



**UH OH!
Will They
Escape!**

THE ORIGIN OF DDC

By Jim Palmeri

My first real encounter with a Frisbee was Sunday, May 10th, 1970, when my family gathered together at my parents' home to celebrate Mother's Day. I was a competitive type of person who enjoyed many different sports and games. On that particular day, I figured that I would organize a two-on-two touch football game with my brother John and my two brothers-in-law. I told the three guys about the idea and they concurred that it would be fun. I grabbed my football and went out to the yard to set up the boundaries for the game and waited. My brother came out and said that the other two would be along soon. He brought two Frisbee discs with him, a green regular model, and a purple pro model with a single gold band hot stamp. Not that I was aware of the differences and nuances of the two discs at that time. I had never flung a Frisbee before, and had absolutely no clue about the different types of Frisbee discs that existed. I was only conscious of the fact that my brother had two plastic discs that he called "Frisbees" and that they were different colors. At first, I didn't even realize they were different sizes!

My brother suggested that we toss one of the Frisbees back and forth while waiting for our brothers-in-law to arrive. I scoffed and told him to put those silly things down and toss the football back and forth with me. He reluctantly agreed - for a few minutes at least - and then complained about how boring that was. He urged me to try flinging a Frisbee with him and said that it would be more fun than tossing a football around. I reluctantly agreed to give it a try. I didn't do too well, but it was kind of fun despite the fact that I couldn't make it fly anywhere near as well as my brother could. After a few minutes of toss and catch, the creative side of me took over and I suggested that we try to toss both Frisbee discs back and forth at the same time. That was more fun. Then the competitive side of me kicked in and I told my brother that we should try to time our throws to force each other to touch both Frisbees at the same time. We decided that if both discs were touched simultaneously, a point would be scored by the other player. In order to make that work, we made a rule that we must try to catch each throw if comes within our reach, or lose a point to the other player. The first one to reach 11 points would be the winner.

The first few moments of this went OK with several back and forth tosses being exchanged successfully. At one point I tossed a nice floater that was coming down slowly toward my brother just as I caught his throw. I quickly saw the advantage of this situation and timed my throw such that it would get to him just as he was catching my previous toss, forcing him to touch both Frisbees at the same time. But he just caught the floater and let the second one sail right by without even attempting to catch it!

I exhorted “No fair, you didn’t even try to catch the incoming throw!” He claimed that it was too far out of reach. I argued back that his claim was nonsense and that he was just trying to cheat me out of getting the first point!

So, our game appeared to be flawed right from the start. But I tried a solution before we gave up on it. I marked out about a 12-foot diameter circle where each of us were standing and made a rule that if any disc touched the ground inside the marked-out circle and didn’t roll, slide or skip out, it would count as a point for the thrower.

That worked fairly well and we had a lot of fun with the game, so much so that we didn’t even realize that our brothers-in law hadn’t showed up for touch football yet. When we finally did notice, we didn’t care; our new game was too much fun to stop just for plain old touch football. We were actually kind of glad that we got stood up...

We called our new game “Court Frisbee.” (Its name didn’t get changed to DDC until four years later.) Playing the game led to me becoming quite enthused with Frisbee activity in general.

So, on Mother’s Day, Sunday, May 10th, 1970, DDC was born, but not with its official name yet, and I became a Frisbee player... all on the same day.

Since I was a total newcomer to Frisbee flinging that day, I couldn’t throw one very well, and really couldn’t throw it very far at all. So, in order to make our game work for us, we had to stand pretty close to each other so that my wimpy tosses could reach my brother. After a fairly long session with our fledgling game, it was time for the Mother’s Day dinner, the basic reason for which we had all gathered at my parents’ house in the first place. But before going in for the dinner, we measured the distance between the marked-out circles so we could recreate the same layout for future Court Frisbee play. The distance from the front edge of one circle to the front edge of the other turned out to be 19 feet. That may seem way short by today’s standards of Frisbee throwing, but that was the best I could do on my first day of Frisbee flinging! So 19 feet became the official distance between the courts.

