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sports
Slam it home
A foosball renaissance reveals Denver area is competitive hotbed of the table game
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Quarters on the table reserve next game. Players now compete for the chance to go to Las Vegas for the Table Soccer World Championships. (Post / Mateo Leyba)

ONLINE EXTRAS



Foosball: It's not just another bar game. [Click to launch story, video & slide show.](#)

It's 8:30 p.m. on a Wednesday night at Castaways Lounge in Thornton. The first thing you hear upon entering the watering hole is a loud, cracking sound, loud enough to be heard above a Pantera selection blasting from the jukebox.

The sound easily could be mistaken for someone breaking a rack on a pool table, except the two pool tables just inside the door sit empty. As your eyes adjust to the darkness, it becomes apparent where the sounds come from: five foosball tables lining the perimeter of the bar.

At each table, a group of players hunches over brightly lit playing fields, controlling a walnut-sized ball with miniature yellow-and-black men suspended by eight steel bars above the field. With quick turns of the wrist, the ball is put into position and sent into the goal, bouncing off the metal interior with a loud crack.

These men and women gather each Wednesday night at the current hot spot of tournament-level foosball in Colorado. Teams of two chase weekly prize money and, in this particular tournament, point awards that could earn them a trip to the foosball world championships in Las Vegas this fall.

"Half the guys want it, the other half just come to play," said Aaron Lefevre, the tournament director.

Lefevre estimates there are roughly 200 serious foosball players in Colorado.

"We get about 40 players each week from all over: Boulder, Greeley, Colorado Springs and that guy from Nebraska."

He points to Mark Kraus, a truck dealer from Nebraska. Timing his truck pick-ups in the Denver area to coincide with tournament nights allows him to satisfy his foosball fix before the 250-mile drive home.

Why would anyone drive 250 miles to play foosball?

"It's a natural high," Kraus said. "An adrenaline sport. It's like a 100-mile-an hour chess match."

To most, foosball is just another bar game to pass the time between drinks.

For tournament players, it's THE game. They spend much of their free time practicing or competing. They hunt down the best games around Denver or travel hundreds of miles to enter major events.

"I really have a fun time playing," said Robert Mares of Aurora, currently ranked the No. 3 player in the world according to the U.S. Table Soccer Association. "This sounds kind of deep, but I feel like I have a gift, and if I wasn't playing I would be wasting it. I feel like it's a responsibility."

As the night goes on and the bracket tightens, those who have been eliminated move on to empty tables for more relaxed play. Others retreat to the bar, doing their best to put a dent in the Jägermeister tap machine.

For those still in the game, it's all business.

The best-of-three championship match is pushed to the deciding game. It's close and play is intense.

"Come on, Bubba, this is big!" Mares shouts to his partner as he hands the ball to the other team to serve. The teams trade goals before Mares finally sinks the winning shot.

"Great playing, guys, way to push it!" he tells the other players as they shake hands before leaving.



Mike Bowers, above left in 1974, won the first world foosball tournament, held at the Trocadero Ballroom at Elitch Gardens. (Post file)



It's not just another bar game: Competitors at Colorado foosball hot spot Castaways Lounge in Thornton huddle intently over their tables. (Post / Mateo Leyba)

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