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OLYMPIC GAMES

Tokyo 2020 will not start on July 24: IOC member Pound

Canada and Australia have bluntly said they would not participate if the Olympic Games were not put back to 2021

Reuters
Toronto/Tokyo

The International Olympic Committee has decided to postpone the Tokyo 2020 Summer Games because of the coronavirus pandemic, IOC member Dick Pound told *USA Today*.

Major sporting nations Australia and Canada had already withdrawn yesterday as organisers came under global pressure to postpone the event for the first time in the Olympics' 124-year modern history.

"On the basis of the information the IOC has, postponement has been decided," Pound was quoted as saying by the US newspaper. "The parameters going forward have not been determined, but the Games are not going to start on July 24, that much I know."

The report said the games, scheduled for July 24-Aug. 9, were likely to be held in 2021, with the details to be worked out in the next four weeks.

A postponement would be a massive blow for the host country, Japan, which has pumped in more than \$12bn of investment, and huge sums are also at stake for sponsors and broadcasters.

But a groundswell of concern from athletes — already struggling to train as gyms, stadiums and swimming pools close around the world — appears to be tipping the balance, along with the cancellation of other major sports events.



In this August 5, 2016, picture, Canada's flagbearer Rosannagh MacLennan leads her delegation during the opening ceremony of the Rio 2016 Olympic Games at the Maracana stadium in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. (AFP)

More than 337,000 people have been infected by the novel coronavirus worldwide and over 14,600 have died in a pandemic that the World Health Organisation said was accelerating.

The IOC and the Japanese government have both edged back from weeks of blanket insistence the Games would go ahead, announcing a month-long consultation on scenarios including



IOC member Dick Pound. (AFP)

postponement.

Mike Ryan, head of the WHO's emergencies programme, said the WHO was feeding into deliberations over the Games, adding: "I believe a decision will be made very soon."

'STRESS AND UNCERTAINTY'

The Olympics have never before been delayed, though they were cancelled altogether in 1916, 1940 and 1944 during the two world wars, and major Cold War boycotts disrupted the Moscow and Los Angeles Games in 1980 and 1984 respectively.

"The moment the IOC indicates that it is thinking about other solutions, it has already decided to delay the Games," said French Olympic Committee president Denis Masseglia.

Canada and Australia both bluntly said they would not participate if the Games were not put back to 2021 and Britain may have followed suit. The Swiss Olympic Committee also called for a postponement, saying a fair, global Games was not currently possible.

"We are in the midst of a global health crisis that is far more significant than sport," said Canada's Olympic Committee and Paralympic Committee in a statement.

"Our athletes have been magnificent in their positive attitude to training and preparing, but the stress and uncertainty have been extremely challenging for them," said Australia's Olympics Chef de Mission, Ian Chesterman.

Paralympic athletes may be at particular risk from the epidemic as some have underlying health problems.

Russia urged global sporting authorities to avoid "panic" and US President Donald Trump expressed confidence in Japan to make the "proper" call.

But a raft of other nations and sports bodies piled pressure on the IOC — and its German president Thomas Bach, a former Olympic fencing champion — to make a quick decision.

"The faster the decision, the better it is for the entire Olympic movement," Greece's Olympic head, Spyros Capralos, a former water polo player, told Reuters.

"I understand where the athletes are coming from," he added. "When you cannot train, you are stressed, you live in agony, which is disastrous. Postponement is inevitable."

FOCUS

World Athletics chief Coe calls for Olympic delay

AFP
Tokyo, Japan

World Athletics chief Sebastian Coe has called for the Tokyo Olympics to be postponed over the coronavirus pandemic as Canada pulled out of the Games and Japan's prime minister admitted a delay could be "inevitable".

Australia also told its athletes to prepare for a Tokyo Olympics in 2021 as expectations grew that the event, scheduled to start on July 24, would be postponed.

Japanese and Olympic officials had stuck resolutely to the line that the Summer Games would go ahead on time, but criticism from athletes and sports bodies has swelled to a crescendo in recent days.

In a letter to International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach, written before Sunday's IOC meeting, World Athletics president Coe asked for the Games to be moved.

"Whilst we all know that different parts of the world are at different stages of the virus, the unanimous view across all our areas is that an Olympic Games in July this year is neither feasible nor desirable," Coe said in his letter.

Athletes and sports bodies have become increasingly vocal after restrictions imposed because of Covid-19

Ready to shift 2021 Worlds for Olympics: WA

World Athletics said yesterday it was prepared to shift the world championships in 2021 in order to accommodate a potential move of this year's coronavirus-threatened Tokyo Olympic Games.

The world championships are scheduled to be held in Oregon on August 6-15 next year.

"We stand ready to work with the IOC and all sport on an alternative date including dates in 2021," track and field's global governing body said in a statement.

World Athletics said it had already been in discussion with the Oregon 21 Organising Committee "regarding the possibility the Olympic Games may move to next year".

"They in turn have held discussions with their key stakeholders and have reassured us they will work with all of their partners and stakeholders to ensure that Oregon is able to host the World Athletics Championships on alternative dates should that prove necessary."

wrecked competition schedules and often made training impossible — and risky.

Britain's world 200m champion Dina Asher-Smith said the IOC's approach was "irresponsible".

"So wait... does this mean that athletes face up to another FOUR weeks of finding ways to fit in training — whilst potentially putting ourselves, coaches, support staff and loved ones at risk just to find out they were going to be postponed anyway?" she tweeted.

In his letter, Coe voiced concerns over the issue of competition fairness, with many athletes struggling to train properly, and potential injuries if they have to push themselves harder nearer the Games.

"No one wants to see the Olympic Games postponed but as I have said publicly, we cannot hold the event at all costs, certainly not at the cost of athlete safety," he said.

The virus has already had an impact on the Games, with qualifiers cancelled and events to celebrate the Olympic torch arrival and relay scaled back.

Despite the measures, more than 50,000 people flocked to a cauldron displaying the flame in northeastern Japan, raising fears about whether the relay can be held safely.

Some waited in a 500-metre (yard) queue for several hours, Japanese media said.

