

A Rookie Looks Back at the 1996 World Masters Flying Disc Championships

by Nancy Malakhoff

The 1996 World Masters were held for the first time ever in New England on July 9th - 13th at Borderland State Park in Easton, Massachusetts. The magnificent Ames Mansion served as a backdrop for the Disc Golf and Discathon courses. The six day event showcased an illustrious field including P.D.G.A. Hall of Famers Dan "Stork" Roddick and Jim Palmeri. Competitors came from as far away as Taipei, Taiwan and Birmingham, England. Among the 63 players who poured in from 14 states and 4 countries were numerous current and former flying disc World Champions and World Record holders. Simply put, Masters was a blast - the weather was great, the location was beautiful, and the people, without a doubt, make the event. By the end of the first day I was filthy and exhausted; my knees were skinned, my clothes were all grass-stained and all was right with the world.

Twenty three players from New England jumped at the chance to take part in the World Masters Championship in their own backyard and fared quite well in the competition. Four NEFA (New

England Flying disc Association) members were in the top ten spots in the Men's Masters Division with Jason Southwick placing fifth. The top New England finisher was Joy Hartwell of North Reading placing 2nd Overall in the Women's Masters Division behind Mary Brenner of Freeville, New York. Three New Englanders placed in the top ten in the Grandmasters Division, with Theo Cade finishing tied for sixth.

Competition was held in seven events: Distance, Disc Golf, Discathon, Double Disc Court, Self Caught Flight, Accuracy and Freestyle. In addition to individual event titles, Overall titles were awarded in four age categories: Masters (35-44), Grandmasters (45-54), Senior Grandmasters (55-64) and Legends (65+). The NEFA Organizing Committee, and particularly Tournament Director Greg Black, found out first hand what an enormous undertaking this event is. Fortunately Greg is at his best when juggling 17 things at once while standing in the path of a runaway freight train. Everyone who pitched in to help deserves a huge thank you for making the first Masters in New England an

unqualified success. The beauty of being a rookie at an event of this caliber is that you can set personal bests in just about everything (easy if you haven't played some of the events before) and then brag that you placed third overall in THE WORLD. I wasn't going to mention that only seven women were entered but I guess I'll have to in order to make my plea that women start turning out in larger numbers for this event. The Men's Masters and Grandmasters were loaded with talented players, while the Women's, Senior Grandmasters and Legends Divisions need to bring in more of the talented players we know are out there. As "Papa" Jack Roddick likes to say "I know you people have parents; bring them with you next year".

While I was utterly amazed by the disc handling skills and the high level of competition all week, it occurred to me that what really makes the Masters such a special event is all the comradery and side events that are going on in and around the actual competition. So here are some of the highlights of the week:

SUNDAY - New England weather is notoriously changeable, as in changing quickly to horrible if you have something planned for

outside. Greg took out a big insurance policy by gathering the helpers to erect a huge tent; virtually assuring us sunny weather for the rest of the week.

MONDAY - Everyone got their first peek at the Disc Golf and Discathon courses. During the Early Bird Golf Tourney people began to worry and ask questions like "Why is Hole #14 called Pebble Beach?", "I have to throw where?", "Are you sure Kyle will be here with a canoe to rescue our discs tomorrow?", and "What is that green three-leaf stuff growing everywhere?". My major concern was the Discathon course set up by the evil Rick Williams. "One kilometer equals how many miles?!" (Answer is 1 km = .62 miles) "Will CPR be available?" Monday evening's player meeting was just like a family reunion - hugs and kisses all around, the youngsters were tortured (you mean we have to howl or you won't let us play?) and then everyone opened their presents. I was assigned to gather goodies for a player's package for an event that I'd never been to with this preamble by Greg: "The player's package has to be really great. This tournament always has the best player's package you've ever seen. Money? No - there's no money to pay for it!" Well, our

sponsors came through in a big way and were rewarded with full color tee signs and our undying gratitude. In order to thank our sponsors (and make anyone who didn't attend jealous) here's what everyone got: 2 lids and a golf disc from Mattel Sports (all with the Masters logo), a Zephyr from Innova-Champion, a golf disc from Lightning, a Fly-Dye Cyclone w/logo from Discraft, 3 minis from Disc Golf World News, Mattel and NEFA, a Cliff Bar, 2 Accu-line Surgical Markers, AAA Map of New England, Best Read Guide to Cape Cod, a copy of the Ale Street News, bumper stickers from Lightning, Tom Whiffen's New England Course Directory, a handful of Discards, 2 issues of NEFA News, a Disc Golf video from Circular Productions, some authentic Cape Cod salt water taffy and a really cool tie-dyed T-shirt complete with a howling wolf.

