



Traveling with a Youth Ultimate Team

By Nick Ligatti

Spirit of the Game™ is the concept that helps govern everything in Ultimate—and it can apply to traveling with a youth team as well. Keeping a level head, staying calm, treating people with respect, and knowing the rules will help you lead a trip and take care of any issues that may arise.

In this article I have tried to cover all of the information I wish I had known before I took my first trip. All of my own specific experience has been traveling with a high school club team that is recognized by the school, so some information found here might not apply, but I believe that the general concepts should prove useful to any team. I have also included a checklist at the end that will hopefully help you to avoid mistakes that I have made in the past.

Roles

There are various roles that need to be filled in order to travel with a Youth Ultimate team. Below are descriptions of the roles that I use. Note that there can be some overlap in responsibilities (for my team the coaches are chaperones and one of the coaches is usually the trip leader).

Team Leadership Roles

Coach(es) Teach the game, lead the team

Chaperone(s) Keep the forms, watch over the players, make sure nobody gets in trouble

Trip Leader Make hotel and transportation arrangements

Team Parent Help wherever they can, organize other parents

Know Your Players

I would never bring a group of kids anywhere if I did not trust them. As a coach or chaperone, it is extremely important to have established trust with the players ahead of time. You also should have an idea of personalities and any conflicts that might happen. Many hotels require room assignments ahead of time, and knowing how the various personalities interact with each other will make rooming decisions easier. You will also have a better idea if any players might cause problems or incidents. In my experience I have found that there are relatively few troublemakers in Ultimate and I have only once refused a player to travel with us, but you should always be prepared for problems to arise, just in case.

Know Your Parents

Parents are the most important aspect of any traveling Ultimate team. Without parental involvement, it is extraordinarily difficult for the team to go anywhere. Just like you need to build trust with the players, you also need this trust with their parents.

Most parents will not let their kids go on trips with just anyone, so you need to make sure that parents have met the coach, trip leader, and chaperones ahead of time. For most teams parents are an untapped resource. My team usually travels with between six and ten parents depending on where we go (if the tournament is nearby, more parents will come with us). When I look at the other teams we play against, there are usually only one or two adults. Make the parents feel welcome and wanted; it gets them involved in the sport and with their child.

Parent Meeting

I recommend having a Parent Meeting at least two weeks before the tournament. At the meeting you should have an itinerary for the trip, being as specific as possible.

Trip Itinerary Information

- Contact information
- Hotel address and phone number
- Field location
- Trip cost per player
- Weather forecast
- Packing list
- Any other special instructions

Many Ultimate players have not played on traveling teams before, so this is a completely new experience for them and their parents. You must keep the parents in the loop about what is going on with every trip. Most parents are willing to help, but might not know how to help. Let the parents know what you have and what you need (do you need more drivers, food and water, medical supplies, trash bags, etc?).

Although it is rare, some tournaments do not provide water and food, so I always bring food for lunch on both Saturday and Sunday, and water and sports drink. Parents will normally donate these items. Depending on the time of year you might want to think about bringing warm foods. We go to one tournament every winter and having some camping gear to make pasta or soup is extremely useful, lifting the team up when temperatures hit 40° (or colder) outside.

Go over the rules and procedures that the players must follow. You need to set a curfew, which may not

normally be an issue on Saturday night after playing all day, but Friday night the players can be a little restless. Players need to be on their best behavior for a variety of reasons. Tournament directors are not going to want teams that are unruly and disrespectful to attend to their tournament in the future.

Make sure you gather every player's name, parent's name, phone number, and email address. This will make it easier to stay in contact with parents and to coordinate supplies. Included in this Resource Guide as "Appendix F" is a blank player information form. Over the years I have found it makes things easier to also gather players' USA Ultimate ID numbers, especially if going to a USA Ultimate event.

If you go to multiple tournaments in a year, one parent meeting should be enough, unless there is a particular issue that needs to be discussed or if there are a large number of new players. The meeting should be at least two weeks before the first trip and include all of the information above. For all of the subsequent tournaments, all of the information can be collected and distributed through emails and phone calls.

School Information

Know your school's rules and policies! For my team we are considered a club in our high school, and every time we go to a tournament it is considered a field trip. We have to be given permission from the District Superintendent to travel out of the state or from our principal if traveling within the state. Most schools should have field trip request forms in the office. A trip itinerary must accompany the field trip request form as well. Make sure appropriate parent permission slips are filled out.

Pay attention to the school calendar as well. There are many activities that might conflict with traveling. Since most tournaments are in the spring always be aware of spring break, prom, SAT, AP, and state testing dates. All of these dates are known to the school administration by the start of the school year, and the team should plan accordingly.

In my school system, school employees are not allowed to give medicine to students. Since each trip is a field trip, we cannot give medicine to any of our players without permission from the parent. This includes over the counter medicine. Make sure that the parent gives permission for any medicine you are giving.

Required Forms for USA Ultimate Events

All forms can be found at www.usultimate.org

Medical Authorization Form
Youth Chaperone Consent and Release Form
Waiver/Release of Liability Form
(signed by Parent or Guardian)

Transportation/ Lodging

Transportation is always a big concern, especially if you are traveling hundreds of miles. This is also another place where you must know what the school policies are. At my school, we have three options:

- 1. School Bus** Paying \$0.50 per mile for the bus, then you need to add in the price of the bus driver, for the entire weekend.
- 2. Charter a Bus** Our school system only authorized three companies, so you need to get quotes and do your homework.
- 3. Parents Provide the Transportation** Parents drive their own vehicle and we reimburse for gas.

Our school will not allow students to drive for field trips and school employees are not allowed to transport students in their personal vehicles. Our Team Parent normally helps to organize the drivers.

Our Trip Leader (one of the coaches) deals with all lodging issues. Make sure to make reservations early. Once you have a committed number of players going, call hotels and make reservations. If the location is unfamiliar to you, I recommend asking the tournament director for nearby hotels. Be wary of the cheapest places, as there may be good reasons they are so cheap. Staying with a well known chain is usually a good idea, and fewer issues arise here. Check to see what amenities the hotel offers as well, such as a free continental breakfast. We like to see if laundry services are nearby, so if it is rainy and muddy the team has the option to wash their uniforms.

Know the area

You should never be surprised by the location of the tournament. If possible, try to scout the area a few weeks ahead of time to know what is around. Try to find restaurants, gas stations, a hospital, grocery store, pharmacy or any other helpful places that you could possibly need. Our team always has a team dinner on Friday night, so I try to have a phone number to make reservations at a restaurant while still on the road, or just after checking in. Also, try to know the major roads in the area. There is nothing worse than being lost in a place you are not familiar with.

Checklist

Before the trip

- Receive bid to tournament
- Create itinerary
- Fill out all paperwork
(school and USA Ultimate, if applicable)
- Find hotel
- Find transportation
- Gather supplies
(food, water, tents, tables, etc)
- Parents Meeting
(at least 2 weeks before trip)
- Sign-in sheet
- Information sheet for the parents
- Trip Rules
- Cost

During the trip

- Chaperone has all forms
- Enforce rules
- Take care of any injuries
(call home, seek medical attention)
- Enjoy the weekend

After the trip

- Shred any personal information
that you don't need
- Ask for suggestions on how to improve
for next time