

Hybrid Sport

Jack Spencer, 17, of Chester, sizes up a short "drive" off a par 3 at Woodstone Meadows golf course at Massanutten Resort on May 29. Spencer plays a new sport called FlingGolf that mixes lacrosse and golf.

Daniel Lin / DN-R



FlingGolf 'Something New'

Sport Mixing Lacrosse, Golf Takes Hold at Massanutten

By VIC BRADSHAW
Daily News-Record

HARRISONBURG — Because they were involved in lacrosse and baseball, respectively, Jack and Ryan Spencer have never taken time to learn to play golf.

As a result, the boys couldn't share the game with their grandfather, Michael King, until King stumbled upon FlingGolf during a trip to Massanutten Resort. FlingGolf is played on a golf course with a FlingStick used to throw a golf ball toward the green and push it in once there, and the game involves the general mechanics of lacrosse or baseball.

"I saw it as something new," said King, a 71-year-old Chester resident



The FlingStick uses a motion similar to a lacrosse stick to help nongolfers enjoy the sport. A good "drive" with a FlingStick will travel about 150 yards, according to Brett Mowbray, golf operations manager for Massanutten.

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who played regular golf last year and this year while his grandsons played FlingGolf with him. "It's mostly the social aspect with family. They can go out and play and enjoy something with me. I

can't play baseball or lacrosse with them, but they can use those skills and play golf with me."

Sport Offered At Resort Since April 2015

FlingGolf

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The boys, he said, took to the game quickly and “had a marvelous time on the golf course the first time they were on a course in their lives.”

Brett Mowbray, Massanutten’s golf operations manager, said the resort has offered FlingGolf since April 1, 2015, allowing people to play in the afternoon on both its Mountain Greens and Woodstone Meadows courses. He sees it as a way to get people to courses at a time when regular golf play has plateaued.

“Everybody,” he said, “is looking for different ways to attract a wider audience to their golf course.”

Exceeding Expectations

Footgolf, which involves kicking a soccer ball into a basket placed alongside golf holes, was something Mowbray considered before seeing an ad in a golf magazine for FlingGolf. He ordered a stick and toyed with it over the winter of 2014-15. He then headed to the FlingGolf booth at a PGA trade show in January 2015 and ordered 24 sticks.

His goal last year was for visitors to play 1,000 rounds of FlingGolf, but the total topped 1,500. This year’s goal is 2,000 rounds.



Ryan Spencer, 15, of Chester, winds up with his FlingStick at Woodstone Meadows golf course on May 29.

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A good FlingGolf shot will travel 150 yards, he said, and par on a course is the same as par for regulation golf. Flingers are penalized a stroke if their ball winds up in a sand trap, out of bounds or in water.

With the mechanics involved, Mowbray said he’s seen people who have abandoned golf because of back problems get back on the course with a FlingStick, and he met his most inspirational Flinger just last week.

Eugene Fawcett of Colorado Springs, Colo., hadn’t been able to enjoy the game he once loved since he fell off a ladder and was paralyzed from the chest down, he wrote in an email Monday.

carts. Mowbray said 85 to 90 percent of regular golfers opt to rent a cart, while it’s 50-50 with flingers.

“You’ve got one ball and one stick to carry,” he said, adding “drives” don’t travel as far.

FlingGolf clinics are offered for \$18 every Monday, Wednesday and Friday morning, Mowbray said, and they tend to focus on some of the trickier shots around the green. A FlingGolf tournament will be offered every Thursday evening through the end of August.

King said his grandsons played the game for the first time a year ago. When they joined him at the resort over Memorial Day weekend and

Massanutten, Mowbray said, probably has had more rounds of FlingGolf played on its courses than any resort in America because it embraced the game early. Creator Alex Van Alen has visited Massanutten, and the resort was mentioned in a GolfDigest story on FlingGolf.

On July 30, Woodstone will host the FlingGolf competition as part of the Virginia Commonwealth Games.

The advantage to the game is that it doesn't require the same level of precision as striking a golf ball with a club. Mowbray said people tend to take the game less seriously and, therefore, have a better time playing. Flingers play as fast or faster than regular golfers.

"I can teach you golf all day long, and you still may not feel comfortable playing around other people," said Mowbray, 46, who's in his 19th year with Massanutten's golf operations. "With FlingGolf you can take a half an hour; I can show you the release points, and the next thing you know you're ready to go on the course."

He was introduced to FlingGolf during a visit to Massanutten, hit the course for the first time since the accident and was inspired.

"FlingGolf is in my future," he wrote. "What a fantastic thing for handicapped golfers!"

Ditching Carts

It's not just folks who haven't had time to learn golf who have taken to FlingGolf.

Mowbray said he's seen wives who refused to play golf with their husbands join them with FlingSticks at Massanutten and enjoy the experience. Families with young children also can involve them in the game.

A company came to play as a team-building exercise, he said, and he sees the potential to host FlingGolf birthday parties.

Massanutten charges a \$15 green fee for nine holes and \$25 for 18. It costs \$10 to rent a FlingStick, and they're available for purchase for \$129.95.

FlingGolf also prompts more people to walk the course instead of riding in

had a choice of what to do, they said they wanted to play FlingGolf again.

Thanks to King, they now own their own FlingSticks, and he plans to find courses in the Chester area that will allow FlingGolf.

Mowbray said he's curious to see whether non-golfers who take up FlingGolf will decide to try the original version of the game. For now, however, he's just glad to see new people enjoying Massanutten's courses.

"For me, it's exciting to see a buzz about something new," he said. "Being able to see other people enjoy the views of the golf courses, the camaraderie with friends or family members, to be able to do something together and offer more for them than just golf — it's definitely been touching to see it grow here."

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