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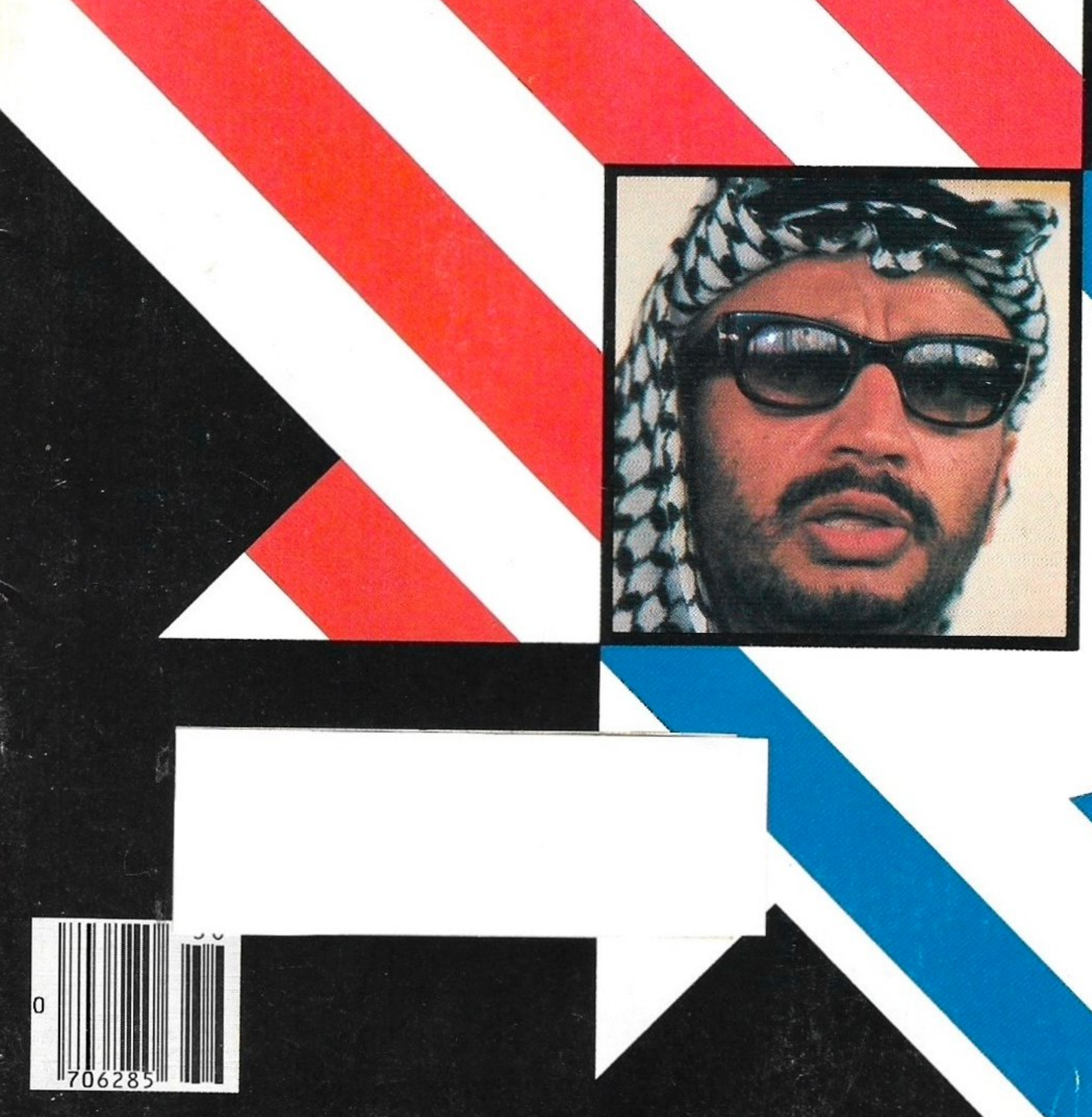
Collision Course Over The PLO



