

A concerned adult poses a direct and unsettling question

How long until someone dies of heatstroke on a synthetic turf field?



It's a question that has raced through the minds of many people, but because of the sensitive nature of the subject matter, it has never been presented so directly. It's also a question that community planners, athletic coaches, school districts, board members and especially parents should begin to take seriously.

Chris Hummer (pictured to the left) is Founder and President of HummerSport, LLC, publisher of Potomac Soccer Wire and numerous other soccer-focused web sites. Off the field, Hummer spends his days running his soccer company, writing about soccer and performing his duties as Assistant Director of Coaching for a youth soccer club in Virginia.

Hummer's credentials are important because the article he wrote in the August 31 issue of the Potomac Soccer Wire will trouble some people and awaken others. He has nothing to gain by addressing this issue. He has no hidden agenda and to our knowledge is not affiliated with any organization that is out to ban synthetic turf.

The following is an excerpt from his article:

How long until someone dies of heatstroke on a synthetic turf field?

Did you know there are studies out there recording synthetic turf field surface temperatures of 200 degrees on a day when the air temperature was 98 degrees? Did you know that synthetic turf field surfaces are hotter than black asphalt?

My feet know it. I am writing this article just two hours after playing at Wakefield Park in Fairfax County Virginia on a day with a 97 degree air temperature, wearing black shoes. The tips of my toes have heat blisters. We didn't have a thermometer, but the surface was literally too hot to touch with bare hands. It had to be north of 150 degrees. Water steamed off my shoes when I squirted them.

How hot is too hot, especially for kids?

Adults are adults. We can decide when it's too much (we called our game short, it was just too much. Guys were walking, and it was no longer fun.) But our kids can't decide not to play as easily. League and Tournament



administrators put them out there on days like this without thinking too much about the heat. If the air temperature was 150 degrees, would you even go outside? The waist-level temperatures on a turf field on a hot day can reach that level.

If there were a lightning storm coming, we'd pull the kids off the field for safety. If it rained too much on a grass field the night before, we won't let them play for fear of damaging the field or twisted ankles. If there's a little frost on the field in the mornings for an icebreaker tournament in March, the whole day's schedule gets backed up. But on a sunny day with no rain, 97 degree air temperatures don't seem to even enter into the minds of league, tournament, or field directors. "It's a beautiful day, just get out there and run your little super-stars!" seems to be the blissful mentality of adults who are supposed to be protecting children.

Has anyone died from heatstroke suffered on a synthetic turf field? I don't think so, at least not that I've heard. But it took a boy getting killed a few years ago in Virginia by a goal that flipped on his head during high winds to wake everyone up to the danger of non-anchored goals that had been around for 50 years. Now local municipalities are patrolling fields looking for non-anchored goals, and threatening to literally remove and destroy goals they find in violation! Is it going to take a death from heatstroke to wake up the soccer community in a similar way to the dangers of these fields?

The answer to Hummer's question isn't so much if, but when? And when such an avoidable tragedy does happen there will be those who will stand up and say, "I knew this was going to happen." Unfortunately, unlike Chris Hummer, many of them will have said or done little if anything to prevent it from happening.

To read Chris Hummer's article in its entirety visit: <http://www.potomacsoccerwire.com/news/5322/12633>

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