'The Dynamics of the Disc:'

Ultimate (Frisbee), Community, & Memory, 1968-2011

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ABSTRACT

'The Dynamics of the Disc:' Ultimate (Frisbee), Community, & Memory, 1968-2011

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'The Dynamics of the Disc' is an oral history project that makes an important contribution to an under-researched area of Canadian sport history. Using a variety of analytical approaches this study traces the growth and development of the sport of Ultimate in Canada. And by examining the thematic links between and across stories told by Ultimate players, it provides a nuanced understanding of what Ultimate means to the people who play.

Ultimate has rapidly evolved into a worldwide competitive amateur sport, and enjoyed exponential growth as a popular recreational game that is currently played in organized leagues in most major urban centres across North America by men, women, and youth. Often described as an alternative sport, Ultimate also prides itself on a (real or imagined) difference from mainstream sporting conventions. Ultimate is, therefore, subject to two over-arching, and sometimes conflicting, narratives -- a postmodern narrative of difference, and a liberal narrative of growth and progress – that players struggle to reconcile.

Yet to many of the people who play, Ultimate is more than a sport, it is a community. Ultimate players form strong attachments to the game, but also to its spaces and places, ideas and practices, and to the people with whom they share their experiences. Through the use of narrative, myth, ritual, symbol, performance and commemoration, this community articulates its difference and celebrates its accomplishments while simultaneously policing its boundaries and disciplining its members. Looking at sport through the lens of community reveals that sport is not just about the human body at play but can also be a site where powerful feelings of belonging converge.

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Dedication

To the Ultimate Community,

especially:

Idle Butt Deadly
Karma
Nixon All-Stars
BFM Hard
the Lazy Shiftless Bastards
Punch
the Flamin' Moes
El Santo
Hip-Hop-Pop-o-tamus
Astroturf

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

Ultimate, Community, and Memory, 1968-2011

Sport historians examine the stories told by the human body at play. "At its most basic level," claims Colin Howell, "sport is about the body: how it is used, how it is imagined, how it is watched, and how it is disciplined to meet the requirements of living or to conform to social expectations."[1] Additionally, many scholars understand sport as a cultural text.[2] They see links between what goes on in sport and what goes on in society and they use sport as an avenue to explore and to better understand social relationships. In such analyses sport is a reflection of dominant gender, class, race, and social organization. Moreover, as a site of tension between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses, sport is an important context for the examination of historical processes of continuity and change. The sport of Ultimate, similarly, absorbs and produces competing social discourses, narratives, and ideas about bodies, sport, culture, and community.

According to the accepted story, Ultimate originated in the United States where, ostensibly since the 1920s, students at New England colleges played variations of the game of catch by tossing metal pie tins around their campuses. The Frisbie Pie Company (est.1871) had been unknowingly providing their pie plates for this collegiate recreational activity for many years when, in 1948 the first flying discs made out of plastic were designed by Walter Frederick Morrison and Warren Francioni. Inspired by sightings of

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[1] Colin D. Howell, *Blood, Sweat and Cheers: Sport and the Making of Modern Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 106.

[2] Richard Gruneau, *Class, Sports and Social Development*, (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1983; 1999).

unidentified flying objects at Roswell, New Mexico, these two former World War II Air

Corps pilots named their invention the "Pluto Platter." When Morrison negotiated a deal

with the founders of the Wham-O toy company, the flying disc then became a

successfully mass-marketed commercial item. Soon, a connection between the pie tins

and the plastic discs was made and Wham-O changed the name of the Pluto Platter to the

"Frisbee." By the 1960s sales of the Frisbee boomed and plastic flying discs became

ubiquitous on beaches, in schoolyards, and popular with dog-owners. The first Pluto

Platters were inscribed with the message, "Play Catch: Invent Games" and Frisbee

fanatics enthusiastically heeded this call. Today different permutations of the disc, in

terms of shape, size, and weight, are used for a variety of disc sports, including Disc

Golf, Guts, Double Disc Court, Freestyle, and of course, Ultimate.[3]

The game of Ultimate was invented in 1968 at Columbia High School (CHS) in

Maplewood, New Jersey by Joel Silver, now a prominent Hollywood film producer, and

a group of his friends. These students were not the first to play a similar-looking game,

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[3] Ultimate is "a non-contact disc sport played by two teams of seven players [where] the object of the game is to score goals. A goal is scored when a player catches any legal pass in the end zone that player is attacking. Players are not allowed to run while holding the disc. The disc is advanced by throwing or passing it to other players. The disc may be passed in any direction. Any time a pass is incomplete, intercepted, knocked down, or contacts an out-of-bounds area, a turnover occurs, resulting in an immediate change of the team in possession of the disc." Ultimate Players Association, *Official Rules of Ultimate*. 10th Edition. (Boulder: UPA, 2003), I.A. Description, 4-5. For a more detailed material history of the Frisbee see Willie Herndon and Phil Kennedy, "It all starts with the disc" in *Ultimate: The First Four Decades,* eds. Pasquale Anthony Leonardo and Adam Zagoria, (Los Altos CA: Ultimate History Inc., 2005), iii-v; for a brief overview of other disc sports see Victor A. Malafronte, *The Complete Book of Frisbee: The History of the Sport & The First Official Price Guide*, (Alameda CA: American Trends Publishing Co, 1998).

but they are acknowledged as the ones who gave it its name and wrote down the first set

of rules for the game recognized today as Ultimate and they are, therefore, credited with

its 'invention.'[4] Some of the first games at CHS were played in a local parking lot using

telephone poles and schoolbags as goal markers. The game quickly spread from there.

After the first inter-high school games in 1970, CHS students then took the game with

them to their New England colleges and inter-collegiate play soon followed. The first

college tournament was hosted by Yale in 1975. International play then emerged as

graduate students and professionals studying and working abroad brought the game to

Canada, Europe, Australia, Asia, South America, and Africa. Ultimate's first world

championship was played in Sweden in 1983. It became an exhibition sport at the World

Games in West Germany in 1989 and advanced to a medal sport at the 2001 World

Games in Akita, Japan. And while Ultimate has rapidly evolved into a worldwide

competitive amateur sport, it has also experienced exponential growth as a popular

recreational game. It is currently played in organized leagues in most major urban

centres in North America by men, women, and youth.

Only a handful of observers have turned their analytical lens to the sport of

Ultimate. And while each contributes substantively to a better understanding of the sport

the existing literature is atomized by geography, discipline, and focus. Ultimate,

moreover, does not seem to attract much attention from scholars who are not also players.

To date, the best histories of the sport are provided by non-academics. Tony Leonardo

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[4] Documented cases of Ultimate-like games that predate CHS are discussed in Leonardo and Zagoria, *Ultimate: The First Four Decades*, 1-4.

and Adam Zagoria's *Ultimate: The First Four Decades* is, for instance, an impressive journalistic compilation of Ultimate history.[5] It reveals the origins of Ultimate, uncovers the material history of the disc, and provides useful anecdotes and a wide range of team and player profiles from the 1960s to the 2000s. It is, however, primarily a chronicle of competitive Ultimate in the United States and a history of its national organizing body, the Ultimate Players Association (UPA). It largely ignores recreational Ultimate and devotes little attention to the game in other parts of the world. Though a useful resource, *The First Four Decades* is a popular history and not a scholarly work and, as such, does not engage with academic sports literature. This void is partly filled by Kirsten Walters's PhD dissertation, "Ultimate Spin: Contesting the Rhetoric, Countercultural Ethos and Commodification of the Ultimate 'Frisbee' Sport, 1968-2008."[6] Because it employs many of the same source materials, "Ultimate Spin" resembles *The First Four Decades* in content, but adds an analytical dimension by engaging with current academic sports literature. An ethnographic and cultural study of Ultimate in the American mid-west, "Ultimate Spin" takes a deconstructionist approach to the sport and questions many of Ultimate's closely held ideals.

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[5] Other 'lay' histories of the sport include Stancil Johnson, *Frisbee: A Practitioners Manual and Definitive Treatise*, (New York: Workman, 1975) and Victor A. Malafronte, *The Complete Book of Frisbee: The History of the Sport & The First Official Price Guide*, (Alamena CA: American Trends Publishing Co., 1998) which are both useful early efforts, but pale in comparison to the detail provided by Leonardo and Zagoria in *Ultimate: The First Four Decades.*

[6] Kirsten Walters, "Ultimate Spin: Contesting the Rhetoric, Countercultural Ethos and Commodification of the Ultimate 'Frisbee' Sport, 1968-2008" (PhD diss., American Studies, University of Iowa, 2008).

Other scholars have used Ultimate as a context within which to analyze other concepts. For instance, Andrew Dale Thornton's PhD dissertation, "Ultimate Masculinities: An Ethnography of Power and Social Difference in Sport," follows a small group of Ultimate players through a season of league play in the city of Toronto in the mid-1990s.[7] By interviewing and observing his own teammates, Thornton provides a sophisticated analysis of the workings of class and gender in Ultimate and he correctly identifies a prominent theme of ambivalence running through the sport's discourses.[8] Yet, he focuses fairly exclusively on issues of class and gender performance and ignores important historical developments on the larger Canadian Ultimate scene. Blaine Robbins uses Ultimate as a forum to think about game theory.[9] And most recently, Gerald Griggs, looking at the Ultimate landscape in the United Kingdom, attempts to "decode" Ultimate's spatial and aesthetic discourses.[10] These are all useful contributions, but partly because the sport itself is young, and also because those who do study it tend to be sociologists, there remains very little historical scholarship on Ultimate. What then,

[7] Andrew Dale Thornton, "Ultimate Masculinities: An Ethnography of Power and Social Difference in Sport" (PhD diss., Sociology and Equity Studies in Education, OISE, University of Toronto, 1998).

[8] Andrew Thornton, "'Anyone Can Play this Game:' Ultimate Frisbee, Identity and Difference" in *Understanding Lifestyle Sports: Consumption, Identity, and Difference*, ed., Belinda Wheaton ((London: Routledge, 2004).

[9] Blaine Robbins, "'That's Cheap:' The Rational Invocation of Norms, Practices, and an Ethos in Ultimate Frisbee," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 28/3 (2004): 314-337.

[10] Gerald Griggs, "'Just a sport made up in a car park?': the 'soft' landscape of Ultimate Frisbee," *Social & Cultural Geography*, 10/7 (2009): 757-770; "'When a ball dreams, it dreams it's a Frisbee: the emergence of aesthetic appreciation within Ultimate Frisbee," *Sport in Society*, 12/10 (2009): 1317-1326.

can historians contribute to the interdisciplinary discussion about Ultimate and its place in contemporary sporting culture?

Ultimate is often classified as an alternative sport. This category is somewhat unwieldy as it encompasses a vast range of non-mainstream sports and leisure activities. Some alternative sports are more precisely described as "lifestyle sports" where "underpinning these forms are lived cultures that are fundamentally about 'doing it,' about taking part."[11] This includes many of the 'extreme' sports which additionally incorporate an element of personal risk or danger. What *alternative sport* has come to denote among scholars is the perception of "such activities as having presented an 'alternative,' and *potential* challenge to traditional ways of 'seeing,' 'doing,' and understanding sport."[12] Ultimate, however, occupies an awkward place among the pantheon of these 'new' sports that scholars have identified as posing a challenge to the mainstream since the 1960s.

At first glance, Ultimate does seem to pose a challenge and offer an alternative to mainstream sporting practices. But while Ultimate shares an anti-establishment ethos with many alternative sports, it lacks the elements of danger, risk, and rugged individualism that characterize extreme sports. Can it be better understood as a subculture? Many aspects of the sport can certainly be interpreted as "nonconformist and non-normative: different, dissenting, or (to use a term sometimes applied to subcultures

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[11] Belinda Wheaton, *Understanding Lifestyle Sports: Consumption, Identity, and Difference*, (London: Routledge, 2004), 4.

[12] Ibid., 3.

by others) 'deviant.'"[13] This label seems initially apt but becomes awkward because unlike Ultimate "very few subcultures imagine that society's values ought somehow to reflect or absorb their own."[14] Ken Gelder points out that this aspiration for mainstream acceptance is more characteristic of counter-cultures. Is Ultimate, then, a counter-cultural movement that uses sport as a vehicle to advance a particular social agenda? It might be more appropriate to describe Ultimate as a scene which sociologists define as having "more permanence than fads and crazes," but whose members are "also participants in the diversity of modern life, aware of the cultural diversity of their worlds, and they do not believe that their own culture is the only culture."[15] Ultimate seems to move variously through all of these categories, yet occupy none of them comfortably. Perhaps the broad, imprecise, all-inclusive term, *alternative*, does indeed provide the best classification for Ultimate. It is, after all, the one that Ultimate players use.

What makes Ultimate alternative? Many of Ultimate's protocols do seem to be positioned against those of the dominant sports culture. The most obvious difference between Ultimate and other team sports is the absence of officials. Ultimate, even at the highest levels of competition, is self-refereed. This means that each player has the authority to call fouls and violations. In addition, Ultimate shuns the use of penalties. In the case of a foul call, the rules of Ultimate are designed to "resume play in a manner that

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[13] Ken Gelder, *Subcultures: Cultural Histories and Social Practice*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2007), 3.

[14] Ibid., 22.

[15] Ibid., 46.

simulates what most likely would have occurred absent the infraction."[16] There are no red cards, no penalty box, no free throws, and no referee to appeal to (in Ultimate every player on the field is a *de facto* referee),[17] and supposedly no disincentive for playing fairly.

Another distinctive aspect of Ultimate is its purported rejection of a 'win-at-all-costs' attitude toward competition. According to Blaine Robbins, in order to "ensure fair and fun competitive play the players have generated a number of norms, practices, and an ethos to facilitate and ease the possible problems of player misconduct."[18] This ethic is known among Ultimate players as the *Spirit of the Game* (SOTG). It stipulates that

> Ultimate relies upon a spirit of sportsmanship which places the
> responsibility for fair play on the player. Highly competitive play is
> encouraged, but never at the expense of the bond of mutual respect among
> players, adherence to the agreed-upon rules of the game, or the basic joy

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[16] Ultimate Players Association, *Official Rules of Ultimate*, 11th Edition (Ultimate Players Association, 2007): 2.

[17] Since 1987, the UPA has made use of 'Observers' "in highly competitive situations where the stakes may be significant or where there is added value to faster-paced play, such as when spectators are present." Canadian Ultimate was slower to endorse Observers, but has now adopted the UPA Observer training protocols as part of a joint-project. As the pool of trained Observers grows, they are becoming increasingly visible in North American championship play. Observers differ from Referees in that "Observers shall not make active foul and violation calls of a subjective nature, while Referees are empowered to make any call authorized in the rules, bylaws, officiating guide, or any set of tournament ground rules." Ultimate Players Association Observers Program, *Observer Manual*, (Ultimate Players Association, 2010), 1-2. Contrarily, the World Flying Disc Federation (WFDF) which oversees international competition does not endorse the use of Observers. WFDF-sanctioned events do make use of Game Officials who perform the tasks of score and timekeeping but "may not interfere with the ongoing game by making any calls or decisions." *WFDF Rules of Ultimate 2008* Appendix B: WFDF Additional Championship Event Rules B6.3.

[18] Robbins, 315.

of play. Protection of these vital elements serves to eliminate adverse conduct from the Ultimate field. Such actions as taunting of opposing players, dangerous aggression, belligerent intimidation, intentional fouling, or other 'win-at-all-costs' behavior are contrary to the spirit of the game and must be avoided by all players.[19]

And in order for this system to work, it is necessary that the "primary responsibility for the integrity of Ultimate and the *Spirit of the Game* remains with the players."[20] These anomalous features help give the impression that Ultimate has found a new way to do sport. Peter Donnelly, however, cautions that residual cultural forms can masquerade as emergent ones.[21] A closer look at many of Ultimate's 'innovations' quickly reveals that Ultimate has invented very little that is *new*, but rather adopted much that is *old*. SOTG, for example, is touted as the thing that most "sets Ultimate apart from other competitive team sports."[22] But is this really an innovation unique to Ultimate? Or can its roots be found in previous sporting structures?

It seems reasonable to draw an ideological link between *Spirit of the Game* and the late-nineteenth-century "games ethic" of manly sportsmanship. James Mangan, in his influential study of the cultural diffusion of sports throughout the British Empire, argues that "[team games] were the pre-eminent instrument for the training of a boy's character,"

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[19] Ultimate Players Association, *Official Rules of Ultimate,* 11th Edition. I.B., 5.

[20] Ultimate Players Association, *Observer Manual*, 2.

[21] Peter Donnelly, "Subcultures in Sport: Resilience and Transformation," in *Sport in Social Development: Traditions, Transitions, and Transformations,* eds. Alan G. Ingham and John W. Loy (Windsor: Human Kinetics, 1993), 119-145.

[22] Ultimate Players Association, "Spirit of the Game" http://www1.upa.org/spirit, (accessed 10 November 2005).

and that "by means of this ethic the public schoolboy supposedly learnt *inter alia* the basic tools of imperial command: courage, endurance, assertion, control and self-control."[23] Similarly, Ultimate has been described as a game that is played "on two planes: the physical plane – how well can I throw, run, and catch?; and a moral plane – how well can I control my actions, how honest can I be?"[24] *Spirit of the Game* and the system of self-refereeing in Ultimate seem to reflect the revival of a nineteenth-century ideal of sportsmanship and fair play. Yet Mangan cautions that the diffusion of this "hugely influential moralistic ideology" was also bound up with notions of "ethnocentricity, hegemony, and patronage, with ideals and idealism, [and] cultural assimilation."[25]

While Ultimate is generally promoted as a simple game that "anyone can play,"[26] many observers point out that it seems to appeal to a specific demographic of predominantly white, urban, heterosexual, middle-class, university-educated, and white-collar professional participants. Like other alternative sports, the Ultimate field is noticeably (and for some embarrassingly) free from "other" bodies. Why should alternative sports appeal to such a narrowly-defined group? The literature suggests that

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[23] J.A. Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal*, (New York: Viking Penguin, Ltd., 1985), 18.

[24] Gary McGivney, quoted in Leonardo and Zagoria, *Ultimate: The First Four Decades*, 84.

[25] Mangan, 17.

[26] Thornton, "'Anyone can play this game,'" 175.

alternative sports are expressions of some kind of identity-politics.[27] Extreme sports, for

example, have been read as a postwar anti-modernist revival of the ideology of the

strenuous life,[28] or as a postmodern re-incarnation of the imaginary of the American

frontier,[29] highlighting the ways that participants perform gender, racial, and class

identities through alternative sporting practices. Kyle Kusz, for instance, interprets the

typically white, male, middle-classness of extreme sports as a reaction to a post-1960s

crisis of American masculinity.[30] He posits that as postwar middle-class white men were

being pushed out of the "big four" collegiate and professional sports (namely football,

baseball, basketball and boxing) by bigger, stronger, and more aggressive black men and

working-class men, they sought new venues for their athleticism and found a satisfying

and redemptive alternative in the rugged individualism of extreme sports. In this way,

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[27] There is a decidedly political aspect attached to sports. In the second half of the twentieth century, for instance, many otherwise socially marginalized groups have used sport as a vehicle by which to make claims on social legitimacy, to achieve greater visibility, and to further political agendas. Groups who have made use of sport to advance socio-political agendas include gay people, visible minorities, and the disabled. On the Gay Games see Judy Davidson, "The Wannabe Olympics: The Gay Games, Olympism, and Processes of Incorporation," (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 2003); on sport as a site of political protest see Douglas Hartmann, *Race, Culture, and the Revolt of the Black Athlete: The 1968 Olympic Protests and their Aftermath*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) and David W. Zang, *Sports Wars: Athletes in the Age of Aquarius*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2001).

[28] Chris Dummitt, "Risk on the Rocks: Modernity, Manhood, and Mountaineering in Postwar British Columbia," in *BC Studies* no. 141 (Spring 2004): 3-29.

[29] Ellyn Bartges, "Frontier Extreme Thesis" Conference paper presented at the 37th Annual Convention of the North American Society for Sport History, Asheville, North Carolina, May 22-25, 2009.

[30] Kyle Kusz, "Extreme America: The Cultural Politics of Extreme Sports in 1990s America," in *Understanding Lifestyle Sports*, ed. Belinda Wheaton, 209.

the development of extreme sport is characterized as a balm to the undermining of the hegemony of the white middle-class male body in the sporting arena by "other" male bodies. Andrew Thornton seems to point to a similar process at work in Ultimate. He suggests that in Ultimate, "white bodies get to be 'athletic' while being able to cast their physicality as more acceptable and less violent than their marginalized others."[31] Many scholars, however, are critical of such explanations, believing that "to imply that masculinity was in crisis suggests that manhood is a transhistorical category or fixed essence rather than an ideological construct which is constantly being remade."[32]

The class, race and gender characteristics of alternative sports need to be understood in the larger historical context of amateurism. Bruce Kidd, for example, points out that late-nineteenth and early twentieth century amateurism "was a system that worked, at least for the class that championed it." By placing "effective limits" which "discouraged working-class athletes," Kidd argues that the amateur ideal "left the field clear for university students and members of private clubs to win the prizes while legitimating the system as 'fair' and 'just.'"[33] Looking at the later twentieth-century, Varda Burstyn, argues that rather than being pushed out of professional sports, middle-class men continue instead to opt out, preferring to pursue more stable, secure, and lucrative careers in the white-collar professions, while working-class men and men of

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[31] Thornton, "Ultimate Masculinities," 26.

[32] Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 11.

[33] Bruce Kidd, *The Struggle for Canadian Sport,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 62.

colour are attracted to and deliberately streamed into the pipeline of professional sport –

recruited and often exploited as labourers in the "sport nexus."[34] Theories about

Ultimate's class and gendered divides need to pay attention to amateur and professional

sporting models and take into account their ongoing influences and effects.

It is, nonetheless, interesting that Ultimate, a sport that purports to be inclusive,

seems in practice to be rather homogeneous in terms of race, class, and sexuality.

Thornton, for instance, asks "how do Ultimate players [in Toronto] maintain a fairly

exclusive community and set of identifications in the context of what is one of the most

racially, ethnically, culturally and sexually diverse cities in North America?"[35] And he

suggests some plausible explanations. According to Thornton, the sport's class and

ethnic character can be accounted for partly because, "the 'radicals' of the sixties, who

made Ultimate, grew up and took their place among North America's ruling and middle

classes; Ultimate grew out of the 'Ivy League' universities in the United States; [and]

players generally recruit based on friendship and so like begets like."[36] That people are

largely introduced to Ultimate through existing social networks, – and I would add family

to Thornton's list of school, profession, and friendship – helps explain why white,

middle-class, professionals are attracted to the game. But it begs the question of why

Ultimate is so seemingly unpopular with other groups.

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[34] Varda Burstyn, *The Rites of Men: Manhood, Politics, and the Culture of Sport,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 17.

[35] Thornton, "Ultimate Masculinities," 16.

[36] Ibid., 23.

Why are there not more gay people, visible minorities, or working-class people

playing Ultimate? Maybe, as Thornton implies, they are not sufficiently exposed to the

game through the social networks in which they move and the barriers are institutional

and systemic. Annie Gilbert Coleman posits that when a sport is coded according to

social status or race, then "the first barrier makes [participation] difficult for all but

upper-class minorities; the second makes it a potentially alienating experience as

[players] are bombarded with images of whiteness."[37] Following this logic, perhaps

visible minorities, and gay people bombarded with straight images, are not eager to take

part in a sport that does not reflect them back to themselves; they may not feel as though

they belong. Gendered "binaries like male/female, active/passive, violent/peaceful,

competitive/cooperative," while understood as "outdated essentialisms" in academic

circles, might still be working to give the impression that Ultimate with its non-violent,

cooperative aspects is a feminized sport where "male values are exorcised and female

values nurtured."[38] Ultimate, therefore, may not present much appeal for people invested

in strictly bifurcated codes of gendered behaviour. Ultimate's demographics may also be

partly understood as an effect of its alterity, which may be unpalatable to people

comfortable and familiar with more conventional notions about sports and competitive

play and turned off by Ultimate's seemingly bizarre rituals and performances. It should

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[37]Annie Gilbert Coleman, "The Unbearable Whiteness of Skiing," in eds., John Bloom and Michael Nevin Willard, *Sports Matters: Race, Recreation, and Culture*, (New York: New York University Press, 2002): 156-7.

[38] M. Ann Hall, "From Pre- to Postfeminism: A Four-Decade Journey" in ed. Pirrko Markula, *Feminist Sport Studies: Sharing Experiences of Joy and Pain,* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), 56.

be noted that "other" people are not *absent* from the game but are, rather, minorities there; that Ultimate is *predominantly* white, middle-class, and straight, does not mean that it is *exclusively* so. And certain ethnic groups, most notably Asian-Canadians, are becoming a conspicuous presence. Ultimate demography is not static, but fluid and subject to change over time and as the sport grows, spreads, and evolves its class, and ethnic characteristics are noticeably shifting.

Figuring out why certain people do not play involves a heavy dose of speculation. And tying those reasons to race, class, and sexuality might be more misleading than helpful. Building on Judith Butler's influential concept of performativity, scholars across disciplines have been re-thinking what is meant by identity. Leerom Medevoi argues that identity needs to be understood as something "bounded to a historical moment."[39] Gerard Delanty posits that "the old certainties of class, race, nation and gender that were the basis of the kind of society that emerged with industrialization have become contested categories in what is now an age of multiple belongings."[40] In this framework identity cannot be easily reduced to gender, race, sexuality or class. Iain Borden explains that "identity is not who you are, or your ethnic origins, but an individual and collective construction of what you are doing and with what attitude."[41] In other words, identity

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[39] Leerom Medovoi, *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 2.

[40] Gerard Delanty, *Community*, 2nd Edition, (London: Routledge, 2010), 103.

[41] Iain Borden, *Skateboarding, Space and the City*, (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2001), 151.

"ain't where you're from, it's where you're at."[42] Thinking about identity this way is a more useful starting point in the attempt to unravel Ultimate's seemingly obvious, but nonetheless complicated demographic make-up.

One area where Ultimate seems to be successfully inclusive is with respect to gender. Sport is normally a site of gender segregation. Both individual and team sports have historically curtailed the ability of men and women to compete either directly or indirectly with one another.[43] Few competitive sports allow women and men to play together and sport scholars point out that organized sport is an institution that emphasizes the differences and obscures the similarities between the male and female body. According to Eric Anderson, "other than jails and mental hospitals, few other institutions segregate men and women so perfectly."[44] Contrarily, Ultimate puts men and women in close proximity. Indeed, one of the things that scholars find most intriguing about Ultimate is its unusual level of gender parity. Eileen McDonogh and Laura Pappano, for instance, note that "there are exceptions to the tradition of gender segregation," and that as a college and community club sport, "Ultimate Frisbee produces hundreds of gender-integrated teams, suggesting that males and females need not play apart."[45] Most

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[42] Paul Gilroy, "It ain't where you're from, it's where you're at," in *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures*, (New York: Serpent's Tail, 1993), 120-145.

[43] Susan K Cahn, *Coming On Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport*, (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 52.

[44] Eric Anderson, *In the Game: Gay Athletes and the Cult of Masculinity,* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), 71.

[45] Eileen McDonagh and Laura Pappano, *Playing with the Boys: Why Separate is Not Equal in Sports,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 18.

recreational Ultimate is played in a co-ed format, as are some of the most popular

organized club tournaments and international competitions. And unlike many other

sports, there is no difference in the rules between the Open (men's), Womens, Mixed,

(co-ed), Masters, and Juniors divisions. Yet both Andrew Thornton and Kirsten Walters

illustrate adeptly that men and women do not necessarily experience the game the same

way, that there are many ways in which *separate* spheres can be maintained while

playing *together*, and the idea that men and women are equal on the playing field falls

apart under close scrutiny.

Despite its many proclamations of difference, most of Ultimate's elements are,

nonetheless, familiar. The Frisbee is a popular children's toy. The playing surface is a

rectangular field with endzones. The game borrows an amalgam of strategies and skill

sets from soccer, football, and basketball. Its guiding philosophy harkens back to

nineteenth-century ideas about sportsmanship. By taking these familiar elements and re-

combining them into something new, Ultimate can be seen as a postmodern sports mash-

up. Moreover, as a sport that does things differently, Ultimate's apparent rejection of

mainstream sporting structures and its *alternative* approach to competition can be read as

a postmodern critique of conventional assumptions about sport.

Ultimate's degree of alterity is, however, debatable. Kirsten Walters points out

that "while some turn to Ultimate out of disgust for mainstream sporting practices, others

consider Ultimate yet another sport – one whose quirky culture is a lovely, but fading

reminder of the sport's countercultural origins."[46] Walters evaluates how effective

Ultimate has been in offering an alternative to mainstream sport. And she finds that, in

practice, Ultimate is much closer to the dominant culture of sport than it likes to pretend.

Because of its quest for legitimacy and public recognition, and its rapid growth and

increased popularity among a wider variety of players, over the course of its evolution,

both by accident and by design, Ultimate has incorporated more and more of the

trappings of modern mainstream sports and its claims of difference are becoming more

difficult to defend.

Ultimate's rapid diffusion throughout North America and indeed around the world

helps fuel a narrative of progress. That Ultimate is the "fastest-growing sport" is a

commonly articulated, if rarely empirically-tested, idea.[47] Certainly, Ultimate has come a

long way from the first games played in that New Jersey parking lot. Additionally,

Ultimate's global expansion has been qualitative as well as quantitative. It was a point of

pride for the organizers of the Vancouver WFDF World Ultimate and Guts

Championships, which hosted teams representing twenty-one countries from six

continents, that "2008 will be seen as the time when the top of our sport started to

become much more crowded" as nations other than the United States and Canada

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[46] Walters, 128.

[47] Rick Collins, "Flippin'Out Over Disc-Go Fever" *National Post*, 16 November 1998, B.12; Bonnie Tsui, "Ultimate Frisbee Takes Off," *New York Times,* 29 April 2009, Fashion & Fitness section, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/30/fashion/30fitness.html?_r=2&em (accessed 12 May 2009); David Barman, "Non-Paper: Spirit of the Game and Innovation in Officiating" *Ultimate Canada Magazine,* no. 7 (2011): 32.

represented serious medal threats.[48] Its expansion has filtered down, as well as up, as schoolchildren are introduced to the sport at younger and younger ages. As Kirsten Walters rightly points out, "Ultimate is a sport on the cusp of true popularity, on the edge of mainstream acceptance, toying with professionalism, and hotly debating issues of sponsorship, scholarships, and Olympic status."[49] From its humble origins, Ultimate has indubitably enjoyed impressive growth. For Ultimate boosters there is ample evidence of achievement and the future, does indeed, look bright. Yet the narrative of progress and the goals that it inspires often come into conflict with Ultimate's other dominant motif. Ultimate is, therefore, subject to two over-arching, and sometimes conflicting, narratives: a post-modern narrative of difference from mainstream sport; and a liberal narrative of growth and progress. Despite much convincing evidence that Ultimate has become 'just another sport,' people still believe and insist that it is inherently different and these ambivalent narratives of progress and difference continue to compete for the hearts and minds of Ultimate players.

Once the purview of anthropologists, ethnography is becoming a popular and increasingly respected methodology among a wider range of social scientists. Despite this I still sometimes feel the need to defend my choice to write about an activity that I spend a great deal of time doing, and in which I am heavily invested outside of my academic life; as Pirrko Markula notes, "although a necessary facet of knowledge

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[48] Brian Gisel, "Remembering World Ultimate and Guts Championships 2008: Vancouver Changed Things," *Ultimate Canada Magazine,* (Fall 2008): 20.

[49] Walters, 7.

construction, recording one's experience does not alone advance scholarship."[50] Since

my personal involvement with the sport both inspired and informs so much of this study

it is necessary, I think, to explain how I became exposed to, involved in, and admittedly,

obsessed with Ultimate.

I began playing Ultimate seriously in 1998. But I'd been aware of it for slightly

longer than that. After attending university, I returned home to Sudbury, Ontario to live

and work. Meanwhile, a small Ultimate league was being formed by a girl with whom I

had played flag football in high school. At this time, all of my sports and leisure

activities were tied to the local bar and all my teammates were regulars there. The

Townehouse Tavern sponsored my women's and my co-ed softball teams, my ladies'

pool league team, my ball hockey league – and they also sponsored the Ultimate league.

So I knew there was this thing called Ultimate Frisbee and I was familiar with some of

the people who played.

When I was approached by a friend to play on her Ultimate team, I was reticent. I

went out to watch a game and decided that there was too much running involved.

Though I was playing a lot of sports, and always had, I was not in very good shape. My

'bar sports' lifestyle wasn't a particularly healthy one. None of the sports I was playing

required the amount of sustained running that Ultimate seemed to demand. So even

though my friend insisted that it was something I would enjoy, I managed to put her off

for several months. But that was only one reason for my hesitation. There was also

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[50] Pirrko Markula, *Feminist Sport Studies: Sharing Experiences of Joy and Pain,* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), 8.

something very cliquey about Ultimate that I initially found intimidating. The people who played seemed like a very close-knit group and I was unsure that I would fit in.

I don't remember how, but eventually I did play a game. It took a couple of attempts before I really got hooked, because at first I had no clue what I was doing. But I think it must have been my first successful diving catch that did it. 'Laying out' is the most satisfying, thrilling, exhilarating of moments and the desire to recreate it again, and again, and again, still keeps me coming back to play. I also found that I was a pretty good thrower, and that meant that I could be a 'handler' and not run so much. So I started practising my throws and learning the forehand – we called it 'the flick.' I joined the league and slowly, began playing more and more Ultimate.

League was fun, but traveling exposed me to a whole new world of Ultimate. My first out-of-town Ultimate tournament was 'Divine Nines' in Hamilton. That's where, with a beer in one hand, I threw my first perfect flick! I still advise people to hold a drink when they're learning the forehand. The traveling team we eventually became, 'Idle Butt Deadly,' was made up of a core group of regulars with a few pick-ups here and there. Our squad was small, but dedicated. We were quite often short on girls, so there were tournaments where I played just about every point and over the next two or three years, I saw a lot of playing time. Pretty quickly we started going to tournaments all the time and people got to know us as the gang from Sudbury.

The summer of 2002 was particularly hectic. I was working part-time as a bartender and all my tip money went toward tournament bids. That was also the year that I decided to try putting together a women's team which meant even more tournaments. I

put bids in to every tournament within reasonable distance. We travelled to London,

Fergus, Hamilton, Rochester, Deep River, Barrie, Toronto, North Bay, Ottawa, Kingston,

and Montreal. I used to work Saturday nights at the bar and couldn't always get time off.

So I would work my shift until 3am then drive to the tournament, then play all day

Sunday, then drive home. It's amazing that I didn't get into an accident! I had a friend

who would come with me to make sure I stayed awake. She would always make a mixed

tape to listen to on the drive and we would sing our hearts out to the songs and think

about how to change the lyrics into Ultimate cheers. It wasn't very smart, but it was an

awful lot of fun!

Ultimate became my life. I was working to play. But playing soon became work.

When the original organizer left town, I took on the task of league co-ordinator and

tournament director for the Sudbury Ultimate Club. But I eventually burned out.

Constantly fronting the money and chasing people for a commitment became frustrating.

But the most difficult part of running the league was dealing with the constant turnover of

players. Sudbury is, typically, not a place people stay and that meant that we were never

really able to improve the level of play, in either the league or the traveling teams. Every

year it felt like we were starting over. I knew there was a bigger Ultimate world out

there, and I wanted to be a bigger part of it, but very few others seemed to feel the same

way. I had exhausted what Ultimate in Sudbury seemed able to offer.

When I moved to Montreal in 2003 to pursue graduate studies, it was a relief to

find a well-established league to join. It was liberating. I could simply enjoy playing

again and I signed up to play every night of the week. I noticed, moreover, that people

really seemed to take it seriously; there was a very different feel to Ultimate in Montreal.

I joined a women's team and began traveling with a group of girls who all felt as I did

about Ultimate. I met people who could teach me and I could see that my game was

improving. And through playing Ultimate I made new friends. Today, nearly all the

people I know in Montreal are Ultimate players. But all that playing had an unforeseen

consequence.

When I tore my ACL, I cried. Not because it hurt, but because I was frightened. I

was afraid that I wouldn't be able to play anymore. And if I couldn't play Ultimate, what

was going to become of me? It was an irrational fear. Many Ultimate players have torn

their ACLs. It is a common injury and can almost be considered a rite of passage. I still

play, although the injury cost me my competitive momentum. But the incident made me

reflect: somehow, my identity, my sense of self-worth, had become tied to this sport, and

the prospect of not being a part of it anymore was terrifying. What follows is, in part, an

attempt to understand how and why this happened.

'The Dynamics of the Disc' is an oral history project that makes an important

contribution to a still nascent literature on the sport of Ultimate, and more specifically,

Canadian Ultimate which, despite Canada's recent competitive successes, has received

little attention from both academic and non-academic observers of the game. Since

Ultimate is a young sport, whose invention is still within living memory, talking to

Ultimate players through a process of oral interviewing seemed like a logical way to

proceed and it is the main methodology that I employ. Oral history can indeed help to fill

in the gaps left by the written record. And, according to Alessandro Portelli, one of the

benefits of oral history is that it allows the researcher to uncover intents as well as outcomes. Through oral interviewing the historian can solicit reflections from subjects about what they were trying to do, what they actually did, and what they believe to be the significant results of those actions.[51]

I deliberately choose not to interview my immediate circle of friends and teammates. This was not because I did not believe that they would have interesting stories to tell me, but rather because they had already told me plenty. Because so much of my teammates' insights and behaviours inform my general impressions of the sport, I sought out other people for formal interviews.[52] My selection of interview subjects was based on a three-pronged strategy. I began by approaching people at Ultimate games, telling them about the project, and asking if they would be willing to participate. These first interviews then led me to other potential candidates. For instance, I was quite often told, "if you want to know about ... then you should talk to ..." and several more interviews resulted from this snowball effect. My second strategy was to interview members of the Association de Ultimate de Montréal (AUM)'s hall of fame. These are, after all, people that the league has singled out as individuals of some significance and several hall-of-famers graciously agreed to be interviewed. Thirdly, I approached people whom I felt, either because of positions they held within their organizations or specific contributions they had made, could shed light on particular events and developments.

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[51] Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 45.

[52] When I do, occasionally, quote directly from a friend or teammate, I credit them in a footnote, though their names do not appear in the bibliography.

Because of these selection strategies, the resulting cohort of nineteen participants is neither a representative nor random sample of Ultimate players. By accident more than by design, my interviews include people who began playing in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. This group is made up of twelve men and seven women, mostly hailing from Montreal, five of whom are francophone. And it is significantly over-represented by the viewpoints of veteran players whom I subjectively define, not solely by number of years playing, but as people who have played at both recreational and competitive levels, and who have become involved in the organization of either recreational or competitive Ultimate through volunteer or paid positions.

Ultimate players differ from more typical subjects of oral history projects in that they are not an especially vulnerable population. Neither elderly, nor victims of traumatic events, nor socially marginalized or disenfranchised they are, nonetheless, still human subjects and need to be treated ethically. An oral interview is a dialectic process between two agents who may have different expectations or be pursuing different agendas. Narrators, for instance, can control the presentation of their stories as they are able to divulge, withhold or distort information, while the researcher has the power and ability to interpret, evaluate, and re-present a narrator's stories. Aware of these nuances of power and subjectivity, I attempted to be as transparent as possible with my participants by ensuring that they understood the objectives and possible outcomes of the project.[53] Participation was subject to informed consent and all were offered anonymity.

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[53] My research was approved by both the Concordia University History Department's Ethics Officer and the Concordia University Human Research Ethics

One participant elected to remain anonymous; all others agreed to have their identities

revealed.

Available online tools allowed me to extend the "sharing of authority" beyond the

creation of the interviews themselves. [54] By maintaining a blog, where I posted my

writing as it evolved, I kept my participants apprised of my progress and encouraged

them to provide commentary and feedback.[55] This also meant that I was consciously

writing with (at least) two audiences in mind -- Ultimate players, and academics – who,

as I was very aware, have different expectations. Ultimate players want their stories told

and their personal contributions recognized; academics want to understand what it all

means in a larger context. Balancing these two sets of standards was sometimes

challenging.

Oral history is fundamentally about understanding that memory is a system for the

organization of meaning. Oral historians often claim that "the stories people tell matter"

not for what they reveal about the past, but for what they reveal about people's present

relationships to their pasts. For oral historians, the truth in a narrative may not, and most

Committee. The consent form, which details the purpose of the research, the rights of the interviewee, and the possible uses of the material in the future, is reproduced in Appendix A.

[54] Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*, (New York: SUNY Press, 1990).

[55] Visit http://lpattis.wordpress.com. I also frequently contacted participants with additional questions or follow-up clarifications over e-mail. I aim to carry on the conversation with my participants beyond the dissertation, by finding creative and collaborative ways to make my research materials relevant and accessible to Ultimate players, as well as for future academic researchers.

often does not, lie in its historical accuracy, its recounting of facts, but is revealed in the way that a teller chooses, both consciously and unconsciously, to represent and order events, tell stories and anecdotes, and synthesize a lifetime of experiences.[56] "The importance of oral testimony" claims Portelli, "may lie not in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism, and desire emerge."[57] Paul Thompson similarly claims that "stories are commonly used in order to convey values; and it is the symbolic truth they convey, and not the facts of the incident described, which matters most."[58] Oral historians endeavour, therefore, to interpret narratives with the view to understanding whole stories thematically – searching for the organizing principle, the inner logic and underlying meaning of the narrative. This project, therefore, examines the thematic links and symbolic truths within and across stories told by Ultimate players. And it tries to reveal how players understand this sport and its place in their lives. What, it asks, does Ultimate mean to them?

One of the ways that players talk about Ultimate is as *more* than a sport. Indeed, *the Ultimate community* is an idea that appears often in my interviews. What do players mean when they refer to their sport as a community? Is it the same thing academics mean when they use the term? For scholars, community is "one of those words – like 'culture,' 'myth,' 'ritual,' 'symbol,'" that is "readily intelligible to speaker and listener

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[56] See Daniel James, *Dona Maria's Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

[57] Portelli, 51.

[58] Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History,* 3rd Edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 163.

when bandied around in ordinary, everyday speech," but which "causes immense difficulty when imported into the discourse of social science."[59] At its most basic, community is defined as "a group of people [who] have something in common with each other, which distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other putative groups."[60] For Anthony Cohen, this means that "community implies simultaneously both similarity and difference."[61] Community has also been defined as "the largest social group – larger, certainly, than circles of kinship and friendship, but smaller than city or nation – in which individuals could feel they had a 'place.'"[62] Richard Gruneau and David Whitson point out that "the sense of 'place' attached to the idea of community has often been understood simply in geographical terms, but if this was all the concept of community meant, it wouldn't be very important."[63] They argue instead that understanding community means paying attention to "the historical and social processes that construct and transform people's identifications with others, both locally and more broadly."[64] Gerard Delanty similarly argues that "community exerts itself as a powerful idea of belonging," and he urges us to understand community as "an expression of a

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[59] Anthony B. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, (New York: Tavistock Publications, 1985), 11.

[60] Ibid., 12.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities, and Cultural Politics*, (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1993), 201.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.

mode of belonging that is symbolic and communicative."[65] As John Walsh and Steven

High persuasively argue community is a fluid, multivalent system of group association

and affiliation, simultaneously "an imagined reality, social interaction, and process."[66]

Ultimate can be shown to have the things that scholars say communities have, and

be seen doing the things they claim that communities do. While she is generally

dismissive of the important discursive work being done by the symbolic, Kristen Walters,

nonetheless, makes the point that "with its festive tournaments, unusual dress code,

playful cheers and unique conventions, traditions and rituals," Ultimate is "as much a

'community' as it is a sport."[67] But more importantly, because "community is largely in

the mind," I argue that the concept of community provides Ultimate players both a useful

vocabulary with which to express themselves and a system of organizing their memories

that helps them to make sense of their experiences, actions, and relationships with the

game.[68] "Community" is the thematic logic, the framework, Ultimate players use to

understand their sport.

'The Dynamics of the Disc' is also a history of Ultimate in Canada. And in order

to reconstruct that history, it makes use of a wide variety of sources beyond oral

interviews. Concerned with portraying themselves as serious scholars, sport historians

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[65]Gerard Delanty, *Community*, 2nd Edition, (London: Routledge, 2010), 4, 20.

[66] John C. Walsh and Steven High, "Rethinking the Concept of Community," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 32/64 (1999): 255.

[67] Walters, 127.

[68] Cohen, 114.

tend to adopt a traditional approach which privileges archival research over other kinds of potentially valuable sources. Yet as Tara Brabazon argues, "sports history is remarkable because of its diversity of source material" and "if anything, there are more sporting sources – of a great breadth and diversity – than are available in other historical sub-disciplines."[69] Moreover, because the official record of sport in the twentieth century – that recorded in news reporting, sports press coverage and the archives of sporting organizations – is dominated by records and statistics, expert opinion and prescriptions, and administrative records left by sporting and educational authorities it rarely incorporates the voices of the people who played organized sports and recreational games. A more nuanced analysis of the role of sport in people's everyday lives is one of the "important benefits from broadening out the database of texts and evidence."[70] Indeed, in order to study Ultimate in Canada, casting a wider net, is not only desirable, but essential because unlike their American counterparts, researchers of Canadian Ultimate do not yet benefit from a conventional archive.[71] While Canadian Ultimate's archival footprint may not yet be terribly extensive, its source materials are rich and varied – that they have not yet found a permanent home in a central archive, is not a good reason to ignore them. Nonetheless, compiling useful sources is a challenge for those of us researching Ultimate - one we have all struggled with and solved imperfectly.

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[69] Tara Brabazon, *Playing on the Periphery: Sport, Identity and Memory*, (London: Routledge, 2006), 83.

[70] Ibid.

[71] The Midwest Disc Sport Collection is located in Columbia, Missouri. Visit http://whmc.umsystem.edu/mdsc/mdsc.shtml

A large and easily accessible repository of information about Ultimate can be found on the Internet. Lev Manovich claims that "by the end of the [1990s], as Internet use became commonplace, the computer's public image was no longer solely that of a tool but also a universal media machine, which could be used not only to author, but also to store, distribute, and access all media."[72] As a result of the enthusiastic embrace of this communication technology by Ultimate organizations and their members, there exists a great deal of information about Ultimate on the Internet – stored, shared, and accessed by organizers and administrators, players and participants, and available to a wider public. Ultimate on the Internet consists of a cacophony of websites, blogs, discussion boards, and youtube videos. Online tools and digital resources, particularly the websites of Ultimate organizations, leagues, and tournaments, were frequently consulted.

Key materials came to me from an unexpected source. Another advantage to talking to people is being able to experience their generosity. I have, through the course of my research been amazed at how generous people are – with their time, their insights, and especially their stuff. The majority of the printed materials used in my research was contributed by the people with whom I have spoken. I have found that the most valuable Ultimate archive is not located in any conventional repository nor online, instead it is scattered around the country in people's homes. Not only did people show me their files and collections, but many agreed to let me borrow, copy, and digitize them. These donations consisted of newsletters, magazines, videos, personal and administrative

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[72] Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), 69.

correspondence, tournament programmes, images, posters, calendars, cheers, and material items such as clothing and discs. This material, coupled with conventional press and media coverage afforded a fairly wide range of print and documentary sources to supplement the oral interviews and online resources.

The drawback, however, is that what I was able to compile relied upon what people had kept, and what they were willing to share. And it also means that there is an imbalance in the source material which reflects my own geographic location based in Montreal. Because the sources partly dictate the focus and direction of this study, it is geographically concentrated in the Ottawa-Toronto-Montreal corridors. It largely ignores the stories from other regions of the country, notably the West Coast, the Maritimes, and the Prairies, except where these intersect meaningfully with developments in central Canada. And because this is where I live, where I play, and where I have best access to people, Montreal stories do carry greater weight. I do not claim, therefore, that this study is a comprehensive history of Canadian Ultimate. There are many stories left untold and unexamined, and much future research to be carried out.

At its heart, however, this study is about me and how I understand Ultimate. Talking to people, trolling the Internet, and reading decades of newsletters and magazines has led me in directions I had not anticipated. I have learned a great deal and gained a much better understanding of this sport that I was already so passionate about. I have also been forced to entertain new perspectives and I hope that I have achieved a judicious balance based on careful attention to all of my sources. But it is an inescapable reality that as a participant observer, I am filtering my research through a lens clouded by my

own experiences, emotions, and nostalgia. I readily admit that my perspective is heavily influenced by yet another pervasive ambivalence. I sometimes feel that Ultimate has been a victim of its own success and I am, therefore, more inclined to be skeptical of progressive developments. I am cognizant that my subjective position as a player, organizer, woman, and proponent of the old school all no doubt affect my interpretation. I am, perhaps, wired to interpret the information a certain way. Another researcher, another Ultimate player, looking at the same materials might make very different interpretive choices and could draw different conclusions.

This study examines and is organized around two themes that emerge prominently from the stories Ultimate players tell: community and ambivalence. In order to illustrate how its ambivalent narratives function within the sport, the chapters are divided into loosely alternating treatments of difference and progress. And in order to demonstrate the pervasive theme of community, each chapter also examines some of the various ways that Ultimate players 'do' community and in the process, imagine, perform, and reproduce the culture surrounding their sport.

