

STREET SCENE

The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers
Richard Lech coordinator/591-2300

Monday, May 11, 1987 O&E

★ ★ 10

Disc golfer Bill Phillips of Birmingham shoots from the rough.



Disc golf

Frisbees fly on the fairway



Signs map out each of the nine holes at the Wagner Park disc golf course.

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

A disc golfer lives for open spaces, a slight breeze at his back and the beauty of flight.

So who is this woman and her pedigreed pooch standing in the middle of the fairway on the dreaded fourth hole at Wagner Park in Royal Oak? Arnie Palmer, dammit, doesn't have to deal with such doggone distractions.

She doesn't realize that she's ruining the most serene moment in a disc golfer's existence when he launches the projectile into full and hopefully uninterrupted flight toward the metal chain basket 434 feet away.

Apparently, she's also unaware that if they don't move soon, a disc could become accidentally embedded in her or the dog's melon.

"Fore!" the disc golfer yelled, finally grabbing the woman's attention. The dog looks up, wags its tail before back pedaling out of the way with its master.

The disc golfer, not too teed off, gets back to the business of teeing off. It's just one of the bugs to be worked out in the fast-growing sport. If it's not dogs and their owners in

the path, it's kids and bikes. If it's not kids and bikes, it's trees and branches.

In disc golf, there's always something in the way, ready to interrupt concentration.

"Yeah, especially when you go to launch a Frisbee and there's people camped right in the middle of the fairway having a picnic," said Duane Utech of Rochester Hills. "You have some unusual obstacles in this game."

BUT THE FUN of disc golf certainly transcends any barriers. Anyone who can heave a Frisbee can play.

The game is played like regular golf. You drive. You chip. You putt. You slice. You bogey.

And you swear. "You have the same type of frustrations like in real golf," added Utech.

Distances to each hole range from 100 to 450 feet. Most courses have nine holes, complete with tee-off area and fairways.

At the end of the fairway are chain baskets, which serve as the final resting place for the disc.

Disc golf has linked up with some growing popularity in its short history. After roughly eight years of existence, there are 50,000 card-carrying members of the Professional Disc Golfers Association in the Midwest.

(You don't have to be a professional to belong.) Darrell Lynn, membership coordinator for PDGA in Memphis, Tenn., said the majority of players are in the 21-35 age group.

There's even a PDGA tour with stops all across the United States and Canada.

"WE'RE GOING to be the sport of the '90s," Lynn proclaimed.

It won't take Mark Kearns, 34, of Southfield until the next decade to figure out what lures him to the disc golf course.

"Just watching the disc is a beautiful thing," Kearns said. "No matter how hard you throw it, the disc just floats in the air. It's a lot different than throwing a ball."

Indeed. Taking in a round of disc

golf at Wagner Park, one starts to feel tranquil as each disc rises and falls unhindered to its destination against the tree-lined backdrop.

No wonder some of the players seemed to be holdovers from the "peace, love — not war" generation of the '60s and '70s. Frisbee games, like Ultimate, are a remnant of that era.

And many disc golfers are current or retired Ultimate players.

"I PLAYED Ultimate Frisbee for awhile," said Scott Monchik, 27, of Troy. "After I destroyed my body doing that, I decided I'd do something more casual."

For Ron Harris, 28, of Rochester it was the sign at the time that got him hooked on disc golf.

"I went to Stony Creek and I noticed all these signs and baskets," Harris said. "I found out what they were for and got involved with the sport. It's relaxing."

Bill Phillips, 29, an electrical engineer from Birmingham, agrees.

"I like being outside on a nice day and being with people," he said.

On Wednesdays at Wagner, players go off in groups of four. Fellow disc tossers offer praise after a good shot by a partner.

And, likewise, they are hush-hush after a bad shot.

Like regular golf, they carry their own bags. Joe Egan, for example, has an arsenal of discs.

Egan, who works in Troy, uses a different disc in various weather conditions. Wind can be a problem.

"Certain discs will cut right through it," he said.

But the engineers at NASA would have a hard time finding a disc that can go through trees. That, along with the human obstacles, give disc golfers fits.

Black and Decker could make a bundle if it got into the disc-making business. If it does, one player in the group is ready to buy stock.

After his drive was stopped cold by an elm, he displayed an uncharacteristic bit of anger for a disc golfer and, gosh, cussed.

"Yeah," he said, looking up with a smile. "See how relaxing it is?"



Staff photos by DAN DEAN.

