

[Team Knockerheads Add Evan Fitzgerald \(An Exclusive Interview\)](#)

Posted by eric anderson on Friday, October 25, 2013

The year 2013 was a great year for [Team Knockerheads](#). As a two or three-player team, they won the U.S. Midwest Championship, the 52-team winter Loppet tournament, the Des Moines Fall Klassic, Kasson, and Decorah, not to mention bringing home yet another podium finish at the U.S. Championship (3rd). The Freight Train, as we like to call them here at Kubbnation Magazine, was full steam ahead.



Team Knockerheads (The Freight Train) at the 2013 City of Lakes Loppet Tournament

Then, less than two weeks ago, Team Knockerheads added Evan Fitzgerald (Roscoe, IL) to their team. As unarguably one of the top three teams in the U.S., and many would say the best team in the U.S., adding a fourth player for their quest to raise the [Stapp King](#) and continue their domination at tournaments was very intriguing to a lot of people. We here at Kubbnation Magazine wanted to learn more and we wanted to get some more information to all the kubb fans that follow our magazine. What was the reasoning behind the move? What does 2014 look like for The Freight Train? What was Evan's reaction? And a whole lot more. We caught up with Josh Feathers, Chris Hodges, and Grant Scott in Des Moines, Iowa and Evan Fitzgerald in Roscoe, Illinois. A big thank you to Team Knockerheads for taking the time to answer all of our questions.

We think it is safe to say that you really shook up the U.S. kubb world with this addition. Talk us through what your reasoning was to move to a four-player team. Specifically, did you first think you wanted to add a fourth and look for that player, or did the idea that Evan was available make you consider adding a fourth?

Chris:

It's hard to look back at 2013 and say "This is a team that needed to make a change." I didn't see any glaring holes in our game plan or abilities, there were no deficits that made me worry about a matchup with any given opponent. Adding Evan wasn't about fixing a problem, it was about seizing the opportunity to add one of the top players in the game to our roster - a player that all three of us hold in the highest possible regard.

Grant:

I brought it to the table to add Evan because it was inevitable. This year I couldn't make the Madison tournament and Evan was the go-to fill-in for team Revolver. A death in the family almost prevented me from making nationals and Evan, may or may not know, was going to be the only option. Evan has played with both Chris and Dobbie, along with Evan and I committed to playing in several of the smaller tournaments next year that the others are unable to attend. Rather than splitting up the team, team name, and goals from tournament to tournament we now have a four man roster that allows unlimited options. Not to mention, Evan is one of the best. How other players and teams don't, didn't, and haven't realized this fact remains ludicrous. The kubbmunity had the chance, we rolled the dice!



Grant Scott (and Evan in the background) (Blind Photography)

You have stated more than once that your ultimate goal as a team is win the U.S. Championship and lift the Stapp King. Even winning five times with two or three of your players in 2013, you were not satisfied. What does Evan bring to the pitch for Team Knockerheads to get you to get your names on the Stapp King in 2014?
Chris:

Evan brings everything we want in a teammate. He loves Kubbation, he understands and respects the spirit of the game, and he is a competitor down to the marrow of his bones. He has a true passion for bettering himself, and it shows every time he appears at a tournament. There's a Bear Bryant quote that strikes a chord with me and I think describes Team Knockerheads to a T: "It isn't the will to win that matters - everyone has that. It's the will to PREPARE to win that matters." Anyone that knows Evan, has played against him, or has been lucky enough to line up beside him knows that he prepares as hard as anyone in the game.

Grant:

My goal isn't nationals anymore, I'm certain that it definitely remains a team goal. With that being said, Evan adds another person and perspective on the pitch. It adds to our rotation and allows us to mix up our routine. Decorah was by far the most loose we got with our rotation, and it was a blast. I look forward to more of the revolving rotation on the pitch. In hindsight, when that time comes to raise the Stapp King... it will be a huge relief and accomplishment. Since I've been playing for two years I never got to see Dobbie win nationals. So it will be huge for me to get to enjoy seeing Dobbie, Chris, and Evan raise the KING. All three are extremely deserving.

Josh:

Evan has the kubb acumen, the pitch presence, and the passion to take our team to another level. When I watch Evan play, there is something that really gives me a positive vibe. His demeanor on the pitch and the discussions we have off the pitch are on a level of strategy and analysis that will give us an advantage. Oh yeah, did I mention he can hit stuff down as well? He is currently too well-mannered to be a Knockerhead, but we have some time to mold him into a boisterous and raucous individual.

