

**BASEBALL,  
BE PREPARED,  
and the  
EZ-UP EVERLASTING**

Once upon a time during COVID, in the name of Public Health and Safety, our Little League season was cancelled. Boys and grown men were disappointed. Disgruntled. 2 months into the pandemic, groups of them banded together to form our travel-ball team.

We didn't play near the amount of games the 2019 travel team played, but every game was a gift. Double-header here, double-header there, and even 2 weekend tournaments! We even made it to Utah (beautiful, patriotic, friendly UTAH!) for two days of ball games in early September.



It was due to be in the near 100°s. Luckily, we remembered to bring the EZ-UP that the guys use camping. I even had *sides* to loop into the supports to keep the shade on us as long as possible during the 2-3 games per day. I was ready: blankets for Tallyn to play on, her chair, my chair, spray bottles to cool ourselves, sunblock, snackies, games and toys for Tallyn, and everything fit in a collapsible wagon.

We had the first game in the morning, so I put the EZ-UP down the right field fence line to be close enough and far away enough from the action. I looped in the sides, spread out the blankets, and Tallyn played and snacked while I cheered our boys on.

During our second game in the afternoon, we returned from lunch to our spot and I checked all of the straps on the EZ-up. I checked the stakes that held down the back legs and tightened the ties to the fence in the front. Everything was secure.

I was starting to settle in; Tallyn was content and I was able to watch the game and stay remotely comfortable. That old Boy Scout motto that had been drilled into my head from attending my brother's scout functions had paid off: BE PREPARED.

Long about the bottom of the 5<sup>th</sup>, a rogue gust of wind (180° off and 25 mph more than any gust so far this day) reached under my solid, well-placed EZ-UP to lift it up and flip it over the right field fence! It tore out the stakes (bent the stake-plates), broke two of the structural brackets (plastic, and one was already broken, but it was zip-tied together and holding quite well, I might add... until *now*), and I stood with my mouth open, clutching my daughter, whose face was glued to her Leap Pad tablet as she was squirming out of my grasp. My brain then engaged as two dads from the local team ran over to help me collect my battered and broken glorified half-tent and offered to help me set it back up.

(My husband later asked what happened, only knowing that I/my setup was the cause of a disruption in the ball game he was trying to coach his team and our son through and how could it have been prevented?)

I managed to find a decent setup after it was broken. My chair was low to the ground, and so is my daughter and her chair. I rested the back side of the EZ-UP on the ground and staked it. Then I tied the front to the fence, about halfway up. It was much lower than it had been, but we didn't need it high in the air and thus more kite-like. For the remainder of the games, it worked out ok.

First thing after we got back home, Trent ordered a new EZ-UP. About a week after we got home, we finally got around to cleaning up the mess from the trip, old EZ-UP included. I examined all of the pieces and even tried to put it together one more time just to confirm that, as a whole, it couldn't be saved. (It's in my blood not to throw things away that are still useful, and it's in my husband's blood to throw things away that: 1. Aren't his, 2. Haven't been used in his presence, or 3. Are in his way. So I had to be sneaky and hide things after he's informed me they are of no use TO HIM.)

Which leads me to my truck. And the All-Stars of Little League baseball season of 2019. It was my son's first year as an All-Star, and the District tournament was to take place Saturday and Sunday, 2 hours away. No big deal. 5 teams, double elimination (2 lost games and they're out and on the road home).

The boys took too long to wake up and look like a ball team, and by then the first game was lost. Well, that was all it took. I don't know exactly what speech the All-Stars coach pulled out of his repertoire, but it was probably something to the effect of "You guys are better than this! We need to be smarter on base and hit the dang ball! It's a simple game! Make good throws! Catch the ball! You guys can do all of these things! I've seen it! Now show THEM you can do these things! Get out there and COMPETE! Do you want to go home?? Then PLAY the GAME like the **BALLPLAYERS** I know you are!!" Just saying. Probably something like that...

It worked. Our boys found their grit and won their second game of that day, and their game the next day. After that win on Sunday, their next game was Monday evening. Well, I had to go back to work and so did some friends of our we were traveling with. Holly and her daughter needed to get back and I needed to get back. My then-2-year-old daughter did better on a schedule involving her preschool. Both our husbands and boys stayed and camped after Monday's win. 2-hour drive there, 2-hour drive back for Holly, me, and our girls. As long as the boys kept winning, we would keep driving.

