

The Bonds of the BU Nine

Alums have made Super Bowl weekend reunions a tradition—and an adventure

Move fast and try not to break things. It might be a good motto for the BU Nine, although it would cover only a fraction of what happens when these friends meet for Super Bowl weekend, as they have every year for nearly two decades.

The BU Nine got their start (and their name) in 1995, on the 13th floor of Rich Hall. “It was a bunch of guys who met at an amazing university,” says Kevin Wolkov (CGS’96, SMG’98). “Nine guys who were 100 percent different from each other.” They began watching the Super Bowl together at the Canton, Mass., home of classmate Rob Mariano (CGS’96, CAS’99)—who became the reality TV star Boston Rob—where they feasted on his mother’s Italian cooking.

Before graduating and going their separate ways, says Rick Gosálvez (CAS’00, SMG’00), “we decided not to be one of those BU groups that say they’ll keep in touch and then never do. We had made that first commitment to meeting on Super Bowl as undergraduates. Why not continue?”

They have gone from crashing on one another’s floors and couches to planning elaborate adventures in some unexpected places, with increasingly complex itineraries. They have celebrated the Super Bowl in Los Cabos, Mexico, in the Bahamas, in Dubai, at Machu Picchu in Peru, and in Oahu, Hawaii, among other destinations.

Each year’s host—the rotation was established early on—selects the location, plans the weekend activities, and arranges accommodations. The other eight just have to show up. Weddings, professional activities, family vacations, and other events on Super Bowl weekend are always to be avoided. Most have been, except for the occasional arrival of a baby. Nearly everyone manages to get there each year, even Walter Archambo (CAS’99),



FOR NEARLY TWO DECADES, nine alums have reunited for Super Bowl weekend. In Orlando in 2009 are (front row, from left) Ted Shimizu, Adrian Prezioso, Paulo Heyman, Gabe Nasser, and Walter Archambo; (back row, from left) Rick Gosálvez, Marcel Dabdoub, Kevin Wolkov, and Rob Mariano.

COURTESY OF KEVIN WOLKOV

who once flew in, still in uniform, directly from his Army posting in Baghdad.

The general idea is simple: get together, catch up, and see if this year’s host can outshine last year’s. For the Nine, Super Bowl hosting has become an art—albeit with some attendant anxiety.

But two elements are inevitable: the transportation can take any form (motorcycles, scooters, ultralights, RVs, kayaks, camels) and something will get broken, like a runaway dune buggy in Dubai or a totaled scooter in San Francisco. These incidents may result in good-natured ribbing of the host or pain for the guests, but they have become the stuff of legend for the Nine, in stories told over and over.

More than a decade out of BU, these alums are still close friends, sounding boards, and even colleagues—Gabe Nasser (CAS’99, GRS’99) and Adrian Prezioso (CAS’99, GRS’99) work together in Boston, specializing in radio frequency identification tracking software used by jewelers—despite their widely divergent locations and professional activities. Marcel Dabdoub (SMG’99) is a lawyer in real

estate development. Wolkov owns a retail business. Ted Shimizu (SMG’99) is in pharmaceutical advertising. Archambo is a defense consultant for General Dynamics. Gosálvez works with local governments in land use planning and productivity. Paulo Heyman (CAS’99) is in environmental remediation consulting and contracting. Most of the Nine are married, some with kids.

“We run the gamut from quiet, relaxed, and low-key,” Gosálvez says, “to high-energy, loud, and risk-taking.” Nonetheless, says Prezioso, “it seems like the bonds get stronger every year.”

The common denominator is Boston University. To honor that connection, the Nine decided this year to make their first joint gift of \$1,000 to BU to support student organizations, initiating another annual tradition.

Meanwhile, the adventures continue. It’ll be Dabdoub’s turn to host the group’s 20th annual gathering. He hasn’t said where, but a few things are certain: the Nine will find an adventure, celebrate their friendship and their alma mater, and retell the old stories. It’s also a good bet that something will get broken. ■