"I queued for three hours but watching the Olympic flame was greatly encouraging," a 70-year-old woman told public broadcaster NHK.



INTERVIEW

'Health & safety of athletes is prime concern of IOA'

IAN S
New Delhi

The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) yesterday said there will be no compromise on the health and safety of athletes after Canada created a flutter by becoming the first nation to pull out of the Olympics due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"I am personally in touch on regular and continuous basis with Union Ministry of Sports, Sports Authority of India, International Olympic Committee, National Sports Federations in India, with Athletes thru the NSF's and all stake holders regarding the 2020 Olympics and preparations for Olympics," IOA President Narinder Batra said in a statement.

Federations had a video call with the IOC President on 17th March and all 206 NOC's had a video call with the IOC President on 19th March to discuss on Covid-19 and the Olympics. All NOC's have to get back to IOC this week on their preparations and the health of Athletes in their respective countries.

"The Health & Safety of Athletes is prime concern of IOA and of the Union Sports Ministry and there will be no compromise in this regard. As of now, Hockey Men & Women, Athletics and Weightlifting Athletes are in their training camps while other probable athletes are mostly back home," he added. The IOA is yet to take a call on India's participation at the showpiece event. A clutch of top athletes and sports bodies have rammed up pressure on the International Olympic Committee (IOC)

to postpone the Tokyo Olympics scheduled to be held in July-August. World Athletics chief Sebastian Coe has written a letter to IOC president Thomas Bach, calling in postponement of Tokyo Olympic Games amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

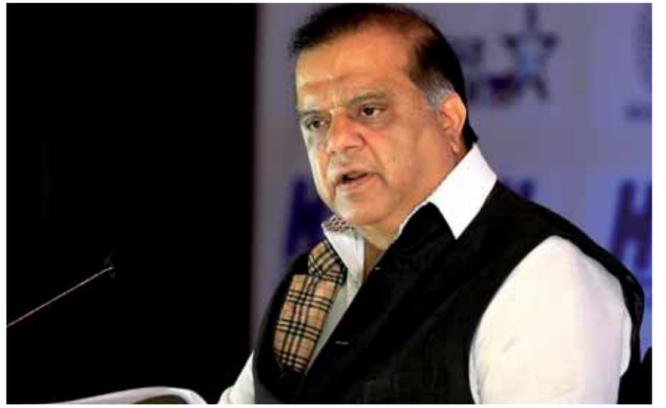
The Tokyo Games are due to start from July 24 but the rising concern over the spread of coronavirus and the havoc it has wreaked on the qualification calendar has led to questions being raised on whether the organisers can go through with the scheduled date.

The IOC and Japanese government, under increasing pressure to take action, have flagged that postponement was possible. IOC has stated that postponing the 2020 Olympics is one option amid the worldwide coronavirus pandemic, although it added that cancelling the Games al-

together is "not on the agenda. Bach, in an open letter to athletes around the world, said a decision on when to hold the Games would be made "within the next four weeks". Canada has already announced that they will not send their athletes to the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympic Games due to the Covid-19 which has claimed over 14,000 lives across the world.

In a statement, the Canadian Olympic Committee said on Sunday night it will not send teams to Tokyo unless the Games, which are scheduled to be held from July 24 to August 9, are postponed by a year.

The Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) has also said that they could not assemble a team for the Tokyo 2020 and thus their athletes should prepare for Olympic Games which look all set to be played in the summer of 2021.



Indian Olympic Association President Narinder Batra.

OPINION

Re-organising Olympics a Herculean task: former IOC marketing head

'It is mind-bogglingly complex to make a sudden change after seven years of preparation'

AFP
London

Thomas Bach and the IOC should not be criticised for procrastination over the Tokyo Olympics as re-organising them is "mind-bogglingly complex", the movement's former head of marketing Michael Payne told AFP.

Payne, who in nearly two decades at the International Olympic Committee was widely credited with transforming its brand and finances through sponsorship, said yesterday the IOC could have unilaterally cancelled the Games because of the coronavirus pandemic.

However, Payne believes that was never an option given Bach's experience as a sportsman of missing out on the 1980 Moscow Olympics due to the boycott by Western nations in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Payne said behind the scenes the IOC have been moving towards a postponement for a while.

"It is mind-bogglingly complex to make a sudden change after seven years of preparation for the biggest sporting event in the world," he told AFP in a phone interview.

"The IOC have been with increasing urgency looking to fall back on Plan B. The IOC remit allows them legally to cancel the Games unilaterally.

"Cancelling the Games though is not an option so to postpone the Games, you have to have your delivery partner (Japan) on board."

Payne said Japan would take its time to decide as until recently the local organisers had been enthusiastic about maintaining the Games in their scheduled slot.

"The Japanese have been holding out in the hope it might still be possible to hold the Games in July," he said.

"The cost to the Japanese of postponing them is loss of face and political capital to (Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo) Abe as this is very much his project.



The Olympic rings are seen near the Statue of Liberty replica at Tokyo's Odaiba district yesterday. (AFP)

"In the last few days Japan have been very up for them to go ahead but the problem is the rest of the world cannot get there."

SUMMER 2021 'ONLY OPTION'

Payne said the Japanese reluctance to contemplate postponement has left Bach with "one arm tied behind his back."

However, with Australia and Canada now calling for a delay to next year even the option of delaying by a few months looks unlikely.

"The Japanese message is maybe hoping for postponing to later in the year but would this solve uncertainty?"

Payne asked. "The last thing you want is a dark cloud hanging over the Games, as in 'is it going to happen?'"

"Various teams now saying they want it postponed till 2021 helps the IOC's hand with the Japanese and saying 'October will not work'."

Payne said Abe would consider a Games in 2021 as a enormous consolation prize given the grave circumstances. "As difficult as that could be to Abe to postpone to 2021 I believe Japan could host the greatest Games ever," he said.

"The DNA of the Olympic Games after all is a celebration and humanity coming together.

"Next year the Japanese can celebrate by saying we have come through this so it would be huge for Abe.

"Summer 2021 is the best option - indeed the only option."

Payne dismissed the theory that US broadcaster NBC or the main sponsors would dictate the terms of a postponement.

