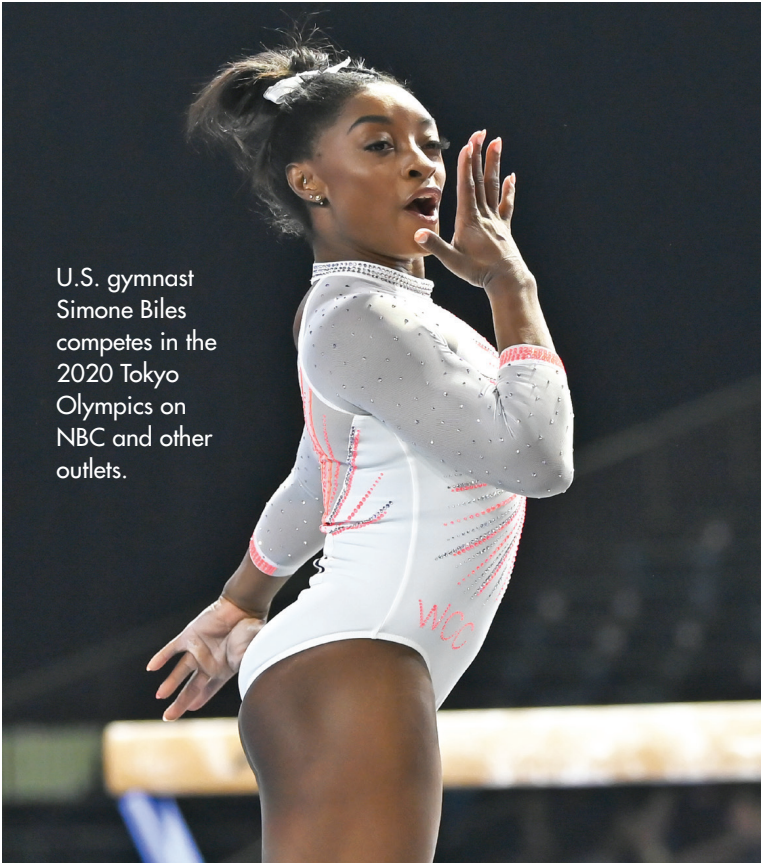


coverstory
BY GEORGE DICKIE



U.S. gymnast Simone Biles competes in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics on NBC and other outlets.

The same but different: Summer Olympics return post-pandemic

Shrouded in uncertainty and a year late, the 2020 Tokyo Olympics get going this week with as much anticipation as any in recent memory.

Kicking off Wednesday, July 21, two days before the Opening Ceremony on Friday, July 23, NBC along with USA Network, CNBC, NBC Sports Network, Golf Channel, Peacock, Olympic Channel, Telemundo, Universo, the NBC Sports app and NBCOlympics.com will provide over 7,000 hours of coverage of 33 sports. Among them are swimming, diving, basketball, gymnastics, track and field, beach volleyball and boxing, plus new sports karate, skateboarding, sport climbing and surfing and returnees baseball and softball.

More than 11,000 male and female athletes from 206 countries will be at these games, the status of which was in doubt as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. There will be no spectators at any of the venues, thanks to a state of emergency in the Japanese capital. But despite the anxiety and all the restrictions in place, Mike Tirico, NBC's prime-time studio host for these games, thinks Tokyo will make a fine host city.

"This is one of the great cities in the world," he says, "and I think tourists from around the world would've come to the games. And I think that's just the unfortunate part of this timing for the host city. You know, you plan seven years out for the games and this would've been such a spectacular games. And as you know, there's so much culture ...

"Having said that, I think they'll put on a great games," he continues. "The venues were, according to the IOC, more ready and prepared than any city that hosted the Summer Games, so we were really in for a great games. So from a preparation standpoint of the venues, the facilities for the athletes, I think that's going to be still as good as possible."

In the weeks prior to these games, Tirico has been crisscrossing the country, taking in qualifying events in various sports and making note of athletes to watch. And he's also looking at the big stories. In particular, Usain Bolt's absence means there will be a new fastest man in the world. And he sees U.S. gymnast Simone Biles adding more medals to her collection and the American swim team dominating as well.

And in soccer, the U.S. women's team will look for a modicum of redemption for their deflating loss to Sweden in the quarterfinals in Rio de Janeiro in 2016 when they face that country early in competition.

"Coming off the success of the World Cup," Tirico says, "I think the likes of Megan Rapinoe and everyone else has become extremely popular athletes in this country. And they're just one example of what I think is the overall strength of Team USA in Tokyo and that is the women's teams. ... It really will be a lot of the focus of the coverage and of America's best medal chances coming from many of those women."

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