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**THE TAO KA-CHING**  
**Confessions of a Disc Golf Basket-Case**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS  
IN  
ENGLISH  
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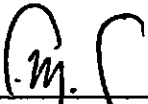
**By**  
**John K. Burzynski**

**Thesis Committee:**  
**Susan Schultz, Chairperson**  
**James Henry**  
**Robert Sullivan**

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**We certify that we have read this thesis and that, in our opinion, it is satisfactory in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in English.**

**THESIS COMMITTEE**

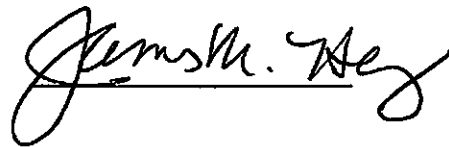


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## Preface

My goal for this project is to introduce the sport of disc golf and my essays on it, as well as to mediate the conversation of the topic so that both a literary reader and a “regular” disc golf player can get an enjoyable and satisfying read out of the (future) book. Although at first glance, the two reader-types seem to be on opposite ends of “culture,” so to speak, I hope to bring them together in a common quest for the meaning of life and the enjoyment of disc golf. A tall order, indeed, but this is what Robert Pirsig did in his 1974 book *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, although his “vehicle” was a motorcycle.

In Pirsig’s book, the narrator seamlessly weaves the enjoyment and maintenance of the motorcycle with themes on quality, value, philosophy, science, and insanity. I read this book for the first time when I was in my mid-twenties, and an avid motorcycle rider. I thoroughly enjoyed “riding along with him,” in his descriptions and ruminations on motorcycles. At the same time, though, I was (trying to) ride along with him on his more intellectual, philosophical and metaphysical digressions called *Chautauquas* in the book. Originally, Chautauquas were traveling

tent-shows that used to move across America, and were “an old-time series of popular talks intended to edify and entertain, improve the mind and bring culture and enlightenment to the ears and thoughts of the hearer” (Pirsig 7).

So, in a way, Pirsig drew me in, with his book about “ridin’ bikes,” and connected the dots, so to speak, from activity, to reflection and quiet contemplation, to literature, and to the search for truth and the meaning of life. *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* was one of the books that got me into literature in the first place. It was about this time that I decided to go to college and get a degree in English.

I would like to do with disc golf, in a small way, what Pirsig did with motorcycling. He brought riders and literary/intellectual people together in the book through motorcycling. He got the typical biker (or motorcycle rider) to start to look at things in a literary or philosophical way, while perhaps some non-bikers went out and bought a motorcycle. I cannot match intellectual depths of Pirsig’s writing in my project, but I think I can, in my own way, speak to both the “riders” and the “writers” and get them thinking of each other’s muses. I realize my project is just in its beginning stage, but whenever it is finished, I hope that the book will motivate some

readers to try the sport out, and by the same token, maybe motivate a few disc golfers to get into reading and experiencing literature.

Thus, my goal for this project is to write and revise personal essays, and then find a way to link them together. Up until relatively recently, my essays did not have a common theme. In each essay there was always a particular moment of slow-motion emotion/action, but besides that, there was no connection, no overriding thematic connection. Recently though, I have written a few essays on the sport of disc golf, of which I am an avid player. I don't know why I hadn't written essays about disc golf before, but once I started to, I realized that it is the natural direction for my writing to go.

Why disc golf? Like motorcycling, disc golf is an activity in which there is no time limit, and the participants, unlike those in most sports, spend quite a bit of time alone in quiet contemplation. Baseball and hiking also share these elements, as well as walking. Henry Thoreau's essay "Walking" is an exercise in walking and thinking (and writing!). Disc golf, too, is an exercise in walking and thinking. John Updike, who has written essays on golf, notes that "[g]olf converts oddly well into words" (Updike 15). I agree. There is a certain slow pace to a disc golf game that

lends itself to quiet contemplation interspersed with the drama of the game.

Golf and baseball already have an extensive body of literature, and I think the reason for that is the relative slowness of the sports and perhaps the type of people who enjoy them. So why not a literature for disc golf? Considering disc golf's popularity surge of the last twenty years, I have seen only one book on the subject, *Disc Golf: All You Need To Know About the Game You Want To Play* (2003), which is mostly instruction, except for the last chapter. Also there is a national bi-monthly magazine, but it too is mostly about courses, technique and technology. Even on the Internet, where the number of disc golf sites are increasing, there seems to be a dearth of good creative writing, or literature, on disc golf. I would like to fill that vacuum with my book, and at the same time, get more non-players interested in the sport.

Yet there was a problem with integrating the parts of my project. The disc golf essays I was writing were for people already playing disc golf, rather than for the general reader. The problem was how to use these essays in my MA project, or how to frame the essays in a context in which they could be appreciated by non-players. And also, even though the essays themselves contain beginnings and endings that point to a larger picture, for this project (and perhaps for my writing in general) I

needed to add some more texture, as well as elucidation, exposition or explication of the wisdom gained through the experience.

My first step was to improve on the framing of the essays. Although I had a beginning and an ending to each of the essays, everything was still in the general context of disc golf. I needed to pull back from the disc golf aspects and frame the essays in a wider context that relates more to life in general, who I am and why I am so enamored of the sport. In this way, the non-disc golf player may be drawn into my disc golf experiences.

In my case, I have two seemingly mutually exclusive readers with whom I am trying to have a conversation. One is the disc golf player who appreciates my empathetic, tongue-in-cheek, exaggerated ordeal essays; and the other audience consists of non-disc golf players, non-sports people, university professors and everyone in between who may identify with my general introductions and conclusions, but cannot relate at all to the actual experiences of playing disc golf. Reconciling these two different sides, so that both can appreciate the writing, is an interesting problem that should work itself out as I continue the book.

The next step in my writing process was to define, for the non-player, what

disc golf is, including its history, techniques of play, tools of the trade and how it is played. For this, I started a thread of introducing the sport of disc golf to the uninitiated, while searching, and in some places creating, connections to my essays. So, on the one hand, I am preaching to the choir in the essays, while on the other hand, I am introducing others to the sport through the running explanation and commentary on the sport. As the pages go on and the reader gets accustomed to the sport and my writing, I believe the gap between the two avenues of thinking becomes smaller and smaller.

Another element that seemed to be missing in the writing was a sense of who the narrator is. Even though I feel that, inside the essays, I expose myself more than I would like to, the readers still don't know who I am and why I am writing this. Thus, I went back and worked in some personal information pertaining to me and disc golf. Though at first I was reluctant to talk about my "real" self, I think this personal history serves a purpose by creating a neutral and common subject area that can be a link between the "two readers" of the book.

The next phase in my thesis was to work in more expository writing into the essays themselves. To this effect, I teased out more content and depth from the



non-disc golf digressions I had. Also, I started thinking of other writers who have influenced me, yet were not in the thesis, such as Franz Kafka and Alan Watts. Indeed, my essays do contain confusing, horrible and surreal Kafkaesque moments as well as metaphysical, unifying Buddhist concepts from Alan Watts' *The Way of Zen* (1957).

During this semester I have been reading Lopate's *The Art of the Personal Essay*, and in it I find discussions of the elements of and the various techniques of the personal essay which I find instructive and supportive of my writing style.

Unfortunately, there is a little irony here, I think, between the "M.A. Thesis," which is to be on the literary/intellectual side and the personal essay itself, defined as "a kind of informal essay, with an intimate style, some autobiographical content or interest, and an urbane conversational manner" (xxiv). The personal essay is quite the opposite of what would be traditionally thought of as the typical scholarly thesis. The essay strives for the "ideal of 'light learning,' which graciously informs without humiliating or playing the pedantic schoolmaster" (xlii). The M.A. creative writing thesis and my essays, in their original forms, were not necessarily mutually exclusive in their content and manner, yet improving the essays by adding more texture has made them, I believe, more readable for a wider audience.

My essays usually consist of a certain moment of time that I have experienced and remember vividly. Then I take that moment and stretch it out for a couple of pages, often in a Thurberesque manner of humor, embellishment and time travel. It was James Thurber who said that humor “is emotional chaos remembered in tranquility,” and that is the kernel of my essays. Right after the event, perhaps sitting around after the round, telling our magical or horror stories of the day, a one- or two-sentence synopsis of one’s experience is all that is usually possible, and words usually do not (or cannot) express the flood of emotions and connections contained in the moment. After the “moment” is gone, yet clearly still lingering in the mind, one can sit down in tranquility and delve deep into the experience and write about the experience as if from “up on a roof.” (Of all the sports writing I have read, even in collections of essays, I have yet to encounter much of the type of writing, the long drawn out moment, that is the core of my essays. If anything, there may be just a sentence or two describing the “shot” and perhaps an apt adjective or two. And the writer is usually not the “doer.” ) Having written the kernel event of the essay, I then fashion an introduction and conclusion around the event that attempt to put the “moment” into a larger perspective of disc golf and life in general.

As I was working on a way to integrate the three disc golf essays and the running explanation of disc golf, I came upon a way to introduce my essay writing style with a non-disc golf topic. While discussing the discs as tools of the trade, I went into a digression about how some people seem to always “need” to buy the latest model, not just discs, but in everything from shoes to cars. Especially nowadays, with computers, sports equipment and Ipods, Thoreau’s comment, “Lo, men have become tools of their tools,” seems even more relevant today. It was at this point in my writing that I realized I could insert an essay (“Road Walker,” which I changed to “Tools of Their Tools”) here since the essay is relevant to the “technological innovation” discussion at hand. At the same time, though, the essay is an example of my “stretching the moment” writing style with a topic understood by all. I think by using this essay first, the reader gets a good idea of my tone, voice and my style of essay writing—without having to worry what *anhyzer* or *Banshee* mean.

Back to the bigger picture, and in conclusion, the German philosopher Theodor Adorno wrote, “[t]he usual reproach against the essay, that it is fragmentary and random, itself assumes the givenness of totality. But the desire of the essay is not to seek and filter the eternal out of the transitory; it wants, rather, to make the

transitory eternal” (xliv). I think that this is what I try to do in my essays—narrate a certain moment in time (often an ostensibly bad one) and delve into it completely, sometimes hoping to turn the corner from the ridiculous to the sublime in the process.

I know that in my reading, it is these moments, and the reflections on them, that I relate to and feel goose bumps of intellectual or emotional agreement. In sports, too, that “great moment,” although in a different form, delivers the same “high” as literature. By reading or writing, the certain “moment,” which is transitory becomes, if not eternal, then lingers on the reader’s mind for longer than just a moment or two.

I find that this process of thinking and writing lends itself to what is essential to the essay which, as Adorno posits is “luck and play.”

**The Tao Ka Ching**  
Reflections of a Disc Golf Basket-Case

*...so then I tried to anhyzer my Banshee around the mando...and wouldn't you know, it was way overstable. It wouldn't turn over. The next throw I grabbed my Roc and tried to flick it near the basket, but it turned into a worm-burner. Dang, I thought—there goes my bogey-free round. But then the Roc caught the grass at a good angle and skipped all the way towards the basket, as if guided by a very small pilot, and kissed the chains as it flew by, for a six-footer gimme...*

This scene may seem as if it were taken from a Harry Potter-esque sports event, but actually it is from one of the fastest growing sports in America, Europe and Japan. Golfers may recognize some of the golf terms above, but may be puzzled at others. The sport, and for some nearly a religion, is *disc golf*.

What is disc golf? Very simply, it is golf played with a disc (a.k.a. Frisbee) instead of a golf ball and a club. Rather than a “hole” in the ground, disc golf has a “basket” as the target. “Disc golf is like traditional golf, except there’s no ball, the clubs are replaced by discs and the cups by chain baskets. The objective of the game is also simple: hurl a plastic disc across a designated area into a steel basket in the least possible throws” (Gregory 10).

If you understand golf, you understand disc golf in the same way that if you understand baseball, you’d understand softball when you see it the first time. Perhaps a more accurate comparison would be learning a second language, in that since you already “know” how to speak one language, learning another is similar to learning disc golf after knowing how to play golf. Yet despite the similarities, there are major differences between language-one and language-two, as there are differences between traditional golf and disc golf. As in golf, the goal in disc golf is to throw the disc into the basket in as few throws as you can. Each consecutive throw is made from where one’s previous throw lands. The fewer the number of throws, the better the score. The winner is the one who completes the 18-hole course in the fewest number of throws.

So as not to confuse the two sports, I will use the term “golf” for the sport with clubs and balls, while using “disc golf” for the newer sport with discs and baskets.

