

Managing Team Members with Poor Spirit of the Game

Introduction

A key part of what makes Ultimate special is that it is self-refereed and relies on individual players' Spirit of the Game (SOTG) - integrity, rules knowledge and fair mindedness that does not compromise high intensity competitive play.

While in general Ultimate tends to attract players that are engaged with SOTG, issues can and do arise when one or a few individuals do not adhere to the [principles of SOTG](#). These issues can affect the team as a whole, not only in terms of the enjoyment of team mates and competitors, but can filter through to affect team mentality and dynamics.

This document is aimed at providing advice for captains, spirit captains and coaches to deal with individuals whose behaviour and/or attitude is in conflict with the principles of SOTG, in order to provide the best possible experience for all involved. The [SOTG committee](#) is happy to be contacted for further advice and support in these matters.

It is worth noting that perceptions of individuals with poor SOTG are generally subjective; consider perspectives both within and from outside the team, when determining whether a team member's behaviour needs to be addressed.

Managing Teams

Many of the issues outlined in this document can be addressed as a team, using strategies such as:

- Designating a knowledgeable player as a [Spirit Captain](#). The UKU recommends that all teams playing at UKU events have a designated spirit captain to deal with issues as they arise at tournaments.
- Having regular group discussions about rules and SOTG.
- Reviewing game footage (of your own team and/or others) and discussing aspects of SOTG on display.
- Having training sessions and scrimmages specifically targeted at improving SOTG, by encouraging players to discuss behaviours and rules in a controlled way.

Managing Individuals

Although preventative measures at the team level (see above) can help to alleviate many issues, there are situations in which players need to be approached individually. These conversations can be challenging, but

guidance is [available online](#). Talking to other players and even contacting a more experienced coach to ask for advice can also be helpful.

As a general guide, outlining the facts of the issue and why this is an issue is a good starting place. By encouraging the individual to share their experiences you can gain some insight into why the issues have arisen and how they might be resolved. Creating a dialogue will also help to diffuse any defensiveness and will help with engaging the player in their development. You may find that by treating behaviour management as another area for skills development (in the same way as throwing, pitch awareness or other key skills), that it becomes easier to talk to with all players.

If your team has regular individual meetings with coaches/captains and players to discuss development, this can be a good place to include discussion of behaviour management for problem individuals. Ultimatums and exclusions should be a last resort only in extreme situations.

In the next section we identify a number of particular types of SOTG issues that may arise, and some strategies for dealing with each.

Identifying and Dealing with Specific Problems

It can be difficult to know when it is necessary to intervene with problem individuals, one-off incidents often arise when players are having a bad training or game. As a guide to what constitutes problematic behaviour we outline some examples that can be used as a guide.

These examples are not an exhaustive list of issues that can arise but can be used when identifying difficult players and determining how best to resolve the issues.

Rules Knowledge and Use

All players should be well-versed in the [rules of Ultimate](#) and having regular rules briefings and discussions in and outside of practice is recommended. It is understandable that players new to Ultimate will take some time to get up to speed however, the [spirit captain](#) and other more experienced players with rules knowledge should provide constructive support to newer players.

Most problems with rules knowledge occur when a player is unclear on rules but, rather than asking for clarification, states an incorrect interpretation of a rule with certainty. If individual players do this regularly, the teams understanding and interpretation of the rules can be compromised.

Issues surrounding rules knowledge and transmission of incorrect information by problematic individuals can be remedied by regular team discussions of the rules, and 'rules checks' during practice and trainings that target rules and SOTG. Querying the interpretations provided by the problematic individual, and then validating or invalidating these assertions will provide both positive and negative feedback for that individual.

Positively reinforcing good rules knowledge will foster a positive environment for new and experienced players to learn the rules, and query them when appropriate. Encouraging players to take the [WFDF rules accreditation quiz](#) can be particularly useful here, and the [WFDF decision trees](#) can be useful in helping to resolve calls.

Fouls and Body Contact

Fouling and body contact can be a problem for many players new to Ultimate, particularly to those coming from other sports that involve more contact. Preventative measures are important when coaching new and improving players when teaching defensive techniques.

Certain individuals may cause problems simply due to lack of coordination, which can be assisted by well thought out defensive drills. More problematic are players that display a lack of self-control in their choices, and repeatedly initiate body contact or dangerous play.

It is important that all players are encouraged to call fouls during training (for instance in targeted scrimmages, see 'managing teams' above). A team environment where fouls are not simply tolerated will discourage this behaviour by individuals, but further intervention may be needed. If a player continues to be a problem then it may be necessary to engage them individually (see 'managing individuals' above).

Players that watch a lot of ultimate online may also be unaware that sometimes they are watching ultimate played to a different ruleset. In particular some of the details about contact occurring after a D player has contacted the disc are different between USAU and WFDF rules. We play WFDF rules. Moreover, AUDL employs different rules still, which may lead to confusion, particularly for less experienced players that have watched AUDL games.

Attitude problems

Negative attitude towards teammates or opponents can have a profound impact on others' enjoyment of Ultimate, both at trainings and tournaments. Often issues with attitude arise in highly competitive situations such as at tournaments; a person may also be experiencing stresses outside of Ultimate, that affect their behaviour.

Negative attitude can manifest in a number of ways and does not necessarily affect others, but when it does coaches and captains ought to intervene. For example, discourage conspicuous demonstration of anger or frustration that is directed at other players. Other attitude issues might arise around responses to calls, inappropriate celebrations, provoking opposing players, physical or verbal confrontation of other players or officials and rude or disrespectful verbal communication, body language or gesturing.

Managing attitude problems is particularly difficult because often tempers are already high when a problem occurs. Conversations around these issues need to be raised with care and sensitivity, and often displays of poor attitude should be discussed and followed up after the event, instead of (or as well as) at the time.

Many of these issues can be helped by having a [spirit captain](#) to diffuse problems as they arise at tournaments. Captains, coaches and spirit captains should monitor problem players and have one-on-one discussions where necessary to address specific issues. Referring these players to the [BE CALM strategy](#) on the WFDF website, which may help some individuals to improve their attitude and consequently their enjoyment of the sport.