

**A Conversation with Rich Froning
Four-Time CrossFit Games “Fittest Man on Earth” Title Holder**

Q. You have been called the “Fittest Man in History.” How does it feel to have held that CrossFit Games title for a record-setting four years?

A. The title is associated with the CrossFit Games and is a catchphrase associated with CrossFit early on. I’m not sure I was the fittest man on Earth, but I was honored to have the title for four years from 2011 - 2014. It represents a lot of hard work, although I enjoyed competing. Having that title was a fun run while it lasted.

Q. You were the first and only person to have taken the "Fittest Man on Earth" CrossFit Games title four consecutive years. You then went on to take team CrossFit Mayhem Freedom to a first-place finish in the CrossFit Games team category in 2016, 2017 and 2018. What roads led to these achievements and to CrossFit being such a big part of your life?

A. I grew up playing sports. I played baseball and football until I dislocated my shoulder my junior year. I always enjoyed the training part of baseball. I went to play college baseball and decided it wasn’t for me. I worked in a factory for six months and was a firefighter in Cookeville for several years. They paid my tuition, and I got a lot of life experience during that time that helped me grow up. I had to be fit to perform as a firefighter because other people are relying on you to be fit to do the job. The last semester in college, the head strengthening coach at Tennessee Tech showed me some CrossFit videos, and I started the workouts. I trained with my cousin and opened a gym together. We found out about the CrossFit competition and thought we should give it a shot. My cousin chickened out, but I signed up for the CrossFit games that winter. You had to get in the top 15 to transfer to regionals, and 75 guys were competing. I thought I would get destroyed. After the first workout I was in first, and after the first day I was in first place, but I ended up taking second, losing the entire games by three points. After I worked through the depression that came with feeling like I failed because of placing second, I was motivated to try again and came back to win the next year.

Q. How did placing second in your first CrossFit Games competition play into your faith journey?

A. After I placed second in the 2010 CrossFit Games, for the first time, I was a little down about the competitive side of everything. I felt like a failure, which led to depression. I didn’t want to work out at all anymore. But my faith pulled me out of it. My faith had been a huge part of my life when I was growing up, my mom and grandma influencing that part of my life. I thought faith was a big part of who I was, but I realized during this time that I was asking God to help me when I was putting too much of what I was into CrossFit and not putting enough of my life into Christ. That’s when I decided that Christ was my life first and foremost, not CrossFit.

Q. You have a tattoo of Galatians 6:14 (But far be it for me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.) Why is that verse so meaningful to you? Does it create opportunities to share your beliefs as a Christian?

A. The verse keeps me humble. It doesn't matter what I do as a person. The only thing that matters is what Christ did. What He did is way bigger than anything I'll ever do. I got the tattoo during the 2011 Open, which used to be our qualifier. That was the year after I got second. It is a reminder to me of my commitment to Christ and is also a conversation starter when people ask me what it means.

Q. What does a day-in-the-life look like for you?

A. When we get up in the morning depends on which of our kids is the alarm clock for the day. I usually go downstairs and do some type of intervals including biking running, rowing or swimming. We usually meet up with the team around 11 am and train until 1 pm, then break for lunch and hang out with the kids, run errands or have meetings at the gym. In the afternoon around 3 pm, it's back to the gym. The evenings are mass chaos until the kids go to bed.

Q. You are focused now on inspiring others to achieve maximum fitness. What are the attributes and skills it takes to push people to become their best selves?

A. To change, you have to want to be your best self. You can't make people want to do better for themselves. They have to be motivated to want it, and everyone is motivated in different ways. Some people need me to get in their faces and others not so much. Sometimes it's hard for me to level with people who are not motivated. There's not a ton of inspiring I need to do within the group I'm currently coaching. But, I do work to push them to put their heads down and work.

Q. What do you do to motivate yourself?

A. I think my original motivation came from what I call the "perfect storm." I was born with 32 first cousins, 25 of whom were boys. There was always some sort of competition going on like who can run around the pond the fastest, or who has the best batting average. My dad played sports growing up, but he never forced me into sports. We did a lot of chores though, and he would always find us something to do if we didn't have anything. My years growing up teamed with years that followed playing sports, taught me about competition and mental toughness. There are days I may not feel like doing anything, but as soon as I push forward and start moving, I immediately start to feel better.

Q. You have two daughters. What do you hope your passion for fitness inspires in them? What does it mean to you for them to grow into strong women?

A. I think it's an awesome thing that my daughters get to grow up in the situation they are in, seeing first hand that there are four girls on our CrossFit team, working out hard. They

get to see that it's okay to be fit and strong. I want them to know they can be strong women. They can do all the things that boys can do. I'll never tell them they have to be involved in CrossFit, but as long as they are in our house, they will be active. My kids are all learning that it's okay to be uncomfortable sometimes. The more you are uncomfortable, the more you can grow to become. There are times you want to quit, and you have to use your mental strength to push yourself. They are learning that physical discomfort can translate to growth; that it will be okay and you will come out on the other side. Lakeland, my oldest, likes being strong. She loves to play and is very independent. Sometimes she's even a bit aggressive.

