

'HAVE A LOT OF TOILET PAPER'

Toni Kroos is in self-isolation with his family in Madrid, as is now the norm for footballers across Europe. La Liga was suspended last week with Real Madrid two points behind leaders and bitter rivals Barcelona. Kroos, like his teammates, is unsure of when to expect the 2019/20 league campaign to resume or indeed if it will at all. Speaking to the German TV show Late Night Berlin, the 30-year-old midfielder reassured viewers that he was coping well and that boredom wasn't an option. "We're in good shape", he told the TV show. "I'm not bored, as I'm sure you can imagine with three kids. Being at home is never boring with the children around. Whatever way you want to look at it, the main thing is that we are all fine." He revealed that he's been on a noodle-heavy diet because of his children and joked: "I have a lot of toilet paper here at home".

-- AGENCIES



Abahani's star striker Sunday Chizoba joined a group of youths during their practice at the Abahani ground in Dhanmondi yesterday, before the camp was closed due to the postponement of the Bangladesh Premier League.

PHOTO: STAR

UEFA postpone Euro 2020 by one year

REUTERS, Lausanne

The Euro 2020 soccer Championship, trumpeted as a continent-wide feast of football from Dublin to Baku to mark UEFA's 60th anniversary, was postponed for a year on Tuesday as the coronavirus pandemic claimed its biggest sporting casualty yet.

The fate of the 24-nation, month-long showpiece due to start in June had hung in the balance ever since Europe's domestic leagues began shutting down in the wake of the sweeping health crisis, which has killed around 7,000 people worldwide.

UEFA eventually relayed the news after an emergency video conference with all 55 of its affiliated national federations and representatives from clubs and leagues.

"We are at the helm of a sport that vast numbers of people live and breathe that has been laid low by this invisible and fast-moving opponent," UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin said in a statement confirming what the Norwegian and Swedish FAs had already leaked earlier in the day.

"It is at times like these, that the football community needs to show responsibility, unity, solidarity and altruism."

Even as the video conference was ongoing, Norway's FA broke ranks to confirm via Twitter that the tournament had been postponed for the first time in its history.

Swedish FA chairman Karl-Erik Nilsson also sent a message to Reuters during the video conference. "Postponed until 11/6-11/7 2021," he said.

It was a widely expected move, with pressure ramping up from Europe's big domestic soccer leagues.

Earlier, Reuters learned that UEFA had cancelled its hotel bookings in Copenhagen, one of the 12 host cities staging the tournament.

The CPH Hotel said UEFA had booked 80 of its 102 rooms but cancelled them a little over a week ago.

Europe's flagship tournament, staged every four years and second only to FIFA's World Cup in terms of prestige in soccer, will now be staged from June 11 to July 12, 2021.

Sixteen playoff matches were due to be held on March 26 and 31 to decide the full line-up of nations for the tournament. They will now be played in the international window at the start of June, subject to a review of the situation.

The new coronavirus has infected almost 180,000 people worldwide since emerging in China, and most of Europe now finds itself in virtual lockdown as governments desperately try to stop the spread of the disease.

The sporting calendar has been shredded, with a host of blue-riband events cancelled and competitions suspended, and the fate of the Tokyo Olympics this year now hangs in the balance.

Most clubs to close camps

SPORTS REPORTER

Most of the professional football clubs of the country are going to release their players from training camps after the professional football league committee of the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday conveyed government's directives to postpone the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League due to the spread of coronavirus.

The league's seventh round of matches were scheduled to resume on Thursday.

The game's local governing body, on Monday, suspended the league up to March 31 following instructions from Ministry for Youth and Sports, and yesterday it conveyed the directives to participating clubs at an emergency meeting of the league committee, with senior vice-president Abdus Salam Murshedy in chair.

After the meeting, most of the club officials said they were going to stop their camps even though a Bangladesh Police FC and Sheikh Jamal DC want to continue with their camps.

The club officials also informed that they have already taken precautions to keep the safe from coronavirus at respective camps by using sanitiser, hand-washes and limiting the players' movement outside the camps.

"We will give a four-day break to the local players but the foreign players will stay at their respective places as the camp will resume after four days," Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu said.

Bashundhara Kings' general secretary Minhajul Islam said, "We are yet to take any decision on how many days of vacation the local players will get but it is certain that the foreign players won't be

released as they can't travel due to travel restrictions."

Brothers Union manager Amer Khan said that they would release all the players - local and foreign - as they are not capable of providing necessary measures to the players.

"We wanted at least two months' postponement as the local players will travel to their districts and then come back again. If they are infected in their districts, then we won't have anything to do. The foreigners may also go to their home if they want. Our striker Nkwocha Kingsley has already left the country for United States," said Amer.

Saif SC manager Mahbubur Rahman Suman said, "We won't release the foreign players because if they face quarantines in their respective countries and then in Bangladesh on their return, it

will be tough for us to play the league. However, we have taken all measures to keep the players safe."

Rahmatganj MFS general secretary Imtiaz Ahmed Sabuj said, "Due to the postponement, the small clubs will face financial loss owing to the payment to foreign players. But they all accepted the postponement as it is a national issue and we will take a decision about the camp after discussing it with the club officials and coaches."

Bangladesh Police manager Sheikh Maruf Hasan said that they would continue with their training camp by taking all safety measures while Sheikh Jamal manager Anwarul Karim Helal said that they would also continue the ongoing camp with the safety measures they have at the club.

Baridhara's Lima defies quarantine

SPORTS REPORTER

Uttar Baridhara Club's footballer Leonardo Lima played the in Bangladesh Premier League match against Mohammedan on March 14 after returning from Thailand the previous day, violating self-quarantine related directives.

