



AC Milan forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic lets out a roar after scoring one of his two goals during their 2-1 win over Sassuolo on Tuesday. The 38-year-old Swede has scored seven goals and recorded four assists in 15 appearances since joining the Rossoneri on a free transfer from LA Galaxy in January and has helped revive the club's fortunes.

PHOTO: AC MILAN

Ibra driving Milan resurgence

AFP, Milan

Luis Muriel came off the bench to score the only goal as Atalanta beat Bologna 1-0 in a fiery Serie A clash on Tuesday to move back second behind leaders Juventus.

Muriel struck just after an hour as Atalanta extended their unbeaten run to 15 games to move six points behind Juventus, and two ahead of third-placed Inter Milan.

Swedish star Zlatan Ibrahimovic turned back the clock with a double as AC Milan beat 10-man 2-1 Sassuolo to move fifth ahead of Roma and Napoli and into the Europa League berths.

Atalanta had won six successive games since the league resumed after the coronavirus lockdown before drawing 2-2 with Juventus, and were held 1-1 at Verona last time out.

The Bergamo side have 74 points this season with three games to play,

SERIE A STANDINGS (TOP FIVE)

TEAM	P	W	D	L	GD	PTS
JUVENTUS	34	25	5	4	36	80
ATALANTA	35	22	8	5	51	74
INTER	34	21	9	4	38	72
LAZIO	34	21	6	7	32	69
MILAN	35	17	8	10	11	59

overtaking their previous best haul of 72 during the 2016-17 season.

Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini was banished from the sidelines after a spat with counterpart Sinisa Mihajlovic before the break, with the Bologna boss receiving a yellow card.

It was the second red card in recent weeks for Gasperini who has been showing signs of frayed nerves before his side meet Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League last night next month.

"I didn't deserve to be expelled," fumed Gasperini afterwards. "But let's talk about the match.

"We're looking for consistency

on the pitch, then we'll have 12 days later to choose what kind of work to do to prepare for the Champions League."

Bologna, in tenth, battled after their 5-1 defeat against AC Milan last time out with Musa Barrow missing a double chance against his parent side.

SERIE A TOP FIVE SCORERS

Cristiano Ronaldo (Juventus)	30
Ciro Immobile (Lazio)	30
Romelu Lukaku (InterMilan)	21
Francesco Caputo (Sassuolo)	19
Joao Pedro (Cagliari)	18

Muriel came off the bench after the break and picked up a cross from fellow Colombian Duvan Zapata to score his 18th goal this season and 11th off the bench.

Juventus can seal the title with a win over 16th-placed Udinese, but it depends on Inter Milan, who are eight points behind the champions,

failing to beat Fiorentina at the San Siro on Wednesday.

Outside the Champions League places, Stefano Pioli's Milan extended their unbeaten run since the return with a seventh win in nine games.

"I was already seeing the team improve before the lockdown, then we grew a lot," said Pioli, who has been given a two-year contract extension until June 2022.

"We're doing good things, but it is not over yet," added Ibrahimovic. "We are still in the running to reach our goal. Fifth place is what we want, but the qualifiers are fine too."

Ibrahimovic nodded in Hakan Calhanoglu's cross after 19 minutes and added a second just before the break.

The 38-year-old, who helped Milan to their last Serie A title back in 2011, savoured scoring more than one goal in a Serie A game for the first time in eight years.

Time for Tigers to start stirring?

NABID YEASIN



Since the postponement of the Dhaka Premier League (DPL) in mid-March in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, uncertainty is all that has swirled around Bangladesh cricket.

From the postponements of five bilateral series to cricketers being holed up in their homes, everything had come to an unprecedented standstill.

There have however been developments in the past few days with a number of cricketers resuming individual training -- a test run being monitored by the BCB -- following the board's decision to make training facilities available for interested cricketers. The ray of hope for resumption brightened on Monday, when BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury cleared the order of priorities regarding possible upcoming tours and series.

