

SPORT



Sevilla's Argentinian midfielder Lucas Ocampos (R) celebrates with teammates after scoring the opening goal against Real Betis at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan stadium on Thursday night. Spain's La Liga finally returned after three months due to the coronavirus pandemic. PHOTO: REUTERS

Mueller, Lewandowski to miss potential title-clincher

APP, Berlin



Bayern Munich could secure an eighth straight Bundesliga title this weekend, but host Borussia Moenchengladbach on Saturday without suspended duo Thomas Mueller and Robert Lewandowski.

Bayern will be confirmed champions with a win on Saturday if second-placed Borussia Dortmund lose at relegation-threatened Fortuna Duesseldorf earlier in the day.

That scenario would give Hansi Flick's side an unassailable 10-point lead with three games remaining.

But Bayern are without Lewandowski, the league's top scorer this season with 30 goals, and Mueller, who is one short of the Bundesliga record of 21 assists in a single campaign.

"It's annoying, but we can't do anything about it," said Bayern coach Flick.

Thiago Alcantara is likely to replace Mueller, while winger Serge Gnabry could take Lewandowski's place up front if he is fit after a back injury.

Bayern proved they can score goals without Lewandowski by thumping Hoffenheim 6-0 in late February when the Polish striker was injured.

They had a scare in Wednesday's German Cup semi-final win over Eintracht Frankfurt, when Danny da Costa equalised for the visitors before Lewandowski sealed a 2-1 win with his 45th goal this season.

Mueller admitted Bayern were "tired", "worn out" and scrapped their way to victory in the first of three games in six days.

But they are still in the running to repeat their 2013 treble having beaten Chelsea 3-0 away in their

TV TIMES

FACEBOOK

La Liga

Espanyol v Alaves

Live from 6:00pm

Celta Vigo v Villarreal

Live from 9:00pm

Leganes v Real Valladolid

Live from 11:30pm

BUNDESLIGA

Star Sports Select 2

Dusseldorf v Dortmund

Live from 7:30pm

Bayern v Borussia M'gladbach

Live from 10:30pm

Star Sports Select 1

Wolfsburg v Freiburg

Live from 7:30pm

Champions League last-16 first leg before the competition was suspended in mid-March due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Fourth-placed Gladbach pulled off a shock 2-1 victory at Borussia Park when the sides met last December. But Marco Rose's side have been erratic of late, crushing Union Berlin 4-1 at home at the end of May before stumbling to defeat at Freiburg last weekend.

Rose hopes to include Swiss forward Breel Embolo, with the 23-year-old fit after an ankle knock.

At the foot of the table, fallen giants Werder Bremen face a crucial game at Paderborn in a battle of the bottom two. Florian Kohfeldt's Bremen are six points from safety in 17th and three off the relegation play-off place. Bremen, who were in the Champions League a decade ago, have spent more seasons in the top flight than any other club, but are running out of time.

PRESS CONFERENCE FROM 8,000 KMS AWAY

Beijing Guoan head coach Bruno Genesio gave a press conference Thursday from 8,000 kilometres away in his native France via mobile phone because he is locked out of China by coronavirus. The 53-year-old Genesio spoke to reporters in the Chinese capital via video call during an open training day for his team. A mobile phone was held by a Guoan staff member who translated Genesio's comments from French to Chinese for the media. "The team is training normally every day. Although the situation is very difficult now, we use new technical means and mobile phones to overcome all of this," Beijing News quoted the Frenchman as saying.

--APP



Moles vows to carry on despite amputated leg

APP, London

Afghanistan director of cricket Andy Moles plans to continue his career despite the "trauma" of having his leg amputated after being told he could otherwise lose his life.

Moles was with the Afghanistan team in Abu Dhabi, preparing for September's tour of Bangladesh, when he discovered the skin on the ball of his left foot had gone after a five-kilometre walk in 47 degrees Celsius heat.

That sparked an unfortunate chain of events including a separate injury to the former Warwickshire batsman's left little toe, which had to be amputated when Moles returned to South Africa, now home for the 59-year-old.

Worse followed, with Moles contracting the MRSA bug, resistant to antibiotics, in a Cape Town hospital and then being told he might die if his left leg was not amputated below the knee.

"A specialist came to see me on Saturday

4th April -- I'll always remember the date -- and he said we could keep on cutting the infected flesh away but it's just not going to get any better," Moles told the BBC.

"As difficult a decision as it may seem, it's actually quite simple. I said to him: 'I wouldn't expect you to tell me how to play a forward defensive, so I won't question your expertise as a surgeon.'

"It is traumatic. But there are thousands in the world that have got over this, and I'm going to be one of those people."

Now Moles intends to complete a 10km charity walk in support of a campaign for the Professional Cricketers' Trust, which provided him with funds for a new prosthetic leg.

Meanwhile Moles, who guided Afghanistan to their first World Cup in 2015, is determined to make a complete return to coaching.

"I haven't lost my brain or cricket knowledge. There's no need for me to be running around a field. I can hit catches, I can pass on messages and I can talk tactics. I don't see it being an issue at all."



BCCI calls off Zim tour

PTI, New Delhi

India's August tour of Zimbabwe was on Friday called off by the BCCI owing to the COVID-19 threat, which hasn't allowed national cricketers to even resume training.

The development comes a day after Sri Lanka announced that India's tour in June-July was postponed indefinitely.

