



The Origins of Ultimate in Ottawa

A Short History from the 1980s

Originally penned by Brian Guthrie, 1986

*Added to over the years by Brian Guthrie, Marcus Brady,
Craig Fielding & Keith Whyte*

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Summary: Five Boys With Disc Fever

As with the birth of any grand “institution”, the origins of Ultimate in Ottawa were the result of many actions by many people over many years. A capsule summary:

- In 1984-1986, Marcus Brady and Brian Guthrie got together, started pick-up, organized traveling teams, cajoled new recruits and conceived the league.
- In 1985-1988, Keith Whyte and Craig Fielding brought in Zonker passion and extra organizational skills to solidify not only the league, but tournament play and “spirit of beyond the game”.
- In the late 1980s, Jack Web added new ideas and leagues to the mélange, providing diversity to the Ottawa Ultimate scene that guaranteed its long-term survival.

These five organizers each came from different disc backgrounds. Brian Guthrie was active in Toronto in all sorts of disc sports including freestyle and golf. Marcus Brady developed an intermural league at McGill, that morphed into a Canadian team entry into the Worlds in Switzerland in 1984. Meanwhile, in a Swiss youth hostel, Keith Whyte got the disc bug while gazing at the Alps. Craig Fielding came out of nowhere, armed with incredible analytic and organizational skills. Jack Webb showed up from Elgin Street, providing a singular passion to create great new things.

And of course, these guys were backed by a whole cadre of keen, key people:

- John Atkinson (the “Grappler”) organized a pivotal pickup game on June 21, 2004 (summer solstice).
- Mark Cuddy and Steve Montague were the league’s first Director and Assistant Director.
- John Baenziger and Mike Davis were first year organizers and team captains.
- Max Miner published the early Ottawa Ultimate Review.
- Cliff Youdale, Jamie Wildgen, Mandy Hockey and Shawne Clarke were vital players and strategists in both the league and traveling teams.

In 1984, Marcus Brady and Brian Guthrie met, not all by fate, but by design. Like “only children”, both were literally combing the parks and green spaces of Ottawa, looking for someone, anyone to play with. Brady was riding along the Riverside Drive bike path when he saw Guthrie and a few buddies playing pick-up. He veered off the path, dropped his bike, and joined in.

Brady, the passionate assertor, and Guthrie, the thoughtful organizer, made perfect partners. In 1985 and 1986 they pulled together pickup games, did demos on Parliament Hill & Roughriders' games, and organized kamikaze teams to travel to tournaments in the North-East U.S. To cut down on travel, they invented No Borders, asking the Americans to come to us. They helped pull together a Canadian team for the 1986 Worlds in England, and organized the first Canadian Nationals -- in Ottawa in 1987.

Tired of mere "pickup", Guthrie held a league organizing meeting at his home in November 1985, with a bunch of keeners representing four-teams-worth of players. Keith Whyte and Craig Fielding showed up, claiming to have a full (fifth) team. (Little did the others know that the Screaming Yellow Zonkers were yet a glint in the eye of Whyte & Fielding. And little did anybody know that, over the years, the Zonkers would emerge into an Ottawa Ultimate institution unto itself.)

These organizers and friends developed some basic league principles and guidelines. League play started in May 1986, every Tuesday night off Riverside Drive. From the original five teams, the league grew every year thereafter. Jack Webb started a fall league and challenged the founders to think out of the box re organization. Fielding took over coordinating the league, with a cadre of Zonkers playing support roles. Guthrie & Brady handed off No Borders to Whyte, who proceeded to run it for almost two decades, turning it into one of the premier "must go to" tournaments on the continent.

All in all, many people and circumstances led to the development of Ultimate in Ottawa. The events of the 1980s laid an incredibly strong cornerstone, and as a result, we now have one of the strongest Ultimate communities in the world.

[1.] Several Species of Small Furry Animals Gathered Together in a Park Grooving With a Disc

Throughout the early 1980's, five people (Brian Guthrie, Marcus Brady, Keith Whyte, Craig Fielding and Jack Webb) were all wondering aimlessly and independently around an Ottawa, looking for anyone to play this very unfamiliar game called Ultimate. Invented in New Jersey in 1967, and played seriously in the USA, Ultimate had only superficially touched Canada and Ottawa.

A pivotal event occurred on Friday June 21, 1984, considered by some (at least in the *Bruce & the Usuals* camp) to be the start of Ultimate in Ottawa. Mark Cuddy and John Atkinson (later known as "*The Grappler*"), invited a bunch of friends to a summer solstice party at Vincent Massey Park. After hamburgers and before star gazing, the group, in its semi-sober state, decided to try some Ultimate. Guthrie briefed the gathering on the rules, they went at it, and had a hoot. At the end of the evening, they said: "*Hey that was a blast. Let's play again next week!*"

They agreed to meet on Riverside Drive across from the hospital (but closer to Bank Street than the current sites). Over the summer the "*Usuals*" played a total of three or four Tuesday evenings of incredibly poor quality Ultimate, typically with 10-15 people per night.

