

IN BRIEF



South African players symptom-free

JOHANNESBURG
The South African cricket team's chief medical officer Shaub Manjra has said that the players have completed a 14-day period of self-isolation after returning from India and they were symptom-free. The team returned from India on March 18 after the ODI series was called off due to the pandemic. But the players will remain in lockdown for the next two weeks. IANS

IOA contributes ₹71 lakh to PM-CARES Fund

NEW DELHI
The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) has contributed a sum of ₹71,14,002 towards the PM CARES Fund. IOA also expressed gratitude to all the NSFs, State Olympic Associations and other federations/bodies for extending their support and humble contributions. IANS



UEFA tells clubs to complete the season

PARIS
UEFA and Europe's top clubs have stated their determination that the current football season should be played to a conclusion and threatened that teams may be excluded from the next Champions League if their domestic competitions are ended prematurely. In a joint letter released on Thursday, UEFA, the European Club Association (ECA), and the European Leagues body representing nearly a thousand clubs in 29 countries, said that they were working on the possibility of playing on into July and August if need be. AFP

FIH extends Pro League suspension

NEW DELHI
The International Hockey Federation has been forced to extend the suspension of FIH Pro League's second edition due to the pandemic and now plans to hold the ties in July and August, provided the current situation improves. PTI



Infantino says 'nobody knows' when football can resume

ASUNCION
FIFA boss Gianni Infantino admitted that "nobody knows" when football can resume around the world. "We all wish that we could have football tomorrow but unfortunately it's not possible and nobody in the world today knows when we will be able to play like before. Our world and our sport is going to be different when we return to normality. We have to make sure that football survives and that it can prosper once again." AFP

Premier League put off indefinitely

LONDON
Premier League clubs will ask players to take a combination of pay cuts and deferrals amounting to 30 percent of their salary due to the financial crisis caused by coronavirus, the league said in a statement on Friday. The Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) will meet with league and club officials to discuss the proposal on Saturday. A meeting between the 20 English top-flight clubs also agreed to indefinitely extend the suspension of the season until it is "safe and appropriate" for football to return. AFP

IOC revises qualification deadlines

Athletes now have up to June 29, 2021, to book their berths for Tokyo Games

OLYMPICS

UTHRA GANESAN
NEW DELHI

The International Olympic Committee has revised its qualification deadline for the Tokyo Games to June 29, 2021.

Many yet to complete

The 2020 Olympics, postponed by a year due to COVID-19 pandemic, has forced the IOC and International Federations to rework their qualification and tournament calendar. While some of the events, like hockey, have already completed their qualification processes and would not be affected, several, including badminton and track & field were yet to complete the same.

In a communiqué to National Olympic Associations, the IOC has now confirmed the new dates. "The new qualification period deadline is 29 June 2021, and IFs can



Extended wait: A man wearing a face mask takes a selfie next to a Tokyo 2020 Olympics countdown clock that has been adjusted for the new start date of July 23, 2021. ■ GETTY IMAGES

define their own qualification period deadlines, should the deadline be prior to this date. The revised final sport entries deadline has now been set for 5 July 2021," it

said. The IOC also reiterated its efforts to revise an overall final qualification system at the earliest, even as soon as mid-April, but admitted that specifics would only come later.

"We understand that at this time these are unlikely to include the full details on the dates and locations of the specified events, recognising that these will follow later as

the impacts of COVID-19 and its related restrictions become clearer.

"We aim to finalise the adapted qualification systems by mid-April, with the details on specific events to follow when available. The priority remains to reflect, where possible, the allocation method/pathway of the original qualification systems for each sport," it added.

The IOC, while allowing international federations the discretion to tweak their rankings system accordingly, sought to ensure sport-specific balance between protecting those close to qualifying in 2020 and giving the top performers of 2021 a chance to qualify.

It also authorised IFs to decide on the age-eligibility of athletes who may not make the cut in 2020 but do so in 2021. While there is no upper age limit, sports like gymnastics (16 years), football (under-23) and boxing (17) have a minimum age.

Mixed feelings for Ramanathan Krishnan

Playing now not a priority: Ramesh

WIMBLEDON

RAYAN ROZARIO
COIMBATORE

When The Championships was called off a couple of days ago due to COVID-19, many former champions expressed disappointment. Ramanathan Krishnan, who made the world take notice of India with his exploits at the prestigious event in the sixties, shared his views too.

"My immediate feeling about the cancellation was one of joy and sorrow," he told *The Hindu* from Chennai.

"It's sort of joy to me as it's going to save the players, the spectators and the others involved, from this virus threat. At the same time, it's one of sorrow as the players may have to miss the event for a year," he added.

Huge loss

Krishnan, a semifinalist in 1960 & '61 and who reached a world-ranking of No. 6, said that in a tennis player's career, losing one year of Wimbledon is a huge loss.

