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UP 04:11
ROGUE

By Mary McCashin

35

Masters of

It's 7pm in Toronto, Canada. It's snowing sideways and on a frigid night when the Average Joe would bypass the gym for some time with Netflix, CrossFit Games competitor Matthew Lefave makes his way from his law office to his box to begin his training for the day. For the first time in four years he has a new goal – qualify for the Games again. Having qualified and competed in the 2012 CrossFit Games Lefave knows to expect the unexpected, but this year it comes with a different option – the CrossFit Masters Division for ages 35-39.



39

A NEW DIVISION OPENS UP THE PLAYING
FIELD AT THE 2017 CROSSFIT GAMES

the Game

PHOTO: SHOOTING MONSTERS

In the summer of 2007 CrossFit expanded into new territory – the CrossFit Games. With director (and mastermind) Dave Castro, the CrossFit Games began to push CrossFit athletes to new physical limits culminating with the crowning of a female and male as “Fittest on Earth”.

In 2011 the Games grew and became a three stage process. The first stage qualification being the Open which as its name implies is open to anyone, the second being Regionals, and the third being the CrossFit Games, previously held in Carson, California.

2017 brings more changes to the CrossFit Games – a new venue in Madison, Wisconsin and a 35-39 Masters Division. This is the first expansion to the Masters since 2013 when it was open to men and women forty and over.

Chris Spealler, an individual in seven CrossFit Games, affiliate owner, and trainer for CrossFit Headquarters was

not surprised by the new Masters age division. “The sport has evolved enough and the demands being presented to the athletes naturally yield to a ‘younger’ crowd. I think it was only a matter of time until the new category opened up.” During the 2016 Open, Dave Castro stated that the average Games athlete is 24 years old.

Neal Maddox has competed in four consecutive games (2012-2015). The 39-year-old athlete states, “It aligns it with other professional sports - like Olympic weightlifting that has age divisions. I think it came 4 years too late, but better late than never. I’ve been waiting for it for 4 years. Pretty excited to see how I stack up against people my own age even though I turn 40 this year.”

Any individual familiar with the Games knows that it often brings new challenges not often part of the typical CrossFit training regimen – a regimen that has only intensified





CHRIS SPEALLER

PHOTO: SHOOTING MONSTERS (LEFT PAGE); MARIE-LUISA DORMEUS (RIGHT PAGE)

“THE SPORT HAS EVOLVED ENOUGH AND THE DEMANDS BEING PRESENTED TO THE ATHLETES NATURALLY YIELD TO A ‘YOUNGER’ CROWD. I THINK IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME UNTIL THE NEW CATEGORY OPENED UP.”

every year. “I expect the average individual competing at the Regional level today is far fitter than the average Games athlete in 2012,” explains Lefave. “To qualify for the Games today you need to treat your training like a full-time job. I think that there are likely a lot of very fit people in their late 30s that would still love to compete, but there are other commitments such as a job and a family that prevent them from dedicating the training time that is now required. The new Masters division changes that.”

According to CrossFit coach Jane Holgate’s calculations, in 2013 nearly 15,000 athletes over forty completed the five CrossFit Games Open workouts. At that time, over 505 represented the (then) newly introduced 40-44 group which means there were nearly 8,000 athletes for the final forty spots.

Maddox, Spealler and Lefave are quick to point out the advantages of the new Masters division. “The competition is always growing and getting more intense. Younger athletes come in and have an edge over the older athletes when it comes to recovery. Weights weren’t getting any lighter, and

