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Inside China's swimming regime that shaped Sun Yang



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PSL suspended as England star shows virus symptoms

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FOOTBALL **SPOTLIGHT**

UEFA postpones Euro 2020 by a year

European leagues had urged UEFA to give priority to completing domestic competitions

Reuters
 Lausanne, Switzerland

The Euro 2020 soccer Championship, trumpeted as a continent-wide feast of football from Dublin to Baku to mark UEFA's 60th anniversary, was postponed for a year yesterday as the coronavirus pandemic claimed its biggest sporting casualty yet.

The fate of the 24-nation, month-long showpiece due to start in June had hung in the balance ever since Europe's domestic leagues began shutting down in the wake of the sweeping health crisis, which has killed around 7,000 people worldwide.

UEFA eventually relayed the news after an emergency video conference with all 55 of its affiliated national federations and representatives from clubs and leagues.

"We are at the helm of a sport that vast numbers of people live and breathe that has been laid low by this invisible and fast-moving opponent," UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin said in a statement confirming what the Norwegian and Swedish FAs had already leaked earlier in the day.

"It is at times like these, that the football community needs to show responsibility, unity, solidarity and altruism."

Even as the video conference was ongoing, Norway's FA broke ranks to confirm via Twitter that the tournament had been postponed for the first time in its history.

Swedish FA chairman Karl-Erik Nilsson also sent a message to Reuters during the video conference. "Postponed until 11/6-11/7 2021," he said.

It was a widely expected move, with pressure ramping up from Europe's big domestic soccer leagues.

Earlier, Reuters learned that UEFA had cancelled its hotel bookings in Copenhagen, one of the 12 host cities staging the



In this September 21, 2016 picture, the UEFA European Championship trophy is on display during the launch event for the Euro 2020 tournament in London, United Kingdom. (Reuters)

Copa America postponed from 2020 to 2021

AFP
 Asuncion, Paraguay

The Copa America due to kick off in June in Argentina and Colombia was yesterday postponed by a year to 2021 because of the coronavirus pandemic, organisers CONMEBOL said. The announcement came shortly after UEFA's similar decision to also push back Euro 2020 by 12 months. The Copa is South America's main continental competition.

tion between national sides and had been scheduled to run between June 12-July 12. The competition was being staged for the first time in two countries rather than one. The finals featuring 12 teams, for this edition included invitees Australia and Qatar. The tournament is now rescheduled to run from June 11-July 11 2021. The decision was taken in conjunction with UEFA's decision to postpone Euro 2020 to 2021. "We also thank UEFA and its

president Aleksander Ceferin for working together and the co-ordinated decision to also postpone the 2020 Euros for the betterment of the whole football family," said CONMEBOL. The South American governing body had decided to align the Copa, which mostly used to be played in odd years, to the Euros in order to reduce the impact on European clubs, where a large number of South American international players ply their trade.

Sixteen playoff matches were due to be held on March 26 and 31 to decide the full line-up of nations for the tournament. They will now be played in the international window at the start of June, subject to a review of the situation.

The new coronavirus has infected almost 180,000 people worldwide since emerging in China, and most of Europe now finds itself in virtual lockdown as governments desperately try to stop the spread of the disease.

The sporting calendar has been shredded, with a host of blue-riband events cancelled and competitions suspended, and the fate of the Tokyo Olympics this year now hangs in the balance.

All five of Europe's top domestic soccer leagues - England, Spain, Italy, France and

Germany - are suspended, along with the Champions League, Europa League and World Cup qualifiers.

Leagues had urged UEFA to give priority to completing domestic competitions, as clubs throughout Europe feared they would lose significant ticket and associated match-day revenue by not completing the season while still having to pay player salaries.

"UEFA tabled a range of options so that competitions can finish this season safely, and I am proud of the response of my colleagues across European football," Ceferin said.

While the domestic leagues will welcome the news, next year's international soccer calendar already looks crammed.

The women's European Championship is due to be held in England in the summer, and FIFA's revamped Club World Cup in China, featuring eight European club sides, is pencilled in from June 17-July 4.

The European Championship was first held in 1960 with four nations reaching the finals in France and the former Soviet Union beating then Yugoslavia 2-1 to the trophy.

It evolved into an eight-nation tournament in 1980 and in 1996, when it was held in England, it grew to 16 teams.

The most recent edition in 2016, again in France, included 24 nations for the first time. The final, in which Portugal beat the hosts, was watched by a television audience of 284mn.

The 2020 edition was supposed to be the first staged across the continent, rather than by a single or joint host nations. The new format was the brainchild of former UEFA president Michel Platini.

The host cities were Glasgow, Dublin, Bilbao, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Munich, Rome, St Petersburg, Bucharest, Budapest and Baku, with the climax set for London's Wembley Stadium.

