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CLUB INSIDER
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Norm Cates, Jr.

80 Years and Still Kickin'!

JANUARY 2026

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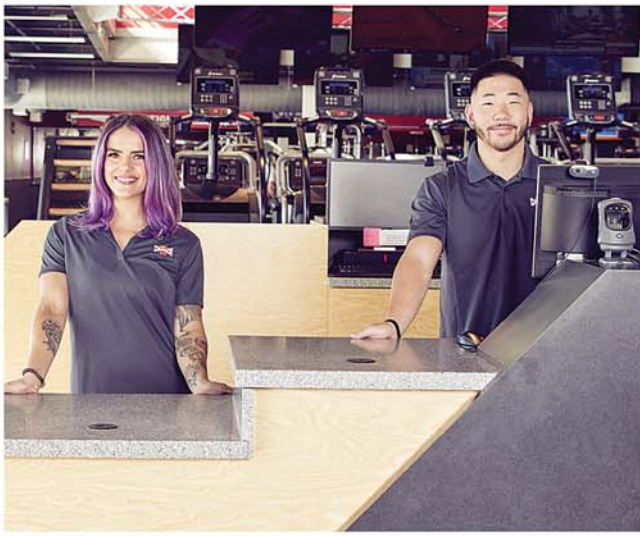

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80 Years and Still Kickin'!

By: Justin Cates

One's life is the aggregate of the experiences, lessons and people met and affected along the way. And, a life well lived is one that fills each of these categories with a plethora of stories and shared experiences. The life of *my Dad*, **Norm Cates, Jr.**, is one that has been well lived, and I am thankful it is one that continues on.

In honor of his **80th Birthday** on **January 17, 2026**, this month's cover story will share his life to date with you. Now, 80 years in, his experiences, lessons and the people he has met and affected along the way can fill volumes, so I am going to do my best to share as much of it with you as I can in this limited space.

Sharing this milestone in my Dad's life is a top honor in my own life, so I thank you for the time you spend reading this story. Though it is long and thorough, I can promise you it is entertaining, informational and beneficial. So, once again, I invite you to grab two or three of your favorite beverages, sit in your favorite comfortable spot and enjoy the following in-depth interview with Norm Cates, Jr.

P.S. Dad recently celebrated 25 years of sobriety, and I have no doubt that greatly contributed to his longevity. As one who still very much believes it's 5 o'clock somewhere and enjoys a good happy hour anywhere, I also believe his choice back then allowed me to share this story today. **Good on ya' Pops!**

An Interview With Norm Cates, Jr.

Club Insider (C.I.) - Where were you born, and where did you grow up?

Norm Cates (NC) - I was born in *Minden, Louisiana*. My Mom and Dad, **Leota and Norm Cates, Sr.**, were visiting my Mom's parents in the small town of *Springhill, Louisiana* when I decided to arrive into this world. Because Springhill was a tiny town with a population of 5,600 and no hospital (but it was home of **John David Crow**, the *1957 Heisman Trophy Award Winner* who played for Texas A&M), my Dad had to drive Mom 30 miles to the closest hospital, which was in Minden, and that's where I was blessed to enter this beautiful world.

*(See **Norm Cates** Page 10)*

Norm Cates

Top Crunch Fitness Franchise CR Fitness Holdings Surpasses the Million Member Milestone

TAMPA, FL - *CR Fitness Holdings*, the leading and fastest-growing franchise group of *Crunch Fitness*, announces it has surpassed one million members nationwide, contributing to Crunch Fitness' more than three million members worldwide and marking a major milestone in the brand's continued expansion and industry impact.

This achievement reflects Crunch Fitness' ongoing commitment to creating an inclusive, high-energy environment where fitness meets fun. With a focus on accessibility, innovation and community, Crunch continues to attract members of all fitness levels by delivering a unique blend of world-class equipment, dynamic programming and a welcoming culture complete with certified personal trainers and world-famous group fitness classes.

"Reaching one million members is a powerful reminder of why we do what we do," said **Tony Scrimale**, *CEO of CR Fitness*. "It represents millions of

*(See **Crunch** Page 6)*

24 Hour Fitness Founder Mark Mastrov Returns to Accelerate Brand's Next Era of Growth

CARLSBAD, CA - *24 Hour Fitness* announces that company founder and fitness industry trailblazer, **Mark Mastrov**, is returning as *Owner and Executive Chair* to accelerate the brand into its next phase of innovation and expansion. Mastrov and *LongRange Capital* have partnered to acquire 24 Hour Fitness and support the company's executive leadership team, led by **Karl Sanft**, *President and CEO*.

Mastrov founded 24 Hour Fitness, growing it from a single location to 420 clubs and 4.5 million members before selling the company in 2005. He then went on to lead the purchase of *Crunch Fitness* in 2009, expanding it from several locations to 550 owned and franchised clubs before it was sold in 2025. Widely regarded as the pioneer of the modern fitness culture, Mastrov has helped reshape the industry through four decades of worldwide development. With Mastrov's return, he and Sanft are united behind a shared vision to propel the company and industry into its most ambitious chapter yet.

This announcement marks a pivotal moment for 24 Hour Fitness, which is experiencing one of the strongest growth periods in its history. Fueled by renewed

*(See **24 Hour Fitness** Page 6)*

Inside the Insider: Edition #385

- Raise the Bar: Innovation in Strength Training - **By:** Terry Browning
- Five Keys to Introducing Teens to the Benefits - and Expectations - of Your Facility - **By:** Chris Stevenson
- The Core of It All: How Men's Fitness Trainers Are Rethinking Pelvic Health - **By:** Nancy Trent
- Americans Plan to Invest $60 Billion in Health and Fitness in 2026
- And, of Course, *Norm's Notes*

Norm's Notes

■**Hello Everybody!** This is your **Club Insider Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993** checking in with our **385th monthly edition of this 30+ year running club business publication** I refer to as: **A Labor of Love!** I'm very thankful that you've tuned in again for this iteration of **Norm's Notes**, as I proceed on my keyboard with my longtime habit of **"Telling-It-Like-It-Is!"** I'm really happy that you're reading this edition, and I want to **THANK YOU ALL** for sticking with us every month! As usual, we have a bunch of health and fitness club business news, **so please read on!**

■**Is AMERICA a GREAT COUNTRY, or WHAT!? Hmm... hmm... hmm!** And, as usual, let me start these **Norm's Notes** with my normal monthly salutation to you all: **GOD BLESS AMERICA and GOD BLESS YOU, YOUR FAMILY and YOUR BUSINESS!!!**

■**Happy Birthday** to my Son, **JUSTIN CATES!!!** Thank you for all you do for us, *Club Insider* and the industry!

■If you have not already done so, be sure to sign up and make your plans for **The HFA Show 2026**, to be held in San Diego, March 16 - 18. Go to: **healthandfitness.org**. Check out the **HFA Ad** on **Page #15.**

■On December 4th, my best friend, **RUSSELL MARCHIONE**, of Rome, New York, informed me that he was experiencing a huge challenge with his personal health. The matter is that he's had to have BOTH of his kidney's removed due to cancer!

Here's what Russ wrote to me: "I am reaching out with a humble and heartfelt request. I am in urgent need of a living kidney donor. I have had both kidneys removed due to cancer, and while I continue to fight with strength and courage, a kidney transplant is my chance for longer survival and a healthier life."

Russ continues: "A living donor provides the greatest opportunity for better health, increased longevity and more precious years with my family. Even learning about this process or simply sharing this post can make a life changing difference. Thank you for your kindness, your prayers and for sharing this message. Your support truly gives my family and I hope **upstate.donorscreen.org**."

■Folks, let me briefly share the background of my friendship with the fellow who wrote the comments above, my best friend, **RUSS MARCHIONE**. Way back in 1963, I was a *Junior at Rome Free Academy High School (RFA)* in Rome, York. There, in Rome, my Dad was a jet engine tech rep for *Pratt & Whitney Aircraft*, and he was based at *Griffiss Air Force Base*, which is in Rome. Dad got transferred to North Carolina after we had lived in Rome for two years. So, I was going to have to leave RFA, where I was going to be Co-Captain of our high school football team. I really didn't want to move to North Carolina, so Russ and his Dad, **DOMINICK**, and Mom, **LORETTA**, invited me to move into their home for my Senior Year of high school. WOW, what a marvelous experience that turned out to be! I have been and will always be grateful to Russ and his wonderful Mom and Dad forever!

RFA was my high school, and it had 3,000 students before a new high school was built in Rome, taking away 1,500 students from RFA! So, to be named Co-Captain of the RFA Varsity Football Team was a very high honor for me. And, I was also greatly honored when the aforementioned Russ Marchione and his family invited me to live with them my senior year of high school. I accepted their invitation.

