

Cricket umpire Alcwyn Jenkins is killed by a cricket ball

A cricket umpire was killed in front of hundreds of spectators when he was hit on the head by a ball thrown by a fielder towards the stumps.

Alcwyn Jenkins, 72, failed to see the ball coming as it was thrown from the boundary during a league match at St Helen's cricket ground in Swansea, South Wales. His death has led to suggestions that umpires should be issued with protective helmets similar to those worn by some players.

Paul Llewellyn, 51, a spectator, said: "It was a freak accident - no one was to blame. The fielder threw the ball back to the wicket - it happens dozens of times in a game. But the umpire didn't see it coming.

I saw him lying on the pitch and no one was sure what had happened to start with."

Neil Hobbs, honorary chairman of the South Wales Cricket Association, said: "The throw would have been from about 40 yards away. No one can quite believe it has happened. Umpires do get hit by the ball occasionally, but the chances of it being a fatality must be less than one in a million. I've umpired with Alcwyn - he was a great guy. He was well respected throughout the league and everybody knew Alcwyn. He's umpired for the best part of 25 years."

Mr Jenkins, a widower and father of two, was umpiring a league one match between Swansea and Llangennech when he was hit on the side of the head on Saturday afternoon. The game was abandoned after he was lifted off the pitch by air ambulance. The accident happened at the ground where Sir Garfield Sobers famously hit six sixes off one over in 1968.

Friends said that shortly before taking charge of the match Mr Jenkins had been talking of his love of the game and all the friendships he had made through the sport.

Steve Davies, chairman of Swansea Cricket Club, said the incident happened at 4pm in front of an unusually large crowd. "Just before the game he turned to me and said, 'I just love playing games at St Helen's. It's a wonderful place to play cricket'."

Eddie Blake, a fellow umpire, said Mr Jenkins, from Skewen, near Neath, was devoted to the sport. "He was one of the oldest umpires in the game, but a great guy and a real character," he said.

Roger Knight, the chairman of the England and Wales Cricket Board Association of Cricket Officials, said: "Alcwyn Jenkins was a highly respected umpire in the South Wales cricket community for the last 25 years."

South Wales Police said there were no suspicious circumstances and a file was being prepared for the coroner. An inquest is expected to open this week.

Dickie Bird, the veteran umpire, said that the death highlighted the risks faced by officials. "Being hit by the ball is one of the risks of umpiring but I have never heard of anyone being killed. I think it may have come to the point where umpires have to wear helmets."