



Star News (Wilmington NC)

March 28, 2004, Sunday

A different round of golf

Millard K. Ives, Staff Writer

There's a golf tournament going on in Castle Hayne this weekend, but there're no golfers in plaid pants, stroking little white balls with clubs.

Most of the players are wearing shorts, baseball caps and T-shirts and are lugging around bags of discs, better known to most people as Frisbees.

A two-day tournament of the Professional Disc Golf Association started Saturday at Castle Hayne Park. The tournament is a competition for professionals and amateurs.

The object of disc golf is the same as regular golf. Players try to get an object in a hole in the fewest number of attempts. After 18 holes, the player with the fewest number of strokes wins. In disc golf, however, instead of a hole, there is an elevated basket - a device made of heavy wire and chains to catch and trap the disc.

"It's a game that can be played for years," said 51-year-old Alan Beaver, a Hall of Fame disc golfer from Raleigh, who said he was too old to still play baseball.

Ever since the Wham-O company sold its first Frisbees nearly 50 years ago, people have been flinging the toy - or discs made by other companies. It eventually became a sport. In 1976, a handful of disc golfers started the PDGA to introduce the sport to new players. The nonprofit organization has more than 20,000 members who play in more than 20 countries on five continents.

"It's a game that has really taken off in recent years," said Kirk Yoo, a professional disc golf player from Raleigh.

The PDGA provides about 40 tournaments a year across the country. About 75 men and some women are participating in the Castle Hayne tournament.

Mandi Snodgrass, 22, is the only women in the Open Professional Division, so she had to compete with the men. She had a score of 143 Saturday after the second round.

"I played it in high school for fun and have been playing since," said Ms. Snodgrass, shortly before slicing a Frisbee in the air toward the first hole with a powerful throw.

The Chapel Hill resident said she has made a number of holes-in-one.

This weekend's players are going through more obstacles than sand traps. During the 18-hole course, players have to maneuver their discs around trees, through tunnels and over roads. This weekend event is dedicated for disc golf, but there are several events or competitions using discs, including free style, double disc and throw-run-catch, the latter where competitors catch their own discs.

Then, of course, there's the competition that allows man's best friend to catch the disc with his or her mouth. Robert Leonard of Greenville said he thought all the various events were fun.

"I'm for anything that brings more attention to the sport," said Mr. Leonard, who was competing in the Advanced Amateur Division.

Amateurs are playing for prizes, a set of discs, in this weekend's tournament. Professionals paid a \$ 37 entrance fee and were playing for prize money.

Professional Chris Lee, who was leading after the second round of the Open Professional Division on Saturday with 116, said if he holds onto first place today, he expects to take home about \$ 400 in prize money. He said it wasn't a lot of money, but added, "most people who play this game are in it for the fun."

After the two rounds played Saturday, Ron Kirik was leading the Advanced Amateur Division with 124. Tyler Harris was leading the Intermediate Amateur Division with 131.

Beverly Blue was leading the Women's Intermediate Amateur Division with 187.

The final two rounds will be played today.