

## **Preventing Serious Oral & Facial Injuries Among Players who Wear Orthodontic Braces**

Across the country, 80% of those who wear orthodontic braces are under the age of 18. Needless to say, many of those young people also play club soccer without realizing that their unprotected braces pose a potentially life-threatening situation. To illustrate this, below is an actual case report of such an event. I presented this case study at the January 2005 Conference of the Georgia Athletic Trainers' Association. *The details are graphic.*

“During a youth soccer game, two 16-year-old male players left the ground simultaneously to head the ball in their desired direction. Afterwards, one of the players fell to ground striking his head. The ATC was then called onto the field to find the player in a dazed state, and a large through-and-through wound on his left cheek, exposing both his teeth and gums. Bleeding was extensive. Shortly after communicating with the athlete, there was silence and the sound of blood being aspirated into his airway; the player became cyanotic. Recognizing this, the ATC immediately raised the athlete to a seated position, freeing his airway of aspirant. Once normal breathing was restored and the athlete was stabilized, he was then taken to the hospital where a facial-plastic surgeon repaired the wound, both internally and externally. The player returned to competitive play the following week. Unprotected orthodontic braces were the major contributor to this life-threatening injury.” [ATC= Certified Athletic Trainer]

### Implications for Players, Parents & Coaches

1. The case report above clearly states that the player wore unprotected orthodontic braces during play and as a result, he almost drowned in his own blood.
2. During play, every soccer player who wears orthodontic braces should also wear a mouth guard or use orthodontic wax to protect themselves from potentially serious injuries.
3. Parents and coaches should be aware of the potential seriousness of wearing unprotected braces during play, and support the use of a mouth guard or orthodontic wax to prevent serious injuries.
4. Prevention of these potentially serious injuries is cheap and simple. Players can obtain a custom-fitted mouth guard from their orthodontist, and orthodontic wax can be purchased from most grocery and drug stores for less than \$3.00.

The case report above illustrates the potential seriousness of wearing unprotected orthodontic braces during play, and the need for players, parents and coaches to be aware that the potential for serious injuries does exist. It is hoped that the information provided above will help eliminate injuries of this nature in the future.