

Following are several ideas and examples for developing a community of engaged and effective ultimate coaches at the youth level.

**Background:**

Many local affiliate organizations are actively involved in youth coach selection and development, while others are planning to do so in the near future. Finding and engaging effective youth ultimate coaches is a real challenge, even among communities with plenty of experience and aptitude for the sport. For a long time, ultimate has been an adult-oriented sport, with the majority of players discovering it as very young adults in university club sports programs. Thus, many ultimate-playing adults did not grow up with ultimate coaches helping to develop their skillsets during their youth, and they do not have that natural model to emulate. Many may have instead grown up with coaches in other sports, but the sense that "ultimate is different" or sometimes even an "anti-sport" can keep ultimate cognitively compartmentalized in their minds. Ultimate really IS different, but more so in other, better ways than being traditionally "uncoached." Fortunately, with the growth of youth ultimate, this attitude seems to be changing, and it is often the slightly younger generation of adults, those in or recently out of college, which tends to have the most open mindsets towards coaching youth ultimate. That said, there are many more factors involved, and among all generations there are potentially great coaches to be discovered and engaged.

**Main Idea:**

There are three distinct levels of youth coaches to consider engaging, in terms of commitment, impact, benefit/reward and experience needed, along with corresponding local programming examples:

**1) Local Team Coaches**

For both school-based and youth club programs, consider requiring that each team in a youth league or event have a coach. This can be a great way to provide entry-level coaching opportunities for experienced players and supporters in your ultimate community to try coaching without huge performance pressures. Coaching isn't for everyone. Parents and competitive situations can mean excessive psychological stress for some personality types, and that is understandable. On the other hand, other personality types will thrive despite those stressors, and you want to specifically identify those key individuals.

**Ideas for coach incentives**

Go beyond the event requirement component, which will motivate some parents to be able to ensure their kids get to play. However, before entering into the accounting complexity of 1099s and income tax implications of offering monetary compensation, consider such alternative rewards as:

- Physical goods, such as a jersey and/or a disc (perhaps include the coach in the team/league order and spread the cost between all players)
- Future league or other event registration discount (perhaps most appealing for an organization that runs both youth and adult events)
- Complimentary coaching certification registration (great way to ensure enough interest exists to host a USAU coaching clinic in your community)

**Sample online team coach application** - <http://goo.gl/forms/MhxVqNxCFE>

## 2) Camp Coaches

Many organizations have discovered the impressive demand and financial benefit potential of running ultimate-specific camps for youth interested in some fun, intense skill-building sessions during times free from academic calendar pursuits. With such programming comes increased demand for identifying and engaging high quality coaches, who can effectively help the campers to demonstrably improve their skillsets, sustaining programs with returning players from year to year through excellent word-of-mouth marketing, the most effective kind!

### Ideas for coach incentives

While many of the same less expensive incentives for team coaches might also be effective at this level, it might be important to reach out to solid, proven players, perhaps who are currently engaged in a healthy college ultimate program, and who may need more than slight cost reductions or tangible goodies in exchange for devoting significant periods of their days or weeks to a camp program.

Here are some other ideas that may appeal more strongly:

- Stipends (offer a set amount for completing a camp coaching stint, perhaps with different levels for a head vs an assistant coach position)
- Hourly compensation (typically, there is significant potential even to offer a rate rather near the minimum wage standard, due to the fact that coaching opportunities offer many inherent rewards as a very satisfying activity for the right persons; also, there is often a solid understanding that small volunteer-driven nonprofits on small budgets can't afford to pay large amounts, even for great coaches)

\*\* Don't forget to budget the expected costs of any coach compensation into your program fees and to properly follow state and federal requirements for reporting on payments to temporary staff.

*Sample online camp coach application* - <http://goo.gl/forms/WziDHgVROF>

### 3) National Championship Coaches

Typically, the youth club teams that are formed with the intent to represent your state, metro area, and/or disc organization are the very best of the best youth players in the represented ultimate community. Thus, their sights are often set on winning a national championship, if not this year then next. They want to learn and accomplish what it takes to get to the highest levels of youth ultimate. So you want to engage the absolute best of the best coaches to prepare these national contenders.

#### Ideas for coach incentives

Unfortunately, travel costs are inevitable for these teams, including their coaches. Fortunately, the passion and commitment of the players and families, as well as the supporting community being represented, will often provide revenue opportunities to cover these increased costs.

Ideas for incentives beyond those mentioned for both team and camp coaches:

- Full reimbursement of actual travel costs (both getting to/from the event as well as renting a comfortable, private accommodation at the event)
- Meal per diems (consider offering a standard corporate or government per diem rate to cover meals that a coach will need to consume while away from home and/or family)
- Community recognition as the "best" youth coach around (this one may be technically "free" in terms of money budgeted into the program, but don't forget that coaches typically come from highly competitive backgrounds, and "winning" feels good, as does the public recognition that comes with it!)

\*\* Perhaps more than the other 2 levels, this is one where the inherent rewards of coaching are strongest. It's a real challenge to produce competitors on the national level and those that do it well receive serious gratification from that accomplishment.

*Sample online national team coach application* - <http://goo.gl/forms/1zgRNhNZYn>

#### Key Concept:

Consider the psychology of engaging individuals in any volunteer role, but especially in coaching positions. Communicate about the opportunity to coach as something to be coveted, as opposed to a chore or service being begged. Yes, that is a real challenge when it really does feel like we are in desperate need for more or better coaches. But it is very important to

be selective with who we trust and empower with minors in sport. The language and attitude that we employ can have a significant impact in conveying our commitment to selectivity. Use terms such as opportunities to "apply" to be a coach, rather than just "volunteer" to coach. Engage volunteers selectively, attaching the appropriate honor and esteem to their selection. Sure, the terms of employment may be "volunteer" for which we, as the "employers" or program directors, are grateful for great work done and efforts expended, but that word "volunteer" is too often taken to meaning "open to anyone who is willing, no matter the skillset or aptitude or level of commitment." And that doesn't have to be the way we approach putting people in positions that may not make them rich monetarily but will absolutely enhance the quality of their lives in far greater ways.

Take another look at the sample online application forms, and notice that the clear concept is that a selection process is involved and not just anyone will be selected to coach our youth:

- 1) Team coach sample online application - <http://goo.gl/forms/MhxVqNxCFF>
- 2) Camp coach sample online application - <http://goo.gl/forms/WziDHgVROF>
- 3) YCC coach sample online application - <http://goo.gl/forms/1zqRNhNZYn>

### **Conclusion:**

There are other in-between or parallel youth coaching levels to further consider developing for different programs, such as regional and/or state championship teams (vs. local area league participating teams only). It is unlikely that any of these descriptions is fully complete for the variety of places and communities across our nation. The best solution for your program or current stage of development may be a combination of the ideas included above and likely further development of most that are applicable. Ideally, these ideas can help to form a starting place for developing a great coaching corps to serve your successful programs, each one of which helps to promote the ultimate sport around this great nation.