Japan Olympic Committee deputy head tests positive for coronavirus

AFP
 Tokyo, Japan

Japan Olympic Committee deputy chief **Kozo Tashima** said yesterday he had contracted coronavirus, as doubts increase over whether Tokyo can safely host the Summer Games.



"Today, my test result showed positive for the new coronavirus," Tashima said in a statement, issued via the Japan Football Association, which he also heads.

"I have a mild fever. Examinations showed a symptom of pneumonia, but I'm fine. I will concentrate on treatment following doctors' advice," he said.

Japanese officials insist that the summer Games - due to start in July - will take place as scheduled despite rising speculation that it might be postponed or even cancelled due to the virus.

Tashima said he had been on a business trip since February 28, first heading to Belfast to attend the annual general meeting of the International Football Association Board (IFAB).

From March 2, he visited Amsterdam for a Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) meeting to give a presentation on Japan's bid for the 2023 women's World Cup.

And on March 3, he attended a general meeting of the same body.

"In Amsterdam and in Europe in early March, the level of nervousness against the novel coronavirus was not the same as now," he said in the statement.

"Everyone was still doing hugs, handshakes and bises (cheek kissing)."

He then travelled to the United States to watch the Japanese women's team in action and to lobby for the women's World Cup, before returning home on March 8.

"In the United States, too, the sense of crisis about the novel coronavirus was not as serious as now," he said.

Staff at the Japan FA have been working from home as a precaution against the virus, but Tashima said he went to the association building several times last week and attended meetings.

He began feeling chills and experienced a mild fever from Sunday. He went to a local public health centre on Monday and told them about his travel history.

During the UEFA gatherings, Tashima said he saw Swiss and Serbian football chiefs, who have tested positive for the virus, although he added it was not clear how he contracted the infection.

His positive test came yesterday. "I have chosen to face the illness as so many people are doing in Japan and around the world," he said, adding that he hoped his decision would help eradicate the stigma attached to the infection.

NFL

Quarterback Brady says he is leaving New England Patriots



Reuters
 New York, United States

Six-time Super Bowl champion quarterback **Tom Brady** said yesterday he is leaving the New England Patriots after 20 years with the team, stunning fans of the NFL franchise and adding a dramatic twist to the league's off-season.

NFL records, including most victories and appearances in the Super Bowl and most playoff wins. He won a record four Super Bowl Most Valuable Player trophies.

"Although my football journey will take place elsewhere, I appreciate everything that we have achieved and am grateful for our incredible TEAM accomplishments," Brady wrote in a Twitter post that instantly went viral.

He did not elaborate on his plans or next steps in his career. Previously, he has said he wanted to continue playing and was unlikely to retire. "I had hoped this day would never come, but rather that Tom

would end his remarkable career in a Patriots uniform after yet another Super Bowl championship," team owner Robert Kraft said in a written statement.

"Unfortunately, the two sides were unable to reach an agreement to allow that dream to become a reality."

Patriots head coach Bill Belichick, who formed one of the NFL's most enduring and successful partnerships with Brady, said in a written statement that the quarterback was one of the Patriots program's "original creators."

"Sometimes in life, it takes some time to pass before truly

appreciating something or someone but that has not been the case with Tom," said Belichick. "He is a special person and the greatest quarterback of all-time."

Belichick selected out of Michigan Brady in 2000 with the 199th pick of the NFL draft. Brady spent his first season as a backup, then stepped in for the injured Drew Bledsoe in 2001 as starting quarterback. He led the team to its first ever Super Bowl victory at the end of the 2001-2002 season.

Brady also had detractors who accused him of cheating in 2015 by ordering Patriots employees to improperly lower the pressure

of footballs before an NFL playoff game. Brady was ultimately suspended four games for the incident that became known as "deflategate" even though he denied wrongdoing.

Speculation over where he may land next has been rampant for months, as the Patriots' most recent season ended in a humiliating at-home defeat against the Miami Dolphins, followed up by a shock loss to the Tennessee Titans in the playoffs.

Suitors have reportedly included the Los Angeles Chargers and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, the latter an early betting favourite.

FOCUS

IOC say 'no need for any drastic decisions' on Tokyo Olympics

'The IOC has confidence that the many measures being taken by many authorities around the world will help contain the situation of the Covid-19 virus'

AFP
Lausanne, Switzerland

The International Olympic Committee said yesterday it was not the time for "drastic decisions" over the staging of the Tokyo Olympics, which has not yet been postponed because of the deadly coronavirus pandemic.

"The IOC remains fully committed to the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, and with more than four months to go before the Games there is no need for any drastic decisions at this stage; and any speculation at this moment would be counter-productive," the IOC said in a statement after its executive board met in Lausanne.

The Tokyo Olympics are scheduled to run between July 24-August 9, but the year's biggest sporting event is as yet one of the sole sporting competitions to have survived a postponement in the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak that has caused more than 7,400 deaths and infected more than 180,000 around the world.

