

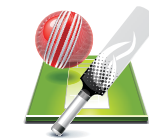


Even amid the coronavirus outbreak that had halted sporting events nationwide, Abahani had their practice session at the BCB Academy ground in Mirpur yesterday and it was their skipper Mushfiqur Rahim who seemed to be in a good mood, playing with a football during the practice.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Coronavirus halts events, not fitness

SPORTS REPORTER



Almost all sporting activity around the globe has come to a halt due to the coronavirus pandemic and there is uncertainty around the resumption of postponed events.

While postponing sporting events has been the need of the hour, it is equally important for athletes to maintain their fitness levels during this unexpected downtime. Because, once the situation is brought under control, the players will once again have to gear up and perform, without excuses.

For athletes, regular sporting activity provides the opportunity to remain tuned. Be it international assignments, domestic series or even training camps and practice sessions, players always keep themselves up and ready for the next challenge.

With all that coming to a standstill and in the backdrop of the disturbing spread of the virus and the toll it has taken on populations around the world, players and club officials around the globe have been determined not to compromise on one aspect -- fitness.

Leganes, a Spanish football club has adopted an interesting method to keep players in shape -- an online training session. Pol Lorente, the fitness trainer for Leganes, started his demonstration using an elastic band, a couple of large water bottles as weights and a chair for the players who had to follow his instructions from their respective homes on Monday, in the midst of the lockdown in Spain.

The online session that was transmitted through the Twitch app was made public with the intention of sharing it with fans. Real Madrid captain Sergio Ramos was seen training at his home gym with his three kids playing by his side in a video he posted on social media. Similarly, Barcelona goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegan was seen jumping ropes and doing other exercises in his backyard.

In Bangladesh too, sporting activity has been postponed till March 31, following a press release after a meeting with different federations at the secretariat on Monday. But just like other clubs and players around the globe, Bangladesh athletes are focused on staying fit during this unexpected break in action.

"It has just been a day [since the second round of DPL was postponed]. We have just been told by our team that one fixture has been postponed. Other than that, we are all focused on staying fit and we will be training individually. The moment there is a resumption of matches, we will shift our mentality back to playing," said Bangladesh batsman Soumya Sarkar after his training session with DPL side Gazi Group in Mirpur yesterday.

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GAZI GROUP BATSMAN

## 'The cricketers want to play'

Mahmud advocates continuing DPL

SPORTS REPORTER



Amidst all the concerns and uncertainty in the sporting world due to the coronavirus outbreak, there are still sentiments among Bangladesh cricketers and club officials to continue the Dhaka Premier League (DPL). The country's prestigious fifty over tournament was stopped after the first round and almost all the players are hoping that the league resumes soon despite a recent directive from the government to stop all local and international sporting events for the time being.

Bangladesh's upcoming tour to Pakistan later this month was also

postponed due to health risks and the Bangabandhu Dhaka Premier League was postponed as well.

No one can even begin to speculate when things will return to normality but although the DPL games were postponed, defending champion Abahani are still continuing their camps and the team even took part in a training session yesterday.

"We had a game tomorrow [Wednesday] which won't take place, but we want to play. I have spoken to the boys and they also want to play. We know that there is a threat and we are safe here in the academy. It's actually not safe for the players if they go out. There is also concern that the league will get stopped and never resume again," Abahani coach and

BCB director Khaled Mahmud told reporters yesterday.

"Ramadan is approaching and the question remains whether we will be able to complete the league or not. But it's a directive from the government and we have to give it importance. It's important to return to the field because the boys want to play."

Meanwhile, national selection panel member and former Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar termed the situation 'unique' and said that there was nothing to do but wait.

"The current situation is something unique. I have never faced such a situation in my life. It's not just the cricketing nations, all the sporting events and even daily life has been hampered due to the coronavirus

worldwide. At the moment, we can only wait for things to become normal," Bashar told The Daily Star yesterday.

However, the 47-year-old believes it will be important for players to focus on fitness during the off period because they will not get enough time to prepare when everything returns to normal.

"Obviously, I can't force the players to work on their skills during this time as there is nothing for them to do at the moment. But they can work on their fitness at home in various ways because whenever things return to normal, matches will resume in a very short time. So if the players remain fit, it will definitely help them get in the groove right away," he added.

## CORONAVIRUS FALLOUT

### I thought it was all a joke: Richardson

Australia pace bowler Kane Richardson has detailed his coronavirus scare as the pandemic brings cricket to a grinding halt across the globe.

Richardson was quarantined from the ODI squad in a hotel room for 26 hours ahead of what proved to be Australia's only match against New Zealand in Sydney last Friday, with the series ultimately called off when the Kiwis had to depart prematurely.

"I was at risk because I'd travelled overseas within [the previous] two weeks and I had one of the four symptoms, so that was the reason I got tested," the 29-year-old told cricket.com.au's The Unplayable Podcast.

"I thought it was all a joke at the time but [the team doctor] was adamant it wasn't. He spoke to various people on the phone to make sure he was doing the right thing and got the biggest swab I've ever seen out and stuck it into the back of my nose and back of my mouth, so it wasn't a pleasurable experience but that was the protocol so I was happy to go along with it.

