

The story of Staples Ultimate...

While Columbia High School is credited with writing the 1st official rules of Ultimate and spreading the game to neighboring schools, Staples High School in Westport, Connecticut, was the 1st school outside of New Jersey to launch an Ultimate team.

The Staples story began with Al Jolley, a 1960 graduate of Columbia High and Wesleyan University (and Rutgers), who began teaching mathematics at Staples in 1966. When Ultimate took off at Columbia, Jolley's sister, Audrey, was still attending school there and sent her brother a copy of the 1970 rules. Jolley saw the Columbia players during a visit home in 1971.

When I got a copy of the rules to Ultimate Frisbee and shared them with my student friends, we quickly became avid Ultimate players, recalled Jolley, who not only spread the game at Staples, but to the local Boy Scouts and a youth fellowship group as well.

By 1971, the Staples group was playing on an unkempt, unmowed field adjacent to the high school. When the Staples players tried playing on a grass field used by the girls field hockey team, they were chased off by girls brandishing sticks at them.

Still, they persevered, playing coed Ultimate 3 afternoons a week into the late fall, until their Frisbees cracked due to the cold weather. By 1972, Jolly had helped create a uniform consisting of blue jeans and a tight blue turtleneck, with a Staples Frisbee monogram, SF, on the chest, and FriSbee on the back. They often wore red bandanas, or sweat bands, in their heads.

The students altered the Columbia version of the rules and came up with "Official Rules for Ultimate Frisbee (Staples version)". Those stated that Frisbee had to be "played on the honor system", and in that vein, that a defender must allow an uninterrupted flow by the player to the Frisbee. Blocks or interceptions were permitted, but defenders could not impede throwers by hitting their arms or the disk in their hands. Staples allowed an unlimited field width.

Staples had close ties with Weston High School and Jolley's group encouraged its neighbors to form an Ultimate team. The 1st known interscholastic Frisbee game in Connecticut took place in October, 1972 with Jane Elmer scoring several times as Staples won, 24-9.

After corresponding with Paul Schindel at Columbia High, Jolley helped set up the 1st interstate high school ultimate game in history. On April 14th, 1973, six months after the first intercollegiate game had pitted Rutgers against Princeton, Staples used its man to man defense to beat Columbia at home, 18 to 8. Sharon Appling scored a goal for Staples to become the 1st woman in history to score in an interstate ultimate game. In good fun, Staples proclaimed itself national champion.

Columbia played without 4 of its top players, including David Leiwant, who promised revenge in a rematch.

“Several weeks later, Columbia came back with its four missing players, including Leiwant, and mopped the field with us”, recalled Ed Davis of Staples.

The Staples class of 1974 included Ron Kaufman, who later that year formed a team at Brown University, and Davis, and Dan Buckley, a.k.a. Buck Danley, who founded the University of Connecticut UConn team. “My incentive was to use it as an excuse to skip an economics lecture”, Davis recalled.

By 1977, the ultimate Frisbee newsletter reported that UConn probably plays more games in a semester than most teams play in a year. UConn played 31 intercollegiate games during the 1976 77 season. During that stretch, the team ended Rutgers 48 game winning streak.

Meanwhile, Staples’ grad Greg Mead formed a team at the University of Pennsylvania, while Bob Lacy helped build the Wesleyan team, The Bees, which later became known as the Nietzsche Factor. In 1976, Buckley and Kaufman founded the Westport Ultimate Frisbee team, WUFT, and created a round-robin summer tournament called “Westport Ultimate Frisbee Festival of Flight”. The festival featured teams from UConn, Brown, and Westport. and was played at the Staples Athletic Fields.

Buckley later played on the East Coast All Stars in the 1976 World Championship at the Rose Bowl, and the Dukes, the 1st club team in the state of Connecticut. Founded in 1979 by UConn players Torrey Deuce Hack and Brian Harpo Toal, the dukes were dedicated to the living memory of Hunter S. Thompson and Uncle Duke of Doonesbury fame. One of the more substantial club teams of the 1980s and 90s, the Dukes stayed together on and off for more than 25 years.

Jolley continued to coach the Staples team into the late 1970s until issues with the school administration over insurance and other matters led to the dissolution of an organized team.

Photo:

1972 Staples team, left to right, Al Jolly coach, Dan Buckley, Duncan Heath, Dave Abrams, Bob Kay, Jane Elmer, Mark Hartman, George Patterson, and Davis, Sharon Epling, Doug Griffith, Mark Miller, Bob Lacy, Mike Nash, Ernie Ferrari, holding banner, Mike Mahar, Rob Gassman.