'YOU'VE GOTTA LOVE THE PLASTIC!'
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF ULTIMATE FRISBEE IN THE UK

Thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at the University of Leicester

by

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December 2009

Abbreviations

(BUF)   British Ultimate Federation

(BUSA)   British University Sports Association

(CCCS)   Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies

(CCPR)   Central Council for Physical Recreation

(SotG)   Spirit of the Game

(TD)   Tournament Director

(UK)   United Kingdom

(UKUA)   United Kingdom Ultimate Association

(USA)   United States of America

(WFDF)   World Flying Disc Federation

Abstract

'You've gotta love the plastic!' An ethnographic study of Ultimate Frisbee in the UK - by Gerald Griggs

Over the last decade a body of academic literature has emerged concerning the phenomena of what have been termed 'alternative' or 'lifestyle' sports (Wheaton, 2004). This thesis makes a contribution to knowledge produced by recent studies by examining the sport of Ultimate Frisbee within the UK. Ultimate Frisbee (commonly known as 'Ultimate') is a fast paced, non-contact, mixed sex team sport played with a flying disc or 'Frisbee', which marries features of a number of so-called 'invasion' games, such as American Football and netball.

The data were collected within the Ultimate Frisbee community of the UK from 2004 – 2007 across a range of sites and as an established and active member of that community an 'insider' role was adopted (Fetterman, 1998). Data were collected using three methods, namely participant observations, interviews and list mining. In keeping with previous studies on sporting subcultures, foundation chapters are concerned with key questions concerning participation and looking at the social construction of identity via participation in Ultimate. Closer scrutiny served to highlight a number of emergent themes which provide ideal jumping off points to explore highly pertinent aspects for more detailed discussion later in the study.

Beyond the micro detail of the study, key findings indicate that Ultimate in the UK represents something of an 'anti sport' sport embedded within an alternative counter cultural value system. Furthermore it is also suggested that Ultimate in the UK is a sport at the point of fracture, caught between its 'alternative' roots and the modernisation agenda of its governing body.

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Introduction

1. Some background on Ultimate in the United Kingdom

'It's cold, wet and very windy. It's April, it's Bristol and from this one spot I can see over five hundred men and women chasing pieces of plastic around a huge field...so now it's just the simple task of working out what it all means!' (Field Notes 02/04/05)

The above account represents what had been a common sight each spring over the duration of this study. Though within the United Kingdom (UK) crocuses and daffodils may appear to be blooming earlier and migrating birds might seem to be changing their flight plans, the activities of participants of Ultimate Frisbee continue to be as regular as clockwork as early April marks the start of another outdoor season.

Ultimate Frisbee (more commonly known as 'Ultimate' to participants) is a fast paced, non-contact, mixed sex team sport played with a flying disc, which marries features of a number of so-called 'invasion' games, such as American Football and netball, into a simple yet, physically demanding sport. The game is played between two teams of seven players (five players indoors) on a large rectangular pitch. A line drawn across the pitch at either end creates two end-zones, as in American Football. By 'passing' the disc through the air from player to player, the team on the offence attempts to work the disc up the pitch and a point is scored when a team completes a pass to a player standing in (or more likely running into) the end-zone they are attacking. As with netball, players cannot run when in possession, so in Ultimate when the disc is caught players must come to a stop before throwing it to another player. The defending team attempts to stop the team with the disc from making progress up-field by 'marking'

potential recipients. The theory here is that the offence will not want to risk passing to a player who is being marked too closely, as it is likely to result in an interception. So it boils down to the offence players trying to get free of their markers to receive a pass, while the defence makes every effort to stay with them in the hope of forcing a turnover (a transfer of the disc from one team to the other) (Griggs, 2004).

Ultimate is essentially a non-contact sport and any contact that occurs between players can be declared a foul by participants. Such decisions about foul play are made collectively only by the players concerned and not by a referee. At every level of the sport, participants are guided by what is known as 'the spirit of the game', which in essence is the central ethos behind Ultimate (WFDF, 2004).

Within the UK, most participants within Ultimate begin their development in the sport at institutions of Higher Education: it is yet to permeate into schools to any great extent (where this *has* occurred it has usually been as a result of a teacher who already plays). Indeed the first Ultimate team formed in the UK in 1977 was at the University of Warwick (Warwick Bears). So prevalent has the sport become within the UK Higher Education sector that in April 2006 Ultimate gained recognition from the British University Sports Association (BUSA), leading to nationally recognised inter-institutional competitions comparable with more mainstream sporting activities.

Many UK graduates wish to carry on playing after Higher Education and teams have formed either as collections of alumni e.g. Mustard (the alumni of the University of East Anglia) or within geographical areas, not unlike more established team sports such as football. Within Ultimate, the latter are known as 'geo' teams and are largely located in

larger urban areas in order to maintain a viable player base. Teams compete in events that are held the length and breadth of the country and include both indoor events (largely October – March) and outdoor events (largely April – September). These events are organised either by enthusiastic individuals who take on the role as chief organiser or tournament director (TD) for the weekend, or are within a more formal programme of events organised by the sport's national governing body, the United Kingdom Ultimate Association (UKUA).

The UKUA run both indoor and outdoor national championships each year which comprise a series of qualifying events and national finals. In recent years an increasing importance has been placed upon the outdoor season and in particular the national series of UKUA competitions referred to as the 'Tour' (now further delineated by the top 16 teams comprising the 'A' Tour and the remaining teams comprising the 'B' Tour). Over the last few seasons this has comprised a series of five events (four qualifying events at which points are scored and a ranking secured, and a finals to which the top thirty two UK teams are invited) which take place around the country (e.g. the 2004 season comprised (in order) events at Bristol, Eastbourne, Mansfield, Edinburgh and Birmingham). The 'Tour' largely takes place during student vacations and so players are, in effect, more likely to practice and to be based in and around the area in which they live, rather than within the educational institution they attend. Teams on the 'Tour' may have no equivalent in the indoor season and they may cover a large geographical area for player recruitment (e.g. the EMO team draws players from across the whole Midlands area but are based loosely in the East Midlands due to the location of one or two key organisers of the team).

2. Why study Ultimate sociologically?

Ultimate is now played in more than forty-two countries (WFDF, 2004), from which it is estimated that there are as many as 200,000 regular participants (Thornton, 2004). It is primarily played in Europe, North America and Australia, but has become increasingly popular in Japan. Though Ultimate is largely self funded by players, through memberships and tournament fees, programmes in Sweden, Norway, and Japan receive government funding and in countries such as Australia, there are well established school and youth competitions. Overall, however, it is the United States that produces the largest number of players, teams and leagues (WFDF, 2004). Ultimate's global development took another giant step forward in 2001, when it became a medal sport at the World Games in Japan. Not surprisingly, its governing body now has ambitions towards gaining Olympic Games (IOC) recognition from this international platform, in much the same way as Taekwondo and Badminton have progressed to Olympic status in recent years (WFDF, 2004).

The attraction of a sociological study of Ultimate Frisbee comes from what now amounts for the author to seven years of participation, and the belief - though not always entirely tangible - that there was something 'different' going on here compared to other UK sports. Being involved in sport from a young age and later both studying and then teaching Physical Education and Sports Studies, this is not a conclusion reached easily or without some real foundation. Anecdotally, and at face value, there appears to be much about Ultimate that could explain such a view: it is a mixed sex sport; it is consensually self refereed; and the people who played it are self-consciously 'cool' about both their participation and competitive drive. All three of these features

are far removed from some occasionally ill-tempered all-male five a-side games of football I had found myself in some years prior.

However, viewed as a social scientist - a gaze I had begun to acquire at around the same time as I began to play Ultimate - there began a deeper search for evidence and answers. Readings about sporting sub-cultures and about what have been termed 'alternative' or 'lifestyle sports' (Wheaton, 2004) led to the realisation that in any search for difference, similarities also abound and that many of the anecdotal 'truths' I had acquired about Ultimate were apparently equally applicable elsewhere. The key difference here however was that Ultimate was an 'invasion' team sport, unlike many so-called 'lifestyle' sports which tend to be individual pursuits such as windsurfing, skateboarding and snowboarding. That said, the insights gained from a thorough and detailed investigation 'in the field' and from other sporting analyses - largely ethnographic in nature – suggested that an interpretative sociological study of the social processes operating within Ultimate was the most fruitful way forward.

Some of the most effective sociological studies of sporting cultures to date have looked at the dynamics of participation decisions, the social construction of identity and underlying social meanings of sport (Horne et al., 1999). This study aims to follow in that vein. The rationale for undertaking this study is perhaps best summed up by Rinehart and Sydnor (2003:8) when they argue that:

> 'Knowledge matters. To know more about our intricate mysterious lives on this planet enriches us…such knowledge matters because it tells us what it is to be human; how wondrous yet frightening, how universal, yet particular.'

It is this 'particularness' that probably best defines the sporting sub-culture and in order to identify and examine this within the sport of Ultimate specific theoretical tools have been employed.

In **Chapter 1** I detail relevant developments within the sociological study of sport and include coverage of earlier work conducted on subcultures, charting the development of such studies as Weinberg and Arond's (1952) work on 'career' boxers, through to the growing focus on the phenomena of what has been variously termed 'extreme', 'alternative' or 'lifestyle' sports (Wheaton, 2004).

The **second** chapter sets something of an historical context for the study. Firstly, it deals with the origin of the name 'Frisbee', followed by the subsequent development of the plastic flying disc. The idea of 'Frisbee football' is explained and then attention is drawn to locating the development of Ultimate in the American counter culture. Finally, the creation of Ultimate and the first game (in the USA) is detailed. The sport's later development within the UK has evolved in a very particular way over the last thirty years and this is explored within the second half of the chapter. The development of UK sports policy is outlined which serves to provide a wider context for locating the introduction of Ultimate Frisbee into the UK. In addition the relevance of the sport taking root in the University sector before spreading wider is discussed. The chapter concludes by examining how the subsequent governing bodies of Ultimate within the UK have actively sought formal recognition from external bodies for more than a decade.

I argue in **Chapter 3** that in order to gain a reliable cultural and sociological understanding of Ultimate we need to use a form of analysis rather than undertaking the process of simply basic reporting. 'Analysis implies a concern for identifying, scrutinising and clarifying, and in this way helping overcome the obstacles to a complete understanding of the object of study' (Sage, 1990: 11). The complexities and details of producing a methodology are dealt with, here. In particular, the selection of ethnography as a suitable methodological approach (Butts, 2001; Sands, 2002) as a means to collect and analyse data is examined. Because there are major differences regarding both the conceptual meaning of ethnography and its application (Brewer, 2000), its precise meaning for this study is clarified and a rationale is offered for its use. More specifically, a case is made for why the research is located within an approach which combines the best features of naturalism (good practice of the methods) with elements of sure methodological foundation. The second part of this chapter examines the application of the approach by considering the methods and techniques employed. Early population sampling known as 'the big net approach' (Fetterman, 1998) is discussed along with the adoption of recommendations which advocate engaging in the familiar qualitative techniques of participant observation and interviews. However, a very new technique of list mining (the practice of researching messages sent to Internet-based forums) is also employed as a third method of data collection. The ethical considerations required are also discussed and embedded within this section.

As individuals participate in an activity they create a rich cultural landscape (both metaphorically and literally) within which they attribute meanings to their actions (Coakley, 2003). Gaining insight into the experiences of individuals of Ultimate therefore provides answers to a number of key questions which are discussed in

Chapter 4. Though the site upon which an activity takes place is often overlooked as a source of data, closer inspection can reveal a wealth of information that is waiting to be 'decoded' (Cosgrove, 1989). In order to interpret and analyse the sporting landscape of Ultimate a modified framework devised by Meinig (1979) examining different 'Views of the sports landscape' is employed. In addressing how participants become involved in Ultimate and how their involvement develops, a three stage progression model devised by Stevenson (1999) is used. The third and final key area examined in this chapter is the core characteristics of Ultimate and insights on why individuals participate. Stebbins (1992) suggests that such participants become engaged in 'serious leisure' as they show significant commitment to an activity and engage in it for significant amounts of their leisure time. Donnelly and Young (1988) indicate that whilst engaged in this process identities are constructed, which are embodied in the actions in the participants. When this occurs, specific characteristics appear to be evident which exemplify key aspects of the activity and give insight into why individuals choose to participate. As such these characteristics will be identified and examined in turn.

Contemporary studies involving sporting subcultures have centred on locating the real or *authentic* identity of participants (Wheaton and Beal, 2003) and this is an issue I turn to in **Chapter 5**. Donnelly and Young (1988: 224) suggest that the establishment of sub-cultural identity is 'intended for two distinct audiences – members of the larger society and members of the subculture'. According to Jenkins (2004: 97) this serves the purpose of constructing visible external differences which in turn 'generates internal similarity', thus 'distinguishing the in-group from the out-group' (Donnelly, 1985: 546). Two key themes that appear to represent strong elements of subcultural capital that

emerge from Chapter 4 are those of 'strong social interaction' and 'alternativeness'. In light of this, these two elements are examined further in Chapter 5 where I look at how they may be embodied and objectified in the production of authenticity.

From the critical examination undertaken in Chapter 4 on participation in Ultimate, four further themes emerge that are worthy of closer and more detailed study. These involve aspects of self refereeing, contesting traditional notions of gender and masculinity, the aesthetic experience of Ultimate and the development and apparent emergent divisions in Ultimate in the UK.

In Ultimate, the ethos of the 'spirit of the game' is pervasive at all levels and reflects a 'collective morality' to which all subscribe (Robbins: 2004: 332). This is the main focus of **Chapter 6**. As the game is self refereed at all levels such responsibility to administer and to adhere to the said rules is taken very seriously. The integrity of the spirit of the game in practice according to Robbins (2004) is not in question as Ultimate players at all levels will be able to give a competent account of what it means and its centrality to play. However, in reality its interpretation is less clear and, as such, it needs to be examined in more detail. Firstly, the development of the constitutive rules is briefly discussed, by looking at the original conception through to the present day. Secondly, consideration is given to how constitutive rules work in practice. Thirdly, the dominant ethos of Ultimate, the 'Spirit of the game', is examined. Lastly, an emergent aspect from the data is how members of the Ultimate community have reacted to recent suggestions that observers or referees may be needed within UK Ultimate should excessive rule breaking occur, as it seems to have done in the United States.

Within the UK, boys' public schools provided both the setting and the blueprint for the development of institutionalised team games and competitive sport. Their brand of Victorian masculinity celebrated physical prowess and strength in sport and years later this heritage continues to vindicate male superiority in many sports. These values have also restricted opportunities for women as ideals and myths of female frailty have remained entrenched in our sporting culture, confirming the difference between the sexes and leading to separatist sporting policies. By contrast to many long established team sports Ultimate developed some years later and, far from being separatist in its development it has long proclaimed itself as a mixed sport. Thus it provides an interesting context within which to examine issues of gender and masculinity in **Chapter 7**.

The first part of this chapter explores how sport has become synonymous with traditional notions of masculinity (Connell, 1995), and suggestions that alternative sports such as Ultimate, present a less clear-cut cultural landscape and can offer something of a challenge to established ideas (Wheaton and Tomlinson (1998). The second part of this chapter explores this issue further and draws upon key indicators suggested by Whitson (1987), Birrell and Richter (1987) and Theberge (2000), as well as Thornton's (2004) assessment of this issue in North American Ultimate. Despite the celebrated uniqueness of participating in a mixed team sport, key, pivotal and ideological shifts have occurred within Ultimate in the UK and this becomes the focus for the final part of this chapter as recently elite performers have sought to reject the unique selling point of mixed Ultimate as a desirable sporting model of co-operation and moved to a more separatist stance mirrored in other more dominant team games. The implications of this decision are also speculated upon.

In **Chapter 8**, Aesthetics emerge as a focal theme because the data reveals repeated references to and celebration of the aesthetic elements of play from both performers and spectators. This became apparent when first considering how the landscape for Ultimate provides a specific aesthetic backdrop for play, manifested in aspects such as physical location and musical background. This aspect was unexpected because Ultimate, as with other 'invasion games' such as rugby and football, does not, at face value, seek to be especially beautiful or to contain elements of deep aesthetic value. It is, what is termed by Best (1978), a 'purposive sport' – where the purpose of activity can be specified, such as scoring a point. How this occurs within the rules is relatively immaterial. 'Expressive' sports, by contrast, such as figure skating or gymnastics, cannot easily be separated from the aesthetic. How they are performed is implicit within the activity and the marking (Best, 1978). Such a classification is far from exhaustive but it usefully indicates where the relative focus lies (McFee 2004).

Even 'purposive sports such as football, do of course have, an aesthetic dimension – where grace, line elegance and the like are celebrated' (McFee, 2004: 91). However, the data obtained here goes further than exploring mere aspects of artistic form. In order to examine it fully an analytical structure outlined by Carlisle (1974) has been used for the sake of clarity. Within this, consideration is firstly given to expressive and evocative elements, followed by the apparent beauty of Ultimate and, lastly, a focus on its dramatic elements.

The fourth major theme to emerge within this study, which is covered in **Chapter 9,** is that of the development and apparently imminent fragmentation of Ultimate in the UK.

The wider context here can be found in Chapter 2, as consecutive governing bodies of Ultimate within the UK have actively sought formal recognition from external parent sporting bodies for more than a decade. This became most sharply apparent with the formation of the UKUA in 2002 as the new national governing body of the sport, and the UKUA's joining of the Central Council for Physical Recreation (CCPR), followed by its gaining of British Universities Sports Association (BUSA) recognition in April 2006 and UK Sport recognition in November 2008. The UKUA has brought a more 'professional' edge previously unseen in the governance of UK Ultimate, practically illustrated in its inception through the consolidating of the 'Open' Tour as the premier national Ultimate competition and strategically through the establishment of promotional objectives.

The key themes here are a major focus on promoting and supporting elite performers with no obvious similar attention given towards grassroots development. This focus has manifested itself in a number of ways over recent years, most notably by encouraging elite 'super teams' in the Open Tour. This has been done by lifting the restriction on players required to play for local teams, the creation of the Womens' Tour, the consolidation of the Mixed Tour, and the overall focus given to prioritising outdoor Ultimate over indoor. In addition the UKUA has looked to 'improve' the product by the introduction of kit rules, compliance with drug testing regulations and the introduction of coaching programmes. Each of these changes however can be seen to be a site of resistance, the specific details of which are discussed in turn in the first part of this chapter.

Issues that appear to hinder the wider legitimacy of Ultimate still further are the name of the sport and the object played with. To an outsider, the question remains to many, '*What, exactly is* ultimate about it?*'*

> *'Do you play with a metal disc with jagged edges? I thought as it was Ultimate Frisbee you might use something more dangerous.'* (Comment made to author by non participant – Recorded in field notes 21/04/06)

The apparent pretentiousness that the word Ultimate conveys in this respect is seemingly made worse by the trivialness of playing a serious team sport with a beach toy, a Frisbee. Unsurprisingly perhaps, many see a game that involves a Frisbee as trivial, as it is something that they 'play with' during leisure time or with their dog.

What resonates through each site of resistance is that Ultimate is also clearly a sport that is divided as it contends with a modernisation agenda from the governing body which is at odds somewhat with the 'alternative' counter cultural values which historically the sport has come to embody. What appears to underlie both a quest for legitimacy and this modernising agenda is the rejection by the elite players and key decision makers of the 'stigma' (Goffman, 1963) typically carried by committed participants of a minor sport that is not taken especially seriously by 'outsiders'. Data indicates that a 'tipping point' appears to have been reached by the decision makers and elite players about the direction the sport is now heading in, something which is leading to a clear divide between the elite and the grassroots.

A summary of the key findings makes up the concluding chapter. To clarify terms and any sub-cultural argot, a glossary has been provided and can be found in the Appendices.

Chapter 1

Research on sporting subcultures

1. What is sport?

Everyone knows what sport is. Ask most people actively engaged in their chosen organised physical activity such as football, or me in my pursuit of Ultimate Frisbee, and we will tell you a version of what *it* is or simply that we play *it*. Such responses according to Dyck (2000: 20) are typical, not least because there is an understandable 'inclination for sports persons to configure their notions of sport to match their own experiences and knowledge.' Unfortunately this position is not viable for those wishing to study sport academically. Blanchard (1995), Guttmann (2007) and Coakley (2003) all highlight the need to define activities such as sports so that they might be studied with more focus and to this end, all offer clear definitions or mechanisms through which sport can be categorised.

Blanchard (1995: 9) indicates that a sport is 'a game like activity having rules, a competitive element and requiring some form of exertion.' A similar conclusion is reached by Guttmann (2007:25) who proposes the use of the 'inverted tree diagram' (see below) with which to identify a sport where one should ask a series of three questions about an activity: is it spontaneous or organised?; is it competitive or non competitive?; and is the contest intellectual or physical? (Guttmann, 2007).

```
                              PLAY
                               |
          ┌────────────────────┴────────────────────┐
  Spontaneous Play                          Organized Play (GAMES)
                    ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
          Noncompetitive Games              Competitive Games (CONTESTS)
                          ┌───────────────────────┴──────┐
            Intellectual Contests              Physical Contests (SPORTS)
```
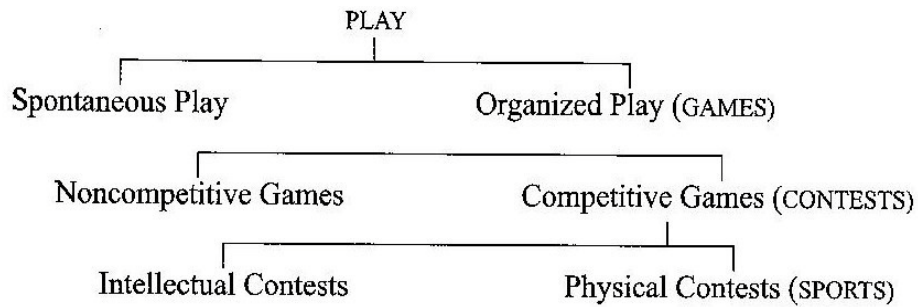
Therefore, by selection, to be considered a sport the activity should be organised, competitive and physical in nature. Features contained here are built upon by Coakley (2003: 21) who states that sports are 'institutionalised competitive activities that involve rigorous physical exertion or the use of relatively complex physical skills by participants motivated by internal or external rewards.'

Though there are clear areas of similarity in these and other definitions there are also clear, notable differences and questions. For example how 'physical' does physical need to be? Is snooker physical enough to be considered a sport? Is it more physical than motor sport, which is essentially sedentary? How competitive must it be? How organised or rule bound? Both Guttmann (2007) and Coakley (2003) propose a myriad of activities that offer numerous contradictions, highlighting further the complexity inherent in trying to define what is, in essence, an 'Essentially Contested Concept' (Gallie, 1956: 167). That is it to say, it is difficult [and arguably impossible] to arrive at a consensus on what sport 'is' (Horne et al, 1999).

This has led Dyck (2000) to conclude that how we choose to define sport may be less significant than what we can learn from examination of how and why these definitions

may be used, most notably in the way this changes over time and the hierarchies that evolve therein.

Historically, understanding what sport 'is' is made problematic not least by the fact that it has changed its meaning over time. A few hundred years ago arguably most people would surely have included field sports and activities perceived today as cruel (MacAloon, 1987). These activities might not be considered today as sports and they are a far cry away from modern sporting forms such as football or netball that are more easily recognisable in this way. By the same token, an Elizabethan Englishman may, similarly, not recognise netball as an activity which he might term 'sport'. What this example also shows is that hierarchies can also evolve as some sports change their place in the public consciousness, leading to a system whereby some sports become dominant, some become residual and others emergent (Horne et al, 1999). In recent times the media have come to play a significant role in shaping this hierarchy illustrated most starkly and lucidly by Horne et al, (1999: 161) indicating that 'if it is on TV then it must be a sport.'

Ultimate Frisbee, the sport under investigation in this thesis, would seemingly fit into what has been expressed here as an emergent sport (fitting easily into any of the definitions of sport outlined previously) but its place as a minor sport next to a dominant activity such as football is clear. This tension, along with others already outlined in the introduction, illustrates Dyck's (2000) assertion that such are the numerous and complex issues apparent in the broad area of sports and within individual sports, that it offers a field of enquiry that is compelling to study. Locating the academic study of sport has however not been straightforward as Dyck (2000) further explains. Although

sport may well be a compelling area to study, convincing others in his own field of anthropology has been problematic. Similar concerns have been voiced by Bourdieu (1990) about sociology and ultimately (and perhaps naturally) this has led to the historical development of a distinct field known as the sociology of sport.

2. The sociology of sport – a brief historical context

The study of the sociology of sport can be traced back at least as far as 1921 when Heinz Risse published the *'Soziologie des Sports'* at the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research. However, it was not until the 1950s and the expansion of Higher Education that occurred across most Western countries that a stream of papers centred around the sub-discipline began to emerge in the USA (Coakley and Dunning, 2000). Yet it has probably only been in the last thirty years that mainstream sociology journals have been willing to publish papers which use sociological perspectives to study sport.

It has been suggested that historically 'many sociologists around the world have seen sports as trivial, non productive dimensions of society and culture that do not merit scholarly attention relative to more serious issues and concerns' (Coakley and Dunning, 2000: xxiv). This is perhaps not surprising given that most early academics came from the higher social classes to whom sport was peripheral and of little interest and not a 'mental' aspect of culture (Blanchard, 1985). The fact that early sporting contributions were based largely on empirical study and not grounded in theory did little to contradict this viewpoint.

That said, what emerged over decades of study in the sociology of sport was the problematisation of what were classic sociological dualisms, such as 'individual v society' and 'macro v micro analysis', and with it the more diligent application of social theory (Dawe, 1970). Accordingly, major paradigmatic stances have emerged within the sociology of sport, such as the early dominance of Functionalism (see Edwards, 1973; Stevenson, 1974); the rise of Marxism (see Hargreaves, 1995), and Feminism (see Birrell, 1988); the growth in importance of Interpretative approaches (see Donnelly, 2000); the emergence of Post Modernism in sport (see Slowikowski, 1991); and the rise of figurational sociology (see Elias and Dunning, 1986).

Of these competing stances, those taking an Interpretative approach deal with the 'everyday life' of participants and, in particular, concerns itself with my prime concern here, the analysis of sporting subcultures (Donnelly, 2000).

3. Analysing subcultures

Concepts such as 'subculture', 'community' and 'societies' are increasingly used interchangeably by social scientists (Wheaton, 2004; Thornton, 1997). Gordon (1947: 40) first defined the term 'subculture' as:

> 'a subdivision of a national culture, composed of a combination of factorable social situations such as class status, ethnic background, regional and rural or urban residence , and religious affiliation, but forming in their combination a functioning unity which has an integrated impact on the participating individual.'

Donnelly (1985: 559) suggests that, over time, researchers have taken this rather wide-ranging definition and have constructed meanings and theories to suit their own specific

studies, resulting in a situation in which we are left with 'a word that has been used to refer to everything from a single sport team to the entire black population of the United States'.

In an extensive review of subcultural studies, Thornton (1997:1) notes that despite sixty or so years of shifting debates on what the term 'subculture' means, the one common factor that can be identified across the existing body of work is the idea that 'subcultures are groups of people who have something in common with each other (i.e. they share a problem, an interest, a practice) which distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other social groups.' Such a definition, although helpful at face value, becomes problematic under closer scrutiny, not least because such a description would be true of other terms used to define populations, such as 'societies' or 'communities'. Attention can also be directed here to the term 'sub-world' in relation to ethnographic work on sport (see Crosset and Beal 1997).

Not surprisingly, such terms are commonly used interchangeably with the term 'subculture' (Thornton, 1997) but disparities can be found which determine when and why one or another should apply in any given case. Firstly, the concept of 'societies' is largely considered to relate best to those who study macro-sociology and who concern themselves with larger structural sociological issues, such as power and class (Thornton, 1997). By contrast, subcultures are often studied by qualitative researchers interested in micro-sociological research that is interested in the interaction between individuals (Donnelly, 1985). Secondly, by association with a concept of structure, societies are often identifiable by the fact that they can simply be joined and therefore, commonly, have a 'membership' (Fine and Kleinman, 1979). Subcultures, on the other hand, are

not something that an individual can simply enter into, as time is required to learn and adopt the defining values and behaviour (Wheaton, 2004). As such, traditionally documenting the everyday life of such as group is a job best left to the insider (Thornton, 1997).

Furthermore, the use of the word 'community' thus far in social science has tended to suggest a more permanent population, often linked with a particular neighbourhood, of which the family is commonly a key constituent (Gelder and Thornton, 1997). In contrast, groups that have, to date, been identified as 'subcultures' have tended to be studied *apart* from their families and away from areas of domesticity (see Fox, 1987). In addition, a common theme to subcultural studies has been the idea that such groups are somehow 'different' and are held in a lower social standing from the normative ideals of the wider culture (or parent culture) in which they are located (hence the use of the prefix 'sub'). The most notable examples of this are found, of course, in the work produced at Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in the 1970s, which largely dealt with the resistant (or deviant) and ritualistic behaviour of 'youth subcultures' (for collected examples see Hall and Jefferson, 1976 and in particular Clarke et al., 1975).

Forms of resistance of various kinds are said to be best manifested in sports such as surfing, skateboarding and – I would argue - Ultimate Frisbee which have typically evolved from North America and were imported into Europe (Bourdieu, 1984) and which have their roots in the counter-cultural social movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Midol and Broyer, 1995; Midol, 1993). Typically, they possess, 'characteristics that are different from the traditional rule bound, competitive and masculinised dominant sport

cultures' (Wheaton, 2004: 3) and thus these activities are 'informal, playful and expressive precisely because the dominant sporting culture in North America was (and is) rationalised, technologised, bureaucratised and patriarchal' (Donnelly, 1993: 134).

The case for viewing such sports as different from the 'norm' is made best by Donnelly (1985) who uses the term 'semi-deviant' to identify specific sporting or leisure pursuits (in this instance hand gliding) (McDougall, 1979 cited in Donnelly, 1985), pursuits which are traditionally pursued by the minority. Though such activities have qualities that are shared by mainstream sports, such as commitment and courage, they are often criticised for their alleged 'pointlessness'. Perhaps a better explanation of the relationship of such activities to mainstream sport can be found in the work of Brake (1985) who considered that a subculture is not unlike the use of slang: part of the dominant system, yet nonetheless unique. Although the shared values and norms of a subculture depart from those of a broader culture, they are not however completely oppositional or detached from the larger society (Crosset and Beal, 1997).

4. The development of sporting subcultures

Though there are some isolated early academic studies that pertain to sport, such as those by Tylor (1871), Cullin (1907), Firth (1931) and Lesser (1933) (all cited in Sands (2002), Weinberg and Arond's (1952) research on boxers became the first of many subsequent studies documenting what could be accurately termed sporting *subcultures*. In early works on sport the particular focus was towards mapping out sporting 'careers' (what Loy et al., 1978 later termed 'occupational subcultures'). However, the majority of work of this type was not carried out until the sociology of sport became more

credibly established (Loy and Kenyon, 1965). Examples of notable work that followed in the same tradition include Stone's (1972) study of wrestlers and Faulkner's (1974) study of ice hockey players. As a further development out of this early work, the cultural characteristics of subcultures began to be studied without referring to the idea of 'career'. One of the first studies to investigate what might be called 'avocational subcultures' (Loy et al., 1978) dealing purely with leisure and recreation was by Pearson, (1979), who focused his attention on surfers.

An important contribution that both occupational and avocational studies of sport have made has been their ability to open up the non public or 'back stage' characteristics of a subculture (see Goffman, 1959) which reveal such attributes as 'the special language, knowledge, and understandings that serve to distinguish the in-group from the out-group and the various forms of norm-breaking behaviour that is hidden from the general public' (Donnelly, 1985: 546). Such has been the general impact of the awareness of this special sporting language or 'argot' that examples have increasingly slipped into everyday usage e.g. 'taking a time out.' Such language makes up an important part of an identity of a sport and its participants and Ultimate is no exception (see Glossary of Terms).

In reviewing the related literature on sport, the 1980s saw a marked change in how sporting subcultures were examined (Donnelly, 2000). Firstly, the work of Geertz (1973) and his methodological approach to writing a 'thick description' led to much richer accounts of the social contexts of sporting practices being documented. Secondly, the development of subcultural theory at the CCCS meant that researchers were able to theorise how sport and leisure practices were socially constructed and how participants

attached meanings to their actions (Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Hebidge, 1979). Important examples of work that resulted in the light of such changes might include the studies by Williams et al., (1989) on football hooliganism and Sugden's (1987) study of boxing.

5. Subcultures - towards an alternative to mainstream sport

Over the last decade there has emerged a body of academic literature examining the phenomenon of what has been variously termed, 'extreme, alternative, lifestyle, whiz, action, panic, post modern, post industrial and new sport' (Wheaton, 2004: 2). Examples of such literature are referred to by Sands (2002) as 'sports ethnographies' and they include studies of skateboarding (Beal, 1995; Borden, 2001) baseball (Klein, 1997), snowboarding (Humphreys, 1997), windsurfing (Wheaton, 2000) and surfing (Butts, 2001; Booth, 2003).

The study of, and subsequent public identification of, such sporting activities probably emerged with the work of Nancy Midol (see Midol 1993 and Midol and Broyer 1995) who first classified them using the term 'whiz' sports. Midol and Broyer (1995: 210) suggest that for such activities:

> 'The culture is extremely different from the official one promoted by sporting institutions. The whiz sport culture is championed by avant-garde groups that challenge the unconscious defences of the existing order through which…society has defined itself for the last two centuries. These groups have dared to practice transgressive behaviours and create new values.'

Whilst Midol developed her thinking based upon the experiences of French culture, in North America the term 'alternative' became increasingly used to describe such

departures (Beal, 1995; Rinehart 1996; Humphreys 1997). The concept of 'extreme' was also used increasingly by the media during the same period. According to Rinehart and Sydnor (2003: 2), 'the labels extreme or X are everywhere these days. If someone wishes to convey radical, extraordinary, unusual properties to nearly any product, activity, individual or lifestyle, these terms crop up'. Most notably, this has occurred with the emergence of ESPN's 'Extreme Games', later to be repackaged as the 'X Games' (Kusz, 2002).

The adequacy of the definition of such activities has been considered most notably by Rinehart (see Rinehart and Sydnor, 2003; Rinehart 2000) and includes a range of activities that broadly fail to fit into traditional conceptions of Western achievement sport (Bale, 1994; Eichberg, 1998) such as jet skiing, beach volleyball and ultra-distance running. The 'alternative' here refers to how such sports present a challenge to the traditional way of doing and understanding sport (Wheaton, 2000). More particularly, they possess 'characteristics that are different from the traditional rule bound, competitive and masculinised dominant sport cultures' (Wheaton, 2004: 3). For instance, many celebrate an artistic or flamboyant quality to their play (Howe, 2003; Humphreys, 1997; Booth 2003). Wheaton (2004) suggests that as well as providing an alternative for participants, some activities such as windsurfing represent a lifestyle rather a sport. Significantly, Wheaton's (2004) collection entitled *Understanding Lifestyle Sports* includes a chapter by Andrew Thornton which focuses upon Ultimate Frisbee.

To what extent the differences in nomenclature aid the general discussion is debatable, especially when, in most instances and irrespective of the definitions used, authors seem

to mean similar, if not identical, qualities. What is clear however, as Maguire (1999: 87) suggests, is that the emergence of such sports highlights a 'creolisation of sport cultures', whereby sports continue to diversify and challenge traditional modes.

Indeed, Kellner (1992: 141) points out, when older research was conducted social identity was relatively fixed and stable, based as it was on 'traditional social identifiers such as gender, ethnicity, race and age.' In contemporary Western society by contrast, 'identity becomes more mobile, multiple, personal, self reflexive and subject to change and innovation.' In fact for authors such as Bauman (1992), 'lifestyle' has begun to overshadow traditional identifiers such as social class. As such, traditional social categories have become destabilised, seeing an increasing fluidity in social relationships (Wheaton, 2004). This, in turn, has led to more complex concepts of identity coming into play (Bradley, 1996).

Maffesoli (1996) suggests that the emergence of these new groups and classifications offers more fluidity than those accepted in previous definitions of subculture and that the process of identity construction will continue to become increasingly complex (Chaney, 1996). One key issue identified in more recent studies is the observation that ascribed characteristics (see Gordon, 1947) e.g. of sex, age, social class etc do not mean that the individuals in that group necessarily share any of the same *cultural* characteristics. Therefore, what links a social group together in subcultural studies are best defined by use of *achieved* characteristics (Donnelly, 1985). According to Wheaton (2004) the common belief amongst current researchers studying sporting subcultures is that subcultural identities are not static but are contested and are, in fact, remade over time and space.

As outlined in the methodology chapter of this thesis, I argue that in order to gain an insight and access to what is termed the 'authentic' experience, that this is best defined and observed as part of *doing* the activity (see also Butts, 2001; Sands, 2002; Wheaton and Beal, 2003). In particular, this type of practice enables the researcher to 'get past' the more immediately visible, but 'screening' aspects of such activities. For example, an unaware observer may interpret a young person wearing clothing typically associated with skating as a 'skater', whereas an 'insider' within a subculture might not. These symbolic boundaries and behaviours are wide ranging involving beliefs and ritualised practices, language and skills.

Donnelly and Young (1988: 224) suggest that the establishment of subcultural identity in sport is 'intended for two distinct audiences – members of the larger society and members of the subculture'. According to Jenkins (2004: 97) this serves the purpose of constructing visible external differences which in turn 'generates internal similarity', thus 'distinguishing the in-group from the out-group' (Donnelly, 1985: 546). In the process of deciding what similarities and differences exist, theoretical boundaries are created and at that point, individuals can be considered 'insiders' or 'outsiders' (Barth, 1969). However the concept of a fixed boundary is problematic because:

> 'Even where it can be said to exist, it's far from clear 'where' or 'what' the boundary of any particular boundary "is". This is not surprising, since "it" is not, really, anywhere or anything. Boundaries are to be found in interaction between people who identify themselves collectively in different ways' (Jenkins, 2004: 103).

This point can be most simply illustrated by the use in sporting subcultures of a specific argot or specialised language (Wheaton, 2004). Boundary issues can best be explained

and resolved, therefore, by the fact that, 'some cultural features are used by actors as signals and emblems of differences, others are ignored, and in some relationships radical differences are played down and denied' (Barth, 1969:14). In this instance, insiders have the dominant power to fix the rules and, therefore, the boundaries as they see fit. The cumulative information that is held inside a boundary by a group of people therefore becomes the identity of the collective form (Barth, 1966). Thornton (1997: 202) argues that the cumulative information of insiders serves as a form of 'subcultural capital.'

Just being exposed to subcultural capital is in itself of course insufficient to turn an outsider into an insider. As (Horne et al., 1999:140) indicates:

> 'Becoming involved in sport involves a process of identity construction and confirmation...one's identity as a participant is affirmed and reaffirmed over time.'

In addition to analysing the social construction of identity and underlying social meaning, Horne et al., (1999) indicate that, to date, the most effective studies into sporting (sub)cultures have also focused upon the dynamics of participation decisions. Participation in any activity is dependent on a wide and complex range of factors which may influence decisions people make about how and why we take part (Coakley and Donnelly, 1999). These factors can include aspects such as self reflection, social support, social acceptance and both cultural and political factors (Coakley, 2003).

What is apparent here is that clear patterns of increasing commitment are evident throughout the life histories of many participants in sport. Most commonly, with many popular sports individuals typically make a smooth transition through school and local

club and beyond (Stebbins, 1992). Stevenson (1999) identified a progression amongst athletes that clarified this journey starting with early introductions and involvements, and moving through to entanglement and then on, later, to greater commitments. Stebbins (1992) suggests that such participants who show significant commitment to an activity and engage in it for significant amounts of their leisure time become engaged in 'serious leisure.'

6.   Research on Ultimate Frisbee

To my knowledge, there have been three significant academic pieces of work which have sought to gain some insight into the sub-cultural world of Ultimate Frisbee. The first of these to report upon is the paper by Robbins (2004) who explains how he was attracted to the academic study of the sport in a similar way to myself, as a participant with some nagging questions and a realisation that these, or even the sport more broadly, had not been explored in existing literature. In particular, Robbins (2004) explored the nature of self refereeing in Ultimate Frisbee in the USA and published the work in the *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*. It became apparent in this work that the spirit of the game was ambiguous and negotiable in nature, as were specific rules such as 'no contact' being allowed. Though apparently straightforward, such a rule is actually subject to interpretation, with contact at the highest levels being much more permissible than at the lowest levels. Robbins (2004) sought to explore this area theoretically by studying three different levels of competition and applying both a rational choice model of behaviour (Hechter and Kanazawa, 1997) and game theory (Axelrod, 1986). His approach was qualitative in nature and was gathered by video recording players during practice, making field observations and engaging in informal

interviews. The research was conducted on three different college sites in the Pacific North West and on each occasion the researcher's role changed, moving from almost complete participant in the first instance to complete observer in the latter. His analysis identified that at all levels Ultimate players start with existing common norms and practices but then interpret and invoke these norms and practices differently depending on the situation (Robbins, 2004).

The paper also acknowledges the limits to which the findings can be generalised, especially as elite competition was not the sole focus of the research. However the further need for study in this area is highlighted and, interestingly, the author suggests investigating different aspects, such as self refereeing and comparing its practice within different groups e.g. in Masters (over 30s) and Womens' events.

Thornton (2004) contributed a chapter in Wheaton's (2004) edited text entitled *Understanding Lifestyle Sports* and he reported on the ambivalences apparent within Ultimate in North American (primarily Canada), focusing on gender, the spirit of the game and the play itself. The findings reported were an amalgam of personal observations from participation and qualitative data collected as part of an unpublished thesis completed at the University of Toronto some six years earlier. Firstly, it was indicated that traditional constructions of masculinity and femininity are manifest most notably in Ultimate through the brave and skilful play exhibited by *men*. This is in keeping with more traditional American sports, despite the fact that Ultimate players suggest that the sport represents a form of embodied equality. Secondly, again with an interest in the spirit of the game in mind, Thornton (2004) concludes that although Ultimate players espouse the virtues of such an ethos, because self refereeing occurs not

everyone's interpretation of events and outcomes will match. Thirdly, building upon the first point, it is indicated that to be brave, physical and aggressive is celebrated by the majority of players (denoted on occasions by comparing physical scars) despite the espoused 'non contact' nature of the activity. Overall, his conclusions are that in a sport dominated by young, white, heterosexual men, the transformative and progressive values espoused by participants are no more than, 'the production of a new space in which to play around with established boundaries of identity' (Thornton, 2004: 193).

The only identified academic work on Ultimate in the UK is that of Smith (2008) who advocates the use of Ultimate in Physical Education in UK schools, identifying the benefits of offering an alternative invasion game that requires the mastery of new equipment and new skills. The paper published in the professional journal *Physical Education Matters* makes a compelling case to teachers for the adoption of the sport into the school curriculum, highlighting the merits of fitness promotion, social inclusion and low cost. In addition, the concept of self refereeing is identified as a useful vehicle for delivering wider curriculum requirements, aligned to social and moral development. There is, however, no empirical aspect to this work.

The contributions of these authors, despite being few in number, should be noted not least because of their effective role in shining a new light on the sport as an area of academic interest and opening the field for others to follow. Gaining acceptance for such pieces with academic editors and reviewers who may not have anticipated such a broad scope to their work should also not be underestimated: I too need to publish.

7. Summary

This chapter explains how the sociology of sport developed sufficient intellectual forward momentum to flourish as a discrete area of academic study. As the area developed researchers have used a wide variety of research techniques, theories and concepts to organise and analyse their findings. The study of subcultures is one such concept in which 'groups of people that have something in common with each other (i.e. they share a problem, an interest, a practice) which distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other social groups' (Thornton, 1997:1). In sport, the analysis of sporting subcultures has featured for almost half a century but during this time the focus has shifted considerably. Ultimate has been identified as such a sport (see Thornton, 2004 in Wheaton, 2004) but as yet has been given little academic attention, especially in the UK. The empirical research that exists to date has had a very narrow focus and has been based almost exclusively in North America. There is an opportunity here using this study to make a contribution to the small but emerging, literature concerning the sporting subculture of Ultimate Frisbee by critically examining in detail the specific cultural characteristics of the sport as it is played within the UK. But before moving in that direction in the next chapter I want to look at the origins and history of Ultimate.

