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Spin and dazzle: Frisbee master wows crowds

Vestal native is 11-time world champion in freestyle disc throwing competition

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First off, a warning.

If you've never seen freestyle disc throwing before, trying to understand what Arthur Coddington III does by reading a description is like trying to understand a Harlem Globetrotter's routine if you don't know basketball.

In one of his moves, Coddington will catch a disc thrown by longtime partner Dave Lewis on his right index finger while reaching underneath Lewis' left leg.

"It's something that people understand immediately when they see it," Coddington said in a recent phone interview. "But since most people have just thrown catch, visualizing it without seeing it is difficult.

"Freestyle Frisbee is basically doing the craziest tricks you can do with a

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the craziest tricks you can do with a Frisbee."

Few people in the world are better at freestyle disc throwing than Coddington, a Vestal native who lives in San Leandro, Calif. He is 11-time world champion in the sport. Last month, Coddington and Lewis finished third out of 26 teams at the World Championships in Seattle. Last year, the two won the title in Italy.

"He makes the right decisions in competition," said Lewis, Coddington's partner since 1993. "Let's say our routine is going OK but we really need something big to set us apart. He might go for a big catch. He can always pull out the big move when we need it."

Coddington, 39, works during the day as an elementary school teacher in the Hayward School District. The Princeton University graduate has been living in California for 13 years.

He got started in the flying disc competitions as a teenager. His sister gave him a book about all the different sports you can play with a Frisbee. His family took him to a few competitions and he began collecting videos. When he was 13, he took part in the World Junior Frisbee Contest (kind of like the Punt, Pass and Kick in football). He won the local competition in Endwell, putting him in the state competition.

Since then, Coddington has become one of the best in his sport. He has consistently been ranked in the top 10 in the world during the past decade.

"He's incredibly consistent," Lewis said. "He's a really great partner to have because I can always depend on him to come through."

Freestyle disc throwing bears little resemblance to the game of catch most of us struggle with in the park. For one thing, the disc itself is bigger and sturdier than the cheap plastic ones we use.

The heavier the disc, the easier it is to throw, catch and do tricks with.

Competitions consist of routines done by teams of two, three or four members. Teams spend part of the time passing the disc to each other with trick throws and catches. The rest of the routine consists of solo moves. Teams are judged on the degree of difficulty and artistic impression of their routines.

The basic move is spinning the disc on your finger. From there, the pros do any variety of trick throws, catches and maneuvers.

Coddington is known for his acrobatic tumbling. One of his signature moves is a triple or quadruple scarecrow. It begins with Coddington spinning the disc on his finger. He'll then whip it into the wind, spin his body around three or four times and catch the disc with his arms fully extended behind his head (so it's a complete blind catch).

"In competition, you basically put on a show for four minutes," Coddington said.

Coddington, who graduated from Vestal High School, has become an ambassador for his sport. He was one of the competitors featured when ESPN did a piece on the sport during the World Championships in Seattle. He is writing and self-publishing an instructional book



Vestal native Arthur Coddington III has been consistently ranked as one of the top 10 freestyle disc throwers for the past decade.

WAYNE HANSEN / Press & Sun-Bulletin

about the sport.

"The book is everything they need to know to have fun playing Frisbee," Coddington said. "They can take the game of catch they have in the park and be able to take that in whatever direction they want."

Coddington also pointed out that Wham-O (inventors of the Frisbee) are giving out a free DVD about freestyle with the purchase of a disc.

"The good thing right now is that there's a lot of video available online," Coddington said. The DVD "is one of the best ways for people to get a taste for freestyle."

This is the kind of sport, after all, where seeing is believing.

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