



Playing Ultimate in London

A guide for new players and teams

Revision 1.2 – May 2007

This document brings together information published at www.londonultimate.com. Visit the website for details of London's summer league, winter league, and other events.

Rev 1.2 of this document updates the "How to Get Playing" section with better information on pickup games and the Teams and Practices database.

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Ultimate – the basics

Ultimate is a fast-moving team sport enjoyed by thousands the world over. Although frequently compared to sports like soccer or American Football, Ultimate has some unique features that set it apart. There are no referees. The rules are simple, but the strategies are infinite. And it’s played with a flying disc.

To compete at the highest level, Ultimate players require speed, agility and endurance. Yet beginners find the game easy to learn and fun to play. Grab a disc, get out there, and discover why many think this is the ultimate team sport.

Basic rules

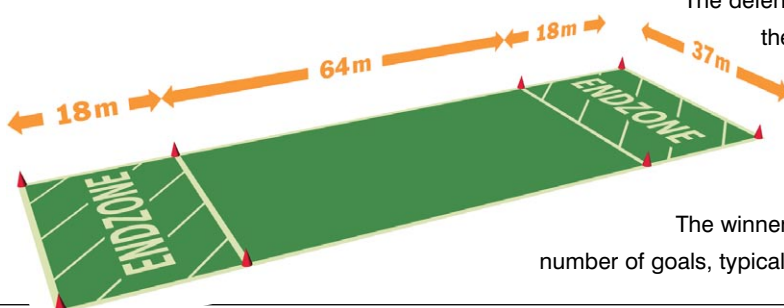
Ultimate is a game for two teams of seven, played on a field similar in size to a football pitch. The last 18 metres at either end of the field are the “endzones”. A goal is scored when you throw the disc to a member of your team standing (or more likely running) in the endzone your team is attacking.

Players cannot run with the disc. When a player catches the disc, they must come to a stop. A team can therefore only move the disc upfield by throwing it from player to player.

The defending team takes possession if the disc touches the ground, or if they make an interception by catching the disc or knocking it to the ground in mid-flight. The game is non-contact; when contact between players occurs, it might be deemed a foul.

The winner is the first team to reach a previously decided number of goals, typically fifteen or seventeen.

Download the full official rules of Ultimate at www.wfdf.org



“Spirit of the Game places the responsibility for fair play on every player. Highly competitive play is encouraged, but should never sacrifice the mutual respect between players, adherence to the rules of the game, or the basic joy of play.”

WFDF Rules of Ultimate

Fair play

There are no referees in Ultimate. The players make their own foul calls and settle disputes according to procedures laid out in the Rules of Ultimate.

Upholding the principles of fair play and “Spirit of the Game” during competition becomes a challenging responsibility for players and is one of the defining aspects of the sport.



Broad appeal

Ask five different players why they love Ultimate and you’ll get five different answers. Many players enjoy the physical and tactical challenges of Ultimate. Others are attracted by the unique qualities that self-refereeing brings to the sport. Some just love to throw a disc. But all would agree on the lasting friendships they have made playing Ultimate.

Ultimate is played at a range of different levels, from casual pickup games and city-based leagues, to national and international tournaments. Whether you’re a beginner or an experienced player, just getting into sport or super-fit, there’s something to suit you.

Useful websites

There is a vast amount of information about Ultimate on the Web. You’ll find more detailed explanations of the rules, articles on techniques and tactics, tournaments, blogs... To save you time searching, here are some useful links.

Wikipedia’s Ultimate page

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ultimate_frisbee

Excellent overview of the sport, including rules and conventions, strategy, glossary, and some good links.

World Flying Disc Federation

www.wfdf.org

World organising body for flying disc sports. Download the official WFDF Rules of Ultimate.

UK Ultimate Association

www.ukultimate.com

Organising body for the UK. Info about Ultimate nationwide, including the Tour, National Championships, diary of events, and a database of teams around the country.

Australian Flying Disc Association

www.afda.com

The AFDA website has some of the best learning resources around.

UK Ladder League

www.regionalultimate.co.uk

An informal league system for UK teams. Register your team, find others to play against, set up some games and see how high you can climb the rankings.

London Ultimate

www.londonultimate.com

Probably where you got this guide from! Home to London’s summer and winter leagues, and other Ultimate happenings in the capital.



Staying in touch – the mailing list and forum

If you want to play Ultimate in London there are two things you should do straight away:

BritDisc is a national mailing list for announcements and general chat about Ultimate across the UK. If you are interested in playing events like the Tour, or any other tournaments outside of London, you should definitely sign up to BritDisc.

