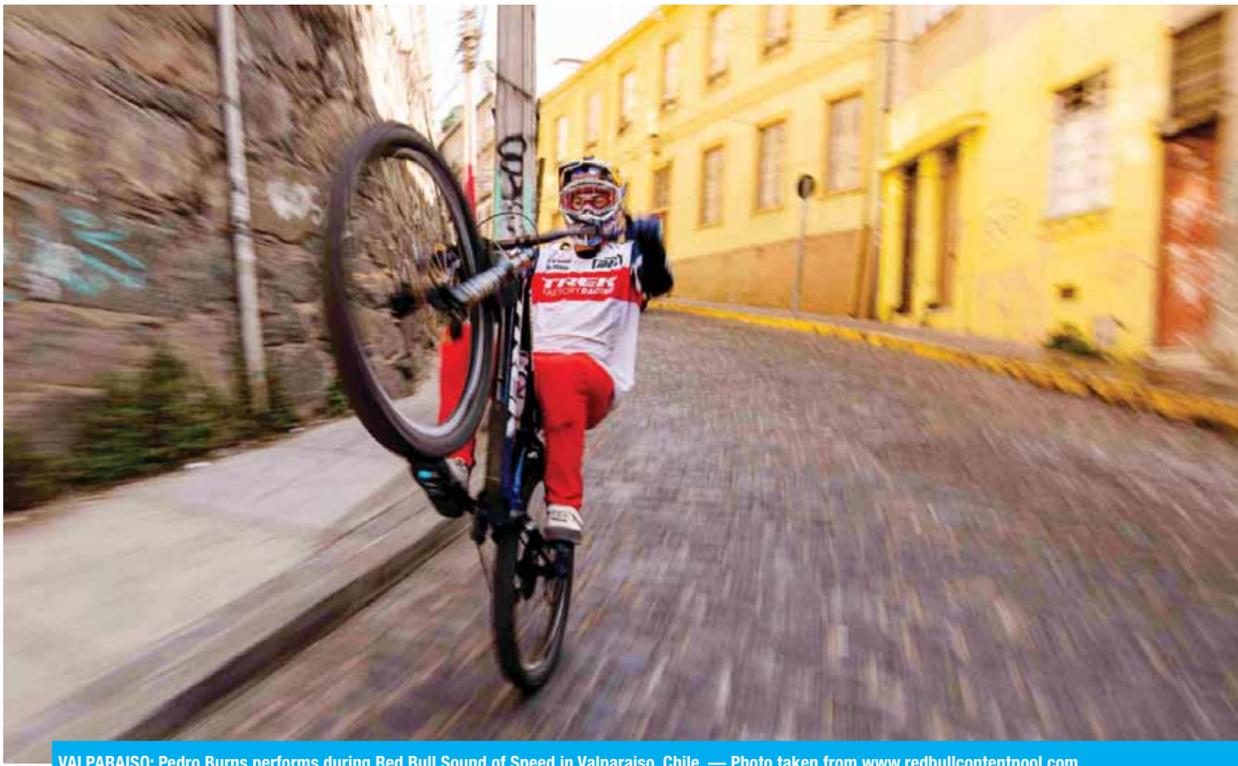


Sports

Photo of the Day



VALPARAISO: Pedro Burns performs during Red Bull Sound of Speed in Valparaiso, Chile. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

FIA green lights
F1 world
championship start

PARIS: Motor racing chiefs on Friday rubber-stamped the start of the Formula One world championship with, as expected, eight races in Europe between July and September.

The 2020 campaign, which should have got underway in mid-March in Australia, will open on July 5 at the Red Bull Ring in Spielberg, Austria, behind closed doors. There will be reduced numbers of people in the paddock following strict health protocols.

A second GP is planned in Spielberg on July 12, before Hungary (at the Hungaroring in Budapest) on July 19. Back-to-back events follow in Great Britain (at Silverstone) on August 2 and 9, Spain (at Barcelona) on August 16, Belgium (Spa) on August 30 and Italy (Monza) on September 6.

The continuation of the season, not yet revealed, should in principle take teams and drivers to Asia and the Americas, before finishing in the Middle East in mid-December. Measures to combat the spread of Covid-19 initially provide for the absence of spectators and the reduction of the number of people present on the circuits.

This includes teams, officials, security and media. These will be divided into secure groups and regularly tested. In the event of a positive case, those individuals concerned will be isolated and replaced.

To allow compliance with social and physical distancing measures, the FIA on Friday also authorised race marshals to "operate remotely in exceptional circumstances".

