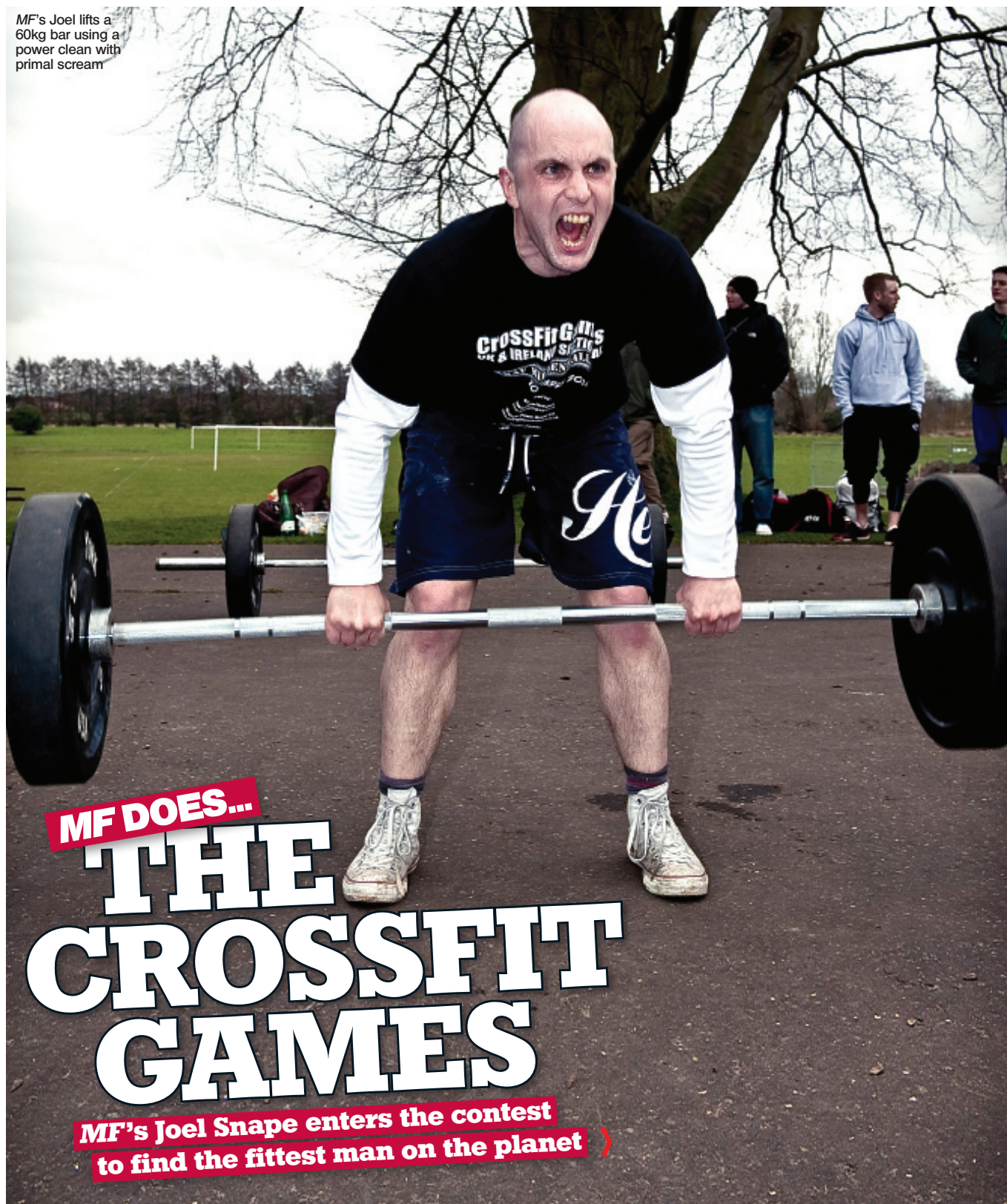


out there

■ Fitness classes, races and adventures tried and tested by the *MF* team

MF's Joel lifts a 60kg bar using a power clean with primal scream



MF DOES...

