

I just think the Premier League should be void. I know there's going to be a lot of Liverpool fans going: 'oh, Rio, just because you used to play for Man United.' I just don't see a way that can be done where health isn't compromised."

RIO FERDINAND

Pulling the plug: The WHO and why behind the Games rescheduling

From insisting the Games will go on to setting a four-week deadline to decide fate before eventually delaying, the IOC has rapidly changed its stance on Tokyo 2020 following the outbreak of the pandemic. Here are the reasons that led to the postponement. MIHIR VASAVDA explains.

WHO's 'alarming information'

IOC president Thomas Bach said government guidelines, imposing restrictions on daily life till April, and even USA president Donald Trump's target of lifting restrictions by 'middle of April' was among the reasons he waited to postpone the Tokyo Games. Amid mounting pressure, he then called an emergency meeting of the IOC executive board on Sunday, which agreed to open discussions with Japan over postponement and scheduled a call for Tuesday. In the hours after the IOC meeting, further "alarming information" emerged about the rapid global spread of the virus. This development, combined with Monday's WHO warning that the spread was "accelerating," meant the IOC opted to push for consensus to postpone the Games. The WHO's advice, Bach said, 'was a crucial moment' in their decision making.

Empty seats

The possibility of holding the Olympics behind closed doors was never seriously considered but there was an underlying concern of the stadiums not being filled to capacity during the Games. "Hide the empty seats" is a popular dictate in the TV sports industry, something executives remind producers and directors about all the time. It's based on the idea that if only so many fans turned up in the stands, why would a viewer bother to watch? The Associated Press noted. The IOC, many believe, would have found it difficult to allay the safety concerns and there was a risk that several athletes, officials, spectators and even sponsors would have stayed away from the Olympics if it would have gone ahead as scheduled. A poorly attended event would have reflected badly on the hosts as well.



Playing in an empty stadium was one of the reasons behind the postponement.

Qualification quagmire

With nearly every sport suspending play in the wake of the pandemic, more than

two-thirds of the 11,000 potential Olympians from 200 countries had not yet qualified. With a majority of athletes unable

to train, and given that there is still no clarity as to when the situation will get normal for play to resume, there were suggestions that quotas would be distributed according to the latest world rankings or, in some cases, based on performances in the previous Olympics. That would have made the entire process arbitrary and created further complications. Many even argued that it would dilute the playing field. Postponing the Games by a year gives the respective sports federations enough time to work out strategies to finish their qualification process. More light on this is expected to be shed on Thursday, when the IOC holds a conference call with international federations.

Abe's crowning glory

The Games, many commentators say, were expected to be the 'crowning glory' of

Shinzo Abe's nine-year period as Japan's Prime Minister. He is Japan's longest-serving Prime Minister in history and has actively promoted the Tokyo Olympics, even dressing up as Super Mario in the closing ceremony of the Rio Games. Like they used the 1964 Games to rightful place on the international stage following the ignominy of Second World War, Abe—according to The Times—'had been banking on Tokyo 2020 to mark a similar moment of recovery from the tsunami and nuclear disaster in 2011'. Abe was faced with the choice of delaying the Games or cancelling, which would have caused a massive economic impact.

As per the rules of his political party, Abe is due to retire in September 2021. "Is this why he and Mr Bach agreed that the postponed Games will be held no later than the 'summer' of next year?" The Times wondered.

Calendar congestion: The logistical nightmare that could be 2021



Lionel Messi will end up playing the COPA and WC qualifiers in 2021.

WITH THE sporting calendar for the 2020 season being disrupted by the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, several major events of this year have been shifted to the following season. Only, the 2021 calendar is already packed with major sporting events, some of which will have to be moved to make way for the postponed 2020 tournaments. SHAHID JUDGE looks into the window of June to August, where a majority of these events are set to take place.

THE ADDITIONS

Three major events from the 2020 year have been postponed to the following year. The Copa America, South America's continental football championship, which was to be hosted in Argentina and Colombia this time, will take place from June 11 to July 11. On the same dates, what was to be the Euro 2020, or the European Championships, will take place in 12 different countries across Europe.

Meanwhile, the biggest spectacle of 2020, the Olympic Games in Tokyo, has also been shifted to the summer of 2021. Though the new dates for the Games have not yet been confirmed, it is assumed that it may take place in the same window that was prepared for it in 2020—July 24 to August 9.

COLLATERAL DAMAGE

Now that the Olympics will take place in 2021 (assuming between July 24—August 9), four major events will be forced to reschedule. The World Aquatics Championships were originally scheduled for July 16 to August 1 in Fukuoka, Japan, and the World Athletics Championships were to be held in the United States from August 6 to August

15. Both these events, however, will have to be moved as all the big names in the two disciplines will be competing at the Olympics in Tokyo at the same time. Similarly, the Euro Hockey Nations, which was to take place in The Netherlands in August, will have to change its dates since the major hockey nations will be competing in Tokyo at the time.

