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*Living in the
State of Yo*

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Living in the State of Yo

by Kelly Milner Halls

It goes up and down...up and down...up and down. If you had asked Brett Jurgens two years ago to explain what a yo-yo does, that might have been his answer. But that was before

the eleven-year-old took first place in both the 1996 U.S. Open and 1996 World Yo-Yo Championships. "I really didn't know there was much you could do with them back then," he admits.

But Leota Bernhardt, his physical education teacher and coach at Mountain View Elementary School in Longmont, Colorado, saw things differently. She knew there was a world of possibility at the end of that three-and-a-half-foot string. She understood the mental state of yo—a magical way of thinking that helps yo-yo athletes believe in themselves and never give up. And she believed in Brett.

"I started teaching yo-yo in my physical education classes at school because it was something different for



Brett and his coach, Leota Bernhardt, practice a trick called "Yo for It," where the string makes a "y" and the yo-yo makes an "o".

the kids to explore,” Mrs. Bernhardt says. “Yo-yo is a sport almost everyone can do. Even my physically challenged students in wheelchairs can feel good about their yo-yo accomplishments. But I could tell right away that Brett was a special kid. I knew he had the patience and the ability to concentrate. I knew he could be a champion.”

So Brett and his yo-yo teammate Tuan Anh Nguyen started practicing three days a week after school with Mrs. Bernhardt, and an hour every afternoon at home. “One of the great things about yo-yo is that you can practice at home so no one sees you mess up,” says Brett.

Brett and Tuan worked hard to learn the seven beginner yo-yo tricks—the Throwdown, the Forward Pass, the Spinner, the Breakaway, Walking the Dog, Rock the Baby, and Around the World—that they would need to master to compete in the annual American Yo-Yo Association championships.

“It wasn’t really that hard for me,” Brett says. “I think anyone can yo-yo. Mrs. Bernhardt and I teach yo-yo clinics. We try to help other schools start yo-yo teams. I’ve helped about 3,000 kids learn how to yo-yo



This trick is known as the “Flying Saucer.”

since I started. And I tell them that the hardest thing when you first get started are the knots. You get a lot of knots in your string. But that’s no big deal. You just stop, undo the knot, and go on.”

“Brett definitely had the right attitude,” explains his coach. “He would try a new trick a couple of times with me. Then after he got the basic idea, he would spend hours of his own time

Tossing his yo-yo skyward, Brett performs the trick “Around the World.”



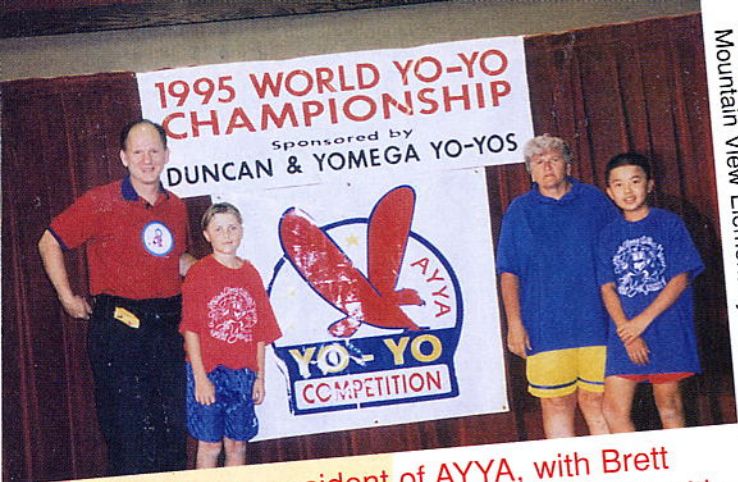


Photo courtesy Mountain View Elementary

Dale Oliver, president of AYYA, with Brett Jurgens. Coach Leota Bernhardt stands with Tuan Anh Nguyen.

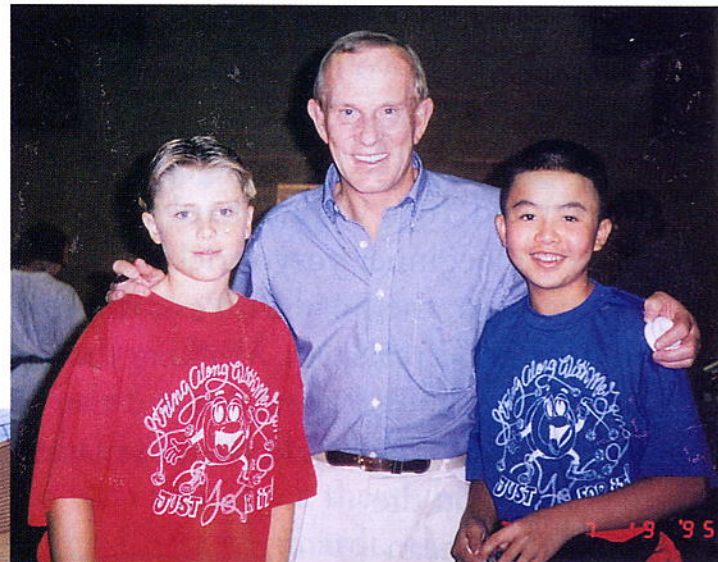
perfecting it—making it look just right. By the time the championships rolled around, I knew he was good enough. I knew he was ready for more.” So Mrs. Bernhardt, Brett, and Tuan headed for the fourth annual World Yo-Yo Championships in Las Vegas.

