

## Sports

Photo of the day



Coco Zurita performs at Ritoque, Chile in 2019. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

# Masked, muted Olympics will still dominate crowded 2021 in sports

## Tokyo organizers, government struggling with increased costs

**PARIS:** The rescheduled Tokyo Olympics will be the centerpiece of a crammed sporting year in 2021 as sports administrators who had their calendars wiped away by the coronavirus pandemic try to fill the gaps even as a second wave hits. While the Games will still be called the 2020 Olympics, they have been changed by COVID-19. Tokyo organizers and the Japanese government are struggling with increased costs and, despite the growing possibility of vaccination, whether to allow foreign visitors and what safeguards and restrictions will apply to spectators and participants.

In early December, organizers said the delayed Games will cost at least an extra \$2.4 billion as the unprecedented peacetime postponement and a raft of pandemic health measures inflate a budget that was already over \$13 billion. Enthusiasm appears to have waned in Japan. A poll in July showed that just one in four people wanted to see the Games held in 2021 - and a majority backed either further delay or cancellation.

"Whether it's seen as too much or that we have done well to contain the costs, I think it depends on how you look at it," said Tokyo 2020 CEO Toshiro Muto. Organizers have reduced the number of free tickets, scaled down the opening ceremony and made savings on mascots, banners and meals, but so far have cut just \$280 million. "It will be simple rather than festive, but I hope it will be something moving that encourages people through the power of sport," he said.

The organizers are determined to go ahead next

year, even if the pandemic has not receded. They want to welcome foreign spectators and plan to waive quarantine requirements. They plan to require fans to wear masks, to refrain from cheering and keep their ticket stubs for contact tracing. Athletes will be asked to arrive late and leave early, minimize their time in the Olympic village, refrain from speaking loudly, avoid physical contact and wear masks when not competing or training. They will be screened on arrival and undergo tests every four to five days.

"I think the Games will go off," World Athletics president Sebastian Coe said this month. "What nobody is clearly across at the moment, is... whether we are going to have a stadium populated by good, noisy, passionate fans." The challenge for the organizers is considerable, since the Games bring together 11,000 athletes from 206 countries, accompanied by at least 5,000 officials and coaches, 20,000 media representatives and 60,000 volunteers.

### Lost time

Meanwhile, other sports, desperate to make up for lost time are, for the most part, manoeuvring to minimize overlaps between their revamped schedules and the Olympic behemoth. The National Basketball Association, which only finished its coronavirus-hit 2019-20 season on October 12, agreed with its players union to start the new season on December 22, cut the regular season by 10 games and end it on May 16.

This was partly to allow players to compete in Tokyo, although since the playoffs are scheduled to continue until July 22, the day before the Games start, some of the biggest stars could still miss Tokyo. One event that has not, so far, publicly rethought its plans is the other marquee casualty from the summer's sporting wipeout: the European football championships. Still called Euro 2020, they are scheduled to stick to the planned 12-city format but some member nations have reportedly been urging UEFA to put all the matches in one country.

The significance of the Olympics goes beyond sports. Following on from the diplomatic gestures at the PyeongChang Winter Games in 2018, there is talk of inviting North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to the Tokyo Games and holding a summit with South Korea, China, the United States and host Japan. Another dominant theme in 2020, opposition to racism, threatens to cause friction in Tokyo.

In early December, Coe pointedly gave the World Athletics President's award to Tommie Smith, Peter Norman and John Carlos, the three 400m runners who raised a fist in a black power salute on a medal podium protest at the 1968 Mexico City Games. "Sadly, their cause and what they so bravely stood for has not been consigned to the history books," said Coe. Thomas Bach, the head of the International Olympic Committee, quickly responded with irritation, saying any gestures opposing racism, such as taking a knee, would be against his rules prohibiting "political and religious marketing" at the Games. —AFP

## Kuwait Club win fifth Super Cup

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Sports Club met Arabi Club on Tuesday evening to launch the new football season with the Super Cup. Kuwait were determined from the onset for an attack as they kicked off with the attacking squad - Ahmad Al-Zanki, Faisal Zayed, Jumaa Saeed and Akaishi. 10 minutes into the match, defender Fahad Humoud headed the ball but missed, then five minutes later, Talal Al-Fadhel shot the ball that was handled by goalkeeper Suleiman Abdelghafour with difficulty. Akaishi threatened Arabi's goal in the 20th minute, and later scored in the 30th minute but was disallowed due to offside. Arabi meanwhile felt the pressure and adopted a defensive position though there were some attempts to move forward and attack. The second half started with a bang as Kuwait's forwards were in the Arabi's box and the ball was being tossed between players of both teams, until it



reached the head of Arabi's defender Ahmad Al-Saleh who headed it into his own net in the 47th minute.