Norm Cates

As a Co-Captain of the RFA Football Team playing for a high school that had 12,000 fans attending games on Friday nights was very special. Later, I was honored when I was named to the *All Upstate New York Football Team*. That honor caused me to receive a full football scholarship to **N.C. State University** where I was honored even further when my

*(See **Norm's Notes** Page 6)*

About Club Insider

Celebrating 30+ Years of TRUST

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Thanks and Appreciation

At *Club Insider,* we are excited to be in our **33rd Year** of this home-based health and fitness club trade publication! The thought that this publication was *founded to serve an industry I truly love,* and so that *I could become a Mister Mom for my son,* **Justin**, is still *intriguing* and *amazing* to us. So, I wish to extend my most sincere **Thanks and Appreciation** to everyone who has made this amazing 30+ year run possible.

Very sincere *Thanks and Appreciation* go to the **late Rick Caro**, the **late Dr. Gerry Faust** and the **Faust Executive Roundtable #1** for helping me decide in 1993 what my home-based business would be. *Thanks and Appreciation* to my long-time friends, **Ron Hudspeth** and **Cathy Miller**, formerly of **Atlanta's Hudspeth Report** for the tremendous assistance they provided. *Thanks and Appreciation* to all of the folks at **Walton Press** in Monroe, Georgia. They did an absolutely excellent job for us over the years and printed every one of our monthly printed editions! And, of course, *Thanks and Appreciation* to the **United States Postal Service** for sending those editions to our readers!

Now, as we have gone all digital, *Thanks and Appreciation* to all of our **READERS**. Sincere *Thanks and Appreciation* to our **Club Insider Advertisers**, past and present, for their kind and dedicated support of this publication. *Thanks and Appreciation* to all of our **Club Insider Contributing Authors**, past and present. *Thanks and Appreciation* to the **Health & Fitness Association** for all it does for all of us. And, sincere *Thanks and Appreciation* to my son, **Justin**, our *Publisher*, who is a truly great business partner. You name it and Justin does it each and every month!

Last, but surely not least, this writer who refused to fear failure when many told him he didn't have a chance of surviving the publishing business for even a year did survive. And, he would like to give his sincere *Thanks and Appreciation* to the power that made that survival happen: **God**.

Very sincerely, with love in my heart for you all,

Norm Cates, Jr.

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...Norm's Notes

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teammates elected me to be Co-Captain of my Freshman Team. I went on to be named to *1st Team All Atlantic Coast Conference Football All Star Team*. Our N.C. State Team was ranked **#3 in the USA** with an 8 and 0 record. Unfortunately, we finished that season with a 9 and 2 record by beating *The University of Georgia* in the *1967 Liberty Bowl* in Nashville, Tennessee. **Go Wolfpack!!!**

■This news is from **BOB HATHAWAY**, who writes: "I'm thrilled to share, effective January 1st, that I will be moving into my new role with *The Edge Fitness Clubs LLC as Regional Vice President of Operations*. I've had the privilege of working with so many great leaders in my time with Edge. I look forward to helping forge a strong future and growth for Edge in 2026 an'nd beyond." The Edge has also recently announced a $25 million investment in system-wide upgrades. *Club Insider* says, **"Congratulations and good luck, Bob!"**

■As an *Atlantan*, congratulations are due to **MATT RYAN**, a sports analyst and the future hall of fame, former quarterback for the *Atlanta Falcons*, as he was named by **ARTHUR BLANK**, the *Falcons Team Owner*, to be the team's *President of Football!* Ryan's hiring comes just days after the Falcons terminated *Head Coach*, **RAHEEM MORRIS**, and *General Manager*, **TERRY FONTENOT**, after an 8-9 season that ended on Sunday, January 4th with a 19-17 win against the *New Orleans Saints*. In his new role, Ryan will oversee all aspects of football for the organization, reporting directly to Falcons owner, Arthur Blank. He'll also be involved in the search for both the Head Coach and GM roles, which are now open. **Best of LUCK to MATT RYAN** as he embarks on a very exciting and challenging part of his life!

■Folks, in our *January 2024 Edition of Club Insider*, I wrote the following **Norm's Note** expressing **my sincere THANKS and APPRECIATION** to seven people in my life who have made a **HUGE DIFFERENCE**. As I turn 80, while reviewing some of my past comments, I came across this Note, and right then, I decided I just had to share it again! Especially for those of you who may not have previously read it. It read and has been updated to read:

First, I want to thank my friend, **RICH BOGGS**, because were it not for him, along with our now deceased former partners, **LYLE RAY IRWIN** and **FRED STRECK**, I would have spent my working life as a commercial airline pilot, not as a club developer and owner/operator, and later a newspaper owner and publisher for 30+ years.

Next, it's important that **I THANK and ACKNOWLEDGE the late RICK CARO** for all he did for me, **JUSTIN** and **ALL of US** in the entire industry worldwide. Without *"UNCLE RICK's"* talented efforts, dedication and hard work for over 50+ years in our industry, trust me folks when I say that our industry would NOT be nearly as excellent and as advanced as it is today! And, for sure, *Club Insider* would not be in its 33rd year of publication. That's because he was one of those who helped me dream up *Club Insider*, and he has hugely contributed to our efforts over the past 30+ years! Even more importantly, along with Justin, Uncle Rick was one of the two people who saved *Club Insider* from going out of business, when in the Spring of 2020, I went blind in both eyes after I had a Retinal Stroke, which permanently blinded me in my right eye, and then, I went blind in my left eye because of cataracts! GOD Blessed Me with the return of my vision in my left eye after a successful cataract surgery many months later.

I also want to **Tip My Black Hat** to our friend, the one and only **JOHN McCARTHY**. John is the man who successfully took on the organization called *IRSA* that Rick, I and five others had dreamed up... The *International Racquet Sports Association, a/k/a IRSA* in the beginning (then *IHRSA*, and now, *HFA*). I call *him "BIG JOHN"* because in my eyes he IS BIG! John directed IRSA/IHRSA and made it successful for over 25 years before he retired! **THANK YOU, BIG JOHN!** And, I do not want to fail to mention my friend, **JOE MOORE**. Joe stepped into John McCarthy's role as IHRSA Executive Director after John retired and Joe did a fine job for IHRSA.

I want to also recognize and acknowledge **MS. ELIZABETH CLARK**, HFA's highly esteemed and hard-working *President and CEO* since mid-2021. Liz is doing a great job for the Association, and I want to thank Liz for ALL of her efforts!

Last, but for sure, not least, I want to **HEAP A HUGE AMOUNT OF PRAISE and MY VERY SINCERE THANKS and APPRECIATION on JUSTIN CATES**, *my fine Son and Partner in Club Insider*. For 20+ years, Justin has done a truly great job every week and every month with our *Club Insider WEEKLY* and our *Club Insider MONTHLY* Editions. **GOOD ON YOU, JUSTIN CATES! And, JUSTIN, THANK YOU SO VERY MUCH FOR ALL OF YOUR HARD WORK** on *Club Insider* and ALL you do for our industry worldwide!

Folks, I thought it was important for me to write this special Norm's Note recognizing, acknowledging and praising the special people in my life. **THANK YOU ALL!**

■**JUSTIN and I want to THANK YOU for reading Club Insider! We appreciate you being with us. And, in particular, WE VERY SINCERELY APPRECIATE ANY and ALL SUPPORT OF OUR ESTEEMED Club Insider ADVERTISERS! PLEASE DO BUSINESS WITH THEM and WHEN YOU DO, PLEASE TELL 'EM Club Insider SENT YOU! THANK YOU ALL!**

■**God bless our troops, airmen and sailors worldwide and keep them safe. Thank you, Congratulations and Welcome Home to all of our troops who have served around the world. God bless America's Policemen and women and Firemen and women; keep them safe. Finally, God bless you, your family, your club(s) and your members. God Bless America! Laus Deo!**

(Norm Cates, Jr. is a 50+ year veteran of the health, racquet and sportsclub industry. He is the Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993 of Club Insider, celebrating 30+ years of trust in publication. In 1981, he was IHRSA's First President, and a Co-Founder of the Association with the late Rick Caro and five others. In 2001, he was honored by IHRSA with its DALE DIBBLE Distinguished Service Award, one of its highest honors. And, in 2017, he was honored with Club Industry's Lifetime Achievement Award. You can reach Norm by phone at **770-635-7578** *or email* at **Norm@clubinsideronline.com**.*)*

...Crunch

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workouts, goals achieved and communities strengthened. We're proud to grow alongside our members and continue expanding the Crunch experience across the country."

CR Fitness Holdings currently operates 93 Crunch Fitness locations across Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Texas, with continued expansion in Arizona and beyond. Backed by more than 150 years of combined industry experience, the leadership team (**Vince Julien, Geoff Dyer, Tony Scrimale** and **Jeff Dotson**) has built CR Fitness into a growth-driven organization known for disciplined expansion, strong unit performance and community impact.

