

# No love for tennis?

Players question why golf is allowed but their sport isn't

BY JEFF WILLIAMS

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Now that Long Island's golfers have been able to return to the links, tennis players are wondering when they can return to the courts.

On Thursday, the Eastern Section of the United States Tennis Association sent a letter of appeal to Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, asking that the state consider reopening courts and emphasizing that the sport can achieve social distancing and sanitary protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Joe Arias, coach and kingpin of tennis in Suffolk County, sent a letter to Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone on April 27 asking that he use his powers to open courts across the county.

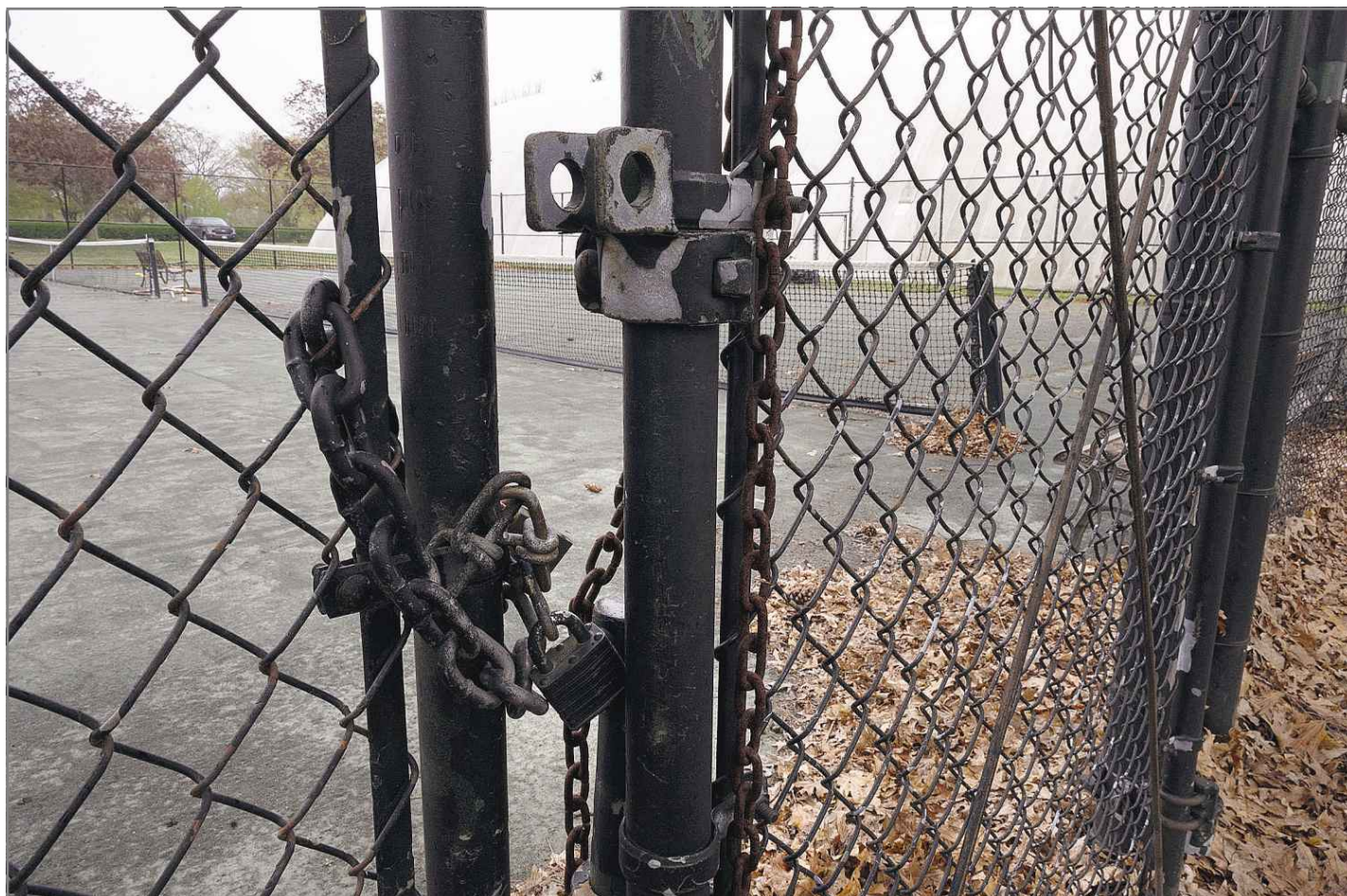
Tennis player Maria Rizzuto of Manhasset has started a petition on Change.org to open courts and she wants to send it to Cuomo.