"One of the complete misnomers is all the debate is being directed by NBC and sponsors," he said. "Nothing could be further from the truth. The IOC does not consult sponsors or NBC before they vote on who gets the Games.

"The idea the IOC say to sponsors, 'what works best for you?' is just

not the way it works." At the end of it, though, Payne believes Bach will be guided by his own painful experience of being denied the chance to defend the fencing title he won in 1976 because West Germany withdrew from the Moscow Olympics.

"He is marked by what went on in the 1980s with IOC presidents making the wrong decisions vis a vis boycotts (the Soviet bloc then boycotted the 1984 Los Angeles Games)," said Payne.

"He is mindful of what cancellation of a Games could mean to 6,000 athletes as many just get one shot in their careers. "So he was never going to opt for cancellation."

Gold medallist Skinner slams IOC's Bach's 'arrogance'

Britain's Olympic gold medal track cyclist Callum Skinner has attacked International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach's decision to wait up to a month to make a decision on the 2020 Tokyo Games.

"IOC President Thomas Bach's stubbornness and arrogance has spectacularly failed in this instance and he has weakened the Olympic movement. This isn't the first time he has put his own motives above the athletes and the movement," Skinner, who won gold and silver in the 2016 Rio Games, wrote on Twitter.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and Japanese government had on Sunday and yesterday slightly shifted their position that the Games would start as planned on July 24, announcing a month-long consultation over other "scenarios".

Canada and Australia responded by saying they would not be sending athletes to the Tokyo Olympics if the Games went ahead as scheduled this year.

Skinner is a member of the Global Athlete group, which aims to help athletes raise their voices in world sport, and that body, who have called for the Games to be postponed, issued a statement yesterday, strongly criticising the IOC's decision.

"Such a response is unacceptable, irresponsible, and once again ignores the rights of athletes," they said. "Over the next four weeks the world is going to increasingly shut down, the Covid-19 virus will sadly take more lives, and without a clear answer, athletes are still being indirectly asked to train.

"If anyone knows how competitive athletes work, they will stop at nothing to achieve their goals. We understand it is a difficult decision, but the IOC and IPC (International Paralympic Committee) have a duty of care towards athletes which they have not exercised. "A clear message should have been sent to all athletes to stop training and observe government mandates to self-isolate. Sport should never be prioritised ahead of public health."

From 'best prepared' to possibly postponed: Tokyo 2020's rocky road

Olympic officials regularly lauded Tokyo as the best prepared host city they had seen. But no one could have planned for the coronavirus pandemic that may now force a postponement of the 2020 Games. And while organisers won praise, a plagiarism scandal, corruption charges and budget woes all clouded the horizon even before the virus outbreak threatened the Games. Here, AFP Sport chronicles the path to what could be the first postponement in Olympic history.

2013: Tears of joy
TV news presenters burst into tears and thousands of people erupt in screams of delight as the IOC awards the Games to Tokyo in September 2013. With emotions running high, the thoughts of many Japanese turn to the thousands of victims of a devastating earthquake and tsunami in March 2011, with the Olympics seen by some as a

golden opportunity to rebuild. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe vows Tokyo will be a "safe pair of hands" with a reputation for efficiency and competence.

2015: Stadium scrapped
Embarrassment for Abe as he is forced to tear up blueprints for the proposed national stadium when costs balloon out of control. "I have decided we must go back to the drawing board," a red-faced Abe says in July 2015 after public anger over the \$2 billion price tag which would have made it the world's most expensive stadium.

2015: Logo dropped
Scandal follows in September 2015 as the logo for the Games is ditched after accusations of plagiarism. Designer Olivier Debie says the design is stolen from his logo for a Belgian theatre and threatens court action before

officials withdraw the emblem, saying it "no longer has public support".

2018: Cute mascots
After the logo disaster, there is relief at the smooth rollout of futuristic mascots for the Olympics and Paralympics, chosen by schoolchildren. Olympic mascot "Miraitowa" - combining the Japanese words for future and eternity - is a blue-checked, doe-eyed character with pointy ears, while Paralympic counterpart "Someity" sports pink cheeks derived from Japan's famous cherry blossoms.

2018: Boxing blues
In an unprecedented move, the International Olympic Committee strips troubled governing body AIBA of the right to run the boxing competition at the Games over various allegations. There are fears the sport will not feature in the Games, but the IOC opts to organise the boxing tournament itself.

2019: French charges
French investigating magistrates in January 2019 charge the former head of Japan's Olympic Committee, Tsunekazu Takeda, as they probe two payments totalling \$2.3 million made before and after the Japanese capital was chosen. Takeda says he was "never involved" in any decision-making process over the payment and protests his innocence but he steps down as head of Japan's Olympic Committee.

2019: Marathon move
After warnings against holding the marathon in the middle of Tokyo's sweltering summer, the IOC springs a surprise in October 2019 by shifting the flagship race to Sapporo, 800 kilometres to the north - and usually cooler in August. Tokyo 2020 organisers are livid, but city governor Yuriko Koike says she has no choice but to accept the decision.

2019: Budget blowout
Organisers unveil the final version of their budget in December, with the Games expected to cost \$12.6 billion, although Tokyo 2020 and the IOC are still wrangling over the cost of moving the marathon. An audit suggests the national government's part of the overall bill, which is supposed to be 150 billion yen, is actually nearly 10 times that. Organisers say auditors are counting expenses only tangentially related to the running of the Games.

2019: Russian ban
Russia's participation in the Games is thrown into question in December, when anti-doping agency WADA bans the country's athletes for four years from global events including the Olympics over manipulated doping data. Russia vows to appeal, but a hearing in March 2020 is postponed as the new

coronavirus spreads globally.

2020: Cancellation 'unthinkable'
By late March, the coronavirus outbreak has been declared a pandemic causing more than 325,000 infections and over 14,400 deaths. Pressure grows for organisers to acknowledge the Games may be hit, but the IOC initially says there is "no need for any drastic decisions", while Tokyo governor Koike calls cancellation "unthinkable".

