

Throwback to the Future

By Chuck Kennedy

We keep hearing that the future of this sport is the installation of more courses that have more par 4s and 5s like ball golf. I've been able to get a few in the ground myself over the past several years at Highbridge and the Steady Ed at the IDGC. However, here is a sobering stat comparing the average Scratch Scoring Average (SSA) for 1000 rated players in all sanctioned PDGA tournaments in 1999 to 2007. The average SSA in 1999 was 49.5. It only moved up to 51.5 in 2007 after 9 years of new course development.

We're still not even "up to par" if you think in terms of an 18-hole course for top players that actually averages 3 throws per hole. Of course, we've seen the big boys playing on a few longer courses with several par 4s and 5s. Winthrop Gold has led the way for several years at the USDGC. However, even at some of our biggest National Tour events like the Majestic, the average SSA was still less than 54.

Will it take another 10 years just to move up to a 54 SSA average on tour? Even then, that still means par 3 "golf" for most players. Is there any way to accelerate our progress to provide more players at all levels a more golf-like experience with par 4s and 5s on the courses? How about a throw back...

Throw Back

When our sport first started, our pioneers throwing Frisbees® created object courses modeled after the mix of holes on golf courses that had lots of par 4s and 5s along with 3s. That's partly because the discs didn't fly that far and it was easy to find space for holes that took three full power throws to reach. Our early basket courses were modeled after those object course lengths. However, once beveled edge discs came on the scene in the 80s, many of those old school par 4 and 5 holes reverted to mostly par 3s.

Disc technology has continued to advance faster than the acreage park departments have available or have been willing to allocate for

disc golf. Many budding designers have never known anything but par 3 disc golf. New courses still get installed today that have mostly par 3s even when the space is available. They might install twenty four par 3 holes instead of eighteen with some par 4s and 5s even if they have the space.

There's no question the popularity of par 3 disc golf has fueled a 25-year boom in this sport that's been growing at an annual clip over 15%. However, the game being played today is mostly a limited version of *real* golf. It's more like disc darts. Locals stand at each tee and have carefully dialed in a specific disc in their bag to park each hole. Throw it properly and they score a 2. If they're slightly off, they score a 3. Dinking a putt results in some 4s. The scattering of true par 4s are mostly found on some wooded courses. Of course, I'm talking about par for those who have been playing a while. Many courses can still be challenging for beginners no matter how short.

Many baby boomers who are now players over age 39 remember traditional golf and possibly even played it before discovering disc golf. We would expect many of them to support the introduction of more par 4s and 5s in our game. Likewise, up and coming top players are seeking more challenge with our longer and longer courses offering more par 4s and 5s.

I don't have a quick solution for these young guns that will move any faster than the progress slowly being made with a handful of longer courses going in each year. However, I do have an immediate solution for baby boomers, throwers with excellent Frisbee® skills like freestylers and ultimate players, current players looking for new course challenges with par 4s and 5s, plus the millions that haven't yet discovered our game.

Throw Forward

*It's called **Super Class**. This is a newly defined category of super-sized golf discs that may weigh up to 200 grams, have bigger rim heights more like catch discs, and a minimum diameter over an inch larger than our long distance drivers.*

Yes, it's truly a throwback to the future. Super Class discs will initially be based on the bigger diameter Frisbees® we've all played catch with, but molded in much heftier golf weights to work well in the wind and penetrate chain baskets.

Presto! By throwing a mix of Super Class discs that don't fly as far as typical golf discs, many of our current par 3 courses now turn into true golf challenges with everything from par 3s, 4s, 5s and even some 6s. Using Super Class discs, the winning strategy tilts a little more toward skill and accuracy versus power and advancing technology.



Photo shows standard size white driver inside a small diameter Super Class disc (orange Zephyr) and one of the larger Super Class discs (white Ultra-Star).

The PDGA will start sanctioning Super Class events in 2009 in addition to the 800 events that use regular Hi-Tech golf discs. Players will earn points and get a new Super Class rating in addition to their regular PDGA Player Rating. To encourage TDs to offer Super Class events, its fees are expected to be somewhat lower during 2009. All Super Class discs are part of the same family as the familiar Hi-Tech golf discs and can be used in regular PDGA events, too. Players trying Super Class discs might even discover their new favorite approach disc to use in regular events.

Our exploratory group - **Pete May** (#12700), **David Greenwell** (#962), **Barrett White** (#16737), **Dan Doyle** (#310), **Dan Roddick** (#003) and **Chuck Kennedy** (#4949) has been developing this concept for the PDGA. Our test putts with Super Class discs seem to have fewer cut-throughs, bounce backs and low putts (due to float). That's offset by slightly more misses on offline putts due to the somewhat larger diameter and slightly more blowback misses on putting into headwinds. Overall, Super class putters seem to hole out with the same percentage made as regular putters but with different challenges.

