the choices down to the two packages shown in the table on this page.

Even for working out by yourself, the "fancy package" is pretty useless. How do you think you could train a group of thirty with it? With the "simple" package plus some pull-up bars (or a tree branch, or ladder, or whatever you can find), you can accomplish about 70 percent of CrossFit workouts with your group, providing you as a leader use your ingenuity when modifying the workouts. What if you cannot get even the funding outlined above? You can still perform the workouts if you are creative; the hip extensors don't know the difference between cleaning a dumbbell or an ammo can filled with sand. Making homemade equipment is a great project for your group when they have some downtime anyway. In a group of thirty soldiers you will always have a couple that are pretty handy at carpentry or metalworking. Draw up a rough idea of what you want, supply the materials, and in no time you can have high-quality sets of rings, plyo boxes, medicine balls, and parallettes.

## Maximize PT time by learning and practicing new skills

Most military courses and unit physical training periods are allotted one hour per day. When you subtract the ten-minute warm-up, five-minute WOD explanation, twenty-minute WOD, and five-minute cool-down, you have twenty minutes of unused time. Not only can you use this time, you need it to ensure the skill progression of your CrossFit group continues throughout the time you have with them. In this twenty minutes you can introduce, practice, or refine a skill in gymnastics or weightlifting. The table on the following page shows how, in five days of these twenty-minute blocks, you can have your group performing the snatch with a stick, assuming you have already introduced the overhead squat to them. (See the table on this page...)

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Day	Activity	Remarks
Mon.	Snatch intro	-Explain why Olympic lifting is important, both physiologically and in real-world applications. -Demo and explain the salient phases of the lift: starting position, first pull, second pull, third pull, recovery.
Tue.	-The power position -The second pull	-Have students learn the power position by performing the dip of a push press, dropping their arms so the stick touches the legs, and then widening the grip to snatch width. -Simply extend the hips (jump) and shrug.
Wed.	-The third pull -Pressing snatch balance and snatch balance	-Have the students start in triple extension, bring stick properly to overhead position. -As explained in <i>CFJ</i> issue 39.
Thur.	-Starting position -The first pull  -The scoop	-Your group knows how to deadlift; just use a wider grip. -Lift the stick to above the knee. A common fault will be moving the bar around the knee instead of moving the body around the stick (caused by not pushing the shins back to vertical or by changing the starting trunk angle in relation to the ground.) -With the stick in the proper position just above the knee, lift the chest and rotate the hip and trunk to get the body into the now-familiar "power position." -A good check is: once in the power position, take the stick back to the push press dip. Correct as necessary.
Fri.	-Putting it together  -Full snatch	-Break the movement into parts and practice like a drill, moving from the start position to the knee; scooping from the knee to the power position; then jumping from the power position to landing and into an overhead squat. Repeat. -Now try some full snatches. These will be ugly. The most common faults will be no scoop, swinging the stick out away from the body, and incomplete hip extension.

level. Send two soldiers on a demanding, stressful navigation course with the same equipment and same level of instruction, and the one who finishes will be the one in better physical condition who has taken in the correct fuel. The mind will be sharper, fatigue will set in later, and injury will be resisted. Competency in theory and practice of the human body must be looked at as one of the essential base skills for a military professional, and currently it is not.

Since you are reading this article, you must believe that physical fitness knowledge is essential for your group. How to introduce it into an already-constrained schedule is the difficulty. The ideal would be to take a week of classroom and practical time on a recruit course to explain and practice the workings of the body and nutrition. It is extremely doubtful that

So in five PT periods, while still getting in five WODs, you have taught your group how to snatch with a stick. They will still need a lot of work before adding weight, but now if the group practices and refines these movements a couple times a week, they will soon be able to safely perform lightweight dumbbell and barbell snatches as part of a WOD. The snatch is just one example of how you could use your new "extra" twenty minutes. You could work on handstands, levers, rolls, cleans, or whatever skill you think the group is ready for. Unless your group consists of class "E" gymnasts who are also getting ready for the Pan Am Olympic Weightlifting national team, there are enough skills in the CrossFit repertoire for your group to work toward for years—literally.

