

PDGA Amateur & Junior World Championships Preview



The world's best amateur and junior disc golfers will descend upon Emporia, Kansas, this summer, and both the weather and the play will likely be hot.

Emporia is a delightful town, home to Emporia State University, which started life as a teacher's college; famed journalist William Allen White was from Emporia as well. I spent three summers in Emporia a long time ago when my dad attended summer school to earn his masters degree. The first summer it rained for days and a huge flood inundated a great deal of Kansas, including, of course, Emporia. Another summer was hot beyond description and we spent days in the college library because it was air conditioned and in those days not much else was. So my memories are colored by water and heat, which pretty much sums up what you face this summer. It might not rain for days but most of the courses have a considerable amount of water OB so water will be on players' minds.

Like most Kansans, I don't cotton to much humor that references Dorothy or Oz or stupid little dogs. It was funny in 1939 but not so much any more, so can the jokes about not being in Kansas any more. Look around you: you are in Kansas so you should soak it up and enjoy every sunny bit of it.

There is not a single host hotel this year, but most of the area's hotels have agreed to set aside rooms for the championships and most will offer discounts. Check the tournament Web site for more details.

This is not an urban environment—and that's a good thing. Fewer distractions and fewer miles twist courses and events.

Since we go to press a couple of months before the event, there are likely to be some pieces of information that might change, particularly as they pertain to specific course/hole info; some holes might get tweaked, but players will find these course maps and distances useful in understanding the overall course layout.

—RMS

For all questions and additional information, please visit the Web site: www.dynamicdiscs.com/2013amworlds.

The Courses Reviewed by D. Loomis

MUNICIPAL—This is a temporary course located on a permanent ball-golf course five miles south of Emporia. The Municipal course is flat, open, and therefore susceptible to the strong Kansas winds. The course snakes its way across the landscape with a mixture of short, reachable holes and long, dangerous ones. The emphasis here will be to stay in bounds as OB comes into play on almost every hole. This will be made more difficult if the famous winds of Kansas decide to make an appearance. This course does not require a big arm, or the ability to hit a gap in a long tunnel. All but two greens are on flat areas so roll-aways should be minimal. The signature holes will be holes 3 and 18; both require drives and upshots over water and the greens are small and surrounded by OB. The average score will be 64. With no wind, expect scores in the 50s or low 60s; with wind pray for a score in the 80s.

Summary: Fly Pads, Mach 5 temp baskets, water hazards, shots in space, visually daunting.





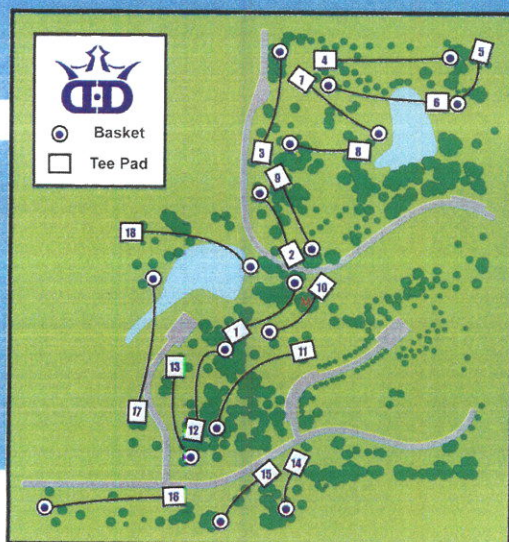
PETER PAN—The shortest of the Emporia courses, but in many ways, it's the toughest. Most of the course requires a great touch on the drive to offer any chance at birdie, but any miscue and you'll be scrambling to save par. There are slight changes in elevation, but the risks here are the greedy trees, the narrow fairways, and the proximity of OB to most of the pins. The signature holes are 4 and 11. Hole 4 plays over 500 feet down a low ceiling tunnel to a blind green sitting next to OB. Hole 11 is one of the most daunting drives in disc golf. The pin is located on a narrow peninsula only 10 feet wide. Large trees protect most approaches to the peninsula, and any miscue could result with your disc in water. The average score will be 60. A great score will be in the low 50s or even the 40s.

Summary: New concrete tee pads, Mach 3s, water hazards, tunnel shots, island holes, blind pin placements, dangerous greens.

