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fitness

## Are you being coached?

**PUSH IT** | Personal trainers are great for a workout at the gym, but a new breed of fitness professionals offering the whole-body philosophy that elite athletes embrace can help us common folk perform like the pros.

By **Rebecca Landwehr**  
Special to The Denver Post

Mark McDonald doesn't want to do an Ironman triathlon. He's not interested in running the Leadville 100, nor did he tackle the Triple Bypass this year.

McDonald just wants to lose some weight and get back into shape. But instead of joining Weight Watchers and hiring a personal trainer, McDonald found himself a coach.

While it's common for Colorado's elite athletes to hire a coach to improve performance, the whole-body approach enlisted by a new group of coaches is finding favor with locals who probably never will enter any grueling races.

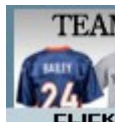
So what's the difference between paying a personal trainer for regular workout instruction at the gym and hiring a coach? The fitness pros marketing themselves as coaches are offering more than just workout sessions to their clients. A coach often adds



Andrea Wieland, center, motivates Bob Goodyear as he performs a VO2 Max test as International Center for Performance and Health intern Jen Scherer cheers him on. Wieland, a former Olympic athlete, has a degree in psychological counseling. (Post / Glenn Asakawa)

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exercise physiology, nutrition and mental conditioning to the client's fitness prescription.

"He changed my whole mind-set," says McDonald, CEO at Corporate Intelligence Executive Search, speaking of coach Rich Russon. "This is fitness for the long term, not just this season."

McDonald weighed 250 pounds and lacked the energy to endure more than a 60-minute bike ride when he first came to Rick Russon, a USA Cycling-certified coach. Within a matter of months McDonald lost 15 pounds, lowered his blood pressure and gained enough stamina to handle a regular three-hour ride each weekend. Their coach-client relationship is built upon just two coaching sessions, which produced an analysis of McDonald's riding, a detailed ride schedule and a nutritional overview. Today they maintain an open dialogue on McDonald's progress handled mostly over the phone.

McDonald opted for a cycling coach rather than a personal trainer after he saw the change in performance in one of his cycling buddies. It was a decision that saved him money and time at the gym.

"I'm not a competitive coach," says Russon, the founder of Midlife Cycling, a coaching business geared toward recreational athletes between 45 and 60 years old. Most clients come to us with a health issue; some are recovering from injury; others are just trying to lose weight. Russon wants his clients to look at cycling as fitness for the rest of their life; a low-impact way to stay active and enjoy living. Russon charges \$60 an hour for his one-on-

one training and also offers group classes on cycling physiology and nutrition at \$45 per session. His clients generally splurge for a few hours of his time when they're beginning a new fitness program or if they are looking to break up their routine. He offers cycling analysis with the aid of his computerized training system along with developing ride schedules and a training routine of core exercises that can be done at home in the client's spare time.

"Maybe it's an ego thing, but I enjoy helping people succeed," Russon says.

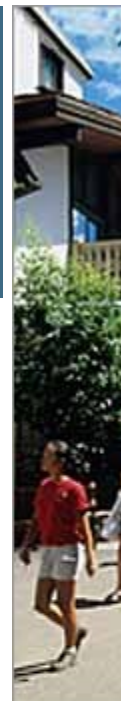
The mind game

Although Russon works only with noncompetitive clients, often it's the same coaches training those intense Colorado triathletes who devise scaled-back workouts for their recreational clients. Colorado's elite athletes already are familiar with Evergreen's

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Colorado Center for Altitude Training and Performance, but the center's director of exercise physiology and coaching, Cortino Garcia, says working with recreational athletes brings him as much - if not greater - coaching rewards as he gets working with his elite competitors. His recreational coaching clients have ranged from a 70-year-old man training to climb Africa's Mount Kilimanjaro to a runner intent on conquering a steep hill near her house.

Although he isn't a sports psychologist, Garcia knows how to ask questions to identify the mental issues that go hand in hand with fitness success.

"If a 40-year-old woman tells me she wants to lose weight, I'll ask, 'What does that mean to you?'" Garcia says. Often that mental component of coaching means talking a client down from such unrealistic expectations as returning to the figure she had as a 20-year-old. "I'll set other goals that are realistic and attainable," like running five miles at a faster speed or designating a 14,000-foot peak to climb, he says.

After meeting with a client for an initial interview and fitness assessment, Garcia designs a detailed training schedule customized to his client's goals, be they weight loss, competing in an upcoming event or simply improved fitness levels. He too has a three-pronged approach to coaching, addressing mental and emotional issues along with nutrition and physical training.



Andrea Wieland oversees Bob Goodyear's abdominal exercises at International Center for Performance and Health. (Post / Glenn Asakawa)

Garcia charges \$25 a week for his training plans. That cost includes the initial interview and assessment, and the client walks out the door with a detailed calendar of fitness training. Although he doesn't maintain a continual dialogue with these clients, often they return a few times a year with new challenges to face. Garcia prefers to coach clients over a six-month relationship but will take on clients for as little as eight weeks.

