

# Orlando Sentinel

## The way the WhirlyBall bounces

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Staff Writer

They could have called this sport “bumperjaibasketracquetball,” but “WhirlyBall” fits better on business cards.

At any rate, WhirlyBall — which combines elements of bumper cars, jai alai, basketball, racquetball and hockey — now has a home court on Orlando’s **International Drive**. Welcome to **WhirlyDome**, created in the building that formerly housed the **Sports Dominator** store.

Inside are two 50-foot-by-80-foot WhirlyBall courts with 10 electric **WhirlyBug** vehicles each. The object of the game is to score points by flinging a ball with a curved racket onto a round target on a backboard while maneuvering the bumper cars.

An official game consists of two teams of five players competing in four 15-minute periods, although visitors can purchase smaller units of playing time.

“It’s actually a long time to play. It’s pretty tiring,” says **Kelli-Ann Metropulos**, WhirlyDome’s sales and marketing manager. “You’re getting pretty banged around.”

One hand throws while the other controls the WhirlyBug. It takes awhile to get coordinated. Some folks get stuck in a circular pattern.

WhirlyDome supplies a referee who is stationed in a balcony. The ref, who doubles as color commentator over the loudspeakers, subtracts points for transgressions such as aggressive ramming, standing up, removing seatbelts or grabbing the ball with a bare hand. (No one wants a hand smashed between WhirlyBug and SolidWall.)

Referees have all the power in their hands. If necessary, they can flip the switch that cuts all the electricity to the game.

Spectators watch the action through windows that ring the courts. These concourses are home of WhirlyDome’s other activities, including a rare Formula I simulator, laser tag, two shortened bowling lanes, billiards tables, a small arcade and a full bar and restaurant called **Bloodhound Brew Pub & Eatery**, which features sing-



JACOB LANGSTON/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Two teams maneuver their way through a game of WhirlyBall inside the new WhirlyDome attraction, which opened last month on International Drive.

### WhirlyDome

**What:** Orlando’s home for Whirlyball plus laser tag, Formula I simulator, billiards, arcade, two bowling lanes and a full-service bar and restaurant.

**Where:** 6464 International Drive, Orlando

**When:** 11 a.m.-2 a.m. daily

**Cost:** WhirlyBall rates are \$10 per person for 15 minutes, \$20 for 30 minutes, \$30 for 60 minutes.

**Phone:** 407-212-3030

**Online:** WhirlyDome.com

ers twice a day.

“Our concept is an ‘eat, drink and compete’ sort of thing,” Metropulos says.

There are popular WhirlyBall outlets in Chicago, Detroit and other cities with the closest one to Orlando being in Atlanta, Metropulos says. The other WhirlyBall spots are in industrial parts of town, she says.

“This is the first WhirlyBall facility in retail space,” she says.

Activity at the I-Drive facility, which opened last month, picks up in late after-

noon and has another surge around 10 p.m., about the time nearby restaurants are closing.

Folks who had visited the space’s previous occupant may be surprised by the renovations, which include the addition of a 20-ton floor that serves as the upstairs WhirlyBall court. About \$7 million was spent on the project, Metropulos says.

Up there, the ceiling has a dome structure looking out to the sky, thus the name WhirlyDome.

Any action ricocheting off that dome — or walls and windows — is considered a live ball.

“Anywhere is fair game as long as you’re not intentionally hitting someone with the ball,” Metropulos says.

More and more tourists and locals have been checking out the attraction, she says. Groups without enough people to field an entire team are paired off with other waiting folks or matched up with members of the WhirlyDome staff.

“The staff loves the opportunity to go out and do that,” Metropulos says.

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### Elsewhere on International Drive

■ **Fun Spot** will celebrate its 14<sup>th</sup> birthday Saturday with a discount on its “unlimited” armbands. They normally sell for \$35, but from 10 a.m.-noon on June 9, they will go for \$14.

Folks can buy only six of the armbands, which give access to go-kart tracks and thrill rides, but they can be used for one day through the end of 2012. The deal must be purchased in person at Fun Spot locations on **International Drive** or in **Kissimmee**. (There will be free cookies for the first 1,000 folks on Saturday.)

“In 2010 we had 4,000 people show up for our birthday special. Last year it was 8,000 people,” says Fun Spot Attractions CEO John Arie Sr.

More info: [FunSpotAttractions.com](http://FunSpotAttractions.com).

■ **“Star Trek: The Exhibition”** is now open on I-Drive, sharing a building with “**CSI: The Experience**.” (They are both produced by **EMS Exhibits**.)

Included are props from the “Star Trek” films and TV series, as well as exhibits examining the science and the fiction presented on-screen. A version of the Star Trek attraction appeared last year at the **Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex**.

Admission is \$15.95 general (\$9.95 ages 5-12) for either “Star Trek” or “CSI” exhibit. Go through both for \$29.95 (\$18.95 ages 5-12). These attractions are at 7220 International Drive, Orlando.

More info: [StarTrek.com](http://StarTrek.com) or [CSiExhibit.com](http://CSiExhibit.com).