

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.