



HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS' — ULTIMATE RESOURCES MANUAL

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Introduction by Kyra Catabay

Prefaces by Michelle Ng & Gail Reich

Edited by Michelle Ng, Libby Cravens, Gail Reich, Collin Bartoldus & Stacey Waldrup

Graphic Design by Katie Dyer

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thank you!

VC was created over 20 years ago by three young ultimate players in Montreal. Our team today has evolved, yet we all still work our hearts out every day to ensure that we're constantly improving, supporting our community, and promoting our values.

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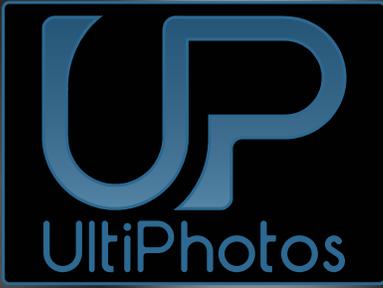
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Twitter: @kyrabay_
Instagram: @kyrabay_
Email: kyra@withoutlimitsultimate.com

MICHELLE NG CREATED the College Women’s Ultimate Resources Manual Volume 1 in 2010. There was nothing else like it yet—a treasure trove of articles written by women’s ultimate athletes for women’s ultimate athletes. Volume 2 was released in 2018. It built on past ideas from Volume 1 and also tackled other topics —interpersonal relationships, mental health, equity. We relied primarily on club players to write these gems of knowledge for college players. Instead of reinventing the wheel, readers could learn from someone else who had already done it. With the purpose of widening access to knowledge, the [Manuals](#)¹ are absolutely free to anyone who wants to read them.

1. <http://withoutlimitsultimate.com/resources/>

Recently, we thought about using this same framework for another group. What if we gathered authors including current college women’s players to write articles for youth players? Just like the previous Manuals, we leveraged our community to help us with this endeavor. As more players begin their ultimate careers at the youth level, we wanted to create a resource that spoke specifically to youth athletes, their coaches, and their parents.

When Without Limits was formed, most existing tournaments clearly favored the men’s division and there were far fewer opportunities for women’s teams. Michelle changed the infrastructure of college women’s ultimate. She filled the gaps and even remodeled opportunities to better suit the needs of teams. Every problem was an opportunity for another creative solution; just take a look at all of our [past projects](#)²! With each of our tournaments, we try to do best by each team, no matter their level of play or their goals.

There are people in the ultimate community doing remarkable things to push the envelope of how we think about growing the sport. In this Manual, you’ll find articles from organizers working to create a version of ultimate that looks more like the communities we live in, athletes thinking critically about how to build their teams, coaches creating structure for their players, and parents working hard behind the scenes.

In this Manual, we want to share these voices with you and help you on your journey as you play, coach, or organize to the best of your ability. We hope that you take what you learn here and adapt it to your ultimate community!

2. <http://withoutlimitsultimate.com/projects/past-projects/>



Twitter: @mdng10
 Instagram: @mdng10
 Email: michelle@withoutlimitsultimate.com

WHEN I WAS IN COLLEGE over a decade ago, I ran my first ultimate tournament—a small round robin in the Bay Area. When I moved to Texas for grad school, I grew tired of the women’s division being relegated to the worst fields and saw teams struggling to find quality events within a reasonable travel distance. Dreaming of a different future for our sport, I started Without Limits with the goal of fostering relationships within the women’s ultimate community and creating quality playing and development opportunities for women.

Over the past 15 years, I’ve organized 100+ tournaments and clinics, raising the profile of existing events and

creating new events all over the country. I’ve brought in club players to coach skills clinics, guest coach developing teams, and teach leadership skills to college players. I’ve also had the privilege of mentoring dozens of players and advising programs as they developed.

In 2010, I organized and edited the first edition of the College Women’s Ultimate Resources Manual in an effort to scale some of my work and make resources available to a wider audience. I wanted to capture and share insights from some of the amazing leaders in our community. In my own journey as a leader, the guidance I received from friends and leaders on other teams was invaluable to me, and I wanted others to have access to this same wealth of knowledge!

In 2018, the second edition of the Manual was released, and now, we’re proud to share the High School Girls’ Ultimate Resources Manual with our community. We hope that the Manual inspires you, sparks conversations between you and your co-leaders, and aids you in becoming the best leader you can be.

A big thank you to Gail Reich for all of her hard work behind the scenes and for her commitment to making this Manual happen! I also want to express my gratitude to Adriana Withers from VC Ultimate and Kyra Catabay who has taken the lead on Without Limits. Thank you for all that you do for our sport.

And of course, thank you to my family for all of their love and support over the years. I love you!



Instagram: @greichphoto
 Email: captaingail@gmail.com

AS SOON AS I TOOK ON THE ROLE of Girls’ National Outreach Director for GUM, the [Girls’ Ultimate Movement](http://gum.usultimate.org),¹ doing some sort of collaboration with Michelle Ng/Without Limits was a priority on my agenda. She and her organization have been trailblazers in ultimate, hosting many fabulous tournaments, advancing women in the sport, and executing many a solid clinic. This High School Girls’ Ultimate Resources Manual is the product of our collaboration, and I could not be more grateful for having had the opportunity to work with her to bring this resource to you.

I had the fortunate opportunity to play ultimate while I was in graduate school. This is when I first came across Without Limits, a women-centric organization supporting the growth of ultimate players. I learned a lot and gained

confidence from attending two Without Limits clinics and having access to their first College Women’s Ultimate Resources Manual. Learning directly from women ahead of me in a sport that I was growing to love felt much less intimidating than the mixed club teams I was playing on at the time.

Entering a new sport can be intimidating, but having individual, strong female leaders like Michelle really helped pave the way for me. It may have been a guy who got me into ultimate, but it was his female roommate who really included and welcomed me into the sport. Excited for another female to play, she quickly went out of her way to get me signed up for league even though the registration had already closed (fortunately for me, she was on the local board of directors). She was excited for me - and that made me excited. Having another woman share her experiences and include me made it all so much more accessible. It is my hope that this resource guide helps pay forward the generosity and inclusivity I experienced.

Ultimately (no pun intended), it has been the people and my experiences with them that have fueled my addiction to ultimate. Our fine sport is generally full of such lovely, giving, friendly people. Because of Spirit of the Game and the types of people the sport attracts, it has truly been a space where I have been able to not only fit in, but also experience true belonging. It is my wish that others would have that opportunity as well. And the thought of high school girls being able to be part of this sport, that many of us didn’t discover until college (or in my case even later), is even more amazing.

Playing sports, specifically ultimate, is so formative for youth. It is an avenue for learning emotional intelligence, maturity, grit, leadership, confidence, teamwork, athleticism, and so on. More youth could use ultimate in their lives, and girls should have just as much presence and opportunity as boys in athletics. This resource is meant to help aid in that endeavor.

1. <http://gum.usultimate.org>

This resource manual is full of great articles for players, coaches and organizers of girls' ultimate. We cannot say enough about how grateful we are that these authors took time out of their busy lives to share their knowledge. This manual is obviously nothing without all of its contributors. Michelle is an amazing human in general, super kind and intelligent, and it also has to be said that she has been so generous and professional to work with on this project. It has been a truly enjoyable experience to collaborate with her. Michelle also had a big role in editing many of these articles. A big shout out must also be made for Libby Cravens (a general youth and GUM badass volunteer) and Collin Bartoldus who also assisted in the editing process - thank you both! I also want to thank Sarah Powers of USA Ultimate, who is the Manager of Youth and Outreach Programs, for allowing me to do this project through GUM.

My hope is that anyone who reads this manual will enjoy perusing the articles, find great use in the information presented, be positively impacted by it in some way, and share it with all who might benefit from reading it. Thank you!



SECTION I: GROWING PLAYERS

YULA Saturday: Kevin Leclaire - UltiPhotos

MOTIVATION, EFFORT, AND REJECTION

DAWN CULTON



© Hugo Sowder, Seven on the Line Productions, LLC

Email: dawnculton@gmail.com

Twitter: [@dawn_culton](https://twitter.com/dawn_culton)

Instagram: [@dawnculton](https://www.instagram.com/dawnculton)

Hi! My name is Dawn Culton. I play for University of North Carolina Pleiades, NC Phoenix, and Radiance, and I'm double majoring in Sociology and in Management and Society. I started playing my freshman year of high school and played on the U20 Women's US National team.

IT'S HARD TO FIGURE OUT what makes a good player, and how to become the best you can be. I think that for me, I improved the most by taking all of the opportunities I had to play.

I played on my school's girls' team and open team. I also played on Tourists, a team of high schoolers who played in college tournaments during the school year. Additionally, over the summer, I played on Warhawks, a local U20 youth club team. By playing on so many different teams, I was able to work on filling lots of different roles. Also, my skills and abilities were different in the girls' versus open divisions. Although I could rely on just out-running my person when I played in the girls' division, I had to actually think about my positioning when I played open. I also really valued being able to bring ideas and skills over from division to division. I was frustrated that so many people on the open team knew how to bid, so my friend and I taught ourselves, and eventually I taught a lot of the women that I played with. I think that effort and continual focus at practice have allowed me to succeed. I've spent a lot of time trying to coach, and it has become really obvious to me who is actually putting in their full effort. Those are the people who tend to improve most sustainably and reliably. The people who are frustrated at the first road block tend not to make it very far without feeling like they want to quit. Differently, those who see challenges as opportunities to grow often feel more fulfilled.

My junior and senior years, I was one of three captains on Eclipse, my high school's girls' team. Each year I

played in high school, Zog was our head coach, and we had at least one assistant coach, usually a University of North Carolina player. Being a captain was really hard, and while I am immensely grateful that my team trusted me to take on that role, there were certainly days that I felt unbelievably frustrated. I think that something that was hard for me to realize was that I shouldn't treat everyone the way I want to be treated. Just because I want everyone to be brutally honest with me and give me criticism without praise, doesn't mean that's how everyone learns best. Everyone has different communication preferences, which is something I'm still working on. I think that filling out a communication spreadsheet before the season starts is a really good idea. I also believe that being upfront and willing to talk openly about things like playing time and strategy are good and make everyone feel included. I think one of the most important things to do as a captain is to be willing to admit that you were wrong or that how you approached a situation was suboptimal. I wasn't the best captain that I could have been in high school. I was too controlling, and I pushed my vision of the team onto all the players. I wanted Eclipse to be highly competitive, so I pushed for perfection, both in attendance and in effort, all the time. But that's not what everyone on the team wanted. Some people played for the competition and to improve the most that they could, but some people played simply for fun - something I didn't understand. It was selfish of me to push my goals onto everyone, and I should have tried to motivate people based on their personal goals, not only mine. This year, I'm helping Zog coach Eclipse, and I'm excited to continue to grow.

Throughout my high school career, my coaches and teammates provided invaluable support and opportunities. Multiple times, I was encouraged to try out for teams I assumed that I had no chance of making. After my freshman year, Zog urged everyone to try out for Warhawks or Kitty Hawks (our U-17 Youth Club team). I had only been playing for seven or eight months and

knew I would be gone half the summer, but I tried out for Warhawks for the tryout experience that Zog promised would be valuable. It definitely was. The coaches offered me a practice player position, and when someone got sick the week before Youth Club Championships (YCC), they offered me a roster spot. Two or three years later, a teammate asked me what I was planning on doing if junior worlds conflicted with the first week of college for me. I replied that it wouldn't be a problem since I wasn't trying out, and even if I applied, I doubted that I would get a tryout, much less a place on the team. But I was continually encouraged to apply. Eventually, I did, and I made the team. For me, trying is always worth it. When the worst that can happen is rejection, I trust myself to be able to handle it. Getting practice trying out is valuable, and you never know what might happen. My freshman year of college I tried out for the U-24 National Team. I didn't make it, but I later tried out for Radiance (our Premier Ultimate League, PUL, team) and Phoenix (our women's club team), which I did make. I can deal with rejection, but I never want to wonder "what could have happened" if only I had tried.

PLAY LIKE YOU

SADIE JEZIERSKI



Email: sadiejezierski6@gmail.com

Twitter: [@sadiejezierski](https://twitter.com/sadiejezierski)

Instagram: [@sadiejezierski](https://www.instagram.com/sadiejezierski)

Sadie Jezierski started playing in 2007 in 6th grade with her middle school team. She was one of the only girls and soon became one of the only girls on the open team for seven years. She also helped start her high school's girls' team as an 8th grader.

I'VE ALWAYS HELD THE BELIEF that the open game is different than the women's game. It's not that one is better than the other; in fact, pitting them against one another is unfair to each. Each game has its own style that you can't find in the other, and that's what makes each division unique and worthy of being celebrated.

My name is Sadie Jezierski, and I played on my high school's open team while helping to start and lead my high school's girls' team to three state finals. Since that time, I have been to college nationals five times and club nationals twice. I also co-founded a PUL team and have won two gold medals on the Worlds Stage. There were three major lessons I learned playing youth ultimate that I've taken with me in my journey since: be persistent, embrace change, and make good mistakes.

Be Persistent

I found ultimate how most kids in 6th grade find their passions - their friends. Luckily, my friends, who were almost all boys, didn't blink twice when I wanted to follow them to practice every week. It was hard at first; I was one of two girls on the middle school team that first year and soon became the only girl throughout the rest of middle school. But to me, it was normal.

As my male friends and I continued to play ultimate through middle school, they started to become taller and faster, while I stayed the same physically. I knew I needed to figure out how I could still make an impact and not

just be “the girl on the field.” **Persistence** was my key. There were countless times when I was misjudged and considered the easy matchup. Each time I felt this doubt, the fire inside me grew. I learned how to be physical and aggressive and to not shy away from any contact. I learned how to take shots that I had no business taking just to show the competition that I had those shots. My persistence paid off. Somewhere along the way, I proved to myself, and to others, that I belonged.

Embrace Change

My middle school coach approached me in 8th grade telling me that he needed more girls for a brand new high school girls’ team for the state tournament. At this point, I had never played in the girls’ division. I didn’t know what to expect at all. Could I play the way I played with the boys? Would my cuts still work? My throws? I wasn’t sure how my skills would translate. But I knew that I wanted to play more ultimate, so I said yes to the opportunity!

At States, I played the way I knew best - mostly brute force and sheer athleticism. However, it wasn’t working like I was used to it working. People were shutting me down, stopping my cuts, and getting in the lanes that I wanted to throw to. This was when I realized what ultimate IQ really is. I thought sports were all about just who was the fastest, strongest, and fittest. I realized that players were stopping my moves before I even knew what I was doing! I needed to embrace this challenge just like I had learned how to play as the only girl on an open team. **Embracing the change.**

Make Good Mistakes

My coach used to call me a cannon. He knew that if he pointed me in a direction, I could shoot or run there. However, my playing style lacked a measure of grace, and I beat myself up when I couldn’t do what he wanted me to. The best advice I was given during my first year playing in the YCC girls’ division was that it isn’t about making mistakes; it’s about **making good mistakes**. I

learned a lot about myself when I was told this. The boys’ division made me strive to be the best, to prove the doubters wrong, and I believed that every mistake was costly. But a good mistake? How could a mistake be good?

Good mistakes are execution errors or errors caused by uncontrollables. For example, a person is wide open cross-field and you go for that hammer? Yes. It double helixes to the ground 10 yards short of your target because of a sudden gust of wind? I turned good mistakes like these into lessons. I learned that I needed to put more power behind that throw by using my wrist more. I learned how to adjust in windier conditions. And I applied these lessons so that I didn’t make them twice in a row. These mistakes helped me grow.

Mistakes are one of the most important learning tools. My coach taught me to learn from each mistake and to take the time to understand what may have gone wrong so that I could make adjustments the next time around. The ability to learn from mistakes can help an average player become an elite player.

Putting It All Together

After my first year with the high school girls’ team, I was tasked with building the team from scratch as a freshman. As someone who had just been introduced to the girls’ division, this was a daunting task. I recruited





2012 YCC U-16 Championship Game

hard. I hooked my friends who had played soccer, basketball and all of the sports in between. I was **persistent** in building this brand new team that started with just seven people. Amazingly, it worked, and the people I recruited soon became some of my closest friends in high school. Practices were tough. We rarely had enough people to scrimmage 7 v. 7, even with our two coaches playing. But we **embraced the changes** that came every practice, game, and season.

From schedule changes to roster changes to strategy changes, we learned to try new things and got better in the process. We also **made good mistakes** and learned from them, striving to be better every step along our journey. After all was said and done, I learned what it meant to lead a team that was building toward a State Championship. We made the state finals three times, and while we didn't achieve our goal of winning States, we all learned a lot in the process.

Conclusion

The preconceived notions about women in sports are slowly getting knocked down, and it's amazing to see. My suggestion for the young girls trying to be the next Claire Chastain or Maggie Ruden: be persistent, embrace change, and make good mistakes. My journey in youth ultimate wasn't without challenges, but they made me into the person and player I am today. I'll forever be grateful for my teammates and coaches who pushed me to be the best. If you find something you love, stick with it. It will pay off in the end, and you'll realize how far you've come.

CAPTAIN MATERIAL: HOW TO STAND OUT BEFORE IT IS YOUR TURN TO STAND UP

DEIRDRE ABRAHAMSSON



Email: deirdre.abrahamsson@gmail.com

Twitter: [@deeisfromqueens](https://twitter.com/deeisfromqueens)

Instagram: [@deeisfromqueens](https://www.instagram.com/deeisfromqueens)

Deirdre began playing ultimate in Philadelphia's summer league in 1996 and has been involved in ultimate since then as a player, coach, organizer, and parent. Highlights from her ultimate journey include playing in three world championships (1997, 2000, 2002), being part of the organizing committee for Worlds 2002 in Hawaii and a World Flying Disc Federation (WFDF) staff member

for the 2005 World Games in Germany, and playing at so many fun tournaments around the US and Europe including Poultry Days, Paganello, and the Porron Open. She co-founded the ultimate program at Strath Haven High School with her husband Petter and runs youth programs in her community.

SO, YOU WANT TO BE A CAPTAIN of your high school ultimate team. That's awesome! There are many ways to prepare for that role and to position yourself as a strong choice as a leader in the eyes of your coaches and teammates. Regardless of whether you're eventually selected to be a captain, your actions and initiative will contribute positively to the team in many ways. So focus on having a positive impact on your team, and you'll become a leader on your team, regardless of title.

As the co-founder of the ultimate team (and now program) at Strath Haven High School in Wallingford, Pennsylvania, I have overseen the evolution of a single mixed team of about 12-15 players in spring 2014 to a program of three teams in spring 2019 consisting of 16 varsity boys, 22+ JV boys, and 19 varsity girls. We've also added five new coaches. (Thank goodness for that!)

Filling the captain positions has been an evolution as well. I don't think we had any captains in the traditional sense that first spring season, just game-day captains for the few tournaments we played in. Now, interested players apply to be a captain by submitting a written statement to the coaches during the summer. Players

describe why they want to captain, the strengths they bring to the role, and other leadership experience they have had. They also have the opportunity to share anything else they deem relevant. Generally, the coaches select a set of captains from the players who apply. We have had players vote in the past, but the coaches have always provided input and overseen the process.

Over the years, I have seen a wide variety of players with different strengths, abilities, and leadership skills become captains. Many of them have evolved into strong leaders, but the most effective have been those who stood out from the beginning. Here are some traits that they demonstrated that made me and the other coaches know that they were “captain material” and had what it took to lead the team:

1. Warm up with enthusiasm / lead everywhere.

“If you’re not a leader on the bench, don’t call yourself a leader on the field. You’re either a leader everywhere or nowhere.” - Abby Wambach, Wolfpack

Come to practice READY to go. Get your cleats on, get throwing, and when it is time to do the warm-up lap (or two), be ready to join in. Be focused during dynamic stretching and the rest of the warm-up routine. Don’t simply jog along, do one skip for everyone else’s three, or just talk to a teammate the whole time. Time and time again, I have seen a lack of effort during warm-ups spill into other areas. Not only are your coaches observing you, but your teammates are watching too. Are you an athlete that others wish to emulate? What is your work ethic? Do you pick and choose when to be engaged? Or are you all in, every step of the way? Practice doesn’t just begin when the scrimmage starts.

2. Care very hard.

“The main thing is to care. Care very hard, even if it is only a game you are playing.” - Billie Jean King

Know what is going on. In the team circle, listen to the coaches and captains. When a drill is about to start,

know what to do or ask for clarification. Pay attention to instructions. Read team emails and check the calendar. Always update your availability. Besides the games and practice sessions, our team has other events and commitments, such as interest meetings, parent meetings, team potlucks, fundraising events, and more. If you can’t make a practice, game, or tournament, let the coaches know in advance. If you tell a coach something during a busy moment after practice, follow up with an email as well. Be prompt and clear. Demonstrate your reliability and communication skills. Know what is going on with the team. There are players who just show up and float through practice. In order to lead, you need to do more than that and understand the bigger picture. You need to be deeply invested.

3. Dare greatly (team first, friends second).

“Courage starts with showing up and letting ourselves be seen.” - Brené Brown, Daring Greatly

It takes courage to join the ultimate team. For many, it is a totally new (and sometimes intimidating) sport and may not be as accepted as a “real” option at your school (i.e., not part of your school’s league or state governing body, as is the case at ours). At Strath Haven, it took several years for us to have enough players for a stand-alone girls’ team. It took the bravery of a few players in the early years to set the foundation for the excellent team we have now.

When new players come out to explore or join the team, we want them to feel “seen.” We know how awesome the ultimate community can be. We want new players to experience this awesomeness so that they want to keep coming back. It is often intimidating for a newer player to pair up to throw with someone who is older, more experienced, or who they just don’t know that well. Make a point to reach out to the newer players to pair up with in drills or to chat with during water breaks. This is crucial for team inclusiveness and helps everyone to feel more comfortable. I have seen newer players make

breakthroughs on their throws after pairing up with a more experienced player at the start of practice. They were that much more focused and mirrored the stronger thrower. And you could see the new players feel more relaxed as they felt more accepted and included. It makes a difference.

Are you a difference maker? Or do you just arrive with your closest friends, interact with them, and leave with them? This is not to knock the amazing friendships that are made through ultimate. It is one of the best parts of the sport! But ask yourself, “What can I contribute to the team environment, and what can I do to contribute to an environment of inclusiveness?” Does every member of your team feel “seen,” and what can you do to make that happen?

4. Inspire each other’s success.

“The success of every woman should be the inspiration to another. We should raise each other up. Make sure you’re very strong, be extremely kind, and above all be humble.”
- Serena Williams

Not everyone is an extrovert or chatty or loud, but show your enthusiasm for the team the best you can. From the end-of-practice cheer to rooting on your teammates from the sideline at a game or tournament, show your support. Create a team culture where players are engaged, enthusiastic, and supportive.

Utilize your strengths to inspire success. That could be writing cheers or updating your team’s social media accounts. Maybe you organize ribbons that everyone wears, design temporary tattoos to show team spirit, or pair players up to make “psych boxes” before an important competition. Find a way to demonstrate your team spirit and enthusiasm in a way that helps to inspire everyone to be their best.

5. Be a rules maven.

Increase your knowledge of the game by reading up on the rules. It is a lot to read through, comprehend, and

apply! You will learn a lot of it as you go, from the more experienced players, from your coaches, and from other teams. Here are some other ways that you can accelerate your rules knowledge.

- Watch game footage on YouTube (USA Ultimate and Ultiworld channels) to see rules application in action.
- Peruse USA Ultimate’s rule book and look up rules questions that come up in practice or at games: usultimate.org/rules
- There are often more frequent occurrences that require clarifications, so this FAQ is a great resource too: <https://www.usultimate.org/faq>
- Help organize a rules quiz session for your team. Make it a fun Jeopardy-style event or have players work in small teams to present or role play common scenarios.

A great way to stand out is to be able to speak up about the rules and share your knowledge of the game. Coaches and teammates will know that you are reliable in this area (or at least trying). Everyone should know the rules of course, but a little extra effort will go a long way.

6. Leave your legacy... now.

“If your actions create a legacy that inspires others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, then, you are an excellent leader.” - Dolly Parton

Our program’s coaches and captains meet before the start of every season to plan, share information, and delegate responsibilities. Although we now have three teams, we are still one program operating together. As volunteer coaches, we really rely on our captains to take ownership of many tasks. Usually in their applications and interviews, the candidates for captain express their areas of interest (e.g., outreach to younger players and to the community, spirit, organizing team social events, fundraising, strategy, etc.) These same areas are where you can get started on helping to improve the team and having an impact on the program now. You can get involved in an area or two that interest you as soon

as you join the team. Start building a foundation of involvement. Show that you are reliable. Coaches know who their “go-to” players are: the ones who respond to emails, show up to team community service events, and help rally people for fundraisers.

Getting involved in these team operations early on also gives you a chance to learn from the more experienced players, giving you a chance to step seamlessly into a captain role down the line. Make sure to continue team traditions. Honor your alumni and what they have established and contributed. But make your mark as well. Whether it is conceiving new traditions or new cheers, contributing to new uniform or disc designs, or creating a season mantra, there are many ways to help shape new directions. The best new practices develop organically based on the relationships, connections, and the vibe of the team. Build on your foundation and leave a legacy of success!

7. Grow as a leader.

There are many other things you can do on your own to develop your leadership skills.

- Explore your leadership style.
 - Gretchen Rubin
 - Meyers Briggs
 - Strengthsfinder
- Read up on sports leadership and youth sports (articles, podcasts, books, research).
 - Changing the Game
 - Julie Foudy Sports Leadership Academy
 - The Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport
 - Women’s Sports Foundation
- Follow ultimate and know what’s going on in the high school, college, and club divisions as well as in international play.
 - USA Ultimate
 - World Flying Disc Federation
 - Premier Ultimate League
 - Local club teams
- College women’s teams– follow them on Twitter and get ideas!
- Being Ulti on Twitter
- Ultimate podcasts
- Take advantage of other leadership opportunities, both on your team and beyond.
 - Become comfortable with leadership roles and practice using your “voice”- speaking up and contributing.
 - Find other ways to lead in your school and community.
- Take advantage of youth coaching opportunities.
- Attend clinics and see what the leaders and coaches do. What resonates with you?
 - Volunteer to help out at local youth ultimate clinics and programs (e.g., at Strath Haven, our middle school has a club that meets for a half hour on Wednesdays, and we host clinics and youth programs during some parts of the year. We ask our high school players to volunteer to help when they can.)

In Summary

If you’re looking to become a captain or leader on your team, there are many ways to stand out as someone your coaches rely on and who your teammates respect. Captaining a team is an awesome, exciting, and daunting responsibility and challenge. Prepare yourself and work to achieve your goals, but know that whatever happens, your growth through your high school years will prepare you well for whatever is ahead.

Being a captain doesn’t have to be the final destination either. An awesome way to be a great teammate and an impactful leader is to be a follower. Show your commitment, work hard both on and off the field, and help build a spirited team and program that will last long after you have moved on.

Keep ultimate fun, allow your place on the team to evolve as you grow, and make important contributions, whatever your ultimate role might be!

SMALL INVESTMENTS YIELD BIG RESULTS

ALEXIA McCASKILL



Email: alexiamcc@gmail.com
Twitter: @mccaskilla
Instagram: @lolasanajewelry

I have played ultimate for 25 years at the league, club (women's and mixed), and women's grand masters levels. I have also been a high school ultimate coach in Boulder, CO, since spring 2014. This fall, I stepped into the role of head coach for the mixed team (Hula), and I will serve as head coach for the girls' team (Flower Power) this spring.

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT MATTERS to me because I came to the sport of ultimate at the age of 29, well after most players begin playing. Early on, I struggled to develop confidence as a player. I am the player and coach I am today because others believed in me. I made my second club team because a player on that team advocated for the player she believed I could become with coaching and investment from teammates. Even when I began coaching girls' ultimate, I was unsure of my ability to teach players fundamentals and to help girls develop their identities as ultimate players. However, I did feel confident in my ability to make sure each of my players felt seen and supported. I trusted that could go a long way.

Very often, when we focus on player development, we start with teaching fundamental skills - throwing, cutting, marking, and other basics. We help players refine these skills toward mastery. An alternate approach that I like to take is thinking of player development as fostering players' belief in their ability to contribute to their team and ensuring that they feel a sense of belonging. I believe that these elements are essential to enabling players to become their best athletic selves and creating the environment required to learn our sport's fundamentals.

My first mission is to learn every new player's name (first and last) immediately and to refer to them by name in drills and when greeting them at practice. These acts may seem insignificant, but they make each player feel

welcome and seen. These acts also show players that they are valued for who they are as people, not the quality of their throws or their speed when sprinting. I believe feeling accepted helps players want to be at practice and gives them the space to relax and learn.

Another important focus for me as a coach is acknowledging and celebrating players' "small" achievements. This is another action that lets players know they are seen. It also builds players' confidence to take the next, bigger steps in building their skills. Fierce bids, big hucks, and point blocks always draw sideline roars. Those parts of the game ARE deserving of kudos, but so are the subtle accomplishments. It's important to recognize players for "small" achievements such as running the dump set correctly or completing an "easy" throw that they have been struggling with. Recognizing these victories lets players know that their hard work is noticed and appreciated. It may also make these players think about what else they might be capable of. Celebrating players' achievements often opens up opportunities for more conversations about skills development. Recently, I complimented one of my players who is a very tentative thrower on her hustle to get into the right dump position during a scrimmage. At the end of practice, she asked me for more tips on handling. We talked about some of the throwing skills she could work on and ways to develop those skills, and she expressed her excitement and gratitude for the feedback. At the next practice, she happily and confidently stepped into the handler role when called upon.

My third cornerstone for player development has been having a deep faith in each of my players, even before they know to believe in themselves. I believe in each player's potential, and I communicate this belief to them. I see many similarities between my players and my younger self. My players try hard at practice and make great progress with their skills, but continue to doubt that they belong on the field and question whether

they are contributing to their team. One of my coaching mantras (said in different forms) is, "I believe in you and want you to believe in yourself. I'm going to carry your confidence until you have confidence in yourself." I communicate my belief in my players directly and also continue to push them in drills and games. I don't allow players to give up during a drill because they've turfed a disc or dropped a pass. Opting out is not an option, but I am careful to push players while also communicating my clear belief in them.

One of my most rewarding moments as a coach was receiving a card from one of my players that read, "The first year I started, I always second guessed myself, but you taught me to always believe in myself and never stop trying." Last year, I watched her play in a college game. She moved with the confidence and played with the skill I wanted for her when she showed up as a high school freshman who didn't trust herself. I truly believe players can develop the technical skills they need for ultimate if you develop their confidence and help them to feel a sense of belonging. Letting them know they are seen, recognizing their "small" victories, and communicating your confidence in them result in an atmosphere that allows players to grow.

THE TOURISTS' WAY

MIKE SHYU



© Brent Russell

Email: michaelmshyu@gmail.com

Twitter: [@Tourists_NC](https://twitter.com/Tourists_NC)

Instagram: [@TU_Warhawks](https://www.instagram.com/TU_Warhawks)

Mike has been involved in two internet startups in New York City and Beijing, where he was also fortunate enough to find time to play ultimate. He currently works with Triangle Ultimate on growing and developing youth programs in the Triangle Area in North Carolina. In his free time, he can be found building furniture and spending time with his family.

2014 WAS MY FIRST YEAR coaching in the Triangle Area in North Carolina. I quickly realized that in order for our girls to reach their potential, they needed consistent, quality opportunities. If you've been involved in girls' ultimate in any way, I'm sure you're familiar with the story. Practices with four or five players, lack of coaches, and limited access to fields are altogether too commonplace for many girls' teams. Like many communities, we had pockets where quality opportunities existed, but they were far and few between and varied wildly from year to year.

During my third year coaching in the Triangle, the seeds for the Triangle Tourists were planted. I wanted the Tourists' program to provide opportunities for young players to learn the game and compete at a high level with quality coaching. In fall 2016, Brian Dobyms and I launched the Tourists and had our first girls' practice. We were not sure what to expect or who would come, but the idea was simple: provide a quality opportunity for girls to play.

As a coach and organizer, my focus was on numbers at practice, coaches, and fields. I was determined to give the girls consistent access to these magic ingredients. We committed to a season from September through January and practiced every Sunday, rain or shine. Over the course of the season, practice numbers varied, but we had a core group of eight girls come out, and we worked hard to build on those numbers. Brian and I committed our time as coaches for the Tourists, and we

occasionally brought in guest coaches as well. Initially, we poached fields, carefully scheduling our practices on Sunday mornings when poached fields were easiest to come by. All of these things gave the girls a measure of consistency that had been lacking in many of their other playing opportunities leading up to this point.

In 2017, the Triangle's YCC girls' team, the Warhawks, won our first National Championship. The eight core members of the Tourists were a big part of that championship, and the Tourists started to gain more momentum as players and parents recognized the value of this high-quality development opportunity. Our practice numbers increased, and we had about 15 girls come out consistently. The Warhawks repeated as National Champions in 2018, and again, practice numbers increased. In our fourth season of running the program, we currently have over 30 girls signed up to participate.

I have learned a lot through my involvement with the Tourists over the past few years. Below, I'll share with you some of the lessons I've learned in hopes that you can apply them to your own team or program.

1. Don't be afraid to fail.

Failure is how we grow. We're taught early on that failure is bad, so when we fail, we have a negative reaction to it, or worse yet, we don't act for fear of failure. On the Tourists, we teach our girls that failure is good if you know how to deal with failure. Failure is a great tool and motivator to improve.

Once you learn to handle failure, you can then challenge yourself and your teammates and push your comfort zones. Learning from your failures enables you to figure out how to have sustained success.

2. Be positive, supportive and re-affirm.

We all have the same goal. Every player wants to get better, and everyone here is here to help you achieve your goal. We communicate this to the team, and we hold each other accountable to this.

If you've played any team sport, you know that it only takes one bad apple to spoil the bunch. If there are any signs of this, root it out early. Our players understand that success goes beyond individual accolades. We all succeed, or we all fail together. We embed this into our team philosophy and culture.

This doesn't mean that you can't give honest feedback.

3. Empower your players.

Too often, we get into a trap of telling our players to do something specific like a string or pull play. The players are then in the mindset of running that play. The defense comes down in a zone set, and the play is still run without recognition of the defense, and a turn typically ensues. An alternative to this would be to teach a process, and then teach players how to make observations and respond. For example, players should know who is picking up the disc, where we want to keep the disc, who is setting the stack, and who is calling out the defensive set if there is a turn. This empowers players to recognize what is happening and figure out how they need to respond.

We need to let our players express themselves and develop their own playing style. I can tell you how I would do it. However, my way is not the only way or necessarily the best way. I try to give the players a high-level concept and have them develop their own ideas within that concept. As an example, failing is okay, but failing the same way is not. If a team sets up a zone and your offense keeps turning it by swinging, it's a good idea to suggest a different method. As your players develop a certain awareness, they'll come up with new methods, plans, and strategies, and you'll soon have a team of collaborators.

4. Give players space to try things.

At each tournament, the coaches name captains to handle the captain responsibilities. Responsibilities

include warm-ups, representing the team at meetings, talking with other captains, and leading the team huddles. We work with the captains throughout the weekend to get them more comfortable with their role. This rotation of captains allows many players to develop leadership skills and test out the waters of captaincy. This also allows them to go back to their high school teams with more confidence to lead.

We also create flexibility with the way that we call lines. On Tourists, we typically don't call any lines on Saturday. This gives girls the opportunity to mix and match who they play with as well as play different roles and positions. Of course, they often need some encouragement from the coaches to play positions they might not necessarily be accustomed to. Warhawks is different in this regard as the team is only assembled to play at YCC. During YCC, the Warhawks will call lines for every point to align with our overall strategy.

5. Make a play.

I will never get upset or angry at a player who tries to make a play on the field, and I make sure they know that. They are the ones on the field making split-second decisions based on the information they have. Good, bad, or lucky, I will support them in their decision to make a play. Regardless of the outcome, I will talk about these plays and give players certain cues to look for. I also make sure that other players understand the adjustments they could have made in the situation. I encourage our girls to make a play. It doesn't always work out, but that's how we learn.

6. Give players individual attention.

I strongly believe that coaches play an integral role in players' improvement, and I make it a point to ensure that each player receives individual attention. I try to challenge each player, so practice is relevant, compelling and engaging for them.

The Tourists do not have tryouts; we will work with any player who commits to the team. We work very hard to maintain a good player to coach ratio. As a coach, it's important to recognize that the players who receive the most quality attention are the ones who will develop the most. So we have created a structure where all players have access to all coaches, and we don't segregate players by skill whenever possible.

7. Put players in a position to succeed.

There's no cookie-cutter method to developing outstanding players. We look at the skill sets of the girls we have, facilitate their growth, and develop a plan to leverage their strengths. It's a coach's job to put players in a position to succeed. By developing our strategy and systems around our players' strengths, we optimize their chances of success.

In the start-up world, we throw lots of things on the wall and see what sticks. We apply a similar concept here and then expand from there.

8. Everyone doesn't need to do everything.

We only have the girls for a very short period of time, and we can't hit on everything. For Warhawks, that period of time is only 2-4 months for a year or two at the most, so we need to focus our developing efforts. Being well-rounded is good, but different players will have different strengths. Start with players' strengths, then expand into other areas. If you're focusing too much on weaknesses, people will struggle and might not be motivated to push through, especially early on.

On Tourists, we have the girls for slightly longer, so we can develop more well-rounded players. The concept is still the same. Start with their strengths, and then expand from there. For some of these girls, they are able to play whatever is needed and float between positions during a point.

9. Build relationships.

Your players will respond to you best when they know how deeply invested you are in them and their development. Take the time to get to know your players and their families, and show genuine care for them.

10. Have fun!

At the youth level, you are probably the first touch point these players have with ultimate and probably organized sports. Make sure they have a positive experience and have fun.

These are some concepts and principles I have applied to coaching both the Tourists and the Warhawks over the past five years. I hope these insights can help your teams/programs prosper and grow.

DISCOVERING THE POWER OF LEADERSHIP

KELLAN GIBBONEY



© Joseph Harrison

Email: kegibboney@gmail.com

Twitter: [@kgibbs18](https://twitter.com/kgibbs18)

Instagram: [@kgibbs18](https://www.instagram.com/kgibbs18)

Kellan (they/their) was a four year captain and coach on the University of Cincinnati Women's Team where they used school resources to study what leadership is and what it looks like in the real world. They have also played professionally for Indianapolis Red and are now the head coach of the Cincinnati U20 Girls' YCC team Belle.

LEADERSHIP IS A BIG SUBJECT. Everyone has interacted with different leaders, and that changes the way that we tend to think about leadership as a broad concept. So I want to try something different to start this article: a visualization. Read this, then close your eyes and picture the first example that comes to mind: Think about a fellow player who most represents “leadership” to you. What are some specific actions that player does that make them a leader? Pause. Visualize. Take your time. Come back when you’re ready.

There’s a good chance that you thought of someone who leads warm-ups, or organizes your team on the line between points (if your coach does not do that), or who flips before each game and reports back to the team and coach(es). We’re trained to think that these (typically) captain-related tasks are the pinnacle of leadership and that everything else related to “leadership” is preparing us for those tasks. I’m here to tell you that’s not true. Leaders can definitely be those players who stand up and talk in front of everyone, but there are so many other types of leadership that are equally as important. And when we focus on developing those qualities, we become not just better players, but also a better team. I will talk about that person you thought of in a bit, but first I want to tell you how you can be a leader even if you aren’t that stereotypical captain.

“Actions speak louder than words” is a phrase just as applicable on the field as off the field. Players who are fully engaged with whatever idea the team is working

on and are giving every bit of effort on the field have always stood out to me as a fellow player, and even more so now that I'm a coach. This work ethic is what we mean when we say "lead by example" because it is actually a form of leadership. That's right - it's a form of leadership that involves absolutely no speaking, just doing. This is called **participative leadership**. It means that you are fully participating in everything the team does. You are engaged during drill explanations (when others may be talking), you are working hard during drills, fitness, scrimmages, games, everything. Players who are participative leaders are vital to the success of every team. Without participative leaders, teams would never be able to work that hard or reach their full potential. These player leaders create the foundation of every team. This is one of the easiest leadership styles to practice. Know that your coaches and fellow players see you and appreciate this effort even when they might not remember to say it directly to you.

Another form of leadership comes in the form of asking questions. Coaches don't always explain everything perfectly, and everyone learns best in slightly different ways. Asking questions shows your coach (and maybe other players) two things: (1) that you really care about understanding things which means you care about improving and (2) that you have enough confidence to speak up and ask the question(s) on your mind. Most of the time, you aren't the only person with that question. Speaking up and asking it makes you a better player, helps your team understand, and helps your coach learn how they can better explain things. **Inquisitive leadership** is so important that a lot of businesses offer training courses on it and consider a person's curiosity when hiring them. When you practice inquisitive behaviors by asking questions or thinking about new ways to run plays or strategies, you make your team better and prepare yourself for other life experiences. If you feel like you have participative leadership down, inquisitive leadership could be a next step for you. But this is also a separate

leadership style entirely, and you can practice this without feeling like you've checked other boxes.

Now, with that foundation laid, we can talk about **directive leadership**. Explicitly defined, directive leadership is the art of directing people - of telling them what to do and when to do it. For many of us, this is the most intuitive definition of leadership. At the beginning of this article, you probably envisioned some form of this. These leaders make their teams better and more organized and can also make coaches' lives easier. Players who can be a guiding voice help keep their team focused and set the tone for each practice and game. The first step in building this skill is to watch players you think demonstrate it well. Your coach may tell you to watch game footage, to pay attention to a cutter or handler, and to watch and learn from how they are playing. The same is true of leadership skills, particularly this one. Watch the people who lead like you want to lead, and then work on practicing those skills yourself. If you don't have a teammate who leads the team in ways you think are necessary, work on being the person who fills those gaps.

So now that we know some different ways that leadership can benefit our teams, how do we make sure that this can all be real things and not just ideas on paper? Here's a quick list that can help you and the rest of your team become better, well-rounded leaders:

- **Safe Space:** Create a team culture where everyone wants to learn and grow and making mistakes in order to grow are okay.
- **Recognition:** If you see someone exhibiting any of these leadership styles, recognize them and tell them how important their work is.
- **Create Opportunities:** If you have a role that has some power, create opportunities for more players to get involved with leadership. Reward participative leaders, allow and encourage players to ask questions, and invite directive leaders to more discussions to continue growing their confidence.

Whether you are a player or a coach, there are things you can do to become a stronger leader, and there are ways you can help those around you grow into leaders themselves. Seek those opportunities. The confidence young womxn gain from this type of development empowers them on and off the field.

Note: There has been a lot of research done on leadership styles. The names of the ones I discuss are in bold so that you can go do your own research on them if you want. This article just provides a foundation.



SECTION II: RESOURCES FOR COACHES

Spaghetti Western 2019: Rodney Chen - UltiPhotos

PLANNING A COHESIVE SEASON

JENNY WEI



Email: jennyqwei23@gmail.com

Twitter: [@_jennywei](https://twitter.com/_jennywei)

Instagram: [jennywei.6](https://www.instagram.com/jennywei.6)

JWei grew up as a volleyball player in North Carolina and started playing ultimate at UNC Chapel Hill in 2013. She has played for Phoenix her entire club career and has also played on the 2016 All-Star Ultimate Tour, the 2018 U-24 Women's United States National Team, and the Premier Ultimate League team Raleigh Radiance. JWei started coaching in 2014 and currently coaches the U-17 YCC team Kitty Hawks, as well as the Chapel Hill High School girls' team, Ember. Outside of ultimate, JWei enjoys playing with cats, doing zumba, and listening to BTS.

WE ALL REMEMBER trying to learn how to throw a flick for the first time. If you're like me, your first flick had no spin and wobbled all the way to your receiver. You probably also traveled a mile trying to use your legs to generate enough force to push 175 grams of plastic 10 yards, and your throwing form looked somewhat like you were trying to give an incredibly awkward, one-sided hug! The returner you were throwing with probably said something like, "That's ok. More wrist next time."

Now you're a coach, of high school girls¹ no less! You're responsible for teaching all of the skills that now come easily to you to impressionable players who haven't figured out how to move their limbs in an athletic fashion yet. Here's what you'll need to consider in order to effectively teach the skills your team needs to be successful!

Understand the Numbers

In my experience, girls' high school teams are typically formed by a core of returning players who may have previously played on a boys' team. The first few years, you might only have 8-10 players, and you will likely have many practices where you won't have enough players to scrimmage full field. But don't be discouraged! High school teams don't develop in one year, and your roster will grow. Meet with the core of returning players

¹ The use of sex-specific words throughout this article indicates the division a player would participate in based on their sex and not their gender.

or captains (if they're already set) before your season begins, and understand what kind of numbers you're expecting.

Ask questions like:

- How many returning players will there be?
- Are there any middle school players who will be joining the team?
- How many rookies do we anticipate we'll have?
 - These are usually friends of returning players who have said they're interested in ultimate. You'll be relying heavily on your players to bring their friends!
- What will we be doing to recruit, and how many new players are we expecting to "cold recruit?"
 - By "cold recruit," I mean recruiting players who have never played ultimate and are unrelated to any current member of the team. These players might be recruited at club fairs or through posted fliers.

Once you get an understanding of the numbers, you'll need to take into consideration your players' other commitments. High school players have a lot of extracurriculars (as they should). We're talking school clubs, JV / varsity sports, music lessons, etc. Even if you have solid numbers for your roster, you can expect that practice attendance might be lower than your total roster size. I've experimented with various ways to track expected attendance, and I've found it most helpful to send out our season schedule and a [quick survey](#)² asking the following questions:

- Do you plan to regularly attend practices? (Yes or No)
- Do you plan to compete with us in games / tournaments? (Yes or No)
- What are your other commitments during the school year? (Free Response)

2. Link to survey: <https://bit.ly/35vtMmT>

Understanding the numbers of your roster is vital in planning what to teach and how you'll teach it. I definitely made ambitious practice plans early in my coaching career where we needed a full team (20-24 players) to effectively run drills or scrimmages and then had only six players come to practice. Let's just say that we scrapped that practice plan and played 3 v. 3 for two hours. Yikes!

What to Teach Plan

Now you're feeling ready to impart your wisdom on these female youth players. GREAT! How do you plan what to teach?

It's probably obvious that you'll start with the basics and eventually begin refining skills and concepts. This is probably the most universal part of this guide across sex, age, and competitive division groups. I like to organize my plan of attack for each skill set into three categories (as applicable) in a skills checklist³: Basics (Ultimate 101), Improvement (Ultimate 201), and Refinement (Ultimate 401). For each skill, I brainstorm some drills that would isolate that skill for development. For example:

BASICS (ULTIMATE 101):

Skill: Throws - backhands and flicks; flat IO, OI, 25-yard away passes

Application: Unders to unders or 4 lines

Skill: Cutting - vert stack

Application: Reps with no defense

Skill: Open side v. break side

Application: Zig-zag drill, double box drill, D in a box

IMPROVEMENT (ULTIMATE 201):

Skill: Throws - throwing to space and using break throws on medium marks

3. Link to skills checklist: <https://bit.ly/2RZEYnS>

Application: Breakmark drill

Skill: Cutting - reading the disc and starting deep cuts from shallow

Application: One person Apples or Apples

Skill: Defensive footwork - drop step, hip opening toward offender)

Application: Hollywood squares, three Ds in a row drill

Skill: Zone Offense and Defense

Application: Salmon ladder, Pentagon drill, dead disc reps

REFINEMENT (ULTIMATE 401):

Skill: Throws - using fakes to juke out your mark and getting it off the trap sideline

Application: Redemption, progressive marking drill

Skill: Cutting - juking or outsmarting the defender

Application: 1 v. 1 isolation cutting, Revolver / Black Mountain

Skill: Helping / heads up D / switches

Application: Reps through situations, scrimmages

Skill: Specific / special zones

Application: Scrimmage, dead disc reps

Tips: What to Teach

Tip #1: Plan to spend the most time on the basics.

