

**The Joy  
of Disc  
Golf**

*by Pete Smith*



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**of** Disc  
Golf



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## The Basics

Like chess, and anything else worth doing, Disc Golf is relatively easy to learn and play, but challenging to master.

Like ball golf, the object of disc golf is to complete each hole in the fewest number of throws (strokes). Each hole starts at the tee. The player with the lowest score on the previous hole has “honors” and throws first.

The tee area is generally marked by a sign that lists the distance and par of the hole, as well as a map showing the layout of the hole. The player must start by throwing his/her first shot from an area behind and within 3 meters of the tee box markers (similar to ball golf). On most holes, players will tee off with one of their Drivers, or longest flying discs. The drive may be thrown from any area of the tee box, provided that the player’s support point(s) at time of release are behind the tee markers, and no farther back than 3 meters behind the tee

markers. The player may step past the tee line once the disc has been released. This shot is known as the Drive. The player may run up to the line prior to throwing the disc. This is generally referred to as the run up.

The next shot, known as the approach shot, is thrown from the spot where the drive or previous shot came to rest, and must be thrown from a place that is behind the spot marking the leading edge of the disc. During casual play, players sometimes mark their lie simply by turning over the disc from their previous shot. The player farthest from the hole throws first. For approach shots of 200’ or less (generally speaking), many players will use Multi-purpose or Mid-range discs. These discs are designed to fly with more control than a driver. The player may again run up to throw the disc, as long as the player’s foot is behind the marker disc, and within 30 CM (~12 inches) of it when the shot is released. Once again, the player may step past the marker disc once the shot has been released.

Most disc golf courses feature an elevated basket with chains to stop an incoming disc, generally referred to as the target, basket, or Pole Hole®. A putt is considered any throw that originates within 10 M of the basket. The rules for throwing putts are slightly different than drives and approach shots. When putting, a player may not run up, and must maintain control of his/her body position after releasing the putt. Putters are generally used for the final shot of the hole and are designed to fly slower and straighter than mid-range discs. When putting, players are not allowed to step past their marker disc even after releasing

the shot. The hole is finished when a player's disc comes to rest in the basket. The score for each player is recorded immediately after completion of the hole, and reflects the number of shots thrown from the tee until the disc came to rest in the basket.

Object courses, or home courses, have similar rules, but instead of a basket or Pole Hole®, the targets are any handy pole, or stack of rocks, or bucket. Really, all that is needed to play a round of disc golf is a disc, some space, some free time, and maybe a friend or a dog for companionship.



## A Brief History of Disc Golf

**1920's** — The first known instance of anyone playing golf with a flying disc occurred in Bladworth, Saskatchewan, Canada in 1926. Ronald Gibson and a group of his Bladworth Elementary School buddies played a game throwing tin plates at targets such as trees and fence posts. They called the game Tin Lid Golf and played on a fairly regular basis on a disc golf course they laid out on their school grounds.

**1964** — Wham-O introduces the “Official Pro Model” Frisbee to be used for all disc sports, including disc golf.

**1965** — Modern Frisbee patent applied for based on design by “Steady” Ed Headrick of Wham-O, who would later become known as the “Father of Disc Golf”.

**1969** — The first official disc golf tournament was held at an object course in Brookside Park in Pasadena, California. The goals were natural objects marked with a ribbon. Disc enthusiasts introduce the concept of disc golf to other parts of the

country. “Object Courses” using anything from lamp poles to fire hydrants as targets begin to crop up in the Midwest and on the East Coast.

**1970** — The first “Frisbee Club” is formed in Rochester, New York and disc golf is played on a regular basis by the locals.

**1972** — Rochester, New York becomes the first municipality in the world to hold an Annual City Disc Golf Championship.

**1975** — Oak Grove Disc Golf Course located within Hahamonga Watershed Park in Pasadena, California becomes the world’s first permanent disc golf course. It was an instant success because it rocks!

**1976** — Ed Headrick patents the modern chain style target he called the “Disc Pole Hole” and organizes the Professional Disc Golf Association (PDGA).

