

## Buddy Ball hits a home run in Amity Township

Children who normally are watchers take their swings, round the bases with a little help

By Michelle Park  
Reading Eagle

**WATCH: Participants hit, field and throw during game**

When it comes to sports, 8-year-old Jason Kleinert is typically on the sidelines.

Diagnosed with Coffin-Lowry Syndrome, Jason, a third-grader at Amity Intermediate Center, has difficulty walking and communicating and often uses a wheelchair.

But for the first time Sunday, Jason didn't use his wheelchair to watch a game: He used it to play, manning third base and scoring runs during the season opener of Buddy Ball in Amity Township.

"Jason's always been a watcher," said his mother, Linda E. Kleinert of Douglassville. "Now this is about him."

Coordinated by the Daniel Boone Youth Sports league, Buddy Ball pairs children who have disabilities with "buddies" who help them play.

There are no strikes and no outs - just children hitting balls and scoring runs as spectators cheer them on.

Buddy Ball, with games scheduled through the end of the school year, is the first baseball league of its kind in the area, said Traci L. Huddleson, a member of the Boone youth sports board of directors, which started planning Buddy Ball last July.

The league adopted the idea from the national Babe Ruth League, she said, with the goal of giving all youngsters the opportunity to play the game.

Stepping up to home plate, some children swung at pitches, while others preferred to use a batting tee.

Watching her 14-year-old son, Christopher, approach the plate, Kim M. Murray of Birdsboro cautioned: "If he connects, look out. He's a powerhouse."

She wasn't kidding.

Christopher, an eighth-grade student at Daniel Boone Middle School who has Down syndrome, drove the ball into right field for a home run and ran around the bases so fast his peers couldn't keep up.

Finally, all the base runners met at third base and ran home together.

Asked how hitting a home run felt, Christopher grinned widely and replied, "Happy."



*Reading Eagle: Jeremy Drey*  
Buddy Ball player Jason Kleinert, 8, center, gets help batting Sunday from Alli Juddleson, 10, and his brother Bradon Kleinert, 10. Daniel Boone Youth Sports hosts the games.

### Play Ball!

Buddy Ball is a sports league that pairs children who have disabilities with buddies who help them play baseball.

There are more than 15 players and 35 buddies. Play is open to those 5 to 21 years old and buddies 9 to 21.

Buddy Ball games begin at 1 p.m. on Sundays through the end of the school year, except Memorial Day weekend.

They are played at the field behind the municipal building in Amity Township at Weavertown and Old Airport roads.

Participation is free, thanks to three sponsors.

The sponsors are local carpenter Chris Angstadt, the MOMS Club of Douglassville West and A Smile From Jason, a Douglassville nonprofit organization that raises money to support local special needs children.

Organizers hope the Buddy Ball league will grow, but space is limited.

For information, contact Traci L. Huddleson at [traci\\_huddleson@hotmail.com](mailto:traci_huddleson@hotmail.com).

Source: Traci L. Huddleson, Daniel Boone Youth Sports league

"I think it means a lot to them because they get to do something a normal kid does," Murray said.

"I'm really happy for him," she continued. "I'm happy that all these people have come out to make this such a big deal for these guys. It makes the kids feel important."

Rachael M. Kunkel of Birdsboro agreed.

"You worry that your children aren't going to be able to do these things," said Kunkel, whose 8-year-old son, Ethan J. Henry, played Sunday. "To see the smile on his face... that just makes

to see the smile on his face ... that just makes everything worth it."

Ethan, who has autism and is nonverbal, is a first-grader at Amity Primary Center.

When asked how it made him feel to hear his mom cheer from the sidelines, Ethan quietly leaned in toward his mom and kissed her on the lips.

"I love you, too," Rachael told him. "You're my boy."

Pride filled the park as many parents watched their children play a game they didn't know they'd ever play.

Marissa T. Montowski, a 7-year-old who played baseball for the first time Sunday, seemed proud of her efforts.

"It was fun," said the second-grade Amity Primary Center student. "My favorite part was batting. I like to bat a lot."

Rounding the bases with Marissa was her buddy, Elaina R. Schilling, a seventh-grader at Daniel Boone Middle School.

"I wanted to help the kids because they don't really get a chance to play baseball," said Schilling, 12. "I thought it would be nice to help them get that chance. I want them to grow up and remember this, that they had a chance to play."

Asked if she will remember, Marissa didn't hesitate.

"I will remember everything," she said.

Contact Michelle Park: 610-371-5022 or [mpark@readingeagle.com](mailto:mpark@readingeagle.com).