

TOKYO OLYMPIC VENUE SHAPING UP AS WORLD'S COSTLIEST

TOKYO: When the dust settles on the marquee venue for the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, it could well be the most expensive sports stadium in the world. The latest cost estimate of 252 billion yen (\$2 billion at current exchange rates) would push it beyond the current record-holder, the \$1.6 billion MetLife stadium completed in 2010 for the New York Jets and Giants football teams.

What is the money buying? The design of the stadium's ribbed roof on huge steel arches resembles a bicycle helmet. To support a natural grass field, the roof's southern end will be translucent to let in sunlight and underground will be soil ventilation and temperature control systems. Movable seats will bring the crowd closer for more intimate events, and this being Japan, the stadium will have earthquake-resistant features.

While exchange rate fluctuations and inflation make comparisons tricky, it is safe to say that Japan's new National Stadium will likely be the most expen-

sive ever built, two sports economists told The Associated Press. The latest estimate was a 55 percent increase over an earlier one of 163 billion yen.

"The spiraling costs come as no surprise," Victor Matheson, a professor at the College of the Holy Cross in Massachusetts, wrote in an email response. "Most of the recent Olympics Games and World Cups have seen final costs come in far above initial estimates."

Andrew Zimbalist, an economics professor at Smith College in Massachusetts, added that he suspects the cost will rise further during construction, which is due to begin in October.

At least five stadiums costing more than \$1 billion have been built worldwide, four for American football and baseball teams and Wembley Stadium for soccer in London. Tokyo's new stadium, designed by award-winning architect Zaha Hadid, would be the first to reach \$2 billion. Unlike venues for professional sports teams, which generate a steady

revenue stream, Olympic stadiums risk becoming "white elephants," little used after their two weeks of glory.

The rising price tag has put the government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on the defensive, at a time when his approval ratings are already slipping because of opposition to his push to expand the international role of Japan's military. It also doesn't bode well for Boston and others bidding for the 2024 Olympics, as well as the International Olympic Committee's goal of making future Olympics more affordable for host cities, Matheson said.

"If a modern city like Tokyo with tons of highly developed infrastructure already in place can't make an Olympics work without breaking the bank, what chance do any other potential host cities have," he wrote. The IOC has approved changes in plans for other 2020 venues in Japan that have saved more than \$1 billion, according to the committee. The main stadium, though, far exceeds the

\$455 million "Bird's Nest" stadium built for the 2008 Olympics, and the approximately \$680 million stadium for the 2012 London Olympics.

Japan is a rich country, but it doesn't have cash to spare. More than two decades of economic stagnation have left the government saddled with debt, and the rapidly aging nation faces soaring pension and health care bills.

Public opinion, already tepid about building a massive new stadium in central Tokyo, has turned decisively negative since the government sharply revised up the project cost. The government though says it's too late to make major changes and still meet a 2019 deadline to host the inaugural event, the Rugby World Cup. The Japan Sports Council, which is overseeing the project, attributes about one-third of the increase in price to rising labor and materials costs, and two-thirds to the unusual design of the stadium. An increase in the consumption tax rate also added about 4 billion yen.

Asked about the cost, Jim Heverin, the project director for the stadium for Zaha Hadid Architects, said in a statement that the design allows the roof and the spectator stands to be built simultaneously, saving time and money and "ensuring the stadium will be delivered cost-effectively and on schedule against the backdrop of steep annual inflation in Tokyo construction costs."

Japan is no stranger to high-priced venues. The 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano were by far the most expensive until Sochi, Russia, last year, Matheson said. Japan also held the record for the most expensive World Cup stadium - the \$621 million Nissan Stadium that hosted the 2002 final in Yokohama - until Brasilia built a \$900 million stadium for the 2014 tournament. Nissan Stadium remains in use, as the home field for a J-League soccer team, the Yokohama F. Marinos. The Mane Garrincha stadium in Brasilia, however, is now perhaps the world's most expensive bus depot. — AP



TORONTO: Audrey Lacroix of Canada competes during the finals of the women's 200-meter butterfly swimming event. Lacroix won the gold medal. — AP

COUGHLIN STUNNED AT PAN AM GAMES

TORONTO: Natalie Coughlin gave a jolt to the Pan American Games on Tuesday but the decorated US swimmer suffered a surprising defeat while Cuba earned more kayaking gold.

Defending champion Canada then beat Cuba in a marquee baseball game to improve to 4-0 while Peruvian Francisco Boza Dibos, 50, qualified for his eighth Olympics by winning the men's trap shooting final. Coughlin, a 12-times Olympic medalist, was expected to swim away with a gold medal in the women's 100m freestyle and 4x100 freestyle relay but she settled for silver in each.

The 32-year-old American set a Pan Am record during her 100 heat but was stunned by Canadian 20-year-old Chantal Van Landeghem in the final where

her 53.83 pipped the Pan Am mark set earlier by Coughlin. In the relay final, Coughlin began her anchor leg with a slim lead but could not hang on as Van Landeghem again denied the Americans.

After the race, Coughlin discussed her competitive future. "I know I have a few years left in me. I love competing, and I want to keep representing my country," said Coughlin. "But I need to be realistic. It's not going to happen forever. I just want to enjoy it and see what happens in the next year." Canada delivered another dominant rowing display as they grabbed gold in women's single sculls and light-weight double sculls as well as the men's quadruple sculls as part of a 23-medal day for the host nation. Canada have 25 gold, 22 silver and 17 bronze, which

tops all nations in gold and overall medals. The United States, a Pan Am powerhouse, are second with 19 gold medals (60 total), followed by Cuba and Colombia, who have 14 gold each.

