

From A to Barcelona: A Finalists Perspective
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When I was asked to apply for the Life Fitness' 2015 Global Personal Trainer to Watch competition by the Alberta Provincial Fitness Unit, I never in my wildest dreams thought I'd make the global Top Ten. The question "Do you have what it takes?" pushed me to enter with the yes-I-do-mindset. It is hard to describe my excitement when I was told I was on the short list. Quite frankly, after it was submitted in July, I had actually forgot about it by the time I received the notice in September.

The next step was to submit a two minute video describing my passion for my work. Thankfully, I was able to "bang it out" in just a couple of takes. It was easy to talk about what drives my work!

I was flattered just to be shortlisted, so just a couple of weeks later I was a bit surprised to see an email from the President of Life Fitness, Chris Clawson in my inbox. I will never forget the elation I felt, when opening that email with a jittery mouse click, to see I was invited to participate in Life Fitness' 2015 Global Personal Trainer to Watch contest!

It's hard to keep news like that to your self. I had difficulty holding on to my secret until the formal press release was out a couple of weeks later. That was almost the most difficult part of the whole experience!

As the competition neared, my dear friends, family, patients, and colleagues were wishing me well. It felt like I had an army of support behind me. That pushed me to spend most of my non-mommy hours imagining the event and how I would use the Synrgy BlueSky.

Prior to arriving in Barcelona, I connected with a handful of other Top Ten participants on social media and began to get to know my new fast friends. Since we were all passionate about our work as exercise professionals, it felt like we all had an immediate connection.

After about 15 hours of travel I arrived in Barcelona, with only one passport mishap and mediocre airplane sleep, but it did not matter as I was pumped to get the event started. The night before the event was a mix of wakefulness and sleep as I was playing through my mind how best to use the Synrgy BlueSky. At one point, I even got up and wrote out a yoga circuit I came up with!

When the alarm rang the next morning, I jumped out of bed, got ready and took a butterfly-filled selfie! Let's go!

Time slowed as I walked towards the group of easy to identify red shirted participants. Was this happening? I was about to meet my fellow participants who were only images on the Internet and casual conversations on social media. Then the judges began to arrive and it shot me back into my adrenaline filled excitement.

Someone please pinch me. Is this actually happening!

After a breakfast meet and greet, we were whisked off to David Lloyd Club Turó where we began our training and learning with two of the finest Life Fitness has to offer. Nick and Keith, are two of Life Fitness Academy's coaches who travel the world teaching exercise professionals how to make best use of Life Fitness Products. Each brought to the table their unique perspectives of not only how to use the BlueSky but also how to be a leader. Professionally, I have always advocated for Life Fitness equipment because of its quality and intuitive setup. But now, meeting two employees of the company reinforced the fantastic corporate culture of the organization, which makes me love the equipment more!

Life Fitness, as its name states, is about life and the full spectrum of incorporating fitness into life. The Synrgy BlueSky hit the mark in offering an exercise opportunity for all people. It is workable for low function or fitness individuals as it is for athletes in their physical prime. As my husband suggested, if we had one in our backyard, our two boys (under the age of four) would be all over it thinking of it as a unique playground.

After a "casual" (read: sort of stressful) lunch, we were paired with a local client with whom we were given a short time to assess and develop a personalized workout plan. I was happy to meet Alvero, a healthy 47 year old IT professional who clearly loved to exercise. He attends David Lloyd five days a week for gym workouts plus a daily game of paddle tennis (a smaller version of tennis that we saw everywhere in Spain). Being a more serious (or maybe it was proud) Spanish man, I kept my overt enthusiasm in check as I wanted to know what his goals were and how we could tailor a session to get him there. I started to work on a program focused on strength and agility to help with paddle tennis.

In no time, it was time to guide Alvero through his routine. I frantically re-wrote out my plan for the judges and we were off.

I was in the zone. I can only describe it as positive psychologist, Mihály Csíkszentmihályi does as flow. Meaning "is the mental state of operation in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity. In essence, flow is characterized by complete absorption in what one does." My time with Alvero passed quickly.

After a high five to Alvero, I had a quick self-reflection on what I showed the judges. I was content with my performance and choice of exercises. The judges asked me a handful of questions and the competition was complete. I debated viewing my fellow competitors' sessions but out of respect I opted not to peer over them as they competed. I would have loved more time to learn from them!

Overall, I had a winning weekend. Not only did I achieve my goals for the event but I proudly represented my country. My three objectives going in were to meet new people, learn something different and challenging, and have fun.

Of course, meeting nine other exercise professionals with similar enthusiasm and drive was amazing. It was clear from the start that we had a creative group who loved what we do. It was also clear we came from different backgrounds, years of experience and worked with different types of people.

The Synrgy Bluesky pushed me to critique my knowledge of body position, biomechanics and effective exercise choices. In new gyms I am always like a kid in a candy store, but this felt even more. Like Christmas morning to me. My first thought was let me play!

Play was just what I did. All the work ahead of time strategizing on a flat paper image of the Bluesky, came to life in person. I could now see how (and if) my ideas would work. Can I add a single hip flexion/lift to the row? Does my idea of transversing the cargo rope on a diagonal work? Could I add some heel/calf raises on the arc and on which side would it work? How can I implement cardiovascular exercises to all the different components? Would my wee hours of the morning yoga circuit work? In the end, the most amazing part of play was looking up to see the actual blue sky while doing rows. How fitting!

I felt I had the best possible day, whether I was the winner or not.

In the end, my dear competitor, Greg Johnson took the crown. And rightly so.

I believe the judges saw his love of exercise, the care he delivers to his clients and his genuine personality. Before the competition, Greg's genuine and easy going nature was apparent to me. He invited me (a complete stranger) to sightsee with him prior to the competition. To see his face as they announced his name, I was certain the right person won!

As I return to life back in Canada, I will always hold this event in a special place in my heart. It has pushed me both personally and professionally and I am internally grateful for the experience. I hope to stay in touch with my fellow competitors as I have my name on a guest bedroom list in London courtesy of a kind offer from one of my fellow competitors!

Thank you to everyone involved with the event. It was the chance of a lifetime!