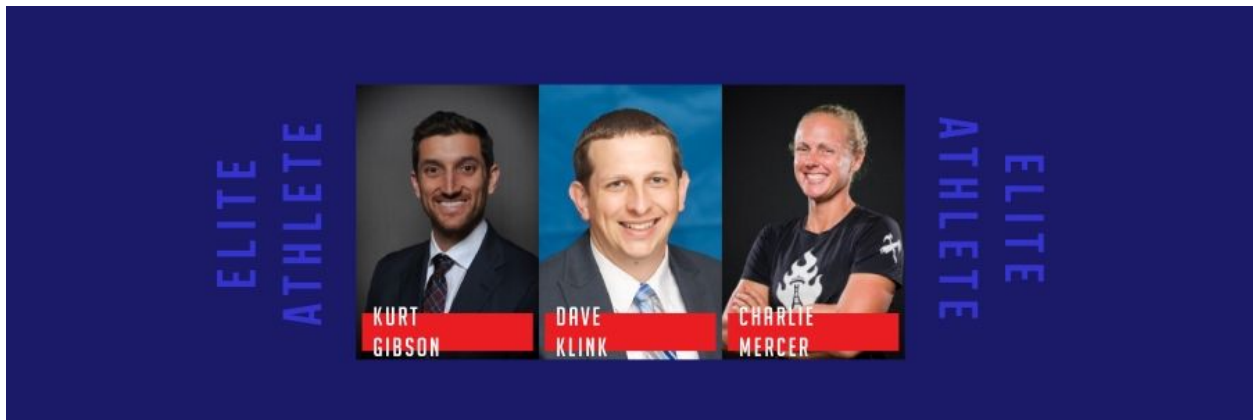


You can learn more about the election process [right here](#).

You can learn more about the candidates [right here](#).



## Questions

- 1) What work have you done to promote equity within our sport, particularly in areas that might get less attention than gender, such as racial or socioeconomic equity? What ideas will you bring to the board to further this work? [[Jump to answers](#)]
- 2) What kind of changes do you plan to make on the board to ensure that in the next election, the culture of the USAU board is such that more women feel comfortable and encouraged to run for available seats? [[Jump to answers](#)]
- 3) What are some steps you would push for in terms of being more trans/nonbinary/genderqueer inclusive/what are your ideas on programming for outreach in this community, on the national scale, while our sport still operates within the binary? Leadership ops? Organizational trainings/partnerships with LGBTQ+ orgs? [[Jump to answers](#)]
- 4) What are the plans to create a serious functioning web site? If we're going to compete with other major sports, we should have the technology to match. Will you commit to a serious increase of resources into IT? [[Jump to answers](#)]
- 5) How will you increase transparency and improve communications between USAU and the community? [[Jump to answers](#)]
- 6) How will you advocate for dedicated club players who play for teams outside of the top 8? What about adults playing at the local league and pick-up levels? [[Jump to answers](#)]
- 7) What changes would you advocate for in relation to gender equity? [[Jump to answers](#)]

8) What directions taken in the recent past by previous USAU boards do you disagree with, and what would you have advocated for instead? [[Jump to answers](#)]

9) How would you ensure the voices of women's and mixed players are adequately represented in decision making? How would you ensure players at every level of the sport feel heard, respected and valued - not just those players who compete at the national level? [[Jump to answers](#)]

10) What are your stances on disc spiking culture, particularly in relation to the idea of the "spirit of the sport?" [[Jump to answers](#)]

11) What's your view on the Masters program (i.e., Masters, Grandmasters and Great Grandmasters)? Specifically, how does the program fit into your vision for the long term growth and sustainability of the sport, and what investments (if any) do you foresee making in the program? [[Jump to answers](#)]

12) What work would you do to make ultimate structurally less expensive and more accessible to all socio-economic levels, especially youth and college offerings, including the elite series, without resorting to the "tax" on low-income players to have to apply for aid. [[Jump to answers](#)]

13) Do you feel that the USAU board is transparent enough to the membership? Would you change anything about how the board communicates with the membership about the topics they discuss and the decisions they make? [[Jump to answers](#)]

14) Do you think coaches, league organizers, sectional/regional coordinators should be receiving reduced player dues? [[Jump to answers](#)]

15) Currently 23% of the board (3 of 13) and 3 of the 7 spots the members vote for are designated for elite athletes. According to our last report, we have 54,796 annual members. If we assume that all top eight teams in the country have 27 players on their roster that puts us at 648 members voting for those 3 spots (I am assuming that national team players are made up of those players, and those EA voters from previous national teams/non top 8 teams are cancelled by those on top 8 teams who don't vote in elections). This works out to 1% of the playing population having the only vote for 1/4 of our national board. 1) Understanding we need to have elite athlete board members for participation in IOC, would you change the definition of elite athlete for the purposes of these elections? If not, how do you intent to improve the quality of play for sectional/regional level teams? [[Jump to answers](#)]

16) What are some changes you believe are necessary to encourage the growth and development of ultimate? What are some specific areas that you think require the most attention for the long-term health and growth of our sport? [[Jump to answers](#)]

## Answers

1) What work have you done to promote equity within our sport, particularly in areas that might get less attention than gender, such as racial or socioeconomic equity? What ideas will you bring to the board to further this work? [[Jump to top](#)]

### **Kurt Gibson:**

One of the best ways to promote opportunities for men and women lies within connecting on a local level with the youth. As a cancer survivor who played Ultimate, I was asked to be on the Board of Directors for Early Recognition is Critical in its infancy stage and helped guide the organization to move towards providing opportunities for both boys and girls in schools in Texas to play Ultimate. At the time, my job as a sales rep in the Houston area, I was responsible for managing our K-12 school business and had built many connections to help drive integration of Ultimate clinics into gym classes in schools. This idea, to bring Ultimate to our youth is critical to ensure to provide opportunities for both boys and girls to play Ultimate at a young age. As a board member I will ensure that we put a major focus and resources against ensuring that we enhance programs to bring Ultimate to lower income areas and children of lower socioeconomic status and bring more diversity to our sport.

### **Dave Klink:**

Acknowledging upfront: as a white, cis-gender, middle class man, I'm not the best person to come up with all the ideas (though as a mixed player from MN I do have some limited personal perspectives to bring). However, my main goals are to listen to others, ask questions, educate myself, and put in the work to help translate good ideas into action. And one idea I have is therefore to try to encourage others - particularly others with many privileges - to do the same. Another idea is to encourage more education on equity issues, particularly for USAU and its strategic partners (local organizations). For example, I've been lucky to participate in two training sessions with Cadoux Consulting, and I can't recommend Zara's training enough. While these ideas are certainly insufficient, I believe they are incredibly important building blocks to change.

In terms of work I've done, here are some examples: for Minnesota Ultimate, primarily at the suggestion of GUPI, I drafted an athlete representative code of conduct which includes significant equity and inclusion pledges. As the competition director for the Minnesota State Tournament, at the suggestion of a local coach trainer and equity expert, I provided coaches with materials on Spirit of the Game and implicit bias and requested that they speak with their teams to check those biases during play. At the USAU level, in 2015 I brought a proposal (which was approved) to modify the USAU transgender policy to allow more flexibility for youth athletes. Recently I've been a leader on a task force drafting a more comprehensive Transgender Inclusion Policy for USAU, which I hope will be approved and released very soon. I've been a big proponent of equity for the mixed division too, both for the division (e.g., equal or greater coverage, field assignments, game times, etc.) and within the division (e.g., better gender ratio rules and more balanced rosters; more attention to dangerous play rules; more

female captains). I was part of the decision to move USAU's mixed division from "offense chooses" to "endzone chooses." I was also calling for, and supportive of, the latest ESPN deal which allowed USAU to return to an even rotation between the three club divisions in terms of semis/finals times and air time.