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to Guthrie, Cuddy, Atkinson et al, Marcus Brady was playing across town at the National Defense Medical Centre with some High School buddies (including Mike's Davis & Adair, Tony's Boyd & Heacock).

Previously, Brady had started an intramural ultimate league at McGill, and then expanded it all into a more competitive team that traveled to Massachusetts and Vermont. He was also a part of a cobbled-together group seven guys from McGill -- plus two Torontonians -- who represented Canada at World Championships in Lucerne, Switzerland, in the fall of 1984.

[2.] Pick Up: Brady Meets Guthrie

In the fall of 1984, a major step in the evolution of Ottawa Ultimate occurred: Brady met Guthrie.

Brady was (like Guthrie) desperately cruising the bike paths and parks for disc-sign. After hounding local joggers for information on the rumored “Riverside disc players”, Brady learned they played on Tuesday night in front of the Riverside Hospital. The following Tuesday, he veered off the bike path, crashed into the turf, and went gaga. “What? What? What?” he said. “Ultimate?! Ultimate in... Ottawa? Well I’m a deli *&*^%\$#%\$#”

A week later, Marcus brought his crew called the “Bisons” (friends from high-school and scientists from the National Research Council - NRC) to play against and with Guthrie’s engineer buddies. Regular Tuesday night pickup off Riverside Drive emerged.

There it started. Marcus the ferocious met Brian the facilitator, and ***the Ultimate mass in Ottawa went critical.*** Brian solicited more players and made brochures. Marcus badgered friends, bribed students in his U. of Ottawa biology labs, and literally pulled people off the bike path to play. Brady and Guthrie didn’t know it at the time, but a vital partnership had just begun.

The first March Meltdown was held at Glebe Collegiate in March of 1985. Although the field comprised mostly Ottawa players, a bunch of Canadian National Team players from Toronto and Montreal also showed up.

That spring, they sent recruitment flyers everywhere. They coerced people from work. They got coverage in the Ottawa Citizen, and air time on CBC Radio. Brady and Guthrie fed off each other with Ultimate energy.

By the summer of 1985, pickup was a regular thing. They played on Parliament Hill several times (including the second March Meltdown in 1986). They toured the city’s schools, holding demos for students and Phys. Ed. teachers. They even did a demo at an Ottawa Rough-Riders game at half-time. (Quote from a drunken fan in the urinals afterwards: “*You guys are a hell of a lot better at completing passes than the Riders!*”)

The organizing gang found enough people to go on mercy-missions to the States to get their butts kicked by the Yanks, loving every minute of it. They thought they were getting good. With some glee, the Ottawa crowd challenged the hippie freestylers from Toronto to a game in Lansdowne Park during one of their Orange Crush Freestyle Tours. (**Ottawa was** crushed -- showing the value of disk skills!)

In the summer of 1985 with great bravado, Brady & Guthrie announced the “*First Canadian Ultimate Nationals*” (subtitled that first year as “*No Borders Ultimate*”) – held at the RA Centre on Riverside Drive. To make up for our lack of skill, the Ottawa organizers aimed at

creativity and organization... blow-up toys for field markers (ducks, dogs and floaty rings) and hot-dogs on the field.

Six US teams (from Upstate New York and Vermont?), plus Ottawa and North Bay showed up... (North Bay? Where the hell did they come from? -- They'd been playing "Frisbee football" for four years, unbeknownst to the rest of the world!) Held in the middle of the second hottest & driest summer on record, Brady was up to his organizational best, including hounding the RA Centre and the City to water the field with trucks just before the first pull.

[3.] A League Evolves

In November 1985, a bunch of people got together in Guthrie's living room to consider a league and to figure out how to get a second type of organic growth in the sport in Ottawa. Brady and Guthrie were still the ring-leaders, and all their buddies showed up at the meeting. Mark Cuddy, John Atkinson, Steve Montague, Mike Davis, John Baenziger, amongst others, came forward to help.

Two "dark horses" also showed up: Keith Whyte and Craig Fielding. Nobody knew them -- Keith and Craig had heard rumors about the Tuesday night pickup through the grapevine and photos in the Citizen. They talked about their team (called the "*Creaming Yellowish Tokers*"?)... "*Been together for months*". Keith had "*played for years in Europe*". Craig "*had it all organized*". Really, they had almost no players at the time. But of course, in the following spring, they showed up with a great team (plus): the *Screaming Yellow Zonkers* had been born.

