

CHASING DISC GOLF AND THE OVERALL TITLE

*Confessions of the
Overall World Frisbee Champion*

SCOTT ZIMMERMAN



FOREWORD BY
DAN "STORK" RODDICK

Praise for Chasing Disc Golf and the Overall Title

He was the most dominant disc sports overall competitor in the 80s, perhaps ever. In this riveting book, Scott retraces the steps and strategies that helped him win the overall title an incredible 8 of 9 years at the World Frisbee Championships and U.S. Open.

Gregg Hosfeld, 1987 PDGA Champion, Disc Golf Hall of Fame Inductee

This book chronicles Scott's drive and competitive history that led him to become the greatest overall Frisbee player ever. His astounding training regimen gives aspiring new players an indication of what is required to rise to the top.

Eric Wootten, Virginia Frisbee Hall of Fame

An excellent training manual and intimate glimpse into a champion's heart...a fascinating read by one of the greatest disc athletes ever!

John "Friz Whiz" Kirkland, Disc Athlete of the Decade

These engaging stories tell how Scott became a top-notch freestyler and gained my utmost admiration for his determination in many ways.

Joey Hudoklin, Multiple-Time World Freestyle Champion

Chasing Disc Golf and the Overall Title

Confessions of the Overall World Frisbee Champion

Scott Zimmerman

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Foreword by Dan “Stork” Roddick

As I first read Scott’s early drafts of this book, it took me back through so many vibrant memories from the early days of our sport and I realized how many ways our experiences were intertwined. It was a very unlikely sequence of events that put me into the position of Director of the International Frisbee Association. I was supposed to be at Rutgers, finishing up a doctoral program, not in Los Angeles, building this thing we came to call “The Overall.” Somehow, I had a particular vision of disc sports that explored the vast variety of things that could be done with the disc. I had always been an admirer of the decathlon and those athletes who pursued that challenge of competing in ten different events that call upon such a wide range of abilities.

Through extremely good fortune and the invitation of Steady Ed Headrick, in 1977, I was in position to forge my aspirations for disc sports into a reality. However, what made that reality into a phenomenon was the incredible enthusiasm, talent and determination of the many players around the world who responded to the challenges of the overall. And, the indisputable king of that eclectic band of maverick athletes was the impossibly young Scott Zimmerman. I say, “impossibly young” because his rapid rise to domination of the sport contradicted all of my expectations. As the components of the overall came into place, I was specifically pleased by the wide diversity of skills that were essential for success. The overall was designed to be the most comprehensive and definitive test of disc play. I and many other players knew that it took years of practice and competitive experience to master just one of the involved disciplines. At the risk of overstating, I think a case could be made that the overall is one of the most complete athletic tests in existence... period. I realize that contention would be firebombed in any online sports discussion, but those folks simply don’t realize what disc overall play requires. Certainly, our games are much less broadly known, but when objectively compared to more conventional sports we hold up very well. I

guess the best comparison would be some sort of event that combined tennis, golf, cross country running, archery, discus, javelin and rhythmic gymnastics. That calls for a pretty demanding training regimen.

So... given all that, we just assumed that nobody could possibly be a contender for the overall until they had years of experience under their belts. Sure, it was expected that there would be young stars in particular events. If a talented kid focused on golf or freestyle, maybe they could come into an overall and make a significant splash in their specialty. But... that's a long, long way from being a legitimate contender for overall.

That's what was most enlightening about Scott's story for me. Although I know him quite well, I really didn't know much about those early years in Virginia and how he came to be so captivated by the joys and challenges of the Frisbee. Especially at that very young age, nobody really can hook up with the game on their own. One of the most endearing aspects of what we call the "Frisbee Family" is that I believe we provide a very warm and encouraging welcome and support for newcomers. Almost every great player has the story of being taken under the wing of one or more local players who went out of their way to foster that initial curiosity about the sport. And, it's also very common that those relationships became more than just about the game, maturing into lifelong friendships. So, in many ways, the Virginia playing community can take much-justified pride in the life and career of Scott Zimmerman. Without them, we might never have seen this brilliant talent.

And that's worth a bit more thought. What exactly has made Scott so successful at a sport that does not lend itself to consistent domination? I say that, because the overall has so maddeningly many moving parts. As Scott retells the saga of his overall career, the unpredictable variables are constantly working against his repeated success. An unexpected gust of wind either causes a freestyle error or lifts an MTA catch out of reach. Or, that gust propels another player's distance throw into the finals or over the discathon finish.

