



Weightlifter Mabia Akter, who won gold in the 13th South Asian Games last year, is spending time practising at the Bangladesh Weightlifting Federation's gymnasium while PWD Club are practicing volleyball in the premises of the Khulna Stadium as sport is gradually stirring back to life in the country. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED/COLLECTED

Sport set to stir to life by year's end

ANISUR RAHMAN

As the country is gradually stirring back to life amid the threat of the coronavirus, the country's sports fraternity too seems to be preparing to wake up.

Sporting activities in the country had been halted from mid-March until the government lifted the suspension by allowing national federations to start the activities on a small scale in line with health safety guidelines on August 10. Athletes of a few sports - cricket, archery and shooting being the major ones - then returned to training on a small scale as part of preparation of the national teams.

The Bangladesh Hockey Federation completed a month-long training of junior players, which is supposed to resume in mid-October as part of preparations for the upcoming Asian Junior Hockey

Championship, while football suspended scheduled training for the national team after the deferral of World Cup Qualifiers.

Taekwondo was ahead of all sports, staging a poomse tournament early this month and the brave initiative has worked as an eye opener for other disciplines and most mainstream sports federations are planning to resume activities in November and December. Some federations have also taken the decision to hold national championships, tournaments and leagues.

The Bangladesh Weightlifting Federation held the 14th Cup tournament with the online participation of 14 clubs this month. Each club sent videos of athletes lifting weights and the federation later declared the winners after assessing the footage. The federation also kept its gymnasium open for national players to practise and also

provided assistance to different clubs to continue training.

"We have decided to start training in 20 districts from October 9 before holding the 26th senior national championship from December 9, though we have already completed the Kata competition for men's senior category online and the junior & cadet kata competitions are still being held virtually," said Bangladesh Karate Federation Vice-president Moazzem Hossain Sentu.

Bangladesh Wushu Federation general secretary Dulal Hossain said: "We are still observing the coronavirus situation cautiously but our players have been training individually. We are planning to hold the taolu competition in late November and take the final decision within next two weeks."

Bangladesh Athletic Federation has already announced the tentative date for the Junior

Athletic Championships on November 20-21 at Army Stadium where they also want to stage the national athletic championships on January 15-17.

Bangladesh Football Federation has also announced that the new season of the football league will start from December, having been forced to abandon the previous season after only six rounds. However, it also has plans to complete the Women's Football League by resuming it from November.

"Ahead of three proposed tournaments -- South Asian Junior & Cadet table tennis championships in February, Commonwealth Regional Junior & Cadet competition in March and World Women's Table Tennis Championships in March -- we are going to start training for three categories from October 15," said Bangladesh Table Tennis Federation Vice-president Hasan

Munir, adding that they are also planning to hold a ranking tournament before the Premier Table Tennis League in December.

National volleyball captain Horosit Bishwas said that 10 to 12 players alongside him had stated training in Khulna as the federation is thinking of staging the premier division league in December.

Bangladesh Wrestling Federation has however been on the back foot and are not getting positive responses because of the nature of the game, which is a close contact sport.

"We have issued a circular for the competitions from October 18 but the majority of teams don't want to participate because it is a game of close contact," said BWF general secretary Tabiur Rahman Palooan. "I think it is not possible before December but everything depends on the situation getting better."

Is there a plan for domestic cricket?

MAZHAR UDDIN



"Do you know when domestic cricket is going to start again?"-- this is the one question that reporters covering Bangladesh cricket have been asked by domestic cricketers almost every other day over the past month or so.

Unfortunately there is no positive reply to the question, thanks to the lack of initiative from the cricket board.

Although the government lifted nationwide shutdown on May 31, prompting millions to head back to work, there are few professionals who have been unable to resume. Among those professionals, sports people are the foremost.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is desperate to get the national team back to international cricket through the tour of Sri Lanka and the BCB thinktank is working in earnest to make the tour happen, but unfortunately there is no apparent initiative on their part to start domestic cricket.

BCB president Nazmul Hassan did announce that the board would focus on starting domestic cricket after rejecting preliminary health protocol by Sri Lanka Cricket for touring the island nation, but there is still no definite planning or discussion being made by the board on how they would resume local cricket.

None of the BCB officials are sure of how they would maintain health protocol and provide a safe environment to resume domestic cricket. The officials were reluctant to make any comment on the issue.

It is true that the coronavirus situation in Bangladesh is still alarming and with the imminent threat of a second wave this winter, it will be a huge challenge for the BCB to tackle stage a return for domestic cricket.

There were talks that the BCB might arrange a tournament involving the national team, the A team and the High-Performance squad with participation of around 50 to 60 cricketers if the Tigers' tour of Sri Lanka eventually got cancelled. However according to sources, BCB is still keen to get the tour going. So what will happen to domestic cricketers if the Bangladesh team eventually tour Sri Lanka?

Even if the BCB organises a tournament with top players, it will not help the remaining 150-something domestic cricketers who would not be able to make it to the tournament and will have to sit idle with uncertainty.

The majority of the clubs of the Dhaka Premier League, which was halted in mid-March after the first round due to the pandemic, have their constraints and financial issues for not being able to resume the league at the moment.

With the uncertainty and financial constraints, life is getting more and more difficult for domestic cricketers and hence the BCB must act quickly to regain their faith.

'It's too cold'

REUTERS



Gone are the queues of spectators and gone is the sun as the French Open kicked off in underwhelming fashion on Sunday with persistent drizzle and a chill wind sweeping the almost-empty Roland Garros grounds.

Former world No. 1 Victoria Azarenka complained about the playing conditions amid light drizzle and low temperatures during her 6-1, 6-2 first-round victory.