JONES PARK EAST

—The crown jewel of the Emporia disc golf empire, Jones East is a permanent course and the hardest of the two Jones courses. Every hole employs a change in elevation to distort distances to both the pin and trouble. And there is plenty of trouble to be had: OB lines, water, roads, and here the tall prairie grass will be out of bounds. There are several drives over water so make sure you pack plenty of confidence in your disc golf bag. There are several opportunities for birdies. The average score should be 65. A great score will be in the low 50s. The signature holes are 9 and 11. Hole 9 challenges the player on the tee to decide whether to go to the left over OB, or to go down the middle and challenge the trees. The green is narrow with OB above and below the pin. It's difficult to know if you should go for it or not. Hole 11 is fairly open and downhill with only a small group of trees protecting the green. However, there is a lake in front of the green, which comes up fast. There is also a mando pole to the right to force all players to go straight at the pin. Again, go for it? Or lay up?

Summary: Concrete tee pads, Discatchers, water hazards, tunnel shots, shots in space, blind pin placements.



JONES PARK WEST

—The original Jones Park course is smaller than its sister course though it's no less challenging. The emphasis on this course is shaping drives around trees to find well-hidden pins. A player with a bag full of tricks will do well on Jones East. There is OB, and water comes into play on two holes, including hole 18, one of the two signature holes. Hole 18 plays downhill toward a lake. The pin is located on the side of the dike on the far side of the lake. The other signature hole is hole 11. A narrow tree-lined ravine protects the pin and requires all drives to come straight at it. The average score will be 58. A great score will be in the 40s.

Summary: Concrete tee pads, Mach 3s, water hazards, tunnel shots, shots in space, blind pin placements.

COUNTRY CLUB

—This is another temporary course built on a permanent ball-golf course, but this one is inside the city limits. Like Municipal, the issue here will be staying in bounds. Every hole on the course employs some sort of OB mixture: cart paths, water, rope, or OB islands (which are greens and tee boxes). Unlike Municipal, there is a great deal of elevation to contend with, which will make distances hard to judge. There are a few birdie chances out here but the smart play will be to go for par and walk away. The biggest challenge for most players on this course will be keeping their ego in check. "Going for it" can be costly. This will be especially true on signature holes 1 and 18. Hole 1 is 500 feet downhill to a peninsula green surrounded by water. Hole 18 is a true island green. It's completely surrounded by water; the green is barely 20 feet wide and it's not flat. Two different drives at opposite ends of the round. Go for it or lay up? The average score will be 70. A great score will be in the 60s, but if the winds pick up I hate to imagine.

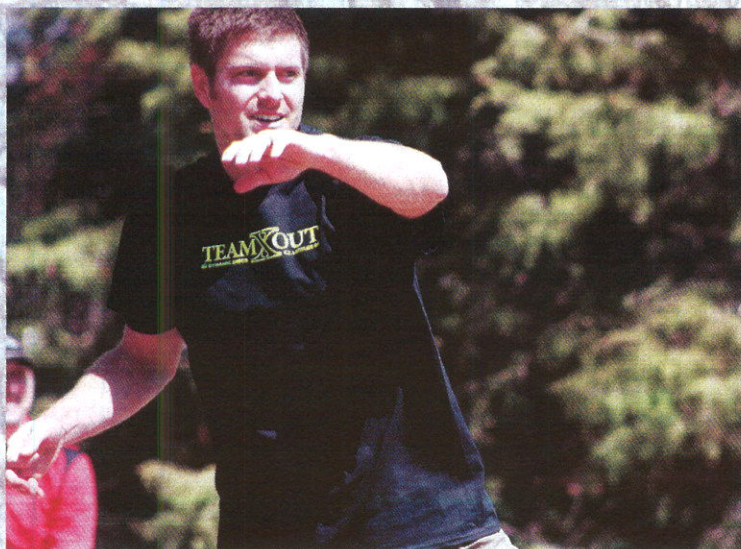
Summary: Fly Pads, Mach 5 temp baskets, water hazards, tunnel shots, shots in space, mentally daunting.



COURSE PAR: 61 FRONT: 5258ft BACK: 4096ft TOTAL: 9354ft

The Evolution of a Revolution: A Conversation with Jeremy Rusco

By D. Loomis Photos By CoolDaddySlickBreeze



The first time I heard the name Jeremy Rusco was at a tournament in Topeka, Kansas, back in 2008. He had just won the Advanced division at the Mighty Shunga Open and was giving a rather muted speech, which I wouldn't have been able to hear had he been yelling into a microphone because everyone kept yelling, "move up!" and drowning him out. I went up to him after his speech to congratulate him and he grinned sheepishly as if ashamed of his accomplishment and said, "Thanks."