While it is an individual event, we also have the unique variable of the two team events. If your DDC or freestyle partners don't play up to expectations, the hope for an overall win is bleak. In short, it's a bettor's nightmare. Almost anything can happen, which is fine. That's part of what makes it so much fun. But, the game does not lend itself to consistent success. In short, Scott's career was incredibly improbable. So, just how did he beat those odds? What made Magic Johnson great? No simple list of attributes can provide the answer. Vertical leap, visual acuity and eye-hand coordination are all important, but it seems certain that there are always subtle, perhaps unmeasurable facets of a person that are essential components of greatness. And, as I read through Scott's improbable life story, I think I realized a few of those components of his success.

Of course, he did possess an impressive set of physical skills. But, I must say that if we were simply measuring physical skills among the top overall players, I'd have Scott finishing out of the top ten. He definitely had enough physical skill, but that wasn't the key. So, if not strength and speed, where was the magic? Well, I think it was not just one facet that we could pour into a bottle and sell (unfortunately). I break it down into several characteristics. The first is sheer, unrelenting determination. As you read Scott's recounting of his earliest days of play, you'll be able to see that determination being forged. Imagine that Scott were your kid and he comes home from high school to tell you that he wants to drop out to become (wait for it...) a professional Frisbee player.

"Well, son, let's start with the fact that there really isn't such a thing. Have you talked with your guidance counselor about this? No, seriously son... Really?"

And then, his proof that this is such a great idea is that these hippie guys who have adopted him say that he's really got tremendous Frisbee potential. Where do you start to explain how many things are wrong with this terrible idea?

But, as you'll read, young Scott actually managed to sell this very unusual vision of his future. That, in itself, is pretty amazing. I'm certain that the

key to the sale was the depth and certainty of his youthful determination. Even at that age, he was not a person to be denied.

That relates to what I believe was the second key to Scott's success; his ability to focus on the desired result, even in the face of unexpected setbacks. In that way, the overall truly is life in microcosm. Things very rarely go as expected. It's all about how we handle those setbacks. As you read Scott's description of how some of the overall races played out, it may be hard for you to grasp the significance of some of the setbacks. That's largely because in his retelling, he has baked in his extraordinary ability to absorb such difficulties without disruption of his overriding goals. You might come closest to seeing it in his description of the epic battle at the 1982 World Championships at Rutgers. Pre-event, I had written an article handicapping each of the events. For self-caught flight, I picked Scott to win, saying that it was the most certain bet in the field. Spoiler alert... he doesn't even make the first-round cut! Unless you're an experienced fan of overall, you probably can't grasp what a disastrous turn of events this was for Scott's overall prospects. Losing those points was catastrophic. It's over...

"Hey... things happen. It's a quirky event. You can't win 'em all."

And, you can be sure that there were plenty of wolves licking their chops at the almost certain prospect that there was going to be a new alpha in the pack. The king was down and probably out... I'll let you read that chapter for the amazing details of how Scott turned that around, but the key is that rather than the showstopper that the SCF result would have been for almost anyone else, Scott somehow was able to turn that bitter defeat into rocket fuel, launching himself to completely unexpected successes in the remaining events. It was an epic triumph of determination and focus.

There is another essential aspect of Scott's ability to focus. He absolutely owns all aspects of his performance. By that I mean that he takes full responsibility for the outcome of his efforts. This is a relatively rare trait. Even among the most successful athletes (and others, such as politicians) it's so common to see them (us?) immediately blaming someone or

something else for any shortcoming. Scott wastes absolutely no energy on this common mind game and is immediately moving on without distraction. Again, you can see that in his recounting of the famous \$50,000 Disc Golf Championship. I so clearly remember a dramatic incident that impacted Scott. The wife of another competitor inadvertently created a situation in which Scott had to make a key putt that was in a very much more difficult position than it should have been. It was a perfect set up for a classic failure and blame game. The psychology of the moment is so tempting that we almost all get pulled in by it.

“Poor me... the putt I deserved was so simple, and now, because of someone else I’ve got this much, much more challenging shot.”

That putt was just begging to be missed. When Scott just stepped up and drained it for his birdie, I knew we had someone very special on our hands. And... I can assure you of this: if he had missed the putt, he would have moved on without even a nod to the drama that had put him in that situation. That’s the real payoff of owning his results. He was always willing to take the personal risk of failure. And that allowed him to produce his absolute best effort, unfettered by any rationalization.

