

How Erik's Passion for Running and His City Grew into One of America's Biggest Run Crews

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by [Amy Schlinger](#)

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In 2017, Samsung and Under Armour teamed up to help athletes better understand the importance of tracking their activity, nutrition and sleep. This partnership culminated in Under Armour health and fitness apps being integrated with the [Samsung Gear Fit2 Pro](#), allowing users to log exercise, meals and sleep directly on the wearable. As part of the partnership, we invited 12 athletes to Portland, Oregon, to challenge their physical and mental capacity and encourage them push past their comfort zones. One of the athletes was Erik Valiente, founder of [BlacklistLA](#), the biggest run crew in the city of Los Angeles.

Growing up, Erik Valiente was always active, playing everything from volleyball to soccer and more. As he transitioned to college, Valiente struggled to get enough people together to play these group sports, so he picked up running. "It was a singular sport and I could cover miles by myself," says Valiente, 29. "But I always thought it would be more fun with a team."

Post-college, Valiente decided — unlike the rest of L.A. — he wasn't going to own a car. Instead, he biked around the city or took the metro, when necessary — and he continued running, too.

“Along my routes, I would notice all the art around the city,” he says. “I felt like a tourist in my own city, and I attributed that to running, biking or riding the metro instead of using a car.”

[Samsung](#) and Under Armour have collaborated to inspire you to push beyond your comfort zone and take on your own 'Firsts.' Join Under Armour's Natasha Hastings, an Olympic gold medalist, on [a challenge](#) that will celebrate individual milestones.

Gear Fit2 Pro

With so much traffic and so many people in L.A., Valiente admits it can be easy to feel part of a smaller community, but not often a larger one. The L.A.-native wanted to find a way to bring people together in his city to experience what he did when he was using his body as his main mode of transportation. He invited a couple friends to meet him on a Monday night to run 3 miles, ending at a mural on Melrose.

“We met at 10 p.m., and the idea was to explore the city at night when we could own the streets,” says Valiente. “I thought this was the perfect opportunity to bring people together to see the art and make something happen.”

And with that, BlacklistLA was born.

Valiente and his friends committed to doing this run every Monday night. Slowly, they invited others to join. Within the first few months, they had about 20–30 people joining them, and by six months, they started seeing their first triple-digit numbers. “How did we get to 100 runners and it's only six months in?” recalls Valiente. “It was crazy!”



There's no fee to run with BlacklistLA, which is one of the best parts about the run group. And Valiente and his other pacers focus on engaging with new runners. "Many people are hesitant to join a group and have anxiety about it," explains Valiente. "So we make it a point to go up to new runners and notice anyone who is maybe on their phone, feeling a bit out of place. We engage with them, ask them why they run, how did they hear about BlacklistLA and help them feel more comfortable in this big group."

BlacklistLA now meets four days a week, and runners can come to any or all of the workouts for free. Monday runs at 10 p.m. are still 3–4 miles, where the group visits one mural in the city along the run. Wednesdays are a night run to the metro, where Valiente and his crew show runners how to use this as a mode of transportation around the city, as well as metro etiquette. "L.A. actually has a metro," jokes Valiente. "Many people just don't know about it." Thursdays are a cross-training, strength or mobility workout, led by Valiente himself who is an RRCA-certified running coach. Saturdays are a long run, anywhere from 10–22 miles, depending on what people are training for.

Valiente cherishes the fact he is able to use his body as a mode of transportation and loves that he can give that appreciation back to his city. "There's the obvious environmental side of not having a car, but I would also say that biking or running from place to place helps me slow down. I think of the murals as modern day 'stopping and smelling the roses,'" he says. "Now, when I'm traveling from point A to point B, or I'm stuck in traffic and I make a right or a left, I'm controlling that. Every time I go somewhere it's an experience, and it has helped me falling love with my city even more."

This past month, when Valiente traveled to Portland with Samsung, Under Armour and a group of new athletes, he had the chance to explore a new city. He participated in dragon boating,

running and cycling around the city, and then camped out overnight in the Oregon woods.



“Being so involved in Blacklist, I haven’t left L.A. for a while to explore nature and the trails,” says Valiente. “I really enjoyed camping, sleeping without the background noise of the city and waking up to the smell of trees and the sound of birds. I ended up going camping again a week after I got back because I enjoyed it so much.”

BlacklistLA is a full-time job for Valiente, though, and keeps him busy. His team has grown to about 25–30 pacers and volunteers, plus his co-founder, Carlos, their resident physical therapist, Jayna, and his board of directors that consists of five people and two advisors. To continue the group’s growth, Valiente does a lot of the fundraising and builds awareness about the club himself. “My parents always instilled in me the importance of giving back to the community,” he explains. “So while I’m not always making what I maybe need to be sometimes financially, having 500 runners show up a week ... that’s my paycheck.”

Written by Amy Schlinger, a New York-based fitness and health writer and editor whose work has appeared in SELF, Men’s Fitness, Shape, Muscle & Fitness HERS, Pilates Style, Max Sports & Fitness and more. Check her out at www.amyschlinger.com.

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Gear Fit2 Pro

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