"Every athlete comes to me with a goal, whether

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they're an elite athlete or a hiker who just wants to climb a fourteener this summer," says Garcia, who loves the challenge of creating highly individual training programs. "Once we identify their strengths and weaknesses, I can create a plan to get them there."

#### A team approach

The coaching relationship can take as much time and money as the client wants to invest. Andrea Wieland, a member of the 1996 U.S. Olympic field hockey team, designed a team approach to coaching for her clients at the newly opened International Center for Performance & Health in Denver.

"For the Olympics we had a team of experts to help us develop in multiple dimensions of our performance," says Wieland, CEO and founder of ICPH. "I saw that approach was missing for folks who wanted to excel with their own fitness goals."

Wieland's business is a 7,200-square foot Denver workout facility that maintains a staff of health and fitness professionals. Her bank of experts includes a nutritionist, an exercise physiologist, a physician's

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assistant and a psychologist/business -performance partner who is available for one-on-one client sessions. Their philosophy incorporates the big picture of performance (at home or at work) with their health goals.

"We're for the overachiever," Wieland says. "People who tend to perform at a cost to their health." Her clients mostly fall into the 35-55 age range and are often executives with fast-paced careers and mounting health concerns.

Although it also offers strength training, spinning classes and yoga, ICPH is not a traditional gym. Instead of signing up for monthly dues after a 30-minute tour, clients are encouraged to begin with a daylong health and performance assessment called "Team Based 360 Degree Care." For \$3,500, the plan includes a customized performance/health plan, which covers the mental, physical and performance goals for the client along with workout recommendations. The cost can go up to \$27,000 for those wanting to hire the team for a full year of coaching.

"We call it 'transdisciplinary,'" Wieland says. "We look at the whole being, not just the athlete, and who they are in relation to their family and work. Of course we cover exercise and nutrition, but it goes beyond that."

Buzz Yancey turned 60 last December, and the milestone was admittedly filled with trauma. An entrepreneur with no plans of slowing down at work or play, Yancey wanted a health plan that would see him through the rest of his life.

"I was headed into this great unknown, physically and emotionally, and I needed someone to help me deal with it," Yancey says. A trip to the trainer at his gym resulted in geriatric fitness routines that didn't address the big picture for this baby boomer. "I don't think the trainer knew what to do with a guy my age."

Yancey met with the ICPH team and created his plan. He usually visits the club four times a week whether it's for spinning class, yoga or to meet with Wieland to discuss his goals.

"Sometimes it's unnerving to think there are five people sitting around a table saying, 'What are we going to do about Buzz Yancey,'" he says. "But it keeps me accountable. I don't want to let the team down."

Rebecca Landwehr is a Denver -based freelance writer.

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#### How to find a coach

The process of hiring a fitness coach is similar to finding a personal trainer. The American College of Sports Medicine's council of experts suggests some universal guidelines for recreational athletes seeking professional support.

First, ask friends with similar health and fitness goals for recommendations. Also, coaches won't

necessarily be associated with a particular health club, so check with local sporting groups such as cycling or running clubs for coaching pros. Often these recreational sporting groups have several coaches that already work with the club.

Once you found a few candidates, make time for face-to-face interviews. Personality is key to the coaching relationship, so look for someone who will provide motivation without intimidation - a coach with whom you immediately connect.

Finally, after you've established a connection with a potential coach, be sure to ask a few basic questions before signing on the dotted line.

Questions to ask a potential coach

How long has he/she been coaching?

What types of clients does the coach prefer to work with?

Ask to speak with current clients as references.

What are the coaching fees and what services are included for that price?

Does the coach have a resource network? Can he or she refer you to other professionals when your fitness concerns fall outside the coach's expertise?

Professional certifications to consider

Does the coach have a four-year degree in an exercise science field (for example kinesiology, physiology or physical education)?

Does the coach have additional national certification or professional training in your sport of choice?

Is the coach certified in first aid and CPR?

For more information visit [acsm.org](http://acsm.org).

Free coaching sessions

Interested in trying a coach on for size?

In preparation for the Denver Livestrong Challenge event on Aug. 20, Nike is sponsoring free coaching sessions twice weekly for beginning cyclists, runners and walkers. USA Cycling-certified coach Rick Russon coaches the cyclists and registration is not required.

Nike 10//2 Training

Tuesdays at 6:30 at Sloan's Lake, 1701 Meade St.

Saturdays 9 a.m. at Sloan's Lake, 1701 Meade St.

Look for the big yellow tents at the southeast corner of Sloan's Lake. For more information, visit [nike.com/wearyyellow](http://nike.com/wearyyellow).

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