## Educate your group about fitness

By the time military officers reach the end of their training, depending on their classification, they will be able to provide an explanation of how radio waves work, describe the inner workings of mechanized vehicles and thermal sites, site a defensive position to maximize the ballistic effects of automatic weapons and missile systems, navigate in pitch black using only compass and foot pacing, and demonstrate mastery of a host of other subjects. Yet, most will not know the difference between joint flexion and extension, how to correctly use their core musculature to stabilize themselves when moving a load, or the difference between protein, carbohydrate, and fat sources. This does not seem logical. If the human body is not performing to its maximum capacity, all other skills acquired are going to be performed to a submaximal

you will be able to replace other training considered essential with this physical fitness material. Here is a strategy that has worked well in the past on military courses with only PT periods used for fitness instruction:

- You as the group leader pick relevant articles/material that you want the group to learn. The *CrossFit Journal* is one great resource, but anything goes.
- Issue the material to the students and tell them that one of them will be chosen the next day to brief the whole group on the content of the article. To really shake things up, pick the same soldier twice in a row (people get caught in this all the time).
- Give the soldier five minutes at the end of the next morning's fitness period to brief the group. Correct any errors, add anything you think is pertinent, and stimulate discussion. If the soldier obviously didn't read the article, fill the

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five minutes with wall-ball shots and burpees and discuss that article in the next session.

- This approach has multiple advantages besides the obvious benefit of increased fitness knowledge. Course candidates practice the essential skill of absorbing a large amount of material and breaking it down to the essential points for group presentation. They also practice their briefing skills, a must for officers and non-commissioned officers.
- If you really want to shake things up, have the soldiers complete a short written quiz on the material. Encourage those who fail to do better next time by giving them extra wall-ball and burpee practice.

## Plan in advance for PT periods

Pre-CrossFit, you may have been standing in front of your troops while the battalion commander was giving his morning address,

figuring out what running route to use and where to stop for push-ups along the way. This will no longer cut it. If you are going to run a CrossFit session, you will want to plan in advance:

- What workout/lesson you will use
- How to modify the workout for your group's size and equipment
- What equipment you need
- What facilities you need
- How to score the workout
- How to scale the workout to your group members' abilities
- How you will explain and structure the workout
- What diagrams are necessary
- What skill(s) the group will work on
- What transport will be present to move equipment if necessary

If you are a platoon leader and there is only one set of equipment for the whole company (a likely scenario, as there are three to four platoons in a company, for those non-military readers), you will need

to have negotiated beforehand which platoon will be using what equipment on which day. You get the idea. Instead of planning your PT period five minutes before it begins, you are probably going to want to plan a whole week of periods, and likely a week ahead of time as well; this ensures that all logistical considerations can be managed. Since you have reached the point of your career where you are the leader of your group, you have obviously demonstrated the planning ability necessary to complete this fairly simple task and there should be no problems—except maybe when it rains and you were planning on doing muscle-ups on the soccer nets.

## Logistics and equipment

Once you have convinced your superiors to let you use CrossFit with your group and have followed the principles described above to get you on your way, the main

