

IPL cancellation on cards after three-week lockdown, Olympics postponement

AGENCY
NEW DELHI: The cancellation of this year's IPL looks inevitable with the BCCI under tremendous pressure after the declaration of a 21-day nationwide lockdown to contain the deadly COVID-19 pandemic.

When the BCCI postponed the IPL to April 15 earlier this month, it said conducting the tournament would only come into the picture if the pandemic subsides. However, there hasn't been any remarkable change in the situation with positive cases crossing the 500-mark in India, including 10 deaths.

Speaking to PTI, BCCI president Sourav Ganguly did not have much to say on the current scenario, which was made worse by the postponement of Tokyo Olympics to the summer of 2021, on Tuesday. The global COVID-19 death toll is nearing 19,000.



"I can't say anything at the moment. We are at the same place where we were on the day we postponed. Nothing has changed in the last 10 days. So, I don't have an answer to it. Status quo remains," Ganguly's helplessness was palpable.

Kings XI Punjab owner Ness Wadia was more forthright. "The BCCI should really consider postponing the IPL now. As a premier event, we need to act with great responsibility. Contemplation

of IPL is inhuman right now. We need to save lives, not IPL," KXIP co-owner Wadia told PTI.

"Let's say even if the situation improves by May and I hope it does, who is going to come and play? Will the (foreign players) be even allowed to enter the country?" he asked.

Earlier on Tuesday, a conference call between BCCI officials and team owners was postponed.

The star-studded eight-

team league was originally scheduled to start on March 29 in Mumbai. It seems the BCCI is deferring the announcement hoping against hope for things to improve.

"If Olympics can be postponed by a year, IPL is a much smaller entity in that regard. It is becoming increasingly difficult to organise. At this point the government is not even thinking about allowing foreign visas," a BCCI official, in know of things, said.

Currently, each stakeholder is discussing ways to limit the financial damage with insurance companies as well as broadcasters.

"With a 21-day lockdown, it is virtually impossible that things will return to normal by April 14. It might improve but a lot of restrictions will be in place. So it will be foolish not to cancel the league," a BCCI veteran said.

IOA, Sports Ministry to revise preparation plans after Olympics postponement

AGENCY
NEW DELHI: The Indian Olympic Association on Wednesday conceded that careers of some athletes would be impacted by the postponement of Tokyo Olympics and the IOA would look to address this when it makes revised preparation plans in consultation with the sports ministry.

Like all stakeholders, the IOA on Tuesday welcomed the International Olympic Committee's decision to postpone the Summer Games, supposed to be held in July-August, to the summer of 2021 owing to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

"A one-year postponement might impact the career/qualification and plans of some athletes, which would be addressed in the coming months and all necessary support would also be extended by us,"



IOA Secretary General Rajeev Mehta said in a letter to the IOC and the Tokyo Games organisers without specifying any names.

"I am holding discussions and there would be meetings scheduled with the Federations after the lockdown in India is over. Athletes' safety is our utmost priority now."

"We would be also consulting with the Ministry of

Youth Affairs and Sports in revising the preparation plans," he added.

While the postponement of the Games has brought relief to the athletes, it has also made some of them uncertain about the qualification process, which was abandoned in most sports due to the deadly outbreak.

The global death toll from coronavirus has crossed 18,000 with more than four lakh being infected.

J&K Boxing meet postponed

STATE TIMES NEWS
JAMMU: Jammu and Kashmir Amateur Boxing Association postponed the J&K Boxing Championship scheduled to be held from March 26 to 29.

A decision in this regard was taken by the Association in view of the restrictions imposed by the administration post COVID 19 spread.

Earlier, general secretary of the Association, Rajan Sharma, in consultation with other senior officers, decided to postpone the event indefinitely.

"We are left with no other option but to postpone the event. The next date for the competition will be announced in due course," informed Rajan Sharma.

Indian Paralympic body welcomes postponement of Tokyo Olympics

AGENCY
NEW DELHI: The Paralympic Committee of India (PCI) on Wednesday welcomed the postponement of Tokyo Olympics to 2021, calling it a "big relief" for para athletes who were in a dilemma over their preparation.

"PCI will also now be in a better position of planning the next step once this current lockdown in India in the wake of COVID-19 is finally lifted," PCI secretary general Gursharan Singh said.

