

## SPORTS / TENNIS

# Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo gives OK for outdoor tennis starting on Friday, but no doubles



A black tennis racket and yellow tennis ball laying on the ground at a tennis court in early morning light. Credit: Getty Images/1MoreCreative

**By Jeff Williams**

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Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo is opening up tennis in New York, at least the outdoor game, as of Friday. Just what this means to Long Island's tennis community will need to be sorted out over the next few days.

In Cuomo's COVID-19 pandemic briefing on Monday, he had this to say about the game as the state enters Phase 1 of its reopening with the lifting of the "pause order" on Friday: "We will open certain businesses statewide that are low-risk . . . Low-risk outdoor activities like tennis."

There were no details on which facilities would be opened and what protocols there might be, which left the Island's tennis community both excited that some tennis can be played but in search of answers on just how. Municipalities and clubs were trying to track down the details.

Claude Okin, CEO of Sportime, which is the biggest tennis operator on Long Island, obtained some rather bare-bones, bullet-point protocols from a government agency in Westchester that had been dealing with Empire State Development, through which guidance flows during the pandemic.

The points were this:

- Courts must be restricted to singles play
- No means of congregation may be available
- All buildings (including bathrooms) must remain closed

- All places of congregation (chairs, benches, etc...) must be off limits

“The singles part is a little bit frustrating,” said Okin, whose company has 94 outdoor courts across its facilities in the metropolitan area. “Older people who rely on tennis for their fitness, we have a lot of members who just don’t feel they can play singles. I think that is really unfortunate, a mistake. Tennis is a really good exercise for older folks and doubles is the way to do it.”

Joe Arias, president of the Suffolk County Tennis Coaches Association and a major force in the game on Long Island, said he was “pleasantly surprised” at the announcement while still looking for the particulars. The order is unlikely to allow courts at schools, which are used by locals for much casual tennis, to be used because the schools themselves are closed until further notice.

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“I think school districts will be down the road when they have figured out how to manage the buildings, even,” Arias said. “I’ve heard from several athletic directors. They don’t see an opening anytime soon.”

The United States Tennis Association has put out guidelines on how tennis can safely be restarted, which can be found at [USTA.com](http://USTA.com). USTA spokesman Chris Widmaier said on Monday that the National Tennis Center would not be opening for public play until “at least mid-June.”

The indoor facility at the tennis center is currently being used as a hospital and Louis Armstrong Stadium is a food preparation and distribution center to support the front line of the COVID-19 battle.

“Our phones are all ringing off the hook, our members are all wanting to book lessons and court time, mostly lessons,” Okin said. “Our economic survival depends on that as it does for the coaches. We’re happy to do it outside, but it’s not clear if it is allowed under the law.”

The towns of Huntington and Islip, contacted by Newsday, said they were planning on opening their courts on Friday.

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