

Sports

Hample sets Arkanoid record

By Daniel Fleishman

STAFF WRITER

Old news: Senior Zack Hample owns a full-size, coin-operated arcade game called Arkanoid. He plays it in his Milner room and enthusiastically welcomes all passersby to give it a whirl.

New News: Hample, who previously self-titled himself the "world's best Arkanoid player," broke the all-time record shortly after midnight on Tuesday, February 16th.

Twin Galaxies' Official Video Game & Pinball Book of World Records lists the record as 1,466,460. Hample scored 1,536,450, nearly 70,000 points higher, a staggering feat almost unheard of in the arcade world.

"I expected that if I did beat the world record I might simply edge out the former score by a few thousand points, but I really eclipsed it by a wide margin, which surprised me," said Hample. "This game has been around for, now, 15

years, and you have to think of the tens of thousands of players that have played it. And to think that I'm the best of all of them—that's very shocking." Indeed.

Hample, notorious on campus for his quirky hobbies, is an expert in and has written a book on, of all things, snagging major league baseballs; he founded Guilford's Scrabble club; he has become known for his incessant soapboxes in this publication's Forum section. Hample is unique, opinionated, and unafraid to be exactly as he wants to be, with a candor that sometimes draws disfavor.

Hample honed his skills as an Arkanoid player about eight years ago at home in New York City at a Times Square arcade, where he devoted five hours a day to the game for one full week. Last November, he purchased an Arkanoid machine through an ebay.com auction, fulfilling a long-sought dream.

"I hadn't made many serious attempts at the high score because at that point I didn't know what the world record was; I had nothing to aim for," said Hample. "Once



COLIN ROACH-BENTLEY

Hample rejoices in his conquest.

I found out what the world record was, it kind of lit a fire under my ass, you could say, and I was motivated to try to beat it."

And so he did—less than two weeks later. At least 13 fellow Guilford students gawked in amazement as Hample made history that memorable night in his remarkable wall-to-wall poster room. And of that bunch, two witnessed the entire hour and 40 minute game. Approximately six others saw the majority of it, while another five came in briefly just to see what the large gathering was about.

The room was cramped and muggy, but the large crowd did not bother Hample; rather, he thrived. "I was nervous and excited to have an audience. I definitely play better in front of people—I know that to be a fact," he said.

With his door propped open, Hample carefully beat each level, one through 33, racking up every point with delicate nervousness, as any confident expert would. The atmosphere in the room bordered on out-of-control restlessness for the duration of the game. Hample knew, however, that a record would be difficult unless the audience became completely silent for the last level, allowing him to maintain the required intense concentration.

"At the end, people were very respectful. I said, about five minutes before I reached the last level, that I really wanted it to be quiet," explained Hample.

Jacob Noble, a senior, watched most of the game. "It was like he knew he was going to break the record. That's what was so unbelievable," said Noble of Hample's request for silence.

First-year student Adam Williams viewed the game in its entirety. "At first everybody was talking like normal, but then, when he got to the end, everybody—even Jake Noble—managed to shut their mouth for a little while," he said as if surprised that the crowd

had hushed.

Stephen Krogman, a video game technician from Boca Raton, Florida, held the previous record, but took 13 years to reach that peak. He seems mildly embarrassed and frustrated that one of his many video game records has gone down, but refuses to admit anything but the contrary. Krogman, who is in periodic contact with Hample via telephone and e-mail, now claims to have broken his left hand. This untimely impairment, he says, does not prevent him from playing Arkanoid, but does hinder his true gaming abilities. Broken hand? It sure seems like a pretty convenient excuse.

"Looking through the various records for video games, [Krogman is] at the top of the list for dozens of games," said Hample. "He may be the best video game player in the world, but as far as Arkanoid is concerned, he's second best."

Noble made his own candid guesses regarding Krogman's current mental state. "Krogman has put everything on hold: Mortal Kombat's one through four including Tournament Edition, Grand Prix Derby, Jackpot Pinball. Everything is on hold now because Krogman has been shocked and stunned by this Arkanoid record allegation."

Ryan Taylor, a first-year student, and witness to the record-breaking game, put it simply and soundly: "Krogman is the past, Hample is the future."

Rumor has it that someone might soon offer a prize of \$1,000 to anyone who can break 1.63 million points, but that is of little interest to Hample; his motivations are not monetary in nature. He plays for the love of the game, strives for nothing but perfection, and hopes to break the 1.6 million-point mark someday, prize money or not.

Only time will tell what Arkanoid adventures are in store for him.

Baseball begins

By Chris Brown

STAFF WRITER

The optimism shines brighter than the sun in major league baseball's spring training. Every veteran is revitalized and every young kid has a chance to make it if they play well enough. Managers endlessly fiddle with possible line-ups and pencil in a new rotations or possible closers, hoping that each change will be the one that puts his team in position to win their respective division.

In what has seemed like a few short years since the World Series was cancelled due to a prolonged strike, baseball has soared back on the bats of Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa. Since the strike, baseball's biggest market, New York, has seen three series titles come home and watched some great playoffs series in both the National and American leagues.

Perhaps the optimism is a little brighter this year with the teams that haven't made the Series in a few years than with the traditional powers. And why not, considering the aging of the players who powered the teams of nineties and some big time trades?

How big? Ask Cincinnati, they only picked up the most productive hitter of the last decade. In what might turn out to be the biggest trade since Boston dealt Ruth to New York, Seattle finally let Ken Griffey, Jr., join his father in Cincinnati. Griffey is currently on pace to break the all-time home run record before his 40th birthday. As for the rest of the organization, unlike Mark McGwire and St. Louis, the Cincinnati Reds know how to win games and should be poised to make a run for the pennant.

Other than Griffey, the big news around the league is old news, that both Atlanta and the New York Yankees are banking on their mostly aging veterans. Atlanta's one-time colossal starting pitching staff showed signs of rust last year and the Mets are hoping this is the year they get to play David and knock down the perennial Goliath.

In the American League East, the Red Sox are hoping a new century means they can finally lift "the curse" and win their first series title since Ruth was sold to New York to pay off gambling debts. The Yankees might have trouble defending the championship from the Sox and their upgraded out field.