I mean it. Plan to spend weeks and weeks on the basics. It's easy to get excited about all of the concepts and things you want to teach, but we are the adults here (or at least we pretend to be), so we have the responsibility of staying disciplined and repeating basics over and over again. If you asked my players, I'm sure they'll tell you we repped dump sets for weeks on end; but now our offense looks like a well-oiled machine! Share with your players the concepts that might be coming up to keep them excited about something new, but make sure the basic skills and concepts are ingrained before moving on.

Tip #2: Stay consistent each week for practices.

If you're planning on teaching offensive concepts at the beginning of the week, stay on offense all week and/or into the next few weeks. I've found staying consistent will help players retain concepts longer and builds a better base to work off of. If you're switching from throws to defensive footwork to cutting to marking at each practice, there won't be enough repetition for the concepts to sink in before a new one is taught. My guess is, the youth are probably too used to cramming for tests to retain what you teach in the long-term. Relatable.

Tip #3: Adjust the plan as needed, and be flexible.

If it's taking longer than planned for players to pick up on a basic concept, stick with it the next week until it looks good and smooth. If everyone gets a concept immediately, move on to a different skill while staying consistent in the larger picture (see Tip #2) or stay on that skill set but move on to the improvement or refinement category.

Tips: How to Teach

Understanding your team's composition - check. Skills plan - check. Now, how do you communicate these concepts to high school girls? This seems like a daunting task, but here are some tips on how to teach, give feedback, and communicate:

Tip #1: Keep it simple AND stick to it.

This might not be a new tip for you as a coach, but it's so important. Many people, not just youth, have short attention spans, and as knowledgeable as you are, your players didn't sign up for another lecture after their full day of classes. I've found it extremely helpful to come up with 2-3 big focuses for a drill or a concept and to stick to those all practice. If a player asks a question out of scope, it's totally fine to respond that we'll cover that situation later on. If you're working with co-coaches,

make sure you're all on the same page, so you're not each adding a point here and there. That can get overwhelming to players real quickly. The last thing you want is to have one of your new players zone out or get lost because you've talked them into confusion.

Tip #2: Give feedback immediately and often, and make sure it's received and understood.

Whenever possible, give feedback to players on adjustments immediately and as often as possible. This becomes much easier if you can recruit some other coaches to join you. Big disclaimer: This doesn't mean you're making minor adjustments to everything you see and changing something every rep (see Tip #1). Again, know what phase you're in. If you're in the basics, give feedback on basic skills. Additionally, stick to the same feedback when the adjustment hasn't been made on the field. You might need to find a different way to explain it, but make sure your feedback is received and understood by the player before moving on.

Tip #3: Build your player's confidence.

Remember that your players are very impressionable. In my experience, many high school girls haven't found their belief in themselves...yet. So one of your responsibilities as their coach is to believe in them and communicate in a way that exemplifies that. Eliminate "can't"s from your season as much as possible, and even if a player hasn't been able to implement a concept, make sure they understand that with each rep, it's an opportunity to move toward "can." Point out times when players try something new or try to implement feedback, even if it's not perfect or it didn't work. Let them know that you support the effort they put into moving out of their comfort zone, and eventually, it'll get there. They have to believe they can, or they never will.

I want to point out that there isn't just one way to plan a season and teach the necessary skills that will reach your

players. I hope that this guide inspires you and gets you thinking but know that there's a lot of room in coaching to choose your own adventure. I'm definitely still figuring it out, getting feedback from my co-coaches, captains, and players; learning every season; and switching things up the next time around. And that's one of the many exciting parts of coaching - you're learning, growing, and overcoming new challenges each season, just like your players!

Oh, and last tip but definitely crucial - make sure you have lots of fun coaching and shaping the next generation of ultimate players!

WOMXN COACHES: WHY REPRESENTATION MATTERS

LIBBY CRAVENS



Email: bbyelc@gmail.com

Instagram: @libspenguin

Libby Cravens enjoys investing time and energy in creating opportunities and spaces for girls and womxn to play more ultimate. She previously coached in the college women's division for several years, but now primarily coaches girls' YCC and serves as a Girls' Outreach Coordinator for the Girls' Ultimate Movement.

IN 2017, I MOVED FROM my long-time ultimate community of Austin, Texas, to a part of New Jersey with very little ultimate. A local parks and recreation department wanted me to run youth programs for them, and asked that I prepare a “Coach Resume” for their review. Even though I had run many youth programs in the past, I felt nervous. Would I look qualified on paper? In my previous community, I had dozens of players, families, and teammates who would vouch for my competence. I was worried that my coaching prowess would not translate to the black and white of a piece of paper.

I had been a long-time youth director for a non-profit disc organization, was a college head coach for several years, had been involved with ultimate summer camps for almost a decade, and more recently had become a club division head coach. Yet somehow I worried I was unqualified to helm inaugural youth programs for an area that had limited exposure to ultimate! I had heard the term “imposter syndrome” previously, but had assumed I was immune. I was (and am) a confident and capable player and coach and should logically never have questioned if I was qualified for this position. Yet the doubt set in. If it could happen to me, I realized that other womxn with or without a laundry list of coaching experiences could find themselves asking, “Am I capable/qualified?” YES. YOU ARE.

“If I can see her, I can be her.” I heard this quote at a gender equity conference I attended years ago, and it

has stuck with me ever since. Here are a few statistics to consider:

- Approximately six in 10 college womxn's teams are coached by men.
- Though more womxn are playing college sports than ever before, the number of womxn coaching has dropped below 50%.
- Womxn comprise <25% of coaches across all levels of play.

From my experience as a youth ultimate organizer, that percentage is even lower in our youth ultimate communities. I think it is no coincidence that in a room of 43 youth coaches in Austin, the school with two womxn coaches had a significantly higher number of girls participating. I think back on my own career, and I have had the pleasure of being coached by and coaching with some great womxn (shoutout to Cara Crouch and Tina Woodings, to name a couple). 100% of boys have had a male coach at some point during their athletic careers. The same cannot be said for most girls about womxn coaches. Womxn coaching and serving as role models shows girls that sport is a space for them, thus empowering girls. WOMXN NEED TO TAKE UP THAT SPACE.

Womxn as coaches positively impacts not only girls but OTHER womxn who coach by providing a network of support. The "Womxn Coaches in Ultimate" Facebook group has been a treasure trove of information and ideas, and I would encourage you to join if you are not already a member. Additionally, research has found that boys ALSO benefit from having womxn as coaches. Challenging stereotypes from a young age will benefit our sport as these boys become men who play pickup or mixed leagues.

Womxn coaching MATTERS. Don't just take my word for it...

*I cannot tell you how many girls have told me by now that the *only* reason they stayed with the sport was because I or the other female coach I work with was there. The way in which other womxn see what girls need, support them in ways that men do not, and nurture their growing courage into fierce confidence is hard to put in words, but it is real and present and urgently needed by young girls.*
- Julie Barr, El Cerrito, CA

Most of my youth experience was playing on boys' teams because there weren't girls' programs. Having female coaches was a way of learning that there was a generation before me who made sports a focus and excelled.
- Nikki Adamson, Berkeley, CA

I think having a female/male coach has been beneficial for both genders, and we purposefully build into practices methods so that all players are getting included and that the kids' implicit biases that are starting to develop at that age get countered...Sometimes my male co-coach does inadvertently use language that reflects that implicit bias - so then I rephrase their point in a way that doesn't, and they're always on board and glad to learn and adjust. I, of course, also learn from them and their experiences, as do the kids of both genders. I think it's good for all the kids to see a woman in a position of authority and sports mentorship.
- Bonnie Melville, Bloomington, MN

Watching a great male leader/coach doesn't necessarily impress on women that they can also aspire to be a great leader as much as watching another woman leader. Women empower women...It's important for women to be given the opportunity to develop coaching skills and a coaching record, and coaching other women is the best way to get there.

Again, not all female players will act differently with a male coach, but it's a huge possibility...Could the

differences be partly because the women don't have the same inherent respect for or trust in the abilities of a female coach? Do they need to see more women in leadership positions? As head coaches? I absolutely believe they do.

I believe that women coaching women can make a huge contribution toward empowering women to gain the confidence to speak up, to claim equality on the field and in the sport of ultimate and to compete equally with men for coaching positions of both men and women. As others have said, so many life lessons are learned from sports. And what better way for a woman to learn about being a woman than from another woman.

- Laurie, Philadelphia, PA

There are so many societal barriers for girls sticking with sports through adolescence and beyond. Having a womxn coach is one way to normalize being committed to your sport, being a life-long athlete, and being a leader. All too often, men occupy positions of power in our society, such that qualities of leadership often get conflated with those that tend to be displayed by men. Being exposed to leaders of all genders and with different styles is very important for both girls and boys to help combat implicit gender biases and provide models to help inspire young people to be leaders themselves.

- Gwen Ambler, Seattle, WA

We (womxn coaches) matter because respect shouldn't have a gender barrier. I coach a men's team because I love it, and I'm suited for it, regardless of the fact that I am a woman.

- Ace, Seattle, WA

What drives womxn away from coaching?

The answer to this question is complex and systemically ingrained in the power systems and societal expectations in which we are raised. Stereotypes are at play, including perceived gender biases. Womxn aren't applying to coach. Coaching is demanding. Coaching puts a strain on mothers. Womxn coaches lack mentors. The microaggressions and more subtle or implicit gender issues working against womxn are much harder to put a finger on. In the end, we know that womxn are working against challenges as coaches that men do not face.

I urge you to coach. Coaching brings me joy in our sport in a way that is wholly different than that which I feel while playing. Getting to share something I love and have put more than a decade of my life into with someone who is beginning or still making gains in their ultimate journey is THRILLING. If you already coach, encourage other womxn you know to coach. Take advantage of professional development opportunities. Get involved with your program's athletic department. Maintain connections, and check in with your contacts. Be open with your coaching peers, and share ideas! **Become the coach that inspires our youth to become future coaches themselves.**

SEASON AND PRACTICE PLANNING

CLAIRE CHASTAIN



Email: claire.yahtzee@gmail.com

Twitter: [@claireyahtzee](https://twitter.com/claireyahtzee)

Instagram: [@clairechas](https://www.instagram.com/clairechas)

Claire Chastain began playing ultimate her freshman year of college at the University of North Carolina Wilmington (stmlb!). She has played club for Raleigh Phoenix and currently captains Denver Molly Brown. She began coaching at Fairview High School in 2014 and has spent the past five years coaching Colorado Quandary (formerly Kali).

A LITTLE BIT OF BACKGROUND: I'm a special education teacher at a middle school in Aurora, Colorado. This is my third year teaching. I got started through AmeriCorps as a Math Fellow at a middle school, then worked as a paraprofessional at an elementary school. Teaching is something I am both new at and passionate about, and it's helped me exponentially as a coach (and vice versa). Most aspects of teaching correlate directly with coaching; planning a lesson or unit requires the same amount of forethought and care as running an effective practice.

STEP 1: Where do we want to be at the end of the season?

When I begin planning a practice, I start from the end and work backwards. In education, we have standards, pacing guides, and scope and sequences that dictate where we need to be at the end of the year. In ultimate, we likely have an end-of-season tournament that we're trying to perform well at. We have a set of players, a schedule for practices and tournaments, and some institutional knowledge to help guide the answer to this question.

- Outcome Goal: What do we want to accomplish?
- Processes: How will we accomplish our goal?
- Offensive and Defensive Systems: Are we running horizontal, vertical, side stack, or other? Are we going to primarily play person, or do we want a zone, junk, or non-person team defense? (If you

have to choose between person or zone, I beg you, PLEASE choose person!)

- Team Culture: Who are we? How are we going to treat each other? What do we expect of each other?

Commitment: What are we willing to do to reach our goal? How often can we practice, condition, and play at tournaments?

STEP 2: What knowledge and skills do players need?

- We know what we want to do. Now it's time to break our systems into groups: knowledge and skill. By the end of this season, players should know x and be able to do y.
 - x = "When the disc moves to the sideline, we look deep, then look to swing."
 - y = "Throw centering passes from the trap sideline, and throw deep from a power position."
- Do this ^^^ for **all** systems. It's tedious but so helpful in planning practices and either selecting drills or creating drills based on the skills and knowledge we need to acquire.
- Same for team culture! What kind of team culture do we want to establish to help us reach our goal? There should definitely be some guidance from a coach or captain here, but the majority of this conversation is driven by players. I definitely have some non-negotiables in terms of team culture (e.g., being good to teammates, no yelling, taunting, blaming, bullying), but for the most part, let the team dictate team culture and course correct as needed.
- Team culture can be difficult to skill build, but having open and structured conversations is a great place to start. I've slipped on this during different seasons and always regret not having the conversation(s) sooner. It's worth giving up some practice time if players aren't able to commit time outside of practice.

STEP 3: What knowledge and skills do I need?

- If I want to teach something, I need to know the content deeply in order for learning to happen. When I don't know the content well, task completion happens. Task completion may seem nice, and it may feel like something was accomplished, but no one gets better from completing bad reps. It's like doing a math problem and not understanding how you got the answer, but you got it right, so you move on. Once you get to the harder problems, those reps start to come back and haunt you.
 - I take an inventory of what I feel confident teaching, what I need to learn more about, and what I may need to outsource.
 - I assess my knowledge and skills relative to the group. There are some things I teach at the college level that I outsource at the club level.
 - There are always things I need to learn more about and seek to increase understanding of.
- Skills are important too! Skills can be things like organization, time management, motivational speaking, breaking large concepts into concise pieces of information, demonstrating, spreadsheets, or throwing in the huck drill (my personal favorite - #reps). Whatever relevant skills I've accumulated from work, school, and/or relationships go here.
- The best leaders have an acute understanding of what skills and knowledge they are bringing to a particular team and what their areas of growth are (i.e., opportunities, weaknesses, deltas, deficits, or whatever you want to call them). I do what I'm good at, try to get better at what I'm not good at, and I strive to have the humility to outsource when I simply am not going to get better in the time frame allotted or when my personal growth is impacting the team's ability to grow.

STEP 4: Create a season plan!

I like to split seasons up into phases. Phases can help scaffold the season and add more intention to practices.

- **Phase 1:** Early season should be dedicated to skill building and foundational system building. Start with the basics! Everyone needs to be on the same page by the end of this phase. This is where I build common language, introduce the principles of our systems, and build vital skills. We might take some losses, but who cares - it's the early season. We have to be willing to lose in order to grow.
- **Phase 2:** Depending on how long the season is and how many phases we can realistically get through, the middle portion of the season is a nice time for role development. We've got some semblance of an offense and a defense. Now is the time to maximize the systems by plugging people into positions that make sense for their potential skill set. (e.g., What does the reset handler need to know and be able to do in order to maximize their potential in this role?)
- **Phase 3:** This time is primarily for making small adjustments and refining. No new learning should happen in this phase, and if you **MUST**, it should happen on a very small scale and not be a major departure from the previous phases. For Molly Brown 2019 Phase 3, we are making a major change to one particular system. That's it! Everything else stays the same other than team and personnel specific adjustments.

Also, I definitely suggest not giving anyone a red light until the last phase. Let everyone try everything. Go in with the mindset that everyone can adopt the skills and knowledge needed for the team to be successful. Again, we might take some losses, but “\("/)_”.

Now, let's dig into a few tips for practice planning:**Having a similar structure every practice helps with transitions.**

I could write a whole other rambly article about how the worst part of coaching (and teaching) is transitioning from one thing to another. Do your coach a favor and jog over to get water and jog right back.

Keep people moving.

Balance getting quality reps with keeping engagement by moving drills along in a timely manner and making sure there aren't too many folks standing around.

Use versatile drills.

I've found it helpful to have a few drills that can be adjusted based on the specific drill that we're working on. Teaching a new drill every practice takes a ton of time, folks are always going to ask questions, want to see a demo, ask about the rotation, etc. It's helpful to have 4-5 basic drills that can be augmented to work on specific skills.

Implement controlled, developmental and performance scrimmages!

Everyone always wants to scrimmage 7 v. 7, for better or for worse. Ok fine, but let's get something out of it. Controlled scrimmages are when the coaches and captains can stop reps to make adjustments to positioning, bring attention to a common mistake, or refine a look progression. Using a whistle is way easier than yelling “Freeze!” into the abyss. Developmental scrimmages are when the rules of the scrimmages are augmented to emphasize something we worked on in practice beforehand. For example, if we want to work on moving the disc off the trap sideline, the stall count is 10 everywhere but on the trap sideline, where it's 5. Performance scrimmages are where we get to simply play. Regular rules, no whistles.

MONDAY PRACTICE - 120 MINUTES		
TIME	PRACTICE ITEM	NOTES
30 Minutes	Warm-Up	
10 Minutes	Warm-Up Drill	
10 Minutes	Chalk Talk	Introduce vert stack reset progressions.
15 Minutes	Handler Resets	Groups of 6, rep trap side and middle reset progressions.
20 Minutes	3 v. 3 Half-Field	Augmented Rules: Can't advance the disc more than 10-15 yards at a time. 20-30 yards wide to help defense.
30 Minutes	End Zone 7 v. 7	Controlled Scrimmage: Freeze when the whistle blows to correct positioning or look progressions.
5 Minutes	Surprise!	

Sample Practice Plan

I never build in water breaks which is a flaw. I also never figure out drill rotations because I coach a bunch of engineering students, and I stay in my lane.

I hope that this article helps you as you begin your season and practice planning. Good luck, and have fun!

PLAN A YEAR, PLAN A SEASON

MIRANDA ROTH KNOWLES



© Daniel Cohen

Email: mirandakayknowles@gmail.com

Twitter: @mirdiggity

Instagram: @mirdiggity

Miranda Roth Knowles has been involved with ultimate for 21 years as an athlete, coach and commentator. She currently coaches the Paideia High School girls (Groove varsity) as well as Atlanta open pro (Hustle) and club (Chain Lightning) teams.

HEADING INTO A SEASON OF ULTIMATE leadership can be an exciting, daunting space. How will we perform? Will we have fun? What goals can we accomplish? At any level of ultimate, it is important for team leadership to have a plan for the upcoming season - a path for all to see laid out ahead. Much like a player doesn't want to find herself unprepared for the point or play she is in, a coach should prepare herself to guide her team in a mindfully chosen direction. A coach should be the boat's captain, steering her team, not the water-skier being dragged through uncharted waters.

Though this article applies to all team leadership, I'll speak from my current perspective, that of a coach. I like to choose an overarching season focus, well before my season begins. This isn't a goal, per se, and it certainly isn't an outcome goal. It's often more just something that can be threaded through team activities, no matter what they are. The focus can be chosen based on the team's challenges in the previous season or perhaps a hot topic in the ultimate community. The first time I was considering a season focus, with Paideia Groove 2017, I had been disappointed with the 2016 team's endurance at the end of the season, so I chose fitness as the focus for the new squad. We added preseason workouts, designed by the fabulous local CSCS Anna Hammond, we spent valuable time in the weight room during the early part of the season, and we referred back to our fitness as a strength throughout the season. I particularly liked being able to refer back to fitness - a focus far

from throws, catches and D's - during games as a rock of confidence. The athletes were healthy, strong and happy, and it gave them the headspace to concentrate on skills when they weren't worried about fatigue. We've had similar luck with other season foci since then - Spirit of the Game/self-officiation, effort, and hopefully in 2020, presence/mindfulness.

Once a coach has her season focus, she can start planning her season accordingly. I find it useful to refer to parts of the year as "offseason," "preseason," "season," and "postseason." We all know athletes should be doing VERY different things physically and mentally at these different points in time, but without careful delineations, we risk severe athlete burnout or lack of preparedness (physically and skill-wise). I actually like to start by thinking about the postseason, the time that starts right after our last game from last year. I'd like for my athletes to be resting and recovering; this doesn't mean that they become sedentary, but I do hope that they have activities other than ultimate they can pursue in the postseason. Particularly for high schoolers, this is often the summer when they should be going camping, touring colleges, playing other sports, and swimming in the lake with their friends. This recharge time is imperative for athletes' preparedness in the following season. The offseason could include things like baseline workouts and fitness preparation, but again, with many high school athletes, this is the fall when they might be running cross country, playing volleyball, or easing themselves back into the new academic year. These are all good things! We as coaches should be sure we don't get caught up in our thing and forget about our athletes' well-being in the process. Supporting athletes' non-ultimate endeavors into the offseason will yield a happier, healthier team when the season rolls around.

The preseason should include mandatory fitness and injury prevention as well as skill building for the coming season. For my high school team, this is typically the month of January and part of February, finishing with

tryouts in mid-February. Given that many athletes try ultimate for the first time in high school, it is necessary to spend the preseason teaching ultimate skills as well as body awareness, basic strength and speed.

This brings us to the season, which, if all goes well leading up to it, sort of takes its own course. A well-planned and executed non-season year will leave you with athletes who are ready to play the full March-May high school season without an ounce of burnout at the end. They should feel that they could play one more game after the state final, but that they have much to celebrate in the rear window.

During the season, ultimate often still revolves around tournament weekends, so it is necessary to plan around those weekends. In the future, I hope to see more teams (especially girls' teams) develop so that competition can happen more regionally or locally and weekend tournaments can be the exception, not the rule. Playing 6-8 games in one weekend is not healthy or predictable for any athlete, let alone a high schooler. But given the current situation, I aim to never play tournaments two weekends in a row. This can be challenging when you're at the mercy of a school calendar, other community's tournaments, and very busy young people, but keeping their health in the forefront of your scheduling is a must. For example, in 2019, I wasn't able to schedule as many tournaments as I would've liked because there were conflicts with a school music trip, Easter, and finals. It was an unpopular decision, but I knew opting for fewer tournaments was better than overexerting my athletes or alienating those who had multiple commitments (chorus, church, etc.). It is also important to be mindful of athletes' other commitments when scheduling practices. It is our job as coaches to make practices high quality and to keep the quantity manageable. I think a varsity sport should have 4-6 commitment days per week, and that is what I aim for with ultimate. For JV or developmental teams, 2-4 seems appropriate.

Once you have your practice schedule set around your tournament schedule, it's time to decide what to teach in these practices. Starting with my preseason skill-building practices (usually 1-2/week in January and early February), I follow USA Ultimate's coaching guidelines and plan one practice around each fundamental skill in order: catching, backhand, forehand, marking, faking/pivoting, downfield D, cutting, and the force. This often gets me almost all the way to tryouts, at which point I start folding in defensive and offensive strategies. It's important to note that I don't do much strategy in the preseason which means I have to be ok with some confusion and unconventional play in scrimmages during that time. If I've been leading a practice on backhands, I make sure to celebrate all the great backhands in our scrimmage and don't dwell much on catching or on stacks or cuts. Once the season is in swing, practice topics can cycle back through the eight skills of ultimate and layer in advancing versions of the skill. I often opt to observe issues in competition (I always write these down on my sub sheets during tournaments) and focus on those topics for practices during the season.

In closing, I'll just put in one more plug for the season focus and a reminder to fold in this focus throughout the season in any way possible. As a coach, it's so valuable to have something to fall back on in difficult moments, to talk about when there is no clear issue and to bond a team together from the get-go. Think to yourself, "What is one intangible skill I'd love for my team to have this season and my athletes to have long-term?" This should relate to ultimate and life, making your team a safe and happy place for athletes and a welcoming and fair opponent. Best of luck in your season planning!

DESIGNING ATHLETE-CENTERED DRILLS AND PRACTICES

CANDACE YEH



Email: yeh.candace@gmail.com

Twitter: [@candoyeh](https://twitter.com/candoyeh)

Instagram: [@candoyeh](https://www.instagram.com/candoyeh)

Candace Yeh began her ultimate playing career at Florida State University where she captained and led the program. She has since played on a variety of mixed club teams and has spent most of her career playing with Colorado Small Batch, a women's club team. She also played with the Israel National Mixed Team at WUCC in 2014. She is a User Experience Designer and is in her fourth year coaching the U-20 YCC Colorado girls' team.

DURING AN INJURY TIMEOUT, *I looked out onto the field at seven of my players after what felt like a 30-minute point. It was universe point, and the opposing team had called three subs within that point because it was so grueling. There was a lot of tension in the air, and our players used this timeout to reset and clear their heads. I shouted over to ask if anyone on our team needed a sub. The girls looked at me, wearily, but shook their heads no. I saw a fiery grit, resilience, and intensity in them that had been developing all season up to this point. After another five minutes of grinding it out, our team got the disc back on offense and demonstrating the most mature, chilly, and natural flow, my girls worked the entire length of the field and used every member of the line to score the final point for the W. It will be one of the points I remember for a lifetime. How did these girls do it? Just last year, they crumbled at every discouraging point, threw huck after huck to no one, and made bad decisions at every critical moment. What was different this season?*

One of the keys was that I switched up my coaching plans and created athlete-centered experiences, with drills that gave my players the tools to execute in a variety of different scenarios that come up in games.

In this article, I'll offer you insight on how design thinking can help you to better develop your practices. I hope that this article inspires you and helps you to do more than just throw a set of drills together. I encourage you to use your own strengths and weaknesses to create depth in your practice plans and to help your athletes develop

emotional intelligence and confidence. As coaches, we have the opportunity to give athletes more than just the physical tools to play ultimate.

Design Thinking

User Experience (UX) design is the process that individuals and teams use to create products (or in our case, teams) that provide meaningful and relevant experiences to users (or in our case, athletes). UX design leverages the ability to think critically, empathetically, and creatively about how to solve problems for users in ways that you, and they, might not expect. In my professional life, I use design thinking to design products, but in coaching, I leverage the same skills to shape my coaching plans and design environments in which my athletes can develop their skills. The process is very athlete-centered.

There are five parts to the design thinking process:

1. Empathize
2. Define
3. Ideate
4. Prototype
5. Test

Empathize

Some of you may jump right into brainstorming when you plan practices. Pump the brakes. This first step, empathizing, is the most critical and essential part of the design process. In order for us to be efficient with our time, we must spend a significant amount of time (preferably in the off-season) understanding our players and the problems they experience during the season. Essentially, instead of assuming what players need to learn based off our own experiences, which come with biases and assumptions, we need to be really comprehensive in gathering information on exactly what athletes should be learning and what skills they should be developing.

TASK

One way to better understand our players is to “interview” a variety of folks involved in our ultimate community, including players, co-coaches, organizers, coaches of college programs, recent graduates of our team, and parents. I recommend starting with simple but direct questions like:

- What were two successful components of the season?
- What were two negative components of the season?

The questions can differ based on who we’re interviewing. For example, if we’re interviewing a local college coach, I might instead ask, “What skills are incoming freshmen lacking when they enter your program?”

Get it all down in writing (even repeat responses!) and combine it with survey feedback, coach observation, and other notes you may have taken during the season. I want to emphasize that the data should be written down; it’s important to have a visual. Once we’ve gathered enough information, we can *synthesize* this information and define the problems and goals of the upcoming season in the next step.

EXAMPLE

Prior to last season, nearly every player asked about learning how to handle or made a comment about wanting to have an arsenal of throws. I also heard many comments about how players lacked the confidence to throw. College coaches remarked to me that incoming athletes lacked physicality and a wide range of throws. A parent once told me that her kid was extremely scared of throwing both backhands and forehands, even at the end of the season.

Define

In this step of the design thinking process, we define the goals or focuses for the season. Define these goals and focuses to the athletes themselves, and be specific about what tools they should come out of the season having developed. During practice planning, we'll use this step to define the challenge the athletes are facing in order to come up with ways to approach and overcome the challenge.

TASK

During or after the previous step's interviews are completed, write down comments and themes from the interviewees' responses on sticky notes. Then group similar sticky notes together, and synthesize the information to determine what goals to set for the upcoming season. While we likely won't be able to address each of the pain points shared, this process helps us to identify the biggest challenges so that we can focus on them.

EXAMPLE

After grouping my sticky notes together, I noticed a significant number of comments on handler movement as well as confidence. These were, by far, the most repeated comments. I also noticed some comments on pulling and laying out, and I made note of these themes as well. I ended up using these lessons as incentives to get through some of the tougher lessons.

Ideate

This is the most fun step in the design thinking process. When we ideate, we come up with the craziest ideas we have for solving our challenges! My co-coaches and athletes sometimes laugh at me when I propose a new drill, and I often feel really self-conscious about it. After all, there are plenty of tried-and-true drills created by amazing coaches, so why come up with new ones? Cast

away that imposter syndrome! If we've fully empathized with the athletes' experiences and we've done the research to really think about solving a challenge, then we belong in the arena! I encourage you to be completely and utterly innovative and wild with your ideas.

TASK

Complete these three exercises:

- Feature development - Before sketching out a drill, list the features of the drill that are important.
- "How might we" - In this exercise, I put myself in the right frame of mind by writing down "How might we" statements.
- Sketch - Fold a sheet of paper so that there are eight sections to write ideas. With five minutes on the clock, write out eight quick examples of how we might work on a skill, incorporating the features we've listed.

EXAMPLE

- Feature development - Being a dump requires an understanding of timing, body positioning, and field positioning. It also requires an awareness of the thrower, the ability to adjust, and confidence.
- "How might we" - How might we instill confidence in a handler with a shaky backhand? How might we better set up dumps, based on the situation? How might we better recognize when we need to clear to make room for someone else?
- Sketch - The more outrageous the ideas, the better! Here are a few examples of what I sketched out: We fly each athlete to a club-level tournament and ask them to stand on the sidelines and watch dump movement. Athletes shadow club players on the field executing a dump cut. Coaches walk players through the movements individually on the field. We watch video on handler sets. I define the steps needed in a dump set and execute several times with all players during practice.

Prototype

Take our favorite (or a combination of a few of our favorite) idea(s) and create a new drill or practice! Keep in mind that we need to break it down enough for our athletes' brains to fully digest, analyze, incorporate, and practice. I use the template of:

- Goal.
- Features (to help accomplish goals).
- Explanation / Set-up.
- Process.
- Recap.

EXAMPLE

A large part of creating this drill was recognizing in the Empathize step that the reason the first dump often didn't feel comfortable clearing was because some players felt like clearing indicated failure, and also, they didn't trust that there was a system. I realized that I needed to define the steps in a dump set, including clearing, in order to help instill confidence in my athletes.

My first prototype of this drill was to define dump-set movement (when disc is trapped on the sideline) in four steps:

- Set-up position and body.
- Adjust based on defense.
- Shake and fake.
- Establish route and escape route.

I walked my players through each of these four steps on the field, gave them video examples to watch, and gave parameters and options. I wrote down my practice plan and tried it out in the middle of the season.

Test

As someone who struggles with imposter syndrome, I have a hard time with this step, but I have gotten better at this since starting to implement design thinking principles. In our journeys as coaches, we will

be tweaking and reworking how we teach, drill, and present every time we step on the field. It gets easier. Testing, iterating on the practice plan, making tweaks, and reflecting on the process will better refine the plan. I take 10 minutes after each practice to talk to the captains about how the drill felt and then another five minutes talking to the coaches.

EXAMPLE

After running this practice plan and getting feedback, I determined that the second step, "adjust based on defense," needed more explanation. Our first attempt at running the drill showed that my players spent significant time on this second step, thinking about how to adjust and doing it incorrectly. It turned out that I assumed they knew what "adjust to defense" meant. In my next iteration of that practice plan, I explained more in depth why they might adjust based on the defense and showed specific defensive scenarios and their respective position adjustments.

Conclusion

While this is a lot of information, I've only given you the tip of the iceberg for design thinking and UX design exercises. It's a lot of work to do this for every skill and goal you want to achieve, but having this process helps me to think about everything from my athletes' perspectives. Design thinking can be used for any ultimate skill, and I'd love any feedback you have if you give it a try!

BURNOUT: WHY YOUR ATHLETES DON'T LOOK STOKED TO BE AT PRACTICE

DANIE PROBY



Email: danie@elevateultimate.com

Twitter: [@danieproby](https://twitter.com/danieproby)

Instagram: [@elevate.ultimate](https://www.instagram.com/elevate.ultimate)

After completing her degree in Physical Education, Danie quickly left teaching to co-found Elevate Ultimate in Vancouver. She's coached at the high school, club, and college levels, and has run coaching workshops globally as a Coaching Director with Ultimate Peace (UP). She's coached with UP in the Middle East for six years and is an integral coaching member and consultant in the development of Ultimate Spirit (US) which aims

to strengthen lasting relationships with communities through play and connection by sharing the spirit, culture and sport of ultimate. She has recently been selected as one of the assistant coaches for the 2020 Team Canada U-20 girls' team.

I'VE HAD MOMENTS WHERE it took everything I had to pull myself up from the couch, stop whining, and head to practice. I would tell myself that "people were depending on me" and that I was weak for needing a break. I would slowly put on my cleats and try to quiet the voice inside my head that was saying "why am I here?" I can also remember times where I would literally show up hours early for practice, tail wagging, because I was so excited to see my teammates to work hard together. I would practice or throw seven times a week, 12 months a year, for five years in a row and love every minute. I would endlessly chase down hucks like I was a golden retriever, tongue sticking out, big smile across my face (maybe less drool)...The stark contrast between these moments was not lost on me, and I began to wonder what was happening. Was I burning out? What had changed?

As coaches, we are pressured from many angles. Pressured from parents, pressured by results, or by the athletes themselves who are hungry to improve...and quickly. As our sport grows in popularity and visibility and as the Olympic dream is whispering in our ears from afar, training load and intensity are following suit. We want to help our athletes to fall in love with the sport

that we all did, and we of course want them to reach their fullest potential. More specifically, as coaches of young female athletes, we must have a heightened sensitivity to these signs of burnout due to the increasing rate of drop out for this demographic.

Over my years of playing and coaching, I have identified three major risk areas for ultimate and athlete burnout:

1. Strict, repetitive systems;
2. Overlapping seasons and overtraining;
3. Stress, pressure, and a focus on perfectionism.

Ultimate is a niche sport. As much as we don't like to admit it, it is very rare that a young child grows up seeing themselves as being an ultimate star. When I go to the physiotherapist for injuries, I am still sheepish to call myself an "athlete." People fall into ultimate for many reasons, but a common one I see is the athlete is leaving another sport for ultimate. Just like my own personal story, young people love the freedom they feel when they leave other traditionally competitive sports and start playing ultimate. They have left the shackles of hyper-controlled systems and moved into a sport where there is more room to express themselves and be creative on and off the field. Where I often see young ultimate players burn out, is when we take those gifts away from them and replace them with strict systems, repetitive drills, and an environment where failure and mistakes are not valued as crucial to the learning process.

Adolescent ultimate players where I am from begin their high school tryout process in February, often playing tournaments on back-to-back weekends. Their school season wraps up by June and is overlapped by the intense tryouts for the club season. The club season lasts until mid to late August. When we select our teams for the club season, there are always myriad overuse injuries the athletes are arriving with. They are excited to play with their new team, so often they do not express their injuries to their coaches. By midway through the summer,

things start to break down, and you see the motivation, intensity, and passion fade in the athletes. The un-cleated sideline continues to grow, and the amount of tape you're suddenly going through is making your credit card cry.

As our sport becomes more professional and we begin to throw out words like "elite" and "high performance" our understanding of the toll this can take on our athletes must follow suit. Athletes are now seeking out training opportunities outside of their seasons [full disclosure: I co-founded an ultimate academy that functions because of this demand]. The issue lies with when we equate "professional" to "serious and strict." We want to provide our young athletes with great training and access to top-level coaching, but we mustn't forget that they're also kids who have pressures coming at them from all angles. Ultimate should be a place where they can release their stress, not compound it. Lastly, there is usually more going on in that athlete's life that you may be unaware of as well.

Burnout is a state of fatigue or frustration brought about by a devotion to a cause, a way of life, or a relationship that failed to produce the expected reward – Herbert J. Freudenberger

Common Signs and Symptoms

THE ATHLETE:

- Is constantly tired and sleeps much more than usual.
- Exhibits an increasing aversion towards the sport by showing a negative attitude in training.
- Seems bored or anxious.
- Complains about not seeing any results of their hard work and is fighting "a losing battle."
- Seems to have lost all enjoyment for the sport and only trains and competes to please others or abide to a professional contract.
- Is a "24-hour athlete" and does not seem to have any other interests or friends outside of the sport.

Signs of athlete burnout

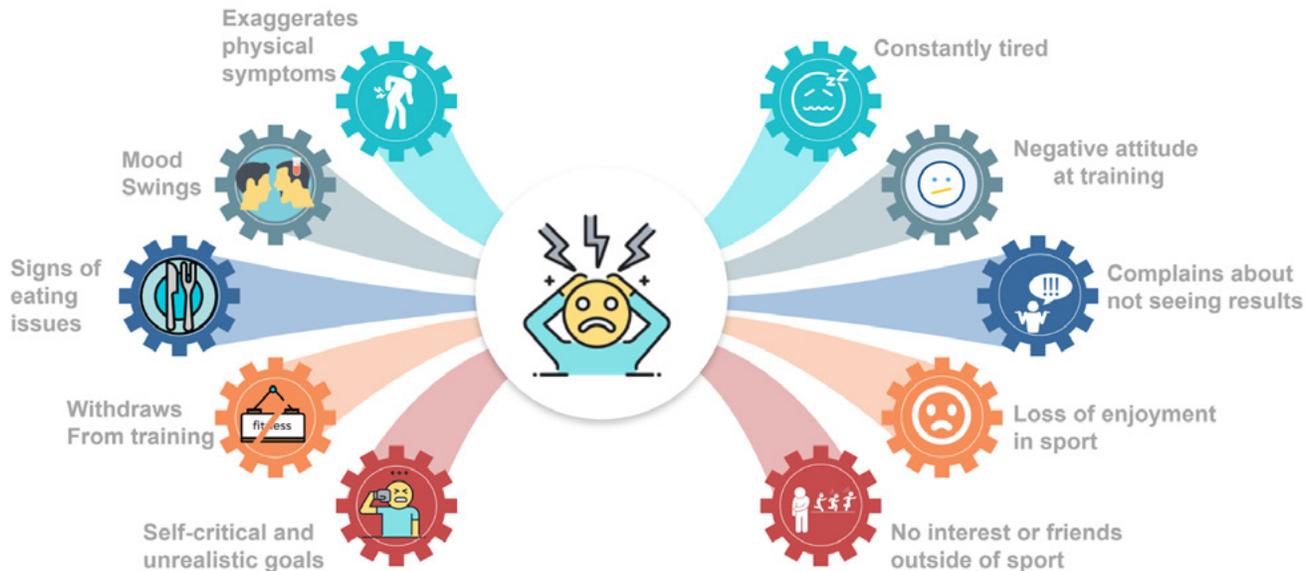


Image: <https://metrifit.com/blog/athlete-burnout/>

- Exaggerates physical symptoms, feigns an injury, or drags out the recovery process of an existing injury.
- Exhibits mood swings and gets easily frustrated, aggressive, or depressed.
- Shows signs of disordered eating.
- Cheats in trainings or withdraws altogether from certain training activities.
- Has unrealistically high self-imposed performance goals and is extremely self-critical.

SUGGESTIONS AND TIPS:

1. Consistently check in with your athletes one on one (beginning, midway, end of season).

- Ask them how they're feeling with the sport.
- Check in with how they're doing in general.
- Ask them if you can do anything for them.
- Online surveys may also get more unfiltered responses.

2. At the beginning of each training session, do a quick survey of everyone's state and readiness to train/learn.

- Thumbs up, sideways, or down.
- Number out of 5 or 10.

3. End each practice with something fun and/or bonding.

- Do silly throwing challenges.
- Play an "ultimate-like game" that allows them to run around and be a bit more free.
- Have them buddy up and check in with goals or how they're feeling.

4. Change it up!

- Add new drills; research other sports and adapt to ultimate.
- Gamify your practices (have mini teams, add scoring, fun competitions).
- Avoid repetitive drilling - this leads to little skill

transfer in games.

- Start with simple games and gradually increase challenges (see Teaching Games for Understanding teaching models: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yiZIXZ9rd4>).
- Make sure athletes play in tournaments or games that are simply for fun (no coaching).
- Sometimes adding extra challenges can be motivating.
- Some routine can be good, but make sure to keep things interesting by mixing up certain parts every day.
- Have your athletes design a practice.

5. *Create a culture of positivity and growth.*

- Reward choices over execution.
- Create opportunities for athletes to try new throws without judgment.
- Push athletes to make mistakes throughout their learning.
- Do shout outs at the end of each practice where athletes can compliment each other on their effort.

6. *Take breaks!*

- Give the athletes some time off, especially after tournaments.
- Try to create breaks between seasons, and avoid overlapping.
- Ensure you have open communication, so your athletes can request to take personal days off when they need it – think LONG TERM!
- Play other sports / do other activities (hiking, biking, soccer, swimming, yoga, art, etc.).

Burnout is a complex interplay of the sport itself, social-emotional state, physical health, and an athlete's private life. Recognizing the signs and symptoms can help us intervene before it's too late. Athletes should arrive to the field excited, enthusiastic, and ready to learn. Anything that deviates from that is worth a check in. I personally want my athletes to show up, smiles across their faces, ready to chase down hucks as happy as the golden receivers that they are.

See the signs, ask questions, make changes, follow up, and STAY GOLDEN my friends.

HOW TO FOSTER POSITIVE SELF-TALK AND ITS EFFECTS ON YOUR TEAM

TOBEY BALZER



Email: tobalot@gmail.com

Twitter: [@tobes204](https://twitter.com/tobes204)

Instagram: [@tobes204](https://www.instagram.com/tobes204)

I have been playing ultimate for the last 20 years in various places around the US at the youth, college, club and master's divisions. I have been coaching at the middle school and high school level, organizing youth programs and helping promote the sport in Nashville, TN for the past 10 years.

WE'VE ALL HAD THOSE DAYS on the field that just don't quite feel right - a dropped disc, a missed D, or not connecting with teammates. Both the challenge and beauty of sports is that it gives players an opportunity to persevere through these obstacles and bounce back. Positive self-talk is so important in resilience and in being successful when things are feeling off or not going our way. Unfortunately, female players in particular may need more guidance and practice with changing negative self-talk to positive.

While many of us struggle with this, here are the reasons why positive self-talk can make a big difference for you and your team. Positive self-talk can be a life-changing tool and valuable strategy that players can use both on and off the field for the rest of their lives. Approaching situations with optimism and believing in your ability to succeed can make all the difference when taking on a challenge. If coaches and players on your team practice positive self-talk, it rubs off on others, and teaching players this foundational skill will have a big effect on your team as a whole. A positive team culture can drastically change the experience of every player on your team for the better.

So, what is the best way to go about teaching and fostering positive self-talk on your team? I would suggest that coaches start by practicing it themselves in their role as a coach. It's extremely powerful for players to see a coach model this type of positive behavior. In sports, and in life, it's inevitable for things not to go our way; it's how we respond that makes a difference. Players can benefit

a lot from seeing coaches respond to challenges in a way that they can emulate. This doesn't mean you have to be perfect all the time. I've had plenty of coaching days where I have gotten down on myself or second guessed decisions. Once I started on that negative self-talk, I became less patient with my players and had a harder time thinking through game plans. The important thing is to notice when this is happening. If you have another coach on your team, try to check in with that person and use them as a sounding board so that you can recenter yourself. Over the years, I've found it really helpful to have someone to check in with so that when it comes time to talk to my players, I've gotten those negative feelings out and can talk to my players in a positive tone. This doesn't mean I'm perfect, but I recognize that my behavior as a coach sets the tone for the team, and I want to bring them my best self.

When it comes to teaching players to use positive self-talk, here is the method I have used. The first step is for players to notice when it is happening and take five deep breaths. It just takes a few seconds, and that time and added oxygen allow them to be more relaxed. Then I have them say a go-to phrase that I ask them to repeat. A phrase I have used in the past is "we got this." Then I ask them to think of one positive step they can take to change what's happening. For example, something like "Let's just focus on holding the mark or defending the long throw." It's really beneficial to have the same team mantra like "we got this," because you can reinforce it and use that phrase in practice and in games. It can be repeated in your warm ups, team cheers or team check-ins.

This leads to my next tip on how to promote positive self-talk: practice, practice, practice. Just like we create opportunities for players to work on throwing, cutting, and defensive fundamentals, we also need to build in opportunities and acknowledge times to work on mental toughness and positive self-talk. Design drills and practice game situations that you know your team struggles with. If you see that frustration and negative self-talk come up in practice, take a pause, point it out,

and go to your team mantra. It's also helpful to let your captains or team leaders know that this may be a time you need them to be vocal leaders and use positive words and body language to keep your team morale high.

These team leaders and captains can play a major role in promoting positivity and a strong team culture. It's important to recognize that every player doesn't wear their heart on their sleeve. I've certainly had instances in the past where I thought everything was fine with one of my players, only to find out later that they were upset or down about ultimate. The last bit of advice I have is to build in multiple occasions throughout a practice, game or tournament day for players to check in with each other and coaches about how things are going. It's best to give them some sort of guiding questions such as:

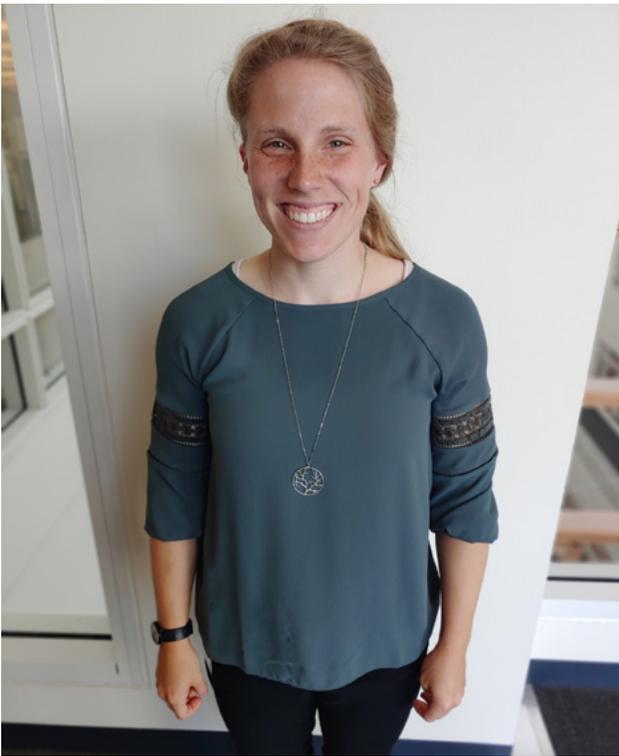
- "What's one thing you feel you are doing well?"
- "What's one thing you want to improve on and how can your team help?"
- "What's your goal for the rest of the game, practice, etc?"

This will give you a chance to connect with players and build a team culture of inclusivity. Players respond to situations differently, and creating a variety of ways and opportunities to check in helps me to better understand where my players are and how I can support them. It also creates an atmosphere where players check in with and support each other.

In the 10 seasons I have coached at the high school level, I have never once had a team that had the same exact culture and feel because each team had different players and different leaders. This is both the beauty and challenge of coaching a high school team; you get to define and rebuild your culture each year. Teaching, promoting, and practicing positive-self talk is a really effective way to strengthen individual players and your team as a whole. Teaching a player to look inward and see the good is also one of the most meaningful experiences you can have as a coach.

