

# ***SPIRIT OF THE Game***



# ***WFDF***



WORLD FLYING DISC FEDERATION



## **What is Spirit of the Game?**

Spirit of the Game is the mindful behavior practiced by players worldwide prior to, during and after a game. It encompasses attitudes and skills such as good knowledge and application of the rules, fair-mindedness, safe play and spatial awareness, clear and calm communication, and a positive and respectful attitude towards teammates, fans, and opponents, in a mutual effort to protect the basic joy of play.

## **Spirit fosters RELATIONSHIPS and builds RESPECT**

The essence of Spirit was born during the first matches by ultimate's creators. Playing against each other, they practiced the implicit honor system, where no one takes unfair advantages in a game played among friends.

Years later, as the sport expanded beyond close circles of friends, this idea was codified into the rules to help maintain this: to keep the focus on the joy of play instead of the "win at all costs" attitude that often arises in competitions.

To help grow Spirit, treat your opponents as you would treat a close friend and trust them to do the same. Take active steps: Get to know your opponents, appreciate them for playing against you and recognize their best plays. Your games and relationships will benefit from it.

## **Spirit supports SELF-REFEREEING, and vice versa!**

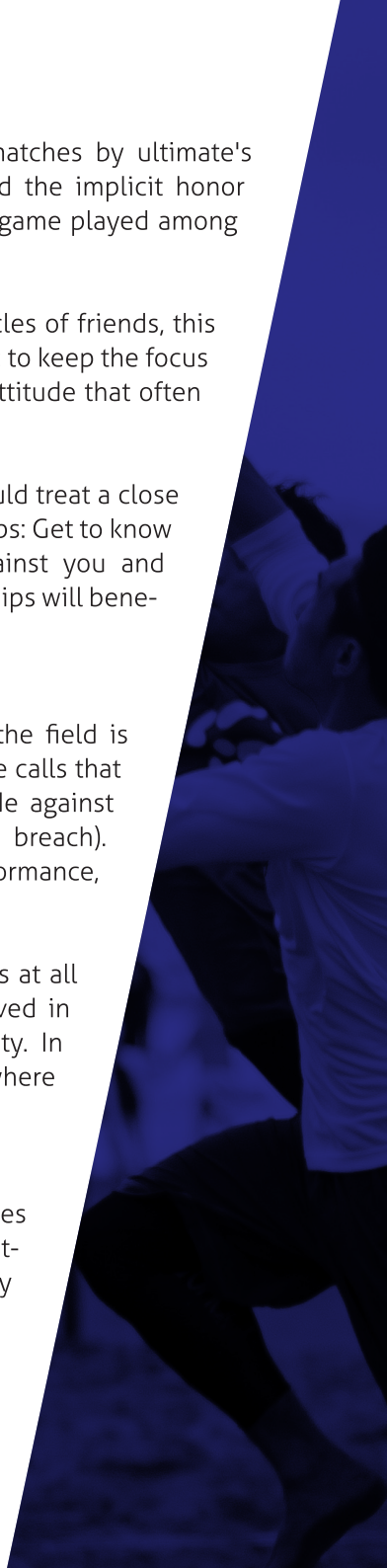
Spirit of the Game requires that every player on the field is knowledgeable of the rules and empowered to make calls that are honest and fair as well as accepting calls made against them (where they recognize they have caused a breach). Players are responsible for their behavior and performance, and self-refereeing makes this explicit.

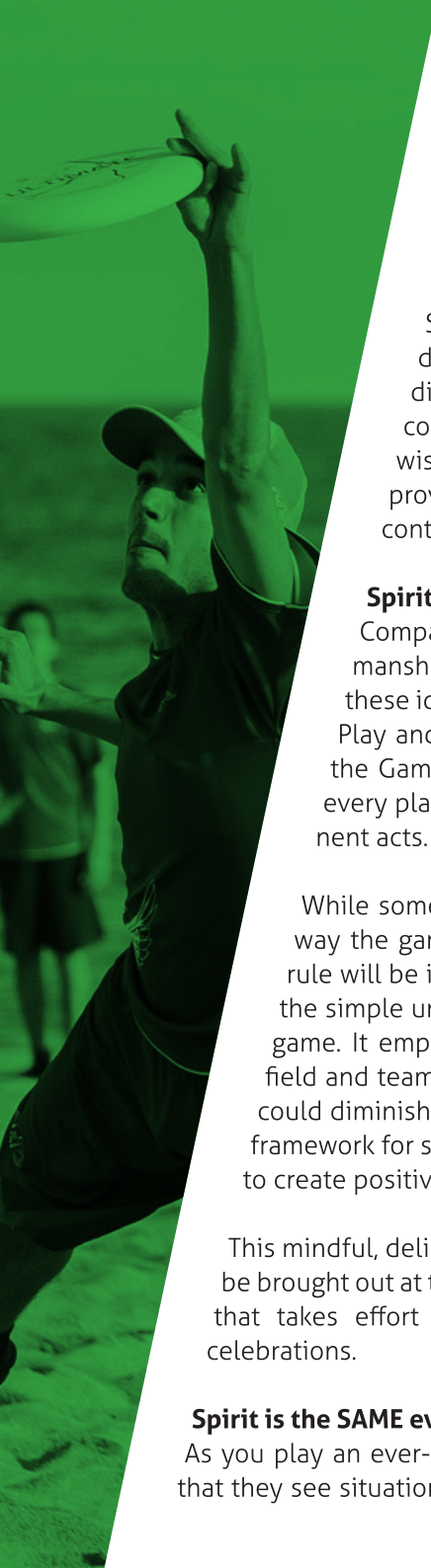
Done well, self-refereeing delivers the fairest games at all levels of competition, because every person involved in play is given the equal responsibility and authority. In turn, self-refereeing creates and fosters a culture where Spirit is put into practice and demonstrated.

