

Closed doors no obstacle for Messi fan

No spectators are allowed at La Liga games to curb the spread of coronavirus but the restrictions could not dissuade one Lionel Messi fan from sneaking into Barcelona's match away to Real Mallorca on Saturday. The fan calmly walked onto the pitch in the 52nd minute and approached Barca defender Jordi Alba before heading towards Messi. The intruder was tackled by security guards before he could make contact with Messi, while two police officers helped remove him from the pitch. The fan later told Spanish radio station Cadena Cope he was a French national living in Mallorca and that he had scaled a two-metre fence to enter the stadium shortly before halftime.

-- REUTERS



Return to cricket a lengthy process

NARID YEASIN



With the new normal very much in mind, sporting activities have slowly started to resume around the world. That is not yet the case for Bangladesh, one of the worst-hit by the coronavirus pandemic, but with the resumption of cricket on the horizon. Although the BCB has still made no decision over a three-Test tour of Sri Lanka in July, players now have to get back to their regular lifestyles. But after such a long halt, will it be easy to get a jump-start on proceedings?

According to the BCB physiotherapist Bayjedul Islam Khan, the resumption of cricket is a long process and will require players to be patient.

"Players will at least six weeks of fitness training. The first three weeks will be for the players to get functional adaptability while the final three weeks will be for skill training and other fitness activities. This will help the players get into decent enough shape before they go to play a series or any tournament," Bayjedul told The Daily Star.

The ICC stated the need to exercise extra caution over bowlers' workload in their 'back-to-cricket guidelines', saying it would require bowlers to go through 8-12 weeks of preparation before playing Test cricket. Bayjedul voiced a similar opinion.

"Fast bowlers are usually more vulnerable to injuries. The quicker bowlers are away from any sort of bowling during this time. They will need to train a lot more and will be under a lot more pressure



PHOTO: FACEBOOK

extra effort might disrupt their body and that is when there is a chance of the body suffering a breakdown," said Bayjedul, who also mentioned that players may mostly suffer from three types of injuries -- back spasms, side strains and hamstring injuries -- if they try to push their limits.

The BCB's head of physical performance Nick Lee has already charted out a weekly indoor workout plan for players to counter any such mishaps and help players stay fit. Despite that, Bayezedul says that the players will have to go through a series of tests when they return to training.

"Players will go through a three-fold measuring test. Their fat percentage and weight will be measured and compared to previous stats. Players who have gained weight will be given aerobics activities and their training load will be a bit heavier than others. Also there will be some food restrictions imposed. The players will also go through a VO2 Max test, which measures lung capacity. If any player has lower lung capacity, they will be given a different programme. The aerobics load will be increased," informed Bayjedul.

It is in the best interest of the players now to follow the BCB-provided guidelines and do regular freehand exercises at home as that, according to the experienced physiotherapist, will be most helpful for a smooth transition to the intense training sessions after resumption. However, even if the players follow all the procedures and guidelines, getting back to professional cricket, with all safety measures and a good physical condition ensured, is sure to take a long time.

HIGHLIGHTS

Minimum six-week training period before playing a series or tournament

Training period for fast bowlers needs to be longer, especially before playing Tests

Players will go through a three-fold measuring test -- weight measurement, fat percentage test and VO2 Max test to measure lung capacity -- when training resumes

'Saliva ban could upset balance'

PTI



Former Australia captain Mark Taylor on Sunday warned that ban on the usage of saliva runs the risk of upsetting balance between bat and ball in Test cricket.

The ICC has banned the use of saliva on ball as an interim health safety measure in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic -- a move that has raised concerns about the game becoming even more batsmen friendly.

"I think it is a bit of a concern because I like, particularly in Test matches, to see the ball slightly dominate the bat, it is much better game when Test cricket is played that way," Taylor told 'Channel 9'. "My concern will be that if the players can't shine the ball and the ball does get very straight and very predictable we are going to see more and more runs, more and more high scores in Test match cricket. And that is not the best Test match cricket."

The ICC has also introduced the system of issuing warnings to players for violating the ban, before adding a five-run penalty. Taylor said: "...eventually one umpire is going to stick his neck out and say 'that's a five run penalty.'"