**1977** — The first PDGA tournaments are held in Mobile, AL and Northern New Jersey. The modern era of disc golf competition begins and grows quickly.

**1982** — The PDGA becomes a player-run



organization scheduling tournaments and formalizing rules. Harold Duvall wins the first PDGA World Disc Golf Championship.

**1984** — Disc Golf World News begins publication. This is the first magazine for Disc Golf. This is also the same year the World Flying Disc Federation (WFDF) is established to promote disc golf and Ultimate Frisbee events all over the world.

**1985** — The World Flying Disc Federation organizes the first “World Championships” held outside of the United States, in Helsingborg, Sweden. Players from 21 countries attend. Around the world, players continue to lobby parks departments and college campuses for more disc golf courses.

**1991** — The first annual World’s Biggest Disc Golf Weekend is held at Zilker Park in Austin, Texas. The WBDGW is always held on First Weekend in May each year.

**1993** — The PDGA begins to chronicle the history of disc golf with the

establishment of the PDGA Hall of Fame.

**1998** — The inaugural United States Disc Golf Championship is held at Winthrop University Gold Course in Rock Hill, South Carolina. Ken Climo is the first to win and be crowned the U.S. Champion.

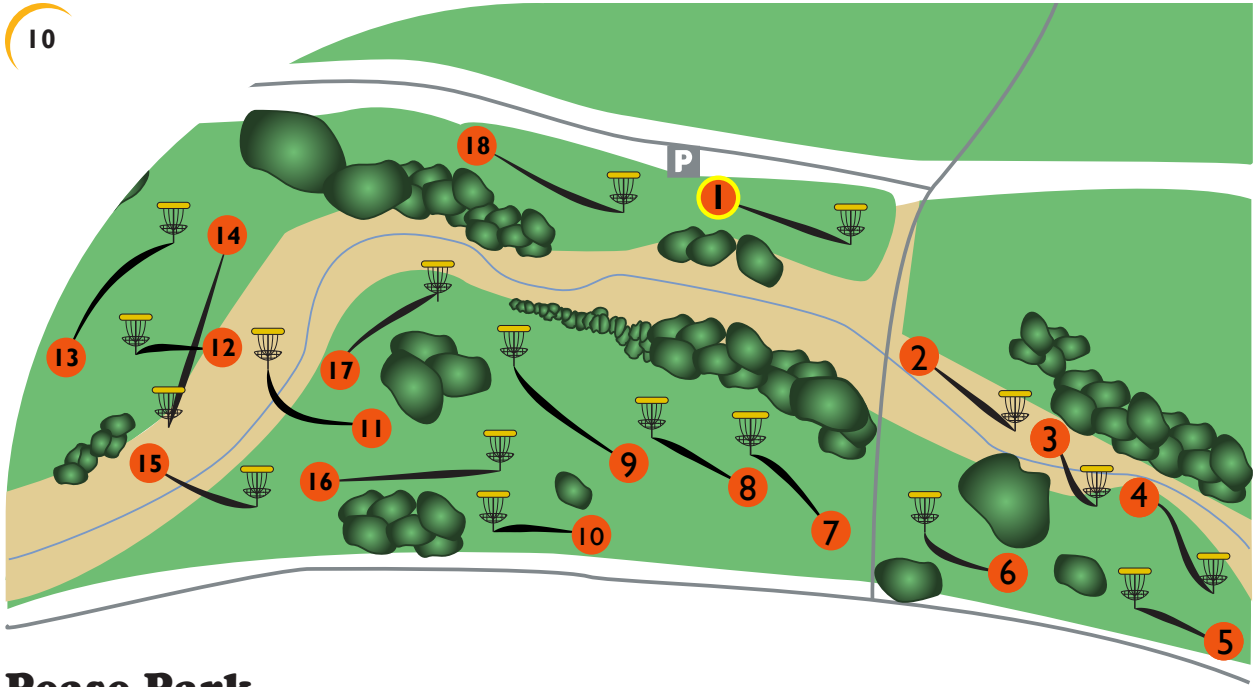
**2000** — The number of permanent disc golf courses in the USA surpasses 1,000.

