



**USA Ultimate Board Meeting Notes  
April 18, 2015  
Conference Call**

**President Mike Payne calls meeting to order 11:07AM ET, Saturday April 18, 2015.**

**Board Members on the call:**

Mike Payne\* – President, At-Large (Appointed) Representative  
Kathy Hendrickson – Mid-Atlantic Region Representative  
DeAnna Ball – Vice President, At-Large Representative  
Henry Thorne – At-Large Representative  
Stephen Hubbard – Southwest Region Representative  
Ness Fajardo\* – Athlete Representative  
Brian Garcia\* – Treasurer, Athlete Representative  
Val Belmonte – At-Large (Independent) Representative  
Michael Eck – At-Large (Independent) Representative  
Mary-Clare Brennan – At-Large (Appointed) Representative  
Kevin Minderhout\* – At-Large Representative  
\*Elite Athlete

**Board Members Absent:**

Josh Seamon – Secretary, At-Large Representative

**USA Ultimate Staff on the call:**

Dr. Tom Crawford – CEO  
Julia Echterhoff Lee – Director, Finance and Development  
Will Deaver – Managing Director, Competition and Athlete Programs  
Andy Lee – Director, Marketing and Communications  
Melanie Byrd - Director, Membership and Sport Development

**Financial Update**

Led by Tom Crawford

- The organization is in good shape for the first quarter; net position is strong.
- No Board votes were taken

**YTD Update**

Led by Tom Crawford



- We had a strong performance at the World Beach championships, collecting 6 gold and 1 bronze medal.
- This was a good way to lead into inaugural beach championships in a couple of weeks; good group of teams/athletes coming.

#### Olympic update

- Progress is being made on several fronts.
- USA Ultimate to be Working with WFDF to advance effort at USOC and IOC levels.

#### Youth

- A relationship is being built with an NYC Catholic Youth Organization; 11,000 kids are being introduced to ultimate.
- Schools in NY are introducing ultimate in a way that's tied to DiscNY.
- This is a great example of the affiliate model in action.

#### College Series

- Many great teams are competing and working hard.
- The Championship series for for DIII and DI will be very exciting.
- We are up 5% in college division membership.

#### US Open

- Plans are set for tournament in OH.
- Australia and Germany are coming.

#### **Judicial**

Led by Kathy Hendrickson

- A review and summary of judicial committee proceedings.

#### **Proposal 2015.2 (Gender Equity Ombudsgroup) - Board Working Group**

##### **Recommendation & Votes**

Led by Mike Payne

Process for discussion:

- Mary-Clare Brennan commented on the Marketing Working Group recommendation and gave context.
- There was a Q/A period and general discussion.
- The Board voted.



Votes:

**Proposal 2015.2:** *“For the dual purposes of advising USAU on matters relating to gender equity, as well as being an independent voice communicating to the Ultimate community at large about the ways in which USAU is advancing gender equity, the USAU will form a gender equity ombudsgroup (GEO). The GEO will have access to how decisions that impact gender equity are being made at USAU, will be a sounding board for USAU during decision-making processes, and will communicate to the community at large, as an independent voice, about how USAU programs and policies are advancing gender equity.”*

The full proposal is contained in the appendix A.

### **Recommendation #1 of the Marketing Working Group regarding Proposal 2015.2**

The Marketing Working Group’s first recommendation is that the Board of Directors decline to create a “gender equity ombudsgroup”, as outlined in the GEO proposal for the following reasons:

- a. It is the opinion of the Marketing Working Group that the proposal focuses too narrowly on broadcast exposure as a visible expression of equity, without also considering programs that will more broadly drive equitable gender opportunities.
- b. As USA Ultimate progresses further within the Olympic Movement, it will become increasingly subject to USOC requirements and oversight including the expectation that it is the role of the professional, paid staff to manage, implement and regulate all day-to-day aspects of the organization, and the Board’s role to focus on strategy, finances, and governing the organization according to the NGB board member guidelines.
- c. The creation of a volunteer “ombudsgroup” would add another, redundant layer to an existing system of governance and staff oversight. It is the responsibility of the professional staff – led by the CEO – to uphold organizational policies like the existing gender equity policy. Athletes and many other volunteers participate on the Board of Directors and on committees and working groups, including the Marketing and Competition Working Groups, which already collaborate with, and provide guidance to, USA Ultimate on many of the concerns addressed in the proposal. The Board of Directors holds the CEO accountable for the



performance of the professional staff on all matters, including policy performance. USA Ultimate is structured to allow members a voice, either directly or through volunteer representatives, in the governance process through its existing structure.

