

# Tokyo organisers eye July 2021 for delayed Olympics

AFP | Tokyo

Tokyo Olympics organisers are eyeing next July as a start date for the postponed Games, Japanese media reported Sunday, following the historic decision to delay the event due to the coronavirus.

Given the ongoing pandemic and need for preparation time, the most likely plan would be for the Games to begin on July 23, 2021, public broadcaster NHK said, citing sources within the organising panel.

It came after Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike raised the idea on Friday of moving the event to a less hot and humid time of year.

She argued that this would make marathons and other races easier to endure, meaning they could be held in the capital instead of in northern Sapporo city, where the International Olympic Committee (IOC) had decided to move them.

The Tokyo 2020 team led by Yoshiro Mori is currently discussing possible dates with the IOC, according to the Asahi



A man wearing a face mask walks in the tunnel of a metro station with the board of the official 2020 Summer Olympics advertisement in Tokyo

Shimshun newspaper.

On Saturday, Mori told a Japanese TV station that "some kind of conclusion" would be reached within a week.

The Olympics were scheduled to open on July 24 this year with the Paralympics on August 25,

but Japan announced last week it had secured agreement from the IOC to postpone the Games -- a decision unprecedented in

peacetime.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said they would be held in around a year instead as a testament to humanity's victory over the pandemic.

The decision had been seen to open options for Tokyo, with IOC chief Thomas Bach saying that "all the options are on the table" and rescheduling "is not restricted just to the summer



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## Star batsman Smith's leadership ban ends



Steve Smith plays a shot (file photo)

AFP | Sydney

A two-year leadership ban slapped on Steve Smith after the ball-tampering scandal in South Africa ended Sunday, leaving the master batsman free to skipper Australia again.

The 30-year-old captained the team until he was suspended for 12 months over a brazen attempt to alter the ball with sandpaper under his watch during a Test in Cape Town in 2018.

Part of his punishment included a further year-long exile from any leadership role, which has now expired.

Co-conspirator and former vice-captain David Warner was banned from any leadership role for life, although both have successfully resumed their international careers.

There have been calls for Smith to take back the Test captaincy from Tim Paine, but it remains unclear whether he wants to, with the 35-year-old seemingly intent on playing on.

Coach Justin Langer last year praised Paine's leadership as "brilliant" and said Smith may not want the "burden" of captaincy on top of batting pressures.

Aaron Finch is skipper of the

Twenty20 and one-day teams.

Smith told Channel Nine television on Sunday he was focused only on trying to stay physically and mentally fit during the coronavirus shutdown of Australian cricket.

He was supposed to be preparing for a big-money payday at the Indian Premier League, but the tournament has already been delayed until April 15 in response to the pandemic.

With India in a three-week lockdown in a bid to contain a spread of the virus, Smith admitted the IPL appeared unlikely to go ahead.

"I think the country's basically shut its borders until the 15th of April," he said.

"It's obviously not looking likely at the moment, I think there might be some meetings

over the next couple of days to discuss what the go is with it all.

"But just trying to stay physically fit and mentally fresh," he added. "If it goes ahead at some point, then great. If not, then there's plenty going on in the world at the moment. Just play it day by day."

All cricket in Australia has been cancelled, with the team's three-match T20 series against New Zealand this month a casualty after just one game.

**"I'm just trying to stay physically and mentally fit and fresh and, if it goes ahead at some point, then great. And if not, there's plenty going on in the world at the moment"**

STEVE SMITH

## Giroud reveals he was desperate to join Inter

Goal | London

Chelsea striker Olivier Giroud has confirmed that he received offers from Tottenham and Lazio in January, while admitting that he found a potential move to Inter to reunite with Antonio Conte as his most appealing option.

Giroud found regular playing time hard to come by in the first half of the season, as new head coach Frank Lampard opted for Tammy Abraham as the main centre-forward in his Blues line up.

