

### Proximal Distancing and Risk Assessment

Contact between →	Official & Official	Official & Player	Official & Tournament Director	Official & Spectator	Player & Player	Player & Tournament Director	Player & Spectator	Spectator & Tournament Director	Spectator & Spectator
Location ↓									
On court	12	20	3	0	44	0	0	0	0
Tournament desk	0	1	3	1	10	9	1	0	1
Viewing area	0	0	0	0	15	2	15	2	45

1 day, 7 hour observation, 1 venue.

#### Abstract

Four months ago, CDTA/NITA tournament play resumed after the Covid 19 shutdown, presumably guided by safety protocol of masking and social distancing (SD) i.e. 6' or greater established by CDC and IDPH and supported by USTA. Approximately 160 hours of observing SD with officials, players, tournament staff and spectators over these 4 months revealed a substantial amount of proximal distancing i.e. <6', most notably with spectator viewing. This finding, coupled with the alarming global positivity metrics has possibly led to the decision of one of the more prominent indoor venues in the Chicago district to ban spectators from future tournaments. Such a significant change surrounding tournament activity and its possible link to spectator viewing points to the challenge indoor venues face with providing a safe environment for all, including individuals not necessarily associated with tournament play.

#### COVID 19 and District Tournament Tennis What's Essential?

My last report addressed crisis, reality and perspective and how reconciling these concepts shapes behavior both globally and, closer to home, during district tournament play with respect to Covid 19 and SD. The rise in global positivity metrics and decision by one club to ban spectators from future tournaments has prompted me to offer personal insight as to what may have led to this decision and implications for future tournament activity.

I begin with a reminder that crisis and reality, regardless of perspective, puts us all in the same boat; and the boat has a hole.

Eight months ago we experienced a global crisis which literally brought to a grinding halt, daily life as we were accustomed to. In an effort to stop the coronavirus spread (and literally save lives) decisive action was taken, the most significant of which was the stay-at-home directive and global shutdown of non-essential activity.

Within 3 months normalcy once enjoyed was restored, the most notable enterprise being social engagement.

Now, 8 months later, we are witnessing reinstatement of mitigations related to social engagement, and within our community, a club's ban on spectator viewing.

Mortality and morbidity metrics suggests the crisis is still with us (in fact, the hole in the boat may be getting bigger). Unfortunately, some in the boat no longer acknowledge the hole.

Dr. Arwady of IDPH cites "COVID fatigue" as the malaise that has led many to let their guard down with regard to masking and SD.

This in spite of every CDC and IDPH medical update pointing to social gatherings as a major contributor to the continuing rise in positivity metrics, insisting that SD still remain part of the “gold standard” of safety protocol.

I ask, given trending, both globally and with spectator viewing, has the point been reached where a collective ban need consideration?

This takes us back to defining reality and perspective.

One reality is that spectator SD continues to be a problem. Another reality is that indoor social gathering carries an increased risk of exposure and transmission of the virus. Still another reality is that medical certainty cannot ascertain that the virus is not present in any given spectator.

Yet, of most significance is the reality that pushback will come from some spectators i.e. parents who, because of their perspective, fail to acknowledge the above.

Metaphorically, in March we experienced a global computer crash. And over 4 months, CDC and IDPH created new software in the form of safety protocol i.e. masking and SD that would return, in stages, a relative sense of normalcy. In turn, USTA (and CDTA/NITA) tailored this new software to allow tournament tennis to do the same. The caveat is that a reboot became necessary and our computer would only function with uncompromising adoption of the new software.

This, valued tennis leaders, is where we stand today. Globally, many persist on layering old software i.e. social habits onto the “new norm.” Such behavior has led at least 1 club to shut its doors to spectators.

Moving forward, while I don’t profess to have “**the**” answer, district leadership might consider a return to “what’s essential.”

Is junior tournament play an essential enterprise? Yes. Engagement in organized self-initiated out-of-school activity enhances adolescent socioemotional growth.

Is spectator (parent) viewing an essential enterprise? Yes. Visible support by a caring adult enhances a child’s self-systems development. However, the caveat lies in the risk sanctioning such support poses to safety when social distancing is likely to be compromised.

With officials, what on and off court movement is essential? With staff, what movement away from the tournament desk is essential? With multiple staff, is proximal distancing essential? With player interaction e.g. check-in/reporting scores etc., is proximal distancing essential?

In essence, a crisis commands decisive change. And as experienced in March, decisive changed reduced activity to what was essential.

This, for now, is my final covid report. With SD, I’m convinced officials and players have figured it out. TD’s are getting there but still have a little work to do. With spectators, many simply fail to acknowledge the hole in the boat. Time will tell whether the ban on viewing will change this perspective.

For me (at least for now), the above suggests that my presence at future tournaments will not meet the standard of *what’s essential*.