

Real legend Gento no more

AFP, Madrid

Paco Gento, the only footballer to win six European Cups, has died aged 88, his former club Real Madrid announced on Tuesday.

Gento's club record of 23 trophies, which stood for over 50 years, was equalled on Sunday by Real captain Marcelo when he came on as a substitute in the Super Cup victory.

Gento scored 182 goals in 600 matches, also accruing among his trophies 12 league titles and two Spanish Cups from 1953-1971.

"Real Madrid C. F., the club's president and the Board of Directors are deeply saddened by the death of Francisco Gento, honorary president of Real Madrid and one of the greatest legends of our club and of world football," read Real's statement on their website.

"Paco Gento is the only player in the history of football to have won the European Cup 6 times.

"He will always be remembered by madridistas and all football fans as one of their greatest."

Gento played on the left wing in a formidable attacking line-up with some of the greatest names of the era, including Alfredo di Stefano, Raymond Kopa and Ferenc Puskas.

They won five successive European Cups from 1956 to 1960 with Gento surviving a cull of that generation by former teammate-turned-manager Miguel Munoz and going on to lift the trophy for a sixth time in 1966.



Mirpur abuzz with stars

SPORTS REPORTER

With the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) slated to begin in two days' time, the Academy Ground adjacent to Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium was buzzing with activities as the franchises continued their scheduled practice sessions.

The teams were getting their players acclimatised with the setup, with international stars such as Faf du Plessis, set to feature in his first-ever BPL stint, joining Comilla Victorians practice session yesterday while established stars such as Mushfiqur Rahim, Tamim Iqbal, Mahmudullah Riyad and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza continued their grind ahead of the start of the tournament on January 21.

However, the month-long tournament will be a huge challenge due to growing concerns over Omicron variant of coronavirus. There were already suggestions that there could be more cases in the coming days.

"We started the mandatory Covid-19 tests of the players and support staff of the BPL teams yesterday and so far, we have got a few positive cases," BCB chief physician Debashish Chowdhury told The Daily Star.

With all the six franchises undergoing their practice sessions in the same ground, albeit in different times of the day, it remains to be seen how the



managed bio-secure environment can keep the tournament running smoothly.

In the morning session, Mashrafe, who had a bout with back injuries, pulled a muscle during while bowling with a longer run-up. The former ODI captain may well miss the opening fixture of his side against Khulna Tigers but the arrival of international stars such as Andre Russell, Oshane Thomas and Isuru Udana

should soften some of the blow.

Du Plessis joining Comilla's practice session was the pick of the international attraction and the South African batted at the nets with gusto, the sound of his bat hinting at the incoming demolition.

Later, Du Plessis was seen having a long chat with coach Mohammad Salahuddin and veteran Imrul Kayes. Former Bangladesh head coach Steve Rhodes, who will be working as the team's advisor, was happy to be back and working with Salahuddin.

"Salahuddin, as you all know, has been a very successful coach and not just in the BPL, but also in bringing along some tremendous cricketers. He is the head coach I'm here to assist, to help, not just the players, but the coaches as well. Hoping I can share my experience and my knowledge of cricket. I got on really well with Salahuddin. I think it's going to work very, very well. It's important that players know the head coach is Salahuddin," Rhodes said.

He was, however, keen to not shy away from controversy relating to his departure as head coach following 2019 World Cup.

"After departure from certain jobs or posts, people have opinions but I don't really want to get too involved with that. All I can say is how pleased I am to be back among people of Bangladesh," Rhodes dictated at the end of Cumilla's session yesterday.

Deposed captains in focus as SA meet India in ODIs

AFP, Paarl

Two deposed captains, Virat Kohli and Quinton de Kock, could play significant roles in a three-match one-day international series between South Africa and India, starting at Boland Park in Paarl on Wednesday.

Both former skippers have the potential to be the leading batters for their respective sides.

For Kohli, it will be the first ODI series since Rohit Sharma was named captain by the Indian selectors in December.

Even though Sharma had to withdraw from the series in South Africa because of injury, the captaincy was not returned to Kohli but was passed to KL Rahul.