**Charlie Mercer:**

I firmly believe that we need to listen to others and uplift their voices. One of the biggest ways that we can promote equity in our sport is to educate ourselves. As such, I'm going to use this platform to share resources, created within the community, and I challenge you to click on them, keep an open heart, and consider a new perspective.

Equity is a complex topic and it doesn't do it justice when one points to a specific action and say, "there, I did this for equity, I'm doing it good" and pat yourself on the back. Fighting for equity is an ongoing process. As Hana Kawai says, "if you're not dealing with your racist shit, then your shit is racist." My personal involvement with equity has been a series of continual actions - big and small. I haven't always done or said the "right" thing, and I'm committed to continually iterating and growing.

I volunteered as a Regional Coordinator so that I could ensure high-quality events for women's teams. We embedded social justice Thursday into our summer camps and had the kids do a privilege walk. I facilitated discussions on equity at tournaments, including a particularly notable one at the US Open with Manisha "Slap" Daryani about the Black Lives Matter headbands. I coach mixed teams and create a team culture that values all players. I coached an MLU team with two other incredible womxn. I donate annually to Age Up (and you should too - more information below). I'm a member of our ultimate HOME, a group that seeks to make ultimate a home for everyone, particularly for those of historically marginalized backgrounds.

I first met the Filipino ultimate community at Boracay Open in 2013. From that point on, they became a second family to me. After twice representing the Philippines at international events (WCBU 2015 and WUGC 2016), I knew I wanted to move there and be part of the training leading up to Beach Worlds 2017. In trying to find words to describe the impact of this experience, I recalled a social media post from just after returning to the US: "It was challenging, enlightening, lonely, gorgeous, fleeting, forever, silly, disappointing, fulfilling - and everything in between. How can I sum up 2.5 months of living in another community? The moments when basic beliefs are challenged. ("Home" is not where your stuff is in frisbee, "Home" is always the trees and "Away" is always the water. Where you stuff is doesn't matter.) The moments when I feel totally accepted and included. ("You're so Filipina Charlie") The moments where I feel so alone. (Sitting at dinner, not understanding a word of what's being said.) The moments when I'm in awe of where I live and what I'm doing. (When our scrimmage spontaneously ended due to a pounding rainstorm and all of the players ran into the ocean for shelter.) My time in Boracay was everything. It was hard, and I would do it again. We, as humans, strive for connection. And the connections I've been lucky enough to make within the Filipino ultimate community are beyond measure. This community is breathtaking in its depth, passion, and dedication."

I have more learning to do, always, as does USAU. I intend to be a catalyst for the continued growth of our sport. Promoting equity comes in a lot of different forms, and I believe that it's something that we need to embody in our everyday lives.

Resource: I encourage you to learn about, and donate to, All Girl Everything Ultimate Program (Age Up). This organization is everything a youth-led organization wants and needs to be. The community, the impact, the leadership - it does it all. Huge shoutout to Hana Kawai and Sam Terry for their work here: <https://www.allgirleverything.org/>

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2) What kind of changes do you plan to make on the board to ensure that in the next election, the culture of the USAU board is such that more women feel comfortable and encouraged to run for available seats? [[Jump to top](#)]

**Dave Klink:**

I'll first note that participation in USAU elections has traditionally been very low (both in terms of candidates and voter turnout). It's common to only see 1-2 candidates for a seat. So I want to give kudos to the nominating committee for the work they did to get the word out this year, resulting in 8 candidates for 2 seats. With that partial success acknowledged, 7/8 candidates being male highlights a significant problem.

There have been a number of great ideas circulating on Facebook after this question was posed, including: (1) providing a nomination window for folks to nominate others (not just themselves); (2) more communication of expectations/commitments/details for board positions; (3) longer application period with fewer conflicts with fall series and club rep elections; (4) more direct outreach. I'm supportive of such measures. I'd add to the list that I'd love more transparency on the list of candidates who have been nominated thus far, before the nominating deadline - I think that can be a powerful motivator for others to consider a run, and while there's still time to do so.

Another thing which the board needs to do is appoint more women to the appointed & independent seats. These are the seats which the board can directly control, but they are currently held by 4 men and 1 woman. In contrast, the elected seats are more balanced between men and women, and in fact the elite-athlete seats are currently held by 2 women (Heather Ann and Robyn) and 1 man (me). Each year the USAU board has the opportunity to fill 1-2 of those appointed/independent seats, and it would be great to see the board leverage those opportunities to build a team which more closely aligns with our equity goals.

This goes beyond the question, but I wish to note that in addition to more women, I would also like to see more LGBTQ+ people, people of color, people from lower socioeconomic statuses,

athletes with backgrounds in various divisions, people from geographically diverse areas, etc. And we still need to ensure a mix of the right professional backgrounds to fulfill the important responsibilities of the board (e.g., legal, financial, management, sports, etc.).

**Charlie Mercer:**

First, what are the barriers to entry? How can we proactively dismantle those barriers? From discussions that are being had in the community right now, it sounds like some common barriers to more womxn candidates are:

- Transparency of what the job is actually like and the time commitment involved (credit: Jill Simmerman)
- Not believing they're qualified (credit: Eileen Murray)
- Fear of failure
- Short nomination period
- Challenging time period (credit: Angela Lin, Kate Wilson)

Given that, potential solutions to these problems would be:

- Create an open Referral Form for anyone to submit recommendations. Staff/Board members could follow up with these individuals. (credit: Gwen Ambler)
- Recruitment booth at tournaments (credit: Michelle Chamberlain Steele)
- Longer application period, not during the fall club series (credit: Anna Michelle and many others)
- Increased USAU publicity during the nomination period, including social media posts, website, and emails

Speaking as the lone womxn in this candidate pool, the factors that made a difference for me personally were womxn role models and encouragement of peers.

Resource: I'd like to highlight the work of the Gender Equity Action Group and their Guide for Young Gentleman. Groups like the GEAG formed to move the needle in our sport in positive and productive ways. This article provides a primer in gender equity and works to dispel some of the myths around visibility in ultimate:

<https://skymagazine.com/2016/09/gender-equity-ultimate-guide-young-gentleman/>

**Kurt Gibson:**

I believe the current culture is one that supports gender diversity and our community is one that goes above and beyond to support women in their efforts to running for board seats and I would like to see that continue.

3) What are some steps you would push for in terms of being more trans/nonbinary/genderqueer inclusive/what are your ideas on programming for outreach in this community, on the national scale, while our sport still operates within the binary? Leadership ops? Organizational trainings/partnerships with LGBTQ+ orgs? [[Jump to top](#)]

**Charlie Mercer:**

We need to put more inclusive policies in place and to educate ourselves better. DiscNW has done a lot of work to create standards for recreational play that are more flexible for non-binary players to play without gender selection

(<https://relic.discnw.org/about/genderinclusionpolicy.html/>). Similar policies, adopted and disseminated by local, state, and national organizations would make an immediate difference.

In addition to learning and growing in the space of race, this is a space where we need to educate ourselves. We need to seek out and highlight the voices of those living outside of the binary and hear what they want and envision for the sport.

