

FIVE VOICES FROM FIVE CONTINENTS

A fitness trend update from around the world

BY LAWRENCE BISCONTINI, MA

Across the continents, the theme of change weaves throughout fitness in many countries. In the midst of an economic recession, it can become easy to view our fitness positions as isolated from the rest of the world. To bridge the gap, this update reports uncommon answers to common questions from five fitness experts from five different continents. For each country, we will answer questions like “What’s popular and what’s not?”, “Has the recession affected your fitness schedules?”, “What makes the best group and personal trainers?”, “What do trainers get paid?” and “What’s on your economic wish list for the rest of 2010?”

North America

California resident Jay Blahnik, instructor, trainer, presenter, product/programming consultant and author with over 22 years of experience, finds that popular and growing programs are group strength classes like “The Skinny Jeans Workout,” because he says they “are intense, but simultaneously simple to follow.” Also still growing is indoor cycling, which “provides great cardio, is very challenging, allows everyone to fit in, and no one knows who is working harder or easier.” The new Indo-Row® is taking off by storm because it includes “total body cardio, ... a healthy competitive component, is rhythmic, novel and athletic.” The new trend in these types of classes is that such “measurement classes” provide computers with feedback that is specific, individual and

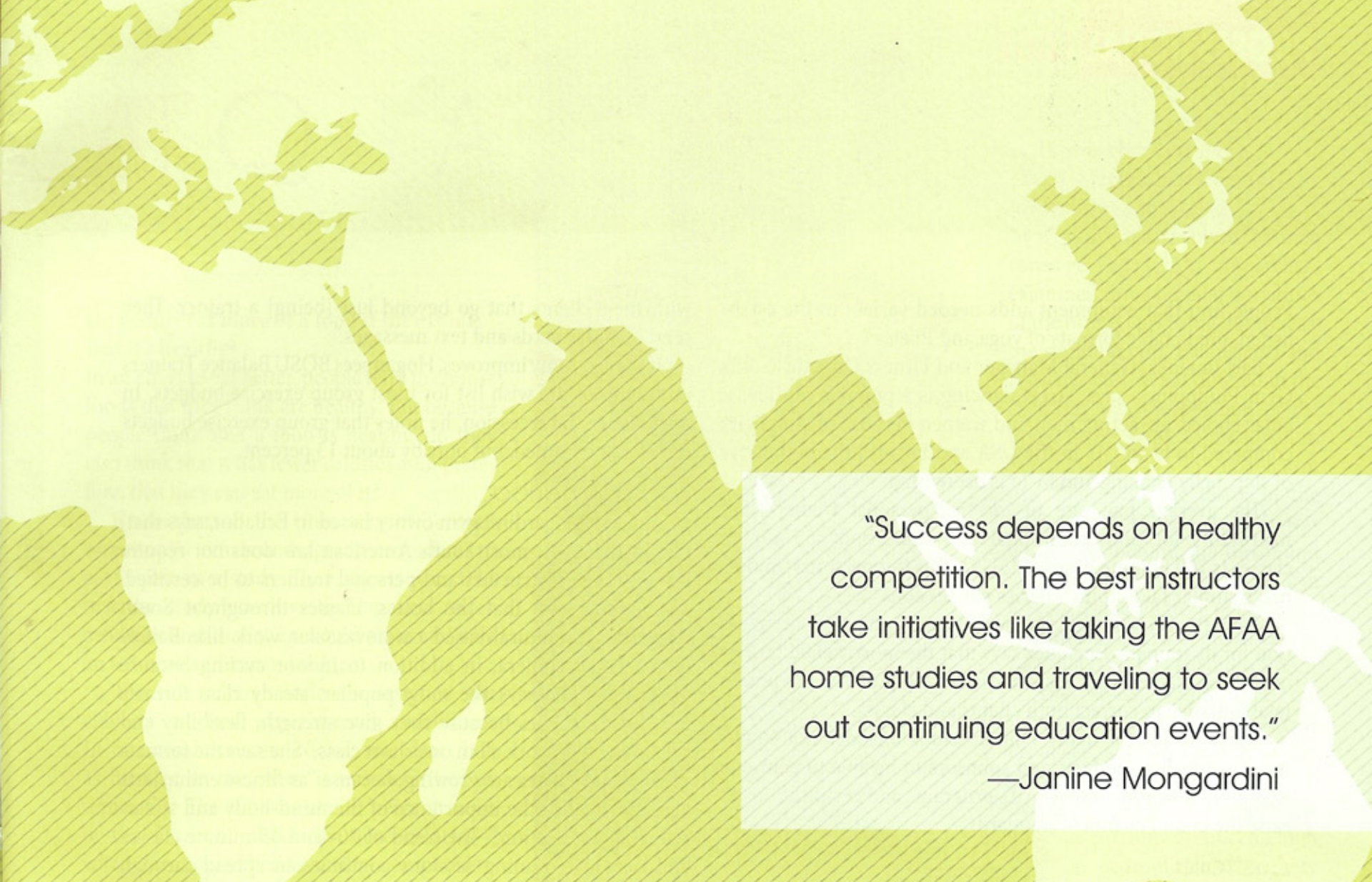
immediate. “People are motivated when they can know how they are improving,” says Blahnik. He also says that other popular classes are Zumba® and mind-body disciplines like yoga and Pilates. Declining are highly choreographed and dance-based classes, including step.

