



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 23-21

Team Sports Injuries

Team sports are a great way to build camaraderie, stamina, and overall mental and physical toughness—and unfortunately, cause injuries. Our database captured plenty of sports and training-related injuries resulting in lost workdays, missed deployments and, in some cases, loss of permanent change of station (PCS) orders. In fact, during the 2022 101 Critical Days of Summer, team sports mishaps ranked third behind car and motorcycle accidents. The injuries ranged from a sprained ankle to permanent/partial disability and discharge from service. The sports leading the charge with injuries include basketball, baseball, football, soccer, and ultimate frisbee.



With plenty of examples, we selected the top injury-causing sports from our database. The purpose of this dispatch is not to discourage participation in team sports but to drive home awareness of the hazards that accompany them and how they impact readiness. So lace up your shoes and learn pain-free, unlike these unfortunate service members who learned the hard and painful way.

Football Fever, Feeling like a Pro.

- It was Friday, late September, and an off-duty Sailor was playing flag football at a field on base. While going for a pass, he jumped, heard a loud pop in his right knee and immediately fell to the ground. The Sailor was taken to the hospital emergency room, where X-rays concluded that there were no broken bones, but he had a torn Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL). The Sailor was discharged, given 14 days of restricted duty and scheduled for a follow-up appointment and possible surgery. —*Some injuries are unavoidable, but staying fit and flexible can help. Keeping your hamstrings and quadriceps strong will go a long way to protecting your ACL. And don't forget your core too!*
- A Sailor was playing ultimate football during departmental physical training. During the game, the Sailor attempted to catch a pass and made contact with two other teammates, also attempting to catch the ball. The Sailor fell directly on his back and could not stand due to pain. He was transported by ambulance to the local hospital and later diagnosed with a severe back sprain. —*Someone wasn't paying attention to the play call in the huddle. Teamwork makes the dream work!*
- While participating in a Captain's Cup flag football game, a Sailor was playing defense and attempted to grab the flag of the running back. As the defender stopped to grab the flag, his body quickly turned right, but his knee turned left, causing it to twist, followed by a loud pop. The Sailor collapsed to the ground and needed assistance to get to the sideline. Further investigation revealed the member wore the proper shoes, had experience and warmed up properly but still suffered an ACL injury confirmed by medical. —*Sudden pivoting or "cutting" maneuvers are the most common causes of ACL tears, according to Johns Hopkins Medicine. Sometimes our competitive state of mind makes us unaware of the potential for injury. Beware of and control your movements, or be sidelined for weeks or months.*

Still got it? Or never had it.

- During a command basketball game, a Sailor jumped to block a shot, lost his balance, and fell to the ground on his left leg. Team members helped him off the court and took him to urgent care. An X-ray determined the Sailor had broken his left tibia in two places (*ouch!*). The physician scheduled him for surgery, where they installed a plate and eight screws. —*The report noted "degraded situational awareness" by the Sailor. Basketball is a highly dynamic sport. Play within your abilities and keep your head on a swivel.*

Team Sports Injuries

- A Sailor was playing a game of basketball at an off-base park. As he passed the ball to a team member attempting a shot, he stepped back with his left foot and heard a loud pop (*never a good sound*). His initial thought was, “Someone kicked me,” but no one was there when he turned around. He instantly knew something was wrong as he attempted to put pressure on his left leg. He immediately stopped the game and asked for assistance. He was taken to the military hospital and diagnosed with a ruptured left Achilles tendon. —*The Mayo Clinic notes that one of the primary causes of an Achilles tendon tear is “increasing the intensity of sports participation, especially sports that involve jumping.” It also notes that the peak age for such injury is 30-40. Don’t allow your mind to write a check your body can’t cash.*



The Good Old Days

- A Sailor was playing in a softball tournament under the lights. During the game’s excitement, he didn’t realize the proximity to another player taking warm-up swings before going to bat. As the batter took a full practice swing, he hit the Sailor in the hand, fracturing his knuckle and finger and earning him 30 days on light duty. —*Even baseball can be a contact sport, sometimes when you least expect it. Maintaining situational awareness (especially during an exciting play) can save you from weeks or months of pain.*
- A Sailor was fielding ground balls during an all-Navy softball team tryout when a line drive struck the Sailor in the face. This line drive resulted in multiple facial fractures and 45 days of lost time. —*The report doesn’t mention if the Sailor made the team, but he did miss the critical rule of baseball and the origin of the phrase “keep your eye on the ball.”*
- A Sailor was participating in a local base softball game when he injured his right shoulder. While rounding first base, he stepped on the turf covered with dirt and slipped onto the first base bag with his right arm extended to brace his fall. Upon impact, he dislocated his shoulder. Despite his injury, the Sailor slowly reached his feet and entered the dugout. Two corpsmen unsuccessfully attempted to reset the shoulder (*that sounds painful*), so the Sailor was transported to the base clinic where they reset it. He was put in an arm sling, given medication for pain, and placed on light duty. —*The report is scant on the causal factors, so we’ll take this opportunity to remind players to wear the right shoes for the sport and ensure proper turf upkeep.*

Key Takeaways

Team sports have great benefits, including building physical endurance, mental toughness and teamwork, which can help increase our Sailors’ and Marines’ warfighting readiness. To avoid the bad results, however—there were far more injury examples than we could fit in this dispatch—here are a few considerations as you plan your next sports event.

1. **Make the juice worth the squeeze.** Consider the risk to your unit and mission when planning team sports. How aggressively does your unit play? Is flag football borderline tackle football? Are your basketball games nearly full contact? Competitiveness and enthusiasm are healthy qualities when managed with player safety in mind. If not managed, they become less healthy.
2. **Monitor players’ experience and conditioning.** Everyone’s fitness level and training varies, so properly build yourself and your teams. Play and train at the appropriate level for all of your players. Stay engaged and watch everyone’s safety on the court or field. Team sports should be fun. The competition is great, but the goal is not to break yourself or your people.
3. **Build a winning team.** We’d like nothing more than to see a decline in team sports-related mishaps, but we don’t mean by not playing them. There is a winning element to team sports, and that is the ability to bring people together to reach a common goal. That principle applies to our mission as well. Having fun is a part of life, but we have to temper the joy with a little risk management. Injuries happen, but the better we manage the risks around us, the safer our sports days will be.

And remember, “Let’s be careful out there”