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**OLYMPICS**

# Dissent grows as IOC battles to keep Tokyo 2020 on track

'No solution ideal... counting on the responsibility and solidarity of the athletes'

Reuters  
Athens, Greece

The International Olympic Committee is facing its strongest headwinds in decades as it briefed national committees yesterday on the state of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics amid the coronavirus pandemic, with voices of dissent growing louder.

The IOC has remained committed to staging the Tokyo Games as planned from July 24-August 9, saying on Tuesday after a meeting with international sports federations that measures against the virus were delivering results.

The coronavirus has so far killed more than 8,200 people and infected over 200,000, with the epicentre now in Europe.

The Olympic body has refused to publicly consider cancellation or postponement as possible options, even as other major events including soccer's Euro 2020 and Copa America and the French Open tennis grand slam announced postponements on Tuesday.

The virus has also wreaked havoc with Olympic qualification tournaments, with athletes struggling to train, travel or compete and many pre-Games qualifiers cancelled or postponed.

Tokyo is set to host some 11,000 athletes and 57 percent have already earned their spot at the Games. The remaining 43 percent will clinch their place through modified qualifiers, or previous performances based on ranking.

Under the current exceptional circumstances, the IOC said, solutions needed to be found that were appropriate, though they might not be ideal for all athletes.

"This is an exceptional situation which requires exceptional solutions," the IOC told Reuters in a statement yesterday.

"The IOC is committed to finding a solution with the least



Staff members of Japan Airlines and All Nippon Airways, and runway crew wave as they see off the 'Tokyo 2020 Go' aircraft as it departs for Greece to transport the Olympic Flame to Japan at Haneda international airport in Tokyo yesterday. (Reuters)

negative impact for the athletes, while protecting the integrity of the competition and the athletes' health.

"No solution will be ideal in this situation, and this is why we are counting on the responsibility and solidarity of the athletes."

The IOC got the backing from Panam Sports, the organisation representing 41 national Olympic Committees in the Americas.

"The Panam Sports family unanimously supports the IOC with all the measures taken... to address the issues facing the NOCs and athletes in the current qualification opportunities," Panam Sports President Neven Ilic said after the briefing via conference call on Wednesday.

"The athletes of the Americas are facing issues to complete

their usual training schedules and take part in competitions."

According to sources with direct knowledge of the conference call, some national Olympic committees (NOCs), especially from countries severely affected by the virus, said they fully supported the IOC in its effort to host the Games as planned but could not wait indefinitely to find out what will happen.

The source said some NOC heads expressed their concern as their athletes are unable to train due to restrictions for the virus and were also struggling with qualifiers.

**'INSENSITIVE, IRRESPONSIBLE'**

IOC member Hayley Wickenheiser called the decision to pro-

ceed with the Games "insensitive and irresponsible" in the most vocal attack on the Olympic body since President Thomas Bach took over in 2013.

Wickenheiser, who competed in five Winter Games in ice hockey and at the 2000 Summer Olympics in softball, said continuing with the Games as planned ignored the challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic.

"This crisis is bigger than even the Olympics," Wickenheiser said in a statement on Twitter. "Athletes can't train. Attendees can't travel plan. Sponsors and marketers can't market with a degree of sensitivity."

"I think the IOC insisting this will move ahead, with such conviction, is insensitive and irresponsible given the state of

humanity."

She is not alone. Several athletes, including reigning Olympic pole vault champion Katerina Stefanidi, said the IOC decision was putting athletes' health at risk, urging them to train as normal when entire countries have shut down to contain the virus spread.

"There is no postponement, no cancellation. But it (the IOC) is putting us at risk," Stefanidi said in an interview with Reuters. "We all want Tokyo to happen but what is the Plan B if it does not happen?"

"Knowing about a possible option has a major effect on my training because I may be taking risks now that I would not take if I knew there was also the possibility of a Plan B."

**NBA**

# Durant among Brooklyn Nets players diagnosed with Covid-19

AFP  
New York, United States

Kevin Durant is reportedly among four Brooklyn Nets players who have tested positive for the new coronavirus and are in isolation.

The injured Durant, who has yet to play for the Nets since signing for the club last year, confirmed to The Athletic website he had tested positive for the virus.

"Everyone be careful, take care of yourself and quarantine. We're going to get through this," Durant was quoted as saying.

News that the two-time NBA Finals MVP was among those who had contracted the virus came soon after the Nets confirmed four players had tested positive for Covid-19.

"Four Brooklyn Nets players have tested positive for the Covid-19 virus," the team said in a statement. "Of the four, one player is exhibiting symptoms while three are asymptomatic."

"All four players are presently isolated and under the care of team physicians."

The Nets said they were notifying known contacts of the players including those from teams who played against the Nets shortly before the NBA shut down its season indefinitely on March 12.

The last team to play the Nets was the Western Conference-leading Los Angeles Lakers, who were stunned 104-102 by Brook-

lyn on March 10.

The Lakers said in a statement on Tuesday they had been informed of the four Nets players testing positive and have been in touch with their own players and staff.

"Given the exposure risks from our game against the Nets on March 10th we are following the next steps of our Covid-19 procedures and protocols that are established in consultation with various health officials, the NBA and our UCLA Health doctors," the Lakers said.

The Nets said all players and members of the team travel party had been asked to isolate themselves and monitor their health.

The four cases more than double the known number of cases of Covid-19 among NBA players.

Utah Jazz defensive standout Rudy Gobert was the first NBA player to test positive - his illness triggering the NBA's current closure.

Teammate Donovan Mitchell and Christian Wood of the Detroit Pistons have also tested positive for the virus.

Wood was tested after reporting flu-like symptoms to the Pistons medical staff.

Mitchell was tested after Gobert's positive test, but had not experienced symptoms.

"I don't have any symptoms," Mitchell said in an interview broadcast by ABC television on Monday. "I could walk down the street (and) if it wasn't public knowledge that I was sick, you wouldn't know it. I think that's the scariest part about this virus."



In this May 6, 2019, picture, Golden State Warriors Kevin Durant reacts after a play during a game at Houston Rockets. (USA TODAY Sports)

**CYCLING**

# European riders grind to a halt with season suspended



In this April 13, 2014, cyclists riding across cobbled stone during the 116th edition of the Paris-Roubaix classic in France. (AFP)

Reuters  
Paris, France

The coronavirus pandemic has left a lot of professional riders unable to hit the road to compete or train with the biggest race in the world, the Tour de France, due to start in just over three months.

All cycling races up to the end of April have already been cancelled and riders in France and Spain, where many are based, have been explicitly told they cannot train outside.

"An exception is unthinkable, it is clear that the lockdown ap-

plies to all, athletes included," said French sports minister Roxana Maracineanu.

"For the moment I'm not training, I'm taking a one-week break," Trek-Segafredo's French rider Julien Bernard told Reuters yesterday. "We don't know when racing will resume, at best at the end of May."

The International Cycling Union (UCI) on Wednesday said once the season resumes it will give priority to "events on the calendar at the date of resumption" and to the five Monuments (Milan-Sanremo, Tour of Flanders, Paris-Roubaix, Liege-Bastogne-Liege and Tour of Lom-

bardy) and three Grands Tours (Italy, France, Spain).

