

A Strong Resolution

Personal Fitness Trainers Are The Latest Gay Rage

By Ian Drew

Starting a health and fitness regimen is something everyone swears to do as each New Year begins.

But Sean Tarr, a gay man living in North Miami got a head start. He took advantage of cheaper gym rates in December, by joining a Bally's Total Fitness Center near his home.

"Rates usually soar in January as a result of resolution frenzy," he says. Tarr adds that he intends to take advantage of one of the perks of joining the gym—sessions with a certified personal trainer.

Across the board, gym employees, doctors, nutritionists and health experts indicate there is a growing cottage industry, employing personal trainers in planning fitness programs. They indicate that the practice is particularly skyrocketing in popularity amongst gays and lesbians.

At Better Bodies Gym in Fort Lauderdale, every new member is given a complimentary one-hour personal training session upon sign-up. Paul Johnston, Better Bodies' controller and accountant, says that

body image and goals, rather than comparing himself to others.

One of his clients, Bob Artale of Fort Lauderdale, says he has noticed a major improvement since beginning to train with Acosta six months ago. "I realized I was not pushing myself hard enough," Artale says. "A trainer helps you to do what you can't get yourself to do."

Artale says that after the first month, he had lost inches around his waist, gained muscle, lost body fat and greatly improved his self-confidence. He also claims that his entire life has improved since beginning to work with Acosta. "The self-confidence I gained taught me to say no and ask for what I want easier. I now feel I deserve what I want in life."

Many trainers and experts insist that while using a trainer has many benefits, it is important for trainees to keep realistic goals in tune with each person's capabilities and genetic makeup. "Many guys come in and want to look like the images that the mass media sees as perfect bodies," says Acosta. "A lot of times these images are just not real



Miguel Acosta trains Bob Artale

Nutrition Center in Wilton Manors, says that a good trainer should get help the client get results within two to three months. He says the most important thing to look for in a personal trainer is that they listen to the client. "The client is the expert on their own body and the trainer must know that. A lot of trainers I see waste time talking personally and wasting the client's time. A good trainer will redirect the client, work with them on a program and in time, send clients on their way to use what they learned on their own."

Ray Fennon and his partner, Jeffrey Selzer, are commercial real estate owners in Fort Lauderdale. They have both been working out with their trainer, Yvonne Kokaska, for nearly three years. Though many trainers only see clients for an initially agreed upon period of one or several months, Fennon says he has continued to work out with Kokaska as a motivational tool and because he has the financial resources to do so.

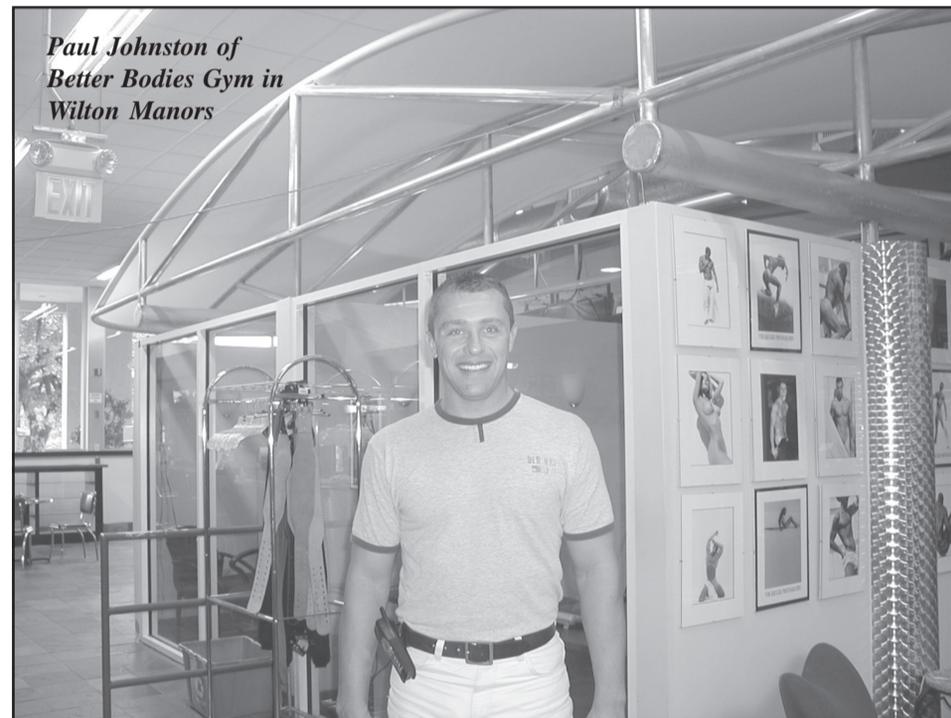
"We first started using Yvonne because we were new to the gym environment and needed that direction," Fennon says. "Now, we like to have someone available on a scheduled basis every time we work out because it keep us coming to care for our health. It would be much easier to back out of going to the gym without her waiting for us."