The IOC statement fell shortly after both this summer's Euro 2020 and Copa America tournaments were postponed by one year to 2021.

US President Donald Trump has suggested the Japanese capital also postpone the Olympics for 12 months, although Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe responded by pledging his country would host the Games as planned and saying he had no immediate intention to declare a state of emergency over the virus outbreak.

"This is an unprecedented situation for the whole world, and our thoughts are with all those affected by this crisis," the IOC said.

IOC president Thomas Bach added: "The health and well-being of all those involved in the preparations for the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 is our number-one concern."

"All measures are being taken to safeguard the safety and interests of athletes, coaches and support teams. We are an Olympic community; we support one another in good times and in difficult times. This Olympic solidarity defines us as a community."

The IOC acknowledged preparations for the Tokyo Games had been impacted, and encouraged all athletes to continue training "as best they can".

"The IOC has confidence that the many measures being taken by many authorities around the world will help contain the situation of the Covid-19 virus."

PRACTICAL ADAPTATIONS

One of the results of the virus outbreak has been the cancellation of qualifiers, in a number of sports, for the Tokyo Olympics.

But the IOC insisted it would work to surmount any difficulties that threw up.



The extinguished cauldron hosting the Olympic flame is protected by a plastic sheet following the closure of the Olympic Museum amid the spread of the Covid-19 (novel coronavirus) in Lausanne, Switzerland, yesterday. (AFP)

Coronavirus must hit peak by end-May for Tokyo Games to happen on time: French Olympic Committee chief

Reuters
Paris, France

The coronavirus pandemic must have reached its peak and be on the wane by the end of May otherwise the Tokyo Olympics cannot be staged on schedule, the head of the French Olympic Committee (CNOSF) said on Monday.

"My feeling is that if we're still in the crisis by the end of May I can't see how the Games can happen (on time)," Denis Masegla told Reuters in a telephone interview.

"If we are beyond the peak and the situation is getting better questions will arise about who qualifies, but we will find the

least worst solution." Masegla, who is back in France after a work trip to Japan, said the International Olympic Committee (IOC) will hold a conference call with National Olympic Committees today.

"I trust the IOC and I'm waiting for more information although I'm not sure we'll get a lot more on Wednesday," he said. The Tokyo Olympics are scheduled for July 24-Aug. 9 with the Paralympic Games due to be held from Aug 25-Sept 6. Last Thursday, Shigeru Ishiba, a ruling party heavyweight and a leading candidate to be Japan's next prime minister, said the country must brainstorm plans for dealing with a cancelled or postponed Tokyo Olympic

Games, even if that was unlikely.

PREPARATIONS HIT

The coronavirus pandemic has infected almost 180,000 people and killed over 7,000 worldwide, with the epicentre having switched from China to Europe. Sports competitions have come to a halt in Europe as part of a global effort to contain the spread of the virus, hampering the preparations of athletes for the Olympics.

"At some points we're going to have to tell them (athletes) something (about the Games)," Masegla said. Masegla, who has been head of the French Olympic Committee since 2009, said however that Japan had been tackling the

spread of the virus perfectly. "A week ago, I couldn't even imagine the situation we're in today (in Europe). When I came back on Saturday morning (from Japan) I came back confident, optimistic, telling myself the Japanese had handled the problem a little differently," he said. "They are in extreme precaution, there are water-based gels everywhere. Everybody wears a mask, they work almost normally." Japan has had 895 cases of coronavirus, while the total in Italy, Europe's worst-hit country, had reached 27,980 on Monday. "If we are out of the crisis in a couple of months everybody will want to get back to normal and we will be able to imagine something," said Masegla.

and insurance it will in any case be able to continue its operations and accomplish its mission to organise the Olympic Games."

A taskforce (consisting of the IOC, the World Health Organisation, the Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee, the Japanese authorities and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government) was created in mid-February to ensure "coordinated actions by all stakeholders" and offer guidance the IOC said it would follow.

Already, the format of all the test events in March and April in Japan has been "altered to allow for the testing of essential Games elements".

"The lighting of the Olympic torch in Greece and subsequent elements of the Torch Relay in Japan are being adapted, the entire Games preparation supply chain has been analysed, and alternative plans are in place in the event of anticipated disruption," the IOC said.

Reaction to postponement of Euro 2020

"It was important that, as the governing body of European football, UEFA led the process and made the biggest sacrifice. Moving EURO 2020 comes at a huge cost for UEFA but we will do our best to ensure that the vital funding for grassroots, women's football and the development of the game in our 55 countries is not affected."

—UEFA president **Aleksander Ceferin**

"We've been looking forward to this for a really long time. It would have been the first time that Finland was in a European Championship so it's a bit sad. But in the general perspective, in the big picture, football is a really small matter. Now it's about life and death and trying to control the spread of the virus, so it's a good decision."

