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COVER STORY

Frisbee fingering also a workout for legal mind



Alexander Drecun / Special to the Daily Journal

Eric S. Boorstin, an associate at Horvitz & Levy, is an Ultimate Frisbee enthusiast. He says the back-and-forth over foul calls in the game is reminiscent of courtroom battles.

By Henry Meier / Daily Journal Staff Writer

ENCINO — Racing around on a field, throwing a plastic disc and catching it acrobatically isn't an activity one typically associates with an appellate lawyer.

Yet that's exactly how Eric S. Boorstin, an associate at Horvitz & Levy LLP, spends the (admittedly little) free time he has.

A longtime devotee of Ultimate Frisbee — just “ultimate” for those in the know — Boorstin can usually be found at least once a week playing in competitive games in ultimate leagues around Los Angeles.

Ultimate pits two teams in a timed match or until one reaches an agreed upon number of points. Seven players usually comprise a team but that rule is also governed by individual league rules. A point is scored when a player successfully throws the disc to another player on his team in the scoring zone — the equivalent of a football end zone. When a player catches the disc on the field of play, he can no longer move and must remain stationary until he has passed the disc to a

teammate. Possession changes if a player throws an incomplete pass or if the other team intercepts the disc during flight. There is no stoppage in play unless a foul is called or a point is scored.

The sport often gets maligned as something a certain brand of tie-dye loving college student plays but Boorstin said ultimate lends itself to a lawyer's mind.

There is frequently a protracted dialogue between the offense and defense over foul calls with an explanation of the foul often required from the offensive player, which can be rebutted by an argument from the defensive player. If the opposing sides can't agree on the foul call, the disc is returned to its previous position on the field and play resumes.

Sound familiar?

“Focusing on the rules and what matters is a very important aspect of

the sport,” Boorstin said.

“Ultimate is a very collegial sport where players call their own fouls,” he said. “It's not about whether you can get away with something or deceive a referee. Knowing the rules is important because if there's a dispute about a foul, the rules tell you what to do.”

Legal training is a huge asset in these situations, Boorstin said.

“My lawyering skills help me keep things running smoothly and people calm,” he said.

Boorstin was first introduced to ultimate during high school where he played with friends in pick-up games. As an undergraduate at Princeton, he found the ultimate team provided an excellent way to stay active. He joined the team as a member of the practice squad his second semester and played in tournaments as a sophomore.

“I got sucked in,” he said. “I wanted to keep playing sports in college and Ultimate Frisbee seemed like a great option that matched up with my skill set.”

After graduating in 2004 with a degree in economics, Boorstin continued to play while in law school at Harvard. Unlike varsity college sports where student athletes can only play for four years, ultimate is played under club sport rules that allow players five years of eligibility. Michael B. MacKenzie was a year ahead of Boorstin at Harvard and also played ultimate. He recalled that Boorstin came to Harvard fired up to play for what was then a regional powerhouse.

“He was pretty excited about playing,” MacKenzie said. “I was just happy to have another law student on the team because it was a long walk down the hill from the law school to the athletic facilities.”

At Harvard, Boorstin and the rest of the team made it to the Ultimate Players Association's national tour-

namment — a gathering of the best 16 teams in the nation — in both years he played. During his first year, the team finished second in their region, which earned them an at large berth to the championship tournament and in his second year they won the region outright.

Boorstin was an integral part of those successful Harvard teams, MacKenzie said.

“He's a do it all player,” MacKenzie said. “He's very quick so he stepped right into the starting [offensive unit]. He's a fiery player.”

Now an associate, Boorstin spends long hours buried in research and writing. But he said he still finds time to stay in shape playing ultimate.

The sport is physically demanding with players running around on a field approximately the length of a soccer pitch and about half as wide. The uninterrupted play adds up to a great cardiovascular workout, Boorstin said.

While his playing time has been curtailed with the birth of a son six months ago, he still tries to get out and “huck” a disc around once or twice a week.

“It's not so much of a time commitment that you can't fit it into whatever else you're doing,” Boorstin said. “If I can play twice a week I feel like I'm maintaining really well.”

And while ultimate hasn't penetrated the lawyerly profession the way golf has, Boorstin said he runs into attorneys on other teams with some frequency. He said he expects this will lead to networking opportunities.

“There's a really strong ultimate community in Silicon Valley where it's a hotbed for networking,” Boorstin said. “I've definitely made a lot of friends and it's only a matter of time before a business opportunity pops up.”