

Neighbor



Time out! Sunday

Today's guide to events and entertainment — Page 4

Hardball

The baseball diamond's no longer just a guy's turf

girl style



PHOTOS BY BOB CHWEDYK/bchwedyk@dailyherald.com

Chicago Redbirds centerfielder Missy Mulert, second from right, demonstrates base running to girls at a recent training event in Rolling Meadows hosted by Go Hardball, a local organization aimed at teaching girls how to play baseball.

Girls learn to play and love America's pastime

BY AMES BOYKIN

rboykin@dailyherald.com

"Go, go, go," shouts Kate Mitchum.

A line of 30 girls kick up dirt in a hustle toward first base.

They are all safe. That's how Mitchum of Hoffman Estates wanted them to feel.

Along with her boyfriend, she started a program geared to get girls to play hardball so they would feel safe and comfortable on the baseball diamond.

"To make them feel respected and make them enjoy the game and learn," Mitchum said of her purpose. "A lot of women have never played before but they know the game."

Mitchum and boyfriend Tony Feo founded Go Hardball earlier this year to train girls and women to play baseball. The couple also founded a new women's baseball team, the Chicago Redbirds, which plays its games in Rolling Meadows.

In a special program, about 120 young girls from Chicago recently came by bus to the Redbirds' home field at Salk Park in Rolling Meadows to learn the basics of baseball from members of the team.

The girls were participating in a Chicago-based program,



Daisy Rucker, 8, of Chicago takes a swing. She's one of 120 girls who recently learned the basics of baseball in Rolling Meadows.

Girls in the Game, that aims to get girls playing sports. They came to learn pitching, running, hitting and fielding skills.

After T-ball, girls are typically shepherded toward softball. High schools in the area offer softball teams for girls and leave the baseball for the boys.

Lindsay Horwitz, a 15-year-old from Gurnee, is changing that. She came to the Go Hardball event to teach girls how to throw. She grabbed headlines playing on the freshman team for the Blue Devils at Warren Township High School.

Lindsay plays shortstop for the Redbirds, a team for girls 14 and up, and pitches for the Chicago Pioneers, a girls baseball team that last year captured an international tournament in Orlando, Fla.

Lindsay followed her brother to the baseball diamond. She wanted to be like him. As a pitcher, she also had other reasons for taking up hardball.

"I like to pitch, and I can't pitch underhand," Lindsay said.

Liz Pearson, programs director for Girls in the Game, said she had to clear up some confusion before the training session.

"I think girls hear 'baseball' but they think 'softball.' We had to say, 'This is not softball.

"You know the expression, 'Throw like a girl.' She's proud of that. She's a girl and she's terrific."

Gary Horwitz, father of pitcher Lindsay Horwitz

This is hardball," Pearson said.

Karrionna Owens, 9, and Daisy Rucker, 8, say they have played baseball before.

Daisy has no problem making contact with the ball.

But Karrionna is moved to call out some encouraging words to 9-year-old Nyla Brown after her friend misses the ball.

"You can do it. You just need confidence," Karrionna said.

Nearby, Tony Feo smiles.

Later, Nyla admits that baseball doesn't top her list of favorite sports. She enjoys swimming and bicycling.

While it might not be the



Rachel Harris of Chicago goes for the catch during a training practice to teach girls how to play baseball.

trend, women playing baseball is nothing new.

Women were paid to play baseball in a game in 1875, according to the San Francisco science museum. In the 1890s, many "Bloomer Girls" baseball teams formed all over the country.

In the 1930s, however, public opinion that women had inferior sporting skills caused the teams to strike out.

The 1992 film "A League of Their Own" portrayed a league that lasted 12 seasons ending in 1954.

In 1952, organized baseball formally banned women from the minor leagues.

In Chicago, women and girls have a few options if they want to play baseball. The Pioneers is open to girls age 9 to 15. The Redbirds team for

ages 14 and up that Mitchum and Feo started is part of the inaugural season of the Midwest Suburban League's Women Division.

The Redbirds feature players from around the area, including Chicago, Des Plaines, Lake Zurich, Elk Grove Village and Long Grove.

Gary Horwitz, Lindsay's dad, enjoys watching his daughter excel at baseball.

"You know the expression 'Throw like a girl,'" Gary Horwitz said. "She's proud of that. She's a girl and she's terrific."

• rboykin@dailyherald.com. For more on the Redbirds, visit www.chicagoredbirds.com. To learn more about the history of women in baseball, visit www.exploratorium.edu/baseball/girlsofsummer.html



Lindsay Horwitz, 15, of Gurnee shows girls from Chicago how to throw. Horwitz pitches for the Chicago Pioneers and for Warren Township High School, and plays shortstop for the Chicago Redbirds.