DI MEN

PENN ULTIMATE

# THEN AND NOW

**BY ANDY BORINSTEIN**

Ultimate Hall of Fame,
Class of 2009;
Chairman, DiscNY

## THEN

**THIS PAST MAY, AFTER 30 YEARS, THE** University of Pennsylvania, my alma mater, finally officially recognized the ultimate team that won the 1985 College Championships by hosting a special

reception and alumni game at the beautiful, new Penn Park facility just south of campus. ust south of campus.

It was a very special occasion for the 12 players from that team who traveled from east and west, north and south to re-unite, reminisce and celebrate an indelible part of their young adult lives.

University of Pennsylvania Void won the College Championships in 1985.
**Photo: Tom Kennedy**

It was also a very special event for me, someone who typically eschews such reunions, because many of those players were an important part of my past—freshmen and sophomores when we held practices every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon in the fall and spring on dustbowl Hill Field (now a construction site slated for new dorms and university buildings) in order to travel throughout the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast Regions seeking to play top college and club teams.

When I first arrived in Philly in August 1978, the city—forever in the shadows of New York and Washington, D.C.—was a microcosm of urban poverty, racial division and violence that plagued many older U.S. cities. MOVE, a self-proclaimed black liberation group whose armed members all adopted the surname Africa, held the Philadelphia police at bay for nearly a year in a squalid house in Powelton Village, a neighborhood just north of the Penn and Drexel campuses. The standoff ended with a police officer killed and nine group members eventually sentenced to life in prison.

**But new blood arrived in the fall of 1978 that would forever change the direction and future of Penn's team.**

Wolfpacks, groups of teenagers who would roam the streets looking to rob and assault pedestrians or board a subway car to assault the passengers before jumping off the train, provided a gritty and unsafe feel to many parts of the city. Frank Rizzo, the city's law and order mayor, tried to run Philadelphia like a police state where stop and frisk was the rule, not the exception. It was a time when many Philadelphians were looking for alternatives—politically, socially, culturally and athletically. It was in this environment that

Penn Ultimate existed, but did not thrive. The team, nicknamed The Whammers, had formed two years earlier and was made up of a dozen or so men and a few women who, except for a handful of players, weren't particularly skilled, athletic or competitive.

But new blood arrived in the fall of 1978 that would forever change the direction and future of Penn's team. Three freshmen—Ken Glass from Westfield, N.J., Chris Carilli from Franklin Lakes, N.J., and yours truly from New York City—were part of the class of 1982. All three of us had played in high school, were captains of our respective squads and formed the building blocks of a strong team. We could run, throw, organize, recruit, and we lived to play the sport.

The transformation from a casual to a serious club team took about a year where these freshmen actively recruited friends, athletes (including three former Penn varsity soccer players), referrals such as "Big" Rick Atkins (who went on to win championships at nearly every level and is now PADA's director of competition) and disc throwers they encountered in the quad, Penn's popular open-air area surrounded by freshman dormitories that was the campus mecca for Frisbee throwing. That's how we found Noam "Norm" Frankel (who played for Windy City) and the speedy Howard Gold.

▲ UPenn Void at the 1985 College Championships.
**Photo: David Gitter**

An influx of these players who had been recruited by my freshman class led to our election to team leadership positions and cemented our job of transforming the team into one of the best and smartest in the region. Attendance at practice was made mandatory; offensive and defensive structures, largely lacking under the previous regime, were instituted; and the team started winning. We took first place at sectionals and made the semifinals of Mid-Atlantic Regionals in November 1979.

In a short period of time, Penn became the nexus for ultimate in Philadelphia. Players who moved to town for work (Danzo Perry), school (Nick Puscak) or both (Tom

“Ironman” Coffin) found their way to Hill Field and participated in the growth and evolution of The Whammers (1976) to the Killer Bees (1980) to the Refubees (1981) to Void (1983), the team’s current name.

The team gradually evolved to become one of the better college programs on the east coast, adopting the latest and greatest ultimate technology of the day—employing different zones and forms of man to man, shifting defenses in the middle of play, running a set offense and end-zone plays, knowing how to patiently beat a zone, etc.

...a championship that the university rightfully recognized after 30 years.

**It was a day I will never forget.**

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We knocked off some of the better clubs of the day (Heifers, BAD, Rude Boys, Knights of Nee, NJ Plastic Exchange) as well as strong college teams (Bucknell, Columbia, Cornell, Princeton, UMass, Duke, Virginia). The only team we could never conquer was the mighty Glassboro.

By the spring of 1982, we were the best team in the Ivies. We made it to the quarterfinals of Easterns (losing to The Hostages, the eventual champs) and had attracted an incredible group of freshmen and sophomores which included Bobby Riddell, Bruce Jacobson, Paul Toumayan and Matt Karowe. They formed the nucleus of a team that would add Karim Basta, Paul Shields, Kevin Lewis, Bruce Kuo, Ed Clarke and David Gitter.

This Penn team took the program a number of steps further, making it to two consecutive finals of April Fools Fest East, the semifinals of College Nationals in 1984, the second day of Easterns in 1984 and 1985, and compiling a 63–6 record in spring 1985 which culminated in the team's first and only College Championship title.

