



SUMMARY

A six-month long task force convened to determine best practices for developing non-school-based play based upon interviews with ultimate organizations and other sports organizations. The task force's recommendations for implementation are as follows.

Local organizations should:

- create year-round playing opportunities for members;
- create sustainable financial structures and business models for the organization; and
- participate in the USA Ultimate infrastructure for competition, education, and administration.

USA Ultimate should:

- restructure coach education and training;
- create distinct seasons of play for school and non-school-based play; and
- create a youth club road map for developing youth club playing opportunities locally.

STATE OF HIGH SCHOOL AND YOUTH CLUB ULTIMATE

Currently, USA Ultimate has 12,000 youth members. These members primarily play in a high school season with competitive opportunities that include leagues, tournaments, a state championship, and regional championships. USA Ultimate works with local leagues and volunteers (State Youth Coordinators) to organize 26 state championships and qualifying events for those state championships in boys, girls, and mixed divisions of play. The number of high school teams in a state can range from a few to nearly 100.

In addition, since 2005, USA Ultimate has hosted a national championship called the Youth Club Championships (YCC). YCC is targeted toward non-school-based teams (youth club teams). In order to be eligible to send a team to the Youth Club Championships, a local organization must have an existing sanctioned youth club league or a two-year development plan for the same. These leagues typically take the form of a summer or fall draft league with new teams each year and can last from four to eight weeks.

USA Ultimate has recognized that increased resources and attention need to be given to the youth club division in order to help it grow into a sustainable, local playing opportunity. This task force was convened in order to more fully research this playing structure and to provide recommendations on how to proceed nationally and locally.

OBJECTIVES

- Define a successful youth sports program.
- Define successful youth ultimate program.
- Provide recommendations for local organizations' best practices in developing youth ultimate programs.
- Provide recommendations on next steps for USA Ultimate in developing youth club playing opportunities.



- Present report in July 2014 at the U.S. Open. Report will contain detailed youth programs and recommendations for USA Ultimate.

METHODS

The task force was broken into three periods of work:

January – April: The task force was formed with members of ultimate organizations from around the country. The initial period was set aside for creation of interview materials, identification of subjects around the country to interview, and development of best practices and methods. In addition, the task force consulted with Kurt Weaver and Brandy Medran of USA Rugby on USA Rugby youth programs and competition structure.

April – June: Task force members independently conducted 60-90 minute interviews with four to six ultimate and other youth sport organizations.

June – August: The task force shared and reviewed reports, examined parallels between the youth sport organizations, and began drafting a final report based on these identified best practices. In addition, the task force presented initial findings at the USA Ultimate U.S. Open Convention on July 4, in Blaine, Minn.

SCOPE OF TASK FORCE

For the interview sessions, the task force identified several topics that were the focus of the interviews:

- Infrastructure of Organizations: Including membership, financial structure, volunteer and coach recruitment, and engagement with the community.
- Challenges: Including programming challenges, cost of programs, and incentives for athletes, coaches, and volunteers to participate.
- Future: How far in the future do youth sports organizations plan, and what topics do successful organizations plan for?

During the course of the task force, there were several items discussed and acknowledged as important to the sport as a whole, but deemed outside the scope of the task force.

Girls' ultimate initiatives are necessary, but with the Girls' Ultimate Movement underway, this task force aimed to remain focused on creating high-level structures for both boys and girls in non-school-based playing opportunities. Similarly, the instruction of Spirit of the Game™ is an ongoing conversation and is currently part of the USA Ultimate Strategic Plan. However, it is outside the scope of developing a nationwide player structure and is best addressed by the Spirit, Officiating and Rules (SOaR) Committee at USA Ultimate.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

After synthesis of the ultimate and other youth sports organization feedback, the task force developed the following recommendations. Each recommendation will be elaborated upon in the subsequent section.

Successful youth sports organizations plan and execute the following:

- 1) Create year-round playing opportunities for members.
- 2) Create sustainable financial structures and business models for the organization.
- 3) Participate in a national infrastructure for competition, education, and administration.
- 4) Utilize strong coach education and training.
- 5) Create distinct seasons for school-based and non-school-based play.
- 6) In order to facilitate the above, USA Ultimate must create a youth club road map for developing youth club playing opportunities locally.

The task force notes that some recommendations may seem self-evident or introductory. However, based on the survey of existing ultimate organizations and other successful youth sports organizations, these recommendations are often only partially executed and are foundational to creating a thriving youth club play opportunity.

