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Debate over contracts amid resumption uncertainty

ANISUR RAHMAN

Nearly two months after the postponement of the Bangladesh Premier League in light of the coronavirus outbreak, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has been stuck in a state of indecision about whether to resume the league even as a majority of clubs have been clamouring for the season to be cancelled.

If the league is cancelled, most clubs want local players' contracts for this season to be carried over to the next as teams have each played only six of their league 24 matches.

After failing to take a concrete decision, the professional football league committee referred the matter to the BFF executive committee, with the recommendation that the league be resumed at a suitable time after taking the clubs' opinions into account.

But the wait for a decisive move is set to continue as the BFF secretariat has yet to decide when its executive committee will sit.



captain Jamal Bhuiyan has left it up to the BFF to decide whether to resume or cancel the league this season, but he is against the clubs' intention of carrying forward current contracts.

"I think it is for the BFF to decide if they should cancel the league," Jamal told The Daily Star over phone from Denmark.

"All players have different contracts for different lengths. If a contract expires in August and the league is ongoing at that time, well then I think either the club should offer a new contract or the player should be able to sign for a new club and that is actually FIFA law," Jamal said.

It may be mentioned here

that Jamal usually signs contracts with clubs for a certain period on the basis of monthly salary like foreign players, but local footballers are signed by clubs on a season by season basis and they are bound to play for their clubs until the season is over.

According to FIFA regulations, if the season is declared to be over, there is no scope for clubs to retain players on the same contracts for the new season.

However, according to FIFA's special regulations in the wake of Covid-19, players must complete the current season for their respective clubs if the season is delayed due to the pandemic.

National team and Abahani

striker Nabib Newaj Jibon is also against the clubs' desire to retain players on old contracts but is ready to sacrifice a portion of his salary this season.

"I don't know why everyone is in such a hurry. Only four months of this year have gone. Eight months are left. Clubs can easily wait another two or three months, then take a final decision," said Jibon. "We have already played half the season and the league was supposed to be completed before Eid-ul-Adha. The players need new contracts in the new season but there may have to be a mutual understanding with individual players regarding old contracts."

Jamal also wants the return of the domestic league for the sake of the national team, which is supposed to play four fixtures of the Qatar World Cup qualifiers.

"It will have a big impact on the national team's performance if there is no domestic competition ahead of the World Cup Qualifying fixtures," Jamal said. "I think domestic competition is a key factor and is very important not only for people in Bangladesh but also so that we can show the rest of the world that Bangladesh have a great league with a lot of competition. When there is a lot of competition, the national team's level also is lifted."

The 30-year-old left for Denmark on March 26 after being confined for nearly two weeks at the club tent following the lockdown in Bangladesh. He is now roaming freely in Denmark and practising regularly as the situation there is comparatively better.

"Denmark had been shut down for the last 2 months and is not taking any risks. I'm keeping myself active with daily fitness activities," said Jamal.

Bundesliga to restart behind closed doors from May 16

REUTERS, Berlin



The Bundesliga season will restart on May 16 after a suspension of more than two months, the German Football League (DFL) said on Thursday, becoming the first European league to resume amid the coronavirus epidemic.

The DFL said the season would restart under the terms of a strict health protocol that bans fans from the stadium, with six games on Saturday, including the high-profile Ruhr valley derby between Borussia Dortmund and Schalke 04.

The derby and four other matches will start at 1330GMT while Eintracht Frankfurt will host Borussia Moenchengladbach at 1630GMT. League leaders Bayern Munich face Union Berlin in one of two games on Sunday while one more will be played on Monday.

"The interest (globally) is big. I see reports from across the world that we are the first major league to return," DFL CEO Christian Seifert told a news conference.

"This is only possible because we have the privilege to live in a country with one of the most modern health systems in the world."

He was speaking by video conference after a meeting with first and second division clubs following the government's decision on Wednesday to give the green light for the Bundesliga to restart in the second half of May and throw a financial lifeline to the cash-strapped clubs.

Seifert said there would be no Friday match in the first week as the government's order was for play to resume in the second part of the month.

"Friday the 15th is not in the second half of the month," Seifert said.

All teams will have to have go into a seven-day training camp in complete isolation prior to May 16 and with all players being tested before their inclusion in the camps, to reduce the risk of any infection.

About 300 people, including players, staff and officials, will be in and around the stadiums during matchdays.

"The matches will feel different. After

the first matchday we will all know why we prefer games with fans," Seifert said. "But that is the framework we have to operate in and I expect the best possible sport within this framework."

The DFL is desperate to finish the season by June 30 to be contractually in compliance with sponsors and broadcasters and because more than 100 players' contracts are running out on that date, Seifert said.

The DFL has warned any further delay could be "existence-threatening" for some clubs.