**2001** — Disc golf becomes a featured event and Ultimate becomes a medal sport at the World Games in Akita, Japan.

**2005** — With 250+ disc golf courses built this year, the number of permanent disc golf courses in the United States reaches 2,000!

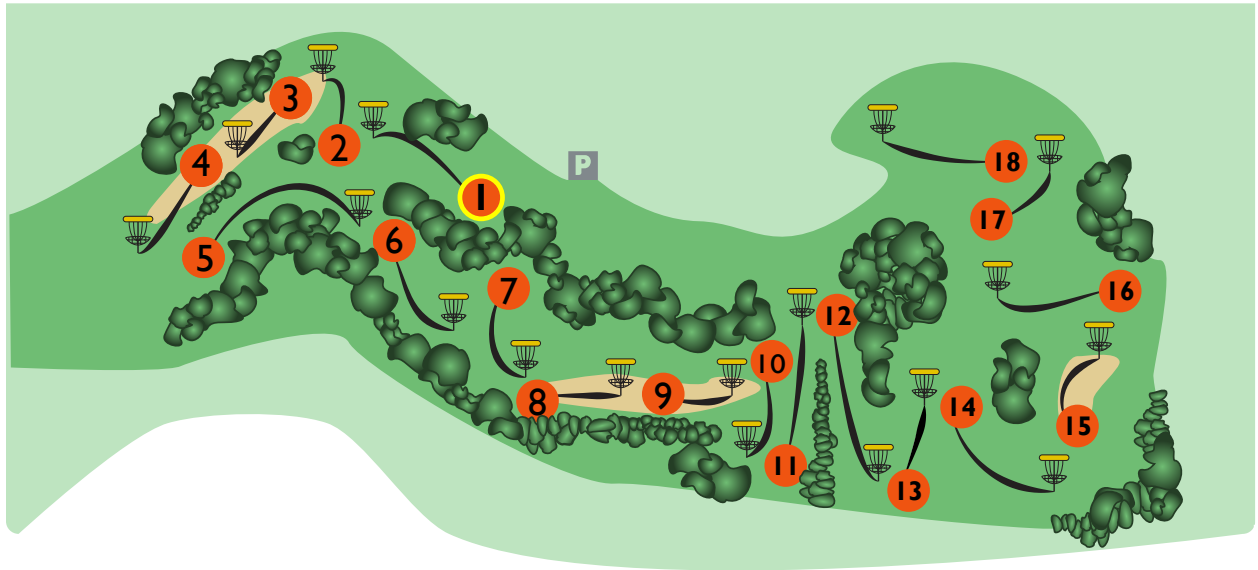
**2009** — The number of permanent disc golf courses hits 3,000 worldwide. The growth of Disc Golf continues at an amazing pace, the number of USA disc golf courses has gone up by 15%. with no sign of slowing down.

BINGO BANGO BONGO – 1 point per hole is awarded for longest drive (BINGO), closest to pin on 2nd shot (BANGO), first to hole out (BONGO).  
After all players drive, player furthest from hole throws next



## Pease Park

This is the first course I ever played and where I learned the game. A long course through a city park, 300,000 players a year played here until the city closed it in 2010 for revegitation. The city claimed the disc golfers were responsible for trampling the plants in the park chasing errant discs. The disc golfers claimed the park was essentially a homeless camp until they started using the park. This is also the course I played in my first tournament. The Rest In Pease tournament was also the last tournament to be held here before the city pulled all the baskets. Hopefully the city will open it again someday.



## Circle C

**Circle C Metropolitan Park** is another long course testing the ability of golfers to stay below par. When I first started playing this course there were 22 holes and it was not marked very well. More than once I had to quit because I got lost in the woods and couldn't find the next hole. As the popularity of the sport has grown in recent years various disc golf organizations have made it a priority to polish this course. Now at 18 holes with signs marking each hole and providing direction, this is one of the better courses in town.

