

NAMASTE IN, HIGH-FIVES OUT

Namaste and clapping could replace handshakes and high-fives when cricket resumes after the coronavirus pandemic, India's Ajinkya Rahane said. Wicket celebrations might look very different post-virus, the 31-year-old batsman said, predicting many changes on and off the field. "I think we might go back to the good old days when fielders would still stand in their designated positions after the fall of a wicket and clap," Rahane said in an online briefing. "Maybe handshakes will be replaced by a namaste," he added, referring to the Indian greeting where both hands are brought together in front of the chest.

-- AFP



After completing medical check-ups and undergoing tests for Covid-19 on Wednesday, Barcelona's footballers led by Lionel Messi arrived at the Tito Vilanova facilities and began individual training sessions.

PHOTO: FC BARCELONA TWITTER

La Liga knocks down talk of June 20 restart

REUTERS, Madrid

La Liga has refused to confirm Leganes coach Javier Aguirre's announcement that the Spanish soccer season will re-start on June 20 after being halted for more than three months due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"There are no confirmed dates to return to competition," a La Liga spokesman told Reuters on Thursday. "We will begin training sessions and wait for a government decision about established dates. Our intention is to return to competition in June."

Speaking to Mexican website Marca Claro earlier on Thursday, Aguirre said he had been given details of when the campaign would start again and had been informed the season would conclude before the end of July.

"We now have a start date for the league, we begin on June 20 and finish officially on July 26. We will play 11 rounds of matches on Saturdays and Sundays and Wednesdays and Thursdays," said Aguirre, whose Leganes side are 19th in the standings. "La Liga has just told me this and I'm very happy that we now have our training programme scheduled."

Clubs in Spain's top two divisions held obligatory testing for players on Wednesday and many teams are due to begin individual training on Friday.

Germany's Bundesliga announced on Thursday that it will resume action on May 16, making it the first of Europe's top five leagues to resume action.

Son dazzles in boot camp

AGENCIES, Seoul

Tottenham Hotspur's South Korean star Son Heung-min completed a three-week military training programme with the best performance among all trainees Friday, as he excelled in shooting and other areas, officials said.

Son was one of the top five trainees to receive a prize at the camp's graduation ceremony on the southern island of Jeju on Friday. The exact scores of the trainees were not disclosed, but officials said Son was the top among a total of 157 trainees.

In shooting, Son hit 10 out of 10 shots on the target, officials said.

Son entered the camp on April 20 for basic military training required of those entitled to exemption from two years of mandatory military service.

Son earned the exemption after winning the men's football gold medal for South Korea at the 2018 Asian Games.

India to be quarantined in Australia?

AFP, Sydney

India's cricket team is prepared to undergo quarantine to salvage a money-spinning Test series against Australia, a top official said Friday, but there was less optimism about this year's Twenty20 World Cup taking place Down Under.

Virat Kohli's men are scheduled to contest a four Test series in Australia towards the end of the year but will need to isolate for two weeks under current COVID-19 rules.

Board of Control for Cricket in India treasurer Arun Dhumal said the Test team were willing to make that sacrifice to save the series, which cash-strapped Cricket Australia desperately needs to replenish its coffers.

"There is no choice -- everyone will have to do that. You would want to resume the cricket," Dhumal told Fairfax newspapers. "Two weeks is not that long a lockdown."

Australia this month dethroned India as the world's top-ranked Test team, setting up the series as a blockbuster rivalry.

The series would also generate hundreds of millions of dollars for a host organisation struggling during the coronavirus shutdown.

Revenue from the series is so important to Cricket Australia that it has proposed adding a fifth Test, which would mean ditching a one-off Test against Afghanistan in November.

BCB to raise its guard for post-pandemic cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

With lockdown restrictions slowly easing off around the world, the cricket bodies have started to think of resuming the game while maintaining safety measures.

Cricket Australia is set to begin its pre-season later this month under a set of new training protocols devised for the safety of players amid the Covid-19.

According to a report, CA is churning out strategies for resumption of training supervised by chief medical officer Dr John Orchard and head of sports science and medicine Alex Kountouris.

Although the coronavirus situation is showing no signs of abating, with hundreds of new cases being detected in Bangladesh, the

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is already looking forward to post-pandemic reality and suggesting all players and employees to undergo tests in order to ensure safety once the shutdown is lifted.

"Covid-19 tests have not been carried out in private sector till now. Government labs are doing it and they have their own protocol. If someone does not have symptoms, he needs not be tested. We are expecting the government to allow tests in private sector, but until that we do not have an option [to have our players or BCB employees do the test]," said Dr. Debashish Chowdhury, the chief physician of BCB.

"We will of course want, especially the players, to undergo tests and we can approach the government if the players do not

have symptoms, but for safety we want them to undergo the test. And if by then it is allowed in the private sector, then it can be managed easily," he added.

The BCB suspended all cricketing activities on March 19, with the DPL suspended after the first round of matches as the board decided to run office from home.

"All physiotherapy of the players is halted now due to the situation. There are no new injuries, given there is no cricket happening. We are concentrating on players' fitness. They have been provided protocol online and they are trying to follow it as much as possible. We will not be active on the field until the government directive comes. Once everything opens, we will be able to start our outdoor activities,"

Debashish explained.

