

CrossFit The Shake Up S2 E2

Intro

We are talking about the changes in CrossFit, the shake-up as they call it. We're probably 3 months late doing it, but we have an opinion about it, so let's talk about.

Phil

What are the consequences? That's what we're going to be discussing. Let's start quite generally, guys and let's just give your initial feedback when the news came and how you felt. What were your initial feelings?

1:18 – 1:45

Jowsey

I was quite excited by it to be honest. Just the fact that there are more opportunities to spread your season out, qualify in different areas – encourage more competition – yeah, I welcome it.

1:45- 2:00

Jem

Yeah, as you say it opens opportunities to people, it keeps the year interesting instead of people just building up to the open and then the Games ... yeah certainly interesting/

2:00 – 3:05

Phil

Yeah, we had that opinion before but now we have the hindsight now of already having some events... being a little bit hyped and watching things going on... and almost having a sport that is only 2 events a year... it's a sport that's got many, like football you watch every weekend, it's quite nice to have that buzz going around.

Jem, you mentioned there that it's a greater opportunity for people to compete and there's more athletes now who would never had the chance to compete at the scale of regionals who now have the opportunity to compete – which I agree is a wonderful opportunity. And the guys I'm coaching who would never have got to regionals are now getting the chance to go to a sanctional (s). do you think that would potentially heighten the gap between the elite and the recreational CrossFitter now? There's more opportunity to earn money, more sponsorship opportunities, which of course is positive if you're good.

3:05 – 3:32

Jem

Yeah, I hugely widens that gap, doesn't it? If you think about the prize money for one of the events, that potentially is going to allow someone to train professionally or at a more professional level. But for those others who are going to podium or aren't going to win – it limits their ability to train at the level, that more professional level and that means the gap is just going to get bigger and bigger.

3:33 – 4:05

Yeah there's the plus / minus cost isn't there. Some guys are finishing outside the top 10 and its costing them and significant amount to go to the events versa the guys in the top 3 who are being paid a significant amount. That will start to... as we see in every sport, the premier league in football and every other sport the guys with the highest wage bills are the teams who are finishing top of the league. Will we see that in CrossFit? Will we see that pretty much the top 10 on CrossFit will be the guys with the biggest budgets and the best sponsorship deals, versus the best athletes.

Jem

Well there more than likely to get the best sponsorships because they will be doing the best and it will spiral like it has done in other sports.

Phil

But do we isolate some younger athletes, for example, coming through. Do we put them under pressure... for me CrossFit is in its infancy... that's what's exciting it's a new sport. Science behind training in CrossFit is not even touched upon yet, we are just getting started. As the science starts to come in, as the better coaches start to come in ... the gap will widen, and it will be harder and harder for young athletes to catch them. And do we create a gap and is it good for the sport to create that gap?

5:00

Jem

Well I guess the alternative is does it drive determination to get to that level does it encourage more people to train at a higher level. And by having more competitions and opportunities throughout the year does that not just promote more interest in the sport? And therefore, more interest in training?

5:23

Phil

I hope so.

5:24 – 7:00

Jowsey

I think the new competition give these people, the kind of... second tier athlete, up and coming – it gives them the chance to compete with the big guns. The one down side is do you get a true representation of the big guns? Some of the competitions at each point you probably see some people finish nearer the podium than they would do because of the density of the field. You don't get the same density at the sanctionals as you do at the Games, which is yes – the world championships so you would expect a difference.... I don't know I'm thinking ahead here now; would it be good to have a year-round league? You have the top guys go at it over the year at different stages and it's the champion over the 12 months rather than the champion... maybe it all finishes with the yellow jersey in the CrossFit Games finale and then it's an opportunity for people to see them go at it and there's a qualification league underneath where people are then relegated and promoted... I don't know...

7:00

Yeah, you're thinking football... I don't think we need promotion and relegation but hope that's where we are headed... you get qualification points. rather than winning a sanctional event and qualify... you get qualification points, you're placing at events – you have to do a minimum of 3 events a year ... on the 1st June the top 40 points scorers of the year get their qualification to the final. And it's a clean slate at the final, I like the idea of a final – I like the excitement of it... I like to go in there and its even, I like to peak for it as a coach. And not having to peak all year. you can do 5 sanctional events or 10 sanctional events but they take you top 3 finishes will count to your total score on the 1st of June or whenever the cut-off point would be then the top scorers qualify for the grand final. I think that would be wonderful.