The above six recommendations have been divided into recommendations for local leagues and organizations (#1-3) and for USA Ultimate (#4-6).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXECUTING THE KEY TAKEAWAYS

League Recommendations

1. Create Year-Round Opportunities

The task force recommends that local ultimate organizations move toward providing year-round playing opportunities for youth. From a very young age, children have opportunities to play many sports year-round, and not having ultimate as an option limits exposure of the sport.

Part of providing year-round opportunities for youth is changing how the community thinks of programming. We do not want the same kids playing year-round. Instead, many of these cyclical opportunities should be seen as “jumping on” points for different age groups. It will be important that communities have developmentally appropriate opportunities targeted towards specific populations. If a child wants to start playing, he or she should have opportunities year-round from basic clinics, such as Learn to Play clinics, all the way up to league play and tournaments. In order to provide these developmentally appropriate, year-round opportunities, USA Ultimate will embark upon creating an Athlete Development Model and a Youth Club Road Map (see next section). In addition, communities should explore variations of the game such as smaller sides, e.g., 3v3 or 5v5. These activities allow for a lower minimum number of participants, while also keeping the game new and engaging for youth. When possible, single-gender opportunities for youth ultimate should be encouraged.

In order to provide these recommended opportunities, the Youth Club Task Force recommends that local ultimate organizations build relationships with local youth-serving organizations to add ultimate as an offering in their programs. In addition, USA Ultimate will continue to offer opportunities like Learn to Play that will be a developing resource for affiliates and sanctioned leagues. Most importantly, youth ultimate organizations should look at their calendars holistically in order to make certain the appropriate types of opportunities are being offered throughout the year.



2. Sustainability

The task force recognizes that ultimate organizations have been developed by different people and for different reasons. However, in order to promote the sport safely and effectively, each youth-serving organization should examine its own organizational structure. By developing a strong and sustainable foundation, local organizations will improve their ability to continuously provide high-quality playing opportunities for youth players of all skill levels and ages. This can be achieved through sound financial management, effective operational practices, and proficient governance. The task force recommends that each ultimate organization focus on the following areas of their governance and administration.

- **Financial Management:** Having a firm understanding of the finances will enable the organization to make good business decisions. Financial management begins with good budgeting practices and may also include evaluation of any investments, equipment, or assets. This work can be performed by a staff member, the board treasurer, a bookkeeper, or a partner organization. Analysis of financial reports may help to increase revenues, lower expenses, or find efficiencies. A nonprofit can also use this information to make informed decisions about funding programs that support the organization's mission.
- **Operation Structures and Practices:** More ultimate organizations are engaging in long-term planning to hire staff, and this task force recommends that all ultimate organizations plan for financial stability from year to year in order to facilitate this hiring. Volunteers are often highly motivated to do great work to promote the sport. However, these volunteers have limited time and energy, and long-term sustainability can require more consistent staffing. Too many organizations are still budgeting from event to event.

Similarly, field scheduling is a common issue for youth ultimate and many other youth sports providers. For a sport that requires only limited equipment, finding adequate fields is crucial. Local and regional differences make it difficult to develop broad recommendations. Having field reservation processes in place is nevertheless crucial to local organizations. The process of managing field reservations can be benefitted by establishing good relationships with field schedulers at parks departments, school districts, and other jurisdictions. Ultimate organizations should continue to centralize field reservations for leagues, tournaments, and practices at all competition levels in order to develop and build these relationships with field providers.

- **Governance and Administration:** While the business of running ultimate events is often very rewarding, proper governance and administration are important tasks. A board of directors is common for local ultimate organizations. Some boards are operationally focused, but all boards have a duty to steer the organization. This includes providing financial oversight, ensuring proper legal standing, and engaging in strategic planning. As the organization grows, responsibilities may also include fundraising, human resources, and risk management. For beginning organizations, the USA Ultimate Affiliate Program provides resources for developing this structure and establishing best practices.

3. National Infrastructure



The task force's third recommendation is that ultimate leagues, in addition to creating robust organizations locally, move towards becoming part of a national infrastructure. The task force has found a direct correlation with other successful sport organizations that have strong relationships between national, regional, and local governing bodies in order to administer competition, conduct outreach, and distribute education.