Language does matter. Over the past few years, there has been a movement in Seattle to replace “man” defense with “person” defense. We’re normalizing sharing preferred gender pronouns with introductions. While these language shifts may seem small, they’re incredibly significant in actualizing our commitment to being an inclusive space.

Resource: This article by Corey Wakefield offers additional practical solutions to increasing access for trans and non-binary individuals.

<https://skydmagazine.com/2018/09/boycotting-the-binary/>

**Kurt Gibson:**

I admittedly am not an expert on these issues, however, I do know that in business, companies that have the greatest success are ones that foster and promote diversity and inclusion of ideas and thoughts. Differing perspectives is critical to success in achieving a mission of an organization which is why I am a big supporter of diverse sets of ideas, from people of all different types of backgrounds. I believe the board of directors for USA Ultimate is not exception to ensuring a diverse set of ideas from people of all backgrounds are represented.

**Dave Klink:**

I believe that USAU needs a much more comprehensive inclusion policy. Thankfully, that is coming very soon, and I've been a leader on the task force which has spent a lot of time working on it, including consulting with trans, nonbinary, and intersex athletes in the community. And releasing the comprehensive policy will just be a first step - not only will we need to be revisiting it frequently, but we will need to ensure that we are implementing it across the organization and putting our ideals into practice. I can't get into too many details until it is approved and released, but I'm excited to talk about it a lot more, and continue working on it, once it is.

I would certainly support leadership opportunities, organizational trainings, and partnerships with LGBTQ+ orgs as well, and they would be well in line with the new policy. The one caveat I'd make is that USAU must be careful not to cross a line into politics, as NGBs are not allowed to get political, so some organizations would be more appropriate partners than others. I think ultimate as both a community and a sport is very well suited to be a leader in inclusion of transgender athletes, and there's much work to be done to get there.

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4) What are the plans to create a serious functioning website? If we're going to compete with other major sports, we should have the technology to match. Will you commit to a serious increase of resources into IT? [[Jump to top](#)]

**Kurt Gibson:**

A website that is functioning properly and easy to use in this day in age can immediately give legitimacy and credibility to an organization. The current website we have does not meet the standards to meet the expectations of the current members and we need to increase our resources and investment to make it successful. Creating a great website can allow for other companies to sponsor and purchase space for marketing ads which will drive more income to USA Ultimate. It will help drive activity and create these additional opportunities for revenue. In my experience, we also need to hold the people who are managing the website accountable as it is very difficult to find information, and it frequently is not updated in a timely manner. If USA Ultimate is going to continue to be the leader for Ultimate we need to increase our resources and spend to ensure we are meeting the needs and expectations of our members and people that are new to the sport. I believe we need to create additional positions and increase our resources in this space to be successful and I plan to do that if elected.

**Dave Klink:**

Yes, I will, or actually, I already have! I've been a strong advocate for this for a while, but to be honest I'm hardly unique in that respect. (I have yet to hear a passionate defense of USAU's website.) The good news, though, is that things are happening. On one front, USAU has launched a number of microsites for events, national teams, and GUM in the past few years which are much more appealing. And then the big news was that in March, USAU hired Kirstin Graham as the Manager of Online Technology - a new position. Kirstin has over 15 years in software development (including at Lockheed Martin). I can't get into details on what she's doing currently (in part simply because I don't have the technological expertise, and in part because it isn't my role to do so), but what I can say is that I'm seriously committed to ensuring that USAU is devoting appropriate resources to upgrading the web site.

**Charlie Mercer:**

The Board and Staff have already announced a revamp of the website, which is currently underway. The National team page is an example of the new site launch that is being slowly



rolled out. To my understanding, beyond approving the budget and general support of the initiative, this matter is largely operational and managed by USAU staff.

Additionally, I think it's important to note that the organization has limited resources. While I realize the need and strongly support the revamp, I am also conscious that there are other higher priorities that the community has voiced to be more crucial.

Resource: The recently revamped National Team website. <http://nationalteam.usultimate.org/>

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5) How will you increase transparency and improve communications between USAU and the community? [[Jump to top](#)]

**Dave Klink:**

My response to this question will frustrate some, but I hope it also shows that I believe strongly in improved communication and transparency. However, the reality is that promising to improve communication and transparency is easy, but doing it is hard. In order to address these issues, we must first acknowledge some significant barriers for board members to make an impact here:

-The board is of course a powerful entity in the organization, but only as a board. Acting alone, a board member doesn't have the power to speak for the organization. And board approval requires 7+ people to sign off on the communication during a board meeting, or 8+ people in writing via email between meetings after a reasonable voting period (and with nobody else demanding we wait for the meeting to discuss). That works for occasional "big idea" statements, but it's not conducive to regular communication, particularly in the age of twitter. Also, the board has entrusted the CEO/staff to run the day-to-day of the organization: it's the only way an organization of this size can be successful. And USAU has four professionals on staff working in the marketing and communications department. It's their job to communicate for the organization, among many other important things. If a board member interferes with that, whether by sending out mixed signals or by trying to micromanage (or manage) staff, that's not in the best interests of the organization.

-Full transparency, even just about board-level work, can undermine the ability of board members to do their job and hurt the integrity of the organization. We don't want to turn our board room into a dysfunctional, hyper-partisan arena (like the U.S. congress). Instead it should be a safe place to debate ideas, review and discuss sensitive information, and always keeping the best interests of the organization, its members, and the sport at heart (instead of worrying about ourselves or our next reelection campaign). Full transparency can also subject the organization to more lawsuits and outside attacks. These vulnerabilities can force NGBs to spend their limited resources on lawyers. (And as a lawyer I know firsthand how unproductive that is for clients!) I'd also note that the specific issue of publishing of board votes is somewhat

of a red herring because the USAU board very rarely has divisive votes - take a look at our board meeting minutes, and you will rarely see tallies in both the "yes" and "no" columns. (You will see some abstentions, but that's usually just because the board member wasn't present at the time of the vote.) I believe this ability to reach consensus is a product of the safe and productive environment in the board room - this board actually listens to each other and keeps an open mind as we navigate the important issues of the day.

Having verbalized these barriers, I'll say that I believe that USAU can increase, and is increasing, communication and transparency. This is something which the board and staff discusses, but as a sitting board member I'm not in a position to give more details than I've already given, though I'd welcome hearing from others with ideas or concerns.

On the other hand, I also want to acknowledge that USAU does a lot more communicating than it gets credit for. Weekly newsletters, Facebook/Twitter feeds, quarterly board meeting minutes, USAU magazine, annual budget, annual report, press releases, etc. And the board, staff members, and high level volunteers are pretty accessible too. At the club level we have 3 national directors and 6 elected player representatives who play a key role in club division governance and are constantly interacting with the community. And I know that many hardworking staff members set aside significant time to interact with community members as well. Don't get me wrong - all of this is not to say there isn't room for improvement in communications - again, there is - but those who want to be informed do have access to many resources.

For my part, I'm happy to discuss USAU business via email, phone, or at events - please feel free to reach out to me! I will do my best to answer questions and provide info, and if we veer into areas where I can't be fully transparent, then I'll explain why. I may also be able to direct you to someone who can give you more information on specific topics where I'm not as directly involved. After all, USAU has a lot going on, and board members do not run the day-to-day.

