

# Baseball -- blindfolded? Lions fundraiser brings blind team to town

TEWKSBURY -- Joseph Quintanilla loves baseball, but as a kid, he couldn't take part in America's favorite pastime.

When he was 24, that dream came true, and for the past 17 years, Quintanilla has been playing his favorite game -- blindfolded.

Quintanilla joined the Boston Renegades Beep Baseball team, which will be bringing its talents to Tewksbury on Tuesday, July 3. The Tewksbury Lions Club has organized a game between the Renegades, which has legally blind players, and the Tewksbury Fire Department.

Lions Club Treasurer Jerry Selissen, who will serve as president beginning July 1, said the game will be part of the town's Fourth of July celebration. It will take place at the Obden Field on Livingston Street at 6 p.m.

"The Lions' focus is helping people with vision problems and I'm taking over as of the first of July, so I'm trying to reemphasize that," Selissen said. "I think it's really great."

Because everyone on the team has varying vision impairments, the entire



Boston Renegades Beep Baseball player Larry Haile practices his base running. COURTESY PHOTO

team is blindfolded for a level playing field. Quintanilla, 42, of Medford, has been on the team since 2001.

"I have been legally blind my whole life and have never been able to have usable vision and baseball was my favorite sport," Quintanilla said. "I couldn't play Little League and it's something that I missed out and wanted."

The team uses a softball-sized ball that has a speakers inside. Players can hear sound the ball emits as it approaches them.

Sound is emitted from the bases so players know where to run. Sighted volunteers also help during the game.

"For a century now, baseball has been considered America's pastime, and through volunteers like the Lions, blind people are able to take part in America's pastime and compete at a high level," Quintanilla said.

Tewksbury firefighter Robert Keddie has been organizing a team to play against the Renegades.

When the department first heard about the idea from Selissen, they were taken aback, but Keddie said there was definitely strong interest among the firefighters.

"I think it's going to be a good time to get out there and interact with these guys," Keddie said. "I'm glad that they brought it to us and hopefully people down there will see it and word will get out and it makes everybody more aware."

Keddie said they are up for the



challenge and are looking forward to the exposure the team will get.

"We're excited to show people that blind people are athletic and capable,"

Quintanilla said, "and help chip away at the misconceptions that blind people are reclusive or not active."

He encourages those who come see the game to hold their applause until the end. It is important for players to be able to hear the ball and the bases as they play.

"I'm just thankful to Jerry and the Tewksbury Lions to want to promote what blind people are capable of and promote our sport, and to the Tewksbury Fire Department for wanting to be part of showcasing blind baseball," Quintanilla said.

For more information on the team, visit [www.blindcitizens.org/renegades](http://www.blindcitizens.org/renegades).

Follow Kori Tuitt on Twitter @KoriTuitt.

Boston Renegades Beep Baseball rookie David Sanchez, left, learns from seasoned vets Larry Haile, center, and Joe Quintanilla. COURTESY PHOTO/BOSTON RENEGADES BEEP BASEBALL