Blahnik has won enough international awards to be able to speak to success. “Today’s fitness leaders,” he says, “are good at building relationships and interacting with their students and members in general. They are prepared, and always teach great classes, even when their personal days may not be so positive. Students know that they will have successful experiences in class because of consistency. [Instructors] consistently show up for their classes and, when they cannot, they make sure they find a great sub in their absence. Furthermore,” he adds, “today’s best trainers are fun to be around, knowledgeable, educated and motivating.”

The current economic uncertainty precludes finding an average rate for instructors and trainers since the disparity is so high among states and cities. If the economy improves, the clubs for which Blahnik teaches and consults hope to purchase more BOSU® Balance Trainers and Indo-Row machines.

Europe

Dimitris Kandris, group fitness instructor based in Athens, Greece, has seen the role of fitness evolve. Unlike in



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—Janine Mongardini

the United States, the Greek government does mandate that trainers and teachers possess certifications from the University of Athens Physical Education division. He says, “In most EEC countries, the government mandates the same.”

Like Blahnik, Kandris observes popular classes and trends in Europe dealing with group cycling, lower body-based classes, and mind-body classes like yoga and Pilates. Interestingly, there is a resurgence of non-impact cardiovascular training in Greece. Dance-based classes with complex choreography and step are decreasing in popularity. “People are getting older and worry about their knees,” he states, so both newcomers and fit individuals want to take low-impact, funk, Zumba and hip-hop. Growing this century is a new interest in incorporating a strong component of balance into functional training classes. “It sometimes takes a lot of convincing to tell people that they have to work on their balance, because some think that they have to sweat in order to work out, and we don’t always sweat when doing balance training. Whether we are using functional equipment like the BOSU Balance Trainer or just working barefoot (or both), people are slowly starting to understand the importance of making balance a part of their fitness regime.”

Kandris states now that the Euro has leveled the land in terms of EEC country-to-country currency, there is more of a standard than ever before regarding pay rates. According to

Kandris, the average pay rate for a traditional 55-minute class is 20 Euros (\$30US), and for a mind-body 55-minute class is 25 Euros (\$37US). Similarly, the average rate for a 55-minute personal training session is 35 Euros (\$53US) to the trainer. With the current state of economic affairs, Kandris says that he has observed across Europe that, while people tended not to cancel their memberships, many group fitness departments in various countries had to shorten group schedule offerings in the interest of budget cuts. *Note: Dollar conversion rates are approximate due to fluctuations.*

Asia

Veronica I. Enriquez, Branch Manager of Holiday Gym and Spa in the Philippines, says that many countries in Asia have not felt the recession as deeply as in other parts of the world. “When you don’t have much to start, you can’t lose much,” she jokes. Like Blahnik in the USA, she says that studio cycling continues to be a huge draw, “especially in such a music-driven country as we are. Karaoke cycling where the participants bring their favorite songs and sing them is our most popular format. It’s also the single most effective class at helping our members shed unwanted pounds of fat.” Not surprisingly, strong in Asia are mind-body formats. “All of our successful yoga and Pilates programs fuse those disciplines with equipment such as rings, rollers, mini balls, hand and ankle weights, and bars, but not all at once, of course.

