Up Front

Western Pennsylvania Sports Museum
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On Course

This region is home to the nation’s oldest surviving continuously played golf course. Established by Joseph Fox in 1887, the Foxburg Country Club and Golf Course celebrates its 130th anniversary next year. Nestled near the Allegheny River about 60 miles northeast of Pittsburgh, this USGA course has welcomed competitors to its narrow, but challenging fairways for more than a century. However, a different kind of golf recently attracted hundreds of athletes from around the world to Pittsburgh—they came to compete in the Professional Disc Golf World Championships.

Disc golf is a relatively new sport. It traces its history to the evolution of the Frisbee, from a metal pie pan tossed for fun on college campuses in the 1930s and ’40s, to the hard plastic discs made possible by advances in technology in the 1950s. A southern Californian, Fred Morrison, designed the first plastic “flying saucer,” and he later sold his design to Wham-O, which renamed the toy a Frisbee. Popular for beach and outdoor play, the Frisbee also inspired competitive games that included throwing for distance and accuracy. The sport of disc golf grew out of these games.

Though it is not known who first played disc golf, a group in Rochester, New York, held the first professional tournament in 1974—the American Flying Disc Open—using cardboard boxes for targets. Ed Headrick, Wham-O’s...
marketing director, later hired the tournament's winner, Dan Roddick, to head the company's new Sports Promotion Department. With Roddick's leadership the sport gained visibility, and with "Steady" Ed Headrick, it evolved into the form that is played today.

Headrick left Wham-O to found his own company, the Disc Golf Association, and in 1977 he patented a disc golf catching device he called the "Pole Hole." This addition turned a back yard game into a formalized sport. Players compete on a "golf" course by throwing their disc into the pole hole target with the goal of having the fewest possible throws. More than 23,000 active PDGA members now compete in 1,500 sanctioned events on almost 5,000 permanent disc golf courses around the world.

The sport of disc golf took off in this region about a century after the Foxburg Golf Club opened, with the first sanctioned PDGA tournament held at Frick Park in 1984. The winner, Steve Kohman, went on to design the region's first 18-hole course at Schenley Park with Keith Clark, Red Whittington, and John David. Whittington, a Pittsburgh native who still competes at the Masters level, has won state, national, Can-Am, and World Championships. Along with hundreds of others, he took part in the World Championship matches played here in August, bringing this new kind of golf to a regional audience.