

## Charged up over football



PHOTOS BY GEORGE WALKER IV / STAFF

Chris LeMay, left, and his stepson Ben Coile keep a close eye on their teams during an exciting game of electric football at their home in Antioch.

## Players go to electric Super Bowl

By JIM WYATT  
Staff Writer

It was just their second date, but Chris LeMay figured it was time to let Sylvia Coile in on a little secret.

He welcomed her into his home, and there it was, all over the dining room table: an electric football game board, with tiny players scattered on and around it.

"I told her, 'this is what I do. I spend a lot of time with it,'" LeMay

said.

The end of the date? Hardly. The two were later married.

Perhaps even more surprising is the fact that Sylvia Coile-LeMay still allows her husband to keep his hobby on the dining room table.

"She's OK with it," he said. "I have to move it when we get ready to eat, but other than that she doesn't

mind. She thinks it's pretty cool."

LeMay, 44, is charged up by electric football, a game that dates back to 1947, was popular in the 1970s is making a comeback. There are leagues all over the country, and Internet chat rooms filled with enthusiasts. LeMay, who works at a local Toys "R" Us and lives in Antioch, says the game had sold out



at his store the past two Christmas seasons.

Franklin's Rick Fisher, 41 another electric football fanatic, has collected more than 100 teams and 12 fields over the years. This weekend he and LeMay are headed to Memphis to take part in the Eighth Annual Official Electric Football Super Bowl and Convention, an event that last year attracted about 1,000 enthusiasts to Canton, Ohio.

It is much better than computer games because there is a human side to it," Fisher said. "The computer is going to pretty much control the plays on the screen, but when you're playing electric football it is like real football. Once you flip on that switch, anything can happen, just like when you snap that football."

LeMay played electric football as a kid, then caught the fever again after spotting the game in a catalog a few years back. Now he spends roughly 25 hours a week practicing plays and painting players.

He's such an enthusiast that his groom's cake was made to resemble an electric football field, complete with players on top. He's traveled to various states for games and once had a chat room pal travel from Los Angeles for a contest.

Fisher has been devoted to the game since the early '70s. He estimates he spends 15- 20 hours a week either playing or painting players.

I guess it has been a big part of my life since I was a kid," said Fisher, who said his fiancée hasn't seemed threatened by all the attention he gives to the game.

"At first she wasn't too sure about it," he said. "But believe it or not she sat down and played it with me one night, and now she understands. She gets it."

The game is pretty simple. It's played on a board configured like a football field. The plastic players are



**Chris LeMay paints his electric football players the colors of his favorite teams. He plans to participate this weekend in the Electric Football Sper Bowl and Convention.**

an inch tall and stand on plastic bases. They are arranged in formations on the field, with the ball (a BB-sized piece of felt) tucked under the arm of an offensive player.

Throwing a switch "electricifies" the board, vibrating the field and moving the players. The bases have small prongs that determine how the players move when the field vibrates, though newer models make it easier to control direction.

The play continues until the player with the ball is touched by another player, scores or runs out of bounds. Once the board is electrified, players aren't to be touched until the play ends.

Diehards contend that there is a lot of strategy involved - players can be controlled to go left, right, or straight ahead - through play calling.

There are other ways to get an edge as well.

LeMay has used a cigarette lighter to reshape the prongs on the bottom of a base, something that makes the it easier to control the direction that a player moves. Fisher sometimes boils the bases in water to help make the players move faster.

That may be responsible for making one of his throwback players - freshly painted Browns running back Leroy Kelly - so tough to deal with.

Don't just take Fisher's word for it. He keeps stats on the games.

"He just tears up the field," Fisher said with pride. "He runs straight, and I can make him turn and hook, too. he's hard to stop."

But even the most imaginative tricks don't always guarantee success. Anyone familiar with the game knows the sight of a player turning in circles on a vibrating board isn't uncommon. trying to complete a pass? Good luck.

"It can be frustrating because you set up a play and the guys don't always do what you want them to do," LeMay said.

Although some competition can get heated, Fisher says it's all in fun. This weekend, the sight of jersey-wearing men, women, and children with faces painted will be a part of the atmosphere. Memphis is certain to be, if you will, buzzing with excitement.

"You can touch the guys, you can feel them - I think it is such an alternative to the video game," said Micah Warren, who helps promote the Super Bowl and Convention for Silverman Media and Marketing Group. "it is physical, hands-on-interaction as opposed to letting your mind rot in front of the television. And whether you realize it or not, you can learn strategies of the NFL by playing." ■