

Stouffville store big on Beyblade tournament craze

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and said I should try it out. And it just went from there."

To encourage sales, Mr. Benevides holds after-school Beyblades tournaments in the back of the store, where 10 to 20 kids pay \$1 each to put their tops to the test.

The rules are simple: Two tops are revved up and let loose inside a plastic tabletop arena and the top that stays spinning the longest is the winner. It sounds like a game of chance, but there's actually a lot of strategy involved, Paul explains. Different tops have different attributes; some are designed to attack, others for defence and still others for endurance.

Plus, Beyblades, which sell for about \$10, can be taken apart, rebuilt and accented by extra weight disks and attack rings, a definite bonus for those pre-Battlebot kids looking to hone their junior-level engineering skills.

"You can take them apart, if you know what you're doing," Paul said.

"If you don't, you might wreck it and have to buy a new one. You can get the bigger attack rings or defence rings to put on them. It's really cool."

Named after the bey-goma, a 1960s-era Japanese spinner,

Beyblades first appeared in that country about three years ago. They soon became a national obsession, with boys dragging their parents to pre-dawn stakeouts in front of toy stores to snag the latest models.

And it's not just the kids who are getting hooked. In May, more than 15,000 people of all ages showed up for the first World Beyblade Championships in Tokyo.

No surprise, then, that Hasbro, the North American distributor, has big plans for the little toy.

Along with the usual ads and in-store demonstrations, the toy giant, which introduced the tops in Canada in March, is planning a gaming

league like the one in Japan.

A YTV cartoon series based on the wildly popular Japanese show starring the spinners is also fueling demand, said Andrew Pelletier, spokesperson for Wal-Mart Canada.

"We will be getting as many shipments as we can between now and Christmas, but they're literally flying off the shelves," he said.

John Gibbs, store manager at the Toys R Us store in Newmarket, knows what he means.

Two Saturdays ago, during the store's grand re-opening, 600 brand-new Beyblades were on display. By closing time, they were completely sold out.

"It's fun for the kids and the parents like it, too," he said, adding a lot of parents see Beyblades as more benign than video games or Yu-Gi-Oh! cards, which were banned from several schools after students were caught stealing cards from each other.

That's the case at Paul's school, but he said he doesn't mind because Beyblades are much more fun than collecting cards.

"You know exactly what you're getting," he said, "and it's really fun."

For more information, visit Hasbro/beyblades.com



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Beyblades fans Kieran Douris and Cody Steele "let em rip!" Stores are awaiting shipments.

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