

# 14 SPORT



Let's say the NBA comes back without fans. Once you play one game without fans, you will adjust to not having fans there."

MAGIC JOHNSON  
NBA LEGEND

## Tokyo Games doubtful even in 2021, feels CEO

# Hockey skating on thin ice

With superpowers struggling financially and leagues suspended, the sport is treading an uncertain phase

## England-Windies series in for a significant delay, reckons Giles

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE  
TOKYO, APRIL 10

MIHIRVASAVDA  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 10

AS THE coronavirus spreads in Japan, the chief executive of the Tokyo Games said Friday he can't guarantee the postponed Olympics will be staged next year — even with a 16-month delay. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe issued an emergency declaration this week to battle the virus, putting the country under restrictions after it seemed it had avoided the spread. "I don't think anyone would be able to say if it is going to be possible to get it under control by next July or not," Tokyo organising committee CEO Toshio Muto said at a news conference conducted remotely.

"We're certainly not in a position to give you a clear answer." The Olympics were postponed last month with a new opening set for July 23, 2021, followed by the Paralympics on August 24.

Abe has been criticised for being slow to act against the coronavirus. Opposition political leaders have suggested he downplayed the severity of the virus and have said it may have been tied to wanting to hold the Olympics this year. "We have made the decision to postpone the games by one year," Muto added.

"So this means that all we can do is work hard to prepare for the games. We sincerely hope that come next year mankind will manage to overcome the coronavirus crisis." Muto was asked if there are alternative plans to 2021. "Rather than think about alternatives plans, we should put in all of our effort," he said.

"Mankind should bring together all of its technology and wisdom to work hard so they can develop treatments, medicines and vaccines." Japan has reported about 5,000 cases and 100 deaths. The country has the world's oldest population, and COVID-19 can be especially serious for the elderly.

Muto was asked several times about the added costs of postponing, which has been estimated by Japanese media at between \$2 billion-\$6 billion. He said it was too soon to know the price tag and who would pay.

He also acknowledged that Tokyo Olympic organizers had taken out insurance. Tokyo 2020 has taken out several insurance policies," he said. "But whether the postponement of the games qualifies as an event that is covered is not clear yet."

ON APRIL 2, one of Netherlands' biggest clubs, Tilburg, suspended payments for their staff and coaches, among the first sides in the hockey world to take such a measure since the outbreak of the coronavirus. The club, in its defence, said hundreds of thousands were lost in revenue after the season was abruptly stopped and the expenses kept mounting.

In Australia, too, it has emerged that the salaries of coaches have been held up and the clubs were refunding the registration fees to their members, according to *The Reverse Stick* podcast.

Hockey has never been a big sport money-wise. For most nations, save for countries like India, Netherlands and Australia to some extent, it's a hand-to-mouth existence. Now, with top nations struggling, combined with the current fragile situation of the International Hockey Federation (FIH) and an uncertain future, it is feared that the sport could be headed for a tumultuous period.

"Like for every company, all sports institutions, international federations, clubs, leagues... we will also be impacted. The question is, by how much? That is difficult to say right now not knowing when this crisis will end," FIH CEO Theiry Weil says.

Weil was FIH's marketing director during the previous global recession, in 2008. Back then, he says, there was one major difference: "At least the matches were taking place." Right now, FIH's flagship tournament, the Pro League, has been suspended till July. On Friday, New Zealand called off their tour to India next month, where they were scheduled to play two matches.

Weil says they will wait till mid-August to see if a part of the season can be salvaged. "In September, a lot of domestic seasons start. So after mid-August, it doesn't make sense to continue (with Pro League). Then we might have to stop 2020 season and look forward to plan the new season in 2021," Weil says.

That could result in the FIH having to return the sponsors and broadcasters their money, leading to a loss in revenue since the tournament isn't insured. For the FIH, which according to *The Hockey Paper* suffered a loss



While Indian hockey teams have so far remained unaffected in terms of financial losses following the outbreak of coronavirus, top countries like Australia and Netherlands have taken a massive hit. File

of £590,000 last year, could be a massive blow. To compound their woes, the postponement of the Tokyo Games means that International Olympic Committee could freeze the payment they are entitled to receive every four years.

