Tokyo wraps up 2020 Olympics in subdued closing ceremony

Tokyo doused its Olympic flame on Sunday in a ceremony that echoed the restraint of the games held without spectators and transformed by the global pandemic, dazzling sport and deeply personal turmoil.

After postponing the Tokyo 2020 Games for a year, organisers said the event would serve as a symbol of world triumph over the pandemic. But with strict pandemic countermeasures and as COVID-19 variants have surged back around the world, the Olympics fell short of the triumph and financial windfall Japan had wanted.

The ceremony, although lustreless, gave athletes something of a glimpse of everyday Tokyo life as the Olympic Stadium was transformed into a park with grass, buskers and BMX riders.

The scene was meant so the visitors could "experience Tokyo", organisers said, a poignant reminder of the many restrictions of the games.

It was a duly odd ending to an unprecedented event. Japan is now saddled with a $15bn bill, double what it initially expected, and with no tourist boom.

The president of the International Olympic Committee thanked the Japanese people and acknowledged the difficulty of staging the games during the pandemic.

"For the first time since the pandemic began, the entire world came together," Thomas Bach said. "Nobody has ever organised a postponed games before."

Public anger over the pandemic response and a slow-to-start vaccine rollout have badly damaged Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's standing. Public opinion polls showed most Japanese opposed holding the games during the pandemic.

Still, organisers appear to have prevented the Tokyo Games from spiralling into a COVID-19 super-spreader event, notable given that some 50,000 people came together amid the pandemic.

In a sign of the measures, winners accepted their prizes from trays, putting the medals around their own necks, although social-distancing protocols such as preventing hugging were largely ignored throughout the games.

While the bubble – the set of venues and hotels to which Olympic visitors were largely confined – appeared to hold, elsewhere some things fell apart. Fuelled by the Delta variant of the virus, daily infections spiked to more than 5,000 for the first time in Tokyo, threatening to overwhelm its hospitals.

Japan's record medal haul also helped to take out some of the stings for organisers. The United States finished top of the tally with 39 gold medals, one more than rivals China at 38 and Japan at 27.

The games also showcased the Olympics' push for more diversity.

For the first time, a victory ceremony was held for both the women's and men's marathon events. The Kenyan anthem filled the 68,000-capacity stadium twice, for gold medallists Peres Jepchirchir and Eliud Kipchoge. And when they came, the games themselves provided plenty of high drama.

In a moment more reminiscent of the Cold War, Belarusian sprinter Krystsina Tsimanouskaya refused to board a flight home after she was taken to the airport against her wishes. She has since sought refugee status in Poland.

US superstar gymnast Simone Biles shocked the world when she pulled out of five of her six events, including abruptly abandoning the women's team final after attempting just one vault, citing concerns for her mental and physical health.

Her frank admission, combined with earlier comments by Japanese tennis star Naomi Osaka, brought a sharp focus on issues of athletes' mental health.

In athletics, Italy provided a different kind of shock with their amazing run.

Their wins included a stunning gold in the men's sprint relay, taking their athletics gold tally to five.

In swimming, a US team without 23-time Olympic gold medallist Michael Phelps still ended the meeting on top of the medals table.

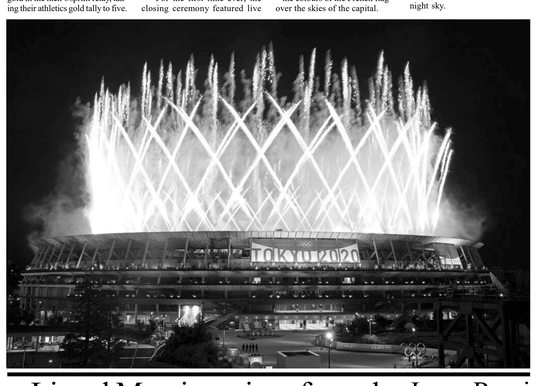
Capping five years of intense preparations for athletes, some of them stretched out on the grass laid down in the stadium. Some appeared to relax as they watched a volley of fireworks light up the Tokyo sky.

