

Speedy runners great catch for popular Ultimate league Championships this weekend. Both sexes can excel while on same field - no one's allowed to crash into others

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Anyone who doubts women can compete on the same field as men should look in on the Canadian Ultimate Championships taking place this weekend.

The sport is called Ultimate, it's played with a plastic disc most people know as a Frisbee, and men and women are teammates in its "mixed" version.

In Ultimate, teams of seven compete on a 120-metre-long field. The object is to pass the disc upfield and catch it in the opposing team's end zone.

Players cannot run with the disc; in stead, they pivot, as in basketball, to attempt the next throw.

The game was invented as an "anti-sport" in the late 1960s by a pair of bookish teenagers at a New Jersey high school. Since its modest beginnings, Ultimate has evolved into a fast-paced, non-contact game played in more than 40 countries.

This weekend's 1,200-athlete, 60-team championship tournament runs today through Saturday in St. Jean sur Richelieu, with the finals set for Sunday at Molson Stadium in Montreal.

The tourney will feature play in three divisions: mixed, open and women's.

But it is the mixed game, played in city leagues across Canada, that's leading the sport's growth.

In Montreal, this year's summer league, run by the Association de Ultimate de Montréal, features 84 teams, up from 67 in 2002. Ottawa, host of last year's Canadian championships, claims it has the world's largest Ultimate league in the world - 350 teams with 4,200 players.

There's something about the mixed game that is greater than the sum of its parts, its fans say.

"It takes years to learn to play with one another and be successful," said Louis Beauregard, general manager of the 2003 Canadian Ultimate Championships.

"The best men and women players put on the same team will not necessarily make the best mixed team."

The rules are such that men and women can excel on the same field at the same time, mainly because no contact is allowed - incidental or otherwise. Ultimate is not about strength; some football crossovers don't fare as well as their girlfriends.



CREDIT: JOHN KENNEY, GAZETTE

One player keeps close watch on another during an Ultimate Frisbee game on the grounds of the Douglas Hospital. The national championships for the game will be played later this month.

"They've got the speed. They've got the jump. And the laying out," Beaugard said of Ultimate's best female players.

"In the mixed division, it's the women who make or break a team," Beaugard said.

"If you don't have strong women, you're not winning."

The 2003 Canadian Ultimate Championships take place today through Saturday on the fields of Fort St. Jean, in St. Jean sur Richelieu. The championship games are set for Sunday at Molson Stadium in Montreal. Game times are 11 a.m. for the open division, 1:15 p.m. for mixed and 3:30 p.m. for women's. Tickets are \$5 for the whole day, available in advance at Sports Experts, 930 Ste. Catherine St. W.

On the Web: www.canadianultimate.com/cuc/2003/www.montrealultimate.ca

Ultimately, It's Not So Confusing

The absence of referees may puzzle the first-time Ultimate spectator. But all 14 players on the field can call a foul or stop the play.

In Ultimate, everyone is supposed to respect a codified, all-governing honour system known as "Spirit of the Game." The action is fast and furious, but if all the players keep Spirit in mind, things rarely get out of hand.

Gone with the refs are Oscar-

worthy dives and cheap shots behind the play. Spirit's credo of "Be nice or else" replaces the uglier side of competition. Trash talk is gone, replaced by winded banter.

Because of Spirit's influence on the game, it is common to see players lift fallen foes, cheer good plays in both directions, and help coach less experienced opponents. Spirit also mandates cheering the other team's efforts at the end of the match with a musical parody or a whimsical game. Some think it's a silly ritual, but cheering keeps everything lighthearted. No one goes home nursing a grudge.

Here are a few more tips that those new to the game should keep in mind:

The playing field is 70 metres long, by 40 metres wide, with two end zones 25 metres deep.

A team initiates play from its goal line by throwing the disc to the team on the opposite goal line.

A player scores a point by catching a pass in the opposing team's end zone. To win a game, a team must score 13 or 15 points.

A player in possession of the disc cannot run with it and has 10 seconds to make a pass.

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