The sports are divided in five categories, and each international federation receives money depending on their audience and size, with those in top-most bracket receiving around \$40 million and the lowest getting \$7 million. Weil doesn't reveal the category where hockey belongs but says it is a 'substantial amount.' "We are one of those which are depending on that (IOC payout). With the postponement of the Games, this is another open question. (But) I am extremely confident that the IOC will not let down the international federations in that regard," he says.

So far, India has remained unaffected. Most of Hockey India's financial needs are fulfilled

by the government and its primary sponsor, too, is a state government. There have been no indications of a cutback by either the union sports ministry or Odisha, meaning the interest of Indian players and coaches remain protected. But that isn't the case elsewhere.

### Leagues suspended

Across Europe, the most dominant region, the leagues have been suspended. There has also been a growing discontent because of the Pro League, with many feeling that the tournament had damaged the continental club hockey. However, with countries likely to feel the pinch of the impending economic crisis, it is speculated that some national federations might not have the funds to stay afloat and participate in events that involve excessive travel.

Weil says the current situation is 'concerning.' "We need to do an assessment... be frank

with each other and see who has suffered an extreme loss and cannot participate, maybe, in the next season. Maybe, in two seasons' time they could come back. But today, all this is purely based on speculations," Weil says.

In a way, hockey's story encapsulates the gloomy future a lot of Olympic sports, which are devoid of hefty sponsorship and broadcasting deals, are starting at. Especially at a time when the IOC has been pushing for events that appeal to a larger audience, as well as e-sports.

Weil is under no illusion of the challenge he is facing, but is confident that the sport will turn the tide and remain relevant at the Olympic level. "It will hit us. The question is how big will it hit us," Weil says. "But when the crisis is over, I think hockey will have a future, when we are talking about the sport itself. Leagues will be there, international hockey will be there, maybe stronger than now."

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE  
LONDON, APRIL 10

ENGLAND CRICKET team chief Ashley Giles has forecast a significant delay to the home series against the West Indies in June should the coronavirus relent sufficiently to allow the three Tests to go ahead. The county championship, comprising four-day matches, was due to start on Sunday but English cricket is shut down until at least May 28, with the expectation of further postponements.

England are meant to play a three-Test series against the West Indies in June, with the opening match at The Oval starting on June 4. But England team director Giles told reporters in a conference call on Thursday: "The deadline of May 28 still stands but it's looking less and less likely that we're going to be out there in June. We have to look at alternatives."

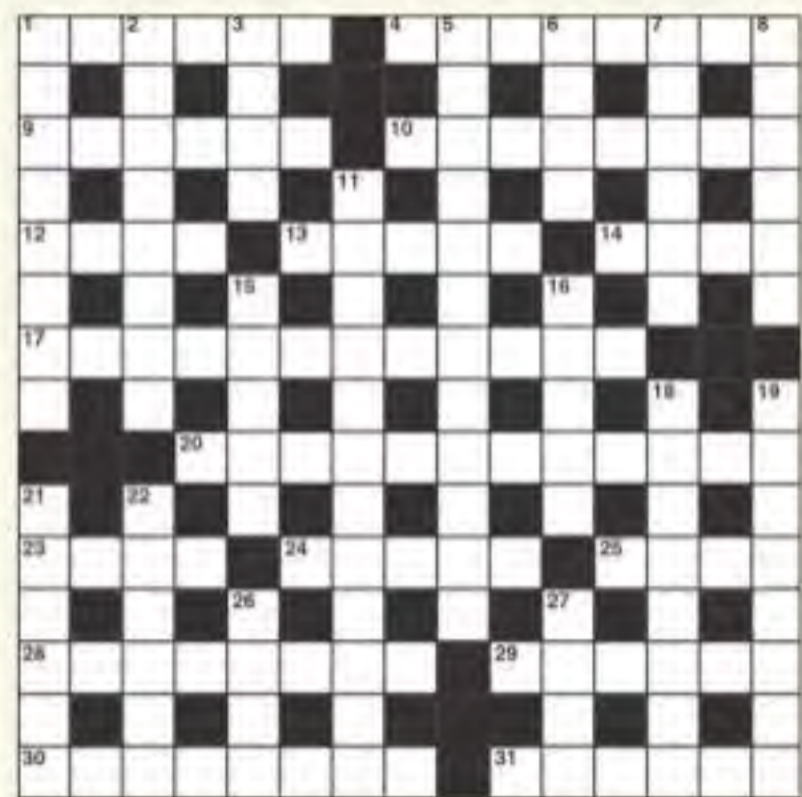
Following the visit of the West Indies, England are meant to play home series against Pakistan, Australia and Ireland as well. "We are looking at scenarios where we can push those matches back as far as possible without losing any cricket," said Giles.

