

Warm, sunny Bay Area days don't mean end to El Niño

Mark Gomez and Jason Green, Mercury News, 2-8-16

SAN JOSE -- It sure seems as though Mother Nature is a fan of Bay Area sports. Is she a fan of ending our drought?

In the midst of a rainy winter fueled by a strong El Niño, Super Bowl 50 was played Sunday under sun-splashed conditions at Levi's Stadium. This week, a new round of celebrities and athletes is in Northern California, visiting the Monterey Peninsula for the annual AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am, where sunny skies and temperatures in the mid-60s are expected through the weekend.

The only rain so far this month was in San Jose, which recorded .05 inches, one forecaster said.

But don't be fooled by this stretch of sunny weather. El Niño conditions in the Pacific remain potent, and weather scientists say the Bay Area is still expected to see more rain through April.

How much rain and when? No one can predict.

But with several weeks remaining in the rainy season, the smart money says there's more wet stuff to come.

"El Niño is still there, still strong," said Steve Anderson, a forecaster with the National Weather Service. "We've got all the way through March to get rain. There's plenty of time left."

It might be hard to think about rain in the Bay Area after two glorious days of sunshine and record-setting temperatures. Monday was expected to be the warmest day of the week, with San Jose peaking at 78 degrees, breaking the record of 75 set in 1987, according to Diana Henderson, a forecaster with the weather service.

Records also were set Monday in San Francisco and Oakland and at Moffett Field, all of which broke highs set in 2006. It was 75 Monday in San Francisco, while the previous high was 74; Oakland hit 81, beating the previous high of 77; Moffett Field reached 75, topping its previous high of 74, Henderson said. Sunday's high at Mineta San Jose International Airport, the closest weather station to Levi's Stadium, was 76 degrees, which tied the record set in 1963, according to the weather service. Temperatures were higher in the South Bay on Sunday than they had been in 53 years. The normal high for Feb. 7 is 61 degrees.

The springlike conditions are attributed to a strong ridge of high pressure that has settled over the West Coast, pushing moisture north to British Columbia, Anderson said.

The high-pressure ridge is expected to weaken throughout the week, bringing temperatures to more seasonal averages by the weekend. Still, there is no rain in the seven-day forecast

Most locations in the Bay Area remain right around their seasonal rainfall averages, including San Francisco (13.70 inches, 93 percent of normal), San Jose (8.84 inches, 103 percent of normal) and Oakland (10.44 inches, 86 percent of normal).

January was exceptionally wet in the Bay Area, as San Francisco received 6.94 inches of rain (3.21 is the average for the month), and San Jose 4.09 inches (compared with an average of 2.01).

The weather scientists all say February too is usually a wet month in California, but it's off to a dry start. Daniel Swain, a climate researcher at Stanford University, acknowledged the pattern is reminiscent of the "ridiculously resilient ridge" -- a term he coined -- that kept rain away the past couple of winters.

Meteorologists blamed that ridge -- a vast zone of high pressure that stuck around for months in the atmosphere off the West Coast, nearly four miles high and 2,000 miles long -- for the four-year drought.

But Swain said Bay Area residents needn't worry just yet that the current warm, sunny weather means that phenomenon is back.

"It still seems like the good money is on wetter conditions returning," he said. "We're not done with the rainy season."

Forecasters Jan Null and Swain said it's normal for the Bay Area to experience dry stretches during the winter, even in the peak of the rainy season.

All the weather experts said nothing can be predicted beyond a week.

"Get out while you can," Anderson said. "Enjoy the sunny weather."