

25 Years of ice bowl!

Fighting Hunger with Winter Fun

by Joe Feidt



It was one bitterly cold Saturday in January. The roads were slippery from five inches of snow. I was sooooo close to wimping out, but I forced myself to drive hours so I could stumble around an Ice Bowl near Lake Wobegon, Minnesota. Near the end of a long round, a tiny sun sunk low on the horizon. Cold and tired, I thought I heard a wolf howl. I asked—innocently I thought—how many holes remained. This was the chilly reply I got from

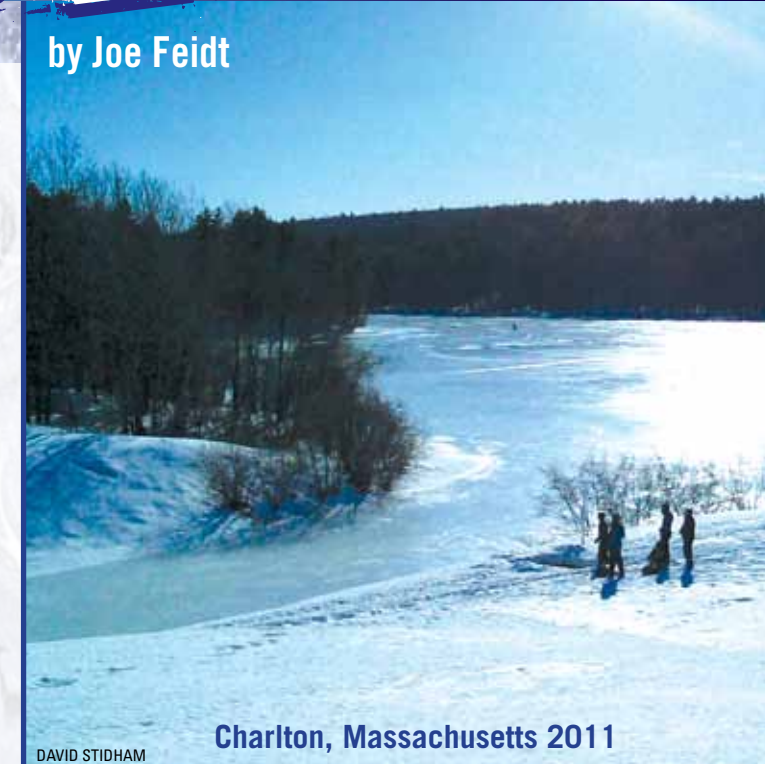
playing partner/pal/putting machine Lightnin' Lyle Jensen: "That is coming very close to a whine, Joe. Next time you owe a buck." But that's the Ice Bowl mantra: No wimps, no whiners. We disc golfers whine in all kinds of weather, but at Ice Bowl, you gotta man up.

Big things often start small. When Rick Rothstein—PDGA Hall of Famer, owner of Disc Golf World in Kansas City, editor of more than 100 disc golf publications, yadda yadda—held the first Ice Bowl in Albert-Oakland Park in Columbia, Missouri, in 1987, it sprung from his simple idea to get outside and play our favorite game in the middle of winter. Only 34 disc golfers showed up that year, but Rick was pumped up enough to try it again the next. The idea was to get everyone playing on the same cold day, the Sunday before the Super Bowl when not many sane disc golfers ventured outside to throw.

\$2 million for local food banks

Things change. Ice Bowl changed. The biggest Ice Bowl change came in 1996 when Rick decided to make fund-raising for charity, with an emphasis on fighting hunger, part of every Ice Bowl. He even trademarked Ice Bowl to ensure every local Ice Bowl now has a tie-in with charity. Over the past 25 years, Ice Bowl has grown year after year and has been nurtured and nudged into what it is today, a juggernaut. In 2010 alone, Ice Bowl raised more than \$270,000 and collected 69,000 pounds of food for local food banks. The year-to-year running total for Ice Bowl is now a cool \$2 million donated. Not too bad for some organized winter silliness.

From its early quaint notion of everybody playing on the same day, we now have two full months with hundreds of Ice



Charlton, Massachusetts 2011

Bowl events across the United States and Canada, and one each in Germany, Norway, and Finland. Unlike almost all disc golf tournaments, the actual competition is mostly superfluous. Who won the Ice Bowl? Who cares, but how much money was raised and how many pounds of food were donated? How much good will was generated for disc golf? How were the communities affected? How many young players learned about their local food bank? How much fun was had? These are the Ice Bowl results that really count.

