


I TAUGHT RONALDO A LOT, SAYS NANI

Former Lazio winger Luis Nani has claimed Cristiano Ronaldo "learned a lot from me", as he picked two Serie A players in his five-a-side line-up of former teammates. "In goal, I pick David De Gea; for me, he's one of the best in the world," Nani said in a video released by MLS. "He's a good friend of mine, but he must bring his glasses because he doesn't see anything without them. It's true." The other four players; Deco, one of my idols. I learned a lot from him, and his technique fits very well in the five vs five. I would put a defender, Bruno Alves, who is very technical for a defender. If you need to play, he can play, if you need to destroy, he's there. Cristiano Ronaldo, with all these skills, fast feet. . . All I taught him in the youth, you know. He learned a lot from me. He knows, he knows," laughed Nani. And since he couldn't play himself, he picked former Manchester United hero Paul Scholes to complete his five-a-side with former teammates.

— AGENCIES





People take pictures of an Omega clock, previously used as a countdown clock for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games but currently displaying current time and date, after the announcement of the games' postponement in Tokyo on Wednesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Japan awakes to reality of Olympics postponement

REUTERS, Tokyo

Japan awoke on Wednesday to the deflating reality that the Olympics they had hoped to host in Tokyo this summer were now probably 16 months away after the coronavirus crisis forced organisers into an unprecedented postponement.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and Japanese government finally succumbed to intense pressure from athletes and sporting bodies around the world on Tuesday when they agreed to put back the Games until 2021.

It was a huge blow to Japan, which has invested \$12 billion in preparations, but also for the prestige of the Olympic movement and its leader, Thomas Bach, who had come under fire for not reacting sooner in the face of the global health crisis.

Japan Olympic Committee (IOC) President Yasuhiro Yamashita said that the decision had come earlier than he thought it would, but that he was determined the host nation's athletes would be ready to compete in 2021.

"Now that the decisions have been made, let's take this positively, reset our mindset," he told a news conference.

"With a fresh mind, not giving up, I want to go through this challenge heading into next year."

Japanese government officials said Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had phoned U.S. President Donald Trump to explain the postponement as they sought to further cushion the economy

from the twin blows of the coronavirus and the delayed Games.

Tuesday's decision came 122 days before the planned opening ceremony at Japan's newly built National Stadium, which was to usher in the 16-day event featuring 11,000 athletes from 206 nations and territories.

The clock in front of Tokyo Station, which had been displaying the number of days until the Games, ceased its countdown and reverted to Wednesday's date and time.

Although 14 major corporations have indicated they would remain in the IOC's global partnership programme despite the delay, local organisers might have some negotiating to do to retain their own Games-specific sponsors.

Tokyo Gas Co Ltd said it would decide whether to continue sponsorship for another year depending on conditions, including cost.

"We don't have an answer to whether or not we will continue our sponsorship as we have just heard about the postponement," Tokyo Gas President Takashi Uchida told a news conference on the company's new business plans.

"We will make a decision after we learn about details."

Athletes around the world, many struggling to train because of restrictions put in place to contain a virus that has killed more than 17,200 people, have expressed disappointment but largely welcomed the decision.

Many other questions remain about the re-arranged Games, not least when they will happen after the IOC announcement stated only that they would take place "not before the

end of summer 2021".

Somewhere around the original 2020 dates of July 24-Aug. 9 looks most likely, especially after organisers confirmed the marathon and race-walks would remain in Hokkaido where they were moved because of the sweltering Tokyo summer heat.

Those dates would require the shifting of other major events scheduled next year, in particular the athletics world championships in the United States and the swimming equivalent in the Japanese city of Fukuoka.

World Athletics chief Sebastian Coe has suggested its championships in Eugene, Oregon, could be moved to 2022, while swimming's FINA said they would discuss a rescheduling of their event with Tokyo organisers and the IOC.

The Olympic flame, already lit at Olympia in Greece and taken to Japan for a now-cancelled torch relay, will stay in the host nation and the Games will retain the title Tokyo 2020.

"This Olympic flame will be the light at the end of this tunnel," IOC chief Bach said on Tuesday.

U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) chief Travis Tygart raised the prospect that postponement might open the door for convicted drug cheats to compete for medals, an issue he told Reuters would need to be tackled.

The 57 percent of athletes who had already booked spots in Tokyo face a wait to discover whether they will have to qualify again, although Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) chief executive Matt Carroll said they would not.

'Tokyo Games may come before summer 2021'

REUTERS, Athens

The head of the global Olympic movement said on Wednesday that the rescheduled Tokyo Games faced "thousands" of logistical and financial problems and could go ahead before summer 2021.

Though most people have assumed the Games will be held around roughly the same July-August timetable as they were planned for this year, International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach said earlier dates in 2021 were possible.

"The agreement is that we want to organise these Games at the latest in the summer 2021," he told a conference call.

"This is not restricted just to the summer months. All the options are on the table including the summer 2021."

The IOC agreed with Japan on Tuesday to the first postponement in the Olympics' 124-year history due to risks from the coronavirus impact.

It was the last major international sporting event of 2020 to be cancelled, with many questioning why a seemingly inevitable decision took so long to make as the coronavirus epidemic raged around the world.

Athletes were sad but largely relieved, given disruption to their training. The decision was a huge blow to Japan, which has invested \$12 billion in the run-up, and presents a massive headache to reorganise logistics, funding and sponsorship.

Bach said he could not guarantee all elements of the Games would remain as initially planned. For example, he did not know what would happen with the athletes' village, where apartments were set



IOC president Thomas Bach speaks during an interview in Lausanne on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

to be sold after the Games this year.

