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Community NEWS



Hundreds take part in state tournament for new sports craze

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But there's a hidden agenda to Quickball — getting kids in shape and getting them interested in the "concept" of baseball.

The 10-year-old North Carolina-born sport made its way to Sanford Friday as 10 teams from across the state converged for a tournament sponsored by the Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation's Badges for Baseball, a program that gets young people and law enforcement officers on the same field and (hopefully) on the same page.

Sanford was chosen because of its central location, according to Boys & Girls Clubs of Lee County's middle school director Timir Cox, but the city has also become a hot spot for the new sport.

"It's a game that helps kids develop a love for baseball," Cox said. "The kids here love it."

The Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation has been responsible for getting Quickball its national exposure, but the game was actually created in Winston-Salem by brothers Chris and Keith Mackie, both of whom were on hand for Friday's tournament in Sanford.

The game came out of the duo's desire to create a baseball game without all the tie-ups that make baseball long and hard to follow.

"We just never grew up," Chris Mackie said. "We actually started it as an intramural game for college at North Carolina State, and it was introduced to kids through the Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation as an outreach program. Now, there's 600 to 700 clubs that have it, plus school P.E. departments and other colleges. We're amazed how it's caught on."

Players on Friday were playing the "Hit for the Cycle" version of Quickball, meaning in Round 1 they hit for singles, Round 2 they hit for doubles, and so on. The 10-on-10 format Friday had 10 players in the field while the other team batted. An official pitches for both teams, using a foam ball that travels a fraction of the length of a real baseball (one that doesn't require a leather glove); and hitters get one swing.

If they hit the ball and make it to first base (or second base in Round 2) before the ball reaches that base, they get a point. They get two points for a home run. The rules get a little more complicated in Rounds 3 and 4, but the scoring is much the same.

There are few pauses, and at times, the action can seem overwhelming (and difficult to score). But the kids love it. Daivonn Rollins, 10, of Sanford said Quickball has gotten him interested in baseball enough to where he wants to sign up and play Little League next year.

"It's better because you get to run the bases even if you don't hit it," Rollins said. "It's faster."

SANFORD — No manager's trips to the mound. No adjusting your batting gloves between each pitch. No warm-ups. No walks. No pick-off attempts.

In others words, none of that "filler" that makes baseball so time consuming and ... ahem ... boring to today's kids.

The game is called Quickball, and the point is to keep the game going — a nonstop version of baseball for a generation of kids more likely to play a video game than join a baseball league.



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