

Sports

IAAF head Coe seeks radical change to keep athletics relevant

IAAF is now an example for all sports in terms of transparency

LONDON: The 2019 Doha World Athletics Championships could have a very different look to this year's event, IAAF head Sebastian Coe said yesterday as he explained how the sport is embracing radical change in the fight to "stay relevant". Established track and field events could be cut from the programme - though the former British politician was careful not to name any in the firing line - while some of the basic presumptions that have underpinned the sport for over a century are up for debate.

"Everything is on the table. Frankly, I'm not ruling anything out," Coe told journalists at the Leaders in Sport conference. "The London World Championships was fabulous but is it sensible that it runs over 10 days anymore? Do we have fewer athletes? Do we want the World Championships to be semis and finals? "These are the things that are on the table and I don't want to remove them until we've had a possibly uncomfortable set of conversations. You're going to have to challenge a lot of the orthodoxies." Coe addressed the conference on the subject of sports governance and said that he had been forced to spend his first two years in office as IAAF President "securing the foundations" of an organisation shattered by corruption issues that had dogged it for years and remain the subject of a French judicial investigation. He said that the IAAF is now an example for all sports in terms of transparency and ethics and that now changes, which includ-

ed him giving up many of the powers previously attached to the Presidency, had been put in place he is free to address athletics' external problems. The former double Olympic 1500 metres champion has long recognised the shortcomings of the Diamond League and promised changes for next season. He also said he had concerns over the sport's obsession with times, recognising that fans were more engaged by great racing. "There has got to be drama, nobody wants to watch a procession," he said.

A fan of city-centre events Coe said he was happy to look at suggestions from anywhere in his new crusade of keeping the sport "relevant" to the next generation. "Over the next year our relentless focus on formats and the changes that we make in the sport has to be absolutely laser-like," he said. "Our season needs to make sense, we need a rhyme and reason to it. We really need a deep dive over the next two years so that we really do understand what that sport can look like and set it on the way for the next 30 years. "For example, why are we wedded to a 400-metre track? Why can we not have pop-up 300m or 200m tracks in football stadiums? "What about teams, cities, franchises? What about having the excitement of the draft, the IPL (cricket's Indian Premier League) auction? Those are the things that I really want to have on the table.— Reuters



IAAF head Sebastian Coe (centre) with officials.

“These are the things that are on the table”

Superstar Bolt can inspire young, says Sebastian Coe

LONDON: Jamaican track superstar Usain Bolt can play a key role in inspiring youngsters to get involved in athletics even though he has hung up his running spikes, IAAF president Sebastian Coe said yesterday. Bolt, the world record holder in the 100m and 200m, brought down the curtain on his glittering career at the London world championships in August. Coe, himself a two-time Olympic gold medalist, said he was due to meet the 31-year-old Jamaican before Christmas to discuss what he could do. "I had conversations with the Jamaican prime minister when I went to watch Bolt run his final race there," Coe told reporters at the Sport Business Summit, held at Chelsea's Stamford Bridge ground in London. "Jamaica's challenges aren't dissimilar to ours in figuring out all the inspirational things he can do in Jamaica and for us on a global scale," he said.

