

# Why Hockey 5s could be the future of the sport at Olympics

FOR SOME, it's a smarter, simpler version of the sport. For quite a few, it is an upstart that will ultimately overtake – or take over, depending on which side of the debate you are on – the traditional format. Hockey 5s, a fledgling format that is rapidly spreading its wings, has evoked cynicism and thrill in equal measure. But when the International Hockey Federation (FIH) announced on Monday that a Hockey 5s World Cup will be launched in 2023, there was more scepticism than excitement over their intentions.

### Eye on the Games

What were once whispers have turned into roars that the shorter version of the sport will replace the traditional 11-a-side game at the Olympics, with many even suggesting the change could take place as soon as the 2028 Games in Los Angeles.

The FIH has denied any such move. "There is no plan at all to have 11-a-side hockey cease to exist at the Olympics," a spokesperson told *The Indian Express*. "We have seen how other sports are successfully running two formats."

Another possibility, of both formats taking place simultaneously at the Games, has been put forth as well, like volleyball and beach volleyball. But at a time when the International Olympic Committee is looking to reduce the number of events, this looks like a remote possibility.

### No 'D', use of sideboards

Hockey's complicated, and constantly changing, rules have been one of the biggest deterrents in terms of viewership. The 5s version, played over three 10-minute periods, cuts the complexity.



In many ways, Hockey 5s will mirror ice hockey.

In many ways, it mirrors ice hockey. As the name suggests, five players are allowed in the starting line-up and four on the bench. Like the 11-a-side version, rolling substitutions are allowed.

Unlike the traditional format, however, there is no 'D', which means a goal can be scored from anywhere on the 'court', which is half the size of a normal hockey pitch.

The boundary boards can be used to rebound the ball, giving the players an option to use the speed and angles generated from it in attacking moves. The ball is out of play only when it completely passes over the boundary board on the sideline or backline. That means, more often than not, the game stops only when a player gets injured.

### New destinations

The world body hopes that like Rugby 7s or Twenty20 cricket, Hockey 5s will attract newer countries to the sport. The format was tried at the last two Youth Olympics and has thrown up a few surprising results – Zambia, for instance, stunned Germany 8-1 at the Nanjing Games and teams like Austria and Kenya gave a good account of themselves in Buenos Aires last year.

"The FIH Hockey 5s World Cup is created first and foremost to promote hockey and to have a high-level FIH competition for Hockey 5s, therefore giving many National Associations a chance to have a competitive Hockey 5s team than an 11-a-side one," the FIH said.



### India's position

India has been slow to warm up to the concept and did not compete at the 2014 Youth Olympics. In 2018, however, the team led by Vivek Sagar Prasad, now an established player in the senior 11-a-side team, won the silver medal after losing to Malaysia in the final.

The FIH has said continental 5s championship will act as qualifiers for the World Cup, which will be a 16-team affair. Hockey India does not have a dedicated 5s programme yet, although they have been conducting national championships for a couple of years.

It is learnt that there will be separate camps for 5s and 11-a-side versions of the games going forward. No timeline, however, has been set so far for that.

MIHIR VASAVDA

## Sindhu wins, Saina, Sameer knocked out

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
HONG KONG, NOVEMBER 13

WORLD CHAMPION P V Sindhu made a positive start to her campaign but Saina Nehwal and Sameer Verma were ousted from the Hong Kong Open after suffering contrasting defeats in the opening round of the \$400,000 event here on Wednesday. Sixth seed Sindhu, who had faltered in the opening round in a couple of recent tournaments, took 36 minutes to see off World No.19 Kim Ga Eun of Korea 21-15, 21-16 to progress to the second round. The Olympic silver medalist will face Thailand's Busanan Ongbamrunphan next. HS Prannoy also crossed the opening hurdle, beating China's Huang Yu Xiang 21-17 21-17 in 44 minutes to a clash with sixth seed Indonesian Jonatan Christie.