“I guess I was pretty excited the night before we went to the championships,” Brett admits. “But I don’t really get stage

fright that much. Maybe some kids think about messing up, but I don’t. The whole time I’m performing, I’m just thinking, ‘I can do this. I can do this.’ And when I practice, I don’t think I think about anything at all, really. I think that might be what helps me stay calm.”

Staying calm helped Brett take first place in the eleven and under novice division of the 1995 World Championship. “It actually seemed pretty easy after working so hard all year long with Mrs.

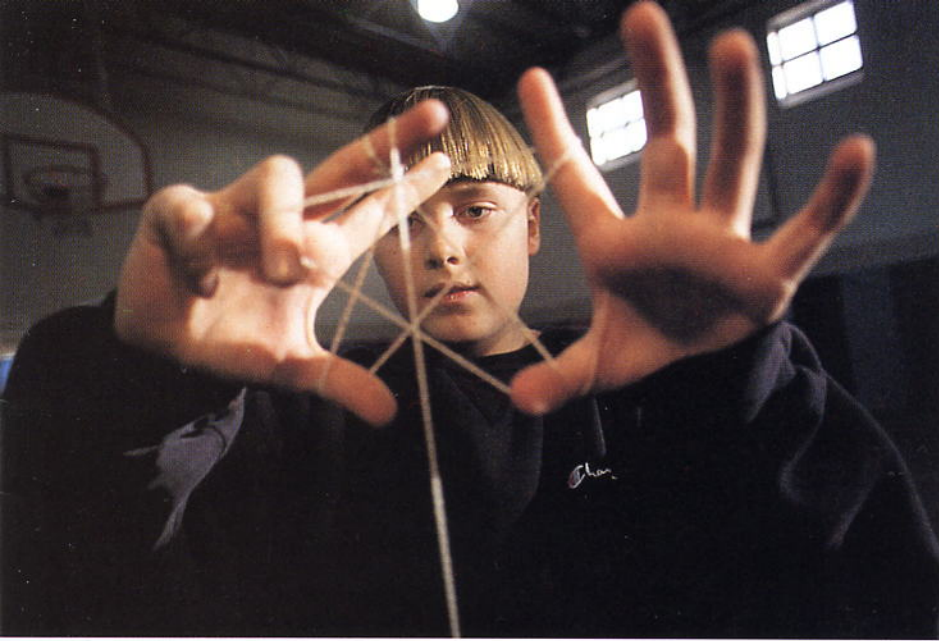
Photo courtesy Mountain View Elementary



Brett and his teammate Tuan meet veteran funnyman and yo-yo enthusiast Tommy Smothers.



Brett practices a trick called “Inside Loops” as he strolls outside his school.



Brett performs the "Two-Handed Star" trick.

Bernhardt," Brett says. But his calm was really tested the next year when he traveled to Rapid City, South Dakota, for his second World Championship competition.

When Mrs. Bernhardt tried to register Brett in the Novice division again, she was in for a surprise. Because Brett had won the 1995 Novice Championship, contest rules said he'd have to compete against the Advanced Division in 1996. That meant eleven-year-old Brett would be competing against kids as old as fifteen. And he couldn't perform the simple tricks he'd practiced all year. He had to perform at least eight new tricks using a new, high-tech transaxle yo-yo he'd never even seen.

The axle connects both halves of the yo-yo, and the string wraps around it. With a traditional yo-yo, the axle is fixed to the halves and spins inside the string loop as the yo-yo spins. The transaxle yo-yo features an additional "free-wheeling" axle sleeve that spins independently of the yo-yo. This

reduces friction and increases spinning time—what yo-yo enthusiasts refer to as "sleep time."