Phillips sends his disc toward the "hole" at the Wagner Park disc golf course in Royal Oak.

Where the disc jockeys can tee off

For those who want to take a fling at disc golf, there are a few places in the area to play.

At some places, there are park fees. Stony Creek MetroPark charges \$2 per car. Rolling Hills Park in Ypsilanti Township charges \$4 for non-residents.

There are no greens fees.

THE STANDARD piece of equipment is a flying disc. Golf carts or caddies are optional. Frisbees will suffice. But for the serious player, there are discs de-

signed specially for golf.

Golf discs, which are smaller and heavier than the basic Frisbee, are more aerodynamic. The discs, which cost around \$7, can be ordered through the mail.

Rules for the game are also available by mail. For more information, write to: Professional Disc Golfers Association, P.O. Box 2415, Little Rock, Ark., 72203.

But an aspiring player can bypass the post office and head to any one of the following nine-hole courses:

• Wagner Park, Rochester Road, between 12 and 13 Mile roads, Royal Oak.

• Rainier Park, John R Road, south of 17 Mile Road, Troy.

• Stony Creek MetroPark, 26 Mile Road, Shelby Township, 1-800-247-2757.

• Star Jaycee Park, 13 Mile Road, east of Dequindre, Royal Oak.

• Rolling Hills Park, Stony Creek Road, south of I-94, Ypsilanti Township.

Inside S²

In good taste

Food critic Gustibus joins Street Scene to give you a tasty look at how local restaurants stack up. This week he samples the down-home ambience of the Harbor Steak House.

The Big Chili

A hot time was had by all when a bunch of "renegade" cooks got together at the Great Chili Cook-off in Saline. Where else could you sample "nuclear chili" — or view the site plan for the world's biggest pot of chili?

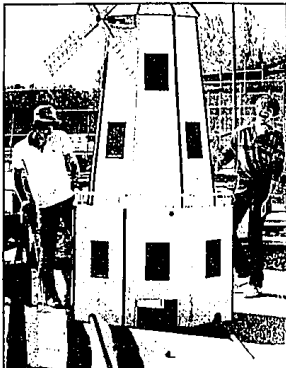
Motown sound

Channel 4's "Saturday Night Music Machine" is beaming the Detroit sound to a national audience. Take a look behind the scenes at what makes this "machine" tick.

Drive-ins drop out

Drive-in movie theaters are fast becoming as rare as '57 Chevys and red-die shirts. For posterity's sake, we've decided to collect a few memories of movies under the stars. So tune up the cheap speaker and fluff up your pillow as we visit drive-in memory lane.

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STEVE FECHT/staff photographer

Miniature golf can really run you through the mill, but it also leaves you laughing. Here Duane Parsons (left), 19, of Detroit and Matt Kujawski, 15, of Livonia joke about Matt's shot at the Yogi Berra course in Northville Township.

Mini golf's proof is in the putting

By Brian Lysaght
staff writer

Cheap green plastic carpet covers a concrete floor with a few mounds, curves and mini windmills added to challenge.

Oakland Hills, it ain't.

But where else can you play 18 holes of golf for three bucks?

It's miniature golf, a game some take seriously but, thankfully, most don't. It's a game that's as popular as it's ever been.

Take it from Tiffany Downer, 12, and Sierra Knotts, 13, both of Garden City. They play Ford Road Miniature Golf about once a week, and neither approaches the game or their putts seriously.

They play, in fact, with reckless abandon, not so much lining up their putts as swatting them.

Why do they play?

"Just for the fun of it," the two junior high students say with a giggle.

CHUCK HEIKKINEN, 19, an accounting ma-

jor at Lawrence Institute of Technology, plays for another reason: the challenge. He's serious but he doesn't always get respect.

Heikkinen plays the Wednesday night amateur tournaments at Putt-Putt Golf and Games in Farmington Hills. He putted his way last year to the course record, 95, over 54 holes. Par is 108.

He's thinking about turning professional (Yes — there are professional miniature golfers) but wants to be sure he's good enough. Professionals must slap down \$100 to enter a tournament.

"And that's a lot of money for me," Heikkinen said.

Despite his skill, people are skeptical about his miniature golf seriousness.

"When I talk to my friends, they say, 'You're wasting your time.' I say 'It's my time to waste.' But if I can ever bring back a trophy or a \$1,000 check, I could show them."

Others are just as serious. There are some 200 members nationwide of the Professional Putters Association (PPA). They compete in four major miniature golf tournaments each year.

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