Chapter 2

The Origins and Development of Ultimate

From invention to recognition

1. Introduction

Ultimate, as with all disc sports, would not exist without the invention of the flying disc, or 'Frisbee', as it is commonly known. Flying discs have of course been thrown in numerous cultures for centuries for a variety of reasons, including sport (Malafronte, 1998). The origins of Ultimate Frisbee can be argued to have gone through a number of distinctive and crucial stages and each will be discussed in turn. Firstly, I will examine the origin of the name 'Frisbee' followed by the subsequent development of the plastic flying disc. The original idea of 'Frisbee football' will then be explained and then attention will briefly be devoted to locating the development of Ultimate within the American counter culture of the 1960s. Finally the invention of Ultimate and the first game will be detailed. The game arrived in the UK some ten years after its creation in the USA and it faced a very different political and social climate from that from which it came. As such, the sport's development in the UK has evolved in a very particular way over the last thirty years and this is explored in the second half of the chapter. The development of UK sports policy is outlined which serves to provide the context for the introduction of Ultimate Frisbee in the UK. In addition the relevance of the sport taking root in the University sector before spreading more widely in Britain is discussed. The

chapter concludes by examining how the subsequent governing bodies of Ultimate within the UK have actively sought formal recognition from external bodies for more than a decade.

2.   The origins of the 'Frisbee'

The origin of the name 'Frisbee' is accepted by most sources to be traceable to one William Russell Frisbie of Bridgeport, Connecticut (Johnson, 1975; Malafronte, 1998; Iocovella, 2004; Leonardo and Zagoria, 2004). Following the end of the American Civil War, William Russell (W.R.) Frisbie moved to Bridgeport to manage a new bakery, which he subsequently bought and renamed, the 'Frisbie Pie Company'. The original bakery was situated close to the college which later became Yale in 1887 (Scotland, 2004). Not surprisingly, perhaps, there are strong links between Yale and the origination of the Frisbee. The popular theory – perhaps it is a myth - is that Yale students frequently bought Frisbie Pies and after eating them would toss the empty pie tins around the Yale campus (Johnson, 1975; Malafronte, 1998) (see Appendix A). As metal pie dishes are not the kindest of missiles to be struck by, this led to throwers shouting the cautionary word 'frisbie-e-e-e!' (not unlike golfers shouting the word 'Fore!') to warn both the catcher and bystanders of the approaching disc (Weiss, 2004).

Not surprisingly, in the absence of definitive evidence on this issue, modified or alternative stories abound. One particular point of contention is whether the projectile concerned was indeed a pie tin or whether, in fact, it was a cookie tin lid. Support for the cookie argument can be found in (Johnson, 1975) who conducted interviews with

former Yale students. An example of one such account is credited to ex-Yale man Charles O. Gregory who recalled:

> 'I clearly remember the cookies; and I also recall that the cover of the tin box was used by the older kids just the same way that Frisbees are now used... When I went to college...I saw students using these same tin box lids as people now use Frisbees. So I assumed that the name came from these sugar cookies and the boxes in which they were sold…. I never heard of Frisbie's pies' (quoted Johnson, 1975: 18).

As a semi-professional player and respected writer on Ultimate, Malafronte (1998: 35) considers that cookie tins were more likely to have been used for throwing games. 'With their flat tops and deeper perpendicular edged rims [they] were much more air worthy – players could perform a variety of throws, with more control than a pie pan.' However, the belief persists that the tossing of pie pans was equally popular and, in some cases, was likely to be more so given the fact that pies were considerably cheaper to purchase for the typical student than tins of cookies (Malafronte, 1998). Johnson (1975) considers that both cases probably have some truth and merit but that additional research, including conversations with the widow of Joseph P. Frisbie (son and heir of the late W.R. Frisbie) and former plant manager Mr. Vaughn, leads strongly to the conclusion that the earlier prototype was most likely to have been the pie tin.

In addition to Yale – and in accordance with the rising heritage industry - other East Coast USA colleges also claim to be the birthplace of the 'Frisbee' (Weiss, 2004). For instance, at Middlebury College in Vermont, a statue of a dog caught in mid-Frisbee-snatching-flight has been erected to celebrate the claim that a group of Middlebury boys discovered pie-pan tossing while on a road trip to a fraternity convention in Nebraska in 1938 (Weiss, 2004). Such claims are perhaps not surprising when one considers that, according to Malafronte (1998), workers of the Frisbie Pie Company travelled around

many of the 'Ivy League' institutions of New England and were apparently renowned for tossing pie tins around during their breaks.

3. The development of the flying disc

Following the end of World War II and in the context of gathering anxieties about future external threats, supposed sightings of UFOs and flying saucers were beginning to grab the public's imagination in the USA (McMahon, 1998). Capturing the prevailing public mood, one budding American inventor, Fred Morrison, took an idea to the Southern Californian Plastics Company and in conjunction with Warren Francioni produced a crude prototype plastic flying disc, known as the Arcuate Vane model in 1948 (Johnson, 1975; Mc Mahon, 1998; Malafronte 1998). In 1951 Morrison went on to produce his second model called the Pluto Platter which he sold at fairs with moderate success (Scotland, 2004). Although the importance of the Pluto Platter cannot be underestimated, as it became the blueprint for all subsequent Frisbees (Johnson, 1975), it was not in fact initially mass produced.

However, among the young student population in the USA, the Platter was gaining popularity and 1954 saw the first recorded competition using a flying disc when Dartmouth University (New Hampshire, USA) students organised a tournament for the disc sport known as 'Guts' (Iocovella, 2004). In addition, the Pluto Platter, significantly, reached the USA West coast beaches too. According to Johnson (1975), the story goes that Rich Knerr and A.K."Spud" Melin, fresh from the University of Southern California, had established a fledgling toy company known as Wham-O. In late 1955, after seeing Pluto Platters whizzing around southern California beaches, they cornered

Morrison while he was 'hawking his wares' in downtown Los Angeles and made him a proposition (Malafronte, 1998). In 1958, mass production of a Pluto Platter based design began (USA Design patent 183,626 – See Appendix B). But as co-founder of Wham –O, Knerr recalls (quoted in Johnson, 1975: 20), 'At first the saucers had trouble catching on but we were confident they were good, so we sprinkled them in different parts of the country to prime the market.' According to Scotland (2004), however, disc production would have been far from paramount given the success of Wham-O's other new creation which began a national craze, the hula-hoop.

In a bid to improve both the flying properties and the marketability of the Pluto Platter, Wham-O turned to another fledgling inventor called Ed Headrick and in 1967, the 'Wham-O Frisbee' was launched   (USA patent design 3359678 – see Appendix C). It is alleged that it was Knerr who picked up the catchy term whilst on a trip around the campuses of the Ivy League colleges. He reported that Harvard students told him how they had been throwing pie tins around for years and calling it 'Frisbie-ing'. Being unaware of the possible origins of the word (the Frisbie Pie Company closed in 1958 and Knerr was not from the East Coast) he spelled his new creation as 'Frisbee' (Johnson, 1975).

4. 'Frisbee football' – and Ultimate is born in 1967

Frisbee football (a version of American football played with a flying disc) is recorded as the origin of many games similar to Ultimate (Johnson, 1975; Malafronte, 1998; Zagoria, 2003). Accounts of such games are recorded at institutions such as Kenyon College, Ohio as early as 1942. A version of such a game (referred to as 'Aceball' was

later captured by _Life_ magazine in 1950 (Malafronte, 1998). Evidence of another similar game, involving 'a plastic or metal serving tray' cropped up at Amherst College in the early 1950s. In a letter to the editor, published in the January 1958 Amherst Alumni News, Peter Schrag (alumni from 1953) describes this game, stating that:

> 'Rules have sprung up and although they vary, the game as now played is something like touch (football), each team trying to score goals by passing the tray down field.' (quoted by Leonardo and Zagoria, 2004: 5).

Established sources indicate that the most likely origin of Ultimate probably rests with members of Columbia High School (CHS), Maplewood, NJ, USA, who introduced their idea of an 'Ultimate Frisbee' game to their student council in 1967 (see Appendix D). The key individual among the group in devising Ultimate was probably a student called Joel Silver who had played Frisbee Football at a camp in Mount Herman, Massachusetts in the summer of 1967 (Johnson, 1975; Malafronte, 1998; Iocovella, 2004; Leonardo and Zagoria, 2004).

Ultimate was conceived in the USA amidst political assassinations, the escalating war in Vietnam, urban riots and civil rights unrest (Heale, 2001). The Vietnam War had raged for over a decade and with no end in sight and a growing casualty list, the American population were growing tired and impatient with their leaders and questioning their country's involvement in the conflict. With President Johnson misjudging not only the military situation but also the public mood, the escalation of the war effort which committed over half a million troops to a 'distant corner' of South East Asia by 1965, led to increasing civil unrest among the American population, evident through ever growing public demonstrations (Anderson, 1995).

This served to build upon further domestic hostilities involving the struggle of the civil rights movement which dominated the first half of the decade, which saw riots across most American cities, the bombings of black churches, murders of civil rights workers, and police beatings of protesters. Furthermore, at a time when an anxious American population wanted to look to its charismatic political and religious leaders to find its stability and direction, confidence was shaken still further by the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy in 1963, African-American minister, Malcolm X in 1965, presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy and civil rights leader, Martin Luther King Jr in 1968 (Heale, 2001).

As increasing numbers of young Americans became 'alienated from the parental generation' they looked for forms of escape and resistance from civic unrest and loosely formed what became known as the 'counter culture' (Roszak, 1972: 1). The forms of escape and resistance were manifest in a multitude of ways including political activism and protest, the creation of alternative lifestyles, experimental and communal living and through dress, drugs and music (Heale, 2001). Although 'hippies' embodied key features of the US counter culture in their anti-commercialism and their anti-work/pro-personal fulfilment agenda and were widely taken to represent a serious threat to the American establishment, it was actually middle class, college educated students who were at the very heart of the counter culture events and attitudes. In short, 'there were more conservative kids who were eager apprentices of the system' (Anderson, 1995: 242) as baby boomers flooded onto campuses.

The values and behaviours that came to represent the core tenets of the counter culture, which was at its height in 1967 during what was termed the 'Summer of Love' (Farrell, 1997), were that of democratic action, perceived alternative and superior lifestyle choices, communal caring and sharing, an appreciation of beauty and nature, having a relaxed and laid back attitude, rejecting regulation and technology and encouraging self expression and personal growth (Heale, 2001; Anderson, 1995). For those espousing such values they viewed the time and the counter culture idealistically as, 'an instrument of change. They hoped that through spreading their cultural values and changing the consciousness of their fellow citizens, a structural transformation of society could in turn be effected' (Heale, 2001: 147).

To many of those involved, doing something transformational was predicated on doing something differently and dropping the core values of the mainstream by living what was rather pretentiously described as the 'here and now revolution' (Anderson, 1995: 257). To Joel Silver and his friends it also involved creating a new game that would somehow embody many of these 'oppositional' values and, as will become apparent throughout this study, some forty years later and an ocean apart, many of these features continue to be celebrated within Ultimate in the UK today but in a very different social and cultural context.

5. **The invention of Ultimate and the first game**

When Joel Silver returned home to Maplewood, he continued to throw with fellow students, adapted the rules of Frisbee Football, and thus in effect 'invented' the team sport of Ultimate. The name itself is said to have arisen due to Silver casually referring

to the game as the 'Ultimate sports experience.' Such claims of origin have been supported by fellow players of the time (Zagoria, 2003).

However, more recent and rigorous research has come to light to suggest that the truth may be somewhat different. According to Herndon (2003), as a result of interviewing Silver, he found that Silver had learned a Frisbee game from someone named Jared Kass while attending summer camp. Herndon (2003), like many, assumed that Silver had played something like Frisbee football with Jared Kass at camp, and then returned to Columbia High School in Maplewood, New Jersey and made up and named, a whole new game called Ultimate. However, upon questioning Kass closely it seems that the whole of the Ultimate playing world had been somewhat misled.

Herndon (2003) learned that Kass had taught Silver not some distant relative of Ultimate, but Ultimate in its essence and by name, whilst having no idea that he had had anything to do with the creation of a new sport. Kass claims that the game evolved from a variation of touch football whilst at Amherst College where he started as a student in 1965. Whatever the true chain of events, Silver continued to throw with his friends, including Bernard 'Buzzy' Hellring and Jonny Hines until in the autumn of 1967, Silver proposed that, for a joke, the Student Council form a Frisbee team. Yet by the end of the school year, Silver and members of both the student newspaper _The Columbian_ and the Student Council had begun to play a modified game of Frisbee football (Johnson 1975; Malafronte, 1998).

The game was what one might describe as a 'free-form', violence-free version of a pre-modern sport early on, with no strict limits on how many players should be on each

side, with as many as 20 or even 30 players being allowed per team. However, the local ecology meant that this number was eventually whittled to seven (the current number) because 'that was the most you could fit in the parking lot' (Zagoria, 2003:2). The original game also allowed running with the disc, and it included lines of scrimmage and a series of downs; but as they played, Silver, Hellring, and Hines began to modify the rules of Ultimate. Finally, in the fall of 1968, the members of the student newspaper, _The Columbian_ challenged the students on the school council to a formal game. In a match up that featured two large, co-ed teams, _The Columbian_ won the first game in front of the high school, by 11-7. This historic first match was played on the now famous Columbia High School parking lot. During the summer of 1970, Silver, Hellring and Hines re-wrote and refined the rules. Unlike modern sport, which was disseminated mainly via travel, trade and imitation, the rules of Ultimate were subsequently printed and copies were sent all over the world (Leonardo and Zagoria, 2004).

Thus, the sport of Ultimate Frisbee was born and following the dissemination of the early rules mainly via disruptive college campuses in the United States, the sport grew from strength to strength, seeing the first inter collegiate game played in 1972 between Princeton and Rutgers and two years later in 1974 the beginning of the founding of international organisations, as represented by the formation of the Swedish Frisbee Federation (Iocovella, 2004). Now Ultimate was ready to travel the world.

6. Ultimate takes root in the UK

Historically, the UK Government has largely been reluctant to acknowledge sport as an appropriate area for political intervention and has struggled to locate it successfully within its ministries (Houlihan, 1997). In matters of sporting _policy,_ responsibility has

largely been fulfilled by different semi-autonomous agencies, such as the Sports Council and local authorities. Since its creation in 1972, the remit of the Sports Council was focused around slogans such as 'Sport for All' which sought to serve to support a broad range of sporting participants across a very wide range of activities (Houlihan, 1997). It was later re-organised in 1997, when five new sports councils came into existence, one for each of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland under the overarching organisation of UK Sport. Despite such structures being the main driver of sports policy, this position has been repeatedly challenged by the Central Council of Physical Recreation (CCPR) (Houlihan, 1997). The CCPR is an umbrella sporting organisation which was first formed as far back as 1935 and which seeks to give a voice to governing and representative bodies of sport and recreation. 'In fact, there is barely a recognised sport or activity in the country which is not affiliated to CCPR' (CCPR, 2008).

A clearer picture of the governance of UK sport emerged, however, with the publication of 'Raising the Game' in 1995, which represented a significant shift in government policy on sport (Kirk, 2003). This new policy emphasis has seen a refocusing back towards more traditional sporting activities and the backing of more elite performers within higher profile sports (DNH, 1995). In short, 'more recently the government has sought to narrow the focus of sports policy, giving priority to a more limited range of sports and concentrating on youth/school sport and elite development' (Houlihan, 1997: 46). Such policies have continued to been upheld by the current Labour government (following their election victory in 1997) (DCMS, 2000).

The old Sports Council structure was still in place when Ultimate was first played in the UK at the University of Warwick in 1977. As far as we can tell, it was introduced by visiting American students who were studying at the University. Similar occurrences took place soon after at a number of older UK HE institutions and challenge matches of Ultimate between students at these founding universities occurred (Warwick Boar, 2002). What followed shortly afterwards was the modest consolidation of Ultimate as a sport within the older UK universities and the gradual spread of the sport across other UK Higher Education institutions (Leonardo and Zagoria, 2004). At the same time, following the graduation of early Ultimate participants and given the tendency for many top, young graduates to seek work in London, the capital *'became the centre for a thriving league [of Ultimate] in the 1980s'* (PT – interviewed 12/04/06). Larger UK cities, such as Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, Bristol and Edinburgh, as well as smaller ones accommodating older universities such as Leicester (often with well established links with USA universities), soon boasted teams and, *'competitions began to spring up all over the country'* (LC – interviewed 12/04/06).

After growing from this small base to become a larger informal network of clubs (there are however no known records of numbers of players and teams during this period but the player base is unlikely to be beyond a few hundred), Ultimate in the UK established its first national governing body, the British Ultimate Federation (BUF) in 1981 (WFDF, 2008). The motives behind the creation of such a body are unclear but one suspects that UK Ultimate representatives may have sought both greater parity and the affiliation gained by other European countries, against whom they first competed in the European Ultimate Championships held in France in 1980. There is however a clear naivety on show here in terms of a wider cultural understanding in choosing originally

to be known by the acronym BUF: which is much more synonymous for most UK people with the British Union of Fascists established nearly fifty years earlier in 1932 by Oswald Moseley (Thorpe, 1995).

Given the almost exclusive development of Ultimate in the UK in the University sector, one could easily assume the sport has become the preserve simply of the educated middle classes. For sure, it seems to have found a comfortable home at this level and perhaps for two clear reasons. Firstly there are clear sympathies between some of the counter cultural values outlined earlier by Heale (2001) and Anderson (1995) and the history and values of University sport in the UK. Traditionally university life was seen as an extension of the English public schools and all its traditions and values, including sport (Baker, 1982 in Mangan, 2006). Many of these sports were characterised by an established commitment to a code of fair play (Huggins, 2006) which is not inconsistent with the ethos of the Spirit of the Game that is pervasive within Ultimate.

Secondly, as British sports have historically been the site where traditional forms of hegemonic masculinity have been both demonstrated and reinforced (Salisbury and Jackson, 1996) - including forms of 'hyper masculinity' within working class work and leisure (Hargreaves, 1994) - it is hard to see how a non contact, mixed sport played with a Frisbee such as Ultimate might put down roots elsewhere in the UK. This 'alternative' and even quasi-rural conception, embodied in other alternative or lifestyle sports, is a key reason why there continues to be a predominance of white, middle class, males in such activities (Wheaton, 2004). From participant observation this demographic is confirmed in Ultimate too. But, that said, there is a clear mix of genders and some minority ethnic groups are represented in most competitions.

This kind of class distinction has served to define Ultimate as a 'middle class' activity, not least because much of the physical and social access to playing it has been through the UK University sector. So although the sport may well promote an ideology and philosophy of 'openness' the realities are that historically many have been excluded from Ultimate because they lack the 'right' sort of educational background and the appropriate cultural capital to connect effectively with the sport. Commonalities with other forms of middle class exclusiveness which exists around sporting activities such as tennis or rowing (Huggins, 2006) are easy to draw, but these other examples often locate their superiority, - or as Bourdieu (1978: 828) explains it, their 'gain in distinction' - in their financial exclusiveness. Ultimate does not. Not only are discs cheap to buy but the clothing worn by many players indicates, in many respects, a positive rejection of exclusivity and excessive consumption.

In more recent years, however, this stratification via class has arguably begun to weaken in Ultimate has 'geo' teams have recruited participants from their surrounding populations whose intake has varied considerably. In addition, within some areas, isolated individuals have taught the sport in schools and these young people have continued to play in their nearest location. Consequently a new generation of participants and teams are now emerging who have not had access to Higher Education and because of indicative factors such as socio economic area or occupation are likely to be identified as being located, structurally and culturally, very differently from the traditional British university-educated middle classes. This capacity for sports to soften or even shift its social status over time is identified by Bourdieu (1978). The implications of this are yet to be fully realised and may indeed be an interesting future

case study. However one suspects that a strategic repositioning of Ultimate is already well underway, evidence of which can be found in developments such as the quest for national and even international recognition recently undertaken by the UKUA.

7.   The quest for recognition

Ultimate's quest for formal recognition from external bodies in the UK has now been underway for over a decade. The BUF originally applied to the British University Sports Association (BUSA) in 1995 for membership of mainstream British sport at the university level. According to the then BUF Board, there was a pragmatic reasoning behind this strategy:

> *'If we could get the 'student' part of Ultimate recognised, events like the Student Regionals/Nationals and further things like Student Leagues would have the additional site/administration resources and maybe funding and seem more 'serious'. The other part was that if we could go to the Sports Council and say 'the students are taken seriously' we might have an extra foot on the ladder'* (Message Archive).

That original bid for BUSA recognition failed, with the basic reason for its rejection given that there was *'not enough interest'* among students in the sport (Message Archive). From a student perspective, the key issue concerning gaining recognition for Ultimate at British university level was that of finance.

> *'I think that the money issue is the biggest selling point of BUSA recognition. It would mean that things such as travel to events would be paid for from a separate budget to club funds. Speaking as someone who has just set up a new team, I know the hassle we face from our [Students] Union about money - being given 200 pounds for our whole budget for the year, only £80 to be spent on travel. This means that players have to pay all their travel costs themselves, and I can see this putting off people from playing, which really shouldn't happen. Then there are things like tournament fees... But I think the first one that should be dealt with is the*

level of control BUSA would get by Ultimate becoming recognised' (Message Archive).

It is probably a mistake to assume that gaining BUSA recognition would not have helped a subsequent bid to the Sports Council for funding, but that did not deter the BUF. In 1996 the BUF applied for the Sports Council recognition nevertheless (as part of a Disc Sport package) but in the spring of 1997 the application was rejected. The BUF board reported that:

> *'The decision of the Sports Councils was that flying disc sports should not be formally recognised by the Sports Councils, primarily on the grounds of lack of uniqueness of the activity'* (Message Archive).

The response from key members of the Ultimate 'community' in the UK to this latest rejection was largely one of outrage (and occasional abuse) leading some to question whether the governing body of Ultimate had made a strong enough case to the Sports Council. It also left many people wondering whether striving for national funding support for a sport defined in some ways by its *opposition* to the mainstream was really worth the effort anyway. Here, views were clearly divided and dissenters were not difficult to find.

> *'Ultimate has always been an "alternative" sport. It is part of its appeal. Is "recognition" really going to help us? ... Are we sure that we even want their help? ... Are we willing to put up with the inevitable strings which will be attached with their recognition? Will it be worth what we can actually expect to receive from their recognition?'* (Message Archive)

> *'What do we need recognition from BUSA or the Sports Council for? Can't we just bowl along and do our own thing? Who cares whether other people think it's a real sport or not?... I know there's a lot of people who put a lot of effort into organising it all and I offer them my heartfelt gratitude, they do such a good job that I can't see any reason for changing it'* (Message Archive).

The BUF committee was initially quite measured in its response towards its members, indicating that wider recognition would be a positive step for Ultimate, a seal of approval which could potentially 'open doors', thus helping the nascent sport to gain media exposure, sponsors and even to access National Lottery funding. It also outlined the accompanying information sent to the Sports Council that made the sport attractive to 'ordinary' people. E.g. that Ultimate is simple to play, inexpensive, inclusive, mixed sex, promotes fair play and requires unique skills. Clarification was also sought by the BUF as to why the Sports Council (in the view of BUF) had failed to appreciate the sporting 'uniqueness' of the activity. The official reply from the Sports Council, as reported by the BUF committee indicated:

> *'That there was nothing in the skills and physical exercise etc. required to play disc sports which are not already catered for within the collection of sports already recognised [The case was possibly not helped here by the inclusion of the activity Disc Golf, which makes the following argument easier to make]... If you replaced the ball in American Football with a disc, then you would have Ultimate ... Anyone could invent a new sport based upon an existing sport by, say, replacing the ball with a paper cup and then argue the merits of the skill required to throw a paper cup!'* (Message Archive)

The BUF's response was to point out, archly, that disc sports had, in fact, been played for some forty years (and had therefore had not just been invented) and they inquired whether there had been some confusion in the material provided by the BUF and whether something was 'lacking' in its funding application which might need to be revised for future applications. The response was somewhat surprising. The Sports Council said that so-called 'disc sports' had: *'no chance and [it] did not think that the Sports Council would ever recognise disc sports'* (Message Archive). Despite a letter from the BUF to the Chief Executive of the UK Sports Council appealing against the

decision not to recognise Ultimate, and disc sports in general, no further reply was forthcoming.

Although perhaps somewhat flippant in tone, the substance of the alleged Sports Council response to this letter was certainly in keeping with the idea of 'refocusing' on more traditional British team sport activities, something that had first been articulated in the publication of 'Raising the Game' only one year earlier (DNH, 1995). Irrespective of the quality of the bid, therefore, the request for Sports Council recognition and support, in hindsight, looks at best ill timed. Formal recognition was not pursued again by the BUF, but comments and questions about recognition were liberally posted on message boards with increasing frequency by the players themselves over the following months and years. A comprehensive response from an unnamed BUF board member was written in reply to concerned players who were still raising the issue some eighteen months after the Sports Council had rejected the BUF's application. Here the marginal national status of Ultimate seemed to be the key issue:

> *'This discussion kicks off annually, and the same arguments are replied (sic). If it matters that much to you that our sport gets the proper respect from QUANGOs like the SC, then pay attention to what people are saying. We aren't important enough, not nearly enough...'* (Message Archive).

> *'In my honest opinion the responsibility for the development of our sport does not lie with...any individual key figure in the administration of our sport - it lies with you, the players...Start a junior team (it only takes one hour a week) hold a tourney, form a local league, open your practices up to newcomers, publicise what you are doing somewhere... Or maybe we actually like what we have too much? The choice, as they say, is yours'* (Message Archive).

The subsequent years seemed to have been a period of reflection and introspection in the upper echelons of UK Ultimate, in which the 'national' playing community evaluated what they wanted the sport of Ultimate to be and what they wanted from the

sport. Thus far, the playing community that BUF had presided over had been overwhelmingly student and ex-student based and has been content with players learning the game at University (typically playing indoors in the autumn/winter and outdoors spring/summer) and then continuing to play after graduation should they so wish to do so by forming teams (often University alumni teams) which competed in friendly competition at irregular tournaments, including annual tour events.

The formation of the United Kingdom Ultimate Association (UKUA) in 2002 as the new national governing body of the sport in Great Britain and Northern Ireland seemed, at face value, not much more than a cosmetic rebranding exercise. The chairman of the new organisation, Barry O'Kane (an Edinburgh based, Great Britain player) stated, apparently without irony, that: 'Ultimate players want to play Ultimate' and the role of the UKUA was simply 'to provide the support and the means to enable everyone who wants to play to do so in the way they choose' (UKU, 2004). This seemed broadly in keeping with the largely non-interventionist rhetoric derived from those working within its predecessor, the BUF.

However the formation of this new organisation came with a considerably broader range of figures on the board and, for the first time, a paid official. Specifically, the UKUA employed a part time administrator to help with the day to day running of the Association and with communication with the national membership. The administrator also acted as the secretary to the Board. In 2008 the UKUA became a limited company (though with a not for profit guarantee) and is still run by an elected Board of volunteers who are still all active, high level players. Nominations and elections are held annually in which all registered members can vote (the actual number of which has recently been

estimated at 10 000 (UKU, 2009). The positions on the Board are made up of: Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer, Director of Competitions (DOC), University Coordinator (Elected separately by the student University and College membership) and Director of Junior Ultimate. An interesting addition to the UKUA structure is the addition of two or three Board members *Without Portfolio*. (Responsibilities for different projects and areas of organisation are divided among such members). In addition there are a number of positions that are appointed by the Board to help with the work-load or in areas that require dedicated individual attention, such as coaching and the development of all-women's Ultimate (UKU, 2008).

In dealing with the issue of recognition, the UKUA were quick to act, joining the CCPR. In addition, board members were allocated to work with BUSA to explore opportunities for membership of that organisation and in April 2006, Ultimate finally gained BUSA recognition. In response to this quite momentous news, the UKUA chairman, Barry O 'Kane gave a rather measured reply:

> 'It is important however to remember that being 'recognised' alone is not some sort of Holy Grail. I feel really strongly that we should be concentrating on developing our sport and Association in the way we want it to grow, having events we want to play in, developing coaches so that our teams get better and keeping and developing the unique character of our sport' (UKU, Press Release 2006).

Interestingly, too, the chair was not resigned to the view that Sports Council recognition was unachievable, despite the absolutist 'no' indicated to the BUF ten years earlier. In responding to that particular issue he indicated that:

> 'This was probably not because we don't play with a ball or don't have referees. More likely it was just too early. We met very few of the criteria - numbers, organisation, coaching structures etc' (UKU, 2006).

This was proven to be correct, when UK Ultimate finally gained UK Sport recognition in November 2008. What gaining recognition from sporting bodies signified was a more wide reaching, goal-focused approach and a more 'professional' edge to administration previously unseen in UK Ultimate. This was illustrated in its inception, practically, through the consolidating of the 'Open' Tour as the premier national Ultimate competition and strategically through the establishment of promotional objectives, the details and implications of which are dealt with more fully in Chapter 9.

8. Summary

In this chapter I have explored the origins of Ultimate Frisbee and outlined some of the distinctive and crucial stages of its development, starting with the origin of the name 'Frisbee', the development of the plastic flying disc, and moving through to development of 'Frisbee football' and the playing of the first Ultimate game. Importantly, attention was drawn to locating the development of Ultimate within the American counter cultural tradition, some of the values of which permeated into the sport and largely remain to this day. The chapter also showed how Ultimate arrived in the UK some ten years after its invention in the USA and evolved in a very particular way over the last thirty years. The outline of UK sports policy served to provide a context for the introduction of Ultimate Frisbee in the UK.

In addition to this, the relevance of the sport taking root in the UK University sector before spreading more widely was also briefly discussed. The chapter concluded by examining how the subsequent governing bodies of Ultimate within the UK have actively sought formal recognition from external bodies for more than a decade. Most

critically, the formation of the latest governing body, the UKUA in 2002 heralded a more 'professional' and rationalised approach to sports administration. Finally, this chapter also serves as a useful context for considering the discussion in Chapter 9 on the fracturing of UK Ultimate.

Chapter 3

Methodology

1. Introduction

In order to produce a valid account of Ultimate in the UK, whilst at the same time being 'fully engaged' with the sporting subculture in question, researchers in this field have often selected 'ethnographic study' as a suitable methodological approach (Butts, 2001; Sands, 2002) as a means to collect and analyse data in order to better understand and explain the subculture being studied. However, Brewer (2000) warns that there are major differences regarding both the conceptual meaning of ethnography and its application. To this end, in order to clarify the methodologies being employed, this chapter will examine firstly what conceptually is meant by the term ethnography and consider its rationale for use as a research tool. Secondly, the chapter will examine the application of the approach by considering the methods and techniques that were employed in this research.

2. The debate about the ethnographic method

Defining exactly what is meant by the term ethnography is problematic, especially given the many and varied sociological studies that have been said to have employed such a methodology. The simple act of conducting fieldwork is grounds for a sufficient claim to the term by Zigrami and Zigrami (1980), whereas both Ellen (1984) and Stoddart (1986) consider that its definition truly lies in the end product and more specifically the written account that is produced about the research. Further

complications arise in establishing a definitive meaning when authors such as Weppner (1977) and Johnson et al. (1985) identify ethnography as being particularly useful in researching specific risk-laden situations, such as producing accounts relating to deviants and drug users. Such practice has led to the use of terms such as 'street ethnography' or 'urban ethnography' (Leininger, 1985: 33), which although may well have been an attempt to distinguish research practices from anthropology, only serves to confuse rather than to clarify the issue.

In a bid to identify a common theme to all these studies, however, ethnographic research, it appears, must involve the work of describing a culture. The essential core of this activity is to aim to understand another way of life from the native point of view (Spradley, 1979). Early ethnographic work of note drew from British social anthropologists such as Malinowski (1967) who pioneered an approach that involved immersion within and close observation of particular pre-industrial cultures. Across the Atlantic, sociologists from the 'Chicago School' were making first hand observation of groups at the margins of urban USA society in 1920s and 1930s (Brewer, 2000). Notable contributions that continued in the same spirit at least, would include the 'thick description' of Geertz (1973) and the 'cultural description' of Wolcott (1973) which allows for a level of insight from the researcher where 'a wink can be distinguished from a twitch and a parody of a wink is distinguishable from an actual wink' (Wilcox 1988 cited in Berg 134: 2001).

With cultural understanding being so key here, it is clearly important that the aim of ethnographic sociological research is realised through analysis, rather than undertaking the process of simply basic reporting. As if to underline the point and to highlight the

focus still further, Lofland (1996: 30) usefully coined the term 'analytical ethnography', in order to:

> 'refer to research processes and products in which, to a greater or lesser degree, an investigator...presents an analysis that is developed in the senses of being conceptually elaborated, descriptively detailed, and concept-data interpenetrated.'

However, Agar (1986) warns that whatever the situation, if sound principles of enquiry are kept in mind, then maybe such discussions are simply a case of semantics and that essentially such situations are all the same. In this respect perhaps Berg (2001: 134) offers a definition that provides most clarity, describing the key feature of ethnography as:

> 'The practice [that] places researchers in the midst of whatever it is they study. From this vantage, researchers can examine various phenomena as perceived by participants and represent these observations as accounts….[Ethnography] is primarily a process that attempts to describe and interpret social expressions between people and groups.'

When researchers embark upon a role that involves a level of participation within the field being examined questions they are understandably asked concern how 'objective' their study actually is. For some, such as Ellen (1984: 77), to engage in ethnography is to embark upon a process of 'subjective soaking' where the researcher 'abandons the idea of absolute objectivity or scientific neutrality and attempts to merge him/herself into the culture being studied.' Such an approach, not surprisingly, may well produce subjective accounts that can be translated and read (Berg, 2001) and are of a genuine interest. But they have typically failed to stand up to scrutiny from researchers that both work within the social sciences (such as Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983) and from those in other fields (Brewer, 2000).

To escape this accusation of this being an 'invalid' methodology, those that used an ethnographic approach underwent what Ellen (1984) described as a 'quiet revolution' which has resulted in the widespread incorporation of specific formal research techniques (Ellen, 1984; Spradley, 1980; Van Maanen, 1982). Formal techniques are to be practised here also, in a bid to be rigorous and to be seen to be conducting research that adheres to current thinking in the field. The results of such a shift included the re-legitimation of a methodology that became widely employed in institutional settings, such as schools and hospitals (for studies in education settings see Ball, 1981; Burgess, 1983; Benyon, 1985; Riddell, 1992 and for studies pertaining to health settings see Morse and Field, 1995; Burns and Grove, 1993; Polit and Hungler, 1993).

Sport, too, was to benefit from this shift. As has already been pointed out, there had been a relative lack of academic interest in sport for many years, and it was not until the work of Roberts, Arth and Bush (1959) (Cited in Sands, 2002) that ethnographic investigation was effectively employed in the sporting field. After this slow start, a lull ensued and though there were exceptions such as the notable contribution of Geertz (1973) it has not been until the renewed interest in other areas of investigation, such as in education and health, that an emergence of sporting ethnographies has been apparent (see for example, Beal, 1995; Brownell, 1995; Bolin, 1997; Klein, 1997; Sands, 1999; Butts, 2001; Wheaton, 2000). What typically has emerged through this research in the last decade or so are ethnographic accounts which combine research tools which can gain in depth data, while remaining strongly rooted within sure methodological foundations.

3. **Research Methods for the Project**

Though traditionally there have been no distinct stages to such ethnographic research, with a constant interaction occurring between problem formulation, data collection and analysis (Walsh, 1998), it is still vital to maintain sound scientific principles in research (Sands, 2002). To this end, the initial phase of this study involved a review of relevant literature concerning research undertaken within other sporting subcultures. Useful common themes from these studies were then grouped together.

A decision was made from this reading to document two wide areas of discussion, namely those of levels and motivation for participation and the generation of subcultural identity. Coakley (2003) suggests that as individuals participate in an activity they create a rich cultural landscape within which attribute meanings to their actions. It was felt that gaining insight into the participatory experiences of individuals would therefore provide a bedrock for the study from which further ideas could be explored. On the issue of participation, it was decided that key questions to be explored should be:

- Who participated?
- How and when did they become involved?
- Why did they play Ultimate and continue to do so?

A later addition to these questions was made following a reading of the early data about the importance of *where* Ultimate takes place.

The reason for selecting subcultural identity as a second broad area of research focus, was the realisation that contemporary studies involving sporting subcultures have

tended to centre on locating the real or *authentic* identity of participants (Wheaton and Beal, 2003). What becomes apparent is that there are aspects of subcultural identity that are more significant to 'insider' concepts of 'authenticity' (Kiewa, 2002; Wheaton, 2000). It was felt that to document this aspect was essential, in being able to get to the real 'nitty gritty' of what it means to be a participant in Ultimate Frisbee and to be able locate this study within the wider field of sporting ethnographies.

A number of interesting ideas and themes also became apparent following a largely iterative approach, concerning further phases of data collection and repeated reading concerning the connected issues of participation and subcultural identity (Bryman, 2008). Keen to narrow the focus upon specific and highly pertinent issues for this study, rather than focus upon further broader aspects, four further themes were considered worthy of closer and more detailed study. These involve:

- Aspects of self refereeing

- Contesting traditional notions of gender and masculinity

- Gaining aesthetic experiences

- The development and apparent division of Ultimate in the UK.

Data gathering was initially centred on national tour events and larger competitions as these are deemed most representative of Ultimate games and the players involved. In addition the Tour provided the biggest source of players available at any one time. Such events are located across the country and they are played within large leisure centres (indoors) or on large adjoining grass pitches (outdoors). In addition, different cultural 'scenes' frequented by the players (locations such as the practice venues and social

environments) were also used as sites of data collection. These are important additions as specific knowledge is used in different situations (Sands, 2002).

In order to gather the information necessary across these different sites and situations to complete this study it was necessary to engage in a sustained period of ethnographic fieldwork. It was proposed that this period should last at least one complete Ultimate season, though it was also foreseen that this period would undoubtedly extend as it was anticipated that there would be a need to return to the field to examine and re-examine issues as they emerged. In reality, given the iterative nature of such a study, the data was actually collected over a three year period (2004-2007). Across the season a broad range of different elements were examined ethnographically comprising of beginners events, university competitions, indoor and outdoor matches and including the established national competitions, in order to build up as full a picture as possible. Such a way of sampling a population of events is known as 'the big net approach' which initially encourages the 'mixing and mingling' with everyone. 'The big net approach ensures a wide-angle view of events before the microscopic study of specific interactions begins. This big picture helps refine an ethnographer's focus' (Fetterman, 1998: 33). As the study progressed, the focus narrowed to examine specific issues concerning firstly participation and then subcultural identity and later, self refereeing and the spirit of the game, contesting traditional notions of gender and masculinity, gaining aesthetic experiences, divisions within Ultimate and finally the experience and impact of stigma.

The next key methodological issue in the study was ensuring good access – 'getting a foot in' to the said groups that needed to be engaged. During sporting ethnographic

studies, access into the culture being studied is a recurring problem (Sands, 2002). However in this instance, being an active player (both indoors and outdoors), access was relatively unproblematic. The necessary skill therefore was to fit the role of 'field worker' into the experience, following such precedents as that provided by Wheaton (2000), who was already active in the windsurfing community before commencing her academic study upon it. Such an arrangement was conducive to data collection as it is suggested that within the field of sports ethnography, field work is perhaps most successful when conducted in an area where professional and personal lives take place (Sands, 1999). This is largely because of the extended and unbroken time frame that is required to gain an 'authentic' account of any sporting subculture (Granskog, 1992; Bolin, 1997; Wheaton, 1995; Sands, 2002).

Without reasonable access to the field the research simply could not have been completed. Access is traditionally a difficult obstacle to overcome (see extensive discussions on gaining access in Hornsby – Smith (1993)) but in this instance access to the subculture of Ultimate has already been achieved by the author's four years of active participation in the sport prior to the commencement of the research. Having close ties to the members of the group to be studied helped considerably (Brewer, 2000). Broadly speaking, being on the 'inside' already allowed the asking of more effective questions and provided the researcher with the capacity and freedom to move more easily between different groups and settings (Becker, 1963).

One of the chief concerns I had initially was that my role would change once I begin carrying out research. In my playing years previous to conducting the research, I was merely a participant; now I was a researcher too. Regarding access this may have

proved problematic. Though I was optimistic that by being overt and upfront about my participant observation, what I was doing should demystify my perceived new role as a researcher and would actively facilitate the development of a rapport with some new subjects (Berg et al., 1983 cited in Berg 2001). For others, however, there was potential for a mistrust to develop. As indicated by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 71) 'research carried out without the knowledge of anyone in, or associated with the setting is quite rare. Much more common is that some people are kept in the dark while others are taken into the researcher's confidence.' This study operated in very much the same way with a degree of honesty about what is going on to all, but with specific details only available to a select few.

Many researchers investigating sports subcultures have adopted such an approach, especially if they are an existing member of the group being studied (Donnelly, 1993), largely because in any given situation 'the researcher must find a compromise between purist ethics and pragmatic judgement, based on an awareness of how the real world operates'(Wheaton, 1995:169). What guided the choice of who was to be taken completely into my confidence was the obvious ethical problem associated with remaining 'under cover' and the information I was required to collect in order to complete the study effectively, without compromising myself or damaging in any way the individuals I interacted with. To this end, the identities of all players and observers who were part of the research have been disguised. Such dilemmas and decisions are typical of ethnographic study (Rees, 1991) but making positive choices to gain the data whilst minimising harm are essential in being able to conduct an honest account in a social world (Douglas, 1976).

An additional concern, of course, was in researching in a setting that was initially so familiar to me. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 92) indicate, 'it is, of course, much more difficult to suspend one's own preconceptions, whether these derive from social science or from everyday knowledge. One reason for this is what one finds is so obvious'. A very good illustration of this is provided by Becker (1971) who identified the problems that groups such as teachers have 'seeing' things beyond those that are obviously apparent. In order to overcome this potential problem, I planned, wherever possible, events that I would only participate in and target certain events where I would merely collect data. This, of course, did not always go to plan as often, when participating, excellent opportunities for data collection would occur and these could not be passed by.

An additional problem with studying a known setting was the inability to play the role of a novice (Beynon, 1983) as it was impossible to forget or unlearn the knowledge and skills which have already been acquired. The danger was that information that is critical in processes of socialisation for example could have been missed because it has been taken for granted. I initially addressed this particular obstacle by collecting data at beginner competitions in order to get fully in tune with novice perceptions again but this proved insufficient. As indicated earlier, identifying events for data collection only became an important step to gaining some cognitive distance from one's potential complete immersion as a participant. However, it was not until I picked up an injury that effectively sidelined me for half a season in the middle of this study that I began to explore certain aspects of the subject with real depth. One such example is the addition of the analysis concerning the landscape upon which Ultimate is played. This issue was

effectively 'staring' at me from day one, but I was too close to the sport as a participant to see it clearly.

Though the intention is to produce as 'objective' and analytical account as possible, there was also a strong awareness throughout that the information gathered could unwittingly incorporate highly subjective and potentially misleading data. In order to counter this possibility, Fettermann's (1998) recommendations were heeded, that specified methods and techniques should be employed to help guide the ethnographer through the many and varied social situations they face and, ideally, 'standardise' their perceptions. To this end, this study engaged mainly in the familiar qualitative techniques of participant observation and interviews, but a very new technique of list mining was also employed as a third method of data collection. Each of these will now be considered in turn including the rationale for their usage and detailing how the research was undertaken. With respect to list mining, the ethical considerations required are also discussed within this section.

