


We may target the Asia Cup for preparation: Akram

SPORTS REPORTER

 Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) cricket operations chairman Akram Khan reiterated that the unprecedented situation caused by the pandemic had rendered the board unable to make a move, which led to the postponement of the Sri Lanka tour. For now, the BCB may be looking to get back onto the training pitch with shorter-version cricket in mind.

“Right now, we have some plans in place and the coaches are ready to come in as well. You need more time to prepare for Tests and thus we couldn’t go to Sri Lanka. When the coronavirus pandemic first emerged, it caused panic, it took us some time to grasp the situation. We couldn’t just make a rushed decision and go there. The bowlers would need at least a month to get back bowling fitness,” Akram told The Daily Star yesterday. He clarified that when the cricketers do come back, a certain amount of time will have to be given to get back into shape if restart takes place with longer-version cricket.

Akram mentioned that they may target the Asia Cup as a way of bringing players back to the field for preparation. The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) are looking into the



‘Cannot accept not trying,’ read the caption on Bangladesh pacer Taskin Ahmed’s photo which he uploaded on his official Facebook page yesterday. Like Taskin, other national cricketers have been doing their bit to stay fit during this enforced break.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

possibility of hosting the Asia Cup in September or October but Sri Lanka remain the most likely venue given the coronavirus situation in the island-nation.

“We may target the Asia Cup since preparation for the shorter version is relatively easier. We have to discuss these things. I have

been in touch with the players and everyone is upset at not being able to play or train but the situation is not improving and that is a cause for anxiety,” he said.

BCB are looking at the probability of starting to get into gear after Eid. There is doubt regarding whether getting the players back onto the

field without a set target would benefit anyone but at the same time Akram acknowledged that doing exercises at home is a lot different that training on the field. “There is a whole lot of difference in being able to train on the field compared to maintaining fitness at home. It’s very hard to cover that gap,” he said.

“Some players requested individual training before Eid but they could not practice as the situation became difficult. We will resume as soon as the situation becomes normal, hopefully after Eid,” he added.

The situation in countries like Australia and New Zealand have enabled them to restart cricketing activities earlier than most. England will play the first bilateral series since the pandemic when they take on the West Indies at home next week. However, the situation in South Africa has not improved and, on Wednesday, Cricket South Africa announced that cricket would be returning with a three-team domestic tournament from July 18.

Akram reiterated that with not much possibility of international cricket on the horizon, focus should be on restructuring domestic cricket. “We should have a serious look about restructuring domestic cricket since we may have to do without international cricket for a while,” he said.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

What about the rest?

ANISUR RAHMAN



Professional football has resumed in different parts of the world in the new normal but it is uncertain when football will recommence in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) already closed the 2019-20 season without completing the major leagues due to ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. As the days progress, the situation is becoming dreadful for many football professionals for whom the sport is their bread and butter.

Similar to the difference in terms of payment between top players and the rest, of whom the number is huge, there are also differences between some top-ranked coaches and the others. While the top coaches were bemoaning missing out on their professional activities, the rest were crying for their livelihood.

Only a few top coaches [only seven local coaches out of 13 clubs work in the Bangladesh Premier League] receive handsome payments from the BPL outfits each season but the rest in other leagues get insignificant payments and they have to bank on coaching different teams of different leagues in a single season to secure their livelihoods. But the fallout from the Covid-19 outbreak has put them in dire straits.

“We are also losers, but a bit lucky to receive a few instalments of the contracts before the cancellation of the league. The big damage is that I can’t train players. Coaching is a spiritual matter for me and coaching players is bigger than money for me,” said Sheikh Russel KC coach Saiful Bari Titu.

“Coaches sometimes face such situations when they are terminated or can’t get any suitable contract in a season. As a coach, I want to see this gap as a usual one. I think the players are in bigger trouble than coaches, not only financially but also performance-wise, with no game for nearly four months,” said Sheikh Jamal coach Shafiqul Islam Manik.

