

Gaining Media Attention

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The following chapter will help you gain media attention for your tournament or league. It contains instructions on how to create a press release, agate, and a press kit. There is also information on what to do before, during, and after your event takes place and how to pitch your angle. While no method can guarantee media exposure, there are many things that can be done to improve the chances of your event being published.

Tools of the Trade

Before you attempt to gain media attention for your event, there are a few tools of the trade you should familiarize yourself with. Press releases, agate, press kits and how to seek out different story angles are all integral pieces of the media puzzle that will help you promote your event. Not only will you become better familiar with these items, but you will be able to create your own and begin to gain media attention for your event.

Press Release

A press release is simply an announcement meant to draw media attention to a specific event, in this case your event. A press release is the most basic tool of media relations and doesn't cost you anything more than time to produce. A good press release can make the difference between your story winding up in the newspaper or in the editor's garbage can. Please refer to Appendix H for tips on how to write a successful press release.

Layout

Media expect a standard layout when receiving press releases. Please refer to Appendix G for an example of how to lay out a press release. At the top of your release, against the left margin, include "For Immediate Release" with the date on the next line below. Skip a line and place the headline on the next line, centered and bolded. If you choose to have a sub-head, it should go directly beneath the headline in a

slightly smaller font and be italicized. Skip a line, put the dateline followed by the body of the paragraph. The dateline is simply the city you are reporting from in all caps, followed by the state in AP style format (see figure 1-2) for AP style formatting.

The Body

All press releases answer the same basic questions: Who? What? Where? Why? When? These questions should all be answered in one or two, to-the-point sentences within the first paragraph. Members of the media can be bombarded with press releases on a daily basis and your first paragraph often dictates whether or not they move on to the second. Be concise and you have a better chance of garnering attention.

The second paragraph can either explain what the outcome of the event means or feature a quote from someone involved with the event. Use a quote from someone involved with the event as it adds credibility by using a direct source close to the event. If it is a pre-event release, the tournament director or event organizer is a good person to quote. During the event you should always try to use someone competing in the event to reiterate what you are saying happened during the game(s). Whenever using a quote from someone, be sure to attribute it to them and follow their name with where they live (city, state) in parenthesis.

Example: "It is also good to break up quotes into two parts," said Ryan John (Boulder, Colo.), USA Ultimate director of communications. "The first part of the quote should state something and the second part back it up with a fact."

All the rest of the paragraphs should complement the first two paragraphs. This is where you would put additional information, peripheral details and any interesting facts that make your release seem newsworthy.

You should conclude your press release with a wrap-up paragraph. This would be a good time to mention the next day's match-ups and/or times, the next event that your organization is running, or recaps from past events such as, "A year ago Team A breezed through the competition to win their third Our City Classic title."

At the end of your press release, include all contact information for the person in charge of the media. Provide as much information as you can to make the media's job as easy as possible. Again, refer to the sample press release layout in Appendix G to see an example of how to layout your contact information.

Agate

The word agate, as it pertains to print not the gem, comes from a size of font approximately 5 1/2 points, which is the size font that classifieds and box scores normally are printed. For our intents and purposes, agate is just another word for "scores" and, if done correctly, is your best bet for getting your event in print on busy news days.

There are simple rules to follow when putting together your agate and the closer you follow these rules the less the copy editor has to do and the easier you make his job, which is Ultimately the goal in everything you do for the media. You should start out your agate page with a header listing the name of your league or event, where the league or event takes place, dates the event takes place, and the date of the results. Please see Figure 1-1 for a sample of a tournament agate header and a league agate header.

After the header you will put your scores. Organize and label them clearly by division first and then by round if you are creating agate for a tournament. Correct agate lists, in order, the name of the team that won the game, where they are from, the losing team's name, where they are from followed by the score. You also want to check out your local paper's sports section, or, if you need to, call, to find out what format they use when publishing scores. In the mean time, the following is a sample of a line of agate.

Women's Quarterfinals
Barnstormers (Boulder, Colo.) def. Fliers (Sarasota, Fla.), 15-12

If you notice in the sample above, postal state abbreviations aren't used, but rather Associated Press (AP) style abbreviations are used. Figure 1-2 shows accepted AP style abbreviations for all 50 states. Use these in all City, State references except when a state is used by itself.

Be sure to include your contact information, in the same manor that you do on your press releases, at the bottom of your agate.

Creating and preparing agate may seem simple—and it is. It is the easiest way to get your first media attention and should not be overlooked. Often times, if papers have room anywhere it is in the scores section where your agate would go. It can be the first step towards building a relationship with your local media and making Ultimate become more familiar and commonplace within their publication.

