

At [Greenepsych Sport Psychology](#), we work with athletes from practically every sport, including CrossFit. Thanks to [Daniel Davidson](#) and [Crossfit Mainline](#) I've had the chance to learn from some of the best, including coach, and personal trainer, Cassio Oliveria. He understands how an athlete's mental mindset is directly tied to his/her ability to meet their training goals. A great read below on how Cassio applies psych training to the work he does as a CrossFit coach. Any coach and athlete will benefit from Cassio's article below. [#courageoverconfidence](#) [#crossfitmainline](#)

Athletic Recovery: Brain First, Muscles Second

In my experience as a CrossFit coach, personal trainer and physical therapist, I've come to the conclusion that any recovery from injury must start with the mind. Muscles might be ready, but if a client's brain isn't in the right state, progress will be slow and more difficult than necessary.

To help athletes return to where they were before their injury, I start with learning about their abilities and limitations, their preferred learning style, and of course, their goals. There are thousands of different recovery techniques out there, created by people smarter than me, like Paul Chek, the renowned kinesiologist at whose Institute I studied. But much like knowing which tool to grab from the toolbox, it does take experience and skill to match the right athlete with the right recovery technique. Once I find the right tool, I can design a plan that works to remove mental blocks, keeps the client motivated, and promotes long term results.

Here are the stories of three clients (not their real names) I worked with to help overcome mental and physical obstacles:

Alan:

Alan was a CrossFit athlete who was recovering from a second shoulder surgery. Because of his injuries, he became convinced that he could no longer lift overhead, a crucial component of many Olympic weightlifting and CrossFit movements. He was still determined to get big, so he reluctantly switched to bodybuilding, after coming to the conclusion that he could no longer train as a CrossFit athlete.

When I met Alan, I could see that bodybuilding was the wrong path. There was no joy or spark to his workouts. He was just doing them because he didn't think there was any alternative. I worked with him to identify his goals of returning to CrossFit and lifting overhead, and designed an appropriate plan. We started with mobility and accessory work to improve the muscles that weren't injured, so that he wouldn't dwell on his limitations and could focus on his progress. I also helped him with mental exercises to keep him in a positive mindset.

When we did work on overhead movements, we kept things light and slow, building in small weight increments over time. It wasn't easy. Sometimes it was "two steps forward, one step back", but in the end, his hard work paid off and he is now able to lift overhead and complete the CrossFit metcons he enjoys.

Linda:

When I met Linda, she was an experienced athlete, but had endured multiple bone breaks and three knee surgeries. At first glance, an athlete with her training experience shouldn't have had

so many injuries, so I met with her to determine their cause. What I came to understand was that all of her physical issues were due to mental stress. Lack of confidence, unhappiness at home, and working a dead-end job were all factors that led her to haphazardly train for three or four hours a day, without a real plan or goal. Overtraining caused her physical injuries, but they began with psychological issues.

Before we even stepped foot in the gym, I asked her about WHY she was training for so many hours without a plan. Once she and I had some emotional conversations, we could begin the process of training more intelligently to prevent further injuries. Again, before we started any rigorous exercise, I introduced breathing techniques, stretching, and mental health exercises. Then we moved to core and balance work like unilateral exercises. Only after she had made progress on the basics did we move to more intense weight training with a balanced, structured plan. I still work with her via an online platform and am happy to report that she has been injury-free for months.

John:

With seven years of CrossFit training under his belt, John was healthy and uninjured, but he had plateaued and was no longer making the progress he would've liked. Over the last two years, he had only made small improvements, and the amount of Personal Records (PRs) were not where they should've been given his experience. After one session with John, it was clear to me that he was afraid of heavy weights and was psyching himself out before approaching the rack.

To remove his mental blocks and get him to increase his front and back squat PRs, I tried to take the pressure off as much as I could. I had him load 110% of his PR weight onto the bar without actually completing a movement. He would simply approach the bar, lift it out of the rack, hold it for 5-10 seconds, and then replace it. After feeling comfortable with the weight on the bar, he would remove just enough weight to still reach a PR, and then perform a front or back squat. Success!

On more technical movements such as overhead squats, cleans, and snatches, I'd break the movements into pieces, again working with weights that were higher than his normal PRs. By doing lots of reps of small movements, he became more comfortable. When it came time for him to complete the entire movement, he was again successful at reaching a new PR.

These are just a few examples of clients of mine who have been able to remove mental obstacles (along with following a proper program design and appropriate progressions) in order to improve their athletic performance. While every client is different, identifying their psychological blocks and figuring out a plan to combat them is always the first step towards recovery.

As a multi-sport athlete, CrossFit coach, and personal trainer, Cassio Oliveria, has performed and coached from Brazil to Hong Kong and everywhere in between, meeting some amazing people along the way. During his travels he's benefited by learning from the different cultures; their training styles and how to best communicate to help athletes and himself constantly improve. Sharing knowledge whenever he has moved has helped him become a better coach and athlete.