Many Americans have been fascinated with the beautiful flight patterns of thin round objects ever since metal pie tins were tossed around in backyards during the Great Depression (Gregory 11). Disc golf was “invented” by college students in the Sixties and Seventies. Frisbees, previously known as Flyin’ Saucers, had become popular objects to throw and catch. Even just watching the Frisbee in flight can stir the imagination. Perhaps the idea of a UFO someday visiting our planet—and indeed its shape would be the same as our collective, science fiction form of a saucer—is an other-worldly concept that is hardwired into our being.

*I felt the Frisbee had some kind of a spirit involved. It's not just like playing catch*

*with a ball. It's the beautiful flight.*

—Steady Ed

Since its relatively recent birth as a sport, many people, local, national and international, have been instrumental in developing and promoting the sport of disc

golf. Most of those who were involved early are still actually playing disc golf into their sixties and seventies. The “undisputed Father of the modern Frisbee” was a man named Ed Headrick, who was a general manager for a water heating business, as well as marketer and inventor. Steady Ed, as he was called, also invented the Super Ball. In the 1960s Steady Eddy, as well as many hippies and college students, got into the habit of playing Frisbee in the park, “throwing at trees, drinking fountains, open car windows and the occasional coed (Gregory 14). Steady Ed put his mind to it and decided to create some type of standard “target” for the game. After 56 attempts, he came up with the answer: an elevated steel chain basket target (Gregory 14). Steady Ed Headrick invented disc golf when he created the basket—not just the basket itself, but the idea of standardized precise targets—as there is in most sports. It was golf—positively morphed. The baskets used on disc golf courses all over the world today are of Steady Ed’s design (Figure 1). Some 30,000 members have joined the Professional Disc Golf Association, which was created by Headrick. Even after his death in 2002, Steady Eddy was busy. He arranged to have several hundred discs manufactured with his cremated ashes mixed in. Those discs were given to his friends



and acquaintances in the disc golf world or sold as collectibles.

I imagine most people have had the experience of playing catch with a Frisbee. When I was in my teens and twenties, living in Northern Virginia, I would occasionally toss a Frisbee around in the neighborhood or at a barbeque. I enjoyed gazing at the timelessness of its flight and trying fancy catches, but never entertained the thought of playing golf with a Frisbee. I played basketball and baseball in my teens, then tennis and softball in my twenties and thirties. I was always into one sport or another, but I had never played golf. The few times I watched it on television I remember thinking it was the most boring and slowest sport in the world. The players make one physical exertion every three minutes—how dare they even call it a “sport.”

My friend Riley and I started playing “Frisbee golf” in the mid-Eighties at Burke Lake Park in Fairfax, Virginia. One summer afternoon, we were playing catch with a Frisbee and saw some guys, with serious-looking faces, tossing a Frisbee into some contraption at the edge of the woods. WHAT the heck are they doing? we thought. We watched for a minute or two and then instantly we both got it: Frisbee

Golf. Wow. What a great idea! The next week, we each brought a Frisbee to the course and played the eighteen holes in less than an hour, discovering the game and laughing as if we had just discovered the holy grail of sports. Here was a sport for people who love to play sports competitively and, at the same time, love to hang out and talk “about other stuff.” A novel idea. Usually we separated playing sports and hanging out into two distinct activities. But here, in Frisbee golf, we could do both at the same time. Riley and I must have played that course a hundred times, and rarely would we see any other players. Neither of us had ever even played golf, but here was the same sport, yet in a faster and different form. It was the first time I had ever played a sport in which part of the game was “just taking a walk in the woods” with a good friend, chatting along the way.

Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854) was a book that was on my mind in those days, and whenever I would take a stroll in the woods it would bring me back to Thoreau’s walking in the woods of Massachusetts while contemplating life and the issues of his time. Reading *Walden* is like taking a long, refreshing and well-needed walk in the woods as you slow down and look at the forest of your life rather than the trees. “It is

not enough to be busy. So are the ants. The question is: What are we busy about?"

(Thoreau). Reading *Walden*, one gets a sense of what is important in life and ideally how one should live. Simplify, simplify. We really shouldn't be running around like ants, caught up in the busyness of our modern consumer society, but rather should live a more simple life, like walking in the woods and reading good books.

In disc golf, the walk in the woods is there, the beauty of the trees and landscape is there, and the enjoyment, thrill and intensity of the game are there, too. And like icing on the cake, you have time—during the play—to enjoy conversation about the hole or the landscape, or perhaps more enjoyable than either of those, you have the time to enjoy a simple walk in the woods and quietly inspect and appreciate the mesmerizing hues of the bark on a rainbow eucalyptus tree. Thoreau would have been a good disc golfer, I think. It suits his temperament: he likes to putt around in the woods, has a great approach to life, and, no doubt, he could really thoreau that disc a far way...

As the round of disc golf goes on, the conversation starts to meld with what is happening in the round—some point that we were talking about between shots

somehow finds its way onto the course, miraculously yet naturally, and contributes subtly to the conversation. Or sometimes a good throw seems to add an appropriate punctuation mark to something just said. Maybe I disagree with Riley's point about, say, the War in Iraq, but I don't say anything. Instead, I just slowly prepare to take my next shot, and the disc flies exactly how I had intended—as if to magnificently, majestically and wordlessly refute his point. At other times, out of the blue, a shot adamantly refutes a major point we were agreeing on—say, that Hawai'i should be the first state to ban automobiles, or a Eureka! moment of agreed-upon philosophical or psychological insight—and just like that our wise insight is refuted by a horrendous throw which makes everybody, even the park ranger passing by, cringe and look away.

In Frisbee golf there is no defense—you are not physically trying to stop anyone and no one is trying to stop you. The sport breeds harmony rather than the antagonism and occasional ill-will that can subtly permeate a sport that has “defense.” (Just watch the ice hockey highlights.) In disc golf, you are actually rooting for the other guy to do well. Well, usually.

After graduating from college in '89, I moved out of the country to teach English as a Second Language for a year, and wound up staying away for six years. I had forgotten about Frisbee golf and got involved with other things. In '96 I moved to Hawai'i, but it wasn't until '01 or so that, by chance, I ran into a co-worker who played Frisbee golf. Actually I wasn't sure at first that we were talking about the same thing, because he was using the name "disc golf," which I'd never heard before. But sure enough, it was the same game I had played and loved back in Virginia some fifteen years prior with friend Riley. But rather than Frisbees, people were now playing with "discs." I would use the word "Frisbee" and they would respond, amicably yet slightly pedantically, using the word "disc," as if I were saying *ice box* for *refrigerator*. But these "discs" could fly farther and straighter than the old Frisbees. Now, instead of just one Frisbee, players carried a dozen or so discs, each with a different function, snugly ensconced in a rectangular disc golf bag that hangs down from the shoulder on a strap, resembling a woman's handbag. I was somewhat disappointed at first at how such a simple sport morphed from using one Frisbee into employing a whole bag of different specialized discs. With one Frisbee, we had to try

to make it do what we wanted, but now players have different discs for different situations. It seemed to me a sign of the times, for better or for worse. Technology is always looking to develop a better mousetrap—not necessarily to catch more mice, but just to sell us something that the marketers tell us we “must have.” I resisted changing to the new discs, but eventually gave in. I didn’t even have a computer back then. Try as I do to resist it, I suppose technological change is inevitable.

Nonetheless, and somewhat suddenly, I started playing “disc golf” again although the game had changed. Throwing a disc is quite different from throwing a Frisbee, so it took me a while to catch up with most of the other players. I was even reluctant about getting an “official disc golf bag,” instead of using a knapsack, but after a while I caved in and joined the crowd. A few years ago, when I went back to Virginia and got together with friend Riley, we grabbed a couple of “Frisbees” and went over to Burke Lake Park to play a round for old time’s sake.

We were shocked when we arrived at hole one and realized that we were going to have to *wait* our turn to start. Discs were flying here and there, and we could see dozens of players (with their bags) already on the course. Oh my god,

unbeknownst to us, the sport of disc golf had exploded in the Nineties, all over America! People were starting to discover and understand the attraction and simplicity of disc golf.

Almost 2,000 disc golf courses have sprung up in the United States, according to the 2007 PDGA Course Directory (Figure 2), and more are being created every month as people get hooked on the simplicity, excitement and beauty of the sport. Four states have over one hundred courses each! The “correct” name of the sport is disc golf, but older players may call it Frisbee golf. From the mid-Eighties a flatter, heavier and smaller disc was created to fly further and with more control. Even though we used to use just one Frisbee each, a “disc golfer” will use an array of discs, just as golfers use different clubs for golf, such as drivers, approach discs, putters, and everything in between. The discs come in all colors, and their names are even more colorful, such as the Tee Rex, Orc, Valkyrie, Sidewinder, Archangel, Avenger, Tsunami, Shark, Coyote, Beast, Wraith, Illusion, Eagle, Squall, Dragon, Firebird, Reaper, Roc, and my favorite, the Banshee.

The distance of a disc golf hole is about one-third the distance of a golf hole,

so a disc golf course requires only one-third the area, at most, of a typical golf course.

Holes are usually between 250 and 500 feet long. The rules of disc golf conform logically to those of golf, and are revised occasionally in the PDGA's Official Rules of Disc Golf. The most common style of throwing the disc for the tee shot is backhanded (the same way you'd throw a Frisbee), after winding up and taking a couple of steps to get maximum torque from your body (Figure 5). Most experienced players can throw over three hundred feet—the length of a football field. Some pros can hurl the disc over 500 feet.

After the tee shot, or the drive, the next shot is the approach, or upshot.

Usually a thicker beveled disc, such as the Roc, is used since an approach disc tends to hold its line, or its direction of flight, better. Once the disc lands within forty feet or so, the next shot is the putt—the most delicate part of the game. A good player should be able to make most putts from within twenty feet. Still, if there is wind, even a short putt of ten feet can be tricky.

Unlike the Frisbee, a disc is harder and sharper, so you cannot really play catch with a disc. In fact, you could get seriously injured if at the wrong place at the



wrong time. The average player will carry five to fifteen discs in his disc golf bag, along with his water, towel, marker mini-discs, and his keys, wallet and other valuables. Each disc model has particular scientifically tested ratings for its flight characteristics such as glide, length and stability. For a right-handed player, a “stable” disc should fly straight; an “overstable” disc will turn to the left; and an “understable” disc should fly to the right. (All of this depends on whether you’ve thrown the disc correctly.) Discs are priced from about seven to fifteen dollars, depending on the quality of the plastic.

The life of a disc is one, maybe two years. Some players use the same discs for years, while others buy new discs in the same way some people buy the latest cell phone, television or golf club. Like other recreational sports, manufacturers constantly try to push the latest “innovations” in discs that are “sure to improve your game.” Certainly, there is some truth in the idea that better equipment begets better results—you don’t see people using wooden tennis racquets anymore. But in general, I believe, if you have modern equipment, you do not need to go out to buy every new model. I think it becomes self-defeating when we get caught up in

focusing on the equipment rather than “just doing it.” We want to control the equipment rather than be controlled by the equipment.

*Lo, men have become the tools of their tools.*

–Thoreau

Thoreau wrote about the foibles of commercialism more than 150 years ago.

Advertising does indeed convince people to get the latest product or gadget.

Occasionally people I know will lose their Blackberry or their computer is on the blink, and they are at a loss as to how to get or send information. Their life comes to a temporary standstill as they wait for a specialist to help them debug the problem.

Their “tools” are controlling them instead of the other way around. They have practically forgotten how to use a pencil and a piece of paper to compose a message.

(One of Thoreau’s jobs, by the way, was as a pencil maker.) The more “things” you have, the more problems you will have. Thoreau was a master of living simply and practically, especially in his cabin in the woods.

Perhaps for younger people nowadays who have grown up during the computer age, in which their gadgets become passé within six months, the inclination to buy the newest model is even more ingrained. I know young disc golf players who are always looking for the next “farther” flying disc to come on the market and save their game, rather than learning to use the discs they already own.

In the same way, electronic communication has gotten faster and faster, but the content of things being sent is still the same, if not even lower, quality. It’s the same with television and stereos, too. The industries are controlling the consumers, making them slaves of the desire to do things bigger, better, faster, and, in golf, farther. People want the high definition televisions and such, and indeed the picture or sound is greatly improved, but most of the content is the same old stuff. People become focused on the quality or quantity of the medium rather than the content. This news is wonderful for the companies that make the products.

On the other hand, perhaps I am the problem. I’m just not catching up with the times. Or maybe I am technologically-challenged. I was thinking about this as I “booted” up my computer the other week...