8:04

Where does the Open fit into all this? Is the Open stronger than ever because of this or are we seeing a gradual fade out of the Open... As CrossFit enthusiasts, as you are, where is the Open headed?

8:17

Jowsey

I think it opens the open for everyone really. Because now you've got people who didn't think it was possible... The Regionals in Europe for example was so, so tough to get to... like, you had to be literally... the top 80 in Europe in most other regions... as low as the top 8- would be qualifying somewhere. It was always, stupid stressful for the athletes in Europe going into that... Now, it opens up... you've just got to be the best in your country. It's not just a shot at regionals, which I was miles away from before...now it's, alright... top 1 in the UK... maybe it's within their reach... maybe it's even tougher...

9:23

Phil

I was going to say ... its even tougher

9:24

It's a little bit more on your radar than being top 40 out of ... I think we had 30,000 in Europe... 30,000 men or something.

9:49

Jem

And the difference between CrossFit and some other sports is that there is a grass roots level where you can still compete in the Open and class yourself against some of the higher-level athletes and you don't really get that in any other sports. So, I think if somewhere along the line you lost the open, I think that would completely change the sport of CrossFit and that would be a shame to do.

10:15

Phil

There is a certain sort of mystical element of the Open, the Games is sort of synonymous of we don't know what's coming, we're going to get a shock... and this is our one chance a year as Dads, or unfit people or not as fit people to experience the excitement and not know what's going to come and feel that feeling.

I don't have the answer, but I don't how relevant in 5 years it's going to be to the elite in the sport. I think and I don't think it's a bad thing, we are starting to see a split between recreational CrossFit and professional CrossFit. Almost having a recognised professional circuit is, potentially, where we are headed. The CrossFit Open, for me, should always be a huge part of it. I hadn't actually thought about your point, Jemma, that it's an opportunity to measure yourself against the best and go right, I'm only 365 reps from Sam Briggs on that work out or I'm only 65 kilos from Matt Fraser in that work out... and that's quite a nice way of doing it.

Before I came into the discussion I thought, lets drop the elite from the open but let's promote the open and have it be a measurement and testament of fitness. We've got so many people doing the open because we've got so many people healthy and able to do the open. We could have different work outs because we wouldn't have to sort the elite out. Because saying it as it is, the programme is designed so that we get the showcase at the Games... if we lost that we could have a better open, I think.

12.03

Jem

Yeah, I can understand that... that makes sense.

12.06

Jowsey

I think that's why CrossFit athletes get so much respect from people who can throw down with them. They are not us normal folk because we get a direct comparison to how impressive that skill is. When you compare it to other sports, for example team sports, you have no idea how good the guys at the top level are. You sit and watch it from the outside, but you've never felt a pass from an England rugby international... you can't appreciate the speed the games played at compared to the lower levels. Whereas in CrossFit, you can say "yeah tried that work out and couldn't even lift the weight." Or it took me ten times longer than Matt Fraser...

12:50

Phil

Yeah you do that don't you, the 7 min AMRAP of staring at the bar because it starts with something heavier than you can lift.

Jowsey

I can still deadlift his (Matt Fraser's) snatch, thankfully

12:59

Phil

Mind you, I have seen you deadlift in the Dad Cup recently... didn't go wonderfully for you...

13:23

Jowsey

Yeah, but technically if it's me versus you... I won again.

Phil

No, you lost.

It went to a tie break and you bottled the tie break...

13:31

Jowsey

Listen, mate.. we can run tonight, if you want to run tonight?

Phil

Let's get going... I'm in Timberlands. Ill beat you in Timberlands

13:37

Jowsey

It all comes down to the Open...

Jem

Is it a clean slate, the Open?

13:45

Jowsey

Well, I'm the reigning Champ... so he's got to take the title off me.

13:50

Phil

That's the other side of the Open, isn't it... it gives friends infinite opportunity to have a bit of fun with it.

I mean, I'm going to be open and say it.. the only reason I've trained the last year is because I don't want to lose to Jowsey in the Open.

14:02

Jem

You're having a competition again?

