

# Frisbee flingers sail saucers into Seventies

by Edward Blau  
Newsweek Feature Service

When the Frisbee sailed onto the scene in the late 1950s, few people thought it would be anything more than another short-lived fad on the heels of the hula hoop and Davy Crockett. No one could have predicted it would not only survive but go on to become the hottest pastime of the Aquarian Age.

The saucer-shaped discs have proved so enduringly popular that the Wham-O Co., a San Gabriel, Calif., firm which owns the Frisbee trademark, will turn out some 12 million of them this year. (Hundreds of thousands more will be made by such Wham-O competitors as Saucer Tossers and Flying Saucers.) There is now even an International Frisbee Association (IFA) which is sponsored by Wham-O and which has more than 65,000 members in 70 countries around the world.

What accounts for the Frisbee's remarkable longevity?

To one Wham-O official, it's the fact that "the Frisbee allows everyone to do his own thing. Some like to compete determinedly. Some like to participate with great skill and plenty of style. But most just find it a welcome relief from the rigid, regimented competition that other sports seem to generate."

Basically, there are only two things that can be done with a Frisbee—throw it and catch it. But it is not, of course, quite all that simple.

In the hands of a skilled Frisbee-ite, it can be made to soar and dip and curve in infinite variation—a gyroscopic wonder of the air, defying all traditional laws of flight. The experts can also perform trick catches behind the back and through the legs, sail it up to 100 yards, skip it off the ground like a stone in a lake or boomerang it in the wind.

Once predominantly used by kids, Frisbees are doing their aerodynamic acrobatics from grassy knolls to city

streets, college campuses to Vietnam firebases. And virtually anyone can participate without having to worry about size or age or crowds or regulations or teammates.

"Flying a Frisbee gives me a sense of freedom," says one young Frisbee flinger who turns up regularly at the center of Frisbee activity in New York City—the Bethesda Fountain in Central Park.

Even the IFA, which hosts tournaments and puts out a Frisbee newspaper, is dedicated to minimizing organization. Says Irv Lander, associate director: "The IFA does not cater to the militant or fiercely competitive types who represent a tiny fraction of the multitudes who enjoy Frisbee informally."

Still, some organization has inevitably come to the Frisbee, via tournaments and teams. The IFA hosts an international Frisbee championship every summer at Copper Creek on Michigan's isolated Upper Peninsula, a Frisbee flick from Lake Superior. Teams and individuals come from near and far to compete and also to indulge in the tourney's main tradition—beer drinking.

Other contests and Frisbee festivals are being held across the country and Frisbee competition in school sports programs is on the rise. On the

other hand, Frisbee organization, or "Frisbeezation" as it's known, suffered a setback last year at the University of Oregon when a 2-credit course in the Frisbee was de-credited.

The Frisbee frenzy is still mounting, however, and even spilling into the world of politics—at least in Sacramento, Calif. There, Geoffrey Wong, of the Wong's Wenches Frisbee team, entered a mayoral race recently by flipping a Frisbee into the ring rather than tossing the proverbial hat.

There is much legend surrounding the origin of the Frisbee. One tale has it that a 19th-century churchgoer, tired of depositing coinage in the plate, began throwing the disc around in protest. Others date the sport's birth from the time when some irate Colonial husband started flinging the good china at his mate during a domestic tiff. Still others think the flying saucer scare of the 1950's played a part.

The name of the game probably stems from the now-defunct Frisbie Baking Co. of Bridgeport, Conn., where employees evidently took note of the aviatational abilities of the tin pie-plate. In any case, the plastic version was designed in the 1950s by Fred Morrison, a Los Angeles building inspector, who sold the rights to Wham-O

and has made a small fortune from it.

While Frisbee is generally not a strenuous activity, it has its dangers. The most widely feared is the Frisbee finger, an injury that occurs when a speeding Frisbee comes into painful contact with the finger rather than the inside of the hand. While not a fatal wound, the injury could impair a competitor's effectiveness at a tournament—especially if it's on the beer-drinking hand.

Despite such hazards, the Frisbee is flying higher than

ever—one of the few amusements to hold Americana's fickle interest from the placid '50s through the tumultuous '60s and into a new decade.



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