## **Tools of their Tools**

The other day, maybe because I woke up late, I found myself getting a little testy at having to wait an extra ten or fifteen seconds for my computer to retrieve my e-mail. Usually I'm fine with the ten seconds or so that it takes to connect to here and there. You see, I still have dial-up service. When I tell this to people, they make me feel as if I'm still using a horse and buggy. Yes, I still can hear that little phone doohickey (modem?) beep-beep-beeping the phone number to hook me up. I like it. I'm used to it. It makes me feel as if I'm taking off into outer space. Now, most people (like yourself) have the newer direct connect set up—I don't even know what it's called—the non-dial-up system.

And I could, too, for a couple extra dollars a month, get Road Runner or whatever and, beep-beep, my connections would be seventy percent faster. Or is it seventy times faster? Either way, I don't wanna get Road Runner.

It's not a money thing; I just don't want to evolve that much. I don't need to be any faster. I don't need my computer to be any faster. Usually I'm not in that much

of a hurry that I can't wait twenty seconds to get my e-mail or whatever on line. And what? In another year or two, no doubt, the connection time will go from three seconds to one second—if it's not there already. In the not too distant future, I'm sure I'll be able to just think, for example, "What is the temperature in Ecuador today?" And before I can even enjoy the pleasure of wondering about the weather in Ecuador, the answer will appear on a micro-screen on the inside of my eyelid. It's a runaway bullet train of fasterfasterfaster is betterbetterbetter. And I'm getting off the train—right here and now. As Gandhi said, "There is more to life than increasing its speed."

Technological progress is just going too fast nowadays. Looking back at history, paper was invented in 105 A.D. What a shock it must have been! Suddenly, you didn't need to wait weeks for the stonecutter to carve out that perfectly-shaped stone tablet for you to chisel out your thoughts on. Jeez, before paper, can you imagine the hassle of, say, spelling mistakes? "Oh, sorry Zebadiah, would you mind going back to the cliffs and pick-ax out another tablet—I forgot that damn 'principal is your pal' thing. Oops." You'd have to wait weeks, if not months, for a new tablet to write on, as Zeb and his family trudged back up the mountain to carve out another

chunk of stone.

So, yes, paper was a good thing. It saved weeks of time, and it was worth the learning curve necessary to interface with the new system. I'm sure there were some setbacks and anti-paper people, especially in the stone-carving and transportation sectors of the economy. "Hey, that paper stuff is a fleeting trend—here today, gone in a couple millennia. If you really have something to say, say it in stone." Yes, that papyrus was a major invention, ranking up there with the wheel, the printing press and the computer.

Back in the ancient days, you had a lot of time to adjust to the new realms of progress. Hundreds of years. It wasn't until another fourteen hundred and fifty years after paper that the pencil was finally invented. Now that's a comfortable amount of time between inventions in the same area, don't you think? I'm sure I could have mastered the pencil in half the time. But nowadays, with computers and the idea of faster is better, the rate of change has just gone haywire. And it's a quantity improvement, not a quality improvement. Nowadays, everything, including junk, can travel faster. Big deal.

Alvin Tofler, in *Future Shock* (1970), talks about this rate of change in civilization. As the time between inventions and innovations decreases—from millennia, to centuries, to decades, to years, and nowadays just a matter of months—we become overloaded. We have the problem of "too much change in too short a period of time." It is perhaps a disease of our "modern" consumer civilization, that is, although I hope not, inescapable. So, no, I do not need Road Runner, and I don't need, or want, my computer to go any faster. What took me days or hours twenty years ago to do, I can now do in less than a minute. That's fast enough.

So yes, amazing as it may seem, I *can* wait ten whole seconds for the weather report for Ecuador. Better yet, I can even use that extra ten seconds or so of waiting time productively. There are a lot of things I can do. Important stuff. I can feed the cats—that's a good six or seven seconds. Or, during that ten seconds or so, I can straighten out my desk, do some stretching exercise, crack my knuckles, clip my toenails, straighten out the picture on the wall, change the calendar to the right month, or even take some sandpaper and smooth out the nicks on one of my Frisbees so it'll fly straighter the next time I play a round of disc golf.

If I didn't have the dial-up service, I'd rarely look away from the screen and none of these things would get done. Even if I were to catch up on all these little things, I still wouldn't want Road Runner. Even if it were free.

There are aesthetic things, too, that can be done while waiting for my dial-up. I can stand up and go take a real good look at a picture or painting on my wall. Get into the scene. Or I could flip through my little Zen quote book and—look, here's one: "We are here and it is now. Further than that, all human knowledge is moonshine" (H. L. Mencken). I like that. It reminds me that the here and now is all there really is. Past and future are just constructs for us to think about past "nows" or imagine future "nows." Here and now is the only reality. In playing sports, such as disc golf, the player must be fully in the "now," not thinking of his last shot or worrying about results. Wherever you are, it's good to be there. I'm right here right now, my fingers stumbling over the keyboard while hearing distant police sirens. Or, while I'm waiting for my dial-up connection, I could also just gaze out the window and relax. Take a deep, deep breath. Abdominal breathing is healthy.

And so on.



And, you know, besides all these positive things-to-do while waiting, I have really come to appreciate, and dare I say, enjoy, the beep-BEEP-beep-beep-beep-BEEP-beep of my dial-up service. It's grown on me like the sound of coffee percolating on a Sunday morning. The beeping reminds me that time can, suddenly and beautifully, stand still, as it does sometimes in disc golf when one marvels in silent appreciation at the flight of a crisply thrown disc as it winds its way through the ironwoods. I may be an anachronism in the making, but I refuse to let this faster-is-better technology invade my computer life anymore. So here and now, I resolve to keep my dial-up service. I'm jumpin' off of this train wreck called innovation here, to preserve those sacred and pristine ten-to-fifteen second nuggets of "now" time that define our humanity.

Now, about those damn "ipod" things...

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This idea of slowing down time and spending it in qualitative thought or

action is exactly what happens in a round of disc golf. You leave your Blueberry at home, turn off the cell phone, put job and family on the back burners (on the *warm* setting), and concentrate just on playing and having some slow quality time. This experience probably applies to many “recreational” activities also. No doubt as our lives become busier and busier, our recreation time becomes even more valuable. I am content with my career in teaching English as a Second Language, but if pressed, would agree with the common golf expression “a bad day at golf is better than a good day at work.” And the beauty of disc golf is that it does not even take half a day to play a round.

Anyway, speaking of tools, back to our DISCUSSION. Unlike golf balls which are used lost and replaced often, the same disc can be used for months if not years, provided you don’t lose it, or Fido doesn’t chew it up. In fact, as a disc ages, its flight characteristics change in ways that can benefit the player. An old, familiar and comfortable disc is an essential part of a player’s game, like a ballplayer’s glove; so when a disc gets lost during the course of a disc golf round, you take the time to try to find it before moving on. As an amateur level player myself, I have suddenly lost a

disc, one that I simply “can’t do without,” in the middle of tournaments. It happens. A player throws an errant shot, his favorite disc flies into the water, bushes or a hard-to-find place, and, dang, he just cannot find his disc. According to the rules, the other players should assist in the search. But after three minutes of looking, the disc is declared lost and it’s time to move on. So suddenly you find yourself in unexpected, unfamiliar and uncomfortable territory. Perhaps it would be similar to if you were in the bottom of the ninth inning of a close and important baseball game, getting ready to go out on the field—and you couldn’t find your glove. You’re searching through the dugout, looking everywhere, and just not believing the predicament you’re in. Time is moving very slowly yet very quickly at the same time, in the same way time ceases to exist temporarily (and wonderfully) when you hit a homerun and are trotting around the bases. In this case, though, the frozen moment of time is not a moment of beauty; it’s a moment of sudden horror. Everybody is waiting on you, so you have to borrow someone else’s glove and go out to play third base. Then, as Murphy’s Law decrees, the first pitch is a slow grounder to your left—a play you’ve made hundreds of times (with your old glove!), but as you move toward the ball, the untested glove

on your left hand feels very unfamiliar and unsure. At any rate, when we are playing a round of disc golf and suddenly lose a disc—especially an old reliable one—it can feel like a crisis...

### **Three Long Minutes**

Disc golf is exactly the same challenge and enjoyment as traditional golf. Unlike basketball, for example, there's no defense in disc golf, no stupidly grinning guy stickin' his big hands and growling nose in your face, trying to stop you from shooting. In disc golf, players are in harmony, most of the time, with the other players. In disc golf it's up to you and you only (oh, and the tree gods) whether you're going to make or miss a shot. Disc golf is a peaceful game, a walk in the park. Rather than battling someone else, you're battling, or totally in tune with, yourself and all your physiological, mental, social and even moral dimensions. As in golf, disc golf also requires the etiquette, courtesy and honesty that transfers from and into one's everyday life. You are tested, punished and rewarded in many different ways during a

round of disc golf much in the same way obstacles come up in real life. How one acts and deals with the problems on the course is an amazingly accurate mirror into how the person conducts himself in the real world. Do you gloat when things are going well? Do you get angry and kick things when misfortune occurs? Play a couple of rounds of disc golf with someone and you end up knowing each other, for better or for worse, very well. Most of the time it is for the better.

In disc golf, you're working not so much on the game itself, but on yourself. Robert Pirsig, in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974), noted that "the real cycle you're working on is a cycle called yourself. The machine that appears to be 'out there' and the person who appears to be 'in here' are not two separate things. They go toward Quality or fall away from Quality together" (332). I would say it's the same with disc golf. The real game you're working on is a game called yourself. The disc that appears to be 'out there' and the person who appears to be 'in here' are not two separate things. In disc golf you are working on your game and on yourself, in cahoots with, or against, the wind, trees and the lay of the land. You may think of yourself as a separate entity, fighting against all the elements, but you are just fighting

yourself, because you are inextricably connected to everything around you.

Separating things, especially subject and object, is our modern-day dilemma.

Ever since Newtonian physics, we have broken up everything in our conscious universe into discrete, separate parts, down to identifying different parts of the molecule. By doing this, it becomes ingrained in our Western minds that everything is quantifiable and can be separated into its particular compartment and labeled.

Relating this thinking to sports, it would mean that you *can* break down the individual mechanics of how to throw a disc (hold it like this, step like this, aim like this, use this type disc, etc.) and you should be able to succeed. But it doesn't happen that way.

All the aspects are so interrelated and connected in a way that defies common Western thinking. Subject and object are not two different things; one assumes the other and they are part of a whole that is beyond our Newtonian outlook and even perhaps beyond our language. For me, this is summed up beautifully in a short poem from the *Zenrin Kushu* (1504):

At dusk the cock announces dawn;

At midnight, the bright sun.

Midnight is not a thing-it-itself but rather the other side of its opposite. They

are one whole rather than separated entities or concepts, just as deepness implies lightness.

Back to the lighter side of disc golf, I am happy to have discovered the sport. I am always wanting to say “Frisbee golf.” I knew it as Frisbee golf before it moved to the swanky neighborhood and started calling itself disc golf. But *disc golf* sounds too, too technical and distant, or something. Maybe it’s the word “golf” that has a negative connotation for some people. Or the quasi-scientific hue of the word “disc.” When students in my ESL class ask me the perennial question, “What is your hobby?” and I say disc golf, most of them think it’s “disco.” Sometimes I just leave it at that. We do need another word between Frisbee golf and Disc Golf. Frolf? Gisbie? No, they sound like Gothic video games. I guess it’s too late. We’re stuck with the name. But that’s okay; often great people have strange names. Englebert Humperdink. Despite the initial awkwardness of the name, there is no doubt that I will continue playing disc golf for years and decades to come.

Having severely digressed in opposite directions concerning disc golf, I come back to the here and now. Just the other week, I was playing in our regular weekly game with my three other irregular friends. We usually have a good combination of fun and friendly competition, and on any given day anyone can take anyone’s lunch money. Last Friday I was really having a decent round. Two birdies and just one bogey going in to hole fourteen. I was under par. Under par! I’ve been

under par so few times that I am not really sure of the math involved down under, in the negatives. What if you're two under then you make a birdie...don't two negatives make a positive? Huh? I dunno. I don't often have the pleasure of having to do such calculations. But back to the game. I wasn't worrying about my score. I was fully focused on my next tee shot.

My drive on the fourteenth was pretty much where I wanted, making it past the mando right, but a little weak. No major disaster, though. With a nice upshot, I could very possibly par this.

The next guy gets ready to tee off, the guy whose disc golf bag squeaks like Tin Man Walking—why *doesn't* he ever fix that? Squeaky Bag winds up and ouch! shanks his tee shot a good fifty degrees off to the right, with an ugly kakkklunk! that finally and mercifully puts Squeaky—and us watching—out of the misery of having to watch his disc fly and fly in the wrong direction, into a wooded area full of thorny bougainvillea bushes. A terrible shot, but it happens to all of us. I remember Squeaky kicking a tree out of frustration a few holes back and figure that he was getting payback from the tree gods. You've got to be nice to the trees in this sport...