Borussia Dortmund striker Erling Braut Haaland juggles the ball in training yesterday. PHOTO: COLLECTED

"The season finale will take place at the end of June," Seifert said, with June 27-28 as a likely date.

He said ideally he hoped the new season to start some time in August but a date had not been finalised.

The teams have been training since mid-April, divided into small groups and under strict conditions, including extensive COVID-19 testing of all players and coaching staff.

Organisers say Australian Open could be cancelled

AFP, Sydney



Tennis Australia conceded Thursday that January's Australian Open faces cancellation under a worst-case scenario, but said it was looking at a range of options in hope the COVID-19 crisis eases.

This year's tennis calendar has been suspended until at least July 13 and, with global borders closed, there is uncertainty about when the international circuit can resume.

The season-opening Grand Slam is scheduled to take place in Melbourne from January 18, more than 8 months away, and Tennis Australia said it would abide by whatever restrictions were in place then.

"We've certainly made no secret about the number of scenarios that we're looking

at," a spokeswoman told AFP. "We're hoping for the best but planning for everything."

Possibilities range from cancellation to imposing quarantine on overseas players and allowing only Australian fans into the event.

"We have to look at all the angles because a lot of the decisions will be beyond our control and related to government guidelines and restrictions," she said. "We do need to have all the protocols in place to ensure everyone's safety."

This year's Wimbledon has been canceled for the first time since World War II and the French Open postponed until the end of September.

The United States Tennis Association will decide in mid-June whether or not the US Open will be able to begin on schedule in New York in August.



Chinese Super League club Shanghai SIPG players returned to their first public training session following the coronavirus outbreak, and the players were extremely relaxed and looked like they enjoyed catching the eyes of fans after a lengthy gap.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'Don't want to be typecast in one format'

PTI

Star West Indies all-rounder Jason Holder says he might be leading the Test side but doesn't want to be "pigeonholed" in just one format and is determined to make a name for himself in all the three forms.

"I don't want to just segregate myself and pigeon-hole myself to one particular format," Holder, who has been the captain of the Test side for the last five years besides leading the side in 86 ODIs, was quoted as saying.

"Yes I'm the captain for the Test team but as I've crossed formats for a number of years, I think my sole focus has been on West



'MY FACE SAYS IT ALL'

Juventus have announced that forward Paulo Dybala has recovered from the coronavirus. The Serie A leaders issued a brief statement Wednesday saying that Dybala's two latest tests came back negative. Dybala later took to social media to confirm the news. "Many people talked in the past weeks ... but I can finally confirm that I am healed. Thank you for your support and my thoughts to all who are still suffering. Take care!" Dybala tweeted. "My face says it all, I'm finally cured!" Dybala posted. The picture, posted on Instagram, shows the Argentine looking absolutely ecstatic.

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

CA to begin pre-season with new protocols

AGENCIES



Cricket Australia is set to begin the team's pre-season later this month under a set of new training protocols devised for the safety of players amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to a report in 'The Sydney Morning Herald', CA is churning out strategies for resumption of training under the watchful eyes of its chief medical officer Dr John Orchard and head of sports science and sports medicine Alex Kountouris.

The duo is working closely with counterparts of other cricket playing nations and are part of committees of the Australian government and the ICC which are trying to find ways for the resumption of sports.

The report said CA's immediate priority is to draw up protocols for players' pre-season, which include barring the use of saliva or sweat to shine the ball during training.

CA's head of sports science and sports medicine Kountouris said the coronavirus-forced new normal shouldn't have much impact of teams' training in a sport like

cricket.

"There's physical distancing in the nets - there's two or three bowlers in each net. One bowls at a time, the batter is 22 yards away so it's not a big problem," Kountouris said.

"We don't see it as too big a problem to manage, but these are the things we're spelling out. This is what you should do: keep your distance, how you should handle the ball, these are things easy to manage."

Kountouris said with social distancing becoming mandatory in the post-COVID world, teams will have to find out new ways of on-field celebrations.

"You might not see high-fiving after a wicket or people ruffling someone else's hair. It will be a spaced huddle. It will be the new norm. That's one of those things, the physical distancing for the time being, that will definitely be out until a vaccine or some sort of solution like that (comes up)."

"I think we'll have to find a different way to celebrate, they'll have to be innovative," he said.

"There are things you won't be able to chop out overnight but people will gradually get used to doing things differently."



Indies cricket, ideally in all three formats not only in Test cricket.

"I think West Indies cricket is so diverse in many different ways and for us as players, we've got to understand each and everyone of us has a part to play in this whole puzzle," he added.

The 28-year-old is ranked number one in the international Test all-rounders' list for over a year now.

He is placed at number three in the bowling charts and is the highest-ranked batsman for his country at the 35th spot.