

Hyper-speed, 2K kinetics make “Quick Baseball” a hit

By Jen Singer
Courier Sports

Okay youth fitness world. You say you want a revolution?

Here’s one to consider — there’s now a way to battle childhood obesity through... baseball.

That’s right, baseball.

Generally viewed as a slow-moving sport that strikes out when attempting to mesh with modern physical fitness objectives, baseball is undergoing a radical transformation on the recreational sports level.

Meet Quickball — literally “Quick Baseball” — a rapidly-growing youth sports program that turns pastime into fasttime.

The goal is simple — teach today’s kids the joy of our national pastime in a hyperspeed setting that jives with 2K kinetics.

Thanks to the efforts of two sets of brothers (one set famous, the other not), Quickball has become a literal hit in physical education departments and after-school centers across the country.

Using a revolutionary set of concepts that promote constant player movement and widespread success, the fast-paced diamond program dispels the notion that baseball is too slow to promote physical fitness.

It’s an approach that has already brought thousands of kids to the plate (many for the first time) and has thousands more waiting anxiously on deck.

An active form of baseball

“Baseball has taken a beating on the rec level in recent years,” explains Chris Mackie, one of two Mackie brothers who created the organization USA Quickball in the late 1990’s. “And we’ve heard all the reasons why — ‘baseball is too slow, baseball is boring, baseball isn’t active enough for the kids of today.’

“But the one thing we know for sure is that the *activity* of baseball is fun. Hitting a homerun is still one of the greatest thrills there is in all of sports.”

But, as Mackie is quick to point out, the traditional rules of baseball do not meet the needs of today’s recreational sports professional — especially physical education teachers.

“We have talked with hundreds and hundreds of instructors across the country and the question we get asked all of the time is this — ‘How do we teach baseball in class when space is limited, our class size is too large, class time is too short and the game isn’t active for the group as a whole?’

Filling those needs is why Quickball was created.

“Baseball,” Mackie continues, “needed a new twist — a fun program that was easy to teach and exciting to play, regardless of your skill level. It had to involve the greatest aspects of baseball and fuse them with ‘X’ game dynamics.”

Ripkens join in

As it turned out, another set of brothers agreed with the Mackies. They’re the famous ones. Their names are Cal and Bill Ripken.

Introduced to Quickball after it had become an underground success on the college intramural level (a host of major universities such as Oklahoma State and Johns Hopkins still have thriving Quickball programs), Cal and Bill immediately embraced the concept. Like the Mackies, the two famous former Major League baseball players had also noticed that old school “sandlot” ball had, for the most part, fallen by the wayside.

In order to help with their mission to grow baseball at the grass roots level, the Ripkens joined forces with the Mackies in 2003.

The results have been impressive. Working on various projects in association with the Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation, Quickball has been implemented in nearly 800 Boys & Girls Clubs, Police Athletic Leagues and school physical education departments.

Quickball has also been used for events and programs



Quickball or “Quick Baseball” offers a number of physically-active ways to play baseball in the gym or outdoors for today’s kids. Here two youngsters race through a game in Atlanta. Below, students learn and play Quickball during middle school and elementary school P.E. class. — Photos courtesy of Ripken Quickball

presented by USA Baseball, the National Alliance of Youth Sports, Major League Baseball Fanfest, the National Intramural Sports Association, AAHPERD National Conference and the U.S. State Department’s international sports envoy program.

Today, it is estimated that more than 250,000 youngsters participate in a Quickball event or program each year.

Fast and fun

So just what is it that makes Quickball so popular?

Keith Mackie says it’s a combination of factors, including the most obvious — it’s fun to play.

“Quickball enables kids of all skill levels to actively experience the highlight-reel stuff like homeruns and sliding catches,” explains Keith, a lifelong fan of baseball who

holds a doctorate in education. “And it does so in a way that doesn’t embarrass the less-skilled player.

“It stresses game speed, total player involvement and player success — three components that are vital in today’s P.E. class.”

Expanding into new areas

Asked what’s next for Quickball, Mackie said continuing to grow the program in school

P.E. and as a P.E. after-school club activity are top priorities. Also on the agenda is forging new partnerships with community-minded partners who love the game of baseball and want to give all kids a chance to play.

And considering the current war on childhood obesity and the fact that baseball needs a boost in popularity in the inner city, the timing for Quickball could not be better.

“Chris and I are now in our 12th year with USA Quickball and the need for this program has never been greater,” Keith concluded. “We have presented at a number of regional and national conferences and the feedback is always positive. We’re grateful for that and just want to continue to expand the program in all areas.”



As a result of its growth, Quickball tournaments and competitions have begun popping up. Above, teams compete during a summer tournament. At left, a competition is held at the Major League Baseball All-Star Fanfest.