I'd additionally note that this has been a big year for the USAU board communicating with the membership in developing our new strategic plan, including a large, multi-city tour in which we were nimble with the format in response to insightful feedback. I'm excited for the final product to be released, and I believe the community will see that this board has listened and is communicating.

**Charlie Mercer:**

Transparency is critical to connecting the community with the Board and the USAU organization. As a Competition Committee Club Working Group representative, I started the "Women in Club Ultimate" Facebook Group to create a space for communication and surveying the community I was representing. I have answered the transparency question in more depth in question 13, however, I think there are some actionable things the Board and organization can do right away to grow in this space:

- Be accessible and responsive by email
- Listen first, talk second
- Ask questions of people, wanting to know and authentically get their experiences
- Office hours for board members
- Revisit the discussion on publishing votes, particularly for elected officials

Resource: This is a newly released article by Geoa Geer with concrete ways that we can create community as players and organizers:

<https://medium.com/@SunlightG/community-in-a-nutshell-a-cheat-sheet-for-ultimate-players-and-organizers-bc0a2a5619b7>

### **Kurt Gibson:**

I think one of the most important things to the success and longevity of a healthy organization is ensuring transparency between the leadership and its members. Without it, an organization can lose its way. I believe it is critical to ensuring the members are kept abreast of the current initiatives of the Board of Directors. Through the website, social media, email communications, and through its communication programs and resources, it is imperative these be used to effectively communicate all initiatives of the board.

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6) How will you advocate for dedicated club players who play for teams outside of the top 8? What about adults playing at the local league and pick-up levels? [[Jump to top](#)]

### **Charlie Mercer:**

A great way to advocate for a community is to participate in it. I have always participated in ultimate at varying levels - player, organizer, and coach. In fact, as a high schooler, I wrote the schedule for my high school ultimate league. I served as a Commissioner for the Washington Area Frisbee Club's Rec League. I volunteered as the Mid-Atlantic College Regional Coordinator and later as the Northwest Club Regional Coordinator. I've run a variety of tournaments, most notably Pro Flight Finale (x2). I continue to engage with the local Seattle community - both as a resource and as a peer. I am the founding Camp Director for DiscNW's Eastside Summer Camps. I coach at a local high school. But I also play every chance I get - pick-up, league, hat tournaments, local costume tournaments. In fact, on Saturday, I had a four hour practice for Riot, played a league double header, and then played another hour of Spikeball and Boot with my teammates and our opponents. (Don't tell my coaches. I had another four hour practice the next day.)

For more of my thoughts on this topic, please refer to my response to Question 15. While I am running for the Board as an Elite Athlete, I am running to represent all players in the community, because at the end of the day I plan to be a lifelong ultimate player.

Resource: This article is called "Open Letter to Male Ultimate Players...From a Guy". In it, Kenny Wiley, a wonderful human who will "never play at Nationals" (his words) creates a call to action for men to observe and question their behaviors:

<https://skydmagazine.com/2014/04/open-letter-male-ultimate-players-guy/>

**Kurt Gibson:**

As an Elite-Athlete candidate it will be my job to represent the Elite Athletes and their needs in the board. However, as a proponent and supporter of diversity and inclusion within the board and our broader community, I will always work with my peers and the members they represent to achieve the best possible outcomes to achieving our mission as whole.

**Dave Klink:**

I'm fortunate to still qualify as "elite" because I road some coattails to worlds, but that occurred during the sunset of my club career, and 4 years later I'm not able to compete at the elite club level with a straight face anymore. Also, my college team, which I poured my heart and soul into, never made nationals (some years we didn't make regionals either) and the first half of my club career my seasons ended at regionals too. So if you are looking for a candidate for this "elite athlete" seat who understands what it's like for the 99%, then I'm probably a safe bet under the current system.

In terms of improving quality of play for sectional/regional level teams, the honest answer here is that I think many times decision makers are not primarily considering the classic and select flight teams when they are driving policy. It's not a matter of intent, but rather just a reality that most people who get elected to high profile positions tend to have a high profile themselves, and so they may not have much experience or interaction with select and classic teams, particularly in the TCT era where they can even skip sectionals. With that stated, when issues or concerns which matter to select/classic players are raised in discussions, my experience is that the great people in these positions of power are typically very responsive to them. So it's really important to have someone in the room who thinks about these issues and who can raise them to the group.

I have a history of doing just that. For example, when the TCT came along, the "select" flight became an important thing, and to qualify for select you had to be one of the top 4 teams outside of the nationals bids at regionals. This is all well and good in theory, but the formats manual was not updated to reflect new formats for regionals to play out that final select flight spot (in addition to nationals bids). When I was the mixed national director, I worked hard to ensure that my regional coordinators were building consolation brackets appropriately so that those select flight spots were decided as fairly as possible. As another example, as a board member, I passionately advocated (with others) to successfully reverse a prior organizational policy of shifting the club series to the summer. More on that topic can be found in my response to question #8. I will also note that my general philosophy when it comes to running club ultimate is that I'd rather see USAU make policies with honey than vinegar (or carrots instead of sticks - whichever metaphor you prefer), and I think that's particularly important when it comes

to classic flight teams. I would love to see USAU ramp up the opportunities for such teams without ramping up requirements. I know that can get tricky, but it's the position I try to advocate for.

In terms of adults playing in local leagues and pickup, I was on the board of the twin cities ultimate league for many years, and I've spent most of my career playing league. I have mixed feelings about USAU getting too deeply involved with local leagues - I'm not sure it would be in the best interests of either USAU or the locals. I do think it's good for USAU to offer resources and support for those who desire it (e.g., insurance, best practices, registrations, etc.), and USAU does do that, but I also think it's good for USAU to not always try to have its hands in every cookie jar, particularly where it may not be wanted. With that stated, if there are ways in which local leagues or pickup groups would like to see USAU more engaged with them, I would love to hear about those ideas - please contact me!

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7) What changes would you advocate for in relation to gender equity? [[Jump to top](#)]

**Kurt Gibson:**

No answer submitted

**Dave Klink:**

I think the USAU is currently walking a lot of great paths in the direction of gender equity, in large part thanks to guidance (pressure) from the ultimate community, though it's certainly a work in progress and goals are far from met.

I believe that a primary objective must be increasing the participation in ultimate of girls, women, and LGBTQ+ athletes. Because even when our policies are technically gender neutral, or gender equal, they often have a disparate impact in practice due to a disparity in participation numbers. Also, male privilege is a very real problem in the world, and neither the world of sports nor the world of ultimate is an exception.

As an example of disparate impact, the "regional scaling" rules in the club division, which seek to reduce the number of spots for teams at regionals based on the number of overall teams who register in the region (with the goal of getting a nice even number of teams for a great regionals format even after a few qualifying teams inevitably decline their bids), work arguably pretty well in the mixed and men's divisions most of the time. It works well because there are enough teams competing in most sections in those divisions for robust sectional tournaments. However, the scaling rules have led to some very unfortunate results in the women's division given its current size. Reducing the size of regionals for a better format may not be worth putting a number of teams in the position of only getting to play 1-2 games for their entire fall series experience because there are only 2-3 teams in their section. Indeed, that becomes

counterproductive to growth, because teams are much less likely to sign up if that will be their potential fate. So on this issue, I was very happy to support the efforts of the club working group, and primarily the women's division player reps, to create some exceptions to the scaling rules for this last season, and to further encourage teams to participate in the regular season as well and maximize their value from the club season. It's an ongoing process to continue to tweak policies like this, but I think the main point here is that I think we must be able to treat different divisions differently, in the favor of the disparately impacted division(s), until such time as they are similarly situated.