You now have A) the person that won back-to-back Bästa Inkastare awards at the U.S. Championship and one of the top-level blasters in the U.S. (Josh), B) the person who most people consider the best eight-meter player in the nation, and we will say he is the best eight-meter player in the nation, and he really showed that off, yet again, in Dallas (Grant), C) the person many consider one of the best all-around player in the country and we named him the best all-around player in the Country earlier this year (Chris), and D) Evan Fitzgerald, who if you know kubb, you know he is also one of the top all-around players in the game as well. You only have six batons. When you play as a four-player team, do you know yet how you are going to distribute them? Will each player have their specific specialty? Let us know your thoughts at this time.

Chris:

Adding Evan as a 4th player also brings a subtle but important aspect - Flexibility. A year ago the prevailing wisdom was that the smaller a team was the more competitive they would be (and that is true to a point), but at the Minnesota Winter Loppet and Decorah Nordic-Fest I think that Team Knockerheads demonstrated that bringing 3 players to a 2-player tournament could actually be an advantage if you know yourselves well enough to use your individual strengths to their fullest. When we competed as 3-in-2 we didn't restrict ourselves to "2-2-2", and when we bring 4-in-3 I guarantee that we won't be limiting ourselves to "1,2,1,2 ; 2,1,2,1" either. Having more choices means you can implement a richer strategy, and the right strategy goes a long way in this game. You will still see Dobbie drilling for us, and you will still see Grant firing away at 8m, but everything else will be fluid and situation dependent.

Grant:

Titles and awards are kind of a thorn in my side. I don't care for the attention that it takes from a team in win or defeat; in addition, the criteria and determining factor is biased at the least. This team has four members that legitimately could, can, and will claim stakes at being the best all-around player, inkastare, blaster, and 8m. If the new four man roster creates any problem it will be each of us wanting the last baton at an important moment. I know, such a problem to deal with. It will be interesting to see how the batons are divided. I imagine the batons will sort themselves out as we are playing depending on how we are all feeling at the moment.

Josh:

I'm with Grant on this one. We are a team; we support each other in the roles we play, those roles can change based on the day, and we practice at every facet of the game. Team titles are what's important. To answer one question about our direction from a 4 player team in a 3 player tournament; the current plan is that Chris/Evan/Grant will open on turn 1. From there, it's a big ass question mark. The Loppet will really give us a feel for what comes natural, but with the entire team being really savvy and having a lot of kubb under our belts, I don't see any "should I go; should you go?" moments. Someone will simply grab a baton, line up, and hit what they were aiming for.



Chris Hodges (Blind Photography)

You are not shy about letting people know about certain aspects of your training regimen, which we love and think is great for the game. Specifically, you have mentioned in the past that a lot of it involves playing against each other. Three of you live in Des Moines, which is in central Iowa. Evan lives in northern Illinois. Will your training regimen change up a little?

Chris:

I hope Evan is able to make a trip or two to Des Moines, but it's impractical to think that there will be a lot of full team practices. 4-player 2-on-2 scramblers for team scrimmages would be fantastic though!

Grant:

The training regimen will remain the same. Chris and Dobbie will continue to throw countless kubbs and batons, while analyzing and examining the percentages. Evan is on his own for what he does, whatever it is, it works. Emails, text messages, and Skype will probably become a key factor in the development of our off-season routine.

Evan:

Fortunately, Michelle's and my parents live in eastern Iowa and there will be opportunity for me to make it to Des Moines when I go back to Iowa. At a minimum, I would like to get there fairly early in the spring to see where I stack up and what parts of the game I need to work on to help the team. Hopefully, I can make an additional trip shortly before Nationals. In addition, I plan on squaring off against players from my curling/kubb club, Dave Giese, the Kettle Moraine Kubb club and hopefully even the Fox Valley gang to stay sharp. Put me in the category of throwing countless batons and analyzing my percentages. I spend time breaking down techniques and trying to analyze my throws by video as well. I am always looking for ways to be excellent consistently.

