

# Spirit of the Game Working Group

Report on recommendations to the MODS Board of Directors

## Working Group Members List

---

Rob Borges (Owner, chairperson)

Angela Perez

Bailey J Armstrong

Corey Draper

Daniel Plourde

Giuseppe Grande

Kari Bergmuller

# Introduction

---

The MODS board of directors created a working group to assess the state of spirit of the game (SOTG) across the organization's many ultimate-related programs and make recommendations with positive impact on spirit in the future. The working group is expected to dissolve following acceptance of the report by the MODS board of directors.

End-of-season survey results identified SOTG as a high priority for MODS members coming out of its flagship summer ultimate league. As such, the working group inferred that SOTG was not at an adequate level for MODS and has crafted a set of recommendations that we believe will improve spirit in both the short and long term.

The recommendations herein strive to accomplish two central goals of the working group:

1. To improve rules knowledge across all MODS members
2. To renew emphasis on SOTG as the cornerstone of ultimate

## List of Recommendations

---

The recommendations are sorted, based on the goal they are meant to achieve, and described below.

### Goal #1: Improving MODS members' rules knowledge

Rules knowledge is important for both the gameplay and spirited aspects of ultimate. Poor rules knowledge leads to improper play and a higher number of rules disputes. We believe that these recommendations can alleviate the number of rules-related disputes on the field while encouraging proper play of the sport.

***Recommendation: Use a list of "key rules" to develop a baseline for rules knowledge that all ultimate players should know***

The working group has created a list of five rules that we consider critical to ensure that ultimate is safe, fair, and enjoyable for all players. These rules were chosen because of their role in gameplay, their importance to players' safety, and their relative complexity.

The list of rules is:

- Reckless disregard for safety (Dangerous play) – Rule XVI-H-4, including the Dangerous Play Foul WUL Amendment
- Dispute arises on field (Conflict resolution) – Rule XVI-D
- Double team (10 foot rule) – Rule XIV-B-2
- Traveling – Rule XVI-J
- Pick – Rule XVI-I

## Implementation:

We recommend that these rules be summarized by a rules expert, to make them easily digestible by non-experts, and disseminated to all MODS members. Suggested dissemination methods include (but are not limited to):

- Featured “rules of the month” in newsletters and/or on the MODS website
- Develop a video series explaining these rules
- Provide the list of rules and their summaries to coaches and/or captains

### *Recommendation: Enforce a basic rules quiz as part of MODS memberships and an advanced rules quiz as part of captains’ requirements*

As suggested in the first recommendation, we believe that all players should be accountable for a basic level of knowledge in the sport they play. This recommendation ensures that all players are tested on their basic rules knowledge. Moreover, an advanced rules quiz ensures that at least one player on the team has a good understanding of the rarer cases, which should still help to limit the number of disputes.

## Implementation:

We recommend that the basic rules quiz is implemented as part of the online membership registration process through the MODS website. This quiz can be added as a step between signing waivers and paying memberships. MODS staff may consider repercussions for failed quizzes, such as increased membership fees or mandatory rules clinics.

We recommend that the advanced rules quiz take the place of the current captains’ rules quiz. The functionality would be similar – where a member must pass the quiz to take on the role of captain. Again, consequences for failed quizzes should be considered by MODS staff.

## Goal #2: Emphasizing spirit’s role in ultimate

Ultimate is a relatively young sport that is touted for its dependence on positivity. Spirit is integral to ultimate in ways that don’t relate to other sports. As the sport grows, more players enter MODS leagues without this understanding. Spirit and competitiveness are often improperly labeled as competing objectives. For example, “Spirit division” is often used to describe the lowest tier in a tournament, unfairly suggesting that winning and good spirit cannot coexist. These recommendations are intended as options for improving the perceived importance of spirit without denouncing the competitive nature of sport.

### *Recommendation: Mandate spirit captain as a role on all teams*

Spirit captains are a common feature on tournament teams. They are expected to know the rules and intervene in cases where disputes arise. We believe that spirit captains are a valuable addition to MODS leagues and should be required in addition to administrative captains.

## Implementation:

We recommend that, as part of the team registration process, captains must elect a spirit captain for their team. MODS staff should consider the qualifications for spirit captain eligibility and may consult outside resources, like Ultimate Canada, for further assistance.

### ***Recommendation: Add a “Spirit of the Game” page to the MODS website***

We believe that emphasizing spirit also provides an opportunity to give more spirit-related information. Adding a SOTG tab to the MODS website is an opportunity to feature spirit as a prominent part of MODS. The spirit page would be meant to promote good spirit and provide resources for teams to improve their spirit.

