

Qualification period freeze a wise move: Anju

Says it is meant to be a hurdle for dope cheats; Sreeshankar, Toor and Annu among Indians eager to make it to the Games

OLYMPICS

STAN RAYAN
KOCHI

With every new day bringing a fresh load of worrying news, Anju Bobby George feels World Athletics' decision to freeze the Olympic Games qualification period for eight months, till November 30, is a wise move.

"They did this because there is a high chance of cheats taking illegal drugs during the coronavirus period since dope-testers cannot travel to take out-of-competition tests owing to lockdown in many places," said Anju in a chat with *The Hindu* from Bengaluru on Wednesday.

"Athletes can easily hide somewhere now, take drugs and qualify for the Olympics, and can later come up with better performances."

Big worry

Anju, the chairperson of the Indian Olympic Association's Athletes' Commission, revealed that doping was a big worry when the qualification period extension was dis-



Ready, but... Annu Rani and Sreeshankar will be anxiously waiting for the qualification doors to open in December. • FILE PHOTOS

cussed recently.

"We had a con-call between the athlete commissions of various countries by the end of March. All of us were worried that cheaters could benefit. That could be the reason for closing the Olympic qualification doors till December," she said.

"We feel that proper test-

ing will happen only from January next year. So, to some extent, that will dissuade the dope cheats everywhere... even in India."

Anju feels that it will not be proper to conduct national competitions before the Tokyo qualification process begins in December.

"If there is no qualification

chance, I don't think it will be wise to conduct national competitions.

"And look at the way coronavirus is spreading in the country, I don't think athletes can have enough time to train if they have competitions in September or October.

"Right now, we don't



Anju Bobby George. • FILE PHOTO

Stars like long jumper M. Sreeshankar, javelin thrower Annu Rani and shot putter Tajinder Pal Singh Toor will be among those who will be anxiously waiting for the qualification doors to open.

Helplessness

Anju said she was worried about the coronavirus pandemic.

"When you see that the UK Prime Minister is in the ICU, you feel a certain helplessness about the whole thing. It just shows how small and insignificant we are in this world."

Akhtar moots India-Pakistan ODI series

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Former Pakistan pacer Shoaib Akhtar, on Wednesday, proposed a three-match ODI series against arch-rival India to raise funds for the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic in both the countries.

"In this time of crisis, I want to propose a three-match series in which, for the first time, the people of neither country would be upset at the outcome of the games," Akhtar told PTI from Islamabad.

"You are bound to get massive viewership for the games. For the first time, both countries will play for each other. And whatever funds are generated through this can be donated equally to the governments of India and Pakistan to fight this pandemic," added the 44-year-old.

Wisden honour for Ben Stokes

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

Ben Stokes has ended Virat Kohli's three-year reign as *Wisden's* leading cricketer in the world after playing a starring role in England's World Cup win last year. Australia's Ellyse Perry reclaimed the leading women's cricketer in the world title from Smriti Mandhana.

Stokes, the first England player to receive the honour since Andrew Flintoff in 2005, had won the ICC player of the year award.

Two defining knocks

The 28-year-old won the man-of-the-match award in the World Cup final against New Zealand at Lord's and then produced a remarkable match-winning innings of 135 not out in the third Ashes Test against Australia.

"Ben Stokes pulled off the performance of a lifetime - twice in the space of a few weeks," said *Wisden*



Freeze frame: Ben Stokes celebrating the Headingley win has won the *Wisden* award for best photograph. • GETTY IMAGES

editor Lawrence Booth.

A photo taken by Gareth Copley for Getty Images showing Stokes celebrating after hitting the winning runs in the Headingley Test has won the *Wisden*-MCC Photograph of the Year award for 2019.

Aussies strike it rich

England pace bowler Jofra Archer, who bowled the

Super Over in the World Cup final, is among *Wisden's* five cricketers of the year.

Australians Pat Cummins, Marnus Labuschagne and Perry have been named alongside Archer, as well as South Africa-born Essex off-spinner Simon Harmer.

West Indian all-rounder Andre Russell was named leading T20 cricketer in the world.

