

Protocols to Minimize Injury, Death and Bad Results at the Courthouse for Track and Field Officials

by J. Shelby Sharpe¹

If avoiding litigation or winning unavoidable litigation is important to you as a track and field official, then this paper is a must read. Properly using the information in this paper will make your participation in track and field competition the safest it can be, which will accomplish either of the preceding stated objectives.

Athletic competition has an inherent risk of injury for the competitors, as well as those involved with the competition, including officials, venue personnel, media and spectators. Some injuries are not preventable, while others are. It is almost a certainty that when an injury occurs, litigation will follow. Following the recommendations made in this paper provides the best opportunity for avoiding these injuries, and if litigation comes, will place those sued in the strongest position possible to prevail.

The conduct of every meet in the United States, regardless of size, is governed by not less than two competition rule books. One is that of the entity governing the competition such as USA Track & Field or the National Collegiate Athletic Association. The other is that of a trial judge if litigation occurs following an injury or a death. The judge's book has more bite than the other and applies whether you like it or not.

It is the intent of this paper to provide practical recommendations to help avoid the preventable injury with the consequences that grow out of it. The language in this paper has been selected for persons who are not legally trained. There are sample questions at the end of each section of this paper to illustrate how an attorney for an injured person would seek to establish liability for failure to do what the law requires. There are also checklists at the end of the paper to assist those of you who are a head or chief official in following the guidance given in the paper as well as a protocol card for use with implement field events that I strongly urge be used if you are a head or chief official of an event involving an implement.

I. Legal Standard for Liability

When an injury is caused by someone who did not act as an ordinary, reasonable person, that person has legal liability for the injury with its resulting consequences. If that individual is acting on behalf of someone else, which is usually an organization, the organization will be

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liable for the person's negligence. Additionally, if the owner of the track and field competition venue has knowledge or should have had knowledge of a dangerous condition in the venue that causes an injury, this, too, creates liability for the owner of the venue.

In summary, any injury that could have been prevented by reasonable action by a person responsible for taking the action creates legal liability.

II. The Competition Venue

A. Owned or Contracted

The location of every track and field competition is owned by some party. Quite often, it is the institution that is hosting the competition. On occasion, it is an institution that has rented or been given the use of a facility. It is incumbent upon the owner of the site to eliminate any potentially dangerous conditions that are known or should have been discovered by reasonable investigation before permitting a track and field competition to occur. If the host entity is leasing or borrowing a facility, the host entity also needs to investigate the facility before the competition begins. However, as an official working a meet, you have an obligation to examine the area you are working for dangerous conditions.

The questions that an attorney for an injured person would probably ask concerning any dangerous condition in an area you are working are:

- (1) Did you examine the entire area where you were to work prior to the competition starting?
- (2) What examination was made by you?
- (3) Was anything discovered that might cause injury to persons in the area?
- (4) Did you report any dangerous condition found by you in the area?
- (5) To whom did you report and when did you do it?
- (6) If something dangerous was found, what corrective measures were taken to eliminate the hazardous condition?
- (7) If corrective measures were taken, when were the measures taken and by whom?
- (8) Who took the corrective measures and were they successful?

B. Identifying the Potential Problem Areas

The following should be investigated before holding or contracting to hold a competition.

1. Adjacent Competition Areas

A determination should be made of whether competition areas overlap where an implement has the ability to reach from one competition area into another competition area if you are officiating in or near an implement throwing venue.² There are two options if this is the situation. Appeal to meet management to either schedule the use of the competition areas adjacent to one another so that an implement going into an adjacent competition area will not have any activity going on at the same time or, adjust the competition area so that an implement cannot reach an adjacent competition area. For example, in a recent national meet, a tube for returning shot puts was used that was partially in an adjacent field event venue that was active. This problem was cured simply by moving the tube to the other side of the shot sector, which was out of the adjacent field event venue.

The questions that an attorney would probably ask where competition areas overlap are:

- (1) Did you examine your competition area for overlap where competition in your area might affect persons in another area?
- (2) Would an investigation of your competition area have revealed that the competition in another area could affect your area?
- (3) What precautions did you take to avoid injury to persons in your area and in adjacent areas?
- (4) Did you request meet management to adjust the competition schedule to avoid this problem and if not, why?
- (5) Did you have qualified individuals positioned to protect persons moving in areas adjacent to the competition area and if not, why?
- (6) Who was assigned to protect the adjacent areas?
- (7) What qualifications and experience did these people have whose responsibility was to protect the adjacent areas?

