

**53. *Scream at me!*** »Just five to go.« Michael shouts the number into my face. Michael is an American and looks like a former rugby player: short, powerful and compact. Somehow it's easier to put up with being screamed at in English. He pushes me beyond my physical limits. I ought to be grateful to him; if I were not so done-in I would rather like to give him a hiding. But for now I need all of my reserves, because Michael is shouting at me to lift my knees another five times. Only then will my first ever *CrossFit* session be over – at last.

Every muscle in my body is crying out, my heart is racing. I'm sweating like a lawn-sprinkler and my breathing is so fast that I can no longer speak. But I'm proud of myself. I feel like Rocky Balboa. Not the Rocky from the first part who lays into hunks of meat, and certainly not the one from part two who gives television interviews while training. I'm Rocky from the fourth part, getting ready for Ivan Drago in an old barn. Instead of high-tech equipment, he trains using car tyres and fells trees.

Why do I feel like that? Because at *CrossFit* you get back to basics – and it is precisely that which is attracting more and more recreational sportspeople. Take Hamburg for instance. This training facility in an old office building looks almost as if people had forgotten to clear away the sports-gear: mats are lying around all over the floor, boxes too. Heavy kettlebells wait to be lifted. On a white board are the names of some members, next to which are their exercises and times. Rivalry is in the air: rivalry against others, but above all against your own weaker self. No-one here wears trendy clothes for show, no-one stands around posing in front of mirrors, holding weights and presenting their muscular torsos. People are here to sweat – and to push their bodies to the limits.

Friedrich Jahn, known as the father of gymnastics, would have loved this club. What *CrossFit* really does is take his old exercises and make them modern and fashionable. What it is, is an updated keep-fit trail. Exercises on bars alternate with running sessions. Pull-ups, press-ups, the whole shebang. And even though this is Germany, everything is in English, like the »bridge-run«, where you have to sprint over a bridge to warm up. But it doesn't really matter what the exercises are called: I've done them all. Thanks for screaming at me Michael, and thanks for the pain. I'll be coming back – once I can walk again.

If anyone else in Hamburg would like to be driven to their personal limits, then I recommend a training session at Mexikoring 9a, 22297 Hamburg. For information about registering and other *Pain Angels* visit [www.crossfithh.wordpress.com](http://www.crossfithh.wordpress.com)

Out for the count: at the end of a CrossFit session people end up exhausted in a position known as a 'Pain Angel'.