"I wasn't expecting a positive result and thankfully that's what happened... I'm all good and I got the OK to go outside and in the fresh air again."



--AGENCIES

### Full steam ahead for men's World Cup: Roberts

Cricket Australia is planning for the men's T20 World Cup tournament to be held as scheduled in October and November this year despite the COVID-19 pandemic curtailing the current summer season and radically altering the global sporting landscape.

In announcing the decision to cancel the 2019-20 Sheffield Shield final (thereby handing ladder leaders New South Wales the title) and recommending that all community associations around the nation follow suit, CA chief executive Kevin Roberts confirmed planning

*With the Sheffield Shield final cancelled and an expectation states and territories will adopt CA's recommendation that all amateur cricket should also cease forthwith, the next scheduled men's international commitment is the two-Test series in Bangladesh set for June. That tour is followed by an ODI series in the United Kingdom, but Roberts indicated no decisions had been reached on whether either series would go ahead and it was unlikely any call would be made on their viability until the weeks immediately prior to their scheduled start.*

for the showpiece men's tournament remained unchanged.

That event is scheduled to begin with a pre-qualifying tournament held in Geelong and Hobart from October 18-23, while the main 12-team competition is set to kick off with a match between Australia and Pakistan at the Sydney Cricket Ground and then India v South Africa at Perth Stadium on October 24.

Given the two last-named venues also host Australian Football League (AFL) matches during winter months, the AFL's announcement yesterday they may consider extending their season into October due to the impact of coronavirus has raised questions about potential schedule conflicts.

However, Roberts said today that while the constantly changing responses to the global pandemic presents challenges for long-term decisions, CA is currently planning for the T20 World Cup to proceed as programmed with the final at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on November 15.

"We're really hoping that all forms of sport can be played again in a few weeks or a few months' time," Roberts told reporters today.

"None of us are experts in this situation obviously, so our hope is that we're back in very much normal circumstances come October and November when the men's T20 World Cup is to be played.

"And at this stage we're planning on November 15, to have a full house at the MCG to inspire the world through men's cricket as the women's cricketers did here just last week."

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That tour is followed by an ODI series in the United Kingdom, but Roberts indicated no decisions had been reached on whether either series would go ahead and it was unlikely any call would be made on their viability until the weeks immediately prior to their scheduled start.

"All I'd say on those is we hope they go ahead, because if they go ahead it means the Australian community and the worldwide community are in better shape than we are just now in relation to coronavirus," he said.

Before then, however, a number of Australia men's players are contracted to take part in the Indian Premier League T20 competition, the start of which is currently suspended until April 15 due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Roberts confirmed that CA had not received any recent updates from the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) regarding the IPL's outlook, but will continue to share the latest health advice from the Australian Government to help players with decision making should the tournament proceed.

--SMH

### Hales in self-isolation

England batsman Alex Hales returned home early from the Pakistan Super League (PSL) and then went into self-isolation due to symptoms that could indicate Covid-19.

Hales was among a number of overseas cricketers who left the PSL last week due to uncertainty over travel restrictions and possible quarantine scenarios, arriving home on Saturday morning without any indication of being sick.

--AGENCIES

## PSL called off

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's Twenty20 cricket league was suspended Tuesday after a foreign player developed suspected coronavirus symptoms before the start of the semifinals.

The Pakistan Super League (PSL) announced last week that the playoffs would be truncated with this week's semi-finals and final in Lahore to be played with no spectators to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The final had already been brought forward from Sunday to Wednesday.

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chief executive Wasim Khan said officials were forced to reconsider their plans after a foreign player showed coronavirus-like symptoms.

"He's an overseas player. He is not in Pakistan right now. He's developed the symptoms in the last 24 hours," said Khan.

International players, including from England, Australia, New Zealand and the West Indies, have been leaving the country en masse in recent days as cases of coronavirus rise.

## Archer hits out at racist abuse

AFP, London



England pace bowler Jofra Archer said racism should be "addressed properly" after he posted on his Instagram account racist messages he had received.

The 24-year-old has been subjected to racist abuse in the past, notably during the second Test defeat by New Zealand last year.

A spectator was subsequently banned from international and domestic matches in New Zealand for two years.

Archer -- who in just seven Test matches since making his debut last year has taken 30 wickets including three five-wicket hauls -- said it beggared belief people could post such hateful things.

"I will never understand how people feel so freely to say these things to another human being," he said.

"I have given a lot of thought about reacting to this and I hope that no one else has to deal with stuff like this on a regular basis, it isn't ever acceptable and should be addressed properly in my opinion."

Archer is presently recovering from a stress fracture of his right elbow but is seen as the future point man for England pace bowling with Stuart Broad set to turn 34 in June.



Abahani cricketers (L) at the BCB Academy ground and footballers of Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club at their club ground in Dhanmondi celebrated the hundredth birth centenary of the father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman by cutting cakes yesterday.



PHOTO: STAR