Fig. 1-1 Agate Headers

Tournament Agate Header

**2007 USA Ultimate High School Western
Championships
Pleasantview Soccer Complex
Boulder, CO May 20-21**

Results: Saturday, May 21

League Agate Header

**Grass Roots Ultimate 2007 Summer League
Pleasantview Soccer Complex
Boulder, CO**

Week 3 Results: Saturday, May 28

Press Kit

Although a press kit may seem more involved than many people have time for, it is surprisingly simple and inexpensive to create a basic press kit, and it will go a long way towards making your event appear professional to a member of the media.

A press kit can simply be viewed as a folder with all of your "stuff" in it. It will include everything that you have to promote your event and is something that you will distribute to members of the media and keep on hand during your league or event. The following are some examples of what you would want to include in a press kit.

Two-pocket Folder

You don't need fancy folders made specifically for your event, instead use a basic, two-pocket folder that can be picked up at any office supply store. If you have a business card, you will want to get the type with the business card holder.

Labels

Also be sure to clearly and neatly label the outside of the folder. You need to include a logo (if you have one), the event or organization name, and the words "Press Kit." With so much information needed to go on the label, a 3 1/2" X 4" address label, available at most office supply stores, seems to work well. Please see the figure 1-3 for an example of what your label should look like.

Press Releases

Any pre-releases you have written for the event should go in the press kit. The press kit should be updated throughout the event with new releases as you write them. This way if a member of the media shows up at your event, they will have all the information they need at their fingertips. Also, if you have had anything else recently newsworthy within your organization (new board election, recent charity event, etc.) include those releases as well.

Easy-to-read Schedule

You want to include a schedule that is easy to read and follow in the press kit. This should clearly show times and field locations. An added bonus is creating the schedule large enough to write on so that you, and the media, can easily update the draw sheets.

Fact Sheet on Ultimate

Fact sheets on Ultimate are available for download under the media section of the USA Ultimate website. Of course if you choose to make your own, assume that you are explaining the game to someone that has never heard of the sport. Be sure to mention the basic rules and how to play the game as well as the aspects of the sport that make Ultimate unique, such as Spirit of the Game™.

Fact sheet on Your Organization

This fact sheet is your chance to tell a little about your organization. You would want to include a list of officers, number of members, number of tournaments held each year, any charities that your organization donates to, a list of frequently asked questions, and basically anything that may be of use or interest to the

media. Also, be sure to include as much contact information as possible on the fact sheet. This includes contact name, email, phone(s), fax, and mailing address.

Publications

If your event publishes a tournament program or player guide, be sure to include it in the press kit. If your organization publishes a newsletter, be sure to include that in the press kit.

Angles

Your local paper most likely likes to publish local stories, which is perfect for most Ultimate tournaments and leagues. Be sure to play up the local angle. If you are running a tournament, be sure to make mention of the local teams competing in it. Look for people that are prominent members of the community that play in your league, business owners, councilmen, people that have unique jobs. Of course, be sure to get that person's permission with your media efforts.

There are many different angles available at your fingertips; you just have to try to find out what they are. Try to dig a little deeper than just people playing Ultimate. If people don't play Ultimate then they won't care who won the league tournament this year. They might be interested, however, in the team that won the league tournament and donated two large boxes of canned goods to their local food drive.

Figure 1-2 AP Style State Abbreviations

Ala.	Ariz.	Ark.	Calif.	Colo.	Conn.
Del.	Fla.	Ga.	Ill.	Ind.	Kan.
Ky.	La.	Md.	Mass.	Mich.	Minn.
Miss.	Mo.	Mont.	Neb.	Nev.	N.H.
N.J.	N.M.	N.Y.	N.C.	N.D.	Okla.
Ore.	Pa.	R.I.	S.C.	S.D.	Tenn.
Vt.	Va.	Wash.	W.Va.	Wis.	Wyo.

Never abbreviate: Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Ohio, Texas, or Utah



Getting to Work

OK, so now you have some tools to use during your quest for media attention. Now, what do you do with these tools? When do you use them? We'll be going through a step-by-step of the basics from what to do before the event starts through the completion of your event and how to make sure that you increase coverage next time you seek it.

Pre-event

Gather Contacts

Now you know how to write a press release, prepare agate and build a press kit. But who will you give it to? Before the event starts is when you need to gather your media contact list. The fastest and most accurate way to research your contacts is on the internet. There are several media search engines to help lead you to your local media's websites where you will usually find all of the contact information you will need.

