

## Sports too bitten by the Bug

The following is a list of international sports events affected by the coronavirus, which has killed over 420 people and infected more than 20,000 in China so far.

### ATHLETICS

The World Athletics Indoor Championships had been scheduled for Nanjing from March 13-15, were postponed until next year. World Athletics is working with organisers to settle on a date to host the biennial event in 2021.

■ The Asian Athletics Association cancelled its Feb. 12-13 indoor championships in Hangzhou.

### FOOTBALL

Asian Champions League matches involving Chinese clubs Guangzhou Evergrande, Shanghai Shenhua and Shanghai SIPG have been postponed. Guangzhou and the two Shanghai clubs will now join the competition in April, with their group matches due to be played by the end of May.

■ A four-team women's Olympic soccer qualifying tournament involving China, Australia, Taiwan and Thailand was moved from Wuhan and rearranged to be held in Australia by the AFC. Organisers were also forced to change the match schedule after China's team, which arrived in Australia on Jan. 29, was placed in quarantine in Brisbane until after Feb. 5.

### TENNIS

The ITF moved the Fed Cup Asia/Oceania Group I event featuring China, Taiwan, Indonesia, South Korea and Uzbekistan out of Dongguan to Nur-Sultan (formerly Astana) in Kazakhstan. But the Feb. 4-8 event was later postponed after Kazakhstan declined to serve as substitute hosts.

### BADMINTON

The Feb. 25 to March 1 China Masters tournament in Hainan was postponed after several players withdrew. The BWF said it hoped the flagship Badminton Asia C'ships could still go ahead in Wuhan from April 21-26.



Medical officers spray Indonesian nationals with antiseptic after they arrived from Wuhan. Reuters

### BOXING

The IOC announced Jordan as hosts of the boxing qualifiers for Asia and Oceania after an event in Wuhan was cancelled. It will now take place in Amman from March 3 to 11.

### BASKETBALL

The IBF moved the Feb. 6-9 Tokyo Olympics qualifiers to be held in Foshan to Belgrade.

### GOLF

■ The elite women's LPGA golf tour cancelled the March 5-8 Blue Bay tournament to be held on Hainan. The Hong Kong Ladies Open, scheduled to take place from Feb. 28-March 1, was postponed to May 8-10.

### ALPINE SKIING

■ Skiing's governing body cancelled the Feb. 15-16 World Cup in Yanqing.

### X-GAMES

■ The first winter X-Games scheduled to be held in China, in Hebei province from Feb. 21-23, was postponed.

### FUTSAL

■ The AFC Futsal C'ship that was scheduled to be held in Turkmenistan between Feb. 26 to March 8 has been postponed, with new dates to be announced later. REUTERS

# Ruthless Prajnesh goes for the skill

India's top singles player records first-ever ATP main draw win at home; Paes-Ebden in second round

SHAHID JUDGE  
PUNE, FEBRUARY 4

A HIGH ball toss, knees bent, then the spring-like leap upwards to meet the ball with the full face of his racquet. On the day, Prajnesh Gunneswaran's serve was effortlessly crossing the 190 kmph mark. It's one of his two biggest weapons. And in the early exchanges in the opening set of his match against Germany's Yannick Maden, at the Tata Open Maharashtra, it was near flawless.

But as the set went on at the Balewadi Tennis Stadium in Pune, at the most crucial of stages, that serve deserted him. He was serving for the set at 5-3, when two double faults helped the German break back – the second double fault coming when Prajnesh was facing break points.

Later at 5-5, he faced another break point. And that's when it was time for his other weapon, the forehand, to take over. An inside-out forehand drive found the German unable to put the ball back in play. That's how Prajnesh went on with his game, when the serve dwindled, the big left-handed forehand kicked in to win the point.

After an hour and 39 minutes of play, India's highest ranked singles player wrapped up the match with a 7-6(4), 7-6(5) win – his first ever main draw win at an ATP-level event in India.

The 30-year-old's performance was a stark contrast to the way he played the last time he was on court, in the first round loss at the Australian Open, against the world no 146 Tatsuma Ito. A wrist injury had already been nagging him before that match, but early in his Australian sojourn, the elbow too took a blow.

"That was really just because I hadn't played so much tennis. I was resting my wrist I just hadn't been serving so much," he had said on Sunday. "And then when I started to sort of go after the serve in the match, just tweaked something."

The serve was hampered, and the wrist injury forced him to play much flatter than he usually likes to – resulting in a high percentage of forehand errors. But all the machinery in his left playing arm was on sound on Tuesday.



Prajnesh Gunneswaran made the most of his big left-handed forehands during his 7-6(4), 7-6(5) win over Germany's Yannick Maden. Daniel Stephen

"I held up quite well with my wrist and elbow. Served well, used my forehand well," he says after his match. "It was much closer to my regular style. I am happy. I played a good match. I should have held serve at 5-3. It was my first bad game. Two double faults. The first was okay, but the second was bad. Shouldn't have happened."

But the weapons kicked in at the right time, and it was crucial that they did in the tiebreakers.

In the first set breaker, Prajnesh was down 3-0 but then won the next seven of eight points. In the second set breaker, Prajnesh entered a 20-plus shot rally with the score at 2-2 on Maden's serve. The world no 122 stayed

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on top, using the forehands to drill the ball into corners, playing a few backhands to keep in play, and then striking another forehand cross court that ended with the German scrambling a backhand slice into the net to concede the mini-break. A few shots later, a forehand winner – his 28th off both flanks in the match – secured the match.

The first time Prajnesh competed at the Indian ATP was back in the qualifying rounds of the Chennai Open in 2012. His second entry was again in the qualifiers in 2016, and he started at the same stage for the next two years. Last year he lost to American Michael Mmoh after getting a wild card to the main draw.

