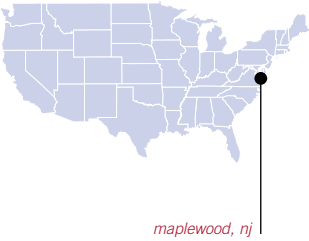


the pre-up years



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Nineteen sixty-eight was one of the most tumultuous and transforming years in the history of America and the world. ¶ In January, the North Vietnamese Tet offensive brought the battle from the jungles to the cities, an event seen as a major turning point for the American attitude toward the Vietnam War. ¶ On March 31, President Lyndon Johnson gave into political reality and announced that he would not seek a second term. Four days later, Dr. Martin Luther King was gunned down, triggering riots in 125 U.S. cities that left 46 dead and 20,000 arrested, and put 55,000 federal troops on the streets of America. ¶ Student protesters took over Columbia University in April, shutting the campus down. The Grateful Dead managed to get through the police guarding the gates and played a on the steps in the middle of the campus. ¶ On June 4, Bobby Kennedy was gunned down by Sirhan Sirhan after winning the California primary. In August, the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia with over 200,000 Warsaw Pact troops, crushing the so-called “Prague Spring.” Days later, at the Democratic National Convention in August, anti-war demonstrators clashed with the Chicago police, the U.S. Army and Illinois National Guardsmen over five days. When the convention was finally over, the Chicago police reported 589 arrests had been made and 119 police and 100 protesters were injured. Without Kennedy or Johnson as the Democratic presidential nominee, Richard Nixon defeated Hubert Humphrey in the November election. ¶ Radicalized by the war, Dr. King’s death and economic conditions at home, the civil rights movement turned increasingly away from non-violence and integration and toward self-defense and Black Power. At the summer Olympics in Mexico, U.S. sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their black-gloved fists as part of a Black Power salute during the “Star-Spangled Banner” at their medal ceremony. ¶ The world of music reflected these turbulent times. The Beatles visited India and released the year’s top album, the White Album. The Rolling Stones Beggar’s Banquet was moving up the charts. Simon & Garfunkel released The Graduate Soundtrack and the critically acclaimed Bookends. The rock musical Hair opened on Broadway. Cream disbanded after guitarist Eric Clapton heard the debut album from The Band, Music From Big Pink. ¶ Amid this furious pace of world events, most Americans were still going about their daily lives, working and living and playing, still trying to get by. In one small corner of the Northeast, the seeds of a new game – played with a Frisbee – were being planted.



In the summer of 1968, Joel Silver, a willful, talkative, highly intelligent teenager from South Orange, N.J., attended a summer program at the Mount Hermon School, a boarding school in Western Massachusetts now known as the Northfield Mount Hermon School. More than a camp, it was an educational enrichment program for college-bound high school students.

There, Jared Kass, a 21-year-old Amherst College student working as an assistant teacher in the English Department and a dormitory advisor, exposed Silver to a still evolving game played with a plastic disc. By that time, Frisbees, also known as Pluto Platters, had become fairly common in American homes, with the Wham-O Manufacturing Co. producing a variety of models, including the Professional model, which was introduced in 1964 as the first “high tech” model for the serious player, and the Master model, used for most of Ultimate’s early years.

Even before the summer of 1968, before the invention of the plastic Frisbee, people were playing games with flying discs. In *The Complete Book of Frisbee* Victor Malafronte documented how students at Kenyon College in Gambler, Ohio used a large size Oven-Ex cake pan to play a “two-hand touch” early version of Frisbee football as early as 1942. The game was created by brothers Bud and Tom Southard and dubbed “Aceball.” By 1950, one of the games was photographed for *Life* magazine by Elliot Elisofon.

Malafronte also found evidence of another game, involving “a plastic or metal serving tray” having cropped up at Amherst College in the early 1950s.

“In a letter to the editor, published in the January 1958 Amherst Alumni News, Peter Schrag ’53 describes this game, stating, ‘Rules have sprung up and although they vary, the game as now played is something like touch-tackle, each team trying to score goals by passing the tray down field. There are interceptions and I believe passing is unlimited. Thus a man may throw the Frisbee to a receiver who passes it to still another man. The opponents try to take over either by blocking the tray or intercepting it.’”