The Monuments, with the exception of October's Tour of Lombardy, have already been postponed, as well as the Giro d'Italia, which was scheduled from May 9-31.

The organisers of the Tour de France have not yet considered postponing the June 27-July 19 event, which is due to finish five days before the start of the Tokyo Olympics.

Bernard believes arrangements will be made for athletes in France.

"For now it's only two weeks then authorities will probably

take measures for professional athletes, so there's no panic," he said.

French authorities imposed a two-week lockdown, however making clear the confinement would likely be extended.

In Italy, where similar measures have been taken, riders can still go out to train, but Under-23 world champion Samuele Battistella said he suffered a barrage of insults on social media for riding his bike in the centre of Bassano del Grappa in the Province of Vicenza.

"I can't ride with a banner on my back saying 'I am working'" the rider from the Veneto region

told *La Gazzetta dello Sport*.

Others, like Swiss rider Sebastian Reichenbach, believe it is wiser to stay at home.

"I would have a bad conscience if I crashed and were to occupy a hospital bed," the Groupama FDJ rider told Swiss newspaper *Le Nouvelliste*.

"So I ride on my home trainer and do other physical activities. To be honest I don't think about the current season anymore."

That approach has been followed by his teammate and Tour de France podium finisher Thibaut Pinot of France, who has been posting pictures of his fishing catches on social media.

## TOKYO 2020

## Ticket holders anxiously await word on Games

Reuters  
Tokyo, Japan

HOLDERS of coveted tickets for the Tokyo Olympics are anxiously awaiting word on whether the Games will go ahead as planned, with a media report that briefs might not be refundable in case of a cancellation stirring fears they may be left out of pocket.

Tickets have been snapped up in Japan, with over three million sold during the first domestic lottery last May. Hot demand for later sales also left many potential buyers disappointed. Organisers have repeatedly said the July 24 to August 9 Games will go ahead as scheduled but with the rapid spread of the coronavirus

bringing the sports world to a virtual standstill fears are growing the Olympics may be cancelled or postponed. Yesterday, the Asahi Shimbun newspaper reported that tickets might not be refundable if the Olympics were to be cancelled, citing Olympic organisers and contractual details connected to the tickets.

Should holding the Olympics be prevented due to a number of "force majeure" incidents ranging from disasters to war and "states of emergency connected to public health," organisers were not to be held responsible, the Asahi added.

The report prompted a flood of comments on social media, making it one of the top trending Twitter topics in Japan.

"What — no refunds if it's cancelled? Are you kidding me?" wrote

commenter may lulu. Another lamented: "I'll just bid goodbye to that 100,000 yen (\$933.97)."

Tokyo 2020 organisers did not immediately respond to requests for comment yesterday.

When asked about the issue of refunds on March 11 they said, "Tokyo 2020 has never discussed cancelling or postponing the Games. Preparations for the Games are continuing as planned."

Many ticket holders appeared resigned. "I've almost given up on the Olympics," said Toshikazu Moriwaki, a 66-year-old retired banker who paid roughly 110,000 yen for four tickets but said he believed he would get a refund.

"I really want to watch the game but above all, I want to have the Olympics in Tokyo, even delayed. No

cancellation please." Liz Shek-Noble, an Australian resident of Tokyo, has tickets to diving and Paralympic fencing.

"I am not optimistic about the likelihood of getting a refund in the event that the Olympics and Paralympics are cancelled," she said.

"In the event that they are postponed, I hope that those who have tickets are given the choice of attending their events on a new date or being partially or fully refunded."

And some continued to hope. "First, I want to know if the Games are on or not before worrying about a refund," said a Korean woman living in Japan who holds two tickets to see golf.

"I'm really looking forward to seeing the events that we luckily got tickets for."



A woman wearing a facemask, amid concerns over the spread of the Covid-19 coronavirus, sits at a bus stop in front of a Tokyo 2020 Olympics advertisement in Bangkok. (AFP)

## NFL

## Quarterback Brady set to join Buccaneers

The move will send former Tampa Bay quarterback Winston into free agency

AFP  
New York

SIX-time Super Bowl champion quarterback Tom Brady appears set to join the Tampa Bay Buccaneers as NFL free agency signings were prepared to begin today.

Three-time NFL Most Valuable Player Brady, who turns 43 in August, said Tuesday he was leaving the New England Patriots after 20 seasons with the club under coach Bill Belichick.

Both the NFL's website and TV network reported that Brady has agreed to terms on a deal worth \$30 million (27.6 million euros) a season.

No contracts can be signed until the start of free agency for the 2020 season at Wednesday at 4pm (2000 GMT), but there is no guarantee any announcement would come then.

Brady joins a Buccaneers club owned by Manchester United owner Malcolm Glazer, a team that has not reached the NFL playoffs since 2007.

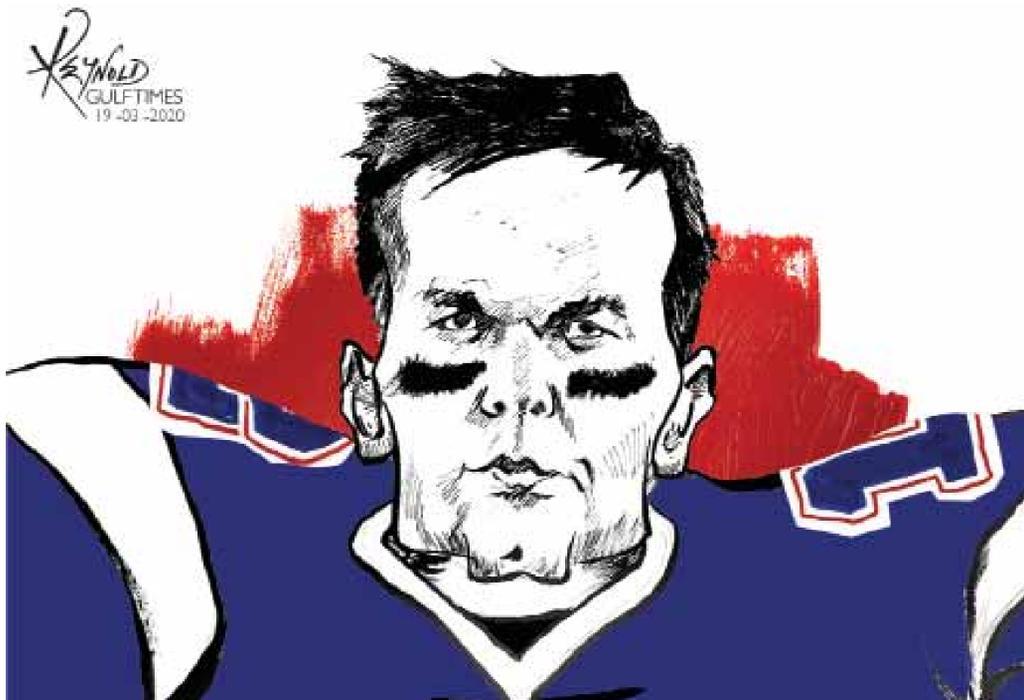
The Bucs, who captured their only Super Bowl title in 2003, boast a powerful offensive attack that ranked third in both total offense and scoring in 2019.

