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Full steam ahead for Ryder Cup, says Harrington



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Players face backlash over quick tests as others wait

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**FOCUS**

# Moving Olympics possible, too soon to decide on cancellation: Coe

World Athletics chief admits ensuring a level playing field for athletes during preparations may not be possible



Reuters  
London, United Kingdom

**W**orld Athletics chief **Sebastian Coe** said yesterday that moving the 2020 Tokyo Olympics to September or October due to the coronavirus outbreak was a possibility but it was too soon to take a decision on whether to cancel the Games.

While most of world sport has come to a standstill due to the pandemic, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has remained committed to staging the Tokyo Games as planned from July 24-August 9 despite growing dissent.

"Let's not make a precipitous decision when we don't have to four months out," Coe told BBC Sport.

"If you had to ease that date, you'd have to ease it. It's possible, anything is possible," he added when asked if the Games could be



In this September 26, 2019, picture, IAAF president Sebastian Coe speaks at a press conference at Khalifa International Stadium in Doha, Qatar. (USA TODAY Sports)

moved to September or October.

"Events are changing by the hour but it is not a decision that has to be made at the moment. We're trying to manage the situation with the information we have but there is not a great deal of information."

"The temperature in the room with the IOC is, nobody is saying we're going to the Games come what may?"

Europe has become the new epicentre of the flu-like virus that originated in China late last year and restrictions on movement in several nations have hit the training plans of athletes ahead of Games.

IOC president Thomas Bach said they heard athletes' concerns on health and preparation but Coe said ensuring a level playing field for athletes during preparations may not be possible but it is a challenge World Athletics will strive to overcome.

"Recent evidence suggests China seems to be pulling out of this but if you're living in Europe, you're an Italian distance runner and you're confined to your house, that's a massive challenge," Coe told *The Times* in an earlier interview.

"Our sport has always been about fairness and a level playing field so we shouldn't feel ashamed to set that as our ambition. The reality is that may not be possible in every case but we want to do what

we can to drill down on that.

"Some are not able to train properly, some are not able to access public tracks or indoor facilities and we're working to try and help them find these facilities."

The virus has infected nearly 219,000 people globally and caused more than 8,900 deaths so far, sparking concerns over the viability of the Games.

Coe, the driving force behind the success of London 2012 as chairman of the organising committee, said the problem faced by the Tokyo Games was bigger than the mass boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics.

"I lived through Moscow and that was a crisis... This has probably exercised more thinking time and expended more effort for federations than anything I can remember," Coe added.

"We're doing everything we possibly can to get our sport and our athletes into the best possible shape through a challenging time and get to an Olympic Games."

## Tokyo organisers receive flame for troubled Olympics in low-key affair

Greek Sports Minister and Olympic Committee President Spyros Capralos (left) hands the Olympic torch over to former Japanese swimmer Naoko Imoto in Athens, Greece, yesterday. (Reuters)

Reuters  
Athens, Greece

ity horseshoe-shaped marble stadium. The flame was then transferred into a small receptacle to travel to Japan aboard a special aircraft named "Tokyo 2020 Go." Only a few dozen officials were allowed into the central Athens stadium as the country has imposed strict measures to contain the spread of the virus. The eerie mood during the ceremony, which normally attracts thousands of Athenians and visitors, reflected the problems facing Tokyo 2020, with athletes and national Olympic committees questioning whether the Games should be held this year. Despite the IOC's commitment to the Games, several athletes have cast doubt on the quality of competitions in Tokyo, given that thousands cannot train at the moment due to restrictions placed upon them in many countries. Tokyo Games chief Yoshiro Mori said in a video message he hoped the flame's arrival would help lift Japan's spirits. "Tokyo 2020 commits to be in readiness for the Games as planned..." Mori said. "The concept of the Tokyo relay is 'Hope lights our way'. I hope that the light will shine on the hearts of people all over in Japan and that will shake off the dark clouds hanging over the earth." The plane carrying the flame will land at JASDF Matsushima Air Base in Miyagi Prefecture today. The domestic relay will start from Fukushima Prefecture, site of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, and will last for 121 days. It is planned to end at the Games' opening ceremony with the lighting of the Olympic cauldron.

## JOC board member says Olympics should be postponed: Nikkei

Reuters  
Tokyo, Japan

**J**apan Olympic Committee board member Kaori Yamaguchi has said the Tokyo Olympics should be postponed because athletes are unable to prepare adequately because of the coronavirus pandemic, the *Nikkei* newspaper reported yesterday.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and Tokyo 2020 organisers have repeatedly said that the Tokyo Games, due to start on July 24, will run as scheduled. However, the spread of the coronavirus and successive cancellations of sporting events and qualifiers has raised questions over the plans, including among athletes.

Yamaguchi, who won a judo bronze medal at the Seoul Games in 1988, was quoted by the paper as saying that the IOC's insistence on holding the Games as scheduled will put athletes at risk.

She said that she plans to raise this at a JOC board meeting scheduled for March 27.

"As far as I can see in news from the United States and Europe, athletes aren't in a position where they can continue their training as usual," she was quoted as saying.

Officials at the JOC were not immediately available for comment. One IOC member has called the group "irresponsible" for insisting on holding the Games as scheduled, while several athletes have said the IOC decision puts athletes' health at risk. The Tokyo Olympics are due to run from July 24 to August 9.



## FOCUS

# Athletes still setting sights on Tokyo despite virus: Olsson

'As an athlete, focus is like a laser beam on (a big season)... but there are more factors'



In this February 8, 2020, picture, France's Armand Duplantis clears the bar to set the then world pole vault record of 6.17 metres at the Orlen Copernicus Cup 2020 in Torun, Poland. Duplantis' manager Christian Olsson has revealed that the 20-year-old continues to train in the US for the Tokyo Olympics. (AFP)

Reuters  
Stockholm, Sweden

Athletes are still doing their best to train for the Tokyo Olympics but it is looking increasingly unlikely that the Games will take place as the coronavirus continues to spread around the world, former Olympic champion Christian Olsson, who is now a sports agent, has told Reuters.

Olsson won gold in the triple jump at the Athens Games in 2004 and since hanging up his spikes in 2012 he has moved into management. He now looks after a thriving stable of track and field athletes, including pole-

vaulter Armand Duplantis.

"If you ask me today, I'd say with the information flow that we're getting and all the information that we have, I would say that it's very doubtful that the Olympic games would take place in Tokyo," he said in an interview.

"Hopefully, if the IOC and the Swedish Olympic committee have more information and are maybe seeing more signs that we are heading in a more positive direction, then they will take place, but I would say no at the moment."

Duplantis, who set the track and field world alight by twice

breaking the world record earlier this year, is back in America, where he was born to a Swedish mother and an American father, and is still training as if the Games will go ahead, Olsson revealed.

"He's back in the States in Louisiana, training pretty much as he should be, normal practices. You can already train outside there, so he's not doing anything that he shouldn't be. They can be by themselves... just a few days ago you could see him posting something on Instagram," he said.

#### UNCERTAINTY

With the competitive calendar almost entirely wiped out for the coming months, the uncertainty is bound to have an affect

on athletes who have their sights set on Tokyo.

"As an athlete you're usually in a situation where you have a huge focus for the season — the Olympic Games, the World Championship, the European Championships — and your focus is like a laser beam on that. Now it's still going to be the focus, but there are more factors that are a part of it, and that I think is going to affect all the athletes," Olsson said.

