Frisbee Encyclopedia Article

Frisbee

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Frisbee

On a warm spring day on a college campus, you may need to duck in order to avoid being hit by a barrage of brightly-colored frisbees being tossed from one player to the next. However, the original frisbee was not the universally popular plastic disk often seen now. It was actually a pie tin with the name *Frisbie* stamped on it. After William Russell Frisbie 's bakery opened in Bridgeport, Connecticut, in the 1870s, his pies and sugar cookies became quite popular. Years later in the 1920s, students at nearby Yale University started tossing discarded pie tins and cookie tin lids and yelling "Frisbie." Just as college students of that era had popularized crazes like eating goldfish, tossing pie tins became another fad. Twenty or so years later in California, Walter Frederick Morrison used his basement laboratory to tinker with tenite, a plastic used in camera parts. The son of an inventor, and himself the creator of the home popsicle maker, Morrison fashioned a plastic disk that could fly. Morrison improved the pie-tin shape by adding the familiar curled lip which keeps today's frisbee more stable in the air. He named his flying disk "Lil' Abner" after the popular cartoon strip character. In the late 1940s, Morrison amazed the crowds at county fairs, carnivals and beaches by tossing the Lil'Abner to his wife, claiming it was sliding along "invisible string" which he was willing to sell. The toy came for free. Morrison's Lil invention become well-known enough to catch the attention of Spud Melin and Rich Knerr in 1957. This inventive pair made backyard slingshots, the sound of which gave them the idea for the name of their company-- Wham-O. They bought rights to Morrison's toy and renamed it the Pluto Platter because of the nation's fascination with science fiction and flying saucers. The plastic spinning disk had the shapes of planets around the outside ring and they added the familiar grooves in the plastic. The Pluto Platter was a great success--especially on college campuses. A year later Wham-O changed the name to Frisbee to pay tribute to the original. Today's frisbees come in all manner of colors and variations. There are international frisbee championships and frisbee-catching dogs. Even the military tested frisbees as a practical way of keeping flares up in the sky.