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Members of the Ultimate Frisbee team prepare to charge the field. The men and women's ultimate teams combined for a 1-15 record last year.

Frisbee team moving on up

Ultimate team focuses on positive attitude despite lack of funding from the university

By Becky Kreuser
Staff writer

Battling a lack of funding and practice space from St. Thomas, experience, more practices and growing group chemistry has made UST Ultimate Frisbee a competitive and winning team.

"We had teams that would come up to us after games and say, 'Wow, you guys have improved a lot,'" said junior co-captain Rob Mooers.

The men and women's ultimate teams combined for a 1-15 record last year. This season, the men finished 10-30, improving with seven wins in the spring compared with three in the fall.

UST ultimate is centered on fun and love for the game. Moods are kept light by beginning practices with discussions of "life philosophies, favorite cereal brands or the advantages of different teeth-whitening systems," said senior co-captain and UST ultimate founder John Whiteman.

"We have everybody from computer science to business to biology," Whiteman said, "but with several things in common – a passion to play and be the best possible and a spirit to hold to the idealism of sportsmanship and friendship."

The team practices three to four days a week at city parks, open gyms and racquetball courts. St. Thomas has a lack of facilities for varsity sports, so club sports rarely get practice space on campus.

"We really developed a good sense of team," Mooers said, "and whenever you develop a good sense of team, you work harder to reach goals."

The players accomplished their main goal this year when they made it to regionals. They traveled to Iowa City in April and played teams from the University of Wisconsin-



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Rob Mooers, junior co-captain of the Ultimate Frisbee team, scans the field for an open teammate.

sin-Madison, which included the No. 4 ranked team of 270 nationally.

"It was an incredible feeling just to be there," Whiteman said, "having gone from literally no team to competing for a spot at nationals in just two years."

The season ended with the "Charity Bowl" tournament for cystic fibrosis at Luther the weekend of May 3. Whiteman credited the third place finish to great plays and team spirit.

Players who went to every tournament this year spent between \$250 and \$350. Although junior Aaron Johnson said it is "frustrating"

that the school did not help with funding, about 20 team members were willing to pay for ultimate out of their own pockets.

"We love the game and will pay the price to play it," Mooers said.

Ultimate is a relatively cheap sport, requiring only a disc, but money is needed to pay for tournament entry fees, jerseys, team parties, the annual team banquet, gas and hotels. St. Thomas has never helped fund ultimate frisbee, although the team is fairly confident that the school will provide funding beginning next year.

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"Our club started during a transition period for management of club sports at UST," Whiteman said. "It seemed to be we were 'lost in the shuffle' as new administrators took over. However, after this spring I believe we have finally been given the appropriate instructions and requirements for club sports."

Whiteman joked that the lack of money helped the team become closer. There were several times when all of the players stayed in one hotel room. Sometimes a host team provided facilities, but they also slept on the floors of doors and common areas around campuses.

"We try to fit as many people into each hotel room as possible to keep the cost down," Whiteman said. "Sharing one shower, one sink and two beds with 8 to 12 people really helps the team bond as well."

The team will lose four graduating seniors next year but is confident that it will continue to improve since most of its core players this year were sophomores and juniors.

"We had really strong game play from the freshmen and people who were new to disc this year," said junior Jason Wachter. "L.J. Sutar and Brad Ragozzino were key newcomers."

Whiteman said he is excited to see how the team does next year. He believes the players have grown enough to compete with almost any other team.

"The underclassmen coming into this program are going to have the time of their lives," Whiteman said, "and this team is going nowhere but up."

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