## **Spirit starts with TRUST**

As in all sports, accidental actions that breach the rules can happen. When these are resolved fairly, it heightens our enjoyment of the game; handled unfairly, they cause frustration and more conflict.

A simple way to improve discussions on calls is to trust your opponents. When you start with trust, conversations naturally run smoother, and it sets a precedent for how future calls (by and against





you) will be resolved. By assuming they are making a call because they believe it to be legitimate and significant, you improve the chances of agreeing on the outcome. Always give them the benefit of the doubt.

Similarly, be understanding that others may disagree with your own call, and that the reason for disagreement may simply require a moment of consideration or calm explanation to resolve. If you wish to merit more trust in discussions, work on providing good evidence for why you are making or contesting the call.

### **Spirit is EXPECTED of EVERY PLAYER**

Comparisons between Spirit and Fair Play or Sportsmanship are common and it's reasonable to consider these ideas as similar. The big difference is that while Fair Play and Sportsmanship are desirable qualities, Spirit of the Game is an expected quality, one that is required of every player, regardless of level of play or how your opponent acts.

While some sports treat fouling intentionally as part of the way the game is played, Spirit sets the expectation that no rule will be intentionally broken or even bent. It goes beyond the simple understanding and honest application of rules in a game. It emphasizes communication between players on the field and team-to-team co-operation for solving situations that could diminish the opportunity for excellent play. It also gives a framework for showing appreciation for great play and pushes us to create positive interactions between players.

This mindful, deliberate behavior is not just something that should be brought out at times of potential conflict, but rather is something that takes effort from practice sessions through to post-game celebrations.

### **Spirit is the SAME even when it's DIFFERENT**

As you play an ever-wider variety of players and teams, you'll notice that they see situations and make calls differently than you would. For

example, some may be strict about travels but comfortable with increased physical contact, while others may be just the opposite. Or perhaps your team may make fewer calls in order not to disrupt the flow of your offense; but this doesn't give you the right to expect fewer calls that the other team legitimately feels are merited, nor does it give the other team license to foul you just because they "know" you may not call it. In such cases, it may take additional communication to balance these competing perspectives.

While Spirit of the Game itself does not change with level or environment of play, the context you're playing in may demand different behaviors.

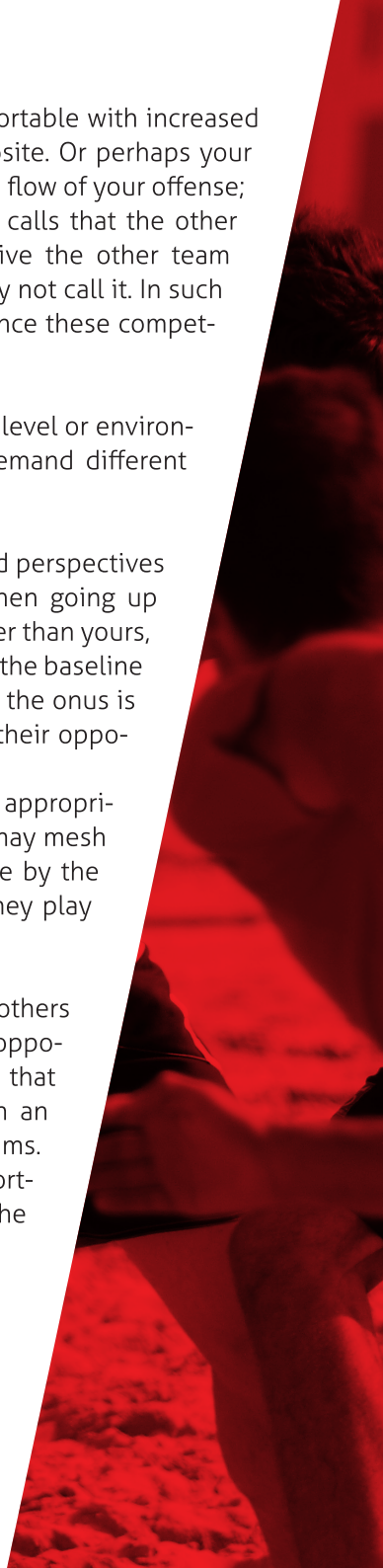
It's important to recognize that differing priorities and perspectives do not mean your opponents are less Spirited. When going up against a team whose comfort with physicality is lower than yours, your behavior should accommodate that. In ultimate, the baseline for initiating contact with another player is zero, and the onus is on the more physical team to adjust to the level of their opponents, keeping the game joyful for both.

