

Background:

In 2008 the UPA adopted a gender equity policy (see Appendix I) to ensure that UPA coverage and promotion of women's divisions was equal to that of the corresponding men's division, as well as to encourage outside partners to do the same, with the aim of growing the number of female athletes in the sport. While the promotion and coverage of women athletes has grown considerably since then, and additional targeted outreach programs to increase participation have been implemented, there remain discrepancies in coverage by both USAU and its broadcast partners, as well as other issues of concern for proponents of gender equity.

In 6 out of the 9 broadcast events of the last two years, the women's division has had fewer total games streamed (3/9), fewer games for the larger audience of ESPN3 (4/9) and/or fewer games from later elimination rounds in the tournament as compared to the men's division (2/9) (see Appendix II). Even though USAU reaffirmed the gender equity policy in 2013 and specifically pledged to supplement coverage of the women's division in cases where media partners did not do so (Appendix I), only in 1 out of 4 instances where ESPN had unequal coverage of men's and women's games did an endemic media partner cover more women's games than men's games to equalize the coverage. It is also often the case that when scheduling constraints preclude both divisions from having the same round covered, the later men's division round is covered (Appendix II), which serves to better showcase that division's top level of play, as later round games are usually closer.

These discrepancies, and a lack of understanding of the process by which such decisions are made, have led to dissatisfaction from players and women's advocates that are being aired in private and public forums and resulting in negative perceptions about how well USAU is adhering to its own policy. In addition to media coverage, there is a sense that decisions about competition structure are made largely by focusing on what is best for the men's/boy's division, often at a cost to growth of the women's/girl's division. As USAU frames other important decisions as being based in the gender equity policy, it is critical that the organization's members perceive USAU to be doing the utmost to promote gender equity in all of its decisions.

To address this problem, we propose the formation of a gender equity ombudsgroup (GEO), to both act as a sounding board for USAU on matters of gender equity, and to be an independent voice that can communicate externally about the ways in which USAU is advancing gender equity. This would include highlighting positive examples of gender equity (e.g. Appendix III). USAU would have control over the composition of the GEO (although it would be important that the group include members perceived to be "independent" of USAU). The USAU communications team would work together with the GEO to ensure that communications were factually correct, complete, and did not violate any confidentiality agreements. By being privy to some of the information about how the media contracts are negotiated, this group would be able to understand and communicate externally what is and isn't under USAU's control, or, potentially, make suggestions about what tradeoffs are preferable in various circumstances. We envision that this group would be consulted on decisions regarding media coverage of USAU events, as well as major changes to competition structure, so that the group could fulfill its role of both advising and communicating those decisions.

Proposal wording:

For the dual purposes of advising USAU on matters relating to gender equity, as well as being an independent voice communicating to the Ultimate community at large about the ways in which USAU is advancing gender equity, the USAU will form a gender equity ombudsgroup (GEO). The GEO will have access to how decisions that impact gender equity are being made at USAU, will be a sounding board for USAU during decision-making processes, and will communicate to the community at large, as an independent voice, about how USAU programs and policies are advancing gender equity.

Pros/Cons:

Pros:

- USAU will receive additional thoughtful input and suggestions about policies and programs that impact gender equity or the gender equity policy.
- USAU policies that promote gender equity will have an additional platform from which to be recognized.
- The community at large will feel that USAU is taking a positive step towards strengthening its commitment to gender equity.
- Maintaining itself on the forefront of gender equity may position USAU especially well in the eyes of the US Olympic Committee.

Cons:

- Consulting such a group may feel like an added administrative burden, although the parameters for engaging the group can be designed to minimize this burden.

Financial Implications:

None

Conclusion:

USAU can continue to position itself at the forefront of NGBs with regard to gender equity – a position that will also be useful for ongoing and future USOC relationships (the IOC has already expressed that gender equity was something they liked about WFDFs application). This proposal is also somewhat analogous to the system in place for assuring Title IX compliance: Title IX mandates that institutions or other recipients of federal funds designate at least one employee as a Title IX coordinator to oversee compliance efforts.

While outreach programs that encourage participation by girls and women are part of the solution to growing women's participation in Ultimate, media exposure serves to create role models for younger players, and equity of coverage assures them that Ultimate is unique in the world of sports in promoting female athletes. As Ultimate grows and establishes itself as a visible and viable option for all athletes, other opportunities for national and international promotion will occur. Coverage on ESPN is just the beginning of the discussion. We believe it is important to have a group such as this one in place to deal proactively with any concerns regarding gender equity, so that the community as a whole can enthusiastically promote our sport as every new opportunity arises.