Economics is a primary factor in who uses personal trainers. One-on-one training can cost upwards of \$60 a session, although most trainers say they are flexible and work out payment options based on specifically designed programs for each individual client. Because of having a greater disposable income, gay men over 30 are the predominant demographic using personal trainers. This group also needs more specialized attention, because metabolism slows down and fat ratio

increases in most people after age 25.

Kokaska says that there is an inordinate proportion of gay men to lesbians. As a lesbian herself, she says she is often frustrated by the lack of interest in using trainers by the lesbian community. "I hardly ever get lesbian women, although I have tried so hard to get them interested," she says. "Men seem to understand the overall importance of health and the need to hire a professional to help them reach their goals."

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—Ray Fennon, about his personal trainer.



Paul Johnston of Better Bodies Gym in Wilton Manors

nearly every new member takes advantage of the session as a way to tour the gym and get tips on starting to work out. He says that most of the gym's membership, which is more than 98 percent gay, continues to sign-up for additional training sessions as a result of the initial session.

"The popularity of using personal trainers among gay men has definitely increased in popularity over the last five years," says Johnston.

"A new focus on both looks and health care has taken place since the advent of the AIDS crisis. Many gay men have figured out that in order to become as healthy as possible, you need to have someone walk you through your routines so that you are exercising and eating properly."

Miguel Acosta, a personal trainer who often trains his mostly gay male clientele at Better Bodies, agrees. "We, as gay males, put more emphasis on the way we look, but this is not a negative thing," he says.

"We simply have more time and money to spend on ourselves. Trainers are now so popular because people are more educated and informed. This knowledge causes them to seek out experts who can better assist them," Acosta emphasizes.

Acosta says that he had spent nearly 12 years working out on his own using the wrong form and techniques before turning to a personal trainer. He believes using a trainer enabled him to become better motivated and to learn to focus on his own

even for the models." He also says that these images are trends that continuously change. While a big, bulky look was popular for several years, trainers are now being called upon to help sculpt leaner, more cut physiques with defined abs. He points out that none of this can be done without proper nutrition in addition to exercise, and trainers are often called upon to give diet advice and tips.

Most trainers say that a mistake many gay men make when starting a training program is basing their motives on vanity as opposed to health.

Eston Dunn, a certified personal trainer who also certifies other trainers for the Aerobic and Fitness Association of America and Fitness Resource Associates, says, "There is real body dysmorphia going on in the gay community. A lot of guys have started using trainers because they think we are a quick fix with some kind of magic potion to help them instantly look a certain way. They are coming to realize that we are guides, not gods. Any good trainer needs to come from a position of health, not vanity."

Experts point to numerous things to look for when finding the right trainer. While gym owners who hire and appoint trainers to members often require proper certification from an accredited association, many claim that it is just as important to shop around for a trainer who fits the trainee's personality and style.

Ike Bateman, the owner of Ike's



Yvonne Kokaska helps Ft. Lauderdale resident Ray Fennon keep in shape

I think this is because they were so greatly impacted by AIDS and, to them, this is their investment in getting longevity out of their life."

Many trainers and health experts say the trend in the gay community shows no signs of slowing down. Paul Bunting, a trainer at

(continued on next page)