Chapter One focuses on processes of inclusion in Ultimate and illustrates some of the various ways that Ultimate promotes and encourages a sense of belonging among and between players. Here I explore the ways that players imagine their sport, their experiences of it, and their relationships to it. The stories told by Ultimate players about the appeal of the sport and their experiences playing reveal key commonalities and demonstrate a process of becoming a distinct sporting community.

Chapter Two then turns to the processes of exclusion and division within the sport

by examining how the Ultimate community polices its internal and external boundaries through the manipulation of its myths, symbols, and rituals. The most noticeable division that emerges here is the one between veterans and newcomers. But who qualifies as a veteran player? When does a newcomer graduate to veteran status? These are qualitative and highly subjective categories with no agreed-upon definitions. By telling stories, performing rituals, and modeling Ultimate-appropriate behaviours, players are able to mark their sport as different from mainstream sports. Yet these actions also serve to highlight and reinforce divisions, both real and imagined, between members of the Ultimate community.

Chapter Three chronicles the development of an organizational structure at the national level. As Ultimate grew in popularity, as city leagues became larger and more numerous the sport began to shed its 'clubhouse' mentality and to adopt instead more professional structures of governance and management. Moreover, as competitive Ultimate became more of a national (and international) affair the necessity for a governing body to oversee national competition, set policies and procedures, and act as an official representative to other national and international sporting bodies (such as the UPA, the World Flying Disc Federation, Sport Canada, and the International Olympic Committee) became apparent. This chapter demonstrates a significant shift in attitudes toward organization as Canadian Ultimate struggled to manage growth and acquire legitimacy.

In Chapters Four and Five the focus shifts from the national to the local scenes and the process of community is examined through spaces and places. No history of

Canadian Ultimate should ignore the city leagues. In Canada, the recreational city leagues are where the higher numbers of Ultimate players, if not the highest caliber of play, are found. Whereas in the United States most city leagues are comparatively small and recreational Ultimate is typically overshadowed by both the UPA and the college system which tend to dominate the Ultimate landscape, in Canada Ultimate's development and its character is heavily influenced by the municipal recreational leagues. Tony Leonardo categorizes leagues with 1500-2000 players as "medium-sized" and those with over 3000 players as "massive."[73] With their memberships hovering around this number, leagues in Toronto, Winnipeg, Montreal, and Calgary satisfy this latter classification, while with over 5000 members each, the leagues in Ottawa and Vancouver far exceed it. While Canadian Ultimate players often look with envy toward the United States's well-developed competitive club and college scenes, American observers often seem puzzled by and sometimes covetous of Canada's "massive" organized recreational leagues. Nonetheless, within Canada these leagues have developed in an atomized fashion and there are distinctive regional flavours to the development of the sport in different places. These chapters focus on two of these urban leagues, the Ottawa-Carleton Ultimate Association (OCUA), and the Association de Ultimate de Montréal (AUM). Arguing that leagues absorb and reflect the cultural sensibilities of their urban environments, these chapters examine how Ultimate players make space for themselves and how their experiences are received, perceived and absorbed by other Ultimate

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[73] Pasquale Anthony Leonardo, *Ultimate: The Greatest Sport Ever Invented By Man*, (Halcottsville, New York: Breakaway Books, 2007), 4.

communities.

Chapter Four explores the issue of urban space in relation to recreational sport. In 1984 the Ottawa Ultimate Club consisted of a small group of enthusiastic participants. Today, the Ottawa-Carleton Ultimate Association boasts that it is one of the largest Ultimate leagues in North America. In 1997, in order to accommodate its continuous growth, the OCUA embarked upon a project to purchase a large tract of land outside of the city and became the first Ultimate league in Canada to own its own fields. Other leagues watched with varying degrees of both interest and skepticism. Should the Ottawa land purchase be held up as a model for other leagues to follow? Or should alternative means be pursued to ensure the sport's future? This chapter argues that the places Ultimate is played are not just practical arrangements but meaningful to community-building at local, regional and national levels. It examines the various strategies that Ultimate leagues in Canada have adopted in order to secure field space and it tries to assess how their successes and failures have impacted the development and public image of the sport of Ultimate. Examining various strategies that leagues employ in order to secure the space they need, this chapter also shows the ways that leagues communicate and learn from one another.

Chapter Five concentrates on what is distinctive about Ultimate in Montreal. The sport of Ultimate follows a similar pattern of growth in Montreal as it has in other Canadian cities. L'Association de Ultimate de Montréal (AUM) began in 1993 with six teams. Since then its membership has grown to over 2800 players. It plays host to annual men's, women's and co-ed tournaments, and regularly sends individuals and

teams to national and international competitions. These things are unexceptional. What is

unique about Montreal Ultimate is its bilingual character. This chapter chronicles the

growth and development of the AUM and examines the ways that the players and

organizers of the Montreal Ultimate league address, manage, and negotiate language

dualism. An examination of the growth and development of Montreal's Ultimate league

offers a window into how members of the two dominant linguistic communities in

Montreal play together and it shows how urban recreation and leisure draw upon,

contribute to, and fit into local and national narratives of language, community, and sport.

The sixth and final chapter spotlights memory. How do Ultimate players

remember the past forty years and how do they communicate and document those

memories? This chapter discusses the various ways that the Ultimate community

attempts to build a collective memory. It illustrates how Ultimate players remember

significant people, places, and events and how they respond to tragedy and loss.

Moreover this chapter argues that the creation of celebrations, halls of fame, memorials,

and other sites of memory are used as a means of communicating shared values,

transmitting Ultimate culture, and contributing to the ongoing processes of community.

Taken together this study portrays Ultimate in Canada as a sporting community

struggling to negotiate and reconcile the pervasive ambivalence of its two guiding

narratives. Yet, for me, it has been more than an investigation into the history of

Ultimate in Canada and a contribution to an under-researched area of Canadian sport. It

has also been an exciting (and sometimes frustrating) personal journey into oral, digital

and public history – one that has combined my passions for Ultimate and history,

challenged my analytical faculties, exposed me to new methodologies, and helped me to develop new skills. While I believe that sports scholars will find the analysis a valuable contribution to the field and one upon which to build and expand, I also sincerely hope that the Ultimate community will find it compelling, relevant, and faithful to the 'spirit' of their stories.

CHAPTER 1

'The Dynamics of the Disc'

> Sport is a spectacle; a way to manage bodies, public opinion and
> consumerism. It also maps our emotional lives, connecting subjectivities
> and personal impressions with wider expressions of community and
> belonging.
>   -- Tara Brabazon, *Playing on the Periphery: Sport, Identity and Memory*

What is so compelling about the sport of Ultimate? What accounts for its

popularity? A teammate once told me that, in his opinion, "what makes Ultimate a

unique sport are the dynamics of the disc."[1] That concept can be extended beyond the

Frisbee's physical properties to the social, gender, and community dynamics of the sport.

Ultimate players describe a constellation of elements that attract them to the sport which

include the disc, the game, and the people. To many of the people who play, Ultimate is

more than a sport, it is a community. Players experience Ultimate as a game, a social

network, and a process of inclusion and belonging. This community is built upon a set of

shared practices, assumptions, and experiences about sport, about gender and about

community itself.

The phrase "when a ball dreams, it dreams it's a Frisbee" was made famous by

disc enthusiast Stancil Johnson in 1975.[2] This has since been repeated so often in

Ultimate circles that it has become cliché, but it remains a popular saying because it

succinctly encapsulates the unique and compelling properties of the disc in flight. The

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[1] Marc Huras, conversation with author, Summer 2005, Montreal, QC.

[2] Stancil Johnson, *Frisbee: A Practitioners Manual and Definitive Treatise,* (New York: Workman, 1975).

disc, as many players point out, is noticeably distinctive and it behaves differently than other kinds of projectiles. Ken Hunt admits that he "always liked the Frisbee itself. It was cool. I can throw a Frisbee a lot further than I can throw a ball. Then you realize that you can throw it a lot of different ways."[3] In addition to its cool factor, the disc in flight provides a pleasing aesthetic. Lorne Beckman claims to "love throwing discs when there's a bit of wind and you can bank them and curve them and they float. I just think it's a really beautiful sport for that reason."[4] Ken Lange concurs pointing out that "when it flies, the disc is a graceful object. In the hands of a master, it can do amazing things. There's something about the air in Fall and the disc just sails. There's a beauty to it, a grace."[5] The physical properties of the disc seem particularly compelling for male players. But women can also appreciate this aspect of the sport. Rose Carlton claims that "especially at the start, I could spend hours with people just sort of throwing and trying different things; learning how to make the disc fly in different ways, I just found so fun and interesting."[6] Gerald Griggs remarks that "the properties of a flying disc seem to somehow provide a satisfaction beyond many purposive activities which are ball sports."[7] Certainly, when discussing their introduction to Ultimate, a common sentiment is that

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[3] Ken Hunt, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 10 March 2010.

[4] Lorne Beckman, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 7 April 2010.

[5] Ken Lange, interview by author, Ottawa, ON, 11 June 2010.

[6] Rosemary Carlton, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 26 March 2010.

[7] Gerald Griggs, "'When a ball dreams, it dreams it's a Frisbee': The emergence of aesthetic appreciation within Ultimate Frisbee," *Sport in Society* 12/10 (2009): 1319.

"the main attraction was the love affair with the Frisbee"[8] and most players seem to agree that "there's something about a disc"[9] that sets Ultimate apart.

Partly because of the unique properties of the disc, the game looks and feels different. According to the promotional video, *The Ultimate Experience*, "the game itself is intoxicating; chasing something down that defies gravity, puts you in a whole different timeframe."[10] Eric Lewis, a particularly analytically-minded observer of the game, describes Ultimate as "a non-Euclidean sport" where unlike "most sports [where] the movement of the object is more or less in straight lines, [where] you don't get a lot of curve, except maybe to some degree in soccer, Ultimate really foregrounds the fact that you can get from point A to point B in an infinite number of trajectories."[11] The disc is, therefore, an important factor in the game's distinctiveness.

Players, however, go on to articulate other attractions. Craig Fielding, for instance, claims "I think it's more than the disc. Just the game itself; it takes the best of a lot of sports."[12] For Mark "Shaggy" Zimmerl, the attraction lies in the degree to which the game presents a physical challenge. He recalls that "it was such an exciting and physically demanding sport. I was blown away by the physical prowess of the best

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[8] Tony Boyd, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 28 September 2010.

[9] Ken Lange, 11 June 2010.

[10] *The Ultimate Experience*. VHS. Directed by Tom McConnell, Ultimate Players Association/DisCanada, 1992.

[11] Eric Lewis, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 2 June 2010.

[12] Craig Fielding, interview by author, Ottawa, ON, 11 June 2010.

teams. It was just amazing. The sport is incredibly dynamic."[13] Lorne agrees that

athletic gifts, are important – "teams nowadays have guys who can run and jump, they're

throwing their bodies around and they have to have crazy endurance" – but adds his

appreciation for the cerebral side of Ultimate, claiming that it is "really a game of

strategy, more than it might seem."[14] Rose continues to explain that "I really love the

game" because "I really like strategy and the planning on the field; how to not just move

the disc, but to move people. It's a mixture of organization and intuition on the field and I

really like that."[15] Without coaches, players take on the responsibility for strategizing.

And without referees, they are also responsible for understanding and applying the rules.

Ken Hunt reflects on this:

> I can't remember if that was a conscious or subconscious appeal, but
> definitely, I realize now, looking back, that I'm the kind of person who
> would rather have that sort of control over the refereeing. I was one of
> those people who as soon as he started playing, read the rules and tried to
> understand them better.[16]

Because of these added mental dimensions of the game there are, according to Eric, "a

whole class of Ultimate players who may not have the kind of physical gifts of the best

athletes, but who can actually think the game better and play at a high level. Ultimate

raises the bar for what it means to 'think' the game."[17] Ultimate players seem, therefore,

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[13] Mark "Shaggy" Zimmerl, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 5 October 2010.

[14] Lorne Beckman, 7 April 2010.

[15] Rosemary Carlton, 26 March 2010.

[16] Ken Hunt 10 March 2010.

[17] Eric Lewis, 2 June 2010.

to appreciate the game for its showcasing the exercise of both physical and mental prowess.

Players derive satisfaction from the game's various elements, but part of the appeal also lies in combining them effectively. Ken Lange explains that "there's a strong teamwork aspect to it" and because the game incorporates a variety of different physical and mental skills "you can find a way for each person to contribute to the team's success."[18] He claims that

> people are able to adapt what they have to the game. And the game sort of adapts to them. You can adjust your strategy to incorporate the tools that you have. Some of the best experiences I've ever had in Ultimate have been where we didn't necessarily have the best individuals, but the team as a whole was incredible ... and we went out with that group of guys, all buying into a concept of 'here's what we've got, here's how we're gonna make it work.' It was a great feeling. It's rare. Ultimate allows you to do that.[19]

Again, these comments highlight the combination of mental and physical abilities demanded for success, but they also hint at the appeal of an interpersonal, group dynamic.

Many players express the idea that the game provides a fulfilling social experience. An article appearing in the 2001 Fall issue of the Montreal league newsletter outlines the process through which personal friendships can form as a result of playing Ultimate:

> A few weeks before league began, FOSSIL consisted of Phil and me and, of course, lots of enthusiasm – but (Aaarghh) not the twelve other players

[18] Craig Fielding 11 June 2010.

[19] Ken Lange 11 June 2010.

> necessary to play and compete. ... By the end of May there were fourteen players ready to go. Fourteen players who didn't know each other... some players were new to Montreal. ... And here's the great part, a wonderful side effect of Ultimate Frisbee. The birth of fourteen new friendships! Never had I become so close to so many strangers so quickly. Over the summer we traveled to a few weekend tournaments: one in Vermont, another in Ottawa and then a wild camping tournament in Sherbrooke. We slept on floors, ate in the rain, got muddy, built bonfires, sang ... and as the season went on, these (Ultimate) acquaintances were fast becoming true friends.[20]

Ultimate teams are usually formed in one of two ways. Some people are drawn together *because* of the game – and are then likely to go on to forge personal attachments that extend beyond it. This is most often the case for college and competitive club teams. Alternately, some groups of people come to the game with pre-existing relationships, such as family, friends, or colleagues who decide to put a team together – and Ultimate becomes one in a series of other activities that this group does together. This is more typical of recreational league teams. People who play on multiple teams and at multiple levels, either at once, or over time, will likely experience both of these.

Players can develop strong ties to their teams or city leagues but Ultimate is also greatly appreciated for its portability. Montrealer, Christine Sura, for instance, believes that Ultimate "fulfills something in your life; fills a void." She claims that it is "a really nice *place* for people to meet and develop a community." Particularly in large metropolitan areas, she sees it as "a good medium for people who come from out of town" to encounter other people.[21] Calgarian, Erin Van Regan agrees. She claims, for

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[20] Keith Agnew, "New Summer, New Friends," *Discours,* (November 2001): 3.

[21] Christine Sura, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 12 May 2010, emphasis added.

instance, that

> finding a Calgary-born and -raised Ultimate player in Calgary is sorta
> tricky. It's tough, I know a few, but most of them are from somewhere
> else. And what I think is so great about the Ultimate community is that if
> you're moving from Montreal to Calgary you're gonna be able to find ...
> there's a *place* for you here.[22]

Women, particularly seem to be drawn to the sport because of this accepting social

atmosphere. Rose claims that when she first started playing "people seemed very open to

welcoming new players; I felt very welcomed." She also remembers how "it was

amazing to me how everybody knew each other, there was a real camaraderie among

people, [and] I really liked the people I met."[23] But men clearly also appreciate the easy

camaraderie that is fueled by the sense of community. Shaggy explains how "even when

I started playing more competitively, I could laugh afterwards. It was fun. We just had

such a good time."[24] For many people, Ultimate provides a sense of belonging, of 'place'

that transcends geographical boundaries.

The interpersonal relationships produced through playing Ultimate can be intense.

Rose claims that "this shared game that we all did together created weird bonds between

people" and "those who let Ultimate become a huge part of their lives, were so invested

in each other's lives, it became overwhelming." She comments on the fact that "some

teams consistently stay together year after year, after year. I see it over and over in

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[22] Erin Van Regan, interview by author, Calgary, AB, 18 August 2008, emphasis added.

[23] Rosemary Carlton, 26 March 2010.

[24] Mark "Shaggy" Zimmerl, 5 October 2010.

league teams, how many maintain the same core of people. There are shifts, but the same core are still playing together." One team in particular, she likens to a closely knit family. 'Discombobulation' – 'BoB'– began as a Montreal league team in 1995 and soon became more: "we started to go to tournaments because we wanted to spend time together. It's much more about people with 'BoB.' [With] some of my other teams it's more about the game." But with 'BoB,' "it's like family." And she maintains that "I didn't just superficially enjoy these people, some of them have really become that close to me," they are "the people [with whom I've] shared some of the biggest highs and lows."[25] These comments might seem sentimental, but as Sara Ahmed argues, paying "attention to emotions allows us to address the question of how subjects become *invested* in particular structures," and such stories illustrate how deep the personal relationships and affective ties in Ultimate circles can become.[26]

This helps explain why Ultimate seems to inspire levels of commitment beyond what might be considered normal or even reasonable for a recreational pastime. Andrew Thornton remarks that "as one gets better and or plays for more years, many players eventually focus much of their summer leisure time on playing, organizing and training for playing Ultimate; some players have even been known to quit jobs, end relationships

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[25] Rosemary Carlton, 26 March 2010.

[26] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 12.

and move to a different city to play."[27] The expenditure of time and energy can go

beyond playing the game. Some people find themselves pulled into the organization of

their city leagues. Ken Lange, for instance "first moved [to Ottawa] in 1995 and I was

hoping to get involved, I knew there was a league here ... so I met some guys ... I came

out. By '97 I had started volunteering," and he was also "on a competitive team, playing

tournaments, playing twice a week" all "in a very short period of time." For Lange,

"there's something about the lifestyle, it's healthy, and fun, you're getting good exercise,

and the people are just ..."[28] Rose agrees that "Ultimate grabs a hold of you, becomes a

massive part of your life." And while she claims not to know the source of the

compulsion, she suggests that "it's partly the game, partly the community."[29] Any sport

has the potential to become an all-consuming passion. John MacAloon, describes a

"curiously polarized affective spectrum of play" where "games are fun, 'entertaining,'

'enjoyable,' 'lighthearted,' and yet ... regularly carry off the players into states of utter

earnestness and commitment, at times becoming a rapture or a sickness unto death."[30]

And this is clearly something that can happen to Ultimate players.

Ultimate is very often described as an addiction. Many players admit that "once

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[27] Andrew Thornton, "Ultimate Masculinities: An Ethnography of Power and Social Difference in Sport" (PhD diss., Sociology and Equity Studies in Education, University of Toronto, 1998), 46.

[28] Ken Lange, 11 June 2010.

[29] Rosemary Carlton, 26 March 2010.

[30] John J. MacAloon, "Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle in Modern Societies" in *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance,* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984), 255.

you get introduced to this game and you get a feel for it, there's a certain amount of addiction; it slowly takes over your life."[31] Dan Berman tries to explain: "people call it *cultimate*, and I see it all the time, people get introduced to the game and they lose their minds!"[32] Although they often struggle to put the experience into words, many players admit that Ultimate can become something of an obsession. Ken Hunt calls this phenomenon "the bug," and admits that he and his wife caught it. He claims that "we were completely addicted, couldn't play enough Ultimate."[33] Thinking back to how it happened, he recalls that becoming addicted was a process:

> It was not right away, ... I remember ... we would play pickup every
> Sunday... and we would pretty much always be the last people on the field.
> ... We weren't always the first to arrive, but we'd be the last to leave. We
> were addicted to, not just Ultimate, but disc play. We'd go to the
> Reservoir and latch on and play with the college kids, if we could.
> Between my men's and coed teams I'd play like eight tournaments in four
> months, pretty much every weekend. Playing league two nights a week,
> but also practicing one or two nights a week as well. So a normal thing
> was Monday night practice, Tuesday night league, Wednesday night
> practice, Thursday night league, Friday night pack or drive somewhere,
> Saturday/Sunday tournament. But we were still completely addicted!
> And at the time, not only was I playing all the time, I was also running the
> league and the website. Ultimate was my life.[34]

Players recognize that love of the game is not unique to Ultimate. But they also express a sentiment that there is something special about Ultimate that eclipses the experiences

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[31] Todd Kimberley, "City Teams set for Ultimate Challenge," *Calgary Herald*, Sports, 17 July 1997, C.2.

[32] Dan Berman in *TUC: Thirty Years in Thirty Minutes*, dir. Otto Chung (2010), http://iamultimate.com/videos/tuc-30-years-in-30-minutes/ (accessed 2 February 2011).

[33] Ken Hunt, 10 March 2010.

[34] Ibid.

provided by other sports. Rose claims "I've never caught the bug for any other game the same way;"[35] Ken Lange similarly reflects that "I don't think it's necessarily unique to Ultimate, but I've never been so engrossed in any other sport;"[36] and Tony Boyd wonders, "is it the same with other sports? It must be! ... But maybe it's not quite the same?"[37]

There are certain signs that Ultimate addiction has set in. The amount of time expended on the sport is one. People who have caught the bug will often play Ultimate to the detriment of some of their other interests. Some take this to an extreme, as in the case of the players who claim that "the day I played my first Ultimate game is the day I quit other sports."[38] In addition to an impressive investment of time, supporting an Ultimate addiction, particularly when it involves travel, requires a substantial commitment of money. Christine remarks how "it can easily take up a lot of your time, money, and vacation from work, but if you like the people on your team, it's fun."[39] And typically, people addicted to Ultimate "can't talk about anything else...people [will] talk about nothing but Ultimate for hours and hours. For people who don't play, it can be torture!"[40]

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[35] Rosemary Carlton, 26 March 2010.

[36] Ken Lange, 11 June 2010.

[37] Tony Boyd, 28 September 2010.

[38] Amy Cameron, "Ultimate Fun," *New Brunswick Telegraph Journal*, 26 July 1999, np.

[39] Christine Sura, 12 May 2010.

[40] Ken Hunt, 10 March 2010.

Many of these symptoms feature prominently in Shaggy's memories:

> I was so passionate about Ultimate. Those first couple years that I played, I must have recruited, no exaggeration, a hundred people. Every person I talked to it was 'bla, bla, bla, Ultimate, bla, bla, bla, Ultimate, Ultimate, Ultimate! I must have been so annoying. But I loved it. And there were a lot of things that I was passionate about and I didn't even realize that I was putting them aside. I stopped playing guitar. I was an avid hiker. I was doing whitewater canoeing. I was practically a semi-professional windsurfer. And then Ultimate came along and I didn't notice that I stopped doing these things entirely.[41]

Travelling obsessively is another sign of Ultimate addiction. In some circles, "to be considered part of cultimate you *have to* travel."[42] The commitment of time, energy and money that Ultimate addicts put toward travelling can seem excessive to some, but then "ordinary people just don't understand the fierce pull of an Ultimate tournament."[43]

Tournaments are, in addition to athletic competitions, Ultimate festivals, spectacles that showcase the culture surrounding Ultimate. Those who have travelled a lot admit that in many ways, certainly at the level of competition, all tournaments are essentially the same. Shaggy claims that "they certainly blend" in his memory:

> I've been to many tournaments and they're all the same. The sad fact is that no matter where you're going, you'll be spending it at a sports complex. Hanging out with the boys is really fun, but serious teams don't even party that hard – until you're eliminated. I remember where the tournaments were and how we finished. 2002 Club Worlds in Hawaii was super fun. A couple clutch victories at certain points in the tournament. Universe point games. I remember getting up super-early to go catch of

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[41] Mark "Shaggy" Zimmerl, 5 October 2010.

[42] Pasquale Anthony Leonardo, *Ultimate: The Greatest Sport Ever Invented By Man*, (Halcottsville, New York: Breakaway Books, 2007), 9, emphasis added.

[43] Eric Reder, "The Road Trip: Getting Your Priorities Straight," *Chasing Plastic Magazine,* 1/1 (2001): 57.

few waves. It's fun to go to exotic locations. But the actual tournament is the same. It's what you tack on before or after that makes them stand out.[44]

Outside of the world and national championship series, which do privilege the on-field competition, certain tournaments try to "create a happening" around the competition and stand out as being distinctive.[45] Many tournaments adopt a theme or celebrate an occasion that helps set them apart from one another and some attempt to be as outlandish as possible. Tournaments are to some degree like pilgrimages. Players return again, and again to their favourites. 'BoB,' for instance became known for its annual appearance at Gender Blender and for almost fifteen years its core members prided themselves on having attended every one. Some tournaments, such as Paganello in Italy, have become truly legendary; like an Ultimate Mecca, all players are encouraged to attend at least once in their lifetime. John MacAloon claims that such spectacles can act as recruiting devices that "lure the proudly uncommitted;" where people "may find themselves suddenly caught up in actions of a different sort at levels of intensity and involvement they could not have foreseen and from which they would have retreated had such participation been directly required or requested of them."[46] Talking about the tournament experience, Christiane Marceau claims that "c'est intense, et ça frappe à l'imaginaire. Ça fait parti des anecdotes de ta vie."[47] Tournaments, with their emotional highs, and intense

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[44] Mark "Shaggy" Zimmerl, 5 October 2010.

[45] Christiane Marceau, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 12 January 2011.

[46] MacAloon, 268.

[47] Christiane Marceau, 20 January 2011.

interpersonal experiences, figure prominently in people's Ultimate memories.

A constellation of elements can, therefore, be seen feeding the process of Ultimate addiction. But becoming an obsessive addict is not every Ultimate player's experience. Some are content to play recreationally and invest much less time, money, energy, and emotion into Ultimate. And for those who do catch the bug, Ultimate obsession does not last forever. The compulsion to play all the time, talk about nothing else, and sacrifice other interests to the pursuit of Ultimate does eventually fade. Ken Hunt, for instance, claims

> I always talk about people getting the bug with Ultimate ... I see it, and it's fascinating. Maybe it's nostalgia, because I had it, and I lost it ... I've been cured, or become immune, or whatever. I overdosed. At the end of every summer, we'd say, 'I wonder what the Jazz Festival was like?'; 'you know, we never went camping, except at [Ultimate tournaments];' '... what about all these other things?' That began to tell and we began to pull back. Of course, a lot of Ultimate players will say that, then sign up for just as much Ultimate come the Spring. A ton of my friends play, and sometimes it's the only way to see them if they still have the bug.[48]

Shaggy also admits that as he gets older "the ability of Ultimate to get me to sacrifice those [other] things gets weaker."[49]

Nonetheless, players admit that they happily and eagerly *allowed* Ultimate to take over their lives in pervasive ways. For Luc Drouin, "Ultimate was part of living and breathing. It was always a prominent part of my life and one that's helped me bring balance to my life."[50] Similarly, Shaggy tells me that

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[48] Ken Hunt, 10 March 2010.

[49] Mark "Shaggy" Zimmerl, 5 October 2010.

[50] Luc Drouin, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 6 June 2010.

> I don't have regrets about it. You find things you love, and there's something so amazing, just inherently about the game and the intensity of each point and your responsibility on the field, and how important you are as a cog in the gears. When you play Ultimate, there's nowhere to hide on the field. So if you're playing competitively, you're going to be training really hard, with people who are like-minded about coming together to collectively realize your potential. It's an exciting project. It's really great. But to do that you need to invest a lot of time. And sacrifice things. And it takes over.[51]

Lorne, who quickly found himself playing, competing, and volunteering, not just in his own city league but more broadly on both a national and international scale, reflects that

> I don't know why I got involved. The closest answer I can give is that I had nothing else to do at the time, but then yes, it became all-enveloping. To this day it's all-enveloping, the whole sport, it took over my life, and I let it, and it was good for me. I've got a million friends because of it. I've had a ton of great experiences because of it.[52]

These veteran players insist that qualitative benefits have far outweighed any quantitative costs associated with their Ultimate addictions.

That Ultimate is a non-contact sport that allows for people of various athletic abilities to play together means that it also lends itself well to gender-integrated play. Unlike other field sports, Ultimate puts male and female bodies in close proximity. This is something that we are not used to in the world of sport where gender segregation is usually – and often literally – the rule. Sport is normally a site for the practice of homosociability, but in Ultimate patterns of heterosociability have infiltrated the culture and "a major part of the appeal is that the game is a co-ed sport and one that couples can

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[51] Mark "Shaggy"Zimmerl, 5 October 2010.

[52] Lorne Beckman, 7 April 2010.

do together."[53] Ken Hunt, for instance, explains how the mixing of the sexes creates a

certain type of atmosphere on an Ultimate team:

> the co-ed has a more complicated dynamic ... because you've got thrown
> in, the issue of how the players of different genders are treated on the field
> ... men are either more athletic, or more often just more aggressive about
> getting the disc ... and if you get into a hucking game, it's usually just
> men. So there are those dynamics. But then there's as well, because there
> are fewer of each gender, issues about subbing, and playing time. But
> then you have the whole social life of the team, which in Ultimate is huge.
> You end up with sexual relationships and all the dynamics of that thrown
> in – you have married couples, people who are dating, people who used to
> be dating and all that stuff. That simultaneously can make it more difficult
> but also more interesting.[54]

Thomas Dunk notes that "the way middle-class men express their masculinity is

different, ... from the way working-class men do the same thing." Unlike its working-

class counterpart, Dunk notes that middle-class "social life is almost always a coupled

affair, a shared experience of husband and wife."[55] Certainly, there is a great deal of

spousal participation in Ultimate circles and the co-mingling of the sexes often leads to a

flirtatious atmosphere. I would like to suggest that this aspect of Ultimate culture is an

effect of the colonization of sport by normal patterns of middle-class hetero-sociability.

Ultimate is a sexy sport. And it provides a site to think about the act of looking at

sporting bodies. Much is made in sport studies of women as the objects of the male gaze.

In Ultimate, however, women have equal opportunity to observe and pass judgment on

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[53] Amy Cameron, "Ultimate Fun."

[54] Ken Hunt, 10 March 2010.

[55] Thomas Dunk, *It's a Working Man's Town: Male Working-Class Culture in Northwestern Ontario* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), 100.

the prowess and physical attributes of the male players. What might be the effect of such

an "active female gaze?"[56] Tara Brabazon asks whether female spectatorship, for

instance, "allows women to appropriate the gaze," and "opens up a space for female

subjectivity," or as other theorists have posited, does it "actually confirm patriarchal

modes of vision?"[57] Ruth Barcan points out that while "it is still true to say that women

are unequally positioned in this signifying system," some scholars are "intriguingly

skeptical of the automatic assumption that what is often called objectification is

inherently negative or oppressive."[58] In her study of nudism, Barcan finds that "the

already complex subject–object relations between men and women are complicated by

the reciprocation of the gaze (i.e. women look at men)" and "the diminution of the power

of looking (once the novelty wears off, the question of looking recedes from

prominence)." Moreover, she suggests that "the idea of gender inequity may be

disavowed, denied or displaced back into the imaginary space beyond the borders of the

beach, club or resort."[59] I see a very similar process operating in Ultimate spaces.

The usual analysis of female spectators as consumers of sport or alternately in

supportive roles "as mothers, girlfriends and wives" is more complicated in Ultimate

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[56] Suzanne Moore, "Here's Looking at You, Kid!" in Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment, eds., *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture*, (Seattle: Real Comet Press, 1988), 45.

[57] Brabazon, 19.

[58] Ruth Barcan, "'The Moral Bath of Bodily Unconsciousness': female nudism, bodily exposure and the gaze," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 15/3 (2001): 305.

[59] Ibid., 313

because while women do perform these roles, they are not relegated to them.[60] In its

current state of amateur competition and recreational play, all involved are players as

well as spectators. This lends a mutuality to the erotic objectification that inevitably

occurs when the human body is put on display. Both men and women move fluidly

between the act of playing and observing; looking and being looked at. Moreover, in

Ultimate, the gaze is not only an impartial act of looking from a distance, it is also an act

of, close-up, interpersonal interaction, which, I suggest, complicates its effect. Barcan

notes that "we are well used to thinking of the act of looking as almost inherently

invasive or powerful."[61] We are not, however, used to thinking about the eroticized gaze

(whether female or male) as being tangled in a web of affective ties. These are not just

bodies we are looking at, they are also our friends, colleagues, and teammates with whom

we have relationships that extend beyond the playing field.

One of the things that an active and omnipresent female gaze might be doing is

deflecting homoeroticism. In an atmosphere where violence, homophobia, and misogyny

– the conventional means of denying and diffusing the homoerotic spectacle of sport –

are not welcome or tolerated, the female gaze might be stepping in to do the work of

constructing a heterosexual frame for the athletic performances and physical displays.[62]

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[60] Brabazon, 169

[61] Barcan, 305

[62] For discussions of the links between homoeroticism, homophobia, and violence
in sports see Michael A. Messner & Donald F. Sabo, *Sex, Violence and Power in Sports:
Rethinking Masculinity*, (Freedom, California: The Crossing Press, 1994), Brian Pronger,
The Arena of Masculinity: Sports, Homosexuality and the Meaning of Sex, (London:
GMP, 1990), and Eric Anderson, *In the Game: Gay Athletes and the Cult of Masculinity*,

Ken Hunt, who has played on both men's and co-ed teams remarks that "when you have fifteen guys spending a lot of time together, it can get creepy; with a mixed crowd things are more real, I guess."[63] Playing in mixed company might equally be working to diffuse lesbian stereotypes for women.

Additionally, Ultimate players are performing and observing more than physicality. It is often said that "Ultimate doesn't *build* character, but rather *reveals* it."[64] Because interior qualities, such as integrity, honesty, and self-control, are so much a part of the game's code of conduct, a player's character is on display as much as his physicality. Rita M., for instance, describes a former teammate as "a very accomplished, very skilled Ultimate player, attractive, smart, but very down-to-earth, very playful, and the kind of personality who doesn't worry much about what other people thought of him."[65] Notice that few of the adjectives she employs actually describe him physically but refer instead to character traits. Character, I suggest, is as important an ingredient to the perceived attractiveness of an Ultimate player as physical assets. Sport historians identify a moment tied to the rise in consumer culture and the commercialization of

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(Albany: SUNY Press, 2005). For a discussion of homoeroticism and misogynist rhetoric in sport see Varda Burstyn, *The Rites of Men: Manhood, Politics, and the Culture of Sport*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999). Homophobia in women's sports is discussed at length in Helen Lenskyj, *Out on the Field: Gender, Sport and Sexualities*. (Toronto: Women's Press, 2003).

[63] Ken Hunt, 10 March 2010.

[64] Pasquale Anthony Leonardo and Adam Zagoria, *Ultimate: The First Four Decades*, (Dublin, CA: Ultimate History Inc., 2005), 1.

[65] Rita M., interview by author, Montreal, QC, 11 February 2010.

sports when a Victorian ideal of manliness, understood as a set of internally-defined

character traits, was eclipsed by a concept of masculinity, which corresponded more

closely to external physically-defined markers. Similarly for women, "this process

transformed femininity from a more interior concept, which emphasized traits like piety

and purity, to a more exterior set of indicators through which femininity was mapped on

the female body."[66] The affective ties between Ultimate players, coupled with the

ideological emphasis on sportsmanship, appears to revive an investment in and

appreciation for character. Few contemporary sports prioritize interior qualities over

physical prowess or sexual appeal, and even fewer provide the intimacy required to

evaluate both simultaneously.

Ultimate presents a very straight display of sexuality. And that display runs the

gamut along a spectrum of "rough to respectable" or dirty to domestic.[67] Many people,

for instance, do find partners (temporary and permanent) through playing Ultimate. Rose

claims that "it's a great place to meet guys. Not that I play Ultimate to meet men, but it

happened -- twice!"[68] It is widely acknowledged among players that "Ultimate is a

singles scene."[69] Rose points out that "that's a nice way to put it. It can be a little

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[66] Susan K. Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport*, (New York: Free Press, 1994), 19, ff35.

[67] Ibid., 14.

[68] Rosemary Carlton, 26 March 2010.

[69] Leonardo, *The Greatest Sport*, 86.

incestuous at times."[70] This aspect of the culture is intensified when teams travel as

"there is no end to the hijinks of traveling with a mixed male-and-female team."[71] A

playful, sexually-charged, and in some cases promiscuous, atmosphere does, indeed,

permeate Ultimate tournaments.

At the same time Ultimate is also very much a family affair. Many players

appreciate the opportunity that the sport affords them to play with their brothers and/or

sisters. Many report being introduced to the sport by their siblings and extended-family

groups make up the core of many teams. The family dynamic is also increasingly

becoming inter-generational. When I began playing, many couples brought their dogs to

games and tournaments. Ten years later, the dogs are seriously outnumbered by babies.

The sidelines are now usually festooned with playpens, strollers, and toys, with children

of all ages running around and some leagues are beginning to consider offering

babysitting services for their members.[72]

Despite the continued numerical predominance of males, Ultimate has been

steadily growing in popularity with women and girls. Indeed, one of the things that

scholars find compelling about Ultimate is its unusual level of gender parity. Ultimate,

however, did not emerge fully-formed in its present state of gender integration. This has

been the result of a series of struggles, debates, and negotiations over the role and

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[70] Rosemary Carlton, 26 March 2010.

[71] Leonardo, *The Greatest Sport*, 36.

[72] Association de Ultimate de Montréal, online newsletter, *Affaires*, 9/3, 7 May 2010, http://www.montrealultimate.ca/fr/node/9339 (accessed 4 June 2011).

inclusion of female players.

While there have always been female Ultimate players, the first women typically played with men on "men's" teams and "the idea of getting seven women together, and then finding another such team, was not even on the radar screen" in the early 1970s. Women's Ultimate first took hold in the US in the late-1970s. The "women's wing" of the Ultimate Players Association (UPA) which oversaw a structure of competition for all-women's teams was born "in a swimming pool at the University of California-Irvine" in 1981. Womens was not an official college division in the United States until 1987. In that same year, the first, co-ed club tournaments began to appear. And the mid-1990s saw a campaign to create a competitive co-ed division that "could survive outside of league structure." An experimental series, "the Co-ed Celebration," was spearheaded by Joey Gray in 1997 and by 1998 co-ed Ultimate was absorbed into the UPA's championship structure.[73] In Canada co-ed play has enjoyed popularity as the dominant format in recreational and intramural leagues and less competitive tournaments and, following trends and developments in the United States, was introduced as an official division at the competitive level in 1999.

Despite being seen, and generally portraying itself, as a sport that embraces equality of the sexes, there continue to be gendered issues within Ultimate and many of the ensuing concerns and anxieties are familiar to observers of gender and sport. For instance, former president of the Ottawa Carleton Ultimate Association (OCUA), Craig Fielding, claiming it as "one of my favourite stories," wanted to tell me about 'Five

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[73] Leonardo and Zagoria, *Ultimate*, 52, 54, 120, 121.

Token Women' which

> was a team when [Ottawa] brought in a mandatory 5/2 co-ed rule. You
> needed five people of a given sex on the field and two of the other. The
> Ottawa competitive women put a team in the B-division. They brought in
> a few guys with them, but they played five women, two males and called
> themselves 'Five Token Women.' And in that division of fourteen teams,
> they finished fourth. At the September captains' meeting one of the
> captains wanted to complain about this team. So the guy stands up and
> says, 'they're too good. They should have to play in the A-division.' So I
> said, '... but three other teams finished above them. Are they also too
> good, that they should have to play in the A-division?' And he said 'no,
> because they play with five guys.' He actually said this! I laid this trap,
> and I thought it was a pretty obvious trap, but he went right into it ... Now,
> if he had said 'yes, those other teams have to move too,' then we would
> have had to have a bigger discussion. But he didn't say that.[74]

And the complainant was then publicly shamed into dropping his objection. This

anecdote illustrates both the discomfort some men feel in gender-integrated sports, and

the commitment on the part of players and organizers to the appearance of gender-

equality, as well as the ways that those positions can come into conflict. Yet there is

another way to read this story. This is another instance of the very rare occasion where

women are allowed to compete directly with men, but only when highly skilled women

play against less accomplished men.[75] If Ultimate were truly egalitarian, then perhaps the

competitive A-level women should have been pitting their skills against other A-level

players? For many men, however, "Ultimate has been a new experience of learning what

it means to play alongside and inclusively with women."[76] Jean-Lévy Champagne, for

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[74] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010.

[75] Cahn, 53.

[76] Thornton, 35.

instance, told me that while captaining a co-ed team he noticed that only half of his

players responded positively to his cap-throwing, and expletive-rife verbal outbursts.

"J'ai appris," he says, "que sortir un gros 'sacre,' j'étais capable de motiver la moitié de

mon équipe - la moitié motivée c'était les gars. Les filles sont moins motivée quand on

crie 'tabarnac!'[77] He quickly learned that he needed to employ a different leadership

style in order to effectively motivate both his male and female players.

It is a common observation among sports scholars that despite impressive gains,

"women's sport still languishes compared with the public adoration heaped on men's

games."[78] Even at the recreational level, "sport is based on the popular ideology that

men's sport is intrinsically superior to women's competition."[79] Some men, clearly do

not like competing against women because of the prospect that they might appear

inferior. There is more at stake, however, than personal ego and the public

embarrassment of certain individuals. Susan Cahn argues that in early twentieth-century

sporting philosophies "the female athlete kindled acute anxieties about the erosion of

men's physical supremacy and the loss of distinct male and female preserves."[80]

According to Mark Dyreson, "women had a place in modern American sporting practice,

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[77] Jean-Lévy Champagne, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 12 January 2011.

[78] Mark Dyreson, *Making the American Team: Sport, Culture, and the Olympic Experience*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 112.

[79] Brabazon, 189.

[80] Cahn, 20.

but it was generally designed to be a separate place."[81] Dyreson claims that women were

encouraged to play sports in order to "increase their health, improve their figures, share

common interests with men, channel dangerous energies, and learn the value of

cooperation" but they "were prohibited from playing to win."[82] The story of 'Five Token

Women' shows that many of these assumptions, anxieties and concerns about the place of

women in sports remained salient in the late-twentieth century. Moreover, it shows that

the transition from a homosocial to a heterosocial sporting culture has not necessarily

been complete or smooth.

In the mid-1990s, there was serious talk about the possibility of bringing more

women into the game. How to do that, however, proved controversial in some places.

Many recreational leagues started discussing and eventually introducing a more even

gender ratio. The move from 5/2 to 4/3 in the Toronto Ultimate Club (TUC) figures

prominently in TUC's 30th anniversary video where it is described as "the next quantum

leap" in the development of Toronto Ultimate's growth and development.

In Toronto, the move from a 5/2 to a 4/3 gender ratio is remembered as a highly

contested episode in the league's history. "In the beginning," claims Jim Lim, "it was just

about fielding seven people, and at some point it became 5/2, it became organically

5/2."[83] While some TUC teams recognized the value of female players, made the effort

to find "women who could play," and relied on them as integral to the success of the

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[81] Dyreson, 112.

[82] Ibid., 110

[83] Jim Lim in *TUC: Thirty Years in Thirty Minutes.*

team, rather than as tokens, this integrative approach seemed to be a minority position.

By the mid-1990s "there was increasingly a sense of frustration with some of the women

players [who] weren't getting a lot of playing time nor were they feeling the disc a lot

when they were on the field." Jo Gallagher recalls starting "a petition for women to sign

that would support this gender split of 4/3."[84]

Adjustments to the 5/2 gender ratio was initially opposed by both men and

women because of the perception that it would mean less playing time for all existing

players, both the men and the women. Monica Kerr-Coster explains how some women

might feel conflicted: "You want to get more women involved in the sport but at the same

time women didn't want more women coming in taking their field time."[85] And

increasing the minimum number of women would require men to rescind their spots.

Thornton characterizes these kinds of arguments militating against a 4/3 gender ratio on

the grounds of decreased playing time as specious in an environment of overall league

expansion.[86] Despite it being a noticeable trend on the North American tournament

scene, Dan Berman recalls that some people "were really disparaging about co-ed

Ultimate" and "there was a faction of people who basically were not going to accept it,

no matter what we said."[87] Nonetheless, after a recruitment drive which revealed an

untapped pool of interested female players, and a heated captain's meeting, the 4/3

[84] Jo Gallagher in *TUC: Thirty Years in Thirty Minutes*.

[85] Monica Kerr-Coster in *TUC: Thirty Years in Thirty Minutes*.

[86] Thornton, "Ultimate Masculinities."

[87] Dan Berman in *TUC: Thirty Years in Thirty Minutes*.

gender ratio was introduced. Interestingly, neither the film, nor the TUC website

specifies exactly when this happened, claiming only that it was sometime "in the mid-to-

late 1990s."[88] This indicates that what is important – at least to the filmmaker and

webmasters – is not the year in which it happened, but rather the memory of the

divisiveness of the debate.

In the mid-to-late nineties, other leagues were also making adjustments to their

gender ratios. In Ottawa, for instance, "the rapid rise in popularity of the 4/3 leagues

since they were first introduced in 1993, ultimately led to the demise of 5/2 in 2002."[89]

In Ottawa, however, the shift to 4/3 is characterized as less of a controversial break with

the past, than as a gradual trend in a protracted evolution. This reflects Craig's

management style of "letting the teams decide." He explains how

> the original five teams in the Ottawa league all had women, but there was
> no mandatory co-ed rule, teams were just expected to play their women.
> The first co-ed rule was 6/1. When I went to other cities I always asked
> them how they did things. At the time Toronto had a women's
> competitive team called 'See Jane Run' – they were a dominant team. The
> Toronto city league had a mandatory 5/2 rule and I thought, 'There's a
> connection.' I came back and said we should take Ottawa to 5/2. The
> introduction of 6/1 was controversial, but 5/2 was widely accepted. And
> 5/2 existed for a long time. Then someone suggested we should make the
> C-division 4/3. There was no desire to make the A- or B-divisions 4/3.
> They were perfectly happy with 5/2. The vote was split down the middle
> [and] we decided, since it was such a large division, to split it in two and
> create a C-4/3 and a C-5/2. And we just let teams decide which division
> they wanted to play in. Over time 4/3 became the preferred format. More
> and more teams were going over to 4/3. Some people thought we should

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[88] Toronto Ultimate Club, "Jo Gallagher" in *TUC Hall of Fame,*
http://www.tuc.org/halloffame (accessed 15 May 2011).

[89] Ottawa-Carleton Ultimate Association, "OCUA History"
http://www.ocua.ca/book/export/html/13 (accessed 7 August 2009).

force everyone to play 4/3, but I thought, 'no, as long as there are enough teams that want [5/2], we'll keep [it].' 5/2 just died a natural death; the A-division was the last holdout.[90]

Until 1999, when 4/3 was adopted across the league, Montreal also had both 5/2 and 4/3 leagues running simultaneously - with the understanding that 5/2 was considered the more competitive of the two. A compromised caliber of play is another reason some men claim to dislike playing with and against women. Nonetheless, in the 1990s leagues were bringing more women into the game, trying to increase women's presence on the field, and improve their involvement in the game, despite a common underlying understanding that having more women somehow translated into a reduced caliber of play.

Some women express frustration at the ongoing gendered assumptions in Ultimate. Rose, for instance, claims that "it's always an effort to get guys to notice you as a woman as being good. Until you've played with them for a while, there's always a period of having to prove it."[91] This reflects Gail Weiss's observation that "bodies are marked by assumptions made about their gender, their race, their ethnicity, their class, and their 'natural' abilities" and that "these assumptions, moreover, often tend to go unnoticed until they are violated by a body that refuses to behave as it should."[92] At the same time that Ultimate players acknowledge that "there are differences" between men and women when it comes to physical and athletic ability many make an effort to

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[90] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010.

[91] Rosemary Carlton, 26 March 2010.

[92] Gail Weiss, *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality*, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 2.

acknowledge the accomplishments and abilities of women players. For instance, when Craig talks about the time his men's team "stomped" an all-woman's team, he is careful to emphasize that "it wasn't [because of] skill. They were much more skilled than we were. It was just physical difference."[93] And sometimes, bodies that don't behave as they should are applauded. Ken Lange, for example points out that

> there are a couple of women [who can play with the guys]. For example, Nikki Brackstone. Often a guy will have to cover her and you have to explain to him that 'She is not a girl. Cover her like a man.' And they don't, and they get lit up! I covered Nikki one time. And this is when I was playing competitive, so I was in better shape then. I swear she ran me up and down the field, back & forth, back & forth ... I was taking her seriously and it was all I could do to keep up with her. She is good. She is really good. And she's fast. And she is tireless. And she will run you into the ground.[94]

Despite a recognition that some women are athletically gifted and many women can and do dedicate themselves to the pursuit of sport, work and train as hard as men, hone skills, and contribute as substantially to a team's success, the physical differences between men and women continue to inform the ways that players speak about and understand the game. Entrenched cultural ideas about men and women, athleticism, and competition come into conflict with the rhetoric and ideology of fairness and gender-equality.

The evolution toward a 4/3 gender ratio was a response to increasing female participation in the game, the demand by women for more of a presence on the field, and also an attempt to address the obvious inequities in the game itself. With a gender ratio of 5/2 women can be easily marginalized. John Harris explains that "five guys could

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[93] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010.

