

## WHAT'S YOUR WORKOUT?

# When Zoom Couldn't Cut It, Dad Took Over Gym Class

After the pandemic paused youth sports and moved school online, this father started leading his boys through at-home workouts in the family's garage gym

*By Jen Murphy / Photographs David Walter Banks for The Wall Street Journal*

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Many parents have taken on the [role of teacher](#) during the pandemic. Jeremy Bodenhamer, 42, is working out more than ever since he's been acting as P.E. educator for his three sons. When youth sports were put on hiatus last year and parks and playgrounds closed, the CEO of packing- and shipping-software company ShipHawk started leading his boys through workouts in the family's garage gym.



Bethany and Jeremy Bodenhamer have always encouraged their boys to be active.

“My boys love school but loathe Zoom school,” says Mr. Bodenhamer, who lives in Goleta, Calif. “P.E. takes the edge off and gets their pent-up energy out.” Mr. Bodenhamer and his wife, Bethany Bodenhamer, dean of students at a local high school, are both avid CrossFitters and have always encouraged their boys to be active. Titus, 9, plays baseball. Solomon, 8, loves hockey and running. Jeremiah, 6, is so into basketball that he watches [Stephen Curry's MasterClass](#) daily and mimics the NBA player's drills.

In the mornings, Mr. Bodenhamer takes the boys on runs or leads them through short workouts. When they finish with their remote-learning sessions, they meet their dad in the garage for workouts. Ms. Bodenhamer also occasionally joins to make it a family affair. The boys post their workouts and fitness challenges on their Instagram account [@heartandhamer](#), hoping to inspire other [kids to keep active](#). Last fall, the boys raised money through a GoFundMe campaign so they could purchase 700 jump ropes to give to local elementary school kids.

“I try to teach the boys that fitness is more than strong muscles,” says Mr. Bodenhamer. “We talk about life lessons like goal setting and building strength inside and out.”



Mr. Bodenhamer says the boys love an activity that involves hanging, jumping or climbing.

## The Workout

The boys are up and ready to go by 6:45 a.m. They join their dad for a 3-mile run three mornings a week as part of the 100 Mile Club, a nonprofit that encourages children to run or walk 100 miles during a school year. (The youngest doesn't always run the full 3 miles.) Mondays and Wednesdays they run at the school track or around their neighborhood. "Friday is always an adventure run," says Mr. Bodenhamer. "We might run on the beach or the boardwalk downtown." Tuesday and Thursday mornings the boys do foot drills or a short workout.

At least five days a week the boys meet their dad for an after-school workout focused on CrossFit-inspired, high-intensity, functional movements. Tuesdays are equipment-free and might include squats, push-ups, handstand holds and lunges. When the boys do use equipment, Mr. Bodenhamer makes sure the weight is kept low. The gym includes kettle bells, dumbbells, a 15-pound barbell bar and five and 10-pound medicine balls.

"Kids love to jump and climb, so I have the boys do a lot of pull ups, rope climbs and box jumps," he says. "And when you make anything an obstacle course they get excited." A recent obstacle course had the boys jumping over a series of low hurdles followed by burpees and box jumps.

Sometimes workouts are focused on sports skills. For example, the boys have a batting cage in the yard and might practice hitting and fielding. Mr. Bodenhamer occasionally moves the workouts to the beach. "That's great because after they roll around in the sand they can run in the water and rinse off," he says.

He and his wife alternate using the Peloton and running outdoors.



The boys often join their father for a run.



The Bodenhamer brothers get a dose of nature and a workout at a beach near their home in Goleta, Calif.

## The Diet

**Philosophy:** "I jokingly say we're 80% Paleo, 60% of the time," says Mr. Bodenhamer.

**Low-Sugar:** "Sugar is highly monitored in this house," he says. "The boys only have boxed cereal on weekends and they think Cheerios are a treat."

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The Bodenhamer boys tested in to [The Wall Street Journal Fitness Challenge](#), a six-week program of exercises, by seeing how many steps up and down they could do in 20 seconds. They used a kid-friendly four-inch step. Here are their step-up scores.

•Jeremiah (6 years old): right foot 29, left foot 28

•Solomon (8 years old): right foot 31, left foot 31

•Titus (9 years old): right foot 33, left foot 32



The Bodenhamer brothers share their workouts on their Instagram page [@heartandhamer](#) in hopes of inspiring more kids to be active.

## Essential Gear

**Home gym:** Mr. Bodenhamer estimates he invested \$12,000 in equipment.

**Fitbit:** “Solomon got one for his birthday and shares it with his brothers,” he says. “They are obsessed with tracking their steps.”

**Peloton bike:** “We were lucky to buy one before the pandemic,” he says.

## Playlist

“Solomon is obsessed with the soundtrack from the Greatest Showman,” says Mr. Bodenhamer. “He sings along while he works out. Titus is into rock and country, and Jeremiah just adapts his pace to whatever beat.”

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**Post-workout treat:** Sometimes after a hard workout he takes the boys to 7-Eleven for Gatorade or Slurpees.

**Splurge:** Mr. Bodenhamer occasionally buys a box of doughnuts for the house.

## Helping Kids Stay Active

Even before the coronavirus pandemic, many kids weren't getting as much physical activity as they should have, says Avery Faigenbaum, a professor of pediatric exercise science at the College of New Jersey. The [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans](#), issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, recommend that children and adolescents ages 6 through 17 years do 60 minutes or more of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily.

“Before Covid only 20% of boys and girls accumulated that recommended hour,” he says.

“Now amidst Covid, we’re seeing an increase in sedentary behavior and screen time.” Dr. Faigenbaum notes that those 60 minute can be broken up throughout the day.

“Researchers call them energizer breaks and they can last anywhere from two to five minutes,” he says. The mental-health rewards are just as important as the physical.

“Physical activity will help kids feel better, sleep better and have more focus,” he says.

Brett Klika, co-founder of SPIDERfit Kids in San Diego, says that research suggests the most significant influence on children’s physical-activity habits is parental physical-activity habits. “Consider active things you can do together as a family,” he suggests. You don’t have to work out together, but adopt evening walks, bike rides and other recreational forms of family activity, he says. In today’s work-and-learn from home scenario, he says scheduling is a necessity. “A schedule doesn’t have to be complex, and it should offer kids some choices,” he says. “It could be as simple as no screens from 3 to 5 p.m.” He says simple at-home games like balloon volleyball, obstacle courses and a shoe-tie challenge encourage creativity, friendly competition and can be done throughout the day.

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