

Anti-smoking leader says ban's too late

Dr. Alan Blum says Food and Drug Administration rules against brand-name sports sponsorships by tobacco companies are two decades too late.

"It's wonderful they are taking a bold stand, but they are taking a bold stand that is doomed to failure," says Blum, who campaigns against tobacco as founder of Houston-based Doctors Ought to Care (DOC). "The FDA has acted very well,

if this were 1977."

In 1989, Blum's group said it documented 5,933 exposures of the Marlboro logo during a 90-minute telecast of an Indy-car race.

He says race fans have been "imprinted" over so many years with such logos that cigarette companies could skillfully market products even if use of brand names is prohibited.

"In Italy, where cigarette advertising is banned, it does not

say 'Marlboro' in Italian Formula One racing. You see the red and white horizontal stripes. They can always change their identity. That's what the tobacco companies are so good at."

He also says tobacco companies could use telecasts of international races and other sports.

Blum suggests a powerful education campaign is the best way to reduce demand among

young people.

"You do it by trying to advertise that this stuff is crap, ridiculous," he says. "I've become much more appreciative of the First Amendment because it works on my side of the fence, too, when there is a really hard-hitting anti-smoking ad.

"We have to show we have more creativity to outsmart them."

By Gary Mihoces