

FELLAINI FIRST CASE IN CHINESE LEAGUE

Footballer Marouane Fellaini has tested positive for the coronavirus, his club Shandong Luneng said Sunday, the former Manchester United player becoming the first known case in the Chinese Super League (CSL). The 32-year-old Belgian international midfielder has a normal temperature and is feeling fine, Shandong said, but “is under observation and having treatment at a designated medical facility”. “The club will do its best... to help in the treatment and recovery of the player,” Fellaini is the first confirmed case in the CSL, dealing a blow to the league’s hopes of starting the season as early as next month. The campaign has been indefinitely postponed by the outbreak. -- AFP



A man wearing a face mask stands in front of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic flame being displayed outside the Miyako railway station in the Iwate prefecture of Japan yesterday. The flame arrived from Greece to a scaled-down welcoming ceremony as doubts grow over whether the 2020 Tokyo Olympics will go ahead on schedule. PHOTO: AFP

IOC readying plans in case of deferral?

REUTERS, Athens

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) faced mounting opposition on Sunday to the current schedule for the Tokyo 2020 Games as athletes, teams and federations called for a delay because of the coronavirus pandemic.

IOC President Thomas Bach, who has insisted the Games will go ahead as planned, said yesterday: “The Olympic Games cannot be moved like football to next Saturday.”

He also ruled out a cancellation but sources told Reuters on Sunday that organisers were drafting alternatives to holding the Olympics this summer.

“We have been asked to make a simulation in case of a postponement,” a source close to the organising committee who is involved in drafting the scenarios said. “We are making plans - plan B, C, D - looking at different time-frames,” said the official, adding the scenarios included cost estimates for different delays.

Former Real president Sanz dies after contracting coronavirus

AGENCIES, Madrid

Former Real Madrid president Lorenzo Sanz, who was hospitalised with coronavirus, died on Saturday at the age of 76, his son announced.

Sanz was in charge of the Spanish giants from 1995-2000, overseeing two Champions League titles.

“My father passed away. He did not deserve this ending and in this way,” tweeted son Lorenzo Sanz jr. “One of the best, bravest and hardest-working people I have ever seen. His family and Real Madrid were his passions.”

Three days ago, Sanz Jr. said that his father had been admitted to a Madrid hospital after suffering the symptoms of the coronavirus which has killed more than 1,320 people in Spain.

With Jupp Heynckes as coach and star players such as Davor Suker, Roberto Carlos, Clarence Seedorf, Fernando Hierro and Raul, Real won the Champions League in 1998 by beating Juventus in the final under Sanz’s supervision.

It was their seventh European Cup but first in 32 years and the only goal in the final being scored by Predrag Mijatovic, who described yesterday as “one of the saddest nights” of his life.

“Leaving like this, without being able to say farewell, without being able

to say a final goodbye, is very hard, very sad,” Mijatovic said via Marca. “It’s one of the saddest nights of my life.

“The sadness at not being able to go to visit him because of the contagiousness that is always there is very cruel. I still can’t believe it. I considered him as a father. I had so much love for him. In life, there are people that leave a mark on you and Lorenzo was one of them.”

Two years later, in Paris, Real

claimed an eighth by beating Valencia in the final. However, that same year, Sanz was ousted as president by Florentino Perez, who opened a new era at the club, adding five more Champions Leagues in two decades.

Current captain Sergio Ramos said: “Very sad day for Real Madrid. Lorenzo Sanz connected yesterday and today with two numbers for history -- 7 and 8,” tweeted Ramos in reference to the key Champions League titles.



Lorenzo Sanz celebrates with Real Madrid Champions League win in 1998, which ended a 32-year drought without a European triumph. PHOTO: TWITTER

Jibon, Tapu counting days ‘in quarantine’

SPORTS REPORTER



National team striker Nabib Newaj Jibon and centre-back Tapu Barman are counting days to return to the field from ‘seemingly home quarantine’ as Bangladesh and the rest of the world goes through an unprecedented time due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Bangladesh Football Federation postponed the Bangladesh Premier League for up to March 31 following directives from the youth and sports ministry on March 16, leaving majority of the clubs suspending their training camps and releasing their local players.

League leaders Abahani were supposed to resume their training yesterday following a five-day break, but the six-time champions again deferred the resumption by, leaving Jibon frustrated.