Kuwait players kept attacking after which Faisal Zayed tried to double the score in the 63rd minute but his shot missed the goal. Arabi had a chance to equalize in the 92nd minute but forward Juma About squandered the chance following a corner kick. This is Kuwait's fifth Super Cup win, while Qadisiya has six and Arabi (2). The Super Cup match started in 2008, and is usually between the Amir Cup winner and the League winners.

ahead of next Dakar in January. However, if there is extra performance to be found the Spaniard will do all he can to find it. "We still want to make a few minor changes, in order to be as well prepared as possible for the start of the Dakar." - Carlos Sainz. 13-time Dakar winner Peterhansel completed the overall podium in Hail after fighting back from 10 lost minutes on day one caused by a flat tyre. The Frenchman's tenacious spirit was in evidence as he fought back from this misfortune to finish third overall.

"I didn't push to the max, as I don't want to take any big risks with the car I will be using at the Dakar." - Stéphane Peterhansel. Meanwhile, race winner Al-Attayah's fellow Toyota Hilux driver KubaPrzygonski lost his chance of challenging for a podium position after fuel-related issues on stage one. However, the Polish driver and his German co-driver Timo Gottschalk came back strongly on stage two to set the fifth fastest time of the day.

Now the convoy's attention turns to the Hail Baja 2 which covers 479 kilometres between December 14 and 15. This will be the last competitive distance raced before the 2021 Dakar Rally gets started on January 2 next year. Hail Baja 1 overall results - Car race Top 3 - (1) N Al-Attayah (QAT)/M Baumel (FRA) Toyota - 6h 14m 27s (2) C Sainz (ESP) / L. Cruz (ESP) MINI JCW Buggy - 6h 20m 37s (3) S. Peterhansel (FRA) / E. Boulanger (FRA) MINI JCW Buggy - 6h 23m 26s.



## Al-Attayah blasts over the dunes, wins Hail Baja 1

**KUWAIT:** Nasser Al Attiya wasted no time showing his speed over the dunes as he took a stunning victory at Hail Baja 1. Qatar's sand racing specialist demonstrated his competitive edge as he fended off fellow Dakar supremos Carlos Sainz and Stéphane Peterhansel to take the win. Al-Attayah and French co-driver Mathieu Baumel made their intentions plain from the start line in Hail as they set the opening day's fastest time. The duo backed up this performance on the second day with another stage win, and ultimately overall victory.

"We believed in our speed and we're happy to win Hail Baja 1." - Nasser Al-Attayah With less than a month to go until the start of the 2021 Dakar Rally, competition at the back-to-back Hail Baja races is intense. Staying on Al-Attayah tail throughout the first Hail Baja were the MINI JCW Buggy crews of Carlos Sainz/Lucas Cruz (both ESP) and Stéphane Peterhansel/Edouard Boulanger (both FRA).

Reigning Dakar car class champion Sainz came home in second place and is happy with how his car is running

## Antetokounmpo seals a record deal with Bucks

**LOS ANGELES:** Milwaukee Bucks superstar Giannis Antetokounmpo ended speculation about his future on Tuesday after agreeing a new long-term deal reported to be the biggest in NBA history. Antetokounmpo, who would have been able to enter free agency next year, said in a statement on Twitter he had agreed a five-year deal with the Bucks.

"This is my home, this is my city," the 26-year-old two-time NBA MVP said. "I'm blessed to be able to be a part of the Milwaukee Bucks for the next 5 years. Let's make these years count. The show goes on, let's get it." ESPN reported that Antetokounmpo's contract extension was worth \$228 million. The deal allows an opt out after four years. ESPN reported that the contract was the biggest in NBA history, eclipsing the \$206.8 million five-year deal agreed between Russell Westbrook and the Oklahoma City Thunder in 2017.

