

## **Buyer Beware: A Client's Guide to Finding the Right Personal Trainer/Strength Coach**

**Anthony Donskov MS, CSCS, PES**

Although I am a relatively young strength and conditioning coach, I continuously take the time to educate myself through lecture, readings, DVD's, seminars, mentorship programs, and most importantly through experience in training my athletes/general clients. I have had the opportunity to learn, apply and grow from many of the best in the industry. If this business has taught me one thing its that the learning process is truly ever evolving!

Having said this, it continues to amaze me today how much work still has to be done. Our field is unregulated! Almost anyone can become a personal trainer, or call himself a strength coach. Whether it's an instructional DVD, an on-line coarse (many are good), or a weekend lecture, it's scary to see how many clients hire unqualified people to take care of their bodies. Would you hire a mechanic to fix your car, if he/she received this kind of education and limited experience? How about a physical therapist or doctor? The answer to this question is obviously NO! Below are three important factors that ALL athletes, general clients and team managers should look for when hiring a personal trainer/strength and conditioning coach.

**1.) Education/Experience:** Notice I didn't say anything about arm circumference, chest girth or if this person had a previous professional sporting career. Education and experience trump the previously mentioned attributes 100 percent of the time. Michael Boyle never played professional hockey, but his education and experience in this field (training 1000's of athletes) place him at the forefront of ice hockey strength and conditioning. Scotty Bowman (coached the most wins in NHL history) never played hockey past the junior level. It is their experience in the field (through man hours) and their education/knowledge that have made them successful coaches. Don't get me wrong, its nice to have a coach that once played the game/or currently trains, but this NEEDS to be coupled with proper education and experience. Experience comes from training athletes/clients. Big arms, big legs and hollow heads don't make for good coaches!

**2.) Results:** This may be the most important element. What are the results of the product? Are athletes'/clients' getting bigger, stronger, faster, and more powerful? Have previous weight loss clients lost weight? Are workouts being documented (If you walk into a gym today, its scary to see no records being kept of clients progress)? My grandfather always said, "**The quality is remembered long after the price is forgotten.**" If your personal trainer/strength coach has a track record of proven results, this is a very positive attribute! The only way to get these results is through training hours and experience. Results may also carry larger price tags. Remember, you get what you pay for. Quality training is no different.

**3.) Philosophy/Sport Knowledge:** What is the philosophy of your personal trainer? What does strength and conditioning mean to them? Do they understand your sport/job requirements? Which muscles get overused? Which muscles need stretched/strengthened? How to improve your strength? How to improve your energy system capacity? Every good personal trainer/strength coach should be able to defend each and every exercise written and be able to explain why it applies to the sport and/or individual being trained. In order to properly do this, they must have a thorough understanding of functional anatomy (please revert back to #1 re: education).

In my opinion, these are three essential elements to look for when hiring a good coach/personal trainer. As a customer, ask questions (ask many of them), and don't believe everything you hear. Certification doesn't always mean qualification. Education and experience outweigh the acronyms in this business. It's unfortunate in this day and age that many clients base decisions on aesthetics (don't get me wrong, I would want someone training me who could demonstrate each and every exercise and who took their health seriously), previous sporting career or simply without performing proper due diligence. Would you hire an employee for your company without an interview or background check? Why hire a trainer/strength coach without knowing about them, their experience, education, the results they've garnered, and their philosophy? After all, your body, performance gains and health are in their hands.

Anthony Donskov, MS, CSCS, PES, is a former collegiate and professional hockey player, founder of Donskov Strength and Conditioning Inc., ([www.donskovsc.com](http://www.donskovsc.com)) and Head Instructor/Director of Off-Ice Strength and Conditioning for The "OV" Hockey School ([www.ovhockey.com](http://www.ovhockey.com)). He can be reached at [info@donskovsc.com](mailto:info@donskovsc.com).