



# Spirit Captain Guide

(Adapted by USA Ultimate from WFDF "Spirit Captains" job description, with permission. May 2025 Edition)

## Definition of a Spirit Captain ([2024-2025 Rules of Ultimate](#))

*3.Q.13. A Spirit Captain is a team member who is eligible to participate in the game and has been designated to address, discuss, and resolve Spirit issues at any point throughout the competition with opponents, teammates, coaches, and game or event officials.*

Spirit Captains are encouraged for all levels of play and may be required for certain tournaments and leagues.

## Role of a Spirit Captain

Spirit Captains guide teams in upholding the core tenets of Spirit of the Game: adherence to the rules, mutual respect, and the basic joy of play. While Spirit Captains reinforce actions described in this section – the responsibility for upholding Spirit of the Game (Spirit) falls on all players.

- **Learn, know, and teach the rules**

A Spirit Captain must know and understand the rules to effectively apply them to game situations and explain them to others.

Spirit Captains should:

- Frequently review the rules
- Be comfortable answering questions about the rules
- Engage with opponents
- Hold teammates accountable on rules issues and throughout disputes
- Know and use the hand signals to communicate calls

- **Be aware of the potential for implicit biases to impact play and Spirit of the Game**

Spirit Captains should acknowledge and recognize that the implementation of Spirit, including Spirit scores, is susceptible to bias. Spirit Captains should be mindful of, and should encourage their teammates to be mindful of, their own biases when discussing interactions with, and impressions of, other teams as well as when considering interactions with, and impressions of, their own team.

Understand that intent and impact are not the same. The intent of a person's statement or gesture may be neutral or positive to them, but the impact of what they say or do may be harmful or hurtful to others.

- **Demonstrate patience and empathy during conflict resolution**

Spirit Captains should model the principles of Spirit in their interactions with teammates and opponents.

Spirit Captains should:

- Listen with the goal of understanding both sides of the discussion. A Spirit Captain recognizes that two people can experience the same event, have different conclusions about the event, and that both perspectives can be valid.
- Ask for a moment to collect themselves, if needed, to process another viewpoint and reconsider their own experience.
- Communicate their perspective clearly and concisely to others.
- Take care not to talk over or interrupt others.

## **Responsibilities of a Spirit Captain**

- **Before the Season/League/Tournament**

- Learn the rules!
  - An important component of Spirit of the Game is knowing and properly implementing the rules. Actively encourage your teammates to learn the rules too.
- Spirit scores
  - Familiarize yourself with the Spirit Score Sheet and the included examples (addressed below).

- **Throughout the Season/League/Tournament**

- Consider how Spirit Captains can work with team captains and coaches to set goals around Spirit, team culture, and inclusiveness.
  - Schedule practice time to teach the rules and how to make and discuss calls.
  - Be mindful that ongoing reflection is often necessary to keep your team accountable to these goals.
  - Based on feedback received during competition, work with team leadership to make adjustments as needed.
  - Develop a plan for how you can relay feedback from opposing teams' Spirit Captains to leadership and/or the team during the game (not just afterward).
    - Consider blocking off time in advance for halftime huddles in case there are issues that the team needs to address.
    - Develop a system for receiving feedback from your teammates during games and options for when and how to communicate that feedback to the opposing team's Spirit Captains.
- Respond to any requests from organizers about Spirit.
  - Spirit Directors may have questions and requests about previously submitted Spirit scores.
  - There may be feedback from opponents to address.

- **Immediately Before the Game**

- Introduce yourself to the opposing team's Spirit Captain (and observers, if applicable).

