

ASAP *news*



Continuing the Little League tradition of making it "safer for the kids."

Training the 'Road Show' Way

Make your safety plan better by implementing these ideas from a Road Show near you!

If you attended a Little League Road Show, you know what great training it provides. If you haven't been to one, you **are** missing out and should go to one.

From material geared to league administrators to umpires to safety officers, the Little League staff annually brings a quality training program to a town near you. This is the same program you'd have to travel to Williamsport or a regional center to see otherwise.

Here's a recap of the safety presentation put on by Jim Ferguson, assistant risk management director at Little League International at the Central Region Road Show in Davenport, Iowa.

Requirements Bring Results

"The ASAP program still has just 13 minimum requirements," Ferguson stated. The requirements are listed on the Qualified Safety Program Registration Form (www.littleleague.org/Learn_More/forms.htm) mailed to all safety officers as part of the ASAP Safety Officer Manual on CD last winter.

Whether your league implements a safety program is up to you, he stated, but he stressed to the audience, "You make a difference in a child's life. You can choose whether it's a positive difference or a negative difference. It's up to you."

In 2008, the ASAP program brought \$629,825 to participating leagues through the league cash award, and \$57,050 to Districts helping leagues to submit their safety plans early. Leagues reached an all-time high of 81 percent participation in ASAP. That participation



Jim Ferguson, Little League International Associate Director of Risk Management, discusses some of the tools available to local leagues.

has decreased injuries in Little League to 77 percent of injury rates before ASAP was initiated in 1995.

But work remains. While all injuries will not be eliminated, all leagues can and should look at the local issues they face, and implement policies to reduce the chances of people being needlessly injured, he pointed out. An ASAP plan just helps to provide a written record of what those policies and procedures are from year to year.

Do All Background Checks

Complete background checks are essential for all leagues to complete, he noted. Ferguson told about a league that had a volunteer who wanted to be the league treasurer, but the ChoicePoint criminal background check showed she had stolen money in the past. She

threatened to sue the league for checking her criminal background, until the league president showed the signed consent form "that proved the league had authorization to do a background check on her. She said she had forgotten she had signed and filled out the form," he said.

He recommended leagues have volunteers fill out the form on their computer, so the forms can be read, "but they must sign it, and try to get the Social Security number," so you don't have as many hits of offenders you have to make sure aren't your volunteer. Keep the forms for the year of service, to show proper authorization, and **DON'T** do any checks without the consent form being signed.

Continued, page 2.

Road Show Training Continued

He also told of a league president who called: "He said, 'I have a gentleman who we checked, and he had 22 arrests, but none of them against a child; what do I do?'" I asked him if he wanted the man volunteering in the league, and if not, to politely decline him." He reminded that the league is supposed to appoint the best person for any position, one who is a leader and a role model. But if the president doesn't feel a volunteer should be nominated, then don't put the person up for a vote. Decline their services politely; no reason is needed.

Avoid 'Avoidable' Accidents

Part of any safety plan is first getting people to think about safety. "In one accident, a nine-year-old boy went after a foul ball, tried to jump the fence, but caught his pant leg on the fence top. He fell, breaking his leg in three places. His mom said he'd be in a cast for a year. Just because someone didn't tell the player not to jump the fence, or didn't put the PVC covering on it to avoid the injury," Ferguson related.

Other examples were: an outfielder who is running catches his foot in a hole and receives a compound fracture of the ankle; a player sliding into third base gets cut on broken glass, requiring stitches. "These are things that could be recognized with walking the fields, or players recognizing safety problems and speaking up," he stated.

"A league brought in a pile of rock that was going to be spread. Five adults walked by as four boys were playing with the rocks. One boy picked up a rock, threw it, and put out another boy's eye. No one said, 'Hey, boys, that's not a good idea,'" he said.

Good Policies, Too

"If you're the president, don't make your wife or husband the secretary," Ferguson noted. It raises perceptions that a family has control of league funds and/or leadership and can cause concerns even if unfounded; maybe a spouse can volunteer in a different area. And it allows people who ARE trying to bypass good policies fewer hurdles in accomplishing the bad acts,



Mike Legge, Central Region Director, gives a talk on changes to Little League rules and regulations.

whether financial mismanagement or breaking rules.

