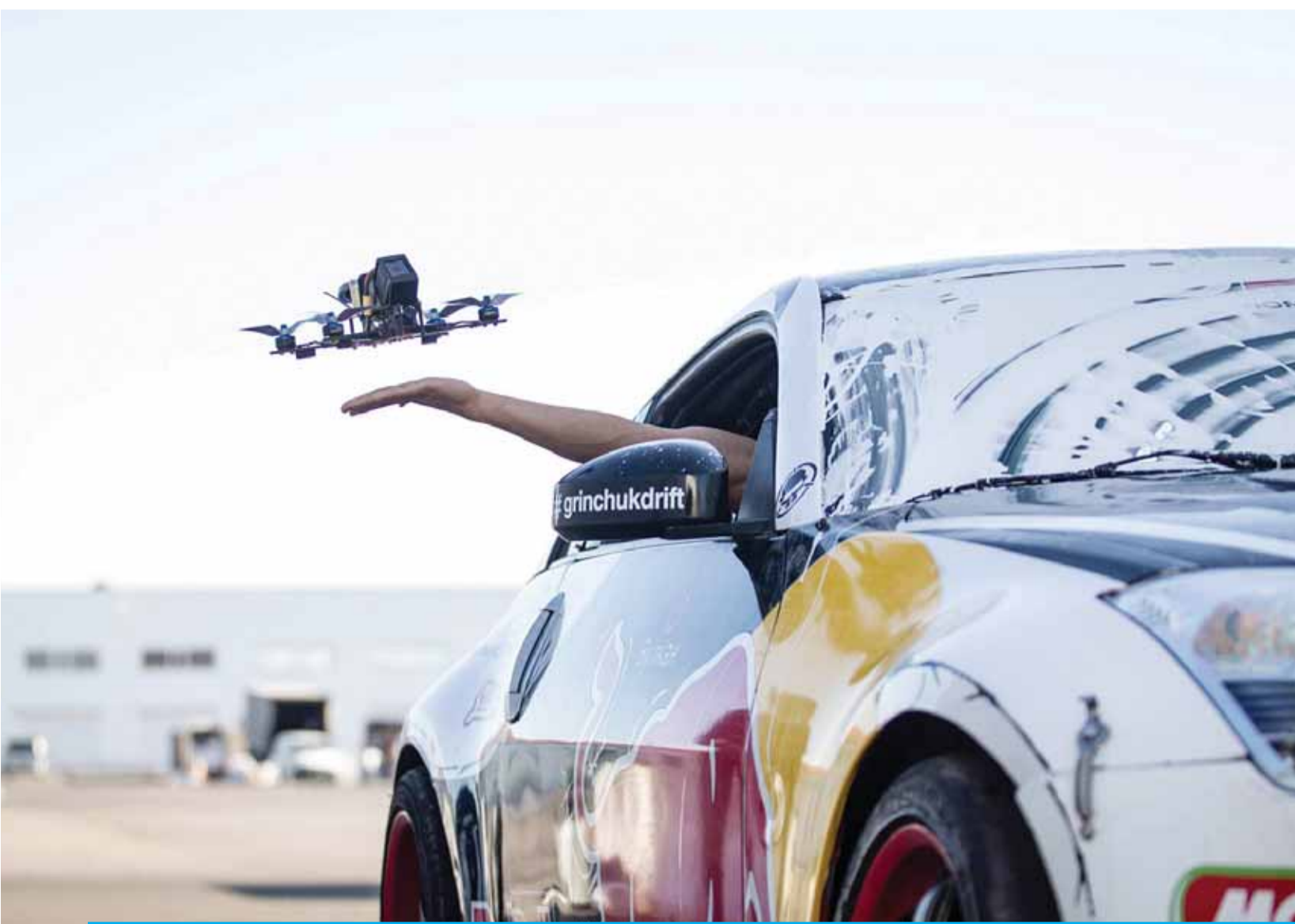


Sports

Photo of the day



Tommy Tibajia drifts in Ukraine. Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

US bobsleigh
Olympian
Jovanovic dead

LOS ANGELES: Pavle Jovanovic, who competed in bobsleigh for the United States at the 2006 Olympics, took his own life last weekend at the age of 43, the US Bobsled and Skeleton federation said Saturday.