[94] Ken Lange, 11 June 2010.

easily play against five guys and the four women on the field didn't get involved in some games." And that, he maintains, "was just so frustrating to be a part of and to watch."[95] Whereas, explains Ken Lange, "to do that in 4/3 you have to have four phenomenal guys. 4/3 allows the women to get more involved in the game because if you don't use your women in 4/3 you will lose! Whenever you watch co-ed play, the teams that win are invariably the ones who make best use of their women."[96] Jean-Lévy agrees that "la meilleure stratégie c'est d'utiliser les filles autant que les gars."[97] How to make best use of the women then, becomes a problem that can be solved by intelligent strategizing. Some players suggest that this added dimension makes co-ed Ultimate a more challenging version of the game. One successful strategy, of course, is to recruit strong women players in the first place. Jean-Lévy, for instance admits that "j'ai toujours joué avec des excellentes joueuses, donc je vois pas la différence. Je le vois dans les autres équipes où les filles sont peut-être des fois moins fortes. Mais dans mes équipes j'ai pas eu ces problèmes. J'adore la gang, j'adore le philosophie." And, he makes sure to add, "les 'partys' c'est plus de fun quand il y a des filles aussi."[98]

By no means do I want to make the claim that Ultimate's gendered evolution is complete, but 4/3 has, nonetheless, proven to be a very successful format. Despite a rocky start in some places, players seem to have adjusted to it, recognizing that it is a

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[95] John Harris in *TUC: Thirty Years in Thirty Minutes*.

[96] Ken Lange, 11 June 2010.

[97] Jean-Lévy Champagne, 12 January 2011.

[98] Ibid.

much more equitable (though still a long way from egalitarian) way of playing together. However, close scrutiny of these stories reveals that while the intent is to convey a progressive, liberal, narrative of inclusion, fairness and gender equality, there remains, embedded within the language, a residue of masculine privilege. Comments such as "cover her like a man," and "use your women" illustrate how women who excel are described as exceptions and should be treated *like* men, and when women are included in the action on the field, they are still not seen as directing it. No one has to remind the players to make good use of the men on the field. Perhaps sport has not (yet?) developed a vocabulary adequate to the task of communicating an atmosphere where women's and men's contributions can be treated equally.

Where language falls short, perhaps actions can be a more effective barometer. As a spectator at the Canadian Ultimate Championship (CUC) held in Ottawa in 2002, I was watching the final game in the Mixed division. I noticed that there was a woman who kept making great cuts to get open, but her handler kept 'looking her off.' It did not take long for others to notice what I had and the next time the handler looked off this woman, the crowd erupted in a chorus of loud boos. After a couple of these, the handler did throw to this player and the crowd erupted in an even louder chorus of cheering. Marginalizing female players can be interpreted as a display of poor sportsmanship. Many players told me similar stories of crowd response to egregious examples of 'bad spirit' where "it's as if the community collectively decides that we will not accept such

behaviour."[99] Without referees or other external arbitrators, "the main method of enforcement is shaming" and instances of collective peer regulation can be read as a means of upholding community standards which includes gender-equality.[100]

In addition to its gender, family, and team dynamics, Ultimate players talk a great deal about the sport as a 'social network.' Ottawa player, Ken Lange says that "almost everyone I know is either Ultimate people that I've played with or friends of Ultimate players that I've met at parties. There's the odd work person thrown in, but basically my entire *social network* over fifteen years, is Ultimate players."[101] And this idea of a social network of Ultimate players extends beyond the local scene. Speaking to a Montreal sports reporter in 1991, Wendy Bain described "that *network* of people around the world who play Ultimate: if you show up in a town, you can find an Ultimate player and they're your friend – automatic. It's sort of like a code word."[102] Illustrating that almost two decades later the experience of a network of Ultimate players is still a salient one, Erin Van Regan comments how "the people I've met over the past couple of years have been so amazing" and "if I manage to make it out to Winnipeg for a tournament I know people I can call and know that they'd be happy to have me stay with them. I've got friends in almost every major Ultimate city in Western Canada ... it's been great for my *social*

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[99] Geneviève Després, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 5 July 2010.

[100] Ken Hunt, 10 March 2010.

[101] Ken Lange, 11 June 2010, emphasis added.

[102] Wendy Bain, interviewed by Scott Russell for CBC Sports, August 1991; VHS recording provided by Tony Boyd, emphasis added.

network, which expands with every tournament."[103] While some complain that the recent

growth of the sport makes an intimate sense of community more difficult to sustain,

nonetheless a feeling of acceptance and collegiality between Ultimate players persists.

The practice of "pick-up" is another example of the openness, and inclusivity of

the Ultimate community and it is also an important way that the sport is disseminated and

its culture transmitted. Initially, the development of a pick-up culture was a symptom of

and pragmatic response to the small size of the Ultimate community. Knowing this,

individuals could arrive at tournaments and fully expect get picked up by a team and be

able to play. This culture of pick-up was not isolated to Canadian tournaments – it was

an integral part of the sport generally. Moreover, the skill and experience of the person

being picked-up usually mattered little. Keith Whyte, for instance, was first exposed to

Ultimate while working at a youth hostel in Europe. In 1982, although he had never

played before, he was picked up by a British team for the European Championships being

held in Namur, Belgium. Upon his return to Ottawa, he was then able to contribute to the

growth and development of the city league where, in addition to playing, he acted as the

director of the annual No Borders tournament – a volunteer position he held for twenty

years![104] The practice of picking-up at highly competitive tournaments has declined as

the pool of players has grown, as competitive play has become more serious, and as

stricter rules about rosters and eligibility have been implemented. But this aspect of the

culture has not disappeared. It has also evolved and become somewhat formalized as, for

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[103] Erin Van Regan, 18 August 2008, emphasis added.

[104] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010.

example, in 'hat' tournaments where players register individually and are made into teams by the tournament organizers – the name refers to the drawing of names from a hat. Some tournaments will reserve space for a 'hat team.'[105] Pick-up encourages the idea that there is a "universal bond between Ultimate players."[106] And it also helps to explain how local, regional, national, and international interpersonal networks develop between Ultimate players. Loving the sport is often enough to be accepted into an international community of like-minded people.

The internet and online communication facilitates this process. Some people see a connection between Ultimate's explosive growth in the 1990s and 2000s and the widespread use and popularity of the Internet. But Ultimate, in fact, has a much longer digital history. "Whatever the newest thing was," claims Ken Hunt, "Ultimate was there, just because of all the techies."[107] Long before email, websites and blogs became commonplace, a "small but fervent" group of disc enthusiasts had been making use of Usenet's online discussion forums. Ultimate's own group, rec.sport.disc (RSD), was added to Usenet in 1991 and in addition to being an "unlimited supply of cringe-inducing sophomoria," "whining," and "a litany of rehashed arguments," RSD provided a forum

[105] One of the most successful hat tournaments is Zodiac, where teams are made according to astrological sign. Interestingly, Scorpio and Aquarius are frequent winners at Zodiac. I have attended four Zodiacs and my sign, Gemini, has never done well. Zodiac is also interesting because, originally held in Toronto, it attracted many players from New York State, and the tournament now alternates annually between the cities of Toronto and Rochester.   It has been running since 1998.

[106] Tony Boyd, 28 September 2010.

[107] Ken Hunt, 10 March 2010.

where players shared useful information.[108] Ken Hunt remembers making daily use of this service, and that "before the websites were significant at all, RSD was the method of communication in the Ultimate world."[109] In the 1990s, even more newsgroups and online forums allowed players to quickly communicate ideas, strategies, frustrations, and news over a seemingly borderless vista. Ultimate players have, undoubtedly embraced online communications and social networking tools. Websites and blogs are now the predominant means of sharing information; formerly printed materials such as newsletters and magazines are mostly now also produced and distributed online. Moreover, according to team captains, league organizers, and tournament directors, the advent of email "was a freakin' godsend!" because it allows them to more quickly and effectively communicate with players.[110]

The popularity of online communication and the growth of Ultimate do seem to dovetail. Yet I have found no compelling evidence to suggest that the Internet should be credited with Ultimate's explosive growth. People are not drawn to Ultimate because they come across a blog or website; Ultimate is not something discovered online. Rather, the Internet is a tool used by people already familiar with Ultimate. Rita M. explains how the Internet provides the means to communicate with organizations "anywhere across the country or internationally." For example, she claims "if I'm going to Brazil for a month, I can post a note on a site in Brazil, saying, 'hey, I'm going to be in this location, is there

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[108] Leonardo and Zagoria, *Ultimate*, 96

[109] Ken Hunt, 10 March 2010.

[110] Ibid.

any disc going on?' Or, I can click on that site and find out if there's something going on and just show up." That way, "I can play Frisbee anywhere I want."[111] Christiane relates a similar experience:

> Quand je suis allée en Vancouver en 2004, je suis allée sur le 'net'... [chercher] Vancouver, pick-up, Ultimate ... J'ai trouver un site, puis j'ai demandé: "I'm here for two weeks, I want to play some Ultimate... where can I go?" Ils m'ont dit, bien, ce weekend, c'est notre tournoi fin de saison, si tu veux, viens. Je me suis installée au 'disc central,' puis il y avait un capitaine qui avait eu des cancellations, il n'avait pas assez de filles. Puis il demandait "is there a girl? Are there any girls who could play with us?" J'ai levé la main puis dit "yes, me, can I?" Puis j'ai jouer avec eux toute la journée. Puis là j'ai fait des contacts. Ils m'on dit où aller à Vancouver. Un aspect de friendship qui s'est créer.[112]

I do not want to dismiss the importance of the Internet, nor claim that online tools have had no effect on how Ultimate has evolved – in many ways leagues have become dependent on the new technologies and could not manage their current volume of communications without them. But neither do I want to attribute to them an effect they did not have. As Evgeny Morozov recently cautioned, "it's important to avoid falling victim to Internet-centrism and focusing only on the intrinsic qualities of online tools at the expense of studying how those qualities are mitigated by the contexts in which the tools are used."[113] While "digital media have extended their reach into the mundane heart of everyday life," what we accomplish with the technology, *what we use it for*, is

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[111] Rita M. 11 February 2010.

[112] Christiane Marceau, 20 January 2011.

[113] Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 148.

not essentially different or new.[114] Jeffrey Juris reminds us that "the internet

complements and *reinforces*, rather than replaces, face-to-face interaction."[115] A more

accurate assessment of the relationship between Ultimate and the Internet, I suggest is to

claim that they have a long and intimate history. The Internet helps organizers to

efficiently manage information and allows players already hooked in through

interpersonal networks to access more Ultimate, more quickly, more often and to expand

those interpersonal networks: "Quand tu pars dans un autre pays ou une autre ville, et que

tu découvres où sont les gens qui jouent au Ultimate, tu découvres une communauté."[116]

While online tools are ubiquitous and extremely useful for initiating connections,

Christiane's anecdote illustrates that face-to-face communication and a shared experience

of playing together remain important to the cementing of Ultimate ties.

Rather than seeing communities as either static or geographically-bounded

entities, researchers increasingly seek to understand them as a combination of imagined

reality, social interaction and process.[117] Indeed, this is a very useful framework for

understanding Ultimate. The stories people tell about playing Ultimate reveal that they

very much understand it as more than a sport but also as a transnational community of

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[114] Gabriella Coleman, "Ethnographic Approaches to Digital Media," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39 (October 2010): 488.

[115] Jeffrey S. Juris, *Networking Futures: The Movements Against Corporate Globalization*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 13, emphasis added.

[116] Christiane Marceau, 20 January 2011.

[117] John C. Walsh and Steven High, "Rethinking the Concept of Community" *Histoire Sociale / Social History* 32/64 (1999): 255-273.

like-minded people. Clearly relayed in these stories is the sense that Ultimate is an intense set of interpersonal experiences, an ongoing process of incorporation, and a culture in transmission. Sarah Ahmed claims that "to consider the investments we have in structures is precisely to attend to how they become meaningful" and by articulating Ultimate as a community, players are able to make sense of, to attach meaning to their experiences.[118] One of the central features of this imagined community, however, is the idea that Ultimate is *different*. The disc, the game, the people, and the experience of playing, are understood as elements fundamentally *unlike* those found in other sports.

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[118] Ahmed, 56.

CHAPTER 2

Performing Difference:
Myths, Rituals, and the Symbolic Construction of a Sport

> Understanding ritual practice is not a question of decoding the internal
> logic of a symbolism but of restoring its practical necessity by relating it
> to the real conditions of its genesis.
> – Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*

> What interests Bourdieu is the genesis, 'the mode of generation of
> practices;' not, as in Foucault, what they produce, but what produces
> them.
> – Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*

The Ultimate community is rooted in a shared experience of playing. Yet within that experience there is the possibility of a wide variety of perspectives, opinions, and orientations toward the sport and its practices. Anthony Cohen argues that "in the face of this variability of meaning, the consciousness of community has to be kept alive through the manipulation of its symbols."[1] Like all communities, Ultimate has stories that it tells about itself and rituals that it performs in order to help discipline its members. Because community is both a process of exclusion as well as inclusion, much of Ultimate's ritual behaviour is "concerned with the generation of meaning and its investment in the boundary."[2] Ultimate is a sport that claims to do things differently. How then, do Ultimate players use myth, symbol, and ritual to create, police, and transgress boundaries?

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[1] Anthony B. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, (New York: Tavistock Publications, 1985), 15.

[2] Ibid., 19.

Origin Stories

"Like any good tale," claims Kirsten Walters, "the story of Ultimate's origins has a number of twists and tangles."[3] But it is often claimed that Ultimate is a sport that was invented by hippies. And while the link is somewhat tenuous, it is an association that has proven to be tenacious. Ultimate did, indeed, emerge in the late 1960s and early 1970s, at the same time that the hippie counterculture was gaining in popularity and notoriety. While the link is now essentially connotative, the conceptual connection between Ultimate and the hippies is very real.

Walters argues that "the promoters of Ultimate have attempted to construct a central narrative that positions Ultimate as a sport that emerged out of the counterculture to offer an exemplary alternative sporting model."[4] This myth of hippie origins then reinforces the idea that Ultimate is a different, alternative, and by implication, *better* way of "seeing, doing, and understanding sport."[5] That Ultimate is a 'hippie sport' is a story that is continually retold (by both its supporters and its detractors) and an image that persists partly because the non-conformist values and ideals of difference inherent in Ultimate dovetail nicely with the anti-establishment ethos articulated by the hippie counterculture.

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[3] Kirsten Walters, "Ultimate Spin: Contesting the Rhetoric, Countercultural Ethos and Commodification of the Ultimate 'Frisbee' Sport, 1968-2008" (PhD diss., American Studies, University of Iowa, 2008), 157.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Belinda Wheaton, *Understanding Lifestyle Sports: Consumption, Identity, and Difference*, (London: Routledge, 2004), 4.

Walters' assessment that "a majority of the sport's players as well as mainstream journalists have helped to shape and uphold this central narrative," is certainly true. Yet it is not the whole story. In addition to upholding the central narrative of difference, there have clearly also been periodic attempts to dispel it. This revisionism appears in the press,[6] the sport's literature,[7] and in academic studies[8] as well as informal discussions with players and organizers. While the hippie origin story functions as a guiding principle in one respect, the idea that Ultimate is a 'hippie sport' is often used derisively as a way to undermine its legitimacy as a *real* sport and this presents a problem for Ultimate boosters. The danger in cultivating a close association with hippie culture is that negative connotations come along for the ride and for this reason, "the label isn't always welcomed."[9]

George Lipsitz claims that "any retrospective account of the sixties inevitably

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[6] "I saw no bikinis, I saw no dogs. I didn't even hear people debating existentialism. I saw a world of disc-flinging jocks, playing a version of Frisbee that was both entertaining and physically taxing." Adam Richardson, "These Players are Serious about Frisbee" *Halifax Daily News*, 18 August 2008, SPORTSNews, 62.

[7] "Stereotyped as hippie, Ultimate is actually preppie." Pasquale Anthony Leonardo, *Ultimate: The Greatest Sport Ever Invented by Man,* (Halcottsville, New York: Breakaway Books, 2007), 76.

[8] "Players increasingly come to the sport already invested in mainstream sport, in love with competition, enthused by the notion of media attention, longing for well-organized events, intrigued by opportunities for sponsorship, and willing to train hard to win." Walters, 128.

[9] Andrea Baillie, "Frisbee Game Ultimate in Fun, Players Say," *London Free Press*, reprinted in *Edmonton Journal,* 30 June 1995, E.2.

runs up against our collective societal capacities for remembering and forgetting."[10] Indeed, many have forgotten that the rationale underlying much of the counterculture's objectionable or bizarre behaviours was a politics of protest. In addition to sex and drugs "baby boomers used clothing, hairstyle, and rock and roll as rebellious political gestures against mainstream social values"[11] And the whole notion of counterculture is more complicated than it at first seems. Doug Rossinow explains that "this category has always been a heuristic device ... used to group together values, visual styles, social practices, and institutions that were widely disparate but considered by most to be unified in their rebellion against the dominant culture."[12] The term 'hippie' also, therefore, "encompasse[s] a broad social reality" because regardless of their political leanings, it was "used as a category in the sixties to label indistinctly people who wore particular attire, had long hair and in the case of men, had facial hair."[13] In the minds of many, 'hippies,' a specific manifestation of baby-boomer rebelliousness, get lumped together with other social and cultural movements and their images conflated so that "in the

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[10] George Lipsitz, "'Who'll Stop the Rain?': Youth Culture, Rock 'n' Roll, and Social Crises" in David Farber, ed., *The Sixties: From Memory to History*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994): 208.

[11] Marcel Martel, *Not This Time: Canadians, Public Policy, and the Marijuana Question, 1961-1975*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 5.

[12] Doug Rossinow, "The New Left in the Counterculture: Hypotheses and Evidence," *Radical History Review* 67 (1997): 79.

[13] Marcel Martel, "'They Smell Bad, Have Diseases and are Lazy': RCMP Officers' Reporting on Hippies in the Late Sixties," in M Athena Palaeologu, ed., *The Sixties in Canada: A Turbulent and Creative Decade*, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2009): 171.

popular memory of 'the Sixties,' cultural and political rebellion were and are indissolubly linked."[14]

But, as Fred Turner remarks, "today, it is the counterculture's hedonism that many remember best; the drug use and open sexuality of long-haired youths."[15] Moreover, in the 1990s, for instance, sentiments such as "'I associate the word hippie with people who just sit around and smoke dope and don't do anything to change the world" indicate that, for many gen-Xers, the hippie label had lost any positive connotations.[16] This is problematic for Ultimate players and often leads to statements which attempt to distance themselves from the hippies. Ultimate, claim some participants, "has a misunderstood reputation for being a kind-of-hippie, smoking dope and 'whatever' kind-of sport, when it really takes a lot of dedication, a lot of hard work and sportsmanship."[17] Denigrating statements toward hippies are often coupled with ones pointing to the positive lifestyle choices of Ultimate players in an attempt to shed any negative associations. For those who want Ultimate to be taken seriously, affiliation with the 'dirty hippies' has to be denied.

We should, however, be careful not to dismiss the hippie image simply as

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[14] Rossinow, 79.

[15] Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Steward Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 32.

[16] Bailie, "Frisbee Game Ultimate in Fun."

[17] Louise Dickson, "High Flyin' Frisbee Fanatics Test their Mettle for National Title," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, 17 July 1997, 1.

falsehood. Not everybody, for instance, agrees that the hippie label is either inaccurate or particularly harmful. Older players insist that in the early days Ultimate did "have a counter-culture air about it."[18] Ultimate Players' Association founder, Tom Kennedy certainly expresses this view. With respect to the game's origins, he remarks that "the climate was right, ... people were questioning authority, shying away from the traditional, looking for alternate expressions."[19] And the hedonistic practices that we now associate with the hippies were part and parcel of that culture. "It was a package," claims Eric Lewis, who began playing Ultimate at Cornell University in the mid-1970s. "Drugs, mainly hallucenogenic drugs and cannabis products," he explains, "were not absent from the field in tournaments; road tripping, spliff, Ultimate, was all part of the thing you did – *and we did do that*."[20] Tony Boyd, who began playing in Ottawa in the mid-1980s agrees that "marijuana culture and Ultimate were inextricably linked."[21] A typical Ultimate tournament could easily be likened to "a Grateful Dead concert, but with a lot more running."[22]

While there is reason to believe that Ultimate was entwined with a countercultural scene in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, there is much convincing evidence that this is

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[18] Eric Lewis, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 2 June 2010.

[19] "Scenes from interview with Tom 'TK' Kennedy (taken 2001)," *Ultimate: The First Four Decades,* accompanying DVD, produced by Joe Seidler (2005).

[20] Eric Lewis, 2 June 2010, emphasis added.

[21] Tony Boyd, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 28 September 2010.

[22] Craig Fielding, interview by author, Ottawa ON, 11 June 2010.

83

no longer the case. Very few players these days describe themselves, their teammates, or opponents as hippies. Reflecting upon changes to the sport, one Halifax player observed that "there's been a very clear shift away from the original group of people who, for one reason or another, did not fit in to mainstream culture, including mainstream sports, towards those who now help define the mainstream."[23] Ultimate players describe themselves as typically middle-class, urban, university-educated professionals. And the drug culture, while not completely gone from the Ultimate scene – Ultimate's politics of inclusion, mean that a tolerant attitude toward recreational drug use remains – has "been diluted by popularity."[24] As the sport grows and appeals to a wider circle of people this aspect, once central, has been pushed to the periphery.

Additionally, some of the sentiment towards the hippies seems overtly hostile. Couched in the language of trash talk, comments like this one point to an underlying contempt for the old school Ultimate scene:

> two and a half decades of evolution saw masses of cleated gladiators crush the handfuls of sandal-bearing hippie kids; we will fake your ankles out of their sockets, sky you so bad you'll be inhaling the leftover mud on our cleats, and dive straight through you, grabbing discs to leave you feeling robbed beyond your deepest comprehension,[25]

Paul Connerton, however, claims that "to pass judgement on the practices of the old

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[23] Dan Kehler, "Seven on the Line: How has Ultimate changed in the last 25 years?" *Ultimate News,* 24/1 (Spring 2004): 10.

[24] Tony Boyd, 28 September 2010.

[25] Melody Hui, "Seven on the Line: How has Ultimate changed in the last 25 years?" *Ultimate News*, 24/1 (Spring 2004): 10.

regime is the constitutive act of the new order."[26] And in that vein, the attempt to put

distance between Ultimate and its countercultural image, to portray Ultimate as "a *real*

sport, played by *real* athletes," can be recognized as both a conscious and unconscious

strategy to bring Ultimate closer to, if not mainstream sports themselves, then the

legitimacy and recognition that they enjoy in the popular culture.[27]

Despite these attempts from various people at various times to dispel it, the hippie

label remains an iconic theme, trope and symbol within the sport. It has taken on the

function of an invented tradition. Commonly understood as "a custom that purports to be

of greater antiquity than it is,"[28] I instead use the term, "invented tradition" as defined by

Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger as "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly

or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain

values and norms of behaviour by repetition," and which "attempt to establish continuity

with a suitable historic past."[29] It can also be seen operating as a "myth" which Anthony

Cohen describes as "an expression of the way in which people cognitively map past,

present and future." Cohen explains how "in the struggle to interpret, we use our past

experience to render stimuli into a form sufficiently familiar that we can attach some

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[26] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 7.

[27] Richardson, "These Players are Serious about Frisbee," emphasis added.

[28] Mark Dyreson, *Making the American Team: Sport, Culture, and the Olympic Experience*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 26.

[29] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

sense to them."[30] Or, as Pierre Nora describes, a means by which "we seek not our

origins but a way of figuring out what we are from what we are no longer."[31]

Recognizing that "for good or ill," the hippie days are over, the Ultimate community has

adopted an ironic use of this invented tradition and the imagery has become ubiquitous in

Ultimate newsletters, blogs, 'zines, and websites, paradoxically strengthening the

conceptual connection between the Ultimate and the hippies.[32]

Despite its drawbacks, the 'hippie' label has proven to be a very useful tag

because, as Cohen argues, "symbols are malleable, [and] can be made to 'fit' the

circumstances of the individual, [and] can often be bent into idiosyncratic shapes of

meaning without such distortions becoming visible to other people who use the same

symbol at the same time."[33] As such a meaning-laden image, "hippie" is often employed

as shorthand to quickly explain to outsiders what Ultimate is all about. Whereas some

Ultimate players are die-hard evangelists, others may find themselves in situations where

they are "not feeling up to the task of explaining what Ultimate is."[34] For example, in

response to the question, "why are there no referees?"– rather than getting into a lengthy

discussion about *Spirit of the Game* (SOTG), describing how Ultimate positions itself

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[30] Cohen, 99.

[31] Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory*, Volume I, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 13.

[32] Dan Kehler, "How has Ultimate changed?" 10.

[33] Cohen, 18.

[34] Eric Reder, "Road Trip: Getting Your Priorities Straight," *Chasing Plastic Magazine,* 1/1 (Summer 2001): 59.

differently from mainstream sport, or explaining how the presence of referees actually encourages cheating and dilutes sportsmanship – an Ultimate player might simply reply: "it's a hippie thing." This is often heard in response to queries about what's going on both on and off the field – and since everyone has an ingrained understanding of what 'hippie' means, no further explanation is usually required.

Ultimate players use the hippie tag as code among themselves as well. For instance, a comment such as "we had a lot more hippie-dippy types," I understand to mean, not that the people in question were actual hippies, but rather as a reference to people who were out to have fun and be silly, who used the rules as guidelines, and were not as interested in winning the game as in playing it.[35] It is a nostalgic reference to a time when the sport was thought to be more laid-back. And because another common association with the hippies was their eventual 'sell-out,' its use can be understood as lamenting the loss of a predominance of those attitudes. But its use by players can also represent a more insular sentiment: "you couldn't possibly understand this sport, so I'm not going to bother trying to explain it to you." Ultimate players can use the tag to police boundaries and to help keep outsiders outside. *We* know that it is more than just a hippie sport. The hippie label might invoke images of 'free love,' 'free-spiritedness,' 'social protest,' or even 'dirty, lazy, apathetic, pot-smokers' and these connotations help explain many of the sport's seemingly bizarre elements: the self-refereeing, the cheering, the nudity, and other practices. And precisely because so many of the things we associate with hippies are elements of the sport, it makes the label even more unshakeable. To

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[35] Ken Hunt, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 10 March 2010.

whichever use it is being put, the hippie origin story is a powerful mythology; not a lie or misrepresentation, but rather a story that helps explain Ultimate to Ultimate players and to others.

Spirit of the Game

Spirit of the Game is touted as the thing that most "sets Ultimate apart from other competitive team sports."[36] It is primarily the upholding of this doctrine of sportsmanship, many players and organizers believe, that makes Ultimate different from other competitive sports. Ultimate players recognize that they did not invent sportsmanship, but they insist that Ultimate is different in that it does more than pay lip service to the idea. "All sports have a sense of decorum and fair play," claims Tony Leonardo, "but Ultimate takes sportsmanship seriously."[37] Similarly Lorne Beckman, member of the UPA Standing Rules Committee, claims that "it's nothing unique to Ultimate. It's sportsmanship, that's really all it is." But, he continues, "unfortunately that's completely lost on pretty much any professional sports nowadays. I see very few examples of any true sportsmanship. Watch a game of soccer. It's crazy, it's the opposite of sportsmanship, people will do whatever they can to win and that's contrary to Ultimate."[38] Yet Lorne also believes that spirit is subjective: "Spirit is personal. Every

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[36] Ultimate Players Association, "Spirit of the Game," http://www1.upa.org/spirit (accessed 10 November 2005).

[37] Leonardo, *The Greatest Sport,* 21.

[38] Lorne Beckman, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 7 April 2010.

interpretation is different, and each is equally valid. Don't ever let anyone persuade you to adopt theirs. ... in the end, it's not what you think about Spirit that guides you, it's what you think about yourself that guides your Spirit."[39] For him, spirit is ideally about "finding the spot in the universe where you're ok with yourself and your actions on the field, and you're ok with everyone else's actions, and you're out to have fun, regardless of where it is or who you're playing ... double game point at Worlds or first pick-up game in the snow ... it should be the same."[40] Ultimate players, moreover, cast spirit as compatible with highly competitive play. Mark "Shaggy" Zimmerl, for instance, admits that "I am very competitive and I do want to win, I love winning, but there's no honour in winning if you have to cheat and bend the rules."[41] He explains how

> I had played a lot of team sports and set them aside ... because, as I grew into an adult body, and was relying on referees, there was all this chippiness that developed in the games, it was no longer for the pure fun of it. It just got nasty, I was getting elbows in the ribs when the ref wasn't looking, there were fights breaking out between my own teammates, I appreciated less and less my teammates and the people I was playing against. It wasn't fun. Why play a sport where you have to demonize your opponents in order to play well?[42]

Ultimate, therefore, claims to practice sportsmanship whereas other sports seem prone to gamesmanship.[43]

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[39] Lorne Beckman, "ESS OH TEE GEE" *Discours,* (May 1998): 6.

[40] Lorne Beckman, 7 April 2010.

[41] Mark "Shaggy" Zimmerl, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 5 October 2010.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Michael Oriard, *Sporting with the Gods: The Rhetoric of Play and Game in American Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 16.

Spirit of the Game is codified and is placed upfront in the *Official Rules of Ultimate.* Yet, when asked to describe SOTG, very few players recite the clause from the rules. Instead players talk about respect, self-refereeing, fair play, dressing up, cheering, and love of the game. Because it encompasses a constellation of subjective elements spirit can mean different things to different people. This has allowed the concept to evolve over time. But it also means that there can be differences of opinion as to the appropriate ways that it should be performed. Ken Lange claims, for example, that "people new to the game often confuse SOTG with 'being nice.'"[44] Christine Sura agrees that

> Spirit is not fully understood by all the players. There's a team that I've played on, where it was all about Spirit, and winning didn't matter. People didn't care if you couldn't catch, at all. It was all about being happy [and] gay and silly, and showing your booty ... the personality of the team was very gay and joyful. We wore pink, and it was all about style and having your hot pink top and having pink socks and headbands and trying to match ... and they were all about Spirit of the Game and thought that they were so spirited in their game because they were into doing cheers, and writing long cheers – which is part of Spirit of the Game – but a handful of people on the team probably never read the rules, and didn't know how to play, and didn't care. They thought they were being spirited, but personally, I think you need to know the rules and understand the game a little more in order to fully abide by Spirit of the Game. It's still a sport ... so another thing about this really fun team is that they weren't really very athletic, and made no effort to appreciate it *as a sport*. It was all about style, and pink, and happy, and cheer, but there was a lack of respect for the sport.[45]

In addition to a "lightheartedness to leaven the competition," Ken Hunt also describes playing with spirit as having "respect for other players." For him, this means "having

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[44] Ken Lange, interview by author, Ottawa, ON, 11 June 2010.

[45] Christine Sura, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 12 May 2010.

respect for their safety, but also respecting their opinion: simply acknowledging that two people can experience the same event very differently."[46] *Respect* is the element of *Spirit of the Game* that veteran players emphasize most. SOTG is often explained as having respect for one's opponent and "behaving with integrity on the field."[47] This, like other dearly-held Ultimate concepts, can be traced back to sporting ideas that were circulating in the nineteenth century. Baron de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympic movement, for instance, "spoke of respect of the peoples of the world for one another" and viewed the Olympics as a means "to promote peace and understanding among nations by fostering 'Victorian' ideals of sportsmanship."[48] Yet *respect* can also be a subjective, mutable concept thus making it highly useful in many situations.

Which behaviours can be considered respectful are often subject to debate among players. The results from an online poll taken by *Ultimate News* in 2003 demonstrate this propensity. When asked, "Does spiking the disc contradict Spirit of the Game?" one response was: "Yes. A big part of SOTG is not defacing or disrespecting your opponent. By spiking a disc, you are demonstrating a lack of respect for your defender and a lack of respect for your teammates." Another player took the opposing view: "Absolutely not! I believe that the Spirit of the Game is founded on respect for one's opponents on the field.

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[46] Ken Hunt, 10 March 2010.

[47] "Scenes from interview with Tom 'TK' Kennedy."

[48] John J. MacAloon, "Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle in Modern Societies" in *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance,* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984), 260; Donald Macintosh and Michael Hawes, *Sport and Canadian Diplomacy*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 165.

Spiking the disc (anywhere but on or at a defender) effectively conveys the ineffable joy

of scoring a goal against a worthy defender, and ought to be taken as such."[49] While both

players invoke the concept of SOTG being about respect for one's opponent, they

interpret what can be construed as respectful behaviour very differently.

Somewhat ironically, the belief in Ultimate's closer adherence to sportsmanship,

can sometimes perpetuate a superior attitude and an undertone of condescension toward

Ultimate's "less civilized cousins: football, hockey, and basketball."[50] This is partly

because these sports seem to display a propensity for gamesmanship, but it also reflects

the perception that they are excessively violent or aggressive. Eric recalls that "I didn't

like the person I was when I was playing basketball. I was aggressive and angry.

Ultimate neither tends to tolerate that nor endorse it."[51] It is easy, therefore, to infer that

"Ultimate attracts a special quality of person ... not necessarily better, but ... better."[52]

One observer recently commented that "the fact that we elevate, value, and reward key

components such as sportsmanship, fair play, and respectful camaraderie among

opponents is extremely unique in the world of sports" but he maintains that "we are not

morally superior to other sports. We are not the only sport to emphasize principled

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[49] "Seven on the Line: Does Spiking the Disc Contradict Spirit of the Game?" *Ultimate News*, 23/3 (Fall 2003): 10. *Ultimate News* reported getting "over 200 responses to this question. 36% believe spiking does contradict SOTG, 30% believe that it does not, and 34% fell somewhere in between."

[50] Pat Harris, "Take Pride in Ultimate Defence," *BCDSS newsletter,* (April 1989): 19.

[51] Eric Lewis, 2 June 2010.

[52] "Scenes from interview with Tom 'TK' Kennedy."

sportsmanship, and we are not sufficiently mindful of that fact." Chastising Ultimate

players for their superiority complexes, he points out that "some of us have not displayed

the appropriate level of humility and awareness, especially to the outside world" and "we

have a tendency to come off as self-righteous, holier than thou, and frankly, simply naive

and annoying."[53] As these comments indicate, there is nothing inherently better about

Ultimate players, but it does sometimes seem that way to insiders. John Harris explains

that because "you have to be co-operative and respectful to opponents, the ultra-

competitive, high-level testosterone people tend not to fit in, or they're frustrated and go

away, *or they change,* and that's the coolest."[54] The culture of sportsmanship in

Ultimate, like that of aggression or gamesmanship in other sports is, therefore, learned

behaviour.

While admitting that SOTG is much more than singing songs, dressing strangely,

getting naked, being generally silly, and nice to each other, players – even veteran players

– nonetheless, associate these things with *Spirit of the Game*. This is because these are

ways that players give material expression to the more subjective elements of SOTG and

extend those performances beyond the game itself. Cohen claims that, "most symbols do

not have visual or physical expression but are, rather, ideas" and "this may make their

meanings even more elusive."[55] Yet Ultimate players, it seems, have found ways to give

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[53] David Barman, "Non-Paper: Spirit of the Game and Innovation in Officiating" *Ultimate Canada Magazine,* no. 7 (2011): 31.

[54] Catherine Porter, "Paying the Ultimate Price," *Toronto Star,* 1 June 2003, B.06, emphasis added.

[55] Cohen, 18.

their ideas physical and visual expression. Many of Ultimate's ritual practices, including

its acceptance of gender-bending, nudity, and a general carnival atmosphere, can be

understood as material, visual ways that this (real or imagined) difference is performed.

By adopting the hippies's "performative sensibility" Ultimate players are able to

similarly "challenge the social and emotional rigidities of mainstream culture" and mark

their sport as different.[56]

Rituals

An obvious way that Ultimate players set themselves apart from mainstream sport

is in the way that they name themselves. A name gives a group of individuals a

collective identity. And it allows players to announce that identity as alternative. Tony

Leonardo, for instance, jokingly cautions "don't name your team anything that's a sports

cliché, like Wildcats, Bobcats, Mountain Lions, Jaguars, Tigers, Cougars, Panthers, etc.

Ultimate doesn't do that."[57] There are six common types of Ultimate names: the "sainted

obligation" to somehow incorporate "disc," "Frisbee," or "Ultimate" into the name;

names that reference the body, sex, or nudity; names that reference drugs or alcohol;

names that are pop culture references; puns and deliberately ironic names; and names that

reference place.[58] Ultimate names may at first seem bizarre, but upon closer reflection,

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[56] Turner, 32.

[57] Leonardo, *The Greatest Sport*, 93.

[58] Examples of typical Ultimate names: disc names; Discombobulation, Ultimatoes, Disclexics, Frizz-bee; sex & body names: Snatch, Lady Godiva, Callipyge, Holes & Poles, Viscous Coupling, Whiskey Disc; substance names: the Buds, Herb and

they are only strange in their superficial differences from the conventional names taken

on by mainstream sports teams. They make perfect sense if we take a closer look at what

they are referencing. By choosing clever, ironic, silly, or untypical names, Ultimate

players differentiate themselves from other sports teams. And they do so in a manner that

clearly references their sport, its culture, and their sense of community identity.

Team names present another opportunity for Ultimate players to police

boundaries. Some names make no sense to outsiders, but may have meaningful

etymologies for insiders. For instance, some team names "spill out from the teams that

parented them ... like family trees of Ultimate teams." This happens often at the league

level. As individuals leave teams to start new ones, they often keep some reference to

their former team, particularly if there is some salient connection. But it also happens at

the competitive level where teams will use a particular element of their name as reference

to their origins or relationship to one another. Names of the competitive teams in Ottawa,

for instance, have an interesting genealogy. In the 1990s, WAX was the elite men's

competitive team. Their name originated from Brian Guthrie, who claimed that his team

would play "balls-out Ultimate" and anyone who wasn't up for the challenge would get

their "PP whacked." So, 'PP Whacks' was the first name they went by. It eventually

changed to the more stylized 'WAX.' This inspired other teams to be ironic: a league

Mary Jane, Bombing Mad Fatties, Opiate of the Grasses, Bunch of Stinkin Drunks; pop
culture references: Flaming Moes, See Jane Run, Serenity Now; puns and ironies:
Furious George, Huckin' Foes, Old & in the Way (Masters), I need to Sit, Merely
Players, Our Best Guy's Not Here Today, Well Flung; place names: Winnipeg General
Strike, Riot (Seattle), Bytown Flatball Club (Ottawa), Vieux Montréal (Montreal
Grandmasters). Obviously there is overlap between categories. The best names are those
that can simultaneously tap in to as many of these themes as possible.

team humourously called itself 'EarWax;' there was also, briefly, a competitive team called 'Sphynxter Wax.' Over the years, players came and went, and when enough of the original members had left, the team decided it needed a new name to better reflect a new generation of players. The name they chose, 'Phoenix,' references this process of renewal, but by keeping the 'x' at the end of the name they were also paying tribute to the players who had come before them. Their B-team, Firebird, doesn't have any obvious connection to 'WAX,' but clearly has a thematic link to 'Phoenix.' And the current Ottawa Juniors team, 'ResurreXion,' is continuing the pattern.[59]

The story behind a team's name is rarely public knowledge and team names can have multiple layers of meaning. Stuart Henderson claims that "appelation is a profoundly powerful act – it is both to endow a thing with a recognizable individuality and to establish its social and political (not to mention historical) context/meaning" which can then be "debated, evaluated, [and] *(mis)understood*."[60] The competitive team, 'GOAT,' has such a name. Most people understand that it is an acronym and various speculations as to what the letters stand for have been proposed over the years. According to *Ultimate News* it means 'Greater Ottawa and Toronto.' But I was told that it stands for 'Greatest of All Time,' which was controversial, because while Open teams often adopt strong, or aggressive-sounding names, this one was perceived as too arrogant, even for an elite-level team. Yet, there was an alternate meaning for those who knew the

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[59] Craig Fielding and Ken Lange, 11 June 2010.

[60] Stuart Henderson, "Toronto's Hippie Disease: End Days in the Yorkville Scene, August 1968" *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 17/1 (2006): 216, fn 37, emphasis added.

story: 'Greatest of All Time' was originally the ironic name of a lower level league team which underwent the tragic death of one of their players. A member of that team who went on to play competitively and help form the elite team wished to pay tribute to that friend by keeping the name.[61] Names, therefore, can often carry deeper cultural significance for insiders. Moreover, because "the process of shared remembering can powerfully exclude outsiders when the people involved belong to an existing long-term network of companionship and sociability," the story of a team's name can act as a shibboleth.[62] By telling the story, disclosing the meaning of a name, insiders are selecting those for induction into a circle of cognoscenti, and acting as transmitters of culture.[63] Thus, naming is a practice that does double-duty. It is a way that Ultimate players perform difference, and it allows veterans to engage in powerful acts of inclusion and exclusion.

One of the ways that Ultimate players perform spirit is by recognizing or 'acknowledging' their opponents in some fashion. Cheering -- changing the lyrics of well-known tunes and serenading your opponents as recognition of an enjoyable on-field experience -- fulfills this function. Cheering also helps to diffuse any residual

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[61] Rosemary Carlton, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 26 March 2010.

[62] Talja Blokland, "Bricks, Mortar, Memories: Neighbourhood and Networks in Collective Acts of Remembering," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 25/2 (June 2001): 279.

[63] The story being told need not be accurate for this process to occur. Both WAX and GOAT stories, for example, were told to me by different people, in different cities and I have no way to verify their accuracy. Yet they share a similar thematic structure that highlights community, continuity, solidarity, and tribute, telling me that those are meaningful tropes for veteran players.

competitive tension since "it's hard to stay angry at a team when you are singing them a

song."[64] Tony Leonardo claims that "post-game cheers are sometimes considered an

extension of Spirit of the Game."[65] Montreal players recall that when they first began

playing in the mid-1990s cheering was akin to presenting "a gift to the other team," and it

was considered essential: "the game was not done until each team had cheered each

other."[66]

'Slagging' refers to a particular type of cheer designed to tease, make fun of, or

disparage the other team. Players describe it as "good-natured ribbing."[67] True slag

artists, however, following the credo of "the cruder, the better," often crossed over the

line of good taste.[68] Montreal players recall "g[etting] off on writing the filthiest

[64] Amy Cameron, "Ultimate Fun," *New Brunswick Telegraph Journal*, 26 July 1999, np.

[65] Leonardo, *The Greatest Sport*, 73; Leonardo spells out the "Five Steps to Proven Post-Game Cheers: Step One - Pick a song that everyone can sing along to. At least one person should actually know the song by heart. Step Two - Change a substantial portion of the lyrics to compliment the other team on the game just played, regardless of outcome. Step Three - Write the cheer large enough on a dry-erase board so that everyone will be able to crowd around and read it clearly. It is better if fifteen people sing a mediocre cheer loudly than if one person sings a good cheer well. Step Four - Sing it hard and long - sing the crap out of it. Instrumental breaks must be hummed or beat-boxed. Interpretive dance, partial nudity, and a ceremonial presentation of beads are encouraged - even expected. Step Five - Clap or rah-rah for the other team, smile cheesily and awkwardly, exchange pleasantries and return to your sideline." Leonardo, *The Greatest Sport*, 73-4

[66] Rosemary Carlton, 26 March 2010.

[67] Craig Fielding and Ken Lange, 11 June 2010.

[68] Lindsay Bales, "We'll be Singin,'" *Discours,* (October 1998): 12.

cheers."[69] Some of "those cheers were nasty! And there was a real competition to see who could be the most crude."[70] But, in a friendly environment such as the municipal league, where "everybody knew everybody else, ... slagging your friends was fun."[71] Even at tournaments, where opponents may not know each other as well, slag cheers have been used as expressions of friendship or as acknowledgment for a particularly enjoyable game. There was, however, an unwritten etiquette to slagging – one that could be lost on the uninitiated. Veteran players are adamant that slag cheers were reserved for "the teams that we really liked."[72] Rose Carlton explains that "against teams we hated, we'd still give them a cheer, but it would be a happy, friendly, lovey cheer." Only "if you love a team" she maintains, would "you slag them."[73] Thus receiving a cheer that had no slagging component was actually a thinly-veiled insult. Again, a seemingly simple practice is shown to be rife with ironies, and can be shown to be yet another way that Ultimate players police boundaries.

There are a couple of explanations for the decline of the cheer. It is a common belief among players that cheering first fell out of fashion at the competitive level. As SOTG came to be associated more squarely with the appropriate way to comport oneself *on* the field, off-field and post-game expressions of spirit eventually became superfluous.

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[69] Rita M., interview by author, Montreal, QC, 11 February 2010.

[70] Rosemary Carlton, 26 March 2010.

[71] Rita M., 11 February 2010.

[72] Luc Drouin, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 6 June 2010.

[73] Rosemary Carlton, 26 March 2010.

In the mid-nineties "teams like Boston and New York, these elite teams in the States," who, while maintaining an interest in sportsmanship and fair play, "had no interest in 'let's do a song after the game' kind of spirit."[74] For competitively-minded people, this kind of expression of spirit was seen as a distraction. Perhaps inspired by trends in the United States, competitive players were increasingly encouraged to keep their focus on the actual game and to use the time between games to mentally prepare for the next one, rather than waste time thinking about writing a cheer.

In 2001 at my first tournament with a women's team, I was told (apologetically) by another team captain that "we don't cheer." While they were happy to let us cheer them, they did not reciprocate. Indeed, most of the other teams seemed to have abandoned the practice and my team was looked upon as something of an amusing anomaly. Tony Leonardo points out that at the competitive level, "post game cheers are considered quaint but they are still in vogue for summer leagues and super-fun tournaments."[75] Moreover, he remarks that "the effort put into making a cheer, is usually inversely related to the intensity and athleticism of the game."[76] Choosing not to cheer can, therefore, serve to mark a team's high level of commitment to serious competition. Increasingly, cheering was considered by many competitive teams to be representative of the wrong attitude toward competition, or something that more appropriately belonged at the recreational level. Also, in a scenario where the same travelling teams might be

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[74] Ken Hunt, 13 March 2010.

[75] Leonardo, *The Greatest Sport*, 71.

[76] Ibid., 73.

meeting "every other weekend" over the course of a summer tournament circuit, "are you really going to cheer each other every time?"[77] Eventually, it became unnecessary as camaraderie was fostered by familiarity, mutual respect, and special events provided by the tournaments.

The decline of cheering at the recreational level can be partly attributed to rec players taking the lead from their competitive counterparts. But that is only a partial explanation. Many players attribute the decline of cheering indirectly to the discovery of Ultimate by large groups of 'outsiders.' The rapid expansion of the city leagues meant that more and more people were coming to the game already familiar with other sports, but rather unfamiliar with Ultimate. There seemed to be "more sports-minded people playing Frisbee than Frisbee-minded people playing a sport."[78] With their mainstream competitive mindsets these 'athletic types' seemed to have a different approach to the game: "as more players accustomed to rougher sports filter into the game, Ultimate is becoming more 'gooned up'" and "besides being more aggressive, these players usually have a less-than-perfect understanding of the game."[79] This had what some consider a predictably negative effect on expressions of spirit both on and off the field.

The growing athleticism of the game, and its deleterious effect on sportsmanship, however, was a constant concern throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s making it

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[77] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010.

[78] Dan Brown, "Ultimate Frisbee is Dating Game Co-Ed Sport" *Globe and Mail,* 19 August 1996, Sports, C.12.

[79] Ibid.

difficult to pinpoint a specific time when the trend began, or if it was more imagined than real. This suggests, I think, that 'athletes' are often used as scapegoats in a moral panic over the watering down of SOTG. Many veteran players, for example, recognize that they too, were once uninitiated novices to both the game and its culture. "When I first started I didn't understand that I was doing anything wrong," says Ken Lange. "But I had people there to instruct me ... [now] as leagues grow, there are teams of all new people and no one to pass on the sense of what the game is all about."[80] So the problem was not simply that more 'athletes' were discovering the game. The trouble lay in that rapid league growth led to an imbalance in the numbers of people familiar with the game, its rules, and its etiquette and able to transmit the culture to those who were not.

Busy playing at the competitive level, or isolated in the higher league divisions, veteran players often remained unaware that whole groups of people had no one to mentor them, and many new teams and players were left to figure it out on their own, without any idea that they might be getting some important elements wrong.[81] Only as these new teams advanced and met veteran players, did the difference in attitudes become apparent. Thus, by the time league organizers realized they had a problem, it was already rampant. Many leagues established Spirit Committees in an attempt to address incidents of poor spirit. These committees had the "gargantuan task" of trying to impart a "Frisbee mentality to people who had no concept of it."[82] And "trying to regulate the belligerence

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[80] Ken Lange, 11 June 2010.

[81] Fadi Hobeila, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 13 May 2010.

[82] Rita M., 11 February 2010.

was difficult. It took years to get that under control ... [that teams weren't] cheering was the least of our worries!"[83]

In this climate, where opposing teams would, more often than not, consist of strangers, some of whom were uninitiated to the game's culture and traditions, slag cheers also became increasingly inappropriate. "Is this a team we can slag?" became a real concern. Rita M. claims that "the mentality of the sport was adjusting. The idea of celebrating the fact that we just played became watered down; overwhelmed by players with no idea that that could be part of the competition."[84] Once the subtleties of the slag cheer became lost, it also lost its function as a gesture of respect and friendship and was more often taken as insult.