(i) Participant observation

In order to gather the data I required to explore the sporting subcultures in question, the intention was to firstly engage in participant observation, the preferred method to examine such environments (Burgess, 1984; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) because it 'opens out the possibility of an understanding of reality which no other method can realise' (Walsh, 1998: 232). The approach:

> 'involves data gathering by means of participation in the daily life of
> informants in their natural setting; watching, observing, talking to them in

order to discover their interpretations, social meanings and activities' (Brewer, 2000: 59).

It is important to remember when using such a technique that the main instrument of data collection is the researcher (Burgess, 1982) and, as such, the choice of the role that was played is vital. Of key importance here was the ability to find a balance between the roles of insider and outsider - enough of an insider to identify with the members of the social setting being studied and get close enough to them, but enough of an outsider to maintain the sort of professional distance which permitted adequate study. When considering the question about the role which was to be adopted, Junker (1960) and Gold (1958) give insight into differing levels of involvement and detachment describing four possible roles:

- Complete participant – A fully functioning member of the social setting and operating as a covert observer

- Participant as observer – as above but the individual is known as a researcher and has regular interaction with members

- Observer as participant – Often mainly as interviewer with little participation

- Complete observer – No interaction with the group

Gold indicates that key risks are that, if observer roles are primarily taken there is a risk that the social situation will not be fully understood and that participant role lead research risks over identification or 'going native'. In an ideal world:

'a proper balance in the participant observer's dual role as part insider and part outsider gives them the opportunity to be inside and outside the setting, to be simultaneously member and non-member, and to participate whilst also

reflecting critically on what is observed and gathered while doing so' (Brewer, 2000: 60).

In order to maximise opportunities whilst in such a role, Burgess (1982:45) identifies specific abilities that are important to develop – 'to be able to share in the lives and activities of others, to learn their language and meanings, to remember actions and speech and to interact with a range of individuals in different social settings.' To do this effectively, Pawson (1999) highlights the fact that flexibility is paramount because dealing with people in their natural environment is unpredictable, is not a neat series of sequential steps. However, as a researcher it was important to be mindful of being pushed towards the extremes of complete observer or complete participant as indicated by Gold (see Bryman, 2008).

Specifically, the role adopted for this study can be defined as 'participant as observer' where the role is mainly overt to the group being studied (Gold, 1969 cited in May, 1997). The choice to be a participant was made implicit by the fact that membership of the subculture had already been achieved and to withdraw myself too much from this position and to try to become an obvious observer instead would have been alien to others in the group. This would also draw to the attention of the group members that they were being studied, thus potentially contaminating the research.

A further issue to consider of course was how active or passive the participation should be (Van Maanen, 1978). As Fine (1996) indicates, though a researcher may intend to engage in a predetermined participation, circumstances may occur which changes the intended involvement. In some instances the researcher may feel they have no choice, not least because failure to engage may indicate to members of the social setting a lack

of commitment and hence a lack of credibility (Bryman, 2008). Data from experiences and observations were logged, in the main, as field notes, as this was the easiest and quickest way to record events as they occurred (Sanjek, 1990; Sands, 2002).

(ii) Field Notes

Field notes are the traditional means in ethnography for recording observational data. They typically consist of:

> 'relatively concrete descriptions of social processes and their contexts. The aim is to capture these in their integrity...(Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 145).

Initially, the idea of making field notes appeared to be fairly straightforward – I would simply write down what I would see and hear, and when things arose they were to be recorded in a specific book, to keep the information together. Ultimately it became apparent that such an approach was too simplistic and somewhat naïve and as such specific aspects needed to be re-addressed, namely:

- What should be written down?
- How should information be most effectively recorded?
- When and where is the best time to record information?

Regarding what should be written down, many prominent researchers in the field such as Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 150) advocate 'if in doubt, write it down'. In theory this is all well and good but it falls someway short of providing a focus for the wealth of information potentially available during fieldwork. Though the advice should

be heeded to an extent 'as features that previously seemed insignificant may come to take on new meaning' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 151) (see earlier points concerning the addition of landscape as a pertinent example) it seemed prudent to search for some sense of greater direction, though caution also needed to be taken not to narrow the focus too much, or else significant information could be missed. An early solution was found in the work of Spradley (1980) who suggests focusing and categorising information into different registers, such as space, actor, activity, object etc. However as the work became more focused there was greater need to see how data collected related to the identified and emergent themes.

Clearly, whatever was recorded needed to be as concrete, descriptive and substantive as possible but to complement such field notes two additional aspects recommended by Brewer (2000) were taken on board. The first of these was the making of *analytical field notes* which were rudimentary interpretations and thoughts of initial data. The reason for this is that faced with new information I often had multiple thoughts and ideas and such a mechanism would enable these not to be lost. In addition, if such thoughts were recorded elsewhere (e.g. in another book) then the concern is that their relevance to the initial information would risk being lost. The second addition taken on board was the completion of *diary entries* for recording aspects of the research process such as emotions, feelings, problems etc.

How information should be most effectively recorded is inherently difficult as notes should incorporate a detailed commentary of events, people and conversations (Fielding, 1993), though by their nature events, people and conversations are nether uniform nor predictable. As such Lofland and Lofland (1995) and Sanjek (1990) both

advocate the employment of three different types of notes, which I found most useful during my fieldwork. These were mental notes, jotted notes, and full field notes.

- *Mental notes* (sometimes called 'headnotes' (see Sanjek, 1990), proved useful when it was impossible or inappropriate to be seen to be taking notes, especially important during game situations.

- *Jotted notes* (also called scratch notes) which were very brief notes, memory joggers 'little phrases, quotes, key words and the like' (Lofland and Lofland, 1995: 90) proved very useful at all times during the field work. Most importantly of all these could be made inconspicuously so not to make others self conscious (Bryman, 2008). These were commonly recorded in a notepad but on occasions on whatever was available, such as shopping receipts from my wallet or the back of my hand. According to Brewer (2000: 87) an important way of 'allaying fears is by taking notes as obtrusively as possible.'

- *Lastly full field notes* were also made usually at times when I was away from others and in situations where my presence did not draw attention, such as amongst a scattered crowd on an outdoor pitch. Attempts were made at a later juncture of every day of research to write or type up full field notes that included as much detail as possible and were clearly legible. Wherever possible all notes were typed into my laptop at the earliest possible convenience.

From both reading and experience, the best time to record information is simply as quickly as possible, though obviously natural participation mitigates against this on occasions. Put simply:

'While it's possible to rely on memory to preserve this data over the course of the research, and some reliance is unavoidable, there are limits to the amount of data that can be retained in this way. There is also a serious danger of distortion…A particular danger is that data will be subconsciously transformed in line with emerging theory' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 145).

To both illustrate and complement field notes made, photographs were taken to illustrate specific points, examples of which can be found in the Appendices. Also tape recordings were made of particular events (such as after game rituals) to provide a later source to be used and relevant notes and thoughts were again typed up as soon as possible.

(iii) Interviews

In order to fully explore identified and later emergent themes, the intention was to engage in face to face interviews with a sample of members of the Ultimate community. Specifically two techniques were employed here, firstly that of pre-planned, semi structured interviews and secondly the engagement in non planned relatively unstructured interviews. These techniques were chosen broadly for their specific qualities and value. 'Qualitative researchers value the unstructured or semi structured type because it gives access to people's meaning-endowed capacities and produces rich, deep data that come in the form of natural language' (Brewer, 2000: 66). Thus it was felt that a more 'authentic' account of the subject could be reached by using such data.

Firstly, semi structured interviews were selected where, 'questions are normally specified, but the interviewer is more free to probe beyond the answers' (May, 1997: 111). This technique represented a midpoint between structured and unstructured

approaches, providing a framework that allowed comparability across the interviews conducted, but at the same time allowed sufficient latitude so that clarification can be gained and that emergent themes can be adequately explored.

The interview schedule was initially devised from preliminary readings of literature and discussion board messages. In order to determine how well the research instrument would work, the recommendations of Bryman (2008) were heeded and a pilot study was conducted upon three known acquaintances. A key aspect learned from this exercise, following reflections from playing back the audio account, was the how questions were leading in nature and so adjustments were made to the phrasing of future key questions (Bryman, 2008). In addition, it became clear that even early thoughts about how data obtained here would link to more specific areas of theory could not be forced. For example, attempts at exploring areas such as gender and participation quickly became dead ends: an early lesson about being patient and how through further analysis and reading, it was useful to wait for important themes to emerge rather than to try to force their appearance.

To reflect the views of the wider Ultimate community it was acknowledged that pre planned semi structured interviews should ideally cover a representative sample of informants (Bryman, 2008). A most effective way of doing this is the selection of individuals, often referred to as gatekeepers (Taylor, 1993) who are considered to be the most useful in gaining a valid account of the culture. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) such individuals are best identified from observations or by way of other members in the group. To this end, the following plan was employed after consideration of existing notes and known contacts.

Initially, subjects were used that were readily available and in proximity – convenience sampling - and so players who represent local clubs were interviewed first. Such interviews were conducted in mutually agreed settings e.g. person's home or local pub. By speaking to people in such settings the subjects were made to feel at ease and it enabled them to speak freely about Ultimate. Next, I targeted contacts I had made at other clubs across the country and attempted to interview these subjects during a pre-arranged point over the weekend of a national competition. The third wave of semi structured interviews was conducted with people who had been identified as 'important' figures in UK Ultimate by either myself or other informants (or in some instances had been approached but had not been available during initial contact). Again, these subjects were interviewed during a pre-arranged point over the weekend of a competition and the interviews were conducted in available vacant spaces including corridors, empty squash courts, corners of bars and even inside cars.

I conducted a total of twenty semi structured interviews during the course of this research, which included both males and females, members of both Tour A and Tour B teams, and experienced and novice participants. In this way I sought to recruit a reasonably representative sample of 'insider' view of the Ultimate subculture.

In order to complement the semi structured interview approach above, more informal, spontaneous interviews were also undertaken. The rationale behind this type of interview was that 'the absence of a formal structure gives greater freedom for respondents to answer accurately and in depth' (Brewer, 2000: 66). Unstructured interviews were a new challenge as I had little 'in the field experience' but to get the

most of these experiences it seemed prudent to know the topics inside out without referring to notes (Bryman, 2008). This helped in engagement with subjects and ensured I was prepared for chance meetings. Ultimately it would prevent me from getting flustered and it ensured that I had the best chance of gaining the information I required. Developing a rapport with people came fairly naturally to me and it is relatively easy to strike up a conversation by asking another player about a particular game that is going on or about a game they have played in.

Preliminary attempts at unstructured interviews began at my first competition following the ethical approval of this study. Having not conducted such fieldwork before I was uncertain as to how this would work, but I endeavoured to prepare as thoroughly as possible and to memorise all the key topics I wished to investigate. I was also conscious of the need to practice my technique as only by doing interviews would the quality of the data gleaned be sufficiently high (Bryman, 2008; Salkind, 1996). I was afraid that if I asked badly thought through or poorly phrased questions due to inexperience I risked 'messing up' potentially important situations. Initially, therefore, I chose to begin targeting players towards the bottom of Tour B (the weaker and often less experienced teams) as many of these players are less focused before, during and after games and are therefore more willing to just 'chat'. I also considered that if I made mistakes here it was potentially less critical to the study. I hoped to learn from the process.

During this early fieldwork I began by standing on the sidelines during games and attempted to engage players in small talk in a bid to establish a rapport. Again, initially I started with players from teams that were known to me and then tried to engage others in natural conversation. Throughout I endeavoured to have 'conversations with a

purpose' (Burgess, 1984: 102) and tried to remain on track and still presenting a natural front. One of the key skills I wanted to try and develop here was the idea of 'aware hearing' (Salkind, 1996) by always responding according to the response that is given. Though I was aware that I needed to probe beyond monosyllabic responses I similarly had to be respectful as to how much that person was willing to communicate and not push my line of questioning too strongly. In all instances I dressed in team kit, standard Ultimate-style hoodie and with disc, irrespective if I was to play or not, as I considered that in these instances at least such an appearance would make it easier for me to engage in meaningful conversation.

I became aware of the importance of recording and jotting down key findings of these conversations as soon as possible after the event occurred. I was also aware that I may engage such individuals in a conversation in the future. To this end I was aware that I should always try and leave the conversation in a friendly fashion and be friendly and appreciative of their time.

   (iv) List Mining

Increased usage and accessibility to the Internet have led to the rapid growth of cyber communities, where people of like minds and common interests transcend geographical barriers and communicate with one another on a diverse range of subjects (Schrum, 1995; Murray and Sixsmith, 1998). Though such communities may well only exist in cyberspace, many serve as an extension of physical communities that may meet irregularly in the 'real' world (Castells, 2000). The Ultimate Frisbee community in the UK is an example of one such group, who since 1996 have been communicating with

each other on an online discussion board known as DiscSpace (the name of the actual site has been changed in the interests of confidentiality). In this virtual space, participants post email messages concerning a range of issues such as informing others of events and training times, as well as engaging in detailed debate about issues of the day such as rule interpretations and tournament structures.

Thus far, such sites have received relatively little attention from social science researchers but it was felt that analysis of the individual messages posted on DiscSpace would provide an invaluable data source to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and views of participants engaged in Ultimate. The practice of researching messages sent to Internet-based forums has become known as 'list mining' (Till, 2006: 939) and initially has been used predominantly in medical and health related fields (Eysenbach and Till, 2001).

Some critics may argue that the inclusion of online research data runs counter to traditional notions of ethnography, given the placelessness of the internet (Bryman, 2008), though some exponents identify cyberspace as constituting a place (Hine, 2000), with some ethnographies now completed entirely online (Markham, 1998). In the interests of completing an effective and comprehensive ethnographic study of the Ultimate Frisbee community in the UK it was decided that list mining would be a research technique used along with participant observation and the conducting of interviews. This combination of traditional and more recent and innovative methods of data collection is in keeping with the spirit of seeing each research situation and opportunity as unique and believing that the method for getting data should largely be determined based on the situation and research problem concerned (Miller and Slater,

2000; Markham, 2008). It was further hoped that greater use of this type of data source would make a contribution to the growing pool of knowledge on the recent phenomenon of online communities. The inclusion of list mining as a research method however is not without its problems, as 'such research raises new issues in research ethics, particularly concerning informed consent and privacy of research subjects, as the borders between public and private spaces are sometimes blurred' (Eysenbach and Till, 2001: 1103).

It was considered that given that the DiscSpace message board had been available to view without restriction since 1996 that these 'archived responses of individuals may be construed to be matters of public record, and few ethical considerations apply when the records of these responses are used in research' (Pace and Livingston, 2005: 35). That said, given concerns that can surround these issues, this study concurred with studies such as those of Smith (2004) who chose to handle to data as responsibly as possible and to anonymise all obvious identifiers to protect confidentiality. This included changing the name of the message board, removing email addresses, names, dates and times and referring to each data extract of this type as 'message archive.' Given the detailed and valuable responses of the messages themselves however, it was felt necessary to include verbatim quotations.

(v) Data Management and Analysis

When and where possible, interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone in order to retain as much information as possible (Burgess, 1984; May, 1997). Relevant transcripts were then produced and were coded initially through a process of open coding. These were then later developed into axial codes as themes emerged from the data (Strauss

and Corbin, 1990). This same process was also applied to the field notes and was completed shortly after they were written. In addition both sets of codes were working documents and were regularly reviewed and updated. One such example that emerged from revisiting the data was how Ultimate participants used space, which was not clearly obvious on early readings of the data but developed during this process.

List mining was a large undertaking with the online archive consisting of eleven years of discussion board messages. These were read individually and then copied into word documents which totalled in excess of 100 000 words. Themes emerged more readily from this data as often the title of the message gave insight into its contents. Therefore it was easier to apportion axial codes. Once the data was organised into relevant themes, including those that were emerging from the other data sources, relevant extracts could be utilised.

4. Summary

The chapter explains the processes that were engaged in to produce a research accurate account of the Ultimate community in the UK. It explains how researchers in this field have often selected 'ethnographic study' as a suitable methodological approach (Butts, 2001; Sands, 2002) as a means to collect and analyse data in order to better understand and explain a subculture being studied. However, Brewer (2000) warns that there are major differences regarding both the conceptual meaning of ethnography and its application. So the first part of the chapter examined what conceptually is meant by the term ethnography and its rationale for use as a research tool was considered

The second part of chapter considered the methods and techniques that were employed in this research. In keeping with research traditions in this field this study engaged mainly in the familiar qualitative techniques of participant observation and interviews, with the relatively new technique of list mining was also employed as a third method of data collection.

Chapter 4

Participation in Ultimate

1. Introduction

In order to gain a sociological insight into the experiences of individuals who participate in Ultimate and also the meanings they give to their actions, it is important to ascertain the answers to a number of key questions, the first of which is *where* does Ultimate take place and how is the space and time in which it occurs shaped, inhabited and utilised. Consideration of the *landscape* within which a sporting activity takes place is an aspect that is often overlooked or merely taken for granted, but closer inspection can reveal a wealth of information on this score that is relatively easily unearthed and is waiting to be decoded (Cosgrove, 1989). Such information is important because it allows the values ascribed to the landscape to become more clearly visible (Lewis, 1979). In order that the sporting landscape of Ultimate can be effectively interpreted and analysed a modified framework devised by Meinig (1979) examining different 'views of the sports landscape' will be employed.

The second key question to be addressed here is: *how* do participants become involved in Ultimate and how does their involvement develop? Patterns of increasing commitment are evident throughout the life histories of many participants in sport, but specific details of early involvement in an activity remain unclear (Stebbins, 1992). To examine how participants became involved in Ultimate therefore, a three stage model devised by Stevenson (1999), which identifies a progression from early introductions

and involvements, through to entanglement and then to later commitments, will serve as a useful tool.

The third and final key question to be examined here is *what* are the characteristics of Ultimate that become apparent through sustained participation and what insights can be gleaned about *why* individuals participate and who they are? Stebbins (1992) suggests that such participants become engaged in 'serious leisure' as they show significant commitment to an activity and engage in it for significant amounts of their leisure time. Donnelly and Young (1988) indicate that whilst engaging in this process of commitment, identities are constructed, identities which are embodied in the actions in the participants. When this occurs, specific characteristics appear to be evident which exemplify key aspects of the activity and which give insight into why individuals choose to participate. Accordingly, these characteristics will be identified and examined in turn.

2. How Ultimate takes place in space and time

Many academic disciplines such as physiology, psychology, sociology, philosophy and history have well developed sporting sub disciplines evident in long established journals, associations and conferences. To date however, the same cannot be as easily said of geography (Bale, 2000). Though a scholarly relationship between sport and geography can be found, the sub discipline remains marginal within each other's respective field, not least because its perceived value continues to be unclear. This is illustrated by Dear's (1988:271) view that a 'geography of sport is not central to the structure and explanation of geographical knowledge.' However, common features,

such as those of space and time exemplify reasons why a strong interrelationship should exist between sport and geography and that further studies within such marginal areas can provide insights into aspects that otherwise could not be revealed (Maguire, 1995). One such example of this is an analysis of the 'ordinary' sporting landscape which is often taken for granted by both academics and participants.

Information about sporting landscapes is largely socio-cultural in nature and can include all elements that comprise the sports context from buildings to people (Bale, 1994). The insight that this information can provide cannot be underestimated, for as Lewis (1979:12) indicates, sporting landscapes provide an 'unwitting biography, reflecting our values…in tangible, visible form.' One aspect clearly visible in modern sporting forms is that of modern technocentric ideology (Bale, 1994). Wagner (1981:92) explains that this is most evident in spatial terms, where most sporting contests are played in 'exactly specified and formalised environments, for in most cases the contest explicitly concerns dominance of territory or mastery of distance.' As such, much modern sport has taken this to an extreme with its standardised pitch dimensions and timings and thus many sporting forms have become the practice of 'the reduction of space to geometry' (Brohm, 1978: 74).

More recently what have been variously termed 'alternative' or 'lifestyle' sports (Wheaton, 2004) such as Ultimate have sought to challenge accepted conceptions of modern Western achievement sport, including the space and time in which they occur (Eichberg, 1998; Rinehart and Sydnor, 2003). As yet, however, no significant attention has been given to the ordinary sporting landscape within which sports occur. To aid with the interpretation and analysis of the sporting landscape with respect to Ultimate,

in an area where few theoretical frameworks exist, a modified framework devised by Meinig (1979), which considers different 'views of the sports landscape', will serve as an effective tool for decoding the available data.

(i) Sport, landscape and habitat

Before the widespread codification of sports in the nineteenth century, Malcolmson (1973) indicates that early team sports were traditionally played in available spaces in any given town or village such as streets, squares, parks and fields. In this respect, they had a minimal impact on the existing habitat and in many cases they were delimited by physical or social constraints. For example, football was bound by the length and width of market places, streets and alleys (Delves, 1981) and cricket 'usually had to wait for its field until after the first haymaking' (Brailsford, 1983: 42). Ultimate, too, originated in such a way, despite its invention as a modern form of sport over a century later. As we have seen, the first known Ultimate games were played on the Columbia High school car park or 'lot' which became affectionately known as 'the Frisbee Field' (Malafronte, 1998). Natural and man-made physical barriers also served to delimit the area.

> 'The asphalt lot was bounded on the east by a 12-foot drop that descends into the East branch of the Rahway River and on the west by the Erie-Lackawanna railroad embankment and because the lot was lit by mercury vapour lights, the students could play there into the early hours' (Leonardo and Zagoria, 2004: 9).

Rules identifying specific measurements and restriction on playing spaces often came after codified games were founded (Bale, 1994) and as this occurred the fashioning of habitats into sports landscapes that are readily recognisable, such as football stadia and tennis courts, result in modern sporting landscapes being made 'non natural' (Galtung,

90

1984), leaving a permanent mark on any given habitat. Despite the growth of Ultimate in the UK and its widespread adoption and weekly participation in many universities, towns and cities across the country, unlike most modern codified sports in any given location, it makes little additional impact upon its immediate habitat. Outdoor games of Ultimate are played on existing grassed 'pitches' and indoor games occur in leisure centres. There is also a lack of permanency of any pitch markings visible during many games, with the immediate natural environment sometimes being used to denote playing area boundaries (not unlike the first known game):

> *'In practice today bags, spare discs and bottles are used to denote the field of play. There are no visible sidelines and so unless you are clearly miles out [of play] no one gets called.'* (Field notes 20/06/06)

> *'Existing lines of both basketball and netball courts have been used – one black, one red. The front and back of the end-zone has been marked for the duration of the weekend using black and yellow hazard tape.'* (Field notes 18/02/06)

Only in the most important outdoor events will any evidence of Ultimate pitch markings be visible (see subheading below concerning artefacts). Illustrations of both indoor and outdoor pitch markings can be found in Appendix E.

An interesting observation concerning the actual game play of Ultimate is that the immediate habitat is actually incorporated and might be specifically referred to when a team is defending, as in the example recorded below.

> *'Typically, a team's defensive strategy will either be 'zone' or 'man'. In either case, the importance of space and position are clearly defined. In 'zone', defence players will simply mark an area of the pitch and carry out a specific role within it. In 'man', one player will mark an opposition player and follow them wherever they go on the pitch. However, the team will always choose to force the thrower to release the disc in the same direction. To do this the person forcing will always stand on the same side (see Appendix F for an illustration) and often call out the direction of the force*

(often a pre-agreed strategy). The force calls will be one of two choices and, depending on the vocabulary of each team, shouts of either 'line or middle' or 'home and away' or [in this case] 'tracks and playground' may be heard' (Field notes 14/01/06).

To choose to make the thrower always release the disc towards the sideline or towards the middle, is clearly a fixed notion, present as both are defined by the field of play. The latter call represents a team or a player using the local physical features they can see around them, such as in this case a railway track or a playground, as a visible marker to which the defence can always orientate themselves. To use the terms 'home and away' is less clear cut but evidently the most common terms to be heard on an Ultimate pitch. 'Home' is defined by the side closest to where the team has put their 'stuff' [clothes, bags, etc] before the game starts: 'away' being defined as the opposite side to this (but importantly, not to do with where the opposing team has necessarily put theirs). Interestingly, the side of 'home' or 'away' therefore changes each game as teams move from pitch to pitch and are not consistent about where they put their stuff. This can lead to some confusion.

> *'It's common to hear new players to the line today asking 'Which way's the force?' and 'Which side's home?'*(Field notes 28/04/06)

This can be complicated further as some players may switch the direction of the force on any new point.

(ii) Sports, landscapes and artefacts

As humans have conquered, dominated and modified their habitats in the pursuit of leisure (Galtung, 1984; Eichberg, 1982) 'modern sports disregard the natural landscape upon which they originated' (Bale, 1994: 10). This trend involved a 'sportisation' (Elias, 1971) of the natural habitat towards a 'standardised sportscape' (Bale, 1994)

which seeks to regulate spaces and make them uniform and 'fair' (Auge, 1995). Often a consequence of this is the artefacts they impose upon any given space, ranging from purpose built stadia with their access roads and car parks, to local pitches and courts with their sport specific enclosures, markings and posts.

In Ultimate the biggest potential impact upon the habitat that would leave artefacts as evidence typically occurs at a large outdoor competition with the creation of specific marked pitches. For an outdoor event, there will be between twelve and sixty four teams accommodated on between two and sixteen pitches to host a weekend competition. The UKUA (2007:7) indicates that for 'for UK Ultimate sanctioned events a recommended minimum is one pitch for every two or three teams depending on the event' but also acknowledges that 'the number of pitches you require is dependent on the number of teams attending and on your format.' For large competitions such as tour events, the UKUA adopts the pitch dimensions specified by the WFDF (see Appendix G) indicating that:

- '3.1. The Field of Play is a rectangle one hundred (100) metres long and thirty-seven (37) metres wide'

- '3.2.1. All lines are between seventy-five (75) and one hundred twenty (120) millimetres wide, and are marked with a non-caustic material (WFDF 2008: 3)'

Many outdoor venues, however, now struggle with the logistics of accommodating these guidelines, hence the caveat in their recommendations of 'the number of pitches

you require is dependent on the number of teams attending and on your format.' UKUA (2007:7). The first difficulty here is to find the physical space to that can accommodate sixteen pitches which are 100 x 37 metres in area. As one tournament director (TD) indicated:

> *'Ideal spaces are far from common and those that would be OK are usually booked up by football.'* (Field notes 02/11/06)

Despite the ongoing attempts to standardise Ultimate, Tournament Directors (TDs) are pragmatists and are usually restricted by both space and time during a weekend tournament and they therefore implement their own interpretation of the UKUA guidelines. As such they will often shrink game time and the specified dimensions of each pitch, whilst keeping the relative proportions of the indicated rectangle in order to accommodate a larger number of pitches and therefore more teams.

> *'TDs mark out as many pitches as they can in the space provided. Similarly, length of game is dictated by getting through the competition by a reasonable time on a Sunday Evening (between 5 and 7pm to allow for acceptable light and travelling home). To that end I have played competitive games indoors (like today) that have been as short as twelve minutes and as long as twenty eight, and outdoors, games between forty five and ninety minutes. Such rules and others are typically at the discretion of the TD and are disseminated to each team through their Captain at the Captain's Meeting early on a Saturday morning'* (Field notes 29/04/05).

What becomes clear when discussing the manifestation of rationalisation in Ultimate is that the sport's parameters, broadly agreed, have an apparent degree of fluidity. Bale (1994) explains that across sports, parameters vary in their 'hardness' and as such it would seem apparent that within Ultimate spatial, temporal and constitutional boundaries are 'soft'. Interestingly Bale (1994:184) indicates that 'the alternative "sports" movement associated principally with the hippy years of the 1960s and

early1970s', the climate in which Ultimate was conceived, continues to exhibit practices that represent an 'alternative ideology' and a different code of behaviour, as outlined earlier (Eichberg, 1998; Midol and Broyer, 1995).

(iii) Sport landscape as history

According to Inglis (1977: 489) 'a landscape is the most solid appearance in which a history can declare itself.' In this respect, if 'it is possible to see the present day landscape of sport as the result of a cumulative process of evolution' (Bale, 1994: 10) then the development of the Ultimate pitch becomes obvious. As 'Frisbee football' (a version of American football played with a flying disc) is recorded as the origin of many games similar to Ultimate (Johnson, 1975; Malafronte, 1998; Zagoria, 2003) then it should follow that the spatial area upon which Ultimate has evolved is rectangular in nature with endzones marked at each end. Despite this apparent adherence to a recognised pitch shape, early rules specified no quantifiable boundaries (Halpern, 2002). The use of painted lines to denote a visible pitch is a relatively recent phenomenon and it occurs still only at the highest level. According to Shields (1992: 7) this approach to delineating the field of play in sport is not uncommon, as 'new' activities such as Ultimate exist for periods of time within 'liminal zones', without having rigidly defined boundaries.

What can occur, as a result of the relative lack of demarcated playing space, is a blurring of roles and an increased interaction between the players and spectators, not unlike that which sometimes occurs in the slightly more formal context of local or 'parks' football.

'Bags on the sideline; spectators and subs actually standing ON the pitch in the final' (Message archive).

'Spectators, which largely include members of other teams, regularly comment on line calls [whether someone went 'out' or not]. This occurs most readily in indoor play where the spectators are in an enclosed space and therefore in close proximity to the players.' (Field notes 18/02/06)

'Subs regularly encroach on the pitch and there are regular calls to 'clear the line' from the team on 'O' who need to throw the disc up field along the sideline.' (Field notes 09/07/06)

Marples (1954) indicated that the lack of a distinct sideline and the mixing and interacting of players and spectators was characteristic of early football as it started to become more rationalised. It is still not uncommon to observe this in other minor sports such as lacrosse which like Ultimate may still be played (symptomatic of a relic activity akin to its heritage, Bale, 1994)) on areas such as public parks. Indeed, many Ultimate teams list public parks as their practice venue for the outdoor season and even national tour events are still played on public parks, such as Manor Park, Mansfield (UKU, 2007).

If history is to provide a guide and a tool for learning, what should follow, as in other pitch-based team sports, is the increasing standardisation of pitch size (Brailsford, 1992) for Ultimate, possibly due to the greater regulation of the 'A' tour by the UKUA and their application of the WFDF specifications. In addition, regular venues may be able to host pitches that are permanently marked for Ultimate participation – though the demands on space of other sports are sometimes acute. Spectators too, may be regulated by being given a boundary beyond the pitch from which they should observe.

(iv) Sports landscapes as systems

As the 'footprint' of sporting events are usually spread over an area much greater than that of the playing area itself there are often what Bale (1992) refers to as 'systems' that flow and interact within the given space. Such systems are typically social, economic or physical in nature. Social systems, though not identical in every event, are surprisingly uniform within Ultimate. Though differences will be apparent as the physical specification will vary from venue to venue, key features are ever present at both indoor and outdoor Ultimate events with typical examples provided below.

'Indoor venue today, the same as many: held in a Midlands leisure centre. The edge of the car park and the entrance area, both inside and out, are full of teams doing post-game speeches and calls, who are regularly asked to 'Move away from the doors' by staff. Through the windows and doors to the main hall, games are played on two pitches (approximately 4 badminton courts in length). Only one can be seen directly, as the second pitch is hidden from view by a curtained partition. Players from each team stand on the sideline of the game in which they participate, with some seated on benches.

Strewn along the side of the pitches are hoodies, bottles, spare discs and a manual scoreboard at half way. Players not participating from other teams largely watch from the balcony above, whilst others around them chat, eat or even sleep. At the far end, the TD runs the clock and records game results at a table. At a table further along there is a stall that sells discs and other Ultimate stuff.' (Field notes 22/10/06)

'Outdoor venue in Midlands, with good facilities. A large car park is adjacent to a large pavilion which offers changing facilities and some food service during the day. There is also a bar with TVs on inside, in which a large number of the teams not playing, eat and chat. From the entrance to the pavilion, which is slightly raised, a view over about a dozen pitches can be observed (see Appendix H). At one edge of the field a large group of assorted tents can be seen, where players have camped overnight.

All pitches are currently being played on. Players from each team stand on the sideline with others (possibly friends and family). Some sit in garden chairs. Bags (some wrapped in black plastic bin-bags because rain is forecast), along with bottles and spare discs can be seen along the side of each pitch. A manual scoreboard sits at half way, between both teams. At one edge of the field, near the pavilion, the TD has a large tent. Just along from that is the masseur's tent, the Lookfly stall and the St. John's ambulance crew.' (Field notes 09/07/06)

Over the course of the weekend, all players will negotiate this social landscape, interacting with whichever social space they may require. As can be ascertained in the above accounts, a weekend Ultimate event has within it an identifiable and functioning economic system, if a relatively primitive and informal one. Payment, of varying scale, will be made for travel, accommodation, food and entertainment away from the venue but in addition to this, concerning a competition, teams must pay entrance fees and may frequent the facilities at the event.

> *'Entry fees per tournament range from £80 to £150 per team'* (Field notes 14/01/06).
>
> *'Stalls such as Lookfly are present at most tournaments selling discs, t shirts, hoodies and assorted Ultimate related items'* (Field notes 09/07/06) (Examples of such merchandise can be seen in Appendix I).
>
> *'Tour events like this one are increasingly well catered for. Food, drink, changing facilities, Lookfly, St John's ambulance and even masseurs!'* (Field notes 31/08/05)

In many ways the restricted economic landscape of Ultimate events also serves to illustrate the presence and influence of counter cultural values. Not only is it relatively inexpensive to become involved with – with little requirement for recognised kit and discs selling for approximately £7 each (Lookfly, 2007) - but entry is ostensibly democratic. If a team wishes to enter an event they simply send their cheque to the tournament director and they are in. Where places are restricted, such as in an indoor venue, then typically what operates is a first come, first served approach. Physical systems, such as the spatial layout and the weather have an impact upon both social and economic systems. In the account of the outdoor venue discussed above the physical layout is compact allowing easy flow and access from one social space to another (see Appendix J). As the weather was overcast, with rain forecast, teams appeared more inclined to head indoors between games and to buy warm drinks and bacon rolls,

congregating in large numbers in the pavilion. Should the physical systems concerning layout and weather be different or change, then social and economic systems will also vary accordingly in their interactions.

(v) Sports landscape as a problem

As indicated previously, Ultimate's need to seek out suitable spaces on which to play is an ongoing one. The fact that *'ideal spaces are far from common and those that would be ok are usually booked up by football'* (Field notes 02/11/06) reflects the fact that the use of sporting landscapes demonstrate the ability of one group to exercise power over another, through an imposition of territoriality and thereby excluding less important marginal 'others' from that space (Sack, 1986). Bale (1992) indicates that such situations usually occur through social or economic priorities implemented by those in charge of leisure facilities. Until Ultimate can compete by generating enough social or economic demand in such contexts, finding suitable venues and having pre-marked pitches will remain some way off.

As well as the difficulties of access to appropriate space, time also represents an issue, not least in the apparent inability of TDs to publish a coherent tournament schedule ahead of any given Ultimate event. Regular requests for a schedule are apparent on DiscSpace in the days and week leading up to a competition which, despite any promises that might be made about how things are going to be 'different at this event', inevitably lead to a posting by the TD reading:

> *'The schedule is not going to be available until the tournament.'* (Message archive)

Typical key reasons offered by TDs for such a delay appear to include:

'Doubts over a few of the pitches, which means we do not know which schedule we will be using.' (Message archive)

'We still don't know who/how many [teams] have entered!' (Message archive)

The routine inability (or the unwillingness) of TDs to finalise a meaningful schedule until the day of competition is largely tolerated and one suspects that this rather 'laid back' approach is an important part of the character of the individuals who choose to take on this role, embodying in some small way an 'official' resistance to rigid scheduling and the sort of bureaucratised clock watching typified in more dominant sporting forms. There are, perhaps unsurprisingly, consistent voices of disapproval on this score, not least because of the impact upon individuals of when games are likely to be scheduled, start and finish, and how this affects waiting time and travel arrangements.

'I'm sure whoever wrote the schedule had a tough job and I'm sure they did what they thought was best. But a schedule of 9am, 5hr gap, 4pm, 6.15pm is pretty awful.' (Message archive)

'We appear to be playing ourselves at 4.00pm on Saturday.' (Message archive)

'Sorry, did someone say 'shambles?' (Message archive)

'If you can't even write a half decent schedule then how the hell can the sport be 'professionalised?' (Message archive)

As indicated via the TDs' explanations of scheduling, and as discussed earlier, confirming pitch space for Ultimate events is inherently problematic. However, this is often complicated further by the organiser's insecurities of knowing exactly how many teams will turn up on the day, due to the rather 'laissez faire' attitude that some teams

have about entering competitions and then withdrawing from them at impossibly short notice.

(vi) Sport landscape as aesthetic

Sports performers indicate that the experience of participating in different places impacts upon performance (Meinig, 1979:45) making many aware of a 'sense of place' in any given event. As Bale (1994: 10) puts it:

> 'The fact that a sense of place will vary between different landscapes implies that such landscapes possess aesthetic qualities predisposing the observer towards one against the other... impressions of nature and environment are important elements of the athlete's experience, relations with nature being full of emotions and memories'

Since the creation of the UKUA, an award has always been voted on by the membership on preferred venues and the regular winner is the Eastbourne Sports Park, which hosts the annual British Open each summer. Feedback from the event typically refers to 'the excellent facilities and high standard of play….It's an especially good tournament for teams to come to because it's situated on the coast and enjoys a good sunshine record.' (EBC, 2007:1) The annual shortlist always contains venues that have excellent facilities (e.g. flat pitches, refreshments, changing rooms) but the coastal location and the extremely high levels of recorded sunshine (Met Office, 2007) suggest that this gives it an aesthetic edge to Eastbourne over more urban facilities such as the BCU sports grounds in Birmingham. That said, one must also be aware that such idyllic notions of how and where a sport is best experienced may actually be nothing more than romantic, projected ideals common in literature and typically pertaining in sports such as cricket and baseball (Bale, 1994).

A less obvious reference to the aesthetic experience of participating in Ultimate can be found in the playing of music during Ultimate events. Snyder (1993) refers to the playing of music as a primary phenomenon of a sporting event, but typically any inclusion of music to traditional UK sports participants and fans arguably represents something more akin to 'entertainment' rather than real sport. Where music has been added to other sporting events it has been mainly in the interests of marketing and largely in the pursuit of 'sportainment' and often stirs the opposition of 'traditional' sport supporters (Whannel, 2002). In Ultimate, music during play is specifically confined to indoor events and often at those which are less formal.

> *'The stereo, which I presume belongs to one of the TDs, is set up at one side of the hall. It's on all day, through every game, and plays indie rock stuff, or harder.'* (Field Notes 02/11/06)

In fact, creating the 'right atmosphere', which includes the playing of music is something that TDs pride themselves on being able to create and is usually appreciated by participants in the main.

> *'I'd like to thank people, both players and in the audience, who praised the music. I'd also like to thank all the people who came up to me afterwards to comment on the choice of tunes and how it set the tone for a chilled out tournament. I was particularly pleased with the impact the music had on the finals.'* (Message archive)

> *'Music during games is a definite positive for the game of Ultimate. It makes a beautiful game even better to watch and play.'* (Message archive)

According to Kupfer (1995: 393) participation in the right environment actually facilitates the perception of aesthetic elements as it, 'instigates aesthetic awareness of ourselves moving in space and time'. The gaining of aesthetic experiences within Ultimate has in fact emerged as a rich theme considered worthy of further explanation and, as such, is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 8.

3. Participants in Ultimate and the development of their involvement

Few researchers have provided detailed attention as to how and why involvement in sport develops. Of those that have, Stebbins (1992) argues that clear patterns of increasing commitment are evident throughout the life histories of participants in sport. Though early involvement is often seen as unclear, Stevenson's (1999) research examining how sports performers became engaged in their chosen activity identifies a process of recruitment in which early participants' experiences are often supported, subverted or coerced by important people in their lives. A three stage model, identifying a progression from early introductions and involvements, through to entanglement and then to later commitments, was identified and it serves as a useful tool in this study to examine how participants became involved in Ultimate.

(i) Introductions and involvements

According to Kenyon and McPherson (1981) becoming involved in sporting activities through significant others such as family members, teachers or friends is common and at the very beginning is often associated with a degree of intrigue. Donnelly and Young (1999) use the term 'pre-socialisation' to define the information an individual acquires before their first participation in an activity. In the case of Ultimate the key issues that appear to hinder its sporting legitimacy for many are the apparent pretentiousness that the term 'Ultimate' conveys, the informality of the sport, and the notion of play (not sport) evoked by playing with a Frisbee. Unsurprisingly perhaps, many see a sport that involves team competition with a Frisbee as trivial: as a form of relaxing leisure rather than real sport. As such it is evident that Ultimate and those who participate in it do

carry something of a 'stigma', in relation to the general public, who typically play or consume more traditional or dominant sporting forms.

Interestingly, this sense of 'difference' appears to be quickly realised by those who first participate in Ultimate, yet it appears not to deter involvement and, if anything, it may even serve as one of the main attractions. To continue to participate and to become further entangled in an activity which appears to carry a stigma might indicate that the participants are happy to embrace their role as 'social deviants' (Goffman, 1963: 143) and disaffiliate themselves from more traditional sporting activities and become further entangled and further committed to playing Ultimate. This broad aspect of involvement in Ultimate is discussed in more detail in Chapter 9 as an emergent theme. It is argued there that the rejection of such a stigma underlines the UKUA's quest for greater sporting legitimacy and the promotion of a modernisation agenda.

(ii) Entanglements

'Entanglements are those relationships which act to involve an individual more and more deeply in a role or activity' (Stevenson, 1999:92). Within Ultimate such entanglement relationships are formed firstly during informal practices. What becomes apparent from players in their early practices is they consistently refer to elements of strong social interaction and a sense of belonging with phrases such as: 'I've been really been made to feel welcome' or 'Everyone's really friendly.' With many people over the age of eighteen taking up Ultimate away from strong significant others, such as a family members who are integral in primary socialisation into activities (Horne et al., 1999), Stebbins (1992) found that older new sports participants were more likely to experience friendliness, encouragement and legitimacy, and this seems to be borne out here also.

According to Stevenson (1999:93) 'these webs of relationship draw the athletes deeper into their sporting involvements and they chose to allow themselves to be drawn in because of the value they place on those relationships.' The strength of such relationships are tested further when individuals decide whether they will choose to commit to the activity or not.

(iii) Commitment

Before investing greater time and money to any activity and thus showing a degree of commitment to it, Donnelly and Young (1999) indicate that individuals must evaluate the accuracy of their pre-socialisation and their early involvements and entanglements to determine whether or not participation should continue or deepen. Having chosen to participate in a less traditional sporting activity and having received a welcome that is positive in nature there appear to be two more factors that determine whether or not participation in Ultimate is sustained beyond those early experiences, namely, coping with the physical demands, and acceptance of the ethos of the 'spirit of the game' (the latter of these points is discussed more fully in Chapter 6).

The physical demands required of an Ultimate player are often far in excess of what is initially expected. There may be little sanctioned on-field physical contact between Ultimate players, but games - especially games outdoors - can continue for in excess of an hour and this period largely comprises of a series of repeated and lengthy sprints to either get free from marking or to mark another player. This sort of repeated, extended sprinting is exhausting and it often causes amusement from Ultimate players when individuals from other sports come and try it (often after playing other team sports)

believing Ultimate to be something rather leisurely or less challenging than mainstream sport , as the examples below attest:

> *'I had this mate who came who played a lot of football. You should have seen him. Within the space of twenty minutes he was blowing out of his arse. He never came again!'* (MC – interview 02/11/06)

> *'I like the fitness side of it. I like the idea that you can go like a bat out of hell and then take a point off and then go again. That kind of thing appealed to me, more so than say football would. I don't think you'll see many fat Frisbee players but there are so many fat buggers on the football field and rugby field.'* (TM – interview 02/11/06)

> *'Compared to football it's so much harder. You can't stand still or pass your marker on to someone else and if you've gotta mark someone who runs like a greyhound, it kills.'* (HL - Interview 22/05/06)

Beyond the endurance aspect, there is also the technical and physical mastery of the throws themselves which are challenging. What appears to frustrate many starters is quite how long it can take to learn to throw – with little apparent effort – a flat disc that glides smoothly over any distance. In particular the basic mastery of the 'sidearm', one of the two basic throws, can take a long time to develop – far too long in some cases. Generally, commitments are manifest in the long term by collective obligations, such as the expectation that practice will be attended or that a player will be picked and will willingly represent a team in competition. The transition into meeting such obligations in Ultimate is rarely steady or straightforward, unlike in many popular sports where individuals typically make a smooth transition through school and the local sports club and beyond, due to the ease of access into non-school sports clubs (Stebbins, 1992).