Another big area to prioritize is supporting our SBOs and affiliates, and other organizers around the country, to bring ultimate to younger age groups. Sports participation research indicates that women are more likely to play sports when they start younger than high school, yet most youth ultimate today starts at the high school level and we often actually see larger gender imbalances at youth levels than in older age groups. It can be tricky to start up ultimate at younger levels, but I'm thrilled that USAU staff and volunteers have worked to develop curriculum for younger age groups and encourage middle school and elementary gym teachers to introduce ultimate as well. The faster we can keep moving younger across the country, the easier it will be for the Girls Ultimate Movement to achieve its very important goals.

In terms of media and promotional policies, until we achieve our equity goals, I believe that we must cover and promote female athletes more than male athletes. Unfortunately the old ESPN deal was somewhat of a barrier to that, but the current one sets a more level playing field which USAU can then build on with other providers to tip the balance. And Luke Johnson (Fulcrum) has demonstrated that he is the hero we need to ensure that there is a healthy imbalance of coverage in favor of women and girls at big events like nationals. I believe that USAU should continue to support such efforts and in fact double down on them. And by the way - it's not just a smart policy for gender equity, it's also just a smart policy for growing the sport. See more on that in my response to question #16.

**Charlie Mercer:**

Progress has been made in the field of gender equity, and we're not done yet. USA Ultimate has committed to equal coverage for the divisions in terms of streaming and write-ups. Women's and Mixed games are being put into showcase time slots. These are improvements, due to the tireless work and feedback from the community. Here are some other changes that I would advocate for:

- Use gender neutral pronouns when announcing games
- Develop more support for womxn coaches, and create tools for womxn who are coaching men's teams
- Create and distribute tool kits to have community and team conversations around gender equity
- Support increased numbers of womxn within the organization and on the Board

- Recruit individuals with demonstrated knowledge and skills to continue educating the community (Zara Cadoux, Sam Harkness, Rena Kawabata, Will Neff, Claire Chastain, and Mario O'Brien are some people who come to mind.)
- Willingness to have different policies for different divisions - what the women's division needs to thrive right now is different from the men's and mixed divisions
- Build up the story lines of womxn's players - through short videos, a poster series, articles, etc.
- Teach everyone about intersectionality and the increased harm we're creating when we focus exclusively on gender equity, without considering race and class

Resource: The youth are our future, and this comic from the Girls Ultimate Player Initiative (GUPI) is an example of how youth adeptly use their voices to point out a system that doesn't work for them, or us. This comic follows a young boy and a young girl throughout their ultimate journey and documents the inequity. <https://www.mngupi.org/news/the-ultimate-privilege-comic>

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8) What directions taken in the recent past by previous USAU boards do you disagree with, and what would you have advocated for instead? [[Jump to top](#)]

**Dave Klink:**

As a current board member, it would potentially violate my fiduciary duty to USAU to criticize the organization publicly, so please forgive me if I don't put too fine a point on this response or focus too heavily on current policies. With that stated, there are some changes I've successfully advocated for, in concert with others, during my three years on the board, and I'll describe one big one here.

In recent years USAU was heavily focused on visibility of the sport. Indeed, it was the #1 goal of the 2013-2018 strategic plan. And don't get me wrong, it's a great goal for many reasons (including for helping to accomplish other important goals). But I believe that the visibility goal should not be put on a pedestal above others. Visibility must be tempered by preserving and enhancing our most important values. Growth should not outpace our ability to maintain the best parts of our sport. And for me, this principle was well illustrated by a prior USAU strategy, which rolled out with the TCT around 2013, of shifting the club season to the summer. From a visibility perspective, and from the outside looking in, it was a very wise strategy - get nationals into August and away from direct competition with the crowded autumn sports calendar. The problem, though, was that the move was in steep contradiction with the tradition and culture of club ultimate, and the devil was certainly in the details for how it was impacting teams in a variety of challenging ways.

As the mixed national director, I was a member of the club working group before joining the board. The club working group saw several years of the fall series creeping up, moving up by a month over the course of 2013-2015, with the stated intent of moving even further. The club season was shrinking, and as the community was becoming well aware of what was going on, we heard the outcry (and felt many of the same concerns ourselves). We decided to work on a potential proposal to the board to change course. We surveyed 12,000 club players, receiving responses from nearly 2,000. We issue coded and processed more than 1,500 detailed comments. We analyzed the data to demonstrate that the group most negatively impacted by the season shift were the classic flight teams - the teams whose seasons typically end at sectionals or the bottom 2/3 of regionals. These teams many not always have high profiles, but they makeup roughly 75% of the club population! And their concerns were many, and valid. We translated those survey responses, and numerous conversations, both internal and external, into a detailed proposal for the board in which we asked the board to rethink this strategy. During this period, I was also elected to the board. I was then able to transition from helping to develop the proposal with the club working group to helping to present the proposal to the board at my first board meeting. It was a challenging, but rewarding, way to join the board! The board approved the proposal, and the club series was returned to the fall.

While visibility remains an important goal, I believe the season shift proposal was a milestone in the rethinking of the organization's priorities. The new strategic plan will demonstrate that we have listened to the community and reframed the organization's focus to one which puts our most important values first.

**Charlie Mercer:**

A strong emphasis has been placed on getting ultimate into the Olympics. USAU's Vision Tour showed that while community members wouldn't be disappointed if we made it into the Olympics, the message was that other things, such as equity, was a higher priority. I'm eagerly awaiting the launch of the Strategic Plan and am hoping that it will shift back to the member voice.

The Equity and Diversity Working Group was focused solely on gender for too long. This issue was raised as a US Open Equity Forum a few years ago when a player of color asked about what steps were being taken to make the sport more accessible for all and had to redirect the USAU speaker to address diversity in terms of race - they didn't have a strong response. I would have advocated for race and socioeconomic status to be part of the discussion sooner.

The US Open was initially conceived as a flagship event that would be held over the 4th of July. This was an incredibly undesirable and difficult decision for players. We used our voices on the Club Working Group to collaborate with staff and Board to move the event's date off of the holiday weekend and later in the season when teams were better prepared for competition. This change took time to happen, and it's indicative of the way I will do work on the Board to make changes that need to be made for the community.



Resource: Having just discussed the lacking emphasis on forms of equity outside of gender, here's another gender equity resource. The All-Star Ultimate Tour documentary is a moving and powerful narrative. Credit to Qxhna Titcomb. <http://www.allstarultimate.com/documentary/>

**Kurt Gibson:**

One of the biggest opportunities the USAU organization has in front of it is how it wants to work with the AUDL. I believe it is imperative to build bridges and foster communication between the two organizations. The resources between both organizations pooled together can be a powerful force in supporting the mission of USA Ultimate. The AUDL has a broad reach not only domestically but internationally, to some it is viewed as the premier league or even all one knows about Ultimate frisbee. By working with the AUDL to help promote the mission of USAU, we can help shape the definition and experience young people not just the United States, but across the entire world have with our great sport.

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9) How would you ensure the voices of women's and mixed players are adequately represented in decision making? How would you ensure players at every level of the sport feel heard, respected and valued - not just those players who compete at the national level? [[Jump to top](#)]

**Charlie Mercer:**

One of the key ways to ensure that the voices of women's and mixed players are adequately represented are to elect people who play in those divisions. (Hint hint, wink wink, nudge nudge.) I've been involved in one of those divisions for 13 years at this point, whether it was starting a mixed club team that was eliminated after two games at Regionals or playing in women's division finals. I give more of my thoughts on this topic in Questions 6 and 15.

