

Sports

World rowing chief gives thumbs-up to 2020 Tokyo Olympic venue

‘Everything has been on track, on time and I am very pleased’

TOKYO: The head of the International Rowing Federation has backed the newly opened 2020 Tokyo Olympic venue to provide a world-class test for athletes at next year's Summer Games.

The Sea Forest Waterway, which will also host sprint canoeing and be used for the Paralympics, opened yesterday with a demonstration event completed in blustery conditions.

“Of course the wind, if it's too strong, might be an issue,” admitted world rowing chief Jean-Christophe Rolland, who won a gold medal for France at the 2000 Olympics. “But it's the fourth time I came here in Tokyo and this is the first time I've seen it so strong.”

“On an eight-day programme, I hope that we will find easily a time when the wind is not too strong and that we can have a good competition.” Rolland praised Tokyo organisers for completing the venue on schedule. “Everything has been on track, on time and I am very pleased more than one year before the Olympic Games to be in such a position without any major issues,” he told reporters.

“There are still some little things to improve but we can be relieved we will have a good course for the Olympic Games.” The Sea Forest Waterway is one of just eight permanent new venues being constructed for Tokyo 2020, in addition to 25 existing and 10 temporary venues out of a total of 43.

The 2,300-metre (2,500-yard) course was built on canals in Tokyo Bay next to an old landfill site that has

been transformed into a forest for the Olympics.

Its grandstand seats around 2,000 while an additional 16,000 spectators will be able to follow the action from temporary seating and standing areas, officials said. Despite rowers and canoeists taking a buffet in the winds, Rolland declared himself happy.

“We have to cope with the local situation,” he added. “Our intention is not to make a venue perfect (but) to make a venue fair for the athletes, the best at an acceptable cost.” The new archery venue was completed in April as Tokyo organisers continue to deliver after a series of early setbacks. They opened their first permanent venue—the Musashino Forest Sport Plaza, which will host badminton and modern pentathlon fencing—in 2017, which followed a disastrous rollout of plans for the Olympic stadium.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe tore up the blueprints for the new national stadium in 2015 faced with public anger over its \$2 billion price tag. Designs for the official Games logo were subsequently scrapped following accusations of plagiarism, before Olympic organisers admitted that prolonged summer rain had brought high levels of bacteria to a venue earmarked for triathlon and open water swimming.

Tokyo officials have since been looking for ways to reduce their 1.35 trillion yen (\$12 billion) budget, despite concerns from some sports bodies warning that cost-cutting could adversely affect the running of the Games. — AFP



TOKYO: Tokyo metropolitan governor Yuriko Koike (2nd L), Jean-Christophe Rolland, president of the World Rowing Federation (2nd R) and other officials hold a tape cutting ceremony attends the Sea Forest Waterway opening ceremony in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

Huget double leads Toulouse to 20th French title

PARIS: France winger Yoann Huget scored two tries as Toulouse won the French title for a 20th time beating Clermont 24-18 on Saturday. Huget dotted down either side of the break as the side who finished in pole position in the Top 14 table at the end of the regular season lifted the title in their first final appearance since 2012.

Clermont, who scored a record amount of tries for a side during the 26-game campaign, failed in their attempt to win a European and league double after lifting the Challenge Cup in May despite a flawless kicking performance from Scotland's Greig Laidlaw.

“It's crazy. It's magnificent. We had an incredible season,” Toulouse centre Sofiane Guitoune told France 2 TV. “We played our game, we scored two tries and we could have scored more, we never gave in, everyone together. It was hard until the end, it's marvellous.”

The Stade de France pitch had been damaged by concert from K-Pop boy band BTS a week earlier but it failed to hamper both teams' intent to play. Laidlaw opened the scoring within the first two minutes with a penalty after early fisticuffs, crossing the 200-point mark in the league for the season.

Toulouse captain Jerome Kaino chose for a shot at goal three minutes later and France's Thomas Ramos brought the teams all square 3-3 after nine minutes. Laidlaw and Ramos then slotted a further penalty each for a 6-6 score with a quarter of the game gone.