Tampa Bay has two 1,000-yard receivers in Mike Evans and Chris Godwin, a rising star at running back in Ronald Jones and two strong reception threats as tight ends in O.J. Howard and Cameron Brate.

Brady has enjoyed great success in finding tight ends during his days with the Patriots, notably connecting with Rob Gronkowski before his retirement last March after a victory in last year's Super Bowl.

The move will send former Tampa Bay quarterback Jameis Winston, the top pick in the 2015 NFL Draft, into free agency after five years as a starter for the Bucs.

Winston has thrown 88 interceptions compared to 121



touchdowns during his time in Tampa Bay. Last year, he led the NFL with 626 pass attempts and 5,109 passing yards but also tossed an NFL-most 30 interceptions.

With 33 touchdown passes as well, Winston became the first quarterback in NFL history to throw 30 pickoffs and 30 touchdowns in the same season.

Other moves also set to be confirmed include Houston's reported trade of star receiver DeAndre Hopkins to Arizona for running back David Johnson.

Drew Brees reportedly will sign a two-year deal worth \$50 million to remain the starting quarterback for the New Orleans Saints while his backup, Teddy Bridgewater, reportedly will join

the Carolina Panthers in a deal the NFL website says will be for three years at \$63 million.

That would dislodge Carolina signal-caller Cam Newton, who reportedly has drawn interest from the Chicago Bears. The Panthers are likely to release Newton if a trade partner doesn't emerge for the former NFL MVP who has spent nine seasons in Carolina. Chicago is shopping for a veteran to compete with Mitchell Trubisky at quarterback, and the Bears have been tied to Nick Foles (Jaguars) and Andy Dalton (Bengals) in addition to Newton.

Carolina gave Newton permission to seek a trade, which led Newton to sound off on the franchise. "One of the distinct pleasures of my career was se-

lecting Cam with the first pick in the 2011 draft," Panthers general manager Marty Hurney said Tuesday of Newton, a three-time Pro Bowl selection and 2015 NFL MVP.

"Every year difficult decisions are made and they are never easy. We have been working with Cam and his agent to find the best fit for him moving forward and he will always be a Carolina Panther in our hearts."

Newton, however, then took to social media to tell his version of the story.

"STOP WITH THE WORD PLAY!! I never asked for it!!" Newton wrote on Instagram. "THERE IS NO DODGING THIS ONE; I love the @panthers TO DEATH AND WILL ALWAYS

LOVE YOU GUYS!! PLEASE DO NOT TRY AND PLAY ME, or MANIPULATE THE NARRATIVE AND ACT LIKE I WANTED THIS; you forced me into this!!"

The Panthers' decision comes one month after new head coach Matt Rhule told reporters that the club wanted to keep Newton.

Newton has a salary cap figure of \$21.1 million in 2020, including a base salary of \$18.6 million. He signed a five-year, \$103.8 million contract extension in 2015 that took effect with the 2016 season, and the team could free up \$19 million in cap space by releasing or trading him.

"Cam is one of the all-time greats in Panthers history," owner David Pepper said in a statement.

## FOCUS

## French Open date change over virus rocks tennis

AFP  
London

THE global tennis calendar has been thrown into further chaos after the decision by French Open organisers to postpone the Grand Slam, with players and rival tournaments critical of the apparently unilateral move.

The event at Roland Garros, traditionally the second major of the season, was on Tuesday moved from a May 24 start date to September 20, meaning it would start just one week after the US Open, if that event remains in its original slot.

Organisers said strict confinement measures imposed by the French government to tackle COVID-19 had made it impossible to continue with preparations. French tennis Federation president Bernard Giudicelli said: "We have made a difficult yet brave decision in this unprecedented situation, which has evolved greatly since last weekend."

Organisers of the Grand Slam in New York acknowledged it might need to be moved but, in a scarcely veiled dig at the French Open organisers, said they would not go it alone. The rescheduled French Open would also clash with the start of a series of Asian tournaments and the Laver Cup team competition, due to take place in Boston from September 25 to 27.

The men's ATP tour and the women's WTA tour are both currently suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic. British doubles player Jamie Murray queried the apparent lack of coordination at the top of the game. "Strong Move by French Open/FFT to move to end of Sept," he tweeted. "I thought the powers that be in tennis were supposed to be all about working together these days?"

Canada's Vasek Pospisil, a member of the ATP player council, was strongly critical of the decision. "This is such a difficult time," he tweeted. "Everyone is being impacted by this catastrophe. Enhancing communication & working together to find solutions should be the priority. Not going Rogue & making selfish/arrogant decisions to further impact the tour in a negative way. #RolandGarros."

It also caught WTA chief Steve Simon by surprise, as



A flag showing the logo of French Open is seen at the Roland Garros Stadium in Paris. (AFP)

well as former US and Australian Open champion Naomi Osaka. "Excusez moi???" tweeted Osaka, while Romania's Sorana Cirstea took issue with the method of communication. "What??? Again finding out through twitter..." she wrote.

The revised dates will leave players contesting a clay-court Grand Slam in the middle of the traditional hard-court season, with limited opportunities to adjust to the slower surface. Roland Garros will also now clash with a number of tournaments.

Federer has already committed to the event and Rafael Nadal — the 12-time French Open champion — is another key figure due to be at the tournament. "This announcement came as a surprise to us and our partners — tennis Australia, the USTA (US tennis Association) and the ATP," said Laver Cup organisers.

"It raises many questions and we are assessing the situation. At this time, we want our fans, sponsors, broadcasters, staff, volunteers, players and the great city of Boston to know that we intend to hold Laver Cup 2020 as currently scheduled." The decision and its impact on a congested schedule also pose the risk of a potential Roland Garros boycott by players. Federer has missed the event three of the past four years due to injury concerns.

The USTA said it would not determine any new date for the US Open without consulting the other major championship organisers, the International Tennis Federation and the ATP and WTA tours. "We recognise that such a decision should not be made unilaterally," it said in a statement. The US Open, usually the final Grand Slam on the calendar, is scheduled to run from August 31 to September 13 in Flushing Meadows, New York.

## BASKETBALL

## US team still planning for Tokyo Olympics, says Kerr

Reuters  
New York

THE sports world is almost entirely shut down due to the coronavirus pandemic, but the Olympic Games are still due to go on as scheduled from July 24-August 9 in Tokyo.

At this point, the US men's basketball team is still planning to be in Japan for the competition this summer, according to assistant coach Steve Kerr.

Kerr, the Golden State Warriors' head coach, spoke with reporters on a conference call Tuesday, and he referenced discussions with US head coach Gregg Popovich.

"Pop and I have spoken a couple of times over the last week or so, and everything's just up in the air," Kerr said. "There's no sense of whether things are going to be delayed or anything."

"We're all kind of sitting here wondering what's going to happen, and so is the rest of the world. We're just going to plan as if this is going to happen, and we're going to try and put together a roster, and that's all we can do."

As for his current team, Kerr took note of the fact that his Golden State Warriors were scheduled to face the Brooklyn Nets in San Francisco on Thursday before the NBA halted play Wednesday night. Had the game gone on, it would have

been played behind closed doors due to virus-fighting measures that already were in place in San Francisco. On Tuesday, the Nets revealed that four players have tested positive for coronavirus — including injured former Warriors star Kevin Durant. The Nets, but not Durant, were in San Francisco yesterday.

