

Too Hot to Play? Sports in a Warming World



Built from *The Heat Game: The World Cup's Other Opponent* by Ethan Yang, Editor-in-Chief

Grades 4–8 · About 45 minutes · ★ everyone · ★★ older readers

Name _____

Date _____

1. Before You Read

★ Have you ever played or watched a game outside on a really hot day? How did you feel?

★ What do you think athletes can do to stay safe when it is very hot?

2. The Short Version

Read this first. Older readers: read the full article too.

The World Cup is the most-watched event on Earth. At this summer's tournament, Ethan says, the toughest opponent wasn't a team. It was the heat. Many games kicked off at 3 p.m. in July, in the hot middle of America. Players needed cooling breaks, and coaches planned when their players would drink water as carefully as they planned their plays.

Summer was always hot, Ethan writes, but three things changed. First, dangerous **heat waves** used to be bad luck. Now they are expected. Second, money: TV pays for the sport, and TV wants the biggest games on at a good hour for viewers in Europe. That puts players on the field when the sun is strongest. Third, star players are only the top of a pyramid. Below them are youth teams, high school leagues, and weekend players who play in the same heat without ice vests, medical staff, or stadiums with roofs.

Sports are already changing to fit a warmer world. The men's World Cup before this one was moved to November and December because of heat. Marathons now start at dawn, and sports like tennis and cricket have new heat rules. This kind of change is called **adaptation**.

Ethan’s big question is about the bottom of the pyramid. Will we just admire the changes made for the stars, or will we use them to protect kids and everyday players too?

3. Word Bank

Word	What it means
heat wave	a stretch of days that are much hotter than normal
hydration	drinking enough water so your body keeps working well
broadcast	a show or game sent out on TV or online for people to watch
reschedule	to move something to a different time or date
adaptation	changing how you do things to fit new conditions

★ Use **hydration** in a sentence of your own.

4. Check Your Understanding

★ 1. What does Ethan say was the World Cup’s toughest opponent? Answer in one sentence.

★ 2. Why are many of the biggest matches played in the afternoon?

☐ Players play better when it is hot ☐ So the games are on TV at a good hour for viewers in Europe ☐ The stadiums have no lights

★ 3. Name two ways sports have already changed because of heat.

★ 4. Top players have help staying safe in the heat. Name two things they have that many kids’ teams and weekend players do not.

★★ 5. Ethan describes sports as a pyramid. Who is at the top, who is at the bottom, and why does he worry most about the bottom?

5. Ethan's Ledger

Ethan weighs every big idea with three questions: *What do we win? What does it cost? And what's the catch?* In this article he fills in a ledger of his own, for afternoon kickoffs. Find his answers and write them in your own words.

	Your answer
The win: What good thing comes from playing big games in the afternoon?	
The cost: Who pays the price, and how?	
The catch: What makes this trade unfair?	

6. Think Deeper

★ Ethan calls sport "one of the most sensitive climate instruments we have." An instrument, like a thermometer, measures something. What does he mean? How can a game tell us something about the weather?

★★ Ethan says the changes made for star players are a message for "every school league and street game." Imagine you are in charge of a summer sports day at your school. What would you change to keep everyone safe? Use at least two ideas from the article.

7. Write Your Report

Write a short report answering this question: **Should the biggest games be played at cooler times of day, even if that is a less convenient hour for TV viewers?**

- My answer:
- Reason 1 (from the article):
- Reason 2 (from the article):
- One thing the other side would say:
- My conclusion:

For Teachers and Parents: Answer Key

Word bank sentence: Answers vary; check that the student uses hydration to mean drinking enough water.

1. The heat: afternoon kickoffs in July, during a heat wave, were harder to beat than any team.
2. So the games are on TV at a good hour for viewers in Europe.
3. Any two: the men's World Cup before this one was moved to November and December; marathons now start at dawn; some race calendars have moved to different seasons; cricket, tennis, and American football have new heat rules; the Winter Olympics has fewer places that can host it and relies on machine-made snow.
4. Any two: ice vests, medical staff, stadiums with roofs.
5. Top: star athletes, like World Cup players. Bottom: youth tournaments, high school leagues, and weekend players. He worries about the bottom because they play in the same heat without ice vests, medical staff, or roofed stadiums, and nobody publishes how fast the new heat rules are reaching them.

Ledger (from the article): Win: about a billion viewers get to watch at a comfortable hour. Cost: the players are on the field when the sun is strongest, pushed to the edge of what their bodies can handle in heat. Catch: only one side does the sweating; the viewers get the benefit while the players take the heat.

Think deeper: Open answers. Strong answers explain that sport has hard limits on how much heat a body can handle and huge audiences, so changes like cooling breaks and new start times show the climate is changing before many other places notice. For the sports day, look for ideas from the article such as moving games to cooler times like early morning, adding cooling breaks, planning when players drink water, and having adults ready to help, like the medical staff top players have.

Report: Look for a clear answer, two reasons taken from the article, a fair statement of the other side, and a conclusion that matches the answer.