## Equipment

### DISTANCE DRIVERS

- Designed for maximum distance off the tee
- Provide the greatest range, speed, glide and control possible
- Offered in many different models, weights and plastics for players of every skill level
- Individual models are designed to perform uniquely in various conditions and situations



### MID-RANGE DISCS

- Designed to provide accuracy and control for mid-range shots, approaches and short drives
- Dependability from fairway to chains
- Versatile discs that can perform a wide variety of shots
- Available in a wide range of models, weights and a selection of plastics



### FAIRWAY DRIVERS

- Dependable distance control for consistent fairway driving
- Valuable discs for shorter controlled drives and long approaches
- Easier for beginners to use than distance drivers
- Added control and consistency
- Offered in several distinct models, weights and plastic types



### PUTT AND APPROACH

- Designed for dependable, accurate, and confidence inspiring putts
- Ideal for executing controlled upshots, short drives and “go for it” shots
- Available in a variety of different models to match unique putting styles



# Disc Characteristics

## **SPEED**

Speed is the ability of the disc to cut through the air. Speed Ratings are listed from 1 to 13. Discs with high numbers are faster. Faster discs go farther into the wind with less effort. Slower discs take more power to throw, but have less of a chance to fly past the basket.

## **GLIDE**

Glide describes the disc's ability to maintain loft during flight. Discs with more glide are best for new players, and for producing maximum distance (especially downwind). Glide is rated from 1 to 7. Beginners looking for more distance should choose discs with more glide.

## **FADE**

Low Speed Fade is the disc's tendency to hook left (for right hand back hand throws) at the end of the flight. Fade is rated from 0 to 5. A disc rated 0 will finish straightest, while a disc rated 5 will hook hard at the end of the flight. Discs with a high fade rating are predictable even in wind.

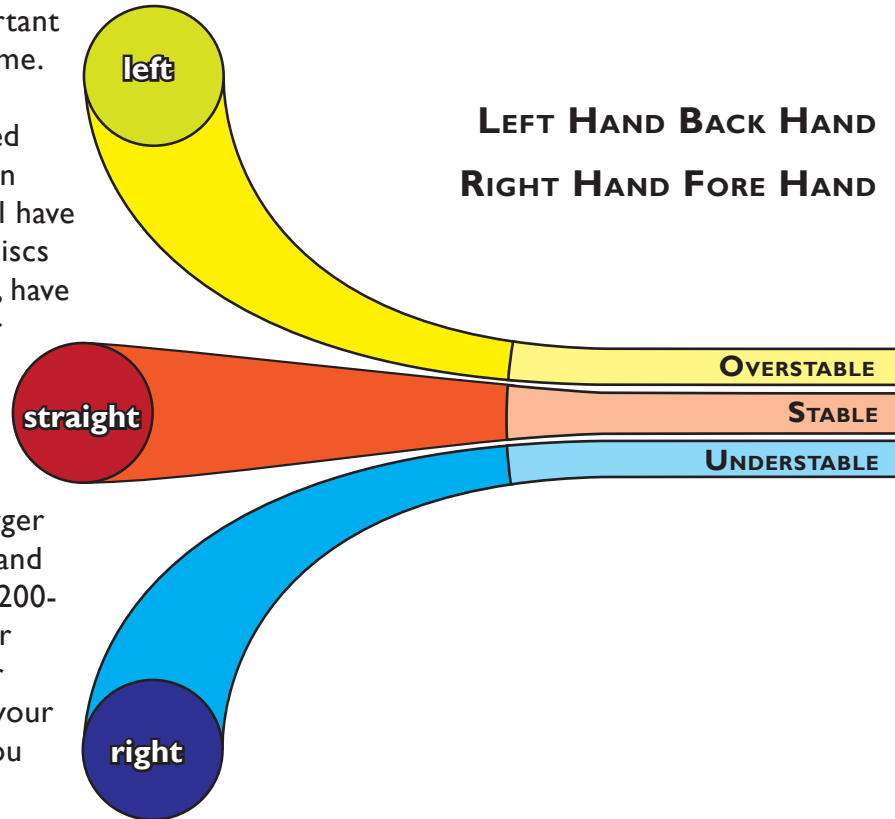
## **TURN**

High Speed Turn is the tendency of a disc to turn over or bank to the right (for right hand back hand throws) during the initial part of the flight. A disc with a +1 rating is most resistant to turning over, while a -5 rating will turn the most. Discs rated -2 to -5 make good roller discs.