Rusco was one of the best amateur players in the world in 2008 and his tournament résumé for that year was exceptional with top-10 finishes in 14 of the 16 tournaments he entered including The Memorial, the U.S. Amateur Disc Golf Championship, Bowling Green Amateur Championships, and the Amateur World Championships. Rusco was a player who seemed primed for the jump to the pro level in 2009, but instead, he did something unexpected—he opted to slowly withdraw from competitive disc golf and dedicate all of his time to running his disc golf company, Dynamic Discs.

It started as an eBay store in 2005, which he ran out of the attic in his home in Emporia, Kansas. "Things were very slow at the start, but I had no intention of them being anything other than that," he said. "It was my college hobby that I was having fun with. It was a one-man operation that didn't need more than that while things were getting off the ground; I just wanted to get my plastic cheaper, supply the locals, and sell a couple discs on eBay. I got hooked up with Eric McCabe and he was instrumental in helping the logo and brand get national exposure, which is what fed the fire to make this a full-time operation. As things started to gain momentum, it was time to find help, and some of my favorite disc golfers jumped on board. Clay Houser and Chris Wiggins were the first two official paid employees who likely received

plastic and product instead of a paycheck starting out. They both started as dye guys doing about 10 discs a day. Clay evolved into the person to handle shipping and Wiggins took over the custom-dye operation, which became a staple part of the business. Clay is still with us today and one of the major reasons why we have such a great looking website, great customer service, and streamlined operations."

From 2007 to 2010, Dynamic Discs was located in three different basements. Eventually Dynamic Discs moved its operations to a small retail space in Emporia in May 2010. After outgrowing this space in fewer than eight months, they relocated into a much larger retail space in May 2011 in downtown Emporia. "That first store was in the back of this building that you couldn't see from the road. It was 1,500 square feet, which was way more space than we needed at the time but we outgrew it in no time at all so we had to move to downtown Emporia where a lease to own a building opened up. The building featured 6,500 square feet for us to grow into."

In 2012, Dynamic Discs added two other stores; one in



Kansas City, Kansas, which is considered a corporate store and the other in Dallas, Texas, which is a franchise store, making Dynamic Discs the only disc golf retailer in the world with more than one disc-golf-only retail store.

The Dynamic Disc logo has quickly become one of the most recognizable brand names in disc golf, with the famous "DD" logo being sported by many of the sport's elite players. The DD-sponsored team (prior to the great shake up of 2012) had some of the biggest names in disc golf over the last five years with such notables as Paul McBeth, Paul Ulibarri, Catrina Ulibarri, Paige Pierce, Eric McCabe, and Nikko Locastro—with at least one member from the DD team winning a world championship in each of the last three years. This helped the Dynamic Discs name spread across the disc golf universe.

Rusco ceased to be a presence on the courses but his name is still synonymous with disc golf tournaments. In the past five years, Dynamic Discs has sponsored, hosted, or run more than 200 tournaments around the United States. In 2012 alone, they ran 50 PDGA events in seven states, making them the largest disc golf hosting entity in the sport. This year they will exceed that number and they will host the Amateur World Championships in Emporia in July.

I asked Rusco for an interview back in September 2012 and it took five months for us to finish it. He is a hard man to catch for any length of time, but I was finally able to corner him in Emporia in January of this year. He agreed to meet me in person after months of emails and phone calls. Then came the announcement that Dynamic Discs was coming out with its own line of discs, and this helped feed the frenzy of disc golf team shake-ups in December. Several key members of the team were forced to make us-or-them decisions and when the dust settled, several key members of the team departed. It was a hot-button issue in disc golf and all anyone wanted to talk about.

We set up the meeting at the Applebee's in Emporia. Rusco is a busy man, but he has to eat and I figured I could get what I needed from him while he noshed on some chicken fingers. As I sat down at the table, I noticed on the wall behind our booth was a poster of Eric McCabe. It read, "Eric McCabe. World Champion. Team Discraft." I pointed this out to Rusco as he sat down at our table. "Yeah," he said, "I need to see about getting them a new poster."

Rusco: I'm glad we came here. I didn't bring any lunch from home today and I'm starving.

Loomis: *You bring your lunch to work everyday? Do you like to cook?*

I know how to put things in a microwave, but no, I don't have time to cook.

Do you come here a lot?

