

NO LIMITS

Meet the women who push themselves through **extreme physical** and mental barriers to go further, get faster and be **fitter than ever**

The CrossFit coach

Candice Howe, 26, British



“For me, fitness is about participation in life. I grew up in Dubai, and returned in 2008 after six years away. I first heard of CrossFit in March 2008 and began

incorporating it into my gym routine. It wasn't until late 2009 that I started to commit to CrossFit as my sole training method. I really saw progress and got hooked.

“CrossFit workouts usually last between five and 20 minutes. Every workout is tough – it has to be if you want results. The hardest thing in the workout is the split second where you feel like slowing down or giving up. Pushing through that is tough.

“CrossFit uses functional movement, performed at high intensity in constantly varied combinations. The movements can be done at any fitness level; you always work hard, but the intensity is dictated by how hard you push yourself. We use gymnastic, bodyweight, weightlifting and cardio movements. It's not easy; you face physical challenges each time you train, always working to better your previous results.

“There are some world-class athletes

in the sport who are capable of things that seem impossible. You go into every workout knowing it's going to be tough. However, you learn to use this, to develop mental toughness and a willingness to take on a challenge head-on. It fosters a sense of teamwork, community and support.

“The mental challenges develop resolve, determination and willingness to work hard. You are accountable for what you achieve, and you learn about yourself and how to cope at your 'bleeding edge'. It becomes

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TOP TIP
“My magic words are determination, commitment, clear goals and a community. By defining what you want to achieve, you can begin to chip away at your goals. Having a great community is also critical to support and motivation.”

addictive as you strive to achieve different goals.

My partner and I are both certified CrossFit coaches. When

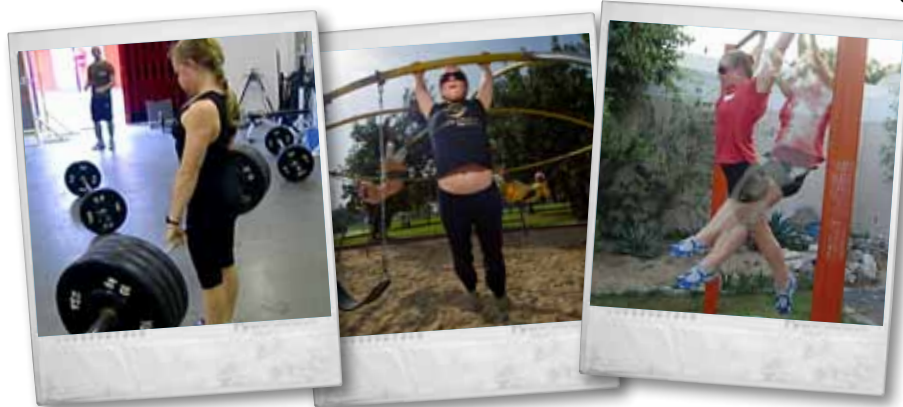
coached properly, it's very safe. The movements are complicated and the weights can get very heavy, however, we operate on three key principles: mechanics, consistency, intensity. Until someone has the correct mechanics [technique] they won't be loaded with weight.

“I am very proud of some of my benchmark times and lifts, and as far as I am aware, I'm the only female CrossFit coach in the UAE. It's exciting to be at the cutting edge of this kind of training. I recently coached a Gulf for Good challenger who put her success on Kilimanjaro down to my coaching – that was hugely rewarding.

“I have made some amazing friends through CrossFit, both here and around the world. Before opening our affiliate we took a CrossFit tour in the UK and spent three weeks visiting different gyms. CrossFit is growing rapidly but has retained a 'community' feel. It's good to know that you can turn up at a box [gym] anywhere and be welcomed.

“If you can do a workout that pushes you beyond your limits, you can do anything. Daunting conversations or tough projects seem so much more manageable. CrossFit teaches you to break things down and strategise how best to achieve your goals.”

If you want to know more visit
www.crossfitlifeparkdubai.com



The rock climber

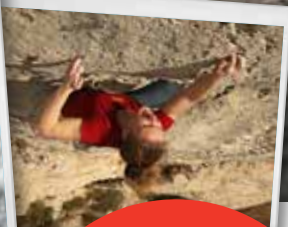
Juliette Danion, 29, French



"I was 14 when I first started climbing. I knew nothing about the sport until I stumbled upon an advert for a climbing gym in the Paris suburb where I lived. When I got home, I begged my mum to sign me up. I was convinced this sport was somehow meant for me; I fell in love with it the first time I got on a climbing wall.

