

references, each of which relates to position statements rather than to any scientific reference that "blue skies and lack of rainfall are not adequate reason to breach the 30 minute return to play rule".²⁻⁴

Unless there are reasonable scientific explanations why lightning should strike someone in the presence of blue skies, I would think that this policy needs some reconsideration. It seems logical that if a storm is moving away, the skies should become blue, and the time between lightning and thunder should increase. I would have thought that if there was a weather watcher around, he or she could monitor the situation, and ascertain that the storm was moving away, and this would allow for earlier resumption of sport.

Can you imagine a weather watcher preventing play in an AFL game, or even a minor suburban game of football, because of the threat of lightning if the skies were indeed blue?

If I am to take this recommendation to my local football club, I would like to see evidence that this has some credible scientific backing.

1. Brukner P, Makdissi M. Recommendations for lightning protection in sport. *Med J Aust* 2002; 177: 35-37.
2. Holle RL, Lopez RE, Zimmerman C. Updated recommendations for lightning safety — 1998. *Bull Am Meteor Soc* 1999; 80: 2035-2041.
3. Cooper MA, Holle RL, Lopez RE. Recommendations for lightning safety [letter]. *JAMA* 1999; 282: 1132-1133.
4. Walsh KM, Bennett B, Cooper MA, et al. National Athletic Trainers' Association position statement: lightning safety for athletics and recreation. *J Athletic Training* 2000; 35: 471-477. □

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IN REPLY: The "30/30" rule is a simple and easy-to-remember rule designed to reduce the probability of lightning strikes. Two important studies over recent years have led to its development.

First, in 1993, Holle et al analysed the number of casualties relative to flash rates during thunderstorms and found that most casualties occur at the beginning and end of storms.¹ They concluded that individuals typically wait too long to seek safe shelter and often resume too soon.

Secondly, in 1999, Lopez and Holle examined the distribution of successive flashes for large numbers of different types of storms, and found that, although most were separated by less than 8 km, a significant number of successive flashes occurred up to 13 km apart.² This was

noted to be more likely with larger, more complex storms.

Given that lightning can strike kilometres forwards or backwards from the storm front, being within 10 km of lightning activity (as estimated by a "flash-to-bang" count of 30 seconds) reflects a risk that the next flash might conceivably be at the observer's location, irrespective of whether there are blue skies overhead. This is why blue sky alone is not enough reason to break the 30/30 rule.

1. Holle RL, Lopez RE, Ortiz R, et al. The local meteorological environment of lightning casualties in central Florida. Preprints, 17th Conference on Severe Local Storms and Conference on Atmospheric Electricity. St. Louis, Missouri. Boston: American Meteorological Society, 1993; 779-784.
2. Lopez RE, Holle RL. The distance between successive lightning flashes. NOAA Technical Memorandum ERL NSSL-105. 1999. □

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TO THE EDITOR: I enjoyed reading Makdissi and Brukner's "Recommendations for lightning protection in sport",¹ but I feel that in addressing an audience of renowned golf hacks the authors have made a glaring omission.

It is well known in golfing circles that the first rule of lightning self-protection on the golf course is to always carry a 1-iron in the bag and in appropriate conditions to reach for it — because not even God can hit a 1-iron!

1. Makdissi M, Brukner P. Recommendations for lightning protection in sport. *Med J Aust* 2002; 177: 35-37. □

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