“Yesterday [Saturday] afternoon I felt really bad as I am not being able to play or practice in the present situation created by coronavirus,” Jibon told the Daily Star over phone from his residence in Mirpur.

“We are confined inside the house in fear of coronavirus. Training was supposed to resume today [Sunday] but it will now resume on March 26. We are counting days to return

to action but I am doubtful whether training will resume anytime soon,” said the Abahani striker.

“I am trying to maintain my fitness by doing exercise at home. I have been doing core training. Besides, I also have some gym instruments at home which help me follow my training regime,” said the Bogura-lad, who is worried after an infected person passed away in his neighbourhood.

“I heard that one person died of coronavirus in Mirpur and some 600 flats have been locked down. I think the whole country should be locked down for 15 to 20 days to avoid the spread of the virus,” said Jibon.

Like Jibon, Bashundhara Kings defender Tapu is mostly confined within his home in Narayanganj even though he often ventures out for running in a bid to maintaining his fitness ahead of the resumption of the professional league.

“I’m staying at home and doing core training to keep myself fit so that I don’t gain weight during this time. I going out to run at the small ground adjacent to our house,” said Tapu, who is reportedly the highest paid among the local footballers.

“We are eager to return to the field as training of Bashundhara Kings is supposed to resume on March 25, however, we see no hope of that considering the deteriorating

situation. We have a Whatsapp chat group of Bashundhara Kings where team doctor and trainer are regularly updating all of us by sending messages of how to maintain hygiene,” said Tapu.

“Each and every family in our neighbourhood has been passing through an anxious time and no one goes outside except for emergency work. My father also goes out only once a day to buy groceries,” said Tapu, who is also keeping his team’s prospects in his mind, being concerned about their 4-3 defeat against Chattogram Abahani in their last match.

“Despite taking a 3-0 lead, we let Chattogram stage a strong comeback due to our mistakes. The players got puzzled after conceding the second goal and never fought back. Our confidence level was good for the first 60 minutes only.

“Our defence is still the best in the country but I must admit that there are problems there, which is why we conceded goals in every match. The results against Mohammedan and Chattogram Abahani are now past. As team, everyone has a responsibility to defend. If we can play as a team, I think we can get rid of this problem. Otherwise, it is not possible for the defence to defend all time,” said Tapu.

Abahani in AFC Cup’s Magic Moments

SPORTS REPORTER

While six-time Bangladesh Premier League champions Abahani have made an early exit from the AFC Cup this time after being knocked out of the prequalifying phase, the Sky Blues had reached a new high for Bangladesh football by reaching the inter-zone playoff semifinals last year. In doing so they became the first club from Bangladesh to reach that further in the second-tier club competition of Asia.

Abahani’s journey was a see-saw affair as they eked out into the knockout rounds following a stoppage-time goal in their last group match against Minerva Punjab in Guwahati. That goal, and Abahani’s journey thus far, made it to AFC Cup’s Magic Moments, featured on their official website on Friday. Here’s how AFC relived that journey:

Abahani’s stoppage-time joy

Bangladeshi teams featured in the first three AFC Cups and then again between 2015 to 2018, but had never made it out of the group stage in seven attempts.

Abahani picked up four points in both 2017 and 2018, with India’s Bengaluru FC dominating the South Zone, and little was expected of the Bangladesh champions ahead of the 2019 campaign.

However, with Bengaluru failing to qualify, Abahani began the group stage – alongside Indian duo Chennaiyin FC and



Minerva Punjab, as well as Nepal’s Mahang Marshyangdi Club – as the only side with Continental experience.

Four points from their first three games left them off the pace but a come-from-behind 3-2 Matchday Four win over Chennaiyin brought them right back in it, before the Dhaka side eased past Manang 5-0 to set up a gripping climax.

It all came down to the last game against Minerva in Guwahati, with Abahani needing to equal Chennaiyin’s result to advance. But with Chennaiyin 3-2 up against Manang and Abahani scoreless as the clock ticked into stoppage time, the dream appeared to be over.

Step forward Afghan international Masih Saighani.

A deep corner from Nabib Jibon was headed back across goal by Kervens Belfort and Saighani headed in from close range to spark joyous scenes as Abahani booked their ticket to the Inter-Zone semifinals.

CORONAVIRUS FALLOUT



Maldinis and Dybala return positive tests

Argentina striker Paulo Dybala said Saturday that he has become the third Juventus player to test positive for coronavirus while former AC Milan defender Paolo Maldini revealed that he and his son have also been infected.

