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Third-grader an Electric Football champion

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By [Tom Langhorne](#)

The fullback bulldozes right into the teeth of the defense, only to be stopped cold by a strategically placed gap-plugging linebacker.

A wide receiver breaks free of the man covering him, snagging a bullet of a pass and prancing into the end zone untouched.

A skillfully executed lateral results in a 90-yard sprint to touchdown glory that leaves defenders lagging far behind.

All of these dramatic gridiron moments are unfolding in a small room in a home in Moore, where Bryan Nutt and his 8-year-old son, Kyle, are playing some of the most sophisticated Electric Football in the world.

Electric Football — yep, the game with the vibrating metal field and the little plastic men who move — has advanced radically since the first crude sets were manufactured in 1947.

And no child in America has proved he can play it better than Kyle, a third-grader at River Ridge Elementary School. The son of Bryan and Karen Nutt is this year's winner of the Super Bowl of Electric Football for kids.

At Miggle Toys' annual Electric Football Convention in Memphis, Tenn., last month, Kyle's Dallas Cowboys beat teams operated by three of the world's best competitors from ages 8 to 11 to claim the title of Spark Bowl Junior Champion. It was his first Super Bowl-level competition.

Electric Football and its products are exclusively



Sallie Turner/Herald-Journal

Eight-year-old Kyle Nutt plays electronic football with his dad, Bryan, at their home in Moore.

Kyle Nutt is an electronic football champion.

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More information

--Today's Electric Football isn't the game your father played. Miggle Toys Inc. has replaced small metal fields with much larger fields set in oak tables, lighted stadiums with electronic scoreboards that produce animated graphics, music and crowd noise, and a host of accessories. Highland Park, Ill.-based Miggle, the exclusive manufacturer and



manufactured and marketed by Highland Park, Ill.-based Miggle Toys Inc. The company produces teams wearing the uniforms of real college and professional teams.

During the competition, Kyle used a variety of complex offensive and defensive formations to outwit his opponents. He earned praise as well for his ability to "pass" Electric Football's tiny cotton ball using a plastic quarterback figure and the right amount of tension.

Like so many other children in the EF world, Kyle learned the game at his father's elbow.

"I played Electric Football when I was a kid, then I just got busy and let it sit in the attic for a long time," 38-year-old Bryan explained. "Then I sort of rediscovered it three Christmases ago. I'd always intended to bring my set back out to teach the game to Kyle, so I did."

As Bryan and Kyle became more and more immersed in the game over the months that followed, they quickly outgrew Bryan's vintage 1970 set. Using Miggle's Internet chat forum to make contact with other EF aficionados around the world, Bryan's notion of what was possible expanded dramatically.

From a man in Texas, he bought a specially made set that is almost 6 feet long and 3 feet wide. The set is real-life proportional, meaning that the players stretch over about two game field yards when laid along the hash marks.

Bryan's old set, like all others of its time, was small enough that the players would occupy five full yards when laid down — meaning they would have been a preposterous 15 feet tall.

The new large set — Bryan won't disclose how much he paid for it — includes tiny sideline yard markers, first down chains and a customized University of Tennessee logo.

Bryan, a freight car design engineer by trade, also began painting players and teams for other EF enthusiasts around the nation. As his reputation for highly skilled precision painting grew, he began using

marketer of Electric Football, can be reached at (847) 432-0140.

--You can get started playing Electric Football for as little as \$49.95, the cost of a basic set that includes two unpainted teams.

Painted teams cost \$7 each. The deluxe game table costs almost \$500.

Serious players can spend thousands of dollars on equipment and accessories.

--Among the newest accessories are tiny painted figures representing team owners, television reporters, cameramen, game officials, coaches and cheerleaders.

--Miggle produces a newsletter titled Plugged In! for customers and other EF aficionados.

The newsletter covers Miggle's annual Electric Football Convention and offers order forms, classified ads and feature stories about individual enthusiasts around the country.

--Lavell Shelton of Greenville, a former two-time winner of the Super Bowl of Electric Football, runs the South Carolina Upstate Electric Football League. There are almost 20 teams operating out of six cities, though Shelton



the Internet to market himself and solicit work orders.

Because he is colorblind, Bryan has Karen mix the sometimes exotic colors he uses to achieve the effects desired by his customers. He estimates he spends 15 hours a week on the hobby.

says new members are welcome. He can be contacted at (864) 467-8268.

Electric Football players, once painted in assembly lines without much attention to detail, have become increasingly realistic in Bryan and Kyle's playroom.

Bryan uses a word processing program with color laser printer and waterslide decal paper to produce tiny names for the backs of players' jerseys. He buys tiny but amazingly detailed team helmet emblems from a man in California who has a computer specialized enough to produce them.

When Bryan and Kyle square off against each other with college teams, Bryan fires up the two teams' fight songs, which he has downloaded off the Internet.

The father and son also compete against other area players for fun. This year, Bryan will join an Upstate South Carolina league.

"The thing that's so great about Electric Football is that, unlike video games, it's hands-on, with a lot of experimentation and strategy," Bryan said. "It's a fantastic game for a child to learn and to play with his friends."

Michael Landsman, president of Miggle Toys and commissioner of the Electric Football League, said the game promotes skill, sportsmanship and teamwork.

"One of the things we have going for us that has allowed us to thrive is that this is a social game that calls for at least two people to play," Landsman said. "With a computer game, a kid sits alone pressing buttons; there's no social interaction."

Landsman said more than 40 million EF games have been sold since 1947.

"We met Kyle at our 2001 convention in Canton, Ohio (the home of the Pro Football Hall of Fame)," he said. "When we saw him this year, he had improved tremendously. We were really surprised by his skill in the passing game in particular."

Lavell Shelton of Greenville is a two-time winner of Electric Football's highest competitive honor, the EFL Super Bowl. Shelton won in 1997 at Miggle's convention in Chicago and again in 1998 at the Cleveland Browns' training facility in Berea, Ohio.

"Bryan's field in his house is gorgeous; it's the largest one in South Carolina, to my knowledge," Shelton said. "I spent two and a half hours with Kyle the night



before the Spark Bowl in Memphis, and I could tell he can be a great one.

"His eyes locked in and he caught on really quick as I was talking to him about strategy, the passing game, and so on."

Shelton, who should know, said Kyle has the ability to one day win Electric Football's highest honor himself if he continues to polish his skills. Landsman enthusiastically concurred with that assessment.

"There is no question that Kyle has that kind of potential," the EFL commissioner said.

The praise from Electric Football's luminaries leaves Kyle smiling.

"This is more fun than a video game," the youngster said, surveying his and his father's play room.

"It's a lotta, lotta fun."

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