My brother and I were very enthused our new game, and we played it on a fairly regular basis from that that day on. As you play any new game, modifications and new rules to make the game better and more playable get discovered. This was true for our Court Frisbee game for sure. The first modification came the very next time my brother and I got together to play our game again. We replaced the 12-foot diameter circles with 12 feet wide by 10 feet deep rectangles. Marking out rectangles with rope and stakes was

easier than trying to create circles. Another very early modification was that two points would be awarded when your opponent touched both Frisbees at the same time.

Playing our Court Frisbee game on a regular basis led us to increase our Frisbee activity in general. In August of 1970, we discovered that we could play the game of golf with our Court Frisbee discs. That was as much fun as our Court Frisbee game, and made me even more of a Frisbee fanatic. I was hooked.

As the winter season approached, the frequency of our Frisbee activity waned and then stopped altogether until the spring of 1971. Upon shopping at a convenience store that spring, I noticed a bunch of Frisbees in a counter display on sale for 88 cents apiece. I bought the whole bunch, ten to be exact, thinking that a supply of Frisbees would be handy for Court Frisbee and Frisbee golf activities.

I managed to get a few of my friends interested in playing my Court Frisbee game, and we sort of billed ourselves as the "Rochester Frisbee Club," very informally though. We got together perhaps two or three times a month for a session of Court Frisbee and some Frisbee Golf during that spring and summer of 1971. Our Court Frisbee game evolved a bit, but it wasn't too similar to today's game yet. The big differences were the small 12' by 10' foot size of the courts of course, and that the game was a one-on-one competition, not teams of two players opposing one another. Another big difference in our original game was that discs landing outside of the court boundary did not score against the thrower and remained in play. Either player could run to the disc, pick it up and throw it to the other player's court in an attempt to score. Quite different from today's game.

We capped off the 1971 summer season with an informal but somewhat organized Frisbee championship event in conjunction with a Labor Day hot dog cookout that I hosted at my apartment. The event consisted of a Court Frisbee bracket tournament and two rounds of Frisbee golf on a nine-hole course that I had laid out around my apartment complex. Unfortunately, the records of the results are long gone, and memories of that data are pretty well wiped out. What I know for certain though, is that I finished near the bottom of that first ever Court Frisbee tournament, proving early on that just because I invented the game didn't mean I could play it well.

When the spring of 1972 came around and the weather started to get better, I looked for opportunities to play Frisbee more often than the previous year, so I organized a Court Frisbee and Frisbee Golf league, which met every Tuesday evening at Ontario Beach Park in Rochester, NY. Our little "Rochester Frisbee Club" grew a bit, and about five or six regulars would show up for any given Tuesday night league play. We would

start off with an 18-hole round of Frisbee golf, and then spend the rest of the daylight hours playing Court Frisbee. When darkness set in, we headed toward a nearby pizza place and capped the evening off socializing with some pizza and beer.

In an effort to expand the size of the small group of people taking part in this Tuesday night league, and to find other people who enjoyed competitive Frisbee play, I posted flyers about our Frisbee club activities at all the Rochester area colleges and on the public bulletin boards in area grocery stores. That turned out to be of no real avail, only two people responded to those posted notices all summer long. We had to rely on word of mouth to friends and acquaintances in an attempt to drum up more interest in the Tuesday night league. I concluded that Frisbee play must not have been very popular with the general public, or at least not very high on their priority list.

But interest in participating in the league did grow somewhat. As many as 8 to 10 people would show up some Tuesday evenings, most of them being personal acquaintances of the players in our little group. But that was enough to make me decide to hold a big formal "City of Rochester Frisbee Championships" event featuring the club's "Court Frisbee", and "Frisbee Golf" games. Between word of mouth promotion, and another round of posting notices at local college campuses and local grocery store bulletin boards, 13 people showed up on Saturday, August 5th, 1972 at Ontario Beach Park for the event. The tournament got excellent newspaper coverage with a huge write-up in the Sunday edition of the Rochester, NY Democrat and Chronicle newspaper, complete with photographs. The tournament directly introduced Frisbee play as a competitive activity to at least 4 or 5 new people, and with a Sunday edition circulation of over 200,000, the newspaper article, indirectly introduced the concept of competitive Frisbee play to many thousands more. This resulted in few new people showing up on subsequent Tuesday evenings during the rest of the summer season.

