

Sports

Coomes exceeds goal, finishes top 50 in CrossFit Games

BY ABBY HOOVEN

At 65 years old, Shawn Coomes has put her name among some of the best CrossFit participants in the world for her age group.

In just her second CrossFit Games Open competition, Coomes placed 37th overall in the women's 65 and above age division.

"My goal was just to make the top 200. Last year was the first time that I'd ever done a competition and I was like 267th, I think," said Coomes.

About five years ago, Coomes was introduced to CrossFit after discovering she had the beginnings of osteopenia, a condition that weakens bones.

"Someone in my husband's office had been doing it and she had talked to us about it, and so that's how I landed there, just because of the doctor saying I needed to start with weight-bearing exercises," said Coomes.

With little to no experience in weightlifting and other CrossFit exercises, Coomes started at CrossFit 222 in La Grange and has been there ever since.



Photo submitted

Shawn Coomes took home 37th place in the 65 and above division of the CrossFit Games Open competition.

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“It was a great place for me to start because you start with learning how to do things properly, how to do things safely,” Coomes said.

Coomes attends workouts five days a week, typically taking weekends off to rest. Each workout takes about an hour to complete between the warmup and planned exercises.

Each week of workouts tend to focus on different muscle groups and parts of the body, and over time, the program hits every possible muscle group.

Workouts are also planned by coaches, which is something Coomes appreciates.

“Even though I’m athletic, I’m competitive, I’m not the type of person that’s going to go into the gym and just do it by myself. I need somebody guiding me and telling me what I need to do,” said Coomes.

When it comes to competitions, workouts are predetermined and monitored by coaches who judge, score and submit the workouts.

Anyone can enter, and at CrossFit 222, Coomes said everyone in the gym does the competition workout whether they entered or not.

“The way we do it at our gym is, it’s just over a three-week period and our owner actually programs that as our workout on the Friday that it comes out,” said Coomes.

Coomes said about 25 people from her gym entered the competition, but she was the lone entry for her age group. Worldwide, the 65 and above category had about 1300 entries.

Following the three-week competition, the top 10% of age-group athletes advanced to the quarterfinals. Coomes was one of about 130 participants to move on to the quarterfinals round, which took place in mid-March.

In the quarterfinals, four to six workouts were to be completed in a 48-hour time span.

“I did one Friday afternoon and we came back Saturday morning and did one and then Saturday afternoon and then Sunday morning,” said Coomes.

Unlike the initial round of competition, the quarterfinals workouts were not released until Friday afternoon at 3 p.m. when the competition was set to begin.

The top 30 athletes from the quarterfinals then moved on to the semifinals. Through-



Photo submitted

Shawn Coomes began her CrossFit journey about five years ago and competed in her second Open competition in February and March.

out the weekend, Coomes lingered around 32nd to 34th place before ending up in 30th.

“I couldn’t decide if I really was glad I was 30th or if I would have been okay not making it because at that point, being in the top 30, I was kind of getting to my max on stuff,” said Coomes.

As the competition went further, the workouts became more challenging. Workouts were also videotaped for submission to ensure athletes were correctly completing each exercise.

“The weights get heavier, the times get longer or they could get shorter. You’re supposed to be doing more in a shorter period of time,” said Coomes.

In the semifinals, Coomes finished in 27th place. The top 10 athletes advanced to the finals, which will be televised in August.

“This is only my second time to have ever been in a competition and a lot of the ladies at this point that make it to this, they’ve been competing in the games or they’ve been competing for 10 years,” said Coomes.

After surpassing her goal of breaking into the top 200- and

then some, Coomes said she didn’t expect to finish as high as she did.

“I am a very, very competitive person but I just didn’t have any concept to know that was even going to be a possibility,” said Coomes.

While scores were rolling in, a friend texted Coomes to check where she was ranked, but she initially didn’t want to look.

“It got to where there was a pressure that I was putting on myself because I was like okay, I can do this,” Coomes said. “Then I started thinking, okay, maybe I could finish the top 100. This was during that time frame, and I’d do another workout and we’d submit a score and I’m like okay maybe I can do top 50 on there. So, I was unbelievably surprised to be honest.”

Throughout the competition, Coomes said the people at CrossFit 222 were “unbelievably supportive” and came to encourage her during the workouts even when they didn’t have to show up.

Yet, Coomes is unsure if she will compete in next year’s competition.

“I don’t know. Right now, I don’t have a goal. I’m just going to work out tomorrow.

I’m just continuing to try to get stronger and do heavier,” said Coomes.

Going from never picking up a barbell to placing in the top 50 in the world in the CrossFit Games in a few short years is an impressive feat, but athleticism runs deep in Coomes’ family.

Her father played college ball, her mother was “very athletic” and her brother was “an exceptional athlete.” Growing up, Coomes cheered, ran track and played tennis before focusing on running as an adult and now participating in CrossFit.

In 2013, Coomes retired from her job of 30 years as a counselor at Henry County High School. During her working days, she didn’t have time to work out like she does now but admires the working moms that carve out time to attend workouts before or after work.

“I have so much admiration for them because of the example they’re setting for their kids of a very healthy lifestyle,” said Coomes. “I was not good about that and that’s something that I would definitely have hoped that I could have learned from them.”

As evident by their support

during the CrossFit Games, Coomes said the people at CrossFit 222 help create a welcoming atmosphere where everyone cheers for everyone despite varying levels of skill.

“It’s a different type of community workout out of anything that I’ve ever been a part of before,” said Coomes. “It’s always the encouragement. It’s not a competition against anybody else. It’s simply against yourself, trying to improve and grow and strengthen yourself.”

She added that CrossFit may sound daunting, but it can truly be for anyone at any level.

“The beauty of it is anybody can do it. People are very intimidated by it because of what they think it is. But it doesn’t matter what it is, it can be scaled to what your ability is,” said Coomes.

Whether it’s CrossFit or another form of exercise, Coomes encourages anyone at any age to move their bodies in some way.

“Just move for your health and lifestyle. Just get up and move and try something. I say try CrossFit 222, but just try something, like make some type of change if you want to get started,” Coomes said.