

# DOUBLEDAY, Orthodox way

## SUNDAY LEAGUE ALMOST A RELIGION

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**Monticello** – The rabbi is going nuts in the dugout.

Mordy Eichorn has just smacked a pitch between two outfielders, and Yaakov the rabbi can't contain himself.

"Oh yes, oh yes!" Yaakov Salomon shouts, bursting out of the dugout as Eichorn tears around the bases, the tassles from the prayer shawl beneath his shirt flapping behind him.

Now he's heading home; here comes the relay throw to the plate. Eichorn slides ... safe! He hoots as he jumps to his feet.

"I need water," Eichorn gasps, his goggles and beard flecked with dust. Instead, Salomon greets him with an embrace and drags him back to the dugout.

A three-run home run! Oh, they'll be talking about this one back at the Castle Hill bungalow colony.

How they finally broke through in the sixth inning against the guys from Beaver Lake and pulled away to win this key game in the Orthodox Bungalow Baseball League.

If you can't trust men of faith to call balls and strikes, who can you trust?

The OBBL – where yarmulkes and prayer shawls meet bats and gloves eight Sunday mornings a year throughout the Catskills, from late June through late August. It's Sunday morning or bust: These guys work all week and the Sabbath keeps them indoors on Saturday.

The OBBL – where state Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver pitched when he

wasn't tussling with George Pataki and Joe Bruno in Albany. He's on a golf course somewhere now – 29 seasons was apparently enough.

The OBBL – where men who pray twice a day sneak Marlboros and Newport in the coaching boxes and dugouts between innings while their sons, grandsons and nephews climb the dugout fences and chase after foul balls.

Marc Newman has spent a lifetime negotiating – he's a lawyer. This particular morning, the Castle Hill captain is negotiating with another team over who gets to use which field at Monticello High School. Well, more like arguing. Loudly.

League commissioner Yoel Zagelbaum is called over to mediate. He rules against Castle Hill.

"They know they're wrong," Newman says. "God knows they're wrong. But it's OK."

Of course it's OK. It's a beautiful August morning and Sabbath observation wrapped up last night. It's time to play.

So what if the Monticello fields are locked? These men just squeeze themselves through a small opening between the fence and the dugout.

They bring their own bases. Umpires? Who needs 'em? Just have players from both teams alternate when they're not hitting. If you can't trust men of faith to call balls and strikes, who can you trust?

Out here, it isn't Rabbi Yaakov Salomon, the 54-year-old with eight children, nine grandchildren and a psychotherapy practice to go with his rabbinical obligations, playing third base for Castle Hill. It's Yaakov the 5-year-old who fell in love with baseball growing up in Manhattan before

the obligations of work, family and faith intervened.

"I hope I can play forever," Salomon says.

Newman, 60, has been Castle Hill's captain for all 30 years of the OBBL's existence. He can count the number of games he's missed on one hand. Now he's playing with his son. "It has to be a presence in your life," he says.

Summer is coming to an end, and so is the league. The bungalow colonies will empty. The players will return home, to the glass and concrete of New York City and its immediate suburbs.

The High Holy Days will begin. Rosh Hashana is but a few weeks away, a solemn and introspective time for Rabbi Yaakov Salomon and the men of the Orthodox Bungalow Baseball League.

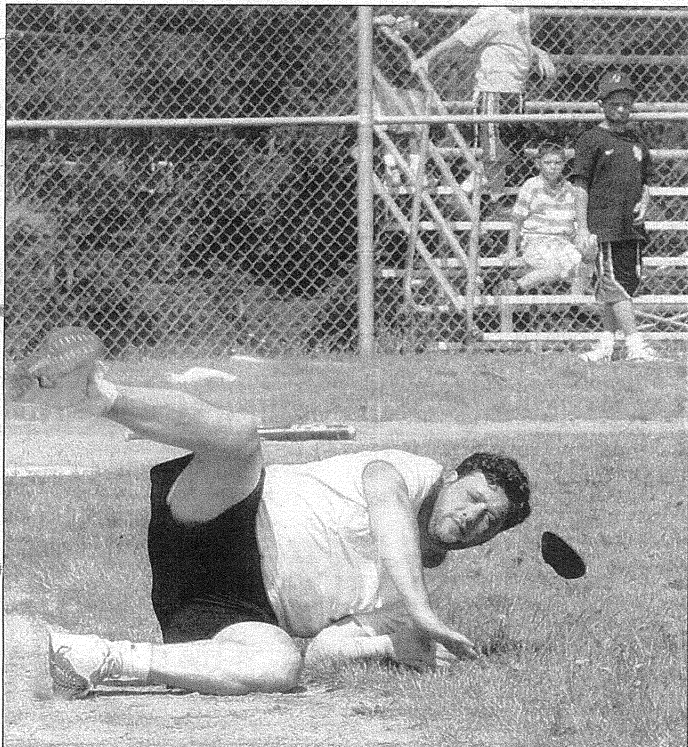
The crazy kid will stay trapped inside, waiting for next summer, and the escape to the ball field.



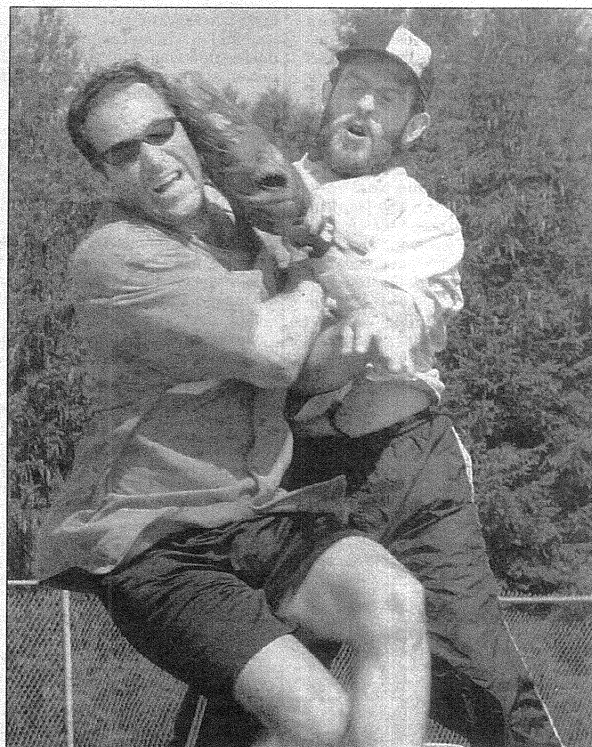
Times Herald-Record photos/JEFF GOULDING  
Everyone is yelling, but it all ends up with Mordy Eichorn being safe at home.



Mordy Eichorn, left, is congratulated by Rabbi Yaakov Solomon.



Dovi Bergman stumbles on his way to first, losing his yarmulke, but recovers and later scores.



Alex Lowinger, right, tags out Heshy Muehlagy.