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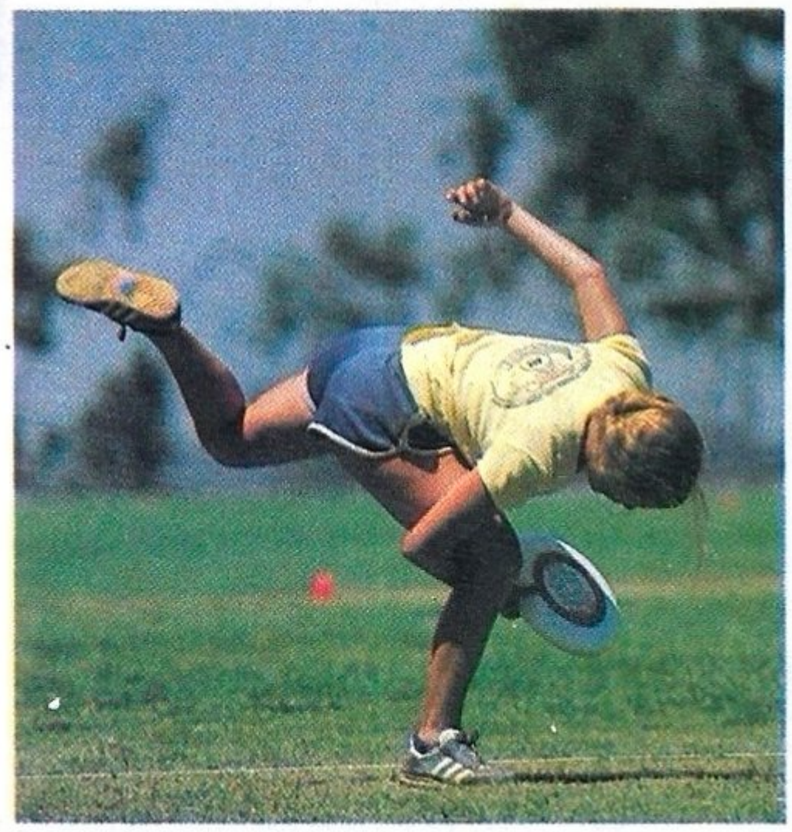
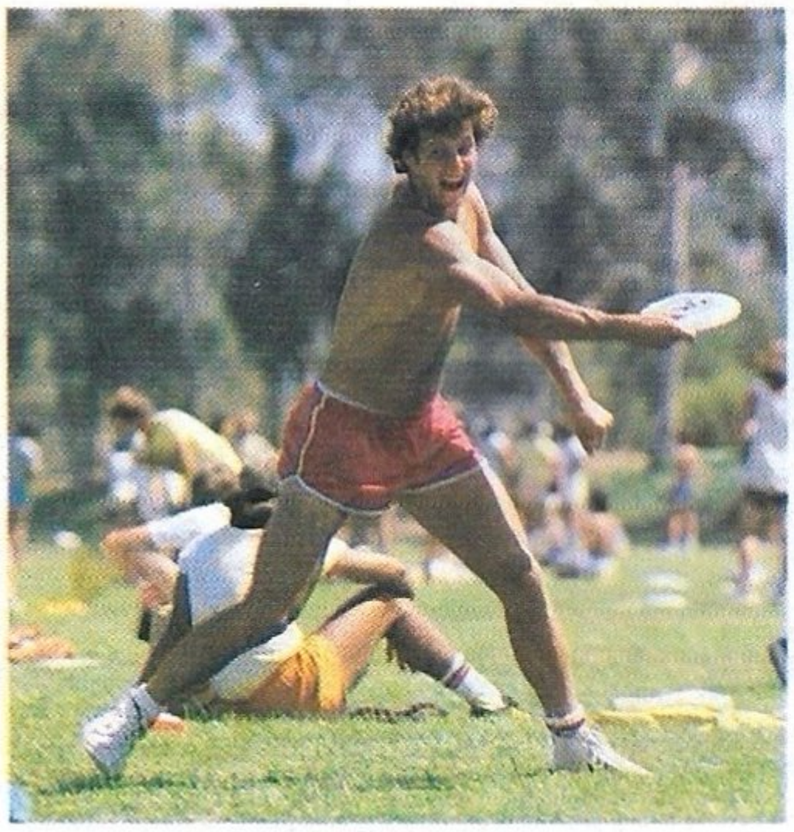