However, eighth seed Saina, who claimed the Indonesia Masters Super 300 tournament next week. Women's doubles pair of Ashwini Ponnappa and N Sikki Reddy also couldn't cross the opening round, losing 13-21, 12-21 to Denmark's Maiken Fruergaard and Sara Thygesen.

World No.6 Sindhu moved to a 8-4 lead early on but Kim managed to turn the tables, holding a 11-10 advantage at the breather. The Indian then reeled off six points at 13-13 to march ahead and seal the opening game. The second game was no different as Sindhu again broke off at 5-5, grabbing seven points on the trot to move to a massive 12-5 lead. The Indian kept moving ahead and eventually shut the door comfortably on her opponent.

Earlier, Saina lacked the wherewithal to put up a fight against Cai in the opening game and fell behind from the very start. She couldn't catch up with the Chinese, who moved to a comfortable 11-4 lead at the break and kept surging ahead to win the first game. In the second game, Saina was 3-0 up initially but Cai reeled off seven straight points at 2-4 to jump to a 9-4 advantage. The Indian narrowed the gap but Cai was ahead 11-9 at the breather.

After the interval, the Chinese jumped to a 17-11 advantage. However, Saina managed to fight back and grab a game point at 20-19 but the Chinese once again managed to nose ahead. Sameer, on the other hand, managed to take one game away from the world no.26 Wang after meekly surrendering the opening game.

## Worry lines before kick off

Lack of goals and uncertainty in defence makes India's qualifier against Afghanistan a tough task

MIHIR VASAVDA  
NOVEMBER 13

ONLY SEVEN players in India's travelling contingent of 26 have played every minute of their clubs' domestic campaigns. Between them, the squad has scored just five goals after the first four rounds of the Indian Super League. And when the team lines up against Afghanistan tonight, they might be without a regular central defensive pair.

Much has been made about the conditions that welcomed India in Dushanbe – the chilly weather, artificial turf, convoluted flight paths, et al. But it will be the on-field problems that will trouble coach Igor Stimac more ahead of two crucial 2022 World Cup and 2023 Asian Cup joint qualifying matches, against a tricky Afghanistan on Thursday followed by a much superior Oman next Tuesday.

Some, like the lack of goals, are old issues that resurface in newer ways. But it is the defence line that will concern Stimac going into the doubleheader.

Most of India's recent performances – the two wins over Thailand, the draw in Qatar, etc – have come on the back of a solid defensive performance. Heading into the Afghanistan match, however, one wonders if Stimac himself is sure of the back four that will start on Thursday.

Sandesh Jhingan, who leads the defence line, has been ruled out for at least five more months after twisting his knee and rupturing the Anterior Cruciate Ligament during India's practice game against NorthEast United before the Bangladesh match in October. On Tuesday, Anas Edathodika returned home due to a family bereavement.

Adil Khan, whose late goal saved India from an embarrassing defeat at home to Bangladesh, is reported to have a tight hamstring. Although he is not ruled out yet, Stimac has a tough decision to make – should Khan be risked against Afghanistan in cold conditions on an artificial turf, which can aggravate the injury, or save him for the match against Oman?

The only central defender who is available and match-fit is Narender Gahlot. The 18-year-old made his international debut earlier this year but has not played a single minute for Jamshedpur FC. It is likely Stimac will opt for either right-back Rahul Bheke or left-back Subhashish Bose in a central position, which will open the door for the likes of Pritam Kotal and Sarthak Golui to make the starting XI.

The midfield might not pose such selection issues for Stimac, but the form of a few will concern him. Udanta Singh's pace on the right has set up several counterattacks and goal-scoring moves for club and country. The winger also has a tendency to get into scoring positions himself but lack of composure inside the box has been a repeated letdown. Bangladesh choked India's young mid-



The Indian football team has not been the best of travellers. File

field and made them irrelevant with some smart tactical play to which India had no counter. Afghanistan, who prefer a 4-5-1 formation or a variation of it, are expected to do the same. Stimac has argued that the 510 passes India made against Bangladesh, along with the 17 attempts on goal, show they were the better side who just had an off day. But the conversion rate has been abysmal for quite some time now, and there seems to be no solution in sight.

