

ONE MORE YEAR: ON THE POSTPONEMENT OF HANGZHOU ASIAN GAMES

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In recent times, sport seemed to be breathing easy despite [COVID-19](#)'s long shadow. Yet, a surprising full stop has sprung up in a multi-disciplinary continental event with the [postponement of the Asian Games at Hangzhou in China](#). That Shanghai has witnessed an outbreak which led to the enforcement of strict restrictions has obviously forced a rethink within the Chinese landscape. Scheduled to be held in September, the Asian Games needs a fresh window and the speculation is that like the Tokyo Olympics, which suffered a year's postponement and was held in 2021, the Asiad too may spill over into 2023. In the current year featuring the World Championships, which was to be followed by the Commonwealth Games, the Asian Games was expected to be the big climax. This benchmark has now vanished, and athletes and sports bodies have to alter plans. Sportspersons train to gradually reach the 'zone' or the 'peak', when they maximise their chances of winning a coveted medal. It is linked to a monitored blend of training, nutrition and rest while the eye is locked on the event dates. However, a last-minute change scuppers even the best-laid plans and demands a recalibration from the concerned athlete, coaching staff and sports associations and nations.

The latest development offers a mixed bag for India, which finds better success rates in the Asiad and Commonwealth Games, unlike in the Olympics. But cutting across the varied spectrum of Indian sport, the indefinite postponement is seen both as a blessing and a curse. With the Asian Games serving as a qualification event for the Paris Olympics in 2024, Hockey India was initially mulling over fielding a second-string team at the Commonwealth Games and sending across its main squad for the Asiad. The apprehensions were centred around the difficulty of peaking twice in a year within a few months. But with China postponing the marquee event, a full-strength hockey outfit can now be sent to Birmingham for the Commonwealth Games. The same relief applies to other athletes too as they now have to focus only on the World Championships and Commonwealth Games. But for the 30-plus athletes eyeing a swansong, it would be difficult to stretch every sinew in the next year too. Runner Jinson Johnson, gold medallist in the 2018 Asiad, may have to train for an additional season. There are other complications as in the boxing calendar, 2023 competitions are the yardstick for Olympic qualification. An Asiad in that cycle would affect preparation. China had its reasons for the postponement, and the sporting world will need to rework preparations and priorities.

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