Equipment	Quantity	Cost
Sticks	30	Free if you use camouflage mounting poles.
Medicine balls	10	Five dollars each if you fill cheap basketballs with sand and duct tape them.
Rings	10 Sets	Free if you use the webbing straps, carabineers, and PVC piping in the system to make your own.
Olympic bars with spring collars	12	About \$110 each.
Weights	10 x 5 lbs 20 x 10 lbs 20 x 25 lbs 10 x 35 lbs 10 x 45 lbs	About 59 cents per pound. (This list is the ideal; if you don't have the funding, maximize the 10 and 25 lb plates. Most WODs use 95 lbs or less.)
Dumbbells	10 x 25 lb 10 x 35 lbs 10 x 45 lbs	About 69 cents per pound. It is better to get more of these mid-range weights than a lesser number of a larger weight. Most WODs and the capacity of your group will be in the listed range
Parallettes	10 Sets	About \$30 or less per set homemade, or free if you can get some free ABS/PVC piping or wood through the system.
Pull-up bars	MAXIMIZE	You want as many as possible. A tree branch can be a pull-up bar; you have to get creative.
Plyometric boxes	6 sets	Get some plywood sheets, cut 20-inch by 20-inch sections, hammer together and you have 20-inch jump boxes for about \$25 per box. Or free if you use existing benches, boxes, platforms, or other stable objects in your environment.
Rubber Matting	24 x 18 x 24-inch squares	Use these to rest your weights on if working on concrete or indoors. If you buy four 3 x 6-foot rubber horse stall mats and cut them to size, they will cost about \$10 per square.
Bumper Plates	10 x 10 lbs 10 x 25 lbs 10 x 35 lbs	These are really expensive, about \$3-4 per pound. They are a necessity, however, when starting to go heavy on cleans and snatches. If you are lucky enough to have the funding, buy them. If not, make it a long-term project.
Climbing Ropes	3	You are on a military base, right?

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difference between CrossFit training for groups and for individuals is largely a matter of managing equipment and resources. I have already discussed how a basic set of equipment will allow completion of a large number of workouts; the equipment listed in the table on the previous page (which assumes a platoon of thirty personnel) will allow you to push this to more like 90 percent.

This equipment will allow a platoon-sized organization to conduct group CrossFit workouts. Really though, it outfits a company. Almost no WOD requires every piece of equipment in the above list, although it would certainly be challenging to perform one. (Do *not* take that as a hint, Coach Glassman.) While the first platoon is doing “Fran” with the Olympic bars, a second platoon can be using the dumbbells for “Helen,” a third platoon can be on a rucksack march followed by ten minutes of “Cindy,” a fourth platoon can be learning the tuck planche and back lever using the parallettes and rings, and company headquarters can be using the medicine balls and plyo boxes to do “Kelly.” Five groups, five different workouts, five unique sets of equipment drawn from the same equipment pool. If the company headquarters has planned properly, they can rotate the groups through these five workouts within the same training week.

As for facilities, the ideal is to perform your workouts outside, weather permitting. All you have to do is have the equipment loaded from your stores area onto a truck the night before, and have it delivered and set up the next morning at the designated area, whether that be running track, obstacle course, or mud pit. As an added benefit, this is a good leadership project for the student-group senior on leadership courses. If the correct equipment doesn't show up as you directed, have some of the platoon run back to get it while the rest practice wall ball and burpees.

Even with all the equipment listed above, you will not have the resources necessary to do all the WODs on the CrossFit website as written. For example, “Linda,” also known as “Three Bars of Death,” requires an individual to bench, clean, and deadlift three different bars with three

different weights—each customized for their bodyweight. It is nearly impossible to hog that much equipment by yourself in the weight room; it would be completely out of the question for a group of thirty to perform “Linda” in this manner in a one-hour PT period. Here are some suggestions, using “Linda” as an example, for implementing workouts designed for individuals in your group setting:

- Alter the exercises so they hit the same muscles and movements but use different equipment. For a group “Linda,” ring dips (or weighted push-ups), dumbbell cleans, and barbell deadlifts would preserve the flavor and stimulus of the original but lessen the need for a specific piece of equipment—in this case, Olympic bars.
- Alter the way the workout is performed. For “Linda,” instead of doing the workout individually, do it in groups of three, with one trainee at each movement. The three complete their assigned repetitions at their station at the same time and then rotate stations when the last group member has completed their repetitions. This takes a little bit of planning, as you want soldiers of similar size and strength in the same group so time is not wasted changing bar loads to accommodate widely differing body weights and capacities.