#### **Implementation:**

We recommend that MODS adds a SOTG tab to its website. The page would be used to share all spirit-related information with its members. Suggested items include (but are not limited to):

- Links to external information sources (such as other leagues, conflict resolution strategies, etc.)
- Links to rules documents
- Featured spirit stories
- Spirit scoring information

We also recommend that “spirit” never be misused as a term to denote lower divisions in tournaments or leagues, as it conflates strong spirit with poor athletic ability.

### ***Recommendation: Publish spirit scores***

We believe that competition is viewed as more important than spirit simply by virtue of the standings. Currently, MODS publishes games scores immediately as they are posted but hides each team’s spirit scores out of respect for privacy. This inhibits teams from knowing how they are performing, in terms of spirit, and suggests that the important result of the game is who won. This recommendation may be seen as controversial, but has precedence in multiple other organizations. Publishing scores immediately after both teams have posted scores would allow teams to recognize how their actions are perceived by opposing teams.

#### **Implementation:**

We recommend that spirit scores be added to published game scores. Further, summarized spirit scores should be featured on every league’s standings page (e.g. average spirit or sum of spirit scores) alongside the conventional standings categories.

### ***Recommendation: Provide an awesome spirit winner prize***

This “carrot” approach to improving spirit assumes that teams will perform better if they are incentivized to do so. We believe that major MODS leagues would benefit from having a highly desirable spirit prize by making teams want to earn higher scores, thus deterring un-spirited behaviour.

#### **Implementation:**

We recommend that MODS add major spirit prizes to their most popular/prominent leagues in addition to recognizing conventional league winners. In order to be effective, this prize should be more desirable than league winner prizes. MODS staff should consider prize options in light of the available budget. Examples of similar prizes from other leagues include:

- Custom “spirit winner” apparel (jerseys, shorts, etc.)
- Free registration in the following season

- Spirit winner party

***Recommendation: Implement spirit score minimum thresholds for recreational and competitive teams***

This “stick” approach to improving spirit applies to all teams representing MODS at ultimate events. We believe that those teams should be accountable, as representatives of MODS, for their behavior. On the competitive side, recent tournament results have featured multiple (though not all) Manitoba teams with disappointingly low spirit scores that reflect poorly on our players and organization. These teams enter into agreements with MODS as part of the high performance policy, which can be altered to include spirit score clauses. Similarly, recreational teams could be held accountable by adding minimum spirit score thresholds to major MODS leagues.

**Implementation:**

We recommend that the MODS board reviews the high performance policy to incorporate a spirit score clause. The MODS board should consider consequences for repeated poor spirit. Suggested ideas for this clause include (but are not limited to):

- Loss of tournament bid for repeated poor spirit scores
- Funding tied to spirit performance

We also recommend that MODS develop a policy for teams that have unsatisfactory spirit performance in recreational leagues. Suggested consequences for teams with poor spirit include (but are not limited to):

- Forced attendance for multiple members at the following year’s rules clinics
- Cashed performance bonds

***Recommendation: Encourage spirit of the game as a primary consideration for coaches***

Coaches have the ability to shape how players perceive their roles within the game. We believe that players, young and old, should be taught to play fairly and with a positive attitude. If an athlete learns the game in a way that balances the competitive and spirited aspects, then that player should uphold those beliefs as they continue through MODS programs.

**Implementation:**

We recommend that MODS develops tools for helping coaches teach the merits of spirit alongside competition. These tools should aim to eliminate the perception of spirit vs competition as a tug-of-war, and instead recognize that both can be taught simultaneously. Adult developmental leagues and youth programs should both be considered in this endeavor.

***Recommendation: Encourage the use of spirit circles***

This recommendation assumes that if MODS endorses certain behaviours, more teams may employ them. We believe that MODS can work to improve spirit by simply asking teams to do more things that are shown to improve spirit. Spirit circles are used by other organizations to encourage teams to interact with their opponents and provide an opportunity to talk about issues they’ve seen without affecting gameplay.

## Implementation:

We recommend that MODS feature spirit circles, and potentially other spirit-improving ideas, through their multiple communication channels. Should a SOTG page be developed for the website, this would be a strong candidate for something to host on the page.

### *Recommendation: Improve data collection and retention of spirit scores*

We believe that part of improving spirit involves normalizing it as a part of the game. Spirit scores can be tracked, recorded, and utilized in the same way that conventional scores can to monitor progress and gauge success.

## Implementation:

We recommend that MODS records spirit-related data and disseminates them as necessary to improve trend tracking and operations. This may include (but is not limited to):

- Monitoring teams' spirit scores over time (say, before/after an incident)
- Providing historical incident reports to the conduct committee

## Conclusion

---

The MODS Spirit of the Game Working Group provides this report to recommend actions for rectifying the perceived decline in SOTG in MODS programs. The report addresses rules knowledge and spirited behaviour as the two main contributors to improving spirit. Each recommendation is provided with context and implementation suggestions. We hope that this report leads to both short and long term improvements to spirit.