

## **Viewpoint: Why They Should Cancel the NYC Marathon**

History is full of uplifting, utterly improbable tales of sports teams and athletic events lifting up communities – even whole nations – devastated by loss or reeling from upheaval. Hollywood, of course, does this based-on-true-events genre as well as anyone, with movies like *Invictus*, *We Are Marshall* and countless others celebrating the enduring ideal of the inspirational underdogs. Then there are those unforgettable, heart-stopping moments in one's own life (Mike Piazza's monumental home run against Atlanta at Shea Stadium in 2001, in front of 40,000 disbelieving fans just 10 days after 9/11, for instance) when the world of sports seems the only realm capable of awing and uniting us at the same time.

Maybe this restorative element of sports is at least part of what New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg had in mind when he recently announced that despite the devastation wrought by Hurricane Sandy in all five of the city's boroughs – and New Jersey, Connecticut and a dozen other states – the Nov. 4 New York City Marathon will go ahead as planned.

That's right. With three dozen New Yorkers killed (and scores of others from the Caribbean to New England dead or missing) and the likelihood of the discovery of more bodies still high; with millions of people in New York and the tristate region without power, heat or, in many cases, fresh food; with the city's subways, buses and roadways in a state of schizoid paralysis; with the estimated bill for the cleanup and recovery from the devastation soaring toward \$50 billion over who knows how many years and how many cost overruns, delays and disruptions; and finally, with a city of 8 million people still grappling with the emotional, psychological and financial body blows it's endured over the past several days, Bloomberg thinks the road race should go on.

"There's an awful lot of small businesses that depend on [this race]," Bloomberg said at a news briefing on Oct. 31. "We have to have an economy ... It's a great event for New York, and I think for those who were lost, you've got to believe they would want us to have an economy and have a city go on for those that they left behind."

Yes, of course, the marathon – in a normal year – pours an estimated \$340 million into the city. In an economy as battered and fragile as ours has been for the past several years, that kind of number is hard to ignore.

Then there's what might be called the emotional argument. Bloomberg used it in his briefing, insisting that those New Yorkers killed by Sandy would *want* us all to go on, to push up our sleeves and spit on our hands and, for their sake, get back to the noble work of ... what?

Hosting a marathon? Less than a week after they and scores of others died? Sorry, but that sort of reasoning is specious, at best.

Some who support keeping the marathon on schedule this year will no doubt point to, again, 2001, reminding us that after 9/11, the marathon went on as planned. Compelling as that might be, the 2011 marathon was not only run *two months* after the World Trade Center attacks, but it also took place in a city that was – physically, at least – unscathed beyond the appalling, gaping wound in Lower Manhattan.

But beyond all of the touchy-feely notions about whether or not the marathon should go on, Bloomberg's decision not to cancel the race is, ultimately, a profound and irresponsible error in judgment. Inviting tens of thousands of people, many from out of town, to run through the streets of New York less than a week after the biggest Atlantic storm in history raked the city and leveled entire neighborhoods means that hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of cops, emergency and hospital personnel, sanitation workers and others who are needed right now to continue the recovery effort – and, in all probability, to save lives that are still in the balance – all of these men and women will have to spend precious hours concentrating on a road race instead of the critical needs of their fellow citizens. Yes, the marathon runs so smoothly every year thanks to thousands of volunteers, but that hardly negates the fact that city services are, to a greater or lesser extent, involved in its often thrilling annual triumph.

At the very least, the marathon can and should be postponed for, say, one month. After all, the race's organizers themselves take great (and rightful) pride in stressing how nimble they are when dealing with even colossal obstacles. In the end, it makes no difference – no difference at all – if the marathon goes off without a hitch. But what if one person dies because a great city's already strained, compromised resources are diverted from a more urgent task at hand? Perhaps Michael Bloomberg can live with that risk. As a man and as a mayor, though, he will be diminished by having taken it.

**<http://ideas.time.com/2012/11/02/viewpoint-why-the-should-cancel-the-nyc-marathon/>**