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## CrossFit and WME-IMG - The Rise Of Non-Traditional Sport

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I do CrossFit.

There. I said it. At the very beginning of this post, thus conforming to most stereotypes about those wedded to the strength and conditioning programme first devised by husband and wife team Greg Glassman and Lauren Jenai.

Since first “*Forging Elite Fitness*”™ in 2000, CrossFit has become the largest gym organisation globally with some 13,000 affiliates around the World. It has claimed some 4 million devotees to its programmes largely based on aerobic activity (running, rowing, biking), calisthenics (body weight exercises) and Olympic weightlifting (squat, snatch, clean and jerk).

This overall philosophy was famously simplified by Glassman into 100 words. Put simply it consists of varied functional movements performed at high intensity combined with healthy eating and living.

Earlier this month it was announced that WME-IMG, the talent agency and sports and entertainment group, had signed a deal with Glassman (he bought out his ex-wife’s shares during their divorce in 2012) to promote its content, marketing and live events. The agreement follows WME-IMG’s recent acquisitions of both Professional Bull Riders and the Ultimate Fighting Championship reflecting a move by the agency into non-traditional sports.

These non-traditional sports have obtained greater prominence of late in much the same way as renowned disrupters such as Uber or Airbnb. They have taken something commonplace and given it a twist. This is often also coupled with embracing new technology and/or social media and CrossFit is no different.

In the already saturated world of health and wellbeing CrossFit has carved its own niche appealing to the young and old across the full spectrum of fitness and ability. In much the same way as golf is designed to allow you to compete against those more proficient by virtue of the handicap system, so WODs (workout of the day) can be scaled depending on your own level of fitness and ability. Secondly, such is the devotion of those who attend their ‘box’ that affiliates have become more than just a gym; they become the (fitness) community to which each member belongs.

No-where is this more obvious than with the CrossFit Games.

Over 330,000 athletes from 175 countries entered last year’s competition via its online qualifying system the CrossFit Open. During the Open new workouts are released each week and, adding to the sense of community, everyone can measure themselves against, and indeed watch online, the bench marks set by the so called “Fittest on Earth”.

After the top athletes in the Open have been whittled down by a further regionals competition, the top 40 men and women in each category (which range from teenagers aged 14-15 to Masters aged 60+) compete at the Games themselves.

From starting on the family ranch of Glassman’s right hand man, Dave Castro, in 2007 the Games have evolved into a weeklong celebration of all things CrossFit streamed live on the internet and broadcast on ESPN. For the

The logo for Squire Patton Boggs, featuring the word "SQUIRE" in a large, serif font, followed by a stylized blue and green circular icon, and the words "PATTON BOGGS" in a smaller, sans-serif font below it.

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last 6 years the Games have been held at the StubHub Centre in Carson, California however from this year they move to the Alliant Energy Centre in Madison, Wisconsin.

The CrossFit Games has also allowed a generation of athletes such as four times Games Open winner Rich Froning, Ben Smith, Matt Fraser, Sam Briggs and Katrin Davidsdottir (to name but a few) to make a very comfortable living doing what they love with prize money for the winners of each Open category in 2016 being a healthy (see what I did there) \$275,000.

Athletes and affiliates are also widely followed on social media, particularly Instagram, which again allows their followers to see them training and completing astounding feats of accomplishment which in turn drives them to train harder.

Given CrossFit is already doing a good job of growing its user and fan base, it may be asked why it needs to partner with WME-IMG?

WME-IMG will no doubt see CrossFit as the perfect platform to present sponsorship and commercial opportunities for brands and sponsors. Tough Mudder's recent media partnership with Sky Sports is another example of the surging popularity and opportunities afforded by mass participation fitness events.

CrossFit's partnership with Reebok has already seen the fitness brand, previously best known for its pump-up basketball shoes, reinvigorated and boost sales with a new cutting edge clothing range that is not only technologically advanced but looks good inside the gym and out. CrossFit in turn benefitted from significant investment in the CrossFit Games allowing it to immediately increase the money for the Open category winners from \$25,000 to £250,000.

The answer may also be because, despite its disciples extolling its virtues to anyone who will listen, and indeed some who will not, it remains an unheard of 'sport' and will continue to face issues breaking into the mainstream market. One only has to look at the criticism aimed at eSports, other non-traditional sports or indeed shortened versions of more established sports to see how difficult it is to be recognised as a genuine 'sport'.

Whatever your view, it would appear that CrossFit is here to stay and its future looks increasingly healthy.

Now where are my trainers? I'm off to do my WOD...

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