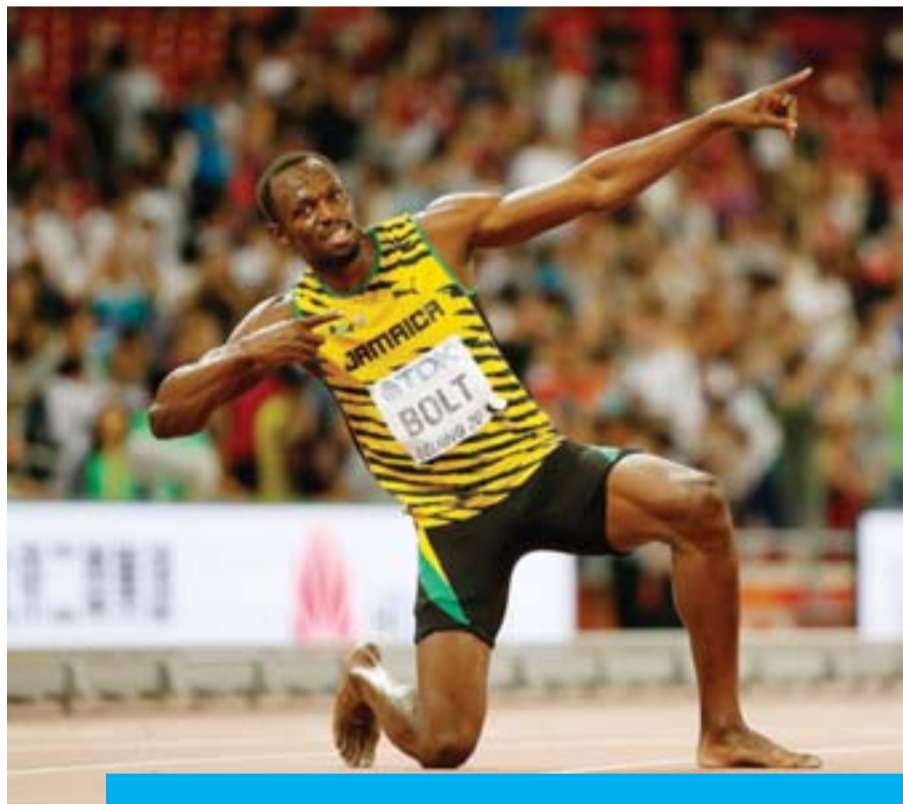
"At the moment it is difficult for me to say what he can do beyond engagement with young people. I don't think I have ever witnessed anyone in any sport apart from Muhammad Ali who has had that ability to engage with the young."

International Association of Athletics

Federations chief Coe said it was difficult to see the enormous vacuum left by Bolt on and off the track being filled immediately. "Nobody will fill the boots straight away," he said. "This is not just simply about someone who will dominate sprinting for the next three Olympic Games.

"It is maybe not being philosophically or politically correct but we are in the entertainment business. "The athletes have to have an opinion, they must be able to dominate a room and a stadium and sometimes I sit there at athletes' press conferences and I wonder are you really offering as much as you should? "I want to feel like I wasn't expecting that response, they have to be interesting, take the sport beyond the stadium, they have to reach out." Coe backed the right of American sports stars to "take a knee" in protest during the playing of the US national anthem following a tirade against them from President Donald Trump.

"I believe in personal freedoms, always," said Coe. "You have to be. Sport is rarely a mirror image of society. Sport sets the trends. "For instance Jesse Owens in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin (who exploded the myth of Aryan superiority) or the raised fist



Usain Bolt

salute in the 1968 Games (involving 200m medalists Tommie Smith and John Carlos). "Sport will always take a view, sometimes makes one uncomfortable but we all have an individual view.

"I have never felt under pressure from political leaders, not even 1979/80," added

Coe with a trace of a smile, referring to pressure put on him and his father by a minister in Margaret Thatcher's government to boycott the 1980 Olympics in Moscow over the then Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan—he declined and went on to win his first gold. — AP

Doping bans leave North Koreans set for glory in US

NEW YORK: Weightlifting's new hardline approach to doping has not only led to one-year bans for China, Russia and seven other nations, it has also opened the way for North Korea to register its biggest sporting triumph in US President Donald Trump's backyard.

Tensions between the US and North Korea have escalated in recent months, with Trump vowing to halt the country's nuclear ambitions, but the North Korean lifters will be welcomed. Despite Trump's travel ban against several nations, including North Korea and Iran, the World Championships organising committee do not foresee any visa problems.

"We look forward to welcoming DPR Korea, one of the top teams in the sport, to Anaheim, (California)," said Phil Andrews, chief executive of USA Weightlifting. North Korea have never topped the medals table at a world championship in any major sport but excel at weightlifting.

