

Gentlepersons Have a Fling at Ultimate Frisbee article.docx

Bill: This article which I've attached as scan image and as ascii file, is from the National Observer in 1973. I want you to evaluate this as an expert in the field of PR exposure and audience participation, tell me how many impressions this article likely garnered and any other information about how the publicity for it would have been received.

Chat: This is a remarkably important piece of publicity in the early history of Ultimate. From a public relations standpoint, it was almost certainly one of the most influential articles ever written about the game during its formative years.

1. Estimated Number of Impressions

The key fact is that this article appeared in the **National Observer**, a national weekly newspaper published by Dow Jones. In 1973, the paper's circulation had grown to approximately **560,000 copies per week**.

Newspapers in the early 1970s enjoyed very high "pass-along" readership rates. A single copy was often read by multiple people in homes, offices, schools, libraries, waiting rooms, and colleges. A conservative multiplier for a publication such as the National Observer would be **2.0 to 2.5 readers per copy**, while some media historians would argue for as high as 3 readers per copy.

Estimated readership:

Measure	Estimate
Paid circulation	~560,000

Measure

Estimate

Conservative readership (2 readers/copy) ~1.1 million impressions

Moderate estimate (2.5 readers/copy) ~1.4 million impressions

High estimate (3 readers/copy) ~1.7 million impressions

My best estimate:

1.2 to 1.5 million impressions.

For a sport that, in 1973, was still largely confined to a handful of New Jersey and Connecticut high schools, this represented an extraordinary level of exposure.

2. Public Relations Value

From a modern PR perspective, the article scores exceptionally well.

A. National Legitimization

The article appeared in a respected national newspaper published by Dow Jones rather than in a youth magazine or local paper.

The headline:

"Gentlepersons Have a Fling at Ultimate Frisbee"

instantly tells readers:

- this is a new phenomenon;
- it is socially acceptable;
- adults should take it seriously.

The article repeatedly refers to Ultimate as a **team sport**, which in 1973 was itself news.

That distinction cannot be overstated. Before this point, Frisbee was primarily perceived as:

- beach recreation,
- backyard play,
- counterculture amusement.

The article says, in effect:

"No, this is an organized athletic activity."

That is a major rebranding event.

3. Messages Most Likely to Resonate With Readers

Several themes would have appealed strongly to 1973 audiences.

"Anybody can play"

The article stresses repeatedly that:

- there are no cuts,
- girls participate,
- teachers play,
- students join simply because they enjoy it.

During the early 1970s—an era skeptical of authority and traditional institutions—this message fit perfectly with broader cultural currents.

"A sport without referees"

The self-officiating aspect would have fascinated readers. The article emphasizes that players call fouls on themselves and describes Ultimate as a "gentleman's and gentlewoman's game."

This probably struck readers as:

- idealistic,
- refreshing,
- almost utopian.

In PR language, Ultimate was being positioned as a **values-based sport**, not merely a recreational activity.

That remains one of the game's strongest brand attributes fifty years later.

"High-achieving students"

The article specifically notes that Ultimate attracts "top students" and that the Staples team has a high GPA.

This was enormously important.

Many adults in 1973 still associated Frisbees with hippies, idleness, or campus unrest. By emphasizing academic excellence, the story reassured parents, teachers, and school administrators.

The implied message was:

"This isn't juvenile nonsense. Smart kids are doing this."

4. Likely Immediate Effects

I would expect this article to have generated:

Short-term

- inquiries from schools around the country;
- requests for rules from Columbia High School (the article prints an address where rules could be ordered for ten cents).
- increased media coverage in local newspapers;

- greater legitimacy for existing teams.

Medium-term

The article almost certainly contributed to:

- formation of new high school teams;
- expansion onto college campuses;
- increased interest among physical education teachers;
- broader acceptance by school administrations.

Because the article appeared only four years after Ultimate's invention, it reached readers during the precise period when a new sport either dies or spreads.

5. Overall Historical Assessment

As a sports historian and PR analyst, I would rate this article:

Category	Rating
National reach	A+
Credibility of source	A+
Positive framing	A
Influence on adoption	A+
Historical importance	A+

I would argue that this article belongs among the **foundational publicity documents in the history of Ultimate Frisbee**, alongside:

1. the original Columbia High School rule sheets,
2. early New Jersey newspaper coverage,

3. the first collegiate articles,
4. early Wham-O promotional materials.

For a sport with perhaps only a few hundred active players nationwide in 1973, exposure to well over a million readers was an astonishing amplification—probably increasing public awareness of Ultimate by an order of magnitude.

From a PR perspective, this was an extraordinary success.