

[Personal Banking](#) | [Business Banking](#) | [Investor Relations](#) | [Mohave Online](#) | [Home Mortgages](#) | [Locations](#) | [Career Opportunities](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Preferences](#)

Baseball Injuries Reason to Watch Your Head: Balls Hit 2 Fans in Stands, but Clippers GM Says New Stadium is Safe

The Columbus Dispatch, Ohio

2009-06-04

By Kathy Lynn Gray, The Columbus Dispatch, Ohio

Jun. 4--Two baseball fans beamed by foul balls at Huntington Park last weekend were treated at hospitals, but Columbus Clippers general manager Ken Schnacke sees no cause for alarm.

Despite the cozier design of the new stadium, Schnacke said, "we're having less incidents than at the Coop" with fans being injured by flying balls and bats. He did not have statistics on injuries.

Cooper Stadium had netting behind home plate to protect fans from errant balls and splintering bats. Netting in the new park stretches from dugout to dugout behind home plate because spectators are closer to the field, Schnacke said.

Fan safety is continually assessed, he said, but he has no plans to add more netting. Signs at the ballpark and wording on tickets warn fans to pay attention during games, especially when batters are swinging, he pointed out.

Still, the back-to-back injuries Saturday and Sunday are worrisome, Franklin County Commissioner John O'Grady said Tuesday.

O'Grady was at the park both days. On Saturday, he saw a popup ball hit a woman's head, then bounce high in the air. The victim was in about the 14th row behind the first-base dugout, he said.

On Sunday, in the park's first-aid station, he saw a man in a wheelchair with his head bleeding profusely. That man had been hit by a home-run ball over the left-field fence, Schnacke said.

Randy A. Mobley, president of the International League, said balls flying into the stands could be traveling 90 mph or more.

Players are well aware of the danger, Mobley said. On Friday, he saw a Clippers player suggest to a woman with a baby that she might want to move out of the second row behind the home-team dugout.

That location has no netting, and fans have little time to react if a ball comes their way, Mobley said.

South Carolina author and librarian Robert Gorman has researched ballpark injuries and said fan fatalities from foul balls are few -- just one recorded in minor-league play -- but injuries are not.

Baseball officials don't want to scare fans away, so few statistics are kept, said Gorman, who co-wrote the 2008 book, *Death at the Ballpark: A Comprehensive Study of Game-Related Fatalities, 1862-2007*.

Gil Fried, a sports-management professor at the University of New Haven in Connecticut, estimated that each minor- and major-league ballpark will send 10 to 15 injured fans to the hospital each year. His research shows the first- and third-base lines are the most dangerous places to sit.

Mobley said fans should make wise choices about where they sit in a ballpark.

"Are you going to watch the game or visit with friends and not pay attention?" he asked. "That should affect your choice."

kgray@dispatch.com