For the first time ever, the closing ceremony featured live celebrations from the next host city as the people of Paris welcomed the handover of the Olympic flag.

In a pre-recorded video, French astronaut Thomas Pesquet performed the French national anthem on his saxophone – in zero gravity – from the International Space Station as a symbol of the Olympics' universality, and jets released blue, white and red smoke – the colours of the French flag – over the skies of the capital.

French President Emmanuel Macron was filmed on the top floor of the Eiffel Tower reciting the newly updated Olympic slogan "higher, faster, stronger, together".

The evening concluded at the Olympic Stadium in Tokyo with a final flurry of fireworks and the word "Arigato" – Japanese word for thank you – lighting up the night sky.



Athletes from Afghanistan to participate Tokyo Paralympic competitions

Tokyo Paralympics games are about to take place in upcoming two weeks, and there will be two disabled athletes, from Afghanistan, who will be representing Afghan disabled athletes in Para-taekwondo and para-athletics fields.

Talking to The Kabul Times, head of the disabled athletes competition department, Master Arian Sediqi, said: "This historical event will take place within two upcoming weeks. Fortunately, there will be two talented Afghan disabled athletes: Ms Zaki Khudadadi and Hussain Rasooli, who will be representing Afghanistan in the Para-athletics and Para-taekwondo fields." He added: "Our athletes have done professional exercises. It is a huge honor for the Afghan nation that our athletes are representing 34 million citizens in the Paralympics. I hope they win the Olympics medal for our country".

Representing the Afghan nation, Afghan Para-taekwondo athlete, Zaki Khudadadi, thus expressed her feelings in Tokyo: "I am so happy that I could find a way to the Olympics". She added: "I am the only disabled woman athlete who participates in the Para-Olympics games. My ambition is to win an Olympics medal for the Afghan disabled athletic community".

Thus Hussain Rasooli, another Afghan disabled athlete who will be representing Afghanistan in the Para-Olympics, expressed his feelings: "I am the only Afghan disabled athlete who will be representing Afghanistan in para-athletics for 100-meters long competition in Japan Para-Olympics".

Sports have a unique place amongst the countries that pave the way for their athletes to represent their identity in the sports competitions that take place in the world. Any athlete who represents Afghanistan in an international athletic competition draws everybody's attention in the world— In fact, they represent Afghans' identity, unity, and friendship all around the world.

Nangialai Osmani

Lionel Messi receives formal PSG two-year contract offer after Barcelona exit

Lionel Messi has received a formal two-year contract offer from Paris Saint-Germain.

The French club have offered Messi an initial two-year deal, thought to be worth £25m a year after tax, and the six-time Ballon d'Or winner and his representatives are now reviewing and considering it carefully.

Barcelona announced Messi would not continue at the club after they were unable to fulfil a new contract that had been agreed with the player due to "financial and structural obstacles".

The Argentina international has spoken directly with PSG head coach Mauricio Pochettino this week about moving to the French capital.

Asked if PSG will be his next move at his farewell news conference on Sunday, Messi said: "That is one possibility, to reach those heights.

"I've got nothing confirmed with anybody. I had a lot of calls, a lot of interested clubs. At the moment, nothing is closed, but we are talking about a lot of things."

PSG quickly emerged as the front-runners for his signature, in a move that would reunite him with former Barcelona team-mate Neymar. Messi said he did not want to leave Barcelona in an emotional farewell news conference on Sunday. Messi was in tears as he received a standing ovation in his final Barcelona press conference to announce the end of his 21 years with the club.

Barcelona confirmed Messi's departure on Thursday night, the same day he returned to Catalonia following his post-Copa America holiday.

Messi had travelled to Barcelona expecting to agree on the details of the announcement of his new five-year deal, and he confirmed he offered to reduce his wages by 50 per cent.

"This year, my family and I were convinced we were going to stay at home, that's what we all wanted more than anything," said Messi. "We'd always made this our own, we were at home. We thought we would be staying here in Barcelona. But today, we have to say goodbye to all of this."

