Introduction

This paper will document my risk management plan for a small college that has six sports: women’s field hockey, men’s soccer, men’s ice hockey, women’s gymnastics, men’s baseball and women’s softball. Following the format in Dr. Richard Borkowski’s article “One Month at a Time,” I will describe the risk management plan in terms of what steps should be taken each month at this college.

August

August is the time for annual risk identification and evaluation across the entire athletics program. To start, the following steps should be performed before we switch focus to the fall sports:

1. Review all accident reports for all sports for the last three years.
   a. Identify any risks that led to accidents that still exist in the program.
   b. Make a list of items that need to be addressed to mitigate these risks.
   c. Contact the appropriate staff members and delegate responsibility for minimizing or eliminating the risks so that similar accidents do not happen in the future.

2. Review all waivers with legal counsel.
   a. Determine if waivers are still adequately worded to limit liability for the college.
   b. Determine if any newly identified risks can be transferred by updating the waivers.
   c. Make sure all insurance is adequate and in place for the upcoming year.

3. Review and update the risk management plan, including the crisis plan. Make plans to perform a thorough review of the crisis plan after the initial steps are taken to begin the season, but before the first contest.
4. Review the college’s maintenance and construction plans.
   a. Are there any changes in the maintenance plans that will impact athletics facilities or operations? Should there be?
   b. Are there any construction projects on campus that will impact athletics operations or common areas that may be visited by staff, student-athletes, or fans?
   c. Schedule meetings with campus maintenance and construction staff to discuss the impact of their plans and limit risks to athletic operations.

5. Tour and survey all athletic and common area facilities. The true weakness of the facilities will be easy to spot when the facilities are not yet in perfect shape and have been dormant for several months.

6. Review all ingress and egress plans for all athletic facilities. Make any changes necessary in order to provide for safe and orderly access to and exiting from the facilities.

7. Hold risk management meetings with all staff who work with multiple sports. This would include all athletic department staff, maintenance, security, medical teams, public relations, and university officials.

Once the annual review procedures have been performed, it is time to focus on the fall sports.

**Steps to be completed for both women’s field hockey and men’s soccer:**

The following risk management steps should be taken in August:

1. Meet with the coaches and discuss risk management, looking both forward and back for potential liability issues.

2. Walk through every facility that will be visited by student-athletes or fans. Perform very detailed safety reviews of these areas in particular:
   a. Weight room
b. Locker room

c. Playing field.

d. Spectator areas.

e. Concession areas.

f. Parking lots.

3. Ask maintenance to perform their own review of these facilities and report back to you with their observations.

4. Double check with the medical staff to make sure all forms are in and all athletes have had physicals. Ask the medical staff if they have any concerns for the upcoming season.

5. Hold meetings with parents and student-athletes to discuss risk management issues.

   a. Make sure the coaches review safety procedures specific to field hockey or soccer with the student athletes.

**Additional steps for women’s field hockey**

The following steps should be taken with respect to field hockey:

1. Inspect all equipment.

2. Review with the team the safe ways to handle their sticks.

3. Inspect all protective equipment. Replace aging or worn equipment.

**Additional steps for men’s soccer**

The following steps should be taken with respect to soccer:

1. Inspect all equipment, including players’ cleats for legality.

**September**

By September, practice and competition will have begun for both field hockey and soccer. In the in-season months, focus will be on continuing to identify and evaluate new risks,
and monitoring the programs for accidents or losses. The following steps should be taken in September for both sports.

1. Attend the first home contest. Get to the facility early and stay late, and observe the entire contest from a risk management perspective.
   a. Was the playing surface safe?
   b. Were medical personnel in position?
   c. Were the spectator areas clean and in proper repair?
   d. Ask all similar questions about every aspect of the event.
   e. Review your observations with the appropriate athletics or campus personnel after the contest. Make any corrections necessary to minimize or eliminate any noted risks.

2. Review game reports and accident reports after each contest, home and away. Review information from the conference or national association about any accidents at any other field hockey or soccer contests.
   a. Discuss any accidents noted in this review with appropriate staff and make any adjustments necessary to mitigate that risk on your campus.