FOSTERING CONFIDENCE IN ULTIMATE AND LIFE

EMILY REGAN



Email: rega0148@umn.edu

Emily is an ultimate player, coach, cheese consumer, and public health educator. She thinks that ultimate is a unique way to empower young people to learn self-regulation, build relationships, practice conflict resolution, and solidify their self-image. Emily has coached at the middle school, high school, and youth club levels.

DURING THE SOCCER OFF-SEASON of my sophomore year of high school, I volunteered to be an extra body at a boys' B team game. I could not complete a forehand, and I was unsure about what a stack was, but I really wanted to play. When I got the disc for the first time, I remember thinking, "This is not the end zone. I'm not sure what to do...everyone is so loud!" My coach's voice rose above the chaos to remind me that I had 10 seconds to throw the disc. What I heard, however, had little to do with the time reminder and everything to do with the trust my coach conveyed in my ability to complete a throw. I couldn't believe that he believed I could throw the disc! Although it wasn't pretty, I reset to a handler, and we ended up scoring. And after that, I never doubted myself again! Haha, just kidding. Obviously that isn't true, but something I learned that day was the power of communication. My coach's message to me was so simple, yet it had such a profound impact on me. The lesson has stayed with me since, and it has made me think a lot about the ways that I communicate with my teammates, the players I coach, and even my friends and family.

Ultimate was one of the first spaces where authority figures trusted me to make the right decision, counted on me to use my own intuition, and celebrated me being me. This fostered confidence in a way that no other previous experience had. It's tempting to think that our effect on athletes is only what we say outright in the team huddle. The reality is, how we let athletes respond

to situations, how we treat opposing coaches, and even how we talk about ourselves has an impact on every athlete. Particularly when coaching young womxn and non-binary folks, we should be especially mindful about the messages we're sending about confidence.

Powerful messages take on many forms. I've learned that developing confidence can look different depending on the team that I'm coaching. Here are some tools I keep on hand each season:

1. Personal Goals Check-In

Every season starts with a personal goals check-in with the captains. I meet with the captains and learn what they want from the season, what drives them, how they want to grow, and any concerns they might have. This sets the stage to have a session with the entire team to understand where the team wants to go and how I can help them get there. We incorporate equity with our goal talk so that the team can have a space to decompress, push themselves to experience life from another's perspective, and foster their creativity and power.

2. Buddy Groups

I implement buddy groups that help each other improve during the season. To give everyone a chance to be intentional with relationship building, I put folks together that don't know each other well. They share how they like feedback, what gets them pumped up, and what to do if they're feeling down. This also improves attendance at practice! Buddies can help to build each other's confidence and are another way to check in with players.

3. Point Out Strengths

I make it a point to regularly point out players' strengths. Even when talking about how to improve, I frame the comment so that it is focused on how a player might reach that goal based on their strengths. For instance, if someone is struggling to throw a 20-yard forehand, but has a beautiful 20-yard backhand, I might say, "Your backhand throw is so strong, and I remember you

working so hard to get it where it is today. Why don't you take some of that awesome energy from making your backhand strong into making your forehand just as strong?"

4. Use Drills

I include drills in practice that work specifically on mental toughness and reacting to the environment. Sometimes this is a regular drill or scrimmage with a specific focus and/or punishment for mistakes. Other times, it's a catching drill where the entire team circles and acts loud around two players catching and throwing, mimicking the loud and crowded atmosphere of a game with spectators.

5. Set Clear Expectations

Clarity in expectations and holding players accountable, even in the youth setting, is also an exceptional way to build trust and self-efficacy. Because ultimate is a self-officiated sport, it's essential that all the players know and practice the rules. Sometimes, this can seem to balk the gendered norms that society places on young womxn, and it can be a challenge to convince some young people that calling a foul is not mean; it's following the rules. I also set the clear expectation that we adopt a growth mindset. I tell my players that it's ok to make mistakes and that we learn from them and get better for the next time.

These strategies have helped to get players on the same page and to trust each other, trust me, and build their confidence in themselves through the season. Having a go-to set of tools to leverage has helped me to approach my mission of cultivating confidence with a defined plan.

There are many reasons that it's important for a coach to care about building confidence in their players. First of all, confident players perform better. Players who are sure of themselves and have had the space to try things and mess up are more likely to know what they're good at and do those things consistently. Making big

mistakes allows players to learn, and if players have had the opportunity to do that, it will help their development and connections to other players. Secondly, players who are confident in themselves are able to forge strong relationships with those around them. These relationships are essential to team sports as well as to life. Finally, confident players are more likely to be more successful off the field, in school, with their families, at a job, etc. As coaches, we are invested in our players as people, not just as athletes. In the long run, building confidence in our players is an investment in our community, and this is a tremendous responsibility and opportunity for coaches. As a coach, my role is not to teach the player all there is to know about ultimate; it's to get them hooked on the sport, inspire them to continue to be part of the community, and learn from others in the future. Hopefully, what they learn from ultimate will spill over into other facets of life.

Coaches can make an impact on their players' lives by shaping, encouraging, and lifting up young womxn and non-binary people to be confident adults. As we all know, the world is hard, and many young people deal every day with violence, racism, homophobia, sexism, poverty, mental illness, addiction, and other negative factors. Ultimate can be a proxy for dealing with tough things in life, especially when a young person has a strong support system and social network. Coaches are central to helping our young players grow into confident and successful adults. Data consistently shows that teens with a caring adult in their life and those who are physically active tend to have higher self-esteem and are more successful. Here are a few facts:

- According to the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, adolescents who have a connection to a caring adult are less likely to engage in risky behaviors (Healthy People 2020).
- Relatedly, researchers in 2019 found that LGBTQ teens who had at least one supportive and accepting adult were 40% less likely to report a suicide

attempt in the past year (The Trevor Project, 2019).

- Getting at least 60 minutes of moderate to physical activity each day is associated with better cognition and performance in school (CDC, 2019).

Ultimate coaches can play a big role in helping athletes process their everyday lives, build communication skills, set goals, understand their strengths and growth opportunities, and approach challenges with confidence.

Our work truly extends off the field. We also need to model confident, healthy behavior for our players. Our players look up to us. The way that I carry myself around my players has a big impact on them. As a young woman, I feel it is essential to be real and proud. This means sharing ultimate accomplishments in my life when appropriate; using respectful, positive, and confident language; and never talking down to other coaches, players, parents, or community members. It also means trusting my players to work things out on the field, and only ever responding in a directive manner if it's an emergency, or if they ask for a rules clarification. Every time I don't respond to a "Was that in?!", I'm doing my part to show my players that they are the ones with the power. While the tools I leverage and my approach to planning practices and our season all have great importance, how I carry myself around my players may have the biggest impact yet.

One of my most important jobs as a coach is to help my players find and grow their confidence. Confidence allows players to be themselves. It allows them to build relationships. Confidence enables them to be leaders. Confidence opens up a world of possibilities for them. Although sport culture can provide some inherent challenges, ultimate allows for learning and growth to build more confident womxn and non-binary leaders for the future of our sport and our world.

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PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR FOSTERING INCLUSION, SPORTSMANSHIP, AND COMPETITIVENESS IN HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS' ULTIMATE

JESS SCHUELER (WITH INPUT FROM TEAM CAPTAINS STELLA HYDE & PILAR CARSON)



Email: jessschueler@gmail.com

Jess Schueler has coached the Summit High StormBears (Bend, OR) for the past five years with her sister, Christina Schueler.

MANY OF US have been touched by the unique culture of ultimate, and we have a very special opportunity to spread those values to the next generation of ultimate players through coaching. My team has identified three important values for our team culture: inclusivity, sportsmanship, and competitiveness. This article will provide a look at some of the tangible things we do to build these values into everything we do. Before you set about applying any of this to your own team, you'll want to sit down as a group and define your team's values. Every team's values and cultures look different.

Inclusivity

Ultimate's inclusive nature has always impressed me, and it has been something that we have worked to maintain on our high school girls' team. While there are some obvious actions that promote inclusivity (e.g., not making cuts to the team, advertising the team as "no experience required," etc.), here are some other ideas that we have found contribute positively to inclusivity.

Sub evenly early in the season.

We have made the decision to sub evenly in each game for the first half of the season (even when games are close!) so that we can focus on learning and building skills. This means that rookies find themselves on the line for big points. Subbing evenly has helped us foster the idea that everyone's growth and skill development is equally important. One method of even subbing that has worked for us is to rotate evenly between a line of

more-skilled players, a line of less-skilled players, and two lines of mixed-skill level. This allows skilled players opportunities to practice higher-level strategy on their line, less-skilled players to get experience in more dominant roles on their line, and mixed-skill lines to work on cohesion. For the second half of the season, we still aim to keep playing time relatively even over the course of a tournament, but that playing time varies from game to game.

Create an environment of learning.

We often end up with a team of varying skill levels, which can be intimidating for new players and frustrating for more experienced players. By encouraging an environment of learning, we make space for newer players to make mistakes and for more experienced players to continue to build skills. One way to promote this mentality is to say “thank you” instead of “sorry.” We ask players to say, “Thank you for your patience while I work on my flick,” instead of “Sorry my flick is so bad.” This turns the focus to the strengths of the teammate (patience!) instead of a weakness (a less-than-perfect flick). If players do apologize for mistakes (especially when first learning ultimate), we find that reminding them that the goal is to practice new skills helps to shift the mindset towards learning. This allows the building of more tolerance and a positive environment on our team.

Travel.

Many of the players on our team remark that travel is when they learn the most about their teammates and build deeper friendships. As our team has many players from different friend groups (and even different schools), we feel it is important to use travel time to encourage new bonds between teammates who aren't as close. Car and hotel room assignments are made before the trip by the team leadership with the two-fold goal of making sure that players are always with someone they feel comfortable with as well as someone that they don't know as well.

Get involved as a coach.

One of the most powerful things you can do as a coach is to model the behavior you wish to see. We regularly make it a point to befriend the less athletic/skilled/popular/spirited/outgoing players in order to help them integrate into the team. We also work hard to figure out what players' strengths and passions are (especially off the field), and we try our best to create an avenue for players to apply those strengths and passions. Some practical ways to do this might be encouraging players to design a jersey, put together a playlist, come up with cheers; we've even had a player lead the charge of crafting team bandanas. As coaches, it is sometimes easy to fall into the trap of giving energy and attention to players who you've known for a longer time or who are more skilled and more passionate about ultimate. This puts a lot of value on players' skills and experience with ultimate instead of valuing players' strengths as people and teammates. We also make it a point to talk about each player's strengths and improvements over the course of the season at the end-of-year banquet, acknowledging the contributions of each player.

High fives and positive talk.

As coaches, it's important to model and encourage positive talk. We aim for a ratio of five positive comments to every “corrective/negative” comment we make. In our experience, we've found that physical contact (in the form of a high five) is an additional way for teammates to build connections. As coaches, we make it a point to make high fives commonplace at practices and have noticed players following suit with their teammates.

Sportsmanship

Spirit of the Game is often a new concept for players who are coming to ultimate from another sport, but we have found that many players find it one of the more rewarding parts of ultimate, and for many, it's the reason they continue to play. Here are some things that have helped us foster a spirited team.

Set it as a goal.

Our team's goals are always to be the most competitive team and the most spirited team. These goals are stated and known to the players and parents. We make it a point to explain Spirit of the Game at our beginning of the year potluck. USA Ultimate has an excellent [two-page overview](#) of Spirit of the Game that we read/talk through and give to players and parents the first night we meet.¹ We've found it especially important to have parents on-board (especially as they are our main spectators and dictate the spirit of our sidelines).

Model it.

As a coach, your behavior has an impact on your team. We make it a point to befriend the other coaches in our state and build relationships with them. They are our allies after all! We make sure to vocalize positive feelings towards other coaches to our team (e.g., "I really value how respectful X coach is on the sidelines," or "X coach did a really great job putting on this tournament"). This can be applied to comments about other teams as well.

Address issues when they come up.

Conflicts often lead to the best discussions about Spirit of the Game. Good questions we might ask are:

- "Was the action in line with Spirit of the Game or not?"
- "What's the most positive way to address the issue, if needed?" (This is a great segue to discussing conflict resolution skills and encouraging listening to understand the other's perspective.)
- "Is there anything our team did to contribute to poor spirit?"
- "Are there ways that we can improve our spirit?"

Take a moment of gratitude for your opponent after the game.

Spirit circles are a strong tradition at the tournaments our team attends, so we make sure to talk about what happens in a spirit circle and the importance of them. Our team also takes time to make spirit prizes to hand out in the spirit circles. In our case, coaches don't participate in the spirit circles, but we try to help prompt thinking about spirit with questions and comments like:

- "What do you like most about that opponent?"
- "That was a great game, and we improved a lot because we had such a good team to play against."

Even small questions or comments like these can take a tense moment and refocus it on Spirit of the Game.

Competitiveness

Over the years, we've had a variety of levels of competitiveness. We've found that some years, we have a lot of players from other sports who are already very competitive. Other years, we have a lot of players who are new to sports, and we've had to work to "teach" competitiveness. Here are some tactics that we used:

Make conditioning competitive.

Most teams will already have some sort of conditioning built into practices, but this is a good opportunity to create some competition. We often use relay-style groups when doing conditioning to put a little bit of competitive pressure on players. Another activity that has helped players to increase intensity is to do 20-yard sprints across the end zone, with one player sprinting at a time. We've found that the pressure of having the rest of the team watch often pushes players to their full potential. We do the same exercise with five steps out the back of the end zone before the 20-yard sprint to simulate a commitment cut (faking one way and then cutting the other).

1. https://www.usultimate.org/assets/1/Page/SOTG_Packet.pdf

Keep team goals/tournaments on the mind.

We've found that reminding players of the "why" can help foster competitiveness. Some examples of things we might say to our players:

- "We're going to work extra hard on this conditioning because it's our last conditioning session before X tournament."
- "Let's focus on this vertical stack defense so that when we play X team, we'll be able to force more turns."
- "We're going to work on zone again today because one of our team goals is to be able to swing the disc all the way across the field against a zone defense."

Keep score.

If you want to foster competitiveness, there needs to be a measure of how the team is doing. It is easy to let a scrimmage just become a chance to practice playing 7 v. 7, playing as many points as time allows until a practice is over. We have started to favor playing shorter games to a specific score. We will often teach or drill a specific skill and then play a game to three. This is a short enough game that players can stay focused on the score, and it often ends in a close game or double-game point, which helps players practice being in the mindset of those more competitive moments.

Play other teams!

One of the biggest things that has helped our team has been finding other teams to play against. This could mean more tournaments or coordinating unofficial games with nearby teams. Early on, neither of these were options for our team, so we rallied a group of women ultimate players/coworkers/community members interested in learning the sport to play against our high school team.

Play with the rules.

We have found in girls' high school ultimate, there is a big hesitation to call fouls because it "seems unspirited"

or is "unkind." We talk a lot about how self-officiation and Spirit of the Game work together. We also have specific scrimmages where we ask certain players to purposely commit fouls or violations (usually things like fast count, double team, disc space, etc.) to force players to practice making calls. We have also noticed that "no contest" seems to be an almost expected answer to a foul call. While we do encourage the "no contest" answer if a player believes they committed a foul/violation or are not sure if they did, it's important to discuss when it's appropriate to contest a foul (and that it's not looked upon negatively).

The Importance of Captains

In addition to the suggestions above, one factor that has helped us solidify our team's culture is having captains committed to maintaining and encouraging these values in their teammates. We have often found that team captains have more influence than coaches in defining team culture. There are also places like school and social media where captains may have a much more significant presence than coaches. Thus, we put a lot of time, energy, and effort into mentoring and developing team captains.

Electing captains.

We have chosen to let players write a "pitch" to their teammates as to why they would like to be a captain. We've asked them to address these questions:

- Why do you want to be captain?
- What are your season goals for the team?
- What strengths do you bring?
- What will be the biggest challenge for you as a captain? What traits would you want in a co-captain?

We avoid setting a specific number of captains for the season and have successfully managed with anywhere from 2-4 (we had four captains when we regularly split

into two teams for tournaments). We leave the decision of captains to a team vote.

Mentoring.

We make sure to meet with captains before the season starts to address goals for the season, talk about the desired team culture and what the captains and coaches plan to do to support it, and discuss what the captains want to work on as leaders. We make sure to talk about what went well and what needs improvement from the previous season (including the strengths and weaknesses of the previous year's captains). Throughout the season, we try our best to include captains in discussions and decisions about the team.

Empowering captains.

When we first started coaching, we felt like we had to make all of the decisions and take care of all of the work (which is how we experienced high school sports). Over the years, we have found it much more rewarding and empowering to actively involve captains/players in the running of the team. While some responsibility will always belong to the coach (e.g., managing issues between players, making decisions about players' safety, etc.), we have found many areas where captains can fill a leadership role:

- Leading warm-ups (we often forward resources on leading a good warm-up).
- Making some strategy decisions on the line during games (we work on this a lot at practice and have a lot of discussions with captains regarding when we would use certain offenses/defenses, when we look for field position, what to choose on a flip, etc.).
- Teaching/running new drills (we make sure to talk through these first with the captains and set clear goals for the drill).
- Working one-on-one with new players.
- Leading cheers.
- Talking in the huddle before games (we give captains our two cents about our priorities for the game).

- Helping with travel logistics (e.g., assigning players to cars or hotel rooms, choosing a place to eat, etc., and we make sure to re-emphasize our team goals for these decisions).
- Serving as spirit captains and/or teaching the team the rules of ultimate.
- Running optional conditioning practices.

In addition to supporting and empowering our captains, we also involve players in:

- Jersey design (we give a small group of players a budget and almost free reign).
- Building a practice playlist.
- Team bonding activities (e.g., making spirit prizes, decorating team t-shirts, pasta feeds, etc.).
- Helping with logistics of team fundraisers.

For us, the most important part of building team culture is setting goals for the team and then using these goals to make decisions. Decisions are easier when you can ask, "Which of these options best meets our team goals?" While this article gives a laundry list of ideas about how to build team culture, each team (and perhaps each season) will be unique. I hope that our team's experiences can help your team more efficiently build the team culture its players desire. As you embark on the season, remember that team culture takes time to develop, and it takes some trial and error. Also, remember that no team is perfect. Our team continues to have to work, adjust, and try new things to maintain the positive culture we've worked hard to build.



SECTION III: BUILDING A TEAM

Texas High School State Championships: Daniel Thai - UltiPhotos

THREE KEYS TO BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS' ULTIMATE TEAM

MIRANDA KOSOWSKY



Email: mirandakosowsky1999@gmail.com

Miranda Kosowsky has played ultimate competitively for the last seven years. She started playing on Pittsburgh's YCC team the summer before her first year of high school and knew she wanted to play more in high school, so she created a girls' ultimate team at her high school that still exists today. She currently plays at the University of Pittsburgh.

MY FRESHMAN YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL, I received an email from the director of Pittsburgh Ultimate containing details for an upcoming meeting about the Pittsburgh High School Ultimate League. Somehow, my school, Creative and Performing Arts High School (CAPA), had been signed up for the high school league, and it was now my responsibility to organize an entire ultimate season. The decision to embrace that responsibility led to the creation of the CAPA girls' ultimate team, changing my high school experience for the better. Our team was aptly named the Rainbow Unicorns.

Before I dive in any deeper, I want to say that I am from Pittsburgh and played my high school ultimate in Pittsburgh. Many of my experiences may differ slightly from yours, but I hope the lessons I learned will be things you can take back to your team. One fairly unique part of my situation was that CAPA didn't have a boys' ultimate team. Many programs start first with a boys' team and then add a girls' team along the way. However, this fact didn't make a difference in how much work my teammates and I had to put in. In the end, our story shows that there doesn't have to be a strong boys' program at your school before there is a girls' program. Don't let the boys' program intimidate you! And don't feel that you have to be invested in the boys' program before you can start a girls' program because that simply isn't true.

There are three main focuses that I believe make for a successful team and contribute to the continued health

and longevity of a new girls' ultimate program. These focuses are to recruit, find a coach, and set goals.

Recruit

Recruiting is the bread and butter of your new program. When you start a team, it's helpful to have a few people you can rely on, but after that, it's recruiting, recruiting, recruiting! Start by recruiting your friends or people you know. In our first year, my team was made up almost entirely of my friends, and that made the experience a lot of fun. Cast a wide net when you recruit. All kinds of people end up falling in love with ultimate and becoming some of our sport's most dedicated members. Reach out to whoever you can, and don't stress about reaching the most athletic people at your school at the beginning. That will come in the following years as you continue to recruit and grow your program.

Find a Coach (If Possible)

Secondly, a coach is a great asset to any team and can bring many benefits, especially to team leaders. A coach is able to help plan practices, teach, and allow captains or other team leaders to focus more on growing as players. Coaches can alleviate much of the stress and responsibility of developing a team for team leaders. Coaches may also have more ultimate experience than players on the team and bring an outside perspective. Leverage your local ultimate community to find a coach. Players on a local college or club team might be good candidates, or they might be able to point you to other possible coaches!

While a coach can be a great asset, it is possible to create a team without a coach. It can be hard to find a dedicated individual willing to do the job, and it's important that a coach is a good fit for your team. The CAPA Rainbow Unicorns didn't have a coach our first year, but we were still able to grow, and we found a coach a few years later. Anyone who is strong enough and invested enough (you!) to start a team is also strong

enough and invested enough to keep one going. Don't let the barrier of finding a coach stop you from realizing your full potential as an athlete, leader, and person.

Set Goals

The last key to getting a new team off the ground is setting goals. This might seem cheesy or like a waste of time, or it may seem difficult and not worth it, but I can't stress enough how important it is to be on the same page with your team. Setting goals also enables you to build out an entire framework for your season, which is almost as important as the goal setting itself.

I used to think that goal setting was important, but I never realized the enormous impact it could have on a team until my sophomore year at the University of Pittsburgh. Our women's team, Danger, set ambitious goals for our performance at the College Championships. When we didn't reach those goals, the question of why rose almost immediately. I think a possible reason was that our team wasn't entirely bought in to our goals. I also think that perhaps we didn't fully realize the work required to reach our goals and the steps we needed to take to achieve them.

Failing to reach our goals at the College Championships reinforced for me that solid goals can be the foundation of a team and can drive people in your program to a higher level. They bring legitimacy and a sense of purpose to individuals, as well as to your team. Making people feel that they are a part of something important is critical to the success of your team today, tomorrow, and in the future. Goal setting is a simple, accessible way to do that. Just as importantly, goal setting also allows for a discussion about how to reach those goals. This allows a team to break goals into actionable pieces and informs the season plan, practice plans, and even conditioning. All of this helps to get (and keep!) everyone on the same page and gives people concrete things to focus on during practices and games. The season-long process of striving toward a goal is arguably

more important than achieving the goal. The lessons learned along the way define your team and make the journey a fun one to be on. Don't be afraid to set big goals and encourage your team to do great things!

The journey ahead of you will be an amazing and inspiring one. Keep believing in yourself, and remember all of the parts of the sport that make you happy. Recruit, find qualified coaches, and set goals. Once your team is established, keeping it going will seem like a breeze. Each year, you'll learn more, and you'll carry everything you learn with you on your journey. Surround yourself with teammates who will support you and lift you up. And most importantly, have fun!

TIPS FOR STARTING A HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS' TEAM

KATE LANIER



Email: katelanier17@gmail.com

Twitter: [@katelanier](https://twitter.com/katelanier)

Kate Lanier attended Carolina Friends School where she played for both the open and girls' teams. She currently attends Carleton College where she plays for Syzygy, their D-I women's team. She has also played on both the Women's U-20 (2016, 2018) and U-24 (2019) US National Teams.

Author's Note:

I want to preface this article with two things. First, I use both the terms "woman" and "girl" in this article. I use

the term "girl" solely because that is the official division label. I have had many discussions about the negative connotations of calling women "girls," and in my everyday life, I aim to avoid that. I also want to note that this term is binary and does not necessarily reflect the spectrum of genders that the players in the division may identify with.

Second, I am by no means claiming responsibility for starting the women's team at Carolina Friends School (CFS). This team could not have gotten off the ground without endless support and guidance from Annie Reuben and Kyra Catabay. Also, a huge thank you to all the parents for driving to tournaments, supplying snacks, and stepping up to help when asked. Lastly, thank you to my friends who made this team such an amazing experience.

I WAS LUCKY ENOUGH TO FIND a place on the open team at my high school and grew as a player on the team for multiple years. My older brother was on the team, and I had other close male friends that always respected me on and off the field. I constantly encouraged my female friends to come and play on the team. "It's so fun! You'll love it. I promise!" "The guys are really nice and welcoming!" "Yeah, it sucks we don't have a girls' team, and I really want you to play ultimate, so just try the open team!" It took me a while to realize that while the open division team worked well for me, that didn't mean it would for other women. Many women have valid

reasons for not wanting to play with men: not getting the disc when they're open, being disrespected on or off the field, feeling left out of the social aspects of a team, among many other reasons. I very much wanted my female friends to have a place to play ultimate, so I adjusted my recruiting tactic to creating a new space and team they felt comfortable in.

There was a local girls' team, Carrboro Koi, that functioned as a combo team for a few local high schools. These schools had a handful of players each. This was all that was possible at the time, and the unfortunate part was that it required commuting after school to different locations which took time, effort, and resources (i.e., parents willing and able to drive!) that limited who could participate. However, in our case, CFS was in a very fortunate situation with a school administration that respects ultimate and access to on-campus fields. One big hurdle crossed! As Koi grew and interest from CFS students reached what seemed like a critical mass, the Koi coaches encouraged me and a few friends to create a CFS women's team.

Starting with a core of players, field access, and two coaches, the job became finding the numbers to field a team and successfully attend tournaments. Recruiting took many different forms. Here are a few tips based on what we did at CFS:

- **Be visible!** If your school does any form of morning announcements, put your team out there. If your school has a club fair, make sure to have a table. Have a sign-up list, and get interested players' email addresses. Give people names, faces, and contacts that they can reach out to if they have any questions. Make sure people know about your team!
- **Set goals.** Set up a time to meet in a classroom to talk about what the team and season will look like. Discuss and define goals, commitment level, cost, etc. Make sure to leave time for questions, and emphasize you are welcoming new players who have never touched a disc in their life.
- **Meet people where they are.** Make sure the first practices are the right level, especially for the players new to ultimate. Consider pairing experienced players with new ones. Teach basics, and talk about Spirit of the Game (SOTG), but don't make it overwhelming. Make sure everyone gets touches and moves around a lot. The atmosphere is probably more important than anything else! Set the vibe of the team from the very beginning, whatever you want that to be.
- **Showcase advanced play and community.** Go to a tournament earlier rather than later! Approach it with clear "low expectations" for the win-loss category, and focus on individual development and team bonding. The players might be hesitant thinking they aren't ready, but the growth over two tournament days will be astounding, as well as more fun than any practice can be. Tournaments showcase a higher level of play than practices, allow your team to be one team (rather than scrimmaging each other), and showcase the ultimate community and SOTG.
- **Target friend groups!** If one player is invested, tell them to bring their friends along. This keeps players from trying it out and not feeling comfortable not knowing anyone. Having friends close by can help people ease into a new situation and also help players hold each other accountable for showing up to practice.

I was lucky to attend a small school where many of my friends on the open team helped us in the process of starting the girls' team. These male friends talked to their female friends and passed prospects along to us so that we could do further outreach. Keep in mind that this type of help doesn't need to be limited to other ultimate players. Leverage your entire network of friends, including friends who don't play ultimate!

Seemingly obvious, but worth noting, is that it's important to plan fun team activities outside of practices

and games to keep players coming back. It sometimes takes persistence (i.e., pestering) to get people to come out to practices, but once they come out, make it such an amazing experience that they want to keep coming back. Tournaments and bonding with my teammates off the field are two of the biggest reasons that I stuck with ultimate! Make sure that these team activities happen early, often, and with intentionality. Have a team movie night (or watch film of high-level womens' ultimate), have an ice cream party, tie dye shirts, have water balloon battles, or host an end-of-season potluck with paper plate awards. There are endless possibilities!

A number of people asked me why I stopped playing on the open team my senior year of high school. They asked, "Wouldn't that team push me harder?" While the players on the open team had many more years of ultimate experience than the brand new players on the girls' team, I learned many other skills on the girls' team that I would not have otherwise had the opportunity to learn. I learned leadership skills, including how to foster a positive team environment. I also learned a great deal about organizing logistics. While I did enjoy the challenge of being one of, if not the only, girl at an open practice, I also enjoyed the challenge of showing new players why I love this sport so much. I also greatly enjoyed watching our women's ultimate community grow.

Teams are something special. Long bus rides, shared sweat, hilarious cheers, loss of sleep leading to happy delirium, shared looks Monday after a tournament when you're walking up the stairs at school sore and in pain and only your teammates understand...all of these things happen when you don't even have a disc in your hand. It isn't easy spending time convincing others that our sport is special, but the payoff of watching new players complete their first flick in a game, hype each other up on the sideline, bring glitter and face paint to tournaments, come up with new cheers, tryout and make a YCC team, and slowly also fall in love with the sport

makes all of the effort worth it. I hope that these tips help you on your journey. Good luck and have fun!

GRIT: CULTIVATING COMPETITIVENESS

BRITTA JONES



Email: brittaelyse@gmail.com

Twitter: [@britta14](https://twitter.com/britta14)

Instagram: [@brittaelyse](https://www.instagram.com/brittaelyse)

Britta is a second generation ultimate player who played college ultimate for the University of Florida (FUEL) and UNC Chapel Hill (Pleiades). While working on her PhD, Britta coached the Carrboro HS Clams for seven years and was voted USAU Youth Open Coach of the Year for North Carolina. Britta served on the Triangle Ultimate (TU) Board of Directors, functioned as the Youth Chair for TU and the director for the TU (formerly TYUL) YCC teams. She now lives in Seattle, WA, where she coaches for the Seven Hills Ultimate Club.

WHAT A LUXURY IT IS to play on a team where all of the players are bought in to the goals and values of the team and share the same deep desire to continue to build upon the team's past successes. At the girls' ultimate youth level, there are often a number of things standing between this ideal team and reality. In most communities, teams are working hard to recruit new members every season; in these recruitment efforts, many new players show up with little to no experience with ultimate or even team sports at all. There is often a fraction of players that shies away from direct competition - especially in the context of a sport and skill set that they do not already possess. Let's face it, middle school and high school are periods of big change and periods where the approval of one's peers and desire for a sense of belonging take a high priority. How can you welcome new players into your team while also cultivating competition? Can you build your program or team while also building the caliber at which they play? Maybe your team is already full, but you are looking to move to the next level at tournaments while maintaining the positive team culture you've worked so hard to develop. What follows is an entirely biased essay on what has worked for me in my years of coaching North Carolina youth ultimate. I am going to keep much of my thoughts neutral with respect to sex because this topic and these techniques are applicable to all athletes; however, I do recognize the role society and our culture play in undermining the self-confidence and strength of females, making this a particularly pertinent topic for this manual.

There you are the day after Labor Day standing in front of your high school team. You have four returners who have spent the summer playing YCCs and are even stronger athletes than when you last saw them in May. You have six more returners who played summer league and continued to grow into their athleticism and understanding of the game. The first thing that hits you is that you need more players. You graduated a handful of great seniors last year, and the 10 players in front of you are certainly not enough to get you to Sunday afternoon of your first fall tournament. You need more players, but you need to build an environment that still promotes competition and challenges all of your players without sacrificing inclusivity. Is this going to be a rebuilding year? Or the year this team takes their competitiveness to the next level? How about both?

It is important to recognize that not all people are initially motivated by the thrill of competition, especially when folks are overwhelmed by feelings of self-doubt and failure. So much of the time, the hook to encourage young women to pick up ultimate involves friendships/social groups but practices are riddled with apologies, embarrassment at making mistakes and self-deprecation. Ultimately, cultivating competitiveness is about linking the non-competitive aspects of a team to the end goal of winning. This means embracing the **team-building** activities and bringing attention to the strengths different players bring to the game/field. **Skill building** (drills) paired with scrimmages with adjusted rules to highlight the skills can work to build confidence both within players and among the team as a whole. **Cultivating competitiveness could almost be compared to exposure therapy.** Recognizing that the biggest roadblocks are often confidence and fear of failure, we can address each of these through practice and through recognizing that women are hardest on ourselves. Positive coaching engenders positive teammates and an overall positive team culture. Don't hesitate to call attention to cliques (exclusivity) and negative self-talk or negative sideline chatter.

Team Building

Building a positive, inclusive, fun team is one of the very first things we work on in the fall. Suggested activities can include team pizza dinners, movie nights, or meeting up for ice cream and throwing; oftentimes captains lead and organize these activities, but sometimes a team parent can help host or organize. Team bonding outside of practice serves to build a safe space for players to fail and make mistakes and an opportunity for players to build lasting friendships. A place where having a rough practice doesn't mean they quit the team. For youth teams, this means building rapport across multiple grades and class schedules. As a coach, I always appreciate spending time with my team outside of practice, so I can get to know them more as people and have some level of appreciation for what their life is like at home. [Note: Coaches should not be spending time alone with players and should not be "friends" with their players but instead work to build a positive relationship built on mutual respect.] Now that access to film footage is so amazing, pulling a team together to watch film (on their own or with a coach's commentary) can be really impactful and inspiring. For new players, just being able to watch the game at the highest level is incredible and something that wasn't very accessible even 15 years ago. Just like in college, these are where the inside jokes are born...where nicknames are formed and where a team is born. Work to find the fun inside practice as well. I've always taken a lot of joy in ending a practice with a goofy relay race. Nothing warms my heart like watching my team wheelbarrow their teammates across the width of the field and then do bear crawls or crab walks. Whatever makes your team find their joy - work those things into practice from time to time. Finally, many teams incorporate "shoutouts" or "appreciations" after games and tournaments to bring positive attention to each player and allow players to empower one another. Even as an adult, I find this practice to be one of the highlights of a tournament weekend.

Skill Building

What if we operate under the assumption that the biggest deterrent for youth players that shy away from competition is the fear of failure and the embarrassment and alienation that failure might bring about? Let's begin with skill building. Somewhere along my years of playing, I picked up the toolbox analogy—probably from Brian Dobyons when he coached UNC Chapel Hill Pleiades. Essentially, think of the skills and techniques you want your team to have as tools in a toolbox. Our goal is to have enough tools that if someone takes away one of our tools (at the very basic level, this could be as simple as forcing flick on a team that prefers their backhands), then we can reach into our toolbox and find another tool to play with. On defense, our goal is to make the opposing team try to beat us with their third best tool. They love to play vertical stack? We're going to force middle. They love to huck off a strike cut? We are going to minimize how often their players get the disc in a power position (or we are going to back the cutters...you get the idea). Once we take away some of their favorite tools, we want to see if they can still beat us using their remaining tools.

In addressing the skills of other teams, bear in mind that players still getting used to the culture of competition will not always be motivated by the old “shut ‘em down” pep talk. Using something like the toolbox analogy ties in process goals to the end goal of winning a game. It also opens up a conversation wherein you don't win the game, *but* you do stop a team from playing using their top tools and make them improve by winning with other skill sets. This creates a set-up where huddles during and after the game can include both positive and constructive feedback that can be unpacked as needed. Maybe you never talk about the big goal of winning, but you just keep your team laser focused on your process goals (take away the strike cut, make them run a horizontal stack). Consider emphasizing process over outcome. These are often much more digestible for

someone on the field who is still adjusting to the sport and the tournament or game atmosphere. My father has been playing ultimate since the 1970s, and his most salient advice when I began playing was to just keep my girl from touching the disc. It's hard to think of a more basic process goal for defense, but it helped me grasp how my effort could impact a point. In the same way, despite your best efforts, sometimes you just have to tip your hat and walk 70 yards back to the line (this is most certainly adopted from Tully Beatty while he was coaching North Carolina Phoenix).

One last note about skill building. A subset of every team really revels in the strategy behind what you are doing as a coach, so bring them into the fold, and **explain the why**. Often it will only increase their buy-in to the team and your leadership.

Continuous Exposure to Competition

The last pillar to cultivating competitiveness is perhaps the most obvious: You have to expose players again and again to competition. This is easier once your players have a foundation of skills to employ and the trust and respect of their teammates to feel safe enough to make the mistakes necessary to improve. I've heard folks say that **the greatest competition is between a player and themselves**. I believe that just by showing up to practices and games, all players will improve in some aspect (indeed, even without a coach). I urge coaches to measure metrics at the beginning of the season and return to remeasure them later in the season, not for the purpose of ranking players, but for the purpose of highlighting how much each player has grown over the course of the season. Try to pick metrics that highlight a wide range of skills (throwing, agility, aerobic or anaerobic endurance/speed, strength) so that players can see which category they have improved in the most. But remind them that no single metric will ever totally reflect their strength as a player on the field.

Chances are you have played a scrimmage where no one really had much invested in the outcome. Find what motivates different players on your team and build in meaningful outcomes to your scrimmages or edits to the rules that increase the gravity of the situation. This can be as simple as running sprints for each point a team loses by, bringing treats for the winning team, or allowing the seven players that scored to stay on the field to play the next point as well, you can also add in “hockey-style” subs where if a player turns over the disc, they must sub out in the middle of the point. At the same time, I think **it’s important to introduce the concept that winning and losing are not synonymous with success and failure.** Have direct team conversations about what your team does define as success and how they choose to define failure. These definitions may change over the course of the season. Revisit them often.

In continuously exposing your team to competition, you can work to destigmatize winning and repackage the goal of working hard to win as the most respectful thing we can do for our opponents. Sometimes, especially in women’s sports, it feels like we have normalized goal setting that doesn’t include winning. As if playing for fun and for the purpose of gaining experience has to be mutually exclusive with playing to make it into the bracket on Sunday. Ultimate doesn’t need to cultivate playing with joy at the expense of being competitive, and we don’t need to sugarcoat these goals when coaching young women. I think the most obvious rebuttal to this argument is that sometimes you lead a team that you know will not make it to the finals on Sunday, and thus you work to set goals that do not include things that are unlikely. Ultimately, I believe this further stigmatizes losing and devalues the element of competition. Perhaps winning a tournament (or a game) is a reach goal for your team...that’s great. Set a variety of goals for your team that include reach goals and smaller, more attainable goals. A successful weekend or game doesn’t mean you achieved all of your goals. *Set goals so that*

when you win the fields on Sunday, you are walking away hungry for the goals you haven’t yet achieved but are still proud of those you accomplished.

Grit

So much of the time my conversations around coaching youth ultimate boil down to a single concept: grit. To me, grit is the belief in hard work and the ability to persevere against obstacles or even the ability to embrace adversity. For a long time, whenever I was coaching with the clipboard in my hands, there were always a rotating cast of two or three players following behind me quietly asking me what the score was. I nearly always told them that we were down by two. Sometimes I would find these players talking to their opposing team asking them what the score was as they searched for a more accurate answer. Early in my sixth year of coaching, a freshman came up to ask me the score, and before I could respond, a senior turned and told them that we were down by two, we just needed to keep grinding and that every point mattered. *I’m not sure I have ever felt more validated as a coach.* Sometimes we would win, and there would be a kid in the high-five line quietly saying, “I thought we were down by at least two!”

By exposing players to competition consistently in a friendly, supportive setting (like practice), you can begin to plant the seed of what competition looks like. As a coach, sometimes you recognize that your team’s goal of winning the tournament is unlikely. I urge you not to shy away or dissuade your team from setting lofty goals. The key is to be ready to praise and applaud the smaller process goals the team is able to achieve in the course of a weekend. Incorporating goals within each game or even each half is a great way to keep the process first and foremost in your players’ heads. Did you make the other team adjust their mark? Call the first timeout? Did their handler struggle with resets because of your handler defense? Did you win a game to three? These are all wins for teams at any level, and finding the

time and place to applaud these process goals is often more important (and more achievable) than the goal of “winning the tournament.”

Sometimes I worry that my less innately competitive players fear that in setting high goals for themselves or their team they are only left with two outcomes: winning or losing. There is so much success to be found in the grey area outside of winning the tournament. As a coach, oftentimes you are left making lemonade from lemons - and sometimes those lemons present in the form of exhaustion, injury, hunger, frustration and chronic cramping. You need to be able to stand in front of your team and validate their very real feelings about the tournament or game, while at the same time finding the small successes and praising the hell out of them. Creating opportunities to lift one another up is so empowering for a team; you may be the best coach in the world, but *your job is always to make your role nearly obsolete*. Teach your players to look to one another when they are down - not to you. Teach your players to put one another first, and find the positive things in each point. I believe that players who are not innately competitive can be brought into the fold of a competitive team in a series of small steps that ultimately culminate in the appreciation of the large grey area between winning and losing.

I leave you with a quote from Anson Dorrance, the head coach of the women’s soccer program at UNC Chapel Hill who has one of the most successful coaching records in the history of athletics.

*“If there is a defining aspect of UNC women’s soccer, and its success, it is what we call the competitive cauldron. It is the pinnacle of our program. The great part about the cauldron is that it fosters a quality we can all possess. It isn’t a talent we are born with. **Competitive drive is not governed by innate ability, but by self-discipline and desire.**”* - Anson Dorrance

THREE KEYS TO BUILDING TEAM CULTURE

RACHAEL ROMANIAK



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Email: rromaniak2@gmail.com

Twitter: [@JustCallMeRomy](https://twitter.com/JustCallMeRomy)

Rachael “Romy” Romaniak is a girls’ high school and women’s club ultimate coach in Madison, WI. She started playing ultimate in college for the University of Wisconsin Bella Donna in 2012.

I WAS NOT PREPARED for my first season coaching high school girls’ ultimate. On one hand, it was the same sport I played and loved throughout college, but on the other hand, it was like I had stepped into a new sport entirely. Our head coach gathered all of the players into a circle and asked them what their favorite part of ultimate was. The players answered with everything from spirit circles to halftime dance parties to buddies and buddy gifts. With each answer, I became more incredulous because none of the players mentioned winning games. Even blowing bubbles ranked higher for these players than winning. I left practice in a state of disbelief. How could I be expected to coach players who didn’t seem to care if they won or lost? Despite my initial skepticism, we ended up having a pretty good year. The team got stronger on the field as a unit, individual players improved their skills, we had a lot of fun, and we won a decent number of games. I came away with the realization that none of our team success would have been possible without the team culture we established.

With each passing season, I’ve come to understand why culture is so important for high school teams. Despite the fact that our high school has had a girls’ program for a number of years, most of our new players have little to no experience playing organized team sports at all. Establishing a team culture is one major way we have kept players engaged and focused on building a strong team. We use culture as a way to give our players a voice and develop them into leaders. It’s important for our

coaches to empower the young women who play for us and to inspire them to want more.

Give Your Players a Voice

The most important aspect to building a strong team culture is making sure that every player has a voice. Your players will buy into the team mission if they feel like they have ownership over the team and its direction. Getting players to buy in to your team at the outset of the season is crucial. Players who are bought in will be invested in their personal development, the development of their teammates, and development of the team as a whole. Buy-in is what keeps players attending practices and workouts, and it creates players who proactively reach out to players who are struggling to connect with the team or commit to team activities. Giving players a voice on the team is more than just accountability. It's about showing your players everyone has something to contribute and that their ideas matter. Odds are that you will end up needing player ideas throughout the season, and giving your players a voice opens up genuine channels for feedback which will only make you better as a coach.

Personally, I like to start out the year with a player-driven meeting during which all players get a say in what our core values for the year should be and what kinds of goals they want to achieve. This meeting sets the tone for the season and establishes that players drive the team and that coaches are here to support and foster successful development. My primary role during this meeting is to be a facilitator. I'm there to help organize ideas and make sure everyone's voice is heard. The first part of our meeting consists of outlining three words that will define our team. Players are encouraged to put forth a word, define what it means to them, and place it within the context of ultimate. Once the players have contributed their ideas, we give them each three votes and allow them to choose the team words. From there, we move into the second phase of the meeting: defining

team goals. I like to leave the three winning words up in a visible place to remind players that their personal and team goals should reflect some or all of the words chosen. This part of the meeting is always the part where I have the most difficulty staying quiet because it's where players set for their expectations for accountability. I do my best to stay in the facilitator role to show my players that I trust their judgment and that the team will go as far as they are willing to take it. This kind of player-driven meeting is special in high school sports; it sets ultimate apart from the pack and gives players another reason to keep coming back.

Encourage Every Player to Be a Leader

The next key aspect in building a strong culture is to encourage every player to be a leader. Ultimate tends to fall into the same trap as most other team sports where the best athletes often get chosen or elected into the captain role, regardless of their leadership abilities. I believe that the best way to avoid this is to outline the expected traits and behaviors for leaders. When doing this, I emphasize the values decided upon in the pre-season meeting as this reinforces again that the players drive the team. Part of my goal is to get players to feel empowered by both the coaching staff as well as their teammates. I find that this helps my leaders to be invested in the development of their teammates. I believe that the teams that are the strongest are those that have players who are genuinely invested in each other. The players' love for each other keeps them positive, dedicated, and competitive. I also emphasize a growth mindset in parallel with all of this. I believe that all of my players will grow over the course of the season, and I encourage this mindset in all of my leaders and players as well.

There are two very simple ways I get all players into a leadership role that don't require a lot of work on my part. The first is to explicitly use player buddies as leadership vehicles. I pair my returning players with

new players as much as possible. I put the responsibility on the returning player to bring the rookie along and make her feel like she is a part of the team. The returner is responsible for helping the rookie with everything from learning to throw to making sure they aren't overwhelmed by classes. Returners lead with their words as well as with their actions as positive role models. This system gives the rookie an outlet to talk about things as well as a built-in friend in the hallways or at lunch. High school can be tough on kids, and everyone should have someone they feel like they can go to. The second way I get each player into a leadership role is by creating tasks that individual players or groups of players can be responsible for. I define what roles are available for players, let them choose one or two, and then make sure the team knows who is in charge of each role. Some possibilities include leading warm-ups, picking the pump-up jams, coordinating team lunches, picking team dress-up days, etc. I group players into leadership packs if necessary, and I make sure that every player has a responsibility. At the end of the day, the team belongs to the players, and as a coach, I need to find ways to help them lead it.

Be a Consistent Positive Force

The last aspect of developing team culture that I focus on is being a consistent positive force as a coach. As coaches, we ask a lot of players, especially new players. It's important to recognize that players are doing their best. Often times, experience and making mistakes will be the best teachers for players during the course of the season. Their gains might come gradually, so it's important to celebrate the small successes players have along the way. I try to celebrate the things that my players do well and reinforce that all their hard work and efforts at practice are worth it. The more that we as coaches can model celebrating players, the easier it becomes for players to celebrate their teammates. At the end of the day, players' success will be measured by the

amount of work they put in for their teammates, not by their stat lines at games or tournaments.

The simplest way to be a consistent positive force is to reinforce players with positive feedback after they have success in practices and games. That "in-the-moment" feedback tells players that I'm paying attention to them and that I'm invested in their development. Another easy way to keep the positivity flowing is to end each practice or game with a round of team shout-outs. During this time, I encourage players to recognize their teammates for the successful things they did that day. I place a little extra responsibility on my captains to make sure that each player, especially the new players, are recognized for their efforts. Shout-outs give players something positive to take away with them at the end of the day. This is something they can go back to and reflect on later. One last thing that I do to recognize positive growth is to create small, game-specific goals for players to focus on. There are a million little things a team can do right in order to win a game, and players do not always recognize what those things are. I try to highlight these little things through my game-specific goals for players. This increases my players' understanding of the game while also rewarding their hard work regardless of what the scoreboard says.