"I'm hoping none of our players went and hung out with them the night before our (scheduled) game," Kerr said Tuesday. "I don't know if that is the case or not."

The San Francisco Bay Area is now under "shelter in place" orders due to the pandemic.

Although at least seven NBA players have tested positive for coronavirus, and the Los Ange-

les Lakers reportedly are asking all of their players to undergo testing, the Warriors will not follow the Lakers' lead. All of Golden State's players are currently healthy, according to general manager Bob Myers.

"I've been told by our doctors that we shouldn't be testing asymptomatic people in California," Myers said on a conference call. "We've been told there's not enough tests to do that. And if we're not interacting with each other, we're not doing that right now."

"If somebody potentially became exposed and was tested, I think we'd act like anybody, which is that, if somebody you know was exposed or had it, then I think you can get tested."



Steve Kerr

## All England badminton chose finances over players welfare: Nehwal

India's former world number one Saina Nehwal said officials had put profits ahead of player welfare by allowing the All England badminton championship to go ahead last weekend despite the coronavirus pandemic. The competition was one of the few international sporting events to conclude Sunday amid the deadly outbreak, which has claimed thousands of lives across the globe. "Only thing I can think of is that rather than the players welfare feelings, financial reasons were given more importance," Nehwal, who won bronze at

the 2012 London Olympics, wrote on Twitter. "Otherwise there was no other reason for the #AllEnglandOpen2020 to go on last week." Denmark's Viktor Axelsen clinched his first All England title, while Tai Tzu-ying of Taiwan regained the women's singles crown. Nehwal bowed out of the event in the first round and is racing against time to qualify for the Olympics scheduled to begin on July 24. The Badminton World Federation (BWF) has suspended all tournaments until April 12 due to the virus, badly affecting Olympic qualifying which closes on April 30.

FOCUS

# India players spread awareness to battle tough times

THE PLAYERS HAVE BEEN POSTING MESSAGES AND UPDATES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

IAN S  
New Delhi

The cricketing world has come to a standstill due to the coronavirus outbreak which means that the members of the Indian cricket team have got a break from their unrelenting schedule. The second and third match of the ODI series against South Africa were called off due to the outbreak of the viral pandemic and away from the cricket field, the players have been posting messages and updates on social media.

Captain Virat Kohli said, "Let's stay strong and fight the #COVID19 outbreak by taking all precautionary measures. Stay safe, be vigilant and most importantly remember, prevention is better than cure. Please take care everyone."

His limited overs deputy Rohit Sharma posted a video of himself in which he asked people to be "a little smart, a little proactive" and inform the nearest medical authorities as soon as they get any symptoms. He also lauded the efforts of medical professionals who have been in the frontline of the battle against the virus.

Test vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane has posted a series of tweets. He first said, "Sad to see everything coming to a standstill due to the #coronavirus. A big salute to the doctors, nurses & the police who are working round the clock to help people" He then posted a photo of him reading a book with the caption, "Stay positive and Read!" Rahane later posted a video of himself in which he asked people to stay safe in the wake of the pandemic outbreak.

Ace Test spinner Ravichandran Ashwin urged the people of Chennai to understand the importance of social distancing. "Let me rephrase it, social distancing doesn't seem to have caught the attention of the people in Chennai yet. The only reason could be their belief in the summer to curtail it or just faith that nothing will happen. #Coronaindia," he tweeted.

All-rounder Ravindra Jadeja said, "Urging everyone to stay safe, follow the precautionary measures suggested by the health authorities and in this difficult moment let's support each other. #coronavirus #COVID19"

Wrist spinner Yuzvendra Chahal posted a photo on his Instagram stories in which he is having a night out with a few friends while chinaman



File photo of India's skipper Virat Kohli. (Reuters)

Kuldeep Yadav posted a statement in which he said: "The world today is going through a global crisis and my thoughts go out to those suffering in these difficult times. In this tough moment we all must come together, be united and be there for each other. A massive thank you to all the health professionals working tirelessly to make the planet a safer place." Opening batsman KL Rahul said: "In these testing times let's stay strong and care for each other. Urging everyone to follow the instructions given by health experts and stay safe #coronavirus"

His fellow opener Mayank Agarwal said: "Wash your hands. Avoid crowded places whenever possible. Stay at home if you feel unwell. Don't believe every WhatsApp forward. Check @WHO for updates. Don't panic. Wash your hands. (Did I already say that?) Namaste."

## South African players in self-isolation

Members of the South African Cricket team have been told to undergo a 14-day period of self-isolation and social distancing to prevent the spread of coronavirus following their return from an aborted tour of India.

The players arrived back in South Africa on Wednesday ten days after departing on a tour during which they played no Cricket. The first of three scheduled one-day internationals was abandoned without a ball bowled because of rain and the remaining two were cancelled. Dr Shualb Manjra, Cricket South Africa's medical officer, who accompanied the

team on the tour, during which they stayed in or travelled through Dubai, Delhi, Dharamsala, Lucknow and Kolkata, said the cancellation had been decided because of the rapid change in the global coronavirus situation.

"CSA had engaged in a risk assessment before the tour," said Dr Manjra. "We deemed the risk to be very low. While on tour the world became a different place and we had to take cognisance of the fact that there was a change in the global environment." He said the risks were reassessed, especially the possibility of borders being closed.

"Ultimately the players' frame of mind was the determining factor," he said, adding the players had been concerned about their families and what was happening in South Africa. Dr Manjra said the team had effectively been in isolation in India and had travelled on chartered flights and coaches in a sanitised environment. But he said it had been decided to follow expert guidance on prevention of the spread of the virus. England's tour of Sri Lanka has also been postponed as the coronavirus pandemic has virtually wiped out the global sporting calendar for the next few months. **Reuters**

GOLF

## PGA Championship in San Francisco called off



Brooks Koepka celebrates with the Wanamaker Trophy after winning the 2019 PGA Championship. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

Reuters  
New York

The PGA Championship scheduled for May 14-17 has been postponed over coronavirus concerns, the PGA of America announced on Tuesday saying it hoped to reschedule the event for the summer.

The PGA Tour, a separate body which runs the game's biggest weekly circuit, has cancelled its schedule until at least May 10.

The PGA Championship, one of the sport's four men's majors, was due to be held at TPC Harding Park in San Francisco.

"Throughout our evaluation process, we have been committed to following the guidance of public health authorities and given the coronavirus shelter-in-place order in effect in San Francisco, postponement is the best decision for all involved," said PGA of America CEO Seth Waugh. "We are and have been working in concert with (PGA Tour) commissioner Jay Monahan and our partners and friends at the PGA Tour to find an alternative date that works for all. "We are all very hopeful for a great outcome... and look forward to hopefully (playing the event) at a date this summer when it is once again safe and responsible to do so."

The news follows a previous announcement by Augusta National that it had postponed

the Masters, the first major of the year that had been scheduled for April 9-12.

Augusta National offered no hint as to when it planned to play the tournament, though October looms as the most likely time if the coronavirus has subsided. With the first two majors postponed, the focus turns to the June 18-21 US Open at Winged Foot in New York and the July 16-19 British Open at Royal St. George's in Kent, both of which for now are still on schedule.

