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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

FREDERICK E. LEONARD,
Plaintiff,
v.
M. THOMPSON, et al.,
Defendants.

No. 2:16-cv-2767 DB P
ORDER

Plaintiff is a state prisoner proceeding pro se with a civil rights action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Plaintiff alleges an Eighth Amendment claim of failure to protect and a claim that his due process rights were violated in a disciplinary hearing. All parties have consented to magistrate judge jurisdiction. (ECF Nos. 5, 40.) Presently before the court are defendant’s motions for summary judgment (ECF Nos. 41, 42), plaintiff’s cross motion for summary judgment and response to defendants’ motions for summary judgment (ECF No. 46), and defendants’ responses to plaintiff’s motion (ECF Nos. 47, 48). For the reasons set forth below, the court will grant both the defendants’ motions for summary judgment and deny plaintiff’s cross-motion for summary judgment.

BACKGROUND

I. Procedural History

Plaintiff initiated this action by filing the complaint on November 16, 2016. (ECF No. 1.) The court screened and dismissed plaintiff’s original complaint for failure to state a cognizable

1 federal law claim. (ECF No. 12.) Upon screening the First Amended Complaint the court found
2 plaintiff stated a claim against defendant Thompson for failure to protect under the Eighth
3 Amendment and against defendant Clemente for a due process violation during plaintiff's
4 disciplinary proceeding. (ECF No. 16.) Plaintiff's claims against defendant Metzger were
5 dismissed.

6 Following the close of discovery defendants Thompson and Clemente each filed a motion
7 for summary judgment. (ECF Nos. 41, 42.) Plaintiff filed a cross-motion for summary judgment
8 and response to defendants' motions. (ECF No. 46.) Defendants objected to plaintiff's cross
9 motion as untimely, but also filed responses to his motion. (ECF Nos. 47, 48.)

10 **II. Allegations in the Complaint**

11 The events giving rise to the claim in this action occurred while plaintiff was an inmate at
12 the Stanton Correctional Facility ("Jail") in Fairfield. (ECF No. 15 at 1.) Plaintiff alleges that on
13 July 12, 2016, he was housed in the Administrative Separation ("Ad Sep") area of the Jail. (Id. at
14 2.) Plaintiff alleges that Ad Sep houses inmates who are dangerous, mentally ill, or need
15 protection. He also claims deputies were aware that no two cell doors should be open at one time
16 because Ad Sep inmates were not permitted to have contact with each other. Inmate Butler
17 previously threatened plaintiff and defendant Thompson was aware of Butler's conduct. On July
18 12, Thompson failed to ensure that Butler was secure in his cell before opening plaintiff's cell
19 door. After Thompson left his station, Butler followed plaintiff and a fight ensued.

20 Plaintiff claims the day after the fight, he filed a grievance complaining that he should not
21 be held responsible for the altercation because it was due to the "illegal unlock" by defendant
22 Thompson. (Id. at 4.) He was interviewed by Deputy Clemente and Sergeant Ramirez regarding
23 his grievance. Ramirez found he was not guilty of instigating the altercation. However, two days
24 later Clemente conducted a formal hearing. Clemente did not interview any witnesses, denied
25 plaintiff's request to present witness statements, and found him guilty based only on Clemente's
26 viewing of part of the video of the altercation. As a result of the guilty finding, plaintiff incurred
27 ten days in-cell confinement. Plaintiff seeks monetary damages.

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1 other materials” or by showing that such materials “do not establish the absence or presence of a
2 genuine dispute, or that an adverse party cannot produce admissible evidence to support the fact.”
3 Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(c)(1).

4 “Where the non-moving party bears the burden of proof at trial, the moving party need
5 only prove there is an absence of evidence to support the non-moving party’s case.” Oracle
6 Corp., 627 F.3d at 387 (citing Celotex, 477 U.S. at 325); see also Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(c)(1)(B).
7 Indeed, summary judgment should be entered, “after adequate time for discovery and upon
8 motion, against a party who fails to make a showing sufficient to establish the existence of an
9 element essential to that party’s case, and on which that party will bear the burden of proof at
10 trial.” Celotex, 477 U.S. at 322. “[A] complete failure of proof concerning an essential element
11 of the nonmoving party’s case necessarily renders all other facts immaterial.” Id. at 323. In such
12 a circumstance, summary judgment should “be granted so long as whatever is before the district
13 court demonstrates that the standard for the entry of summary judgment, as set forth in Rule
14 56(c), is satisfied.” Id.