In a potentially unpopular viewpoint, I also encourage the membership to become more engaged - seek answers, get involved, and VOTE. As someone who has engaged with USAU staff and other high-level volunteers, we have been pushing for more transparency and community connection. A persistent challenge has been how to successfully engage the membership. From the perspective of staff, it sometimes feels as if people say they want to be involved, but then don't actually follow through. The participation numbers for surveys, votes, and USAU social media engagement are low. So yes, there is definitely a disconnect here. It's incumbent on the USAU Staff and Board to do better, do more, and keep working to find how to have member's voices heard, respected, and valued. And, I challenge the membership to see what they can do to become more engaged and involved.

Resource: Just released, this is the new "it" resource for the ultimate community. Michelle Ng, Kyra Catabay, and Chip Chang have absolutely outdone themselves with this immensely insightful collection - target at college women's teams and relevant for everyone: <http://withoutlimitsultimate.com/resources/>

**Kurt Gibson:**

No answer submitted

**Dave Klink:**

These are wonderful questions, but as it happens multiple people asked similar questions. Please see my responses to questions 1, 2, 6, and 7.

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10) What are your stances on disc spiking culture, particularly in relation to the idea of the "spirit of the sport?" [[Jump to top](#)]

**Kurt Gibson:**

Did not answer

**Dave Klink:**

Much like the words "sportsmanship" and "respect," spirit of the game mean different things to different people. Don't get me wrong, our SOTG clause does make certain things clear - e.g., that you should not taunt opposing players. But some would argue there is room for spiking in celebration with your own team, so long as you aren't taunting. My general understanding is that different regions and different divisions have different standards on this, and I'm not sure that USAU should attempt to legislate too heavily beyond outlawing things which are widely considered to be wrong (e.g., taunting, intimidation). In my personal experience playing mixed in Minnesota, I'd say that spiking occasionally happened between friends, but rather rarely outside of that. Some teams may be OK with it, and others may balk or consider it poor spirit. Some individual players are all about spiking and that can create tensions on a team. But generally speaking, when a player does something which falls outside the social norms to which I'm accustomed, I find it helpful to try to interpret their actions within the lens of their background and experience, instead of my own. It's not an easy thing to do because I haven't lived their life, but I can listen, ask questions, and try to learn. I'd rather USAU leave some room for these sorts of cultural exchanges, certainly provide training and education, raise awareness, and enable spirit captains do their jobs, but avoid legislating too heavily in this area beyond the more clear restrictions in the rules.

**Charlie Mercer:**

Disc spiking is a divisive issue within our sport. While I choose not to participate in spiking, I recognize that spikes and celebration dances are important to others. I have teammates who spike and I have coached teams that fired each other up with hilarious celebrations (looking at you, Mixtape). As it stands now, the problem that I have with spiking is our double standards. Why is an exceptional competitor like Claire Chastain criticized when she spikes the disc? Why is Dylan Freechild not? How is the pushback that Khalif El-Salaam gets different? How do

societal norms around gender and race play a role in how we respond to spiking? Is the outcry truly because spiking isn't spirited, or because we're looking for reasons to exclude the actions of certain people? If the entirety of the community wants to eliminate spiking from our sport in the name of Spirit of the Game, I would support the will of the community, but we can't keep applying standards in different ways.

Resource: This article is the last in a three part series by Chris Lehmann. It's about race and ultimate, and how that intersects with how we view Spirit of the Game. He calls for us to examine our implicit bias and increase our cultural competency:

<https://ultiworld.com/2018/03/12/ultimate-race-spirit-game/>

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11) What's your view on the Masters program (i.e., Masters, Grandmasters and Great Grandmasters)? Specifically, how does the program fit into your vision for the long term growth and sustainability of the sport, and what investments (if any) do you foresee making in the program? [[Jump to top](#)]

**Dave Klink:**

As a masters player myself, I know that masters occupies an interesting space within USAU, and there have been some growing pains. My vision for masters is that it be heavily player-focused (as opposed to fan-focused or visibility-focused) and provide a smooth path for athletes to continue playing seamlessly once their lifestyle is less conducive to club (and for the select few who can do both, provide a nice change-up to the club season). Masters players don't want all the required events, uniform policies, schedules catering to other interests, etc. They want to be able to commit as much or as little as life allows, but still have the opportunity to stack up against the best of their generation. I believe masters can and should feel like a wonderful community, an amazing network. It can be a reward for coaches, parents, volunteers, organizers, hard workers, etc., who maybe can't devote 9 months anymore but still want to get away for a few weekends a year and compete hard, see old friends, and make some new ones too. And SOTG should be at the center. Maybe some have always been spirited, and maybe for others it's something that took until they were 28, or 35, or 45, to start to appreciate more. But the point is - masters players get it, and we can exemplify that aspect of the game at its best.

I believe that the #1 challenge for masters in the next 5 years is growth. Most masters divisions have a pretty solid nationals experience, but the regionals experience is hit or miss (to be charitable) due to insufficient teams. We need to keep building until local masters play becomes a reality and regionals becomes a very fulfilling competition. The good news is that some of this will happen naturally, as there are quite a few more people playing ultimate in their 20's than in their 30's (and not just due to attrition - USAU had significantly fewer members 10 years ago). But USAU also needs to keep adjusting things to ensure those smooth transitions

and a higher appeal for those considering giving it a spin. And I'd add that masters players could also consider taking stock of the improvements we've seen to the masters series in the past couple of years, and perhaps start focusing more on being ambassadors of the division, helping to pull back in old teammates who maybe didn't have access to those smooth transitions or who were frustrated with those early growing pains.

**Charlie Mercer:**

I had the honor and privilege of playing in my first Masters event this summer and it was phenomenal. To me, the Masters division is really about creating lifelong opportunities to compete. Being at the same tournament as one of my first league captains and the person who taught me to throw was such a gift. The Masters division is likely not what increases the visibility of ultimate to the greater population - it's what we do for ourselves, to deepen our existing relationships. It's worth continued investment.

Resource: This article by Kathi Valeii demonstrates the importance of ultimate as an inter-generational bonding tool:

[http://www.espn.com/espnw/voices/article/24264751/parenting-how-ultimate-frisbee-helped-nect-my-teen](http://www.espn.com/espnw/voices/article/24264751/parenting-how-ultimate-frisbee-helped-connect-my-teen)

**Kurt Gibson:**

No answer submitted

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12) What work would you do to make ultimate structurally less expensive and more accessible to all socio-economic levels, especially youth and college offerings, including the elite series, without resorting to the "tax" on low-income players to have to apply for aid. [[Jump to top](#)]

**Charlie Mercer:**

This summer, Bay Area womxn's teams organized an eight team tournament where the tournament fees were based on travel distance. The local teams incurred the majority of the cost for the event, thereby easing the burden on teams that had to pay for flights, housing, and cars. I applaud this model and think that it is more broadly applicable to competitions everywhere and would more equitably distribute the geographic cost burden. I think similar models could be used for a variety of other factors - asking some to pay more so that others can pay less. In fact, this policy is already in place for some WFDF events. At WUCC in Ohio this year, tournament entry costs varied by country, and more affluent countries (like the US) were asked to pay more so that other countries (like India and the Philippines) could pay less.