Not that often, but sometimes. My wife doesn't like to cook either, and this place isn't that expensive. She's going to kill me for saying that. It's just that when she gets off work, she's not in the mood to cook any more than I am so this is easier.

You that worried about money?

I'm not worried, but let's just say that I still drive the same '94 Ford Explorer that I drove in high school.

Doesn't owning a disc golf store make you any money?



No, not really. There isn't that much money in disc golf. There's some, but not that much. I guess you could say that we break even.

You mean with all the disc sales, the tournaments, and all the tee shirts, you aren't turning a profit?

We reinvest everything back into growing the business. I'm lucky my wife has a great job. She's a chemist and she pretty much brings home the bacon in our family. This is really more of a labor of love that I will hopefully be able to take a paycheck home from, eventually.

What does your wife think of this labor of love?

She loves me. (smiling)

Does she play?

She's been out a few times, but it's not really her thing.

Were you playing before you met her or did you discover disc golf after you met?

Uh, man, that's a good question. I met Wendy in college [Ft. Hays State University in Hays, Kansas] and I started playing around that same time. I guess I started playing disc golf first, but I didn't really take it seriously until I moved to Emporia, so I guess it's both.

When did you start playing?

I was in Hays playing football and it wasn't going well. I had a great situation with a starting position my redshirt freshman year and full scholarship, but I was miserable and didn't want to continue doing something that I didn't enjoy. A friend of mine took me to play the course there and it was fun, but it didn't really sink in at that time. I moved to Emporia in 2004 and that's when I really started playing for real.

How much did you play?

One or two rounds a day. Usually before and after football or track practice if there was someone who wanted to go play. The house that I lived in all got hooked so we all became very competitive.

What do you remember about those early days?

It was fun! Learning how to throw and what different discs did was neat to get figured out. Many of our rounds included a cooler with the loser of the hole being the one to carry it to the next tee. It didn't take long before we learned about professional disc golfer Eric McCabe who was just starting to get serious about touring and making disc golf his career. McCabe talked me into playing the Glass Blown Open, which was my first event in 2005! This is what really made me want

to get competitive and play more events.

What was your first disc?

A used DX Marauder that I purchased for \$2. Remember the money thing? It was rare for me to spend money or spend more than I had to.

It's been a very interesting off-season in the disc golf world, so I guess everyone wants to know: How are things going down at DD?

Well, as you know, we just released the four discs and we're hoping to get four more out before the end of the year. So that's good. We are finalizing our plans with the city for Am Worlds and the Glass Blown. And, you know, trying to keep it together. Lots of tournaments to run. Things are busy and there is no shortage of excitement around the DD shop. What has been the response so far to the new line of discs?

Good. They're awesome. I think everyone has really gotten behind them. Ron [Convers] just won a tournament using our plastic last week. And the rest of the team seems real positive about them. We like how they turned out.

How'd this all come about—you partnered with Latitude 64° on this venture, right?

Yeah. Well, we started talking about making our own discs in July and it just sorta took off from there. We made the decision to move forward on September 1st. I flew over to Sweden in November and they had the prototype discs waiting for me at the airport. I threw them that day and was really impressed with not only the discs, but with their operation and production facility. It was just a great experience and I think it's going to work out really well for everyone.

The names of the discs are interesting. Who came up with Legal scheme idea?

This might have been the most challenging aspect of the project. I never thought that so much would go into the name of a disc, or plastic name, but it took months of discussion where we would talk in person as well as post our ideas and thoughts on a discussion board so that nothing was lost. Eventually we all came to the conclusion on what we liked and moved forward. I think there were a few names that we thought might be too inappropriate for discs, but it was funny at the time.

Such as?

I think "The Shank" was one of the names we passed on. It is still on the discussion board so in five years when all the names in the dictionary are taken you might see this one released. The most overstable disc ever?

Having your own disc line and being a disc golf retailer, how is that going to affect your relationships with Discraft, Innova, and other manufacturers?

I'm sure it's going to affect things a little bit. I'm not sure yet how much—we will have to wait and see how that goes. I know we aren't being allowed to be a part of The Memorial this year. But I understand that. I mean, it's business and they have their interests to protect. I still have really good relationships with the guys at Discraft, Innova, and Gateway, and I called them and told them what we were doing. They were very supportive, but I can see where things might not be the same after this all settles in.

Are we ever going to see Jeremy Rusco return to competitive disc golf?

I played last year.

One event.

Still. That's playing.

Do you miss it?