But acknowledging one another has not disappeared; it has morphed into other – some may argue, more appropriate -- practices. Ken Hunt, for instance, explains that

> ... something I've realized about Ultimate players over the years [is that] even the highly competitive ones tend to be simply quite addicted to games. And this is why cheers have evolved into playing a game, a different game, after the game. We've just finished a game, but now we're going to play another little game that will only take five or ten minutes. And Ultimate players, even the competitive ones, like that – they can't get enough games.[85]

Acknowledging one another can be done with a quick game (such as a rock/paper/scissors race), bestowing of prizes, sharing of food, or a brief 'hip-hip-hooray.' In many international tournaments the 'spirit circle' where teams come together

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[83] Rita M., 11 February 2010.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ken Hunt, 10 March 2010.

and discuss the game *post facto* takes the place of cheering. While not as elaborate or creative, these practices replace the cheer as means of diffusing tension, fostering camaraderie, and expressing sportsmanship.

However, while admitting that it could seem silly or even lame, not to mention that to do it well is time-consuming and difficult, most people, even the most vehement cheer-haters, have fond memories about a particularly spectacular cheer, gifted cheer-writer, or slag artist. "Certain people," claims Rose, "are so incredibly creative and talented and you could witness that when people were doing cheers."[86] Some players lament the loss of the cheer and have expressed the wish to see that particular aspect of the game revived.[87] But is it the cheers that they miss? Or is cheering used as a symbolic representation of a sense of community that many feel they are losing and wish to recover?

Ultimate is also known for its gender-bending and general carnival atmosphere. Sport historians explore the stories told by the human body at play and one of the most important ways that bodies tell their stories is with clothing. Clothing serves as a marker of subjective identity, vehicle of expression, and symbol of group affiliation or ideological persuasion. It is one of the relevant 'technologies' that both disciplines sporting bodies and allows observers (spectators and historians) to 'read' them. Yet, the important work continuously being done by clothing usually goes unremarked. So culturally embedded is the language of dress that "we seldom notice clothing unless it is

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[86] Rosemary Carlton, 26 March 2010.

[87] Ken Lange, 11 June 2010.

particularly flamboyant or outlandish."[88] But, observes Charlotte Suthrell, "once it crosses into the world of blurred genders and unacceptable wearers, it moves intensely into focus and acts as a very material marker of ideas, notions and theories."[89]

Ultimate bodies are sometimes difficult to read because they often clothe themselves ambiguously: men and boys periodically wear skirts and other pieces of feminine decoration; women also sometimes wear skirts and adopt hairstyles which complicate the reading of their athletic bodies; and naked and semi-naked displays are not uncommon. Thus nudity and cross-dressing are fairly common occurrences in Ultimate. Almost everyone has a story about someone playing in a skirt or other bizarre costume. And most players also tell stories about either witnessing or participating in acts of nudity.

Public nudity is a socially transgressive behaviour. We are not conditioned to see naked bodies in most public venues. When we do, we may have a range of reactions: surprise, fear, disgust, outrage, or confusion. Outside of prescribed areas where nakedness is expected and controlled (eg. strip clubs, art galleries) delight and appreciation are rarely the elicited responses. As Ruth Barcan astutely observes, "nude may be natural, ... but in a clothed society it's not 'normal.'"[90] Public nudity is not something that is normally tolerated and clothing, therefore, becomes conspicuous by its

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[88] Charlotte Suthrell, *Unzipping Gender: Sex, Cross-Dressing and Culture*, (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 3.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ruth Barcan, *Nudity: A Cultural Anatomy*, (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2004), 179.

absence. In a culture dependent upon a bifurcated gender order, instances of cross-dressing can be equally disturbing. We are immediately uncomfortable when a person's sex is not readily apparent, when clothing seems to be paired improperly to biological sex, or when clothing and dress prove unreliable indicators of sex and gender. Once again, outside of controlled spaces where it is expected and its meanings and messages understood (eg. theatre) cross-dressing disrupts the social order.

So, why do these practices persist? Why are these otherwise respectable people engaging in such unruly behaviours? Importantly, Victor Turner reminds us that "not all instances of subversion of the normative are deviant or criminous"[91] and Pierre Bourdieu comments that "nothing seems more ineffable, more incommunicable, more inimitable, and, therefore, more precious, than the values given body."[92] Practices of nudity and cross-dressing are, I suggest, bound up with Ultimate mythologies. As Varda Burstyn observes, "the culture that surrounds physical performances is as important as the physical acts performed."[93] If one then takes the notion of "camp as a critique of the very idea of 'normality,' a set of theatrical performances that highlight the artificiality of sociosexual roles through burlesque and parody,"[94] and applies it more broadly to

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[91] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), vii.

[92] Bourdieu, *Outline,* 94.

[93] Varda Burstyn, *The Rites of Men: Manhood, Politics and the Culture of Sport,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 15.

[94] Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 150.

sporting structures, might the appearance of camp in Ultimate be read as the adoption of the means of critiquing gender and sexuality into a critique of the dominant ways of "seeing, doing, and understanding sport?"

Additionally, it is important to recognize that this behaviour is performed in a 'closed-circuit' manner that outsiders rarely see. Ultimate players are not always running around naked and in drag. Indeed, most recreational and competitive Ultimate conforms to the dominant sports model of conventional dress and deportment. Ultimate clothing lines have emerged which mimic the commercial styles of many other field sports; cleats, shorts and team jerseys have become the standard Ultimate uniform. As recreational Ultimate becomes more mainstream, and as local, regional, and international competitions have become increasingly serious and fierce, this is reflected in sartorial practices in that displays of nudity, cross-dressing, and other old-school rituals seem to have become generally less pervasive. They have not, however, disappeared. Nudity and cross-dressing appear most often in the contained space of the tournament. Reflecting upon her own experiences with "getting your gear off," Rita M. says that "when you did something – when you think about it, totally socially unacceptable – people loved it! They told you to do it again. They applauded. They gave you prizes! So, yeah, it was encouraged.[95] Indeed, many popular tournaments encourage these performances by acting as "sites of ritual exception" where nudity and cross-dressing have come to be entirely expected and appropriate.[96] In the contained space of the Ultimate tournament,

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[95] Rita M., 11 February 2010.

[96] Barcan, 166.

sartorial displays that might otherwise be considered deviant act as normalized rituals that are put to productive use.

Ultimate is a sport riddled with ironies and paradoxes. Recognizing this helps us to make sense of its seemingly bizarre sartorial rituals and nudity and cross-dressing cease to seem like quixotic escapism and begin to appear discursively important, pointing to broader themes, tensions, and anxieties within the Ultimate community. While initially, it seems paradoxical that Ultimate players are performing these displays for one another, this suggests that they have a disciplinary function. Nudity and cross-dressing persist because these sartorial performances do, indeed, express ideas, notions, and theories about the sport by modeling Ultimate mythologies. They reinforce for old-school veterans and illustrate forcefully for newcomers the core ideals of Ultimate and help to school participants in these tenets. These behaviours reinforce and help disseminate ideas about non-conformity, inclusivity, and *Spirit of the Game*; they also reveal tensions about gender and status; and provide material support for the myth of a unique (yet often ambivalent) collective identity.

Nudity and cross-dressing function well as an articulation of difference in Ultimate partly because they already carry meaningful discursive connotations and associations of protest and difference. The hippies made use of clothing and dress to express an ideology of difference. Sartorial non-conformity is something that the counterculture engaged in for political effect. Nudity, for instance, (which the hippies borrowed – or hijacked – from various twentieth-century anti-modernist movements)

represented, for them, "a symbol of and a pathway to sexual and social liberation."[97]

Similarly, by flagrantly disobeying its gendered dress codes, the hippies expressed a

political stance that questioned the moral authority of the established order. Non-

conformity of dress paralleled a political or social non-conformity. Nudity and cross-

dressing do very similar work in Ultimate. By embodying a (real or imagined)

connection with the anti-establishment ethos of the1960s counterculture, they invoke a

narrative of protest. This reiterates the idea that Ultimate is, at its heart, a countercultural

movement. Since the association with the hippie counterculture acts as an origin story,

practices of nudity and cross-dressing function as ritualized, material reminders of that

story. Ultimate players are sartorially performing their difference.

When men and boys don skirts and other feminine decoration they are not really

dressing as women or attempting to disguise their sex, but rather adopting the theatrical

practice of 'working with pieces.' Marjorie Garber describes this as the deliberate mixing

of "sex-role referents within the sartorial system," such as "an earring, lipstick, [or] high

heels, ... worn with traditionally 'masculine' clothing ... so that the artifactuality ... is

brought to consciousness."[98] The caricature of femininity, the 'wrongness' of the visual

signs, draws attention to the sexed body underneath the clothes and works as an ironic re-

articulation of masculinity. By working with pieces, then, the men and boys who play

this 'hippie sport,' a sport that is played by and with women, are actually asserting their

[97] Barcan, 176.

[98] Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety*, (New York & London: Routledge, 1992), 152.

masculinity and making a claim to a certain kind of manliness, while at the same time

performatively paying homage to the origin story and giving their ideals physical

expression.

But what about the women? What does it mean when they wear skirts? On one

hand, women are simply doing what many of the men are doing: participating equally in

the playful sartorial rituals of Ultimate. At another level, however, they can be seen to be

engaging in their own gendered critique. This is not quite so apparent, since it is not so

obviously recognizable as cross-dressing and does not have the same immediate ironic

impact. It is, however, clearly still working with pieces. And, I think, it has a very

similar purpose and effect, namely to draw attention to the sexed body underneath the

clothes. In the realm of literature and art, for instance, Christine M. Havelock asks

whether clothing "does in fact conceal and protect the body beneath? Is its purpose to

cover erotic areas, or is it instead a clever device to prevent us from forgetting them?"[99]

Could it be doing similar work on the Ultimate field? Since the default uniform is an

androgynous costume of shorts and jerseys, the women who adopt more conventionally

feminine pieces are reinscribing femininity (and with the mini-skirt and pigtails,

heterosexuality) onto their androgynized bodies. While 'playing with the boys' women

use clothes and decoration to loudly proclaim their femaleness (and sexuality), and are

claiming a 'place' for their bodies on the field – troubling a conventionally understood-

to-be-masculine space.

[99] Christine Mitchell Havelock, *The Aphrodite of Knidos and Her Successors: A Historical Review of the Female Nude in Greek Art*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 32.

It is, however, important to remember that Ultimate bodies speak in a subjective, as well as a collective register. For some individuals, engaging in nudity and/or cross-dressing is simply a means of participating in the anti-establishment culture surrounding the sport and taking part in its longstanding rituals. Rita M. explains that "it comes right back down to Spirit of the Game – showcasing how much you love the sport to the point where you're willing to make a total fool of yourself!"[100] And Ultimate players often surprise even themselves, with the lengths to which they are willing to go to demonstrate this love for the game.

But at the same time this engagement is a way of claiming 'insider' status within the culture and the practice of dressing unconventionally reveals yet another policing of boundaries. It is crucial to point out that these practices are mediated by skill. Neither men nor women can "wear a skirt to play unless [they've] earned the right."[101] Earning that right consists of displaying a balance between athletic prowess and Ultimate attitude. Participating in Ultimate rituals, and more importantly, knowing when and where they are appropriate, indicates one's Ultimate literacy, one's familiarity with and adherence to the sport's values – and significantly, separates insiders from outsiders.

Prescribing Diffference?

The Ultimate community is rife with ambivalence about its myths, rituals, and performances. That these have not disappeared despite strong mainstreaming influences

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[100] Rita M., 11 February 2010.

[101] Ibid.

points to the important cultural work that they do. As suggested above, however, not all Ultimate players embrace these rituals. Many view them as nostalgic, and quaint, but not particularly relevant anymore, and some perceive them as overtly detrimental to the public image of the sport. Significant parts of the Ultimate community, it seems, have variously lost interest in such means of performing difference.

Cheering, for example, is viewed with plenty of ambivalence. Some players lament the decline of cheering and have expressed the wish to see that particular aspect of the game revived. Others feel that cheering has largely lost its meaning and that "you might as well give it up, if it's just another thing you gotta do."[102] Some people, of course, simply never liked cheering and are happy to see the practice fade away. And some take an extreme position expressing a desire to see cheering banned altogether.

Nudity and cross-dressing, too can be problematic. While some interpret acts of nudity as harmless expressions of "free-spiritedness,"[103] or even find it "liberating"[104] to engage in these performances, others are less enthusiastic about the practice. Moreover, such practices can present a problem for organizers trying to maintain good relations with neighbours, landowners, and municipal authorities. In Montreal, for example, "l'arrondissement Verdun ne tolerera pas le bruit excessif et ou des actes d'incivilité tels que se déshabiller en public" and contravention of these policies and regulations can

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[102] Eric Lewis, 2 June 2010.

[103] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010.

[104] Rita M. 11 February 2010.

negatively affect the ability of city leagues to secure necessary access to urban spaces.[105]

Something as deceptively simple as a team's name, which is another potential means of proclaiming difference can prove controversial. Team names, for some, "reflect the casual inclusiveness of the game,"[106] but can sometimes be interpreted as in poor taste, insensitive, or "vulgar."[107] I myself, once left a team because I found its name offensive and did not wish to be associated with it.

For these reasons, many of Ultimate's rituals have fallen prey to both formal and informal means of regulation. For instance, at the 2005 Ultimate Players Association (UPA) Club Championships "two teams in the Mixed division were asked to change their names" because they "were not in line with the UPA's championship guidelines." While recognizing that "a team's freedom to name themselves what they want" was coming into conflict with "community standards and interests," Kyle Weisbrod, UPA Director of Youth Development, urged players to

> think about how your language reflects the sport to a first time spectator, how your heckling is heard by the parent of a player, and how your team name will look in the UPA magazine in the hands of the parent of a 14 year old that just joined the UPA and needs her parents' approval of the sport to keep playing.[108]

Canadian leagues too, have started regulating team names. The general manager of the

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[105] Ville de Verdun, Contrat d'utilisation 2002-2CT000762-0075807, supplied by Lorne Beckman.

[106] Ken Lange, 11 June 2010.

[107] Eric Lewis, 2 June 2010.

[108] Kyle Weisbrod, "What's in a Name?" *Ultimate News,* 26/1 (Spring 2006): 4.

Association de Ultimate de Montréal, tells me that for the past two years, the league has

begun to put a stop to names they consider inappropriate. With respect to vulgarity, she

says that "on demandra pas à une équipe qui existe depuis quinze ans de changer son

nom, mais une nouvelle équipe qui s'incrit qui veut metre un nom dans cette mentalité,

on n'accepte plus. Parce que sans limite, sa dégénère."[109] And she admits that it is

largely in order to grow the juniors divisions that they've begun to impose limits. In

order for the sport to grow, to gain more recognition and legitimacy in the public eye, and

to conform to the requirements of private and civic authorities, aspects of Ultimate's

ritual practices that can be interpreted as lewd, obscene, illegal, or otherwise offensive are

prescribed. But regulation is not always overt. Pointing to negative outcomes such as

"we'll lose our fields," "minors won't be allowed to play," and "we won't get

sponsorship," organizers encourage players to self-police and refrain from potentially

objectionable behaviours *in the best interest of the sport.* This is, in one sense,

pragmatic, but it assumes that everyone shares the same vision for the sport's future.

Moreover, it serves to further marginalize some of the practices that do the work of

marking Ultimate as different.

    As a result of both formal and informal curtailing of Ultimate's rituals and

performances, even more onus falls on the "moral ideology"[110] of SOTG to be *the*

essential thing that marks Ultimate as different from mainstream sport. In this climate,

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[109] Christiane Marceau, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 20 January 2011.

[110] J.A. Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal*, (New York: Viking Penguin, Ltd., 1985), 17.

where Spirit is "designated as already under threat in the present" it becomes "installed as that which we must fight for in the future"[111] and Ultimate players are encouraged to conceive of their sport therefore as "unique, not because we swill beer or have a puff between games, not because we wear long hair and tie-dye uniforms, and not because we play with a piece of plastic instead of a ball, [but] because we have a completely different attitude toward competition."[112] Ultimate's adherence to sportsmanship as practiced *on* the field, through respect, fair play, and self-refereeing, becomes all-important as these other cultural manifestations of difference are denied, discouraged, and increasingly hidden from public view.

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[111] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2004), 77.

[112] Rick Collins, "UPA Referees: Can Canadian Ultimate Be far Behind?" *Ultimate Canada,* (Spring 1990): 9.

CHAPTER 3

Making Progress?:
The Struggle for Canadian Ultimate

> A player in one city told me that when Ultimate is utilized by large corporations as a marketing tool, they'll hang up their cleats [while] in another city people are working relentlessly to make professional Ultimate feasible, and a reality.
>
> -- Eric Reder, *Chasing Plastic Magazine*

As Ultimate took root and grew in popularity in Canada, it was marked by many conflicts and sometimes heated disagreements over how to proceed. From its beginnings Ultimate has been organized and run by the people who play. Player-centredness is a noticeable theme running through the sport's literature, its mythologies, and my interviews. Ultimate belongs to the players; it is *our* sport and the debates about its future are often informed by the sentiment "where do *we* want it to go?"[1] But in spite of Ultimate's friendly, cooperative image, sometimes likened to "a great big group hug," players do not always agree on which directions they want their sport to take.[2]

DisCanada (1985-)

One of the ways that Ultimate migrated to Canada was by piggybacking on the popularity of the other disc sports. True disc enthusiasts "loved *all* disc sports ... not just

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[1] Erin Van Regan, interview by author, Calgary, AB, 18 August 2008.

[2] Hanneke Brooymans, "The Ultimate in Sportsmanship: What really Sets the Frisbee Sport Apart is its Philosophy," *Edmonton Journal*, 17 August 2001, B.I.

Ultimate."[3] In major centres like Toronto and Vancouver, the Ultimate scene grew out of

a broader, more encompassing disc sport culture. Torontonian Chris Lowcock, described

as a "frisbee fanatic," a proficient disc golfer as well as an avid Guts and Ultimate player

recalls that "the scene was overall - you played everything."[4] The first organized

Ultimate league in Canada was started in Toronto in 1980 by a group of "top

freestylers."[5] In the 1970s, Ken Westerfield was one of the best freestylers around, and

he has been credited with popularizing disc sports in Toronto.[6] Similarly, on the west

coast disc sports were popular on the lower mainland and Vancouver Island long before

Adam Berson, "one of the city's top freestylers and a devoted Ultimate player and

advocate," helped form the Vancouver Disc Sport Society, later the British Columbia

Disc Sport Society (BCDSS), in 1986.[7]

In the 1980s Canadian disc enthusiasts were busy establishing themselves and

their sports. In 1986, *The Globe and Mail* reported that "legitimate teams, leagues,

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[3] Eric Lewis, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 2 June 2010.

[4] Karen Shopsowitz, "Frisbee enthusiast hoping to open disc golf course" *Toronto Star*, 25 August 1987, N18; Chris Lowcock in *TUC: Thirty Years in Thirty Minutes*, Otto Chung, dir. (2010) http://iamultimate.com/videos/tuc-30-years-in-30-minutes/# (accessed 2 February 2011)

[5] Richard Kelly Heft, "Ultimate Frisbee," *Toronto Star,* 7 August 1988, H8.

[6] *TUC: Thirty Years in Thirty Minutes*. See also Toronto Ultimate Club, "Ken Westerfield," in *TUC Hall of Fame*, http://www.tuc.org/halloffame (accessed 16 March 2010).

[7] Nick Rebalski, "Frisbee Frolics," *Vancouver Sun*, 22 August 1987, D1; British Columbia Disc Sport Society, "About the BCDSS," http://www.bcdss.bc.ca/about/index.html (accessed 29 June 2011).

associations and world championship tournaments" were "sprouting at a furious pace

across Canada for such Frisbee offshoot games as Ultimate, Guts, Disc Golf and the

classic Free-style."[8] Many Ultimate players were heavily involved (often more involved)

with the other disc sports. But that experience was not universal. In Montreal, for

instance, there was no comparable disc sport scene when Ultimate was introduced to

students at McGill University in the early 1980s. Players in Ottawa, also appear to have

been introduced directly to the game of Ultimate.[9] In the 1980s, a discernible distinction

emerged (in both Canada and the United States) between "Frisbee players" who

participated avidly in multiple disc sports and "Ultimate players" who primarily or

exclusively played Ultimate.[10]

In 1985, twenty-two-year-old Chris Lowcock created DisCanada (the Disc

Involvement Society of Canada) to help organize and oversee disc sports in Canada.

Following both American and European organizational models, Lowcock believed that

"as disc in other parts of the world is being formally recognized as legitimate competitive

activity, Canada should not be left behind."[11] And he had ambitious plans for his new

[8] Linda Masse, "An Ultimate Sport, Competitors Say Frisbee Players Seek Recognition," *The Globe and Mail*, 7 August 1986, D5.

[9] Three of the key founders of the Ottawa league can be identified as Ultimate players. Marcus Brady, learned about Ultimate during his years at McGill, Keith Whyte was introduced to Ultimate at the European Championships in Namur, Belgium, while he was working overseas, and Craig Fielding was introduced to the game of Ultimate by playing pick-up on Sundays.

[10] John Harris, interview by author, Toronto, ON, 23 July 2010.

[11] Christopher Lowcock, "President's Message," *DisKraze*, 1/1 (June 1985): 3.

organization. Lowcock sketched this vision in the inaugural issue of DisCanada's

newsletter:

> While being the medium for this country's talent abroad, DisCanada will
> concurrently strive to promote and improve the quality of Disc sport
> within Canada. The organization will represent Canada's Disc enthusiasts
> as a unified voice when seeking corporate sponsorship, Government
> Funding, Media coverage, etc., etc.[12]

Lowcock's vision involved fundraising, sponsorship and media attention and he was

clearly committed to increasing public exposure to and awareness of disc sports.

Meanwhile, as one of the more popular disc sports, Ultimate began to develop a national

character of its own. The 1980s saw the proliferation of Ultimate clubs. In addition to

the Toronto Ultimate Club (est. 1980) players in other Canadian cities such as Calgary,

Ottawa (est. 1985), Vancouver (est. 1986), and Winnipeg (est. 1988) formed their own

recreational leagues, established annual tournaments,[13] and began introducing Ultimate to

people in their local regions.[14]

In 1987 Ultimate players in Ottawa took it upon themselves to host a national

championship. Tournament director Marcus Brady mined his vast personal network of

contacts and "by word of mouth and sending out invitations" these first nationals

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[12] Lowcock, "President's Message," 3.

[13] Vancouver's Flower Bowl (est. 1978) Calgary's Ho-Down (est. 1985) and Ottawa's No Borders (est. 1985) are some of the longest running Ultimate tournaments in Canada.

[14] It should be noted that Ultimate took hold not only in large metropolitan areas but also in places with more modest population bases. Lasqueti Island, BC and North Bay, ON both had a presence early on the Canadian Ultimate scene.

attracted eight Open and two Womens teams.[15] Teams from Ottawa, Toronto, Calgary,

Vancouver, and Montreal were expected. And there were some surprise attendees: a

newly formed team from Winnipeg as well as a team from North Bay.[16] The tournament

took place at St. Paul University the weekend of August 20th - 23rd, 1987. In an upset in

the final game, the Toronto 'Darkside' emerged victorious over the favoured Calgary

'Cynics' to be the first Canadian Ultimate Champions.[17] The establishment of the annual

national championship tournament was an important landmark but it brought with it

many issues specific to that event which would become contentious over the next decade.

The rift between Ultimate players and Frisbee players became more apparent

when Ultimate players took umbrage at their treatment at the 2nd National Ultimate

Championships. Organized by Chris Lowcock on relatively short notice, and held in

Toronto in conjunction with the Canadian Open Overall Championships, this tournament

illustrated to many Ultimate players that Lowcock had a very different approach to the

organization and management of the sport. Reporting in their local newsletter, some

players from Ottawa claimed that this national tournament had "turned out to be a fairly

poorly organised affair."[18] Ultimate players mainly objected to what they perceived to be

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[15] Tony Boyd, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 28 September 2010.

[16] The Open teams represented were Vancouver 'Flaming Sallies,' Ottawa 'Pulltoys,' Calgary 'Cynics,' Winnipeg 'Reactionaries,' Ottawa 'Rays 'n' Terrain,' McGill University, Toronto 'Darkside' and North Bay 'Nads.' The two Women's teams were Ottawa's 'Northern Lights' and a nameless team representing Toronto.

[17] A detailed description of the events of the tournament appears in *DisKraze,* 3/4 (1987): 14-19.

[18] "Nationals Update," *TOUR*, (July 1988): 2.

the unprecedented and unjustifiably high entrance fees. Craig Fielding recalls that "one

of the things that did not sit well was the fees were jacked up to around $40 / player – that

seems low by today's standards but at the time it was a huge fee for any tourney."[19]

Moreover, it was felt that the fees collected from 128 Ultimate players "subsidized either

the organizational charges or the prize money for the [fifty-one] non-ultimate players."[20]

Ultimate players strongly felt that they had been overcharged and underserviced.

Lowcock disagreed on all counts. Addressing the accusation of mismanagement

Lowcock responded that "this tournament was, as far as I was concerned, well organized.

There were volunteers and proper paper work for all entrants" and "every penny was

documented and accounted for." Claiming that "every event went smoothly – except for

Ultimate," Lowcock pointed out that Ultimate players could shoulder much of the

responsibility for their unsatisfying experience: "games did not start on time, scores were

not reported, score boards not returned, garbage was left everywhere, [and] not all

participants registered."[21] With respect to the fees, he accused his critics of ignorance

and inexperience arguing that

> if any of you people had been to any real disc tournaments, whether in the
> US or International, you must pay to play. Disc golfers fork out anywhere
> from $20 to $30US per weekend (and yes this also makes for their prize
> money). International tournaments cost anywhere from $50 to $500 for a
> week of play (and yes that sometimes includes food and accommodation
> and yes the tournament director and crew make $1000 off the concessions,

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[19] Craig Fielding, e-mail message to author, 19 October 2010.

[20] Mike Davis, "Letters," *Ultimate Canada,* (Winter 1989): 2.

[21] Chris Lowcock, "Nationals '88 Financial Update," *Ultimate Canada,* (Winter 1989): 8.

but they put the tournament together).

Lowcock, who did not see a problem with the organizers being compensated for their time and effort, clearly felt he was being unfairly attacked. And in terms of services he argued that by failing to register on time "and seeing and hearing what was available" Ultimate players failed to avail themselves of all the tournament had to offer. His motives, he maintained, were wholly laudable: "I took the time because no one else was doing a thing and I thought Nationals was important and needed some help." Most noticeable is Lowcock's repeated use of the term "you people" indicating his defensiveness as well as a sense of separation from his critics.[22]

Ottawa's Brian Guthrie seemed to agree that Ultimate players could be an apathetic, lackadaisical, and ungrateful bunch. While admitting that "there were lots of problems with this year's Nationals," Guthrie went on to chastise the complainers pointing out that, "at least Chris Lowcock DID SOMETHING. That's a lot more than the rest of us can say."[23] This hints at a division within the Ultimate community between those willing to do the work (and willing to recognize those who do the work) and those who take the behind the scenes effort of organizers and volunteers for granted. Organizers agree that "Ultimate players hold you to a high standard."[24] And tournament directors are often easy targets for criticism. "Dealing with complaints and issues from [the players]" claims Giles Deshon, "is a big part of the weekend" when running a

[22] Lowcock, "Nationals '88," 8.

[23] Brian Guthrie, "Letters," *Ultimate Canada,* (Winter 1989): 2.

[24] Ken Lange, interview by author, Ottawa, ON, 11 June 2010.

tournament. "In any group of more than twenty people" Deshon estimates that "there

will be at least one person who will come to me to complain about the fee, there will be

three people who complain about the food, four who complain about the draw, four who

complain about their seedings and six people who will complain about the DJ."[25]

According to John Harris, "Ultimate players don't understand how hard it is to run a

tournament. You have to put your life on hold, and nobody understands that."[26]

Guthrie's main point, however, was that the 1988 nationals had been a missed

opportunity to "talk about a national organization and national communications."[27]

A small but vocal group of Ultimate players came to believe that they had a

different set of priorities from those expressed by DisCanada and they understood their

interests as separate from those of the other disc sports. Bolstered by their sour

experience at the 1988 nationals, many opined that developments within the sport, such

as the running of an annual national championship, required an organization committed

to the specific needs of Ultimate players. There was a growing sentiment that "for those

of us not involved in those other sports, it didn't seem logical to be represented solely by

DisCanada" which they likened to "having basketball, baseball and volleyball governed

by the 'Spheroid Society.'"[28] There was, however, some opposition to this idea

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[25] Giles Deshon, in *Gender Blender 2004: A Documentary,* DVD, directed by Otto Chung, Velvet Productions, 2004.

[26] John Harris, 23 July 2010.

[27] Guthrie, "Letters," 2.

[28] Mike Davis and Cliff Youdale, "Fear of Organization: The Birth of Ultimate Canada," *Ultimate Canada*, (Winter 1989): 1.

expressed by other disc sport representatives. Arguing that disc sports were less like ball games and "more like, say, skiing which encompasses alpine, freestyle, cross-country, and ski-jumping" in their federations, "the BCDSS believes that we are better off to remain united under DisCanada or some equivalent body, than fragmenting into Ultimate Canada vs. Disc Golf Canada vs. Freestyle Canada, etc." Scott Lewis, speaking on behalf of the BCDSS board of directors argued that "together we are stronger than apart, and we can structure the organization to give each subunit sufficient autonomy."[29] Although the BCDSS wanted to continue the collective representation of disc sports, the language used suggests that they too were dissatisfied with, or at least sympathetic to the criticisms of DisCanada and supportive of new national representation.

UltimateCanada (1989-1992)

Following the 1988 nationals, enough people were determined to do more than just talk about a national body to represent Ultimate players and "to separate Ultimate from other disc sports at the organizational level."[30] This, it was believed, would give Ultimate players more control over their sport. The Calgary 'Cynics,' winners of the 1988 nationals, received $2000 in prize money which they donated to fund a newsletter. It was, according to Craig, "a great thing [to do] with the money" and "it was this act

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[29] Scott Lewis, on behalf of the BCDSS Board of Directors, "Letters..." *Ultimate Canada,* (Summer 1991): 4.

[30] "Nationals Update," 2.

more than anything else, that got UltimateCanada off the ground."[31] Despite accusations

of Ultimate player apathy, there was clearly significant and widespread support for a new

direction.

The move to organizationally divorce Ultimate from the other disc sports marked

a significant shift in Frisbee culture. Yet UltimateCanada did not immediately replace

DisCanada. The two continued to operate simultaneously for several years. And they

were not clearly separate entities. In fact, Chris Lowcock, still president of DisCanada

was UltimateCanada's International Representative, whose role was to "provide interface

to international and other national bodies for Ultimate in Canada (WFDF, UPA, etc,)"

and to "report to UltimateCanada on developments on the international scene."[32] The

two organizations essentially divided the tasks into foreign and domestic areas of

responsibility and worked closely, if not always harmoniously with one another. In his

capacity as president of DisCanada, Lowcock was involved in what turned out to be

another controversial major tournament – the World Ultimate Club Championships, held

in Toronto in 1991. Again, high fees, accusations of mismanagement, and suspicions of a

profit motive on the part of the organizing committee was disturbing to many

participants. Neal Dambra, spokesperson for the Ultimate Players' Association (UPA),

somewhat ironically claimed that "nobody here does this for money, it's just for the

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[31] Craig Fielding, e-mail message to author, 19 October 2010.

[32] Davis and Youdale, "Fear of Organization," 1.

fun."[33] Lowcock's interest in advertising, marketing, and revenue-generation is not

surprising given his marketing and business background. Yet this management style

clashed with a strong grassroots, volunteer orientation that Ultimate players expected.

"Before Worlds in 1991," explains John, "no one had paid themselves a salary."[34] As

Gerard Delanty points out, "the discourse of community is infused with notions of

voluntarism, charitable works and self-organized care" and while many Ultimate players

advocated greater promotion and increased publicity, few appreciated Lowcock's

apparent use of their sport as a personal business venture.[35]

UltimateCanada was created in 1989 to establish "an organization whose sole

responsibility would be the representation and organization of Ultimate players in

Canada" and to address the chronic problem of "a general lack of communication

amongst the various regions."[36] After starting the newsletter, UltimateCanada then began

the task of trying to implement the policies and regulations necessary for the smooth

running of the national championship. In addition to formats, schedules, and rankings,

which were all contentious issues related to nationals, one of the most pressing concerns

was the establishment of a policy to determine eligibility.

Who could play at a national championship? And how would that eligibility be

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[33] Neal Dambra in *The Ultimate Experience*, VHS. Directed by Tom McConnell, Ultimate Players Association/DisCanada, 1992.

[34] John Harris, 23 July 2010.

[35] Gerard Delanty, *Community,* 2nd Edition, (London: Routledge, 2010), 68.

[36] Davis and Youdale, "Fear of Organization," 1.

determined? The need for establishing a policy became particularly apparent at the 3rd

nationals held in Vancouver in 1989 where "the lack of a clear understanding of who and

how people are eligible to play" proved itself to be "one of the only sore spots of [an]

otherwise excellent tournament."[37] In these early years, John recalls that "there were not

clear rules. You were supposed to register ahead of time and you were supposed to

submit rosters, but few teams did. Rosters were submitted at the captain's meeting."[38]

The problems this situation presented for individuals hoping to 'pick up' were spelled out

in detail in a letter appearing in the Fall issue of the UltimateCanada newsletter:

> Three players from Ottawa who were not part of [Ottawa's] 'Secret Police' travelled to Vancouver hoping to pick up with another team. A scant Victoria team offered them spots on their roster, but an arbitrary eligibility rule prevented them from playing simply because they didn't live in the right part of Canada. In the end, these players left the tournament with sour tastes in their mouths and both they and Victoria ... were denied the opportunity of learning from one another. Some other players who went to this tournament were similarly affected.
>   This rule was originally brought in to prevent superstar teams from being formed and to prevent higher caliber American teams from taking over our National Championship. Exceptions to the rule were voted on by team Captains the night before the tournament. In reality, this rule serves to discriminate against 'B' division players. Those players with 'connections' get exempted, those without them get barred.
>   The existing rule creates problems, solves none, and is sorely unfair. ... In no way should eligibility decisions be made the night before the tournament. People take time off work and travel at great personal expense to play in this tournament, and to be ruled ineligible the night before is a completely intolerable situation.[39]

[37] Steve Wright "Eligibility Proposal for 1990 Nationals" *Ultimate Canada,* (Spring 1990): 8.

[38] John Harris, 23 July 2010.

[39] Craig Fielding and Steve Penny, "Letters," *Ultimate Canada,* (Fall 1989): 2.

Controversy over eligibility also hinged on the issue of what the national championship was supposed to represent. Should it be an elite event open only to the best players? Not everybody thought so. Some wanted to make the nationals a competitive showcase but without its becoming elitist. Craig Fielding and Steve Penny suggested that the eligibility problem could be solved by introducing a rule that "any Canadian Citizen, or any person who has resided in Canada as of January 1 of a given year, will be eligible to participate in the Canadian National Ultimate Championships in that same year." This proposal, they believed, would "prevent American based teams and players from taking over" and "would allow weaker teams or teams that are unable to send a full complement to combine with other teams and players." People would still be able to 'pick-up' at the highest levels of competition, and new techniques and tactics could be disseminated through conventional means of learning directly from players from other regions. In their opinion, this would "encourage the growth of Canadian Ultimate by allowing [more] players the opportunity of participating in the National Championship." What was at stake here was ensuring that the founding ideals of Ultimate, namely participation and inclusion, be preserved while simultaneously accommodating the growth of the sport and increasing the caliber of play on a national level. The goal of this proposal was clearly to make the national tournament a showcase of elite Ultimate without making it unnecessarily exclusive. This balance, Fielding and Penny believed, could be achieved through thoughtful attention to the institution of outcome-oriented regulations that would be fair for a broad majority of players, and true to the participatory spirit of Ultimate.[40]

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[40] Fielding and Penny, "Letters," 2.

As Ultimate proliferated, more teams were formed, and more teams wanted to play at nationals. Eventually the eligibility question was extended beyond individuals to teams as well. In 1994 Keith Whyte explained how "up until now any team who wants to put in a bid has been accommodated."[41] Yet "sadly" the continually increasing number of teams meant that "the tournament is getting so large that no one is going to be able [to] host it, because no one will be able to find the appropriate facilities."[42] In 1989, for example, Vancouver "did a first class job in scheduling a record seventeen teams on just four fields."[43] But, due to the expected growth of all the existing divisions (Open, Womens, Masters, and Juniors), by 1995 it was determined that a nationals venue required a minimum of ten fields. With the addition of the Mixed division in 1999, that number was expanded once again. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, concerns over host cities being unable to find suitable venues and the need to limit the number of teams at nationals lay on the horizon. More immediately pressing was the ongoing lack of clear guidelines about eligibility, rankings, and schedules which meant the continued "thrashing out" of these issues at the captains meeting. These were often characterized by bullish wrangling and lengthy and heated discussions where little seemed to be accomplished to anyone's satisfaction.

However, UltimateCanada's greatest challenge to its effectiveness as a national governing body proved to be the selection process for the national team. Until 2000, the

[41] Keith Whyte, "Let's just play!" *The CUPA newsletter* (August 1994): 1.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Fielding and Penny, "Letters," 2.

World Flying Disc Federation (WFDF) held World Championships every two years.[44] In years preceding a World Championship, tensions were exacerbated and differences of opinion expressed at captain's meetings made more acute by the understanding that the Canadian nationals would determine the team to represent Canada. With even more at stake in winning the tournament, any perceived advantage was jealously guarded. Yet, once nationals had been held and winners determined, another battle seemed to be fought over how to put together a Canadian team. Difficulties arose because there were different ideas about what a national team should look like. Should the team who won the national championship simply be acclaimed as the team to represent Canada? Alternatively, should a national team be comprised of the best players from around the country? Or could it be a hybrid of those ideas?

In some cases, particularly with the smaller Womens and Masters divisions, practical concerns eclipsed ideals and teams were often put together based on who was available and could afford the trip. In 1986, for instance, "a woman cycling past the Ultimate field in Ottawa was liable to find herself buying a plane ticket to England if she was able to run the length of a field several times in succession."[45] Similarly for the Master's division, while there was an East-West Masters game to determine a champion,

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[44] In 1998 it was decided to discontinue the practice of holding WFDF Championships every year - club teams in odd numbered years, and national teams in even years. After 2000, the WUCC (club championships) and WUGC (national championships) began being held in alternating even numbered years: ie. club teams in 2002, 2006, etc.; national teams in 2004, 2008, etc. See John C. Harris, "WFDF Congress - Blaine Minnesota" *Spirit* (October 1998): 9.

[45] Shawne Clarke, "Canadian Women's team ready for the road," *The CUPA newsletter* (March 1994): 2.

John jokes that "maybe we'd get together after the tourney and decide over beers who was going."[46] That the Womens and Masters teams could find solutions on their own somewhat simplified the problem for UltimateCanada, but that scenario was not always fair, and sometimes it seemed the national teams were determined by "who yelled the loudest."[47] The growing pool of "talented and keen" players in all divisions meant that the need for a clear policy about how the Canadian national teams were selected became more pressing.[48]

After the 1989 nationals Rick Collins, acting as the Men's Coordinator for UltimateCanada, tried to develop a formula for the selection of the national Open team. Yet misunderstandings over the goals of the selection process sparked and/or exacerbated some seemingly personal animosities. Adam Berson, the captain of 'Vancouver Van Gogh,' the 1989 national champions, took the position that "the understanding regarding Nationals was and is clear. The team that won the thing gets to decide how they want to run the [national] team."[49] Collins disagreed. He expressed the opinion that "although it's a nice thought to be able to just send the national champions to the Worlds, we would not be very competitive at this point (and probably won't be for some time)." He argued that "only one team in the top ten in the World is able to send a club team, all others send

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[46] John Harris, 23 July 2010.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Clarke, "Canadian Women's team ready for the road," 2

[49] Berson, "1990 Worlds Team," *Ultimate Canada,* (Fall 1989): 9.

some form of a national team to remain competitive."[50] And after consultation with the

top seven Open teams, he decided that

> the format for the Canadian National Ultimate Team for Norway in July
> 1990 will be as follows: Vancouver is allowed a maximum of 12 players.
> 7 players to be chosen from the rest of Canada to join them in Norway.
> These players are chosen as follows: 2 from the second place team,
> Calgary (chosen by Calgary to represent them). 1 player from the 3rd
> place team, Ottawa (chosen by Ottawa to represent them). 1 player from
> the 4th place team, Toronto (chosen by Toronto to represent them). 1
> player from the remaining teams (chosen by Vancouver). 2 players from
> any team but Vancouver, to act as alternates who are ready to be a part of
> the team in case of injury, illness, etc. These players practice, play and are
> a part of the team but know their role from the outset (chosen by
> Vancouver). Players chosen to play with Vancouver must have played at
> Nationals 1989 in Vancouver.[51]

Collins believed that this formula would "work to the benefit of all Ultimate players

across Canada by spreading the wealth."[52] Indeed it would mean opportunity for more of

a variety of Canadian players to participate at Worlds. Unsurprisingly, members of

'Vancouver Van Gogh,' whose main interest did not lie in spreading the wealth, felt that

this was unreasonable and unfair. Berson vehemently protested:

> We all knew what was at stake as we approached Vancouver Nationals:
> The Worlds. And as we prepared, we had the understanding that the team
> that won Nationals would decide how to, how many, etc. No team,
> including the tops [sic] ones, can even consider the fact that issues like the
> following entered their minds: That during a year of training, we were all
> telling ourselves that if we won as a team, only some of us would go? We
> all knew that as teams training together, if we win, then we are going

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[50] Rick Collins, "Cross Country Communication," *Ultimate Canada,* (Winter 1989): 3.

[51] Rick Collins, "1990 Worlds Team," *Ultimate Canada,* (Fall 1989): 10.

[52] Ibid.

together. ... I've got 15 players that split their guts out to practice for the Nationals with one thing in mind, I've still got 15+ who are willing to spill their guts at practice with one thing in mind. Don't even be trying to think that anyone is going to take away the goal that we have worked towards for a year as team, okay. If we want to make new policies, then let's do it right, but 1 month after Nationals, I myself, Van Gogh, the whole fund raising squad, tournament schedule (starting in February) and team cohesion just won't stand for this b.s. And most of all, "Eet jhust 'ain faer."[53]

While less than articulate, this clearly illustrates the frustration and resolve on the part of Vancouver's captain. And he enjoyed support for his position from some of the other top teams who felt similarly that the team that won the national championship should have more control over the selection process.

For a while, it seems as if there was an impasse. But eventually, a compromise was reached and it was determined that the national Open team going to Oslo "will include members from Vancouver [and] at least four team members will come from Ultimate teams in other Canadian cities." Moreover, these 'pick-ups' would be determined by "the team coaching staff, with the recommendations of experienced Vancouver players, based upon compatibility with team spirit and goals as well as individual skill levels."[54] This new formula meant that Vancouver could take more of their own players and while accepting a limited number of players from other teams, Vancouver was given control over the selection of those players. But there was nothing official about this formula and it did change for subsequent national teams.

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[53] Berson, "1990 Worlds Team," 9.

[54] Vancouver Van Gogh, "Around the Nation: Vancouver," *Ultimate Canada*, (Spring 1990): 4.

Over time an acceptable formula did evolve. In 1993, for instance, the team that won the Open title – Ottawa's 'WAX' – took on the responsibility of picking the national team for Worlds the following year. They formed a selection committee and decided that "a core from Wax, supported by the strongest players from the other teams across the country would best represent Canada." This, they believed would strike a balance between two concerns: "putting the best players Canada has on the field; and having the team practise together." Thus the 1994 Canadian Open team was made up of fourteen Ottawa players, four Vancouver players, two Toronto players, and two Calgary players.[55] This was a slightly altered adoption of Collins' formula from 1989, but one that kept control in the hands of nationals winners. Having the winning team appoint a selection committee to determine the roster for Worlds was eventually adopted as the official method of choosing the national teams.

The battle over the 1990 national Open team raged over several issues of the UltimateCanada newsletter. And the response it elicited from other observers is interesting. Susan Buss of Calgary, for instance, expressed her dismay at the vitriol that seemed to accompany the discussion over the national Open team. She felt that "the troubles brewing in the men's camp disheartens me and taints Ultimate for all of us." And she maintained that "what is shocking about this is the degree to which this conduct differs from the very essence of the game of Ultimate."[56] Other contributors concurred

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[55] Andrew Lugsdin, "Wax Wings it's Way to the Worlds!" *The CUPA newsletter,* (March 1994): 2.

[56] Susan Buss, "Letters..." *Ultimate Canada*, (Spring 1990): 2.

that this acerbic debate, which periodically degenerated into episodes of personal insult, was unseemly at best and un-spirited and detrimental to the core values of Ultimate at worst. Preserving the *Spirit of the Game* and extending it to off-field administrative matters was a concern of many contributors to the newsletter. According to these commentators, *Spirit of the Game*, in terms of respect for your opponent and behaving with integrity, was something that Ultimate players should abide by in all their dealings with one another.

Geography complicated these discussions and misunderstandings. Players and teams from different regions of the country could have vastly different ideas about how things should work. John explains that "the problem with the East vs. West was that we [didn't] meet during the season."[57] The national tournament was the only time players from different regions had the opportunity to meet face-to-face to discuss and try to work out their differences – or perhaps come to realize that they had differences. UltimateCanada recognized the problem and attempts were made to rectify it. Rick Collins admitted that "communication has not been our strong point, guys, and something has to be done about it." He recognized that "we have to be able to discuss controversial issues over the winter months to avoid trying to deal with them during the spring/summer when nothing seems to get done but a lot of playing." In order to remedy the situation he proposed a communications strategy involving "regular correspondence and east/west regional meetings" that would be "held by a central host, separate of tournament play to

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[57] John Harris, 23 July 2010.

achieve maximum input and output by all."[58] This proposal was logistically difficult to coordinate and never materialized under his watch. The national tournament, thereby, remained the main point of contact for many years to come. Yet most players remained, understandably, more interested in playing at nationals than in debating organizational policy.

UltimateCanada had dedicated people, but it was comprised of a relatively informal group of volunteers. Its lack of a formalized structure meant that it had little legitimacy which, in turn, meant that it had no teeth. Ongoing arguments over formats, eligibility, and seedings, and the vitriolic debate over the 1990 national Open team illustrate that UltimateCanada was hamstrung in its ability to effectively oversee Canadian Ultimate. Indeed, this episode clearly illustrates that players did not recognize UltimateCanada's authority to hand down decisions on their behalf. There was a consensus that issues and details should be worked out in advance, that there should be some kind of expected standard to make decisions fair, uniform, and well-understood. Ultimate Canada tried to implement such formulae, but the organization had no real means with which to implement any of its policy proposals. It quickly became obvious to many that Ultimate Canada's ineffectiveness was tied to its informality.

The Canadian Ultimate Players' Association (CUPA, 1993-2010):

By 1990 some people at UltimateCanada began working on the preliminary steps

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[58] Rick Collins, "From the Men's Coordinator..." *Ultimate Canada,* (Fall 1989): 8.

of setting up a formally-structured, legitimate national body. At the 4th national

championships, which took place in Calgary in 1990, "the first-ever general meeting of

Ultimate Canada" was held.[59] The main goals on the agenda included the election of

player representatives and the ratification of a constitution. These proved to be ambitious

goals, and the gains made at Calgary were more modest. What was accomplished at this

meeting was the formation of an eight-member "steering committee" to begin drafting a

constitution and set of by-laws for the new organization which was tentatively going to

be named the Canadian Ultimate Players' Association (CUPA).[60]

Establishing an official, legitimate organization took longer than anyone could

have imagined. For instance, while the steering committee had hoped to have a final

version of the constitution ratified by late 1991, two years later, in 1993 when the 7th

Canadian National Ultimate Championships were held in Ottawa, CUPA was still very

much under construction. The organizers of these nationals hoped to put an end to the

delays. "It is our belief," they claimed "as it seems it is of many of yours, that a

legitimate National players organization is essential to the growth of our sport" and "we

have been trying to get this off the ground for what seems like forever."[61] Tournament

directors, Keith Whyte and Maren Hansen included a great deal of information about

CUPA in their correspondence with players and captains. Taking it upon themselves to

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[59] "Agenda" Canadian Ultimate Championship Programme, Calgary 1990, 6.

[60] "Steering Committee Releases Draft of Constitution," *Ultimate Canada,* (Winter 1991): 1.