A decade later, Kass and his friends at Amherst – Bob Fein, Richard Jacobsen, Robert Marblestone, Steve Ward, Fred Hoxie, Gordon Murray and others – were playing a version of Frisbee football with a plastic disc. They played it in different locations around campus, in various quads and also near the “Social Dorms” where they lived. Hence, one variation was referred to as “Social Dorm Frisbee.”

“‘Social Dorm Frisbee’ was much more creative than the game of Frisbee football that I sometimes played with Jared and friends,” Ward recalled. “We played on an enclosed quadrangle with two brick dorm walls as goals. The rules: 1) No one can run with a Frisbee in hand; 2) A team scores a point when a Frisbee bounces off a Social Dorm wall or window and is not caught before it hits the ground; 3) If a Frisbee goes through an open window or ends up on the roof, the opposing team resumes play with a throw from the base of the Social Dorm wall they are defending; 4) The game does not stop when non-players (students, dates, college work crews) pass through the quad—to the players’ general consternation.”

In 1997, Willie Herndon, a math teacher, filmmaker and Ultimate player from St. Louis who fell in love with the game while a student at the University of Pennsylvania in the late 1970s, conducted a videotaped interview with Silver that has proven invaluable in understanding the history of this period. During this interview, Silver mentioned Kass’ role, prompting Herndon to follow up with an interview with Kass in 2003. During that interview, Kass explained how this early Frisbee game came about.

“When I arrived at Amherst College in 1965, it was a very poor social environment, and not just in the sense of being an all-male school, but also in the sense that it was a fairly competitive environment,” Kass told Herndon. “We were trying to figure out how to be friends at the same time as knowing that you’re in a hothouse, an academically competitive environment.

“There were a bunch of us who knew how to throw the Frisbee and we also played touch football....I think that it was probably really in our junior year (1967-68) that it kind of happened and jelled – when we shifted from sometimes playing touch football or sometimes kicking a soccer ball around to using the Frisbee in that way. There was a moment when we began to play a team game using a Frisbee.”

What Kass and his friends liked about their Frisbee game was its fluidity.

“One could not run with the Frisbee,” recalled Jacobsen. “One tried to throw it to teammates with the idea of getting it caught beyond the goal markers. The defending team could not strike the Frisbee holder but could race to knock down or catch a thrown Frisbee. If the pass was incomplete, the defender got the Frisbee where it fell.”

Added Kass: “I just think we understood that the beauty was to keep the Frisbee moving and that that’s what it was about. If you were running with it, then how could somebody stop you? It had to become a contact sport. So [we decided] it was okay to take a couple of steps to position yourself, but basically you couldn’t travel by running.”

The group often played anywhere from five to seven people per side, in a variety of locations on campus. They also played “to a set number of points,” Kass said. As with other pick-up games, “there were no referees,” Jacobsen added. “We relied on self-regulation. But no one was taking anything very seriously so there was little need to call infractions. There were few rules, only common sense and a spirit of fair play were needed.”

“I just remember one time running for a pass and leaping up in the air and just feeling the Frisbee making it into my hand and feeling the perfect synchrony and the joy of the moment, and as I landed I said to myself, ‘This is the *ultimate* game. This is the *ultimate* game.’”

One day while playing Frisbee on the green of the Webster circle behind Amherst’s Frost Library, he is not certain precisely when, Kass had an epiphany. It was an epiphany he would enjoy later in life while doing other things, like singing Jewish prayers. But on this particular day it came while he was running for the Frisbee toward a shimmering sets of trees that served as the goal line.

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That was it. He just uttered it once, to *himself*. He doesn’t recall telling his friends to use the term as a description for the game. By and large, his friends don’t even recall hearing the word “ultimate” in association with Frisbees.

To this day, Kass deflects any credit for inventing the game now known as “Ultimate,” which later took on the capital “U.”

“It’s not that the game came from me,” he said.

“It’s that the game came from the joy of life, and that was a moment when I discovered it. And that’s one of the particular moments that I was lucky enough to discover it and I think that that joy is part of who God is. That joy is something that’s trying to manifest itself in loving ways in the world in as many possible ways as it can.”

Indeed, over time, hundreds and thousands of others would share this same feeling. But Kass first began spreading the game that summer as a means of “having fun” at the Mount Hermon summer program. He cannot specifically recall Silver among the 20 or so kids in his dorm. Still, by Silver’s recollection, the group began playing a passing game involving a Frisbee on a green about a week or two into the program.

