



CrossFit provides quite a workout, with a lot of variety

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Kristen Olson doesn't mind the physical demands of a high-intensity sport, having played lacrosse for George Mason, where she ran, then ran some more, then ran yet again.

She was a slender midfielder, capable of sprinting up and down the field without stopping to catch her breath. If there was an ounce of body fat on her, it hardly showed.

Two years ago, she was introduced to CrossFit. Her life changed forever – for the better.

"I've never been in the shape I'm in now," said Olson, one of 160-plus participants in the CrossFit/USA Weightlifting Open that concluded Sunday at Cheyenne Mountain Resort.

Created in the 1970s by Californian Greg Glassman, CrossFit has evolved into one of the nation's most popular strength and conditioning programs, requiring participants to have power for weightlifting, stamina for sprinting and athleticism for gymnastics.

It's practiced in almost 1,700 gyms worldwide, and it's also part of the workout regimens of fire departments, law enforcement agencies and military organizations – a challenging but rewarding combination of lifting barbells; propelling pull-up bars; swinging from still rings; climbing and jumping rope; and carrying heavy objects across long distances.

"When you get competitive with one thing, you've got to train in that sport, that activity," said Olson, 29, of Centennial. "All-around fitness, endurance, strength, this is it. This fits all of it in one thing. ... I get so much out of it."

"It's more engaging," added Shaina Jordan, a 25-year-old Colorado Springs resident. "It suits me because I like the variety. ... It's kind of outside anything I've known before."

Most CrossFit workouts (everything a newbie needs can be found at www.crossfit.com) last 20 to 40 minutes, serving the dual role of increasing physical fitness and preventing injuries. There usually aren't many CrossFit competitions like the inaugural three-day event at the Country Club of Colorado, with eight men's and seven women's Olympic weight classes.

Almost all elite-level endurance athletes nowadays incorporate some aspects of CrossFit into their training. Football players use it in hopes of becoming quicker, and it's a regular element for Olympians in track and field, swimming, triathlon and rowing. Mixed martial arts fighter Chuck Liddell and the Florida Marlins even break a sweat with CrossFit.

"Weightlifting is a little harder on your body because you're lifting heavier loads," said Paul Fleschler, owner of RedRocks CrossFit in the Springs. "In weightlifting, the object is to lift as much weight as you can over your head. In CrossFit, they always use a lighter weight. You just try to lift it as many times as you can in a certain amount of time."

"We're very specific, and we're really trying to hone in on one lift at a time," said Natalie Burgener, an Olympic Training Center lifter. "We do a lift, sit down and rest. Do a lift, sit down and rest. ... With them, it's all about capacity, seeing how much you can put out."

Burgener admitted that CrossFit is "beyond a shadow of a doubt, way more intense. What I do is this half of it," pointing toward two weightlifting platforms. "And it's really hard. To end that and go straight into a really intense workout makes it five times harder."