—Finland captain **Tim Sparv**

"As things are now, the setup of the tournament in 2021 will be the same as the tournament in 2020. Copenhagen has the opportunity to have its four matches. So if infrastructure, hotels, logistics... are in place in Copenhagen in June 2021, then Copenhagen will also have its four matches again."

—Danish Football Association chairman **Jesper Moller**

"The French Football Federation fully supports UEFA's decision to postpone Euro 2020 from June 11 to July 11 2021 and to adapt the formats for European competitions accordingly. The international matches planned for March, including the two matches of the French team on March 27 and 31 at the Stade de France, would therefore logically be postponed to June."

—French Football Federation president **Noel Le Graet**

"We'll be considering the implications for all England teams and our organisation over the coming days, including any implications on the date of the 2021 women's EURO which we are very proud to be hosting."

—England Football Association CEO **Mark Bullingham**

"The focus now will be to come up with solutions to conclude the 2019-20 club season in the most practical manner and, beyond that, ensure football, like society as a whole, returns as quickly as possible to its natural form and rhythm."

—European Club Association chairman **Andrea Agnelli**

"It's a pity (that Euro 2020 has been postponed) but football is not the important thing in life right now. We must prioritise what is happening now (with the coronavirus). I had anticipated it would not happen this summer."

—Netherlands manager **Ronald Koeman**

"Since the last World Cup we have worked hard to prepare as best possible for the Euro 2020. But it's off because of circumstances beyond our control. We must be united together to beat this virus. The Red Devils (Belgium) have always shown inspirational and united strength and we want to make it clear we are all standing together to beat this situation."

—Belgium manager **Roberto Martinez**

SPOTLIGHT

Spain committee says would prefer postponed Tokyo Games to prevent 'inequality'

Reuters
Barcelona, Spain

Spain's Olympic Committee (COE) president Alejandro Blanco said he would prefer this summer's Tokyo Olympics to be postponed because his country's athletes are unable to train due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Olympics are scheduled to be held July 24-August 9, and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said yesterday that it was fully committed to the games taking place and that there was no need for "any drastic decisions" regarding the event.

But Blanco took a different view.

"The decision is for the International Olympic Com-

mittee (to make) after getting reports from the World Health Organisation and the organising committee," he said in a COE statement.

"The news that we get every day is uncomfortable for all countries in the world, but for us the most important thing is that our sportspeople cannot train and to celebrate the Games (as planned) would result in unequal conditions."

"We want the Olympics to take place, but with security. We're an important country in the world and four months before the games, our athletes can't arrive in equal conditions."

Sports competitions across the world have come to a halt due to the coronavirus pandemic, while Olympic qualifiers across 33 sports have been postponed.

TENNIS

French Open delayed to September due to coronavirus

AFP
Paris, France

The French Open has been postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic and will take place from September 20-October 4, organisers said yesterday.

The Grand Slam event was to have taken place from May 24-June 7, but organisers said: "The current confinement measures have made it impossible for us to continue with our preparations and, as a result, we are unable to hold the tournament on the dates originally planned."

The new dates would mean the

tournament would start just one week after the US Open, if that event remains in its scheduled slot.

"The whole world is affected by the public health crisis connected with Covid-19. In order to ensure the health and safety of everyone involved in organising the tournament, the French Tennis Federation has made the decision to hold the 2020 edition of Roland-Garros from 20th September to 4th October 2020," read a statement.

"In order to act responsibly and protect the health of its employees, service providers and suppliers during the organisation period, the FFT has chosen the only option that will allow them

to maintain the 2020 edition of the tournament while joining the fight against Covid-19."

FFT president Bernard Giudicelli said: "We have made a difficult yet brave decision in this unprecedented situation, which has evolved greatly since last weekend. We are acting responsibly, and must work together in the fight to ensure everybody's health and safety."

Last week, the ATP announced it was suspending the men's tennis tour for six weeks "due to escalating health and safety issues" arising from spread of the virus. All events on the ATP Tour and second-tier ATP Challenger Tour are cancelled until April 27.

The International Tennis Federation, which runs the lower tiers of the professional game as well as the junior and senior circuits, followed the ATP by announcing there would be no tournaments on any of its tours until April 20 at the earliest.

The WTA Tour said on Monday it was suspending the women's season until May 2, having already called off events in Bogota, Guadalajara and Charleston.

Next month's Fed Cup finals in Budapest have also been postponed indefinitely.

The revamped 12-team women's competition scheduled for April 14-19 as well as a series of play-off ties were both put on hold.



In this June 8, 2019, picture, a groundstaff member walks on the cover across the court surface as rain falls during a French Open match at Roland Garros in Paris, France. (AFP)

SWIMMING

Inside China's tough swimming regime that shaped Sun Yang

Wang, a former national butterfly champion, gives a glimpse of life at the heart of Chinese swimming

AFP
Shanghai

A former teammate of banned Olympic champion Sun Yang has given a rare insight into how China drives its swimmers hard from childhood in the pursuit of national glory. But Wang Yajie, who started swimming at three-and-a-half, told AFP that China's approach had helped make the country a powerhouse in the sport.