[61] Maren Hansen and Keith Whyte, "7th Annual Canadian National Ultimate Championships," newsletter, June/July 1993, emphasis added.

explain the process, they "sent out copies of the yet to be ratified constitution in the hope that when we all meet in Ottawa we can have a common base of understanding."[62] The player programme for these nationals urged, "LET'S DO IT THIS YEAR!"[63]

Their efforts yielded promising results. In Ottawa, the new "Players' Association" was announced, its proposed structure explained and the need for volunteers to fill its executive and board of director positions outlined. Everyone was also informed that $5 of their tournament fees had gone to the new organization of which they were all now paid members. Keith Whyte explained "there are many things to get done on a national level and the larger our community gets the more difficult it is going to be without a[n] official association."[64] A constitution and a paid membership were requirements for the immediate goals of incorporation, and the funding of a national newsletter. These steps were seen as essential in order to correct the problems of illegitimacy and poor communications. Modeled after the UPA, CUPA's architects envisioned its purpose as follows:

> 1) to serve as the governing body of the sport of Ultimate, representing the interests of the sport and the interests of all players in Canada.
> 2) To promote the growth and development of the sport throughout Canada.
> 3) To provide a means to facilitate open and continuous communication within the Ultimate network and the sports community

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[62] Hansen and Whyte, "7th Annual Canadian National Ultimate Championships" June/July 1993.

[63] "C.U.P.A. Annual General Meeting," 1993 Canadian National Ultimate Championships Programme, 4.

[64] Keith Whyte, "Canadian Ultimate Community welcomes the Last Spike!" *The CUPA newsletter,* (March 1994): 3.

4) To act as the vehicle through which the ongoing activities of the sport are organized, including, but not limited to: overseeing national and international competition, developing and disseminating educational programs and serving as a medium for the exchange of information. [65]

While the structure was put in place in Ottawa, CUPA could not officially begin to perform the tasks of governance until its by-laws were formally ratified. This happened the following year in Winnipeg. As a registered not-for-profit, CUPA was legally required to conduct itself in accordance with the *Canada Corporations Act*. In addition to regulations regarding record-keeping and taxation, that meant that it needed to hold annual general meetings, have an elected board of directors, and an appointed executive. Being a legal entity brought new administrative constraints, but it also meant that CUPA was now structurally and legally responsible to its members. But this new organization was only going to be effective if a majority of Ultimate players supported it and its initiatives.

By 1994 CUPA had gained legitimacy. But it took several more years for CUPA to become an effective governing body. Firstly, CUPA inherited UltimateCanada's unresolved problems. While UltimateCanada was busy trying to get CUPA off the ground, it was unable to see to the concerns that had spawned the initiative in the first place. In the 1990s, the CUPA newsletter is dominated by some familiar preoccupations: coming up with a format and schedule for nationals, devising a policy about how the national team is to be selected, and facilitating communication among the regions. An official corporate structure also brought with it many new issues and once established, it

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[65] "Canadian Ultimate Players Association - By laws" *The CUPA Newsletter,* (Spring 1995): 9.

was a difficult process to get CUPA running smoothly.

Finding people to fill the positions was the first hurdle. It was determined that CUPA would have an executive consisting of an executive director, treasurer, secretary, and newsletter editor, and a board of directors made up of "not less than five nor more than eleven" representatives.[66] John, who put himself forward as a regional representative for Southern Ontario, remembers that there was a fair bit of confusion over the first CUPA positions:

> People volunteered for certain positions, and they were just acclaimed. ... I volunteered to be interim secretary and was acclaimed later, ... Wheels became newsletter editor, ... and no one really became the executive director ... I assumed that Keith had volunteered. He had been involved in setting up the by-laws and the constitution, ... he felt that he had done his part ... but he never told us that. So we just kept cc'ing him on emails and he never objected.[67]

Nonetheless, John maintains that "by January [of] 1995 we sort of had all the positions filled ... we thought! And then we just started working on stuff." But, he admits that initially "we weren't really able to make a great deal of progress."[68]

One of the obstacles to progress was the debate over the regions themselves. Under UltimateCanada, the country had simply been split into East and West. But this was problematic. John claims that "the East-West thing was a really bad idea. They organized things differently and they just didn't agree. When I got involved in CUPA, I pushed to have representation from across the country." But John also recalls that "there

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[66] "CUPA - By-laws," 9.

[67] John Harris, 23 July 2010.

[68] Ibid.

was definitely discussion about the regions and about fairness ... how many teams

constitutes a region? It was difficult to decide what to do."[69] CUPA initially created

seven geographic regions: British Columbia (BC), Alberta (AB), Prairies (PR), Southern

(ie Southwestern) Ontario (ON W), Eastern Ontario (ON E), Quebec (QC), and Atlantic

(AT). Each region was entitled to elect a representative who would also serve on

CUPA's board of directors. This may have been more symbolic than practical. John

comments that "we thought seven was a great number, because it was also the number of

players on the field," which suggests that these divisions were somewhat arbitrary. [70]

They certainly became contentious as some felt that they did not accurately reflect the

nation's Ultimate demographics nor provide a fair system of player representation. John

recalls how "Vancouver decided it wanted to be its own region," which then encouraged

the prairie provinces to want to be represented separately as Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Having accommodated these demands, in 1997 CUPA recognized nine regions.

Increasing the number of regions led to logistical difficulties of both how to fill and then

coordinate communication between nine positions. At the 1998 CUPA AGM, a motion

to reduce the number of regions was passed.[71] John explains that "Ontario became one

region, and *that* seemed to make a lot of people happy. Vancouver could then merge

back with BC and Manitoba/Saskatchewan merged back together. Six regions seemed to

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[69] John Harris, 23 July 2010.

[70] Ibid.

[71] "1998 CUPA Annual General Meeting, August 28, 1998, 8pm, St. Jean sur Richeleau [sic], Quebec," *Spirit,* (October 1998): 8.

make some reasonable sense." John claims that "we got it figured out, but it took four years!"[72] And indeed, the issue of the regions was never truly settled. Regions will remain a recurring concern as the sport grows and changes demographically. The Yukon, for instance, is not currently represented by any CUPA region, yet a small but vibrant Ultimate scene has been growing there since the late 1990s.[73] When a team from the territories wants to play at nationals, the regions will once again need to be reconsidered and possibly adjusted.

Addressing the original issues over running the nationals also took longer than might have been expected. John Harris and Brian Gisel, for instance "did a lot of the work on what became the official CUPA schedule" and had it ready for the 1998 nationals in Montreal. John remembers, however, that "in Montreal there was some problem with fields and they couldn't use our schedule after all." Nonetheless, for John "it felt like progress." Finally, he claims, "we were getting to a point where we didn't need to have these huge arguments at the captain's meetings over formats and seeding. We could deal instead with other [immediate] administrative stuff, like here's where you get your water, don't put your cleats on the cricket pitches, who still needs to pay some money?"[74] Similarly, the late 1990s saw a formula for team eligibility, although debated and contested, put into place, and the selection process for a national team was also

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[72] John Harris, 23 July 2010.

[73] See Denis Legere, "Yellowknife Ultimate: Play in the Land of the Midnight Sun" *Ultimate Canada Magazine,* (Winter 2009): 29.

[74] John Harris, 23 July 2010.

hammered out.

A new issue facing CUPA in the late 1990s was the competitive disparity between regions. In the mid-1990s Ultimate grew in popularity all across the country, but the caliber of the competitive teams was uneven. The largest numbers of Ultimate players were concentrated in Ontario and British Columbia, followed by Alberta, Quebec and the Prairies. The smallest region in terms of numbers was the Atlantic. Relatively late on the scene, by 1995 the first CUPA rep for the Atlantic region admitted that "Ultimate in the Maritimes is still limited to Halifax and Fredericton, though players have begun to surface in Moncton and St. John."[75] By 1998, "the new philosophy coming out of the Atlantic region" was "if we're too small to do it alone as individual communities, let's do it together" which involved "treating the region as one big league to some degree."[76] Size was an issue, not only in terms of maritime league membership, but it meant that their competitive teams lagged far behind the caliber of the longer-established teams from Vancouver, Ottawa, Toronto, Calgary, Montreal, or Winnipeg. This caused problems for CUPA's eligibility proposals.

Again, what the national championship should represent versus how to make eligibility fair was at issue. There was a prominent sentiment that nationals "should be an elite tournament" featuring "the best of the best."[77] It was also a strongly held belief that

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[75] Andrew MacDougall, "CUPA Board of Directors," *The CUPA Newsletter,* (Spring 1995): 10.

[76] Donnie McPhee, "News from the East," *Spirit*, (January 1998): 12.

[77] John Harris, 23 July 2010.

all the regions should be represented. But how was that to be accomplished when the

numbers and calibers across the country were so disparate? It did not seem reasonable

that the regions should be given equal weight. That would mean that teams from weaker

regions would trump stronger teams from more populous regions and then "we wouldn't

have [all] the best teams."[78] A system that would ensure the best teams as well as teams

from all regions could play needed to be devised.

Each year CUPA pre-determined a number of regional 'allotments' or berths to

nationals. These were based on "the number of fields available, the total number of

regions, the final rankings of teams from the previous Nationals, and the numbers of

CUPA members in each region."[79] But, if there were more teams than spots in a given

region and division, then "those regions will have to determine which teams get in and

which don't."[80] At first, the decision of who would fill the allotments was left up to the

teams involved. This promoted a "dynasty effect," where teams could coast on their

reputations and previous finishes. John points out, that this method was not always fair

or spirited because "the stronger team[s] just browbeat the others until they dropped

out."[81] The solution seemed to be the introduction of a system of regional qualifying

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[78] John Harris, 23 July 2010.

[79] For instance, in 1999 "based on the CUPA membership numbers as of May 31, 1999, the initial Nationals allotments [were]: Region (Open, Womens, Juniors, Masters, Coed): ON (7,5,3,3,3), BC (5,4,2,2,2), PQ (3,2,2,2,2), PR (3,2,1,1,1), AB (4,2,1,1,1), and AT (2,1,1,1,1)." "1999 Club Nationals Allotments," *Spirit,* (July 1999): 4.

[80] Ibid.

[81] John Harris, 23 July 2010.

tournaments.

There were many advantages to such a system. It would identify the top teams in each region in a given year, and help to determine the seedings at the national tournament. Brian Gisel envisioned that this would demand an increased level of "leadership from the National Organization."[82] John explained to me why this is not what happened. While "we wanted them to be sanctioned by CUPA, a lot of our board members weren't interested in being responsible for the regional tournaments." Yet neither did CUPA particularly "want another organization running it." In the end, the Provincial Sports Organizations (PSOs) did get involved because "CUPA didn't have the resources to do it."[83] Nonetheless, CUPA maintained that a system of regional qualifying tournaments was necessary and would be "good for Ultimate in Canada in the long run," by increasing competition and encouraging the formation of new teams within each region.[84]

All this effort to make the national championship an elite showcase ran up against the immense obstacle of Canadian geography. Since 1987, when "a Toronto team played well enough in the Michigan section to advance to [the US] Central Regionals" the UPA debated whether or not Canadian and Mexican teams should be allowed to play in the US

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[82] Brian Gisel, "The Nationals Question," *Spirit,* (March 1999): 13.

[83] John Harris, 23 July 2010.

[84] Gisel, "The Nationals Question," 13.

national series.[85] Deciding that the potential benefits outweighed any possible negative

outcomes and that it was "a clear vision of Ultimate's manifest destiny," in 1992 the UPA

officially included Canada in their regional boundaries, making Canadian teams eligible

for the US National Championship.[86] For many Canadian teams, it is, indeed, "easier and

more competitive" to play in the United States than in Canada.[87] It is much more

convenient for teams from Vancouver, for instance, to play teams from nearby Seattle in

the UPA Northwest regional series, than it is for them to play their best Canadian

competition from Ontario. Thus geography, in addition to the higher caliber of

competition provided by American teams provides a strong incentive for Canada's best

teams to turn to the United States.[88]

Travel is only one component to the elevated cost involved in playing at the

Canadian nationals. "There's something wrong," claims Mark "Shaggy" Zimmerl, the

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[85] Pasquale Anthony Leonardo and Adam Zagoria, *Ultimate: The First Four Decades*, (Los Altos CA: Ultimate History Inc., 2005), 78.

[86] Leonardo and Zagoria, *Ultimate*, 80.

[87] Ibid*.,* 78.

[88] The proximity and ease of travel between Canadian and American cities and its effect on Canadian sport has been commented on by many sports historians. Nancy and Maxwell Howell noted, for instance that "it was faster and more economical ... to travel from Toronto to Buffalo rather than to Winnipeg, from Winnipeg to St. Paul rather than Vancouver, from New Westminster to Seattle rather than Montreal." Nancy and Maxwell L. Howell, *Sports and Games in Canadian Life – 1700 to the Present*, (Toronto: MacMillan, 1969), 290, quoted in J.A. Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal*. (New York: Viking Penguin, Ltd., 1985), 163. The effect this had in the early twentieth century was, according to James Mangan, "predictable: the influence of the United States increased while that of Britain declined" and "Canada increasingly became North American in character." Mangan, 163.

long-time captain of Montreal's elite Open team. "Fees, fees, fees!" he complains,

pointing out that Nationals is "the most expensive tournament that we play; [it's] seven or

eight times more expensive than any other tournament!" In comparison, he claims that

the UPA championship tournament, although a much larger event is a much more

affordable, more competitive, and a more attractive spectacle:

> At the US nationals they've got everything right. They understand what works about Ultimate. The finals is on grass. They don't care about it being in a stadium. In Winnipeg we played the final in Blue Bomber stadium. Putting Ultimate in a stadium on a lined football field, it's confusing, it doesn't look pretty. But for some reason people have this mission, or they're confused that somehow this brings the sport viability if it's in a stadium. But the stadium's empty! Does that make the sport more viable? We cram everybody into one side, no one's allowed near the field, the finals is on turf, which is a terrible surface, the field looks disgusting, there are lines all over the field, it's confusing. Where's the beauty in that? At UPA nationals in Florida it's a field, there aren't even stands, and all around it's spectators maybe three people deep. The only lines are Ultimate-specific. It's great![89]

It is a frustration for many, players and organizers alike, that the Canadian nationals

perennially fails to attract Canada's best teams. But there are clearly reasonable

explanations why Furious George, GOAT, Prime, and other aspiring world class teams

elect to "skip" the Canadian championship.[90] Geography, expense, competitive caliber,

and aesthetics all help draw these teams to the UPA championship. Only every four

years, when the national teams need to be chosen, do they make an appearance at home.

In addition to issues related to the national championship, one of CUPA's

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[89] Mark "Shaggy" Zimmerl, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 5 October 2010.

[90] John C. Harris, "From the Executive Director: Furious George Skips Canadian Nationals," *Spirit,* (January 1998): 16.

priorities was to gain public recognition and legitimacy for itself, and by extension, the

sport. Claiming that he "wanted to see CUPA become an effective, stable organization

for Canadian Ultimate," Andrew Lugsdin began the process of national recognition by

applying to have CUPA registered as an Amateur Athletic Association.[91] This was

successfully achieved in February 1994. But more important than the tax-exempt status

that this bestowed on the organization was the sense of legitimacy that it lent. Tellingly,

Keith Whyte voiced the opinion that "if one part of the government recognizes us it can

only be a matter of time before others like Sports Canada [sic] do."[92]

In 1968, recognizing that sport, "like other cultural forms which demonstrated

Canadian accomplishments, could serve as a powerful source of national unity," Pierre

Elliot Trudeau launched the Task Force on Sport for Canadians. The desire to improve

Canadian international competitiveness and the finding that National Sports

Organizations (NSOs) were typically "characterized by a high degree of inefficiency,"

due partly to their reliance upon "part-time volunteer officers and officials," and "their

'kitchen table' style of operation," the federal government revamped the national sport

system and created a model devoted to the rationalization, centralization, and

professionalization of Canadian amateur sport. In order to provide the necessary "funds

for the hiring of full-time executive, technical and program directors and national coaches

for the NSOs" Sport Canada was established to oversee high-performance sport within

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[91] "CUPA: Board of Directors," *The CUPA Newsletter*, (Spring 1995): 11.

[92] Whyte, "Let's just play!" 2.

the Fitness and Amateur Sport Branch.[93]

Getting recognized by Sport Canada as the official NSO for Ultimate, and therefore becoming eligible for government funding and assistance, has been on CUPA's radar since its inception. In the 1990s the criteria to qualify for registration with Sport Canada reflected yet another new direction of the Canadian sport system and Canadian NSOs were subsequently required to have formal policies on official languages, equity, harassment and abuse, and a host of other areas of compliance. In 2000, CUPA's executive director reported that in order to qualify for registration with Sport Canada, "fifteen simple criteria" needed to be met of which CUPA "currently satisf[ied] three."[94] As Sport Canada only accepts new NSOs every four years, John Harris was optimistic that a complete application package, fulfilling the requirements, could be put forward by 2004. Yet in 2011, despite CUPA's best efforts to comply, recognition by Sport Canada is a goal that remains elusive.[95]

Over and above the potential financial assistance and institutional support, recognition by Sport Canada is coveted because it is the gateway to recognition by other international sports organizations, including the International Olympic Committee and

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[93] Donald MacIntosh and David Whitson, *The Game Planners: Transforming Canada's Sport System*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 4-5.

[94] John C. Harris, "From the Executive Director" *Spirit,* (March 2000): 7.

[95] At the 2009 AGM, as another step toward the goal of official recognition by Sport Canada, CUPA's board of directors elected to change its name to Ultimate Canada in order to put itself more "in line with all the other sports." Kirsten Niles, e-mail message to author, 22 May 2011. See also Erin Van Regan, "The Ultimate Canada Conference: Exciting Road Ahead," *Ultimate Canada Magazine,* (Spring 2010): 12.

possible inclusion in "the pinnacle of sporting events, the big prize, the Olympics."[96] For

decades, players and organizers have expressed a desire to see Ultimate become an

Olympic sport.[97] There is a sense that "Ultimate really embodies a lot of what the

Olympics is supposed to be about,"[98] and thus deserves a place at "sport's high altar."[99]

In 2001 lobbyists were finally successful in getting Ultimate's foot in the door. Inclusion

in the World Games was seen as "a big step for Ultimate" and "the first time Ultimate

will be played in an officially recognized international multi-sport competition."[100] This

was both an accomplishment and an opportunity. With the IOC looking on, it was

deemed "important that we show the sport at its best: fast paced action, exciting play, and

Spirit of the Game."[101] Boosters recognize, however, that their Olympic dreams must

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[96] "Akita, Japan: Ultimate in the 2001 World Games," *Chasing Plastic Magazine*, 1/1 (2001): 39.

[97] To an *Ultimate News* poll asking "How has Ultimate changed in the last 25 years?" one player responded that "one thing that hasn't changed is that folks still say, 'I think it will be an Olympic sport in 20 years.'" George Cooke, "Seven on the Line: How has Ultimate changed in the last 25 years?" *Ultimate News*, 24/1 (Spring 2004):10.

[98] Mark "Shaggy" Zimmerl, 5 October 2010.

[99] John Bale and Mette Drogh Christensen, "Introduction: Post-Olympism?" in *Post-Olympism?: Questioning Sport in the Twenty-First Century,* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 1.

[100] "2001 World Games - Update," *Spirit*, (July/Oct/Dec. 2001): 5.

[101] The 2001 World Games in Akita, Japan included "a total of six teams: Japan and one from each of the highest ranking countries (other than Japan) from [the 2000 WFDF] Worlds: the United States, Canada, Sweden, Germany, and Finland." "2001 World Games - Update," Spirit, (July/Oct/Dec. 2001): 5; The process of becoming a medal sport at the World Games "began in 1985 with the establishment of the World Flying Disc Federation and its subsequent acceptance into the International World Games Association (IWGA)" it then "took years of lobbying, notably by Professor Fumio

draw on more persuasive arguments than a similarity to founding principles and "that it could take decades of lobbying to get into the Games."[102] Some players have lost interest in this particular dream. "I wouldn't hold my breath," claims Shaggy. "I guess I'm a little jaded with the Olympics," he continues. "It's a commercial enterprise. If you don't have the money pushing the sport, it's not going to be there."[103] Olympic scholars agree that there is plenty to be jaded about. John MacAloon, claims that "as they have gained prestige and scope, the Games have become increasingly troubled by political, economic, and organizational struggles" and "the joyfulness of the Games has become increasingly problematic."[104] More scathing is the observation that "the Games can be seen as divisive, racist, elitist, homophobic and sexist."[105] And since the IOC's recent trend toward limiting and even decreasing the numbers of Olympic sports means that Ultimate's inclusion seems doubtful, Ultimate players and organizers can, perhaps,

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Morooka of Japan, to have Ultimate first as a demonstration event in the World Games in Finland," after which "an intensified effort, which involved educating the IWGA as to the size and breadth of Ultimate, culminated in the acceptance of [the] sport into the Akita World Games with full medal status." "Akita, Japan: Ultimate in the 2001 World Games," 39.

[102] "Frisbee fanatics set sights on Olympics" CBC News, 19 October 2002 available at http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2002/10/19/frisbee_021019.html (accessed 30 June 2009).

[103] Mark "Shaggy" Zimmerl, 5 October 2010.

[104] John J. MacAloon, "Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle in Modern Societies," in *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle*: *Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance*, (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984), 248.

[105] Bale and Christensen, 4.

console themselves with the conclusion that "Ultimate is too good for the Olympics."[106]

Inclusion in the World Games, however, heightened interest, and renewed hope in some

quarters in the prospect of becoming an Olympic sport. And, should the opportunity ever

arise, Canadian Ultimate will need to be represented by an officially recognized NSO in

order to compete at the Olympic level.

Nonetheless, Ultimate players and organizers should perhaps be more wary than

they seem of inclusion in the Canadian sport system. One of the problems with any kind

of sponsorship, is that the demands of the sponsor can run counter to the accepted or

desirable practices of the sport. Inclusion in the World Games proved sobering for

exactly this reason as it was "the first time Ultimate athletes [were] tested for banned

substances."[107] CUPA directors realized that "if we do want to be recognized and to

receive financial support from Sport Canada, then we will indeed need to adopt an anti-

doping policy."[108] The troubling issue, according to John, is that "in order to comply

with their requirements, we'd have to get rid of some of the aspects of our sport that we

kind of like."[109] More generally disturbing is that inclusion in Canada's high-

performance sport system is usually marked by both a growing reliance on government

funds and a loss of control and autonomy. Donald MacIntosh and David Whitson caution

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[106] Pasquale Anthony Leonardo, *Ultimate: The Greatest Sport Ever Invented By Man*, (Halcottsville, New York: Breakaway Books, 2007), 6.

[107] "2001 World Games - Update," 5.

[108] Ibid.

[109] John Harris, 23 July 2010.

"that the costs and benefits of progress are usually unevenly distributed," and we should

"examine what we lose collectively ... in the relentless quest for 'progress.'"[110]

Much of the history of Canadian Ultimate is indeed marked by a relentless pursuit

of recognition, legitimacy, and credibility, the achievement of which is then interpreted

as progress. In the process, Ultimate players and organizers are sometimes prone to

conflate growth and progress. More and bigger is seen as better. But is it actually best?

For whom? Why? And who says so? The most apparent sea change in Canadian

Ultimate's short institutional history is the shift from grassroots, volunteer-led,

'clubhouse' or 'kitchen table' styles of management to the adoption of formal, corporate,

and professionalized structures of organization. While Ultimate's 'progress' has not gone

uncontested, the site of the administration of Ultimate has, nevertheless, gone from

barstools to boardrooms. Once looked upon with skepticism, corporate governance is

now understood as unavoidable and indeed, normal and desirable. And this is equally, if

not more, true for the municipal leagues as it is for the provincial and national

organizations. In the mid-1990s the largest city leagues incorporated as registered not-

for-profits, and in the early 2000s the day-to-day running of these leagues became such a

large commitment that employees were hired to do many of the tasks once performed by

volunteers. Today, the largest city leagues are quite bureaucratic and they are engaged in

a project of branding themselves and the sport as they go about the business of delivering

Ultimate to thousands of members. How to foster a sense of player-centredness and

community in such a climate is a conundrum organizers struggle to solve. This chapter

[110] MacIntosh and Whitson, 30.

has chronicled developments on the national scene through the organization of competitive Ultimate. I turn my attention now to recreational Ultimate at the league level.

CHAPTER 4

Squatters to Stewards:
Finding Space, Making Place, and the Ottawa Land Purchase

> Man, out of his intimate experience with his body and with other people,
> organizes space so that it conforms with and caters to his biological needs
> and social relations.
>
> -- Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place*

> Sports are eminently spatial phenomena; they are struggles over space.
>
> -- John Bale, *Landscapes of Modern Sport*

Ultimate is a game with few requirements. But one of the prime necessities is
space: you need somewhere to play. And as urban leagues grow their spatial
requirements increase. Difficulties in accessing appropriate and sufficient playing fields
present a challenge for all recreational Ultimate leagues and finding space is an ongoing
preoccupation for organizers. There are three basic strategies by which Ultimate players
carve out space for themselves. They squat in public parks and other green spaces, they
negotiate with landowners for the use sportsfields or other usable spaces, and for slightly
over a decade, they have been building their own facilities.

Finding space can lead to the making of place. The manipulation of the natural
landscape is a feature of modern sports. This is one of the characteristics that sets
modern sports apart from their pre-modern precursors which "were traditionally played in
available spaces ... such as streets, squares, parks, and fields"[1] Some scholars believe that
modern sportscapes are the result of "the physical culture of industrial society" which

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[1] Gerald Griggs, "'Just a sport made up in a car park?': the 'soft' landscape of
Ultimate Frisbee." *Social & Cultural Geography*, 10/7 (2009): 759.

"necessitated the establishment of a separate environment in which to pursue [sport]."[2]

John Bale suggests that "sports can be seen as a 'world of authored landscapes' where the

hand of individuals, their ambitions, and their perceptions become important in

explaining the present day scene."[3] Through the process of ascribing meanings to the

spaces where Ultimate is played, these are transformed into Ultimate places, to which

players can form various kinds of attachments. Setha M. Low, defines place attachment

as "the symbolic relationship formed by people giving culturally shared

emotional/affective meanings to a particular space or piece of land that provides the basis

for the individual's and group's understanding of and relations to the environment" and

the meanings that players give to Ultimate spaces are multivalent and contested, imbued

with the familiar themes of difference and progress. [4] Ultimate's ongoing hunt for urban

space also illustrates the ways that Ultimate does community by demonstrating how

leagues approach common problems, share ideas, and model strategies for one another.

Finding Space:

In the 1980s, when urban leagues were young and memberships small, many took

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[2] Henning Eichberg, "The Enclosure of the Body: The Historical Relativity of 'Health,' 'Nature,' and the Environment of Sport" *Journal of Contemporary History*, 21 (1986): 101.

[3] John Bale, *Landscapes of Modern Sport*, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1994),13.

[4] Setha M. Low, "Symbolic Ties that Bind: Place Attachment in the Plaza," in Setha M. Low and Irwin Altman, eds., *Place Attachment*, (New York: Plenum Press, 1992), 165.

advantage of Ultimate's inherent flexibility and played in informal venues. The use of

cones or natural landmarks allows for field dimensions to be altered easily. Because "the

parameters have a degree of fluidity," any reasonably flat open space can be used.[5]

Recall, for instance, that in 1968 the games at Columbia High School were played in a

parking lot. Commenting on how "it was a much more casual time for Ultimate back

then," Craig Fielding recalls his first pick-up games in Ottawa where

> no one wore cleats, some people played in bare feet. It wasn't really
> according to the rules as they specifically are, but it was Ultimate. No
> running with the disc... we didn't have any fouls... out of bounds was the
> bike path on one side and where the hill kinda broke up on the other side,
> so it was really ill-defined... there was no back of the end zone... they were
> endless end zones.... but it was fun... it was really, really fun."[6]

John Harris, who was introduced to Ultimate his first semester at the University of

Chicago in 1979 relates a similar experience:

> we played on the grass in front of the math department. It was not really
> rectangular; it was kinda this open area with a line of trees on one side that
> was out of bounds, and a line of trees on the other side that was out of
> bounds. There was sort of this one tree that was the goal line – think
> about it, one tree! And at the other end there was one tree and a post that
> was the other goal line – it didn't really matter that much. And the
> sidelines weren't really strict. If you caught the Frisbee and ran into a tree
> you were out of bounds, but if you had to dive under the tree to catch it
> you were in bounds. Because it's a cool catch, those counted.[7]

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[5] Griggs, "Just a sport," 762; A regulation size Ultimate field is 37 x 64m with 23m-deep endzones. The rules allow, however, for the manipulation of dimensions and other regulations: "a game may be played under any variation of the rules agreed upon by the captains of the teams involved. Such things as game length, field dimensions, number of players and stall count can easily be altered to suit the level of play." Ultimate Players Association, *Official Rules of Ultimate*, 11th Edition, (Ultimate Players Association, 2007), I.C., 3.

[6] Craig Fielding, interview by author, Ottawa, ON, 11 June 2010.

[7] John Harris, interview by author, Toronto, ON, 23 July 2010.

These players adapted the game to available spaces and used natural landmarks as boundaries. Gerald Griggs argues that "within Ultimate spatial, temporal and constitutional boundaries are 'soft'" and the suspension of fouls and the renegotiation of boundaries for exceptional displays of athleticism illustrates how the fluidity of the game's parameters can extend beyond the physical space it occupies. The inherent flexibility of the game, moreover, allows players and organizers to be innovative about finding spaces to play.

Squatting is how most Canadian Ultimate leagues got their starts.[8] The first city league games in Montreal took place at the McGill Reservoir and Île Ste-Hélène; Vancouver Ultimate players made use of the "playing field behind the Jericho sailing club;"[9] Winnipeg's league began "with just three teams competing once a week in a local city park;"[10] and in Toronto players "[met] two to three times a week at the Rosehill Reservoir."[11] Similarly, in 1984 the Ottawa Ultimate Club could be seen playing on a

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[8] Squatting is not a practice unique to Ultimate. In the 1960s and 1970s, for example, in addition to drainage ditches, dams, and pipes, skateboarders in Los Angeles and other cities often used private swimming pools, sometimes without the knowledge or permission of property owners. Iain Borden claims that "adopting and exploiting a given physical terrain in order to present skaters with new and distinctive uses other than the original function of that terrain is one of skateboarding's central features." See Iain Borden, *Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body*, (New York: Berg, 2001), particularly Chapter 3: "Found Space" pp 29-55.

[9] Nick Rebalski, "Frisbee Frolics" *The Vancouver Sun*, 22 August 1987, D.1.

[10] Cory Young, "Winnipeg Builds Own Ultimate Facility," *Ultimate Canada Magazine*, Issue 1 (2008): 33.

[11] Richard Kelly Heft, "Ultimate Frisbee," *Toronto Star*, 7 August 1988, H.8.

swath of green space beside a major highway across from the hospital on Riverside Drive.[12] As Ultimate was still relatively unknown in the 1980s, public open spaces could be secured easily – often without any formal permission – because, to the untrained eye, an organized league game might be indistinguishable from a group of people playing with a Frisbee in the park.

One advantage to playing in parks and public green spaces as opposed to municipally- or privately-controlled sportsfields was the lack of competition from more mainstream field sports that require specific terrains or features. Craig claims that "we just found patches of grass... we would just show up and play."[13] Moreover, not having to rent field space, meant that fees were initially very low. For instance, in 1985 the fee to enter an entire team in the Ottawa league was $25.[14] Costs could be kept low partly because leagues in Canada enjoy an important natural advantage over their American counterparts. Long summer days benefit all recreational summer sports in Canada because arranging to play in the evening does not require lit fields.[15] Normally, if lights are needed, then the city has to agree to turn them on (where utilities exist) and the users

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[12] Karen Lauriston, "The Ultimate in Frisbee; It's Run, Cut and the Occasional Doob," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 15 August 1987, E.6.

[13] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid. It is worth noting that the games at CHS were played in that parking lot because "for some reason, it was lit at night." See "Scenes from interview with Joel Silver," (taken 7/22/1997) *Ultimate: The First Four Decades,* accompanying DVD, produced by Joe Seidler (2005). See also Pasquale Anthony Leonardo and Adam Zagoria, *Ultimate: The First Four Decades*, (Los Altos CA: Ultimate History Inc., 2005), 7.

are generally responsible for the hydro bill and perhaps other fees as well. In addition to affordability, squatting has other potential advantages. One is an increased visibility for the sport. For instance, Marcus Brady, who in 1984 had been teaching his highschool buddies to play Ultimate, found out about Brian Guthrie and the fledgling Ottawa Ultimate league when his father told him about "a bunch of guys on Riverside Drive playing the same silly game you play."[16] Over the ensuing years, Brady and Guthrie helped turn the Ottawa Ultimate Club from a "ragtag pickup team of twenty people" into a respectable city league.[17]

There are, of course, disadvantages to squatting. One is field quality and maintenance. Having no formal agreement with landowners means that there can be no reasonable expectation that fields will always be properly maintained. Another, perhaps more worrisome drawback is insecurity. Without a permit, securing fields in public parks often entails showing up in sufficient numbers to discourage other potential users. The Ottawa-Carleton Ultimate Association (OCUA) continues to squat on the fields at Riverside, which fall under the authority of the National Capital Commission (NCC).[18] Upon inquiring after permission to use the park, the OCUA was made aware that any

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[16] Lauriston, "The Ultimate in Frisbee."

[17] Ibid.

[18] "The NCC is a Crown corporation that was created by Parliament in 1959 as the steward of federal lands and buildings in the National Capital Region, with a mandate and mission to build the Capital region into a source of pride and unity for Canadians." National Capital Commission, "About the NCC," http://www.canadascapital.gc.ca/bins/ncc_web_content_page.asp?cid=16302&lang=1 (accessed 16 January 2011).

formal request would be denied. For the past twenty-five years, the NCC has seemed

content with its 'don't ask, don't tell' arrangement where it looks the other way while

league games proceed.[19] While this might be a convenient arrangement, organizers

recognize that relying on the benign neglect of landowners is not a sound long-term

strategy for securing field space and as the leagues grow larger, other solutions need to be

found. In the mid-1990s, for instance, Ottawa league organizers were well aware that

"we have become used to playing on fields that have dangerous turf, are not regulation

size, or not really ours and available only 'til the NCC kicks us off."[20]

The Douglas Hospital

Sometimes landowners recognize a benefit in allowing Ultimate players to make

use of their properties. The relationship can be strictly monetary, as in rental agreements.

But the situation in Montreal illustrates how sharing space can also yield more qualitative

benefits. Since 1993, the Association de Ultimate de Montreal (AUM) has conducted

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[19] Part II Section 34 of the *Regulations Respecting the Property of the National Capital Commission and the Operation of Vehicles Thereon* (CRC, c. 1044) states "No person shall play at golf, tennis, baseball, football or soccer on any property of the Commission except in those parts thereof that have been designated by the Commission for that purpose." The OCUA's use of Riverside may not be violating the letter of this regulation, but is obviously in contravention of its spirit. The complete text of the *National Capital Act* (RS, 1985, c. N-4) can be found at http://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/N-4/index.html

[20] "This Land is our Land: everything you need to know about how to be a part of our land purchase," *TOUR*, (May 1997): 11.

league games on the grounds of the Douglas Hospital in Verdun.[21] Because the

agreement to use the grounds "was done on a handshake and a smile," with the details

known only to the AUM board of directors and the Douglas Hospital's facilities manager,

the exact nature of the agreement between the Douglas and the AUM is a matter of

mystery to many – if they stop to think about it at all.[22] In fact, the relationship between

the Douglas Hospital and the many community organizations that make use of its

grounds is symbiotic. As a mental health treatment facility the Douglas battles negative

stereotypes and is continually working to "rejuvenate, enliven and humanise its image" in

an effort to "demystify mental illness."[23] As part of that effort, the hospital makes its

extensive 150-acre grounds open to local residents and community groups and keeps

searching for ways to "welcome Montrealers to the Douglas campus."[24] Allowing sports

organizations to use their land fits nicely into this strategy.

Ultimate players sometimes say that the use of the grounds of a psychiatric

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[21] The grounds of the Douglas Hospital were discovered and used in 1991 to host the 5th Canadian National Ultimate Championships. The site is also used for the Montreal Jazz tournament (est. 1994), the Comedy of Errors tournament (est. 1999) and several AUM league tournaments.

[22] Lorne Beckman, "Fields Report" *Discours,* (April 2000): 7.

[23] Douglas Hospital, *Annual Report*, (2002-2003): 21 http://www.douglas.qc.ca/publications/15/file_fr/rapport-annuel-02-03-en.pdf (accessed 14 November 2010).

[24] In 2000, the Douglas Hospital hosted the Montreal International Celtic Festival where "patients, volunteers, and staff, all took part in the celebration," mingling with 20,000 visitors. Douglas Hospital, *Annual Report,* (2000-2001): 11

hospital "mak[es] all participants feel particularly at home!"[25] But Tony Boyd, who

initiated the negotiations between Ultimate players and the Douglas, recalls that the

hospital "really liked and embraced the Montreal Ultimate league." From the beginning,

it was clear that "this was a good opportunity for them to reach out and offer their

facilities to the community, and they really liked, both for their patients and for the image

of the [hospital], this wonderful Frisbee league with all these young athletic people."[26]

As a reciprocal gesture the AUM makes a voluntary annual donation to the Douglas

Hospital Foundation.[27] For most of the past two decades this has proven to be a

mutually-beneficial arrangement.

Yet, as pleased as the Douglas is to welcome Ultimate players, and as happy as

AUM members are to make use of its facilities, issues of ownership, and entitlement,

crop up. The Douglas is first and foremost a hospital and has strict rules and policies

regarding the use of its grounds. Participants of the 1991 nationals were warned that

"The Douglas is a Psychiatric Hospital that has kindly provided us with field space.

Often their patients are free to roam the grounds, and some like to chat to sideline

players, and may be inclined to meander onto a field ... we do hope you will give a little

[25] Luc Drouin, "History of Ultimate in Montreal" accessed through the Internet Archive, http://web.archive.org/web/19980205030137/aum.zoo.net/aum/history (accessed 18 June 2009).

[26] Tony Boyd, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 28 September 2010.

[27] Over the years the AUM has increased the size of its donation from several hundred to several thousand dollars. Other sports clubs that donate to the Douglas Foundation include the Montreal Wanderers Rugby Club, the Dragons Soccer Club, and the St. Vincent Mets Cricket Club. See Douglas Hospital, *Annual Reports,* http://www.douglas.qc.ca/publications (accessed 14 November 2010).

latitude when it comes to the patients."[28] Another hospital policy is the prohibition of

drugs and alcohol on the premises. This becomes an issue, as players often fail to see the

harm in bringing beer – particularly to tournaments. Every year captains are warned that

this could lead to the loss of the privilege of playing at the Douglas, which would be

devastating to the league, yet every year, someone tries to bring a cooler of beer. In

addition to Ultimate, local rugby, cricket, and soccer leagues also play at the Douglas.

For the most part the AUM co-exists with these other groups. But, as the sports

organization that makes the most use of the grounds, and makes the largest annual

donation, Ultimate considers itself the Douglas's "principal tenant."[29] The Douglas is

also surrounded on two sides by residential streets. In 1993 the AUM used the Douglas

grounds on Tuesday evenings. By 1998 they were playing there on Tuesdays and

Thursdays and they began making use of more of the green space, expanding from ten to

sixteen fields. In 2003 they started playing on Mondays, and Wednesday evenings were

added the following year. Additionally the AUM uses the Douglas for its weekend

tournaments, and competitive teams hold their practices there as well. For adjacent

homeowners this means that four evenings per week and several weekends in the summer

are filled with the sometimes raucous sounds of Ultimate play. As much as the presence

of "all these young athletic people" helps the hospital's image, it sometimes causes

unwanted conflict with their neighbours and attempts to curtail noise at the Douglas

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[28] "Field Etiquette," 1991 Canadian National Ultimate Championships player
handbook, supplied by Tony Boyd.

[29] Beckman, "Fields Report."

remains a concern for league administrators.

Also of serious concern is what all this use does in terms of damage to the fields, which are not proper sportsfields, but rather the hospital's extensive lawn. While the hospital has permitted the AUM to perform minor maintenance "to improve field quality," nonetheless, as Lorne Beckman explains, "major projects have been beyond our budget" and major field improvement projects are problematic, "without first getting a commitment from the Douglas for our use of the fields in the long term."[30] Thus periodic attempts at field maintenance at the Douglas have been small-scale and ultimately inadequate to counteract the damage from decades of excessive use.

More worrisome for a league that has come to rely upon the Douglas grounds for its activities is the threat of losing the fields to development. Since the 1980s, for instance, there has been a protracted public debate between the municipality of Verdun, the Douglas hospital, patients, and local residents over the possible alienation of some of the hospital's land.[31] In the 1990s, "due to shrinking of government grants to hospitals" several institutions "located on valuable land in Montreal" were "looking to sell off some of their property" and the Douglas was no exception.[32] Existing zoning bylaws and public pressure to preserve green space succeeded in preventing this proposed sale of

[30] Beckman, "Fields Report."

[31] See Ann Lauglin, "Verdun eyes Hospital Land," *The Gazette*, 24 March 1986, A.3; Isabel Corral and Joshua Wolfe, "It's time to Reclaim Island's Waterfront 'blue belt' as Parks," *The Gazette*, 21 March 1987, J.10; Harvey Shepherd, "Patients Fight to Prevent Loss of Hospital Green Space," *The Gazette*, 5 December 1988, A.3.

[32] Jeff Heinrich, "Hospital Plan is Disguised Expropriation, Lobbyists Say," *The Gazette*, 28 March 1991, A.7.

Douglas land. But as will be shown in greater detail below, zoning laws are relatively

simple to have changed. Reflecting the perpetual hunt for new sources of funding, the

Douglas Hospital's 2004-05 five-year strategic plan announced that "we are exploring

options for having a portion of our unused land rezoned. This would allow us to sell the

land and use the proceeds for capital projects."[33] While these periodic attempts at selling

off bits of the land seem to have been temporarily thwarted,[34] no laws prevent the

hospital from developing the land itself. The AUM's current executive director points

out that "on a déjà perdu un de nos terrains," to recent structural improvements.[35] With

sixty percent of the Douglas's infrastructure built before 1940, plans for the construction

of new buildings and expanded parking facilities will undoubtedly continue to chip away

at the Douglas's green space.[36] No matter how much Ultimate players consider the

Douglas to be their "home base," without a long-term contractual agreement, perpetual

use of these fields by Ultimate players is in no way guaranteed.[37]

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[33] Douglas Hospital, *Annual Report* (2004-2005): 3, http://www.douglas.qc.ca/publications (accessed 14 November 2010).

[34] See Émilie Côté, "Des citoyens de Verdun opposés aux changements de zonage," *La Presse*, Actualités, 30 mars 2005, A.18; "Zonage résiteniel d'un espace vert à Verdun" *La Presse,* Nouvelles générales, 2 avril 2005, A.45; "Zonage résidentiel" *La Presse,* Actualités, 6 avril 2005, A.14; Anne Sutherland, "We goofed on hospital rezoning, Bosse says: Verdun scraps housing plan," *The Gazette*, 5 April 2005, A.7.

[35] Jean-Lévy Champagne, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 12 January 2011.

[36] "Open Letter to Borough of Verdun and City of Montréal Elected Officials," 14 August 2005, http://www.douglas.qc.ca/news/105?locale=en (accessed 20 January 2011).

[37] Lorne Beckman (AUM) to Mr. Pierre Côté (Toujours Ensemble), 20 December 2002, supplied by Lorne Beckman.

Dedicated Ultimate Fields?

Both squatting and negotiating can be understood as partial and imperfect

solutions to Ultimate's field space needs. In the 1990s, the Canadian Ultimate

community was growing and nowhere was this growth more remarkable than in the city

of Ottawa.[38] Craig Fielding, who began running the league in 1985 and saw it grow from

five to 210 teams over the twelve years of his tenure, attributes the growth to several

factors. Partly, he explains, the city of Ottawa is the right size: small enough that it is

"relatively easy to get around the city," but large enough to provide the necessary pool of

potential players.[39] Ottawa's population, moreover, is comprised of a large number of

students and white-collar professionals – the type of people who tend to take up Ultimate.

But Ottawa Ultimate's rapid growth can also be attributed to "good word of mouth" and

the "evangelistic" tendencies of its first players and league organizers.[40] In the

beginning, of course, the numbers had nowhere to go but up. Craig remembers that

"people were ignorant about the sport! I thought, 'this is so much fun, and nobody knows

about it – we gotta get the word out!'" He admits that "my wife got sick of me constantly

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[38] From 1994 to2004 the OCUA claimed to be the largest Ultimate league in the world. It continues to claim to be "one of the largest, one of the best." Ottawa-Carleton Ultimate Association, "About OCUA," http://www.ocua.ca/node/14 (accessed 31 January 2007); and "OCUA History," http://www.ocua.ca/book.export/html/13 (accessed 7 August 2009).

[39] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010.

[40] Ibid.

talking about Ultimate."[41] Tony, who also began playing in Ottawa in the mid-1980s,

explains that "part of the appeal was that it was a fun sport [to play], but it was also fun to

get other people into it [and] we would always be recruiting."[42] By 1992 the renamed

Ottawa-Carleton Ultimate Association had grown to thirty-six teams and could still

regularly be seen playing beside the highway at Riverside.[43] But they had added an extra

night and had started using three additional locations: Linda Lane Fields, National

Research Council Fields and Lakeside Gardens, Britannia Park.[44] Clearly Ottawa

Ultimate was growing both in terms of numbers of teams and players, but also in terms of

the physical and temporal space required to accommodate its activities.

By 1993, the (now incorporated as a registered not-for profit) OCUA had fifty-

two teams and continuous growth was projected for the coming years. Increased

numbers and higher fees, meant greater revenues that could be put towards renting

fields.[45] But Ultimate players and organizers found that "the toughest competition is *for*

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[41] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010.

[42] Tony Boyd, 28 September 2010.

[43] Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, "Ultimate: Frisbee Fun and Fair Play" CBC Digital Archive Website, http://archives.cbc.ca/sports/more_sports/clips/15396/ (accessed 8 July 2009).

[44] Louise Dickson, "Catch The Ultimate: Spirit of the Game Powers Soaring Popularity of Latest in Disc Drives," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 7 June 1992 C.6 FIT.

[45] In the early 1990s, team fees rose to $200. Mike Harley, "Telling it like it is: Bringing all Ottawa Ultimate players together for a common goal," *TOUR,* (May 1997): 13.

the turf – not on it"[46] In the 1990s field space in Ottawa was scarce and in high demand.

Other sports groups, particularly soccer leagues, were also having trouble finding

adequate space to support their own accelerated growth. In 1996 the Ottawa-Carleton

Soccer League claimed that "there are only about thirty-five usable fields in Ottawa – all

of them in demand by soccer, rugby, football and ultimate-Frisbee teams" and organizers

also complained that "such high demand takes its toll on the fields [and] they are in very

poor shape."[47] Symptomatic of a chronic and ongoing field space crunch, this

municipality-wide "lack of playing fields" remained "the biggest obstacle facing

Ultimate."[48]

Limited municipal budgets and a lack of political will was pointed to as the root

of the problem. Environmental activist, David Chernushenko remarked that "in the debt-

and recession-ravaged 1990s, opportunities for participatory recreation are now being

curtailed" because of budget cuts to "almost every level of government."[49] Despite an

obvious demand, in this discouraging political and economic climate, it was seen as "not

a likely occurrence" that municipal governments would devote more funds and lands

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[46] David Fontaine, "Fight for the End Zone," *The Globe and Mail,* 21 May 2005, M.2.

[47] Wes Smiderle, "Success Squeezes Soccer Clubs," *Ottawa Citizen*, 23 June 1996, B.6.

[48] Craig Fielding, "The Future of Ottawa Ultimate," *TOUR,* (June 1993): 8.

[49] David Chernushenko, *Greening Our Games: Running Sports Events and Facilities that Won't Cost the Earth*, (Ottawa: Centurion Publishing & Marketing, 1994), 93.

towards new sports fields.[50] Moreover, because of Ultimate's lower profile, the more

recognized, more mainstream, and also-growing-in-popularity field sports were perceived

as having an advantage in securing the existing municipally-owned and operated playing

surfaces. While Ultimate was slowly improving its ability to compete with the other field

sports for rentals, players perceived that "Ultimate takes a back seat to other sports in

obtaining city fields."[51] In their dealings with the City of Ottawa, Ultimate players felt

that they were being allocated the less conveniently-located, poorer quality fields or

inconveniently-scheduled rentals.[52] Players feared that inability to secure the requisite

playing surfaces would eventually cripple their organization and "Ultimate will find itself

squeezed out."[53]

At some point in their development, all leagues face the decision either to limit

growth to accommodate existing field availability, or expand field availability to

accommodate league growth. Several leagues have, at one time or another, capped their

membership for exactly this reason. In the late-1990s, for example, organizers in Toronto

were "scrambling to find playing fields, and wondering if a shortage of them will limit

the potential of their beloved game."[54] Similarly in Montreal, "without changing our

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[50] Fielding, "The Future of Ottawa Ultimate," 8

[51] Ibid.

[52] Marc Gobeil, Letter, "Ultimate League has bad History with City Sports Fields," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 3 July 2005, A.11.

