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## **Ballpark caught in debate over netting: ; Spate of foul-ball injuries prompts talk of measures to protect fans**

**Author:** Simmons, Christine

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**Abstract (Abstract):** "You can't put up netting that extends 300 feet away from home plate, but that's what it would have taken to protect two of the three people. You would have to quadruple the netting to protect the third," he said.

Still, city officials and team management have been discussing the possibility of additional netting since two people were hit by foul balls earlier in the season and sustained serious injuries to the face, said Rod Blackstone, assistant to Charleston Mayor Danny Jones. City officials have also spoken to the ballpark architect, HNTB, about the possibility of additional netting.

Consistent with ballpark standards, netting at Appalachian Power Park is only behind home plate, connecting the two dugouts. Any additional protection would extend the netting to one or both far sides of the dugouts, Blackstone said.

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**Full text:** csimmons@wvgazette.com

City officials and authorities of Appalachian Power Park are baffled.

For the third time this baseball season, a fan was hit Sunday by a foul ball at the new East End ballpark. But putting up additional protective netting, now being considered for the ballpark, may not alleviate the problem, said Andy Milovich, general manager of the West Virginia Power.

"You can't put up netting that extends 300 feet away from home plate, but that's what it would have taken to protect two of the three people. You would have to quadruple the netting to protect the third," he said.

Still, city officials and team management have been discussing the possibility of additional netting since two people were hit by foul balls earlier in the season and sustained serious injuries to the face, said Rod Blackstone, assistant to Charleston Mayor Danny Jones. City officials have also spoken to the ballpark architect, HNTB, about the possibility of additional netting.

The most recent injury - to a man sitting in the picnic area near left field, about 300 feet away from home plate - complicates the decision.

"It's unfortunate, but you're talking about an incident that's even more hard to come by," Blackstone said.

If additional netting were put up, it would not be in place until next season, Blackstone said. City officials would make their decision by the end of this season.

Consistent with ballpark standards, netting at Appalachian Power Park is only behind home plate, connecting the two dugouts. Any additional protection would extend the netting to one or both far sides of the dugouts, Blackstone said.

Netting here would mean demolition of concrete already in place to put in poles and cables that support netting. But the expense for this, which Milovich estimates to be more than \$200,000, is extravagant for a measure that may be useless, Blackstone said.

"This is a double-edged sword that we have to consider. Even if we extend it to that level, I don't think it would have prevented any of the three injuries," he said. "The only way you can make it fully safe is if you put up Plexiglas or netting all around the playing field, but that's unnatural with the game of baseball."

More netting also raises technical issues such as how players would be able to enter and exit the dugouts, said Milovich.

He said he's only heard from a couple of fans who are concerned and so far he isn't aware of a drop in ticket sales. The majority of fans disapprove of additional netting, he said.

In fact, Marshall University Athletics Director Bob Marcum, who was hit by a foul ball during a May 26 game, doesn't like the idea of a netted field.

"Baseball parks aren't like that. Yes, I got hit by a ball, but it could have happened at a Cincinnati Reds [game] or any other team," Marcum said.

"What happened to me is just an unfortunate event."

Rick Paugh, 50, of Charleston, has season tickets for seats behind the first-base dugout, the area that could have netting next season.

"If I wanted to be behind the net, I'd sit behind home plate," Paugh said. "What's causing the problem is a lot more people are going to the games, and obviously that going to cause more injuries."

Blackstone said this is exactly why there's a greater chance of an injury at Appalachian Power Park, compared to Watt Powell Park, where fewer people were in the stadium.

"There's more people attending the games, and that means more people have to pay attention," Blackstone said. "I encourage people to remember that they are at a baseball game."

Milovich said this season is still very unusual.

"It happens at every ballpark in the country, but rarely does it happen three times in the course of two months," he said. "To have three people hit in the face - I can't begin to explain the odds in that."

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