



Starting an Ultimate Club at Your School

By Kyle Weisbrod

So you love Ultimate, but are scratching your head and wondering “why isn’t there a team at my high school?” Ultimate is cheap, fun to play, and growing fast at the high school level and, starting a team at your high school is incredibly rewarding. You will be introducing a brand new sport at your school. You’ll get to play on a team and know you’re the reason a new Ultimate team exists. And as long as recruiting efforts are made, the team will survive.

The Keys to Success

There are a handful of elements that will lead to the successful establishment of a team. Here’s a checklist. There are more details for each of these below.

1. Organizers (1 player, 1 teacher, 1 coach)
2. Recognition from your school
3. Equipment
4. Recruitment and promotion
5. Practice
6. Getting connected to other teams
7. Games and tournaments
8. Maintaining the team year-to-year
9. Building your team for the future

Building Your Team Organizers

In order to get your team off the ground, you need to have the right organizers. At the very least, you must have a player, a teacher, and a coach. Each of those people has a different role in organizing your team.

The Player The player organizer is often the catalyst for the team and is the organization’s person on the ground. The player is able to spearhead recruiting and many of the leadership responsibilities. The role is essentially a captain.

The Teacher It is essential to have a teacher involved in the team’s organization. The teacher can be the team’s liaison with the school’s administration and help the team become an official club and get field space and other resources from the school. The teacher’s role is mostly that of sponsor. Don’t be afraid to ask a teacher to be the sponsor for your Ultimate club.

The Coach The coach will provide legitimacy and instruction for your team. It is often difficult to be taken seriously as a player/coach and so an adult coach helps. The coach will also serve to limit the school’s liability and is necessary for club status. The coach and teacher can be the same person if he or she is qualified. The coach should be USA Ultimate certified.

Recognition from your School

Getting club status from your school is one of the most important and easy things you can do to get your team started. You will need a sponsor that is a school staff member. Rules on obtaining club status differ by each school, but your teacher/sponsor should

know how to do it. If not, ask your athletics or activities director. Club status can give you access to field space, equipment, school insurance, the right to use the school's name, and financial support. It will also allow you to advertise for your team in your school. Finally gaining club status is the first step in the road to gaining varsity status.

Equipment

Before you get going, you'll need to invest in equipment. Luckily, everything you need for an Ultimate team is inexpensive. In fact, USA Ultimate has produced an instructional kit with everything you need including 14 discs, a copy of *Basic Skills, Strategy & Drills*, two posters for recruiting, a PE curriculum, and a rule book. The instructional kit is available from our distributor The Wright

Life. The only thing you'll need in addition to the instructional kit is cones!

Recruitment and Promotion

Promoting and recruiting for the team will have a significant impact on getting your team off the ground. First, schedule a time after school with your sponsor for an organizational meeting a couple weeks in advance. In the weeks and days prior to the meeting, be sure to carry a disc around school and throw whenever you get the chance. Put signs up around school and tell people about the meeting and make sure they invite others. Some people might have excuses like: "I'm not good enough," "I don't know how to play," "I don't know how to throw." Encourage everyone: "You'll get better," "No one knows how to play yet," "We'll teach you to throw."

Working with High School Ultimate Parents

By Sherry Harris

Parents of high school aged students appreciate being kept in the loop on team happenings. Many teenage students do not openly share information with their parents, making them feel left out of school events. By having a 'team parent' who works closely with the coaches, she can not only provide her own input on team plans and trips, but she can also keep in touch with the player's parents and give them pertinent information regarding team trips, tournaments, and events.

Many parents are willing to help if asked, but are reluctant to step forward and volunteer or to take the lead. Some parents are juggling one or more full-time jobs, work travel, several children in multiple schools, family responsibilities, and other social responsibilities. So it helps them to know schedules and events ahead of time so that they can plan their lives accordingly. When parents have conflicts with scheduling, advanced notice helps them either reschedule things or lets their child know that they cannot attend their Ultimate event.

Parents who are unable to donate their time to help are often willing, if able, to donate material items like food, drinks, etc. Most parents appreciate the efforts of other adults (parents and coaches) who take the time to work with their children and they try to help in every way that they can!

When students travel with their Ultimate team, parents need to know the details. Parents care about their kids, and if they are given this information in advance and in an organized fashion, they gain trust in the coaches and organization traveling and feel more comfortable in letting their children travel with the group.

Parents generally want to support their teenagers in any way that they can. Teens today are seeking their own independence while simultaneously needing the support and help of their

Parents Need-to-Know

- Where are their children going?
- How are they getting there and back?
- When are they leaving & returning?
- How much is it going to cost?
- Who are they traveling with?
- What are the overnight arrangements?

The meeting should be attended and run by the captain and the coach. Start the meeting by showing some footage of high level Ultimate. Recommended videos include *Above & Beyond* (2000 Club Open & Women's), *Stacked* or the *CSTV USA Ultimate College Championships*. While the video is running pass around a sign-up list to get names, phone numbers, and email addresses. Once the video is done the coach should tell everybody who s/he is and explain his or her experience. That should be followed with some questions and answers about the sport of Ultimate and finally what they can expect out of practices and playing during the season. Find out what the best times for people to play are and set your first practice. The meeting shouldn't take long and once you're done, head outside to play some, but be sure to collect your sign-up sheet. After the meeting record all of the information from the sign-up sheet.