Limits will also be placed on the number of people allowed on the starting grid while podium protocols will also be reviewed. — AFP

World number one Djokovic puts positive spin on US Open plan

Cheers to ATP, US Open for further perpetuating my unemployment

PARIS: World number one Novak Djokovic appeared to row back on scepticism over plans to stage the US Open, saying he was "extremely happy" the Grand Slam had escaped the coronavirus cull which claimed Wimbledon and much of the season.

Djokovic had initially voiced unease over the United States Tennis Association's intention to keep the event starting on August 31 at Flushing Meadows despite New York being the hardest-hit city by the US coronavirus crisis.

He described health protocols as "extreme" and "impossible". However, organisers will have been encouraged by the positive noises coming from the three-time US Open champion on Thursday.

"I'm extremely happy and excited to see that all the tournaments, especially Grand Slams, are organising their events," the Serb said in reference also to the French Open, rescheduled now to start in late September.

"I think that a lot of people were sceptical, especially for the US events considering what the US went through as a country during this pandemic," the 17-time Grand Slam winner told Eurosport's Tennis Legends podcast.

"So a lot of people, including myself, were quite sceptical on whether it would happen or not.

"We are very glad that it is happening, of course, and it is very important that we provide opportunities, we provide jobs, we provide opportunities for players to compete.

"Because at the end of the day, this is what we do! As tennis professionals we love the sport; we are pas-

sionate about it. We miss competing and travelling and, at the end of the day, we miss being on tour. So I think this is very positive news."

The 33-year-old said he hoped the stringent restrictions including the existing ban on South American players travelling to compete would be eased before the Grand Slam gets underway.

"Let's hope that in the next two months some of those restrictions will loosen up a bit and that we will have a great, great tournament."

'PERPETUATING MY UNEMPLOYMENT'

This month Djokovic had said that most players he had spoken to had "a rather negative view" about playing in New York, and predicted some would instead switch to the delayed clay court season.

A number of other players have also expressed doubts over the US Open including defending champion Rafael Nadal who said that he would not take part if the event was taking place now.

Women's world number one Ashleigh Barty as well as Wimbledon champion Simona Halep have also expressed reservations.

The US Open will be played without fans in attendance while strict health protocols will be in place.

However, there has been anger at the decision to drop qualifying from the tournament. "Cheers to ATP and US Open for further perpetuating my unemployment," tweeted world number 195 Mitchell Krueger of the United States.

Sachia Vickery, the women's world number 158,

holding my breath. I am his fan. I am his friend," tweeted former world Formula One champion Mario Andretti. "Please do what I'm doing and pray pray for this wonderful man."

'TRULY INSPIRATIONAL'

Zanardi's life changed forever on September 15, 2001 when he crashed at 320kmh at Lausitzring while taking part in a CART race. But what could have been the end of the sports career for the former Lotus and Williams Formula One driver from Bologna proved to be the start of another.

Zanardi adapted to his prosthetic legs and was back competing in the final race of the European Touring Car Championship at Monza in 2003 driving for BMW.

"Although the situation was really bad at the time, I set myself the goal of leading a normal life again at some time in the future," Zanardi said at the time.

"Today, I can walk, I swim, I go skiing." In addition to his Paralympic medals, Zanardi also competed in the gruelling Ironman triathlon in Hawaii in October 2014.

His most recent feat was last September when he achieved a new Paralympic triathlon world record time at the Ironman of Cervia, Italy of 8 hours, 25 minutes and 30 seconds.

It was a record which he achieved a few days after the conquest of two gold and a silver medal at the world championships in London.

"Alex is one of life's truly inspirational people and as we all know, a fighter through and through. Stay strong and Forza Alex," his former Williams team wrote on Twitter.

"Alex has already had his share of bad luck, which he transcended with a mighty determination and spirit to win again," said former F1 driver Martin Brundle. "Let's hope he's fine and this is nowhere near as serious as it sounds from reports."

Zanardi raced for Jordan, Minardi and Lotus in Formula 1 in the early 1990s before switching to the CART championship in the United States where he was series champion in 1997 and 1998. Zanardi returned to F1 with Williams in 1999 before heading back to the CART series. — AFP



BELGRADE: File photo shows Serbian tennis player Novak Djokovic returns the ball to Serbian tennis player Viktor Troicki during their single match at a charity exhibition hosted by Novak Djokovic, on June 13, 2020 in Belgrade. — AFP

tweeted: "What a slap in the face to all the players in qualifying that won't even have a chance to compete and who literally depend on the money from grand slams to survive."