THE CROSSFIT GAMES

MF's Joel Snape enters the contest to find the fittest man on the planet



Note Joel's chest does not touch the bar. So that isn't a valid rep



CrossFit's Kempie looks on as Joel prepares for the overhead anyhow

It's 9am on an overcast Saturday morning in Suffolk, and more than 70 people are standing in a field near Mildenhall Pavilion, cheering their lungs out and yelling advice. They're not watching football or rugby: they're bellowing encouragement at a group of men doing pull-ups. Quite a few of them are wearing T-shirts with slogans like 'CAN'T BREATHE - CAN'T MOVE - WANT MORE'. Welcome to the CrossFit Games.

CrossFit is a fitness programme beloved of thousands – including many of the police, the military and pro fighters – for its combination of functional exercises, heavy lifting and lung-popping cardio. The website crossfit.com posts recommended workouts almost every day, and plenty of followers make up their own schedules. Intensity is key and workouts are often timed. In 2007, the natural progression of this idea produced the first CrossFit Games, where dozens of athletes tackled three different workouts in direct competition.

The games have since evolved into a two-day event where athletes go through eight separate workouts,

all of them brutal. The finals take place in sunny Aromas, California, but they're so popular that CrossFit HQ has introduced sectional and regional qualifiers. The UK and Ireland sectional in Mildenhall is the first stop for anyone who wants to claim the \$10,000 prize and title of 'fittest man on the planet'. Whoever that is, I'm pretty sure it won't be me. But I'm going to try my luck anyway.

Push and pull

Today there are three workouts to get through. I had been a bit apprehensive about these – they weren't announced until Tuesday, and CrossFit is infamous for including Olympic lifts and the dreaded 'muscle-up' (a combination of a pull-up and dip on gymnastic rings), neither of which I'm very good at. Thankfully, the organisers have chosen to stick with moves that anyone can do.

The first workout is three rounds, as fast as you can, of ten pull-ups, 15 GHD sit-ups (done on a Glute-Ham Developer machine that allows you to hook your feet under a bar and lean right back) and 20 20kg barbell 'thrusters' (a combination of squat and military press). Form isn't as important as range of motion

so, for instance, you can swing your legs as much as you like on the pull-ups but your chest *must* touch the bar. I grind through in 7min 39sec, but I have to stop and catch my breath a couple of times.

Other competitors do every rep without slowing down. A rugby player called Mike, who does the whole thing in under five minutes, tells me that 'this is pretty much a typical CrossFit warm-up, except with no rests between the exercises'. It takes me 20 minutes of lying on the ground gulping water before I can breathe properly. I eat two apples and a bag of beef jerky, and I'm ready for workout two.

Setting the bar

'Can you do double-unders?' asks Chris 'Kempie' Kemp, the event

'It takes me 20 minutes of lying on the ground gulping water before I can breathe properly'



Those workouts in full

We really do not recommend that you try this at home

Workout 1

Complete three rounds in 12 minutes

- 10 **pull-ups** (chest must touch bar)
- 15 **GHD sit-ups**
- 20 **thrusters** using 20kg barbell

Workout 2

Complete in 12 minutes

- 50 **double-unders**
- 3 rounds of 3 **overhead anyhows** with 60kg and 10 **toes-to-bars**
- 40 **double-unders**
- 2 rounds of 3 **overhead anyhows** with 60kg and 10 **toes-to-bars**
- 30 **double-unders**
- 3 **overhead anyhows** with 60kg and 10 **toes-to-bars**

Workout 3

Complete in 15 minutes

- **Row** 500m
- **Carry** 20 15kg sandbags across basketball court (10m)
- **Run** 1,200m
- **Carry** 20 15kg sandbags across basketball court (10m)
- **Row** 500m

organiser and the man who'll be my judge for this workout. I nod, gripping my lucky skipping rope. In fact, this classic skipping-for-showoffs move is my secret weapon – I've been practising it for the past three days. After an initial fumble after just three I blast through 47 more in one go, more than I've ever done before in my life. Amazingly, I'm the first to the barbell station and the crowd actually seems impressed.