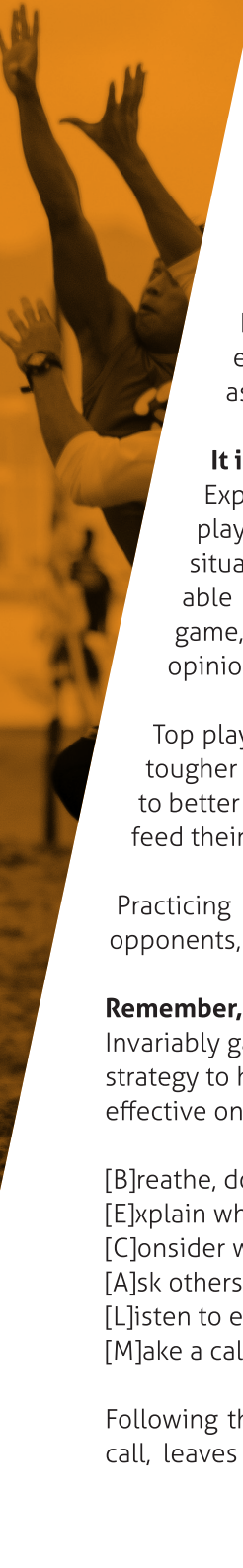
Work to avoid any negative assumptions, and when appropriate, be pro-active about discussing how play styles may mesh or conflict. Assess their Spirit by whether they abide by the rules, are respectful, and are consistent with how they play and make (or respond) to calls.

Some teams focus on the fun and joy of play while others emphasize playing their best regardless of who their opponent is. Both are important aspects of Spirit; a game that ends in a wide point spread can still be played in an extremely Spirited way to the enjoyment of both teams. Communicating and reaching a common place is important, especially when your opponents seem to be on the opposite side of the spectrum.

### **Spirit requires CONSISTENCY**

A key element to maximizing Spirit is consistency in one's behavior. Players should be consistent with the calls they make during all point, you should also make it early in the game. Alternatively, if you





don't feel the need for a call early in the game, the same call should be avoided later, even if the stakes are higher.

It's also important for players on a team to be consistent from player to player. Experienced teams often have a team code of conduct by which all players will abide. This kind of consistency benefits both teams because it makes it clear what to expect from each other as teammates and opponents, not just in one game but as the shared history between you grows.

### **It is a path towards MENTAL TOUGHNESS**

Experienced teams understand that practicing Spirit strengthens players and prepares them to play at their best under high-pressure situations, like during a windy point or after facing a dispute. Being able to communicate well, focusing on controllable elements of the game, and respecting and trusting your opponents even when their opinions disagree with yours -- all this allows you to play better.

Top players are often the most Spirited athletes on their teams. Mentally tougher and prepared, they take less time to shed negative energy, leading to better choices on the field. They reinvigorate their own team rather than feed their opponent's confidence.

Practicing Spirit improves not only your relationship with your team and opponents, but also aids in becoming a better athlete.

### **Remember, B.E. C.A.L.M.**

Invariably games have their tough moments with hard calls. BE CALM is a strategy to help players remember how to keep interactions positive and effective on the playing field.

[B]reathe, don't react straight away,  
[E]xplain what you think happened,  
[C]onsider what they think happened,  
[A]sk others for advice on perspective and rules,  
[L]isten to everyone, and  
[M]ake a call.

Following these steps in a timely manner, regardless of the outcome of the call, leaves players with a positive impression and fosters trust that both

parties focused on resolving the play in a fair manner. It takes practice. BE CALM.

### **Spirit can be MEASURED**

Spirit of the Game can largely be built from five foundations, which are used in both self-evaluation and opponent evaluation during official WFDF tournaments. These foundations are:

- 1) Rules knowledge and use,
- 2) Avoiding fouls and body contact,
- 3) Fair-mindedness,
- 4) Positive attitude and self-control, and
- 5) Communication.

The purposeful practice of each of these elements drives the growth of Spirited players and teams.

### **Final Thoughts**

Spirit of the Game has been a huge part of the growth and appeal of ultimate. It makes it attractive to beginners and keeps veterans active and involved. It fosters a culture of inclusiveness and equality. In 2015, the International Olympic Committee granted full recognition to WFDF and the sport of ultimate. Ultimate's unique Spirit of the Game and history of self-officiation were cited as two major deciding factors.

Working to become better at Spirit takes commitment, but both you and the game will become better as you improve.

Spirit is contagious, broadly applicable and often extends its influence beyond behavior on the field into the lives of players off the field as well, to the benefit of all.

### ***Special Thanks to the Following Contributors***

Paolo Chiappin, Patrick van der Valk, Travis Smith, Brian Gisel, Will Deaver, Daniel Raabe, Dario Lucisano, and the members of the WFDF Spirit of the Game committee.





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