“As I got to know the guys on the floor, I could see that they

– Jared Kass

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didn’t have any good ways of relating to each other – besides listening to music...and drug-related activities that I was not supposed to know about,” Kass wrote in an e-mail elaborating on his interview with Herndon. “They were a good bunch of friendly, high-energy young men—but they didn’t know what to do with themselves. Many of them clearly came from highly competitive environments. Some had already developed an abrasive, competitive edge. Some seemed lonely. Some seemed bored. Getting them involved in a sport seemed like a good thing to do. But in my gut I knew that the game should not be overly competitive. It should simply be fun – and I knew just the game.

“But I also knew that I had to entice them.....which is why I opened with, “So, do any of you know how to play...’Ultimate?’”
For his part, Silver doesn’t recall Kass ever using the term “Ultimate,” just that the group played a Frisbee game of some sort.

On the field, Kass emphasized cooperation over competition.
“Someone would drop a pass. I could see the kid getting really pissed at himself, and I’d say, ‘Don’t worry about it. That’s what’s cool about this game because the mistakes are what allow the direction to change so fast.’ And so it began to give them a way to relax. Sometime somebody would take too many steps, and someone would start yelling, ‘You took too many steps,’ and I’d say, ‘Yeah, that’s right, but the most important thing is actually to keep the game going. So let’s not count steps, guys. Let’s try to just sort of self-regulate on this. Nobody’s gonna give you any trouble....”

Even though Kass taught the nascent game with passion and a teacher’s eye for inclusion and teamwork, it is possible that it might have died on the vine had it not been for the presence at the camp of Silver.
That fall, Kass returned to Amherst for his senior year, eventually moving on to graduate studies in psychology and higher education. He never pursued “the ultimate game” seriously. And it is possible he might have been lost to history had Silver not mentioned him during his interview with Herndon.

COLUMBIA HIGH SCHOOL AND THE INVENTION OF ULTIMATE FRISBEE

In the fall of 1968, not 1967 as has been reported in the classic accounts, Silver brought the Frisbee game back to Columbia High School in Maplewood, N.J., a three-year school where he was beginning his junior year. Located in Essex County and populated mostly by upper middle-class white kids, Columbia was considered one of the best high schools in the nation. In the mid-1960s, Mark Rudd graduated from Columbia High in the top 10 of his class. As head of the Columbia University branch of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), Rudd would go on to lead the student protests and the nine-day takeover of the university in 1968, and would later become involved with the Weathermen.

Silver was extremely influential in the Parnassian Society, a theatre group. He was also a member of both the Student Council and the school newspaper, *the columbia*, where he was second in command to his friend Bernard “Buzzy” Hellring, an extremely bright, well-liked guy whom Silver had known since before nursery school.

Silver possessed a creative mind and a blossoming reputation for pushing the limits with his mouth.
“Joel was an extremely powerful personality,” recalled Shelly Payson, who was two years younger than Silver. “People were either drawn to him or repelled by him. No one was neutral.”

By his own admission, Silver was no athlete. He swam a bit, but when he discovered Frisbee, he enjoyed it thoroughly.

“I was able to throw it pretty far, I was able to have a little more control than most,” Silver recalled in a lengthy interview with Herndon in Burbank, Calif. “I had an affinity for it. It wasn’t really a sport per se, it was a recreational activity, and I guess I liked the idea of making it into a sport.”

One day that fall, Silver, stood up at a Student Council meeting and said, “I move that a committee be formed to investigate the possibility of introducing Frisbee into the high school curriculum.”

“As a joke, the Council passed it,” Silver said.

Discussion of Frisbee continued in the Council throughout the year and into the spring, but it remained tongue-in-cheek. Still, discs were beginning to seep into the American consciousness, and members of *the columbia* had already been tossing a disc – a black 150-gram Wham-O, Master Tournament Model – during their lunch period on a big lawn on the East side of the school.

Together, Silver, Hellring and other members of the two groups began to play the Frisbee game originally learned by Silver at Mount Hermon. Still, there were questions. How similar to Frisbee football should the game be? Could you run with the



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“I really feel that it was myself and Buzzy Hellring and Jonny Hines who kind of put the game together and got it working and made it happen.”

– Joel Silver

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disc? If so, should you be able to tag the person who had it? Should there be a system of downs? Should there be a line of scrimmage?