"Whether eventually games start falling off the calendar right now we don't know. If we can't get it all, it's really important we work in partnership with all the other boards to fulfil those fixtures but with a priority on keeping people safe."

Meanwhile the former England spinner said an intra-squad match similar to the one Australia played before last year's Ashes could serve as a warm-up fixture for his side if the season can get underway. With Britain currently in lockdown, players cannot go straight from their homes into the international arena. "From a playing point of view certainly, I think we'll need to play a couple of warm-up games," Giles said.

"They could be behind closed doors, they could be among England players — none of us really know until we get there." Following last year's one-day World Cup in England, the Australians played a three-day 12-a-side match at Southampton as their sole warm-up fixture for the Ashes.

### CROSSWORD 4089



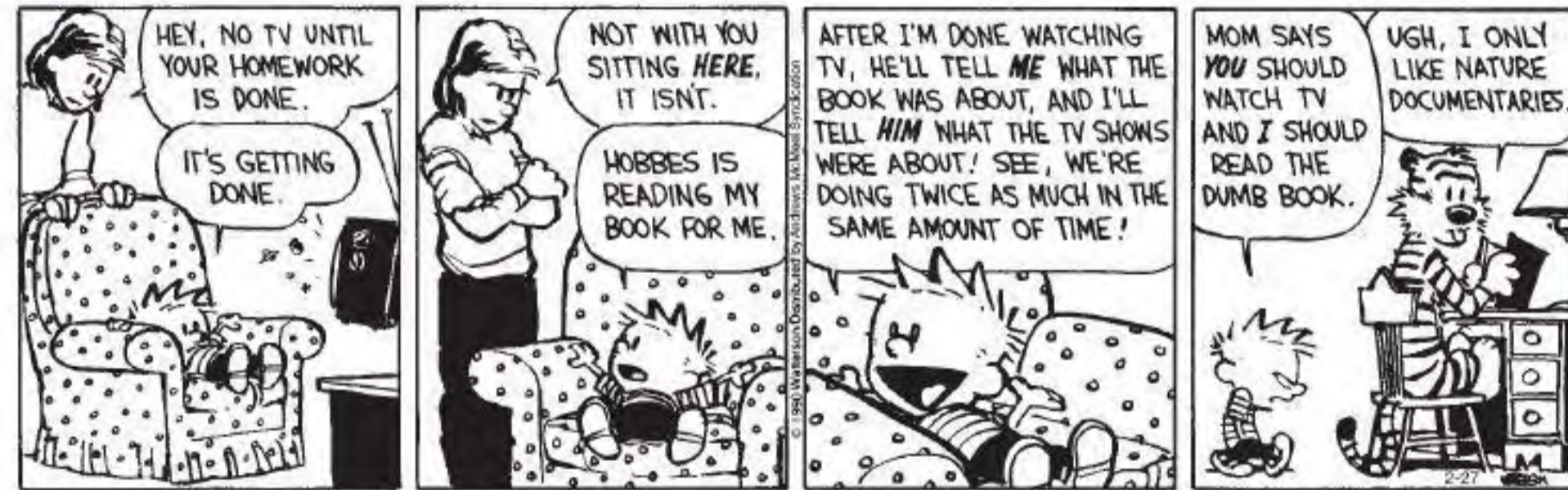
- ACROSS**
- 1 Highly bred? (6)
  - 4 The penalties of strife, perhaps (8)
  - 9 It's odd about the taxes (6)
  - 10 Bewildering, but delightful all the same! (8)
  - 12 John Napier's records? (4)
  - 13 Short work for a barrister (5)
  - 14 Run away when left in charge (4)
  - 17 Soldiers kept permanently on their toes? (8,4)
  - 20 Not far from following a private hobby (5,7)
  - 23 Carry to terrible extremes (4)
  - 24 They secure the normal shipping rates (5)
  - 25 It gets me back in the newspaper (4)
  - 28 Attempt to include a garment as disguise (8)
  - 29 In a European it is courteous (6)
  - 30 An ivory castle, perhaps (8)
  - 31 Many agree it's new and in short supply (6)
- DOWN**
- 1 Girl belittled is without mercy (8)
  - 2 Possibly relating to the whole (8)
  - 3 Fewer beheaded means more jug (4)
  - 5 Bound to fight? (2,3,7)
  - 6 Money bringing pleasure to many (4)
  - 7 It is suspended when it is very cold (6)
  - 8 Fashion design made one's name (6)
  - 11 Honest kind of artisan made records (5,7)
  - 15 Though solid in form, they may have fragile footing (5)
  - 16 Quick trim (5)
  - 18 Travelling at high speed injured a fish (8)
  - 19 Stock reaction to panic (8)
  - 21 Make a cat sit still (6)
  - 22 Faster form of attack (6)
  - 26 Lockers A to G perhaps (4)
  - 27 Left the last word to the auctioneer (4)