TUESDAY - Players from other parts of the country and world were seen suffering from culture shock when exposed to NEFA time: "What's NEFA time?", "Does that mean everything will run late? early?" Silly people - once everyone relaxed and realized that NEFA time has no actual correlation to real time, the competition was able to begin in earnest. Round one of Golf and the accuracy prelims were played on

the castle grounds and then we moved to Sharon Elementary School for the Self Caught Flight prelims. The Wolf Pack convened on Tuesday night at the Irish Embassy Pub in Easton for "Dances With Wolves". We all know these people can play disc, but is there another side to any of them? Absolutely, and a few brave souls were kind enough to share a little more of themselves with us. You had to be there, but the Reader's Digest condensed version goes something like this: Stork is a veritable walking encyclopedia on the history of our sport and the memorabilia that he has pulled out of the dumpster at Mattel could fill a table at a Save The Children Auction; Blair Paulsen's trip to the Masters was an epic voyage somewhat longer than any by Magellan and involved every form of transportation known to man; I'd love to sneak into Dave Johnson's house and see just how many Frisbie pie tins he really has - his samples were great and I'm still laughing about the one that magically changed from an antique to a Mother Buckley's pizza plate halfway through the evening; Sunny demonstrated his newly learned deep muscle massage on Stork, and then tried to sell us his house so he and Jude could run off to California, and, last but not least, Rick Williams

apparently genetically engineers his own freestyle partners in his basement.

WEDNESDAY-- Play, play and more play - what a day. Round two of golf in the morning followed by Discathon prelims. My luck held out and

my division didn't have Discathon prelims until after the course was shortened. Controlled pace Discathon was a bit confusing at first but everyone who played was raving about it. Controlled pace put a lot more emphasis on good disc handling skills and less emphasis on running. Back to the school after lunch for the distance prelims. I was absolutely floored by the distance some of those guys can



Greg, Stork & Sunny in front of the Ames Mansion.

throw a disc. Disc people have a reputation of being cheapskates and the label is largely justified EXCEPT for the Save the Children Charity Auction. This is an event where people like me pay \$26 for a \$4 disc (I can only hope my husband doesn't read this) all in the name of a good cause. I was as amazed all evening by the generosity of the Wolf Pack as I was by the foolishness of the Parks Department. They

actually were crazy enough to set us loose inside the beautiful Ames Mansion amongst 6,000 rare books and antique furnishings on Greg Black's promise that we would behave. Paul Thompson was an enthusiastic auctioneer, \$1,800 was raised to support



Lev & Nancy Malakhoff Monday morning at the Masters

the important efforts of Save the Children, and Steve Hartwell and Bill Richards probably had to refinance their homes after adding some great classic discs and memorabilia to their collections.

THURSDAY-No after hours events were planned for this day of heavy-duty competition. There were finals for some divisions and semi-finals for others in Accuracy, Discathon (Again !?), Self Caught Flight and DDC. We started early and played late. The Men's Masters were still playing DDC well past 7 PM.

FRIDAY - Rumors started flying around about the imminent arrival of Hurricane Bertha so we scurried around trying to finish off some of the events to leave a lighter schedule for Saturday. After lunch I resisted the temptation to flee and made my debut in Freestyle. The crowd was incredibly kind and didn't laugh (too loud) at my feeble efforts. The competition was held on the front lawn of the castle with the shrubbery forming a circular stage. Mark Mudgett did a great job as the sound man and NEFA President Toddy Brodeur organized the judging of the most incredible freestyle routines I have ever seen. Flash - Men's Masters Discathon Final - Harvey Brandt is in the lead with Jason Southwick running second

about 30 seconds back. Harvey's disc crosses the finish line and the fans go wild. Rick Williams, officiating, spots Harvey's disc just brushing the edge of the fake lake near the finish line and calls it OB, but no one, most importantly Harvey, can hear the call over the crowd noise. Harvey would have had plenty of time to re-throw but by the time the spectators quiet down enough for Harvey to hear the call, Jason has already crossed the finish line. Who wins? After a lot of discussion Harvey was assessed a time penalty, but even with that, still finished first ahead of Jason. About a month later I overheard Jason talking about that Discathon Final. Was he moaning about losing a World Title on a technicality or disputing the call? No - the spirit of fair play at the World Masters was totally unlike what you see in any other high level sports competition today. Jason was explaining how much he had learned about Discathon by watching Harvey. Congratulations to Harvey and Jason on a race well run. At the Friday night party, several players enjoyed videos of the day's freestyle prelims. Thanks goes to Steve Scannell's friend, Phyllis Zaiger, for her hospitality and use of her lovely house and patio.

Masters *continued from 15*

SATURDAY - Hurricane Bertha arrived on the scene and we had a very wet morning of field events. Unfortunately we didn't get any extra wind assistance to help our distance throws, just heavy rain knocking the discs out of the sky. Tiina Booth arrived at the last possible moment to jump out of her car and win the women's distance event in her sandals while Greg Black was perfecting a dry run-up with Roy Doar as his umbrella bearer. A handful of spectators, known as the few and the crazy, hung around laughing under umbrellas during the final two ultra-soggy DDC matches while all the sane people ran for cover at Mansfield High School where the Freestyle Finals were held indoors. Saturday evening was the piece de resistance, a genuine New England style Clambake with lobsters, clams, mussels and all the trimmings. After gorging ourselves and rehashing all of our triumphs and near triumphs, the Parks people were crazy enough to let us back in the castle for our Awards Ceremony. Glenn and Sue Whitlock gave us 101 good reasons to all get together in Vancouver for the next World Masters Championship after which Greg proceeded to roast everyone

in the room. A great time was had by all, no one escaped unscathed, and no one left without an award in their hands and a smile on their face.



Greg Black Relaxing during the Masters.

Capping off the week's competition were three World Records. In Freestyle, 18 players set a group chest roll record and 48 players helped to set the Maxi-op record. In the Distance event, Jack Roddick of Pennsylvania edged out Der-Hsin Tang of Taiwan with a throw of 77.31 meters to set a new World Record in the Legends division.