Peri Kurshan (*USAU Women's Club Division Council Rep & former USAU BoD President*)

DeAnna Ball (*USAU BoD*)

Josh Seamon (*USAU BoD*)

Ness Fajardo (*USAU BoD*)

Gwen Ambler (*Former USAU BoD Vice President*)

Michelle Ng (*USAU Women's Club Division Council Rep & former USAU College Athlete & Competition Programs Manager*)

Heather Ann Brauer (*USAU National Girls Outreach Director*)

Zara Cadoux (*Chair of the USAU Girls Ultimate Movement Working Group*)

Tiina Booth (*USAU Coaching Instructor*)

Charlie Mercer (*USAU Women's Division NW Regional Coordinator*)

Kath Ratcliff (*Current 2-time Women's Division National Champion*)

Appendix I. Gender Equity Policy and BoD statement

The gender equity policy, first approved by the UPA Board in 2008, was most recently updated in January 2013. The following is the version approved by the USA Ultimate Board (emphasis added):

“In an attempt to strengthen the Ultimate community and ensure that the sport of Ultimate remains an inclusive and welcoming sport for female athletes, USA Ultimate endorses a policy of gender equity. **USA Ultimate will ensure that USA Ultimate coverage and promotion of women's divisions is equal to that of the corresponding men's division**, and encourage outside partners and vendors to achieve gender equity in their coverage of and marketing to Ultimate. As long as the number of female players lags behind the number of male players, USA Ultimate will implement targeted outreach programs that strive to increase the number of female players.

USA Ultimate, in order to promote and encourage the growth of female play in USA Ultimate competition, recommends the creation of comparable teams of each gender. In situations of unequal opportunity, reasonable accommodations should be made to include female participants.”

Statement from the USA Ultimate Board of Directors (Jan 2013) (emphasis added):

“Given goal number one in our new strategic plan, (Increase the visibility of the Ultimate) the board supports the staff's efforts to work with national broadcast partners and other vendors to maximize the overall exposure the sport receives, build strong long-term relationships with those partners, and prove to them that Ultimate is a commercially viable product they will want to have on their various networks. **If, despite our encouragement to cover all divisions, the wishes or mandates of these external partners leads to more broadcast exposure for one division at our showcase events, we intend to supplement that exposure with additional partners interested in providing video or streaming coverage of the other divisions.**”

Appendix II. Recent USA Ultimate Broadcast Schedules

2013

Event	Division	Total			ESPN3			NGN/UltiW			Finals			Semis			Quarters			P-Quarters			Pool Play		
		M	W	X	M	W	X	M	W	X	M	W	X	M	W	X	M	W	X	M	W	X	M	W	X
D-I Nationals	College	3	3	--	3	3	--	--	--	--	1	1	--	2	2	--	0	0	--	0	0	--	0	0	--
US Open	Club	7	6	4	3	2	2	4	4	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	--	--	--	--	--	--	4	3	1 [#]
Pro Flight Finale	Club	3 [^]	3 [^]	0	--	--	--	3	3	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	--	--	--	2	1	0
Nationals	Club	8	8	5	3	2	2	5	6	3	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	1 [*]	0	1	1	0	2	2	1

[^]Initially scheduled to broadcast 6 men's games and 2 women's games; was changed at the event due to USA Ultimate request

[#]Exhibition match between Team USA and Team Colombia (i.e., not club teams)

^{*}Pro-flight qualifying game

2014

Event	Division	Total			ESPN3			NGN/UltiW			Finals			Semis			Quarters			P-Quarters			Pool Play		
		M	W	X	M	W	X	M	W	X	M	W	X	M	W	X	M	W	X	M	W	X	M	W	X
D-I Nationals	College	7	7	--	3	3	--	4	4	--	1	1	--	2	2	--	1	1	--	0	0	--	3	3	--
US Open	Club	7	6	2	3	2	2	4	4	0	1	1	1	2	2	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	4	3	0
Pro-Elite Challenge	Club	4	4	0	--	--	--	4	4	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	--	--	--	2	2	0
Pro Flight Finale	Club	4	4	0	--	--	--	4	4	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	--	--	--	2	2	0
Nationals	Club	6	5	2	2	1	1	4	4	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1 [*]	0	1	0	0	1	1	0

^{*}Pro-flight qualifying game

Summary: At 6 out of 9 broadcast events (67%) in 2013 and 2014, the women's division had fewer total games streamed (3/9), fewer games for the larger audience of ESPN3 (4/9) and/or fewer games from later elimination rounds in the tournament as compared to the men's division (2/9). In 1 out of 4 instances (25%) where ESPN had unequal coverage of men's and women's games an endemic media partner covered more women's games than men's games to balance the number of games streamed. ESPN has provided equal coverage to the men's and women's division at college nationals every year.

Appendix III. USA Ultimate Magazine Covers 2012-2014

Issue	Men's Cover	Women's Cover	Mixed Cover
2012 Spring		X (action)	
2012 Summer	X		
2012 Fall	X (action)		
2012 Winter		X	
2013 Spring	X (action)		
2013 Summer		X (action)	
2013 Fall			X
2013 Winter		X	
2014 Spring	X (historical)		
2014 Summer		X	
2014 Fall		X (action; youth)	
2014 Winter	X (action)		
TOTAL:	5 (3 action)	6 (3 action)	1

Summary: Over the past 12 issues, 6 USA Ultimate magazine covers (50%) have featured women's division players and teams. There has been an equal number of covers primarily highlighting a woman's play on the field as a man's play (3 action shots each).