PHOTO: REUTERS/NAPOLI FC

European football had a stellar night on Saturday. Dries Mertens became the all-time top-scorer for Napoli as he scored his 122nd for the club in a Coppa Italia semifinal against Inter Milan. Lionel Messi set up two and scored one in a 4-0 rout of Mallorca in Barcelona's first game since the break while Bayern Munich came one step closer to retaining the Bundesliga title with a 2-1 win over Monchengladbach.

WHAT TO WATCH

FACEBOOK

LA LIGA

Levante v Sevilla

Live from 11:30pm

Real Betis v Granada

Live from

2:00am (Tuesday)

Third leg of Djokovic's tour cancelled

REUTERS

World number one Novak Djokovic's winning start to his tournament was spoiled by news that the event's third leg has been cancelled due to coronavirus concerns.



While the world remains indoors and patiently waits out the coronavirus pandemic, Chris Gayle yesterday shared a picture of the retreat he has found in one of the most serene parts of the universe that he bosses.

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

Kings look to conquer new ground

ANISUR RAHMAN



Rarely had any of Bangladesh's professional football clubs taken the AFC-sanctioned club tournament very seriously, so it inevitably followed that the country's outfits exited the competitions at the pre-qualifying or qualifying stages.

Six-time professional league champions Abahani, along with Sheikh Jamal, Sheikh Russel and Saif Sporting Club got opportunities to play the AFC Cup but none could produce satisfactory results, except in the last edition when Abahani crossed the group stage in their fourth attempt and achieved a rare success by contesting the zonal semifinals.

However, new Bangladesh Premier League champions Bashundhara Kings are eager to buck the trend as the new powerhouses of Bangladesh football are taking the AFC Cup seriously ahead of their debut.

Roping in former Argentinian national striker Harman Barcos (with a whopping wage of approximately 20,000 USD per month) solely for the tournament underlined their intentions in Asia's second-tier club tournament, for which they qualified by clinching the BPL title.

Bashundhara reaped the rewards of their tireless preparations for the AFC Cup by notching a huge 5-1 win over TC Sports Club of Maldives in their opening match, before the tournament was suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Asian Football Federation (AFC) is set to restart the AFC Cup in late October and participating clubs are priming their respective squads. Kings have once again shown the intent

to seize the opportunity by strengthening their squad in the hope of making their debut a memorable one by realising their target to become group champions.

Kings have decided to release all four foreign players except Barcos for the AFC Cup, including the influential Daniel Colindres, and are now searching for replacements.



"We are hopeful of getting quality replacements for the three foreign players. We have already gotten four to five CVs from Iraq, Australia, Argentina and other countries. We are now watching their video clips, analysing their performance and trying to get opinions from known foreign coaches," club president Imrul

Hasan told The Daily Star, hinting that they are looking for a foreign centre-back to rebuild a vulnerable backline.

Coach Oscar Bruzon is also supports singing a foreign centre-back. "Regarding our backline, I would not say we had a problem in the backline itself but in the whole defensive stage [collective defence] as we were missing [because of injuries] ball winners in the midfield such as [Masuk] Zony and [Atiqur Rahman] Fahad," Bruzon told The Daily Star.

Hasan also revealed plans to rope in a good left-winger, who can assist Barcos.

"We are also trying to find a speedy left-winger to replace Colindres so that he can trouble the opposition backline and create free space for Barcos," said Hasan, adding that they would also be trying to replace injured local players in case they fail to recover before the resumption of AFC Cup.

Bashundhara Kings have planned a six-week preparation starting from the first week of September to solidify the team combination with possible new signings. They are even thinking of shifting their camp to the Middle East if Qatar hosts the AFC Cup Group E qualifiers.

"Unofficially we have learned that a few countries like Qatar and UAE are interested in hosting Group E qualifiers within the next month, but clubs are not ready. If they agree, then our national footballers will stay back in Qatar to join club training after Bangladesh's match against Qatar on October 13," said Hasan.

While Hasan wants Bashundhara Kings to emulate Abahani's feat, he would love the side to surpass the giants by playing the zonal final in their debut appearance.