

THIS COMPETITOR JUST WANTS TO ROCK

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By RYAN E. SMITH
BLADE STAFF WRITER

It's the advice my parents have given me ever since I was little:

Never give up! Never give in!

For years, I suspected this was to spur me on to greatness in my chosen field - to win a Pulitzer Prize or maybe write the great American novel. But now I know the truth: It was to make me the rock, paper, scissors champion of the world.

RPS (as the pros call it) may seem like a child's game to you - you know the one: paper covers rock, scissors cuts paper, rock smashes scissors - but to hundreds of people, it's actually considered kind of cool, even a chance for everlasting glory.

Such fame eluded me last year when I took part in the world championships in Toronto, missing out on the \$7,000 (Canadian) grand prize. Unwilling to give up - my parents would be proud, right? - I returned this year certain I would win it all.

Trouble is ... I didn't. I, um, lost in the second round.

As best as this English major could calculate, that left me in a tie for something like 256th place out of about 500 competitors. But that's not important. What matters is that I realized this is exactly what Toledo needs: 500 young people, many wearing costumes, engaging in hand-to-hand combat.

Toledo should host a tournament like this. Contests have sprung up all over America, and news of the world championships was front page news across the country. Seriously.

This is a sport that's taking off. It certainly has more of an appeal than playing chess on a larger-than-life board, an idea discussed a few years ago by a Toledo mayoral panel charged with addressing the city's loss of young, talented people.

Not only is rock, paper, scissors the subject of a book, *The Official Rock Paper Scissors Strategy Guide*, but it was the game of choice for a Japanese businessman earlier this year who organized a match between Sotheby's and Christie's auction houses: The victor won the right to sell off his art collection valued at more than \$20 million.

(For the record, Christie's won by throwing scissors, thereby cutting Sotheby's paper. The move came on the advice of an employee's 11-year-old twins who play the game at school practically every day, according to a New York Times article.)

There are signs that Toledo is meant for this: The daily newspaper is called *The Blade*, for crying out loud.

I don't write this without considering the alternatives, some of which have been chronicled by Joshua Davis, author of *The Underdog: How I Survived the World's Most Outlandish Competition*. His Web site, www.underdognation.com, lists a host of unusual contests, including Thumbwrestling, Jump Rope Nationals, Chessboxing, and Underwater Shot Put.

But those competitions just sound silly, right? So let's stay focused on something we can understand, something primal - rock, paper, and scissors.

The odds of our city hosting the world championships are slim, but there's no reason we couldn't create some sort of regional or national competition. That's exactly what Geir Arne Brevik did in Norway.

After attending last year's world championships, clad in matching striped wristbands, Geir went home determined to put together a dream team for 2005. He accomplished even more, creating a Norwegian rock paper scissors society. Its recent national championships had 8,000 participants!

It's possible that Scandinavians have a thing for weird competitions - Finland hosted last summer's World Air Guitar Championships, in which American champ Fatima "The Rockness Monster" Hoang finished 11th - but I think this shows the huge potential of getting in on this action while it's hot.

I have a dream: hundreds of people, mostly recent college graduates, hanging out downtown for a whole weekend.

I dream of Toledo streets filled with vibrant young people wearing afros and track suits and oversized sunglasses playing a child's game.

I dream of competitors coming to Toledo from around the world, sporting leisure suits and fake mullets, gathered to love all things rock, paper, and scissors.

And I dream of banners welcoming these fanatics: To those about to rock, we salute you!

Contact Ryan E. Smith at: ryansmith@theblade.com or 419-724-6103.

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