

# Flame lands in Japan, sparks deferment debate

Sports bodies in USA, France, Norway, Brazil along with Jamaica's sprints and American swimming coach call for the 2020 Olympics to be postponed

MARTYN HERMAN  
LONDON, MARCH 21

CALLS FROM sporting organisations for this year's Tokyo Olympics to be postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic gathered pace on Saturday with USA Track and Field (USATF) and Brazil's Olympic Committee the latest to join the throng.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and Tokyo 2020 organisers still insist the July 24-Aug. 9 showpiece will go ahead as planned despite Europe and the US struggling to control the spread of the flu-like virus.

Their optimism that the show will go on, however, is looking increasingly out-of-step with countries in lockdown and athletes around the world unable to train.

In a letter to United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee (USOPC) chief executive Sarah Hirshland, USATF urged USOPC to use its voice to "speak up for athletes".

Chief executive Max Siegel said the USTAF "understood" the ramifications of postponing the Games for the first time ever in peace time, but that moving forward would not be in the best interest of athletes.

"We acknowledge that there are no perfect answers, and that this is a very complex and difficult decision, but this position (to postpone the Games) at least provides our athletes with the comfort of knowing that they will have adequate time to properly prepare themselves physically, mentally and emotionally to be able to participate in a safe and successful Olympic Games," he wrote. USA Swimming wrote to USOPC on Friday calling for a delay of one year, CEO Tim Hinchey saying "we have watched our athletes' worlds be turned upside down".

The chairman of UK Athletics said last week the Olympics should be called off to spare athletes the stress of trying to train in the grip of a pandemic which has killed around 12,000 people since the virus surfaced in China.

Brazil's Olympic chief Paulo Wanderley echoed those thoughts on Saturday, saying athletes would not be able to arrive in Tokyo in top form because of the impact of the crisis.

"It's clear that right now, maintaining the Games for this year will impede (the athletes) dream from being realised," he said.

## Political boycotts

Suggesting a year's delay, he said the IOC was experienced in dealing with obstacles, cit-



Olympics organisers land in Tokyo with the flame on Friday. The Torch Relay is scheduled to start Thursday from Fukushima. AP

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ing the cancellations in 1916, 1940 and 1944 because of World Wars and the political boycotts of the Games in Moscow in 1980 and Los Angeles in 1984.

Norway's Sports Federation and Olympic and Paralympic Committee (NIF) said it had written to IOC chief Thomas Bach calling for the Games to be postponed, even if the pan-

demic is under control in Japan by the summer. "Given the highly unresolved situation in Norway and in large parts of the world, it is neither justifiable or desirable to send Norwegian athletes to the Olympics or Paralympics in Tokyo until the world community has put this pandemic behind them," sports president Berit Kjøll said.

The Sport and Rights Alliance (SRA) and the World Players Association (WPA) said a "deep review and broader consultation" with athletes was required regarding the decision over whether the Games could run as planned.

## Move everything: Bolt coach

Usain Bolt's long time coach called on Friday for this year's Tokyo Olympics to be put off until 2021 as the Covid-19 Coronavirus continues to claim lives around the world.

"My recommendation would be to postpone the Olympics until next year," Jamaica sprint coach Glen Mills told Reuters in a telephone interview. "This would be unprecedented, but we are in unprecedented time. Move everything up one year and then everything will eventually fall back in place."

"But I don't think that the Olympics will take place at the time that is specified (July and August) because the outbreak is worldwide and in some countries, it is just starting to accelerate. "I can't see the Olympics going ahead; taking persons from all over the world and bringing them to one central point."

Mills, who coached the now retired Bolt to eight Olympic gold medals and 11 world championship titles, said his current athletes at the Racers Track Club have been unable to train since Wednesday.

## SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

# How long before IOC takes a concrete call on the Games

THE OLYMPIC flame has arrived in Japan from Greece. Next comes the torch relay around the country, which is scheduled to start on Thursday in northern Japan. Getting the flame to Japan represents a minor victory for both organizers and the IOC. Its symbolic presence could give the IOC space to postpone the Tokyo Olympics, leaving the symbol behind as a reminder of what's still to come.



Hayley Wickenheiser, a four-time gold medalist from Canada, called IOC 'insensitive and irresponsible'.

## What is the deadline for making a final decision?

Bach surely knows, but he is not saying. In an interview with The New York Times Bach said "cancellation is not on the agenda." That leaves only going ahead, or postponement, as the options. Empty venues seem to have been ruled out.

## Who will make the final decision?

It will be made jointly with the IOC, the city of Tokyo, and the Japanese Olympic Committee. They are the three that signed the 81-page Host City Agreement, which spells out in enormous details all games contingencies. The IOC has all the leverage, though it will have to honour WHO suggestions and the interests of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

## Who is pushing back?

The most recent pushback has come from USA Swimming and USA Track and Field, each having called on the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee to push for a postponement. Swimming executive Tim Hinchey said that the 'authenticity of a level playing field' would be under question, along with significant mental health and wellness questions to be answered.

IOC member Hayley Wickenheiser, a four-time gold medalist from Canada, called IOC 'insensitive and irresponsible' in its attempts to carry forward their Tokyo Games'

plans. On the Japan side, Japanese Olympic Committee member Kaori Yamaguchi told the newspaper Nikkei that the IOC "is putting athletes at risk." Yamaguchi is a former Olympic bronze medalist in judo. "Even if there is a reason that prevents the IOC from making a decision right now, (the IOC) should indicate a deadline."

Olympic committees in Norway and Brazil are also asking for delays.