Together with his partners at JRS Sports Management, Olsson also looks after the careers of a number of Olympic hopefuls such as Norway's middle-distance running trio of Ingebrigtsen brothers, along with athletes

from Great Britain, Germany and Qatar.

"I think many of them have concerns about it, they're getting the same information flow from media as we do, they see other sports events are being cancelled or postponed, but I guess, having been an athlete myself, they know that everybody has the same situation, so if the Olympic Games take place, it's the athletes who will handle it the best, who will do the best with the situation.

"But of course, it's going to affect them. There's so much around you, people getting sick, businesses struggling, restaurants, hotels, everything, so you're being reminded of that on a daily basis," Olsson said.

## COMMENT

## Holding Tokyo Games as scheduled is a disservice to the world: Wickenheiser

Reuters  
Moscow, Russia

Six-time Olympian Hayley Wickenheiser said that holding this year's Olympics as planned in July and August would be a disservice to athletes and the general population considering the coronavirus pandemic is sweeping around the world.

The virus has brought global sport to a virtual standstill, with major events being postponed or cancelled as cases of the virus grow.

But organisers of the Tokyo Olympics have repeatedly said the Games, scheduled to take place from July 24 to August 9, will go ahead as planned despite the rapid spread of the virus.

Wickenheiser, who represented Canada at five Winter Games in ice hockey and the 2000 Summer Olympics in softball, said the Olympic movement should be showing "more compassion and empathy" for the struggles people are experiencing because of the virus, ranging from job losses to confinement at home.

"I just feel that the insistence that the Games are going to happen in July is doing a disservice

to people in the world first of all, and then athletes secondly who are trying to prepare," Wickenheiser told Reuters from self-isolation in Toronto.

"Humanity first, and sport always follows."

Wickenheiser, winner of four Olympic gold medals, said athletes around the world will not be prepared to compete in the Olympics because lockdowns, self-isolation measures and global travel restrictions are derailing their training plans and pre-Olympic competitions.

"If you are going to the Olympics... you want to go there in the best frame of mind possible knowing that you were able to do all the training that you could," she said. "A lot of athletes are not going to have that chance."

Wickenheiser, who is a member of the International Olympic Committee's athlete commission, has nearly completed her studies to become a doctor and witnessed firsthand Canada's efforts to contain the virus.

"I have been on the frontline. I have seen how this virus is spreading," she said. "To be talking about how we are going to quarantine the Athlete's Village (at the Olympics), it just doesn't sit right with me at the moment."



In this February 23, 2014, picture, International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach (left) welcomes Canada's Hayley Wickenheiser to the IOC session on the final day of the Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games. (Reuters)

## British Olympic chiefs issue virus vow over Tokyo Games

AFP  
London, United Kingdom

British Olympic Association chiefs insist they will not "endanger the health" of athletes by encouraging them to prepare for Tokyo 2020 if the coronavirus makes it unsafe.

Guy Learmonth, hoping to be picked in the 800m, this week became the first British athlete to warn that the risks of going to Tokyo are too high in the circumstances.

Athletes' frustration was not reserved for the British, with Olympic pole vault champion Katerina Stefanidi also blasting the IOC.

The BOA support the IOC's decision-making process but said: "We can be categorically clear that we will not endanger the health and well-being of the athletes or wider delegation at any point."

"It is imperative to preserve competitive integrity for athletes, but it is clearly only wise for athletes to continue to prepare for the Games where it is safe and appropriate to do so, within relevant Government and public health guidelines." Officials from the BOA and British sports federations returned from Tokyo this week following a series of venue and athletes' village visits, and reported that preparations appeared to be on track.

## SPOTLIGHT

## As Games face risk, Tokyo flags chief hoists standard for perfection



Tadamasa Fukiura is the flag supervisor and consultant for Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games organisers. (Reuters)

Reuters  
Tokyo, Japan

At 79, Tadamasa Fukiura has never lost his boyhood love of flags. But now the man in charge of supplying more than 10,000 of them for Tokyo's 2020 Olympics has a flag obsession of a different stripe — whether the Games will go ahead.

Doubts are mounting around the world that the Olympics can proceed as planned amid the coronavirus pandemic, with countries in all continents implementing drastic social and travel lockdowns. Still, Tokyo Games and Japanese government officials insist the event will go ahead as scheduled.

For Fukiura, whose lifelong fascination saw him asked to supervise displays at Tokyo's 1964 Games, a call needs to be made, and soon, on whether to proceed with meticulous preparations for over 10,000 flags representing nations around the world at this

year's event.

"I think by the end of March, we have to decide whether to stop or continue preparations for the Olympics," Fukiura told Reuters in an interview.

Despite the coronavirus outbreak, flag manufacturing plants in Japan are currently up and running to meet their own May deadline, Fukiura said.

Currently an advisor for the Tokyo Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, Fukiura describes his passion as an "addiction" and literally wrote the book on flags of the world when he was a 22-year-old college student at Waseda University supervising displays at the 1964 Olympics.

At the time, there was no official policy on what shade of red Japan's flag should have. After reviewing 2,000 lipstick colours from cosmetics maker Shiseido, he selected the shade that would become standard for the national flag.

Fukiura said 1964 was a defining moment of national unity for Japan, then rising from the ashes

of the World War II less than 20 years earlier on its way to become a major economic power.

"It was really exciting. Nineteen years after losing the war, Japanese people concentrated on the Olympics," he said.

But Fukiura said organising flags for this year's Games was as nerve-wrecking as in 1964, involving twice as many participating nations and sports event as well as major corporate sponsors. A fear of mistakes, like flags being hoisted upside down, never leaves him.

He also knows what it feels like to be haunted by the prospect of a cancellation, recalling the eve of the opening of ceremony when sudden heavy rains threatened the historic moment.

"I was preparing for the opening ceremony for two and a half years. I thought to myself, this rain would cancel the event," said Fukiura.

But that rain melted away, giving way to glorious sunshine, and the spectacle of flags saluting the world, just as he had planned.

CRICKET

# Would love to be in quarantine with de Kock: Steyn

'He is one of my favourite people in the world'



South Africa pacer Dale Steyn (right) and Quinton de Kock. (AFP)

IAN S  
Johannesburg

Veteran South Africa pacer Dale Steyn has said that, given an option, he "would love to be in quarantine" with Quinton de Kock. The entire world is currently battling with the coronavirus pandemic, which has so far claimed close to 9,000 lives.

"I would love to be in quarantine with someone like Quinton de Kock," Steyn told ESPN-cricinfo.

Expanding his choice, Steyn said de Kock is a 'proper cook' and staying with the current Proteas skipper would allow him to watch all the fishing videos the

wicketkeeper-batsman watches. "He is one of my favourite people in the world. If you walk into his (hotel) room, he's either making flies for fishing or he is watching a fishing video or he is watching a cooking video. And when you are at his house, he's doing the same stuff."

"I hate cooking, so it would be great if he was because then I could watch all the fishing videos that he's watching, I could help him do all the tying, and he could cook all the food. He's a proper cook," he added.

When asked which matches from the past he would watch while on the isolation period, Steyn said: "I would probably say that they should put every World Cup up until '99 on. So

1992, '96, '99 - I love those World Cups. "And even the one in South Africa (2003) because that's when I really started to get into guys like Brett Lee, because I knew the possibility of me playing against them or meeting them was so much closer than what it was in, say, '92, when I first got introduced to the game," he added.

The 36-year-old, who is chilling at home following his return from Pakistan where he was playing in the Pakistan Super League (PSL), said it's a pity that sporting events are being cancelled en masse due to the crisis as "if you take sport away, then I don't know really what we have."

