

the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

Pull-up Challenge

Last winter we challenged the message board crew to drive towards 40+ pullups by September '04. After a couple of deadline extensions the contest officially ended with seven winners – Lynne Pitts, Kelly Moore, Aaron Fisher, Adam Walinsky, Larry Lindenman, Ryan Atkins, and Graham Hayes. Each received a CrossFit Champion T-shirt.

From a contest intended to demonstrate that the secret to high rep pull-ups is desire and that all methods couple successfully with desire, here are Larry Lindenman and Lynne Pitts recounting their paths to success.

“My pull-up challenge started when the contest was first posted. I had been completing the Workout of the Day since September 2003. I have been doing the WOD, as written, with no modifications, since February 2004. Along the way I have picked up or made every piece of equipment necessary to stock a Crossfit Gym, except I still substitute towel chins for rope climbs and I haven't purchased a GHR bench yet. I am a 43 year old police officer, with approximately 20 years of weight training experience and 37 years of athletic experience. I rockclimb and teach and practice martial arts. I am currently 6'0", 200 lbs, approximately 6-7 % bodyfat.

The 40 pullup challenge struck me as a great goal and a way to focus my efforts on the one exercise, which

is the staple of the Crossfit program: pullups. Being an active member of the on-line community I devoured all of the posts related to increasing pullups. I then conducted a pretest, with disappointing results: 8 wide grip, overhand, strict form (chest to bar), slow, pullups performed on the bar attached to my power rack. I had a long way to go.

Then IT struck. A profiteer entered the online community and began trashing training methods without offering alternatives. The message board became a mini battle ground and the idea of the 40 pullup challenge seemed tainted. I wanted to train for the wide variety of physical and mental adaptations, not just one event. I dropped any speciality training and forgot about the challenge.

However another goal came to surface. I wanted to lose body fat. At six feet, I weighed 218 pounds. I was at my heaviest ever in my life. Although I completed the WOD's my dietary discipline was almost non-existent. My max lifts were up but my cardiorespiratory efficiency was horrible. I was taking long rest periods during the WOD and my “running” times were pitiful.

My wife, who is an athlete, wanted to try out the South Beach Diet. I went along for the ride and lost a large amount of fat. I added a 3 mile walk on rest days to my training; this acted as a recovery workout and, I believe, accelerated fat loss. Once I entered the maintenance phase of the SBD, I switched to the Zone diet (5 block meals / 2 block snacks). Bottom line, I lost 18 pounds and now hover around 200# at 6 -7% body fat. When I completed the pullup challenge I weighed about 196#.



Pull-up Challenge (continued...)

Since I started with Crossfit, I have completed the Crossfit warmup. I started with 3 X 5 pullups as part of a warmup circuit. By the time I completed the challenge I was completing 3 X 10 pullups very easily. I just added pullups when I felt the current rep range was easy. I now complete 3 X 12 pullups for warm-ups, circuit fashion, with overhead squats, situps, dips, 20# med ball cleans, and Sampson stretches, I also work on hand walking and presses to handstands. If the WOD calls for pullups, I drop them from the warm up circuit.

Within the last three to four months, the subject of kipping came up on the message board. I was very familiar with kipping due to my background as a ring specialist in highschool and one year of college competitive gymnastics. As a police officer, I believe in training for reality, not training to pass a test. There has been some recent discussion about kipping being cheating. Quite frankly, if I have to get up on a second story balcony, from the ground, during combat, no one is giving style points and I'm kipping my ass off. During my final test, I kipped, every rep. The first 5-10 pullups felt like the bar was going through my chest, I was pulling so hard.

On to the final test: Kipping is hard to do properly on my power rack / pullup bar because I have to bend my knees. I went to a nearby park with a high, thin pullup bar, kicked my shoes off, and completed the challenge in approximately 1 -1.5 minutes. The last three or four reps were a little slow, the rest were rapid fire full extension. These are the points I posted on the message board as I progressed towards 40 pull-ups.

1. Only did the WOD (as prescribed 3 on 1 off) with supplemental pullups for warm-up (went from 3x5 to 3x10 in WU increased number in warmup about 1 per month barely noticed).

2. First set of pullups (in Feb) were from dead hang, on the pullup bar attached to my power rack, so I had to bend my knees. I did not kip when I got my original 8 and I pulled up and lowered slowly.

3. Yesterday's 33 were done on a bar at a park, my feet did not touch the ground at full hang, the bar was thinner than my bar, and I kipped, like a mad man. Also took off my shoes. The full 33 took about 1:00 or less (I didn't time it).

4. Since February I lost 18 pounds, maintaining around 6-7% body fat level (Zone + WOD, did a little South Beach Diet in February-March because my wife was

doing it and she cooks so what the heck).

5. Since that time all WOD times have dropped drastically (Today's benchmark Helen dropped by 3 min and 20 seconds).

6. I haven't tested pullups since February, but believed I could hit 30 because the 3x10 in the warmup are easy and done in a circuit fashion and during the WOD's with pullups, I'm able to string together greater numbers of reps to lower times.

7. Pullup technique with the kipping came easy to me due to my background in gymnastics, I think the addition of kipping, weight loss, and consistent practice in warm-ups and WOD's were the greatest factor in my increased pullups.

8. No Ben Gimbal required!"

"On the pullup challenge, I started with a density protocol, but quickly burned out on it. (The concept of the density protocol is to double your desired reps and break them into bite-sized chunks, done at the top of each minute. So, to get to 40, pick 80. Start with 20 sets of 4. Then 16 sets of 5, 13 sets of 6, etc. Idea being that when you get to 2 sets of 20 (with a full minute break, not at the top of the minute) you should be able to get your 40. The earlier rounds were easy; once I got to 8 sets of 10, I couldn't complete them all. Even taking the next step, which is a full minute between rounds, instead of starting at the top of the minute, wasn't enough to allow me to complete them. I suspect I should have stuck with it, but I'm not patient. So I started adding weighted pullups and holds at the top, and they seemed to make the difference. They were in small doses - 3-5 sets of 5 with 25 lbs, for example, once or twice a week, in addition to the WODs and an odd near-max attempt about every week or 10 days.

Other keys were probably that I didn't have a huge gap to cross; I started the challenge with about 25 pullups. Also, I stayed pretty consistent with extra pullup work from March to Sept. I bet that a lot of folks looked at that long time, and procrastinated themselves out of the contest."

- Lynne Pitts