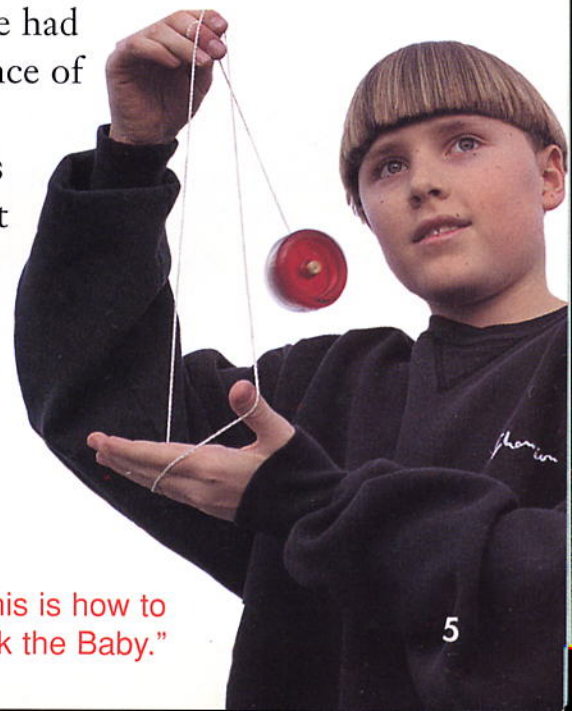
"Brett and I had practiced the more advanced tricks a few times to keep him challenged, so that surprise was something we could handle. But he had always used a standard yo-yo," Mrs. Bernhardt says. "The trans-axle had a totally different

feel to it. Getting used to it overnight was a tall order."

"We were up really late just trying to learn the Advanced Division tricks on the new yo-yo," says Brett. But by morning, he had added the transaxle version of the Corner, Creeper, Tidal Wave, Flying Saucer, Three Leaf Clover, Trapeze, Inside Loops, and Around the Corner to his bag of yo-yo tricks.

"I couldn't believe it," Mrs. Bernhardt says, "but Brett was ready to compete. Even under those circumstances, we could tell he had a good chance of winning."

And that's exactly what he did.



This is how to "Rock the Baby."



Goody Rainbow (1950s)
This rare and colorful wood yo-yo has seven inset rhinestones.



Duncan "Litening" (1956)
Very rare wood yo-yo. One of the "Holy Grails" of yo-yo collecting.

Photos courtesy of David Hall and Mark Brataas

A Man With Ups and Downs!

by Kelly Milner Halls

David Hall has been collecting yo-yos for more than a decade. He has put together one of the most amazing collections in the world—hundreds of ups and downs, you might say. And, as you can see from our interview with him, if you've got a yo-yo question, he's probably got a yo-yo answer.



How many yo-yos do you have in your collection?

I used to keep a very accurate count until I got to 1,300, and that was quite a while back. Right now I have a total of between 2,000 and 2,200. But some of those are duplicates. I think I have around 1,500 different models.

What is the most unusual yo-yo you have in your collection?

That's a really tough question. My oldest is an original Flores (an early yo-yo manufacturer) from 1917. It was the first yo-yo ever called a "yo-yo." I also have a yo-yo that's a clock, and one that whistles as it spins. That's one of the things that's so fun about collecting yo-yos—there are so many unique and unusual possibilities.



Duncan Shrieking Sonic Satellite (1960) This strangely shaped yo-yo is made of wood and whistles as it spins.



American Spinners "All-American Spinner" (1990) Only a dozen of these were made, and then never mass-produced.



Duncan Mardi Gras (1960) This colorful yo-yo is made of solid plastic.

Cheerio Glitterspin (1950)
Features gold foil sticker
and four inlaid rhinestones
on each side.



Duncan Wooden
Butterfly (Late 1950s
to early 1960s)



David Hall, The Yo-Yo Collector

Where are the best places to find unusual yo-yos?

I have the best luck in antique malls, flea markets, and swap meets. Lately I've found a lot of interesting yo-yos and yo-yo related stuff through the Internet and through my own Web page.

What makes a yo-yo a good collector's piece?

A good collector's item is old, scarce, and in good condition. And above all, it's fun to look at—nice colors, interesting logo—a little work of art.

How many different yo-yos have been made?

No one knows the answer to that. I hope I can start a formal collector's club using my Web site on the Internet.

Can kids write to you with yo-yo questions?

Sure thing! I love to promote

yo-yos and yo-yo collecting. I've already helped at least a dozen kids find information for school reports and things like that. They can e-mail me on the computer, write regular letters, or get in touch through my Web page. (David Hall's Web site is reviewed in "Computer Zone," on page 28!)

You can write to David Hall at:
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Web address:

<http://www.nmia.com/~whistler/>



Goody Master
Filipino Twirler
(1950s)



Duncan
Champion
Patch (1970-
1996) One of
the most well-
known yo-yo
competition
patches.

The New Duncan Super
(1996) This painted wood
yo-yo is a remake of the
old 1950s Supers.



Duncan Disney's Wonderful
World of Color (1962) This
beautiful yo-yo is made of
solid plastic.

