

Pat Rigsby with Brian Grasso

Pat Rigsby: Hey everybody, this is Pat Rigsby here again, and today I am with the founder and CEO of the International Youth Conditioning Association, the one and only Brian Grasso. Brian, would you say hello to everyone?

Brian Grasso: The one and only, geez, that's deep. Hello everybody!

Pat Rigsby: Well, today you're in for a treat. We are going to grill Brian on how to make it big in the ever-growing youth fitness market as a successful youth fitness professional. So, Brian, I'm pretty much just going to kind of ask some open-ended questions and hopefully get you talking about the opportunities that are there, how somebody can pursue them, and really kind of shed light on what you and I, I know, both agree is by far the hottest market in the fitness industry.

Brian Grasso: Most definitely, yes.

Pat Rigsby: So, let's kind of do a little bit of background here. Tell us a little bit about the youth fitness opportunity out there for fitness professionals today.

Brian Grasso: Well, I mean, it's growing exponentially – literally by the day. And, there's – I think it's important to understand Pat that there's no shortage of degrees of opportunity. And I say that because unlike perhaps the rest of the fitness and sports training industry and the sub-niches that are alive within the sport performance or geriatric fitness or general personal training, youth fitness has several prongs to it, which is partly what makes it unique, partly what makes it really open to fitness professionals who have certain loves and interests and passions regarding this industry, but also it sort of accounts for why it's grown so quickly. You do have several opportunities. You have consultancy with major health club franchises or just even local gyms who recognize – I mean, we're talking about an industry that right now in this country – United States of America, over 4 billion dollars a year are spent on personalized training and coaching for kids. Over 1 million kids in the United States of America hired a personal trainer in 2006, and that number is on the rise dramatically. So, health clubs are smart. They're looking for ultimate revenue sources. So, they're looking to create youth fitness programs and paradigms within their service offering, and are certainly looking to hire the right people to create and implement and maybe even run those programs. There's one – consultancy is one. A second would be youth sport performance. I mean, world-wide there are national governing bodies, there are state governing bodies, and there are local youth sport organizations. There are non-profit governmental agencies that run sport programs. If you're interests or passions lie in the area of sport, there are absolutely no shortage of avenues for you to either run programs, work as a consultant, provide content and IP, provide educational seminars as perhaps lost leaders to a facility or program you're running locally. So youth sport is a multi-pronged sub-industry all by itself. But you know, there's so many more – you have hospitals who run overweight and weight reduction programs for kids, so there's the health aspect of youth fitness and hospitals run a cutting edge of offering those programs, and truth be told, they don't run them terribly well. You see a lot of kids on treadmills and being bored to tears with stuff like that. And youth fitness specialists can walk into hospitals like that as a consultant, as a paid staff member, as a part-time employee, and add real flavor, real fun, and real exercise to those programs. The list goes on and

on –there's private practice, private programs, facilities of your own, franchise opportunities. So, these things when you examine the youth fitness industry, and I say that and I'm referring as well to the youth sport development industry as part of that, there are absolutely no shortage of opportunities that will fit your passion and yet that is what accounts for this being such a monumentally growing sub-niche within the entire industry of fitness and sport training.

Pat Rigsby: So, okay, we've established the fact that there is far reaching opportunity, so now let's go ahead and move forward. What would you consider the prerequisites for somebody being a successful youth fitness professional, I know, in our language – youth fitness specialist?