CA's Kountouris said the new normal should not have much impact on training in a sport like cricket. Since cricket is not a physical contact sport, with the physical distance between a bowler and the batter being 22 yards in nets, there is not much to worry about as far as cricket training is concerned, according to Kountouris.

However, just before the shutdown with coronavirus threat still looming in Bangladesh, the BCB did initiate the players to maintain social distancing during the first round of the DPL.

But those directives were hardly followed. According to Debashish, the board will come up with a proper guideline for the players to cope with the new normal.



Although he had been exempted from mandatory military service after winning the gold medal with South Korea's football team at the 2018 Asian Games, Son Heung-min used the unexpected break from sport to finish a three-week military training programme, where he was deemed the top recruit among 157 trainees.



The quarantine has given athletes, who are usually busy jetting around the world, some precious time to spend with their children. Five-time Ballon d'Or winner Cristiano Ronaldo posted a snap of him enjoying his time with his four children while Shakib Al Hasan posted an adorable selfie with his elder daughter.

PHOTO: COLLECTED



'It's difficult to recreate emotions without fans'

AGENCIES



India captain Virat Kohli acknowledged that there is a possibility of sport resuming without fans at stadiums but said it will be difficult to recreate the magical moments without supporters.

"It's quite a possible situation, it might happen, I honestly don't know how everyone is going to take that because we all are used to playing in front of so many passionate fans," Kohli said.

"I know it will be played at a very good intensity but that feeling of the crowd connecting with the players and the tension

of the game where everyone goes through it in the stadium, those emotions are very difficult to recreate," he added.

Kohli said the many moments which are created because of the passion brought in by fans would be missing.

"Things will still go on, but I doubt that one will feel that magic happening inside because of the atmosphere that was created. We will play sports how it is supposed to be played, but those magical moments will be difficult to come by," he said.

Ben Stokes, Jason Roy and Pat Cummins have backed the idea of playing behind closed doors. However, Allan Border has said it would defy belief to host a World Cup without spectators.

Jerseys of Munna, Tayeb on auction

SPORTS REPORTER

Auction 4 Action, a charitable organisation, is all set to put two memorable jerseys of former national captain Momen Munna and former FIFA referee Tayeb Hasan up for auction through Facebook tonight to raise money in fight against the coronavirus pandemic. The auction will get underway at 10:30pm.

Auction 4 Action has already uploaded a short clip on the career of Munna, arguably the best defender in the history of Bangladesh. The last time Munna wore the historic jersey was when Bangladesh won its first international trophy in 1989 by beating a South Korean side to clinch President's Gold Cup title at then Dhaka Stadium.

The base of Munna's jersey has been fixed at Tk 2 lakh.

"Part of the fund will be used through Munna Smriti Sangsad. The other part will be distributed among some people, who were close to both Munna and myself, as they are going through trouble right now," Munna's wife Surovi Momen told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, former referee Tayeb will auction the jersey he wore while officiating the 2013 SAFF Championship final between India and Afghanistan. Nasim Faruque Khan, president of Satkhira chamber of commerce, wanted to buy his jersey for Tk 5 lakh.

"The base-price of my jersey is Tk 2 lakh," Tayeb told The Daily Star, adding that he wants to help people of football community and Satkhira locality.

French Open to refund all tickets

AFP, Paris

All ticket holders for the French Open, postponed from this month until September because of the coronavirus pandemic, will be refunded, the French Tennis Federation announced Thursday.

"The current health situation and the extent of this pandemic are causing uncertainty for all events bringing together the public, all over the world," the federation said in a message sent to all people who had bought tickets.

"Pending having drawn up all the outlines, the FTF has decided to cancel and refund all tickets already purchased."

Roland-Garros was scheduled for May 24-June 7, but has been pushed back to run from September 27.

Root 'very optimistic' about home Tests against Windies

PTI



England captain Joe Root has said he is "very optimistic" Test cricket will take place in the 2020 home season even if that means the squad have to go into more than two months' of quarantine.

With Britain currently in lockdown because of the coronavirus, a three-Test series against the West Indies scheduled for June has been postponed, with Pakistan due to visit later in a season whose start has now been delayed until July 1 at the earliest.

In a bid to salvage the most lucrative matches following a warning from England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) chief executive Tom Harrison that a totally wiped out season could cost the board 380 million, Root said as long as the British government relaxed rules sufficiently to let the matches go ahead, some international matches could yet be salvaged from an otherwise possibly barren campaign.



"I'm very optimistic, hopefully that can be the case and it would be a real shame if it wasn't," he told the Cricket show on Sky Sports on Thursday.

"I think a number of people are desperate to see live sport back on telly and the guys are all very much missing playing and would love to get back out there."

Root praised the recent input of ECB

medics as he stressed: "Safety is paramount and we need to make sure everyone involved is absolutely safe."

"I'm sure the discussions will progress and we'll get more information and get closer and closer to cricket being back on and international cricket being played."

One plan would be to have all internationals played at Hampshire's Ageas Bowl and Lancashire's Old Trafford as these grounds, with on-site hotels, offer better 'bio-security' than other venues. But it could put a strain on players' private and family lives if they were unable, as is normal in a home season, to go home between matches.

Nevertheless Yorkshire batsman Root, whose wife Carrie is expecting their second child, said he and his team-mates could cope.

But Root, acknowledging the need for England to be "flexible" in a situation that could "drastically change" in the coming weeks, added "we've got to find safe ways of getting out of the bubble".