

CAMERON HAY: Alright, this is Cameron Hay, with Northern Michigan University's HS 345 Oral History class. Today is September 28th, 2018, and I'll be interviewing Dylan Steslicki in relation to his experiences on the Ultimate Frisbee club here at Northern Michigan University.

CH: So Dylan, first off, if you could state and spell your name.

DYLAN STESLICKI: Dylan Steslicki, D-Y-L-A-N S-T-E-S-L-I-C-K-I.

CH: Okay, and if you could tell me when and where you were born?

DS: July 28, 1998 is my birthday. I was born in Commerce, Michigan but raised in Brighton, Michigan.

CH: Okay, so that's downstate, correct?

DS: Yes, Ann Arbor area.

CH: So being from the Commerce, Brighton area, what brought you up here to Northern Michigan University? That's a fair distance away.

DS: It's about seven hours. Um, mostly the outdoors. We visited here as a family a few years prior in the summer during high school, and I just loved the outdoors, loved hiking, all the nature. Then, I knew I wanted to be a science major. I came in undecided, but knew I wanted to do science, and Northern is most known for their science program, so it was kind of a good fit. I've been here for three years, so I'm a junior right now.

CH: So you get to Northern Michigan University. You're in the Ultimate Frisbee club right now, and how did that happen?

DS: Um... well, my older brother goes to U of M, or went to U of M, he graduated last year, and he played Ultimate Frisbee there. He kind of got me throwing and playing around a little bit. Probably throughout the entire state, Ann Arbor is the ultimate Ultimate Frisbee hub of Michigan, where most teams are located out of like the elite team. So I did a youth league there, and I got played a little bit. Then, at Fall Fest or club fair or whatever orientation you do, there was a signup table for Ultimate Frisbee club, so I signed up, gave my e-mail, and I remember a week or two after school started I got an e-mail about practice starting. I started going to practice. I had a friend, too, who was doing it, so we went together.

CH: So you did have some experience coming in?

DS: Yeah. A little bit.

CH: Okay. At this point, I do have to say, what exactly is Ultimate Frisbee, if you could give a quick description?

DS: Um... it's hard to explain.

CH: It's got a Frisbee. Start with that?

DS: Yeah. It's got a Frisbee. It's played on, usually, a soccer or a football field, dimensions are a little different. It's a 70 yard field, plus another 20 yards for both end zones, so kind of a narrower main part with larger end zones than a normal football field. 7 on 7, and the goal is to get the disc in the end zone.

You can't move when you have the disc, so once you get it you stop, look to throw it to someone else. Defense, your goal is basically to not let the offense throw it to each other by slapping it down, catching it, whatever you need to do to make sure they don't get it.

CH: Alright, well that's simple enough. So there is an Ultimate Frisbee club here at NMU, as you've I'm sure noticed, so can you speak a little about how it's grown here at NMU?

DS: Before I was here, it used to be just one team. It was a mixed team, NMU Echo, and I want to say five years ago it split. So once there were enough numbers, there's a guys' team and a girls' team now. Now there's enough numbers, so there's Riptide, which is men's, and Aurora, which is women's, so that kind of speaks as far as numbers go. Since I've been here, numbers have been pretty consistent, mid-teens-ish. One thing I have noticed a lot is the alumni of the organization really like to give back. We have some sponsorships where they donate money. We stay at houses, as you know, like we had last weekend, we stayed at an alum's house for the tournament, so it's just kind of a good growing organization. I've noticed that the past players really interact and are helpful towards the present players.

CH: You mentioned the alumni giving back to the team a little bit, does that seem to be, kind of, a common thing? Have you noticed that, maybe, for any other teams?

DS: Yeah, I know for my brother at U of M. Every year they have, like, I think it's their homecoming weekend, they have an Ultimate Frisbee club weekend. They have a Frisbee house there, and they have a big party where all the alum come back, and I know they definitely get donations also. And, a lot of tournaments have alum divisions. Teams stay in touch a lot. Riptide has an alum team, so the next tournament we're going to, we'll have an alum team there, so we'll definitely hang out with them in between games. It's a cool way to stay in touch with people that you may not otherwise see.