"...Indian Cricket Team will not travel to Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe owing to the current threat of COVID-19," BCCI secretary Jay Shah said in a statement.

"India was scheduled to travel to the island nation from 24th June for three ODIs and as many T20Is and to Zimbabwe for a series comprising three ODIs starting 22nd August 2020."

Lisbon to host rest of CL?

APP, Berlin

The final stages of this season's interrupted Champions League will be played in Lisbon, with the final on August 22 or 23, German newspaper Bild reported on Friday.

The assertion by Bild follows reports by several other European media in recent days. An official announcement is expected when UEFA's Executive Committee meets by videoconference next Wednesday, June 17. Bild also reported that the Europa League is set to be moved to Germany, with matches being played in the region around Cologne.

This season's Champions League final was scheduled to take place in Istanbul at the end of May before the competition was suspended in mid-March in the last-16 stage because of the coronavirus pandemic. The Europa League final was scheduled for the Polish city of Gdansk.

In both competitions, all ties will be played as one-off matches from the quarterfinals onwards. Usually the quarter-finals and semi-finals are staged over two legs.

Four second-leg matches in the Champions League round of 16 are still to be played. According to Bild, those matches could be played on the weekend of August 8 and 9 before the quarterfinalists move to the Portuguese capital.

'Racial banter not acceptable'

APP, New Delhi

Former West Indies captain Daren Sammy said black athletes should not have to shrug off degrading words as "banter" after he discovered his nickname in the Indian Premier League had racial connotations.

Earlier this week, Sammy demanded an apology from his Sunrisers Hyderabad teammates who called him "kulu" in 2013 and 2014.

Sammy has dropped the idea of an apology, after hearing that the word can be used as a friendly nickname as well.

But he said "it doesn't take away the fact that certain words that are being used could come across as degrading because of the colour of your skin".

"Why must my people endure 400 years of slavery and still have to adapt? Why is it always the people of colour that have to adapt to oppression?" Sammy told ESPNcricinfo. "Why can't the other side change and see us differently? And just not do it. So, no, you cannot use something that is degrading to the colour of my skin and tell me to take it as banter."

Sammy urged the ICC to raise awareness of the fight against racism, giving it the same attention as its anti-corruption drive.

"We have anti-racism in the code of conduct of the ICC. You hear it every time it has been recited," said Sammy. "But to make it a subject of discussion -- like match-fixing and all these things are a subject that is given special attention."



A worker sanitises seats inside the Stadio San Paolo in Naples on Friday ahead of the Coppa Italia semifinal second leg tie between the home side Napoli and Inter Milan. With Juventus taking on Milan in the other semi on Friday night, top-tier football returned to the country after a break of three months. PHOTO: REUTERS

Booters warming up for camp

ANISUR RAHMAN

Footballers of the Bangladesh national team are slowly shrugging off the rust and warming up for individual training after the Asian Football Confederation recently announced World Cup qualifying fixtures in October and November.

The men in red and green are likely to resume their qualifying campaign against Afghanistan on October 8 at home before travelling to Qatar for an away match on October 13. Head coach Jamie Day asked every player to be mentally prepared for the camp following nearly three months at home due to the coronavirus pandemic.

As a professional footballer, I can't think of anything other than football, but to be honest, the current situation has forced everyone to think of himself

family members, relatives and others. All the national players now need to focus on physical and mental fitness and not think too much of the current situation, which will change one day," national team winger Saad Uddin told The Daily Star, adding that he has been training individually at home in Sylhet since the start of the shutdown.

Saad also believes the next two months are crucial. "Next two months are important for every player. If the players follow the programme given by Jamie Day, then the six-week training camp is good enough for recovery. But if we don't follow that schedule, it may become tough."

The Abahani player informed that the coach sent schedules for running, power-gym, etc and that the coach also advised them about their food and how much they should consume per day.

"The coach has been in touch with all



Ashraful Islam



Saad Uddin

the players for the last two to three months through WhatsApp group and providing us guidelines for training, food and other things. As we all are out of football at the moment, it is a big challenge for everyone to stay fit. If we can follow Jamie's programme, we can maintain 60 to 70 per cent fitness," national goalkeeper Ashraful Islam Rana told The Daily Star from Manikganj.

"After the announcement, the coach

knocked everyone personally and wanted to know our condition. As he is pushing us regularly, we are doing training as much as possible, so that we can at least adjust ourselves in the training camp and avoid extra training to get fit," said Rana, who has been training at Manikganj District Stadium.

Both Saad and Rana want to play three to four practice matches before hosting Afghanistan because they need to recover mental strength which was affected due to the pandemic with no football activities.

"Mental strength is an important factor for the players before competitive matches. We must build confidence which can be done through practice matches," said Rana.

Rana said, "We must play three to four practice matches because we are out of matches for a long period. Besides, practice matches can also help the coach pick up the right combination."

Haider, Shah in Pak squad

APP, Karachi

Teenagers Haider Ali and Naseem Shah have been picked for Pakistan's tour of England next month, continuing the country's tradition of throwing young players in at the deep end.

The series of three Tests and three T20Is gets cracking on August 5.

17-year-old pacer Shah became the youngest bowler ever to take a Test hat-trick in February after debuting in Australia last year.

The inclusion of Haider, 19, will also spark excitement after he scored 107 runs in the U-19 World Cup this year.