Each Crunch location is designed to deliver a high-value fitness experience, offering top-tier strength and cardio equipment, group fitness studios, cycling studios, the *HIITZone, HydroMassage* beds, dry saunas and spacious locker rooms.

Crunch Fitness is also known for its innovative group fitness programming and certified personal training services. Members have access to expert-led classes including *BodyWeb with TRX, Zumba, Cardio Tai Box, Yoga Body Sculpt, Fat Burning Pilates* and the *HIITZone*, a proprietary high-intensity interval training program, along with personalized coaching designed to support individual goals.

...24 Hour Fitness

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demand for health and wellness, the company has invested in a nationwide slate of remodeled clubs and a wave of new experiences that allow each member to accomplish their personal wellness goals. The brand employs approximately 7,000 team members and supports more than 113 million workouts each year, ranking in the top three among company-owned fitness clubs in the country.

"Mark founded and built 24 Hour Fitness into the powerhouse brand it is today, and the organization is inspired and energized by his return," said Sanft. "With the business stronger than ever and our investments aligned with what members value most, this is the perfect time to welcome him back. Together with LongRange Capital, we're ready to accelerate our growth story."

Over the past two years, 24 Hour Fitness has rolled out an extensive remodel program and introduced a premium suite of offerings, including *Recovery24*, giving members a robust range of resources to support their personal wellness goals and journey. 24 Hour Fitness has also deepened its roots in the community through expanded partnerships with major sports organizations across the *NBA, NFL* and *NWSL*. Together, these initiatives have strengthened the company's position as one of the most recognizable, trusted and enduring brands in the industry.

"LongRange Capital was founded on the belief that through strategic support, patient capital and a focus on delivering greater value for customers, companies can develop into exceptional businesses over the medium- and ultimately long-term," said **Bob Berlin**, *Founder and Managing Partner of LongRange Capital*. "24 Hour Fitness has an iconic legacy and significant opportunity ahead, and we're excited to partner with Mark, Karl and the exceptional team at 24 Hour Fitness during this next phase of growth."

With the return of Mastrov's world-class expertise and LongRange Capital's backing, 24 Hour Fitness is doubling down on its mission to inspire healthier lives through innovation, community, outstanding fitness experiences and expanded wellness offerings. New initiatives, partnerships and global expansion plans will be announced throughout 2026.

RBC Capital Markets LLC served as financial advisor and *Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP* acted as legal counsel to the investor syndicate. *Sidley Austin LLP and AJB Law Group, PC* acted as legal counsel to Mark Mastrov and his affiliated investors. *Piper Sandler & Co.* served as financial advisor, and *Ropes & Gray LLP* acted as legal counsel to 24 Hour Fitness.

Americans Plan to Invest $60 Billion in Health and Fitness in 2026

WASHINGTON, D.C. - A new, nationwide survey from the *Health & Fitness Association (HFA)* finds that Americans plan to spend **$60 billion in 2026** to support health, fitness and exercise goals and New Year's resolutions.

Among the 56% of U.S. adults who plan to set personal goals for the year ahead, 54% say they intend to focus on health, fitness and exercise, making it the most popular resolution focus for 2026.

The goals of individuals setting health and fitness resolutions reflect a broad view of well-being, including building muscle or strength (50%); improving mobility, flexibility and/or posture (48%); and improving overall mental health through physical activity (46%).

To turn these ambitions into action, Americans emphasize the importance of structured exercise environments. About 86% say access to fitness facilities such as gyms, studios and health clubs will be important to achieving their goals, including 61% who say it will be very important.

At the core of these decisions is a widely shared belief about the role of exercise itself. Nearly 9-in-10 Americans (89%) say regular physical activity is one of the most effective forms of preventive healthcare, a perspective that increasingly shapes how people plan and prioritize their spending. As a result, fitness remains a protected household expense even amid broader economic uncertainty. When asked which costs they would reduce if they needed to make budget cuts, only 23% of Americans said they would cut back on fitness or exercise spending, well behind categories such as dining out (44%), travel or vacations (36%) and entertainment (29%).

"Americans are not just setting fitness goals; they are budgeting for them," says **Liz Clark**, *HFA President and CEO*. "This research shows that people increasingly see exercise as an essential investment in their long-term health. Even in a challenging economic environment, Americans are prioritizing physical activity as a proactive form of preventive healthcare."

Key findings from the survey reveal:

- More than half of U.S. adults (56%) plan to set personal goals for 2026.
- Health, fitness and exercise are the most popular resolution focus for 2026, with 54% of goal-setters prioritizing these resolutions, followed by money/financial (49%), nutrition/diet goals (40%) and relationships with friends or family (37%).
- Among Americans planning to set health or fitness goals, expected spending averages about $61 per month, or approximately $733 per year.
- Nationwide, that translates into approximately $60 billion in planned health and fitness spending.
- Nearly 9-in-10 Americans (89%) believe regular physical activity is one of the most effective forms of preventive healthcare.

Follow-through on fitness goals is notable. Among Americans who included health, fitness or exercise-related goals in their New Year's resolutions for 2025, 55% say they fully achieved them.

Together, the findings highlight the central role of fitness and exercise in Americans' personal health strategies and budgeting decisions, underscoring the continued importance of fitness facilities, professionals and programs in supporting long-term health outcomes.

Methodology: *Kantar*, on behalf of the Health & Fitness Association (HFA), conducted an online survey between December 5 and 16, 2025, among a nationally representative sample of 2,000 adult Americans aged 18 and over related to New Year's resolutions and 2026 goals. The margin of error is +/- 2 percent and greater among subgroups.

Raise the Bar:
Innovation in Strength Training

By: Terry Browning

Consumer demand for strength training has never been higher. Google search data can tell you that, but in your facility and in your conversations, I'm sure you have noticed your members and prospects are looking for strength training that fits and fulfills them, whether they're brand new to it or long-time lifters.

Also higher than ever: *Their Expectations.* People don't just want to move; they want results. They want something innovative and inspiring, not lifting alone and not moving just for the sake of muscles. They want to lift better, move better and feel stronger in real life.

I'm proposing a solution to both: meeting people's strength training needs and meeting them where they are, all while delivering innovation that they (and you!) want. **Group Power**, *MOSSA's* fits-all strength training program is the most innovative workout out there.

Group Power is a barbell-based group fitness workout at its core, and it offers so much more. It's cutting-edge training styles, heavier lifting, functional 3D training and the product of real-world testing. With every quarterly Group Power release, we raise the bar (pun intended) so instructors can deliver the most effective, motivating and relevant workouts.

Not Older, But Better

Group Power isn't new; we celebrated its 20th year in 2025, but while some programs age, Power evolves, reflecting where fitness is going. It's not 20 years older; it's 20 years better. It's constantly refined, challenged, tested and elevated so you can offer fresh and challenging workouts to new movers and loyalists alike. First-time lifters feel successful. Experienced members feel challenged. And, everyone feels connected.

If you're thinking, "But we've offered Power for years..." Today, I'm asking you to revisit it. Grab a teammate and take a workout.

And, if you don't offer Group Power, or if what I'm describing doesn't sound (or feel) like Group Power at your facility, let's correct that... the sooner the better. Let us train your people and coach you on recruiting and reinspiring your instructor team, refreshing your schedule, refocusing your marketing message and reinvesting in your room and equipment.

Terry Browning

Two Needs, One Solution

As expectations for strength training continue to rise, you don't need trendy new programs to reach niche audiences; you need smarter ones to reach all audiences, programs that rise with people's expectations and keep people moving, seeing results, and sticking with you for decades.

Group Power delivers innovation and accessibility in a way few programs can. Let's make sure, together, that you deliver the modern, motivating strength training workouts you and your members are seeking, so your group fitness onboarding, retention and performance are their strongest ever in 2026.

▪ ▪ ▪

This New Year, let us help you renew your programs and get more people excited about strength training... for life. Email me at **terry@mossa.net** *to visit (or revisit) Group Power and to talk about making it the epicenter of group fitness at your facility.*

(As President and CEO of MOSSA, formerly known as Body Training Systems, Terry Browning leads the team that introduced Branded Group Fitness to health clubs in 1997 and now steers the company's growth in the consumer digital workout market. Terry has 30+ years industry experience and holds a degree in Marketing and Business Administration from the University of Akron. Terry can be reached by email at **terry@mossa.net** *or phone at* **800-729-7837, Ext. 242**.*)*

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...Norm Cates

continued from page 3

I chuckle at the second part of the question: *'Where did I grow up?'* That's kind of a long answer because my Dad was in the Air Force... *So, hold onto your hats, folks!* After being born in Louisiana, but having never lived there, by the time I was a Senior in high school, my family and I had lived in **nine cities**, including one in a foreign country... Japan. In order, those cities include: Texarkana, Arkansas; Colorado Springs, Colorado; Okinawa, Japan; New Castle, Delaware; Virginia Beach, Virginia; Goldsboro, North Carolina; Tampa, Florida; Panama City, Florida; and Rome, New York, where I played Varsity football and eventually earned an football scholarship to *NC State University*.