After everyone tees off, we walk to where our drives landed. It looks like I'll be shooting third, from right behind the trunk of a huge monkey pod tree, looming ten yards smack in front of me. The basket is behind the tree another forty yards away, which is somewhat uphill and to the right. What to do, what to do? Man, if I could somehow scrape up a par on this hole, this could turn into a great round, maybe one of my best rounds ever. Fortunately, I do have a little time to think. *Let's see, maybe I could throw a backhand with my Roc around the right side of the tree. It is uphill though. Hm. Maybe a forehand with my Banshee just to the left of the trunk, where it's more open, and I could get it to curl back within possible putting distance. But hey, that huge tree trunk is there, taunting me. Well, considering the wind coming down from the right and the natural slope of the land, maybe a roller with the Sidewinder would do the trick? What would be the smartest route? Let's take our time and mull over the options once more, factoring in the grassy upward slope, the slight breeze coming down the slope, my history on this hole, my confidence with various discs, as well as my karmic account balance with the tree gods—*

**BUT WAIT A MINUTE!** Stop the thoughts! Squeaky Bag over there, the guy

who grrrrripped his tee shot is still looking for his disc. Oh, c'mmon! Geez, not only did we have to suffer through the guy's worst drive of the month by witnessing it, but now we are obligated to participate in searching for it:

*All players of the group must, upon request, assist in searching for the disc for the full three minutes before the disc is declared lost.*

—Official Rules of Disc Golf, Rules of Play: 803.11 (Figure 4)

Well, it doesn't seem fair that, because one guy lost his disc, all of us have to stop right in the middle of our concentration and go look for it. But those are the rules; cooperating like this speeds up the game and it's common courtesy.

And so, the other three of us, one by one, reluctantly mosey over to the “scene of the crime,” as zombies fulfilling a morbid obligation. My previous strategic train of thought on what may indeed be *the most important shot of my disc golf career* has just poof! disappeared, like when a car crashes and it steals all of your attention. Or like a stupid car alarm going off, the lost disc hijacks your concentration and sends you off on meaningless digressions, such as what is for dinner tonight. And nobody's even stealing the car...

Where *am* I?

Yes, instead of pondering my own dilemma and par possibilities, I am now

trampling through some thorny insect-infested, bougainvillea bush looking, or at least acting as if I'm looking, for Squeaky's lost disc. Thorns are poking at my legs. Small creatures are crawling into my shoes. I'm not feeling very harmonious.

Good thing the rules don't read *must assist in searching for the disc happily for three minutes*, because this is not fun at all. I don't even like looking for my own stuff. Still trudging along looking for Squeak's disc, burrs sneaking up my shorts, I wonder if it's been three minutes yet. No, far from it. At least another minute. Sixty more long drawn out seconds of acting as if I care where the guy's disc is. I'm trying to care—Squeaky is a good friend of mine, but I just don't. Sorry. I have completely abandoned my usual ideal that playing disc golf is an exercise on “working on yourself,” and “being engrossed in the now.” Instead I find myself disconnected from everything except my own predicament. Rather than working with the elements, and being a part of the harmonious whole of the experience, I have compartmentalized and separated myself from the scene. I care only about my own situation.

*And why doesn't he fix that creaky bag strap of his—it's giving me a headache. It would just take a piece of tape or two to stop the squeaking.* I'm so far

removed from my own game, my own train of thought, that I've forgotten what exactly it was that I was doing before I started walking around in circles gazing vacantly at the ground. Why are we walking around in this specific area? Are we camping here? Are we looking for a dead body? What day is it? What is that damn squeaking?

Finally—after what seems like an hour-long three minutes—Squeaky reluctantly declares his disc lost, releasing us from our obligatory misery and distraction. He accepts the one-throw penalty, and throws his next shot. Order is restored.

And so I make my way back to my lie, forgetting any strategy or any disc-choice ponderings I had before the trekking in the woods. Squeaky and his errant disc ruined any sense of momentum, concentration or focus that I may have had. But, it's part of the game—just as midnight implies the bright sun. Urrggh. So I line up my shot—*oh, there's that big Monkey Pod tree, which now seems to be floating back and forth in my way, and the basket forty or fifty yards behind it, somewhat uphill but slanting down to the left. Okay, got it.* Forgetting all my previous disc choice

ruminations, I decide to toss my dependable Banshee, my sole forehand disc that flies straight and fades beautifully to the right at the end. Even if this particular round-saving shot is off the mark, I still love this Banshee. She's been so good to me, despite Webster's meaning of *banshee*: "a female spirit believed to wail outside a house as a warning that a death will occur soon in the house." Look closely at the picture of the banshee on the disc—oozing ugliness, death, evil, ferocious determination, and ghastly fingers as she glides, more often than not, in the general direction of my will. Yes, I've been glad to have her in my bag for the last couple of years. Each of her nicks, some over a year old, tells of the occasional clinks into light posts or clunks into trees and boulders.

As I get ready to throw the disc, I'm thinking that since the upshot is somewhat uphill I definitely don't want to leave it short. I want to at least reach the basket. Never up, never in. So I put a little more umph on it and let her fly.

And fly and fly. I really got a hold of it. A nice snap; it felt good, like when you hit a baseball on the sweet part of the bat. The Banshee heads right for the basket, with the old banshee lady's focused determination, destined for the chains. My heart

rises, waiting for that beautiful metallic ka-ching confirmation of trueness. It's making a bee line for the basket. A birdie?! Could it be!? Heck, a par'd be fine, but, I'll take it...

Back to my throw, and to reality. Yes, the upshot looked okay at the beginning of its flight, but unfortunately it sailed, beautifully and quite aerodynamically, if I may say so myself, way past the basket and landed in some short bramble about fifteen-twenty yards out. So, I had a look, an outside chance for sure, but a look nonetheless, at saving par. I could salvage par and still have my game-of-the-year intact. Who knows, maybe it'll go in—everyone is due the magic of one long putt per round, that long putt that sails right into the basket, and makes the chains sing that beautiful ka-ching ka-ching melody, is one of the reasons we come back and play. Even though it's a mere moment in time, the pleasant memories of fantastic shots lavishly linger in the mind and heart. Michel de Montaigne put it much better when he said that, “[t]he pleasantest things in the world are pleasant thoughts; and the art of life is to have as many of them as possible.” When one of those shots go in, it is perfection imagined and then realized. Perfection and beauty that we

seldom see in life.

Speaking of beauty, and digressing even further, Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* (1912) contains a discussion of beauty that has always stuck in my mind.

The gist of the idea was that there is beauty in life, for example, a beautiful person or a beautiful work of art or action. Then there are the observers of beauty, those who can and do appreciate the beauty. The narrator argues that the two qualities, the beauty itself and the appreciation of that beauty are rarely present in the same person.

Either you are a creator of beauty or an appreciator of beauty. Franz Kafka said the same thing in a different way, "Not everyone can see the truth, but he can be it."

I agree with this concept in general, but the two aspects, creation and appreciation of beauty, can and do reside in the same person when playing disc golf.

The thrower of a beautiful shot, the creator of that aerodynamic piece of action art, can indeed watch and appreciate the disc's flight along with the other observers. And during every round, this magical and mysterious experience happens at least once.

Unfortunately, the opposite happens, too.

Back to the game. Even with a bogey, which in reality will probably happen

on this hole, I'll still be looking at a mighty respectable round for myself, barring no disasters.

So I gavotte, semi-confidently, over to where I threw my disc, or where I thought I threw my trusty Banshee. Golden rays of the setting sun were dancing with the bougainvilleas, giving them an electric magenta glow. (It's funny how—when things are going well in a round—nature glows in beautiful wonder! At other times during a round, when things are going bad, nature can look ghastly.) *What beautiful vista toward the basket is my Banshee going to bestow upon me this time? A clear open shot from fourteen yards? Okay. And even if I miss, it's a gimme bogey? Sure, I'll take my chances.* Sometimes bogey can be a blessing, like when you slither thankfully from the green after nailing a twelve-yarder to save that bogey. It's not a par or a birdie, but sometimes saving bogey can be a confidence booster.

*So where the hell is my Banshee?* I amble around in the bramble. *I saw it come in right here, right where I'm standing. It's gotta be here.* I start walking in wider and wider circles, my eyes glued to the ground and shrubs. "I know it's right around here," I say to nobody, as I check in a nearby trash can, just in case. No, it's



not in the trash can. Where is it?—I'm starting to panic. I really need that Banshee for the next two tee shots, fifteen and sixteen. I don't know what other disc I can use.

Okay, it's been a mini-while already. Neither Squeaky Bag nor the other two guys have even noticed that I am exhibiting outward signs of having lost my disc, a little disc-concerned. *Well, c'mon, you gotta start moseying over here sometime. Geez, do I have to formally ask them, send them friggin' engraved invitations to get the hell over here and help me look?* It's my Banshee—lost, right at the crucial hole of possibly the best round of my life. It's bad enough that I screwed up my approach shot, now I have to endure the humiliation of asking for help *in searching for the disc for the full three minutes before the disc is declared lost.*

"I thought it was right around here," I gesture after finally catching someone's attention. It's their job to come over and help—it speeds up the game. And in three minutes or so, it's time to move on. That's ideally twelve minutes of cooperative searching for the disc. Plenty of time. But sometimes a disc is just lost, lost to the universe, sunk in some invisible crack in the earth or wedged in an unimagined crevice that time forgot. Finally we're all looking. I'm losing all sense of

time. I'm sweating. My eyes are peeled on the ground, darting up and in the prickly whatever-the-hell-they-are-called thorn bushes. I'm shocked, embarrassed and thoroughly disc-contented. And something's crawling up my butt, I think. And what's worse, the others are looking, but they're not really *looking* for my disc. I'm getting disc-gruntled. They're just going through the motions. *C'mon, look for it, look! Show some concern, fer chrissakes. Imagine it's your favorite disc. Have some discompassion, will ya!*

In my deepening panic, and impending vertigo, I check the trash can—the one I checked one minute ago—again. This time I dig under the stuff in the trash can, under the greasy Styrofoam plate lunch leftovers and beneath the bag of dog poop with orange sticky stuff on the outside. (disc-gusting!) No, it is not here. But who knows, the disc could have landed in the trashcan. In its downward flight, it might have slipped between the trash bag and the slimy stuff inside, and slithered all the way to the bottom of this trashcan. It is possible, I think to myself, as I take a furtive glance around to make sure nobody is watching my trashgroping.

It's gone. My Banshee is gone. I feel as if my head is swimming a whirlwind,

as I set up for my long, long save-bogey putt from 17 or 18 yards out. Hell, it's a fifty-footer, a Hail Mary of a putt. But if I make it, it'll be one of those awesome bogey saves that can keep a good round going. Even if I miss, I'm sure I can put it within a couple of yards. Flabbergasted from the last several minutes, getting itchy in the butt area, and wondering what disc I'm going to use for the next two holes, I toss a gimpy, short Peewee Herman-type putt that graciously leaves me with a testy four-yarder to save, uh, double bogey now, I think. I'm losing count. I'm getting dizzy. I don't want to count. Can't compute. My Roc, the round plastic thing with a huge pre-historic bird of prey logo on it, in my hand feels like a foreign object, like it's the first time I've ever held a disc. My fingers feel alien, as if they're not connected to me. The basket, a mere twelve feet away, appears smaller and farther than it should. It seems to be breathing, moving. There's no breeze. Everything is eerily silent and moving in slow motion. I putt.

Yes, yes, of course, I miss the twelve-footer. A complete air disc. I take a triple bogey, negating, in one ugly fell swoop, any and all of my positive highlights up until now. I end up bogeying the final four holes, and wind up, well, right around

my average. But who knows, if I hadn't been interrupted by searching for someone else's disc, it probably would've could've been my best round of the year.

Well, I'll try it again next week. A memorable round, as they all are. The great shots are just as vividly recalled as the bad ones. Yes, it is the occasional seeing-eye great drive, the threading-the-needle upshot or the fifteen-yarder that ka-chings into the basket that keep us coming back to play disc golf. That's how disc golf pays you back. Those miraculous moments of perfection, accidental as some may be, do happen in disc golf. Henry Thoreau said, "If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours." I would say, "If one advances confidently in the direction of the basket, and endeavors to throw the shot which he has imagined, he will occasionally meet with a "ka-ching!" unexpected in common hours." And that is why we play the sport. That's why it's easy to suddenly get hooked on disc golf. It happens when you do make that perfect shot that you had imagined.