**October**

In October, both field hockey and soccer will be competing. In addition, men’s ice hockey and women’s gymnastics will begin practice in one month, so it is time to start thinking about the winter sports as well. For both field hockey and soccer, the monitoring and risk evaluating activities noted for September should be continued. By the end of October, all reviews, assessments and meetings for the winter sports that will take place in November should be scheduled.
November

In November, field hockey and soccer will be completing their regular competition seasons. Hopefully the teams will have qualified for post-season competition. As the fall sports conclude, the following steps should be taken for both sports:

1. Review travel procedures for post-season competition.
2. Review all waivers and releases for athletes, parents and fans who may be travelling to post-season competition.
3. Contact the facility managers or championship administrators to discuss any current risk management or safety issues.
4. Review university policies on end-of-season banquets, including alcohol consumption policies.

Before practice begins for ice hockey and gymnastics, the following steps should be taken:

1. Meet with the coaches and discuss risk management, looking both forward and back for potential liability issues.
2. Walk through every facility that will be visited by student-athletes or fans.

Perform very detailed safety reviews of these areas in particular:

a. Weight room
b. Locker room
c. Ice rink and gymnastics facility.
d. Spectator areas.
e. Concession areas.
f. Parking lots.

3. Ask maintenance to perform their own review of these facilities and report back to you with their observations.

4. Double check with the medical staff to make sure all forms are in and all athletes have had physicals. Ask the medical staff if they have any concerns for the upcoming season.

5. Hold meetings with parents and student-athletes to discuss risk management issues.
   a. Make sure the coaches review safety procedures specific to ice hockey and gymnastics with the student athletes.

**Additional steps for men’s ice hockey**

Ice hockey is a dangerous sport with significant additional risk management issues. The first of these is the risk of serious injury to the athletes. Every season, we hear of at least one case of significant laceration from skate blades and at least one case of significant head or neck injury, including paralysis. Ice hockey also has a culture of aggression that carries over into the audience. Stories of violence among spectators are common. Finally, ice rinks carry their own unique set of risks. At a small college, it is likely that the ice rink facility may not be university owned. Due to these sport-specific circumstances, it is imperative that administrators and coaches perform the following additional steps related to ice hockey:

1. Review safety protocols with the players at the start of the season, including a serious discussion about checking players head first into the boards.

2. Renew agreements with the nearest level one trauma center. If the nearest level one trauma center is not close, consider an arrangement with a medical helicopter
transportation company. Meet with hospital administrators to review procedures for head and neck injuries. Provide hospital administrators with a schedule of home events.

3. Renew security contracts and security procedures. Meet with security personnel to discuss additional security at hockey events and procedures for handling unruly fans.

4. Renew agreements with the rink operator if it is not a university property. Have your maintenance staff meet with rink staff to tour the facility and address all safety issues, including ice maintenance, condition of the boards and glass, and locker rooms.

**Additional steps for women’s gymnastics**

Women’s gymnastics has similar injury and facility risks to hockey. Some of the additional steps for hockey should also be performed for gymnastics, including:

1. Review safety protocols with the gymnasts at the start of the season, including a serious discussion about spotting their teammates and other sport-specific safety procedures.

2. Renew agreements with the nearest hospital. If the nearest hospital is not close, consider an arrangement with a medical helicopter transportation company. Meet with hospital administrators to review procedures for any potential serious gymnastics related injuries. Provide hospital administrators with a schedule of home events.

3. Carefully inspect all gymnastics equipment for safety and reliability. Consider replacing any aging equipment. Review procedures for setting up and caring for the equipment with the coaches and staff.

4. Discuss gymnastics specific risks with the coaches and address any additional gymnastics-specific risks.

  **December**
December is competition season for ice hockey and gymnastics. The steps taken for the fall sports in September should be repeated for each winter sport in December, including:

1. Attend the first home contest. Get to the facility early and stay late, and observe the entire contest from a risk management perspective.

2. Review game reports and accident reports after each contest, home and away. Review information from the conference or national association about any accidents at any other ice hockey or gymnastic contests.
   a. Discuss any accidents noted in this review with appropriate staff and make any adjustments necessary to mitigate that risk on your campus.

3. As noted by Borkowski in “One month at a time,” policies for facility use during the holiday break should be reviewed in December.