With perhaps 80% of our existing courses not able to expand and offer more par 4s and 5s, many of them have become outdated for golf disc competition. Many are bypassed by TDs for events and their potential to bring outside revenue into the community is reduced. These lesser used courses may progressively become wasted assets for our sport let alone their potential to fall into disrepair and possible removal by parks departments.

Super Class discs are a way to reinvigorate these courses and reestablish the original version of our game that's a little more golf-like and more accessible to a wider population. New players used to playing catch can easily throw these Frisbee-like discs without any pressure to learn Hi-Tech golf discs right away. In fact, their catch discs may already be legal in Super Class. With a successful first outing, beginners may then want to buy other Super Class discs or transfer to smaller Hi-tech golf discs without the pressure to do it immediately. The fact that the PDGA governing body will sanction Super Class events not only helps legitimate the use of catch discs on our existing courses, but may also encourage play from the shorter sets of tees which can be challenging for even the best players using Super Class plastic.

Ultimate Discs

Ultimate players typically have learned a variety of throws. Players skilled with discs approved by the UPA for ultimate will be very

competitive in Super Class events. Ultimate players can become immediately successful without learning new plastic. Super Class provides the ideal scenario for ultimate player cross training where they can practice several of their throwing skills using the same disc they use for ultimate. With much higher numbers of women playing ultimate than disc golf, the crossover potential to Super Class could really boost the number of women who also play disc golf even if it's mainly in Super Class events.

Another area where Super Class discs might really boost the number of disc throwers is in the schools. Schools may be more likely to get involved in EDGE® programs where catch-type discs like those in the Super Class are used versus discs only used for golf. Super Class discs are safe enough to be caught and

are actually designed that way in the first place. Lighter weights are also available so children can handle them easier.

Super Class is by no means intended to replace Hi-Tech competitions but simply add to the existing mix of disc golf events available. Regular disc golf competition is booming. That's becoming a problem in some areas that have already maxed out on course and tournament capacity. Super Class events running on the same day as regular golf disc competitions can handle overflow players that couldn't get into the regular event or who specialize with Super Class discs on courses more suitable for Super Class competition. Many Super Class players will hopefully be beginners so these events can become good training grounds to learn rules and not slow play for the more advanced players at regular events.

PDGA Approved Discs Potentially Included in Super Class

Producer	DISC MODEL	Max. Wt. (g)	Diameter (cm)	Rim Depth (cm)	Rim Thickness (cm)	Rim Depth/ Diam. Ratio (%)	Rim Config.
Innova-Champion Discs	Super Nova	200.0	27.5	2.2	0.6	8.0	112.50
Dynamic Discs	Floater	200.0	27.5	2.0	0.6	7.3	106.50
Innova-Champion Discs	Pulsar	200.0	27.5	2.0	0.8	7.3	93.50
Wham-O / DTW	Master	200.0	27.5				
Disc Golf Aotearoa	The New Zealand Ultimate Disc	200.0	27.3	1.9	0.7	7.0	94.25
Discraft	Ultra-Star	200.0	27.3	2.0	0.7	7.3	88.25
Wham-O / DTW	The Tool (T501 Mold)	200.0	27.1	2.1	0.7	7.7	96.75
Daredevil Discs	Gamedisc	200.0	27.1	2.0	0.7	7.4	94.50
Wham-O / DTW	90 Mold	200.0	27.0	1.8	0.5	6.7	94.75
Wham-O / DTW	165g (80 Mold, High Rigidity)	200.0	26.9	1.9	0.6	7.1	94.75
Wham-O / DTW	Midnight Flyer (80 mold series)	200.0	26.9	1.9	0.6	7.1	94.75
Wham-O / DTW	Midnight Flyer (80 mold)	200.0	26.9	1.9	0.6	7.1	94.75
Discraft	Sky-Styler	200.0	26.7	2.1	0.6	7.9	109.25
Innova-Champion Discs	Apple	200.0	26.4	2.0	0.7	7.6	93.25
Wham-O / DTW	141g (50 Mold)	200.0	25.9	1.8	0.6	6.9	101.50
Wham-O / DTW	Midnight Flyer (50 Mold series)	200.0	25.9	1.8	0.6	6.9	101.50
Wham-O / DTW	Super Pro (60 Mold)	200.0	25.5	1.8	0.6	7.1	86.00
Wham-O / DTW	Midnight Flyer (100 mold)	200.0	24.9	1.8	0.6	7.2	97.25
Wham-O / DTW	Olympic/Collegiate (100 Mold series)	200.0	24.9	1.8	0.6	7.2	97.25
Discraft	Sky Pro	200.0	24.1	1.6	0.5	6.6	89.00
Discraft	Skystar	200.0	24.1	1.6	0.5	6.6	89.00
Innova-Champion Discs	Zephyr	200.0	24.1	1.7	0.7	7.1	83.00
Wham-O / DTW	Professional (all molds)	198.4	23.9	1.7	0.6	7.1	89.00
Wham-O / DTW	Fastback (all molds)	196.7	23.7	1.7	0.6	7.2	79.50
Wham-O / DTW	Midnight Flyer (Fast Back)	196.7	23.7	1.7	0.6	7.2	79.50
Innova-Champion Discs	Hero Disc Type 235	196.7	23.7	2.8	0.6	11.8	77.75
Disc Golf Aotearoa	Te Moko	196.7	23.7	2.3	0.7	9.7	77.00

Some of the larger diameter Hi-Tech golf discs like the Jaguar, Lynx and Condor did not make the list since the shape of their rim is either too streamlined or low profile to meet the Super Class specifications.

