

## Tibet's only football club folds over altitude row

Tibet's first and only professional football team has become the latest in a string of Chinese clubs to fold, following a row over hosting matches in one of the highest cities in the world. Lhasa Chengtuo played only two games in the Tibetan capital – which sits at an oxygen-sucking altitude of 3,650 metres (12,000 feet) – and on both occasions the referee had to suspend play every 15 minutes to let the players breathe bottled oxygen, Xinhua news agency said. The demise of the club, just three years after it was founded, is a blow to the ruling Communist Party's hopes of having a team in the professional leagues to make Tibetans feel more integrated into China. Lhasa Chengtuo finished last season 26th of 32 teams in China's third division and had been playing their home matches thousands of kilometres (miles) away.

—AFP



Arsenal frontman Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang (L) and Manchester City striker Raheem Sterling were in jovial mood in training as the defending champions prepare to take on the Gunners when the English Premier League resumes today.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Can the money-spinners get it right?

### Premier League returns tonight

SAMAMA RAHMAN



After 100 days of inactivity, England's Premier League will return to eerily empty stadiums across the country tonight, with clubs playing each of their remaining nine league fixtures in the space of 37 days to meet the provisionally scheduled finish on July 26 -- a game every four days for clubs no longer in the FA Cup.

There will of course be the strict protocols that have to be maintained in order to negate the threat of coronavirus infection, such as no handshakes, no spitting, no mass confrontations and no surrounding match officials. In the absence of ball assistants, spare balls will be placed around the pitch and, in a commercialisation of the game perhaps only possible in

the climate of English football, players will even be directed by broadcasters towards a 'celebration camera' after scoring a goal.

But that run of fixtures, coupled with the fact that players will be returning to competitive football less than three weeks after beginning contact training and only a few days removed from their first taste of competition in friendly matches, will serve only to exacerbate the risk of injuries that has been highlighted in sport worldwide.

The Premier League will need its restart to go without a hitch in order to preserve its glamorous image above all else, and for that they will need to heed the warning signs from Germany's Bundesliga, Europe's first major league to resume their season.

There were a total of 12 injuries in Germany's top tier over the opening weekend as

the Bundesliga returned to action despite the number of substitutions being upped from three to five on a temporary basis. Players there could not cope with the demands of the game after 66 days without football and the 'mini pre-season' had not done enough to get them back in shape. Whether the extra 24 days in England will make a difference, only time will tell.

Another observation that can be made from the restart of the Bundesliga is that home advantage has taken on less significance than ever before. Data from Gracenote shows that before the postponement of the Bundesliga, home teams won 43 percent of the 223 games played, with 35 percent being away wins and 22 percent draws. In the 55 games since the restart, home wins have plummeted to 20 percent while away teams have won 50 percent and draws have

gone up to 29 percent. Prior to the lockdown, over 43 percent of matches ended with the home team victorious.

That will perhaps not be a problem when Arsenal and Manchester City face off tonight, with their stadiums usually having the atmosphere of a library, but it will affect teams lower down the ladder -- whose supporters are less 'prawn sandwich brigade' -- such as in the earlier kick-off, when Aston Villa face Sheffield.

Lessons can be learnt elsewhere as well, such as in Italy, where Maurizio Sarri was unimpressed by his side's showing on their return to football in the Coppa Italia, commenting that the players 'faded after 30 minutes' and that the situation was 'worse than in pre-season'.

If those observations were made by the veteran following a clash as important as the

semifinal of a tournament, the Premier League will not be able to pride itself on providing 'the most entertaining brand of football' that it claims when most of its teams -- barring those in the race for the top four -- have nothing to play for. Sarri also had another cautionary tale, saying that he had been overzealous with the five substitutions, thereby disrupting the flow of the game.

With Liverpool on top by an unbelievable 25-point margin, needing just two wins from their remaining fixtures to secure the title, some may question why the league has restarted at all. But with losses already amounting to over 500 million pounds and some projecting it to climb over a billion, 'Project Restart' became almost the need of the hour. Whether it will pay off on the field is another question altogether.

## Day signs two-year extension

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) retained the services of Jamie Day as head coach of the national team for the next two years.

