

Premium disc chuckers travel to Michigan to determine frisbee golf royalty at the 2000 world championships

By Dan Williams
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DEXTER — Lurking deep within the tall brush grass, Ken Climo becomes a sniper.

His ammunition — a colorful blue weighted Innova frisbee disc.

His arsenal — a perfectly calibrated right arm that torques and flexes with mechanical consistency as he delivers a frisbee to a sighted destination.

His target — A metal basket, approximately two feet in diameter, suspended in the air by a center pole extending through its base. As Climo zooms in his scoping eyes further, he identifies a circle of chains, hanging just above the bin, which will cushion the impact of his flying, spinning disks and allow them to fall safely into the basket.

Climo is the world's disc golf phenom. He had been crowned world champion nine times prior to the start of last week's championships, held just outside Ann Arbor, in Dexter.

So Climo stood in those overgrown weeds serving as rough, staring down the final twenty feet of the renowned 18th hole at Hudson Mill Park's Monster course, hoping to complete a decade's worth of titles.

As he prepared to attempt a makeable putt, he planted his right foot firmly as his left raised slightly off the ground behind him, almost like a ballerina. His balance was maintained, and his eyes remained focused on the soon-to-be-victimized basket.

Climo whipped his right arm, his rifle, across his body and released the disc, sending it floating on a near-perfectly straight path.

"Cling"

The beloved noise of a successful frisbee golfer — the rattle of disc hitting chain.

The Event

By car, by plane and by Winnebago, the 830 best frisbee golfers from all 50 states as well as countries such as Japan, New Zealand and Sweden descended upon southeast Michigan last week for the six-day world championships.

The tournament has existed since 1982, but 2000 marked the first year that both the amateur and professional brackets competed in the same city.

This made head tournament director Steve Peck and his staff the guinea pigs in an experiment in event orchestration.

The group had to manage eight divisions of pros and nine divisions of amateurs on six courses at three different parks.

With the aid of Nextel phones, the internet, and an ensemble of disc golf-devoted volunteers that had been preparing for two years, the tournament went off as a success.

"I haven't been getting a whole lot of sleep," said Peck. "I can't wait for sleep."

"I think things went very well. Maybe there are some things we could have done different, but they're minor procedural details."

The Culture

On Saturday at 1 p.m., the center of the frisbee golf world was an 18-year-old boy from Ohio named Mike Sommerfield, who had cruised to an insurmountable five-shot lead in the advanced amateur division.

Sommerfield stepped onto the tee-off area of the first hole on Hudson Mill's Original course, just nine holes separating the kid with the bleached blond hair from the title. Sommerfield was completely focused — a model competitor.

But the scene surrounding him resembled a Grateful Dead concert rather than a sporting event — the crowd was like one giant acid trip.

Many spectators sported tie-dyed t-shirts, often to cover up a jutting beer belly. And those guts continued expansion with many fans drinking while they watched the golf.

There was no shortage of mangy dogs, scraggly goatees or Camel lights.

It was a scene completely unique to disc golf. But much of the charm of the sport lies in this laid back, permissive atmosphere it encompasses.

"It's more for the blue collar guy in a tie-dye and ripped up jeans," said tournament director Al Haaksma.

And frisbee golf's association with marijuana is undeniable.

On a regular day at a course, it would be unsurprising to see players toking to "enhance" a round.

"Yeah, we have drug testing," chided one tournament competitor. "If you're not positive, you can't play."

But no one, right up through the tournament officials, is apologizing for the counterculture disc golf has spurned.

The easygoing attitude of the sport allows it to cross ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic lines.

"One thing I think disc golf has that stick golf doesn't is the camaraderie of being part of something new," advanced amateur and Ann Arbor resident Tom Carpenter said.

The frisbee golfing community considers the sport's liberality a positive, a refreshing change from more uptight sports.

The Experts

For the first four days, players completed their rounds virtually unmolested by spectators.

But a gallery formed for Saturday's action with hundreds following the top players during the finals.

The consensus was that crowds are good for a growing sport, and the overwhelmingly positive attitude of the spectators began to exhilarate the players.

While the galleries may have initially increased the edginess, by the end, all the golfers were praising the crowd.

"I love it," said advanced amateur co-runnerup Curtis Gatlin. "There are some sensitive players, but as long as you aren't tickling me, I'm okay."

For the professional men's finals, the number of fans had swelled to approxi-



NORMAN NG/Daily

Ohio's Jason Anderson attempts to sink the putt and nail his par during a Thursday round on Hudson Mills Monster course.

Bag of tricks

Five shots every frisbee golfer craves

1. Backhand hyzer — Natural frisbee throw, curves left for a righthander.

it continues to roll forward long after it lands.

2. Backhand anhyzer — Backhand thrown with arm at about a 45 degree angle makes frisbee curve right for a righty.

4. Forehand — Follows same path as an anhyzer, used more for shorter shots around obstacles.

3. Backhand roller — Frisbee is released perpendicular to the ground so that

5. Tomahawk — Frisbee is thrown baseball style, causing it to turn over twice and sail. Some believe it to be hard on the arm tendons.



NORMAN NG/Daily

Colorado's Jay Rohrer, an amateur, winds up for a standard backhand hyzer throw, which causes the frisbee to curve to the left for right-handed players.

mately 1,000 by the time Ken Climo and company walked to the 18th green.

Crowd control had already become an issue during the round when an errant drive by Rick Voakes sent onlookers diving out of the way.

"No one is used to playing in front of a gallery," commented advanced amateur Dave Prue.

But Climo showed no signs of irritation as he trekked towards his disc, with a swagger to his step and a smirk on his face.

The frisbee assassin played solid all week, and went from approaching the leader board, to topping it, to dominating it.

Ron Russell, who won the competition in 1999 — thwarting Climo's effort to sweep the 90's — was long since out of the running.

The sniper's biggest competition broke his hand on a tree in an earlier round, and despite his valiant attempt to finish the tournament left-handed, Russell bowed out in the semifinals.

So his tenth championship was literally just a walk in the park for Climo, as he putted in his final disk for a week's score of 64 under par, eight shots better than second place.

"This is pretty special, it feels good to win it back," Climo said. He then lifted his arms up to the hoards of fans soliciting his autograph on a shirt or a frisbee and exclaimed, "Ten, baby!"