

Southern Soccer Scene

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— Have You Checked Your Soccer Goal Inventory Lately? —

What Every Soccer Club/Association Must Know!

Soccer goals are basically the only pieces of equipment on the soccer field that are necessary to play the game. They are expensive items, and often times local soccer organizations seek to reduce the cost by using "homemade" goals. Some of those are put together locally by welding heavy iron pipe into a soccer goal frame.

In many cases those "look" like a soccer goal, but are put together without the benefit of the engineering and proper support system, including the angles at which the bracing is welded.

A soccer organization that goes this route is opening itself to a "lawsuit waiting to happen", and is without any way to defend itself in terms of assurance that a professionally manufactured goal has been placed on its fields.

Even a goal, manufactured by a recognized goal company, constructed under approved specifications, can be deadly if it is not anchored.

The CPSA and ASPM issued preliminary recommendations on design specs for manufacturing soccer goals in 1999 and then issued an official recommendation for design specs in 2001. Soccer goal manufacturers do not have to adhere to these design specifications, but the legal opinion is that any manufacturer that is aware of these recommendations, but does not follow them, can be held liable in the event of an accident.

Many organizations that purchase soccer goals do not pay attention to whether the goals they are buying were constructed according to the recommended specifications, and should, in fact, stipulate in the purchase agreement that the construction was in compliance with CPSC/ASPM design specs.

In the 2004 lawsuit, filed in the Zachary Tran death in Illinois, attorney Shawn Kasserman, said

that the case for liability against the local youth soccer association and the park district which owned the facility, was "virtually indefensible."

The Tran case was settled for \$2.25 million dollars in the spring of 2005.

Non-Soccer Related Accidents

Over the years, many of the accidents reported involved children who were not playing or practicing soccer, but who were injured while playing on or around the soccer goal.

This is known as an "attractive nuisance." A young child is never aware of whether or not a soccer goal is anchored.

Numerous accidents have happened when players jump up, grab the crossbar, and hang or do chinups from the crossbar, causing the unanchored goal to tip forward.

Other accidents have occurred when children climb up and sit on the crossbar, while others have occurred when children climb on the net webbing.

In a Fayetteville, NC case a young child was seriously injured after wandering to a nearby soccer goal while his family watched another sibling play little league baseball.

Anchoring Goals

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends that soccer goals be anchored with long stakes, with auger-type devices, or with sandbags, the latter being the least effective type of anchor. Regulation metal goals, made from steel or aluminum, are eight feet tall and 24 feet wide, and can weight from 150-600 pounds. Homemade goals may exceed that range in weight. Most goal manufacturers also market anchoring devices.

Don Pevonka, owner of Pevo Goals, said that his company sells a built-in auger system that he

calls a "no-mistake system." However, many buyers have opted not to include the built-in anchoring system because of the additional price.

Who Moves The Goals

Soccer goals are moved most often during training sessions by players or by coaches. If anchored, the anchors are removed to move the goal, and because of the time involved in re-anchoring them they are not re-anchored.

At the end of the training session the goals are left as they were last used. Perhaps they are left that way because coaches and players have "never seen a soccer goal fall over."

Maintenance people who move the goals to allow a mowing crew to cut the grass around the goal area, also fail to reattach the goals. Private and public facilities must impress on maintenance crews the importance of anchoring the goals and then remain vigilant to make sure the goals are being re-anchored.

Storage Of Goals

Rather than leave soccer goals on the field during the offseason, soccer organizations should properly store their goals. The best way is to break down the goals and lock them away.

If goals are not broken down, the organization must certainly remove the nets and either chain lock the goals face-to-face or chain lock them to a nearby fence.

Educate Your Coaches To Educate Players

Every soccer club/association has the obligation and responsibility to be proactive in educating their coaches/parents about the dangers of unanchored goals. Parents should be made aware of the dangers in allowing children to wander over to soccer goals while the parents are in another part of the complex.

Any public or private entity that leases its facilities to a local soccer organization must be proactive in making sure the local soccer organization has a plan in place to educate its members and staff.

Coaches must take time in a practice session to stress that players should check to see if goals are anchored, and it should be stressed that they should never attempt to tip or move a soccer goal. Players should never be allowed to jump up and grasp the crossbar and use it for chinups.

Not only should this be done in a practice session, it should be constantly re-enforced throughout the year.

Guidelines regarding soccer goal safety should be in printed form and distributed to every coach in the organization and every soccer family involved with the local program.

Injuries From Soccer Goal Accidents

Not only have there been soccer goal accidents that have resulted in deaths, many more injuries, many of which have been catastrophic, have been documented despite numerous warnings about the dangers of unanchored soccer goals. A Risk Management Report was produced by Bollinger, Inc., an insurance company that insures over two million youth soccer players across the U.S. Accidents have occurred in different ways, but in all cases the goals were unanchored. Some are listed below:

Claims Related To Moving Goals

- A 1998 claim involved a 10-year old player who was paralyzed from the neck down. Maintenance workers left the portable soccer goals at the side of the field in order to mow the grass. Later that day, the player was in the area when the goals were being moved. They lost control of the goal and it fell on the 10-year old, injuring his neck and skull.

- In 1999 a Pennsylvania boy was moving a portable soccer goal with the help of his coach and other adult volunteers. The goal posts fell apart and struck the boy in the head, resulting in injuries to his face and mouth.

- Children are not the only victims. In Oregon a team father was hanging the nets on the goal when it fell over and landed on his legs, fracturing several bones in his foot and ankle.

Wind-Related Accidents

- A five-year old girl was playing near where her brother was playing soccer. High winds toppled the soccer goal, which landed on the little girl and broke her femur and injured the growth plate area.

- Similar accidents in Pennsylvania in 1995 and Southern California happened in 1997. The Pennsylvania case involved an adult spectator who was injured when the goal posts were blown over in a 20 mph wind—not a unusually strong gust of wind.

Attractive Nuisance

Unattended soccer goals, sitting on the field, are considered to be an "attractive nuisance", much like an unattended, uncovered swimming pool.

- In 1993 an 11-year old boy came to practice early

installed soccer goal. He fell from the cross bar and broke his neck and is paralyzed from the neck down.

- A young boy participating in a YMCA extended day care program was outside and climbed on a portable soccer goal with his friends. The goal post fell over and fractured the boy's leg. The soccer association was held liable because they were responsible for maintaining the field, even though no soccer activities were going on at the time.

- In 1995, a goalkeeper from New York dove to block a shot on goal. The ball hit the side post on the goal, which was not commercially made and was in poor condition. The goal collapsed and the goalie was struck by the crossbar. She suffered serious head injuries and lacerations to the scalp.