STRING GOLF – Each player gets a length of string of equal length. Players can spend segments of the string to move their disc, i.e. missed putt into basket

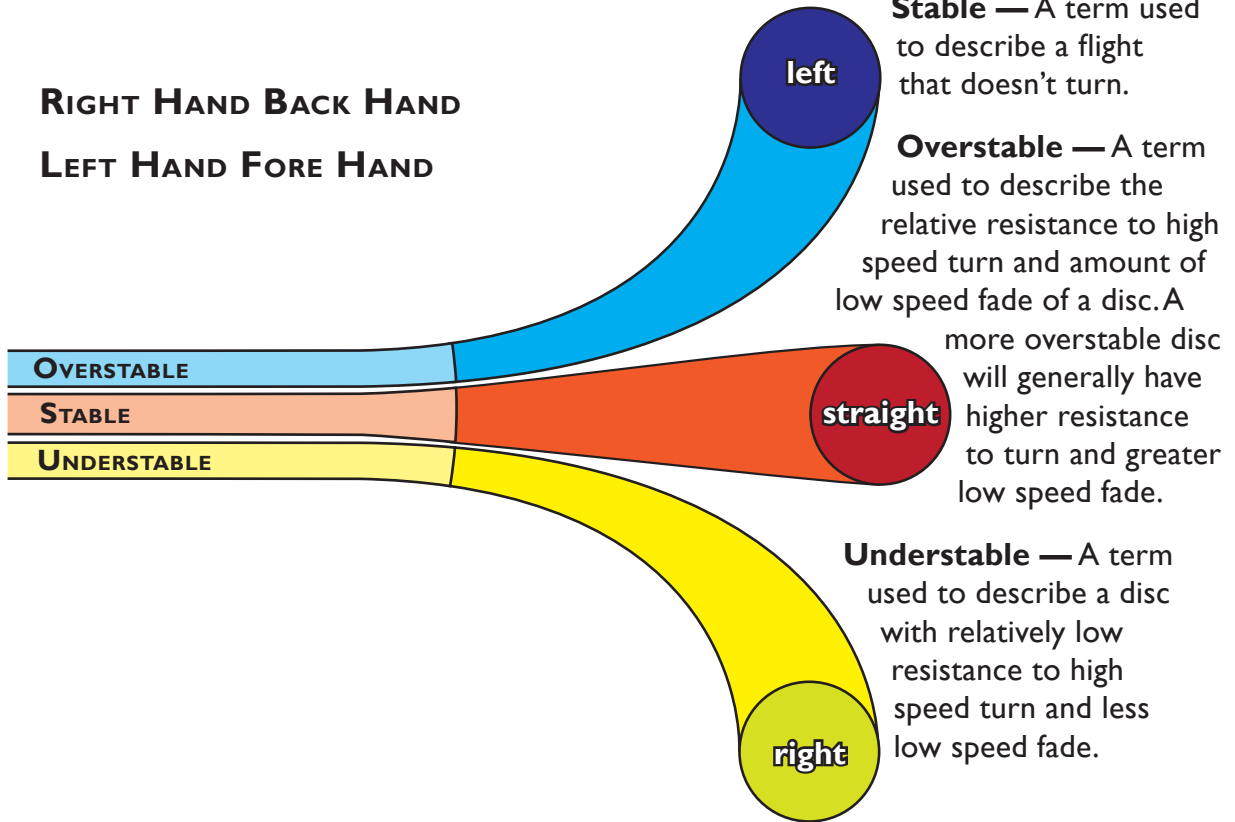
## Disc Selection

Disc selection is an important part of the game. Most 'ultra long' drivers are designed with the pro player in mind. New players will have the best success with discs that are easy to control, have good glide and are under 170 grams in weight. If your average distance is less than 200' you will probably have the most success with the larger diameter midrange discs and drivers. If you can throw 200-250' on average the easier to control small-diameter drivers should be within your range of control. Once you can throw 250'+ you will be in a better position to control the faster maximum distance drivers.



