

Despite Progress, Unanchored Goals Still A Problem

By Ray Alley

Despite two decades of warnings, mandates, and tragic consequences of unanchored soccer goals, another death on the soccer field occurred in May, 2008.

Eight-year old **Gabriel Mendoza** (Phoenix, Arizona) died when a soccer goal post fell on top of him during a local YMCA after-school activity.

Neither his mother or father were present when the accident occurred, but his grandmother saw the whole thing.

He was the ninth child in the past three years to die from a falling goal post. The Executive Director of the YMCA, **Robin Jordan**, was quoted as saying that to the best of her knowledge, the goal posts had not been anchored.

This accident was similar to the one that took the life of **Zachary Tran**, a 6-year old first-grader in Vernon Hills, IL. A lawsuit was filed and was settled for \$2.6 million. It was reported that both Tran and Mendoza had been swinging from the crossbar prior to the accident happening.

In June, 2004 it was 11-year old **Luis Jimenez** who died in a soccer goal accident in San Jose, CA.

Just one year prior to Mendoza's death, in May, 2007, 10-year old **Hayden Ellias** died

from blunt force trauma to the head and neck when a goal fell on him during a scrimmage game at Millbrook High School in Frederick County, VA.

Ellias' parents have named the high school, the Blue Ridge Soccer Association, Inc., Old Dominion Soccer League, Inc., Virginia Youth Soccer Association Inc., the United States Youth Soccer Association, Inc. and the United States Soccer Federation, in a \$10 million wrongful death and product liability suit.

Also named was the manufacturer of the goal, Porter Athletic Equipment, the facility designer and the contractor.

All parties to the suit have denied any responsibility.

News reports have indicated that the YMCA in Phoenix has offered to assist with funeral expenses for the Mendoza family. It is likely that they will eventually pay far more than that. The common denominator in all of

these deadly accidents was that the goals were not anchored.

Unanchored Goals

It has been reported that there are between 395,000 and 600,000 soccer goals in the United States. There is nothing sinister about a soccer goal, unless it is unsecured.

An unsecured goal is unsafe if it is unstable because it is either unanchored or not correctly anchored, or if it is not counterbalanced. Goals that are "home-made" in a local metal framing shop, often are not built with the technology that distributes weight and are top-heavy.

Soccer goals could weight as much as 400 pounds. If they tip over and begin to fall, the speed of the weight-load accelerates with deadly consequences.

Much has been done over the past two decades to raise public awareness about the dangers of unanchored goals. Soccer organizations have adopted rules that require goals to be anchored

for games, and part of the referee inspections prior to contests, is how well the goals are secured.

However, accidents can happen in practice or in scrimmages when game officials are not on site. They have happened on goals when no activity is taking place on the soccer field, but are there to attract children from other activities. Deaths have occurred when children climb on the goals, hang from the crossbars, or get entangled while climbing on the nets.

On fields where practices are held, coaches often move goals around. Too often they are not secured in their new locations, or secured when the coach and players leave the facility.

Awareness and Advocacy

Zachary Tran's parents have formed a soccer safety advocacy group called Anchored for Safety, which has stated that 34 people have died nationwide, and another 51 have been injured since 1979, by falling soccer goals.

That includes adults, as well as children, and in some cases the goals simply blew over in a strong wind. Hard to believe that a heavy soccer goal can just blow over, but it can if it is unanchored.

While rules have been written requiring that goals be anchored, that doesn't mean they always are.

How many times have you taken your child to practice and watched as soccer goals were moved?

Most of the time it is the players who move the goals. Did a coach, or another adult or adults, assist in the move? Were the goals anchored?

How many times have you walked out on the field before a game and checked for yourself to see if the soccer goal was anchored? Are you allowing your child to go out on the field and extending good faith that the coach or some other adult "has done the right thing?"

How many times did you arrive early at the soccer facility where soccer goals are sitting around the field, and walk over to see how secure those goals are?

After you read the article below, written by **Mary Ellias**, the mother of Hayden Ellias, chances are that more parents will want to be certain that maximum care has been taken to make their child safe.

Things To Remember To Prevent Soccer Goal Accidents

Anchor The Goals

- When the soccer goals are not in use lock them up. Chain and lock goals face-to-face or facing a fence.
- When goals are on the field make sure they are anchored to the ground before you take the field with your team, and also when you leave the field after training.

Have A Plan/Policy

- Have a club policy in place about the requirement to safely anchor soccer goals. Make sure everyone in your organization is familiar with what is expected and required.
- Make sure printed instructions and guidelines are given to anyone who will use your facility.

Important To Remember!

- Most accidents happen to youngsters who are not actually playing soccer at the time of the incident.
- Most injuries occur to boys and girls who are playing on or around the soccer goals. Do not allow children to hang on the crossbars and/or play in the goal's netting.

Hayden Elias' Mother Speaks Out

By Mary Elias

Soccer goals can be dangerous! They can injure, cripple, and kill. We know first hand. Our son was killed by an unanchored goal.

Hayden was our son and he was Collin and Alanna's brother. Now he's no longer here. How do you explain to your children that their brother is dead because a soccer goal was not properly anchored?

Unfortunately, this wasn't a freak accident. This happens all too often and most incidents don't get reported. There have been 32 reported deaths resulting from soccer goal tip over, most of which occurred at a practice.

