

Sports shutdown due to COVID-19 impacts officials

The pandemic leaves those who work the games without any assignments.

BY ANDREW TURNER

It has been nearly a month since the spread of the coronavirus shut down the sports world.

For some, there was hope that a return to the playing field might be possible, but it became improbable as the situation developed.

On April 3, the CIF State office and the 10 CIF section commissioners decided to call off the spring sports season outright, canceling the section, regional and state championships.

The last month has seen an outpouring of support and compassion for high school athletes as their seasons have come to an unexpected end.

Not to be lost in the shuffle are those who also exist within the symbiotic circle of the game: the officials.

For the past 12 years, officiating has been a way of life for Duke Fuller and his wife, Ann-Marie, who are both members of the USA Track and Field Southern California Officials Committee.

Fuller, 54, the Vice-Chair of Certification, regularly works as a starter at the high school level. He has also been a starter for the Paralympic Trials and lap counted for two U.S. Olympic Trials.

Ann-Marie can often be

found officiating the high jump, a task she has handled in elite events such as the Mt. SAC Relays. Fuller added that she has officiated high jump for CIF post-season meets.

Fortunately, Fuller and his wife both have jobs outside of officiating. He works in special education, while Ann-Marie teaches the fourth grade.

The loss of income will still have an impact on their lifestyle, as Fuller said that most of the money that he pulls in from officiating goes toward paying household bills.

"For me, I've lost for March almost \$2,200 since everything started to get canceled," Fuller said. "Everything got canceled for me on and after March 14. I had assignments all the way up through May."

If officiating provided supplementary income for the Fullers, the loss of the spring season has changed that equation.

"I'll have to modify my eating habits," Fuller said. "It's definitely affected us, and of course, I have hobbies and stuff like that, too, so I have to cut back on that. It's been a change."

Mike Cossack, 63, of Mission Viejo is the umpire-in-chief for Premier Girls Fastpitch.

The organization is run by Dan Hay, who co-



DUKE FULLER points the starting gun into the air in preparation to get a race underway in a track and field meet in March.

Courtesy of Wilson Alcantara /NPPA

coaches the Marina High softball team with Shelly Luth.

An assignor of officials for the travel ball circuit and PGF, Cossack has umpired in high school for 28 years, something that he continues to do.

Cossack, a retired postal service worker, joined a co-worker at a high school officiating meeting in 1992. He found himself not only working softball games, but football, basketball and baseball, as well.

"When we first started, it was more like a hobby, and it was a little extra change," Cossack said of officiating. "As you go along and you get into travel ball and you're working games every weekend, it turns into a big part of your income."

Cossack said that the coronavirus stimulus package could provide some financial relief to some umpires who are able to claim unemployment as independent contractors.

"This is a livelihood for a lot of these gentlemen," said Hay, the president of PGF. "They depend on that income from high school and travel ball to live, so some of these guys are working every single week-

end, or they go straight from work to a high school game. They depend on that income."

There are no games to officiate right now, but when the action resumes, there continues to be a need for officials. Cossack said that those who are umpiring are aging, and some new recruits would help.

"These kids, if they need to work during the week, ... they can go out and do some softball games," Cossack said. "You can make \$400 to \$500 on a weekend doing softball. You would have to flip a lot of burgers to make that much."

For those who do not want to call balls and strikes behind the plate or patrol the bases much longer, Fuller hopes that he can sway them to join the next arena of their officiating career.

"I tend to promote or recruit umpires to work track and field because it's not as strenuous on your body," Fuller said. "I've been pretty successful with that, so that's kind of one of my angles."

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CROSSWORD ANSWERS

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COSTA MESA

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eral cuts, many of which staff have already made, to eliminate nonessential expenses, limit hiring and cut travel, conferences and training budgets.

The city will also defer \$6 million in capital improvement projects, including the city's storm-water drain system, City Hall's elevators and citywide street improvements.

"If we don't cut every little bit that we can cut right now, next time we're going to be cutting all the way down to the bone," Councilwoman Sandy Genis said. "Whoever's going to be here a year from now, they're going to have a big mess on their hands if we don't take every action that we possibly can."

To date, the city has spent about \$1 million — at least half devoted to staff time and overtime — in responding to the coronavirus pandemic, Molina said.

Costa Mesa was already toeing the line on its reserve



AN EMPLOYEE at South Coast Plaza in Costa Mesa disinfects the hand rails of an escalator on March 16.