USAU has created the Ultimate Foundation with the following Mission: "To give everyone the opportunity to experience the joy of ultimate and spread the ethos of self-responsibility by supporting underserved communities, nurturing grassroots programs and inspiring and

empowering youth.” The goal of this fundraising arm is to reduce financial burdens and increase access to this sport.

This film is called “175 Grams” and is an incredible short documentary (8 minutes!) about the impact that ultimate has had on a community in India:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wY2fI00Aguo>

**Kurt Gibson:**

The barriers to entry of Ultimate are quite small compared to many other sports. With just a frisbee, and some field space, a group located anywhere in the world can put together an Ultimate game. Like Soccer, it has the potential to be a worldwide sport that many could come to love or grow up on if they just had access to a frisbee. Everywhere I travel internationally I always bring frisbees and give them out to children to use to play with their friends. Many of them have never seen a frisbee before and with a small gift, it can shape their future interests in sports and promote teamwork, good health and exercise, self-officiation and conflict resolution experience with others at a young age.

**Dave Klink:**

I've been privileged enough to be able to afford college and club ultimate (and there wasn't much youth ultimate in my area at the time), so I don't claim to have all the answers here. I think the most important thing I can do is listen to others with deeper experience. With that stated, while I'm open to more ideas, here are three things which I believe USAU has within its power to accomplish in this regard. The first is inspirational - the vision of ultimate which USAU projects must be an inclusive one, and accessibility must be a stated and emphasized priority, both for USAU programming and for USAU's partners. Second, we must continue to raise the profile and image of the sport, in part to bring in more sponsors and strategic partnerships (e.g., boys and girls club, etc.). USOC recognition was a huge milestone, but it isn't enough. Getting on ESPN was a huge milestone, but it isn't enough. Getting on the Olympic program would be amazing for this, and hopefully it happens, but it can't be (and isn't) the only strategy. And third, and most importantly, continue to improve the State Based Organization and Affiliate models and keep recruiting and supporting more local organizations. Why? Because building up the grass roots provides more local playing and showcasing opportunities, making the sport cheaper for the vast majority. It also provides far more local resources to support top athletes with elite aspirations. Imagine if you could multiply the number of ultimate community members in your area by a factor of 10 - it would make a big difference in what might be possible. Perhaps USAU can't make that happen from Colorado, but it can help support and empower local organizers everywhere with the knowledge, strategies, procedures, talking points, systems, protection, and vision they need to be most effective - oh yeah, and some modest financial support to help kick things off too.

13) Do you feel that the USAU board is transparent enough to the membership? Would you change anything about how the board communicates with the membership about the topics they discuss and the decisions they make? [[Jump to top](#)]

**Kurt Gibson:**

No answer submitted

**Dave Klink:**

This appears to be another one of those "great minds think alike" scenarios - please see my response to question #5 above.

**Charlie Mercer:**

The USAU Board is not transparent enough with the membership. I'm fortunate to know several current and former Board members personally, and struck by how consistently they are unable to share information, likely because of the the Board's strict confidentiality policy. I can see how much work is being done, and I want board members, particularly those who are elected by the membership, to be able to communicate more openly with their constituents. I think amending this policy and expanding the range of what can be shared is an essential first step to increasing transparency.

I acknowledge that many candidates call for transparency and then struggle to make it a reality. I'm committed to understanding why this is happening, and to create a forum for the the community to understand this challenge as well. Additionally, I will create infographics and other tools for the community to understand the roles, responsibilities, and "whys" of the Board.

Resource: This is Zara Cadoux's "Reformation Before Revolution." In it, Zara talks about the importance of examining our own false progressiveness in order to build a strong foundation for revolutionary action: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qITRW6nXb9Y>

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14) Do you think coaches, league organizers, sectional/regional coordinators should be receiving reduced player dues? [[Jump to top](#)]

**Dave Klink:**

Sectional/regional coordinators absolutely should not pay dues, and I believe they should receive additional benefits as well. That's the very least they deserve for the often thankless volunteer work they contribute to USAU's competitive series' and their local/regional communities.

In a perfect world, most coaches shouldn't pay dues either, but there are challenges there, particularly at the national level. USAU's budget primarily comes from member dues, and

keeping costs of player dues down is important for many reasons. USAU also isn't in a position to manage coaches (other than national teams). I personally believe it would be best for more local organizations to subsidize coach members, as the local orgs are in a better position to understand what that specific coach is doing with their membership, and also in some cases to even direct and oversee the coach. Someone who is fully dedicated and coaching a high school team should certainly be subsidized, whether by the team or the local organization. But somebody who is getting the training to then maybe run a for-profit league or camp, perhaps should be paying their own way. With that stated, I recognize that the majority of USAU coach members today are of the sort who should be subsidized one way or the other. The USAU budget may not be the most appropriate source of that, but we can keep working to build up SBOs and affiliates who may be better suited for it. Notwithstanding what I just said, I was happy to hear on a recent call with Dan Raabe at USAU that USAU is now offering the opportunity for SBOs and affiliates to direct USAU to give discounts for certain coaches to get extra training (e.g., attend a conference). I hope to see more programs like this built into the USAU budget which are sort of a hybrid of what I'm talking about here.

League organizers have the power to build their own league budgets and certainly can (and should) build in some profit (whether for themselves and/or their local organizations), but again, I'm not sure it would be appropriate for USAU to increase dues on all players in order to reduce player dues for league organizers.

**Charlie Mercer:**

Sectional and Regional Coordinators currently have their annual USAU dues comped. I believe that Coaches and League Organizers should have this same treatment. These individuals are donating incredible amounts of time to create opportunities for others, and this is a relatively easy investment that USA Ultimate can make, and financially sound - good coaches and good organizers recruit and retain more paying members.

Resource: This is Chip Chang's Open Letter to the Ultimate Community about intersectionality, the election, and how apathy feeds oppression:

<https://medium.com/@chipadelphia/an-open-letter-to-the-ultimate-community-1378dd8a357f>

**Kurt Gibson:**

No answer submitted

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15) Currently 23% of the board (3 of 13) and 3 of the 7 spots the members vote for are designated for elite athletes. According to our last report, we have 54,796 annual members. If we assume that all top eight teams in the country have 27 players on their roster that puts us at 648 members voting for those 3 spots (I am assuming that national team players are made up of those players, and those EA voters from previous national teams/non top 8 teams are

cancelled by those on top 8 teams who don't vote in elections). This works out to 1% of the playing population having the only vote for 1/4 of our national board. 1) Understanding we need to have elite athlete board members for participation in IOC, would you change the definition of elite athlete for the purposes of these elections? If not, how do you intent to improve the quality of play for sectional/regional level teams? [[Jump to top](#)]

**Charlie Mercer:**

Yes, I would change the definition of “elite athlete”. I could extend the qualification for participants at Club Nationals and Masters from finishers in the top half of competition to all participants. I would also extend the participation period from two years to three. Additionally, I would add in all participants from College Nationals and the Youth Club Championships for the last three years.

Expanding who qualifies is significant, and with the correct representation, I think that Elite Athletes can successfully advocate for increased quality of play for Sectional and Regional level teams. As an example, as a Women’s Representative to the Club Working Group, I participated in the groundwork that became the Women’s Growth bids from Sectionals to Regionals. This opportunity created more games played, and extended the season for some teams.