"This is one of the many thousands of questions this task force will have to address. We hope and we will do whatever we can so that there is an Olympic village, the village is where the heart of the Games beat," he said.

"Our mission is to organise Games and make dreams of athletes come true," he added. "We have no blueprint but we are confident we can put a beautiful jigsaw puzzle together and in the end have wonderful Olympic Games."

Bach, a 66-year-old German lawyer and former Olympic fencing champion, also said that outright cancellation was discussed, even though the IOC had long insisted that was not an option.

"Of course cancellation was discussed and considered like all options on the table, but it was very clear from the beginning that cancellation should not be something the IOC would in any way favour," Bach said.

The IOC is due to start talks from Thursday with other global sporting bodies as moving the gigantic Olympics event has a knock-on effect for many other competitions.

Van Niekerk looks for positives

REUTERS, Cape Town

Olympic 400m champion Wayde van Niekerk says that while the postponement of the 2020 Tokyo Games due to the coronavirus outbreak was a "downer" the delay will give him time to regain full fitness after a long period on the sidelines due to injury.

The 27-year-old was one of the stand-out performers of the 2016 Rio Games where he stormed to gold in a world record time of 43.03, smashing the previous mark of 43.18 set by Michael Johnson in 1999.

But a serious knee injury sustained in a charity touch rugby game in October 2017 has meant Van Niekerk has seen very little of the track since.

He had just started his competitive comeback in the last few months, giving him little time to prepare for Tokyo.

"I'm trying to see the positive in it," Van Niekerk was quoted by South Africa's Daily Maverick on Wednesday.

"I view it as more time to prepare, more time to work and more time to invest in my career. Tokyo is just another stepping stone to the entire legacy that I want to leave behind."

Had the Games gone ahead as scheduled in July, Van Niekerk would have had few opportunities to test his knee and build up speed but he can now be more cautious in his return.

"This gives me more time to work and strengthen myself to be in even better shape for the Olympic Games."



Ronaldo, Messi make donations

REUTERS, undated

Cristiano Ronaldo and football agent Jorge Mendes joined forces on Tuesday to donate lifesaving equipment to Portuguese hospitals struggling to treat patients with coronavirus.

The two will donate equipment for two wards at Lisbon's Santa Maria hospital, providing the wards with 10 beds each, ventilators, heart monitors, infusion pumps and syringes, the hospital said in a statement.

In Porto, the country's second biggest city, the Portuguese pair will equip one ward at the Santo Antonio hospital with 15 intensive care beds, much-needed ventilators, monitors and other equipment. The three wards will be named after the men.

Earlier, Barcelona forward Lionel Messi and Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola each donated one million euros (\$1.08 million) towards the fight against coronavirus.

Argentina international Messi's donation will be split between Hospital Clinic in Barcelona and another medical centre in his home country, according to a report in Marca.

Small clubs struggling to pay foreign players

SPORTS REPORTER

Big clubs in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) may not have much trouble clearing payments to foreign players as per their contracts, but smaller clubs appear to be in trouble relating to those payments after the professional football league was suspended indefinitely on Tuesday.

Most of the small clubs are hoping to reach a mutual understanding regarding the contracts with the foreign players, who have been stuck in Bangladesh after the government suspended flights to all but four countries to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

"We are in deep trouble in the case of the foreign players, who are concerned with the situation because they are away from their family and also need money. The foreign players are eagerly waiting to return home but all international flights except a few have been suspended," Rahmatganj general secretary Imtiaz Hamid Sabuj told The Daily Star over the phone yesterday.

"We can't talk to them until international flights resume. If the league is not played, then it is not possible to bear all their salaries. There is a clause in the agreements that we can talk to them about a mutual understanding and we will do that," Sabuj said, adding that they pay at least US\$ 15,000 to five

foreign players per month but it was impossible to get donors in such a situation.

Brothers Union manager Amer Khan said that they had been running around with their foreign players after the league was postponed indefinitely.

"Their family members are scared by the situation in Bangladesh. Everyone wants to stay with their family during such bad situations. But their families are alright," Amer said, adding that they had been trying to reach an amicable settlement with the players by clearing this month's salary.

"The players and our German coach Reza Parkas have also been in touch with their respective embassies in Dhaka to see if there is any scope to return home," said the former national footballer.

Uttar Baridhara Club general secretary Jahangir Alam said: "Of five foreign players, we cleared two players' salary up to April 15 and cleared this month's salary to three others before their departure."

"According to our agreement, the club will clear the payments of the running month if any player is terminated or departs from the country. The choice is open for players, who can come back to play for Uttar Baridhara if the league resume in the near future. Or if they want a clearance certificate from us, we are ready to give it to them," Jahangir said.

He added that they would continue to provide accommodation and food to the foreign players until international flights resume.

Saif SC managing director Nasiruddin Ahmed Chowdhury said they were not thinking about any payments because they were more concerned with the players' safe departure from Bangladesh.

"We don't want to talk to them regarding contracts or salaries because we started the season with a budget. However, we are thinking about their return to their countries because they are eager to meet their family," Chowdhury said.

He believes foreign players wouldn't face such if the league committee decided to postpone the league on March 17 because all the foreigners had bought tickets home anyway as there was to be a break in the league due to World Cup and Asian Cup qualifiers.

Chowdhury also informed that Bangladesh captain Jamal Bhuiyan left the country on Tuesday for Denmark but three foreign players and one foreign coach remained in the country.

Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu said they would sit with foreign players and coaches to discuss the matter while Arambagh general secretary Yaqub Ali urged the BFF to pay them the participation money so that they could clear payment to foreign players and release them immediately.



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