

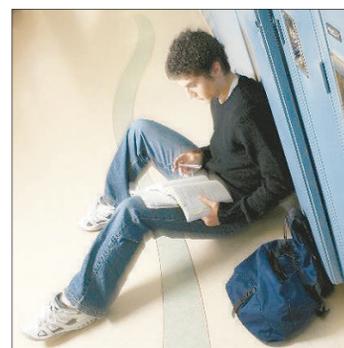
# W&E



**Out & About** Catch Van Halen in concert, one of many events for the weekend ahead — Page 2

## Junior year angst

High school — especially 11th grade — has become incredibly stressful — Page 4



## Suburban Life & Entertainment

# Here's the pitch



Kyle Lipponear puts some spin on his fastball during a Wiffle ball game in Carol Stream

PHOTOS BY SCOTT SANDERS/  
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## Wiffle ball still a big hit with old and new players

BY MATT ARADO  
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In the age of MySpace, iTunes and "Grand Theft Auto," the Wiffle ball might seem like the kind of ancient artifact that Indiana Jones would hunt down.

Yet every spring, when the snow melts and the breeze finally turns warm, people all over the Chicago area dig out the white plastic ball with the funny-looking holes and start to play.

And no, it's not just little kids and old-timers doing it.

"We're addicted," said 18-year-old Jared Brown of Carol Stream as he and three

friends played a pickup game of Wiffle ball at Armstrong Park. "It's incredible how much time we spend playing this."

The Wiffle ball first landed in America's backyards in 1953. Its oblong holes allowed baseball fans to throw curves and sliders like the pros without killing their arms. And because the ball was made out of rubbery plastic, it was safe to use in yards and driveways.

The game quickly became an almost mandatory part of American childhood, with rules that differed from backyard to backyard.

Some threw the ball fast, some lobbed it. Some scuffed the ball to give it more curve,

others covered the holes with electrical tape so hitters could launch towering home runs.

"The Wiffle ball was a hit because just about everyone could play it," said Stephen Mullany, vice president of Connecticut-based Wiffle Ball Inc. and grandson of the ball's creator. "And you could change the game to match your skill level."

Today, as teens and younger adults spend more of their free time on electronic entertainment and the Internet, the Wiffle ball might seem like a candidate for the nostalgia bin.

But local fans say the Internet has actually kept the game relevant by providing a place where players of all ages can organize and compete in regional tournaments.

"The Internet has kicked Wiffle ball up to a whole other level," Brown said. "These games are serious, and they allow pitchers to let loose and do all different kinds of things with the ball."

Brown and his friends play relaxed pickup games as often as they can, usually in one of their driveways. But they also like to set up more serious games at a park, complete with an official strike zone and pro-level pitching. "We scuff our balls on the ground so they move better," he said. "And we like to use deluxe bats. It gets pretty intense."

Roselle resident John Patty, a lifelong Wiffle enthusiast, agrees that the Internet has been a good thing for the game.

"With the Web, for the first time you could connect with players from all over the area — all over the country, even," he said. "That's when I noticed the game really start to take off."

Patty, 45, grew up playing Wiffle ball in the South suburbs with his five brothers. He says they'd play so much that the ball would split apart.

"We couldn't afford to keep buying new



Jared Brown of Carol Stream demonstrates the proper grip for pitching a slider, top with a Wiffle ball. Below, the proper grip for a screwball.



Matt Richardson, left, Jared Brown, Nick Powers and Kyle Lipponear set up a strike zone and backstop in Carol Stream's Armstrong Park before a pickup game of Wiffle ball.

## 'Sex in the City' movie lacks any real sizzle

BY DANN GIRE  
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On cable TV (and later on syndicated networks in a sanitized format), the original HBO series "Sex and the City" became extremely successful with its character-driven scripts, conservative camera work and bold nudity, all of which played to the strengths of the maturing medium.

The series celebrated many things, but two in particular: the importance of honest, female friends and forgiveness in everyday life.

The main character, newspa-

per columnist Carrie Bradshaw, used incessant voice-over narration to keep a running tally on what was going on, who the personalities were and how they all felt, which negated the need for cast members to excel at projecting their characters' emotions and thoughts.

This became a godsend for the show, since it featured the most overtly mannered and least-convincing actress in the history of American television, Kristin Davis.

Yeah, she's the cute one. On TV, cute can cover massive deficiencies of talent. So can incessant omniscient voice-over narrators.

### "Sex and the City"

★★

**Starring:** Sarah Jessica Parker, Kristin Davis, Cynthia Nixon and Kim Cattrall

**Directed by:** Michael Patrick King

**Other:** New Line Cinema. Rated R for sexual situations, nudity and language. 140 minutes.

Now, four years since the vaguely happy series finale, along comes the anxiously awaited silver-screen version of

"Sex and the City," and it proves that what works on TV doesn't necessarily translate into meeting the expectations of a theatrical feature.

Michael Patrick King has never directed a full-length feature, just tons of TV episodes. So it should come as no surprise that his movie "Sex and the City" is a flabby and padded affair that rumbles along like a star vehicle with the tires deflated.

Enough of the original show's charm and character survives to ensure the series' extensive fan base will get its fix of martinis, Manolos and men, but newcom-



Charlotte (Kristin Davis), Samantha (Kim Cattrall) and Miranda (Cynthia Nixon) cast votes on Carrie's wardrobe in "Sex and the City."

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