To read more about Norm's nine cities, check out the *Club Insider Archives* at **www.clubinsideronline.com/archives**.

Early Lessons Learned

C.I. - Wow, that is truly an incredible journey, and you were not even 20 yet! Moving around so much, what lessons did you learn?

NC - Having lived through our home being moved nine different times, I believe two lessons I've learned that have helped me a lot over the years are:

1. Develop a lifetime habit of NEVER MEETING A STRANGER. By that, I mean never let a stranger continue to be a stranger once you've both met. *Always be genuinely interested* in what the new people you meet are doing in and with their lives.

2. - You rarely get something in this world IF you don't ask for it.

N.C. State University

C.I. - Your time playing football didn't end at *Rome Free Academy*. Instead, you continued on at N.C. State University on a scholarship. Please take us through that experience.

NC - Here I was, an extremely determined young guy who earned a one-year full football Scholarship to N.C. State. But, I had to show up in Raleigh and prove myself before I would be granted and awarded the remaining three years of the scholarship. Did I prove myself? Long story short, I sure did! But, here's what happened.

Reporting to N.C. State for the freshman football team in September of 1964, I was assigned to a tiny room in *Tucker Dorm* on, of all things, *Cates Avenue* (By the way, they didn't name Cates Avenue after me! They named it in honor of the *Charles F. Cates and Sons Company* of Cates Pickle Company fame!). There were three of us crammed into that tiny dorm room, and the bathrooms were down the hall.

The two guys I roomed with were great fellows. There was **Chuck Amato**, a truly amazing dude who, in addition to being an All State Linebacker out of *Easton, Pennsylvania*, had also won the *Pennsylvania State Wrestling Championship at 167 pounds three years in a row!* Later in life, Chuck went on to be the *N.C. State Head Coach* for six years, and he did a fine job during that era. Chuck retired after 45+ amazing years of coaching football at all levels but the pros. There was also **Art McMahon**, who was from New Jersey. He became an early starter and was also elected to be one of the Co-Captains of our 1967 Team, along with **Steve 'Pigpen' Warren**. I nicknamed Steve 'Pigpen' because, during rainy day practices, Steve would often end up totally covered with mud! I know he hated that nickname, but that didn't stop us from electing him Co-Captain. And, he turned out to be a great player and team leader.

Coach **Earl Edwards** was *N.C. State's Head Football Coach* for many years, and in our Class of 1964, he had recruited some truly great high school football players from *all over the country*. So, to say the least, I was very *honored* to be given a full scholarship in this class, and then, shortly after arriving at N.C. State, to have been voted by that special 1964 Freshman Team to be one of their Co-Captains along with **Jay 'Momma' McDuffie**. We nicknamed Jay 'Momma' because he was always looking out for any of our teammates who were home sick or not feeling well.

Let me also mention that our special freshman class included a defensive tackle named **Dennis Byrd** (the late), who went on to be named *1st Team All American three years in a row* and a *1st Round NFL Pick by the New York Jets!* And, we had **Freddie Combs**, another super star, who would also make the *1st Team All American Team* our senior year in 1967. Plus, we had a great kicker our senior year named **Gerald Warren**, and he also made *1st Team All American!* So, as freshmen, when Jay and I were elected to be Co-Captains of this amazing freshman team, we both felt very highly honored to be Co-Captains among such talented company! Finally, but certainly not least, there was **Pete 'Mad Dog' Bailey**, my teammate, roommate and best friend at N.C. State.

Following my freshman year, and after playing second-string defensive end my sophomore year and then as a second-string offensive guard my junior year, I went on a massive weight training program. Here is what happened... Immediately after the last game of our 1966 season, I had five days to lose 17 pounds, from 200 down to 183, so I could pass the required *U.S. Air Force R.O.T.C. (Reserve Officer Training Corp.)* pilot training physical. Somehow, I did it! I bought a rubber suit and went on a starvation diet, and in just five days, I lost those 17 pounds and weighed in at 183. After that weigh-in, starting Thanksgiving weekend of 1966, I went on a three-day-per-week, two-and-a-half-hours-per-work-out upper body weightlifting program in which I would do ten sets each of six different lifts: *Standing Clean and Press, Bench Press, Standing Strict Bicep Curls, Standing Rows, Dead Lifts* and *Bridge Bench Presses*.

Simultaneously, I went onto a *Hoffman High Protein Milk Shake* augmented diet. My program was successful, because from December 1, 1966 to August 1, 1967, a total of eight full months, I went from **183 pounds to 237 pounds** with a high percentage of my weight gain being muscle. Then, on August 1, 1967, I reported to *Myrtle Beach Air Force Base* in *South Carolina* for a mandatory one-month-long R.O.T.C. Program, in which six days a week we would rise at 5AM for two hours of exercises such as pushups, pullups, sit-ups, running, etc. During that month, my body weight went from 237 to 220.

So, 220 was my football playing weight at guard when I reported to N.C. State for my senior year of football. Here I was, a dude who had played 2nd string guard my junior year behind a guy named **John Stec**, who made *1st Team All ACC* at guard, to then become starting guard on our 1967 Team. At one point, our team was 8 and 0 and ranked #3 in the country. And, as a starter on this special team, I was honored to be named as a member of the *Associated Press' 1st Team All Atlantic Coast Conference Football Team for 1967*, and I also received an *Honorable Mention on the 1967 All American Team*, both achievements I'm very proud of. Let me add that one month of R.O.T.C. Summer Camp training helped me achieve all of this.

*(See **Norm Cates** Page 12)*

Norm Cates with High School Coach Flood

Reunion of the 1967 N.C. State Wolfpack Team

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...Norm Cates

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Looking back on it all, ironically, the decision my 9th Grade High School Football Coach convinced my Mom, Dad and me to make, which was to drop my newspaper routes and play 9th grade football, had *finally paid off 8 years later!*

C.I. - I know what football has meant in my life and the lessons I've learned from the sport. What lessons did you learn from this experience?
NC - There's a few:

■In football, remember and never forget that *it isn't for the weak*. If you can't tolerate pain, forget about it, because football is NOT for you. But, trust me when I say that *life is often very painful*, too, no matter what you do. So, *having a powerful, disciplined mind* when you're dealing with *physical* or *emotional/mental pain*, or *both*, you will do better in life. And, **YOU WILL SURVIVE.**

■In football, always keep your head up whenever you're blocking a defenseman or if you are defenseman, always apply the same rule... *always keep your head up, not down*. And, when attacking challenges in life, *keeping your head up and going into challenges with intensity will give you a better result than if you do not attack!*

A Flying Man

C.I. - Following college, like your father, your early career was in the Air Force. Please tell us about that experience.
NC - Being a pilot became a goal in my life when I was just a kid. Having grown up with my Dad in the aviation world and being at Air Force bases all around the world all of my early life certainly fueled that goal. I never, ever forgot my goal, so when I got a full football scholarship to N.C. State, I immediately found out about and signed up for the *U.S. Air Force R.O.T.C.* Four years later, in October of 1972, upon graduating from N.C. State, I was immediately commissioned as a *2nd Lieutenant* in the *U.S. Air Force* and stationed at *Moody Air Force Base* in *Valdosta, Georgia*. There, I attended the *U.S. Air Force's 53-week Undergraduate Pilot Training Program*. If I recall correctly, I finished #**7 out of a Class of 72 student pilots**.

Upon graduation from pilot training, I was a qualified enough pilot that they made me an *Instructor Pilot* in the same 53-week program I had just graduated from. This was during the *Vietnam War*, and during that time, I taught about 60 student pilots, guys who had zero jet flying time, how to fly jets. Then, I was honored to be selected by the *Base Commander* to become what they called a *'Check Airman'* in what they called the *'Stan Board.'* My job in that role was to give proficiency check rides to the other instructor pilots, including the Base Commander! This was an amazingly interesting job. Moreover, the same Base Commander that recommended me for the Stan Board also recommended me for a job at the *U.S. Air Force Academy* in *Colorado Springs, Colorado*.

I was hired at the Air Force Academy to become an *Athletic Instructor*. My Base Commander told me he had personally recommended me because *he thought I had the talent, mindset and potential to be a General in the U.S. Air Force*. Just a few months later, the airlines restarted hiring, and I had to tell my Base Commander, my Squadron Commander and my friends, 'Sorry, but I've got to go be an Airline Pilot.'

