

Frisbee -- a sport or a spoof?

By Bill Frapp
Globe Staff

At noon today in Eagle Harbor, Mich., the tension will be unbearable as competitors await the magic words, "Gentlemen, sail your Frisbees."

The announcement signals the start of the International Frisbee Championships, an event which has drawn over 2000 scalers to the tiny hamlet.

The competition was saluted by traditional championship hoopla, including presentation of the 60-year old Frisbee Queen and the flying of the Frisbee Flag, which is displayed on this day only.

At stake is the Julius T. Nachazel Memorial Trophy, an old tin cup named for an early tournament entrant who reputedly chased an errant toss in the woods and was never seen again.

The top Massachusetts team, unhappily, won't be there. Doug Johnston of Westford, self-styled world champ and captain of the Stony Brook Blasters, has Frisbee elbow.

Johnston, a 28-year-old realtor, will be sorely missed at Eagle Harbor. When he zips his black Wham-o Master disc at 75 m.p.h. neighboring children and birds are no longer safe.

His specialty, the "Rise O'er," which goes straight up and hovers, was the scourge of opponents at recent competition on Boston Common.

He has 10 shots in his repertoire, some for speed, and others for distance. He can catch a Frisbee on one finger. Frisbee has reached full flower in Johnston.

"Competition is rough," says Johnston. "Last year a

guy on our team broke three fingers catching a Frisbee; tempers grow short and fights break out."

Although there are individual contests for distance and accuracy at Eagle Harbor, the heart of the competition is the bitterly contested "guts" Frisbee, a team game.

This is played by two five-man teams standing about 15 yards apart. They hurl the plastic discs at one another with awesome force, scoring points when an opponent fails to catch a throw one-handed. There is always the risk of incurring the dreaded "Frisbee finger," an injury that results from making a catch at the wrong angle.

In guts contests Johnston is feared for his overhand reverse wrist flip with twist, a toss opponents concede is virtually untouchable.

Previously the plaything of kids and collegians, Frisbee flying has recently become everyone's pastime. Actors flip them between sets, soldiers in Vietnam between action, statesmen between conferences.

There's even an International Frisbee Assn. whose membership has soared to 28,000 from 3000 a year ago. The association is attempting to set standards of proficiency, rules and regulations to gain acceptance in the Olympic Games.

The Frisbee, in case there is anyone so woefully uninformed as to be unaware of its existence, is a plastic disk about the size of a pie pan that can soar, dip or bank like a glider when thrown properly.

They are manufactured

commercially by the Wham-o Mfg. Co. of California in several sizes and models, ranging from novice to masters.

Legends about the origins of Frisbee are many — all probably apocryphal. One has it that a Yale man named Frisbee sailed a church collection plate 200 feet across the campus in protest of compulsory chapel in 1827.

Movie people claimed it all started in Hollywood in the 1940's when film editors relaxed at lunch by scaling empty film tins.

But most Frisbee historians agree that the modern era began after World War II when the clientele of the now-defunct Frisbie Baking Co. of Bridgeport, Ct., found that the tin plates holding Mother Frisbie's pies were great for soaring.

In the late 1950's, Fred Morrison of California, a pie-tin tosser of notable skill, took the idea to Wham-O. The company has since sold several million Frisbees, and Morrison has become wealthy on his royalties.

New modes of play surface daily. German shepherds have an interest in catching Frisbees which reportedly transcends food, rest and even other dogs. Sky divers flip Frisbees diving. Frisbee water polo is played in rowboats. Frisbees are hurled from mountain tops to set new altitude records. Boomerang techniques are being perfected.

Put the zany pieces of



PREMIER FRISBEE scaler Doug Johnston of Westford displays the agility of a ballet dancer in making behind the back catch. (Frank O'Brien photo)

Frisbeeism together — the bizarre costumes worn at contests, the strange legend of Julius T. Nachazel and his cockeyed cup — and you come up with a splendid spoof of organized sport, an existential exercise just right for the times.

If you couldn't make Eagle Harbor, there will be state and regional championships held on Boston Common Aug. 5 and Aug. 20.

TRADE WINDS

A West Coast speedster, Sanger Boats, has chosen Performance Marine located on Rte. 28A in Alton Bay, N.H., as dealer for Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

Robert Mait, owner and manager of the new Performance Marine, a boating enthusiast for the 25 years, is bringing the speedy craft to the water for demonstrations in New England.

Sanger Boats started in 1955 and has grown from a one-man operation to one

employing 25. They claim to be the largest builder of V drive boats in the world.

Sanger's eight models include an 18-foot drag and ski hydros and boats, their Catalina "V" Bottom of 19 feet that has jet unit, I/O or inboard power, an 18-foot family ski boat with inboard and a 22-foot day cruiser.

Sanger makes its own hardware, has special speed props and will even customize wood decks on their speedsters.



ONE FINGER catch is easy for Doug Johnston, leader of the Stony Brook Blasters, top-ranked Westford squad. (Frank O'Brien photo)

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