

Sports

Photo of the day



Rubi Habash poses for a portrait in Ancient Jerash, Amman. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Pakistan to pick only an 'up to the mark' Amir

LONDON: No player is indispensable and Pakistan will pick Mohammad Amir against England only if the bowler is "up to the mark", bowling coach Waqar Younis has said. Amir had initially pulled out of the tour but is set to join the Pakistan squad in England following the birth of his second daughter last week.

Waqar suggested Amir, whose test retirement last year irked the team management, could not take his place for granted in England where Pakistan are scheduled to play three tests and as many Twenty20 Internationals from Aug. 5.

"The doors are never shut for anyone even if they have played for Pakistan or (are) yet to play," Waqar told in an online interaction with reporters on Tuesday. "He is a seasoned bowler and at times it did hurt when he left test cricket at a crucial time and we all expressed our displeasure on it."

"But we have moved on and we have to see where he stands. If he's up to the mark, then we will pick him and play him. But nobody is indispensable. I never thought we couldn't function without one cricketer."

Joined by the crafty left-arm quick's shock test retirement, former captain Waqar oversaw the creation of a bigger pace pool, which includes pace mainstay Shaheen Afridi and the exciting teenager Naseem Shah.

Waqar said the youngsters could learn from Amir's experience. "In a way it's actually good that he came and young players can actually learn from him," said Waqar, himself a formidable swing bowler of his era. "But we will prioritise those who are doing well, and they are definitely going to get a go. With 29 players here, there's a good healthy competition and that's a great luxury." —Reuters

Sole in one! thousands of players kicking balls on 'footgolf' courses

Footgolf, a novel fusion of two of the world's most popular sports

SHAH ALAM: Her eyes fixed on the flag in the distance, Jamiatul Akmal Abdul Jabar takes a run-up past her cheering friends and kicks a football down a golf course in Malaysia.

This is "footgolf", a novel fusion of two of the world's most popular sports that is growing fast and attracting people to the fairways. It follows the rules of golf, but players leave their clubs at home and instead tee off with their feet try to complete each hole in as few kicks as possible.

Jamiatul was having a go at the sport with her friends on a converted course with 21-inch (53-centimetre) holes outside the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur. The 38-year-old said she had considered golf "such a boring game" but was rather taken by footgolf.

"You feel that this is something new, something to experience," Jamiatul, an avid futsal player, told AFP. "I'm planning to book another (session)." Thousands of players are now kicking balls on footgolf courses in about 36 countries, and the sport has been governed by an international federation since 2012. Several World Cups have been staged, although the 2020 edition originally due to take place in Japan has been postponed to next year due to the coronavirus.

The sport's origins aren't clear, but one of the earliest recorded tournaments was in the Netherlands in 2008. In Malaysia, people started playing footgolf in 2018 at the Bukit Jelutong course outside the capital Kuala Lumpur, which had been abandoned but was given a makeover by Footgolf Malaysia.

Jeffrey Cottam, who co-founded the organisation, said initial attempts to start the sport were resisted by course owners who balked at the idea of letting footballers onto their greens.

But he finally managed to set up at Bukit Jelutong, and the company now manages two footgolf courses in Malaysia — the second is in the



SHAH ALAM: This picture taken on June 21, 2020 shows Jamiatul Akmal Abdul Jabar, 38, kicking the ball on a footgolf course in Shah Alam, on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. Footgolf, a novel fusion of two of the world's most popular sports, is growing fast and attracting young people back on to the fairways. —AFP

southern state of Johor — with a third on the way.

More than 2,000 people play each month in Malaysia, Cottam said. "Footgolf, like golf, isn't about strength and how young you are," he told AFP. "It's more technical... It's not about beating people. It's about beating the course."

He also hoped the growing popularity of the sport could give some help to ailing courses. Golf has fallen out of favour in many countries, with young people largely uninterested and few having the time to spend a whole day playing the

sport, leading to many courses closing.

But footgolf is giving them some much-needed revenue — in the US, for instance, the sport is now played on more than 500 courses, according to the American Footgolf Federation.

Danny Chia, a Malaysian professional golfer who plays on the Asian Tour, also said footgolf might help courses. "There are still a lot of golf courses out there that are not doing very well," he told AFP. "This could be a new avenue for them." —AFP



SHAH ALAM: This picture taken on June 21, 2020 shows Jamiatul Akmal Abdul Jabar, 38, watching as her "foot putt" goes into the hole on a footgolf course in Shah Alam, on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. —AFP

Virus vaccine key for Olympics go-ahead in 2021

TOKYO: The development of a coronavirus vaccine or treatment will be key to allowing the postponed Tokyo 2020 games to open in a year's time, organising committee president Yoshiro Mori said yesterday.

