



La Liga is set to restart today and although the unexpected break in the season due to the coronavirus pandemic has caused a great deal of strife, players such as Real Madrid's 100-million-euro summer signing Eden Hazard (C) will be happy that it gave them time to regain fitness and perhaps play a pivotal role in the title race.

PHOTO: REAL MADRID

Lifelines aplenty as title race resumes today

AFF, MADRID



When La Liga stopped they were not expected to play any part in the rest of the title race but when the season resumes on Thursday, Eden Hazard and Luis Suarez could be set to decide it.

Hazard was looking beyond Real Madrid to the Euros after undergoing surgery on his right foot in March while some felt Suarez had played his last game for Barcelona after having a knee operation in January.

Instead, both have been thrown a lifeline, Suarez to preserve his career at Barca and Hazard to kickstart his with Madrid.

After Real Madrid paid 100 million euros (\$108.4 million) to sign him from Chelsea last year, fans sprinted outside the Santiago Bernabeu to beat the queues for Hazard's unveiling, and around 50,000 made it inside.

However questions were soon being asked about his weight in pre-season, and he has struggled

HIGHLIGHTS
<p>» La Liga roars back into action tonight after a three-month pause, with matches taking place almost every day.</p> <p>» Barcelona (58) were leading Real Madrid (56) by two points after 27 matches when the current 2019-20 campaign was postponed back in mid-March. There are 11 rounds left to play.</p> <p>» The return of La Liga will see empty stadiums and new stadiums as well as the introduction of five substitutions and other new precautions.</p> <p>» Players will be tested for coronavirus</p>
<p>within 24 hours of kick-off.</p> <p>» Only 270 people will be allowed inside stadiums, including club players and staff, doctors and security personnel, match-day and club officials, as well as press and technicians.</p> <p>» Players won't be cautioned for spitting and punish for hugging during goal scoring celebrations.</p> <p>» La Liga will use virtual images of stands in television broadcasts with added 'fan audio', produced by the makers of the FIFA video game.</p>

with injury all season.

Every time he has come back, Hazard has needed time to find form, initially lacking that burst of speed and change of direction that at his best, can leave a defender for dead. But reports from Valdebebas have been positive, with Thibaut Courtois saying on Sunday he had been surprised by the Belgian's "rhythm" before adding a note of caution. "We can't expect him to be on top form without playing,"

he said.

Barca coach Quique Setien said: "He is better than we expected," "But the question is how ready he is after so long out and whether he is ready to start." Despite winning the Clasico on March 1, Madrid were in a slump before the hiatus, that 2-0 victory over Barcelona their only win in five games.

They lost the defensive steel that saw them go 21 matches unbeaten either side of Christmas

and a familiar bluntless, still lingering from Cristiano Ronaldo's departure, remains.

Hazard was supposed to help fill the creative void but 11 games over five and a half weeks offers no room for rustiness and, unlike Suarez, this is still a new team to him. Fifteen appearances in 10 months hardly breeds familiarity.

Barca meanwhile need bodies as they have only 19 fit senior players, which leaves them surprisingly ill-equipped to capitalise on two extra substitutes.

The club sold back-ups in January to raise funds for a striker that never arrived and instead they were left to exploit La Liga's emergency signing rule in February to poach Martin Braithwaite from Leganes.

But Suarez brings experience and quality, not to mention the best out of Lionel Messi.

In full flow, Messi could see off Real Madrid but the Argentinian has had his own injury problems this season, the latest a minor thigh complaint that led to him missing three training sessions last week.



Chelsea players were in extremely high spirits as they continued to train ahead of the scheduled restart of England's Premier League on June 17. They were bolstered by the infectious smile of N'Golo Kante (R), who rejoined contract training after previously sitting out due to concerns over contracting the coronavirus.

PHOTO: CHELSEA FC

Colindres leaving Bangladesh

SPORTS REPORTER



Daniel Colindres' journey in Bangladesh football came to an end as Bangladesh Premier League champions Bashundhara Kings parted ways with the Costa Rican World Cupper owing to their inability to bear his wages during the off-season.

Colindres, who was signed in September 2018, had played a key role in debutant Kings' Premier League title and Independence Cup title that season. He was also the main architect of 2019-20 season's Federation Cup triumph before the season was cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The 35-year-old forward, who played for Costa Rica in the FIFA World Cup in 2018,

had played 48 official matches including one in AFC Cup and a friendly against a Maldivian club. The Costa Rican, who used to wear No. 26 jersey, interestingly scored 26 goals for Kings.

"Colindres' contract expired in May and the AFC Cup will resume in October. It is tough for us to bear his wages during this off-season. We will try to bring in a quality player like him to for the AFC Cup," Bashundhara Kings president Imrul Hasan told reporters yesterday.

"I am happy to play for Bashundhara Kings because they can't write their history without me. Bashundhara have a very good view of football in Bangladesh and I am lucky to play for them," Colindres said, adding that he has a couple of offers from Asia as well as his own country.

Colindres is likely to leave Bangladesh on June 15.

BFF secretariat trying to buy delegates, allege three bodies

ANISUR RAHMAN



Apprehension over injustice from the mitigation committee for the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) delegates' nomination ahead of the 2020 congress and polls was again brought to the fore as the existing committee of two affiliated bodies -- Dhaka Divisional Football Association (DFA) and Dilkusha SC -- alleged that the BFF secretariat bypassed them by giving away their nomination forms to BFF-preferred candidates.

Mohiuddin Mohi, one of vice-presidents of the BFF, voiced concerns to The Daily Star in mid-April after BFF president Kazi Salahuddin allegedly formed the committee without approval from an executive meeting. The mitigation committee comprises BFF senior vice-president Abdus Salam Murshedy and executive members Harun Ur Rashid and Abdur Rahim.

