

"Weighing in" on WZA and the CrossFit Open

The second weekend in January (just a little over one month ago), I competed at Wodapalooza (WZA).

WZA is a three-day competition held in Miami each year, where approximately 1,500 athletes and 25,000 spectators from over 30 different countries come together. In terms of size and the number of Elite athletes competing, WZA is second only to the CrossFit Games. Each year, WZA is prefaced with qualifying workouts, video submissions, and email invitations to determine which athletes have earned the right to throw down in Miami and experience competition at a higher level. In 2017, I became one of those athletes.

When I first realized I made it to Miami, I excitedly registered and broadcasted the news across all my social media channels. Hooray! Then, reality began to sink in. I have only been doing CrossFit for two years. There are so many people who are better than me—who lift more weight and finish workouts in less time. I'm the girl who struggles with double-unders, who can only do pistols on one side. I still eat *pizza* on the weekends... I haven't even gone Paleo. How could I go to Miami?

In the months leading up to Wodapalooza, I struggled with feeling like I didn't deserve my spot. Especially as the holidays commenced and I ate Christmas cookies and skipped the gym in favor of wine and movie nights with family, guilt weighed heavily on my conscience.

When January finally arrived, I can honestly say that I was significantly more worried than excited. Nevertheless, I knew I would go. I had already registered, paid, and reserved a hotel room for the weekend with friends from my gym. Propelled forward by financial commitment, the accountability of my box, and some deep-seated resolve, I packed a suitcase with sports bras and Spandex and headed to Miami.

At the beginning of my first workout on Friday, my hand visibly shook as I stepped onto the stage and passed my scorecard to the judge. As soon as the music started and I hook-gripped the barbell in my hands, though, my nerves faded away. I hadn't forgotten how to do a thruster, and the people cheering from the stands weren't condemning me for the cheesy breadstick I ate several nights before—they just wanted to see everyone performing their best.

The experience of competing at Wodapalooza turned out to be an important lesson for me. I met so many amazing people in just three days, and I was reminded (and blown away) about the awesome community fostered by CrossFit.

One of the Wodapalooza workouts called for double-unders and, as mentioned before, I struggle with that movement. The competitor in the lane next to mine finished her workout quickly and, rather than resting on the sideline, stepped immediately into my lane to cheer for me. While I painstakingly worked through one double at a time, she shouted advice and encouragement until my time was up. And she wasn't the only one.

January 13–15 were days filled with teamwork and inspiration. I watched as adaptive athletes overcame physical challenges, athletes in every division pushed each other to peak performance, and everyone present became stronger together. In the athlete warm-up area, one girl achieved her first muscle-up as strangers stopped for high-fives and applause. I became friends with the other girls in my division and

grew closer with the people from my own gym who came to compete and spectate. My roommates even sacrificed sleep by setting a 5:30am alarm to support me in an early morning race.

By the end of the trip, I learned that I did belong in the competition. I participated in the qualifying workouts and published video submissions on YouTube, just like everyone else who competed. I may not have been the strongest or the fastest, but I completed every movement to the best of my ability. I practiced pull-ups on a rig beside Noah Ohlsen. I tried new things (who knew I could swim?) and was pleasantly surprised by my results, more than once. But most importantly, I didn't quit. Despite my initial feelings of fear and inadequacy, I did it anyway—and that is *exactly* why I deserved my spot at Wodapalooza.

I hope my experience encourages someone else to take the plunge and try something new. The CrossFit Open is happening from February 23–March 7 and registration is open now. In past years, I've heard people refrain from participating because they are not interested in competition or can't perform certain movements without scaling. The Open, however, is about testing your limits, identifying areas for improvement, and friendly competition in a non-stressful environment.

Author T.S. Eliot once asked, "If you're not in over your head, then how do you know how tall you are?" CrossFit is not only a way to achieve a healthy lifestyle, it also promotes personal growth. If you discover that you can't complete a certain movement in an Open workout, then celebrate! Now, you know what to work on. The Open is a great tool to track your progress, so that year-to-year you can see yourself surpass your most important competition: *you*.