The deal will also see Antetokounmpo pocket the highest average annual salary in the NBA over the length of the contract, ESPN reported. Antetokounmpo will earn an average \$45.6 million a year. LeBron James earns \$44.5 million a season with the Los Angeles Lakers. The eye-watering contract marks the latest chapter in the rise of Antetokounmpo, who was born in Athens to Nigerian immigrants and once earned money hawking watches, bags and sunglasses as a street vendor. After taking up basketball as a youth, he was eventually spotted by NBA scouts and drafted with the 15th overall pick by the Bucks in 2013. He made his league debut as an 18-year-old later that year.

Antetokounmpo has dominated the NBA in recent seasons, winning the season MVP honors this year as well as the defensive player of the year award, averaging 29.5 points and 13.6 rebounds per game. However Antetokounmpo's dominance has not translated into championship success for the Bucks, who were eliminated in the Eastern Conference finals by Toronto last year before falling to Miami in the early rounds of this year's playoffs. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Iniesta sidelined for months

**MADRID:** Former Barcelona star Andres Iniesta broke a bone in his leg while playing for Japanese club Vissel Kobe in the Asian Champions League and will be out for four months, his club said yesterday. Iniesta, 36, underwent successful surgery in Barcelona. The injury occurred in last week's ACL quarter-final against Suwon. Iniesta said in a statement on Instagram accompanied by a photo of himself in a hospital bed that he had broken the "rectus femoris of my right leg". "After many tests I took the advice of my medical team and we have considered that the best option for me was to get surgery and speed up the recovery. "The surgery has been a success and I am feeling very well." —AFP

#### Lyon see off Juventus

**D'CNES-CHARPIEU:** Lyon cruised into the last 16 of the women's Champions League on Tuesday after beating Juventus 3-0 to claim a 6-2 aggregate victory. The seven-time European champions dominated the second leg in France from start to finish after only squeezing past the Italians 3-2 in the first leg in Turin. Dzenifer Marozan gave the holders, who were missing Wendie Renard, Sakina Karchaoui and Eugénie Le Sommer, a two-goal aggregate advantage when she opened the scoring midway through the first half. The tie remained in the balance until two minutes from the end when France forward Melvine Malard doubled the hosts' lead on the night. Belgium international Janice Cayman made sure the score reflected the balance of play in stoppage time. —AFP

#### India bids to host Asian Cup

**NEW DELHI:** India yesterday joined a five-nation race to host the 2027 Asian Cup, the continent's biggest football tournament, as it steps up efforts to secure international sporting recognition. Saudi Arabia and Qatar have already officially entered the fray and an All India Football Federation (AIFF) spokesman said the country's documents would be sent to the Asian Football Confederation this week. Iran and Uzbekistan have also said they will bid. India, once called a "sleeping giant" of football by former FIFA president Sepp Blatter, has stepped up its interest in hosting international events in recent years. It put on the 2017 under-17 men's World Cup and will host the 2022 women's Asian Cup and the 2021 under-17 women's World Cup. India is also considering a bid for the 2032 Olympics. AIFF president Praful Patel said the Asian Cup bid would further the country's reputation as an emerging football nation. —AFP

#### Foo Kune banned for 2 years

**GENEVA:** Mauritian badminton player Kate Foo Kune, her country's flag-carrier at the 2016 Rio Olympics, was banned for two years for doping on Wednesday after failing to prove her drink was spiked. Foo Kune, 27, tested positive for a banned steroid last year but she escaped a ban when the Badminton World Federation's anti-doping panel accepted her explanation that she was the victim of sabotage. But after a BWF appeal against its own panel's decision, the Swiss-based Court of Arbitration for Sport said there was no evidence of foul play. Foo Kune, the world number 105 in singles, tested positive at last year's African Badminton World Championships in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. "The CAS panel found the athlete's assertion of intentional spiking during the 2019 African Badminton World Championships devoid of supporting evidence," said a statement from the court, announcing a two-year ban from December 15. —AFP