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**Dave Barry** 

Posted on Sun, Feb. 05, 2006

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## Clear the streets! It's snowplow hockey

BY DAVE BARRY

*(This classic Dave Barry column was originally published on Jan. 8, 1995.)*

The problem with winter sports is that -- follow me closely here -- they generally take place in winter. Winter is both cold AND slippery, which means that if you engage in a typical winter sport, such as skiing, you could easily wind up freezing in some godforsaken snowbank, unable to move because one or more of your knees have been converted into ligament gumbo.

FACT: Last year, 17 percent of all recreational skiers were eaten by wolves. This is why leading health experts recommend that you spend the entire winter in a heated, TV-equipped environment eating Cheez-Its directly from the box. But for those of you who insist on leading an active lifestyle all year, I'm pleased to report that there is a new winter sport on the scene -- a winter sport that lets you stay warm, yet at the same time enables you to potentially get arrested.

I found out about this sport from Judy Schneck, an alert reader who lives in a Wisconsin city called "Oconomowoc" (a Native American word meaning "Word that even Native Americans cannot pronounce"). Judy wrote to me in response to a column I'd written about a sport called "car bowling," in which guys try to hit junk cars with bowling balls dropped from airplanes. She said this reminded her of a sport invented by her husband, Mark, and a buddy of his named Bob Thelen.

It seems that some winters ago, Mark and Bob were sitting around a gas station with not

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much to do. I certainly do not wish to make gender-based generalizations, but if Mark and Bob had been women, they probably would have passed the time in some non-productive manner, such as nurturing their friendship, exploring their innermost feelings, or helping each other gain significant insights into the important relationships in their lives. But fortunately for humanity in general, Mark and Bob are not women. Mark and Bob are guys, and what they did is invent snowplow hockey.

According to Mark, three factors led to this invention:

1. Mark and Bob each had a vehicle equipped with a snowplow.
2. Both sides of the street were lined by steep, hard snowbanks.
3. Mark's vehicle also contained (no motorist should ever be without one) a bowling ball.

As Mark recalls the moment, he and Bob realized that if they shoved the bowling ball with a snowplow, it would be prevented by the snowbanks from leaving the street; it would just bounce off and keep going.

"We realized that it would basically roll forever," Mark says.

Which is why you need the other snowplow to play defense. And that's how snowplow hockey works. You have your two opposing snowplows facing each other. The player on offense drives forward and gives the bowling ball a hearty shove with his plow; the player on defense then tries to block the ball. The trick on offense is to angle the ball ("It's just like pool," Mark says) so that it caroms off a snowbank and rockets past the defender into the intersection behind him, where it knocks over an elderly woman.

No, seriously, Mark says they play this sport only on deserted streets, and nobody has been injured so far, although there obviously is a certain amount of hazard involved in having guy-operated snowplows lunging toward each other in a competitive manner.

"How close do you come to hitting each other?" I asked.

"Too close," replied Mark. He said there are rules about how far forward each snowplow is supposed to go, but ``we can't get anybody to come out and referee."

Mark, who in real life is a restaurant manager, says that he and some other guys still play snowplow hockey on a semi-regular basis.

"Fortunately, the police have never seen us," he said. ``They would probably take our bowling ball away."

I don't know about you, but I think this sounds like a WAY more entertaining brand of hockey than the kind where you have a bunch of stick-waving Canadians skittering

frantically around trying to hit a semi-invisible puck roughly the size of a breath mint. Just think, as a sports fan, what it would mean if we had a National Snowplow Hockey League with franchises in all major U.S. cities! It would mean hundreds of pedestrian deaths. So we probably should limit the franchises to places that are the size of Oconomowoc or (if this is possible) smaller.

Nevertheless, this is clearly a major "ground-floor" opportunity for the type of wealthy stupid businessman who likes to own sports teams. Also you large corporations should be aware that Mark Schneck told me that, as one of the top three or four snowplow-hockey players in the world, he is available for lucrative product endorsements. For example, you could have a commercial wherein Mark snowplows into McDonald's for a hearty meal, taking down most of the building in the process.

My point is that there's plenty of opportunity for everyone who sincerely cares about sports as a way to get rich. But if you're interested, you'd better act fast. Because if this thing gets any more popular, there will definitely be a strike.



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