

# SPORTS

## This game's a blast

**JEROME WATT**  
Staff Writer

It's a blast. BlastBall that is. The sport, designed to teach young tots the fundamentals of baseball, has caught on in York Region. Different leagues in the region are using the system with children as young as two.

"It's a learning experience in a non-competitive manner," said Brian Gordon, vice-president of house league for the Thornhill Baseball Club.

The club introduced the game this season.

"Before this, we had nothing for this age group," Mr. Gordon said.

The game is played with six players per team, although teams can have fewer players. The defensive players take an infield or outfield position and the batter hits the ball off a tee.

If the hitter can reach a base before one of the opposing players catches the ball in the air or catches it and yells blast, he scores a run.

Typically, there is only one base in the game and, when players step on it, it emits a loud honk noise.

Players use a foam bat and soft ball, so no gloves are required. The game can be played on any grassy location and, because it takes up a small area, it can also be played indoors.

Depending on the objective of the coach and the children's age level, rules, including distances to bases, can be changed. Mr. Gordon said his league is tweaking the game to see what works best.

Next year, the Thornhill Baseball Club is considering reducing the age of the participants from six to five.

The response to the game has been overwhelmingly positive, said Sharon Kravitz, a mother with two children in the league.

Ms Kravitz, who is convener of the BlastBall division, was instrumental in getting the league up and running.

"There's nothing for kids (this age) in an organized community event," she

said. "They're too young for soccer. They were hoping to get 20 kids, now they have 49 kids. It's a night out for the kids."

She said the game is good for young children, such as her sons Josh and Jake, both four, because no score is kept and there is no pressure to win.

Five-year-old Aaron Arieli, a BlastBall participant in the Thornhill club, said he likes the noise the base makes when he steps on it and the chance to hit the ball.

"I like hitting," he said.

Bob McKillop, executive director for Baseball Ontario, said a large number of leagues and associations across the province are now using the BlastBall system.

"The response back to us has been exceptional," he said.

Mr. McKillop said BlastBall is a good way to attract children to the sport at an early age.

"We recommend it for five and six-year-olds," he said. "We needed something that got our kids involved earlier. The bottom line is we've created something they enjoy."