CH: I was going to say, it does sound like it's a very close-knit community.

DS: Definitely.

CH: Alright. A little more goal-oriented, maybe, what are the goals of this club, maybe to do well at tournaments, what are we looking at here?

DS: My main goal, I have a couple. Main goals coming into the season is grow numbers, which we definitely have a more consistent first-year player base. We have six or seven who are coming consistently to practices, which is always good to see. That was one of my goals, and the other one, so at the end of the year we have a... sectionals I think is the first, and if you do well in sectionals, each region of the country has their sectionals. Ours is with Minnesota, Wisconsin, Upper Peninsula Michigan, all the north. Eight or nine teams make it to the next level, so my goal would be to make it to that next level. To make it out of sectionals and into regionals.

CH: And this is a larger, nationwide, official tournament?

DS: Yes. It starts with smaller sections of the country then it gets bigger and bigger and bigger, and eventually there's nationals, which I think twenty teams in the country make.

CH: We've worked our way onto the topic of tournaments now, so maybe a little bit about how they're organized?

DS: Tournaments are either sanctioned or unsanctioned, which, unsanctioned means basically anyone can play, you can just bring a team. We had an unsanctioned our first tournament and we had an alum player play with us. You could have girls on the team in a guys' division, or people who don't go to the school if you want, they can play. It's kind of more just go learn and usually happens more in the fall semester.

CH: When everyone's getting used to it, with the new guys?

DS: Yeah. It's good, especially when you have new people, it's good to balance them out with more experienced people like some of the alum who can play. That kind of creates a better learning environment. And then, spring semester, we have our sanctioned tournaments, and those you have to be enrolled at the school, active student, USAU, which is United States, U.S., yeah I don't know it's something Frisbee. It's USAU, which is the, um, official College Ultimate site. You can get a five-year membership, so you're allowed five years of eligibility for playing, so if you're a grad student, you do your four years and you're in grad school, after your fifth year you're no longer eligible. You have to be within your five-year period to be considered a sanctioned player. We do those tournaments in the spring, that's when we do, like I said, sectionals, earlier. That's when you get your actual ranking as a team. That's the official rankings that happen during sanctioned tournaments.

CH: Sanctioned implies there's that governing body of course.

DS: USAU.

CH: So it's kind of a formal tournament or the sanctioned follow the, I'm just repeating to make sure I understand, so the formal ones, the sanctioned ones, have more roster rules, was there anything else?

DS: Not really, just that they're run by USAU. The non-sanctioned, if you wanted, we could put a tournament together at Northern. So anyone can do that, but for USAU, you have to be sanctioned, it's more official, like they check your roster, make sure everyone's legal. If you get caught having a non-legal player, you can get suspended or kicked out of the tournament or whatever. They're more strict on roster, and how you finish is more important.

CH: Okay. So I guess we've spent a little time outlining the sport, a little on the structure of the governing body, if we could focus a little on you personally. So you've been in the club now for how many years now, three? Three years, and hopefully at least a bit more, depending on where life takes you, but what are you really hoping, personally, for? Is there anything in specific, maybe not necessarily for the team, but you, personally, that you'd like to improve?

DS: Um, I played over the summer on a team called, it was called Four, in Ann Arbor, and I didn't get to go to tournaments with them, cause there were weekends I couldn't make it, there were only a few tournaments. Their tournaments were further, also, so it was much more of a commitment. I would like to get to play with them more over the summer. It's a different level of Ultimate, too, club is generally more competitive than college, so I'd like to play with them more cause that is how you really get better, college is super helpful, but club is different levels. Another thing, as of now, I'll be done in four years here, most likely, if all goes according to plan. My fifth year, I'm looking at going to dental school, so I'd like to play wherever I go to dental school, I'd like to play with them for a year. Try to keep with it, use that fifth year I have. Maybe, following those five years, just continue to practice. I love playing the

sport, so I couldn't go to tournaments after that fifth year, but maybe just go and practice with the team.