This time, though courtesy of a depleted foreign field, he made the main draw cut on merit. At the Australian Open he was guilty of wasting the chance of getting into the main draw as a lucky loser, and then losing to a lower ranked opponent.

But on Tuesday, he took full advantage of the opportunity.

**Paes-Ebden beat Sharan-Sitak in first round**

Leander Paes, in his farewell season, paired up with Australian Matthew Ebden for the first time in his career. And on the day that the 46-year-old played his first round match at India's only ATP tour, against Divij Sharan and Artem Sitak, it was the 32-year-old Australian who made the difference – helping his side win 6-2, 7-6.

Paes too had his moments at the net, but his most crucial contribution to the match was striking a 168kmph ace up the T, at 3-2 in the tiebreaker.

At 6-5 in the tiebreaker, he hit another well-angled serve straight to draw a weak return, that Ebden smashed to seal the match.

## I went viral for the wrong reasons: Jose

REUTERS  
FEBRUARY 4

TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR coach Jose Mourinho wants Premier League referees to use pitchside monitors to make more key decisions, but conceded on Tuesday that watching the same replays himself can push him over the edge.

A clip of Mourinho running to confront the fourth official after a video assistant referee (VAR) decision in Spurs' 2-0 win over Manchester City on Sunday has gone viral on social media, and the Portuguese said emotion got the best of him.

"I think the fact that now it is allowed to have the screen in front of us is not good for our emotions," Mourinho told a news conference ahead of Wednesday's FA Cup fourth-round replay against Southampton.

"We watch exactly the same (thing) as the VAR and... the referees don't see it as well as we can. My reaction was just based on being able to watch everything on the screen... but okay, I went viral for the wrong reasons."

Mourinho was unhappy when Raheem Sterling was shown a yellow card instead of red for a foul on Dele Alli and was further frustrated when the City forward escaped a second booking for simulation after City had missed a VAR-awarded penalty.

"I was immediately very upset that Sterling didn't get the red card and then that situation happened again and in one minute I was laughing and the next minute fuming," he said.

Mourinho said on-field referee Mike Dean should have taken the call on the penalty himself and that Sterling escaping the second booking after going down under slight contact from goalkeeper Hugo Lloris was another unacceptable VAR 'mistake'.

"In this moment, the referees that are in the pitch are not making the most important decisions of the game," he added. "I don't accept the mistakes by the video referee."

"When I play PlayStation I don't make mistakes, I only make mistakes when I'm on the touchline. The referee... can make mistakes and I have full respect for them because it is very, very difficult."

"When they have time on the VAR it is more difficult to accept and we are being punished, very punished by decisions of the VAR."

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JOSE MOURINHO  
ON HIS VIRAL TOUCHLINE CLIP

## He's not God: Verstappen wants to dethrone Hamilton

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE  
LONDON, FEBRUARY 4

RED BULL'S Max Verstappen says he can beat Lewis Hamilton to the Formula One title if his car is good enough, insisting Britain's six-time world champion is "not God".

The 22-year-old Dutchman could prove Hamilton's closest challenger this year, following Red Bull's strong finish to the end of last season.

Hamilton, 35, has dominated F1 in recent years, winning five of the past six championships, and will this year equal Michael Schumacher's record haul of seven titles if he secures another triumph.

But asked if he could beat Hamilton over the course of a season, Verstappen said: "Yes. Of course, it is very car-dependent in Formula One. Lewis is very good. He is definitely one of the best out there. He is not God, maybe God is with him, but he is not God. When you can put the pressure on it is a lot harder for the guy in the lead. If he never really has pressure, he can drive at 97 or 98 percent and then you never make mistakes."

"If we start the season within two-tenths (of a second of Mercedes), we can mount the pressure. I am looking forward to when we get that fight and if we are really close I am pretty sure we can do better."

Verstappen, speaking at a Red Bull media event on Monday, resisted the lure of a move to either Mercedes or Ferrari by committing his long-term future to Red Bull with a four-year contract extension.

Hamilton's next move is uncertain, with his Mercedes deal set to expire at the end of the year. "It is a good thing my future is sorted because it takes away any doubt," said Verstappen, who won three times last year and finished third in the championship behind Hamilton and his Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas.

"There are no question marks any more. When you go into a season and your contract is up at the end of the year, at one point it is going to be a bit awkward. I didn't want

## Ron's no-show to pinch Korean promoter

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE  
SEOUL, FEBRUARY 4

A SOUTH Korean court ordered a local promoter Tuesday to compensate fans for Cristiano Ronaldo's no-show at a friendly match in Seoul last year.

The Juventus star stayed on the bench throughout a 3-3 draw with a K-League all-stars team at the Seoul World Cup Stadium in July, despite rounds of appeals from a sell-out crowd of 65,000.

Match promoter The Fasta had run adverts heavily featuring the Portuguese striker. Tickets – priced from 30,000 won (\$25) to 400,000 won – sold out in less than three



Max Verstappen finished third in the championship behind Hamilton and his teammate Bottas last season.

minutes, with many eager to see the 34-year-old superstar in action.

Two fans sued The Fasta, accusing it of false advertising, and the Incheon District Court ruled the promoter should pay them 371,000 won each, the South's Yonhap news agency reported.

No order was made against Ronaldo or his club. South Korean fans' frustration has led to the coining of an online phrase, "acting like Ronaldo", to criticise someone who only seeks benefits without fulfilling promised action.

"If he had played just for 10 minutes, everyone would have walked home happy," one user wrote on the country's largest portal site Naver.