



SPINMEISTER

SANITISER, NOT GIN

Shane Warne's distillery has started manufacturing hand sanitiser instead of gin to make up for the shortage of the alcohol-based solution

# Tokyo Games could be delayed, but too early to cancel: Coe

REUTERS LONDON, MARCH 19

World Athletics chief Sebastian Coe said on Thursday that moving the 2020 Tokyo Olympics to September or October due to the coronavirus outbreak was a possibility but it was too soon to take a decision on whether to cancel the Games.

While most of world sport has come to a standstill due to the pandemic, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has remained committed to staging the Tokyo Games as planned from July 24-Aug. 9 despite growing dissent. "Let's not make a precipitous decision when we don't have to four months out," Coe told BBC Sport.

"If you had to ease that date, you'd have to ease it. It's possible, anything is possible," he added when asked if the Games could be moved to September or October. Events are changing by the hour but it is not a decision that has to be made at the moment. We're trying to manage the situation with the information we have but there is not a great deal of information," he added.

"The temperature in the room with the IOC is, nobody is saying we're going to the Games come what may."

Europe has become the new epicentre of the flu-like virus that originated in China late last year and restrictions on movement in several nations have hit the training plans of athletes ahead of Games. IOC president Thomas Bach said they heard athletes' concerns on health and preparation but Coe said ensuring a level playing field for athletes during preparations may not be possible but it is a challenge World Athletics will strive to overcome.

"Recent evidence suggests China seems to be pulling out of this but if you're living in Europe, you're an Italian distance runner and you're confined to your house, that's a massive challenge," Coe told The Times. "Our sport has always been about fairness and a level playing field so we shouldn't feel ashamed to set that as our ambition. The reality is that may not be possible in every case but we want to do what we can to drill down on that." "Some are not able to train properly, some are not able to access public tracks or indoor facilities and we're working to try and help them find these facilities."

The virus has infected nearly 219,000 people globally and caused more than 8,900 deaths so far, sparking concerns over the viability of the Games.

Coe, the driving force behind the success of London 2012 as chairman of the organising committee, said the problem faced by the Tokyo Games was bigger than the mass boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics.

"I lived through Moscow and that was a crisis... This has probably exercised more thinking time and expended more effort for federations than anything I can remember," Coe added. We're doing everything we possibly can to get our sport and our athletes into the best possible shape through a challenging time and get to an Olympic Games."

## Olympic leaders back IOC's Tokyo stance

Regional Olympic officials are rallying around the IOC and have backed its stance on opening the Tokyo Games as scheduled, as direct criticism from gold medalist athletes built amid the coronavirus outbreak.

Leaders of continental Olympic groups praised the IOC after a conference call Wednesday to update them on coronavirus issues four months before the opening ceremony in Tokyo on July 24.

"We are living through an unpredictable crisis and as such, it is important that we have one policy, expressed by the IOC, and we follow that policy in unison," the Italy-based

## HARD TALK



**Let's not make a precipitous decision when we don't have to four months out. If you had to ease that date, you'd have to ease it. It's possible, anything is possible. Events are changing by the hour but it is not a decision that has to be made at the moment.**

SEBASTIAN COE  
WORLD ATHLETICS PRESIDENT

**I think, in the present scenario, with the health scares and all the travel restrictions and all, it is a tough time and at the moment the whole world is thinking about health and safety for its citizens, so I think given the situation it is better if the Games is postponed.**



PULLELA GOPICHAND  
CHIEF BADMINTON NATIONAL COACH

**The IOC wants us to keep risking our health, our family's health and public health to train every day?"**



KATERINA STEFANIDI,  
2016 OLYMPIC POLE VAULT CHAMPION

European Olympic Committees said.

However, when the International Olympic Committee published an interview with its president, Thomas Bach, after a separate call with athlete representatives, it prompted a four-time Olympic champion to urge postponing the games.

Bach acknowledged that many athletes were concerned about qualifying events being canceled, but noted that there were still four months to go until the games are set to be opened. "We will keep acting in a responsible way in the interests of the athletes," Bach said.

British rowing great Matthew Pinsent wrote on Twitter that the comments from Bach, his former IOC colleague, were "tone deaf."

"The instinct to keep safe (not to mention obey govt instructions to lock down) is not compatible with athlete training, travel and focus that a looming Olympics demands of athletes, spectators organisers," Pinsent wrote. "Keep them safe. Call it off."

One of the IOC's 100 members had earlier broken ranks in a rare public criticism of the body's unwavering strategy.

# AFI's GP stopped in its tracks

Ministry asks federations to hold off events and trials till April 15; javelin throwers in quarantine

NIHAL KOSHIE  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

SOME OF India's top javelin throwers, including Neeraj Chopra, and coaches have been put in quarantine rooms for 14 days at the National Institute of Sports in Patiala. The deputy chief coach of the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) has isolated himself for a fortnight.

At least two national campers were told by NIS officials to leave the premises on Thursday though the AFI had asked them to travel to Patiala from their respective training bases for the first leg of the Indian Grand Prix.