In Ultimate players appear to commit either gradually or they 'break' and become steady over time. Gradual commitment seems to occur especially when individuals also participate in another sport which is then held in tension with Ultimate. What appears to

happen in many cases is that, as time passes, players commit more completely to participating in Ultimate, often because of time pressure or because of emerging tensions over respective sporting values:

> *'It made me give up badminton pretty much. I played badminton and Ultimate all through 2002, and then a bit more Ultimate, I suppose, in 2003. Then I hurt my wrist, and since then Ultimate's taken over really. I don't know why I never went back to badminton. I mean, I was a stronger badminton player than I am an Ultimate player…but there's something more satisfying about Ultimate.'* (RL- interview 04/05/06)

> *'I used to play football for years and then when I started playing Ultimate I did both for a while. Over time, I started to realise how shitty football was and how people just seemed to wanna kick me, so I thought I've had enough of that and just played Ultimate.'* (TM – interview 02/11/06)

> *'It was tricky in the summer when I played cricket, 'cos both sports took up lots of time and I tried to make both socials. Somehow, over time, most of my best friends were Ultimate players and so I gave my time to that.'* (EC– interview 09/07/06)

Breaks in Ultimate participation occur, largely, after individuals leave university and either move back home or relocate to a new area because of work. As already discussed, participation in 'telephone' teams or 'geo' teams may become a steady option, though the transition into these is not always easy. In such instances players may choose to 'pick up' for a while, whereby they agree to play for different teams across the country or in an area, either by prior arrangement or by turning up at a competition and simply offering to play. Although, at face value, this appears to show anything but a traditional notion of commitment in which an individual restricts and obligates their services to one club and one group of team mates, it is actually the individual's commitment to *play the sport* that is especially valued and, as such, this sort of ad-hoc approach to team-play is a completely legitimate and accepted practice.

4. What are the characteristics and attractions of Ultimate?

As participants in any sporting activity, move from initial introductions, entanglements and then onto showing significant commitment, Stebbins (1992) suggests that such participants become engaged in 'serious leisure': an activity in which people engage for large parts of their spare or discretionary time. They can now be identified by the fact that such:

- Participants experience a unique ethos,
- They invest considerable effort,
- They persevere,
- They have careers,
- And they come to identify strongly with a particular activity.

In order to gain an insight into how and why individuals participate in serious leisure through Ultimate, these characteristics will be briefly examined in turn. In addition I would like to offer three further characteristics that appear to attract participants to commit to Ultimate, namely:

- Ease of access
- Mixed participation in a team setting
- The gaining of aesthetic experiences.

Other aspects that have been selected for further investigation are indicated within each of the relevant sections and are included within Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9.

(i) Experience of a 'Unique ethos'

An ethos, or spirit, is a meaningful system of values in a social network, that guides and influences behavioural norms and practices (Weber, 1997). In Ultimate, the ethos of the 'spirit of the game' is pervasive at all levels and it reflects a 'collective morality' to which all players must subscribe (Robbins: 2004: 332). Similar examples of a 'collective morality' are not uncommon in many individual activities even at the highest level (e.g. in golf or snooker players are expected to call fouls on themselves) but to find this in a competitive team sport is something of a rarity.

The WFDF indicate that the 'Spirit of the Game is the most important rule', a fact which is reinforced by it being placed first within the rules of Ultimate. The ethos is most comprehensively summarised in the WFDF preamble to the rules of play:

> 'Flying disc sports have traditionally relied upon a spirit of sportsmanship which places the responsibility of fair play on the players themselves. Highly competitive and committed play is encouraged, but never at the expense of the bond of mutual respect between players, adherence to the agreed upon rules of any event, nor the basic enjoyment of play. Protection of these vital elements serves to eliminate adverse conduct from the playing field. The responsibility for the maintenance of this spirit rests on each player's shoulders.' (WFDF, 2008:1)

As the game is self-refereed at all levels, such responsibility to administer and to adhere to the said set of rules is taken very seriously. The WFDF, (2008:1) rules indicate that. 'It is trusted that no player will intentionally violate the rules' and that 'at a bare minimum, ultimate players should hold themselves to the same code of conduct as referees would be expected to conform to at their level of play.' The integrity of the spirit of the game in practice according to Robbins (2004) is not in question as Ultimate players at all levels will be able to give a competent account about what it means and its

centrality to play. However, its precise interpretation is much less clear cut and as such it will be examined in more detail in Chapter 6.

Unlike most other team sports which have recognised match officials, in Ultimate there are 'no harsh penalties for infractions, but rather a method for resuming play in a manner which simulates what would most likely have occurred had there been no infraction' (WFDF, 2008: 1). In short: *'When a rule violation occurs, if it cannot be resolved the disc is sent back to the last person who threw it'* (Field notes 14/01/06). Broadly, what the ethos of the spirit of the game provides for Ultimate is a code which aims to minimise disputes and maximise player welfare and mutual respect. Its application illustrates how players manage potentially unethical actions and 'evade the code of winning at all costs' (Robbins: 2004: 332).

(ii) The investment of effort – based upon knowledge training and skill

To compare a competent Ultimate player to a non-Ultimate player, someone who has perhaps thrown a Frisbee on the beach during the summer, serves to highlight the marked difference in skills development that probably exists between the two. This occurs through the investment by the Ultimate convert of considerable time and effort in training and physical preparation and in honing his/her skill.

> *'Since I went to Uni I've been training three times a week. It's Mondays for two hours indoors, Wednesday for two hours outdoors and Fridays one hour indoors. Then, of course, any weekend tournaments on top.'* (EC– interview 09/07/06)
>
> *'At the moment, 'cos it's summer we've switched to just training outdoors, two hours on Tuesday nights and two hours on Sunday afternoon. In the winter we'll just have the Tuesday night slot but that will be indoors.'* (MM – interview 09/07/06)

> *'As I have to work some weekends I have to book off the time so I can play competitions. With some of the competitions being so far away, or me being so knackered on Monday, I've been trying to take either Fridays or Mondays [off] as well.'* (HL – interview 22/05/06)

As well as the time commitment involved in playing that is apparent here, the effort exerted over this time, especially in a weekend competition, is sufficient for some players to consider missing work because of necessary recovery time on Monday morning. This is perhaps not surprising when one considers that the physical effort required during a weekend competition is probably beyond what they have experienced in many other sporting pursuits.

(iii) Persevere

Those who continue to participate in Ultimate demonstrate more than a degree of perseverance, firstly in trying to develop the basic skills and secondly through their response when events threaten to prevent participants from playing, such as injury or changes to personal arrangements.

As illustrated previously, beginners are typically 'taught a basic backhand throw and some pancake catching before having a go at a sidearm' (See Glossary of Terms). These elements make up much of the basic throwing and catching skills required. However, throwing a disc with enough spin to make it fly accurately and flat (and therefore at speed) takes time to perfect and it can continue to be a source of frustration, even for those who have been playing for a couple of years.

> *'I'd love to be able to throw a sidearm, down the line, that just goes flat whenever I needed to. Every time I force it, it arcs. In practice I can do it sometimes but in a game I've got to the point where I might choose not to throw it.'* (MC– interview 02/11/06)

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> *'As well as working harder on my fitness this year, I want to try to handle [the disc] more and improve my throwing.'* (RL- interview 04/05/06)

More technically difficult catches and throws such as hammers, IOs and scoobers (see Glossary of Terms) are usually acquired only after the above skills have been honed to become staple throws. As such, these more technically testing moves are rarely achieved without perseverance. The 'wanting' to play appears to serve as a key motivator for both injured players and for those juggling other personal commitments.

> *'I've done my knee three times now. The doctor tells me it won't get any better without rest, but at the moment it's not getting any worse, so I'll carry on.'* (BM Interview 03/11/06)

> *'I should be resting it [an ankle] for at least another week officially but I really wanted to play this weekend. It's a bit sore but it should be alright.'* (TM – interview 02/11/06)

> *'With my new job I've not been able to make Tuesday night training. However, with a few changes of arrangement at work I've sorted it so I can leave earlier and at least make the last hour'* (HL - Interview 22/05/06).

According to Stebbins (1992) participants are prepared to persevere if they believe that positive feelings and durable benefits will later emerge as a result of sticking at the activity and overcoming adversity, even though some moments may not always be pleasant.

(iv) Careers

After years or participation, repeated commitment and perseverance and the investment of a lot of time and effort, pursuing leisure seriously generates recognised histories and achievements, referred to by Stebbins (1992) as a 'career'.

As previously discussed, progress is made during a 'career' both by the regular attendance of practice sessions and through playing for (gradually more proficient) teams in competition or otherwise 'advertising' one's playing credentials.

> *'In practice, more experienced players are apparent by the fact they often wear older tops from the previous teams they have represented, or they throw the disc with a far higher degree of skill.'* (Field notes 22/02/05)

In social settings, experienced players may well indicate the extent of their careers by talking about previous teams for which they have played or they may reminisce in public about past competitions. This appears to be most common when travelling together in cars to an event and memories of last year's performance at that event are frequently shared.

'Careers' tend to vary considerably in length and roles within teams appear to change over time.

> *'Though most Ultimate players are young professionals [by occupation] and in their twenties, on the tour this year there are an increasing number of teenagers and a substantial group, with families, who are over the age of forty'* (Field notes 09/07/06).

> *'In more mixed age teams, older players dominate the handling of the disc with younger members running and catching far more'* (Field notes 29/04/05).

> *'Over the past twenty years I've gone from being a 'nutter' who would chase and lay for anything, to a middle and then a handler for the last few years. I suppose it's largely due to the fact I can't run as fast as I used [to], but it's also what's been needed by different teams I've played for'* (BM Interview' - 03/11/06)

What the last comment here shows is that a players' role may well shift during the passage of time. This may be due to team necessity but sometimes is due to a shifting of role, linked to age and experience (Ball, 1976). As with many sports, due to the

accruing of experience, senior players, captains and coaches tend to be older. In university these are generally final year students and at club level, the older members of the group.

(v) Identify strongly

According to (Stebbins, 1992:7):

'participants in serious leisure tend to identify strongly with their chosen pursuits. They are inclined to speak proudly, excitedly, and frequently about them to other people, and to present themselves in terms of these pursuits when conversing with new acquaintances.'

As we have already seen, participants often get introduced to Ultimate by other players, whether because of the social or the playing aspects of the game or a combination of the two. Those immediately around Ultimate players, people who are very familiar with the strong associations their respected friend or family member has formed with the sport, referred to as 'sympathetic others' or the 'wise' (Goffman, 1963), also have to face the inevitable stigma attached to participation.

'My wife was asked by a member of a footballing group I was part of, "Is your husband still playing Frisbee? When's he coming back to playing a real sport?" (Field notes 14/01/06)

Responses from both the 'wise' and from players as deviants themselves tend to be strong, rather than passive and according to (Goffman, 1963: 145) this is because 'social deviants often feel that they are not merely equal to, but better than, normals, and that the life they lead is better than that lived by the persons they would otherwise be.' As

such, Ultimate players embody their role when they 'flaunt their refusal to take their place" (Goffman, 1963: 145).

(vi) Ease of social access

'It's a common claim by Ultimate Frisbee players that *anyone* could play their game' (Thornton, 2004: 175 emphasis added) and, by all accounts, this seems to be largely true. As indicated earlier, what becomes apparent from speaking to players about their early practices is that they consistently refer to elements of strong social interaction and a sense of belonging. Such comments are more widely representative of a sport whose existing membership consistently seems to make an effort to welcome newcomers and this aspect is discussed more fully in the next chapter.

(vii) Mixed participation in a team setting

The real attraction for some Ultimate converts, both male and female, is to be able to engage in a mixed sex team sport. Most team sport participants have been confined to single sex activities which are common in more dominant sporting forms specified either through league affiliation, legislation or school regulations. The clear appeal for some is being able to compete and socialise directly through sport with members of the opposite sex:

> *'What's not to like about switching to Ultimate? I still get to spend my weekends playing sport but now I get to hang out with cool people, which include women. Result!'* (PW – Interview 01/12/05)

For others it is about what participation in mixed sport represents as an alternative to more traditional notions of sporting masculinity.

Such responses are in keeping with Wheaton's (2004) indication that 'alternative' sports, present opportunities for more transgressive embodied social identities that differ from the sorts of masculinities typically performed in traditional sports. Not only could this subversion of traditional gender identities in sport serve as an attractor for some players, male and female but, but conversely, it could also serve to dissuade many men from participating in Ultimate. Many British men, who have largely been socialised into highly aggressive traditional male team sports, are unlikely to regard mixed Ultimate as a 'real man's sport.' This highly unusual aspect has been selected for more detailed discussion in Chapter 7 so we will return to this matter later.

(viii)   *Gaining of aesthetic experiences*

For some committed players, Ultimate is an activity in which individuals seem to feel they can fully express themselves, and also experience a sense of control, something which they may have found difficult in other team sports.

> *'I like the fact that when you're on the disc you're totally in control of it and nobody's gonna knock it off you and you've got that moment to choose what you're gonna do. You're not hurried – well you're hurried in that you've got the stall count but basically you can pick out what you wanna do and put as much flair into it or be as simple as you want.'* (RL- interview 04/05/06)

> *'It's the clean, aesthetic pleasure of it that makes it a bit different. You don't get that in other sports. In football it's scrappy, but in Ultimate it's clean and you can play the perfect pass anytime you want to rather than be hacked down.'* (EC– interview 09/07/06)

Such comments appear to be significant as examples of self actualisation, where individuals seek to fulfil their potential, something which was identified earlier as an important counter culture value. Interviews repeatedly highlight how individuals are attracted to Ultimate because it allows them to play in a team sport which has

characteristics concerning aesthetics which differ from most others. These elements again seem worthy of more detailed discussion and this can be found in Chapter 8.

5. Summary

What this chapter has served to do is to provide an insight into the experiences of individuals who participate in Ultimate. Answers were provided to a number of key questions namely; *where* does Ultimate take place in both space and time; *how* do participants typically become involved in Ultimate and how does their involvement develop; *what* are the characteristics of Ultimate that become apparent through further participation; and what insights can be gleaned about *why* individuals participate? Such information shows not only the commonalities between Ultimate and other sports but it also serves to highlight key differences in this respect.

Concerning where Ultimate takes place and in space and time, it was identified that participation in Ultimate takes place in both indoor and outdoor venues. Indoor 'pitches' can be contained within a leisure centre and outdoor pitches are sited on existing grassed areas. In both instances however, there is a lack of permanency of pitch markings which is reflective both of the social or economic priority given to more dominant sporting forms and some of the key values of Ultimate. What is evident is that the key spatial, temporal and constitutional boundaries within Ultimate are 'soft' reflecting practices that are indicative of an 'alternative ideology' being played out through the sport (Bale, 1994).

Regarding *how* participants become involved in Ultimate and how does their involvement develop Many people are introduced to Ultimate as a consequence of their

Higher Education experiences, especially for those who attend a UK University where Ultimate has already been established. Some individuals continue participation after graduation by either creating or joining telephone or geo teams. A recent development has seen more teams develop outside of the major urban centres and is often started from the drive of one single person or a small group of enthusiasts. Individual action on the part of teachers also accounts for the small numbers of schools that have begun to play Ultimate. Barriers to participation centre around the key role of HE, the apparent pretentiousness of the sport's labelling, and the alleged triviality a sport played with a Frisbee. Those who participate do carry a 'stigma', in relation to members of the general public - perhaps especially men - who typically play or consume traditional or dominant sporting forms.

Through continued 'serious' participation, key characteristics of Ultimate become more easy to describe and they provide insights into *why* individuals participate. Ease of acceptance into the culture seems a real appeal for newcomers with players in their early practices referring to elements of strong social interaction and a rapid sense of belonging. An additional attraction for some is to be able to engage in a mixed sex team sport, especially after many years of being confined to participating in single sex sporting activities. The clear appeal for some is being able to socialise with the opposite sex, while for others mixed sport represents a welcome alternative to more traditional notions of sporting masculinity. It was noted that not only could this aspect serve as an attractor but conversely could well have served to dissuade some men from participating in Ultimate; men who have largely been schooled in aggressive traditional single-sex team sports. For some, Ultimate is an activity in which individuals feel they can express themselves and experience a sense of control, something which they may

have found difficult in other team sports. Such comments appear to be significant as examples of self actualisation, where individuals seek to fulfil their potential identified earlier as an important counter culture value.

What this chapter also serves to highlight are a number of emergent themes which provide ideal 'jumping off' points to explore highly pertinent aspects for more detailed discussions which can be found in later chapters.

Chapter 5

Subcultural Identity in Ultimate

1. Introduction

Contemporary studies of sporting subcultures have centred on locating the real or *authentic* identity of participants (Wheaton and Beal, 2003). As outlined in the chapter on methodology, I want to argue that in order to gain a critical insight into such matters access to relevant information is best defined and observed by actively *doing* the activity under study (Butts, 2001; Sands, 2002; Wheaton and Beal, 2003). This sort of practice enables the researcher to get past the surface realities of such activities. For example, a casual observer may interpret a young person wearing clothing associated with skating as a 'skater', but a subcultural 'insider' might not. – 'Who fucking cares what people wear when they skate? Get a life! Any real skater should know that it's not the look it's the attitude' (Cook,1995, cited in Rinehart, 2000: 510). What becomes apparent is there are aspects of subcultural identity that are more significant to an insider's concepts of 'authenticity' (Kiewa, 2002, Wheaton, 2000). These 'symbolic boundaries and behaviours' (Cohen, 1985:71) are wide ranging and can include anything from beliefs and ritualised practices (Fine, 1979) to a specific argot, skills or certain 'attitudes'(Wheaton, 2004).

Donnelly and Young (1988: 224) suggest that the establishment of subcultural identity is, 'intended for two distinct audiences – members of the larger society and members of the subculture'. According to Jenkins (2004: 97) this serves the purpose of constructing

visible external differences which, in turn, 'generates internal similarity', thus 'distinguishing the in-group from the out-group' (Donnelly, 1985: 546). In the process of deciding what similarities and differences exist, theoretical boundaries are created and at that point, individuals can be considered 'insiders' or 'outsiders' (Barth, 1969). However the concept of a fixed boundary is problematic.

> 'Even where it can be said to exist, it's far from clear "where" or "what" the boundary of any particular boundary "is". This is not surprising, since "it" is not, really, anywhere or anything. Boundaries are to be found in interaction between people who identify themselves collectively in different ways' (Jenkins, 2004: 103).

This can be most simply illustrated by the use of a specific argot or a specialised language (Wheaton, 2004). For example,

> *'The object with which Ultimate is played is termed by outsiders as a 'Frisbee'. However, insiders would only ever refer to the same object as a disc'* (Field notes 12/03/05).

Boundary issues can be explained and resolved therefore by the fact that, 'some cultural features are used by actors as signals and emblems of differences, others are ignored, and in some relationships radical differences are played down and denied' (Barth, 1969: 14). In this instance, insiders have the dominant power to fix the rules and therefore the boundaries, as they see fit. The cumulative information that is held inside a boundary becomes the identity of the collective form, a form of subcultural capital (Barth, 1966; Thornton, 1997). Within Ultimate two key themes of subcultural capital can be identified namely those of 'strong social interaction' and 'alternativeness' and these are both embodied and objectified in the production of authenticity. Firstly, in explaining how a strong social interaction is embodied, social practices that occur before, during and after games are examined here, along with behaviours that reinforce these

interactions away for the pitch. Secondly, in identifying how 'alternativeness' is objectified, aspects such as team names, disc merchandise and fashion will all be examined.

2. Strong social interaction

Practices are social conventions and routines (Collins, 1981) which are often employed to facilitate cooperation. In Ultimate these are sharply apparent at intervals immediately before, during and immediately after games and then again at some time later, away from the pitch. In order clearly to identify and critically explore such practices, the occasions when they are most apparent will serve as a useful structure.

(i) Before the game

<u>Flipping the disc</u>

> *'Before a competitive game, the captains from each team (or a nominated representative) convene to determine who would 'pull' and receive the disc first. This is usually done by each captain taking a disc and simultaneously flipping it in the air. While the discs spin in the air, one captain (determined before the flip) calls 'odd' or 'even'. When the discs have landed they will either be both the same way up (even) or different (odd). In the event that only one disc can be found at the time of flipping one captain calls 'up' or 'down' instead. The successful captain can opt to pull or receive the first point, or can opt from which end of the pitch they wish to start.'* (Field notes 14/04/05)

<u>Pulling the disc</u>

> *'Both in practice and competition, all teams exhibited a practice that signifies the start of the game (and the start of a new point). Before the game commences, players walk to the opposing end of the field and stand facing each other on opposing endzone lines. Typically, both teams will take a moment to confirm strategy. When conversations are completed the team with the disc raises it in the air to signify they are ready. The opposing players raise their hands to signify they are ready to proceed. The player*

with the disc, 'pulls' or throws the disc to the opposing team.' (Field notes 29/04/05)

(ii) During the game

Slapping of hands on first point

> *'Though no obligation is made to do so, players regularly slap hands with their marker as a greeting just prior to the first disc being thrown. This is sometimes extended as a greeting to others when their marker changes, though this is less common.'* (Field notes 24/04/06)

Checking the disc

> *'Though games can be restarted after a stoppage by tapping the disc (including on the floor), almost always the disc is offered to the person marking so that it may be tapped in by them. When this occurs one or both players may call 'Disc in' to indicate that the game has been restarted.'* (Field notes 24/04/06)

These above examples are what Robbins (2004) refers to as 'entrance practices' and is typical of the behaviour that participants who seek to foster strong social interaction engage in when they enter particular settings to facilitate and regulate their entrance. Typically these practices also facilitate the onset of the game and impact upon interactions, as well as the quality and fluidity of play.

Player changes/Substitutions

As explained earlier, the indoor game of Ultimate is played with five players on each team, whereas the outdoor game is seven a-side. Teams may change as many players as they like at the completion of each point, though never during a point unless to replace an injured player. As Robbins (2004:323) observed, players on the sideline typically negotiate who was to go on, which was sometimes determined by the captain but, 'was usually determined by previous playing time, the need for good and experienced

players, surplus of players, and subjective whim'. My own findings indicate that there appears to be established practices about how player changes are self-managed and negotiated and that these vary depending upon specific team cultures and the context of the game.

> *'Within most teams, if you want to play the next point in Ultimate, you walk onto the pitch and stand on the line your team is about to begin from. Players walking back or already standing on the line will observe this action and walk off according to how many players have come on. This may also be facilitated by tired players walking straight off... If, for any reason, this cannot be reconciled e.g. a group of players saying: "But we've just come on" the captain or other senior players confirm the decision.'* (Field notes 14/03/06)

In particular, new players can appear quite hesitant at first about exactly when to go on to the line and they often need encouragement from established members to just 'walk on'. Such hesitancy however is understandable; the rookie does not want to make a social mistake (Donnelly and Young, 1999). This is especially the case as the act of 'walking on' may lead to an established member being obliged to walk off. This example is set against the formal organisation and social hierarchy evident in previous sporting experiences, but it is wholly acceptable in Ultimate.

In some practice sessions this process may have an added dimension.

> *'In practice sessions the process of "sorting out" who plays each point begins in the same way, with players walking on, but after that it is sometimes determined by which players get their foot (or sometimes knee) on the line first. This often leads to friendly competition about getting on the line first.'* (Field notes 20/04/06)

Robbins (2004) concluded that such instances led to concerns over the amount of playing time made available for each player, but no such evidence has been found for this view in this study. In fact, the regulation of substitutes and attempts to enforce any

kind of social hierarchy in this respect has only been observable during important competition.

> *'Typically, teams change less than half their personnel for each point (indoors 0 – 2 changes and outdoor 0 – 3 changes are usual). More able performers play the majority of points with a small number of changes employed to maintain some kind of continuity, although on occasions, such as after a particularly long point, a team will change more of its players. Largely, captains employ a 'walk on' policy, but in important games or in close contests, they may specify who should, or even who should not, go on.'* (Field notes 11/11/05)

> *'During competition, and on the line itself, the selection is sometimes refined further by the team pulling the disc changing their positions in the line to match up how they prefer to against the opposition. The receiving team are expected not to move during this time and should they do so or if they go into a huddle and don't quickly show their line, the opposing team will shout 'Hold your line!'* (Field notes 13/04/06)

With increased rationalisation and specialisation becoming apparent within elite Ultimate competition, these established practices have undergone further change at the highest levels of Ultimate.

> *'To compete at this level we've tried to go the same way as the big teams and try and use specialist squads.'* (SB– interview 10/07/06)

> *'On the A tour, when the top teams score, most of their players (sometimes all) will come off the field to be replaced by players who are deemed to be more effective for the next point, which will be on defence'.* (Field notes 02/04/06)

Such practices are reminiscent, of course, of the highly specialised approaches to sports such as American Football, with which Ultimate had early associations and is consistent with a strategy development that occurs within sports as they evolve and become more rationalised (Coakley, 2003).

Game Infractions and Resolutions

Robbins (2004) suggests that in Ultimate the opposing teams rely on each other not to abuse the agreed-upon rules and trust each other to maximise the quality and fluidity of play. The first aspect will be dealt with later. Here, however, it is evident that the fluidity of play is facilitated by these sorts of trust relations.

> *'Game infractions occur at all levels due to the human error involved. Players collide, discs get knocked away and people make their share of mistakes. To maintain game fluidity and to facilitate cooperation, by and large, small violations are therefore left to slide e.g. a player failing to begin counting with the word 'stalling', or 'travelling' due to the speed at which a disc is caught.'* (Field notes - 14/01/06)

Gouldner (1960) identifies such practices as typical of the 'norm of reciprocity', a form of social exchange in which people willingly help those who have helped them and people should not injure those who have aided them. That's not to say, however, that all game infractions are ignored. If an obvious violation of the rules is observed then the game will momentarily stop. Such an example is shown here:

> *'A disc is swung across the pitch and just at the point when the disc is to be caught, the defender makes a bid and hits both the disc and the attackers arm. The attacker shouts "foul" [This is done to communicate to the players that a foul has been committed and play should stop]. The defender shouts "contested" as they do not agree. The brief exchange indicates that the players do not agree as to what transpired. The attacker says "You hit my arm and that's why I dropped it". The defender replies "I reckon I got the disc first."*
>
> *Neither appear to see the other player's point of view. The disc is thrown back to the last player who threw it before the dispute occurred., the offensive player offers the disc to their marker [to signify that the infraction has been resolved and that play can commence once more] at which point they tap the disc and shout "Disc in!'* (Field notes – 31/08/05)

Because of the absence of game officials, it is apparent that Ultimate players have devised mechanisms to facilitate game play and to do so they are willing to 'put up with

minor matters' (Ellickson, 1991:227) in order to maximise game fluidity. These aspects are discussed more fully in Chapter 6.

(iii)   After the game

Exiting Practices -shake, speech, call, slaps, cheers

Immediately following a competitive game a post-game set of practices is enacted which follows the pattern and the specific order of the shaking of hands, making a speech, 'doing a call', slapping hands and giving three cheers to the opponents. The first of these, the shaking of hands after a game, mirrors most team sports and would therefore not distinguish it from any other. However what then ensues appears much more unusual:

> *'As the teams leave the field they will find a place to sit or stand in a circle. This can be located in any available space away from the playing area. Typically, in an indoor venue, a circle convenes just outside the main entrance and, outdoors, somewhere just off the playing pitch. The circle itself sees players alternating their places (one team's player, then the other team's player) where both captains (or a nominated spokesperson) will give a short speech (normally the losers first, followed by the winners) about the match'* (Field notes – 14/03/05).

Two typical examples of such speeches are recorded below.

> *'Thanks for a great game. I really enjoyed that. You really made us work hard. There was lots of hard running from both teams and it was close for quite a while. But your 'D' caused us lots of problems and made us throw a few discs we didn't want to, which was the difference in the end…So thanks a lot and good luck for the rest of the tournament'* (Field notes - 11/11/06).

> *'Right, okay. Well, a good game - a hard game. Both teams played well. At the end of the day I think it was a fair result. Good spirit. I really enjoyed it. I look forward to seeing you tonight and I hope you party as hard as you play! And at the end of the day, Ultimate was the winner'* (Field notes – 14/03/05).

As can be seen by the above, post-match 'speeches' typically include reference to:

- The qualities of the game

- How well the other team played

- How hard they had to work in either victory or defeat

- The spirit in which the game was played

The speech usually ends with a positive sentiment. According to (Orlick, 1978:112) the repetition of such practices 'allow us to experience reinforcing cooperative relationships' and when this occurs sentiments are reinforced and 'the more predominant these responses will become'. This seems especially important in Ultimate in order to model to newer players the ethos that is professed by participants after each game. Additionally, it can serve to diffuse highly competitive or contested moments that may occur during game play.

Following the post match speeches, 'calls' will occur and one of the captains will typically say something like: 'Have you guys got a call?' The 'call' in Ultimate is a practice that involves a team inviting the other to partake in a silly game or a song of their choice.

> *'Calls sometimes relate to using the disc, such as 'show' or 'land shark' and at other times are completely unrelated to the game, such as racing to eat or drink things (such as doughnuts) as quickly as possible. Once one team has 'done their call' the other will follow. On occasions, especially if teams are particularly tired or have another game shortly afterwards, a shared call may be employed, or possibly none at all.'* (Field notes 02/11/06)

An important point to make here is that unlike other sports where alcohol may play a central part in immediate post game rituals (Dunning and Waddington, 2003), due to the

high probability that further games in Ultimate will follow as the day progresses, alcohol consumption remains firmly located in the evening in typical locations such as nearby bars. Penultimately, teams will slap hands with each other:

> *'Slaps are initiated by one captain calling "inside or outside." Members of their team respond 'Bears inside.' On hearing this the team quickly form a line that moves in a circular direction, around the opponents' line coming in the opposite direction, slapping hands as they pass.'* (Field notes 14/03/05)

Finally, as the teams part, one captain will often call 'three cheers' for their opponents and the team will respond accordingly. Again, such action is usually reciprocated by the opposition and it serves to reinforce the strong social interaction between participants. Such behaviours are sometimes, though not *always*, seen in other team sports such as Rugby Union.

(iv)   Later interactions

Observing/spectating

> *'When not playing, participants in Ultimate regularly watch other teams playing. Though players may well sit or stand with members of their own team, mixing with others is commonplace as social relationships may well have been formed at an earlier time e.g. when playing earlier for the same team.'* (Field notes 24/04/06)

Casual throwing and Impromptu games

> *'In and around venues where Ultimate is being played, participants will regularly just get out a disc and begin throwing it around. This is not any kind of warm up but just a casual throw around.'* (Field notes - 14/04/05)

> *'Impromptu games involving a disc are sometimes played during Ultimate events, such as Double Disc Court or other social games such as Hackysack (see Glossary of Terms).'* (Field notes - 11/11/07)

What these observations serve to highlight is the ongoing pleasure of play for participants, even when they are not directly participating in Ultimate matches.

The 'party' and the '3 pint challenge'

During a weekend competition, with games on the Saturday and the Sunday, some kind of entertainment or 'party' is traditionally provided for all players on the Saturday evening. This can take the form of the hosts acquiring tickets for a club for all players or merely a DJ being hired for the sports venue. Whatever forms the entertainment take, where there are Ultimate players and alcohol together there will almost certainly be a three-pint challenge competition at some stage during the evening. The practice occurs as follows:

> *'An upturned competition disc is filled with three pints of beer. Two people are then required to drink from the beer filled disc through straws (typically from McDonalds) in the fastest time possible.'* (Field notes 23/06/05)

Sometimes this will become an ad hoc competition between teams but most commonly it manifests itself as an initiation to team members who may be making their debut. Many Ultimate players will have done this at some point of their playing career and they do expect others to do so, evident in the vocal encouragement observed during such occasions.

Equivalents of such initiation practices have been observed across a range of other team activities (Donnelly and Young, 1999). But drinking in Ultimate is mixed sex and 'social' rather than aimed at re-affirming masculinity ties as in the case in other team sports (Dunning and Waddington, 2003). The nature of the three pint challenge makes

this a finite exercise and not one associated with the sorts of initiations practices frequently seen in other (male) team sports which might be strongly rooted in the cultural importance of drinking to capacity or excess.

3. 'Alternativeness'

In identifying how the trope of 'alternativeness' is objectified in Ultimate, aspects such as team names, disc related merchandise and fashion will all be briefly examined.

(i) Names

In some important respects, Ultimate teams express their identity through their team names, which although varying considerably, can be classified into six different broadly-based groups. These include:

- Place - Clapham, Cardiff,

- Acronyms – UBU (University of Birmingham Ultimate), CHUFT (Chester Ultimate Frisbee Throwers)

- Animal names – Rhinos, Bears, Skunks

- Names with 'Disc' in the title – Discuits, Dischunters, Disconduct, Disco

- Ultimate related names – Random Fling, Flyght Club, Far flung

- Unusual, humorous – Mild Mannered Janitors, Chevron Action Flash, Mexican Horse Bandits, Coventry Child Abuse

The first three styles of names are broadly in keeping the naming of clubs in other British sports e.g. Liverpool and Manchester United (MUFC) in football or the Sale

Sharks and the Warwickshire Bears in rugby and cricket respectively. The latter names are relatively new in British sports and are examples of the Americanisation of traditionally non American sports which have occurred in the last thirty years (McKay and Miller, 1991), though in Ultimate's case, at least, this approach has the appropriate American heritage.

By far the most common type of names used for Ultimate teams are the Ultimate and Disc related names and the more unusual or humorous monikers. The former are quite specific to the sport and are reminiscent of the use of habitat discussed earlier. The unusual or humorous names do represent a significant proportion of any tournament entry list but as the rather liminally ironic name of the 'Coventry Child Abuse' indicates, the appropriateness of some club names may be questionable to say the least, and can at times be a point for serious discussion between Ultimate players.

> *'Personally I don't give a fig what names teams have - I love the weird and wacky names traditional in our sport and I'm not serious about censoring anything...All I am suggesting is that it would not be too much to ask newly forming teams just to be a bit careful about what names they choose.'* (Message archive)

> *'I don't see why we should have to change names of teams... Sunday league football teams in St. Andrews have no shortage of sponsors even with team names like Shafters, Inter Ya'Ma and The BJ Boys.'* (Message archive)

> *'Being sensible about this does not have to involve the infringement of civil liberties or any huge compromise with the culture of our sport.'* (Message archive)

> *'You are quite within your rights to name your team "Paedophile Ring" if you want, but you wouldn't do it because it would get bad press. Likewise, I am suggesting that overt references to drug culture might also not be in the sport's best interest.'* (Message archive)

Though such comments indicate that devising 'interesting' and unusual names – sometimes for shock value - is usual practice within Ultimate, the last comment also

indicates an awareness of how this may be perceived by others, especially when relating specifically to drug references.

(ii) Drug Associations

Rinehart and Sydnor (2003) indicate that 'alternative' sports are often associated with popular stereotypes such as the casual use by their protagonists of recreational drugs, usually cannabis. With Ultimate having its origins in 'the alternative 'sports' movement associated principally with the 'drop out' self-exploration years of the 1960s and early1970s (Bale, 1994: 184), the supposed associations here are obvious.

> *'The general public immediately assume that any game involving "Frisbees" must be played by drug-crazed hippies. Nearly every time I speak to media people about the sport, you can tell that's what they're thinking.'* (Message archive)

The reality, however, is that drug references in Ultimate are apparent through a number of team names.

> *'Team names at this event which have drug connotations include Substance Abuse, Headrush, Under the Influence and Purple Haze.'* (Field Notes 14/03/06)

> *'I recently did an interview for a magazine in Leicester and the moment they saw a list of Ultimate team names they jumped on the drug culture references.'* (Message archive)

Discussion within the culture on this issue is a constant feature, with views more recently becoming more polarised.

> *'Team names are individual teams' choice and there's little we can do to stop them having other connotations. At this stage of the sport I don't think we're in a position to affect that (or would want to).'* (Message archive)

> *'When possible sponsors look at Ultimate they see a lot higher percentage of the teams with drug-related names... Any connection between ultimate and drugs will slow the growth of the game.'* (Message archive)

> *'Unfortunately, almost all of the people who control the facilities we need to play on (i.e. decent sports grounds) have very fixed views on drugs (at least publicly).The point I am trying to make is that if we want to use decent venues then we can't afford a negative image. The people who run those venues will refuse to associate themselves with that negative image.'* (Message archive)

While there does seems to be an increasing awareness that drug associations may have a negative impact on the sport, such as in the securing of appropriate venues, the reality is that the use of recreational drugs is routinely present during weekend competitions and that, broadly speaking, there is an ambivalence expressed towards it:

> *'The fact is, we all know there is a certain degree of substance abuse involved with our sport and opinions will undoubtedly be divided as to how much this is an essential aspect of the Ultimate community and as to how serious a problem it is. Some may well say it is in the nature of the sport, but even those who have no qualms about it (and even play under the influence) will admit that there's far more to the sport than that, if only the ignorant, mainstream-sport-supporting public would realise it. But, then, while the sport is minority and alternative, why not combine it with more illicit pleasures?'* (Message archive)

> *'Fact: players at all levels are known to smoke dope, some do it before during and after playing, others don't, leaving it for the party...Sadly (to me anyway) it appears that drugs are an integral part of the Ultimate culture but I hate the idea that the drugs side of things might actually attract people to our sport.'* (Message archive)

> *'It's true that a small minority of players indulge in a joint or two at tournaments, and most of us will acknowledge that...But endorsing and associating illegal behaviour with Ultimate is only going to cause the sport to be even further marginalised.'* (Message archive)

Drug use in mainstream sport is an extreme taboo subject, of course, so its open presence in Ultimate must be seen as a celebration of the latter's 'outsider' status and professed anti-sport subcultural credentials. Becoming more aware that drug associations with sport could be potentially harmful in gaining broader

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recognition and potential sponsorship, in 2004 the UKUA made a move to align itself to more established sporting policies by signing up to the World Anti Doping Agency (WADA) code. Not surprisingly, player responses to this move were quite extensive and quickly became polarised. But what this issue serves to illustrate are the tensions between a national governing body that is keen to develop the sport in the mainstream via a modernisation agenda, but which on the other hand has to contend with lifestyle choices which seem integral to the intrinsic character of the sport and which have developed from counter cultural values. This along with further 'sites of resistance' within Ultimate are identified and discussed in further detail in Chapter 9.

(iii) Discs and fashion

Another way in which subcultural capital of Ultimate may be objectified is by the customised design of discs. Though discs need to comply with the same standard measurements of 10.75 inches in diameter and 175 grams in weight, the main companies that provide discs such as Discraft, Daredevil Discs or Lookfly in the UK, all offer a customisation service. Lookfly (2007:1) indicate that 'custom discs are an essential part of Ultimate and a great way to promote your team or tournament' (see Appendix I for examples).

Many teams choose to design a disc and some will do so annually, especially at University level, which can serve as an indicator of a year of intake.

> *'Most logos are designed by members within a team and are therefore very reflective of that specific group's identity. Many include the team name and some illustration or connotation to do with it. Though discs are available in a range of colours, most choose white as this has become the norm for competitive play.'* (Field notes 14/01/06)

Key to the identity of most subcultures is their surface appearance and style and, in particular, the clothes and fashions that are associated with them (Thornton, 1997). Indeed it is generally important to recognise the communicative power of dress, which 'can express consciously or unconsciously our personal attitudes, values and beliefs and emotions' (Cunningham and Lab, 1991: 17). It is through dress that shared ideas about meaning can be learned, such as appropriateness of dress and group affiliation. In order to 'belong' to a subcultural group, such as those who participate in Ultimate Frisbee, individuals need to appear to be 'right' (Cunningham and Lab, 1991).

> *'Typically an Ultimate player will wear their team t shirt, often covered by a 'hoodie' away from the game. They will wear shorts, socks and trainers almost exclusively and boots (and sometimes knee and elbow pads) during a game.'* (Field notes - 31/08/05)

This is a heavily Americanised style argot, but T-shirt design is probably the key identifier here and teams will spend time and money, either designing it themselves and getting it printed, or else ordering specified designs from bespoke manufacturers such as 'Lookfly' or 'Gaia'. Whichever choice is made:

> *'Common features to be found on most T-shirts include a team design on the front, a nickname across the shoulders and then sometimes additional slogans or a number on the back.'* (Field notes - 31/08/05)

Despite this, there is no guarantee – nor is it required - that players on the line during any given match will all be wearing matching T shirts and during a weekend competition the following observation is typical.

> *'T-shirts are normally a similar colour e.g. mostly red. Differences are usually caused by kit evolution as teams may issue a new design each year. In most cases, teams will carry an additional strip with the most common distinction being a variation of light and dark tops e.g. black or white.*

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However in many cases the change of strip is usually worse in terms of uniformity. One team wearing black appears to have a mixture of modern sports tops and heavy metal t-shirts and even a dress shirt! ... In all teams, shorts and socks appear completely random.' (Field notes 18/02/06)

In order to play almost any team sport there needs to be a degree of co-operation and conformity, confirmed by players being able to identify members of their own team and those of the opposition. Such observations about Ultimate indicate something of non-conformity and a rejection of normative patterns of consumption around sport and what can be defined as a type of 'anti fashion' (Polhemus and Proctor, 1978).

'Why do the best players seem to wear the shittiest kit?' (Field notes - 02/04/05)

'It seems to me that Ultimate players enjoy being part of something that is a bit different - we are not the type of people who buy Man United kit and the latest Nike trainers. We are individuals. Long live non-matching kit...!' (Message archive)

Such comments reflect the very concept of 'anti fashion' exemplified by (Davis, 1994: 162) 'as a kind of self conscious, even organised, oppositional stance toward prevailing fashions.' The origins of anti fashion in Western society can be found in the cultural radicalism of the 1960s (in which Ultimate was born) which in differing ways diffused throughout wider society (Steele, 1997)

According to Davis (1994: 183) counter cultural inspired anti fashion is the most powerful version: 'it most directly confronts and challenges the symbolic hegemony of the reigning fashion', which in a sporting sense would now be reflected within an opposition to highly consumed branded goods. This idea fits comfortably with respect to Ultimate for, as Levine (1984) suggests, the main thrust of anti fashion typically comes from middle class youth who are in opposition to some sort of commercialised

mainstream ideal. This is because this group exists on closer terms to mainstream culture, unlike say a highly persecuted minority group. In many respects the anti fashion stance exemplified by participants of Ultimate, 'smacks more of subversion from within than opposition from without' (Davis, 1994: 182).

4. Summary

This chapter has examined how the two key themes of 'strong social interaction' and 'alternativeness' are embodied and objectified in the production of authenticity in Ultimate. Strong social interaction is found to be embodied here, through social conventions and routines that occur at different points during a contest, which are often employed to facilitate cooperation. Further interactions that serve to reinforce strong player interaction and sociability away from the immediacy of competitive play are the observing of other games, participation in 'casual throwing' and 'Impromptu' games and attendance at a prearranged 'party', at which participants regularly engage in the ritual of the '3 pint challenge.'

'Alternativeness' in Ultimate is objectified, in aspects such as drug consumption, team names, disc merchandise and fashion. Key findings here suggest the traditional links between Ultimate and recreational drugs, exhibited both through consumption and through the appearance of drug references in team names is giving rise to new tensions around the sport's traditional anti-sport identity and the ambitions of its national administrators. Non-conformity, in terms of team names and kit, also offers behaviour and subcultural style which is also at odds with the 'modernisation' agenda led by the UKUA. The governing body is dismissive of behaviours akin to the 'alternative'

counter cultural values which the sport has come to embody. These issues have unsurprisingly become sites of struggle and resistance, further details of which can be found more fully discussed in Chapter 9.