Subscribe to BritDisc at:
fysh.org/cgi-bin/mailman/listinfo/britdisc

or visit www.ukultimate.com for more info.

1. Join the LondonLeague mailing list

The LondonLeague mailing list is primarily used for London Summer and Winter League announcements. You'll also hear about other local events, and teams sometimes post there looking for players. Anyone is welcome to use the list if they need to get in touch with the London Ultimate player base at large. Don't worry, there's not much traffic, so your in-box won't suddenly start overflowing.

To join the mailing list, either go to:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/londonleague>

or send a blank email to:

londonleague-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

2. Check out the London Ultimate Forum

This is a web-based discussion forum, with chat about Summer and Winter League, and lots of other good stuff. League organisers post updates there too, which don't always appear on the league website.

It also has forums designed to connect players with teams and vice versa. These "players available/players wanted" forums get particularly active before the start of Summer and Winter League (around April and October respectively). Visit the forum at:

www.londonultimate.com/forum

How to get playing Ultimate in London

Finding somewhere to play Ultimate, and a bunch of people to play it with, is the number one issue for new players in London. Here's a guide to finding yourself a game.

Pickup

The **London Teams and Practices List** at www.londonultimate.com is the best way to find yourself a team or a pickup game in London. The list details team practice times and locations, the kind of events teams enter, their policy towards new players, and so on.

You can get an idea of the relative skill levels of teams by looking at Tour results (see www.ukultimate.com), and London Winter and Summer League results on www.londonultimate.com

A pickup game is a regular practice where anyone is welcome to show up and join in. Going along to pickup is a great way for new players to get a taste of the game, and a few years ago there were a couple of very well-attended pickup games in London. But paradoxically, as Ultimate has become more popular and organised, players have formed more teams, and pickup games are rarer. Most practices are now "team" practices. Confusingly, some of these team practices are "open", meaning anyone can play, including non-team members. Admittedly, it's a subtle distinction between this and pickup!

Of course, you can always start your own pickup game. Get some friends together, find somewhere to play, then advertise your game on the mailing list and forum and try to encourage other local players to come along. Don't forget to add your pickup game to the teams and practices list.

Team practices

Anyone wanting to start playing Ultimate could do worse than find a team practice to go along to regularly. It's polite to check with the team's organiser first rather than simply showing up and hoping to get a game. You will also need to check because team practices often change at short notice. For instance, if the team is away at a tournament, a weekend practice may be cancelled

It is important to make sure that the team practice you are hoping to go along to is suitable for novice players. There is little point asking whether you can attend a Clapham Ultimate or Fire Of London practice if you have never played before (Clapham and Fire are two of the top Ultimate teams in Europe).

Lastly, it's well worth keeping an eye on the London League mailing list and the London Ultimate Forum, as teams will occasionally advertise for new players.

Start your own team

There is of course an alternative to hitching a ride with an existing team, and that is to start your own. Our guide to starting your own team starts on page 10.

Coaching sessions

We occasionally organise introductory sessions specifically for new players, where experienced players will show you the ropes and get you started. Make sure you keep an eye on the mailing list and Forum to be sure you don't miss these sessions.

Tournaments in London, the UK, and beyond.

Different London teams play in different kinds of events — some only play Summer League, others travel the world. So it's good to understand the range of tournaments you could find yourself playing in.

London Summer League

London Summer League (or "LSL") started in 1998 and has been growing rapidly in popularity. Games take place on weeknights, typically from mid-May until late August. Each team plays one game a week. Games are played at venues in both north and south London. Summer League is played mixed — teams must feature men and women.

We accept entries from teams only. Individuals that want to play Summer League can either find an established team to play for via the London Ultimate Forum, or join forces with others in a similar predicament and enter their own team. It's rare that anyone finds themselves team-less.

Novice teams are welcome at Summer League. Even though the top league teams are pretty strong (we have some world-class players in London), the league is structured so that you spend most of the summer playing against teams of a similar standard to yours. Rest assured, you will not be the only new team at Summer League.

Summer League is renowned for its friendly atmosphere, even by Ultimate standards. Your opponents will almost certainly insist on dragging you to the pub after a game. There used to be a saying in Ultimate circles: "Most Fun Wins". Even if you don't hear it quoted much any more, it's no less true.

If you're an experienced player then get yourself onto one of the top teams and be prepared to kick ass. In the most spirited manner possible, of course.





