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SIDELINES

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Emerald Sports Supplement

Enthusiasm spreads for this 'friendly' sport

Since its introduction in 1972, footbagging has evolved from an obscure pastime played by a handful of Americans to a nationally recognized sport involving millions of dedicated players.

The sport's popularity spread with the production of the original Hacky Sack footbag, which brought enthusiastic responses from new players around the globe and eventually led to the formation of the World Footbag Association in May of 1983.

The WFA has become a major resource for novice and professional players alike and has been instrumental in promoting, educating and stimulating interest in footbag games and competitions.

The most recent extension of footbagging's ever-increasing popularity developed just this year with the introduction of the 1985 First Annual National Collegiate Hacky Sack Championships, sponsored

by the Association of College Unions International and Wham-O Mfg. Co., manufacturers of the Hacky Sack footbag.

Held at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago April 18-20, the competition featured 16 of the best collegiate footbaggers in the nation — including the University's own Fred Barnum.

The sport of footbagging is nothing new to Barnum, who says he's been kicking a Hacky Sack for six years. Barnum began playing the sport with friends at Southern Oregon State College, and it wasn't long before he was hooked. He eventually found his way to the University campus, which seemed to be a great footbagging environment.

"When I moved to Eugene a year ago, I found a high enthusiasm for footbagging in the area," Barnum says.

Competing in a national tournament came quite suddenly for the sophomore business major. "I was really lucky. I found out about the competition the day before it happened."

Nevertheless, Barnum got a strong start in the preliminary tournaments as he took first at the local University level and placed a close second at the regional competition in Seattle.

Barnum left for Chicago the morning of April 18 to meet with the best collegiate competitors from Illinois, Florida, Oregon, California, Washington, Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, Tennessee, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Nebraska.

The all-expenses-paid trip included round-trip air fare, meals, three nights in a motel and a complete athletic outfit for each competitor. After an opening dinner with ITT and tournament officials, the athletes got some practice in before starting the two-day competition the next morning.

The championships included three different footbag games: footbag net, where players pass the footbag to one another across a five-foot net; freestyle footbagging, where scoring is based on originality and style of a competitor's routine; and consecutive footbagging, which involves continuously keeping the footbag airborne using the lower portion of the body.

Barnum says the competition in each of these categories was pretty tough. "We all knew we were the best in the country, but we didn't know how close in skill we were," Barnum says. "That was the most exciting thing of the tournament. You didn't know whether you were going to be first or 16th."

Even though the competition was fierce at times, Barnum is quick to point out that footbagging in general never gets out of hand the way some competitive sports do. "Footbagging is social to a friendly end — not a competitive end," Barnum says. "We compete against ourselves to get better."

After a weekend of intense footbagging, Barnum emerged from the pack of competitors with a third-place finish in the consecutive category and earned fifth in both net and freestyle. Barnum's 3,643 consecutive kicks in the championship event

Story and Photos by Ross Martin
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FOOTBAGGING

