

## SCENE FEATURE

## Disc Golf: A Call to Arms!

The first time I went disc golfing, disc golf was not the primary objective. Rather, it was a means to an end. You see, it was Stage One of a bachelor party that would last 15 hours, easily spanning two days (and more than one adult beverage). It was at O’Hauser Park in Menasha, WI, a fairly long, wooded course that would challenge even the best players.

I was hooked instantly. The game presented straight forward objective but with countless nuances, opportunities for creativity and improvisation, as well as some quality fresh air. Five years later, disc golf is a passion in my life with few rivals.

I finished that first round roughly 27 over par, but the challenge to improve on that score brought me back time and again.

As I began playing more and more, I quickly learned that many of my friends and coworkers played occasionally during the summer months. I greeted each one with identical “where-the-heck-was-I” looks.

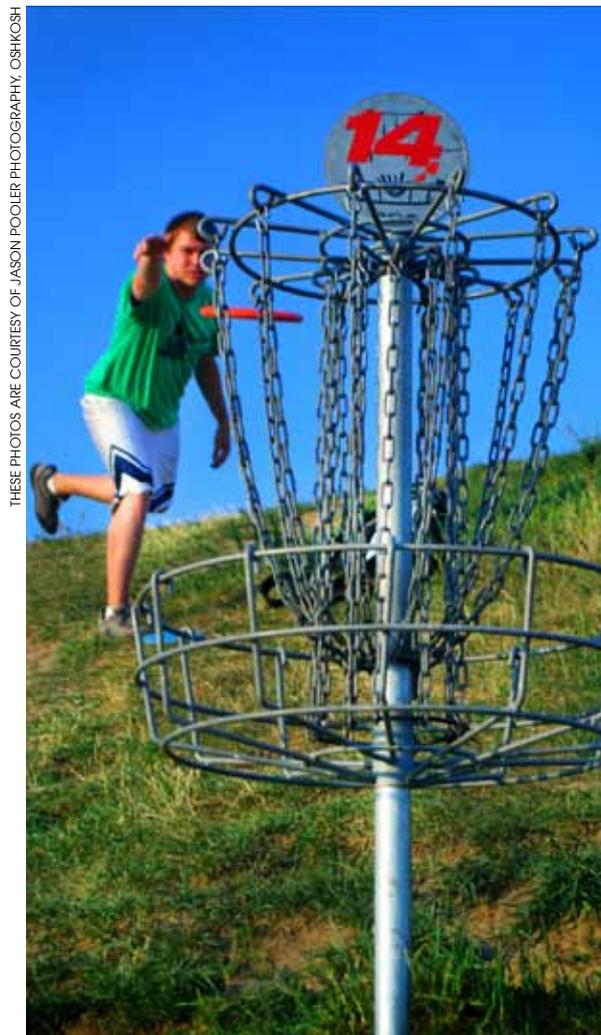
Soon after, I learned there were local, national and even international tournaments, most of them sanctioned by the Professional Disc Golf Association (PDGA). I became a member immediately after playing my first tournament in April of 2008, The Under Par Disc Golf Open at Riverside Park in Berlin, WI.

Since then, I’ve played in more than 100 tournaments in five states. In fact, I’m writing this from Charlotte, NC, site of the 2012 PDGA Professional and Amateur Disc Golf World Championships. With officially 1136 competitors vying for world titles in 24 divisions, it is the largest disc golf tournament in history with competition spanning five days and 14 courses.

#### So what is disc golf?

Disc golf requires you to traverse or complete the course from start to finish in the fewest number of throws, similar to the traditional game of golf. A typical course is 18 holes and a hole is completed once your disc has come to rest in the target, which is basically an elevated metal basket made up of chains, a pole and yes, a basket.

The chains help to “catch” the disc before it comes to rest in the basket, thus “holing out” and completing the hole.



Jacob Rusch playing disc golf at Red Arrow Park, Oshkosh

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Although commonly mistaken for the Wham-O Frisbee®, there are flying discs designed specifically for the sport of disc golf: sharp-edged “drivers” for distance, blunt-edged “putters” for accuracy and just about everything in between. Major manufacturers include Innova Champion Discs and Discraft.