“I don’t know what I would have done if I was not paid 50 per cent of

my agreed amount two weeks before the league was suspended in the middle of March,” said Muktijoddha Sangsad coach Abdul Kaiyum Sentu. “But I am missing the coaching.”

But the tales of the other less fortunate coaches have a different tone altogether. “Everything went wrong after the cancellation of the season. Like me, many professional coaches cover family expenses. I have earned only Tk 70,000 this year by coaching an Army team in Cumilla for one month and now I am running my family with support from my brothers,” said Masud Ahmed Jahangir.

Coach Rezaul Haque Jamal said: “I don’t know anything other than coaching football, so it is tough to change profession after 20 years. It is our bread and butter. We are often deprived of payments as per contracts but still continue because of our love towards this game.”

Jamal said that his closest friends from home and aboard were helping financially as he could not earn anything this season, although last season he earned about Tk 2 lakh from a BCL team.

“The coaches are not paid well in the lower divisions and professional coaches have to work for two or three clubs of different leagues each season to run the family. Coronavirus shattered all my plans this season. Now it is very tough to survive in such a situation,” Monowar Hossain Moina, who received 20 percent of his contract from Youngmen’s Fakirerpool Club despite the cancellation of BCL.

Moina added that he sought financial help from relatives and friends to meet his family’s expenses. Moina and Jamal were frustrated due to the lack of initiative from BFF to help struggling coaches when the Bangladesh Cricket Board, Bangladesh Hockey Federation and many other federations have come forward to help their respective players and coaches who are suffering financially.



A howler from goalkeeper Tim Krul gifted Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang his 50th Premier League goal as Arsenal thumped Norwich City 4-0 at the Emirates on Wednesday, pushing the Canaries closer to relegation. Aubameyang teed up Granit Khaka for the second after a flowing move before killing the game off himself with his second goal in the 67th minute. The Gabonese said he was proud of his goal-scoring record, adding that discussions with the club about signing a new contract were ongoing. “We’ll talk with the club and we’re going to see what’s going to happen, but first of all I’m really focused on the games and the end of the season, so we’ll see.”

PHOTO: REUTERS

No Dukes, CA to use Kookaburra

AFP, Sydney

Australia on Thursday announced plans to ditch the English Dukes ball in domestic cricket and revert to using the traditional Kookaburra for the next Sheffield Shield season.

Cricket Australia introduced the Dukes ball in 2016 and they were used in the second half of each Shield season to try to accustom players to conditions in England, where Australian batsmen had often struggled.

Dukes balls tend to have a more pronounced seam, enabling them to swing further and for longer when new than the Australian-made Kookaburras.

Cricket Australia’s head of operations Peter Roach said reverting to the Kookaburra was the right move at this time.

Long way to go, admits Lampard

AFP, London



Frank Lampard said Chelsea’s capitulation to lose 3-2 at relegation threatened West Ham on Wednesday is a sign of how much work he still has to do to make the Blues title contenders once more. A 10th league defeat of the season leaves Chelsea just two points clear of Manchester United and Wolves in the race for a place in the top four.

“I wouldn’t say it is the story of our season because it’s been a good season, but there have been so many of these moments,” said Lampard. “The players in those moments have to show an extra mentality to see a game through like this when you have a lot of domination.”

After a 2-1 victory over Manchester City last week that sealed the title for Liverpool and the signings of Timo Werner and Hakim Ziyech, Chelsea have been touted as title contenders to City and Liverpool next season. However, Lampard believes his side have to be far more consistent than they have shown during his first season in charge.

“I’ve seen us play great games, but I also have seen opportunities to close a gap or move into third wasted. That’s the difference at the minute and shows how much work we’ve got to do.”

Just a second win in 12 games takes David Moyes’s men up to 16th, three points clear of the relegation zone. West Ham’s win was the first for any side in the bottom five in 30 games since the Premier League’s restart.

“We’d be lying if we said we weren’t looking at the results (of the other sides),” added Moyes. “I didn’t think we had been as bad as our results suggested.”

The controversial VAR call came at 0-0 when Antonio was adjudged to be interfering with goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga’s line of vision from an offside position on the floor when Soucek swept the ball home from a corner.