These are just some examples. You as the group leader have to apply your ingenuity to the problem and arrive at a workable course of action. Give ten group leaders the same problem and they will likely arrive at ten different ways of tackling the workout. There are no wrong answers as long as fitness is improving. “Team Workouts” in *CFJ* 14 is a goldmine, as a lot of your work is already completed for you. A progression of team workouts for groups of ten is already done; you just have to adjust them for a larger group.

### Scoring

I mentioned earlier how important it is to score workouts to induce competition. Trainees will not work as hard in an unscored workout; you will see it, and the fitness period will be less effective than it

could have been. An exception to the rule is that you will not score when using a fitness period for skill learning and refinement. If you are using the WODs from the CrossFit website as the template for your modified group workouts, the WOD explanation will normally tell you how to score. In some cases, you will need or want to modify the specified scoring method for your group. Here are common types of scoring schemes:

- Minimize the amount of work necessary to complete a set amount of work. This can be done individually or modified for a group. For example, the workout known as “Frelen” (five rounds for time: 800-meter run, fifteen 75-pound thrusters, 12 pull-ups) can be modified for a group as follows: The group of thirty is broken into six groups of five trainees. Each team will have two bars, two pull-up bars, and a common running track. The clock starts for all teams at the same time, and stops for a team only when the last member finishes his last pull-up of round five. Members of a team can provide assistance only to members of their own teams, and when team members have completed their assigned work they may no longer assist others at all.
- Maximize the amount of work performed in a set time period. Similar to the above workout, but count the maximum number of rounds of, for example, an 800-meter run, 15 75-pound thrusters, and 12 pull-ups completed in twenty minutes. Same setup as above, but different scoring and time domain. You could add up total number of rounds performed by the team, or only count the lowest score on each team, or only the top four scores, or whatever system you decide on.
- Maximize the load lifted for a specific exercise. This is the “Deadlift 3-2-2-1-1-1-1 reps,” with heavy loads and long rest. Do not skip these types of workouts in favor of always inducing a “metabolic effect” in your group with mixed-modality WODs. The maximal load workouts are extremely beneficial and an integral part of CrossFit. Why?
  - This is how your soldiers will learn to manage heavy loads. This article will not delve into anatomy and physiology; suffice it to say that it is important to

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train the nervous system—strength is a skill, and moving heavy loads must be learned and practiced. Some critics will say that moving heavy loads is dangerous. The opposite is true; it is soldiers who don't know how to move heavy loads who will be dangerous to themselves and others. This will not be their fault, it will be a result of our negligence as trainers. Think about it: there may come a time when a soldier has to pick up a wounded 230-pound comrade in full gear. If the lifting soldier has never mastered a 275-pound deadlift with correct form (230 pounds plus the 45 pounds of gear the lifter is wearing), the lifter is likely to injure his back and be unable to rescue his wounded comrade. *This* is the dangerous situation, not the heavy deadlifting with proper form.

- Endurance and performance on the WODs (and therefore combat readiness) will improve. If a trainee can perform a 190-pound thruster for one rep, then the 95-pound thrusters in “Fran” are performed at 5 percent of maximum capacity. How much faster could “Fran” be performed if the weight were only 33 percent capacity, which for this trainee would be 63 pounds? If you've never tried it, attempt “Fran” at 65 pounds instead of 95; you will take minutes off your time as the number of reps you can perform without rest skyrockets. One way to improve the “Fran” time for this trainee is to make 95 pounds into 33 percent of their capacity by driving their maximum thruster up to 285 pounds. Performing the maximum load workouts is what will do this kind of thing.