People find that equipment adds needed variety to the established, predictable formats of yoga and Pilates.”

Earl Jimenez, General Manager and Fitness Director Gold's Gym Philippines, says “street dancing is a popular cardiovascular choice, attracting men and women because of simplicity compared to hi-lo.” As in the USA and Europe, the popularity of step, belly dancing and hi-lo is decreasing.

The average pay rate of top-tier personal trainers and instructors for both traditional and mind-body 55-minute classes is 700 Filipino pesos (\$15US). Top-tier personal trainers make similar take-home salaries per sessions.

As in the USA, the government does not mandate certification for its trainers. Enriquez says that the most valued quality of her top trainers and instructors is “going out of the box to take initiative to correct both clients and classes.”

The wish list for many Filipino clubs includes not equipment as much as budgets and sponsors to be able to continue to import education like AFAA's programs and certifications to raise the country's fitness standards.

Australia

Ryan Hogan, group fitness instructor with over 12 years of experience, says that Australian government mandates instructors to possess current, valid certifications. Some of the most popular and growing classes are indoor cycling, circuit training/boot camp classes, and the mind-body disciplines of yoga and Pilates. Surprising is the continued popularity of step, which, he says, is due to the “large number of Australian presenters like Rebecca Small who continue to promote its popularity.” Hi-lo classes and body sculpting classes are declining. “Most classes—especially in the morning—are shorter in duration now,” states Hogan, “because 45-minute classes give people time to park, change and shower in those extra 15 minutes. Likewise, personal training has had a huge boom because of shorter 30-minute sessions, due to the recession and the decrease in clients' disposable income. This trend also has helped PTs maintain their same income without having to work too many extra hours.”

Hogan states that there is not a huge discrepancy between traditional and mind-body instructors, with both averaging \$45 Australian (\$40US) for 55-minute classes. In the larger cities, the average personal trainer take-home salary is about \$65 Australian (\$60US). Hogan says that the most successful teachers and trainers “promote themselves to the club members outside the class and constantly invite them to participate in their classes. Furthermore, they understand the delicate balance between consistency and variety.” Like Blahnik, Hogan notes that excellence oftentimes involves going beyond the job description. “Top trainers develop professional relationships

with their clients that go beyond just [being] a trainer. They send birthday cards and text messages.”

If the economy improves, Hogan sees BOSU Balance Trainers at the top of the wish list for most group exercise budgets. In response to the recession, he notes that group exercise budgets have been trimmed, but only by about 13 percent.

South America

Janine Mongardini, gym owner based in Ecuador, says that, like in the USA, most South American law does not require group fitness instructors and personal trainers to be certified. Mongardini says that the hottest classes throughout South America are cultural-based cardiovascular work like Bailoterapia and Capoeira, in addition to indoor cycling because of its ease. She says the most popular, steady class formats are “fusion classes because they give strength, flexibility and cardiovascular work all in one short class.” She says the formats of yoga and Pilates are growing, because “as fitness enthusiasts age, they realize the importance of the mind-body and stress-reducing connection.” The trend of 30- and 45-minute classes and personal training sessions continues to spread through more clubs. Declining are step and dance-choreography classes involving complexity. “In Ecuador and close countries,” she states, “traditional instructors make an average of \$12 per class (regardless of length), while mind-body instructors and personal trainers average \$12 to \$15 (for 45-minute sessions).”

“Success depends on healthy competition,” she says. “The best instructors take initiatives like taking the AFAA home studies and traveling to seek out continuing education events.” With the recession, Mongardini states that, while memberships are not down, many have taken to spending less extra money in fitness facilities and have turned toward independent, outdoor fitness forms like hiking and running.

The World View

While the world offers a vast amount of differences in fitness from continent to continent, similarities in global trends continue to be uncanny. As this author mentioned in his first book on travel, “a ‘tourist’ travels and focuses on the differences, while a ‘traveler’ focuses on the ways in which we are all so similar.”

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LAWRENCE BISCONTINI, MA, is an American Fitness Contributing Writer and Certification Specialist. He has established fitness history by winning multiple Instructor of the Year Awards from ECA (2009), IDEA (2004), Can Fit Pro (2004), and ACE (2002). Interestingly, Lawrence has lived on all five continents outlined in this article. He works as Mindful Movement Specialist and Creative Consultant. Find Lawrence at www.findlawrence.com.