

Sports

# Futuristic superheroes picked as Tokyo 2020 Olympic mascots

A futuristic blue-checked, doe-eyed character with pointy ears

**TOKYO:** Tokyo yesterday unveiled its long-awaited mascot for the 2020 Olympic Games: A futuristic blue-checked, doe-eyed character with pointy ears and "special powers" that was picked by schoolchildren across mascot-mad Japan. The mascot, which has yet to be named, was selected by elementary school kids from a shortlist of three competitors instantly recognisable as "made in Japan".

The students picked option "A", which, according to the Tokyo 2020 organisers, has a "strong sense of justice and is very athletic". Helpfully, it also has a magical power that enables it "to move anywhere instantaneously".

Its Paralympic counterpart sports pink cheeks derived from Japan's famous cherry blossom and is "usually calm, however, it gets very powerful when needed". Its magic power: "It can talk with stones and the wind. It can also move things by just looking at them".

The pair, which have "opposite personalities"

but are "very good friends", received over 100,000 votes—more than the other two design sets combined. Mascots are massive in Japan, the land of Hello Kitty and Pokemon, and there are literally thousands representing everything from small communities to prisons.

Known locally as "yuru-kyara" or "laid-back characters", mascots can also be major money-spinners. The pot-bellied, red-cheeked bear known as Kumamon—created in 2010 to promote Japan's southern Kumamoto region—raked in \$8.8 million last year for local businesses selling branded products.

**BIG BUSINESS**

Twelve-year-old Miyu Kawa from the school where the winner was unveiled on Wednesday pronounced

the mascots "unique" and "very cool". "I am excited to imagine these characters on display everywhere and moving around," she said.

But social media reaction was mixed with some saying they wanted something "more round" and more "huggable".

Several users said the futuristic-looking mascot chosen appealed more to children whereas adults preferred the softer and more traditional options. Welcoming the "adorable" characters to the Tokyo 2020 team, the city's governor Yuriko Koike said she hoped the selection would continue to build "momentum" and "excitement" with less than 900 days to go until the opening ceremony.

**Selected by elementary school kids**

The Tokyo 2020 mascot will hope to replicate the success of Soohorang, the cuddly stuffed tiger from the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang handed out to athletes on the podium.

More than 100,000 stuffed dolls (Soohorang and Paralympic mascot

Banbdabi) were sold over the past year. Pyeongchang organisers said, Soohorang sparked an inadvertent social media frenzy after a volunteer dressed up as the tiger got stuck in a doorway, needing a helper to push him through.

The 2016 Rio Olympics had a yellow feline animal representing Brazil's rich fauna and wildlife named Vinicius after music great Vinicius de Moraes. The Paralympic mascot, a predominantly blue and green figure whose head was covered with leaves to represent Brazil's rich vegetation, was named Tom after musician Tom Jobim.

Brazil netted \$300 million in profits from licensing intellectual property from the 2016 Games, according to the International Olympic Committee (IOC).



**TOKYO:** Ryo Taniguchi (R), winning designer of the official mascots for the 2020 Olympics (L) and Paralympics Games, speaks beside members of the Mascot Selection Panel at an elementary school in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

**HIT AND MISS**

But Wenlock and Mandeville, the widely mocked mascots of the 2012 London Games, proved far from Olympic gold. The one-eyed characters were dubbed "bizarre" and "creepy" by some, reportedly sending shares in their manufacturer down by more than a third. The Rugby World Cup, which takes place in Japan next year, has already unveiled a pair of pot-bellied lions as its mascots. With luxurious manes, short horns and faces that appear to be shaped like rugby balls, mascots "Ren" and "G" are inspired by "shishi," the mythi-

cal lion-like figure that features in Japan's new year celebrations and kabuki theatre.

Organisers turned to children to select the 2020 mascot, hoping to avoid a repeat of the bungled roll-out of the official Olympic logo, which ended up having to be scrapped following accusations of plagiarism.