Toulouse went into the lead on 28 minutes as South Africa's Cheslin Kolbe took a wide arching run targeting a vulnerable Alivereti Raka and fed Huget in the corner. Ramos missed the touchline conversion for a 11-6 score. Kolbe was then shown a yellow card after 33 minutes. Clermont's Fritz Lee broke free with Peceli



PARIS: Toulouse's players celebrate with the Bouclier de Brennus trophy after the French Top 14 final rugby union match between Stade Toulousain and ASM Clermont Auvergne at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis, north of Paris. Toulouse won the French title for a 20th time beating Clermont 24-18. — AFP

Yato alongside in support but Kolbe tackled the Fiji back-row early and he spent the rest of the half in the sin-bin. Laidlaw slotted his third three-pointer of the game to close Toulouse's advantage as the first half ended 11-9. Ramos re-established his side's five-point lead with a penalty on 48 minutes following heavy pressure from Champions Cup losing semi-finalists then Laidlaw converted another three-pointer to close the gap to 14-12 with less than half an hour to play.

On 54 minutes, Huget, again making the most of Raka's poor positioning, scored his second try at the

end of the stadium filled by fans in red and black. The ball was worked wide by the likes of Ramos and Maxime Medard, the sole survivor of their last appearance at a Top 14 final in 2012 and Huget dived over unopposed for his 10th try in all competitions for the campaign and Toulouse led by nine points.

Laidlaw kept his perfect record for the match with his fifth effort as Clermont trailed by 21-15 with less than 20 minutes to play. Ramos added another penalty goal and France fly-half Camille Lopez did so too for a 24-18 score. — AFP

days after undergoing surgery on his arm, started from pole in the seventh MotoGP of the season and eventually came in second, 2.66sec off Marquez.

Marquez, on 140 points, benefitted from a fall by Italian rival Andrea Dovizioso to consolidate his lead in the world championship rankings and is now 37pts clear. Dovizioso was brought down along with Yamaha pair Valentino Rossi and Maverick Vinales by Honda rider Jorge Lorenzo.

“You don't have any options if you brake a little bit too late, like happened with me. It was my fault, my mistake and I apologise. It was really unfortunate to take out Dovi, Maverick and Valentino - it wasn't their fault, it was mine,” Lorenzo tweeted.

His victory came on the 70th anniversary of MotoGP. The competition's first race, the Tourist Trophy of the Isle of Man, was held in 1949 and won by Britain's Freddie Frith. Alex Marquez, on a Kalex, saw his Moto2 win propel him atop the category's stand-

ings. Marquez clocked 38min 25.678sec to finish ahead of Switzerland's Thomas Luthi, with another Spaniard, Jorge Navarro, rounding out the podium at the Montmelo circuit.

The victory saw Marquez leapfrog Italian teammate Lorenzo Baldassari in the standings. There was more glory for Spain in the Moto3 when Marcos Ramirez, on a Honda, notched up his maiden victory, and in doing so became the 12th different winner in the last 12 races in the highly competitive class.

Ramirez took the lead from Honda teammate Kaito Toba after the Japanese, who started 24th on the grid, fell on the final lap. Despite a last-corner pass attempt from KTM's Spanish rider Aron Canet, Ramirez held on through to the line of a chaotic, crash-marred race.

Spain's Canet heads up the riders' standings, extending his lead from three points before the race to 23, with his closest rival Lorenzo Dalla Porta forced to retire with trouble on board his Honda. — AFP

Brumbies playing for Australian pride in quarter-finals

CANBERRA: The ACT Brumbies are the only side left flying the Australian flag in Super Rugby and coach Dan McKellar says the team will be playing for national pride in the quarter-finals.

On a freezing Saturday night in Canberra, the Brumbies rallied from 7-0 down to beat the Queensland Reds 40-27 for their sixth straight win. It was a record-setting victory, equalling their longest win streak ahead of the home quarter-final against South Africa's Coastal Sharks next Saturday.

Australia's three other teams—the Reds, NSW Waratahs and Melbourne Rebels—all lost, summing up their disappointing seasons in a World Cup year. Dane Haylett-Petty's Rebels finished 11th on the 15-team ladder, the Michael Hooper-led Waratahs came 12th and the Reds, who said goodbye to departing skipper Samu Kerevi, were second last, ahead of only Japan's Sunwolves.