Chinese swimming is in the spotlight after Sun, a three-time Olympic gold-medallist, was banned last month for eight years for refusing to provide a sample to doping inspectors. Sun, the most decorated product of the Chinese system, started swimming at a young age at Chen Jinglun Sports School in Hangzhou, which has bred a number of Olympic stars. Wang was Sun's contemporary in the national swimming team before she retired following China's 2013 National Games to pursue other interests, among them singing. Underlining the sensitivity in China surrounding Sun, Wang declined to speak about his doping case, saying only that he was "a rare talent" whose loss would affect the team's medal hopes at this year's Tokyo Games.

The 27-year-old also declined to discuss whether during her spell in the Chinese team — a world often closed to outsiders — she was offered any banned substances. But Wang, a former national butterfly champion, gave a glimpse of life at the heart of Chinese swimming, which is regarded as the jewel in the crown of Olympic sports in the country.

While on the national team they were mostly confined to camp, rising at 5:30am to train for up to eight hours a day, seven days a week in the most intense periods. "We'd go to sleep at 10:00pm with two or three people sharing a room, usually two," said Wang, speaking by telephone from Wuhan, the epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak and a city of 11mn people on lockdown. "I used to write a training diary eve-

ry day. Because you need to focus on rest after training, you generally don't leave the training base." They were well looked after but training was "tiring and hard", Wang said.

She admitted that the perception that Chinese training tends to be repetitive and unforgiving is accurate. But Wang said sacrifices must be made in the pursuit of success, and that it is the same with top-level athletes in all countries.

"Recalling it now, I'd use three words to describe my feelings: affection, passion and gratitude. "Every swimmer trained with 100% passion during each session, and I was no exception," said Wang, who now runs a swimming club for children in Wuhan.

Sun, the 1500m freestyle world record-holder, has vowed to appeal the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) ruling against him. The length of the ban took into the account the fact that it was his second doping violation, after he was suspended for three months in 2014 for taking a banned substance.

If the CAS judgement is upheld at a Swiss federal court, China will be shorn of its biggest star at the Tokyo Olympics — and 28-year-old Sun's career will almost certainly be over. Wang described Sun as "very amiable" on the few occasions they talked and believes that the Chinese team can still do well in Tokyo, despite his expected absence. "The Chinese swimming team still has a lot of new stars, they are very strong," she said.

Wang said there were clear differences between how young swimmers are coached in China and other nations. "Whether in sports training or learning in general, they mainly enjoy the process and enjoy the sport," she said of some other countries.

"They are not so strict about technique and results and they may be more respectful of children's ideas. In China, starting at six or seven years old, children begin to develop swimming skills, swimming speed, strength training and other disciplines. I think that is why the performance of the Chinese swimming team is getting better and better."



Chinese swimming is in the spotlight after Sun Yang, a three-time Olympic gold-medallist, was banned last month for eight years for refusing to provide a sample to doping inspectors. (AFP)

There are more important things than golf, says Tiger

Los Angeles: American Tiger Woods sought to put the cancellations of a slew of golf tournaments due to the coronavirus into perspective on Monday, saying the well-being of others trumped the sport. "There are a lot more important things in life than a golf tournament right now," the 15-times major champion wrote on Twitter. "We need to be safe, smart and do what is best for ourselves, our loved ones and our community."

Woods, 44, has been struggling recently with pain in his surgically-repaired back but had hoped to defend the Masters title he won last year at Augusta National next month. Last week organisers of the year's first major postponed the tournament in the hopes of helping slow the spread of the growing pandemic.

The decision to postpone the year's first major came the day after the PGA Tour cancelled the Players Championship at TPC Sawgrass in Florida after one round and all events through April 5. Woods' remarks came on the heels of the Centers for Disease Control recommendation on Sunday that events of 50 or more people should be cancelled for the next eight weeks throughout the United States. The coronavirus pandemic has infected almost 180,000 people and killed over 7,000 worldwide.

As the cancellations unfolded last week, Woods was already sidelined. He opted to skip the Players Championship — which was abruptly halted after one round because of coronavirus concerns — with a stiff back. "I have to listen to my body and properly rest when needed," Woods tweeted before the Players. "My back is simply just not ready..."



ROUND-UP

Infantino offers to move Club World Cup to accommodate Euro in 2021

FIFA president Gianni Infantino yesterday proposed delaying next year's revamped 24-team Club World Cup in China after UEFA postponed the European Championship until 2021 because of the coronavirus pandemic. South America's equivalent of the Euros, the Copa America, also scheduled for this June and July, has also been postponed by a year, ensuring European-based players will be free to finish the season with their clubs.