2020: Postponement 'inevitable'
With growing anger from athletes, the IOC says postponement is now a possibility, pledging a decision within four weeks, but warning a delay will be complex. Prime minister Abe tells parliament that "it may become inevitable that we make a decision to postpone" comes the first country to pull out, citing fears over the virus.

FOCUS

Australian Rugby League suspends season

THE 16-CLUB NRL KICKED OFF A FORTNIGHT AGO AND HAD MADE IT THROUGH TWO ROUNDS



The cash-strapped rugby league is considered part of Australia's social fabric. (NRL)

AFP
Sydney

Australia's National Rugby League bowed to the inevitable and suspended its season yesterday over growing fears for player safety coupled with tightened government restrictions to curb the spread of coronavirus. The 16-club NRL kicked off a fortnight ago and made it through two rounds as one of the last professional sports worldwide still playing during the pandemic. The cash-strapped league is considered part of Australia's social fabric and determined efforts were made to keep it going, but the noose began to tighten over the past few days. The government recommended against all "non-essential" domestic travel and on Monday a shutdown of a range of businesses began countrywide, with Australia recording more than

1,600 cases of Covid-19. A final blow came when Queensland, a major centre for the NRL along with New South Wales, joined other states in closing its borders. "Our pandemic and biosecurity experts said due to the outbreak it is no longer safe for our players to play," Australian Rugby League Commission chairman Peter V'landys said. "This decision hasn't been taken lightly. Our experts are very concerned with the rapid rate (of infection). We were alarmed at how everything changed over the past 24 hours." He said they were leaving any potential resumption of the season open. It follows the hugely popular Aussie Rules suspending its season on Sunday, with A-League soccer the only competition still going, without fans, in Australia. Football Federation Australia are scheduled to make a decision on its fate today. NRL bosses have previously

said closing down the season would bankrupt the game and push clubs out of business, with lucrative broadcasts contracts at stake. V'landys admitted it was "catastrophic". "I don't think we've ever come across a financial crisis like it," he said. "Rugby league will always survive in some way but I can't guarantee it will in the same way. We're ready for the worst," V'landys added. Desperate to stave off financial ruin, the NRL had earlier yesterday been considering relocating the entire competition to a vacant mining town in central Queensland. All the players would have remained there in isolation with games played at a nearby venue. But the decision by Queensland to close its borders put paid to the plan, with V'landys saying they did not have enough time to carry it out.

Japan's Top League cancels rest of season

Reuters
Los Angeles

Japan's Top League is cancelling the remaining 42 matches of the season to help stem the spread of the coronavirus and safeguard the health of players and spectators, organisers of the rugby union competition said in a statement yesterday. League organisers also said the step was necessary as many players would be returning to their home countries. With nations all around the world closing their borders, several Top League players, including former Wallaby Matt Giteau, have already been allowed to return to their native countries so they can reunite

with their families. The 103-cap veteran Giteau, who plays for Suntory Sungoliath, had urged the league authorities to take swift action over the future of the league season. "There are more important things than rugby right now," Giteau had posted on Twitter. "I love living and playing here in Japan but not to the extent of being locked out of Australia away from my family until June." More than 14,600 people have died since the coronavirus outbreak began in China late last year. The Japan Rugby Football Union had already suspended the competition for three weeks following the arrest of a Hino Red Dolphins player for drug use.

NFL

Cowboys defensive end Gregory to petition for reinstatement



Reuters
Los Angeles

After being indefinitely suspended for over a year, Dallas Cowboys defensive end Randy Gregory plans to soon petition the NFL to lift his ban in the wake of changes to the league's collective bargaining agreement, according to a report Sunday. Sources told David Moore of the Dallas Morning News that Gregory will soon file the required paperwork with the league in hopes of returning to the field for the 2020 season. Gregory, 27, was suspended indefinitely on Feb. 26 for violating the NFL's substance abuse policy and the terms of his conditional reinstatement. This was his fourth suspension since coming into the league. He has been suspended for more games (30) than he's played (28). But with changes to the league's CBA that halted the policy of punishing players for testing positive for marijuana, neither Goodell nor the league have indicated any possible amnesty for players such as Gregory who were previously suspended over such tests. Gregory was suspended and missed the entire 2017 season for a failed drug test and was granted conditional reinstatement last July. Gregory, drafted by the Cowboys in the second round of the 2015 draft, has battled substance abuse dating to his college years at Nebraska. Per the Morning News report, Gregory has failed or missed six tests while with the Cowboys. In his last NFL action in the 2018 season, Gregory recorded 25 tackles, six sacks and two forced fumbles in 14 games for Dallas. Gregory has played in parts of three seasons (2015-16,

'18), recording 45 tackles, seven sacks and 11 tackles for loss in 28 career games (one start).

PATRIOTS AGREE TO ADD LB COPELAND

The New England Patriots turned to a division rival for help restocking their defense, agreeing to a one-year contract with former New York Jets linebacker Brandon Copeland, according to multiple reports Sunday. The Boston Globe first reported the agreement, which ESPN later termed a deal worth \$1.05mn. The 6-foot-3, 268-pound Copeland joins the Patriots during a free agency period in which they have already lost three linebackers to other teams, including Kyle Van Noy and Elandon Roberts (Miami Dolphins) along with Jamie Collins (Detroit Lions). All three players are joining former Bill Belichick assistants who now hold head coaching positions - Brian Flores with Miami and Matt Patricia with Detroit. Copeland, 28, posted a career-high 42 tackles in just 12 games (one start) last season with New York, adding 1.5 sacks and five tackles for loss. He was suspended for the season's first four games for violating the NFL's policy on performance-enhancing drugs, the first missed games of his four-year career. Copeland's best season came in 2018, his first with the Jets, when he racked up a career-best five sacks and 10 games started, in addition to 35 tackles (eight for loss). Originally an undrafted free agent out of the University of Pennsylvania in 2013, he has collected 107 tackles and seven sacks in 60 career games (14 starts) with the Detroit Lions (2015-16) and Jets (2018-19). Copeland missed the 2017 season with Detroit due to a torn pectoral muscle.

