

Resumption scenarios different for Bangladesh

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

 Novak Djokovic on Tuesday said he was “deeply sorry”. After all, he had set in motion the chaos during an ill-fated Adria Tour -- a tournament he himself organised through his foundation -- which acquainted tennis with the realities of the current pandemic.

Djokovic, along with stars Grigor Dimitrov, Borna Coric and Viktor Troicki had all tested positive for Covid-19 during the Zadar leg of the event where people were seen flouting social distancing rules. The Zadar event dealt a severe blow to tennis’s planned official return.

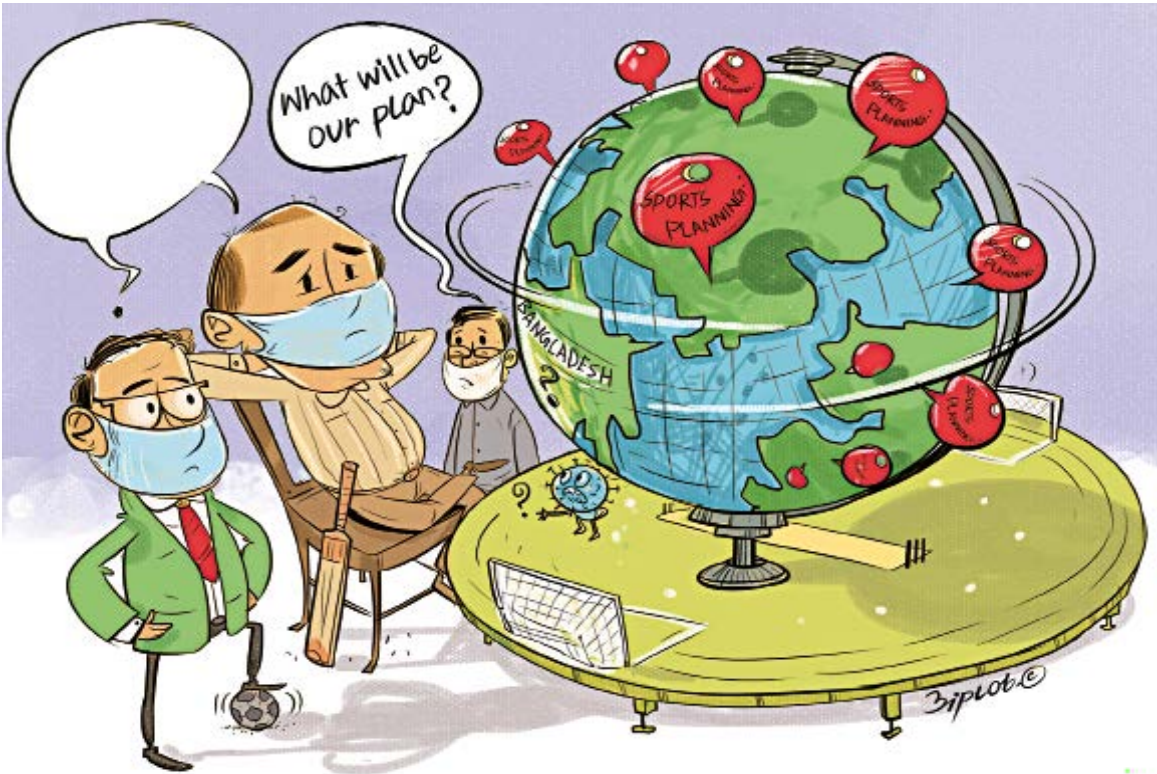
Usually, each and every sport exists in its own vacuum, but in a pandemic, the series of events in Croatia showed how difficult it will be to safely resume sports activities all over the world, but more so in the context of Bangladesh. Cricket, the premium sport in the country, took a hit when the Dhaka Premier League (DPL) was postponed three months ago during the second round. The infection rate in the country has since been increasing steadily and alarmingly.

The positive tests of former ODI captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and left-arm spinner Nazmul Islam severely dented the Bangladesh Cricket Board’s (BCB’s) plans to even ponder cricket’s return.

While sporting activities have commenced in many countries, Bangladesh cannot yet think about resumption and although BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury had previously told The Daily Star that ‘they need to look forward and find a way to resume things at some point’, that reality is a distant one at the moment.

Bundesliga, the Spanish La Liga, Italian Serie A and English Premier League have begun once more in an effort to complete the season while the French Ligue 1 was declared over with PSG awarded the title.

Following government directives, the leagues had started their plans for resumption. Protocols were put in place as the players geared up for the restart following a break and despite the huge toll that coronavirus inflicted on countries such as Italy and Spain, football started again.



However, the plans and the eventual restart of these leagues depended ultimately on what stage of the pandemic they were in. Germany were the first to start, allowing the players to start training because they had curbed the virus considerably by then. France, whose Covid-19 fatalities is the fifth highest in the world at the moment, have not restarted the football league.