London Winter League

London’s Winter League started around 1999, when players that had just finished Summer League realised they didn’t want to stop. The evenings are not light enough over the winter to play midweek, so “LWL” operates as a series of mini-tournaments (or “matchdays”), taking place one sunday per month, kicking off in November. Teams play four full games at each matchday.

A couple of other features distinguish Winter League from Summer League. Firstly, it can be cold and occasionally wet. But British Ultimate players worked out a few years ago that it was perfectly possible to play all-year round... just wear the right clothes and bring a thermos!

Secondly, because Winter League takes place on weekends during the off-season, teams from all over the south-east show up to Winter League, using it as a warm-up for the major outdoor events that start in April. LWL matchdays can look like UKUA Tour events in miniature.

Nevertheless, new teams are welcome, and there are separate divisions catering for everyone from European Champions to complete beginners.

Weekend tournaments

Weekend tournaments are the traditional backbone of Ultimate in the UK. They’re enormous fun and a great opportunity to meet players from outside London. Tournaments take place all over the country.

The UKUA “Tour” events are the most competitive of these tournaments, and the Open Division ‘A’ Tour is the place to see Ultimate played at its highest level. The UKUA also organises a Mixed Tour and Women’s Tour, and the season culminates with National Championships in all three divisions.

There are also many popular informal tournaments throughout the year. With less riding on a good Sunday morning performance, Saturday nights at these tournaments are, shall we say, enthusiastically-received!



To find out about the Tour and other national-level tournaments, go to: www.ukultimate.com
 Information about weekend events also appears on the **BritDisc** mailing list — see page 4

Ladder League

Get full details of Ladder League at:
www.regionalultimate.co.uk

The most flexible way to play competitive Ultimate is to join the UK's "Ladder League". The idea is simple. You form a team, arrange games with other local teams, and report the results on the Ladder League website. The results are continuously collated to produce Regional and National rankings. The more games you play (and the better you do in them), the higher up the rankings your team climbs. It's a great system.

Indoor Ultimate

Although there has been something of a decline in indoor Ultimate in recent years, there are still well-attended events happening around the country throughout the winter. The game is played 5-a-side, and the smaller pitch and lack of wind makes for a very different style of play. Games are shorter than outdoors, but are no less demanding physically. The other bonus for some is that you can't get rained on.

London has it's own Indoor League. Other indoor events can be found via the UKJA website.



Beach Ultimate

Beach Ultimate Lovers Association
www.beachultimate.org

Beach Ultimate is a fast-growing variation of the game which now has it's own World Championships just like the traditional grass game. Beach is usually played 5-a-side. However, the simple fact that you're running on sand makes it tactically very different, and exhausting in the extreme. On the plus side, laying out is almost entirely painless.

There are a couple of popular beach events in the UK, and many tournaments are staged around Southern Europe. "Paganello" in Rimini, Italy, is without doubt the most famous beach tournament. With over a hundred teams attending from all over the world, it has to be seen to be believed.



Photo © José Pires



International tournaments

One of the attractions for many Ultimate players is the opportunity to experience other cultures by chasing a plastic disc around a field (or beach) in a foreign country.

You can find Ultimate being played in pretty much every corner of the globe. The particularly adventurous player can travel to North or South America, Australia or Asia, but tournaments around Europe are understandably the best-attended by British teams. A good way to find out about European tournaments is to subscribe to the EuroDisc mailing list:

<http://www.ira.uka.de/%7ethgries/disc/ed.html>

No discussion of international Ultimate would be complete without mentioning the WFDF World Ultimate Championships and the World Games. But seeing as we started by talking about London Summer and Winter Leagues, I'll leave it to you to find out more.



Starting your own team

Instead of trying to find an established team to join, why not start your own? There's a definite satisfaction and camaraderie that you only get by competing with a team that you helped form.

Finding players

Obviously, start by asking your friends. It's easy to convince people to try a new sport when they know everyone else on the team is a beginner too. Maybe you can put a team together with work-mates or school/college friends. Find additional team members by advertising on the "Players Wanted" section of the London Ultimate forum.

You can start learning Ultimate with as few as eight people — just play four-a-side on a small pitch. However, to compete in most events you'll need a practical minimum of twelve or fourteen reasonably committed players. You'll also need to bear in mind the requirements of any competition you want to enter. For instance, London Summer League is played mixed, so you will need both men and women on the team.

Learning the game

The web is packed with resources you can use to help you get started. Occasional coaching sessions are organised in London for new players. And obviously, playing and practising a lot is important. We've included some tips on learning the game, starting on page 12.

