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Blossom Valley Athletic League & coronavirus: Where things stand for winter football, other sports

Commissioner Bill Murray on prospect of January games: “I would love to say yes, but things change daily.”





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Leland High School's Mark Eby (8) runs wide and stiff arms the defender to gain extra yards. Santa Cruz defeated Leland 20 to 7 in the Central Coast Section Division V football championship game at Independence High School on 11/29/19. (photo by Keith Tharp) Leland High School Mark Eby (8) runs wide and stiff arms the defender to gain extra yards. Santa Cruz defeated Leland 20 to 7 in the Central Coast Section division V championship game on 11/29/19. (photo by Keith Tharp)

By [SHAYNA RUBIN](#) | srubin@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group

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Editor's note: This is one in a series of Q&A's that Bay Area Preps HQ is doing with high school league commissioners throughout the region in advance of the scheduled start of practice for sports such as football, volleyball and water polo in December. Look for links to the [published Q&A's here](#).

The 24 schools that comprise the Blossom Valley Athletic League are situated in Santa Clara County — a county known to take the earliest and most aggressive actions to combat the coronavirus.

Health officials bumped Santa Clara County into the orange tier (tier 3) mid-October, restricting still outdoor gatherings of up to 200 people and indoor gatherings of up to 100 people.

With the first practices about a month away and games scheduled for January, BVAL commissioner Bill Murray and school athletic administrators are still waiting for clarifications from the county on how to play safely — the coronavirus case count's rapid rise nationally possibly pushing the light at the end of the tunnel a bit farther.

Murray spoke with Bay Area Preps HQ late last week to address possible protocols, testing and what the return of sports might look like for the league's schools.



Here is some of what Murray said:

Note: Some answers have been edited for brevity and

What is your league allowing teams to do right now?

Our league is made up of four school districts, and each district has its own conditioning workouts. Three of our four districts are allowing outdoor workouts at schools to do any outdoor workouts yet.

Is there a particular reason San Jose Unified isn't allowing outdoor workouts?

Not that I'm aware of. I think they just are being cautious, which is never a bad thing.

From what I've heard from athletic directors in San Jose Unified, they're working with their directors to help get workouts going. Maybe as early as next week. But I haven't heard directly any updates. We don't have the authority to tell them they can't do things. It's a wait-and-see process.

Is there optimism or pessimism that all the school districts will start practice on Dec. 14?

I would be optimistic. I haven't heard any school district say they don't plan on it, and I think everyone is still playing the waiting game to hear more regarding protocols from California government, from Gavin Newsom's office, and then also from Santa Clara County and Dr. Sarah Cody. That's what we're waiting on.

What do you anticipate hearing from Dr. Cody and the county?

We can't anticipate much, we're just in the wait-and-see process. We can be optimistic and hope that we're able to start on time, but we can see any outcome at the moment. From schools that I've been in contact with, all schools are planning on a December start. We need an OK from the county, but there hasn't been any indication they won't give us the OK.

When do you expect to hear from Santa Clara County?

No idea. I would assume with the start date being December 14, you would hope a few weeks from that for planning purposes. I would hope sometime after Thanksgiving or earlier.

What are the health and safety protocols teams are following right now with their outdoor cohorts?

They're following the Santa Clara County guidelines. They're limiting the number of participants for each workout. Everybody is wearing masks. No physical contact. No sharing equipment. I think some districts are allowing equipment use, as far as outdoor weights and skill work on an individual basis.



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What needs to happen between now and Decemb

If Santa Clara county says we’re ready, we can go. And is ready. Athletic directors have questions for individuals able to go, I don’t anticipate any hang-ups outside the



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Will testing be required?

That’s still up in the air. That will come down from the county and state.

What happens if someone that is playing tests positive?

All that is still being discussed. We discuss this daily.

How are those discussions going?

We’re taking information from other districts as well as other states. We also use, not necessarily to the letter of the law, but we’re using the NFHS guidelines that they put out during the summer. I think the better ones to look at now are some of the states that are competing right now. We’ve been looking at those. As far as I’ve seen there haven’t been many states requiring testing for high school athletes primarily because of the financial aspect. A lot of public schools aren’t going to be able to test every week. If that is what’s needed, where does that funding come from? I think that’s the main hiccup I could see. I think everyone understands the reason for being cautious and safety being a priority, but until we get those answers we don’t know. Almost universal in the CIF will be that we’re all following the same idea. Some districts and schools might have more financial resources, but we should figure out a system that works for everybody.

Do you have any idea of what the health and safety protocols will be like at games?

I have no idea right now.

What would happen if some teams in your league are cleared to play and others aren’t? Just in terms of scheduling.

We’ve got plans in place for both. We can work around, say, if a district doesn’t feel comfortable hosting games. This is an evolving situation and things change all the time, so if a particular team or school isn’t able to play or has to shut down for an outbreak on campus or anything. If those games can’t happen or need to be rescheduled we’ll put it down as a no contest. We can’t punish a school or kid for not being able to play.



Our main idea is not even worrying about standings a that’s the main thing right now. Nobody’s been out th them out there, that’s what everyone’s looking at.

How important is it to get kids playing sports agai

There are a couple benefits. One being the physical a out and walking, competing with your team is different. I nen there's the benefit of being able to see friends, the social aspect of it. There’s also the mental release around sports, instead of sitting in front of a computer all day. It’s about going out and getting back to a little bit of normal as possible. However normal these protocols we have to follow feel.

That’s an echoing sentiment among all the league commissioners.

Gut feeling, will there be games in January?

Hopefully. I would love to say yes, but things change daily. I’m optimistic, I hope so.

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