Yeah. No. Yeah. I want to get back out there and play and be competitive but it is just so hard to break away when there is so much going on to keep this beast growing at the rate that it is.

Do you ever want to just blow off work and go play?

Sure. But I'm not going to. I try to make it a point to get out and play one casual round a month. Sometimes I might get two rounds in to make up for the month that I missed a round.

We finished our lunch and headed over to the Dynamic Disc store in downtown Emporia. Inside is a spacious showroom with large metal racks from floor to ceiling lining one half of the store walls. Hundreds of boxes of discs fill up the shelves. In the center of the store is Eric McCabe's 2010 World Championship Basket mixed in with half a dozen other baskets. Racks of clothes sporting the DD logo fill up the other side of the store. Standing behind a counter is Clay Houser who is busy filling internet orders to be mailed out. Clay used to be an up-and-coming Amateur player much like Rusco, and like Rusco, has given up his golfing career to work full time for DD.

How many full time employees do you have working for you?

We have Clay, Searle, Shannon, Stevo, and Scott who work full time. We are working on bringing in Jeremy Kindy [he did]. There are also several part-time employees who will



likely be turning full-time due to the increased workload from the disc release and soon-to-be bag line. We also have "Smitty" [Christopher Smith] who is now our team liaison, and Eric McCabe as team captain.

How much of the success of DD do you attribute to your friends?

All of it, assuming that when you refer to friends, you are also referring to the DD team and staff. You can only do so much yourself in a day. We have a very talented and driven team that has a vision about what is happening. It is all about having the right people on board and I couldn't be happier with who we have associated with DD. If it were just me, Dynamic Discs would simply be an eBay-based operation. The growth of the company has come from having the right people in the right places.

You said it wasn't that profitable.

It's not really. Buildings cost money. Discs cost money. Tournaments cost money. People have to be paid for the things they do. So at the end of the day, it just sort of breaks even with any of the profits being put back into the growth of the business.

Then why do it?

(pausing and looking around) Cause we love it. Come in to the back, I want to show you our new bags.

Rusco takes me into the backroom of the shop. There are a few small offices tucked neatly among thousands of discs. The space is a converted garage that holds excess stock and the tournament inventory ready to be loaded up and sent out in the RV and trailer, which are waiting just outside the building for the next road trip. This is the heart of the DD tournament-running machine, comprised of a trailer, two full-sized RVs, and 20,000 pieces of DD-stamped gear or "merch" as it has come to be known.

Rusco: That's the RVs and the trailer. We lock all this stuff up after the theft.

Oh, yeah, you guys had a trailer full of merchandise stolen a few years ago. Did you ever get that trailer back?

This is really weird, but I received this collect call from a guy in Wichita who was in jail for something else, who said he would tell us who stole the trailer if we bailed him out of jail. It was all really weird and we had already settled the claim with our insurance company so we just told the dude, "No, thanks." Though there is a part of me that would really like to know who did it.

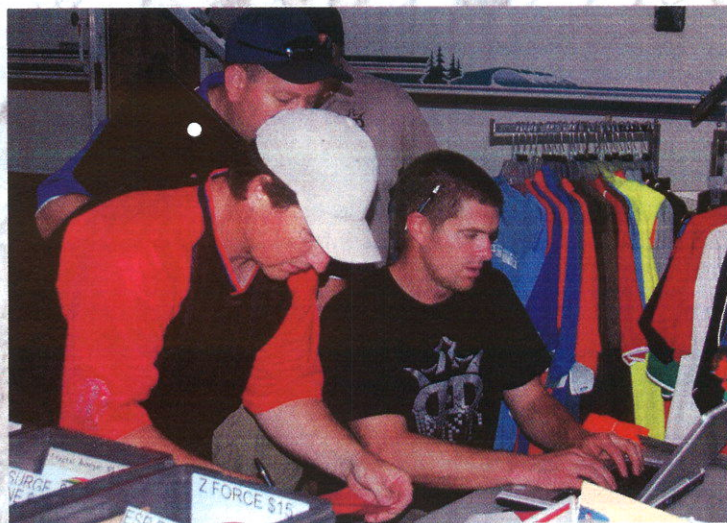
Was it a disc golfer?

I have no idea, but at this point I don't think that it was, which gives me a sense of relief.

In the backroom, Rusco shows me the prototypes for his new disc golf bags. He has several backpack ideas and a few "normal" looking bags.

We are calling the backpack "The Ranger," says Rusco. "What do you think?"

