

## Sports

# Scotland plead for WCup go-ahead as typhoon threatens campaign

**TOKYO:** Scotland coach Gregor Townsend has urged World Cup chiefs “to do all they can” to make sure his side’s must-win match against Japan is played as an incoming super typhoon threatens to end their campaign.

Scotland need to beat the hosts in Yokohama on Sunday to have a chance of reaching the quarter-finals. But if the match is cancelled they will be going home. In an unprecedented move for the tournament, officials announced yesterday that tomorrow’s matches between England and France, and Italy and New Zealand, had been axed because of the expected impact of Super Typhoon Hagibis, likely to be the biggest storm to hit Japan this year.

Scotland’s final Pool A fixture against Japan in Yokohama, at 7:45 pm (1045 GMT) on Sunday, is also in the projected path of the typhoon, but officials will delay a decision on whether it will go ahead until the morning of the match.

Cancellation would see the match declared a 0-0 draw, with both Japan and Scotland receiving two points each. That would put Japan through to the knockout phase, with Ireland likely to join them provided they don’t slip up against Samoa tomorrow.

It would also mean Scotland were out, leading to more World Cup heartache after a controversial refereeing decision led to them being denied a quarter-final win over Australia four years ago. But Townsend, during a hastily-

arranged press conference at Scotland’s hotel in Hamamatsu on Thursday, said: “We believe the game hasn’t been cancelled because the weather forecast is much improved for Sunday.

“It looks like the game will be played and that’s what we have to keep faith with.

“I’d hope that everyone who is involved in the tournament would want the game to be played and that they will do all they can to ensure that it is. “We have to have faith in the organisers that the game will be played even if it’s behind closed doors or at a different venue.”

Former Scotland fly-half Townsend added: “The way I read the rules was that you can’t change days but you could change venues and contingencies would be in place.

“I’ve since been told there is a force majeure (provision in the rules) and things can change because of exceptional circumstances.

“If that means (playing the game on) Monday because it takes a day for things to be put back in order then who knows. But right now I think they’re planning on it going ahead on Sunday.”

Scottish Rugby responded to Thursday’s announcement by World Rugby with a statement that said it “fully expects contingency plans to be put in place to enable Scotland to contest for a place in the quarter-finals on the pitch”.

But World Cup tournament director Alan Gilpin said yesterday teams knew long before the event started that “matches in the pool phase



**SHIZUOKA:** Scotland’s prop Willem Nel (C) runs to evade Russia’s fly-half Yuri Kushnarev (L) and Russia’s flanker Tagir Gadzhiev (R) during the Japan 2019 Rugby World Cup Pool A match between Scotland and Russia at the Shizuoka Stadium Ecopa in Shizuoka. — AFP

wouldn’t be postponed”. He added: “We have looked again at the potential to apply some consistency to our contingency plan across all the games and we treat all the matches fairly.

“Italy are in the same position as Scotland are in. It (Japan v Scotland) is a huge match and we would love to play that game. “But we won’t treat that match any differently.” — AFP

## Wallabies avoid typhoon to line up ‘tough’ Georgia

**SHIZUOKA:** Escaping an incoming super typhoon, Australia will warm up for the Rugby World Cup quarter-finals with a last Pool D outing today against “tough” Georgia.

World Rugby took the unprecedented step Thursday of cancelling two games — England v France and New Zealand v Italy — as Japan braces for Super Typhoon Hagibis, likely the biggest storm to hit the country this year.

But the match in Shizuoka today will take place before the typhoon hits, avoiding cancellation and handing the Wallabies a useful run-out against a competitive Georgian side playing for pride. Wales’ 29-17 victory over Fiji on Wednesday ensured Australia a quarter-final place, with the Welsh likely advancing as pool winners should they see off minnows Uruguay in Kumamoto on Sunday.

With some pressure lifted, the Australia players will still be performing with an eye on making the team for the likely quarter-final against Pool C winners England in Oita on October 19. With that in mind, the Wallabies made two late changes on Thursday, bringing in Lukhan Salakaia-Loto and Rob Simmonds for Michael Hooper and Adam Coleman on the bench, both of whom were said to be carrying minor niggles.

