



## Fans missing their escape from reality

NABID YEASIN

After a lousy day at office or school, navigating all the chaos around the city and bearing long hours of traffic, the one thing that people try to find peace in at the end of the day is seeing their favorite club or team playing the game they love. Sport is not only a source of entertainment but also kind of an escape from reality for most people.

Whether it be tuning in to a UEFA Champions League clash or seeing Rafael Nadal fighting tooth and nail for his 20th Grand Slam, it is through sport that people try to forget all their hassles.

But for more than a week now, everything around the globe has come to a standstill due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Major sporting events have all been postponed indefinitely with lockdowns imposed around the world.

While athletes are trying to maintain fitness during this perilous time with the hope of returning to the field soon, fans are spending time watching training videos on social media and re-watching highlights of their favourite games.

Even in a cricket crazy nation like Bangladesh, there are a huge

number of people who follow European football. And during this time, some fans have grown impatient with nothing new on offer and would give anything to see two teams going at each other.

"At this point I am ready to watch football matches between clubs of even unpopular leagues. I would watch it with the same level of excitement that I have while watching a Champions League final. I even watched the Turkish league before it got cancelled. I am even ready to watch people playing in the streets through my window, but now that everyone is staying indoors, that is also not possible," said Ishrak Bashar, an avid football fan.

While some fans just want to see the football rolling, some are anxious about what will happen if the season does not resume.

This is especially a tough time for fans of Premier League giants Liverpool, who had all but confirmed a league title with an incredible 27 wins, one win and one loss. It would have been their first league win since the 1989-1990 season, but now there are talks of declaring the season 'null and void'.

Liverpool fan Shashwato

Pratik said that while it would be unfortunate to see Liverpool being denied the title, he would gladly wait another 30 years to see his club triumph instead of risking lives.

"We have not won the title for 30 years. It now seems the whole world is against Liverpool winning it. Everyone is just hoping something, be it Manchester City or coronavirus, to stop Liverpool from getting the trophy. I am actually enjoying this. It will be unfortunate if the season is declared null and void but given the situation, I think it is fine. If I stay alive, I would gladly wait another 30 years to see Liverpool win the trophy," sighed Pratik.

Meanwhile, some fans are finding it hard to cope with the uncertainty that looms over the resumption of sporting events.

"We do not know when the games will start. Usually at the end of a season there is a break. But we know how long that break is and we keep on counting the days. But this is really uncertain. We are at home now and we literally have nothing to do. This would have been the best time for us to see some matches because there is nothing much else to do," explained Shahjeer Ehsaan,

who usually follows the Premier League and UCL.

Fans are also trying to stay connected to the sport they love even while being quarantined. Playing video games, sneaking out and going to their rooftop to play or even juggling with a ball inside their house, sport fanatics are finding ways to keep themselves busy.

Jawad Mahmud Chowdhury, a 24-year-old who represents his university football team and usually spends his time playing different local tournaments, explained how he was staying close to football during this crisis.

"It is really frustrating. Previously we had no time to play but a lot of eagerness. Now we have time as well as the urge to play but opportunities are not there. I often juggle a football in my room. I also completed the stay-at-home challenge [juggling a roll of toilet paper] that all the [professional] players are currently doing," said Jawad.

While sharing their thoughts, all these sports enthusiasts agreed on one thing: the best thing that can happen now is to wake up one day and hear that normalcy has returned.

## Councillors want deferment of polls

BFF executive committee meeting today

SPORTS REPORTER



As coronavirus sweeps through Bangladesh, all government and private offices are closed and mass transport remains halted but the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is seeking opinions from only 21 members of the executive committee on whether to postpone its April 20 polls or hold it despite the threat to public safety.

Even last Monday, the BFF maintained its decision to hold on the polls on April 20 using names like FIFA and AFC although they suspended all types of leagues and tournaments on March 16.

However, the BFF seem to be softening on their position ahead of today's executive committee meeting, where they will decide on the polls.

Physical attendance will not be required at the meeting at the BFF House today as general secretary

Abu Nayeem Shohag emailed members four questions, including whether or not the elections should be postponed and whether the deadline to submission names of delegates should be extended past the March 30 deadline. Executive members were also asked to give an explanation if they wanted to postpone the elections.

Although Shohag launched the opinion polls, the councillors at District Football Association (DFA) were in favour of deferring the polls considering the situation in Bangladesh.

"We are scared to go to Dhaka. I brought back my two sons from there and they are now in isolation at home. I think the polls should be deferred by a few months," Bholu DFA president

and councillor Hamidul Haque told The Daily Star.

"It is better not to hold the polls in such a situation. I am not sure whether I will travel to Dhaka if the BFF holds the polls on April 20," said Naogaon DFA president Mamunur Rashid Mamun.

"You know all types of sports in Bangladesh are now suspended and everyone is going through a tough time due to coronavirus. It is not that football will develop drastically if the elections are held or that football sink if polls are not held. At the moment, we are not in a situation to discuss the BFF polls, which must be deferred," said Natore DFA president and councillor Syed Mustak Ali Masum.

