

FIFA to consider four bids to host 2023 Women's World Cup

FIFA has received bids from Brazil, Japan, Colombia and a joint bid from Australia and New Zealand to host the 2023 Women's World Cup. Soccer's international governing body will now assess the bids, which will include visiting each country. Evaluations will be submitted to the FIFA Council and a vote on the host will be held at the organization's meeting in Ethiopia next June. Anticipated bids from South Korea and South Africa were withdrawn before Friday's deadline. The 2023 World Cup will feature 32

teams, up from the 24 that competed this summer at the tournament in France. The United States won its second straight World Cup title and fourth overall this year, and the event enjoyed unprecedented television viewership of 1.12 billion worldwide. "France 2019 was certainly a watershed moment for women's football, and now it is FIFA's responsibility to take concrete measures to keep fostering the game's incredible growth," FIFA President Gianni Infantino said in a statement. "With the FIFA Women's World Cup generating an un-

precedented interest across member associations, we are ensuring that the process to select the hosts is seamless, objective, ethical and transparent. By the time the FIFA Council announces the hosts, there should be no doubt whatsoever as to why that choice was made." The Japan Football Association has already launched a website hyping its bid, which encourages supporters to submit "My Dream of 2023" hopes for the event. Japan's association proposes using eight stadiums, including the new National Stadium. (AP)



In this July 19, 2019 file photo, US women's soccer team player Rose Lavelle's Women's World Cup trophy rests on a table as she attends a welcome event in her honor at Fountain Square in Cincinnati. FIFA has received bids from Brazil, Japan, Colombia and a joint bid from Australia and New Zealand to host the 2023 Women's World Cup on Dec 13. (AP)

Sports Plus



'The amount of money spent on the Olympics should have been used for real reconstruction'

Tokyo being billed as 'Recovery Olympics' – but not for all



A group of seniors play gateball in a school yard on Nov 27, 2019 in Date, Fukushima prefecture, Japan. The torch relay for the Tokyo Olympics will kick off in Fukushima, the northern prefecture devastated almost nine years ago by an earthquake, tsunami, and the subsequent meltdown of three nuclear reactors. (AP)

Osumi, the town spokesman, said many former residents have found new homes and jobs and the majority say they won't return. He has his own mixed feelings about going back to his mountainside home in Futaba. The number of residents registered at the town has decreased by more than 1,000 since the accident, indicating they are unlikely to return.

"It was so sad to see the town destroyed and my hometown lost," he said, holding back tears. He reflected on family life, the autumn leaves, and the comforting hot baths.

"My heart ached when I had to leave this town behind," he added.

Standing outside the Futaba station, Mayor Shirou Izawa described plans to rebuild a new town. It will be friendly to the elderly, and a place that might become a major hub for research in decommissioning and renewable energy. The hope is that those who come to help in Fukushima's reconstruction may stay and be part of a new Futaba.

"The word Fukushima has become globally known, but regrettably the situation in Futaba or (neighboring) Okuma is hardly known," Izawa said, noting Futaba's recovery won't be ready by the Olympics.

"But we can still show that a town that was so badly hit has come this far," he added.

To showcase the recovery, government officials say J-Village – where the torch relays begins – and the Azuma baseball stadium were decontaminated and cleaned. However, problems keeping popping up at J-Village with radiation "hot spots" being reported, raising questions about safety heading into the Olympics.

The baseball stadium is located about 70 kilometers (45 miles) west of Futaba, J-Village is closer, about 20 kilometers (12 miles) away along the coastal area.

The radioactive waste from decontamination surrounding the plant, and from across Fukushima, is kept in thousands of storage bags stacked up in temporary areas in Futaba and Okuma.

They are to be sorted – some burned and compacted – and buried at a medium-term storage facility for the next 30 years. For now they fill vast fields that used to be rice paddies or vegetable farms. One large mound sits next to a graveyard, almost brushing the stone monuments.

This year, 4 million tons of those industrial container bags were to be brought into Futaba, and another million tons to Okuma, where part of the Fukushima plant stands.

Yoshida says the medium-term waste storage sites and the uncertainty over whether they will stay in Futaba – or be moved – is discouraging residents and newcomers.

"Who wants to come to live in a place like that? Would senior officials in Kasumigaseki government headquarters go and live there?" he asked, referring to the high-end area in Tokyo that houses many government ministries.