- Be prepared to share anything unique about your team that might affect your opponents' perceptions of your team (e.g. particular cheers or celebrations).
    - Allow your opponent to respond or ask questions. Work to reconcile expectations or assumptions.
  - Listen to what your opponents' Spirit Captains choose to share.
  - Establish where and when to check back in with the opposing Spirit Captain(s) during the game.
  - Ask your opponents whether they want to have a Spirit circle at the beginning or end of the game. At a minimum, Spirit Captains should plan to meet briefly after the game.
- **During the Game**
    - *Proactively communicate!* Check in with teammates to identify any issues that need to be discussed with the opposing team or positive moments that can be shared.
    - Empower teammates to make calls when infractions occur on the field and communicate with their matchups about physicality and other Spirit items if needed.
    - At the established check-in time, share what issues need to be addressed and/or offer things to be celebrated.
    - Acknowledge and celebrate authentic exchanges of Spirit by your teammates.
    - Be a resource to your teammates in resolving questions or issues, if needed.
    - Call a Spirit timeout, if necessary. They really do help.
- **After the Game**
    - Fill out the Spirit Score Sheet as soon as possible after the game, incorporating feedback from your entire team.
      - Score your opponents based only on the current game, rather than past games.
      - Be sure to solicit specific examples, especially if your team is giving the opposing team a low score.
      - Don't award high scores just to be nice or score other teams based on your team's mood — do it in response to specific actions.
    - If agreed upon, facilitate a Spirit circle with the opposing team.
      - If there is no time for a Spirit circle due to schedule constraints, or if there is no agreement to have such a circle, check in with the opposing team's Spirit Captain to share Spirit scores (if already completed) and/or any quick thoughts.
    - Enter or return scores promptly to tournament organizers or scorekeepers at your field.
    - If possible, keep backup records of all Spirit scores.
- **After the Tournament or Event**
    - Follow up with opposing teams as necessary.
    - Respond to inquiries from tournament organizers promptly.

## Spirit Scoring System

- There are three measurable aspects of Spirit.
  1. Rules Knowledge & Use
  2. Fouls & Body Contact
  3. Communication & Conduct

- Definitions and examples of these three aspects are described in the [Spirit Score Examples Sheet](#).
- Spirit scoring is a **team** effort! The Spirit Captain's role is to facilitate discussion and consensus regarding scores to be given.
  - Create your preferred methodology for determining what score to give in each category.
    - Ask players for feedback about the scores they proposed.
  - Clarify outlying scores of 0 or 4 on the Score Sheet with **comments**.
- Reminders for your team:
  - A "2" is a "Good" score in any category, indicative of an average game.
    - Use the examples included with the Score Sheet to help determine a team's score in each category. Remember that low and high scores should be justified with specific examples.
  - Scores should be determined from gameplay and should not consider additional activities before or after the game.
  - Be aware of ways in which implicit bias could impact Spirit scoring. Refrain from determining Spirit scores based on preconceived notions or in retaliation.

## Spirit Circles

- At the end of a game, teams can use Spirit circles as an opportunity to highlight, discuss, or address any Spirit-related issues. Some teams may choose to have one before the game.
- If agreed upon, the Spirit Captains of the opposing teams should arrange a space for the conversation to occur between the teams.
  - It is standard practice for players to form a circle, standing shoulder to shoulder and alternating players from each team as much as possible.
- Spirit Captains should be prepared to speak about their team's experience during the game.
  - Before engaging in a Spirit circle, each Spirit Captain should quickly check in with their team and/or complete Spirit scoring to inform the discussion in the circle.
  - Discussion and feedback should be honest and candid, but not overly critical, and consistent with the submitted scores.
  - Spirit Captains should refrain from calling out individuals for negative actions which may be better discussed with that player and/or their Spirit Captain as a separate follow-up.

## Spirit Timeouts (from [2024-2025 Rules of Ultimate](#))

Spirit Captains have the special ability to call a Spirit timeout, which can be a useful way to defuse tension when needed and get a game back on track. They are not often called, but you shouldn't hesitate to use one if the situation calls for it. Call one early, rather than waiting until too late. Be sure your team doesn't strategize during the timeout.

