



PART 2

Ultimate Leagues

Recruiting Players for Leagues

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Recruiting Players For Leagues

By Brevin Balfrey-Boyd

Like many organizations, yours may be involved with organizing one or multiple leagues each year, hosting tournaments, providing pick-up fields and/or providing your local traveling teams with practice fields. Despite the high demand for fields, organizations that have learned the system often have access to all of the fields they need and are continually looking to expand. This section will provide you with tips in acquiring fields within your own community.

Important Factors to Consider

When organizing an Ultimate league, an early frustration is often not being able to translate passion, creativity, and organizational skills into actual bodies for the league. The greatest entrepreneur can line up every other pertinent detail: field permits, shirts, waivers, online schedules and even sponsors, however, without a critical mass of players, the league will never get off the ground. While organizers are seldom alone in forming a league (often there are teammates, pick-up partners, or friends forming a base of players), the first thing to recognize is that no one knows enough people to make a league from one social circle alone, and even if someone did, to do so would be a disservice to the sport at-large, as well as the specific local community. Disregarding streams of publicity and recruitment besides word-of-mouth excludes many potential players. It's a great way to make a team, but the wrong, or at least long, approach to making an enduring league.

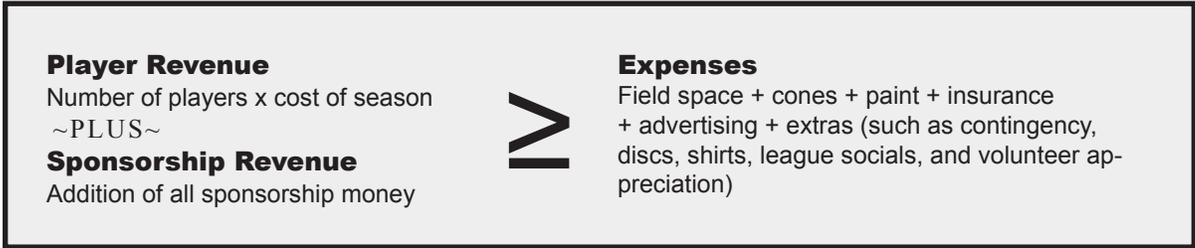
Starting a league takes hard work and is largely thankless, so keep in mind your own personal goals and vision for the league and remember to celebrate the small, day-to-day victories when they are achieved. Start early with an adequate budget and clear vision and plan to achieve a critical mass, or better. Borrow freely from ideas here and elsewhere,

and tweak and mold these methods to your unique community. Be sure to use any and all organic talent already existing in the community/league. Share the responsibilities of recruiting and work as a team to come up with new ideas, artwork, posters and ways to advertise. Identify graphic designers, natural recruiters, web-gurus, and marketing and advertising specialists within the league as early as possible—do not reinvent the wheel. A smart organization may start by recruiting volunteers to help with the recruitment of players. Be creative and relentless with recruiting.

Practical Constraints: Critical Mass

Recruitment is not just something an organizer arbitrarily does; there are some very practical and economical considerations that an organizer needs to factor into the league's recruitment model in order to calculate a league's critical mass. This is due to the fact that the number of players in the league is one of the only negotiable factors in the league budget equation. So, when planning recruitment, it is essential for an organizer to know, very early on, how many players the league will need to break even.

The number of teams and number of players on each team's roster are practical factors of consideration for the equation above in that each directly



affects the quality of the experience, as well as number of fields required since both will inadvertently affect the Ultimate number of league participants. The more teams a league has, the more fields (or time) the league will need, and an organizer must not overlook the critical mass each team will need to field a full team week in and week out. The organizer must consider commitment to the team, the time of year of the league, and the day of the week and time of the games when coming up with a number for each roster. A cautious organizer will roster two and one-half times the number of people required to play on the field. For example, in a seven-on-seven league with a two-women requirement at all times, each team would have roughly 17 or 18 players (with five women and 12-13 men) to address situations in which players get injured or miss games due to prior engagements. Over time organizers may find that 17-18 players is too many or too few and may adjust the player count per team to meet the needs of the league.

Finally, it is important, even at this planning stage, to keep in mind that if the league is coed, and has gender requirements, the organizer will have to satisfy two separate critical masses: number of male and number of female players. Additionally, the organizer should have a plan to address the participant overflow issue. While having more players than the league can take is a better problem than having too few, crowding each team can significantly affect the overall experience and it ultimately affects league retention.

Advertising

Advertising is more related to recruiting than most in the Ultimate community acknowledge at present; so closely is it related, that advertising and recruiting in the sense of a local Ultimate league are almost synonymous. Advertising is the single most important factor that can make or break a recruiting campaign as it is an organizer’s strongest tool in terms of getting the necessary information out to the target population.

For this reason, vigilant planning, grave attention to detail, and significant resources (both volunteer and monetary) must be allocated for advertising to hit its mark. Very few start-up leagues budget adequately for advertising and those that do often inadvertently miss their mark by directing the resources to the wrong media with the wrong presentation. The importance of an exciting and up-to-date website supported by an effective advertising campaign cannot be overstated in terms of recruiting. For ideas beyond this section concerning advertising, consult local advertising talent you may have in your league such as career professionals with experience in advertising, marketing, public relations and mass media.