President Deepa Malik had earlier said that "health of the athletes will always be our top priority".

The decision on Tokyo 2020 was made on Tuesday evening by the IOC Executive Board and Japanese government with the full support of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) which was also present at the meeting.

"Postponing the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games as a result

of global COVID-19 outbreak is absolutely the right thing to do. The health and well being of human life must always be our number one priority and staging a sporting event of any kind during this pandemic is simply not possible," read a statement from IPC.

"Top Indian para athletes, including World champion javelin thrower Sandeep Chaudhary, too welcomed the decision saying that the health of the athletes is the number one priority."

"Though we have been training for the last four years for this summer's Games but the recent developments in regard to the COVID-19 outbreak has made it necessary to make a decision like this."

"There are so many athletes who are not able to train at this difficult time, and there should be a fair competition at the biggest Games the Olympics or the Paralympics," said Chaudhary.

MCA postpones all matches amid COVID-19 lockdown

AGENCY
MUMBAI: The Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) on Wednesday announced that it has postponed all its matches in light of the nationwide coronavirus lockdown.

The MCA office, situated at Wankhede Stadium, will remain closed till April 14.

"The Mumbai Cricket Association has decided to postpone all its cricket matches, which were scheduled to be played between March 14 and April 14 due to the ongoing COVID-19 (Coronavirus) situation,"

the city's cricket body said on its official Twitter handle.

Maharashtra has so far recorded 112 coronavirus cases, the highest in the country.

Indian men's, women's hockey teams take Olympic postponement in stride

AGENCY
BENGALURU: The news of Tokyo Olympic postponement is yet to sink in but India's hockey captains Manpreet Singh and Rani Rampal are confident that they will take the disappointment in stride while working hard for the next one year.

The decision to move the Tokyo games to 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, was announced on Tuesday after a phone call between Japanese PM Shinzo Abe and the International Olympic Committee supremo Thomas Bach.

"We had just finished the day's evening session when chief coach Graham Reid informed us about the postponement of the Olympic Games," men's team skipper, Manpreet Singh said.

"I think the news is yet to sink in for us. We were mentally gearing up for our first match on 25th July, so the disappointment is surely there



but it is important for us to now look at the positives," he added.

The Indian men's and women's teams have shaped up well over the course of the last year, winning big competitions such as the FIH Series Finals and the Olympic Qualifiers in front of the home crowd in November last year.

The men's team made a fine start to the season this year with fantastic outing in the Pro League while the women's team was stoked after their

tour to New Zealand earlier this year.

"Our motivation has not been affected by this announcement. As a team, we will continue to remain committed to our goal of becoming a better side and bring back the glory days for hockey in India," he added.

The skipper also appealed for self-isolation to combat the dreaded COVID-19 pandemic "On behalf of the entire team, I would urge all hockey fans to please follow the lockdown and stay safe. While you are indoor, try and do basic workouts to keep yourself fit. It's important to stay healthy both mentally and physically."

Expressing her team's disappointment over the announcement, women's team skipper Rani Rampal said that her side will utilize the next one year to hone their skills further ahead of the Olympic Games in 2021.

"We were already in a meeting when chief coach Sjoerd

Marijke received the news and broke it to us. Personally, I was very disappointed because the team was in good rhythm as we approached the Tokyo Olympics."

"If you see our team's performance in the past two years in specific, we have grown from strength to strength, challenging every top team in the world. We are looking at this postponement as a positive to continue to work hard and take our game to the next level" Rani said.

The striker emphasised that it's important for the team to maintain the same focus over the next year.

"It is important for the team to remain focused and continue to keep up the intensity. This one year postponement also gives us more time with Analytical Coach Janneke Schopman, who has been a fantastic addition to the support staff and her experience as an Olympic Gold Medallist is very inspiring for us."

'All options on table' over new date for Tokyo Games: Bach



On Wednesday in a conference call, IOC president Bach said: "This is not restricted just to the summer months."

"All the options are on the table, before and including the summer of 2021."

World Athletics said Monday it was prepared to shift its world championships in 2021 in order to accommodate a rescheduled Games.

The world championships are due to be held in Eugene, Oregon on August 6-15 next year. And the International Swimming Federation said Tuesday that it was open to moving next year's world championships to fit in with the rescheduled quadrennial sporting extravaganza.

The swimming worlds are set to be held in Fukuoka in Japan between July 16 and August 1 next year.