What disc you choose to throw, how you throw it and what “line” you take to the target each leaves a lot of room for creativity and improvisation. You can throw backhand (traditional), forehand or side-arm, overhead or even roll the disc on the ground.

Much like traditional ball golf, you’re playing against the elements as well as the course, which incorporates the mental game as well as personal strategy. But no matter how serious you are about disc golf, there is a

reason to do it – and plenty of local venues as well.

There are several courses within 25 miles of Oshkosh. Notable parks include Zobel Memorial County Park in Green Lake, Plamann and Telulah parks in Appleton, Grignon Park in Kaukauna, Adelaide Park in Fond du Lac, the newly revamped O’Hauser Park in Menasha and Winnebago County Park right here in Oshkosh off of County Road Y.

#### Disc golf is growing

When newly-minted Wisconsin Disc Golf Hall of Fame inductee Tom Jenkins started playing competitive disc golf in 1978, there were just two courses in Wisconsin. “There were very few players and discs were just Frisbees,” chuckled Jenkins.

Jenkins stated the sport grew so quickly because of the work of “movers and shakers” diligently worked to sell the sport to parks and communities all over the state. “The main man was “Duster” Don Hoffman. He took me under his wing and showed me how to sell the sport to those types of folks and to design courses. With all those courses in the ground now the recreational players came out. There are so many recreational players out there nowadays that you have to wait to get on the first hole of many local courses. It is a good problem to have.”

#### Getting started

If you’re looking for gear, GO Disc Golf, Hergert’s, Satori Imports and Play-It-Again Sports each carries golf discs both new and used. Equipment, apparel and targets can also be found at GO, located at 503 Ohio St. in Oshkosh.

You can find a local league virtually every night, Monday through Thursday throughout the summer months. Tournaments are typically held on weekends and can be anywhere between one and five days long, though generally last a single day.

Currently, there is a singles league in Oshkosh as well as a doubles league in Menasha on Mondays. Tuesday hosts Fond du Lac singles league as well as a women-only league in Appleton run by Mindy Robertson. Telulah Park in Appleton hosts league on Wednesday nights and Thursday

gives players the choice of doubles in Oshkosh or Green Lake.

#### Why play disc golf?

Disc golf is easy to learn yet difficult to master, making it open to all ages while still leaving the die-hards wanting more. No two courses are alike; some incorporate water and distance while others test your accuracy and touch with tight woods and elevation.

The game is also inexpensive to play. Most courses are free to play and you only need one disc, although many players choose to carry more.

There are numerous local courses and opportunities for competitive divisions of all ages and skill levels if interested. When asked the benefits of playing for the casual player versus the competitive tournament player, Rob Mertins of Appleton put it this way: “The difference between casual play and tournament play is the competition... and the pressure. I love to have it matter! At the Zobel Open (July 7), we had a three-way tie for first and had to playoff (to determine a winner). Talk about exciting!”

In fact, there have already been tournaments at Telulah Park, Winnebago County Park as well as Zobel Memorial Park this year, but players can find one virtually every single weekend from mid-March through Thanksgiving weekend in Wisconsin, Northern Illinois and Eastern Minnesota.

The tournament scene features those most passionate about this up and coming sport. Some professionals tour in the summer around more traditional day jobs while some tour year-round, choosing to live in a warmer climate to keep their skills sharp.

But the future of the sport lies at the grassroots level: Amateur and recreational disc golfers. I asked Rob what disc golf provides for him personally that keeps him coming back for more? “Disc golf provides me with exercise and gets me outdoors all year long. There’s nothing like a nice winter round in the middle of January. Disc golfers are many of closest friends now.”

Recreation, competition and camaraderie – I couldn’t have said it better myself. ■

*Matt has a degree in Journalism from UW Oshkosh, and is a dedicated discgolfer.*



BY MATTHEW PARKER