"Climbing requires a lot of fitness, but you can start unfit and gradually improve. You work out all your muscles; lower and upper body. Climbing harder makes you lose weight.

"I became a member of the French National Climbing Team and competed in different countries. In 2007, I won the World Cup and the European Championship in bouldering [a style of rock climbing done without a rope]. Competing is a great experience, but a selfish one, because to achieve your goals you need to put all your

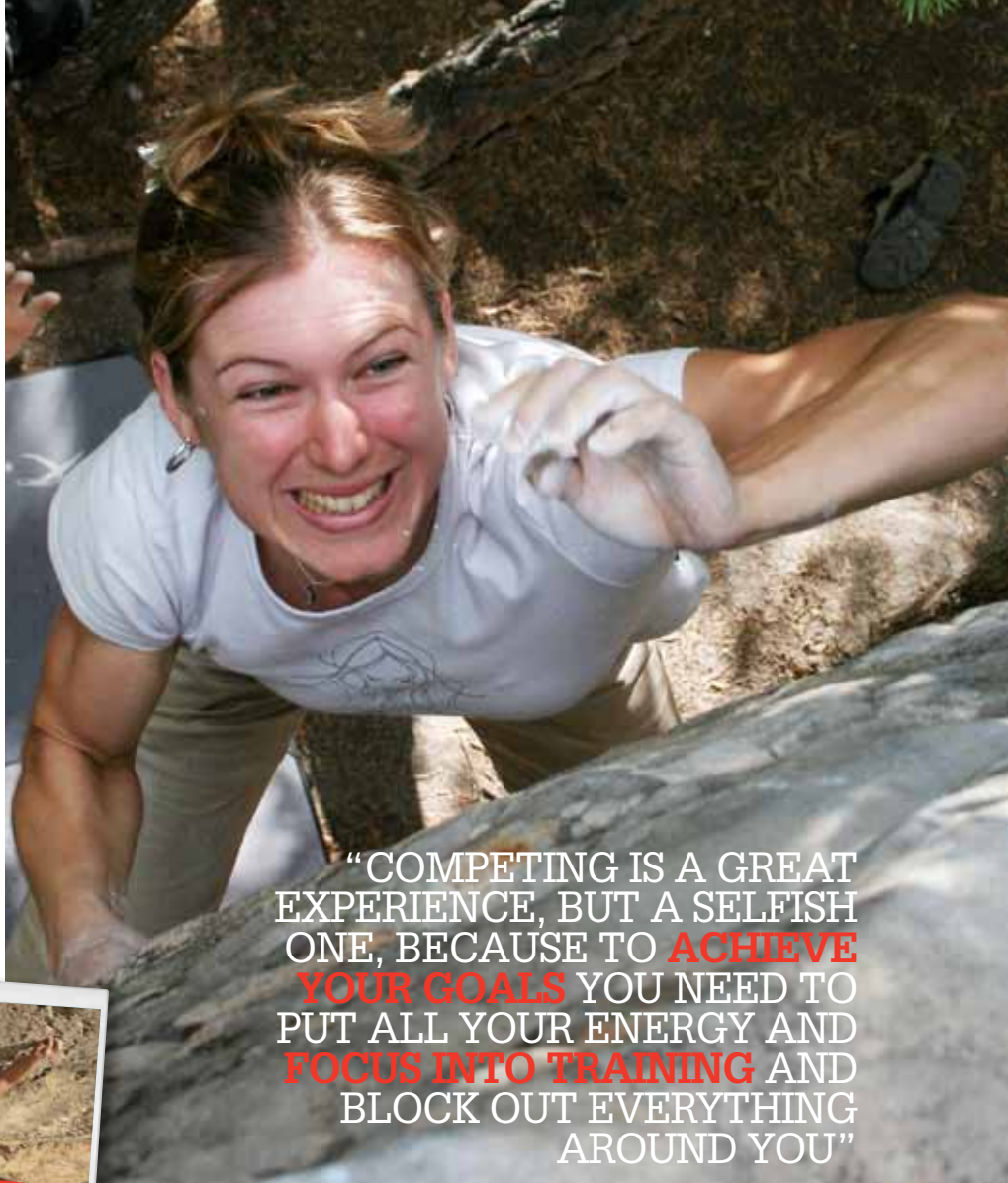


TOP TIP
 "Hang out with people who will motivate you. A weekend doing an activity you're interested in, cycling, climbing or even camping, has the power to get your mind off everything and after a weekend like that, you'll find yourself totally refreshed to start your week."