SPOTLIGHT

Gobert says he's temporarily lost sense of smell



In this file photo taken on December 4, 2019, Utah Jazz's Rudy Gobert looking to pass the ball during an NBA game against the Los Angeles Lakers in Salt Lake City. (AFP)

AFP
Los Angeles

Utah Jazz center Rudy Gobert, whose positive coronavirus test prompted the NBA to shut down its season, says the virus has caused him to lose his sense of smell. The French big man, whose defensive talents earned him the nickname the "Stifle Tower," tested positive for Covid-19 on March 11, the result bringing the NBA season to an abrupt halt. In social media posts since then, the 27-year-old had said he was feeling better, but on Sunday he tweeted that he was experiencing one of the lesser-known symptoms of the illness. "Just to give you guys an update, loss of smell and taste is definitely one of the symptoms, haven't been able to smell anything for the last 4 days," Gobert wrote on Twitter.

"Anyone experiencing the same thing?" More than a dozen NBA players have tested positive for Covid-19. Gobert's teammate Donovan Mitchell was the second player diagnosed, and the total includes four players from the Brooklyn Nets. The Nets players testing positive included superstar Kevin Durant, who has been sidelined all season recovering from injury. Days before his positive test, Gobert had shrugged off safety measures aimed at limiting the spread of coronavirus, pointedly touching every microphone and voice recorder on a table in front of him at a media availability. The cavalier stunt took a serious turn after it emerged he had tested positive. Gobert apologizing for his actions and saying he wished he had "taken this thing more seriously." The global death toll from the virus surged to more than 14,300 on Sunday, according to an AFP tally.

League uses social media reach for informative campaign

The NBA may have been suspended due to the coronavirus outbreak but that has not stopped the league from using its massive online reach to good effect by educating its followers, sharing important information and guidelines related to the pandemic. The NBA suspended its season after a Utah Jazz player tested positive for the virus and since then more players have tested positive, including two-time champion Kevin Durant, three of his Brooklyn Nets team mates and two Los Angeles Lakers players. The campaign, called 'NBA Together', will share the latest health and safety guidelines while using its digital platforms to help people cope with the pandemic. "Over the past week, 18 NBA and WNBA players created public service announcement videos to share important health and wellness information about ways to reduce the spread of the coronavirus," the NBA said in a statement. "Those videos have generated more than 37mn views across the league's social media accounts." One feature is a web page <https://cares.nba.com/coronavirus> with all the necessary information required to tackle the pandemic, with useful links to updates from the World Health Organisation and what fans can do to protect themselves. The league said players from the NBA and WNBA have already committed to pay more than \$30mn to support both healthcare organisations fighting the pandemic and people impacted by the virus. They aim to raise \$50mn. Reuters

CRICKET

Rohit's presence in NZ Tests could've made difference: Mitchell

Rohit was ruled out of the ODIs and Test series against NZ after suffering a calf injury



File photo of India's Rohit Sharma. (Reuters)

IAN S
New Delhi

With the coronavirus outbreak, most sportspersons are spending time at home and taking to social media to interact with fans. New Zealand fast bowler Mitchell McClenaghan is no different and in a Twitter session, the pacer said that Rohit Sharma's presence could have made a difference in the result of the two-Test series that was played between India and New Zealand.

The Kiwis completely outplayed the Indians and replying to a query from a fan on whether Rohit's presence would have made a difference, the Kiwi pac-

er said: "Of course."

Rohit was ruled out of the ODIs and Test series against New Zealand after suffering a calf injury while batting in the first T20I at the Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui.

Skipper Virat Kohli's form was also a cause for concern. In the two Test matches against Kane Williamson's men, Kohli managed just 38 runs at an average of 9.50 – his worst in recent times. He amassed a total of 218 runs in the 11 innings (four T20Is, three ODIs and four Tests) that he played against the Black Caps and ended a pathetic tour with just 14 in his last innings.

The end result was that the number one Test side had to face a crushing defeat at the hands of

Black Caps, who made amends following their 5-0 whitewash in the T20Is and came back strongly to win the ODIs and the Test matches – 3-0 and 2-0, respectively.

Kapil Dev had said that Kohli needs to practise more as his reflexes and hand-eye coordination are probably slowing down.

"When you reach a certain age, when you cross 30 then it affects your eyesight. In swings, which used to be his strength, he (Kohli) used to flick them four, but now he has been dismissed twice. So I think, he needs to adjust his eyesight a bit," Dev had said.

But former India opener Virender Sehwag begged to differ and said it was a clear case of being out of form.

"COACH" ROHIT GIVES DAUGHTER BATTING LESSON

With the coronavirus outbreak bringing the world to an almost standstill, sportspersons across the world are looking to make the most of the time they are getting with their families and the Indian cricketers are no different. In a video posted by Rohit Sharma on his Instagram account, he is seen teaching daughter Samaira how to play cricket.

The Indian cricketers hardly get time with their families as they are travelling non-stop thanks to their hectic calendar. But the pandemic has sent the cricket calendar for a toss and the cricketers are looking to make the most of the lockdown.

In fact, India skipper Virat Kohli had complained about the

schedule after the team headed to New Zealand within a couple of days of their ODI series against Australia at the start of the year. Addressing the media ahead of the opening T20I at Eden Park, Kohli said that it was coming to a scenario where players were landing at the stadium from one series to the other.

"It's getting closer and closer to landing at the stadium straight. That's how compressed the gap has become. This kind of travelling to a place that is seven and a half hours ahead of IST is difficult to adjust immediately. Hopefully, this will be taken into consideration in the future," he had pointed. "But this is the year of the World Cup and every T20 is important. So we can't lose our focus."

ANNOUNCEMENT

Du Plessis named among players under contract



File photo of Faf du Plessis during a net session. (Reuters)

Reuters
Cape Town

Former captain Faf du Plessis has been offered a new 12-month contract by Cricket South Africa, suggesting he will extend his international career beyond October's Twenty20 World Cup in Australia.

Du Plessis had said that he would review his international future after the tournament. But having been named as one of 16 recipients of a national contract for the 2020-21 season, he now looks set to be available for the next South African summer, which includes home Tests against Sri Lanka and Australia. Du Plessis has handed over the captaincy in all three formats to wicketkeeper Quinton de Kock.