Communicating the League’s Vision

Advertising planning starts with a vision for the league because successful advertisers know that it is all about image! This vision defines: who the target populations are, where those populations are, and how to reach and motivate them with advertising. It is important to anticipate stereotypes about Ultimate in the community and each form of advertising should do its part to address objections from the target population before they are even verbalized. For instance, if an organizer recognizes that many in the community might ask questions such as: “isn’t that for _____?” (insert hippies, white men, dogs, kids, or people who know how to throw a disc),” the resulting ad campaign will go to great lengths to debunk such stereotypes, and instead encourage the targeted population. The posters might show two professional-looking women dressed in eye-catching uniforms throwing on a lined field, with no hint of dogs, children, or tie-dye. The poster might include creative phrasing communicating who the league is open to (the targeted population i.e. “Wanted: Young Professionals looking for a Fun Coed Team Sport: Great Way to Meet People and Workout.” There should also be some mention of who

the league is not open to, i.e. “Sorry, no youth under 17 years of age in the Adult League, but check with _____ (insert the local youth league organizer if applicable). Childcare available!!!”

Word of Mouth Advertising

In any human endeavor, person-to-person advertising is the most powerful advertising tool, but as mentioned before, it is seldom the most prolific way to reach potential players and it is often not the most effective, stand-alone approach due to its self-limiting nature. However, that does not mean that it should be completely disregarded. Quite the contrary, word of mouth advertising is a wonderful starting point for league recruiting. Promoting word of mouth advertising among early participants can effectively supplement other forms of advertising, and “Bring a Friend” events such as clinics and development tournaments can go a long way while developing a mass media advertising campaign. Some players and volunteers will be better at recruiting than others because it is ultimately about personality and comfort level. As an organizer, it is important not to be frustrated with players who are not good recruiters. No amount of frustration will make a player who is uncomfortable with word of mouth recruiting more motivated or effective. Every community will have a few outgoing members who are natural sales persons. It is an organizer’s responsibility to identify these people and enlist their help, whether on a volunteer basis or with incentives such as a free league membership, discs, gift certificates, etc. This incentive method can work for creating sponsorships as well, especially if the organizer is the type of person who does not feel comfortable person-to-person.

One type of league that especially relies on word of mouth advertising is the league in which players join as a team and captains are responsible for drafting players on to their own team. This type of league will not work in every community and it works best when there is already a developed and prolific Ultimate scene, but then when it does work, all an organizer has to do is recruit captains, who are in turn responsible for recruiting their own roster. For all organizers who are intimidated by recruiting or who favor the laissez-faire approach to building the league, the league that uses a captain draft format to create teams can be a dream-come-true, as long as the community is large enough to support it and the captains come through. On the flip side, team leagues are not the best way to encourage

growth. Existing teams are more passive and do little to bring brand new players into the scene. Either way, there are important factors to consider, aside from recruiting, when choosing the appropriate type of league for your community. Read more about team vs. draft leagues in the Drafting, Ranking and Choosing Teams section of this manual. Also bear in mind that in terms of league coordination, the economics of a league that uses a captain’s draft to form teams are at the scale of a team, not its players.

On a related note, for markets large enough to support them, the best approach to recruiting is to have a diverse offering of leagues. Offering both team and individual sign-up on competitive and recreational, coed and same sex, with diverse choices for days of the week or times, allows players to pick the league that best suits their level, schedule and fancy. This is rarely possible as it requires a massive Ultimate community, but it can be a goal to work towards. In the end, this model will be the most effective in terms of recruiting because the players will be the most satisfied and have the best experience.

Diversity

Diversity should be an important consideration to any organizer preparing to recruit for their local organization. Efforts should be made to reach out to all populations equally. While it is not wrong to want to make a league look like the overall community it represents, it is important that methods chosen for encouraging diversity within an organization maintain equal and balanced treatment of players regardless of race or sex.

In regards to promoting diversity, and targeting new populations, an organizer must keep two questions front and center when assessing recruitment materials/policies and the overall league experience. First, ask if everything (policies, advertising, etc.) are inclusive for everyone? Then, reflect on the league and whole recruiting process and speculate whether anything (a situation, team name, altercation, anything) could have made anyone feel uncomfortable or unwelcome in the league at any time? Even the slightest ambiguity in the mind of the organizer in regards to answering these questions should throw up a red flag. As with all conduct issues, organizers should address questionable acts or issues regarding discrimination immediately and clearly for all to see that this is not accepted.

Targeting Populations

Placement of advertisements and posters affects who will respond to an advertising campaign. Ask, who will see this ad and how can it be made visible not only to more people, but to all races and sexes. So how does an organizer appropriately outreach to new populations? Start with asking members of that population (women, racial minorities, youth, etc.) already playing how they became involved and try to assess a pattern or mechanism from which more new players might come. If the league is completely new, the organizer should contact members in nearby leagues to learn local best practices.

Ultimate can be a relatively cheap sport to play. But consider providing players with opportunities for discounts. Offer new people a way to see what the sport is about and help them become comfortable with the idea of joining. Hosting one or a series of beginner's clinics is a great way to address these issues. Then offer league discounts to clinic attendees. This gives brand new players a chance to learn skills and have an incentive to continue playing. Offer opportunities to volunteer and have incentives to reward those that get involved. Use incentives or creative rewards to encourage players to bring new members to the league. Get everyone involved with the recruiting process. How you as an organizer recruits helps to ensure that everyone can have an opportunity to participate in the local leagues.

While the league should be open to everyone equally, it is common to have too many men and not enough women sign-up for a coed league. Extra efforts in targeting specific groups are often needed to fulfill league requirements. Organizers could further target women by distributing the posters at women's fitness centers or in the women's health section of the local news paper. The ratio of a coed league may not seem like a big issue, but anyone who has played in a recreational coed league knows that unless the ratio is written into the rules, and addressed during recruiting, the potential for resentment and inequity is likely later on both on and off the field. Recognize the role that gender-specific recruiting plays in ensuring that each team in the league has an adequate gender ratio that keeps the peace, and recruit accordingly.