January

In January, both ice hockey and gymnastics will be competing. The monitoring and risk evaluating activities noted for December should be continued.

February

In February, both ice hockey and gymnastics will still be competing. The monitoring and risk evaluating activities noted for December should be continued. In addition, the spring sports of baseball and softball will be starting in March. Schedule all reviews, assessments and meetings for the spring sports. Also, perform the following steps for ice hockey and gymnastics as they complete their seasons:

1. Review travel procedures for post-season competition.

2. Review all waivers and releases for athletes, parents and fans who may be travelling to post-season competition.
3. Contact the facility managers or championship administrators to discuss any current risk management or safety issues.

4. Review university policies on end-of-season banquets, including alcohol consumption policies.

March

In March, before practice begins for baseball and softball, the following steps should be taken:

1. Meet with the coaches and discuss risk management, looking both forward and back for potential liability issues.

2. Walk through every facility that will be visited by student-athletes or fans.

3. Ask maintenance to perform their own review of these facilities and report back to you with their observations.

4. Double check with the medical staff to make sure all forms are in and all athletes have had physicals. Ask the medical staff if they have any concerns for the upcoming season.

5. Hold meetings with parents and student-athletes to discuss risk management issues.

   a. Make sure the coaches review safety procedures specific to baseball and softball with the student athletes.

Additional steps for baseball and softball

From a risk management perspective, baseball and softball are very similar. Therefore, one set of additional sport-specific procedures will suffice and should be performed for each sport.
1. Review playing fields and all surrounding grounds with the grounds keeping staff. Pay special attention to uneven turf, new erosion or animal holes, rocks, ruts, and anything other imperfection that could injure a player. Repair fields before the first practice.

2. Review all field equipment, including fences, dugouts, benches and batting cages. Make any repairs necessary. Consider replacing or refurbishing any field equipment that is aging or worn out.

3. Review all player protective equipment. Replace any worn equipment. It is a good idea to budget for replacement of one-third of your protective equipment every year, so that your equipment is regularly replaced on a rolling three-year schedule.

4. Review insurance contracts, paying particular attention to liability for foul balls and parking lot damage.

5. Update signage on the grounds warning fans of the dangers of foul balls.

6. Hold safety meetings with the players to discuss baseball and softball specific risks, such as thrown bats and the importance of paying attention to the play at all times when you are on the playing field.

April

April is competition season for baseball and softball. The steps taken for the fall sports in September should be repeated for each spring sport in April, including:

1. Attend the first home contest. Get to the facility early and stay late, and observe the entire contest from a risk management perspective.

2. Review game reports and accident reports after each contest, home and away. Review information from the conference or national association about any accidents at any other ice hockey or gymnastic contests.
a. Discuss any accidents noted in this review with appropriate staff and make any adjustments necessary to mitigate that risk on your campus.

3. In addition, if your teams will be practicing, competing or travelling over spring break, review the travel plans and the necessary waivers before the trips.

**May**

Baseball and softball will be completing their seasons in May. The end of season procedures related to post-season competition and banquets noted in November and February should be repeated for the spring sports in May. In addition, May might be your last chance to hold a risk management meeting with your entire staff before everyone leaves for the summer. Before they go, gather and review all of your incident reports for the year. Hold one last meeting with your entire risk management team from the athletic department and the university to discuss what went well, what could be improved upon, and any ideas or suggestions that people may have. Thank the team for being diligent this past year and make a commitment to doing an even better job next year.

**June and July**

During the summer break is the time to review the year in detail and make plans for next year. Start with your own analysis from your meeting in May. Research injuries or incidents on other campuses related to the sports that your institution sponsors. Review all contracts and insurance policies and renew them for the next year. Finally, review your training programs for coaches, athletes and parents and make adjustments based on your experiences from the past year.

The summer also may hold one additional risk management item to attend to. If your coaches will be holding camps on your campus, you will need a risk management plan.
related to the camps. The review items and procedures will be very similar to the procedures noted in this plan for the in-season sports. Since campers are not university students, review your waivers and insurance related to these activities. Make sure all facilities and protective equipment is inspected before use, and make sure medical personnel are under contract and properly trained to support the camps.

References


www.athleticmanagement.com/2009/08/16/one_month_at_a_time/index.php