Solutions Crossword 4088: Across: 1 Whist, 4 Netball, 8 Arm, 9 Water polo, 10 Federal, 11 Issue, 13 Really, 15 Errata, 18 Cheat, 19 Orotund, 21 Forging, 23 Own, 24 Sleight, 25 Thyme. Down: 1 What for, 2 Immediate, 3 Tower, 4 Nettie, 5 Terrier, 6 Ago, 7 Loose, 12 Statutory, 14 Letting, 16 Andante, 17 Soviet, 18 Cuffs, 20 Ought, 22 Rue.

### OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



### CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



### MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



### JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given clue.

The books that you the most are those which make you the most. - Theodore Parker (4,...5)

DPEIT ABIOHP

KPULN HACKLY

SOLUTION: TEMPL, PLUNK, PHOBA, CHALKY

### SUDOKU 4176

Difficulty Level 4s

Instructions To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

Difficulty Level 1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy; 3s = Medium; 4s = Hard; 5s = Very Hard; 6s = Genius



### SOLUTION SUDOKU 4175



### DAY TODAY

BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)

Life goes on, and on. And on. Therefore, please don't be taken in by the thought that today's planetary aspects, reckless and imprudent as they can be, give you any sort of permission to let go or abandon course in mid-stream. Stick with it and you won't regret your determination.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)

Venus, your planetary ruler, now casts a rosy glow over home and family affairs. This is a very useful indication indeed, mainly if you're recovering from recent disagreements. More important, after today you'll be able to make up your own mind.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)

It doesn't matter whether you are considering other people's proposals, or making your own. It's not a question of right or wrong, but of realising that once you have made a final decision you must stick with it. Once today has passed, there will be no going back.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)

You have a great deal to learn when it comes to money. There's no doubt about that. That doesn't mean, though, that anyone has the right to take advantage of you. Use this happy time to make a fresh start on a domestic matter or revitalise a family relationship.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)

Three cheers for mischievous Mercury, which endows you with all your bright ideas. Now is the moment to make up your mind and aim for solid, lasting agreements. You have around seven days to reconsider your plans, in spite of all current distractions.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)

On a superficial level your chart talks of positive trends around travel, excursions and overseas contacts. The deeper perspective indicates that you have much to learn from tuning into your dreams. Strangely enough, a day-dream might show you the way forward in an unlikely personal goal.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)

Coming events at home will test your bargaining power, not to mention your social skills. The catch? Well, you need partners' support and approval. But how can you get it? Perhaps you could take a little trouble to find out exactly what they want. Listen carefully to every word.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)

Never again must you allow yourself to be pushed into a corner. For the second day running, the Moon is giving you the chance to mend fences and build bridges. And about time too, you may say! It might be difficult to offer an apology, but the effort should be worth it.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)

You appear to be searching for something, but what? Any astrologer will tell you that the purpose of your journey through life is not to arrive, but to travel. Now, as ever, you will find that, having reached a goal, it soon ceases to satisfy.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)

Today's stars are all about love, affection and personal fulfilment. Where and how you will find these is another matter, but you should prepare the way by being completely open to whatever happens, putting aside your prejudices and personal preconceptions.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)

A great deal of good should come out of recent dramas. At the very least you should now have a much better idea of who your friends are. You may resolve family and domestic problems as soon as you have faced up to awkward issues involving such complicated matters as a possible cash crisis.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)

Just how much you owe other people will soon become apparent. Helpful changes at home over the weekend focus on relationships with reluctant people. Maybe you need to work harder at explaining to them just why it's in their interests to back you all the way.