The US Open, however, on Tuesday cancelled the first qualifying stage for an event that usually receives about 9,000 entries.

### NINE EVENTS LOST

Meanwhile, news that the PGA Tour will shut down until at least May 10 means that nine non-major events have been scrapped, starting with last week's \$15 mn Players Championship, which was called off after one round.

"As we receive more clarity in the coming weeks, the tour will be working with our tournament organizations and title sponsors, in collaboration with golf's governing bodies, to build a PGA Tour schedule for 2020 that ensures the health and safety for all associated with our sport and a meaningful conclusion to the season," the tour said in a statement.

The earliest the tour could resume would be May 21-24 with the Charles Schwab Challenge in Fort Worth, Texas. -

## Cricket chiefs call for suspension of recreational game

Cricket chiefs yesterday recommended the suspension of all recreational forms of the game due to the coronavirus outbreak. The England and Wales Cricket Board said it was making the move with "sadness and reluctance" after the government's latest advice on social distancing. The ECB statement covers "training, pre-season friendlies and any associated

cricket activity". There have been 2,626 confirmed cases of coronavirus in Britain. The latest figure for deaths is 71. Last week, England's two-Test series with Sri Lanka was postponed but there is no decision yet on county cricket, with the 2020 season due to start next month. England are set to play West Indies in a three-Test series starting on June 4. **AFP**

RUGBY

# Struggling Super Rugby pushed towards oblivion by virus crisis

AFP  
Wellington

Super Rugby has confronted numerous problems during its 25 years, but experts warn the coronavirus pandemic may prove a knockout blow for the southern hemisphere's premier club competition.

With 15 teams in five countries straddling 16 time zones from Buenos Aires and Cape Town to Sydney and Christchurch it has long been criticised as unwieldy, expensive to run and exhausting for elite players.

Now virus-related travel bans have put the competition in limbo, leaving administrators scrambling to set up locally-based alternatives that do not require international travel.

While officials say Super Rugby is on hold "for the foreseeable future", in reality they are preparing for the season to be scrapped.

SANZAAR admitted that would place the governing body and its constituent unions "in a precarious position", as broadcasters have paid huge sums for



Sharks' center Andre Esterhuizen (centre) is tackled by Stormers' Juarno Augustus (left) and Scarra Ntobeni during their Super Rugby match in Durban on March 14, 2020. (AFP)

the rights to cover the game.

"Without that revenue, without the ability to be playing in front of stadiums that have

crowds, it all does have a direct impact on the bottom line," SANZAAR chief executive Andy Marinos told Newshub.

"That's something I know the national unions are dealing with all of their clubs and then indirectly with all their govern-

ments."

Short-term plans are focused on staging local derbies in New Zealand, Australia and South Africa, with Japan's Sunwolves potentially part of the Australian competition and the Jaguares of Argentina based in Africa.

However, that may not satisfy broadcasters. New Zealand's Sky Network Television noted in a market update this week that "the company has options to recover some costs associated with sports content rights".

Australia-based sports consultancy firm Global Media & Sports (GMS) said SANZAAR's members were in no position to pay back tens of millions of dollars in broadcasting revenues.

"I doubt any of the unions could afford to do that, I'd wager that most of that money has been spent already, or at least allocated," GMS managing director Colin Smith told AFP.

Given Super Rugby's myriad structural problems, Smith said, the virus-enforced shutdown would raise questions about its future, with the makeshift local derby matches potentially forming the nucleus of new national competitions.

SPOTLIGHT

## AFL season to commence today with no spectators

Reuters  
Melbourne

The Australian Football League (AFL) will press ahead with the opening weekend of the top flight Australian rules season despite new measures to control the coronavirus introduced by the government.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison yesterday declared a "human biosecurity emergency" which he said could last at least six months, telling the country's citizens to abandon travel abroad and avoid gatherings of more than 100 people. AFL boss Gillon McLachlan told a news conference the 18-team competition's regular season would kick off as scheduled today when Richmond take on Carlton behind closed doors at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG).

"We start tomorrow night with confidence... that our players are well placed to bear the proportionate risk of playing a contact sport," McLachlan said.

"We commence tomorrow

night on government advice that putting on a game sits within the newly-established protocols and guidelines announced by the Prime Minister this morning.

"We don't know how many games we will get into this 153-game journey before we have to pause but... tonight our industry is unified in making a decision to start."

The season had already been shortened to 17 rounds of matches from the usual 22 and McLachlan announced the length of each quarter would be reduced from 20 to 16 minutes in duration.

The AFL had already banned fans indefinitely from matches following government advice last week to shut down events involving crowds of 500 or more.

The league is one of the world's best-attended with average crowds of about 35,000 last year.

The top flight A-League soccer competition, which is approaching the end of its season, will also continue this weekend without fans in attendance.

## ATHLETICS

# India's Chand says training fraught with virus fears

'Of course with all the meetings cancelled it has become tough for me to qualify'

AFP  
New Delhi

Indian sprinter Dutee Chand says she has to overcome the fear of training in a pandemic to maintain her Olympic hopes. Chand, who was banned from competing internationally because of the hyperandrogenism gene condition, wants the Tokyo Games to go ahead even if she has not yet made the women's 100 metre qualifying time of 11.15sec.

But running close to other Indian athletes is fraught as the deadly coronavirus spreads across the country of 1.3bn people. "There is fear of catching the coronavirus because we train together and if somebody catches it then it is going to spread," the 24-year-old said from a camp in the eastern city of Bhubaneswar.

"I am not going out other than to train. Home-cooked food is the order of the day, I don't eat out at all. Washing hands has become a 24-hour activity. So hopefully we will overcome the crisis."

But the global sporting lockdown caused by the mounting death toll means there are no races for Chand to run and reach the qualifying time. Despite mounting doubts about the event, the Games are still scheduled to start on July 24 and time is running out.

"Of course with all the meetings cancelled it has become tough for me to qualify," said Chand, whose personal best is currently 11.22sec. "I have to clock 11.15 seconds to make the cut and I am worried how I am going to make it if international events don't happen."

With just three reported deaths, India has so far been spared a pandemic that has killed almost 8,000 around the world. But virus fears are widespread in India and travel is increasingly difficult in the country. "Training is affected because the state government has shut down all facilities though we have got special permission to train because of the Olympics. But it affects us mentally as schools, colleges, offices are closed. We don't know whether the Olympics will happen or when the next meeting will be."

One of six children born to a poor family, Chand is not new to beating the odds.



Asian Games 100 and 200m silver medallist India's Dutee Chand. (AFP)

Her battle against gender testing when she was a teenager after showing elevated levels of testosterone made international headlines. She fought a four-year battle with the world athletics body over hyperandrogenism – the same condition that affects South Africa's two-time Olympic champion Caster Semenya. At the 2016

Rio Olympics, Chand became only the fifth Indian to participate in the women's 100m, though she did not get past the heats. After the Court of Arbitration for Sport definitively ruled in her favour, Chand went to the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta, where she won silver medals in the 100m and 200m. Chand said Indian

runners want to test themselves against the best at the Olympics.