Since Innova Discs was founded in 1983, the company has been a strong supporter of disc golf. Innova sponsors plenty of events every year, but of all the events the company sponsors, one stands out. Harold Duvall of Innova says, "Sponsorship can be thought of as an investment in the future. Ice Bowl has been the sponsorship that for years has produced the greatest return. In hundreds of areas, Ice Bowl positively impacts all three vital disc golf constituencies: players, promoters, and communities. Players benefit by being brought back to their true love—the love of the game. They are also blessed by the soul-nourishing opportunity to give. Promoters benefit because Ice Bowl's effect lasts well beyond the final putt. There are numerous examples where relationships with the parks improved noticeably after Ice Bowl. Charity seems to transform relationships in a unique and long-lasting way. Ice Bowl wonderfully serves the future of disc golf."

the instigator

MATT PECKHAM



The Instigator

Sort of a herder of cats, Rick Rothstein is the guy who somehow organizes this far-flung chaos of hundreds of events into a single force for having fun playing disc golf in the winter and fighting hunger in America. He calls himself the Instigator. "I started calling myself the Ice Bowl Instigator to represent my role in creating and nurturing Ice Bowl through the years," he says. "As the Instigator, I cajole, remind, inform, and tie it all together."

While Rick does have an ego and is proud of what Ice Bowl has become, he deflects praise to the toiling TDs who hold the events. "While I got it started, and get it moving each year, it's the 265 TDs of these events who really make Ice Bowl happen. The best part of the job is working with the TDs, especially those who are new to running events. Talking them through their worries and brainstorming with them about their events is quite enjoyable. But I also greatly enjoy talking with veteran TDs, many of whom I consider friends. There are some, such as Steve Wright in Oregon who I've never had the pleasure of meeting in person, but feel like I know him really well from talking on the phone with him for nearly 20 years."

Trying to get a handle on something as big as Ice Bowl is challenging. Let's ask the TDs of a few of the most successful Ice Bowls how they pulled off their excellent events. While every Ice Bowl is unique, common threads emerge. Here are the stories of a few of the hundreds of TDs who host disc golf's winter games.



Aberdeen, South Dakota 2011

Jerry Suiter Indianapolis disc golf club

Jerry Suiter—Indianapolis Disc Golf Club

The origins of Ice Bowl were simple: have fun with your buddies on a cold winter's day. The big growth in the number of events took off with the introduction of a charity connection in the mid-1990s. In 1994, the Indianapolis Disc Golf Club donated proceeds to the local food bank. The driver for the Indy Ice Bowl is Jerry Suiter.

"We were the first club to make our Ice Bowl a charity drive and use that to get some extra publicity," he says. "After having a couple of discussions with Rick about how successful that had been for us, he made it an integral part of the Ice Bowl in 1996. The snowball effect of that, more than \$2 million raised for charity so far, is the single greatest thing I have been involved with in my disc golf career."

MIKE JENNEMAN



Indianapolis, Indiana 2011

It is really overwhelming when I think back on it."

Another first for the Indy DGC was its introduction of the "No Whiners" part of the Ice Bowl mantra. "Rick originally had the slogan of 'No Wimps.' We had a lot of people turn out for our events so we really didn't have any wimps. We did, however, have a lot of whiners. So we came up with the 'No Whiners' part of the slogan," recalls Jerry.

"A tremendous thank-you goes to Rick for almost single-handedly making this happen. I know he will give credit to the many TDs who run the events, but to organize something this big takes a tremendous amount of dedication and effort. I would love to see him get some national recognition [outside of disc golf] for the amount of charity contributions that have been raised from Ice Bowls, which can be directly attributed to him. That recognition would also go a long way in promoting the sport of disc golf and the giving nature of disc golfers everywhere."

john bird mile high disc golf club

While having fun and taking part in a wacky winter disc golf tradition is key to Ice Bowl's success, the dollars raised for local food shelves is the most important aspect of this huge eclectic enterprise. The top fund-raising club for 2011 goes to Colorado's Mile High Disc Golf Club, which raised a Rocky Mountain high \$15,139 for the Food Bank of the Rockies and the Arvada Community Food Bank. What's cool is this year is only the club's ninth Ice Bowl. The person behind their success is John Bird from Longmont who has been playing Frisbee since the 60s. When the club was organized in 2003, one of its goals was to give back to the community. John told them then that he would hold them to that goal.

How did they do it this year? "My formula is having an awesome group of people who play disc golf and love to have fun and care about their community enough to help out others who need a hand," says John. "Keep it a FUNd-RAISER! I always call this an event and not a tournament," he says. His formula for success also includes planning ahead. In the weeks leading up to the Ice Bowl, the Mile High club holds a series of Saturday random doubles called Winter Warriors. Everyone donates \$5 a day to play, and the series goes for 12 weeks. At the end of play each day there is a CTP for a buck a throw. This year they raised \$5,700 with Winter Warriors. John credits Ray Woodruff and Jeff McCormack for running this successful series this year. Their top fund-raiser was Dave Schierling of Fort Collins with a whopping \$2,700.

Arvada, Colorado 2011

rick rentz st. cloud disc golf club

One of the most consistently successful Ice Bowls is the one in St. Cloud/St. Joe, Minnesota. Rick Rentz serves as TD. This year Cloud came in a close second on dollars raised. The club secured a matching grant and donated a hefty \$14,766. In doing so they surpassed a milestone—raising \$109,144 over the years.