"It is actually such a pity that everything is being blocked off,

because in a country like South Africa, where we have all of our problems from the past - culture, religion, ethnic backgrounds - the one thing that brings everybody together is sport," said Steyn.

"But now at the moment, you don't have that. In South Africa, we kind of like looking for things that unite people in big, big groups. When you don't have sport, it's like, oh, what do we fall back onto?"

"And I think Nelson Mandela was the first person to really say that: sport unites people in a way that nothing else does. And if you take sport away, then I don't know really what we have. We're going to have to work it all out," he added. Despite the panic

all around, the right-arm pacer said he has avoided stockpiling essentials like many others as it's unfair to do so in a crisis.

"It just seems like it is the only topic of conversation. Any WhatsApp groups that I'm part of, it's really tough to escape. Normally if I am on holiday I'll be planning a fishing trip or a surfing trip. At the moment I am just chilling at home," Steyn said.

"We were under that kind of hotel arrest - advised not to go out and wander the streets, which is totally fine; I don't want to break protocol and (have) something happen and be blamed for cricket never being played in Pakistan again because I did something stupid."

SPOTLIGHT

# Sachin compares Covid-19 battle to Test cricket

AFP  
New Delhi

Indian legend Sachin Tendulkar has offered an unusual take on the coronavirus fight by comparing it to Test cricket, urging patience and teamwork, and warning "we have to defend well".

"While the world battles the Covid-19 pandemic, this is probably the time for us to draw lessons from the grand old format of the game," Tendulkar wrote in a commentary for *The Times of India* newspaper.

The world record-holding batsman said the virus was "beyond our collective comprehension" but could be beaten with tactics used in cricket's five-day format.

"Test cricket rewards you for respecting what you don't understand. It makes you value the virtue of patience," he wrote.

"When you don't understand the pitch conditions or the bowler, defence becomes the best form of attack. Patience is what we require now, if we have to defend well."

India has reported only three virus deaths and 169 cases but the country is increasingly fearful of the spread of the disease that has killed nearly 9,000 people around the world. Like many countries, it has imposed draconian travel restrictions.

Tendulkar, 46, retired in 2013 after scoring 15,921 runs from 200 Tests, and has considerable influence in Indian society. He said all countries must work together against the virus.

"To use a cricketing metaphor; while individual brilliance can help a team in shorter formats of the game, in Test cricket it is all about partnerships and teamwork," he said.

"Test cricket is about staging comebacks.



A man wearing a facemask as a preventive measure against the Covid-19 coronavirus walks past a mural of former Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar in Mumbai yesterday. (AFP)

There is always a second innings, if you've missed the first one." "Different countries are at different stages of their fight against coronavirus," he added.

"All nations should consider themselves part of one team." "We shall take this battle session by session, and eventually emerge victorious."

## R&A hoping to conduct The Open and women's British Open in July-August

Golf's governing body the R&A said yesterday that they are hoping The Open and the women's British Open, to be held in July and August respectively, will go ahead as planned after the coronavirus outbreak brought world sport to a standstill.

The 149th Open Championship at Royal St George's Golf Course is due to be played from July 16-19 while the women's British Open at Royal Troon is scheduled for Aug. 20-23. The year's first two majors - the Masters (April 9-12) and the PGA Championship (May 14-17) - have already been postponed due to the outbreak along with several European Tour events. "We have some time before we start building the infrastructure at both venues and so we are keeping the scheduled dates in place for The Open and Women's British Open at this point," R&A chief executive Martin Slumbers said in a statement.

"We recognise that this is a rapidly changing situation and we will keep everyone informed of any changes to our plans. "These are difficult times but we are bearing in mind our responsibility for what's right for golf and most importantly for society." However, the R&A cancelled two international amateur events - the Student Tour Series Final at St Andrews and Carnoustie and Girls' Under-16 Amateur Championship at Fulford - which were set to be played next month.

FOCUS

# Fate of IPL can be decided after April 15, says minister

IAN S  
New Delhi

The Sports Ministry has made it clear that the fate of the 13th edition of the Indian Premier League can be decided only after the government comes out with a fresh advisory after April 15, keeping in mind the situation with regards to the coronavirus outbreak.

Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju reiterated that while it is the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) which decides on cricketing matters, the pandemic is something which has a direct effect on the loves of the citizens of the country.

"After April 15 the government will come up with new advisory and guidelines according to the situation. BCCI is a body that looks after cricket which is not an Olympic sport. But here it is not the question of the sporting event alone but a question of the safety of the citizens. In an event there will be thousands of spectators. So it is not just

for the sports bodies or sportspersons it is for every citizen of the country," he said.

The BCCI earlier put the IPL on hold till April 15 even though the tournament was set to start from March 29 after the government issued a travel advisory which made it clear that foreign players wouldn't be issued visas to come into the country. This was done in a meeting on March 11.

The Sports Ministry on March 12 made it clear that all sporting events should be cancelled in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak. And if it is unavoidable, the events should be held behind closed doors so as to avoid mass gatherings.

The Delhi government went a step further and said that there would be no IPL matches in the national capital till March 31.

BCCI President Sourav Ganguly also informed the media after the meeting with IPL franchise owners last Saturday at the BCCI HQ in Mumbai that all calls would be taken keeping in mind the advisory from the government.



## Injury forces Wade to pull pin on Somerset

Big-hitting Australian batsman **Matthew Wade** yesterday abandoned plans to play with English county side Somerset after being advised to rest an injured knee. The 32-year-old had been scheduled to pad-up for the first half of the English summer, but said cricket Australia had told him to recuperate. "It's a big blow," said Wade, who is a regular in the Australian Test team. "I was looking forward to the

challenge of playing county cricket... but after discussions with the cricket Australia medical team, regrettably, it became clear that I wouldn't be in a position to join Somerset." The county season is due to start on April 12, but the coronavirus epidemic may force it to be postponed.

The BBC said the England and Wales cricket Board were due to meet yesterday to discuss the situation.



ANNOUNCEMENT

# Major League Rugby cancels remainder of 2020 campaign

AFP  
Washington

Major League Rugby, the 12-team North American circuit that had started its third season, announced yesterday that it will cancel the remainder of the 2020 campaign due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Health and safety guidelines from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have banned large gatherings to combat the Covid-19 crisis. A week after issuing a 30-day pause to the regular season, the rugby union league decided to shut down any attempt to restart the season and begin preparing for 2021.

"I am saddened to announce that the remainder of the 2020 season is cancelled," MLR commissioner George Killebrew said.

"We believe it is ultimately the correct decision as we factored in health and safety

risks for all parties." Killebrew vowed the league would return next year.

"I want to ensure our fans that there is no doubt MLR will be back in 2021 and will emerge bigger and better than ever before," he said. "We will be using this time as an opportunity to grow all aspects of MLR and we're excited to continue this journey into 2021 and for many years to come."

The league grew from seven to nine teams from its 2018 debut to 2019 and added three more clubs in 2020 with Atlanta, Washington and New England joining.

When the season was halted, the San Diego Legion topped the table at 5-0 on 23 points followed by Toronto at 4-1 on 19 points and Old Glory DC at 4-1 with 17 points.

MLR also began adding more top names from overseas, notably prop Tendai "The Beast" Mtawarira, who sparked South Africa to the 2019 Rugby World Cup title before joining Old Glory.

INTERVIEW

# 'Asian golfers could lose out if Olympics go ahead'

AFP  
Hong Kong

The Olympics going ahead in Tokyo this year is "highly unlikely", the boss of Asian golf told AFP, and proceeding as planned could cost players the chance to qualify.

