

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Batting for a cure

14-year-old's benefit baseball tournament honors his mother

By EDEN STIFFMAN
estiffman@neighborsgo.com

For a brief moment Saturday, groups of pint-size pitchers stepped away from the baseball diamonds at McKinney's Gabe Nesbitt 5-Plex.

As a KLAQ-FM (97.5) host counted down, they released bunches of brightly colored balloons into the blue morning sky, each color representing a type of cancer, dedicated to survivors and those battling the disease. Then they went back to baseball.

About 450 teams from across Texas, as well as a few from Oklahoma, participated in the fourth annual Strikes Against Cancer youth baseball tournament last weekend. Games were held on fields throughout McKinney, as well as in Allen, Celina, Little Elm, Mesquite, Plano and The Colony.

The nonprofit raises funds for cancer research through the charity tournament. Last year, \$40,000 was donated to The V-Foundation for Cancer Research, the nonprofit founded by Jim Valvano, former college basketball coach and commentator, before his death from cancer in 1993.

It all began as a 2010 Christmas present from Geordon Cox of McKinney to his mother, Lisa Cox, who loved to watch her son pitch. At that time, Lisa was battling endometrial and cervical cancer.



Lisa Cox

A baseball family

Geordon started out as a batboy at age 3. "He'd bring his Godzilla doll and hang out in the dugout," his father, Adam Cox, said. "We've always been a baseball family."

Before her diagnosis, Lisa Cox was at games all the time. "She'd come watch practices just to see how



Photos by REX C. CURRY/Special Contributor

Geordon Cox started Strikes Against Cancer at age 10 in memory of his mother.

he was doing," said Tom Goller, Geordon's former T-ball coach. "Watching Geordon and the rest of the kids was something she truly, truly got joy out of."

When Lisa's cancer and treatment made it difficult for her to attend, Geordon started asking people to pledge money to cancer research for each strike thrown.

The idea turned out to be successful, and the tournament evolved.

"I was surprised by all of the response we got by everyone wanting to come in and support me," said Geordon, now 14 and a freshman pitcher on the Melissa High School baseball team.

With the tournament, money is raised through team registration as well as pledges for strikes.

It has grown from fewer than 200 teams ages 7-15 in 2011 to 454 teams

MORE INFO

Visit strikesagainstcancer.org to learn more about the organization.

Download the Strikes21 app, which allows players to create a digital baseball card of sorts — one with their image and the customizable message "I throw strikes for _____", which can be uploaded to various social media sites.

this year. Last year, Geordon was honored as the McKinney Convention and Visitors Bureau Tourism Partner of the Year for the tournament's success in bringing people to the area.

While it's one of the area's first spring tournaments of the season, Adam Cox thinks the cause is also a draw. "I think it's only a few degrees to know someone that's been touched by cancer," he said.



Donevan Davis with North Texas Fury gets a hit during Strikes Against Cancer in McKinney.



Strikes Against Cancer in McKinney.

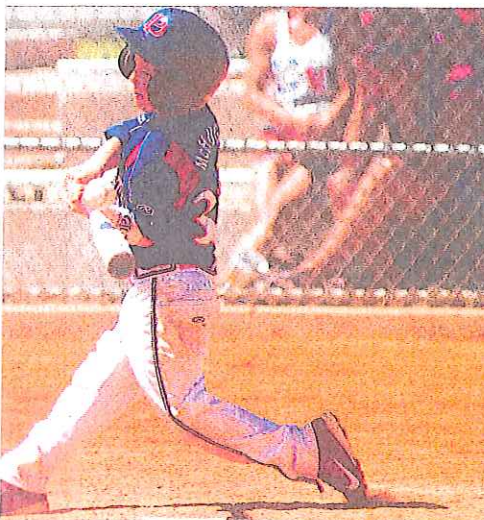


Left: Todd rounds the bases during Strikes Against Cancer.

Below: Scooter New of Texas Blackhawks El Paso starts home during Strikes Against Cancer.



Todd McHugh makes contact with the ball during Strikes Against Cancer in McKinney.



Strikes Against Cancer in McKinney.



Geordon gives a radio interview during Strikes Against Cancer.

"It was difficult for Geordon to understand when he was younger," his father said. "It's an education process for kids — and everyone at

every age. It's hard to fathom." Kids battle cancer have been honored at tournaments. This year, a blood

nosed with Bell's palsy leukemia. His mom and sister joined him at Nesbitt Park for the balloon watch wearing matching Team Cordero

shirts made by his team to help the family cover expenses.

A grounding force

Lisa died in 2012. Geordon also lost his grandmother to lymphoma and an aunt to bone marrow cancer.

Baseball has remained a constant in Geordon's life, even when everything around him has been a struggle.

"He's a kid who's going through the transition to adolescence," said Goller, who also serves on the Strikes Against Cancer board. "That's a difficult balance, even without all the additional circumstances that he had. And I think he really wants baseball to be a grounding force."

"It was certainly difficult for him to watch his mom's cancer slowly get the better of her. But at the same time, he had a huge appreciation for how hard she was fighting. The few times that she could make it out to the Strikes tournament to watch him pitch, it was amazing to see how he reacted ... He really dug down deep and made

sure that he was giving absolutely everything he had when his mom was there watching."

Geordon, who attended Faith Christian Academy in McKinney before starting in Melissa schools in eighth grade, continues to give his all to the sport.

He works out almost every day, has lessons once or twice a week, and is working constantly on his pitching mechanics, Goller said. "Pitching is really Geordon's strength — and he's been for a while."

"I just have a lot of respect for him Melissa High School varsity baseball coach Joe Williams said. "He brings a lot of character to the team."

Having the spotlight on him doesn't really bother Geordon, whom Williams described as reserved.

"Really, I just want to represent my mom and the city of McKinney, where I'm from," Geordon said.

Allen/Frisco/McKinney editor Ede Stiffman can be reached at 214-97-8486.