



Naval Safety Center

LESSONS LEARNED



LL 21-01

WINTER SPORTS MISHAPS II

Winter sports season is back! It's time once again for snowboards, skis, skates, sleds and, unfortunately, all the bumps and breaks that come with them. Nationally, nearly 200,000 people were treated for winter sports-related injuries in 2018, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Contributing to those numbers, the Navy and Marine Corps average more than 300 winter sports mishaps each year, according to a 2018 Naval Safety Center study. For all the stats, check out our last edition of Winter Sports Mishaps (LL 20-02) on our public website. Not interested in the numbers? We'll make it simple: when you attach yourself to objects that hurl you down snowy slopes or across icy surfaces, you're assuming some risk. With a little planning, common sense, and, of course, PPE, you can mitigate the risks and enjoy your favorite wintry sport injury-free.



There's sure to be exciting runs, spectacular tricks, and major wipeouts with the Winter X Games right around the corner, but why wait? We're not proud of it, but we have plenty of our own fearless competitors in the Naval Safety Center's Winter *M* Games (*"M" is for mishaps, of course*). As always, we ask that you read and learn from those whose epic falls *"landed"* them a spot on the podium of naval mishap history.

- A Sailor injured his shoulder while snowboarding in an attempt to avoid colliding with a skiing child. The report notes the child failed to give way in accordance with common ski slope etiquette (*as children may do*). Due to the high rate of closure, the Sailor chose the best available means to avoid the collision at the moment by jumping over him. — *While it was honorable for the Sailor to risk his own safety to avoid colliding with a child, we shudder at the image of a grown adult with a 5-foot plank strapped to his feet jumping over a tiny human (Yikes!). Twenty-eight days on light duty was a small price to pay, considering the potential alternative outcomes. Watch that traffic on the slopes, folks.*
- While "partaking in snowboarding activities with friends," according to the report, a Sailor decided to attempt his best X Game snowboarding champion Shawn White move by hopping on a rail. The mount was flawless, but it went *downhill* from there. The report doesn't specify the Sailor's intended rail trick, so we can only assume it wasn't the "backside boardslide" or the "backside blunt 270 out" dismount. Whatever the move, our "slope surfer" busted the dismount and fell awkwardly, spraining his wrist. The report later indicates the Sailor didn't have the experience level to attempt the rail in the first place. — *Well, you gotta start somewhere, we suppose; but maybe take it slow the first time.*



- In another inexperienced snowboarder fail, a Marine fell while snowboarding at a popular ski resort, dislocating and fracturing his shoulder. The Marine lost control after he was "slightly airborne" over uneven terrain, and his snowboard edge caught in ice when he landed. This day was only the Marine's second time snowboarding, and the report noted excessive speed for his inexperience. — *Based on his injury and 28 days on light duty, we're pondering the young Marine's definition of "slightly airborne." Repeating it for emphasis: go easy at first, please.*
- A Sailor was skiing in the "slow zone of a ski hill," when BAM! A snowboarder plowed into him from behind. The snowboarder was new to snowboarding and "did not know how to stop or control themselves," according to the report. The Sailor flew from the force and fell, hyperextending his knee. It took several minutes to separate the ski-snowboard entanglement, but fortunately, our Sailor escaped with only a minor strain. — *Keep your head on a swivel out there. It's not just your own skill level you have to be concerned about.*

WINTER SPORTS MISHAPS

- Do a quick web search for “puck to the face” before you read on ... yes, countless video compilations of hockey players getting nailed in the face with the puck, and the common denominator — no face mask. While pro hockey players mostly wear clear visors, these do little to protect their faces. In our M Games hockey game, the report says a Sailor was “unintentionally” struck in the face by a hockey puck. (*This begs the question: “Were there ‘intentional’ pucks to the face?” But we digress*). The report states the Sailor was wearing “all normally worn” PPE; however, the helmet did not have a face mask, as “these are seldom worn in hockey leagues.” Well, after years of playing hockey, the odds finally caught up to petty officer Gretzky with a fractured jaw, emergency surgery, and seven days Sick in Quarters (SIQ). — *There are many places we don’t want to get hit with a hockey puck, and the face is probably first or second on the list. Seldom worn or not, a face mask is a smart idea. Football didn’t initially have helmets, but now they’re required. Be a trendsetter: wear the right PPE. Your face will thank you for it.*



- A Sailor was skating at an ice rink when he “became stressed due to the influx of skaters on the ice.” The report also states, “skaters were traveling in all directions.” (*What kind of uncivilized skating rink allows such anarchy? Skating, track, baseball, and even NASCAR follow the counterclockwise tradition, which some lore holds began with chariot racing in ancient Rome*). Regardless of the origins, the Sailor realized he needed to slow down, but panicked. The blatant violations of skating norms and collective speeds were too much for our intimidated skater. Not knowing how to stop properly, the Sailor opted for the fall ... but not knowing how to fall properly, he fractured his fibula and spent several weeks on light duty. — *This is another case that falls into the “know your abilities” category.*



There’s no shame in bailing out of the skating rink until another less-congested day to practice.

- How much fun is a little holiday sledding with the family? It’s *relative*. (*Sorry, we couldn’t resist*). While sledding with his family, a Sailor fell off the sled, lodged his foot in the snow, and hyperextended his knee (*Ouch!*) The report states that the “member did not assess the risk of sledding in the chosen area,” so we can only assume it was a bit sketchy. — *Choose your sledding location wisely, lest you spend the rest of your holiday on light duty with a torn ACL like our M Games skeleton competitor.*

Key Takeaways / Lessons Learned

Quoting comedian Stephen Wright, “Experience is something you don’t get until just after you need it.” That sums up the hard lessons many of our 2021 M Games participants learned all too late. Here’s what we can take away from this year’s competition for glory ... and ultimate defeat.

1. It’s all fun and games until someone breaks their [arm, leg, face]. Even the most experienced professional winter sports athletes fall, so you should be prepared for the same. Learning how to fall is just as important as learning how not to, but don’t just take it from us. There’s no shame in taking a lesson, which will show you, among other things, how to properly fall ... because you will.

2. Winter sports are just that ... sports. Whether you’re a first-timer or you’ve been hitting the slopes for years, get in shape first, and not just the week before. Many winter sports take strength and flexibility to avoid injury. Just like the fitness test, you’re not going to do well by waiting till the last minute.

3. The pros wear PPE, so should you. Have you ever seen a helmetless X Games snowboarder? Didn’t think so. If there’s PPE like a helmet or face protection for the sport, wear it. It won’t make you indestructible, but it will increase your chances of returning to duty in one piece.

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