Brian Grasso: Well, I mean, first and foremost passion. It really is a labor of love for me. And I say this almost every single time I end up on audio of some kind. But, I still coach daily. A lot of my coaching hours are volunteer, because I love what I do. And I work with kids who may or may not be able to afford my services sometimes, so I've reached a point in my career that's pinnacle where I can donate some hours back, and that's an important thing. But, that's based on the passion I have for watching young athletes get better and become less injured and thrive for scholarships, and have team wide success, so passion really is the determining factor. I don't think it's maybe moreso you have to have passion more than you would if you were working with just general adult clientele, but it's been a long time since I've worked with general adult clientele, so it's hard for me to gauge if that's true. I think the passion you have to have and have to exude to work in this particular niche of the industry maybe actually exceeds other parts of the industry, because working with young athletes and youth fitness populations is a long-term process – it's not a short-term process, it's not 6 weeks in and out, it really shouldn't be just about making their vertical jump better or their 40 time faster. It's about a long term approach to developmental sport or developmental fitness. So, that takes some thoughtfulness. It takes some time, and it takes a lot of passion. So, passion is probably the first requisite I suppose in terms of wanting to get into this particular part of the industry. Now, as a bit of a curtail for that, it is the most rewarding part of the industry I've ever worked in. When you see a young person who is afflicted with sensory integration issues or is overweight and you actually play a role in helping them regain self-esteem and lose weight and become a bit more normal in their function of movement skill and human growth, that is rewarding beyond belief. Same holds true for sporting situations. Where you're watching a team you worked with win the state championship or you know exceed the goals they had for themselves – even if it isn't winning a championship, but they established goals for themselves and you're watching them exceed that as the season goes on. That is rewarding beyond belief, and I say that from a place of good prospective, because I've worked with innumerable numbers of elite athletes – Olympians, national teams, and professional athletes, and some of my athletes historically have gone on to wonderful things in their professional and elite amateur careers, and I've experienced all of that and have experienced the grass roots as well. And I've never had more pride in what I do or career fulfillment as I do when I'm working with kids and watching them. You know, you are a seed of inspiration for them. You're more than a trainer, you're much more than a coach, you're a life mentor. And fitness and sport are conduits to life lessons, and so the passionate role that you need to have from inside is just so fulfilling when you watch your young athlete and youth fitness participants exceed even their own expectations of themselves.

So, those two things would be the number 1, and number 2 I suppose would be credentialing and education. It's just an absolute must for so many reasons. Youth fitness development and youth sport development are not at all related to adult based exercise. It's a different animal altogether. It's predicated entirely on human growth and development, and we're not trying to fit a round peg into a square hole. We're not trying to force bi-motor changes. We're trying to understand what the human body is doing naturally in points of function and dysfunction and provide the right kind of stimulus at the right time to elicit the right response. And that takes a great deal of understanding regarding the science of motor skill, the science of human growth and development, the science of emotional and cognitive behavior, the science and the art of coaching and communication and learning styles. These are things that are incredibly important, and when I say the average personal trainer it's not a demeaning moniker whatsoever, I don't mean it to sound the least bit underhanded, but the average personal trainer who works with the average client – they have to appreciate that they're not suited at this point in time with a limited understanding or historical education insofar as pediatrics, etc. They're not suited yet to work with this demographic properly. So, credential and education are absolutely vital in order to make the kind of change – become the agent for change that kids world-wide need. And I say that even though the sport performance industry and the youth fitness industry in this – insofar as the youth segment of the world is actually booming, we still don't do a great job with it. So it's a market that's on the rise – dramatically on the rise. But, the professionals who work in it often don't do a great job. We're still trying to pigeon hole 6 weeks of training with 9 year olds to make them faster, and that's not at all even close to the essence of athletic development. So, even though you may work in youth sport performance or youth fitness, you still have to appreciate it's a science and a specialty unto itself, which really is why I created the IYCA – to provide this demographic with a voice of reason and a governing body so that professionals can understand what's right and what's wrong and work together as an industry to make the changes that are necessary.

Pat Rigsby: Okay, so that's where somebody needs to begin. That's where the prerequisites lie. Now, let's go ahead and move forward a little bit. Let's assume that the listeners feel like I have those personal characteristics or intangibles if you will and then I'm willing to set out and gain the educational background and the credentialing necessary to be successful. Then what? Where could somebody begin to embark on not only a successful career as a youth fitness professional, but a profitable or lucrative one as well.

Brian Grass: Well, you first have to ascertain where it is you want to work. You know, the first question we talked about today, and my answer was a long one, is that there are innumerable opportunities and avenues. There's not one specific area. It can be medical, it can be sport, it can be general fitness, it can be privatized, it can be in conjunction with other facilities, it can be consultancy. So, you have to identify exactly where it is you want to go, but having said that, you might not know. You might need to get your feet wet just a little bit and decide from experience how to get started. And I think I've mentioned this to you before Pat, I'm very fond of the expression ready, fire, aim. So, as opposed to taking your time and trying to figure out everything up front and then execute a very rigidly developed plan, just get started on something and let the plan kind of formulate along the way – you'll figure it out, but there's no time like the present to get started. So, where I would start in terms of getting my feet wet in this part of the industry is working with nonprofit organizations – YMCA's and park districts in particular.

