

Southern Discomfort: The Southeast Regional Qualifier

By Russell Berger

After a brutal weekend of competition at the Jacksonville Police Academy in Jacksonville, Florida, the Southeast Regional Qualifier produced seven male and seven female competitors for the CrossFit Games.

The “Dirty South” featured 95 men and 40 women from Georgia, Florida, Mississippi and Alabama going through two days of self-induced suffering, all for the chance to prove themselves the fittest men and women in the Southeast. The Dirty South scoring system (compared to Nascar’s points system by event manager John McLaughlin) allowed for a variety of formats during the competition.

Day 1 started off with two bouts of three minutes of work separated by a two-minute rest and transition phase. The first was a max-point suicide run where competitors were awarded points for sprinting back and forth to lines marked between 10 and 50 yards from the starting line. That was followed by max-rep deadlifts at 275 pounds for men and 185 for women. Fighting burning lungs and fried hamstrings, Laura Demarco of CrossFit RX pulled a single point lead over Wendi Shafranski of CrossFit Vero Beach, who was followed closely by Mariah Provost of CrossFit Dahlonoga.

On the men’s side, Lance Mosely, a.k.a. Heinz, took an early lead by pulling a massive 43 deadlifts. I took a close second with the aid of an 88-point suicide run, while Brandon Phillips and Sean Provost easily made it into the Top 7.

After a few hours of blasting music, cheering crowds and the smell of generously applied sunscreen, it was time for the second WOD. In order to squeeze three events into Saturday’s competition, the morning heats were split in two for our second workout. Half the competitors went into the gym for the a timed five-round triplet of 20 double-unders, 10 wall balls (20 pounds for men, 14 for women) and one 15-foot rope climb, while the other half moved into the scorching midday sun for an eight-minute AMRAP of five clean and jerks at 135 pounds for men and 95 for women, plus 10 chest-to-bar pull-ups.

Inside the Gym, HQ trainer Jenni “Jelli” Orr dominated the event with a blazing total time of 6:36. close on Orr’s heels was Marie Kiel at 6:49. Third place was only a second slower, with Shana Alverson of CrossFit East Decatur posting a time of 6:50.

In the men’s heats, Jared Davis, who moved between Top 10 and Top 40 over the course of four events, came out of nowhere and locked in a first-place finish with a total time of 4:16. Sean Provost, who took second, tailed Jared by only two seconds. I took fourth, and Omar “Bionic” Torres placed eight with a final time only 17 seconds slower than Davis’.

In the other event, bloodied hands and over-worked muscles were put to the test. In the women’s heat, Alverson and Orr finished in a dead tie, each completing just over five rounds. Jenn Harris, six points behind, took third, while Adriana Grassi-Mosely, Provost and DeMarco battled to Top 7 finishes.

In the men’s outdoor heats, I took first place with seven full rounds, with another Russell, Chris Russell, securing second place with six rounds and five clean and jerks. Close behind were Mike G of CrossFit Atlanta, Mosely, Torres and Provost in a fairly close representation of what would be our final standings.

The split among the second and third workouts made the final the results a mystery until the last heat of the day. Once our scores had been totaled, the standings for the first day were announced. Orr was in first place for the women, and I had taken the lead on the men's side. Saturday was long, and while the final contenders were all but sorted out, Sunday's brutal "Chipper" event led to more than one upset.

After a one km row, athletes were funneled through 25 heavy overhead squats (135 pounds men/95 pounds women), 50 kettlebell swings (53 pounds for men and 35 for women) and 25 burpees conveniently separated by medium-length sprints along the Jacksonville Police Academy's 400-meter running track.

Orr took first for the women, with rival Alverson sprinting home for second place. Close behind were DeMarco, Grassi-Mosley, Provost, Nkongho Ndiya and Rachel Steinbrucker, all of whom sealed their places as Top 7 finishers. Not as fortunate were those who suffered under the weight of the overhead squats. Shafranski and Kiel, who were both in the Top 7 after Day 1, went overtime on Sunday's event, dropping them out of competition. In true CrossFit fashion, however, each finished. Shafranski, determined and full of heart, finished her last overhead squat, sprinted to her kettlebell and knocked out 50 swings without pause.

On the men's side, Brandon Phillips took first, raising his standing from sixth to third overall. Mike G, knocked back by his final rope climb on Day 1, flew through the overhead squats and placed second, just behind Phillips. Leonid Soubbotine took third, which bumped him into the Top 7, and Mosley, Drew Mckenzi and I finished within the Top 10.

The Dirty South regionals served their purpose professionally, fairly and effectively. The staff, volunteers and host Johnny Mac kept the qualifier running like a well-oiled machine, and the competition was intense.

So what do all these hard-fought battles for the Dirty South? For one, we can certainly boast some elite couples (Lance Mosley and Adriana Grassi-Mosley, Sean and Mariah Provost). Second, the narrow margins of victory between our top finishers mean these Southeast athletes will be battling each other to the finish in Aromas, California, in July.