Chapter 6

Rule development, self refereeing
and the spirit of the game

1. Introduction

A recurring theme throughout the literature pertaining to the development of sports and games is the construction of rules or laws (Steenbergen and Tamboer, 1998). Historically, the devising of very *different* rules or laws amongst different sporting groups has been a commonplace feature (Mangan, 1981), although 'there has often been the search for canonical formulation of a particular rule, in words, no doubt so that one rule is used by all players' (McFee, 2004: 34). The wider circulation and adoption of an agreed constitution of written rules in sport has typically emerged, largely, as a result of sports clubs seeking guaranteed income via a move to develop a regularity of contests between each other (Mangan, 1981). When such regular sporting contests occur in practice, participants must follow a basic *acceptance* of these rules, or else perpetual rule breaking would result in the near-constant cessation of play (Suits, 1988). So there is an accepted level of moral obligation in sport to promise to play by agreed rules (Court, 1992). However, it is well known that, in reality, there is much more to 'playing by the rules' than just defining and following the constitutive rules (known as 'formalism'; see Morgan, 1995). In practice, a shared understanding about the importance of regulative rules (Searle, 1969) insist that participants are generally considered to be both 'playing according to and in the spirit of the rules' (Steenbergen

and Tamboer, 1998: 39). Lenk (1964) has termed this distinction one between 'formal and informal fair play.' Formal fair play is considered a necessary condition for sporting action to occur (Morgan, 1987) and informal fair play is reflected in what might be termed the ethos of the game (D'Agostino, 1981).

Just what occurs in practice regarding both formal and informal fair play can vary considerably from sporting activity to sporting activity and it can also be different in different groups, ages, levels of performance and nationality, depending on existing social and cultural norms (Heinila, 1979 cited in McIntosh, 1979). As 'cultural pluralism and moral diversity even at a local level represents a challenge' to an accurate understanding of what actually takes place within the workings of a particular sport (Loland, 1998: 80), it is clear that this is an area worthy of careful study. In order to gain an insight into how this set of understandings works within Ultimate a number of different aspects of this process will be examined.

Firstly, the development of the constitutive rules will be briefly discussed, looking at their original conception through to the present day. Secondly, consideration will be given to how the constitutive rules work in practice. Thirdly, the concept of an 'ethos' in Ultimate will be examined, which is referred to as the 'Spirit of the Game'. Lastly, an emergent aspect from the data is how members of the Ultimate community react to the suggestion that observers or referees may be needed within UK Ultimate should excessive rule breaking occur, as seems to have occurred in the USA.

2. Rule development in Ultimate

As discussed earlier, Ultimate Frisbee was conceived in the 1960s in the USA as a development out of American Football, and it was originally called 'Frisbee football'. As such, its original format was heavily influenced by this specific sporting and cultural context. Following an early, free-form, game along the lines of American Football, with downs and scrimmages, a set of constitutional rules was soon devised which eventually produced the Ultimate code. Halpern (2002:6) explains the six key aspects to the original rules:

> 1. Individual players may wear almost any aids they wish including hats, helmets, or gloves as long as they do not endanger the safety of another player. No player may carry any sort of stick, bat or racket.
>
> 2. The playing area shall have no lateral boundaries; however, it is best to choose a field with natural boundaries created by a hill, a river or a wall.
>
> 3. A referee or referees may officiate, and if so their decision must be final.
>
> 4. A team is awarded one point for each goal legally scored, and there is no other way to gain points.
>
> 5. Seven is the optimum number for each team, though a game can be played with as many as twenty or thirty for each team.
>
> 6. As proficiency with Ultimate Frisbee increases, a "one-hand only" version of the game can be tried.

The fact that such a constitution was drawn up and circulated by 1970 indicates that the participants were constructing an activity that was based, albeit loosely, on existing sporting structures which were already familiar to most of them. More overtly, 'Rule one' (concerning equipment), 'Rule three' (concerning the role of a referee) and 'Rule four' (concerning scoring) still clearly make references to practices typical of other sports, such as American Football. By contrast 'Rule

two' (concerning boundaries), 'Rule five' (concerning numbers of players) and 'Rule six' (concerning proficiency) represent something quite different from most other codified sports and are perhaps reflective of practices more indicative of 'the 'alternative' sports' movement.

The development of rules such as these is reflective of what Eassom (1998: 74) describes as 'common law reasoning', whereby games and rules are developed based upon human needs (Midgeley, 1992). If the needs of the 'founding fathers' (Halpern, 2002: 6) were to create a game which was representative of the counter cultural values of the time and the 'needs of the participants', rather than to satisfy an external requirement, such as participating in an established codified activity, then it is unsurprising that these rules were developed along these very specific, but also rather loosely conceptualised, lines.

Another key point of interest here is that, originally, there was no specific mention of what later became the core ethos of Ultimate known as the 'Spirit of the Game.' This is not because such an approach to playing Ultimate was seen as unimportant but, on the contrary, because it was simply assumed. In short Ultimate was, 'regarded by the Columbia High School players as a gentleman's sport' (Zagoria, 2003: 2). Though rules have been amended and changed over time, essentially Ultimate today is still introduced to most players with just a basic outline of the rules – sometimes known as the Ultimate Code, (now ten in number) which has evolved over time (UPA, 2008).   It reads as follows:

1. The Field -- A rectangular shape with endzones at each end. A regulation field is 70 yards by 40 yards, with endzones 25 yards deep.

2. Initiate Play -- Each point begins with both teams lining up on the front of their respective endzone line. The defence throws ("pulls") the disc to the offense. A regulation game has seven players per team.
3. Scoring -- Each time the offense completes a pass in the defence's endzone, the offense scores a point. Play is initiated after each score.
4. Movement of the Disc -- The disc may be advanced in any direction by completing a pass to a teammate. Players may not run with the disc. The person with the disc ("thrower") has ten seconds to throw the disc. The defender guarding the thrower ("marker") counts out the stall count.
5. Change of possession -- When a pass in not completed (e.g. out of bounds, drop, block, interception), the defence immediately takes possession of the disc and becomes the offense.
6. Substitutions -- Players not in the game may replace players in the game after a score and during an injury timeout.
7. Non-contact -- No physical contact is allowed between players. Picks and screens are also prohibited. A foul occurs when contact is made.
8. Fouls -- When a player initiates contact on another player a foul occurs. When a foul disrupts possession, the play resumes as if the possession was retained. If the player committing the foul disagrees with the foul call, the play is redone.
9. Self-Refereeing -- Players are responsible for their own foul and line calls. Players resolve their own disputes.
10. Spirit of the Game -- Ultimate stresses sportsmanship and fair play. Competitive play is encouraged, but never at the expense of respect between players, adherence to the rules, and the basic joy of play.

Such a list is fine as an introduction for newcomers but to cope with the highly competitive sport that elite Ultimate has now become at the highest level, a far more complex set of rules has also evolved over time and it is regularly amended by the WFDF and is updated annually (see WFDF, 2008).

3. The application of rules

When sporting contests occur participants must follow a basic acceptance of common rules, or else perpetual rule breaking would result in the cessation of play (Suits, 1988). So in all sports there is a level of moral obligation to promise to play by agreed rules (Court, 1992). The construction of what can be termed the 'social order' of sport (Eitzen, 2000) is constituted by the following three aspects, of 'socialisation, social control and ritual' (Critcher, 1995: 31). For thousands of years sport has been seen as an

important element in the socialisation of the young (Loland, 1998) and what is learned in this context depends upon the sport being practised in a certain manner and with a certain attitude through a process of moral learning (McIntosh, 1979). As Critcher (1995: 31) puts it, 'the rules governing human interaction are established for the new member in a process which is very complex.'

From a background based on both observation and personal experience I can say that on arrival into the sport, new players are given a verbal explanation of the key basic rules (along the lines of the 10 basic points indicated earlier) by an experienced player. Shortly after acquiring this basic knowledge of the sport and having engaged in some basic disc throwing, newcomers are quickly encouraged to participate in a game with everyone else. The structural aspects of the game become reasonably straightforward after a short time, such as the pulling of the disc, how to score points and how possession changes. Mastery of the more complex rules, however, takes much longer to acquire and despite the rule book being easily accessible via the WFDF website, few players seem to take the time to bother to consult them. How many players of other sports consult the laws closely? But as explained to me informally by a fellow player whilst watching a disputed foul occur in a game,

> *'This must be the only sport in the world where most of the players don't know the rules'* (Field notes 19/02/06).

Regular examples illustrating relative rule ignorance can be found in both formal and informal conversations around Ultimate, examples of which are provided below (further clarification of context can be found in the Glossary of Terms).

> A: *'What's the rule if a player goes off the pitch and then comes back on again?'*

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B: 'It's not allowed is it?
A: 'Well that's what I thought.'
B: 'At the weekend this guy ran out of the end zone when I was marking
him and I said, 'You can't do that.''
A: 'What did he say?'
B: 'Do what?'
A: 'And so I explained, and he seemed really confused.'
(Informal conversation between two players watching a game - Field
Notes 24/06/06)

'I can't get my head around 'skying'. I mean if you can't bid for a disc
that you can reach, when are you supposed to bid for it?' (RL –
Interview 04/05/06)

'The one [rule] I only just found out about was what happens if you're
fouled in the end-zone and they [the opponent] agree that they fouled
you. I always thought that you scored, but you don't. You get the disc on
the end zone line instead.' (HL – Interview 22/05/06)

In many ways, identifying such commonplace rule ignorance is paradoxical, because
without an official to decide whether or not a rule violation has occurred it is up to the
players to make the decisions about interpretation of the rules. Clearly, if they do not
know the rules properly how can they make appropriate and just decisions? What seems
to steer many through what might otherwise be a debilitating level of rule ignorance is
the largely unacknowledged understanding (though one which is clear to an observer
with any analytical focus) that most Ultimate players prioritise the idea of continuity of
play and 'flow' over that of formal accuracy in rule application (Csikszentmihalyi,
1990; 1997). This pursuit of 'flow', therefore, appears to be a largely unacknowledged
appeal of Ultimate, perhaps as a reaction to more formal constraints participants have
experienced in other sports. This emphasis on 'flow', however, appears to vary at
different levels of play.

As in all sports, in training and practice situations, which are less formal, flow is
paramount and is stressed over halting play to deal with all rule violations. Individuals

who repeatedly call fouls and contest calls in such environments are quickly subject to rebuke and even ridicule from other players on how this is 'not the right time (or place)' for such behaviour. But at the other end of the scale, flow is also paramount at the very highest levels of the game of Ultimate. Contests which concern the very best teams in the A tour (known as the Top 8) or involving top teams in indoor competition, for example, appear to have very few stoppages and when such stoppages do occur they are very brief and soon settled. Where match flow *is* hindered, much more markedly, is in contests involving teams who might be described as merely competent or average. Repeated stoppages appear to be much more prevalent within B tour contests and within the middle echelons of indoor Ultimate competition.

An explanation for repeated stoppages at an intermediate level is not readily available, but a number of suggestions might be offered here. It seems reasonable to assume that players will not typically choose to exercise the rule of law in more informal play situations where the emphasis is likely to be more on enjoyment and experience and thus the emphasis is on prioritising flow and 'playing the game'. This can also be said of play among many newcomers or the very weakest teams (arguably often comprised of newcomers) in any competition. At the very highest levels of Ultimate competition, most players seem to have a stronger grasp of the rules but actually call far fewer rule violations, especially those concerning player contact. This could be a combination of players being more proficient and exercising a relative self-prohibition at this higher level of 'using' the rules to try to gain field advantage - in that players are self-sanctioned to 'let more go' in the pursuit of 'flow' or are conscious of their presentation of self amongst other elite performers (Goffman, 1959). The very highest level of Ultimate competition seems not to affect this dynamic of rule contestation, in contrast to

what one might expect to find in more dominant sporting forms where the emphasis as quality increases seems increasingly on 'bending' the laws or gaining advantage by deception as a new form of sporting 'professionalism'.

Stoppages at an intermediate level in Ultimate are called largely for minor offences, such as 'travelling' [to move with the disc beyond the pivot foot, whilst it is being held], 'picks' [intentional or unintentional blocking] and minor contact fouls. Intermediate level players are less proficient (fewer accurate throws, less precise cutting and less game awareness) than elite players and so more 'accidental' violations are likely to occur (and are called). In addition, it might also be suggested that 'a little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing.' Being, in some cases, newly capable and confident of spotting play violations - and having been raised in a wider culture in which adherence to and manipulating the rules is something of an absolutist creed - new players of Ultimate may chose *always* to call them.

Lastly, it also seems reasonable to suggest that some players and teams within this intermediate group have aspirations to move from this echelon of play to the highest level of Ultimate. Accordingly, perhaps they are more determined to find a way to win more than anyone else in the culture. Paradoxically, however, successful movement into the elite levels of play is likely to erode this focus on 'calling everything' as the presentation of self at this level demands a rather different approach to the application and interpretation of the rules. It could be posited that, again, the need to present oneself as a paragon and adherent of game flow remains paramount amongst elite performers. Not to do so would indicate that a participants' identity remained rooted in a lower echelon of competition from whence they came.

Complete newcomers to Ultimate rarely dispute what is said or occurs on the field and at one level this suggests that 'most of the time we ourselves desire just that which society expects of us. We want to obey the rules' (Berger, 1963: 93). That said, the idea of playing an essentially non-contact mixed-sex team sport which is self-refereed and in which players 'call' their own fouls presents its own problems to newcomers.

> 'S___ and L__ had only been involved for a couple of weeks but it was clear from the sidelines that they were pushing their markers all the time whilst off the disc, not unlike the way they would play football.' (Field Notes 14/01/06)

> 'Experienced players have come to learn that there are optimum situations when one should try to bid [compete] for a disc. Rookies, by contrast, especially if they've played other team sports, try to bid on anything and everything and, as such, they risk causing injury to others by bidding for discs in difficult or impossible situations e.g. when they are too far away to make a bid or when the opponent's body is between them and the disc.' (Field notes 21/01/06)

What tends to happen in such instances described above is that more experienced Ultimate players take it upon themselves to explain to rookies exactly what is acceptable on the field and what is not. Those who find this transmission of the sporting ethos repeatedly problematic have invariably left the Ultimate landscape after a few weeks of frustrating participation. Those who choose to stay have clearly chosen to internalise such rules and norms, thus indicating that they wish to be part of the group and Ultimate subculture and that, 'they want to conform' (Eitzen, 2000: 371). Such examples also illustrate, in a broader sense, the power of social control, the means by which deviant behaviour is discouraged within society (Eitzen, 2000). This can involve in a societal situation a broad range of sanctions, including the withdrawal of approval through informal shame through to public stigma and even to incarceration (Critcher, 1995). However, in most cases: 'sport is weak; it tends to leave deviance lightly

admonished or move quickly into coercive social control. What is absent is a sense of shame; either you got away with it or you didn't' (Critcher, 1995: 32). Within Ultimate, however, there is evidence to suggest that the application of shaming and stigma as a means of regulation is in rude good health.

Though the casual observer may consider that it is possible to 'get away with anything' in Ultimate because the sport is self-refereed, the reverse is more likely to be the case in practice, as the above example illustrates. In Ultimate 'all players are responsible for administering and adhering to the rules' (WFDF, 2008). This type of social control is both personal and ideological in form whereby 'individuals impose controls upon themselves' and is considered considerably more powerful than the more overt forms of social control which are externally applied and which is typically found in many sports which have an official who is responsible for applying the rules or laws (Collins, 1992: 63). Such behaviours might be considered to be analogous to Foucault's (1975/1977) concept of the 'Panoptic prison' (a metaphor for the operation of power in society) which produces in individuals the sense of being under constant surveillance, which, in turn, causes them to internalise the gaze of the jailer. In Ultimate, proponents are watched by fellow players. This 'disciplinary gaze', or self-surveillance, results in individuals acting as their own disciplinarians, thus conforming them to normative conventions.

Many non-players of Ultimate find these aspects of the sport especially fascinating. This is because having been socialised to play in more dominant sporting formats in which officials are expected to apply the laws as players practice attempts at deception, they find it difficult to understand why players do not try and 'get away' with rule breaking.

Though an enthusiastic (and often repeated) response to such questions usually ends with: 'It just works', theoretically the explanation probably lies in the acceptance by Ultimate players of what is termed in political science circles a 'social contract' (Rawls, 1971; Riley, 1982; Arnold, 1988; Eassom, 1998; Loland, 1998). Though, clearly, no one formally signs anything before a sporting contest to agree that they will uphold the rules or laws of the game, Riley (1982) indicates that there is tacit consent to do so; individuals freely chose to get involved in the game. This acceptance is built upon the premise that:

> 'When a number of persons engage in a mutually advantageous co-operative venture according to certain rules and thus voluntarily restrict their liberty, those who have submitted to these restrictions have a right to a similar acquiescence on the part of those who have benefitted from their submission' (Rawls, 1971: 343).'

In short, 'when we are voluntarily engaged in rule governed practices, we enter a social contract in which we are mutually obliged to follow the rules' (Loland, 1998: 92). This moral obligation to 'fairness' is challenged in many other sports, but it appears to be a very powerful theme in shaping the culture of Ultimate, as illustrated below:

> *'If you make a shitty call that you and the opposition both know to be shitty. How do you justify it to yourself? Do you really want to win at all costs? Why not cut the brakes on the opposition minibus? You won't find many people to play with, never mind against.'* (Message Archive)

The explanation that sports and leisure activities can create such instances of strong mutual obligation to the rules is rooted in the view that individuals culturally locate their behaviour within different sports; in other words, they learn an accepted pattern of behaviour (Eassom, 1998; Arnold 1988). The location of such activities within the American counter culture values of the 1960s or traditional notions of amateurism

among the English middle classes (Huggins, 2006), as discussed earlier, illustrate this very point well.

Participants in Ultimate are not, therefore, 'special' people who are 'holier than thou' in a sporting sense but rather people who appear to want to uphold a specific social contract within their own chosen sport. Take them out of that specific sporting environment - into a game of football for example - and the perceptions they have and the behaviours they endorse may well be somewhat different. As one Ultimate player put it:

> *'Ultimate people who play football have no choice but to play aggressively, because everyone else does it'* (Message Archive).

Of course, examples can be found in professional sport in which self-policing is a key feature of the established ethos of such sports. In golf and snooker, for example, it is not uncommon to see survivals of some of the core values of amateurism: even world class performers in prestigious and highly paid competition publicly admit that they have played a foul shot, even if it remains generally unobserved by others. However few parallels can be found in team sports in the modern era, suggesting that there are perhaps correspondences between the behaviours exhibited in Ultimate and those found within English sporting amateurism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, where 'gentlemen' were supposed to openly acknowledge their infractions (Taylor, 2006).

The intriguing follow up question for many 'outsiders' is: 'So what happens when a foul is deemed to occur in Ultimate? What do you do?' At a practical level maintaining the 'social order' in Ultimate is dealt with by use of 'ritual', of the sort described by

Critcher (1995: 32) as a, 'ceremonial recognition of the common symbols and interests of the group.' In practice what typically occurs is exemplified below:

> *'A disc is' hucked' downfield and is chased by an attacking and a defending player. As they both reach for the disc contact occurs between the two. Both fail to catch the disc and as it sails onwards and lands on the ground, the attacker can be heard to call 'foul!'* (Field Notes 31/08/05)

The defender accused of a foul now has two choices. The first of these is that they can agree that they did, indeed, foul the attacker. The attacking player is then given the disc to resume play at the point on the field where the foul is agreed to have occurred. When this happens the foul is usually glaringly obvious and is usually due to clumsiness; the defender lacks awareness of both the flight of the disc and/or the path of the attacking player.

The second, and more commonly chosen, option is that the defender immediately refutes the accusation that they fouled the attacker and does this by calling out the word 'Contested!' What then occurs on the field is a brief stoppage in play (ten seconds at most) during which the two players in dispute explain to each other what they believe to have occurred. If agreement can be reached that a foul did indeed occur, then play resumes with the attacking player in possession of the disc, as indicated above. In contrast, if it is subsequently agreed that no foul occurred then the defending team gains possession of the disc from where it came to rest as what occurred, in essence, was an unsuccessful pass.

More commonly, the two players in dispute fail to agree on what happened and, in this instance, the disc goes back to the last person who threw it before the dispute emerged.

Such common acceptance of this ritual is pivotal for two reasons. The first is that continuity of play and 'flow' Csikszentmihalyi (1990; 1997) is broadly maintained, something which is highlighted as important by participants and which is discussed more fully in the following chapter. Secondly all participants must acknowledge that this is a satisfactory solution to an otherwise unresolved problem of rule interpretation.

A dynamic often observable occurrence which impacts upon the two players in dispute is the involvement in the debate of a *third* party, which can be either welcomed and unwelcomed. In a welcomed sense this can occur within the rules; if they are novices, players in dispute are permitted to ask a third party on the pitch for advice (see WFDF rule 1.8. 'In the case where a novice player commits an infraction out of ignorance of rules, experienced players are obliged to explain the infraction'). Or, if any two players in a dispute were unable to see or know clearly what happened then a third party may be invited to offer their independent views. For example, if two players run at high speed and fairly contest a disc in the air and their momentum sends them both careering out of bounds, neither of them might accurately know whether the attacking receiver who caught the disc landed with a foot in bounds or not. In this instance they may choose to ask, 'a player who had the best perspective on the play' (as well as their team captain) (see WFDF, 2008: rule 1.9).

'Unwelcomed' comment on a dispute can also be offered from both on and off the field. Despite having little validity in terms of resolving the dispute, it does not stop some players and casual observers from passing their own vocal judgement upon what occurred. This perhaps is not surprising given that players are used to engaging in and resolving on the field disputes and they regularly believe that they have a clear view of

incidents, almost regardless of how far away they might be from its commission! In addition the close proximity of the 'sidelines' - which can sometimes be unclear boundaries - only serves to facilitate interaction between players and spectators. In most cases, any such 'external' offerings are quickly dismissed (unless those combatants involved are novices) by other players with phrases such as: *'It's their decision to make'* or *'It's not your call'* (Field Notes 09/07/06).

As indicated earlier, those players who are deeply troubled by the dilemmas of self-refereeing usually leave Ultimate within a few weeks of beginning their participation; for many, such rituals appear incompatible with how competitive sport should be played and regulated. Collective decision-making by players is, of course, hardly a perfect science, but then neither is trying to 'con' an official or protesting to them when they see an incident differently to the players! As Kretchmar (1998: 28) explains, negotiating sporting disputes is 'an art in its own right, one that requires considerable ethical skill. Yet it should not be avoided, for the alternative is far less satisfactory.'

A question usefully asked by Robbins (2004) when conducting research into Ultimate in the USA, is 'What do players do when repeated violations occur?' Again, this is similarly and provocatively raised in discussions with outsiders who ask: 'So what's to stop me just continually fouling my opponent [and refusing to accept one is fouling]?' The answer to the latter is simple: nothing...and everything! An explanation can be found in discussions on social contracts. In the USA, Robbins (2004) found that four courses of action typically occurred in response to repeated rule violations, namely:

- Players chose to put up with it

- Players continued to negotiate

- Players reciprocated violations

- Players made verbal accusations.

I did not witness any games during my period of fieldwork in the UK which I would classify as containing repeated rule violations. Interviews also revealed that participants had few experiences of such games. However, when pressed, responses were typified by the account offered below:

> *'Probably the worst game I played in was a couple of years ago against C____. The game was just stop, start and I couldn't get into it. They just called everything. Every bit of contact, though they caused most of it by the way they were marking'*
>
> *[So what did you do about it?]*
>
> *'Well, you just get on with it, don't you? Stand up for yourself, if you're sure your right, but otherwise just play. There were a couple [of players] that had a word and made their point again in the speech after [the match] but that was about it.'*
>
> *[Have you played them against since?]*
>
> *'Yeah. We played them in the tour again last year.'*
>
> *[And how was that game?]*
>
> *'Really good, actually, and they were nice as pie. I reckon they just had a really bad tournament when we played them the first time.'*
>
> (RL – Interview 04/05/06)

This account, allied to my own playing experiences, shows that when repeated rule violations do occur, then typically three out of the four courses of action identified by Robbins (2004) in the USA (all except reciprocating violations) are applicable. However, evidence to identify such occurrences appears less obvious in the UK. What

appears more evident within UK Ultimate is what Orlick (1978) calls the concept of 'co-operative competition':

> 'Whereby other people, including competitors, are always more important than the goal for which they compete. The structure may be competitive, but the people playing within the structure are co-operative' (Orlick, 1978: 110).

Instances of cheating or attempting to cheat, common today in dominant UK sporting forms, are rare and are, I would claim, very difficult to identify in Ultimate. Some examples of what might be termed 'gamesmanship' are, however, observable on occasions in play at higher levels of competition. This includes making slight contact with a player just before they throw known as 'bumping' (see Glossary of terms). Players who experience it however, do not see it as major rule violation.

> *'At a high level an amount of incidental contact when cutting seems acceptable. Is this a good thing? Personally, though I try to minimise contact when I play, I relish the challenge of breaking [throwing the disc the side the marker is trying to prevent the throw] people that try to lean on me while I'm throwing, and beating a physical mark with agility.'* (Message Archive)

Again this is consistent with the idea of co-operative competition but within a competitive structure, seeing such instances as contests: looking to, 'solve a problem, but doing it better than at least one other committed person' (Kretchmar, 1998: 28). Such an attitude is exemplified through the generally remarkable upholding of the ethos of the 'Spirit of the Game'.

4. Ethos and the Spirit of the Game

As Loland, (1998: 85) points out, 'games are defined by rules, but these rules have to be interpreted for games to be realised in practice.' This is not least because games consist of two parties or more, so they require some commonality of agreement for play to ensue (Newcomb et al., 1966). When such parties implement a set of shared norms based upon the rules of the game, an 'ethos' is created, defined succinctly by D'Agostino (1981:7) as: 'conventions determining how the formal rules of that game are applied in concrete circumstances.' In reality, 'the idea of an ethos allows for a more dynamic understanding of the game' (Loland, 1998: 87) making it easier, for instance, to deal with rule violations. In practice, an ethos allows players to mediate between permissible acts, which are in accordance with the rules, acceptable acts in terms of certain rule violations which are considered part of the game, and rule violations which are considered unacceptable. More important, still, perhaps is that understanding the ethos of a sport gives insight into the shared experience and 'social and historical situatedness' of the community as a whole (Sheridan, 2003:176) and represents for Morgan (1995:61) the essence of a sport: 'It is the history of the game – its sustaining traditions, lively passions, storied commitments, and evolving standards of excellence – the flesh in the shell, that enlivens it as the specific kind of human practice that it is.'

The pervasive ethos within Ultimate, is known as the 'Spirit of the Game' and is explained at the beginning of the WFDF Rules (WFDF, 2008: 1) in the following way:

> '1.1 Ultimate relies upon a Spirit of the Game that places the responsibility for fair play on every player...

1.4 Highly competitive play is encouraged, but should never sacrifice the mutual respect between players, adherence to the agreed-upon rules of the game, or the basic joy of play.'

Such an ethos evokes truly amateurist sentiments and although it is a difficult concept to define, amateurism is perhaps well summed up by Eitzen (1989: 95) in his assertion that:

'The amateur derives pleasure from the contest; the activity is freely chosen; the process is every bit as important as the outcome; the motivation to participate comes from the intrinsic rewards from the activity rather than the extrinsic reward of money and fame; because there is a love of sport for its own sake, there is a climate of sportsmanship'.

Both within the rules and the public communication regarding Ultimate, there is a regular use of the terms 'sportsmanship', 'spirit' and 'fair play', which can also be found within the literature concerning the sport (See Morgan et al., 2001). Keating (1995: 12) argues that, 'sportsmanship is not merely an aggregate of moral qualities comprising a code of specialised behaviour, it is also an attitude, a posture, a manner of interpreting what would otherwise be a legal code.' Whichever view is taken, the central issue would seem to be an all encompassing approach to one's own behaviour and that of one's opponents that is more than just the interpretation of the formal rules. The difficulty with such notions is that, without formalisation, in practice these terms are open to interpretation (Keating, 1995). This issue has become a site for investigation within USA Ultimate by both Robbins (2004) and Thornton (2004).

What is meant by the 'Spirit of the Game' in Ultimate is explained in some detail in the WFDF rules (see WFDF, 2008). Yet there still appears to be an underlying ambiguity about the 'Spirit' of Ultimate that remains negotiable. For instance, in prior work in this field, Robbins (2004: 327) found that 'every player…knew the definition of the spirit of

the game. However, every player interpreted it differently.' Such individual interpretations of the meaning of the 'Spirit' of Ultimate were also found in this study, with typical answers provided as follows:

> *'As I understand it, the core idea of "the Spirit of the Game" is more closely expressed in not getting arsey when someone calls a foul on you'* (MB – Interview 30/05/07).

> - *'[The Spirit of the Game is] to make reasonable infringement calls as defined by the rules, and to respect the calls of others when they make them'* (Message Archive).

Robbins (2004: 327) found in the USA that the interpretation of the 'Spirit' of Ultimate varied considerably from event to event and from team to team, as players 'interacted with other players depending on the context of play, threat of sanctions, history between teams and players, and the individual interpretations of the spirit of the game'. This observation of such 'ethical relativism'(Loland, 1998: 88), should, however, come as little surprise, as the 'Spirit' of sport can only ever be applied pragmatically to the situations that individuals find themselves in (Morgan et al., 2001).

Within this study, however, there seems to be rather less variation in the interpretation and the 'deep' operationalisation of the 'Spirit' of Ultimate, even if relations between teams varied. As one player explained:

> *'You get on better with some teams rather than others, that's for sure. And there are some teams you don't look forward to playing against. But I don't really think it makes you less spirited in how you play.'* (PW – Interview 01/12/05)

In addition, the *level* of play in the UK also seemed to make relatively little difference to the way the 'Spirit' of Ultimate is operationalised, though some opponents are clearly rather less scrupulous than others:

> *'In most of the A tour matches I've played in it's been really well spirited. You always get the odd one when they get wound up, but it's nothing big.'* (TM – Interview 02/11/06)

> *'The B tour can be really random. You go to one event and get some teams who are a real laugh and some really arsey wannabes. Yet in the next event the team you thought were tossers turned out to be alright.'* (BJ – Interview 22/10/06)

If the 'Spirit of the Game' does break down, it tended to be in close and highly competitive games, contests where players felt particularly tense and really craved a win.

> *'The worst I've seen is when a guy deliberately challenged a call on the sideline with just seconds left, so his team won by one...but then that guy's an arse anyway!'* (LC – Interview 12/04/06)

> *'Repeated pick [intentional or unintentional blocking] calls are the worst, when you know you've just toasted your marker. You don't get them often, but it tends to be in a close one.'* (FK – Interview 02/02/07)

Another illustration of the overriding respect for the game is evident within the rich conversations and debates found on the pages of *DiscSpace* on a daily basis, evident most readily on occasions in which major structural changes to the sport may occur (in recent years, for example, the change in tour formats). Butcher and Schneider, (2001: 35) indicate that, 'taking the interests of the game seriously means that we ask ourselves whether or not some action we are contemplating would be for the good of the game concerned, if everyone did it.' This aspect appears pervasive both on and off the field within the UK Ultimate community reflective of behaviour perhaps akin to that of 'virtue theory' proposed by Sheridan (2003) who suggests 'the pursuit of human

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flourishing does not lie in specific actions regulated by rules or principles of right conduct but in the character of good persons living good lives' (Sheridan, 2003: 174). Perhaps Ultimate provides more of a home for such characters within a sporting context?

5. 'To observe or not to observe? That is the question.

As modern sports have become codified and, in many cases, professionalised and commercialised over time there have been prevailing trends towards cheating, violence and a 'win at all costs attitude' which has detracted from the essence of what some argue sport should represent (Vamplew, 1988). Sports such as Ultimate, which have attracted less media interest or money thus far, have been less affected than others, but the participants have clearly not been immune to the behaviours exhibited in more dominant sporting forms. Nowhere is this more apparent than in North America, where vast amounts of money and media time are devoted to aggressive and male dominated mass spectator sports such as American Football, Baseball, Basketball and Ice Hockey (Sage, 1998).

As Ultimate continues to grow worldwide and as it becomes increasingly competitive, most notably in North America, the suggestion that Ultimate players are starting to cheat intentionally has been raised on *DiscSpace* leading to in depth discussion between participants. As a reaction to this concern, in North America and recently in larger European tournaments, game observers (ostensibly, umpires) have been employed to aid decision-making in the game. Interestingly, to date the extent of their role has been limited and these officials can, for instance, only make active decisions (like an assistant

referee in football) about sideline infringements and offsides (UPA, 2008). However, the second role of observers in the USA is to make also make 'passive' calls regarding on the field incidents, such as fouls, picks, strips, travels etc. The crucial factor here is that these are '*passive*' calls: the initial responsibility for making the call remains with the players. If they cannot agree or take too long in making the decision then the independent observers are used. If the observers see the play they make a ruling but if they did not see the play, then they make no ruling (UPA, 2008). As yet, in the UK and in most European tournaments, there has been no resort to observers but, historically, further codification and regulation has occurred as sports have evolved, with the evolution of the officiating at football serving as a very good example (Guttmann, 1978).

(i) Football – An historical lesson for Ultimate?

By 1895, most British sporting institutions and codes were already in place. The League and cup competitions in football; Test and county matches in cricket; and the Open Golf Championship, to name but a few. In addition, most national sporting associations had already been established (Allison, 2002). The growth of working class sport and the pressures that resulted therein due to demands for broken time payments put pressure on the defining ethos of amateurism (Horne et al. 1999). Different sports and governing bodies reacted very differently to this challenge. The Football Association took a positive step to resolve the issue by agreeing to professionalism and then to the establishment of a professional league in 1888 and also to the playing of professionals in the FA Cup (Mason, 1980). However, English public school rugby refused to compromise with professionals in either code, which led to the Northern rugby clubs breaking away in 1895 to form the rugby football league (Dunning and Sheard, 1976).

In the 1890s professional football in England became rapidly commercialised (Walvin, 1975) and, as such, a change in organisation and attitudes led to a changing of the laws. For example, there was no provision for a penalty kick (originally called 'the kick of death'), up until 1891 for it was assumed that a gentleman would never deliberately commit a foul (FIFA, 2005). At the initial national codification of the game by the FA in 1863, disputes that ensued were settled by the two team captains but as the game progressed and by the first international match (between England and Scotland) in 1872, two umpires, one per team, were employed to whom each side could appeal decisions. But it was not the ideal solution as some decisions were only arrived at following lengthy delays and several appeals. The referee, at first, stood on the touchline keeping time and was 'referred to' if the umpires could not agree (FIFA, 2005; Walvin, 1975).

The advent of professionalism and of the intensification of competition and stakes however saw the number of complaints from players and spectators soar (Mason, 1980; Walvin, 1975). Contentious decisions, such as those pertaining to penalties, of course, had to be awarded by someone and following a proposal from the Irish Football Association, the referee was allowed onto the field of play. In the law changes of 1891 a single person with powers to send players off, as well as give penalties and free kicks without listening to appeals, became a permanent fixture in the game, while the two umpires were made linesman or 'assistant referees', as they are now called (FIFA, 2005).

Football too, evolved out of what could reasonably be termed a 'gentleman's sport' interestingly a term used in a very different social and cultural setting also to describe

Ultimate at its inception (Zagoria, 2003). However, given the lessons learned from the origins of football and the recent developments in North America, questions must arise about the current state of the Spirit of the Game in the UK and the future of self refereeing as an effective controlling mechanism in Ultimate. Certainly, players within the current Ultimate community appear to be split on the matter. There is a strongly held view amongst some players that self refereeing is a key to players taking responsibility for their actions and is central to the core values of the sport:

> *'Handing over responsibility for any sort of calls to a third party [means] you take something away from the players. That is the requirement to be honest and spirited and play with respect for the rules and other players.'* (Message Archive)

> *'It's precisely because it is the player's (and only the player's) responsibility to play fairly that most 'numpties' give the sport a wide berth and I would argue that observers would lead to a slow, but inevitable, decline in the spirit of the game over a period of time.'* (Message Archive)

> *'If you don't like the idea of self refereeing and the SotG and all that that means, then you don't usually play! Though I accept that we all get pissed off with poor calls and bad spirited players, the alternative of players appealing for everything and anything to an official, not unlike football, is a slippery slope we don't want to go down.'* (Message Archive)

By contrast, there is also a strongly held (and perhaps growing) view amongst others that even more important than the 'Spirit of the Game' is the perceived 'fairness' and especially the accuracy of decision making. Thus, in a bid to gain the best or the most accurate decision, employing an 'official' third party, it is argued, is probably the way forward.

> *'The concept of observers has always seemed like a reasonable one. Quite often a person off the pitch has a better view of a line call, infringement, or travel than the players involved. Line calls especially.'* (Message Archive)

'The rules state that the person with best perspective makes the call. All too often players in the UK and elsewhere claim best perspective when they couldn't have had it, i.e. O and D players both "skying" for a disc and claiming that they where simultaneously looking at their feet! In the USA the observers have two very distinct roles. First they make active line calls and flag offsides...when seven players are trying to cross the line at top speed as the disc is being pulled none of them nor the defence really know whether they where offside or not. Having an observer make this call from a position on the line cannot hurt the game. As far as I see it observers making line/offside calls can't hurt the game but only make it better, faster and played more in line with the rules.' (Message Archive)

This split in positions on referees arguably represents only the smallest of cracks in the groundswell of opinion on this issue in the UK at the moment. But with the increasing expansion and development of Ultimate, the idea of observers and possibly referees seems likely to continue to be revisited. Already there are those who appear to be resigned to the inevitable.

'My worry is that as things evolve over the long term the decision making is going to be placed more on the observers, making the players less responsible. Start introducing money into the equation and the whole thing could snowball and before you know 'spirit' is just a consolation prize, as the fair play award is in football.' (Message Archive)

'Spirit of the Game' does not and will not always work. When there's enough on the line (if it becomes a professional sport, for example), 'Spirit of the Game' will quickly fall by the wayside. That is simple human nature...Observers will be a necessity. Ultimate will continue to evolve. To think it won't is as mistaken as thinking that Rome would never fall. Observers will eventually become an accepted part of the sport's evolution.' (Message Archive)

6. Summary

What becomes evidently clear in this chapter is that Ultimate contests exhibit a strong degree of internal social control. Deviant behaviour is discouraged, due to the fact that all players are responsible for administering and adhering to the rules. By accepting a form of 'social contract' when participating in Ultimate, self refereeing creates a form

of ideological social control whereby rule violations and disputes are dealt with through a well established 'ritual' of resolution between any two given players in a way that maximises game flow. Despite 'outside' influences, manifested most clearly in a practical sense when 'over competitive' outsiders in the form of rookies play the game, the strong internal social order and moral imperative to internalise appropriate behaviour has appeared to somewhat cocoon the sport and help it maintain its values.

Beyond the implementation of the written rules which have evolved over time, one aspect of Ultimate that makes it easier to deal with any violation is the pervasive ethos within Ultimate, known as the 'Spirit of the Game'. What is meant by spirit of the game in Ultimate is explained in some detail in the WFDF rules and is known by all participants yet there still appears to be an underlying ambiguity about the 'spirit' of Ultimate that remains negotiable. While this notion is still widely supported here in the UK, recent developments in North America have shown that such a system is open to abuse and change, with the recent introduction of active observers due to excessive rule breaking. This has led to the raising of questions about the future of self refereeing as an effective controlling mechanism in Ultimate. While some participants identify the practice as unique and a key to the core identity of Ultimate and its participants, others fear an inevitable decline and moral corrosion resulting in the sport moving towards some of the behaviours and practices found more routinely in more mainstream dominant sporting forms such as football.

Chapter 7

Mixed up?
Contesting traditional notions of gender and masculinity in UK Ultimate

1. Introduction

According to Thornton (1997) gender still remains one of the clearest sites of social difference within subcultures as Victorian ideals and myths of female frailty remain entrenched in the wider culture, confirming difference between the sexes (Theberge, 1989) and consolidated by practices in modern competitive sport (Connell, 1987). With Ultimate unusually proclaiming itself as a mixed-sex sport (UKU, 2004) it therefore provides an interesting context within which to examine issues of gender construction in sport. To set something of a context, in the first part of this chapter an historical review will be undertaken, examining the development of the interplay of heterosexual masculinity and modern sport and how this typically impacts upon sporting opportunities for women.

Though it is argued that sport has become a practice so closely associated with heterosexual men that it has become a 'key signifier of masculinity' (Connell, 1995: 54), Wheaton and Tomlinson (1998: 270) have suggested that alternative sports such as Ultimate, allow for a 'broadening of boundaries' making the cultural landscape less clear cut and can present something of a challenge to traditional notions of masculinity. The second part of this chapter will seek to explore this issue and will draw upon key indicators suggested by Whitson (1987), Birrell and Richter (1987) and Theberge

(2000), as well as on Thornton's (2004) assessment of this issue in North American Ultimate.

In the third part of this chapter I discuss what could yet be a key, pivotal and ideological shift for Ultimate in the UK as elite performers have sought to reject the unique selling point of 'mixed' Ultimate as a desirable sporting model of co-operation (Hargreaves, 1993) and moves to a more separatist stance mirrored in other more dominant team games.

2.   A brief historical context - Masculinity and modern sport

The origins of contemporary sport were developed in a period between the mid nineteenth century and early twentieth century in both Britain and North America (Guttmann, 1994). In particular, boys' public schools provided the setting for the development of institutionalised and codified team games where the moral benefits of 'playing the game' were professed (Mangan, 1981; Holt, 1989). In particular, team games such as cricket and rugby were seen as fundamental to the curriculum and were perceived as enabling the building of one's character and the teaching of characteristics such as manliness and loyalty; qualities that were seen as 'transferable to the world beyond' (McIntosh, 1979: 27). Parallels can also be found in the USA were Ivy league colleges, such as Yale and Princeton, engaged in American Football as an important foundation towards business leadership (Sammons, 1997).

What is referred to as the 'cult of athleticism' involved training young men to be leaders and became the cornerstone of the Muscular Christianity movement, which professed

the positive moral benefits of physical exercise and sport (Mangan, 1981; McIntosh, 1987). This became enshrined in popular romantic sporting mythology embodied in such texts as *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (Rees and Miracle, 2000). In particular the 'cult of athleticism' reflected a very specific image of Victorian masculinity, which whilst celebrating physical prowess prized the ideal of gentlemanly conduct embodied in amateurism (Hargreaves, 1994). Significantly 'games playing in the boys' public schools provided the dominant image of masculine identity in sports and a model for their future development in Britain and throughout the world' (Hargreaves, 1994: 43).

The early twentieth century saw the continued rapid expansion of professional sport, including the slower development and innovation of women's sport rooted in the English middle classes (Tranter, 1998). With the latter came both the loosening and the reinforcement of Victorian gendered discourses. Heated debate raged amongst physical educators and the medical profession about whether physical activity was in fact beneficial to health or dangerous to the fragile female form (Theberge, 2000). Significantly, the debate was 'resolved' by the introduction of modified activities that were less strenuous and were therefore considered more 'suited' to women e.g. running shorter distances in athletics. However, the adoption of such a model served to reinforce the Victorian ideals and myths of female frailty which became entrenched in the sporting culture of many sports. These were largely imposed by men and internalised by middle class women inculcated with bourgeois norms, serving only to confirm the 'natural' differences between the sexes (Theberge, 1989; Hargreaves, 1993).

These associations largely continue today through modern competitive sport (Connell, 1987). An obvious example of how this practice continues is the disparity still found in

elite tennis where men play five set matches and women play only three set matches in grand slam events. Because events such as these are the most prestigious and attract more TV coverage and visibility, this only serves to reinforce an image of 'culturally exalted' masculinity via sport (Connell, 1995: 77). The passing of time and changes in society have seen a noticeable shift away from more traditional values which coloured the landscape at the birth of modern sport to one where culture has a more prominent role. As a result, it is argued that identity is now more fragmented (Giddens 1991). As such, fragmented discourses around identity construction offer the opportunity for the development and establishment of more varied identities, shaped increasingly away from those heavily gendered versions produced around work and career (Jackson et al. 2001, Whannel, 2002). Such changes also provide more opportunities for leisure and a wider choice of activity for both men and women (Featherstone, 1991).