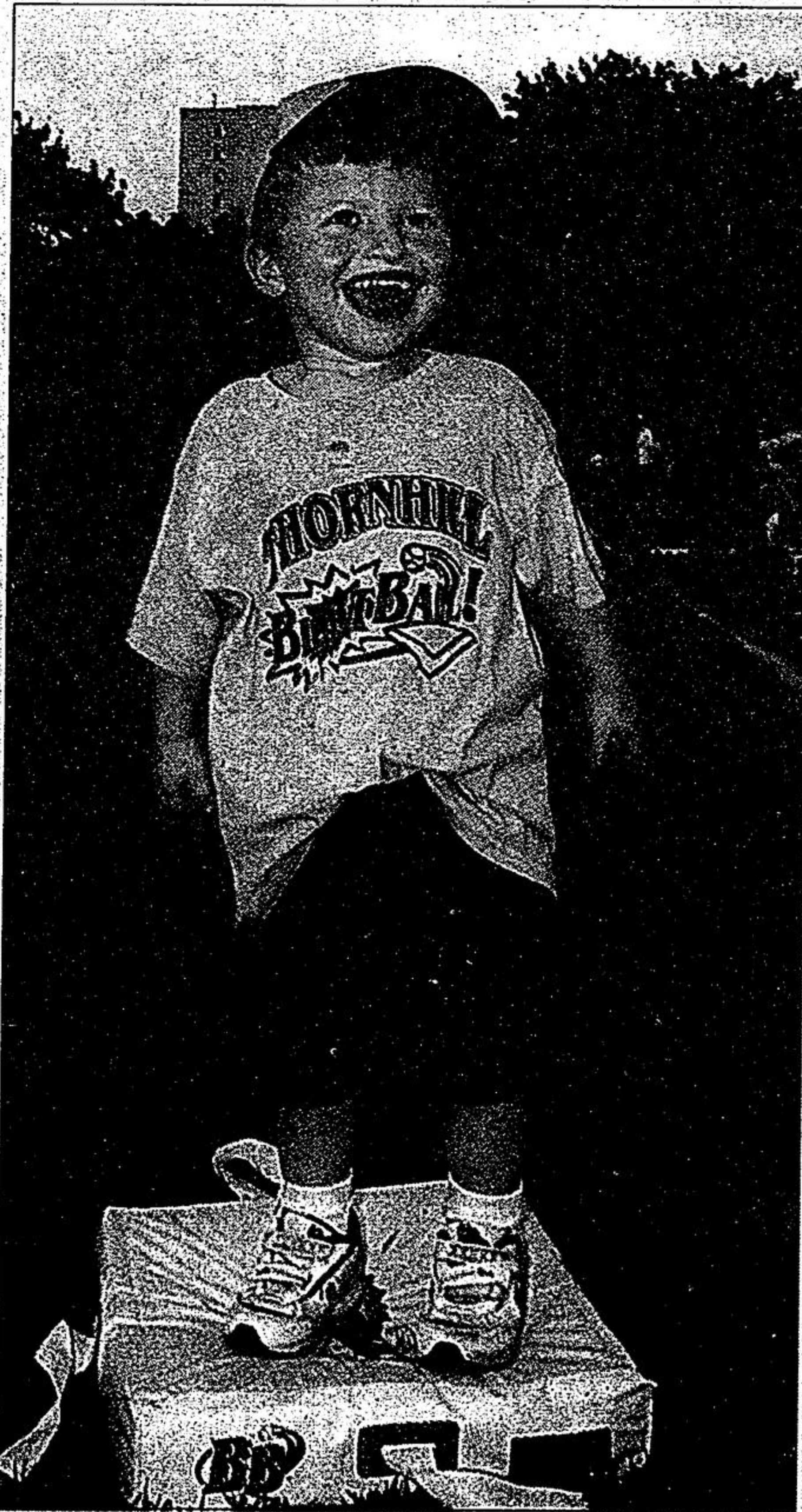
Mr. McKillop said involving children in a baseball-related activity at an early age may help retain their interest in the sport as they get older.

"It should be instantly changed to keep it interesting," said Mr. McKillop, adding coaches should keep in mind they are dealing with younger players.

"You need to make it fun. You have to be silly," said Sheila Epton, coach and vice-president of the Newmarket Minor Softball Association. She ran a BlastBall program for the association last fall and winter.

When Ms Epton coaches younger children, she plays games, such as pretending to be a duck, to get kids warmed up. She also said children's focus should be placed on skills development, not winning.

"I'd like to see more associations take the win or lose out of it," she said. "From age 10 down, kids don't need that."



STAFF PHOTO/JEROME WATT

Thornhill BlastBaller Jake Kravitz stomps on the honking base — a key feature that helps keeps the attention of younger players focused on the game. The Thornhill Baseball Club has had a good response after introducing BlastBall this year.



Mitchell Brown

## Been There, Done That It's Frisbee with attitude

The ultimate what, exactly? That's the only question I could come up with prior to meeting ultimate player Barry Goldlist.

Mind you, I'm not saying he's the "ultimate player" in the sense he's the best athlete in the world. At 39, the Richmond Hill property manager may be a little past his prime to hold that title.

No, I'm calling him an ultimate player just as I would call Curtis Joseph a hockey player. As in, he plays a game called ultimate.

*It's a sport that combines  
athleticism and  
comraderie. Ultimate players  
are really the best  
people I've known.*

It gets confusing sometimes, but you catch on after a while.

Anyway, back to the original question: Why ultimate?

"It's the ultimate sport," Mr. Goldlist said. "I remember playing softball and baseball and thinking that was a sport until I started playing this. Now I look at baseball and softball as more like leisure activities."

Consider it Frisbee with attitude, although some players will tell you they prefer the term "disc" (Frisbee being a duly registered trademark of the Wham-O corporation).

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