The 40-year-old British national signed the contract online yesterday, just over a month after his previous contract expired on May 15.

However, the two-year contract with Jamie will come into the effect two months later, from August 14, as BFF wants Jamie to resume work from the middle of August following the coronavirus pandemic that forced FIFA and AFC to suspend its World Cup and Asian Cup qualifiers campaigns, as well as club competitions while the various football associations also halted their domestic competitions.

"I just want to confirm I have agreed to a new two-year deal as the head coach and am really looking forward to working with BFF again. I am obviously excited about getting back and working with the national team players," Jamie said in a video message sent by the BFF yesterday.

"I am now looking to developing and progressing further as a national team. We have four tough games [of World Cup and Asian Cup Qualifiers] in October and November but ones we are really looking forward to, and I can't wait to get back with the boys in the camp and get them fit and ready for the games," added Jamie, who has been in charge of the boys in red and green for the last two years on the basis of one-year contracts.

Ahead of the World Cup Qualifiers, Jamie wants to start the national camp from August 22. "It's an exciting year. I'm looking forward with delight now that we have agreed to a new deal and now hopefully we can get ball rolling to get the players back [into football] and have a really good year with results," said Jamie.

"We have signed a contract with Jamie on a virtual [platform] and the contract remains almost the same as last year's contract, but the vacations have been reduced in the new one," said BFF general secretary Abu Nayem Shohag, adding that the national teams committee will sit today to discuss the different issues.



## Sarri targets first Juventus trophy

AFP, MILAN

Maurizio Sarri takes on his former club Napoli in Wednesday's Italian Cup final looking for his first trophy as Juventus coach days before Serie A resumes after a three-month shutdown.

Juventus are chasing a record-extending 14th Italian Cup against five-time winners Napoli in Rome, after the Turin giants' four-year cup-winning streak was ended last season.

Sarri took over at Juventus one year ago after a season with Chelsea.

## 'Staging T20 WC this year is unrealistic'

AFP, SYDNEY



Staging the Twenty20 World Cup in Australia this year is "unrealistic" in the midst of a global coronavirus pandemic, Cricket Australia chairman Earl Eddings admitted Tuesday.

The tournament is scheduled to take place from October 18 to November 15, and officials have previously said they are planning for it to proceed on those dates.

But with many global borders still shut due to virus-related travel restrictions, Eddings conceded that was looking increasingly unlikely.

"While it hasn't been formally called off this year, or postponed, trying to get 16 countries into Australia in the current world, where most countries are still going through COVID spiking, I think it's unrealistic, or it's going to be very, very difficult," he told reporters.

Eddings said Cricket Australia had put forward a number of options to the International Cricket Council (ICC).



Although sport around the world is only now re-emerging after being halted for three months because of the coronavirus pandemic, the Bangladesh national football team have been given a strict prescription on how to maintain fitness during the lockdown by coach Jamie Day. Midfielder Sohel Rana has had the privilege of getting his workouts done at the Abahani ground in Dhanmondi as he has been staying at the club dormitory since the shutdown began in March and he continued to work in line with instructions. Bangladesh are supposed to resume their World Cup and Asian Cup Qualifiers on October 8, when they play host to Afghanistan, before travelling to Qatar to play their away match against the defending Asian champions on October 13. Although Sohel was a fair distance away, he did not have the field to himself as some Somali students from Daffodil University were also playing at the same ground.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