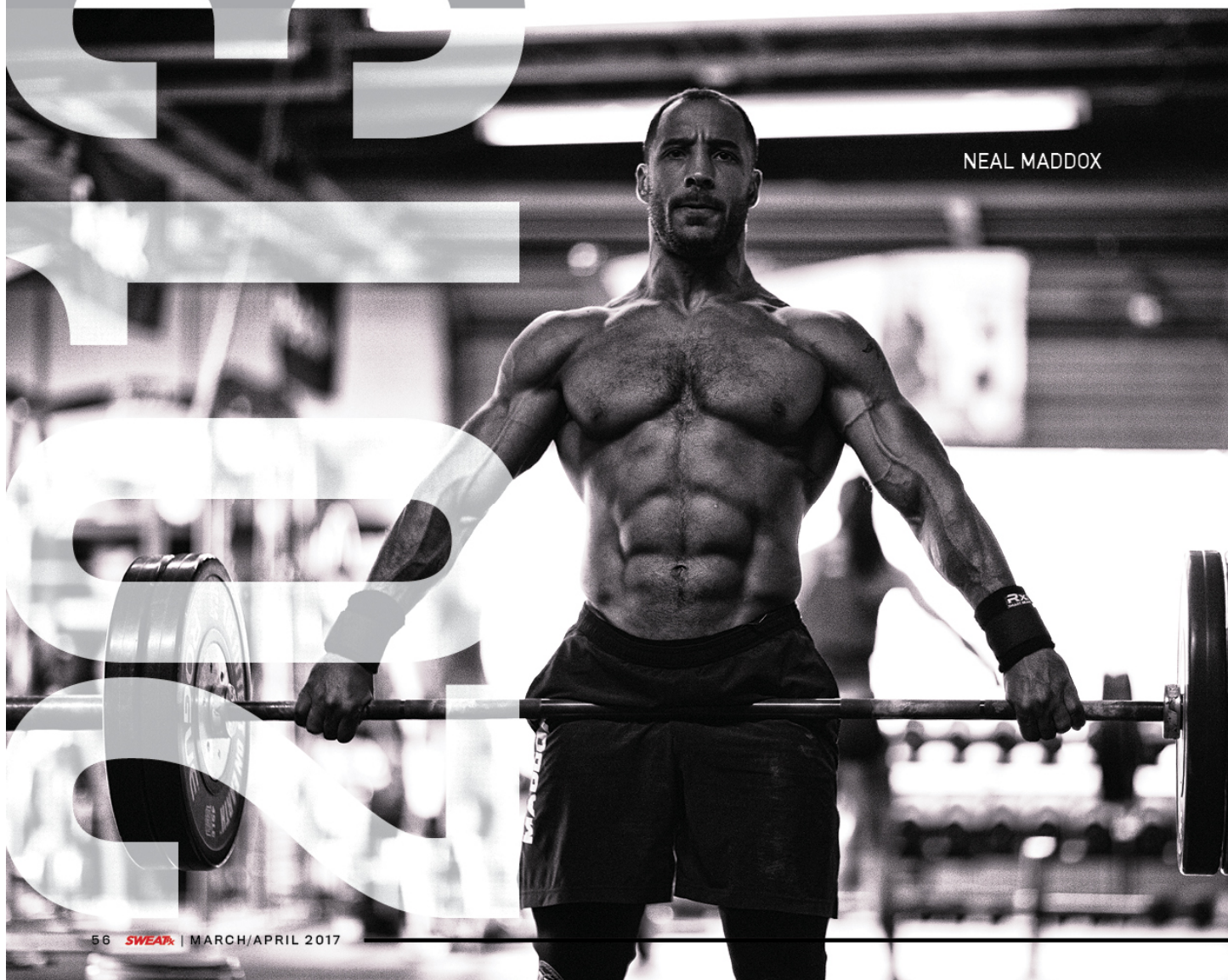
the demands of training to get back to the Games were becoming more and more rigorous," states Spealler.

Maddox adds, "It's been the same every year, the only difference is that I was getting older. You can't outrun father time. However, 6 open division CrossFit Games at my age is a pretty good accomplishment. I'm curious to see how many other athletes can compete in the open division at the Games in their mid to late 30's."

The new Masters division allows both men to train less, focus on family more, and expand their businesses. Spealler continues, "My time with my family, working on developing Icon Athlete and CrossFit Park City has been much more productive. All of it is supported by CrossFit now instead of taking a back seat to all the competing that I did in the past." Matthew Lefave agrees, "I have a very supportive wife, a successful law practice, and a goal to

qualify for the Games again." Lefave maintains that separating his work life from his training is key – no thoughts of law while training, and no thoughts of training while in the office. "I try to be present as much as possible."

While Maddox's and Lefave's eyes are on the Games, Spealler is taking a different approach. "I will compete in the Open because I feel like it sets an example for my clients in the gym and builds community...It's a fun competition I can throw my hat in the ring with and do for the enjoyment of it. If that one hour/day gets me through to the qualifying round I would do it. And if by some off chance that one hour/day got me to the Games and I was feeling healthy I would do it, mainly just to be part of the experience." States Maddox, "Right now I'm prepping myself for the Open, after the Open I'm prepping myself for the Master Qualifiers, and after that I



NEAL MADDOX



PHOTO: SIMPLY PERFECTION PHOTOGRAPHY (LEFT PAGE), MARIE-LYSSA DORMEUS (RIGHT PAGE)

“IT’S BEEN THE SAME EVERY YEAR, THE ONLY DIFFERENCE IS THAT I WAS GETTING OLDER. YOU CAN’T OUTFIT FATHER TIME. HOWEVER, 6 OPEN DIVISION CROSSFIT GAMES AT MY AGE IS A PRETTY GOOD ACCOMPLISHMENT, I’M CURIOUS TO SEE HOW MANY OTHER ATHLETES CAN COMPETE IN THE OPEN DIVISION AT THE GAMES IN THEIR MID TO LATE 30’S.”

will be prepping for the Games. My goal is to compete in the 2017 CrossFit Games.”

However, all three men make the same point, the Games are an amazing experience, and if someone’s goal is to reach that pinnacle of the sport then they had better be prepared. “Get the raw goods from someone who’s been there. Learn as much as you can about the level of commitment and sacrifice that is required and then decide if it’s still something you want to do. In my (Lefave’s) experience, the Games athletes are accessible. You will always find someone eager to help.”

For these accomplished athletes, the development of the 35-39 division not only allow them to still compete on that elite level, but they know it also grows the sport by enabling more teens and younger adults to rise through the ranks of the Games. Chris Spealler sums it up best. “It’s just an honor and a privilege to have been part of the growth of CrossFit and the Games for as long as I have. When younger athletes let me know that I have been an inspiration or helped them in some form or fashion it’s a reminder that I’m on the right track and it’s not something I take for granted.”