Here is an example of how you could score max lift workouts for a group, using the deadlift as an example. Divide your group of 30 into six teams of five, and line each team up behind a 135-pound barbell. Have each trainee attempt a set of three reps; increase the weight after each full round. Any team member who gets three reps in a turn moves to the back of the line; one who fails due to inability to move the load or

bad technique has to leave the line and practice deadlifting off to the side with the last weight lifted safely and successfully. As the supervisor, you must be vigilant about technique during these types of efforts. This is a race or timed workout. Give everyone two minutes of rest after their last successful set of three, and you will have plenty of time to supervise the lifters. At the end of the workout, rank trainees from one to thirty based on the last load successfully lifted; add up the rankings for each team to provide an overall team total. Alternatively, you could add up the total load lifted for each team.

If you have a group doing CrossFit for a relatively long time, like a six-month recruit course or your own platoon in a line unit, you can perform some interesting ongoing scoring. In the recruit course example, you could break the group into permanent five-man teams. Using logical pre-existing groupings such as half squads, for example, builds cohesion during PT that will carry over into later field training. Every day the group will perform individual or team workouts. You can assign individual or group points each day, and both if you wish.

Points will be added up throughout the course to give an overall winner at the end of the course. I have discussed how to use group scores for workouts done in teams. But you can also use group scoring for workouts that trainees perform as individuals, using a method such as the following:

- Give points to individuals according to finishing place—one point for first place, two for second, and so on.
- The team score is then calculated something like in Formula One racing. If individuals in team one come in 1, 2, 3, 4, 5th place, their team total is 15. If team two gets 6, 7, 8, 9, 10th place, they get 40 points. Team one gets one “overall” point for getting the best team score and team two gets two “overall” points for second-best team score, and these get added to the team totals cumulated from previous competitions. So even though your soldiers are performing the work individually, if they come in dead last the team score will suffer, and the team will be none too pleased. The table below shows how this was done with one group of twenty doing “Fight Gone Bad” as individuals;

Rounds	ONE	TWO	THREE	FGB SCORE	FGB RANK	CUMULATIVE SCORE	CUMULATIVE RANKING
<b>TEAM ONE</b>							
Soldier 1	124	91	81	296	2	18	1
Soldier 2	68	54	52	174	18	102	19
Soldier 3	85	77	71	233	9	49	7
Soldier 4	89	63	58	210	11	82	17
Soldier 5	77	63	63	203	15	34	4
<b>TEAM TWO</b>							
Soldier 6	141	88	87	316	1	46	5
Soldier 7	77	70	60	207	14	97	18
Soldier 8	116	89	78	283	4	68	11
Soldier 9	91	65	64	220	10	72	12
Soldier 10	103	93	88	284	3	33	3
<b>TEAM THREE</b>							
Soldier 11	97	80	71	248	8	78	14
Soldier 12	87	63	51	201	16	74	13
Soldier 13	96	DNF	DNF	96	19	79	16
Soldier 14	73	65	59	197	17	66	10
Soldier 15	109	70	74	253	6	61	8
<b>TEAM FOUR</b>							
Soldier 16	81	69	60	210	11	64	9
Soldier 17	82	67	60	209	13	78	14
Soldier 18	108	77	86	271	5	47	6
Soldier 19	93	81	78	252	7	31	2
Soldier 20	77	85	71	233	9	61	8

TEAM	TEAM FGB TOTAL	TEAM FGB SCORE	TEAM CUMULATIVE SCORE	TEAM CUMULATIVE RANKING
<b>TEAM ONE</b>	55	3	17	2
<b>TEAM TWO</b>	32	1	19	3
<b>TEAM THREE</b>	66	4	22	4
<b>TEAM FOUR</b>	45	2	13	1

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both individual and team points were awarded.

- If you repeat your PT test at the end of the course, as suggested, you could use the CrossFit PT sessions as 50 percent of the final score, and the results of the final PT test as 50 percent of the final score—kind of like “regular season” and “playoffs.”

