



The Ultimate Sleepover

The welcome mat is always out: just don't send it flying. **by Karen Telleen-Lawton**

Alumni crave Stanford's sports action—but season tickets, Cardinal-clad crowds and saturated tailgates are not for us. For our fix, my husband, Dave, and I became dedicated to a nearly fanless, fundless sport: Ultimate. No longer called Ultimate Frisbee (because the official flying disc of tournament play is the Discraft Ultrastar), this is a sport we embraced when our son, Tim, '05, joined the men's Ultimate B team. Seven times in the past five years, this remarkable group has competed near Santa Barbara, Calif., and camped in our home. The experience is like being invaded by Saint Bernards.

Ultimate, played on a soccer-like field, meshes the energy and team spirit of basketball with the sportsmanship of golf. Team members perform all the roles, including player, coach, referee and cheerleader. The game's vocabulary is thrillingly arcane: Tim plays kag, which means he can be relied upon for a lateral throw or backward pitch. His friend Falck is always open for a huck—a long throw, perhaps half the length of the field. During timeouts, sideline teammates gather between the opposing huddles, singing and laughing together to shield their teams' brewing plans. When a game between special rivals ends, the teams honor their opponents with an impromptu ballad.

The first time the team came home, Tim didn't want to saddle us with dinner for 34. But at 9:30 p.m. players were still cooking pasta and had only begun to rotate through every available eating spot. For subsequent visits, we began boiling water when the lead vehicle started to serpentine down the pass to Santa Barbara. We'd greet the first carload, learning names and hometowns. We'd greet the second carload but forget their names. More arrived, in waves, and we'd retreat upstairs. Emerging occasionally, we'd observe the Texas Hold'em, Risk and Stratego games that engulfed the kitchen and dining room tables.

Ultimate is played in all weather conditions, and several of "our" tournaments seemed to attract California's annual rainfall allotment. I posted signs directing players to strip off their muddy clothes in the garage. Then we hid in our bedroom until after the shifts of showering. We re-emerged to backpacks, sleeping bags, iPods, laptop computers and sweatshirts collaging every inch of carpet, tile and upholstery. Sock turds led to the garage, where a mound of athletic shoes festered. When we tired of adjusting running toilets, we convinced team members that the correct flushing technique required the same finesse they'd use to reach around an opponent for the disk.

On Sunday mornings, the team captains roused the players at 6 a.m. with the strident recordings of the LSJUMB, followed by canticles from Stanford's a cappella groups. We read our news-

paper, sneaking peaks at the dissolving chaos. What our home had slowly swallowed miraculously drained back into team members' cars. Team captains gave clean-up orders, doling out brooms and sponges. One year they misjudged the time and left a player named Matty B. vacuuming cheerfully.

In 2005 the team lost the first two games in a downpour. UC-Santa Barbara's synthetic fields had been strewn with tiny pieces of black plastic so that players might gain some traction. Phoenix-like, the team won five straight, earning the championship. The next fall, clearing up for practice on Roble Field, Tim discovered some black pellets in the bottom of his bag. His teammates relived their historic win as our senior son held one aloft. "They're little glory bits!" he exclaimed, grinning.

Revisiting the glory, the team won the 2006 qualifying weekend in early January. Two weeks later they racked up upset wins against UCLA's and Santa Cruz's A teams. After a close elimination-round loss to Duke A, Dave and I returned to a house emptied for the last time of all signs save the team's photo on my PC. The lid to one Indian basket went missing, but we found it later under the sofa—the victim of a huck. ■

KAREN TELLEEN-LAWTON, '78, is a writer whose first book, *Canyon Voices: Romancing The Nature of Rattlesnake Canyon*, will be published in September.



GEORGE DATES