

GAMEON

Combust a Move

Play structures have often been victimized by wildfires, but rarely do entire playgrounds self-destruct. In August, police in Arlington, Texas, reviewed surveillance video in the hopes of tracking down the would-be hoodlums who ignited a fire that caused an estimated \$25000 in damage to the Anderson Elementary School playground. What they found was a "very unusual occurrence," as Arlington Independent School District Superintendent Mike Beard mildly described it to the Associated Press.

Sources told the Dallas Morning News that low-quality, decomposing wood chips blanketing the playground and baking in the summer sun spontaneously combusted. "It was like a perfect storm," Arlington deputy fire marshal Rich Ebel told the News.

Though no one was at the playground during the blaze, Beard announced that wood chips at 25 playgrounds at 20 Arlington schools would be replaced by pea gravel before the start of the school year. The switch cost about \$200000.

Mark Cusack, president and CEO of Gulf-based Forest Wood Fiber Products (which is not on the school district's roster of suppliers), told the News that the blaze likely could have only occurred

due to poor-quality chips that either contained some flammable elements or were made up of "green waste."

Officials at the Austin Independent School District — which is in the middle of a three-year process during which pea gravel at its 70 elementary schools will be replaced with wood chips in order to better meet ADA requirements — reacted coolly to the flame-up in Arlington. Paul Bestine, the district's playground coordinator, told the Austin American-Statesman he thought the Arlington district's decision to switch to pea gravel was "hasty."

—N.R.

BARKING ORDERS

This special force has more than 60 years of military experience (it lost 281 members in Vietnam), and today numbers more than 2,000 working at home and overseas for the U.S. Department of Defense. Its members protect facilities and presidents, and sniff out weapons caches and IEDs (improvised explosive devices).



And in September, canine "personnel" from the National Security Agency and Washington, D.C.-area Forts Meade, Myer, Lee and Belvoir took part in what was billed as the Iron Dog triathlon, a weeklong competition between 24 teams of dogs and handlers. Unlike similarly named noncompetitive events held by various dog-lovers' organizations — for example, the Minnesota Iron Dog Triathlon celebrates "the spirit of companionship between dogs and their people" — the event at Fort Meade was a grueling affair. Dogs and their handlers competed in a three-mile cross-country run and navigated an obstacle course that among other things required dogs and their handlers to crawl through a number of constricted spaces. Other events required dogs to detect narcotics and explosives, or to launch themselves into a bite-and-tackle move on a pretend suspect. Judge Hans Freimarck, the Army's program manager for military dogs, told *The Washington Post* that dogs and handlers were judged primarily on "team union — how well they work together."

Top Dog in the overall events went to two teams from Fort Myer: Sgt. Jonathan Nunemaker and his dog, Gino, and Staff Sgt. Gunnar Pedersen and his dog, Rex. According to the paper, 8-year-old Rex, a German shepherd, was due to be put up for adoption later this fall.

—A.C.

KLIPPING THE FAITH

An enterprising athletic director has turned what could have become a messy entanglement with the Florida High School Athletic Association into a new business venture.



After years of allowing male student-athletes from several of the state's Orthodox Jewish high schools to wear their kippahs, or yarmulkes, during competition, FHSAA officials banned the headwear last year — citing the pins or clips that keep them in place as potential playing hazards.

Rather than fight a legal battle claiming religious discrimination against the association, Jon Kawebum, athletic director and boys' varsity basketball coach at Weinbaum Yeshiva High School in Boca Raton, channeled his energy into finding a more amicable solution. He developed the Klipped™ Kippah, featuring built-in, comb-like clips designed to firmly secure the headpiece to hair.

The patent-pending product received the FHSAA's blessing, and now Kawebum runs a side business selling Klipped Kippahs on the Internet (klippedkippahs.com). Rabbi Perry Tirschwell, principal of the small high school, couldn't be happier. "This is more than clips on a yarmulke," he told the *Palm Beach Post*. "I told the children, 'Don't let this lesson be lost on you. There will be obstacles, but you can keep true to your faith and your principles and participate in the American experience.'"

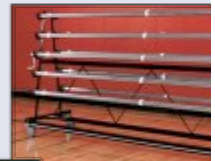
—M.P.

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