Make sure to release your volunteers at the end of the season. "One of the top lawsuits is from volunteers who are not appointed next year," Ferguson emphasized. Don't give the volunteers any reason to automatically expect to be appointed to the same position. "Send a letter at the end of the season thanking them for volunteering, and ask them to re-apply next year."

Another helpful suggestion Ferguson made was to look for backgrounds and careers that would help your league from the volunteer application form. "Find people you can approach about needs your league has," he said.

Make sure all fields being used, for practice and games, are league approved. "The league president assigns the practice schedule and locations. Make sure these are proper fields and well maintained," he said.

Insurance Questions

Also, he noted anyone not listed on a team's roster is not covered by accident insurance. "Are parents covered by accident insurance? Not if they are not an official coach on a roster with a completed background check." So make sure all "helpers" get properly documented and checked before they assist at a practice.

"I had a call from a league 'Can our 6-year-olds play our 18-year-olds?' NO! Only players playing with their team can play against teams within the same division," he said. The same goes for parent/player games, which are not be allowed.

He also reiterated the concern of leagues supplying beer or other alcohol at league events.

"Supplying alcohol is excluded from your insurance coverage," he noted. From under-age drinkers to drunk drivers, Little League warns local leagues against putting themselves in a position of having to defend their actions, if something goes wrong and the league provided the alcohol for those attending.

Finally, Ferguson raised the concern about paying umpires. First, he noted that paid umpires are NOT covered by Little League's volunteer accident insurance, since they are not volunteers. This is something the umpires need to understand, and agree to before being paid. It does not reduce the league's role by having someone else, either the coach or a parent, pay for the umpire, since it is a league responsibility.

"In every state, there are laws that require workman's compensation for ANYONE that you pay. In Pennsylvania, fines up to a maximum of \$15,000 plus seven years in jail per day of non-compliance are possible," he stressed. He recommended leagues who pay their umpires seek legal help in addressing what the league's liability is, and how it must act to stay within the law on the issue of workman's compensation.

So take a look at your league's practices, policies, and procedures. See what can be improved by better equipment, communication or approaches. If you can't tackle it this year, make a note to do it next. A good safety plan raises awareness of maintaining a safer environment. It also prepares people to handle concerns when they happen, to help avoid injuries on and off the field.

Does your safety plan do this?

Are You Protecting Your Volunteers?

Recent serious injuries and deaths point out need for increased protective devices, procedures for coaches, volunteers.

A Virginia assistant professor died in April from a line drive, and a South Carolina high school coach is sidelined for rest of the season for his own health, both after being hit in the head / neck while pitching batting practice this spring. Does your league use safety nets for pitchers throwing batting practice, and have procedures in place in case of potential head trauma?

News reports state Jeff Taylor Sr., 44, an assistant professor of health sciences and kinesiology at Liberty University, was struck in the jaw or neck April 28 while he was pitching batting practice for some college friends of his son at Lynchburg College's Fox Field.

The professor was reportedly an avid sports fan, and had been pitching batting practice for his son since his son's youth league baseball days. He was not a formal member of the coaching staff of the men's baseball team at Lynchburg College.

Published reports in *The News and Advance* in Lynchburg, Va., state he was pitching batting practice for an unnamed batter when a line drive hit came right back, hitting him in his throat or lower jaw, according to his wife. According to the players there, he initially fell down after being struck, then got up, stated he was OK, but soon collapsed and could not be revived. The college's EMS squad was the first on scene, trying to resuscitate him to no avail.

The news articles did not report that a pitching screen had been used.

In another accident, Joel Perry, a junior varsity coach at Timberland High School in St. Stephen, SC, was reportedly struck in the head when his pitching motion took him beyond the protection of the pitching screen he normally uses for batting practice. An article in *The Charleston Post and Courier* stated a hard line drive up the middle hit the coach in the side of his skull just above his right ear during batting practice on March 23.

The coach initially blacked out before regaining consciousness and asking for a bottle of water. He reportedly joked with players about how hard his head is, before concerned parents – remembering the recent tragedy of actress Natasha Richardson's skiing accident death – called for an ambulance. It was a great decision; the coach was found to have a compressed skull fracture, and underwent surgery the next day, where 15 medical screws were inserted.