It was Monday, May 7, 2007. We left our house rushing out the door yelling at all the kids that we were going to be late if they didn't hurry up. Dinner was sitting on the stove for us to eat when we returned home. Little did we know that was the last we would see of that life of which we were so familiar.

We arrived at the soccer field where Hayden was scheduled to have a scrimmage with another travel soccer team. We barely got the car in park and off he rushed to the field to play his favorite game.

I'm not even sure if I said anything to him when he ran off. Maybe I said something like make sure you have your bag or do you have your water? That was the last time I would be able to say anything to him and hear a response like "OK Mamma.."

Hayden was able to play in his scrimmage in other positions besides goalie. He scored the first goal of the game. As time went on, it was his turn to play goalie. This was nothing unusual as he shared the position of goalie with another player.

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Hayden had made a couple of saves in the short time he was in goal. Then came the last play we remember. Hayden saved a goal and kicked the ball to the other end of the field. It was such a nice, high kick that all eyes were on the ball.

That's when my family's world was turned upside down. There was a noise that didn't quite register, but I turned towards the noise, as did everyone else at that moment. What I remember seeing was our son lying face down lifeless on the ground.

I watched in slow motion as my husband, Greg, ran to him. I saw Collin running toward

me crying, and Alanna looking to see what was going on. I held them close telling them it would be OK. I vaguely remember dialing 911 to tell the dispatcher my son was on the ground and a goal fell on him. I don't think at that time I truly understood what was happening.

I remember the looks on people's faces around me, reading every one of them. I knew it was serious. They tried to stop me from going to him, but I knew he needed his Mommy. When I got to Hayden, Greg was covered in his blood, and others were frantically helping.

I could hear what sounded like echoes of people saying things like "he's not breathing,"

"I don't have a pulse!" Then as clear as the day I heard Hayden cry when he was born, I heard a silence. Greg, who is a registered nurse, looked up to me and said, "it's bad Mary, it's real bad!"

Greg rode in the ambulance with Hayden to the hospital. Another parent, an off-duty police officer, drove me. Other friends took Collin and Alanna home where my best friend awaited their arrival. On the ride to the hospital, I made as many calls as I could to inform friends and family of Hayden's incident.

When we arrived at the hospital, it was as though my legs forgot how to walk. I finally walked in the hospital with the help of Brian, the officer. I was greeted by one of Hayden's teammate's mom whose face spoke a thousands sorrows. She stayed with us as I was escorted to a special room.

That is where I saw Greg sitting on a couch, helpless, his arms being washed of Hayden's blood by a nurse that was there at the field with us. I heard him remind another nurse that Hayden would need some blood as he lost a lot on the field.

I knew in that moment what I was going to hear the doctor say. It was less than one hour from when the goal tipped over that the doctor entered our room and told us our son, Collin and Alanna's brother, had died.

That's the story we relive every day of our lives. With that story is the knowledge that if the soccer goal had been properly anchored or designed not to tip over, we would still have our precious Hayden and his warm smile. We were ignorant to the danger even though we walked right next to a goal that evening.

I have since learned how many of these acci-

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Some Tips That May Save A Life!

- No goal should be used that has not been properly secured. For more information on anchor types go to: www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/soccer.pdf. It can take as little as 22 pounds of pressure to tip over a 400-pound goal.
- Inspect goals for sharp corners, loose hardware and structural integrity.
- Forbid any horseplay around goals especially climbing on or hanging from goals.
- Remove nets when goals are not in use.
- An informed adult should only move portable goals. At no time should any child be responsible for moving a goal.
- Portable goals should be secured in a safe place when not in use and should be inaccessible to children
- "Push, don't pull" Stand on the outside of a goal and "push" forward to check for stability of the goal. Do not stand in front of the goal and "pull". If the goal is not stable it will fall directly on you!!
- CHECK EVERY GOAL, EVERY TIME! Just because it was secure yesterday, doesn't guarantee it's secure today!

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Soccer Goal

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idents have occurred. It's our mission. "Hayden's Goal." to spread the word about anchoring goals and using non-tipable goals. Referees, coaches, managers, players and **especially parents** need to know what they can do to prevent another tragedy like Hayden's.

As parents, we know it's our job to protect our children everyday. Why should this be any different? If you have read this story, you now know how terribly wrong things can go when simple measures aren't followed. It is our duty as referees, coaches, managers and parents to ensure safety on the soccer field.

We should empower our children with the knowledge of soccer goal safety. Let them know they have the right to speak up and tell a coach if they feel a goal is not properly secured. Let the coaches know to heed their warning. This is their precious life we are talking about, and no game, no practice is worth risking their safety.

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Another Soccer Goal Death

Sadly another child has died because a soccer goal was unanchored. This time during an Arizona YMCA after school program for special needs kids.

Warnings have been issued for many years, and still adults, who are responsible for securing the goals, fail to do what is required. Leagues, state associations, governing bodies, goal manufacturers, consumer protection groups, and soccer publications like *Southern Soccer Scene*, have made the effort to educate the public of the dangers of unanchored soccer goals.

Southern Soccer Scene has include its Great Goals section in summer issues over the past 20 years. The first of a two-issue section can be found in this July 15 issue on pages 6-7. Our August 15 issue will address the legal aspects of these cases.

After you read these articles, we hope that forever more when you see a soccer goal on a field, or along the sidelines of a practice facility, that you will wonder if that goal is anchored. Go and check!