The book is full of such moments. Look for them. I truly believe they are what made Scott the king of what might be the most daunting sport challenge in the world. Yeah, I know... there are lots of pretty scary sport challenges out there: Olympic downhill, facing a major league pitcher, a round in the MMA ring, and many more. I definitely get that, but hey, I’m prejudiced. For sure, I’ve got a big dog in this particular fight. But, I’m pretty, pretty certain that it would take any of those other great athletes a very, very long time to win one of our overalls.

I like Scott’s chances...

Introduction

I hope to make this more than the story of my, I think colorful, life. Various parts are funny, dumb, controversial, unbelievable, and inspiring. I will share how becoming world champion took more than skill and hard work. It took grit and creativity.

I'll try to put you inside my head as I faced off in an intense disc golf match with the legendary John Kirkland, hitchhiked through Florida to get to the Rose Bowl, practiced distance on freezing nights in deep snow, made a full-sprint diving catch to clinch the world overall title, pushed myself to throw 80 Aerobies in six hours to break the Guinness world record for the longest throw of any object, and squeezed my training for six disc sports into 45 minutes every night to stage a major comeback.

This book has two elements. One is the story of the amazing “Frisbee Family” and the history of the sport from one man’s perspective, although that would barely be a page in a complete treatise on the decades it took to lay the foundation for the explosive growth of disc golf.

This is also the story of a naïve kid, whose eagerness for success practically forced him to drop out of high school to travel the world playing Frisbee, supremely confident that he knew what he was doing and that everything would work out fine. I describe my athletic training, mental preparation, and some of the competitive mistakes I made and tips I discovered. I'll tell you about my worst throw ever, and my greatest (a blind shot that won the overall).

These two themes are interwoven. I considered highlighting the training tips and competitive secrets, or even making a separate book, but finally decided to bury those gems in the historical context where I discovered them – or fell victim to them.

As you'll see, my flying disc career consisted of lots of highs (and some lows as well). Here are some of my major achievements that I'll tell you about:

- World Overall Frisbee Champion four years in a row
- U.S. Open Overall Champion four years in a row
- World Frisbee Golf Champion
- World Self Caught Flight Champion
- International Frisbee Tournament Guts Champion
- U.S. Open Double-Disc Court Champion
- U.S. Open Accuracy Champion
- U.S. Open Self Caught Flight Champion
- International Surf Festival Freestyle Champion
- World Flying Disc Overall Champion
- World Flying Disc Distance Champion
- Winner of several North American Series events
- Virginia Frisbee Golf Champion three years in a row
- Virginia State Overall Champion three times
- Atlanta National Disc Open Distance Champion
- Breaking the Guinness World Record for the Longest Throw of any Object
- Appearing in TV commercials
- Handing a Frisbee to the future president of the United States
- Throwing across Niagara Falls and the Potomac River

I also placed second in the U.S. Open Disc Golf Championships, third in the World Frisbee Golf Championships (twice), fifth and sixth in the PDGA World Disc Golf Championships, third in the Japan Open disc golf competition, and tenth in the famous Wham-O \$50,000 disc golf tournament. I'll share with you how I might have done better in those events.

As in most sports and professions, specialized terms exist in flying disc sports. The names of some disc sports are common words, including *guts*,

ultimate, freestyle, accuracy, distance, and overall. In this text, every time these words are used refers to the flying disc sport, except the word *distance* carries the ordinary meaning in a dozen places and refers to the disc sport in all other cases. I believe my readers will easily discern the meaning by context and become familiar with our lingo.

The overall championship is typically comprised of five to eight separate disc sports (excluding guts and ultimate): freestyle, double-disc court (DDC), accuracy, distance, disc golf, discathon, Maximum Time Aloft (MTA), Throw Run and Catch (TRC), and Self-Caught Flight (SCF). Here's a quick summary:

- Disc Golf is played very similarly to regular golf except that the objective is to finish each hole by throwing the disc into a chain basket.
- In Freestyle, a team of two or three players performs trick throws and catches, and other elaborate moves sometimes involving dance and acrobatics. Teams are judged by level of difficulty, execution, and presentation.
- In DDC, a team of two players defends a 13-meter square court which is 17 meters away from the opponent's court. Two discs are in play simultaneously with the objective being to land a throw into the opponent's court for one point or force them to touch both discs simultaneously for two points.
- In MTA, the player must catch his own throw with one hand and is scored according to how much time the disc is in the air. At this writing, the open division world record is 16.72 seconds and the women's world record is 11.81 seconds.
- In TRC, the player must catch his own throw and is scored by the distance he runs to the catching point. The open division world record is 94 meters and the women's record is 60 meters.
- SCF combines MTA and TRC into a single event. The MTA time is multiplied by 5.5 and added to the TRC distance.