The US Open runner-up, who entered court Suzanne Lenglen wearing a thick pink puffer jacket, and her opponent Danka Kovinic walked off the court after play was suspended with Belarusian Azarenka leading 2-1.

"No, it's eight degrees, I live in Florida, I'm used to hot weather," a furious Azarenka told the supervisor who asked her to wait on court until a decision was made on if the match should continue.

Speaking to her opponent from Montenegro, 10th seed Azarenka, who next faces either Venus Williams or Slovakia's Anna Karolina Schmiedlova, said: "Do you want to wait on court?"

"No," Kovinic replied.

"No, it's ridiculous, it's too cold. What's the point? Sitting here like ducks," said Azarenka, who wore a wind jacket on court and said she was worried about sliding on a court made heavier by the persistent drizzle.

The players returned after a delay

of about 50 minutes and Azarenka immediately broke her opponent's serve before wrapping up victory in front of nine spectators.

Azarenka said the interruption should have been better managed.

"I think it's very tricky at the moment to have these conditions. So definitely not going to sit here and complain, but sometimes I think there are smarter ways to handle situations.

"The unfortunate part sometimes with the French Open is that there is no communications with players or players



council," she added.

The French Open is usually played in May-June but this year's tournament was pushed back to late September due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The weather in Paris is therefore colder than normal for the Grand Slam event with the claycourt conditions much heavier and slower than the players are accustomed to.



Zinedine Zidane's (L) Real Madrid saw off a stiff challenge from Real Betis, but they needed a controversial penalty decision from VAR to bag the decisive goal on Saturday. There was no such trouble for Antonio Conte's Inter Milan, who left it late to seal a frantic 4-3 win over Fiorentina. Chelsea's Frank Lampard also benefitted from a controversial, if technically-correct, VAR decision against West Brom. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Comebacks, shocks and VAR: Big bosses survive tough night

AGENCIES



Fans around the world gathered in front of screens as they stepped into another weekend of league football and while there were no crowds, there was no shortage of drama and entertainment for those watching. Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, Frank Lampard, Antonio Conte and Zinedine Zidane all had a hard time securing favourable results on Saturday.

It all kicked off at Brighton, who hosted Manchester United in the Premier League, a game that was incredibly decided by the first goal in Premier League history to have been struck after the final whistle.

Brighton would have felt hard done by with just a point, having hit the woodwork a total of five times, but Neal Maupay was found to have handled the ball inside the box after a VAR review following the final whistle. Bruno Fernandes converted to secure a stunning 3-2 win.

Ole admitted that United had got away with one, joking afterwards: "First of all we have to be thankful Jose [Mourinho] isn't here to measure the goalposts, otherwise we'd have been in trouble."

The drama continued at The Hawthorns as West Bromwich



Albion found themselves 3-0 up against Chelsea's Chelsea inside 27 minutes. Mason Mount ignited a second-half comeback with a thundering effort in the 55th minute before Callum Hudson-Odoi added a second 15 minutes later.

Tammy Abraham tapped home a dramatic equaliser in extra time to salvage a point, although the ball hitting teammate Kai Havertz's arm shortly before the goal caused a furore. The rules, as they are interpreted in the Premier League currently, may be extremely harsh on defenders but they state that a handball will not be called against an attacking player unless it leads directly to a goal or assist.

"What do you want me to do now? Say what I want to say and get fined again?" Slaven Bilic fumed at the final whistle.

In Spain's La Liga, defending champions Real Madrid came away with three points against Real Betis in a five-goal thriller after a controversial penalty went their way following a lengthy review by VAR.

Manuel Pellegrini's side surged to a lead with a two-minute blitz, started by Aissa Mandi in the 35th minute. William Carvalho added the other, after Fede Valverde had opened the scoring.

It took Zidane's men just three minutes of the second half to draw level before Emerson was shown a straight red after a VAR review. VAR would again intervene in Real's favour, giving them what many labelled a 'soft' penalty that Sergio Ramos buried.

"When you are up against Real Madrid and VAR it is too much," Pellegrini said. "When you are

playing against Real Madrid and you concede a penalty and get a man sent off because of VAR it is very difficult. But I value how well we played when it was 11 against 11."

Zidane refused to be drawn in. "There's a referee and it's his job to review the plays. I think what happened today was fair," he said.

At the San Siro, Antonio Conte's Inter Milan had a tough start to their Serie A campaign but edged a 4-3 win against Fiorentina. The lead changed hands constantly, with Inter 1-0 down inside three minutes, 2-1 up after 52 minutes and 3-2 down again after 63 minutes until two quickfire goals, in the 87th and 89th minute from Romelu Lukaku and Danilo D'Ambrosio, gave the hosts a nail-biting win.

On a night when most big teams came away with something to show for their struggles, there was agony in Germany's WVK Arena as Borussia Dortmund fired blanks in a 2-0 defeat to Augsburg.

Dortmund, quietly hoping to pose a threat to Bayern Munich in the race for the Bundesliga, dominated the match. "I am very disappointed. It is difficult to accept this defeat. We dominated the game completely, had almost 80% possession, but sometimes that does not get you much. We started very well but we weren't precise enough, we played hastily."



Reigning Premier League champions Liverpool are left "wanting to strike back" after two defeats to Mikel Arteta's Arsenal. Jurgen Klopp admitted ahead of the two teams' meeting in the league at Anfield tonight. Although the German seemed in a better mood in practice, he is aware of the threat that Arsenal pose and adding to his worries is the possible absence of Thiago Alcantara, whose fitness had reportedly become a concern at the eleventh hour. Arteta, meanwhile, is looking to become the first Arsenal manager to win on a first trip to Anfield. PHOTO: COLLECTED