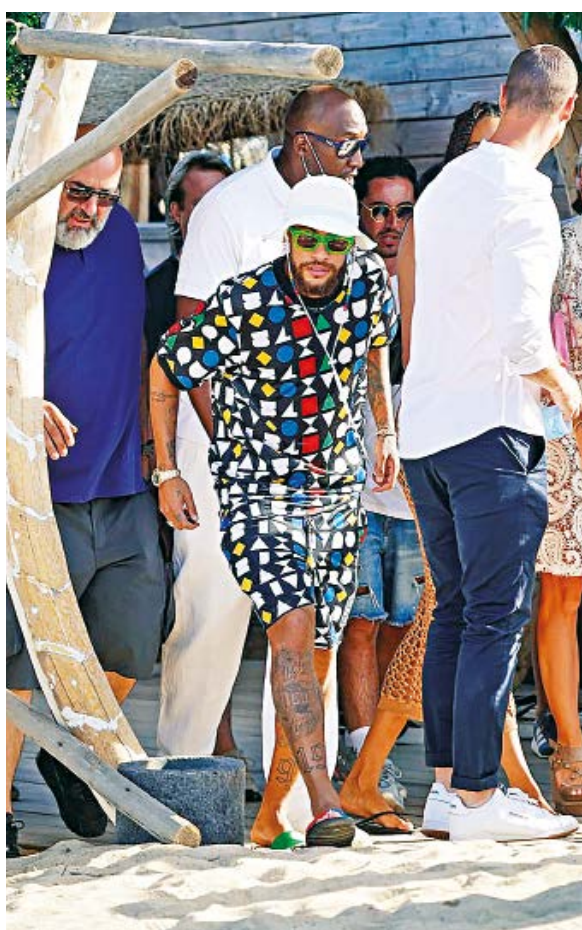


PHOTO: COLLECTED

PSG talisman Neymar could not resist sneaking out to the beach, the day after returning to Paris following a three-month stay in his native Brazil.

## From badminton to cricket

While much fandom surrounds Bangladesh's male cricketers, the story is not yet the same for women cricketers who have nonetheless been growing in stature on the international arena. Since the halt in cricketing activities The Daily Star has been talking to women cricketers to learn stories of their early days. In today's instalment, we talk to batter Sharmin Akhter, who scored the first ever half-century for the country against Ireland during their World Cup qualifier fixture in 2011.

MOSTAFA SHABUJ

Most cricketers usually dream of playing cricket on the biggest stage due to their admiration for someone who has excelled in the sport.

It is also usual to see a cricketer discovered by some local or international coach after an excellent display in a local tournament. However, Bangladesh opener Sharmin Akhter's cricketing journey is different as the right-handed batter's cricketing ability was first noticed by a local coach when she was playing a different sport.

"I once participated in a local badminton tournament when I was in the seventh or eighth grade. A lot of people, including some local cricket coaches, also used to come and watch those tournaments. One such coach, Bablu bhai, after seeing me play asked me, "You seem to have good strength in your hands.



Would you like to play cricket?" I agreed and started going to the stadium to practise. But after practising cricket for a few days with the boys, I kind of lost interest," said Sharmin, who hails from Gaibandha.

Having come to cricket from a different sport, Sharmin's interest for the game was yet to grow. That was soon to change as Sharmin

recalled the time she was first fascinated by the cricket.

"In 2008, I went for a trial at the BKSP in Savar after coming to know about it from Bablu bhai. Just as I entered the BKSP premises, I saw a number of girls and boys, wearing white jerseys, divided into two teams and playing cricket. I found the environment to be very appealing and that is when I

decided that I have to get admitted here," said the 24-year-old.

Sharmin had impressed during the trial and got herself admitted at the BKSP in 2008. But she still had a long way to go. And according to her, it was the environment in BKSP that made her realise that she too can make it big and take up cricket as a profession.

"Rashed sir in BKSP taught me everything about cricket. It was Rashed sir who had instilled in me the idea that cricket can be taken up as a profession and can be a way of achieving greatness in life.

"Actually, BKSP was the basic foundation of my cricketing career. I don't think I would have made it this far had it not been for BKSP. I think BKSP's environment, discipline and lifestyle is ideal for a girl to become a cricketer," explained Sharmin, who now only hopes to get back to the field as soon as possible and contribute for the country.

### WHAT TO WATCH

#### FACEBOOK

##### LA LIGA

Eibar v Athletic Club  
**Live from 11:30pm**  
Real Valladolid  
v Celta Vigo  
**Live from 11:30pm**  
Osasuna v Atletico Madrid  
**Live from 2:00am**  
(Thursday)

##### BUNDESLIGA

Star Sports Select 2  
Eintracht Frankfurt  
v Schalke  
**Live from 10:30pm**  
Borussia Dortmund  
v Mainz  
**Live from 12:30am**  
(Thursday)

##### ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Star Sports Select 1  
Aston Villa v  
Sheffield United  
**Live from 11:00pm**  
Man City v Arsenal  
**Live from 1:15am**  
(Thursday)