

## Sports

Photo of the day



ALMATY: Red Bull Skydive Team performs in Almaty, Kazakhstan. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## Tokyo 2020 organising committee member contracts coronavirus

**TOKYO:** The Tokyo 2020 Olympics and Paralympics Organising Committee said yesterday a member of the organisation has tested positive for the new coronavirus.

A man in his 30s who works at the committee's headquarters had tested positive on Tuesday and had been placed in quarantine at his home, it added.

"The organising committee has identified those who have had close contact with the patient and entered them in home isolation from today, while the floor where the individual worked will be closed off and disinfected," the committee said in a statement.

The vast majority of Tokyo 2020's approximately 3,800 staff have been working from home since the Japanese government announced a state of emergency earlier this month.

Members of the organising committee are working on plans for the rescheduled Olympics following the decision to postpone the Games last month because of the coronavirus outbreak.

The Games, originally due to start in July, have been pushed back until 2021.

Over 2.5 million have been infected globally and 172,927 people have died of the coronavirus.

At least 12,000 people have tested positive for the virus in Japan, leading to 276 deaths as of Tuesday. —Reuters

## NFL braces for 'Virtual Draft' amid coronavirus lockdown

'It's really the ultimate work from home experience'

**LOS ANGELES:** The NFL Draft will head into uncharted territory today, with lockdown restrictions put in place to combat the coronavirus pandemic forcing teams to take part in an unprecedented "virtual draft". The annual three-day marketplace to choose the cream of collegiate talent was initially due to have been held on the Las Vegas strip, with a special stage constructed amid the famous fountains of the Bellagio hotel.

But with Sin City's neon lights dimmed and casinos shuttered due to COVID-19, the gaudy backdrop envisioned by the NFL for one of its biggest events of the year has long since fallen by the wayside.

Instead, the NFL's 30 teams will choose the 255 draft selections from remote locations scattered across the United States. With different states having different lockdown regulations, the NFL has ruled that all league and team employees participating in the draft must do so from offices set up at home using an encrypted draft channel designed by Microsoft.

Teams of NFL technical support staff have spent weeks ensuring each participant has reliable internet connections at home while each team will have an IT specialist on standby at the home of its key decision maker.

Fifty-eight of the top draft prospects meanwhile will have in-home cameras as they wait to watch NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell announce the coveted first round picks from the basement of his home in New York.

## 'EXCITING, NERVE-WRACKING'

"It's really the ultimate work from home experience on a really large scale where everyone's watching."

Michelle McKenna, the NFL's chief information officer, told the Wall Street Journal. "It's exciting and very nerve-racking as well."

A trial run of the system on Monday was not without its glitches. According to ESPN, the Cincinnati Bengals — who are expected to take highly rated quarterback Joe Burrow at the top of the draft — encountered a technical problem as they attempted to use their first pick. It caused a delay of several minutes.

Other ESPN journalists reported negative feedback from team personnel. "Everybody is saying the same thing which is bandwidth is a problem. There are many communication issues," ESPN's Dianna Russini tweeted.

Other NFL team executives however said the test run had passed largely trouble-free after the early hiccup. "The draft went smooth," said Denver Broncos chief John Elway. "It got off to a little bit of a hiccup when we first started, but other than that it went really smooth."

"There were really no problems with it, so we got more comfortable with it. It should be fine to go on without a glitch. I'm sure there will be a couple of glitches here and there, but actually for the first time I thought it went pretty well."

## LOSING 'PERSONAL' TOUCH

The biggest impact of COVID-19 on the draft may turn out to be the restrictions that have limited opportunities for face-to-face meetings between players and team officials. Normally prospective draft picks are flown to team facilities for interviews and private workouts conducted in front of team personnel.

the Stanley Cup without a champion, the only other time that's occurred was in 2005 with the season lost due to a labour dispute. The NHL will be hoping the suspended 2020 campaign does eventually resume to crown a champion.

## A LEGEND EMERGES

Spanish flu and the war had a hand in Babe Ruth's emergence as a legendary baseball slugger. The disease had been carried to the US by troops returning from the war in Europe. Despite those twin evils a shortened version of the MLB season and World Series went ahead. In March, Ruth, the Red Sox's best pitcher, was given an opportunity to prove his skill as a hitter, smashing five home runs in practice for troops at an army camp in Arkansas. He was to survive two flu attacks that year to help the Red Sox to the title. In the first he was rushed to hospital, triggering rumours that he was on his deathbed. Widely regarded as the greatest baseball player in history he won seven World Series. The staging of the 1918 series in Boston was blamed for contributing to the spread of a lethal second wave of the disease that took the life of renowned major league umpire Silk O'Loughlin.

