

Anna Tunncliffe

The Olympic gold medal winning sailor and Team inov-8 member tells Tony James about her ambition to become a top CrossFit athlete

When you're one of the best small boat sailors of all time with a shelf full of trophies, including an Olympic gold medal, what do you do when, just over 30 and still supremely fit, you decide you want a new challenge?

If you're 31-year-old Anna Tunncliffe, you take up what has been described as a sport designed to find the fittest humans on earth. CrossFit, a gruelling blend of gymnastics, weightlifting and endurance, holds its world games every summer and Tunncliffe is in the team of world class athletes put together by technical running shoe brand inov-8 for this year's event.

FAST GROWING

Since its development in the US 14 years ago, CrossFit has been taken on by more than 7,000 gyms across the world and

since 2007 has become a phenomenally fast growing sport. The world CrossFit Games now attracts top class athletes like Tunncliffe, Commonwealth Games swimmer Stuart Trees and former US track and field star Dan Bailey, who are also in the inov-8 team that Tunncliffe joined in January. Although an outstanding sailor, Tunncliffe also excelled at cross country, swimming and track events, but eventually chose sailing when she went to university and helped to win four national championships while a student.

Tunncliffe has admitted that retiring from Olympic class sailing was a traumatic time and that she made the decision: "With a sad heart and tears in my eyes. I have had a great run over the past 12 years, coming away with an Olympic gold medal, two ISAF World Sailor of the Year Awards, two world championships and a lot of world cup titles.

"I have had the best teammates, sponsors and supporters anyone could ask for. I love sailing and will never quit the sport, but the Olympic scene takes an incredible amount of energy and time. For 12 years I dedicated every moment of my life to it, but it was time to move on. I was finding it hard committing 100 per cent and that wasn't fair to my teammates."

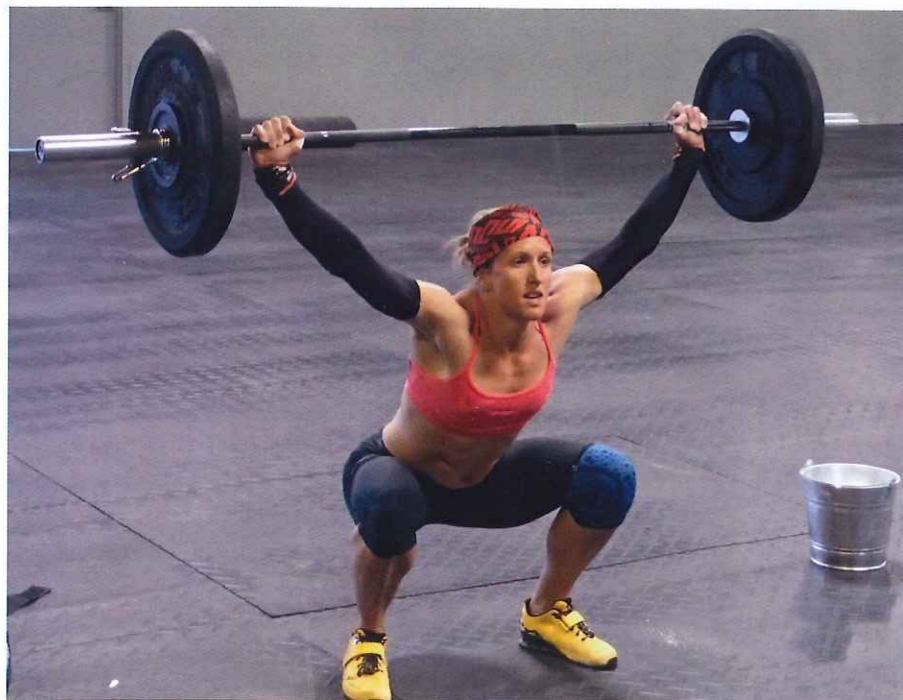
Tunncliffe won almost every prize in small boat racing, but will be particularly remembered for the Olympic Gold she won at the 2008 Beijing Games - the first American woman to do so for 20 years. However, instead of taking life a little easier after finally quitting world class sailing earlier this year, she plunged straight into something as equally demanding by joining the inov-8 CrossFit team.

HARD WORKOUTS

In fact, Tunncliffe had discovered CrossFit in 2011 and used it for general strength improvement in the run-up to the 2012 Olympics: "I think CrossFit prepared me both physically and mentally for sailing. The hard workouts and mental edge you needed to keep pushing definitely helped on the water when days got long and people were beginning to tire. I felt I could stay fresh longer.

"The windier it gets, the more fit you have to be because you have to use your body weight to counter the wind pushing against the sails. It's no booze cruise across the bay."

Tunncliffe has said she never sails for fun: "I'm trained to make a boat go as fast as it can. If I'm going out in a cruising boat, I know I will try to tweak the trim



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to make the boat go as fast as possible when I really should be relaxing."

After winning virtually everything in single handed racing, Tunncliffe took up a new sailing challenge - skippering a crew of three in match racing, in which boats race one to one. She describes it as: "Like chess on water. You are trying to trick the opposition into a bad position, so you can win the race. I like the challenge of mind games." She has taken a break from match racing, but still regularly sails professionally.

Not surprisingly, when her sailing career was edging over the horizon, Tunncliffe needed a new challenge. As she has put it: "I believe in having a dream, a goal and aiming to reach it with desire, dedication and discipline - I call them my four Ds. With these together, you can accomplish your dreams. When I set my sights on a goal, the fire burning inside me is fierce and it drives me onwards.

"My focus is now on functional fitness and pushing my body to the limit against the fittest athletes on the planet. After the 2012 London Olympics, I threw myself into training for the CrossFit Games. I am now focused on returning to the games this year and performing even stronger. I'll be giving it 110 per cent.

"In CrossFit, every day is completely different because you never know what you're going to get and the more you push yourself the more you'll achieve. If you train properly, you can do CrossFit at any age - for instance, I train with my parents and do the same workouts they do.

"Sailing and CrossFit are both very demanding, but in different ways. You might spend five hours of your time on the water, but with CrossFit you might just spend 10 minutes of your time giving absolutely everything you have. I have to say that the community around CrossFit is unlike anything I've ever come across in sport. The people are amazing and so much fun to be around."

DRIVEN BY COMPETITION

Founded in County Durham by Wayne Edy, inov-8 opened for business in 2003 with a vision to create innovative, lightweight footwear that could handle the most demanding off road terrain, as well as designing and producing stripped back products and shoes with the best grip.

The company now trades in over 60 countries and Edy said recently: "Our committed athletes compete in many different sports, but they are all driven by competition - that physical pain and passion for pushing their bodies to their limit."

And no one knows more about the relentless drive of competition than Anna Tunncliffe, the girl who - on both land and sea - is determined to be the very best there is.

"I FIRST SAILED WHEN I WAS EIGHT - AND HATED IT"

Anna Tunncliffe is an American with a slight British accent. That's because she was born in Yorkshire. Her parents had a boat and she learned to sail as a child before moving with her family to Ohio when she was 12, where her father managed a limestone quarry.

"I first sailed when I was eight - and hated it," she says. "I joined a youth squad, which was really good, but I wasn't. I was always getting beaten. You were always wet and cold and I didn't like that either. Then when I moved to America I took up sailing again. It was sunny and warm and that's when I started doing well and found there was fun in winning."

In America she joined a local yacht club, where she raced dinghies, began to get noticed as something special and started sailing the single handed Laser Radial class, in which she would eventually become Olympic champion.