In the case of Richardson, she resisted medical attention initially, and seemed fine. When she did collapse, medical attention could not save her. Medical experts call this a lucid interval, while the accident victim seems to return to normal after a head injury before the stresses on the brain due to injury cause a reaction. It is commonly referred to as the "talk and die syndrome" by doctors, for causing victims to delay treatment until it is too late for medical attention to help them.

The article stated that even after he was released from the hospital, he had to be monitored by family members 24-hours a day for two weeks, and now he will have to sit out the rest of the season for his own safety. "I'm lucky," Perry was quoted in *The Post and Courier* as stating. "I'll return when I'm 100 percent. I'll wear a helmet. I can't take another shot to the head. If it had hit me in a different spot, it could have been worse. I feel very fortunate."

A coach pitching batting practice is the closest person to the batter and has the goal of giving players hit-able balls; this puts this volunteer in an especially vulnerable situation. Make sure you have adults pitching from behind an "L"-screen (a frame with netting over it forming an "L" shape, to provide protection for pitchers) whenever they throw batting practice.

And make sure you have clear policies about contacting medical professionals anytime a participant, player or volunteer is hit in the head, especially if they lose consciousness. Time can be crucial in these situations.

Are You Talking Safety?

A good safety plan is not a bound plan sitting on a shelf, but an active, participatory approach to increasing safety awareness across your league's membership.

If you want to increase the impact of your league's safety plan this season, start talking about safety and asking for input. One of the founding ideas of the ASAP program is that "if you talk about safety, people might think about safety, and then take action to make it safer," as one early participant explained it.

Start a New Safety Course

As you continue your season, chart a new course.

Talk about safety and ask for help from all your participants in tackling safety issues. You don't have to add a thing to your already submitted safety plan to do this; just talk about the things you already do to improve safety awareness. Keep people talking about safety and actions will start to change, which will help create an environment that avoids preventable accidents.

Gather Feedback, Gain Support

Team moms, players, coaches, umpires, concession volunteers, board members and facilities crews should all be asked for help in implementing your safety plan and looking for ways to improve it. At board meetings, in league newsletters or posters, even in team meetings, ask your members to spend some time addressing safety issues and take action on any concerns, before an accident happens. Put out "Safety Suggestion" boxes at a central location to gather ideas from these meetings.

Make sure you follow up on suggestions, even if you just tell the person the idea will be put into a "future plans" section of the safety plan and reviewed annually. People want to help, but they want to know their input was valued, or they will stop giving feedback.

If you have a league newsletter or website, publish the suggestions you receive as a way of spreading the safety message and recognizing the effort made. This will then help to prompt others in making suggestions. Create player safety poster competitions or awards for players who spot safety concerns.

Leagues are great about looking at the causes of an accident after it occurs. Talking about factors that can

cause an accident at team meetings and in gatherings of parents and other volunteers will help to keep accidents from happening.

Keep Improving Your Plan

Here's a second idea: No safety plan is complete. Even the best safety plan in the country needs to be looked at and improved. Make sure you keep updating your plan with the ideas and suggestions you implement throughout the season. Then, it will be easy to present the new safety plan to the board next season and have it approved and submitted in plenty of time.

And make copies, electronically and in hardcopies. Every year, people call the ASAP Hotline looking for the plan their league submitted last year. This is a request that shouldn't be necessary, as you should have back-ups on disks or just paper copies with others in the league. So even if your computer crashes, you will still have a copy.

Drop in Accidents Slowing

Why is the slowing decline in accidents important? The overall trend in injuries has been dramatically reduced since ASAP began in 1995, dropping 77 percent. However, in the last several years, the number of injuries has hit a plateau, even though more leagues are submitting safety plans, as leagues continue to have injuries despite having safety plans.

Some injuries are unavoidable. But some injuries could be avoided if the proper steps had been taken to protect players and volunteers. It takes work, and it takes everyone's participation. No matter how good you are as a safety officer, it takes an entire league to reduce injuries. Let's talk safety to help reduce injuries.