15 If the moving party meets its initial responsibility, the burden shifts to the opposing party
16 to establish that a genuine issue as to any material fact actually does exist. Matsushita Elec.
17 Indus. Co. v. Zenith Radio Corp., 475 U.S. 574, 586-87 (1986). In attempting to establish the
18 existence of this factual dispute, the opposing party may not rely upon the allegations or denials
19 of its pleadings but is required to tender evidence of specific facts in the form of affidavits, and/or
20 admissible discovery material, in support of its contention that the dispute exists. See Fed. R.
21 Civ. P. 56(c). The opposing party must demonstrate that the fact in contention is material, i.e., a
22 fact “that might affect the outcome of the suit under the governing law,” Anderson v. Liberty
23 Lobby, Inc., 477 U.S. 242, 248 (1986); T.W. Elec. Serv., Inc. v. Pac. Elec. Contractors Ass’n, 809
24 F.2d 626, 630 (9th Cir. 1987), and that the dispute is genuine, i.e., “the evidence is such that a
25 reasonable jury could return a verdict for the nonmoving party,” Anderson, 477 U.S. at 248.

26 In the endeavor to establish the existence of a factual dispute, the opposing party need not
27 establish a material issue of fact conclusively in its favor. It is sufficient that “the claimed
28 factual dispute be shown to require a jury or judge to resolve the parties’ differing versions of the

1 truth at trial.” T.W. Elec. Serv., 809 F.2d at 630 (quoting First Nat’l Bank of Ariz. v. Cities
2 Serv. Co., 391 U.S. at 288-89 (1968). Thus, the “purpose of summary judgment is to pierce the
3 pleadings and to assess the proof in order to see whether there is a genuine need for trial.”
4 Matsushita, 475 U.S. at 587 (citation and internal quotation marks omitted).

5 “In evaluating the evidence to determine whether there is a genuine issue of fact, [the
6 court] draw[s] all inferences supported by the evidence in favor of the non-moving party.” Walls
7 v. Cent. Costa Cnty. Transit Auth., 653 F.3d 963, 966 (9th Cir. 2011) (per curiam) (citation
8 omitted). It is the opposing party’s obligation to produce a factual predicate from which the
9 inference may be drawn. See Richards v. Nielsen Freight Lines, 810 F.2d 898, 902 (9th Cir.
10 1987). Finally, to demonstrate a genuine issue, the opposing party “must do more than simply
11 show that there is some metaphysical doubt as to the material facts.” Matsushita, 475 U.S. at 586
12 (citations omitted). “Where the record is taken as a whole could not lead a rational trier of fact to
13 find for the non-moving party, there is no ‘genuine issue for trial.’” Id. at 587 (quoting First Nat’l
14 Bank, 391 U.S. at 289).

15 On a motion for summary judgment, it is inappropriate for the court to weigh evidence or
16 resolve competing inferences. “In ruling on a motion for summary judgment, the court must
17 leave ‘[c]redibility determinations, the weighing of the evidence, and the drawing of legitimate
18 inferences from the facts’ to the jury.” Foster v. Metropolitan Life Ins. Co., 243 Fed.Appx. 208,
19 210 (9th Cir. 2007) (quoting Anderson, 477 U.S. at 255).

20 **V. Material Facts**

21 **A. Undisputed Facts**

22 At all relevant times plaintiff was an inmate at the Stanton Correctional Facility housed in
23 the Ad Sep unit. (DSUF (ECF No. 41-2) ¶ 1; ECF No. 46 at 57 ¶ 1.) Defendant Thompson was a
24 unit task officer in the Ad Sep unit at all relevant times. (DSUF (ECF No. 42-2) ¶ 3; ECF No. 46
25 at 57 ¶ 2.) Ad Sep inmates are single celled. (DSUF (ECF No. 42-2) ¶ 4; ECF No. 46 at 57 ¶ 6.)
26 Ad Sep inmates are released from their cells one at a time for 15 to 30 minutes per day. (Id.) The
27 cell doors in Ad Sep can be opened remotely by using a personal data assistant (PDA), which

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1 indicates whether a cell door is open or closed. (DSUF (ECF No. 42-2) ¶ 6; ECF No. 46 at 57 ¶
2 6.)