## CHELSEA WIN SILVERWARE

The English League was suspended during the war years but regional competitions soldiered on. In 1919, with the invisible invader continuing its assault, Chelsea even won a trophy. The club's website notes that 36,000 were at Highbury to watch the 3-0 win over Fulham, the game going ahead despite two players,

Tom Logan and Harry Ford, "being escorted by 'the Spanish Lady'". Both recovered, unlike former outside right Angus Douglas, the Scottish international, who died aged 29. Other players to lose their lives were former Newcastle and Nottingham Forest forward Jack Stanley Allan (after returning from the war) and former Gainsborough Trinity winger Johnnie Pattinson. A quarter of a million Britons perished. The Football League resumed in September with the flu still not totally defeated.

## BARCELONA DEFY SUSPENSION

Then, like now, the Spanish Football Federation in line with all the other major leagues suspended play. But sports daily Marca relates how Barcelona president Joan Gamper defied the lockdown with the Catalan Championship starting in October, 1918. Gamper headed a commission contesting the local health board's ruling that "football games will be suspended; theatres, cinemas and other venues will close, and large scale public hygiene measures will be implemented."

## OLYMPICS ESCAPE

Coronavirus put paid to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, the Games eventually being postponed until 2021, although this week a Japanese virus expert declared he was "pessimistic" they could even be held then. There was no such drama over the 1920 Antwerp Olympics, which with Spanish flu defeated went ahead without a hitch. —AFP



LOS ANGELES: The Bengals had no issues with making their first-round selection last year, as they took Alabama tackle Jonah Williams. This year, the draft is entirely virtual.

Often those meetings are vital in shaping a team's view of a prospect, providing clues to intangible, unknown aspects of a player's personality and a clearer idea of how they may fit into a particular locker room culture.

Instead, teams have been conducting interviews and meetings with prospects via video call platforms such as Facetime and Zoom. "It's not great, it's not perfect, it's okay," said New York Giants general

manager Dave Gettleman.

"By not having pro guys, you miss that personal contact. Watching guys among their peers and how they operate, how they're received. That tells a lot when you just watch a kid in those circumstances. We're losing the personal touchpoints. We have the visual touchpoint, but we're really missing out on the personal touchpoint, when you can smell or feel a guy." —AFP

## Sport in the time of Spanish flu

**PARIS:** The world's desperate combat against coronavirus evokes the battle it faced over a century ago with Spanish flu. AFP Sport examines here some cases of how sport fared during the 1918 pandemic:

## SPANISH - IN NAME ONLY

It claimed an estimated 50 million victims, infecting around 500 million to earn the dubious honour of the deadliest pandemic in history. The virus marched across the globe but misleadingly became known as the Spanish flu. With World War One censorship in place newspapers were free to report on its effects in neutral Spain, generating the false impression the country was at the epicentre of the health crisis.

## STANLEY CUP

The 1919 National Hockey League play-off series between Seattle Metropolitans and Montreal Canadiens was reaching its conclusion only to be called off abruptly before the decisive sixth game when some of the Canadiens players fell ill. One, Joe Hall who had collapsed on the ice in the fifth game, died whilst manager George Kennedy succumbed to influenza-related complications in 1921. It left

## Gronk ends retirement, joins Bucs

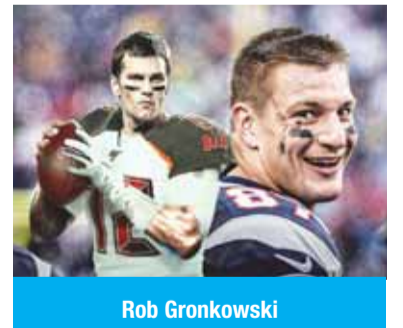
**TAMPA BAY:** Former New England Patriots tight end Rob Gronkowski came out of retirement and was traded to Tampa Bay Buccaneers to reunite with quarterback Tom Brady, both teams announced Tuesday.

The Buccaneers sent a fourth-round pick (No. 139 overall) to the Patriots, who sent back a seventh-round pick (No. 241) with Gronkowski. ESPN reported that Gronkowski passed his physical with an independent physician in Boston to complete the deal.

Gronkowski texted Fox Sports' Jay Glazer. "I'm back. I always said when I have that feeling and it feels right, I will be ready to take the field again. And I have that feeling. I'm ready."

NFL Network reported that Gronkowski, who turns 31 in May, has been putting on weight for a return to football after spending the 2019 season retired.

Tampa Bay made a run at acquiring Gronkowski — perhaps at Brady's urging — and landed the



Rob Gronkowski

player who ranks third all-time in touchdown receptions (79) by a tight end, trailing leader Antonio Gates (116) and Pro Football Hall of Famer Tony Gonzalez (111).

"Rob Gronkowski is one of the best tight ends in NFL history and he plays the game with the type of passion and desire that sets him apart," Buccaneers general manager Jason Licht said in a statement. "Rob has played his entire career alongside Tom Brady and their accomplishments speak for themselves. Together they have developed the type of chemistry on and off the field that is crucial to success."

"Rob combines elite-level skills as both a receiver and blocker but what really makes him special is the fact that he's a proven winner who brings that championship mindset and work ethic." —Reuters