energy and focus into training and block out everything around you.

"Before moving to Dubai in 2009, I found out online that there was a climbing wall at the Club of DIHA, on Sheikh Zayed Road. I met fellow climbers there and we would go to different places to climb. There is actually very little climbing in the UAE, most of it is in Oman. We climbed cliffs in the mountains beyond Al Ain and climbed Hatta Crag, as well as places in Ras Al Khaimah. We also climbed the sea cliffs beyond Dibba; these were very special trips as the scenery is spectacular. I climbed outdoor despite the heat. It was tough but I enjoyed it.

"The sport is very diverse, you never get tired of it. You can climb indoors, outdoors, climb routes with ropes, boulders [without ropes] and even compete. You can do 'deep water solo', which means climbing on cliffs



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above the sea without rope and jumping or falling into the water.

"To me climbing is more than a sport; it guided my life and the paths I was following. When climbing, you have to take your time and be methodical. And like most sports, accidents can happen. In

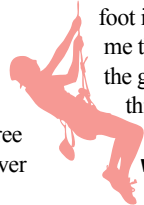
2009, I was with a group of friends in Oman. I started climbing a route as a warm up. We had three climbing ropes, none of which were mine as I hadn't brought my climbing gear from France. I picked a rope at random. It turned out to be 10 metres too short. This meant that when my belayer [the person who holds the climber's rope] lowered me to the ground, the end of the rope slipped through his hands. I fell about 10 metres, hitting the rocks below.

I don't remember anything about the fall as my brain just shut off. My friends somehow managed to get me down via a 40-minute walk along a scree slope and to the hospital. I will be forever

thankful to the people who were at the cliff that day, they saved my life because in Oman you can't be rescued by helicopter.

"I haven't climbed since the accident, because one of my feet is taking a long time to heal. Despite what I have been through, I believe I've been fortunate, because it could have been 10 times worse. Even when my foot is painful, I am still independent, which is what matters the most to me, having gone through phases when I wasn't. For a couple of months, I couldn't handle my life by myself, because my brain was too messed up because of the head injury. I suffered impaired short-term memory, lack of attention and difficulty in concentration. I would never want to go through that again but, despite my accident, I still believe climbing isn't dangerous if you are responsible and careful. I still love the sport and might want to get back to it when my foot is better. This experience has taught me that we easily forget the pain and keep the good moments in mind, which is a good thing after all."

If you want to know more visit www.climbingdubai.com



The activity addict

Tori Leckie, 34, Scottish



"I come from a sporty family. My dad was a swimmer and keen mountaineer, my mum played tennis and ran. I grew up in Hong Kong where both my

parents were into dragon boating; here I paddle with the Dubai Diggers, the UAE's national champions. In the Crew Championships in Macau last year, we came fourth in the world.

"I climbed my first big mountain at age 11 – Mount Kinabalu in Borneo – with my dad. We did Kilimanjaro as a family in 2000. After this trip, I decided I wanted us to do the Seven Summits together as a father and daughter team. However, this came to an abrupt halt last January on Aconcagua in Argentina – the highest mountain in the Americas. At camp two, suffering from altitude sickness and sheer exhaustion, my Dad descended to base camp and was choppered off. It was -40°C and the winds were ferocious.

In the morning, tents were strewn all over the place – they explode with the force. My tent buddy and I would take turns to get up in the night and reinforce the tent with massive rocks, but we slept with boots on and ice axes in hand, just in case.

"I do sports including swimming, boxing, cross training, strength training, and skiing, but the loves in my life are running and high-altitude mountain climbing. My training is always for an expedition or running event, but I've never followed a training plan. I don't even wear a watch anymore, I just listen to my body.