The Sixth Annual World Frisbee disc Championship: From tossing tin pie plates to competing in a full-fledged sport

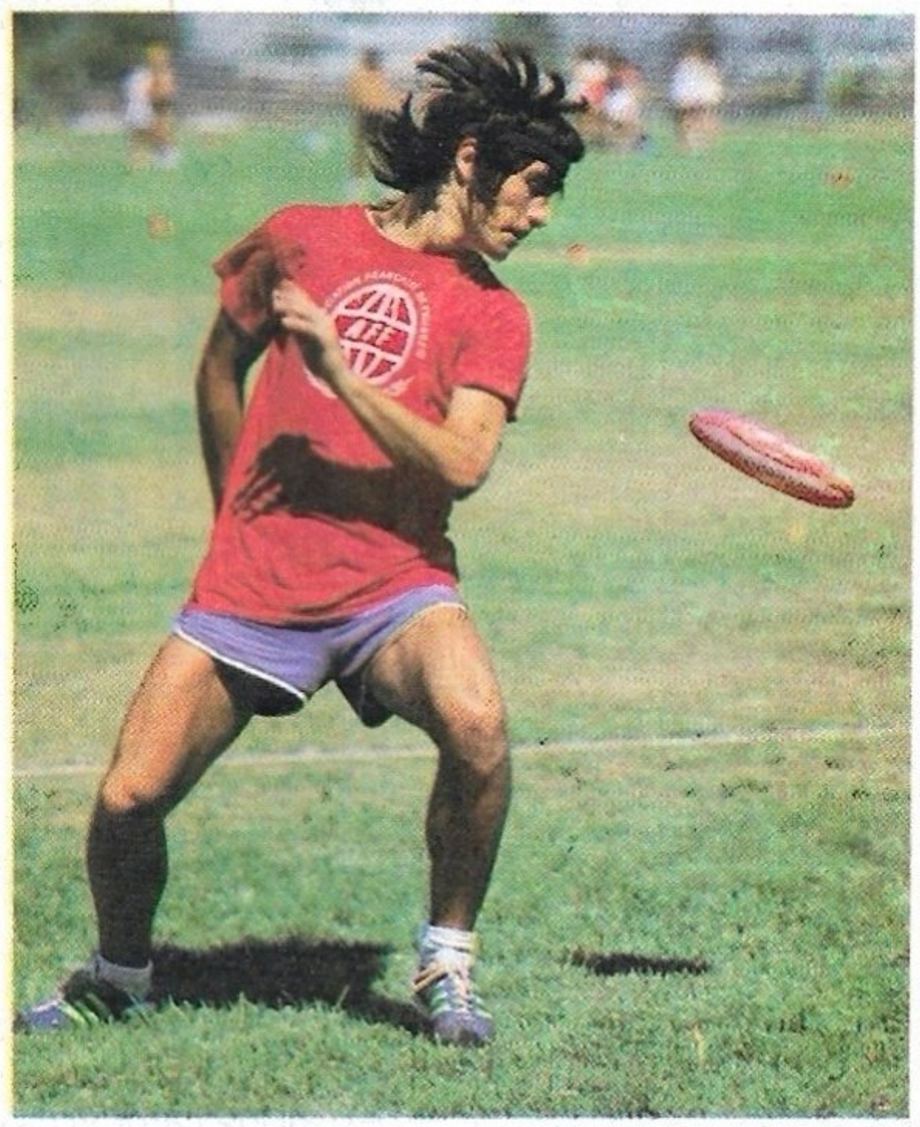
FLYING SAUCERS

It started at least 30 years ago, with the mindless hurling of tin pie plates from the old Frisbie Baking Co. of Bridgeport, Conn. By the late '50s, plastic versions of the discs were spinning, dipping and gliding over college quadrangles. But what was once considered pure play has become a big-time, organized athletic event. Last week, 139 competitors from 35 states and eleven countries met in southern California for the Sixth Annual World Frisbee disc Championship at Pasadena's Rose Bowl.