2. Dangers Within or Around a Competition Area

Every competition area should also be examined for dangers within the area.³ For example, some long jump-triple jump pits have metal grating around the pit. If the grating is broken, an athlete or an official stepping on the grating may be injured. Sometimes this grating

² Attached is an article illustrating an injury caused by an implement from one field event venue reaching an adjacent venue.

³ Attached are news articles illustrating the need to examine a competition area for dangerous conditions and the need to protect persons around a competition area.

is unstable so that it could give way causing an injury, such as a twisted ankle. At indoor competitions, the hardware supporting the running surfaces needs to be checked to be sure none is sticking out to injure a person walking next to these surfaces. All running and walking surfaces whether natural or artificial must be checked for hazards that could cause an injury.

You must also be aware of any object such as an advertising sign that is covering an object that if an athlete fell into the sign would injure the athlete. All too often, these kinds of signs are found close to a running surface, such as the finish line, or near field events pits.

Lastly, has the competition area been properly prepared to prevent athletes or officials from being struck by an implement or steps taken to keep people near the venue from being struck by an implement? For example, in a shot put venue, there should either be a warning line or an official positioned to prevent the competitors from going beyond a point where if a competitor's back is to the ring, the competitor could be hit by a shot. This can be done by placing a very visible line that no one should cross while anyone is in the ring or have an official positioned to prevent anyone getting into harms way. Persons bringing implements back to the competitors who are warming up or in the competition should never have their back to the area from which an implement is being thrown. Additionally, precautions must be taken to protect people adjacent to the venue. As an example, see the articles attached on an injury caused by a discus hitting a photographer and a javelin hitting a photographer.

The questions that would probably be asked for dangers within or around a competition area are:

- (1) Prior to any person being admitted to a competition area, did you examine it for any discoverable dangers?
- (2) What examination was made?
- (3) What precautions were taken to prevent an athlete or someone working in or near the venue from being struck by an implement that might go out of the sector?
- (4) Did you consider these precautions reasonable?
- (5) Were the running and adjacent surfaces checked for safety?
- (6) Were areas surrounding each landing pit checked?
- (7) Did you make a written report of your investigation if you found a problem?
- (8) Were all problems identified in your report corrected before access was given to the competition area?

3. Equipment

All equipment that will be used in your event you are officiating must be examined. This includes cages surrounding the circle from where an implement will be thrown. A cage should be checked for deterioration that would compromise its ability to restrain an implement from going through. Also, every cage needs to be checked for proper height and positioning. At a major national championship meet several years ago, the discus cage was positioned such that a left-handed thrower hanging on to the discus too long could put it into the stands where spectators would be sitting. This cage had to be repositioned before competition began.

As a part of the review of equipment, hurdles, starting blocks, landing pits, standards and bars all need to be examined to be sure that they are in proper condition to function as they are designed to function. Any of these found to be deficient in any way should either be replaced or properly repaired, if repair is appropriate.

The questions related to equipment that would be asked are:

- (1) Was all equipment in the competition area you were working that might cause injury checked before the athletes were permitted to use the equipment?
- (2) Were all landing areas, such as around the pole vault, checked for proper positioning and proper condition?
- (3) Was a written report of any problem made prior to the athletes being given access to the competition area?
- (4) To whom was the report given and when?
- (5) Were all discovered problems corrected prior to access being given to the competition area?

4. Lighting

If a competition will occur at night, the lights should be checked for not only brightness, but positioning. If you discover the lights are not bright enough or not positioned correctly, report this to meet management before permitting throws to occur. At one national championship meet the lights were positioned so that the discus was lost in flight making it hazardous for the officials marking the landing. In fact, two officials were struck in the leg because of losing the discus in the lights.

The questions that would relate to lighting are the same as those found at the end of Section II A. of this paper.