Conclusion

I personally believe that in order to build a winning team or program, you must start by building a culture that the players can buy into. Three key aspects to doing this are giving your players a voice, encouraging every player to be a leader, and being a consistent positive force as a coach. These keys provide a solid foundation for the team, even as players graduate and values and goals change from year to year. Strong team culture encourages buy-in, and teams that are engaged and focused are well on their way to success!

WARM-UP AND BODYWEIGHT STRENGTH PROTOCOL FOR INJURY REDUCTION AND PERFORMANCE

BERT ABBOTT



© Samuel Hotaling

Email: striveanduplift@gmail.com

Twitter: [@striveanduplift](https://twitter.com/striveanduplift)

Instagram: [@striveanduplift](https://www.instagram.com/striveanduplift)

Bert Abbott, NSCA CSCS, NSPA CSAC, USAW SPC, is a strength and conditioning coach with Strive & Uplift out of Boulder, CO. As a coach, she's particularly invested in helping teams and individuals move their work in the gym and on the field from simply exercising to sport-specific training. She has played elite mixed and womxn's club and has coached several high school girls' teams, including as a strength and conditioning coach. You can visit www.striveanduplift.com or tweet directly at Bert (@359bertle).

ANYONE WHO'S BEEN AROUND womxn's sports for a while has a clear understanding of the gripping reality of the rates of severe knee injuries in girls and womxn. In fact, womxn are 2-4 times more likely to tear their ACLs than men. Some common theories thrown about involve inherent and unsolvable issues with the joint structure of womxn and girls. "It's too bad, but what are you going to do with a QL angle like that?!"

The simple truth is that there *is* proactive action athletes can take! Improving movement mechanics and increasing strength and stability help reduce the risk of injury in athletes. The gym is an important resource for long-term athlete development, especially in girls, as Ren Caldwell detailed [here](#)¹ and [here](#)². However, even bodyweight strength movements, which can be done anywhere with no special equipment, can play a huge part in athletic development.

FIFA put together a warm-up and bodyweight strength protocol that, when followed consistently, reduced injury rates in girls by up to 50%, especially the rates of severe knee injuries³. This warm-up protocol has been proven effective in reducing the rate of injuries across multiple sports that involve cutting. The [FIFA 11+ Warm-Up](#)⁴ is great as-is, requires no specialized equipment, and is available for free. It's very straightforward and includes

1. <https://skymagazine.com/2014/11/growing-strong-girls-ftp/>

2. <https://skymagazine.com/2016/08/girls-in-the-mix/>

3. Bizzini M, Dvorak J FIFA 11+: an effective programme to prevent football injuries in various player groups worldwide—a narrative review *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 2015;49:577-579.

4. http://www.yrsa.ca/pdf/Fifa11/11plus_workbook_e.pdf

several detailed images and cues that will help coaches and athletes ensure they're completing the movements correctly. When used completely and correctly 2-3 times a week throughout the season, this warm-up will build more resilient athletes!

Because of the specific demands of ultimate, Deb Scheibe (Doctor of Physical Therapy and two-time World Games player) and Dr. Leslianne Yen (sports medicine physician, ultimate player, and ultimate injury researcher) came up with a few modifications to the FIFA 11+. These modifications focus on strengthening the core for the rotational demands of throwing and replace the use of the soccer ball with a disc. Deb wrote about these shifts at the end of this [article](#)⁵, which I absolutely recommend reading in its entirety, as she covers a lot of great topics for ultimate players.

If you've already started peeking at the warm-up protocol, you might notice that there are no duck herders or walking quad stretches, and certainly no static stretches. I've personally had a long-standing love of duck herders and the way they make me feel, but they have no place in this warm-up. Stretching is maybe better than doing nothing before playing because it gets you in the right mindset, but unfortunately, it doesn't do much more than that and may actually do more harm than good.

Our goals for a team warm-up:

- Reduce the risk of injury above all else!
- Literally *warm up* the muscle tissue; increase blood flow and muscle temperature.
- Practice movement patterns used in-game in a controlled and progressively more game-speed manner.
- Get mentally focused and prepared to play.

Stretching doesn't meet these goals for a team warm-up; there is actually evidence that stretching increases the risk of soft tissue injury and decreases performance in

power-based sports like ultimate. For example, let's pick apart duck herders, my long-lost love. In this exercise, you kick one leg out in front of you and reach down to the ground, sometimes bouncing through the movement ballistically, often slumping through the spine to reach down to the ground. Going through our goals for warm-ups, this move does not reduce the risk of injury, and in fact may increase the risk of injury, especially if you bounce through the motion. Rather than increasing blood flow to the muscle, stretching restricts blood flow, counteracting our second goal. The move, especially when players round their backs aggressively to reach the ground, resembles nothing I've seen on the field of play. This doesn't automatically disqualify a movement on its own, but that's not a vote in its favor. Again, it may reach our final goal of getting mentally prepared to play because players associate duck herders with "now my hamstrings are ready to go!", but that is an association we should try to break.

It's important to focus on proper mechanics throughout the warm-up. The primary ideas to ingrain in athletes are proud chests and stable knees. "Proud chest" is a great cue that helps bring your posture into a neutral spine and allows greater control of the core. Try it out wherever you are right now and notice the changes throughout your torso, hip position, and muscular engagement. "Stable knees" is a simplification of an idea that helps reduce the risk of knee injuries. We generally want our knees to track in line with our toes as we run, land, and change direction. When the knees collapse to either side or wobble during these actions, that adds strain to the ligaments and other connective tissues that hold together the joint, increasing the risk of chronic or acute injury. Conversely, training the knees to track in line with the toes and remain stable under increasing amounts of force reduces the risk of injury. The FIFA 11+ protocol has great images that show both of these concepts.

I've added a few modifications to Parts I and III of the warm-up protocol to more specifically replicate the

5. <https://www.discnw.org/p/run-faster-jump-higher-throw-farther>

motions we use in ultimate, including drop steps and bail runs on defense as well as lateral acceleration. Additionally, it uses the ultimate-specific modifications to Part II detailed in Deb's article. Please note that Part II is used to prepare for practices and conditioning workouts, but not before games or tournaments. There are a few exercise progressions in Part II. Start with the most basic levels of the progression. Once each player has mastered that level by showing great posture and knee tracking consistently through all sets of the movement, they can individually move to the next level of that specific progression. If a player has an injury or something else that makes a higher level of the progression too difficult, they can back down again until they're ready. Leverage this as a teaching moment! Similar to throwing and other skills, we are all just looking to improve from where we are now, and it's okay that teammates are in different places in each progression.

All of the movements in this protocol, put together, gradually increase the intensity of movements and slowly introduce more demanding change of direction tasks over the course of the warm-up. By using the progressions in Part II, they also slowly increase strength and stability in players and improve movement patterns without the use of any specialized equipment (except a disc!).

Warm Up Protocol in Spreadsheet Form:

<http://tiny.cc/UltimateWarmUp>

Warm-Up PDF:

<https://www.striveanduplift.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Strive-Uplift-Field-Warm-Up-for-Ultimate.pdf>

Warm-Up Images and Videos:

<https://www.striveanduplift.com/2019/10/21/field-warm-up-for-ultimate/>

Other Resources:

Quick Reference FIFA 11+ Sheet (English):

http://www.f-marc.com/files/downloads/posters_generic/english.pdf

FIFA 11+ Manual (English):

http://www.yrsa.ca/pdf/Fifa11/11plus_workbook_e.pdf

FIFA 11+ Manual (Spanish):

<https://es.slideshare.net/mfalpri/fifa-11-23186775>

TEAMS NEED A VARIETY OF LEADERS

AJ BEARD



Email: Adrieanna.beard@gmail.com

AJ Beard has been playing ultimate for fun and competitively for 22 years. She is inspired by the people around her who enabled her to grow as her own kind of leader and has been helping womxn in masters, club, college and high school learn the game and other transferable skills.

I HAVE BEEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES where I felt very uncomfortable, and not knowing what skills I brought to the table, I unwittingly sabotaged myself and the group I led from achieving their potential. This has happened in my volunteer work, in ultimate, as well as professionally. Not knowing the value I could bring to the group left me scratching my head and feeling like I was underperforming as a leader. For a while, these failures caused me to run away from leadership roles completely because I felt like I was letting people down. It wasn't until I joined a team that had several different kinds of leaders AND was looking to develop more leaders that I found a space to identify what I was best at contributing, beyond the typical captain role. In this article, I'll share some of the different kinds of leaders that I've encountered, and I hope that you can identify with attributes in one or more of these styles to help YOU find your leadership niche.

Knowing yourself is the first step in understanding what kind of leader you'll be best as.

Answering these questions can guide you in the direction of understanding your preferred leadership style. It's also important to recognize that you may not fit squarely into just one type of leadership. That's ok, too! The more you understand your leadership strengths, the better you'll be able to identify roles for you to contribute.

Identifying Your Leadership Style

Group 1

- Do you enjoy making snap decisions with limited information?
- Do you feel comfortable handling conflict with others, 1:1 or in a group?
- Do you like representing others?
- Can you stick with a decision once you've made it?
- When presented with a problem, do you feel confident when proposing a solution without others' input?
- How do you feel about taking others' opinions and making a decision?

Group 2

- Do you prefer collecting a lot of information to guide what step should be taken next?
- Do like to share details with others without pushing a specific direction or opinion of your own?
- Are you good with details and short-term goals?
- Do you like writing and communicating clearly when you have the information you need?

Group 3

- Do you like rallying people when spirits are down?
- Do you like coming up with creative ways to think about things or solve a problem?
- Are people often surprised by your ideas or suggestions?
- Do you see the best in a situation and seek to understand others' perspectives?

Group 4

- Are you a dreamer or a big-picture thinker?
- Do you come up with inspirational outcomes that your peers think are impossible?
- Are you able to accomplish things without help from others but don't always know how you got there?

Teams need all types of leaders to be successful - from getting started, building, maintaining, and winning on and off the field.

The roles these leaders fill may have different names or focuses from team to team. Some examples are: field captain, administrative captain, spirit captain, finance chair, drills and technique, travel, equipment, etc. In order to be successful, teams need a diverse group of leaders to contribute a variety of skills. Are your strengths in administrative or advisory roles rather than being the person rallying the team huddle? You should be able to support the team in a way that fits you AND benefits the team. Leveraging your strengths and recognizing that you don't have to be amazing at everything will help you and your team.

The questions are a small subset of characteristics for different leadership types and are not meant to be comprehensive, but hopefully they will spark introspection as you consider your own strengths and/or think about how to develop more leaders on your team.

If you answered yes to most of the questions in Group 1, you likely would be comfortable representing your team as a field captain. This role involves play—and line—calling decisions that require fast decision making and comfort with ambiguity of how a game is progressing. It also requires making adjustments to opponents, weather conditions, as well as your own team's performance. You may also be best suited for championing the building of a new team at your school or in your community. You'd be great at recruiting interested players and rallying other kinds of leaders. This type of leader is often the most externally visible type but is only a small part of the whole equation needed to help a team be successful.

If you answered yes to most of the questions in Group 2, there are many valuable contributions you can make to the team that allow it to run smoothly. A leader with these skills is incredibly appreciated by teammates, parents, opponents and school administrators. Administrative duties might include rostering, team / parent / opponent communications, organizing finances, travel planning and logistics, and ordering jerseys. Other tasks might include contributing to team playbook

development, reviewing tape from games, and analysis of your teammates' specific skills.

If you answered yes to most of the questions in Group 3, you could make a great spirit captain or co-captain, keeping focus on the [Spirit of the Game](#)¹, both on and off the field. A team's spirit is reflected in how teammates treat each other and their opponents - with integrity, respect, camaraderie, and a positive attitude. Being silly and enjoying the game for its own sake are valuable traits for spirit captains as well, since building a team and enduring all of the ups and downs that go with it require we don't take ourselves too seriously.

If you answered yes to most of the questions in Group 4, you have a lot to offer the team in drills demonstration, [visualization](#)² practice, team charter development, and goal setting. These tools give your team aspirations to strive for in practice, team activities, games, and tournaments. They require leaders who can dream beyond what has already happened, or take something small and make it really big and powerful.

What Next?

One thing that stands out when learning about [preferences](#)³ and leadership styles is that they can be portrayed as very black and white. As mentioned above, you may not fit squarely into one leadership type. As you think more deeply about your strengths and interests, it's important to consider where will you THRIVE. So as a next step, take no action outside yourself. Look inside and assess what activities in each of the sections makes you feel most energized. What has given you the best outcomes? Hopefully this article also helps you to look around you and see what helps your peers be successful.

Personally, I've found that I really thrive as a Group 3 leader. I love to rally my team. I take pride in building a

sense of camaraderie and developing a positive focus on how we treat each other as well as our opponents. There are times when I've filled other leadership roles, but I've found that I am happiest and most successful when I find ways to contribute that are consistent with a Group 3 leader. It took many years for me to find my niche, and I'm grateful to all of the teams and leaders who helped me develop as a leader along the way. Hopefully this article will give you a bit of courage to get to know yourself and others in ways that allow your strengths to shine in a team setting, truly producing a sum that is greater than its parts.

1. https://www.usultimate.org/about/ultimate/spirit_of_the_game.aspx

2. <https://us.humankinetics.com/blogs/excerpt/visualization-aids-in-reaching-goals>

3. <https://keirse.com/temperament-overview/>



SECTION IV: SPIRIT

US Open 2018: Paul Andris - UtiPhotos

HOW TO TEACH SPIRIT IN 2020

MEG DUFFY



© Kari Paine

Twitter: @meg_duffy

Meg Duffy is a player and coach in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Author's Note:

I am a white, cisgendered athlete and coach. Most of the teams that I have coached have been majority-white high school and college womxn's teams. In some places in this article, I use the term "womxn" to indicate that I'm referring to a group that includes female-identifying and non-binary people.

IN THE LAST DECADE, ULTIMATE PLAYERS across the country have striven to make our sport more inclusive. Through the labor of many grassroots organizers, discussions within our sport of racial and gender equity are now commonplace. These efforts are paying off at the macro level. We've seen the creation of the Premier Ultimate League (PUL), which is the first professional womxn's ultimate league, which includes "gender, racial, and economic diversity in the sport of ultimate frisbee" in its [mission statement](#)¹. Atlanta Flying Disc Club's [Project Diversity](#)² committee hosted the first Color of Ultimate game, highlighting racial and socioeconomic inequity in the ultimate community. These developments are moving our community in the right direction, but to complete the shift into an inclusive, welcoming community, we need to rethink how we teach some of the fundamental pillars of ultimate at the local level. Starting with Spirit of the Game.

In the 2018 Without Limits College Manual, Alyssa Weatherford described how our implementation of Spirit of the Game (SOTG), the on-field discussions over calls, and the way we view our opponents, is impacted by our biases and thereby upholds systems of oppression like racism and sexism. She and other authors ([Chris Lehmann](#)³ is a great example) have sounded the alarm that the structure of SOTG and how bias may influence its implementation is overdue for a second look. Here, I'll

1. <https://www.premierultimateleague.com/mission-statement>

2. <http://www.afdc.com/the-color-of-ultimate-atl/>

3. <https://ultiworld.com/2018/03/12/ultimate-race-spirit-game/>

review what we know about Spirit of the Game and talk through new ways of teaching and learning from high school players about Spirit.

What we know

1. Ultimate communities place a high value on Spirit of the Game. Some of the most coveted prizes in ultimate are awarded to players based on their exhibition of Spirit. The fact that each player must know the rules to make their own calls gives players a common language. For many players, SOTG sets ultimate apart from other sports, which rely on referees to penalize players for breaking the rules. Ultimate players who bend or break the rules by committing obvious infractions are typically chastised by their teammates or coaches. In short, this loosely defined code of conduct allows our system of self-refereeing to function.

2. In the US, we live in a patriarchal society built to favor white culture. Most American institutions were made by and for white men to the exclusion of women and people of color--obvious examples include Congress and the American university system. While the US has changed quite a bit since its inception, these hierarchies are held in place by structural factors (like barriers to education or employment), social norms, and prejudice. The [racial wealth gap](#)⁴ and the [gender pay gap](#)⁵ provide clear examples of the outcomes of these inequities.

As American culture values white-ness and male-ness, so does the ultimate community in myriad ways (as discussed in detail below). Our implicit biases and explicit prejudices play out in our practice of SOTG, whether through our decision to call a particular violation or in whose opinions we believe. Beyond the individual level, our biases inform our impression of a team and we turn that impression into a reputation by discussing it with others.

4. <https://www.demos.org/research/asset-value-whiteness-understanding-racial-wealth-gap>

5. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/02/business/equal-pay-day.html>

What needs to change

To start with the most obvious, we need to stop penalizing black and brown players for behaviors which would be acceptable for white players. As others have noted before, the reaction to a player's behavior on the ultimate field varies depending on both the athlete and the spectator. Spiking the disc after a score provides a great example of how reaction to a specific behavior can vary depending on subjective (or prejudiced) criteria. For white men, this behavior is typically seen as an appropriate celebration. Even if the spike itself is a little too in-your-face, people tend to think it's just boys being boys. The exact same behavior from a black player is far less likely to be brushed off as boyish fun. At the extreme, black and brown players are perceived as aggressive or threatening for behaving this way. (A note, per USAU Guidelines: "Because the potential for misperception is high, spiking is prohibited at the youth level unless otherwise agreed upon by the coaches or captains.")

Beyond obvious discrimination, we need to change the subtle, gendered norms of fair and respectful play. A prime example of these subtle norms is how womxn players must achieve a higher standard of positivity than male-identifying players to be considered "spirited." Within the womxn's division, it's very common to see two opposing players high five, even after one player scores on the other. Many on-field discussions are calm and amicable. At some levels, womxn's teams will sing songs to one another after a game. These positive behaviors are wonderful, but should not be viewed as necessary for a team to be "spirited." From my outsider perspective, it seems that teams in the open division can achieve a reputation as a spirited team without half as much effort towards outward positivity.

How we get there

Changing the use and application of Spirit of the Game in ultimate will require a dramatic shift in thinking at

all levels of play. However, there are activities that your team can do today to take a more inclusive approach to Spirit of the Game.

When working Spirit of the Game into practice plans at the high school level, prioritize a) knowledge of the rules and b) a basic understanding of the relationship between biases and Spirit. Learning the rules is a clear necessity for fair play on any team. Conversely, few teams work to understand how biases play out in our self-refereed sport. This process is a necessary step towards making ultimate into a more fair and equitable game. Here are four ideas for putting these priorities into practice.

1. Incorporate SOTG into a larger team discussion on equity.

Team time is a precious resource, but there are few better ways to spend it than on a team-wide discussion on Spirit and equity. There are many articles that highlight the relationship between Spirit and systems of oppression (for example, [Your Perception Forces Our Reality](#)⁶ by Larry Melton). Choose one of those articles for the team to read and discuss. [Set ground rules](#)⁷ to ensure a productive conversation. Be conscious of how your own identities (particularly regarding gender, race, and class) will impact your perceptions. And finally, do not let the fear of saying something wrong prevent you from starting this conversation your team.⁸

2. Designate a Spirit Captain.

This person can be a captain or simply an enthusiastic rules-follower. This USA Ultimate [Spirit Captain Guide](#)⁹ provides a comprehensive breakdown of what this role entails. This player can improve the whole team's knowledge by bringing a copy of the most recent edition of the rule book to every practice and tournament. Whenever a rule is discussed on the field, that person will

make sure that the entire team knows the rule during the next huddle.

3. Have a rules-focused scrimmage.

Dedicate 20-30 minutes of practice to scrimmaging with a focus on making calls and discussing the rules. Throughout the scrimmage, allow one team to break a rule for the span of one point but do not let their opponent know what rule they will be breaking. For example, tell one team to travel every time they have the disc. On the next point, tell the other team to (lightly) foul their opponents on the mark. As they go through the process of calling and discussing infractions, tell the team to focus on having respectful discussions and knowing the finer points of the rules (e.g., what qualifies as a foul, what stall should the disc come back in on, etc). This scrimmage should be fun (how often do you get to blatantly break the rules?) but also provide a low-pressure situation for players to practice calls, giving them more confidence to do so in a game. As you debrief this activity with your team afterwards, harken back to your team-wide discussion on SOTG and equity as appropriate.

4. Gamify rules knowledge.

Only have a few minutes during practice? Provide a small reward to a player who first correctly answers a rules question. Have an entire practice moved indoors? I recommend Rules Jeopardy. I've included one version of Rules Jeopardy, created by Ben Murphy, on the last page. We used this for an indoor practice with the University of Michigan Flywheel during the 2018-2019 season. Looking at our version, you can see we included some general ultimate trivia and bogus questions. Including categories like these helps to keep people engaged.

A final note

There are potentially endless ways to improve your team's understanding of Spirit of the Game from the basic rules knowledge to a nuanced understanding of

6. <https://www.usultimate.org/news/your-perception-forces-our-reality/>

7. <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/publinks/generalguidelines>

8. For more information on how to start these conversations, see Rena Cawabata's entry in the 2018 Without Limits College Manual.

9. <https://www.usultimate.org/assets/1/Page/Spirit%20Captain%20Role.pdf>

how you and your teammates experience Spirit. If you are approaching this journey as a coach, remember that this process is a two-way street. Your players are experts on their own experiences and can teach as well as learn when it comes to Spirit of the Game.

Thanks to Khalif El-Salaam, coach of the 2019 YCC mixed division champions DiscNW Bankroll, for his input in the formation of this entry.

RULES JEOPARDY			
RULES 1	COLLEGE ULTIMATE	RULES 2	CLUB ULTIMATE
How close do you have to be to call a pick? <i>10 feet.</i>	2018 Callahan Award winners? <i>Jackelyne Nguyen, Cal; Gabe Hernandez, Stanford.</i>	Name three calls that will stop play. <i>Foul, violation, travel, pick, stall, etc.</i>	Name three events in the Triple Crown Tour. <i>Pro-Elite Challenge, Select Flight Invite, US Open Club Championships, Sectionals, etc.</i>
What happens if you call a timeout but don't have any left? <i>Turnover.</i>	Finalists in both the Men's and Women's Divisions at 2018 USA Ultimate Nationals? <i>UNC/Pittsburgh, Dartmouth/Colorado.</i>	What happens when soft cap is blown? <i>Finish the point and then add two to the highest score.</i>	2018 Great Lakes Women's Regional Champions? <i>Nemesis.</i>
What state is the disc in when you are retrieving the pull? <i>Live, note disc can be turned over if picked up and put down.</i>	Most recent Callahan winner from University of Michigan and what year they won? <i>Paula Seville, 2012.</i>	What happens if you drop the pull? <i>Turnover.</i>	2018 Club Ultimate National Champions in each division? <i>PoNY, AMP, Fury.</i>
Do you have to wait for defense to be ready when putting an out of bounds pull in play at the brick mark? <i>No.</i>	Name three USAU regions in the college division that we are not in.	Can you contest a travel? <i>Yes.</i>	Name two of the coaches' pets.

**Jeopardy board reflects rules, conditions, and entities prior to January 1, 2020.*

WHAT DOES SPIRIT MEAN IN YOUTH ULTIMATE?

KIMBERLY REYNOLDS



Email: kreynolds@mcpasd.k12.wi.us

Coach Reynolds is in her eighth year of coaching and brings 15 years of experience in ultimate. She has played at almost every level, including playing ultimate with the mixed team Madison NOISE, women's team Madison Heist and most recently with the women's team Aged Cheddar at the Masters Championships in 2019. Her high school girls' ultimate team has been the recipient of the Spirit Award at multiple tournaments, including Neuqua Knockout, Madison Mudbath, and three times at the Wisconsin State Championships.

I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A COMPETITOR. Ask anyone who has skied with me, gone on a run with me, or attempted to best me at a game night. I loved sports from an early age and could never get enough. I have played softball, baseball (on a team where I was one of two girls playing with boys), basketball, cross country running, cross country skiing, and track and field. I ran cross country and track in college. In hindsight, I seemed to have landed mostly on individual sports rather than team sports. The politics and arguing common in many other sports always rubbed me the wrong way, and I wonder if that's why I subconsciously worked them out of my life.

I remember being at basketball games and cringing as parents and players alike argued with refs, swore, and threw things; it made me so uncomfortable. There always seemed to be a fair amount of animosity between players, which I thought was just how things were. However, all of that negativity left a bad taste in my mouth at times. The sport of ultimate is not completely free of the animosity some rivals have towards one another, but ultimate has better checks and balances in place to negate some of those issues.

I love having spirit circles at the end of a game. "Game respects game" is something I hear a lot, and gathering afterwards with our opponents to talk about how we appreciate the level of play because it pushes us and makes us better means a lot. It's a check and balance I wish that all sports had. You have to play in a way that you can look your opponent in the eye afterward and have a discussion with them.

As a middle school teacher, the skill of having differing perspectives and learning to communicate and listen to others in a respectful way is something our young, aspiring student athletes need. It's something most adults need. I cannot tell you how many parents have told me how impressed they are seeing their child calmly explain their perspective on the field. You just don't see that in any other team sport.

I always have my middle school players circle up after a scrimmage and do a spirit circle. The first spirit circle we ever do, we do as a whole group, and I do the talking. I speak truthfully and from the heart, make eye contact with my players, and also talk about how something they did elevated my own game or outlook. Young kids need to see positive examples and adults modeling this behavior to feel comfortable trying this themselves. My middle school players then have a spirit circle after every scrimmage and choose someone from the other team to be the spirit winner. This really prepares them for their first game, and I have SO many kids all wanting to do the talking when we go up against another team for the first time.

However, there is one tendency I see with many girls, which I've focused on changing—over apologizing—and either not making a call or retracting a call too quickly when an opponent disagrees. I have to tell my girls that deciding not to make an obvious call because you “feel bad calling a foul” is NOT Spirit of the Game. Oftentimes, I think young ultimate players, especially girls, think Spirit of the Game is just being really nice and saying “I'm sorry” a whole lot. It is my goal to make all of the young people I coach become comfortable sticking up for themselves and communicating in a calm, respectful way. This is a skill that cannot be expected to magically happen during a game; it must be practiced.

I LOVE when someone calls a foul at practice, and I can see the other person disagrees. I get so excited and make sure everyone pays attention as my high school

girls talk it out. I also make sure to compliment them for sharing their perspectives and listening. During my high school girls' practice, I will sometimes purposely call a foul when there wasn't one (you should see their look of shock), and then I ask them to explain their perspective. It can be a bit daunting trying to explain why you're not guilty to your coach, but girls need to work at building the self-confidence to calmly and respectfully stick up for themselves, state their case, and then listen to the other perspective.

I have found that girls who have played other team sports seem to be less afraid of speaking up and giving their opinion. However, even these girls will often want to be reassured afterwards that what they called was “correct.” It has been my experience that girls, more so than boys, want reassurance that their call or response was valid. I try to help my girls through this by asking them questions afterwards, “Were you being honest?” “Did you speak calmly and do your best to explain your perspective?” If yes, then you did great! They know they can come to me for a rules question, but that's it. I have found giving girls that mental checklist of questions helps them feel better and more confident going into a discussion. It doesn't matter what the coach's perspective is. If you speak truthfully, calmly, and respectfully, you're playing in a spirited way.

It is my hope that my players, through Spirit of the Game, become confident in their ability to articulate their perspective, resolve problems, listen with intention, and be truthful. These are aspects of the game that are transferable to all aspects of life. I hope my players keep playing ultimate for a very long time, but if they don't, I'll know that I have instilled in them character traits that can be tools to help them well beyond the game of ultimate.

MUSINGS ON SPIRIT OF THE GAME

CAROLYN FINNEY



Email: cfinney11@gmail.com

Twitter: [@finnay11](https://twitter.com/finnay11)

I started playing in 2007 with the UC Santa Barbara Burning Skirts. I have since played pickup, in organized leagues, elite club and for the U.S. National Team. I also have experience coaching college as well as players in grades 3-12.

SPIRIT OF THE GAME IS IMPORTANT because it is one of the foundations of our sport and something that makes ultimate truly unique. Spirit of the Game allows for the highest level of competition while building trust, respect, and sometimes even friendship with both teammates and opponents. In this article, I will share some of my thoughts about what Spirit of the Game means to me. I hope that this article encourages you to think critically about Spirit and to encourage your teammates to do the same!

Spirit of the Game is something of a buzz word in ultimate, and more and more often, we are having inter- and intra-team discussions of what Spirit means to us and how we want it to show up in our experiences with the sport. I'm glad that these conversations are happening because they help shape our vision for the sport and hold us accountable for our actions. They also build a sense of community, which strengthens Spirit of the Game as well as ultimate as a whole.

I started playing ultimate after years of playing and loving basketball (which I still love). When I first started playing ultimate, playing without referees and relying on "Spirit of the Game" to maintain fair competition seemed crazy to me. While sportsmanship exists in every sport, Spirit of the Game truly sets ultimate apart. While we do have observers in some games and their outside perspective can be helpful, the majority of ultimate games are not played with observers. This means that players and coaches have a heavy responsibility to maintain fairness and good sportsmanship.

As one of my club teammates pointed out, when you get beat, there are a few options. You can be upset with yourself, you can be frustrated by someone else, or you can be curious about how you got beat and think about what you can do better in the future. It's a good thing to appreciate others' abilities! Your teammates and opponents' skills and talents can push you to improve and can raise the level of the game as a whole. This competitiveness is part of what makes ultimate so much fun. Spirit has helped me to develop a healthy appreciation for my opponents, which has pushed me to be even better.

While Spirit of the Game is ultimately about maintaining a fair game, that can look very different to players and teams from different cultures. This variance is another cool thing about ultimate, and I've learned a lot from players around the world by seeking to better understand how they define Spirit of the Game and by working through our differences on the field.

One of the differences that comes up most often is the expected level of contact between opponents. I've found that the issue is usually a lack of alignment on how much contact should be acceptable. The best we can do is understand what others' expectations are, share our own expectations, and attempt to come to a consensus. We make calls when we feel an infraction has occurred, and we expect our opponents to do the same.

Making a call on the field is not an unspirited thing to do when you truly believe an infraction has occurred that impacts the integrity of the game. Trusting that no player is intentionally abusing or misinterpreting the rules is the first step to having an open conversation about the play that has just occurred. This trust is central to Spirit of the Game, and these conversations help us to explain our perspectives and to reach a fair ruling.

Ultimate is in a period of tremendous growth, and that means there are lots of new teams and new players. It's often incumbent on more experienced players to teach

and explain the rules to newer players. This experience of explaining Spirit of the Game and rules to newer players has taught me a lot about how Spirit can mean so many different things to people. It's also reminded me that showing up to play will never be only about on-field athletic performances; it's also about character and maintaining the integrity of our sport.

Spirit of the Game can be used as a recruiting tool for athletes who might be burnt out on the screaming and whistles of other sports they have been playing. Be proud of this aspect of our game, and share with others why a sport that holds sportsmanship and integrity as high values is so great! I've found in my coaching, particularly of younger players, that Spirit of the Game is an incredible recruiting tool for players and parents alike. Spirit is also a valuable teaching tool. By teaching players how to discuss a call and work through disagreements amicably, I'm teaching them skills that they'll apply to other parts of life as well.

Spirit of the Game is something that I need to work at continuously. It would be a lie for me to say every interaction I've ever had on an ultimate field has been cordial and resolved with cool heads. Throwing perfect passes AND having calm Spirit discussions require patience. I have aspirations with regard to my skill as well as my Spirit, and they are both continuous targets.

As you think about Spirit of the Game and how it applies to your personal game as well as your team, take some time to set goals and think about how you want to show up for yourself, your teammates, and your opponents. Write these things down the same way that you would with other season goals, and work on them intentionally throughout the season. If you're able, it's a good idea to start conversations about Spirit with your team as well. Learn the rules, ask questions, and have fun! Ultimate belongs to all of us, and we all have a responsibility to keep Spirit of the Game alive!



SECTION V: EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION

US Open YCC Playoffs 2019: Kevin Leclaire - UltiPhotos

THE POWER OF GIRLS IN SPORTS

LIBBY CRAVENS



Email: libbyelc@gmail.com

Twitter: @libspenguin

Libby Cravens is a youth ultimate coach and organizer who was a long-time member of the ultimate community in Austin, TX. She was one of only a handful of girls playing in Texas as a high schooler in the mid-2000s and is extremely invested in growing the number of girls playing ultimate. She enjoys coaching players from elementary school through club, but is most passionate about her role as a Girls' Outreach Coordinator for the Girls' Ultimate Movement.

LIKE MOST MASTERS-ELIGIBLE WOMXN playing ultimate today, I come from a multi-sport background that did not initially include ultimate. I began playing soccer before kindergarten and was running longer distances as early as elementary school. My parents had both played sports through college and were able to provide the means (financial, logistical, and otherwise) for me to participate in organized sports. Not all girls have that opportunity or encouragement. As someone who is invested in growing the number of girls playing ultimate and who is a strong believer in the many benefits of playing our sport, I feel it is important to think about the historical context of girls' participation in sports as well as some of the potential barriers to participation when examining our ability to recruit and retain girls.

Ultimate has only been around for 50 years and is a relatively young sport. Limited research has been done specifically on ultimate; however, the broader research on sports participation is also applicable when considering the benefits of ultimate in the lives of our players.

Historical Context

The 19th Amendment gave women the right to vote in 1920 (100 years ago). "First-wave" feminism of the 1960s started to bring a new tide of change. The Civil Rights Movement led to The Civil Rights Act of 1964, which included Title VII. This prohibited discrimination in the workplace based on sex. Title IX was passed in 1972 to

provide equal opportunity to educational access (not specifically to provide access to sports, but that was a byproduct). Prior to 1972, only one in 27 girls played sports. More recently, approximately one in 2.5 girls play sports, an all-time high (as of 2014). The number of female high school athletes has risen more than tenfold in the past 45 years, while seven times as many women compete in college sports (2016); however, we still have not reached the pre-Title IX male athlete numbers, and female athletes receive less scholarship money and are shown to have lower-quality resources as athletes.

Gender discrimination and gender stereotypes in sports are still prevalent.

Think about examples of gender discrimination from your own experience. I know I can think of more than a few. Some socialized perceptions that have continued over time include the ideas that women are more fragile, women are more passive, women are less capable in sports, sports are “masculine,” and women in sport are intruding on “male” spaces. Female athletes are bullied and discriminated against based on actual and/or perceived sexual orientation as well. “While Title IX has created more opportunities in sport for women, it has done very little to reduce the stereotypical image of women in sports.” (from an article entitled, “Examination of Gender Equity and Female Participation in Sport”).

Female athletes are also less visible. Only 2-4% of media coverage is dedicated to women, despite women making up 40% of the participants. Discrimination against women and girls in sports continues, including pay inequity for both players and coaches. For example, the recent World Cup Champions, the United States Women’s National Soccer Team, filed a lawsuit based on “institutionalized gender discrimination” occurring against their team.

What’s the difference between boys and girls?

The experiences of boys and girls in youth sports are not created equal. You might wonder, “How so?”

- Girls are twice as likely to drop out of sports as adolescents (and primarily at age 8, age 12, or when graduating high school).
- Research has shown that the higher the IQ of a fifth-grade girl, the faster she gave up on a challenge. Research concluded that girls are more likely to doubt their abilities than boys.
- We praise girls and boys differently. We need to be saying, “Yes, you can!” and affirming and encouraging them in meaningful ways.
- 75% of high school boys participate in sports, while only 61% of girls do.
- Poverty impacts girls in sports at a higher rate than boys.
- Playgrounds/fields are dominated by boys, and girls are left on the sideline.

Note: Preceding facts in this section were taken from a Bay Area Women’s Sports Initiative presentation at a 2016 gender equity conference.

What can we (as coaches, organizers, parents, etc.) do to support girls’ participation?

Consider the language we use (e.g., person defense, rather than man defense) and the culture we create for our teams and our players. Emphasize skill mastery, effort and improvement over winning and performance. We need to break down barriers to participation in sport for girls, increase the number of womxn coaches, grow female representation in media, and be conscious of how we communicate with girls. Get involved with the Girls’ Ultimate Movement (GUM), which is a community-wide outreach program designed to increase girls’ participation in our sport and build their leadership skills. GUM is working to make ultimate accessible for girls. Encourage other womxn you know who would make great coaches to get involved.

Why should girls participate in sports?

How do we get more girls to play? What might motivate them to do so? Encouraging girls to participate means

that they too can reap the many benefits of participation.

- Participation leads to improved physical health, including better self-reported health, fewer chronic illnesses, reduced risk of obesity, greater bone density, and reduced risk of breast cancer.
- Participation yields improved psychological well-being, including higher body-esteem, higher self-esteem, and lower rates of depression.
- Sports participation is also associated with improved academic achievement, including better organization and time-management skills, lower dropout rates, higher STEM performance, and higher aspirations for post-high school education (41% more likely to graduate from college within six years, 13% more likely to graduate from college).
- Importantly, participation can result in increased community involvement, including being more likely to volunteer and register to vote.
- Sports participation can even have positive career impacts through the development of team-minded skills, leadership skills, and self-discipline.
- Girls who participate in sports are also less likely to engage in “risky” behaviors (e.g., smoking, illicit drug use, unprotected sex, etc.).
- Girls who are physically active as children are more likely to be active adults.

Why should girls play ultimate?

Research shows playing more than one sport provides the greatest benefit, but only 37% of teens play more than one sport, and 39% of girls don’t even play one sport. “Sport sampling” is beneficial, and early specialization is not better for our athletes. Some awesome sports to pair with ultimate include track and field, cross country, tennis, and soccer. If a girl does not participate in sports by age 10, there is only a 10% chance she will participate at age 25! Kids are interested in trying new sports, but they need the opportunity to do so. Participating in sports creates future girl bosses; 94% of female business executives played sports, and 80%

of Fortune 500 Women CEOs played sports. Because ultimate is a young sport, we can make meaningful change NOW and shape the culture of our sport together.

What prevents girls’ participation?

Some of the barriers to girls’ participation include lack of access, safety and transportation issues, social stigma, decreased quality of experience, cost, and lack of positive role models. Ultimate, like other sports, continues to struggle with both gender and racial equity. Participation in sports is linked to household income. Girls from lower economic backgrounds and girls of color engage in less physical activity, have less access to sports and physical fitness programs, and suffer negative health consequences as a result. Fewer than two-thirds of African American and Hispanic girls play sports, while more than three-quarters of Caucasian girls do.

What can you do to encourage girls to play sports, including ultimate?

Invite girls and womxn in your life to join you on the field! Go with your teammates, players, daughters, nieces, friends’ kids, etc., to girls’ and womxn’s athletic events. Give the gift of sports equipment and apparel; make sure the girls in your life have what they need to play. Pursue the stories of female athletes. Seek out coverage of girls/womxn. There is a growing library of available footage on YouTube and elsewhere.

Girls’ ultimate can only succeed with the support of passionate adults and the buy-in of their peers. Think about what you can do to continue to grow girls’ ultimate - then GO DO IT!

For Further Research:

Research by the Women's Sports Foundation:

<https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/research/articles-and-reports/>

Research by the Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport:

<https://www.cehd.umn.edu/tuckercenter/>

Research by the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity:

https://www.caaws.ca/?fbclid=IwAR1XHVWeQjQwQ7gebdoSxSlvC1MXc-FwO6q8Ha_w-uvVJTW-wimvu-Bijhl

Research by the Aspen Institute Project Play:

<https://www.aspenprojectplay.org/>

momsTEAM Article:

https://www.momsteam.com/successful-parenting/sports-benefit-girls-in-many-ways?fbclid=IwAR1CXJJVCeCziTNqREpqB-HgJjNpvJfsHU4CJFUXTGOT5dAd6v2eUSGk_Tk

Research by the national coalition for WOMEN & GIRLS in EDUCATION:

https://ncwge.org/athletics.html?fbclid=IwAR3rg-kE_JBwO7a3pzdKfj-iwQMaw6HVRhoEX1tdb3FpKHrwwFzmMnTkDqA

ESPN article by Greg Garber:

<https://www.espn.com/gen/womenandsports/020619title9.html>

“Why are girls less physically active than boys?” article:

<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0150041>

Relation between self-recalled childhood physical activity and adult physical activity: The women's health initiative article:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4749265/>

The right feedback could keep young athletes in the game, Global Sport Matters article:

<https://globalsportmatters.com/youth/2019/02/18/right-feedback-could-keep-young-athletes-in-game/>

Visit the GUM Website:

<http://gum.usultimate.org/>

The Sport Journal's “Examination of Gender Equity and Female Sport Participation” article:

<http://thesportjournal.org/article/examination-of-gender-equity-and-female-participation-in-sport/>

Bay Area Women's Sports Initiative:

<https://bawsi.org/>

HOW TO BUILD A GENDER INCLUSIVE HS BOYS' OR MIXED TEAM

CARA CROUCH



© Mike Natenberg

Email: cara.crouch@gmail.com

Twitter: [@caracrouch](https://twitter.com/caracrouch)

Cara Crouch has played ultimate for 17 years at the college, club, world, and now professional levels. She has coached at the middle school, high school, youth club, and college levels for 15 years in Texas and has coached in clinics across the United States and around the world. She is currently a player on Austin Torch, and a co-coach of Kealing Middle School and the Texas Tango U-20 YCC team.

IF ONLY THE PHRASE, “everything is bigger in Texas,” were also true about our womxn’s¹ youth scene. Instead, the unfortunate truth is that the state that I call home is woefully behind when it comes to issues related to gender equity in our sport, especially in our youth scene. There are currently *zero* girls’² high school ultimate teams in the state of Texas. Most of the young womxn that do play compete in the boys’ division because there are not enough womxn on their teams to qualify for the mixed division, which stands currently at an anemic four teams across the state.³

In Austin, we’ve built a thriving middle school league which sends dozens of ultimate-obsessed young womxn players on to high school, only to have many of them quit playing in part due to a team culture at their high school that is not inclusive. On many of these high school boys’ and mixed teams, the few womxn playing are often left to confront, ignore, or just deal with acts of gender inequality, whether they be overt or repeated microaggressions.

The aim of this article is to provide tips on how to create a more gender⁴ inclusive team culture among high school

1. Womxn is used in this article to include all people who identify and/or express as female.
2. “Girls”, “mixed”, and “boys” team labels are used here to denote the names of the official USAU-designated youth competition divisions.
3. According to [USAU Youth Competition Guidelines](#), in order for a mixed team to register and play in a championship, league, or warm-up event, the team must have a minimum of 10 players with at least four per gender represented to start.
4. The need for inclusivity at all levels is vital. However, the focus is on gender in this article because of space and a lack of personal experience and qualifications speaking about other types of inclusivity.

boys' teams⁵, since most of the womxn players in our state are playing on boys' teams. However, many of these tips will also apply to, and benefit, mixed teams.

The impetus to create an inclusive team culture should be on both the team leadership as well as every individual player in the program. Therefore, the following process should be player-led, as much as possible, to gain buy-in from the whole team. Every team and every individual player will be starting out at a different place, so the team and players should first reflect on where they currently stand regarding gender equity before deciding if and how they want to attempt to increase gender equity in their program.

The following tips were collected from players, coaches, and youth league directors all over the country, most with experience at the high school level.

1. Find a womxn coach.

If a qualified coach is available in your area, ask a womxn from your community to help coach the team in *any* capacity they can. Ask your local womxn's club or pro team captains, the captains of the nearest womxn's college team, or your local ultimate governing body to suggest a womxn coach. If the coach cannot commit to coaching full time (or you already have a male coach), ask a womxn coach to come out to guest coach a practice, run a specific drill, lead a fitness exercise, explain a concept, etc.

2. Have high school womxn in visible leadership positions.

There are many types of positions possible, and giving young womxn a chance to be part of the decision making and to hold visible positions within the leadership is crucial. This can be done in a number of ways, from allowing coaches to have input in the leadership decisions, to team-wide voting with pre-established

gender quotas or percentages. There are so many possible visible leadership positions that involve different strengths and skills, such as captain, captain-in-training, president, treasurer, communication director, recruitment officer, spirit captain, fitness/practice planner, warm-up leader, etc.

3. Build team values and set the tone early and often.

Before tryouts:

- Meet or communicate with captains *before the season starts* about how to set the tone for a gender-inclusive environment. If this is an intimidating prospect, reach out to a coach, to an adult ultimate mentor, or even to outside resources (see #6) for help generating talking points or to attend the meeting with you.
- Develop team-created values and goals. Before practices start, the team leadership should hold a team meeting to develop team-created values about how the team should function. These could involve what communication, support, leadership, body language, and other things should look and feel like on your team. The values should be simple and should focus on ALL players feeling included and respected as people and athletes. Examples: "We will use positive language and body language" or "we recognize that every player adds value to the team." These values can then help guide the team in the development of goals that reinforce the team values, such as goals around recruitment, playing time, equity, and even performance (ex. **Value:** "We perform better and have more fun when we use everyone on the field." **Related goal:** "Throw to the first open player *every time*.") Every program will be at a different place when these conversations begin, so keep the conversation value-focused and meet the team where they are instead of forcing a particular set of values or beliefs.⁶ For instance,

5. The idea for this article was inspired by polling high school womxn players in Texas about what topics they would like to see addressed in this manual.

6. While it is important to meet each team where they are, it's also important to have *all*

some teams may have already established the value of increasing the number of womxn players, so it may be natural for them to establish a team goal to recruit more womxn. Other teams might not be at that point yet. Regardless, remember that these values will apply to *everyone*, so they should serve to make the team culture more inclusive and give a framework about what is expected from each player. The team and/or leadership should also develop guidelines for what happens when these team values/guidelines aren't being followed by a player or players (who to talk to, how to approach it, etc.).

At tryouts/first practices:

- Right before tryouts or the first practices begin, bring everyone into a huddle and review the team values to ensure everyone who is trying out or joining the team is aware of the team values, how important they are, and that the expectation is that the team values are followed.

During the season:

- At practices, meetings, and social events throughout the season, continue to have conversations about gender equity in ultimate and other sports. It may be helpful to start with small groups before holding team-wide conversations. Keep the conversations non-judgmental and meet your players where they are. For many, these might be the first conversations they will have had about gender, equity, or other difficult topics. It's also important to keep the conversations based on how being the best team you can be involves valuing and utilizing *all* players, and not framing the conversation about feeling sorry

players reflect honestly about their current team culture and encourage difficult and potentially uncomfortable conversations since that is often when meaningful change occurs. There are also often opportunities and openings if you are looking for them, such as male-identifying players who have a stake in increasing gender equity on their teams (siblings, friends, etc.). While some players on the team (ex. veteran players) may bristle at the potential shift in focus, the newer players will have known nothing else two to three years down the road.

for the womxn players or having these conversations just for their sake. Some possible conversation topics are what it could look like when different players appear to be open on the field (narrow v. wide throwing windows), constructive communication when someone looks or cuts you off, or what the strengths of each player are and how the team could use them to achieve greater success.

- Make sure to model gender equity at practices by doing things like calling womxn in plays, incorporating cross-gender throwing practice into practices and warm-ups, having young womxn handle, talking about how to create space for all players (ex. how to avoid crowding the deep space), and inviting womxn guest coaches to come teach a skill or concept (see #1).
- Have whole team social film-viewing sessions of amazing womxn's games (there's so much great footage, but a great go-to is the [Colombia v. Denver 2017 US Open Finals](https://youtu.be/unUqm3Inwd0)⁷).