Evan, seriously, Team Knockerheads won five tournaments in 2013 and finished third at the U.S. Championship (second in 2012). You are joining what any sane kubb fan would say is the best or second best kubb team in the United States of America, and we here at KubbNation Magazine will add a team that we

would not be afraid to bet money on against any three-person team on the planet Earth. You have to be pretty excited. Tell us how you are feeling.

I am very excited and a little bit scared to be honest. I feel I have a lot to prove to myself to play with the Knockerheads and I will use that to push myself even harder and prepare next year. I was very disappointed in the month leading up to 2013 US Nationals. Goofy Kubbers were not in sync as a team and the miscommunication within the group led to a frustrating weekend for me. Cal Merath and I had a discussion a few days after and it became apparent that we just didn't have the same goals for kubb and the US Championships. I can respect that we all have our priorities in life and he is still a very good friend. We left the conversation with the understanding that I was going to do whatever it took to give me the best chance to win a National Championship. On the surface it may seem a bit selfish, but I recognized that I have a lot of passion for kubb and want to see my name on the Stapp King someday. I really want to be part of a team that shares my goals, so I started analyzing what I perceived my best options were for 2014.



Evan Fitzgerald (right) playing together with his son.

Evan, you were looking to join a new team for 2014, specifically for the U.S. Championship. Did you have a few offers? Any that you are willing to share?

I started looking at who I determined as elite players and 2-person teams that I thought I could plug into and make us contenders. I had quickly crossed the teams that I felt were the top 3 teams (Knockerheads, Kubbsicles, and Kingpins) off my list as they were already a great 3 player team. One team quickly jumped up on my radar and that was the Kubb Snipers. I get a lot of inspiration from both Chads'; Bevers for his passion for kubb and general outlook on life in which we share similar mindsets in many things; Parsons for his dedication to make himself stronger mentally and physically. After discussing the possibility with Chad Bevers, the timing was difficult as I realized they are actually a 3-person team and it was just a situation at Nationals this year where Matt wasn't able to attend. They couldn't commit at this time.

I consider Dave Giese as one of the elite players and living in Madison was a big advantage for practicing together. We are going to play a couple tournaments together next year and were trying to figure out a 3rd player for Nationals that we could both be comfortable as a teammate. We had both discussed that joining Kubb Snipers as a 4-man team would be our best option if it worked out that they only had 2 players next year. We proposed it to Chad Bevers and decided to wait and see what happened next year.

There were a couple other possibilities that I had talked with, but may have included breaking up a team or 2, so I probably shouldn't share. But, would like to let them know that everyone I approached or approached me was strongly considered and hope to play with them at a tournament in the future. It's hard having these conversations with these players and teams and then go a different direction when another opportunity comes up as I consider all of them good friends. Had to remind myself of the promise that I made to pursue the best option available for winning a National title and I believe that playing with the Knockerheads is the best opportunity in the world.

Evan, what was your first thought when Team Knockerheads asked you to join?

First thought when I read the message from Grant was "Wow, who are they replacing?" But, then Grant clarified that they were asking me as a 4th player and it took me about 2 seconds to remind myself of my goal and decide that this was the best opportunity. I was shocked and happy, but was also concerned that I had to now have the

conversation with Dave that I was joining another team. I think it went well... he is a great player and even a better person. I hope to team with him in future tournaments. I love the way the Knockerheads approach the game and have total respect for all 3 players on and off the pitch. It feels good to be part of something big.

Evan, walk us through how it all happened. How did the conversations go?

Grant and I had talked about playing together as a 2 man team at a few tournaments next year. I consider him the best player in the US and was really looking forward to playing with him. One morning last week he sent me a Facebook message asking me to join them. Usually, I see messages pretty quickly, but had a hectic day at work and didn't see it for a few hours. We chatted a bit more and was understood that a 4th gives them flexibility if someone can't attend a tournament and also builds even more of a nucleus for a potential run at a World Championship someday. Shortly after chatting with Grant, I received messages from Chris and Josh welcoming me to the team. Then it kind of hit me that I really have to work hard to even be on the same pitch with these guys and earn my chances to throw batons.

Evan, is this the end of Goofy Kubbers? Can we expect to see a Goofy Kubbers team or two on a pitch in 2014?