From July 7 to August 1, England was to host the Women's 2021 European Championships, but now that the men's edition from 2020 will be held at the same time, and since women's senior teams will be competing at the Olympics, the women's Euros will have to be rescheduled.

THE UNAFFECTED

Tennis Grand Slams French Open (May 23 to June 6), Wimbledon (June 28 to July 11) and the US Open (August 30 to September 12) will take place in the June to August window, without any hindrance from the shifted 2020 events. The United States will also host the 2021 CONCACAF Gold Cup (continental championships) from July 2 to July 25. In September, the European Basketball Championships, or EuroBasket, will take place from September 2 to 19 in Germany, Italy, Georgia and Czech Republic.

The latter nation, however, may opt out of hosting the event as the country is contemplating shutting its borders for two years as a precaution against the coronavirus. Meanwhile, no dates have been fixed yet for the men's boxing World Championship, which is to be held in New Delhi, but the event in the past has been held in the past between August and November.

Spring in their step

IOC has left the door open for the Games to be staged in spring instead of the normal summer slot

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
TOKYO, MARCH 25

Japan set about the unprecedented task of reorganising the Tokyo 2020 Olympics Wednesday after making the tough decision to postpone the Games by a year as the coronavirus pandemic locks down one third of the planet. The dramatic step to shift the Olympics, never before seen in peacetime, upends every aspect of the organisation including venues, security, ticketing and accommodation.

It is not even clear exactly when the rescheduled Games will take place. International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach on Wednesday left the door open for them to be staged in the spring instead of the normal summer slot. "This is not restricted just to the summer months," Bach said in a conference call.

"All the options are on the table, before and including the summer of 2021." In a move symbolic of the difficulties, Olympic countdown clocks in Tokyo switched from displaying the number of days to go to simply show today's date and the time.

"It's like taking seven years to build the world's biggest jigsaw puzzle and, with just one piece to go, having to start again but now with less time to finish," tweeted Craig Spence, spokesman for the International Paralympic Committee.

Japan has framed Tokyo 2020 as the "Recovery Games"—a chance to show the world it has bounced back from the "triple disaster" in 2011 when a massive earthquake sparked a tsunami and the Fukushima nuclear meltdown. The delayed event—still to be called Tokyo 2020—will now be a "testament to mankind's defeat of the new virus", said Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. He repeated that message in a call with US President Donald Trump, in which the leaders agreed the Games would be "proof that humans have beaten the new coronavirus", a Japanese government spokesman said. The Olympic flame "could become the light at the end of the tunnel in which the world finds itself at present", Japan and the IOC said in a joint statement.

Way bigger than me: Bach

The quadrennial Olympics, which has weathered boycotts, terrorist attacks and protests, is the highest-profile event affected by the virus that has killed thousands and postponed or cancelled sports competitions worldwide. The IOC had come under fire for appearing out of touch by sticking to its schedule, but it eventually bowed to the in-



IOC chief Thomas Bach said that a task-force, named 'Here We Go', has been created to examine the scheduling woes. File

evitable, citing the need to protect the health of athletes. Bach said the postponement was "about protecting human life", with more than 11,000 athletes expected along with 90,000 volunteers, and hundreds of thousands of officials and spectators from all over the world.

He said that the postponed Tokyo Games would require "sacrifices and compromises" from all sides to make them work. "These postponed Olympic Games will need sacrifices, will need compromises by all of the stakeholders," Bach told reporters in a conference call the day after the IOC decided to delay the 2020 Games because of the coronavirus pandemic. The IOC's role, Bach said, was "to make the Olympic dreams of athletes come true".

Spring of hope

The Olympic torch relay, due to begin from Fukushima Thursday, has also been postponed but the flame will stay in the area until it is safe to begin. Organisers have to wrestle with a host of unanswered questions: are the venues still available? What

to do with ticket-holders and volunteers? How to fit the Games into a crowded 2021 sporting schedule? The athlete's village was due to be renovated into more than 4,000 luxury apartments, hundreds of which have already been snapped up. Tens of thousands of hotel rooms will need to be cancelled and rebooked. "I cannot tell you what the situation is," Bach said when asked about how the postponement might affect the village.

"It's one of the many thousand of questions the taskforce has to address." Japan and the organising committee were spending \$12.6 billion on the Games and experts say they may need to spend around half that again to rearrange the event—before hopefully recouping the losses when the Olympics are held.

Bach, who was part of West Germany's gold medal-winning foil fencing team at the 1976 Olympics, added: "Of course, I'd be very, very delighted if we could have the Olympic Village in the traditional form. Everybody who has once lived in an Olympic Village knows that this is the real Olympic experience, that

this is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Living under one roof with the whole world, sharing your meals together, celebrating together, discussing together, and forming this unique Olympic unity." Bach concluded by saying: "We are at an unprecedented situation and have an unprecedented challenge. "We have to find the best possible situation under the circumstances that we are living in."

