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Posted on Sun, Jul. 6, 2008

## Getting a grip on inventing

### A Dresher boy, 11, won a Pennsylvania Challenge for young inventors and went on to the nationals.

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By Bonnie L. Cook  
Inquirer Staff Writer

Like many other inventors, Martin Schneider got his start by noticing a problem. The players on his sister's softball team didn't know how to grip the bat; the coach interrupted play again and again to show them.

"If there was something on the bat that would help them know where to put their hands, it would be helpful," Martin recalled thinking.

Martin, 11, who will be a sixth grader this fall at Sandy Run Middle School in Upper Dublin, found the answer: a rubbery material that could accept ink and be peeled off for use on more than one bat.

Using a child's hand for size, the boy cut out the pliable clover-shaped form. He labeled the invention for lefties and righties, and called it the bat gripper.

"There are fingers to show you where to put your fingers," said Martin, a serious youngster with curly, amber-colored hair. "If you put them there, it's impossible to mess up your grip."

Martin entered the bat gripper in the By Kids for Kids Co.'s 2008 Pennsylvania Challenge, in which young inventors compete for prizes.

"I came home from school, and my mom told me I'd won," he said. "I didn't really believe her."

Martin finally became convinced when his mother, Jennifer, 38, showed him the e-mailed notification. The prize, a Dell laptop, arrived at the family's Dresher home June 27.

"He was ecstatic," Jennifer Schneider said. "It took him all of 10 minutes" to get it working.

By Kids for Kids, of Stamford, Conn., encourages children to create inventions, then helps them turn the best ones into products and even market them, operations manager Mike Margolin said.

Winning inventions are chosen through online competitions. Entrants retain the rights to their products; a licensing contract is not part of the prize package, said John Forrester, a company spokesman.

Many of the inventions are for use by children. They include toys, games, sporting goods, school supplies, room decor, literature, health and wellness products, and financial tools.

"We know that while teens have great ideas, they often have no place to take them," said a mission statement on the firm's Web site, [www.bkfk.com](http://www.bkfk.com).

Martin's Pennsylvania win qualified him for the firm's national competition, where he became a finalist in the sports category with four others. Online voters were busy logging their choices last week.

On Wednesday, the bat gripper was running second to a badminton game played without a net. Third was a device that enables children to play volleyball by themselves. Fourth was a skateboard with sides for sitting or kneeling. Fifth was a device to help solitary hockey and soccer players retrieve the puck or ball.

Voting ended Friday, and the winners will be announced on the company's Web site, but it wasn't clear when, Margolin said.

"There will be no physical ceremony," he said, although Martin was honored for his state win at a ceremony in New York in June.

Prizes in each contest category - sports, fashion, digital storytelling, and ideas to save the environment - are \$10,000 and the chance to meet a famous inventor in the youngster's area of interest.

Martin seemed unfazed at the thought that he might win.

"We don't know yet," he said. "The polls aren't in."

The boy described himself as a math and computer enthusiast who loves the Harry Potter books and has created a Web site, [www.123star.net](http://www.123star.net), where he challenges visitors to a game of tic-tac-toe.

"Do you think you can beat me? I don't think so," Martin said on the site. "So far I have played 171 games. I have won 71, have lost 0, and I tied 100 times!"

The bat gripper wasn't Martin's first invention.

He fashioned a two-part bag for car travel that separates recycling and trash, but it didn't win.

"If you're in a car and you eat a banana, you can't put the skin in the same bag with a can," Schneider said.

His mother isn't focused on winning; she's proud of him.

"It's fun and exciting. It's been great for him. He's the kind of kid . . . this is what he likes to do. This has kind of inspired him to improve his skills," she said.

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