C.I. - What lessons did you learn from that experience?
NC - What I learned is that, in life, *you never know what's going to happen*, and just when you think you've got things figured out... boom... *things can change really fast!*

Norm Cates the Fighter Pilot

C.I. - As you mentioned, following your time in the Air Force, you became a commercial airline pilot. Please tell us about that experience and how it actually led to your entrance into the health and fitness club industry.
NC - On January 6, 1973, I got out of the Air Force and immediately moved into the spare bedroom of my old friend and teammate, Pete Bailey's Riverbend Condo in *Atlanta, Georgia*. For any of you who have seen the amazing Academy Award nominated movie, *Catch Me If You Can*, starring **Leonardo DiCaprio** and **Tom Hanks**, you have seen exactly where I lived for four years... two years in Pete's condo and two years in my own apartment overlooking the entire scene. To say this was probably the *LUCKIEST* happening in my life would be an understatement. And, it was during this time that I got hired for two different jobs as a commercial pilot.

The first was as a Co-pilot on the *Holder Construction Company's* eight passenger Sabreliner Corporate Jet. Then, after flying the Sabreliner, I was extremely lucky again to be hired by what has, through multiple airline mergers, become Delta Airlines. The odds of getting that airline job were very low, so the story of how it happened is one of sheer fortune.

One night, I was at the *Riverbend Clubhouse* waiting my turn to play on one of the two racquetball courts they had there when I met a guy named **Gerald Cox**. While we waited and chatted, he told me he was the *General Manager of the Southern Airways Airlines Employment Office* (This is TRUE, folks, I'm not lying!).

I said to him, 'WOW! That's great, Gerald! I've got to tell you that I've had an employment application turned in and on file in your Employment Offices for over two months now, and I've been hoping and praying for an interview. I've got close to 2,000 hours of jet time as a jet instructor pilot and as a Sabreliner pilot, and I would greatly appreciate an interview.'

He laughed and said, 'Well, you happen to be in the right place at the right time. Norm, right now, we have over 1,200 applications on file, and we are hiring pilots at the slow rate of 20 pilots per class per month. I'm about to finish a new class that will start next week, so why don't you call me at my office tomorrow and I will set up an interview for you with me and the *Chief Pilot*, **Bubba Shanahan**, who is also interviewing new hires.'

Wow! I said, 'You bet I will! Let me find a pen, and I'll write down your phone number.' So, I went into the weight room and found a pen and an unused workout card. The next day, I called him and got an interview with *Southern Airways* that afternoon. I was hired the next day, and had my destiny been different, I would now be a *retired Delta Air Lines Captain*.

Again, this is a true story! I was hired the next day, I went to a 30-day orientation class, and I started flying. Ironically, after being hired in April of 1973, six months later, in October of 1973, 39 other pilots and me, all new hires, were furloughed for what turned out to be four years! We no longer received pay and most benefits, but we did have one nice benefit remain during that time, which was they allowed us to ride on DC9 jump seats for free!

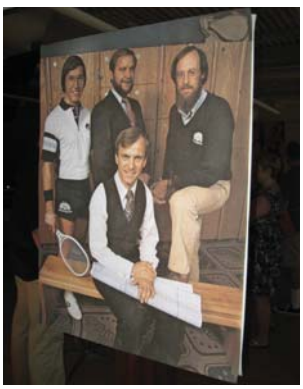
The Health and Fitness Club Industry

C.I. - How did your furlough lead you into the health and fitness club industry?
NC - As you may know, there's an old saying, *'The Lord works in mysterious ways,'* and I can give testimony here to that being a fact and my belief that the Lord was working for me when he got me laid off by the airline for four years. I believe that to be a *'Divinely Guided'* event, because it led me to meet in this order: **Ray Irwin, Rich Boggs** and **Fred Streck**. The four of us created a chain of nine racquetball clubs called *Courtsouth* that eventually had 58 courts in Atlanta and 50 courts in out-of-town franchises. These nine clubs also offered things such as *Nautilus* rooms; free weight rooms; indoor tracks; swimming pools; bar/lounges; locker rooms with full amenity packages including steam, sauna and whirlpools; and typically, LOTS and LOTS of parking! Here's how it happened.

Once again, while living at Riverbend and waiting for a racquetball court (*laughing*... that seemed to become a theme in my life), I met another person who changed my life forever, and that was the late **Lyle Ray Irwin!** From that meeting in 1974, I became deeply involved in the health, racquet and sportsclub industry, and since 1974, I've spent 47 years of my life involved in this great industry. Meeting Ray Irwin that night, while he and I waited for a racquetball court, truly changed my life forever.

Not very long after I met Ray, we were again by the courts one evening when I asked Ray to consider investing in the *Southeast Land Syndications* I was selling with my college football teammate and friend, Pete Bailey. Ray told me that he couldn't invest because he was saving his money to start a new business. I asked

*(See **Norm Cates** Page 14)*



The Courtsouth Boys

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...Norm Cates

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what kind of business it was, and he told me it was a *'Racquetball Club.'* Needless to say, I became very interested in Ray's project, and we became involved with a local guy named **Bobby Siegal**, whose father was rich. So, we sold Mr. Siegal on the racquetball club idea, and he decided to do it... with his son, Bobby, *NOT WITH US!* We only found out about it when a big billboard sign was erected on the land next to I-285 in Atlanta. To say that we were pissed would be an understatement!

Fast forward a few months, and Ray and I met the one and only **Rich 'Romeo Papa' Boggs**. An old Air Force Instructor Pilot of mine, **Ed Jelk**, introduced us to Rich. They were both *Georgia Tech* graduates, and Rich had just moved back to Atlanta from California. He had come back to Atlanta because there were ZERO racquetball clubs here at the time, and he intended to build the first one. So, there we were, the three musketeers of the racquetball world: *Ray Irwin, Rich Boggs* and *Norm Cates*.

We then had a meeting at Rich's house where we met the late **Fred 'Fast Freddie' Streck**. The bank we had been talking to for a loan to start the business had recommended him to Rich because he was a very successful customer of theirs. Fred was a very wealthy night club owner who dabbled in the world of construction. His two famous Atlanta night clubs, one named *Xanadu* and the other named *The Stone Pony*, provided Fred (and us) with the $300,000+ in cash we needed to build our first club (this was in the 1970s folks!). Good thing, too, because combined, Rich, Ray and I didn't have a pot to piss in! Also attending was a friend of Rich's, an architect named **Peter Hand**, whom we had already been working with.

Truly amazingly, in just an hour and a half, we formed a partnership among us four guys. And, even more amazingly, these words came from Fred's mouth to wrap up the meeting. *'We will be under construction on Friday morning!'* That pledge was made by Fred on a Wednesday night.

At 10AM the Friday morning following that Wednesday night meeting, I went to the building, and when I walked in, I spotted *Court #1* with brand-new cinder block walls already over 10 feet high! Clearly, as he promised, Fred was wasting no time getting this baby done. That afternoon, we had our *Membership Presales Office* open, and Rich, our marketing guru, was preparing brochures for membership sales. By the time we opened what we originally called *Courthouse I*, we had presold **1,200** annual memberships. Then, in just three months, we had **5,000** memberships.

Our model was to sell very low-priced annual memberships for **$15** a year for a single, **$25** for a couple and **$30** for a family. People would then book one of our ten courts and pay by the hour for court time. The hourly rate in non-prime time was **$2.50 per person**, and starting at 4PM, prime time was **$4 per person**. For months, we were *100% booked from 6:30AM to 11PM at night!*

In two years, we had nine clubs either open or under construction. We had four in *Atlanta*; one in *Columbus, Georgia*; two in *Knoxville, Tennessee*; one in *Murfreesboro, Tennessee* (outside of Nashville); and one in *Birmingham, Alabama*. Following the success of *Courthouse I* and additional locations, we changed the name to *Courtsouth*, and we grew to have **60,000** memberships!

An Infant Industry

C.I. - In 1974, when you entered the health and fitness club industry, it was truly in an infant state. Please describe the clubs of old compared to what has become the norm of today.

NC - They are two different worlds, really. In the early days, we got by without *Lifecycles* because they weren't yet invented and brought to market by **Ray Wilson** and **Augie Nieto**. When they arrived, we immediately acquired dozens of them. Of course, so did our competitors. And, at the time, all we had for strength training were five *Nautilus* machines, dedicated primarily to lower body work and a small free weight room. We added more Nautilus upper body machines, and we installed **Bill Hubner's** *Paramount Sports Trainer Multi-Station Weight Machines*. So, needless to say, the health and fitness club world is far, far more advanced today than it was 47 years ago when I started. Later, as we went our own ways outside of the original Courtsouth partnership, my future clubs were multipurpose format. We had a lot of what you would expect today, but of course, they were earlier versions of everything (laughing).

C.I. - During those early days in the industry, you became a *Co-Founder and the First President of IHRSA (then IRSA)*. Please take us through this founding experience and the early days of the Association.