Will Bangladesh be able to return to the field this year? Nothing is yet certain, but going by what the BCB said, a return to cricket now seems more imminent and the players can at least now see a clearer picture, if not having a specific set target in mind while training.

"Actually, we do not have much time if we plan to resume cricket this year. There are a few steps. A few cricketers have already started practising individually. So, the next major step will involve how we can bring all the players or at least the national cricketers back to the field," Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, who worked at the BCB in many capacities before resigning last year, said.

"It may not be possible to immediately start playing cricket, but if we can get players together then they can do fitness work like running and practising batting and bowling by rotation. The next challenge would be creating a secure environment for players who return to training and enabling them to do skills training or play practice matches, maintaining safety measures," said Fahim.

Even though the cricketers had been maintaining fitness on their own or by following the BCB-made workout plans at their homes for the past few months, the biggest concern for players has been their skills training that they missed out on during the enforced break.

Experienced cricket coach Mohammad Salahuddin said the most important thing for the players now is to return to proper training and for the board to ensure a safe environment.

"Players never forget their skills. They may however take some time to regain their rhythm. It has been a long time since everything was halted. The most important thing now is to return to full-fledged training. I believe that the BCB is capable of maintaining everything and of creating a bio-secure environment for at least the national players. And I think there is no point being afraid anymore as players need to adapt to the situation and get back to training. So, there is no point in waiting anymore," said Salahuddin.

Even national selector Habibul Bashar asked the players not to dwell on the negatives and to just return to playing whenever the opportunity of playing a series or tournament arrives.

"It is now just important to start playing. I don't want to ponder on the negatives like not having proper preparation or not playing cricket for a long time. If we get the chance to play then that will be the biggest positive for us. I think we should be positive about it and start playing whenever we get the opportunity," said Bashar.

With the BCB now actively thinking about resuming cricket and given the hurried nature in which developments may occur amid the pandemic, the one certainty amid all the ambiguity is that the players have to start thinking about training as if matches are just around the corner.



Day seeks a glimpse into booters' psyche

ANISUR RAHMAN

Footballers have been confined to their respective homes for four months since the coronavirus outbreak in mid-March and players, especially those in the national team, have been adhering strictly to the training schedule set by national team coach Jamie Day following the announcement of the resumption of joint qualifiers for 2022 World Cup and 2023 Asian Cup.

The booters have been regularly posting videos and photographs to a WhatsApp group closely monitored by Day. Ahead of the start of national camp from August 7 at the Sara Resorts in Gazipur, Day last week asked all national players to fill up a form containing numerous questions, including what they believe their strengths, weaknesses and motivations to be alongside family and other information.

The players submitted their answers by the July 17 deadline as Day was very eager to get information. The 40-year-old discussed how to fill up the forms with his players and requested them to communicate with local coach Masud Parvez Kaiser if anyone had trouble.

"It was interesting for me to answer those questions," Tapu Barman told The Daily Star. "I think the coach will analyse our mental strength, weaknesses and the weakness towards our family because we have to stay away from our family for four months due to the World Cup Qualifiers. Jamie wants to know everything before the start of training so that he can take proper steps player-by-player during the training camp."

The centre-back informed that a proper mindset, tactical knowledge, compassion, control over body and ball, long throws, long passes and headers were his strengths while laziness, physical

fitness, impatience and a short temper were his weakness.

The lad from Narayanganj also mentioned his motivation for playing football, citing self-determination, family inspiration, public expectations, internal impetus and the achievements of many successful footballers.

However, goalkeeper Ashraf Islam Rana provided three answers for every questions. "I think the mental power, self-confidence and hard work are my major strengths while operating with my left foot, judging crosses and desserts are my weaknesses.

Rana's motivation for playing is to become a member of a SAFF Championship-winning team, helping the national team rise up in the FIFA rankings to between 150 and 160 and seeing the country's football become the most popular sport within his playing career.

Like Tapu and Rana, all other players answered the questions and Jamie now has all the necessary information and he can identify the areas he need to emphasise.

