

La Liga aiming for June 12 restart

REUTERS, MADRID



La Liga president Javier Tebas has said he hopes Spanish soccer will resume on June 12 after being halted for over three months due to the coronavirus pandemic.

All clubs in Spain's top two divisions began testing players for the virus last week and many including La Liga champions Barcelona started individual training, the second step of the league's four-phase protocol for returning to action.

Real Madrid resume individual training on Monday.

"I'd like to restart on June 12 but we have to be prudent and it's not just up to football, it's also up to society, we all need to focus on complying with measures to protect health," Tebas told Spanish television network Movistar on Sunday.

Tebas confirmed all matches will take place without spectators, as will be the case when Germany's Bundesliga restarts next week, and he said the league was working on ways to add to the atmosphere although he did not give details.

He also said fixtures would be spread out so that there are matches every day.

"Now that we are not going to have fans in the stadiums we are going to have some innovative ideas for broadcasting the games," Tebas added.

"There's going to be football every day once La Liga returns."

The league reported on Sunday that five players across the two divisions had tested positive for the virus and had been ordered to stay isolated at their homes. They will not be able to return to training grounds until they have tested negative.

Tebas added that three staff members had also tested positive for the virus but he said the number of cases was far lower than expected, insisting there would be



Lionel Messi (L) trained at the Joan Gamper centre pitches yesterday as Barcelona continued their practice sessions ahead of the La Liga restart. Meanwhile, Eden Hazard joined his Real Madrid teammates in their first practice session after a two-month halt.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

no increase in the risk of players getting infected once matches started.

"We were expecting around 25 or 30 based on the numbers in the Bundesliga and how much the virus has penetrated Spain. Out of 2,500 people tested we have only eight positive cases, which is good news," he said.

"Infection during a match is practically impossible as we have done a study which we're releasing which will show there is a minimum risk in matches if we all respect the health measures."

RULES AND MEASURES

Football will have changed a lot by the time

it returns from this COVID-19 enforced break and a number of new rules are set to be introduced.

Teams will be allowed to make as many as five substitutes during a game, and LaLiga president Javier Tebas has already expressed his support of the move.

LaLiga sides can have 23 players in their matchday squads.

FIFA will allow for VAR to be done away with, LaLiga intends to keep using it and changes will be made to the VAR facilities to protect the officials.

LaLiga will be responsible for providing images of training sessions for a number

of clubs during the period, and it's been asked that clubs don't disclose any medical information from training in order to avoid rumours of cases spreading.

Temperature of everyone entering the stadium will be checked, hotels will be used exclusively by players and only certain flights can be taken.

Teams travelling by bus will use two buses, with away players tested before traveling and home players tested 24 hours before kick-off.

All players will have to change their kits at half time, spitting will be a yellow card and press conferences will be done remotely.

French Open without fans?

REUTERS, MUMBAI

The French Open, which was postponed to September from May due to the novel coronavirus outbreak, could be held without fans, the organisers of the claycourt Grand Slam have said.

Roland Garros had been scheduled for May 24 to June 7 before the French tennis federation (FFT) pushed it back to Sept. 20-Oct 4 in a bid to save the tournament from falling victim to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Last week the FFT said all tickets purchased for this year's French Open would be cancelled and reimbursed instead of being transferred.

"Organising it without fans would allow a part of the economy to keep turning, (like) television rights and partnerships. It's not to be overlooked," FFT President Bernard Giudicelli told French newspaper Le Journal du Dimanche.

"We're not ruling any option out."

The tennis season was suspended in early March due to the pandemic and the hiatus will continue at least until mid-July with many countries in lockdown.

Wimbledon has been cancelled while the status of the U.S. Open, scheduled to take place in late August, is still unclear.

The FFT was widely criticised when they announced in mid-March that the French Open would be switched, with players bemoaning a lack of communication as the new dates clashed with the hardcourt season.

Organisers said last week they had been in talks with the sport's governing bodies to fine tune the calendar amid media reports that the Grand Slam tournament would be delayed further by a week and start on Sept. 27.

The delayed start would give players a two-week window between the end of the U.S. Open, played on the hardcourts of New York, and the Paris tournament.

"The 20th or the 27th, that does not change much," Giudicelli said.



Bayern Munich practised for the last time at the Allianz Arena yesterday before going into seven-day quarantine ahead of the resumption of the Bundesliga season.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Bundesliga teams in isolation

REUTERS, BERLIN



German soccer teams started the week in isolation on Monday after going into seven-day quarantine ahead of the Bundesliga season restart on Saturday, with club bosses saying completing the campaign amid the coronavirus outbreak will not be easy.

The German Football League (DFL) decided last week to resume the first and second division from May 16 after a two-month

suspension, making it the first major sports league to attempt a restart.

Teams have been sent into mandatory seven-day isolation after testing for the virus in order to reduce the risk of infection before playing in empty stadiums with only a handful of staff and officials, to help prevent the spread of the virus.

Several clubs, including champions Bayern Munich, Borussia Dortmund and VfL Wolfsburg, have picked hotels in their cities to cut travel times to training locations and airports for the weekend matches.

Others like Schalke 04, who face

Dortmund in the Ruhr valley derby, and Borussia Moenchengladbach are using hotels at their stadiums.

Bayer Leverkusen and Union Berlin have moved to more isolated hotels in the countryside, as have bottom club Paderborn who will spend the week in a nearby thermal springs town.