In my experience with one military officer course, implementing CrossFit PT and scoring it in this fashion led to an interesting dynamic that was previously unseen. First of all, the daily competition was fierce, and there was always a crowd around the bulletin board when the daily and cumulative scores were posted. Second, the group became self-correcting, calling out other teams’ technique faults in order to minimize cheating. Finally, the team with the fittest members didn’t always win. When my group did “Frelen” as described above, the team having several of the fittest group members took off as individuals, leaving their weaker teammates behind. Although these fit members finished at the top individually, their effort was wasted since the time for the group stopped only when the last member finished. They did not listen to the instruction that once they had completed their work, they could no longer assist their teammates on pull-ups. They had to sit and watch, their work completed, while their weaker team members struggled on the bar and other teams pulled ahead. Contrast this with another team of less-fit individuals who made a plan and worked as a team. They completed the workout together, assisting each other on pull-ups to minimize the time spent on this station. The group finished at the same time and won the event. This group came in first because of good leadership, teamwork, and planning ability. In this PT session, the soldiers completed an excellent physical fitness training session, practiced leadership and planning, and learned a valuable lesson about group cohesion. What more could be asked for from a military leadership PT session?

## Injuries

One of the major challenges faced by group fitness leaders is how to incorporate trainees with injuries into regular PT sessions. You don’t want to change the whole workout plan to accommodate one soldier, and you certainly don’t want to send that soldier to the gym to ride the recumbent bike while everyone else is working as a group. Your goals with injured soldiers should be straightforward: to increase their fitness in spite of the injury, and allow them to keep participating with the others to maintain their sense of group cohesion. The solution to this challenge can be found (where else?) in a back issue of the *CrossFit Journal*. The article “Working Wounded” (issue 33) is of great benefit for group leaders trying to keep injured soldiers involved in group fitness training.

- When a soldier comes to you with an injury, instead of dwelling on all the exercises they can no longer perform, start thinking of all the exercises they can perform that you can substitute. Someone with a separated shoulder will be doing a lot of one-arm cleans and snatches, for example. Between specially adapted variations and all the exercises in the CrossFit roster that can be performed without the use of the injured muscle or joint, there will still be plenty for them to do and work on.
- Now look at the workout you will be having the group perform, and make appropriate substitutions.
- Make the substitutions worse than what the rest the group will be performing, for several reasons: first, if the soldier is perhaps not as injured as he makes himself out to be, this will likely substantially (if not instantaneously) speed up his “rehab.” Second, if the soldier actually is injured, his doing substitutions will not be held in contempt by the rest of the group. At the end of the session, you want the group to come up to the injured soldier and say: “Am I ever glad I’m not you!” This will allow the soldier to not be ashamed of either the injury or having

to do an altered workout.

To give an example of this, last summer a soldier in a military officer course had stress fractures in his lower legs. His medical exam form stated he could not perform impact PT, which pretty much ruled out running and marching. By chance, the “Working Wounded” article had just come out, so I called “Mac” and asked him for some assistance. The next morning, the group did “Fat Helen” (running, dumbbell swings, and pull-ups). I asked the injured soldier if swings and squats hurt (no impact), and he said “No problem.” So, the soldier did the swings and pull-ups as usual, and, as a substitution for the 800-meter runs, did burpees with no jump at the end. When you think of how long it takes the average person to run 800 meters, you know that this guy was hurting. Ever do four straight minutes of burpees? Eventually I took mercy on him and let him alternate five burpees and five knees to elbows—if you want to call that mercy. The next day was a 5k run, so he rowed 5k on the highest setting. Those in the know will understand these are not exactly equal. He performed the same types of workouts as the group, and usually with the group. He healed after six weeks of this sort of “rest.” Despite not running for six out of eight weeks of PT sessions, when he took the end-course PT test, he had the best obstacle course time improvement and the third-best run time improvement. Now that is rehab.

## Conclusion

Hopefully large-group fitness leaders have been able to draw something of use out of this article. Large groups can and even should train CrossFit-style. The challenges to implementation are largely logistical and easily overcome with a little ingenuity on the part of the leader. It is up to you to implement the program that will take your group to a level of physical conditioning that would not have been thought achievable—the type of fitness that will be a force multiplier in whatever arena your group plies its profession in.

