

times to settle out of court, rather than fighting the case on principle."

In the Halbrook case, college baseball player Scott Halbrook hit his head on Monsanto's AstroTurf (see accompanying story), allegedly causing his death. Monsanto assistant general counsel Frank Vible says the company offered a settlement in September, 1985, for purely economic reasons.

"It was not an admission of guilt," Vible says. "We felt that the economics indicated that it would be a lengthy trial and there would be a lot of sympathy for the plaintiff."

Dan Holland, attorney for the Halbrook family, says they decided to accept the settlement because Monsanto offered enough money.

"None of us will ever know if we made the right decision," adds Alan Halbrook, Scott's father. "But I got the information I went after."

Opponents of artificial turf say it will take a well-publicized case which actually goes to court before



Insurance expert Jim Leatzow says athletic turf managers are liable for injuries on natural turf.

anything will be done about the problems with artificial turf. Most of the cases are settled out of court with a non-disclosure clause.

No choice but to settle

Waldrep feels he had no choice but to settle. When TCU cut off its financial

support, Waldrep was left without medical insurance. The bills had to be paid.

"I couldn't afford to go to court and lose," he says of his decision to settle. "I wish it could have been me. It was an extremely hard decision...almost like giving up, and I've never given up on anything in my life."

Although Waldrep's and Halbrook's cases were serious, a vast number of lawsuits today aren't. Leatzow feels there should be an incentive not to sue frivolously. In Europe, if someone sues and loses the case, the loser is then responsible for the other party's attorney's fees.

Without such incentives, athletic field managers need to be extra cautious about properly maintaining an athletic field.

Rash lawsuits could make it difficult for schools to get liability insurance. Not having insurance could put some sports programs in jeopardy.

As the old adage goes, "An ounce of prevention..." **WT&T**

One wheelchair is too many

by Dr. Kent Kurtz

"Why is it that people wait until someone gets hurt to fix a playing field?"

Jeff Wishard, 26, speaks from his wheelchair:

"Neither the doctors, coaches nor my teammates are really sure how my accident happened. One theory is that, on impact, my head may have been forced down into the ground.

"The practice field was in real poor condition. That particular field was used for many activities other than football, and was extremely hard. The only maintenance to the field was a weekly mowing.

"When the field was wet, it was muddy. During the hot, dry weather in the fall, the surface was hard and traction was very poor. It was comparable to the farmer's field adjacent

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to the school."

Some people are beginning to question whether the satisfaction of making a desperation tackle or scoring a touchdown is really worth the risk of becoming a paraplegic or quadriplegic.

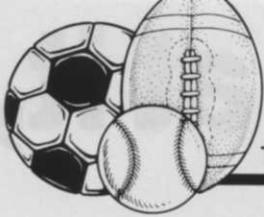
The incidence of catastrophic injuries (those that result in permanent spinal cord disability) is not large when based upon player populations of 100,000. Data indicate that, in 1984, 1.575 million football young men played college and high school football, but only 0.38 percent were injured severely. Most spinal injuries occur during regular games to defensive players, and the majority are associated with blocking and tackling.

Such is the case of young Wishard, who suffered through a football field injury which has left him a quadriplegic.

Wishard lives in Davis, Ill. (pop. 550). Parents Ron and Sandy own an automotive body shop and gasoline

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station. His mother works for an optometrist. The Wishards are a typical hard-working, middle class Midwestern family who are well-liked and very active in the community.

When Wishard was injured 11 years ago, the family was not prepared for the hospital bills, the special care required, the anxiety that followed or the weeks, months, and years of learning to adjust to a new kind of life.

Tragedy strikes

On Oct. 15, 1975, the Dakota High School freshman/sophomore football team was going through a normal

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practice session.

Wishard recalls the day vividly.

"We had just finished our calisthenics on the Dakota practice field and our coach, Jeff Clark, was conducting what was called the 'hamburger' drill," he recalls. "As the defensive player, I was supposed to jump up (from the ground), turn around and tackle the offensive player. On my first attempt, I slipped on the hard, bare soil surface and by the time I recovered the offensive player had gotten passed me."

The coach told Wishard to try again.

"All I can remember from my second attempt is falling to the ground in pain and calling for the coach. I laid on my back while my helmet, socks and shoes were being removed. I knew something serious was wrong and I think the coach and team manager knew I had a broken neck. When they ran a pencil along the bottom of my feet to see if I had any sensations and I didn't, they called an ambulance."

In the next few hours, he went from hospital to hospital. Wishard re-

members seeing his mother at Freeport Hospital.

"When I awoke again, I was being transported to Rockford Memorial Hospital. During the ride, the shock subsided and I hurt real bad. My father was waiting at the Rockford hospital, and I'll never forget the shocked expression on his face. He was as white as a ghost," recalls Wishard.

Wishard soon learned that he had a broken neck, several fractured cervical vertebrae and would probably be a quadriplegic the rest of his life.

Wishard's injury seemed to bring more parents out to Dakota football games during the fall of 1975—perhaps because parents became more concerned or aware of their youth's welfare. They might have wanted to make sure their sons were receiving adequate instruction on the basic football fundamentals.

No better today

The maintenance of football fields in the Northwest Illinois Conference has not been upgraded or improved significantly since the Wishard injury.

Eleven years later, inspection of the Dakota High School football practice and game fields reveals hard, compacted surfaces, several grassy and broadleaf weeds and a maintenance program geared to a weekly mowing. Watering, fertilizing, aerifying, weeding, and the introduction of new turf-type grasses is apparently non-existent.

Minor injuries, and some serious such as broken legs or arms, twisted ankles, broken knuckles and knee injuries continue at Dakota and other conference schools because of rough terrain and poor quality turf.

Two prominent researchers feel that catastrophic football injuries may never be completely eliminated. But a united effort involving coaches, players, administrators, researchers, physicians, trainers and equipment manufacturers is required to identify the problems and then take the necessary preventative measures.

Hope for tomorrow

The purpose of the Sports Turf Manager's Association (STMA) is to provide knowledge and education to improve athletic field conditions throughout the United States, Canada and other countries. STMA is making a concerted effort to get grounds supervisors and personnel to become

members and to join forces to combat unsafe athletic facilities everywhere by providing quality fields for the youth and athletes.

STMA would like every athletic field manager to come together to solve problems, learn about new ideas and techniques, and find ways to further reduce severe athletic injuries.

STMA has long advocated that the easiest way to reduce injuries is to provide a well-turfed practice facility and game field. Selecting and using the adapted turfgrass species, fertilizing often enough and correctly, providing adequate water for the turfgrass plant, mowing at the correct height, and aerifying and topdressing to encourage deeper roots, a more resilient surface and a non-compacted soil medium can go a long way toward reducing sports-related injuries.

WT&T

Preventing, not promoting, the injury

by Ken Kuhajda, managing editor

A high school football player suffers a serious injury; not an abrasion or a bump. He tears up his knee.

His parents in the stands don't give a second thought to the condition of the natural grass field. After all, their son is hurt.

But would that player have been injured so seriously if the field were in better condition?

Data on whether a field's condition contributes to an injury is hard to find. At the playground, grade school, and high school levels, there haven't been many studies conducted.

"It's one of those things people just don't want to talk about," says Dr. Eliot Roberts, director of The Lawn Institute. "If there is a tie-in between field conditions and a young person's injury, it's not discussed much. The school systems just have too many other problems."

Adds Dr. Bill Knoop, Texas Agricultural Extension Service turfgrass specialist: "Some people don't want to document the relationship between field conditions and injuries because of the liability question."