Farukh Choudhary and Manvir Singh – the two recognised strikers apart from Sunil Chhetri – have not set the ISL on fire. Manvir, in fact, has struggled to get playing time in a star-studded FC Goa forward line. The onus to score, or create, goals will thus be on Chhetri once again.

Perhaps, Stimac had foreseen these problems when he asked for extra training time with the team ahead of the twin ties. Last month, the Croat wished that at least one round of the ISL be postponed so that he gets more time with the players in a conditioning camp before the crucial matches against Afghanistan and Oman.

He was cut down to size immediately, when an unnamed ISL official reportedly called Stimac's comment 'unfortunate' and his approach 'unprofessional'. "... it was discussed and agreed upon that since the ISL schedule is out and a lot of planning goes into the whole process of organising games like broadcasting, booking of stadiums and lodging of players, it is not possible to give a longer break before the November games and FIFA rules will be followed," the official was quoted as saying by IANS.

Since then, Stimac has not reiterated his demand. The next two matches will show how much the injuries, lack of playing time and – from the coach's point of view – inadequate preparation will impact India, who are still searching for their first win of the qualifiers.

### Uphill task: Stimac

PTI adds: Searching for their first win of the campaign, India coach Igor Stimac said the situation his team is in, that it cannot afford to slip at any cost.

"It will not come to us, rather we need to go

and snatch it. It's always about us and our performance to achieve something," the Croatian said on the eve of the Pool E 2022 World Cup and 2023 Asian Cup joint qualifier against Afghanistan. "We see Afghanistan as a physical side with good composure. They have some players who also have the experience of playing in Europe. They are not in the top division, but playing in Europe always gives you an extra bit of confidence. They have stamina and they'll pose a tough challenge for us."

The war-ravaged Afghanistan chose Dushanbe as their home venue and the match will be played on artificial turf amid freezing temperatures. This has added to the woes of Stimac whose players are not used to these playing conditions. "It's very cold and mercury level drops to closer to sub-zero," Stimac said. "Moreover, the match is scheduled on an artificial turf which our players are not used to. Afghanistan have chosen the venue to make others' life difficult and we have an uphill task in front of us to overcome it," he added.

Live on Star Sports network: 7:30 pm

## Tough task for defending champ Joshi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
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THE LAST four winners including defending champion Khalin Joshi are in the field of 126 players at the Panasonic Open India, beginning here on Thursday. The tournament, which ventures out of the Delhi Golf Club for the first time, carries a purse of USD 400,000 and provides a great platform for home stars to make a breakthrough at the Asian Tour level. Six of the eight past champions had Panasonic Open India as their maiden wins, the only exception being SSP Chawrasia in 2014 and Shiv Kapur in 2017.

The six players who made the event their first wins include Anirban Lahiri (2011); Digvijay Singh (2012); Wade Ormsby (2013), also the only non-Indian to have won the event; Chiragh Kumar (2015); Mukesh Kumar (2016) and Khalin Joshi (2018).

Interestingly no player has won the tournament more than once, so as many as five players in this field will be looking at becoming the first repeat winner.

One of the highlights of the event will be the coming together of the 'Big Three' of Indian golf – Jeev Milkha Singh, Arjun Atwal and Jyoti Randhawa, who between the three of them have done great service to the sport in the country and the region. Randhawa, incidentally, will play his 300th Asian Tour event this week.

Another one looking for a landmark is Gaganjeet Bhullar, already the highest winner of Asian Tour titles at nine. He will attempt to become the first Indian to get into double digits.

When asked about him still looking for his first win at home, he remarked with a smile, "Thanks for reminding me of that. I've never won so far in India and last year was really good when I got my first European Tour win in Fiji."

Shiv Kapur, who won three events in 2017, Panasonic Open India being one of them, returned to form last week in Thailand, where he lost in a play-off.