C. When Liability Exposure Begins

Liability exposure begins when people who are involved with or in the competition are admitted to any of the competition areas. If practice sessions are permitted by the organization responsible for the meet, then the same precautions must be taken as if the meet had begun. For example, it is reasonably foreseeable that an implement being thrown during a permitted workout prior to the beginning of a meet is just as dangerous as one thrown during a meet. Thus, the same precautions that would be taken during a meet for the throwing of implements should be taken during a permitted practice session. Similarly, runners taking starts should be protected from interference during a practice as well as during a meet.

During a meet, liability exposure begins during a warm-up for the competition. This also requires the same protections as required for the competition. It is primarily the responsibility of marshals to protect against injury caused by an implement or interfering with an athlete during a practice or a competition. Adequate numbers of persons acting as qualified marshals properly positioned are mandatory.

The questions related to injuries prior to and during a meet are:

- (1) Did you permit athletes into a competition area or know they would be there?
- (2) Is it reasonable that one could expect the athletes would be practicing with implements or running?
- (3) What efforts did you make to protect the athletes or others you could reasonably foresee would be there from being hit by an implement or a collision with a runner?
- (4) Were there sufficient, qualified people to provide for their protection?
- (5) Who were these people?
- (6) What qualifications did each have?
- (7) Where were they positioned when the injury occurred?

III. Meet Management and Administration

A. Sufficient Personnel

A failure to have a sufficient number of qualified people to protect all involved in the competition from injury will create liability. Those whose duties involve providing protection in the field of competition are marshals and those responsible for providing hydration for the athletes and the officials are trainers or persons specifically assigned this responsibility. The marshals are under the directive of meet administration, not heads of the various events. The

head or chief marshal should be knowledgeable of situations that cause injury and how to address these situations to avoid injuries. Around the perimeter of the field of competition, those responsible for protection from unauthorized people entering the venue are facility security or local law enforcement. The final group that must be present in adequate numbers has no responsibility for protection of those involved with the competition, but have the responsibility for treating injuries. These are trainers, emergency medical people and physicians.

The questions on sufficient, properly qualified personnel to conduct a meet safely and reasonably address injuries requiring treatment are:

- (1) What was the length of time the athletes would be permitted in the competition area?
- (2) How many people were needed to reasonably protect those within the competition area from harm?
- (3) How many athletes were expected in the venue?
- (4) What arrangements were made for hydration of those in the competition areas?
- (5) By category, what healthcare providers were there and what were their responsibilities?
- (6) What equipment did you have to address injuries that could reasonably be expected?
- (7) What protection did you have to prevent unauthorized persons from being in the venue or to deal with a breach of the peace?

B. Assignment of Personnel for Prevention and Treatment of Injuries

1. Personnel Within the Fields of Competition

The most conspicuous need for marshals is the protection of individuals from flying implements. This means guarding sector lines and any area where a stray implement can reach. In connection with this responsibility, the marshals must work with the media so that the media can do their job with a minimum risk of injury. For example, persons operating cameras will need to be close to sector lines in order to get proper pictures. These photographers should never be permitted along the sector line where implements will normally land. In positioning persons operating cameras, it must be kept in mind they must be positioned where they have sufficient time to respond to a verbal command to move. For example, it is unwise to let these people within 160 feet of the ring during the discus competition because a normal person cannot move quickly enough to avoid a discus closer in than 160 feet. Yet, during the hammer competition, these people should not be where the hammer would usually land by deflection or in the reasonably expected landing area or adjacent to it without a deflection.

Marshals also need to watch the officials who are working in an implement sector whose responsibility is to mark the landing of the implement. If it becomes apparent that an official working in this area for whatever reason demonstrates a lack of judgment or ability to avoid being hit, this should be reported to the coordinator of officials immediately for his investigation. To assign marshals to an implement area who do not have the experience and the physical ability to discharge their responsibilities can create liability also. Similarly, to assign officials to mark implements who do not have the experience, judgment or physical ability to do the job can also create liability.

Concerning the horizontal and vertical jumps, marshals have the responsibility of protecting the approach to the pit so that no one is injured by a collision as an athlete approaches the pit. Similarly, the marshals have a responsibility for protecting the approach of the javelin throw and especially when it extends out into the running lanes to be sure that the runners as well as the javelin throwers are protected.

Lastly, concerning running events, the marshals have responsibility for protecting the start and the finish to avoid collisions there.