The shift this move will engender will be a change from individual members being served nationally to members or participants being served locally by local disc organizations. The task force sees three broad avenues for integration:

- **Education:** Currently, USA Ultimate offers Level I and Level II coaching certification in-person classes. Many areas take advantage of these courses, but few do so in a systemic manner or tie this education into requirements for the pipeline of their local coaching corps. In addition, the task force also recommends that USA Ultimate spend resources to create a greater breadth of coaching resources that are more inexpensive and more easily accessible.
- **Competitive Opportunities:** USA Ultimate and local organizations are at the beginning stages of organizing competitive leagues and tournaments into a national structure. The task force recommends that leagues take a strategic look at these playing opportunities and begin to organize them into their short- and long-term plans. For high school state championships, this means looking at providing more local events and restructuring a two-day tournament into a series of qualifying games. In addition, while 26 states have high school state championships, many states with strong ultimate player populations have minimal youth participation. As such, the task force recommends that USA Ultimate develop a structure for a youth club season, which will necessitate input from local leagues to develop and participation from leagues to execute.
- **Administration:** Continued work is needed to streamline administrative processes locally and nationally. USA Ultimate will need to set standards for a variety of programs, including education and competition. A recent example is the move to background check chaperones and coaches through the National Center for Safety Initiatives (NCSI). The task force recommends continued and increased coordination in order to implement these standards locally and nationally. One opportunity for this is the USA Ultimate Affiliate Program. This program mirrors the success other sports have had with developing formal relationships between local and national governing bodies.

USA Ultimate Recommendations

4. Restructure Coach Education

In order to allow ultimate organizations to integrate coaching resources and requirements in their programs, the task force recommends USA Ultimate restructure the current coach education program. Access to quality trained coaches will be critical for both youth club and school-based play.

Coaching education should be accessible to a range of participants: youth athletes, college athletes, club athletes, and parents, among others. This will allow local organizations to broaden their pool of coaches and explore opportunities for parents to coach alongside more advanced coaches. In leagues with a number of age divisions to cover, organizations should look at using parents and current youth players to coach the younger ages. These coaches should then be given the tools to develop alongside players and provide their athletes developmentally appropriate lessons and instruction.

In an effort to support the coaching program, coaching materials should be accessible in a number of different mediums, comprehensive, and ongoing. In addition, state or local organizations should be encouraged to provide their own state-specific resources and certifications and to eventually establish coach requirements. Since coaches of many backgrounds and experience levels will require access to these coaching development tools, USA Ultimate should develop a series of online trainings or tutorials to supplement in-person training

All youth ultimate opportunities should provide a safe and healthy atmosphere for athletes to develop. USOC SafeSport and Positive Coaching Alliance are two examples of programs that should be used to help coaches establish a healthy setting for ultimate, including promotion of awareness for screening, liability, reporting of violations, and first aid, along with other training and resources.

<http://safesport.org/>

<http://positivecoach.org/>

5. Create Seasons of Play

The second recommendation the task force has for USA Ultimate is to create a season of play and competition rules for youth club ultimate. In order for this division to grow, there is a need for sanctioned play and an emphasis on local playing opportunities for both boys and girls. In addition, it is likely that an additional season will create access to the sport for youth participants who are not able to participate in the current school-based season either due to lack of opportunity or conflicting athletic or activity schedules.

In order to implement this new season of play, the task force recommends a new task force be commissioned in the second half of 2014 to poll local ultimate organizations and develop a framework for non-school-based play. There will need to be enough flexibility in the playing structure for it to fit the needs of different local constituencies.

6. Create a Youth Club “Road Map”

During the six-month review, the task force has acknowledged that there are many questions from local ultimate organizations about the best way to develop playing opportunities and specifically youth club playing opportunities. We recommend that the next task force take as one of its primary objectives the goal of providing a “road map” that will be of use to both new and existing organizations as they look at developing these non-school-based opportunities. This road map should look at developmentally appropriate playing opportunities for both boys and girls of all age groups and provide



recommendations and best practices around structuring playing opportunities, administering leagues, and recruiting and educating coaches and volunteers.

ACTION ITEMS

Many of these recommendations are far-reaching and will take many steps and years to implement. However, the task force has come to the following action items for immediate implementation:

- 1) Fall Task Force – A new task force should be convened for the remainder of 2014 and early 2015 to investigate options and provide recommendations for structuring a youth club season. In addition, this task force should develop the youth club road map that can be used by future organizations to implement and refine youth programs.
- 2) Test a Youth Club Season – In addition, the task force recommends that USA Ultimate select one state in 2015 to run a youth club state championship. This will provide valuable information for the new task force as well as allow USA Ultimate and local organizations to gain feedback on one of the likely outcomes of the next task force.
- 3) Coach Education and Athlete Development Model – USA Ultimate must convene a group to re-write the current USA Ultimate coaching education platform and integrate it with a comprehensive Athlete Development Model. This group should be convened in 2014 with a goal of having a ready project no later than the end of 2015.