Every community nation-wide, and I'm from Canada so I can substantiate world-wide in fact, has local YMCA's, local park authorities or park districts or park and recreation centers, and their sole objective is to service the community from kids to elderly by providing programs – be it art, music, fitness, sport, whatever it might be. So, these agencies are largely understaffed and yet do everything they can to try and provide as much of a benefit to the community in every aspect possible. So, you certainly should walk into those facilities or start making phone calls to your local facilities that are non-profit governmental based and introduce yourself to the right people – the fitness directors, the service coordinators, and start suggesting you'd like to offer youth fitness, youth sport performance, youth sport development training programs through them and with them in partnership. I've done that throughout my career, and I've never been turned down, because they really are starving for good quality people to come in and run good quality programs, so it's not going to be an exercise in futility – they're not going to turn you down provided you present it in the right way. So, that is where I'd start – I'd start at the grassroots of your community working in conjunction with local nonprofit entities, running programs, and they will take care of direct mail and advertising and registration and fee collection, and all you do is coach. And then you'll get cut a percentage of the revenue. So, it's not volunteer work by any stretch of the imagination. It's good community building. It's good practice. It's going to get your understanding of the kind of flavor where you want to work in this industry and make money doing it. So, that's where I would get started unquestionably.

Pat Rigsby: Ok, terrific then. I think that one of the things that I want to touch on a little bit, since I'm kind of the “business guy” are some of the keys to not just kind of falling prey to the trap that I think, how should I put it, plagues a lot of the professionals in our industry. I mean, you and I have talked at length about the high attrition rate for personal trainers, the average yearly income hovering around \$27,000 – what are some of Brian Grasso's keys to making this a lifelong career – a lucrative career that allows you to serve the community, serve the youth market that obviously needs qualified professionals to come in and offer their services and expertise, and you know, not fall prey to that attrition and not literally starve themselves on the minimum wage type income?

Brian Grasso: Sure. Well, the first thing to understand is that this particular part of the industry is the very epitome of a recession-proof career. And I say that because personal training, owning gym memberships – if you're a person who wants to join a club – those are considered in this day and age still luxuries. And people in recessionary times, and we're going through an economical downtrend right now pretty much world wide, will start to cut those expenditures from their personal budgets, because they are deemed luxuries. And they shouldn't be, but they are. Now, if you have kids or if you know parents, and parents your age who have kids, you know that the last thing to be cut from a family's budget is expenditures on their children. They don't ever, and wonderfully so, want to compromise their child's development years or their fun or their childhood – the innocence of childhood – by having to cut back things. So, it really is a recessionary-proof kind of career, because parents will always spend money on their kids irrespective of the economic climate. So, that's one thing to consider. But, in terms of sort of being a cut above the sort of basic salary ranges that most personal trainers find themselves in, and the attrition rates that are so high in this industry, I suppose there are 2 keys as far as I'm concerned, and in no particular order. One is diversification. When you're a trainer at a gym or you own a facility, or you're a personal trainer running programs inside of locations, you are

pretty much restricted to that demographic and you're pigeon-holed into that service offering. And it's hard to break out of that and decide you now want to also do this insofar as the industry, because you're relatively pigeon-holed in your abilities and in what the market knows you as. So, diversification is important, and so even if you start making it big, and you just do such a great job in youth fitness and sport development that you actually open your own franchise or facility, I would never (and I still don't) – I never lose touch with the local grassroots nonprofit organizations, because even in recessionary times, parents are still funneling their kids to the YMCA and the park districts – especially in the summer time for fitness and sport and that kind of thing. So, as long as you keep your sort of hands entrenched in there, you can be providing good service to the community, making money off of the programs you're running, and it exercises or leads as a – not a lost leader – but a sort of a something you can start and you can funnel those kids into your own facility or your own programs eventually as well. So that's one thing – diversity. And then, beyond that, you know hospitals even recessionary times don't cut back that often on a gross scale. They still offer what they offer. So, hospitals, physical therapy clinics, snoop around your area – there are more entities offering youth fitness or youth weight loss programs than you might think – medically based. Start – once you develop a name for yourself and you have a reputation in your area, great time to go to the hospitals, the physical therapy clinics, etc. and start working as a consultant or as a part-time staffer in their programs as well. And you know another one I just thought of right now if you're in the sport minded industry – physical therapy clinics – when they have an ACL injury or shoulder injury, the physical therapist will take the student athlete from dysfunction injury into what's called clinical normal. So, they will regain clinical function – but that does not mean that young athlete is ready to go back to sport, because there's a host of reconditioning and re-assimilation that has to go on body wide, but of course the insurance runs out or insurance cuts off when the student athlete reaches clinical norms – the insurance companies no longer want to pay for physical therapy. So, you know, there's a lot of physical therapy, athletic training, chiropractic facilities that are looking for folks like us – like youth fitness specialists – who can take those youth athletes from the point of clinical normal back to return of sports. So, again, there are innumerable ways you can sort of stay invested in different parts of the market – different parts of the industry related to youth fitness and sport training to make sure that you're diversification is very very good. And, so that way you can always – I think the key I'm trying to get at is your multiple streams of revenues. So, where's your revenue coming from? It's coming from several different places. But it should all funnel into one place eventually, which is hopefully your own programs or your own franchise.