Choose a league or tournament to enter

You could simply practice amongst yourselves. But half the fun of Ultimate is meeting other teams, which mainly happens at tournaments and other competitions. It might seem daunting, but select the right events to start out with and you'll be fine. Ultimate is an incredibly friendly sport, and if you tell teams you meet that you're new to the game, they will do their best to help you out. Don't be afraid to ask questions — all of us were beginners at some point.

London's Summer League is probably the least intimidating introduction to the sport for new teams, although Winter League is huge fun too — as long as you're prepared for the weather and getting up early on a Sunday! Also consider registering with Ladder League and setting up some games. If you've formed a team at work, there are occasional tournaments in London specifically for corporate teams — keep an eye on the forum. If you're at school, check out the junior competitive scene (see the UKUA website).



As you gain confidence you might consider entering a weekend event. Many new players get hooked on the sport after attending a tournament. It's the intensity of games, the huge parties, the atmosphere... Take your team to one and you'll see what we mean.

Stay on top of your numbers

There is a kind of "critical mass" effect with Ultimate teams; below a certain number of players it becomes difficult to keep the team going. Bear in mind how many players you need to practice effectively. If you want to be able to practice with "sevens", you need fourteen players minimum showing up... which means you'll definitely need more than fourteen on your books.

You can have fun at practice even if you only have six (learn to play mini or hotbox). But if you only get five players out to a practice, it's seriously time to worry. Be prepared to scout around for new players as soon as attendance starts falling. Ask your team-mates if they have friends who might want to try the game.

Luckily, there are so many new players in London looking for teams, you should have no problem filling any gaps that arise. Make good use of the forum.

Keep working at it

Running a team can be hard work, especially in the early stages. Start a mailing list (at YahooGroups for instance) so that you can all communicate effectively. Design a team logo, get a strip made (it need only be one light and dark-coloured T-shirt per player), maybe set up a web site. Be tenacious about collecting money for tournament fees, otherwise you can find yourself seriously out of pocket. Keep encouraging your players to come out to practices and games, and make sure you have some laughs together off the pitch too.





Learning to play Ultimate

Here's a few ideas to help you learn the game.

Web resources

You'll find plenty of great stuff on the web to help you learn Ultimate. See page 3 for some of the most useful resources. A couple more sites that new players will find useful include:

What is Ultimate – rules insights

www.whatisultimate.com/what/index.html

Simple explanations of some of the trickier-to-understand parts of the rules.

Video papers – Ultimate skills

www.cogandrew.com/videopapers/ultimate/index.htm

A selection of videos illustrating various aspects of the game - strategy, skills and fitness training. Although it's mostly quite advanced, the section dealing with throwing will be of immediate benefit to newcomers. Authoritative stuff from some of the world's best players and teams.

Searching the web for the word **Ultimate** (and possibly **disc** too) along with terms such as **skills**, **techniques**, **strategy**, **blog** or **drills** will also turn up plenty of educational stuff.

Books, videos, etc.

In the UK, try Lookfly for books and DVDs about Ultimate:

www.lookfly.com

Find a throwing partner

One of the initial hurdles for new players is simply learning to throw well. There's no substitute for putting in the hours with a disc. The majority of your time during games and practices is spent without a disc in your hands, so relying on team practices to hone your throwing skills could make for slow progress.

One solution is to find another player who is happy to go out and spend an hour with you just throwing and catching. Maybe agree to show up early for team practices, or find other times to go to the park and have fun with a disc. Even the best players are continually working on their throwing.



Get some coaching

Occasional "skills days" take place in London, run by players from some of the best teams in the city. Watch the forum and mailing list for details. If you've started your own team, you could also ask an experienced player or two to come along to your practices from time to time. Alternatively, try to get a couple of experienced players to join your summer league team.

Organise friendly games

Track down a local team and arrange a friendly game against them. It's often worth approaching teams that are slightly more experienced than yours to see if they'll give you a game - after they've comfortably beaten you (or not) you can "mix it up" by combining your players and splitting into two evenly matched teams.

Play in leagues and tournaments

One of the fastest ways to improve your Ultimate is to play competitively. Summer League and Winter League are good options for Londoners, and avoid the commitment and logistical issues you must deal with to get a team to a regular tournament. On the other hand, weekend tournaments are like taking a crash course in Ultimate and are incredible fun in their own right. Not only will you gain a lot of competition experience in just two days, but you can pick up plenty of ideas by watching the top teams play.