

A DIFFERENT CORNER

Not unexpectedly, since I moved to the USA the thing that most of my friends in England want to know about America is what the gyms are like. That's not something that I can answer by merely using a few overworked adjectives, to understand the gulf between English gyms and American gyms you have to understand the gulf between the two different ways of life. I'll try to explain what I mean, but as a disclaimer I must say that I live in Tennessee, where the people are exceptionally friendly and there is so much space for everything that it makes anywhere else seem claustrophobic. I don't know if things would be the same in the gyms of a big city like New York or Los Angeles. I also should add that I've obviously not trained at every gym in England or every gym here so this is just a personal take based on the many gyms that I have trained at in both places.

They call this place "the land of the free and the home of the brave" and that is definitely reflected in the gyms so it gives me a good way to explain things. Firstly, the freedom bit. When you go into a gym in England they are usually very one dimensional, "here's the free weights, here's the machines and here's the cardio". Out here it's completely different, just about everything is on offer because different people like doing different things to work out. Yes there are all the same things here as in England and much more but that's just the start of it. Again it comes down to the space thing, the gyms here are, in the main, many times bigger than the average gym in England and they are all air conditioned too which is nice as it's always so sunny and warm here.

That means that if you don't want to use free weights, any of the myriad of different machines or try any of the tons of varied cardio equipment you have a variety of other things to do. Plyo, TRX, the dreaded Crossfit etc. etc. the list goes on and every class that you have ever heard of as well as some that you haven't is also readily available on a daily basis. If you don't fancy any of that then most places have a swimming pool too and if time is a problem because of the kids then don't worry, most of the gyms have a childcare facility as well. Here's the amazing thing though, you pay a membership of about £25 - £30 per month and for that you get EVERYTHING! Seriously, that's what I mean about freedom, just pay your membership and do whatever makes you happy, every time you want to go to the gym. Incidentally, there is always plenty of cardio equipment free in the gym because outdoor cardio in wide open spaces with good weather is much more enjoyable and a lot of people choose to do that, even me, who now actually enjoys cardio after all these years of hating it.

There is one other "freedom" example that I really love although it may be peculiar to me and that is the noise in the gym. Let's be honest, in almost any gym in England you are subjected to overly loud music chosen by whoever is working behind the desk at any given time, their logic is "well, it's a gym". You have no say in the matter, it's always too loud and in some cases it's offensive music containing some words that I personally just don't ever want to hear. It has always bugged me, so much so that I once even bought my own gym so that I could play mainstream music at a reasonable level while I trained, guess what, people complained! It's so beautifully different out here and again it's because of the freedom of choice thing. Every gym has more TV's

than you can count, they all show different channels but with no sound, just subtitles. The music that is played over the PA system is mainstream and is so quiet that you don't even notice it unless you're listening out for it. So people train either watching their favourite 24 hour sports channel or whatever else they want to in between sets or they train with headphones on or, like me, they just concentrate on what they're doing without the assaulting audio intrusion. Do you know why that's good? Because it's a gym! Places where you go to try talk to your friends over loud offensive music are called nightclubs, not gyms. Ok, I know that's a personal thing and most people in the UK will disagree with me but that's the way that it is out here. I'm not saying that noisy gyms like the ones in England don't exist but over here I would have to look for them whereas in England I have to try to avoid them.

So hopefully that explains the freedom part, basically what I mean is that being a gym goer out here is made very easy because of the freedom of choice and the lack of things that would put you off of going there in the first place.

So what about the "brave" bit. Well although, as I've explained, the gyms are welcoming in all kinds of ways that the English ones aren't, people aren't satisfied to just go to the gym so that they can say that they go to the gym. I'm sure that you know what I mean by that and have experienced people in your own gym that could be labelled in that way. Probably my most over used phrase when I was doing TV work was that "I always go to the gym on business". Well out here, it seems that everyone goes to the gym with that mentality and I do mean everyone. The demographic of gym goers here is massive, from kids still at school through to people competing at various sports at all levels through to people in their 70's, disabled, amputees and even people undergoing serious medical treatment like chemotherapy. Of course they all have vastly different levels of training and different expectations but they all go to the gym with a brave and serious attitude to training, they go on business.

