

Japan is being denied World Cup it deserves; FAILURE TO PLAN HAS MADE MOCKERY OF A GREAT TOURNAMENT ; RUGBY WORLD CUP

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Body

EDDIE JONES was driving through the outskirts of Tokyo 23 years ago when he encountered his first major typhoon.

'You know those convenience stores, 7-11, that are everywhere?' he recalled yesterday. 'You know those big signs they have? Well, one flew off and just landed right in front of the car. At one stage, it was looking pretty dodgy because it just kept coming. That was in 1996. I remember it clearly. I was driving to the ceremony for the first game of the season.' He paused, briefly. 'There's a reason why, when typhoons come, everything shuts down. It's because they can be particularly dangerous and this one is supposed to be a big typhoon, like that one. Some turn out more like a thunderstorm, but I don't see the organisers had any option.' On that front, at least, he's right. Given that three died in the last typhoon of significance to strike Tokyo last month, that this one is supposed to be greater makes evasive action imperative.

its own and any time it is else There was no guarantee the city would not be in total lockdown come the time England France were supposed to play Yokohama tomorrow, so it hard to see how anything could be done.

Now, whether the World Cup should have gone to Japan at this time of year, whether there should have been contingencies and how long World Rugby can escape a backlash over their lack of foresight and the chaos that has ensued is quite another matter.

Jones did his best to talk up the hosts and the tournament, then high-tailed it to Miyazaki, where England will kick back in relative calm until the start of next week when it is time to travel to Oita and prepare for their quarter-final with Australia.

Jones says he isn't worried about whether this is good preparation, because it's the only preparation on offer and, in that, he's right again. The Japanese have a word for this form of acceptance and Jones was very liberal with it.

'Shoganai,' he said, on several occasions, to the delight of local reporters. It translates, roughly, as: it can't be helped.

Shoganai is a defining influence on the Japanese psyche, almost philosophical in its importance.

It is the belief that if a matter is beyond your control, the best course is to accept and move on.

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It is the reason Japan thrives despite earthquakes and typhoons, why the country rebuilt after its catastrophic involvement in the Second World War. Shogunai explains the wonderful presence of Kamaishi, the city devastated by a tsunami in 2011, in this World Cup.

Yet shogunai is also why extreme right-wing forces were allowed to propel Japan into world war and why there is so much inertia at the polling booth, even when a government is unpopular.

Shogunai prevents World Rugby answering serious questions about the timing of this tournament when, now that the worst is upon us, the impending storm seems more predictable than anyone was led to believe.

'We've been talking about it all the time, the possibility this might happen,' added Jones. 'Look, it's typhoon season. We had an idea it could and we prepared for it. We made sure we accumulated points in our games to put us in the right position. We knew there was the possibility there could be something like it during the tournament.' 'Really? England were factoring in a plan of action if a typhoon caused the first cancellation in World Cup history?' Then why weren't World Rugby considering this ten years ago when the competition was awarded? Shouldn't the tournament have been played in Japan at a less hostile time of year? 'I haven't got an opinion on that, mate,' Jones said, suddenly coy. He doesn't want to further rock the boat here because, with the final pool weekend in disarray, serious mistakes have been made.

Maybe Leonardo Ghiraldini, the distinguished Italian hooker, denied his farewell against the All Blacks in what would have been his 105th game, might be more forthcoming. He was in tears at the news.

The Japanese Grand Prix is scheduled for roughly this time each year and three races in the last 16 have been affected by typhoons.

England's rugby squad was in Japan a year ago and were confined to their hotel by, guess what? A typhoon. They arrived last month and were delayed at the airport for eight hours by a typhoon. And one just missed them at their camp last month, too.

So this is their third typhoon of the competition, and their fourth in a year. So let's not pretend these are freak circumstances. Much of Japan exists on fault lines and earthquakes are an occupational hazard. I was in an earthquake in Tokyo during the football World Cup in 2002. It was like the room dropped its shoulder, sold me a dummy, then righted itself.

TOTALLY unpredictable and over in seconds, as seismic events often are. Typhoons are different. They are seasonal, meaning there is a time in the year when they do not happen. The time when the World Cup should have been played in Japan, maybe.

As recently as September 2018, tournament director Alan Gilpin called typhoon season 'a real hot topic for us'. Not hot enough, obviously, because by then the schedule was set for September-October and no reserve dates had been considered at the pool stage.

'We're in the midst of a great tournament and we shouldn't let this cast a shadow over it,' said Jones, who clearly feels protective towards the country of his mother, his wife and where he worked during his formative years as a coach.

'It's still the right decision to have the tournament here. What a great tournament we've had. We need world rugby to grow. You can see the growth in Japanese rugby. That doesn't happen unless you have the World Cup here. It's the best-run tournament I've seen.' Nobody is disputing that. This is a brilliantly-organised event and nothing that has unfolded in the last 48 hours alters that.

It is World Rugby that have failed to prepare. Japan do not deserve to end up with a competition that has an asterisk attached, and their team does not deserve its berth in the last eight by default.

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The last remaining hope is that Typhoon Hagibis has passed by Sunday and Yokohama and its infrastructure is in a fit state to host Japan v Scotland that evening. If not, Scotland go home, having not played their final game, a development that Jones may view with shoganai, or simply as symptomatic of not having got points on the board early.

'Just get on with it, guys, get over it,' he concluded. 'There's nothing you can do about it. Shoganai.' There is, of course, another Japanese concept that should be getting more play here. Kaizen.

The philosophy of continuous improvement or, literally, change for the better. A little less shoganai and a bit more kaizen, and **World** Rugby might have seen this coming. And then everybody would be safe and Japan could have merrily hosted the competition it deserved.

Graphic

Sign of the times: coach Eddie Jones (left) has taken the cancellation in his stride SGETTY IMAGES

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