



A multimedia classroom presentation is one part of the BFS certification program.

Certification: A Strength Coach's Perspective

One coach's journey through the maze of certification programs

BY **KIM GOSS, MS**

The number of certifications in the fields of athletic and physical fitness is staggering. Health clubs employ certified personal trainers, certified aerobic instructors, certified strength coaches and...well, you get the idea. Although such instruction

suggests that the person certified knows what they are doing, often the truth is otherwise. Let me tell you why.

I got my first certification in 1982 in Swedish massage. I had actually worked as a masseur for a YMCA in South Carolina during the previous

two years, because in South Carolina at that time you didn't have to be certified in massage to get paid for this type of work. I was told that the only requirement was that you could not massage a member of the opposite sex – apparently the state believed that insisting

on only “same-sex” massages would prevent massage clubs from becoming brothels. In California, the regulations were a different story, as they required me to attend a 100-hour course to practice massage (and during this course, by the way, half the time was spent *getting* massage, as students practiced on each other).

In 1987 I was hired as a strength coach for the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. My supervisor was Jack Braley, who hired me after I came to visit one of my former weightlifters who was stationed there, Ricky Pack. Coach Braley didn’t mind that my undergraduate degree wasn’t in physical education (and only last year did I earn my master’s in human movement), but he did believe it was important that I get certified by the National Strength Coaches Association (NSCA). OK – he’s the boss!

The only requirement to take the NSCA exam was that you needed an undergraduate degree, but there was a loophole for me because the NSCA didn’t say that the degree had to be in a science. I say loophole because this implied that someone with a four-year degree in, say, journalism was more qualified to take their exam than someone with a two-year associate’s degree in the field of physical education.

Confident that I could pass the exam because I am a voracious reader of all things weight training, I didn’t bother purchasing any of the study materials and then I headed for Vegas. As Bruce Lee would say, “My Kung Fu was strong!”

The test consisted of two parts, a *theory* and a *practical*. Well, sort of a practical. We had to watch a video and answer multiple-choice questions based upon what we saw. What’s fascinating is that I learned soon after taking the exam that about half the people

who took it failed! In fact, the person sitting next to me was also a writer as well as a powerlifting coach, *and* he had a master’s degree in exercise science. The next year I saw him and asked him why he wasn’t putting CSCS (Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist) after his name – he admitted that he’d failed the exam. So to be fair, at the time the NSCA was a difficult exam and set a standard for other certification programs to follow.

Aerobic Sense and Non-sense

In 1994 I decided to leave the Air Force Academy and work in La Jolla, California, for Paul Chek, who was doing some interesting seminars on abdominal and lower back training. Chek got into the certification business, and the tests involved answering multiple-choice questions. And this is important, as in these tests there was at least some documentation that the key concepts of Chek’s courses were understood. I say this because a few years later, I was certified by one particular strength coaching organization (I have the membership card to prove it) without ever having to take an exam! Oh, and as an interesting marketing tool, Chek named his certification program after himself: CHEK, an acronym that stands for Certified Holistic Exercise Kinesiologist (much better than my idea of GOSS, which would stand for Good Ole Strength Student).

After working with Chek for about six months, I returned to work for Laura Dayton, who had given me my first writing job in the ’80s at Runner’s World Publications. Because we did a lot of ghost writing for fitness celebrities, I decided to get certified by one of the most prestigious organizations in this field, the American Council of Exercise (ACE). It was a simple



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multiple-choice test, and as I recall, at that time I could miss up to one third of the questions and still pass. One third! As an analogy, would you be willing to get dental care from a dentist who missed one third of the questions on his or her written exam and did not have to take a practical?

When I shared my experiences with Laura, she decided to try to see if she could affiliate with these certification programs. She had written an amazingly successful book about women’s fitness, and found that she could turn that into a course that could be used for continuing education credit for many certification organizations. All she had to do was pay a fee, submit a copy of the course for review, and she was able to get her course approved. This turned out to be a great investment, as personal trainers needed to have those units or face losing their certification.

My next major certification was through A.T. Still University. As part of the corrective exercise track in my master’s program, I earned two certifications through the National Academy of Sports Medicine. I could now add Corrective Exercise Specialist and Performance Enhancement Specialist to my business card (well, to the *back* of

my business card – I now had too many letters after my name to put my titles on the front side).

So that brings us to BFS's certification. When BFS started 34 years ago, there really wasn't anything like a certification for strength coaches – there really wasn't even a profession called strength coaching. When I moved to Salt Lake City in 2004 (after spending the previous five years coaching figure skaters and hockey players at my private gym in Dallas), I told my supervisors that for the most

part, certifications in the athletic and fitness professions had become a joke. But because BFS is in the business of helping kids, we needed to be taken seriously.

The result is that our BFS certification is authentic and consists of two parts: a theory and a practical. During the practical, participants are asked to demonstrate and also teach the BFS core lifts and many other important exercises associated with the BFS Program. Does this certification take the place of an academic degree?

We don't think so, and we consider the certification as a supplementary program that focuses on many aspects of strength and conditioning that are not often taught in physical education curricula.

There are many certifications that unfortunately are not very good. At BFS we are confident that our certification is an honest one that is continually improving and, most importantly, is designed to ensure that the person being certified by us delivers on the promise of the BFS program. **BFS**



A BFS certification is a hands-on experience with coaches being required to perform and also teach the exercises in the BFS Total Program.