Jason Roy inspires Oval Invincibles to victory over Trent Rockets

Jason Roy produced a magnificent innings to inspire Oval Invincibles to an entertaining nine-run victory over league leaders Trent Rockets in a rain-affected clash at the Oval.

The contest was reduced to 65 balls per side after persistent rain earlier in the day had seen the women's contest abandoned without a ball being bowled, but Roy's unbeaten 56 from 29 balls was worth the wait for the packed crowd in attendance.

Trent Rockets' skipper Lewis Gregory had no hesitation in choosing to bowl after winning the toss, but the Invincibles raced to 39-0 inside 17 balls, with Roy and Will Jacks (13) dispatching Rashid Khan (1-28) for two sixes in the opening exchanges.

Jacks' departure sparked a mini-collapse, as the hosts slipped to 68-4 after losing four wickets for 29 runs, with Samit Patel (2-21 off 15) continuing his fine form for the Rockets.

However, Roy spearheaded the Invincibles' innings with an unbeaten 56, before a late flurry from Laurie Evans (9 no off 3) saw the hosts post 125-6 from their 65 balls.

The Rockets' reply began in nightmare fashion, as D'Arcy Short departed for a duck to the irrepressible Sunil Narine, while Dawid Malan (6) was deceived by his England team-mate Tom Curran. Poor Alex Hales gets struck in the groin twice in consecutive deliveries from Reece Topley during Trent Rockets' clash with Oval Invincibles.

Samit Patel (15 off 7) produced an enterprising cameo before falling to Tabraiz Shamsi (2-23 off 15), and after losing wickets at regular intervals, the Rockets' slender hopes were evaporating.

Gregory (28 no off 12) and Khan (16 off 6) threatened to complete an astonishing run-chase, only for Curran (2-21 off 15) to keep his poise to guide home the Invincibles, who were also indebted to Narine, who boasted remarkable figures of 3-11 from his 10.

The England opener made a blistering start to proceedings and despite being starved of the strike midway through the innings, he kept his composure - registering four huge sixes in his pulsating 29-ball innings.

He also left the Sky Sports commentary team running for cover, after smashing Rashid Khan's first ball of the contest straight back down the ground. It was a world-class display from a world-class player.

Gregory led by example in the field for the Rockets, producing a stunning one-handed grab to dismiss an in-form Colin Ingram.

The South African dispatched Samit Patel for a maximum in the previous delivery, but he succumbed after Gregory took an outstanding catch to his right at cover.

Jason Roy, Oval Invincibles opener: "I was having lots of fun. We had a lot to prove tonight. I think we've come off the back of some disappointing performances, but tonight, to write some wrongs was a great feeling.

"It's extremely exciting. We've been searching for that sort of performance where we put all three facets together.

"We have been very disappointing in the field and tonight with the ball and with the bat we were pretty impressive, so happy going forward."

Si Woo Kim hits five balls in the water and runs up a 13 on a par-three in Memphis

Si Woo Kim set an unwanted PGA Tour record as he ran up an astonishing 13 at the par-three 11th on the final day of the WGC-FedEx St Jude Invitational.

Kim went from five over par to 15 over in just one hole, and his score was the highest recorded on a par-three in a regular PGA Tour event since at least 1983, when the Tour began its enhanced statistical coverage.

The 11th hole at TPC Southwind in Memphis is of similar design to the iconic 17th at TPC Sawgrass, a venue which holds special memories for Kim following his Players Championship victory in 2017.

But the South Korean will not look back on the 155-yard 11th hole on Sunday with much fondness after he put five balls in the water, beginning with his initial tee shot which drifted too far right of the green.

Kim wandered over to the drop zone to try his luck from just 96 yards, and his next four shots were right, or long and right as he donated four more balls to the drink on a hole in which only six balls had found the water in the first three rounds.

Under threat of turning the drop zone into one huge divot, Kim finally managed to find dry land with his 11th shot, which settled in the rear rough to leave him a tricky pitch for his 12th, but he chipped to a foot and completed an excellent up-and-down to avoid a 14.