Turning to those responsible for hydration, hydration includes more than just water. Water cannot replace electrolytes. Those officials and athletes whose assignments require them to function in weather conditions requiring their bodies to receive water and electrolytes must have these available within or immediately adjacent to the competition area. While meet management often considers the needs of the athletes, there are too many meets where the needs of the officials who must be in a competition area for extended periods of time are often overlooked. An injury that results where water and electrolytes are not made reasonably available will create liability. Thus, meet management should regularly have the field of competition inspected to be sure water and electrolytes are continuously available during the competition.

Meet management and chief or head officials of a competition must never forget that the marshals' primary responsibility is protection. Chief or head officials of the various events must not forget that the marshals are under the direction of the head or chief marshal who is under the direction of meet management. When a marshal is requested to escort an athlete, or group of athletes, the individual making the request needs to be certain that the absence of the marshal is not going to compromise safety. If safety will be compromised, then someone other than a marshal should be asked to do the escort duty, which usually is the primary function of a steward. All too often, a meet does not have stewards or insufficient numbers of stewards. A steward does not have to be a certified official as a marshal must be. Stewards can be positioned so that they do not interfere with those watching the competition.

The questions on sufficiency and qualifications of personnel within the fields of competition are:

- (1) How many qualified marshals were selected and were actually present for the competition?
- (2) Were the marshals sufficient in number to cover every event for reasonable safety considering the schedule of events and when athletes could be expected to arrive in a competition area?
- (3) What were the qualifications, physical ability and experience of the marshals?
- (4) Were the marshals properly positioned?
- (5) Was a qualified and knowledgeable person assigned to supervise positioning of the marshals?
- (6) Was a qualified and knowledgeable person supervising the marshals to be sure they stayed in proper positions throughout the warm-ups and competition?
- (7) Did the marshals properly protect those who were in the field of competition or adjacent to the field of competition?

2. Healthcare Personnel

Trainers and other healthcare personnel need to be in sufficient numbers and positioned to be able to respond timely to an injury occurring within the field of competition. The numbers of these people will depend upon the numbers of competitors. These people need to be qualified to deal with every type of injury that can be expected at a track and field competition from a minor injury to a life-threatening one. In connection with major injuries, those responsible for the conduct of the meet need to be certain that there are readily available means of transporting an injured person to a local healthcare facility that is equipped to handle the injury.

Questions related to healthcare personnel are:

- (1) Were sufficient healthcare personnel at the venue at all times the athletes were practicing or competing?
- (2) Were they properly positioned?
- (3) Did they have adequate equipment for the injuries that were reasonably foreseeable?
- (4) Was proper hydration available to those in the competition areas?
- (5) Was the hydration regularly checked to be sure it was available in sufficient amounts?

3. Facility Security

The prime responsibility on who is admitted into any facility where a track and field competition is being held is that of the facility security force. This force may be local law

enforcement hired for the occasion or it may be the institution's own law enforcement group. In any event, these people have responsibility to see that no one enters a track and field facility with a weapon. These people also have the responsibility for not allowing unauthorized people into the competition areas. This is not a function of the marshals.

There is, unfortunately, an occasional need for law enforcement to be within the field of competition. When law enforcement learns of physical threats directed at a competitor and it is determined that protection needs to be afforded within the field of competition, this activity must be coordinated with meet management and the marshals. Usually, these law enforcement officials who enter the field of competition will be dressed like the officials working the meet. Their positioning will be coordinated with the marshals. If it is a field event competitor, the chief or head judge should be discreetly notified of these additional people. This protection must be given as discreetly and unobtrusively as possible.

The questions on adequacy of facility security are:

- (1) Were sufficient law enforcement personnel present at the venue to protect from unwarranted entrance into the venue?
- (2) Were they properly positioned?
- (3) Were they properly equipped to respond or prevent what could reasonably be expected?

C. Interference with Competition

Meet management is responsible for the public address system affecting the competition venues. This includes announcers and advertisements that come over the public address system. At first blush, it would seem that this aspect of meet management is unlikely to cause an injury. However, this is not the case. Any sudden loud noise can cause an athlete to be startled to a degree that the athlete can be injured. This has happened to athletes in the horizontal and vertical jumps. In any of these events, severe injury can occur.

