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Tokyo 2020 Olympics logo scrapped after allegations of plagiarism

Decision comes just days after organisers dismissed claims that logo designer Kenjiro Sano based it on one by Belgian designer

[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo

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Japan's hapless preparations for the 2020 [Olympics](#) have suffered another embarrassment after organisers decided to scrap the Games' official logo amid accusations of plagiarism against designer Kenjiro Sano.

Only days after brushing aside allegations that Sano had based [his emblem](#) on a work by the Belgian designer Olivier Debie, the 2020 Olympic committee ditched the design amid new allegations that Sano used other images without permission in his presentation of the logo, including at its official launch in July.

The about-face marks the latest in a string of controversies surrounding Japan's hosting of the 2020 Summer Games and the 2019 rugby World Cup.

In July, [it abandoned British-Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid's design for a new main stadium](#) – which was to be used for both events – after costs soared to \$2bn (£1.3bn), almost twice the initial estimate.

Construction is now [a year behind schedule](#), forcing the Olympic minister, Toshiaki Endo, to concede that it might not be possible to meet the International Olympic Committee's January 2020 deadline for completion of the new stadium.

The arena, the cost of which has been capped at 155bn yen (£844m), will now not be ready in time to host matches at the rugby World Cup. In response, World Rugby demanded that [Japan](#) submit a new proposal for its venues and provide assurances about the tournament's financial security by the end of this month.

Japanese media reported that the 2020 Olympics organising committee decided on the logo's future at a crisis meeting on Tuesday, attended by Endo, the head of the organising committee, Yoshiro Mori, the governor of Tokyo, Yoichi Masuzoe and the head of the Japanese Olympic committee, Tsunekazu Takeda.

Debie has taken the IOC to court over the Tokyo logo, alleging copyright infringement due to its resemblance to [one he designed for the Théâtre de Liège in Belgium in 2013](#). His legal attempt to block use of the logo is due to begin this month.

As recently as last week, however, [Japanese officials rejected claims that Sano was guilty of plagiarism](#), noting that Debie's design was not a registered trademark.

Sano's design centres on a "T" for Tokyo, and takes inspiration from the Japanese flag, with a red circle representing the sun.

Officials took the unusual step of unveiling Sano's initial blueprint, saying its emphasis on the "T" shape bore no resemblance to Debie's theatre design.

“We are convinced that the design of the Tokyo Olympics logo is original,” Toshiro Muto, director general of the Tokyo organising committee, said last week. “It’s a powerful and simple design. Despite all the development, we will continue our effort so that the people would keep using the logo.”

But even that attempt to defuse the crisis backfired when it was pointed out that Sano’s initial submission resembled a work by the late German typographer, Jan Tschichold.

On Tuesday, local media said new accusations had emerged that Sano used a photograph from a website without permission when he presented his original logo.

Sano had earlier said his Tokyo 2020 design was inspired by the emblem used when the city first hosted the Summer Olympics in 1964, adding that he had never set eyes on the Théâtre de Liège design.

“I am extremely surprised to hear the remarks of the Belgian designer,” he told reporters last month. “I would like to take this opportunity to state that [Debie’s] claims are completely groundless.”

But Sano’s own attempts to defend his Olympic design as an original were undermined by allegations that he had plagiarised other designs in the past.

He was forced to acknowledge that some of the images he used on tote bags to promote a Japanese brewery incorporated the work of other designers, but blamed the reproductions on his assistants.

Sano was also forced to deny he had drawn heavily on the motif of Costa Rica’s national museum in a logo he designed for a zoo in the Japanese city of Nagoya.

Tokyo 2020 organisers must now commission a new design, as they also seek a replacement for the scrapped main stadium.

The prime minister, Shinzo Abe, was forced to apologise for wasting taxpayers’ money on paying Hadid for her futuristic stadium design, which has been likened to a bicycle helmet, a turtle and a toilet seat. About 6.2bn yen has already been spent on her and other architects, as well as construction firms.

A furious Hadid dismissed suggestions in Japan that her design was unsuitable, and blamed the decision to scrap it on rising labour and material costs in Japan.

Last week, her office said that modifying her original design was still the most cost-effective way to build what is supposed to be the Games’ centrepiece.

The logo and stadium designs are not the only controversies to have marred Japan’s preparations for global events.

The city of Shima, which will host next year’s G7 summit, was accused of insulting the area’s female “ama” divers – who traditionally harvested pearls without the use of breathing apparatus – by producing a “vulgar and sexist” mascot to mark the gathering of world leaders.

Last month, Nihon TV, a private broadcaster, removed online videos intended to explain the rules of rugby in the runup to this year’s World Cup in England and Wales, following complaints that it had used scantily clad women to act as players.

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