

How coaches are looking out for student athletes' safety during heat wave

By Deke Farrow

Modesto Bee, Tuesday, Aug. 29, 2017

This is one week when area youth who run cross country or play football, soccer, tennis or golf have to wish – just a little, at least – they were doing water polo instead.

Highs in Modesto and other parts of the Northern San Joaquin Valley are predicted to be above the century mark several days this week. Even the lowest highs are expected to be near 99.

Football coaches and soccer leagues are responding in ways like canceling practices or holding them later in the day, and making them less demanding.

Mike Coats, senior director of educational services, 7-12, who oversees athletics for Modesto City Schools, emailed principals and athletic directors that, "Athletic coaches must be particularly cognizant of high temperatures and should reschedule practices accordingly. Practice times should be reduced in length and intensity. Multiple water breaks should be provided and students should be provided opportunities to get out of the sun."

Davis High School, for example, has moved on-field practices to 5 p.m. for Monday and Tuesday. The Spartans will spend the hottest part of the day (3 p.m.) in the classroom, breaking down film and poring over scouting reports.

Downey will practice from 3:30 to 4:35 on the field those days, but has modified its plan for player safety. Coach Jeremy Plaa has cut out nonessentials – conditioning and individual technique work – and said that for all but 20 minutes, players will practice without helmets. They'll spend the rest of practice in the classroom breaking down film.

The Oakdale Soccer Club posted on Facebook a letter to families and coaches stating that the TL Davis Sports Park would be closed this week for soccer practices. It advised its coaches to practice at other city parks to cancel, too.

The club said the criteria it uses to determine unsafe playing conditions are temperature at 100 degrees or above and an air quality index in the red stage during the hours most teams generally practice, 4 to 8 p.m.

The letter advised of poor-air-quality symptoms to look for: "Kids may experience coughing and difficulty breathing, may have tightening in their chest, or a general feeling like they are 'dragging' and can't seem to get their energy going."

The club urged parents and coaches to check its website and Facebook page for updates should the heat and air quality change.

Modesto Youth Soccer Association Executive Director Carlos Zavala said MYSA families and coaches have been told much the same. Practices held at 4:30 and 5:30 p.m. will be canceled or pushed back, he said. The soccer fields at Mary Grogan Community Park, usually open weekdays from 2 p.m. to sunset, will not open to teams until 7 p.m. this week.

During the heat, Zavala said, practicing players will take water breaks every 10 minutes, and coaches will not work them on fitness. "They'll be very static, tactical practices," he said.

At Somerset Middle School in Modesto's Sylvan Union district, cross-country coach Sonja Kivley said her team's scheduled practices Tuesday and Wednesday will move into the workout room because she has several asthmatic runners. "Then the plan if the weather stays as predicted (is) we will move Thursday afternoon practice to Friday morning, 7 a.m., as I need to have my timed 2-mile run to see who will remain on the team."

In the Turlock Unified School District, Assistant Superintendent Mike Trainor asked principals to carefully monitor all outdoor activities this week and have conversations with coaches, said Chief Communications Coordinator Marie Russell. Coaches have been urged to "go light this afternoon and be mindful of high temperatures the rest of this week and to adjust practices accordingly," she said Monday afternoon.

At this point, nothing has been canceled, Russell said, but coaches know to look for signs of heat exhaustion and other ailments and to take practical measures like ensuring student athletes are well hydrated.

The Oakdale Joint Unified School District follows the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's program for advising staff of air and ozone conditions for outdoor activities, Assistant Superintendent Larry Mendonca said. The district put out the Level 3 "Orange" status advisory to all staff Monday, which means that sensitive individuals with respiratory conditions should limit prolonged outdoor exertion.

As Fresno area sets a record for heat, schools take it easy with students

Fresno Bee staff

Fresno Bee, Monday, Aug. 28, 2017

As the Fresno set a record for heat Monday, school districts took steps to protect students and cooling centers offered relief to residents needing a place to take a break.

The National Weather Service forecast a high of 109 degrees in Fresno, and that temperature was reached before 5 p.m. It broke the previous all-time high for Aug. 28 of 108 degrees, set in 1924.

Also hitting 109 were Hanford and Madera. Visalia reached 106.

Clear skies this week will allow the central San Joaquin Valley to continue to bake. The region is under a warning for excessive heat, which means taking it easy if you have to be outside, drinking lots of fluids (but not alcoholic beverages) and wearing loose-fitting clothing.

An air-quality alert has been issued by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District for Fresno, Merced, Madera, San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties because of smoke from the South Fork Fire, which is burning in Yosemite National Park.

Forecast highs in the Fresno area this week are 107 on Tuesday, 103 Wednesday, 104 Thursday, 106 Friday and Saturday and 103 Sunday and Labor Day.

Already this summer Fresno has had three heat waves – extended periods of highs at 100 degrees or more. They were June 17-25, July 3-18 and July 27-Aug. 3. The hottest single day was June 20, when Fresno reached 110 degrees.

Of July's 31 days, 24 were above 100.

Impacts on students

Coaches in the Fresno Unified School District have been told to use caution with their student athletes due to the heat. No long-distance running or strenuous conditioning can take place when the heat index is at 105 degrees. Any team that does practice needs to have frequent hydration and shade breaks. And students must be monitored for any signs of heat-related problems.

Clovis Unified high school football teams cannot practice in pads or helmets Monday, and if practices are held, there must be shade-water breaks every 10 minutes, district spokeswoman Kelly Avants said. Clovis Unified will also follow the air district's guidelines for air quality and will move practices indoors as needed.

Both districts said sports practices, recesses and physical education classes can be canceled if coaches and school administrators think that is needed.

Cooling centers

The city of Fresno is keeping its cooling centers open all week to provide anyone a safe place to cool off. Cooling centers will be open from noon to 8 p.m. at the following locations:

- Ted C. Wills Community Center, 770 N. San Pablo Ave.
- Frank H. Ball Neighborhood Center, 760 Mayor Ave.
- Mosqueda Community Center, 4670 E. Butler Ave.
- Pinedale Community Center, 7170 N. San Pablo Ave.

FAX buses will give a free ride to any passenger who asks for a ride to a cooling center.

In Visalia, the city transit center will be open as a cooling station. It is located at 425 E. Oak Ave., and will be open from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. for cooling through Tuesday; officials are still deciding if it needs to be used for cooling on Wednesday. The center has ample seating, vending machines and restrooms. All of the bus routes lead to the center.