Between league play and the championship tournament event, the Court Frisbee game started to evolve a bit faster. Discovered flaws and loopholes were fixed along with making a few changes that enhanced the play, but the game was still not too similar to today's game.

Around the middle of October, we reluctantly took a break from our disc golf and Court Frisbee play because of the cold winter winds at Ontario Beach Park and in Rochester in general. But we were eager to re-start our weekly Tuesday evening gatherings the next spring, 1973. We found that the weekly participation numbers were somewhat larger than during the previous year, even as high as 15 or so players showing up on some of the Tuesday nights.

Because of the great success we had with the 1972 “City of Rochester Frisbee Championships,” we repeated the event again with a second annual version during our 1973 season. This time around the number of participants doubled over what we had the year before, drawing 26 competitors! Brand new faces seemed to pop out of nowhere! The increased volume of play in both the league and in our big tournament resulted in further evolution of our Court Frisbee game, which by the end of the 1973 season had become quite similar to rules of the game as it is played today. But there were still the two big differences, the very small 12x10 feet rectangle courts placed only 19 feet apart, and the game being a one-on-one competition, not teams of two players opposing one another.

But the huge significance of the 1973 City of Rochester tournament was the fact that one participant showed up with a copy of the most recent IFA Newsletter. Up until that point in time, neither I nor any of the other regular Rochester Frisbee Club members had ever heard of the International Frisbee Association, or of the IFA Newsletter. After three years of Frisbee play, we had thought we were unique with our Frisbee activity. I still hadn’t seen or even heard of anyone else anywhere playing with a Frisbee outside of our club and league activities, either for competitive activities like we were doing, or even just tossing one around! We truly, but very naively, thought we were the only ones on the planet crazy enough to spend so much time and energy playing Frisbee as often as we did, complete with league play and organizing annual city-wide Frisbee tournaments for two years running.

So, imagine my huge surprise when I saw that copy of the IFA Newsletter and read about a plethora of Frisbee activities taking place all over the country! We couldn’t believe that there was an official International Frisbee Association! We also were amazed to read that some people were even playing Frisbee golf like we were! I excitedly told our small group of Frisbee club members that we should do a really big tournament the next year to find out just how many Frisbee players out there are playing Frisbee Golf. I also thought that it would also be a great opportunity to introduce our Court Frisbee game to more people.

In order to do it up big, I figured that we would need to offer a big grand prize to the winner, like maybe something on the order of a brand-new car, to entice the top Frisbee players from all over the country to come to Rochester and compete in the tournament.

I spent the rest of 1973 and the first part of 1974 planning, preparing and looking for sponsors for a really big event. When the spring weather came in 1974, I changed the location of our weekly Tuesday night league to the campus of St. John Fisher College, the site I had selected to hold the upcoming big tournament.

The tournament was billed as the “American Flying Disc Open” and I did offer a brand-new car as the top prize for the event. The tournament consisted of three rounds of disc golf, with the top forty finishers qualifying to compete in a Court Frisbee bracket tournament. Points were awarded based on the finishing place in each event, with the car going to the player who got the most points overall. After the dust settled and all was said and done, Dan “Stork” Roddick ended up winning the car by finishing first in the disc golf event and 3rd in the Court Frisbee event, nosing out John Kirkland.



Dan "Stork" Roddick" receiving the keys to the car!

The players seemed to think the Court Frisbee game was interesting and ok, but all unanimously thought that the courts were far too small and much too close to each other. They felt the game would be much better if the courts were bigger and farther apart.

Well...earlier in 1974, our club had travelled to New Jersey to participate in Dan Roddick's and Flash Kingsley's first Octad, a big overall tournament that they hosted on the first weekend of May, 1974. I was particularly interested in one of the 8 events contested in the Octad, coincidentally named "Court." But Dan Roddick's "Court" game was quite different from our "Court Frisbee" game, similar only in that it was played on two marked out courts facing each other. The first difference was that Dan's courts were much bigger and set much farther apart from one another. They were 15x15 yard

squares set 15 yards apart. Another major difference was that only one Frisbee was used for the game. The scoring and general rules of play were also very different.

