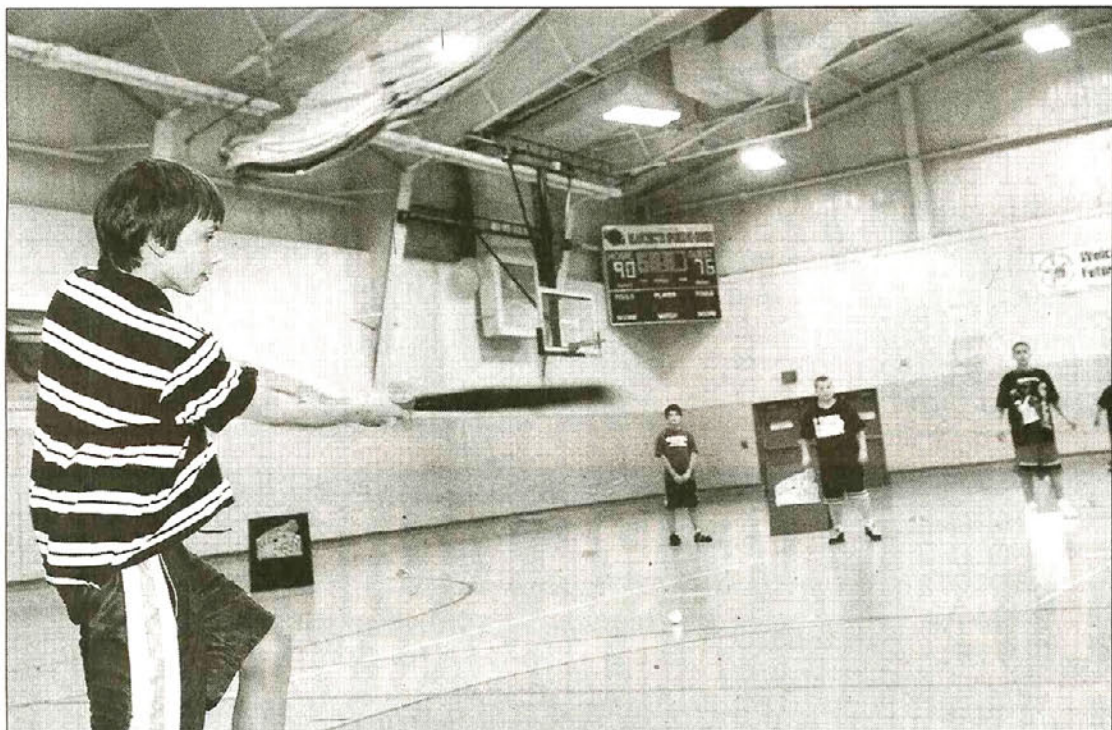


CONNECTICUT POST

NEW ENGLAND NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

THURSDAY April 24, 2008



Autumn Pinette/Staff photographer

Seth Shuster, 11, of Shelton, connects with the ball during a game of quickball Wednesday at the Boys & Girls Club of the Lower Naugatuck Valley during a visit from the Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation on its Play Ball Tour for Kids. Pitching is Cassie Clemente, program coordinator.

Getting into the swing of things

By **MELVIN MASON**
Staff writer

SHELTON — With one quick swing of the bat, Joseph Ciliberti was off and running toward first base with a smile on his face.

Shortly after touching the bag and giving a friend a high-five, he was back in line, waiting for his next opportunity to take a whack at the ball.

"It's fun because it gets you moving," the young man said before scurrying back to the outfield.

That's because Joseph, 8, wasn't playing baseball on Wednesday. He and other members of the Boys and Girls Club of the Lower Naugatuck Valley were introduced to quickball, a game similar to the national pastime — but a lot quicker.

The youngsters learned about it from representatives of the Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation, who have been visiting local groups that received grants and equipment to encourage kids to play baseball and stay out of trouble.

The local Boys and Girls Club was awarded a \$150,000 grant by the Baltimore-based foundation, enabling the club to run a baseball fundamentals program on Sundays with local high school baseball coaches. It will also allow the club to teach and play more quickball games. The grant also includes about \$4,000 in baseball equipment.



Mason Coleman, 8, takes a cut at a high hard one Wednesday at the Boys & Girls Club.

Mike Cotela, director of operations at the Boys and Girls Club, said the grant will help the club in its goals of getting kids involved in positive activities like playing team sports. It will also give kids an opportunity to learn more about the baseball.

"It gives kids a chance to learn about

the fundamentals of baseball in a fun environment," he said. "They get to learn how to play the game the right way."

Wednesday was their introduction to quickball, a fast-paced game that involves hitting a ball and running to a base. But that's where the similarities end.

Players get just one swing and must run to first base, regardless of where it goes. Teams have a time limit for batting and can earn points for where they hit a ball, as well as catching it and tossing it to a teammate to put into a bucket.

Cassie Clemente, a program coordinator for the Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation, said youngsters who may not be interested in baseball at first can get encouraged to play through quickball because of the pace.

"We're trying to get kids into baseball," she said. "We've taken all the fast-moving parts."

Demetrius Maggiore, 9, of Shelton, gave the game his approval because he gets to swing a lot.

"I like to hit the ball far," he said. "When I hit it, the ball goes far."

The baseball fundamentals clinics are open Sundays, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., through June 22 at the clubhouse, 1 Positive Place. Participants do not have to be Boys and Girls Club members but must be at least 8 years.

For more information, call 924-9329.