

By order of the
Governor and the
California Department
of Public Health:

State-wide guidelines now require that face
coverings be worn inside of any indoor
public space.

Thank you for your support.



LEARN MORE AT BAYCLUBS.COM



A CASH CATASTROPHE



Athletic facilities struggle to stay afloat amidst the pandemic

ELLE HORST

He sits at his desk, looking wearily at the stack of bills that continue to pile up. How is he going to pay them? He has no idea. Closures due to COVID-19 caused many athletes to quit, and funds are drying up.

He's doing his best to keep his gym open, but the money is running out fast. The uncertainty of a potential sports season looms ahead. The distance measures put in place mean that typical money-making opportunities are no longer available. Sighing, he turns to his computer.

The first thing he sees is a blaring headline with a clear message: *San Mateo County back to purple tier. Facilities must shut down.* He turns again to the large stack of bills with increasing dread and looks at all the staff he has to pay. His heart sinks as he reaches a decision.

He must close. Permanently. All of his hard work poured into his business suddenly means nothing. It will all be gone.

COVID-19 has had devastating financial effects on numerous sports organizations, clubs, and facilities. Many have been unable to make the amount of money needed to survive, forcing clubs and facilities to disband and shut down. Owners can watch their life's work slip away in a matter of months, ruining their financial situations and adding to an already stressful time.

Matt Hodges, the owner of a local gymnastics center, has seen firsthand the effects of COVID-19 on athletic facilities.

"I know with 100 percent certainty that every gymnastics business has suffered financially due to COVID-19," Hodges said. "Many facilities have closed permanently across the country or had to lay off employees."

The devastation is partly due to a delay in much-needed funding, including Payback Protection Program (PPP) funds that many businesses desperately needed.

"Rent was still due, and mortgages still had to be paid. Most clubs like ours depended on increased owner investment, meaning we had to use our

personal life savings just to keep the gym going," Hodges said.

Decreases in athlete participation and outbreaks stemming from these sports are also contributing factors to these businesses' financial losses.

For many athletes, the uncertainty that the future of their sport holds and the skill loss that comes with constant closures makes it difficult to enjoy their sport.

"The shutdowns were really frustrating for me," said Nadia Herrera-Set, a competitive gymnast. "There was no way to know how long it would take before we could return, and I knew that when we reopened, I would be missing a lot of my strength and skills from before."

Other athletes voiced similar frustrations.

"It was really challenging to get back into my sport. I think that's the worst part of all of it. I was really down because my physical skills were lacking," junior Sasha Belov, a club volleyball player, said. "COVID-19 made this season really difficult because of the uncertainty. We don't know with the rising cases if we're going to have tournaments, and I think that makes a lot of players sad."

For Belov and Herrera-Set, their love for their sport led them to stick with it, and both were able to gain back lost skills. The same cannot be said for others. Both girls know of "many athletes who decided not to return to their sports."

A large reason for this was parents' concern for their child's safety. For some sports, which are played indoors and in close contact with other players, outbreaks are incredibly likely. Recently, for example, Santa Clara health officials attributed a youth basketball tournament in Rocklin, CA, to over 100 COVID-19 cases in parents, coaches, and players.

"Basketball is one of the sports that shows up on various lists and articles as riskier due to the fact it's optimally played on an indoor court and the nature of the game is to guard other

players tightly, face-to-face," said Karen Kwan.

Kwan's daughter, Kiana George, has participated in competitive basketball during the pandemic. However, growing concerns about safety caused them to re-evaluate their involvement.

"We decided to opt-out of travel tournaments after we heard several teams, the coaches, and some parents contracted COVID-19 after going out-of-state to play," Kwan said. "After Thanksgiving, we put a hold on indoor practices. It was a tough decision to make because competitive players feel they need to gain visibility to be recruited for college."

Many parents have taken Kwan's approach, taking extra precautions and finding ways to participate safely in their sports. But others have gone a step further, pulling their children completely from their sport, leaving a massive hole in the incomes of many organizations.

"Decreased enrollment made a huge impact financially. Many recreational and preschool parents have pulled their kids out of training, and unfortunately, those programs are where gyms make most of their money," Hodges said.

Ultimately, COVID-19 has destroyed many sporting facilities' financial situations, leaving owners, coaches, and athletes scrambling to pick up the pieces. With rising cases, the problem will only get worse.

"I feel nervous about the future of sports," Herrera-Set said. "I see so many headlines about how hurt these places are financially. It's hard to feel secure about anything with COVID-19."



CLAIRE TSENG