NC - I was nominated by my Courtsouth partners to become a *Board Member* at the *1978 National Court Club Association (NCCA) Convention* in Sarasota, Florida. I was elected to that Board, and that's how I met and became a lifelong friend of the **amazing late Rick Caro**. To say that *'Uncle Rick' Caro* (as I have referred to him for years) had an enormously positive impact on my life would be yet another understatement.

At the time we met in Sarasota, Rick was also serving on the *Board of Directors of the National Tennis Association (NTA)*. So, here we had this brilliant New Yorker named Rick Caro partnering up with another fellow New Yorker (*laughing...* I say that because I went to high school in Upstate New York) to pursue an idea that Rick had. I was very excited about the idea, which was to merge the *NCCA* and *NTA* to create a new organization called the **International Racquet and Sportsclub Association (IRSA)**, what we later called IHRSA and now HFA. It was Rick's idea, pure and simple. Today and forever, **Uncle Rick deserves all the credit for HFA's existence. Period.**

We kept the IRSA name for 12 years, at which time, under the leadership of the Association's President at the time, **Cecil Spearman**, a great man and good friend I call 'Daddy Rabbit,' and *Founder and Owner of the Laguna Niguel Racquet Clubs in California*, we added the **'H' for Health** into the IRSA name and acronym to make it **IHRSA**.

Club Insider is Born

C.I. - In 1993, you made the difficult decision to leave the day-to-day operations of the health and fitness club business. This led to the creation of *Club Insider*. How did this decision come about, why did you make it, and how did *Club Insider* come into existence?

NC - Well, Justin, you were just eight years old at the time, and we had built your Mom a nice antique store called *The Shops of Distinction* in *Roswell, Georgia*. That store kept her away from our home a lot. I still had four clubs, which also kept me away from home a lot, so I determined that my goal in life at that time would be to leave the day-to-day club business to create and enter into a home-based business where I could earn a living but still help our industry improve its operations. And, this would allow me to be an at-home Dad to you.

At the time, the late, great **Dr. Gerry Faust** had the terrific and now legendary *Faust Roundtable #1*. Rick Caro had introduced me to this great group of industry professionals and future long-time friends. We would all meet every three or four months, discussing our challenges and ideas, and seeing examples in the field with facility tours in each host city.

In Chicago, during our January 1993 meeting, I brought my request for help deciding on a new home-based business to our Roundtable, and we all brainstormed it together. The late **Jane Beusman**, beloved wife of our also beloved and late **'Brother' Curt Beusman**, came up with the idea of a new industry publication when she said, *'Norm, we need to have a new, irreverent, outspoken industry publication that **Tells-It-Like-It-Is** to our industry, and I think that would be a perfect new business that you could create and operate at home!'* I was standing there with a flip chart and a magic marker in my hand, writing down the group's ideas, and I yelled, *'That's it!'*

Four months later, at another Roundtable in California, we were brainstorming name ideas for my new publication when the late 'Brother' Curt Beusman said, 'We could call it *the Insider*. NO! Better yet, *The Club Insider!* Even better, *The Club Insider News!*' I smiled and once again exclaimed, 'That's it!' And, that WAS it. (We have since dropped the words *The* and *News* from our title to become *Club Insider*.)

Now, we are in our 33rd year of publication, and I could not be prouder and happier with the fantastic job you, JUSTIN CATES, my Partner and Son, have done as our new Publisher since taking over when I was blind during those tough months in 2020! Thank you!

C.I. - Wow, Dad, thank you. As you always say, 'That's clear proof there is a God.' Please tell us why you feel that way.

NC - Dude... there is no way you and I would have survived what we've survived publishing *Club Insider* for what's now 384 monthly editions without *'Devine Guidance'* from a higher power! *Period! And, I will go to Heaven with that belief.*

*(See **Norm Cates** Page 16)*

The late Rick Caro, Norm Cates and Justin Cates

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...Norm Cates

continued from page 14

C.I. - It goes without saying that 2020 was a horrible year for just about everyone. Though you were fortunate to avoid contracting the virus, you did experience a tough battle with blindness. Please take us through that experience.

NC - First, let me say this... without you achieving what you achieved with *Club Insider* when I went blind in March of the **'2020 Year From Hell,'** this conversation would be very different, and certainly not be presented in a *new edition of Club Insider*. **So, THANK YOU JUSTIN CATES!** You have made your Dad **VERY THANKFUL** and **VERY PROUD!**

As I hope everyone knows by now, **I am NO LONGER BLIND IN BOTH EYES!** In fact, I am able to see well with my left eye that now has a 20/25 rating. I can once again drive my car, read and write on my computer... you name it; I can do it. My right eye is a different story, though. It's about 90% blind except for a tiny segment of vision that is worthless. It goes without saying that having this happen in the middle of a pandemic certainly didn't present an easy experience, and no matter what, **I wouldn't wish blindness on anyone!**

C.I. - It is never easy to turn the reins of something you created over to someone else. But, in 2020, you needed to do so with *Club Insider*. Please take us through that experience.

NC - **TRUST.** That's the key and operative word I have for you here. **I TRUST you 100% with both my/our newspaper and with my life**, and that's all I have to say about that.

Oh yes... one other thing... GOD HAS TRULY BLESSED ME WITH SUCH A TALENTED PARTNER WHO JUST ALSO HAPPENS TO BE A GREAT AND LOVING SON! I HONESTLY COULD NOT BE MORE BLESSED! GOOD ON YOU AND THANK YOU, JUSTIN CATES!

A Family Affair

C.I. - Dad, what strikes me about your entire story is how one thing led to another. You were in the right place at the right time multiple times and at least two of those times being waiting on a racquetball court at Riverbend! (laughing). And, it is not lost on me that all of that literally led to my existence, let alone what I get to do as a career. Please share your thoughts about this.

NC - Absolutely. This amazing and fun collection of fond memories and experiences would definitely not be complete without comments about *one of the greatest things to ever happen to me in my life*, and that was when I met **ILENA**, my Wife of 40+ years now, and of course, your Mom!

One night back in my single days in Atlanta, I was introduced on a blind date to the *beautiful* **Ilena Marks**. After having been called by her friend, **Betsy Kappen**, to be a last-minute blind date for me, Ilena arrived at the *South of France Restaurant* around 10PM. We had a lovely dinner. Then, we went to a night club for dancing. Throughout the entire evening, we got along famously, and as we were dancing cheek-to-cheek at 2AM while night club staff were starting to place the chairs upside down on the tables, I looked down at her, and asked, 'Ilena, can you see yourself married to me?' She smiled, looked up at me, and said, 'Yes.'

A few months later, in *Las Vegas, Nevada*, Ilena and I attended *IRSA's 2nd Annual Convention and Trade Show*. With prior conversation, but honestly, no advance planning at all, on **January 20, 1982**, Ilena and I decided to get married at the *Chapel* adjacent to the *Riviera Hotel* in Vegas! **Doug Miller**, friend, an employee at the time, and later, a principal in *Sales Makers* with two other good friends of ours, **Ray Gordon** and **Eddie Tock**, was my **Best Man**.

Fast forward to **January 18, 1985**. This was clearly the **BEST DAY OF MY LIFE because it was the day our wonderful son was born**. As you know, you were born at the *Northside Hospital* here in Atlanta! And, I was **so excited** that I even hired an airplane to tow a banner around the hospital that read: **IT'S A BOY!!! JUSTIN CATES!!!** You have truly been a **BLESSING** to our family and a major **JOY** in our lives since your **Day One**.

All of the stops in my life led to you. Period. And, I may just be one of the luckiest guys in the world to have a son like you. *God blessed this family.*

MAKE IT FUN!!!

C.I. - In *every Edition of Club Insider*, we have published a small ad that says three simple words: **Make It Fun!** Please explain why we do this and the importance of *Making It Fun in clubs*.

NC - Let me explain it this way for club owners, operators and employees. Because of the devastation caused by the pandemic, this has become even more of an important thing for people to focus on than in the past! Folks, whatever you do... **DO NOT FORGET that, in order for your business to be successful, it must be CHOSEN by someone when they're thinking of what they're going to do during their day.**

Your club is up against a huge amount of competition for their time. That means that, whenever they go to your club and they do not have an enjoyable time, *they very possibly might not come back!* And, if they do not come back because you or someone who represents you have not treated them in a respectful, nice and friendly manner, *you are in trouble, and you may not even know it!*

So, as we progress into this New Year, I urge you to have staff meetings where all you do is **discuss customer relations** and **generate new ideas** about how you can get better at the **job of Making It Fun.** *YES...* **Making It Fun is a job**, and **it will put more money in your pocket!**

You Did Something Right

C.I. - Along the way, you have received some wonderful honors, including *IHRSA's 2000 Dale Dibble Distinguished Service Award* and *Club Industry's 2017 Lifetime Achievement Award*. So, you clearly did something right! How does this make you feel?