The International Olympic Committee said this week it was "fully committed" to holding the Games from July 24 despite the coronavirus pandemic, but acknowledged there was no "ideal" solution as pressure mounted for a postponement.

Asian Tour Commissioner and CEO Cho Minn Than confirmed that all tournaments

across the continent had been suspended until at least the end of May, in line with the US PGA and European Tours.

"I think everyone right now is more in a state of shock, just trying to figure out what they do with themselves," said Cho, speaking by telephone from Asian Tour headquarters in Singapore. With the prospect of scarcely any competitive golf before the Olympic rankings qualifying cut-off on June 22, Cho said it would be harsh on players from unheralded golf nations.

"Our plan initially was to have about 16 or 17 tournaments before the Olympic cut-off," Cho said. "Today, we probably have only about four or five

Asian Tour players eligible for the Olympics."

**OLYMPICS 'HIGHLY UNLIKELY'**

On current rankings, only Thailand's Jazz Janewattananond and Gunn Charoenkul, the Indian pair of Rashid Khan and Udayan Mane plus Miguel Tabuena of the Philippines would represent the Asian Tour in the 60-strong Tokyo field.

"Given the amount of golf that was left to be played, we were hopeful that more players from nations like Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines would have the opportunity to get into the Olympics over the next two or three months," said Cho.

"Obviously, that's not going

to happen. "I can understand why they would want to push forward with the Olympics - there'd be huge revenue ramifications on the economy of Japan - but it seems highly unlikely now in my opinion."

Cho said that he hadn't yet heard of any players suffering financial hardship but acknowledged that a long layoff could have an impact.

Players such as the world number 39 Jazz, last year's Asian Tour order of merit winner, will remain in the US where he had been due to play a full schedule before a debut at the now-postponed US Masters next month.

"I keep in contact with quite a few players and a lot of them

are comfortable," Cho said. "I feel for the guys who just came through qualifying school and they've probably played one or two events in their life."

"It's very different to having a bad season where you're missing cuts, but you still have got the opportunity to compete."

"Right now you're deprived of the opportunity to compete. That's a whole different ballgame."

**CALENDAR SHIFT**

The Asian Tour can play all-year round, which means the crisis could lead to a permanent shift in the Asian golfing calendar to a wraparound season played from September to April.

"A tour like Europe's going to

have a lot harder time rescheduling events. Theirs is a very short golf season," Cho said.

"I'm hoping that we can continue golf this year, whether it be July, September, October or November. It will definitely help mitigate the potential downside."

"If we could start between July and October, it means we will probably go through to April. We've been planning a wraparound season for the longest time but never really formalised it."

"We're talking to sponsors and promoters. They're definitely ready to go. They're prepared to stage events whenever the world is ready to get back to normal."



Asian Tour Commissioner and CEO Cho Minn Than

GOLF

# Full steam ahead for Ryder Cup, says Euro captain Harrington

'September is a long way off. So there's no change to the situation at all at this stage'

Reuters  
London

There are no plans to postpone September's Ryder Cup in Wisconsin, European captain Padraig Harrington said in response to a British media report that said the event was likely to be delayed due to the coronavirus outbreak. The official Ryder Cup USA twitter feed also described the report in Britain's Telegraph as "inaccurate".

The Ryder Cup, a biennial team event between the United States and Europe, is jointly owned and operated by the PGA of America and the European Tour. "September is a long way off," Harrington said on Irish radio station Today FM. "So there's no change to the situation at all at this stage. I know there's been some rumours and they had to put out a statement to say there's been no change, but there's definitely no change."

The responses follow the Telegraph report that the Ryder Cup was "expected" to be postponed, "with the golf authorities rapidly reaching the decision that their most lucrative spectacle should not be jammed into a schedule that is contracting by the week due to the coronavirus crisis."

The Ryder Cup is scheduled for Whistling Straits on the shores of Lake Michigan from September 25-27.

The event has previously been delayed by 12 months from 2001 until 2002 following the September 11 attacks on the United States, and has since been played in even-numbered years.

Golf's calendar has been affected by the coronavirus outbreak along with most other sports. The year's first two major championships, April's Masters and May's PGA Championship,



Ryder Cup European captain Padraig Harrington. (Reuters)

have already been postponed. The Masters says it hopes to play the tournament at "some later date", while the PGA is aiming for a "summer" date.

The US-based PGA Tour, which runs the game's biggest weekly circuit, has cancelled all tournaments through at least mid-May. The LPGA Tour has scrapped three tournaments in Asia and postponed three American events, including the ANA Inspiration major that had been scheduled for California early next month.

**R&A, USGA delay release of research on distance topics**

The latest report in a major golf research project into the impact of increasing distance will be delayed due to the coronavirus outbreak, the Royal & Ancient and US Golf Association said. The sport's global sanctioning bodies said last month they would release research topics into the Distance Insights project within 45 days, a span that ends today. But that report, and the subsequent research

into the impact of increased distance upon the sport, will be delayed. "At this time, the golf industry needs to focus on its response to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic," the USGA and R&A said in a statement.

"Consequently, we have decided to delay this announcement until a more appropriate time. This will obviously extend the deadline for the research. We will share more information in

due course."

The report will produce analysis and research into the impact of the longer drives on the sport and what can be done with equipment to address the issue if needed. Input from manufacturers and other stakeholders in golf was due to be released into the now-postponed report, which would outline further topics of research that could last for nine months to a year.

FOCUS

# 'Business as usual' – Aussie Super Rugby teams train despite virus shutdown

AFP  
Sydney

Australian Super Rugby players insisted it's "business as usual" as they resumed training despite a coronavirus shutdown that has left the competition facing an uncertain future.

The southern hemisphere club championship, which features 15 teams from five countries, was halted last weekend after New Zealand and Australia imposed strict travel rules to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

Only seven of the 18 rounds have been completed, with governing body SANZAAR looking at whether domestic games can be played as an alternative.

It could see Australia's Queensland Reds, NSW Waratahs, Melbourne Rebels and the ACT Brumbies facing each other, but without spectators after the Australian government banned large gatherings.

"So this is week one of Super Rugby being suspended over the coronavirus outbreak. It's business as usual mostly," Melbourne Rebels winger Harry Potter said in a video clip posted on Twitter.

"Training is back to normal, people are just getting on with things."

"People are pretty happy to be here, there's plenty of toilet paper, there's plenty of food so everyone's enjoying themselves," he added, after panicking about toilet roll and other items at Australian supermarket

kets. Super Rugby sides are the only rugby teams cleared to train in Australia, with all club and community games suspended until May.

Two members of the Australian Sevens team were this week cleared of Covid-19, but a Sydney University first-grade player tested positive at the weekend.

Waratahs assistant coach Chris Whitaker said daily temperature checks were in place for players, with training giving them "a bit of a break to the whole coronavirus thing".

Brumbies lock Cadeyrm Neville also said it business as usual, but admitted it was odd not having a game at the end of the week.

"The things we know - no games for at least two weeks, non-essential staff are not here at the minute, just to limit any potential spread," he told Rugby Australia's website.

"As long as we're careful with the way we operate, we should be able to stay steady with whatever happens next in the competition, with potential domestic games," he added.

Rugby Australia chief Raelene Castle admitted this week that one positive test could spell the end of Super Rugby this season.

Experts say Super Rugby, which has been forced to axe teams after an over-ambitious expansion, will face serious problems if the season is scrapped and member countries have to pay back tens of millions of dollars in broadcast fees.

