

RECOMMENDATIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR PRE-SEASON ACCLIMATIZATION AND IN-SEASON CONTACT TIME

CIF Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (CIF-SMAC)

Background: The CIF Sports Medicine Advisory Committee was formed in 1998 to assist the CIF in ensuring the safety of high school athletes across the state. The CIF-SMAC investigates numerous issues, rules, and situations and considers their potential risks to athletes.

For the past two years, the CIF-SMAC has reviewed the issue of pre-season and in-season contact time and length of practice. Reports continue to come forward that indicate that many high school students are being required to spend inordinate amounts of time practicing and coaches continue to use methods that do not follow scientifically proven techniques that would minimize the risk to the participants while improving athletic performance.

Therefore, CIF-SMAC strongly recommends that all CIF member schools have policies that would ensure that California high school students have the same protections afforded college student-athletes by the NCAA. These recommendations to monitor the conditions and the amount of time for practice will help minimize the risk to the student-athletes and increase student time for academic achievement. (The CIF-Central Coast Section Bylaw Article V and many schools districts across the state have already successfully implemented policies that limit contact time.)

When schools implement these guidelines, the health and safety of athletes are primary. However, the recommendations outlined here are only minimum standards, based on the best evidence available. Schools developing policies and following these guidelines provide student-athletes an opportunity to train safely and effectively during the season.

APPLICATION AND DEFINITIONS

The definitions listed below are for the application of this recommendation only and are NOT to supersede any section terms or definitions.

A practice should be defined as the period of time a participant engages in a coach-supervised, school-approved, sport- or conditioning-related physical activity. Each individual practice should last no more than 3 hours. Warm-up, stretching, and cool-down activities should be included as part of the 3-hour practice time. Regardless of ambient temperature conditions, all film study, play review, conditioning and weight-room activities should be considered part of practice and included within the 3 hour limitation.

A walk-through should be defined as a teaching opportunity with the athletes not wearing protective equipment (e.g., helmets, shoulder pads, catcher's gear, shin guards) or using other sport-related equipment (e.g., footballs, lacrosse sticks, blocking sleds, pitching machines, soccer balls, marker cones). The walk-through would not be considered part of the 3-hour practice period and should last no more than 1 hour per day, and should not include conditioning or weight-room activities.

A recovery period should be defined as the time between the end of one practice or walk-through and the beginning of the next practice or walk-through. During this time, athletes should rest in a cool environment, with no sport or conditioning related activity permitted (e.g., speed or agility drills, strength training, conditioning, or walk-through). Treatment with the athletic trainer is permissible.

A "day" should be defined as a calendar day (12:00 a.m. through 11:59 p.m.).

RECOMMENDATION FOR THE 14-DAY ACCLIMATIZATION PERIOD

A proper acclimatization plan is essential to minimize the risk of exertional heat illness during the early season practice period. Gradually increasing athletes' exposure to the duration and intensity of physical activity and to the environment minimizes heat-illness risk while improving athletic performance. California has a wide range of environmental factors (beaches, mountains, deserts) that face schools and student-athletes and the acclimation period is vital to minimizing the risk.

1. It is recommended that days 1 through 5 of the acclimatization period consist of the first 5 days of formal practice. During this time, athletes should not be allowed to participate in more than 1 practice per day.
2. If a practice is interrupted by inclement weather or heat restrictions, the practice may recommence once conditions are deemed safe. Total practice time should not exceed 3 hours in any 1 day.
3. It is recommended that no more than a 1-hour maximum walk-through be permitted during days 1–5 of the acclimatization period. However, a 3-hour recovery period should be inserted between the practice and walk-through (or vice versa).
4. During days 1–2 of the acclimatization period, in sports requiring helmets or shoulder pads, it is recommended that a helmet be the only protective equipment permitted (goalies, as in the case of field hockey and related sports, should not wear full protective gear or perform activities that would require protective equipment). During days 3–5, only helmets and shoulder pads should be worn. Beginning on day 6, all protective equipment may be worn and full contact may begin.
 - A. Football only: On days 3–5, contact with blocking sleds and tackling dummies may be initiated.
 - B. Full-contact sports: 100% live contact drills should begin no earlier than day 6.
5. It is recommended that beginning no earlier than day 6 and continuing through day 14, double-practice days should be followed by a single-practice day. On single-practice days, 1 walk-through is permitted, separated from the practice by at least 3 hours of continuous rest. When a double practice day is followed by a rest day, another double practice day is permitted after the rest day.
6. On a double-practice day, it is recommended that neither practice should exceed 3 hours in duration nor should student-athletes participate in more than 5 total hours of practice. Warm-up, stretching, cool-down, walk-through, conditioning, and weight-room activities should be included as part of the total practice time. The 2 practices should be separated by at least 3 continuous hours in a cool environment.
7. Because the risk of exertional heat illnesses during the preseason heat-acclimatization period is high, we recommend that an athletic trainer be on site before, during, and after all practices.

RECOMMENDATION BEGINNING DAY 15

1. During this time, it is recommended that athletes' practice should not exceed 3 hours.
2. On a double-practice day, it is recommended that neither practice should exceed 3 hours in duration nor should student-athletes participate in more than 5 total hours of practice. Warm-up, stretching, cool-down, walk-through, conditioning, and weight-room activities should be included as part of the total practice time. The 2 practices should be separated by at least 3 continuous hours in a cool environment.
3. If a practice is interrupted by inclement weather or heat restrictions, the practice may recommence once conditions are deemed safe.
4. A practice round of golf may exceed the 3 hours per-day limitation. A practice round played on the day prior to the start of an interscholastic golf tournament at the tournament site should count as 3 hours, regardless of the actual duration of the round.
5. A "game, scrimmage, match or contest" should count as 3 hours regardless of the actual duration of these activities. This includes tournaments that may require multiple contests/matches.
6. **Practice should not be conducted at any time (including vacation periods) following competition**, except between contests, rounds or events during a multiday or multi-event competition (e.g., double-headers in softball or baseball, rounds of golf in a multiday tournament).
7. A multi-sport student-athlete's participation should be limited to a maximum of 3 hours per day which will require maximum cooperation between the coaches to minimize any risk to the student-athlete. A multi-sport athlete who competes in 2 sports and 2 contests within the same day should only be charged with a 3-hour contact. This "waiver" should NOT apply to practice and/or other athletically related activities.

Q: Why would film study or play review be considered “practice time”?

A: Student-athletes are often required to spend time beyond the practice field and weight-room that may distract from one of the fundamental philosophical beliefs of educational athletics, academics first. CIF Article 12. (8) states that “school sports leadership must ensure that the first priority of their student-athletes is a serious commitment to getting an education and developing the academic skills and character to succeed.” The recommended practice contact limitation of 3 hours per day is a tool that should be used to help reinforce the philosophy of academics first.

Q: A volleyball tournament may take all day. Should we count every hour of the day?

A: No. Regardless of the length of the contest(s), as long as they are all held in the same day, the countable hours should be 3.

Q: Can the multi-sport athlete, who is on two teams, practice more than once a day?

A: Yes, but the total practice time should not exceed the 3 hour per day maximum for the student. An example would be an athlete who practices for 1 ½ hours with the softball team and then can go and practice with the track team for 1 ½ hours.

Q: Should time in the training/first aid room count?

A: No, treatment and injury prevention contact time should NOT count as part of the 3 hour maximum.

Q: What about dressing and shower time, should that time count?

A: No, changing into and out of practice uniforms should NOT count as part of the 3 hour maximum.

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