The questions that would be asked are:

- (1) Could meet management have known in advance the sound level of an announcement or advertisement that would transmit over the public address system?
- (2) Could meet management have known what was happening in the competition venues at the time a sudden high-level sound was to be transmitted over the public address system?
- (3) Could meet management have restricted the sudden high volume of sound so as not to occur during the competition or had the sound adjusted downward so as not to interfere with the competition?

IV. CONCLUSION

In summary, if an injury is foreseeable to a reasonable person, reasonable steps must be taken to avoid the injury or there is liability. Having and following protocols will reduce injuries with the resulting consequences.

FOOTNOTE 2

Javelin hit jumper's kidney, liver

Article from: **Daily Telegraph**

July 17, 2007 12:00am



FRENCH long jumper Salim Sdiri, who was speared by a javelin in a freak accident at the Rome Golden League meeting on Friday, is more seriously injured than at first thought, he said yesterday.

"The javelin touched the right kidney and there is a slight tear at the top of the kidney," Sdiri said.

"The liver was also touched leaving a hole in it. The javelin penetrated over ten centimetres and not four as we initially thought."

Sdiri is still in hospital after the accident and underwent more tests yesterday.

The bronze medallist at the 2007 European Indoor Championships added: "The kidney has started to heal over and surgery will not be necessary. We hope that the liver will also heal on its own ruling out an operation."

To avoid additional bleeding which could be provoked by travel Sdiri has been advised to stay in Rome until the end of the week.

The javelin that hit the athlete at the Olympic stadium was launched by Finland's Tero Pitkamaki.

When asked about the lack of security measure in the stadium Sdiri said: "I want to hold judgement on that for the moment."

The 28-year-old admitted that he had been ill at ease because the men's javelin and long jump events were taking place at the same time.

"I had my worries. We had begun our competition and the javelin throwers were warming up," Sdiri said.

"The javelins were falling not too far from our area and I saw one landing near my foot. I couldn't really see it arriving as my back was to it."

Friday's incident was not the first time such an accident had occurred.

In January, former Olympic decathlon champion Roman Sebrle was hit in the right shoulder by a javelin thrown during a training session in South Africa.

The Czech decathlete was told that he had 'escaped death by 20cm'.

FOOTNOTE 3

Pole vaulter injured in fall

Date: 1995-04-19

Jeff Sherry, Staff Reporter

Gophers track and field athlete J.J. Beckstrand is listed in serious condition at the intensive care unit of Hennepin County Medical Center after suffering a facial fracture and broken wrist during practice Tuesday afternoon at the University Field House.

Beckstrand, a junior who finished third in the decathlon at the 1993 Big Ten Outdoor Championships, was practicing the pole vault when he fell several feet to the facility's hard rubber surface.

Doctors performed a CAT scan on Beckstrand and found no additional head injuries. He will remain hospitalized for 24 to 48 hours for further observation and testing.

Men's assistant track coach Phil Lundin said the injury occurred primarily because a necessary safety mat wasn't in place.

Beckstrand was the first athlete Tuesday to practice the rope vault, a technique in which pole vaulters swing from a platform about 12 feet off the ground and drop onto a pad in the vaulting pit. The rope vault allows athletes to concentrate on the high portion of the vault near the bar without using a pole.

Lundin, who works with the team's pole vaulters, jumpers and sprinters, said he didn't plan for the athletes to use the rope vault Tuesday, and no one properly prepared the mats before Beckstrand's injury.

"The protocol if you're going to do this is to have another mat in front of the existing pads," Lundin said. "When the protocol is followed, it's quite safe. If things had been set up properly, this wouldn't have happened."

Sophomore pole vaulter Seth Mischke, who saw the injury occur, said the team has used the rope vault several times without an accident. But this time Beckstrand got off the rope too late and fell

in the unprotected area between the platform and the landing mats.

"I saw him go across and I thought to myself, 'He better let go or he's going to be in trouble,'" Mischke said.

"I saw him fall, and you could just hear a big thud. His feet landed in the sand (jump area), and it looked like he hit his temple and part of his shoulder on the ground."

Gophers assistant softball coach Sarah Maschka, whose team was also practicing in the field house, immediately called 911. Emergency medical technicians and police arrived at around 2:30 p.m., about five to 10 minutes after the injury occurred.

Beckstrand was conscious and able to move his limbs when the medical personnel arrived. Lying on the ground with his legs shaking, he screamed several times which brought many athletes at the scene to tears.

