

# **HOT, HOT, HOT THE HEAT IS ON ATLANTA TO KEEP THINGS COOL DURING THE GAMES ATHLETES' TASK: BEATING HEAT, OPPONENTS**

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Millions of Southerners sweat through long Sunday sermons, five-hour stock car races and the summer overlap of American Legion baseball and high school football seasons with no more apparent effect than the melting away of final consonants.

But this summer's arrival of the Centennial Olympic Games in Atlanta has opened their sleepy ol' eyes to the fact they apparently endure one of the harshest climates on Planet Earth.

The world's greatest distance runner, Noureddine Morceli of Algeria - the largest nation of Saharan Africa - left the new Olympic Stadium after a track meet earlier this summer vowing to spend the rest of his pre-Olympic training in Florida so he could acclimate himself to the South's heat and humidity.

He had thought moving to New Mexico would be enough.

The International Olympic Committee took note and ordered Atlanta organizers to take additional steps, such as providing umbrellas and misting fans for athletes.

A few weeks later, on a June day on which the heat index on the stadium track hit 112 degrees, early arriving fans for the U.S. Olympic trials sat around outdoor picnic tables at a nearby fried chicken stand licking hot grease from their fingers and wondering what all this Olympic-generated fuss was about Atlanta's weather.

"The Braves have been playing in this weather for years, and nobody's made such a big deal about the heat," one said.

True enough, but it wasn't a New York yankee who coined the name "Hotlanta."

One of the selling points when Billy Payne, president of the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games, made his bid presentation to the IOC was that Atlanta's average temperature during the Olympic period of July 19-Aug. 4 is 78 degrees.

It is a true and meaningless statistic that reflects a point through which the mercury descends from its average high to the nighttime low. According to the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, the average Atlanta high for that period over the past 30 years - 88 degrees - is the hottest of the six most recent Summer Olympic cities. The five others: Barcelona, 86; Seoul, 77; Los Angeles, 83; Moscow, 71; Montreal, 75.

According to the U.S. Weather Records Center in Asheville, N.C., the Atlanta heat index - a hellish counterpart of winter's wind chill factor that accounts for temperature and humidity - exceeded 100 degrees every day of the Olympic period last year. Humidity levels above 90 percent are common in Southern summers.

"Even Southerners aren't out in the sun all day at 100 degrees," said Dr. Catherine Huggins, chief of staff at DeKalb Medical Center in Decatur, Ga.. "We are used to staying in air conditioning."

Many of the athletes are not.

### **What can happen**

Menlo Park runner PattiSue Plumer came off the track after her heat of the 1,500 meters at the Olympic trials with a hacking cough and a nosebleed that flowed faster than her singlet could soak up.

"It's the air conditioning," she complained. "Go out of a cold hotel room into the heat. Ride an air-conditioned bus from the warm-up track to the stadium. This is worse than Barcelona."

And Barcelona was no day in the shade.

The athletes' village, built along a Mediterranean beach, was comfortable without air conditioning, but the city and the Olympic Stadium sweltered for two weeks with nary a breeze. The U.S. track and field trials in 1992 were held in New Orleans to help prepare athletes for conditions in Barcelona.

The last three miles of the Barcelona marathon were a torturous climb up Montjuic to the stadium in the heat of the day. A third of the men's field quit before it got that far.

The starting times of both men's and women's marathons in Atlanta were moved to 7:30 a.m. to avoid as much heat as possible. Eight nurses' stations will be located along the 26.2-mile route, and spotters will report athletes who appear to be in trouble to race officials.

"We won't be seeing records broken in events that are greater than 10, 15, 20 minutes," predicted Phil Sparling of Georgia Tech, a professor of health and performance science, at a press seminar on Atlanta's weather. "In the shorter events, it will probably have minimal effect, if any."

But Sparling spoke before the finals of the men's 100 meters at the U.S. trials. After just 10 seconds of competition on a 100-degree day, seven of the eight men limped from the track complaining of cramps.

### **Another factor**

"It's not just the heat, but the hard track," Carl Lewis said. "I've been taking fluids for days, and I'm still dehydrated."

When the heat index reached 107 last week in LaGrange, Ga., officials delayed by an hour the start of a track meet for athletes from 31 African nations who have been training nearby.

More than 2,000 foreign athletes have been based in cities throughout the Southeast for the past few weeks to help them adjust to the climate and recover from the stress of travel. U.S. athletes whose competitions will be outdoors also moved to the South. The track and field team will remain in Chapel Hill, N.C., until its competition begins next week.

Oakland marathoner Linda Somers left the Bay Area for the South earlier this summer because she said the weather was too cool in California.

### **Horses at risk**

The athletes who may feel the heat most acutely are the horses in the equestrian competition. International teams were asked to ship their horses to the Georgia International Horse Park at least three weeks in advance and to weigh them before and after each exercise session to detect heat stress.

"It would be silly to say we're confident, but we're extremely encouraged by the results of all the work that has been going on that we are in a position to ensure the horses' safety," British veterinarian Leo Jeffcott told the Atlanta newspaper.

The three-day event, the most grueling of the equestrian sports, has been modified for Atlanta's weather. Competition will begin at 6:45 a.m., and officials shortened the cross-country course over massive jumps and water obstacles by 20 percent, extended a mandatory rest stop from 10 to 15 minutes and will provide grooms to bathe the horses in water during the stop.

The biggest Olympic concern, however, is for spectators who will walk long distances through downtown and then sit in outdoor stadiums for hours.

Fans who ordered Olympic tickets also received pamphlets from Blue Cross-Blue Shield with advice on dealing with the heat. Announcements to drink plenty of fluids are planned every 15 minutes at outdoor venues.

Twenty percent of the nearly 300 fans requiring medical assistance on the last day of the Olympic track and field trials were suffering from heat-related illnesses, officials said.

### **Precautions being taken**

The Red Cross has set up eight tents near venues with free water, sponges and misting fans. The U.S. military is providing several large tanks called "water buffaloes." Twenty churches will be open around the clock to provide air-conditioned shelter and free water.

"Heatbusters," rollerblading workers clad in togas with four-gallon tanks on their backs, will roam downtown spraying fans for free.

Spectators may bring water into venues and use fountains to refill, but liter bottles of the Games' official Crystal Springs brand will cost about \$3 at concession stands. The company expects to sell 4 million gallons.

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