Moving the tournaments by a year puts them on a collision course with FIFA and its president Infantino, who had planned to stage the inaugural edition of his highly lucrative Club World Cup in June and July next year in China.

Infantino said in a statement he would hold a conference call with FIFA officials today, during which he will suggest "to decide at a later stage — when there is more clarity on the situation — when to reschedule the new FIFA Club World Cup, later in 2021, in 2022 or in 2023."

He also said FIFA will plan "to discuss with the Chinese FA and the Chinese Government the postponement of the new FIFA Club World Cup from 2021 in order to minimise any negative impact."

UEFA said the new proposed dates for the tournament were June 11 to July 11 next year, as Euro 2020 becomes Euro 2021. This year's tournament was due to be held in 12 countries. There is no suggestion the format or number of venues will change.

"The world is facing an unprecedented health challenge and clearly a global and collective response is needed," said Infantino. "Co-operation, mutual respect and understanding must be the guiding principles for all decision makers to have in mind at this crucial moment in time. Particularly in football, finding appropriate and fair solutions at global level is imperative."

Infantino added FIFA would pledge \$10mn (9.1mn euros) to the World Health Organization's Covid-19 Solidarity Response Fund. The outbreak, which first emerged in China late last year, has quickly



marched across the globe, infecting more than 180,000 people and killing over 7,000.

VALENCIA SAY 35% OF SQUAD, STAFF TESTED POSITIVE FOR CORONAVIRUS

La Liga side Valencia have said more than a third of their playing and backroom staff have tested positive for the coronavirus but that all cases were currently asymptomatic. The club had reported five cases of Covid-19 on Sunday, with Argentina's Ezequiel Garay and France's Eliaquim Mangala both confirming they were among those who had contracted the virus.

"Several further tests for the Covid-19 coronavirus amongst Valencia coaching staff and players have come back positive," the club said in a statement.

Valencia travelled to Milan last month for a Champions League match against Atalanta, which was played in front of a packed San Siro stadium, before restrictions were placed on sports events in Italy — the worst-hit country in Europe. "Despite the strict measures adopted by the club after their Champions League game... these

latest results show the exposure inherent to such matches has caused a positive test rate of around 35%," Valencia added.

"All cases are asymptomatic and those involved are currently isolated at home, receiving medical assessment and carrying out their scheduled training plan."

ISLE OF MAN CANCELS 2020 TT RACES

The Isle of Man has cancelled the annual TT motorcycle races due to the spreading coronavirus outbreak, the government of the British Crown Dependency said on Monday. The annual races around the island off the north-west coast of England have been run since 1907 and rank among the most dangerous in motorsport.

This year's event was scheduled to be held from May 30 to June 13. The races were last cancelled in 2001 to prevent an outbreak of foot and mouth disease spreading from Britain. The event attracts tens of thousands of visitors from all over Europe and contributes significantly to the local Manx economy.

HORSE RACING

Kentucky Derby moved to Sept. 5

AFP
Los Angeles

This year's Kentucky Derby has been postponed due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, race organisers confirmed yesterday. It is the first time the US racing showpiece has been postponed since 1945, when the race was eventually held in June due to World War II.

Traditionally held each year on the first Saturday in May at Churchill Downs in Louisville, this year's race will now take place on September 5. Churchill Downs chief executive Bill Carstanjen said yesterday the escalating Covid-19 crisis had left race organisers with no choice

but to delay the race.

"Throughout the rapid development of the Covid-19 pandemic, our first priority has been how to best protect the safety and health of our guests, team members and community," Carstanjen said. "The most recent developments have led us to make some very difficult, but we believe, necessary decisions and our hearts are with those who have been or continue to be affected by this pandemic."

The Kentucky Derby is the first and most prestigious leg of US racing's Triple Crown, followed by the Preakness Stakes and Belmont Stakes. The Derby is renowned for its huge crowds, with more than 150,000 fans thronging Churchill Downs racetrack watch the spectacle in recent years.

It is the latest high-profile sporting event to be postponed or cancelled due to the global coronavirus pandemic. Several racing events in other countries have also been hit, with Britain's Grand National at Aintree being cancelled on Monday.

Sport in the United States has ground to a virtual standstill, with basketball, soccer, baseball and ice hockey all halting or delaying the start of their respective seasons while college basketball's "March Madness" tournament has been cancelled. The Masters golf tournament at Augusta has also been postponed due to the crisis as authorities impose regional lockdowns and limits on large gatherings of fans to halt the spread of the virus.



For the first time since World War II, the Kentucky Derby will not take place on the first Saturday in May.

FOCUS

Financial fears spur Australian sport to play on

AFP
Sydney

As events are scrapped around the world to counter the threat of coronavirus, a handful of Australia's main sports are doggedly pressing ahead, spurred by fear of financial ruin.

While major competitions elsewhere have suspended their seasons in hopes of curbing the pandemic, rugby league and football have chosen to continue playing to empty stadiums after the government banned public gatherings of more than 500 people.