Kohli, who captained India in 95 ODIs with a 65-27 win-loss ratio, made it clear after India's Test series defeat last week that he could speak about the coming one-day games purely "from a player's point of view".

Kohli, who subsequently stepped down from the Test captaincy, said: "You are obviously very driven and motivated to perform in any match you play for India. As an individual I can definitely say that I am looking forward to the ODI series and I am driven to perform in those ODI games."

De Kock was made South Africa's long-term white-ball captain in February 2020 and was made Test captain for four matches last season. But he did not seem comfortable in the role and a decision was made last March to put Temba Bavuma in charge of the white-ball teams, with Dean Elgar taking over as Test captain.

De Kock, who was already due to miss the last two Tests against India on paternity leave, announced after the first Test last month that he was retiring from Test cricket, although he remained available for limited-overs games.

The series marks De Kock's return to action for the first time since becoming the father of a baby daughter. He fell to two indifferent shots in his final Test match and South Africa will be hoping for a return to the free-flowing, motivated batsman who hit three centuries in successive matches against India eight seasons ago.

The series is not part of the International Cricket Council's World Cup Super League but South Africa in particular will be keen to record their first one-day series win since beating Australia 3-0 in March 2020 before cricket was effectively shut down by the coronavirus pandemic. Since then, series against India and England have been aborted because of the virus, they have lost against Pakistan and Sri Lanka and have had to share the honours against Ireland and the Netherlands.



Two Bangladesh batters bump fists during their Commonwealth Games Women's Cricket Competition Qualifiers match against Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. The Nigar Sultana-led side made a fine start to the campaign, beating the hosts by eight wickets.

PHOTO: ICC

Bashundhara Complex to host Kings' matches

SPORTS REPORTER

Bashundhara Sports Complex and Rajshahi are the two fresh venues for the upcoming Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), set to begin from February 3 and played in a total of seven venues across the country.

Aside from these two latest entrants, BPL had seen 15 more venues used in its previous 13 editions.

However, it is the first time in Bangladesh that a professional football club – Bashundhara Kings – will be hosting all of their league matches at their own venue. Sheikh Russel KC have also expressed their desire to use the same complex as their home venue.

Due to the unavailability of the Bangabandhu National Stadium, the Dhaka-based clubs have been forced to make their home venues outside the capital.

"A technical committee has looked into the Bashundhara Sports Complex's matters such as the measurement of the ground, distance between gallery and the ground, dressing rooms, media box, galleries and parking. The complex will be ready by January 25. So, we have selected it as one of the premier venues for the league," BFF's senior vice-president Abus Salam Mursheedy said after a league committee meeting yesterday.

"Rajshahi stadium just completed a sporting event [cricket] but we think it has yet to fulfil some requirements such as proper equipment for watering the ground in dry season, painting and other smalls works to uplift the venue which also has the floodlight facility," said Mursheedy, adding that renovation or final works at five other venues have been going on and to be made ready, except for the Cumilla Stadium, before the start of the league.

Bangladesh Police have made the Rajshahi Stadium as their home venue.

Apart from these two venues, the five other venues are: Sylhet (home venue for Abahani), Cumilla Stadium (home venue for Mohammedan and Chattogram Abahani), Munshiganj Stadium (home venue for Sheikh Jamal and Sail), Gopalganj Stadium (home venue for Muktijoddha Sangsad) and Tongi Stadium (home venue for Rahmatganj and Swadhinata).

The home venue of Uttar Baridhara Club has not been decided yet.



From sick-bed to second round

REUTERS, Melbourne

Nick Kyrgios promised COVID-weary fans a show after recovering from his own infection and duly delivered on Tuesday with a tweener-laden 6-4, 6-4, 6-3 win over Briton Liam Broady on Tuesday to reach the Australian Open second round.

Sealing the win with a furious backhand return down the line, Kyrgios dropped an "F-bomb" in his televised on-court interview and performed Cristiano Ronaldo's trademark post-goal celebration.

On his way out of the arena, he took a swig of beer from a cup offered by a fan. COVID-19 be damned.

"I served ... well today," said Kyrgios with an obscenity as fans roared in agreement. I don't know what I have done to this crowd as you guys are a zoo now. I am super happy to be here again."