Unlike Silver and Hellring, who were more nerdy, intellectual types, their friend Jonny Hines was a semi-

“He was a very gentle, unassuming guy who wouldn’t have hurt a fly,” Summers said. “I went over to them and the smaller guy took a swing at me. I knew I could’ve decked him, but the big guy was standing right there.”

– Ed Summers

jock. He played lots of baseball, touch football and basketball, watched pro and college sports of all types and was the sports editor at the newspaper. The three of them were together almost constantly, playing the board game *Risk* for hours on end. When Hines became involved in the Frisbee game in the fall and winter of 1968, he brought an athlete’s mentality, helping to change and adapt the game accordingly. Hines and, later, his friend Charles Leiwant, catalyzed debate and experimentation with certain elements and rules of basketball, soccer and hockey until the core group found what they felt was the proper mix. For example, whereas Kass told the students at Mount Hermon that they shouldn’t count the number of steps taken with possession of the Frisbee, the Columbia group ultimately decided that running with the Frisbee was forbidden.

A step and a half after a catch were permitted, and a pivot foot (like basketball) and a half-step for a throw were introduced. The foul (and re-throw) for a defender’s contact with the arm or hand of the thrower was also formalized from basketball (and similar to hockey’s “hacking” penalty) – and the foul for interference with the receiver from football. There was even lively discussion about whether to institute a contained goal area (as in soccer or hockey) or just have a football-like goal line, which was eventually settled on. But it was also agreed that under no circumstances could a goal be scored by stepping over the line without the Frisbee in hand.

“I really feel that it was myself and Buzzy Hellring and Jonny Hines who kind of put the game together and got it working and made it happen,” Silver said. (PQ)

“The credit belongs with Joel and then Buzzy primarily, and I’m happy to have been the third guy then to have come along and help move it forward,” Hines said. (Still, when the official “History” was written into the rules beginning in 1976, only Silver and Hellring would get official credit; Hines name was left out.)

A natural rivalry developed between the Council and the newspaper, fueled by the egos of Silver, Hellring and Gordon Chang, president of the Council.

“They were constantly teasing and taunting each other,” Payson recalled. “It was just a testosterone-driven competition.”

In the spring of 1969, *the columbia* staff challenged the Council to the first official game between the sides. Because the school was undergoing construction, the lawn where the students had previously played Frisbee was no longer available. That June, the big game was played in another grassy area between two coed teams. *The columbia* won, 11-7.

In the June 12 issue of *the columbia*, there ran the following headline: “Paper Snatches Frisbee Title.” Underneath was a photo of the triumphant *columbia* squad, including Hellring, Silver, the team captain who looked unnaturally stiff and proud holding out a Frisbee, and team members Fred Applegate, Mark Epstein and “star catcher” Steve Schwartz. An unidentified girl, who was said to have been “presented as an award to the coach by the winning team,” was also in the shot. Chang, “captain of the defeated Council team,” lay on the ground, symbolizing his team’s loss.

Silver and his friends had a lot of fun with their burgeoning activity. Alexander Osinski was the school’s first security guard; his job included checking lockers for drugs and Silver later referred to him as “the heat.” In an effort to ingratiate himself with the students, Osinski attended a Council meeting and explained that he was patrolling the area for their safety. The Frisbee players decided to make him their “General Manager” and he appeared in “official” newspaper and team photographs.

“I don’t think there are really any bad kids,” Osinski said in a 1983 newspaper interview. “By working with them and giving them a chance, they’ll turn out all right.”

Silver and the others also got a kick out of the small, funny-looking janitor whose name alone – Cono Pavone – made them laugh. He became the “Head Coach,” and he too appeared in team photos. Harvey J. Kukuk, the legendary yet fictional director of the IFA, Wham-O’s marketing arm, was also listed as a member of the Columbia team, though he was said to be “absent” from the first team photo.

Hellring continued to write tongue-in-cheek Frisbee stories and place ads for the team in the paper. In one, the paper reported that “the rise of Frisbee in Columbia high school is merely indicative of a world-wide trend, according to major national periodicals.” The story went on to cite a *Time* magazine article that recommended that the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. take their cue and henceforth “settle all disputes between the two with Frisbees instead of missiles.”

“It was fun for us,” Silver told Herndon. “We thought we were all so hip and so smart and so incredibly with it, that we used the Frisbee as kind of a symbol of running against everything else.