BFF vice-presidents Badal Roy and Mohiuddin Ahmed Mohi had already asked the for the postponement of the elections while Mohi also wrote to FIFA, asking it to take the necessary steps to postpone the polls.

Yesterday, Mohi said that he would go straight to court to stop the elections if the BFF keeps continues with procedures.

BFF vice-president Tabith M Awal also personally wanted to see the postponement of the polls but said that they were awaiting directives from FIFA, which they were supposed to receive last night.

The BFF may still be awaiting a response from FIFA after penning a letter two weeks ago, but FIFA's media department responded quickly to an inquiry about the polls.

"We encourage all our member associations to adhere to the directives provided by the relevant health authorities and congresses should be organised in accordance with these directives," a FIFA spokesperson said through email.



Juventus star Paulo Dybala and his wife were both recently diagnosed with coronavirus, but the Argentine, seemingly in good health, posted this selfie on Instagram yesterday alongside the caption: "We're okay".

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

## WC qualifiers postponed by ICC

AFP, New Delhi

The ICC postponed a swathe of qualifiers for next year's T20 World Cup and the 2023 50-over World Cup on Thursday as the coronavirus pandemic continues to wreak havoc on international sport.

All qualifiers scheduled to take place before July in Kuwait, South Africa, Namibia, Spain, Papua New Guinea, Belgium, Malaysia and Finland are affected, a statement said.

"The decision has been taken in conjunction with members and in line with the relevant government and public health authority advice," the International Cricket Council said.

India will host the T20 World Cup, a revamped version of the former Champions Trophy, in October-November of 2021. It is not to be confused with this year's T20 World Cup in Australia.

## 'Don Nacho' dies at 103

AGENCIES

Ignacio Trelles Campos, who coached Mexico at three World Cups, has died at the age of 103.

Popularly known as 'Don Nacho', Trelles led Mexico in 117 international matches.

He coached Mexico in the 1958, 1962 and 1966 World Cup tournaments, FIFA said, and was also in charge of the team in the 1964 and 1968 Olympic football tournaments.

Trelles' death was announced by his former club Cruz Azul, whom he led to back-to-back Primera Division titles in 1978-79 and 1979-80.

In all, Trelles won seven Mexican league titles as a coach - a record - having also won three championships as a player.

His other coaching domestic title triumphs came with Marte de Morelos, Zacatepec and Toluca. Trelles took charge of 1,083 matches in the Primera Division.

On the World Cup stage, he was only able to enjoy one victory, when Mexico beat Czechoslovakia 3-1 in a group game at the 1962



finals, held in Chile.

Born on July 31, 1916, in Guadalajara, Trelles was remembered fondly on Wednesday.

Cruz Azul confirmed his death, announcing: "With great sadness, but likewise, pride in being part of this club, we would like to inform you that Don Ignacio Trelles was added to the 'Celestial Legends'."

The Mexican Football Federation said: "We join the grief that seizes the football family for the death of

Ignacio Trelles, legend of Mexican soccer. Prompt condolences to family and friends. RIP."

CONCACAF, the confederation to which Mexico belongs, said: "Our thoughts and prayers are with the family and friends of Ignacio Trelles, who made a huge contribution to football in Mexico."

Cruz Azul said Trelles would have a private funeral due to the coronavirus pandemic.

## RFEF offers loans to small clubs

AFP, Madrid



Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) president Luis Rubiales on Wednesday announced lines of credit for lower-level clubs in difficulty because of the coronavirus pandemic and repeated that he hoped the season could be completed.

He also told an online press conference he was willing to talk to La Liga, which runs the top two divisions, about helping its clubs. Rubiales said that semi-professional and non-professional clubs in men's and women's outdoor and indoor football "will have a line of credit that will reach up to four million euros depending on their wage bills".

He said the loans would be interest free and could be repaid over two years. Some clubs are considering introducing part-time working to compensate for lack of income. Rubiales said he hoped that this aid would help prevent such drastic action.

"We're talking about four million for modest levels of football, but there's also professional football and we want to reach out to it," said Rubiales. "If La Liga wants to talk, it's time to do the maths," he said. "We have worked on a line of financing of 500 million euros."

He said the RFEF was ready "to sit down and look for financing for clubs that are going to have a problem".

"(If the season) does not end on June 30, which is more probable, there are going to be clubs that do not receive 100 percent of the money from television," he added.

He said he could make 500 million available "for first and second division clubs, who need 15, 20 million euros now".

## 'Emergency meeting' for Wimbledon

AFP, London

Wimbledon could be postponed or even cancelled after All England Club chiefs called an "emergency meeting" for next week to discuss whether to go ahead with the tournament amid the coronavirus outbreak.

Wimbledon is set to start in London on June 29, but the spread of the virus has caused havoc with the sporting schedule and the grass-court Grand Slam could be the next major event to be delayed.

The French Open was the first of this year's three remaining Grand Slams to be postponed due to the virus.

The new date for Roland Garros is just one week after the US Open finishes and clashes with the Laver Cup, the popular exhibition team competition set up by Roger Federer and featuring leading players from Europe and the rest of the world.