



May 2021

Issue 441

The Latest in Road Running for Race Directors and Industry Professionals

COMMENTARY

Be Careful What You Wish For

By [Jeff Darman](#)

A [recent press release](#) joyously exclaimed that New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo was going to allow the 20th edition of the Buffalo Marathon to take place - with a host of COVID-19 mitigations in effect. While undoubtedly exciting, I fear that the 50% of the normal number of participants who are being allowed to run (remaining socially-distanced) means that race directors and the municipal officials they have been working with to reopen the sport are boxing themselves in with rigid planning. The CDC and other entities are rapidly liberalizing rules, particularly for outdoor activities. Expos aside, the continued need for somewhat draconian outdoor race social distancing seems to be kind of overkill at races as the vaccination rates increase and, in most states, COVID infections decrease. I am not talking about abandoning protocols for a race in May perhaps, but we need to re-examine our policies for events over the summer months as people cram into ballparks, Broadway re-opens and so on. Unless COVID flares up again, most of this will be window dressing akin to, in the past, worrying about surface contamination, which it turned out was overblown. Science is giving us new data all the time, but some remain fixated on the past or are satisfied with half a loaf.

Dr. Scott Gottlieb, a former Food and Drug Administration commissioner, told CNBC on Monday, May 17, that public health officials should take a more relaxed stance on outdoor activities in general because vaccination levels in the U.S. are driving down new infections.

Officials should take steps “to allow more gatherings outside, allow more large groups, allow sporting events, things of that nature,” Gottlieb told *Squawk Box*. “The weather is warming up. We have the opportunity to bring more activities outside. We know activities outside are lower risk than things done indoors.”

I commend the super creative work that was done by race directors and their respective municipal officials during the height of the pandemic so that races could reemerge. But that was then, and now both groups need to recalibrate. Race directors should begin to challenge, rather than accept, the very strict guidelines and rules being set by municipalities that require stricter than necessary requirements than appear to be in place for other events, including Major League Sports and others like the recent Kentucky Derby. Now is the time to move toward what was the norm pre-COVID rather than sticking with the crisis-driven guidelines.

Science evolves and vaccines work wonders. Our goal should be to look more like the other outdoor venues. The original pivot was imaginative and necessary, but now it is time to pivot again and begin to reclaim our sport.

Jeff Darman is the Director of the ACLI Capital Challenge; Marketing Consultant; Past President of the RRCA; Former Consultant to Moving Comfort, Nike, and Running Times; Former Member, World Athletics Running Commission; former USATF Board Member.