Players from the country's most popular spectator sport, Australian Rules (AFL), have stated they too want to carry on, with a decision still pending on whether games are played this week as scheduled.

At stake is not only Australian fans' deep thirst for watching their favourite teams, but lucrative broadcast commitments, with television money their lifeblood.

Making matters worse, the spiralling virus threat has struck

at the start of the season for rugby league and AFL – both big industries in their own right.

The National Rugby League (NRL) only kicked off last weekend and the AFL is due to get underway tomorrow.

According to Sydney's Daily Telegraph, every weekend of rugby league is worth around Aus\$1.2 million (US\$740,000) to each of the 16 clubs in TV rights, not to mention ticket sales, corporate hospitality, merchandise, and food and beverage income.

'BIG TROUBLE'

In confirming round two would go ahead without fans, Australian Rugby League Commission chairman Peter V'landys warned of dire consequences to the viability of a sport seen as part of Australia's social fabric.

"I can't stress enough that our game has never faced such challenges. The longer it takes, the more pressure on our financial viability," he said.

"Our money will only last so long, and once it's extinguished, we are in big trouble."

Broadcasters do not have to pay if games aren't played, the NRL said on its website, and



Australian Rugby League Commission chairman Peter V'landys.

V'landys has urged the government to help the sport as part of its nearly \$18 billion coronavirus economic stimulus package.

The NRL announced a Aus\$30 million surplus in its most recent financial results, but its reserves won't last long if games are cancelled and salaries still need to be paid.

Phil Gould, an influential ex-player, coach, administrator and current television pundit, questioned why the game's financial model had not left it with a bigger war chest.

"We've got to learn from what we've done in the past and ask ourselves why we are so vulnerable as a code right at the moment

because we have to close down for a season," he said.

Some players have voiced concerns about games going ahead, saying the cancellation of global events, including the Australian Grand Prix after a McLaren team member tested positive, should be setting off alarm bells.

NRL chief Todd Greenberg

said he had listened to all opinions, but "it remains our plan to continue to play games in round two this weekend".

DOOMSDAY SCENARIO

The massively popular AFL faces a similar doomsday scenario, with its blockbuster season-opener between Richmond and Carlton at the Melbourne Cricket Ground set to kick off with no one there. Ordinarily, they would expect a bumper crowd.

"A crowd of high 80s, 90,000, would probably return a gate of Aus\$1.2 to Aus\$1.4 million. That's one game. You extrapolate that and it's a big number," said Richmond chief executive Brendon Gale.

The players' union yesterday said there was overwhelming support to keep playing, but AFL administrators deferred their decision pending updated health advice.

In a bid to keep costs down, the AFL has encouraged clubs to make cutbacks, which will likely mean lay-offs and redundancies. Players have reportedly been asked to take a 20 percent pay cut.

"Football will find a way

through," AFL chief Gillon McLachlan insisted.

In contrast, Super Rugby, which involves Australian rugby union teams, has suspended all fixtures while Cricket Australia, whose home season was coming to a close, did the same.

Football is not as popular in Australia as rugby league and AFL, but it has a faithful following and also intends to keep the domestic A-League going.

"The financial impact on the sport is something at some point we are going to get to," said FFA chief James Johnson. "But our priority right now is to ensure our people are safe."

Ten of the 11 A-League teams are Australian, with the exception of New Zealand's Wellington Phoenix.

They face being quarantined for a fortnight on arrival in Australia, where they will base themselves for the rest of the season, and then for another 14 days when returning home.

Club legend Paul Iffill said Phoenix's decision to shift to Australia was "ridiculous".

"They've got to suspend (the season) and see where it's at in a month," he said.

CRICKET

PSL suspended as England star shows virus symptoms

T20 LEAGUE POSTPONED HOURS BEFORE SEMI-FINALS IN LAHORE

Reuters
Lahore

The Pakistan Super League (PSL) has been postponed with immediate effect after an overseas player showed symptoms of coronavirus, the country's cricket board said yesterday.

The postponement was announced hours before the semi-final matches were due to start in Lahore.

"This decision was taken after a player, who had left Pakistan a few days ago, showed symptoms of Covid-19 and he will undergo screening shortly," the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said in a statement.

Former Pakistan player and commentator Ramiz Raja said on Twitter that opening batsman Alex Hales had "self quarantined himself" but the Englishman released a statement later saying he developed symptoms only after returning to the United Kingdom.

"I returned to the UK in the early hours of Saturday morning feeling perfectly fit and healthy and with absolutely no symptoms of the virus," Hales said in a statement.

"However, I awoke early on Sunday morning having developed a fever and followed the government's advice on self-isolation, a process I am obviously still following having developed a dry and persistent cough.

