



FLYING SAUCERS — FLYING MAGIC

For some Santa Barbarans, Frisbee is more than a toy, or even a sport. It's a way of life.

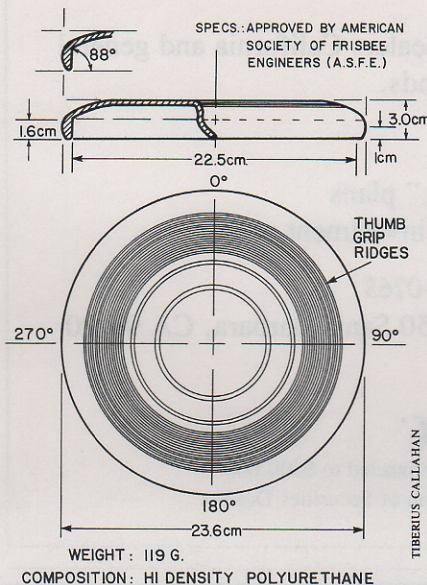
IT'S A TYPICAL SATURDAY in Santa Barbara, the harbor kaleidoscopically splashed with wind surfers, Stearns Wharf shimmering in the afternoon sun. And farther down the beach, on that palm-lined green aptly called Palm Park, several groups of tousle-haired young men and women are doing incredible tricks with Frisbees.

The discs seem magically alive as they hover and gyrate, defying gravity. Each player in turn performs intricate ballet-like moves in split-second timing with the flow and the wind, then hurls the saucer at a partner. The demonstration goes beyond a simple kid's game of throw and catch. Athletic ability is unmistakable; physical sophistication is at its heart. This is freestyle, the heartbeat of Frisbee. And the players, many of them world-class champions, represent Santa Barbara's prominence in the sport's state of the art.

"Palm Park has a long history of freestyle activity," says Jeff Soto, a freckled 30-year-old environmental consultant who was among the first serious competitors in Santa Barbara. Jeff helped organize the Palm Park Disc Artists in the mid-1970s, a club which has produced its share of world champions, notably Evan David, a lithe, blond athlete recognized as the top California influence in freestyle.

Original club members now share their time with careers and families, although Evan, an architectural designer, is still a guiding force in freestyle. But the park has drawn a new generation of athletes whose dedication is pushing the ever-changing art to exalted heights. Many of these young people have immigrated from across the country. Palm Park is their mecca and Frisbee is their life.

Opposite: In the twilight of Palm Park, former world champion Evan David displays the grace that made him kingpin in the world of freestyle Frisbee. Disc athletes from across the nation flock to Santa Barbara for its matchless climate and steady, uplifting breeze.



"It's the wind," exclaims David Zeff as he trots off the field for a breather. "Santa Barbara has the perfect year-round atmosphere for freestyle—a steady, uplifting breeze." A computer science student at Santa Barbara City College, David came from Detroit. "Before Frisbee I was big, fat—anything but an athlete," he says. "Frisbee changed my life."

Tall, dark, and muscular, he is anything but fat now. Like most serious freestylers he attends ballet classes and practices Frisbee every day he can. "The thing is to come out and jam," he adds, gesturing at the groups working together on the lawn. "The idea behind freestyle is to develop consecutive graceful movements, to build a good flow working with your partner. You should see Joey Hudoklin. He's the best there is."

A dusty white Toyota pulls up to the curb. Seemingly on cue, Joey tumbles out dressed in a tuxedo, arriving straight from work. He grew up on the streets of New York City. Now he's a waiter at the Santa Barbara Sheraton, but his life centers on Frisbee. "I'm not worried about my future as long as I can play—just eat and play," he says, grinning.

BY D.B. PLESCHNER

He quickly changes into sweats and Nikes, then chooses a custom disc from several tucked in his backpack. Moments later he is soaring carefree like a wiry, mustachioed Peter Pan, the disc an extension of his body. He finishes with a pretzel-bent, through-the-legs catch, making it look easy. Joey has won several world freestyle championships.

"Freestyle is an exclusive sport," he says. "No more than 50 people in the entire country play at the highest level of skill, and at least 15 of them live in Santa Barbara. We're closest to state of the art. We're innovative and we pull ahead because we can practice all year."