"I don't think they would," Yoshida added. "But we have ancestral graves, and we love Futaba, and we don't want Futaba to be lost. The good old Futaba that we remember will be lost forever, but we'll cope." (AP)

By Mari Yamaguchi and Stephen Wade

The torch relay for the Tokyo Olympics will kick off in Fukushima, the northern prefecture devastated almost nine years ago by an earthquake, tsunami and the subsequent meltdown of three nuclear reactors.

They'll also play Olympic baseball and softball next year in one part of Fukushima, allowing Tokyo organizers and the Japanese government to label these games the "Recovery Olympics." The symbolism recalls the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, which showcased Japan's reemergence just 19 years after World War II.

But tens of thousands still haven't recovered in Fukushima, displaced by nuclear radiation and unable to return to deserted places like Futaba.

Time stopped in the town of 7,100 when disaster struck on March 11, 2011.

Laundry still hangs from the second floor of one house. Vermin gnaw away at once intimate family spaces, exposed through shattered windows and mangled doors. The desolation is deepened by Japanese tidiness with shoes waiting in doorways for absent owners.

"This recovery Olympics is in name only," Toshihide Yoshida told The Associated Press. He was forced to abandon Futaba and ended up living near Tokyo. "The amount of money spent on the Olympics should have been used for

real reconstruction."

Olympic organizers say they are spending \$12.6 billion on the Olympics, about 60% public money. However, an audit report by the national governments says overall spending is about twice that much.

The government has spent 34.6 trillion yen (\$318 billion) for reconstruction projects for the disaster-hit northern prefectures, and the Fukushima plant decommissioning is expected to cost 8 trillion yen (\$73 billion).

The Olympic torch relay will start in March in J-Village, a soccer stadium used as an emergency response hub for Fukushima plant workers. The relay goes to 11 towns hit by the disaster, but bypasses Futaba, a part of Fukushima that Olympic visitors will never see.

"I would like the Olympic torch to pass Futaba to show the rest of the world the reality of our hometown," Yoshida said. "Futaba is far from recovery."

The radiation that spewed from the plant at one point displaced more than 160,000 people. Futaba is the only one of 12 radiation-hit towns that remains a virtual no-go zone. Only daytime visits are allowed for decontamination and reconstruction work, or for former residents to check their abandoned homes.

The town has been largely decontaminated and visitors can go almost anywhere without putting on hazmat suits, though they must carry personal dosimeters – measures radiation

absorbed by the body – and surgical masks are recommended. The main train station is set to reopen in March, but residents won't be allowed to return until 2022.

A main-street shopping arcade in Futaba is lined by collapsing store fronts and sits about 4 kilometers (2.5 miles) from the nuclear plant, and 250 kilometers (150 miles) north of Tokyo. One shop missing its front doors advertises Shiseido beauty products with price tags still hanging on merchandise. Gift packages litter the ground.

Futaba Minami Elementary School has been untouched for almost nine years and feels like a mausoleum. No one died in the evacuation. But school bags, textbooks and notebooks sit as they were when nearly 200 children rushed out.

Kids were never allowed to return, and "Friday, March 11," is still written on classroom blackboards along with due dates for the next homework assignment.

On the first floor of the vacant town-hall, a human-size "daruma" good-luck figure stands in dim evening light at a reception area. A piece of paper that fell on the floor says the doors must be closed to protect from radiation.

It warns: "Please don't go outside." The words are underlined in red.

"Let us know if you start feeling unwell," Muneshige Osumi, a former town spokesman told visitors, apologizing for the musty smell and the presence of rats.

'It shows that they give opportunities to young players'

Academy graduate Pereira part of United 4,000-game milestone

MANCHESTER, England, Dec 14, (AP) – The excitement at being talent-spotted by Manchester United brought on moments of youthful giddiness for Andreas Pereira.

From being told by his footballer father of United's tentative interest in him as a teenager, to the first meeting with the managerial colossus Alex Ferguson and being greeted in Portuguese.

"I was starstruck and I just wanted to join United straight away," Pereira recalls in an interview with The Associated Press. "He told me there was always a place for a Brazilian in his team ... and I didn't want to leave."