Would love to win a Test series in India: Smith

Rajasthan Royals' captain hopes for 'IPL at some stage'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Star Australian batsman Steve Smith believes India is one of the toughest places to play Test cricket and winning a five-day format series in the country is a major career goal for him.

"India is the No. 1 team in the world and it is a very difficult place to play Test cricket, so I would love to win a series there," Smith told New Zealand leg-spinner Ish Sodhi during a podcast organised by the inaugural IPL champion Rajasthan Royals.

"It has been a pretty long year with the World Cup and Ashes, a few away one-day tours. So this rest is not the worst thing but hopefully it is for a few weeks. I am pretty keen to get back to



Steve Smith. • AFP

playing.

"Plenty going on in the world at present, but hopefully we can get an IPL at some stage," said Smith.

"The two seasons that I captained the Royals were both half seasons.

"Looking at having a crack at it full time and the Royals have a pretty good squad," he said.

Deepak's mantra: prevention is better than cure

Asian Games silver medallist is doing physical workouts to stay in shape

SHOOTING

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
NEW DELHI

Asian Games silver medallist shooter Deepak Kumar's message is "Saving lives, staying home."

It is a rare privilege for him to spend time with family at home. "I left home at the age of eight. After that I am in my house continuously for more than five days only now. *Zindagi nikhal gayi, success k peeche peeche bhagte* (life went away running after success)," said the 32-year-old.

Having studied at the Gu-

rukul in Dehradun, Deepak said that he was happy to contribute to the school.

Gurukul's condition

"There are so many celebrities, business and sports persons donating to PM CARES fund. The condition of the Gurukul is very critical because no one donates to it these days.

"It is my responsibility to help them as there are hundreds of students," said the soft-spoken Deepak, when asked about his contribution to the society in this time of world-wide crisis.

With deep understanding



Deepak Kumar. • KAMESH SRINIVASAN

of life's challenges, Deepak firmly believes that "prevention is better than cure".

Since he was preparing for the Olympics, Deepak had

permission from the Air Force to focus on his training. That was the reason he could reach home after the shooting range was shut down. He is happy to spend time with his family and enjoy his favourite food.

Of course, shooting is an integral part of his daily routine, as his main event is the 10-metre air rifle. "I am doing physical workouts and also dry-holding of the rifle in front of the mirror," he said.

Deepak could have been one of the first to win the Olympic quota, but missed it narrowly as he finished sixth in the World Championship

in Changwon in 2018. After agonising moments in the World Cups, Deepak eventually clinched his berth on the last chance in the Asian Championship in Doha.

He has also done well to stay on top of the list along with Divyansh Singh Panwar to make a convincing claim for a ticket to the Tokyo Games.

With time on hand, Deepak follows all the expert talks on Facebook live everyday, arranged by the Sports Authority of India to help the sporting fraternity gain insight into many aspects of sports and life.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

United World Wrestling (UWW) has decided to hold the remaining Olympic Games qualifying events in the 'same period' next year.

Following the coronavirus outbreak, the UWW postponed three of the four Olympic qualifiers scheduled last month. It organised the Pan-American Olympic qualifier in Ottawa last month, but had to postpone the African/Oceania, European and Asian qualifying events.

It also postponed the World Olympic qualifier,

UWW plans to conduct Olympic qualifiers in 'same period' in 2021

scheduled from April 30 to May 3. The first Olympic qualifier, the World Championships, was held in September last year.

"The remaining OG qualifiers shall be organised in 2021 in the same period as in 2020 (except minor adjustments to the dates). The same organisers as originally planned will stage the remaining qualifiers," said a Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) release, stating that the decisions were taken at a UWW Executive Board meeting held via teleconference.

The apex body also decid-

The remaining OG qualifiers shall be organised in 2021 in the same period as in 2020 (subjecting minor adjustments to the exact dates)

WRESTLING FEDERATION OF INDIA

ed to postpone all UWW championships and cancel all international events planned until June 30.

It advised all National federations to cancel their events to ensure that the health of all athletes and participants is protected.

