

Ultimate Frisbee, Palestine's Newest Sport



By Daniel Bannoura

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ltimate frisbee is a unique team sport that relies on a plastic disc, instead of a ball, and uses rules that combine elements of football, American football, and basketball – hence it is the *ultimate* sport! This non-contact sport is thrilling, fast-paced, and especially noted for self-officiation. Players call incurred fouls and mediate disagreements without a referee by means of a well-established ethos of mutual respect and honesty known as the “Spirit of the Game.” This deep-rooted culture of sportsmanship, the unique flight patterns of the disc, and the inclusion of men and women together on the field make ultimate frisbee a truly magnificent game, and a group called Ultimate Palestine is steadily spreading it throughout the country.

Ultimate Palestine was started in 2015 by a number of friends playing pick-up games in Beit Sahour. The group steadily expanded and developed, and in late 2017, Palestine joined more than 85 other countries in being recognized as a national member association of the World Flying Disc Federation (WFDF), the governing body of all flying-disc sports. This membership is crucial as it makes Palestine eligible to send club and national teams to compete in international championships under the Palestinian flag.

Today there are over 100 active Palestinian ultimate frisbee players who play mainly in Bethlehem and Ramallah. Ultimate Palestine's coaches lead practices in local schools, organize community events, and run annual tournaments that boast participation from Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line, as well as foreign players and delegations from neighboring countries. Ultimate Palestine is also a founding member of the MENA Ultimate Federation and has sent teams to compete in a number of regional championships

and tournaments, including the MENA Ultimate Club Championships. In the face of many political and economic obstacles, Ultimate Palestine's continuous expansion, regional leadership, and refusal to play into narratives of victimization are a testament to the passion and grit of the organization's athletes and the resilience of the Palestinian population as a whole.

Furthermore, Ultimate Palestine is making quite a significant impact on local communities. It is redefining social standards of gender equality as female athletes play alongside men and play an integral role in the leadership of Ultimate Palestine. In addition, the sport's culture of self-officiation has challenged players to develop dynamic communication and conflict-resolution skills. Unlike other sports where the player can either hide behind or blame a referee's decision, ultimate frisbee's concept of “Spirit of the Game” intentionally requires the competing players involved in the foul to communicate honestly, respectfully, and calmly to arrive at a mutually acceptable decision. While Palestinian youth have become accustomed to passively accepting injustice, ultimate frisbee is creating a paradigm shift by empowering these same youth to speak up for themselves, confidently and articulately raising objections to unfair calls while also being accountable for their own mistakes. The effect of this has been paramount! Beyond simply becoming better athletes, young Palestinian frisbee players are developing into responsible leaders and citizens who are able to communicate clearly and stand up for their rights.

The future of Ultimate Palestine is exhilarating. Locally, Ultimate Palestine is looking to further expand into new areas around Palestine,



Frisbee in Palestine.



Ultimate Palestine team.



especially in Jerusalem and Gaza, and to establish high school and university teams. As ultimate frisbee is projected to be admitted into the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles, Ultimate Palestine is building a sustainable youth and club infrastructure that produces competitive clubs and players, thus making ultimate frisbee a truly Palestinian sport. The organization is continuing its leadership in the region and actively seeks funding and sponsorships in order to send youth and club teams to regional and international tournaments.

To learn more about Ultimate Palestine, check out our website or find us on Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. Players of all skill levels are also welcome to attend our practices to experience this incredible sport and wonderful community.

Daniel Bannoura is the current president of Ultimate Palestine and coaches ultimate frisbee in the Bethlehem area. He is also an instructor in Islamic Studies at Bethlehem Bible College.



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