One of the best ways to promote women's Ultimate is to provide an alternative for same-sex competition. A good way to recruit for a niche league, such as a women's-only league, is to help some natural and representative leaders organize a women's only pickup game. Pickup is free and less of a commitment than an entire season, so it is more likely to get

new players out, especially if it is structured with some drills to build skills. Once the numbers start to grow, and the competition improves, recruiting for the league will be much easier.

Many leagues overlook the effectiveness of advertising in the mass media because of the perceived cost. Before judging television, radio, or newspaper advertising campaigns too expensive, at least investigate the prices, which are extremely variant across different localities. There is often an affordable or even free (to non-profits) opportunity, which would otherwise be overlooked.

Another method, which can help new players (both targeted and in general) feel comfortable is to allow "baggage" in the drafting and team-making process. Allowing baggage means providing a space on league registration forms for players to designate at least one other player whom they will be guaranteed to play with. This makes new players, especially from minority populations, feel more comfortable reassuring them that they will be on a team with familiar faces. The baggage method also works well with couples (especially if they have to share childcare responsibilities), parents and players coming from far away who prefer to carpool. While it complicates drafting, the benefits can far outweigh the hassle, especially in small Ultimate markets where recruiting is difficult.

Be Informative

How to communicate registration information, directions, and general information is another important consideration within advertising and recruiting. Many organizers have seen the merit of having a league website. The internet can be a fantastic advertising tool abounding with opportunities for free or nearly free advertising such as email lists, online social networking opportunities and online communities (both disc-related and non-disc). However, an adequate website is very important to effectively outreach on the web. The league's website should be captivating, well organized, user-friendly, updated often, and graphically appealing; otherwise the internet is at best, an untapped resource and at worst, an agent of misinformation communicating inaccurate and outdated information. Carefully consider the artwork and presentation of the website because both will considerably affect registration and influence a potential player's image of the league and the overall sport. Presentation and effectiveness can be hard to evaluate, but the good news is that there is probably a talented web designer within every Ultimate

community who may be able to help with designing and maintaining an interactive website which will be powerful for recruitment, and useful in other aspects of organizing.

Retention

Unfortunately, even once the first season is up and running and recruiting is seemingly over, an organizer's work continues. There will be countless concerns throughout the first season and beyond which require attention, but player retention ranks amongst the most important as well as the most difficult to predict. Everything contributing to the overall experience in the league, which is to say everything related to the league, and even many uncontrollable things beyond it, will affect whether or not players return each season. It is important to have a vehicle for feedback such as an evaluation form because this can help with improving the overall experience of players in the league which will lead to higher retention. This, in turn, will lead to easier recruitment and less demand for it. Many of the comments and demands will be impractical and misinformed, but it is critical to give players a way to voice concerns even if nothing can be changed.

In markets large enough to sustain more than one type of league, one way to improve the overall experience is to offer a variety of leagues which fit the needs and abilities of potential players. Judge whether the local community could benefit from a beginner league, or leagues that are age-specific, time-specific, or location-specific. Ask players how they feel about same-sex leagues, or captain drafted or team leagues, or what niche leagues they would like to see in the future. As long as there is adequate participation, diversity in offerings leads to higher retention because players feel more comfortable, and game times are more convenient.

Pay close attention to feedback regarding team size. This is less important in team leagues where the captain is making the roster, but play time will be an important factor throughout all leagues. It is a difficult thing to balance because it depends on the player and the team, (and the gender in coed leagues) but the fact remains that either too much or too little playing time affects league retention.

It is important to save energy, resources, and time for recruiting even into the second and third season. Some organizations will reach a point in which they can no longer accept everyone who is interested in playing, while other organizations will never seem to grow. Recruiting in subsequent seasons can still

be just as time-consuming and energy-draining as the first because the methods should expand each time to include more ways to reach potential players. But, especially in smaller markets, it is important to continue to promote recruitment. Continuing year after year to serve the same players without outreach attempts to bring in new faces, often results in a stagnation of growth and eventual decrease in size of the league as players drop out for various reasons.

Summary

Following is a summary of guidelines to keep in mind when recruiting for your league. Remember to reassess progress often and make adjustments as necessary. Recruitment work will never really end as retention and growth are always imminent issues.

- Start by recruiting volunteers. An organization will always be more affective working in numbers than as individuals. Additional help means additional resources, opportunities, talents and time. Use all resources available, talk with other league organizers, talk with various groups and populations and find local talent to help with advertising needs.
- Know how many numbers are needed. Have a specific idea for the number of players per team. Who do you need and want to target?
- When preparing to advertise and recruit, organizations should convey a clear message, vision and goal.
- Use all means possible to recruit. Consider advertising, word of mouth, web, email, posters and media.
- Be sure recruiting methods are representative, welcoming and informative.
- Be creative when working to bring in new players to the league. Offer clinics for beginners and discounts to attend the league, baggage opportunities, volunteer discounts. Provide opportunities so that anyone (regardless of income, race and sex) could participate.
- Provide incentives to players to bring in new recruits, friends, etc.
- Always recruit and strive to bring in new players. Even if your league is well-established.
- Address discrimination issues within your league quickly and effectively.
- Provide opportunities for participants to submit evaluations or feedback on the league.