Having arrived in Bangladesh on March 13, The Brazilian made a 30-minute cameo for Uttar Baridhara in their 4-1 defeat at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Bangladesh's cabinet on Monday issued a set of directives, including sending returnees from abroad to a 14-day compulsory quarantine as part of precautionary measures against the coronavirus. On March 10, the Institute of Epidemiology, Diseases Control and Research had urged returnees to self-quarantine for two weeks.

After yesterday's meeting of the Professional Football League Committee at the BFF House, Uttar Baridhara club secretary Jahangir Alam told reporters that they had kept Lima in a separate room to observe him and avoid risk.

However, coach Alfaz Ahmed informed that the Brazilian trained with the team till Monday.

"The team management took the decision to play him in the match [against Mohammedan]. I don't know about his self-quarantine but he told me that he was all right as he passed immigration without any hassle. I think he is safe," Alfaz said.

Hope of a strong board in MSC's April 18 polls

ANISUR RAHMAN

The long-awaited elections of Mohammedan Sporting Club Ltd will be held on April 18 with the hope of electing board of directors, which is expected to revive the past glory of the country's traditional outfit.

The elections are going to be held after nine years, with the first and only one so far taking place in 2011 when the club turned into a limited company.

A group of former Mohammedan players, organisers and well-wishers came forward to help the club to form football and cricket teams following the detention of its director-in-charge Lokman Hossain Bhuiyan in September last year in connection with illegal casino business at the club hall-room.

Bhuiyan, who joined the club as special general secretary in 1994, strengthened his grip following a one-sided election in 2011 before being made director-in-charge of a 17-member board of directors. He controlled the club single-handedly over the last nine years, a timeline when the club failed to win prestigious title of the professional football league and the Dhaka premier division cricket league with the exception of sporadic success in different football tournaments such as Federation Cup, Super Cup and Independence Cup.

With Supreme Court Bar association president AM Aminuddin appointed as the independent president by a High Court bench, which passed the order last August following an appeal filed two-and-a-half years earlier, the board of directors on March 15 paved the way to holding its annual general meeting and the elections by forming a 11-member election commission, with advocate Rezaul Karim Kawser made the chief election commissioner.

In the changed scenario, former players and organisers are looking forward to electing a strong board of directors which will reflect the



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

expectation of its large number of supporters across the country.

"We want a committee with those who stood by the club during turmoil and who have financial solvency to help Mohammedan in future. We want those organisers who can meet the expectation of our large number of supporters," said former Mohammedan player Badal Roy, who is playing an important role during this transition.

"I still believe we can bring back the past glory of Mohammedan. It is needless to say that the country's sports will progress if Mohammedan is revived again," said Roy, who is also a vice-president of Bangladesh Football Federation.

However, it may not prove to be an easy task for Roy to elect a strong board of directors as he may face challenge from the permanent Mohammedan members, who are loyal to Bhuiyan.

The club's former additional general secretary Mustaqur Rahman is thinking of a consensus panel if the Bhuiyan followers create any noise.

Not the time for drastic decisions, says IOC

AFP, Lausanne

The International Olympic Committee said Tuesday it was not the time for "drastic decisions" over the staging of the Tokyo Olympics, which has not yet been postponed because of the deadly coronavirus pandemic.

"The IOC remains fully committed to the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, and with more than four months to go before the Games there is no need for any drastic decisions at this stage; and any speculation at this moment would be counter-productive," the IOC said in a statement after its executive board met in Lausanne.

The Tokyo Olympics are scheduled to run between July 24-August 9, but the year's biggest sporting event is as yet one of the sole sporting competitions to have survived a postponement in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak that has caused more than 7,400 deaths and infected more than 180,000 around the world.

The IOC statement fell shortly after news that both this summer's Euro 2020 and Copa America were to be postponed by one year to 2021.

"This is an unprecedented situation for the whole world, and our thoughts are with all those affected by this crisis," the IOC said.

"The situation around the COVID-19 virus is also impacting the preparations for the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, and is changing day by day."

The IOC encouraged all athletes to continue to prepare for the Tokyo Games "as best they can".

"The IOC has confidence that the many measures being taken by many authorities around the world will help contain the situation of the COVID-19 virus."

One of the results of the virus outbreak has been the cancellation of qualifiers, in a number of sports, for the Tokyo Olympics.

But the IOC insisted it would work to surmount any difficulties that threw up.

"To date, 57 percent of the athletes are already qualified for the Games," it said. "For the remaining 43 percent of places, the IOC will work with the IFs (international federations) to make any necessary and practical adaptations to their respective qualification systems for Tokyo 2020."

Copa pushed to 2021

REUTERS, Asuncion

This year's Copa America has been postponed until 2021 due to the spread of coronavirus, the South American Football Confederation (CONMEBOL) said Tuesday.

The 12-team tournament, which had originally been scheduled to take place from June 12 in Colombia and Argentina, follows the Euro 2020 championship in being pushed back by a year with global sport being brought to a virtual standstill by the coronavirus outbreak.

"This is an extraordinary measure for an unexpected situation and responds to the fundamental need to avoid the exponential evolution of the virus," said CONMEBOL president Alejandro Dominguez.

Dominguez said the rescheduled tournament would be played between June 11 and July 11, 2021.

"It wasn't easy to take this decision but we must safeguard at all times the health of our players and all those who form part of the big South American football family. Have no doubts that the oldest international tournament in the world will be back stronger than ever in 2021."

The Copa America is one of the biggest draws on the football calendar, with players such as Lionel Messi, Neymar, Sergio Aguero, Luis Suarez, and James Rodriguez all expected to take part.

In addition to the 10 South American nations, Australia and Qatar were also invited as the Copa was to be held in two countries for the first time in its 104-year history.