The subject of equity, ethics, inclusion and diversity are extremely important issues and - as confirmed by the Board, staff and the proposal authors – represent deeply held core beliefs of the individuals that participate in the sport of ultimate and USA Ultimate as an organization. Although this recommendation does not endorse the proposal to create a gender equity ombudsgroup, the Marketing Working Group commends the efforts of its authors to bring attention to this issue.

1. Following discussion, Mike Payne moves to vote on accepting the task force’s first recommendation (to decline to create a “gender equity ombudsgroup”). Val Belmonte seconds motion.

**The board votes to accept the task force’s first recommendation, to reject Proposal 2015.2 with a vote of 10-2.**

2. Henry Thorne moves to vote on Proposal 2015.2 as stated (a formal vote on the proposal is required, as vote #1, referenced above, was in regards to the Working Group’s recommendation as opposed to the proposal itself). Kevin Minderhout seconds.

**Proposal 2015.2 does not pass with a vote of 2-9-1.** (Henry Thorne absent due to a dropped call).

### **Recommendation #2 of the Marketing Working Group regarding Proposal 2015.2**

The Marketing Working Group’s second recommendation is that “The Board [should] appoint key Directors – presumably the three Board signatories to the proposal – to work with USA Ultimate staff to address the underlying issues raised by the proposal. Those issues include:

- a. The need to build increased trust between member athletes, volunteers, affiliates and USAU’s Board and staff;
- b. The need to improve regular communication detailing USA Ultimate’s performance on gender equity and the dissemination of that information to the USAU member athletes;



- c. The need to review and revise the existing gender equity policy to ensure that its requirements are within the organization's scope of control; and;
- d. To continually search for ways to identify and cultivate female leaders, and other leaders from underrepresented groups, within the ultimate community.
- e. The Task Force will be led by DeAnna Ball and members will include Val Belmonte, Josh Seamon, and Ness Fajardo.

**The board vote to accept the task force's second recommendation, as quoted above, with a vote of 11-0-1.**

**Adjourned 1:09PM ET.**



## Appendix A: Proposal 2015.2

### **Background:**

In 2008 the UPA adopted a gender equity policy (see Appendix I) to ensure that UPA coverage and promotion of women's divisions was equal to that of the corresponding men's division, as well as to encourage outside partners to do the same, with the aim of growing the number of female athletes in the sport. While the promotion and coverage of women athletes has grown considerably since then, and additional targeted outreach programs to increase participation have been implemented, there remain discrepancies in coverage by both USAU and its broadcast partners, as well as other issues of concern for proponents of gender equity.

In 6 out of the 9 broadcast events of the last two years, the women's division has had fewer total games streamed (3/9), fewer games for the larger audience of ESPN3 (4/9) and/or fewer games from later elimination rounds in the tournament as compared to the men's division (2/9) (see Appendix II). Even though USAU reaffirmed the gender equity policy in 2013 and specifically pledged to supplement coverage of the women's division in cases where media partners did not do so (Appendix I), only in 1 out of 4 instances where ESPN had unequal coverage of men's and women's games did an endemic media partner cover more women's games than men's games to equalize the coverage. It is also often the case that when scheduling constraints preclude both divisions from having the same round covered, the later men's division round is covered (Appendix II), which serves to better showcase that division's top level of play, as later round games are usually closer.