“There was a great polarization at my high school at that time. There were the radical kids, there were the jocks, there were a lot of different groups, and we just kind of crossed all the groups. And we all just said, ‘Fuck it, let’s just have a good time.’”

On June 21, 1969, Silver, contributing as a “Special Writer” for *The (Newark) Evening News*, introduced the sport to the people of New Jersey in a story entitled “Frisbee Flippers Form Teams.” The article appeared under a photo of several young men and women

reaching up to the sky for a disc, and above a critical review of a new album by John Lennon and Yoko Ono.

“There is a new sport at Columbia High School in Maplewood-frisbee,” the story proclaimed. “Every day, students from the 10th through 12th grades take part in the newly popular game. Though many may consider the sport to be immature, these high school students are joining the thousands of other people in the country who are enjoying the fun and exercise of the game.”

After briefly explaining what a “Frisbee” was, Silver elaborated on the game’s rules.

“The Columbia version of the game is played on a field with two goals about 40 to 50 yards apart. Each team, membering six or seven boys and girls, tries to pass the Frisbee from player to player and eventually cross the opposing goal line.

“Each goal scored equals one point. Team members are not permitted to walk or run with the Frisbee, but must instead try to complete a pass while other members are in motion.

“Opponents knocking down the disc while in flight receive possession of it. Any player trying to catch the Frisbee, but accidentally dropping it, loses possession for his team.”

THE PARKING LOT

By the summer of 1969, the now famous Columbia parking lot had been built. Down the hill from the school, the large, expansive lot is bounded on the east by a 12-foot drop that descends into a stream that runs into the Rahway River and on the west by a very high railroad embankment. Mercury vapor lights lighted it at night. When Silver, Hellring and Hines returned to school as seniors that fall, they began to use the lot as a meeting place. After a night at the movies or on a date, the Frisbee players would meet up there. Soon, it became known that a regular game could be found in the lot almost every weekend night and during vacations. Some players arrived in sneakers and sweats, others in stiff jeans and walking shoes.

“It was just a cool place to go,” Silver said. “In that era, there [were] no fast-food restaurants, there [were] no malls, there was no place to go hang out. You either had to go to somebody’s house or have a meal or something....Those years, ’68 and ’69 and ’70, it

might as well have been the ‘30s. It was a different time. You couldn’t rent a video and watch a video because there [were] no videos. There were only three television channels. There were no late movies....A lot of us had cars, but there was no real place to go. We might go to the movies, we might go to dinner, we might go out and hang out but then we could end up at the Frisbee lot together and just hang around and have fun.

“There were a lot of drugs around. A lot of people were smoking marijuana. There was a lot of drinking. But it wasn’t a community of stoners. It wasn’t that quality. We like the idea of this structured game and a structured team and a structured group all based around what was essentially a gag. It seemed funny to us, like a ‘Naked Gun’ movie, to take this game so seriously.”

Sometimes the boys would bring dates to the lot. Some of the girls played, others “would sit in the car and listen to the radio and schmooze,” Silver added.

“I used to spend so many weekend nights at the Frisbee field during my junior and senior high school years that my parents would kid and lament that my ‘only girlfriend was a Frisbee’ or that I would ‘marry a Frisbee,’” Hines recalled. “And they were not too thrilled when I ducked out of family Thanksgiving dinners early for a big match down at the lot.”

Hines also recalled that it got mighty cold at that lot on some January and February nights. So cold that the Frisbee sometimes shattered on impact with the pavement – especially when swatted down hard by the defense. No problem: the group got in touch with Wham-O and convinced the company – which was becoming enchanted with what the Columbia crowd was doing – to supply some boxes of Master Tournament gratis, to tide them through the winter.

“Hand pain from catching hard throws at close range on those cold nights was not something Wham-O could help with,” Hines added.

As the weeks and months passed, everything was not rosy in the lot, however. Local toughs and troublemakers sometimes drove through at high speeds – hassling the players and forcing them to scatter. Ed Summers, a 1972 Columbia High graduate, recalled one night when a “real big bruiser” – about 6-foot-2, 240-pounds – and a smaller guy got out of their car and attacked the No. 2 student in the class.