No one practices harder than Joey; he devotes several hours a day to his art. "That's for sure," laughs Joey's freestyle partner, Chip Bell. "It's hard to hit that timing. Joey tries new moves so many times, he has blisters on his hands."

"We always have blisters," Joey puts in, "but the object is to play perfectly—to be in total control emotionally, physically, and intellectually. You have to understand and react not only to your own energy but your partner's. You learn a lot about yourself and other people."

Spinning a Frisbee atop the glued-on plastic fingernail that most freestylers wear to cut friction, Joey muses, "You can control a disc in so many different ways if you know its aerodynamics. You can even achieve perfection through Frisbee, because if you make a mistake and deal with it quick enough, it becomes a perfect mistake."

"It involves the law of precession, you know—physics," explains the park's freestyle philosopher, Roosevelt Baccus, jumping into the conversation. "The disc dips 90 degrees ahead of the place you touch it, and the leading edge of rotation going into the wind supplies the lift." To demonstrate, Joey tips the Frisbee into a stall, deftly kicking it up into another spin on his finger the instant before it touches ground. Satisfied, he adds, "Freestyle is the most creative form of physical art I've encountered. It goes be-

yond dance or gymnastics. There's just the move and the moment. It's euphoric—like flying."

"Frisbee is the safest outlet to fulfill flying fantasies," declares John Kirkland with a piercing intensity that explains his legendary status in disc sports. Another Santa Barbara import, he was the 1970s' Disc Athlete of the Decade. Although he now rarely competes, his obsession still embraces the world's largest collection of Frisbees—15,000 discs cataloged and stored in a warehouse. He also taught Frisbee science at MIT. "The Frisbee is an airfoil," he begins, then lists some of the complex laws that explain Frisbee magic. "But in the end, you can only watch it and do it and be it. One throw is worth a thousand words."

It must be magic. What other ordinary object can soar, drift, boomerang, hook, ricochet, slice, parabolize, even cut a figure eight? Certainly not a ball. Indeed, more discs are sold each year than footballs, baseballs, and basketballs combined. Millions of devotees hurl platters in backyards and on beaches; and over 10,000 athletes from at least 14 countries compete in tournaments leading to the World Frisbee Disc Championship.

Frisbee's origins are rooted deep in the nineteenth century. Legend has it that a Yale undergraduate named Elihu Frisbie hurled a silver collection plate through a stained glass window protesting compulsory chapel, causing his expulsion and creating sports history. But the fact is that Frisbee tossing originated at Yale in the 1870s, the discs no more sophisticated than pie tins from the Frisbie Pie Company of Bridgeport, Connecticut. No one knows what happened to Mother Frisbie's pies, but their containers were an instant sensation, and the pastime spread quickly in the East. Nonetheless, it took a Los Angeles building inspector to elevate the fad to sport.

Fred Morrison chanced upon the game on his way home from World War II. Fascinated, he began molding saucers from plastic and became so accurate in controlling their flight that, when he hawked them at carnivals, he sold the "invisible wire" they flew on and gave away the discs. He became a millionaire when the Wham-O Company bought out his patent in 1956.

Since then, Wham-O has spent untold millions promoting new Frisbee sports. Besides freestyle, there are contests for distance, accuracy, and self-caught flight. There is discathon—a Frisbee-throwing race over an obstacle course. And there is another, mushrooming

world called Frisbee golf, with over 200 permanent "disc pole hole" courses in the United States.

Then there are team events like double disc court, a takeoff on tennis, and guts, a game of wits and wills where two teams face off and hurl a Frisbee back and forth at speeds approaching a hundred miles an hour. But one of the fastest growing team sports in the world today is Ultimate. And one of the best teams in the country hails from Santa Barbara: the Santa Barbara Condors.

The Condors' story begins in the early 1970s on the Santa Barbara Mission lawn, where a bunch of Frisbeeophiles met to invent a field game. "We didn't have a name for it," says Tom "T.K." Kennedy, a founding father and captain of the Condors, "we just played." To their surprise, at the 1975 World Frisbee Disc Championship, they watched an Ultimate demonstration—played amazingly like the game they'd created.