Fundamentally Sound Ball

Make sure to teach your coaches the fundamentals of good play, for everyone's safety.

One of the cornerstones of any safety plan is the training your league provides to its volunteers. Every year, the potential is present for new volunteers with minimal experience to step into an important role.

Coaching is a prime example, and this training should be a focus of your league each spring.

If you don't have a standard fundamentals training clinic for your coaches, start one now. Whether you plan one for next year or implement yet this spring, a fundamentals clinic is key to your league providing an environment that is as safe as possible for everyone.

Don't Be Lulled by History

Some leagues make the mistake of thinking because they have not had injuries, they are a "safe" league, and don't need training. Any league's injury rate can be low, either through good luck or because coaches already have a good foundation of skills. But without a set fundamentals clinic to ensure coaches, and so their players, are receiving quality and appropriate skills development, that league's good fortune can quickly evaporate.

Create an outline for the safety and fundamentals topics to be discussed, and make sure your trainer, whether an outside trainer – like a high school / college coach or professional trainer – or an experienced league coach, goes over all of them. The league safety representative can discuss issues not addressed by the trainer, as necessary.

Ideas for Safer Practices

If you can, break up your training to specific divisions of play. This allows the more skill-specific training that is

appropriate by division (Tee Ball, Minors, Little League, Juniors, Seniors, Big League). Then train your coaches to those appropriate skills for the level of play for the children. An otherwise excellent coach can put players at risk by teaching advanced skills to children who cannot yet correctly perform the skills.

The reverse is also true. If a coach does **not** teach the proper skills, such as sliding or proper catching, players are at risk when they are in game situations and can't perform as they need to, both to play the position/skill and protect themselves. As just one example, facial injuries to defensive players can be reduced by proper hand positions. If a player doesn't have their non-glove hand between the glove and their face, a "bad hop" can do serious damage.

Use Just One Ball

Coaches often get caught up in trying to maximize practice or pre-game infield time to the extent safety is the first casualty. Make sure you emphasize the need to keep safety as a priority, even to the drills the coaches run.

Teach players to focus on the ball, and keep drills at one ball. If a coach introduces two or more balls during a drill, players are put in a situation they never face in a game: having to focus on two balls. If the player watches the wrong ball, it is easy to see after the fact how the player was injured, and unnecessarily so. Make sure coaches understand the danger of multiple balls with any player drill.



Are these players far enough apart that a missed ball won't injure a player involved in a different activity? Proper spacing is an important factor in safe warm-ups for both teams and all players. Don't allow players involved in one drill to be placed too close behind or beside another group, where a hit or throw ball could hit someone not watching that drill.

Use Common Sense

Make sure the drills are age specific and appropriate for the players. Have several coaches watch the players during practice for form, but also safety. If not, when the coach is focused on a specific player, other players are then at risk of unintended actions from unsupervised players (swinging bats, thrown balls, horse-play).

With some planning, your league can provide a high-quality training program that will increase the playing ability of and reduce the injury risk to your players, while providing a safer environment for your players, volunteers, and spectators.

Qualified safety plans must require coaches to attend training once every three years, and for every team to have a representative at each annual fundamentals training. This approach will spread the information out to the coaches, and not just team managers, so all activities are being planned and operated with safety in mind. By spending the time to make your fundamentals training worthwhile for all coaches, and you won't have any difficulty in getting your volunteers to attend.



**Make
Sure
They
Are
Safe!**

REMEMBER:
Catchers must wear helmets during warm-ups and infield/outfield practice.

RULE 1.17
"...All catchers must wear a mask, 'dangling' type throat protector and catcher's helmet during infield/outfield practice, pitcher warm-up and games."

Don't Swing It

...Until You're Up to the Plate!



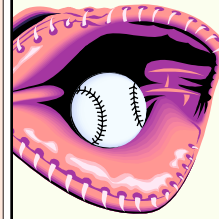
(Photos from North Scott, Iowa, Little League)

Don't let this happen to you, or to a teammate.

pick up your bat until you leave dugout, to approach the plate.

...bat position is not permitted in Tee Ball, Minor League or Little League (Majors) Division. 2. Only the first batter of each half-inning will be allowed outside the dugout between the half-innings in Tee Ball, Minor League or Little League (Majors) Division."