"At this stage, it has not been possible to be tested although I am hopeful that might be the case later today so that I can get absolute confirmation of my



Television crew members pack up their equipment at the Gaddafi Cricket Stadium in Lahore yesterday. (AFP)

current health status." Players, support staff, match officials, franchise owners and production crew have since undergone tests and have been asked to wait for results before planning any travel.

Multan were to face Peshawar in the first semi-final at Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium followed by the

second match between Karachi and Lahore. The final was scheduled for the same venue today.

All three matches would be rescheduled to a later date, said the PCB, which has suspended all domestic cricket.

The franchise-based Twenty20 competition was short-

ened by four days last week and a number of foreign players left before the semi-finals.

The last leg of Bangladesh's tour of Pakistan, which involved a test match and a one-day international in Karachi next month, was postponed on Monday.

"Sad to see the PSL end, but

health and safety of all concerned is the key..." Multan's Shahid Afridi tweeted. The PSL postponement followed Pakistan's decision to suspend all domestic soccer because of the coronavirus outbreak which has shut down sport around the world and killed more than 7,000 people.

ATHLETICS

Diamond League postpones Qatar, China meetings due to coronavirus

Reuters
Paris

The Diamond League has postponed its first three athletics meetings of the 2020 season due to be held in April and May in Qatar and China because of the coronavirus outbreak, it said yesterday.

The announcement came after Qatar banned inbound passenger flights and prevented the entry of foreign nationals on Sunday, making the Diamond League the latest high-profile competition to postpone events as the pandemic shuts down world sport.

"Due to the growing number of countries affected by the Covid-19 virus, the first three meetings of the 2020 Diamond League season, scheduled for April 17 in Qatar, May 9 and

16 in China, cannot be held as planned," it said in a statement.

"The current plan is to stage the Shanghai event on August 13. New dates for Doha and the second meeting in China remain to be announced," the Diamond League said.

It said although the number of new infections was decreasing in China, preparations for the meetings there were set back by "several weeks" due to travel restrictions.

The organisers said there was a possibility the events in China and Qatar could be held after the Diamond League Final in Zurich on Sept. 9-11.

Globally, the coronavirus has infected more than 182,000 people and more than 7,100 have died.

Mainland China has more than 80,000 cases with over 3,200 deaths while Qatar has more than 400 cases.



SPOTLIGHT

Hope Men's T20 WC is played as per schedule: CA

IANIS
Melbourne

Amid the fears surrounding coronavirus outbreak, Cricket Australia (CA) chief Kevin Roberts is hoping that the men's T20 World Cup, slated to be held in October and November, could be played as per schedule in normal circumstances.

Many sporting events across the world have been affected due to the coronavirus pandemic which has claimed more than 7,000 lives so far.

"We're really hoping that all forms of sport can be played again in a few weeks or a few months' time," Roberts was quoted as saying by cricket.com.au.

"None of us are experts in this situation obviously, so our hope is that we're back in very much normal circumstances come October and November when the men's T20 World Cup is to be played."

Australia, who in February successfully hosted the Women's T20 World Cup, will host the men's event beginning with the pre-qualifiers from October 18-23 followed

by the main 12-team competition from October 24.

In the March 8 summit clash of the Women's T20 World Cup between India and Australia, Melbourne Cricket Ground witnessed a record crowd in excess of 86,000 spectators and Cricket Australia is expecting yet another full house for the final of the men's event scheduled to be played on November 15.

"And at this stage we're planning on November 15, to have a full house at the MCG to inspire the world through men's cricket as the women's cricketers did here just last week," Roberts said.

All cricketing activities in Australia have been suspended till further notice amid the ongoing Covid-19 outbreak.

New South Wales have been named Australia's Sheffield Shield champions for the first time in six years after the competition's final was called off due to the coronavirus, governing body Cricket Australia (CA) said yesterday.

CA had already cancelled the last round of Australia's domestic first class season, leaving NSW top of the standings. Victoria finished second.

OPINION

England paceman Archer hits out at racist abuse

AFP
London

England pace bowler Jofra Archer said racism should be "addressed properly" after he posted on his Instagram account racist messages he had received.

The 24-year-old has been subjected to racist abuse in the past, notably during the second Test defeat by New Zealand last year.

A spectator was subsequently

banned from international and domestic matches in New Zealand for two years.

Archer – who in just seven Test matches since making his debut last year has taken 30 wickets including three five-wicket hauls – said it beggared belief people could post such hateful things.

"I will never understand how people feel so freely to say these things to another human being," he said.

"I have given a lot of thought about reacting to this and I hope

that no one else has to deal with stuff like this on a regular basis, it isn't ever acceptable and should be addressed properly in my opinion."

Archer is presently recovering from a stress fracture of his right elbow but is seen as the future point man for England pace bowling with Stuart Broad set to turn 34 in June.

Aside from his impact at Test level the Barbados-born Sussex star also held his nerve when he bowled the decisive Super Over that saw England edge New Zealand in the World Cup final last year.