**RIGHT HAND BACK HAND**

**LEFT HAND FORE HAND**



**Stable** — A term used to describe a flight that doesn't turn.

**Overstable** — A term used to describe the relative resistance to high speed turn and amount of low speed fade of a disc. A more overstable disc will generally have higher resistance to turn and greater low speed fade.

**Understable** — A term used to describe a disc with relatively low resistance to high speed turn and less low speed fade.

## Other Equipment

*If I only had one regular frisbee I could still enjoy the sport of disc golf but there are an array of other accessories to enhance the sport.*

### DISC POLE HOLES

“Steady” Ed Headrick patented the Disc Pole Hole for the basket and chains targets of disc golf courses in 1976 and since then many varieties have been created. General terms for the Disc Pole Hole include basket, pin, and target although basket is the most popular. One of the original designs for targets was known as tonal pole because of the sound made when the disc struck the pole. Disagreements and arguments supposedly led to the additions of chains and a basket and the creation of the Disc Pole Hole by Headrick.



*Permanent disc golf basket*



*Portable disc golf basket*

### BAGS

There are many options for bags to carry discs and related equipment. Amateur players and hobbyists can use small bags good for carrying just the essentials while more serious, or professional players have the option of using a larger bag to carry a full range of discs.







Some players even go so far as to customize an old stroller to carry discs and related equipment, and even provide some entertainment. Looking at this rig I can't help but think of the golf bag used by Rodney Dangerfields' character in the ball golf movie, *Caddyshack*. Although no room for a keg, this cart does provide music.



“Hey everybody, let’s dance!”

YIKES – 2 Players share 1 disc. One player tees off, must get the disc at least 50% of the distance toward the hole. Opponent then throws and must get at least 50% closer to the hole. Player to hole out gets a point. Honor can be awarded to winner, loser, or alternate

## Techniques

*Go out and have fun. Throw an easy to control disc and focus on accuracy, distance will come with time and experience, so focus on throwing down the middle of the fairway. Keep it simple and don't try advanced techniques until you have some basic form and control down. Throw with 1-step rather than trying to attempt a run up keep the disc close to your chest and keep it as flat as possible. Remember to have fun.*

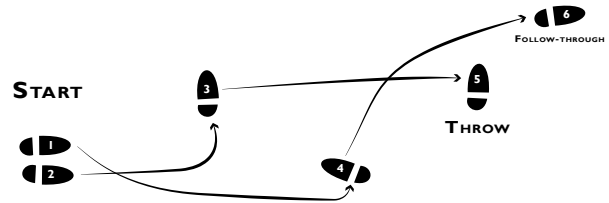
### Driving

#### Grip

Gripping the disc happens before you even step up to throw. There are some general rules of grip, although later on in your game you may feel the need to modify it, here are a few basic tips to get you started. You should be using a grip that has all 4 fingers under the disc., also known as the Power Claw. Your grip should be firm and the disc should rip out of your hand rather than slip out. If you are trying to let go of the disc, a consistent release is near impossible. Your grip should be loose enough to let your forearm and wrist move freely before the disc rips out. When people talk about a very tight grip they are referring to tightening the grip right when the disc should rip out of your hand. Your thumb should as close to the edge of the disc as possible while still being over the soft part of the disc.

#### Footwork

Footwork and balance will dictate the success and failure of your throw. If you are off balance and have a poor center of gravity a consistent and accurate throw will be very difficult to achieve without compensating in other ways. While it is possible to do, the most efficient techniques are those with good



balance throughout the throw. You should be throwing with the X-step. If you use an extra run-up or stutter step, the X-step will be the last 3 steps of your throw. Try to stay light, quick, and smooth on your feet. Heavy steps will lead to mistiming and make shifting your weight more difficult. Make sure you get your

weight over your front foot when you plant and start your throw. If your weight is behind your foot it will affect your throw in negative ways and also risk injuries to your knee and ankle. Use the explosion of your hips to start your body rotation. The direction of your feet will lead your hips, your hips will turn your torso, your torso will turn your shoulders, and your shoulders will lead your arm.