In fact, what has emerged according to Mort (1988:194) is a 'new bricolage of masculinity' [where] 'on the high streets, in the clubs, bars and brasseries, even on the terraces. It seems that young men are now...representing themselves differently and feeling differently.' Wheaton (2004) suggests that Ultimate as with other 'lifestyle' or 'alternative' sports, presents opportunities to adopt identities that differ from the modern masculinities reproduced in more traditional sports. As I have suggested, Wheaton and Tomlinson (1998: 270) argue that such sports allow for a further 'broadening of boundaries' in this important respect. Which raises the question: have the traditional boundaries of gender and especially masculinity construction been 'broadened' in Ultimate? If so, in what ways is this manifested in the practices of those who participate in it?

3. Ultimate and contesting traditional masculinities

A central theme to establishing and maintaining the masculinity/sport axis is the empowerment that results from being physically powerful and from training to become more muscular and stronger, an avenue that has been traditionally less valued by women (Hargreaves, 1994). But it continues to assist and define male superiority in many sports (Guttmann, 1991). What this serves to do is to reproduce notions of hegemonic masculinity whereby cross gender consent establishes a situation in which men are regarded as normatively tough and competitive and women are 'naturally' subordinate (Connell (1987, 1990, 1995, 2000). However, because this form of masculinity is *only* hegemonic, it is capable of challenge and is 'open to reconstitution' (Theberge, 2000: 324). Hegemonic masculinity is also relational (Connell, 2000) and varies according to historical and cross cultural variations regarding masculine ideals in different situations and sports (Giullianotti, 2005).

The increased opportunities for women in sport over the past thirty five years or so are a testament that a relative shift in power relations can and has occurred (Coakley, 2003) which leads to sport becoming something of a 'contested terrain' (Messner, 1988). Hence, as traditional sporting forms are challenged by alternative sports (Wheaton and Tomlinson, 1998) then, by consequence, so must traditional forms of masculinity be contested (Boyle and Haynes, 1999; Messner et al. 2000; Tomlinson; 2001). Typically, these entrenched values are embedded further by well established separatist policies of single sex activities and competition in sport (Hargreaves, 1993). But in Ultimate, participation has historically been mixed and as discussed earlier, this fact serves as an

attraction for both men and women, both for the purposes of socialising and as a locus for perhaps a less aggressive form of performed masculinity.

> *'You don't seem to get the real 'blokey' blokes that play Ultimate if you know what I mean.'*
>
> *[Can you explain that a bit more?]*
>
> *'They don't seem as aggressive as those I know who play football or rugby.'*
> (PD (Female Player) – Interview 06/02/07)

One might speculate that this sort of approach to gender performance is consistent with an activity that is rooted in counter cultural values of communal caring and sharing (Heale, 2001; Anderson, 1995) and is consistent with both Wheaton and Tomlinson (1998) and Wheaton's (2004) assertions that alternative and lifestyle sports, present opportunities for more transgressive embodied social identities that differ from masculinities in traditional sports, not least because they have evolved on sites which do not exemplify this gender formation (Salisbury and Jackson, 1996).

However a key point of distinction here is that unlike almost all alternative and lifestyle sports Ultimate is a *team* sport. At face value this means it is likely to present a very real challenge to more traditional notions of masculinity, as historically, team sports are sites where this type of conventional masculinity has been typically located and reproduced (Salisbury and Jackson, 1996) and it is argued that playing in a mixed sport somehow 'emasculates the virility and nobility of men' (Carroll, 1985: 94). Such perceptions of those who strongly adhere to traditional masculine norms can arguably be sourced to ideas of 'femiphobia' in which playing competitive sport in a mixed context might in some way highlight an underlying fear of appearing female or effeminate (Klein, 1993: 269). Thornton (2004) explored these ideas when studying Ultimate in North America.

He concluded in that context that more traditional masculine values embodied in other more dominant team sports were also to be found in Ultimate and that the sport was merely, 'the production of a new space in which to play around with established boundaries of identity' (Thornton, 2004: 193).

But are these traditional forms of masculinity manifested in Ultimate in the UK? And what are the key similarities and differences in relation to gender comparing UK Ultimate and Thornton's (2004) work on the USA? Wider reading on issues of gender, masculinity and sport suggests that the clearest identifiers of traditional forms of masculinity in team sport are that of the acquisition of high level skill, dominating an opponent and the taking of risks (Whitson, 1987; Birrell and Richter, 1987; Theberge, 2000) and these will provide the central themes for my examination in the rest of this chapter.

(i) The acquisition of high level skill

Skill acquisition and its ostentatious display in sport is held up by many feminist authors as one means of maintaining male dominance as it is, in a sense, hierarchical to those who are less skilled (Whitson, 1987; Birrell and Richter 1987). Thornton (2004) suggests that in Ultimate this is also true and manifests itself in the form of being able to throw a 'flick' or 'forehand' (also known as a 'sidearm'). In addition, Thornton (2004) suggests that there is a perception that women are lower skilled sports performers and that this view is reinforced by repeated comments and narratives.

No evidence was found in this study that the ability to perform a particular type of throw in any way embodied some simple form of hegemonic masculinity in Ultimate. That said, during field research it was clear that comparing skill and abilities was somewhat problematic for participants as many players were reluctant to acknowledge gender difference as integral to sporting culture. As with the findings of Wheaton and Beal (2003), participants were keen, instead, to play up more generic characteristics and inclusiveness:

'I've always played mixed Ultimate and the way I see it, if someone is way good enough to play then they just are.' (SB– interview 10/07/06)

However, as they exist as a more remote medium, internet discussion board threads revealed a much clearer perception by *female* participants that they felt powerful pressures to prove themselves on the playing field.

'Surely I'm not the only woman out there who feels under twice as much pressure with blokes around because I feel like I have something to prove to them as well as having the game to play.' (Message Archive)

The convention that women often have to be meet higher, more exacting, standards just to gain basic respect in sport has also been shown to be evident in skateboarding subcultures (Beal and Wilson, 2004) and reaffirms a notion that to be male does somehow provide immediate access to legitimacy in sport: to be female risks the opposite. A more apparent feature of the debate about gender and the acquisition of high level skills within Ultimate is that there is a strong feeling amongst its players that *personal development* - rather than victory alone - is very important. Players are always considered to be 'trying to do their best' and, to that extent, it is rare for a player to be

publicly admonished if they drop a disc (unless they should know better, of course!). In addition to this:

> *'What is noticeable from both practice and tournament play is that better players will not be reluctant to give a so-called weaker player the disc. The concession that might be made is that the difficulty of the disc thrown may be changed to facilitate catching, but it is very unlikely that a player will be refused a pass if they are in a good position.'* (Field notes 28/04/06)

The development of an anti-hierarchical ideology on the pitch and an interest in the welfare of others is consistent with counter cultural values of communal caring and sharing (Heale, 2001; Anderson, 1995) and it provides a source of motivation and commitment to a cooperative ethic (Mead, 1961), despite being located in a competitive arena. This is further reinforced by the fact that recognition of achievement in Ultimate is not confined to the first placed team(s). For example, as well as a cup presented for the team finishing in first place, there is always a presentation of a 'plate' to the team that proved the best competitor in the lower half of the competition (e.g. in a sixteen team competition the plate would be awarded to the ninth place team). In addition, there is often a 'spoon' prize for the team that 'wins' the battle for last place. The awarding of all prizes is received by other teams with equal, non-ironic, applause.

As if to underline the fact that being skilful, competitive and a winning team is not to be achieved without due respect to others, at the end of every competition and irrespective of the level of play, each team will be invited to cast their vote for which team they felt played most keenly in keeping with the spirit of the game. The 'spirit' award is presented at the prize giving ceremony and is no loser's compensation – it is a much coveted award to win. The award can manifest itself in different guises and I have seen

a cup, a crate of beer and even a garden gnome presented to acknowledge this achievement.

I would therefore suggest that within the UK Ultimate subculture men do not typically use the acquisition of superior skill levels to enforce notions of traditional masculinity as indicated by Whitson (1987), Birrell and Richter (1987) and Theberge (2000). This finding is in marked contrast to Thornton's (2004) findings in North America. In fact, values of caring and sharing, playing within the spirit of the game and communal development appear to hold greater sway here, consistent with activities such as Parkour (Saville, 2008), though it would seem that such values are much less apparent in other (non-mixed) competitive team sports in the UK.

(ii) Dominating an opponent

Connell (1983) suggests that the demands of almost every sport involve a balance between force and skill. Whitson (1987: 365) concludes that 'the more that it is force that is decisive, the more a physically dominating, hegemonic masculinity can be publicly celebrated and the more likely that the culture of sport will be part of the defence of the existing gender order'. Though this sort of dominance is not manifest in contact terms - Ultimate is a non contact sport (and should contact occur a 'foul' may be called so no advantage would result) -, Thornton (2004) suggests that in Ultimate this type of dominance *is* clearly apparent and that it manifests itself mainly in the form of (dominant) men arranging to mark on the field against (subordinate) women.

On face value, evidence from the UK to support this view was apparent on a number of occasions, with some teams appearing to *'elect to score easy points by isolating female players in the endzone'* (Field notes 18/2/06). Upon raising this with one team that was blatantly using this approach the male team members appeared to be quite open about what they were doing and responded with the comments that: 'It's cynical, but everyone does it!' However, it became apparent through further questioning (including with other teams where there were other observable instances) that this was not a simple fact of female players alone being singled out. Rather it was that some teams are very astute at matching up their players in terms of physical attributes, and therefore can easily create mis-matches in terms of speed, height, awareness, ability etc, including between and amongst *men*. Though cross cultural notions of gendered practices can vary (Giullianotti, 2005), this point does highlight the importance of seeking a more in-depth understanding in this area than has hitherto been the case.

A further way that masculinised forms of domination are apparent in many sports is often reflected by the scoring (Coakley, 2003). Thus to truly dominate in a hyper-masculine way might be to win by a massive margin and look to humiliate or 'play with' (mock) the opposition. In Ultimate, within both indoor and outdoor play there is a score 'cap' imposed of thirteen and fifteen points respectively, to prevent such instances happening. If these totals are reached during a game the contest simply ceases, irrespective of time. Though such totals are seldom reached in actual game play, when they are, it is most often due to mis-matched contests when a high level team gets paired to play a very poor one. This effective protection of a very poor team in such uneven contests is further underlined during outdoor play when half-time occurs, not after an allotted time but after eight (or just over half) of the required points have been achieved.

From both observations and experience it is not usual for highly rated teams to attempt to go out and dominate much weaker opposition to zero (referred to as 'bageling'). But, on occasions, teams will set out to win heavily as they may need a healthy points difference to qualify for a higher position on the second day of a competition. When this has been observed (and indeed experienced at first hand) in such an instance, after the game, winning teams are usually apologetic to their opponents. Again it would appear that Ultimate is typically not a site for playing out discourses of masculine domination, leaving it rather in contra-distinction to many other dominant male team sports of the kinds highlighted by Whitson (1987), Birrell and Richter (1987) and Theberge (2000).

(iii) The taking of risks

Wheaton and Beal (2003) indicate that those in subcultural groups readily mention key qualities and characteristics that individuals aspire to, with these characteristics commonly based on values of hegemonic masculinity. For example, Beal (1996) and Beal and Weidman (2003) highlight risk taking which, they argue, males typically perceive as heroic, suggesting that females do not and that any that do are exceptions rather than the norm. Such approaches are consistent with Thornton's (2004) findings when he comments about 'going ho' (a daring, injury-inducing diving for the disc, which is known as 'laying out' in the UK) in Ultimate in North America. Young and White (2000) suggest that it is *men* who are much more likely to pursue such risks in sport because the rewards of hegemonic masculinity continue to be meaningful to them.

Both my own observations and experiences reveal that the vast majority of Ultimate players appear to celebrate 'laying out' vocalised through shouts of approval and

reinforced through narratives in different sites. Thornton (2004) however argued that this was a clear instance for reinforcing hegemonic masculinity as it was apparently clear that many men would 'lay out' and most women would not. As discussed earlier, raising this issue was somewhat problematic for many participants as many players were reluctant to acknowledge that there were any male/female differences in this respect, consistent with the findings of Wheaton and Beal (2003). However it is interesting to note here is that sideline shouts of 'You should have laid that!' are directed almost exclusively at men when they chose not to dive. When I ventured, on one occasion, to say the same thing to a woman who failed to dive, both men and women on the sidelines reverted to highly gendered norms: they explained to me how the player concerned probably did not want to hurt herself, consistent with the interests of self protection and even the concerns about possible breast damage identified by (Thornton, 2004). That said, I observed as many instances of men choosing *not* to lay out as I did of women who actually did. In fact during the womens' tour the expectation of women to lay out was abundantly clear from the sidelines.

These findings would perhaps suggest that there is a more than a degree of ambivalence in this matter: there are observations and narratives about (heterosexual) women 'laying out' as a normal part of play on the one hand, but on the other, in some contexts, women are excused trying to lay out because of their supposed fragility (Lenskyj, 1986). This last point shows at least some consistency with Thornton's findings (2004), though I would disagree with his conclusion that women who 'lay out' are widely regarded as transgressing gender boundaries established by biology and nature, even if my own experience shows that a 'chauvinistic chivalry' does indeed characterise some sideline exchanges in UK Ultimate.

As regards taking risks, the obvious consequences in any sporting activity are the injuries that inevitably occur. Young et al. (1994) found that even in less overtly competitive pursuits such as climbing the willingness to risk injury was as highly valued as being skilful. The idea of risk in sport and the obvious link to injury has been examined by a number of authors in relation to masculinity and identity within sporting cultures (see Curry and Strauss, 1994; Young et al, 1994; Dyck, 2000; Palmer, 2004). Young and White (2000: 126) go as far as to suggest that 'the cultures of some sports continue to produce high injury rates, not only because of the financially driven emphasis on winning but also because of the connection between aggression and masculinisation'. Dworkin and Messner (2002:24) conclude that the willingness to take risks and face injury have become important 'signifiers of heterosexual masculinity'.

Within alternative or lifestyle sports, Beal and Weidman (2003) indicate that such values have come to represent the 'authentic', 'real' or 'insider' view and to be able to access this experience and be associated with 'risk' is important. Beal and Wilson (2004) refer to scars being merit badges of the 'real' in this respect. Although in Ultimate there may appear to be a superficial acknowledgement of 'respect' (and often both interest and sympathy) if one, for example, was to severely graze an arm whilst laying out for a disc, it would not typically amount to what Beal and Wilson (2004) consider to be a sporting badge of honour. In fact, repeated risk-taking in laying out, especially indoors, has rather more chance of being viewed as stupid and wilful as opposed to being positively registered and rewarded as a prized case of sporting hyper-masculinity. Furthermore, and unlike the findings in Beal and Wilson (2004), there was little evidence in the Ultimate community to suggest that 'Chicks dig (male) scars!'

4. Becoming unmixed - From co-operation to separatism

As discussed earlier, one of the key attractors for some players is the very fact that Ultimate continues to exist as a mixed sport and, in many ways, this aspect of the sport remains one of Ultimate's unique selling points. Hargreaves (1993) indicates that this sort of co-operative policy in sport is one of three routes along which lines women's sporting opportunities have developed and it is the one that is least well trodden. Within the UK the most common ways in which sports have developed is through either co-option or separatism.

Co – option is explained as 'women catching up with men' and has been advocated by liberal feminist who reject notions that biological differences or traditional gender values prevent women's sports participation and competition. However because norms are still established by men, women continue to 'seem out of place' (Novak, 1994: 208).

Separatism is typically espoused by radical feminists, who, in order to enhance women's sports participation and achievement support the idea of hosting their sporting contests separately to men. Consistent with this line of thinking is to attribute problems of sports' participation to gender inequalities (Hargreaves, 1993).

By contrast, '*co-operation* between men and women helps establish new sporting models that negate gender differences' (Giullianotti, 2005: 90). Advocated by socialist feminists, this last-named approach 'assumes that men are not inherently oppressive, but are socialised into assuming and reproducing oppressive roles and practices that damage

men as well as women' (Giullianotti, 2005: 90). This approach is advocated by Hargreaves (1993) and one can identify implicit support for the position from the writings of both Willis (1982) and Barrett (1982).

By far the most common course of development for most team sports in the UK has been to pursue *separatist* policies of men's and women's versions of the same activity and despite the introduction of the Sex Discrimination Act in the UK in 1975 which offered a potential to challenge such arrangements (see Bennett v The Nottinghamshire FA in Gardiner *et al*., 2001) an exemption was included (Section 44) which allowed sports to preserves the status quo.

Both Whitson (1987) and Birrell and Richter (1987) argue that such policies are hierarchical and exclusionist and consistent with discourses of masculine dominance which can be further reinforced structurally within sports by 'preservist' systems such as hierarchical leagues. Within Ultimate a move to this approach has recently evolved in the outdoor form of the game and specifically within the Tour structure, with the better players being representative of teams (the top sixteen) on the A tour. Significantly, though the Tour events are 'Open' competitions a key change occurred in 2004 when the UKUA launched the women's tour, a separate competition for women-only teams. This took place at the same venue and within the same weekend as the 'open' tour and thus meant that talented female players could not play for an 'open' team and a 'women's' team at elite level. This new direction was developed in the first instance in order to prepare the strongest possible set of teams for international competitions, the first of these being the 2005 World Championships. (The categories of play at such

events are typically, open, mixed and womens, with events sometimes included for juniors and 'masters' (the over 30s)). These structures have remained in place.

At the elite end of Ultimate there seems to be overwhelming support for this new direction from both men and women, as I found out during informal conversations and as was captured most interestingly on the *DiscSpace* discussion board:

> *'Few can argue against the fact that the men's game has and is getting stronger, but as this happens there is a danger the women's game will get left behind...The only way to improve women's Ultimate is to have more of it.'* (Message Archive – Female Player)

> *'In the vast majority of sports, especially team sports, women do not compete against men in the same way as in Ultimate in GB, because it is not realistic. When Ultimate was first 'born', by its very nature it challenged the traditional beliefs associated with men and women and sport. It is true that the fact that women have the chance to play against men is one aspect of the sport that makes it different and arguably special. However, it is possible that this very aspect is holding back its development.'* (Message Archive – Male Player)

This last comment appears to signal something of a watershed moment. To acknowledge that one has something in one's sport that 'makes it different and special' but that we must now be 'realistic', as staying co-ed is 'holding back its development' challenges the very nature and ethos of the sport and also presumably challenges the ideologies and values of most of the people who play.

That said, there have been some objections to this embryonic separatist policy, voiced by both men and women many of whom do not play at the highest level. Some saw the move as one aimed at constraining womens' opportunities and others simply objected to the abandoning of the established mixed-sport principles:

'Can you please explain what reasons there are for this constraining of women's Ultimate?'….. (Message Archive – Male Player)

'By forcing women (the majority of who want to play Open as well as Womens') to choose one specific team per tour, you create obvious problems.' (Message Archive – Female Player)

'Every team ranked between 6 and 10 in the tour has at least 1 female player…I know for a fact that a few of these teams would have had more, but for the two women's teams being in the tour. Don't get me wrong, I'm not knocking the women's teams. I just think the individuals concerned should be allowed to choose between a women's only team and joining a co-ed open team. Top level Ultimate is possible with a co-ed team.' (Message Archive – Male Player)

'I believe that splitting the sport into single sex competitions is a very bad idea. Having "sold" Ultimate at countless [university] fresher's fairs, I am certain that one of the unique selling points of the sport is the fact that men and women can and do play together in a game. Without this, I don't believe we would attract as many women to even attempt to play, which, in turn, surely can't be any good for Women's Ultimate, or for Ultimate in general.' (Message Archive - Female Player)

Again this final statement from a female Ultimate player is very poignant. If a key attraction of University-based Ultimate play is mixed participation then to lose such 'uniqueness' is potentially to take a very serious risk. More dominant sporting forms will always recruit given their wider popularity, but sports such as Ultimate are arguably best placed to market themselves based on what makes them different, rather than the same. Overall, what seems to be apparent here is that Ultimate - at least at the elite level - is seeking to mirror the policies of separatism commonly found in other, more male-dominated, team games and is moving in its thinking away from what is arguably a more progressive sporting model of co-operation to one which seems more in tune with the demands of sport in capitalist societies.

5. Summary

Imported alternative and lifestyle sports, such as Ultimate, have been seen to present opportunities for more complex social identities that differ from the modern masculinities of traditional British sports. Many 'alternative' sports have evolved on social and cultural sites which do not typically exemplify traditional forms of masculinity. In particular this is because they are often individual, less directly competitive and more middle class leisure pursuits that are widely engaging within a community. Though Ultimate may be more removed from the direct influence of Victorian values in which modern sport was forged, the fact remains that it is a team sport played in Britain and at face value it presents a very real challenge to more traditional notions of masculinity. Consistent with this view is involvement in an activity that is rooted in core counter cultural values such as challenging conventional gender roles (at least expressively) communal caring and sharing, making it overall something of a paradox.

When Thornton (2004: 193) explored the gender question in North American Ultimate he concluded that traditional masculine values embodied in other more dominant team sports were also to be found in Ultimate. These findings in the UK suggest something slightly different. When identifiers of traditional expressions of masculinity in team sport were sought out in Ultimate - such as those of the acquisition of high level skill, dominating an opponent and the taking of risks, highlighted by Whitson (1987), Birrell and Richter (1987) and Theberge (2000) – relatively little evidence was found to support this case. Of course, Ultimate in the UK (and the USA) is played mainly by middle class, university educated, white men who have sought out a mixed non-contact sport for their leisure, rather than a highly competitive, male-only high contact variant such as football or rugby union. The interpolation of class and gender is probably

crucial here, especially in the UK. That said, my findings did suggest that there is also a degree of ambivalence in this matter concerning the practice of 'laying out', with the risky practice of women laying out being normalised – at least in some contexts.

Given the future challenge that Ultimate may possibly pose to the traditional forms of masculinity expressed in team sports, a possible further area of consideration might be that of sexuality. Neither Thornton's work (2004) or my own collected data pertains directly to sexuality, which maybe of potential interest given the traditional heterosexist and homophobic sentiments which are predominant in other more dominant team sports (Price and Parker, 2003). My own observations and conversations for this research suggest no obvious signs that UK Ultimate attracts lesbian or gay players but this might be a useful direction for future research.

If a key attraction and part of the uniqueness of Ultimate as a team game is its mixed-sex participation, then potentially the decision to pursue a separatist sporting model at the elite level is a very serious one. Within UK universities, more dominant sporting forms will always recruit well given their wider popularity but sports such as Ultimate are arguably best placed to market themselves based on what makes them different to its competitors. In addition, elite conceptions of most sports become the ideal to which most versions of sport eventually succumb. There seems to be an underlying assumption here that somehow there is a need to look like other more dominant sporting forms in order to gain national acceptance and that this is consistent with notions of stigma which will be discussed later.

This new conformity to more traditional separatist structures and characteristics is likely to make Ultimate of less interest to many potential recruits, both men and women. A counter argument here might be to suggest that it will, in some way, be more attractive to others.   But for those men who do not want to play in a highly competitive mixed sport it would seem likely that other current aspects of the game - such as self refereeing and playing with a 'Frisbee' - might continue to serve as detractors. Barring serving the interests of the elite few, therefore, it is unclear at this point exactly how this new separatist policy might be of real benefit to the long term development of the game in the UK for all supporters of Ultimate.

Chapter 8

The Aesthetic Experience of Ultimate

1. Introduction

Ultimate, as with other 'invasion' games such as association football, does not, at face value, seek to be especially beautiful or even to contain obvious elements of aesthetic value. It is, what is termed by Best (1978), a 'purposive sport.' This is, a sport in which the purpose of the activity can be clearly specified - such as scoring a point - and how this occurs within the rules is largely immaterial. Traditionally described 'aesthetic' sports, by contrast - sports such as figure skating or gymnastics - cannot be easily separated from their aesthetic content, as how they are performed is implicit within the activity and also the marks obtained for it (Best, 1978). Such a classification of sport is far from exhaustive – or even especially enlightening - but it usefully indicates where the main focus lies in delineating different types of sporting involvement (McFee 2004).

In this study there have been repeated references and celebrations of what we might describe as more 'aesthetic' elements in a purposive activity on the part of both performers and spectators. Such emphasis is worthy of further investigation. This becomes apparent when first considering how the chosen landscapes for playing Ultimate are important and how they provide an aesthetic backdrop which are manifested in aspects such as the preferred choice of physical location for contests as well as the music chosen to accompany events. According to Kupfer (1995: 393)

participation in the right sort of environment actually facilitates the perception of aesthetic elements as it, 'instigates aesthetic awareness of ourselves moving in space and time'. Such links should perhaps come as little surprise. Reid (1974) has claimed that even though the purposes of sport and art are quite different conceptually, observable aesthetic elements can be present in both. Indeed, the distinction drawn between so-called 'purposive' and 'aesthetic' sports is a very loose one because, 'purposive sports like football, do of course have, an aesthetic dimension – where grace, line elegance and the like are celebrated' (McFee, 2004: 91).

However, the data obtained here suggest more than this focus on mere aspects of the artistic form. In order to examine the aesthetic dimensions of Ultimate more fully and with the dearth of specific theoretical frameworks in this area, an analytical structure outlined by Carlisle (1974) has been used for the sake of clarity. Within this, consideration will, firstly, be given to addressing the expressive and evocative elements of Ultimate, followed by a focus on its apparent intellectual beauty and, lastly, its compelling dramatic elements.

2. *What* do players find aesthetically pleasing about Ultimate?

(i) Sport has expressive and evocative elements

Carlisle (1974) separates expressive and evocative elements into two distinctive strands, namely those associated with movement qualities and those where human life values are expressed. The first of these is best exemplified where skilled performance takes on specific qualities beyond those of clinical performance, most notably with the throwing of discs.

'I love the flying dynamics of the disc and the joy of actually seeing it fly. Whether it was thrown by you or someone else, or whether you're just watching it, it is just a joy to see.' (PT – interview 12/04/06)

'There's just nothing more satisfying that throwing a pitch length huck [see Glossary of Terms] that flies flat and straight. There's just something beautiful in the way it flies.' (EC– interview 09/07/06)

What seems distinctive about Ultimate, and in contrast to the comments of those such as Best (1978) and McFee (2004) who have examined 'purposive sports', is that this sort of aesthetic appreciation is apparent even when the purpose remains unfulfilled. McFee (2004: 91) indicates that the aesthetic dimension in sport, 'only becomes important once it is granted that the purposive element is satisfied'. However, in Ultimate, players typically indicate that there is something aesthetically pleasing in executing a well thrown disc, even if the purposive element is not achieved – if it is not caught for a successful pass or score.

The peculiar aesthetic properties of a flying disc seem to somehow provide a satisfaction beyond many purposive sporting activities where a ball or some other object is used. Kupfer (1995) explains that a key determinant to differentiating sports is what is required to obtain a score and that this directly affects the activities we choose to watch and play. After all, according to Johnson mischievously (1975: 3), 'when a ball dreams, it dreams it's a Frisbee'. Such an appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of a disc may be openly apparent because, as Best (1978:109) suggests, there is 'a general tendency to prefer, from an aesthetic point of view, sports which allow for smooth, flowing movements in the achievement of the primary purpose'. What is more, the flight of a disc in the air also has a tendency to induce 'hanging' which, arguably, builds a degree of anticipation not typically found in the flight of a ball. Thus, when a well thrown disc

travels for a long time and is then caught for a score (and better still to win a game) both purposive and aesthetic elements are satisfied making for an even more satisfying experience. Such an instance has been described by Kupfer (1995) as a 'meta appreciation', where some sporting experiences:

> 'provide clear cut occasions for the joining of the useful (purpose achieving) and the aesthetic (aesthetic execution of the play). When this happens our aesthetic appreciation seems to be of a second order, a "meta appreciation" of the harmonising of the practical with the aesthetic' (Kupfer (1995: 396).

Carlisle's (1974) second explanatory strand, whereby human life values are expressed in sport, is perhaps best exemplified in Ultimate by players being deemed to have been 'courageous', usually by 'laying out', as discussed earlier, or else by being coolly 'patient', an approach often termed in Ultimate as 'chilly.'

> *'The best teams this weekend were really chilly on O [offense]. Especially when teams played any kind of zone, they just passed it around until a good chance opened up.'*(WR - Interview 03/02/07)

> *'The team's 'champagne moment' of the weekend came against TNT. We traded the first few but we effectively won the game in the middle by being really chilly on the disc. We must have used up the best part of five minutes on two consecutive points'* (BJ - Interview 22/10/06).

What is apparent here is that in order to truly evaluate the aesthetics of these situations both knowledge and acute perception is required of a kind which can involve both performers and spectators (Whiting, 1974). For instance, to 'lay out' in order to catch or intercept a pass when it is clear there is absolutely no chance of it being effective is simply stupid and detrimental to the team, rather than being courageous. Similarly, it is possible to watch a team 'coolly' pass the disc for minutes on end, but if the team is behind on scores then they are simply wasting their own time, rather than creating anything meaningful or especially pleasing to the eye.

(ii) Sport has intellectual beauty

Carlisle (1974) suggests that sport has intellectual beauty, most readily when play acts as a solution to a problem. In particular, within Ultimate this is best manifested in efficient performance and during moments of perceived unity. These issues will be dealt with briefly in turn. An appreciation of high quality play appears evident from most Ultimate players. Such comments routinely refer to the *efficiency* exhibited by better teams – often experienced at close quarters.

> *'Fusion were slick. The way they passed the disc so quickly and so low to the ground during those upwind points was amazing.'* (TM – Interview 02/11/06)

> *'Chevy took us apart and it looked like they were just out for a training session.'* (RL – Interview 04/05/06)

> *'With the tall guy in the middle of their ISO it's so hard to play against. They're so efficient on O and so have bags of energy left for D.'* (EC – Interview 09/07/06)

Such instances have been described as examples of 'efficiency of action' (Best (1978:109) and 'economy of effort with a purpose' Kupfer (1995:391), and have also been termed by both authors as expressions of 'grace'. Although this term is more readily associated with more overtly aesthetic and artistic forms of movement and expression such as dance (Lowe, 1976), it may well apply to the instances outlined above. Arguably, too, they might equally be described as functional. Cordner (1995) suggests that these terms are readily conflated and, although they are closely related, they are not the same. For example a cricket bowling machine could be functional in providing deliveries for a batter to hit, but may lack the grace of well balanced and seemingly effortless bowler. According to Kupfer (1995: 395) 'what is crucial, especially from the aesthetic point of view, is how the score is made, not *that* it is made'

and as such there still remains an appreciation inherent in the performance that is recognised by those who perform and experience such moments first hand.

The second aspect to be addressed here is that of unity. A key experience expressed by many Ultimate players is the beauty that becomes evident when there is a 'oneness' or unity of the team and its members.

> *'The best moments are when the team just gels. You don't stop to think, you just throw and cut and everyone seems to be in the right place at the right time.'* (WR Interview – 03/02/07)

> *'There are some players I love to play with, for sure. I can think of a couple of people I just seem to click with and everything seems far easier.'* (RL – Interview 04/05/06)

> *'It's rewarding when the stuff you've worked on in training actually comes off. It's like a well oiled machine when that happens.'* (PD – Interview 06/02/07)

Elliot (1974) suggests that it is the continuous movement in sport that is appreciated by both performer and spectator with James (1974:103) indicating that within sport there is a beauty in 'the perfect flow of motion'. Sociological thought here relating to the sociology of the body and the sociology of emotion are still in their theoretical infancy (Shilling, 1993), so in order to build upon an area that thus far has been dominated by philosophical thoughts, one can perhaps look to other disciplines such as social psychology. In this field such examples of perfect motion are perhaps best categorised by what Csikszentmihalyi (1990; 1997) describes as 'flow' experiences.

Typically, these moments of flow, expressed by sport performers are characterised by harmonious experiences (relating to a state of mind, as well as being manifest in action) and are considered special times when performance was particularly enjoyable and/or

optimal. In fact, the combination of both efficiency and unity are referred to by Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi (1999: 13) as 'action awareness merging.' One of the fundamentals of flow is when a performer is at one with the movements they are making and where decisions seem spontaneous and actions are smooth and fluent. Indeed, other flow fundamentals appear to be applicable here, namely those of 'unambiguous feedback', 'the transformation of time' and 'autotelic experiences.'

The term 'unambiguous feedback' specifically relates here to kinaesthetic awareness and the feedback a performer gets from the movements of the body. Most notably, players get a 'feel' for when something has worked on the field:

> *'I knew that disc was right the moment it left my hand.'* (DD – Interview 31/05/07)

> *'It was great. I just pivoted and stuck it. It just felt right you know.'* (BM - Interview 03/11/06)

Here time is transformed and it generally follows that when things flow well, time appears shorter and games go by more quickly:

> *'The second game went so quick. Everything went for as after they made some early drops and after that we couldn't stop scoring'* (WR – Interview 03/02/07).

By contrast when there is no discernable 'flow' the opposite is also true.

> *'Damn that was a long game. We spent practically the entire game chasing discs and I'm absolutely knackered.'* (SA – Interview 03/02/07)

> *'I couldn't believe that there was still fifteen minutes left and we were already five behind.'* (PW – Interview 01/12/05)

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Autotelic experiences are gained from an intrinsic joy that is experienced from playing - 'from auto "its own" and telos, "goal", end or purpose' (Guttmann, 2007: 24). Though a number of the experiences already documented in this chapter could be considered autotelic, there appear to be some experiences or moves that give an extra sense of enjoyment.

> *'You can't beat laying out in the rain – that does it for me.'* (HL – Interview 22/05/06)

> *'I love playing on the beach. Sun, sand and Ultimate is a winner.'* (LC – Interview 12/04/06)

> *'I played in the all star game and it was a right laugh.'* (FK – Interview 02/02/07)

> *'Though I play 'A' tour now, I still go to Glastonbury [an Ultimate 'party' tournament, not the festival] every year just to be able to have a bit of a more relaxed throw around.'* (MB – Interview 30/05/07)

What these statements illustrate is that ideally, participation in any leisure pursuit should offer intrinsic rewards about doing and experiencing the activity. However, what the final comment also indicates is that these can get lost if external rewards, such as the pressure of high level competition, become paramount or determining (Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). What is apparent, however, is that there remain opportunities within Ultimate to experience a more playful element of the sport. Indeed, there has arguably been something of a surge in popularity in the UK recently of so called 'party tournaments' (events where 'having a good time' are prioritised over the outcome of the competition) such as at Glastonbury:

> *'Over the last few seasons, since the calendar has been more formalised, at certain times of the season, party tournaments have been more popular than serious ones. For example on the 3rd Feb 2007, they struggled to get sixteen teams at Weston-Super-Mare to make up the qualifying tournament in the South West region for indoor nationals. Yet one week later the newly created 'Disco' Inferno party tournament in Bristol was massively*

oversubscribed. It filled up almost immediately and had a long waiting list' (Field Notes 17/02/07).

This would seem to indicate that the need to experience the aesthetic joy of merely playing remains and that it is actively sought by many who experience Ultimate. Such findings are perhaps consistent with ideas discussed by Theberge (1995) and Duquin (2000) who both indicate that adherence to idealised elements of emotional expression can be found in new sporting forms as they seek to build both a community and a collective identity.

(iii) Sport has drama

Carlisle (1974) indicates that sport contains drama as the contest taking place exhibits a swaying balance of tension. In such instances the element of competition is, in many ways, a prerequisite to the aesthetic as it serves to give meaning to the drama that unfolds, in which there are winners and losers. In fact, many players' best personal moments relate to close, hard fought contests in which they played a key part in winning the contest.

> *'Personal highlight? Hmmm... that's got to be last year at Warwick Indoors, where we came from two points behind in the crossover to make the top eight and I got double happiness to win it.'* (FK – Interview 02/02/07)

> *'Sheffield Beginners five years ago. I scored the winning point in sudden death.'* (PW – Interview 01/12/05)

According to (Russell, 1979), such tense, well balanced contests serve as a magnifier as these contests often bring out peak performances that after 'to-ing and fro-ing' ideally end with a resolution and a crescendo. Kupfer (1995: 397) suggests that these rhythms within a game mean that, 'embedded in a contest, the athletes' movements are taken up

into the larger movements and rhythms of the game, creating a correlative mood or atmosphere.'

Of course, in one sided contests there is relatively little or no tension of this kind. Leibling (1956) explains that games can be barren or free scoring and only between these poles lays tension. It is not uncommon in sport that contests move quickly towards one end of the spectrum and so, in this instance, the aesthetic moments are not complete as the motion just ends and there is no drama (Kupfer, 1995). Interestingly, in Ultimate there is perhaps a uniquely meritocratic system in play involving pooling teams of similar ability, one which seeks to keep match ups close and so actively fosters these rewarding tension and associated aesthetic experiences.

> *'On the Saturday in most competitions, teams are seeded and, as such, there can be some quite one sided contests. However on the Sunday, commonly three pools are created (known as top eight, middle eight and bottom eight). The strongest teams constitute the top eight, the weakest teams the bottom eight and the rest in the middle eight. There are cross over games between these pools to ensure that the right teams are in the right pools and then the rest of Sunday is spent by the teams in each pool playing matches between themselves. Even within those pools the winners only get paired with other winners and losers with other losers, thus ensuring, as the day moves on, that the opposition is of as equal performance as it is possible to match.'* (Field Notes 22/10/06)

Ghose (1974) indicates that the use of descriptive language best exemplifies how the explanation of what occurs can also seek to make events more dramatic. In Ultimate this is evident in the name of the activity itself. After all, there can be few activities where the name suggests that participation will provide the 'Ultimate sports experience' (Zagoria, 2003). In addition, it is also apparent in specific terms that are used in the sport. Two types of throw, in particular, a 'hammer' and a 'knife' (see Glossary of Terms) make particular overhead throws seem much more aggressive and powerful that

they actually are in practice. When a player successfully makes a defensive play by preventing the completion of a pass and then immediately upon the turnover of the disc, receives a pass to score a point it is referred to as 'Double Happiness' – a successful defensive and offensive play in the same sequence. Possibly the most embellished and celebrated feat in Ultimate is an occurrence known as the, 'World's Greatest', a rare event whereby the disc firstly flies out of bounds but is caught and thrown back into play before either it, or the player concerned, touches the ground. To complete the move the disc is then immediately caught by another team-mate for a score.

Within Ultimate, what further reinforces the moments that possess expressive and evocative elements, intellectual beauty and drama, as outlined by Carlisle (1974), are the way these experiences are reinforced through recounting narratives in specific social sites. Firstly, it is a common feature of the subculture that many experiences are communally *shared* as most players watch other teams play, when they are not playing themselves. This is facilitated by the fact that waiting participants have often travelled to a distant venue, such as a sports hall or a sports field in a relatively anonymous location, meaning they know of nowhere else to go or they have minimum transport (two or three car drivers for a team) to go elsewhere. Also with schedules being so tight it is important to be nearby so that a team can chat, warm up and be immediately available to play. In addition, because of the close interaction that is apparent in the Ultimate subculture players like to 'catch up' with other people they probably last saw at a previous event and they often support friends whilst they are resting. In more 'socially-driven' team sports such as Ultimate the environment becomes key because 'people comprise our environment' (Kupfer, 1995: 403).

Secondly, as specific aesthetic moments are shared at first hand it also makes them easier to share after the event with other team mates, which can make them strong and durable and can give them a certain longevity. As such, these events can take on almost a 'fictional' or a 'detached' quality from the events in which they were located (McFee, 1986) mythologised in their retelling and become powerful and 'deep acting' points of reference for participants as they repeatedly draw upon emotive memories (Hochschild, 1983). Snyder (1991: 228) suggests that this occurs 'as it helps participants to define who they are and the values they hold.' The instances where these interactions appear to be most strongly reinforced are during car journeys to and from events:

> *'Game highlights such as…'perfect throws' are often talked about and reinforced in the narratives of players long after the event.'* (Field Notes 14/01/06)

> *'PN never shut up all the way home about the weekend. The amount of times we heard about how good his backhand had got.'* (RL – Interview 04/05/06)

> *'All the way down to Southampton, the conversation kept flicking back to personal highlights from last year's event.'* (Field Notes 23/06/05)

This last point illustrates also how social sites such as the journeys to events are important in order to build up anticipation for the experiences that may soon occur again which gives an insight into the importance of gaining a memorable aesthetic experience from play. Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi (1999: 30) suggest that these special moments 'provides a glimpse of perfection, which is why we seek it again and again once we attain it.' They also suggest that these moments can be incredibly attractive as they are applicable to all levels of competence.

In considering all the above points we can begin to see why participants in Ultimate appear so readily to make reference to and celebrate more aesthetic elements in a purposive activity. These circumstances in conjunction appear to raise what (Kupfer, 1995:400) refers to as aesthetic attention: 'Noticing the features and qualities of whatever is present to us...Aesthetic attention in sports can and does affect our everyday perception of physical movement...We are awakened to the flows and interruptions within each, however mundane.' These moments of being located in an 'emotional mode of being' are described by Freund (1982) as being 'in touch' and demonstrating a tangible awareness of the relationship between body and mind.

Kupfer (1995:402) also goes on to explain that 'aesthetic potentials vary from sport to sport, some variations greater than others.' This is why at some level we give particular attraction to one activity over another, as the rewards to be gained from one activity compared to another are different and participants feel different in different contexts. This idea is not new of course. Angell (1978) indicates that the outdoor context for baseball - such as the setting, the sun and social - hold distinct advantages over that of other sports such as basketball. That said, with the unique set of circumstances discussed above, Ultimate does appear to offer something rather more than appears to have been documented to date. Kupfer (1995: 391) believes that for many people during their participation or spectating of sport, 'we are losing something profound on the side of aesthetic appreciation; direct aesthetic appreciation of sport and consequently what sport has to offer for the aesthetic enhancement of daily life.' Perhaps what Ultimate allows people to do is somehow to reconnect with such enigmatic and elusive aspects of their everyday lives but during competitive sporting activity and, as Freund (1982) suggests, facilitating our bodily well being.

3. Summary

Purposive sports, do not necessarily seek to be beautiful or to contain elements of great aesthetic value. An analytical outline proposed by Carlisle (1974) provided a clear structure within which expressive and evocative elements, intellectual beauty and dramatic aspects of Ultimate have been examined in this chapter. Expressive and evocative elements were separated into two distinct strands, namely those associated with movement qualities and those where human life values are expressed. The first of these was exemplified with the throwing of discs where skilled performance appears to take on specific qualities beyond those of clinical performance. Ultimate, players indicate that there appears to be something especially aesthetically pleasing in executing a well thrown disc and seeing it fly.

The second strand, whereby human life values are expressed, is best exemplified by Ultimate players being courageous, usually by 'laying out' or by being patient, termed in Ultimate as 'chilly.' In order to truly evaluate the aesthetics of these situations requires both knowledge and perception. Intellectual beauty within sport occurs most readily when play acts as a solution to a problem. In particular, within Ultimate this is manifest in efficient performance and during moments of perceived unity, sometimes referred to as 'flow'. Further analysis of the fundamentals of 'flow' show that players have a kinaesthetic awareness of when they have made a good throw, that there is a transformation of time depending on how well they are performing and that there are tangible autotelic experiences which are gained from an intrinsic joy that is felt from simply playing.

What is also apparent however is that despite the recent attempts to formalise Ultimate there remain opportunities to experience a more playful element, ones which are actively sought by many who experience the sport. As in many other sports, Ultimate players' own personal highlights often relate to close, hard fought contests in which they played a key part in winning the contest. Within Ultimate, there is a uniquely meritocratic system which seeks to keep match ups close and this actively fosters these competitive and aesthetic experiences. The use of highly descriptive language exemplifies how the explanation of what occurs can also seek to make events more dramatic. Throws such as a 'hammer' and a 'knife' as well as plays referred to as 'Double Happiness' and the 'World's Greatest' serve as examples of this.