A personal example of putting what’s best for a division ahead of what’s best for an individual (and their team) is why I advocated strongly against the new Nationals format (2016). Riot, as a consistently top 4 team, would likely benefit from having a bye into quarters after pool play. And yet, from conversation and the survey results we’d gotten from club players, it was very clear that the community wanted (and needed) MORE cross-tier play, and not less. For the women’s division, this was not the optimal move. It served to made the path to finals easier for the top teams, and added in an additional game for anyone looking to challenge them.

Resource: Every December, key volunteers get together to offer guidance and make decisions about different divisions within USA Ultimate. The organization always reports some of what is decided, and these are useful for keeping a pulse on what’s happening at a national organizational level. This recent example is the result of the conversations from December 2017 and outlines the growth bids mentioned above:

<http://tct.usultimate.org/2018/02/06/womens-growth-bids-mixed-gender-ratio-rule-b-included-2018-tct-guidelines/>

**Kurt Gibson:**

I do believe there is an opportunity to expand the Elite Athlete qualification past the Top 8 teams. I believe the current criteria that is being used to determine who an Elite Athlete is based more off of the highest quality of talent in our sport. By using this criteria, you potentially eliminate some of the best talent that doesn’t necessarily play on a good team or finishes in the Top 8 of Nationals within the given timeframe. I believe the criteria was set up to encompass rather the time, effort, and training needed to compete at the elite level as well as being towards the upper echelon in terms of talent in our sport. By combining the time, effort, and training



needed to compete at the elite level into the equation, this could expand the way we view what an Elite Athlete is to more than the top 8 teams. As an example, while even the level of training can differ between players on an individual top 8 team, there are definitely players who do not finish outside of the top 8 that dedicate as much of their life to the competition in the club season and are just as talented and I don't want those people to be excluded from this type of vote.

**Dave Klink:**

I would favor opening up the elite athlete requirements to allow voting from as many player members as possible. I do think it's important that some seats are reserved for players (especially in this sport which seeks to give so much control to players!), but I do not feel that the series placement for those players' teams meaningfully informs their value as voters or candidates for the board. If reelected, I would raise this issue with the board. (Given the board's 2-term limits, it would not be as self-serving to argue for this change during my 2nd term as it would have been during my 1st.)

In terms of improving the quality for sectional/regional level teams, please see my response to question #6 above.

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16) What are some changes you believe are necessary to encourage the growth and development of ultimate? What are some specific areas that you think require the most attention for the long-term health and growth of our sport? [[Jump to top](#)]

**Kurt Gibson:**

One of the single most important issues right now to the long-term health of our sport is how USA Ultimate will work with the professional leagues. I know I may differ from some of my peers in this perspective, but I adamantly support beginning communication between USA Ultimate and the AUDL. The AUDL, while not a perfect organization, in just its infancy, has access to many resources that can be used to support the mission of USA Ultimate. I agree that the AUDL can further support diversity and inclusion from all perspectives, including gender, across different platforms. To do that we need to focus on building bridges between the organizations and players. I have built close relationships with multiple league owners and representatives and can help foster this communication between organizations. The AUDL is already in the process of putting forth an initiative to create a women's league and through the pooling of both organization's resources and the creative spirit of our community, we need to put forth our best effort to support these types of efforts. If elected, I will ensure to leverage the collective resources to achieve the best possible outcome for USA Ultimate's mission and its members.

**Dave Klink:**

For me a top priority is strengthening the State Based Organization and Affiliate program. I discussed the importance of this some in my response to question #12 above. To expand on that, right now I feel ultimate is too top heavy and this sport has too much going on at the national level compared to local levels. And that's not meant as a criticism of USAU, but rather an observation that a great deal of the growth of our sport has been contingent on just a few major organizations. Interestingly, as compared to other NGBs, USAU actually probably runs significantly more programming. I think it's important for USAU to look for ways to support, empower, and trust other organizations with more programming instead of trying to run everything. I envision a future where USAU staff makeup a small percentage of the full-time employees working on ultimate across the country. I envision a future where the USAU budget is dwarfed by 50+ other ultimate organization budgets around the country (or is largely passing through to those organizations).

Another top priority is keeping up with "safe sport" and promoting safe, healthy environments for participants, particularly youth. One trap which people can sometimes fall into in the ultimate community is assuming that these are issues for other sports to worry about, but ultimate is different. I can't stress enough - we aren't different. And research suggests that no news isn't good news - rather it's a sign that we haven't built a culture which encourages reporting of abuse. Indeed, if anything, we are arguably more vulnerable because of the perception that people can let their guard down in our community. There are people in every community who take advantage of others, and we need to be sure that we are following best practices, raising awareness, and putting as many safeguards in place as possible. All sports organizations, large and small, need to get their houses in order on this. There is also new legislation coming into effect which will have broad-ranging implications, which thankfully USAU is closely monitoring and now providing free training on. In order to protect our members, to keep our insurance costs down, to avoid an endless spiral of lawsuits, and to build a healthy atmosphere for long-term growth, safe sport must be a central focus of USA Ultimate.

Finally, as discussed in my responses to questions #1, #7, and others, we must promote equity in all its forms. It's an important goal unto itself. In addition, though, promoting equity is absolutely the best marketing strategy for our sport to skyrocket in 2018. If we try to be another "football jr" or we will basically spend the next 50 years trying to push a huge rock up a hill in an avalanche. Instead we must differentiate ourselves and provide a better product for today and tomorrow. We must emphasize our great selling points like spirit, self officiating, inclusion, and mixed play. And we must promote strong female role models. Unlike during the decades when the current top sports were developed, today women drive 70-80% of all consumer purchasing. Women are more powerful than they have ever been in history - certainly far more powerful than they were when football made a name for itself. (That's not to say we don't still live in a patriarchy - we do - but this isn't the 1950's.) In 2018, female role models are simply more marketable than male role models, particularly outside of the "mainstream" sports which already have fully saturated the market for selling to the 20-30% of purchasing power they still cling to, and which already have their own devoted fan bases (in other words, the type of person who is looking for a role model like Peyton Manning probably won't be tuning into ultimate over football

anytime soon). So whether we are doing it to be on the right side of history, to honor our community, or to cause our sport to experience unprecedented growth, we must embrace the best and most unique parts of our culture and particularly ensure that our female heroes are leading from the front. And similar arguments can and should be made for promoting athletes of color, LGBTQ+ athletes, and others who can help ultimate turn its ideals into reality and appeal to the next generations of sports fans.

**Charlie Mercer:**

I think the growth of our sport is built on investing in accessibility. “Making it” as a sport isn’t worth it if we lose our ideals on the way. We are a sport that’s invested in Spirit of the Game, in being more than an athletic endeavor. If that’s what truly matters to us as a collective, then we need to prioritize access to our sport for everyone, and not only reduce barriers to entry, but also to reduce barriers to compete at all levels.

One specific way to increase access is to build role models into the positions that we want them to occupy. Age Up does this excellently, building leadership in youth (largely POC) through coaching ultimate. USAU has a Coach Certification rebate for “women who coach any team”. It’s essential that we seek out individuals and invest in them as people.

Resource: For my final resource share, I want to highlight Ultiphoto’s 10 year anniversary album: <https://www.ultiphotos.com/best/10yrs>. When looking through the photos, I was so present to the incredible community that we’re privileged enough to be part of. I remember when Kevin Leclaire started Ultiphotos in 2008. Many of those first photos are from WAFC leagues that I played in. That, to me, is the crux of what makes ultimate so special - the incredible people who make up our community.

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