**South African golfer Lange tests positive for Covid-19**



Unheralded South African golfer **Victor Lange** has tested positive for the new coronavirus, the PGA Tour said in a statement on Wednesday. Lange, ranked 1,215th in the world, was diagnosed with the COVID-19 in his native South Africa after returning from an event in Mexico on the PGA Tour Latinoamerica circuit. A statement from the PGA Tour said Lange had no symptoms and was expected to make a full recovery after a period in quarantine at his home in Johannesburg. "We appreciate Victor's prompt disclosure of his

diagnosis, which allows the PGA Tour to not only alert those he may have come in contact with during his lone PGA Tour Latinoamerica start this season, but also provides an opportunity to remind fans of the critical need to follow current recommendations and mandates to protect others," the PGA Tour said in a statement.

The golf world has been thrown into chaos by the coronavirus pandemic, with the first two majors of 2020 - the Masters and the PGA Championship both being postponed.

RUGBY

# Stormers hit by 'freakish' injuries to WCup winning Boks

Reuters  
Cape Town

Stormers coach John Dobson has lamented the "traumatic" injuries suffered by his Springbok World Cup final stars this Super Rugby season that will also play on the mind of new national team coach Jacques Nienaber.

The Stormers were early season front-runners in Super Rugby before back-to-back losses halted their progress, and they are currently training in isolation in Cape Town with the competition on hold due to the coronavirus outbreak.

The good news is that Bok captain Siya Kolisi is on the mend and four weeks away from fitness after he was injured in the season-opening win over the Hurricanes, but there is little other reason for cheer.

The latest injuries are to scrumhalf Herschel Jantjies (fractured fibula) and prop Steven Kitshoff (pectoral muscle), who are expected to be out for three and four months respectively.

"We had six guys who played in the World Cup and five are now out with long-term injuries. These are all deeply traumatic injuries, nothing to do with load. It is something you can't explain," Dobson said.

"It is freakish, because it is not a conditioning issue. You saw Siya's tackle, how Bong'i's (Mbonambi) leg got bent back at a ruck, Herschel fractures a fibula ... it's terrible."

Dobson also revealed that lock and World Rugby Player of the Year Pieter-Steph du Toit is expected to be out for three months after he picked up a hematoma that developed into acute compartment syndrome and put him at risk

of losing his leg following the loss to the Auckland Blues on February 29. "We are not the Stormers we were at the start of the season. Take five World Cup finalists out of any team and it is a struggle. But we have got depth and have shown character."

The world champion Boks are scheduled to face Scotland in two tests in July, as well as a one-off game against Georgia, though a final decision on those matches will be made next month.

The coronavirus outbreak has shut down sport around the world, with top competitions called off as governments ban mass gatherings and tighten border controls as part of efforts to contain the virus, which has killed more than 9,000 people.

**FUNERAL OF WALES WATKINS TO BE STREAMED OVER VIRUS FEARS**

The funeral of former Wales rugby player

Matthew J Watkins is to be streamed online because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Watkins, who won 18 caps for Wales between 2003 and 2006, died earlier this month at the age of 41 after being diagnosed with a rare form of pelvic cancer in 2013.

The former Dragons, Scarlets and Gloucester centre's funeral will take place on March 31 and a large gathering had been expected in Cardiff.

But Woodfield Park Funeral Directors said in a statement on their website: "During these uncertain times we ask that only family and close friends attend Matthew's funeral service."

The added: "The funeral service will be streamed online for anyone wishing to see from the safety of their own home."

Watkins made more than 300 club appearances in a 14-year senior career before he retired in 2011.

NBA

# Players face backlash over quick Covid-19 tests as others wait

The ability of teams to secure tests on demand has drawn the wrath of fans on social media



In this file photo taken on January 18, 2020, Kevin Durant (left) and Kyrie Irving of the Brooklyn Nets look on during their game against the Milwaukee Bucks at Barclays Center. (AFP)

Reuters  
Toronto

While the NBA champion Toronto Raptors, Los Angeles Lakers and Brooklyn Nets quickly received coronavirus tests, the general public has been left waiting, sparking a backlash over privileged athletes' and celebrities' access to care.

"We wish them a speedy recovery. But, with all due respect, an entire NBA team should NOT get tested for COVID-19 while there are critically ill patients waiting to be tested," tweeted New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio after it was reported the Nets had been tested and four players were isolated after positive coronavirus results. "Tests should not be for the wealthy, but for the sick."

As the coronavirus spreads and the United States deals with a shortage of test kits, the public has grown increasingly disgruntled over the ease by which profes-

sional athletes get tested while others displaying symptoms are forced to wait.

The highly contagious respiratory illness caused by the virus has now infected close to 8,000 Americans while the death toll has climbed to at least 145.

NBA commissioner Adam Silver, in an interview with ESPN on Wednesday, said he could understand de Blasio's concern but the bigger one was that there are not enough tests available and that the league was simply following protocol.

"I of course understand his point and it's unfortunate that we're in this position as a society that it's triage when it comes to testing," said Silver, adding that eight full teams as well as individual players have been tested. "And so the fundamental issue is there are insufficient tests.

"But we've been following the recommendations of public health officials." USA Today reported last week that after Utah Jazz's Rudy Gobert tested positive for the virus 58 members of the Jazz organization were tested.

## INFECTED PLAYERS

So were the Oklahoma Thunder, the team the Jazz were scheduled to play last Wednesday, and the entire Toronto Raptors travelling squad who were concerned they might have come in contact with infected players during a visit to Salt Lake City on March 9.

The Los Angeles Lakers, the last team to play the Nets before the NBA season was suspended, announced on Wednesday their players were also undergoing tests for Covid-19.

The ability of NBA teams to secure tests on demand has drawn the wrath of fans on social media.

"The thing is that is always the case. The rich will always get it first and the poor will always get it last," tweeted @thedsec, who has over 23,000 followers and a radio program on 22 stations across seven states.

President Donald Trump waded into the issue during a news conference on Wednesday when he was asked, "How are

non-symptomatic professional athletes getting tests while others are waiting in line and can't get them? Do the well connected go to the front of the line?"

"No, I wouldn't say so," said the president. "But perhaps that's the story of life. That does happen on occasion, and I've noticed where people have been tested fairly quickly." In most cases the ability of teams to get their players tested has had more to do with money and going through private labs than state-run public health departments and jumping the queue.

The NBA also defended the speedy action as a way of preventing the spread of the virus with testing of players drawing it to the attention of young people.

"The NBA's move to halt its season led the way for other leagues and raised awareness of the threat of the virus," said Silver.

"My sense was that especially among young people, people were not taking these protocols very seriously until we did what we did."

## NBPA chief defends players



NBA players didn't deserve to be criticised for taking coronavirus tests while much of the nation had limited access to testing, National Basketball Players Association executive director Michele Roberts told ESPN on Wednesday.

According to NBA commissioner Adam Silver, eight teams have undergone testing.

Roberts said the tests were warranted given the fact that players and teams have been exposed to others who have the virus. At least seven NBA players have tested positive. Roberts told ESPN, "There's nothing irresponsible - if you've got that information (that you've been exposed) - about trying to get the tests.

"The problem that more of us can't get the tests - and I'm not apologetic about saying it - in my view, that rests at the foot of the federal government. They were responsible for making sure we were protected in that regard, and I think they failed.

"We shouldn't be fighting about this now... but once this is done and we get through it, and we will, let's figure out who screwed up and fix that."