Lore velit am, vullametue
consequ smodiat, si tat.
Dui blan hendit volore
magnim vel eui tem

sidebar: the first official rules

In February 1970, Silver and Hellring decided to name the team the Columbia High School Varsity Frisbee Squad (CHSVFS) even though it had no official connection to the school (The squad would later refer to itself as the CHSVFT, with “Team” replacing “Squad.”) They designed sweatshirts, T-shirts and cards and began to institutionalize their “anti-sport.” Silver’s mother paid to have the sweatshirts made up and the players proudly wore them in the first “official” team photo.

“We had all this stuff that we thought made us so official,” Silver said. “And in those days, it was an effort to do that and we were so proud that we did it.”

In the spring of 1970, Silver, Hellring, Hines and their classmates graduated from Columbia. That summer, Silver and Hellring decided that the original rules should be republished in booklet form. Hellring, with Silver and Hines fine-tuning them, wrote the “2nd Edition” rules. This set included a provision for two 24-minute halves. The booklet cost 10 cents.

On Aug. 6, twenty-five years to the day after the U.S. dropped nuclear bombs on Hiroshima, Hines scaled the 12,399 foot Mount Fujiama in Japan and tossed a Frisbee into the 300 ft crater in an act of international Frisbee friendship.



“He was a very gentle, unassuming guy who wouldn’t have hurt a fly,” Summers said. “I went over to them and the smaller guy took a swing at me. I knew I could’ve decked him, but the big guy was standing right there.” (PULLOUT QUOTE)

Meanwhile, evolutions in the game continued to take place. At some point after watching the 1965 James Bond movie “Thunderball,” in which a skeet shooting scene takes place, Silver decided to use the term “pull” for the game’s opening throw-off.

In early 1970, Hellring suggested that they codify the “rules” of the new “anti-sport” they had invented.

Silver’s first thought was, “Why?” “We gotta do it, we gotta do it,” Hellring kept telling him.

“Okay, we should do it,” Silver said.

Finally, Hellring typed up the rules and dropped them off at Silver’s house, Silver recalled during a phone interview.

Sitting in the den of his parents’ home in South Orange, Silver then called Hellring on the phone.

“I think they’re pretty good,” Silver recalled Hellring saying. “But what do you think we should call it?” Hellring then suggested the name ‘Speed Frisbee.’

“It’s too silly to call it ‘Speed Frisbee.’ Speed’s not a cool name,” Silver told his friend.

“It’s the Ultimate in Frisbee,” Silver said. “Let’s call it Ultimate Frisbee.”

It appears possible that Silver may have subconsciously recalled the term “Ultimate” that Kass had given the game at Mount Hermon during the summer of 1968, though he maintains that he never heard Kass use the word. It is equally possible that the two men simply came up with the phrase independently. To this day, Silver and Hines both adamantly deny that Kass had anything to do with the naming of “Ultimate Frisbee.”

“He had nothing to do with naming the game,” Silver said of Kass. Indeed, Silver returned from Mount Hermon in 1968, but did not name the game “Ultimate Frisbee” until 1970, suggesting that Kass had no influence on how Silver came up with the name.

From Silver’s perspective in 1969, he wanted to make a distinction between Ultimate Frisbee and Guts, which at that time, and for years to come, was considered the premier Frisbee game. Generally played with two five-man teams standing 15 yards apart, the goal of guts is to make a throw with a great deal of force that the opposing team cannot catch cleanly. Scoring is contingent on the success or failure of the throwing team. A good throw, without a catch, results in a point for the throwing team and a bad throw results in a point for the receiving team.

Guts was invented in 1958 after two brothers, “Boots Bob” and John Healy, discovered a “Pluto Platter” in a store in Minneapolis and began tossing it around with several friends. The Healy brothers created the International Frisbee Tournament at Eagle Harbor, Mich., which later became the largest, and longest running, Frisbee event in the nation. Frisbee enthusiasts from around the nation made the pilgrimage each summer to Michigan to participate in a variety of events, including Distance, Accuracy, Maximum Time Aloft and Guts.

The Healy brothers founded the International Frisbee Association (IFA) in 1966 to help promote their annual



tournament. The brothers tongue-in-cheek approach to Frisbee was highlighted by the invention of the mysterious character Harvey J. Kukuk, who was later named the organization’s Executive Director. In Stancil Johnson’s seminal 1975 book *Frisbee*, a photograph taken from behind of an old man appears, with the tongue-in-cheek caption, “Only known existing photograph of Harvey J. Kukuk.”

