

What's troubling athletes arriving in Rio? No 'Pokemon Go'

30 July 2016, by Ryan Nakashima And Stephen Wade



In this Thursday, July 28, 2016, file photo, fans play the highly addictive "Pokemon Go" game during a gathering in central Madrid, Spain, to play the computer game. Since debuting to wild adulation in the U.S., Australia and New Zealand this month, the game from Google spinoff Niantic Inc. has spread like wildfire, launching in more than 30 countries or territories, but not Brazil. For athletes and other visitors caught up in the wave, not having access is just one more knock against an Olympics that officials are racing to get ready. The opening ceremony takes place Friday, Aug. 5. (AP Photo/Daniel Ochoa de Olza, File)

So the plumbing and electricity in the athletes' village took several days to fix. Who cares?

But no "Pokemon Go"? That's an outrage!

If there were ever a more "First World problem" for the Zika-plagued, water-polluted Rio Olympics, it's Brazil's lack of access to the hit mobile game, which has united players the world over.

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For athletes and other visitors caught up in the wave, not having access is just one more knock against an Olympics that officials are racing to get ready. The opening ceremony takes place next Friday.

"I wish I could run around in the (athletes') village catching Pokemon," New Zealand soccer player Anna Green said Friday. "I just can't get it on the phone. It's fine, but it would have been something fun to do."

What will she do instead? "Train," she replied.

Niantic didn't reply to a request for comment on when the game might be released in Brazil. And though social media rumors point to a Sunday release for the game, similar rumors in Japan resulted in heightened expectations and the sense of delay before its debut there last week.

This week, British canoer Joe Clarke tweeted—with a broken-hearted sad face—a screenshot of his player on a deserted map near the rugby, equestrian and modern pentathlon venues in Rio's Deodoro neighborhood. The map was devoid of PokeStops—fictional supply caches linked to real-world landmarks. No Pokemon monsters to catch either: There was nary a Starmie nor a Clefairy to be found.

"Sorry guys no [#pokemon](#) in the Olympic Village," tweeted French canoer Matthieu Peche, followed by three crying-face emoji. Getting equal billing in his Twitter stream was a snapshot of a letter of encouragement from French President Francois Hollande.

Players with the app already downloaded elsewhere appear to be able to see a digital map of their surroundings when they visit Rio. But without PokeStops or Pokemon, the game isn't much fun. It would be like getting on a football field—soccer to Americans—but not having a ball to kick or goals to

defend.

The Olympics kick off next Friday. Will Pikachu be there to witness it? The world is watching with baited Poke-breath.

Many competitors in the athletes' village took it in stride, though. Canadian field hockey player Matthew Sarmiento said it would give him more time to meet other athletes. But he would have welcomed Pokemon during downtime in competition, adding that "sometimes it's good to take your mind off the important things and let yourself chill."

Athletes might not get Pokemon, but they'll have access to 450,000 condoms, or three times as many as the London Olympics. Of those, 100,000 are female condoms. Officials deny that it's a response to the Zika virus, which has been linked to miscarriages and birth defects in babies born to women who have been infected.

In Pokemon countries like the U.S., PokeStops are being used to attract living, breathing customers. In San Francisco, for example, dozens of bars, restaurants and coffee shops have set up lures that attract rare Pokemon, along with potential new patrons looking to catch them.

That's presumably one reason why Rio Mayor Eduardo Paes—plagued by a host of bad news from player robberies to faulty plumbing—urged Niantic investor Nintendo to release the game in Brazil.

"Everybody is coming here. You should also come!" Paes wrote in Portuguese on his Facebook page, adding the hashtag #PokemonGoNoBrasil—"Pokemon Go" in Brazil.

His post generated responses such as this: "The aquatic Pokemon died with superbugs."

Paes didn't respond to requests for interviews.

One video circulating virally, with more than 3.5 million views, shows one fan identifying himself as Joel Vieira questioning how Brazil can host the Olympics but not Pokemon.

"I can't play! I am not allowed to know how it really feels to see the little animals on my cell phone," he said on the video. "Because we don't have it in Brazil, yet. But we are having the Olympics."

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