Super Class Discs

Manufacturers who have yet to produce a Super Class disc are looking into doing so and some manufacturers sell models that could be

approved for Super Class if submitted for PDGA approval. Super Class discs are a larger diameter subset of both regular Hi-Tech and the official Vintage disc class supported by the

World Flying Disc Federation for some of their events. The preliminary spec for a Super Class disc is at least 24.1 cm in diameter, a rim depth ratio at least 1.6, rim config at least 82 and weigh up to 200 grams maximum. This will allow some of the new plastics to be used that accept dyeing and are more durable. It also means the heavier versions allowed in Super Class will handle wind better and more easily hole out on chain baskets than lighter discs.

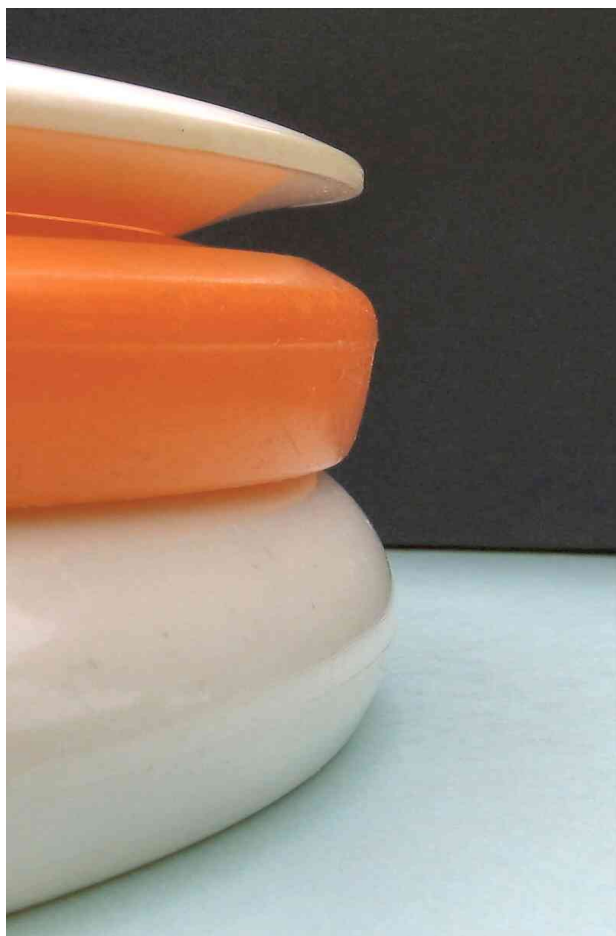


Photo shows the range of rim heights and shapes with the golf driver on top of the more squared off, lowest allowed Super Class height disc (orange Zephyr) on top of the rounder rimmed, somewhat taller Super Class ultimate disc (Ultra-Star with Steady Ed's ashes in it).

Super Class Play

Several of us working on this initiative have tested Super Class discs on more than a dozen courses. The Zephyr® and the Ultra-Star® discs currently seemed to be the easiest to find at retail so much of the preliminary testing was done with them. What we discovered was that simply playing the longest tees on courses with more than one set wasn't as fun and balanced as mixing in some holes played from the shorter tees. Our suggestion is select your six easiest holes from the long tees and choose the four toughest of those, then play those from the short tee and all the rest from the longs. This will provide the longest, most fun layout with enough holes where you have a reasonable chance to score a two along with a good mix of par 4 and 5s.

Another option is to play what we christened the "barber pole" layout in Minnesota back in the 90s when several of our courses had sets of red and white tees. One round we would play all of the odd numbered holes from the red tees and even numbered holes from the white tees (barber pole colors). We then reversed it for the next round and played odds white and even reds. The par for these barber pole layouts is a little easier than playing mostly longs but it still has more par 4 and 5 holes than the typical course with regular golf discs.

Try it out on some of your shorter courses and see what you think. We've been having a blast trying out new courses with these discs to see how we do. There are many, many more fairway shots than you'll sometimes see in a year with regular plastic. Persuade some ultimate players to try it or invite some beginners or those who were frustrated throwing regular golf discs the first time they tried. For more information on sanctioning Super Class, check the new PDGA website by December when competition guidelines for the 2009 season should be completed.