[53] Fielding, "The Future of Ottawa Ultimate," 8

[54] Jennifer Prittie, "The Ultimate Craze has them Running, Leaping, and Spinning," *National Post*, 15 April 1999, B.3.

usage of those ten fields at the [Douglas] hospital, the league will be limited to twenty

teams."[55] Now with over 200 teams, AUM organizers still characterize field availability

as "le plus grand frein à notre croissance."[56] Ultimate promoters, however, find the

prospect of turning new members away highly distasteful. John Harris, former general

manager of the Toronto Ultimate Club explains that Ultimate "gave me so much life

enjoyment over so many years. I just love the sport and I think everyone should have the

chance to play. I didn't want to exclude anyone. I never accepted that you would have to

stop growing."[57] Craig recalls that some OCUA league members' attitude toward growth

(especially if it involved higher fees) was: "we're playing, why do we need to grow?"

But, he maintains, "that was *not* my attitude."[58] For evangelistic promoters like John and

Craig, limiting growth is not an appealing option and finding more playing fields is the

only acceptable course of action.

Yet innovative solutions were needed. Ottawa players and organizers began

thinking about the possibility of acquiring "dedicated Ultimate fields."[59] The idea to

build their own Ultimate park resulted from the intersections of the OCUA's rapid

growth, competition from other sports for limited and well-maintained playing surfaces,

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[55] Luc Drouin, trans. Lorne Beckman, "On perd du terrain! / We are Losing Ground!" *Discours,* (October 1997): 7.

[56] Jean-Lévy Champagne, 12 January 2011.

[57] John Harris, 23 July 2010.

[58] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010.

[59] Fielding, "The Future of Ottawa Ultimate," 8

and "years of fruitless negotiations with the city," for fairer, more secure, and better

access to municipal fields.[60] "Frustrated by an inability to find available sports fields in

the area" the OCUA embarked upon a plan to help solve their space problems.[61] In the

process, the Ottawa-Carleton Ultimate Association fundamentally altered the approach

that Ultimate leagues across Canada employ in solving the problem of access to urban

space.

The Sod Farm

The story of the Ottawa land purchase really begins with the Sod Farm. In 1993 a

temporary solution to the OCUA's field space issues presented itself when Craig

negotiated an agreement with "the sod farmer." Jess Peterson of Peterson's Turf Farms,

whose business was growing sod, maintained hundreds of acres of agricultural land in the

adjacent townships. Craig explains that "we gave him a $2000 damage deposit, and the

rent was $7500 for his most northerly property, thirty acres, closest to the city."[62] This

site, located on Spratt Road in the then adjacent city of Gloucester, provided the OCUA

with sixteen fields for their exclusive use. The league paid rent and was required to sign

a lease and in exchange the sod farmer saw to maintenance by planting grass seed

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[60] Marc Gobeil, "Ultimate League has bad History with City Sports Fields," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 3 July 2005, Letters, A.11.

[61] Tom Casey, "Ultimate Ambition Shines Through: The Ottawa Region Features the World's Largest Ultimate League," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 19 August 1999, B.6.

[62] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010.

designed specifically for sports fields, and fertilized, watered, and mowed the fields.[63]

Craig saw many potential benefits for the OCUA in this arrangement: "league growth

would be accommodated and games would be played on superior quality fields; fields

[c]ould be lined and playing surfaces would be flat and level; fewer injuries would occur;

[and] league administration and communication would be simplified."[64] In addition,

Craig hoped that the Sod Farm could reignite a sense of community that had existed

when the league was smaller. "Riverside was a nice community" he remembers, "but we

only had three fields at Riverside," with sixteen fields, "the Sod Farm was a chance to

bring it all back together in one place."[65] Yet, securing the Sod Farm, as well as its

ability to foster a sense of community, proved more complicated than Craig had initially

envisioned.

Complaints from a local resident attracted the attention of the municipal

authorities who informed Craig that playing Ultimate at the Sod Farm was an infraction

of the zoning laws. In order to continue using the Sod Farm, the OCUA needed to apply

to have the zoning by-law changed. A public hearing of the Gloucester Planning

Advisory Committee (PAC) was held on 18 April 1995 to discuss OCUA's application.[66]

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[63] Fielding, "The Future of Ottawa Ultimate," 8

[64] Ibid.

[65] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010.

[66] "All property owners and tenants within 120 metres of the subject site" were
advised of the public hearing and Fielding requested that each OCUA team send one
player to represent the league, "so there were about 50 Ultimate players in the room."
City of Gloucester, PAC Meeting #6, Clerk's Meeting Notes, 18 April 1995; Craig
Fielding, e-mail message to author, 14 November 2010.

The original complainant, a Mr. Ken MacLeod, voiced his opposition "based on extra noise and traffic, road-side parking, the safety of existing residents, garbage which attracts pests, and the highly visible toilets" and argued that the OCUA should not be permitted to use the fields because "the applicant does not contribute to the local tax base."[67] According to Craig, the elderly Mr. MacLeod "*hated* us being there" and "came out and told all these lies about us!"[68] He remembers MacLeod's complaints as mostly spurious:

> he said it was noise - but we weren't noisy. He said the outhouses were eyesores – I said we'll move them behind the shrubbery. He said, 'they leave the place a mess,' which was not true! I took exception to that. We had a carry-in-carry-out policy. We kept the place clean. The township said we needed a proper parking lot – we parked on the grass and just kept moving the cars around. Dust was a bit of an issue – we ended up watering the road to keep the dust down."[69]

Presenting OCUA's case Craig indicated their "wish to co-exist with the neighbours," but also explained how "locating suitable fields within the area is not an easy task."[70] Other OCUA members Peter McKinnon, and Philip Rodger also "spoke in favour of the amendment" and respectively explained the growing popularity of the sport and the potential benefits to the city of Gloucester as host to national and international tournaments.[71] Fortunately, Craig was able to convince the planning committee that the

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[67] City of Gloucester, PAC Meeting #6, Clerk's Meeting Notes, 18 April 1995.

[68] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010.

[69] Ibid.

[70] City of Gloucester, PAC Meeting #6, Clerk's Meeting Notes, 18 April 1995.

[71] Ibid.

OCUA could "mitigate all these [issues]," because "if we'd lost those fields we couldn't have continued the league."[72] Within only a couple of years, the OCUA had come to rely upon the fields provided by the Sod Farm and the prospect of losing them seemed potentially devastating. Happily – for the OCUA – the application was approved and a three-year "temporary use" zoning amendment was granted, permitting recreational use of the Sod Farm.[73]

There was, however, another unforeseen problem with the Sod Farm. Many team captains, for instance, objected to its remote location in Gloucester. Craig recalls their vociferous objections to his attempt to move *all* OCUA games to the Sod Farm: "Boy, did I get crapped on! What I had ignored was that people had to get there. I got the message loud and clear: 'we want to keep our in-city fields.'" This input proved fortuitous because, despite its many benefits, "the Sod Farm was not enough" and "we really needed *both* the Sod Farm and the city fields."[74]

To this day, Craig speaks glowingly of the years at the Sod Farm. "It was a fantastic facility to have," he insists. "It was a great site! We had all our tournaments and city league playoffs there."[75] But the Sod Farm was only a partial and, as it turned out, temporary measure. Eventually, the question arose as to how sustainable the arrangement

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[72] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010.

[73] The OCUA renewed the 'temporary use' zoning amendment in 1998 and again with the newly amalgamated City of Ottawa in 2001.

[74] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010.

[75] Ibid.

might be. Former OCUA president Ken Lange explains that "over the years the rent went

up, UPI was developed, and the city developed more of its own fields."[76] So, after a

decade of playing there, the OCUA decided that the Sod Farm was no longer cost

effective and it was abandoned. Nonetheless, the experiences at the Sod Farm proved

instructive in many ways. And it was an important first step that led to a much more

ambitious project to alleviate the OCUA's space problems.

Ultimate Parks, Inc. (UPI)

Since the Sod Farm was not enough, players and organizers continued to search

for more usable field space in the Ottawa region. For some people, land ownership

presented a promising method of securing permanent access to fields. According to an

article in *TOUR* magazine, "Ottawa Ultimate owning its own land for fields" was an idea

that some players had been contemplating since the late1980s because even then "we

recognized that field space would eventually become a problem."[77] Yet, this concept

proved controversial among the OCUA board of directors, which was then made up of

team captains, particularly because accumulating the necessary capital would mean a

significant increase in team fees. Craig claims that it was Justine Price, drawing on the

experience of the Sod Farm, who helped convince the captains: "She stood up in the

meeting and said, 'years ago, Craig said we should go to the Sod Farm, and some of us

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[76] Ken Lange, interview by author, Ottawa, ON, 11 June 2010.

[77] Mike Harley, "Telling it like it is: Bringing all Ottawa Ultimate players together for a common goal," *TOUR,* (May 1997): 13.

doubted him ...but that turned out to be a really good decision ... it's only another $150 more per team that he wants... I think we should trust him.'" And, "That was it!"[78] Thus "at the start of the 1996 playing season, team captains voted to raise team fees to $400 per team with the intention of creating a monetary surplus that could be put towards a long-term solution to the area's field needs."[79] For its proponents land ownership would provide "all current and future players in Ottawa field space to play on"[80] while ensuring that "we'll control it, and no one can take it away."[81]

The OCUA's Field Needs Committee, led by Nick Roberts, then began looking at properties. Properties across the river in nearby Quebec were considered but rejected because the prospect of crossing the bridges at rush hour was a major disincentive. Eventually, after rejecting a promising site in Gloucester, a property in the neighbouring township of Osgoode, "a 2.5 minute drive from our present Sod Farm," was selected. Priced at $200,000, this 109-acre property's front forty acres had already been cleared and used as another sod farm, thus the obvious appeal was that "it's big, flat, easy to develop, and cheap!!"[82] In order to avoid the same problems experienced with the Sod Farm, the offer to purchase the land was submitted on a conditional basis. These three

[78] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010.

[79] Craig Fielding, "Ottawa-Carleton Ultimate Association says Buy-Buy to Field Crisis," *Spirit,* (Spring 1997): 16.

[80] Mike Harley, "Telling it like it is," 13.

[81] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010.

[82] Ottawa-Carleton Ultimate Association, "We're Buying Land! And we Need Your Help," promotional flyer supplied by Ken Hunt.

conditions were: "the approval of the deal by a majority of OCUA team captains, that the local town council [permanently] amend the zoning to allow the use of the land for Ultimate and that the necessary financing could be obtained."[83] The first condition, approval of the board of directors, was met with relative ease with seventy-seven percent of OCUA's captains voting "in favour of the purchase."[84] Craig characterizes the second condition, a permanent rezoning, also as a relatively simple affair. He claims that the Osgoode town councillors "were all in favour, totally supportive, it was easy to get the zoning."[85] Indeed, on 16 September 1997 the proposed zoning by-law amendment was passed and OCUA was granted a permanent rezoning from rural (RU) to a private open space exception (O2Xh) permitting the use of the land for Ultimate.[86]

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[83] Fielding, "Buy-Buy," 16.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010. Nonetheless, getting the necessary zoning amendment entailed following the requisite procedures of civic government. On 28 January 1997 the Township of Osgoode Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) received an inquiry from "the Ottawa-Carleton Ultimate Association ... about rezoning the property described as West part of Lot 4 Concession 3 as a playing field for their sport." The initial response from the Osgoode PAC was that they had "no objection in principle" but (as with the Sod Farm) parking and septic systems were raised as planning issues (Township of Osgoode, Planning Committee Minutes, 28 January 1997, 2002-9046). On 25 February 1997 the PAC "recommend[ed] to Council that the Ottawa-Carleton Ultimate Association rezoning application be processed and a public meeting be held" (Township of Osgoode, Planning Committee Minutes, 25 February 1997, Motion #18). That public hearing was held on 8 April 1997 with little apparent fanfare (Township of Osgoode, Planning Advisory Committee Minutes, 8 April 1997). After a report from the Director of Planning and three readings of the proposed amendment, it was carried and passed on 16 September 1997 (Township of Osgoode, Regular Council Meeting, 16 September 1997).

[86] Township of Osgoode, Regular Council Meeting Minutes, 16 September 1997, 2002-5559. Section 3 of the Township of Osgoode By-Law no. 76-1997 spells out the

The third condition, financing, proved to be the "toughest challenge."[87]
Conventional means of raising money, borrowing from the bank, proved unworkable.
Craig recalls that "we went to the banks, told them we had good cash flow, and they'd
just laugh. Land with no buildings? -- which banks hate; we were a not-for-profit, which
means limited liability for everyone involved – which banks hate. They wouldn't touch
us."[88] Therefore, in order to finance the project the OCUA hit upon the idea of
borrowing from their members. Craig explained that "to raise this money OCUA is
creating a private company with 1000 shares for sale at $200 each. OCUA will [then]
buy all the shares back at $225 each from its annual surplus. We expect it will take about
six years to buy back every share based on a new league fee of $500."[89] Creating this
company – Ultimate Parks, Inc. (UPI) – was not a simple endeavour, and "there was a lot
of legal work involved."[90]

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permitted uses of the rezoned land: "On the lands zoned O2Xh- Open Space Exception
holding, a 10 metre setback for sports fields and/or buildings, sheds, facilities shall be
maintained from top of bank of the Castor River; parking for a minimum of 100 cars or 1
space for 4 person capacity, whichever is greater, shall be required on site; the 'h' has
been placed on the zone to ensure that a satisfactory site plan is entered into with the
Township; building shall be permitted only on the north-west corner of the site in a
squared area south 200 metres from the point which divides Lot 3 from Lot 4 and thence
east 200 metres" (Corporation of the Township of Osgoode, By-law no. 76-1997, Being a
By-Law to amend zoning By-Law 16-1971).

[87] Fielding, "Buy-Buy," 16.

[88] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010.

[89] Fielding, "Buy-Buy," 16. The first in a wave of buy-backs occurred in
November 2001.

[90] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010. Mike Harley issued a letter to "inform all current
shareholders of change in date developments" where he explained that "it seems that

Once the company was created selling shares in UPI also proved more difficult than expected. Proponents publicized the fact that "the success of this endeavour will depend entirely on our ability to sell these shares," but they found that not all of Ottawa's players were necessarily interested in or supportive of the project.[91] Mike Harley expressed his surprise and dismay on behalf of the Share Sales Committee:

> To tell you the truth I expected that raising the money from Ultimate players in Ottawa was going to be easy. From my point of view (and I'll have to admit I'm pretty rabid about Ultimate), who wouldn't want to help out. ... I was not prepared, however, for players who just said no and were unwilling to listen or read any information about the land purchase.[92]

Selling the shares required a lot of dedication, inventiveness, and hard work. The Share Sales Committee opted to solicit pledges rather than asking for money upfront and they accepted pledges from teams, as well as individuals. The 1997 summer issues of *TOUR* are replete with articles by various members of the committee publicizing the land purchase, the share sales initiative, and urging Ottawa players to get involved. Craig remembers that it also took legwork: "we sold shares all through the summer, we went to the games, [and we got] 100 shares committed in a one week blitz."[93]

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since we will have more than 50 shareholders we must issue a prospectus in order to conform to the 'Securities Act.' Issuing a prospectus would cause a delay and add some legal fees. We have decided to try and get an exemption and therefore not have to issue the prospectus. Other sports organizations, in similar situations, have gotten this exemption. With advice from our lawyer we feel this is the way to go but the exemption will take three to six months. Therefore our original purchase date cannot be met." Mike Harley to Lorne Beckman, nd, supplied by Lorne Beckman.

[91] Fielding, "Buy-Buy," 16.

[92] Mike Harley, "Telling it like it is," 13.

[93] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010.

These efforts paid off. There are over two hundred original UPI shareholders: six organizations, thirty-eight teams, and 174 individuals, the majority of whom were indeed, OCUA members.[94] Some people were exceedingly generous. Dave Knowles, for instance, bought fifty shares, investing $10,000, which made him by far the largest UPI shareholder. UPI also enjoyed support from members of the larger Ultimate community. Craig remembers that he "immediately" received a pledge to purchase twenty shares from the AUM who in addition to investing $4000 of the league's money also "encourag[ed] donations or outright share purchases by Ultimate players throughout Montreal."[95] In addition to Montreal's purchase, shares in UPI were bought by the Canadian Ultimate Players Association (CUPA) the Toronto Ultimate Club (TUC), and London Ultimate (LU). The OCUA hoped to have the land purchased and developed for the 1998 summer Ultimate season. But, "we were still $100,000 short."[96] After various attempts at covering the shortfall failed, the OCUA negotiated a vendor-take-back mortgage with landowner, Ken Gordon, who according to Craig, "has always been a good friend to Ottawa Ultimate."[97] This, in addition to the money raised by the sold shares in UPI finally put the issue of financing to rest.

For proponents within the Ottawa Ultimate community land ownership and a

[94] A list of original UPI shareholders can be found at http://www.ecoview.com/conbd.html

[95] Lorne Beckman, "Montreal votes 'Oui' to Ottawa's Land Deal" *Spirit,* (Spring 1997): 16. One individual Montreal player heeded the call and purchased a share in UPI.

[96] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010.

[97] Ibid.

dedicated Ultimate facility represented security and guaranteed access to fields in

perpetuity. For opponents it meant unnecessarily high league fees. For others such an

"extraordinary venture" had a deeper significance.[98] In a letter urging national support

for the project Lorne Beckman, on behalf of the AUM, clearly outlines what he saw as

the meaning of UPI:

> this Land Deal [is] a tremendous opportunity to earn greater public
> acceptance of the sport, and [we] envision it as an epic milestone toward
> the betterment of Ultimate across Canada. The tenet 'A man is nothing
> without land' can be extended to the sport of Ultimate: Without land,
> Ultimate might endlessly struggle for recognition. This Land Deal is the
> right step toward earning a well-deserved legitimacy.[99]

And Lorne urged other players and organizations to support the initiative, arguing that

"land ownership by *any* league in Canada is to the advantage of *every* league in

Canada."[100] Similarly CUPA executive director and TUC general manager, John Harris,

"thought it was really important," and personally bought twenty-five shares, "partly to

show people that I supported it."[101] Charlie Mead, Chair of the World Flying Disc

Federation (WFDF) also recognized

> the Ottawa Ultimate Land Buy [as] one of the most exciting long term
> projects for Ultimate players around the world. It will become the first set
> of fields dedicated to the sport and will, I am sure, provide a focus and
> incentive for other players around the world to build their own dreams."[102]

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[98] Beckman, "Montreal votes 'Oui,'" 16.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid., emphasis added.

[101] John Harris, 23 July 2010.

[102] Charlie Mead, quoted in *TOUR,* (May 1997): 11.

An array of boosters, therefore, understood the venture, not only as beneficial for players in Ottawa, but meaningful for a larger Ultimate community. And they looked on with interest and varying levels of investment (capital and personal) as Ottawa set out to build the first Ultimate park.

Having successfully financed the purchase of the land, the OCUA could now turn its attention to the actual development of the fields. Yet "as with any construction project," claims Ken Lange, "there were a lot of unforeseen obstacles"[103] and the OCUA's Field Design Committee found itself facing considerable challenges, not the least of which was how to develop the land in the most cost-effective way. This was done both by mining OCUA membership for skills and expertise and partnering with other groups. For instance, OCUA member Larry Pegg, and his landscaping company, Ecoview, was given the contract to design and develop the facility. David Chernushenko, former deputy Green Party leader and member of the International Olympic Committee's Sport and Environment Commission, was also involved in the project. With its formula of "eco-efficiency = waste avoidance = savings," Chernushenko's company, Green & Gold, Inc., was able to put the OCUA in contact with people who could assist.[104] By partnering with various consultants and contributors, UPI was initially developed as much as a research project, as a sports facility. Four of the nineteen fields were initially research fields with much of the labour and materials acquired for research purposes.

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[103] Ken Lange, 11 June 2010.

[104] Green & Gold, Inc., "Company Profile," http://www.greengold.on.ca/about/profile.html (accessed 23 September 2010).

Peter Johnson Beresford of Kempville College (University of Guelph) donated grass seed

for turf grass research. Domtar donated $3,600 of fine paper waste biosolids for "random

replicated trials using twenty-one different sports turf blends." And the "state of the art,

electronically managed" irrigation system was also acquired at a $30,000 research

discount.[105] Pegg, in fact, mortgaged his home in order to install the irrigation system at

cost.

The most noticeable theme in the documentation about the development of UPI is

its environmental focus. According to their website, the "OCUA and UPI are committed

to developing the land in an environmentally sound manner."[106] Their press release

outlined some of their plans for the site:

> as turf management is traditionally known as an environmental offender
> our developers and partners have been studying more environmentally
> friendly techniques to maintain the grass. We are also concerned about
> the effects to the water in the community. There is a stream running
> through our land and it is our goal to have the quality of water leaving our
> property higher than the quality of water entering it. We are making use
> of our irrigation pond with natural wetlands and natural shoreline to work
> towards this. ... Other initiatives that the league is working towards for the
> land development include; pond and natural wetland, the development of a
> river bank ecosystem, and interpretive boardwalk and a footbridge for the
> property"[107]

According to this document, environmental concerns seem to eclipse the intended use of

the land for Ultimate. Ken Lange comments that "environmentally-friendly construction

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[105] Larry Pegg, "Welcome to 'The Ultimate Sports Park' a Global First," reprinted in *Spirit*, (October 1999): 6-7.

[106] Ottawa-Carleton Ultimate Association, "About Ultimate Parks Inc.," http://ocua.ca/pressroom/ocua_upi_info.pdf (accessed 8 July 2009).

[107] Ibid.

appealed to our members, many of whom are environmentally conscious."[108] But, the

eco-friendly emphasis surrounding UPI should be better understood as a reflection of the

orientation of UPI's partners.

In fact, the attention to environmentally-friendly development often conflicted

with the OCUA's immediate needs and created professional and interpersonal tensions

between the Field Design Committee and the contractor. Pegg, for instance, who "talks a

good game, and was able to help get the Conservation Authority off our backs," at the

same time "came in with some big ideas, and while admirable, the problem was his ideas

didn't necessarily line up with what we wanted or what we could afford."[109] Lange

explains that "his being an Ultimate player was good, it meant that he was willing to go

the extra mile. He obviously cared about the project, and was invested in it. But at the

same time, he had strong ideas about what he wanted, and it blurs the business

relationship when it's one of your members."[110] There were clearly drawbacks as well as

advantages in mining the skills of the membership. Pegg obviously worked hard and

sacrificed a great deal for the project, but his interest was not wholly altruistic.

Introducing the park as "a *world model* for sports organizations, private sector developers

and the public alike, demonstrating the practical steps that can be taken towards

environmental stewardship in an industry that often shows flagrant disregard for its

environment," Pegg clearly saw and took advantage of the potential promotional

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[108] Ken Lange, 11 June 2010.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Ibid.

endorsement for Ecoview.[111] Chernushenko also proudly promoted UPI as a flagship

initiative. With UPI, he claimed that "we aim to demonstrate how a sports facility can be

designed and operated in an economically and environmentally sustainable manner" and

"we hope that by the year 2000, ours will be just one of many [such] facilities."[112] Both

Chernushenko and Pegg were able to use their involvement in UPI to market their

companies and launch future projects.[113]

Cultivating an environmentally-conscious image taps into other Ultimate

narratives. The rhetoric clearly tries to distinguish Ultimate field management as

responsible as opposed to conventional methods used by other field sports which are

"traditionally known as environmental offenders," which extends the narrative of

difference beyond the game and its players to the physical playing surfaces. Indeed,

Ultimate players generally like to cast themselves as more respectful of playing surfaces

and facilities than other sports groups. This, however, is not always the case. Rita M.,

for instance, remembers participating in an event that demonstrated flagrant disregard for

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[111] Pegg, "Welcome to 'The Ultimate Sports Park,'" emphasis added.

[112] David Chernushenko, "Chelsea sets a Praiseworthy Example with its Stand Against Use of Pesticides," *Ottawa Citizen*, 3 December 1998, Letter, C.5.

[113] Larry Pegg was the driving force behind the Ottawa Sports Park (OSP). First proposed in 2001, OSP was an ambitious plan to build a $35 million privately managed, environmentally-sound sports facility consisting of 30 full size soccer fields on Transport Canada lands south of the Ottawa airport. The project was supported by local community organizations, soccer leagues, the OCUA, and initially by several Ottawa city councillors. Plans for the OSP were, however, cancelled in 2006 when the Ottawa Airport Authority denied permission to develop the site citing safety concerns over flightpaths. See Ecoview, "Press Releases," available at www. ecoview.com/press_releases.html (accessed 23 September 2010).

the fields:

> it was my first competitive tourney with Fifi, May 10, 1998, in
> Philadelphia... Three storm systems had been dumping rain on the area for
> a week; we played on polo fields, and totally, totally destroyed them.
> Within the first three points of the first game on the first day, we were up
> to our SHINS (not ankles) in mud ... I have never, ever been that dirty in
> my whole life. The polo club handed the Philadelphia disc association
> that hosted us a bill for several hundred thousand dollars in damages after
> it was all over, which resulted in the UPA introducing a "field condition"
> cancellation clause into tournament organization in '99 (up to that point,
> tournaments were played regardless of weather or field conditions).[114]

Trashing the fields - especially if they are not yours – used to be considered cool among

certain Ultimate players. Andrew Thornton argues that Ultimate players like to show

how tough they are and continuing to play 'regardless of weather or field conditions,' is

one of the ways they can do this.[115] While more stringent policing, and an improved

general awareness of the damaging effects (and negative repercussions) has reduced the

practice of trashing the fields, it can still be a difficult task, despite potential danger to the

fields and themselves, to get Ultimate players to abandon games because of inclement

weather. At the same time that UPI's eco-friendly image strengthens a sense of

difference, it also highlights the narrative of progress, showing the formerly dirty

squatting hippies becoming responsible land stewards – an image which helps fuel

Ultimate's sense of legitimacy.

After many difficulties and delays, UPI was opened in time to host the 1999

Canadian Ultimate Championships. Indeed, one of the contributions UPI makes to

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[114] Rita M., e-mail message to author, 3 September 2009.

[115] Andrew Dale Thornton, "Ultimate Masculinities: An Ethnography of Power
and Social Difference in Sport" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1998).

Canadian Ultimate is to "provide [a] single-site venue where the nationals can be held."[116] This is desirable because as Lange explains, "nationals with satellite sites are never as enjoyable. There's a community, festival atmosphere [and] you want to be together."[117] However, its design provides neither shade nor shelter. This is not a problem for league teams playing in the evening for a couple of hours, but for competitive players, being there all weekend in less than ideal weather conditions (ie. blazing sun, rain, or cold) can be uncomfortable. In addition, its distance from amenities such as hotels and restaurants means that some competitive teams find it to be a less-than-ideal site for the national championship.

The main reason for its creation was not to host the nationals, but rather to secure a reliable source of fields for the Ottawa league. Like the Sod Farm before it, the development of UPI did not solve the OCUA's field space problems. In its current state of development UPI provides nineteen grass fields. Yet, "on any given night there could be as many as eighty Ultimate games in the Ottawa Carleton region"[118] and "that number is growing dramatically every year."[119] Despite UPI being an "exciting" part of the

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[116] Lorne Beckman, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 7 April 2010. UPI has hosted the Canadian Ultimate Championships twice (1999, 2002) and will host the 25th anniversary of the tournament in 2011.

[117] Ken Lange, 11 June 2010

[118] Tom Casey, "Ultimate Ambition."

[119] OCUA Open Forum, "Municipal Elections & Ultimate," Letter to 2000 mayoral candidate Bob Chiarelli, 21 October 2000, accessed through the Internet Archive, http://web.archive.org/web/20010119124700/www.ocua.ca/forums/Forum1/HTML/0004 3... (accessed 19 August 2009).

OCUA's history, it admittedly serves as a "*supplement* to our other field sites."[120] And, also like the Sod Farm, not everybody appreciates its remote location. Whereas "some people are happy to drive out to UPI," Lange admits that "those without vehicles, don't like it so much."[121] Moreover, for deep ecologists, "there is something fundamentally contradictory about driving to a place where you can get some exercise or watch others who are doing sports."[122] Thus UPI's environmentally-conscious image is tarnished by having these fields outside of the range of public transit and while cycling to the fields is not impossible, the road is not lit. In addition to these familiar issues, the land purchase brought with it many new concerns. It meant a restructuring of the league's organization and a rewriting of its by-laws "in order to manage this asset."[123] And it did not necessarily improve OCUA's relationship with the City of Ottawa. Lange explains the ambivalent effect that UPI had on negotiations with the city, claiming that "it worked both for and against us" because while UPI lent the OCUA the air of an "obviously serious organization" the attitude of many municipal officials was "if they need more fields, why don't they just build more?"[124] Although only one-third of the property has been developed into playing fields, allowing for the potential addition of more fields in the future, the OCUA was well aware that those nineteen fields would not be nearly

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[120] Ottawa-Carleton Ultimate Association, "OCUA History," emphasis added.

[121] Ken Lange, 11 June 2010.

[122] Bale, 40; Chernushenko, *Greening Our Games*, 159.

[123] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010.

[124] Ken Lange, 11 June 2010.

enough to provide the necessary space to conduct all league activities and UPI was never

intended to replace the practice of playing on city fields.

While the building of UPI had "huge benefits," Lange admits that "it certainly did

have its impacts." Once of its unforeseen negative effects was volunteer burnout. Lange

remembers that "it was a trying couple of years [and] a lot of people put in a lot of

effort," but "every committee meeting, it seemed, presented a new obstacle, problem, or

expense" and "by the end we were all burnt out." This had an appreciable effect on the

volunteers:

> some people just dropped out of volunteering altogether, [one of us] even
> stopped playing Ultimate for a couple of years. Others of us stayed and
> continued to volunteer, but I think that the quality of our effort and work
> declined. It was like, ok, yeah, we did this, now we have to sit back and
> breathe for a little while and try to recover from that effort.

New people stepped in, but Lange explains that volunteer exhaustion in the aftermath of

UPI "left a void in terms of a lot of experience that you can't draw from." Lange also

admits that the board and league executive were able to do little else during the building

of UPI. He explains that "we spent two to three years focusing on nothing but this deal.

Obviously there are the basics of running the league that need to be taken care of, but

really, the focus during this time wasn't Ultimate." The OCUA was not, therefore, able to

put their energies into other potentially beneficial projects.[125]

Nonetheless, Lange maintains that "it was the best thing we ever could have

done."[126] Conveying obvious pride, Lange remembers "that first '99 Nationals, the first

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[125] Ken Lange, 11 June 2010.

[126] Ibid.

day of play, standing on the hill, looking out over the people playing on all those fields. I don't think I've ever felt a more gratifying feeling. It was like, yeah, we did it. Wow!"[127] Despite his obvious and ongoing affection for the Sod Farm, Craig clearly shares Lange's sense of accomplishment, claiming "I like going out to *our* park at UPI. It's beautiful out there, and the fields are so nice to play on."[128] Lange concurs, claiming that "to this day, I love playing at UPI better than anywhere else."[129]

I started playing Ultimate around the time that UPI was being built. And there was a buzz of excitement in the air about the promise of these fields. Everyone, it seemed was talking about them, and everyone was anxious to go to Ottawa to play on them. Time and familiarity, however, can dim the exuberance. Lange laments that many newer OCUA members "take UPI for granted" and do not appreciate the "sweat equity" that went into the building of the fields."[130] Setha M. Low and Irwin Altman claim that "places are repositories and contexts within which interpersonal, community, and cultural relationships occur, and it is to those social relationships, not just to place qua place, to which people are attached.[131] Similarly, John Bale claims that "a love of place can be generated by the experiences people have there, rather than the character of the place

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[127] Ken Lange, 11 June 2010.

[128] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010, emphasis added.

[129] Ken Lange, 11 June 2010.

[130] Ibid.

[131] Setha M. Low and Irwin Altman, "Place Attachment: A Conceptual Inquiry" in *Place Attachment*, (New York: Plenum Press, 1992): 7.

itself,"[132] which helps explain why "those involved back then have [a deeper] appreciation for [UPI]."[133] Lange claims that "the people who were involved feel like it's *our* land, *we own it*, it's *ours* to take care of and be responsible for."[134] Over the years, OCUA succeeded in buying back the bulk of UPI shares and now holds a majority interest in the company, effectively owning UPI and its sole asset, the fields. There are, however, some remaining shares outstanding. Ken Lange, for instance, still owns his shares in UPI which makes his sense of "ownership" and stewardship of the land literal as well as experiential. The Ottawa Land Purchase shows how "places are significant, not because of their inherent value, but rather because we assign value to them in relation to our projects."[135] Because people had different levels of investment in the project, different hopes for it, and different experiences with it, because UPI meant (and continues to mean) different things to different members of the Ultimate community, they demonstrate different degrees of attachment to the place.

But what has UPI meant more generally for the sport of Ultimate? In the eyes of boosters, land ownership was supposed to lend credibility to the entire sport. Many of those involved believe that it has done so. Craig proudly claims that "anyone in Canada can point to 'that facility in Ottawa' to give the sport legitimacy in their own towns."[136]

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[132] Bale, 122.

[133] Ken Lange, 11 June 2010.

[134] Ibid., emphasis added.

[135] Bale, 122.

[136] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010.

But the most tangible effect of the experience of UPI was its influence on the field space strategies of other leagues.

People did find the Ottawa Land Purchase inspiring. Other leagues thought about trying to do something similar to address their own issues with urban space. While attracted to the idea, other leagues have rejected the model as impractical and unrealistic. In Montreal, for instance, "we always had the dream," but Lorne points out that "it's different for us."[137] Ken Hunt explains that "there's no way we could ever buy enough land on the island to create anything like UPI."[138] Similarly, John Harris relates how "buying a facility sounded really cool," but realistically Toronto Ultimate players knew that "you're not going to find an empty chunk of land in the middle of the city."[139] John also claims that the predominant attitude among Toronto players was that "the city should provide fields for us!"[140] These anecdotes also illustrate that players imagine Ultimate places as closely tied to the urban environment.

The building of the first dedicated Ultimate facility can be seen as one in a number of firsts by Ottawa Ultimate players.[141] As the largest recreational league in Canada, OCUA often served as a model for other leagues to follow in terms of

[137] Lorne Beckman, 7 April 2010.

[138] Ken Hunt, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 10 March 2010.

[139] John Harris, 23 July 2010.

[140] Ibid.

[141] Ottawa was the site of the first National Ultimate Championships (1987), the first Canadian University Ultimate Championships (1995), and Ottawa players were instrumental in establishing both UltimateCanada (1988-9) and CUPA (1993).

administration and organization. Yet the perception of UPI as an albatross has, it seems, somewhat tarnished the image of the OCUA as a national leader in all things Ultimate. As proud as the OCUA is of their fields, it is not an endeavour they would repeat and they have not recommended that others follow their lead and venture into the outright purchase of land. Instead, they encourage leagues to pursue other means of acquiring dedicated Ultimate fields.[142] In addition to practical concerns over urban real estate markets, there is also a general perception that UPI was not a financially sound venture. People run the numbers, and decide it is not worthwhile partly because "maintaining grass fields is a tremendous amount of work and expense – it's a lot easier and cheaper in the long run to [rent] turf fields."[143] Elevated team and player fees for the ongoing maintenance of UPI, and the long arduous process and the sheer effort that it entailed are also strong disincentives for city leagues to copy Ottawa's model.

The main lesson that other leagues took from UPI was the importance of capital accumulation for any future field acquisition project. Not long after UPI's opening, other Canadian leagues started "Field Funds." For instance, in 2002 the Vancouver Ultimate League Society (VULS) unanimously passed a motion to create a "Capital Projects Fund" wherein "any moneys held in the Society's bank account, in excess of three month's

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[142] Jean-Lévy Champagne, 12 January 2011. In 2008 the OCUA "designed and constructed four brand new Ultimate fields on land owned by the federal government's Canada Science and Technology Museum Corporation, financed primarily with a $55,000 grant from the provincial government's Ontario Trillium Foundation, and within the framework of a City of Ottawa strategy to provide new facilities for the rapidly-growing sport of Ultimate." Marcia Morris, "Ottawa to get New Fields in Innovative Public-Private Partnership," *Ultimate Canada Magazine,* 1/1 (2008): 13.

[143] Ken Hunt, 10 March 2010.

reasonably anticipated expenditures shall be placed, to be utilized *only* to increase or enhance the field and practice facilities available to the league."[144] Citing UPI as a precedent, in 2003 TUC "determined that a portion of all individual membership fees would be allocated to a capital fund" in order "to accumulate capital for future use to acquire, develop, maintain, improve, and otherwise support the Club's ability to obtain playing fields."[145] Winnipeg also, "began collecting funds for a field levy out of teams' league fees."[146] With no specific targets in mind leagues nonetheless began growing their war chests, investing in their ability to take on future projects. By 2005 Vancouver's fund had given them "$250,000 to spend" and they were exploring their options: "We could develop our own private land, or work with [the] school board to get first access. We can partner with other groups to create FieldTurf options, which would get us access to new all-weather fields."[147] Rejecting land ownership as a viable option, the VULS instead pursued a strategy of public-private partnerships and got "a pledge from the Parks Board to create more fields for Ultimate players."[148] By 2007 the Capital Projects Fund

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[144] Vancouver Ultimate League, "2002 AGM Minutes," http://www.vul.bc.ca/v3/home/about/minutes/agmminutes03.htm (accessed 27 January 2011).

[145] Toronto Ultimate Club, "Fields Fund," http://www.tuc.org/Club/Fields-Fund (accessed 28 February 2011).

[146] Young, "Winnipeg Builds Own Ultimate Facility."

[147] Vancouver Ultimate League, "2005 AGM Minutes," http://www.vul.bc.ca/v3/home/about/minutes/agmminutes05.htm) (accessed 27 January 2011).

[148] Ibid.

had reached $409,000 and VULS put this money toward several initiatives to improve

their access to fields in the city. By 2008 several of these 'capital projects' came online:

> In September 2008, at W. 37th and Oak Street, the first real Ultimate field
> in Vancouver will open. As well, Columbia will be resurfaced on the
> south side, making the field all one level, and hopefully making the field
> playable by fall 2008. The VULS will trade two Tisdall fields for the
> lower field at Winona [where] the VULS will pay [to] have the baseball
> diamond taken out and then have the field levelled. This work will be
> done in the spring, so in the fall the VULS will have priority on Winona,
> which by then will be a six-field Ultimate facility.[149]

Somewhat ironically, the AUM – who had initially expressed such enthusiastic support

for UPI – has become a strong critic of land ownership as a space acquisition strategy.

After years of discussing the merits of a project similar to the one in Ottawa, (and the

accumulation of capital for that purpose) the AUM declared that it will not pursue the

purchase of land as a field development strategy, preferring instead to work in partnership

with the city of Montreal and other private interests to maintain and develop already

existing fields.[150] Approaching the borough of Rosemont with $180,000, the AUM,

helped pay for the construction of an Ultimate field at Parc Père Marquette. This facility

opened in 2010 and while the borough maintains ownership of the field, the AUM is

guaranteed priority of use on it.[151]

Within a decade of the opening of UPI, therefore, dedicated Ultimate facilities,

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[149] Vancouver Ultimate League, "2007 AGM Minutes,"
http://www.vul.bc.ca/v3/home/about/minutes/VUL-AGM-2007-minutes.pdf (accessed 27 January 2011).

[150] Association de Ultimate de Montreal, Annual General Meeting, 3 April 2009.

[151] Jean-Lévy Champagne, 12 January 2011.

while not owned outright by Ultimate players, began cropping up across the country. In 2008 the Manitoba Organization of Disc Sports (MODS) opened its own seven-field facility and in conjunction with the adjacent Maple Grove Rugby Park, hosted the Canadian Ultimate Championships in 2009.[152] Claiming that "it represents a significant leap forward for the organization and for Ultimate in Winnipeg" Cory Young employs language that indicates that the Winnipeg Ultimate Park is already imbued with familiar and ambivalent themes: "Just the third Ultimate facility in Canada, the Winnipeg Ultimate Park is (quite literally) a groundbreaking advancement towards growing the sport into mainstream athletics ... No small feat for a non-profit group better known as a bunch of Frisbee-throwing hippies![153]

The building of UPI highlights several themes. Saturated with the images of both progress and difference, the Ottawa land purchase illustrates the immense effort of some and the willingness of a vast array of other Ultimate enthusiasts to contribute to the achievement of a seemingly impossible goal. It illustrates the great lengths that Ultimate players are willing to go and the sacrifices they are willing to make for what they consider to be *good* for the sport. More importantly, UPI's historical significance is that the experience of it, both direct and indirect, influenced a reorganization of Ultimate's relationship with and approaches to urban space. Ultimate's spatial history parallels an "evolution of the sports landscape" which "is usually interpreted as a linear form of

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[152] Young, "Winnipeg Builds Own Ultimate Facility," 33.

[153] Ibid.

'development' towards one of increasing rationalisation."[154] But, Bale cautions, this "does [not] mean that there is an absence of counter-movements against an unambiguously modern form of sport."[155] Doreen Massey, for instance, suggests that "it may be useful to think of places, not as areas on maps, but as constantly shifting articulations of social relations through time."[156] Ultimate leagues continue to squat in public parks, and they still rent fields from other landowners, but increasingly, they are engaging in public-private partnerships as either investors or outright land developers. This represents a complete reversal in power relations between Ultimate leagues, municipal governments, and other sports groups from the ones that existed in the 1980s and 1990s. This reversal of fortunes can be partly understood as a result of the increased revenue-generating potential of larger and larger memberships, partly attributable to an improved economic climate, as well as a result of the increased awareness of the sport and its popularity. Nonetheless, the model UPI provided and the lessons learned from the initiative were important contributors to this change.

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[154] Bale, 35.

[155] Ibid.

[156] Doreen Massey, "Places and their Pasts" *History Workshop Journal* 39 (Spring 1995): 188.

CHAPTER 5

Language at Play?:
Ultimate, Bilingualism, and Montreal

> Scenes are mortal – they come alive and die, they are volatile and
> ephemeral, and they are strongly imbricated with urban life.
> -- Sherry Simon, *Translating Montreal*

> Cities, of course, act not only as empty spaces in which actors operate, but
> their structures, institutions, and landscapes actively contribute in the
> production of knowledge, ideas, and culture.
> -- Sean Mills, *The Empire Within*

There are distinctive flavours to the development of the sport of Ultimate in different regions, and indeed in different cities. The Association de Ultimate de Montréal (AUM) differs most from other Canadian leagues because of its bilingual posture. Recreational leagues are heavily influenced by the urban character of their cities and this is patently apparent in Montreal where Ultimate players and organizers have to negotiate the question of language.

In 2003, for the first time, francophones outnumbered anglophones in the AUM. By 2005, they represented a comfortable majority of the membership: sixty-four percent of the AUM's 1847 members were francophone.[1] This was also the year that I joined a team consisting of a tight-knit urban tribe of anglophone Montrealers. These people had grown up in the Westmount-NDG areas; many had been educated in private schools (where most had met); and most were pursuing advanced degrees in social science, science, medicine, and law, or embarking upon professional, white-collar careers.

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[1] "2005: L'AUM en chiffres," *Discours,* (December 2005): 14.

Typical of both Ultimate players and anglo-Montrealers, they had been playing together

for over a decade and had much to tell me about how they saw the city, the game, and the

league. One of the stories they seemed to be telling was a nostalgic tale for the days

before the AUM became French. Yet my preliminary research quickly revealed that the

AUM had never been exclusively English. Some of the original founders of the league

were francophone, features in the first newsletters appeared in both English and French,

and the name – Association de Ultimate de Montréal – indicated an openness to both

francophones and the French language. While initially anglophones did dominate the

membership, this longing for the 'good old days' of an English AUM seemed

exaggerated.

This irony is typical of nostalgia. Stephanie Coontz claims that "most visions of a

'golden age' evaporate on closer examination." Rather than an accurate recollection, she

explains that nostalgia "is an ahistorical amalgam of structures, values, and behaviours

that never co-existed in the same time and place."[2] Similarly, Janelle Wilson claims that

"nostalgia realigns cognition and emotion to produce comfort and security" and because

of this process, "the nostalgia we experience is often for a past that did not exist."[3] The

ironies persist upon a closer examination of my teammates. Some have French surnames

and familial ties to the francophone community. They were raised and educated in a

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[2] Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 9 .

[3] Janelle L. Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning*, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005), 23.

post-Bill 101 Montreal and are mostly fluently bilingual.[4] What is their investment in the memory of a 'golden age' when the AUM was English?

Could my teammates be attributing something to language difference that was not really about language at all? In the wake of the 1976 election of the nationalist *Parti Quebecois*, an anglophone 'exodus' saw 100,000 people leave Quebec. In her study of anglo-Montrealers, Martha Radice finds that "these departures 'formed part of a collective absence that continues to mark the imaginations and actions of Anglo-Montrealers.'"[5] Could my teammates, then, be drawing upon a familiar narrative of language relations within the city in order to make sense of some other experience? Some other loss?

John Meisel claims that many Canadians suffer from a two-pronged misapprehension about language; first, that "most of Canada's conflicts arise from French/English differences," and second, that "interactions between Canada's French and English communities have been overwhelmingly negative." He argues that "a

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[4] Only myself and one other player were raised and educated in other Canadian provinces.

[5] Quoted in Graham Fraser, *Sorry, I Don't Speak French*: *Confronting the Canadian Crisis that Won't Go Away*, (Toronto: McClelland and Steward, 2006), 134; Fraser finds that "between 1971 and 2001, there was a net loss of 276, 000 people with English as their mother tongue who moved from Quebec to other provinces or other countries. (There is, interestingly enough, a net loss of 37,500 francophones during the same three decades – presumably moving for exclusively economic rather than linguistic reasons.) But, despite the net loss, there continued to be a flow of English-speaking people from other provinces to Quebec. The number drops significantly after 1976 – but every five years after that, between 25,000 and 32,000 anglophones moved to the province." Fraser, 134.

complementary and more positive perspective is needed."[6] Much of the literature on

linguistic communities in Canada deals with the impact of Trudeau-era language policies.

It is generally concerned with how the *Official Languages Act* affects those communities

both inside and outside Quebec. These scholars are essentially concerned with

government and education policy and their work contributes to an ongoing argument over

the costs and benefits of the implementation of official bilingualism on a national scale.[7]

In the province of Quebec, the city of Montreal plays a starring role in the

politicized debates over language and culture. Marc Levine claims that "in the wake of

the Quiet Revolution," the "consociational *entente*" between the city's anglophone and

francophone elites that had existed since Confederation began to unravel as "a French-

speaking 'new middle class' rejected these historical arrangements."[8] In her 1980 set of

lectures addressing the question of Quebec separatism, Jane Jacobs observed that

> until the late 1960s, Montreal still seemed to be what it had been for
> almost two centuries: an English city containing many French-speaking
> workers and inhabitants. But, in fact, by 1960 Montreal had become a
> French city with many English-speaking inhabitants. By the time people
> in Montreal, let alone the rest of Canada, recognized what was happening,

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[6] John Meisel, Guy Rocher & Arthur Silver, *As I Recall / Si je me souviens bien: Historical Perspectives*, (Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 1999), 9.

[7] See for instance, Scott Reid, *Lament for a Notion: The Life and Death of Canada's Bilingual Dream,* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1993), Michael Behiels, *Canada's Francophone Minority Communities: Consitutional Renewal and the Winning of School Governance*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), Matthew Hayday, *Bilingual Today, United Tomorrow: Official Languages in Education and Canadian Federalism*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).

[8] Marc V. Levine, *The Reconquest of Montreal: Language Policy and Social Change in a Bilingual City*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 40.

it had already happened.[9]

Thus English, "once the language of prestige, is becoming a 'minor' language within the cultural disposition of the new Quebec."[10] According to Levine, "the debate over Montreal's 'French face' revolves around antithetical visions of the city: Montreal as a fundamentally French city versus Montreal as a dualistic city."[11] Karim Larose argues that beginning in the late 1950s a movement toward French uniligualism gradually imposed itself on Quebec's legislative agenda. Yet at the same time that this drive toward unilingualism culminated in *la Charte de la langue française* in 1977, "un certain désir de prendre du recul semble donc suivre la période movementée correspondant aux deux décennies précédentes" and the late 1970s and 1980s saw a resurgence in the idea of bilingualism.[12]

Recently, scholars have called for a more nuanced and inclusive analysis of the complicated and shifting linguistic character of the city. Larose, for instance, claims "le concept de bilinguisme n'est que la stricte transposition sur le plan linguistique de la

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[9] Jane Jacobs, *The Question of Separatism: Quebec and the Struggle over Sovereignty*, (New York: Random House, 1980), 11-12.

[10] Simon, *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of a Divided City*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 27.

[11] Quoted in Fraser, 151.

