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## A new spin on things

Pinball Showdown adds new features in 2nd year

By Nicole Frey

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April 28, 2005

Pinball isn't often considered a tough sport, or any type of sport at all, but after three long, hard days of playing at the Rocky Mountain Pinball Showdown, Donovan Stepp was sore.

"It was exhausting," said Stepp, who took third place in the pinball tournament. "I just played so much pinball, and I usually play a lot of pinball. Every day, I got there when they opened, I'd take a little lunch break and go 'til 10 (p. m.) at night."

Suffering from aching forearms and hands and an angry knee from too much bending and bouncing in front of pinball machines, Stepp was still glowing in the florescent aftermath of the three-day pinball extravaganza that drew about 1,300 people to the Jefferson County Fairgrounds.

"It doubled or tripled from last year," said the event's co-host Dan Nikolich. "There were lots of people, lots of machines, music... Everything went much better than last year's show. Last year was good, this year was better, and next year will be even better."

Pinball enthusiasts came from as far away as Virginia to compete in the Showdown's second annual tournament, attend pinball seminars and view and try their hand at 118 classic and modern pinball machines.

"It was a blast. We just love it," said Stepp of Lakewood. "I'd travel to other states to do this, so to have one happen right here is great. I'm going to do this forever."



Photo by CHRIS STARK

Neil Valenta of Farmington, N.M., tests a pinball game called "Safe Cracker" at the Rocky Mountain Pinball Showdown. Now in its second year, last weekend's showdown doubled in size from the year before. The showdown now includes seminars on how to repair and buy machines, as well as the tournament.

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Pinball is not merely a pastime for Stepp, but a way of life. He said four of the eight men who qualified for the final rounds of the tournament were in his "crew."

And, as much as possible, they kept the winner's circle in the family. Stepp's cousin Mateo Layba took first place and won \$500.

"The family was taking it out. The competition was stiff," Stepp said. "Sometimes there's a game that just doesn't work for you, and when the smoke clears there's only eight people that are going to qualify. I give my props to him (Layba)."

While Stepp was pleased but not overjoyed with his third-place win, he was elated with a best-of-show award for his twilight pinball machine.

"I feel pretty proud about that," he said. "I pride myself on running quality pins, and this one is my baby."

Stepp is also a pinball technician, installing and maintaining the machines, along with jukeboxes and pool tables, in local venues.

With the competition over and still wanting more, Stepp headed up to Lyons Classic Pinball, a pinball vendor in Lyons, to continue the pinball binge.

"Tournaments are a good way to gauge how good you are, to get bragging rights, but you can play a pinball machine by yourself and have just as much fun," said Stepp who has set his sights on first place next year. "If you're not playing very well in competition, then you just go do it for fun, but it's still more fun to compete."



Photo by CHRIS STARK

Rob Weidner of Fort Collins, whose hand is pictured above playing a "Simpsons" pinball game, said he grew up with video games but now owns three pinball machines and likes them more than video games.

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