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ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS FOR FITNESS FACILITIES

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fitness Q&A

By Matt Brzycki

What significant changes have occurred in fitness during the past 20 years?

It seems like yesterday that Olivia Newton-John released her song "Let's Get Physical." The inspirational lyrics and catchy title accompanied the early stages of the so-called fitness boom of the '80s. But what was described as a "fitness boom" 20 years ago never really let up and, thus, is better characterized as a "fitness trend" — a trend with no end in sight.

During the past two decades, there has been a substantial increase in the number of fitness centers, as well as the number of people who join those centers. And, in general, the fitness industry has become more professional. In fitness centers, the staff is made up of people who are much more knowledgeable than in the past. No longer is the resident authority the neighborhood jock.

The advent of certifications in a wide range of specialties has also been a significant change, but isn't without its share of growing pains. Obviously, some certifications — and organizations — are more reputable than others, and the industry must determine what constitutes acceptable standards in a manner that's fair and reasonable.

Fitness programming continues to evolve based on the needs of the participants. In its infancy, the only choice for group fitness was high-impact aerobics. Nowadays, participants have a wide variety of options, including different types of low-impact



aerobics, yoga, Pilates and Spinning (which was created by Johnny G way back in 1987). Programming that holds little or no interest falls quickly by the wayside. Remember the short stay of slide aerobics?

Exercise equipment, and preferences for it, has changed a great deal, as well. In the 1980s, for example, stairclimbing machines were the rage. But their popularity has dwindled considerably, replaced by elliptical machines. Yet, treadmills continue to be a highly popular piece of equipment.

Over the past 20 years, research in the area of exercise, fitness and nutrition has increased dramatically. Among other things, this has given fitness professionals scientific ammunition with which to combat myths and misconceptions.

As strange as it might sound, another significant event was the arrival of the Internet. This has given fitness enthusiasts access to an unbelievable amount of information that's literally at their fingertips. Unfortunately, not all of it is credible. Indeed, any crackpot with a keyboard can post information on the Internet.

And over the past 20 years, an important occurrence that we can probably do without are those ubiquitous infomercials that sell fitness devices that, for the most part, offer far more hype than help. **FM**

What significant changes have occurred in strength training during the past 20 years?

Perhaps the most substantial change in the past 20 years has been the widespread acceptance of strength training as a productive form of exercise. Prior to that, relatively few people lifted weights — and most of those were men. Even many coaches and athletes were skeptical of strength training, for fear that it would result in excessive bulk and a loss of flexibility.

Not too long ago, it was quite unusual to see women exercising in fitness centers. Nowadays, it's almost unusual not to see women exercising in fitness centers. No doubt, their arrival has forced facilities to improve their overall operations.

Going back 20 years, one of the hot trends was shorter — but more intense — workouts in the weight room. Circuits of 12 machines or so were marketed as "The 30-Minute Workout." Sound familiar?

Other major changes that occurred in the past two decades include the introduction of high-quality plated machines and grip-friendly plates, as well as the emergence of personal training.

But regardless of the changes that have taken place in the past, and will take place in the future, the basic requirements of productive strength training remain the same: To improve strength, a muscle must be loaded with some form of meaningful resistance, and the workload must be made progressively more challenging. Truly, some things never change. **FM**

Matt Brzycki is coordinator of recreational fitness and wellness programs at Princeton University, Princeton, N.J. He has more than 22 years of experience at the collegiate level, and has authored, co-authored or edited 13 books.

Do you have questions that you need answered? Email them to edit@fitnessmgmt.com.