Jowsey

The only reason I've trained in the last 6 weeks is because I want to retain my title.

14:09

Phil

But I know we are having a bit of fun... but that's the magic of the Open. It keeps people training, having fun and I sincerely hope that never gets lost. And that the Affiliates continue to back up the Open. I hear a lot of people say they are not going to bother with the Open this year because of the changes etc.. and if the waters get muddied... there's nothing that muddies the water more than insecurities. I've said a lot of positive things about CrossFit and the changes but that's where they need to come into criticism. Their communication in the last 6 months has been appalling and I think that has created an enormous amount of insecurity And I think that that's a shame, I think that they'll get that back don't get me wrong, I think they'll regain it. When people see what they are trying to do, I think it will be a positive change but insecurity muddies waters and puts a bit of pressure on people and our natural reaction as humans is to back off and not want to put your foot in the water but when you dip your toe in the water and feel it and find out its actually the same wat as before, I think it will be fine but I think it's been a bit of a problem...

15:37

Jowsey

Yeah, we still don't really know what's going to go on at the Games... who gets what and how long they've got that competition for... for example the winner of a country who has 5 affiliate and the guy maybe qualifies 20,000th in the world but is the best in his country and he goes to Games... like we said, those guys, do they have the money to compete in the sport? travel all the way to America from a small country somewhere. Are they going to accept the ticket? So, they've qualified but are they going to pay the money to be in the hotel and maybe compete for, we don't know, is it one day? How quickly are they going to get knocked out? How quickly are they knocking the field down? Is it one day? So, will they accept them?

Phil

16:47

And that again is a communication issue and next year it will be easier...

Let's move on and talk about the events themselves, the sanctionals, which I think is holding everything up at the moment ... in a good way, I mean keeping the excitement up and keeping the buzz around CrossFit.

I've been lucky enough to be in Dubai, Wodapoolza and going to be in SID next week. Of course, in every event there are things that could have been better, but I've loved it, enjoyed it. You've been with me Jowse... what's been your overall impression of the events and how they are run?

You've been to the Games many times now, as a coach. How many times have you been?

17:36

Jowsey

Ahhhh 4?

Phil

So, you've got some experience of what to compare the events to. Can you give us an overview of how you feel the events are?

17:49

Jowsey

I've been to DFC twice now, it's a really well-run comp... always on time. We had a little bit of an issue, didn't we, with communication of standards was a little bit cold and short. There were some things that needed to be changed once the right people made the right noises. But yeah, in general it's a good experience. A good way of people getting some excitement around it and qualifying.

18:45

Phil

Jemma, from your perspective, staying home in cold Gloucester...

Delightful Gloucester I'll have you know!

Can't play rugby though...

Well, that's debatable at the moment.

You're a fan of CrossFit, how have the sanctionals engaged you?

Its definitely more interesting. Historically, there has been a bit of a lull... where people continue with their own training plans. The Open comes around you start to think about the Games again but having something more on social media and in the public eye it motivates you to get back to training. I definitely think it's positive for recruitment for people in the sport and to compete as well, not necessarily at that level but even your weekend warriors to find local competitions which again just promotes more into the sport.

20:35

Phil

Yeah – I think the same. Being at events and speaking to people on the circuit it is inspiring people to train.

One of the questions I'm asked quite often... I'm lucky enough to come from an Ironman coaching perspective... its now a similar system to Ironman. You choose your event and you go to the event and win it, score points and that qualifies you to the world champs in Hawaii. There are a number of similarities in this system. Which events are we going to, why are we going to them, which one suits us etc... etc..

Jowse – you're with Sam... congratulations by the way. How do you guys come to that conclusion... that you're going to go to Dubai and obviously Sam was in Australia... congratulations by the way... how do you make the decision where to go and what to do?

Jowsey

Basically. Dubai was... the win was unexpected. We weren't going there expecting to win. We were just going there because it's a great competition to be involved in... there is an opportunity to win prize money per event, with Sam's abilities in her capacity can win which can then fund her training... get through a year pay bills etc.. everything went better than expected and she ended up winning that. We'd already made the decision on Australia because we'd heard about the style of programming that was suited to her. We went ahead with doing it because we reflected on DFC and thought we've got 4 weeks where we can make some adjustments, see if we can make changes that can carry over into the next competition. All be it, the field is not as strong in Australia as it was in DFC, so getting a true reflection on ... did we make the gains necessary relative to the top end opponent? We didn't get. The decisions were made months before.

