

1. Steps in starting a high school league

Getting the word out

- post on web
- word of mouth at leagues
- bulletin boards at fields where local games are played
- establish an easy way that an organizer can be contacted (email is good because some responses may be similar and cut and paste can be helpful for portions of replies)

Creating a **flexible framework**- realize that teams may be at very different levels in terms of commitment, talent, and developing school support. Try to accommodate all teams. Create a system that will work for all teams.

- How can you do this?
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- Scheduling
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- Have teams schedule their own games. They know best what will work for them. Even if a team only plays one game, consider it a stepping stone. Starting a new team can be intimidating for a new captain. Once their team plays their first game, they will often catch the bug and hunger for more games.

Have teams consider several factors when scheduling games. With high school kids, location and proximity is one factor. Another factor is the talent level of the opponent. Especially for new schools, encourage them to play other new schools. Having an exciting closely matched game can really get kids excited about ultimate. Getting crushed in your first game by an experienced team can discourage some players or teams from continuing their efforts.

Contact list. Distribute (probably via email) a contact list with emails AND cell phone numbers for at least 2 contacts per team. Email is a good way for people to initiate the scheduling of games, but having cell numbers is important for the day of game or day before to confirm info or if a team gets lost or there is some other emergency.

I have an email contact list I use to send announcements to teams. I encourage others to use this if there is a need. As new teams join, I add their emails. At the end of the year I ask players if they want to be deleted from the list. This is a key tool for communication

Respect for other teams. Having teams schedule a lot of games is great, but remind them to be realistic and that nothing is worse than bailing out on a team at the last minute. Emphasize this point. Spirit of the game starts with honoring commitments. Canceling a game because your best player can't make it is lame. Often times, a home game for a team may be a showcase that has parents and perhaps even teachers or other school staff present to watch. When the other team doesn't show, it makes everybody look bad, including our sport. In my opinion, it would be better for a team to show up with only 6, and play 6 on 6. Communication and respect are key.

Reward teams for playing games, not just for winning. Before Rodney Jacobsen's high school RRI, there was a system in place that gave 500 points for a win and 100 points for a loss (numbers are estimate). In PHUEL we give 3 points for a win and 1 point for a loss. This encourages ALL teams to play more games. Playing more games gives more experience and increases the level of play.

2. Steps to take to help build a successful high school league

Build Community

What does this mean? It means getting kids from different schools to know each other and like each other. Give them chances to get together not just as opponents, but also in other meaningful ways so that friendship and respect can develop. That way when two teams play and a dispute arises on the field, the captains or coaches are already friends and it's more likely that calm heads and good spirit can prevail.

At our organizational meeting it is a chance for kids and coaches to meet each other (some already know each other). After the meeting we usually have a game of pickup.

Another event we have that helps to build community is our all star game. We have it at the START of the spring season so that it can be a chance for kids to get to know each other BEFORE the season. Each team is invited to select two male and one female representative. (At this point, we have fewer female players). We split into two teams and have our all star game. The past few years we have also had the all star team play against the Philly masters team, OLD SAG. The local ultimate community has embraced this young vs. old game, and it helps the kids to pull together.

In 2006, Philly had its first youth team enter into the YCC tournament. This was another positive opportunity for some of the kids who were often opponents to play as teammates and it was a positive experience for them.

Encourage teams to seek adult support. The ideal situation is having a teacher at a school who is an ultimate player and serves as coach. That doesn't always happen. If there is not a teacher who plays ultimate, the team should still seek a faculty member to serve as advisor/sponsor and then seek a coach from the local ultimate community. It can be tough for a coach's schedule to match up with a team schedule, but any contact with a coach can be beneficial-even teaching them drills and plays they can do on their own at a later date

- have an organizational meeting at the start of each season
- PHUEL has a meeting in September and another one in March
- this serves several purposes: scheduling, building community, helping new captains, building leadership qualities of captains, distribute rulebooks (very important for new players and captains to learn the rules)

Encourage coed play. This is most likely the first step towards having teams which are all girls.

Insurance, waivers, and other boring, but important stuff.

PHUEL is fortunate to be supported by our local organization, PADA. In 2000 we started as a league with 8 teams. We currently have about 30 teams. Some schools have more than one team, and one school currently has 3 teams.

Seek help from a lawyer to help draft a waiver for the high school players. I can share what we use for PHUEL and PADA. Players who are under 18 will need a signature from a parent. Our

insurance company requires specific language so that is why we have created our own, rather than using the UPA youth waiver.

Insurance. We have recently started a program for PHUEL that works in conjunction with PADA. Schools can qualify for insurance under PADA's coverage if they meet several requirements to have the team join as PADA members. They must submit waivers for all players, a roster, a \$50 team membership, and must have an adult present for insurance coverage to be in effect. Having this insurance can help teams to obtain fields, especially if a team has not yet gained official recognition from a school. It also puts a system in place that encourages teams to get organized and take steps to reduce liability.

Tournaments

Tournaments play a key role in building the excitement of ultimate for high school players. In Philly we try to have as many as we can. In the fall we have the Kat in the Hat tourney. Three of the last 4 years we also had a Phall PHUEL championship. This spring we'll have the 14th Annual hoponpop tourney. We will also have our 8th Annual PHUEL championships. IN addition, we try to provide to support for the league teams to have their own tourneys, such as Pennsbury's Fall Brawl or Born to Dive. We also encourage teams to have a mini round robins. Once there are about 4 teams and we call it a tourney there are often other teams eager to be involved. Helping to provide insurance is the key obstacle teams often need help overcoming.

Rewards and recognition

Trophies. Personally, I think ultimate is about so much more than winning a trophy, but to school administrators, athletic directors, and others trophies can be seen as sign of athletic achievement. For our tourneys I try to have many trophies so that teams can take one back to school and be seen as legitimate for their efforts on the ultimate field.

Also, recognize those that have played a key role in building your community. The past few years we have awarded "Breed Ultimate" awards to players and coaches that have played a prominent role. One coach asked that I send a description of the award to his superintendent to let him know. This coach has helped us to use the fields at his school for at least 5 tournaments. Build relationships... breed ultimate!

Fields are a valuable resource. We emphasize to players teams, and coaches that when they play they are representing themselves, their schools, and the sport of ultimate. We encourage them to make good decisions. Keep the fields clean and use good judgment if there has been bad weather and fields can be damaged.

Helpful web resources

- UPA page, especially outreach and links geared towards starting a high school team
- UPA list of high school teams and tournaments
- Yahoo ultimate juniors discussion page
- Playultimateblogspot - a very active discussion on relevant topics, the latest most up to date high school news. Coaches and players from all over the country chime in. (Run by Matt McCabe, the founder of St Joes Prep team in PHUEL)