Spain and Italy employed tough measures to curb the virus and managed to flatten the curve. Spain ended its state of emergency on Sunday and also reopened borders, and while the risk is still there, the facilities provided to footballers will ensure that they can react faster to any outbreak. The financial aspect led to the urgency in restarting the leagues and Spain, Italy and England conduct regular coronavirus tests on footballers to detect cases.

The Premier League has had 18 positive cases since restart but are carrying on with protocols in place. The Vietnamese V.League 1 had begun last month with packed crowds and the country has won praise for its aggressive coronavirus testing and a mass, centralised

quarantine programme.

Meanwhile Brazil, where infections have only been escalating, saw the Rio de Janeiro state football championship postponed only a week after restart following a ruling from the country’s sporting court.

Cricket on the other hand has been less aggressive with restart plans. Financial pressure as always could see the way for international cricket’s return too.

Australia, which has had no new deaths since May 23, are still pondering if they can host the T20 World Cup in October this year. Cricketers in Australia however have been able to start their training programmes. Cricket Australia, which has had significant job cuts, could reportedly lose 300 million Australian dollars if they are unable to host India for the Test series in November. West Indies meanwhile would be banking on their tour of England -- the first international series set to take place amidst the pandemic -- to generate revenue.

The English and Wales Cricket Board are under financial strain and the latest seven positive tests of Pakistan players does put a dent on plans for the upcoming series.

BCB, on the other hand, has

said they are financially stable even without any cricket going on. However, the main headache remains the restart of cricketing activities. The scenario in Bangladesh is similar to that of Brazil in terms of sports returning. While other countries knew about their virus peak, it is as yet uncertain for Bangladesh. The facilities the BCB can provide is not similar to ECB and more importantly, the situation in the country is different to other countries, like Sri Lanka for instance, where players have begun training as well.

“If we make any mistakes, we could infect the whole team,” a BCB official told The Daily Star. “We tried to understand the Djokovic situation. It’s not easy to maintain [protocols] here so we are yet to identify what we can plan. If our country was doing well on the virus front, we could get in on such plans regarding rules. We cannot just isolate cricket and think differently,” he said regarding resumption of training for cricketers.

The local climate matters and, in this regard, conditions are not yet conducive for players to return to training. Cricket here will have to wait.

Pedro takes Sk Russel to FIFA

SPORTS REPORTER



Although all 13 Bangladesh Premier League clubs have negotiated contracts and payments with foreign players following the cancellation of the league in May, Sheikh Russel have been taken to FIFA by their Brazilian forward Pedro Hernique.

Officials of different clubs have informed that they have solved payment issues with foreign players in line with the FIFA-prescribed process of reaching a mutual understanding, ending their contracts through amicable solution.

Four of Sheikh Jamal’s other foreign players -- Udoka Alison, Raphael Odowin, Chris Herd and Alisher Azizov -- accepted the club’s offer in line with their original agreement.

“Only one foreign player, Simon Obioma of Uttar Baridhara Club, complained to us. But he later withdrew his complaint as he reached an amicable solution with the club,” Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) competition manager Zaber Bin Taher Ansari told The Daily Star.

Ansari added that they had received an e-mail from FIFA asking if Sheikh Russel had anything to say in response to the complaint.

“Pedro filed a complaint demanding approximately one lakh US dollars, alleging that Sheikh Russel did not pay him wages and did not bear expenditures for his treatment from injury. We have informed the club.”

Pedro sustained an injury during the team’s third league match against Mohammedan and could not play the next three matches before the league’s suspension in mid-March.

“As per the contract, we can extend with Pedro for two more months or deduct two months before the contract expires. We offered him to accept wages till May 15 but he demanded wages till July 15. We did everything according to the contract. Even Alisher tried to convince him, but he filed a complaint to FIFA,” Sheikh Russel sports director Saleh Jaman Selim said, adding that they had borne the cost of his treatment.

“He lodged a false complaint against us. We have already sent all documents to FIFA. We sought justice because he has damaged our country’s image,” Selim said, adding that they would clear two months’ wages worth 28,000 dollars as soon as FIFA clears the matter.

Tigers’ tour of Sri Lanka postponed

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh cricket Board (BCB) and Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) have mutually agreed to postpone the Tigers’ upcoming tour of the island country, the host board announced yesterday.

There was a lot of buzz about the July tour, deferred now to a ‘mutually planned later date’, which would feature a three-match Test series that would be a part of the ICC World Test Championship (WTC).

“SLC wishes to announce that the BCB has informed SLC that a conducive environment has still not arrived for their players to take part in an international cricket series, purely due to the lack of preparation for its players, caused by the Covid-19 pandemic,” a media release said yesterday.

On Tuesday, Bangladesh’s home series against New Zealand, also part of the WTC and due to start in August, was postponed. The Tigers have faced a total of five series postponements while cricketing activities in the country have been on hold since mid-March.

