

USA TODAY SPORTS

“Ah-mah-gaw!”

(The touchdown was quite pleasing to watch.)

We speak sports

New law in N.Y. requires anchored soccer goals

Jon Campbell, jcampbell1@gannett.com | [@JonCampbellGAN](https://twitter.com/JonCampbellGAN) Published 2:24 p.m. ET Nov. 26, 2014 | Updated 2:30 p.m. ET Nov. 26, 2014

Deaths and injuries from toppled soccer goals have been reported for decades and now New York is requiring that they be anchored.



(Photo: shutterstock.com)

ALBANY –

A regulation soccer goal is 8 feet tall, 24 feet wide and can weigh a few hundred pounds. And soon, state law will require it to be anchored into the ground while in use.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed a bill late last week that requires the state to come up with official regulations for anchoring portable soccer goals, which are top heavy and can be susceptible to toppling if not grounded properly.

The new law, which takes effect in six months, was inspired in part by Julia Parisi, a then-eight-year-old girl from Rye Brook, Westchester County, whose femur was broken by a toppled goal in 2002.

"It's really a serious issue across the country, because there's statistically a fatality across the country each year and hundreds of injuries because these soccer goals are top heavy," said Assemblyman Steve Otis, D-Rye, who sponsored the bill. "If they fall down, they fall on whoever is around, and the victims are usually children."

There have been at least 36 deaths since 1979 resulting from toppled soccer goals, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

New York's new law requires the state Department of State to come up with mandatory rules for portable goals based on [existing guidelines from the federal commission](https://www.cpsc.gov/Global/Safety%20Education/Sports%20and%20Recreation/Soccer/soccerGuidelines.pdf). (<https://www.cpsc.gov/Global/Safety%20Education/Sports%20and%20Recreation/Soccer/soccerGuidelines.pdf>)

The commission recommends holding the goals down with at least two stakes or ground-gripping anchors while in use. The guidelines also call for the goals to only be placed on flat surfaces, and for sandbags to be used if the net is on artificial turf or another surface where stakes can't be used.

If a sports league or school violates the new state law, the state attorney general would be able to take them to court, with a fine of up to \$500 possible for each violation regardless of whether or not anyone was injured. The law is expected to take effect in 180 days.

Many soccer leagues and athletic associations already follow the federal guidelines or similar ones from other regulatory authorities.

The New York State Public High School Athletic Association, the governing body that oversees interscholastic sports in the state, requires its members to follow anchoring guidelines by the national group that oversees high school sports, for example.

Robert Zayas, the state group's executive director, said the law will make the sport safer in youth leagues.

"I think the law is really important for safety in youth soccer leagues that may not have those rules and regulations," Zayas said. "I think it's a big step in the right direction for safety in that regard."

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The bill was sponsored in the state Senate by retiring Sen. George Maziarz, R-Newfane, Niagara County. But its origin is firmly rooted in the lower Hudson Valley.

Former Sen. Suzi Oppenheimer, D-Ossining, Westchester County, first introduced the bill before retiring in 2012. Then-Assemblyman George Latimer, D-Rye, sponsored the legislation in the Assembly before he replaced Oppenheimer; Latimer was a co-sponsor of the bill that passed this year.

Parisi's story is prominently featured in the memo that accompanied the bill, which notes she has "made a full recovery."

Her story is also displayed on the website for Anchored for Safety (http://www.anchoredforsafety.org/parents_parisi.html), an Illinois-based group that advocates for state-level goal anchoring laws. Parisi's father, John, recalls how he was searching for a mallet to hammer in foot-long spikes to anchor the goal in 2002 when he turned just in time to see it toppling on his daughter.

"We must all be vigilant," John Parisi wrote. "It is not only game time that is of concern; there are practices, gym time, recess and early evenings when children return to unsupervised fields to play."

JCAMPBELL1@gannett.com (mailto:JCAMPBELL1@gannett.com)

[Twitter.com/JonCampbellGAN](https://twitter.com/JonCampbellGAN)

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