### **Reach Back**

There are a few things that are consistent

between the various reach back techniques. Your reach should only be as far as you feel comfortable with and can maintain good balance. You should reach in a straight line rather than swinging the disc back on an arc. You should also plan your intended throw during this time. For a flat line drive your hand should be on the same plane as the disc. For a hyzer, your hand should be under the disc and for an anhyzer, your hand should be above the disc.



### **Pull Through**

The pull-through is where you begin to generate the power needed for a long throw. For maximum power and speed your shoulder rotation should pull your arm through.

Don't try to muscle or 'strong arm' the disc it won't be nearly as powerful or fast as a whip driven by the shoulders. Also, keep the disc as close to your chest as possible and let your elbow bend. The extension of your elbow during the latter part of your throw will be your main power source. You should also have your off arm close to your body during the throw in order to let your body rotate as fast as possible. Also, try to be as strong as possible at the point the disc will leave your hand rather than at the beginning of your throw. This should give you maximum snap as the power is focused on getting the most force on the disc at the release rather than during the pull.

### **Follow-Through**

A good follow-through is important for both a clean throw and to avoid injury. Although

you should be smooth and loose during the first part of your throw, concentrate on finishing strong during your follow-through. A clean pivot is also good to avoid knee injury, as your body will continue rotating after the disc leaves your hand.

### **Midrange**

Throw every shot firm. If you are slow and soft a consistent release will be more difficult. Shorten up and use less body rotation on shorter shots rather than throwing softer. Aim just short and slightly to the right of your target (for RHBH throws). The disc will curl to the left and slide/skip a little. Play this knowledge to your advantage. If you are outside of your realistic make range, your goal should be for a drop-in putt. Although spectacular when it goes in, running at the chains from a long ways out is an easy way to lose a stroke by leaving you with a difficult comeback putt. Throw your slowest disc to get you to the desired target. This is the same idea as hitting a 9-iron vs. choking up on a 5-iron. Slower and shorter discs are more accurate than longer, faster discs. Use whatever can get

you there with the most consistency and accuracy (this will often be your putter).

## Putting

Try to putt with the disc flat or nose down and go for a lofting up and down arcing flight path. This line is advantageous vs. a line drive putt by reducing the fly by distance of misses. Learn to play the wind. Headwinds make the disc rise while tailwinds make the disc drop faster. Practicing your putt when its windy out will help you gauge the angles and trajectories you need for success in the wind. Don't try to muscle your putts. The power for a putt is generated by a weight shift forward. On longer putts try to get more of a weight shift. Your putting motion should be quick. Slower motions can be inconsistent and have a tendency to putt low if you are afraid of missing. You want a form that is consistent and that you can repeat again and again. Use

the spring of your fingers to your advantage. Springing your fingers off the disc will give you a clean release and generate enough spin on the disc to keep it from wobbling. Putt how you practice and practice how you putt. If you spend a lot of time lining up your putt and focusing when you throw a round, do not rapid-fire putt during practice. If you prefer to rapid-fire putt during practice, do not spend too much time lining up your putt when you throw a round. Putting differently will cause changes in your putting stroke between practice and the round. Know your putt and try to feel it with every throw. Know when the smart play is to lay up. Long putts are great when they go in but can be a nightmare if you miss. If your 50% make range is 25', don't run at the chains from 50' if you will leave yourself with a comeback putt longer than 25'. Play smart and know the right time to go for it.

GRUESOME – 2 Teams of 2 players tee off. Opposing team picks which drive the other team plays from. Points can be counted stroke, match, or other

## **Appendix**



## Disc Golf Champions

### 1993

Vanessa Chambers | Dave  
Dunipace | Ed Headrick |  
Tom Monroe | Jim Palmeri | Dan  
Roddick | Ted Smethers

### 1994

Harold Duvall | Nobuya Kobayashi |  
Darrell Lynn | Dan Mangone | Doug  
Newland | Snapper Pierson | Lavone Wolfe