The Utah Jazz were tested on March 11 in Oklahoma City after center Rudy Gobert was found to have the virus, news that prompted the NBA to cancel that game and shut down the entire season. Silver told ESPN Wednesday the Jazz were ordered by Oklahoma City health officials to be tested, not that the league or team requested tests.

The Oklahoma City Thunder players subsequently were tested, with the team saying

Wednesday in a statement. "Recognising the stress on the state of Oklahoma's medical system, the Thunder did not use state resources and chose an alternative path for testing of its personnel."

This week, the Brooklyn Nets had all of their players tested after several players and staff members reported symptoms of the virus. Four players tested positive, though only Kevin Durant has been publicly identified as being one of the four.

The Nets issued a statement that their tests were done through a private company and paid for by the team.

The Los Angeles Lakers, the last team to play the Nets, underwent testing Wednesday. It is unclear which other teams have been tested.

The Nets' test drew the ire of New York Mayor Bill de Blasio, who tweeted, "We wish them a speedy recovery. But, with all due respect, an entire NBA team should NOT get tested for Covid-19 while there are critically ill patients waiting to be tested. Tests should not be for the wealthy, but for the sick."

Roberts responded on ESPN, "I get it. People should not be having to wait in line. The at-risk population should be the first to be tested. But god damn it, if the government had done what they were supposed to do, we wouldn't be competing for an opportunity to be tested."

She added, "To be perfectly candid with you, if I was at the arena in OKC when the announcement was made, when the game was canceled, I would be concerned. "In many ways, I think it would have been irresponsible for the teams not to test their players and staffers because people in that arena have the right to know if they'd been exposed."

## NFL, NBA offer complimentary game and video archives

NFL and NBA fans can access past games for free while adjusting to life without live sports during the coronavirus pandemic. With the NFL offseason in full swing and free agency deals dominating sports headlines, the league made Game Pass access complimentary.

Game Pass is a digital product available across multiple platforms and devices and has archives of games dating to 2009. The extensive library includes all regular-

season and postseason games and NFL Films series, such as "Hard Knocks."

NFL Game Pass will be offered free of charge until May 31 to fans within the US.

The NBA will open its historical vault until April 22. Through NBA League Pass, all games from the 2019-20 season and many classic games and events will be shown.

The NBA App or NBA.com is the launch point for fans wanting to access the league's game content.

## SPOTLIGHT

# Warriors shut down facilities, no players have shown symptoms

DPA  
San Jose, California

Hours after announcing the Warriors' intentions to play last Thursday's game against the Nets in an empty arena, general manager Bob Myers got a text from owner Joe Lacob: "Do you see what's going on with the Utah-Oklahoma City game?"

As he watched Jazz and Thunder players get ushered off the court and the PA announcer tell the crowd the game was cancelled, Myers knew the NBA was on the brink of a shutdown. "Just connecting the dots, my immediate thought was that they were going to have to suspend the season," Myers said on a conference call on Tuesday. "It just created an untenable situation for our league." Since then, seven NBA players have tested positive for the coronavirus while the league announced an indefinite hiatus to counter the pandemic.

As of Tuesday, no Warriors players have shown symptoms, according to Myers. Meanwhile, the team has shut down operations at Chase Center as to comply with San Francisco's shelter-in-place ordinance. For the next three weeks, the front office, coaches and players will try to remain in contact and navigate the indefinite suspension of the NBA season. Myers said the

Warriors will not administer tests unless players show symptoms of having contracted Covid-19. This comes after news that four Brooklyn Nets players - including former Golden State forward Kevin Durant - tested positive for the virus.

The Nets left San Francisco after NBA Commissioner Adam Silver announced the league's suspension when Jazz centre Rudy Gobert became the first player to test positive last Wednesday. On Tuesday, several players woke up with symptoms. "I'm hoping none of our guys went and hung out with any of their

players the night before our game," head coach Steve Kerr said on a conference call Tuesday. "I don't know if that's the case or not." While the Nets had their players tested by a private company upon returning to New York, the Warriors have not had their players tested and won't as long as they are asymptomatic.

"In California, my understanding is that these tests are not readily available, and people who don't have symptoms shouldn't be doing that," Myers said. "We're not treating ourselves any differently than anyone else - I think that's the right thing to do."

In the days that followed the NBA's suspension, several sporting events were cancelled or postponed and local and federal governments encouraged stricter rules on social distancing. The



Chase Center, home to the Golden State Warriors, is seen from above in San Francisco, California, on March 12, 2020. (AFP)

death toll in the United States from the coronavirus reached 100 Tuesday.

"The NBA coming to a halt helped a lot of people come to grips," Kerr said. "It was one of the tipping points where society at large knew how serious this was." Meanwhile, with residents of San Francisco and several other Bay-

Area counties being ordered to remain

indoors and cease any non-essential travel until April 7, Warriors players and staffers cannot work at the Chase Center facility in the city's Mission Bay neighbourhood.

Many players don't have the means to work out at home, creating a challenge to maintain their conditioning. For Klay Thompson, who suffered a

torn cruciate ligament in his left knee in last June's NBA Finals, it means he will have to continue his rehab on his own. Myers said he may periodically work with a trainer over the next few weeks.

During the indefinite suspension of the season, the NBA recently informed players they may travel out of market

to be with family. According to Myers, three Warriors players have left the Bay Area, though he would not disclose names. "Some of these guys were living in a 400-foot apartment, so they want to be with their families, which is understandable," Myers said. "Some can't afford to stay in the place they were indefinitely. Everyone's in a different situation as far as family, as far as resources."

Kerr recently drove with his family to self-quarantine in their San Diego home: "We've got a little more space down here," he said.

Though the Warriors' front office, coaches and players remain in constant contact, Kerr has been using much of his time reading about the coronavirus pandemic and watching film of prospects ahead of this year's NBA draft - in which the Warriors will have a top-five selection.

"It's something I haven't been able to do much of over the years," Kerr said. "More than anything, it's fulfilling my fix. I love what I do and I love the game. It's hard, honestly, not turning a game on at night. All of us on this call are big sports fans or we wouldn't be in this capacity."

"I'm sure everybody has felt how strange it is when you have a time like this, where things are scary or different. This is when you turn to sports to get away. Obviously that's not an option."

F1

# Dutch, Spanish and Monaco Grands Prix postponed

THE EARLIEST THE NEW SEASON CAN NOW START IS ON JUNE 7 IN AZERBAIJAN



The F1 Monaco Grand Prix (pictured) will no longer take place in May. (Reuters)

AFP  
Paris

The Dutch, Spanish and Monaco Formula One Grand Prix races were yesterday postponed due to the global spread of coronavirus, officials announced.

The triple postponements follow the cancellation of the season-opening Australian Grand Prix last week, and the postponement of the Chinese, Bahrain and Vietnam Grand Prix races.

The Dutch GP, due to return to the calendar for the first time since 1985, was set to be held at Zandvoort on May 1-3, with the Spanish race following a week later, and the Monaco Grand Prix on May 21-24.

"Due to the ongoing and fluid nature of the Covid-19 situation

globally, the FIA, Formula One and the three promoters have taken these decisions in order to ensure the health and safety of the travelling staff, championship participants and fans, which remains our primary concern," a joint statement from F1 and the FIA read.

All parties said they would study the viability of finding alternative dates to run the races later in the year, and the statement added that Formula 1 and the FIA expect to be able to begin the 2020 season "as soon as it's safe to do so after May"; but will continue to monitor the situation.

The earliest the new season can now start is on June 7 in Azerbaijan.

The postponements are the latest to have hit a sporting calendar turned upside down by the coronavirus outbreak, which has

217,510 cases with 9,020 deaths across 157 countries and territories as of 1100 GMT yesterday.