4. Recruit young womxn to play.

- Almost unanimously, the high school players and coaches that I reached out to cited this one point as an incredible challenge. There is a fine line between developing creative ideas to recruit more young womxn and tokenizing those young womxn. Many high school coaches and players shared that, in their experience, young womxn are less likely than young men to join a sport they don't already know how to play and that young womxn are more likely to join if they have a friend that plays. So is recruitment the chicken or the egg? Hopefully increasing the number of womxn players encourages more young womxn to play, and then naturally inspires more team values and goals around gender equity. But in order for more young womxn to play, team cultures must shift to be more equitable. Some ideas to recruit more

7. <https://youtu.be/unUqm3Inwd0>

womxn players:

- Have young womxn players at the recruitment events/tables.
- Reach out to non-traditional partners to recruit, such as local rec center teen programs, local city or parks and recreation department teen programs, nonprofits that serve in your school or community (ex. Communities in Schools, YMCA), and/or local businesses or organizations that serve teens in your area (ex. religious institutions, social clubs, etc.). You can simply ask them to distribute or display flyers, or you could set up a recruitment table at their building or event. Since many schools are zoned based on neighborhoods, these could be effective tactics for raising awareness in the area that your high school draws from.
- When accessible, ask a trusted womxn teacher at your school to help you recruit. If they know, love, and play ultimate, great! They can verbally encourage their students to play. If they aren't familiar with the sport, you could simply ask them to hang up flyers in their room.
- Trade sports practices with other sports teams at your school. For example, in their off-season, invite the womxn's basketball teams (or track, soccer, cross country, volleyball, etc.) to come to an ultimate practice and play ultimate half the time and basketball (or their sport) half the time.
- See #5.

5. Hold young womxn's only practices/games/clinics.

Get the contacts for womxn players in your area and invite them to a weekly/monthly/bi-monthly practice that is just for them. If you don't have large numbers in your area, hold a throwing practice, run 2-3 person drills, or play fun small-sided games like Hot Box. Building a supportive network of high school womxn players helps them realize that they are not alone in their experience being the gender minority on their high school teams, provides a space where they can share and jointly

problem solve the challenges they are experiencing on their high school teams, and allows them to play a different role than one they might play on their high school team. Other ways to build a support network and retain young womxn players could involve attending or hosting Girls' Ultimate Movement (GUM) clinics in your area, joining a local girls' YCC team, or starting a throwing buddy program with the local college or club womxn's team. Encourage the young womxn who show up to these events to bring a high school friend who is new to the sport, and if they love the sport, encourage them to play for their high school team.

6. Reach out.

Contact a womxn coach, player, or mentor if you have questions, need advice navigating a situation, or just for general support. Many womxn in ultimate have experienced gender inequities in our own playing careers or lives. If you don't have a womxn mentor in your area, feel free to email me at cara.crouch@gmail.com, and I will respond or find someone more qualified to respond.⁸

8. I love footnotes, and I also love everyone who contributed to this article. Many thanks to a long and diverse list of coaches and players from across the U.S. who graciously donated their time and ideas to the article.

YOUTH MIXED ULTIMATE: THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF MIXED ULTIMATE IN THE GREATER YOUTH SCENE, PARTICULARLY FOR GIRLS

BEN FENG



Email: bfeng7@gmail.com

Twitter: [@BFeng7](https://twitter.com/BFeng7)

Ben Feng has coached at National Championships in three divisions: Club Mixed (Ambiguous Grey), College Women's (Pittsburgh), and YCC Mixed (Swing Vote, BUDA). The 2013 BUDA and 2015-16 Swing Vote teams won National Championships. Ben currently plays for the club mixed team San Francisco Mischief and is studying Sports Business as an MBA student at the University of Oregon.

AS AN ASPIRING ULTIMATE PLAYER, you might have to decide if you prefer to play in the girls, mixed, or open division. While I am a male, I have coached youth mixed ultimate for several years (Boston BUDA YCC Mixed 2013, DC Swing Vote YCC Mixed 2014-2016) and will share my perspective in this article for your consideration.

This article will hopefully give you some insight on the benefits and challenges of playing mixed¹ ultimate in the greater youth scene. As you progress in your ultimate career, you may consider moving between divisions as goals, preferences, and/or situations change. Ultimately, it's worth exploring multiple options. We want you to choose whatever division(s) suit you best!

Mixed ultimate provides a tremendous opportunity for on-field physical growth. Mixed teams allow you to play a different role than on single gender teams. Perhaps you were the only player with throwing skills on a single gender team, and now you have the opportunity to be an initiating cutter. Perhaps you were the fastest player on your single gender team, and now you have the opportunity to be a designated goal-scorer. Having exposure to different roles at a young age provide you positional flexibility, which helps you develop as a player.

If you decide to try out for club teams (either YCC or adult), most teams are looking for players who can fill specific roles. Whether that team is mixed or single

¹. Mixed: 4 girls or 3 girls per team on the field during a 7v7 game. I don't define mixed ultimate as playing 7v7 ultimate with 2 or less girls on a team.

gender, positional flexibility gives you the best shot at trying out for different roles and increases your chances at landing a roster spot on club teams that you want to play on. Mixed ultimate may allow you to develop different skills than single gender ultimate which will help you to broaden your skill set.

Mixed teams also provide an opportunity for on-field mental growth by allowing you to learn more about ultimate strategies. The speed and spacing of the game is different compared to single gender ultimate. Ask yourself the following questions: How do handlers of both genders work together? Does the offensive effectively create space for cutters to attack that space? Are defenses adjusting to the strengths and weaknesses of their opponent? If a team overutilizes one gender compared to the other, why?

As legendary high school coach Tiina Booth said, *“games are 90% mental and 10% physical.”* Exposure to both mixed and single gender ultimate gives you a leg up on the mental aspect of the game.

Playing mixed ultimate is also a special opportunity that may not be as readily available in college. While USA Ultimate has a short mixed season in the fall (some schools opt not to participate), the vast majority of college competition is geared toward single gender ultimate. The U-20 YCC Mixed division is the highest level of mixed competition before adult club and is a great opportunity to get exposure to high level mixed ultimate as a youth player. Piper Curtis (BUDA 2013) and Ella Juengst (Swing Vote 2015-2016) are two players who played YCC Mixed, won gold medals with Team USA, and have major roles on 2020 adult club Nationals-level mixed teams. Playing competitive youth mixed ultimate gave these players exposure to the mixed game early on and helped them to develop a skill set that has contributed to their continued success.

One of the biggest challenges in mixed ultimate is team culture. There are significantly more boys than girls who play ultimate, and this becomes a problem if the boys

don't throw to the girls or don't value them as players. It becomes difficult for girls to advocate for themselves if they are in the minority numbers-wise and don't feel supported by teammates.

For what it's worth, I personally do not support a girl opting to play in a 2 girl:5 boy gender ratio in a 7v7 game if there are other options available. For ratios this drastic, I'd love to see organizers be creative and play 4v4 or 5v5 with a more even gender ratio.

A good team culture on a mixed team is certainly possible and is worth striving for. A good mixed coach strives to create a culture of inclusiveness and prioritizes elevating the roles of the female players. This encourages the boys to follow the coach's example and allows the girls to feel more empowered to share their opinions.

Philosophically, this means that there should be an overall team culture where you publicly recognize when a girl does something good, even if it's a small detail. Strategically, the key for female success in high-pressure situations is developing a system that utilizes your girls' strengths; every mixed team in the world has strength there. On the Swing Vote 2016 National Championship team, two girls recorded a 0/0/0 stat line, yet both of them said to me during the tournament, *“I love playing defense and the role that I was put in.”*

If you're considering playing for a youth mixed team, I feel it's very important to know what you're getting into. Have a conversation with a coach or team leadership about team culture. How is the team inclusive toward its players both as on-field players and off-field speakers? Does the leadership use “person defense” or “man defense”? “You all” vs. “you guys”? If you feel confident that the team values inclusivity and creates roles to help you develop as an individual player, by all means, go for it!

“It comes down to the coaching of youth mixed teams. If the coach makes it clear that inclusivity is a priority and works on developing the roles of the young women on

the team, players will usually follow that example. I've had coaches like that and in all those teams the vibe was great and I felt like I was considered an important member of the team. But I've also had coaches who focused primarily on the boys, made all the plays about them, and seemed to consider the girls less of a priority, and on those teams, I was very frustrated because the male players wouldn't throw to the girls, share the air with the women, or include them when calling plays." - Anna Dreher, 2018 U-20 Women's National Team

Bonus

Two examples of girls being utilized in important situations in mixed games!

2015 YCC Mixed National Championship

Double Game Point

<https://youtu.be/kaZ6v-ToMcU?t=8461>

Kristin Herbert forces a turnover with pressure defense. A male handler clears space for Maddy Boyle, who quickly swings the disc to Caroline Tornquist. Our offensive philosophy was designed to clear our primary reset to create space for a front of the stack fill - the gender of the players did not matter, we believed that centering the disc to the front of the stack gave us the best chance to swing the disc laterally for a yardage gain.

2016 YCC Mixed National Championship

Double Game Point

<https://youtu.be/tK-LfUjrV-s?t=3452>

Ella Juengst comes up with a huge block against a throw from a 2016 WJUC Men's player. On the ensuing possession, it's once again, the front of the stack, Rachel Hess, receiving the disc. Notice the male cutter clearing space for Juengst to make a wide-open breakside cut for the championship-clinching goal.

THE SPIRIT OF ALLYSHIP: CREATING A CULTURE OF ALLYSHIP BETWEEN GIRLS' AND BOYS' TEAMS IN A PROGRAM

ROBYN FENNIG



© Becca Miller

Email: robyn.fennig@gmail.com

Twitter: [@wi_statebird](https://twitter.com/wi_statebird)

Instagram: [@wi_statebird](https://www.instagram.com/wi_statebird)

Robyn has been in love with the game of ultimate since 2007, when she found the sport a few weeks into her sophomore spring semester at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Her favorite on-field aspects of ultimate include pulling and laying out for defensive blocks, but she loves the community even more! Robyn is a passionate and enthusiastic coach, athlete, and organizer based in Madison, Wisconsin.

ALLYSHIP IS DIFFICULT but fulfilling work. Through allyship, we ask those with privilege, in this case our male peers, to empathize with our struggles as athletes- a very salient part of our identity. We love being athletes. We love the sense of empowerment we feel by being part of a team. However, it can be hard for male-identifying members of our programs to understand that their experiences differ drastically from ours.

Getting buy-in from coaches and athletes in your program to become allies is important, because it creates a space where everyone can be safe to explore who they are as people and athletes. Making space for people to be both “athlete” and “self” and see how those are linked will help us be the best on- and off-field versions of ourselves. We are leaders on our teams because of our passion and enthusiasm to invest in others. It is important that we take the lead in facilitating discussions about allyship, both on our team and in our program, to help everyone find space they feel safe in to find their full potential. Because we play, coach, and organize in a space that places a lot of importance on mutual respect on the field and sidelines, we and our potential allies are well-equipped to create and nurture an environment where everyone can become the best versions of themselves.

Why Ultimate is Different

Spirit of the Game inherently makes our sport different than almost every other sport. Win-at-all-costs behaviors

are not tolerated, players are given the tools to speak up when something is not right, and we all contribute to an active management of the game. We are expected to know the rules, officiate during game play, and manage conflict when it arises. Athletes learn and practice conflict resolution skills to keep the game moving. The fact that we are actively working together with opponents to keep gameplay competitive and mutually respectful humanizes our teammates and opponents.

Another reason that ultimate is truly different is that all players on the field have a voice in self-officiation and maintaining Spirit of the Game. Womxn can participate in every division of play (women's, open, and mixed) and are empowered to use their voices to communicate that something is not right by making a call. When we make a call, people listen. Our voices have equal weight in stopping a play as those of our male counterparts; we can stop everyone around us when something is not aligned with the rules, directly and openly discuss conflict, and actively fix a problem so that we can all enjoy the game. This is a rare privilege off the field, particularly for women.

It goes further; at the end of a game, we come together with our opponent in a Spirit Circle. Spirit Circles are a place where we link arms with our opponent to physically and emotionally create a space to discuss things that we may potentially disagree on. We discuss ways in which we may have fallen short, met, or exceeded our expectations of Spirit of the Game, and we thank our opponents for giving us their best. This requires vulnerability and an ability to honestly assess our own behavior and reactions to what happened on the field. If done correctly, Spirit Circles humanize our teammates and opponents even further.

In other words, playing a game governed by Spirit of the Game means that we all inherently commit to learning behaviors that make us good allies.

Leveraging Spirit of the Game in Allyship

Think about the role of Spirit in our sport and how it directly connects to allyship. Spirit happens before the game starts. It starts with players learning the rules, actively practicing implementing the rules, and training how we discuss calls. Good Spirit relies on proactive communication about things your team is working on and being honest about baggage your team may be carrying from previous games or experiences. These are skills you and your potential allies are actively practicing as players and coaches.

Male allies should know the rules of how to support the non-male players in your program, how to engage in discussion, learn ways to improve their behaviors, and actively facilitate an enjoyable experience for everyone in your program.

Identify the Rules, Get Buy-In and Start the Connections

This section outlines a plan you can use as a starting point to create a program-wide culture of allyship. If you have a separate girls' team, you are probably not the only team in your school. You can start internally with your team to brainstorm what a culture of allyship looks like within your team. Next, you can engage the boys'/open team coaching staff. Finally, engage the players on the boys'/open team.

1. Girls' team leadership facilitates a team discussion.

Just like in ultimate, we need to have rules to start from. In our sport, we rely on open discussion to find the best resolution. On your team, you can facilitate an equity discussion to create buy-in for a culture that embraces allyship and nurtures safe spaces for everyone. By holding a team meeting with your teammates and coach to determine the "equity rules" that your team believes in, everyone has a chance to share their thoughts, values and experiences and your team jointly has an opportunity to create rules that they are excited to live by as a team.

The equity meeting can be facilitated by a team leader or a coach, whatever makes the most sense for your team dynamic. It is important that your team's coach is at the meeting, because your team's coach is your first and most important ally in your program; that relationship needs to be solid before you engage other coaches and teams in your program. It works best if you give your teammates an opportunity to think about what you will discuss by sending them a list of the questions or scenarios you will discuss ahead of the meeting (see the sample outline at the end of this article). Plan for 60-90 minutes for a focused conversation.

Write out your rules together at the meeting, and send them out to your teammates to review afterward. Create some words, phrases, and cheers that use the words or ideas you discuss in your meeting so you can reaffirm your commitment to these ideas throughout the season.

Ideally, you're having this conversation because you want this to go beyond just your team; you want to engage other teams within your program (boys'/open teams, developmental teams, etc.). Before you engage with other teams in your program, follow up with your coach to make sure you are all on the same page. Coaches in youth and high school teams carry additional authority and responsibility in modeling the behavior they want to see in their players. Make sure they understand the expectations and can communicate them clearly.

2. Girls' coach starts a discussion with the boys'/open team coaches.

Next, it is helpful for your coach to start a discussion with your boys'/open team coaches around the outcomes of the internal team equity discussion/meeting. Your coach can leverage their position to outline some of the barriers your team faces (societal microaggressions, microaggressions from boys in your program/school, inequities present between program resource access, etc.) and present the strategies your team brainstormed to overcome them and offer support.

After your coach discusses where your team is at, they can ask the other teams' coaches become allies to support your team. Your coach can provide the notes from your meeting and some of the model behaviors you brainstormed.

Your coach can report back about how the discussion went. Does this other coach seem to understand? Are you ready to discuss with the other team(s)? If your coach and you believe other coaches are bought in, the next step can be to have a program-wide equity discussion.

3. Get buy-in from male-identifying peers/players: have a program equity discussion.

The next step in the process is to have a facilitated discussion with your boys'/open team. It is important that you open the door for discussion and lean into those feelings of discomfort. Acknowledging those nervous feelings will help you maintain a positive tone and body language during the event, especially if you anticipate it being difficult. For some of your male peers, this may be the first time they are learning about these ideas, and it will take time for them to understand and process them. Your goal of this facilitated discussion is to open the door to discuss these issues and create a culture where people can be vulnerable in their own team and across teams. Create an environment where people can have dialogues and practice new behaviors; your allies need a space to fail as they learn!

Come up with an outline that includes some specific questions to discuss in small groups (see the sample outline at the end of this article). You can use some of the similar prompts you used for your internal team discussion. Topics you should be sure to discuss are microaggressions, toxic masculinity, and strategies for calling out behaviors in a way that pulls people toward the group, rather than isolating them. For each example scenario or behavior, try to use clips from ultimate games, examples from your teammates and your experience as an athlete, so that it is relatable.

After an opening discussion question, I recommend having 2-3 discussion prompts maximum for a 90 minute discussion. This allows for time to report back to the whole group and to brainstorm a program “contract” that all players commit to. I recommend that the small group recaps alternate between the boys’ team and the girls’ team, so people get used to recapping these ideas and hearing them from boys and girls, not just their teammates.

If you have a less friendly relationship with another team in your program, consider inviting some allies from your local club teams to join in the discussion. Sometimes, boys really need to see adults that they admire and respect at the table with them modeling and reinforcing what acceptable behavior is. Work with the coaches to invite some of these well-respected players to the table and provide some background about what the expectations for acceptable behavior will be for the discussion.

Practice Your Tools

Generally, we often wonder if people who are part of the group with privilege are being sincere about their intentions. We see many instances where self-proclaimed “allies” enter this space for their own benefit. The fact that our male-identifying peers have privilege in sports culture means that we are likely to have some feelings of skepticism and discomfort as we begin this work. First and foremost, acknowledge if you have feelings of distrust, skepticism, or doubt – those feelings are self-protection mechanisms. When we feel like we need to protect ourselves or our space (emotional or physical), it is easy to become defensive. In order to engage in this space, we need to make genuine connections with our male counterparts, requiring that we be both compassionate and vulnerable. We need to be able to recognize when we are getting defensive and how we can use communication to break down those barriers.

My general advice is to over-communicate with male

allies. For instance, if you are talking to a male teammate and you can sense you are posturing in a defensive way, you can say, “Hey Henry, this topic is really important to me and I’m becoming defensive in response to some of the words I’m hearing. I just want to let you know that we can keep working through this, and I will do my best to use a positive tone here if we can commit to not using phrases like ‘you’re pretty good for a girl.’ Does that sound fair?” When I over-communicate, I do my best to recap what is happening, explain how I am feeling, and then directly ask for a behavior to stop in a way that can set that male up as an ally instead of an opponent.

Just like on the ultimate field, very few of us are going to walk into a difficult situation, react perfectly, and affect change in behavior without practicing. The above example does not come out calmly without taking the time to recognize and process our emotions or without practice. One of my friends, Michelle Phillips, told me this trick: the best way you can facilitate conversations about allyship is to practice having them with yourself! Use the phrases or behaviors you experience and practice having a discussion around that phrase. Also practice ending conversations when someone is not respecting your boundaries and they do not want to be an ally.

People Are Imperfect: Make Space for Learning and Growing

Allies are people and people are imperfect. Sometimes, they will mess up. We have to make sure that our male allies have a space to process, internalize, and reflect with us. They need to have space to say “we messed up and we will get better.” They may not be perfect, but they are still our allies. (I recommend reading a blog post by Dr. Maura Cullen about “F.E.A.R Factors” and the challenges of being an ally!)

Allyship is about learning. It requires people to have conviction, to be vulnerable, and to be willing to admit when they fail. The best outcome is that you are able to facilitate an environment that feels like an ultimate

game. People can practice their skills without fear of perfectionism. When we fail, we can make a call and have a discussion about what the resolution should be. Just like with Spirit of the Game, we have to demonstrate the kind of behavior we expect, acknowledge when our opponent has good Spirit, and help them be better. Allyship works the same way; it must be an ongoing dialogue with the boys'/open teams in your program with the goal of creating a space that is safe and inclusive for everyone.

Sample Outline: Internal Team Equity Meeting

Introduction/Kick-off Question (7-15 minutes; depending on the size of your team)

- Have everyone start in a positive, action-oriented mindset by asking a question like, "A feeling that I have when I'm contributing the best I can to my team is ___." I like to call this the "ideal performance feeling," which is the feeling(s) that a player feels when they are being their best version of themselves on the field, on the sideline, and as a teammate.

Microaggressions (10-15 minutes)

- Discuss some of the microaggressions and other barriers that are in place for you and your teammates to get to those ideal performance feelings.

Breaking Down Barriers (15-30 minutes)

- Brainstorm ways to eliminate or reduce the barriers.

Team Culture (10-15 minutes)

- Discuss 2-3 team words that can define your team culture/environment, highlighting what they mean to your team in creating a safe space for everyone.
- It's helpful if everyone comes to the meeting with 1-2 words and their definitions in mind. It will make the discussion go more quickly.

Allyship (10-15 minutes)

- Connect those words to allyship.

Sample Equity Discussion Outline with a Boys' Team

I recommend splitting the room into groups of 6-8 people sitting in circles. Groups larger than this can become too big to share or discuss in a meaningful way. You can have people pre-divided into groups, or you can have people choose their positions as they walk in.

Opening Discussion (10 minutes)

- Describe your "ideal performance feeling" and highlight an experience that prevented you from getting there and how it made you feel instead.
- Sample: When I am performing at my best, I feel strong, powerful and that I can control all edges of the disc. One barrier to me getting there is when someone once said that I am "a meat and potatoes girl," because I no longer feel strong and powerful, I feel like my body is too big to be what we idealize in a female athlete. It makes me feel insecure, unathletic, and like I'm slow because I'm bigger.

Microaggressions (15 minutes)

- Define what a microaggression is to the whole group.
- Give each small group a slip of paper with an example of a microaggression (e.g. give a brief scenario or phrase to a table to discuss). Discuss why it is a microaggression and how you could approach that person to change the behavior to get at that they meant.
- Sample: Your mixed team introduces a side stack offense. Throughout the first tournament, your captain only isolates male cutters in the space your team is attacking as the initiating cut.

Toxic Masculinity (15 minutes)

- Define what toxic masculinity is to the whole group.
- Give each small group a prompt of a behavior that meets the definition. Ideally, this should be something that you have seen or experienced at

school or in the context of ultimate.

- Sample: Show a clip of a layout block that has a lot of contact and create a script of a discussion where the person initiating the contact contests a foul call and says “that call is soft.”

Allyship (20 minutes)

- Define what an ally is and highlight sample behaviors of an ally.
- Ask the groups to go back and change the scenarios so that you could be a teammate who supports that person but also lets them know that behavior is not okay in this program.

Program Social Contract (30 minutes)

- Explain the Program Social Contract and in your small groups, brainstorm behaviors to add.
- Coaches facilitate a big group discussion around the Social Contract.

THE F WORD: MISUNDERSTOOD AND NECESSARY FOR INCLUSION AND SPIRIT

HANNAH MATTHYS



Hannah Matthys is a retired club player who continues to work within the ultimate community as a high school coach, board member for Colorado Ultimate, and YCC coach and director. In real life, she has a doctorate focused on educational equity and diversity. She is a professional facilitator on topics of diversity, inclusion, emotional intelligence, and leadership.

YES, I RECOGNIZE THAT THE F-WORD has a dirty (some might even say a “nasty”) reputation, and that many of the readers of this article will be young girls. Some of you might even say that there is no place on the field for it. But I want to change the conversation and provide some insight because I want to see the F-word used intentionally and in a way that adds to our conversation around Spirit of the Game. I want to start by saying it - loud and proud.

FEMINISM. There, I said it. Feminism. Feminism. Feminism.

So why talk about *feminism*? Things are so much better than they were in the past, right? Perhaps you play mixed, and your male-identifying teammates are really good guys and definitely not sexist? Perhaps you play women’s and don’t deal with male-identified players regularly and don’t have an issue with them when you do? Perhaps you identify as male and treat womxn fairly?

Let’s take a deep breath together. Did you notice your heart rate going up as you read the last paragraph? Maybe you were intellectually arguing with me? Or perhaps you were agreeing? We’re all coming from different places, and our beliefs are likely to change throughout our lives. I know that through my college years, feminism was not something that I ascribed to. I was in college, after all. And I was outperforming several of my male-identifying classmates and had a lot

of male-identifying friends. I didn't grow up in the 50s. I grew up believing I could be whatever I wanted to be when I graduated from college. In other words, gender was no longer an issue. So why would I be a man-hating feminist?

This is where feminism gets misunderstood. Feminism is *NOT* about man-hating. Feminism is about changing inherently male-dominated structures in our thinking that unconsciously put male-ness at the center of our thoughts. Gloria Steinham says "Feminism has never been about getting a job for one womxn. It's about making life more fair for womxn everywhere. It's not about a piece of the existing pie; there are too many of us for that. It's about baking a new pie." **Pro tip: if you haven't read Steinham's books because she's sooooo outdated, take a look. It's eerie how what she says resonates so closely with the common issues of today. A couple of my favorites are Outrageous Acts of Everyday Rebellion (1983) and My Life on the Road (2015), which (written almost 13 years apart) also provide an interesting look at her work at two different stages in her life.*

Although feminism works to disrupt unequal structures in gender, it doesn't have the most inclusive history. Feminism has a history that has left out womxn who do not fit the white, middle class, cis, straight, and Christian identities. It was (and often is) so violent, exclusionary, and problematic that terms like "womxn" later spouted up to include transgender, femme/ feminine-identifying genderqueer, fluid, and non-binary individuals, as well as womxn of color. Additionally, "intersectional feminism" was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw to explain the oppression of African American womxn. We can see this call for intersectionality appearing in the 2019 Women's March, which received backlash for its founders being unwilling to denounce the Nation of Islam leader for his homophobic, transphobic, and anti-semitic statements.

So what does this have to do with ultimate? This topic is deeply personal to me. As an Asian womxn, my gender and racial identity are intertwined. I have coached high

school boys for nearly a decade, and a number of times at the boys' U-20 YCC level. I am used to being the only womxn, and often one of the few people of color, on the field. This is common, and I have learned to maneuver in a way that allows me access to authority (so that the players will listen to me and believe me) while also balancing how not to come off as a "bitch." Despite this dance, I am often reminded of my identity. Sometimes it's in small ways, like the opponent's male coach walking past me to talk to my male co-coach about logistics or something on the field. Or perhaps it's a surprised look by a male coach when one of my players asks me for a rules clarification.

But sometimes it's larger ways, ways that scream loudly that I don't belong in the space, and that I am different and weaker. This year at YCC, a coach was getting heated about our players being "too aggressive." His voice was loud and full of emotion, and his arms were gesturing forcefully as he spoke to me, my co-coach, and the observer. I am a professional facilitator and one of my areas of expertise is around emotional intelligence and losing your cool. I noticed the boys were looking to see what was happening. I took a breath and said in a firm and yet calm voice, "I know we're all passionate and care about the wellbeing of our kids. Let's model what good conflict can look like for them." His response was, with still heightened emotion, "I recognize my white, straight, male privilege, and I'm not trying to intimidate you." He then went on with his argument. I was able to de-escalate the situation a bit after that, but the statement stood out. It had nothing to do with the context or what I had said. Why was this his response?

Later, after the tournament, I processed (and vented) with Charlie Mercer, a talented ultimate player and advocate of equity work. I realized that in that moment, that coach's bias was painting a picture of what was happening and that my identity as an Asian womxn was the only thing he saw. This intersection of identities (Asian and womxn) led him to read that I was fragile and

weak (a common stereotype of Asian womxn is that we are docile, fragile, and need protection). Thus, he likely assumed that I was afraid of him, and that this was why I was asking him to calm down.

Okay, so you might think I just took a giant leap here—made up an assumption. First, I want to clarify that I never said he was a bad person, and I never stated that he intended to be rude or dismissive. Rather, I am focusing on the impact on me and my experience and recognizing how his statement tied in to larger beliefs and stereotypes.

And that's part of what makes these microaggressions so difficult. They are rooted in the *impact* of an experience, rather than focused on the *intent*. I didn't go and ask what he meant, and if I did, I likely wouldn't have gotten an honest answer. And so, I will never know for sure. But there are some questions that I can ask that help get me to this place. Would he have said that to a man? Would he have said that to a white womxn (especially the part about being a white man)? Those adjectives were used because they contrasted with how he viewed me.

I want to be clear that my argument here is not that he shouldn't have recognized my identity. I am very proud to be an Asian womxn, and if you can't see those pieces of me, you won't fully know me. However, his assessment of what that meant flattened who I was. It painted a two-dimensional picture of how I should behave and how I should feel—and led him to respond to me based on this assessment.

The goal here is to recognize and appreciate someone's identity without flattening it. First, think about some of the "trademarks" of a teammate. Second, ask yourself if this perpetuates a stereotype and if it's true. If it's not, then think about where this "trademark" came from. If it is true, go to step three. Third, ask yourself what other traits that teammate has that may not come to mind first. (And if you don't know, this is a good sign that you need to build a relationship with this teammate).

Let's try this out with me. I am an Asian womxn. I love to eat sushi, and I would say that I'm smart. These are stereotypes but, in my case, they are also true. But if these qualities were my "trademarks" and they were the only things you really know about me, you would miss other things that make me who I am. For instance, I have two pet ducks who I love. I will be your biggest (and loudest) sideline voice if you ask. I'm afraid of the dark. I play ice hockey.

I want you to get more than just my perspective on this and to broaden the conversation. Perhaps it's the transwomxn who is tall and can sky anyone. Is this true? Look for evidence, not just your gut assumption. Then ask yourself what else you are missing. Are you missing that she is an animal lover, that her parents are always at the tournament, or that she has almost perfect footwork?

Or in the case of a good friend and former teammate, perhaps it's that the Black womxn on your team is funny, aggressive in the air, and is known for twerking during timeouts. Could these be true? Yes. Although this might be an assumption, so be careful with that too! Do these flatten her identity? Are these the only "trademarks" she is known for? If so, you are missing a huge opportunity to know that she is a science geek to the core, that she is a dedicated aunt, or that she is great at using humor and joy to fire up the team.

Going through these three steps will help us recognize and appreciate the complexity of our teammates and others in our community. You will get to see the full, not flattened, beauty of your teammates. And it will allow others to see you more fully. By doing this, we will decrease microaggressions, making our community more beautiful and more diverse for everyone.

Finally, as you read this, if you realize that you have had your identity flattened and this article resonates with you, I hope that this article gives you words for this experience so that you can 1) normalize the feelings you may have and 2) determine what you want the

next steps to be. Next steps are up to you. Perhaps it's a teamwide conversation. Perhaps it's having an individual conversation with a perpetrator. Perhaps it's bringing it up jokingly (for instance, I often joke "not all Asians look the same" when someone mistakes me for another Asian). Or perhaps it's another option. I hope that whatever you choose makes you feel whole and validated.

As we in the ultimate community fight for feminism, we must take an intersectional approach. We must fight against flattening identities and work hard to see people in all of their complex beauty. I hope that you will join me in talking about Intersectional Feminism because the F-word, when intersectional, is F*ing amazing!

HOW TO RETAIN UNDERREPRESENTED PLAYERS

NICOLE NEUMILLER



Email: nicole@ultimate-impact.org

Twitter: [@UltimateImpact](https://twitter.com/UltimateImpact)

Nicole is the Director of Programs and a coach at Ultimate Impact, a San Francisco-based non-profit focused on youth development through the sport of ultimate. Since 2009, Nicole has coached mixed, girls' and boys' teams at the high school, middle school, and elementary school levels in Seattle and the San Francisco Bay Area. Nicole currently coaches the womxn's club team Tempo.

"THEY WON'T THROW TO ME," is by far the most common frustration I've heard from female players in over 10 years of coaching youth ultimate. And isn't just in their heads. The parents of strong Youth Club Championships (YCC) players talk about how aggravated their daughters are over lack of playing time and getting few to no touches on their school teams. I've coached 1st and 2nd grade boys that yelled, "She can't do it!" every time a girl got the disc. Male high school YCC players pull me aside to talk about how the womxn handling with them are unskilled and ask to handle with other male players only. There is a popular meme of Julia Roberts standing in front of Hugh Grant in Notting Hill that says, "I'm just a girl standing in front of a boy asking him to throw to her when she is open." It is an old meme, and it is still as relevant today as it was when it was first made.

Time after time, year after year, I've seen players, especially girls, walk off the field ready to quit because they aren't touching the disc. Getting touches is crucial for the retention and growth of players.

A study by Kathy Franz, published on Ultiworld in June 2018, suggests the issue is much deeper than looked-off players. Franz studied 22 recorded mixed Club Championships finals games from 2014-2017 and found that regardless of the gender ratio on the field, womxn touched the disc around 20% less than their male teammates. While the study mainly focused on the huge difference between men and womxn players in touches and hucks, Franz also observed that while womxn were

more likely to touch the disc on teams that roster more womxn, these teams were also more likely to lose by a slight, but statistically significant, amount and that those losses were by a wider margin than other teams at the top level.¹ This slight correlation was surprising to me since we have many examples of strong womxn throwers in ultimate, and using as many players on the field as possible should be beneficial to a team's performance.

A follow-up article by Tom McClintock, published on Ultiworld in July 2018, looked into possible explanations of the throwing bias and found that the gender of the handler, and their dominance, greatly impacted the number of touches for that gender.² So if men are getting more touches, it is likely that teams are picking men to be more dominant handlers. But why are teams more likely to pick men for this role?

A lot of this has to do with a coach's and other leaders' preconceived notions of what makes a good player. In ultimate and other sports, it is easy to see a player's initial talent as a strong indication of their overall potential as a player. As coaches, we tend to focus more attention on these players. An example of how bias can impact our perspective as coaches is the strong correlation between birth month and elite athletes or scholars known as the Relative Age Effect (RAE). Studies from different countries have disproportionately high participation in the most competitive and prestigious levels of sports and academics among people born just after the age selection cut off than would be expected for normal birth distribution. Being months older is a big advantage for youth who are rapidly developing over the course of a year. Months-older players appear as stronger, more "naturally talented" players from early

ages and receive more coaching attention. That extra attention early on and over time gives these players an additional advantage to continue being stronger players even once the developmental benefit of being months older no longer makes a difference. A 2012 BBC article shares an example of the impact of RAE. In 2009, professional English youth football academies (aged 16-20 years) showed 57% of youth were born in September, November or December with only 14% born in June, July or August.³ The effect is seen in Canadian ice hockey players, European football players, and US Major League Baseball, among others.⁴

In ultimate, players who have previous throwing and catching experience (including practice in other sports) can appear as "naturally talented" or inherently quick learners. A lot of research supports the fact that boys are more likely to be skilled in throwing or catching than girls their age from having practiced more because of our cultural gender bias in activities. The same studies found no evidence of a gender bias in throwing and catching based on biological ability,⁵ suggesting that experience, not "natural talent," is the biggest factor in skill. However, when these players show up for ultimate, boys are more likely to be identified as having a "natural talent" for being a handler and receive focused training and in-game experience that continues to widen this gap. I have seen a consistent bias for male handlers in my own coaching experience and firmly believe that addressing this bias is one way to develop dominant womxn handlers, which can increase the number of primary female handlers leading to more touches on the disc and retention of girls.

1. Kathy Franz. "Research: Elite Mixed Ultimate Still Skewed Towards Male Involvement." Ultiworld, 25 June 2018. Web. 10 August 2019. <https://ultiworld.com/2018/06/25/research-elite-mixed-ultimate-still-skewed-towards-male-involvement/>

2. Tom McClintock. "Simulating Usage Rate in Mixed Ultimate: Investigating An Observed Gender Throwing Bias." Ultiworld, 24 July 2018. Web. 10 August 2019. <https://ultiworld.com/2018/07/24/simulating-usage-rates-mixed-ultimate-investigating-observed-gender-throwing-bias/>

3. Ben Oakley. "How to build a champion: Be born at the right time." BBC Sport, 23 July 2012. Web. 10 August 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/sport/olympics/18891749>

4. Malcolm Gladwell. 1963-. *Outliers: The Story of Success*. 1st ed. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008. Print. <http://www.gladwell.com>, <http://www.newyorker.com>

5. Lisa M. Barnett, Eric van Beurden, Philip J. Morgan, Lyndon O. Brooks, and John R. Beard. "Gender Differences in Motor Skill Proficiency From Childhood to Adolescence: A Longitudinal Study." *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*; Vol. 81, NO.2 (2010): 162-170 https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Lisa_Barnett4/publication/44653159_Gender_Differences_in_Motor_Skill_Proficiency_From_Childhood_to_Adolescence_A_Longitudinal_Study/links/0f317531f90bc196f1000000.pdf

In fact, this strategy is not unique for developing female players. This is a strategy that can be used to increase any focused retention group while maintaining or improving long-term competitive performance for any underrepresented or overlooked group (including girls, non-binary youth, youth of color, etc.) because it works to improve their short-term and long-term playing experience. Addressing our own possible bias of who we are developing as strong handlers is one way to change touches-to-the-disc distribution in ultimate. This would increase retention of girls, and other underrepresented players, by improving their engagement in the game.

So, how do we get underrepresented or overlooked players more touches, while still focusing on being competitive?

There are three ways that we can increase the development of players, thereby also increasing retention of these players:

1. Develop strong disc-handling skills in ALL players.
2. Use a growth-oriented mindset and language in developing players.
3. Engage players in other significant playmaking opportunities.

Develop Strong Disc Handling Skills in ALL Players

Teaching disc-handling skills is essential to individual player growth. This is about working on throwing skills as well as on movement to get open. A player needs to be able to get open, catch, and throw consistently, no matter where they are on the field or who they are matched up against. To sharpen these skills, rotate players through as primary handlers and as middle offensive cutters in practice and games throughout the season. The more opportunities players have to practice and play in these positions, the more they will excel. Players develop muscle memory and an understanding of

how and when to move in these positions by practicing and playing (and making MISTAKES) in these positions.

Here are some practice strategies that help with this:

- Play small team scrimmages (3 v. 3, 4 v. 4, or 5 v. 5) where players get lots of touches on the disc.
- Call out who picks up the disc on a pull and turnover. Have the same person pick up the disc multiple times in a scrimmage. Watch out for players calling each other off picking up the disc when there is no rule.
- Start the season practicing big hucks without receivers to build the throwing strength of ALL players throughout the season. Continue to have all players practice hucks throughout the season.
- Have dynamic throwing practices, throwing challenges, and/or disc-handling drills every practice. Work on fakes as a thrower and jukes as a reset option to consistently get open no matter where you are on the field, who you are playing with, and who you are matched up against.

Use A Growth-Oriented Mindset

Everyone gets better with practice and coaching. Two of the top things that create strong players are investment by coaches and repetition practice by players. When coaching, it is important to remember that any player we invest in is going to get better. No matter how “awkward” or “unathletic” a player appears, if we invest in coaching them and they continue to show up, they will become a more skilled player. This is especially true for youth. However, as I mentioned earlier, in ultimate and other sports, it is easy to see a player’s initial talent as a strong indication of their overall potential as a player. As coaches, we tend to focus more attention on these players. For ultimate, the importance of a growth mindset is especially relevant for throwing. Players who have previous throwing and catching experience (including practice in other sports) can appear as “naturally talented” or inherently quick learners. They

may pick up skills faster because of their previous experiences throwing and catching, as well as getting more individual coaching.

It can be easy for players (and coaches) to fall into a fixed mindset, believing that those with less sports experience or initial skills are limited in their potential growth. We may inadvertently hold these players back by not giving them enough opportunities and coaching to improve. Players with skill from previous experience are encouraged, or may feel more confident, picking up the disc or being in a primary disc handler role. They may also receive more coaching for these situations, further widening the gap. However, the reality is that all players will get better with practice and coaching and that a player's initial performance and learning speed are not an indicator of their peak athletic potential. In fact, with focused coaching, practice, and in-game experience, players who come in with less experience may end up stronger than their peers in a year or two. Developing all players means some of these overlooked players are more likely to stay with the sport and catch up to or exceed the performance of their initially more experienced peers.

To support developing ALL players:

- Create a system to focus on different players at each practice. Make sure ALL players are getting one-on-one or focused coaching. Use the support of assistant coaches to increase individual coaching and development at practices.
- Talk about skill as being learned through practice and mastery, not natural talent.
- Praise and recognition should be about the process that players have applied to gain skills. Compliments based on natural talent support the mindset that sports skills don't require work or effort. These compliments also create an expectation for players that they must be great at everything they try. This will prevent them from taking risks and challenging themselves in the ways needed to continue to improve.

- Encourage mistakes in learning. Players who have the benefit of the doubt from their teammates are more likely to try out new skills and practice them until they are masters at that skill. Players MUST make mistakes to learn and master new skills. Players who have repeated chances to practice the same skills will improve faster and be more confident in their skills.
- Focus on underrepresented players. We can increase the retention of underrepresented groups and groups impacted by negative implicit sports bias with more focused coaching to develop their skills.
 - Because of the bias they face, these players will need to be stronger to have the same opportunities; support them in becoming stronger players to overcome these additional barriers.
 - Publicly recognize their strengths in specific field situations, drills, and games to help other players recognize them as strong options to support in those situations.

Engage Players in Other Significant Playmaking Opportunities

While picking up the disc and being a primary handler are two surefire ways to increase touches and player retention, there are other significant playmaking opportunities that we can also focus on creating. Scoring, being hucked to, and having the green light to throw higher-risk throws are all examples of significant playmaking opportunities. They are exciting, create a sense of belonging, and lead to praise and recognition by teammates and spectators. They are highlight-reel moments that we should strive for all of our players to make.

To work on this skill, set up drills that mimic critical game moments. Some examples of critical game moments are: calling an end-zone isolation (iso), getting a block while playing defense on a handler

swing pass, catching the centering pass and then hucking the continuation, and being the deep deep in a zone. In these drills, every player has a chance to practice being the big playmaker.

Generating playmaking opportunities for a large group of players is challenging for a coach to achieve in games. Instead, here are some ideas to help engage overlooked players in practices:

- Offer praise and recognition in drills. Clearly recognize players who are effectively executing skills that might typically be overlooked. Use these players as examples when talking about high performance in these skills. This helps other players recognize that skill and helps players to develop a wider appreciation for what their teammates contribute on the field.
- Give players permission to fail as they learn to work with teammates. Encourage players to throw to the open player, call someone different as iso, or throw the handler reset to someone they are less familiar with even though it might not work. Identify and communicate moments in practice and certain games for players to focus on getting the disc to overlooked players or simply to whomever is open/closest. Challenge stronger throwers or receivers to learn how to be successful in these situations by increasing the precision of their throws and decisions.
- Give players specific feedback during this process. These drills ensure all players also get the opportunity to see what these high-intensity situations feel like and work towards being successful in them. Giving players specific individual feedback in these drills grows their strength as playmakers. Your team will have more threats for opponents to watch out for on the field.

All of this relates to single-gender as well as mixed-gender teams. Most teams have overlooked players.

Focusing on developing strong disc-handling skills in all players, having a growth-oriented mindset, and recognizing other playmaking opportunities will increase the retention of overlooked players in any division. They are especially useful in groups who are already underrepresented in ultimate. If we do these things in our high school and youth programs, we can not only increase our retention of underrepresented players, but we can ultimately make a difference in how these players are represented in the highest levels of club ultimate.

REPRESENTATION AND EQUITY

ANRAYA PALMER



Email: apalm1990@gmail.com
Twitter: [@apalm_is_napalm](https://twitter.com/apalm_is_napalm)
Instagram: [@apalm_is_napalm](https://www.instagram.com/apalm_is_napalm)

Anraya Palmer currently lives in Decatur, GA. She is a graduate of the University of Georgia. Anraya is an elementary school teacher at the Friends School of Atlanta (FSA). She plays for Atlanta Ozone (club), Atlanta Soul (pro) and coaches ultimate at Paideia and Friends, as well as basketball at FSA.

REPRESENTATION MATTERS. If you know me, you've heard me mention it a few (hundred) times. I probably tweet about it once a week, if not more. It's become my tagline at this point; it's listed in my Twitter bio. I have talked about the importance of representing underserved and underrepresented groups in the ultimate community. I got to share my story at USA Ultimate's Gender and Equity Forum, as well as during the Color of Ultimate (COU) weekend. I'll get more into the Color of Ultimate later, but first, a little more about me. Representation is the reason I stuck with soccer, even though I was always the only black kid. Representation is why I grew up dreaming about playing in the WNBA. Representation is the reason I still play ultimate. Being able to see Briana Scurry, a black soccer player, gave me hope. An entire women's professional basketball league gave me the drive to dream big. And seeing people of color (POC), especially black women, playing ultimate gives me life! "You can't be what you can't see" is a quote from Marian Wright Elderman that I love and use all the time. It was featured in Beyoncé's Homecoming, a documentary about her legendary performance at Coachella that also celebrates black culture and black education, specifically that of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). It makes sense why Beyoncé included Elderman's quote, as Elderman attended Spelman College, an HBCU right here in Atlanta. But Beyoncé also used her stage (Coachella) to show black culture to an audience that was predominantly white. While Beyoncé was the first black woman to headline Coachella, the

bigger picture is she was paving the way for more black artists and more representation of our culture. Would I have played soccer from age 7 until high school or been willing to switch from striker to goalie without Briana Scurry? I know without the WNBA, I couldn't have pretended to be Sheryl Swoopes, a basketball legend, every time I had a basketball in my hand. As for ultimate, there have only been a few black women that have come before me. This lack of representation has been the catalyst behind all that I do. I take on so much in the ultimate community because I want people to see representation from POC. When I take the field, I feel the weight of representing all black people, not just those who play ultimate. I don't mind paving the way for the next generation to follow; I welcome it. To add another quote from Homecoming, "The youth need to see greatness reflected in our eyes. Go forth, let them know it's real" from Danai Gurira. It all starts with visibility and being able to see yourself represented by people who look like you. I have been lucky enough to participate in two events that have been huge in pushing equity and diversity in ultimate: the Premier Ultimate League (PUL) and the Color of Ultimate game. I'd like to share my personal experiences from both events and their significance to me and the entire ultimate community.

There has been a major push for gender equity and diversity in our community recently. The turning point for most people was the AUDL boycott, but I'd like to recognize the efforts of the All-Star Tour and Fulcrum Media. The All-Star Tour was started by Qxhna Titcomb, and it showcased elite, college-aged athletes as they traveled around the country to face some of the best womxn's club teams. The vision of the tour was simple: Promote womxn in ultimate. I was still relatively new to ultimate at the time of the first All-Star Tour. I knew elite club was a thing, but I had seen only a couple of games here and there. I had watched friends who played on Atlanta Ozone a couple of times but mostly against regional competition. The All-Star Tour opened my eyes to an entirely new world of ultimate. I was finally

able to watch teams that I had only heard of before. It totally changed how I saw club ultimate. The game was faster, the athletes were stronger, and the competition was fierce. I was so impressed by these athletes, many of whom I was watching for the first time. Players like Octavia Payne, Jenny Fey, Lauren Sadler, Carolyn Finney, and basically all of Boston Brute Squad. I remember watching these players for the first time and being in awe of how good these athletes were. My friends and teammates would throw watch parties for the games. I still remember watching the game against Brute where we all thought the game had ended two separate times! The Tour was a big deal, and reflecting on it now, its importance can't be overstated. I was more motivated than ever to become one of those athletes I saw balling out. Following the second run of the All-Star Tour, Fulcrum Media launched its "Equity Through Visibility" Project. Fulcrum captured over 117 hours from 30 games in the womxn's division at the 2016 Club Championships.



