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Frisbee demonstration wows kids at Melrose Library

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Noah Greif, front left, and Jimmy Crump, 7, middle, both from Wakefield, practice the Karate Kid pose during a recent session at the Melrose Public Library led by Todd Brodeur, two-time world champion in Frisbee freestyle.

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GateHouse News Service

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Melrose — Todd Brodeur can do more things with a Frisbee in his hand than just about anybody. A two-time world champion in the Frisbee freestyle arena, the North Attleboro native and Bellingham resident has proven that he can hang with not only the best players from around the country, but the globe as well. Despite the accolades Brodeur has garnered over the past 30 years, he remains grounded in his success. In fact, he can often be found teaching the tricks of his trade to the next generation of flying disc enthusiasts. Touching down at the Melrose Library for his second annual demonstration and play shop, July 23, Brodeur was more than happy to show a group of Melrose youngsters his love of the sport, his extensive Frisbee collection and a few tricks as well.

For Brodeur, playtime has become a full-time profession. "This is definitely a dream job," said Brodeur, 44, moments before his exhibition. "I do what I love and if you can find out a way to make money at something that you love then it's not even like work, it's just having fun." Teaching and entertaining spectators, especially younger kids during his recent library tour, has been a rewarding experience for the world champ. "It's been great," Brodeur said. "Libraries have been really good to me this year. Their theme this year is 'Starship Adventure,' so anything that flies is a good show."

And when it comes to his air show, Brodeur is always entertaining. He opened his demonstration performing some spins and under-the-leg moves, before graduating to more advanced drills, much to the delight of the crowd. His signature trick, called the topsy-turvy, is a series of elaborate maneuvers involving twists and turns culminating with Brodeur catching the Frisbee behind his back, while standing on one hand. That trademark move helped him win the world title and always brings the crowd to its feet. According to Brodeur, Frisbee freestyle is a widely accessible and inexpensive sport. You don't need equipment for it, you can play with as many or a little people as you'd like, and you can play it virtually anywhere. Take those factors, coupled with the increase in tournaments around the area, and it's no wonder the sport has garnered an additional liftoff over the years.

"At last year's World Championships, the youngest competitor was 14, the oldest about 60," Brodeur said. "So Frisbee freestyle is truly a lifetime sport."

Brodeur also got to show off his extensive Frisbees collection, while also informing the children about the origins of the flying disc. He pulled out a tin pie pan, which was one of the prototypes to today's plastic flying saucers. Many of the Frisbees in his collection he accumulated while traveling around the world, from virtual manhole-sized covers to coffee can-like saucers. He also added a little science into his demonstration introducing the kids to the concept of gyroscopic ability, the motion that makes the Frisbees take flight.

From there, Brodeur led the group through several exercises incorporating more flips, spins and turns then your average acrobat. His final message to the group was one of encouragement.

"I wasn't very good at Frisbee when I first started," Brodeur said. "I had to read a lot of books and I had to practice, practice and practice. But I loved Frisbee, so I kept practicing and one day I became world champion. So

whatever you guys do in your life, do it to the best of your ability, always follow your dreams and never give up and you'll be champions in life too."

The *Melrose Free Press* recently caught up with Todd Brodeur to get his take on the Frisbee craze:

Q. So Todd, how did you first get into the Frisbee world?

A. I always remember tossing them as a kid and I started to seriously get involved. I used to motocross race before I seriously got involved in Frisbee. I did motocross racing for five years straight and that kind of stopped and I had a void in my life, so that's when I started doing the Frisbee tricks. Each year I got a little bit better and in 2004 I won my first world title in Italy. In 2006 I won my second world title in Berlin, Germany. Later on this year we're going back to Berlin to compete in this year's World Championships.

Q. How are world championships judged?

A. You're on a team. It's like a dance performance. You have 4-5 minutes, 2-3 people on the team. It's judged on difficulty, execution and presentation.

Q. What's the key to success in the Frisbee arena?

A. It's persistence and practice. That's really what it is. You can't give up. If you can't do a trick right off the bat you've got to keep practicing and eventually you'll get it. It's one of those things that really require intense training, practice and focus and if you put all those things together its pretty attainable for almost anyone. Anyone can get good at Frisbee if they try hard enough.

Q. How has the Frisbee world is grown?

A. Well, my specialty is freestyle, but Ultimate Frisbee is also very popular these days, especially in the high school level, and is starting to become more popular in the middle school level. We have one of the best ultimate coaches out in Western Mass. Tina Booth runs an ultimate camp, so that's very popular. The other real popular event these days is Frisbee Golf and courses are being put in all over the place. I'm involved with the New England Flying Disc Association, NEFA.com, and they run tournaments very single weekend. I've also gotten involved in the ultimate community as far as the Life is Good Festival at the Boston Common last March and doing freestyle demos for the ultimate players. I'm also going to another festival on the North Shore, the Yankee Homecoming [in Newburyport], Aug. 1.

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