CSA have held back on handing out a final contract as an incentive to those who have not made the cut.

"We have decided to keep the 17th men's contract open for the moment and players can qualify for it through performance," CSA Acting Chief Executive Jacques Faul said in a statement yesterday.

Seamer Beuran Hendricks, who featured in the test series against England earlier this year, is the only new recipient.

CONTRACTED PLAYERS
Temba Bavuma, Quinton de Kock, Faf du Plessis, Dean Elgar, Beuran Hendricks, Reeza Hendricks, Keshav Maharaj, Aiden Markram, David Miller, Lungi Ngidi, Anrich Nortje, Andile Phehlukwayo, Dwaine Pretorius, Kagiso Rabada, Tabraiz Shamsi, Rassie van der Dussen.

REPORT

ICC Women's T20 World Cup breaks viewership record

IAN S
New Delhi

The recently concluded ICC Women's T20 World Cup saw unprecedented growth in the consumption of T20 women's cricket, resulting in the official broadcaster Star Sports setting new records.

As per a release issued by the broadcasters, consumption rose three times to 5.4 billion minutes during the tournament. In the 2018 edition, it was 1.8.

The finals which witnessed hosts Australia square off against India recorded 9.9 million average impressions, the highest ever for any women's T20 match!

Australia beat India by 85 runs to win their fifth Women's T20 World Cup crown in front of a packed MCG with 86,174 fans in attendance, in a final that will truly go down as one of the most memorable cricketing spectacles ever.

Star Sports, through its campaign #TakeOnTheWorld, which featured the 16-year old swashbuckling Indian opening batter, Shafali Verma, brought alive her single minded-focus

and passion to play the game she loved.

The same passion was seen in Shafali's game throughout the tournament – her talent and pure power took the cricketing world by storm. Even though the teenage sensation ended up on the losing side, her performance during the tournament left many fans of the game in awe and talking about her prodigious talent despite her young age.

The campaign generated 1.3mn interactions across social platforms, a 5.2x increase over the last ICC Women's World Twenty20 2018. This overwhelming response from fans will not only inspire a generation of young girls to take up the sport but also attract brand and advertising interest to further fuel the growth of women's cricket in India.

With this, Star Sports proudly supports 100% Cricket, the ICC's yearlong campaign to grow the visibility of the women's game, celebrate the players and their passion, and reinforce cricket's position at the forefront of the women's sport movement.

SPOTLIGHT

Aspetar continues to provide best medical, preventive services

QNA
Doha

Considering the consequences of the spread of the Coronavirus Covid-19 on various fields, particularly sports, Aspetar, Qatar's orthopaedic and sports medicine hospital continues providing medical support to athletes by adopting a preventive policy aimed at maintaining the health of athletes, reflecting its mission in providing the best medical services for athletes, without neglecting its educational role for the community.

Aspetar has carried out several precautionary measures with the beginning of the outbreak of the coronavirus in the world, by implementing many decisions and instructions for sports clubs and federations in Qatar, following the health requirements imposed by the Ministry of Public Health.

Aspetar has put a set of guidelines that were distributed; to all medical staff working with teams and federations.

Aspetar informed all athletes in Qatar to follow the instructions of the Ministry of Public Health regarding preventive measures to avoid the spread of the virus, and all athletes were informed about the possibility



Dr Khalid Hassoun, Medical Director of National Sports Medicine Programme at Aspetar Hospital.

of quarantine if they travelled abroad.

The Medical Director of Clubs and Federations at the National Sports Medicine Programme in Aspetar Dr Khalid Hassoun said: "At first glance, we informed all medical staff in Aspetar, which works in clubs and federations, to follow the instructions set by the Ministry of Public Health, in parallel with the Aspetar directives to infection control, and reminded them of the procedures we routinely take in Aspetar when sports



Dr Yorck Olaf Schumacher, chairman of the Aspetar Infection Control Committee.

teams participate in events, when athletes travel outside the country to participate in international competitions or training camps."

"Immediately after this procedure we contacted our staff working on the field, through the various clinics of Aspetar distributed in clubs, to avoid coming to the hospital except for the necessity, following the instructions while keeping the minimum surgeries or emergencies, while guidance was provided to athletes undergoing physi-

otherapy and rehabilitation programme." Added Dr Hassoun.

For his part, Dr Yorck Olaf Schumacher, chairman of the Aspetar Infection Control Committee said: "Its the same measures that are applied to the public, including washing hands, the use alcohol disinfectants, and keeping away from crowds to reduce exposure."

"Avoiding any activity that may weaken the immune system, such as lack of sleep and malnutrition, standard infection precautions such as avoiding handshakes and even autographs. In case of travel, isolation procedures should be taken for team members who are suffering from upper respiratory tract infections to protect the rest of the team." He added: "The advices currently being addressed to the public, are the same as those we used to educate athletes about prior to travelling to camps or training abroad. They are not different for Covid-19."

Aspetar accredited by many recognised medical and sports institutions, always educates about such preventive measures through many awareness programmes within Aspetar or in the institutions and sports clubs, such as scientific conferences, and educational lectures targeting medical staff.

No plan yet to move Caribbean Premier League

Caribbean Premier League (CPL) officials said yesterday they had no immediate plans to postpone or cancel this year's Twenty20 cricket competition over the coronavirus pandemic.

Launched in 2013, this year's six-team CPL is scheduled to run from August 19 to September 26, with the Barbados Tridents the reigning champions.

"CPL has been in constant communication with our medical advisors in recent weeks, as well as speaking with Cricket West Indies about the current situation with regard to cricket around the world, and at present there has been no discussion about moving the event," said a statement issued yesterday.

"CPL believes it is too early to make such a decision, but this is an evolving situation and we are carefully watching how events unfold in the Caribbean and around the world."

The lucrative Indian Premier League, the original Twenty20 franchise event, has been postponed until April 15, while this month England postponed their Test series in Sri Lanka.

The England and Wales Cricket Board on Friday announced no professional cricket would be played before May 28 as a result of Covid-19.