I tell him what I think and he absorbs everything I say. He isn't resistant to anything I say about the bags. Even if he disagrees with me, he seems willing to listen to what I have to say.



Rusco: The idea is to get the bags ready for our team members and see what they think.

Who is still on the team?

McCabe is still with us, so is Liz [Dorries], [Chris] Eads, George Smith, [Ron] Convers, Paige [Bjerkaas], [Patrick] Blazek, Smitty, [Zach] Newhouse, Dixon [Jowers], Miles [Seaborn], Giggler [Donald Ellsworth], and a lot of others. We still have a great team that we refer to as the DD family.

Was that hard for you?

It was. I didn't want things to end up like this. Originally we wanted everyone to stay, but the Prodigy team guys just made a great offer we couldn't match. One of the team members—I won't say who—said if I could match their offer they would stay, but I couldn't do it. I mean, what they offered was just too strong of an offer.

I have some quotes here that I gathered last fall from your team members. I sent them each a message and asked them for a quote about you. Several of them are no longer on the team but I want you to hear what they had to say about you.

"He's the greatest person. I don't know if I would have been this successful without his support. He sponsored me before anyone else would. If I wasn't a disc golfer, I would still be his friend. He's the nicest person I know."

You know who said that?

No.

Paige Pierce. Here's another.

"He's the best. The support he gives me is amazing and he has always been there for me. He's awesome." That's Paul McBeth. And this is my favorite one: "I love him. He's my brother. He's always had my back and he never says he can't do something when I ask him."

That's McCabe. Sounds like you're well liked.

I guess so.

I have quotes from most of the team—[Paul] Ulibarri, [David Hemmeline] Hemmi, and Nikko [Locastro]. They all had great things to say about you. Did you take their decision to leave the team personally?

They had to do what was best for them and I straight up told them that. I don't blame them for that. I felt bad that we couldn't provide for them what was needed to keep them as part of the family. The timing just wasn't right.

How did you find out about the team's decisions?

This was a closely guarded secret that we didn't want rumors to get started about. We made the decision to keep things quiet until the announcement was made. I called most of the team and told them what was going on. It was the most hectic and busiest time of my life with a lot of conversations that needed to take place. I made as many phone calls as I could. Some team players were informed by the phone and some were informed by email as there just wasn't enough hours in the day to talk to everyone. Then it was up to them to decide. They called and told me what they were going to do and things ended on a high note. I think that most of the team had bigger issues with Discraft or Innova than they did with me. With all the shake-ups, it was an interesting time and nobody really knew where the cards were going to fall.

How do you select team members? From the outsider's point of view it would look like you are a great evaluator of talent considering your roster.

Our team is a family. I get asked all the time about what it takes to get on our team, or if I will sponsor someone, etc. But the truth is, we want people who best represent the core values of DD. This is a family—our family—and it's not about who has the most talent, or who has won the most tournaments, it's about who best represents what we are all about. I believe that.

I am of the firm belief that teams should be allowed to use mixed bags. For example, I like Discraft midranges and Innova drivers and putters. A lot of big-name pros have also used mixed bags and have gone without teams. Then they seem to start their own companies—Dave McCormick has Gateway, Jussi Murren has Discmania, Steve Rico has Legacy Discs, and now former DD team member Phil Arthur has Prodigy.

Do you think these players, yourself included, are the start of a new trend in disc golf manufacturing; and do you think it comes from frustration?

I really have no idea. Really, I guess if someone comes up with a great idea and the capital to get it started, then who knows. More companies are going to get involved as the sport continues to grow.

Are you going to allow your team members to use a mixed bag?

They can use our discs, Latitude 64°, and Westside discs, but we want to keep the team using our stuff. Originally we were going to let them use mixed bags, but it just didn't work out that way.

We finished the tour of the store and Rusco came across his old disc golf bag. Inside were a mix of Innova and Discraft discs.

What's this?

Oh no! Ha! I guess I better get this straightened out and get some DD plastic in this baby.

Just in case you accidentally find yourself on the course again?

You never know, Loomis, I just might.

What advice would you give someone who wants to start a disc golf company? Either a retail store or start their own line?

One, it isn't always what you know, but who you know; two, create a family and keep everyone as part of the family for as long as you can; three, make sure that you get the right people as part of that family because that is what makes for a successful operation; four, it also never hurts to make sure that everyone enjoys what they are doing.

—D. Loomis #35956 lives, works, and plays in the Greater Kansas City area.

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