Q. What are the steps parents can take to ensure their children are healthy?

A. Parents need to take steps their kids can see. I've never once told Lakeland or Trice to do a workout, but they see us do it and want to do it too. One day we were doing handstand walks during a workout in the barn and Trice started trying to get upside down on his hands too. I've realized how much kids soak up by watching, and it's cool to see what they pick up on without even thinking about it. I encourage other parents to get active with their kids. Create things to do with them. Get out and play some type of sport or create an obstacle course in your house. It does not work, it's playing.

Q. Between coaching, exercising and all that's on your plate, how do you prioritize faith and family?

A. My faith is one of four things I live by: faith family fitness and service. I try to get in the Word in the morning and again at night when everyone is asleep. I do Bible study with a few friends who are mentors, and Hillary and I do a devotional together as well. I'm fortunate not to have to leave every day like most dads. Although I do travel a bit, I get to spend a lot of time with my kids. Trace and Lakeland are old enough now to come out to the barn with us for our workouts, and I can take them to the gym with me where they play between workouts. Spending time with family is important. We start every meeting with a prayer and let everybody know that our faith is the foundation of what we believe and that's we are going to build everything on.

Q. What are a few health modifications you might recommend for those who want to start 2019 with a commitment to health and fitness?

A. I'd recommend picking three times a week to start some form of exercise. I believe CrossFit is for everybody, but if it's not for you, find something you can enjoy that allows you to move three times a week. Then reduce the number of times you eat per week by half and cut out sugar. It's in everything, and you may not realize it.

Q. What advice might you offer someone who also wants to launch a business inspired by a passion?

A. Surround yourself with people who are smarter than you. You need to have access to people you can ask questions to any time you need to, people that have done it before and

failed before. I found people who are better than me in certain areas. You have to enjoy what you do. If you don't enjoy it, it is going to be hard.

Q. Being spiritually fit is a big part of your life as well. What are some of your spiritual fitness routines?

A. I think having someone to hold you accountable is one of the biggest things you can do for your spiritual health. My wife holds me accountable. I also have a group of guys I look up to who prioritize faith and family. We all need someone who will call us out, who will be there if we need something, and with whom we can share things. Fitness of any kind requires getting into a rhythm daily and making time to commit to the work.

Q. How has your and Hillary's adoption journey transformed your life?

A. Our adoption journey transformed us completely. We have three kids and three different stories that make up our family. We both wanted children and had tried almost everything to start a family. Hillary had had surgery, taken shots, done IUI, and none of it worked. Our plan was to have three biological children, and God was like, we're going to do this differently. We talked about adoption, but initially, I wasn't ready. Luckily Hillary kept on me, and we realized that was what God was telling us to do. In 2014, Hillary found a birth mom whose adoption family backed out the week before. That's how our daughter Lakeland became ours. We were in the process of adoption again in 2017 and had a couple of heartbreaks. I had seen Hillary wrecked so many times that I wanted us to stop. She made me sign the paperwork for another try. That time we were one of 19 families to start. On Wednesday we were in the top five families and on Thursday we got the call to get our son, Trice. Then this last year during the open, Lakeland's birth mom gave us the opportunity to adopt our second daughter, Violet. Trice was 10 months old. We have a house full. They are all completely different, and they are all awesome.

Q. You have a barn at home where your team sometimes meets for their CrossFit workouts. Is there a way to incorporate exercise into anyone's lifestyle without going to the gym?

A. Ours isn't a typical barn. Lucky for me, my profession involves owning a lot of equipment. We have the barn set up so the team can train there because the gym can get a little crowded. You can take anything and turn it into a workout, though. You can use your body weight or basically anything for external weights. The beauty of CrossFit is you don't have to have the crazy equipment unless you are competing.

About Rich Froning

Recognizable by the tattoo of Galatians 6:14 scrawled from his left armpit to his hip, Rich Froning Jr. was dubbed the Fittest Man in History after winning four back-to-back individual CrossFit Games championships (2011-2014). He also won the worldwide Open for three consecutive years (2012-2014), and when he retired from individual competition after the 2014 season, he captained his affiliate's team, CrossFit Mayhem

Freedom, to two back-to-back Affiliate Cup championships in 2015 and 2016. Rich holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Exercise Science with a concentration in Fitness and Wellness from Tennessee Tech University. Rich owns and operates the CrossFit Mayhem gym in Cookeville, Tennessee where he also resides with his wife, Hillary, and their three children: Lakelyn, Trice, and Violet.

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