The County Championship, which comprises four-day first-class matches, was due to start on April 12. **AFP**

SPOTLIGHT

'Everything happened very fast': Arteta opens up on positive test

Arsenal coach says it took three or four days for the symptoms to pass and for his energy levels to return

By Nick Ames
The Guardian

Recovering Mikel Arteta has shed light on the background to his coronavirus diagnosis, which hastened the Premier League's decision to suspend the season's activities. The Arsenal manager tested positive for Covid-19 on 12 March and, the following day, the league was put on hold with an initial return date of 4 April.

That has been extended to at least 30 April as the crisis continues to escalate, but Arteta is feeling better and explained how the situation came about. Alarm bells had rung when Evangelos Marinakis, the president of Arsenal's Europa League last-32 opponents, Olympiakos, returned a positive test.

"Everything happened very fast," Arteta told the Spanish television channel *La Sexta*. "On Tuesday afternoon I was feeling so-so and I went to see the doctor but he wasn't there. I got a call from the board of directors after training while I was in my car and they told me the president of Olympiakos had tested positive and everyone who had been in contact was at risk. I went on to tell them that I wasn't feeling well and that we had a situation because we had lots of players that had been in contact with them. We had a game against Manchester City the next day and obviously we couldn't put lots of people at risk without saying anything."

The match at the Etihad was postponed and Arteta was tested for coronavirus that day. "I had the test done last Wednesday and I was diagnosed on Friday, when we had to communicate it to the Premier League that I had tested positive," he said. "Obviously all those who had been in contact with me had to go into quarantine, and consequently



Arsenal's Spanish head coach Mikel Arteta tested positive for Covid-19 on 12 March and, the following day, the league was put on hold with an initial return date of 4 April. (AFP)

games had to be suspended."

Arteta said he was "very well now, I feel that I have recovered" and that it took three or four days for the symp-

toms of Covid-19 to pass and for his energy levels to return.

Nonetheless, Arsenal have put training on hold indefinitely, stating that

it would be "irresponsible" to return to action today as originally planned. Around 100 club employees, including the entire first-team squad and coach-

ing staff, will completed 14 days' self-isolation last night after Arteta's positive test.

"We are clear it would be inappropriate and irresponsible to ask the players to come back at this time," a club statement read. "Therefore our men's first team, women and academy players are all remaining at home. Stay at home and save lives."

The decision not to train was taken after guidance from the head of medical services, Gary O'Driscoll, who has been at the heart of Arsenal's strategy for dealing with the virus. Wider government advice on social distancing was foremost among the considerations but there also remain concerns about getting the players together so soon after Covid-19 was detected within the camp.

There is an awareness that players, particularly those from abroad, may take their news from differing sources so the government's guidelines, as well as other important updates as the wider situation changes, are being communicated to the squad via WhatsApp. O'Driscoll has led that effort, although Sanllehi and the director of football operations, Huss Fahmy, are believed to have been particularly active in staying on top of the messaging.

Arteta has also been in touch with his players. Injured squad members such as Calum Chambers and Lucas Torreira are continuing their rehabilitations via streamed one-on-one sessions with the medical staff. Shad Forsythe, the head of performance, has been integral to drawing up tailored plans while the club decide upon their next move.

Meanwhile, Arsenal have confirmed that their match-day and non-match-day casual workers will continue to be paid until 30 April. The situation will be reviewed when a further decision is made on when football can resume.

FIFA boss looks at reform after crisis

Milan: FIFA president Gianni Infantino believes the global coronavirus crisis could bring about a reform of football which he does not expect to return to action by May.

"Without panic, let's face it, we will play when we can without endangering anyone's health," the head of world football said. "Health first. Then everything else. And the rest, for managers, means hoping for the best but also preparing for the worst."

World football has been thrown into turmoil by the pandemic which has killed 15,000 and confined more than a billion people to their homes. The Euro 2020 and Copa America tournaments have already been pushed back while uncertainty remains over the inaugural 24-team Club World Cup from 2021. "We need an assessment of the global economic impact," the 50-year-old Swiss told *Gazzetta Dello Sport*.

"We don't know when things will return to normal. But let's look at the opportunities. We can perhaps reform world football by taking a step back. With different formats. Fewer tournaments, maybe fewer teams, but more balanced. Fewer games to protect the health of the players. It's not science fiction, let's talk about it. Let's quantify the damage, see how to cover it, make sacrifices and let's start again. Not from scratch. But let's all save football together from a crisis that risks being irreversible."

Infantino revealed he was working on temporary derogations on footballers' contracts to avoid the June 30 deadline. "Now let's think about the national team calendar, and about temporary changes and dispensations for the regulations on the status of players and transfers. To protect contracts and adapt registration periods. Tough measures are needed tough. But there is no choice. We will all have to make sacrifices."

Infantino, meanwhile, dismissed talk of a planned European Super League for the top clubs. "It makes me laugh," he said. "From what I see, others are already planning and organising tournaments around the world."

F1

Azerbaijan latest Grand Prix postponed

Reuters
London

Azerbaijan postponed its June 7 Formula One Grand Prix yesterday, leaving the stalled series with a major rescheduling headache after cancelling or calling off the season's first eight races. What would have been a record 22 round season has already lost two of its fixtures, including May's showcase Monaco Grand Prix which will not feature in the championship for the first time since 1954.

The March 15 opener in Australia has also been cancelled while Bahrain, Vietnam, China, the Netherlands and Spain are postponed with no alternative dates proposed as yet and more races in doubt. Organisers of the race in Baku said in a statement the decision to postpone was "a direct result of the ongoing global Covid-19 pandemic and has been based entirely on the expert guidance provided to us by the relevant authorities."

"In coming to this conclusion, BCC (Baku City Circuit)'s primary concern throughout has been the health and well-being of the Azerbaijani people as well as all visiting F1 fans, staff and championship participants."

Organisers said they hoped to be able to announce a new race date and all tickets would continue to be valid. Preparation of the street circuit, which requires the installation of extensive safety fencing and barriers as well as the sealing of drain covers and asphaltting, would have had to start soon. The track has long, fast straights and a twisting stretch around the old town.

The crowd is usually small, with some 18,000 grandstand seats plus another 2,000 for hospitality and VIP and up to 15,000 general admission tickets available, but the race has been one of the more entertaining and unpredictable.