There seem to be more women in the gyms here too, I know that this has been a massive growth area in the UK but out here it is just a way of life, women go to the gym as much as the men do, that's just the way it is. There is another reason though and that is because of the bravery of the gym owners. Many of the gyms here have "ladies only" rooms and special ladies membership deals because that's what the gym owners want and they will bravely invest in such schemes to further their business and to encourage more women to go to the gym. No matter how friendly any gym is it can be intimidating for women and girls of all ages when they first walk through the door. Out here they do something about that and it is universally recognised as a great idea to get more women into health and fitness in general.

It's an idea that I had when I owned my gym in the UK to get more women into going to the gym. My gym had a ladies only room and we offered discounted female membership rates. However, with Britain being what it is these days it caused me several problems and we had to do away with the ladies only room and, believe it or not, change our ladies membership deals to "owners specials" which meant that I would sign up any new female members with a discount that was a "special one off deal", although in reality I did it whenever we had a new lady member. This was all necessary because our gym was accused of being sexist - against men! Good old PC Britain. A campaign was mounted by a bunch of pussy whipped keyboard

commandos who reported the gym to anyone that they could and the PC brigade crawled out of every hiding place to harass my staff, they even hacked the gym's social media. Of course they declined my many invitations to meet and discuss the matter so in the end I had to go the lengths that I did to alleviate the problem. Seriously, that happened, when I tell people out here they find it hard to believe. It certainly illustrates a major difference and I'll tell you a few others. Out here there are a lot more "lone wolves". Men and women that don't bother with training partners and just go to the gym to workout without wanting the social aspect, I call it the "get it done" attitude. While they will all politely say "hi" they really just want to get on with their work, it's something that really resonates with me. Also, mobile phones are banned on most gym floors and in all changing rooms so that helps people focus on their work rather than texting and calling people. Social media selfie whores would hate it, I love it.

Here's a controversial observation, from what I've seen so far there are less steroid users per head in each gym here than there are in England, certainly in the gyms that I've been using like Golds and the National Fitness Centre. Drug testing over here is very rigid, most employers drug test people before offering them work and steroids count as hard drugs, because that's what they are, so that probably has something to do with it. Another major difference that maybe the UK could learn from.

All in all, the conclusion that I've drawn from spending so much time in gyms in both places is that people here seem to have different, much more positive agendas. Out here people will do anything to help you achieve, they don't just say "have a good day" they actually mean it and will help to ensure that you do. In England, although there are tons of people with a similar attitude it seems that there are also rather a lot of people who would rather do things that benefit themselves more than their clients.

The atmosphere in gyms here seems different to me, maybe it's because the staff are all employed and are not freelance PT's, looking out for their next wage packet. It's as if they all have a vested interest in helping you reach your goals, I don't know, maybe they get the sack if they're not helping you enough? I've never asked anyone if this is the case because I train myself, although I do talk to all of them every day. They all speak to me and make it clear that they are there if I need a spot or anything but they won't interfere with my training unless I ask. That's another thing that I really like about the gyms here, once you've paid your membership there's nothing extra and the staff work to help you. In England I've seen so called PT's (who achieved a minor placing in a bottom of the range beauty contest and now offer online coaching) who will charge for anything that they can, diet help, training help, posing help, even for a 10 minute chat to discuss progress. I do understand that they have to make a living but there has to be limits and some level of free help. Personally I never charged anyone for general help that and I've had many people win or place in shows and even more who would never want to compete but have still made tremendous improvements. The dual outcome of that was that some people said that I was doing others out of a job, although not to my face of course; and one or two of the ingrates that I helped went on to never ever say thank you or acknowledge my help in any way, to pass my methods off as their own and to charge people for it, honestly! Out here free help is readily available and gratefully accepted, that's the way that it should be.

I started off by saying that living in America is a whole different way of life. Hopefully, by giving you an insight into a very small part of it, you will see what I mean and want to come here, it's an amazing place and I would recommend it to anyone who trains for any sport, just wants to get into shape or generally just wants a better quality of life.