

Handling Rule and Conduct Issues

Have any of you ever had the guts to suspend either a player or a team? As the General Manager of the AUM for the past 5 years, I am happy to say that we luckily have had only a few isolated incidents. But as the league grows, the need to educate our members also grows. With so many new players entering the league year after year, it is understandably difficult to properly educate everyone to the concept of Spirit of the Game (SOTG).

All of us in this room want to promote SOTG and to provide a safe and fun environment for our players. So the question is quite simple: how do we ensure that everyone adheres to the same standards? In the past few years the AUM has taken a stronger stance towards enforcing league policies and procedures, and has therefore found it necessary to give out suspensions. Although the solutions may be imperfect, we can nonetheless strive to find the best possible resolutions for our diverse situations.

Today, I would like to share with you what the AUM does to handle rule and conduct issues. The AUM focuses on 3 main areas: League Policies, Rules Education, and Tools & Support Programs.

1 - League Policies

When January rolls around, we are already hard at work updating and improving league policies for the upcoming season, with at least one new policy introduced every year. Last summer each team provided us with a \$100 Performance Bond (PB) cheque. The bond helps to prevent defaults, promote sportsmanship and guarantee good conduct.

Four PB were cashed last year when a team failed to send a representative to mandatory clinics, and also when several players were suspended. In order for the teams to continue playing in the league they had to submit another PB cheque for \$200; as well they lost their team pre-registration rights for the 2007 summer season.

How does a team or player get suspended? Our suspension policy is basically a "3 strikes and you're out" policy. Official complaints of a player or team are lodged by the captain or co-captain when they enter the score and spirit after each game. There is an online spirit comment box and the message is sent to the spirit committee, which consists of the general manager, the league coordinator, and another volunteer player.

If subsequent complaints are received about the same player or team steps are taken to investigate the problem. For example, a league official would be sent to observe a game, or the case would be moderated by representatives of the Board of Directors where further rulings might occur. A player or a team is suspended only as a last resort.

Our code of conduct is succinct and to the point. Teams and players are expected to treat each other with respect, behave themselves at the fields, play safe, and adhere to the rules of the game. Violations of conduct occur when a player fails to meet these expectations.

Violations include, but are not limited to, verbal or physical abuse against another player, inappropriate behaviour, dangerous or reckless playing and deliberate abuse of the rules.

Details of the PB, the complaint procedure and conduct policy are all contained in the captain's handbook [show handbook]. Along with cones and cleats, every captain is required to have the handbook at all league events. This information is also available to all our members online. You may take a hard copy from the back of the room.

2- Rules Education

Beginning in 2003 mandatory rules clinics were instated for captains and co-captains, which is a condition of the performance bond mentioned earlier. These clinics are conducted by Lorne Beckman, an AUM member who is on the Standing Rules Committee and is a seasoned Club Championship observer. These clinics cover rule basics and interpretations, specific league rules and any rule modifications. There is also a forum available on our web site to discuss the rules with Lorne.

Over the past few years we learned that many of the SOTG issues are simply due to a lack of knowledge regarding the rules. We begin the clinics by having one of the captains read the SOTG section from the rule book. The SOTG concept is emphasized continuously throughout the season, and is also the first section in the Captain's Handbook. The concept is also reinforced by including, in the handbook, 10 Things You Should Know about SOTG.

Understandably one cannot, in a single evening, learn and memorize all the rules for an entire season. We also acknowledge that verbatim knowledge of the rules and practical application of them are two very different things. Rule clinics are very important but they are not enough. That is why we have developed tools and support programs to help learn the rules.

3 – Tools & Support Programs

How many of your members receive the UPA magazine [show magazine]? That is no surprise because less than 5% of AUM members are also UPA members; which is very unfortunate because the UPA magazine has some outstanding articles. When I read Peri Kurshan's article entitled "*What's the Call*", I exclaimed to myself, "Thank you Peri!"

Peri Kurshan is the Standing Rules Committee Chairperson and her article dispelling common rule misinterpretations was exactly what I was looking for. I promptly distributed her column to the AUM membership via our web site and electronic newsletter. For good measure it is reprinted in our annual revue [show Discours] and will most likely be added to this year's captain's handbook. I recommend this article be made available to all your players.

Another great innovation this year was the creation of the Visual Rules [show visual rules]. The Visual Rules were created by Lorne Beckman and Vincent Drolet, an AUM member, and is its 11th edition ready. These charts don't tackle any of the more subjective issues such as fouls, "incidental contact", etc., but they provide a neat and tidy way of knowing what to do after any call, who gets the disc, what's the stall count, where do players set up, and so on. We cover the pull, the pick, the throwing foul, and the receiving foul. Again, the Visual Rules are accessible via the web site

and you may also take a copy from the back of the room. Please feel free to reproduce, with the proper credits, and distribute it to all your players.

Another innovation is the Mentoring Program which is designed to help new teams learn basic rules, Ultimate etiquette as well as developing throwing and catching skills. All new league teams registering for the summer season must have at least one experienced player acting as mentor or coach. This person can also be a player on the team but must be approved by the Executive Committee.

The AUM can provide a mentor or the team can locate their own. The goal is to give new players a better understanding of what Ultimate is about, and how it is played particularly in relation to SOTG. Mentors commit themselves to the first 5 weeks of the season and their hours are credited to the AUM Volunteer Recognition Program. The program has worked very well the past two seasons and has received a lot of positive feedback from both the participating teams and the mentors themselves. Teams have a greater sense of belonging and are keen to return the following year. Mentors gain a sense of satisfaction in giving back to Ultimate and meet new friends.

Conclusion

All the ideas presented here [*RECAP* slide] today are pro-active measures designed to handle rule and conduct issues and thus promote SOTG and provide a safe and fun environment for all our players.

Creating and enforcing league policies and procedures will provide a guideline for players and allow you to run your league more effectively. In three words; educate, educate, educate! Our league will use the 11th edition rules this summer. Since we already have a framework for educating, players expect the same level of great service every year. It is an exciting challenge to meet and we usually surpass our expectations. I encourage you to get your hands on as many tools and resources that you can find. Then pick the ones that work for you and use them and continue to improve on them.

As league organizers and leaders, I challenge you to educate your members with sincerity and passion so that our sport remains in the hands of Ultimate players.