Now second – I said there were 2 points – the second point to that is continuing education. Never stop spending money on yourself, even in recessionary times. You know Pat, you always talk about this in your newsletters and stuff. Always spend money and spend time on yourself learning more and understanding more, becoming better at what you do, because invariably the best of the best will always have work. And the best of the best will always make more money than everybody else – that is the reality of life in every industry across the board. So, you know, never stop educating yourself on the complexities of youth fitness, the complexities of sport development training, and how you become a better coach and a better trainer. That kind of investment pays off, because it's not just credentials after your last name. It's stuff parents begin to recognize – and parents being the end-consumer here – parents start to recognize that you are very serious about being the best of the best in this particular market for their children. So, there

will be no shortage of parents who want to bring their kids to you, because you've identified yourself as the best and if you know anything about the demographic of parents, they like to talk. So, if you get a few – 3 or 4 moms and dads who think the world of you, there are 200 people each of them will tell – that you are the best of the best. And you can show that through your efforts, through your passion, but also through your credentials and your seriousness to become the best in this industry. Those are the 2 things that professionals have to be considerate of.

Pat Rigsby: Okay, well I tell you what, the last topic that I want to make sure that we give a little bit of attention to is some of the keys to building that business that I know that you impart on IYCA members – the concept of leverage and the concept of marketing to a broader audience. Both – I mean I love the approach that I know that you've recommended, not only in our own international youth conditioning academy, but you know recommended to all facility owners. Training in groups so you're leveraging the professional's time, plus by training in groups, you're bringing the price point down low enough that now the services aren't just available to the affluent, or like you alluded to, non affluent are still going to spend money, but the price point is manageable enough that it can consistently and for a long term fit into a family's budget. So, I mean, let's talk about that for just a couple of minutes – that kind of – that format and the advantages to using that.

Brian Grasso: Well, I mean there are several advantages, and you've touched on a couple of them. You know one of them, from just a purely developmentally standpoint is that fitness and sport training is long term. It's not a short term solution. It is a long term process much like school. School takes time. Elementary school you learn the basics. High school you advance from the basics. College you specialize. It runs like that for a reason. And fitness and sport training need to be the same kind of concept. Now, having said that, when you reduce the price per session, you automatically get kids and their parents buying into a longer term plan. So, the ways to do that are to have a group-based effort, so that no one person is out lying a tremendous amount of money. Now, the average personal training costs vary depending on geography from \$35 - \$100 an hour. And that's fine. The market determines the price. If you get \$100 an hour for personal training, you know, more power to you, that's wonderful, but you're going to cut away a huge amount of the potential people who need your services. And you're also not going to keep these people for very very long. Even the most affluent person is not going to spend \$100 an hour for their children's personal training for more than a month or two at a couple times a week. So, it's short-term verses long-term. Business needs to have a long term approach, which is why I like the foundations of developmental fitness and developmental sport training, because they also are routed in long-term approaches. So, if you look at your costs or your fee structure as opposed to a per-session ratio, \$75 an hour or whatever, group your youth fitness expense for young athletes into groups of 5-6 per coach for a monthly retainer of, let's just say it's \$150 a month. And that \$150 a month allows that family 2 training sessions a week for their child – or 3 –and it comes in the form of a block schedule, where they can pick and choose when they're going to come, but base on the kid's age it's going to be one of these 5 potential opportunities. They can pick 2 of them. So, you've given them lots of opportunity, and that's good. But you know, it works out to be roughly probably \$10 - \$12 per child per session. But if you group it into groups of 5 or 6, your per session rate now becomes what I consider to be worthwhile. Now, the personal trainers listening might say, but I can get \$100 bucks now 1-on-1 and I'm still coming underneath that in your particular system. True. But, in my system, you don't have to

