

OTTAWA HILLS FOURTH GRADER HOLDS WORLD RECORD IN SPORTS STACKING

Originally published in *The Blade* on Wednesday, February 24, 2010

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Mason Langenderfer definitely is a jock, albeit an unusual one.

He has all the traits. Even though Mason is only 10 years old, the Ottawa Hills fourth-grader can practice his sport for three to four hours a day and has earned a world record in his age bracket. The only catch is that few people are familiar with his competitive pastime: sport stacking.

Developed at a California recreation center in the early 1980s, the sport involves stacking and unstacking specially designed cups into pyramids in the least amount of time possible. There's even a world championship, which Mason will attend in April in Denver.

At the Langenderfer house, the sport is practiced by Mason with a blur of hands and plastic cups. It is accompanied by a loud clack-clack-clacking that could go on forever if his parents, Rob and Teresa, didn't limit his practice sessions.

"We had to move [it] downstairs because it's so loud. You couldn't hear people on the phone," Mrs. Langenderfer said.

Not that it bothered Mason, who handles the flurry of cups with the ease of a magician playing with a deck of cards.

"I just love things that you can time yourself on," he said. "It's a competitive sport, and I'm pretty competitive."

MULTIMEDIA

[See a video of Mason Langenderfer](#)

The young man also enjoys soccer, baseball, and basketball, but sport stacking is his passion. It started in first grade when he was introduced to it in gym class.

"Even back then I was still the fastest in the entire class," Mason said.

Susan Gibbs, his physical education instructor at Ottawa Hills Elementary School at the time, said she uses sport stacking to help students' eye-hand coordination.

"They love it," she said. "Anybody can do it. That's the nice thing about this. You can go as slow as you want and then build on it and build on it and build on it."

Other area school districts have offered sport stacking too, including Anthony Wayne, Washington Local, Perrysburg, Springfield Local, Sylvania, and Toledo Public.

Nationwide, 20,000 schools and recreation centers use sport stacking, according to Bob Fox, a physical education teacher who founded the World Sport Stacking Association and Speed Stacks, Inc., a Colorado company that makes products related to the pastime. A set of 12 cups, which have holes in the bottom to make it easier for air to pass through, sells for about \$15 online at speedstacks.com.

Mr. Fox said he promoted the activity and created curricula for physical education teachers as a way to help improve kids' motor skills, but he's always thought of it as a sport.

"It's physical. It's speed. It's racing. It's got tremendous skill involved," he said. "It's a very nontraditional sport. We admit that. ... [but] when you get into it, kids get very serious."

Mason started competing in tournaments about a year ago, traveling to places like Dayton and Toronto and



Mason Langenderfer shows his sports stacking skills (THE BLADE/LORI KING)

hauling in numerous awards and state records. His top accomplishment came during a trip to Philadelphia when he set the world record for his age group in the event called the “cycle.”

The cycle involves taking 12 cups and stacking them into pyramids of three, six, and three cups. Then they are unstacked and assembled into two six-cup pyramids. After being unstacked again, they must form pyramids of one, 10, and one before being taken down a final time.

Mason did all that in less than seven seconds.

As a result, he was invited to join Team USA for the upcoming world competitions that will involve 1,000 stackers from around the globe. That alone is exciting, but there's more: there are uniforms.

“It's so cool!” Mason said of the clothes.

Who knows where things could go from here. A couple of young sport stackers have appeared in commercials for McDonald's and the American Egg Board. Can a shot at the Olympics or at least a college scholarship be on the way?

“Not yet,” Mrs. Langenderfer said, laughing. “But we hope it happens.”

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