Designer Ryo Taniguchi seemed overwhelmed at the decision. "Thank you. My mind is going absolutely blank. I don't know what to say," he said when the decision was announced at the ceremony. "I want to tell this to my beloved wife." — AFP

## Wade scores season-high 27 points

**MIAMI:** Dwyane Wade scored a season-high 27 points, including a fade-away jumper with 5.9 seconds left, to lead the host Miami Heat past the Philadelphia 76ers 102-101 on Tuesday. Wade came off the bench to score 15 of Miami's final 17 points, including the tough 18-footer over 76ers rookie Ben Simmons. Philadelphia's JJ Redick had a chance for the win but missed a 3-point attempt from the top of the key at the buzzer. It was just Miami's third win in its past 11 games. Joel Embiid led Philadelphia with 23 points, and Dario Saric added 21 points. The 76ers have lost two in a row following a seven-game win streak. Miami's Goran Dragic had 21 points, and Hassan Whiteside had 15 points and a game-high 11 rebounds.



**MIAMI:** Ben Simmons #25 of the Philadelphia 76ers shoots the ball against the Miami Heat on Tuesday at American Airlines Arena in Miami, Florida. — AFP

**Cavaliers 129, Nets 123**

LeBron James recorded his 13th triple-double of the season with 31 points, 12 rebounds and 11 assists as Cleveland withstood a stiff challenge from visiting Brooklyn. James shot 13 of 25 and became the 11th play-

er to reach 8,000 career assists. He recorded his 67th career triple-double while helping Cleveland beat the Nets for the 10th straight time at home since April 2, 2013. George Hill added 26 points for Cleveland. D'Angelo Russell scored 25 points to lead the Nets.

**Hornets 118, Bulls 103**

Kemba Walker scored a game-high 31 points and Charlotte pulled away late in a win over visiting Chicago. The Hornets won their fifth consecutive game, their longest winning streak of the season. Charlotte outscored Chicago 67-52 in the second half to improve to 18-15 at home. Hornets center Dwight Howard finished with 24 points on 10-for-12 shooting. Jeremy Lamb contributed 15 points off the Charlotte bench on 7-for-9 shooting. Zach LaVine led Chicago with 21 points.

**Wizards 107, Bucks 104**

Bradley Beal scored 21 points and Washington held off a furious fourth-quarter comeback attempt in a victory over visiting Milwaukee. Otto Porter hit three 3-pointers and added 17 for the Wizards, who shot 47 percent from the floor. Giannis Antetokounmpo led Milwaukee with 23 points. Jabari Parker finished with 19 off the bench while Khris Middleton and Eric Bledsoe added 17 each. — Reuters

**NBA results/standings**

Charlotte 118, Chicago 103; Cleveland 129, Brooklyn 123; Miami 102, Philadelphia 101; Washington 107, Milwaukee 104; Portland 116, Sacramento 99; LA Clippers 122, Denver 120.

Eastern Conference					Western Conference				
Atlantic Division					Northwest Division				
	W	L	PCT	GB					
Toronto	42	17	.712	-	Minnesota	38	26	.594	-
Boston	43	19	.694	0.5	Portland	35	26	.574	1.5
Philadelphia	32	27	.542	10	Oklahoma City	35	27	.565	2
New York	24	38	.387	19.5	Denver	33	28	.541	3.5
Brooklyn	20	42	.323	23.5	Utah	31	30	.508	5.5
Central Division					Pacific Division				
Cleveland	36	24	.600	-	Golden State	47	14	.770	-
Indiana	34	26	.567	2	LA Clippers	32	27	.542	14
Milwaukee	33	27	.550	3	LA Lakers	26	34	.433	20.5
Detroit	28	32	.467	8	Sacramento	18	43	.295	29
Chicago	20	41	.328	16.5	Phoenix	18	44	.290	29.5
Southeast Division					Southwest Division				
Washington	36	25	.590	-	Houston	47	13	.783	-
Miami	32	29	.525	4	San Antonio	36	25	.590	11.5
Charlotte	28	33	.459	8	New Orleans	34	26	.567	13
Orlando	18	42	.300	17.5	Dallas	19	42	.311	28.5
Atlanta	18	43	.295	18	Memphis	18	41	.305	28.5

## Iran wrestling head quits, refusing to lie over facing Israelis

**TEHRAN:** The head of Iran's wrestling federation resigned yesterday after criticising authorities for letting athletes pay the price for the ban on facing Israeli opponents. Wrestling is a hugely popular sport in Iran where Rasoul Khadem, an Olympic gold medalist, was re-elected as president of the Wrestling Federation just two months ago.