### 1995

Ken Climo | John David | David Greenwell |  
Johnny Roberts | Dr. Rick Voakes

### 1996

Mike Conger | Patti Kunkle | Rick Rothstein

### 1997

Steve Slasor | Elaine King | Jim Kenner

### 1998

Gregg Hosfeld | John Houck | Carlton  
Howard

### 1999

Sam Ferrans | Steve Wisecup | Tim Selinske

### 2000

Tom Schot | Royce Racinowski

### 2001

Stan McDaniel | Johnny Sias

### 2002

Alan Beaver | Gary Lewis

### 2003

Mark Horn | Brian Hoeniger | Dr. Stancil  
Johnson

### 2004

Derek Robins | Geoff Lissaman | Johnny  
Lissaman | Marty Hapner

### 2005

Mats Bengtsson | Sylvia Voakes

### 2006

Chuck Kennedy | Kozo Shimbo

### 2007

Fred Salaz | Michael Travers



## Glossary

*\*Note\* All statements will be made assuming a right-handed backhand (RHBH) throw. Left-handed backhand and right-handed forehand throws will result in a flight path opposite of the ones described here.*

**Hyzer** — Releasing the disc with the outer edge at an angle lower than parallel to the ground. This will cause the most discs to curve to the left.

**Anhyzer** — Releasing the disc with the outer edge at an angle higher than parallel to the ground. This will cause the most discs to curve to the right.

**High Speed Turn** — The characteristic of a disc to curve to the right at the beginning of its flight when thrown hard.

**Low Speed Fade** — The natural tendency of a disc to tail left as it slows down at the end of its flight.

**Turnover** — Describes the flight of a disc that curves to the right when thrown flat or at hyzer. An understable disc will generally be easier to turn over.

**Nose Down** — Releasing the disc with the

front end of the disc lower than the back end. Certain discs will fly better when thrown nose down.

**Nose Up** — Releasing the disc with the front end of the disc higher than the back end.

**Stall Out** — Describes the flight of a disc when it peaks in height and drops off to the left without much glide. This generally occurs when the disc is thrown with the nose up.

**S-Curve** — Describes the flight of a disc when it begins by turning to the right and then “flexes” out and glides back to the left.

**Roller** — A type of throw where the disc lands on its edge and rolls.

**Snap** — Describes the armspeed and power a player gets into their throw. More snap will generally make the disc fly faster and further.

**BIZZARO** – Each hole must be played with a different set of rules. Can use off hand, putters, thumber, switch bags, eyes closed, move tees, worst shot, must hit the pole, 360 spins, no run up, etc.

## Austin Groups

**South Austin Disc Golf Association** — I don't think I could introduce this club better than they have introduced themselves on their web site, "If you're looking for a group of people that have fun and make a difference then look no further. Our goal is to organize the disc golf community and get some of our tax dollars back to places we use the most."

**Waterloo Disc Golf Association** — What can you say about a Disc Golf Club that had it's 30th Annual Waterloo Tournament last year? This club has been a mainstay in the Disc Golf Community since before most of us ever played. Waterloooooo!



**ACES**  
**Keep a log of your Aces**

Course	Hole	Date

## Credits

**THANKS TO THE AWESOME ONLINE COMMUNITY OF DISC GOLF FOR THE PICTURES AND INFORMATION USED TO COMPILE THIS BOOK.**

**WWW.DISCRAFT.COM**

**WWW.PDGA.COM**

**WWW.DISCNATION.COM**

**WWW.INNOVADISCS.COM**

**THE PICTURES ON PAGES 4, 19, AND 23 ARE MY OWN, TAKEN FROM COURSES I'VE PLAYED.**

**PG.4 — BOULDER, CO**

**PG.19. — HOLE 10 AT MARY MOORE SEARIGHT METROPOLITAN PARK IN AUSTIN, TX**

**PG.23 — HOLE 15 AT MARY MOORE SEARIGHT METROPOLITAN PARK IN AUSTIN, TX,  
ARGUABLY THE MOST BEAUTIFUL HOLE IN AUSTIN.**



**Disc Golf is a fast growing sport  
and is fun for everyone from families  
looking for a fun activity to do together  
outside to professionals competing on the  
world circuit for prestige and money.**

**Novices and professionals alike will find  
useful information about the history,  
equipment, and techniques of disc golf  
within these pages.**