At a time when the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has resulted in either the cancellation or postponement of many sports event, including Olympic qualifiers, the AFI over the past week was adamant on its events calendar.

That was till Thursday when the sports ministry in a bid to stop federations like the AFI from conducting national competitions or selection trials issued more stringent restrictions.

All national sports federations were told not to conduct 'tournaments and selection trials' till April 15. Olympic-bound athletes are also to be isolated from anyone not a part of their training camp, the advisory stated. The AFI informed coaches and athletes about the cancellation of the Indian GP. However, there was no official announcement of the event being called off.

The Federation Cup, a qualification event for the Tokyo Olympics, which was scheduled to be held from April 10 to 13 also stands canceled.

When social isolation, self-quarantine and medical screening is being followed across the country and new cases of Coronavirus are being reported daily, the AFI had earlier this week announced that the first and second legs of the Indian Grand Prix series will be held in Patiala on March 20 and 25.

This decision was taken after taking internal feedback from coaches and officials. Spectators were barred though. The AFI accepted over 175 entries from athletes across the country — among them those who would have to take different modes of transport to reach NIS and compete in the same arena as the national campers.

The next day, better sense prevailed and the AFI restricted participation of the Indian GP to national campers and some of the events for men and women were culled. There was no talk of cancellation.

A day later some of India's top javelin throwers, including Neeraj Chopra, Shivpal Singh and Annu Rani returned from their respective training bases in Turkey and South Africa, along with foreign coaches, and headed to the NIS. In 24 hours, they were transferred to 'quarantine rooms'.

## Travel pangs

Sprinter Dutee Chand, who is part of the national camp, left Bhubaneswar and travelled to Patiala. Another national camper too moved out of his training base in Kerala and arrived in Patiala. Both travelled only after checking with the federation if they should.

Both athletes, stayed overnight at the NIS, but were told by officials to head back home on Thursday.

The Indian GP was scheduled to go ahead as planned by the AFI even while its deputy chief coach Radhakrishnan Nair has been in self-quarantine for a week at the NIS. Nair completed the round trip from Patiala-Chandigarh-Trivandrum but on return was suffering from a cough and cold. He is not the only one whose movements have been restricted. Bio-mechanics expert Dr Klaus Bartonietz is also in self-quarantine.



Neeraj Chopra and fellow javelin throwers Shivpal Singh and Annu Rani returned from their respective training bases in Turkey and South Africa, along with foreign coaches, and headed to the National Institute of Sports in Patiala. In 24 hours, they were transferred to 'quarantine rooms'. File

## THE NIS LOCKDOWN

■ AFI cancels Indian GP on the eve of the event after sports ministry asks all federations not to conduct events and selection trials till April 15.

■ Star javelin throwers, including Neeraj Chopra, Shivpal Singh and Annu Rani moved to quarantine rooms at the National Institute of Sports in Patiala. They are likely to be in self-quarantine for two weeks after returning from training centres in South Africa and Turkey.

■ Bio-mechanics expert Dr Klaus Bartonietz is also in quarantine. He coaches Chopra.

■ AFI's deputy chief coach Radhakrishnan Nair has been in self-quarantine at NIS for a week. He had developed a cough and cold.

■ Star sprinter Dutee Chand, who is part of the national camp but trains in Bhubaneswar, asked to leave NIS. She is returning to her home state.

For athletes such as Dutee, who travelled to Patiala after checking with the federation, the eleventh hour cancellation has been nothing short of a nightmare. On Thursday evening, Dutee travelled from Patiala to Delhi by road from where she will take a flight back to Bhubaneswar on Friday morning.

"Before leaving for Patiala on Wednesday, I had checked with the Athletics Federation of India if it was advisable to travel. I was told the Indian GP would happen as per schedule. On arrival in Patiala, I was screened and I stayed in the hostel. But today (Thursday) I was told by NIS officials to leave the premises immediately. Now I have to head back all the way to Bhubaneswar. I understand the current situation with the Coronavirus pandemic and was surprised that the Indian GP was being held in the first place," Dutee said.

Another athlete who did not want to be quoted said: "The AFI's argument is that the Olympics have not been canceled so the Indian GP should be held. But they should have been more sensitive to the issue. The Olympic qualification period is open till the end of June, so national events could have been conducted if and when the health situation in the country improved," the athlete said.

## Fed Cup in May

According to an AFI official, the Federation Cup could be held in late May or early June if the Olympics are not canceled by then. Sports secretary Radhey Shyam Julaniya said the new instructions issued on Thursday was done to ensure that national federations cancelled selection trials.

"In the earlier advisory, we had said a sporting event could be held without spectators. But since then, the situation has evolved and we have had to take new measures. Quite a few domestic tournaments and selection trials were being planned. So as a precaution, we have now issued a new advisory and advised that no sporting event be held till April 15," Julaniya said.

AFI president Adille Sumariwalla said "our aim is to keep our athletes safe and also get athletes ready for the Olympic Games which are as of today on schedule."

