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'Want players to return hungrier than ever'

The sporting world, much like other arenas, has come to a standstill for months due to the coronavirus pandemic. While fans are counting days to catch their favourite games live, players are trying to stay fit with indoor activities, preparing for when times get better. Bangladesh batting consultant Neil McKenzie, who is currently back in South Africa, mentioned that the players must take this downtime positively and use it to prepare both physically and mentally as to how they want to approach the game once normalcy returns. The South African took more of a philosophical approach as he answered questions sent out by The Daily Star's Ekush Tapader via voice notes.



The Daily Star (TDS): How are you spending your time back home?

Neil McKenzie

(NM): It is an unprecedented

situation. Yes we all love sports and cricket but nothing is happening at the moment. But we just have to look at the bigger picture. A lot of people are losing their lives and livelihoods which is obviously a dreadful and frustrated period to be in. We have been in lockdown for over a month now. But I am just trying to look at the positives now. I think it is now time to reflect on your life, time to be with your family, time to check on friends and time just to reflect on who you are in your life and what you want to achieve or what you have achieved. It is not easy being confined but the positive thing is that we are with our family. It is actually time to do things as a family, contact with friends. In this era it is very easy to keep in contact as we have videocalls, Zoom calls, Whatsapp. And let's just hope that the vaccine for this virus is found soon and we can go back to normality.

TDS: Do you feel it has been too long without cricketing activities, especially for the cricketers and supporting staff?

NM: Yes, it has been too long. Rugby, soccer, golf, tennis, cricket and whatever it is; it is very hard to

find on TV at the moment. I think in normal times, the breakaway from reality for people is sports. In Bangladesh, people are mad about cricket. It gives them a break from the normal and routined life. But that is not the bigger picture here. As much as we want cricket in our life, we would not want to see more people die and suffer.

It is not an ideal situation. I can feel for the players. As coaches, we are jumping at our bit to help the players. We have tried a lot of things, we have sent out a lot of fitness requirements, some programs for players to keep

what they want to change. And when lockdown eventually is over, I want all the players to return hungrier than ever.

TDS: What can be the impact on a batsman when he is not amidst preparation for long time?

NM: I think it is not easy for anybody, be it bowlers or batsmen. When it is all over, I think they will just get back to it [playing]. It is like riding a bike -- you just get back on it. I want the players to be more hungry than before when they finally get back to the field. I think we will see some hungry sportsmen around

It is frustrating for the coaches but it is more frustrating for the players. As for matches against Australia, you always want to match your skills against the best in the world. Australia are one of the bests in the world, so it would have been a great series.

strong. It is a frustrating time for players. Especially for these young and fit athletes who want to be out there showcasing their talents and instead they are cooped indoors. But as I said, the situation can be a lot worse. So, our challenge as coaches is just to try and keep them fit physically and more importantly the mental side too at this time. I think it is time for all the players to reflect on their careers, reflect if they are happy with where they are at the moment, and

the world coming back with a new vigour and a new realisation that you cannot take life for granted.

TDS: Have you maintained any communication with prominent Bangladesh batsmen like Tamim Iqbal or Liton Das? What is your advice to them?

NM: There has been communication but not with everybody individually. As a group and as a team the coaches have been in contact with each other just to



discuss where we want to take the team. We and the medical staff have put together certain programmes for the players to follow. We use Shrinivasa Chandrasekaran [Shrinivas Chandrasekaran] a lot who is obviously our video analyst. Players have got access to their footage and other people's footage and to whatever they really want. And I think it is just more of a self-reflection at the moment for players. But obviously if a player needs me then just gives me a phone call or

sends me a video or asks me what they think and obviously I reply. And if I have got some information to add on to any of the players then I just pass it on. Hopefully when they come back they will have questions about not only how to be good but also about how they can be world class.

TDS: Ireland tour and Australia series have been suspended recently. How frustrating is this for you?

NM: It is frustrating for the

coaches but it is more frustrating for the players. As for matches against Australia, you always want to match your skills against the best in the world. Australia are one of the bests in the world, so it would have been a great series. Ireland trip is always quality. It is sort of an opportunity for the players to tour the world and see what is out there. So yes, opportunity is missed but to be honest you cannot control it.

