



The Inception of the Box: CrossFit Ramallah

By Fatima AbdulKarim



Here are three main things you need to know about CrossFit and CrossFitters: they call their gym a box; they name their daily routine a WOD (Workout of the Day); and that's all they talk about.

So when there is a group that talks about sore hands, weights, healed injuries that have been treated at a gym rather than at a clinic, or practicing in a gym without machines, you will know that they are fellow CrossFitters.

And although they are all relatively new to the sport, they are already addicted to it.

"Opening our first facility was a dream. I never doubted that this would be my career," says Basel Qatamesh, owner of Pal-Fit, home of CrossFit Ramallah.

Qatamesh is 27 years old, fresh out of a master's degree program in sports therapy at Leeds Beckett University in the United Kingdom, after earning a bachelor's degree in physical education at the University of Jordan. Nonetheless, he knew that a university education would not be enough for him to become an expert in the field. Starting at the age of seventeen, Basel had come a long way from weightlifting and boxing championships to opening "The Box." He started as a trainer in a school yard and then moved to swimming pools and boxing gyms to become a coach at CrossFit boxes and finally at his own.

What distinguishes CrossFit from other traditional and non-traditional sports is that it treats women and men alike, equal in everything. The



Sireen and Yazan, one of the 15 married couples in Pal-Fit.

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modifications are made in accordance to individual capacities, regardless of gender. This setting of equality is perfect pavement for the unique group bonding that is genuinely felt at The Box.

With females making up nearly 40 percent of participants at Pal-Fit and age groups ranging between 17 and 50 years old, it's clear that there is no limit or restriction to what you can do with CrossFit.

This is a sport that focuses a lot on your body strength and conditioning through your

Rula, a member of Pal-Fit since January 2015.





Group photo at the very first event in Pal-Fit, The Eid Throw-Down (competition).

cardiovascular and respiratory endurance as well as your strength, stamina, balance, and agility. Most classes are one-hour-long group classes, through which a positive competitive spirit raises the collective reinforcement, one to another, in single, pair, or group WODs.

CrossFit is a combination of multiple disciplines such as Olympic-style weightlifting, aerobics, and body weight exercises.

Shadi Baker, choreographer and fitness trainer, says that the beauty of this sport is that it develops mutual respect on both the collective and individual levels. It's a type of human development that allows you to increase your strength and body responsiveness.

CrossFit is enjoyable because its program is never constant. Your WOD is different every day. Although the

exercises may be repeated, they are done in a different sequence and for a different purpose each day.

Coach Qatamesh believes that what distinguishes the "good system" in CrossFit practice is "how this system evolves and adapts with changes in the surroundings. CrossFit has done a very good job with that."

CrossFit is a general strength and conditioning program, says Qatamesh. "The word general means that the program does not specialize in any specific training pattern. It is always changing, and the key point is functionality." The movements and exercises performed during the one-hour classes at The Box are, in fact, very much daily life practices.

Shadi Baker, who is training to become a certified CrossFit coach, says, "The sport springs from our daily

movements. For example, squats or box jumps, pushing and pulling as well as running, swimming, or climbing. The movements that we make all the time are utilized by the program."

An element of extra challenge is added to these exercises by including time caps or adding speed and weight limits, giving your practice an end goal and criteria for progress to look out for.

The trainees place their results after each class without any hesitation on a board in the middle of The Box, making their progress not only measurable but also challengeable, first and foremost by themselves.

In the Ramallah Box, most of the coaching is done in Arabic and most of the terminology is already Arabized, encouraging

inclusiveness and respect for the general social and cultural context in Palestine.

Pal-Fit also makes use of social media by using smart open-source applications or Web-based registration platforms that serve to reserve participants' class information. In addition, there is a Facebook page, a special members-only group, and an Instagram account that promote with pride the achievements of trainees, best practices, and all results. All participants have access to this information and are thus connected to fellow CrossFitters and their Box whenever it's convenient. A key to the openness and friendliness that trainees feel at Pal-Fit is the continued support and encouragement that they receive from fellow teammates whose experiences have been inspiring.

Amani Manasra, a fellow CrossFitter, had hurt her knee very badly a few years back, cutting her ACL (anterior cruciate ligament). The healing process included physiotherapy, and her way back to her sportive lifestyle was

Amani Manasra..
(one of the
interviewees you
might use a quote
or sth).





Weightlifting (Technique class).

through CrossFit. Two months of training got her back on track, she says.

“Crossfit made me a confident, strong, and healthy person. It changed the way I thought about myself and about others around me. After a couple of months of training with Coach Basel Qatamesh, I was able to do everything; my knee is not an issue any more. I feel stronger than ever, and I know I can still do even better! Crossfit is my life!”

Shadi Baker had been subject to a knee injury, and after surgery, he went for physiotherapy with Coach Qatamesh, who gradually introduced CrossFit into Shadi’s life. “I was challenged, inspired, and very interested in CrossFit during my therapy.

Pal-Fit voluntary event for Jasmine Charitable Society for Children with Special Needs (JCS) (coach Basel appears in the photo).



The speedy recovery and personal development was fascinating.”

Unfortunately, throughout the 15 years since the founding of this sport, many trainees have been injured, especially in the United States, where this sport was first founded and introduced. However, most of those injuries did not happen under the supervision of certified CrossFit coaches.

The process of affiliating to the worldwide CrossFit network of over 10,000 boxes is not an easy one, but today we have an affiliate in Palestine. Only after a series of training sessions that lead first to Level 1 Certification can one be granted the title CrossFit Coach. So far, only Pal-Fit: Home of CrossFit Ramallah offers the full experience of this enjoyable sport in Palestine, with aspirations to spread across the country.

Fatima AbdulKarim is a Bedouin TV journalist and a fellow CrossFitter. She has four dogs and is stepping into parenthood with twins. Fatima has experience in outdoor experiential learning expeditions and LARP (Live Action Role Playing).

Article photos courtesy of Pal-Fit.