- In Discathon, players race for time through a one-kilometer course. Each player must throw the disc around various obstacles, such as trees, but if he is able to curve the disc around the obstacle, he may take a short-cut to save running time.
- In Accuracy, the player throws four discs from each of seven stations trying to sail them through a standing target that is a 1.5-meter square. The open division world record is 25/28 and the women's record is 19/28.
- In Distance, the player tries to throw as far as possible. The open division world record is 338 meters and the women's record is 173.3 meters.

If you want to learn more about disc sports, these web pages will help:

<http://www.wfdf.org/>

<http://www.freestyledisc.org/>

<https://www.pdga.com/>

Though it is often written in lowercase to indicate the sport generically, Frisbee is a registered trademark of the Wham-O company: <https://wham-o.com/>

A few photos in this text are of unknown origin and I am unable to credit the photographer. If you know the source, please contact me at scottz1@hotmail.com and I will update the book.

I sincerely hope you will enjoy this book. If so, I would greatly appreciate if you post a positive review on amazon.com.

People Mentioned

Building an index for an e-book is surprisingly complex, so I'm including this page to at least reference the names and stories that you can search for. The paperback edition includes a proper index with page numbers.

Adams, Neil; Adler, Alan; Aiu, Randy; Amann, Randy; Ashton, Billie Sage; Bach, Catherine; Baranyk, Pavel; Basso, Corey; Bell, Chip; Beringer, S.; Berman, Audrey; Beukelman, Gregg; Beukelman, Jay; Birch, Cyndi; Bird, John; Bloom, Billy; Boda, Tom; Bonopane, Alan; Borg, Bjorn; Bowie, Peter; Brandt, Harvey; Brannigan, Doug; Brathwaite, Philo; Brenner, Paul; Brokaw, Tom; Brooks, John; Burns, Bill; Cahow, Jo; Cain, Don; Carmel, Tim; Castiglia, Rick; Cohn, Jon; Conger, Michael; Connelly, John; Cook, Karl; Cooksey, Jack; Damon, Conrad; Danna, Mark; David, Evan; Dunipace, Dave; Duvall, Charlie; Duvall, Harold; Dwork, John; Elliot, Daryl; Erickson, Hal; Federer, Roger; Felberbaum, Jeff; Ferrans, Sam; Field, Tom; Freedman, Jon; Fried, Robert; Gaman, Teresa; Geare, Gerry; Greenwell, David; Greif, Dan; Griffin, Dave; Griffin, Jennifer; Griffin, Merv; Hart, Erin; Headrick, Ed; Hendix, Jimi; Hendrix, Pryor; Herrick, Jim; Hesselberth, Dave; Hoertel, Bruce; Hopkins, Tom; Horn, Mark; Horn, Susie; Horowitz, Judy; Hosfeld, Gregg; Hoskins, Don; Hubbard, Steve; Hudoklin, Joey; Hughes, Mike; Hunter, Craig; Jewell, John; Johnson, Dave; Johnson, Stancil; Kahn, Larry; Kalb, Irv; Kent, Don; Kirkland, Cody; Kirkland, G; Kirkland, John; Kissinger, Henry; Korn, Doug; Krajna, Tom; Lahm, Randy; Lampkin, Kurt; Laubert, Peter; LeBeau, Rick; Lemann, Andrew; Loftus, Dennis; Loftus, Joann; Loving, Cade; Lowry, Hugh; Mackey, Tim; Malafronte, Victor; Mangone, Dan; Marx, Eric; McBeth, Paul; McEnroe, John; McInnis, Danny; McLean, Steve; McNamee, Wally; McRann, Tom; Meier, Roger; Meyers, Rick; Miller, Van; Moldt, Jamie; Monroe, Tom; Morrison, Fred; Muise, Leonard; Nachazel, Julius T.; Naughton, Jimmy; Nixon, Richard; Norton, Goldie; O'dell, Bill; Olsen, Eric; Palmeri, Jim; Pellicane, Tony; Perlberg, Gary; Pickerill, John; Pierson, Snapper; Rabdau, Pat; Reagan, Maureen; Reagan, Ronald; Rhodes, Donnie;

