

# SAFER TO TRAIN INDOORS

Haze can affect athletes' performance and health

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FORMER Ethiopian distance runner Haile Gebrselassie once withdrew from the Olympics as he did not want to risk his health by competing in heavily-polluted air.

That is a fine example of the priority world-class athletes place on taking care of their health.

But the risks of competing or training in polluted conditions may not be as apparent to Malaysian athletes, be it at an amateur or elite level, as we have become accustomed to the haze.

With the haze in Malaysia often lasting for weeks, training outdoors is a risk not worth taking, according to sports science specialist Dr Ahmad Naim Ismail.

"High-performance athletes are very sensitive, for them, everything has to be perfect as the margins are very small at the elite level. There is no room for error," said Naim yesterday.

"It is better to train indoors if the haze

lasts for more than two days.

"The hazy conditions can also be subjective. What looks like moderate conditions can still be bad for athletes. It is best to look at the air pollution index (API) readings and adhere to the warnings."

Naim added that athletes are much more susceptible to illness during hazy conditions due to the stress they place on their bodies.

"When athletes undergo high-intensity training, they become vulnerable to illnesses as the physical stress they endure weakens their immune systems," added Naim.

"Training in haze further weakens their immunity. They become even more prone to illnesses than the general public because of this."

While training indoors is not ideal for high-performance athletes, Naim stressed that coaches must be smart in tailoring their programmes to achieve specific goals while remaining inside.

"Like it or not, training indoors is the safest way to go during hazy conditions but the coaches have to find a way to adapt

their athletes' training programmes," said Naim, who previously served as an associate professor with Universiti Putra Malaysia and Universiti Teknologi Mara's Faculty of Sports Science and Recreation.

"Long-distance runners, for example, can train on a treadmill while sprint-oriented athletes can focus on gym work to build their strength and explosiveness."

"Football and rugby players can also use a futsal court to train."

An API reading of more than 100 is considered to be unsafe for outdoor activities.



Visibility was affected during the Malaysia Cup match between PRNS FC and Negeri Sembilan due to the haze at the Shah Alam Stadium on Friday. PIC BY SADDAM YUSOFF