In recent years it has become the most successful sport for North Korea, who came second in the weightlifting medal count at the London 2012 Olympics and fourth in Rio last year. They have also made the top four at the past three worlds. North Korea are huge favourites to win most medals at the International Weightlifting Federation (IWF) World Championships being staged by the U.S. from Nov. 27 to Dec. 5. There are 16 weight categories, eight each for men and women, in Anaheim and in seven of them a North Korean tops the revised world rankings, after banned countries are discounted. No other nation has more than one lifter in first place.

NINE BANNED

China, which has been top of the World Championship or Olympic medals count 19 times in the past 20 years, will have to stay at home this time along with Russia, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and Turkey.

Those nine nations had three or more of the 49 weightlifting positive tests announced by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) when samples from the 2008 and 2012 Olympic Games were re-tested, bringing a one-year ban from mid-October. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un gave weightlifters pride of place when his nation's 11 gold medalists from the 2014 Asian Games - staged in South Korea - had a victory parade on their return to Pyongyang. Four of the 11 were weightlifters and Kim was photographed with one on each arm, the 56kg world record holder and multiple champion Om Yun-chol, and 62kg winner Kim Un-Guk, both of whom are national heroes.

Kim is thanked by the winners every time they speak to the world's media. When Om won gold at London 2012 he said his medal was "due to the warm love and consideration" of his supreme leader, while Rim Jong-Sim, after her 75kg gold medal in Rio last year, said: "The first thing I thought when I knew I had won was that I had made our beloved leader happy." Om and Rim will be two of the strongest favourites to win on American soil, while Kim will be missing, having been banned for four years when he tested positive along with three other North Koreans at the 2015 World Championships.

Despite those positives, North Korea have a comparatively good record on doping, with eight lifters banned in the past 10 years compared to 29 in the same period from Kazakhstan, the worst offenders. —Reuters

NBA players Marcus and Markieff Morris acquitted of assault

PHOENIX: A Phoenix jury acquitted NBA players Marcus and Markieff Morris in their aggravated assault trial Tuesday. The twin brothers were accused of helping three other people beat 36-year-old Erik Hood in January 2015 outside a high school basketball game in Phoenix.

At that time, the 28-year-old brothers played for the Phoenix Suns. Marcus now plays for the Boston Celtics and Markieff is with the Washington Wizards. After the verdict was read in Maricopa County Superior Court, the Morris brothers said they were relieved and ready to get back to their teams. They have missed the start of the NBA preseason because of the trial.

Another defendant, Gerald Bowman, also was found not guilty on two counts of aggravated assault. Two other co-defendants pleaded guilty to the charges on Sept 13. Jurors got the case Monday afternoon. They began hearing testimony Sept. 18.

Defense attorney James Belanger said in closing arguments that the case was inexcusably tainted by Hood's mentor trying to solicit two witnesses to implicate the Morris brothers for a cash payment in return.

Two witnesses testified about the mentor's attempt and their refusal to lie. They both went to break up the fight and placed the Morris twins near the site but not as part of the altercation. Prosecutor Daniel Fisher had urged jurors to convict the brothers, saying Marcus Morris kicked Hood in the head and Markieff Morris acted as an accomplice because "they had an axe to grind" with him.

Defense attorneys pressed Hood during his testimony about his financial motives in the case and his



PHOENIX: File photo, NBA players Markieff, left, and Marcus Morris arrive at Superior Court for their aggravated assault trial in Phoenix. — AP

knowledge of the NBA players' substantial financial assets. They also repeatedly said Hood lied to police nine times when he said both twins were involved in the assault. Hood later changed his statement to say Markieff did not beat him but had been in the vicinity.

Timothy Eckstein, a lawyer for Marcus Morris, said Hood knew he had to "double down on Marcus" beating him because the case wouldn't be worth anything without one of the brothers involved. Hood testified he

wanted justice for the incident that left him with a broken nose and other injuries. He said he has known the Morris brothers since their youth basketball days, but they had a falling out in 2011.

Hood testified that his relationship with the twins became strained because of a misinterpreted text message he sent their mother. But he said there was nothing "improper" happening with him and their mother. — AP