**Coach, Please
Let Players
Catch!**



**Players must not warm up
pitchers Catch.**

...pitcher at home plate or in the bull pen, stand to observe a pitcher

District: Rotate Safety Signs for 'Fresh' Safety Message

A Texas District Administrator is passing on a successful idea for using safety posters in helping to enforce the rules and help reduce injuries for everyone.

"Even though the leagues in my district are at 100% with safety plans, there is always the issue of enforcing rules in the regular season," says District Administrator Ben Hunt, Texas District 28. "There are always issues of parents and coaches wanting to dispute rules. We put up the safety posters for the first time last year in my District, and the number of issues we had with parents and coaches dropped to nothing. The message was so much stronger with the posters than having someone out saying the same things."

These ASAP safety signs are available on Little League's website at: http://www.littleleague.org/Learn_More/programs/asap/safetyposters.htm

District 28 Sign Program

Provide information to all parents, players, managers/coaches and

umpires, re: basic Little League game safety rules and a constant reminder of the rules.

Keys to the Program:

- 1 Use a double set of about 6-8 signs, depending on number of fields.
- 2 Place the same sign (facing toward the stands) on the fence outside of the entry area for home and visitors benches/dugouts on one field. This makes the sign visible to all players/managers/coaches/umpires who enter the field as well as the parents in the stands. With two games per week, all of the above people should see the message twice each week.
- 3 Rotate the signs each week, so that every field sees a new sign every week. This keeps the sign "fresh" and prevents it from becoming "wallpaper".
- 4 Over the course of a season, each team should see 6-8 signs at least twice.

2008 Results

Our use of the program during the 2008 season had dramatic results. The number of complaints about the enforcement of these rules from managers, coaches, players and parents dropped significantly (just about to zero). And, the compliance to the rules was near 100%! I was a little concerned that the picture on the "No swinging of bats on deck" sign would be received negatively; in fact, the results were quite the reverse. The younger age players *were very impressed* with the picture, which communicated the need for the rule very strongly. This picture was really worth a thousand words (and a steep reduction in accidents).

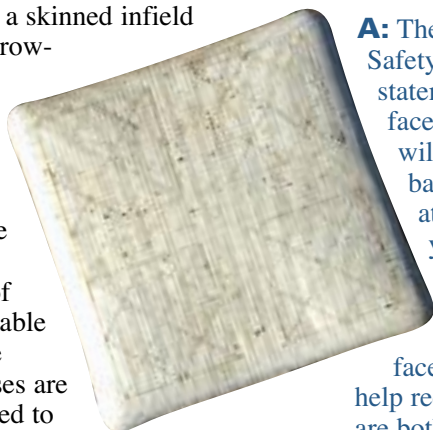
*Ben Hunt, District Administrator
Little League Texas District 28*

Editor's Note: These poster files are available on Little League's website, and may be reproduced by laminating the paper copies and posting, or downloading the PDF and taking the electronic file to a local sign shop to be made into a sign like those above.

O&A

Answers to Your Safety Questions

Q: “I received a question from a League President: ‘Our T-Ball and Coach Pitch teams will be playing on a skinned infield with the throw-down, thin plastic bases. Are the bases in compliance with rule 1.06, use of disengage-able bases? The current bases are not anchored to the ground.’”



*Al Bulgreen,
Safety & Field Director
Delaware District 2*

A: The “throw down” type base is not an approved base for use in Little League for games. It does not have an anchor, so even though it might be considered to meet the “disengage-able anchor base” requirement for Rule 1.06, it does not meet the first requirement for bases “securely attached to the ground.” This is not a new part of the rule on bases, so these bases should only be used on open fields where no bases are located, or just for sliding practice. Having a slippery base is a good way for an ankle or knee to be injured, as a base runner runs past and it slips under his/her weight. And if the league is using a skinned field, why are they not just using the dis-engageable bases required for that field?

Q: “I’m affiliated with the Framingham, Mass., board for Framingham Little League. A few of the coaches and I are considering proposing to the rest of the board to vote in a rule for the use of batting helmets with face guards for base runners for the 9-12 age group. If there is any literature or information we

can use to back our case, would you be able to point me to it?” Thanks!

