

'YOU'LL NEVER WALK ALONE'

Football anthem "You'll never walk alone" rang out from radios across around 30 European countries on Friday as DJs sent out a message of coronavirus solidarity. The song, originally sung by Gerry and the Pacemakers but long adopted by Liverpool football club, was played by 180 European stations, said Dutch DJ Sander Hoogendoorn, who organised the idea. "This is for everyone who's at home, everyone who's working so hard," Hoogendoorn, a DJ with the Dutch radio station 3FM, said at the start of the broadcast. Broadcasters in other countries hailed the idea, including Britain's popular BBC Radio 1 station.

-- AFP



With football and other sports halted in most countries around the world in the wake of coronavirus pandemic, Australia remained one of the few places where the game is soldiering on, like this game between Sydney FC and Western Sydney Wanderers at Bankwest Stadium in Sydney on Saturday. (Bottom) The women's league in the country concluded on the same day, with Melbourne City beating defending champions Sydney FC 1-0 in the final.

PHOTO: AFP/COLLECTED

Football keeps rolling down under

REUTERS, Melbourne

Melbourne City beat defending champions Sydney FC 1-0 in a hard-fought W-League final to win a fourth title in five years as the Australian women's 2019-20 season reached a conclusion on Saturday despite the coronavirus pandemic.

The title-decider, which attracted more than 6,000 fans in the last two seasons, was played out in front of a handful of family and friends at Melbourne's Rectangular Stadium because of government restrictions on gatherings of more than 500 people.

Skipper Steph Catley's early goal was enough to keep City unbeaten for the season after 11 wins and one draw in their 12 regular season fixtures, matching a feat the club achieved in the 2015-16 season.

"Obviously it's been an unbelievable season," Catley said. "Today was a battle, Sydney really took it to us and it was a grind the whole game. At the end of the day I think



we deserve it. Even though it was a tough game, we got over the line."

Catley struck after 15 minutes with a left-footed shot from the edge of the box which

Sydney goalkeeper Aubrey Bledsoe helped into the net in a blunder the American will be keen to forget.

Three-times champions Sydney fought

their way back into the contest and they had a good shout for a penalty turned down nine minutes before the break when a shot appeared to catch Catley's outstretched arm.

American forward Veronica Latsko had the best chance for an equaliser after 48 minutes when she went through one-on-one on Lydia Williams but the keeper got enough on the shot to allow Ellie Carpenter to clear the ball off the line.

Williams again showed why she is the Matildas national team keeper when she got down well for a vital save to deny substitute Sydney striker Princess Ibini 10 minutes from time.

Bledsoe almost suffered another embarrassment in stoppage time when her attempted clearance clattered off City's Serbian striker Milica Mijatovic and flashed past the post.

Social distancing advice did nothing to prevent the City players from hugging each other when the final whistle sounded as they celebrated becoming the most successful club in W-League history.

Opinions split over Tokyo Olympics

AFP, Paris



As the deadly coronavirus spreads around the globe, doubts grow over whether the 2020 Olympic Games, set for Tokyo from July 24 to August 9, will go ahead. AFP Sport looks at who's saying what as the debate becomes even more heated:

"Of course we are considering different scenarios, but we are contrary to many other sports organizations or professional leagues in that we are four-and-a-half months away from the Games."

-- International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach on Friday.

"No solution will be ideal in this situation, and this is why we are counting on the responsibility and solidarity of the athletes."

-- IOC spokesman Wednesday

"Anything is possible at the moment."

-- World athletics chief Sebastian Coe when asked whether the Games could be postponed to September or October.

"Respectfully requested...that the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee advocate for the postponement of the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 by one year to 2021."

-- USA Swimming chief executive Tim Hinchee

"It's (a postponement) not only best from a performance statement for the athletes, but also for what these athletes are going through right now in terms of their mental health."

-- Bob Bowman, the coach who guided swimming great Michael Phelps to 28 Olympic medals -- 23 of them gold.

"The IOC wants us to keep risking our health, our family's health and public health to train every day? You are putting us in danger right now, today, not in 4 months."

-- Greece's Olympic pole vault champion Katerina Stefanidi.

"I think the IOC insisting this will move ahead, with such conviction, is insensitive and irresponsible given the state of humanity."

-- Hayley Wickenheiser, a Canadian IOC member and a four-time Olympic ice hockey gold medalist.

"We don't have to make a decision. Our games are not next week, or two weeks from now. They're four months from now. So we are affording the IOC the opportunity to gather information and expert advice."

-- United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) chairwoman Susanne Lyons.

"Starting to feel a little worried about how the Olympic Games are being treated in respect to the athletes. We keep being told the Olympic Games are happening. Starting to realize it's more important to have the games go on than the athletes be prepared or mentally healthy."

-- US world champion fencer Race Imboden on Twitter.

"It should be postponed under the current situation where athletes are not well prepared."

-- Japanese Olympic Committee executive board member Kaori Yamaguchi, a former Olympic judoka.

UEFA scores an own goal

AFP, Lausanne

UEFA were forced into an embarrassing about-turn Friday after they mistakenly tweeted that Euro 2020 would keep its original title despite being pushed back to 2021 as a result of the coronavirus.