“Steady” Ed Headrick, Wham-O’s Executive Vice President, liked the idea of the IFA so much, that he arranged with the Healy brothers to take over the operation of the IFA late in 1967 and use it as a promotional tool for Wham-O. In 1968, Headrick went one step further: he created the IFA Newsletter, which made the IFA visible to all ardent Frisbee enthusiasts.

“When you compare the tongue-in-cheek bantering described in...early newspaper articles about the IFT with the content of the IFA newsletters, you clearly see that Ed adopted the whole Healy Brother’s Frisbee culture, lock, stock, and barrel,” recalled Jim Palmeri, who introduced Ultimate to the Rochester Frisbee Club in the early 1970s and also invented double disc court and helped launch Frisbee Golf. “Ed took Harvey J. Kukuk and ran with it.”

Though Wham-O also did not own Guts, it viewed that sport as the true Frisbee sport, the one that might someday hit it big. The executives at Wham-O, who were a generation or two older than the Ultimate players of the time, also liked Guts because it did not require as much running as the new field sport that had come out of Columbia High School. In Guts, you could get drunk on beer and stand around throwing discs as hard as you could at your opponents. The rules to Guts were not copyrighted, either.

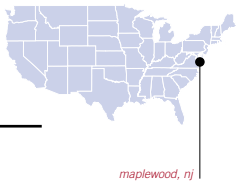
To Ultimate players like Silver, Hellring and Hines, Guts was boring, plain and simple. Using the newspaper’s equipment, they mimeographed copies of the rules to their new game under the heading “Ultimate Frisbee.” The only limit to the size of the field was that “The two goal lines must be parallel and should be somewhere between 40 and 60 yards apart, depending on the number of players.” There were no lateral boundaries, no allowance for pick or travel calls. The rules allowed for 20 or 30 players per side, but in actuality, the number was often whittled to seven. The end zones were unlimited.

book title

chapter title

geographic location
We will highlight the geographic locations that parts of the book occur in.

history of ultimate



In the summer of 1968, Joel Silver, a willful, talkative, highly intelligent teenager from South Orange, N.J., attended a summer program at the Mount Hermon School, a boarding school in Western Massachusetts now known as the Northfield Mount Hermon School. More than a camp, it was an educational enrichment program for college-bound high school students.

There, Jared Kass, a 21-year-old Amherst College student working as an assistant teacher in the English Department and a dormitory advisor, exposed Silver to a still evolving game played with a plastic disc. By that time, Frisbees, also known as Pluto Platters, had become fairly common in American homes, with the Wham-O Manufacturing Co. producing a variety of models, including the Professional model, which was introduced in 1964 as the first “high tech” model for the serious player, and the Master model, used for most of Ultimate’s early years.

Even before the summer of 1968, before the invention of the plastic Frisbee, people were playing games with flying discs. In *The Complete Book of Frisbee* Victor Malafronte documented how students at Kenyon College in Gambler, Ohio used a large size Oven-Ex cake pan to play a “two-hand touch” early version of Frisbee football as early as 1942. The game was created by brothers Bud and Tom Southard and dubbed “Aceball.” By 1950, one of the games was photographed for *Life* magazine by Elliot Elisofon.

Malafronte also found evidence of another game, involving “a plastic or metal serving tray” having cropped up at Amherst College in the early 1950s.

“In a letter to the editor, published in the January 1958 Amherst Alumni News, Peter Schrag '53 describes this game, stating, ‘Rules have sprung up and although they vary, the game as now played is something like touch-tackle, each team trying to score goals by passing the tray down field. There are interceptions and I believe passing is unlimited. Thus a man may throw the Frisbee to a receiver who passes it to still another man. The opponents try to take over either by blocking the tray or intercepting it.’”

A decade later, Kass and his friends at Amherst – Bob Fein, Richard Jacobsen, Robert Marblestone, Steve Ward, Fred Hoxie, Gordon Murray and others – were playing a version of Frisbee football with a plastic disc. They played it in different locations around campus, in various quads and also near the “Social Dorms” where they lived. Hence, one variation was referred to as “Social Dorm Frisbee.”