Lundin said the entire team had difficulty dealing with the dramatic injury.

"If I would've known he was going to (use the rope vault), or had I been involved in this activity, we would have gone with the proper protocol to reduce the chances of injury," Lundin said. "But it just came out of the blue."

"He took it upon himself to do it, and now we're in this situation. So obviously we're all devastated. I feel terrible for J.J. and the situation we've encountered. But this is what we've been dealt so we have to deal with it now -- and it's tough."

The supervising nurse at HCMC said she did not expect Beckstrand's medical status to change Tuesday night.

Beckstrand, a Prior Lake, Minn., native who redshirted last year's outdoor season, will not return to competition this season.

Vaulter injured in fall

By Alex Paul
Albany Democrat-Herald

Keegan Burnett, 23, a former Sweet Home High School pole vaulter, remains in the Intensive Care Unit at McKay-Dee Hospital Center in Ogden, Utah after a May 2 vaulting accident during a Twilight Meet at Weber State University.

Burnett, a member of the Idaho State University Bengals track and field team, flipped backwards off the pole vault landing mat. The university's vaulting pit was covered with padding to regulation lengths, but Burnett's head struck a portion of exposed concrete on the perimeter of the pit.

According to an Idaho State press release, Burnett was unconscious for 10 to 15 minutes after the accident and was taken to the hospital, which is near the athletic facility.

Burnett's parents, Rick and Alice of Sweet Home, rushed to Ogden and have been with their son since the accident.

"He's holding his own right now," Alice Burnett said this morning by telephone. "There's swelling in his brain but so far, they've been able to hold it down with medication. They are monitoring the pressure with a probe. They have had to increase his medication quite a bit and a nurse is dedicated to him at all times. His neurologist says he is pleased they are keeping the pressure down. It's day six, another day or so and the pressure should start going down."

Burnett said most schools extend their pole vaulting mats another four to five feet beyond the regulation lengths.

"When Keegan came down, he bounced and landed on the corner of the mat and his head slipped down on the concrete," Burnett said. "The back of his head is damaged and there is bleeding on the right side of his brain."

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Photographer gets javelin through leg

May 20, 2008 04:30 AM

ASSOCIATED PRESS



RYAN MCGEENEY/AP

Newspaper photographer Ryan McGeeney now has heck of a story to tell after he was speared through the leg by a javelin, a little too close to the action at a high school track meet in Utah.

PROVO, UTAH—A newspaper photographer got a little too close to the action at the state high school track championships and was speared through the leg by a javelin.

Ryan McGeeney of the *Standard-Examiner* was speared serious injury Saturday, and even managed to snap a photo of his speared leg.

"If I didn't, it would probably be my editor's first question when I got back," McGeeney said.

The 33-year-old McGeeney, an ex-Marine who spent six months in Afghanistan, was taking pictures of the discus event and apparently wandered into off-limits area set aside for the javelin.

Striking below the knee, the javelin tip went through the skin and emerged on the other side of his leg.

"I was very lucky in that it didn't hit any blood vessels, nerves, ligaments or tendons," McGeeney said.

Much of the javelin was cut off at the scene. The piece in McGeeney's leg was removed at a hospital, where he received 13 stitches.

The javelin was thrown by Anthony Miles, a Provo High School student who said his "heart stopped" when he saw what happened.

"One of the first things that came to my mind was, 'Good thing we brought a second javelin,'" Miles' coach, Richard Vance, said.

With a subsequent throw, Miles went on to win the state title.

April 10, 2007

Struck by a discus

Steve Gall's picture-taking session at a Medford track meet takes a shocking turn, prompting calls for more safety measures to protect spectators

BY SANNE SPECHT
MAIL TRIBUNE



[Click image for larger view](#)

Sometimes knowledge can make a bloody entrance. When a discus crashed into the skull of one father attending his first local track meet, it brought an immediate and painful understanding of dangers that lurk in the sidelines of athletic events.

Steve Gall, 47, had just finished taking pictures of his daughter's boyfriend throwing the discus for North Medford High School at Saturday's Medford Rotary Relays. Gall was reviewing the images in his digital camera when the next athlete began his throws. Gall never saw the heavy metal plate that came winging down the foul line toward his head until impact, he said.