Assistant coach Simon Raiwalumi added that the niggles were “nothing too major, but with that (quarter-final berth) confirmed, we decided to go that way”.

Experienced Australia prop Sekope Kepu was under no illusion of what awaited the team: “Georgia have a great scrum and a great forward pack

“They are tough buggers and they don’t really take any crap from anybody.” Georgia opened their campaign with a 43-14 defeat by Wales before beating Uruguay 33-7 and then going down 45-10 to Fiji. — AFP

## Typhoons, heat and ice: When extreme weather disrupts sport

**TOKYO:** After an approaching typhoon prompted the cancellation of two games at the Rugby World Cup, here are some other examples of extreme weather disruption in sports:

### JAPAN’S F1 FATALITY

Japan’s Formula One Suzuka race track is no stranger to extreme weather and in 2014 French driver Jules Bianchi crashed in the heavy rain — on the fringes of a typhoon — and tragically died nine months later without regaining consciousness. A typhoon forced the postponement of qualifying in 2004 as did heavy rain in 2010, and as Hagibis approaches, organisers say that while they want to minimise disruption the safety of fans and competitors is their top priority.

### TRAGEDY AT SEA

Violent storms wreaked havoc on the 303 yachts that started in the 1979 Fastnet yachting race off the south coast of England, resulting in England’s largest peace-time rescue operation. At least 75 yachts capsized and there were 19 fatalities, while naval and civilian vessels as well as helicopters plucked 125 yachtsmen from the sea. In

1998, fierce storms battered the 115 yachts which started in the annual Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race. Only 44 made it to the finish, while five sank and 66 pulled out. Six sailors died and 55 were plucked from their yachts.

### THE ICE BOWL

The 1967 NFL championship game between the Dallas Cowboys and Green Bay Packers was played in such atrocious conditions that it gave birth to safety rules to prevent players and fans being exposed to such extreme weather again. The temperature was a freezing -26 Celsius (-15F) with a wind chill factor of -44C. The whistles stuck to the referees’ lips with one ripping his skin off, and calling plays by shouting through bleeding lips. For the record, Packers legend Bart Starr scored a touchdown with 13 seconds remaining to win the game.

### BRITAIN’S BIG FREEZE

The third round of English football’s 1963 FA Cup lasted 66 days as Britain was hit by a major freeze. Frost and snow, as well as power cuts, rain and mud were responsible for 261 postponements, with 16 of the 32 ties called off 10 or more times. The round was ultimately spread over 22 playing days.

### HAIL HITS THE TOUR

In this year’s Tour de France, the last 30 kilometres of stage 19 were cancelled when a powerful hailstorm hit the Alps, blanketing the road and giving organisers had no time to clear the course before the race leaders arrived. The following day, stage 20 was shortened by 71 kilometres because of land-

slides caused by storm weather.

### RUGBY’S ‘WATER POLO TEST’

Officials considered postponing the 1975 New Zealand-Scotland Test because Eden Park was underwater, but with Scotland due to fly home the next day they decided to play. Torrential rain never let up in the so-called “water polo Test” and All Blacks prop Billy Bush said he feared someone would drown. Despite radio messages imploring fans to stay safely at home, 45,000 turned up to see the All Blacks win 24-0.

### THE WET WORLD CUP

The 1995 World Cup semi-final between South Africa and France was delayed an hour after treacherous rain flooded the field in Durban. People were handed mops and brooms to help clear the water enough for the game to go ahead, which was fortunate for the Springboks, the hosts, who won and went on to beat New Zealand in the final. Had the match been abandoned, France would have made the final because of their better disciplinary record which was the tie-breaker then.

### BITTER CHILL

For current French players Louis Picamoles and Wesley Fofana, this is not the first time they have faced weather disruption. In 2012 they were at Stade de France for the Six Nations match against Ireland which was called off 10 minutes before kick-off because of a bitter chill and the referee feared for the players’ safety on the frozen ground. When the match was eventually played three weeks later, it resulted in a 17-17 draw. — AFP