<https://fulcrummediablog.wordpress.com>

I remember the sizzle reels they created for every club team. By this time, I was a rookie on Ozone, and it was super cool to relive my first Club Nationals. I finally had some highlights of me playing ultimate. If you've ever seen highlights or action shots of yourself playing, you know how huge this was for me. I am forever grateful for all the groundwork the All-Star Tour and Fulcrum Media did for visibility of womxn's ultimate.



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Representation of womxn's sports has always taken a backseat to men's, and unfortunately, ultimate has been no exception. The small amount of media coverage that ultimate received would typically place games from the men's division in the primetime spot. Male-identifying players also had more playing opportunities: from youth to pro. Pro ultimate seemed out of the realm of possibilities for womxn until the creation of the PUL. The mission statement of the PUL is "to achieve equity in the sport by increasing accessibility to and visibility of womxn players through high-quality competition, leadership experiences and community partnerships." I believe in the importance of representation, remember—check my Twitter bio. But the mission of the PUL strongly aligned with my values, so I was definitely in. Fulcrum's "Equity Through Visibility" Project really resonated with me when I was deciding if pro was right for me. I remembered all the teams and players I was introduced to and felt compelled to be someone's Briana Scurry. I

remember seeing highlights from people who looked like me and was reminded of how important I felt just by seeing POC on the field. The PUL was an entire league dedicated to highlighting womxn who wouldn't have gotten that opportunity otherwise. The PUL showcased teams from underrepresented club markets like Nashville, Indianapolis, and Columbus, Ohio. People outside of the major hubs play ultimate and need representation too. The first PUL season was amazing! The season started with everybody in the entire league being sponsored through the jersey sponsorship program. I'll say that again, EVERY player in the PUL got their jersey sponsored. Every game was live streamed or filmed. The league consistently put out highlights from games, plays of the week, week-by-week statistics, and other promotional graphics. This was my second season with the Atlanta Soul, and the first one being part of the PUL. The term "professional" really changes the way people view a sport.

My family came to watch games, my co-workers bragged about me being a pro athlete, kids I coached were buying my jersey. The beginning of the PUL season starts with me coming off of coaching high school ultimate at Paideia, which is immediately after coaching ultimate and basketball at the Friends' School during the fall/winter. Needless to say, I got burnt out pretty quickly. At one of our home games, I met a black player from Georgia who was now in school at Pitt. She was so excited to meet me, she found me after the game to talk. Her excitement with just being at the game and seeing me play made me feel like I was doing something right. She was using me the same way I had used other black ultimate players! In that moment, I felt like I had accomplished my overall goal with ultimate. Sure, winning a championship would be cool, and I would love to accomplish that one day, but getting more black women to play ultimate is my ultimate dream. Yes the is pun intended, and I'm not sorry for it. I think about moments like that whenever I'm tired at a three-hour practice or during a tough workout. I hope that one day, the PUL will be full of players who look like me. This experience is rare, so rare that I've rarely had black teammates. I was lucky enough at the beginning of this year to play at Lei Out, a beach tournament in California, with Downtown Brown. As a POC, Downtown Brown has always been the pinnacle of ultimate for me. Playing on a minority-majority team? I didn't think anything would make me feel more seen as a POC in ultimate - that was until the COU weekend.

It took me nine years of playing ultimate to play on a team where all my teammates were POC, so the idea of two all-POC teams competing against each other seemed like a stretch. The game was hosted by Project Diversity, the Atlanta Soul and the Atlanta Hustle. Project Diversity is a local committee out of Atlanta dedicated to "creating more equitable opportunities, so ultimate is more accessible to people of all socioeconomic and racial backgrounds." Much like the mission of Project Diversity, the goal of the COU game was "to bring awareness about the socioeconomic and racial inequity of the sport of ultimate." The hope was to bring in an audience

outside of our sport by showcasing elite athletes of color. This wasn't the first all-POC game. Several club players from Atlanta played in an all-POC game in Tuscaloosa the year before. That game was much smaller in size, but the goal was the same: Encourage more POC to play ultimate. More than 80 people from across the country and Medellin, Colombia, applied when the application opened for the Atlanta COU game. I guess I wasn't the only one hoping to be a part of something that would be a first-time experience for many in this sport. Now don't get me wrong, I love my Ozone and Soul teammates, but this was different. For the first time, I was about to walk onto an ultimate field without having to worry about preconceived prejudices. I was about to compete with and against players who knew what it was like to be a minority in America. Teammates who knew what it was like to have people discriminate against you just because of how you look. I didn't have to carry this weight around with me, for the first time in my ultimate career.



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If you watched the game, you know how incredible it was (if you haven't, go watch). It was competitive, and there were some huge plays. It was high-level mixed ultimate, which was impressive considering many of us don't play mixed. But even as amazing as the game was, it failed to top the feeling of just being in that atmosphere. I still remember our first huddle all together. The emotions that came with looking around at everyone in that circle, I got a sense of belonging. When you feel represented,

you feel like you belong. The emotions were raw. We finally had a safe space to open up. From the stories that we shared with each other during our group discussion, the laughs we shared, the tears we shed together, it was surreal. When Justin Badgett shared his motivation for continuing to play ultimate when he felt alone was the ability to see other black men playing, and then he could actually point to his role models in the same room as him. I mean come on. That was the moment I knew COU wasn't just about the game. It was so much more. The best way I can describe it is like a family reunion. Coming home to family you haven't seen in awhile or family you didn't even know you had. A lot of us finally felt seen that weekend.

But even more than us feeling seen, there were kids who came to the clinics Project Diversity hosted and kids in the stands that night who got to see players who looked like them. The goal of the game was to pave the way for the next generation. The game was for the kids who are playing who don't see themselves represented. The kids who never considered ultimate a sport for them because they had never seen a game full of players who looked like them. The game and the documentary are also meant to be watched, shared, and discussed, not just by POC, but by everybody. Space should be made for everyone in our sport.

From the All-Star Tour to the PUL to the COU game, visibility played a key role. The ability to see these games, that can change everything. It is so important to have womxn and POC represented on the big stage. A professional womxn's ultimate league? The young girls I coach have so many opportunities to watch game film and idolize these athletes. Two teams of baller athletes of color playing against each other? The middle school kids I coach can now watch a game featuring all POC and idolize those athletes. "You can't be what you can't see." Just how I needed Briana Scurry to realize I did belong on the soccer field, I hope there are kids who see me and know they have a place in ultimate. And while I may not have a big stage like Coachella, I am using the ultimate field as my platform. My message is simple: Representation Matters.

Resources:

<http://www.allstarultimatetour.com/>

<http://www.afdc.com/project-diversity/>

<https://www.fulcrummedia.tv/etv/>

<https://ultiworld.com/2016/12/19/story-equity-visibility-project/>

<https://www.premierultimateleague.com/>

<https://fulcrummediablog.wordpress.com>



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SO YOU'RE COMING OUT AS TRANSGENDER OR NON-BINARY ... NOW WHAT?

JENNA WEINER



Email: weiner2010@gmail.com

Twitter: [@jennaweiner6](https://twitter.com/jennaweiner6)

Instagram: [@jennaweiner6](https://www.instagram.com/jennaweiner6)

Jenna Weiner is an ultimate player based in the East San Francisco Bay Area. She is involved in gender equity and inclusion discussions in ultimate, including how to best include and create policies for transgender and non-binary players.

HELLO READERS OF THE FUTURE! This is Jenna Weiner, writing to you on October 11, 2019, National Coming Out Day. It's an appropriate day to be writing to you because I want to talk about the process of coming out and how to manage this as a youth player, captain, coach, or teammate. There's also a bonus section with some suggestions and resources for parents. While each identity under the LGBTQ+¹ umbrella has their own coming out steps, I'm going to mostly speak to transgender/non-binary folx² and our allies because it's a bit of a different process than for other groups. I say that from personal experience, as a transgender woman who transitioned and came out in the middle of an ultimate season.

I've been playing ultimate for about eight years, starting when I was in college at UC Berkeley. After graduating, I continued to play ultimate, and in 2016, right when I was about to move to start graduate school at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), I realized that I was transgender. I wanted to continue to play ultimate in grad school, so I had to figure out who to talk to and how to navigate coming out as transgender while playing college ultimate.

It's this type of scenario I hope that I can help guide you through because coming out is hard and complicated,

1. I use LGBTQ+ refer to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and many other identities under that umbrella including non-binary, pansexual, asexual, aromantic, intersex, etc.
2. Folx is a way of writing "folks" that indicates of gender queer inclusiveness with the 'x' replacing the 'ks'.

especially as a trans/non-binary person in sports. For youth players, there are questions about the coming out process, like who to talk to, what issues to anticipate, and what steps to take. For youth captains and coaches, it's about finding the best way to support your trans/non-binary players and figuring out how to use your position of leadership to help your players. For teammates, it's all about how to be supportive and welcoming of trans/non-binary teammates as they go through a particularly challenging time in their life. And for parents of youth players who are coming out, it's about all of those things at once, which can feel very overwhelming. This article will give some guidance for these situations and some thoughts on how to make the coming out process as easy as possible for everyone involved.

For Players

So you've decided to start transitioning, whether socially, medically, legally, or otherwise, and you're trying to continue to play ultimate while coming out. Congratulations on doing what is simultaneously the most difficult and most rewarding thing that you may ever do! It's not an easy process, but it is one that is so worth it, and I promise you that it gets better as you go. You probably have a lot on your mind as you decide how and when to come out, so here are some thoughts and suggestions based on my own experience.

First, start thinking strategically about who you might want to talk to. The first few ultimate people I told at UNR were some of the coaches of the men's and women's teams because I wanted to make sure I had people in positions of authority on my side. For me, the coach of the men's team was a key person to talk to because I wanted him in my corner as I slowly came out to the rest of the men's team while still playing with the team. I was lucky that everyone I talked to was supportive, and they helped tamp down the few knuckleheads who didn't understand what transitioning

meant or made jokes out of it. If talking to team leaders isn't possible, try to get as many people in your corner as early as possible when it comes to coming out so that when things likely go a bit more public, you have people who support you and can back you up.

Second, try to anticipate what issues might come up. One challenge I experienced is what happens when people find out about your transition who you didn't tell directly. During my first year at UNR, when I requested to be on the men's B team instead of the A team because of transitioning, people began to ask questions. Soon thereafter, a rookie on the women's team asked incredulously why I had been added to the women's team's social groups, which resulted in me coming out to a portion of the men's and women's teams. While mostly innocuous in my experience, these types of unexpected coming outs can be stressful, but if you can anticipate the unanticipated, hopefully that will minimize the amount of stress.

Lastly, think about some of the steps you'll be taking as you come out in ultimate. Coming out can be a scary thing, and having some sort of a road map can be super helpful. When I was coming out, there were only a couple of out trans people I knew of in ultimate, and one of them lived in Australia! There wasn't much precedent for what a trans person in ultimate should do or the steps to take, but hopefully that is changing slowly. Here are my suggested steps:

1. Talk to the people you're closest with. Start simple, one small step at a time.
2. Talk to people in positions of authority (captains, coaches, etc.) who will have your back if things go sideways. They'll help ensure the next steps are easier.
3. Talk to anyone else you feel you need to come out to, and then relax. You've done the hard work and now can start just living your life. Congrats again on taking these big but oh-so-worth-it steps forward!

For Coaches and Captains

So you've had a player come out to you as trans/non-binary, or you want to be better prepared if you do have a player come out to you. How can you best support them through your leadership role, and what information or resources should you have ahead of time? These seem like straightforward questions, and in some ways they are, but there are also complications as coming out can be an extremely sensitive process.

First, how do you best support your players when they come out to you? The easy answer is to clearly express your support and your willingness to help them navigate the coming out process with teammates or other coaches or captains. The hard part is how to do that.

As a general rule, you should let the athlete lead. Allow them to determine who to tell when and how. If they don't ask for direct help, that's okay too. You're there to back them up, to be someone to rely on if issues come up, and to help smooth things over if they do get rocky when it comes to potentially problematic team dynamics. As an authority figure on the team, you also have some power to shape a team culture that is inclusive of trans/non-binary players. Ideally, team culture is shaped before potential issues come up, but if not, that shouldn't stop you and the team from making changes along the way.

If you're trying to create an inclusive team culture, there are many resources available to you and your players. For general trans/non-binary questions and education, check out [GLAAD's Tips for Allies of Transgender People](https://www.glaad.org/transgender/allies)³ and the [NCTE's Transgender FAQ](https://www.ncte.org/transgender)⁴ page. [Transgender Student Educational Resources](https://www.transstudent.org/)⁵ also has great graphics that make for easy viewing and understanding of trans-related topics. As far as ultimate goes, the [USA Ultimate Transgender Inclusion Policy](https://www.usultimate.org/news/usa-ultimate-announces-new-transgender-inclusion-policy/)⁶ is the most relevant policy

3. <https://www.glaad.org/transgender/allies>

4. <https://transequality.org/issues/resources/frequently-asked-questions-about-transgender-people>

5. <https://www.transstudent.org/>

6. <https://www.usultimate.org/news/usa-ultimate-announces-new-transgender-inclusion-policy/>

to consider. Although it is not as relevant for youth ultimate, I and others have shared our experiences via articles with [Skyd Magazine](https://www.skydmagazine.com/),⁷ among others. These resources clearly don't cover everything, and questions not explicitly covered in these resources are likely to come up. In that case, my next recommendation is to reach out and ask others for help, whether myself or other members of the community. Having a player come out to you will almost inevitably spark questions about what to do and how to handle things, but hopefully these resources and suggestions give you a start to understanding how to best support and help your trans/non-binary players.

For Teammates

So one of your teammates has come out as trans/non-binary, and you want to be supportive of them. How can you best do that? The first step is the easiest, and that is to respect your trans/non-binary teammate in how they want to be referred to. This may include a different name or different pronouns. Simply using their requested name and pronouns will go a long way toward making them feel welcome.

Another way that you can help your teammate feel supported is by learning what you can about trans/non-binary topics and issues from other places. When coming out, trans/non-binary people often find themselves telling the same stories and relaying the same information time after time. I personally have probably told the same story hundreds of times over the last several years as I've continually come out to different people. If you are able to educate yourself on some of the issues, whether through the links I mentioned above or through other resources, it'll help your teammate feel less pressure to educate you and your team about what they're going through.

And finally, speaking of what they're likely going through, transitioning and coming out in whatever way

7. <https://skydmagazine.com/column/transultimate/>

that looks like can be really hard. So the best thing you can do for your teammate is to be there for them as they navigate the coming out process. Ultimate can be an escape from the pressures of family and school life, and the easier you make it for your teammate to just play ultimate and have fun with you and your team, the better it will be for everyone.

For Parents

Finally, parents! So your child came out to you as trans/non-binary...now what? Asking what to do next is the most frequent and, honestly, the most reasonable initial response to have if your kid comes out as trans or non-binary. It's something that parents often are not anticipating, and it's natural to have questions about what steps to take, who to talk to, and how to best support your child. While I'm not a parent myself, I hope I can give you some advice to help you through this often complicated and difficult time for all involved, including parents. The most critical thing through all of the coming out and transition process is to simply affirm your child, however they want their transition process to proceed. They may not know right away, but that's okay. Let them lead, let them decide what steps are best for them, and go from there.

The first step you'll likely want to take is to gather information about what your child's transition might look like. Some of the resources I mentioned in the section for coaches and captains are also very helpful and relevant for parents. You may also want to check out resources from organizations like [PFLAG](https://pflag.org)⁸ and [Human Rights Campaign \(HRC\)](https://www.hrc.org/resources/transgender-children-and-youth-understanding-the-basics)⁹. Also, talking to a therapist who is trans-affirming and who has expertise in trans issues can be helpful for both you and your child as you figure out what's next. You may also want to consider talking to other parents of trans kids as well as other people you trust. These people may help you learn more and better understand the transition your child is going through.

8. <https://pflag.org/ourtranslovedones>

9. <https://www.hrc.org/resources/transgender-children-and-youth-understanding-the-basics>

Let's talk ultimate briefly, since this is a resource manual for youth ultimate players and teams. Ultimate culture is generally accepting of trans/non-binary players, and certainly in my experience, I've had almost exclusively positive experiences in ultimate. If possible, you should encourage your child to continue to play ultimate. Playing sports has been shown time and again to have positive effects on people's well-being, and that's doubly true for trans/non-binary kids who may be struggling in other areas of their lives. Ultimate can be a space where they can be themselves and not have to worry nearly as much about everything else going on. Hopefully ultimate can be a place where your trans/non-binary child can thrive, and every parent wants that kind of environment for their child.

Conclusion

The coming out process can be a challenge for all involved, especially for trans/non-binary people, and especially in sports. As a player who is coming out, or a coach, captain, teammate, or parent who wants to be supportive, there's a lot to think about, and the answers aren't always simple. For trans/non-binary players, there are questions about what steps to take, who to talk to and when, and what issues to anticipate before they become problems. For coaches and captains, it's mostly about how you can best support your athletes from an authority role and what things you can know about or do ahead of time to create an inclusive team culture. For teammates, it's all about being supportive. And for parents, it's about affirming and supporting your child while letting them lead in the transition process.

A lot of this knowledge comes from personal experience, and I'm happy to share my thoughts with you or your team if you have more questions on this topic or just want to talk things out. Coming out is hard, but hopefully this article is a starting point in helping with your journey, whether that's coming out as a trans/non-binary person or making your team a welcoming and supportive environment for trans/non-binary folks.

ACCOUNTABILITY IN LEADERSHIP

KHUNSA AMIN



Email: Khunsa.amin96@gmail.com

Twitter: [@khunsanana](https://twitter.com/khunsanana)

Instagram: [@khunsanana](https://www.instagram.com/khunsanana)

Khunsa Amin (she/her) is a cis, South Asian womxn who has been playing ultimate since her college days. Alongside playing ultimate, she is now pursuing DEI work and facilitation full time.

WHITE AND HIERARCHICAL are two words that come to mind when I think of the average leadership structure. The ultimate landscape is no exception in this regard.

Why does this matter?

If we don't analyze and critique the current homogenous and vertical power structures that are present, then we won't really understand what it means to build an inclusive and accountable leadership. I'm thrilled to write this article for high school players, coaches, and organizers — because it's never too early to do this work and radically shift the organizational landscape of our sport.

I've been working **very intensely** in the equity field of ultimate for about two years now. My mindset has shifted from an optimism and belief in the folx who are leading the charge to a tiredness and wariness. In these two years, I completely threw myself into volunteering and ended up burnt out. Why did I do this to myself, you ask? Because I care. And caring is rarely a choice for folx with marginalized and/or underrepresented identities. If you fit into these boxes, you understand all too well what this means. If you don't, let me elaborate.

I am a womxn of color. Rarely do I see people like me in leadership or even on the field, really. And that can feel hurtful and isolating. What I can do is help in outreach efforts, work to better my community, and make it a safe space for other BIPOC (Black folx, Indigenous folx, People of Color). One way that I can do this is by making

myself visible. If I can withstand this pressure for a little while, it's for the greater good of the diversity of the sport. And in a sport that relies on volunteerism to run, I ended up overworked and very, very tired.

This does not mean my case should remain the norm. My experience has shown me many things, and one of them is the fallacy of the current leadership structure.

Whiteness

Currently, ultimate is in a space where the sport is primarily played by white, cis, college-educated folk. Ultimate is also in an exciting time of reflection in regard to the sport's diversity, inclusion, and equity. Changes are happening in a lot of spaces...except in the leadership.

There are a lot of factors that contribute to this: The positions are rarely paid, implicit and explicit racism drive away BIPOC, burnout, etc. Knowing the factors is powerful because then we can get to the real work of eradicating these obstacles that stand in the way of an equitable field.

Sometimes these obstacles are contained within our team, and sometimes they are systemic. A lot of the listed factors, unfortunately, are systemic, so there are no easy, one-and-done solutions. There are many complex solutions available to us.

It all begins with an awareness. But then what?

Chances are, you are a white, cis person. And the best first step you can take is to educate yourself and your teammates on equity-related issues. I am a huge proponent of leaders taking a training on implicit biases, at the very least. The training is the first step in accessing one's ingrained biases and starting to work on them. This is important for you but is vastly more important for the marginalized and/or underrepresented groups you are reaching out to. A well-intentioned white person has generally ended up hurting me more times than helping me.

Let's say your team is somewhat diverse, or at least has some marginalized identities present. How do you keep that person invested in the team and help them consider a leadership position in the future?

Analyze your leadership style, and assess the team culture. How are you critiquing BIPOC when they make mistakes? What are you doing to help them overcome obstacles? Are your team-bonding activities inclusive to all or centered on the white experience? These are the small things you can shift to create change.

Additionally, it is in empowering one's teammates that we create the possibility of their leadership qualities coming to fruition. Have BIPOC lead various aspects of practice, and mentor them when space allows. Creating visible pathways towards leadership is vital; contrary to popular belief, "If we build it, they will come" is not true, especially when an effort to be inclusive and supportive is not made.

Finally, learn about the obstacles. What exactly are the barriers outside the ultimate space that make assuming a leadership position not possible for BIPOC players? For example, systemic oppressions BIPOC players face off the field take up prime real estate in one's mind. This can leave very little bandwidth to even consider assuming a leadership position. What you can do is be supportive; help in the dissemination of duties, so your teammate can focus only on the tasks required of their leadership position.

Accountability

Even if you do everything right, it's very possible that your leadership may remain predominantly white; there are systemic factors at play outside your control. This is where accountability becomes very important.

The practice I will be discussing is a principle of Transformative Justice called Community Accountability. Community accountability relies [on our close relations](#)

to hold us accountable.¹ Let's say you are in the middle of a circle. Your circle consists of your closest relations whom you can rely on to hold you accountable when you make a misstep. Each of the people in YOUR circle have their own circles. Maybe there is some overlap in the circles, and maybe you are the one connecting nexus to the whole map for a person. What you end up with is an interlocked community where each person has at least one person as their accountability buddy.

In a similar manner, I'd like to discuss an alternative to hierarchical leadership structures. Hierarchy creates disparities and upholds the status quo of everyday systemic operations. Horizontal leadership structures hold space for many voices at once.

In the model I propose, a logistical committee lies in the center. These are the people who carry out operational tasks to keep everything running smoothly. Around this center is the circle that is comprised of "leadership." Each person in this circle is an expert in a specific area. For example, one person can be in charge of fundraising, another in charge of strategy, another person in charge of drills, etc. This allows for the participation of many folk and gives people a chance to hone and explore their specific skills.

This leadership circle can then have its own circle. This secondary level allows for input from a larger subset of the community that serves as a sounding board or a think tank. For example, the person in charge of drills can have their own circle where people who specialize in offensive drills and defensive drills are present.

What is the point? The point is transparency and a community-led process as opposed to one where a few hold the power, the burden, and the decision-making authority. This structure also allows for BIPOC players to participate in the team structure without breaking the burden of a task-heavy role.

Conclusion

Because of the makeup of our current ultimate community, it may seem hard to envision a day where leaderships are not majority white. Little considerations and large structural shifts are needed to change this norm. Practices in accountability need to be normalized, and communities need to be evaluated to find the obstacles that stand in the way of inclusivity.

All of this can very much start at the youth level. In working to engrave these processes within our practices, we work towards a future in which accountability is a norm and leadership is both diverse AND inclusive. I encourage coaches and leaderships of middle and high school teams to ponder on these practices and to begin implementing aspects that the program has the capacity to handle. Partner with your local disc organizations for financial aid. Create a leadership structure in which you work through a horizontal set of decision making. Reach out to BIPOC alumni to guide your team, coach, and/or advise. Work together to figure out the obstacles, and then work hard and consistently to eliminate them.

This is in no way easy work, and this work is never finished. Instead of pondering the rewards that come out of this, I end with this: Do the work because it's the right thing to do.

1. <https://batjc.wordpress.com/pods-and-pod-mapping-worksheet/>



SECTION VI: DEVELOPING A PROGRAM

Paideia Cup 2017: Christina Schmidt - UltiPhotos

GROWING GIRLS' ULTIMATE: A PARENT'S STORY

DENISE FLEMING



Email: rehder.fleming@gmail.com

Twitter: [@flamingo_61](https://twitter.com/flamingo_61)

Instagram: [@flamingo_61](https://www.instagram.com/flamingo_61)

I love the sport of ultimate. As a non-player participant in the game, I was on the sidelines for my husband in the mid-90s when he played in winter league in the Triangle Area in North Carolina. For the last eight years, I've been cheering on girls and girls' ultimate as my daughter Sydney has moved through the ranks.

MOST OF THE ARTICLES IN THIS MANUAL focus on the perspectives of players, coaches, and organizers. And rightfully so. But there's another group of people who play an important role in growing girls' ultimate: parents! In this article, I'll share my experiences helping to grow girls' ultimate in the Triangle Area in North Carolina. I'm thankful to be part of such a thriving community, and I hope that you can take something from our story back to your child and their team.

Durga, SAGA, and Humble Beginnings

Our family's entry into girls' ultimate began in 2013 when my daughter Sydney joined a local girls' club team called SAGA (Socially Awkward Girls' Association). She was 13-years-old and had previously played two summer league seasons with the Triangle Flying Disc Association (TFDA), now known as Triangle Ultimate (TU). Her dad is a long-time ultimate player, so she had already spent plenty of time around ultimate by the time she started playing. Me? Well, I'm the non-player, ultimate cheerleader in the family. I loved watching my husband play, and I was delighted when Sydney started playing.

When Sydney started playing, the primary single-gender playing opportunity for high school girls was SAGA. Most schools did not have a girls' team. SAGA was essentially a combo team with players from four or five different schools. The team was preceded by Durga, also a combo team that started in the mid-2000s. The team eventually evolved into SAGA. SAGA's coach, Josh Hartzog, wrote a

great article called “[Why I Coach Girls Ultimate](https://skydmagazine.com/2014/02/why-i-coach-girls-ultimate/)” in Skyd Magazine about single-gender play.¹ Go read it!

Sydney and SAGA played some local college teams, but they mostly traveled to high school tournaments like Tidewater Tune-Up (Carrollton, VA), Paideia Cup (Atlanta, GA), and Southernns, which was the season-ending high school tournament for the region. This travel involved setting up hotels, carpools and organizing sideline support, and I happily volunteered to assist with these tasks. I was glad to support Sydney and her teammates and coaches.

SAGA had two amazing coaches in Josh Hartzog and Suzanne Derby-Wright; they were dedicated to the team and inspired the girls to work hard and play hard. It was a great experience, there were wins and losses, and they loved playing together. Sydney was surrounded by a lot of talented players on SAGA, and the older girls welcomed her into the group.

Shortly after Sydney began playing on SAGA, USA Ultimate disallowed the team from competing in the USA Ultimate High School Girls' Division since SAGA was comprised of players from a number of different schools. USA Ultimate's rules were intended to encourage schools to form their own distinct teams to compete. Without a clear picture of who SAGA could compete against, local organizers and coaches turned their focus on developing local single-gender playing opportunities.

Focusing on Local Single-Gender Playing Opportunities

A girls' high school league was created with the mission to grow girls' ultimate in the Triangle. In order to get more girls playing ultimate, TU organizers felt that it was necessary to give them an opportunity to play where they wouldn't be overlooked on the field. The most obvious solution to this was to create girls' teams and

to facilitate local single-gender playing opportunities. TU took the firm stance of forming a girls' league and disallowing girls on boys' teams with exceptions only for areas where there was no girls' team nearby. The league did allow combo teams, and at first, all of the teams competing drew from at least two or three different schools. TU's stance challenged the girls (and their supporters!) to start recruiting.

This increased focus on local play enabled myself and many other parents to get more involved. We were able to watch our athletes compete on a regular basis, and we developed stronger relationships with the coaches and organizers, as well as other parents. All of this helped to develop a sense of community.

From my perspective as a parent, the focus on local play did great things for our girls. While there are girls who are capable of competing on an open/boys' team, many of our girls found it more welcoming to play on a girls' team. In any case, making sure that there are a variety of types of opportunities will expand the number of girls playing, and I highly recommend this to coaches and organizers everywhere. Creating a safe space is valuable for girls who are new to the sport or who are not as developed yet as players. Creating a single-gender high school league was incredibly important to the continued development of girls' ultimate in the Triangle.

Another thing that supported the growth of girls' ultimate in the Triangle was the establishment of a middle school league, run by the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City school system. With girls being introduced to ultimate at a young age, we were able to build a pipeline for high school girls' ultimate. This bolstered numbers for local high school teams and for the eventual club opportunities that would later develop. The middle school league also gave many parents of high school players a place to introduce younger siblings to ultimate!

1. <https://skydmagazine.com/2014/02/why-i-coach-girls-ultimate/>

The Role of the Youth Club Championships (YCC)

As Sydney's commitment to the sport solidified, I joined the TU Youth Committee. I wanted to give back to the community that was providing these opportunities for her to play ultimate. I volunteered as the YCC coordinator because the YCC experience is amazing for youth players. It is an opportunity to play high-level teams from around the country. YCC is such a highlight for our players that every summer the players come back from Minnesota already thinking about the next year. While local play expanded the number of girls playing in the Triangle, YCC gave our community's strongest players an opportunity to compete at a very high level. This encouraged further growth.

YCC also gives parents an incredible opportunity to get involved as taking a group of kids across the country is quite an undertaking. I've just completed my fourth year

as YCC coordinator for TU. It's a big job and incredibly rewarding. Some of the things I've helped to oversee are team gear, hotels, and food. These seemingly tiny details need to be perfectly orchestrated when you have a team of 20 players or a program of 100+ players traveling in your delegation. Make sure to enlist lots of help. This will make the experience less stressful, and it will also enable you to grow the network of parents committed to growing youth ultimate in your community.

Over the past five years, YCC has been an incredibly important part of growing girls' ultimate in the Triangle. It has opened the eyes of our players *and* parents to the greater ultimate community. Our girls have been inspired by the high level of competition, and they've worked to raise the level of play in the Triangle. Their hard work and dedication was rewarded with their first YCC title in 2017, a second title in 2018, and a co-championship in 2019.



Tourists at Rucktoberfest 2017, © Brent Russell



Tourists at Rucktoberfest 2017, © Denise Fleming

The Triangle Tourists

In 2016, the YCC season came to an end, but the girls wanted to keep playing. The experience of high-level YCC ultimate had sparked a hunger in our girls, and a month later, the [Triangle Tourists](https://www.triangletourists.com/)² had their first practice. The mission of the Tourists was and is to provide an opportunity for players to learn the game and get better by training with top-level coaches. The team practices on Sunday mornings from September through March. Participation in tournaments is encouraged, but there's no pressure to compete. The best part of all? We have high school players *and* middle school players participating!

2. <https://www.triangletourists.com/>

The staying power of the team is a testament to the girls who want to play and the dedication of the team's founders: Brian Dobyns and Mike Shyu. The girls' team just began their fourth season, and last year, we added a boys' club team. One of the unique parts of this program is that the girls' team was established first; this is a source of pride for our girls and the parents, players, and coaches who have supported them!

The Tourists (both the girls' and boys' teams) are fortunate to have a wealth of talented coaches from local college teams who give back to the community. It's not a volunteer job; they are paid for both practices and tournaments. Our parents have also worked very hard to take on much of the work of organizing logistics so that the coaches can focus on what they do best...coaching.

If you're a parent looking to get involved, I can assure you that the coaches and players will be grateful for your help! For the Tourists, I have been involved with taking care of USA Ultimate rostering, registering for events, and helping to coordinate travel plans.

I also want to give a shout-out to Without Limits for welcoming the Tourists to their women's college tournaments. Many of Without Limits' events are hosted in Axton, VA, which is less than two hours from the Triangle. The proximity for competitive play has been key to the growth of the Tourists. The Tourists have played at numerous Without Limits events in Axton as well as Winta Binta Vinta Fest (Charlottesville, VA), Easterns (Wilmington, NC), and Rucktoberfest (Wake Forest, NC). One year, the Tourists even took a wild ride to Missouri for Without Limits' Midwest Throwdown. "If we're Tourists, shouldn't we *really travel?*"

The Best Is Yet To Come!

Although Sydney moved on to her own college team last year (Yay, Pleiades!), I've continued to manage the Tourists girls' team. Growing girls' ultimate is a pleasure that I'm not ready to step away from. I'm excited to see the continued growth of girls' ultimate in the Triangle. We're continuing our focus on local play, YCC, and the Tourists, and we're also continuing to do lots to get girls playing.

I'm incredibly proud of the role that our parents have played in supporting the growth of girls' ultimate here. We're a close-knit bunch, and we care a lot about the players, leaders, and fine young women that we're building. I wish you the best of luck wherever your athlete, team, and/or program are in your journey. I hope that you get involved, whether that's watching a game, pitching in to bring snacks, or becoming a YCC coordinator!

THE “I” IN TEAM: CONTRIBUTING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR TEAMMATES

JENNY FEY



Email: jennyfey@gmail.com

Twitter: [@jennyferfey](https://twitter.com/jennyferfey)

Jenny started playing competitive ultimate in Arlington, VA in 2001 as a high school sophomore. She spent the bulk of her club career with DC Scandal, now plays for DC Space Heater, and has represented the US on the U20 Girls (2004), Beach Mixed (2015), and US Women’s National Teams (2016). She has coached both high school and youth club in the DC area, and in real life, teaches psychology and literature to high school students. She loves crossword puzzles and her baby, Gus.

TEAM SPORTS ARE TRICKY. There are many “I’s” in every “team,” if we are being honest, all with different abilities, personalities, and desires. The task of a team is to coordinate behavior and motivation across these various individuals to create something larger than the sum of its parts. Not an easy task, especially when players are young and when establishing one’s personal identity (on the field and off) feels of paramount importance. Ultimate players are not unique in that they want to see themselves improve in terms of skills and ability. However, ultimate is special in its extreme reliance on collaboration: Callahans aside, teamwork is required to score points. This cooperative element to the rules of the game is a great metaphor for conceiving of our role as individual players in the wider network of the sport. If we are passionate about ultimate, we are likely to play for many teams over the course of our career. The teams themselves provide beautiful opportunities for us to compete and grow. How can we ensure that we repay these teams by helping them to become healthier and stronger before we leave them?

I started playing ultimate, like many gxrls in the early 2000s, on an open team, where constant reminders about my gender exacerbated my self-consciousness about my own development. My desire to come across as “one of the guys” (whom I perceived as generally more athletic and skilled than the gxrls) certainly drove me to work like crazy to improve, but it also reflected some internalized, problematic ideas about sports and who they were for. I did improve, but I made a lot of

choices that I now perceive as short-sighted, because I was singularly focused on giving myself access to the ultimate that would push me the most.

In high school, I sought out only the best players to throw and train with (usually boys). Later, when I attended a small college near DC that was just starting a womxn’s program, I practiced more with the men’s team in my first two years than with the womxn’s team, because I was looking for more of a challenge. Many weekends, I traveled to DC to play club, skipping some of the precious few college tournaments I would get a chance to play.

There was a lot I missed in the narrative that I created (and which was partially created for me) around who was good and who wasn’t, a lot about the history of wxmen’s access to sports, for example. Thankfully, today, my high school community is thriving, with many gxrls programs of all levels, and my college womxn’s team participated in the D-III College Championships—not for the first time. I can’t give myself credit for any of that, however.

My insecurities around the relationship between my performance and my gender was not a struggle unique to me, though I am hopeful that more gxrls playing ultimate today are able to see the sport as a space for them. Even still, all young, developing players are going to have to figure out how their personal growth as players intersects with the growth of their team and ultimate community.

It was transformative for me when I realized something about my ultimate: *It wasn’t mine alone*. We are all part of a system. This realization has many implications, but the first one I came to terms with is that I was only able to progress as an athlete, as a thrower, as a defender because of the work of other people. Other people mentored me, other people inspired me, other people threw me the disc, other people matched up on me and forced me to work hard, other people paid for

my uniform and my travel and my cleats, other people organized the events I went to and lined the fields, other people innovated the game before I was even born.

The next half of that realization was just as important: I was that other person to lots of people. Even in the first few years of my ultimate life, I had played with and against hundreds of people. I was becoming a skilled and competitive player, known in my region, which meant I had even more of a voice and impact. Unfortunately, there hadn’t been many gxrls playing at my high school or at my college - but did I want that to continue to be the case? Unfortunately, I hadn’t had a lot of womxn mentors in the sport so far, but did that mean it was ok?

I decided it wasn’t, and although it was too late for me to invest more in my college team as a player, or spend more time with the gxrls who were playing with me alongside the boys in high school, I was able to return as a coach and youth league board member as time went on. I have also had the wonderful opportunity to play club alongside some of the incredible gxrls that I have coached from DC, and I can be confident that they are being exposed to many more strong womxn mentors than I had the chance to be. But my specific story, which unsurprisingly centers in a lot of ways on my gender, is really extendable to a lot of ultimate stories. It’s really a story about elitism. To be honest, I wasn’t consciously thinking about gender a lot of the time, I was thinking about performance, and how best to associate myself with whomever I perceived to be the best.

It’s important that I acknowledge how natural this is. There’s an awkward tension in competitive sports: How can we be fully welcoming when our success depends on the exclusion of others? Not everyone can make every team. Not everyone can win every tournament. And most athletes are glad about this of course; we participate in ultimate to be pushed and challenged. Also, self-improvement feels great! It’s so rewarding to put in the hours at the track or gym, or to practice your forehand,

and to see the dividends pay out on the field. I am glad I have found ways to motivate myself, and I am proud that I have achieved success at the level that I have. However, I am also proud that I realized that I have a role in the wider system of ultimate, and I am proud to invest in the success of others as a result.

Bottom line: Your program is worth fighting for. It can be really hard to put in the hours sometimes, especially when you feel like not everyone is fully bought in or players are not progressing as fast as you'd like to meet your team's goals, but there are two concrete concepts to keep in mind when the struggle feels real:

- 1. There's no way to be sure of any team's or any player's potential.** Countless teams out there have exceeded expectations just by creating a culture of support and connectivity. There's an old adage that you are only as strong as your weakest link, which may sound like permission to bemoan your weakest link, but it's really an encouragement to lift everyone up and help them feel essential to the team's success. You may doubt your team's ability to perform at any specific level, or a specific player's ability to contribute at that level, but you can be sure that anyone will underperform if they aren't empowered or valued.
- 2. Giving to others is inherently rewarding.** In some ways, we are programmed to serve ourselves (hence my rueful stories above), but research shows that those who [volunteer their time](#)¹ experience a greater sense of well being, and that this tendency to prosocial behavior is [baked into our DNA](#)². It's rare the individual who regrets the energy they put into growing a program, especially when that program starts to make strides. And even more rewarding is when that program sustains itself over time, providing opportunities for more and more players as a result.

1. <https://www.asanet.org/sites/default/files/savvy/images/members/docs/pdf/featured/volunteer.pdf>

2. <https://www.nature.com/articles/ncomms5747>

So what does investing in a sustainable team look like for a player, especially at the high school level?

- 1. Recruitment.** Recruitment can be awkward, and it can feel like a time suck. It can be hard to find new players if communities or institutions are not receptive to the sport, but a lot of biases against ultimate are weakening. It can also be hard to seek out new players if you think of them as long-term projects or perceive their appearance as a symbol of having to start from scratch, especially when you are older or farther along in your development. *We have to teach the force all over again?!* But every elite player was once a new player, and there is no way to really predict who will thrive in this sport or how long anyone's growth will take, especially given how relatively young ultimate still is. Instead of thinking of adding new players as pushing reset at a given moment in time, try to conceive of your program as a large, ever-flowing system of parents, rookies, veterans, alumni, and coaches, all contributing to the success of one another over time. At least, that's what you want it to become, right? So imagine that it can be.
- 2. Support.** No one is able to make their best progress if they feel insecure in their ability. Young or new players need to be validated, and you may underestimate how much your enthusiasm for their developing skills will mean to them. Varsity teams cheering on JV teams or veterans celebrating newbies is one of the most heart-filling traditions in ultimate. You can see ultimate rookies become lifelong converts in a single moment sometimes when they feel encouraged. On the flip side, be cautious about constructive feedback, and work with coaches and team leaders to find the best way to deliver it. New players have a lot to learn, certainly, but they can only take in so much at once without being discouraged. And everyone knows it can be hard to take feedback from peers, especially if a foundation of trust is not already in place. Beyond

simply cheering for new players, it's extremely important to also:

- Throw with them.
- Work out with them.
- Make sure they get lots of PT, especially early in the season.
- Make sure they get specific communication about their role on and value to the team.

Those last two decisions will come from coaches, of course, but player leaders can be talking to coaches and advocating for rookies and developing players for their part.

3. Inclusivity. Ultimate has a history as a sport that is majority white, majority male, and majority college-educated. Despite the minimal equipment, it can also be quite expensive since many competitive events require travel. Many people share this sport with people they already know, and unfortunately, this tends to keep ultimate within some of the bubbles where it already tends to thrive. Investing in a program can also mean re-conceiving what that program might be. Think about who is represented on your team and who isn't and whether it has to be that way. Think about the language your team uses and whether that invites others in or not. Think about the friendships and subgroups that naturally develop on teams, especially between stronger and weaker players, and what structures leadership puts in place to foster communication across these divides. Think about ways your team can minimize costs as a barrier for players.

4. Patience. All of these suggestions are easier said than done, especially as someone who learned these lessons in some ways “too late.” What makes investment in a sustainable program especially hard is that you can't find out if it was sustainable until a certain amount of time has passed. Sometimes, this even means the dividends will come after a player graduates, which can be especially hard to swallow. But even putting personal or team goals on hold for a year, or a month, or a tournament can allow younger and new players more needed time to grow.

Personally, I am relieved to feel that ultimate, both boys' and girls', at my high school and my college, are not going anywhere. I am glad the story continued beyond me and my teammates in those places, and I am eager to be part of the future of ultimate, not just the present.

BUILDING A GIRLS' ULTIMATE PROGRAM AT BURLINGTON HIGH SCHOOL

ISABELLA WESTON



Email: isabella.l.weston@gmail.com

Twitter: [@bella_weston](https://twitter.com/bella_weston)

Isabella Weston grew up in Burlington, VT, and is now a sophomore at the University of Vermont majoring in political science. She began playing ultimate her junior year of high school when Burlington High School created its first girls' team. She is now entering her second season with Vermont Ruckus and continues to be involved in the greater Vermont ultimate community.

Author's Note: I'd like to preface this article with a shout-out to my friend Sarah VonDoepp, who played a critical role in the development of the girls' ultimate team at Burlington High School (BHS) and who dragged me along to that first ultimate meeting in February 2017. Since then, ultimate has become one of my greatest loves and is a huge part of my life. So thank you, Sarah! We couldn't have done it without you.

IN SPRING 2017, BHS FORMED its first girls' ultimate team. Since 2011, when ultimate first started at BHS, the school had only had two open teams. The majority of the players were boys, and until 2016, there were only two or three girls in the entire program. This changed in 2016 when six girls showed up to join the team. As interest in youth ultimate continued to grow in the city of Burlington, it seemed like the time was right to start a girls' team.

When we started the girls' team at BHS, we had around 17 girls sign up, only three of whom had ever played any form of organized ultimate before. We immediately faced a number of challenges that we were forced to tackle head-on. These challenges shaped our team identity and made us come together quickly!

Perhaps the biggest challenge we faced was that our team had a wide range of skills. We needed to figure out how to create an environment that would allow all players to grow and learn as individuals, while still

fostering a competitive environment. We needed to keep the atmosphere light and friendly to keep new players coming out while also creating a space for our more experienced players to compete with intensity. While we didn't create the perfect environment, we competed to the best of our abilities, and we also accomplished one of our biggest goals: sharing the love of ultimate with all of our new teammates. Below were some of the things we focused on that allowed us to grow our young team that season.

Cultivate a Positive Mindset

The first and most important thing our team did was emphasize having a positive mindset. This can be incredibly difficult on a team with such wild variance in skill sets, especially when practicing outdoors in the middle of a Vermont March. Our captains and coaches led by example, never showing frustration with the struggle of working with a new, young team. Their positive attitudes made new players want to keep coming back, and even more importantly, it rubbed off on the more experienced players. The team-wide positivity helped make the team a fun and welcoming place for every player and coach.

We discouraged apologies for bad throws (they were bound to happen with so many new players!), we gave each other lots of high fives, and we had team meetings to write new songs and cheers. Our team created a book of popular songs rewritten with ultimate lyrics for us to present to opponents at the end of games, and we encouraged girls to work together to add even more songs to the book. Activities like this encouraged a positive mindset and also brought the team closer together. This type of team bonding caused us all to be incredibly invested in our positive team culture.

Our positive mindset brought us closer as a team and fueled us even in frustrating on-field moments. At the end of an especially cold or rainy practice, we would keep each other psyched up with fun cheers and songs,

and excessive amounts of high fives. Positivity became part of our team's identity and has continued to play a part in the program's growth over the past few years.

Give Every Player an Opportunity to Grow

On teams with a wide range of skills, it can be challenging to make sure that every player is given an opportunity to grow. One area where this challenge comes to the forefront is playing time. There are many ways to approach playing time, but I will walk you through our decision making so that you can understand how we approached this with our young team.

We were faced with a choice between competitive subbing (using skill level to determine how much playing time each player would receive in a game) and creating a more equal system of playing time (prioritizing ALL players having the opportunity to learn and grow in game situations). It is certainly possible to try to accomplish both of these things in a season, but nevertheless, figuring out a balance between these priorities is a challenge teams will face. Because one of our major goals was retaining numbers throughout the season and growing the team for future years, our team leadership felt that it was essential for new players to have the chance to play in as many game situations as possible. Getting everyone playing time in games was especially important because of our relatively short spring season and because low numbers made it difficult for our team to have full scrimmages at practice.

We decided as a team how to handle the challenge of playing time; I want to emphasize that it was a *collaborative* process. All team members were encouraged to share their goals for the team and their input on playing time through Google surveys and team discussions. We also had a team meeting during which our coaches shared their insights about this important topic.

Ultimately, we came up with a system that would maintain relatively equal playing time, but also reward those who were the most committed and came to all practices. By incentivizing attendance, we encouraged players to continue to come to practices and games. We wanted everyone to feel like their effort and commitment to the team were being noticed.

Regardless of how you decide to handle playing time, it is important to find meaningful opportunities for all of your players to develop. This might mean being strategic with scrimmage time during practice or arranging scrimmages against other local teams. This also means that coaches and captains need to invest time and energy in giving feedback to all players and that practices need to be designed with a variety of skills in mind. For example, a throwing drill can be designed with the flexibility to allow new players to work on open-side throws while more experienced players work on break-side throws.

It Takes a Village

The third key to our success was leveraging as much outside help as possible in getting our team off the ground. We were fortunate to have parents who helped with ordering jerseys, booking fields, and arranging buses. These parents took a tremendous administrative burden off of the coaches and team leaders. This allowed coaches and team leaders to focus on teaching the game and building our team culture. Our parents were an integral part of our community and helped us all to grow even closer together. Our players were never distracted or concerned with finding ourselves rides to games or arranging practice times. Without our parents' assistance behind the scenes, we could not have achieved what we did in that first season.

The greater ultimate community of Burlington also played a large role in supporting our young team. Ultimate players came out to watch our games, bought our merchandise, and helped out at some of our

practices. Again, these people helped us to see our team in the broader context of the ultimate community, and having their support was inspiring for new and experienced players alike. It was also very helpful to have these players come out to practices because it meant that our players could get more individual attention and coaching. These community members also served as role models for our more experienced players and challenged us to continue growing our skills and athleticism. Because of our connections with the Burlington ultimate community, our girls saw how ultimate could stay with them for life and helped them see the bigger picture of the work we were doing as a team.