Aesthetic experiences are reinforced through narratives in specific social sites such as tournament locations and car journeys. Such social sites are important to build anticipation for the experiences that may soon occur again which gives an insight in to the importance of gaining an aesthetic experience which might be repeatable. Additionally it is posited that participants in Ultimate appear so readily to make reference to and to celebrate more aesthetic elements as the activity raises what (Kupfer, 1995:400) refers to as 'aesthetic attention.' Consistent with counter cultural values such an appreciation of beauty and nature and encouragement of self expression (Heale, 2001; Anderson, 1995), perhaps what Ultimate allows people to do is somehow reconnect with such aspects during competitive sporting activity.

The finding of such repeated references to the aesthetic and the celebration of more aesthetic elements has emerged as something of a surprise during the research. Rojek

(1985) explains that sport is important in how we experience our emotional selves and how we come to define pleasure in that activity and, upon deeper reflection, perhaps this is key here. Later informal conversations with participants about this emergent theme brought equal surprise to my own, but then a smile of recognition as if their conscious thought processes had just reminded them of 'who they are and the values they hold' (Snyder, 1991: 228). This suggests that this aspect of Ultimate has become so deep acting and internalised (Hochschild, 1983) that it is an assumed - though perhaps not previously so obvious - part of the subculture's collective identity.

Chapter 9

The Fracturing of UK Ultimate:

Sites of resistance and stigma - towards a two tier system

1. Introduction

As discussed earlier, various governing bodies of Ultimate within the UK over the past decade have actively sought formal recognition for the sport from external parent sporting bodies. The most recent of these, the UKUA, formed in 2002, has had some significant success in this endeavour, demonstrated by its joining of the CCPR, and gaining BUSA recognition in April 2006 and UK Sport recognition in November 2008. This goal-focused approach has undoubtedly brought a more 'professional' edge to the sport, previously unseen (and often resisted) in UK Ultimate. It has been illustrated practically, through the consolidating of the 'Open' Tour as the premier national Ultimate competition and, strategically, through the establishment of identifiable promotional objectives. These include what we might call commercial and communications objectives.

Commercial objectives:

- Secure funding for GB team and players
- Develop working relationships with national sports organisations
- Empower individuals to fund-raise independently

<u>Communications objectives</u>:

- Raise the profile of Ultimate in the UK as a sport through national, trade and lifestyle media coverage
- Gain local PR around players, teams and tournaments
- Become proactively involved with national sports organisations
- Help individuals and teams connect with regional PR and potential sponsors
- Advise Tour Directors on how to get PR coverage and free promos from sponsors and others

The key themes apparent here indicate a major new focus towards promoting and supporting elite Ultimate performers, with no obvious similar attention given towards grassroots development. According to the UKUA, 'there is not currently the resource or structure in place to cope with encouraging and developing new players' (UKU, 2008). This focus towards promoting and supporting elite performers and, indeed, an elite sporting product, has manifested itself in a number of ways over recent years. Most notable here in:

- The encouraging of elite super teams in the Open Tour by lifting the restriction on players being required to play for local teams;

- The creation of the Women's Tour and consolidation of the Mixed Tour;

- And the overall focus given to prioritising outdoor Ultimate over indoor competition.

In addition to these developments, the UKUA has looked to 'improve' the product by the introduction of more stringent kit rules, more compliance with drug testing regulations and the introduction of coaching programmes. Each of these changes, however, can be seen to have stimulated sites of resistance, the specific details of which

are briefly discussed in turn in the first part of this chapter. What resonates throughout each of these sites of resistance is that Ultimate is clearly a sport that is divided as it struggles to accommodate a new modernisation agenda dispensed from above by the governing body and which is at odds with aspects of the 'alternative' counter cultural values which the sport has popularly come to embody. This tendency towards the 'fracturing' of UK Ultimate is explored in the second part of this chapter in which it is also suggested that what underlines both a quest for legitimacy and this modernising agenda is the rejection by the elite players and the key decision makers of Ultimate of the 'stigma' still carried by committed participants of what remains a minor 'alternative' sport in the UK.

2. Sites of resistance within a modernisation agenda

(i) The creation of the 'Uber' Teams and the lifting of geographical restrictions

In 2004 the UKUA abolished the rule that Tour players had to play for a team in their own geographical area. This move had the, presumably, desired effect of consolidating an elite group of UK Ultimate teams, as many of the best players across the country became concentrated in a small number of teams that might compete at the top of the sport and then move further on to European and World representation. Members of teams which lost expert local players as a result of this new emphasis on developing a small number of national elite Ultimate clubs were understandably annoyed, as they told their departing members or - 'tarts' as they were described for the ease with which they were seduced away from their local clubs:

> *'Your somewhat mercenary attitude is very frustrating for those clubs who*
> *want to develop. If we are to grow we need more players like you to do the*

right thing and help out locally. You can do both - play with your mates AND help out a local team.' (Message Archive)

'I certainly don't want to disadvantage UK performance by insisting on 'no tart' teams only. On the other hand if the tarts were more committed to improving their original teams then we would have more teams at international standard!' (Message Archive)

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, those players involved in leaving their local bases and forming elite teams saw things quite differently. Typically, they explained their apparent defection with reference to the more traditional Ultimate values of non-commercialism and equity:

'Remember that this is a self-funded sport and, as such, we should be free to play for who we want.... At the end of the day I am paying to play and for this I want to play the best level of Ultimate I can.' (Message Archive)

'It happens the world over and to prevent UK teams alone doing it would only hold development back in the long term as well as put us at a competitive disadvantage versus the rest of the world in the individual competitions. At the moment all it would mean is that someone way down the roster, who is probably far less committed to the sport and has far less potential, would get an opportunity to play at a level which is completely beyond them.' (Message Archive)

Because of the aspirations these elite teams have to compete at European and even World club competition levels, it is now these top clubs which have imposed their own rules and new measures of commitment:

'We all moved to Clapham pretty much just for the Frisbee...We don't try and hang on to players who move out of our area – if they can't make practice, we shove 'em out the door pretty sharp.' (Message Archive)

'Before the worlds [World championships], I had to travel from Birmingham to Southampton for training at least two nights a week, sometimes three.

[How long did you have to do that for?]

Three months.' (ML – Interview 31/05/07)

Allegiances to specific teams and to other players has always been something of a loose or contingent association in Ultimate, as players typically move clubs when graduating from university and when taking up new employment. In addition, over time teams fold while others are created and this level of 'churn' is likely to vary from season to season. However, there has usually existed a common link between team mates, which can typically be traced back to earlier entanglements and to the social networks and friendship groups involved in the creation of a team and its original group of members (Stevenson, 1999). What is happening more frequently now, however, is the dominance of achievement values over those of ascription: the movement of players to teams who perhaps have more ambitious goals and who wish to compete at a higher level of competition. The UKUA has sought to check this development to some small degree by insisting that in the larger UKUA sanctioned events, such as the Tour, that players register for a team at the start of the season and are subsequently tied to that commitment until the end of the season. However, there is no further obligation to remain with a team once the season has passed.

It remains unclear how sustainable this approach will be in the long term for UK Ultimate, especially as this more transient group of elite players is inconsistent in its choices. Some players will only move in the run up to major competitions and then return to their club of origin, while some others may choose to stay on, despite the imposition of considerable travelling as illustrated in the earlier interview. The effect on some clubs of this sort of player transfer has been hugely detrimental, with three or

more of the best quality players leaving. This has caused a tail off in interest in some locales and in some extreme cases the extinction of the club. Whilst one should perhaps expect a degree of 'natural selection' here, the recent UKUA policy of lifting geographical restrictions on player mobility now means that there are real 'dead zones' of participation in some areas where previously Ultimate had thrived. Ultimately it may even threaten weekend tournaments at the mid or lower levels. This seems somewhat counter to the sort of largely un-hierarchical, communal, shared, and inclusive experience which previously Ultimate had seemed to represent (Heale, 2001; Anderson, 1995).

(ii) The development of the Womens' Tour and the Mixed and Open 'split'

As mentioned earlier, pivotal changes were made during the 2004 and 2005 seasons to move Ultimate away from a truly mixed sport at elite level. These changes were apparent in both the annual tour calendar and in how events would now be structured in order to prepare the strongest possible teams for international competition – in this instance the 2005 World Championships. The available categories of play at such events are typically: open, mixed and women's, with events also sometimes included for juniors (under 17s) and 'masters' (the over 30s). Prior to these seasons, the Tour hosted both 'open' and 'mixed' events that alternated throughout the spring and summer months.

The first key change came in 2004 when the UKUA launched the women's tour, a separate competition for women-only teams. This took place at the same venue, and within the same weekend, as the open tour and it thus meant that talented female players could not play for both an 'open' team and a 'women's' team at elite level. In

2005 the tour calendar was then split, so that mixed and open events no longer alternated. Mixed Ultimate was played by all in the spring and early summer and then open and women's Ultimate was played in the mid - to - late summer. These structures continue to remain in place today. As discussed earlier, the move to consolidate a focus on 'mixed' and 'open' play was broadly welcomed, but understandably perhaps, the 'separatist' approach reflected in the development of women's Ultimate had much more mixed reviews. For those teams - male and female - set on progression and a more elite focus it seems not a difficult decision to take:

> *'At competition level in any sport this is necessary and it is the way that the game has progressed in more advanced ultimate countries. Of course co-ed still exists, but in properly run co-ed tournaments.'* (Message Archive)

> *'The top 'open' teams always have international goals as well as domestic, and we often use the domestic season as a foothold for a summer international. If women's teams aren't supported more fully at the domestic level and encouraged to play for a women's team against other women's teams, how else can we achieve these goals?'* (Message Archive)

Objections to the new separation of players and teams by sex – after all, by mixing the sexes Ultimate had contravened pretty much all accepted conventions of modern team sport - fell into two camps: those who took something of a liberal feminist stance (Novak, 1994) and saw the move as constraining to womens' opportunities; and those who objected to the apparent abandoning of core cultural mixed-sport principles (Heale, 2001; Anderson, 1995).

(iii) Outdoor v Indoor: an unfair fight

One apparent consequence of giving increasing prominence to the Tour events (both Open and mixed) is that outdoor Ultimate has been given an increased prominence, to the obvious detriment of indoor Ultimate. So obvious has this development now

become, that most players who compete on the A Tour outdoors do not even play indoors during the autumn/winter (traditionally the indoor season) and the teams they represent do not even enter the national indoor competition. In the last three seasons, in fact, BAF from Evesham is the only team who play in the A Tour who have also competed indoors. As a consequence, what is increasingly observable from indoor events attended by the author over recent years is that the standard of play is becoming depressingly poor, with perhaps only two or three strong teams in a field of sixteen. There is a real sense within the culture that indoor Ultimate has been devalued and is likely to become a threadbare and residual part of the sport.

This tendency towards playing outdoor, rather than indoor, Ultimate has began to permeate throughout the Ultimate community, and since 2005 a Winter League structure has existed in London, the Midlands and the North for teams seeking the option to continue playing outdoors from October through to March. Due to this large increase in outdoor fixtures there are now a number of indoor competitions that clash with Winter League dates. When this kind of clash occurs, many teams elect to play the more prestigious outdoor Winter League event. Perhaps worryingly for the future of indoor Ultimate, the universities, where many people traditionally learnt to play the game indoors, are also electing to enter Winter League fixtures. In the Midlands region alone, the Universities of Warwick, Leicester, Loughborough, Birmingham and Wolverhampton now all compete outdoors during the winter season.

The creation of insider hierarchies is well documented in other sporting subcultures (see Donnelly and Young, 1988; Wheaton, 2004) but thus far these have been rather less apparent within Ultimate than in other sports. However the perceived and asserted

superiority of *outdoor* players is increasingly reflective of this recent development. From conversations with a number of top players who no longer play indoor Ultimate, it is not difficult to identify an air of near contempt regarding indoors play (or 'schmindoors' as some now like to call it). Often in play here is an identifiably masculinist emphasis on the greater stamina and other physical challenges supposedly posed by playing outdoors:

> *'I think indoor is as a game for wimps: small pitch, short games; no weather problems.'* (SA - Interview 03/02/07)

> *'It's a no brainer. Outdoor players tend to get more respect 'cos it's harder!'* (HL - Interview 22/05/06)

Some players also openly acknowledge that it was their ambitions to be involved solely at the highest levels of outdoor Ultimate which encourages them to think this way.

> *'When you play with better clubs and better players, the attitude of these players, as "we are the best" rubs off on you and all those around.'* (MB - Interview 30/05/07)

> *'I used to love indoors [Ultimate] but since I moved to a top club, I see a lot of others saying indoors is not 'real' Ultimate compared to outdoors...This will be my first year of not playing indoors.'* (ML – Interview 31/05/07)

While such a shift of focus towards outdoor Ultimate may not seem of huge importance to the outsider, this stance seems potentially very damaging for the Ultimate community as a whole. In effect it 'seasonalises' the sport – perhaps in line with its new ambitions to be accepted as a mainstream sport - it devalues the efforts of traditional winter players and demeans those who choose to become proficient largely or solely in the indoor version of Ultimate. Finally it also implicitly weights Ultimate towards favouring male, rather than female, or mixed, play.

(iv) The introduction of kit restrictions

Another indication that the UKUA are taking what we might describe as a more 'rationalised' or a more 'professional' approach to the development of Ultimate is the recent ruling that all UKUA representative events (all tour events, national and international competitions) require teams to wear playing kit that matches and is numbered. In a statement issued by the UKUA in 2004 it was asserted that: 'There is a continued effort to increase the presentation of the sport and teams. To this end, regulations are being phased in over a period of time to achieve higher levels of presentation of teams and the individual players.' The UKUA indicated that it would firstly warn teams that deviated from this new requirement and then it reserved the right to impose sanctions, though (possibly wisely) it did not specify what these might be.

Change here was relatively slow to come, perhaps revealing internal opposition to this important symbolic and material transformation in the playing culture, image management and media presentation of the sport (Cunningham and Lab, 1991). It was not until some two years later, when public complaints were received from senior players regarding the standard of kit especially among the top teams, that this issue started to become the source of some public debate and critique:

> *'Many people, myself included, had family and friends spectating at Tour 3. It's embarrassing to our sport that we cannot present ourselves in a professional way. Spectators and staff at the venues notice these things; we post photos of events online for the world to see. Our image is important, let's do better...'* (Message Archive)

> *'Truth is, if a team sport doesn't "look professional", there'll only ever be limited media interest. Media exposure is the most powerful way of bringing new people into the sport. Bags on the sideline, spectators and subs actually standing on the pitch in the final... oh yes, and non-matching kit.... in the*

finals of what other national-level team sport would you find that kind of thing going on.' (Message Archive)

The UKUA hierarchy response to these sorts of criticisms was interesting in the fact it was clearly aware of the issue (as anyone involved in Ultimate would be) but was not inclined to heavily police a rule that it itself had imposed. For example:

'We did notice that kit standards at the top of the A Tour were pretty rubbish and this was especially disappointing as these are the teams and individuals which the rest of the Ultimate community look to for inspiration. We have given teams warnings in the past and all teams (especially those in semis and finals) are aware of the rules. You, as members, need to tell us if we should try and improve our image and professionalism in these areas. Should we be putting more effort in (and asking all teams and players to put more effort in)?' (Message Archive)

What is interesting here is that the key figures in UKUA seemed hesitant about exploring the limits of its powers in this area; UKUA appeared to want to be seen to be remaining true to some of the sport's democratic values (Heale, 2001; Anderson, 1995) by seeking more guidance from its *membership,* who might be expected to offer a lead (or support) on the issue. This position was possibly due to the swift and numerous responses that were received from players involved in elite matches who seemed unimpressed by the new regulations and the critiques concerning the wearing of imperfect kit. Here the focus of such responses seemed to be on seeing these essentially commercialising objectives as detracting from some of the core historic values and participatory ideologies of the sport. This sort of contestation seems similar to findings in other 'alternative' sporting activities such as skateboarding (Beal and Wilson, 2004):

'I think one player in our semi against Clapham did not have a matching shirt (from memory he was a guest) but he wore a shirt which matched in colour and I think that is fair enough - I certainly wouldn't of expected him to fork out for a top for the sake of one weekend.' (Message Archive)

'Remember, we are not professionals but players who fund ourselves to play this sport.... as long as there are no major differences then let it lie... There are bigger issues to deal with than whether a player had the same style shirt/shorts as another player.' (Message Archive)

'It seems to me that Ultimate players enjoy being part of something that is a bit different - we are not the type of people who buy Man United kit and the latest Nike trainers. We are individuals. Long live non-matching kit...!" (Message Archive)

The UKUA did, however, strengthen its position by the start of the 2006 outdoor season and it reiterated its kit rule with a new list of sanctions which the governing body sought to implement. Warnings were issued at Tour 2 to a handful of teams and this was followed up at Tour 3 with more severe sanctions being implemented for the first time, most notably with the 'Schnell' team being docked 10% of their competition score for inappropriate kit. Though this kind of penalty will clearly deter some - other teams warned on this front conformed to the rules to avoid sanctions - others will continue to resist. One interesting example is the fate of the MMJ team, which publicly refused promotion to the A tour, *'as they like their kit the way it is! (un-numbered) and we're happy to continue doing this'* (Message Archive). Such 'commercial v authentic' conflicts are typical across a host of alternative sports, most notably in snowboarding (Humphreys, 1997) and such tensions are perhaps indicative of a general direction of travel that Ultimate now finds itself moving.

(v) Acceptance of International drug testing procedures

Another move made by the UKUA in 2004 to align itself to more established mainstream sports was to sign up to the World Anti Doping Agency (WADA) code. In a statement issued in May of that year it was declared that:

'Anybody who competes in a UKUA event after July 30th, 2004 can be tested. That means all Tours and all Nationals, including student events. Internationally, competitive athletes can additionally be tested without warning at any time of the year, unless they declare themselves 'retired' and stop going to UKUA tournaments.' (UKUA statement, May 2004)

As we have seen, player responses to this latest move quickly became polarised. For those who saw this policy and these new sanctions as a professional and necessary development, integrating more effectively with other elite level sports at both national and international levels were the key issues. These sentiments below were typical of this position, with the stress placed on excellence, the demands of global sporting competition and the necessity of falling into line with the parameters of the mainstream in the face of a sceptical public:

'I can see that introducing drug testing at the world championships is an obvious step to gain more respect and make Ultimate on a par with other sports..... In the future if a large sponsor was interested and stated it as a prerequisite I can't see how anyone could object.' (Message Archive)

'If we want our sport to be taken seriously (which I'm sure we all do) then regulations such as this are necessary...The only people who have to worry about being tested for drugs are those who are guilty of it.' (Message Archive)

'The real issue here is "Do you want (e.g.) Germany to beat GB because they've been taking anabolic steroids?" No you don't, and if that means that a minority of recreational drug users have their noses put out of joint, then so be it.' (Message Archive)

Those in support of outlawing even recreational drug use for Ultimate players clearly see this as a positive in terms of the future development of the sport and in gaining broader recognition and potential sponsorship. The last point appears particularly significant as it openly promotes an active disregard for the sort of lifestyle choices which are still prized and celebrated by many as part of the distinctive cultural milieu

and historic traditions of alternative sports such as Ultimate. Unsurprisingly, therefore, there were many keen to publicly object to the new legislation:

> *'I don't see any gain by this step in the short or medium term - who do they think they are trying to catch? Maybe you will be old and grey by the time UKU events are drug tested, maybe I will too. But I don't want my sport, to go down this route.'* (Message Archive)

> *'You won't be able to take cough syrups anymore - almost all of them have a banned substance. You won't be able to sit in a room with someone smoking a spliff for fear of second-hand smoke making it into your bloodstream...''* (Message Archive)

> *'Scare-mongering aside, there will always be a few people who try to bend the rules or abuse the 'spirit of the game'. But why inconvenience everyone and ruin the lifestyle associated with our sport just to catch them out?'* (Message Archive)

The tone of the anti - testing lobby, summed up in the comments above, highlights strongly-held objections to the modernising direction the sport is now inexorably moving in: how much 'hassle' and inconvenience will it cause in a sport where no player's livelihood is at stake and where it is interpreted by many as an affront to the sport's associated lifestyle choices. Indeed this very issue serves as a perfect illustration of the evolutionary crossroads at which UK Ultimate now finds itself. On the one hand, the UKUA executive is keen to follow the commercial lead of more well established activities and thus further the future development of the sport, gaining broader recognition and potential sponsorship for the elite end (see Coakley, 2003). But on the other hand it has to contend with a lifestyle culture, and a set of embedded values and meanings which have developed out of counter cultural traditions (Heale, 2001; Anderson, 1995).

(vi) The launching of an Ultimate coaching program

The UKUA Coaching Awards Program was launched in August 2005 when the first Level 1 course became available. The Course was aimed at Ultimate players who have some experience of the game, and who wished to develop their coaching knowledge in order to pass on their experiences to others. The UKUA has plans for a network of coaches to be developed with a structure of four awards comprising of the Leaders Award, Assistant Coach Award (Level 1), Coach Award (Level 2), and Advanced Awards. There is, at present, no timescale as to when such awards beyond the Level 1 are to be developed.

As well as being able to demonstrate, explain and advise on skills, strategies, rules and safety of Ultimate, the UKUA coaching pack is no simple moderniser's technocratic template. It indicates, for example, that coaches have a responsibility for safeguarding the spirit and ethos of Ultimate, stressing that the 'Spirit of the Game' is absolutely fundamental to the sport and should be frequently reinforced. Upholding and reinforcing the cultural values of the sport is argued to be inherent within the information provided and indeed the UKUA predicts that, 'as the sport expands and the aspirations of teams and individuals continue to grow, coaches will play a vital part in keeping the identity and freshness of our sport alive' (UKU, 2008).

Interestingly, the UKUA also seems to acknowledge that aspects of the prevailing participatory culture of Ultimate is something that needs to be challenged, indicating that once the technical skills of the sport have been mastered, 'there is the thornier problem of attitude and tradition to overcome'. This seems like an inherent contradiction: the spirit of Ultimate demands respect and should be defended, but its traditions must also be 'overcome.' Though not explicit in its direction, this strongly

suggests that there is an awareness in the national governing body that there is a significant risk that many Ultimate players will resent being 'instructed' in such matters and that this concern is not without foundation.

Within Ultimate in the UK there is little tradition of 'coaching' in any structured sense and it is largely manifested informally in club situations where a senior player will usually take responsibility for organising a practice session. Within top teams, this approach is pretty well established and accepted, and it is evident in both practice sessions and pre game warm ups during competition and reflective of more dominant sporting forms (Coakley, 2003). However, in most other situations, such as at smaller clubs and at universities, the 'coaching' arrangements are far more ad hoc and though someone usually takes control it may not always be clear to an observer who exactly is in charge. In addition, in these instances mass participation and game play are maximised, with little or no emphasis placed upon formal coaching. This runs counter to the alienating effects of repetitive, technical work of the sort often involved in coaching in other sports (Smith, 2007). A response that sums up the attractions of the current situation and the mood of many to the prospects of being coached more formally is well captured in an interview extract below:

> *'The thing that appeals to me about Ultimate is the lack of people who can tell you what to do. Obviously there are a whole load of other good things, but this is what sets it apart, for me, from other team sports. I have at various times played football, basketball and hockey at an enthusiastic, if not highly skilled, level. But I sort of lost interest in team sports.'*
>
> *[Why was that?]*
>
> *'Without exception, I think, as you get better, you have less freedom. You could be the best surfer or mountain biker in the world and never get within spitting distance of an official or a coach - and I can spit a mighty long way - but you don't get all those nice warm feelings of playing in a team with your mates. So you see, at the moment Ultimate is unique in that is has all*

the benefits of a team sport but with very few of the shitty things. This is very important to me and I'm a bit worried that it's not going to last.' (FK – Interview 02/02/07)

Key to the opposition to coaching in Ultimate seems to be from those who contend that it interrupts the 'freedom' and desirable 'flow', discussed earlier (Csikszentmihalyi (1990; 1997). What coaching represents in these terms to such individuals invokes images of unnecessary organisation and sterility – the repetition of segments of actions - set against the rewards of flowing, participation experiences. Here the repetition of the fragmented act corrodes the enjoyment, spontaneity and creativity of the sport and threatens to mirror the alienating act of 'work'. In short, it is counter to the very reasons why they play, sentiments found in mainstream but also other alternative sporting subcultures, such as skateboarding or surfing (Beal, 1995; Butts, 2001).

3. The Stigmatisation of Ultimate Frisbee

What resonates throughout each of the sites of resistance discussed above concerning recent developments in the sport is that Ultimate is clearly deeply divided as it contends with a modernisation agenda promoted by the national governing body and supported by some elite players which is seriously at odds with many of the 'alternative' counter cultural values which the sport has come to embody. It is suggested that what underlies this quest for greater legitimacy and a more modernist agenda for change is the rejection by some of the elite players and decision makers, of the 'stigma' still carried by committed participants of what is a minor sport. A 'stigma' can be defined as 'some kind of mark, attribute or characteristic of an individual or a group that is regarded by others as flawed, deviant, or inferior' (Cusack et al, 2003: 295). For some individuals, carrying a stigma can engulf others' impressions of them, to the extent that it can

become difficult for others to see beyond it. Though clearly a sport within accepted classifications of the subject (see Suits 2001, and Guttmann, 2007) such minor sports exhibiting the traits and values of Ultimate continue to suffer from public perceptions that it is play, not sport, and therefore it is socially and culturally less important and 'inferior' to real sport. In addition to this, the legitimacy of Ultimate is still further hindered by the very name adopted by the sport and the object played with. Though few would have predicted that Joel Silver's reference to the 'Ultimate sports experience' (Zagoria, 2003) would have been so readily accepted globally, the rather extreme connotations of the word 'Ultimate' cannot be ignored in this context. Connecting this sort of terminology with the act of throwing a Frisbee - a beach toy - the question remains pertinent to many non-players: '*What is* so ultimate about it?'

> '*For about two or three weeks all H____ got was grief about it and you get all the clichés. Once someone taped some razor blades to his Frisbee and said 'This is Ultimate Frisbee' or people called it extreme – stupid daft stuff like that.*' (HL – interview 22/05/06)

> '*The repeated confusion by the public with the word 'extreme' appears to be a common story amongst those who play Ultimate and in my own experience is often accompanied by a smile.*' (Field notes 20/06/06)

The pretentiousness and Americanised argot that the word 'Ultimate' conveys in this respect is seemingly made worse by the frivolity of playing any serious sport with a plastic Frisbee. Unsurprisingly perhaps, many people see a competitive sport that involves a Frisbee as facile and trivial: it illustrates a choice that Bourdieu (1984) might classify as 'bad taste', as participants pass an object to each other that carries little cultural capital, at least in terms of the history of British sport. A plastic disc is seen by many – perhaps the majority in the UK - as something that requires relatively little skill in taming or manipulating, as is required in most ball sports. It is something to 'play

with' during leisure time such as holidays or on a public park; something to use in informal non-competitive settings such as on a beach or with their children, or a dog.

A feature of the above is also the apparent humour evident in exchanges between outsiders and insiders on this score. According to Powell (1988: 99) such a dynamic is typical of many subcultural pursuits and becomes an important aspect of social relations for insiders to manage appropriately. By 'getting' the joke and responding accordingly one demonstrates 'one's grip over and understanding of the way things are' and maintains the social exchange between the two parties. This is also an example of what Goffman (1963) refers to as 'passing', where individuals seek to manage their 'known aboutness' to the outside world, behaviours which have also been found in popular culture, such as with fans of the American TV show 'Star Trek' (known as Trekkies) (Cusack et al, 2003). This perceived lack of seriousness concerning Ultimate however clearly does not deter all, as the following comments illustrate:

> *'A game called Ultimate Frisbee - and I thought this sounds like a laugh'* (PT – interview 12/04/06)
>
> *'If you like to begin with it was a bit of a joke like 'Oh what's H___ playing with a Frisbee for' and then he explained what it was all about....I have to be honest, it seemed like a sport that had just been made up in a car park.'* (HL – interview 22/05/06)
>
> *'If you really want to help promote Ultimate as a 'serious' sport, a good start would be to simply erase the word 'Frisbee' from our vocabulary and just say 'Disc')* (Message archive).

What seems to be reflected here is the suspicion that people often try Ultimate 'out of curiosity' though it should be said, in many instances, as indicated, - not in all seriousness. Phrases identified above such as: 'This is just one of D___'s stupid games' and 'It was a bit of a joke' highlight the lack of legitimacy that Ultimate participants

and the sport itself continues to experience in the eyes of the general public. A stigmatised individual who plays Ultimate is a person who appears to be, 'possessing an attribute that makes him different from others…he is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one' (Goffman, 1963:3). Interestingly, this sense of 'difference' appears to be quickly recognised by those when they first participate. For some it may act as an immediate deterrent and a retreat back into mainstream sport, but to others it may even serve as the main attraction:

> *'When I meet new people and tell them what I now do with my weekends they do often think I'm slightly insane.'* (Message archive)

> *'I soon realised that Ultimate's got a different attitude and a different way of doing things.'* (Message archive)

> *'As an Ultimate player I enjoy knowing that we're different from other sports people.'* (Message archive)

To continue to participate and become further entangled in an activity which appears to carry a stigma indicates that the participants are happy to embrace their role as 'social deviants' (Goffman, 1963: 143) and to disaffiliate themselves from more traditional sporting activities in their pursuit of 'serious leisure'. According to (Stebbins, 1992:7):

> 'Participants in serious leisure tend to identify strongly with their chosen pursuits. They are inclined to speak proudly, excitedly, and frequently about them to other people, and to present themselves in terms of these pursuits when conversing with new acquaintances.'

Potential participants often get introduced to Ultimate by committed players with whom they have contact, who are convincing enough to persuade them to try it, whether it is because of the (counter) cultural, social or the playing aspects of the game. Those in the immediate friendship network around Ultimate players who are familiar with the strong associations their respected friend or relative has formed with the sport,

may be referred to as 'sympathetic others' or the 'wise' (Goffman, 1963). They may also have to face the stigma attached to participation:

Responses witnessed from both the 'wise' and from players themselves to 'outsiders' tend to be strong and assertive, rather than passive. According to Goffman (1963: 145) this is because 'social deviants often feel that they are not merely equal to, but better than 'normals', and that the life they lead is somehow superior to that lived by the persons they would otherwise be. As such, Ultimate players embody their preferred sporting role when they 'flaunt their refusal to take their place' (Goffman, 1963: 145).

4. A new direction - but different paths

The modernisation agenda of the UKUA illustrated earlier in this chapter is espoused by both board members and by many of the elite players of UK Ultimate. Their refusal to be 'held back' by what they identify as 'traditional' (and therefore out-dated) values embodied by grassroots participants up and down the country is palpable as in these comments from an elite player:

> *[What impact do you think this [the modernisation agenda] will have on the grass roots of the sport?]*
>
> *'To be honest I don't care. There are those for whom Ultimate is, and always will be, strictly recreational which is great, and there should be plenty of opportunities for these players to enjoy the sport without being caught up in the politics and bureaucracies of the game. But there are also those among us that want to play at the highest level possible, despite never being able to play 'professionally'. Just because Ultimate isn't technically a professional sport, doesn't mean we should be professional and be able to meet those sorts of levels and standards.'* (BJ (Elite level player) – Interview 31/05/07)

Members of the UKUA seem no less determined or focused:

[And why the need now for an elite focus on and off the pitch?]

'We dedicate so much time, thought, money and pain to playing Ultimate that it would be nice to be taken seriously for what we do.'

[So can Ultimate carry on in the way that it has in the past?]

'Absolutely not! Something is going to be sacrificed to promote the game further for public awareness. This may be curbing drug references and recreational use to promote a squeaky clean image. We may have to change the game by adding referees or creating local leagues instead of tournaments. The ethos and social aspect of the game may also change as sponsorship forces players to change their behaviour on and off pitch. The possible outcomes from pushing the promotion of the sport will bring big beneficial changes to the sport and individuals.' (DD (UKUA board member) – Interview 31/05/07)

The threat of long term isolation for ambitious players at the highest levels of Ultimate is also clear:

[So where do you think we are at at the moment?]

'My worry, if we do nothing, is that Ultimate could become a little isolated group, never growing to above a few thousand players and never really being considered a proper sport. Some people may be happy with this, but why? The only strong argument I have heard so far is that people don't want Ultimate to become like other mainstream sports. I believe that Ultimate could grow to that sort of level but still stay unique. But it seems that there is a great divide in British Ultimate over trying to develop the sport to a greater level'.

[So does it matter to you people think it's a proper sport?]

'I'm far from happy in the knowledge that every one new [to Ultimate] who I speak to thinks the only reason I was able to represent my country is because I am the only one who plays this silly little sport, and that I just wasn't good enough to compete at something more recognised'. (ML (Elite player) – Interview 31/05/07)

The rejection of the public stigma around Ultimate which is evident in this and earlier comments indicates that something of a 'tipping point' appears to have been reached by the sport's decision makers and elite players in terms of the direction in which the sport

is now heading. The 'divide' that one of the respondents mentioned above is increasingly evident to many who play the game and it is played out in many situations, including the various sites discussed above. The resistance to plans and policies aimed at gaining more recognition and modernising Ultimate is expressed well in some of the 'cultish' responses from grassroots players below:

'In my opinion, Ultimate mustn't became a big popular game because that way it would completely lose its fun. I mean, we have come to this sport partly because of the social and the underground part. I personally don't want to be involved in a really strict Ultimate where every single, funky behaviour is banned'. (FK – Interview 02/02/07)

'As an Ultimate player I enjoy knowing that we're different from other sports people. Just because we don't get TV coverage or have some local business paying for our T-shirts doesn't cause me sleepless nights. I play Ultimate to enjoy myself, to meet up with my friends and to compete in a friendly and spirited atmosphere and I say let's keep it that way'. (LC – Interview 12/04/06)

'So, basically we sacrifice large portions of what makes the sport worthwhile in order to make the public aware of something which is no longer the thing we cared so much about, and we're so desperate to let them know about. I'll opt to sacrifice the public awareness, thanks'. (TM – Interview 02/11/06)

Here, then, are the essential points of conflict as Ultimate faces something of a crossroads: Ultimate as a recognised, respectable competitive mainstream sport which seeks global acceptance, sheds its stigma and is taken seriously by all; or Ultimate as a 'funky' sport which remains 'true' to its counter-cultural values which emphasises lack of uniformity, fun, and an anti-commercial ethos, but within a competitive frame. It will not be an easy ride.

5. Summary

The creation of the UKUA has arguably brought a more rationalised, 'professional' edge to the sport, one previously lacking in the governance of UK Ultimate. This is illustrated in a practical sense through the consolidating of the 'Open' Tour as the premier national Ultimate competition and, strategically, through the establishment of clear, promotional objectives. The key themes apparent here seem to be a major focus towards promoting and supporting elite performers, with less obvious attention given towards grassroots development. This focus on promoting and supporting elite performers and an elite sporting 'product' has manifested itself in a number of small and more significant ways over recent years, most notably in:

- Encouraging the formation of elite super teams in the Open Tour by lifting the restriction on players required to play for local teams;

- The creation of the Womens' Tour and the consolidation of the Mixed Tour;

- And the overall focus given to prioritising outdoor Ultimate over its indoor neighbour.

In addition, the UKUA has looked to improve the 'product' by the introduction of kit rules, compliance with drug testing regulations, and the introduction of coaching programmes. Each of these changes however can also be seen to have stimulated sites of resistance to change and what resonates through each of these sites is that Ultimate is clearly a sport that is divided as it contends with an uncertain future. For many adherents the governing body is at odds with the 'alternative' counter cultural values which the sport has traditionally come to embody.

What appears most strongly to underline this quest for legitimacy and modernisation is the rejection by the elite players and decision makers of the 'stigma' carried by committed participants of Ultimate. In effect they seem to be trying to reject the sport's marginal status and its (negative) 'alternative' perception held by 'outsiders'. This has lead to an increasingly clear divide between the elite levels and the grassroots. The latter continue to seek an 'authentic' sporting and communal experience in Ultimate which somehow differentiates it from other modern sport.

Chapter 10

Some Conclusions

1. Introduction

This thesis represents, in many ways, both an academic and a personal journey of discovery and development. When in 2002, I discovered Ultimate Frisbee as a postgraduate Masters student (studying for an MA in Sport, Politics and Society) at the University of Warwick, my interest in the sport as well as in my academic studies began to grow, at first, in parallel, and by engaging in this study they became inextricably linked. As indicated in the introduction, the attraction of conducting a sociological study of the sport of Ultimate came from an unshaken, but at that time still intangible, belief that there was something 'different' going on in the Ultimate subculture compared with all the other sports I had taken part in. Embryonic thoughts of conducting a study to investigate further first emerged during the selection of my MA thesis (and after just five months of participation in the sport) but it was clear at that stage I had not the skills, nor the intellectual maturity, to take on such a project. This offering I hope indicates that I now do have at least some of what it takes.

What should be evident is that this thesis represents a modest contribution to knowledge both broadly within the sociology of sport and more particularly within a group of recent studies on what have been termed 'alternative' or 'lifestyle' sports (Wheaton, 2004), although uniquely in this instance Ultimate is a team sport rather than the sort of

individual sporting pursuit documented in other such studies. The UK focus to this work also brings a new dimension to the small amount of rather narrowly focused empirical research on Ultimate which was previously conducted exclusively in North America. I have tried to show how Ultimate has adapted to the UK context and the wider UK perceptions about the sport and its legitimacy.

Having no previous experience of ethnographic work I have been keen to try to learn by engaging in the process and I have gained a much deeper understanding of what is involved in this type of research methodology. In order to collect the data necessary for my research I needed to remain strongly rooted within sure methodological foundations, I kept within the research traditions established in this field by employing familiar qualitative techniques of participant observation and semi-structured interviews. However a very new technique of list mining was also employed as an important third method of data collection.

With increased internet usage and accessibility, cyberspace has become the main site of choice where people of like minds and common interests can hope to transcend geographical and social and cultural barriers and communicate with one another on a diverse range of subjects. As with many 'alternative' communities, The UK Ultimate community has embraced the use of online communication, in its particular case via the use of *DiscSpace*. As such, the use of list mining opened up a wealth of original data and provided insights where more traditional techniques would have failed. With further growth of new technologies the employment of more varied forms of data collection, such as list mining, are likely to become more prevalent in sociology and it is hoped that

its employment here and its subsequent dissemination will encourage further debate on such topics.

What has become evident during the course of this study is that the direction it would take could not be predicted or forced. This is the route towards dead ends and this served as an early lesson about being patient and how through further analysis and reading, it was important to wait for core themes to emerge rather than to try to force their appearance. In this respect, as well as engaging with the more traditional academic sources within sociology and the sociology of sport, the journey has led me to read issues of the *British Medical Journal*, fashion journals, books on American politics, to become a member of the American Patent Office and even to contact the Eastbourne Tourist Information Centre about their weather patterns!

What has also become clear is that some of the most effective sociological studies of sporting subcultures have examined the dynamics of participation decisions, the social construction of identity and the underlying social meanings of their activities (Horne et al., 1999). By broadly investigating such issues in this study it allowed me to ask a number of key questions and to lay some foundations, which, after closer scrutiny, served to highlight some emergent themes. These provided ideal 'jumping off' points for more detailed discussion later in the study. A summary of thesis will now provide an overview of this, highlighting some of the key findings and final points for reflection.

2. The significance of the findings

Given that most modern sports, especially team sports, can locate their origins somewhere in Victorian Britain (Mangan, 1981) an aspect that is of both interesting and of sociological significance is that the team sport of Ultimate does not have its roots in the UK but is indeed a relatively recent import from the USA. This is important sociologically because, in comparison to other team sports played in the UK, Ultimate has not been so directly subject to the historical and cultural influences of British society and to the impact of the specifically British experience of class and gender relations. Rather it is both structurally and culturally located within the broader context of the American counter culture of the late 1960s. Therefore, some of the values and behaviours from that time and place all permeated the sport. These included: an emphasis on democratic, theoretically non-sexist, non-hierarchical structures; perceived alternative and in a narrow sense 'superior' lifestyle choices; an emphasis on communal caring and sharing; an appreciation of beauty and nature; an encouragement of self expression and personal growth; having a relaxed and 'laid back' attitude; a favouring of amateur rather than professional values in sport; and rejecting regulation and the regimentation of new technology (Heale, 2001; Anderson, 1995). Although Ultimate arrived in the UK some ten years after its invention in the USA it is clear that at least some of the counter cultural values it brought into sport live on, some forty years later – and in Britain.

The imported and marginal position that Ultimate therefore finds itself in as a result of being peripheral to the historical and cultural evolution of other team sports in the UK, is demonstrated in how and where the sport is usually played today. Participation in

Ultimate occurs in both indoor and outdoor venues, but partly due to the social or economic priority given to more dominant British sporting forms, it largely exists in highly informal and often transient sports spaces. Given that most contests for team sports today are played in exactly specified and highly formalised environments (Wagner, 1981; Brohm, 1978) this characteristic has served to keep Ultimate 'alternative' and at odds with much modern British sport.

This struggle for space and time in which to play is a theme that I had more usually associated with alternative or lifestyle sports whose requirements are counter to the environment in which they take place, such as skateboarding in the 'soft city' of pedestrianised areas, or in the concrete spaces around public buildings (see Borden, 2001). This struggle over space continues to be an aspect that is often overlooked in sociological research or is merely taken for granted (Cosgrove, 1989). I, too, was almost guilty of the same indiscretion but it was only after repeatedly reading my early data that I realised how important a sociological configuration of space and the environment was to Ultimate and to my research. Subsequent illuminating reading including John Bale's _Landscapes of Modern Sport_ which led, in turn, to the discovery of Meinig's _Views of a Sports Landscape_ and these texts seemed to be more than suitable tools for aiding in the decoding of the data around the spatial dynamics and tensions of Ultimate.

Importantly, this kind of analysis also helped to highlight that in Ultimate a greater standardisation and rationalisation has become apparent in recent years, in terms of field marking, game timing, numbering of players, kit uniformity, etc, but only at the highest level. These moves towards greater spatial standardisation, instigated since the

formation of the UKUA in 2002 are arguably reflective of a wider shift of British Ultimate towards some of the core practices of modern sport, the significance of which has created resistance (one of six sites identified) as such moves are seen to be directly oppositional to some of the counter cultural values to which many participants in the sport continue strongly to subscribe.

Contemporary studies involving sporting subcultures have also indicated that value is placed on locating the real or *authentic* identity of participants (Wheaton and Beal, 2003) and so, at the same time, increase our understanding of precisely how and why people participate and how they embody these values became key issues. It is clear that, in UK Ultimate, Higher Education has a key role to play here and this fact clearly delineates aspects of the sport's UK social class base. On the basis of participant observation Ultimate is overwhelmingly the preserve of middle class, university educated whites, most of whom are males. Individuals continue their participation after graduation either by creating or joining telephone or geo teams. Continued participation and further entanglement in Ultimate often sees individuals disaffiliate themselves from more traditional British sporting activities and become further entangled and further committed to playing Ultimate. Indeed it was found that the amateur 'alternativeness' of the sport served as something of an attraction for many, and it remains central to the identity of the sport and its core participants.

'Alternativeness' was found to be objectified in Ultimate in a number of ways, most notably in aspects such as team names, disc merchandise and fashion. This sort of development is repeated across most subcultures, as appearances are a key member identifier (Thornton, 1997), allowing the expression of personal attitudes, values and

beliefs (Cunningham and Lab, 1991). Furthermore, as if objectification of alternativeness was not enough, it is also embodied in Ultimate by participants who tend to identify strongly with their chosen pursuit and are inclined to speak proudly, excitedly, and frequently about it. Though this may initially appear to be simply reflective of those who are engaged in 'serious leisure' (Stebbins, 1992), evidence that I have presented strongly suggests that, despite the stigma they undoubtedly suffer, many Ultimate participants believe that the sport is, in some ways, socially, morally and practically superior to other sporting choices that could be made in the UK. This is in keeping with drive to the social deviant behaviour, as explained by Goffman (1963), which sometimes occurs for those marked by stigma.