"But it is tough to qualify for the 100m in India," she said. "We face tough competition from the best athletes from other countries. But fingers crossed, we have two months left and if there is a competition, hopefully I can make it."

## Club World Cup put back as FIFA pledges 'exceptional measures'

Lausanne: FIFA confirmed the postponement of the new Club World Cup yesterday as it pledged to take a series of "exceptional measures" to protect football in the face of the coronavirus crisis, including a possible support fund for financially stricken clubs and associations. World football's governing body accepted it would not play the new 24-team Club World Cup in June and July of 2021 after it was announced on Tuesday that the European Championship and Copa America would both be moved to that period.

The two tournaments were postponed by 12 months due to the coronavirus pandemic, and FIFA president Gianni Infantino had already said in advance of a meeting with the heads of the six continental ruling bodies yesterday that he would propose putting back the Club World Cup to later in 2021, or even to 2022 or 2023.

In the end, a statement released by FIFA simply said new dates for the highly lucrative tournament would be decided "at a later stage". FIFA were seemingly left with little choice after Aleksander Ceferin, the president of the European game's governing body UEFA, said he had told Infantino on Tuesday "that the Club World Cup...cannot happen" in 2021 having postponed the Euro by a year.

Ceferin did not indicate there was any offer of a compromise. Ceferin has been critical of Infantino's Club World Cup plans, and UEFA and South American governing body CONMEBOL agreed together to put their continental competitions back by a year, having recently signed a cooperation agreement. Meanwhile, FIFA announced

the creation of a working group to deal with the consequences of the pandemic, including on players' contracts and transfers and to deal with the economic impact on the game. "This exceptional situation requires exceptional measures and decisions. This crisis impacts the entire world and that is why solutions need to take into account the interests of all stakeholders around the world," said Infantino.

On Tuesday, as well as postponing Euro 2020 by a year, UEFA committed to finishing the European club season by the end of June but accepted that a further review will be required – it may be impossible to finish the season by then if the ongoing health crisis does not ease.

That creates a potential headache with players' contracts often expiring on June 30. Transfer window dates may need to be altered too. The sudden stop to the football season in much of the world is also a serious concern for many clubs and leagues who already have financial worries and now risk going weeks and potentially months without collecting gate receipts and other revenues.

FIFA has cash reserves of around \$1.5bn (1.37bn euros) and said it would "analyse if a support fund at global level will be required and how in that case concrete support mechanisms should be defined".

The body is also pledging to donate \$10m (9.1m 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 200,000 people and killing over 8,000.

## SPOTLIGHT

## Matuidi 'positive' despite infection

AFP  
Milan

France World Cup winner Blaise Matuidi insisted yesterday his "morale is good" despite testing positive for coronavirus. "I am positive, I am strong, morale is good, that of my family too," the Juventus midfielder said on Instagram. The 32-year-old's club teammate Daniele Rugani was the first top-flight footballer to be diagnosed with the virus a week ago, sending the entire team into quarantine. And Matuidi used a play on the word 'positive' in posts on social media to describe his mood at contracting an illness which has killed over 2,500 in Italy.

"I am positive. Usually I like to think I'm positive. Someone who tries to radiate good waves around him, my family, my friends, my teammates," Matuidi said on Instagram. "Today I remain positive. I am an asymptomatic carrier of the virus, aware of the privilege of being a professional footballer and as such benefit from regular and excellent medical monitoring. If it weren't, I probably never would have known."

He continued: "I am positive,



we will come out collectively stronger from this test, it will teach us to know each other better, to be more united, more generous, better. Thank you for your messages of friendship and support. Let's stay disciplined and united so that we can soon cuddle our children, take our parents in our arms, check our brothers and sisters and celebrate goals with our teammates. Thank you for your messages of friendship and support. Let us remain disciplined and united. I am positive, we will do it."

In total 13 Serie A players have officially been diagnosed with the virus including seven from Sampdoria and three at Fiorentina. Italy has been battling the disease for nearly a month and now has over 31,000 Covid-19 cases.

## FOOTBALL

## Players in Norway temporarily laid off as virus bites

Reuters  
Oslo

Professional footballers in Norway have been temporarily laid off as clubs struggle to cope with the economic impact of the spread of coronavirus, with the government stepping in to cover wages, players' union NISO. With stadiums closed and uncertainty over TV revenues, clubs in other countries have issued financial warnings as the virus continues to spread, and Norway is believed to be the first country to announce such sweeping temporary layoffs.

While clubs in countries like England

and Spain can pay top players and managers huge salaries backed by lucrative TV deals and sponsorship agreements, teams in smaller European countries often live on the edge, trying to pay competitive wages while balancing the books.

Norwegian football acted quickly as the virus took hold, quarantining players who had been abroad for 14 days, cancelling the national team's Euro 2020 playoff with Serbia and suspending all football activity including training.

The temporary layoffs are the next step in protecting the long-term future of the game, said Joachim Walltin, who is the director of NISO. "They are only temporarily laid off at the discretion of

their clubs and it is because the authorities have decided that all sports activities, including training, will be stopped until March 26 – they are not dismissed, but are not allowed to work for a temporary period," Walltin explained.

"The authorities have provided emergency packages to help anyone earning between 75,000 and 600,000 Norwegian crowns (\$7,000 and \$55,000) per year will receive full pay for up to 20 days – what happens after March 26, we must wait and see." While Norway has hosted some well-known names, like former Denmark international Nicklas Bendtner, salaries are usually a lot lower than those on offer in bigger European leagues, despite the

relatively high taxes and cost of living.

Young players on modest deals and non-Norwegians on short-term contracts are particularly vulnerable. "Those who earn less than 75,000 crowns and foreign players who do not have a contract of 12 months or more will not be entitled to unemployment benefits, and we and club organisations and federations have encouraged the clubs to pay special attention to these players," Walltin said.

Despite the special circumstances, the union boss said that the layoffs, which apply to men and women at the elite levels of the game in Norway, did not mean that players were free to leave their clubs if they were not paid on time.

## ROUND-UP

## Ibrahimovic launches fundraiser for Italy, pledges €100,000

AC Milan striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic said yesterday he had launched a fundraiser for Italian hospitals battling the coronavirus pandemic, and pledged €100,000 (£91,000) to the cause himself. "Italy has always given me so much and, in this dramatic moment, I want to give back even more to this country that I love," the former Swedish international wrote on Instagram. "I count on the generosity of my colleagues, of all professional athletes and of those who want to make a small or large donation according to their possibilities, to kick this virus away," he said. Globally 200,680 people have been infected by the virus and 8,092 have died, according to the latest tally.

After China, Italy is the hardest hit country, with 2,503 deaths from 31,506 cases. "Together we can really help hospitals and doctors and nurses who selflessly work every day to save our lives," said the player. "Because today we are the ones cheering for them! Let's together kick the Coronavirus



away and win this match!

### ITALIAN FA LOOKING AT MAY RETURN FOR SERIE A

Italian football federation (FIGC) president Gabriele Gravina expressed his hope that Serie A would resume on May 2 with a possible finish in July

at the latest. All Italian sport has been suspended until April 3 as a result of the coronavirus pandemic which has killed more than 2,500 in the country.