"In February I ran the Helambu Trek in Nepal. March will see me running the Balaton Supermarathon – a four-day, 200km-run around Lake Balaton in Hungary. In November, I am competing in Racing the Planet Nepal, a five-day, 250km event at high altitude in Nepal's Annapurna mountain range. It is fully self-supported so I will run with a pack containing all my food, clothing, sleeping bag for the duration. Oh and, of course, my Clarins! In between, I'm hoping to do some boxing training in Thailand, a double marathon in Singapore, and a multi-day event in Spain.

"While running is generally pretty safe, mountain climbing can be dangerous. Above 6,500m you are in the death zone;



the oxygen is so limited that your body starts shutting down. The better shape you are in, the better your body adjusts!

"Some of the mental challenges in sport are to continue when your body is screaming for you to stop, to go that extra mile when you feel tired, to push on when your legs feel like they're on fire. It's no secret that exercising gives you a high. If you combine that with beautiful scenery in amazing countries, like-minded people and learning more about yourself as you break new barriers, it makes for a great buzz.

"With mountaineering, you become very close to your fellow climbers quickly, by having to share tents with people you hardly know, having to go to the loo in front of them, having them see you at your worst and your best. It makes for a very real relationship which is what I love. I hate

superficial relationships – I sometimes get myself into trouble for being too upfront and personal, but for the most part I think this is a positive characteristic!

"When I was younger and swimming competitively, I became quite blasé about the awards I won and never really credited my hard work in achieving them, but now I'm delighted with recognition! The greatest rewards in life are exactly that because they require hard work, thought and preparation.

"Winning my first ever marathon – Petra Marathon – was a huge thing for me and after winning the Dead Sea Ultra Marathon in 2010, there was some publicity about me here, which was exciting."

If you want to know more visit fitchicksandfastwomen.wordpress.com



TOP TIP
"I think anyone can do anything. If you give time, determination, dedication and commitment, then throw in a heap of motivation, you can live your life to the full, achieve your greatest goals and fulfill yourself in a way that many people will never experience for fear of failure or lack of courage."

"I DON'T EVEN WEAR A WATCH ANYMORE, I JUST LISTEN TO MY BODY"



The via ferrata aficionado

Noura El-Imam, 28, Egyptian



“In December 2010, I was referred to Muscat Diving and Adventure Centre by a friend. There was a pre-booked trip happening and the senior climbing instructor

suggested I join a via ferrata trip. Via ferrata is Italian for ‘road with irons’ – a mountain route that is equipped with fixed cables, ladders, and bridges. No qualifications are needed, just mental power and physical strength. I love the outdoors, adventure and climbing, and so the trip turned out to be the best thing ever! Via ferrata was a whole new challenge. I practice at The World Trade Center climbing wall, usually with a friend or on my own for ‘me-time’.

“The physical demands are on your core strength, and you develop a strong upper body and flexibility. Mental power is needed to keep pushing yourself further up the wall. I wouldn’t say you have to be extremely fit, but the lighter you are in weight, the easier it is to climb. Overcoming the mental barrier of ‘too tired, cannot reach the top’ can be a challenge, but I always tell myself I’ve made it this far and only have a little bit more to go. It’s a refreshing sport and one where you put yourself and patience to the test. If I stop and decide to come down, I regret not having the patience to continue to the top.

“I completed a four-hour via ferrata route at Snake Canyon in Muscat, through high wires, zip lines, monkey bridge slack line, vertical and horizontal climbing. I went 100m over ground level above a stunning deep canyon; the whole route was a thrilling, mind-blowing experience! Unlike rock climbing, which requires much more physical exertion as you are constantly climbing up (vertically), via ferrata involves horizontal climbs, walks and vertical climbs mixed in, which keeps you on your toes wondering what will come



TOP TIP
 “Mental power is strong! I usually tell myself ‘don’t be silly!’ when I think I can’t complete another climb. Picture your life goals at the top of the mountain and go get it. It’s such a wonderful feeling once you’ve accomplished your climb.”

next. I don’t think it’s dangerous and I haven’t had any accidents. We did have one lady on my trip who lost confidence in climbing when she slipped once, even though she was completely safe with attached carabiners on the main fixed cable. That is when you realise how powerful your mental power is compared to your physical. Luckily, our senior climbing instructor was well equipped with safety ropes so he tied her up and helped her climb easily to the next level.