A Spirit timeout does not use up game time, unless it's very long, in which case Spirit is likely already affecting the game in other ways. Remember: Calling a Spirit timeout is not a problem, it's a solution. Here are the specific rules:

7.E. A Spirit timeout may be called by one or both teams' Spirit Captain(s) if they believe that either or both teams have failed to follow the Spirit of the Game, and (1) game play has become dangerous; or (2) repeated

Spirit of the Game violations are causing conflict between the teams. Spirit timeouts are subject to the following provisions:

7.E.1. A Spirit timeout can be called only if all of the following conditions have been met:

7.E.1.a. Both Spirit Captains have discussed the perceived Spirit of the Game violation(s) and adjustments to address those violations, and one or more members of either or both teams have not adjusted their conduct.

7.E.1.b. Both Spirit Captains have discussed the need to call a Spirit timeout before calling the Spirit timeout. It is not required that both Spirit Captains agree that a Spirit timeout is necessary.

7.E.1.c. Play is stopped.

7.E.1.d. In games with observers, Spirit timeouts initiated by the Spirit Captains must be communicated to the observers before being called. Observers may call a Spirit timeout if the observer believes it is needed and at least one of the Spirit Captains agrees.

7.E.2. During the Spirit timeout:

7.E.2.a. Both teams will aim to complete all discussions within 5 minutes, with a goal of resuming play as quickly as possible. If teams require more time to resolve Spirit discussions, the timeout can be extended with the consent of both Spirit Captains.

7.E.2.b. Team members may not engage in tactical discussions. Team members may not extend the Spirit timeout to try to gain a tactical advantage.

7.E.2.c. Spirit timeouts may follow one of two formats, as determined by the Spirit Captains. Where the Spirit Captains disagree as to the format of the Spirit timeout, the default format is for teams to form one circle.

7.E.2.c.1. All team members of both teams will form one circle, alternating players from each team, if possible. The Spirit Captains will lead a conversation addressing and proposing solutions to resolve Spirit issues; or

7.E.2.c.2. Two circles will be formed, one for each team to internally resolve Spirit issues that have already been discussed between the Spirit Captains of the opposing team.

7.E.3. After the Spirit timeout:

7.E.3.a. The game resumes in the same manner as it does after a team timeout.

7.E.3.b. Spirit timeouts do not affect timeouts available.

7.E.3.c. For Spirit timeouts lasting five minutes or less, the time taken for a Spirit timeout will automatically be added to the length of the game time to determine time caps for the game. After the initial five minutes, although Spirit Captains may always agree to extend a Spirit timeout, event organizers may limit the time that can be added to the length of games. The Spirit Captain(s) initiating the Spirit timeout will convey the start and end of the stoppage to event support staff or the event organizer for time-keeping purposes.

## Additional Resources

- Official Rules of Ultimate 2024-2025: [usultimate.org/rules](https://usultimate.org/rules)
- USA Ultimate Spirit Score Sheet: <https://usultimate.org/resources/spirit-score-sheet>
- USA Ultimate Spirit Score Examples: <https://usultimate.org/resources/spirit-examples-sheet/>
- Spirit of the Game Basics: The Starting Seven:  
<https://usultimate.org/resources/sotg-basics-the-starting-seven/>
- USA Ultimate “About Spirit of the Game” webpage: [usultimate.org/spirit-of-the-game](https://usultimate.org/spirit-of-the-game)
- World Flying Disc Federation (WFDF) SOTG Resource Page: [wfd.org/sotg](https://wfd.org/sotg)
- USA Ultimate Organizer Resource Manual  
[usultimate.org/resources/organizer-resource-manual](https://usultimate.org/resources/organizer-resource-manual)
  - Article on “Teaching Spirit of the Game” on page 63
  - Article on “Teaching Self-Officiating” on page 69
- High School Girls Ultimate Resources Manual  
[usultimate.org/resources/high-school-girls-ultimate-resources-manual](https://usultimate.org/resources/high-school-girls-ultimate-resources-manual)
  - Section IV - Spirit on page 89
- USA Ultimate Equity, Diversity and Inclusion  
[usultimate.org/equity-diversity-inclusion](https://usultimate.org/equity-diversity-inclusion)
- WFDF WhatsApp SOTG chat community  
<https://chat.whatsapp.com/JdMoT5oP0DI9MLODLYNAe7>