Looking at possibility to freeze rankings, will review Olympic qualification: BWF



AGENCY
NEW DELHI: The Badminton World Federation (BWF) on Wednesday said it might freeze the world rankings for a while as it works on a "fair solution" to the Olympic qualification process after the COVID-19 pandemic forced a postponement of the Tokyo Games.

There have been growing calls for freezing the world rankings with Indian shuttlers Saina Nehwal, B Sai Praneeth, Parupalli Kashyap and H S Prannoy expressing their concern.

"For our athletes, we will review any impacts on the Olympic and Paralympic qualification system to ensure a fair solution is found to qualify players for the postponed Games," BWF said in a statement.

"BWF, in the short-term, is also looking into the possibility of freezing World Rankings until international tournaments start again."

"However, we are still working on the technical solution to ensure the freezing and eventual un-freezing of World Rankings works fairly for all players and we will announce this shortly." Shutters in the singles competition have to be inside top-16 of world rankings to qualify for the Olympics. The cut-off for doubles is top-8.

The international badminton calendar has been on hold since the All England Championships earlier this month.

Range simulators to help Indian shooters practice indoors efficiently

AGENCY
NEW DELHI: Confined to their homes owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, Indian's marksmen and women will soon be provided with shooting range simulators -- SIUS Ascor's electronic target systems -- which will allow them to practice indoors efficiently.

Work is already underway but it could still take a month's time for the equipment to be delivered to the shooters.

The Swiss company is the world's largest manufacturer of electronic scoring system for the precision sport and is associated with the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF).

At a time when the world is grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to

enforcement of lockdowns and social distancing, such product will help the shooters to continue their practice, albeit within the four walls of their homes.

Former shooting ace and national pistol coach Jaspal Rana said they are trying to get it at the earliest.

"We are already on working on getting it but it can still take one month. SIUS Ascor's range will help the shooters to at least practice indoors," multiple-time Asian Games gold medalist Rana told PTI.

Indoor shooting is a simulation of the real thing outside. As with everything else, the COVID-19 crisis has left the shooters with no option but to stop their outdoor practice and stay at home.

The pandemic has led to

the cancellation or postponement of all sports events with the biggest blow being dealt on Tuesday when the Tokyo Olympic Games was postponed by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to next year.

"This is a 'massive setback' for all the aspiring medal hopefuls in the world's biggest sporting extravaganza, which was earlier scheduled to be held in July-August."

"This is going to make a big difference for sure. The last three years they have been tirelessly working on their game, hoping to perform at the biggest stage," Rana said.

"But, having said that, we can't be complacent when faced with something which we have never experienced or imagined in our lives. I sup-

port the IOC's decision to postpone the Games. There was no other way out. We cannot complain and crib."

"We must, at all times, abide by the guidelines issued by the authorities and ensure that we are all safe and alive," said Jaspal, who is currently coaching Manu Bhaker, Abhishek Verma and Chinki Yadav -- all of whom who have secured Olympic quotas.

The shooters went through one Olympic trial before everything was shut down.

Another issue could be when and how the shooters peak, but the coach has faith in his mature athletes that they will tide over all the challenges. The shooters are practising at their homes and Rana is keeping a tab of their progress daily.

All set but still a year to go: Coaches back to drawing board after Tokyo postponement

AGENCY
NEW DELHI: The athletes are playing the waiting game for now but coaches involved with India's Olympic-bound bunch have already put their thinking hats on to redraw the preparation plans a day after the Games got postponed to 2021.

The deadly COVID-19 pandemic caused an unprecedented postponement as the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Japanese government and the athletes world over agreed that Olympics in July-August this year could not have gone ahead in the present circumstances.

"It is going to affect the shooters in a big way, especially the young ones who are appearing in their first Olympics. We have been preparing for the past three years. Having said that, we need to accept this without any complaints," national pistol shooting coach Jaspal Rana told PTI.

So far, close to 80 Indian athletes have qualified for

the Games and the number is expected to swell once the qualifiers re-start.

Shooters are almost always considered India's best bet for Olympic medals.

In Tokyo, 15 of them -- eight men and seven women -- will take aim for medals, including a bunch of exciting teenagers competing in their maiden Olympics.