CH: You'd like to stay connected.

DS: Yeah, stay with the sport.

CH: Alright, well that's understandable I guess, you seem to be having at least some degree of fun judging by how you're talking about it. What about it is so much fun, what keeps you coming back? Maybe not the running, but...

DS: I always played sports growing up and throughout high school. In high school I played tennis and rugby and baseball. I always knew I wanted to play a sport. I'm not a college-level football player, whatever, athlete like that, I was more at school for academics. Ultimate Frisbee, growing up, I always liked playing it. Like I said, through high school, my brother just taught me to play and stuff like that. Let me think.

CH: Is there anything in particular that stands out?

DS: Okay, yeah, I lost my train of thought. [pause] A lot of people for Ultimate, a lot of the draw base for Ultimate, is people who played sports in high school, but weren't, like I said, college level athletes. So I think that's a big draw, is soccer players, players from high school, who are looking to stay active and stay in shape and play a sport, but don't have time to commit to a higher level, so they play Frisbee. I think that's what's great about it, is that you get a good, diverse, player base. See, I just like, I wanted to stay in shape too. Like, going for runs and stuff is super boring and not fun at all or lifting weights or whatever, so Frisbee's a good way to stay in shape, active. It's also a great way to meet people, especially freshman year when you don't know too many people, but as I've kept playing and playing, I've branched out and met new people. It's a good group of people to play with. Which I think adds to it as well, is the social aspect.

CH: So it keeps you athletic, keeps you moving, and you mentioned the group of people, too. What would you say the community's like, both here at Northern Michigan and if you want to go a little bit into the larger scale you can as well? Maybe start here at NMU.

DS: NMU it's, in my experience, everyone I've met, I haven't met anyone I've had any problems with, or disliked, everyone I've liked, had fun with, gotten along with. Everyone is always willing to teach, that's one thing, I'll kind of transition now into Ultimate as a whole, the community, I think, as far as sports go it's one of the strongest, most friendly communities. Older players always want to help young players grow. Even when playing other teams, like this last weekend, for our tournament, I was helping rookies on other teams. I know other teams' captains were helping our rookies, so everyone's just trying to help people out. It's a relatively small sport, kind of. It's definitely growing, but the community is just, very positive. One thing that's unique about Ultimate is, it's self-officiated, which most sports you have your ref or your umpire or whatever, depending on the sport. Frisbee is just, players ref themselves; if you think you got fouled, then you call a foul. The other person says yes I fouled you or no I didn't, but most people generally agree about stuff. Sidelines, you're always talking to other people on the sidelines; you're talking to other teams, see how they're doing, it's just a very friendly and positive community as a whole. Which is another thing I like about the sport and it makes tournaments like fun because are you not only hanging out with your team, you're hanging out with other teams also.

CH: Yeah that seems interesting, it seems like a lot of fun.

DS: Yeah for sure.

CH: You mentioned though that it is self-officiating, does that ever cause any problems?

DS: Not usually, I mean every once in a while you'll have a tournament where a team in the tournament that they're just not, they don't have that same level of sportsmanship that most teams have. Like this past weekend we had a tournament where a guy was calling a lot of fouls on our team and then those games are he games that kind of chippy I guess is the word I'm looking for. Just a little (thinks) argumentative. But for the most part, people are very agreeable and you talk and if you think you got fouled and you say it and the person will either way yeah I did and will agree with you and most people if it's a blatant foul they'll say "yeah I fouled you". But if not and you can't reach an agreement then the disc just goes back to the original thrower and its basically just like a redo.

CH: Okay so, the spirit of the game being part of the game.

DS: Yeah the spirit of the game that's one of the biggest things in Frisbee.

CH: Alright, let's see then, so I guess back to the club a little bit, what would you say the high point of this clubs been, maybe? Its most shining moment, its biggest achievement. Do you have any ideas what that might be?

