

SPORTS

sports

Stokes preparing for IPL despite likely virus shutdown

AFP | London

England all-rounder Ben Stokes says he is preparing to play in the Indian Premier League, even though he knows the tournament is unlikely to go ahead.

Stokes has signed to play for Rajasthan Royals and is one of 13 English players set to feature in the IPL.

But the Twenty20 tournament has already been delayed until April 15 in response to the pandemic and India entered a three-week lockdown in a bid to contain the spread on Wednesday.

"At the moment my next competitive cricket is going to be in the IPL," Stokes told the BBC on Wednesday.

"That hasn't changed yet so I have to think I will be playing on April 20."

Last week, the England and Wales Cricket Board announced that the English county season would not start until at least the end of May, while England's tour of Sri Lanka was also postponed due to the virus.

With IPL chiefs yet to call off or further delay their event,



England's Ben Stokes looks dejected after he is caught out by South Africa's Beuran Hendricks (file photo)

Stokes has to continue to keep himself in shape to play in the unlikely event he is asked to travel to India.

"I have to get my head round that I am playing even though in the back of my mind I know I am probably not," he added.

"I have to build up and get myself physically in a position that if it does happen I am good to go.

"I cannot take three weeks off and expect the body to be ready for April 20 because it doesn't work like that. It might happen and if it does I don't want to be behind.

Staying home is like 'nirvana' for Australian players - coach

Reuters | Melbourne

Staying home during the national lockdown to contain the coronavirus is like "nirvana" for Australian cricketers as they generally have to live out of a suitcase, head coach Justin Langer has said.

Australian cricket is in its off-season and has been largely insulated from the impact of the coronavirus outbreak, which has suspended all of the country's major sporting competitions that run during the autumn and winter.

Some Australian players are signed with teams in the Indian Premier League but the lucrative T20 tournament has been postponed at least until mid-April and may end up be-

ing scrapped like many other tournaments that have succumbed to the pandemic.

"The truth is for me personally and for all the players, this is like nirvana in the fact we're home with our families, we sleep in our own beds, we eat home cooked dinners and we can still work in one degree or another from home," Langer told reporters yesterday.

Government containment measures to shut down virtually all non-essential businesses have already hit the economy, with thousands of workers laid off or stood down without pay.

Australia has recorded more than 2,550 infections, with 12 dead. Globally, the flu-like virus has killed more than 21,200.

IOC working toward July-August Olympics in 2021: Yomiuri

Reuters | Tokyo

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is working with sports bodies to arrange a July-August window for the postponed Tokyo Olympics in 2021 and hopes to confirm the schedule within a month, Japan's Yomiuri newspaper reported yesterday.

John Coates, the IOC's Co-ordination Commission chief for Tokyo, told the Yomiuri the Games would have to be held between the tennis Grand Slams of Wimbledon, slated to end in mid-July, and the U.S. Open, which starts in late August.

"We want to more or less finalize the dates in four weeks' time," the paper quoted Coates as saying.

Coates, who is also president of the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC), said the summer scheduling would be dependent on avoiding clashes with the world championships for swimming (July 16-Aug. 1) and athletics (Aug. 6-15).

World Athletics boss Sebastian Coe has said the world athletics championships in Eugene, Oregon could be moved back to 2022 if necessary.

Coates told the newspaper the hope was to follow the same arrangements next year that had been planned for 2020, including holding the marathon in the northern city of Sapporo instead of Tokyo to escape the heat.



The Olympic rings are pictured in front of the IOC headquarters in Lausanne

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We want to more or less finalize the dates in four weeks' time

JOHN COATES

The AOC confirmed the Yomiuri report's veracity and also told Reuters in a statement that Coates had "proffered a view

but confirms a range of options are on the table for the IOC".

The IOC and Japanese government succumbed to intense pressure from athletes and sporting bodies around the world on Tuesday, agreeing to push back the Games by as much as a year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Yesterday, the Tokyo 2020 organizing committee launched a taskforce to resolve issues linked to the postponement, such as reviewing dates for the

Games and securing venues.

No specifics have been discussed yet on the timing of the delayed Games, but a date needs to be decided as soon as possible, Hidemasa Nakamura, a senior official at Tokyo 2020, told reporters after the taskforce's first meeting.

IOC President Thomas Bach said on Wednesday "all options" were on the table for re-scheduling, including holding the Games before the Japanese summer.

ICC postpones World Cup qualifiers due to coronavirus

Reuters | Mumbai

The International Cricket Council (ICC) said yesterday that all qualifying events for the 2021 Twenty20 World Cup and 50-overs version in 2023 that were scheduled to be held before June 30 have been postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The flu-like virus has infected more than 470,800 people around the world and killed over 21,200, according to a Reuters tally, since appearing in China at the end of last year.

The pandemic has also



ICC logo at its headquarters in Dubai

brought global sport to a standstill and the ICC said in a statement the World Cup qualifiers would also be impacted.

"In light of the significant global health concerns at the current time and the restrictions on movement imposed by governments across the world,

the ICC has taken the decision to postpone all events up until the end of June subject to further review," Chris Tetley, ICC head of events, said.

"Work will continue on contingency plans and options for both men's qualification pathways. We will provide updates

in due course on these plans and decisions on the staging of the remaining events this year."

India host next year's T20 World Cup and the 50-overs event in 2023. As many as eight events will now be postponed due to the ICC decision.

This year's women's T20 World Cup was held in February-March in Australia, which will also host the men's version starting in October. The World Cup trophy tour for the men's event, which was scheduled to start next month, was also postponed.

Italian football chief ready to finish season in August

AFP | Milan

Italian football federation (FIGC) president Gabriele Gravina said Wednesday he was determined that the Serie A season would be concluded even going into August.

All sport in Italy has been suspended until April 3 as a result of the coronavirus pandemic which has forced the postponement of Euro 2020 and the Tokyo Olympics.

"We will do everything to complete the championships, if necessary we will ask for the support of UEFA and FIFA to go beyond June 30 and play also in July or August," Gravina told Radio Marte.

"It's premature to think of a date, but we must think positively, also for the health of



Italian Football Federation (FIGC) president Gabriele Gravina looks on during a press meet

Italians and hope that this situation will end as soon as possible."

The FIGC chief had last week expressed his hope that the championship could resume on the weekend of May 2.

A meeting was scheduled yesterday between the representatives of the Italian league, FIGC, the players' union, coaches and the government to evaluate the future.

"There are many issues," said Gravina. As for the suspended championship, Gravina rejected either cancelling or assigning the title as the table stands where champions Juventus were leading by a point when the season was halted.

"This would lead to an unpleasant scenario. As long as possible, I will continue to reject these options."

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