But in a somewhat cryptic letter published on the federation's website he suggested he had been forced from his post, saying "apparently it is not going to work out" because of "my awkward mentality". "I cannot lie. Sometimes the best way to take a stand is not to stand," he wrote.

The councils for freestyle and Greco-Roman wrestling announced they were resigning en masse along with Khadem, the semi-official ISNA news agency reported.

Khadem had recently criticised Iranian authorities for their approach to competing against Israeli opponents. It followed a six-month ban given to Iran's Alireza Karimi Mashiani by the United World Wrestling Disciplinary Chamber for deliberately losing a match at the under-23 world championships in Poland in November in order to avoid an Israeli opponent in the next round.

His coach Hamidreza Jamshidi was banned for two years. Khadem, argued that Iranians should openly admit they will not compete against Israelis rather than invent excuses, and accept the consequences. "If we must continue with the policy of non-competition against the Zionist regime's athletes, the responsibility cannot fall on the shoulders of the coach and the athlete," he said on public radio, according to ISNA. He said a "fundamental solution" needed to be reached by the Supreme Council for National Security. "Forcing an athlete to accept defeat or run around all night looking for a doctor's note is not right," he added. He had previously told ISNA that, if the country's policy was to avoid Israeli rivals then it should "behave honestly and... accept the consequences". Dozens of Iranian athletes have boycotted competitions against Israelis since the 1979 Islamic revolution, either out of choice or under pressure from authorities. — AFP

## Nadal cuts short comeback after injury flares up

**ACAPULCO:** World number two Rafael Nadal pulled out of the Mexican Open on Tuesday, cutting short his comeback from an injury when his ailing right hip flared up again. "My goal and hope was to play in this tournament. Unfortunately, in my last training session yesterday, I felt a sharp pain in my leg again," the 31-year-old Spanish star said hours before what was to have been his opening match of the ATP Tour event in Acapulco.

Nadal, favoured to win the tournament and champion here in 2005 and 2013, had been due to face fellow Spaniard Feliciano Lopez. "I took all the appropriate steps to arrive at the tournament in form. I went to Cozumel first, to adapt (to the climate)," he told reporters. "But yesterday, in my last training session before the tournament, during one movement I felt a sharp pain again in the same area where I had the problem in Australia."

Nadal limped out of the quarter-finals at the Australian Open on January 23. He has since lost his number one ranking to Roger Federer. Nadal said doctors in Mexico warned him not to play for fear of aggravating the injury.

"I still don't know what it is,

because we don't know. It seems it's not as bad as what I had at the Australian Open," he said. "Now, my main goal is to find out the extent of the injury." This marks the sixth tournament in a row that Nadal has pulled out of or retired from—the Australian Open, Brisbane, London, Paris, Basel and Acapulco.

**INJURY UNCLEAR**

The 16-time Grand Slam winner Nadal previously announced himself fully fit and said he was looking forward to competing in his second event of 2018. "I took a couple of weeks of rest and worked hard on rehabilitation," he said earlier in the week. "Last week, I started practising hard again. I feel ready." Nadal is expected to remain at least one more day in Acapulco to have more tests done. "Maybe it is a minor situation, but the reality is that there is liquid and until it goes down a bit and the relevant tests are done, it will not be possible to diagnose," he said.

While a victory this week would not have been good enough to overhaul Federer, it would leave Nadal primed to replace the Swiss star at Indian Wells or Miami next month. The 2008 Olympic gold medal winner is known as the "King of Clay" and is considered the greatest clay-court player in the history of the sport. But his success is not limited to clay. Nadal has won 10 French Open titles, three US Opens, two Wimbledon and one Australian Open. Nadal, who turns 32 in June, ended 2017 as the oldest year-end world number one in the 45-year history of the ATP rankings. — AFP



**ACAPULCO:** Spain's Rafael Nadal speaks to the press during the Mexico Open in Acapulco, Guerrero state on Tuesday. — AFP