3 On July 12, 2016, at the conclusion of inmate Butler's unlock time, Thompson ordered
4 Butler to return to his cell and lock down. (DSUF (ECF No. 42-2) ¶ 10; ECF No. 46 at 58 ¶ 11.)
5 Thompson checked his PDA. (DSUF (ECF No. 42-2) ¶ 12.) The PDA indicated that Butler's
6 cell door was shut and locked. (DSUF (ECF No. 42-2) ¶ 12; ECF No. 46 at 57 ¶ 6.) Thompson
7 assumed Butler was secure in his cell. (DSUF (ECF No. 42-2) ¶ 12; ECF No. 46 at 57 ¶ 5.)
8 Thompson then used his PDA to unlock plaintiff from his cell. (DSUF (ECF No. 42-2) ¶ 13; ECF
9 No. 46 at 58 ¶ 13.) After unlocking plaintiff, Thompson left the area. (DSUF (ECF No. 42-2) ¶
10 14; ECF No. 46 at 16 ¶ 10.)

11 Prior to the July 12, 2016 incident, Butler had shouted racist comments and general threats
12 against Black inmates. (DSUF (ECF No. 42-2) ¶ 24; ECF No. 46 at 15, ¶ 7.) Thompson had
13 heard Butler make such statements. (DSUF (ECF No. 42-2) ¶ 25; ECF No. 46 at 16 ¶ 13.)

14 At some point while they were both unlocked, plaintiff approached Butler and hit him
15 several times with a closed fist. (ECF No. 43, 44.) Butler does not strike plaintiff or otherwise
16 fight back. (DSUF (ECF No. 41-2) ¶ 31; ECF No. 46 at 69 ¶ 31.) After the altercation,
17 Thompson noticed Butler was still out of his cell and ordered him to return to his cell. (DSUF
18 (ECF No. 42-2) ¶ 15-16; ECF No. 46 at 58 ¶ 16, 19.) Thompson used the video monitoring
19 system to ensure Butler entered his cell and shut the door. (DSUF (ECF No. 42-2) ¶ 16; ECF No.
20 46 at 59 ¶ 16.)

21 On July 15, 2016, Clemente conducted a disciplinary hearing regarding a report of mutual
22 combat involving plaintiff and Butler that occurred on July 12, 2016. (DSUF (ECF No. 41-2) ¶ 4;
23 ECF No. 46 at 64 ¶ 4.) Clemente interviewed plaintiff. (DSUF (ECF No. 41-2) ¶ 7; ECF No. 46
24 at 64 ¶ 7.) Clemente also reviewed a video recorded by a camera on the cell block that captured
25 inmate movements before and after the incident. (DSUF (ECF No. 41-2) ¶ 9; ECF No. 46 at 64 ¶
26 9.) Clemente found plaintiff guilty of a rule violation for fighting based on his review of the
27 video evidence of the incident. (DSUF (ECF No. 41-2) ¶ 30; ECF No. 46 at 69 ¶ 30.)

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1 1060, 1067-68 (9th Cir. 2016) (citing Bell v. Wolfish, 441 U.S. 520, 535 (1979)). In order to
2 prevail under either clause, “plaintiff must show that the prison officials acted with ‘deliberate
3 indifference.’” Castro, 833 F.3d at 1068.

4 The Eighth Amendment requires that prison officials take reasonable measures for the
5 safety of prisoners. Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825, 832 (1994). In particular, prison officials
6 have a duty to protect prisoners from violence at the hands of other prisoners. Id. at 833; Hearns
7 v. Terhune, 413 F.3d 1036, 1040 (9th Cir. 2005); Hoptowit v. Ray, 682 F.2d 1237, 1250 (9th Cir.
8 1982) overruled on other grounds by Sandin v. Conner, 515 U.S. 472 (1995). The failure of
9 prison officials to protect inmates from attacks by other inmates may rise to the level of an Eighth
10 Amendment violation where prison officials know of and disregard a substantial risk of serious
11 harm to the plaintiff. E.g., Farmer, 511 U.S. at 837; Hearns, 413 F.3d at 1040.