Players and staff wore face masks as they departed for hotels where distance between tables at team lunches and dinners will become routine, as will single rooms where players will make their own beds to reduce unnecessary contact with other people.

Federations, athletes continue support

SPORTS REPORTER

Since the government declared shutdown on March 26 in an attempt to prevent the spread of coronavirus, sports personalities and sporting authorities have been helping those in financial trouble – both within the community and outside of it.

Following the footsteps of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF), the other sporting federations and sports welfare associations have also come forward to help people in their suffering.

On Monday, Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) president Air Marshal Air Chief Marshal Masihuzzaman Semiatat made a donation to the BHF account to help needy hockey players, coaches and umpires.

"The BFF president today [Monday] handed over a fund to the BHF account and we will start sending the money to some 50 needy players, coaches and umpires as we, some BHF officials, have raised a fund of Tk 5 lakh to assist them. Our target is to disburse Tk 5,000 each among the listed people. We will also try to help 20 more needy players before Eid-ul-Fitr," BHF's acting general secretary Mohammad Yousuf told The Daily Star.

Bangladesh Tennis Federation treasurer Sheikh Mohammad Aslam informed that they have raised more than Tk 2 lakh as some BTF officials responded to his calls to help the needy players and coaches.

"As most of our players have come from needy families, we have decided to

distribute the fund among some 40 players and coaches and we are going to hand it over to them within a couple of days," Aslam told The Daily Star.

Bangladesh Athletics Federation general secretary Abdur Rakib Montu informed that they have already raised Tk 5 lakh to help former and current athletes, coaches and judges, especially those who are facing financial trouble.

"A committee formed to select needy athletes, coaches and judges is scheduled to sit today [Tuesday] to finalise everything. They will take a decision on how many players and officials need help and how much help they need," Montu told The Daily Star adding that he is also helping needy athletes get relief from their respective districts.

National badminton player Mohammad Ammar, along with other shuttlers, have already made an instance by cultivate paddy in Haor area of Sunamganj as well as providing daily essentials to the under-privileged people and needy badminton players. Following the steps of Ammar, Bangladesh Badminton Federation general secretary Amir Hossain Bahar help some 37 former and current shuttlers and coaches who have been in trouble due to the shutdown.

With the uncertainty over the resumption of sporting, it is not sure how long the individuals and federation officials can continue helping the less-fortunate athletes, but such help will certainly give a bit of relief to them in their hour of great distress.

Raina wants overseas T20 ban lifted

REUTERS, MUMBAI



India's 2011 World Cup-winning batsman Suresh Raina has called on the country's cricket board (BCCI) to lift its ban on players participating in overseas Twenty20 leagues.

The BCCI does not allow active players to sign for franchise-based leagues outside the country in a bid to protect the prestige of its own Indian Premier League (IPL), which attracts many of the world's top cricketers.

Raina said there were many active Indian players left on the sidelines of the lucrative annual T20 tournament who were also being denied the chance to play abroad.

"I hope the BCCI can get together with the ICC (International Cricket Council) or with franchises and allow players who don't have BCCI contracts to play in overseas leagues," Raina said during an Instagram chat with his former India teammate Irfan Pathan.

"I feel there are a lot of players, including Yusuf (Pathan), myself, Robin Uthappa -- a



lot of quality players who can go overseas and learn a lot, no matter which league it is."

Once considered an automatic selection for India's limited-overs sides, Raina played 226 one-dayers and 78 T20 internationals but has not worn the blue jersey since July 2018.

The 33-year-old is also a key member of Dhoni's Chennai Super Kings side in the IPL.

"We aren't in the BCCI contracts list, some of us don't have IPL contracts, we aren't playing international cricket, and the competition in domestic cricket isn't what it is at the international level," Raina said.

AGENCIES



Australian cricket legend Shane Warne has poured scorn on Ricky Ponting for a captaincy call that haunted the 2005 Ashes series.

After thrashing England in the first Test at Lord's, Ponting's great Australian side went on to lose one of the closest series in history 2-1, with a two-run loss in the second Test at Edgbaston the major turning point.

That Test featured many talking points, starting with leading fast bowler Glenn McGrath's warm-up injury that ruled him out after he stood on a cricket ball and rolled his ankle.

McGrath had taken nine wickets in a man of the match performance, but if his injury was the beginning of the end, it was a stunning call by Ponting to send the home team in after



winning the toss that really turned the momentum.

It's a long-held theory that the captain who wins the toss should bat unless there are several factors working in the bowling team's favour, most notably a green pitch and heavy conditions overhead.

Adding weight to that theory in the case of the Edgbaston Test was that Ponting had the greatest spin bowler of all-time in his side, with Warne always preferring the chance to bowl in the fourth innings, when the pitch

was worn and conditions were at their most difficult for the batting side.

Yet Ponting backed his pace attack, minus McGrath, to skittle England for a low score, a decision that blew up in his face when England compiled a commanding first innings score of 407.

Reliving the Edgbaston thriller with Michael Vaughan, Kevin Pietersen, Marcus Trescothick and Steve Harmison for Sky Sports, Warne didn't hold back when asked about Ponting's decision at the toss.

"Nasser [Hussain] goes down as one of those people that had one of the worst-ever decisions when he said 'we'll have a bowl, thanks' at Brisbane [in the 2002/03 Ashes], but at least at The Gabba the ball swings or does something on day one. This was a road and the ball did nothing," Warne said.

"Punter's [Ponting's] decision to bowl first was just the worst decision ever, by any captain. So take a back seat, Nas, Punter has got your back."