Wary of the fall-out, the USTA said \$6.6 million will be put aside as compensation for those affected by missing out on the 128-player main draw. There was also anger too at the decision not to stage a wheelchair tournament at the US Open this year.

"Massively disappointed to find out on Twitter this

morning that the @usopen plan on cutting wheelchair tennis from this year's tournament," tweeted Paralympic champion Gordon Reid, who is also a four-time doubles winner in New York.

"The wheelchair players have had ZERO communication or consultation from either the ITF or the Grand Slam around this decision." International Paralympic Committee president Andrew Parsons added: "The decision has left a lot of the athlete community rightly upset and angered". — AFP

Ex-F1 driver Zanardi 'in serious condition' after bike crash

MILAN: Ex-Formula One driver Alex Zanardi, who had both legs amputated in a motor racing accident almost 20 years ago before going on to become a Paralympic champion, was in an "extremely serious condition" in hospital on Friday after crashing into a truck while competing in a handbike race in Italy.

Zanardi was participating in one of the stages of the 'Obiettivo tricolore' relay race in Tuscany when he lost control of his bike on a descent and crossed into the path of an oncoming truck near Montalcino.

The 53-year-old was airlifted to hospital in nearby Siena where he underwent emergency surgery for serious head and facial injuries before being transferred to intensive care.

"Due to the serious head injury, the neurosurgery and facial intervention began shortly after 7 pm and ended shortly before 10 pm," the hospital said in a statement.

"The patient was then transferred to intensive care. His condition is very serious." Mario Valentini, coach of the Italian Paracycling national team, told Corriere Della Sera newspaper: "Alex lost control of the handbike, rolled over twice and collided with a trailer truck. The collision was terrible."

Italy's Zanardi was a former Grand Prix driver who twice won the CART championship in the United States before having both his legs amputated following an accident on the Lausitzring track in Germany in 2001.

He went on to win four gold medals on his handbike in the 2012 and 2016 Paralympic Games, and two silver medals, and ten world championship titles.

"I am so anxious and frightened about Alex Zanardi that I'm

MLB closes all spring sites as COVID-19 spreads

FLORIDA: With coronavirus infections on the rise in Florida and Arizona, Major League Baseball is closing all spring training sites to have them undergo thorough cleaning, multiple media outlets reported late Friday night.

Earlier Friday, the Philadelphia Phillies, Toronto Blue Jays and San Francisco Giants shut down their training facilities due to positive tests for the coronavirus, and the Houston Astros and Los Angeles Angels announced that players had contracted COVID-19. The spread of the virus at baseball facilities coincides with statewide spikes in both Florida and Arizona. The Florida Department of Health confirmed an additional 3,822 cases on Friday — the highest number of reported cases in the state in a single day. Arizona also saw a single-day high of 3,246 new COVID-19 cases on Friday, per the state's Department of Health Services.

The Phillies closed their Clearwater, Fla., campus after five players and three staff members tested positive for the coronavirus.

The Blue Jays shut their training site in nearby Dunedin, Fla., after a player exhibited symptoms of COVID-19, multiple media outlets reported.

The Giants' camp in Scottsdale, Ariz., was

closed after a person who recently was on site as well as a family member came down with symptoms of the coronavirus. Test results for COVID-19 were pending, Giants president of baseball operations Farhan Zaidi told The Athletic.

The Astros stated in a press release that an unnamed player who had been training at the team's West Palm Beach, Fla., facility tested positive. According to the team, the player dealt with only minor symptoms and was making a smooth recovery.

Angels general manager Billy Eppler told reporters that the organization had two players with COVID-19, but he would not say whether they were major-leaguers or minor-leaguers. The Phillies did not identify the affected players or staff members. In the case of the Blue Jays, ESPN's Jeff Passan reported that the player who tested positive is a pitcher on the 40-man roster who recently had been with the club's minor-leaguers.

Philadelphia managing partner John Middleton said in a statement, "The Phillies are committed to the health and welfare of our players, coaches and staff as our highest priority, and as a result of these confirmed tests, all facilities in Clearwater have been closed indefinitely to all players, coaches and staff and will remain closed until medical authorities are confident that the virus is under control and our facilities are disinfected."

Per the Phillies, the team's first confirmed case occurred on Tuesday. Eight staff members tested negative while 32 others (20 players, 12 staff members) were awaiting test results. — Reuters