The choice to embrace such a marginal sport as Ultimate, and the apparent rejection of key mainstream values associated with modern sport, leads one to speculate that Ultimate represents something of 'anti-sport sport', a refuge where sporting participants can flee when they have had enough of the hyper-masculine and professionalised excesses of modern sport in capitalist societies. For some, even Ultimate will prove 'too commercial' or 'too mainstream' and further analysis of critical and emergent issues reinforces this fact. The first of these issues, as I suggest above, pertains to matters of gender and sport: behaviours connected with over-competitive or aggressive hyper masculinities seemed to be largely under-played in the Ultimate subculture. Traditional features of conventional British sporting masculinities, such as an emphasis on high level skill, aggressively dominating an opponent, and the taking of (sometimes reckless) risks seemed little evident in my study, perhaps suggesting that Ultimate continues to represent something of a challenge to traditional notions of sporting masculinities that have been historically located in competitive, field based, British team sports. That said,

my findings also suggest that there is more than a degree of ambivalence expressed here, most notably concerning the practice of 'laying out.' For some men – even Ultimate players - women's inherent frailty is actually an enduring discourse, a 'truism', in mixed-team sporting competition (Lenskyj, 1986).

Indeed, the future of Ultimate as a mixed, competitive team game is currently in some doubt. The recent choice to pursue a separatist sporting model at the elite level, arguably, has serious implications for the culture and for the core values of Ultimate, many of which are yet to be realised. Should this development accelerate throughout Ultimate's structures, then the sport clearly risks aping more dominant sporting forms, thus eroding a key aspect of its unique identity.

The second major area – there are others - where participants clearly reject core characteristics of modern sport is through the promotion of self refereeing. In an age in which cheating is widely discussed in modern sport Ultimate, contests in the UK continue to exhibit unusually strong forms of informal social control – of 'self policing.' Seriously deviant behaviour is heavily discouraged because *all* players are deemed to be responsible for administering and adhering to the rules. Rule violations and disputes in Ultimate are dealt with through a well established 'ritual' of resolution between any two given players. One defining aspect of the Ultimate subculture that makes it easier to deal with such rule violation, is the pervasive ethos within Ultimate, known as the Spirit of the Game (commonly referred to as just 'spirit'). Individual interpretations of the meaning of the 'Spirit' of Ultimate were also found in this study. But it was also relevant to acknowledge here that there had been recent developments in North America on officiating Ultimate, including the introduction of active observers, due to excessive

rule breaking. This has led to the raising of questions as to the future of self refereeing in the UK as an effective controlling mechanism in Ultimate and players within the playing community appear to be split on the matter.

As Ultimate continues to evolve there is perhaps something of an inevitability that if it moves closer to becoming a more mainstream sport, it will have to give up one of its key identifying features by submitting to external match officials. A key driver here may be the rather distant pursuit of Olympic Games recognition. Ironically, given what we might describe as 'the authority problem' of many modern sports, the IOC is unlikely to be keen to recruit a sport which actively eschews match officials as 'not required'. Television coverage, which emphasises conflict, drama and the spectacular in sport (Horne, 2006), is unlikely to respond to a sport apparently drained of some of these key features. The irony here, of course, is that self-refereed Ultimate much better responds to the 'Olympic' values of 'respect' for opponents and authority than do many other sports which are at the heart of the global Olympic movement.

Ultimate is a purposive sport but repeated references by my research subjects to the celebration of the more expressive and aesthetic elements of Ultimate emerged as something of a surprise during the research. So diverse, yet compelling, were some of the responses obtained here that finding a theoretical tool to address this issue became an obvious requirement. However, an analytical frame proposed by Carlisle (1974) provided a clear structure within which expressive and evocative elements, intellectual beauty and dramatic aspects could be examined.

The idea of continuity of play and the importance of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi1990; 1997) in Ultimate appears evident right from the point of when complete newcomers are encouraged to participate. What seems to steer many through here is the largely unacknowledged principle (though clear to an observer with an analytical focus) that players prioritise, almost above all else, this idea of continuity of play and 'flow'. Though the data indicates that there may be some anomalies here, especially in very average or low level teams, the fact that game and personal 'flow' seems paramount at the very highest levels of the game illustrates its wider importance. In practice this is perhaps seen most readily in the speed at which rule violations and disputes are dealt with, through a well established 'ritual' of immediate resolution between any two given players. Reports by Robbins (2004) of repeated rule violation in the USA were not echoed here. UK players almost never chose to reciprocate violations, for example. What appears more evident within UK Ultimate is the concept of 'co-operative competition' (Orlick, 1978: 110).

Players appreciate 'flow' by engaging in what might be termed 'well spirited' encounters where disputes are rare and, when they do occur, they are dealt with in an expeditious and polite manner. If rapid dispute resolution contributes to game 'flow' then players also indicate the individual experience of 'flow' in executing a well thrown disc. Such experiences can and do occur in other sports, of course. But the properties of a gently hovering flying disc do not require great thrower power, and they seem somehow to provide a particular satisfaction, an exemplar of aesthetic preference for smooth, flowing sporting activity (Best, 1978). Further analysis of the fundamentals of 'flow' show that Ultimate players have a kinaesthetic awareness of when they have made a good throw, that there is a transformation of time, depending on how well they

are performing, and that there are tangible autotelic experiences which are gained from the intrinsic joy that is one of the visceral sensations of playing. This is consistent with ideas discussed by Theberge (1995) and Duquin (2000) who both indicate that adherence to idealised elements of emotional expression can be found in new sporting forms as they seek to build both a community and a collective identity.

However, I have also discovered that the sense of community and collective identity that has been carefully built by participants of Ultimate in the UK over the last thirty years has, become outmoded for some leading members of the governing body and some elite level players who now seek the fracturing of UK Ultimate. What seemed initially to be quite separate developments gradually came together as related issues. It was clear that the formation of the UKUA in 2002 had brought a more 'professional' and bureaucratic edge of a type previously unseen in the governance of UK Ultimate. This new governance structure brought with it the promotion of a more elite product which has manifested itself in a number of ways over recent years, most notably in:

- Encouraging elite super teams in the Open Tour by lifting the restriction on players required to play for local teams
- The creation of the Womens' Tour
- The consolidation of the Mixed Tour.

The overall focus has been given to prioritising outdoor Ultimate over indoor. In addition, the UKUA has looked to improve the product by the introduction of kit rules, compliance with drug testing regulations and the introduction of coaching programmes.

However it has also become clear that each of these proposed and actual changes had stimulated sites of resistance within the Ultimate community and they reflect a sport which has become increasingly divided as it contends with a new modernisation agenda. The recent spurt of bureaucratisation and professionalization of Ultimate is clearly connected, in part, to its new global ambitions. But it was also revealed here, primarily through interviews, that it reflected a concern on the part of elite players and decision makers to reject the 'stigma' typically carried by committed participants of a minor sport identified as having an inauthentic 'Americanised' culture and value system. Data indicates that a 'tipping point' appears to have been reached by the decision makers and some elite players in the direction that the sport is now heading, leading to a clear divide on this issue between the elite and the grassroots.

3. **The future of Ultimate in the UK**

The historian Matt Taylor (2006: 60) refers to 'a cultural severance' which occurs when an establishment culture fails to understand the nature of a popular alternative. Most examples here concern the way grassroots participants and clubs drive a 'bottom-up' initiative from the lower orders against the wishes of a conservative, often elite class governing body which is fighting a rearguard action against corroding professionalism and commercialisation. In the early years of the twenty-first century Ultimate is in a situation in which the roles are somewhat reversed.

The implications for the divide in Ultimate between the grassroots traditionalists and the governing body modernisers are yet to be fully realised, but it seems reasonable to assume that parallels might be found within a sport such as snowboarding (see

Humphreys, 1997) in which an elite group secured sponsorship and media attention and went 'mainstream' by subscribing to Olympic Games rules and competition structures. In contrast, a core of self-styled 'authentic' 'boarders rejected such values and continued to pursue their alternative vision. How exactly this scenario will play out within Ultimate is uncertain. But what is likely is that a more rationalised Ultimate elite will still appear to the outside world to stake a quite reasonable claim for acceptance for their organised, formal competitions for, as Bruner (1989: 13) indicates, this sort of attribution in sport is 'something sought, fought over and reinvented.'

What might become of grassroots Ultimate participants in this new era is less clear, but one can speculate that local demand should see individuals willing to organise more *ad hoc* competitions, such as 'hat' events and party tournaments, and that indoor Ultimate is likely to become the secure home of this movement. What will become more markedly clear, however, is that the personnel attending events at each end of the Ultimate spectrum are likely to become increasingly polarised and thus a two tier system of organisation and play - which has already started to emerge − is likely to become much more striking in the future.

However if the sport continues to grow in the UK - say through a mass uptake due to its introduction in the English school curricula - will its position and perception, relative to more dominant sporting forms, ever change anyway? Even in the USA, which has a well developed college system in place for Ultimate and some TV coverage not unlike American college football or basketball, in popular view Ultimate still remains an activity to be taken less seriously than other sport. This perception is reflected most pertinently in a comment heard during a USA TV sitcom in which a college sports

broadcaster reminds participants of Ultimate that: 'If a dog can do it...it's not a real sport!' This would suggest that trying to escape the stigma attached to UK Ultimate is a futile exercise and that the promise of some notion of equality and equal recognition for Ultimate is nothing more than a false horizon.

4. A final consideration

As Ultimate in the UK seeks to reposition itself within the public consciousness and global sporting structures, a key area which may see the sport change and grow is that of schooling. As recent educational research and policy in the UK have shifted towards a greater emphasis on 'personalisation' and a more holistic approach to learning (TLRP, 2004) there have been strengthening recommendations over the last decade that Physical Education should make a wider contribution to learning, beyond that of physical development (Capel, 2007). In developing the 'whole child' it is now widely acknowledged that the three learning domains of cognitive (mental), affective (social and emotional) and psychomotor (physical) should all be developed at school (Rink, 2005). It may be that the time for Ultimate to be fully appreciated and experienced by young people in schools is now upon us: Ultimate offers a perfect vehicle to meet such needs.

Smith (2008) writes, in advocating the use of Ultimate in Physical Education in UK schools, by identifying the benefits of offering an alternative invasion game that requires the mastery of new equipment and new skills. The merits of fitness promotion, inclusion and low costs are explained and, in addition, the concept of self refereeing is identified as a useful vehicle for delivering those requirements aligned to the affective

domain. The idea of the widespread adoption of Ultimate within the UK would be uncharted territory and raises a lot of interesting questions about how it would be taught, what values would be espoused through it, and what outcomes would result.

However current research shows that in the majority of secondary schools the teaching of Physical Education continues to looks very similar to the past, with a traditional curriculum delivered by largely didactic pedagogic approaches by individuals from backgrounds in traditional team sports (Capel, 2007). The widespread adoption of Ultimate would therefore still need a major cultural change as key decision makers - in this case Physical Education teachers - would need to see value in an alternative sporting activity into which they were inculcated. Ultimately, it seems, both in schools and in parks and leisure centres, it will continue to fall to a select group of largely university-educated individuals in the UK to ask themselves if they indeed 'love the plastic.'

Glossary of Terms

Active call: when an observer makes a decision without being asked e.g. In USA Ultimate such as offside.

All star game: at party tournaments it is common to have an all star game in which an elected member of each team compete in one game in which they are encouraged to show off as much as possible.

Away: the side of the pitch 'away' from where a team has set up camp.

Backhand: to throw the disc from the left side of the body for right handed players (or from the right for left-handed players). The motion has similarities in appearance to the backhand in tennis and would be considered to be the 'standard' throw that non-ultimate players may use to throw a disc.

Bagel: to score no points in a match (e.g. we've just been bagelled).

Beginners: a new player or an event designated for beginners only (defined by the UKUA as anyone playing for three months or less).

Bid: a near but failed attempt to get to the disc (usually refers to the defending team).

Breakside: the side to which the marker is trying to prevent the throw.

Brick it: to take the disc to the brickmark in order to start play.

Brickmark: a mark on the pitch approximately one third of the pitch length from the endzone at which a team starts with the disc should a pull travel directly out.

'Broken!': what is shouted to alert players that the disc has been thrown to the breakside

Bump: when two players make contact with each other. Though often unintentional the practice of 'bumping the thrower' has been observed in USA Ultimate as a subtle means of cheating.

Call: to make a judgement on the field (e.g. I called a foul or call it a strip if you think it was) or a post game ritual that involves a team inviting the other to partake in a silly game or song of their choice.

Champagne moment: some teams will identify a particular highlight after each competition.

Cap: in overtime, a ruling usually applies called the cap, whereby a time is required to reach a particular points total (usually fifteen) or have to win the game by two clear points.

Chase: when employing a zone defence, one player is employed to continually put the force on the player with the disc. They are called the **chaser** or **chase**, as is the act that they are doing.

Check: an alternative name for 'Tap in' (see Tap in)

Chuck around: the informal throwing of discs between games.

Chilly!: said to encourage the attacking team to slow the game down and be patient.

'Clear out': what is shouted to tell another player to get out of the area where the thrower wants to pass the disc.

Clog: to prevent good cuts by standing in the way of your team mates.

Co-ed: the North American term for **mixed.**

Contested: called in response to a foul, if the opposing player believes that no foul took place.

Continuation: called by a team if a minor offence occurs eg.'a pick' but then the opposition throw away the disc. Continuation is permitted to allow the turnover to be taken rather than go back for the offence.

Cross over: during the halfway point of a tournament, before the three main pools are finalised, there are contests between the pools to ascertain if any should move pools.

Cut: an attempt to get free to receive the pass.

Cup: a group of two or three players that sometimes form the front of a zone defence. They stand in arc around the player with the disc and prevent the disc being thrown forward or to one side.

'D' or **defence**: the team attempting to prevent a score.

Decline: called if a team chooses not to accept a continuation of play.

Deep: a receiver who cuts looking for a long pass or a defender who marks the said receiver.

Disc: what ultimate players call a "Frisbee".

Discraft – seller of Ultimate merchandise, especially discs.

'Disc in': shouted by players to signals that the disc is in play.

Double Disc Court or **DDC:** is a rallying type game similar to volleyball or tennis.

Double Happiness: where a player successfully makes a defensive play by preventing the completion of a pass and then immediately upon turnover of the disc, receives a pass to score a point.

Downwind: playing with the wind behind outdoors.

Drop: either when a player drops a catch or a term shouted to a defensive player (often from the sideline) to tell them to drop back down the field.

Dump: a player who stands behind the thrower in order to help when the offence gets in trouble.

D-Up: to mark an opposing player.

Endzone: area at the either end of the pitch within which a point is scored.

Fast count: when during a stall count the player with the disc considers that the person forcing is counting too fast.

Flip: before a competitive game, the captain from each team (or a nominated representative) convene and flip a disc to determine who would pull and receive the disc first.

Flick: another name for the forehand throw (see **Forehand).**

Flood: called as the last line of defence during a zone, when all available players, except the force, drop back to their own endzone and defend in a line.

Force: guarding on only on one side of the thrower to make them throw to the other side. The direction you want them to throw is the direction of the force.

Forehand: to throw the disc from the right side of the body for right handed players (or from the left for left-handed players). Again the motion is similar in some respects to the forehand in tennis.

Foul: to commit an offence by making deliberate contact with an opponent

Free: to be unmarked.

Gaia: seller of Ultimate related merchandise.

Geo team: a team where the players are based in a specific geographical area.

Go ho: 'going horizontal' the North American equivalent to 'laying out'.

Grab: to catch the disc, usually one handed.

Grounding: when the disc touches the floor.

Guts: an early Frisbee based game which preceded the development of Ultimate.

Hackysack or **Hacky** (or footbag): a game played with a small bean bag (also called a Hackysack, Hacky or footbag), commonly observed during Ultimate events. It is typically controlled by the feet and in groups is played in a circle by co-operatively keeping it up in the air. Interestingly the name Hackysack is the brand name patented by the Wham-O toy corporation who own the name Frisbee.

Hammer: an overhead, slightly inverted throw usually propelled over a long distance.

Handler: one of a team's primary throwers.

Hat tournament: a competition in which individuals turn up irrespective of team and are entered into a hat. Names are then randomly drawn to comprise each team with which they stay for the duration of the event.

Home: the side of the pitch where a team has set up camp.

Homeboy: when two players repeatedly pass the disc between themselves in order to make progress up field.

Hooter: the noise made to signify the start and the end of a game.

Huck: a speculative long throw; equivalent to a 'bomb' or 'Hail Mary' in American Football.

Indoors: refers to playing indoors, an indoor event or an event during the indoor season (October – March).

Inside out (also known as an **'I.O.'**): as a backhand, a throw to the right that curves left; as a forehand, a throw to the left that curves right.

Invert: an offensive strategy where players cut from the back of a stack rather than the front.

'ISO' or Isolator: an offensive strategy where a team lines up 3 – 1 – 1. The three handlers seek to play a pass to the middle 'one' and isolate the defender before completing a score.

Jump in: when a team call a 'flood' defence (see Flood), a way to break the line of defenders is to 'Jump in' to the endzone, rather than have the disc passed over a longer distance.

Knife: an overhead, slightly vertical throw usually propelled over a short distance, over the top of a cup or wall (see Cup and Wall).

Lane: a narrow strip of the pitch in which a handler can pass the disc upfield and into which a receiver wishes to cut into.

Last point of contact: usually refers to the foot which was touching the floor before a player steps over the sideline.

Layout: when the player dives to catch or intercept the disc. In North America this is more commonly referred to as "going ho" (from going horizontal).

Line call: when players dispute whether play was either in or out along a line.

Lookfly – the foremost seller of Ultimate merchandise in the UK.

Look off: when a player chooses not to pass to a player who appears to be open.

Mac: to tap the disc forward in mid air without catching it.

Man – D: the most common type of defence where each person on defence marks a specific offence player and attempts to stay as close to them as possible.

Masters: events that are for players who are over thirty years of age.

Mid: a receiver who cuts for shorter passes usually in the middle of the field.

Miss match: when a team believes that a player has a major advantage or disadvantage over a player they are marking (such as speed or height).

Mixed: an Ultimate competition that specifies a specific mix of males and females be present on the field at all times, typically at least two of each.

Nationals: refers to the national finals of any particular event e.g. outdoor, indoor, student.

'No break:' what is shouted to alert the player forcing that they must make a particular effort to prevent a throw being made to the breakside (usually because a player has escaped their marker).

No look: where a player passes the disc without appearing to look where the disc is being thrown.

Observer: in the USA (and in certain International games) officials, known as observers make active and passive calls on the play.

'O' or offence: the team with possession of the disc.

Offside: during the pull, when players of the pulling team run ahead of the disc.

Open: (i) the side to which the thrower is being forced (or a pass/cut to this side).
(ii) Occasionally also used to describe being 'free' to receive a pass.

'Out' (of bounds): to step off the pitch

Outdoors: refers to playing outdoors, an outdoor event or an event during the outdoor season (April – September).

Overtime: sometimes known as OT or extra time. An additional period of play that occurs in a knockout round if both teams are level at full time.

Pancake catch: a basic catch where the disc is caught with one hand one top and one hand below.

Party: the social event that traditionally occurs on the Saturday night of a weekend competition. Often referred to in post matches speeches, as in 'see you at the party'.

Party tournament: less formalised events where more social elements are encouraged, such as fancy dress.

Passive call: when an observer is asked by a player what occurred during an infraction in the game and what should happen next.

'Pick': an intentional or unintentional block (like basketball) where a player gets between you and the player you are covering.

Pick up: the convention where players individually turn up to a competition and play for a team who needs additional players. These individuals are also referred to as '**pick ups.'**

Pitch disc: the disc allocated to a specific pitch for game purposes during a competition.

Pivot: when you plant your foot (left for right handlers and right for left handlers) and step to the side (allowing you the throw around the marker).

Plate: an award for the team who finishes at the top of the middle eight.

Poach: when a defender moves away from their marker to try and make an interception on a pass to another player.

Point: when the disc is caught in the endzone by a player on the offence for a score.

Point block: when a defender stops a pass being made by making contact with a disc the moment it is thrown.

Pop: when playing against a zone defence, offensive players in the middle of the field aim to pop in and out of the spaces. These are commonly referred to as **Poppers.**

Pull: like a drop out in rugby - the restart throw that begins each possession.

Push pass: a very short pass where the disc is pushed and barely rotates.

Qualifiers: refers to any event that may be a qualifying event for a national final.

Receiver: a player whose primary role would be to catch the disc (often to score).

Roll: when the disc rolls on the floor, typically following a pull.

Roll curve: a pass made with a slight curl

Rookie: a beginner

Schedule: the published information about which team is to play another team and when.

Scoober: a disc that is thrown upside down.

Score: to gain a point and also often shouted by both players and spectators should a disc roll between a players legs.

Seeding: at the beginning of every competition, teams will be given a number which indicates there predicted position. This is a provisional ranking ahead of the pool games on the second day and allows the TD to allocate the groups on the first day. Teams will refer to their performance in relation to this number e.g. 'we held our seeding'.

'Send it back': if players cannot agree whether an offence occurred following a brief discussion, the disc will be sent back to the last player or moment upon which they can agree.

Show: to taunt the opposition having just scored by showing them the disc (usually by waving it in an opponent's face).

Sidearm: another name for the forehand throw (see Forehand)

Sideline: the line along the side of the pitch and the name given to the collection of people and objects that may be along it.

Skying: when opposing players focus upon and then attempt to jump together for a high disc.

Slaps: when teams slap hands at the end of the call.

Speech: the statement made after the game by a player (usually the captain) from each team, to comment upon the game played.

Spirit or **Spirit of the Game (SotG):** an amateur notion which in essence is the central philosophy behind Ultimate.

Spirit vote: the formal voting or rating of other teams during an event to decide who embodied the spirit of the game the most.

Spirit award: the prize given at a competition as a result of the spirit vote.

Spoil: another name for 'strike' (see strike).

Spoon: the contest at the end of the competition between the two lowest ranked teams.

Stack: an offensive strategy in which players form lines before cutting in specific directions. Stack can be straight, T shaped or operate horizontally or vertically.

Stalling (or stall count): the player holding the disc has just ten seconds (eight seconds indoors) to pass it to a team-mate - the defender marking the player with the disc counts to ten out loud, and if the disc has not been released on the "t" of "ten" the defender takes possession by calling '**Stall Out'**.

Stick it: to throw a disc quickly and purposefully

Straight up force: instead of guarding on only on one side of the thrower, a player makes themselves as big as possible and does not choose a side.

'Strike': what is shouted to alert players that the force has been rapidly changed or ignored. This typically occurs when a player is aware of an easy pass that can be made and does what they can to prevent it.

'Strip': to knock the disc out of an opponent's hands whilst they are holding it.

Sudden death: when the scores are tied at full time during an indoor game. Whoever is holding the disc at this point, remains in possession and the game continues.

Swing: a lateral pass across the pitch.

Switch: when two defenders swap the offensive players that they are marking.

Taco: refers to a disc that appears not look flat or fly straight due to being damaged (e.g. that disc looks '**Tacoed')**.

'Take the half': be winning at half time (outdoors only)

Tap In: following a stoppage the disc is held and offered to an opponent so that they may 'tap in' the disc, so that play may restart.

TD: commonly used shortening for the tournament director, the person who runs an Ultimate competition.

Telephone team: a team that is convened by telephone only. Common amongst graduands who have moved away from the University team they once collectively represented.

Thumber: an improvised throw where the disc is propelled by use of a thumb rather than the usual fingers.

Three Pint Challenge: a practice common at social events whereby an upturned competition disc is filled with three pints of beer. Two people are then required to drink the beer filled disc through straws (typically from McDonalds) in the fastest time possible.

Throw away: where a player throws away the disc. This is sometimes done intentionally if the stall count has almost finished.

Time out: during official competitions teams may call a time out during a period of play providing they are in possession of the disc. At this point, play stops and a team may gather to decide what they may do next.

Tip: to touch the disc in flight.

'Top Eight': the highest pool in an Ultimate competition from which the winners will emerge and the aspiration at the start of the weekend for all competitive teams. Other sections typically would be referred to as the 'middle eight' and the 'bottom eight.'

Tour: a series of outdoor events sanctioned by the UKUA which comprise the UK's official championship season.

Trade: when teams scoring alternately over a period of time.

Trap: where a defensive player forces an opponent onto the sideline and thus limits their passing options.

'Travel': to move with the disc beyond the pivot foot, whilst it is being held (not unlike basketball or netball).

Turnover: a change of possession occurring when the disc has been dropped or intercepted and the offence becomes the defence.

UKUA: United Kingdom Ultimate Association. The governing body of Ultimate in the UK.

Unspirited: termed for players or teams that engaged in an act that was against the spirit of the game.

'Up! what is shouted to alert players that the disc is in the air

UPA – the Ultimate players association (based in the USA)

Upwind: the difficult task of playing again the wind outdoors.

V cut: to cut from the back middle of the endzone, to either sideline.

'Walk over': to run past the disc without picking it up or to take the points for a win if the opposition fail to show up.

Wall: a line of two or three players that sometimes form the front of a zone defensive. Such a tactic is often employed when playing in a high wind.

WFDF: the World Flying Disc Association. The global governing body for all disc related sports, including Ultimate.

Wing: the name given to a defensive player who marks an area wide left or wide right during a zone defence.

World's Greatest: a rare event whereby the disc firstly flies out of bounds but is caught and thrown back into play before either it or the player touches the ground. In addition, the disc is then immediately caught by another team mate for a score.

Wrong side: shouted when a player has marked on the opposite side to the agreed team strategy.

Zone: a type of defensive strategy that sees players cover areas of the field rather than mark individual players. Examples of zone types include 'house', 'dice' and 'inverted house' named according to the pattern the players make on the pitch.

Appendix A - Frisbie Pie Tin from the Frisbie Baking Company (1871-1958) (Bellis, 2004)

Appendix B – Morrison's Flying Disc Patent marketed as the 'Pluto Platter' (Free

Patents Online, 2008)

United States Patent Office

Des. 183,626
Patented Sept. 30, 1958

183,626

FLYING TOY

Walter Frederick Morrison, La Puente, Calif.

Application July 22, 1957, Serial No. 47,035
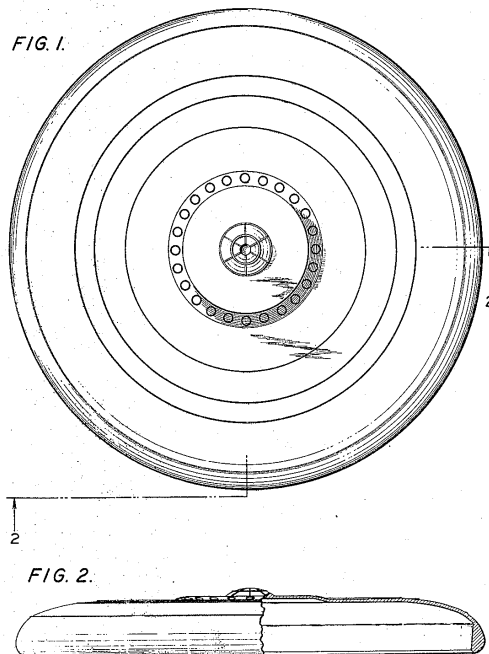
Term of patent 7 years

(Cl. D34—15)

FIG. I.

FIG. 2.

Fig. 1 is a top plan view of a flying toy, showing my new design;

Fig. 2 is a side elevational view thereof, partly in cross section taken on line 2—2 in Fig. 1.

I claim:

The ornamental design for a flying toy, as shown.

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Patented Dec. 26, 1967

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3,359,678
FLYING SAUCER
Edward E. Headrick, La Canada, Calif., assignor to Wham-O Manufacturing Company, San Gabriel, Calif., a corporation of California
Filed Nov. 1, 1965, Ser. No. 505,864
3 Claims. (Cl. 46—74)

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A saucer shaped throwing implement. A series of concentric discontinuities are provided adjacent the rim on the convex side of the implement. The discontinuities provided on the convex side of the implement exert an interfering effect on the air flow over the implement and create a turbulent unseparated boundary layer over the top of the implement reducing areodynamic drag.

This invention relates to aerodynamic toys to be thrown through the air and in particular to flying saucers for use in throwing games.

Over the past several years toys resembling saucers have become quite popular as throwing implements. In the usual embodiment the implement is made of a plastic material in a saucer shape with a rim located around the edge of the saucer, the rim having a somewhat greater thickness than the saucer portion of the implement. The rim curves downwardly from the saucer and has a configuration such that the implement when viewed in elevation approximates the shape of an airfoil.

The toy is used in throwing games and is normally gripped by placing the thumb on the convex side of the saucer and one or more of the fingers on the concave side. Throwing is usually accomplished with a wrist snapping motion wherein the thrower assumes a stance approximately at right hangles to the intended target and retracts his arm across his body. By uncoiling his arm and snapping his wrist, momentum and a spinning motion is imparted to the saucer to cause it to fly toward the target. The direction of flight from the thrower depends upon the thrower's skill and the type of flight path (e.g. curved or straight) depends upon the angle of the saucer relative to the ground when it is released by the thrower. Its appeal as a toy appears to reside in the fact that it exhibits definite aerodynamics characteristics, can be made to do maneuvers of various kinds depending upon the skill of the user, and is relatively easy to master.

The present invention provides an improved version of this well-known flying saucer. In this invention, means located on the convex side of the flying saucer are provided for interrupting the smooth flow of air over this surface. In aerodynamics this action is described as "spoiling" the air flow and the means by which this is accomplished are described as "spoilers." As applied to the present invention, this disruption of airflow is thought to create a turbulent unseparated boundary layer over the convex side of the saucer and to result in a reduction of drag especially in high-speed flight and an increase in stability while in flight. This means that a novice thrower can learn to throw the flying saucer more rapidly, that more expert throws will result with less experience, that better accuracy can be achieved and that a reduction in the skill required to use the saucer is made possible.

The invention contemplates an aerodynamic toy. The toy comprises a central portion and a rim circumscribing the central portion and curving downwardly from the central portion. The central portion and the rim together form a concave side and a convex side of the toy. In addition, means are located on the convex side of the toy

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for interfering with the flow of air over this side of the toy when it is thrown. The toy is of a size to be readily gripped with one hand for throwing and for this purpose has a rim height which permits convenient gripping of the implement with fingers placed on the first side of the implement and the thumb placed on the opposite side.

The invention will be better understood by reference to the following figures in which:

FIG. 1 is an elevational view of the flying saucer;

FIG. 2 is a view of the top or convex side of the flying saucer;

FIG. 3 is a view of the bottom or concave side of the flying saucer; and

FIG. 4 is a cross-sectional view taken along the lines 4—4 of FIG. 2.

Referring now to FIG. 1 there is shown an elevational view of a flying saucer 10 of this invention. As can be observed from FIG. 1, the toy resembles an inverted saucer having a central portion 12 and formed integrally therewith is a rim 14. To provide a smooth transition from the central portion 12 to the rim 14, a curved surface 16 is provided. The central portion 14, surface 16 and rim 14 together form two sides of the toy which will be referred to herein as the concave and convex sides of the toy.

As can be observed from FIG. 1, the bottom edge 18 of the saucer 10 together with the convex side of the toy resemble an air foil. A plateau or crown 20 is formed in the central portion 12 on the convex side of the toy. Although its contribution to the flight of the saucer has not been definitely determined, it is believed that the crown 20 also contributes to the stable flight of the saucer through the air.

Also shown in FIG. 1 are a plurality of ridges 22 superimposed or raised on the curved surface 16. As will be discussed in more detail below, the placement of ridges on the convex side of the saucer has been found to produce a beneficial effect on the stability of the implement when thrown. This stability is thought to be due to the ridges causing an effect which is analogous to the effect of a "spoiler" as that term is used in aerodynamics.

In FIGS. 2 and 3 are shown plan views of the convex and concave sides of the implement 10. As can be readily observed from FIGS. 2 and 3, the implement is circular in form. The rim 14 is placed so that it circumscribes the circular central portion 12 of the saucer. Further details of the relationship of the ridges 22 to the flat central portion 12 and the rim 14 can be seen from FIG. 2. The outermost ridge is located on the curved portion 16 in the area where the rim 12 and central portion 14 merge. The outermost ridge and any others which may be provided circumscribe at least a major portion of the periphery of the saucer. The other ribs or ridges 22 which are provided are located in concentric arrangement interiorly of this outermost ridge and in close juxtaposition with adjacent ridges as shown.

Another discontinuity 26 in the convex surface of the toy, also in the form or a rib or a ridge, is located interiorly of ridges 22 and forms a closed circle on the central portion 12 concentric with the center 28 of the saucer. Interiorly of ridge 26 is a ridge 30 marking the beginning of crown 20. Crown 20 resembles a circular plateau and is located on the central portion 12 of the saucer with its center coincident with the center 28 of the implement.

FIG. 3 depicts a view from the concave side of the saucer and as shown therein has a relatively smooth surface 32 extending from the rim 14 interiorly to the crown 20. Circle 34 corresponds to the ridge 30 located on the convex side of the saucer. In this view the crown appears as an indentation in the concave side of the saucer.
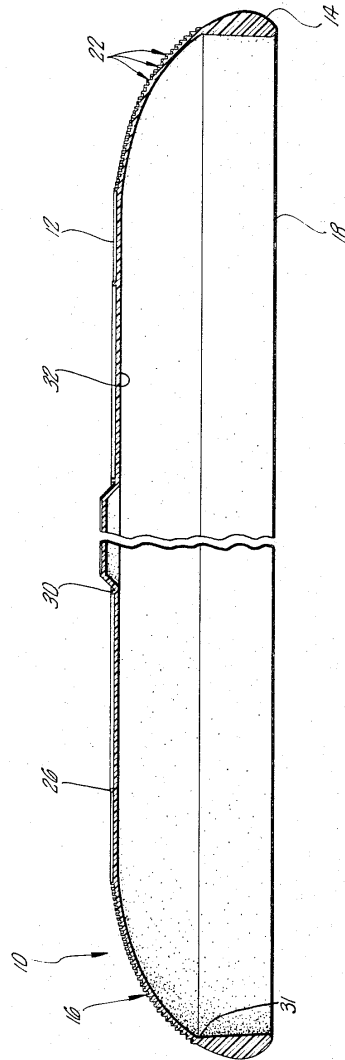
FIG. 4.

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BY
ATTORNEYS.

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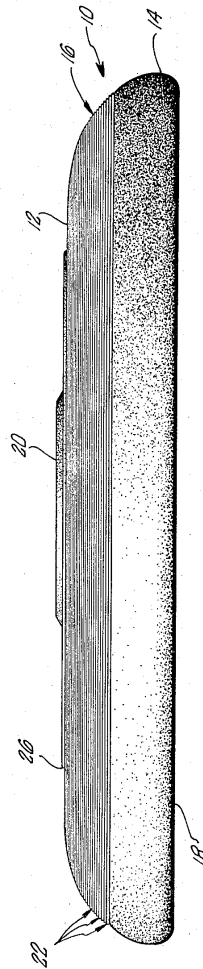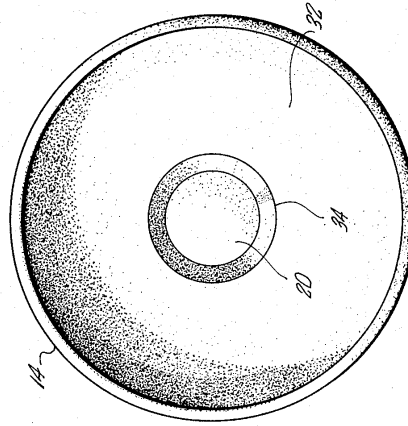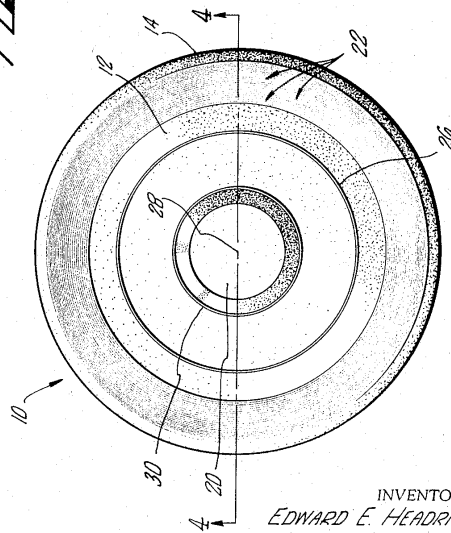
FIG. 1.

FIG. 3.

FIG. 2.

INVENTOR.

EDWARD E. HEADRICK

BY

ATTORNEYS.

Appendix D – Ultimate is played at Columbia High School in 1967 for the first time (Zagoria, 2003)

CHS Varsity Frisbee Squad: (Top row from left to right) Captain Joel Silver, Head Coach Cono Pavone, Bob Mittlesdorf, Jonny Hines, Buzzy Hellring, Arnold Tzoltic, Joe Staker, Paul Brenner, Tom Carr, Mark Epstein, General Manager Alexander Osinski, (Second row) Tom Corwin, Frisbee (Pro Model), David Medinets, David Leiwant, (Third row) Fred Appelgate, Howard Straubing, Steve German, Vincent, (Laying down) Steve Schwartz, Frisbee (Master Model).

In February, 1970, the players adopted the name The Columbia High School Varsity Frisbee Squad, a tongue-in-cheek reference because the team had no official connection with the school.

Appendix E – Pitch Markings

The marking of actual lines to denote a visible pitch is a relatively recent phenomenon and still not a common occurrence.

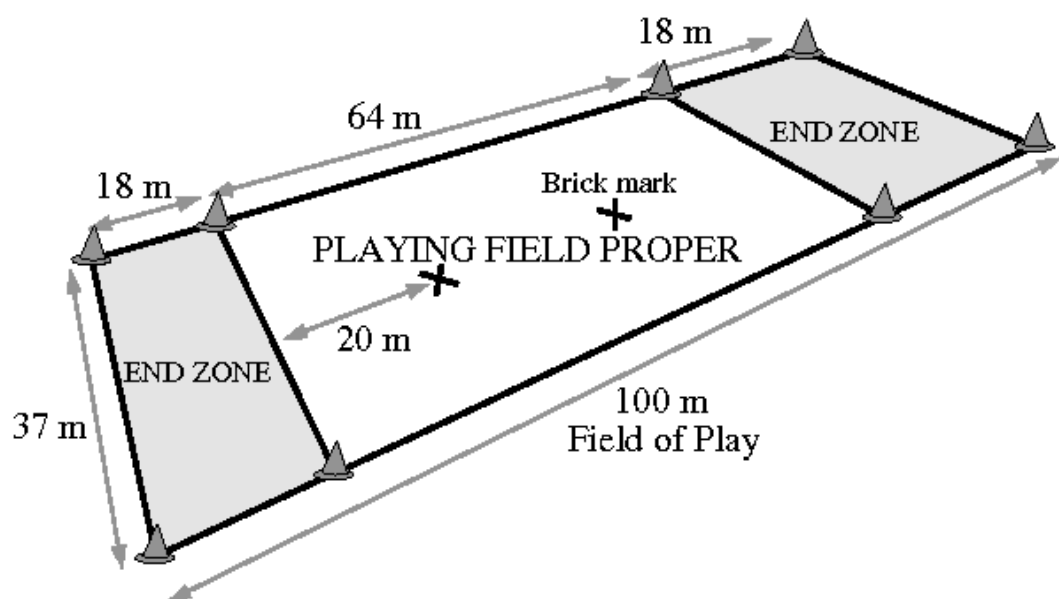A view from indoors

A view from outdoors

Appendix F – Forcing the disc

'Typically when defending a team will repeatedly 'force' the thrower to always release the disc in the same direction…' (Field notes 14/01/06).

Appendix G – The Field of Play (WFDF, 2008)

Appendix H – View across a series of pitches at a National Tour event in Birmingham

Appendix I – Examples of shirts and disc design

Appendix J – An example of the different physical spaces used during an event – Camping and competition

Physical systems such as spatial layout and weather have an impact upon both social and economic systems. At preferred venues, physical layout is compact allowing easy flow and access from one social space to another.

Appendix K– Background details of data collection

<u>Interviews</u>

PW (1/12/05)

- Male
- Early 20s
- University player
- Two years experience
- Good standard

LC (12/04/06)

- Male
- Late 30s
- Club player
- Twenty years experience
- Highly competent player who has played at highest club level during his 20s. Occasionally competes on Tour B

PT (12/04/06)

- Male
- Early 40s
- Club player
- Twenty years experience
- Highly competent player who has played at highest club level during his 20s. Still competes regularly on Tour B

RL (04/05/06)

- Male
- Mid 20s
- Club player
- Five years experience
- Plays on Tour B. Did not learn the game at university but was taught by friend who formed a local club after graduation.

HL (22/05/06)

- Male
- Mid 20s
- Club player
- Two years experience
- Relatively inexperienced. Did not learn the game at university but went with a friend to join a local club.

EC (09/07/06)

- Female
- Mid 20s
- Eight years experience
- Club player
- Highly competent player. Plays occasional tournaments across the year.

MM (09/07/06)

- Female
- Early 20s
- Three years experience
- Recent university graduate
- Competent player making first appearance on Tour B

SB (10/07/06)

- Male
- Mid 20s
- Eight years experience
- Club player
- Elite level player. Competes on Tour A and has represented Great Britain

BJ (22/10/06)

- Male
- Late 20s
- Nine years experience
- Club player
- Elite level player. Competes on Tour A.

MC (02/11/06)

- Female
- Mid 20s
- Four years experience
- Club player
- Competent indoor player. Did not learn the game at university and joined a local club.

TM (02/11/06)

- Male
- Mid 20s
- Six years experience
- Club player
- Elite level player. Competes on Tour A.

BM (03/11/06)

- Male
- Mid 30s
- Club player
- Fourteen years experience
- Highly competent player who occasionally competes on Tour B

FK (02/02/07)

- Male
- Early 30s
- Club player
- Ten years experience
- Highly competent player who occasionally competes on Tour B

WR (03/02/07)

- Male
- Mid 20s
- Club player
- Six years experience
- Competent player who competes occasionally.

SA (03/02/07)

- Male
- Early 20s
- University player
- Two years experience
- Good standard

PD (06/02/07)

- Female
- Early 20s

- University player
- Three years experience
- Competent standard

EJ (07/04/07)

- Male
- Early 20s
- University player
- One year experience
- Emerging player – representation at beginners level

MB (30/5/07)

- Male
- Late 20s
- Nine years experience
- Club player
- Elite level player. Competes on Tour A.

DD (31/5/07)

- Male
- Mid 30s
- Fifteen years experience
- Club player & UKUA board member
- Elite level player. Competes on Tour A.

ML (31/5/07)

- Female
- Late 20s
- Eight years experience
- Club player
- Elite level player. Competes on Tour A.

Competitions attended at which participant observations were conducted

2005

12/13 March – Indoor event (Bristol)
2/3 April – Outdoor Tour event (Bristol)
9/10 April – Indoor event (Plymouth)
23/24 April – Indoor event (Malvern)
18/19 June – Outdoor Tour event (Southampton)
27/28 August – Outdoor event (Manchester)
5/6 November - Indoor university/club beginners event (Birmingham)

2006

14/15 January – Outdoor winter league (Birmingham)
18/19 February – Indoor event (Bristol)
11/12 March – National indoor finals (Bath)
1/2 April - Outdoor Tour event (Bristol)
22/23 April – Outdoor event (Birmingham)
24/25 June - Outdoor Tour event (Bristol)
8/9 July - Outdoor Tour event (Cardiff)
21/22 October - Indoor university beginners event (Sheffield)
28/29 October- Indoor university regional qualifiers (Nottingham)
11/12 November – Indoor event (Birmingham)

2007

17/18 February – Indoor National Qualifiers (Weston Super Mare)
7/8 April - Outdoor Tour event (Bristol)
26/27 May – Outdoor Tour event (Birmingham)
10/11 November - Indoor university regional qualifiers (Nottingham)

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