

For discheads, spirit makes the Ultimate game

## THE LINGO

PATRICIA YOUNG

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It all has to do with spirit. Talk to any Ultimate disc players and they will tell you that it is the hottest sport going. They will wax on about the fun, the fitness and the unbelievable popularity of their sport, but what they all end up talking about is "the spirit of the game."

Never heard of Ultimate? It is a hard-running team sport and the game of choice of the Gen-Xers.

Picture it this way: If soccer went out one evening, got drunk and spent the night with a Frisbee, Ultimate would be its love child.

Ultimate is played with a disc -- don't call it a Frisbee -- instead of a ball, with seven players per side. Like other field sports, you score in the end zone of the opposing team. But unlike any other organized sport there is no referee to control the game. Each player decides if there has been an infraction and calls the fouls. Imagine that next time you watch the Stanley Cup finals or World Cup soccer.

"What attracted me was the spirit of the game. You are in control of the game. With most sports it is the referees who control [the game] and you try to take advantage of any opportunity," Karen Morrison, 29, a former international water polo player, said. "In Ultimate you call your own fouls. It is a very moral environment, if you want to put it that way."

Ms. Morrison was drawn to the social side of Ultimate. After playing semi-pro water polo in France and living Mexico, the 1991 world championship silver medalist returned to Toronto. She needed an outlet for her naturally competitive nature and found it on the ungroomed public sports fields and parks scattered throughout the city.

But being an elite athlete is not a prerequisite for the sport. Ultimate players -- "discheads" -- come in all shapes, sizes and ages. Just ask Don Redmond. He is the president of a successful high-tech Internet company based in Toronto. In the evenings and on weekends he and his son Mark, 24, and daughter Alexis, 23, can be found chasing discs for the Java Grinders.

"It's not all kids out there. Last week, one of the opponents on the other team looked at me and said, 'Did I hear the word Dad?' You come up against all sorts," Mr. Redmond said.

His daughter Alexis says that Ultimate gives her the opportunity to finally play a sport with her father and brother. Most Ultimate teams -- the rules vary -- insist on a male-female ratio of at least three females to four males.

"It is by no means less competitive," Ms. Redmond said. "What I like is playing with my brother. I've never had a chance to compete with him before or with my father. It is great being out there with both of them."

Her father Don says the constant running is a tremendous workout. Since teams

usually mark out the field by eye, the length may vary from game to game, but it is usually 90 yards long and 40 yards wide.

Mr. Redmond is in his early 50s, but has a base of fitness from long years of playing baseball, hockey and just about any other sport he could. He finds the short, bursting runs and constant movement less boring than an hour spent jogging.

Injuries are generally low because it is a no-contact sport. If there is a "spirit violation" and you ram an opposing player, you are expected to own up to the infraction. Knee and ankle injuries can be caused by the sudden stops and starts or hitting a pothole on the playing field.

Ms. Morrison says she was forced to stay with Ultimate when she broke her finger in a freak accident at her first throwing clinic. The injury eventually ended her career as a national team water polo player. "I guess that sealed my fate and I stuck with Ultimate."

In Winnipeg, Max Hegel was recruited to play Ultimate by friends. It didn't take long before the 22-year-old university student was hooked. "I haven't put it down," he said. "I love the spirit of the game."

This is the 11th year that Ultimate has been an organized league in Winnipeg, and that is typical of the sport across North America. The game was started in the late 1960s by high-school students in New Jersey. It blossomed in the 1970s in California, and the free-form, fast-paced sport caught on. The American national championship was held in 1976 and a decade later Vancouver had a growing league. Some of the best discheads in Canada come from the West Coast. Vancouver teams had five spots on the medal podium at the 1998 world championships.

Teams are sprouting up in Australia, New Zealand and Europe -- anywhere there is flat ground.

Jill Rebman, a slim and dynamic insurance executive, is typical of the average Ultimate player. She has no aspiration to go to a world championship. For her, Ultimate is a way to meet friends, have a good workout and a good time.

"After the game, no matter how hard [it was], both teams shake hands," Ms. Rebman said. "But that is the spirit of the game. It is more the social things I like and you meet all types."

The best place to locate an Ultimate team in your area is to check the Internet or just ask around. You'd be surprised how many people play. There could be a few discheads in your office right now.

Patricia Young is the Associate Sports Editor and can be reached via email at [pyoung@globeandmail.ca](mailto:pyoung@globeandmail.ca)

Does sprinting up and down a potholed playing field chasing a bunch of Gen-Xers sound like too much work? Well, there is a simple way to get all the cachet of Ultimate without sweating up your latest Prada...adopt the lingo.

- Goin' Ho: A stretching airborne dive that leaves you horizontal to the ground.

Landing is your problem -- you got up there, you can get yourself down.

- Discheads: That's you.

- The Mac: Deflecting a disc in the air to the person next to you. This is especially useful if the person next to you is on your team.

- Huck: Nothing like a good huck -- one of those magnificent seamless deep throws that would suck the breath out of a pro quarterback. Hucks are even better if someone from your team catches it.
- Scooby: Don't have time to huck? Can't manoeuvre to mac? Try a scooby. More a push than a throw over a short distance. Every effective.
- A bid: Attempting a move, as in, "Nice bid, discheid." Like the stock and futures markets, you can have a good bid or a bad bid. And any trader can tell you a good bid is always better, but a risky bid will raise the heart rate.