"We spoke to the players so we could assess how they were feeling and what their aspirations are for the future," Jamie told

The Daily Star about the questionnaire's purpose. "We can set targets for each player throughout the year which will hopefully help them improve," said Jamie.

Assistant coach Masud Parvez Kaiser explained further: "It is part of team building. It also has a psychological aspect. We believe the players filled it up after thinking a lot. So when they wrote down their strongest as well as weakest points, they must remember to improve their weakest points in the future. This initiative will boost up the players to overcome their respective weaknesses and become stronger," Kaiser said, adding that another reason behind it was to keep the players' focus on football.



Mbappe commits future to PSG

AFP, Paris



Paris Saint-Germain captain Thiago Silva waves to the adoring crowd prior to his last appearance for the French champions at the Parc des Princes in a friendly match against Celtic on Tuesday. The 35-year-old Brazilian is expected to leave the club soon and end a 12-year journey with Le Parisiens.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Kylian Mbappe said on Tuesday he would remain with French champions Paris Saint-Germain next season "whatever happens" despite constant speculation over his future.

"I'm here. I'm part of the project for a fourth year," Mbappe, 21, told Beln Sport during half-time of PSG's 4-0 win over Celtic in a friendly played in front of around 5,000 fans at the Parc des Princes. "The club's 50-year anniversary is an important one in the eyes of the club, the supporters, of everyone, so I will be here whatever happens."

"I'm going to try and bring back trophies with the team and give the best of myself," added Mbappe.

"Kylian has a contract with us, we're not ready to sell him. He is super important, he's a key player, our player. It's a gift to work with him," said PSG coach Thomas Tuchel.

"It's super. There's a really nice connection between him and Neymar. It makes it fun for everyone. It's a real strength for PSG. It's great like that."

Mbappe opened the scoring for PSG against the Scottish champions in the first minute after he was played in behind by Neymar. The Brazil added a second with on 25 minutes in PSG's final tune-up ahead of the French Cup final against Saint-Etienne on Friday. Ander Herrera made it 3-0 shortly after half-time and Pablo Sarabia grabbed a fourth with a sweetly-struck volley from Marco Verratti's lofted pass.

'The whole spectacle made me uneasy'

Archer's agony over ban and backlash

AGENCIES



Pacer Jofra Archer has been cleared to return to the England camp after his biosecure bubble breach, but admitted he has struggled to find motivation and lashed out at the attention his transgression has received.

Archer was ruled out of the second Test against the West Indies on the morning of the match after it was revealed he had breached England's strict biosecurity protocols by travelling to his home between the first and second Tests.

"We knew we had to go to Manchester via certain points. I didn't. To me, home is home. A safe place. I picked some stuff up, dropped some stuff off. It was no big deal," Archer wrote in his column with UK tabloid The Daily Mail.

Archer spent five days in isolation -- allowed out of his hotel room only for solitary fitness sessions -- but has rejoined the squad after twice testing negative for Covid-19.

"This whole week has been extremely tough



and to spend five days in isolation has given me a lot of thinking time on where I am at.

"To be stuck in a hotel room in Manchester was hard. You know you cannot focus on the game being played on the other side of the bedroom curtains and it was frustrating not being able to make an impact on the field.

"I found I was struggling for motivation in the circumstances when it came to returning to bowling in the nets.

"When I walked outside of my room for the first time since being placed into self-isolation ... I heard the cameras clicking with every single step I took.

"The whole spectacle made me feel uneasy ... I haven't committed a crime and I want to start feeling myself again."

Archer's comments come as England head coach Chris Silverwood ponders a headache for the deciding Test against the West Indies. England levelled the three-Test series 1-1 with a 113-run win at Old Trafford, with the third Test to be played at the same venue starting Saturday.

Silverwood now has a fully fit contingent of fast bowlers to choose from for the deciding Test, with Archer seen as a likely starter, creating a squeeze between Jimmy Anderson and Stuart Broad, while Mark Wood, Chris Woakes and Sam Curran have all staked claims over the two Tests.

"It's never easy, and you're always going to get push back, but you try to be as honest as possible," Silverwood said.