How do they do it? "The secret is that our members have made Ice Bowl a priority," says Rentz. "We have people who like to raise a lot of money, and we have people who are willing to put in time to make the event run smoothly. They come together and do their part, like helping out with registration, clearing tee pads, silent auction, and many other little things."

One of the keys to his success is encouraging club members to secure pledges and raise money on their own. This year, member Todd Grundhoefer pulled in \$1,422 as top fund-raiser. Todd says his simple secret to success is "to ask everyone, and the worst they can do is say no."

One of best parts of Ice Bowl is how young disc golfers are introduced to local charities to see how they can make a difference in people's lives. "The Ice Bowl gives club members an opportunity to serve our community by getting them involved with the local food shelf. Many disc golfers have not been involved in a service project to help out the community as a whole, and the Ice Bowl gives them a chance to," says Rentz. "It's a win-win for club members and the community. The people of St. Cloud and St. Joe and city officials are now aware that disc golfers are working in the community, not only in helping clean parks and encourage positive behavior, it also helps the community at large though public service. A few year back our club was honored with a Good Samaritan award. The real credit goes to Rick Rothstein as the Instigator. While his is a thankless job, he just keeps at it and makes improvements every year. He's an amazing man," says Rentz.

JOE FEIDT



St. Cloud, Minnesota 2011

JOE FEIDT



steve wright unique disc association

Besides raising money for food banks, Ice Bowl is all about fun and camaraderie in the middle of winter. From the first event in 1987 to today, Ice Bowl is a good excuse to have fun. Steve "Yosemite" Wright, a wild and crazy TD, has hosted an offbeat Ice Bowl for about 20 years in Canyonville, Oregon.

"I think when Rick went more towards charity and emphasized fun, Ice Bowl really took off," says Yosemite. "We have drawn people who don't like tourney atmosphere but love the Ice Bowl cause. Ice bowl is important because the act of giving to a good cause, while playing some ridiculously fun disc golf in all kinds of weather, has built the relationship with our community and the small-town merchants within."

Steve keeps it fun with various course enhancements, not all of them exactly "PDGA approved." For instance, he hangs hula hoops on the fairways. If your tee shot goes through one, you don't have to count the stroke. "This year with the hoop alignment, we probably had the best chance of recording a zero," he says. Also this year he elevated the basketball hoop hole to a regulation 10 feet in hopes of catching more whiners. He likes to have a few mini-only holes where you have to throw mini discs. One of the "baskets" this year on a mini-only hole was a sink, dubbed, naturally, the Sink Hole.



Aberdeen, South Dakota 1997



Wayne forest tulsa ice bowl

One of the biggest Ice Bowls this year, as in years past, was the one in Tulsa, Oklahoma, put on by Wayne Forest and friends. They had some snow on the ground this year, but by the luck of scheduling, they managed to dodge the Blizzard of 2011. Darn.

Like most Ice Bowls, the Tulsa Ice Bowl emphasizes fun, participation, and giving. What is unusual in Tulsa is the sheer number of players Forest can cram onto the two Chandler Park courses for not one, but two rounds. This year's Tulsa Ice Bowl attracted an astounding 194 players. So what's the secret to attracting so many players on a cold day in January? "I set the January date and thrust it into their consciousness for months. I've kept the same entry fee for more than a decade. I promote it as a gathering for a good charity. I put the emphasis on fun and enjoyment. I work my tail off to be timely and prompt for all players," says Forest.

Tulsa, Oklahoma 2011



ice bowl's future

It is amazing to me how something that started out 25 years ago as an excuse to play disc golf in winter has evolved into a powerful engine for helping to end hunger.

Where is Ice Bowl heading? The Instigator sees a bright future for Ice Bowl. "Ice Bowl has really taken off during the last two years," says Rick. "This year we're tracking 275 events, which means we have to tighten up our organization to handle the 10-15 percent annual growth we've been experiencing. We'd like to see more parks departments running Ice Bowls—there are 10-12 now, more overseas Ice Bowls, and try to get collegiate or high school disc golf clubs involved. Before too long I would like to create the nonprofit Ice Bowl Foundation to administer it. I believe this would position us better to accomplish the goal of finding corporations that will match donations," says Rick.

What can you do for the 2012 Ice Bowl? Contact the Instigator himself at rick@discgolfworld.com. For more information about Ice Bowl, including a running total of donations, visit <http://www.icebowlhq.com>. For photos and other Ice Bowl stuff, visit the Ice Bowl 2011 page at facebook.com.

Rick credits John Dorn and Kent Johnson for their hot artwork, webmaster Rob Whitt, and Facebook coordinator Becky Stebbins for their help in promoting Ice Bowl.



Edmonton, Alberta, Canada 2011



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