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Most disc golf players play in a weekly casual round with a small group of people. However, there are also local, regional, national and even world tournaments throughout the year. Most players, I think, enjoy the casual games more than tournaments, just like eating at home is more comfortable than eating out. At tournaments, players compete at their appropriate ages and ability levels. Pro players compete for cash in the Open divisions while amateurs play for prizes. Just like golf forty or fifty years ago, the cash purses for disc golf are growing larger and larger, and more players are starting to make a living playing disc golf. Still, the majority of disc golfers are in the amateur, recreation and let's-just-have-fun levels. However, no matter what level you are at, taking part in a tournament is an unforgettable experience. Most tournaments involve several rounds of disc golf, often on different courses. There is certainly more tension and excitement during these official tournaments, and the ups and downs are magnified, as well as the enjoyment.

An interesting aspect of a tournament is that usually the first round is

completely mixed, meaning that all players are randomly put into groups of four. This makes it so that even a low level amateur player may get a chance to play with a pro level player. Except for a freak occurrence or some benefit or charity event, an amateur player would never get a chance to spend a couple of hours with a top player. But this does happen regularly at disc golf tournaments, and I think that reflects the accessibility of the sport. The pro disc golfers that I've had a chance to play with have all been pleasant to play with and even helpful sometimes. In disc golf, I believe, there is a hierarchical harmony among players, because everyone is still learning how to improve their game. After the first round, however, everyone is put in to their respective divisions...

### **Notes from the Lower Rungs**

The best shot I've ever had in disc golf? Well, that's easy. I'd have to say the greatest shot in my half a dozen years of playing disc golf would be a long putt I

made last year in the Big Island Open on the island of Hawai'i.

We were playing at Mackenzie Park, a gorgeous but technical course with ironwood trees all over and the blue blue Pacific Ocean lapping up in huge white sprays onto twenty-foot lava cliffs. The island of Hawai'i still has active volcanoes, and other things happening below the earth's crust such as the magnitude 6.7 quake in October of 2006. In fact, there is even a lava tube on the course. No lava flowing, fortunately.

Most of the regular players in the state make it over to this event. When you live in Hawai'i, where for some mysterious reason there are no permanent basket courses, you're happy to go out of your way to play in a tournament with baskets. I was in the Am 2 division—the lower rungs of the skills ladder.

The first round was a random mix of Open and Amateur, women's and rec players. As luck would have it, I was in a foursome with three of the open players, from somewhere in California. Great!—I started thinking, nothing like destroying my confidence for the rest of the weekend, if not the rest of my disc golf career. Still, I'm here for the fun. Maybe I'll learn something valuable...

So anyway, we were at the third hole at Mackenzie. Everyone had bogeyed the previous hole, so we were pretty even. Nobody knew (yet) the amateur that I was. The third hole was about a 100-yard sand hole, with a rather straight and narrow fairway that fades slightly to the right, with ocean angling in from the right and a gaggle of ironwoods on the left. The first two guys teed off and were both in the ironwoods to the left. The third guy went in or near the water on the right. No karma used up on this hole yet, so I figured I'd just try to throw it low and straight right down the middle, and maybe sprinkle a little of that anhyzer powder—but not too much—on my trusty Sidewinder. Even if I'm short, I'm thinking, I'll have a clear line to the basket. Par is good. Par is good.

So I get ready to throw, deliberately going through my pre-shot routine which recently consists of humming an old Scottish folk song while wiggling my left big toe. Just real easy, straight and low, don't try for much, I'm thinking, as I start my windup in the sand. And sure enough, by not trying to put too much on it, I got the drive I wanted. Straight down the narrow sand fairway, not much more than sixty yards. Yet, at the end the disc skips another fifteen yards, as if the sport is rewarding



me for not asking for too much.

As I walk down the sand fairway to where my disc lies, I feel the brisk breeze coming in from the ocean. The basket is about twenty yards before the water and I have a putt, a long putt, of twenty five yards or so. But the wind, the wind coming in from the ocean from right to left is messing with everyone's upshot. Two of the three other guys have long putts into the wind just to save par. I get ready to take my long putt, thinking just for a nanosecond of laying up, especially in this wind. Par is good, isn't it? But the ocean breeze on my face, on the right side of my face, feels smooth and is blowing, no flowing, at the perfect angle for me. I take a breath then release the breath just as I let go of the disc, low and a good forty degrees to the right of the basket. The wind starts carrying it to the left, toward the basket. It's wobbling a little bit, but it keeps flying almost in slow motion, as if floating on a magic carpet of wind and will, right over toward the basket and at the last moment the chains seem to surrealistically rise up a little as if to greet the disc and bring it safely down into the basket. The "ka-ching" is so soft it sounds more like a crunching and cradling than a metallic "ka-ching!"

There is something aesthetically different and pleasing about watching a Frisbee in flight, as compared to, say, a ball in flight. Sometimes we have dreams of flying. When a ball dreams, we say, it dreams it is a disc, slicing through the wind. The way a disc spins and glides effortlessly through the air, curving this way and that as if guided by other-worldly forces as well as one's will, is something to behold. It is an action of art, an artistic event—a synergistic moment in time among the player, the disc, the elements and hopefully the basket.

*Wow, I can't believe it! A birdie! On this hole! I'm so excited that I forget to retrieve my disc from the basket so the next guy can throw, and when I do realize that, I trip over my bag and fall face first into the sand as I lurch forward to the basket. Jeezus Christ—what a dorky, klutzy, I've-never-had-a-birdie-in-my-life AM 2 level shenanigan that was! It's okay though, I got a birdie and the sand tastes good. I regain my composure, brush off half of the sand crusted to my face and jog up to retrieve my disc, trying to wipe the silly grin off my face. C'mon John, try to act as if you've made a long putt before. These other guys do it all the time. Be casual, be casual. They don't know (yet) that you're from the lowly AM 2 division.*

The other three putt out, one par and two bogs, and we walk over to the next hole. I'm feeling light on my feet. Hole four is a breathtaking view of Pacific Ocean and lava cliffs that serve as your fairway. The hole is dangerous, too. Your drive will go out over the water and curve back, hopefully, on to land. The whole scene, the cobalt blue water in front of you, the crashing of the waves into the dark lava cliffs sending up plumes of white, the beckoning ironwoods near the basket in the distance, lures you into the danger and beauty of the hole. Usually when I'm teeing off on this hole, the 3-D living postcard vista of mighty Pacific Ocean, the soft green trees, the sheer cliffs and the ever-present high winds is intimidating. Yet now, still feeling high as a kite from maybe the best shot I've ever had, the whole scene in front of me is pure and magical beauty. I have to go for it. Here, even a conservative shot can be risky.

On top of that, here I am. I've got the box. *It's the fourth hole and I am in the lead for now. For this moment. I've just canned an awesome long putt, and these guys have got to be thinking, hey, this guy's pretty good. Maybe he does that all the time. Maybe he's some pro we haven't heard about. Who is this guy?*

And I'm thinking the same myself. Hey, I can play with these guys. I can hang with these guys. Maybe I am at their level, but just don't know it. Maybe after my spectacular round today, they'll tell me I have to move up to the Open division. Perhaps I was a closet sandbagger and just didn't know it. *Hey, I can make a living at this sport. People do. I could go on tour, travel around the country, and live the Disc Golf Life of Riley. Why not? I could rent one of those RVs and live in it. I've always wanted to do that. I've always wondered what they do with, you know, the toilet stuff on those RVs. Do you have to empty it every day, every week? How do you empty it? Where do you empty it?*

I quickly put that all out of my mind and focus on the shot at hand. I'm gonna go for it. Now that these Open/Pro guys are watching me, waiting for another spectacular display of my disc control, my driver is quivering in my hand like a rattlesnake, ready to strike into the stratosphere then glide toward the ironwoods, and who knows, maybe right, ka-ching, into the basket. I can hear the chains already. I'm so light on my feet that I can't feel the ground as I start my run-up. My muscles feel eerily in tune with each other, and I'm gripping the disc with a newfound animal-like

vigor as I laun—

"WAIT WAIT-WAIT WAIT WAIT!!!" yells the tall Californian in our group.

Just as I approach the point of no return in my windup. I stop in mid-movement and freeze, like a really pissed off Greek statue holding a discus.

"Huh?" I ask slowly and calmly yet with indignity festering as my blood erupts in a sudden boil in my veins. *Did he just fuck my shot up? I was most definitely just on the verge of an amazing ace run on an awesome hole, and this...*

"Dude. The basket's that way." He calmly and politely points in the opposite direction.

"Ahhh. Thanks, man." My knees buckle at my embarrassment and stupidity. Urggggh. What an idiot I am! The Cali guy didn't have to tell me; he could have just said nothing. But then, according to the rules, I would have been penalized a stroke or two. I want to crawl like a sand crab into a crevice in the lava rock and just stay there the whole damn weekend.

I get myself together, what is left to gather now that my heroics of the last minute or two have been trumped by my two moronic acts. No doubt the other guys

are heaving belly laughs inside. And to further solidify their correct assessment of me as an am-two-er, I griplock my drive and send it not northward, but eastward into the blue—now an ugly, ugly blue—Pacific Ocean. Lost forever.

I re-tee and end up shooting, well, very close to double figures on this hole.

The rest of the round is a continuation of such misery and I find myself, after the first day, right in the middle of the Am Twos. Where I thought I was.

So unfortunately, the greatest shot of my life was short-lived, soon overshadowed by greater stupidity. I don't know what it is, but whenever I do make a spectacular drive or putt, the very next shot turns out to be its antithesis. And it happens vice-versa, too, doesn't it? You have a pathetic drive or upshot, then you just nail the next drive or long upshot. What is at work there? Could it be the humbling law of karma at work? On one hand, I prefer to think that I made that long putt solely on my own. But what with my breath and soul doing all they could to will the disc basketwards and the Mardi Gras celebrations going on in my head after it ka-chinged into the basket, my brain cells just up and left. That's one of the unfortunate side effects of ecstasy.

On the other hand, perhaps the wind god intervened on my behalf. It does seem that nature is alive and taking part in the “conversation” going on during a round of disc golf. Sometimes it is the trees that give you love, by not luring your disc into them or maybe granting you lucky ricochet. At other times the trees chastise us, it seems, when they adamantly deny a disc’s passage. The secret, I guess, is to be in the right frame of mind when playing, so that you are in tune with the elements, with yourself, and in the now. Then, the tree and wind gods will be kind to you.

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As in golf and other professional sports, there are major disc golf tournaments that determine the best players in the world. Although most disc golfers are just into a weekly casual game among friends, the names of the top ten men and women players are known to people who follow the professional side of the sport. Presently there are a dozen or so players who earn over twenty thousand dollars a year. Every year the money won on the pro tour level has been increasing, but is still a far cry away from the million-dollar prizes in today's golf tournament. Many

Frisbee golfers would prefer that the sport not become "infected" with big money prizes and corporate sponsors. For some, disc golf is anti-golf, meaning that golf, the sport in which the players pay hefty fees to play a simple sport on pristine, manicured and environmentally-unfriendly courses, is antithetical to the environmentally and financially harmonious sport of disc golf. If only disc golf had been invented first (golf began in Scotland hundreds of years ago), then perhaps we would never have the nearly twenty-thousand golf courses in the United States (according to GolfCourse.com) that are taking a toll on the pocketbooks as well as the environment. But I don't want to disparage golf here.

Nevertheless, there is a professional side of disc golf that is growing (and recruiting corporate sponsors). Any sport wants to have a system to find out who is the best. The best disc golf player in the world is Ken Climo (Figure 3), who turns forty this year, and will be to disc golf what Babe Ruth is to baseball or what Wilt Chamberlain is to basketball. Climo has dominated the first two decades of the sport. Nowadays, though, with the proliferation of disc golf courses, a new generation of pro players is emerging that has been playing since childhood. Skills-wise they are



taking the sport to another level; but there is more to disc golf than long drives and low scores. Most players over forty didn't start playing disc golf until they were in their twenties. Now, twelve-year-olds are throwing discs a hundred yards. On the other side, the generation of players that started the sport in the Seventies is, for the most part, still around. And these living legends of disc golf are not only still alive, but most are still slinging discs.

Usually, as in golf and other sports, the major disc golf tournaments are competitions among the top players in the world. But since disc golf is still in its relative infancy as a sport, an amateur level player like myself can still have an opportunity to play with pro level players in out-of-the-way tournaments. A few years ago I played a round with one of the top women disc golfers at Hawai'i's state tournament, though I didn't know it at the time. (I had no idea. I was giving putting tips to her as we were putting around together before the signal to start play...I thought the young woman was just a casual player, until she threw over 400 feet, and putted twice as well as I did!)

