

Sequoia ban on off-campus running angers coaches

FOR YEARS, Carlmont and Menlo-Atherton high schools have fielded some of the Central Coast Section's best cross country teams and distance runners.

However, M-A coach Plato Yanicks is among those who fear that will change if the Sequoia Union High School District sticks to a recently adopted rule that prohibits off-campus running. The rule states, "Effective immediately (Jan. 31), all running for physical education classes is restricted to the local school site. There should be no running in the streets, crossing of streets, or running in the hills."

On the directive addressed to the district's P.E. instructors, the reason behind the rule was stated: "There have been complaints from police, concerned citizens, parents, and citizens whose property has been damaged about students running off-campus ..."

The ruling affects four of the schools that compete in the Peninsula Athletic League — Carlmont, Menlo-Atherton, Sequoia and Woodside. Yanicks and the other district track coaches are upset with the new rule for at least four reasons:

- The coaches were not consulted before the rule was passed.
- They believe the rule will put their distance run-



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ners at a distinct disadvantage — not only against runners from other leagues in postseason competition, but also within the PAL. All of the PAL's other schools will be unaffected because they belong to the San Mateo Union High School District (except Menlo School, a private school also unaffected by the new rule). No such rule exists in the Santa Clara Valley or De Anza athletic leagues, by the way.

- They believe the rule will make it extremely difficult to motivate distance runners in practice.
- They point out that students competing in most other high school sports are allowed to drive to games, since team buses have become less affordable

in recent years.

"It's certainly going to destroy the great tradition of distance running in the SPAL (former South Peninsula Athletic League) schools," Yanicks said. "It really shuts off your training."

"(Merely) Running around a track is boring," said veteran Carlmont cross country coach Loren Lansberry, who stepped down as the school's track coach after last season. "You certainly can't train a distance runner adequately if you're confined to a track. Running on a track (for a cross country or distance runner) actually is just a way to measure what you've achieved in your training."

"They (distance runners) can only do so much at school," Woodside coach Jim Luttrell said. "You can run about eight 440s, but there's not much else you can do. There aren't too many people who enjoy running around in the same place, time after time."

MERLE FRUEHLING, the Sequoia district superintendent, said the district is concerned about its legal liability in the event a student were to be injured while running off-campus.

"If a student gets hurt or something like that while

running off-campus without adult supervision, the district is liable if it happens during practice time, as part of the school day," Fruehling said.

Unlike cross country coaches, track coaches are unable to leave the campus and follow their runners. Track coaches must stay on campus during practice because of the variety of events that need supervision — such as the pole vault, shot put, etc. However, Lansberry and Yanicks said no serious injuries have befallen any of their runners while running off-campus.

"We've never had any serious injuries over the years — just a few cases of poison oak," Lansberry said, "and the kids are running in groups. If someone did get hurt, the other kids would be right there."

AT FIRST GLANCE, it seems the rule could be circumvented rather easily by the coaches. That isn't the answer either, Yanicks said.

"If a coach cheats and somebody does get hurt, who's going to get in trouble?" Yanicks said. "It takes organizing and planning to have parents drive the kids to Huddart Park. If you had only three or four distance runners, that might be one thing, but we've got a lot of them."