Be sure to gather as much information as you can, including contact's name, title, email, phone, fax, mailing address and physical address. You want to pinpoint your releases and contact to those that are

most likely to pick your story up. The motor sports reporter might not be very interested in your release and you would just be wasting your time sending it to them. The high school reporter might be very interested if you are running a youth league.

Don't be afraid to make contacts outside of sports. With the correct story angle you may also be able to get attention in fitness, lifestyle, community, business, entertainment, or a special segment.

Contacting the Media

This is your chance to get to know the editors and reporters in your area and for you to introduce them, often for the first time, to Ultimate and, more specifically, your event or league. You will want to introduce yourself and the sport to the media a few weeks to a month before your event or league begins to make them aware of it.

There are basically four avenues for you to contact the media: visit, call, email, fax. Depending on your level of comfort and amount of time you have, any of the first three are acceptable ways to make your first interaction. If you decide to call or visit, be sure to know their deadlines and not bother them around those times. Being sympathetic to an editor's schedule will make him or her more apt to want to listen to what you have to say.

Don't fax unless someone requests information in that manner. It is even less personal than email and ideally you want to have a relationship with the members of your media. Plus, with faxing, they are unable to simply "copy and paste" the information you send.

If you visit the media, be sure to bring the press kit you created (if you created one), along with any other information or promotional material that you may have. You don't have to wear a suit, but be sure to dress nice for your visit.

Your initial contact, whether it be in person, by phone or email, is not only your chance to pass along information, but also to gather information for yourself. Be sure to ask important questions such as when deadlines for press releases and agate are. Also find out if you are talking to the right person. Often times the reporter you are talking to will know someone else in the department that might be better suited to report on your story and increase your chances of getting press. This is also a good time to update the contact information you have for their company and find out when they will be sending someone out to cover your event.

During Event

If you did a good job during pre-event then you need to be prepared to capitalize on all of that hard work during the event.

If you created press kits, be sure to keep them available at the tournament desk, or somewhere easy for you to quickly grab, if someone from the media shows up. Keep the press kits updated with the latest scores and press releases. If you are running media operations for a tournament, be sure to update the draw sheets that you included in your press kit.

It is also important to have someone there, not playing, that can answer questions or that can get a hold of you immediately. The media may not have much time to be at the field and therefore, not enough time to wait for you to finish your point. You should already have a list of potential interviewees in case they want to interview someone at the event. You'll want to keep in mind how they will look and what they will say when choosing your candidates.

Be sure to write a press release and create an agate each day after the completion of competition. You know when deadlines are for your media contacts so be sure to get your information there before hand. The earlier you send in your information the more likely they are to use it. They certainly aren't going to hold the presses if they don't have your release or agate by their deadline. And if they were expecting it, you may have taken a few steps back in your media quest by not sending it.

Post Event

After your daily agate, the post event press release is the next most likely piece of information to be published from your event. Include the story of the final, who won and how local teams and/or players fared. Also be sure to include any awards that were given out or items donated to charity. In addition to the final scores, your final agate should include a list of the final standings with each team listed in the place they

finished, followed by their city and state.

It is also a nice touch to follow up with the local media after the conclusion of your event. Send them a nice thank you note or email. If they gave you coverage, be sure to comment specifically on it. If you didn't attract any media attention this time around, try not to be discouraged and still follow up with the media. Something to the effect of, "Thank you for taking the time to read through our material. We understand that your (paper, station, etc.) is very busy and perhaps next time you will be able to find some room in your..."

This is also a good time to tell them of your "next time." Include your next event in the final release and also in any follow-up correspondence. If you don't have anything coming up for awhile, be sure to turn them on to another Ultimate event in your area or on the national scene.

Wrap-up

You now have the beginnings to launch a successful media campaign. Don't worry if you don't have six television crews and three newspapers out at your next event just because you sent out a press release. Gaining media notice in a world so oversaturated with sports takes time so stay positive and try slightly tweaking your approach when unsuccessful.

Odds are that you won't get anyone to come out for your league games each week, but you can still use your leagues to help set up your tournament media. Be sure to send in your agate, every week, consistently. This will help to build your relationship with local media and they will begin to view you as someone that has things organized and is easy to work with.

Ultimate is really such a beautiful sport to watch and is very media friendly. If you can't get them down to the fields, try to point them towards video. Getting the media to notice the sport is the most difficult part, once they see how exciting it is, they will want to come back for more.