The hard part is finding tournaments to fit in with Goofy Kubbers next year. I have committed 2 tournaments to play with Dave Giese (I am very excited about that) and then we need to figure out what tournaments we will be attending as Team Knockerheads. When my family plays together we will be the Goofy Kubbers, but nothing set for next year. Goofy Kubbers 1.2 (Cal and I) is a bit up in the air right now. Cal is a very talented kubb player as he showed at Des Moines Klassic in 2012 and I believe we will play at a tournament again at some point, but we don't have anything set at this time.

Josh played with Evan at the Lindsborg, KS tournament and Chris played with Evan at the Madison, WI tournament. As a teammate, what is it like to play with Evan?

Chris:

My biggest take-away from playing with Evan in Madison (in addition to exceptional talent and a team-first mentality) was his composure. We were a team stacked with talent, but his mental toughness made him stand out. We made a 10-0 run to the semi-finals, then dropped 3 in a row and were losing game 2 of the match for third place, staring a 4th place finish in the face. A lot of us dialed back a little, accepting what seemed inevitable, but Evan was unfazed, playing on with the same stony determination he had displayed all day. That's what we want in a Knockerhead - unyielding confidence and commitment.

Josh:

The biggest takeaway for me was how he is like a skeleton key. You can snap Evan in pretty much any team at any role and he finds ways to mesh with the team, to strengthen the team, and to find out what the team needs to adapt to win games. Evan was able to come into the maelstrom called "Feathers' Family Kubb" and get everyone working at the same speed and play style. It's no secret that when my Uncle and I play we have a hard time getting in sync. He knows it. I know it. It's something we continue to work on and will continue to work on as we play together. I think that was the biggest thing I saw when playing in Lindsborg is that Evan got us in sync quickly and I didn't notice the magic until the ride home reflecting on the day.



Josh Feathers (Blind Photography)

Josh, the U.S. Championship awarded you the Bästa Inkastare award the past two years. Evan is unarguably in the top 10 of U.S. inkastares. Any chance Evan will throw a kubb or two in a 2014 tournament when you are also playing?

Chris:

{Ahem} Let me jump in on this one. This team is not, and has never been, short on talent at the Inkastare position. When Dwayne was here in Des Moines & playing on the team he was one of the best drillers in the club. Anybody who has seen Grant drill lately knows he's at the top of the game too. Evan has put on some AMAZING displays, and I don't think I'm too shabby either. We are all among the best. But we are not THE best - Dobbie is. As long as he is physically capable of throwing kubbs he's the guy.

Now, if Dobbie breaks his hand (or is running the tournament, or can't make a trip) then Grant, Evan, and I will have some tough decisions to make. Fortunately for us, none of those three options are necessarily the WRONG one. ;0)

Evan:

Josh IS the best inkastare in the US. I am fine with whatever role I need to play to make us a stronger team.

Josh:

With 3 people now knocking on the door to toss kubbs, it forces you to practice all the time and invent new ways to be as productive and efficient as possible in that position. That's the strength of our team. We bring out the best in each other. We push each other hard. I credit any award won as a team award. Team Knockerheads won the Bästa.

Now, when the day comes where a teammate is (as Grant would say) stacking them like skyscrapers and the team all agrees a new inkastare is ready to take the lead, I'll hand the torch with a smile, and do everything I can to make them the best inkastare in the world. I may also practice a little on the side in an attempt to reclaim that role. That's what we do; we compete in the backyard to compete on Sunday in Eau Claire, or in Gotland.

What does the 2014 Tournament schedule look like for Team Knockerheads? With four people now on the team, are you hoping to play as three or four players in every tournament you play in? Could you envision all four of you playing in a two-player minimum tournament and fielding two teams? Is this 4/6 of a 2014 Dallas Oktoberfest team and/or 4/6 of a team that might make a trip to the World Championship?

Chris:

As far as I know we are currently only planning on hitting three tournaments as a full 4-player roster - The Winter Loppet, The U.S. National Kubb Championship, and the Decorah Nordic-Fest U.S. Midwest Championship. Aside from that we'll be playing it by ear and getting as much of our roster to as many tournaments as we can.

At this time I don't see me playing on any team other than Six-Pack at Dallas. For me that tournament is more about making the trip with and playing as family (I always play with my brother-in-law and his wife) than it is about playing my most competitive Kubb, and I'd be willing to bet that Dobbie feels the same way about Steve and the Shufflers.

