

SPORTS  
sports

# Wimbledon cancelled for first time since WWII

AFP | London

Wimbledon organisers yesterday scrapped the oldest Grand Slam tennis tournament for the first time since World War II as the coronavirus wreaks further havoc on the global sporting calendar.

The cancellation of the only grasscourt major at the All England Club leaves the season in disarray, with no tennis due to be played until mid-July.

"Devastated," tweeted eight-time champion Roger Federer, while Serena Williams, who has won the tournament seven times, said she was shocked by the momentous decision.

Wimbledon was due to run for two weeks from June 29, with Novak Djokovic and Simona Halep set to defend their singles titles.

But tournament chiefs bowed to the inevitable yesterday, saying in a statement that they had made the decision with "great regret".

All England Club chairman Ian Hewitt said the decision had not been taken lightly.

"It has weighed heavily on our minds that the staging of The Championships has only been interrupted previously by world wars," he said.

"But, following thorough and



A general view of The All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club, best known as the venue for the Wimbledon Championships

extensive consideration of all scenarios, we believe that it is a measure of this global crisis that it is ultimately the right decision to cancel this year's Championships."

Halep tweeted her disappointment.

"So sad to hear @Wimbledon won't take place this year," she said. "Last year's final will forever be one of the happiest days of my life! But we are going through something bigger than tennis and Wimbledon will be back! And it means I have even longer to look forward to de-

fending my title."

The decision to cancel the tournament was widely expected, with the world struggling to contain the spread of COVID-19, which has infected more than 840,000 people worldwide and killed over 40,000.

It also prompted the ATP and WTA to cancel the grasscourt swing in the build-up to Wimbledon, meaning the tennis season will not now recommence until July 13 at the earliest.

The US Tennis Association responded by saying the US Open was still due to take place as

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planned, from August 31 to September 13.

"At this time the USTA still plans to host the US Open as scheduled, and we continue to hone plans to stage the tournament," it said in a statement.

"The USTA is carefully monitoring the rapidly-changing environment surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, and is preparing for all contingencies."

Organisers had earlier ruled out playing Wimbledon behind closed doors and postponing the event would also have created its own problems, with shorter days later in the English summer.

## Beijing 2022 Olympics face 'special situation' after Tokyo delay

AFP | Beijing

Beijing 2022 organisers said they face "a special situation" after the postponement of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics means less than six months between the Summer and Winter Games.

The Tokyo Olympics are now scheduled to run from July 23 to August 8, 2021 after they were put back a year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

However, with the Beijing Winter Games beginning on February 4, 2022 there is the unusual challenge of almost back-to-back Olympics.

"The new dates of the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games mean we are faced with a special situation where the Summer Games and Winter Games are to be held in half-a-year," a Beijing 2022 official told Xinhua news agency.



A general view of Olympic rings sculpture at the national 'Birds Nest' stadium in Beijing

"We will have a detailed assessment of how the new dates of Tokyo 2020 will affect the Beijing 2022 Games.

"In the meantime, will keep close communication with the IOC (International Olympic Committee) and the Olympic family to handle the situation properly and push forward our preparation in all aspects."

Beijing will become the first city to host both the Summer and Winter Games, having held the 2008 Olympics.

## Olympic flame passed into Fukushima's safekeeping

Reuters | Tokyo

Tokyo 2020 organisers left the Olympic flame in the hands of Fukushima Prefecture yesterday where it will be on display in a lantern for the next month after the Games were postponed for a year due to the coronavirus outbreak.

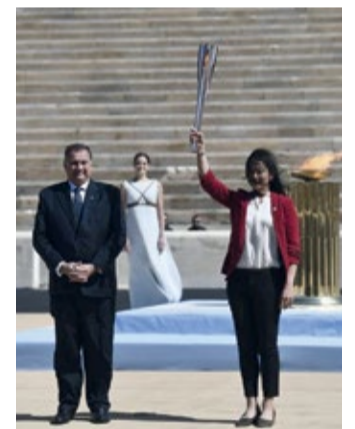
The handover took place at a subdued ceremony at the J-Village National Training Centre in Fukushima, which was originally set to be the starting point of the torch relay.

Only Tokyo 2020 COO Yukihiro Nunomura made the trip north from the organising committee.

"This is a (symbol of) hope for the world to celebrate the best of human beings through Tokyo 2020 after we overcome the serious coronavirus," said Nunomura to start the ceremony.

He then handed the Olympic flame to Makoto Noji from the Fukushima government.

"I strongly believe that the Olympic flame departure from the J-Village next year will be a strong message that we can



Former Japanese swimmer Imoto Naoko (R) holds the Olympic torch next to Greek Sports Minister Spyros Capralos (L) during the Olympic flame handover ceremony (file photo)

overcome whatever difficulty," said Noji.

"(It is a) symbol of hope - after we overcome this coronavirus disease we are now facing, with the people, not only from Japan, but from all over the world."

The flame will stay on display in the J-Village until April 30 before being moved to Tokyo. Organisers have not yet decided where in the Japanese capital it will be displayed.

## Silverstone holding out until end of April on British GP

Reuters | London

British Grand Prix organizers have set an end of April deadline to decide whether the country's Formula One race goes ahead as scheduled in July or becomes another casualty of the coronavirus.

The race, a highlight of a British sporting summer that looks likely to be wiped out by the pandemic, has been the best attended on the F1 calendar in recent seasons with a total crowd of 351,000 last year.



General view of a Union Jack flag being carried out on to the track by service personnel before the race in 2019 (file photo)

The Sunday turnout at the former World War Two airfield in central England was 141,000 in 2019, with the race close to home for seven of the sport's 10 teams including six times world champion Lewis Hamilton's Mercedes.

Britain's Hamilton won at Silverstone last year for a record sixth time. Britain has strict social distancing measures in place at present, with all sport on hold and the authorities asking everyone to stay at home except for essential travel.

## UEFA postpone all international matches scheduled for June

● UEFA has suspended all Champions League and Europa League matches "until further notice" due to the coronavirus pandemic

AFP | Paris

UEFA have made a move towards clearing the decks for the return of club football by announcing yesterday that all international matches that had been pushed back to June have now been postponed

until further notice.

"This includes the play-off matches for UEFA EURO 2020 and qualifying matches for UEFA Women's EURO 2021," said European football's governing body in a statement.

"All other UEFA competition matches, including the centralised international friendly matches, remain postponed until further notice."

The decision followed a videoconference with Europe's 55 member federations as part of discussions on how to adapt the fixture calendar in the face of the ongoing coronavirus crisis.



A man looks on as the UEFA Champions League trophy is displayed at the UEFA headquarters

The play-off semi-finals and finals that are supposed to decide the last four qualifying berths for the next European Championship were initially postponed at the end of March and pencilled in provisionally for June.

That was "subject to a review of the situation" amid uncertainty over how the pandemic will develop and whether many European countries currently in lockdown will be able to return to some kind of normality.

However, UEFA has also stated a determination to finish all domestic and club competitions by June 30.

While that currently looks ambitious at the very least, clearing the international fixtures from the same month does buy some more time as they aim to complete the Champions League and Europa League competitions as well as domestic leagues.

Carrying the season on beyond that date runs the risk of clubs losing their out-of-contract players before matches have been completed, unless a solution can be found.

The impact of the pandemic on Europe has already forced UEFA to put Euro 2020 back 12 months.