Conclusion

Helping to build the girls' program at BHS brought me a tremendous amount of joy, and I hope that you experience the same as you build your team. I am extremely proud of the work that we did to create such a beautiful and strong program that now has two girls' teams and continues to provide a welcoming environment and spread a love for the sport. The work I put in with the team at BHS personally taught me a lot about leadership and organization and gave me a community through which I have found my closest friends and favorite hobby.

Building a new girls' ultimate program in a high school is a significant amount of work, but it is also some of the most rewarding work I've done in my life. It was amazing to grow and learn as a player and to see that growth mirrored in my team as well. By cultivating a positive mindset, giving every player an opportunity to grow, and depending on our village of supporters, we created a thriving girls' ultimate program in a few short years. I hope that these insights from our journey help you as you grow your own team!

WHAT IT TOOK TO GO VARSITY

ANNE WATSON



Email: anneofvermont@gmail.com

Twitter: [@anneofvermont](https://twitter.com/anneofvermont)

Instagram: [@anneofvermont](https://www.instagram.com/anneofvermont)

Anne Watson has been playing ultimate since 2004. She is also a teacher at Montpelier High School, where she has coached ultimate since 2010. Since then, her boys' ultimate team has won the state championship three times. Anne also runs ultimate day camps for middle school students around Vermont, and she has been the Mayor of Montpelier since March 2018.

WHEN I STARTED COACHING high school ultimate almost 10 years ago, I heard a question that I'm sure coaches across the country have to field: "Can we be a varsity sport?" I didn't realize then what was involved, nor did I realize that no state up until that point had recognized ultimate as a statewide varsity sanctioned sport. Nor did I know that it would be another nine years until we would become a recognized varsity sport.

At the time that I'm writing this, only Vermont has made this move, thanks to a dedicated group of adult players who cared deeply about youth access to ultimate. This article documents our story. While your state's story may look very different than ours, I am still hopeful that our story is of some use to you. I hope it shows you that it's possible to go varsity in your state and that statewide varsity status for ultimate is worth pursuing.

What does it mean to be varsity?

Varsity status is governed by a state's scholastic sports organization. For us, that is the Vermont Principals' Association (VPA). In the strictest sense, in Vermont, a "varsity" sport means that it is managed by the VPA, or more specifically, their Activity Standards Committee. So how did we get here?

The Road to Varsity

About 10 years ago, my school ran its ultimate team through a non-profit, after-school program. We scrounged for fields. I arranged all of the games with

fellow coaches. It was a lot of work, but of course, it was a lot of fun too.

We asked our athletic director if we could be a varsity sport. He interpreted this as a financial question; varsity sports get a section of his budget. We were told that we had to exist as a club team for at least two years to demonstrate that we were viable as a team and not just a passing fad.

Two years later, we asked our school's athletic director to be included in the school's athletic budget, which would mean transitioning away from the after-school program. Since ultimate requires no referees, no rink time, and no expensive equipment, they agreed to include us. I think it also helped that we lost a different budgeted sport the year prior.

That was great for my team. I started to be paid a bit more. We got better times to use the fields. We even got buses to go to games. But I saw teams at other schools not fare so well. At the time, I was serving on a board called the Vermont Youth Ultimate League (VYUL), which helped set up the spring schedule and ran a few tournaments, including the Vermont State Championships. As a VYUL board member, we heard stories of other athletic directors denying their ultimate team a place in the athletic budget (along with the support of the athletic trainer, buses, etc.) until "Vermont recognized ultimate as a statewide varsity sanctioned sport." Simply put, support for ultimate was not equitable across schools in the state. Achieving statewide varsity status from the VPA was the only way that some teams would receive the support they needed to survive in the long run.

The VYUL then had a decision to make. Should we petition the VPA for varsity status? In order to answer this question, we invited the head of the VPA to meet with us, so we could ask some hard questions about the pros and cons of going varsity. This was a key part of our process; this meeting set the tone for the next four years

worth of work. The VYUL asked honest questions and got some straight answers. The head of the VPA got to learn about ultimate, how the VYUL ran the season, and what was normal for our community.

While I came into that meeting skeptical, I left totally heartened. My main concern was the possible requirement to include refs, and the head of the VPA assured us that when they recognize a sport as varsity, they do so on the sport's own terms. In other words, he did not anticipate that we would be required to have referees. There would be other costs, which I'll discuss below, but in the end, we decided that the added value to our community was worth those costs. Committing to join the VPA furthered our mission to spread ultimate to schools across the state and to make those teams more sustainable.

Our next step was to present to the VPA's Activity Standards Committee. We would have to request Exhibition Status first, and remain an Exhibition Sport for a minimum of two years while both the VPA and the VYUL evaluated whether or not our partnership was working. Then, after two years as an Exhibition Sport, we could petition for full varsity sanctioning. In order to receive Exhibition Status, we were required to have letters of support from at least nine principals and/or athletic directors. The VPA had a rule of thumb that a sport needed a minimum of nine participating schools to constitute a league.

On February 7, 2014, a group of players, coaches, and an athletic director presented to the VPA's Activity Standards Committee and presented them with the letters of support we had gathered, asking them to grant both the boys' and girls' divisions Exhibition Status. The committee then voted unanimously to support ultimate as an Exhibition Sport.

In order to receive full varsity status, we knew that the VPA would require nine letters of support per division: nine for the girls' division, and nine for the boys'. (We

now call the open division the boys' division because that is the convention of the VPA. It is understood that any gender may participate in the boys' division, though there is no guarantee of gender parity. This is true for girls participating on football teams and baseball teams, when there is no girls' team at the school. So in practice, "boys" means "open." I recognize that this language is still problematic.) At the end of two years of Exhibition Status, we did not have nine girls' teams, but we were close. There were at least fifteen boys' teams at the time. So by the close of those first two years, in 2016, we asked the VPA for a one-year extension of our Exhibition Status, so that both the boys' and girls' divisions could enter varsity status at the same time.

We then learned that another sport, volleyball, had entered varsity status in Vermont with fewer than nine

participating schools. They were granted varsity status on the condition that they would have nine participating schools two years from that presentation. We decided to follow that precedent. The next year, on November 3, 2017, we asked the VPA to grant both the boys' and girls' divisions full varsity status for the 2018-2019 school year, with the condition that there would be nine girls teams by the 2020-2021 school year. At that meeting, the VPA had some discussions about the structure of tournaments, the level of contact, and player safety. The only comment I remember very clearly was that one of the athletic directors praised ultimate's perfection of "the art of the do-over." They loved the fact that students had to make their own calls. No one brought up the possibility of adding refs. They voted unanimously to approve ultimate as a varsity sanctioned sport.



Students, coaches, and an athletic director after successfully petitioning the VPA for Exhibition Status in 2014; © Anne Watson.

The Upside of Varsity (aka the Downside of Club)

For students, the desire to “go varsity” was primarily an issue of parity with other sports as well as legitimacy. They wanted to be recognized for their skill like any other athlete. These reasons alone are good reasons to pursue varsity status. However, there were other details that the VYUL found motivating.

Media Coverage. With only club status, we were denied coverage in our local paper’s sports section because they only covered “varsity sports.” As a varsity sport, we have been covered extensively by local media in the first varsity season, both by TV and newspapers.

Field Space. As a club sport, we had last pick of available spaces and times at the school. As a varsity sport, we have as good a chance of getting a good field as any other sport.

Cost for Player Insurance. As a club sport, all of the liability was run through USA Ultimate. There’s nothing wrong with that per se (indeed USA Ultimate has been incredibly supportive of our transition), but as a coach, I had to get every student to register and pay for a membership. As a varsity sport, our insurance is covered by the school.

Accessibility by All Income Levels. In Vermont, we have a “no-pay-to-play” rule that guarantees that varsity athletes are not asked to pay anything in order to participate in a school sport. This is an issue of access and equity. As a varsity sport, we had funding through the athletic budget which prevented us from needing to ask kids to pay for memberships or tournaments, though many schools still supplement their budgets with team fundraising efforts. Still, there is no per-player fee to play.

Cost for Tournaments. Out-of-state tournaments often cost upwards of \$300 per team. Most of that expense comes from the host team having to rent fields. Lots of high schools in Vermont have multiple fields available

on weekends. Since we are officially affiliated with our school’s sports program, Vermont schools can host tournaments for free or nearly free. We don’t have to rent our own fields.

Athletic Trainer Support. Our school’s athletic trainer is required to be at varsity home games. This support is not offered for club sports.

Transportation Support. Anyone who has coached high school ultimate (or adult ultimate for that matter) knows that coordinating transportation to and from tournaments or games can be cumbersome. Varsity sports have the support of the athletic director to arrange for transportation and a budget for buses.

Coach Payment. Depending on volunteer coaches is not sustainable. Yes, it may work for a few years when someone is willing to give up their time, but that is a good way to burn someone out. Youth coaches work hard to navigate young egos, prevent and address bullying, communicate with parents, and make sure that everyone is having a good time, in addition to teaching the game and making sure things are running smoothly. Their work is real and valuable and worthy of pay. Anything less is wage theft.

The Downside of Varsity (aka the Upside of Club)

At the meeting with the head of the VPA, it became clear that we would need to make a few sacrifices. We would have to abide by all of the rules that other varsity sports abided by. Different states will have different constraints, so please keep in mind that this was just the list for Vermont. If you are interested in pursuing varsity in your own state, you’ll want to find out their rules.

No Out-of-Season Coaching. In Vermont, varsity sport coaches cannot coach their players outside a defined season, except for the summer time. They may coach their players during the summer and during that sport’s

specific season. Since ultimate is a spring sport, varsity coaches could not coach any member of their school in ultimate during the fall or winter seasons.

Limitations on Tournaments. This was the most controversial topic for us. In other sports, the most any sports team could play was a double header. So the prospect of playing seven games in two days was quite a stretch. In the discussion with the VPA, they expressed their concern that normal tournament-style play was unsafe for high school aged players. After we had the green light to go varsity, we had a meeting to determine what specific limitations we would have on our tournament play. That piece is still being clarified, but we discussed the possibility that tournament play time would be limited by the number of minutes a team could play in a day. It also seemed possible that a team could have more minutes of total play time if they had an hour-long break between games. This, however, is still in flux. Despite the lack of clarity around that particular topic, I genuinely appreciate the direction and the sentiment behind that limitation. As a high school coach, I happen to share the concerns of the athletic directors. I'm not sure that we've landed on the best solution yet, but hopefully we'll get there.

Academic Eligibility. When a student plays a varsity sport, the VPA requires that they be in good academic standing. After all, a student's school work comes first. When we made the jump to varsity from being an exhibition sport, there was one school that had fielded a team consistently for years that did not send a letter of support. Their athletic director's reasoning was that he liked having a competitive sport that students with failing grades could still participate in. They too needed an outlet for physical activity, and at their school, some of them found that outlet in ultimate.

Communicating through Athletic Directors. If your youth ultimate community is anything like ours, all the coaches know each other. It was really easy to just text

an opposing coach and say, "Hey, we've got an art show tonight, and we've got to be back early. Is it ok to play our game at 4 PM instead of 5 PM tonight?" Or perhaps "Bad news. I've got a conflict tonight, can we reschedule our game to Thursday?" It turns out that athletic directors hate that. Any scheduling or re-scheduling of the fields must go through them. This might sound like a simple change to make, but it really has meant re-training our coaches to not coordinate things between each other, and instead to make schedule changes or field changes through the athletic director. This is awkward for us because it feels like going through an unnecessary middleman, but this is actually a blessing. This is one less thing that a coach needs to arrange. Our coaches can now focus more on the coaching and less on administrative demands.

Interstate Competition. The VPA did *not* limit interstate competition specifically for us, but I understand this might be an issue for some other states.

The Results and What About Your State?

I hope that our story has helped you think through the possibility of your state going varsity. This has been a long road for us, but it was something a group of adults and players were committed to for a long time. We have been in it for the long haul. Has it been worth it? Absolutely. We saw a significant increase in the number of participating schools when we became an exhibition sport. We have also seen an increase in the number of high school girls' teams. Getting buy-in from athletic directors has enabled many schools to take the next step. For some, that was starting a team at all, and for others, it was moving from just an open team to separate boys' and girls' teams. As a result of our work, more coaches are getting paid, teams are getting the support of their athletic trainers, and no student is required to pay in order to participate. Plus, our kids get to say that they play a varsity sport.

CATCH THEM EARLY, KEEP THEM LONGER: RECRUITING AND RETAINING FEMALE PLAYERS AT THE ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVELS

COLLEEN KEPNER



Austin, TX, she was eager for a new team and sport. She found a home on University of Texas Melee, and went on to play for a number of club teams including Texas Showdown. Inspired by her mother, a career athlete and hall-of-fame coach, Colleen's coaching background includes growing the team at Kealing Middle School alongside friends and mentors Cara Crouch and Michael Natenberg, and working as USA Ultimate's Girls Outreach Coordinator for the state of Texas. She is also a co-founder and director of the Texas Ultimate Summer Camp, and writes young adult fiction about powerful girl-athletes.

I WAS LATE TO THE ULTIMATE PARTY

The coach of the varsity ultimate team at my high school approached me around my junior year, pulling me aside at lunch to ask me if I'd consider joining her team. She was a seminole coach in the youth ultimate movement and a teacher I deeply respected. Many of my closest friends played on the team, and they often boasted of their recent national championships. All of this made the coach's proposition a difficult one to decline.

But here's the thing: The team at the time was entirely boys.¹ And while those boys were my friends, and I'm sure they would have welcomed me, I'd already committed myself to other sports. I loved softball and

¹ During the editing process for this article, I learned that USA Ultimate's youth divisions are identified as simply *girls*, *boys*, and *mixed*. There is no open division delineation.

Email: colleenkepner@gmail.com, tusculti@gmail.com

Twitter: [@colleenkepner](https://twitter.com/colleenkepner), [@tusculti](https://twitter.com/tusculti)

Instagram: [@colleenkepner](https://www.instagram.com/colleenkepner), [@tusculti](https://www.instagram.com/tusculti)

Colleen is a lifelong athlete who fell in love with playing and coaching ultimate later than she would have liked. After a successful Division I college field hockey career and a move across the country from Amherst, MA to

find a group, maybe recruiting a cluster of friends at once, or immediately introducing her to other girls her age in the same situation will help ease the transition to a new sport and increase the numbers from the outset.

Even with a plethora of all-girl playing opportunities, there are times when our young athletes might still prefer a coed setting. If it means being able to represent their school, play with their friends, or have sufficient numbers for a full-field game, sometimes girls will choose to be in the minority. As a coach in a community that still plays primarily mixed-gender youth ultimate, I think it's imperative to seek input from the stakeholders (i.e., our players). Well-intended adults may push for single-gender rosters and leagues, believing that it's a move toward progress for our female players. And sometimes taking that kind of uncomfortable step is, indeed, what progress looks like. But those grown-up decisions aren't always welcomed by the youth players, and the community isn't always ready. This can have adverse effects such as low turnout, reduced buy-in, or disappointed players and diminished experiences. How do you know if your players are ready? It's simple: Talk to them. Kids are smart, and they're more reflective than we often give them credit for. Include them in the conversation. Sometimes they have the best ideas of all, and they know the feelings of their friends and teammates far better than we do. In theory, girls will be more comfortable starting out with other girls. But being able to *actually play a game* will often have the biggest impact on how much they love the sport.

Fake It 'Til You Make It

We'd all be thrilled if young people instantaneously loved ultimate and were desperate for more time on the field. But sometimes having their friends play or their parents forcing them out there is the only thing that gets them on the field at all. I'm not a parent just yet, but many of my friends who are parents swear by a little thing called bribery. (Don't worry, I'm not going to name names.) And

as a middle school teacher, I can attest that while some students are naturally intrinsically motivated, others need a carrot. They need to know that they'll be getting a grade, or a few minutes of extra recess, or maybe a handful of popcorn for their efforts. And the same can be true when recruiting new youth players of any gender to ultimate.

Every year, my co-coaches and I collect swag from our friends and local female players, with the express purpose of letting our graduating middle school girls pick out a jersey or a pair of shorts. It's become such a tradition that when they move on from 7th to 8th grade that they'll often ask us about it, having heard rumors from last year's players. (What they don't know is that we're subtly recruiting them for our own favorite college, club, and pro teams!) The theory here is that not only do these players get a little bit of sweet gear as a graduation gift, but that they also feel inspired and encouraged to keep playing. They learn about future playing opportunities, including womxn's and true mixed. Our local middle school league is technically mixed-gender, but the number of females on any given roster is so inconsistent that matchups are rarely "gender across." It's more accurate to describe the league as "open" or "loosely coed." Seeing our players put on a jersey from Bella Donna or Fury or Revolution reminds them (and us) that they have a bright future in the sport if they choose to embrace it and that female-centered opportunities and rosters do exist.

Providing tickets and access to on-field interactions with players also have a legitimate effect. In Austin, we ask local female youth players to help make signs at games and enlist their help as "hype squad members" on the sidelines. That direct connection with upper-level players and coaches helps them feel like part of the action and might provide them with a level of familiarity and confidence to try out for the team, or a team like it, one day.

Beyond tangible incentives like swag or tickets to games, all players respond well to praise. And if you think you're giving too many compliments, don't worry. You're not. Recent coaching data indicates that even coaches of competitive athletic programs need to give at least three pieces of praise and observational feedback for every bit of criticism in order to build the trust required for athletes to feel safe enough to try and make changes to improve.³ Kids need the same thing, if not more...especially when there will be times neither team can complete a pass and the point lasts for the entire practice. Just KEEP UP THE POSITIVITY. Find the good wherever it exists (and it always does), and emphasize that to your players over and over again. That encouragement is even more critical when a player takes a chance that doesn't immediately work out; a kind word about a well-timed cut, even if the throw was incomplete, might be the feedback she needs to try the same cut again without fear.

See Her, Be Her

One of the most powerful resources that we have in the ultimate community is the community itself. When female mentors and role models are in place, it breeds confidence and optimism for younger players. This might include bringing alumni from their school, players from the high schools they're likely to attend, or Youth Club Championship players to youth camps and programming.

This year, I ran an elementary-based summer camp, and despite my best efforts, only one girl registered. She was confident and self-assured until the very last day, when the pressure of a showcase game and the competitive nature of the older boys on her team got to be too much. She sidelined herself, worried that she wouldn't live up to her teammates' expectations or that the boys would be cruel to her if she made a mistake. She needed a boost,

so I called on one of my volunteers from our local girls' YCC team, someone I'd coached for many years, and asked her to inspire some confidence. After a pep talk from an older player, someone she could both see herself in and whom she respected and trusted, the camper got back on the field and finished the game as strong as she'd played throughout the week.

All-call girls-only practices and pick-up games for all ages offer a place for these relationships to develop further. This is especially true in a youth context where all-girl teams may not yet be an option (like here in Texas), and where mixed and boys' divisions are the only offerings. Intermittently pooling the female players to help them build connections can help foster confidence that they bring back to their mixed and boys' rosters. Elementary and middle school players can meet and play with high school girls, improving their skills and envisioning a future for themselves in the sport.

Similarly, fostering relationships between local club, college, and pro womxn's teams on and off the field reminds our youngest players of what they might aspire to be. That might include tournaments or local games or even meet-and-greets at tryouts and practices. If those events aren't local, organizing all-girl watch parties for live-streamed games can be a terrific way to provide perspective about how big ultimate really is and what they might one day pursue.

Keep Your Allies Close...

The middle school team that I co-coach has graduated some outstanding female players over the years. One year, after a particularly strong season, I found out from a parent that our outstanding core of girls had been recruited by one of the boys on the team. "He was relentless, starting right away in sixth grade!" she told me.

Being a tight group of friends, the girls had obliged and took to the sport immediately. Not surprisingly, this boy

3. Bornstein, David. "The Power of Positive Coaching." The New York Times, The New York Times, 21 Oct. 2011, opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/10/20/the-power-of-positive-coaching/.

had an older sister who played for us some years back and now plays at her own high school. In retrospect, had we not somehow hooked the sister into playing back in the day, then the younger brother wouldn't have developed the same interest and neither would we have been lucky enough to coach his female friends. In short, the power of peers, and of strong male allies, cannot be underestimated.

I've always been lucky to coach with terrific male colleagues, friends, and advocates. Throughout the 15 years that I've been running middle school ultimate programs, and since I began directing summer camps and hiring staff myself, the men alongside me have been collaborative and philosophically aligned with my vision for equity. Modeling equality and collaboration on your coaching staff is one of the most powerful tools that I've seen for bringing our youngest female players to the field, and keeping them there. In many developing youth communities, all-girl opportunities and contexts are limited. This means that working with male allies is paramount for mixed and open scenarios to feel welcoming and safe. Mixed-gender coaching staffs provide opportunities to model behavior for young male players and create teachable moments in which we can be explicit and direct about building a culture of inclusion and respect. The earlier we have these discussions, the more empowered young people will feel to become forces for change and for good. We want this to become intuitive and second nature for our female and male players alike. The girls not only hope for respect, they expect and demand it. Our male players know how to create an atmosphere that is genuinely inclusive, understand their role in building that environment, and recognize the genuine value in that type of team, both on and off the field.⁴

4. Though I've had students who self-disclosed as transgender in my classroom before, I have yet to coach a self-identifying transgender athlete. With limited experience on the topic at this point in my coaching career, I rooted my article with a focus on cisgender female-identifying players, especially given the age group of my specific subject. That also guided the language that I used throughout the piece. However, I am confident that I've

What If and What Now?

I've often lamented the fact that I arrived at ultimate in my twenties, and I've looked back to wonder how the trajectory of my athletic career might have changed if I'd played as a teen or younger. More significantly, I've thought about how Tiina's flattering interest would've felt entirely different if there'd been an all-female program available to me at the time.

And maybe that's the biggest take-away here. There are so many girls in elementary and middle school who are hungry to realize their athletic potential. Many of them commit to more high-profile sports with accessible all-female programming before they even have the opportunity to stumble across ultimate. What if we did a better job of building an environment where ultimate was also available to them as an option? What if there were places for them to play 7 v. 7 with other females at eight and 10 and 13 years old? Those circumstances do exist in a few rare cases and places, but overall the importance of catching girls early and fostering their love for ultimate is invaluable. This is one of the building blocks for robust female programs at the high school level and for the future of womxn's ultimate.

coached transgender players without knowing it and that this will continue to be an issue we must address with awareness and sensitivity as coaches and leaders in our sport. Building inclusive communities and teams will help establish a foundation to welcome and support transgender and non-binary athletes at the youth level and beyond.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION STRATEGIES FOR GIRLS' ULTIMATE

SARAH POWERS



Email: sarah@hq.usultimate.org
Twitter: @GUMUltimate
Instagram: @gumultimate
gum.usultimate.org

As the USA Ultimate Manager of Youth and Outreach Programs, Sarah manages Learn to Play, the Girls' Ultimate Movement, Talent ID Camps, and the Coach and Organizer Convention. She also manages USA Ultimate's outreach coordinator volunteer structure and develops

outreach programming and resources that support local organizers and local disc organizations in growing the number of youth ultimate players. Sarah started playing ultimate after high school cross country practice and has always come back to the sport for the friends, competition, and opportunity to give back.

I HAVE WORKED AT USA ULTIMATE for almost five years and have had the privilege to manage USA Ultimate's Girls' Ultimate Movement (GUM). GUM is a community-wide outreach program designed to address the participation gap between girls and boys in our sport. Nearly 75% of youth ultimate players are boys. This gender disparity is not unique to ultimate; it is sadly seen across all sports. Research from the Women's Sports Foundation in 2016 found that, "[b]y age 14, many girls are dropping out of sports at two times the rate of boys[.]"¹ Ultimate organizers recognize the challenge of recruiting and retaining girls in our sport. One of the most frequent questions I've received at USA Ultimate is, "How do you recruit girls to play ultimate?" Increasing the amount of girls who play our sport is the reason that GUM was created in 2014.

In order to recruit girls to play ultimate, you first need to identify what attracts them to the sport. Ultimate is

1. "Factors Influencing Girls' Participation in Sports." Women's Sports Foundation, 9 Sept. 2016, <https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/support-us/do-you-know-the-factors-influencing-girls-participation-in-sports/>.

a healthy activity outside of the classroom that helps girls develop a positive self-image as well as skills such as leadership, confidence, and teamwork. U-16 girls surveyed at the 2015 Youth Club Championships (YCC) shared that what keeps them playing ultimate is fun, community, spirit, friends, and being challenged. With all of these benefits, why aren't more girls playing ultimate?

One reason that more girls aren't playing is the lack of female coaches. "Girls more readily identify with and see a female coach as a mentor and as a role model, which in turn, can help counter stereotypes and boost girls' confidence, self-efficacy and sense of belonging[.]"² Recruiting female coaches may take more active recruitment, including leveraging personal connections or extending a direct invitation, but the effort is well worth it. Consider players' moms, local women's college or club players, as well as local league players. In addition to directly recruiting women to coach, we can also support female coaches with the resources and training they need to have a positive experience. Some examples of this include encouraging them to start as an assistant coach to ease into coaching, taking a USA Ultimate Coaching Development Program (CDP) clinic, offering continuing development workshops, and identifying a positive mentor. Female coaches can be excellent mentors and role models for both boys and girls, and may have an especially positive impact on getting more girls to play ultimate.

Coaches, both female and male, can also cater their coaching toward girls. Coaches should focus on constructive feedback that is skills-based and should believe in the strength and ability of all their athletes. They should also disregard societal gender norms and encourage all of their athletes to be strong and confident! Specifically at the youth level, coaches look to design fun practices that focus less on drills and more

on games where skills can be developed and downtime is minimized. It sounds simple, but girls are more likely to stick around if they're having fun and learning! Check out resources from Women's Sports Foundation, Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport, How to Coach Kids-Coaching Girls, and Aspen Institute's Project Play for more information on coaching girls. GUM will also be providing more resources on this in the future.

Another important aspect to getting more girls to play ultimate is recruiting them early. There's a big advantage to getting girls to play prior to middle school, before they've determined they aren't athletic and sports aren't for them. It is also important to offer diverse playing opportunities, including single-gender and mixed-gender opportunities. Although it may seem easier to develop a mixed playing opportunity first, some girls may have a more positive experience playing solely with other girls. A single-gender playing opportunity can offer an emotionally safe environment and a level playing field that allows girls to push themselves mentally while developing skills and self-confidence³. Once you've hooked a girl on ultimate, consistent engagement is key, whether with a team, league, or clinic series. Offering a variety of consistent playing opportunities gives girls time to develop their skills and gain confidence in their abilities.

Girls tend to require more active recruitment, so go beyond the basic flyer and have conversations with girls at school and through youth-serving organizations (e.g., Boys & Girls Club, Parks & Rec, YWCA). Recruiting girls through their parents or siblings may also be effective. Share basic information such as skills they'll learn and the practice schedule and team culture. Be sure to also highlight benefits that girls may specifically connect with. And don't forget to follow up! It may take more time and effort to recruit girls, but your persistence will build trust

2. "Designing a Quality Girls' Sports Program." Women's Sports Foundation, 9 Sept. 2016, <http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/howtodesignsportsprogram.pdf>.

3. Zarrett, N., Cooky, C., & Veliz, P.T. (2019). Coaching through a Gender Lens: Maximizing Girls' Play and Potential. New York, NY: Women's Sports Foundation.

and showcase the kind of positive and fun community ultimate can offer. Another avenue of recruiting is to tap in to the existing pool of girls' ultimate players to recruit their friends. This ensures new players already have a friend on the team, which makes them more comfortable with trying something new.

One of the great things about GUM is that we've developed a network of people who are passionate about girls' ultimate. Below I've compiled a list of tips from organizers around the country as well as some of my own. No one method is going to work for every community, so cast a wide net, and try lots of different tactics!

- Recruit a sufficient coaching staff to address player needs on and off the field.
 - Create an environment where mistakes are okay; everyone is learning and working to improve.
 - Engage existing players in recruitment.
 - Create recruitment goals at the start of the season.
 - Try splitting the girls into groups of three to provide a support and accountability network for their recruitment goal.
 - Touch base with the team throughout the season to celebrate successes, while motivating groups and brainstorming new ways to meet their goal.
 - Explain the benefits of increased participation (e.g., more fun, diverse practices and the option to participate in more playing opportunities, such as tournaments like High School State Championships).
 - Encourage players to actively recruit at their school by making school announcements, putting up flyers, setting up a table at lunch, or promoting the team at school events.
 - Build a positive and welcoming team culture.
 - Work with the team to develop your team's identity by creating team goals, writing cheers,
- and engaging in team discussions around the rules and what Spirit of the Game looks like for your team.
- Player or captain buy-in is key to the success of team-building initiatives. You can suggest ideas, but reach out to the players as well, since they know what they're going to enjoy.
 - Pair up players at the start of the season, so they can be connected with a buddy who can cheer them on and support their development.
 - Buddies can exchange small gifts prior to a tournament or at certain points during the season. Some examples include a snack bag, silly socks, or a personalized water bottle.
 - It may be helpful to pair up new players with more experienced players.
 - Attend a tournament as a team early on to introduce new players to our fun and welcoming community.
 - Prior to the season, host an ice cream social or BBQ with a game of ultimate at the end as a friendly and low-pressure way to try out the sport.
 - Run a girls' only clinic. GUM has free resources as well as insurance and liability coverage.
 - You could try this pre-season, mid-season, or even post-season to build off of the excitement of the current season. Host a clinic at the middle school connected to your team's high school to help grow interest early on.
 - Throughout the season, coordinate socials to build good team relationships.
 - This could be anything from pizza after practice to a viewing party of a women's or mixed club game online or in-person.
 - Parents can help with this to take the burden off the coach.
 - Incentives, even small ones, can go a long way.
 - Engage the team in creating practice attendance, individual, and team goals.
 - Try incentivizing players to bring a new friend

to a practice, social, or game. Give both players a prize!

- Incentivize achievement of various goals with carrots such as more playing time, swag grab bag (e.g., stickers, discs, temporary tattoos, donated restaurant gift cards), a longer scrimmage, or a fun game such as Galaxy Wars.
- Encourage girls to bring their friends and families to games, so they can be connected to the competition and community.

You can try an idea or two from this list and build on them to create a recruitment and retention model that works for you.

When I applied to work at USA Ultimate in 2014, one of the aspects that most excited me was the opportunity to drive the growth of girls who play ultimate at a national level through USA Ultimate's Girls' Ultimate Movement. The all-girls middle school and high school I attended focused on female historical figures, authors, and topics, which instilled in me a passion for women's empowerment and equity. I started playing ultimate after high school cross country practice, and since then, no matter my stage of life or where I've lived, ultimate has offered me a fun community, competitive outlet, and opportunities for leadership. Ultimate is a sport that makes me feel strong, confident, and capable of anything. I want to share that feeling with as many girls as possible across the country and give back to the sport that has given me so much! I hope that this article inspires you to join the movement. Let's get more girls playing ultimate!

Suggested Resources:

Tucker Center for Girls and Women in Sport, <https://www.cehd.umn.edu/tuckercenter/research/default.html>.

How to Coach Kids-Coaching Girls, <https://howtocoachkids.org/list/71>.

BUILDING A PROGRAM TO LAST 17+ YEARS

MARIA WHITE



Email: marialwhite15@gmail.com

Twitter: [@Maria_L_White](https://twitter.com/Maria_L_White)

Instagram: [@mariadunnwhite](https://www.instagram.com/mariadunnwhite)

Friends convinced me to quit track and come try ultimate during my sophomore year of high school. I then had the privilege of playing with the Squall girls' team those first three years of Minnesota girls' ultimate, until I graduated

in 2007. I continued to play in college and after. I returned to the program to coach the JV girls' team in 2013, 2014, and 2016, moving to varsity for the three seasons since then. It has been special to be able to contribute to a program that means so much to so many people, myself included.

ABOUT 10 YEARS AGO, our program, Minneapolis South Squall, was facing a looming problem. Our SuperMom was “graduating.” After four children passing through the program, her youngest was moving on to college. She was the parent who had done all of the heavy lifting of running our program at the time of two boys’ teams and one girls’ team. Knowing it was unreasonable to expect one person to step up and take on all that she had done, we were forced to confront how to move forward. Since then, we have taken steps to continue to develop our program, which now includes two or three boys’ teams, two girls’ teams, an extensive parent booster club, and increased involvement in alumni and middle school networks. Some years have been more difficult than others, and there are still plenty more ways we want to grow and improve. These are just some steps that we have taken as a program, in the hopes that others can take something away from what we have built so far.

Players First

A major idea we have endorsed is that if the athletes fall in love with the game, momentum builds from

there. More parents will engage with running the program, so their kids can play the game they love. More administrators will support the program, so their students and families can play the game they love. More community members will donate money, so their neighbors can play the game they love. More alumni will come back to coach because they want to help contribute to something that meant so much to them.

To make this happen, we have developed a team culture that is centered around having fun, playing the best ultimate we can, and building strong technical skills. To begin accomplishing that, we make sure practices at the beginning are two things. They have to be fun; being a little bit goofy helps calm nerves of new players. It also has to be clear to new players that just within those two hours they spent practicing ultimate, that they learned something new and improved on something they could not do before arriving. Youth athletes, especially at the beginning of their experiences with ultimate, have to see that this is something they can, in fact, get better at, and experience success right from their very first practice.

We put such a priority on fun because our years of experience have shown us how important it is. As a team, we play better when we are having fun together. Returning players bring their friends with them to try a new sport that is a lot of fun. In our experience, the vast majority, if not close to all, of our players have joined because a friend or classmate convinced them to come try it out. New players are then more likely to come back and to stick it out through other commitments, if it is something they thoroughly enjoy doing. And if you're ever in doubt about how to make your practices fun, ask your players. Ask them what they liked about that practice, what they didn't like, and what they want more of in order to have more fun. Then do that.

Connect Alumni

When you have a strong culture and have set up graduates with the technical skills to continue playing

ultimate past high school, you also create a support network and pool of potential coaches. Very rarely have we had to look outside of alumni networks for coaches, with 13 of 18 coaches on the girls' side being graduates of our high school. And as time goes on, the network gets even bigger. Over the past five years, we have had 10 coaches on the girls' side, with eight being alumni. With having two girls' teams every season since 2011, by this point in time, we have created quite an extensive network of alumni. There are various other benefits to maintaining alumni's connections to your program, and as a leader in your program, you can decide what purpose you want to build connections for.

One of our strongest methods of keeping alumni connected is through an alumni team participating in the fall mixed league in our city. This team is lead by an alum who does the heavy lifting of organizing and recruiting a team every year for many of us to continue playing together. While a major reason for doing this is for fun, the team can compete fairly well together because so many players learned ultimate through the same program. An added benefit is it keeps alum in touch with each other and has helped to draw more people into coaching. Another method we have used with the girls' team, with varying consistency, is an alumni scrimmage versus the current team. In part due to the efforts we have put into putting players first and connecting alumni through our fall league team, there is a wide network of alum who are still playing ultimate. There are two significant benefits to having our current team scrimmage a team of alum. The current team gets the opportunity of playing against experienced, competitive players. During these scrimmages, the current team gets to practice different strategies we have been learning in deliberate ways and see that they can be effective even against the alum. The second significant benefit is that the current youth athletes get to play against strong, competitive, athletic women who learned to play this sport in the same program that they did. They get to see firsthand that they can go from learning to throw on

these city park fields, to playing for any college or club team they could imagine. And that's pretty special.

Organize Parents

Just like we were confronted with 10 years ago, there is still the question of how you run a growing program without placing all the responsibility on the shoulders of one person. We knew the answer couldn't be giving it all to the coaches, as we wouldn't be able to retain them either. We had to bring in more parents to share the load. What formed in the years following was an extensive parent booster club. As time has gone on, we have seen benefits from this that we did not even expect. I will share how ours works and what they accomplish, but there is one important note that supersedes all others. Always, and I mean always, tell and show parents that any level of involvement is significant and appreciated. Parents want the best for their children, and that looks different to each family. Always make it clear that your program honors that.

Our booster club did not develop its current size and shape in one year. This has been developing for over a decade and will continue to change as we need different things from it. Currently, our booster club meets 3-4 times per year. In Minnesota, the main high school competition season begins in April, culminating in the state tournament in June. Our booster club meets once in early-mid February for the upcoming season. At that meeting, we plan our registration night at the end of February, go over any fundraisers planned for during the season, fill any empty booster club roles, and decide dates for events during the season, such as the end-of-season banquet and the parent social. Our next meeting is at the end of the summer, before the school year starts. Our high school program competes in an additional mixed high school fall league, so at the meeting, we cover the upcoming fall season, fill booster club roles of parents of graduating seniors, and preview what we will need for the coming year. Our third

meeting is at the end of the fall season, in November or December. At this meeting, we cover what we will need for the spring and work to coordinate getting indoor practice space. For many recent years, our biggest fundraisers have taken place during the winter and have been planned during this meeting.

A major responsibility of the booster club is fundraising. Typically, they organize one major fundraiser per year and several smaller ones. For years, we have used a company for selling coupon cards door to door in the neighborhoods surrounding the high school. We usually do it on two weekend afternoons and are able to raise several thousand dollars. This past year, we wanted to try something new, so we used an online fundraising platform, where players sent emails to family and friends with a donation link. This also was successful and brought in several thousand dollars. Other fundraisers we have done consistently are a spring showcase game with a raffle and a restaurant night where a certain percentage of profits are donated to our club. Each of these ideas has been initiated by parents, and typically, the more enthusiastic they are about the opportunity, the more effective it is.

The booster club covers many other responsibilities. Over the years, more roles have been created to help disburse the workload, so more parents can contribute in smaller ways. We have a president, whose responsibilities are mainly organizing and leading the meetings, being a point-person between the booster club and head coaches, and organizing the parent social. A couple weeks into the season, they do a social get-together for parents whose students are new to ultimate, so they can come hang out with other parents and get a lot of their questions answered about this new sport that their child has suddenly fallen in love with. We also have a treasurer who keeps track of our financial account, handles fundraised money and team player dues, and signs the checks for registering us for tournaments. For each team (boys' and girls'), we have

one parent who is in charge of registrations. We have a form players fill out for contact information; players also register with Minnesota Ultimate and purchase USA Ultimate memberships. These two parents help players through the process and make sure everyone completes it. Another parent manages the blog we use as our website, including posting updates about schedules and whatever else needs to be communicated throughout the season. We have parents in charge of the fundraising opportunities, coordinating drivers for tournaments, and planning and organizing the end-of-the-year banquet. Another parent is in charge of the platform we use for coordinating drivers to weekly league games. In different years, different roles have been added, and as the program continues to grow, I am sure more will continue to change. We try to make sure there are different levels of commitment available, so no matter how much time parents can offer to help, there is something significant they can contribute to.

In closing, what works for one program will not work for all programs. Hopefully, this article shed fresh light on possible future steps or even helped re-energize you for the upcoming school year. If I can be of assistance in any way, don't hesitate to reach out. There are some gaps in my involvement with the program over its 15+-year run, so if I am not the best person to answer your questions, I will help connect you to others. The success of our program is the result of years of effort from hundreds of people, and it continues to thrive only with the care and devotion from many more.

YOU (YES, YOU!) CAN GROW YOUTH ULTIMATE

SARA LAZENBY



Email: mufa.youth@gmail.com

Twitter: [@theyouthchair](https://twitter.com/theyouthchair)

Instagram: [@slazenby](https://www.instagram.com/slazenby)

Sara Lazenby is the current youth chair for the Madison Ultimate Frisbee Association (MUFA), one of the largest local disc organizations in the country. She has played ultimate recreationally since 2010, and joined her first club

ultimate team in 2019, six months after becoming youth chair. Sara became interested in growing youth ultimate in Madison after her child wanted to start playing, but there were no opportunities available. A desire to see opportunities created and a push from Robyn Fennig, a MUFA board member, led to Sara becoming MUFA's youth chair.

A YEAR AGO, I WOULD HAVE LAUGHED in disbelief if you told me that I would:

- Be the youth chair of a large disc organization,
- Help to successfully send three teams to the Youth Club Championships for the first time in our organization's history,
- Create multiple new youth leagues in the Madison area, and
- Spend almost all of my free time organizing youth ultimate.

What in the world could I know about expanding and teaching youth ultimate? Who was I, as a non-elite, primarily recreational, relatively unknown player in my community, to spearhead the growth of youth ultimate in Madison?

The answer to the first question is that I knew very little when I started this work. The answer to the second question is that despite this lack of knowledge and visibility within my own ultimate community, I was exactly the person to grow youth ultimate in Madison. I

did not need to be an elite player or the most connected person in my community. I had everything I needed: a passion and desire to grow youth ultimate and a willingness to dig in, meet people, and engage them in conversation.

How am I making progress? Via communication, in all forms. I made it my first task as youth chair to meet with anyone already doing work around youth ultimate in Madison. I wanted to find out what they were doing, what opportunities and challenges they were discovering, and how we could collaborate. There was and is room for all of us in this work; we accomplish more by becoming a community of youth ultimate organizers and by not duplicating efforts. I started my work with the perspective of wanting to understand what good work was already being done. This helped to build trust with fellow organizers and allowed me to provide support for their efforts. It also enabled me to focus my energy on areas that were in need of attention. These organizers are now people I check in with regularly. We brainstorm new ideas together and share our successes and challenges with each other. We support each other's efforts and program offerings, making it easier for players to find opportunities to play and easier to find volunteers to coach or serve as chaperones. We have even worked together across organizations on joint activities, pooling our resources and time to create new opportunities for players.

Beyond communicating with other organizers in the area, frequent and effective parental communication is vital to creating and growing an ultimate program. In fact, this is quite possibly the most important type of communication in youth ultimate, particularly as the player base grows from "children of parents who play ultimate" to "children whose parents don't know anything about ultimate." Parents are entrusting the care and growth of their children to you, even if it's only for a short time period each week. The more you can communicate with them about what to expect from a

youth clinic, league, or tournament, the more they trust that you have a plan that's in the best interests of their children. The more parents understand what's going on in the game and the more they learn about the benefits that Spirit of the Game brings to their child's sport experience, the more engaged sideline you'll have, and the more parents will be willing to volunteer to transport players, bring Gatorade, fill water bottles, and keep score. Parents are a valuable resource to making a league, clinic, or tournament successful, and keeping them in the loop is to your benefit as an organizer or coach. They fill necessary chaperone roles for tournaments, volunteer to help with coaching, and might even start playing ultimate themselves! Parents are also some of the most successful recruiters for youth ultimate. Word of mouth is a very powerful tool; parents who feel connected to a broader community and whose children have positive experiences in youth ultimate will speak positively about it to other parents, bringing new players into the sport.

Outside of my own community, I've found Twitter and other social media valuable for connecting with other youth chairs, organizers, and coaches from across the country. While I hesitated to join Twitter, connecting with others doing the same work on both larger and smaller scales has helped me articulate my goals and priorities and find ideas for expanding and improving the work I am doing. As a bonus, much like my local network, these connections are a supportive group who understand both the joys and sometimes frustrations of organizing youth ultimate. In fact, when our U-17 girls' YCC team struggled with numbers due to a conflicting all-city swim meet the same weekend, I turned to my connections on Twitter to search for out-of-region players to help bolster our roster. DiscNW answered the call, filled those out-of-region spots, and we went on to have a successful tournament weekend with a couple of wins and many new cross-country friendships made.

Advocacy is another important part of my work as a youth chair. I make it a priority to be visible and to

introduce myself to anyone and everyone I come across in the Madison-area ultimate community. I developed an “elevator speech” about my short-term and long-term vision for growing youth ultimate, and I repeat it to anyone who will listen. As you make these connections, it’s useful to find someone to help champion you and your cause. For me, this meant connecting with elite club players and established coaches who were willing to introduce me to others in the ultimate community as the youth chair of the Madison Ultimate Frisbee Association (MUFA). These players and coaches provided an easy avenue for me to advocate for youth ultimate with people I did not know personally at the time. In a school-based program, this might mean connecting with a respected teacher or coach of another sport. These short introductions of me as MUFA’s youth chair engaged adult players in the topic of youth ultimate, and they often provided valuable feedback on things to consider when growing a youth ultimate program, often based on their own experience or network of people they knew. A willingness to talk tirelessly about the importance of youth ultimate, embrace my role as “youth chair,” and be known in the community as such led to offers to volunteer or assist with youth activities, and continues to be vital to developing our network of volunteers.

I cannot stress the importance of these connections. There will be more work than you can conceivably do, no matter the scale of the activity, be it a youth clinic, a high school team, a standalone league, or a youth chair role. Take a tiered approach to growing your program, knowing that you cannot do it all, especially not all at once. As your program grows, turn back to your earlier connections. Even if those individuals were not ready to assist at the time, they might be willing to jump in when they see the positive impact your work is having or when they see a specific event or project they can contribute to. Smaller experiences turn into larger ones, and the momentum from a small successful experience brings in new players as well as new volunteers. One great

example of this in the Madison community is our middle school league. Our inaugural middle school league had 18 kids who signed up. When we offered a second league the following season, we surpassed that number within a day of opening registration and have tripled the league in size between one season, meaning we needed additional coaches. The connections I made early on were willing to step up when I asked for additional coaching assistance, particularly after they saw the smaller league be successful.

While there will be many successes to celebrate on your journey, there will also be challenges. Communication proves valuable on this front as well. Be receptive to communication and feedback from your players, parents, volunteers, and coaches. Their feedback will help you improve your program. Encourage your volunteers and coaches to speak about their experiences to others in order to build a larger coaching network. It’s also been effective in Madison to create a coaching community made up of our youth coaches. This has allowed us to dive deeper on topics such as equity during play and outreach to communities that aren’t well-represented in our ultimate offerings. The coaches also utilize each other as resources, and their reliance on each other helps to prevent burnout.

Growing a youth ultimate program can seem like a daunting task, particularly to someone whose ultimate experiences haven’t been at an elite level. Carrying a passion for growing the sport, displaying a willingness to put yourself out there, and communicating the importance of youth ultimate are more than enough to get started with this work. The more technical aspects of teaching kids youth ultimate can be learned over time, and you might surprise yourself with what you know and are able to teach to new youth players. You do not need to have the ultimate IQ of an elite player to lead an ultimate program; it’s not the most important factor in being able to grow the sport. You (yes, you!) can grow youth ultimate.



SECTION VII: COMMUNITY

Ultimate Peace Summer Camp 2019 - UP Media Team

LEVERAGING COMMUNITY TO CREATE CHANGE

ANNA CLEMENTS



Email: annarclem@gmail.com

Twitter: [@annaclmnts](https://twitter.com/annaclmnts)

Instagram: [@annaclmnts](https://www.instagram.com/annaclmnts)

Anna Clements is an ultimate player and college student based in Minnesota. She plays with St. Olaf Vortex and Minneapolis Pop, and has been involved with equity-related projects such as the Girl Ultimate Player's Initiative (GUPI) and Upwind Ultimate's Crosswind Tour.

AS A WOMXN, ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT challenges I have faced was building the confidence to be successful when voices in my community underestimated me, belittled me, or didn't take me seriously. For many womxn and members of other marginalized groups, it requires a great deal of mental toughness to persevere in an environment where coaches, leaders, and most painfully, peers, often fail to recognize our efforts and success in the same way they would with players of dominant identities. This can be especially detrimental for marginalized athletes in youth ultimate.

