

Coaches know how to beat the heat

Changes in approach to prep practices for fall sports emphasize safety for athletes

By Andrea Cohen

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Last August, former longtime Warren Central High School football coach Jerry Stauffer went to one of Franklin Central's two-a-day football practices to watch a former player at work.

IHSAA guidelines on dealing with heat

The Indiana High School Athletic Association doesn't have rules regarding practicing in the heat, but it suggests following the National Federation of State High School Associations' recommendations. Those include:

- Making water available in unlimited quantities.
- Checking each player's weight before and after practices.
- Checking the heat index, which takes into account temperature and humidity.

The federation recommends limiting or canceling practice if the heat index is above certain levels. The four levels on the index are caution, extreme caution, danger and extreme danger.

To get into the danger category, the heat index must register from 105-129. The heat index is not expected to register in the danger category next week.

While the IHSAA leaves the decision to individual coaches, the Kentucky High School Athletic Association mandates that practices must stop when the heat index reaches 105.

-- Andrea Cohen

What he saw made him smile.

Players taking frequent water breaks. Resting. Conducting drills in partial pads. Clearly, coaches had a game plan to deal with the heat.

Stauffer turned to Lance Scheib, now the Flashes' coach, who was a key member of the Warriors' 1984 state champion team.

"I told him, 'You guys were tougher than this,'" Stauffer recalled with a laugh. "When I was a player, taking a drink of water was a sign of being a sissy. On top of that, they gave you salt pills, which was the worst thing. We just didn't know any better."

Thankfully, Stauffer said, coaches do now.

"It's good you can't do things the way we did it," Stauffer said. "The way Lance is doing it is right. I really think the advent of trainers and student trainers has been a godsend. It brought about a knowledge base to coach the coaches in how to take care of their kids."

Ideally, all high schools would have certified athletic trainers to monitor athletes' health, said Chad Snyder, a certified athletic trainer at Tri-West who coordinates an outreach program for Methodist Sports Medicine.

Snyder is worried that many small schools don't have a trainer every day like larger schools.

"You want to educate coaches and athletes so they can recognize signs of heat-related problems early," he said.

Most fall sports begin official practice Monday. Dealing with the heat will be a daily concern for all involved.

Although fall sports offer a wide range of physical exertion, Snyder said the basic rules are the same whether playing 18 holes or running sprints in pads: Have a complete pre-participation physical and hydrate, hydrate, hydrate.

"Keep your urine clear instead of dark yellow to be sure you're hydrated," Snyder said. "And make sure you're gaining your sweat loss back after practices."

He said players should be weighed before and after practice and they shouldn't lose more than 2-3 percent of their weight.

Carmel cross country coach Chuck Koeppen altered his practice schedule during a camp last week in Anderson.

"We try to go early and late to avoid the heat of the day, but when it gets that hot you have to be extremely careful and back off," Koeppen said.

He had a certified athletic trainer come in to talk to the campers about nutrition and hydration issues, and her advice mirrored Snyder's.

"She told them their urine should look more like lemonade than like apple juice," Koeppen said. "If it's dark, you're dehydrated; that's the way she told kids to check."

North Central boys soccer coach Jerry Little said the school's certified athletic trainer monitors weather conditions. When they get to a certain point, Little follows recommended procedures such as changing workout times and adding water breaks. He tells players to drink eight 8-ounce glasses of water per day.

"We work very hard to make sure the kids are hydrated," Little said.

"But the first thing is that almost all our kids are in very, very good shape. We have a conditioning program during the summer, and most of the kids play year-round so they're acclimated to it."

That's another issue that has changed over the years, Scheib said.

"When I was growing up we played outside all summer long," Scheib said. "Kids today are inside playing Xbox or whatever. So we try to do as much as we can to get them out there, get them acclimated to the heat so they're ready to go when it's hot."

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