

# Training For 10 Minutes

## The life of a double world silver medallist

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Photos: Submitted

Heather Kilius has something that most people will never have in their lifetime: a world silver medal. In fact, she has two of them. She earned them this past November in Seoul, South Korea where she competed in the World Kettlebell Championships.

As you might imagine, a lot goes into a world silver medal, but it all started with a trip to a local bootcamp class with her sister. After a few sessions, the instructor said, “I think you should go see Kendra.”

Kendra Johnsen is the owner of Crossfit Poise. Heather decided to go and meet Kendra and the day of that meeting there was a class going on.

“I saw these barbell movements and thought, “Oh wow,” she says. “I hadn't been exposed to this and I thought, “I think I want to do this.”

Her introduction to CrossFit was probably much like most people - it was hard! But the difficulty only inspired her, and she decided to set a goal. That goal was to do one pull-up. It took her a few classes, and a lot of attempts, but she finally did it. It was through her crossfit classes that her coach, Eric Doucet, suggested she try kettlebells. Doucet, a Canadian Forces pilot, is a CrossFit Level 1 and Basic Kettlebell instructor. And, he is the only advanced Crossfit Kettlebell instructor in Canada.

“Anything you can use a dumbbell for,

you can use a kettlebell for,” she says. “The sport is weightlifting, but with a kettlebell.”

As she improved, Doucet suggested that she try competing. There aren't a lot of competitions for kettlebell sport in Ontario, so Heather signed up for the Niagara KBS Open in June 2015. She competed in the One Arm Long Cycle 20kg class and came second.

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Kettlebell sport is a different type of training than other style of kettlebell lifting. The goal is to lift a bell for 10 minutes consecutively. The sport requires physical and mental strength - being able to remain calm and conserve energy while performing a physical test for 10 minutes. It is a strength-endurance test that is evaluated on precision as well as completed reps. In competition, women compete with a

kettlebell weight of between 12kg and 24kg. They perform the lifts with one hand, with an opportunity to switch hands only a single time without setting the bell down.

The Snatch movement is when a single kettlebell is swung using one hand from between the knees to above the head in a single motion. The One Arm Long Cycle is when a single kettlebell is swung from the knees to the chest and then overhead.

Excited by her placing, she decided to try a national competition, and in May 2016, she headed to the Canadian KBS Nationals. It would be her second competition, and in her words, she went “for the experience.” That experience netted her a second place in the 20kg One Arm Long Cycle and a first place in the 24kg Snatch. Now, she was a Canadian champion.

“As you do more competitions, you become less nervous,” Heather says. The nerves come from how the event is judged. A judge sits directly in front of Heather and watches her every movement exclusively. The judge also counts the reps. If certain positions are not completed flawlessly, the rep is disqualified. This is where it becomes important to manage the mental part of the sport as well as the physical.

It was at the 2016 Nationals that Heather was approached by Misty Shearer and Renee Martynuik two of Canada's most

accomplished lifters, and the coaches for Team Canada in kettlebell. She became a “remote client” given that the team was training in Edmonton, Alberta. It was a commitment that would require her to be self-driven.

“Sometimes it’s a little bit hard to train because I’m training by myself,” she says. “The people around me are just not doing what I’m doing. But it’s catching on.”

In 2017, she increased her One Arm Long

granted a temporary leave of absence to be able to attend the championship. She was grateful for that accommodation. Heather had set some goals leading up to the world championships; one of them she had already reached by making the team. Her next goals were to be able to last the full 10 minutes in both events, and to “not finish last!”

“It’s very much mental - 10 minutes is a long time to lift,” she says, “because after three minutes you want to put it down.”

Even the officials don’t speak English - only Russian. (Kettlebell is mainly a Russian sport.) And then there was the venue, filled with huge televisions and hundreds of flashing lights.