“I really dislike VAR,” said Antonio. “It’s gone against us so many times. Today it didn’t stop us, we keep going and we got the victory.”

Moments later it got even worse for the hosts as Christian Pulisic was chopped down by Issa Diop and Willian confidently dispatched the spot-kick.

Djokovic donates €40,000

AGENCIES

Tennis World No. 1 Novak Djokovic, who along with his wife Jelena have tested negative, donated more than 40,000 euros to a Serbian town badly affected by the pandemic, local media reported Wednesday.

His media team said Thursday that they have tested negative, 10 days after announcing they had contracted the disease.

The player tested positive for the virus after playing in an exhibition series he organized in Serbia and Croatia amid the pandemic. No social distancing was observed at the matches.

The 33-year-old Djokovic donated the money to Novi Pazar, in Serbia’s southwest, to help it fight a growing outbreak of the disease, the SportKlub TV sports channel reported.

The town declared a state of emergency in late June due to the spread of the respiratory disease.

After restricting the first outbreak of COVID-19 in early May, Serbia is now reporting a fresh surge, logging more than 200 cases daily recently compared to around 50 a month ago.

The last of the 3Ws departs for a heavenly reunion

AGENCIES

Legendary batsman Everton Weekes, the last of the famed West Indies ‘Three Ws’, died Wednesday at the age of 95 and was hailed as “a founding father” of the sport in the Caribbean.

“Our hearts are heavy as we mourn the loss of an icon. A legend, our hero, Sir Everton Weekes. He was literally a founding father of our cricket. May he rest in peace,” tweeted Cricket West Indies.

Weekes was the last of a legendary trio of cricketing knights, known as the ‘Three Ws’, who oversaw the rise of West Indies cricket after the Second World War.

Frank Worrell, Everton Weekes and Clyde Walcott were all born within 18 months, and within three miles of each other in Barbados - and were even delivered by the same midwife.

All three made their debuts in early 1948 against England, were the middle-order mainstays of the great West Indies side of the 1950s - and were all subsequently knighted for services to cricket.

Weekes still holds the record for consecutive Test centuries, making five in a row in his first



The 3Ws monument dedicated to the memory of three great West Indies cricketers -- Sir Frank Worrell, Sir Clyde Walcott and Sir Everton Weekes -- can be found in the park opposite the 3Ws Oval in Barbados.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

year of international cricket - four against India and one against England. His famous streak might have been extended to six had he not been run out, controversially, for 90 in Madras. He played 48 Tests, scoring 4,455 runs.

Worrell and Walcott, who died in 1967 and 2006 respectively, are buried at the 3Ws Stadium just outside Bridgetown, Barbados and a plot has been left vacant for their long-time teammate should

his family choose to accept it.

Former West Indies captain Jeffrey Stollmeyer described Weekes as “a five-foot six-inch bundle of muscle”. “There was no nonsense about Weekes, no tomfoolery. Once on the job, he was purposeful. His business was to score runs,” said Stollmeyer.

“Playing strokes was the game he knew and loved best, and unless circumstances warranted discretion, Weekes would produce

his smashing square cut, slashing cover drive, resounding hook and forceful on-drive for all to enjoy.”

“Of the Ws, Weekes was probably the most ruthless run-compiler, and his compact build and high-scoring performances inevitably invited comparisons with George Headley,” wrote Denis Compton, one of the great England batsmen of the era.

Weekes, then 23, had been picked to play in the first three Tests of the 1948 home series against a weakened MCC (England) team led by Gubby Allen but with a top score of 36 he was omitted for the fourth Test.

But when Headley withdrew through injury, Weekes was summoned. He arrived midway through the first day after the journey from Barbados and a day later crashed an England attack that included Allen, Maurice Tremlett and Jim Laker for 141, leading to a 10-wicket win.

“I have seen them all since Victor Trumper and including [Don] Bradman,” said England opener George Gunn who was 71 at the time having played first-class cricket between 1902 and 1932. “I have never seen a more brilliant array of strokes nor heard the ball so sweetly struck.”