The World Cup winner is due to become a free agent in July, and was available to negotiate with any potential suitors during the last transfer window, but Chelsea were only prepared to sanction his departure if a replacement could be found.

Lampard was ultimately unable to bring in an extra frontman, meaning Giroud's services were retained, despite the fact that a number of clubs were chasing his signature - including Spurs and Lazio.

Goal reported that the 33-year-old had reached an agreement to join Inter, which would have seen him link up with ex-Blues boss Conte once again, two years after the Italian lured him to Stamford Bridge from Arsenal.

Giroud shook off the disappointment

of the failed transfer as Lampard restored the Frenchman to his starting line up, and he has since helped Chelsea solidify their place in the Premier League's top four.

It has been suggested that the veteran forward could now extend his stay at the Bridge beyond the summer, but he has conceded that he was eager to move onto pastures new at the start of the year.

"Everyone knows that the sporting project of Inter was the most interesting for me," Giroud told Telefoot.

"Lazio and Tottenham also looked for me. At one point, it was a question of where I wanted to go to play. I spoke to Conte on the phone."

When asked whether he would like to remain in west London beyond the current season, which has been suspended due to the coronavirus

## Barcelona donates 30,000 masks to help fight coronavirus

AP | Barcelona

Barcelona has delivered 30,000 masks to the Catalonia government to help fight the coronavirus pandemic, the club said Saturday.

The masks were made in China and donated by insurance company Taiping, a regional partner of the club.

Barcelona said the "daily use" masks will be distributed to nursing homes.

The club added it is working through its foundation "to do as much as possible to help with this crisis, both locally and internationally."

"The club has put itself at the service of the health authorities to help to fulfill and



The Camp Nou stadium is illuminated in Barcelona

enforce all its instructions, recommendations and orders to combat contagion of the virus and alleviate its effects as much as possible," it said in a statement.

Barcelona on Thursday reduced the salaries of its players because of the coronavirus crisis.

## Olympic qualification process and late season being studied: Coe

Reuters | Tokyo

World Athletics is working to restart a shuttered athletics season and studying any changes that may be needed in the qualifying process for the rescheduled Tokyo Olympics, president Seb Coe said on Friday.

The governing body is hoping to offer a series of meetings that may begin in August and run to October so athletes can get back in to competition as quickly as possible when it is safe to do so due to the coronavirus pandemic, Coe said in a letter addressed to the athletics community.

"We don't yet know the date for the Games next year," Coe said, "but once they (the International Olympic Committee and the Japanese government) have made it, we will look at



Athletes run past a display of awards during the Diamond League (file photo)

what, if any, impact that decision has on our World Athletics Championships Oregon 21."

Many expect the championships in Eugene, Oregon, to be moved to 2022.

Athletics' global governing body also hopes to provide an answer as soon as possible to any changes to the Tokyo Olym-

pics qualifying process, Coe said.

World Athletics began reviewing its Olympic qualification process after the IOC and sports federations agreed that all athletes currently qualified for the Tokyo 2020 Games will remain qualified for next year's event.

"In athletics the primary qualification avenue is by meeting the entry standards set out in March 2019," Coe added.

"Once those places are allocated, the remaining athletes are drawn from the world ranking list. As of today, all athletes who have met the entry standards for their event will remain qualified for the Tokyo Olympic Games in 2021. This is approximately 50% of the places."

A major review is also underway of the global calendar of events, not just for the next two years which will see some major disruptions, but for the long term.

The decision comes as athletics' Diamond League series announced on Friday it has canceled its meetings through June but hopes to have a late season.



Olivier Giroud

**"Everyone knows that the sporting project of Inter was the most interesting for me"**

OLIVIER GIROUD

outbreak, Giroud responded: "Yes. Yes. Of course."

"There are a few months to go, games to win and maybe another trophy, and after, you know, I think I have two [or] three nice seasons in front of me."

"It's not the time to talk about contracts and everything but I will make a decision when it comes."