Born in 1968, Ultimate was the brainchild of several New Jersey high school students who carried the sport to college. Following Frisbee tradition, it became the rage of the Ivy League, but the Condors rose to the challenge. In 1977, at the first East-West championship, the Condors stomped Penn State, pride of the East. The Santa Barbarans kept the national title in 1978, regained it in 1981, and captain T.K. is the reason for much of their success.

Also cofounder of the Ultimate Players Association, which now represents over 500 teams from seven countries, T.K. is an institution in the sport. His blue eyes light up when he talks Frisbee; in fact, he's a walking Frisbee encyclopedia, reeling off lore encompassing every disc event. He has won competitions in all of them, although now his passion is Ultimate. "In the beginning, everybody played everything," he explains. "Today you have to be a specialist to compete at the top level, otherwise you can't keep up. It's a very competitive situation."

The sport he has chosen epitomizes bedlam: seven players on a side trying to pass a Frisbee 70 yards downfield and across the opposing team's goal line without running with it, dropping it, sailing it out of bounds, or bumping into the defense, which, of course, is frantically scrambling to prevent the score. A foul, including any physical contact, constitutes a turnover, and the scramble simply reverses direction.

Simple? Hardly. Ultimate combines all the thrills and strategy of football, basketball, and soccer—without the vio-

lence. It is rife with arcing passes, wild leaping catches, and breakneck action in between. In its own way, it is as addictive as freestyle. The fever is snowballing in high school and college intramural programs, including UCSB where Ultimate is among the most popular sports.

Yet Ultimate's trump card is its spirit, its sense of fair play. There are no officials, even at the highest competitive level. Players abide by the honor system. "We're fostering a sport that teaches and builds character," says T.K. "We do not tolerate taunting the opponent or win-at-all-cost tactics. If somebody wants to win a game by making a call that he knows is incorrect, we let him go home and live with that."

That spirit of sportsmanship—play hard but have fun—infuses all disc sports. Players judge themselves, even in such an abstract event as freestyle. An uncommon respect bonds Frisbee athletes, and nowhere is it more apparent than on the Condor team.

"Actually, there are three teams," says statuesque Michele Pezzoli, T.K.'s girlfriend and captain of the Lady Condors. Both Michele and T.K., at age 33, are the Condors' senior statesmen; they're affectionately tagged grandmom and granddad. T.K. continues, "Between the men's team, the women's team, and the Santa Barbara Sea Wolves [an offshoot of the Condors], there are almost a hundred of us. We're like a loose-knit family."

Clan origins span the continent (although many are native Santa Barbarans), and occupations run the gamut from college student to meteorologist, but the link is familiar: tremendous energies devoted to Frisbee. The teams practice four times a week during the tournament season, between March and November, and play together all year long. "We stay in shape because we play so much Frisbee," Michele adds, smiling in understatement.

That understatement scratches the surface of a peculiar irony. Top Frisbee players consider themselves serious athletes; certainly they expend as much time and discipline as professionals in the major sports. But for all their effort, few can make a living playing Frisbee—there isn't enough money in it. "A lot of us live in pretty precarious ways, but we're doing what we want to do," says Joey Hudoklin. He is committed to freestyle even though he knows that, despite worldwide interest, the general public still looks on Frisbee as a captivating toy.

The Frisbee movement's biggest

sponsor has been Wham-O, a toy manufacturer, and there lies another conflict. Wham-O trademarked the name "Frisbee" over two decades ago and requires contestants in its tournaments to use the company product. That may be no big deal, except one of those competitions happens to be the World Frisbee Disc Championship—an event the toy company views as a spotlight for disc sales, not necessarily a springboard for professional athletes.

Many players think the label "Frisbee" belongs to, well, Frisbee just as Kleenex stands for facial tissue. The Wham-O controversy has not stopped the push for "official" recognition of the disc. Santa Barbara hosts a major tournament every year, organized by T.K. This year Joey Hudoklin and Chip Bell are putting on a second Santa Barbara tournament to promote freestyle. Other world championships have sprung up, along with associations fostering individual disc sports. There's even a national tournament circuit.