Which brings us back to that glorious day in May 2015 when many of these players gathered together with their wives, sons and daughters to play once again and celebrate a championship that the university rightfully recognized after 30 years. It was a day I will never forget. And the feeling that we had started something amazing in 1978 remains.

## NOW

**I HAD THE GOOD FORTUNE OF** interviewing current UPenn Void captains David Shields, Phil Cheng and team president Connor Boyle about the current state of the team as they were heading to Myrtle Beach to play in a spring break tournament. What follows is an abbreviated Q&A with my comments on how things compare to playing at Penn back in the day.

Current UPenn President Connor Boyle at Steakfest 2015 with Void.

**Photo: Paul Andris/UltiPhotos**

**Q Tell me about how the team is currently selected and organized. How do you find new players?**

Void: The fall is largely a time for player and team development where we figure out how to eventually split players into the A and B teams for the spring season when we try to qualify for College Nationals. This decision, made at the end of the fall season, is based on skill, desire and level of commitment to the team. The A team carries 24 players with the B team including 15–20. We recruit in September via on-campus club activities tables and sports fairs during orientation week. We also try to host a showcase game to get students interested and aware of the team.

Andy: 40+ players?! Wow!! We were lucky to get 18 at any one time. Also, the seasons have flipped in terms of importance. Nationals were played over Thanksgiving weekend, meaning that regionals were held in Washington, D.C., usually the first or second weekend of November. We had very little time to recruit (which was mostly done through signs placed around campus announcing practice times and locations as well as word of mouth) and develop new players as the season was in motion right after Labor Day.

# A dome over a full field for winter play, **incredible!**

**Q** **Where and when do you practice?**

Void: We practice every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon at the beautiful Penn Park. We get this field year-round as each winter the university constructs an inflatable dome over the field so we and other teams can practice from

December to early March. We also try to get together on Friday afternoons and throw as a team.

Andy: **A dome over a full field for winter play, incredible! I clearly played in the wrong era. We were lucky to get the old Hutch gym from 11 p.m. to 1 a.m. on a Friday night. And in the fall and spring, we played on a dust bowl known as Hill Field which is now a construction site for new dorms and administrative buildings. Well, at least the Tuesday/Thursday practice schedule hasn't changed!**

**Q** **How do you communicate to the team?**

Void: We have two listservs (a main one and another for freshmen) as well as a Facebook group that includes Venus, the players on the women's team, which is widely used for joint team social events. Note that Venus also has an A and B team with 40 players.

Andy: **We had a phone tree. We also helped start the Zephyrs, Penn's women's team, in spring 1981. Roberta Neidle Shields, David's mom, was the driving force behind the team. She was a standout player on the men's team and recruited eight other women to play. I remember when they scored their first goal—the celebration reminded me of New Years. The rest is history, and with David captaining the men's team, the apple clearly has not fallen far from the tree.**

# I definitely played in the **wrong era!**

**Q How are the fall and spring seasons organized in terms of playing schedule? How is the current spring season shaping up? How is the team looking?**

Void: In the fall, we split evenly into X & Y teams for the Flickadelphia tournament which we host in October, so everyone gets an opportunity to compete with players of varying ability. We then bring everyone to the other games and tournaments we attend and play only college teams. We now have a full-time coach, Darryl Stanley. The spring season is our focus, and we recently traveled to Myrtle Beach to play in an Easterns qualification tournament. We played well, but lost two close games to Michigan and Alabama and just missed out on advancing to the qualification round based on point differential. We plan to travel to Richmond, St. Louis (the Huck Finn tournament) and to regionals in Columbus, Ohio.

Andy: **St. Louis? Columbus? We never played in the Midwest, though we did travel as far south as Charlottesville (University of Virginia) and as far north as**

Hanover, N.H. (Dartmouth). We played at least 40 games a season against college and club teams. The spring season's goal was to make it to Easterns. We were our own player/coaches.

Phillip Cheng pulls for UPenn Void at Steakfest in March 2015.
**Photo: Paul Andris/UltiPhotos**

**Q How does the team work out its finances? Who handles all the logistics, especially with two Midwestern tournaments in a span of two months?**

Void: Each player is charged dues of $150, and we get $4–5,000 dollars from the university. Plus, we raised over $5,000 in alumni donations in 2015. Team president Connor Boyle works with team treasurer Saran Viswanathan to figure out all travel plans including rides, hotels and flights (to St. Louis). This enables our team captains (David and Phil) to solely focus on the field of play. Coach Stanley runs the substitutions and focuses on strategy.

Andy: **Back in the day, Penn gave the club $300 a season which we had to match through player dues. All other expenses were covered out of pocket by the players. Penn also gave us 10 discs that Wham-O sent to the rec department each season. It was the job of the captain to handle everything—travel logistics, player substitutions, strategy, etc. There was little division of labor or financial support. I definitely played in the wrong era!**

# The mark of a true Penn team!

**Q Lastly, can you describe a little bit about the type of game you play—offensively and defensively?**

Void: Well, we are a fast, quick team that is definitely height challenged. We play different zones, throw some junk where appropriate, mix up different offensive looks, run set plays, etc.

Andy: **Well, finally something I can relate to—short, smart players**

punching above their height—the mark of a true Penn team!