The next race that remains on is the Canadian Grand Prix in Montreal on June 14 but that also looks uncertain due to the pandemic, as does France on June 28. France currently has stringent restrictions on people's movements while Canada has closed its borders to all but essential travel.

Questions are now being asked about whether Formula One, with rounds still to come in Asia, the Americas, Middle East and Europe, will be able to hold even the minimum eight races needed to make a championship. Formula One has cancelled its usual August shutdown, bringing it forward and extending it to three weeks in March and



Questions are now being asked about whether Formula One will be able to hold even the minimum eight races needed to make a championship. (Reuters)

April in the hope of rescheduling races from earlier in the season, but that may be wishful thinking.

Postponement of the race in Baku leaves Azerbaijan without a major sporting event in a year that had promised plenty of action. The city had been due to host four games including a quarter-final of the Euro 2020 football championship but that has now been postponed to next year.

ZHOU WINS VIRTUAL SAUDI GP AS F1 SEEKS TO FILL VOID LEFT BY VIRUS

Renault's Chinese test driver Guanyu Zhou won a virtual Bahrain Grand Prix on Sunday as Formula One sought to entertain fans with esports action in a season stalled by the spreading coronavirus. Bahrain would have been the second race of the year on Sunday and Liberty Media-owned Formula One had hoped to enlist current drivers in a virtual replacement using the Codemasters F1 2019 game.

In the end McLaren's Lando Norris and Williams' Nicholas Latifi, who has yet to make his F1 race debut, were the only ones present. Others stepped up, however, with former McLaren F1 driver and current Mercedes Formula E racer Stoffel Vandoorne finishing second with Austrian Philipp Eng, who had started on pole position, third.

English golfer Ian Poulter, 'The Postman'

competing from the garage of his home in Florida, and Britain's six times Olympic cycling gold medalist Chris Hoy also took part. So too did Nicolas Hamilton, brother of Britain's six times world champion Lewis Hamilton, singer-songwriter Liam Payne and retired ex-F1 race winner Johnny Herbert.

Technical problems meant the race was reduced from half the real-life distance to 25% while Norris struggled with a poor connection that meant his car was controlled for much of the time by the computer, which he dubbed 'Landobot'. Norris also made some cheeky calls seeking advice from other F1 drivers, including real life teammate Carlos Sainz and Red Bull's Max Verstappen, during the downtime.

The McLaren driver had earlier raced in a separate 'Not the BAH GP' event organised by Veloce Esports and also featuring Poulter and Real Madrid's Belgium goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois.

That event was divided into two separate races of 25% distance, both dominated by professional gamers.

Former F1 driver Nico Hulkenberg, who left Renault at the end of last year, took part in all of the day's action after also racing on Saturday in an All-Stars Esports Battle organised by Torque Esports.

FOCUS

UEFA formally postpones Champions League, Europa League final

Reuters
Bern, Switzerland

This season's Champions League final, Europa League final and women's Champions League final, all due to be played in May, have been formally postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic, European football's governing body UEFA said yesterday.

"No decision has been taken on rearranged dates,"

said UEFA in a statement. "The working group, established last week as a result of the conference call among the stakeholders of European football, which was chaired by UEFA President, Aleksander Ceferin, will analyse the options available. The group has already begun its examination of the calendar. Announcements will be made in due course," the statement added.

All three competitions are currently suspended along with almost every European domestic league because of the coronavirus.

ROUND-UP

Asensio wins gaming tournament by swapping pitch for Playstation

Real Madrid forward Marco Asensio has missed the entire season with a serious knee injury but the time away from the pitch paid unexpected dividends when he was crowned champion of La Liga's FIFA 20 video game tournament on Sunday.

With Spanish football on hold along with most live sports while the world fights the coronavirus pandemic, players traded the pitch for Playstation in an online tournament organised by esports commentator Ibai Llanos and endorsed by La Liga.

Over 170,000 people watched Asensio, playing as Real, beat Aitor Ruibal of Leganes 4-1 in the final, the culmination of a weekend of action involving 18 La Liga sides. Barcelona and Real Mallorca were not allowed to take part in the tournament as their clubs are sponsored by Konami, the creators of FIFA 20's main competitor Pro Evolution Soccer.

The tournament, which was also broadcast on Spanish television, raised over 140,000 euros (\$149,212.00) to fight the deadly Covid-19 virus, which has claimed over 13,580 lives worldwide and more than 1,720 in Spain.

"REALLY SCARED" SAYS KILIAN, BUNDESLIGA'S FIRST CORONAVIRUS CASE

The first Bundesliga player to test positive for coronavirus said he had been "really scared" as he suffered from the illness. Paderborn's Luca Kilian, 20, was the first case of Covid-19 in the German top-flight which has been postponed until at least April 2 due to the pandemic.

The Germany Under-21 international had missed seven matches since suffering a muscle injury

in late-January but his club's last match was the March 6 loss to Cologne.

"It started on March 10 with a little bit of irritation in the throat. The day after I had a headache but I kept training," he told newspaper Westfalen-Blatt "On March 12 I had the first of my hot flushes and a day later they were really strong. Fever and strong shivers. It was then I started being really scared for the first time. It took four days for the fever to drop, and after that I felt better every day," he added.

Defender Kilian, who joined the league's bottom club from home town side Borussia Dortmund at the start of the season, was able to return home to his family to be taken care of by his mother, a nurse.

PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL IN SPAIN SUSPENDED INDEFINITELY

Professional football in Spain will remain suspended until further notice to limit the spread of coronavirus, La Liga and the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) announced yesterday. La Liga and the RFEF said matches in the top two divisions will only resume when the Spanish government decide there is no longer any health risk.

Fixtures had previously been suspended for two weeks from March 12 but there was no expectation they would restart this weekend, with the crisis continuing to escalate. The total number of deaths due to coronavirus in Spain passed 2,000 on Sunday, making it the third worst-affected country in the world, behind only Italy and China. The Spanish government declared a state of alarm on March 14 and intends to extend the lockdown imposed on the population until at least April 11.