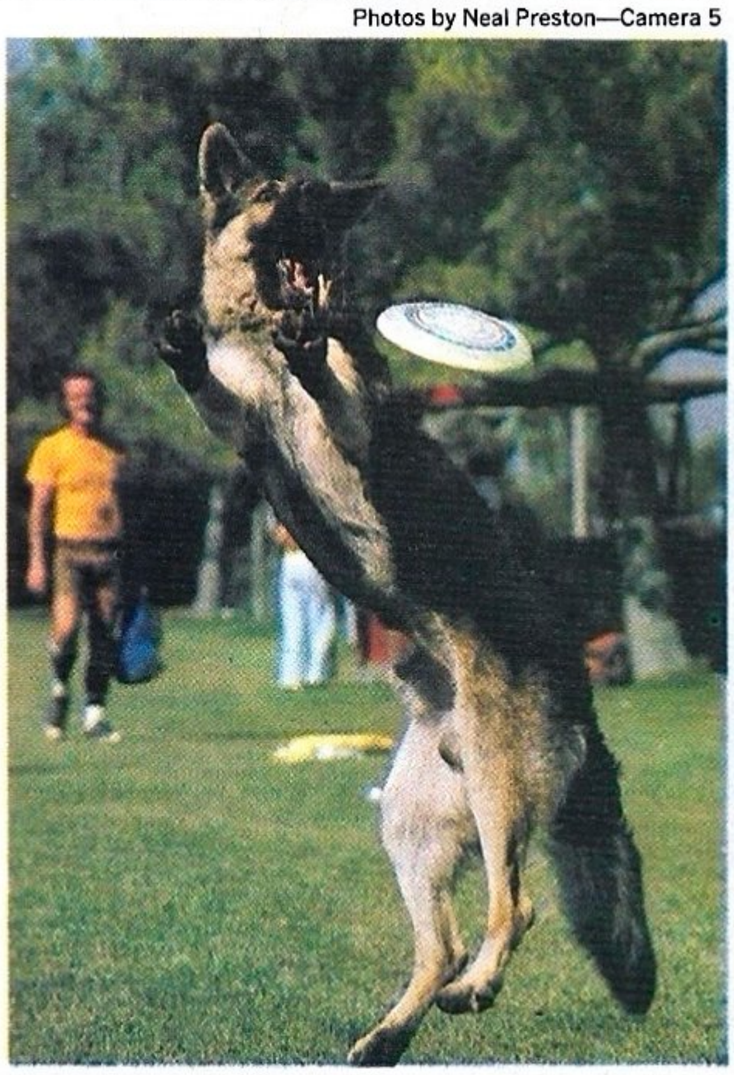
"What I like is that the competition isn't cutthroat," said Johnny Roberts, a 48-year-old teacher from Aravda, Colo. Despite the casual atmosphere, players compete for $30,000 in endorsement contracts in five events: distance; freestyle, which combines gymnastics and dance; self-caught flight, in which the players catch their own discs; double-disc court, similar to doubles tennis but played with two discs, and disc golf, in which contestants sink Frisbees into baskets on poles set up along a course. The tournament also featured a K-9 Catch and Fetch Contest for dogs and demonstrations of Guts, where the object is to hit members of the opposing team.

The arrival of Frisbee as a serious sport is due largely to efforts of the Wham-O Manufacturing Co., the saucer's major producer. Wham-O finances the International Frisbee disc Association, which sanctions the Rose Bowl Tournament. Most players did not enter for money or glory, but because they have become addicted to the Frisbee's endless and unpredictable gyrations. "I was interested in the flight dynamics," explains Ralph Williamson, 49, a Seattle aeronautical engineer who holds the record in his age group for time aloft (9.5 seconds). "It's plastic madness and magic."

Photos by Neal Preston—Camera 5



Canine competitor: Catch and fetch



Freestyle contestant (above), double-disc team: Fun, fame and flight dynamics