Cuban kayaker Yusamai Mengana became the first woman and second athlete to win three golds at the July 10-26 Games. Her triumph in the women's K1 200m and K2 500m came a day after fellow kayaker and compatriot Jorge Garcia won his third gold.

Cuba, who won every baseball gold medal at the quadrennial games between 1971 and 2007 before a third-place finish in 2011, were dealt a blow in their hopes of reclaiming the gold medal. By falling 3-1 to Canada, Cuba slipped to fourth in the seven-team competition where the top four advance to the semis. — Reuters

COUGHLIN HAS EYE ON RIO

TORONTO: The Pan American Games' biggest name in swimming finally surfaced on Tuesday but Natalie Coughlin failed to live up to her top billing when she was beaten in the 100 metres freestyle by Canada's Chantal Van Landeghem.

Coughlin, a 12-time Olympic medalist and one of the greatest American swimmers of all-time, brought a splash of class to a Games in desperate need of some marquee magic. But it was the unheralded Van Landeghem who snatched the spotlight on the first day of the swimming competition with a late surge to touch first in a Pan Am record time of 53.83 seconds.

Coughlin took silver in 54.06 with Bahamas' Arianna Vanderpool-Wallace getting the bronze. Coughlin then anchored the U.S. 4x100 freestyle relay but was beaten to the wall by the Canadians.

"You obviously want to win but for me it is about personal achievements right now," said Coughlin who has 12 Olympic and 20 world championship medals. "The competition here is still really good. There are still fast swimmers here. I know a lot of people are looking at this like it is not world championships but it is still a massive meet

and great practise." Ordinarily, Coughlin would have been preparing for the world swimming championships in Russia that begin later this month but a bout of food poisoning during the U.S. championships put an end to those plans and she signed on to lead a young American team to Toronto. "I'm treating it as my big summer meet," she said. "It was never on my bucket list to go to the Pan Ams but I'm glad I'm here."

The first woman to break the one minute mark in the 100 backstroke, the 32-year-old had been widely expected to retire after the London Olympics, where she failed to qualify for an individual event, but she felt a fourth trip to the Games in Rio next year was still within her capabilities. "I know I have a lot of good swimming left in me. I love doing this," said Coughlin. "It is pretty interesting that people just assume you are going to leave when you reach a certain age but I love the daily grind and I think that makes it a lot easier." I love the training, I love competing and being able to represent my country is a special thing that is not going to happen forever. "I am just enjoying it right now and for the next year and hopefully will be there in Rio." — Reuters

YOUNG US GYMNASTS PREPARE AT PAN AM FOR RIO RUMBLE

TORONTO: The most exciting names in US gymnastics, Gabby Douglas, Aly Raisman and Simone Biles, will all be competing during the Pan American Games-just not in Toronto.

But the absence of the American big guns has not prevented the United States from dominating the Pan Am competition where a new crop of champions are putting the old guard on notice that they will have a battle on their hands for coveted Rio Olympic berths. Two-time world all-around champion Biles, Douglas, the darling of the 2012 London Olympics, and her gold medal-winning Fierce Five team mates Raisman and Kyla Ross, are all competing at the U.S. Classic in Chicago on July 25.

Their absence from the Pan Am games has given the U.S. squad of hungry up and comers an opportunity to grab the spotlight.

For the first time in 20 years the US swept both the men's and women's team gold medals, while Sam Mikulak claimed the men's all-around title to end a 28-year American drought in that event.

The only blip came on Monday when women's all-around favourite Madison Desch was beaten for the gold by Canada's Ellie Black, but the young Americans vowed a return to the top of the podium in the apparatus finals.

"That (Rio Olympics) is what I have been working for and hopefully this is the start of great things," said Desch. "I know I can improve. It is just the start."

"This meet is a confidence booster. We all look up to them (Biles, Douglas, Raisman), train next to them and it

makes you work harder. "It's nice to have your time in the light but training against them makes me work harder."

While Mikulak, a two-time US champion and 2012 Olympic team member, is a seasoned campaigner the young

American women arrived in Toronto eager to gain valuable international experience. For 17-year-old Desch and her Pan Am team mates Amelia Hundley, Rachel Gowe, Emily Schild and Megan Skaggs, the Games are an

important step towards their dreams of securing one of the five coveted spots on the US Rio Olympic squad.

"They are certainly going to be in the mix, no doubt about it," Rhonda Faehn, the senior vice-president of the women's program for US Gymnastics, told Reuters. "This is the perfect experience because they are younger and haven't had the experience overseas at a world championship so this is a perfect opportunity for them to gain experience."

"You never know, that is the beauty of gymnastics, you never know what competition can light or spark a level of confidence in an athlete."

"We've seen it before." Prior to the 2012 Summer Games, Douglas was the unknown newcomer viewed as an Olympic longshot.

But she left London as perhaps the biggest Olympic star with gold from the team and all-around competitions, returning home to fame and fortune.

Desch, an alternate on the US team for last year's world championships, could be that athlete in Rio, as could 17-year-old Gowe. Trained by Liang Chow, who coached Olympic champions Douglas and Shawn Johnson, Gowe has been getting plenty of buzz in gymnastic circles as she returns to form after being hobbled by ankle problems for a year and a half.

"Rachel, she is a polished athlete and has a nice look too her with her lines and she has strong start values and that helps as well," said Faehn.

"I really think she is absolutely one who has great potential. She has had ankle problems but you can see the potential there." — Reuters



ONTARIO: Canada's Marie-Eve Beauchemin-Nadeau attempts a lift during the women's 75kg weightlifting competition. — AP



ONTARIO: Cuba's Delia Grau passes the ball in Cuba's bronze medal women's water polo match against Brazil at the Pan Am Games. — AP