12 “Whether a prison official had the requisite knowledge of a substantial risk is a question
13 of fact subject to demonstration in the usual ways, including inference from circumstantial
14 evidence, . . . and a factfinder may conclude that a prisoner official knew of a substantial risk
15 from the very fact that the risk was obvious.” Farmer, 511 U.S. at 842 (citations omitted). The
16 duty to protect a prisoner from serious harm requires that prison officials take reasonable
17 measures to guarantee the safety and well-being of the prisoner. Id. at 832-33; Frost v. Agnos,
18 152 F.3d 1124, 1128-29 (9th Cir. 1998). Because “only the unnecessary and wanton infliction of
19 pain implicates the Eighth Amendment,” plaintiff must show that the defendant acted with a
20 “sufficiently culpable state of mind.” Wilson v. Seiter, 501 U.S. 294, 297 (1991) (internal
21 quotation marks, emphasis, and citations omitted).

22 In Castro v. County of Los Angeles, the Ninth Circuit announced a new, objective
23 “deliberate indifference” standard for analyzing a pretrial detainee’s “failure to protect” claim,
24 which no longer required proof of an officer’s subjective awareness of the risk to which he was
25 exposing the detainee. Castro, 833 F.3d 1060, 1070-71 (9th Cir. 2016).

26 [T]he elements of a pretrial detainee’s Fourteenth Amendment
27 failure-to-protect claim against an individual officer are:

28 (1) The defendant made an intentional decision with respect to the
conditions under which the plaintiff was confined;

1 (2) Those conditions put the plaintiff at substantial risk of suffering
2 serious harm;

3 (3) The defendant did not take reasonable available measures to abate
4 that risk, even though a reasonable officer in the circumstances
5 would have appreciated the high degree of risk involved—making
6 the consequences of the defendant’s conduct obvious; and

7 (4) By not taking such measures, the defendant caused the plaintiff’s
8 injuries.

9 Castro, 833 F.3d at 1071.

10 **II. Analysis**

11 At the outset the court notes that although plaintiff claims he was a pretrial detainee at the
12 time of the incident, plaintiff characterized his claim against Thompson as arising under the
13 Eighth Amendment and has cited Eighth Amendment cases in his briefing. However, the court
14 need not determine plaintiff’s status, because under either standard, plaintiff’s failure to protect
15 claim against defendant Thompson fails.

16 “In a § 1983 action, the plaintiff must . . . demonstrate that the defendant’s conduct was
17 the actionable cause of the claimed injury To meet this causation requirement the plaintiff
18 must establish both causation-in-fact and proximate causation.” Harper v. City of Los Angeles,
19 533 F.3d 1010, 1026 (9th Cir. 2008) (citations omitted). This means that plaintiff’s injury would
20 not have occurred but for Thompson’s conduct (actual causation) and no unforeseeable
21 intervening cause occurred that would supersede Thompson’s liability (proximate causation).
22 Conn v. City of Reno, 591 F.3d 1081, 1098-1101 (9th Cir. 2010), vacated by 131 S. Ct. 1812
23 (2011), reinstated in relevant part by 658 F.3d 897 (9th Cir. 2011)).

24 The video evidence presented by defendants shows that plaintiff approached Butler and
25 struck him repeatedly with his fist and that Butler did not fight back. (ECF Nos. 43, 44.) Plaintiff
26 has not argued that he was attacked or challenged the video evidence put forth by defendants.
27 Rather plaintiff states he “engaged” Butler in self-defense. (ECF No. 46 at 17, 48-49.) Here,
28 plaintiff willingly engaged in the fight with Butler, thus “his own actions were the proximate
cause of any injury.” See Garces v. Degadeo, No. 1:06-cv-1038 JAT, 2010 WL 796831 at *4
(E.D. Cal. Mar. 5, 2010).

1 Plaintiff claims he suffered the following injuries as a result of the altercation: a laceration
2 on a knuckle, a “retracted” knuckle, and swelling for two weeks. (ECF No. 46 at 15.) However,
3 Thompson cannot be found liable for injuries plaintiff incurred in the course of an assault initiated
4 by plaintiff. See Sellers v. Steyth, No. CV 13-44 H DWM JTJ, 2015 WL 6455565 at *4
5 (D.Mont. Oct. 26, 2015) (holding officer not liable on failure to protect theory where plaintiff
6 instigated the confrontation that resulted in his injuries); Indreland v. Yellowstone Cnty Bd. of
7 Comm’rs, 693 F.Supp. 2d 1230, 1236, 1243 (D.Mont. 2010) (finding plaintiff’s failure to protect
8 claim fails as a matter of law because plaintiff initiated the fight); Hailey v. Kaiser, 201 F.3d 447
9 (10th Cir. 1999) (unpublished) (upholding summary judgment in favor of defendants based on a
10 finding that defendants were not the proximate or legal cause of plaintiff’s injuries because he
11 initiated the altercation with a fellow inmate).