New Zealand have four teams in the last eight and South Africa two. Argentina's Jaguares also made the grade after topping the South Africa conference. “I do think there's a sense that we're representing the country,” McKellar told reporters of being the last Australian team standing.

“You get a bit sick of rugby getting beaten up in Australia for one reason or another. I'd love for us to keep working hard and put some really positive stories together for our own players and group to remember.”

“But also for rugby to get some positivity over the next few weeks,” he added. “I'm confident we can do that.” Australian rugby has been through the wringer recently, with Israel Folau's sacking for homophobic comments overshadowing much of the season, which followed a wretched year for the Wallabies in 2018.

A big disappointment for Australian fans was the late-season capitulation that saw the Rebels throw away the chance of making their playoffs debut. They leaked 125 points in their last two outings, losing 59-8 at home to the Waikato Chiefs on Friday after their 66-0 thrashing by the Crusaders the week before.

Their Wallabies fly-half Reece Hodge said he feared the scale of the losses may cost some players a place in the Australia squad for the World Cup in Japan. “I'm filthy about it and if it costs me my spot then I have to live with that,” Hodge, who has won 33 caps, told reporters. — AFP

Marquez storms to Catalan MotoGP victory

MONTMELO: Spain's Marc Marquez, on a Honda, stretched his lead atop the standings after streaking to victory in yesterday's Catalan MotoGP. It was five-time world champion Marquez's first victory on his home region Montmelo track since 2014 and came hot on the heels of that of his younger brother Alex in the Moto2 class earlier in the day.

“All the team did a very good job and I congratulate them for that,” said Marc Marquez. “It was a great race.” French Yamaha rider Fabio Quartararo, just 11

advantage, and victory in the 87th edition of Le Mans.

Alonso's No.8 car crossed the line 17 seconds clear of the pole-sitting No.7 after 385 laps of the iconic circuit. The outcome was a carbon copy of 2018 and it handed Alonso, Buemi and Nakajima the endurance drivers' title with Toyota having taken the constructors' crown last month.

A distant third was the SMP entry driven by Vitaly Petrov, Mikhail Aleshin and Stoffel Vandoorne. Alonso lined up in the classic race after having failed in his latest bid to complete motor racing's ‘Triple Crown’ when he missed out on qualifying for the Indy 500 last month.

A Toyota win this year was all but guaranteed as for the last two seasons they have been the only manufacturer on the grid after Porsche and Audi pulled out of the elite LMP1 class which this year featured just six other cars.

Although Alonso will not be with them in 2020, Toyota will be on the grid after con-

firming they will enter a ‘hypercar’ under new regulations aimed at boosting competition and trimming costs.

Aston Martin said they too will send a team next year. As dawn broke over the circuit in the Sarthe region of France only five of the eight cars in top LMP1 category remained.

The SMP Racing car of Stephane Sarrazin, Egor Orudzhev and Sergey Sirotkin was forced to abandon the race at around 2:00 am as it was in third place. With Orudzhev at the wheel, it went off the track and was too damaged to continue.

Most of the drama in the early hours of the race was down the field. The Corvette of Swiss driver Marcel Fassler spun after contact with the Porsche of Japan's Satoshi Hoshino who is driving for the team backed by film star Patrick Dempsey.

After two violent clashes with the safety barriers, the Corvette had to be lifted off the circuit by a crane with the crew forced to abandon. — AFP

Alonso wins back-to-back Le Mans with Toyota

LE MANS: Fernando Alonso celebrated his second straight Le Mans 24 Hour race title on Sunday in a Toyota, the two-time Formula One champion sharing the driving with Sebastian Buemi and Kazuki Nakajima.

Another Toyota driven by Mike Conway, Kamui Kobayashi and Jose Maria Lopez, was in the lead and on course for victory only to suffer a puncture one hour from the finish. Entering the closing stages Alonso's car lagged over a lap behind the other Toyota hybrid, before lady luck intervened an hour from the 1300GMT finish to gift them the



LE MANS: (From L) Toyota TS050 Hybrid LMP1 team Gazoo Racing President Shiegeki Tomoyama, Spain's driver Fernando Alonso, Swiss driver Sebastian Buemi and Japanese's driver Kazuki Nakajima holds the trophies on podium after the 87th edition of the 24 Hours Le Mans endurance race yesterday, at Le Mans northwestern France. — AFP