Viraj Madappa, who broke through last year on Asian Tour and Ajeetesh Sandhu, who won in Taiwan in 2017 and has had a decent season, will also be among the players looking to add to their successes.

Youngsters like S Chikkarangappa, Aadil Bedi, Kshitij Naveed Kaul, Priyansh Singh and Abhijit Chadha among others are all searching for their maiden win on Asian Tour and this could be their week. Bangladeshi Siddikur Rahman, who has finished runner-up on three occasions at the Panasonic Open India, remains ever hopeful of making it count at the Classic Golf and Country Club this week.

His last Asian Tour win came in India at the Hero Indian Open in 2013, though he won an Asian Development Tour event in Dhaka last year.

## [SPORTS BAR]



### Prajnesh in Pune Challenger last 16

Led by Prajnesh Gunneswaran, India's top singles players progressed to the pre-quarterfinals with contrasting victories, but Saketh Myneni was knocked out of the KPIT-MSTLA Challenger after being in a position of strength here on Wednesday. Prajnesh needed just 49 minutes to demolish Chandril Sood 6-1 6-3 while third seed Sumit Nagal quelled a late challenge from Aryan Goveas to emerge a 6-3 7-6(5) winner in one hour and 16 minutes. Sixth seed Ramkumar Ramnathan hammered eight aces on his way to a 6-3 6-4 win over Greek player Markos Kalovelonis.

### FIFA hires ex-Arsenal manager Wenger

Former Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger has been appointed as FIFA's new chief of global football development, with the Frenchman set to oversee the growth of the sport plus technical matters, soccer's world governing body said on Wednesday. The 70-year-old was recently linked with the Bayern Munich job following the sacking of Niko Kovac but said that while he was approached he was never a candidate for the job. Wenger will be the leading authority on technical matters on FIFA's Football and Technical Advisory Panels involved in the International Football Association Board (IFAB) review and decision-making process on potential changes to the game's laws. He will also be the chair of a technical study group.



Dutee Chand won two silver medals at the 2018 Asian Games.

Express file

### Dutee named in TIME 100 Next list

India sprinter Dutee Chand has been named in the TIME 100 Next, an expansion of the TIME 100 list of the most influential persons in the world. The list, an initiative of TIME magazine, highlights 100 rising stars who are shaping the future of business, entertainment, sports, politics, health, science, activism etc. "I am delighted to receive this recognition from the TIME magazine. I believe in gender equality. I will continue to fight for the rights of young girls and women in sports as well as in the larger society," Dutee said in a statement. Dutee had won two silver medals – 100m, 200m – at Jakarta Asian Games and had become the first Indian woman sprinter to win gold at the Universiade in Napoli, where she competed in 100m. She was invited by the IAAF to compete at the women's 100m event at the Doha World Championships in September but could qualify for the semifinals, fading in the heats after clocking 11.48s.

### Spain great Villa to retire at end of season

Spain's all-time top scorer David Villa announced on Wednesday he is retiring from football at the end of the Japanese top flight season. Villa, who has been playing in Japan with Vissel Kobe since the beginning of this year, made the announcement with a statement on Twitter as well as calling a news conference. "After 19 years as a professional, I have decided to retire from playing football at the end of this season. Thank you to all the teams, coaches and teammates that have allowed me to enjoy this dream career," he wrote.



### Pooran banned for ball tampering

West Indies wicketkeeper-batsman Nicolas Pooran was on Wednesday handed a four-match suspension after admitting to ball-tampering in the third ODI against Afghanistan, an offence for which he also issued a public apology. Pooran will now miss the next four T20 Internationals for the West Indies and will have five demerit points added to his record. The game in question took place in Lucknow on Monday. "Nicolas Pooran has been handed four suspension points after admitting breaching level 3 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel..." the International Cricket Council said in a statement. Pooran admitted the offence on Tuesday and accepted the sanction proposed by match referee Chris Broad.