Timing Strategy When Starting a League

By Carey Goldenberg

Organization, planning, and delegation are cornerstones to running a successful youth league.

One structure we have used to produce high-level high school and middle school leagues involves spreading out objectives over a 10-week span. It helps to get started early, so you can spread out the tasks. This entails working from just about the beginning of the Fall semester—as teams are being recruited and leadership is being passed to a new set of players and coaches. Good management tools include lining up supporting volunteers, having a planning meeting, and spreading out responsibilities. In the past I have done everything myself, and have found that is much easier and fruitful to share responsibilities with a supporting cast.

Planning Meeting Topics

1. Disc design
2. Shirt design
3. Permit acquisition
4. Coaches clinic
5. Coaches/Captains meeting agenda
6. Pre-season tournament planning
7. Regular season and coverage planning
8. Final tournament planning

Disc Design (Late December)

If possible, try to have disc designs into Discraft by the beginning of the year, when they tend to be the least busy. Between college and spring tournaments, Discraft can get very busy, causing the wait for discs to be up to six weeks. With your design approved and

paid-in-full during early fall, you can get your league discs as soon as ten days!

Shirt Design (January)

Similar recommendations to those for disc orders apply if you are using a local company for league T-shirts. A good goal is to have participant T-shirts ready by the coaches-and-captains meeting, or at the latest by the Pre-Season Tournament, so it makes a big difference to get started early.

Some leagues find it both fun and useful to open up the designs for discs and/or T-Shirts as a contest. This can often manifest many different design options to choose from.

Permit Acquisition (January)

Obtaining legitimate documentation to use certain field sites may be a greater problem now than at any point in the past. Our league was actually moved this year due to permit problems, which causes a huge hassle for all involved.

The main league fields should be as centrally located as your geography permits. Among the thirty two teams we have in our league, we need enough room to set up at least 12-16 Ultimate fields for both the season and the tournaments.

Try to cultivate a good relationship with whatever organization provides field space. Attempt to get local schools involved in hosting games on a rotating basis,

so no one gets too much of a home field advantage. Share the responsibility. Keep in mind that even if you are lucky and do not initially have these issues, Ultimate leagues often lose their field space so you may run into problems in the future. Soccer, lacrosse, field hockey, baseball, and other sports are all trying to find fields to use as well. At one point, we changed game times for the entire league to Sunday afternoons so we would not have to compete with school usage.

Coaches Clinic (Late January or early February)

We start the year with a coaches' clinic in January so that participants get as much time as possible to communicate and convert their knowledge into practice. USA Ultimate has a great coaches' certification program and will likely schedule one in your area every other year. If a clinic is not already scheduled, you can contact USA Ultimate and work directly with the organization to schedule one.

Have a clinic every year because as students graduate and move on, so does your coaching group. Depending on seasonal weather in your area, this clinic might need to be held indoors at a school or field house. If you have the resources, the clinic should be offered to the local community as well as the specific schools or teams that have coaches. Every team in the league could benefit from having a coach, and some community participants might become coaches later on that season or a subsequent one. Help the coaches set up a network of email addresses to facilitate more efficient communication, then encourage players to check every couple of days for posts.

Coaches/Captains Meetings

The month following the coaches' clinic, our league holds a coaches captains meeting at a restaurant in order to get all the details and rules of the league out to each team. Our adult league has been very generous and paid for these meetings, and you may find your local adult league similarly generous. These meetings offer each team a chance to renew acquaintances, meet coaches if they have expressed the need, set up scrimmages, pay fees, get cones, get discs or shirts, and get psyched up for the season! As the coordinator, this is when I get to spread the wealth of information gath-

ered during the year from The USA Ultimate newsletters, *The Huddle*, and any other well-written articles. I also have offered to go to each school and do clinics to offer basic concepts and drills for the teams that did not have a coach come to a clinic.

Pre-Season Tournament

To sign up pre-season tournament participants we have used a "first come, first served" format. Every new team is invited to come out and play, but due to time limits (one day), I decided to limit this tournament to 16 teams. We use a single elimination format to crown the champions. The winners get \$5 off their individual fees. All teams should be guaranteed at least two games. This day provides an opportunity for all the teams attending to turn in their fees and waivers, pick up their shirts and discs, and learn where the fields are before the season begins.

Regular Season Coverage

Every team should provide any foreseeable schedule conflicts ahead of time in order for organizers to create the week to week schedule before the season. If possible, each team should get two games per day to reward their efforts in getting out to the fields to play. We have found it beneficial to have an Administrator on Duty (AOD) at the fields every week. The AOD's holds a copy of the field permits and extra schedules to help reduce confusion and ensure that everything runs smoothly. If necessary, our AOD may also explain rules and make clarifications on disputes. Each team in our league must have an adult on the sidelines for every game. Ideally, this adult should be their coach, but if necessary it may be an older (over 21 years) relative or parent. Make sure that all participants know where the nearest medical facilities are located.

Final Tournament

Our season culminates in a one day playoff—the reason for all that hard work. Teams are seeded into the tournament based on their regular season win-loss record. This is our first year splitting the league in half

into two divisions, one “Competitive,” and the other “Recreational.” We will have two distinct champions. Some school teams send a squad to each side, so they can have their B team players work up towards the A squad. In previous years, after teams lost their first game, some would leave and miss out on seeing the more competitive, successful teams play. If players are given another reason to stay, it may motivate them to stick around and watch high-level Ultimate. If your league can raise enough funds for a player lunch or if you can encourage teams to plan a bar-b-que, it can make the entire experience more enjoyable.