Scott Smeltzer
Staff
Photographer

budget; it began the fiscal year July 1 with about \$455,000 budgeted from reserves. But at the city's mid-year budget update, the council learned that sales taxes were rolling in \$2 million more than expected.

Council members have emphasized repeatedly throughout the year the need to be conservative with costs, to resist using money from the reserves.

Still, Harrison said if lost taxes amount to more than \$18.5 million, the city may

need to prepare to dip into disaster reserves. More cuts would likely impact staff, she said.

"[There is] no bigger disaster in our lifetime than this one," Harrison said.

The council's budget assessment follows a week of protests across the country, including next door in Huntington Beach, from residents eager to reopen businesses and restart the economy.

"Even though we're faced with these economic cir-

cumstances, it's still in our economic best interest not to have an outbreak of COVID," Mayor Pro Tem John Stephens said. "These numbers would be worse and be more permanent and be deeper if we had an outbreak of COVID. ... Our North Star here is to keep our community safe, and that's in our best interest from a health and economic standpoint."

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SHIRTS

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though in chronically short supply nationwide, has become emblematic of the fight against COVID-19, the potentially fatal respiratory illness caused by the novel virus.

It was a delicate balance to clearly reference the pandemic without explicitly mentioning the virus or disease "that's kind of haunting" people, Farmer said.

"We don't want to make the virus a thing," Putnam said. "We don't want to call

it the COVID-19 shirt."

On the positive side, masks help save and protect lives, Farmer said, and are symbols of the people fighting the battle.

Putnam, 20, and Farmer, 22, started STKY in 2016 when they were students at Newport Harbor High School.

They partner with a Costa Mesa printer to make their merchandise or they use a heat press set up in a spare room at the Putnam family home. It's a surf-and-streetwear lifestyle brand, selling T-shirts, hoodies and caps that Putnam said is built around

telling stories through clothing.

Putnam is studying film at Cal State Long Beach. Farmer is a pre-med student and member of the swim team at UC San Diego who is leaning toward emergency medicine or neurosurgery. Neither formally studies business in the classroom. They do that hands-on.

With universities shifting online, the pair had the time to design a shirt and hunt for a mask supplier that could fulfill their relatively small orders, finding one in Pennsylvania.

STKY has sold shirts for a

cause before, including the nonprofit New Orleans Musicians' Clinic. Farmer said companies have a social responsibility.

They sold around 100 shirts to get the funds for their first mask order and are eager to sell more, although they're already pleased, Putnam said.

"Our goal had already been fulfilled when we got the first order because our main goal was just any impact we can make," he said.

Shirts are available at stkylifestyle.com.

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NURSING

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cated team every day. We're grateful for their continued efforts."

Despite initiating lockdown protocols on March 11, the center received its first positive test on April 11 and has since been working with county health officials, Oates said. "Stringent safety protocols" went into effect immediately and all residents have been tested.

The facility has also built up its stock of personal protective equipment, prepared additional isolation areas and heightened its disinfecting protocols, ac-

ording to officials. "We've been vigilant and early for weeks in adopting the practices and protocols ... to protect the frail and vulnerable residents entrusted to our care," Bates said.

Huntington Valley is one of three skilled nursing facilities in Huntington Beach, according to Huntington Beach Fire Department spokesman Eric McCoy. The city has upped outreach efforts and the Fire Department stays in frequent contact with the city's healthcare facilities, McCoy said.

According to a news release issued by the city on Tuesday, the Fire Department's outreach team has even helped secure person-

al protective equipment for healthcare workers.

The reported cases at Huntington Valley, McCoy said, correlate with this week's uptick in "COVID-19-related calls," which is how local first responders are classifying any emergency service calls that involve flu-like symptoms. Overall, however, the Fire Department reports normal levels of emergency service calls, McCoy said.

This week, Orange County launched expanded testing to identify active cases of COVID-19. On Tuesday, OC Health Care Agency launched the OC COVID-19 Testing Network, comprised of six clinics, which will each have the

capacity to administer 100 diagnostic tests per day. The tests are available by appointment only.

The county plans to add four more within the next two weeks. So far, antibody tests, which can identify those who were infected and may have already recovered, aren't yet available.

OC Health Care Agency hopes to be up to 2,000 tests per day by next month.

The AltaMed at 8041 Newman Ave. in Huntington Beach is set to open its testing clinic on Thursday. Visit ocovid19.ocalthinfo.com for more information.

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