TDS: Do you have any new findings about Bangladesh batsmen? What can they improve and how can they prepare themselves while they are stuck at home?

NM: I think we have identified with the Bangladesh players in whole in terms of where we see the opportunities in the ODI format, T20 format. For us coaches it is just role clarification. It is to let the players know what is expected of him, what he can deliver. There is a lot of competition for players in the Bangladesh side. There are a lot of talented seniors, youngsters and a lot of players coming through now. We just hope that someone jumps up like Liton Das has done in the last series and pushes the standards really high. Hope that the players come back with a clear mind knowing how they are going to take their game forward and thrive, not just to be a good Bangladeshi player but to be a great world class player.

Khawaja hits out at board's cashflow crisis

AGENCIES

Usman Khawaja has expressed disappointment at Cricket Australia's financial "mismanagement", admitting he was shocked to learn of its cash-flow woes.

Khawaja is determined to return to Australia's Test XI, suggesting it better placed to bounce back from this week's contract snub compared to the same setback in 2014.

Speaking about CA's financial crisis, he said: "I was very shocked. Because I knew our projections for revenue were still very high and I think they still are, depending on what happens with the India series," Khawaja said.

"It's a bit confusing. I don't have all the financial information in front of me, but it seems like it's more of a cashflow problem. There's a little bit of mismanagement there somewhere, with the portfolio and putting a lot of money into the share market."



Cristiano Ronaldo went hiking with his son in the hills of Madeira, posting this snap on his Instagram page yesterday.

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

Transfer ban on Saif SC

SPORTS REPORTER



FIFA imposed a transfer ban on Saif Sporting Club for not paying fines imposed on the club regarding complaints from three foreign players.

The ban -- which means the club can sign neither local nor foreign players -- will be enforced until the club pays off the amount of nearly 100,000 US dollars to FIFA through the BFF.

The decision was relayed after the club failed to pay the Macko Villiam of Slovakia, Sava Gardasevic of Montenegro and Goran Obradovic of Serbia within the April 14

deadline. The club's managing director Nasiruddin Chowdhury claimed that the three players took advantage of the club's lack of understanding of FIFA statutes.

"The three players were brought on trial by our former coach Nikola Kavazovic. They didn't have ITCs (international transfer certificates), they were not even registered. They were poor in quality and were undisciplined. So we released them in less than a month. However, they must have taken agreement papers with the club to FIFA," Chowdhury told The Daily Star, adding that the club had failed to pay the fine due to complications related to banking transactions due to the pandemic.

No showering, no shaking, no sharing

AFP, Paris

No shaking, no showering, no sharing, no signing.

Welcome to what the world of tennis could look like once restrictions caused by the coronavirus pandemic have been lifted.

On Friday, the International Tennis Federation, issued guidelines for local and national competitions.

The guidelines include arriving at a venue already dressed and leaving immediately after the conclusion of a match. "Do not use the locker rooms or showers," say the ITF.

Masks are to be worn while off-court, players and officials should maintain two metres between each other. Handshakes are also off limits.

Each player will use their own set of balls and ball boys and girls will wear rubber gloves.

The players were also discouraged from signing autographs or taking selfies with fans.

Labuschagne ready for 'heaps of cricket'

REUTERS, Sydney



Australia's Marnus Labuschagne is bracing for "heaps and heaps of cricket" once the COVID-19 pandemic subsides, the prolific top order batsman said on Saturday.

The global health crisis has halted international sports, postponing several bilateral cricket series and jeopardising this year's Twenty20 World Cup scheduled in October-November in Australia.

"There is going to be a lot of tours that will need to be made up," Labuschagne told Australian Associated Press (AAP). "There's going to be a whole heap of cricket in a very short time frame. We'll be making up for missed time, that schedule is just going to be packed. It's going to be a bit different to what we're used to. We're going to have to be ready coming out of this break to play heaps and heaps of cricket."

The South Africa-born Labuschagne has been a revelation since stepping up as Steve Smith's concussion substitute at Lord's in last year's Ashes series in England.

In the subsequent series against Pakistan and New Zealand, the 25-year-old smashed four centuries in five Tests, including a maiden double hundred in Sydney earlier this year.