The second Test against Pakistan, scheduled to be held in Karachi in April, the Ireland and UK tour in May and a home series against Australia scheduled for June were previously postponed.

WHAT TO WATCH

LA LIGA

Facebook

Eibar v Valencia

Live from 11:30pm

Real Betis v Espanyol

Live from 2:00am (Friday)

PREMIER LEAGUE

Star Sports Select 1

Southampton v Arsenal

Live from 11:00pm

Chelsea v Man City

Live from 1:15am (Friday)

STAR SPORTS SELECT 2

Burnley v Watford

Live from 11:00pm



Manchester City and Argentina striker Sergio Aguero posted this picture from a Barcelona hospital after undergoing surgery on a lateral meniscus injury in his left knee yesterday. He will be out of action for up to seven weeks.

PHOTO: TWITTER

Novak apologises amid growing criticism



From chest-bumping at the tennis court during matches, playing full throttle games of basketball and courting controversy by partying at a nightclub, Novak Djokovic showed blatant disregard for the norms of social distancing during his Adria Tour recently.

AFP, Paris



World number one Novak Djokovic was widely condemned on Wednesday for hosting a tennis exhibition where he was one of four players to test positive for the coronavirus, a lapse that sent shudders through a sport struggling to get back on its feet.

The Serbian star said he was “deeply sorry” in an unstinting apology for the now-cancelled Adria Tour, where social distancing was minimal and matches were played in front of thousands of fans.

However, criticism was swift and heavy, with many voicing concerns over attempts to restart professional tournaments in August, including the US Open Grand Slam which is scheduled to begin on August 31.

Djokovic, Grigor Dimitrov, Borna Coric and Viktor Troicki all tested positive after taking part in the Adria Tour, where players embraced across the net, played basketball and even danced in a nightclub.

“I am so deeply sorry our tournament has caused harm,”



PHOTO: AFP/REUTERS/COLLECTED

Djokovic, 33, said in a statement.

His wife Jelena also tested positive after attending the “philanthropic” tour in the once war-torn Balkans.

As the mocking hashtag #Djokovid circulated online, Australia’s Nick Kyrgios, so often in the crosshairs for his own on-court indiscretions, said the incident was pure “stupidity”.

“Don’t @ me for anything I’ve done that has been ‘irresponsible’ or classified as ‘stupidity’ -- this takes the cake,” tweeted the world number 40.

Britain’s Andy Murray, a three-time Grand Slam winner who has known Djokovic since their junior days, told reporters: “I don’t think it has been a great look for tennis. In hindsight, it’s not something that should have gone ahead. It’s not surprising how many people have tested positive after seeing some of the images of the players’ party and the kids’ day. There was no social distancing in place.

“Some people have said maybe this has put the US Open in doubt -- which it may well do. But the measures and the protocols they have in place at the USTA are different to Serbia and Croatia. No fans for a start.”

Djokovic is unbeaten this year, a

run that includes winning his 17th Grand Slam at the Australian Open, but the pandemic has been a public relations disaster for the eccentric Serb. Even before the Adria Tour, he was criticised for breaking lockdown rules to train in Spain, and he then raised eyebrows by insisting he wouldn’t be prepared to vaccinate against the coronavirus.

Djokovic also described limits on players’ entourages at the US Open as “extreme” and “impossible”, again putting him at odds with public opinion.

“I think there’s a lot of his peer group who are scratching their heads,” celebrated coach Paul Annacone told Tennis.com. “I was anxiety-ridden and very disappointed because the restart, or the reimagining of how we can start is about eight weeks away. And with all these opportunities to try to start in a progression, to me, it felt like they skipped about 15 steps.”

Martina Navratilova, who won 18 Grand Slam singles titles, tweeted: “Yikes... this is not good and it’s a pattern... What now, US Open? Roland Garros? We have a lot of work to do.”

We’re lacking spark, Setien says after win

REUTERS, Barcelona

Barcelona coach Quique Setien admitted his side have struggled to get going since the season returned following the three-month hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, after a scrappy 1-0 win at home against Athletic Bilbao on Tuesday.

Barca needed a late goal from substitute Ivan Rakitic to see off a determined Athletic side and although they picked up a third win in four matches since the season re-started, they again failed to sparkle.

“When teams offer you little space you have to be very precise and agile and we have been lacking that since we returned,” Setien told a virtual news conference. “It’s not been easy and we are missing something overall, a bit of spark. Our opponents have a lot to do with this because they are sticking together and leaving hardly any space and we’re finding it hard to open them up. But I think we’ll start to find it easier the more the season goes on.”

Barca thrashed Real Mallorca 4-0 on their return but looked rusty in last week’s 2-0 victory over struggling Leganes and on Friday were held 0-0 at Sevilla, allowing Real Madrid to go top of the league on Sunday.

The win over Athletic took Barca three points ahead of Madrid provisionally.



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