

Ethiopia is a land of plenty with a long and noble history. It is the only African country never to have been colonized. Ethiopia is renowned for its distinctive Christian tradition and association with the Ark of the Covenant. It offers the most dramatic scenery of unsurpassed grandeur (i.e. Simien Mountains National Park), unique rock-hewn churches, the spectacular Blue Nile Falls, the Great Rift Valley, the Danakil Depression, imperial castles, monuments of an ancient civilization linked with the legend of the Queen of Sheba. Ethiopia was recently voted one of the world's best tourist destinations in 2015 by European Council on Tourism and Trade. It is a country which has the ability to “wow” you day after day, and now, Ethiopia can boast that it is the first African country to actively promote the sport of disc golf.



The story begins four years ago with a young man named Yohannes, who was visited in his home of Assosa, Ethiopia by a Finnish friend. His friend from the north brought some discs and a basket to introduce disc golf to Yohannes and his friends. Quickly Yohannes became hooked, and began showing his friends how to play. As Yohannes recalls, “I could not believe my eyes, when we went out to play disc golf with other Ethiopians. Many people (youth, boys and girls and men and women) came to try the game even in the countryside. After that, every time we played there were like four or five people when we started, but soon we were surrounded by countless people watching us, asking questions and wanting to play. They always had such big smiles on their faces! I asked myself why are so many gathered and interested? I concluded there must be a big reason!”



His plan was to establish a new sport nationwide. This was his calling. Yohannes took it as his mission to introduce and promote the sport to anyone who would listen. In 2014, Yohannes applied for a Marco Polo grant from the PDGA, with hopes of building the first course in Ethiopia and teaching the sport to literally thousands of African children. He traveled from city to village and everywhere in between, preaching the “good word” of disc golf. As his message was being heard, the new course was already underway.



Yohannes passed along the specs of a disc golf basket to a metal-worker friend of his for welding and construction. It took only three weeks for the baskets to be completed. The next step was to receive the discs and supplies that were ordered as a result of the grant, as well as

numerous contributions from people supporting the project. So he traveled to the nearby Addis Abeba to collect the shipment, teaching disc golf along the way. The last piece of the puzzle was to find a plot of land that would be appropriate for the new course. The capital of Benishangul-Gumuz's regional state is the construction site for the biggest dam in Africa, which is currently being built on the Nile River only 210 kilometers from Assosa. Tons of people already visit the area to view the dam construction along the same road, so Yohannes asked himself, "What could be a more secure place for a disc golf course than around a military zone? Following many detailed discussions, there, close to Assosa, the 44<sup>th</sup> Military Camp provided a perfect space for the new course to be built.

Yohannes continued his mission and had already garnered enough interest to prepare an inaugural event. As the finishing touches were being put on the new course, Yohannes coordinated Ethiopia's first disc golf tournament with the elementary school, the high school, Assosa University and the Military Camp, inviting all to come and participate. Hundreds of people showed up for the event and watched as the Soldier Team displayed what Yohannes had taught them and they took home the very first title of "Disc Golf Champions."



The story is not over. In fact, this is the beginning of a new chapter for African Disc Golf. Yohannes continues his efforts, and continues to promote disc golf in the country of Ethiopia ([www.ethiopiandiscgolf.com](http://www.ethiopiandiscgolf.com)). "With your support, together we can promote Disc Golf not only here in Ethiopia but all over Africa. I have already touched many people's lives and seen their smiles so please join me to help people in Ethiopia and all over Africa to smile like that. I know they will because of how happy Disc Golf has made me and how it has changed my life."



Talk about paying it forward; Yohannes has successfully provided a fun and safe recreation activity to nearly his entire country (and likely the continent when he's done), and this is just the beginning. There is talk of another exciting project in Zambia in 2016. Disc golf is exploding on a global scale, folks. So, on behalf of the PDGA Staff, Board of Directors and its' members, we say THANK YOU YOHANNES! This is truly another Marco Polo success story.