Another idea is to give a special disc to each team. The team can decide which player gets this “Spirit Disc.” We have also held a “Coaches versus Captains” game before the semis and finals. This can be a great learning opportunity, a teachable moment. Encourage beginning and intermediate players to “Watch what they do that we don’t.”

The day should have four rounds of play because that is about the most this age should play in one day. Every team should be guaranteed at least two games,

just like during the regular season, in order to figure out final standings. USA Ultimate has a Formats Manual that breaks down pretty much every possible format. Make sure to use common sense in applying these formats to youth teams, as they were originally designed for adult play. We provide bagels for all the teams. All winning teams should get some sort of prize. Prizes have included a single trophy for the champion team and shirts and discs for each player on the winning team. This year, we added the stamp “Champions” to a different color disc for both winning squads.

After the season I created a online survey on SurveyMonkey.com to assess the season and get some feedback for future planning.

Post-season Survey

1. Rate your experience 1-10
2. Favorite aspects of the league?
3. Suggestions for improvement?

Field Acquisition for Local Leagues

By Chris Burke

Like many organizations, yours may be involved with organizing one or multiple leagues each year, hosting tournaments, providing pick-up fields and/or providing your local traveling teams with practice fields. Despite the high demand for fields, organizations that have learned the system often have access to all of the fields they need and are continually looking to expand. This section will provide you with tips in acquiring fields within your own community.

How do they do it?

While purchasing fields has been done, many organizations are not quite ready to tackle that challenge. Often there is a scarcity of available land and the cost can be quite high. For these reasons and more, the choice to rent is and will remain the most logical solution for the majority of local organizations.

Organizations that have succeeded in finding as many fields as they can use have often chosen to work with parks departments, school districts, and other entities to rent fields. These fields may be located in the metropolitan area or within urban zones. The rest of the land in our county is zoned either rural residential or for agricultural production; athletic fields are currently not an allowed use of this land.

Advantages of renting existing fields include lower costs, a larger variety of fields from which to choose, and the opportunity to have fields closer to where the people are located. Disadvantages include competition with other users for field space, having to maintain a large internal infrastructure for field obtainment, and having fields spread over a large geographic area.

The four following strategies are recommended for use by any organization interested in finding additional fields in their community.

Take Part in the Public Process

Like most things, athletic fields are subject to politics. The construction of fields, or their improvement (better surfaces, lighting, etc.), usually has some local opposition. Ultimate players must attend city council meetings, neighborhood meetings, and parks department meetings. They must write letters, post signs, and generally be active, responsible citizens. A recent mayor of Seattle, who publicly supported more fields, cited an email written by an Ultimate player that was widely circulated among all sports groups as a major factor in his election victory. For example, over the last few years, Ultimate players have spearheaded an effort to increase the number and quality of fields at Magnuson Park in Seattle. The effort included testifying and letter writing, and has resulted in a plan, with funding, for a 10-field grass space and a 14-field lit field turf complex.

Field-Obtaining Team

Have a field-obtaining team, using the principle of one person, one suburb. The parks department or school district person you rent fields from will want to deal with only one person. They will appreciate your effort to accommodate them. This one person should handle all your organization's needs for her suburb,

including league fields, tournament fields, and team practice fields. If possible, have the person be a league organizer or a practicing team's field procurer, so she has a stake in the issue. Being this one person is so time-consuming that no one should have to deal with more than one city.

Know Where the Fields Are

This may seem self-evident, but knowledge is power. Organizers must make an enormous effort to identify fields suitable for Ultimate in their area. Consider stretching the boundaries of what constitutes "close enough." Players may have to drive further, but it may be worth it if they get to use better fields. A side benefit is that by playing Ultimate in a suburb, the sport can be introduced to a new area.

Partner Up

Partner with a field-owning entity to build or improve fields.

Partner with a church Churches own land, sometimes lots of it, and as a rule they are not against having sports fields on their land. A church in Mountlake Terrace, north of Seattle, partnered with a local men's soccer group to turn a vacant lot next to the church building into a high-quality soccer field. The soccer group paid to grade the field and install irrigation; they bring their own portable lights. The church pays ongoing maintenance costs and the soccer group is the only user of the field.

Partner with a developer Often governments place restrictions on big new developments, such as requiring a certain number of parks or a certain percentage of open space. For example, a giant development under construction east of suburban Redmond (about 10,000 houses) includes a lighted 10-field turf soccer field park. This is because the Lake Washington Youth Soccer Association (LWYSA) partnered with them. The developer owns the land and is basically donating it for the purpose; LWYSA is paying to build the fields. Construction costs big money—expect to pay a minimum of \$1 million per field—but sometimes grants are available.

Partner with a school School levies can be a source of the money needed to build a field. An individual with an interest in youth soccer persuaded a Seattle elementary school to replace its asphalt playground with a field turf soccer field. He spent an enormous amount of time lobbying the school district, talking with the PTA, getting local merchants to chip in cash, and shepherding the engineering study. He raised about \$50,000 from donations, another \$100,000 from grants, and his reward was \$800,000 from a recently passed school levy to actually build the field.

Partner with a parks department

Parks departments own the most fields, and they are nearly always interested in upgrading their fields. In some ways, partnering with a parks department is the path of least resistance—at least the parks people will be on your side.