The second move of this workout is an 'overhead anyhow'. In this you need to get a 60kg barbell above your head three times, any way you like. In earlier heats I've seen people doing snatches, but I stick to a power clean/push press combo. Normally 60kg would be a reasonable weight for me but, with my legs fried and lungs heaving from the skipping, it's a killer. I crank out three reps and hit the third exercise fast. And then everything goes wrong.

The third part of the workout is ten reps of toes-to-bar, CrossFit's hardcore version of a hanging leg raise. The secret to doing loads of these is to hit a consistent rhythm of swinging, and I just can't get



Skipping is Joel's secret weapon. Unfortunately it's in the second workout and after the GHD sit-ups in the first (right) he's absolutely wiped out (below)





After two hellishly tiring workouts, the third asks you to row a for a kilometre

'It's like a marathon – everyone wants to do well but nobody wants to see anyone else fail'

going. Whether it's because my abs are fried from the GHD sit-ups or because I haven't practised the move, I'm reduced to cranking out single reps as the rest of the field storms past me. On a dozen reps my feet come up just short of the bar and Kempie calls 'doesn't count', which makes the whole thing even more exhausting and frustrating. I also seem to be doing a lot of involuntary shouting.

We have to do another two sets of both overhead anyhows and toes-to-bars before returning to the skipping rope, and by the time I get to my third set of overheads I'm yelling twice per lift – a big grunt for the clean and a primal scream for the press. After 40 more double-unders there are another two sets of each move before another 30 double-unders and one more set of each, but at the 12-minute cutoff I haven't even made it to the final go on the skipping rope. I'm not as tired as I was after workout one but I'm really annoyed with myself for falling short.

Sprint finish

Fortunately workout three has nothing too complicated to worry about – just a pair of 500m rows, a 1,200m run and a lot of sandbag carrying. I've also developed my own little cheerleading section, full of friendly CrossFit devotees I've only just met. On the run, one competitor actually shouts encouragement as he's passing me. Another runner in my heat collapses with cramp halfway around, but after the judges check on him he completes the course and crawls back onto his rower, getting the loudest cheer I've heard all day. The vibe's

more like a marathon than a tournament – everyone wants to do well but nobody wants to see anyone else fail. I finish a minute ahead of the cutoff in 13min 54sec, while the best times are around the 11min mark.

The next morning, my girlfriend tells me that watching me get out of bed is like seeing Bambi skidding around on a frozen lake. Two days later, when my abs are so sore that I can hardly walk upright, the results arrive: I came 45th out of 53. That afternoon, Kempie sends me a note saying 'Good graft, you just need some coaching'.

Four days later, I'm back in the gym, working on my power cleans. There's always next year. ■



It's not just killer weights moves – there's a punishing run too

Getting Cross

Try the toughest moves from the games in the 'comfort' of your gym

Sandbag carry

Games version

Competitors carry 20 15kg sandbags across a basketball court and back. Doing four at a time earned big props.

Gym version Try the classic Farmer's Walk – up and down the gym with a heavy set of dumb-bells.



GHD sit-up

Games version Three rounds of 15 sit-ups on a custom-made Glute-Ham Developer (see beaverfit.com). Sadly, gyms never have these.

Gym version Hardcore CrossFitters wedge their feet in the lat pull-down machine, but that'll get you chunked out. Try gym ball crunches for a similar but less vicious move.



Kipping pull-up

Games version CrossFit emphasises using the whole body, so any way of getting your chest to the bar is acceptable, including kicking your legs. Watch a demo at bit.ly/15qIN.

Gym version These are tricky on the angled pull-up bars most gyms have. One alternative is to put a Smith machine bar on its highest notch and do pull-ups from there.



The camaraderie among CrossFit competitors makes it a rewarding day



To watch Joel competing in the CrossFit Games go to mensfitness.co.uk/links/mfcrossfit