NC - **Happy. Honored.Grateful** and **Thankful**. *I am Dedicated and Committed to the industry. And, I am willing to do almost anything to help all in our industry.*

C.I. - In closing what has been a truly monumental interview, I'd like you to share the top three lessons you have for anyone reading this. It could be someone just entering this industry, or someone who has been in the industry as long as you (50+ years).

NC - Absolutely, they are:

1. Never, ever walk into the front door of your club without first briefly pausing for a moment to start your day with a quick *Thank You To God* for *blessing you* with the members and guests you have to serve that day and the staff you have to help serve them.

2. Treat your members like the **MOST IMPORTANT PEOPLE THERE ARE IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFE... because THEY ARE!**

3. *Never, ever, ever, and I mean ever*, let a member or employee leave while they're mad at you.

■ ■ ■

I want to thank my Dad, **Norm Cates, Jr.**, for his time interviewing for this cover story, not to mention his 50+ years of dedicated service to the health and fitness club industry! **Happy 80th Birthday, Dad!** Folks, because of space limitations, there were some stories that just didn't make the cut.

(Justin Cates is the Publisher of Club Insider. Having been born into a club business family in 1985, Justin grew up in the health and fitness club industry. He has lived and breathed this industry for 40+ years, since his own day one, and he loves it dearly. Graduating from the Terry College of Business at The University of Georgia in 2007, Justin has run day-to-day operations of Club Insider for 15+ years. Justin became Publisher of Club Insider in April of 2020. Justin's Dad, Norm Cates, continues to serve as Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993. You can reach Justin at **Justin@clubinsideronline.com**.*)*

A Classic Cates Family Photo

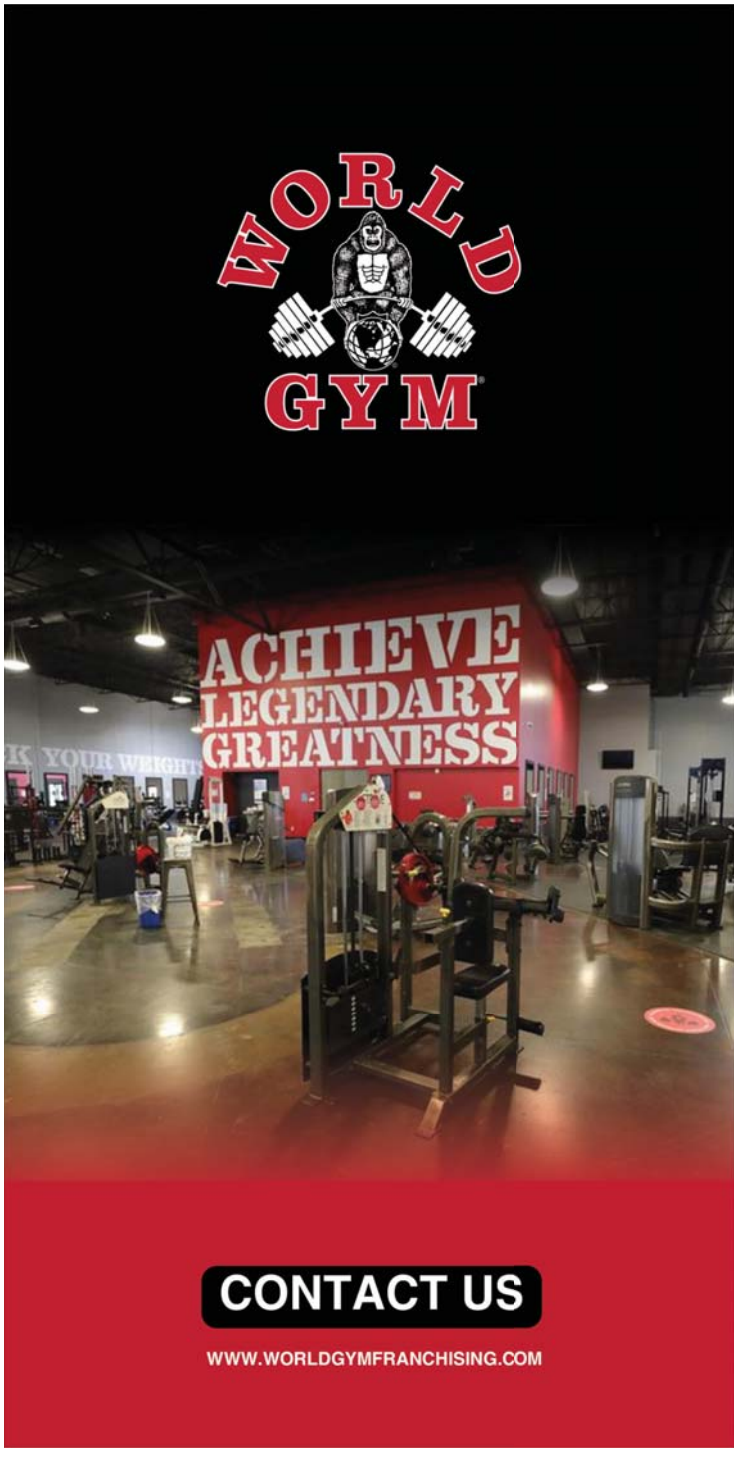
Make It Fun!

Five Keys to Introducing Teens to the Benefits - and Expectations - of Your Facility

By: Chris Stevenson

Embracing an active lifestyle from a young age can set the foundation for a lifetime of physical, mental and social wellbeing. The benefits of regular exercise for teens extend far beyond just physical health by encompassing mental resilience, social connections and the cultivation of healthy habits.

As a gym owner and consultant, I've witnessed firsthand how introducing teens to the gym environment can have a positive impact on their overall development. However, managing younger members in a gym setting comes with unique challenges. Striking a balance between fostering a positive experience for teens and ensuring harmony with other gym-goers is crucial. While challenging, a balance can be achieved with the right strategies.



Here are five key strategies I have recommended to gyms to effectively manage younger members based on my own experiences with youths as a gym owner and operator.

1. Stick to an Age Requirement:

Establishing a minimum age requirement for gym membership is the first step in creating a safe and success-conducive environment for teens. While it might be tempting to accommodate younger individuals eager to join, setting a minimum age ensures that members are developmentally ready for the gym environment.

The age requirement could vary depending on the type of facility, the equipment available and the nature of the fitness programs offered. For instance, community rec centers, YMCAs and JCCs often have an age limit as low as 12, since they are family-oriented facilities and their members expect a more inclusive environment. On the other hand, higher-end luxury facilities with a higher price point might set their minimum age for membership at 16 or even 18, attracting an older demographic seeking a more exclusive and mature atmosphere.

When determining your facility's minimum age requirement, consider factors such as the facility's mission, the goals of your fitness programming and the overall atmosphere you want to create. Examine your model to ensure alignment with your target demographic and long-term objectives. Stick to these age restrictions consistently, as bending the rules can create complications and potential safety hazards.

2. Enforce Strict Behavior Expectations:

Once a minimum age requirement has been determined, it is imperative that clear behavioral expectations are established in order to create a positive and respectful gym atmosphere.

Teens should be made aware of the expected conduct, including using equipment responsibly, keeping noise levels down and respecting the personal space of others. Enforce these rules consistently, addressing any deviations promptly and firmly, yet diplomatically. This ensures a harmonious coexistence among gym members while teaching teens the importance of discipline and accountability.

3. Conduct a Minor Orientation:

An orientation session for younger members can be immensely beneficial. This session should cover essential aspects, such as proper equipment usage, safety guidelines and gym etiquette. Emphasize the importance of warming up, cooling down and using equipment correctly to prevent injuries. Additionally, educate them on respecting the overall gym space, as well as the space of fellow gym-goers. This orientation instills a sense of responsibility and ensures that teens feel confident navigating the gym environment.

Chris Stevenson

Qualified staff or personal trainers are excellent choices to conduct these orientation sessions. They possess the expertise to guide teens effectively and address any questions or concerns that may arise. It is crucial that the session conductor, the teen and the parent all actively participate and sign off on the information provided. This multi-signature approach adds a deeper level of seriousness and accountability, and teens should not be allowed to use the facility until this orientation session is completed and the necessary signatures are obtained.

This proactive approach ensures that all parties involved are well-informed and committed to maintaining a safe and positive gym experience for everyone.

4. Consider Limiting Access:

To mitigate potential disruptions and address safety concerns, consider restricting the hours younger members can independently access the gym. This may include peak-traffic periods, such as the after-work rush, weekend mornings and late evenings.

Depending on your facility's model, you may require teens to be accompanied by a parent or guardian during these peak times. This guarantees additional supervision and minimizes any inconvenience to other members who might prefer a quieter workout environment during these busy periods.

