



# Disc drive

Football, basketball and 80s pop - the ultimate challenge

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Ultimate is an eccentric combination of football, basketball, music and a few other sports. Most people look puzzled when I try to explain it to them. But maybe it will make more sense on paper.

The only absolutely necessary equipment for ultimate is the disc, which is more commonly known by the Frisbee brand name. The game is played on a field with dimensions slightly smaller than a football field, with end zones at each end, just like football. Also like football, a team scores by passing the object (the disc) down the field and catching it in the end zone - although this is only worth a single point, not six.

There are no field goals in ultimate. Nor is there rushing. Whoever is holding the frisbee cannot take steps with it; as in basketball when a player stops dribbling, a pivot foot must be established following a catch. What results is a free flowing, end-to-end game with two teams of seven chasing an almost perpetually airborne frisbee.

## *Beer and Spirit*

The other crucial part of ultimate is a thing called "spirit." In the 70s, the inventors of the game decided

slightly off key versions of cheesy 80s songs (music, remember?).

One result of the spirit rule is that ultimate players generally like each other and compete almost as hard to "out-fun" other teams as they do to outplay them. The proving grounds for ultimate prowess are usually at weekend tournaments, where teams from different cities compete on the field all day and then party together all night. Last year's national championships, which were held at the old military college grounds in St-Jean-sur-Richelieu, attracted 56 teams from across the country, most of whom drank beer. Lots of beer.

"Sleeman's told us that we went through the most kegs. at any event [in Quebec] so far," says David Hoppenheim, who coordinated the event.

## *Gettin' some grass*

Montreal has had an organized ultimate league since the late 80s. The Montreal Ultimate Association incorporated itself in the spring of 1997. Last year, 34 co-ed teams played in the league, which holds games on the spacious grounds of the Douglas Hospital in Verdun. This

The Ottawa league is so popular that organizers recently dropped about half a million dollars on land for permanent, exclusive ultimate use - but that still won't be enough. Less wealthy leagues like Montreal don't have that luxury.

"[The league] continues to grow every year even though we do no promotion at all," says Ken Hunt, a Montreal coordinator. The league intentionally avoids advertising because there simply aren't enough flat, green fields not already choked with soccer teams to accommodate anything but modest growth

However, people interested in playing in Montreal can still get in on the action. Team and individual registration began on Tuesday, Apr 20, but there should be a few team spaces still available. Act quickly! The league also places individuals on understaffed teams. Clinics for beginners are offered on the Douglas Hospital grounds on May 11, 13, 18 and 20, with league play starting shortly after. The league is also divided into three tiers based on skill to ensure balanced competition.

The learning curve for ultimate is fairly steep, since much of the game involves

to attach a universal rule that essentially makes fun the most important goal of the sport. People are expected to call their own fouls (contact is not permitted) and teams keep score themselves. In a world where aggressive, ultra competitiveness is expected in sport, watching the opposing team spontaneously applaud an impossible catch that puts them down a point looks downright absurd. Spirit also means that teams cheer each other at the end of the game, usually with elaborately choreographed, reworded,

year, organizers expect 40 teams. The Montreal league is actually a wee pup compared with other Canadian cities. Ottawa has the largest in the country with 210 teams last year - despite the city's reputation for having the highest percentage of obese people in the country. The Toronto league has space for 140 teams this summer.

"[The Toronto league] has been growing by 40 per cent a year for the last three years and we're scrambling to find fields," says Lexy Relph, secretary of the Canadian Ultimate Players' Association. "It's pretty much the same across the country."

running around. A lot. Of course, there's a science to the elaborate arsenal of different throws that an advanced player possesses (there really is: University of Virginia professor Louis A. Bloomfield analyses the physics of the flying disc in the Apr issue of Scientific American but the classic backhand is good enough to start.

*For more information about anything, including informal weekend pick-up games, call the Montreal Ultimate Association hotline at 221-2212 or hit their website at <aum.zoo.net>.*