



Football league off to a running start

Katie Curley

— SALISBURY — What started with Jeff Johnson's son Brody playing football in the backyard a few years ago culminated in the first-ever Super Bowl in Salisbury this weekend.

Yesterday, the Broncos held off the 49ers for the league title on the frigid Memorial Field tundra.

"Three years ago about 10 kids were playing in the backyard, then the group grew and they moved to Memorial Field and about 10 more showed up," Johnson said.

Brody's flag football games morphed this year into a 90-member, 10-team league, split between two divisions, and was sponsored by the National Football League.

Johnson, who coaches baseball for the town in the summer, recruited coaches and players, but he didn't have to look far. As soon as people saw the games being played each week, he started receiving calls from parents asking if their children could join the team.

"It was just word of mouth really — we have kids from Rowley, Seabrook, everywhere. We let everyone play," Johnson said.

As the games gained momentum, Johnson applied for NFL sponsorship and was accepted. The NFL now provides team jerseys and help with online registrations.

"It's great and NFL makes it really easy for cities and towns to start up leagues," Johnson said. Each team is named after a professional team and has a team uniform jersey.

Salisbury Flag Football has two divisions, the Ponies for 6-to-8-year-olds and the Colts for 8-to-12-year-olds. Every Saturday the teams have one-hour games, from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. It is up to each coach to schedule a practice during the week.

Johnson relies on parents for support. On game day, players' parents run a small concession stand with donated coffee, and on Saturday they held a pre-game Super Bowl program for the players.

For Johnson this season was just the start of a very promising future as he expects turnout to double next season. Plans are already in the works to add a 12-to-14-year-old division as well.

"It's been pretty awesome to see it grow," Johnson said.

For more information on the Salisbury Youth Flag Football League or to sign up for next season, log on to <http://eteamz.active.com/SalisburyYouthFlagFootball/news/>

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Dan Alves of the 49ers makes a move during the Salisbury Flag Football Super Bowl in a game against the Broncos at the field behind Salisbury Memorial School. Staff Photo