"Although it will provisionally take place from 11 June -- 11 July 2021, #EURO2020 will still be known as UEFA EURO 2020," UEFA had confidently said on Twitter.

However, just hours later, they were less assured.

"With apologies for the earlier error, to be clear no decision has yet been made on the name of the rearranged EURO to be held in 2021. The earlier tweet was sent by mistake," they tweeted.

Euro 2020 has been pushed back 12 months to June 11 to July 11 next year to clear the way for suspended domestic competitions to wrap up if conditions allow.

UEFA said the postponement "will help all domestic competitions, currently on hold due to the COVID-19 emergency, to be completed" as it made a "commitment" to finishing club seasons by June 30.

Twenty of the 24 nations set to take part in the Euro have already qualified, but play-offs to determine the final four participants, due to be played this month, have been postponed.

UEFA said those matches, and other scheduled friendlies, would be played in June subject to a review of the situation.

BFF polls Schedule on April 3

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite the ongoing crisis over coronavirus, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is hopeful that it can hold its elections on April 20 as scheduled at the BFF headquarters in Motijheel.

The BFF's general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag, following a meeting with the three-member election commission formed for the election, informed media that they are going ahead with the election as planned, unless situation worsens drastically.

"Our activities will go ahead for the April 20 elections. The names of the councillors can even be sent on e-mails. The decision of the board is to hold the elections at the BFF House, however, if needed, the elections could be held at any other venue if situation demands in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. We are keeping close contact with the AFC and the FIFA with regards to the election," the BFF spokesman said.

Meanwhile, the head of election commission, Mezbah Uddin Ahmed, said that they would declare election schedule on April 3.

"We have decided in the meeting that the schedule for the election will be declared on April 3. We are taking all preparations with the election date of April 20 in mind. Before that, the BFF executive committee will prepare the voters' list and hand it to us."

The BFF had last month decided to hold the election on April 20, 10 days before the current committee was supposed to expire, during a meeting of the executive committee, citing it would be difficult to hold it after that date as the month of Ramadan is expected to get underway from April 25.

Zaha offers health staff free lodging

AFP, London

Crystal Palace winger Wilfried Zaha has offered free accommodation to medical staff in his London properties as they treat patients with coronavirus.

The 27-year-old Ivory Coast international is the latest football personality to offer a free bed, following in the footsteps of former Manchester United star Gary Neville and Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich.

Zaha, reported to earn £130,000 (\$150,000) a week, willingly took up the baton saying he had friends working in the National Health Service and he could provide accommodation for the hard-pressed staff who could not return home after their shifts.

He has built up a property portfolio of around 50 properties in London, including in trendy Notting Hill.



Perhaps running out of ideas to maintain fitness while being quarantined, England wicketkeeper Jos Buttler decided to try Pilates with his wife, who runs a boutique Pilates studio in London. However, Buttler added a twist, stepping up to the session in full cricketing gear, including pads, a helmet and even his bat.

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

Pele in quarantine?

AGENCIES

Brazil legend Pele is in quarantine at his home in Guarujá and those around him are worried that the coronavirus outbreak might affect his health, according to Spanish daily Marca.

The report stated that the 80-year-old belongs to a high-risk group due to his age and current health condition. His future public events are expected to be cancelled soon, while his son, Edinho, revealed a few weeks ago that his father's health has deteriorated in recent months.

"He is quite fragile in terms of mobility," Edinho told Globoesporte.

"He underwent a hip transplant, but



he didn't have the ideal rehabilitation and has a mobility problem, which ends up generating some depression.

"He is 'the King,' he was always such an imposing figure and today he is not able to walk well. 'He is very uncomfortable and ashamed of that.'"

Pele wanted to reassure his fans that he is not in imminent danger.

"I'm fine," he noted. "I have my good and my bad days. That is normal for people my age."

The Brazilian government have taken measures to halt the spread of the coronavirus, imposing travel restrictions and urging citizens to self-quarantine.

United, City join hands to help foodbanks

AFP, London



Manchester United and Manchester City have joined forces to donate a combined £100,000 (\$117,000) to help local

foodbanks affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Collections are normally made at home games for both Manchester giants by fans' groups supporting foodbanks, but football in England is suspended until at least April 30 due to restrictions on mass gatherings due to coronavirus.

"We are proud of the role our supporters play in helping local food banks and recognise the increased strain likely to be placed on these charities by the impact of coronavirus," the clubs said in a joint statement.

"At a time of challenge for our community, we are pleased to come together with our fans to help vulnerable members of society in a City United."

The donation will support the Trussell Trust's 19 foodbank centres in the Greater Manchester area.

United have been taken steps to try to alleviate the burden on their staff

and supporters during the crisis.

The Red Devils have vowed to pay 3,000 casual staff even for the remainder of the season even if matches at Old Trafford are forced behind closed doors or cancelled.

And fans who travelled to Austria for the Europa League last 16, first leg against LASK only for the game to be played behind closed doors at late notice were given a £350 (\$415) payment towards travel and accommodation.

Britain ramped up its response to the pandemic on Friday by ordering pubs, restaurants, cafes and gyms to close.