

# Spin control



Crowds go wild for players like Taylor Whitley (left) of Phoenix, Arizona.



Alex Poole (above), and Lee Green of Honolulu, Hawaii, jumped their way to ninth place in the Teams division.

By Mark Henricks  
Photographs by  
Richard T. Nowitz



Practice helped Team Off String fly to first place in the Teams division.



## Athletes **give it up** (and down) at the ultimate **yo-yo contest.**

**T**hings were really spinning out of control at last summer's World Yo-Yo Contest. With wide-open eyes, crowds watched as competitors in **Orlando, Florida**, wowed them with tricks that used two yo-yos, tricks in which yo-yos flew off their strings, even tricks in which two yo-yos flew off the same string at once.

New technology, new tricks, and new fans are making one of the world's oldest toys one of today's coolest sports. "Players" aren't just idly tossing a yo-yo to pass the time. They're making the toy their own.

Just look at Taylor Whitley. Setting eye-popping tricks to music, the 19-year-old from Phoenix, Arizona, pushes the limits by combining difficult tricks, athleticism, and creativity to compete in the fan-favorite "X" division.

Taylor is your typical "Xtreme" player—with an attitude to match. "After I get into it, I take everybody out," wisecracks Taylor, who took eighth place in the division.

The ancient Chinese who probably invented yo-yos would never believe the things the toy does today. Even players from a few years ago are often amazed at the recent changes in the stringy sport.

The comeback began in the 1980s with the invention of

the “yo-yo with a brain.” It had a clutch that automatically brought the toy back up from the bottom of the string, making it a no-brainer for anyone to toss a yo-yo.

Next up: Transaxle yo-yos appeared in the early '90s. These had a plastic or ball-bearing sleeve around the axle connecting the yo-yo halves. That meant less friction between the string and the axle, so a yo-yo could “sleep,” or spin at the bottom of the string, longer than ever.

Then around 1999 came ball-bearing yo-yos with axles similar to the ones on skateboard wheels. They could spin so smoothly

## The word yo-yo means “come back” in the Filipino Tagalog language.

that the record for a “sleeping” yo-yo shot from 51 seconds to more than 15 minutes practically overnight.

Young players such as 15-year-old Matt Harlow of Phoenix, Arizona, are using those yo-yo improvements to invent wild tricks. “We haven’t even started to get good yet,” says Matt, the sixth-place winner

in the two-handed “AA” division.

Another inventor is Doctor Popular (a.k.a. Brian Roberts, 21, of Minneapolis, Minnesota). For his “Möbius” trick, he twists open the string that holds the yo-yo while it’s spinning and does tricks inside the loop. “It resembles different theories of physics,” says this third-place “X” division winner. (Just don’t ask how.)

Amazing tricks like these led to the sale of more than 15 million yo-yos in the United States in 1997. That’s still less than half the number sold in 1963, a record year. But players never expected the sport to come with no strings attached. The ups—and downs—are exactly why they like it!



Koji Yokoyama of Kobe, Japan, popped up second in the two-handed “AA” division.



Takayuki Shimazu of Shiga, Japan, got underfoot to place seventh in the “AA” division.



John Huber of Phoenix, Arizona, swung his way to seventh place in the “X” division.

## SLEEP TIGHT!

Mastering The Sleeper, a simple trick in which the yo-yo spins on the end of the string, can lead to more complicated tricks. Here’s how to learn the basics:

1. Before you start any trick, make sure your string is the correct length. Rest the yo-yo on the floor, and measure the string to three inches above your belly button and fold over. Tie a knot to form a small loop, and trim the excess string.



# A NEW SPIN ON THINGS

These yo-yos put a new face on an old toy.

## Heart

Pump up any old trick with this yo-yo.



**Baseball**  
Here's the windup... now pitch!

## Cookie

Talk about a sweet little yo-yo!



## Football

This toy goes the whole nine yards.

## Fred Flintstone

Yo-yos do go back to ancient times!



## Bowling ball

Strike up a conversation with this one.

## Basketball

Toss it right, and you're in the zone.



Players don't just compete at the world competition. They also buy, sell, and trade yo-yos.

## CONTEST!

Win an awesome yo-yo!

### In what city was the 2000 World Yo-Yo Contest held?

TO ENTER: Print the answer to the question on the back of a 3 1/2" x 5 1/2" postcard. Send to:

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC WORLD  
Dept. March "Yo-Yo Contest"—NJW  
P.O. Box 97056  
Washington, DC 20090-7056.  
Or FAX 202-775-6112.

Only one entry per person. Include your name, phone number with area code, and address with zip code. Entries must be postmarked by May 1, 2001. One hundred winners will be selected in a random drawing on May 15, 2001. Answer will appear in the June 2001 issue of WORLD. Entries can't be acknowledged or returned. Only winners will be notified.

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To check out the yo-yo contest online, or to get more yo-yo tips and tricks, go to [www.nationalgeographic.com/world](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/world).

2. Slip the string through the loop. This is where your finger goes.

3. Dangle the yo-yo until it stops twisting, then wind up the string.



4. Curl your middle finger around the yo-yo groove and close your hand palm up. Point your elbow forward and bring your hand to your shoulder, as if you're making a muscle.

5. Smoothly but quickly pull your arm down and forward, moving your elbow back slightly. Turn your hand over as you flick your wrist forward so the yo-yo descends almost to the floor.



6. Keep your hand still, about waist high. The yo-yo should spin without climbing. Jerk lightly on the string with your middle finger to bring it back.