Recruiting and Retaining Women

By Susan De Cicco

Coed leagues often face the problem of gender balance. It's rare that just the right ratio of men and women sign up for a league—and though a surplus of women is possible, this is uncommon; the problem is almost always one of too many men and too few women. When men greatly outnumber women, the league may face problems. For example, while there may be enough men and field space to field a certain number of teams, if there aren't enough women to go around, some of those teams can't form (and some men therefore won't be able to play). Also, women may become discouraged by the lack of other women in the league, or even by the league's efforts to manage the gender imbalance. Discouraged women may drop out of the league, and so the problem feeds itself.

This chapter examines the problem of recruiting and retaining women in coed Ultimate leagues, and offers a number of possible solutions. It draws heavily on the experience of the Madison Ultimate Frisbee Association (MUFA), a league that started with a very low number of women, but whose coed summer league now regularly fields over 2,200 people, and whose spring league now includes two women-only divisions.

One League's Experience

Before launching into the techniques MUFA used to build a healthy gender ratio, it helps to know a very brief history of the league:

Early Days (1993-1999) MUFA exists as a summer league only. It is a clique league (in which teams are self-formed, as opposed to a hat league, where teams are built by league organizers). The gender ratio is 5:2 (five men to two women on the field at any given time). Even with this uneven ratio, many teams struggle to field enough women.

Ratio Switch and League Development (1999-2000) After a fair amount of debate, the summer league switches its gender ratio from 5:2 to 4:3 (four men, three women on the field). A coed fall hat

league is also launched, in addition to the mainstay summer league.

Spring League and Further Ratio Change (2003) In 2003, single-gender spring leagues are added as a complement to MUFA's summer and fall offerings. Also, a change is made to the gender ratio of the coed summer league: now the team on offense may, at its discretion, choose to play four women to three men for any given point. The team on defense must match the offense's ratio. (This is the 4:3, Offense Decides rule; more on this rule later.)

Further Adjustments (2003-Present) The women's spring league is subdivided into beginner and intermediate leagues. The fall hat league also begins to experiment with concurrent, single-gender divisions in addition to the main coed league.

MUFA grew from a small, single-league organization that struggled to maintain a 5:2 gender ratio, into

a large organization that uses a flexible 4:3 ratio in its coed leagues and offers women-only leagues in the spring and fall. How was this possible? The new few pages will summarize the lessons learned from this league's experiences.

Equalizing Gender Ratios: Solution, Not Problem

Each time MUFA made a change to the gender ratio—first from 5:2 to 4:3, and then to “4:3, Offense Decides,” there was skepticism. A substantial contingent felt that the ratio changes were either not feasible or not desirable. The main concerns were:

- “It’s hard to recruit enough women as it is. If the ratio changes and more women are required, teams that fail to recruit more women will be unable to play.”
- “Women will take spots on the field that men would otherwise take. Since we already have lots of men who want to play, and not enough women, changing the ratio will just steal spots from existing (male) players.”
- (Regarding the switch to 4:3, Offense Decides): “Our team is finely tuned to have just enough players, so that everyone gets maximum playing time. If we can’t know in advance whether we’ll be playing four men or four women, we’ll have to add extra people to the roster to cover every situation. And then our team will be too big.”
- (Again regarding the switch to 4:3, Offense Decides): “Changing the gender ratio between points will be confusing and will slow down the game. Also, some teams may use it as a tool to gain an advantage over teams with fewer women.”

For the most part, these concerns disappeared within a few months of implementing the new ratio. Here are some results from the ratio changes:

- A more equal ratio encouraged teams to make use of their women rather than ignore them. Each time the ratio equalized, women became more involved in the game: after all, it’s relatively easy to ignore two of the players on the field, but if there are three or even four women, it becomes very difficult to flow the offense without them.

- The increased emphasis on women encouraged more women to join the league. It became clear that some women had either avoided the league, or had tried it and quit, because some teams had been treating their female players as placeholders. As the ratio changed, teams that ignored their women struggled, and often were forced to change their ways.
- While a few teams did in fact have difficulty finding more women for their teams, most did not. The increased ratio forced teams themselves to recruit new women into the league: in effect, the gender ratio changes put the onus of getting more women into the league on individual teams, so that the league directors didn’t have to attack the problem alone.
- Switching to the 4:3, Offense Decides gender ratio introduced a little confusion during the first year, but at present time it is not an issue. Many games are played entirely with a 4:3 ratio of men to women, but many are played with four women on the field much of the time. This arrangement doesn’t appreciably slow down the game.
- The most competitive teams tend to have large rosters, so players can be fresh at all times. The need for extra women is not an issue for these teams. In practice, almost never has the 4:3, Offense Decides rule been used to force a team to play down a woman or to play savage women. It is, however, used strategically, when one team feels its women are superior to another’s. This provides teams with even more incentive to recruit skilled women to their team.

As a league changes the ratio to include more women, organizers can expect a variety of concerns or complaints at the outset. Once the new ratio has been in place for a short time, however, it tends to become a non-issue, and the league will have an easier time incorporating women in the future.

Getting Women Into the League

The following suggestions may help league organizers to equalize their leagues’ gender ratios. Feel free to try one or many of these ideas.

Set Ratios Proactively

As the MUFA example demonstrated, if organizers wait for more women to show up before adjusting the

league's gender ratio, they may be waiting forever. Instead, consider adjusting the ratio and letting the league adapt to it. Expect some complaints in the first year, but also expect that most teams will manage to recruit enough friends, friends of friends, sisters, girlfriends, and acquaintances to make up the shortfall.

