

A League of its Own

*Ultimate Frisbee - fast-growing and fun.
In this spirited sport, teams referee
themselves and make up a cheer
for the opposition*

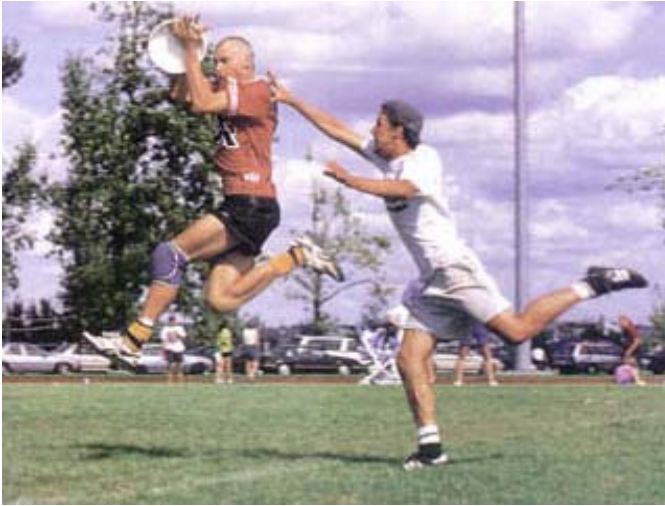
By Danyael Halprin

With a quick flick of the wrist, a

bandanna-wearing athlete tosses the Frisbee into the air. It rises, dips, curves and tilts on edge, but just before it reaches its intended destination, an opponent springs off the ground, grasps the Frisbee in midair, then crashes to the ground. It's the weekend of July 4-5, 1998, and more than 24 teams have gathered in Montreal to compete in the annual Jazz Fest Ultimate tournament. Close to the spectacular aerodynamics of Ultimate, spectators bask in the sunshine, players stretch on the sidelines and dogs prance alongside the playing grounds, just happy to be around Frisbees.

If you're old enough, you might remember the Frisbee as a faddish toy of the '60s that you played with at family picnics. Seemingly overnight this North American pastime has evolved into a sport of international stature. Yet while Ultimate may be headed for the Olympics, its real popularity is still at the local level.

Above' At the 1998 Canadian Ultimate Championships in Montreal, Cathy Janvier of Fifi Fesses d'Acier tosses.
BELOW' Nationals champs Ottawa WaX take on the Victoria Nomads.



CANADIANLIVING

Ottawa's Stella (orange), winner of Montreal's 1997 Jazz Fest Ultimate tournament, plays Toronto's Game Face.

There are 10,000 players across Canada - men,, women, coed, junior (18 and under) and masters (men, 30 and over; women, 28 and over) - in leagues of varying levels of skill and competitiveness. Most teams are recreational, playing in the summer or in weekly pickup games. Ultimate is played in more than 30 countries worldwide, with players competing in tournaments at home and abroad. At last year's World Championships in Blaine, Minn., the Canadian open,



masters and coed teams won their first gold medals. Ultimate will appear in the 2001 World Games in Akita, Japan, which hosts sports that hope to be included in the Olympics.

Despite its popularity, there's not a lot of fanfare surrounding Ultimate. It's truly a grassroots sport, neither televised, advertised nor promoted through corporate sponsorship. Growth is by word of mouth only. Yet the Toronto Ultimate Club, for example, has grown 50 per cent in the last four years. And Ottawa boasts the world's biggest league with 250 teams.

The Ultimate Evolution

Ultimate is a non contact, fast-paced field sport played with two teams of seven. The object is to relay the Frisbee from teammate to teammate until it is caught in the opponent's end zone for a point. Frisbee integrates elements of other sports—the running of soccer and the jumping, pivoting, passing and continual turnovers from offence to defense of basketball. Ultimate is played

"When a ball dreams, it dreams it's a Frisbee."

- Dr. Stancil Johnson,
International Frisbee Hall of Fame inductee

Always Play with Spirit

Central to Ultimate is its spirit-of-the-game philosophy, which has to do with safe play and respect for the rules and fellow players. Ultimate prohibits the taunting of opponents, dangerous aggression and intentional fouling. Competitive play is encouraged, but not win-at-all-costs behaviour. "One has moral obligations when playing Ultimate," says Harris, whose e-mail messages include the postscript Always Play with

players) it offers a whole social context. Andrew Edgell, a 27-year-old financial adviser in Toronto, plays twice a week on a top Toronto men's team and once a week with his summer coed league. "I just love the game," he says. "But I don't see Ultimate as exclusive from work. The networking aspect is a bonus." A sense of community coaxed seasoned player Martha McDougall of Ottawa back to the game after she graduated from Montreal's McGill University. "Ultimate was a great discovery for me," says the 26-year-old, "especially since I was changing cities and was interested in meeting some new people." As for older players, the number of masters entries in the Canadian Ultimate Championships has doubled over the past three years. Harris, 41, competes nationally and internationally on the Toronto masters team Aged to Perfection. Now who

year-round; sometimes even in the snow. And for those too impatient to wait for favourable conditions, there are now several indoor winter leagues.

Ultimate was conceived in 1968 by a group of students from a high school newspaper in Columbia, N.J. As the sport crossed the continent, two major groups of players emerged: college students, particularly Ivy Leaguers, and hippies from the West Coast. "Long hair and tie-dyed T-shirts were popular for a long time," says John Harris, executive director of the Canadian Ultimate Players Association (CUPA).

Feeling Groovy

A sprightly alternative character still marks almost every aspect of this game. Zany team names - Horizont'elle, Discfunctional, Vertigogh and See lane Run - are only outdone by those of annual tournaments: Gender Blender in Toronto, Ho Down in Calgary and Flower Bowl in Vancouver. And in the essence of sportsmanship, players present an ad-lib cheer in the form of a limerick, poem, chant or song to the opposing team at game's end.

Spirit.

Unlike most sports, Ultimate has no referee. When there's a rule infraction or a questionable play, the players discuss the play and quickly resolve the dispute. There are no fiery exchanges between referees and team captains or instant playbacks on fancy video equipment.

These quirks first caught the attention of Adeline Leung, 18, who began playing on her high school team three years ago. She also likes the coed aspect of Ultimate since most sports don't allow men and women to play together. "The guys don't hog the disc - it's a real team effort," says Leung, who attends Vancouver's Prince of Wales Secondary School.

Bridging the Generations

Ultimate's simplicity and affordability - all you need is an open space and a \$15 Frisbee - make it ideal for students. For working adults (and 25- to 35-year-olds make up about 30 per cent of new

says

Frisbee is the sport of youth? The oldest player on Harris's team is 46.

To find a league in your area, check the CUPA Web site (www.ultimate.ca). If you're in Ottawa between Aug. 19 and 22, come watch the 1999 Canadian Ultimate Championships. There'll be lots of air traffic. -

Aerodynamics

Frisbee embodies physics in action. A flick of the wrist hurls the disc upside down, on edge and at unusual angles, or causes it to stop and reverse. Catching, as well, involves physical innovation and courage. Players are frequently airborne when intercepting a throw, the most respected move being a horizontal dive, or "going ho." Ultimate is a non contact sport, though leaps, dives, pivots and sudden stops may lead to a variety of sprains, torn ligaments and bruises. But canny players reap the rewards - a vigorous cardiovascular workout from all that running (an estimated three to six kilometres per game), jumping, throwing and catching