The European football championships and Copa America have been both pushed back by 12 months to 2021. But the International Olympic Committee have so far pledged to carry on with the Tokyo Olympics, scheduled to run between July 24-August 9.

#### REVISED CALENDAR

**CANCELLED**  
March 15: Australia (Melbourne)  
Postponed - March 22: Bahrain (Sakhir)  
Postponed - April 5: Vietnam (Hanoi)  
Postponed - April 19: China (Shanghai)  
Postponed - May 3: Netherlands (Zandvoort)  
Postponed - May 10: Spain (Barcelona)  
Postponed - May 24: Monaco

#### F1 postpones major rules revamp to 2022

Formula One has postponed sweeping technical changes from 2021 to 2022 due to the coronavirus outbreak, the sport announced yesterday. "Following unanimous agreement between the FIA, Formula One and all teams, the implementation of the Technical Regulations due

to take effect from the 2021 season will be postponed until 2022," it said in a statement. It added that "due to the currently volatile financial situation" caused by the virus, teams will also use their 2020 cars in 2021 with talks ongoing over ways to make further significant savings.

#### STILL PLANNED

June 7: Azerbaijan (Baku)  
June 14: Canada (Montreal)  
June 28: France (Le Castellet)  
July 5: Austria (Spielberg)  
July 19: Great Britain (Silverstone)  
August 2: Hungary (Budapest)  
August 30: Belgium (Spa-Francorchamps)

September 6: Italy (Monza)  
September 20: Singapore (Marina Bay)  
September 27: Russia (Sochi)  
October 11: Japan (Suzuka)  
October 25: United States (Austin)  
November 1: Mexico (Mexico City)  
November 15: Brazil (Sao Paulo)  
November 29: Abu Dhabi (Yas Marina).

SPOTLIGHT

# NBA chief Silver floats prospect of charity game

Reuters  
Los Angeles

Despite not yet knowing exactly when his sport will return to action, NBA commissioner Adam Silver told ESPN on Wednesday that the league is considering several scheduling options depending on how long the coronavirus pandemic shutdown lasts, including a potential charity game.

In a nationally televised interview, Silver opined on how the league could best handle its eventual schedule once games are again deemed safe enough to play.

Among the considerations include the safety benchmarks for restarting the league again with fans as normal, how to play games "and operate as we've known it with 19,000 fans" in league venues without concern of spreading the virus.

Silver admitted perhaps it would be better for games to begin first without fans, so as not to overreach and possibly endanger



File photo of NBA Commissioner Adam Silver. (AFP)

fans, players and league personnel before being completely certain the coronavirus would not be spread.

"Because, presumably, if we had a group of players, and staff around them, and you could test them and follow some sort of protocol, doctors and health officials may say it's safe to play,"

Silver said.

Silver then brought up the idea of a charity game, one that would not affect the regular season, in order to raise funds while providing a respite for those itching for a welcome distraction from recent events.

"One of the things we've been talking about are," Silver said,

"are there conditions in which a group of players could compete — maybe it's for a giant fundraiser or just the collective good of the people — where you take a subset of players, and is there a protocol where they can be tested and quarantined and isolated in some way, and they could compete against one another? "Because people are stuck at home, and I think they need a diversion. They need to be entertained."

Silver openly shared that all ideas are on the table these days since the league suspended its regular season last Wednesday, even potentially pushing the annual league calendar to December through August instead of October through June, as some have suggested.

He also said it was premature to reveal any specifics over the fates of end-of-season awards — such as MVP trophies, scoring titles, etc. — if the league fails to resume its 2019-20 regular season.

Silver seemed more concerned with the next steps for the league on the floor and how the NBA could help the nation make a move toward normalcy.

NHL

# Senators player tests positive for coronavirus

AFP  
Ottawa

An unnamed Ottawa Senators player has become the first National Hockey League player to test positive for the coronavirus Covid-19, the club announced late Tuesday.

The player is in isolation after displaying mild symptoms, the Senators said in a posting on their website.

"The Ottawa Senators are in the process of notifying anyone who has had known close contact with the athlete and are working with our team doctors and public health officials," the club said in a statement.

"As a result of this positive case, all members of the Ottawa Senators are requested to remain isolated, to monitor their health and seek advice from our team medical staff."

The NHL put its season on hold last week, agreeing to follow health officials' recommendations that gatherings of 50 or more people be cancelled

BASEBALL

# Angels' Maddon is for playing games in empty stadiums



File photo of Los Angeles manager Joe Maddon (left) chats with general manager Billy Eppler. (TNS)

By Maria Torres  
Los Angeles Times

Even during a shutdown prompted by the outbreak of a virus, Los Angeles Angels manager Joe Maddon is thinking of ways to push baseball's boundaries.

How long would games last if pitchers were forced to heed a 20-second clock counting down the time they have to throw their next pitch?

Would the sport generate more interest if players wore microphones during games — and not only during spring training or All-Star exhibitions?

Can teams adjust to playing by international rules that call for a runner to be placed on second base in extra-inning games?

Maddon said Wednesday those topics, which Commissioner Rob Manfred has championed in his effort to improve pace of play, should be explored as the league monitors the spread of the coronavirus and deliberates over when it should allow baseball activities to resume.

"There's so many adjustments out there that this is the perfect petri dish to experiment with right now to find out what we like, what we don't like and move forward from there," Maddon said.

Of course, getting to the point where baseball can be played again is the challenge. In accordance with guidelines provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention restricting large gatherings, the earliest MLB could begin the season is May 10. That unofficial target date has become increasingly unlikely as the coronavirus pandemic has widened.

Maddon, a self-described optimist, still believes a significant portion of the typical 162-game season can be played if people adhere to social-distancing measures. He thinks teams could even begin the season playing without spec-

tators to aid the containment of Covid-19.

But would owners, who have stakes in a league that takes in an estimated \$11bn per year, be willing to sacrifice revenue from tickets and concessions?

"There won't be the money via the families in the stands, but there's got to be a financial benefit somehow, from either television or streaming," Maddon said on the phone from Tempe, Ariz., the spring-training home of the Angels. "I don't know how that's all gonna play out. I don't know how attractive that would be. But you'd have to believe something would be better than nothing."

"As a manager, and as players, I think we would all be eager to do something like that."

Such drastic measures could provide a distraction during this time of crisis.

"Whatever it takes to get this thing rolling again to make it interesting and not lose the momentum and definitely not lose the season," Maddon said. "Everybody is going to be championing at the bit so much that nobody is gonna complain about anything. We're just gonna get out there and understand how fortunate we are to be able to do what we do. And get back on the field entertaining and being part of the fabric again, which we need and which the public of our country needs."

In addition to expressing encouragement about the future of baseball, Maddon emphasized the importance of following recommendations laid out by the CDC and other government entities. Maddon, 66, mentioned the looming threat of the health care system's infrastructure becoming overwhelmed by those who do not take precautions seriously.

"Why would you not want to listen to health experts right now?" Maddon said. "I've got an 87-year-old mother. A lot of us have people that are a little bit older that are at higher risk. Why would you not want to be a benefit to those people by adhering to the rules?"



In this file photo taken on on March 11, 2020, Blake Lizotte (right) of the Los Angeles Kings reaches for the puck in front of Thomas Chabot (left) of the Ottawa Senators during the second period at Staples Center. (AFP)

for the next two months. "The health of our players, fans, and community remains our highest priority," the Senators said. "We will continue to do everything we can to help ensure our players, staff, fans and the greater community re-

main safe and healthy during this time of uncertainty due to the spread of the coronavirus."

