

Is it 'Game Over' for Pog Players?

Trends: Some schools ban kids' favorite lids

POGS CERTAINLY SEEMED LIKE WHOLE-some entertainment: kids have been enthusiastically collecting and trading the colorful cardboard discs for a couple of years now, playing a simple game of stacking them up and knocking them over. Manufactured by dozens of companies, the Pogs are decorated with dinosaurs, Barbie, cartoon characters, sports heroes and even math puzzles and anti-smoking messages. But there's a darker wind blowing in Pogland too: discs have popped up with images of drugs and pornography—and some youngsters wager money on games. One topical Pog shows O. J. Simpson behind bars. School officials have responded by banning the caps—which, of course, makes kids want them even more. "People at school like to play with them, but we're not allowed to," says Julie Zelman, 11, of Thousand Oaks, Calif. "One kid got suspended."



LAUREN GREENFIELD—SYGMA
Going Pog wild: Discs and tournament at Knott's Berry Farm in Los Angeles

At University Park Elementary School in Dallas, principal Gail Hartin heard rumors of occult and druggy Pogs—but banned them without even seeing any. The games disrupted the lunchroom, Hartin says, and she told students to play them only after school or at home. The Nimitz Middle School in Huntington Park, Calif., prohibits even possession of Pogs, because some turned up with images of female private parts—and also because of gambling concerns. "Even if there isn't any money involved, students got upset if they lost their Pogs," says assistant principal Alvin Glass.



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Based on a traditional Hawaiian game played with the cardboard caps of milk bottles, the current version surfaced there in 1991. It featured decorative discs from a bottled drink containing passionfruit, orange and grapefruit juice; hence the name Pog (now trademarked by the World Pog Federation). Pogs then hit California, where an estimated 350 million were sold last year, and Universal Studios added a POGWorld section to its theme park in October. The craze is spreading around the country, discs now sell for 10 cents to \$1, and the larger metal or plastic "slammers" cost up to \$10.

There may be a fog over Pogs, but the craze hasn't even cooled. More than 3,000 customers and 90 dealers showed up in Walnut, Calif., last Wednesday night for a "Pog show." Sales are brisk at F.A.O. Schwarz, New York City's deluxe toy store, which plans an All-Pog Shop that will include a \$40 version of the game. Guess those tough New York kids can handle a few Pogs.

JEAN SELIGMANN with JEANNE GORDON
in Los Angeles and bureau reports

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