The other summer, I participated in a major disc golf tournament, the

Japan Open, partly on a whim, because my wife and I go to Japan every other year or so to see her family. Since traveling to Japan for a tournament is out of the question for many players, the number of players was limited. There was only one division: open, which means everybody. Thus, even an amateur could technically join and compete with the pros. Even the U.S. Open, in golf, is open to anybody—but their qualifying system is rigorous. You have to be that level. But for this Japan Open, anybody could have joined because Japan is very out of the way. Even the winner's cash prize would not cover the travel expenses. It is possible that I could have won the \$4,444 top prize. Possible, but not at all probable. More probable is that I had the worst hole of my life, which I did...

### **My Worst Hole Ever**

Good shots and bad shots are part of the disc golf experience. Brilliant shots and horrific shots are also part of disc golf. Life is the same. In life good things happen. Bad things happen. Wonderful things happen. Terrible things happen. These are the vicissitudes of life, and the negative is just as important as the positive in our

growth as human beings. You can't take one without the other. If we only had fortuitous experiences in life then there would be no sense of joy. Bad shots suck, and make one grunt or blurt out cuss words fraught with disgust and self-loathing. Good shots make us feel, momentarily, on cloud nine. However, we would never feel so intensely the pleasure of making an important 30-foot putt if we didn't experience its opposite, such as when you shank a drive into a tree ten yards away, or when your six-footer near-gimme putt goes in the basket, rings the chains, then as you watch in slow-motion horror, the disc manages to wiggle its way out of the basket, as if imbued with an evil spirit, and then plop on the ground.

So the brilliance of a great throw and suffering of a bad shot are really two sides of the same coin. Though the emotions are opposite, the energy underlying them both seems to come from the same place. You can't have one emotion without the other, its opposite, lingering in the background. If the sun shone 24 hours a day, we would have no concept of what "darkness" is. No doubt that when playing disc golf, as we go through eighteen holes, our emotions run the gamut, and we always remember the good holes or good throws more than the bad ones. (Or that's what

we're told to do—forget the bad shots, have a short memory—and just focus on the good.) But both brilliance and suffering are different aspects of the same energy that comes with playing disc golf. The whole good hole-bad hole experience, the hole-ness, including you and all your surroundings, is a dynamic two-hour microcosm of the human condition.

I was thinking along these lines the other day after our weekly casual round at my home course here in Hawai'i. We were sitting around after the round, sipping on frosty beverages and passing around a bowl, of chips or whatever, and moaning our couldda-beens and shouldda-beens. (“If I had thrown my Beast instead of my Wraith on Hole 15...” “Man...if that branch didn't come out of nowhere and whack my upshot.”) And here and there we remember the awesome shots of the day. We don't dwell on them much, but those throws, the one or two shots of the day—whether it was your drive that you parked three yards from the basket or your friend's twenty-yard putt that finds the chains—are what brings us back to the course. Those are the shots that get us excited about playing the sport of disc golf, and appear in our dreams as pleasant memories.

The other side of the coin—the horrible shots, or the horrendous holes, are the experiences we would like to forget. However, those ugly disc golf memories, too, are part of the undeniable whole of disc golf. And you grow from them. It is the same in life. You have a terrible experience at work, and come home and tell your roommate or spouse the whole story. In the mere act of telling the story, you detox yourself, and your pain subsides. It's always easier to dwell on your fantastic shots, but to dwell on your bad throws or holes, well, that's just not healthy, is it? Even Henry Thoreau reminds us that, “[h]e is blessed over all mortals who loses no moment of the passing life in remembering the past.”

Yet past memories, especially bad ones, need to be dealt with, exorcised, if you will, so that they cannot come back to haunt us. Therefore, perhaps it is better to relive past horrors so that we are not “doomed to repeat them.” Usually these morbid recollections should be done alone in a dark corner of a dank basement holding on to your disc golf towel, but letting others “breathe deeply” of one’s worst experience can serve as a cautionary horror movie as well as make you feel a little less bad about your two triple bogeys from last weekend’s tournament.

So if you would prefer not to re-live my “worst hole ever” with me, just lick your thumb and nonchalantly flip this page to the next topic. Nobody will notice, and your disc golf game will probably be the better for it. Well...

My worst hole ever happened in the summer of 2006, when I went to the Japan Open in the Nasu Highlands, four hours north of Tokyo. I had never been to such a big disc golf event, but since my wife is from Japan, I was able to finagle, or rather, combine it with a family trip. Having just graduated from the top tier of the Am 2 status to the dregs of Am 1 status, I of course harbored no thoughts of winning the tournament. No, my goal was to not be in last place, or if I was in last place, to be within a couple dozen strokes of the next to the last guy. If not that, then my goal would just be to finish the tournament. If not that, then my goal was to make some disc golf friends. At the very least, my goal was to return to my home course in Hawai‘i with some souvenirs and, if possible, my dignity still intact.

It was at this Japan Open that I had the worst hole of my life. I don’t think I’ll ever be able to top it, or bottom it. It was, in a word, disc-gusting.

To make a short story long, let me tell you. A warning though—if you have

any young or low-level disc golfers reading this with you, this story does get ugly and humiliating, so you might want to have them leave the room for a few minutes. For those of you continuing, may I suggest a strategically placed vomit bag? Well...

The first day of the tournament is when it happened. You'd think a disc golf course on a ball golf course would be rather simple and straightforward, and this course was, despite some of the holes being two or three football fields in length. It was a 150-class event, so I had picked up some 150-gram Orcs, Banshees and Rocs and practiced with them for a good month or two before going to Japan. So I was pretty comfortable with my discs—as comfortable as a bottom-rung Am 1 player could be, I suppose. They were the only things I was comfortable with. As it was Japan's rainy season, the weather conditions on the first day were horrendous. If I had been home, with that weather, I would not even have stepped out of the house. I'd have closed the curtains and picked up a good book. The rain was relentless the first two days. And wind, my god, almost howling at times. As if the wind and rain, and the gargantuan course, and the fact that I was playing with higher level players for the first round, weren't enough to make me "feel" my level, fog rolled in. Now I couldn't

even see the baskets. The conditions were nightmarish.

But at the same time, I was having fun with a capital F. Playing in this major tournament with only one division (Open) was a great disc golf adventure for me.

Warming up putting right next to some of the top players in the sport was cool. Just picking up someone's lost disc, turning it over, seeing the name "Ken Climo" written with a Sharpie on it, and returning it to him as I passed him on the stairs was rather neat. Only in disc golf, in this the first generation of disc golf players, is it possible for anyone to casually walk up to a well-known pro player and talk story.

And on any given hole, anyone can beat anyone. It's true. Even though I was BOB ("back of the box," that is, the last one to tee off because my previous hole's result was the worst) over half the time, I had some nice pars, and a couple of longish putts found the chains. Still, after nine holes it was obvious that I was in the lower skills bracket (i. e., "discually challenged") compared to the rest of our foursome, which consisted of an American, a Taiwanese and a Japanese. Then we came up to hole number ten. The hole does not look difficult, or any more difficult than other holes on the course (Figure 6). It's a hundred yards downhill, with a deep OB gully



comprising most of the fairway. Even I should be able to reach the green distance-wise. But the shot must make it over the gully. Even if I could throw a straight shot, the combination of wind, rain and fog would screw it up somehow. A big hyzer to the right, and have it curve down and over to the green? No, on the right side looms a forest of tall trees called *matsu-no-ki*, which translated directly from classical Japanese means “hungry-like-to-eat-dem Frisbees.” Go down the right side with a forehand? Nonono, even if I could throw a ninety-yard downhill forehand, no way I could conceive of where it would go in these bizarre meteorological conditions.

Still, go with your first instinct and believe in it, is what I was thinking. My first throw landed in the OB gully. It was my prized Orc, the “sea monster,” so I climbed down into the thorn-infested gully, in the wind and rain, slipped several times over slick rocks and, just as the three-minute rule was rearing its ugly finality, I recovered my Orc. I slither clumsily out of the gully, looking like a sea monster myself, and throw from the drop zone, which is thirty yards closer to the basket. The throw looked pretty good, and I think it cleared the gully. I jog down around the gully to the green. Almost. Damn, just two more feet and I’d have been on the green.

Urrrghhh.

Back to the drop zone for throw number five. The wind is pushing the rain in every which way, changing directions pinballically. The eerie fog is closing in, enveloping the whole scene. It's already a nightmare hole for me; it's not a fairway, it's an unfairway. The green is looking farther and farther away

My playing partners are waiting graciously. Kuan, the Taiwanese with a bum leg, lights up a cigarette. The foursome behind us pulls up to the tee area. *I gotta get in on the green, man. It's only seventy yards straight down there. I'll hzyer it, over the trees, with my Roc, my go-to shot with my go-to disc.* I use a Roc for fifty percent of my shots, and am pretty confident with it. It usually goes where I throw it. So I do a half-windup and hzyer it over the trees on the right side. It enters the fog behind and above the trees and then—nothing. Nothing, no sound, only the silence of the limbs. No disc falling through the pines. No disc on the green. The fog just swallowed it whole. No sound from any of us either; everyone is just staring into the fog.

Without even asking if anyone saw it, I take my Orc out of my bag and decide I'm just gonna throw it right down to the green. If it goes over, fine. At least I

can complete the hole. With all the time I've spent so far, and with two foursomes now backed up at the tee area, I just want to get this hole over with. I take a couple of steps back then wind up to throw the Orc, my hands wet with rain and perspiration. Shank! The disc flies low and to the right into a tree trunk in the woods. This time there's a sound, and the sound says, "Get another disc, loser, this one's lost, too."

Back to the drop zone for throw number nine. Kuan takes a slow drag off his cigarette then exhales, the smoke commingling with the fog just overhead. Geez, this is already past embarrassing, but I'm trying to keep my cool. At this point, I just want it to be over. *I'm feeling a complete disunity with all my surroundings; even the slick blades of grass are conspiring against me. I'm down to three discs in my bag—with at least ten more holes to go. What can I do? I have never lost so many discs in one month, even one year, let alone one hole. What are the rules here? Can I just quit? Can I take a pass? Do I keep on throwing all my discs away, then throw my bag, then my shoes toward that disc-repelling, reverse vortex of a green that is rejecting everything I offer?! I want to just do a swan dive into that gully and disappear.*

Even if I had twenty more discs, I simply cannot imagine how I could get it

on that green short of walking down there, getting on my hands and knees, and softly placing the disc on the elusive green using all ten of my fingers. *I'm a cockroach. Suddenly. I've turned into Kafka's cockroach. My reality has turned upside-down. Five minutes ago I was my normal self, and now I find myself experiencing an out-of-body, into an upside-down cockroach experience. Now, physically, I'm upside down, on my back, wiggling and shaking my eight legs for all I'm worth, trying to get back up on my feet, but I cannot. Not only have I become non-human, I'm highly non-functional. And now there's an urgent knock on the door...*

Back to the game. What's happening? Where am I?

I consult with the other players. My sense of embarrassment quickly turns into desperation as I plead my case. Is there a maximum amount of throws we can just agree on? I'll be happy to accept any stroke penalty, whatever it is. *What if I run out of discs? What do the rules say? I feel as if I'm a child who peed his pants on the camping trip, and all the others are gathering around in macabre amusement, to see me melt down. I am drenched from rain and sweat, my feet are drenched sponges, and my hands have become very uncomfortably numb. Waterlogged at my Waterloo.*

*Arrrgghhh! I wanna go home! Can we please press the fast-forward button?*

The other three players, all higher level, discuss it ever so briefly, then come up with the number: twelve. A kind and compassionate number—I would have agreed to anything, just to put me out of this misery. I carded a twelve on a par three hole. A twelve. Zwolf. Juu-ni. A dozen. On the scorecard the twelve looked like a mistake—there are rarely double-figure scores on the card, as unusual as holes-in-one. On top of that, as embarrassing as it may be to admit, I was happy to be able to walk away from that hole with just a twelve.

I resisted the urge to run into the woods, curl up in a ball and hide under a bush for three days. I also managed to finish the round without losing all my discs, nor my dignity. In fact, I did have a couple good holes, and I may have even taken the box momentarily during the last nine. Still, I was beat, physically and mentally. The guys I was playing with were way above my level. I was wet, tired, and mentally frazzled. My toes were frizzled. I wasn't enjoying the game as much as surviving it. I knew that the next day would be easier, at least because I'd be paired with players closer to my level.

If there *were* any such low level players. Maybe there weren't. Maybe my score was so astronomically high, that the Japanese officials would simply ask me to stop. "*Jon-san, chotto sumimasen ga*, please stop playing. Go enjoy the beautiful Nasu Highlands, as a tourist or spectator, but just don't continue this tournament. You're embarrassing yourself and the sport of disc golf."

