

Reading Between the Lines

~ Dave Castro ~

One week after the CrossFit Games I was sitting around CF Santa Cruz and the topic of the top three male competitors came up. Someone marveled that they all performed at such high levels. As the discussions gained some steam I wondered to myself what they all have in common in the performance arena. The first thing that came to mind was the benchmark workout known as “Fran” (three rounds, at 21, 15, and 9 reps, respectively, of 95-pound thrusters and pull-ups). I knew for a fact that all three of them had a sub-3:00 “Fran” time. So I wondered what other benchmark performance numbers they put up. What does it take to compete with these three? What are some constants in their performances? And, are there certain benchmark workouts and exercises that act as indicators (and predictors) of broad fitness and capacity across diverse domains?

The guys

Brett Marshall (known as “AFT”) and James Fitzgerald (“OPT”) flew in from Canada to compete in the Games. Marshall burst into the realm of the CrossFit elite with his sub-2:00 time on “Diane” (three rounds, 21, 15, and 9 reps, of 225-pound deadlifts and handstand push-ups). His training partner, Fitzgerald, is equally impressive. Josh Everett, the head strength and conditioning coach for UC Riverside’s athletic teams—drove up from Southern California. He is well known in the CrossFit world for his lifting prowess, his broad fitness, and his epic battles against Greg Amundson at “Fran.”

Marshall, 33, stands 5’5” and weighs 150 pounds; Fitzgerald is 33, 5’10”, and 164; and Everett, 32, is the heaviest of the three at 5’9” and 183.

The games

The first event, the Hopper, was won by Marshall. He dominated the workout, which consisted of a 1000-meter row followed by five rounds of twenty-five pull-ups, and seven 135-pound jerks. Fitzgerald took second, and third went to Chris Spealler from Salt Lake City. Everett rounded out the group in fourth place.

The second event, the off-trail run, saw Spealler winning and Fitzgerald again taking second. Marshall came in third, and Everett finished in the top ten.

After day 1 it looked like the contest was going to be all about Fitzgerald, Marshall, and Spealler. But the strength stuff was still to come. Sunday was devoted to the CrossFit Total event, which tests the lifters’ max squat, overhead press, and deadlift. And Everett is legendary in the CrossFit community for his strength. The Games ended with his 570-pound deadlift attempt. It came off the ground, but it was too much for him to finish on that day. Everett’s combined score of 1133 earned him second place in the Total, behind Connor Banks, who scored 1225 (including a 540 squat!).

Fitzgerald and Marshall finished 11th and 13th, respectively, which was enough to bring Everett back into the running for the Top CrossFitter title.

When all the points were tallied, Fitzgerald had been consistent enough to win the title of Top CrossFitter, placing high in all three events. Marshall came in a close second, and Everett was right behind in third. It was a close and exciting finish, just as we all thought it would be.

The “girls”

So how do these guys’ CrossFit benchmark numbers measure up? How do they perform on the classic workouts known as “the girls”?

What surprised me is how close their numbers actually are. As I’ve already mentioned, I knew they all had sub-3:00 “Fran” times. Marshall holds the current confirmed record for Fran, at 2:19. Everett has a just slightly slower PR of 2:25, and Fitzgerald’s next clocks in at 2:44.

Everett consistently cranks out “Helen” (3 rounds of 400-meter run, twenty-one 24kg kettlebell swings, and 12 pull-ups) in under 8:00, with a PR of 7:29. Fitzgerald’s PR is 7:47, and Marshall was not sure of his exact PR, but said it is around 8 minutes. So, now we need to have a sub-3:00 Fran and a sub-8:00 Helen to compete with these guys.

What about something with bodyweight movements only? “Cindy” is a good measure (max rounds of 5 pull-ups, 10 push-ups, and 15 squats in 20 minutes). Everett can crank out 28 rounds, while both Fitzgerald and Marshall do over 30 (Marshall’s PR is a serious 36 rounds!)

“Linda” (aka “Three Bars of Death”) was another workout I was interested in comparing, as a measure of the ability to move big loads in a short time period. “Linda” consists of ten rounds of 1.5 times bodyweight deadlift, bodyweight bench press, and .75 bodyweight clean, with each round one rep shorter than the last (the rep sequence is 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1). Their times are nothing short of amazing. Everett knocks out all this work (275-pound dead, 183 bench, and 138 clean) in a mere 12:23. Fitzgerald is just behind him with a time of 13:44 (at loads of 246, 164, and 123 pounds). Then there is Marshall. He weighs 150 pounds, but he chooses to base his loads for “Linda” on a hypothetical 200-pound body weight. For his version of “Linda,” he deadlifts 300 pounds (twice his actual body weight), benches 200 (1.3 times actual weight), and cleans 150 (body weight). All of this takes him just over 30 minutes, which is an impressive time even when done at the prescribed weights.