Robinson, Gary; Roddick, Dan; Roddick, Jack; Rosenthal, Amye; Rust, Rod; Sappenfield, George; Scala, Jimmy; Schindel, Larry; Selinske, Tim; Shaffer, Rick; Sheldon, Sean; Shelton, Jay; Shore, Dinah; Smethers, Ted; Smits, Richie; Snyder, Ross; Starr, Scott; Steger, Dave; Taylor, David; Thompson, Paul; Tobias, Ross; Truman, Harry; Ugalde, Tita; Valencia, Steve; Van Sickle, Krae; Velasquez, Erwin; Velasquez, Jens; Washington, George; Watson, Jeff; Westerfield, Ken; Weyand, John; White, Ivan; Whitlock, Glen; Wilchek, Don; Wiseman, James; Wootten, Bonnie; Wootten, Eric; Wright, Bill; Wright, Tom; Youngman, Joe; Zimmerman, Amanda; Zimmerman, Fred; Zimmerman, Leeanne; Zimmerman, Martha; Zimmerman, Vera

Part I – The Desire to be a Champion

The next few chapters describe how I grew to love Frisbee, and how I developed the desire to be the World Frisbee Champion. I'll explain how I began training intensely, at least four hours every day, even in the snow, and on some days practiced five overall events for over ten hours.



This photo was taken about the time that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger came to dinner at our house (1973) and I played pool with three Secret Service agents.

1 Early Days

- Frisbee Tag with a Keds Disc
- The Chevy Luv Frisbee Game
- The Harlem Globetrotters and the Capitals
- The Frisbee Book and Stoneleigh Frisbee Golf
- Larry Schindel Forms the Washington Area Frisbee Club
- Turning Pro with Eric Wootten

Frisbee Tag with a Keds Disc

My earliest Frisbee memory is when I was 11 years old. Well, yes, I had thrown mom's Maxwell House coffee can lids in the living room before that, but let's take this story outdoors. That summer in 1973, with the Vietnam War raging, and the Nixon White House imploding from Watergate, a bunch of us kids in the Stoneleigh neighborhood in McLean, Va., played a game called "frisbee tag" around the grassy hills on both sides of a creek that sneaked into a culvert. We'd jump over the creek at various points, run over the culvert, and down to the other side of the creek. Whoever was "it" had to throw the Keds disc to hit someone else, who then would be "it." The disc we used had come with a pair of sneakers that one of us, maybe me, had just gotten. Not technically a Frisbee, it looked like a spaceship. One time, when the disc had hit me, everyone screamed "Scott's it" and then like galaxies in the expanding universe, they sped away from my vicinity in every direction. I picked up the disc and saw that the closest kid to me had already jumped the creek and was running up the hill on the other side. I threw immediately. It flew about 50 feet but landed short just behind him.

However, I watched with glee as I learned my first cool lesson about Frisbee. Are you ready for this? It's important. You see, two things happen after a throw. There is the flight of course, but there is also the spin on the disc in flight, which doesn't end just because the flight ends. Although my throw missed him, when the disc hit the ground, the spin rolled it a bit farther until the disc tagged him in the foot. Other kids saw this and screamed "Bob's it!" In that game, that day, it was an amazing shot. (For disc golfers, we'll revisit post-flight spin when I discuss landing your approach shot close to the hole, and when I describe the wickedest thumb roller disc golf has ever seen.)

A couple of other quick notes about Vietnam and Watergate. I remember the very emotional day that summer when my next-door neighbor hung a huge sign on his house that read, "Welcome Home Tom!" That family was lucky — their son escaped the horrible war that finally ended in 1975. Many federal workers lived in Stoneleigh, including CIA agents, a U.S. Senator, and a couple of White House officials. A few years later one of the scenes in "All the President's Men" was filmed in our neighborhood.

Later on, I moved up from the Keds disc to a Regular Frisbee. On the back of the package was a diagram of a sidearm throw, but I just couldn't execute it properly. The disc would tip sideways (that's called a turnover) and roll on the ground every time.