As the results of the day mercilessly showed on the video screen for everybody to see, I wasn't competing with anybody. That twelve on hole ten had put me in a tie for next to last place, one stroke out of dead last in the standings. Number 90 out of 91. Ouch, looking at the results was like kicking a dead horse. However, a little spark forms in my brain. Hey—erase that nonuple bogey on ten, and I move up a tad in the standings. *I am not in last. I am not in last.* I show my wife and mother-in-law the standings, with me having almost the highest number. "I'm almost winning, haha," I wince. They're confused. Tomorrow's gotta be better. Tomorrow I'll play with the others in the lowest rung of the standings and I'll feel better. I'm not the only lower rung player here.

Tomorrow comes and the weather has improved from horrible to just bad. I

played with guys closer to my level for round two. It was much more relaxed for me—even though I floundered again on hole ten, this time an honest ten—seven over on the hole. Call it a septuple bogey. “Hey, I had a septuple bogey!” There, that doesn’t sound so horrible, does it? Seriously though, low-level player that I am, maybe once a year, at most, do I experience a five or six over—on a hole. This hole ten was simply a nightmare for me. Even in my dreams when I play the hole I get, at best, octuples and decuple bogeys. (Occasionally I experience a sextuple, which can be fun if you have the right partner.) The hole, for me, is just a black hole. A hole that should be relegated to the domain of dreams and nightmares.

Yet, all is not lost. Even with my seven-over on the Hell Hole ten, I manage to come out of the second day, the second twenty-seven holes, at fourteen throws less than my first day. This improvement moves me up in the standings. I’m clearly out of the basement, by four or five throws, and there are two players (bless their souls for coming!) below me. The last day is only nine holes. It is only on this last day, Sunday, that the Buddhist Weather god, O-Tenki, has cooperated and given us as magnificent a view from the Nasu Highlands as one can imagine. It’s as if we are up in heaven,

flinging little spaceships down the slopes, in a Thomas Kinkade painting, with the birds-eye view of the glistening villages down in the distance. And this time, I am a grinning part of the picture. It's gone from Hell to Heaven. And now, now that I know I won't be Dead F\*\*king Last (DFL), I'm starting to enjoy the beauty, for the first time, of playing disc golf on a ball golf course.

On this last day of the Japan Open, just two minutes before the start time, my group was still wandering around in the golf carts trying to find our starting hole. None of us knew where we were going. We stopped at every other group, interrupted their pre-round zazen meditation or whatever, got pointed in this and that direction, and finally, zipping along frantically like the Marx Brothers, we, lowest-rung players who should perhaps not even be allowed to join such a tournament, arrived at our starting hole after driving by all twenty-six other holes.

Once we got started, things were going okay for me. I picked up a couple of strokes from the onset over the other two guys battling for last, and was feeling all right, comfortably hovering slightly above the DFL fray. And as icing on the cake (or as they say in Japan, "as lucky as you are when you have dried bonito fish flakes on



your tofu”), it looked as if we wouldn’t be playing the dreaded hole ten on which I had a cumulative score of twenty-two for two holes, where I lost more discs than I’d lost in the previous three years, and the location of my worst disc golf experience ever.

Thank God we weren’t playing that one again. Jeez, if that hole appeared, I started to think, that would ruin my buzz for the grandeur of this course and this great sport. *No, no—we’ve already checked the course map. We are not going in that direction. No way, no how. Great. Yokatta. I don’t ever want to see that hole again. May that hole ten be vanquished from the earth! Die! Good riddance, hole ten.*

And of course, as fate would have it, it turns out that we had read the map wrong and indeed, we were heading for hole fucking ten. Shit. It’s just like when you’re saying don’t-hit-that-tree, don’t-hit-that-tree and—Bam, your disc smacks the tree right in the middle. You attracted the negative karma with negative thoughts

Well, here I am again, hole ten. I can’t believe that I have to suffer through this hole again. Even on a clear calm day like today, I still would have no idea how to play that particular hole ten. My heart sinks, thinking that this would indeed be the

appropriate and tragic ending for my first (and perhaps only) major disc golf tournament. I'm losing my cool, whatever cool I could possibly have as the 90<sup>th</sup> player out of a field of 92. (*Hey, either way, I'm in the top one hundred!*) I'm gonna be in last place—everybody is going to notice my name at the bottom of the list as much as the winner of the tournament. Well, not really. Nobody reads all the way down to the last place finisher, do they?

But for me, and I think the other lower runggers, the competition to stay out of very last place was real, intense and gallows-humor funny, “Hey, you’re not gonna DNF, are you?” If you DNF (did not finish), you withdraw from the tournament with some excuse, and your score is (rather conveniently) not posted. Thus, if you DNF, you cannot be DFL. The saving grace was, of course, whoever did end up in last would be there by just a stroke or two—rather than by an embarrassing, internationally embarrassing, twenty or thirty strokes.

To make a long story a short happy story, I got a five on the hole. Yee-hah! Not an octuple or a decuple bogey, but a simple, easy to fathom, *double bogey*. As it turned out the other two guys tied for last place. The three of us had played together

the last two days and fully inhaled the foggy fumes of the DFL competition down under. Any par was a reason for mini- celebration. At the end of the tournament we signed and exchanged discs. We met each others' spouses and exchanged niceties while acknowledging that, yes, even though we were "on the low end of the skills bracket" of the Japan Open, it was a special event for us bottom runggers. Somebody has to be at the bottom and it was good to not be the only one. And to have the chance play alongside the pros, who were all cordial and accessible, I really got the sense of the unique sport and open community that is disc golf.

Well, fellow disc golfer, now that you've patiently let me fully experience my worst hole ever, I hope I can forget it, let it go, and move on in my disc golf career. On the other hand, perhaps I've etched it on my mind even deeper. Oops. As Montaigne warns us, "Nothing fixes a thing so intensely in the memory as the wish to forget it." I hope my bad experience of carding a twelve on a hole doesn't linger in *your* mind too long. It might not be healthy.

However, if it reminds you of one of your worst holes ever, and you start to relive it in all-too-graphic detail, then perhaps I've contributed in helping you realize

the unity in the positive and the negative, and completeness with all things. Because it is the ghastly holes that make the fantastic holes that much more joyful. If you're regretting that you read all this, and feel that it was like picking up a rock and staring at the slimy creepy insects on the muddy underside, well, too bad. I apologize. At least I've emptied *my* mind of it, so that now I can focus on positive things. Like getting my Frisbees together and waltzing out the door, free of bad memories, to play some disc golf.

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A silent conversation permeates all of the action in a round of disc golf. The way someone aims a disc, winds up and throws, how hard or soft he tosses it, his shot selections, his strategy and even his reactions to his wonderful or disastrous shots, all are integral parts of this "conversation" that we have while taking a stroll in the park. Sometime during the round, however, the "stroll in the park" feels more like crawling naked through a field of broken beer bottles.

**It is as if the sport itself, with all of its elements, is also a being with a voice.**

**A dynamic voice that works in chillingly and sometimes, pleasantly mysterious ways.**

**A voice that is part nature, part physics, part human, part skill, part luck, and  
peppered with wonder, frustration and enjoyment.**

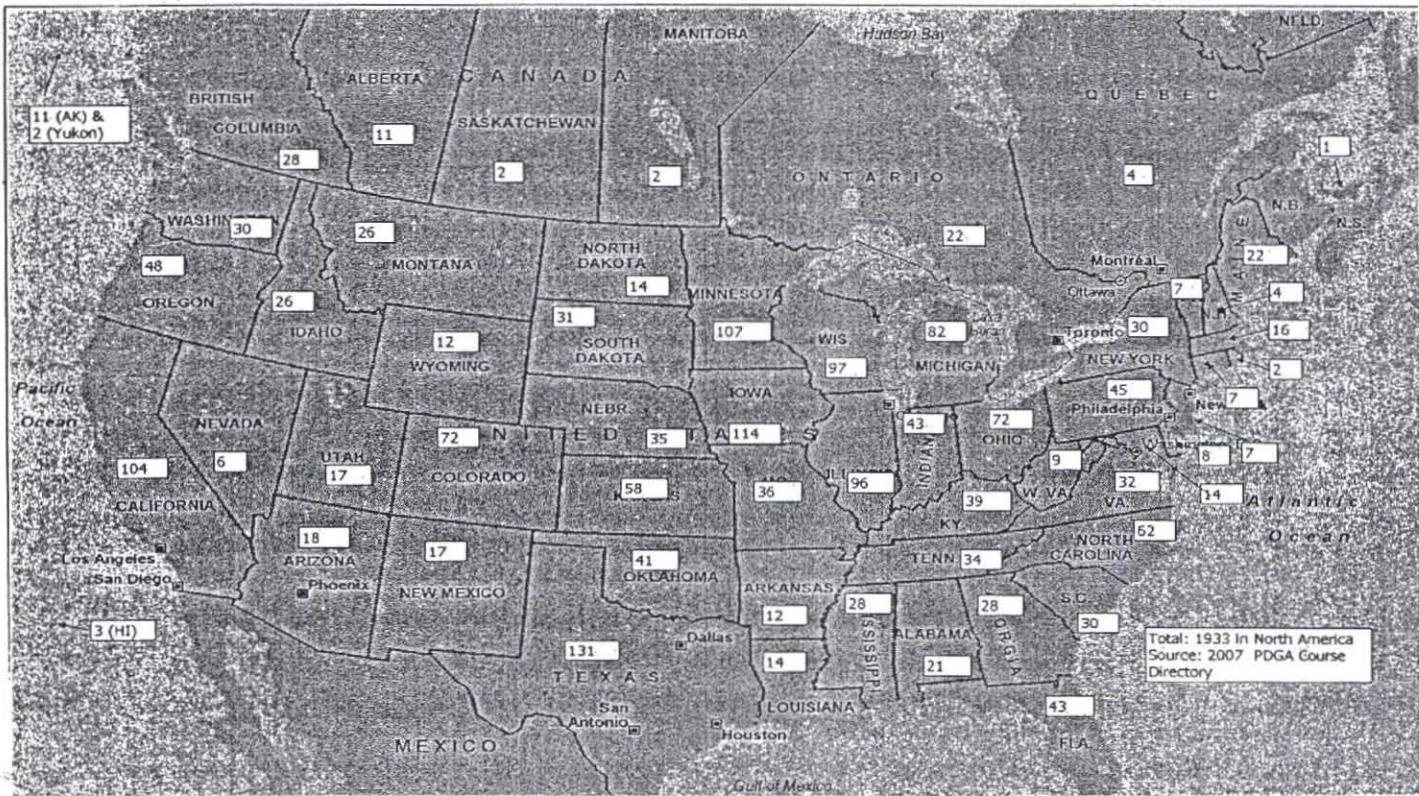
**End**



The disc golf basket. The disc must come to rest inside the basket.

(Figure 1)

Distribution of Disc Golf Courses in North America



(Figure 2)

(Figure 3)



Ken Climo, the first “greatest player” of disc golf.

as it relates to the thrower and the player.

#### 803.08 Out-of-Bounds

A. A disc shall be considered out-of-bounds only when it comes to rest and it is clearly and completely surrounded by the out-of-bounds area. A disc thrown in water shall be deemed to be at rest once it is floating or is moving only by the action of the water or the wind on the water. See section 803.02 F. The out-of-bounds line itself is considered in-bounds.

B. A player whose disc is considered out-of-bounds shall receive one penalty throw. The player may elect to play the next shot from: (1) The previous lie as evidenced by the marker disc or, if the marker disc has been moved from an approximate lie, as agreed to by the majority of the group or an official; or (2) A lie that is up to one meter away from and perpendicular to the point where the disc last crossed into out-of-bounds, as determined by a majority of the group or an official. This holds true even if the direction takes the lie closer to the hole; or (3) Within the designated Drop Zone, if provided. These options may be limited by the tournament director as a special condition (see 804.01).

C. The Rule of Verticality. The out-of-bounds line represents a vertical plane. Where a player's lie is marked from a particular point within one meter of the out-of-bounds line pursuant to the rules, the one-meter relief may be taken from the particular point upward or downward along the vertical plane.

D. If the in-bounds status of a disc is uncertain, either a majority of the group or an official shall make the determination. If the thrower moves the disc before a determination has been made, the disc shall be considered out-of-bounds, and he or she shall proceed in accordance with 803.08 B. If a player other than the thrower moves the disc before a determination has been made, the disc shall be considered in-bounds, and play for the thrower and the mover of the disc shall proceed under the rules of interference, 803.06 B and C.