Grant:

2014 will be a full schedule. We are going to get to as many tournaments as possible. Whether it be a two, three, or four man roster depends on our availability. If it is a two person tourney and all four of us can make it, you may see us split things up to see if we could have an all Knockerheads final. This roster is definitely the start-up for the Worlds roster. Dallas would be exciting, but a lot of people depend on each of us as a member of existing teams. It will be interesting to see if the teams change up a bit to accommodate that move next year in Dallas. Also depends on how the director handles that move considering the lock at 16 teams, and past/existing teams having first shot.

Josh:

The beauty of our team is that we will never suffer from GroupThink. Everyone on the team has their own opinions, strategies, ideas, and visions of the future. Nobody is scared to share what is on their mind. It's very refreshing.

Evan:

2014 will keep me busy. I am playing at Appleton and Kettle Moraine with Dave Giese. Need to figure out if I am going to be able to return to Kansas to defend title with T5. The rest of the tournaments depend on which ones Knockerheads can commit. I loved playing in Dallas, but it will probably be an every other year thing for me as the date conflicts with a popular curling tournament. Trying to get a team to the first Canadian National championship will be very tempting.

Josh:

We added Evan so that we can have a Team Knockerheads Curling Team as well.

We cannot help but look ahead to September 20, 2014, when Des Moines Kubb hosts their Fifth Annual Fall Kubb Klassic (aka The Meatgrinder). If the pattern continues, Josh will be the tournament-day official. You will now have the opportunity to have three players on your team at the Klassic. Can we expect the Fall Klassic to go to a three-player team format (sorry, we had to ask)?

Chris:

Discussions about team size at the 5th Fall Kubb Klassic are currently underway, but I assure you that the decision will be based on what we feel is best for all of the players and the system, and won't be influenced by a possible 3-man Knockerheads team. As I said earlier, we don't have any problems taking three players to a 3-Baton max event.

Grant:

The Klassic will have an awkward feel as the winning team will not defend the title. It will be the job of Chris, Evan, and myself to earn the championship. I'm not currently on the board so I have no say in the decision, but I see the Klassic staying in a two person minimum. The tournament is gaining momentum and really provides the opportunity for the best of the best to team up and demonstrate what they can do on the pitch.

Evan, what number is going to be on your jersey?

28 ... Big Adrian Peterson fan.

It is no secret that Team Knockerheads has a reputation as one of the more serious teams, specifically at the big tournaments. You are coming to play your best and win 1st place medals (which is what many attempt to do). Match that up with being very successful, and it is safe to say that you might not be everyone's favorite team to cheer for right now. Evan on the other hand, even though he is very serious on the pitch, we don't know anyone that does not cheer for Evan and we can all admit that his smile and saying "Good Kubbing" before a match are a bright spot for anyone's kubb tournament day.

Evan, are you prepared to play for the N.Y. Yankees of U.S. Kubb and possibly have a high percent of spectators cheering for the other team?

Grant, Chris, and Josh, are you prepared to possibly gain some new fans?

Evan:

Funny you mention the Yankees reference as I told my brother it felt like I was being called up to the Yankees. :) It

will be a new experience having spectators pay attention to matches that I play in, but I think I am good about focusing on the objective in front of me and blocking peripheral activity. It will be fun.

Chris:

We aren't successful by accident. We don't win tournaments because we hit a hot streak at the right time, or because we have a soft schedule, or because we just get lucky. We work all year long, putting everything we've got into constantly improving ourselves so we can consistently play at the highest level. We know some other teams work hard - we want to work harder.

We do our best to form strong bonds with other clubs, teams, and players. On tournament day we make the effort and take the time to seek out, shake hands, and reunite with as many members of Kubbnation as we can - even as our competitors are warming up.

We have worked to contribute to Kubbnation in all kinds of ways, from assisting in refining the rule set, to promoting the game locally and nationwide (including tournaments that aren't our own), to sharing our experience and insights on tactics and training with anyone who cares to spend a few minutes reading our blogs or asking us questions on game day.

If that is the kind of team you want to root against, then go right ahead. Tired of seeing us win? Then do what it takes to beat us. If you don't think we earned our successes then it shouldn't be too hard. If you DO think we earned them, then what the hell is your problem? What kind of person looks at someone passionately and diligently working toward their goals, and hates them for succeeding? A small one.