"The winter sports community has suffered a tragic loss," said federation chief executive Aron McGuire, a former teammate of Jovanovic.

"Pavle's passion and commitment towards bobsled was seen and felt by his teammates, coaches, competitors, and fans of the sport. He lived life to the fullest and had a lasting influence on all those who had the opportunity to spend time with him." Jovanovic, who competed in bobsleigh for the United States at the 2006 Olympics, took his own life last weekend at the age of 43, the US Bobsled and Skeleton Federation said Saturday.

"The winter sports community has suffered a tragic loss," said federation chief executive Aron McGuire, a former teammate of Jovanovic. "Pavle's passion and commitment towards bobsled was seen and felt by his teammates, coaches, competitors, and fans of the sport. He lived life to the fullest and had a lasting influence on all those who had the opportunity to spend time with him." Another US Olympic teammate, Steve Mesler, posted a moving tribute on Instagram, which was all the more anguished because Jovanovic's suicide comes three years after American bobsleigh driver Steven Holcomb died at the age of 37. "Pav, I can't believe another one of these needs to be written," Mesler wrote. "I can't believe it's you I'm writing this about. My personal legend - the athlete that set the standard for focus, dedication, meticulousness, and drive - tragically took his own life at the age of 43."

Jovanovic missed the 2002 Olympics after failing a drugs test and served a two-year ban before competing at the 2006 games. He placed seventh in the two- and four-man events as a pusher in driver Todd Hays' sleigh.

"You never know what people are going through from outward appearances," former teammate Jason Dorsey commented on Facebook. "We have to talk to them and listen more. I'm going to work on that going forward." —AFP

US PGA's Memorial to track fans to
maintain COVID-19 social distancing

'We're going to use technology to protect everyone around us'

LOS ANGELES: The US PGA Tour's Memorial Tournament will use radio frequency identification (RFID) chips in spectator badges to ensure fans maintain social distance at the July 16-19 event, Golf Digest reported Saturday.

Dan Sullivan, director of the tournament hosted by 18-time major champion Jack Nicklaus in Ohio, said on a Zoom presentation conducted by the Greater Columbus Sports Commission that the high-tech badges were just one measure that will be used to maintain safety amid the coronavirus pandemic. "At any time we can know around the golf course how many people are collecting in a certain area," Sullivan said of the benefits of the tracking technology.

"We're going to use that technology to make sure that we're protecting everyone around us, protecting the folks that are inside those various venues and make sure that we're monitoring effectively and producing a tournament that everyone can be comfortable with."

In a phone interview with Golf Digest Sullivan explained that a small group of marshals on the grounds would have access to the tracking information and if areas become congested people will be asked to disperse.

Sullivan said less high-tech measures, such as elimination of grandstands and wearing of masks by staff and volunteers, would also be employed. The number of fans allowed on the course will also be limited, and those who attend will have their tem-

peratures taken.

Hand sanitizer will be widely available, draft beer and fountain drinks won't be offered and all monetary transactions will be handled by credit or debit card, not cash.

The PGA Tour halted its season on March 12, in the midst of the Players Championship, as increasing numbers of COVID-19 cases brought global sport to a standstill. One of the biggest concerns surrounding the resumption of competition has been the possibility that large gatherings of fans could spark a surge of new virus cases.

The tour is aiming to resume on June 11 with the Charles Schwab Challenge at Colonial Country Club in Fort Worth, Texas, the first of four events that will be played without fans.

The first tournament that might be able to admit fans is the John Deere Classic in Silvis, Illinois, the week before the Memorial. But it's not definite that the closed-door policy will end after four events.

Clair Peterson, tournament director of the John Deere, said the decision to admit fans will depend on what local government restrictions remain in place in to combat the spread of coronavirus.

"Who knows? Memorial could be the first event with fans if we do not have them, but they're in the exact same position of not knowing what will be permissible," Peterson said. "But they have to make every preparation possible, as we are." —AFP

Fans could
spark a surgeF1 without a crowd
leaves Hamilton with
an empty feeling

LONDON: Six-times Formula One world champion Lewis Hamilton says the prospect of a home British Grand Prix without spectators leaves him empty inside but he is still raring to get going after months of waiting.