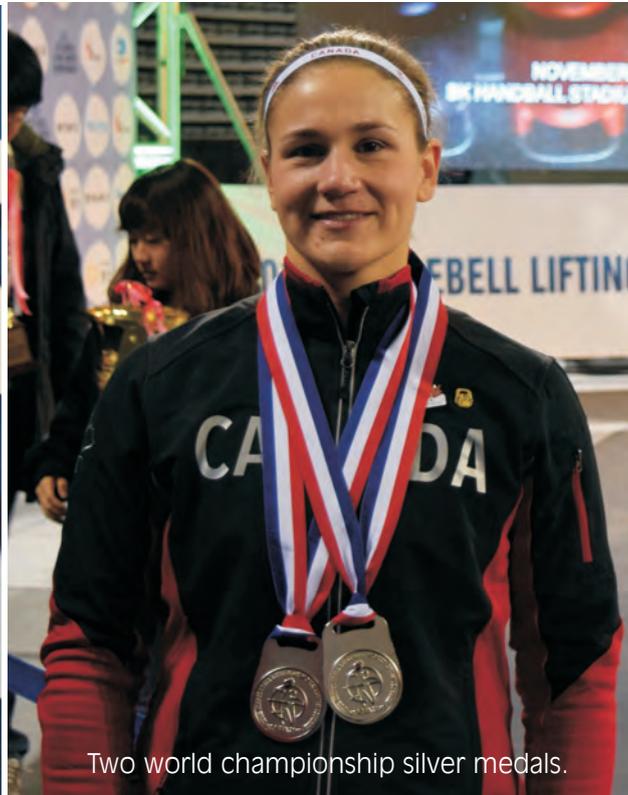
“It can be a bit intimidating,” she says.

But one thing in her corner was that she wasn’t alone. Her husband, Kevin, made the trip with her.

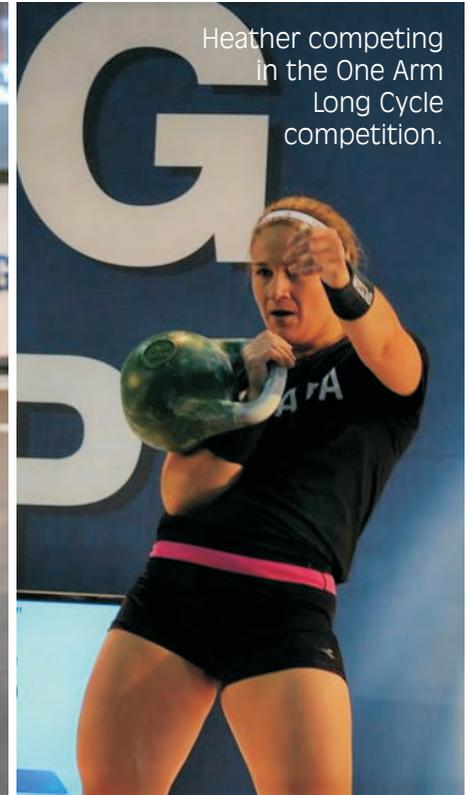
Heather’s first competition was the Snatch. All the competitors were on the stage at the



Heather competing in the Snatch competition.



Two world championship silver medals.



Heather competing in the One Arm Long Cycle competition.

Cycle to 24kg, and took a first place at the West Coast Classic in March. She took a second place in the 16kg Snatch. Two months later in Ottawa, she recorded first place finishes in both 24kg One Arm Long Cycle and 16kg Snatch. She was set up well for her second Canadian Nationals where she walked away with two first place finishes in the same weight. Now, she was a dual Canadian Champion, and Team Canada recruited her for their team that would compete in Seoul, Korea in the World Kettlebell Championship.

Heather knew in July that she would be heading to the World Championships, and she had a plan of working out to give it her best effort. A significant amount of her training involved handling stress. She was working, she had a young son and she was basically training alone. She worked with a nutritionist to help her eat appropriately based on how much she trained, but also to help balance her stress through nutrition.

“Stress affects so much,” she says.

As a nurse at Pembroke Regional Hospital, she used all her vacation days, and then was

She had no expectations of how she would place, and she didn’t study the other competitors. She wanted to focus on her own plan and on controlling the nervousness that comes with competing on her first-ever world stage. Her training at home hadn’t accounted for travelling halfway around the world, and Heather arrived in Korea with a whole new set of challenges she hadn’t anticipated.

First, she didn’t bring any warm up equipment with her- she assumed there would be warm up equipment to use at the championship. While there was equipment, it wasn’t what she was used to using at home, so she had to alter her warm-up routines to accommodate the equipment she had available.