IN BRIEF



Buttler's WC Final shirt raises £65,100

LONDON England wicketkeeper Jos Buttler has raised £65,100 to help fight the coronavirus pandemic by auctioning off his World Cup final shirt. The proceeds of the shirt, which attracted 82 bids, will be given to specialist heart and lung centres provided by the Royal Brompton and Harefield hospitals in London. "It's a very special shirt, but I think it takes on an extra meaning by being able to go for an emergency cause," said Buttler. AFP

Olympic 800m finalist Sabia dies from virus

ROME Two-time Olympic 800m finalist Donato Sabia has died at the age of 56 due to COVID-19, the Italian Olympic Committee (CONI) said on Wednesday. Sabia finished fifth at Los Angeles (1984) and seventh in Seoul (1988). He won the gold medal at the European indoor championships in 1984. According to CONI, he is the first Olympic champion in the world to die from the virus. REUTERS

ACA launches emergency assistance fund

MELBOURNE The Australian Cricketers Association (ACA) has launched an Emergency Assistance Fund of \$250,000 to provide interim relief to former and current players waiting for government aid amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Kelly Applebee, ACA's GM, Member Programs and Relations, said the fund would help those who are experiencing job loss and general uncertainty. PTI



Crisis has burst a bubble, says Mark Wood

LONDON England fast bowler Mark Wood says the pandemic has burst the bubble in which sportspersons live. "There are times when professional sportsmen and women exist in our own bubble. Instead of thinking about fitness, performance or the next match, our concerns are exactly the same as everyone else's," the 30-year-old Wood wrote in a column for BBC. PTI

F1 shutdown period extended further

PARIS Formula One's mandatory shutdown period, which was brought forward from August last month, will be extended by a further two weeks following the delay to the season caused by the coronavirus pandemic, FIA confirmed on Tuesday. Meanwhile, the Canadian GP, scheduled for June 14, has also been scrapped. AFP



Ronaldinho under house arrest in a hotel

ASUNCION A judge in Paraguay on Tuesday ordered the release of Brazilian football great Ronaldinho and his brother into house arrest at an Asuncion hotel. They were jailed almost exactly a month ago to await trial on charges of using false passports to enter Paraguay. Lawyers for the two posted a bail of \$1.6 million. AFP

Sai Praneeth contributes ₹4 lakh to fight pandemic

NEW DELHI World badminton championships bronze medallist B. Sai Praneeth on Wednesday donated ₹4 lakh to help in the fight against COVID-19. Praneeth donated ₹3 lakh to the PM-CARES Fund and ₹1 lakh towards the Telangana CM Relief Fund. PTI



Mourinho admits he was in the wrong

LONDON Tottenham boss Jose Mourinho has accepted he was in the wrong for holding a one-on-one training session with midfielder Tanguy Ndombele in a public park in London. He was pictured on social media flaunting government rules by meeting up with the midfielder on Tuesday, even though they kept to social distancing guidelines. AFP

French footballers strike deal to reduce wages

PARIS Footballers and clubs in France's top two leagues reached a non-binding agreement over a "temporary" pay cut, the national players' union (UNFP) said on Tuesday. The cuts will be done on a sliding scale starting at 20%, the highest earners (more than €100,000 monthly) facing a 50% reduction. AFP

Teen golfer Arjun sells trophies, raises ₹4.30 lakh

NEW DELHI He may be just 15 but golfer Arjun Bhati has managed to raise ₹4.30 lakh to fight the COVID-19 pandemic by selling all his trophies, including three World junior golf championship titles and a National championship. The golfer from Greater Noida has donated the money to the PM-CARES Fund. "After coming to know about my contribution, my grandmother first cried and then said, 'you are a real Arjun!'," he tweeted in Hindi on Tuesday.

2022 World athletics from July 15-24

PARIS The World Athletics Championships, originally scheduled for next year in Eugene, USA, will take place from July 15 to 24, 2022, avoiding a potential clash with the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham. World Athletics last month shifted the event to 2022 to accommodate the rearranged Tokyo Olympics. AFP

