

Wildly popular cornhole is his game, and Brad Navis of Cedar Grove is not just a champion player, but a promoter of tournaments that keep the cornbags flying

When Brad Navis of Cedar Grove started playing cornhole five or six years ago, he considered it a backyard game for family and friends, but soon realized it was a sport that people of all ages and abilities enjoyed playing.

“It started as a fun yard game,” Navis said. “I made a few sets of boards and loaned them out to friends, and they wanted their own.”



The game, which is patterned after beanbag toss, is hot and can be seen almost anywhere, from informal games in parks to tournaments and leagues with prize money.

Navis, who is the business education teacher at Cedar Grove-Belgium High School, is considered the local guru of the game — organizing tournaments and leagues and renting and selling bags and boards he and his father John make.

The game has become so popular that Navis is now designing custom boards for corporations, including Kohler Co., Charter Steel and Northwestern Mutual, that give them to top customers and employees. He and his father have made more than 350 custom boards, with many given as wedding, birthday, Christmas and graduation gifts.

Navis is also a champion-level player who is out to win, opponents say.

Navis doesn't compete in tournaments he organizes, so most of his play is with leagues, including a summer league that met twice a week at Newport Shores in Port Washington and a fall-winter league that will start next month at the Sauk Trail Conservation Club in Cedar Grove.

As much as he likes playing, Navis said, he enjoys watching people having a good time and raising money for good causes, such as Saturday's Bags4Buczek tournament in Port Washington to raise money for the Tyler Buczek Memorial Scholarship Fund. Tyler drowned last summer.

The tournament, sponsored by the Port Washington High School Gridiron Club, had 64 adult

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Written by Ozaukee Press

Wednesday, 25 September 2013 16:21

teams and 32 high-school teams that paid \$20 to \$30 to compete. Sixteen games were going most of the day. Navis and his father had to make three new game sets to have enough for the tournament.

Some players arrived with their own bags, aiming for the prize money, while others played for the first time.

Many people donated their winnings to the scholarship fund, said Gary Knaub, who organized the tournament and plays in the NewPort Shores league. He wants to make it an annual event.

“It’s such a social game. It’s not an age or gender thing. Anyone can play. You don’t have to be in super good shape. Look at me,” Knaub said.

“Of course, there are people who are better than others.”

Knaub and his partner that day, Chris Jackson, were opponents in the summer league. Knaub’s wife Jenny also played Saturday but with a different partner.

“We don’t get along very well when we play competitive things,” Knaub said. “We’ve learned we don’t do anything competitive together.”

As he surveyed the scene, Jim Buczek, Tyler’s uncle, commented, “This is awesome.”

It was the first time, he and his wife Tracy played. They lost quickly, he said, but plan to play again.

Cornhole got its name because all bags used to be filled with corn, Navis said, but now many are made of small resin pellets.

Players get three points for getting the bag in the hole and one point if it lands on the board. A player from each team stands at opposite ends and takes turns throwing four bags each. The first team to score 21 points wins the game. Knocking off an opponent’s bag or pushing a partner’s bag into the hole is part of the strategy. Which side of the bag to use (one side is often

smooth and the other sticks more) and whether to have it land flat or on its side are also maneuvers used to gain an advantage.

Navis provided the boards, bags, score towers and drink holders for the tournaments. He also handled the bracket boards, posting results online so players could get them on their cell phones. Inbetween, he sold cornbags and took orders for custom boards.

Serious players bring their own bags and are always looking for new ones to give them a competitive edge, Navis said.

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Navis' hobby not only involves his father, but also his cousin Jean Dees of Port Washington, who makes canvas or cloth bags filled with corn or resin pellets. Navis also sells bags made by Beer Belly Bags of Madison that come in a variety of options.

John Navis, 67, who formerly owned Navis Builders, said he enjoys making the boards, which his son designs and finishes, and playing the game. He accompanies his son to most tournaments.

"I'm the oldest (in the Cedar Grove league) and bring my Bengay," he said. "People are so glad when I show up because then they're not the oldest. I don't play for money because I always lose.

"Some tournaments have blind draws (for partners). I like that because you get to meet a lot of people."

Brad Navis ran a tournament for the Cedar Grove Fire Department's 100th anniversary and designed two sets of boards decorated with scenes of firemen involved in 9/11 that were raffled.

High school, college and professional team logos are popular, he said. Spouses who support different teams often order boards with each team's logo.

Navis pays royalties to obtain many team logos. The University of Wisconsin has some of the most expensive, and popular, logos, he said.

More information is available on Navis' website www.cornholetourney.com.