

3Qs: The building of a 'fitness tribe'

January 3 2013, by Matt Collette



Two Northeastern alumni are the force behind the November Project, an intense workout that gets hundreds of Bostonians out of bed and into shape. On Wednesdays, the group meets at Harvard Stadium to work out. Credit: The November Project

[The November Project](#) began last fall as a pact between friends who wanted to stay in shape, but has evolved into what co-founders Brogan Graham, AS'06, and Bojan Mandaric, AS'06, call a "fitness tribe." On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 6:30 a.m., hundreds of Bostonians—many of whom are in their 20s and 30s and graduates of North-

eastern— gather for intense workouts at locations such as Allston's Harvard Stadium and Brookline's Summit Avenue.

Last month, GoNU highlighted the November [Project](#), a three-year-old endeavor that aims to duplicate the camaraderie and accountability that Graham and Mandaric showcased as rowers for Northeastern's crew team. We caught up with Graham to find out what gets him out of bed in the morning and what makes the group successful.

Where did the idea for the November Project come from and how did it evolve into what it is today?

Bojan and I had just finished competing in the Northeastern alumni boat at the Head of the Charles Regatta and were at the bar after winning our race. I had stayed in great shape on my own but Bojan had always stayed in shape through rowing. He was saying, "Now that it's over, how do I keep going?" I told him it was all about consistency. As guys often do when they're talking over a beer, we made a plan to meet up and exercise before work every day for a month. Every morning we'd run or do stadiums and every night we'd text about what we were going to do the next morning.

We recorded our mileage, our times, the temperature, and any fun comments in a Google doc. We called that shared document the "November Project," and that's how this all got started. The whole idea was if we got up Monday through Friday, we'd just become morning people. The first few days are difficult, but you become more and more of a morning person over time.

By the end of the spring, friends started running in the stadiums or doing the group runs. It wasn't anything big, but when we gave this thing a name, something was born; we had created a framework for people to

participate. We started drawing some people from the city's running world, some of the city's big yoga instructors. One day, 12 people participated and we were sky high. That's when we started a [Twitter handle](#), a [blog](#), and a [Facebook page](#). All at once people were really die-hard about this and started bringing their friends.

What about November Project gets people out of bed for the workout?

A lot of people think they have to pay a lot of money at a gym to stay in shape. This is free—and it's a lot more fun. We're using the city as our playground and we're building a community. We have a Bruins player right next to a woman with her dog next to a fat guy next to an undergrad, and each of those people is as much a part of this as any other. I love just guiding the interaction, whether it's a big group hug before a workout or a high five while you're running up the hill or stadium stairs. I love making people turn to introduce themselves, because then they're going to do that when they're in the library or the supermarket when they see someone wearing a [November Project t-shirt](#).

We've found that people really connect through social media, too. We take photos and videos all the time and then post them online. When you share your videos online, it's like starring in your own low-level Nike commercial. We've seen people get more competitive about their time or become more serious about their workouts.

We hold people accountable, too. If you say you're going to be there, we're going to hold you to it. That's where we came up with the idea of ["We Missed You,"](#) which is a section of our blog where we call out people who say they're going to be there and then bail. Fear of getting your name and picture up there is enough to get a lot of people out of their bed in the morning.

What comes next for the November Project? And how can people get involved?

We joke about world takeover. But what we're doing, no joke, is universal. Everyone wants to be in better shape and that's a big part of what this is all about. We have found that a larger percentage of people are seeking community with others who share the same interest. They're not looking to find friends at the bar or even friends in the same demographic. With November Project, you find people who just want to get fit and get up early to do this crazy workout.

You just have to show up. Every [Monday](#), we're at some different place in the city—we post it online every Friday so you'll know where we'll be. Every [Wednesday](#), we run stadiums. Every [Friday](#), we do hills on Summit Avenue in Brookline. It doesn't matter if it's raining or freezing, we're there. You don't pay anything, and you don't sign anything. You just get your butt out of bed so you're there at 6:30 a.m. and then you push yourself as hard as you can before you head out for the rest of your day.

Sometimes even I think this is too crazy and too hard. But at the end of the day it's a good, fun workout.

Provided by Northeastern University

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