"I don't even want to think that we won't start again, it would be a hiatus, it would worry me for our country," Gravina said. "We're working on the hypothesis of starting again on May 2 and completing the championships possibly going into July if we don't achieve it by June 30. In the event that it's impossible to use all the windows as planned, we will resort to a change in the format of the competitions."

The FIGC president welcomed the postponement of the European Championship until 2021, stating that as far as they were concerned "national championships have priority".

"We don't want to penalise anyone, but just as we evaluate format changes in the event of a reduction of the windows to play, so UEFA must do so by remodelling the Champions and Europa League," added Gravina. The Champions League final is scheduled

to take place on June 27 and the Europa League final on June 24.

### ALAVES CONFIRM 15, ESPANYOL SIX POSITIVE CASES

Alaves have confirmed a total of 15 positive coronavirus cases, a club statement said on Wednesday.

The news comes after the Basque club revealed on Saturday that two members of their coaching staff had tested positive for the virus. None of those affected have displayed any symptoms, they added.

"There have been 15 positive cases, three of which are from the Deportivo Alaves first team squad and seven members of the coaching team," the statement said. Meanwhile, six Espanyol players have tested positive. "All of them are suffering from mild symptoms and they are complying with the medical recommendations," Espanyol said in a statement.

A report said that 76-year-old former Real Madrid president Lorenzo Sanz, head of the club from 1995-

2000, has been admitted to a hospital in critical condition. Spain is Europe's second-most affected country by the virus after Italy, with 558 confirmed deaths and almost 14,000 cases, with the country in lockdown.

### OBİ MIKEL LEAVES TURKISH TEAM OVER VIRUS FEARS

Former Nigeria international John Obi Mikel has quit Turkish football club Trabzonspor, the team said, after the former Chelsea midfielder said he did not want to play as the new coronavirus spread worldwide.

"The contract has been ended by mutual agreement with John Obi Mikel," Trabzonspor said in a statement late Tuesday. The deal between the player and the team had begun on June 30 last year and was meant to last until May 31, 2021.

He criticised the Turkish Football Federation's (TFF) move to let Super League matches continue without spectators, unlike in other countries where games have been suspended.

"There is more to life than football. I do not feel comfortable and don't want to play football in this situation," Obi Mikel wrote on Instagram on Saturday.

"Everyone should be home with their families and loved ones in this critical time. Season should be cancelled as the world is facing such turbulent times," he added. The 32-year-old played for Chelsea for over 10 years. He retired from international duty after last year's Africa Cup of Nations after making 89 appearances for Nigeria. The TFF on Tuesday rejected growing calls for matches to be suspended. Among those opposed to any delay of Super League matches is Trabzonspor chief Ahmet Agaoglu who said any decision to cancel would lead to a rise in divorces.

Trabzonspor – one of the major non-Istanbul-based clubs – are currently at the top of Turkey's Super League. Turkey confirmed its first novel coronavirus-related death on Tuesday as the number of cases in the country rose to 98.

## FOOTBALL

## Premier League to discuss options today for eventual resumption

Reuters  
Manchester, United Kingdom

England's Premier League clubs will hold a video conference call between themselves today as they begin to sketch out a way to complete the suspended season and tackle the financial damage caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

While some clubs are reported to be urging a quick return and games being played behind closed doors, there have also been talks of cutting the season short, or even declaring it "null and void". However, there are also powerful motives for completing the season in full.

"They want to get the games played if that is at all possible," said one football industry source.



A woman walks past a banner in Liverpool yesterday. (Reuters)

Last week all elite soccer matches in England, including the Premier League, Football League (EFL) and Women's Super League (WSL), were suspended until April 4.

With non-league, youth and amateur football having also subsequently suspended play, the English game is now in a state of total shutdown.

On Tuesday, UEFA opted to postpone the scheduled Euro 2020 tournament by a year, creating a space for the club seasons across the continent to play on during the summer – if the situation with the virus allows.

A large question mark remains on when the season can resume but that will not stop clubs and officials from trying to come up with a plan for a best-case scenario.

Across Europe, other leagues are in the same process. The Italian league was saying on Wednesday that it is targeting a possible return in May, with the season running into June and possibly July.

The Premier League would likely also aim to for such a completion, allowing them to resolve the issues of promotion and relegation and European qualification without any wrangles.

It would also ensure they provided their broadcast partners, domestically and internationally, with a full and complete season in line with their contracts.

Player contracts, some of which end in June, could be an issue although world governing body FIFA has said it is looking into possible 'dispensations'.

The problems facing Premier League clubs, who are among the rich elite of the world game, are minor compared to those facing lower division England Football League teams. They now face cash-flow problems with no ticket revenue.

## Football League chiefs agree £50m rescue package amid virus chaos

The English Football League has announced a £50m (\$58m) relief package to assist financially stricken clubs during the shutdown caused by the coronavirus.

English football is suspended as part of the worldwide bid to slow the spread of the deadly Covid-19 virus.

It is expected matches will not resume at the April 3 date named by Football League and Premier League chiefs as their hoped-for return.

Instead, the focus has moved to helping the lower division clubs struggling with the financial ramifications of the delay to the season.

Finance was among the topics discussed at yesterday's EFL Board meeting, when a plan was agreed to help ease the financial burden for cash-strapped teams in the Championship, League One and League Two – the second, third and fourth tiers of English football.

"As part of the League's continued contingency planning, the Board heard the comments and observations from EFL Clubs, before discussing a number of issues including the current financial position and implications, insurance, regulatory matters and broadcasting arrangements," an EFL statement said.

## MOTORSPORT

## F1 cancels August break, could delay 2021 changes

Switch will also help smaller teams survive what threatens to be an existential crisis



In this March 13, 2020, picture, Members of the Ferrari Formula 1 team arrive to pack up their equipment after the Australian Grand Prix was cancelled in Melbourne. (AFP)

Reuters  
London, United Kingdom

Formula One teams must close for three weeks by the end of April in a move that will allow races to be rescheduled during the European summer and help limit the financial impact of the coronavirus outbreak.

What would have been a record 22-round calendar is already suspended, with last weekend's Australian season opener in Melbourne cancelled and no racing expected until at least the end of May.

The governing International Automobile Federation (FIA) said in a statement yesterday that its World Motor Sport Council approved the change to the 2020 regulations to allow

the cancellation of a scheduled August break.

The 10 teams must instead shut their factories for three successive weeks between now and the end of April.

"The change was supported unanimously by both the F1 Strategy Group and F1 Commission," the FIA added.

The switch will also help smaller, privately-owned teams survive what threatens to be an existential crisis as their revenues shrink without any reduction in costs.

Multiple F1 sources told Reuters that the teams, FIA and senior Formula One management will discuss further measures in a conference call today.

That looks likely to involve delaying by a year the introduction of radical new technical regulations planned for 2021.

Teams would otherwise have to devote considerable resources to designing their 2021 cars while also seeking to remain competitive in 2020. By bringing forward the lockdown, teams can turn off costly windtunnels and freeze development.

Some European countries are in lockdown already as they seek to contain the spread of the virus and many team staff are already working from home or in self-isolation after flying back from Australia.

The lack of an August break will be another blow for employees however, with family holidays having to be cancelled and the prospect of a packed second half of the year with races running into December.