Steve Gall gives the thumbs-up sign after being hit in the head by a discus at a North Medford High School track meet on Saturday. Gall didn't know then that the injury could have cost him his life. (Mail Tribune / Roy Musitelli)

"I went down and forward," Gall said. "I was on my hands and knees. There was blood everywhere. My daughter, she saw my skull."

The impact created a deep bloody gash that runs at a 45-degree angle from the right side of Gall's hairline to below his right eye socket. The force pushed his shattered skull into his brain.

Gall's wife, Susan, was standing about 3 feet away when the accident occurred. Her husband never lost consciousness and initially thought he was fine. But she and her fellow bystanders knew better, she said.

"He kept saying, 'I'm fine. I'm fine,' " she said. "But two nurses who happened to be there got him flat on his back. They used the 'mom' voice. And a half a dozen people, including me, called 9-1-1."

The incident occurred shortly after 2 p.m., said Susan Gall.

Dr. Don Ross, a neurosurgeon, was operating on her husband at Rogue Valley Medical Center by 6 p.m., she said.

"They said his skull is shattered, it's pressing on his brain and we have to get the bone fragments out and the metal plates in place," she said.

The doctors told Gall they expect a full recovery. He was lucky the metal disc hit his skull in an area that did not affect brain function. They also said his ignorance of the pending impact may have saved his life, he said.

"If I'd looked up, I would have lost my eye. If I'd have turned my head, I'd be dead," said Steve Gall. "If I'd been a child I'd be dead."

Susan and Steve Gall want to see safety measures increased to keep others from the threat of major injuries from a wayward throw.

Medford School District officials are reviewing Saturday's incident and will comment once their investigation is complete, said Superintendent Phil Long.

The Galls admit to their ignorance of track and field events.

"We don't have children in track and field, and we had no idea we weren't in an area that was perfectly safe," said Susan Gall.

Steven Gall said he was "in the wrong place at the wrong time." But they thought standing 130 feet out in the field and next to the foul line would protect them from injury.

"There were kids and other parents standing all over that area," said Susan Gall. "The policy needs to be changed. The policy is obviously not safe."

North Medford parent Terral Adams agrees with the Galls about the need for better safety controls. She said she witnessed a dozen more discs land in the out-of-bounds area after Gall was taken by ambulance to the hospital.

"Kids release too soon and discs fly up and over into the crowd area," Adams said. "I believe we need to make the foul lines a bit bigger or the spectators area behind the thrower."

It was Adam's son that Gall had been photographing. She was standing just behind Gall. The disc was heading straight toward her chest before it lost altitude and hit Gall's head, she said.

"It was a really nice, wonderful day until this," said Adams. "It was really a horrible thing that happened to him. The sound replays in my head over and over again."

Reach reporter Sanne Specht at 776-4497 or e-mail sspecht@mailtribune.com.

Meet Administration Check List

1. Sufficiency of personnel to operate the meet.
 - A. Sufficient number of qualified marshals.
 - B. Officials knowledgeable and physically able to discharge duties.
 - C. Sufficient health-care professionals.
2. Avoid overlapping competition areas by scheduling.
3. Have hydration stations properly maintained.
4. Check all competition areas before permitting access to them.
5. Have proper number of qualified marshals for all practice and meet times.

Site Check List

1. Examine all field event areas for overlaps with other competition areas including running lanes.
2. Examine the sectors where implements will land.
3. Examine all pits and equipment for the competition.
4. Examine all implement cages and their positioning.
5. Check all running surfaces.
6. Examine position and brightness of lights if competition involving field events will be held at night.
7. Determine availability of health-care professionals for meet sufficient for needs of the meet.

Protocol Card

It is recommended that a sheet or card be presented to every person who will work in a sector or in connection with the sector of a field event involving an implement and have it signed before the person begins duties in the sector or in connection with it stating the following:

- (1) I acknowledge that the field event in which I will be working is dangerous.
 - (2) I agree to never take my eyes from the throwing area while an athlete has an implement in hand and the throwing area is not closed.
 - (3) If I am involved in retrieving or returning any implement to the throwing area, I agree to always keep my eyes on the throwing area as I approach and retreat from it.
 - (4) I acknowledge that I am physically able to move sufficiently to avoid any implement thrown from the throwing area toward the sector or the area adjacent to it.
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