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Tokyo 2020 Olympics officially postponed until 2021



Jeremy Schaap discusses the agreement by IOC president Thomas Bach and Japan Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to postpone the 2020 Tokyo Olympics due to the coronavirus outbreak. (1:22)



Kelly Cohen
ESPN

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Never before had the Olympic Games been postponed or canceled for something other than war, but rarely has the world come to a grinding halt the way it has over the novel coronavirus.

What felt like the last major sporting event untouched by the current strain of the coronavirus -- known formally as COVID-19 -- the 2020 Olympics served as a glimmer of hope for the entire globe. But on Tuesday, Japan Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach agreed to postpone the Tokyo 2020 Olympics by about one year.

The opening ceremony had been planned for July 24.

EDITOR'S PICKS



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Despite the postponement, the Summer Olympics -- when they eventually happen -- will still be called the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020. The Olympic flame will also remain stored and displayed in Fukushima.

"[T]he IOC president and the Prime Minister of Japan have concluded that the Games ... must be rescheduled to a date beyond 2020 but not later than summer 2021, to safeguard the health of the athletes, everybody involved in the Olympic Games and the international community," said a joint statement by the Tokyo 2020 organizing committee and the IOC.

According to the statement, the World Health Organization had consulted with both parties on Tuesday about what it called the "accelerating" pandemic. There

are now more than 390,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 worldwide, with more than 17,000 deaths. Nearly every country has been impacted.

The decision comes less than 48 hours after the IOC said it was giving itself four weeks to make a decision about the Olympics. As the coronavirus continued to spread in recent weeks, Bach and members of Japan's government insisted the Games could go forward. Sunday's statement was the first on-the-record acknowledgement that a postponement could actually happen.

Pressure from nations and athletes alike mounted in recent days, and most recently, Canada said it would not send representatives to the Olympics without a delay. Australia later joined in that decision.

The U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee sent a survey over the weekend to more than 4,000 American Olympics hopefuls, and nearly seven in 10 respondents said they didn't think the Games would be fair if held in July. Germany and Poland had also called for the Games to be delayed.

"Despite the feeling of eventuality that so many of us have felt in the lead up to this moment -- my heart breaks for you, your fellow athletes around the world, our friends at Tokyo 2020, the people of Japan, and all who are impacted by this global pandemic and the decision to postpone the Tokyo Games 2020," USOPC CEO Sarah Hirshland wrote in a letter to the athletes.

"We heard your concerns and we shared them. I thank you for being so forthcoming with your perspectives, and also for allowing us the time to hear from your teammates across all sports before making a recommendation to the IOC."

The Olympics had never been rescheduled for something other than war. In 1916, 1940 and 1944, the Games were canceled because of the world wars.

In addition to the impact on the athletes whose lives have now been upended by the decision, the financial impact will be staggering. The organizers of Tokyo 2020 estimated the cost to be roughly \$12.6 billion, while other experts have put that figure closer to \$25 billion. The delay will also impact the billions spent by sponsors and broadcasters.

The IOC and Tokyo organizers said they hope the decision to postpone will help the world heal from the pandemic.

"The leaders agreed that the Olympic Games in Tokyo could stand as a beacon of hope to the world during these troubled times and that the Olympic flame could become the light at the end of the tunnel in which the world finds itself at present," the IOC statement said.

Ryan Lochte '100 percent' in for postponed Tokyo Olympics



Greg Garber
Senior Writer

4:51 PM ET



Ryan Lochte, the most decorated Olympian heading into the postponed Tokyo Summer Games, says he is all-in to take part in 2021.

"One-hundred percent," he told ESPN on Tuesday from his home in Gainesville, Florida. "I still have a bunch of goals I want to accomplish in the sport."

After a series of statements to the contrary, International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced Tuesday that the competition, scheduled for July 24-Aug. 9, will be pushed to no later than next summer due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Lochte, 35, would be 37 if the reconfigured Olympics indeed take place next summer.

"Yeah, age is just a number," he said. "You just gotta roll with it. This is good. I get another full year of racing, working on my technique and my skills. I can get stronger."

"Yes, I'm disappointed -- because I was ready. But listen, I'm excited. I have more fuel for my fire."

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Nearly four years ago in Rio de Janeiro, Lochte won his 12th Olympic medal, gold, as a member of the United States' 4x200 freestyle relay. That tied him with three other U.S. swimmers -- Natalie Coughlin, Dara Torres and Jenny Thompson -- for the second-most ever in Olympic swimming. One of his relay partners, Michael Phelps, holds the record at 28 Olympic medals.

"Honestly, if Ryan is truly serious about wanting to get back, this is a great opportunity for him," Phelps said. "An unbelievable opportunity. He has the experience. Sure, taking a little time off, yeah, he's further behind, but he's somebody who is talented enough and knows how to do it. He can get ready for a Games better than anybody. So this extra year could really, really benefit him. If that's something that he wants. He just needs to step back and worry about controlling the things he can control."

To put Lochte's accomplishment in context: Only eight athletes -- regardless of sport -- in the history of the Olympics have won more medals. Tokyo marks what is probably his last chance to add to that total and an opportunity to refashion his Olympic narrative after an embarrassing series of events in Rio. Four days after winning gold, Lochte and three of his USA Swimming teammates claimed they had been forced out of a taxi at gunpoint in an early-morning confrontation. Lochte was charged with providing a false robbery claim and faced 18 months in a Brazilian jail, but those charges were eventually dropped. Later Lochte apologized, admitting he had been drunk and "over-exaggerated" his account.

"This whole thing is not just about me going to the Olympics," Lochte said.

"This is bigger than anything. The Olympics will be there -- they're postponed, not canceled. The Olympics brings people together, and so we're going to have to take care of each other and wait another year. It's not a biggie.

"I've dealt with so many things, especially over the last four years. This is just another bump in the road."