DS: For me what comes to mind, so far, this season, I think our first tournament was excellent. I mentioned at the other tournaments to our players that our rookie base has been the best that it's been since being here. Which is always a great thing. As far as first tournament goes, this is the best one that I have seen. It was a lot of fun hanging out at the house like everyone got along well and then on the field, everyone played excellent and was picking up rules well, asking questions, learning stuff, which is great to see. My freshman year, we did not go to sectionals last year but my freshman year we went to sectionals and that was another high point. We had a lot of fun, we were one team away from making it to the next round so we came close but even though we didn't make it. It was in the spring and it was like the first warm weekend of the year, so it was good weather. It was just a lot and a lot of fun. It was the end of the year so everyone was like friends with each other, knew each other. So as far as tournaments goes that was one of my favorites for sure.

CH: Okay well with that, as far as in relation to the university its self, do you think the clubs offers any significant...Let me rephrase that, do you think this club is important to the university in a significant way, maybe? Like does it offer anything important to the university?

DS: I would say it does. As far as club sports go, a lot of people come into college playing sports in high school or as kids or whatever and they're looking for something to keep themselves active and wanna play sports and want to continue their athletic traditions. And the ultimate Frisbee club really provides an option for those people. Like NMU has got a good amount of club sports and Frisbee I think is one of the more unique ones for people who cant play varsity sports. Like, I know we had one kid join this year who said "I just want to play a sport" and so Frisbee works out for a lot of people cause its, as far as club sports goes, its affordable, easy to pick up.

CH: Don't really need too much equipment.

DS: Yeah all you really need is cleats. So yeah it's easy to pick up and all you have to do really to start is be athletic and even that, if you can throw, or be athletic. And if you are an athletic player you can play at a high level. Its an easy sport to pick up is what I'm trying to say so it provides an outlet for those kids who are looking to keep their sports in their lives or wants to just play a sport.

CH: Alright well that seems like an important service to me I guess. I guess does NMU ultimate have any, maybe rivals, as far as sports go? Tech maybe?

DS: Yeah Tech's the classic one. The thing is like with Tech, it's like you always you want to beat tech. That's like NMU vs. Tech is like the probably the most famous rivalry in the school so we keep that alive. We always play, we usually go there in the spring or in the fall. And then in the winter they come here and we play in the dome. So we usually play them twice a year, we see them occasionally at tournaments but it's like a rivalry you wanna win but at the same time were like good friends. Like it's our biggest rival but the team we talk to the most like at a tournament and stuff over the summer I played with the captain of my summer team is the captain at tech so I know him and like I talk to him regularly. Our other captain played with one of their players over the summer so like we'll play them in the fall and in the spring and both teams wanna win but at the same time. Like earlier in the summer I went hiking at canyon falls, which is kind of in between Northern and Tech and saw two tech guys there and from the Frisbee team so I talked to them for a little bit. So like it's still friendly. Like it's still a rivalry but at the same time it's friendly.

CH: So, do you think that's just probably influenced a fair amount by the fact that as you mentioned Frisbee tends to be more friendly perhaps? Than a lot of other sports. That probably plays a part in it.

DS: Yeah for sure, like I said, when you're not playing, you're on the sideline and you're talking to other people and you are kind of just and theres this other kid I know like he was a freshman when I started so we already are team now I talk to him now. We both started together and have been playing all three years now.

CH: Okay, you mentioned earlier, this will be from a bit ago, but you mentioned earlier that you see ultimate Frisbee growing as a sport, have there been any, do you think that's a good thing probably?

