



16 Years in the Making

My Journey to Worlds

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Ultimate has always been a huge part of my life. From the time I was two years old, I was throwing a disc around with my parents, and I played my first real game at age nine. When I was 12, my cousin Elliott Erickson made the U-20 men's team, so I traveled with my family to watch him play for the U.S. National Team at the World Junior Ultimate Championships (WJUC) in Heilbronn, Germany. Watching all the excitement and spirit, and especially seeing ultimate players from all over the world, made me fall in love with the sport even more. After that experience, I made it my mission to make the tryouts for the women's U-20 team.

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As I reached high school, ultimate began to dominate my life more and more. I got involved with a leadership group based in the Triangle Area called Take the Field, a non-profit course that teaches leadership skills to middle- and high-school-aged girls through female leaders in the ultimate community. The program helped boost my confidence both on and off the field.

Despite weather conditions that made travel difficult, nearly 100 young men and women made the trip to Florida for the WJUC east coast tryout. **Photo: Billy Dzwonkowski/UltiPhotos**

In my sophomore year of high school, I decided to apply for the 2014 WJUC tryouts. I went into the process with the attitude that I had nothing to lose, that I would love to make tryouts just for the experience. When I was chosen as a tryout candidate, I was beyond excited. I kept the attitude that I was going for the experience, to play some high-level ultimate with some awesome girls from all over the east coast.

Tryouts gave me just that opportunity. Being only 16 at the time, I was one of the youngest players at the tryout, but it gave me the chance to test my skills against all of the older, more experienced players. The atmosphere at tryouts was like nothing I had ever experienced. There was a massive energy in the air, fueled by nervousness, excitement and intensity. For the most part, I kept up with the older players, but there was definitely a confidence and maturity gap between myself and the 18 year olds.

The disappointment of not making the team in 2014 was greater than I would like to admit. I continued to tell myself that the overall experience was good for me and that I would grow as a player because of it. That belief became a reality. I became motivated to pay attention to the way I played and what skills I needed to improve. Whereas before the tryout I had handled and cut evenly, I decided to focus on my handling skills. As I went through this transition, I developed better decision-making skills and assertiveness on the field. I challenged myself by matching up on the bigger, more experienced players in practice and began to develop more maturity on and off the field.

The U.S. men's team will have their eyes on gold at WJUC 2016 after a hard-fought silver-medal performance in 2014. **Photo: Brian Chu/UltiPhotos**

Playing on the open team at East Chapel Hill High School and being coached by Aaron Stern (also known as Mom) was a great lesson in assertiveness. As a girl, if you wanted to get the disc, you had to go get it. As I gained experience and confidence, it became easier to be a presence on the field. During my freshman year, Aaron promised me we would develop an all-girls team by the time I graduated. He kept his promise. By the time my senior year rolled around in the fall of 2014, Josh Hartzog had stepped up to coach a brand-new girls' ultimate team at East. We started with about seven people who had played ultimate before, which called for heavy recruiting. We ended up with a roster of around 15 girls, most of whom had never thrown a disc in their lives before joining the team. Captaining East Eclipse, along with Jane Carsey, in its first year helped me grow so much as a player, leader and teacher. This year, the team has grown to over 20 girls, all with an incredible amount of potential.

Playing for the Triangle Warhawks U-19 girls' YCC team for four years was another great opportunity to hone my skills and play with and against high-level women's ultimate players. Last summer with the Warhawks, Coach Brian Dobyns helped me develop a lot as a player. He ran a handler-centric offense, so he taught us how to be the most assertive handlers we could be. He also focused a lot on perfecting our break throws which later became essential to the flow of our offense.

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By the time the 2016 WJUC tryouts rolled around, I was able to treat them as a competitive tryout, not only as an amazing experience I would grow from. Having been to the tryout two years previously, I knew what to expect. I knew we would be timed on sprints, judged on how high we could jump and subjected to various agility tests. I practiced these things beforehand, but nothing compares to playing while your potential future teammates are clapping and cheering your name. Compared to two years ago, the content of the tryout was not much different. We were still tested on athleticism, skill and team camaraderie. However, I had not accounted for the difference the people would make.

Due to the east coast snow storm, I attended the west coast tryout in Seattle. Trying out on the west coast was completely different from the east coast tryout I had been to in 2014. There is an ease to playing with people you know and are comfortable with. In Seattle, I didn’t know any of the players, which created a higher-pressure atmosphere for me and increased my nerves. Despite not knowing anyone at first, everyone was very welcoming and willing to include each other. I immediately felt a sense of team without ever having played with those girls before.

I am beyond thrilled to have made Team U.S.A. and to have the chance to compete alongside all these high-level players. On Sunday at tryouts, I found myself handling more and more with Ruby Cassidy, and I am excited to continue developing that connection. I am also looking forward to continuing to play with my friend and former teammate Kate Lanier. We had incredible handler movement playing together on the Warhawks, and I think we can work to make it even better for Team U.S.A.



The tryouts were tested on athleticism, skill and camaraderie. **Photo: Billy Dzwonkowski/UltiPhotos**

Representing our country at the World Junior Ultimate Championships in Poland will be unlike anything we have ever experienced. I am so excited to begin training as a team and to develop our own style of play. Even though some of us haven’t met yet, there is already an overwhelming sense of camaraderie, and I can’t wait to get to know everyone as a friend, teammate and fellow member of Team U.S.A.!