

Brides are adding personal trainers to the wedding staff

BY IRA DREYFUSS
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Randi Kessel knows just what she wants to see in a wedding gown. Herself, looking fit.

The 30-year-old bride-to-be and her fiancée have not set the date yet and she doesn't have a gown, but she does have a personal trainer and a goal: to lose 10 to 15 pounds.

Like many prospective brides, the New York City woman is knuckling down to a new commitment to exercise so she can fit into the size she wants. Kessel, who describes herself as "5 feet —OK, I'm four-eleven," intends to drop

from a size 4 to a size 2 before she selects a gown.

Just as important, she intends to be fit, in all the parts of her that the gown will show off.

The typical bride reassesses her image and projects a picture of what she thinks her life should be on her wedding day, said Antonia van der Meer, editor in chief of *Modern Bride* magazine. That's why personal trainers get added to the long list of advisers and suppliers that make getting married a \$600 million a year industry, she said.

Looking good in a gown requires something other than

the typical aerobics class, which specializes in trimming pounds and toning legs, butts and abs. The benefits of those workouts may impress the groom but, for the most part, they are hidden under the gown.

Strapless dresses that reveal the shoulders and arms are hot sellers, and that's where upper body weight training can sculpt and define.

"If you ask a bride, the No. 1 thing they will say is, 'I want nice arms,'" said Sue Fleming, a New York City trainer who developed the *Buff Brides* workout routine, highlighted in her book and a cable TV series.

That's true in Kessel's case. "I've always been doing cardio, but I can't do weights on my own," she said.

She works with trainer Mary Onyango in a *Buff Brides* program at a New York Sports Clubs gym in Manhattan.

Women new to weight training take special handling. "They don't like heavy weights. Once you raise the weights, two days later you're going to be very sore," Onyango said. She uses light weights and many repetitions to firm up the muscles without making them larger.

Onyango also encourages clients to eat right and to keep showing up for workouts. For some women, this takes a lot of support. "There is one



AP Photo/Gregory Bull

Bride-to-be Randi Kessel, center, runs on a treadmill with trainer Mary Onyango looking on. Like many prospective brides, the New York City woman is knuckling down to a new commitment to exercise so she can fit into the size gown she wants.

(client) that is a tough case. She can't change her lifestyle, basically," she said.

As the wedding date approaches, Onyango also becomes a counselor. "My other bride is in the panic stage," she said. "She doesn't feel she'll fit into her dress."

What happens when the smaller gown still doesn't fit? Onyango remains upbeat: "If your personality is strong and you are confident, you will make anything look good."

The bridal shop can work on the rest.

"You can have a cap sleeves, a halter, lace sleeves," said Mara Urshel, owner and president of Kleinfeld, a giant bridal emporium in Brooklyn.

She takes issue with one goal: reckless optimism on the part of the bride-to-be. It's easier to take in a gown if the exercise program works than to add panels and perform other expansion tricks if it does not, she said.

"A girl will say, 'I am a size 12 on the chart, but I want you to order me a size 8,'" Urshel said. "We know 90 percent of the time that will not be the case."

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