Tokyo 2020 president Yoshiro Mori, an 82-year former prime minister and cancer survivor, pointed to his own health battles as inspiration for the difficult times ahead. "We have no choice but to have hope. I myself suffered cancer... But I was saved by a new drug. I am here, allowed to live. "Let us hope for these things."

A taskforce, named 'Here We Go', had been created to examine the issue, Bach added, saying the first part of call would be with the 33 international federations, likely starting with a conference call on Thursday. "The first step, we have to see with them, to see what the options are. We also have to take into account the sports calendar around the Olympic Games," Bach said.

Pandit bids bye to Vidarbha, next stop MP

DEVENDRA PANDEY
MUMBAI, MARCH 25

CHANDRAKANT PANDIT, one of the most successful coaches in domestic cricket, will now coach Madhya Pradesh in the coming season after three years with Vidarbha. Under Pandit's tenure, Vidarbha won Ranji Trophy twice and also triumphed in the Irani Trophy. He has played for Madhya Pradesh as professional player in the 90s.

The former India wicketkeeper batsman Pandit had earlier coached Mumbai and Kerala. Pandit confirmed the news and talked about how the former India wicketkeeper Kiran More helped him in moving to the new role with MP. "I have decided to move on. I don't want to be in a place more than three years. My friend Kiran More knew that I won't be continuing for Vidarbha from this season onwards. He told MP about it and they offered a coach job which I accepted for two years," Pandit told The Indian Express.

Pandit known for his old-school-taskmaster coaching style has made it clear to MP that he will lead a restructuring of their team and the association has given him the free hand to execute his plans. "I have told them my expectations and how I want to go about it. MP is



Chandrakant Pandit was the pivotal force behind Vidarbha's Ranji double. File

similar to Vidarbha. When I took job of Vidarbha they too were trying to make a mark in domestic cricket. Twice we won Ranji Trophy though this season things didn't go as we expected, MP has a young team and it will be great motivation to work forward," Pandit added, who currently is in lockdown in his village in Ratnagiri due to the novel coronavirus. "The boys are good and it's just following

right process. I like to coach young motivated boys, give them the goals and direct them how to achieve those goals. When I took on Vidarbha nobody expected that we will win Ranji Trophy and that too twice back-to-back years. Credit should also go to cricket association in Vidarbha and to former player Prashant Vaidya, who is in the association, for showing trust in me."

Pandit has built a reputation for being a coach who is a taskmaster and ticks all the right boxes: strategy, discipline, old-school work ethic, unorthodox methods to get the best out of players. Those in the domestic circuit know that only potential downside of Pandit is that some players might not like his hard style initially and it might lead to a few disagreements. As long as the association and players are ready for such an approach, he usually leads them to success. Some of Pandit's methods are the same irrespective of the teams. Like he did with Mumbai, he also formed various player-led committees for Vidarbha to take care of entertainment, food, fitness, travel—players were deputed to take ownership and it helped in the bonding process.

More coaches seek switch

More state associations will be searching for new coaches. Vidarbha for starters has to find a replacement for Pandit. MCA will also be looking to move on from Vinayak Samant and hunt for a new coach. Sanath Kumar, a very successful domestic coach with good track record across teams, has informed the Baroda Cricket Association (BCA) last season that he won't be continuing due to health issues. Last season during Ranji Trophy game, Sanath had suffered a heart attack and rushed to hospital.

Asian Games medal winning footballer Latif passes away at 73

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOLKATA, MARCH 25

FORMER INDIA midfielder Abdul Latif, who was also a key member of bronze medal winning team at the 1970 Bangkok Asian Games died in Guwahati on Monday. He is survived by a son and two daughters. He was 73.

"He was suffering from old age related problems and he breathed his last on Monday evening. His last rites were performed on Tuesday," a relative confirmed.

Latif was born in Mysore, Karnataka before making Guwahati his home. He was also represented India in Asia Cup Qualifier in 1968 in Myanmar and Merdeka Cup in 1969 in Kuala Lumpur. But his biggest glory was being part of the last national football team that had a podium finish at the continental games. Latif could play on both wings as well as central midfield as he represented Mohammedan Sporting from 1963-1967 and later took over as coach.

After retirement, Latif settled in Guwahati and began his career as a coach, under his tutelage Assam won the junior



Latif was a versatile midfielder and could play on the flanks as well.

and sub-junior national championships. He also coached Mohammedan Sporting Club from 1978 to 1980.

Earlier, he played for State Bank of Hyderabad in the A-Division Rahim League here. Later, he moved to Bengaluru where he played for HAL before settling down in Guwahati. "It is sad to hear that Abdul Latif is no more. His contribution to Indian Football will never be forgotten. I share the grief," said All India Football Federation (AIFF) president Praful Patel.