None of the drivers have raced since December, with the season stalled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but there are plans to start up behind closed doors in Austria and then Silverstone in July.

"It gave me a really empty feeling, because the fans really make that race," Hamilton — a record six-times winner on home soil — said in a video interview released on Saturday by his Mercedes team.

"Around the world, the more fans there the more atmosphere you have, that's why you have places like Silverstone and Monza. So it's going to be very empty."

"I don't know how exciting it's going to be for people watching on TV but it's going to be better than nothing," added the Briton, 35.

"For us it's going to be like a test day, probably even worse than a test day in the sense that at a test day there's not a huge amount of people in

Barcelona that come to watch but there are still some."

The champion, who has homes in Monaco and the United States and enjoyed a busy lifestyle before the crisis, did not disclose his location.

He said he was enjoying the downtime and described himself as a generally quiet, if workaholic, person.

"I'm great. This is the first time that I can remember that I've been in one place for six weeks," he said.

"I'm excited to get back in, I really do miss it. This has been almost a blessing on one side because it gives you more appreciation for the things that you love and do."

"This has given me more energy and inspiration and determination to keep delivering and keep working with this great team."

Hamilton said his weight had stayed the same and he was focusing on areas of weakness in training, such as calf exercises he normally found boring but recognised were important.

He had also done some gaming and signed up for a six-week online course.

"I've always wanted to learn a language and I still don't know any other languages. It's embarrassing I feel when people ask," he said. "I aced French at school, it was the only thing I aced."

"When I do things I just do it to the extreme so I sit down and do it in two hours basically," Hamilton added. "I just do one week a day." —Reuters



AUGUSTA: File photo of Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland walks with Dustin Johnson of the United States during a practice round prior to The Masters at Augusta National Golf Club on April 8, 2019 in Augusta, Georgia. — AFP

Less is more for
Mitchell when rugby
resumes post virus

LONDON: Former New Zealand head coach and current England defence chief John Mitchell believes some good may come from rugby union from the coronavirus if it creates "greater professionalism" thanks to a concentration of talent at fewer clubs worldwide, including Super Rugby.

Even before COVID-19 saw this year's edition of Super Rugby suspended after seven rounds in March, there was a widespread view the southern hemisphere's now 15-string premier club tournament had become increasingly unattractive for fans and broadcasters alike, with talent spread too thinly. The pandemic has already had a huge financial impact on rugby and there are concerns current club structures won't survive the outbreak fully intact.

England's Rugby Football Union has lost £15 million (\$19 million) so far due to the crisis, with Twickenham chiefs forecasting a total loss of £107 million if the autumn internationals are cancelled.

Meanwhile Rugby Australia, already reeling after reaching a multi-million dollar settlement with star player Israel Folau over his sacking for homophobic comments, have reported a \$6 million

operating deficit for last year.

They have also laid off 75 percent of staff, with chief executive Raelene Castle resigning amid accusations of mismanagement and sexism.

Japan's Sunwolves are set to be axed from the 2021 Super Rugby season, which is planned to be a 14-team tournament featuring sides from South Africa, New Zealand, Australia and Argentina.

'LOST ITS VALUE'

But Mitchell, once the coach of Australia's now former Super Rugby side Western Force, indicated greater contraction was still required if the tournament was to return to its mid 1990s and early 2000s heyday.

"I'd like to probably see less markets...The example I give you is Super Rugby," Mitchell told reporters in a conference call. "When it first started it was 12 teams, I think I even played in the first Super 10 but it was probably at its best when it was 12 teams and the best players were playing," added the 56-year-old, who coached the Chiefs in the Super 12 before guiding New Zealand to a third-place finish at the 2003 World Cup. "They obviously wanted to create a style of rugby that suited the southern hemisphere from an athletic point of view." "Ultimately, because they've spread that all round the world, it's in some ways spread players all round the world, creating greater costs."

"It's probably lost its value in some ways because people want to watch the best players playing in their competition." —AFP