

SPORT



A few children play football on an empty street of Dhaka, near Motijheel yesterday, as the countrywide shutdown continues due to the coronavirus pandemic. Even though people are being implored to stay at home and maintain social distancing, not everyone is paying heed to the plea.

Football sponsors at a loss

AFP, Paris



With stadiums dark, match shirts folded in closets and most players confined at home, football's sponsors have lost all visibility and are growing restless.

European clubs are struggling to offer their 'partners' a return on their investments as sport grapples with the coronavirus pandemic.

"We're trying to do activities with our players for our sponsors, who are even more demanding since the lockdown. But it's very complicated because of the health crisis," one club marketing manager told AFP.

The stars, the surest way for sponsors to attract an audience, are at home, many back in their native countries. Worse, there are no games for them to play. Matches on TV display the brands on the team jerseys or around the pitch to millions of viewers.

At West Ham, one of the sponsors, high-risk finance company Bassett & Gold has just gone bankrupt, blaming the coronavirus crisis. Many sponsors are in sectors hit especially hard, such as airlines and hotel and restaurant chains. Some sponsors are beginning to cancel payments.

"It's quite obvious that having no more events, everything has to be suspended, it seems so logical to me. It's a case of force majeure," Marc Vanhove, the boss of the Bistro Regent restaurant chain, which sponsors the Bordeaux shirt, told AFP. The chain suspended its contract, which runs until 2023, he said, "until we have the dates for the resumption".

French hotel group Accor, PSG's main sponsor, left open the question of whether it would pay the full amount provided for in its contract (about 50 million euros a year), before saying two days later that it had honoured its commitments.

With matches cancelled and some broadcasters, notably in France, beginning to withhold payments, club finances are already strained.

Deloitte said the primary source of revenue for its top five clubs is commercial and averages 49 percent of total revenue. Lower down the Deloitte table, the proportions change. For the clubs placed 16 to 20, 65 percent of revenue comes from broadcasting.

One market expert, who did not wish to be named, said that the risks of deserting can outweigh the financial costs, especially for companies "who are doing well" in sectors that are seen to be less affected, such as technology or the food industry.

Chappell draws 'lessons from Tendulkar, Redpat'

PTI



Former Australia captain Ian Chappell has compared the ongoing pandemic with a five-day game, saying the need of the hour is to display patience, determination and initiative to tide over the crisis.

Chappell cited the example of two "influential innings" of Sachin Tendulkar and fellow Australian opener Ian Redpat, which according to him displayed all the three qualities needed to bail out of the current situation.

"With the Covid-19 pandemic biting hard, citizens of all countries are being asked to display - among other attributes - patience, determination, and a bit of initiative. These are qualities essential to playing Test cricket at a high level," Chappell wrote in a column for espncricinfo.com.

"To highlight the point I've chosen two particularly influential innings. The first one is a Sachin Tendulkar masterpiece in Chennai in 1998 [against Australia]. His brilliant second-innings 155 won the Test, but it wouldn't have happened without the initiative displayed by Tendulkar in the lead-up to the series."

Chappell rates that innings as one of the best of Tendulkar and said the master blaster's initiative and determination stood out.

The other innings which stood out in Chappell's memory in this context was that of Redpath against the West Indies at the MCG in 1976.

"Combine Tendulkar's initiative and determination with Redpath's patient courage and you have some of the qualities required to survive this devastating pandemic," the 76-year-old signed off.

Moss dies at age 90

AFP, London

Motorsport great Stirling Moss has died aged 90 following a long illness, the British driver's wife announced Sunday.

"It was one lap too many," Susie Moss told Britain's Press Association. "He just closed his eyes."

Although Moss never won the Formula One title, he finished runner-up four times and third three times. In an era where it was common for drivers to race in different disciplines, a 14-year career saw Moss win 212 of the 529 races he entered. In Formula One, Moss won 16 Grand Prix.

But such was the

enduring fame of the debonair driver that, for decades afterwards, the rhetorical phrase "Who do you think you are, Stirling Moss?" was supposedly the standard question all British policemen asked speeding motorists.

"Yes a policeman did once ask me," Moss told the Daily Telegraph in a 2012 interview. "But I couldn't work out if he was taking the mick."

'In 1971, we could see the enemy'

EKUSH TAPADER

On February 26, 1971, with political turmoil at its peak and the two states -- East and West -- of the then Pakistan on the verge of civil war, a rebellious Roqibul Hasan, the only cricketer from the East amid the 10 other cricketers from the dominating West, was cheered when he walked onto the ground with a 'Joy Bangla' sticker on his bat to play for Pakistan in an unofficial Test against an International XI at the Dacca Stadium.

Roqibul could only make a solitary run in both innings, but the 18-year-old knew that he would have to fight a different kind of war to survive and keep his hopes of playing cricket in the future alive. He realised he would have to fight a war that was beyond bat and ball, a war that would last for the coming nine months and see the birth of a new nation: Bangladesh.