"Life is precious and whatever is being done, it is being done keeping the best interest of the athletes in mind. And it is not just about athletes, it is also about the world," said Rana, reiterating what almost everyone aware of the enormity of the crisis has been saying.

Nine boxers and an equal number of track and field athletes have also made the cut so far.

"I will redraw the plans only after the dates for the 2021 Games are out. We need to know when are the next qualifiers. We aren't really worried because we have got qualification in nine out of 13 weight categories,"

said boxing's High Performance Director Santiago Nieva, referring to the five men and four women, who have already made the cut for Tokyo.

Boxing was scheduled to have a world qualifying event in May, which was postponed. India will have a shot at more Olympic slots whenever that tournament takes place.

"These are unreal times...the planning going forward would be focussed mostly on building up rather than qualifying. We are not as concerned as some others, who did not have enough qualifications in the Asian tournament (in Jordan)," Nieva said.

Deputy national athletics coach P Radhakrishnan Nair struck a note of skepticism on what can be achieved and feels a postponement till 2022 would have been better.

Indian athletics has not produced an Olympic medalist till date.

"It will be a challenge for

us as far as planning of training and competition schedule is concerned. In this situation of lockdown I feel the athletics season is as good as over for this year," Nair said, referring to the nationwide lockdown till April 15.

"I don't think we can start doing anything before September or October. Then the seven-eight months before the Olympics (in 2021) may not be enough. Had it been 2022, it would have been better," he added.

National badminton coach Pullela Gopichand went with the majority view and said he doesn't expect any major glitch in the shuttlers' build-up.

Going by current rankings, P V Sindhu, B Sai Praneeth and the men's doubles pair of Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy are assured of an Olympic berth.

"I think a year is a good time...we will have enough time to come back. So, I don't think there will be any problems or negative effect

on preparations," he asserted.

Another strong medal bet for India is wrestling and Vinesh Phogat, one of the biggest stars among the Indian hopefuls, will take the break positively, according to her coach Woller Akos.

"We need to look at the positive side with Vinesh. We have got one more year to prepare against the best opponents," the Hungarian told PTI, asserting that the Asian Games champion is more than ready for any challenge even right now.

"An athlete needs to be a maximalist. She (Vinesh) is ready to follow our dreams and preparation," he added while talking about the lone woman among four wrestlers to have qualified for Tokyo.

National weightlifting coach Vijay Sharma said he will have to rework his planning to ensure that the one year in hand is put to best use.

Only former world champion Mirabai Chhanu is cur-

rently assured of a Tokyo ticket among the lifters.

"We will have to plan everything again now. We are now waiting for guidelines on the new qualifying system, accordingly, we will plan our training," he said.

"With the cancellation of the Asian Championships (earlier) we changed our plan a bit but now with the Olympic postponement, it will change completely. We will try and find the best way to benefit from this situation," he added.

Rising Table Tennis player G Sathiyana's coach S Raman, a former national champion, welcomed the postponement.

Based on current rankings, Sathiyana is eligible for the Tokyo men's doubles event along with veteran A Sharath Kamal.

"Right decision and should not have come later than now as it would have confused players...You don't want panic training and the resultant virus among community of athletes," he said.

Pant could do with a mind coach, says Brad Hogg

AGENCY
NEW DELHI: Rishabh Pant has got "too much talent to know what to do with" and will be better off with a mind coach to see him through his troubles, feels former Australia cricketer Brad Hogg.

"Definitely, I turn on my television when Rishabh Pant comes to the crease, the entertainer," said Hogg.

"His issue is he has got too much talent to know what to do with. He could do with a mind coach, a lot of great sportsmen use them. It is all in the mind for him," Hogg said.

The former player spoke during an interactive session with fans on Twitter on Wednesday where he was asked if Pant could become one of the best wicketkeeper-batsmen in the world.

Pant's inconsistency has led to him losing his place to the in-form KL Rahul in India's limited overs team. In the two Tests in New Zealand, Pant, who was preferred over the more experienced Wridhiman Saha, had scores of 19, 25, 12 and 4.



Saha and Pant have been the two options used by the Indian team in the two formats. But Rahul's form with the bat and big gloves in recent times meant he has made the position his own.

Last year, Australian great Adam Gilchrist advised Pant to work on improving his own game and being the best version of himself and not try to be a Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

Another former Australia wicket-keeper Brad Haddin had suggested that Pant should make his own identity and not be under pressure to copy someone else's style.