



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH SA 26-22



Popular Sports Mishaps

Many people enjoy playing sports for recreation and staying active. However, fun can quickly become pain if players ignore hazards or their surroundings. The following are examples of service members getting caught up in the game and going home hurt.

Keeping One's Eye on the Ball

(We apologize for the pun). A Marine went to try out for a recreational softball league. He took his position in the outfield waiting for the opportunity to prove his stuff and got the perfect chance *(or so he thought)* when a pop fly came his way. The ball's arc passed right in front of a bright stadium light, obscuring the Marine's view. He kept his head up hoping to regain sight of the ball *(a Marine never shies away from the enemy ... or softballs)*. The ball did come back into view *(briefly)* when it impacted the Marine's face, fracturing his orbital bone, aka eye socket *(we aren't sure if he made the team)*. – *Despite its name, a softball isn't that soft. If one is coming your way and you lose sight of it, maybe play it safe and keep your head down. It's better to miss the catch than to break your face. We believe this Marine would agree.*



'Pick-up' Football

A group of Sailors was spending some off-duty time playing football on the pier by the ship *(maybe not the best place for a highly mobile sport ... you'll see why)*. A pass for one Sailor went long. The Sailor ran to make the catch looking over his shoulder to keep track of the ball. What he didn't see in the process was the parked utility pick-up truck right in his path. The Sailor managed to avoid fully running into the vehicle but did slam his hand against a utility box attached to the truck, lacerating his pinky *(He also missed the catch)*. – *We suggest picking a more appropriate area for activities like this. An active pier has plenty of obstacles and football demands a certain amount of attention and awareness on top of a lot of movement. Passing a ball around is one thing, but playing an actual game of football is another.*

Being Sent a Sign. Literally.

Our next incident involves another case of a service member running into a static object. The Sailor was playing basketball on a court next to a parking lot. An errant shot led to the ball bouncing off the court. The mishap report states the Sailor ran after the ball to stop it from hitting a car. It is unclear whether that meant the Sailor was trying to stop the ball from hitting a parked car or trying to stop it from being run over by a moving vehicle. What is clear, though, is the Sailor was booking it and not paying attention to anything else, because he ran face-first into a handicapped parking sign. His efforts to save the ball cost him a head laceration, a chipped tooth and a concussion *(not to mention a degree of embarrassment)*. – *Being aware of your surroundings is sound advice, no matter your activity. It's probably safer to take it slow when retrieving a ball rather than sprinting into a roadway or parking lot.*

Bush - 1, Sailor - 0

A ship's crew was playing a game of capture-the-flag and were divided between E-6 and below and E-7 and above. The assistant security officer had the flag and was using a four-foot-tall bush to shield his movement. One of the other team's Sailors pursued him and *(we assume in an effort to prove the junior team's physical superiority)* attempted to leap over the bush. This proved less than successful. The Sailor's foot caught a branch and he fell face first to the ground resulting in a head laceration, concussion and a partially torn rotator cuff *(and probably a victory for the other team)* – *Some competitiveness can be healthy, but when the desire to win has you performing actions more appropriate for a track and field competition, you might want to rein in your ambition.*

Ultimate Catch

A Marine was participating in a game of ultimate frisbee. He went for a pass into the end zone, but it was overthrown. Not willing to give up the point, the Marine went for a diving catch, but things did not go as planned. Instead of hearing whoops and cheers from his teammates as he made the game-winning catch, he heard the crunch of his ribs as they hit the ground (*and probably a gasp as the air was forced from his lungs*). The Marine fortunately only bruised his ribs, but this did put him in a limited duty status for nine days (*but hey, they won the game*). – *Professional athletes may sacrifice their bodies for the game, but that mindset doesn't work in the fleet. Friendly competitiveness can be good for morale, but taking yourself out of the fight doesn't help anyone.*



Here's Why You Wear PPE

A skateboarding enthusiast Sailor was at a skate park attempting tricks at the top of a ramp (*the key word here being attempting*). The report didn't say how high the ramp was, but it did say the Sailor fell to the bottom of it, striking his head on the ground (*oh yeah, and he wasn't wearing a helmet*). Despite the Sailor's apparent lack of concern for intracranial safety, he did have the wherewithal to go to the emergency room to get his head checked out. He ordered an Uber (*the driver fortunately did not have a no-bleeding policy*) and went to the hospital where he was diagnosed with a brain bleed. Luckily, surgery was able to remedy this problem, but the Sailor did have to spend 10 days in the hospital – *All jokes aside, if you take one thing from this, it's to wear relevant PPE, especially helmets. This Sailor could very easily have died had he not gone to the hospital; brain bleeds and other head traumas can be fatal.*

Key Takeaways

Sports are a great way to stay active and build teamwork, but just like anything else we do, you still need to watch for hazards and manage risk. Keep these points in mind before you head out to play.

- 1. Choose the right place to play.** There are right and wrong places for different sports. Be conscious of the hazards on your selected venue and if the area doesn't make sense, find a different one.
- 2. Remember, it's just a game.** It's natural to want to "give it your all" in everything we do. It's what makes our military so effective. Sometimes we need to tone that down, though. Don't make a play that will cause you an injury. If you do get hurt, stop playing. "Leaving it all on the field" for your rec league shouldn't hinder your ability to do your job the next day.
- 3. Wear appropriate PPE.** Protective gear exists for a reason. We know much more about long-term injuries than we used to. The lingering effects of injuries, especially head trauma, can have detrimental effects on your personal and professional life. If the sport calls for protective gear, **wear it!**

And remember, "Let's be careful out there"