For those nine months, the

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ROQUIBUL HASAN

nation were halted as the whole country was at war, fighting for liberation. Fast forward 49 years and a lot of similarities can be found. For the past few weeks, all sporting events in the country and around the globe have been halted as the whole world fights one common enemy -- coronavirus.

Roqibul, who was one of those who fought and won the liberation war back in 1971 for the country, tried to identify the similarities and differences between the two struggles so far apart in the timeline while sharing his story with The Daily Star.

No sporting events were being held back in 1971 just as it is the scenario now. Then, many were confined indoors while others were

THE TRAVAILS OF AN ICC UMPIRE

Stranded at his ancestral village of Dangrol in India's Uttar Pradesh due to the nationwide lockdown, ICC international panel umpire Anil Choudhury is grappling with a communication nightmare and says he has to climb up trees in search of mobile network. "I'm here with my two sons since March 16. I was visiting the village after quite some time so I planned to stay for a week but then the lockdown was announced," Choudhury said. "The biggest problem is the network here. I can't talk to anyone or use the internet. To be able to do that I have to go outside the village, climb up a tree or go to the rooftop."

- AGENCIES



Ariful longs for home

ANISUR RAHMAN



Swimmer Ariful Islam could have caught a flight to Bangladesh before lockdown was enforced in France early last month, but the 21-year-old decided to stay back there in quarantine in a bid to keep his family members and others in Bangladesh safe from the coronavirus.

Ariful, a member of the national swimming team, has been in France since September, 2018 under the International Olympic Committee's scholarship. The Bangladesh Navy swimmer was preparing himself for the now-postponed Tokyo Olympics, but due to the postponement of the Games, Ariful's scholarship has also been extended by a year.

Ariful has been confined inside his apartment in Petit-Couronne of Rouen for the last 30 days along with four other swimmers from African countries. There were others though including a Syrian swimmer also under the IOC scholarships, who left the apartment just a day before the announcement of lockdown.

"I could have left France early last month before the lockdown but I didn't do so as it would have been bad for Bangladesh and my family had I carried the virus," Ariful told The Daily Star over phone from France.

"I'm bored at home as I was used to doing training every day. I wish I could return home to my mother, father, brothers and sister even though the situation in Bangladesh is deteriorating every day. But then again there is no scope of returning as all flights are closed," Ariful said.

The lad from Kishoreganj had a scare when a neighbour contracted COVID-19, but he kept himself calm.

"Last month, a woman got infected close to our building and I was a bit scared about the incident. May be she came back after being cured. The elderly citizens above 56 years in France are most affected by the coronavirus. We have to accept the current situation and stay strong to keep the virus away," said Ariful.

Even during these times, Ariful is keeping himself busy with cooking. "I go to the kitchen market once a week on government vehicle with government permission. Though I used to cook only on Saturdays and Sundays earlier, now I'm cooking every

day. And I have been cooking better and better," said the former BKSP student.

In the last South Asian Games in Nepal, Ariful won two silver medals and a bronze medal, thanks to the improvement in his timing during his one-and-a-half year's training in France. The swimmer claimed he has improved his 100m breaststroke timing to 1.20 minutes (SA Games timing) from 1.70 minutes (in 2018) while his 50m breaststroke timing has improved to 28.19 seconds from 30.2 seconds.

The swimmer informed that the IOC, Bangladesh Olympic Association and Bangladesh Swimming Federation are in regular contact with him while he is keeping in touch with his family and advising them to stay at home.

Ariful last came to Bangladesh at the end of December last year before leaving for France on February 2. He is planning to return home, subject to the improvement of the situations in both France and Bangladesh.



Players of Juventus FC v Real Madrid FC -- two Nicaraguan Premier League clubs -- bump fists before the match in Masaya, Nicaragua on Saturday. Even though sporting activities around the world have been cancelled due to Covid-19, Nicaragua remains one of the very few countries which is still continuing with the football league.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Roquibul Hassan batting against the touring International Eleven on 26th February, 1971 with the 'Joy Bangla' sticker on his bat.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

of the situation when I think about it at home. Maybe something similar to this happened during World War II. It is a great disaster that has taken control over the whole world. I have not witnessed anything like this and I would not want to ever again. I can fight enemies that I can see. But how can I fight the one I can't even see?

Maybe we will come up with a weapon to fight this but the human kind are incurring a huge loss in the meanwhile. Humanity will win but maybe at a huge cost," sighed Roqibul.

People find inspiration to fight through sport and hence it is more than just entertainment. There are a lot of instances of a team fighting back and winning even after being asked to follow on in a Test. And Roqibul, who played 15 first-class Tests, believed that the world would fight back and defeat the pandemic.

"We cannot be hopeless if we want to live. I fought during 1971 and I will fight again. I will say this on behalf of the athletes -- we will fight it. Sports people are fighters. They play the game to win according to the rules. We fight, go out and kick out the enemy," Roqibul ended with an inspiring message to the sports fraternity.