And a number of Long Island's indoor facilities are prepping with coronavirus protocols so they can open as soon as they get the word.

"I had a meeting with club owners the other day," said Kathy Miller, director of the Carefree Racquet Club in North Merrick. "We will do everything we can to make our facilities as safe as possible and germ-free, the social distancing, et cetera."

Cuomo has allowed golf to be played while not being designated an essential business. Protocols have to be followed, but the result is full tee sheets across Long Island and the use of single-rider carts at municipal facilities that allow them. But in Cuomo's four-phase reopening of the state scheduled to begin when "the pause" order is lifted May 15, recreation is in Phase 4. And that's where tennis is.

"The governor has said that recreation is in Phase 4, and that there are two-week 'pause periods' between phases, and much of New York is not ready for Phase 1 as of May 15," said Claude Okin, CEO of Sportime, the major operator of tennis fa-



The Eastern Section of the USTA sent a letter to Gov. Cuomo, hoping that courts such as those at Bethpage State Park will be unlocked.



cilities on Long Island. "Certainly not where we have our businesses on Long Island, Westchester and New York City. That's making it look like a very long road to tennis.

"We don't think that makes sense. We don't think that golf and tennis are different. We think tennis might be safer, but certainly no less safe. Seems like in general, the governor has supported outdoor recreation. I'm extremely confused."

Arias, president of the Suffolk County Tennis Coaches Association, among many organizations that he heads in the sport, believes that a tennis court provides ample social distancing. A regulation tennis court is 2,808 square feet, but its functional size — including behind the baselines and outside the sidelines — is about 5,700 square feet, in Arias' estimation.

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"I've been getting information from the CDC, the USTA and my own experience with the sport," Arias said. "I looked at the information, I applied what I'm going to call science, for lack of a better word. If you take the square footage of a tennis court and you figure how many people are involved in playing, we at least qualify to be considered top echelon of places to open.

"In doubles, maybe it's thought of as you're going to run into each other, you are going to crisscross. That doesn't happen as much as you might think, plus just like a golf club, you aren't going to get in the way of a ten-

nis racket swinging at a ball."

The letter sent by the USTA Eastern Section to Cuomo references USTA guidelines that were developed by the USTA Medical Advisory Group, which is chaired by USTA board member Dr. Brian Hainline, who also serves as chief medical officer of the NCAA. Those guidelines can be found at USTA.com.

"We're trying to let state officials know that tennis can be played safely when it's time to get out there, that when there is the OK, tennis is prepared," Eastern Section director Jenny Schnitzer said.

Rizzuto's petition, for which she hopes to get 1,000 signatures, emphasizes the mental well-being of the physically active.

"Our mental health is suffering these days," Rizzuto said. "People need to come out and play a sport that lends itself to social distancing. I was extremely upset that they closed the courts down. Then I heard they are opening up golf courses . . . If tennis helps people with their mental health, it's something the governor should be looking at."

"We have spent a lot of time preparing to reopen," Okin said of his Sportime facilities. "Massive amounts of energy have gone into managing new traffic flows. We've ordered tens of thousands of special face guards for kids. We've ordered 55-gallon barrels of hand sanitizer and disinfectant. We've changed water fountains to touch-free bottle fillers. The list goes on and on."

And so does the wait.