"It's so precious not only for the international stars but also for the Indian

players. I feel sad for them because we do not know whether they would carry the same form or confidence next year."

He was quick to add that one must not take a chance with corona. "Good luck to the players," he signed off.

His son, Ramesh Krishnan, who had reached the Wimbledon quarterfinals (1986), said these were quite extraordinary times. "Sorry this has to happen and, in the present scenario, we have plenty on our mind. Also, things are so uncertain that playing the sport is not a priority at the moment," said Ramesh.

The Wimbledon and French Open junior title-winner in 1979, Ramesh said it's going to be tough for all players.

"The main thing is to remain fit so that when things return to normalcy you can get going. For the older players such as Federer and Serena Williams, it's a year lost, which is a lot for them."

Ramesh, a regular visitor to Wimbledon, said, "I was looking forward to my travel this year, but that will have to wait for another year."



Right move: Tennis greats Ramanathan Krishnan and son Ramesh, though feeling sad at Wimbledon's cancellation, have welcomed the decision. ■ FILE PHOTO: RAJEEV BHATT

PM Modi tells Indian sportspersons to 'boost morale'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged current and former Indian sportspersons on Friday to help "boost morale" and encourage people to adhere to a nationwide lockdown aimed at containing the coronavirus.

Modi held a video conference with 40 stars across various sports, including Sachin Tendulkar, Viswanathan Anand, P.V. Sindhu and Hima Das, his office said. They have a "very important role to play in boosting the morale of the

nation as well as spreading the message of social distancing along with asking people to continuously follow advisories given during lockdown," said Modi.

Face challenges

He said traits learned in sport such as the "ability to face challenges, self-discipline, positivity and self-belief are the essential tools to combat the spread of the virus."

The athletes also "praised the leadership of the Prime Minister in this challenging times," according to the statement.

Ayushi steps it up in tough rifle event

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
NEW DELHI

It is the toughest event in rifle and pistol. The rifle 3-position event demands 120 shots during qualification, 40 each in kneeling, prone and standing positions. Thereafter, it is a 45-shot final.

Unlike air events, in which youngsters shoot from 10 metres to strike world class scores very early in their career, the 50m event requires considerable experience and expertise.

Remarkable progress

Given this backdrop, the 19-year-old Ayushi Podder has done remarkably well to be among the six shortlisted for the Tokyo Olympics. Ayushi has had impressive scores of 1174 and 1168 in the Olympic trials.

From shooting 1121 in the junior section of the 2018 World championship in Korea,



Ayushi, right, with her father and coach Pankaj and Mehuli Ghosh. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Podder, who works with the Railways, is himself a national-level shooter, and internationally qualified coach.

It was Pankaj who initiated Mehuli Ghosh, Commonwealth Games air rifle silver medallist, into shooting, along with his daughter, when he set up the Bull's Eye Academy in 2014.

Groomed for 2024

Having done well at the Khe-lo India Youth Games, Ayushi was recently inducted into TOPS and is part of the development group being groomed for the 2024 Games.

Ayushi, a brilliant pencil-sketch artist, has also trained in Odissi under Dona Ganguly, wife of former India captain Sourav Ganguly. Now, during the lockdown, she relaxes with Western dance and music, and keeps fit through yoga.

Ashish Kumar learning from Vijender's game

Aims to better India's Olympic middleweight record

BOXING

Y.B. SARANGI
KOLKATA

Middleweight boxer Ashish Kumar has not yet met Vijender Singh, but the 25-year-old from Himachal Pradesh draws inspiration from the Olympic bronze medallist.

For Ashish, who booked an Olympic quota place at the Asia/Oceania qualifying event in Amman last month, watching Vijender box is a learning process. "I have never met Vijender *bhai sahib*, but I like his counterattacks and long-range game," Ashish told *The Hindu*.

Special weight category

Ashish knows the importance of representing the country in the middleweight category, in which Indian boxers have given fine performances in the last three

Olympics. Vijender bagged the bronze medal in 2008 and made it to the quarterfinals in 2012, Vikash Krishan, a World Championships medallist, reached the last eight in 2016.

"My seniors have done well. Our middleweight boxers have set a high standard and I want to maintain this," said Ashish, who has been fighting in this weight category since 2012.

Ashish, who claimed silver at the Asian Championships and gold at the Thailand Open, gained his quota place after overcoming some tough times. "I sustained a leg injury. Then, I lost my father. I am happy that, despite this, I could bring cheer to my family with success at the Olympic qualifying event."

"My family, which has some boxers and wrestlers,



Ashish Kumar. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

always supported me. My brother Johnny Chaudhary, an international wrestler, has backed me right from the start.