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James Fitzgerald



Brett Marshall



Josh Everett

	James Fitzgerald ("OPT")		Brett Marshall ("AFT")		Josh Everett	
Overall						
CrossFit Games Result	1st place	272 points	2nd place	270 points	3rd place	267 points
Hopper	2nd		1st		4th	
Run	2nd		3rd		10th	
CrossFit Total	11th		13th		2nd	
Personal stats						
Height	5'10"		5'5"		5'9"	
Weight (lbs)	164		150		183	
Age	33		33		32	
CF benchmarks						
Fran	2:44		2:19		2:25	
Helen	7:47		8:00		7:29	
Cindy	30.3		36		28	
Linda	13:44		30:00 @ 200lbs		12:23	
Lifting numbers						
		% bodyweight		% bodyweight		% bodyweight
Deadlift	459	2.79	400	2.6	569.8	3.11
Squat	343	2.09	395	2.63	440	2.4
Clean and jerk	198	1.2	230 clean, 240 jerk	1.5/1.6	346.5	1.99
Snatch	158.4	0.96	187	1.24	268.4	1.46
"Gymnastics" numbers						
Max pull-ups	45		60		62	
Max muscle-ups	12		10			
Run times						
100m	11:58				11	
400m					50	
800m					2:11	
1600m					5:00	
5k	18:30		18:45		20:19	

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Moving steel

There is no doubt that they all can perform a wide variety of functional movements executed at high intensity very well. But how strong are these guys? Are they just metabolic freaks?

As suggested by their work on “Linda,” the answer is a resounding no.

All can deadlift over 2.5 times their body weight. Everett has the highest deadlift of the 3 with a PR that is over three times his body weight—569.8 pounds! Fitzgerald’s PR is 459 and Marshall’s 400. They also have substantial back squats. Twice-bodyweight squats are not an issue for any of them. Marshall can lift more than 2.5 times bodyweight with a 395-pound back squat. Everett can squat 440, while Fitzgerald lifts 343.

In the Olympic lifts, Everett, who trains for Oly competition, dominates, with an almost double bodyweight clean and jerk. Marshall is also very competitive with a clean equaling 1.5 times his body weight. When it comes to the snatch, Everett again prevails, able to get almost 1.5 times his weight (268.4 pounds) overhead. Marshall is close behind with a 1.24 times bodyweight snatch of 187 pounds. Fitzgerald is just under a bodyweight snatch, with a 158.4-pound lift.

Track work

5k times for Marshall and Fitzgerald are very close. Fitzgerald runs an 18:30 and Marshall an 18:45. The larger Everett has a time of 20:19. Everett is the fastest of the three in the sprint distances, though, with a 50-second 400m.

Nutrition

Everett tries to eat roughly 3500 calories a day in a Zone-conforming 40/30/30 (percent of calories from carbs, protein, and fat, respectively) balance. His dinner usually is larger than 5 Zone blocks.

Marshall calls his diet an “unmeasured” Zone diet.

Fitzgerald’s diet is composed of all organic foods. Meats, vegetables and oils make up most meals, although “cheat” days incorporate rice and pastas.

Training

Fitzgerald and Marshall both religiously do the WODs as posted on the CrossFit.com website. Chris Spealler, who won the run event, also does just the posted WODs. The top three finishers in the run event (Spealler, Fitzgerald, and Marshall) are pure main site CrossFitters. The CrossFit WOD only rarely calls for runs, much less hilly runs of unspecified distance, yet these three still took home the trail run medals.

Prior to starting CrossFit, Marshall trained with isolation movements and traditional resistance training with an occasional functional movement thrown in. Fitzgerald trained with a mixture of Westside, Poliquin split, and strongman work, along with sprinting and running. In his words, “I have tried it all to see what works and what I should throw out... and I ended up finding CrossFit. It fits me. Everett trains Olympic lifting four to five days a week and does sprint workouts or metcon CrossFit workouts three to four days a week. One month out of the year he follows the WOD cycles directly from the CrossFit.com site.

Past sporting endeavors

Marshall has been active in basketball, hard court and beach volleyball, baseball, and a variety of other team sports throughout his life. Swimming, cross-country running, and badminton are some of the individual sports he participated in. He also is an avid skier, mountain biker, and rock and ice climber. At 5’5”, Marshall can easily grab a basketball rim at 10’.

Playing soccer at the national level was part of Fitzgerald’s past, as was university-level basketball and junior hockey. He also ran cross-country and amateur trail runs, which could have something to do with his impressive results on the run at the Games.

Because he underwent three surgeries in three years while on the football team at Division 3 Ohio Northern University, Everett played only ten games there. But in those ten games he scored nine touchdowns! He was also an All-American sprinter on the 4x100m relay team in 1995. His school record in the 110-meter high hurdles still stands at 14.48—and all this after the three surgeries.

What all this means for everyone else

Fitzgerald was consistent enough across the board to win the overall title by taking second place in the hopper workout and the run. Everett was in the top of the pack in the hopper and strength events, but fell back a bit in the run. Marshall won the hopper event, came in third in the run, and lost his edge in the Total. (The Top CrossFitter award did not take weight classes into account.) So, all you have to do to be competitive at next year’s CrossFit Games (July 5-6, 2008) is bring your “Fran” time to under 3:00, deadlift more than 2.5 times bodyweight, and perform “Linda,” in good time, as if you were 50 pounds heavier than you really are.

Start training. You can be assured these guys are.



Dave Castro is the seminar and events coordinator for CrossFit HQ. He lives in San Diego.