It is also worth considering limiting access to certain specialized areas, such as pools and gymnasiums. This can minimize

*(See **Chris Stevenson** Page 19)*

The Core of It All:

How Men's Fitness Trainers Are Rethinking Pelvic Health

By: Nancy Trent

Pelvic floor health is finally entering the mainstream fitness conversation for men, and it's long overdue. While outlets such as *The Wall Street Journal* and *WIRED* have recently published stories that can help validate how common pelvic floor dysfunction is among men (not just women), the conversation has largely stopped short of exploring the practical training solutions now being adopted in real time. Now, many gyms and their elite trainers are specifically focusing on strength, recovery and athletic performance by integrating both pelvic floor and deep core training into men's fitness programs.

Across the United States, well-known facilities, such as *UFC Gyms* on the west coast and *Cowboys Fit* clubs in the Dallas-Metro area, are real-time examples of professional environments where athletic trainers are expanding their approach to include the pelvic floor as the foundation of strength and stability.

"Core performance starts at the floor. The foundation for all movements begins at the center. The pelvic floor at the body's core contributes to all strength, power and control. No longer ignored, there is a considerable concentration to prepare and recover. Every area including the pelvic floor deserves concentration," says **Andrew Hennebelle**, *Director of PWR (performance, wellness and recovery) at UFC Gym*.

This shift in approach reflects a broader change in how fitness professionals and gym owners define performance. Now, it's not *just* about how much weight their athletes can lift; instead, the focus is leaning towards efficiency, resiliency and sustainable training under a heavy output, which can be supplemented and enhanced by a healthy, strong core and pelvic floor.

Historically, men's fitness and workout programs have prioritized the most obvious, visible muscle groups, including the chest, shoulders, arms, quads and glutes, while largely overlooking the pelvic floor. These particular muscles, which sit at the base of the core and support the bladder, bowel and reproductive organs, play a crucial role in balance, posture and circulation throughout the entire body. Pelvic floor health is often solely viewed as a focus for women; however, a weak and poorly coordinated pelvic floor impacts all genders, ages and sizes. In regards to men, specifically, this can compromise training regimens, including lifting mechanics, overall athletic output and increase injury risk, even for those who are in quality shape, well-trained and experienced.

Sports medicine doctors and physical therapists increasingly describe the pelvic floor as a key component and missing link in men's strength training. A stable and responsive pelvic floor contributes to better bracing during compound lifts, improved balance during dynamic movements, and faster recovery following high-intensity sessions. Yet, many men are unaware of how to engage these muscles effectively, largely due to stigma and traditional pelvic floor exercises, such as kegels, can be difficult to execute correctly or are widely ineffective.

Now, the wide gap between awareness and intention has created an open, malleable space for gyms and trainers to adopt new training techniques and technologies to make pelvic health more accessible.

One of the newest, high-tech and direct solutions in performance-focused environments is the *PelviX Core Fitness System*, a non-invasive training chair that delivers targeted magnetic stimulation that activates the pelvic floor and deep core muscles, while the user remains fully clothed and seated throughout the session. In a single 22-minute session, the PelviX can produce tens of thousands of muscle contractions, offering multiple levels of intensity and consistency that is near impossible to achieve through voluntary exercise, such as kegels.

PelviX is gaining extensive traction in gyms across the country, including in multiple UFC gym franchises and Cowboys Fit locations, as facilities are increasing the demand for evidence-based recovery and performance tools. In high-performance gym settings, athletic trainers view pelvic floor engagement as a key part of traditional strength training, where devices like the PelviX can supplement our body's internal support system and provide tangible benefits, including improved stability, better balance and increased control during movement. Even better, this era of pelvic floor and core strengthening allows athletes to generate power more efficiently while reducing strain on the muscles and joints.

"When athletes build awareness and strength in the pelvic floor, movement becomes more controlled and powerful, which can help improve overall athletic performance," says **Lisa Manchee**, *Assistant Fitness Manager at Cowboys Fit Frisco*.

Beyond workouts, pelvic floor training plays a crucial role in both injury prevention and long-term overall health care. Consistent engagement of these muscles can significantly reduce the likelihood of injury, support bladder control, and improve posture and alignment over time. Although not prescribed as a medical treatment, health care experts emphasize that pelvic floor health is not only for those experiencing dysfunction; it is a proactive investment in long-term physical resilience.

"Over time, the pelvic floor muscles naturally weaken if not actively engaged. This gradual decline can affect everything from sexual health and bladder control to posture and stability. By maintaining pelvic floor strength through consistent activation or targeted therapies, men can support a longer, more satisfying sex life, stronger alignment and optimal function as they age," adds **Dr. Ernest Kim**, *Board-certified Chiropractor and Founder of Back On Point Wellness*.

■ ■ ■

As men continue training throughout every phase of life, maintaining a strong pelvic floor becomes increasingly important for sustaining quality of life. Ongoing national media coverage continues to help legitimize the importance of pelvic floor health, but it is the work happening inside gyms and wellness facilities that is driving change and awareness. Trainers, doctors and gym owners are redefining what *comprehensive* men's fitness looks like, using science-backed tools and devices to invoke both knowledge and action. PelviX stands out in this landscape as a leading example of how technology can support this evolution, offering a practical, accessible way to train essential, yet overlooked muscles.

As men's fitness continues to ever-evolve, pelvic floor health is no longer just a niche topic reserved for women. It is becoming an integral part of performance training, recovery and injury prevention. The gyms and trainers integrating these principles are not reinventing strength training; they are refining it.

Over time, the pelvic floor muscles naturally weaken if not actively engaged.

Nancy Trent

This gradual decline can affect everything from sexual health and bladder control to posture and stability. By maintaining pelvic floor strength through consistent activation or targeted therapies, men can support a longer, more satisfying sex life, stronger alignment and optimal function as they age.

Nancy Trent is a writer and speaker, a lifelong wellness activist, a globe-trotting trend watcher and the Founder and President of Trent & Company, a leading wellness PR firm. Trent & Company, which launched many health and beauty brands, grew out of Nancy's personal and passionate commitment to helping people live longer and healthier lives. A former journalist for New York Magazine, Nancy has written seven books on healthy lifestyles, serves on the editorial boards of several magazines and travels around the world speaking at conferences and trade shows on trends in the marketplace. She is a recognized expert in PR with more than 30 years of experience creating and managing highly successful campaigns. Nancy can be reached at **nancy@trentandcompany.com**. *Learn more at:* **www.trentandcompany.com**.*)*

Club Insider Seeks Contributing Authors

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...Chris Stevenson

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the risk of accidents or injuries arising from unsupervised access to potentially challenging or specialized areas. Additionally, it prevents interference with specialized programs and activities tailored for those areas, allowing for a more structured and efficient use of facilities by all members. At the same time, facilities featuring pools and gymnasiums might consider blocking out specific times for exclusive use by teens.

The particular facility type can be crucial in determining these parameters. Different facilities may have varying preferences based on their model and target demographic. Just as the facility's model may influence the age limits set, it can also guide decisions about the most suitable times for teens to be present. This approach ensures that each facility can tailor its policies to provide the best possible experience for both youths and adults.

5. Explore Youth Programming, Designated Areas:

Recognizing the unique needs and preferences of younger members, consider implementing youth-focused programming or designating specific areas within the gym tailored to their interests. This could include age-appropriate classes, specialized equipment or other resources that align with your facility type and capabilities.

Creating an environment in which teens feel comfortable and engaged fosters a positive association with fitness, making it more likely for them to develop lasting healthy habits. By offering purposeful activities and spaces, you transform the idea of "hanging out at the gym" into meaningful attendance with a clear fitness-related purpose. This shift contributes to a more focused and productive experience for teen members and the entire gym community.

■ ■ ■

Successfully managing younger members in a gym requires a thoughtful and strategic approach that prioritizes their wellbeing while ensuring a harmonious coexistence with other gym-goers. Setting an age limit, establishing clear behavior expectations, conducting minor orientations, potentially limiting access and exploring youth-specific programming or areas are the keys to achieving this delicate balance.

Implementing these strategies enhances the overall gym experience for teens and also contributes positively to the facility by creating a diverse and inclusive community. In fostering a gym environment that caters to the unique needs of younger members, we contribute to their physical health, lay the groundwork for a future generation that values and prioritizes fitness and potentially create a cohort of clients for life.

(Chris Stevenson, former Power Ranger stuntman, is the Founder of The Empower Group, a full-service consulting firm with services ranging from staff training, workshops, full facility management and more. Stevenson has over 20 years of experience in many aspects of the health and fitness industry. In addition, he is an international speaker who regularly presents at IHRSA, Athletic Business, Club Industry and many other fitness and business events. From health and wellness to business strategies. Chris can be reached by phone at **818-519-6038** *or email at* **chris@stevensonempowers.com**.*)*

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