

---

# A KNIGHT in Shining Armor

---

A *Joust* master breaks world record on quest to play all 50 states

By Ben Thomas Payne



**L**onnie McDonald was on a mission: hit 10 million points on Joust cabinets in all 50 states. That may sound like a tall order for the 55-year-old owner of a textile cleaning company in Kansas City, but if his collection of world records is any indication — the oldest person to play 50 straight hours of Joust (52 years old), the most Joust cabinets "rolled" (as in rolling over the cabinet's limit of 9,999,999 points) in a single day (three machines), and the most consecutive Joust rolls (14 rolls in 14 days), among many other superhuman feats — his latest achievement is no surprise.



Analog regular Andrew Arnold watches on as McDonald aims for a new Houst record.

For those few of you who have never heard of Joust, it's a platforming game in which the player controls a knight riding a flying ostrich (a stork, if you are player two), maneuvering it to take out enemy knights riding buzzards. Developed by Williams Electronics in 1982, Joust is credited with popularizing two-player cooperative play.

"It has complexity to it," said McDonald. "It's not a pattern game. I never gravitated to pattern games. You've

got flap, and you've got left-right, and that controls everything in the game. Simplistic, yet complex."

McDonald is well on the way to playing through his cross-country tour. When I visited him in October at Analog Arcade Bar in Davenport, Iowa, he had only two more states to check off his list: Maine and Rhode Island. He's played in all kinds of venues beyond the traditional arcade: houses, museums, cold storage, Disney, and garages.



Photos by: Ben Thomas Payne



## Analog Bar



### Hours

M-F:  
4PM to 2AM  
Saturday:  
Noon to 2 AM  
Sunday:  
Noon to Midnight

### Location

302 Brady Street • Davenport, IA 52801  
[www.analogarcadebar.com](http://www.analogarcadebar.com)

"I played in a garage where I was put in the edge of the garage so that everybody could see me play," said McDonald. "It started raining on my back."

Inclement weather is no match for McDonald, who has the game down to a science. In fact, he describes Joust as a combination between chess and physics.

"When people try to get good at this, I always tell them to fly less," said McDonald. "This is a game of physics—everything's coming to *you*. You can't outfly the enemy. It's the difference between trying to track ten things bouncing off everything and each other, and getting them to just come to you. My phrase is 'flying is dying'."

Not long into McDonald's attempt to beat the world record for the highest Joust score in a five-hour period, a number of amateur arcaders ambled over to watch the master work his magic.

"I'm a huge fan of Joust," said Andrew Arnold, who came to Analog just to see McDonald play. "But I'm a bigger fan of watching a master play."

You don't become a master without years of practice and—at least in McDonald's case—years of rest. At age 23, just two years after Williams Electronics released Joust in 1982, McDonald cut himself off entirely from the game before it got the better of him. For 27 years, he was without Joust. For 27 years, he was a knight without a lance.

At the time, it may have seemed like McDonald

# Game Room

was making an early retirement. But really, he was just hunkering down for an extended hibernation. It wasn't until his dad passed away that he began to revisit things from his past. One of those things was Joust.

Another motivator: his legacy. Even though Williams Electronics declared him the "Joust World Champion" in 1982 after he ran up over 37 million points after playing for 24 hours straight on one token, he didn't make the Guinness or Twin Galaxies scoreboards—not because McDonald wasn't good enough, but because, as a young lad, he had never heard of those scoreboards. After more than a quarter century of dormancy, it was finally time to set the record straight.

"Arguably, at 55 years old, I'm not as good as I was when I was 21 when I started playing," said McDonald, who has since posted in those Guinness and Twin Galaxies scoreboards. "I'm not as fast. My mind doesn't work as sharp as it did at 20. I'm probably smarter on *how* I play, but I'm not as fast at playing."

Sure, to his fellow Joust masters, there may be a slight slowdown between twenties Lonnie and fifties Lonnie. But to the casual spectator, he is as fast as lightning. And

he needs to be to break the world record for most points scored in a five-hour period—which is exactly what he did at Analog, notching 11,013,000 points through 503 levels (or "waves", in Joust parlance) to set a new J-ROK world record.

"The score was so high that I had no real frame of reference to go by," said Analog co-owner Dan Bush. "Lonnie sat there for five hours and didn't move. His stamina alone was impressive, but then when you put ten million points on top of it, you realize what a feat it really was. I doubt I'll see anything like it again." ☺

If you want to follow McDonald's record breaking attempts or to see what records he holds, go to —

[joustmaster.com/joust-records-and-accolades/](http://joustmaster.com/joust-records-and-accolades/)