Then I hit on the solution: Let go of the disc as it hangs down beside your hip, not up by your chest (as the diagram appeared to show). That did it! I started flinging those sidearms all over the place. Readers who have grown up with bevel-edge golf discs all your life are probably thinking I was pretty dumb, because you *do* release a sidearm practically beside your chest, not hanging down by your hip. Well, that's true with modern disc technology, but not with light plastic in the 1970's, and especially not with an unstable turnover disc like a Regular Frisbee.

The Chevy Luv Frisbee Game

Hanging around Stoneleigh one day in 1975 I saw a 17-year old guy washing his shiny new red Chevy Luv truck, the Eagles playing on the radio. He can see that I'm bored and strikes up a conversation. When he's done washing his truck, he says, "You wanna play catch with a Frisbee?"

We had a narrow parking lot to ourselves. He curved his throws over the cars, and they would fly right to me. He even taught me how to throw curve shots. I wasn't as accurate as he was, but as soon as I threw, he would start walking to the spot where he would make the catch. Sometimes he would even take his eyes off the Frisbee in flight and, with a skill that amazed me, catch the disc at just the right moment. Throughout the summer I went to his house several times to ask if Cliff could come out to play.

The Harlem Globetrotters and the Capitals

Another day in 1975 my mother Amanda took my sister Leeanne and me to a Harlem Globetrotters game at Capital Centre. Just before the game began, I was excited by the announcement that at half-time we would be treated to a Frisbee show by John Kirkland and Victor Malafronte. I didn't know who they were, but I thought that in case the basketball game was boring, maybe the Frisbee show would be cool.

They didn't disappoint. They skipped discs off the court. Threw and caught a disc between their legs. Rolled it along the floor and kicked it up to a behind-the-back catch. They saved the most thrilling moment for the end: John threw the disc upside down off the backboard and into the basket from full court! (A few years later, after I'd become better at Frisbee, I learned that it's not terribly difficult to make that shot, certainly much easier than doing it with a basketball. But still, making the shot on demand with a giant audience is very impressive.)

A year goes by and I'm enjoying throwing a Frisbee now and then, mostly by myself. One day, again by chance, Mom takes me to Capital Centre where Victor and Tom McRann did a Frisbee show on ice skates during

both intermissions of a hockey game. Again, I was thrilled by an awesome show. They juggled three discs at once skipping them off the ice to each other. Their accuracy seemed incredible.

The best part was when the deep-voice announcer boomed, “Now Victor will attempt to throw the Frisbee into the opposite goal.” Victor skated around behind the net and started to line up his throw while standing just beside the goal. As he looked across the rink at the opposite goal, the crowd fell completely silent. Everyone stared at him, most of them wondering, like me, how he would wiggle out of this. No way he could make such a shot. Then Victor backed up and, perhaps in a bit of showmanship, he began talking to one of the stadium workers. Something wasn’t right. He was asking them to remove the net from beside him because it was at exactly the spot where he needed to stand. So now, standing where the goal once was, he starts to line up his throw again. (I was amazed by the color of the disc—a green Super Pro—because I knew that only blue and orange ones were available at the store. I was thinking, this guy must have some amazing connections with Wham-O to get a green one.) Remember, he’s on ice skates. I knew it had to be difficult to even stand still to launch his throw. But he made it look easy. His sidearm throw curved toward the penalty box and came back into the rink and flew into the net at the other end! What a shot! The crowd loved it. And this kid in the crowd never forgot his showmanship, skill, and professionalism.

Let’s do a little math. Suppose two million people lived in the D.C. metro area in 1976. The capacity of Capital Centre is 18,000, but let’s just call it 20,000. That means that about 1% of the city population went to the Globetrotters game. And then a year later another 1% went to that Capitals game. Multiplying the probability of the two independent events gives this kid a *one in ten thousand chance* of seeing both Frisbee shows. Neither time did we know beforehand that we were going to a Frisbee show, and furthermore my home in McLean was not close to Capital Centre (I only went there one other time, for a KISS concert). Well, life is full of chance events—most of which are of only passing significance. But some are life-changing, which leads me to my next story.

The Frisbee Book and Stoneleigh Frisbee Golf

My parents separated when I was about 11 and Dad (Fred) would come to visit on Saturdays. He had seen me playing Frisbee a couple of times, and he liked to give me books that he thought would interest me enough so that I would spend time reading. On his lunch hour one day, browsing in a downtown Washington bookstore he purchased for me Stancil Johnson's book *Frisbee, a Practitioner's Manual and Definitive Treatise*. I couldn't believe how detailed it was, even scientific, covering the weather and physics and the nine phases of flight. I was impressed by the picture of Jay Shelton throwing distance, but probably the chapter that most influenced me was about Frisbee Golf. The next day I designed my own 18-hole golf course around the neighborhood and started playing two rounds of golf every day after school. Soon I designed a second course for variety's sake.