Second, there was a huge adjustment to make in terms of the long flight, the time differences and the food changes.

“I remember having some stress trying to figure out how I was going to get to the venue,” she said. “I just kept thinking, “Don’t get lost!”

The language barrier was also significant.

same time and Heather stuck to her game plan. She met her goal of lasting the full 10 minutes, and she recorded 181 reps. She felt good about her competition.

“I had made some technique changes this year and I was really happy with that set,” she says. “I felt like I stuck to the plan.”

When the time was up, the results were immediately posted - she had earned a second place finish in her rookie event. It was a world championship silver medal!

She made this post on her Facebook page: “Silver Medal at IUKL World Championships. Thanks for all the support, you guys are all amazing. Mom I love you!”

There wasn’t much opportunity to rest before her second competition - the 24kg One Arm Long Cycle. Again, she lasted the full 10 minutes, but she remembers that it wasn’t her best performance. She started off too fast and had to compensate while she was lifting to conserve enough energy to make it through. She did, and she finished with 67 reps.

“I thought it was such a poor number,” she says. “Then I heard my name in a Russian

accent. I was in shock. Really? Are you kidding me? It made me feel happier about a not-so-good set.”

Heather Kilius was a world double silver medalist. On her Facebook post, she called it a “once in a lifetime experience.”

The Canadian champion had more than held her own on the world stage. Now, Heather Kilius was one of the best in the world. Hundreds of comments from family and friends came pouring in.

CrossFit Poise posted: “Just in case you’ve been living under a rock here is one of our very own coaches, Heather Kilius, who is bringing home not only one but TWO silver medals from worlds! We all could NOT be prouder! Happy Friday everyone!”

Kendra Johnsen, who Heather counts as one of her best friends, also made a personal post: “So I had ZERO doubts but Heather Kilius is bringing home TWO silver medals. All your hard work has paid off now I hope you enjoy yourself a little!”

And her sister, Vicki, who is kind of responsible for how this all started, was with her nephew, Raylan, when he got to see mommy win her silver medals through a live feed of the awards ceremony.

One night when she was back in her hotel room (her husband, Kevin, made the trip with her as well), she took a photo of her two silver medals, side by side. She looked up at Kevin and said, “I did that!”



At the same time as she claimed a few seconds to feel proud of herself, she also thought about the ways she could improve.

“Being at a competition like that, the atmosphere is so inspiring,” she says. “Your drive is really multiplied when you’re there.”

When Heather returned home, she spent most of her final week off giving interviews, including to Health Matters magazine. A little in awe of the media attention, she is humble in her achievements, enthusiastic about the promotion of the sport and is eager to get back to instructing at CrossFit Poise.

“I started out as a client and working out,” she says, “and things just kind of evolved.” Heather became a coach at CrossFit Poise and works with people who, like she once was, are getting into the sport for the first time.

“One of the classes I coach is the Introduction to CrossFit,” she says. “To see these people four months down the road, it’s incredible.”

When a world silver medalist calls your progress “incredible,” you have to think she knows what she’s talking about. After all, she once had a goal to do just one pull-up.

Look where that led.



**Left:** Heather on the podium for her world silver medal in the One Arm Long Cycle. **Above:** Heather jokes around with Corissa Sivorot, a Team Canada member from British Columbia, about her “veteran” medal.

## HEATHER’S TIPS FOR STICKING TO A FITNESS ROUTINE

Heather is in a unique position of being both a client and a coach. Based on both of those experiences, we asked her to give us some healthy advice.

Consistency is a big thing. It doesn’t matter what sport or exercise you pick, it is going to take longer than you think to see results. It’s pretty much like a lifestyle change.

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I think people get frustrated when they change too much all at once. I did crossfit for two years, before I decided to change how I ate.

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Keep the faith and be empowered that you can make a change. And do it for yourself.

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Sometimes you have to recognize yourself. Give yourself some praise without tying it to a victory.

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Stop looking at a number. Ask yourself, “How do I feel?” and “How do my clothes fit?”

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Have realistic goals. Not that having big goals is bad, but you need some achievable goals to keep you on track.