RESOURCES REQUIRED

Most of the resources required are staff and volunteer time. The fall task force will need to be a group of four to eight individuals who will conduct surveys and work remotely to develop the youth club road map.

The athlete development model and coach education reworking will be a larger undertaking. We recommend a group of four to six coaches and staff working together through 2015 for its development. USA Ultimate should budget for monthly in-person meetings for the entire year in order to ensure appropriate resources are being directed toward this project.

Finally, the test season will require the hiring of a new volunteer SYC, which should be budgeted for in the same manner as other SYCs. The Youth Working Group will be tasked with creating provisional competition guidelines for this pilot event.

CONCLUSION

The task force's work should be seen as a stepping stone in the context of developing a national youth club playing structure. The goal was to learn from successful youth sports organizations and determine what could be applied to ultimate organizations. This structure will continue to be influenced by the ongoing work being done locally and nationally to develop youth ultimate organizations. It is through these organizations that youth club play will have to be administered. Successful implementation will



create a broad swathe of youth ultimate programming and, at the same time, help create sustainable ultimate organizations that will be the future of the sport.

APPENDIXES

Members of Youth Club Task Force

William Bartram, DiscNW

William Bartram is the Executive Director of the Northwest Ultimate Association (DiscNW) in Seattle. He holds a masters degree in Sports Administration and Leadership from Seattle University. He served on the USA Ultimate Board of Directors from 2007-2010. He coached middle school and high school ultimate at Seattle Academy from 2002-2006.

Tristan Green, Triangle Flying Disc Association/Triangle Youth Ultimate League

Tristan Green has played Triangle Ultimate since he started middle school. He is a proud alumni of Carolina Friends School and the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill (UNC), where he captained Darkside. After graduating from UNC in May 2013, Tristan became the first-ever paid staff of the Triangle Flying Disc Association, working as the Program Director for the organization. Tristan currently plays for Ring of Fire and has also played men's ultimate with Cannibal, Los and Cash Crop. Tristan has organized [service trips to Guatemala](#), coached middle school ultimate and worked with TYUL to establish [summer ultimate camps](#). His enthusiasm for the sport and for ultimate organizing serves the Triangle Ultimate community well.

Mike Lovinguth, USA Ultimate

Mike Lovinguth began playing ultimate in high school, usually around and between the trees in his parent's front yard after playing it at cross country practice. In college, he began playing in earnest for Truman State University. Mike has spent 13 years working in sport, beginning as a student employee at the university rec center. He solidified his passion for sport organization after a four-year stint as Athletic Director of Arrupe Jesuit High School by attending Ohio State University to pursue a Masters in Sport Management. Lovinguth has worked as the Manager of Youth and Education Programs at USA Ultimate since the fall of 2011 and enjoys teaching the alligator catch to his (currently) lefty-throwing toddlers Connor and Quinn.

Erin Mirocha, Minnesota Youth Ultimate

Erin Mirocha has been playing ultimate since 2001 and coaching since 2009. She has coached youth women's, mixed and open, and is involved in the youth high school and summer leagues in Minnesota.

Baker Pratt (Chair), USA Ultimate

Baker Pratt is the Manager of Competition and Athlete Programs – Youth at USA Ultimate and is responsible for managing and expanding competitive playing opportunities for youth athletes in ultimate. With experience as an educator and a co-founder of the Triangle Youth Ultimate League, he



has had success in working with coaches, parents, athletes and administrators to promote and develop the sport.

Brendan Smullen, Washington Area Frisbee Club

Brendan Smullen has served the Washington Area Frisbee Association for three years as an at-large board member with a focus on youth, fields and paid staff exploration. He is a commissioner for several leagues and a perennial captain. In his spare time, Brendan is an assistant coach of the Woodrow Wilson Tigers, Maryland States Runner-Up 2014.

Interview Participants

William Bartram, DiscNW
Ryan Belline, DEVYL
Val Belmonte, USA Hockey
Katherine Kelley Eberhardt, CASL Soccer
David Dreher, Portland Ultimate
Tristan Green, Triangle Youth Ultimate League
Abby Hagel, Minnesota Youth Ultimate
Jenn Heinrich, Rugby Oregon
Valerio Iani, Bay Area Disc Association
David Klink, Minnesota Youth Ultimate
George Li, Atlanta Flying Disc Association
Rafe Mauran, Rockdale Soccer
Matt Moran, Illinois Youth Ultimate
Jacob Nuxoll, Washington Area Frisbee Club
Jason Parker, Triangle Flying Disc Association
Brandy Medran, USA Rugby
Kurt Weaver, USA Rugby
John Kessel, USA Volleyball