In this article, I will share the story of the ways that I, along with my friends and teammates, built and leveraged community to make a difference in youth ultimate in Minnesota. By using our collective voice, all of us can better our personal experiences in this sport, make our sport more inclusive, and create a more positive environment for the athletes who will play ultimate in the future. I acknowledge my own privilege as a white womxn but share my experiences in hopes that we can continue to work together to support the next generation of youth players.

The Challenge

The summer after my senior year of high school, I had the opportunity to attend the Girls' Elite Program at the Competitive Ultimate Training (CUT) Camp. Getting to be coached by some of the most celebrated and well-known players in the womxn's division was amazing, and I also

relished the opportunity to play with so many talented girls. My skills developed immensely over the course of the week. But honestly, the biggest impact of CUT Camp was that I got to connect with other girls from across the nation. While there were many differences in our experiences, there were also key similarities.

During one of our sessions, one of my fellow campers asked the group, “How do I maintain high standards for myself when others place the bar so low?” She played on a boys’ team and felt that her coaches and peers set low expectations for her because she was a girl. Others in the group reflected on their experiences as well, and the discussion opened our eyes to the commonality of our experiences. Many of us felt that we were regularly underestimated, belittled, or not taken seriously. Confidence was something that we all struggled with and we all longed for coaches, leaders, and peers who would push us to be our best, encourage us along the way, and celebrate our achievements.

Leveraging Community to Create Change

Building community can start with small things like meeting awesome allies at CUT Camp or exchanging phone numbers with an opponent after matching up against them in a game.

Putting in the work to create a community where marginalized voices can be heard and taken seriously can be a key first step to creating a more supportive environment for all players.

During my junior year of high school, my friend and teammate Emma hosted her own Food, Frisbee and Feminism event, open to any high school womxn’s players who were interested. For those who aren’t familiar, these events encourage local conversation and empower people to engage in discussions that might otherwise not take place while also enjoying food and sharing stories. Outside of our experiences with Youth Club Championships (YCC), this Food, Frisbee, and Feminism event was one of our first social events with

players from other high school womxn’s teams. While the turnout wasn’t huge, similar to the conversation at CUT Camp, we realized the commonalities in our experiences with the boys’ teams around us, Minnesota Ultimate (our local governing body), and youth summer league.

We didn’t necessarily expect this, but the event ended up being a significant and emotionally charged one for us. After the event, Emma suggested writing an open letter to Minnesota Ultimate, tapping into the greater girls’ ultimate community to stand up together to address the challenges we were facing. The letter outlined a number of issues and included suggestions on how to improve the experience of playing youth ultimate for female players. The letter addressed issues that were widespread among our peers, including disparity in the quality of coaching for YCC teams and poor treatment of women at mixed summer league (which was a requirement to play YCC). Emma wrote most of the language of the letter, and it was read, contributed to, and co-signed by about 25 players, representing 12 different teams across the Twin Cities metro area.

To my surprise, our letter gained traction. On social media, the letter was shared nationally, far beyond our intended audience. People responded to us, commended us, and stood in solidarity with us. And best of all, Minnesota Ultimate reached out to Emma to have a meeting, which four of us attended, and real, tangible changes were made after we had that discussion. While things didn’t magically become perfect overnight, the situation showed me the enormous privilege and responsibility we have to shape our sport. Everyone has a voice and using our voices together can bring about positive change. The situation also gave me a much deeper appreciation for the community of high school womxn’s players we built. I realized that we were much stronger and more important than we had ever known up until that point.

Building and leveraging community to create change also changed ultimate for me personally. I focused more on playing for the people who supported me and started to care less about the opinions of everyone else. I saw the power of my voice (and of my community's voice) and I realized that I brought value to our sport. All of this led to a pronounced shift in mental toughness. My confidence grew and I realized that I could be a resource to others who were struggling with the same challenges that I was. I saw that I could make a difference for my peers as well as for the younger players who would soon follow in my footsteps.

Because my teammates, collaborators, and I shared our stories with one another and with the broader ultimate community, we were able to improve our own experiences and hopefully the experiences of those to come after us. Our community is one of our best assets in shaping our personal experiences, bettering our sport, and in creating a more positive future. In addition to the changes that Minnesota Ultimate made, Emma and I started a youth-led organization called the Girl Ultimate Players Initiative (GUPI) which has received a very positive response from the ultimate community. I also went on to help lead an equity discussion at the World Ultimate Club Championships in Cincinnati with an incredibly smart and talented team of adult organizers. These experiences have shown me that my voice has value, not just in spite of my youth but because of it. We are the future of this sport, and we should embrace the privilege and responsibility that comes with it.

ULTIMATE IMPACT Q & A

J AHLIL JAMES & ROCKY BEACH



Rocky Beach

JJ Email: JJ@ultimate-impact.org
Rocky Email: Rocky@ultimate-impact.org
Twitter: @ultimateimpact

Rocky is the Executive Director and Founder of Ultimate Impact. JJ is the Community Engagement Coordinator. Both are dedicated to serving underprivileged youth in different parts of San Francisco (SF).

Q: What is Ultimate Impact?

(Rocky) Ultimate Impact is a youth development organization that uses the team sport of ultimate as the



Jahlil James

framework for providing youth from underrepresented communities with increased opportunities, confidence, communication abilities, and conflict-resolution skills. Through weekly training sessions, peer interaction, and consistent adult mentorship, Ultimate Impact creates a positive environment for youth to have fun, be active, improve athletic skills, and build community.

Q: How did Ultimate Impact Start?

(Rocky) The initial seed of Ultimate Impact was planted in 2010, when I retired from a top club team and wanted to give back to the sport that had helped me in so many personal, social, and professional ways. Through a

landscaping project that I led while managing volunteer services for United Way of the Bay Area in 2006, I connected with the program director at Hunters Point Family, located at Gilman Playground in Bayview-Hunters Point, and launched a youth ultimate team there four years later as a volunteer.

The youth, ages 6-13, came from surrounding neighborhoods such as Double Rock, Alice Griffith, Oakdale, and Hilltop and all attended a summer and after-school program at Gilman Playground, near the former Candlestick Park in San Francisco. The kids have incredible stories of resilience. Over the years, it has been extremely rewarding to see the group progress, not just in ultimate, but also in life. It's exciting to see some of the first-year players already in high school and talking about going to college.

In June 2016, I decided to dedicate my creativity, time, and passion, along with my entrepreneurial spirit and program knowledge, to launching a youth development organization modeled off my sports experience and volunteer work with underrepresented youth.

Q: What are some of the programs Ultimate Impact offers?

(Rocky)

1. Structured Learning Through Sports (Weekly Sessions)

- Every week, experienced staff coach and mentor mixed-gender cohorts in some of San Francisco's toughest neighborhoods. Training sessions that last for 1-2 hours not only provide youth with an opportunity to improve their athletic skills, but also give them a chance to have positive peer interactions, receive consistent adult mentorship, learn, have fun, be active, and build a community with youth from other neighborhoods. Our coaching sessions focus on structured learning through sports participation.

2. Dragons Program - We offer weekly practice and traveling tournaments for youth from more than 10 different Ultimate Impact schools. The program combines a series of experiences both on and off the field that develop players' leadership, athleticism, and technical skills.



3. Winterfest Tournament and Ultimate Impact

Invitational - We celebrate our growing student participation and family involvement with two tournaments per year for our youth. These tournaments take place at Gilman Playground in Bayview in December and August. We focus on getting families involved in these events through community outreach and a BBQ.

4. Developing Leaders Program - Our innovative Developing Leaders Program fosters young leaders by providing coaching training, access to top Bay Area companies through the “See It To Be It” series, and project-based skills-building opportunities. Youth from Ultimate Impact are hired as junior coaches, often their first job. These are coveted 20-hours-per-week summer jobs for high school students for 10-12 weeks during the break. Junior coaches help support our training sessions, provide mentorship to younger program participants, participate in our “See It To Be It” leadership series (visits to workplaces like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube), and learn critical career-building skills through independent project work. The Developing Leaders Program cultivates leadership that’s talented, local, driven, and diverse. Students gain critical leadership skills and serve as both community connectors and mentors for younger program participants. One huge challenge that we face in our communities is that youth lack mentors at each level of sports participation. There’s an absence of high school role models in elementary and middle schools which can provide a different level of peer-to-peer mentorship than adults. We provide needed training, summer employment, positive modeling, and experiences that are fun, engaging, challenging, and educational.

5. Girls & Company Program - Our Girls & Company program provides play opportunities for girls across our schools. Our goal is to create a healthy space for girls of all skill levels to engage in sports by focusing on skill and community building across schools. We grow girls’ confidence as athletes and increase their social investment in staying involved in sports during critical transition times between elementary, middle, and high

school. One of the major benefits of this program is getting more girls experience as primary playmakers and leaders. Additionally, we recruit local adult players to support the events and expose youth to a variety of female coaches and playing/leadership styles. We host a tournament and organize 12 travel/workshop opportunities for our Girls & Company youth throughout the year.

Q: Which program resonates with you the most?

(JJ) I know each of us loves all of the different programs we offer, but the program that resonates the most with me has to be the Developing Leaders Program. Our goal with this program was to take the high school players who play with us and put them in a position to grow professionally and personally as leaders in their communities. Our leaders help support Ultimate Impact at different schools, leading and teaching new Frisbee games and drills. They also are phenomenal role models to the youth with their positive energy and charisma. As a way to give back to them, we have a “See It To Be It” series where we take them on various professional development trips to inspire them to be more than just a Frisbee player or athlete.

Q: Do you mind talking more about the “See It To Be It” series?

(JJ) What I really love about the “See It To Be It” series is that it gives us a chance to develop our leaders in more ways than just as ultimate players. For our youth, sometimes goals and dreams are hard to picture unless they see it, and this series is a chance for them to see and meet ultimate players who are more than just athletes. We have friends in the ultimate community that work in tech, social media, banking, and so much more. We connect with them to inspire our players and let them know that just by being a part of the ultimate community, they are connected to so many wonderful people who do amazing things in the world. We’ve had visits to Apple, Twitter, and Instagram, and we’ve had

classes on cooking and banking. There are so many great people that are part of the ultimate community who have generously given back to our youth in so many different ways.

Q: Why is mentoring so important for a sports team or program?

(JJ) Mentoring is important because sports will only ever be just a piece of a youth’s life. As a teenager or young adult, they will still have to deal with life in all of the different forms it takes. Players in school have to maintain grades, communicate with adults and peers, and still function when there are no games or practices. As a coach, if you can set up your players for success off the field, they will have more time and capacity to excel on the field.

Q: What are the communities that you serve?

(Rocky) The youth ultimate scene is quickly developing in the Bay Area, and it is made up primarily of players who can afford to pay hundreds to thousands of dollars to join club teams and attend tournaments. It is critical to provide consistent playing opportunities for all children, regardless of their families’ income. As time and money become more precious for schools in under-resourced communities, structured physical education classes are often eliminated. Here are some startling stats.

- A 2012 study found that 80% of San Francisco’s elementary schools did not meet the state-mandated minimum requirement for physical education. (Shape Up PE Advocates 2012)
- This trend of declining participation in sports extends nationally. In 2015, “healthy” levels of sports participation fell from 30.2% to 26.6% for 6- to 12-year-olds and from 42.7% to 39.3% for 13- to 17-year-olds. (Aspen Institute Project Play/Sports and Fitness Industry Association)
- In low-income families, the trend plays out even

more acutely. Half of all teens from higher-income families participate in sports, versus only 27% of low-income teens. The drop-off is even more pronounced in younger children: Only 20% of children ages 6 to 12 from homes with less than \$25,000 in annual income participated in sports. (State of Play 2016)

- One in three parents making less than \$50,000 a year cited cost as a barrier to sports participation for their children. According to the Sports and Fitness Industry Association’s 2016 annual report, “those who have the greatest opportunity to continue playing into adolescence are those who can afford the club teams, training, and equipment required to advance through the system.” (State of Play 2016)
- A separate study by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found that pay-to-play fees, equipment costs, and lack of school-supported transportation can create barriers for low-income students to participate in organized sports.

We reduce these barriers for our youth. We know that participating in sports activities is fundamental to children’s physical, social, and emotional well-being (Lester & Russell, 2010). It can boost their cognitive functioning, improve their health, and support their confidence, character, and community connections, preparing them for adulthood.

Ultimate Impact provides low-income youth with organized athletic programming that would otherwise not exist for many families. Transportation and other costs are huge barriers for low-income youth to participate in organized sports and have access to competitive playing opportunities. By these covering costs and reducing these barriers, we enable our youth to play consistently. Our programs keep students engaged in sports by offering age- and skill-level-appropriate challenges as they develop.

Q:How do you recruit and empower girls?

(JJ) I think the obvious answer is “the same way you

recruit and empower any player.” I think when biases, misconceptions, and stereotypes get in the way, some people may think that girls don’t want to play sports or be in a position to be a leader on the field. The reality is that girls can not only play at a high level, but they can lead at a high level as well. As coaches and mentors, it’s our role to approach and give girls opportunities to show them what they bring to the table as well as what would be missing without their presence.

It’s also important to note that it shouldn’t just fall on girls to recruit other girls. You’ll definitely have cases where girls can recruit their friends to play, but if you rely solely on girls to retain and recruit girls, then you are bound to have problems. It’s important in coed sports that both the girls and the boys understand the importance that their voice can have when recruiting players of different genders. It creates an open and friendly community, and new players immediately know and feel welcomed by players from all genders. It is also just as important for the coaches and directors, regardless of gender, to take it upon themselves to recruit players of all genders as well. As leaders and representatives of the team, it’s important for them to be visible and welcoming to all players they wish to recruit.

Q: How can I support Ultimate Impact?

(JJ) Great question! There are three main ways you can help support Ultimate Impact. First, sign up for our newsletter at Ultimate-Impact.org and follow us on Twitter @UltimateImpact. Next, we can always use volunteer support at our practices or tournaments; sign up to volunteer by emailing Info@ultimate-impact.org. Lastly, thanks to our donors, we are able to do all of this amazing work, free of charge, for the youth and families that we serve. If you would like to help by donating, head to our website and click the Donate tab. Thank you all for reading, and hopefully we’ll see you out on the field with us someday.

SHOWCASING FOR ULTIMATE RECRUITMENT

RACHEL WINNER



Email: Rachel@ultimatepeace.org

Rachel Winner is the Leaders-in-Training Program Manager for Ultimate Peace. Rachel started playing ultimate at a small college in Pennsylvania and played club in the Southeast before moving to Jerusalem in 2013. She started volunteering with Ultimate Peace as a coach for Arabic—and Hebrew—speaking communities and now manages the Leaders-in-Training Program, helps run the annual summer camp, and continues to coach in a number of communities.

I'VE BEEN WORKING WITH ULTIMATE PEACE (UP) since 2014. I moved to Jerusalem out of curiosity and a quest for adventure and got hooked on this organization. UP uses the sport of ultimate to build bridges of friendship and trust among youth divided by conflict. I coach young Arab and Jewish players in their respective communities and tournaments, I manage our Leaders-in-Training Program, and I'm on the leadership team for our annual summer camp. I played ultimate in college and wish so deeply that I had known of these manuals as a confused captain for a burgeoning women's team at a tiny school in Pennsylvania. I played some club around the Southeast (I'm from Asheville, NC) before moving to the Middle East. We face a lot of infrastructural barriers to girls' and women's ultimate in this region. In fact, my friend just created the first-ever women's team to compete abroad in Vienna this past spring, and we had to pick up a few players to make the numbers work for the tournament. It's an incredibly small community, and while Ultimate Peace and a number of other programs are dedicated to expansion and retention, there are a lot of challenges. For the sake of this manual, I thought the most bite-off-and-chewable topic would be how to kick off a program with a strong showcase, including a few infrastructural components to consider as you dive in. Ultimate Peace has a pretty unique model in how we work with communities around the region. I'm writing from my own experience as a coach in UP, but hope that you can extract some aspects of what we do that will be relevant in your own communities.

A **showcase**, as we use the term, is an opening event that invites any interested participants to come try the sport and check out what we're all about. We don't charge money, and we don't force kids to participate (more on that later). We ideally have the coach who would be coming to the practices, but we also bring in other high-energy volunteers to lower the ratio of coaches to kids and maximize attention and involvement. We've run showcases for groups ranging from 25 minutes to two hours in length. We work both in schools and extracurricular programs, so my description below involves references to both.

Preliminary Planning

Before we commit to a new program or community, we secure the following (and we don't move forward until we have it):

- **Field Space:** Gym, basketball court, or ideally a grass field – we've opened communities on them all. We make sure that the field is accessible for not only our showcase event, but for an ultimate program throughout the year. We also fight for the light (both metaphorically and literally) – lit-field options keep our playing time flexible. Ultimately work with what you've got, but this factor is a big one for us.
- **Community Coordinator:** A point person for the school or the community that is not only an advocate for what we're doing, but will be our liaison for booking the field, talking with the school, perhaps communicating with parents, or whatever relevant logistical needs we might have. This might be a parent, a school administrator, a field manager, or other volunteer or staff member in the community. I'll get back to this key person again shortly.
- **Commitment** that a certain number of kids will show up (or in some cases, a maximum number of kids) to our showcase. This agreement varies widely based on the community, but it shows commitment by the

coordinator, school, or whatever parties involved that they are willing to put in recruitment efforts and invest in our success.

Showcase

The key to a showcase is for kids to have fun and feel like they are getting good at something, but walk away excited to learn more. That's why we start with catching. Kids can learn the art of throwing over the next few months (or a lifetime), but everyone can be immediately successful at catching. We start out demoing and trying pancake catches and then switch to high and low catches, introducing each one in turn and giving them a few tries. Then we mix it up a bit by throwing any of the three to keep them on their toes and ready.

But ultimate isn't about standing around! We've gotta catch in stride! We transition to a basic deep cut (this is known by many ultimate communities as "dog" drill - coach hucks deep, kids run straight out to chase down the disc and circle back to the end of the line). You can switch this up as you prefer: Start with a push pass and have them run under it if they're a bit timid to start; include a cut; go around a cone or make a whole obstacle course; focus on deeper shots. We then switch to one-on-one (two running at the same time) and introduce the idea that there is defense and offense in ultimate. We also take the opportunity to highlight ultimate as a non-contact sport and introduce the idea of Spirit. However you build this part, the key is that in each step we are celebrating and building on their success and giving them a new, slightly harder challenge.

Depending on the participants' energy levels, we switch to teaching a bit of backhand or go straight into a big game. We don't usually teach ultimate in a showcase. What works best for us, especially with younger players, is introducing games that have fewer rules and more allowance for dropping the disc, so they get competitive without getting frustrated by their yet-to-be-developed

skills. Think of a converted capture the flag, a treasure hunt with passing involved, team disc tag, or Monkey's Game*. Coming up with various games and modifications for showcases could be a great task for a young leaders' program or volunteers if you have them. You want anything that finds that sweet spot of success and challenge that leaves them feeling confident but wanting more.

You might have players wander off throughout the session. If they seem interested but overwhelmed, you can engage them in different aspects of the showcase (that's why it's awesome to have a few extra volunteers, especially other young women who might be closer in age who could be good role models, throwing partners, and conversationalists to engage young players). If some kids disengage entirely, our coaches don't tend to pursue them. Your objective is to hook the ones who are at least 50% interested, not to manage a larger P.E. class. That's another reason to have the support of a community coordinator (or to keep the teacher involved if you're showcasing for a class) – your work is not to babysit the players who disappear, but to engage those who want to be there. Success in a showcase is not in making sure 100% of the participants have a good time, but convincing as many of them as possible to come back for a future practice.

Consideration of the larger ecosystem comes into play as you close the session. Give players an immediate option for how to sign up. In our experience, creating a sign-up list with their phone numbers, GroupMe, or a WhatsApp group is way more effective than leaving a flyer. You may have different protocols and regulations regarding getting kids' contact info, so consider the best means of communication with your community coordinator before the showcase. This is another space where the community coordinator becomes relevant as a more comfortable go-between for exchanging information, following up with players, and general recruitment. We also try to bring a little giveaway – at UP we usually have

bracelets and stickers, but flyers work as well (in addition to the sign-ups that they fill out). Ideally, you've already locked in a field time or can tell them a date to expect that information to come out. Boost their enthusiasm with a special discount or prize if they bring friends to the first and second practices.

That's how we showcase for ultimate recruitment at Ultimate Peace. Best of luck in opening your new program! Feel free to read more at www.ultimatepeace.org or via our [Ultimate Peace¹](#) page on Facebook.

**Monkey's Game:* This is a wonderful game invented by a player from one of our girls' middle school teams. We've been using it in showcases for a few years now with great success. The field is divided into two halves by a line of short cones, with tall cones (anywhere from four to 10) lining the back of each half. The width of the field can vary, and we've found that sometimes having a shorter, wider field is more inclusive and easier to navigate for new players or larger groups. The aim is to cross into the other team's half of the field by passing the disc with one of your teammates in order to knock down the other team's cone by throwing a disc at it (or if within pivot foot distance you can knock it over with the disc still in your hand). If the cone is successfully knocked over, the player leaves the disc (they may not keep the disc or knock over more cones) and brings the cone back to add it to their line of cones (on their team's side). The disc can be intercepted/caught or defended/blocked. If the disc hits the ground, it is treated as a turnover, and only the team defending that half of the field can pick it up. When one team has all of the cones, they win. Travel rules apply (no running with the disc).

1. <https://www.facebook.com/UltimatePeace/>



Email: hana@allgirleverything.org

Twitter: [@age_up](https://twitter.com/age_up)

Instagram: [@age_up](https://www.instagram.com/age_up)

Hana plays for Seattle Riot, runs All Girl Everything Ultimate Program (AGE UP), once kidnapped a cat, and has definitely read more Octavia Butler than you.

I'M AN ORGANIZER with All Girl Everything Ultimate Program (AGE UP), a now 10-year-old program embedded within and supporting the broader Southend youth ultimate community in Seattle. When folks ask what we do, I usually say that we eat dinner together, cry about racism, and play ultimate, in that order. We are an organization by and for players, coaches, and alumni to strengthen the Southend youth ultimate community, particularly for girls. We see our work as a type of community organizing, through which we aim to build leadership, deepen relationships, and connect over the issues that are shaping our lives.

We are organizing community through sports. This is not a new tactic; sports have always played a crucial role in building connections. This article is for anyone in ultimate who is interested in reframing their team organizing with social change in mind. What could a world without oppression look like, and how can we use sports to help us get there?

I've picked out a few topics to highlight, selected from a long list that we at AGE UP have been wrestling with recently.

Emotional Health and Healing

A lot of much more brilliant people have done some incredible and revolutionary work¹ that we should all be

1. Check out everything by Octavia Butler as well as Adrienne Maree Brown's *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (2017): "I suspect that is what many of you are up to, practicing futures together, practicing justice together, living into new stories. It is our right and responsibility to create a new world."

learning from, with regard to how to build the world we want to live in. For AGE UP, a few things we've learned along the way are:

- It has to be fun. It has to sustain life. It's also totally anti-capitalist to be making joyful spaces with each other.
- It has to move at the speed of relationships which, unfortunately for the urgent organizer in all of us, is pretty slow.²
- It needs to have lots of space for feelings.

This, at the heart of it, is why most of us play and organize ultimate. Well, maybe not the feelings part, but the joy and the relationships part. And now you'll have some great reasons and tactics to embrace the feelings parts. We see any relationship as a container for emotional work. This actually means the stronger the relationships, the more feelings players will feel safe showing. Thus we have a simple equation: The more successful you are as an organizer, the greater the quantity of team tears!

Here are some fruitful ways that we've learned to make time and space for this type of emotional and relational work at AGE UP:

- Make space for players to share with the team about how their lives are going outside of ultimate. We want to see players as whole people, not just who they are on the field. This is also an opportunity to talk about bigger issues that shape their lives, like racism³, sexism, classism, etc.
- Have small group or pair check-ins before and/or after practices and games. Build a culture of checking in with each other in equal ways (not just the person who shares more dominating and the person "without any feelings" listening).
- Generate player feedback for coaches and captains

2. Also, *Elements of White Middle Class Dominant Culture* (2010). Ever been in a predominantly white middle class group that had a sense of urgency, focused on perfectionism, or was afraid of open conflict?

3. Yes, especially for majority white programs.

as well as peers (things people are doing well and things they could improve upon). Direct communication across lines of power increases trust. If you're receiving feedback, just listen.

Also:

- Talk explicitly about emotional responses to mistakes.
- Talk explicitly about emotional responses to competition, particularly the way we tie our sense of self-worth to winning or losing, how much playing time we get, what kind of plays we make or don't, etc. Capitalism, especially combined with our flavor of American meritocracy, trains us from very early on to compete for attention, jobs, school, healthcare, etc., with hearty personal blame if you fail.

Lastly, taking this on (and, sorry to inform you, but you're already taking it on) requires that we are always working on our own issues. What healing are you doing in your own life? Where is your own understanding of oppression and privilege? Particularly for you coaches, remember that young folks are brilliant and have a well-honed BS meter. They will probably be more gracious about your mistakes than you expect, if you're honest about where you are in your own journey.⁴

Emotional health is a community project. Worst case scenario, I'm pretty sure that a world where everyone improved at sharing their feelings and listening to others would be a better world.

Working with Men and Boys

If we're going to build successful programs that center upon and support young women⁵, someone also needs to be working with boys. The basic premise is that if

4. Start with Ijeoma Oluo's *So You Want To Talk About Race* (2018). Also, listen more.

5. Our trans and genderqueer youth get to participate in whatever programs they choose. However, we believe that explicitly naming "girls" is important when addressing patriarchy, which codes everything not specifically gendered as male. Is this an access issue for genderqueer and non-binary folks? For sure. Do I have a better answer? No, and I would love to hear thoughts if you got 'em.

we want to take down the patriarchy, we need to have everyone on board, right? And if you have any boys in your programs, or if you're a dude, or you're alive in this patriarchal society, then you have a great opportunity to work with some folks who need a lot of work. For those of us socialized as women, we are in no way obligated to do that work and, in fact, many of us need to fight the tendency to do so. However, it's been sweet and rewarding and powerful for me to take this work on for the men and boys in my life who I love, when I choose to.

We started a boys' program a few years after we'd been successfully running our girls' program, with that same idea: to bring boys into the conversation around sexism. And we've been trying to figure out how to make it work—like actually work, not like, “Sexism is bad we need to protect women from it” or “I'm the worst because I'm sexist” - ever since. Men and boys are eagerly blamed, shamed, and isolated for their poor behavior under the guise of accountability, but I'm not so sure that this isn't just more of the “master's tools will never dismantle the master's house” that Audre Lorde so brilliantly warned us against⁶. Patriarchy hurts boys hard and early, and trains them well. Either they can stop feeling the hurt or they can start doing the hurting. Or, more likely, they can do both. And thus, we have young men with very little access to any emotion but anger, whose self-worth is defined by their domination over others.

We can make space for healing these wounds the same way we're doing everything else: by building strong and safe relationships, making space for feelings, having hard conversations, and always doing this work for yourself first. This work is slow, and it can be hard to see the successes (they don't give out gold medals for undoing sexism, unfortunately). But I'm increasingly convinced that it is foundational to all other work that matters.

6. From her essay in *Sister Outsider* (1984): “For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.”

Working Local

Over my last 15 years as a coach, youth player, and adult player in the Seattle ultimate scene, the most important change in direction I've seen is the commitment to focus on local, accessible competition opportunities for youth. In particular, this has meant investing in school-based teams over club-based playing opportunities and highlighting state-series competitions over travel tournaments. This shift has not simply been at AGE UP but has been a larger Seattle priority by coaches, organizers, and DiscNW (our regional ultimate organization) on making all playing opportunities accessible as a first and primary program requirement.

For us at AGE UP, this has meant prioritizing hyperlocal investment in leadership development. We are always looking to build leadership within our programs and seeking to make sure that our coaches reflect our community. This requires:

- Paying our coaches, players, and alumni for their organizing efforts, whenever and wherever we can, and
- Offering the skill-building and support needed to turn excellent community organizers into coaches, rather than the other way around.

Paying people makes it possible for folks who are not white middle class to take on these opportunities. Prioritizing relationships means that we get candidates who aren't “traditional” leaders (i.e., loud and up-front), gives us a headstart on building the robust community networks that make the work I outlined earlier possible, and trains the leaders we need for social change. We want to support everyone to take on their own form of leadership, and we know that communities with deeply embedded leaders and role models are an essential foundation for building movements for a more just society.

Conclusion

Creating successful programs is community organizing. If we do our community organizing right, then we will also have the tools to address the big issues that our communities are facing. For us, this has meant working on the issues above as well as struggling with Seattle's rapid gentrification, legacies of war and domestic violence, and undoing racism and anti-Black racism.

Looking forward, I'm curious about how we, as a larger ultimate community, will take on this current climate crisis, class warfare and deep, deep racism of this country. Or maybe we won't take it on, and our teams and communities will continue to suffer from our individual fears: that we aren't ready, that we don't know what to do, that we are totally inadequate for the challenge. Well, the answer is yes, we are inadequate, but the challenge still awaits us.

It takes time and space for this work. We also get to make plenty of time to play, practice and compete. Joy is healing, and we have to heal.

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF STRONG, LIFELONG LEADERS

JEN PASHLEY



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Email: gurlsprogram@bayareadisc.org

Twitter: [@gurlsprogram](https://twitter.com/gurlsprogram)

Instagram: [@gurlsprogram](https://www.instagram.com/gurlsprogram)

Jen Pashley is the Founder and Director of GURLS and the Youth Program Director for Bay Area Disc Association, where she focuses on bringing ultimate to new and developing youth players in the Bay Area. She also co-coaches the U-20 YCC Girls' Team, California Current, and is a player on FAB, an amazingly spirited and innovative team competing in the women's club division.

THERE IS AN INTERESTING PERCEPTION among our community that ultimate is a constantly evolving and progressive sport. It is likely because, relative to other mainstream sports, everything is young and new; there are new teams, new leagues, new strategies, new tournaments, and a never-ending stream of highlight reels, articles, and documentaries. Players are pushing their athleticism to new heights, teams are stronger, and communities are growing rapidly; even for those of us whose careers are based in this sport, it's hard to keep up sometimes.

But there is one piece (though there are others, to be sure) that I have found hasn't changed very much; there is a continuing sentiment, frustration, and anger among womxn¹ players (of all ages, especially those at the youth level) that we are not being treated as equals. We continually lament being looked off, get frustrated when we have to constantly prove ourselves, roll our eyes at insensitive or sexist remarks on the sidelines, and/or have a lingering feeling that we don't belong, that this space is not truly ours. It's so strange hearing the issues that I faced as a new player all those years ago are *still coming up. All the time.* And while I continue to remind myself that change and progress take time, I also see how quickly parts of our sport have grown and changed, and I wonder why this challenge in particular has stayed the same.

1. Womxn: an alternative spelling to women that demonstrates intentionality to include trans and non-binary people while structures are still predominately binary in nature. This definition was copied from policy documentation created by Jenna Weiner.

This is the reason I founded the Girls Ultimate Revolution Leadership Series (GURLS)² in 2017. I wanted to address (and dare I say) solve this issue once and for all. This was certainly a lofty and slightly absurd goal to create for myself. But I was frustrated and motivated enough to at least try.

The Problem

When I became the first woman hired by the Bay Area Disc Association (BADA) in early 2016, I saw a two-fold problem. There were not enough girls³ enrolled in our programs, and the girls I spoke with were frustrated with their current playing experience.

Approximately 16% of our youth participants were girls, most of whom were coached by men. They played in the open division on their school teams in our leagues and tournaments. High school programs that tried to make a true “mixed” team⁴ could rarely find other teams to play 5:2, let alone 4:3. Instead, girls found themselves frequently matching up against boys, some of whom had little sense of body control or were a foot taller than them. The girls were knocked around on the field, rarely thrown to, or simply left on the sideline, watching their male teammates play.

The only non-open playing opportunities at that time were on a U-16 girls’ or U-19 mixed YCC team⁵ during the summer and on a girls’ club team⁶ during the school year. This meant that for girls who wanted to play competitively, there were few options, few roster spots available, and high barriers to entry (due to lengthy

commute times, high travel costs, and high program expenses).

And the worst part was that everyone knew there was a problem; organizers, coaches, parents, and players alike were frustrated. We tried to create more girls’ events (summer camps, leagues, and tournaments) but then cancelled them due to low numbers. We encouraged gender matching, but most teams never followed through. Teams talked about hiring womxn coaches but then usually gave up trying once the school year started. Despite good intentions, there was no change in sight.

It was frustrating to see the same thing happen over and over again. We were caught in a cycle of recognizing the problem, trying to do something to fix it, facing the same challenges we always came up against, and then giving up. It was the worst kind of *deja vu*, and I felt caught in the middle of it.

The First Step

There are a million different ways to approach and solve a problem. It’s simply a matter of determining the time, resources, and barriers you face in order to find the best route forward. So when faced with the numerous gender equity challenges in the Bay Area youth scene, the first step forward was an obvious one; we needed to talk to the girls.

I started connecting with our girls and their parents every chance I had; I did this at league games, during tournaments, and after practices, going so far as to drive three hours round trip for a 90-minute practice with the girls’ club team to introduce myself in-person. I wanted to make sure they knew who I was and that I genuinely cared about their needs.

While engaging in conversation with girls was relatively easy for me (after all, I was their age once too), building trust with them was an entirely different matter. It didn’t necessarily have anything to do with me, but it was a very real challenge nonetheless. These girls had been

2. You can find more information about our program at www.gurlsprogram.org.

3. Important Note: To create a more equitable space within our community, girls refers to gender expansive youth (cis girls, trans girls, non-binary youth, gender non-conforming youth, gender queer youth and any girl-identified youth).

4. El Cerrito High School Ultimate Club (ECHUC), founded during the 2014/2015 school year and run by Joe Barr and Julie Barr, was one of the first programs to attempt this.

5. Belly of the Beast (U17G), founded in 2015 and coached by Nicole Neumiller; Happy Cows (U20X), founded in 2010 and coached by Geoff Rexroth.

6. California Roll, founded in the winter of 2013/2014 by Chloe Carothers-Liske and Hannah Wells, coached by Lindi Sabloff.

burned so many times before, they naturally developed a distrust of anyone new. Folks would come in, say they would help, not listen to their actual needs, create more chaos, and then leave. Of course the next person who came along was looked at with slight suspicion.

But I remained invested. With time, patience, and a listening ear, I slowly earned the trust of these girls.

A New Approach

With these budding connections starting to bloom, I next thought about how we could further engage the girls we currently served while also recruiting more girls to start playing. My first idea was a simple and low-cost one; I decided to ask some of the older high school players I knew to coach an elementary and middle school girls' league over the winter, and as a further incentive, I offered to pay them for their time. I reached out, and while the idea was well received, there was one specific ask - the girls wanted to learn how to coach before they jumped in.

That simple ask was the catalyst for our initial girls' leadership pilot program. I offered to meet up with anyone who was interested in learning about coaching after a beach clinic we ran one very rainy afternoon. I wasn't sure who to expect and had a deep seated fear that no one would show up, but slowly, through the cold, thick rain, a group of six girls came wandering through the doorway of the dreary and chilly sandwich shop. I sat at a booth alongside Sam Salvia, former Fury player and Positive Coaching Alliance trainer, who offered to help out.

Sam and I had talked extensively about how we wanted to approach this meeting. Instead of diving right into coaching tactics and techniques, we decided to spend our time together asking the girls two questions:

1. What are the problems you are currently facing?
2. How can we help?

I can't be certain, but I believe that first meeting lasted for about three hours. It was as if the floodgates had been opened. Fears, frustrations, general stress, and anxiety all came tumbling out into the open. But what really stood out to me were their answers to the simple question, "How can we help?" I had naively assumed that they would either not have any ideas or that the ideas they came up would simply not be feasible given our current organizational resources. But their ideas were thoughtful, creative, and practical. These were things we could actually deliver on. Sam and I were thrilled.

Building GURLS

After our initial meeting, I had a friend⁷ connect me with some amazing folks: Miranda Knowles⁸, Ben Wiggins, and Hana Kawai. I spent an hour or so with each of them bouncing around ideas, asking questions, and picking their brains about all things youth. It was really great to hear that I was headed in the right direction, and with Sam's help, we planned out our next steps.

After spending two more sessions with our initial group of girls⁹, it was clear that this was something we needed to build into an official program. I approached my boss, Mike McGuirk, with a proposal for a "top-down" approach to equity in our sport. I wanted to invest heavily in a small group of girls, teaching them all about leadership at every level, knowing that this investment would pay off substantially in the long-term. I wanted to create the next generation of Chip Changs, Jesse Shofners, Anna Nazarovs, Michelle Ngs, and Gwen Amblers, but en masse. Each of these womxn has made such a huge impact on our sport, and the thought of

7. Casey Ikeda, whom I first met when we coached Belly of the Beast together (alongside Nicole Neumiller) in 2016.

8. Miranda, my absolute idol. I remember watching her play in the 2005 College Championships finals, completely star-struck. She was such a role model for me and a big reason I kept playing ultimate, especially during my early years.

9. Which seemed to grow in size for every session, at one point, resulting in a hilarious "clown car" session where we packed 10 people into a single study room at a library. For those who work with girls, this is certainly not a new phenomenon. There is a strong reason we say "girls travel in packs."

being able to multiply their impact, by two or three or 10, excited me. We could change our sport, at every level, forever.

The only thing we needed at this point was money. We set up a crowdfunding campaign and raised over \$36,000 by leveraging every contact we had and by using social media to share our story. We had a really powerful story resonated with a lot of people, both within our ultimate community as well as outside of it. We had a cause that people wanted to support.

I then gathered a team of women - Sam Salvia, Jen Thomas (our first GURLS Facilitator), and Julie Barr (an amazing local coach and organizer) - to help me build our curriculum. We recruited a cohort of 11 girls to participate in six classroom sessions and asked that they complete a service project to give back to our community. The classroom sessions each focused on a different type of leadership role, from captain to coach to project manager. We had guest speakers from both the ultimate community¹⁰ and from companies like Verily join us to talk about their role as leaders in their respective fields. We played games, discussed and problem-solved challenges on their high school teams, and gave them a ton of leadership tools and resources.

Participants in our program feel GURLS has a big impact on their lives and our post-program stats seem to prove it. By the time players complete our first year of training:

- 84% of participants agree or strongly agree with the statement “I am confident.”
- 77% of participants agree or strongly agree with the statement “I know how to use my voice.”
- 100% of participants agree or strongly agree with the statement “I feel connected to my community.”

10. Folks like Anna Nazarov, Daniela Lopez, Laurel Oldershaw, Marisa Rafter, Nicole Neumiller, and Opi Payne have all been guest speakers. For those who want to bring in guest speakers or guest coaches, I highly recommend making it as informal as possible. We found our participants got extremely shy around their idols and didn't want to ask questions. One solution is to have them come during a food break, or ask that they each prepare a list of questions to ask so that they aren't trying to think of something on the spot.

- 100% of participants agree or strongly agree with the statement “I am a leader.”

Our participants have also completed some amazing service projects: They've run clinics, hosted middle school presentations on ultimate, written articles on their experience playing open, and conducted surveys on why players leave the sport. All of their work is open source, so anyone can read, upload, or use these project deliverables for themselves.¹¹

We are now entering our third year of GURLS, with a new cohort starting our Year 1 Program (run by Jen Thomas), and two more cohorts entering our Year 2 and Year 3 Programs, run by Simone Saldanha and myself, respectively. Each year's curriculum builds on the year prior. Year 2 focuses on human-centered design and growing players' soft skills¹² so that they feel more prepared to take on new leadership roles, and Year 3 focuses on communication and building connections with community members.

In addition to the positive post-program stats, as well as the amazing service projects, we have also seen our participants take on more leadership roles. Here's a sample of what we're seeing:

- Two of our pilot program participants are captaining their college teams.
- Two of our pilot program participants are focusing their efforts on reducing financial barriers for players during the college season.
- Six players just finished captaining their YCC teams.
- Nine GURLS participants were BADA Summer Camp Counselors this past summer.
- Two players commentated on our Rising Stars Showcase Game.
- Three helped me build a GURLS Jr. curriculum to use in our Summer Camps.
- Many go back to their middle schools to help coach.

11. You can find some of them on Medium page (medium.com/gurls-program)

12. Examples: time management, conflict resolution, problem-solving, prioritizing tasks, etc.

And as if that isn't enough, one of them is already asking about how to get a job working in ultimate! They have all continued to play, captain, coach, and take on tough conversations with their peers about gender equity. I am so incredibly humbled and proud of what they have been able to accomplish. All it took was a little guidance and little encouragement.

First Steps to Support

While we made GURLS an important and integral program within our community, there are lots of other simple ways you can help support girls playing in your own community:

1. **Ask “Who Is Missing?”:** Diversity is such an important piece of problem-solving.¹³ Take a look around the room (or ultimate field), and ask yourself who is missing. Then, and this is crucial, *make sure to invite them*.
2. **Start at the Top:** If you want to create impactful change, get more womxn and girls in leadership. Hire them as staff, coaches, and organizers. Select them to be captains, drill leaders, and warm-up leaders. If you're not in a position to select people for these positions, *talk to those who do* and offer to help with the recruitment process.
3. **Stop Asking the Same People:** Burnout is real. Stop asking the same people to do everything for everyone. There are plenty of folks out there, many of whom do amazing stuff behind the scenes, which goes unrecognized. Sometimes all it takes is saying, “Hey, I think you would be really good at this” for them to say yes.
4. **Listen with an Open Ear:** It is so crucially important

13. One of the most amusing examples of this was while I worked as an EMT in Yosemite. The paramedics were asked to put signs in all of the bathrooms in our Medical Clinic requesting that feminine hygiene products be placed in the trash, not down the toilet. Unfortunately, they placed all of the signs just above the toilets, completing forgetting that we take care of business sitting down (and would therefore never read the sign). If there was one female paramedic on staff that day, it would have been such a simple fix. I still chuckle every time I think about it.

to listen to what girls have to say. Take time to build a solid communication pipeline. Understand that many of their frustrations have likely been a result of years of being treated unfairly.

5. **Build a Positive Team Culture:** Whether you're a coach or a player, building and reinforcing a positive team culture is critical to whether girls continue playing. Hold players accountable to that culture and check-in throughout the season to make sure you are hitting your targets. If you don't check-in, how will you know there are problems until it's too late?
6. **Know Little Actions Have Big Consequences:** If there is one thing I have learned from reading our GURLS applicant essays, it's that even the smallest actions can have big consequences, both good and bad. Whether it's a senior offering to help a new player learn how to throw, or a male player yelling “mismatch” when they are marked up against a girl in a game, those little moments can have a big impact on whether or not girls stay in our sport.
7. **Use Your Voice:** Whether you are a coach, captain, player, or parent, using your voice can be an incredibly powerful tool. If your teammate says a guy is harassing her while she's on the field, *say something*. If a middle school player makes an inappropriate sexual remark to one of his friends, *say something*. If a parent makes a snarky comment on the sideline about a girl calling an injury on the field, *say something*. If a coach keeps saying “hey guys” to a group with girls or non-binary folks in it, *say something*¹⁴. Silence can be one of the worst ways to respond, so speak up!
8. **Own Up to Your Failures:** I guarantee you, at some point, you will fail. I have failed more times that I care to count. But owning up to that failure not only shows everyone else that you recognize that something went wrong, but that you are going to take steps to fix it in the future. Even if it's a simple word slip or fumble, take ownership of your actions and learn from them.

14. As a note, all of these examples have happened in our programs.

Building Your Own Version of GURLS

You don't have to necessarily raise \$36,000 and hire staff to create your own version of GURLS. At a basic level, it's pretty simple. Here's the essentials of what you will need:

- 1. Participants:** Talk to the captains (or other leaders) in your community, and get them to buy-in. It shouldn't be hard to do, especially if you work around their schedules, offer to bring some snacks¹⁵, and let them know that you want to listen and help them¹⁶.
- 2. Time:** Find a time that works best for the girls. Reach out to their coaches, and make sure to coordinate schedules so that there is room for them to attend practices and games as well as a leadership program. We hold our classroom sessions in September and October, right after YCC and before our Fall Mixed League starts.
- 3. A Safe Space:** Find a library study room, a free community space, or someone's house. Just make sure it's quiet, easily accessible by public transportation (or help set up carpools), and relatively private; sometimes tough conversations come up, and it's important to create a safe and welcoming environment for sharing and dialogue.
- 4. Curriculum:** You can either build your own to match the needs of your participants, or you can reach out to us, and we'd be happy to share ours! Our mission is to create the next generation of lifelong leaders, so we're happy to help other communities.
- 5. A Facilitator:** Having a trusted facilitator in the room to listen and teach is essential. For every four hours of classroom time, facilitators typically talk for about one hour. Most of our activities and discussions are done

by the participants themselves. A facilitator can either be paid (ideal) or volunteer (less ideal, but absolutely doable).

- 6. Listen:** I cannot emphasize this one enough. The most important piece of all of this is to listen. Ask a question, stop talking, and listen. Do not interrupt. Do not assume you know better than the participants. They are all smart, strong, and creative individuals, and more often than not, they have the answers themselves; you just have to help them build their confidence in finding it.
- 7. Deliver:** If you make a promise, you must keep that promise¹⁷. Be honest about expectations, ask for the players' opinions and insights, and know that creating a new program (be it a leadership program, girls' tournament, or league) takes time and energy. But it's absolutely worth it in the long run.

Conclusion

Supporting more girls playing, more womxn in leadership, and more gender diversity at every level of our sport is by no means a simple task. *But it is not impossible.* I simply equate it to learning how to play ultimate. Things start off rocky, you learn a ton, you ask for help, you face new challenges you weren't expecting, you fail, you learn from your mistakes, you fail again, you slowly start to figure things out, you build your confidence, you start to help others, you keep learning and growing... and at some point, you look back and are in awe of how much you've accomplished.

It just takes time, patience, hard work, and a willingness to step up and ask for help when you need it. So what are you waiting for?

15. Boom Chicka Pop was an absolute hit among our group. I think at one point they were eating multiple bags of it per session. I would highly recommend asking them what their favorite snacks are to buy. Food definitely brings folks together!

16. It's also incredibly important to ask who is missing from the room. Make sure you reach out to a diverse group of players so that girls' leadership development and empowerment can be shared equally with everyone from every type of background.

17. One of the most heartbreaking moments of my career was failing to recruit enough girls to form a U-20 YCC girls' team in 2017. We recruited 50 girls to tryout for our U-17, U-20 X and U-20 G teams, but only 30 could actually attend the tournament. We ended up only bringing a U-17 G and U-20 X team that year. I was extremely fortunate that the justifiably angry response from the girls was channeled into a strong (and successful) drive to form the U-20 girls' team the following year, but I also knew that it could have easily ended up with a lot of them leaving the sport.



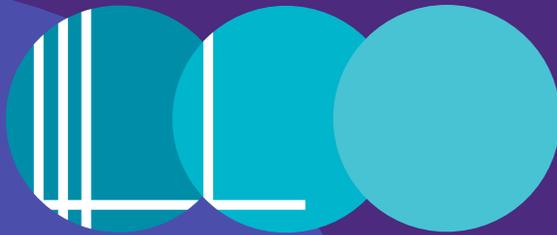
GIRLS' ULTIMATE MOVEMENT

 GUM.USULTIMATE.ORG

 GIRLSULTIMATEMOVEMENT@USULTIMATE.ORG

[@GUMULTIMATE](https://www.instagram.com/gumultimate)   

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