[12] Karim Larose, *La Langue de papier: Spéculations linguistiques au Québec*, (Montreal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montreal, 2004), 23. See also Ronald Rudin, "Postscript: English Quebec at the Start of a New Era" in *The Forgotten Quebecers: A History of English-Speaking Quebec, 1759-1980*, (Québec: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1985).

logique du biculturalisme et de la 'théorie des deux peuples fondateurs.'"[13] Sherry Simon

similarly finds "the symmetrical, facing-page image of translation that is a result of

Canada's official bilingualism" problematic because it "sends out a message of a mirror-

image two-tongued polity," which "reflects neither the lopsided reality of transactions in

government nor the multilingualism of daily life in Canadian cities."[14] Rather than a

strictly bifurcated system of linguistic or cultural dualism, she sees a complicated set of

interactions that "fall along a continuum of mistrust, resistance, and vivifying exchange,"

that help to produce Montreal's distinctive urban character.[15] "Culture," she argues, "is

born in translation, that is, in relationships of exchange, resistance, or interpenetration."[16]

Language issues in contemporary Quebec and Montreal are usually framed in

terms of work, school, and home because, as Monica Heller claims, along with the media,

these are "among the most important institutions which do the work of linguistic

regimentation and the production and reproduction of linguistic norms."[17] Graham Fraser

remarks that "a kind of mutual tolerance has developed"[18] as members of different

linguistic communities have found ways to work, learn, and live together. But what falls

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[13] Larose, 11.

[14] Simon, *Translating Montreal*, 18.

[15] Ibid., 27.

[16] Ibid., 17.

[17] Monica Heller, *Linguistic Minorities and Modernity: A Sociolinguistic Ethnography*, (New York: Longman, 1999), 13.

[18] Fraser, 157.

outside of analysis in this framework is how well Monterealers play together. Alessandro

Portelli claims that "sports help unify and pacify a socially divided society not because

they mean the same thing to all people and all classes, but precisely because they mean

different things to different groups, but manage to keep diverging or conflicting meanings

together under the same set of signs."[19] Sports and leisure, therefore, should be a point of

analysis in a better understanding of the relationships between Montreal's linguistic

communities.

In the wake of the 1988 Seoul Olympic scandals over doping, the 1990 *Report of

the Commission of Inquiry into the Use of Banned Practices Intended to Increase Athletic

Performance*, (the Dubin Report) "called for a rethinking of Canadians' values in sport

and a redesigned sport system which would safeguard athletes' health and ensure fair

competition."[20] This "shift in values" toward a newfound stress upon an "athlete-

centred" sports system ushered in a set of funding reforms designed to ensure "minimum

expectations that sport organizations are expected to meet in the areas of athlete-

centredness, women in sport, *official languages*, athletes with disabilities, and harassment

and abuse."[21] Since the 1990s, a succession of government reports have emerged

evaluating and re-evaluating the level of success achieved by reforms to the Canadian

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[19]Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 159-60.

[20] Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, *Official Languages in the Canadian Sports System*, Volume 1, (Ottawa: Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2000): 5-6.

[21] Ibid., 6, emphasis added.

sport system "aimed at eliminating language barriers imposed on francophone athletes."[22] In terms of language equity, they seem to find that at high-level competition French-speaking athletes are under-represented, that they often have difficulty accessing communications, coaching, or medical services in their first language, and that, unlike their anglophone counterparts, "francophone athletes must normally master the English language as well as their sport."[23] Yet, they also find that "those Francophones who reach the high performance level have overcome the linguistic barriers," and that "if barriers to participation exist, they manifest themselves at lower levels of competition and not at the high performance level."[24] Indeed, these reports can only shed light on the situation of language at play at high performance levels. They do not reveal how language plays out in grassroots sporting communities and voluntary associations.

How do the players and organizers of the Montreal Ultimate league approach, manage, and negotiate language? How does urban sport and leisure draw upon, contribute to, and fit into local and national narratives of language accommodation? The story of the evolution of the language of play in Montreal's Ultimate community is rife with familiar themes: growth, progress, and cultural diffusion. But it also reveals how Ultimate takes on the cultural influences of its urban environment.

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[22] Mira Svoboda and Peter Donnelly, *Linguistic Barriers to Access to High Performance Sport: Study - 2005*. (Ottawa: Canadian Heritage, 2006): 2.

[23] *Official Languages in the Canadian Sports System*, i.

[24] Svoboda and Donnelly, *Linguistic Barriers*, 13.

McGill University

Because of its early contributions to the development of amateur sport Montreal is sometimes referred to as the cradle of Canadian sport.[25] Many organized sports owe a debt to McGill University and it seems that the institution can also claim Ultimate as part of its roster of sports heritage. According to the AUM website, "disc in Montreal started with a McGill intramural league in 1984."[26] However, according to *The McGill Daily* student newspaper, 'disc' at McGill existed before then. The earliest reference appears in the 1978 Letters section. The anonymous writer remarked upon the "daily frisbee games" taking place on the Lower Campus and wondered "when will the *Daily* Sports Department start to seriously cover" them.[27] He would have to wait a few years for 'Frisbee' to make a more regular appearance.

In the early 1980s, Ultimate became popular as a recreational activity. In addition to the informal games that could be observed around the McGill campus, it was picked up as an intramural sport. In the Fall of 1982, in addition to touch and flag football, soccer, tennis, softball, rugby, basketball, volleyball and ice hockey, the recreation and athletics department advertised co-rec frisbee as one of its intramural offerings. The following

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[25] Don Morrow and Kevin Wamsley, *Sport in Canada: A History*, (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2005), 50.

[26] Luc Drouin, "History of Ultimate in Montreal," trans. Tony Boyd, accessed through the Internet Archive, http://web.archive.org/web/19980205030137/aum.zoo.net/aum/history/ (accessed 18 June 2009).

[27] Friz Saucer, "Faculty of Frisbiology?" *The McGill Daily*, 4 October 1978, Letters, 4.

year they offered separate men's and co-rec sections of "team frisbee."[28] By 1985,

"Ultimate Frisbee" was touted as the "perennial favourite." intramural sport.[29] And by

the end of the decade McGill could claim twenty-three teams, making it the "largest

University intramural league" in Canada.[30]

The early 1980s were also formative in competitive play for McGill students. The

"McGill Ultimate" disc club seems to have caught (finally?) the attention of *Daily*

columnists. In 1983, although the estimate seems high, the club claimed to have

"accumulated almost four dozen members."[31] In the Fall of 1983, seven members of the

McGill Ultimate men's disc club, proclaiming themselves to be the "Canadian National

Disc Team," participated in the US sectional championships at the University of

Massachusetts, Amherst.[32] In September of 1984, seven members of the Montreal

McGill University team formed the core of a team that travelled to Luzern, Switzerland

to compete in the 2nd International Ultimate Tournament, where they finished seventh of

fourteen teams in Canadian Ultimate's "European debut."[33] By 1985 the men's "McGill

Intercollegiate Ultimate Frisbee team" was in their third season and a women's team was

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[28] "Intramural Sports," *The McGill Daily*, 14 September 1983, 12.

[29] Deb Dunaway, "Intramurals Provide Friendly Exercise," *The McGill Daily*, 9 September 1985, 6.

[30] Eileen Askew, "1989 Survey Results" *Ultimate Canada*, (Summer 1990): 4.

[31] Edgar Wedig, "Canadian Disc-tinction," *The McGill Daily*, 28 October 1983: 5.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Dante Anderson, "Ultimate Frisbee: Past, Present and Future," *Diskraze*, 1/1 (June 1985): 4.

inaugurating its first season of club competition. Despite the meager allocation of funds

for club sports – $100 per year – the men's team had an impressive tournament schedule

planned for 1985, including "New England Sectionals in Boston, the Regionals at the

University of Massachusetts, and a series with Ottawa's Capital Punishment team."[34]

McGill draws undergraduate and graduate students, and faculty from across Canada and

the United States. In the 1980s, some of these students, particularly those attending

McGill's Medical and Law schools, had played or been exposed to Ultimate at their

American colleges where the game had been played since the 1970s. Thus McGill owes

its role in the story of the origins of Ultimate in Montreal to its position as a top-flyte

North American graduate school. This allowed it to draw to Montreal a group of people

who could teach the game to others and help disseminate it. Indeed, "McGill was really

at the centre" of the history of Ultimate in Montreal (and possibly elsewhere).[35]

McGill University occupies a controversial place in the city's language debates.

It has periodically been accused of being an institution that demonstrates a "lack of

accountability to the Quebec people." In his recent study Sean Mills explains how in the

late 1960s:

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[34] Richard Hemming, "McGill Frisbee Team Flourishes," *The McGill Daily,* 30 September 1985: 5

[35] Luc Drouin, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 6 June 2010; John Harris, interview by author, Toronto, ON, 23 July 2010; and *TUC: Thirty Years in Thirty Minutes*, Online, directed by Otto Chung, 2010, http://iamultimate.com/videos/tuc-30-years-in-30-minutes/ (accessed 2 February 2011); Marcus Brady, who helped found the Ottawa Ultimate Club in 1984, was a McGill student in 1983, illustrating that not only did McGill draw talented players from elsewhere, its players then took the game with them after leaving McGill.

activists argued that McGill, having its roots in nineteenth-century British colonialism, had become an institution dominated by American capital, training those who would go on to work for the American and English-Canadian companies operating in Quebec. To the eyes of the young activists, the school had come to symbolize much more than a prestigious site of 'anglophone' education; it was a symbol of both the privileges of settler colonialism and of the technocratic and inhuman nature of American imperialism.[36]

Mills contends, therefore, that "the conflict over McGill was, at least to some extent, a conflict over who owned and controlled Montreal itself."[37] McGill's prominent role in the bringing of Ultimate to Canada shows how, in the 1980s, it was still drawing Americans and English-speaking Canadians to the city and its function both as a source of Ultimate expertise and talent and as an English-language institution helps to explain the initial predominance of anglophones in the ranks of Montreal Ultimate players.

In the mid-1980s, a small summer pick-up league was formed. Players were found by "drawing on the McGill Fall Intramural league (those who did not flee home for the summer), recruiting people who were found throwing discs in the park or chatting with people who stopped and marvelled at the game."[38] This four-team league at first played regularly at the McGill Reservoir - a grassy area slightly north of McGill's main campus at the intersection of Dr. Penfield and MacTavish Streets. But, remembers Tony Boyd, "it had natural hazards – I've run into those bloody green air ducts at the Reservoir a few times – and it just became more and more difficult in terms of parking and

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[36] Sean Mills, *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal,* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 147.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Eileen Askew, "Around the Nation: Montreal" *Ultimate Canada,* (Fall 1990): 4.

accessibility. It was time to find a better venue."[39] The field they found was located on Île Ste- Hélène and the handful of players involved have fond memories of this site. Tony recalls that "the island was a beautiful venue ... you had the water there and the view of the city. There was a little stream nearby. So we moved the games there... mainly because it was bigger."[40] Île Ste-Hélène became home to a small but passionately dedicated group who played on Tuesday evenings. While the Reservoir remained a popular and convenient place for students to play pick-up, organized Ultimate was moving beyond the McGill campus.

Simultaneously, Montreal Ultimate players became involved in the wider national Ultimate scene. Eileen Askew and Steve Wright "from 'The Peg' who were instrumental in starting Montreal's first summer league," were also involved with UltimateCanada and acted as liaison/contact people for Montreal.[41] Eileen regularly contributed articles to the UltimateCanada newsletter discussing the happenings in and around the Montreal Ultimate scene, and Steve was involved in spearheading UltimateCananda's steering committee - the first steps toward the formation of the Canadian Ultimate Players Association. In the late 1980s and early 1990s Montreal Ultimate players mounted both women's and men's competitive travelling teams. 'The Lipstix Girls' and the 'Ultimatoes' made frequent appearances at both regional and national tournaments. Tony

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[39] Tony Boyd, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 28 September 2010.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Drouin, "History of Ultimate in Montreal."

Boyd claims that "we always had keen travelling teams."[42] These teams represented a

very small cohort. Writing about their 1990 season, 'Lipstix Girl,' Melissa Labelle

recalls that "as always, we barely managed to scrape together a line of seven players for

each tournament."[43] The situation was the same for the men's team. Luc Drouin tells the

story of how he and his brother, after initially opting out of the 1990 National

Championship tournament being held in Calgary, changed their minds and at the last

minute borrowed their parents' car, drove seventeen hours a-day, and arrived in Calgary

the night before the tourney began. Upon answering the knock on the hotel room door

and seeing the Drouins, their delighted teammate exclaimed: "guys... we're nine!"[44] This

situation was not unique to Montreal. Small rosters, 'scraping together' enough people to

play 'savage' (no subs), or hoping to find a few extra bodies at the tournament was

typical for many competitive teams in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Despite much congratulatory rhetoric, the size and scope of Montreal's Ultimate

community in the 1980s and 1990s remained modest. Outside of McGill's intramural

league "in 1988-1990 there were only about 18-20 players."[45] One possible reason for its

slow growth was the lack of an organizational structure. Tony Boyd explains that "while

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[42] Tony Boyd, "The History of Montreal Ultimate," *Ultimatum*, no. 1 (May 1994): 1.

[43] Melissa Labelle, "Around the Nation: Montreal" *Ultimate Canada,* (Fall 1990): 4.

[44] Luc Drouin, 6 June 2010.

[45] Neil Rossy, to AUM Hall of Fame Director, letter of recommendation (Luc Drouin 2008), supplied by Mike Venditti.

disc has been happening since '85, during all these years, most of us just wanted to huck,

biff, snagg, and layout, not organize! So on we went, merrily, with a good crew for

pickup, but never much more."[46] Another explanation is that Ultimate continued to rely

on McGill as its main source of players: "most local players are in their mid-20s, students

or professionals recruited by a group from McGill University that used to play informally

near the McGill Reservoir."[47] As a result, turnover, as people came and went as dictated

by their study period, posed an ongoing problem. "It was always a huge source of

frustration," claims Tony "because we never had enough depth of talent."[48] This was an

issue for the McGill teams as well: "coming off a successful year in 1984-85, the 20-

member [McGill] Ultimate Frisbee squad has been hurt by the graduation of their three

top players."[49] Reliance upon McGill students worked to keep growth modest because it

limited the pool of potential players and, according to Luc, it meant that "people didn't

stay."[50]

Nonetheless, in 1991 there was enough ambition among a few dedicated

individuals to hold the 5th Canadian Ultimate Championships. This was an important

development in several ways. Firstly, it marks the moment when Montreal became

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[46] Boyd, "The History of Montreal Ultimate."

[47] Paul Delean, "Ultimate Thrill Awaits You: Running, Passing keys to Team Sport with Frisbee-like Disc," *The Gazette*, Montreal, 9 August 1991, D.8.

[48] Tony Boyd, 28 September 2010.

[49] Hemming, "McGill Frisbee Team Flourishes." One of those players was Marcus Brady.

[50] Luc Drouin, June 6 2010.

nationally recognized as a place where Ultimate was played seriously. Being able to host

the national tournament and welcome the best players in the country designated Montreal

as an important Canadian Ultimate centre, joining the ranks of Ottawa, Toronto,

Vancouver, and Calgary.[51]

Secondly, hosting the national championship required securing a site large enough

to accommodate all the games. The 1991 nationals marked the beginning of the

relationship between Montreal Ultimate and the Douglas Hospital. While many of the

original players have fond memories of both the McGill Reservoir and Île Ste-Hélène, it

is widely recognized that the 'discovery' of the Douglas Hospital grounds in Verdun was

key to the development of the league and the ongoing relationship between the AUM and

the Douglas hospital is integral to AUM history.

The 1991 nationals presented an opportunity to provide Montreal Ultimate with

some media attention. Three local television stations (TQS, CBC, and RDS) and *The

Gazette* sent representatives to report on the games at the Douglas. Local players and

organizers took the opportunity provided by this public exposure to promote the sport.

TQS's reporter, once again, explained how this unusual game "a été importé à certaines

universités anglophones d'ici par les étudiants americains" so that "les équipes sont

presque entièrement anglophones pour l'instant." But he speculated that "les campus

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[51] Only a handful of Canadian cities have hosted the national championship and
only six have held it more than once (Ottawa-5, Vancouver -4, Toronto -3, Calgary -3,
Winnipeg-3, Montreal-3, Victoria-1, Edmonton-1, Halifax-1, Sherbrooke-1). Montreal
has played host three times: 1991; 1998; 2003. In 1998 and 2003, although Montreal was
the host city, the tournament took place 25km south of Montreal in St-Jean-sur-Richelieu.

francophones vont sûrement emboîter le pas."[52] It would be several years, however, before Montreal's French language institutions, first Université de Québec à Montréal (UQAM) then l'Université de Montréal (UdeM), began to contribute meaningfully to Montreal's Ultimate scene.

Despite the added media coverage of the 1991 championship, the Montreal Ultimate community remained small and unorganized. And its sustainability was in question as its continued existence relied heavily upon the efforts of a few key individuals. In an article published in the 1995 Spring issue of *The CUPA newsletter* Luc Drouin lamented the disappearance of the "glue" that had kept Montreal Ultimate running: "Comme le témoigna notre participation au 'Nats' de 1992, cet été-là, le frisbee à Montréal est mort. Il avait simplement fallu à Steve et Eileen de quitter vers la Californie pour déclarer la fin des festivités. Personne n'avait alors osé reprendre les rennes!"[53] This illustrates how reliant young leagues were/are on the energy and drive of committed individuals – and how vulnerable should that commitment wane or those individuals move on.

L'Association de Ultimate de Montréal (AUM)

Despite the ominous prediction, Ultimate in Montreal was not dead. Many people credit the beginnings of the Association de Ultimate de Montréal to the efforts of Luc

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[52] Yvan Martineau, Centre Sports, TQS, August 1991, footage provided by Tony Boyd.

[53] Luc Drouin, "What's happenning in Montréal?" *The CUPA newsletter,* (Spring 1995): 14

Drouin. When the AUM launched its Hall of Fame in 2008, Luc's contributions made

him a shoe-in. Recognizing that "it takes someone with a lot of dedication to help create

the needed structure to build a league in a major city like Montreal (where there are

infinite other distractions)"[54] and that "without Luc, Ultimate wouldn't have graduated

when it did from pick-up on Île Ste-Hélène to a summer league at the Douglas," the

AUM claims him as "our founder."[55] Luc is more modest. He claims that he had a lot of

help. After the disastrous 1992 season "les choses on commencé à reprendre" thanks to

the efforts of a group of Montrealers who decided to form a more stable city league.[56]

It was partly the desire to improve the competitive travelling teams that fueled the

incentive to create the AUM. In this way, "the league was envisioned as a recruitment

tool for the competitive teams."[57] This is reflected in the language of the first league

recruitment poster:

> This summer we hope to have a league of 6 mixed teams. We will also
> have a male and female travelling team. We usually try to make the
> tournaments in the eastern United States and Ontario. We will probably
> have a tournament or two ourselves. The league will schedule games once
> a week. We will also have a night for pick-up games and a night for
> travelling team practices. The weekends will be for pick-up games or
> tournaments.

Luc explains that "I wanted to play competitive, to get competitive" and in order to have

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[54] Neil Rossy to AUM Hall of Fame Director.

[55] Lorne Beckman to AUM Hall of Fame Director, letter of recommendation (Luc Drouin 2008), supplied by Mike Venditti.

[56] Drouin, "What's happenning in Montréal?" 14

[57] Ken Hunt, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 13 March 2010.

a high caliber of play, there needed to be a large pool from which to draw the most

talented players. But, cautions Luc, the two had to exist "in parallel" and "the goal was

always to get more and more people."[58]

Luc believed that an organized league was the best way to attract the necessary

numbers and to build a more permanent membership of Montreal residents. A

recruitment drive yielded promising results and the new city league initially exceeded

their expectations:

> nous avons mobilisé nos troupes. Via les méthodes conventionnelles de
> communication (bouche à oreille, posters, ...) Nous avons réussi à piquer
> la curiosité et à attiser la motivation des Montréalais. Ainsi, notre ligue
> redémarra avec huit équipes solides! Un océan de talent fut découvert.[59]

Ken Hunt remembers that one or two of these teams were frequent defaulters and it is,

perhaps, a more realistic assessment to claim that the AUM began with six solid teams

and a handful of other semi-committed individuals.

Both Ken Hunt and Lorne Beckman were part of this 'ocean of talent' uncovered

in the 1993 recruitment drive. They were typical of what Lorne describes as the "hangers

on" from the McGill crew; people who did not necessarily attend McGill but through

interpersonal networks of friends, relatives, and romantic partners can be traced back to

the McGill intramural leagues and pickup games at the Reservoir. Ken, for instance,

credits his wife, Mila with introducing him to the McGill intramural league when she

began medical school in 1991. Both Ken and Lorne also recall that med student Neal

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[58] Luc Drouin, 6 June 2010.

[59] Drouin, "What's happening in Montreal?"14

Mahoot, former captain of the Stanford Ultimate team, was instrumental in recruiting players for the new city league. Lorne recalls that "somehow he knew that there was going to be a league," and "he taught us the sport, [and] we formed a team of basically med students and hangers on."[60] This shows that in the 1990s American students were still prominent disseminators of the game at McGill. Lorne and Ken quickly became avid players, and eventually important contributors to major developments on the Montreal Ultimate scene. But in 1993 they were two guys with time on their hands and a growing enjoyment for the game.

Despite these gains, it seems that in 1993 Ultimate was not yet known to many native Montrealers outside the university's orbit. In 1993, McGill was still an important source of players for the new league and continued to provide the players with the most skill and expertise. Organizers recognized that more participants needed to be drawn from a pool of Montreal residents, people who would not leave during the summer months or after finishing their degrees. The organizers of the 1991 nationals commented that "one of the reasons growth has been slower here than in other cities has been lack of awareness of the sport in the francophone community. Once inroads are made there, it should boom here as it has in [other] cities."[61] This statement would prove prophetic. Sustained growth necessarily meant looking outside of the McGill pool into the larger urban population, which in turn meant welcoming francophones who make up the largest

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[60] Lorne Beckman, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 7 April 2010.

[61] Paul Delean, "Ultimate Thrill Awaits You: Running, Passing keys to Team Sport with Frisbee-like Disc," *The Gazette*, Montreal, 9 August 1991, D .8.

segment of Montreal's residents.

Despite an awareness of the need to welcome Montreal's francophones, other than a general encouragement for current members to introduce "de plus en plus de francophones à notre sport," there is no evidence of any calculated effort, premeditated campaign, or deliberate strategy, to go out and specifically target francophones for recruitment.[62] Francophones, it seems, came to discover Ultimate through conventional means: "Quand on leur demande ce qui les a amenés à pratiquer ce sport méconnu, la plupart des joueurs racontent la même histoire de bouche à oreille: c'est un ami, ou un frère ou une soeur, ou l'ami d'un ami d'un ami, qui les a invités à tenter l'expérience, et ce fut le coup de foudre."[63] An organic grassroots process, rather than any overt strategy of recruitment, drew Montreal's francophones to Ultimate and the AUM. Fadi Hobeila remarks that "le boom s'est fait par la base."[64] This mirrors the method of growth in other Canadian leagues. Being drawn in by friends, family, and colleagues was a common introduction to the game, and word-of-mouth was the primary means of league growth in the 1990s.

Geneviève Després discovered Ultimate this way. First approached in her capacity as a graphic artist, she did some design work for Luc. The two began dating, and Luc then brought her out to the games where "playing was better than just standing

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[62] Cathy Janvier, *Ultimatum,* no. 3 (November 1994): 4.

[63] Jean Dion, *Le Devoir*, 3 juillet 2009, A.5.

[64] Fadi Hobeila, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 13 May 2010.

there." She recalls the league being very small, with only a handful of francophones.[65]

She also remembers understanding very little and being frustrated by the language

barrier: "Il avait cinq ou six Québecois, tous les autres sont anglophones – je comprenais

rien!" Although Geneviève went on to become deeply involved in both the league and

competitive travelling teams, she nonetheless claims that the language barrier was "what

stopped me in the beginning" and made her first season less than enjoyable.[66] Initially,

the predominance of English may have acted as a repellent for some unilingual

francophones.

The original handful of francophones were, therefore, primarily responsible for

both the league's impressive growth and its shifting linguistic character.

"Tranquillement, pas vite," claims Fadi, "les peu de francophones ont commencer à partir

de nos équipes, nous avons commencer à faire rentrer nos amis, de l'école, collègues de

la job – tous francophones."[67] By introducing the game to their friends, relatives, and

colleagues, Ultimate in Montreal began to grow "comme une boule de neige."[68] Yet, it

took ten years for francophones, who far outnumber anglophones in the general Montreal

population to come to outnumber anglophones in the AUM membership, suggesting that

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[65] The 'Lawnboys' was a team made up primarily of "guys from Cote-St.-Luc" and Ken Hunt jokes that in the beginning "there were probably more Jewish guys than francophones" in the AUM. Ken Hunt, 10 March 2010.

[66] Geneviève Després, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 5 July 2010.

[67] Fadi Hobeila, 13 May 2010.

[68] Ibid. It is important to note that anglophone teams were doing the same thing. In 1995, for instance, the Lawnboys split up and formed two new teams "to bring in new players" for "the benefit of Montreal Ultimate" or at least "that's what [they were] telling everyone." Dave Hoppenheim, "Lawnboys," *Ultimatum,* no.1 (1995): 5.

it was, indeed, a slow organic process from the bottom-up that brought Montreal's francophones into the league.

The continued dominance of English, despite the growing number of francophones, needs to be explained. It can partly be attributed to the game's origins. Ultimate is a game that was invented in the US, the official rules are written in English, and it is played in North America by a majority of English-speakers. As a result, the game's culture and argot is overwhelmingly English. Mira Svoboda and Peter Donnelly indicate that "most international sport organizations function in English, and international competitions use English as the default language."[69] This is also demonstrably true for Ultimate where English is the official language of play in international competition.[70]

The continued reliance on McGill, and eventually Concordia, students also helped sustain English as the language of play by keeping the numbers of anglophones stable. But even though Montreal's English-language universities, particularly McGill, remained an important source of players for the AUM throughout the 1990s, that does not mean that they provided only anglophone players. Luc , for instance, like many Montreal francophones, raised and educated in French, made a "conscious choice" to pursue his post-secondary studies in English.[71] He graduated from McGill with an Engineering degree in 1991. Similarly Fadi attended McGill in the mid-nineties. It was there that he got involved in the McGill intramural and club teams before taking up the game more

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[69] Svoboda and Donnelly, *Linguistic Barriers*, 35.

[70] See *WFDF Rules of Ultimate 2008*, Appendix A5. Language.

[71] Luc Drouin, 6 June 2010.

seriously, joining both the AUM, and eventually Montreal Open competitive teams. The

league team that he and his brother formed, 'Réal Villeray Ultimate Club,' is one of the

longest continuously-running teams in the AUM.

At least part of the reason that English continued to dominate Ultimate in

Montreal, despite a growing number of francophones, is that "most francophones

functioned well in English."[72] This comment suggests that the AUM's anglophone

members did not function as well in French. While francophones do make up "the vast

majority of bilingual Canadians,"[73] Ronald Rudin points out that after 1980 anglophone

Quebecers were also increasingly likely to be bilingual.[74] Graham Fraser observes a

range of circumstances that influence the language selection "when two bilingual people

meet."[75] Choice of language, he claims,

> can depend on the language the relationship was established in, where the
> conversation happens, the presence of other people, the nature of the
> relationship, and a whole series of other factors that can involve shadings
> of power (I'll pick the language here), one-upmanship (I speak your
> language better than you speak mine), exclusion (I speak my language
> only with my people - and you're not one of them), complicity (we speak
> this language and they don't), solidarity (I'm one of you or you're one of
> us) – or simply convenience.[76]

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[72] Rita M., interview by author, Montreal, QC, 11 February 2010.

[73] Hayday, 172; Svoboda and Donnelly claim that nationally, "based on the 2001 Census, the proportion of Francophones (44 percent) who are bilingual tends to be much higher than the proportion of Anglophones (9 percent) who are bilingual." *Linguistic Barriers*, 35.

[74] Rudin, 282-3.

[75] Fraser, 143.

[76] Ibid., 144.

The language of play can, therefore, be understood as a result of a constellation of factors – including but not limited to, the presence of unilingual anglophones.

Language choices were also influenced by the realities of the urban environment and the goals of the AUM's organizers. From the beginning Luc believed that "we need[ed] to make the AUM bilingual, and keep it bilingual." Making "francophones feel at home," he claims, "was necessary to get growth" and what has "allowed it to be a sustainable organisation."[77] He maintains that the first organizers were people open and committed to bilingualism. An editorial in the league newsletter in 1995 informed new players that "le médium linguistique de la ligue le plus souvent utilisé est certainement l'anglais, toutefois, sentez-vous à l'aise d'utiliser le français."[78] Starting in 2001, the league entered a period of accelerated growth. Between 2000 and 2002 league membership jumped from 504 members to 895 and the numbers of teams nearly doubled from thirty-six to sixty-seven.[79] Organizers agree that this was mainly due to an influx of francophone members.[80] Fadi believes that this was inevitable claiming, "ça devais arriver à un moment donné, mais quand? Pourquoi?"[81]

Francophone players may have gotten a boost from the Canadian Ultimate

[77] Luc Drouin, 6 June 2010.

[78] "Editorial" *Ultimatum,* 1 (1995): 2.

[79] "2005: L'AUM en chiffres," *Discours,* (December 2005):14.

[80] Sheillah Quintos, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 14 June 2010.

[81] Fadi Hobeila, 13 March 2010.

Players' Association (CUPA)'s application to become a recognized National Sport

Organization (NSO). In the early 2000s, in order to comply with Sport Canada's

requirement that national NSO's conform to the *Official Languages Act*, the CUPA

website was made bilingual. This may have made Ultimate more accessible to

francophone players in Montreal and elsewhere. It certainly helped lend Canadian

Ultimate the appearance of being a bilingual organization. This, however, was more of a

symbolic gesture than reflection of reality. Ultimate in the 'Rest of Canada,' with the

possible exception of Ottawa which does have a number of francophone members and

some French-speaking teams, is essentially English-speaking. And the AUM's current

executive director, Jean-Lévy Champagne claims that "je m'implique moins vers

[CUPA] parce que je suis moins à l'aise en Anglais" which illustrates that the national

body still operates predominantly in English.[82]

Mark "Shaggy" Zimmerl suspects that urban geography was an important factor

in the league's growth. "It seemed obvious to me," he explains, "that if you wanted the

game to expand, you needed some visibility." With "no visibility at the Douglas," the

league had plateaued. In 2002 other fields in more central locations had been secured,

and since "the francophone community is bigger than the English community as soon as

you've got some [decent] exposure it was just natural that it would become more

francophone." and "then it just took off" [83] Unquestionably, Montreal francophones have

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[82] Jean-Lévy Champagne, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 12 January 2011. Jean-Lévy claims that Montreal's is the only bilingual league.

[83] Mark "Shaggy" Zimmerl, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 5 October 2010.

enthusiastically embraced the game. "J'adore ce jeu," claim francophone addicts, "le Ultimate, c'est le plus beau sport du monde. Tout mon été tourne autour de ça."[84] And predictably, as the AUM membership came to more accurately reflect Montreal's urban demographics, the linguistic culture of the AUM shifted accordingly, the use of French becoming more prominent and eventually dominant.

At the most recent AUM Annual General Meeting, members were told to "feel free to pose questions in English," clearly showing the complete reversal in the dominant language at the administrative level.[85] There was no official AUM policy on language. In 2003, for instance, the board paused to ask itself: "Is the AUM officially bi-lingual, French and English equally? Should this be in our Bylaws? Our Policy and Procedure manual? What does the *Office de la langue française* have to say about this?"[86] Indeed the commitment to bilingualism was never officially mandated but was rather a strategy to encourage league growth, and it was largely a conceit on the part of the league organizers. There is no guarantee that, having achieved that growth, the current and future league administrators will continue to practice such a policy. Other, more pressing concerns could eclipse a commitment to bilingualism.

What is most noticeable on the field, and within the community, is the ongoing

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[84] Shawn Saint-Jean Timmins, quoted in Jean Dion, "Macadam: Le lancer de l'assiette à tarte, un sport de gentilhommes élevé au rang d'art," *Le Devoir*, Les Actualités, 3 juillet 2009, A.5.

[85] Jean-Levy Champagne, AUM AGM, 1 April 2011.

[86] Lorne Beckman to AUM Board of Directors, Agenda, April 2003, supplied by Lorne Beckman.

simultaneous interchange between languages. Ken Hunt recalls the first time he was

faced with an opposing team made up entirely of francophones. He responded by

exclaiming, "They're speaking in code!" which elicited a laugh from the other captain.[87]

This humourous interchange was always a prominent feature of play on the field.

Writing at the end of the 1994 season, newsletter editor, Cathy Janvier saw fit to

comment on the linguistic tone of the league:

> On a entendu et on entendra encore: 'Les ost@ d'anglais,' et 'fuc@
> frenchmen,' ... Mais, au Ultimate, cet été, ce qu'on a surtout vu et entendu,
> ce sont les rires-aux-larmes d'un tas de têtes carrées des suites de
> bouffonneries d'une de nos grenouilles québécoises! L'absence de
> 'languophobie' presque totale (mon observation), le partage des 'tradition'
> entre différentes appartenances linguistiques (autant de différentes
> manières excitantes de se saouler la gueule ... entre autres), et surtout, le
> désir très evident des têtes carrées d'apprendre à dire les plus sales
> grossièretés françaises! Autant de raisons fantastiques supplémentaires
> pour apprécier l'esprit très unique du sport du Ultimate.[88]

She attributes this interchange and a lack of "languophobie" partly to the culture of

Ultimate. Language certainly adds an extra dimension to the practice of slagging your

opponents. But language also acts as a marker of identity. Montreal teams, for instance,

use language as a way of announcing their affiliations when representing the city

elsewhere:

> When we'd go to tournaments, we'd explain to the other team that as
> recipients of provincial funding, we were legally required to sing our
> cheers in both languages. Then we'd sing a happy, nice, clean verse in
> English: 'we love you, we had a great time, etc.' But for the French verse
> we'd ramp up the nasty: 'your mothers are all whores, etc.' and in every
> team, there'd be at least one person laughing his ass off, while everyone

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[87] Ken Hunt, 13 March 2010.

[88] Cathy Janvier, *Ultimatum,* no. 3 (November 1994): 4

else just listened politely or stood there looking confused.[89]

As Sherry Simon points out, playing with language is a distinctive feature of Montreal's urban character. Montreal, she claims, "is the home of language games."[90]

The language of play in Montreal is a reflection of living in a bilingual city. Jean-Lévy maintains that

> Tout le monde parle le language qu'il sens le plus à l'aise. Si tu habites à Montréal tu comprends l'anglais, tu comprends le français. T'as pas le choix. Tu réponds dans la langue que tu veux. C'est la même dynamique sur un terrain d'Ultimate. On est un ville bilingue. C'est la base à Montréal.[91]

And for travelling teams, part of reflecting this aspect of the city's culture is choosing a team name that works well in both languages. Geneviève maintains that "moi j'ai toujours fais attention de trouver un nom qui se dise aussi bien en français qu'en anglais. Comme 'Mephisto,' je trouve ça beau comme nom, puis ça se dise aussi bien en anglais."[92] However, she notices that a new generation of players may not be carrying on this tradition. She claims to have "trouvé ça triste quand j'ai appris le nom de la nouvelle

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[89] Richard Stewart, conversation with author, 2 April 2011.

[90] Sherry Simon, "Connecting Across the City: Les modernités de Montréal," paper presented at the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, Concordia University, May 28-June 4, 2010.

[91] Jean-Lévy Champagne, 12 January 2011. The practice of speaking in both languages is apparent in my interviews as well. When interviewing francophones, I wanted them to speak in the language in which they were most comfortable. For most of them, this was obviously French. While, initially, I tried to use French as well, in most cases, I found myself quickly switching back to English. Thus my interview tapes are great examples of how less-than-fluently-bilingual Montrealers speak with one another.

[92] Geneviève Després, 5 July 2010.

équipe de femmes. 'Storm,' c'est juste anglais. C'est un beau nom, 'Storm,' fort, competitif, mais j'étais quand même un peu déçue."[93]

Montreal Ultimate players see Montreal as the centre of Ultimate in Quebec. According to its boosters, Montreal leads the way. Until recently, teams from Montreal have dominated the competitive scene in Quebec. Most credit this to the advantage of a large urban population from which Montreal teams can draw the best players. Also, having marquis teams here, helps Montreal draw the best players from the regions. But because of a language barrier, francophone teams may have had trouble meeting some of their competitive goals.

'Mephisto,' the elite Open team, for instance, has both benefitted and been hampered by Montreal's and Canada's language dynamics. Shaggy, who has been with Mephisto's from its beginning in 1995, as both a player and captain, claims that

> there were always francophones on the team, it was never an English
> team. But it seemed that most of the local competitive players came out of
> the university programs. And it was only Concordia and McGill at the
> time. So chances are that they would be English, and chances are they
> would move away. As soon as the team became more francophone there
> was less and less turnover every year.[94]

Having more francophones has helped 'Mephisto' maintain a more "consistent roster," which has contributed to its improvement. Yet cultural influences also create a barrier to the free interchange of experience that benefits players and teams from other places. In 2010 'Mephisto' was the best Open team in Quebec, but only the third or fourth best

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[93] Geneviève Després, 5 July 2010.

[94] Mark "Shaggy" Zimmerl, 5 October 2010.

team in Canada, and it fell well down the list of best teams in North America. Lorne

called them "the best of the rest."[95] And Shaggy speculates that some of this might be

explained by artificial language barriers. He claims, for example that

> there have been very few players who have gone from Montreal to
> [GOAT's] tryouts. It's just not in their mindset to do that. And it's too
> bad. Because anytime a player gets experience playing on a successful
> team, they can then model that culture for their teammates. One of the
> reasons that Mephisto can't take it up to the next level is that there have
> only been three guys who have gone and played at that level. Some guys
> are trying to model it, but the whole team doesn't understand what it
> means to live it.[96]

The provincial border and its implications for national eligibility regulations, means that

players from Montreal can't easily gain experience by playing with teams from Toronto

or, Vancouver unless they are willing to move. And language, as Shaggy intimates,

perhaps makes that a more difficult decision. Shaggy casts the free interchange of

information between competitive teams as key to improving competitive caliber.

Interestingly, language barriers have not impeded teams from Quebec City from excelling

on the national and world stages.

The growth and development of Ultimate in the rest of Quebec has also had an

interesting influence on the perception of cultural differences. In Chapter One, I

suggested that athletes are sometimes used as scapegoats for a sense of change or loss of

community. In Montreal, this is complicated by language difference because a

perception of growing athleticism and the presence of more francophones seems to

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[95] Lorne Beckman, 7 April 2010.

[96] Mark "Shaggy" Zimmerl, 5 October 2010.

happen simultaneously. The two trends can, therefore, be conflated. Speaking about the

changes he's observed, Ken Hunt remarks that

> it was ninety percent anglo when we started playing, and college people ...
> people who were either in university or recently graduated from
> university. It was a pretty homogenous community... now it's like sixty
> percent francophone... and it's still actually, as far as university-educated
> and professional, relatively homogeneous ... it's mostly professionals, tons
> of engineers... but the difference now is that you have a lot more athletes,
> people who come from other sports, and have taken up Ultimate as their
> serious sport. ... Now we have Ultimate in the rest of Quebec, where it's
> much more of an athlete's culture and their notions about how to play,
> even their interpretation of the rules is quite different than in Montreal.
> They play a much more aggressive game. And they're fine with a lot
> more body contact than Ultimate is in other places. And their notions of
> what's respectful and not, is a little different...[97]

With the success and impressive development of Ultimate in other Quebec cities,

Montreal's anglophone veterans might feel like more and more of a cultural and

linguistic minority within their sport.

This leads back to my teammates and their nostalgia. I suggest that their

grumbling over a linguistic shift has less to do with the AUM becoming "too French," as

it does with the league becoming "too big." What they are doing, then, is drawing on a

convenient and culturally understood rhetoric of exclusion and displacement - speaking

in a familiar idiom, using language as a metonym for community. And what they miss, is

not a time when the AUM was English, for no such time truly existed, so much as a time

when they felt a sense of belonging; a sense of 'place' and community. Now with over

2800 people, scattered on playing fields all across the greater Montreal region,

community is more difficult to recognize or experience at the league level. People can't

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[97] Ken Hunt, 10 March 2010.

reconfiguration. As people find affective relationships in smaller more manageable

groups such as their teams or divisions, the Ultimate league becomes more and more like

a 'community of communities.'

CHAPTER 6

Acts of Memory

> ... to study the social formation of memory is to study those acts of
> transfer that make remembering in common possible.
>   -- Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*

Ultimate players are continuously engaged in memory-making. Paul Connerton claims that "collective memory" needs to be understood as "facts of communication between individuals" and that in order for a social group to "'remember' in common, it is necessary that the older members of the group transmit these mental representations relating to the past to [its] younger members."[1] Websites, blogs, and other online forums are various means that the Ultimate community employs to share stories, document events, and recognize significant people. And Ultimate players and organizers also engage in more conventional practices of commemoration. Public celebrations, halls of fame, and memorials, are cultural practices that Ultimate players have adopted as ways of remembering their history, transmitting their culture, and reinforcing the boundaries of community.

How successfully do Ultimate players communicate their history? In 1998 Andrew Thornton observed that "there is no decent history of Ultimate or Frisbee culture in general."[2] Ken Hunt recalls that "when we started playing we didn't know where it

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[1] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 38.

[2] Andrew Thornton, "Ultimate Masculinities: An Ethnography of Power and Social Difference in Sport" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1998), 22.

had been invented" but that "by '97 I was finding all kinds of stuff, all sorts of little

things, the history of this and that, people were putting stuff up like crazy."[3] For most of

its existence, Ultimate's history was circulated in "bits and pieces" in magazine articles,

newsletters, and online forums, and most importantly, by word of mouth.[4] An effort to

create a more authoritative version of that history began in the 2000s. In 2005,

recognizing a "need for a deeper understanding of the history of their sport" sportswriters

and avid Ultimate players Adam Zagoria and Tony Leonardo "published a retrospective,"

Ultimate: The First Four Decades which is often touted as the definitive history of the

sport. [5] Yet, in 2008, Kirsten Walters remarked that "both players and journalists

continue to express confusion regarding Ultimate's origins, despite efforts to document

the sport's history."[6] Ultimate history online, in the press, and in printed materials

remains episodic, anecdotal, often inaccurate, and is not always successful in reaching its

intended audiences.

The Ultimate Players Association (UPA) also launched an effort to celebrate and

communicate the sport's history. In 2004, at the urging of its alumni, and to help

celebrate its twenty-fifth anniversary, the UPA board of directors approved the first

Ultimate hall of fame. This project was initiated because "the UPA has crowned team

[3] Ken Hunt, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 10 March 2010.

[4] Thornton, 22

[5] Kirsten S. Walters, "Ultimate Spin: Contesting the Rhetoric, Countercultural Ethos and Commodification of the Ultimate 'Frisbee' Sport, 1968-2008" (PhD diss., American Studies, University of Iowa, 2008), 4.

[6] Ibid.

and national champions every year since its founding in 1979 but, outside of those few

players honored through the Spirit and Callahan awards, there has been no vehicle to also

honor the many individual Ultimate players and contributors to the development of the

sport who attained the very highest level of achievement as measured by their peers."[7]

The hall of fame was devised as a means by which the UPA intended to "celebrate the

history, honor the heroes, inspire the youth, and preserve the legacy of the game."[8]

Halls of fame are markers of history and tradition that mainstream sports have.

And because "the underlying theme of sport halls of fame and museums is the

glorification of a sport heritage," some believe that "a sport must have developed a

sufficient … antiquity to warrant the establishment of a hall of fame."[9] Having enough of

its own history to celebrate in such a formal way is another means by which Ultimate

claims legitimacy. But this sense of legitimacy is compromised somewhat since the

Ultimate hall of fame is not (yet) a conventionally physical place. For while the UPA's

"long-range goal is to establish a permanent site by 2018, the 50th anniversary of the

founding of the sport," currently, its hall of fame "remains a 'virtual' hall for the time

being."[10] In a digital age, when halls of fame need not entail bricks and mortar, and are

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[7] Robert Rauch, "Ultimate Hall of Fame Established: 2004 Inaugural Class Inducted," *Ultimate News,* 24/4 (Winter 2004): 10.

[8] Ibid.

[9] E. Snyder, "Sociology of Nostalgia: Sport Halls of Fame and Museums in America," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 3/8 (1991):229.

[10] USA Ultimate, "Hall of Fame," http://www.usaultimate.org/about/history/hall_of_fame/default.aspx (accessed 13 July 2010).

relatively inexpensive to construct, edit, and maintain, a long and glorious heritage is not necessarily a prerequisite.

Many Canadian Ultimate organizations followed the UPA's lead. The Ottawa-Carleton Ultimate Association (2008), the Association de Ultimate de Montréal (2008), the Vancouver Ultimate League (2009), and the Toronto Ultimate Club (2010) established similar halls of fame to recognize important individuals, and mark significant anniversaries of their own. It is worth noting that it is the municipal leagues, and not the national organizing body, that have established the Canadian Ultimate halls of fame.[11] Partly because the largest city leagues have the necessary resources to engage in projects like these, but also because Canada's municipal leagues see themselves and their members as important figures in the history of Canadian Ultimate, establishing halls of fame became popular projects in the late 2000s.

But what are these halls doing? John Bale claims that sports halls of fame "couple nostalgia with religion, being a combination of museum and shrine, dedicated to praising sporting heroes and displaying various quasi-religious relics (or memorabilia) of the past."[12] Tara Brabazon, however, argues that "sport is a culture of the present which fetishizes the now and creates [only] shallow links with a hyper-relevant past," and she maintains that "'tradition' is only important when either challenged or confirmed by

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[11] In 2009 Ultimate Canada began a project to recognize excellence and instituted an annual system recognizing male and female MVP, coach, and *Spirit of the Game* awards.

[12] John Bale, *Landscapes of Modern Sport*, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1994), 138.

current events."[13] Similarly Carol Duncan, maintains that "whatever their stated aims and potentials," museums "function within existing political and ideological limits" and it is "what happens in the space between what museums say they do and what they do without saying" that interests observers of places of public memory.[14] Ultimate's halls of fame have equally present-minded intents, purposes, and effects.

The Association de Ultimate de Montréal (AUM) launched its hall of fame in 2008. Its original director, Mike Venditti, explains how he came up with the idea and what he hoped it would accomplish:

> Initially it was a pet project of mine. I knew the UPA had its own hall of fame and I figured the AUM was getting old enough, that there were people who from the 1990s were founders or had been there from the beginning, they're getting on in age, some of them were no longer playing because of other commitments, family, work, whatever, and a new generation of players coming in had never heard of these people. And it was getting harder to get to know these people. Most players just starting would never play against them. And if you did, you'd have no idea who so-and-so was. Unless you're a competitive player, you'll never know who Shaggy is. You might know who Lorne is, 'cause he's been around forever, and he's still here. But you'll never know who Luc is. Or Cathy. I thought, let's give some recognition to people who had been there for a long time, and showcase some of the top talent. Initially we were just going to recognize the founders and show how it evolved over time.[15]

According to Mike, what began as a small project to "build a history" then "morphed into

[13] Tara Brabazon, *Playing on the Periphery: Sport, Identity and Memory*, (London: Routledge, 2006), 116.

[14] Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 4.

[15] Mike Venditti, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 14 July 2010.

a full-fledged hall of fame."[16] Public museums, as scholars claim, are institutions "with

two deeply contradictory functions: 'that of the elite temple of the arts, and that of a

utilitarian instrument for democratic education.'"[17] And both of these goals are

discernible in Mike's comments. The AUM hall of fame is intended to identify certain

individuals for public recognition while also educating a larger group of younger players

about the league's history. Memory places also have a third function as disciplinary tools

for transmitting culture and ideals.[18] And that, according to Carole Blair, Greg

Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott, involves making choices: "groups talk about some events of

their histories more than others, glamorize some individuals more than others, and

present some actions but not others as 'instructive' for the future."[19] E. Snyder, for

instance, claims that "halls of fame are agencies of socialization wherein the memories

symbolically transmit values and norms," and that "by eliciting nostalgic feelings

associated with the acceptable behaviour of the honored athletes, the sport heroes are

expected to be role models that exemplify these qualities"[20] Halls of fame, therefore, are

places where culture is transmitted and appropriate and desirable behaviours are modeled

[16] Mike Venditti, 14 July 2010.

[17] Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, (London: Routledge, 1995), 89 quoting Hooper-Greenhill, 63.

[18] Ibid., 63.

[19] Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott, "Rhetoric/ Memory/ Place" in *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*, eds. Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair and Brian L. Ott, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 7.

[20] Snyder, 231, 232, 233.

and endorsed.

Are the Ultimate halls of fame manufacturing heroes? Classical heroes are

defined as "individuals, real or fictional, whose life and death are recalled and celebrated

by some social group" because "the hero is the symbol of a given society, the society's

progenitor in many cases and a sort of ideal summing up in one mythic individual of the

chief characteristics of the various empirical members of the group."[21] Ultimate, like

other communities, has such figures. In February 2010, when Frederick Morrison died at

the age of ninety, the 'ulti-net' was abuzz with the news. Inboxes filled up as

commemorative messages and articles were forwarded and disseminated throughout the

online community. Although he was never a player, as the inventor of the Frisbee,

Morrison is understood to be one of Ultimate's founding figures. And his passing now

allows for a mythic, heroic stature to be bestowed upon him. Other figures as well, such

as the inventors of the game – Joel Silver, Johnny Hines, and Buzzy Hellring – fit the bill

of founding fathers. The sport also boasts some living legends, such as Steve Mooney,

Ken Dobbyns, and Canada's Andrew Lugsdin, who have headed successful club teams,

changed the way the game is played, and accumulated an impressive number of

championship titles. Acknowledging these figures helps give the sport a sense of history

and a narrative arc that can be traced through the contributions and efforts of specific

individuals.

