

JCC/Pikesville Ultimate Frisbee Leagues Combine Middos, Exercise and Competition
By Brett Weil

Frisbee may be just thought of as a game played in the park with your dog occasionally, but when the word "ultimate" is added, it becomes something much, much bigger. Ultimate frisbee, also known as just ultimate, was created in 1968 by a group of high school students in Maplewood, N.J. Two teams essentially play very athletic keep away until one team scores catching the disc in the other team's end zone.

For Pikesville-area youth, ultimate is not only a serious and competitive sport, but also offers a unique sense of sportsmanship and community to those involved. As a recreational sport run in partnership with the JCC and completely *shomer Shabbos*, the Pikesville Ultimate youth leagues exploded to over 70 players this year.

BOYS DIVISION RECAP

In the most hotly contested championship in the four year history of the Pikesville Boys Ultimate Frisbee league, Ring of Fire narrowly bested Grey Duck 8-7 in sudden death overtime on Wed. May 24.

The boys division, which included 7 sessions, had over 50 participants this year, divided up into two divisions: the Sports Boosters Classic Clinic for grades 1-3 that focused on skill-building and scrimmaging, and the M&T Elite League for grades 4-6 which had 7 competitive teams. In addition, a girls division with nearly 20 players, schooled elementary-aged girls in the basics of throwing, catching and field positioning. The players developed their skills learning different throws and increased their accuracy as the season progressed. They also practiced some strategies on the field with the vertical stack, learned how to cut and play defense.

Coaches came from Towson University's club ultimate team and were vetted through background checks prior to the season. The M&T Elite league featured 2 sessions of skills and evaluations to balance the teams. Sessions 3-6 included skills and drills as well as two competitive games each week, to determine playoff seedings. After the round-robin schedule concluded, an all-star game was played which allowed some of the better players to hone their craft against a more consistent level of competition.

Even when the playoffs started, good sportsmanship was the rule and not the exception even though play became more competitive and "high stakes." As a recreational sport run in partnership with the JCC and completely *shomer Shabbos*, the league has open registration but drew heavily from local Jewish day schools. Coaches focused on giving the kids a positive athletic experience and modeling and teaching good *middos*. Winning is a salient but secondary goal. Rather, the primary focus on helping to develop solid, responsible athletes who become menschen.

To that end, the coaches and parents were very proud of all of the winners of the **Ethan Kadish "Chazak"/Be Strong award** for integrity on the field, hard work and improvement. Ethan Kadish is a Jewish boy from Cincinnati, OH who got struck by lightning while teaching others to play ultimate frisbee several years ago while 12 years old at summer camp. He has many medical treatments and he and his family have demonstrated admirable perseverance while going through this challenge. Close to \$700 was donated for his ongoing annual medical expenses to his charity "Team Ethan" from registrations and parent donations. Ultimate stresses a code of conduct called Spirit of the Game which tied in perfectly with the traditional Boy-to-Mentsch core curriculum of Conflict Resolution,

Empathy, Communicating without Anger and Being Part of a Team – and creating the Chazak award fit in perfectly with the ideal of playing hard but within appropriate guidelines.

The award recipients from each team and coach comments are as follows:

Nosson Horwitz - Ring of Fire - Nosson showed great decision making, spirit and perseverance during our run to the championship. He's always joked around with his teammates and lifted their spirits. He showed a lot of heart during the season and dug the team out of a lot of holes.

Yisrael Yair – Rhino - Even though he was a great player on the field he also had the best attitude towards other players and the game as a whole.

Rafi Lerner - Grey Duck - Rafi is recognized for his hard work, good spirit, and appreciation towards his teammates and coaches.

Yair Ziffer - Black Tide - Yair had one of the most consistently positive attitudes on team. When foul calls were made against him, he never argued and would often say non-contest. He played hard all the time though not yet the most developed in his skills. Yair was very receptive to instruction and was proactive in asking what to do in certain situations.

Elan Vogelstein - Johnny Bravo - Elan was selected for having the best spirit and for focusing on having fun.

Didi Sebbag – Pandamonium - Didi was always very spirited, especially focused on playing the game and never the score. Didi also was very open and willing to receive advice on his throws.

Avi Bookman – Spidermonkeys - Avi got everyone in the team involved ready and together in the stack. Also showed good sportsmanship on and off the field.

Ruxton Smith – Clinic - Ruxton is a kind young man who worked well with every boy on the field. Ruxton did everything he could to try make everyone feel a part of the "team". He's a good Ultimate player and very humble.

Gav Mirkin – Clinic - Gav came in full of doubt but kept working hard and became a terrific little cutter and learned to read the disc well! We love his never give up attitude!!