Another member, seeking anonymity, raised questions about whether the BFF can form the judiciary committee with its executive members as they are prohibited by article 32 of the BFF constitution to be part of any judiciary committee. The mitigation committee is a judiciary committee, which seems a clear violation.

The polls were originally scheduled

to take place on April 30 before being postponed on March 27 due to the coronavirus pandemic, but the BFF secretariat has continued preparing the voter list. The deadline for submission of delegates' names ended on June 7, with the BFF receiving all 141 delegates' names. But there are a couple of disputes, with some alleging that they were harassed for irrelevant documents such as copies of the club constitutions and audits in a move designed to prevent them from submitting their nomination forms on time.

"The BFF secretariat did not give the delegation forms to the newly-elected body, which was elected uncontested on March 19. We informed the matter to the mitigation committee and Murshedy told me that we would not face any problems if they could nominate their preferred delegate, Abdur Rahim bhui. But we turned down their proposal," alleged Shahin Bhuiyan, president of Dhaka DFA, to The Daily Star.

Murshedy is rumoured to again be targeting the seat of senior vice-president in the coming elections.

It was learned that the BFF formed an ad-hoc committee for the Dhaka DFA by naming Abdur Rahim its head and sending his name to the BFF secretariat as the delegate. The BFF did not declare the existing Dhaka DFA committee illegal.

It is unclear whether the ad-hoc committee has any voting rights as all types of BFF statutes are currently unavailable on their website despite

being available a few months ago.

"Since the casino scandal, Dilkusha SC officials went into hiding and a new committee was formed on March 24 to keep the club alive. The BFF was aware of every step and we submitted all the papers that they demanded. But they kept us waiting till last Saturday although Murshedy bhui told us that we would get forms. Ultimately, the BFF did not give us the forms as we declined their proposal to select the delegate according to their preference," Dilkusha SC general

delegates without a mandatory executive meeting.

Tangail Football Academy, a third division team, also alleged that the BFF secretariat influenced them to change their delegate's name by offering Tk 8 lakh.

BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag denied all the allegations, terming the claims from the three bodies "baseless, false, purposeful and politics of sports".

"We asked the Dhaka DFA to stop the election process but they did not. That's why we formed an ad-hoc committee during the shutdown. We gave the delegation forms to the legal committee of Dilkusha SC," Shohag said. "Offering them money is a false allegation."

Shohag did not outright disagree when asked if the mitigation committee was illegal under the BFF constitution, but defended the decision by saying that they had formed a similar committee in the 2016 elections without raising question.

It was also learned that incumbent BFF vice-president Badal Roy and Mohiuddin Mohi wrote to FIFA secretary Fatma Samoura about the BFF's process of holding the elections amid a pandemic and requested that they look into the constitutional violation in forming the mitigation committee. Both Dilkusha SC and Dhaka DFA added that they are willing to take legal action to get justice.

Pacers still playing catch up

Salahuddin proposes separate pace unit

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI



Cricket will have to come to grips with the new paradigms brought on by the coronavirus pandemic as the ban on saliva and use of substitutes ratified by the ICC yesterday. But the fast bowlers in Bangladesh, who appear ready to make the leap to the next level and enhance the country's cricketing status further, will need to undergo a more seminal change.

The versatile Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, now in the twilight of his career, has paved the way and the pace unit currently needs a mentor like him so that the likes of Mohammad Saifuddin, Abu Jayed Rahi and Ebadat Hossain can usher in an era of pace prowess following the exploits Mustafizur Rahman and Rubel Hossain.

Curiously, the Tigers, especially at home, are more reliant on their pace department in ODIs than in Tests, with the perception of the longer-version relatively spin-heavy. While it is an indication of the management's mindset, it is also an indication of the relative gap in experience and skillset of the Bangladesh pacers compared to those elsewhere.

What cannot be denied is that Bangladesh now have a number of capable pacers in their ranks that need to be worked on. Bangladesh ODI captain Tamim Iqbal feels that it is time for pacers to be mentally prepared to do better on flat surfaces.

"A bowler who bowls well in Bangladesh is likely to succeed in England. I feel that if our pacers get more experience, we will be more competitive. The pacers will need to be mentally stronger and find a way to become good in these [home] conditions. If we talk about providing grassy wickets [at home], they will surely do well but they won't learn the art of bowling on flat wickets," he opined during an interview

with The Daily Star.

Tamim used the country's most successful pacer, Mashrafe, as an example to reassert his point.

"If you think about Mashrafe bhui, he didn't play on grassy wickets a lot. He played mostly on flat wickets but he also knew how to bowl on those [grassy] wickets. We have a lot of talent at our disposal [in the pace department]. We lack some experience but if we can work on our strengths and weaknesses, I am sure we will become a good bowling side," he added.

How to then improve the pace department? When the question was posed to Mohammad Salahuddin, a mentor to many of the national team stars, he reiterated: "We have got quite a few pace bowlers now with pace and skill. I feel that they need to be separated from the rest and there should be a special programme for them. We should have a separate unit of just pacers."

"If you can't bowl at 140 kmph, it becomes difficult to bowl in Tests and survive. If we create a separate unit and train them, the bowling unit will be stronger and it will be hugely beneficial. We have some good prospects and arranging something like this is not a matter of spending a lot of money. There are lots of good coaches from abroad here now so it will be easy to do. It will ensure that focus is on each and every boy in the unit."

The idea of a pace unit that works together has been known to pay dividends worldwide. Not only will the individuals push each other, but the combined skillsets will develop them both individually and collectively. The only thing that matters now is whether such a programme will be developed and if people in charge and the drive of the players themselves. Going by current cricketing standards, it is an upgrade of immense necessity that the Tigers need to make.

