

Baden's disc golf is year-round entertainment

Premiere courses and international tournaments played at Foxwood Golf Course

By Lisa Hagen

A sport that is "soaring" during the pandemic is the increasingly popular disc golf game and two of the premier disc courses in the province are at Foxwood Golf Course in Baden.

For a disc layout that is only a few years old, Foxwood has already hosted a Provincial championship and a B tier, U.S. Disc Golf Championship (USDGC) qualifier, a tournament that is compared to The Masters in golf. In 2021, the course will host the top level of players, the A tier qualifier for the USDGC.

"There's the World Championships and then there's the USDGC for big tournaments," said recently turned pro and president of the Grand River Disc Golf Association (GRDGA), Zac Jolliffe. "There will be a limited number of qualifying spots available to move on."

Last year's tournament saw 140 players from all across Canada compete in the qualifier for 5 positions. The USDGC itself was covered on pay-per-view TV.

The sport came to the area about 11 years ago when the Chicopee Ski Club in Kitchener installed a course. In the last three years, courses have sprung up at Columbia Lake, Soper Park in Cambridge, and 3 courses at Foxwood (2 championship 18 holes, and one 9 hole novice course). There are a number of smaller tracks in municipal parks as well. With the surge of courses came a surge in players and the game is on a serious upswing.

"We had steady, upward growth over the last 5 years but with the pandemic, we saw 3 times the growth in 2020 not unlike the growth in golf this summer," said



Disc golf pro, Zac Jolliffe, putts out on the 18th hole at Foxwood Golf Course in last weekend's Jingle Jangle charity tournament for Toy Mountain.

Jolliffe. "The majority of the players are 20-50 years old, but I take my 5 year old out all the time, and like golf, you can play into your 60's competitively. We are seeing more and more families playing together as well. The local scene is just booming."

Disc golf is COVID-friendly in that there is no shared equipment or touch points, and players are not in close proximity to each other in the great outdoors. It is such a perfect sport for our times that Foxwood has decided to keep both the disc golf and regular golf (or ball golf as the disc play-

ers refer to it) open all winter.

"We're hosting a tournament on Jan. 16-17 called the Snowdown and already have 87 players signed up," said Foxwood's golf pro and assistant general manager Joe Blundell. "We also have a winter league that you can play anytime the course is open, and this past Saturday we held the Jingle Jangle which is a fun, charity tournament for Toy Mountain."

Disc golf is user friendly and all levels are invited to the league play. The learning curve is fairly short and the cost is not

prohibitive. Three-disc rentals are available to try the game out but the more serious players will carry between 20 to 25 discs in their backpacks, much like the various clubs found in a golf bag.

"You carry different discs for different shot shapes," explained Jolliffe. "There are also discs for dealing with the wind, whether you are going into it or with the wind. Within the general categories of putting, fairway and driving discs, you can have different options on shot shape and flight characteristics. Personally, I love the shot shaping and making the discs move; it's intoxicating for me."

A new, premium disc runs about \$25 or a starter set of 3 will cost about \$50.

Foxwood courses are reputed to be some of the more challenging around, drawing players from Toronto to Windsor. During the summer, both disc and ball golfers share the holes with traditional golf etiquette in place. Disc golfers play 18 holes in about half the time as traditional golfers.

"The benefits are many, but first and foremost it is very accessible to any age and any physical ability," said Jolliffe. "It gets you outside and walking and can be played in any weather, even in the winter. You don't need lessons, but a little instruction can make a huge difference, and there is a big social aspect to it as well as a competitive side. If you can walk, you can play an enjoyable game."

(If you are looking to pass some time this winter, contact Joe Blundell at Foxwood (joelundell44@gmail.com) for league information. For next level playing, check out membership at www.grandriverdiscgolf.com.)

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