DS: For sure, see its growing not only at the college level, there's a professional league called the AUDL. So as far as professional sports go, it's very, very, very small but as that grows, the fan base kind of grows. A lot of people learn Frisbee, I don't know if you know Brody Smith is from youtube, a lot of people know ultimate Frisbee from him. And then I feel like its growing too like now you see everyone in a while on Sportscenter top 10 plays, you'll see an ultimate Frisbee play. So that's from the AUDL, so I feel like people now see those kind of things and think well that looks fun, that looks cool, that guys laying out or whatever grabbing the disc so I feel like that kind of helps grow the sport too. Like it adds a larger fan-base which people see that and say that looks fun I want to play that and then they find a club. So definitely it's growing at the college level too as far as like more teams popping up and then at the professional and nationwide level as well.

CH: I've noticed at times too maybe walking through a park or something just maybe a pickup game or something, too.

DS: Yeah, I know Lower Harbor, Marquette, a lot of times people play pickup there. Over the summer there's a Marquette pickup ultimate group, so over the summer, people who lived here played once a

week. And a lot of people just go outside and throw the disk, too. Like, it's a very easy thing, if you just have one other friend, just toss the disk back and forth, and then someone walks by, sees you, joins in. It's a very accessible sport that people can just pick up and play.

CH: Alright. So, nice and simple as far as that goes. Now, you talked about fouls, from my understanding Ultimate Frisbee is a non-contact sport, but there can still be collisions and the like?

DS: Yes.

CH: Are injuries necessarily going to be a major risk, and what type of injuries would you be looking for, usually?

DS: I mean, injuries are a risk anytime there's a sport going on. Yeah, it's a non-contact sport, so you're not tackling or whatever like you would in football or hockey. Probably the riskiest things that happen are if it's a deep throw to the end zone and both players are jumping up to get it, that's when injuries do happen. The most common injuries I've seen are mostly leg or ankle, people spraining their ankles, tweaking their legs or whatever, just cause a lot of it's cutting. Running in one direction, cutting, running in another direction, so maybe your cleat slips, your ankle rolls, or you step on someone's cleat or something. Stuff like that happens.

CH: So sudden change of direction, a lot of non-contact injuries?

DS: Yeah, so most of them I've seen are just leg tweaks and then the occasional, um, collision midair or something like that. Like, we had one kid this weekend sprain his wrist because they both went up for the disk and they came down on our player's wrist, so stuff like that. And usually, nothing super serious, it's more like you sit out the rest of the game, the rest of the day, ice your ankle up at night, and you're usually ready to go the next day.

CH: Alright, that's better than some sports, I suppose. Alright, let's see, I guess I've run to the end of what I have, if you have anything you'd like to say?

DS: Um, I guess I'm just looking forward to the future of the club, would be my biggest thing. Honestly, this is my first year captaining, hoping to be a captain again next year. Like I said, my rookie base is very strong this year and I'm hoping to continue that. We're supposed to pick up a few more at the semester, so I'm hoping that'll grow the team more, and as long as we can keep commitment levels high, that's good for the club, which makes me happy, good for the team. Yeah, winter's usually what we struggle with, as far as keeping numbers and commitment strong, so I'm hoping this year, we don't deal with that issue and keep everyone involved.

CH: I guess you mentioned winter, is there a specific issue, what issue with winter is it, just practice schedules, or?

DS: Yeah, um, people, yeah, cause a lot of times, obviously it's snowy and cold, so we're inside, which when we have the dome, it's fun, cause you get to play in the dome. But we don't always have the dome, which sometimes we play in the volleyball arena, so it's playing on a gym floor, so it's definitely not always as fun as being able to go outside. And last year our dome time was six to eight in the morning, was the time we got dome.

CH: Bet you got a lot of people with that.

DS: Yeah... so we were averaging like four, five people, so that was kind of, I mean, those were the practices we had. Tuesday, Thursday, from six to eight in the morning, so numbers dropped a lot. Then, occasionally we had night practices, and we got people at night practices, but then in the morning we wouldn't practice as much, so we'd go into a tournament rusty and wouldn't play as well as we could have if we had better time to practice and stuff like that. So, keeping commitment up in the winter is one of the biggest challenges. I hope to, um, be able to deal with that well this year.

CH: Alright, with that, thank you.

DS: Thank you, my pleasure.

[END INTERVIEW]