Labuschagne felt his Glamorgan stint helped him get better as a batsman and lamented not being able to reunite with the county as professional cricket remains suspended in England until at least July 1.

"I really enjoyed it last year. I loved Glamorgan, hence why I signed a two-year extension," he said.

"It's disappointing to see them and England cricket in trouble. It's our responsibility, cricket on the whole, to make sure once this period is over that we get games on television and get the sport started again. We need to support each other."

Martinez to stay at Belgium

REUTERS, Brussels

Belgium coach Roberto Martinez has extended his contract through to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, ending weeks of speculation about a new deal, Belgian media reported on Saturday.

There was no official confirmation from the Belgian football association but newspapers said Martinez would stay in charge through to the next World Cup after negotiating a new two-year deal.

His contract was up after this year's Euros, which has been shifted back a year because of the coronavirus.

Martinez, 46, had already said in interviews over the last weeks he wanted to stay in charge in order to take Belgium to Euro 2021, where they are drawn in Group B and will play Denmark, Finland and Russia.

The team, who are top of the FIFA world rankings, had qualified in imposing fashion, by winning all 10 qualifiers, scoring 40 goals and conceding just three.



Virat Kohli posted this picture of himself and his wife Anushka Sharma alongside an endearing message on her birthday, which she celebrated on Sunday.

PHOTO: TWITTER

Tributes pour in for Chuni Da

AGENCIES



Heartfelt tributes poured in from all corners for former India football captain Subimal 'Chuni' Goswami, who died at the age of 82 in Kolkata on Thursday.

Legendary singer Kabir Suman recalled memories of the former football captain.

Suman recalled in a Facebook post: "When I came to Kolkata, I was 4 years old. After coming to Kolkata, I came close to football. Chuni Goswami was a favourite player of Mohun Bagan and East Bengal as well. Chuni was from undivided Bangladesh so it was a pride for East Bengal supporters. He was an icon for me. His smiling face was a positive power for us. There were talks that he didn't score goal against East Bengal, because he was a 'Bangal'. I wrote a song on Manna da and Chuni. I never played football but it was a dream for me. I

met him in a program and went to touch his feet for blessings. He felt uneasy but I said, 'you are my icon'. So, people think of Uttam Kumar, Manna De as icons but you are my icon. Chuni motivated me to bring variety in my singing skills. He played football and cricket simultaneously, so I felt I can also sing variety of songs. From my childhood to teenage he was like a role model for me."

From Sunil Gavaskar to Sunil Chettri, cricket and football stood united in grief for the loss of Goswami, considered a colossus in Indian sports.

Born in Kishoreganj district of undivided Bengal, the striker played 50 international matches between 1956 and 1964, including the 1960 Olympics in Rome.

Besides captaining India to the Asian Games gold medal in 1962, he was also a part of the silver-winning team in the 1964 Asia Cup in Israel, which remains India's best



performance in the continental showpiece till date.

He was among the rare few players who played multiple sports. Apart from leading the Indian football team to victory in the 1962 Asian Cup, Goswami also played 46 domestic matches in the Ranji Trophy.

"Today is a truly depressing day. First Rishi (Kapoor) and now Chuni da have left us.

Both champions and legends in their craft. The world will be the poorer for their departure to the Heavens. RIP," said cricketer great Gavaskar.

"Chuni was a fantastic dribbler. His close control was superb. But those weren't the biggest attributes of his game. His greatness lay in his brain. Great players play with their brains, which sets them apart with regards to decision-

making. And decision-making separates a great footballer from a good one," Tulsi Das Balam, Goswami's India teammate and a part of Indian football's 'Three Musketeers' - PK Banerjee, Chuni and Balam - told The Indian Express.

Former India captain Bhaichung Bhutia called him the first superstar of Indian football.

"It's a big loss for Indian football in two-three months. First PK Banerjee (who died on March 20) and now Chuni Goswami. He was a true sporting icon. He was the first superstar of Indian football."

Former cricketer Dilip Doshi, who played under Goswami in the Bengal team, said he learnt a lot from the versatile athlete.

"He was India's all-round sportsman and much to learn from in fitness and fighting spirit. I had the privilege to play with him for a few years when I made my debut for Bengal."