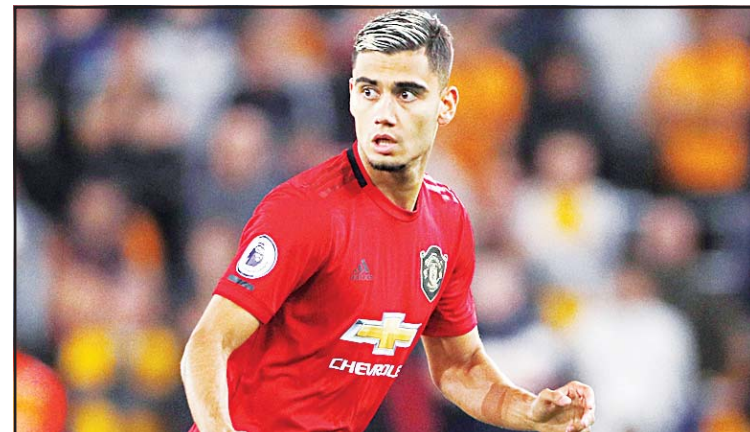
Pereira would have to wait until he was 16 to officially start in the United academy in 2012. But there was a moment of confusion over what everyone was doing in his first practice after joining from Dutch club PSV Eindhoven.

"I wanted to show my skills," Pereira says, "and it was rugby."

The midfielder was eventually able to flaunt his skills, and made his first-team debut in August 2014. That night, against the MK Dons in the League Cup, the Belgium-born Brazilian extended the line of academy graduates featuring in United's matchday squads stretching back to 1937.

The link remains unbroken, with the sequence reaching 4,000 continuous games on Sunday when Everton plays at Old Trafford in the English Premier League.

"It shows that they give opportunities to young players," the 23-year-old Perei-



In this Aug 19, 2019 file photo, Manchester United's Andreas Pereira during their English Premier League soccer match against Wolverhampton Wanderers at the Molineux Stadium in Wolverhampton, England. The excitement at being talent-spotted by Manchester United was a moment of youthful giddiness for Andreas Pereira. From being told by his footballer father of United's tentative interest in him as a teenager to the first meeting with the managerial colossus Alex Ferguson and being greeted in Portuguese. "I was starstruck and I just wanted to join United straightaway," Pereira recalls in an interview with The Associated Press Dec 13. "He told me there was always a place for Brazilian in his team ... and I didn't want to leave." (AP)

ra says, returning to the academy building at United's Aon Training Complex. "It's difficult at first. It's not easy."

United has produced some of the game's greatest names – from Bobby Charlton in the 1950s to David Beckham in the famed "Class of '92."

"It's in our DNA," says United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, who won the treble as a player alongside Beckham in

1999. "This club is built on having your own local lads and academy players coming through and we pride ourselves on that."

Pereira has played in all but one of United's 16 Premier League games this season, featuring alongside fellow academy graduates Jesse Lingard, Marcus Rashford, Scott McTominay and Mason Greenwood.

The 18-year-old Greenwood is among 10 academy players to get their first-team debuts at United in 2019, with graduates accounting for 35% of playing time. Of the 38 goals, 34 have been scored or assisted by an academy player.

"We've been playing for United a long time, we know everybody," Pereira says. "So it's not like Mason comes and plays with us and we're like, 'Who is this new boy?'"

"I remember when I played with him in the cage game at United. He was still a little boy ... but we knew he was good and we knew that one day we'd play together."

For every success story, however, there are many more who do not make the grade long-term at United.

Adnan Januzaj was Pereira's best friend at United. The Belgian enjoyed a rapid promotion to the first team but his impact was fleeting after helping to win the title with goals toward the end of Ferguson's final season in charge in 2013. The striker fell out of favour in the post-Ferguson era and spent two seasons largely out on loan before leaving in 2017.

"The hardest bit is not to get there," Pereira says. "The hardest bit is to stay in the first team, to stay important for Manchester United and make your career. You see a lot of players that come in and they play well and then do well for a month, maybe half the season and then they disappear."

"So that's what I want from myself. I just want to make sure I'm here for the

long run. I want to stay and play many years to come."

To achieve that, Pereira had to leave, convincing then-manager Jose Mourinho to allow him to go on loans to Granada in 2016-17 and Valencia the following season to gain experience.

"It was difficult because, you never want to leave United," Pereira says. "You want to play straight away. But when it's not possible, you have to improve to get to be a better player."

"It's always in the back of your mind; I'm going, but maybe I'm not coming back to United."

Pereira has advice to the current crop of academy students who might need to temporarily leave United to prove themselves: Make the club feel you are missed.

"That's what I did," he says. "And it worked out very well."

No one, though, is satisfied with the current status of the record 20-time English champions. Even after beating City in the Manchester derby last weekend, they are 22 points behind leader Liverpool in fifth place due to erratic form.

"It's mixed emotions. It's like we do well in some games and then some games we don't do well – so we have to get out of that," Pereira said. "We're better off with the young squad learning, because now we have nailed it down."

What is missing for Pereira is some silverware.

"I've been raised to win trophies," he says. "And I just can't wait to win trophies with United now."

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