Practice

Prior to your first practice be sure to remind everybody using your contact information. For a new team, practice should focus on fundamental skill building and should include plenty of time to scrimmage. For ideas on how to teach skills and drills, use the USA Ultimate's *Basic Skills, Strategy & Drills* manual available from The Wright Life or in the instructional kit.

Warm up your body and stretch before playing. People will think twice about coming out to practice if their body still aches from the last practice. Have group stretches before and after practice. Stretching prevents injuries. Make sure you discuss the importance of stretching.

Remember that practices should be fun. Also keep in mind that is fun to learn new skills and improve.

Don't overload players with new information, but

parents. Parents may be willing to step in, help work concessions, participate in fund raisers, and support their teen in his or her extracurricular activities in any way they can. They just need notice to be able schedule time and know exactly what is expected of them.

Parents enjoy watching their children participate in wholesome organizations like Ultimate where their teen learns sportsmanship, respect, discipline, and team dynamics. They learn how to win humbly and loose with dignity. Students learn how to play hard and work hard, while having a great time! Ultimate is a very physically demanding sport and many students learn if they work hard, play together as a team, and help support each other, they can have a successful Ultimate game or tournament! Parents like to see their child learn these real-life lessons while having a safe, good time with their friends.

Parents are sensitive to their student's grades as their children have high hopes of getting into their favorite college. Parents want to see their child succeed and are sensitive to anything that affects their well being, their study time, their health, and their attitude towards school and their academics. When players participate in a successful Ultimate Club whose members work together and help each other on their school work, group projects, and who are in the same classes as each other, parents see a positive impact on their children. It is acceptable for their child to come home from an event exhausted because they have played very hard and given it all that they can, and whether they won or lost the tournament, they still feel good about what their team did, and their personal donation to the event.

When parents are included in an Ultimate program by being asked to help run tournaments, concessions, transportation for the team to off site events, etc., they become part of the team themselves, and they get swept up by the Spirit of the Game™! They watch their young athletes play the game, learn the rules, and thus parents begin to understand why their child enjoys Ultimate so much. Ultimate is different than other sports like football and baseball, because there is not as much pressure on the students to win and be so competitive. By being self-officiated, students learn to be honest, and they learn how to handle situations that others may struggle with. Playing on a team is a major learning experience within itself and a real-life lesson to learn! Parents like seeing their children act responsibly and honestly. When parents see these things happen, they spread the word to others who encourage their children to get involved in such a positive program!

give them enough that they can see tangible gains in their skills and knowledge of the sport. Use positive reinforcement when teaching new players to play.

Getting Connected to Other Teams

Youth Ultimate is growing rapidly around the country. Many states already have USA Ultimate State Youth Coordinators and State Championships that take place at the end of the spring or in the fall and more states are being added every year. The first thing to do is to go to USA Ultimate Contacts Page and find out if your state has a State Youth Coordinator (SYC). If your state does have an SYC, email that coordinator and let them know that you are playing and ask what you can do to get involved.

If your state does not have a state coordinator, email the Regional Youth Director or the USA Ultimate Director of Youth Development. There are likely other teams in your state that these individuals can put you in touch with. Many states also have Yahoo groups or Facebook groups where youth Ultimate players and organizers communicate with each other. USA Ultimate also hosts a teams and tournaments website where you can register your team, find contact information for other teams, report your scores, and find information on tournaments.

Games and Tournaments

Now that you are connected to other teams in your area, you should schedule games. Scheduling a game is as easy as emailing another team or the local Yahoo or Facebook group and deciding on a time and a place for a game. For tournaments, simply email the tournament director and request a bid for your team. Planning for games and tournaments is covered in the USA Ultimate Coaching Development Program.

Maintaining the Team From Year-to-year

It's important that when the player/leaders of a team graduate that the team doesn't disappear the next year. Maintaining teams is an important part of growing the sport so that in the future there are more opportunities to play at the high school level. There are two important things to do to make sure that your team continues. The first is to have a coach and a teacher sponsor who will stick around after players graduate. The second is to have a Junior be an assistant captain. Make sure that the assistant is involved in all of the major organizational aspects of the team and knows what to do the next year as a captain. This will make your transition to the next year much easier. If you have too many players for one team, start a second or "B" team.

Building Your Team for the Future

One step beyond simple maintenance is actually building your team for the future. Many aspects of building your team are covered in depth in the USA Ultimate Coaching Development Program. Introduce Ultimate to the PE department. If people are learning about Ultimate in their PE class they will have a base when they come out to practices. USA Ultimate has many resources for PE teachers including curriculum for teaching the sport. If you purchase the team instructional kit, you can give the curriculum in the kit to your PE teacher. Get your parents involved by inviting them out to games. Parents can be an invaluable resource for your team. They can help with organization, transportation, or help the team financially. Most importantly, they can be strong lobby for your team with the school administration.