It became apparent that Fielding & Whyte had more skills and motivation for organizing than even Brady & Guthrie. A new critical mass and leadership was born. Fielding and Whyte would ensure the longer term sustainability of the league.

So at the November 1985 meeting, it was agreed to field five teams. Captains and assistant captains were chosen. Mark Cuddy was league Director, with Steve Montague as assistant. They wrote the OCULT rules, with spirit of the game and bottom-up control being cornerstones of the city league philosophy. The emphasis was not on competitiveness, but on participation by all -- maximizing the appeal of the league to the "great unwashed".

Ottawa City League Ultimate League, Thing (OCULT)

From the League guidelines & principles (penned in November 1985)...

Philosophy:

- "*The teams through their leaders players are responsible for making the majority of league decisions.*"
- "*There will be minimal direction to teams from the league coordinator or other individuals.*"

Commentary from B. Guthrie (1998): The league must continually make all efforts practicable to allow for **bottom-up** decision-making from its players. This is a natural offshoot of *spirit of the game*.

A month later (December 1985), the captains divided the list of 50-60 players into the five teams. The league was born. OCULT. *Ottawa City Ultimate League, Thing.*¹ In May 1986, league play started on Riverside Drive every Tuesday night. The gender split was 5-2. Some teams got sponsorship to pay for shirts. Some teams didn't even have shirts. Everybody knew everybody. Spirit rained supreme.

OCULT 1986 Team Line-Up:

Team Name	Captain	Asst. Captain	Colour
Bruce & the Usuals	Brian Guthrie	Steve Montague	Maroon
Disc Drive	John Atkinson	Myrna Monck	Orange
Discguys	Mike Davis	Richard LeCompte	Green
Revolution	John Baenziger	Roger Fortin	Powder Blue
Screaming Yellow Zonkers	Keith Whyte	Craig Fielding	(Need you ask?)

OCULT Official 1986 Standings:

Team	W	L	T	Pts.	GF	GA
Bruce & the Usuals	10	2	0	20	173	118
Revolution	8	4	0	16	151	138
Disc Drive	6	6	0	12	149	145
Discguys	4	8	0	8	139	162
Screaming Yellow Zonkers	2	10	0	4	126	175

Semi-Finals: **Revolution** defeats Disc Drive (15-11)

Finals: **Usuals** defeat Revolution (23-22)

24-Cup **Discguys** defeat Zonkers

So Bruce squeaked out a win, and won the first league trophy. (The *Godzilla* part of the trophy (built by Guthrie) came out of a garbage can on Powell Ave.)

¹ Thanks for the last word in OCULT ("Thing") goes to Kevin Smyth (aka Mr. Acronym).

[4.] On the Competitive Side

Over the years 1984 through 1990, the competitive teams traveled to the North-East U.S. and continued to get pummeled. Many players represented Ottawa in these tournaments, and at No Borders, plus the Canadian Nationals. Some of these early “pioneers” included:

Andy Hebert	Keith Whyte	Phil Atwood
Brian Guthrie	Ken Darkowitch	Phil Kennis
Brian Morrison	Kevin Smyth	Phil Roger
Cliff Youdale	Marcus Brady	Rob Bohnen
Craig Fielding	Mark Cuddy	Rod Nicholls
Dave Pelletier	Max Miner	Sam Armstrong
Frank Hegmann	Mike Davis	Steve Montague (“The Slime”)
Jamie Wildgen	Mike Gagnon	Steve Penny (“Wheels”)
Joe Playfair	Mike (“Puke Fake”) Kelly	Tim Hockey
John Atkinson (“The Grappler”)	Mike Scofield	Tony Boyd
John Baenziger	Owen Caves	Tony Heacock

In the summer of 1986, Brady and Guthrie pulled a Canadian team together for the World’s in Colchester, England. Brady, Guthrie and Mike Davis represented Ottawa. Other Canadian players came from Montreal, Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver.

In the 1980’s, other Canadian organizations came out of the woodwork (Toronto, Calgary, Vancouver, North Bay) and a national presence evolved. In 1987, Brady and Guthrie again teamed up to organize the very first Canadian National championships, held in Ottawa at St. Paul’s on Main Street. At that time, led by Chris Lowcock from Toronto, DisCanada, a national organization was started. It was the predecessor to CUPA, and was developed with lots of input and participation from the Ottawa folks.

In 1986, Guthrie organized the second “*No Borders*” at Parc du Lac-Leamy in Hull. *No Borders* continues today, and under Keith Whyte has became a cornerstone of Ottawa Ultimate.

B. Guthrie / 1986