find new clients 2 months from now when the \$100 an hour became cost prohibitive for that family. The kids I work with, and historically this has been true of facilities I run, stay with me for 3, 4, 5 years. So, that's \$150 a month I can count on for the next half decade times 100, 200, 300, 500 kids. So, for me it's not really about finding new clients, it's about making sure I have enough staff to cover the kids who I'm bringing in the door – that's where the dichotomy comes, and that's fine – I'll take that problem any day. And that's the reality of it all. We don't market – I don't spend a lot of dollars on marketing. I keep kids invested long term. I make sure them and their parents are unbelievably happy, and invariably those parents tell their friends, and their friends tell their friends, and their friends tell their friends. So, what started off as a 3 person training system grew to 200-some odd kids inside of 4 months. Because we provide good service, we were cost economical, we locked people in long term, and parents like that, and then they told their friends who told their friends, and it just grew exponentially from there. And that's the kind of business plan I think more personal trainers need to look at, because there's longevity in it. And longevity equals business success. Anybody can make a lot of money in a short period of time – believe it or not, that's not hard. But when you have to focus then on finding rapidly and quickly new clients because it became too cost prohibitive for your old clients to stay invested in what you're doing, all you're doing is kind of like spiking and dying, spiking then dying, spiking then dying over the course of a year or 2. And that is wasted effort. I would rather have a nice gradual ascend upwards and keep bringing on staff to accommodate more and more kids as we develop them, as we bring in more clientele, because our curve never goes through a dip – it's always kind of ascending upwards. And that is a much better business plan to have, both for the kids as well as for me and our staff from a revenue perspective.

Pat Rigsby: Very nice. Well Brian, before we wrap up today, is there anything else you'd like to add – any more gems that you would like to share about making it big as a youth fitness professional?

Brian Grasso: Well, you know, in the last 2 years I've been interviewed and/or profiled by Newsweek, New York Times, San Francisco Chronicle, I've been on ABC news, I've traveled to Ireland, New Zealand, I'm going to Australia, been invited to Singapore and South Korea – I've traveled all over the United States and Canada – all for consultant work or to provide educational seminars. As you know Pat, we're starting partnerships with Perform Better. We have partnerships with Perform Better, the NSCA – there are no shortages of people who are coming to us now, because they recognize what we are insofar as this particular brand or part of the industry. And I say all of that not to pat myself on the back but just to show you that there was a time when I would have classified myself as an average trainer – the kind of guy who went to work 5 o'clock in the morning, ran some of his clients through hour long sessions until 8 and then roughly had 8 until about 3 o'clock in the afternoon off, when I had another 5 or 6 clients and rolled home at 10 o'clock at night exhausted and had to get up and do it all over again the next day, and it can be rewarding and exhausting. It can be financially rewarding – it can be financially uncertain. But, this industry is open. The youth part of the industry is absolutely wide open, and ever since I decided to become the best of the best in that part of the industry, I mean my career has changed immeasurably. You know - being hired as a consultant with Men's Health, going nation-wide – working with school districts on youth physical education redevelopment – there is no shortage of what you can do in this part of the industry, and I know the personal trainer mindset. I know the strength coach mindset. We are passionate. We are good

at what we do. And we're frustrated, because we can't seem to make enough money, and then when we do make enough money it's because we're working 18 hours a day. And that is the kind of thing that doesn't have to be. Opportunity exists, and the smart-minded will always just before the rest of the herd find the opportunity and start migrating in that direction. The smart-minded will find it first and lay their seeds down and be the first into a sort of new avenue, and that's what I've done, and that's what I'm encouraging other people to do. And look at what's happened to my career – I mean, if you don't look past me if you want to see what you can do in this industry, especially where I came from, which is where most of you came from. So, always project into the future. Youth fitness and youth sport development are unbelievably on the rise – fastest in the entire industry. It's not going to go away. It's not a fad. Obesity rates are getting out of control. Government, private, everybody is trying to do stuff and evoke change. So, be on the cutting edge of all of that and create a fulfilling career that is based on hitting what the market most desperately needs. That is a true entrepreneur.

Pat Rigsby: Wonderful, Brian. Wonderful. I mean, you wrapped it up beautifully. I talk at length about becoming a specialist rather than a generalist, and that is the epitome of it. Well, Brian, thank you once again for sharing your valuable insight and letting people kind of have a behind the scenes look at the ascension that you've made to the top of the industry and then also some of the information that I know that you make available to IYCA members. But, for some of the others out here that are not part of the IYCA, this is gold. Pure gold.

Brian Grasso: My pleasure.

Pat Rigsby: Thank you, Brian, and this is Pat Rigsby and Brian Grasso signing off.

Brian Grasso: Take care.