The playoffs and final were a hotly contested affair. Following the regular season results, Santa Barbara Black Tide captured the #1 seed while second place ended in a three-way tie between Portland Rhino, Minnesota Grey Duck and North Carolina Ring of Fire. Playoff seeding was settled by a statistical tiebreaker (goals against) with Ring of Fire being dropped down to the #4-7 pool. Yet it was Ring of Fire, lead by Yosef Chaim Weil and Nosson Horwitz, that won a 3-game play in and beat the #1 seed in semis to earn an unlikely spot in the finals.

The final was one of the most competitive games in the history of the Pikesville boys league and the most thrilling denouement. Grey Duck, led by Aaron Luxenburg and Yechezkal Newman, and Ring of Fire battled back and forth, matching point for point until half time where Grey Duck took a 5-4 lead. Grey Duck then extended its lead by scoring first out of half-time. Ring of Fire remained calm under the pressure, and took advantage of the mistakes that Grey Duck made in order to comeback and tie the score as regulation play expired. The teams continued battling into the evening in a sudden death

situation (a.k.a. "Universe Point"). Drives went back and forth with each team coming close to scoring multiple times. Eventually, Yosef Chaim Weil of Ring found Lucas Elms Kim in the end zone for the game winner to capture the title 8-7.

The following week, all participants were treated to an hour jump and kosher pizza party at Skyzone in Timonium. Players all received an appropriate award, recognizing their strengths. League leaders included Aaron Luxenburg with 22 assists (touchdown throws), Yechezkal Newman with 26 goals and Dani Ocken with 27 defensive blocks. There was a surprise for the champion team in that Noah Saul, a Jewish player with the "real" North Carolina Ring of Fire, had heard about the performance of the namesake team, and sent a congratulatory letter to the "junior" Ring, which was read aloud to all of the players to inspire them to work hard and believe in their own abilities.

Saul wrote: **Winning takes a great deal of strength, determination and perseverance, and your road to the championship proves that you excelled in each. To come in as the 4 seed, win a 3-game play in, beat the 1 seed in semis and win finals on universe point takes a lot of heart. You should all be very proud!**

I am sure along the way there were tough times, moments in which maybe you let doubt creep into your minds, unsure if you would emerge victorious. But hopefully you remained determined in the face of adversity and never let your belief in yourselves or your teammates falter. Every great achievement in Ultimate and in life starts with belief in yourselves.

The greater the challenge in front of you, the greater the opportunity to accomplish something amazing and push your own limits. So I urge you as you grow and continue to pursue Ultimate and other endeavors, believe in yourselves, face your challenges head on, and never be afraid to fail.

Ultimate Frisbee is about working together with your teammates to push yourselves to new heights. The challenges you face and overcome on the field will help prepare you for the challenges in your everyday life. Always believe in yourselves, no matter what the odds.

GIRLS DIVISION RECAP

The girls league this year had 19 athletes that were split into four teams: Bluejay's Foot, Thunder Berries, Tigers, Strawberry Toads. Some of the girls came to the season with experience playing ultimate, while others were trying it out for the first time. There were 7 sessions where players worked on skills, cooperation, and game play. The players developed their skills learning different throws and increased their accuracy as the season progressed. They also practiced some strategies on the field with the vertical stack, learned how to cut and play defense. After working on drills each day, the girls would put their skills into action through playing in a game or two. As the season drew to a close, the coaches saw a lot of progress in the understanding and ability level as the girls played longer games and were successful with throw completions and scoring points.

Beyond just learning the technical aspect of playing ultimate, the coaches spent time on developing relationships between the girls as a large group and individually on the teams. By doing this, the players had more of a connection which helped when they were playing on the field. They also worked on learning the spirit of the game, practicing good sportsmanship, and respect for each other, even if they won or lost.

The girls had a lot of fun participating in the league and improved their ultimate skills while building character and making new friends. The coaches really enjoyed working with these players with everyone working toward mutual encouragement of each participant in a positive environment.

The Ethan Kadish award winner was **Kimie Stal** for her hard work, great attitude on the field, willingness to help out her teammates and her ability as a player.

Editor – please see links to pictures below. Can you put those in the body of the article? Please give photo credit to Bob Hume. His stamp is on lower-right.

- [Nosson Horwitz pressure catch](#)
- [Yosef Chaim Weil in air](#)
- [Dani Ocken catch](#)
- [Leo Shiller Starger throw](#)
- [Yisrael Yair catch](#)

(Captions are unnecessary)



Also, please put link to the **full deck of photos** through a link or direct display (photo essay) or however you prefer.