



Finola Shannon, member of the Irish Ultimate Frisbee ladies team, heading to the WFDF (World Flying Disc Association) World Ultimate and Guts Championships from 2 to 9 August in Canada.

The 'Ultimate' high for Finola Shannon

This August, a young Donegal student will be jetting off to Canada to compete in one of the most unique and up-and-coming team sports in the world.

21-year-old Finola Shannon from Ballyshannon was recently chosen by selectors to represent Ireland at the Ultimate Frisbee World Championships being held in Vancouver.

Ultimate Frisbee is a fast, athletic team sport played by thousands of men and women in Ireland and globally on a field similar to a rugby field.

Ultimate is founded on sportsmanship and fair play, known as "Spirit of the Game", a flying disc is thrown between players to score goals in the end zones of the pitch.

The game is played without referees with players making their own foul calls, setting it apart from all other competitive sports.

Competitive play is encouraged, but never at the expense of respect between players, adherence to the rules and the basic joy of play.

Finola has always been a very keen athlete since her days at Colaiste Colmcille where she was part of the school's basketball team.

"I was really big into basketball and I played into two All Ireland finals with Colaiste Colmcille, winning one of them," said Finola.

After completing her leaving certificate, Finola was accepted to Trinity College Dublin, where she is now in her third year studying speech and language therapy: "I was always in-



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terested in doing something in health care and this course really appealed to me."

It was at Trinity College that Finola first started playing 'Ultimate', but she was introduced to the game back home in Donegal.

"It was in the summer of 2005 before I headed off to college. We were at Rosnowlough beach and two friends of mine, who had been playing Ultimate at college, had a couple of disks with them and showed the ropes."

Finola was immediately intrigued: "Starting college, I knew I wanted to go out and try new things so when I saw the Ultimate stand at the Freshers' Fair at Trinity I signed up, as well as signing up for ladies' basketball."

Trying out a new sport would be a good way of getting to know new peo-

ple at college, Finola thought, but she admitted she never realised she would get into it so much.

"I got into it gradually, but really got hooked to the game after competing at a beginners' tournament in Edinburgh.

"There are not many sports in Ireland, where you get to travel so much, and I realised that this was a sport I could be really good at.

"I found it hard juggling both sports at the same time," said Finola, "College basketball didn't really appeal to me anymore, so I chose to stick to Ultimate."

Finola could have tried out for the Irish squad when they were holding trials for the European Championships, but she chose to do volunteer work for the summer.

"I had been playing a lot in college, as well as with ladies' teams in Dublin, but I decided to go volunteering in Ghana instead of staying in Ireland to go to the European Championships.

"I knew that the Worlds were coming up so when I got back to Dublin I really put my heart into it and trained for the trials which took place in January of this year," said Finola.

"There were two trial sessions held and there were so many ladies trying out and the standard of talent was so high, I was really surprised when I actually got selected.

"I think it may have been due to the fact that the captains that were

selecting the teams had seen me play before and weren't just selecting on how players had done at the trials."

Finola's role on the team is that of a deep cutter: "I like to run a lot so when we're playing I'm more of a receiver rather than a thrower, so I think having played so much basketball it was a great sport to make the transition from," she said.

The Irish Ultimate Squad is now training three times a week, as well as holding weekend training sessions, covering everything from core fitness and intense training programmes improving on individual and team skills.

"We're going to a few warm-up tournaments, Belgium in May, The Netherlands in June and then in July we are holding a Nations Cup in Dublin which all should be good fun."

Finola said that they are hoping to get a lot of media coverage in order to promote the game and help them in raising funds.

"We are completely self-funded so we are looking for sponsor to support us when we go to the World Championships in Vancouver."

The timing of the games in Canada worked out really well for the young student: "As I will be going into my fourth year in September I will have to concentrate on my studies.

"Although I don't know where I will be working after college, I'd certainly like to continue playing Ultimate and help promote the sport, especially on a primary and secondary

school level."

Finola is the daughter of Noreen and Michael Shannon and has five siblings, Aileen, Michelle, Gemma, Diarmuid and James.

Following their success in the European Ultimate Championships in Southampton in 2007, both teams are determined to increase the standing of Irish Ultimate on the international stage.

The teams are completely self-funded and are currently embarking on a number of fundraising initiatives and also looking for corporate sponsorship.

Vancouver, Canada will play host to the WFDF (World Flying Disc Association) World Ultimate and Guts Championships from 2 to 9 August.

More than 100 teams from over 30 countries will gather to compete for the world title.

Given the massive Ultimate following in Vancouver in combination with all of the teams and supporters attending the event, there will be an audience of well over 8000 sports enthusiasts.

The Irish Flying Disc Association (IFDA) is the co-ordinating body for Ultimate, Disc Golf and other disc sports and is responsible for the growth, development and promotion of Ultimate Frisbee in Ireland.

They are elected every year at the National AGM. For more information on this exciting sport log onto www.irishultimate.com