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TECH | GEAR & GADGETS

# New Year's Fitness Resolutions: The Smartest Way to Keep Them

People who work out alone give up the soonest. But a new trend—retro classes that turn fitness into competitive group games—is helping Americans play the pounds away and keep coming back for more



ILLUSTRATION: JOEY GUIDONE

By *Emily Abbate*

Updated Jan. 3, 2018 2:50 p.m. ET

**IMPATIENT TO ESCAPE** a mundane exercise routine of running, Andrew Feigelman stepped into Throwback Fitness in Midtown Manhattan, a retro gym that aims to make workouts a game—and felt like he was stepping back through time. Beneath a poster of Schwarzenegger hulking out in his '80s action-star prime and Ferris Bueller in full recline, the New York native was greeted by a trainer decked out like a junior high Phys Ed. coach: crew cut, high socks, varsity tee, whistle around his neck. Pop music blared as Mr. Feigelman, 31, was introduced to intense variations on relay races, basketball and dodgeball inspired by the days of recess past.

The sweat session culminated in an unconventional game of basketball. Divided into two teams, players earned a shot on their opponents's basket only by completing a quick circuit of push-ups, sit-ups and mountain climbers. The 45-minute workout left Mr. Feigelman gassed—and his team victorious.

"I was sore for days," he said, masochistically content. "The actual workout was fun. The games made me want to work out more, and I never sat in the room wondering how much time is left until this is over."

While hitting the "dreadmill" alone or listening to the same pumped-up Spin class instructor yodel commands over Beyonce loses its charm over time, turning fitness into a competitive game helps ensure no two workouts are alike. Injecting your exercise with an element of play might help you pursue your passionate 2018 New Year's fitness resolution beyond...tomorrow.

"Adults need playtime, too," said Dr. Bonnie Marks, a psychologist at NYU Langone Health. "The kind of intensity that these classes offer gets your endorphins going. And as a result, they can help reduce stress, lower blood pressure and potentially reduce your risk for heart disease. Finding those slices of joy is what's important."

About 50 blocks and a generation away from Throwback's analog workouts, the recreation

center Asphalt Green offers "AG6," a heart-pumping, high-tech experience with stations designed to make participants feel immersed in a videogame. Under blacklight, Spandex-clad weekend warriors high-five, stomp and slam medicine balls against glowing dots as they move across a life-size game board, advancing from one exercise to the next.

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And at  
more  
than  
500

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locations across the country, running fanatics can jog into an OrangeTheory for the chance to race competitive classmates and best personal records in treadmill sprints. Between intervals, members steal glances at an overhead leaderboard as it constantly updates their "splat points"—earned by spending time in the heart rate zone where the most calories are burned.

That desire for competition with a side of sweat can make you work harder to attain an ever-evolving set of goals. In 2016, researchers from the University of Pennsylvania found that contests encourage a higher participation rate than solo pursuits, where your only companion is a smartwatch indifferently blinking out your stats. In an 11-week study of nearly 800 people, those motivated by competitive classes exercised 90% more than those sweating it out alone. Such classes seem even more appealing when you consider that about 92% of people never see their New Year's resolutions through according to research from the University of Scranton, while gyms continue to make millions off those who sign up in January, go twice and never return.

"Competition shifts the main objective from the more obscure goal of general fitness to a simple one: Get more points now," said Dr. Don Vaughn, a neuroscience postdoctoral fellow at UCLA. Gamification helps us transcend our "impatient biology," Dr. Vaughn said, by giving us short-term highs—win or lose—that keep us motivated and determined to chase long-term fitness goals.

Gaming your workouts can make them feel less like a chore and more like something to look forward to. And it seems the trend isn't about to exhaust itself anytime soon. According to a review by Brigham Young University, more health apps than ever in the Apple store offer elements of play. Take Spar, an app that lets users challenge friends to athletic feats for a pot of cash; winner takes all.

As bored fitness seekers continue to patronize boutique studios to get their play fix, demand for instructors is growing. Throwback co-founders Ryan Wilke and Brian Gallagher recently partnered with the National Academy of Sports Medicine to create a certification course for anyone hoping to teach Throwback's method—one that hasn't yet gotten old for Mr. Feigelman. "The class helped people bond while working as hard as possible," he said. "That's what kept me going back for more."

## MAKING FUN OF FITNESS //

### Workouts That Exemplify the 'Gamification' Trend

**BROOKLYN BOULDERS**, *New York*

Augmented reality and indoor climbing are married in an experience called Time Trial, in which challengers chalk up, jump on the wall, and aim to beat the clock as they slap virtual targets on their way to the top. *\$32/day pass, brooklynboulders.com*



The incline at Brooklyn Boulders in Chicago. PHOTO: BROOKLYN BOULDERS

### **LAZRFIT, Los Angeles**

This laser-tag-inspired class starts with a dynamic warm-up followed by two rounds of play. Class-goers wear special vests and guns while weaving between wooden obstacles and exploiting hiding spots in pursuit of one another. *\$29/class, lazrfit.com*

### **SOCCERSHAPE, Miami**

Founded by soccer pros, this class combines strength training and cardio with fun, challenging drills. Leave your shin guards at home and prepare to get sweaty—most classes are held outside at local Miami parks and beaches. *\$20, soccershape.org*

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