E. A throw that misses a mandatory and lands out-of-bounds shall be penalized and the lie marked according to the mandatory rule (803.11) and will not be penalized for being out-of-bounds.

#### 803.09 Throwing From Another Player's Lie

A. A player who has thrown from another player's lie shall receive two penalty throws, without a warning. The offending player shall complete the hole as if the other player's lie were his or her own. No throws shall be replayed.

B. The player whose lie was played by the offending player shall be given an approximate lie as close to the original lie as possible, as determined by the offending player, a majority of his or her group, or an official. See section 803.10 C if the disc has been declared lost.

#### 803.10 Lost Disc

A. A disc shall be declared lost if the

player cannot locate it within three minutes after arriving at the spot where it was last seen by the group or an official. Two players or an official must note when the timing of three minutes begins. All players of the group must, upon request, assist in searching for the disc for the full three minutes before the disc is declared lost. The disc is considered lost immediately upon the expiration of the three minute time limit.

B. A player whose disc is declared lost, shall receive one penalty throw. The approximate lie for the player's next shot shall be marked in-bounds nearest the spot where the disc was last seen, as agreed to by a majority of the group or an official.

C. If it is discovered, prior to the completion of the tournament, that a player's disc that was declared lost had been removed or taken, then the player shall have the penalty throw for the lost disc subtracted from his or her score.

D. A marker disc that is lost shall be replaced in its approximate lie as agreed to by a majority of the group or an official, without penalty.

#### 803.11 Mandatories

A. A mandatory restricts the path the disc may take to the target. A disc must pass to the correct side of the mandatory before the hole is completed.

B. A disc passing the incorrect side of the mandatory results in a one-throw penalty, and the next throw shall be made from the drop zone, as designated for that

mandatory. A throw is considered to have missed the mandatory if it passes the incorrect side of the mandatory, crosses the mandatory line from the direction of the tee, and comes to rest lying completely beyond that line.

(1) The mandatory line is the line marked by the director or course designer to indicate when a disc has passed the mandatory.

(2) If no line is marked, the mandatory line is a straight line through the mandatory, perpendicular to the line from the tee to the mandatory.

(3) In the case of a double mandatory when no line is marked, the mandatory line is the straight line connecting the two mandatories, and extends beyond them in both directions.

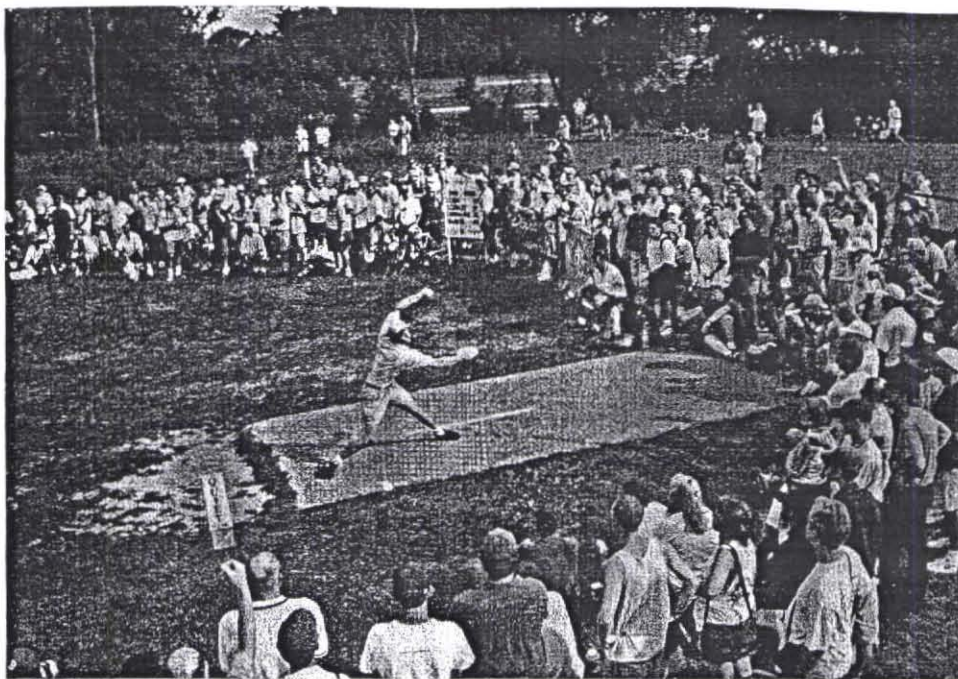
C. A throw is considered to have passed the mandatory if it passes the correct side of the mandatory, crosses the mandatory line from the direction of the tee, and comes to rest lying completely beyond that line. Once the mandatory has been passed on the correct side, the mandatory is to be ignored for the remainder of play on that hole.

D. When marking the lie, if the line of play does not pass to the correct side of the mandatory, then the mandatory itself shall be considered the hole for the application of all rules regarding stance, markers, obstacles, and relief. For the purposes of taking a legal stance, the mandatory object which has not yet been passed, and is nearest the tee, will be considered to be the hole.

A page from the PDGA Official Rule Book.

(Figure 4)





A professional disc golfer tees off at a world championship

(Figure 5)

(Figure 6)



Hole #10

Hole ten at the Japan Open. This was on the last day, when the weather cooperated.

Open										
1	Steve Rico	USA	83	84	58	24	249	\$4,444		
2	Avery Jenkins	USA	87	78	56	28	249	\$3,111		
3	Barry Schultz	USA	86	82	57	26	251	\$2,000		
4	Nathan Doss	USA	86	81	58	28	253	\$1,333		
5	David Feldberg	USA	89	83	54		226	\$1,067		
6	Markus Källström	SWEDEN	87	88	53		228	\$989		
7	Ken Climo	USA	89	85	56		230	\$800		
8	Shawn Sinclair	USA	98	81	56		235	\$711		
9	David Harless	USA	91	90	57		238	\$622		
10	Brad Hammock	USA	96	91	53		240	\$1,083		
11	Jay Yeti Reading	USA	94	91	56		241	\$489		
12	Michael Sullivan	USA	93	85	65		243	\$794		
13	Manabu Kajiyama	JAPAN	96	86	63		245	\$356		
14	Kevin Couch	USA	88	102	57		247	\$520		
15	Atsuhito Kawasaki	JAPAN	97	93	58		248	\$276		
15	Terry Roddy	USA	100	88	60		248	\$276		
T17	Jussi Meresmaa	FINLAND	99	95	55		249	\$231		
T17	Michael Williams	USA	98	95	56		249	\$331		
T17	Yoshiyasu Kajiyama	JAPAN	95	88	66		249	\$231		
T20	Dave Dunipace	USA	97	91	62		250	\$563		
21	Hideaki Matsuda	JAPAN	94	91	66		251	\$204		
22	Bamba Rico	USA	99	89	64		252	\$196		
23	Rick Voakes	USA	95	95	64		254	\$437		
T24	Koichi Sasaki	JAPAN	102	90	63		255	\$173		
T24	Jerry Davis	USA	98	94	63		255	\$173		
T26	Bill Davis	USA	97	99	63		259	\$164		
T26	Hiroki Takahashi	JAPAN	99	95	65		259	\$164		
28	Hayato Hikan	JAPAN	104	94	62		260	\$160		
T29	Anders Källström	SWEDEN	105	93	63		261	\$151		
T29	Tetsuya Kikuchi	JAPAN	104	94	63		261	\$151		
31	Sam Ferrans	USA	102	96	65		263	\$142		
T32	Ari Agnasan	USA	103	98	63		264	\$133		
T32	Brian Hoeniger	CANADA	108	92	64		264	\$233		
T32	Yasushi Jitsuhiro	JAPAN	103	97	64		264	\$133		
T32	Hidekatsu Sakai	JAPAN	98	94	72		264	\$133		
36	David Gentry	USA	102	95	68		265	\$133		
37	Kenji Kudou	JAPAN	98	101	69		268			
T38	Dana Lawton	USA	107	99	63		269			
T38	Doug Porter	USA	112	90	67		269			
T40	Kazuo Shirai	JAPAN	103	99	68		270			
T40	Jeff Kennedy	USA	107	93	70		270			
T40	Stanny Lee	TAIWAN	105	94	71		270			
T43	Takamichi Roppongi	JAPAN	106	98	67		271			
T43	Jason Dowling	USA	105	98	68		271			
T45	Marty Hapner	USA	108	97	67		272			
T45	John Kretzschmar	USA	104	101	67		272			
T45	Mac Hsiao	TAIWAN	106	98	68		272			
T45	Michael Cloyes	USA	103	99	70		272			
49	Kenichi Suzuki	JAPAN	105	101	69		275			
50	Koji Takayama	JAPAN	107	104	65		276			
51	Hiroyuki Sato	JAPAN	103	105	69		277			
T52	Kuan Chen	TAIWAN	106	104	68		278			
T52	Tomoyuki Kishi	JAPAN	110	98	70		278			
T54	Mitsuhiro Takano	JAPAN	110	102	67		279			
T54	Dwight House	USA	109	101	69		279			
T54	Vincent Chang	TAIWAN	105	101	73		279			
T54	Richard Tang	TAIWAN	104	102	73		279			
58	Chi Chin Wang	TAIWAN	113	99	68		280			
T59	Josh Yocum	USA	109	107	66		282			
T59	Gary Sandoval	USA	107	107	68		282			
T59	Ray Hill	USA	106	108	68		282			
62	Patrick Sweeney	USA	115	99	69		283			
T63	Susumu Yamada	JAPAN	114	98	72		284			
T63	Chika Nii	JAPAN	109	101	74		284			
65	Paul Walker	USA	118	95	72		285			
66	Rambo Tang	TAIWAN	112	105	69		286			
T67	Michihiko Akutsu	JAPAN	112	106	70		288			
T67	Toshihito Fujinohara	JAPAN	110	106	72		288			
T67	Fumihiko Yoshimura	JAPAN	113	102	73		288			
70	Tom Schot	USA	116	104	70		290	\$100		
71	Shozo Mori	JAPAN	114	106	73		293			
72	Graham Walker	USA	110	111	32		253			
73	Khyber Easton	USA	115	106	34		255			
74	Robert Lu	TAIWAN	120	102	35		257			
75	Takaji Hironaka	JAPAN	114	108	36		258			
76	Michiyasu Morooka	JAPAN	115	106	38		259			
77	Kazuhisa Terakaku	JAPAN	117	109	34		260			
T78	Eiji Tatebayashi	JAPAN	124	105	32		261			
T78	Shin Asaya	JAPAN	120	105	36		261			
T78	Yoshito Nishizono	JAPAN	115	109	37		261			
81	Todd A. Breiner	USA	120	105	37		262			
82	Daniel Hart	USA	117	113	39		269			
83	Paul McGowan	USA	111	120	40		27			
T84	Paul Arden	AUSTRALIA	117	113	42		272			
T84	Sadayuki Sato	JAPAN	130	104	38		272			
86	Ipppei Yokota	JAPAN	122	110	41		273			
87	Sho Sakai	JAPAN	120	119	38		277			
88	Masahito Tsukasaki	JAPAN	133	108	37		278			
89	Morgan McDowell	USA	130	109	40		279			
90	John Burzynski	USA	132	118	41		291			
T91	Tim Wiley	USA	132	124	44		300			
T91	Tomohiko Komuro	JAPAN	129	126	45		300			
DNF: Jason Florio, Rick Rothstein										
Women										
1	Valarie Jenkins	USA	102	95	34	30	261	\$2,222		
2	Juliana Korver	USA	100	100	33	29	262	\$1,333		
3	Des Reading	USA	103	98	30	34	265	\$889		
4	Anni Kreml	USA	108	97	34	35	274	\$733		
5	Carrie Burt Berlogar	USA	110	103	32		245	\$267		
6	Nacko Inami	JAPAN	116	105	34		255	\$178		
7	Yurkari Komatsu	JAPAN	112	109	35		256	\$133		
8	Chieko Kakimoto	JAPAN	116	109	32		257			
9	Rika Tsukamoto	JAPAN	120	114	36		270			
10	Suzette Simons	USA	117	120	34		271	\$100		
11	Tracey Thorpe	USA	120	118	38		276			
12	Sachiko Satou	JAPAN	133	115	34		282			
T13	Lisa Reisch	USA	133	121	35		289			
T13	Sylvia Voakes	USA	130	119	40		289	\$100		
15	Kuniko Yoshioka	JAPAN	120	125	45		290			
16	Anna Akesson	SWEDEN	131	123	41		295			
17	Yuki Fukuhara	JAPAN	132	127	39		298			
18	Melinda Umphenour	USA	133	134	44		311			
Ace: Doug Porter, #17, 357"										

# The 2006 Japan Open

## Japan Open Results

(Figure 7)

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