“‘Social Dorm Frisbee’ was much more creative than the game of Frisbee football that I sometimes played with Jared and friends,” Ward recalled. “We played on an enclosed quadrangle with two brick dorm walls as goals. The rules: 1) No on can run with a Frisbee in hand; 2) A team scores a point when a Frisbee bounces off a Social Dorm wall or window and is not caught before it hits the ground; 3) If a Frisbee goes through an open window or ends up on the roof, the opposing team resumes play with a throw from the base of the Social Dorm wall they are defending; 4) The game does not stop when non-players (students, dates, college work crews) pass through the quad—to the players’ general consternation.”

In 1997, Willie Herndon, a math teacher, filmmaker and Ultimate player from St. Louis who fell in love with the game while a student at the University of Pennsylvania in the late 1970s, conducted a videotaped interview with Silver that has proven invaluable in understanding the history of this period. During this interview, Silver mentioned Kass’ role, prompting Herndon to follow up with an interview with Kass in 2003. During that interview, Kass explained how this early Frisbee game came about.

“When I arrived at Amherst College in 1965, it was a very poor social environment, and not just in the sense of being an all-male school, but also in the sense that it was a fairly competitive environment,” Kass told Herndon. “We were trying to figure out how to be friends at the same time as knowing that you’re in a hothouse, an academically competitive environment.

“There were a bunch of us who knew how to throw the Frisbee and we also played touch football....I think that it was probably really in our junior year (1967-68) that it kind of happened and jelled – when we shifted from sometimes playing touch football or sometimes kicking a soccer ball around to using the Frisbee in that way. There was a moment when we began to play a team game using a Frisbee.”

What Kass and his friends liked about their Frisbee game was its fluidity.

“One could not run with the Frisbee,” recalled Jacobsen. “One tried to throw it to teammates with the idea of getting it caught beyond the goal markers. The defending team could not strike the Frisbee holder but could race to knock down or catch a thrown Frisbee. If the pass was incomplete, the defender got the Frisbee where it fell.”

Added Kass: “I just think we understood that the beauty was to keep the Frisbee moving and that that’s what it was about. If you were running with it, then how could somebody stop you? It had to become a contact sport. So [we decided] it was okay to take a couple of steps to position yourself, but basically you couldn’t travel by running.”

The group often played anywhere from five to seven people per side, in a variety of locations on campus. They also played “to a set number of points,” Kass said. As with other pick-up games, “there were no referees,” Jacobsen added. “We relied on self-regulation. But no one was taking anything very seriously so there was little need to call infractions. There were few rules, only common sense and a spirit of fair play were needed.”

one: the pre-upa years / 1969-1974

“I just remember one time running for a pass and leaping up in the air and just feeling the Frisbee making it into my hand and feeling the perfect synchrony and the joy of the moment, and as I landed I said to myself, ‘This is the **ultimate** game. This is the **ultimate** game.’”

pull quote system

One day while playing Frisbee on the green of the Webster circle behind Amherst’s Frost Library, he is not certain precisely when, Kass had an epiphany. It was an epiphany he would enjoy later in life while doing other things, like singing Jewish prayers. But on this particular day it came while he was running for the Frisbee toward a shimmering sets of trees that served as the goal line.

“I just remember one time running for a pass and leaping up in the air and just feeling the Frisbee making it into my hand and feeling the perfect synchrony and the joy of the moment, and as I landed I said to myself, “This is the *ultimate* game. This is the *ultimate* game.” (PQ)

That was it. He just uttered it once, to *himself*. He doesn’t recall telling his friends to use the term as a description for the game. By and large, his friends don’t even recall hearing the word “ultimate” in association with Frisbees.

To this day, Kass deflects any credit for inventing the game now known as “Ultimate,” which later took on the capital “U.”

“It’s not that the game came from me,” he said.

“It’s that the game came from the joy of life, and that was a moment when I discovered it. And that’s one of the particular moments that I was lucky enough to discover it and I think that that joy is part of who God is. That joy is something that’s trying to manifest itself in loving ways in the world in as many possible ways as it can.”

Indeed, over time, hundreds and thousands of others would share this same feeling. But Kass first began spreading the game that summer as a means of “having fun” at the Mount Hermon summer program. He cannot specifically recall Silver among the 20 or so kids in his dorm. Still, by Silver’s recollection, the group began playing a passing game involving a Frisbee on a green about a week or two into the program.

“As I got to know the guys on the floor, I could see that they

– Jared Kass

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chapter/page

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clipped photo

We will be using a clipped photo for every chapter’s intro spread.