A little history:

Because my truck is an early-2000's, it has almost no bells and whistles. It has a CD player as part of the stereo, and that was the upgrade from my late 80's Honda. I wanted something that would last that I could pack our family in. But it being a truck, and 4-wheel drive at that, and living in the mountains and

unpredictable weather, I needed to BE PREPARED. In addition to being around too many boy scouts, I had a driving instructor who taught his class by telling horror stories of his time as Traffic Collision Inspector/Detective.

My husband got me tire chains. I won a truck toolbox at a benefit dinner (in went the tire chains). Then there were multiple trips to the vet with multiple dogs (needed multiple leashes). And then, KIDS. It kind of snowballed from there... to include, but not limited to: a reflective Nomex fire jacket, rain gear (tops and bottoms), two fleece blankets, 1 wool blanket, a set of bungee cords and zip-ties, Rain-X windshield spray, tow hitch and ball, tool kit, 2 MREs (Ready-to-eat meals), dustpan and whisk broom, leather gloves, first aid kit, two coolers, grocery bags (since we have to pay for bags now), -30° sleeping bag, sleeping pad (doubling as a yoga mat), small snow shovel, softball glove and batting gloves (from my slow-pitch softball days), sun hat, extra clothes for the kids, folding chair and fully-adjustable umbrella, collapsible wagon, drinking water, duct tape, electrical tape, fiber tape, and packaging tape, jumper cables, sunblock, windshield washer fluid (-20° good stuff from NV, and the Bug-Off stuff), towels, goggles and swim cap (for those impromptu trips to the pool), ...the list goes on.

Holly kidded on the drive home one night that I was the one she wanted to be with when the world ended because while my truck came standard with nothing, my truck has ...everything. "Trish-a-geddon," she called it.

(Back to All-Stars 2019: Holly and I took turns driving each day until the boys won District. 5 days of driving 2 hours each way. And Trish-a-geddon had everything we needed to be away from home so much.)

So, naturally, the only spot for me to hide the EZ-UP portion that still functioned was ...in my truck.

Last week, I cleaned out my truck. Washed, waxed, windows, floor mats, headlights, ...and even EMPTIED the back out. Completely. Took mental inventory, rearranged, organized, the works. Uncle Matt came over after observing my neurosis and asked if I'd found any bodies while cleaning out the back of my truck. No, thankyouverymuch, but I found the EZ-UP I put back there and recalled how it got there. And, in the words of Paul Harvey, here is THE REST OF THE STORY:

Later that evening was my son's first regular season little league tournament game. I always park under the trees so I can sit on my tailgate and cheer. It makes me feel better to cheer, and everyone else feel better that they can only hear me when the wind stalls. But evening games get toasty with the setting sun angling under the trees, so I had to figure something out since it was due to be around 100° by game time.

I parked in my spot, put my daughter in her chair inside the camper shell and opened both side windows on the camper shell itself to catch what little breeze there was. I quartered the EZ-UP, creating a piece-of-pie shaped tarp, stabilized each edge with the supports and tied the ends to the fence (using a dog leash and a bungee cord). I secured the point of the pie with another bungee cord and ran an additional support stake in the middle to keep the tarp up enough that we could be shaded and still see under it. It

was SO ghetto, but I had the only vehicle with any amount of shade because of my tired, old EZ-UP that I refused to ditch.

The boys won their game. Before the next game got going that night, Trent had to come over and make fun of my sweet set-up: “The Clampetts go to a Ball Game.”

15 minutes later, I had my revenge. I started taking down my super-awesome, albeit piecemealed arrangement when a kindly older gentleman approached me, asking if I needed any help taking it down.

“No, thank you, though!” I smiled, unwrapping the leash from the fence.

“Where did you get this? Was it made especially for your truck?” I smiled even bigger, shaking my head.

“Sure wasn’t! This is all that’s left of a broken EZ-UP that I saved from the trash last year!”

“Oh,” he said, “I was going to ask you where I could buy one like it.”

HA!