Frisbee's potential is limited only by public acceptance, and T.K. thinks that's just a matter of time. "Frisbee sports are still in the embryonic stage; they're still evolving," he says, visualizing future professional disc competitions, a world series, maybe even the Olympics.

Now, however, the lure is more ethereal. It's a subject that Joey Hudoklin, for one, has given a lot of thought. In the shadow of twilight at Palm Park, Joey speaks up. "The universe is filled with round objects that revolve around a center. Round discs could be the answer to outer space flight. Frisbee is futuristic. It's universal."

Whatever its future, Frisbee's spirit captures the young at heart, promoting self-expression, creativity, and sportsmanship. Disc athletes play with a spirit and dedication that thrive in Santa Barbara. Someday they may revolutionize attitudes toward sport. Who knows? Maybe even toward life.

D. B. Pleschner is a free-lance writer and photographer with a special interest in sports and environmental issues.

The Santa Barbara Condors invite the public to view the Santa Barbara Ultimate Classic May 28, 29, and 30 from 9 a.m. to sundown at UCSB's Storke Field, admission free. The tournament involves men's and women's teams from across the country, and the play-offs, held Monday at Harder Stadium, feature halftime freestyle and Frisbee dog demonstrations.

SANTA BARBARA MAGAZINE

APRIL/MAY 1983

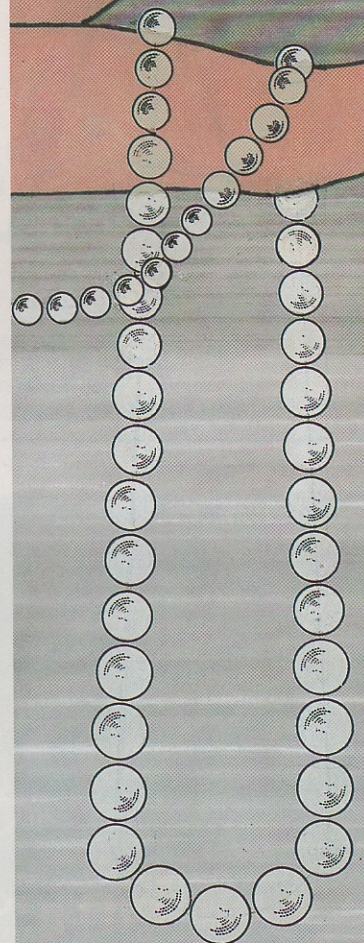
VOLUME NINE/NUMBER TWO

ISSUED BIMONTHLY

| | |
|---|----|
| Letters | 6 |
| Snapshots | 10 |
| <i>The Press Goes West</i> BY TED BERKMAN | |
| <i>Gateway to Channel Islands National Park</i> | |
| Anacapa | 16 |
| <i>An Intimate Perspective</i> BY JEFF GREENWALD | |
| <i>Historic hillsides echo to their cry:</i> | |
| "Ride, Rancheros, Ride!" | 24 |
| <i>Los Rancheros Visitadores</i> BY WALKER A. TOMPKINS | |
| <i>The Santa Barbara Style</i> | |
| Visions of Living | 32 |
| <i>Current trends from Menegon, Garcia, and Holroyd</i> BY WILLIAM LEWIS | |
| <i>For some, Frisbee is more than</i> | |
| Flying Saucers — Flying Magic | 46 |
| <i>It's a way of life</i> BY D. B. PLESCHNER | |
| Books | 52 |
| <i>Santa Barbara Whale Watch</i> BY LIN ROLENS | |
| <i>Hometown cover girl</i> | |
| Kathy Ireland | 54 |
| <i>International face of the '80s</i> BY CORK MILLNER | |
| Inside Santa Barbara | 60 |
| <i>High class food — to go</i> BY TRUDY REECE | |
| Entertainment | 67 |
| <i>A leisure guide to spring events</i> | |
| Burt's Eye View | 76 |
| <i>Marriage: A Very Risky Business</i> BY BURT PRELUTSKY | |

Cover photo by Jürgen Hilmer: The Santa Barbara home of recording artist Kenny Loggins, by architect John Menegon.

*Cultured Pearls
the perfect gift*



*Harwin
Jewelers*

Professionals since 1944

907 State Street
Santa Barbara.
962-8050