Build Women-Only Leagues

Some women are intimidated by, or uninterested in, coed leagues. If at all possible, consider launching a small women-only league or division to go along with existing coed league(s) or division(s). Keep the fees low and actively promote the league. Encourage current league members to recruit friends. Though the women-only league or division will likely start small, it may gather players who would otherwise not try Ultimate. These players will then filter into the coed league(s).

If possible, try to have two divisions: a higher division and a lower. The lower division will attract women with concerns about their own skill level, in addition to any higher-level women looking to play as much as possible. (These women will likely play in both divisions, if allowed to.) The higher division, on the other hand, will attract women who are certain of their own skills but concerned about playing in low-level games that might bog down with turnovers and poor play.

(As a side-note, if there are two divisions of women's play, it helps to call the upper division "Intermediate" rather than "Advanced." The term "Advanced" seems to frighten off a number of perfectly good players.)

Host Skills Clinics and Full-League Gatherings

Many potential women players have never played organized sports, or have played organized sports but not Ultimate—and they assume that they need some level of experience in order to join an Ultimate league. If the organizers host free, open-invitation events, such as a skills clinic that teaches basic throws and cuts, these events can convince women to join the league.

When going this route, have existing women players run the clinic, and mass-email current league players, asking them to invite anyone who might be interested in Ultimate to come see what the sport is all about. Consider holding such a clinic before launching a women-only league or division, as it might help boost initial membership.

Full-league gatherings such as all-star games and championship games are a great place to show new people what Ultimate is all about. For example, consider ending the league's season with a party, complete with food, drink, and the league's championship game. Encourage players to bring friends, family, and significant others to this event. Newcomers will be able to mingle with current players, and will also see firsthand what Ultimate looks like. More than a few of them may decide to join next season.

Allow Women on Multiple Teams

Ideally, a league won't need to make any special concessions to get enough women involved. In reality, since the supply of women players may be limited, the league may have to allow women to play on multiple teams (while men cannot). So for example, a woman who wanted to play extra games could be a member of two different teams, so long as those teams were not in the same division. (Obviously, belonging to same-division teams would cause problems.) This rule allows the most enthusiastic women players to play extra games, and effectively increases the number of women in the league, allowing more teams to exist.

Is this policy perfectly fair? No. In a perfect league, men and women would have exactly the same opportunities. However, this policy may be the only way to have both a large number of teams and an acceptable gender ratio.

For the record, MUFA's summer league allows women to play in multiple divisions. However, if and when the number of women in the league is no longer a limiting factor (for example, if the league's gender ratio becomes almost 1:1, or if the league runs out of field space), this policy will likely be discontinued.

Focus on Spirit

Do whatever it takes to keep the league as spirited as possible. Many women players have less tolerance than male players for arguments, insults, and general poor spirit. If the league has difficulty recruiting or retaining women, consider whether the games are generally fun and positive, or whether the league is facing a problem with attitude and spirit. While a discussion of how to improve spirit is beyond the scope of this chapter, organizers might

want to brainstorm or consult with other league organizers (not necessarily Ultimate leagues; any will do) about how they've managed to keep their leagues reasonably positive and pleasant.

Allow Baggage

If running a hat league (in which the organizers create random teams from the pool of available players) rather than a clique league, the organizers may allow baggage (small groups of players who are guaranteed to be placed on the same team). If a league doesn't currently allow baggage, and it's having difficulty getting women to play, consider allowing it.

Hat leagues can be especially daunting to first-time players, to low-skill players, and to people with no team sport experience (and many potential women players will fall into one of these categories). Instead of joining a group of friends, as is the case in a clique league, hat leagues force players to deal with a group of strangers. If a player is worried that her skills won't be up to the task, and that her teammates will be annoyed or critical, the player very likely won't join. Even if the player is skilled, the prospect of dealing with an entire team of unknowns can be a turn-off.

Allowing baggage softens these concerns, because players know that they'll have at least one friend on the team. Furthermore, allowing baggage lets male players bring wives and girlfriends into the sport. These women in many cases will not join if they can't be on the same team as their partner; sometimes this is for social reasons, and sometimes because it's simply too hard to manage two different team schedules. But regardless of the reasons, allowing couples into the league opens the door to more women.

Lower Fees

Potential league members who are on the fence or uncertain of their own skills can be swayed by league costs. Since many women may fall into this category, keeping league fees as low as possible will encourage those players to join. This is particularly important if women are allowed to play in multiple divisions; if the league is too expensive, joining multiple teams may be cost-prohibitive.

Offer Financial Incentives for Women

If an organization has tried everything else and still struggles to get women into its league, it may have to lower the league entry fees for women. This should be a tactic of last resort, since the men in the league may (correctly) feel it's not a fair policy. However, the tactic can work: think of bars that offer "ladies' night."

One approach might be to combine lower fees for women with a rule allowing women to play in multiple divisions. In this scenario the league would charge full price (or nearly-full price) for the first division a women played in, but drastically reduce the fee for each additional team she played on. This would make it feasible for women to play on multiple teams even if the league normally charges high fees.

If the league does have to offer financial incentives, don't view it as a permanent solution.

Direct Recruiting

If organizers have tried all of these ideas and are still short of women, or if they're in the process of starting a women-only league or division, here are some suggestions for recruiting women into the league.

Send Personal Email

Have veteran players and league organizers send personal emails to women who might play. Emphasize that they are good enough to play in the league, and that no prior experience or skill level is necessary. This approach can grab players who would otherwise think they aren't capable enough.