British-based Red Bull said they planned to close their Milton Keynes factory on March 27

## Le Mans 24-hour race postponed from June to September

AFP  
Paris, France

The Le Mans 24-hour endurance race, one of the traditional highlights of the motor racing calendar, has been postponed from June to September 19-20 because of the coronavirus pandemic, organisers said yesterday.

The organisers said they had taken the decision "as a consequence of the health situation linked to the coronavirus and the current restrictions in France and the world".

This season's 1000 Miles of Sebring was cancelled due to a travel ban to the US from mainland Europe, as was the 6 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps.

The decision will impact the 2020-2021 World Endurance Championship campaign which was set to start on September 5 at Britain's Silverstone.

Other motor racing events to be put on hold due to the Covid-19 outbreak including Formula One, the World Rally

Championship and Moto GP. The season-beginning Australian Grand Prix was called off hours before its start last Sunday and earlier on Wednesday F1 said it will bring its summer shutdown period forward to March and April and extend it by a week.

The move was made in order to free up the August break for a racing calendar decimated by the deadly virus that has forced organisers to postpone the first four events of the season.

Rally Mexico, the third of the campaign, was cut short by a day last weekend and April's Rally Chile had already been put on hold due to political and social unrest in the south American country.

Next month's Grand Prix of the Americas in Austin, the third race on the MotoGP calendar, was moved to November because of the outbreak.

The first and second MotoGP races of the season at Qatar and Thailand have also been hit with the former scrapped and the latter rescheduled.

for three weeks, subject to developments.

"Whilst we would all love to return to racing, the severity of this global pandemic is changing by the hour and the impact transcends our sport," the team said in a statement.

"We therefore agree with the measures being taken to reduce the risk of transmission and will support any further race postponements that are deemed necessary."

The Spanish, Dutch and Monaco Grands Prix in May all look uncertain but have yet to be

postponed or cancelled.

Monaco is likely to be cancelled if not held in late May, due to the logistical challenges of organising the race in the Mediterranean principality, but the Dutch round – a home race for Red Bull's Max Verstappen – could switch to August.

The sport is also keen to reschedule lucrative races in China, Vietnam and Bahrain.

Swiss-based Sauber, who manage and run the Alfa Romeo team, said they would close their Hinwil factory from March 23-April 13.

## BOXING

## Roger Mayweather, mentor to nephew Floyd, passes away

Reuters  
Los Angeles, United States

Roger Mayweather, trainer to nephew and champion boxer Floyd Mayweather, has died at 58 after a long battle with diabetes, his camp said on Tuesday.

Before becoming a legendary cornerman, the Grand Rapids, Michigan native was a champion in his own right.

He had a celebrated 20-year career, becoming a two-division world champion with notable fights against Julio Cesar Chavez and Pernell Whitaker.

"The Black Mamba" held the WBA and lineal super featherweight titles in the mid-1980s and the WBC light welterweight title later that same decade.

He held the IBO light welterweight title and IBO welterweight titles in the mid-1990s and finished with a 59-13 professional record.

He first began working with Floyd in the late 1990s and over

12 years helped shape him into one of the best pound-for-pound boxers of all time, amassing an unblemished 50-0 record.

"My uncle was one of the most important people in my life inside and outside of the ring," Floyd Mayweather said in a statement.

"Roger was a great champion and one of the best trainers in boxing. Unfortunately, his health was failing him for several years and now he can finally rest in peace."

"Roger meant the world to me, my father Floyd Sr., my uncle Jeff, our whole family, everyone in and around the Mayweather Boxing Gym and the entire boxing world. It is a terrible loss for all of us."

The loss of Roger is the second major blow to Floyd this month.

Last week his ex-girlfriend and the mother of three of his children, Josie Harris, was found dead inside a car in her driveway in Valencia, California.

Floyd responded by posting a series of photos of the couple on Instagram as a tribute to her.



In this April 22, 2014, picture, WBC welterweight champion Floyd Mayweather Jr. (left) trains with his uncle and trainer Roger Mayweather in Las Vegas, United States. (Reuters)

## Joshua title defence could be delayed by virus chaos: promoter

Anthony Joshua's world heavyweight title defence against Kubrat Pulev could be delayed until July due to the chaos caused by the coronavirus, promoter Eddie Hearn said on Tuesday.

Joshua is due to fight Pulev at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium on June 20.

But the British star could be forced to give up that date if Tottenham need the ground for a potential extension of the Premier League campaign.

Referring to Joshua's June 20 date, Hearn told Sky Sports News: "At the moment it's still in place."

"Obviously with the news of the Euros being cancelled and the possible extension of the Premier League season, Spurs may need that stadium in June. "We do have an option to run that fight in July as well at the same stadium. Everything now is really a case-by-case situation and a day-by-day situation of trying to think on your feet."

## CRICKET

## Anderson fears virus could wreck English season as WI offer to stage series

AFP  
London, United Kingdom

England fast bowler James Anderson fears the global coronavirus pandemic could see the domestic and international cricket season abandoned completely.

The England and Wales Cricket Board are due to meet with the 18 first-class counties today, possibly by teleconference, in a bid to see whether the existing structure for the 2020

summer can be maintained.

It follows yesterday's decision by the ECB to recommend the suspension of the recreational game.

The County Championship is meant to start on April 12 but a delay looks increasingly likely given other sports have called a halt following British government advice to avoid mass gatherings.

"Cricket and sport is not the be all and end all but it is my livelihood, it's all I know," Anderson told the BBC's Tailenders podcast.

"The season is unlikely to start. It's

still a little bit hazy as to what's going to happen. There's a chance we might not even bowl a ball this summer."

Anderson made the last of his 151 Test appearances against South Africa in Cape Town in January before a broken rib saw him miss the last two matches of the series.

The 37-year-old was not selected for the Sri Lanka series in the hope he would be fully fit for the start of the home season.

The Lancashire paceman, England's all-time leading Test wicket-taker, added: "I feel a little bit anxious. Just

the not knowing is giving me a bit of anxiety."

England postponed their tour of Sri Lanka last week. They are next meant to play the West Indies in a three-Test home series, starting on June 4.

But if that is not possible, Cricket West Indies have offered to stage the series in the Caribbean.

CWI chief executive Johnny Grave said yesterday he had held talks with ECB counterpart Tom Harrison.

"To that end, yes, we have offered to host the series here in the Caribbean if that is deemed helpful," Grave told

ESPNcricinfo. "The ECB would retain all commercial and broadcast rights."

## 'GET WORSE BEFORE IT GETS BETTER'

Meanwhile Hampshire chairman Rod Bransgrove said the counties were bracing for all eventualities.

"It's likely to get a lot worse before it will get better and I think our conclusion is we need to have plans for various different contingencies," Bransgrove told BBC Radio Solent.

"They include no cricket at all during the season, but hopefully that

won't be the one that prevails."

ECB cash reserves have declined from £73m (\$85m, 78m euros) to £11m due to county grants and setup costs for the Hundred, its new showpiece tournament which officials believe will revive interest in cricket.

Their most recent accounts identified the loss of matches due to "events outside cricket's control" as a major risk and the ECB will now have to decide whether to go ahead with the 100 ball per innings format or delay its inaugural season until next year.