“Hi everyone. I just wanted to let you know that we have received the Covid-19 test results and that Oriana (Sabatini, his girlfriend) and I are positive,” the 26-year-old Dybala tweeted. “Fortunately, we are perfectly fine. Thank you for your messages.”

Italian champions Juventus said that Dybala had been self-isolating since Wednesday. “He will continue to be monitored. He is well and is asymptomatic,” said the club in a statement.

Later Saturday, AC Milan said Maldini, now the technical director, and his 18-year-old son Daniel, a youth team player, were also infected. “Paolo and Daniel are both well and have



already completed two weeks at home without contact with others,” said a statement from AC Milan. “They will now remain in quarantine until clinically recovered, as per the medical protocols outlined by the health authorities.”

Maldini, 51, is considered one of the greatest defenders of all time. He won five Champions Leagues with Milan and appeared in 647 matches. Juventus teammates Daniele Rugani and Blaise Matuidi have also tested positive for the disease which claimed almost 800 more lives on Saturday, bringing the total in Italy to 4,825.

There is not too much concern at Milan about other possible contagions currently, Paolo Maldini hasn’t been at Milanello since March 5, even before the team then played against Genoa, as he was advised by the Milanese medical staff to stay at home when the first flu symptoms arose.

Even Daniel should not have crossed paths with the first team as he has been at home for about two weeks with illness, and last crossed his team-mates on March 6. --AFP

Self-isolating Siddikur urges people to stay home

Bangladesh’s ace golfer Siddikur Rahman urged people to stay home and take precautionary measures against the coronavirus after going into self-isolation in the city yesterday.

The two-time Asian tour winner, who returned from Malaysia on March 5 after a tournament, made this appeal on Facebook yesterday afternoon.

“My family and I have been at home for the past three days and I am requesting all of you to stay home. Don’t go outside unless it is necessary,” the 35-year-old golfer.

Siddikur, who was supposed to participate in tournaments in Thailand and Malaysia this month before they were cancelled, also reminded people to wash their hands frequently with soap among other measures. --SPORTS REPORTER

FIFA, AFC delegates to livestream BFF polls

Delegates from FIFA and AFC will not physically attend the upcoming Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) polls, said general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag yesterday.

“On Friday, AFC let us know that since there is a travel ban, it won’t be possible for them to send observers to the April 20 BFF polls. FIFA also informed the same over phone,” Shohag said yesterday.

However, he informed that FIFA and AFC would stream the polls online for officials to observe and that the elections would go on as scheduled on April 20.

“A FIFA official asked me whether it was

possible to watch the BFF congress live through the internet and I ensured them we would present live coverage. We will also include AFC in this process,” said Shohag.

Although two incumbent vice-presidents have urged the game’s governing body to defer the polls due to the coronavirus outbreak, Shohag added that they have no intention to defer the polls.

“We asked FIFA whether the polls could be deferred and they said it is too early to comment. They said Maldives held its congress today [on March 20]. Bangladesh and Maldives are neighbouring countries, so why should you decide on a deferral at this moment?”

Lucy to think of resuming training next week, says Torino president

Torino President Urbano Cairo said the idea of clubs wanting to return to training is “from another planet” following speculation that Lazio and Napoli both want to resume training.

On Friday, Napoli announced that their squad will return to training next Wednesday. “If I think back to the Lega meeting on March 10, there were still those who talked about training and returning to play,” Cairo told the Turin daily. “It is logical that time has been wasted. Those speeches, heard now, seem from another planet. I said ‘if we do not take drastic action, moving fans will also contribute to increasing the infection of others.’”

“Meanwhile, there are 16 clubs who don’t want to think about resuming training next week.” --AGENCIES

BHF suspends all activities

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) yesterday suspended all of its activities by closing the headquarters at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium following instruction from the BHF president.

“As part of precaution to avoid the transmission of coronavirus, all types of BHF activities have been suspended from March 22 till 31 following an instruction from BHF president and Air Chief Marshal Masihuzzaman Serniabat,” stated a BHF press release yesterday.

The BHF statement added: “All types of training and play at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium has been postponed and all officials have been instructed to work from home. All BHF office bearers and employees have also been directed to ensure the health of themselves and their families.”

The Bangladesh Cricket Board had announced on Saturday that they had decided to allow all of their staff to work remotely after having suspended all cricket in the country earlier.