These discrepancies, and a lack of understanding of the process by which such decisions are made, have led to dissatisfaction from players and women's advocates that are being aired in private and public forums and resulting in negative perceptions about how well USAU is adhering to its own policy. In addition to media coverage, there is a sense that decisions about competition structure are made largely by focusing on what is best for the men's/boy's division, often at a cost to growth of the women's/girl's division. As USAU frames other important decisions as being based in the gender equity policy, it is critical that the organization's members perceive USAU to be doing the utmost to promote gender equity in all of its decisions.

To address this problem, we propose the formation of a gender equity ombudsgroup (GEO), to both act as a sounding board for USAU on matters of gender equity, and to be



an independent voice that can communicate externally about the ways in which USAU is advancing gender equity. This would include highlighting positive examples of gender equity (e.g. Appendix III). USAU would have control over the composition of the GEO (although it would be important that the group include members perceived to be “independent” of USAU). The USAU communications team would work together with the GEO to ensure that communications were factually correct, complete, and did not violate any confidentiality agreements. By being privy to some of the information about how the media contracts are negotiated, this group would be able to understand and communicate externally what is and isn't under USAU's control, or, potentially, make suggestions about what tradeoffs are preferable in various circumstances. We envision that this group would be consulted on decisions regarding media coverage of USAU events, as well as major changes to competition structure, so that the group could fulfill its role of both advising and communicating those decisions.

**Proposal wording:**

For the dual purposes of advising USAU on matters relating to gender equity, as well as being an independent voice communicating to the Ultimate community at large about the ways in which USAU is advancing gender equity, the USAU will form a gender equity ombudsgroup (GEO). The GEO will have access to how decisions that impact gender equity are being made at USAU, will be a sounding board for USAU during decision-making processes, and will communicate to the community at large, as an independent voice, about how USAU programs and policies are advancing gender equity.

**Pros/Cons:**

Pros:

- USAU will receive additional thoughtful input and suggestions about policies and programs that impact gender equity or the gender equity policy.
- USAU policies that promote gender equity will have an additional platform from which to be recognized.
- The community at large will feel that USAU is taking a positive step towards strengthening its commitment to gender equity.
- Maintaining itself on the forefront of gender equity may position USAU especially well in the eyes of the US Olympic Committee.

Cons:



- Consulting such a group may feel like an added administrative burden, although the parameters for engaging the group can be designed to minimize this burden.

Financial Implications: None

### **Conclusion:**

USAU can continue to position itself at the forefront of NGBs with regard to gender equity – a position that will also be useful for ongoing and future USOC relationships (the IOC has already expressed that gender equity was something they liked about WFDFs application). This proposal is also somewhat analogous to the system in place for ensuring Title IX compliance: Title IX mandates that institutions or other recipients of federal funds designate at least one employee as a Title IX coordinator to oversee compliance efforts.

While outreach programs that encourage participation by girls and women are part of the solution to growing women’s participation in Ultimate, media exposure serves to create role models for younger players, and equity of coverage assures them that Ultimate is unique in the world of sports in promoting female athletes. As Ultimate grows and establishes itself as a visible and viable option for all athletes, other opportunities for national and international promotion will occur. Coverage on ESPN is just the beginning of the discussion. We believe it is important to have a group such as this one in place to deal proactively with any concerns regarding gender equity, so that the community as a whole can enthusiastically promote our sport as every new opportunity arises.

- Peri Kurshan (*USAU Women’s Club Division Council Rep & former USAU BoD President*)
- DeAnna Ball (*USAU BoD*)
- Josh Seamon (*USAU BoD*)
- Ness Fajardo (*USAU BoD*)
- Gwen Ambler (*Former USAU BoD Vice President*)
- Michelle Ng (*USAU Women’s Club Division Council Rep & former USAU College Athlete & Competition Programs Manager*)
- Heather Ann Brauer (*USAU National Girls Outreach Director*)
- Zara Cadoux (*Chair of the USAU Girls Ultimate Movement Working Group*)
- Tiina Booth (*USAU Coaching Instructor*)





- Charlie Mercer (*USAU Women's Division NW Regional Coordinator*)
- Kath Ratcliff (*Current 2-time Women's Division National Champion*)