The Octad "Court" game basically turned out to be like a one-on-one guts game. A player threw the disc to the other court, and a point was awarded if the Frisbee touched inside the 15x15 yard court boundaries. The Frisbee only had to touch inside the court, it didn't have to stay in the court after touching the ground. The opponent defended by catching the incoming Frisbee if it threatened to touch inside the boundaries. So, the strategy basically became one of burning a shot to the other player's court hard enough to make it difficult to catch even if the opponent were able to get to the incoming Frisbee in time. If the receiving player caught the Frisbee, then he or she had to throw it back to their opponent from the spot where the catch was made. There was little of the finesse and timing of our Court Frisbee game.

So, based on the feedback I got about my game, we took Dan Roddick up on his suggestion to experiment using the dimensions of his Court game for our Court Frisbee play. Dan's 15x15 yard courts set 15 yards apart from one another seemed OK, but upon further experimentation, we finally decided upon 13x12 yard rectangles instead of the 15x15 yard squares. These dimensions along with the courts being 15 yards apart worked out quite well for our game, which suddenly became quite similar to today's game of DDC.

We decided to re-name our game to "Double Disc Court" to distinguish it from Dan's single disc "Court" game. It was a moot point however, because Dan and the New Jersey players had abandoned their Court game after the 1974 Octad anyway. Dan had hoped that his game was going to have elements of finesse and throwing variety. He was unhappy with how the players turned it into a guts-like game. Guts was already a well-established sport and he was looking for something different, something along the lines of a tennis type game. With the newly revised court dimensions, the Double Disc Court game appeared to fulfill his needs rather well and rekindled his interest in a court type of game.

We adopted the newly sized and newly named DDC game for our 1975 weekly league play, and the nature of the game evolved from there, responding to the feedback we got from playing it on the larger sized courts.

After the 1976 NAS series season ended and the 1976 WFC was over, Dan Roddick started thinking that the new DDC game might be a good addition to the events being contested in the NAS series. He experimented with the revamped DDC game, and used it as an event at the 1976 Jersey Jam. A round robin format of competition was played,

and the event ended up in a 3-way tie for first place. Then in Philadelphia in 1977, Jim Powers hosted what was billed as the first “DDC World Championship.” These two events went Ok, but Dan sensed that something seemed to be missing, and felt that further assessment and experimentation was needed.

Dan and Al Bonopane didn’t stop experimenting with the game, and over the winter of play with the LA Frisbee Club, they discovered that when DDC was played with two-person teams competing against each other, the game took on a whole new feel and playability. Despite widespread skepticism about the new and largely untested event, Dan decided to include DDC in the 1978 NAS series, but solely as a two-on-two pairs game, giving double meaning to the name “Double Disc Court,” two discs, and two player teams!

With the massively increased numbers of people playing DDC on a regular basis during the 1978 NAS series, annoying flaws in the game were soon ferreted out. Most critically, within the first few months of the season there were two very significant changes made. Players were initially allowed to run to the front of the court after catching a disc. That was changed to establish a throwing spot at the point where a disc was caught. Significantly, this was not made to be a pivot foot limitation such as in Ultimate. The thrower was allowed move either foot while holding the disc in preparation for a throw but was not allowed to move forward from the point where the catch was made, or more than a step to either side. The second change, and the most essential, was to eliminate the impasse rule which was invoked each time the teams waited longer than 5 seconds for the other team to initiate a throw in an effort to gain a timing advantage. When that situation occurred, the rules called for a restart of the point. However, this was happening far too often and became a major distraction to the flow of the game and needed fixing. The result was the designation rule that required the team that won the previous point to initiate play as soon as both teams held the discs simultaneously. Those two changes put the game the game on the path to the DDC game that we have today. Also changed during this period of increased play was the official disc designated to be used for the game. The initial rules of play written up for the 1978 NAS series called for the 119 g model, but that was changed to the lighter 110 g model. By the end of the 1978 season DDC had grown from the unwanted duckling of the sport to becoming one of the most popular of the events.

From 1979 forward, a slow evolution of the game has taken place in response to little nuances that got discovered along the way, a process that basically goes on with any established sport as players constantly strive to make it better. For DDC, that process has resulted in a number of small changes, including adjustments to the size of the courts and the distance between the courts. But overall, the essence of game has not

changed from the competitive format that DDC took on in 1978 when it became a game for teams of two players.