

Welcome to boot camp

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Madison woman pulls herself up at The Pit Fitness Club

By Lisa Reisman

MADISON — This is not a story about someone who lost 30 pounds in 30 days or had two dress sizes melt away in six weeks.

This is about a pull-up. A single unaided pull-up by Madison's Meghan Coady. It's slated to take place on Sept. 25. It's also about another approach to exercise and fitness.

Still, why should we care about Meghan Coady's pull-up?

"She's an inspiration to all of us," said Al Mirto, the Pit Fitness Club owner and head trainer, amid a chorus of blaring music, clanking barbells, and grunts and groans on a recent sweltering afternoon at the School Ground Road fitness studio.

Coady grew up in Madison, the middle of three. She graduated from Daniel Hand High in 2015 and enrolled in the baking and pastry culinary arts program at Johnson & Wales University in Providence, R.I.

She lasted a year. "As much as I loved the creativity and structure of baking, I realized it wasn't what I wanted to do for the rest of my life," the perennially upbeat 20-year-old said before the workout at The Pit. "I can still make cakes for my family and friends on special occasions without it



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Meghan Coady, of Madison, exercises with pushups at the Pit Fitness Club in Branford, during a recent workout.

being my career."

While waitressing at a pub in Charlotte, N.C., that summer, her mother mentioned over the phone that she'd joined a boot camp-style gym. She'd lost weight and had

never felt better or stronger, she said.

"I said 'Oh, that's nice,' and then I didn't think anything more of it," Coady said.

That fall, she moved back home

and took a job as a medical receptionist at a dermatology office. One day, her mother suggested she come along. "Just try it once, she said."

Coady was far from a fitness

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enthusiast. "I just plain hated working out," she said. "I could never find anything that I was interested in. I tried Zumba, but I couldn't keep up and I was too clumsy for it. I tried running, but it was boring, and just flat-out hard. I never knew how to use any of the machines at the gym."

Nonetheless, she agreed to go along. To her surprise, she took to weight-lifting.

"I never saw myself as strong," she said, "But I was able to do it. And I could imagine myself getting better at it. I said to myself, 'If I can lift a 20-pound weight for a certain amount of reps today, then I'll work up to 25 pounds, and then 30.'"

Better yet, "I loved the way I felt afterwards," she said. "After sitting all day at work, the first thing I wanted to do was go home and take a nap, but then I found myself craving that feeling you get after an intense workout."

She signed up for the rest of that month. Almost two years later, she hasn't stopped.

"I think weight-lifting is what I'm best at, but we do all kinds of different things," she said. "It's never the same routine twice."

Workouts, she said, might include high-intensity intervals of medicine ball crunches, tire lifting and elbow planks one day, and fast-paced burpees, dead lifts and jumping lunges the next. "You jump from one hard thing to another, with the goal of becoming better at doing hard things."

That kind of daily challenge allowed Coady to gradually work up to what once seemed physically impossible, like wall climbs and box jumps and, yes, running laps around the unassuming building complex that houses the fitness studio.

That's because The Pit puts a premium on scaling up or back



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Above, Meghan Coady, of Madison, exercises with a jump rope at The Pit Fitness Club in Branford during a workout. Right, she exercises with a kettle bell.

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Meghan Coady

a particular exercise, depending on what a person can handle. "When you learn to surf, you're not going to paddle into a 50-foot wave because you know you don't initially have that ability," trainer Leighton Davis said.

It's all part of the philosophy that pulses through The Pit, according to trainer Ashley Hillier.

"We focus on what people can do — people of all ages, sizes and levels of fitness. And then we build from there," she said.

That's in part what's kept Coady coming back day after day.

"It's you and eight other people doing the routine at their own pace, and if you can't do it, fine, nobody cares," she said.

"Everyone has the same goal, which is to get healthier and stronger and feel good. And all of us grinding through the workout together, that creates a bond."

There's no mystery to that. "Doing something physically intense and difficult binds a group of people," according to Time Magazine. "Military trainers have known this for thousands of years."

"Seeing what other people are capable of inspires me to do more," Coady said. "So do the trainers. They encourage me to be my best."

It's not one-sided. "We've watched Meghan work up to 24-inch box jumps and that gets us motivated," said PIT member



Michele Malerba, of North Haven. "She sets herself a challenge and then she just goes for it."

Not only in the workouts, it seems. Earlier this year, Coady took on The PIT's Spring Challenge, a six-week-long contest that had members committing to follow common-sense nutrition guidelines. Coady prevailed, losing 10 pounds.

"It was fun," she said. "I did it more to see if I could stick with it than to lose weight. That used to be important to me. Now I just love how strong I feel. If I lose weight as a result of working out, that's fine, but it's not taking over my life."

Which brings us back to that

single pull-up. The goal is Sept. 25, Coady's 21st birthday.

"Even if I only get halfway there, I'll keep working on it," she said. "It's not as if I'm going to stop trying if I don't get there by then."

She paused, wiping away sweat from her forehead, a broad smile spreading across her face. "No matter what I end up doing, I'm in this for good."

The Pit Fitness Club is at 83 School Ground Road in Branford. For information, visit thepitfitnessclub.com or call 203-605-5805.

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