

Pog Heaven

Kids flipping for their discs

BY CHRIS MCCOSKY

Brace yourself, parents. Pogmania is upon us. Don't worry, though; it doesn't appear to be overly dangerous and, in these times of high-priced, high-tech games and gadgets, it's refreshingly cheap and simple.

The hardest part, parents, will be coming to grips with the fact that those Sega and Nintendo games that you shelved out of boredom for hours on the floor flipping a bunch of tiny 10-cent cardboard discs.

Since there currently aren't any therapy groups established to assist befuddled Pog parents, the Observer, as a public service, offers you this parents' guide to understanding the game of Pog and why your children, if they are between the ages of 6-14, are or will soon be in Pog heaven.

A bit of history

Pogs is an extremely well-marketed incarnation of a very old game: milk or bottle caps.

"We call it the old-fashioned game of the future," said Brian Theriot, vice president of Marketing and promotion for the World Pog Federation, which owns the name and everything else associated with Pogs.

Kids used to collect and flip milk and bottle caps as far back as the 1920s, but the actual forerunner to Pogs originated in Hawaii in the 1940s. Young Hawaiians would collect and flip the milk caps; the person with the most caps at the end of the flipping would be the winner.

The name Pog comes from the Hawaiian drink, Passion-Orange Guava, produced on the island of Maui for more than 100 years by the Haleakala Dairy. Kids used the POG caps for the game.

In September of 1993, the Costa Mesa, Calif.-based World Pog Federation bought the drink and the name, and brought Pogs to the mainland.

"We now have 60-some Pog-related items," Theriot said. "We did \$20 million in sales for 1993-

1994 and are projected to do some \$200 million this year."

After two years in California, Pogmania has begun creeping eastward.

"I started hearing about Pogs a year ago but there was no demand here," said Ron Cronan, general manager of retail sales for Gage & Gamco, which has eight stores including ones in Livonia, Canton, Westland, West Bloomfield and Rochester Hills. "Then right before Christmas, we started getting people in here asking for them. We officially got into the Pog business in mid-January."

Cronan estimates that Pogs have boosted sales about 10 percent across all eight stores.

"It just popped up out of nowhere," Cronan said. "It's bigger in some areas than others, but it's been good. I'm still waiting for the big push."

The game

OK, enough history. Let's get to the game. It involves two or more players. Pogs, which are half-dollar-sized cardboard discs that feature a wide assortment of decorations; and slammers or Kinis, which are thicker and heavier discs made of plastic, aluminum or brass.

You can play the game on any flat surface, or, of course, you can buy a rubber game board.

Players place equal numbers of Pogs on the board (at least four). You mix and stack them face down in the middle of the board. Flip to determine which player goes first. Each player takes turns slamming the Kini on the stack. The object is to flip the Pogs over. You keep the Pogs that you flip. The player with the most Pogs at the end is the winner.

Ridiculously simple.

"If I was 10, I probably wouldn't want to play this game. But, these kids seem to like it."

The World Pog Federation is counting on that.

"We are planning a U.S. National Pog Tournament this summer," Theriot said. "We will have state and regional championships. It'll be huge. We just had a

tournament in New York. It was a cool, snowy Wednesday night in the middle of Manhattan and we had 300 players."

And, in case the regular Pog game is too dull, the WPF also markets Pog Baseball, Pog Football, Pog Hockey and many others. (See related story.)

"We just do what the kids tell us," Theriot said. "They make up variations on the game and we just follow up."

Buyers' guide

Of course, Pogs are also being marketed as collectibles. There was a Wayne Gretzky series used as a promotion in Canada last year. The 18-piece collection is now valued at \$5,400.

The WPF issues limited amounts of each design and numbers each disc.

"Buyers beware," said Theriot. "Those discs that you can buy like 1,000 for a buck, those have no value at all. If it doesn't say Pog on the front or the back, put it back in the stack, Jack." There are other non-Pog discs that may have value. Disney has put out various sets, and so has Upper Deck (maker of baseball and hockey cards). But the official, authentic disc is the Pog brand.

Of course, the serious Pogman — we're talking about the younger kids — isn't really that concerned with collecting them. They just want to win them.

"I think one of the reasons kids find these so cool is the price," said Chris Lagasse, who owns Diamonds and Ice Sports Cards in Livonia. "They can get a whole paw-full of Pogs for a buck."

Most stores carry bins of discs that sell for a dime each or 15 to 20 for a dollar. The WPF Pogs come in packages and are a little more expensive (between \$2 and \$3 for packs of 10).

The slammers or Kinis range in price from \$1 to \$6. Some places offer starter kits that include a game board, Pogs and slammers for roughly \$15. Game boards alone are between \$4 and \$6.

See POGS, 18A

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Brian Theriot
World Pog Federation

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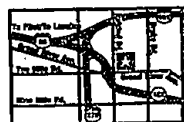
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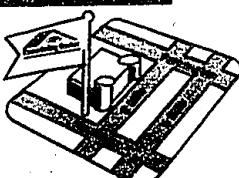
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