The book also called it Folf, as was done in a Seinfeld episode years later, but don't ever call it that. In the mid 1970s Folf became Frisbee Golf, and since the 1980s it's called Disc Golf. Today it has grown to be a giant sport. There are 10,000 courses in the world, dozens of disc manufacturers, and probably two million active disc golfers.

Larry Schindel Forms the Washington Area Frisbee Club

Here's another seemingly mundane event that turned out to be life-changing: Reading the Washington Post at our kitchen table, as I did every day, I happened to skim across a page of tiny classified ads. A two-line item buried between Accountants and Handyman read: "Interested in joining a D.C. Frisbee Club? Call Larry: 123-4567" We didn't have Facebook or the phrase "search criteria" in those days, so coming across a contact like that was pure chance. I called Larry right away and he kindly offered to visit me in a few days.

I showed him my golf course and noticed that he threw a lot farther than I could. Then, in a pattern to be repeated with greater significance, we asked Mom if he could drive me to McLean High School where we could play catch on an open field. We played with a Super Pro and a Master Frisbee. He made lots of trick catches. Then he totally astounded me by running

and “air brushing” the disc (hitting the edge of the disc with a cupped hand in a sweeping motion to apply spin while pushing it up in front of him). After air brushing it with his hand twice, he even did a foot brush by kicking the edge of the disc with just the right amount of force and spin to keep it going. Then he jumped up and caught it between his legs. Wow!

We left it that he would contact me when Frisbee club meetings began, probably at the Washington Monument. I was happy to get acquainted with him, but I didn't realize that our meeting would turn out to be a steppingstone for the direction of my life.

Turning Pro with Eric Wootten

When we were younger, Eric Wootten, who lived in our neighborhood, had sometimes watched after my sister and me when Mom was out. When I was 14, on one of Eric's weekend trips home from Mary Washington College—where he'd been playing a lot of Frisbee—he stopped by our house to say hello. Mom suggested I show him my collection of 61 discs hanging on the wall of my basement bedroom. (I had ordered several of them through the mail. I had a white CPI All Star, black Master, red Professional, white All American, two Super Pros, a bunch of Regulars, a blue Giant Saucer Tosser, and a white T-bird that didn't hang on the wall very well but was sort of fun.)

Eric flashed his characteristic smile of amusement and asked: “Do you have a 119?” What a coincidence. I had just acquired a green World Class 119 and a blue World Class 141 from Hermann's Sporting Goods. Although the World Class line was introduced at the World Frisbee Championships in August 1975 (unbeknownst to me), the retail discs didn't hit the store in my town until October 1976. And when they arrived, I was spellbound at how they flew like nothing else. They were so much more aerodynamic than the Super Pro or the Master. When I first ripped open the 119 package and felt it in my hand it just seemed, well, magical. I took it outside to the front yard for its first flight, and I remember saying to myself, “Okay, see if you can hit that tree.” It was about 60 feet away—I hit it on the first throw. I was married to that disc.

But back to Eric. I played *Stairway to Heaven* and showed him all my discs. I told him about Larry and the Frisbee Club, and he told me about an exotic overhand wrist flip that he had learned from Hugh Lowry at college. We went to the field across Westmoreland Street and played beginner freestyle. We were both learning nail delays (letting the disc spin on your fingernail before catching it), body rolls (letting it roll across one arm, your chest and into your other hand), air brushing, tipping, and trick catches. It was funny when we realized he nail- delayed clock spin, and I counter, and neither of us could do the other. Good freestylers today are skilled at both spins, and judges take note if they are doing so with rim delays or with center control moves. The latter are much harder (I'll give some examples later).

We formed a habit of freestyling there each weekend he was home—but we didn't realize that someone was spying on us. One day after our session, a man followed me home and asked if we were planning to go back out there. He was having a party with a few friends and wanted them to see it. He offered to pay us \$5 each if we would give them a show. I ran over to Eric's house as fast as I could. We gave them a little show, and will always remember that day when we "turned pro," Christmas week 1976: Another steppingstone toward my future.