12 Plaintiff cannot establish the requisite causation to show that Thompson violated his
13 rights. Thus, Thompson’s motion for summary judgment will be granted and plaintiff’s cross
14 motion for summary judgment will be denied.

15 **III. Legal Standards Exhaustion**

16 The exhaustion requirement of the PLRA applies to both pretrial detainees and convicted
17 prisoners, who “may not file suit challenging conditions in a correctional facility unless he or she
18 has exhausted administrative remedies at the facility.” Rodriguez v. City of Los Angeles, 891
19 F.3d 776, 792 (9th Cir. 2018) (citing 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(a); Kingsley v. Hendrickson, 135 S. Ct.
20 2466, 2476 (2015)). “The PLRA strengthened the exhaustion” requirement such that
21 “[e]xhaustion is no longer left to the discretion of the district court, but is mandatory.” Woodford
22 v. Ngo, 548 U.S. 81, 85 (2006) (citation omitted). The exhaustion requirement “applies to all
23 inmate suits about prison life, whether they involve general circumstances or particular episodes,
24 and whether they allege excessive force or some other wrong.” Porter v. Nussle, 534 U.S. 516,
25 532 (2002).

26 Regardless of the relief sought, a prisoner must pursue an appeal through all levels of a
27 prison’s grievance process as long as some remedy remains available. “The obligation to exhaust
28 ‘available’ remedies persists as long as *some* remedy remains ‘available.’ Once that is no longer

1 the case, then there are no ‘remedies . . . available,’ and the prisoner need not further pursue the
2 grievance.” Brown v. Valoff, 422 F.3d 926, 935 (9th Cir. 2005) (emphasis and alteration in
3 original) (citing Booth v. Churner, 532 U.S. 731, 736 (2001)).

4 “Under § 1997e(a), the exhaustion requirement hinges on the ‘availab[ility]’ of
5 administrative remedies: An inmate . . . must exhaust available remedies . . . but need not exhaust
6 unavailable ones.” Ross v. Blake, 136 S. Ct. 1850, 1858 (2016) (brackets in original). In
7 discussing availability in Ross the Supreme Court identified three circumstances in which
8 administrative remedies were unavailable: (1) where an administrative remedy “operates as a
9 simple dead end” in which officers are “unable or consistently unwilling to provide any relief to
10 aggrieved inmates;” (2) where an administration scheme is “incapable of use” because “no
11 ordinary prisoner can discern or navigate it;” and (3) where “prison administrators thwart inmates
12 from taking advantage of a grievance process through machination, misrepresentation, or
13 intimidation.” Id. at 1859-60. “[A]side from [the unavailability] exception, the PLRA’s text
14 suggests no limits on an inmate’s obligation to exhaust—irrespective of any ‘special
15 circumstances.’” Id. at 1856. “[M]andatory exhaustion statutes like the PLRA establish
16 mandatory exhaustion regimes, foreclosing judicial discretion.” Id. at 1857.

17 “[F]ailure to exhaust is an affirmative defense under the PLRA.” Jones v. Bock, 549 U.S.
18 199, 216 (2007). It is the defendant’s burden “to prove that there was an available administrative
19 remedy.” Albino v. Baca, 747 F.3d 1162, 1172 (9th Cir. 2014) (citing Hilao v. Estate of Marcos,
20 103 F.3d 767, 778 n.5 (9th Cir. 1996)). The burden then “shifts to the prisoner to come forward
21 with evidence showing that there is something in his particular case that made the existing and
22 generally available administrative remedies unavailable to him.” Id.

23 A prisoner is required to exhaust administrative remedies before filing suit. McKinney v.
24 Carey, 311 F.3d 1198, 1199 (9th Cir. 2002) (per curium). Section 1997e(a) mandates that “[n]o
25 action shall be brought . . . until [the prisoner’s] administrative remedies . . . are exhausted. 42
26 U.S.C. § 1997e(a). “The ‘available’ ‘remed[y]’ must be ‘exhausted’ before a complaint under §
27 1983 may be entertained.” Booth, 532 U.S. at 738. “Exhaustion subsequent to the filing of suit
28 will not suffice.” McKinney, 311 F.3d at 1199.