Everyone knows someone who could potentially play in the league; that's why it's easiest for the league organizers to email their core players and encourage each of them to personally recruit a female friend or two to join the league—and for those friends to recruit other friends, if possible. Think of it as a benevolent pyramid scheme.

Encourage Cross-Participation

If running multiple leagues or divisions, encourage existing women players to participate in more than one. This can be accomplished with financial incentives, as mentioned earlier, but it's also

important to send emails and get the word out that cross-participation is desired. There may be fence-sitters in one of the leagues who can be persuaded to join another as well.

This is especially the case when running a women's league with two or more divisions; encourage some of the advanced women players to participate in the lower division as well as the upper. They will serve to anchor the beginner teams and prevent the games from being discouragingly sloppy.

Recruit at Pickup Games

If there are ongoing pickup games in the area, it might be worthwhile to stop by and spread the word that the league needs women players. Often these players will already know about the existence of the organized league, and some may already have joined. But there may be others who are on the fence, and a personal invitation will be the deciding factor for them.

Advertising

Traditional advertising may be beyond a league's scope or budget, but it may be useful to advertise the league in non-traditional (viral) ways. For example, organizers could ask core players what other sports leagues they play in, and then have those core players spread the word about the league whenever they play those other sports.

If this approach is combined with an incentive—say, a free league membership for any member who brings two or three new women into the league—the organization can find a number of new players very quickly.

Final Thoughts

Finding enough women to play in a coed league can be challenging. League organizers may have to make concessions, be they financial (free or reduced memberships for women; free or reduced memberships for players who recruit new women) or rule-based (allowing women to play in multiple leagues or divisions). Sometimes the best way to get new women into the league is completely counterintuitive: for example, adjusting the league's gender ratio, or starting an all-new women's division, seem like ludicrous things to do when the league struggles to get enough women into the league as it is. However, these moves often prove to be the part of the solution rather than the problem.

Regardless of how it's done, equalizing the number of men and women in a league is always a worthwhile goal. It makes team creation easier; it allows a coed league to truly be coed, rather than a men's league with a few token women; and it encourages a balanced approach to the game that results in a better experience for both genders. Taking the time to address a league's gender ratio before it becomes a problem will pay dividends for the league in future years.

Youth Ultimate Strengthens the Women's Game

By Meredith Tosta

In the fall of 1999 the idea of freshmen women coming to college with any sort of Ultimate skill was largely unheard of on the west coast. In those days, everyone started out totally green and learning to throw, with the majority of the fall being spent on the most basic of skills with the seniors and grad students modeling proper techniques for the underclassmen.

Now fast forward to the spring of 2009, on the sideline of USA Ultimate College Championships in Columbus, OH. There are now alums from the 2008 Girls' Jr. National team shredding through the competition as freshmen. Granted, these ladies now have a season of college Ultimate under their belts but their skills were developed years ago in high school. But it's not just the girls from the Jr. National teams that are having an impact on college programs; it's every girl who has the chance to find Ultimate at a younger age and carries that passion into college.

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This isn't about being hyper competitive. It isn't about getting the early edge over the competition. It's about opportunities for young women to play team sports. It's about being fit and eating healthy. It's about making lifelong friends. And it's about reaching out to the community and giving back. In the end, if it also means that a college program gets a head start on the season, or has more tools available to succeed in USA Ultimate College Series, than that's just the cherry on top. So what can a women's college team do to encourage the growth of girls' Ultimate?

Be a mentor

By taking an active interest in the high schools and middle schools near your college, you have the power to get girls hooked on Ultimate. There may only be a handful of girls on the local team, but having college women coaching and playing with a youth team will make a difference when it comes to retaining female athletes. The USA Ultimate can put you in touch with schools desperately in need of coaches, and can even schedule a Level I Coaching Workshop to generate momentum.

Run clinics or hat tournaments

This can be a great fund raiser for your team (ask for donations or charge a small fee), and also gives you a chance to get to know youth players in the area and interact with the Ultimate community beyond your college campus. Open it up to women of all ages and you may be surprised who comes out of the woodwork to take part. If you need insurance, USA Ultimate can sanction your event and provide it. There are also free Women's Clinic kits available.

Play showcase games with regional rivals

Believe it or not, the market for Ultimate as a spectator sport is growing, and it's the youth players who are driving it. Don't underestimate how cool it is to watch college teams battle it out. This could be another fund raising opportunity, plus its good "show time" practice for your squad. Advertise through the local youth organizers, find a venue that's easy to get to, and where you are likely to draw a crowd.

Promoting Women's Ultimate today builds future participation

When it comes to USA Ultimate membership numbers, women's memberships increased 8% in 2008, slightly more than the 7% for men. The fact that the growth percentage is comparable between the genders is fantastic. What we should also consider is that women represent 31% of the total membership. While this approximate 30/70 split is on par with other team sports organizations, the more that you can help cultivate girls playing Ultimate, the stronger those numbers will be for every generation going forward. The investment made in developing the younger generations will of course pay off when it comes to our competitive teams down the line. Yet, in a culture where girls aren't necessarily as supported and encouraged to participate in sports as their male counterparts, the impact of bringing more girls into the fold goes beyond our immediate experience.

Ultimate is a powerful sport, most notably in the aspect of self-officiating where players learn to have a voice and speak up for themselves. It's an endurance race every game—players must take care of their bodies and eat right to be strong. It's also being a part of a bigger community—one that emphasizes respect, hard work and fair play. Bringing more girls into the community at the youth and the college level not only grows the sport, in numbers and in level of play, it also builds confidence and weaves a network of support that girls can benefit from in many facets of life.