24:01

Do you think people will target the weaker events and look at the field? We do in Ironman, look at the typical field, the athletes that are there and think well that's an easy ticket. Respect to the athletes that are there, I don't mean to sound disrespectful.

24:28

Jem

Easy in terms of that event?

Phil

Yeah, easy in terms of I'm top 5 in the world and everyone else is top 100.

There's a lot of events 16, only the top one going. Looking at South Africa as an event... for me and athlete made a reasonable decision to go there and be like I've got my ticket. Its intelligent, there's nothing derogatory meant by it.

Sara and I've made some decisions, we want to go to a stronger field, we want to test ourselves. We've had a year or so out of competition, so we actually made the other decision, it's not so much about winning the event it's about getting back to shape and getting in form again.

25:34

Jowsey

Its knowing where your cards are isn't it. Knowing if you want to play an easy hand and go for that which you are absolutely right to do. For example, Briggsy going to a really dense field, programme dependent, is she going to take first place? Possibly.

26:02

Phil

So, you're looking at your programming over the last year, or last 2 years... in 4 years' time typically it's lighter more capacity based we'll take that one.

26:15

Jowsey

Which is then a downfall of the system... yeah its great that there are events but maybe there needs to be an overview from CrossFit in a sense of the programming... they've done it longer than anybody else, make sure it's not biased to a certain type of athlete – that would ensure that the standards were held across the board. Yeah that's one downfall of it.

26:46

Jem

I've got a question for you guys as coaches of elite athletes do you find it then difficult with that choice, with that spread over the year – from December to June this year... to pick which competitions, how you then cycle their programming, how you peak them for which event. How do you manage that?

27:19

Phil

The first thing I would like to say about the competitions is that we are talking about, maximum 10 events, probably more like 6- 8 events over 2-3 days. A competition is a de load. They guys with the amount of training they're doing, going away to a competition for 3 days should be just a lot of fun. There is a big difference between I'm going to competition

to I'm peaking. The top-level guys should, if they get there selection right, should be able to go and get their ticket without having to peak. So, in that respect...there isn't the competition ruins a period. If you are peaking, for example, you've had a good rest, you'd have a taper phase and then you'd have a rest after. You're potentially losing months of training there, that could be detrimental to a season. If the sanction system was changed to a points-based system, you would have to peak. If there were a stronger field you would have to peak. And you can peak twice a year. Your second peak in a year is always stronger than your first anyway. With an adequate off season or an adequate rest your second peak will always be better, so you want to try and peak somewhere 5-6 months out, come up – go down again and that peak is always going to be better and perfect for the sanctionals.

28:50

And that's better for the season., the density that we have in Europe, they guys have to be so on point just to get to regionals and then when they are in regionals then the regional field is so dense, they have to be at a really high peak there so the European field are, especially the men, working so hard to just hold for the games. Whereas some of the American regions and you do the comparative scores and see that the top 10 in Europe would have qualified for the Games in half of those regions... having the spread across the year and being able to choose your sanctional event and get your space in between sanctional games, open like those you can get a better spread for the two peaks.

30:00

If you are astute with your programming you will get a benefit from the sanctionals.

31:00

One thing I want to touch on carefully... the doping policy. Where I feel reasonably fortunate I have been lucky enough to coach at a reasonably high level across a multitude of sports. The cycling background is now where I come in and go on the record and say the reason that so many cyclists get caught is because the doping procedures and policies are so good. There's not so many getting caught anymore, because you will get caught. Not to say it's not still going on... based on my psychological studies I have read that 1 in 6 males have taken performance enhancing drugs. Whichever sport you want to talk about, doping exists. The cyclists get caught because the procedures are so good, there are as many doping in CrossFit as there are in cycling and that is not a negative to CrossFit, it's just because it's a sport. the same applies to weightlifting, running, rugby, football. Nobody is caught doping in football, that's not because they're not doping – it's because the testing procedures are bad. So, we can see CrossFit making strides and efforts to negate that. For me the success of what they are doing is not good enough because they are not catching people, not because there are not people doping.