A: The Consumer Products Safety Commission has issued a statement that putting facemasks on batting helmets will reduce facial injuries in baseball and softball. I’ve attached the document for your use. In addition, I attached the study they released on protective equipment, including facemasks, and how they can help reduce injuries in ball. These are both from 1996, but the information is still valid.

In 2007, ASAP put together the data from 2004 - 2006 on injuries just in Little League, which shows the injuries to base runners. In this chart it shows “Other” as 17% of base runners’ injuries, which would include facial/dental/eye injuries that would be prevented by facemasks. In the chart “Injuries Per Position,” the base runner and the batter are equally injured in Little League, at 19% of the total annual injuries. Of more importance, you’ll see the most common injuries to batters include eye, nose, teeth, face, and come to 29% of all batters’ injuries. So implementing facemasks for batters WILL reduce these injuries as well.

Hopefully this helps sell the idea of facemasks on batting helmets to your board.

Several newspaper accounts recently talked about severe injuries to college and high school batters’ faces, either from foul tips or pitched balls. A facemask would reduce

injuries in either situation. Read on for more on these cases.

Wildcats Player Sees Merit in Facemasks

The third University of Arizona softball player in four seasons was hit by a foul tip while batting, causing Victoria Kemp to considering installing a face mask on her helmet. Kemp is currently out, having been injured March 18, breaking an orbital bone in her face while batting, according to the *Arizona Daily Star*. The National Federation of State High School Associations has mandated face masks for high school girls softball. Kemp, the team’s starting second baseman, reportedly said, “Honestly, I think people should wear them, just because they won’t have to go through this again. Down the road, they’ll make it a rule.”

HS Baseball Player Faces Blindness

Justin Dingman, catcher for his Ellison, Texas, High School baseball team, will have to take prescription eye drops and wear night vision goggles and a facemask on his batting helmet in order to return to play following two inside pitches that both hit his left eye, according to the *Killeen Daily Herald*. Dingman, a sophomore, has reportedly developed glaucoma, a disease resulting from damage to the optic

nerve, from the two pitched ball injuries he sustained early in the 2009 season.

In all, Dingman missed over six weeks of the season from the injuries. In the article, Dingman said, “The doctors said if I get hit in the eye again, I could lose sight in that eye.” That’s why he’ll be wearing a face mask when he returns to the plate.

The local league has the option to mandate facemasks, and parents have the right to supply a batting helmet with a facemask for their child. Leagues have had this option for many years.



Ideas From Successful Safety Plans:

“Coaches: Monitor outfielders to prevent ‘kid-holes’ being dug in the outfield.”

**Beachside Little League
Satellite Beach (Indian Harbour
Beach), FL**

“Lockable safety fencing around the barbecue grill.”

**Port Saint Lucie
American Little League
Port Saint Lucie, FL**

“Uniforms shall not have names (first or last) inscribed on them.”

**Aliso Viejo Little League
Aliso Viejo, CA**

“Players should play hard but in a safe and responsible manner and should not intentionally endanger another player in any way.”

**Middlesex Little League
Middlesex, NJ**

“Caution shall be taken to avoid overloading electrical circuits.”

**Rancho Penasquitos Little
League
San Diego, CA**

“Foul balls batted out of the playing area will be returned to the snack shed for a free soda and not thrown over the fence during a game.”

**Thomaston Little League
Thomaston, CT**

“The concession stand is opened before the season, thoroughly cleaned and the equipment (microwave, oven, and coffee maker) is inspected by a volunteer fireman.”

**Town of Pawling Little League
Pawling, NY**



without prior permission.
chartered Little Leagues
News may be reprinted by
All materials in the ASAP
E-mail: asap@musco.com
Fax: 641/672-1996

**24 Hour Hotline:
800/811-7443**

© April 2009,
Little League®
and Musco Lighting

Musco Lighting
facilitated and published by
and Softball
Little League Baseball®
ASAP News is a service of
ASAP News

539 US Route 15 Hwy
PO Box 3485
Williamsport, PA 17701-0485



PRESORTED
FIRST-CLASS MAIL
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
DES MOINES, IA
PERMIT NO. 4053