

MotoGP events in Italy, Catalunya join list of postponed races



Riders take the start of the 2017 Italian Grand Prix (file photo)

Reuters | Madrid

The MotoGP season will not begin until mid-June after the Italian and Catalan races were postponed yesterday due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The decision brings the number of postponed races to seven, while the March 8 first round in Qatar was cancelled.

Italy and Spain, where a majority of the riders and teams come from, are the two European countries worst affected by the virus, with more than 16,000 deaths in Italy and 13,000 in Spain.

"The FIM, IRTA and Dorna Sports regret to announce the postponement of the Gran Premio d'Italia Oakley (May 31) and Gran Premi Monster Energy de Catalunya (June 7)," MotoGP said in a statement.

"The ongoing coronavirus outbreak has obliged the two events to be rescheduled.

Liverpool reverse decision to furlough staff

Reuters | London

Premier League leaders Liverpool have reversed their decision to furlough some of their non-playing staff and club CEO Peter Moore apologised to fans on Monday after the decision drew sharp criticism from the British government and supporters.

The club said over the weekend they had furloughed some of their non-playing staff due to the COVID-19 pandemic and were holding talks about the prospect of salary deductions for players and senior staff.

The decision was made after the Premier League was suspended last month and, with no clear date for when it can resume, the club said they intended to apply to the British government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to reclaim a percentage of the wages.

Bahrain to decide future of sports events on July 1

TDT | Manama

Bahrain will decide whether to resume its national sports competitions or cancel them on July 1.

The decisions will take into consideration the positions of the continental and international federations in each of the sports, a meeting of the Bahraini association, chaired by HH Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa, First Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports and President of Bahrain Olympic Committee (BOC), said.

The meeting, held virtually in line with the directives of the Executive Committee to reinforce measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, reviewed the visions presented by the presidents of the various associations for the competitions and their plans for their resumption or cancellation.

"We are all confident that the Kingdom of Bahrain would overcome COVID-19 thanks to the solidarity and mutual support of all," HH Shaikh Khalid



HH Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa attends the virtual meeting

said.

"Everyone is committed to the measures and precautions to protect all people in Bahrain and we are all motivated to be stronger and more determined in combating the virus."

The meeting was attended by many leading figures in the sports and youth area in Bahrain, including Shaikh Salman bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa, Secre-

tary-General of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, Aymen bin Tawfiq Al Moayed, Minister of Youth and Sports Affairs, Dr Abdulrahman Sadiq Askar, Assistant Secretary-General of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, Mohammed Hassan Al Nusf, Secretary-General of Bahrain Olympic Committee and heads of sports federations.

HH Shaikh Khalid stated that the directives given by HH Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa, His Majesty the King's Representative for Charity Works and Youth Affairs, National Security Advisor and President of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports strengthened the implementation of the measures taken to protect the Bahraini sports community, in order to prevent

the spread of the disease and to safeguard sportsmen from the risk of infection.

HH Shaikh Khalid said, "We are confident that the Kingdom of Bahrain will overcome Covid-19 through unity. Everyone is responsible to commit to the measures and procedures to protect the society and strengthen it in its battle with this disease and to prevent it."

Through the meeting, HH Shaikh Khalid reviewed the perceptions presented by the heads of sports federations for their tournaments and competitions this season, and the strategy the federations would follow to resume or suspend the season.

His Highness hailed the positive interaction shown by the sports federations through the measures and steps it implemented, such as suspending its activities in the ongoing season as a precautionary step to combat and prevent the spread of Covid-19, in addition to its participation in spreading social awareness on the importance of adhering to safety and health measures.

Buttler fine with England playing different formats

Reuters | London

England could field two different teams on the same day at separate venues if the COVID-19 pandemic leads to a compressed home season, wicketkeeper-batsman Jos Buttler has said.

England have suspended professional cricket until at least May 28 due to the global health crisis, which also looms over their home series against West Indies, Pakistan, Australia and Ireland.

"I think I saw (limited-overs captain) Eoin Morgan say everything has to be looked at as a possibility," Buttler, 29, told British media.

"If it was logistically possible, I think you would get people wanting to watch.

"Is it an option? Could you put two games on the same day? Potentially you could, in different areas," said Buttler.

"It's right that it is being considered."

Asked which format he would pick if different formats were played concurrently, Buttler said, "I don't know,



England's Jos Buttler reacts during a match (file photo)

whichever one I got selected to play in."

The World Cup-winning player also saw some merit in the idea of playing in stadiums without fans present.

"We haven't watched any sport for a long time, and we know how big an impact TV revenue has on the game and how vital that is.

"I know it would be very strange playing competitive sport without a crowd... but it would be nice for people who have been in isolation or lockdown for a long time to be able to see their heroes and role models back on the TV."

Halep is pain-free from foot injury

Reuters | Los Angeles

Wimbledon champion Simona Halep is recovering well from a foot injury she suffered in February and is able to run without pain, the former world number one has said.

The Romanian won in Dubai but the injury forced her to pull out of Indian Wells, which was later cancelled as the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic prompted countries to lock down borders and restrict travel.

"The foot looks good, I have started to run already and I don't have pain at all," Halep said in a video posted on Twitter.

"I don't play tennis yet but being able to do the training means a lot and gives me a big positive actually."

Tennis, like virtually all other sports, has been severely impacted by the pandemic, with the professional season suspended until at least mid-July.

Halep defeated Serena Williams in last year's Wimbledon final but will not get to defend her title in 2020 as the Grand Slam was cancelled due to the virus, which has infected 1.27



Romanian tennis star Simona Halep reacts during a match (file photo)

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SIMONA HALEP

million people globally and left over 70,000 dead, according to a Reuters tally.

"I miss my team, I miss the tournaments, I miss everyone from the Tour," said the 28-year-old, who also won the French Open in 2018.

"I know it's bit tough for everybody, this period.

"But if we stay home, if we stay strong and positive it will help a lot. I can't wait to travel again, I can't wait to play tennis again and I can't wait to see you."

Japan ends Olympic flame display due to virus crisis

AFP | Tokyo

The Olympic flame will be removed from display in Japan, officials said yesterday, as the country braces for a state of emergency due to the coronavirus that also forced the historic postponement of Tokyo 2020.

It had been on public display in the northeastern Fukushima region since last week, but Japanese Olympic organisers decided to shelve it as coronavirus cases climb in the country.

The ill-fated flame, lit in Greece, arrived in Japan on March 20 for a torch relay originally scheduled to start six days later and climax at the Olympics opening ceremony on July 24.

But the raging pandemic prompted the first postponement of the Games in peace-time, with the opening ceremony now slated to take place on July 23, 2021.

To keep the Olympic spirit alive in Japan, local organisers decided to maintain the flame in a lantern and display



The Olympic Flame is displayed at the J-Village National Training Centre in Naraha, Fukushima

it in Fukushima, where the torch relay was going to start.

"Originally we wanted to hold the public display until the end of April. But considering recent developments, we decided to stop," said a Tokyo 2020 organising committee spokesman.

He declined to comment on where the flame will be stored, saying that organisers had no immediate plan to show it to the public and hoped to prevent people from congregating around the storage location.

The flame has had a troubled journey due to the coronavirus since being lit in ancient Olympia without spectators to avoid spreading the disease.

The Greek leg of the torch relay was scrapped when large crowds mobbed Hollywood actor Gerard Butler as he lit a cauldron in the town of Sparta.

The flame arrived to a muted welcome in northern Japan in front of a few dozen officials and guests, after plans to invite 200 schoolchildren were abandoned.