33:17

Jowsey

That's the problem with the new structure because now if you can qualify as a national champion, now it's fair game in your country to try and push the limits because they are not going to test the top 20 males in the UK, they don't know who they are, they only care about the people who eventually get to the games.

33:46

Phil

And budgetary constraints...

33:58

Jemma

But do you think that as they are getting to be a more professional sport they will tighten all that up?

34:00

Phil

That is the hope. For the integrity and longevity of the sport. When you do a business assessment you do a risk assessment and look at what are the threats, what are the threats to our business as a sports coaching company and one of the biggest threats to CrossFit, for me is the doping. You look at cycling in the 90's I will never know how cycling survived that... we lost so many sponsors. When I first got into cycling and young 18,19 year old guy who was half decent could find a place on a team with a half decent salary because people liked cycling, there was money in it, people sponsored. Cycling is still recovering in terms of sponsors and people coming into the sport, that's huge hit of people being caught

I don't think it's an easy task for the guys sitting in charge of this. What we need is a better testing system than we have now. But we don't want to be in a situation where we end up ruining the sport by losing the integrity of the sport and I think there is a balance there, you have to get the procedures better than they are currently.

35:50

Jowsey

It's a fine line and what CrossFit is about, we are about health. They are trying to separate the two (sport and health) out. CrossFit is for everyone and for health but if the sport side, taking drugs, isn't promoting health. It's a tough predicament to be in.

36:20

The business model is that you are damned if you do and damned if you don't. If you don't catch the people you are in trouble you've got people pointing fingers. You tighten up procedures and you start catching people and you lose integrity of the sport. Either way you lose integrity of the sport. I have huge amount of respect for how difficult the job is.

Have they got the balance right in its current format? My instinct is not quite. There's work to be done but it might just be an evolutionary progress and it's a new system. The experiences I've had of the doping policy, so far, coming from a very strict cycling background. You finish a race and you get a body guard, essentially, stand next to you until you have peed in the cup, given blood etc, etc and we are not quite there yet.

I'm hoping we will be but there is still a long way to go.

37:35

Jowsey

Yeah, agree, agree for sure. Going back to, on that process of sponsorship – this is where we worry about the top guys getting sponsorship but the nature of CrossFit and Instagram you've got people with following and sponsorship because of how they look – they are a marketable athlete regardless of success... so yeah there is some girls out there who are the best of the best but are not as marketable as some lesser athletes and males likewise.

It's out there in the fitness industry ... 1 in 6 males are taking performance enhancing drugs – how many of those are guys wanting to get jacked to stick it on Instagram to sell a fat loss programme, to sell an insta fame profile. They are taking those steroids to look better and get sponsors and live off Instagram like 99.9% of the world seems to be right now... No one wants a career anymore – it's intsa fame! That's the way it's going.

39:04

Well, thanks for that insight Jowse... for those listening at home we also do philosophy, Instagram philosophy and Jowsey is leading the way.

It's because I'm so epic on it!

Good, I hope we have stimulated some thoughts, questions. The idea was to do something slightly different, from the coaches' side on the new format. To summarise I think most of us enjoy it. From the coaches in the network, I'm not yet to talk to a coach who hasn't enjoyed it. I've talked to most of the guys on the circuit. I think perhaps some of them feel a financial pressure to move around and go to the sanctionals and get a sport at the games, if they are not as confident in their ability to finish in the top 20... we are all thinking about it. I think the top 20 from last year will look different to the top 20 this year, a lot of athletes will go I've only, with respect, got to be in the top 40 in my region, now they have to be top 20

in the world – I think there will be a lot of athletes peaking for the open and taking it very seriously which will create a buzz and excitement – I'm looking forward to that battle. All in all, we quite like the idea of the sanctionals and where it's going, we feel like we'd like some more information...

I think the format of the Games. Like, where does different qualification routes take you, and how much game time for that. Guys need to know, you might just get one day. It's a big trip for one day.

41:05

Phil

Yeah, it's a long way to go for one work out.

Speculation let's not do that.

Thank you for listening.

We'll be back with the interview with Samantha Briggs. I'll be interviewing her, so I'm going to try and bring my A game. We're going to try and get a little bit of a different slant from her... of course CrossFit but maybe ask her about her political views... so where we go.

Take it easy, team.