Asked what factors will be crucial for the rescheduled Games to go ahead, Mori said "it would be whether the coronavirus woe is settling down." "Specifically, the first point will be that a vaccine or drug has been developed," he said in an interview with national broadcaster NHK, published yesterday.

Asked whether Tokyo could hold the Games if the virus situation remained unchanged, Mori said: "If things continue as they are now, we couldn't." But he said that scenario was hypothetical. "I can't imagine a situation like this will continue for another year," he said.

Tokyo 2020 should have been opening on Friday, but the Games were postponed in March as the coronavirus spread across the globe, marking the worst disruption to an Olympics since two editions

were cancelled during World War II.

The Games are now set to open on July 23, 2021, but recent polls have shown less public enthusiasm for hosting the event, as virus cases show a resurgence in Japan. Just one in four people in Japan want to see the delayed Tokyo Games held next year, with most backing either further delay or a cancellation, according to a survey published by Kyodo News this week.

Most of those backing a delay or cancellation said they simply didn't believe the pandemic could be contained in time for the Games. Among the options that have been floated for a Games held during a pandemic is the possibility of limited spectators, or holding the event behind closed doors.

But Mori said reducing the number of spectators would be tough. And he said holding the event without any fans was not an option for now. "If it's the only way to do it, then it's something we'd have to consider. If that happens, there might be talk of cancellation," he was quoted as saying, without elaborating.

With just over a year to go until the rescheduled Games, there are persistent doubts about whether the delay will be sufficient for the pandemic to be brought under control. Japan has so far reported 26,300 COVID-19 cases with 989 deaths, but Tokyo has seen an increase in cases recently and the country's borders remain almost completely sealed to overseas visitors. —AFP

'Long way to go' with Olympics on hold

SYDNEY: Australia's elite swimmers should now be in peak condition and eyeing Olympic medals but instead, like their rivals from other countries, they're treading water — and wondering whether they'll get to compete in Tokyo at all.

The decision to postpone the 2020 Games for a year because of the coronavirus was "devastating", team bosses said, with preparations thrown into disarray and mental as well as physical fitness needing careful management.

With the pandemic showing no signs of abating, Japanese and International Olympic Committee officials have spoken openly about cancelling the Games altogether. Adding to the turmoil for Australian swimmers, long-time coach Jacco Verhaar quit last month to return to his native Netherlands.

Verhaar took control in 2013 after Australia's poor results at the London Olympics a year earlier, a campaign marred by ill-discipline, drug use and drunkenness. He steadied the ship and helped restore Australia as a swimming superpower, with the squad finishing second only to arch-rivals the United States at the 2015 and 2019 world titles.

Swimming Australia has turned to Rohan Taylor, who was state coach for Victoria and Tasmania and has been around the national team for years, as his replacement. He inherits a squad boasting a slew of world champions including Mack Horton and Ariarne Titmus, along with experienced sisters Cate and Bronte Campbell.

Taylor told AFP in an interview that his immediate focus was to get them through the anguish of the Games being

postponed, and deal with the uncertainty of whether they will go ahead. "Any athlete who is highly competitive across any sport is motivated daily, and what gets them up and moving is that carrot at the end of the stick. And when that was taken away it was quite devastating for them," Taylor said.

"And then of course it is back on, but we still can't really get our hands around it. "So I think there is a bit of treading water, doing what they can do, keeping themselves under good control and recognising there's still a long way to go."

HALFWAY HOUSE

Australian swimming legend Grant Hackett, who has dealt with his own mental demons including a breakdown in 2017, said being an Olympic athlete right now would be "hugely challenging". "People put their whole life on hold for the Olympics. You stop studying, you stop doing other things, you stop being a well-rounded person," he told the Sydney Morning Herald.

Hackett added: "The worst thing as an athlete right now is to be in that halfway house. You have to train for it like it's on, believe it's on and commit to that degree; commit like it's happening and if it doesn't happen, so be it."

After about six weeks of being banned from pools due to government coronavirus regulations, most of Australia's top swimmers are now allowed back in the water.

But given continuing travel restrictions, any competition leading into Tokyo is likely to be on home soil. The 2021 world championships have been moved to May 2022 to accommodate the Olympics, and the short course titles rescheduled to December 2021. Australia is set to hold its national championships in April, with finals in the morning and heats in the evening to mirror what will happen in Japan, ahead of Olympic trials in June. —AFP