

Press Release

“Jury finds against local college and manufacturer in NCAA compliant landing pit in death of pole vaulter”

A wrongful death lawsuit against Illinois College in Jacksonville, Illinois and product manufacturer Litania Sports Group, Inc., from Schaumburg Illinois has resulted in a record verdict for Morgan County, Illinois. The verdict came in plaintiff's favor despite undisputed evidence that the pole vault landing system complied with NCAA requirements.

Robert Yin, a student at Grinnell College in Iowa, was participating in the pole vault at Midwest Conference Track and Field Championships at Illinois College on May 14, 2010. Yin was attempting to vault 11 feet when he landed on the far right side of the landing pit, slid off and struck his head. He died due to head injuries a few days later. Yin's mother, Sandra Giger, filed suit due to his death.

Pole vault landing pads consist of many sections. Evidence showed that in 2002 the NCAA changed the width requirements of a pole vault landing system from 16' 6" to 19' 8". Schools were given the option of purchasing new, wider pads or could purchase add-on kits to place on the sides of the existing landing pits to come up to the minimum width requirements. Illinois College purchased an add-on kit from Litania, resulting in a landing system that consisted of its original three large pads, and two 30" pads on either side, bringing the total length to 21' 6" – in excess of the NCAA minimum width requirements.

According to NCAA requirements, the 5 pads only needed to be connected via a common top cover and did not need to be strapped together in any additional fashion. Although straps were provided to connect the three center pads, no straps were provided to connect the add-on pads to the primary landing system. Before the start of competition, the pads were inspected by a certified master referee, as required by the NCAA, as well as all of the coaches of the participating schools.

Illinois College and Litanía argued that the landing pit was NCAA compliant and that Yin effectively missed the mat – giving himself no chance for a safe landing. They also argued that Yin was so off course in his vault that he should have never let go of the pole vault pole and should have “bailed out.” Giger’s attorneys relied on American Society for Testing and Materials (“ASTM”) standards for pole vaulting, which require supplemental padding to be attached to the primary system via some prudent means, including ropes, straps and bungees. Illinois College argued it was only required to follow NCAA regulations, and all those regulations required was to attach the pads via a common top cover.

When Yin landed on the far right side of the landing mat, the add-on kit pulled away from the primary landing system, resulting in that mat being turned and Yin being dumped on his head – causing his fatal injuries. Yin was survived by his mother, Sandra Giger, his father, from whom he was estranged, and a younger brother.

After a three-week trial, the jury returned a verdict late Friday night in Yin's favor, awarding \$100,000 for pain and suffering, \$124,482 in medical bills, \$275,518.00 for loss of society, and \$2,000,000 for grief, sorrow and mental suffering. The verdict was reduced by 50% contributory fault.

According to Jury Verdict Reporter research, the verdict is well in excess of the previous high verdict of \$300,000. It is also the only case tried in Illinois concerning an injury incurred while pole vaulting.

Plaintiff was represented by Martin Healy, Jr., Jack Cannon, Matthew Gannon Dennis Lynch and Patrick Anderson of Healy Scanlon, Chicago.

Illinois College was represented by David Mueller, John Cassidy and Ron Cadwalater of Cassidy and Mueller, Peoria.

Litania was represented by Brian Hunt and Seamus Horan of Hunt Law Group, Chicago.

The case was tried from April 24, 2018 until May 11, 2018 before Hon. April Troemper.

For more information please contact Martin Healy, Jr. at 312-977-0100