## How important is the torch relay to the IOC and local organizers?

Its important symbolism for the Japanese government and Prime Minister Abe. Abe hopes to use the Olympics to argue that the Fukushima area has recovered from the disaster nine years ago. The government has dubbed these "The Recovery Olympics." However, many residents are still living in temporary quarters after the earthquake, tsunami and meltdown of three nuclear reactors in 2011. Getting the relay started from Fukushima also helps major IOC sponsors Coca-Cola and Toyota, who pay millions to give their brands exposure during the relay.

# A City United: Rival clubs unite to help food banks

Manchester City, Manchester United donate £100,000 to a trust, join a host of clubs to help their communities in the aftermath of the coronavirus outbreak

**REACHING OUT TO 1,200 FOOD BANKS**  
Manchester United and Manchester City are the latest Premier League clubs to spring into action to help their communities during the coronavirus pandemic, joining forces to donate 100,000 pounds to support local food banks. Responding to an initiative already run by fans of both clubs, City and United will donate 50,000 pounds each to the Trussell Trust, a support network of more than 1,200 food banks. Aston Villa distributed 1,000 packed lunches intended for matchday staff at their postponed game with Chelsea to local homeless organisations and sheltered accommodation units. Newcastle United also donated 1,200 pies and a range of cold meals to a food bank after last weekend's postponed match. Brighton and Hove Albion are ringing self-isolating elderly fans to offer support.

**CHINESE STAR TESTS POSITIVE**  
Chinese football star Wu Lei, who plays for Espanyol in Spain, has been diagnosed with the coronavirus, the Chinese Football Association (CFA) said on Saturday. "Wu Lei has mild symptoms and is currently undergoing treatment," the CFA said, adding that they had been given the news by La Liga strugglers Espanyol. "CFA has maintained close communication with Wu Lei and the club, and will provide all necessary assistance as appropriate. We wish Wu Lei a speedy recovery." The 28-year-old striker, China's best-known player, is in self-isolation at home in

Barcelona, Xinhua news agency said. Wu is the only Chinese playing in one of Europe's five top leagues.

**DOPING CONTROL FACING CHALLENGES**  
The coronavirus pandemic is restricting the fight against anti-doping, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has said while issuing new guidelines to continue testing of athletes ahead of the Tokyo Olympic Games. WADA said sample collection officials must be healthy and have no symptoms related to the virus and should be provided with protective medical equipment. If testing opportunities are limited due to local restrictions, ADOs should focus on targeted athletes from high risk sports and disciplines, WADA said. The governing body also urged ADOs to remind athletes they can still be tested at any place and any time and continue to provide whereabouts for their movements to be monitored.

**KICKBOXING MATCH LEADS TO SPIKE**  
Kickboxing aficionados came from all over Thailand to attend a major Muay Thai match at Bangkok's indoor Lumpini Stadium on March 6. Dozens or more went home unknowingly carrying the coronavirus. The wayward boxing fans led an inevitable rise in infections this month. As of Friday, confirmed cases from three boxing stadiums in Bangkok totaled 72, more than a fifth of the national toll of 322. It's feared hundreds more in all corners of the country could be viral time bombs.



## HAMILTON SELF-ISOLATING AS PRECAUTION

Six-time Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton says he is self-isolating but will not get tested for coronavirus as others need attention more than him. The 35-year-old Briton said he decided to self-isolate because he had been at the same function in London that actor Idris Elba and Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's wife Sophie Gregoire-Trudeau attended earlier this month. Elba and Gregoire-Trudeau subsequently both tested positive. "I want to let you know that I am doing well," Hamilton said. "There has been speculation about my health, after I was at an event where two people later tested positive for coronavirus. "I have zero symptoms and it has now been 17 days since I saw Sophie and Idris. I have been in touch with Idris and happy to hear he is OK."

# Lower-division football clubs worst hit

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
MADRID, MARCH 21

A SPANISH third-division soccer team had just started selling a special membership package for the decisive portion of the season, hoping to bring in some extra income. Another was counting on the boost from revenue on the back of ticket sales for the upcoming derby against a regional rival, one of its biggest matches of the season.

They were not expecting the coronavirus outbreak, nor to see soccer come to a halt. The suspension of competitions across the globe has taken a toll on top teams everywhere, but it will be for the smaller clubs that the financial impact may cause the most damage.

While the stoppage has already forced some teams in the major leagues to cut play-

ers' salaries, the effect of the crisis on lower-division clubs may be even more dire, lasting longer and possibly leading to financial collapse. "Every team in the third division will suffer serious consequences," Franco Caselli, president of Spanish third-division club Burgos, told The Associated Press. "Some more than others, depending on their economic situation."

In most countries, there are no lucrative television broadcast deals for teams outside the first and second divisions. Their income comes mostly from ticket sales, small sponsors, team merchandising, season memberships and youth academy memberships \_ most of which have been affected by the suspension of games.

Caselli said Burgos, one of the bigger clubs in Spain's third division, is doing well financially and should be able to withstand the crisis, but not without losses. "We had put

on sale a special membership package for the last matches of the league, and more than 1,000 had already been sold," he said. "That was a 20 percent increase in new memberships at this stage, so the losses will be important."

Merida, also in Spain's third tier, was looking to pack its 14,600-capacity stadium for the derby against Badajoz just before it was suspended because of the outbreak, jeopardizing one of its biggest revenue sources of the season. Fourth-division club Sant Andreu, which plays in a Barcelona neighborhood at a small stadium where players' errant shots can go over the stands and onto the nearby streets, estimated a 30 percent deficit from the current stoppage of play.

"We are facing the unknown," Manuel Camino, president and owner of the club, told the AP. "We don't know how long this will last."

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