# NRAI postpones all coaching camps, meetings

New Delhi: In line with a government directive, the National Rifle Association of India on Thursday postponed its Olympic selection committee meeting and all coaching camps scheduled for April owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. The selection committee meeting was planned for Friday.

"In view of the outbreak of COVID-19 and as per recent directions received from the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, the National Rifle Association of India has decided to postpone its Olympic selection committee meeting scheduled for Friday, March 20, as well as all coaching camps proposed in April 2020, till further directives received," the sports body said in a statement. The sports ministry had earlier in the day advised all national federations to refrain from conducting tournaments and selection trials till April 15 besides asking them to ensure that Olympic-bound athletes are isolated from anyone who is not a part of their training camp.

"The health of our athletes, coaches and administrative staff are of paramount importance to us," NRAI president Raninder Singh said in the statement.

"We urge all Olympic bound shooters and national coaches to refrain from coming to the range till further notice and request they continue with their respective training schedules from their home bases, as best as they can. The senior coaches are also specifically requested to refrain from travel. These are trying times, but we should ensure that we do not lose focus of the larger goal. We wish them all the very best and the pink of health." PTI

## EXPERT OPINION

# Why stronger bodies don't imply better immunity against the virus

SHIVANI NAIK  
MUMBAI, MARCH 19

TILL THE Kevin Durant positive turned up and news of a 21-year-old football coach losing his life scrolled on timelines, a hooper - not named here - remained under the false hope that as high-functioning, fit athletes, sportspersons were somehow not vulnerable to contract the Covid-19. Talk of higher immunity and a stronger body (better lung capacity) had lulled many into believing that the Coronavirus was something that struck only those who were very old or very young or with lungs compromised owing to various health ailments.

Dr Nikhil Latey who has trained a bunch of Olympians over the years, says this false sense of invincibility common among sportspersons is "utter rubbish" in the face of the leveler virus. A bunch of footballers and now NBA stars have been affected, proving that fear of exposure even to the fittest of bodies, is very real. Dr Latey clears some doubts:

## Are sportspersons' immunities a better shield against the Covid-19?

Utter nonsense. This sort of thinking is

not of the brightest of minds. Nor are all sportspersons the most hygienic of people inhabiting the most hygienic spaces. But to be clear, there is no natural immunity against the Covid-19. The human body has no clear idea yet, of how to deal with this. Of course, fit athletes will not suffer the worst of it.

They might show fewer dire symptoms and even feel fine-ish. Which can make them even more dangerous carriers of the virus and put their families at risk. So even if they don't end up on a ventilator, this is no time to boast about how strong and immune a sportsperson is. Everyone is vulnerable. Everyone needs to take utmost precautions and follow protocol.

## Are the contact sports the riskiest?

There are various complications - boxers and wrestlers also undergo crash weight losses which definitely impacts immunity, so they might not be as strong or hydrated as they think. Boxers wipe their sweat, their gum shields get handled by their corners to wash. Badminton courts are enclosed spaces and not the cleanest and there can be sweat on the floor. Spit flies in boxing.

Shooters need to be very very careful



**Shooters need to be very very careful about their equipment. They need to start washing their inners far more regularly. While swimming pools have chlorine, you don't know. For that sort of a virus, you'll really need to up the chlorine levels which might cause discomfort to the swimmers.**

NIKHIL LATEY,  
DOCTOR, WHO HAS WORKED WITH OLYMPIANS

about their equipment. And they need to start washing their inners far more regularly. While swimming pools have chlorine, you don't know. For that sort of a virus, you'll really need to up the chlorine levels which might cause discomfort to the swimmers.

## So what can those who are training for Olympics still do?

There's no harm in running. And shadows. You have to be very careful about the equipment you use in the gym and ensure it is disinfected and not used by multiple people. You can't be touching others' equipment. We need to decide what's best way forward for those that have already qualified. In fact we need to isolate our qualifiers and not expose them to several people. So if Sindhu wants to train, it has to be just her, a coach, a couple of sparring partners and not a room full of people. In shooting, a maximum of 4 should train on a range, spaced wide apart between lanes. You can't have a training hall with 40 kids. You have to reduce their man-to-man contact to absolutely minimum. Clean all

gear with Sterillium and keep phones clean. It is best to wash hands with soap to clear nailheads and lines of the hand along with the alcohol-based sanitisers.

## What are the risks to sportspeople even if the infection might not lead to morbidity?

Look, they might not see the worst of it - and it might be just a fever and cough. But it can affect athletic performance bigtime. There's 4 months for the Olympics - assuming it goes ahead on time - even losing a month can be the difference between a silver and a 4th place. So athletes need to be clear if they are not extremely careful there is every chance of them getting infected. It might be a mild condition. But don't forget these are elite athletes. As an athlete, their entire life is about high performance. That can get blunted.

For ordinary people like you or me, we can just rest it out sitting at home if it's mild. For Olympic-bound athletes, this is about tiniest of margins and even one month lost is a big problem. So wherever possible, they should isolate and not take