“Climbing can get addictive, but you either love it or not. Someone who isn’t sure about climbing and goes for it might fall in love straight away. Mental strength is built along the way and

climbing solo clears your mind as you put yourself to the test.

“Climbing leaves me feeling so much healthier and stronger and I walk away with an adrenaline

buzz. I’ve suggested it to nearly everyone I know, whether they are an outdoors junkie or not. It is an activity we offer at Muscat Adventure that gives you a sense of accomplishment once completed. Your fear of heights – if any – would have vanished and you feel ready to take on the next adventurous activity.

“The hardest thing about pushing my body to extremes is the fact that you want more and more... but sometimes your body functions much better when it has two days of rest. I’m always surprised at how relaxed and flexible I am after a good rest.”

If you want to know more visit the Muscat Diving & Adventure Centre page at www.holiday-in-oman.com



The free diver

Sara-Lise Haith, 41, British



"I got into freediving in 2002, when I was working in the Cayman Islands as a scuba diving instructor. Half the dive centre staff were from the Team Canada free

diving team and Calista Johnston from Team Canada was teaching freediving courses. She got me hooked! In the UAE, I freedive on the East Coast, and at every opportunity I have when on holiday.

"Freediving gives me a feeling of exhilaration, achievement, and empowerment. There are times when I feel I am squeezing my body to the max and, after relaxing, it allows me to do more. After freediving I feel so relaxed and drive home feeling like I've achieved something that I never believed I could. One has to get to know oneself quite intensely and, as with any sport, you have bad days when things don't go as planned. Ears can feel pressured and if you are stressed and tired your dives may suffer. On the other hand, freediving can also relieve you of stress if you approach it with an open mind and choose to let your woes go on the day of a dive.

"We have a fantastic freediving community in Dubai and we meet twice a week for pool training and yoga sessions. I am an AIDA (International Association for the Development of Apnea) instructor and teach freediving courses during the last week of every month at Al Boom Diving Centre.

"Students find equalisation tricky in the beginning, but as you practise and increase your depth, physical challenges are overcome. Some people are naturals and others require more time. Students may find some lactic acid build up during dives and this is felt mainly in the legs during constant weight dives. Pool training helps to overcome this; you don't have to be fit to begin with, but it helps.

IMAGES: CHRISTA WALLER



"THERE ARE TIMES WHEN I AM SQUEEZING MY BODY TO THE MAX"

TOP TIP

"If you are training competitively, a lot of discipline is required, but it's important to make training sessions fun too. If you want to excel, it takes a combination of proper diet, exercise including yoga, body and lung stretching, and applying the correct amount of mental and physical rest."

The main mental challenge is not thinking about the fact that you are holding your breath and need to breathe. When a diver is practising static apnea (holding your breath face down in a pool), the mind can play games and if you don't relax it affects how long you can hold your breath. I encourage students to do a puzzle in their mind to take their mind off the static. Another challenge is being able to relax and know that the surface is not far away. Some divers sink into the depths as if there were no limit, others take a while to adjust.

"I've never experienced any dangers, but there have been some accidents in the spearfishing and freediving world, mainly because divers don't adhere to the buddy system. You should never dive or practise holding your breath by yourself. If you are diving with an inexperienced buddy, you should not dive deeper than your buddy's limits.

"The hardest thing is ignoring the pain! My personal trainer, Shane Powell, always reminds me of this when he is pushing me to go that bit further. Lactic acid build-up has always been one of my biggest bug bears. You need to keep reminding yourself of your goals and in Tanya Streeter's words, 'Redefine your limits' on a constant basis.

"I entered the Fazza Freediving Competition for the first time in 2007, and I came fourth and was the only female competitor. Last year's competition attracted international younger competitors of both genders and I still made the top 10. We had only two females and a young 13-year-old Emirati girl who did fabulously. There is no ladies section for this competition and typically males can hold their breath longer than females, so I believe that is something to be proud of. Freediving encourages a healthy lifestyle and also healthy relationships with friends and family."

If you want to know more visit www.divasindubai.com