Additionally, USA Ultimate (formerly the UPA) is currently pursuing a project to

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[21] Alexander Riley, Sarah Daynes and Cyril Isnart, eds., *Saints, Heroes, Myths, and Rites: Classical Durkheimian Studies of Religion and Society, Marcel Mauss, Henri Hubert, Robert Hertz*, (London: Paradigm Publishers, 2009) 4, 5.

create a 'star system' intended to make icons out of the game's best players in order to help promote the sport to the wider public.[22] Such modern sports figures are problematic because usually they "are not just heroes but celebrities; the public personas of the champions now marketable goods, giving them fame beyond their class and community."[23] And, according to Don Morrow, they "fall far short of being truly heroic; instead they are victims- or carriers-only of our projection of heroism."[24] In a commercialized achievement-oriented society, Morrow claims, "the mythological process has been distorted or re-mythologized" so that "the athlete-hero merely gains the external trappings of the culturally-supported marketplace … – a pyrrhic victory that we reinforce with money, halls of fame, world titles and hero-worship out of all proportion to the significance of what the athlete has really achieved."[25] These figures are, in other words, somehow inauthentic.

Most Ultimate heroes do not fit the image of either the classic hero, or the celebrity sports figure. As Morrow claims "the type of satisfaction sought in a hero is derived from the values of one's culture and anyone set up on the heroic pedestal is emblematic of that culture and cultural values that placed the hero there."[26] For this

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[22] Christiane Marceau, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 20 January 2010.

[23] Elliot J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America*, (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1986), 129.

[24] Don Morrow, "The Myth of the Hero in Canadian Sport History," *Canadian Journal of History of Sport* (December 1992): 73.

[25] Ibid., 80.

[26] Ibid.

reason, Ultimate's heroic figures are more often found much closer to home. Jean-Lévy

Champagne, for example, doesn't use the word, but clearly casts his older brother in the

role of personal hero:

> Tout le monde a une personne qui dit, 'lui c'est mon mentor qui m'a appris à lancer mon premier Frisbee.' Moi, c'est mon frère, Dan. Dan n'est pas le meilleur lanceur, mais c'est lui qui a mis le premier disque dans mes mains et m'a dit 'c'est comme ça qu'on lance un flick.'... On dirait que mon frère a dicté mon parcours. ... C'est Daniel, qui m'a poussé d'aller vers l'UQAM, il m'a dit, 'và aux jeux de commerce, và jouer au Frisbee.' Mon frère m'a dit d'inscrire dans l'AUM. ... Mon frère a joué un été avec 'Mephisto,' et il trouve qu'il avait assez potentiel d'avoir une deuxième équipe. Il a creé l'équipe 'Magma.' C'est Dan qui nous a appris.[27]

Ultimate heroes tend to be more personally-defined, teachers and mentors. Players often

tell stories about the person who introduced them to the game, the one who taught them

how to throw; the person who encouraged their development, or widened their Ultimate

horizons. Calgary player, Erin Van Regan, for instance, describes finding her mentor

when she registered for her first tournament with the Calgary Ultimate Association:

> I go out to this tournament and I get put on this team and I meet Dave MacLean... and I realize that he's married to this girl I went to school with ... We're on the sideline, getting ready to go out on the field. I've only ever played man defense and they say 'we are going to play a zone, who wants to be in the cup?' And I'm like, 'what is a cup?' And Dave said 'Erin, you and me are going off to the sideline, and I'll give you the breakdown.' So he's got Frisbees and water bottles and doing a demonstration, giving me the lingo. And he was so good about breaking it down for me so that I wouldn't feel lost, or be lost and mucking things up for the team. And I'll always remember that tournament because he was so good to me. And it was a really great start to my tournament career. It made a huge difference that he was willing to take me off and explain everything and not get angry or frustrated with me for not knowing any better.[28]

Tellingly, when asked who he would like to see in the AUM hall of fame, Jean-Lévy

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[27] Jean-Lévy Champagne, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 12 January 2011.

[28] Erin Van Regan, interview by author, Calgary, AB, 18 August 2008.

replies, "Mon frère Daniel, que je trouve a fait beaucoup pour l'Ultimate. Pour son implication, pour me donner la passion."[29] As Mike succinctly remarks, "the gods and goddesses of Ultimate are real people."[30] While Ultimate does have its larger-than life, classic figures and living legends, its heroes are generally characterized, not by outstanding public achievements and contributions, but most often by patience, encouragement, and willingness to share knowledge; they are people who through their everyday actions convey the sport's underlying values of inclusion and participation.

Who, then, belongs in an Ultimate hall of fame? Who decides who will be included? Selection of inductees appears to be a democratic process and seems to be responsive to input from the members. League members nominate candidates who are then vetted by a committee of their peers. What results is a mix of idols and mentors. The hall of fame, moreover, has been evolving to accommodate the demand for certain kinds of representations. For example, Mike relates how:

> in 2008 there were a lot of people who wanted to nominate Mila [Oh]. But she didn't really fit well in the player category - she was never an elite player. And she didn't really fit as a contributor – she didn't really involve herself in league matters. She didn't really fit into either category. Yet I kept getting her name from the peer reviewers. The description of why her name kept popping up was her spirit or her cheers, so it made sense to expand the categories.[31]

In response to the demand a special merit/spirit category was added in 2009 and "it was a no-brainer for Mila to be the first person on the ballot for that category, and she was

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[29] Jean-Lévy Champagne, 12 January 2011.

[30] Mike Venditti, 14 July 2010.

[31] Ibid.

inducted."[32] Not having these categories initially seems odd. Particularly, since the

UPA's hall of fame had a special merit category in their inaugural class of 2004. But the

original emphasis on players and contributors reflects Mike's vision for the hall of fame

to act as a vehicle by which to transmit otherwise obscure "nuggets of information" like

"how did this tournament start? Why is it called 'Comedy of Errors?'" and to allow

players to "find out more about things they take for granted." Mike envisioned the hall of

fame as a means "for players to make a connection between day to day league games or

how the league runs to an actual person; things you would never know, unless you had

the history to go with it."[33] Others, however, obviously felt that the scope of the hall of

fame needed to be expanded to include people who embody the *Spirit of the Game*. And

Mike explains that the peer reviewers are also demanding "a category for non-human

inductees" where they can recognize "Montreal-based teams that stayed together for

many years or the Douglas Hospital grounds – people want to see these things in the hall

of fame."[34] Not having an appropriate category, Mike points out, does not stop players

from nominating people and things that they feel are important to the AUM's history.

But how truly effective is the hall of fame as a means of communicating with the

younger players? The ability of Ultimate halls of fame to effectively act as vehicles of

cultural transmission is questionable because some Ultimate halls of fame are neither

physical nor virtual places. The AUM's hall of fame, for example, has a webpage but,

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[32] Mike Venditti, 14 July 2010.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

unlike the sites devoted to the Ottawa-Carleton Ultimate Association (OCUA) and the

Toronto Ultimate Club (TUC) halls, as Tony Boyd remarks, "there's nothing there."[35]

The Vancouver Ultimate League (VUL) hall of fame, similarly does not exist publicly.

The VUL started their hall of fame in 2009, and Adam Berson (2009) and Anja Haman

(2010) are its current inductees.[36] But they have not yet (though they plan to) created a

publicly accessible site where people can go to find out who these people are or what

significant contributions they have made. This is partly a function of the halls of fame

being largely volunteer-run projects. When Mike, for example, spearheaded the process

he had no idea just how much work it would entail, and he was not able to devote the

necessary time to follow-up with a web presence for the hall. "Eventually," he hopes,

"when we have more information on the website people will be able to go there and see

the history of what [these people have] done."[37] He has since transferred responsibility

for the hall of fame to the league organizers, and perhaps they will devote more time to

making the hall of fame a comprehensive vehicle for transmitting AUM history. If

Ultimate halls of fame are intended as educational tools, where new players can go to

learn about the founders and the sport's heritage, that some of them seem to be

incomplete or under construction means that they are not functioning as effective vehicles

of collective memory.

But the inattention on the part of some leagues to the public face of their halls can

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[35] Tony Boyd, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 28 September 2010.

[36] Brian Gisel, e-mail message to author, 27 January 2011.

[37] Mike Venditti, 14 July 2010.

also be explained by their focus on the annual social performance of the induction

ceremony. Paul Connerton argues that "images of the past and recollected knowledge of

the past are conveyed and sustained by (more or less ritual) performances."[38] Unlike

conventional museums and other sports halls of fame where "it is the visitors who enact

the ritual"[39] by descending upon them "in nothing less than a secular pilgrimage,"[40]

Ultimate halls of fame function less as "destinations rooted in touristic practices"[41] than

as public performances. The Ultimate halls of fame that do have an accessible online

presence are also first enacted as social performances. Mike, for instance, believes that:

> having a gala where we can present the inductees, present their
> accomplishments, have speeches. That's what really makes the connection
> with the members. They attend the gala, they see the inductee, being
> presented by their close friend who describes what it is they've done over
> the years, they hear the speeches ... that's where the connection is made.
> Just having a website with a bunch of faces on it, the connection is not as
> strong. The extra weight [of] pairing it with the gala makes the
> difference.[42]

Here, the virtual space is cast as the lingering artifact of that performance; the website is

secondary. It is the process of selection and the annual performance of the induction of

new members that is entrusted with doing the work of educating the group. Yet, as

Jeffrey Alexander cautions, "performances may fail if any of the elements that compose

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[38] Connerton, 4.

[39] Duncan, 12.

[40] Bale, 139.

[41] Blair, Dickinson, and Ott, 26.

[42] Mike Venditti, 14 July 2010.

them are insufficiently realized, or if the relation among these elements is not articulated in a coherent or forceful way."[43] As much as league organizers hope that the public spectacle of the induction ceremony will convey a sense of history, without giving equal weight to a place where interested people can go to learn about the inductees, the hall of fame remains an imperfect means of transmitting either history or culture.

This may not be the main objective. Blair, Dickinson and Ott claim that "groups tell their pasts to themselves and others as ways of understanding, valorizing, justifying, excusing, or subverting conditions or beliefs of their current moment" and the AUM can be shown to have such utilitarian ambitions for its hall of fame.[44] Mike explains how "initially there was resistance to it," but, in 2008 when the board went through the exercise of devising a five-year strategic plan and identified a need to "establish a sense of history and belonging for the members," then "it became obvious: let's do a gala because it matches with what the membership says we should be doing."[45] Moreover, Mike explains the rationale to "have an event specifically for the members, where they all attend, and do things at the gala that helps them become more familiar with the AUM and become more of a fan or a cheerleader. The hall of fame fit into that very well."[46] Beyond paying tribute to the accomplishments of veteran players and organizers, educating new players and providing them with role models, by publicly celebrating the

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[43] Alexander, 96.

[44] Blair, Dickinson, and Ott, 6.

[45] Mike Venditti, 14 July 2010.

[46] Ibid.

important contributions of its members, the hall of fame serves as a means by which the

association can promote and market itself.

For the AUM board of directors, the hall of fame falls nicely within the

parameters of its strategic plan. For Mike, its purpose is to transmit a sense of history

and "to shift knowledge down to the members."[47] For the current AUM executive it also

serves as a vehicle for recognizing important contributions and a way to "remercier les

gens pour toute leur travail."[48] But what does it mean to its inductees? When asked how

he feels about being inducted, Tony Boyd replies:

> Good. You know, it's nice. I feel honoured and privileged and lucky as
> hell. It's very cool. It triggers some introspection, to look back at all this
> and make you think about where it all started and all the great memories.
> But it's not like I've invested a lot of emotional capital. I think about it,
> but I've got three young kids and life goes on. But it's very cool. It's a
> very nice bookend and way to be recognized. To be a member of the hall
> of fame is a tremendous honour. I was touched.[49]

Despite the obvious ambivalence, hall of fame inductees, nonetheless, believe that they

are contributing to a valuable project. Tony speculates that "I don't know to what extent

a youngster would have an interest in the history and the origins, but I think there will be

a cross-section who will groove to going to see the archives."[50] Shaggy similarly sees the

hall as a means to "convey a sense of tradition and history" for people passionate about

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[47] Mike Venditti, 14 July 2010.

[48] Jean-Lévy Champagne, 12 January 2011.

[49] Tony Boyd, 28 September 2010.

[50] Ibid.

Ultimate who "want to learn more about it."[51] Comparing it to "a museum or hall of

fame of any other sport," Tony claims that "it does exactly what it's purported to do: it's

capturing a slice of history and by documenting it, it stays a part of our collective

memory, because if not, what record do you have of what went on?" Somewhat tellingly,

he adds: "and no one's going to be able to take that away," indicating that perhaps

veterans feel that their contributions are ephemeral and in need of the institutional

support and the public validation provided by a forum like the hall of fame.

One more thing that Ultimate halls of fame are doing without saying is recovering

a sense of exclusivity for a select few. As Ultimate has grown in popularity, it has lost its

underground, 'secret club' cachet, and veterans may feel that they have lost the sense of

participating in something exclusive. Inclusion in the hall of fame allows them to recover

this feeling. The structure of the vetting process, moreover, gives current inductees

significant influence in deciding who else becomes a member of the hall of fame.

There are good reasons for this system. Inducted in 2009, Tony Boyd, for

example, was missed in the first round of nominations because, no longer part of the

league and having 'retired' from competitive play due to nagging injuries and family

commitments, the people who created the hall of fame did not know of him. This is

somewhat ironic, because in his letter of reference, Eric Lewis specifically details how

well-known Tony used to be in Ultimate circles:

> I have always been struck, when attending high-level tournaments, that
> *everyone* knows Tony. He has been the face of Canadian Ultimate for
> many, many years (and think about how successful Canada has been). My

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[51] Mark "Shaggy" Zimmerl, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 5 October 2010.

old disc buddies in the US, players of the highest caliber, know Tony, and respect his game. He is clearly viewed as one of the great first-second generation Canadian players, and clearly deserves to be in the AUM hall of fame.[52]

The intended effect of the system that gives hall of fame members a say in inductions is precisely to ensure that worthy players and contributors who perhaps no longer play, or no longer live in the city, will not be overlooked. Without the input from the 2008 inductees, Tony may have continued to go unnoticed and, perhaps, forgotten.

Another effect of this system is the potential for a clique to develop around hall of fame membership as veterans can once again belong to and police the boundaries of an exclusive club. Shaggy, for instance sees the need to recognize "people who were instrumental with a bigger impact than others." But he also admits that "once I got inducted I didn't want to induct anyone else. I want to keep it exclusive."[53] Similarly, Tony claims that "the pioneers deserve to be in," and "you should probably recognize the people who [did] so much work" but once he was inducted and given the opportunity to vet candidates, he admits that "looking at the list, there weren't very many names that seemed worthy."[54] Interestingly, Tony now has something in common with his old friends – Marcus Brady, Brian Guthrie, Keith Whyte and Craig Fielding -- who have been inducted into the OCUA's hall of fame. The trend toward creating league halls lends an inter-urban scope to the elite club of inductees. It is somewhat ironic that Mike,

[52] Eric Lewis, to AUM Hall of Fame director, letter of recommendation (Tony Boyd 2009).

[53] Mark "Shaggy" Zimmerl, 5 October 2010.

[54] Tony Boyd, 28 September 2010.

who tells me how "greatly annoyed" he was at Ultimate's cliquishness when he started playing, was instrumental in creating a vehicle for some individuals to be elevated above others. But, as he explains, "you don't want a hall of fame that is ridiculously huge. After a flood of founding people get in there, then it will naturally trickle down to a smaller number."[55] Ultimate's new sites of memory are, therefore, another example of the internal policing of boundaries and the ongoing processes of inclusion and exclusion that gives "some a feeling of cultural ownership and belonging while they make others feel inferior and excluded."[56] But that process is not one-directional and veterans do not have a monopoly on the ability to police boundaries.

The public performance of the induction ceremony allows the larger membership to respond. And those responses can be indicative of a disconnect between the delivery and the reception of the intended messages. Jeffrey Alexander notes that "cultural antagonisms and/or social cleavages can create polarized and conflicting interpretive communities" and "the success of a performance can be thwarted if audiences are fragmented."[57] In 2010, for example, Jay Popsipil was inducted into the AUM's hall of fame. 'Jaybird' no longer lives or plays in Montreal, and few current AUM members are familiar with his name or aware of his role in AUM history. I know who Jay is because he figures prominently in old AUM newsletters as well as many stories I have heard over the course of my interviews. In his day, he was a well-known figure on the Montreal

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[55] Mike Venditti, 14 July 2010.

[56] Duncan, 4.

[57] Alexander, 97.

Ultimate scene and it makes sense that his peers would want to see his contributions recognized. They wanted to include him in their group of inductees. However, at the 2010 gala it was painfully obvious, particularly to those giving the speeches, that the majority of people present did not know who he was, and were not terribly interested in his induction – it did not have meaning for them. Much more concerned with socializing with their friends and enjoying themselves, and importantly, celebrating their own experiences of the 2010 season, few made the effort to pay attention. The "performative failure" of Jay's induction nicely illustrates how "a drama that is utterly convincing for one audience-public might seem artificial to another."[58]

Shaggy's 2008 induction was, in contrast, arguably more successful. While he is a bit perplexed by the timing of his induction – "It was really odd. I was inducted while I was still playing at the highest level. I felt I was still learning the game and my best years were still ahead of me. I couldn't accept the award because I was playing with 'GOAT'"– it makes good sense if it is understood, not only as a tribute to past accomplishments, but equally as a vehicle for the transmission of current values and ideals. Eric Lewis astutely remarks that "it's important that the hall of fame not be perceived as a retirement gift: we expect you to continue to be a role model."[59] In order to encourage this, AUM hall of famers are awarded lifetime memberships.[60] If the hall of

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[58] Alexander, 96, 97.

[59] Eric Lewis, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 2 June 2010.

[60] Jean-Lévy Champagne, "Ultimate Recognition: 4 players get honoured with an induction into the Hall of Fame" *Ultimate Canada Magazine* (Winter 2009): 15.

fame is to function as an effective tool of socialization, and as a place where community is reified, it is important that it include figures who bridge past and present – whose contributions seem relevant to the general membership. But halls of fame are only one site around which community and memory, the past and the present, coalesce.

The Ultimate community has experienced its share of loss. Once I started looking for it, I found many examples of tragedy in the lives of Ultimate players. A segment in the 1992 promotional film, *The Ultimate Experience* was dedicated to the memory of Captain Charles "Chuck" Cooper who perished in the first Gulf War. The column in *Ultimate Canada Magazine*, "In Memoriam," is becoming a regular feature, most recently paying tribute to Art Hawkins, who succumbed to cancer in 2010.[61] And many of the pages in *Ultimate: The First Four Decades* are likewise devoted to the memory of Ultimate players who have succumbed to all manner of unfortunate and untimely deaths. Perhaps Ultimate's first tragic death was that of CHS student Buzzy Hellring – codifier of the first set of rules – who died in a motor vehicle accident in the spring of 1971 and "never lived to see the birth of the sport at Princeton."[62] Memorials are, therefore, another important site of memory where Ultimate players celebrate heroes, map their histories, and engage in formalized acts of community solidarity.

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[61] The Vancouver Ultimate League also prominently displays a memorial message for Hawkins remembering him for his "enthusiasm, hard work, dedication, leadership and most importantly, his Spirit" In his memorial message, Brian Gisel reports that the Great Canadian Ultimate Game, a nation-wide fund-raising initiative which Hawkins spearheaded has now been renamed for him. See Vancouver Ultimate League, "Art Hawkins," http://www.vul.bc.ca/v3/_files/2010/art.cfm. (accessed 27 January 2011).

[62] Pasquale Anthony Leonardo and Adam Zagoria, *Ultimate: The First Four Decades,* (Los Altos, CA: Ultimate History, Inc., 2005), 11.

Ultimate players engage in fairly conventional acts of mourning for fairly
conventional reasons. In 2001, when a member of my own team died suddenly the week
before we were supposed to go to a tournament, we thought about how to proceed.
"Should we not go?" I remember asking the team. None of us wanted to cancel the trip,
and we told ourselves that Pat would not have wanted that either. But we felt we needed
to do something. So we went to the tournament, and played our games wearing black
armbands. In retrospect it seems like an inadequate gesture. But broadcasting our grief
to others did make us all feel slightly better about playing so soon after Pat's death.

It is particularly unsettling when a death occurs on the playing field. On 10 April
1994 a field in Nashville was struck by lightning and one Ultimate player, Shawn Adams,
died. Another, Carmen Lipoma, fell into a coma. While teammates grieved for the loss
of Shawn and prayed for Carmen's recovery (which would be a long, arduous process)[63]
Ultimate players all over North America reacted. Craig Fielding of the OCUA was
particularly moved by the story. "Oh yeah," he remembers, "that was sad. I read about it
on rec.sport.disc. I read it over and over again. And then I [went] into the captain's
meeting and read it to them. The room was just silent."[64] The Ottawa Ultimate players,
despite having no personal connection to the fallen players were inspired to do

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[63] A year later, Stu Downs reported that "our friend is walking around with some
assistance from a cane. Her voice is quiet but she responds pretty well. Recent surgery
helped restore full hearing to her left eardrum. She remains childishly happy and sweet
in the presence of her friends. ... it will be a long time (years) until she resumes 98% of
her former lifestyle." Stu Downs, letter to Craig Fielding, reprinted in "On the Road to
Recovery," *The CUPA newsletter,* (Spring 1995): 19.

[64] Craig Fielding, interview by author, Ottawa, ON, 11 June 2010.

something: "we raised $190 for the Shawn Adams Memorial Fund in support of low-income housing and $310 to help with Carmen's medical bills."[65] And they were not the only ones. Friend and teammate Stu Downs, writing a decade after the event, recalled that the fund set up to assist in Carmen's care "reached $70,000 at one point" and he credits the "numerous Ultimate donors and tournaments [who] gave proceeds to her" including ones where "I don't think anyone knew Carmen or Shawn."[66] Craig recalls that "that's when we really started cracking down on playing in lightning, because we don't want that to happen here."[67] The long-term effect of the Nashville incident is a greater awareness of field and weather safety and many Ultimate players are aware of the dangers of lightning because of it – if they don't necessarily know the details or the persons involved.

More immediately, however, the incident illustrates a sense of affiliation, and a desire to express solidarity with fellow Ultimate players. These events also illustrate how this sense of community transcends national and civic boundaries. Another good example of this, is the spirit award at Gender Blender, a tournament in southwestern Ontario, which memorializes Kit Faragher, a Colorado native who died in the 9/11 attacks in 2001 in New York City.[68] "There's a bond," claims Ken Lange. "You may or

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[65] Craig Fielding, "On the Road to Recovery," 19.

[66] Stu Downs, "Carmen Lipoma and Shawn Adams" in Leonardo and Zagoria, 100.

[67] Craig Fielding, 11 June 2010.

[68] See "The Kit Faragher Spirit Award," http://www.genderblender.org/kit-faragher (accessed 21 May 2011).

may not have known the person, but you knew they played Ultimate. And when [an Ultimate player dies] the community pulls together."[69] Lightning strikes and terrorist attacks are particularly dramatic examples. Mundane tragedies, however, are equally effective in bringing Ultimate players together to grieve. In Ottawa, for instance, "tons of us raise our beer to the Shawn Green Cup," the B-division trophy awarded every year at the No Borders tournament named for an Ottawa player who "died doing something we all do everyday. Going down the basement stairs one day, he hit his head and died." According to Ken Lange, "Shawn Green was never going to be top of the class from a playing perspective, he was a B-level player, but he was the nicest guy in the world; everyone knew Shawn. His death rocked the community." He recalls that "the turnout at the funeral was spilling out of the room, the family was just overwhelmed" and maybe more illustrative, "the Irish pub across the street ran out of beer!"[70]

Naming things after people is one of the most obvious and conventional ways to remember individuals. "Public memory" claim Blair, Dickinson and Ott, "is typically understood as relying on material and/or symbolic supports – language, ritual performances, communication technologies, objects, and places – that work in various ways to consummate individuals' attachment to the group."[71] Conveniently, an array of trophies, prizes, and awards are available for the memorialization of Ultimate players who are no longer with us. These kinds of memorials are effective ways of expressing

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[69] Ken Lange, interview by author, Ottawa, ON, 11 June 2010.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Blair, Dickinson, and Ott, 10.

grief and remembering friends. But, like the halls of fame, they also have instructive

functions rooted in present needs.

Prizes and awards are opportunities to materially and symbolically express values.

Not only are these awarded again and again, giving the opportunity to enact a

performative ritual of remembering individuals, but the material object can be fashioned

in such a way so as to symbolically convey other salient meanings. The Masters MVP

trophy is a good example. On 27 December 2006, at age 37, Jamie Kelly, was killed in a

car crash. According to his obituary, "Mr. Kelly" was "a long-time disc-sports athlete"

who "played for such teams as 'Wuz' and 'Girly-Drink Drunks' in Ottawa, as well as for

'Furious George' in Vancouver; in 2003, he was named the most valuable player in the

Masters division at the Canadian Ultimate Championships at St-Jean-sur-Richelieu,

Quebec," but "the highlight of Mr. Kelly's disc career came when he was named to the

Canadian Masters side for the 2004 World Ultimate and Guts Championships in Finland"

where "wearing no. 42, he was described by the team as 'a key defensive handler when

Canada gets the disc.'"[72] Ken Lange remembers Jamie Kelly as "a guy who really

epitomized Ultimate. He was spirited and always fun. He played hard."[73] Former

teammate Jack Webb suggested that the Masters MVP award be named in Kelly's honour

and the Ottawa-based Masters team, 'GLUM,' fashioned a "suitable" trophy out of a

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[72] Tom Hawthorn, "Jamie Kelly, 37," *The Globe and Mail*, 12 January 2007, S.6.

[73] Ken Lange, 11 June 2010.

coffee grinder.[74] For outsiders, this might seem like an odd choice, but it shows how "the

social aspect of building an appropriate physical artifact as a memorial involves linking

past community events with the present."[75] In order for the memorial to have meaning

and to "enhance community moral unity" a pertinent connection is established between

the physical object in the present and the life of the person being remembered.[76] The

light-heartedness of the memorial seems an appropriate tribute to a person "known for his

razor-sharp wit, practical joking and goofy sense of humour."[77] But it also carries on the

tradition of unconventional Ultimate trophies (toasters, blenders), – another means that

Ultimate players symbolically mark their difference – and self-deprecatingly pokes fun at

the Masters division. Here it can be demonstrated that, as Sara Ahmed suggests,

"cohesion (sticking together) demands adhesion (sticking to)" and there is a clear link

being made between object, life, and culture in this memorial.[78] By tapping in to broader

Ultimate narratives, the Masters MVP trophy will also be relevant and comprehensible

for Ultimate players who may not have personally known Jamie Kelly.

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[74] "In Memoriam: The Jamie Kelly CUC Masters MVP Trophy," *Ultimate Canada Magazine,* (Fall 2009): 19.

[75] Janelle Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning*, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005), 52.

[76] Stanford W. Gregory and Jerry M. Lewis, "Symbols of Collective Memory: The social Process of Memorializing May 4, 1970 at Kent State University" *Symbolic Interaction* 11/2 (1988): 216, quoted in Wilson, 52.

[77] "In Memoriam: The Jamie Kelly CUC Masters MVP Trophy," 19.

[78] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 15.

Memorials are also a particularly good medium for reminding players of the importance of *Spirit of the Game* (SOTG). In 2010 Mila Oh "passed away peacefully on the morning of May 26 after a long and courageous battle with breast cancer."[79] Mila is remembered with great affection by people who knew her and was an important figure on the Montreal Ultimate scene. Even before her death, she figured prominently in my interviews. People remember her as their mentor: "I became aware of Ultimate purely through Mila. In the hockey locker room one day, she said 'there's this funky new sport, and you should all come and play on my team.'"[80] They recall her as teammate and coach: "'Pür' was great. Mila was our captain and it was really fun. We weren't the strongest team by any means. But we all tried our best and Mila was a really great coach, really positive and it was a really fun summer."[81] Her very close friend Rose Carlton admitted that "I think a lot about Mila and her illness, and how much she matters to people." Rose portrays Mila as a lynchpin in their immediate circle of friends and teammates describing "how much she's done in terms of keeping us all together and keeping us interested and excited."[82] And she is especially remembered as a particularly spirited player and great slag artist: "Mila Oh était folle pour faire des slags, elle était

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[79] "Oh, Mila OBITUARY Mila Oh," *The Gazette*, 30 May 2010, DEATHS, A.20; "Ophthalmologist, athlete, epicure, daughter, wife, friend. Born Nov. 23, 1969, in Winnipeg. Died May 26 in Montreal of complications from breast cancer, aged 40," Mona Gupta, "Mila Oh," *The Globe and Mail,* 22 November 2010, L.8.

[80] Rosemary Carlton, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 26 March 2010.

[81] Christine Sura, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 12 May 2010.

[82] Rosemary Carlton, 26 March 2010.

bonne, difficile à battre."[83] Her death was experienced as a great loss by many Montreal

Ultimate players.

Mike Venditti's memory of Mila, however, is particularly revealing. He told me

that "I remember specifically last year's gala when Mila was inducted [into the hall of

fame]. Everybody in the entire room was sitting there, listening to her. She had

everyone's attention. It's rare. Even for other inductees, people are talking in the

background. But for Mila - dead silence."[84] I also attended that gala, and that is not how

I remember it. I don't recall dead silence. I remember having to listen carefully in order

to hear Mila's speech through a hum of background conversations – very much *like* the

other inductees. Why does Mike remember it differently? My interview with Mike took

place in July of 2010, only six weeks after Mila's memorial service and her illness and

death were still fresh in our minds. Mila Oh is different from other members of the hall

of fame, not because she commanded special attention at her induction ceremony, but

because we feel a need to set her apart. That is not to say that she wasn't special. The

fact that we remember her differently, indicates just how special she was to the people

who knew her.

For many people, Mila embodied the *Spirit of the Game*. Christiane Marceau

explains: "Le vrai spirit, c'est quoi? Quand on aime tellement les gens, on les écoeure,

c'est ça qu'elle a fait."[85] Eric Lewis who has "played in leagues in four countries, and

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[83] Fadi Hobeila, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 13 May 2010.

[84] Mike Venditti, 14 July 2010.

[85] Christiane Marceau, 20 January 2011.

attended tournaments in many more than that" claims that

> in all my years of playing I have NEVER encountered a player who so personifies the spirit of the game of Ultimate as Mila did, and continues via her example, memory and many, many active players who she touched. For those of us who had the pleasure of knowing Mila via the game of Ultimate, Mila *is* the spirit of the game, and always will be.[86]

By continuing to play, as much and as often as she could, Mila kept the seriousness of her decline from all but her closest friends. Rose confides that "a lot of what I've heard [Mila] talking about is how playing sports and also just being around the people has helped her through some of the really painful periods."[87] Yet, when it became clear that her battle would be unsuccessful, the friends and teammates who had known her the longest spearheaded another campaign to celebrate her life and spirit. Not only is Mila the first hall of fame inductee in the AUM's Spirit category, but the award presented annually to the team determined to have the highest spirit, is now named for her. With obvious melancholy, Christiane recalls the process of convincing the AUM board of directors that naming the spirit award after Mila was an appropriate and timely thing to do:

> Ce qui était triste, à ce reunion, autour de la table, il avait que deux gens qui connaissaient Mila. Personne n'était capable de faire la décision. On s'est demandé aux membres qui la connaissaient. Malheuresement, quand la décision a finalement été prise, elle etait déja decédée.[88]

Unfortunately, therefore, Mila never knew that the AUM's spirit award had been named

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[86] Eric Lewis, "The Spirit of the Game Award: Mila Oh," *Ultimate Canada Magazine,* no. 7 (2011): 13, emphasis added.

[87] Rosemary Carlton, 26 March 2010.

[88] Christiane Marceau, 20 January 2011.

for her. But, while she probably would have been touched, memorials are not really for

the deceased, but rather for the survivors. For the people who knew her, Mila was

terribly important. And it is important to those people that she not be forgotten. The

Mila Oh Spirit Award is so named so that we can remember Mila and her special brand

of spirit. Nominating her for awards, putting her name on prizes and trophies are ways

that we bring her back to life, if only symbolically.

But spirit awards are also intended to be instructive. Christiane claims that

naming the spirit award for Mila "c'est donner l'identité de quelqu'un qui a compris

c'était quoi, metre une image au spirit. C'est quoi spirit? C'est ça, c'est Mila." And

memorials like these function in order to "transmettre ce message aux gens."[89] How

these acts of memory are received by people who did not know her, is more complex.

Fadi Hobeila, for example, relates how his team embarked upon a project to pay tribute to

Mila's memory:

> L'an dernier, après la mort de Mila, le 'Real Villeray Ultimate Club' a
> décidé de lui dédier sa saison. Nous avons fait ce que Mila aurait fait, soit
> faire un slag cheer à tous nos adversaires de la saison et avoir le meilleur
> *spirit* de l'AUM. Ce fut tout un défi. Le slag cheer, on connaissait bien
> car plusieurs d'entre nous avions joué avec Mila ou ses émules mais la
> tradition du slag s'étant perdue dans l'AUM, nous ne savions pas trop
> quelle seraient les réactions de nos adversaires. La ligue ayant grandi, les
> vétérans hésitent ou évitent de slagger car on joue moins souvent contre
> d'autres vétérans (surtout dans les niveaux inférieurs de la ligue).
> Traditionnellement, on *slag* nos amis alors jouer contre des "inconnus"
> ne portent pas à slagger. Aussi, les plus jeunes n'ont pas appris à slagger et
> ne sont pas habitués à se faire slagger. Nous avions une approche
> "pédagogique" en fin de match. Avant le cheer, on expliquait notre
> démarche à nos adversaires: qui était Mila, le spirit et si nous étions de

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[89] Christiane Marceau, 20 January 2011.

bonne humeur, qu'est-ce qu'un slag. Après on les slaggait.[90]

Partly by "slag cheering unsuspecting B-league teams" 'Real Villeray' became the first team to win the Mila Oh Spirit Award. This story illustrates how ideas about grief, memory, spirit, and community are intertwined in social action.

But it also demonstrates how once a persona is attached to an idea – that Mila *is* spirit -- that image can then be circulated among members of the community for disciplinary purposes. The AUM, too, can now make use of Mila's image as a tool for instructing younger members about, not only the centrality of SOTG, but in how to perform it. This, however, is something of a mixed message. Mila won her share of spirit awards, but for performances that are now discouraged, such as getting naked, or outmoded, such as slagging. The more subtle, and arguably more important, manifestations of her spirit, such as her love of the game, her generosity, her tireless encouragement of new players, and her passion are more difficult to convey. One of my deepest regrets about this project is that I did not get the opportunity to interview Mila before she died. And including her story is, therefore, personally important to me. And I admit that I feel guilty of the same thing that I accuse the AUM of doing: manipulating her image for my own ends. In situations like this it is easy to see acts of memory as "power at work" and "to attribute actors with instrumental, not idealistic motivations."[91] Modeling Ultimate values, however, is something that Mila did naturally in life, and playing a part in continuing that project seems like something that she would have

[90] Fadi Hobeila, e-mail message to author, 25 May 2011.

[91] Alexander, 96.

supported. She believed that:

> Ultimate is a very special sport. Unlike many other sports, Ultimate promotes a community of athletes who interact in a positive way with members of other teams, who can put down the disc at the end of a hard fought game but then go on to have a good laugh or fun game with their opponents. There is a real sense of community that does not exist in other sports. I hope that my jokes, my slags, and my sense of fun help promote this unique aspect of our sport. I think I will be remembered for my sense of humour, my sense of fun, and my pure love of the game. I want to play good disc. I want the game to be competitive, but I also want to have fun.[92]

Not everyone has the same level of investment in the memory of Mila's story. As Sara Ahmed claims, "shared feelings" not only *heighten tension*, they are also *in tension*"[93] The first year that the Mila Oh Spirit trophy was awarded, for instance, Christiane felt that "Il y a tellement de gens qui ne la connaissait pas, puis ne s'interessait pas à la connaître – que j'ai trouvée triste."[94] Fadi agrees that "c'est vrai que beaucoup de membres de l'AUM ne connaissaient pas Mila et c'est certain qu'il y a une division entre ceux qui la connaissaient et les autres" and this division, he believes, is amplified and made more visible "par le décès de Mila."[95] In this scenario, between those who knew her and those who did not, Mila becomes an "object of emotion," "saturated with affect" in a "site of personal and social tension" as a variety of personal, social, and institutional

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[92] Mila Oh, "The Spirit of the Game Award: Mila Oh," *Ultimate Canada Magazine,* no. 7 (2011): 13.

[93] Ahmed, 10.

[94] Christiane Marceau, 20 January 2011.

[95] Fadi Hobeila, e-mail message to author, 25 May 2011.

objectives are discursively and performatively tangled together.[96]

The stories players tell about tragedies are not essentially about the victims, but are rather about the actions of the "community" in response to these losses. "One thing about Ultimate" claims Ken Lange, "is the sense of community. We develop close friendships and we remember these people."[97] These stories recall the individuals, but they also convey something about how Ultimate players see themselves as a community: one that can be shaken by tragedy, but when necessary, "pulls together" in a manner that expresses and models its values in the present, and for the future. These stories also reveal a real or imagined boundary between remembering members of the community, and those who receive the stories.

Ultimate halls of fame, celebrations, and memorials can be interpreted as part of the legitimizing project whereby Ultimate takes on the performative and commemorative trappings of other successful sports. The past decade has been marked by an intensified effort to document the history of Ultimate, identify and commemorate its heroes, and celebrate its achievements. What sparked this seemingly increased appetite for remembering Ultimate's past? Carol Duncan argues that "every culture mounts some symbolic effort to contradict the irreversibility of time."[98] And in the 2000s, there is a sense that Ultimate has come of age. There is now an adequate amount of history to tell, and a new generation to tell it to. In the last decade, many Ultimate organizations

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[96] Ahmed, 10

[97] Ken Lange, 11 June 2010.

[98] Duncan, 17

attained what they considered to be significant milestones. There is, therefore, a sense

that there is a history that could be celebrated. Acts of memory are, therefore, imbricated

within a project to recover, document, and communicate the sport's history. Ultimate

halls of fame, memorials, and accompanying celebrations are efforts to create a collective

memory and to give that memory institutional and material, as opposed to ephemeral,

foundations. They also, however, reflect a pervasive anxiety. Ultimate has irreversibly

changed and is moving in new directions. In a climate where there are so many more

new players, whom veterans believe to have an imperfect understanding of the sport's

values and traditions, the old means of communicating history and culture by word-of-

mouth are seen as somehow inadequate. Because "our understanding of and investments

in the past change as our present conditions and needs change," Ultimate's recent appetite

for and investment in introspection can be seen as a Janus-faced project that tells the

story of how we got here and documents the way things used to be in order to better

preserve the elements that we want to carry forward.[99]

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[99] Blair, Dickinson, and Ott, 7.

CONCLUSION

The Ultimate Community

Ultimate migrated to Canada in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It was first played here by disc enthusiasts on the West Coast in and around Vancouver, a small cohort of players was located in Toronto, and it was brought to Montreal by American graduate students attending McGill University. The game quickly radiated from these "hotbeds" to other Canadian cities and by the mid-1980s a handful of recreational leagues were formed and new players recruited by word of mouth and evangelistic efforts to "spread the gospel" of this, new, exciting, and countercultural sport.

Looking back to these heady days, Tony Boyd remembers players being torn "between wanting it to grow and popularize it, and keeping it our own little secret." Yet if there was a desire to keep Ultimate a secret, it was certainly not reflected in action. Canadian Ultimate, and Tony's personal story, is marked by ongoing, if not always concerted, efforts to grow the sport, get more people involved, create more opportunities to play, and become more competitive. And what Ultimate players built in a few short decades, by themselves, for themselves, is truly impressive. "It's gone mainstream," Tony claims, "and that's what we always wanted, – to see how much it's grown and how popular it is, that's wonderful, you can only be happy for the sport, – but it'll never again be what it was." It is worth asking how much of Tony's memory is a "true" recollection of the way things were and how much of it is a reflection of Ultimate players' struggle to reconcile the sport's ambivalent narratives.[1]

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[1] Tony Boyd, interview by author, Montreal, QC, 28 September 2010.

One theme that emerges strikingly from interviews with Ultimate players, and is reflected as strongly in print and digital sources, is the sport's *difference* from mainstream sport. The disc, the game, the adoption of a philosophy of sportsmanship and self-refereeing are pointed to as things that make Ultimate distinctive. And this sense of difference is reinforced through the use of narrative, myths, rituals, and symbols. Yet, Ultimate has clearly, despite its proclamations of difference, been busy chasing legitimacy. Ultimate seeks legitimacy as a means to achieve its goals, although these are sometimes ill-defined. Growth and popularity, corporate structure, capital accumulation, responsible land stewardship, official recognition by state agencies, visibility and media attention, are some of the achievements that are lauded as important markers of progress.

This simultaneous investment in both difference and progress creates a poignant ambivalence. There is a sense that as the sport grows, its countercultural elements become more difficult to sustain. Yet while veteran players may remember a "secret club" atmosphere that pervaded the scene in the early days, newer players continue to imagine their sport as alternative, different, and not quite (although perpetually on the cusp of becoming) mainstream. Not surprisingly players express concern over how becoming mainstream will affect the very thing that they understand as an essential component to Ultimate's difference. For many players mainstream acceptance, while desirable, puts *Spirit of the Game* (SOTG) under threat: "As our sport continues to be introduced on the world stage, our sport philosophy will increasingly come under the microscope of the world of competitive athletics. I'd hate for the spirit of our game to be

lost or changed as Ultimate joins the mainstream."[2] Erin Van Regan feels similarly divided claiming, "as much as I'd like it to grow, because I love it so much, ... I don't know if I'd like it to get so big that SOTG gets diluted. I hope all that stuff stays intact."[3] The players I've talked to are conflicted. They want the sport to grow and develop, they want to share it with others and for it to get the recognition they feel it deserves. But they are anxious that progress not mean an end to the things they find beautiful and distinctive about the sport. Convincing players that SOTG is compatible with the mainstream competitive sports status that Ultimate is striving for is an ongoing challenge for Ultimate boosters and a project in which they are continually reinvesting.

The pursuit of legitimacy, however, is essentially about control. Creating governing bodies to oversee the sport and set policies, securing access to space, becoming legal entities and hiring employees to see to the day-to-day running of the leagues are means by which Ultimate players attempt to maintain control over the development of the sport and keep decisions about its direction in the hands of those who play: "so that we'll control it, and no one can take it away."[4] As ironic as it seems, becoming more like other sports is the preferred means of remaining alternative.

Much about the game of Ultimate is similarly counter-intuitive. And this feature extends beyond the game to the culture surrounding it. Ultimate is rife with paradoxes,

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[2] Jeff Warner, "Competitive v. Spirit: Friends or Foes?" *Chasing Plastic Magazine,* 2/2 (2002): 39.

[3] Erin Van Regan, interview by author, Calgary, AB, 18 August 2008.

[4] Craig Fielding, interview by author, Ottawa, ON, 11 June 2010.

ironies, and complexities. And players often struggle to explain what the game is, what it means to them, and how they experience it. "Community" is a convenient and effective way for players to define and describe themselves.

When I began this project, I expected that community would be just one of the many analytical approaches that I would employ, along with gender, performance, space, and memory, to shed light on a particular aspect of the story of Ultimate. I soon realized that community was more than a useful analytical framework, and more than a recurring theme. It is the way that Ultimate players understand their sport.

The idea of community is, indeed, powerful. It can narrowly describe a small group of individuals or its scope can be expanded to include everyone who plays. Its elasticity makes it a useful tool for both inclusion and exclusion. Discursively, it acts as another catch-all tag that allows players, in one eloquent expression, to convey a multitude of meaning. Community succinctly encompasses ideas of distinctiveness, camaraderie, participation, social network, and the sense of belonging and place that Ultimate players experience. Its use can be optimistic and forward-looking, but also nostalgic, or imbued with feelings of loss or erosion of community. It can be descriptive and revealing, but it can also blur and obfuscate.

Community is marked by both similarities and differences. One of the things that the language of community helps to blur, are the internal divisions and the anxiety surrounding Ultimate's ambivalent narratives. Ultimate's internal divisions, sometimes more imagined than real, reflect the ambivalence over progress and difference and are bound up with conflicts and tensions over status and meaning. A prominent division that

is revealed in this study is between veterans and newcomers. The idea that newcomers do not fully understand the game or its culture and that, by implication, veterans do is a sentiment that emerges from a variety of sources. But these categories are subjective, and not always reliable. I have, for instance, seen newcomers catch the bug and exercise impressive displays of spirit, and I have equally seen veterans cheat and bend the rules – not out of ignorance, but out of a desire to 'win-at-all-costs' – and engage in atrocious displays of disrespect for their opponents. Nonetheless, qualitative divisions appear to exist between veterans and newcomers, hippies and athletes, francophones and anglophones, players and organizers, men and women, competitive and recreational. Some of these can be massaged through the mutability of signs and concepts which helps the players to negotiate their differences.

The Ultimate community is an idea profoundly based in shared experiences. Team dynamics and interpersonal connections are cemented by the act of playing together, and intense affective ties can develop between Ultimate players. But a strong bond also exists between Ultimate players who may never have played together. In this sense, Ultimate functions as what Benedict Anderson describes as "imagined community."[5] And this idea of belonging to an extended group of like-minded people seems not to have faded with time or popularity.

Ultimate players do not just talk about themselves *as* a community, they also continuously *do* community. Through social performances, self-organized care, and

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[5] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (New York: Verso, 1991).

powerful acts of storytelling – oral, material, and commemorative – the Ultimate community teaches its values, models appropriate behaviours, reproduces its culture and builds a collective identity.

Sport, as scholars claim, is about the body but by looking at it through the lens of community, we can discern the ways in which it is also about the heart and the mind. People attribute deeper meanings to physical performances. People invest in sport emotionally and psychologically as well as physically and form attachments to spaces and places, ideas and practices, and to the people with whom they share their experiences. Talking to Ultimate players reveals the centrality of community, but like so much else, this is not unique to Ultimate. Understanding sport as a more than a structure of competition, commercial spectacle, and physical performance, but also as a "powerful mode of belonging," helps explain why it occupies such a prominent place in our lives and our society.[6]

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[6] Gerard Delanty, *Community*, 2nd Edition, (London: Routledge, 2010), 4.

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    (player since 1995)
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    (current AUM executive director, player since 2000)
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    (OCUA hall of fame, former OCUA general manager, player since 1985)
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    (TUC hall of fame, former TUC general manager, former CUPA executive
    director, player since 1979)
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272

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Appendix A

Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN "'The Dynamics of the Disc': Ultimate (Frisbee), Community, & Memory, 1968-2011." This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by Lindsay Pattison of the History Department of Concordia University, lpattiso@alcor.concordia.ca

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is to collect the personal stories and memories of Ultimate Frisbee players in order to produce a dissertation; this collection will contribute to an online digital archive; a post-dissertation documentary film; and this information will be made available for future researchers and/or the wider public.

B. PROCEDURES

The interview will take one to two hours, and will be digitally recorded. Identification of the participant(s) in the ensuing print or digital media productions will be entirely subject to informed consent. Participants may elect to have their identities remain confidential (eg. by use of a pseudonym) and/or to withdraw from the interview at any time. Upon consent of the participant, the digital recording of this interview will be donated to an appropriate archive with open access to researchers and may be included on a website or published in another digital medium (eg. DVD) at a later date.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

This study involves minimal risk. The audio or video recording of this interview may be donated to a local archive as a lasting contribution to the history of Ultimate.

D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation in the interview at any time without negative consequences.
- I understand that my participation in this study is (please check one of the following)

  ☐ CONFIDENTIAL (ie., the researcher will know, but will not disclose my identity)

  ☐ NON-CONFIDENTIAL (ie. my identity will be revealed in study results)

- I understand that the data from this study may be published in print, digital, and/or documentary format.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print)   _____

SIGNATURE   _____

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Brigitte Des Rosiers, Research Ethics and Compliance Advisor, Concordia University, at (514-848-2424 x. 7481) or by email at bdesrosi@alcor.concordia.ca

Interview Guide

Name
Address
Contact Info.

Part I – Background

Where were you born? Where did you grow up? What did your parents do?
Where did you go to school?
What is your current occupation?

Part II – Ultimate history

When did you first become aware of Ultimate?
What was the initial attraction?
Which (if any) sports, besides Ultimate, do you/have you play(ed)?

Part III – Ultimate

Tell me about SOTG.
Tell me about your most vivid memory/favourite experience?
Do you have a favourite tournament?
Tell me about the people you play with.

Part IV - Particulars

(questions specific to the individual)

Part V – Internet

How does your league make use of online tools?
Did you ever use rec.sport.disc?

Are there any further comments you'd like to add?

*** My style of interviewing is informal. These questions represent only a general guideline and direction for the interview.***