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ULTIMATE WARRIORS

Soggy beach no problem at Wildwood tournament

By REGINA SCHAFFER Staff Writer, (609) 272-7211

WILDWOOD - It was a mid-air catch deserving of the highest compliment.

"Sweet, bro!" shouted someone on the sidelines as a player leaped from a puddle thick with sand for a white disc flying his way.

The scene played out over and over in dozens of simultaneous Frisbee games, spanning nearly 10 blocks on Wildwood beaches Saturday afternoon during the 13th annual Wildwood Beach Ultimate Tournament.

Approximately 180 teams were registered for this year's event, known by the name "Ultimate," making it the best attended in the tournament's history. Last year, 140 teams were registered.

On average, there are 10 players on each team who try to try to move the disc among teammates down the field and across a goal line to score points.

The Wildwood Ultimate event, which runs through 4 p.m. today, is the largest of its kind in the world, according to organizers. Only an annual Ultimate tournament in Italy comes close, tournament director Len Dagit said.

"It started out very small, and, really, under the radar of Wildwood," Dagit said. "Now, the city bends over backward for us."

That is because the Ultimate tournament brings in thousands of players, along with their family and friends, who use the competition as a chance for a vacation in Wildwood.

"They'll play in the tournament, but they'll rent a house, too," Dagit said.

Ultimate is as intense as it sounds, with players constantly running and turning to catch a flying plastic disc in mid-air, only to quickly flip the wrist and toss it back. Ultimate players flock to Wildwood each year to take advantage of the resort's extra-wide beaches, which allow many teams to play at once.

"Where else can you find a beach this large?" Dagit said.

"For most people, this is the pinnacle tournament of the year," said Ultimate player Clayton Coltman, 31, of Swarthmore, Pa. "This is the highlight of the year."

Puddles, large and small, dotted this year's tournament playing fields, thanks to heavy rain overnight. Participants, who in some instances played in several inches of water this year, said this tournament was by far the wettest.

"It's pretty sweet to lay out on," said Adam Trumzo, 20, of Fredericksburg, Va., who was playing on a team with alumni from James Madison University.

By "lay out," Trumzo meant the water made diving for a disc a bit more forgiving on the body.

Coltman, who was playing in his third Wildwood tournament, said he was drawn to the sport because of the physical grind and the competition. A self-described hippie in college, Coltman said he always loved the freestyle spirit of Ultimate.

"Other than friends and family, this is my third love," Coltman said.

"People that come here are very laid back," said Michael Michigami, 20, of Voorhees Township, Camden County. "At the end of every game, everyone is friends."

Roberto Vazquez, 21, of East Lansdowne, Pa., was playing in his first Ultimate tournament this year.

"I broke my fear of laying out," Vazquez said. "It's an awesome time out here. I actually like it better (wet), to tell you the truth."

Vazquez said Ultimate couldn't compare to football or soccer.

"I like it more, it's more, like, running and sprinting than physical contact," Vazquez said. "It's real intense."

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