"After my father's death, he did not let me stay at home as the situation could have distracted me. He motivated me saying my father had always wanted me to

compete in the Olympics and win a medal," said Ashish.

Thanking JSW for its support, Ashish said, "When I badly needed a sponsor, they came forward."

Having achieved his first target of qualifying for the Olympics, Ashish wants to make the most of the additional time following the postponement of the Tokyo Games. "I now have more time to make myself stronger and better prepared."

Keeping in touch

In the time of lockdown, Ashish is doing his best to stay in touch with boxing. "We get inputs from our coaches through video conferencing. I stay indoors and do strength exercises and follow the training schedule given by the coaches," said Ashish.

Sinha lends coaching a tech touch

'Best way to stay connected with wards in current times'

CRICKET

VIJAY LOKAPALLY
NEW DELHI

In *Sunny Days*, his best-selling autobiography, Sunil Gavaskar credits his mother for giving him lessons in batting in the balcony of his house in Mumbai. Many cricketers share similar experiences of one of their family members chipping in as a volunteer.

In the current times of lockdown, noted coach Tarak Sinha has kept his wards engaged by using technology to reach out to his students, especially those in the under-15 section.

"I give them lessons through video messages and we interact constantly to ensure the process is maintained in this critical phase for all us," Sinha told *The Hindu*.

The idea, as Sinha ex-



Tarak Sinha. ■ FILE PHOTO: SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

plained, was to keep the youngsters in a state of positive mindset. "Most youngsters, who are kind of outdoor individuals, find it tough to be locked inside the house. They can get restless and also there is this fear of losing focus. This is the best way to stay connected with them," he added.

Sinha's day begins with

planning coaching lessons for batsmen and bowlers; even fielders too. How?

"What I do is I ask them to record a particular action. For batsmen, it can be forward and backfoot defence, execution of shots like cover drive and sweep, which have to be strictly by the book.

"For bowlers, it can be the loading and delivery, and the short follow-through. Obviously much depends on the space available for these kids to record their videos."

Sinha has a big pool of international players from Delhi's iconic Sonnet Club such as Suresh Khanna, Randhir Singh, K.P. Bhaskar, Raman Lamba, Manoj Prabhakar, Atul Wassan, Sanjeev Sharma, Aakash Chopra, Ajay Sharma, Ashish Nehra, Shikhar Dhawan and Rishabh Pant.

Numbers reveal that women's cricket is fast gaining in popularity

The ICC women's T20 World Cup was the most watched event after the 2019 men's ODI World Cup

P.K. AJITH KUMAR
KOZHIKODE

Biju George was following the recent women's T20 World Cup closely. That wasn't surprising as he had been the fielding coach of the Indian team till recently.

Biju, though, was stunned to know that all his friends in his hometown of Thiruvananthapuram, too, had watched the mega event held in Australia.

He was in for a bigger 'shock' when the ICC released the viewership figures of the tournament: it was the most watched ICC event after the 2019 men's ODI World Cup. Across the digital channels, there were 5.4 billion viewing minutes in India



Wave of support: Fans at the ground and viewers across the globe made the women's T20 World Cup a grand success. ■ FILE PHOTO

alone. The Indian fans were in for a disappointment in the final, though, as the Women in Blue were compre-

hensively beaten by the host. That match was watched by 86.174 fans. Among them was former India seamer Snehal

Pradhan. "Both Cricket Australia and ICC deserve credit for making the World Cup such a big success," she told

The Hindu. "Though I wasn't surprised that it became such a big hit on television, I didn't expect it would become the ICC's second-most watched event."

Snehal said Cricket Australia had done a lot of work on the ground, while the ICC promoted the World Cup through its digital platforms well. "This World Cup was further proof that women's cricket is fast rising in popularity," she said.

Biju could not have agreed more. "When I joined the support staff of the Indian team, many of my friends did not even know that we had a national team," he said.

"India reaching the final of the 2017 World Cup, riding

on Harmanpreet Kaur's astonishing innings against Australia in the semifinal is, of course, the main reason for the change in fortune for women's cricket here.

"We should also give credit to the huge improvement in quality across the international teams."

Just curious!

Snehal said there was a time when people used to come to a watch a match in India just out of curiosity.

"Years ago, I had played a game in front of a full house at Rajkot, but most spectators were there just to see how the girls played cricket," she said. "That is no longer the case."

Life more important than IPL: Raina

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The IPL can wait till millions of lives which are at risk due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic are saved, felt veteran India batsman Suresh Raina.

Raina has already done his bit in the fight against the deadly virus by donating ₹52 lakh, one of the highest donations among elite sportspersons.

Asked about the IPL, which has been postponed to April 15 but is unlikely to take place in the near future, Raina said "it is all about life" at the moment.

"Life is most important at this point of time. IPL can surely wait."