

El Niño works its way into NFL

No matter what El Niño brings to the West Coast, the Super Bowl will be played in San Diego

By Bernie Wilson
The Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Will El Niño sack the Super Bowl?

Don't count on it.

Bureaucrats from city hall to the White House are rushing to put in defenses for the anticipated winter arrival of El Niño, the ocean-warming condition that could spawn the worst storms in 15 years along the California coastline.

Piers may wash away, surf may surge and blufftop homes may slide into the sea.

But the Super Bowl will be played Jan. 25 at Qualcomm Stadium, El Niño or not.

"If I hear that one more time, I'm

going to throw up," said Jim Steeg, the NFL's Mr. Super Bowl. "I've heard that this winter is going to be a wet one, a dry one, that it's going to hit Feb. 15, or that it's going to hit Dec. 15."

Depending on which expert is talking, El Niño could waterlog California, or it could peter out.

Still, by Super Sunday, El Niño promises to be as well-known as John Elway or Brett Favre.

Yet, the NFL brass isn't worried. Steeg likes to point out that while it may have rained before or after previous Super Bowls, it has never rained during any of the 31 games themselves. Of course, eight have been played in domed stadiums.

When it comes to the Super Bowl, the reign that really matters is that the NFC has won 13 straight over the AFC.

After all, rain is hardly the worst condition for a football game. This

isn't Green Bay and its bitter cold, or even Chicago and its fog.

But because of all the hype, including an El Niño summit sponsored by the White House on Tuesday in Santa Monica, Steeg has suggested an El Niño update be put on the NFL's Super Bowl Internet site, which will be online in December.

"There are going to be thousands of questions about it," said Steeg, the NFL's executive director of special events. "The public is going to be all worried about it, if it is a rainy month. That's the great thing about it. It's got everybody worried, and they don't even know if it's going to rain or not."

Super Sunday happens to sit smack in the middle of San Diego's rainy season. The city gets an average of 1.80 inches of rain in January, which could double during El Niño.

Outdoor: UO's program sets a precedent for colleges and universities across U.S.

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The Outdoor Program is called a "cooperative" program: it allows students, alumni and faculty, who are willing to pay a fee, to use the program in any sane manner they desire. The program acts as a helping hand to students by providing equipment, maps, magazines, management plans, catalogs and other aids to help guide them.

It also provides a bulletin board where students can post sign-up lists for their trips and, as a result, gain team members. As Mason said, the program is suited to "initiators."

"Most programs are set to tell students what they can't do," Mason said. "We say, 'Here are the roadblocks, and here's the way around them.'"

However, the Outdoor Program provides more than just trips. Students also can dive into its considerable video library, check out books, borrow equipment for private excursions, look up maps and seek advice from people with years of experience outdoors.

"People use us in a variety of different ways," Mason said. "You can participate to the level you want."

One of the most valuable resources offered by the Outdoor Program is the Allard and Casey Memorial Safety Library. This collection of outdoor safety equipment was established in memory of University students Frank Allard and Michael Casey, who died while climbing in the Three Sisters Wilderness in November of 1995.

The library contains state-of-the-art safety equipment such as cellular phones, VHF radios, Global Positioning System units and avalanche transceivers and probes. All gear in the library may be borrowed free of charge from the Outdoor Program office located in the basement of the EMU.

"I can use my imagination and choose to do anything I like, and they'll help me do it," said Matthew Mattson, University student and Outdoor Program

participant. "It requires more initiative on my part, but that really tailors to my interests."

At many colleges, different clubs serve as home to students who actively pursue outdoor interests.

Things were the same way at the University throughout the '40s, '50s and '60s until the Outdoor Program was established in 1967 as the first of its kind among U.S. colleges. It remains one of the few open-ended, cooperative outdoor programs in the country. This is just one of the many reasons for its national reputation.

"The University of Oregon is where it all started," said Ron Waters, Idaho State's Outdoor Program coordinator. "The model it developed has been copied throughout the nation. It still remains one of the top programs around."

Mason believes the Outdoor Program's most popular area is white water activities, such as kayaking and rafting. He also said sea kayaking is rapidly increasing in popularity, and during the winter, skiing trips are a frequent occurrence.

Often the Outdoor Program's influence does not end with the last bucket of water bailed out of the raft or the 20 feet traversed back to the base of the mountain. In fact, many participants feel its effects for the rest of their lives after making lifelong friends or meeting alumni through the program.

Mason said, "I can't tell you how many careers have been made on University outdoor trips."

He strongly encourages students who have even a remote interest in outdoor activities to check out the Outdoor Program. Whether it be to find companions for excursions, to look through local maps for mountain biking trails or to attempt to locate the perfect place for this weekend's camping trip, it doesn't matter.

As the signs surrounding the EMU used to show before the building's renovation: "Outdoor Program — hard to find, but worth it!"

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