The Senators had the second-worst record in the league when the season was shut down with 25 wins and 62 points from 71 games.



SPOTLIGHT

# Caputo, the voice of optimism in Italian football

'It was my idea. I hadn't told anyone. I wanted to get this message across'



After the scoring first of his two goals against Brescia in the Serie A match on March 9, Sassuolo striker Francesco Caputo (second right) turned to a camera and held up a hand-written message on a sheet of paper in Italian, which said: "Andra tutto bene. Restate a casa": everything will be fine, stay home.

AFP  
Rome

“Everything will be fine. Stay at home.” Sassuolo striker Francesco Caputo understood before everyone else. The Italian’s reassuring message came hours before the government halted all sport in the country amid the devastating coronavirus pandemic. Italy was already worried, the disease had done a lot of damage, and movement restrictions were about to be implemented. It was March 9 and Europe was still playing football despite the escalating health crisis. That night in Emilia-Romagna, a region hard hit by the virus, home side Sassuolo beat Brescia 3-0 in what would be the last match in an Italian championship since suspended. After the first of his two goals, Caputo

turned to a camera and held up a hand-written message on a sheet of paper. “Andra tutto bene. Restate a casa”: everything will be fine, stay home. A few hours later, the head of the Italian government Giuseppe Conte used the same words — “Stay at home” — to explain to Italians the new draconian provisions put in place to fight against the pandemic. Since then, the concrete and reassuring message of “Ciccio” Caputo has made its way even beyond the world of football. It is found in all information and awareness-raising campaigns and even on banners hanging from windows all over the country. “It was my idea. I hadn’t told anyone. I wanted to get this message across. It is a difficult period for the whole nation,” said the 32-year-old. “We want to protect our families. For example, at home I have my wife with three children, not letting

them leave home is very difficult but we are very attentive to the rules.” But the player, currently the second top Italian scorer in Serie A with 13 goals, behind the untouchable Ciro Immobile (27), did not stop there. Like many other footballers, now deprived of playing time, he has become involved in helping raise funds for those in the medical world, on the front line facing the crisis which has killed nearly 3,000 and infected over 13,000 in Italy. He participated along with other Serie A players in a juggling competition as part of a fundraiser for hospitals. He also auctioned his No.9 jersey worn during the final match this month, signed with the now famous motto “Andra tutto Bene”. The 2,500 euros (\$2,600) raised were donated to health authorities in Italy’s southern Puglia region, from where he hails. It was in this region, in the heel of

Italy, where Caputo started his career in his native Bari under coach Antonio Conte. “I will be forever grateful to him. He launched me in Serie B, with Bari (in 2008) and that day I scored a hat-trick,” explained Caputo. “Then he wanted me in Siena (2010-11). He taught me the importance of sacrifice. With him, when you return home, you’re totally exhausted.” His year in Siena under Conte was the first of nine seasons for Caputo in Serie B. After two seasons with Empoli, helping them to top-flight promotion in 2018, his form has exploded this term since joining Sassuolo last July. “He’s a master in the art of in-depth attacking and marking,” said Sassuolo coach Roberto De Zerbi. “He arrived late in Serie A. His strength is that he takes advantage of all this with the maturity of a man.”

TRAGIC

## Former Villa and Cardiff midfielder Whittingham, 35, dies

AFP  
London

Former Aston Villa and Cardiff midfielder Peter Whittingham died yesterday at the age of 35 following an accidental fall. Whittingham had been in hospital since suffering head injuries at a pub in the seaside town of Barry on March 7. He reportedly fell down a flight of stairs after watching England play Wales in the Six Nations tournament. In a statement on their website, Cardiff said: “It is with an immeasurable amount of sorrow that we must inform supporters that Peter Whittingham has passed away at the age of 35. We are heartbroken. The news of Peter’s sudden and untimely passing has shaken us to our very foundation.” Whittingham, a former England Under-21 international, started his career at Villa and won the FA Youth Cup with them in 2002. He played 66 games for Villa and had loan spells at Burnley and Derby before joining Cardiff in 2007. Whittingham helped Cardiff reach the 2008 FA Cup final, which they lost 1-0 to Portsmouth, and the 2012 League Cup final, where they were beaten on penalties by Liverpool. He was in the side who won the Championship in 2013, taking Cardiff back to the top-flight for the first time since relegation from the old Division One in 1962. He moved to Blackburn after 450 appearances in a decade with Cardiff and finished his career at Ewood Park in 2018.



Peter Whittingham reportedly fell down a flight of stairs after watching England play Wales in the Six Nations tournament.

“Our love goes out to his wife Amanda, their young son and family. They are at the forefront of our thoughts and, on their behalf, we ask for their privacy to be respected at this unfathomably cruel and difficult time,” the statement said. “First and foremost, Peter was a family man — and somebody who could light up a room with his sense of humour, warmth and personality. Then, as a professional footballer — as a Bluebird — he excelled with talent, ease, grace and humility. Nobody did it better. The loss of Peter will be painfully felt by our city, supporters and indeed all who ever had the pleasure of knowing him. We love you Pete and your memory will eternally stay with us.”

## Belarus league kicks off after others shut down

**Minsk, Belarus:** As football around the world shut down amid the coronavirus pandemic, defiant Belarus kicked off its new season yesterday and said it would even allow spectators to watch the games. Energetik BGU got the Belarus Premier League underway with a 3-1 win over BATE Borisov and a live stream of the game showed at least several hundred fans watching in the main stand. Earlier, Vladimir Bazanov, the head of the Belarus Football Federation, said on its official website that only 51 cases of coronavirus had been recorded in the country and there was no reason for not beginning the season. “For what reason should we not start it? Is a state of emergency declared in our country?” he said. “There is no critical situation. So we decided that

we are starting the championship in a timely manner. Today.” He added there was no point in barring the public, as many other leagues did before they eventually suspended games altogether. “Yes, many matches in Europe have been played without spectators. But so many fans gather around the stadium that it makes no sense to close off the game.” Bazanov said that he would see several matches himself. “If you followed the last championship, then you know that I constantly attend matches. And over the first round of games I plan to be at three matches,” he said. Shakhtyor Soligorsk were hosting Torpedo Zhodino in yesterday’s other match with six more games to be played between yesterday and tomorrow.

ROUND-UP

## Real striker Jovic faces criminal charges for breaking quarantine

The Serbian government is set to press charges against the country’s Real Madrid striker **Luka Jovic** for breaking his mandatory 28-day coronavirus quarantine, the state Tanjug news agency said yesterday. “Jovic breached the self-isolation when he left his apartment in the Belgrade suburb of Vracar and his excuse was that he went to a pharmacy to buy medicines. If he breaches the quarantine again, he faces harsher measures and possibly arrest. The law applies to everyone and the authorities will not discriminate regardless of what one does for a living,” the agency said. Serbia’s president Aleksandar Vucic declared a state of emergency on Sunday to curb the coronavirus outbreak in the Balkan nation. One of the measures is a 28-day quarantine for all Serbian citizens travelling home from European countries most affected by the virus, including Spain. Serbian media reported that the international striker had returned to Serbia from Madrid earlier this week to visit his girlfriend after matches in Spain’s La Liga were suspended. The 22-year-old denied rumours that he had broken Real Madrid’s own quarantine to travel to Serbia.



teammates, due to the coronavirus pandemic, local media reported. The nine players refused the temporary unemployment terms offered by the club with the Super League postponed until April 30 due to the ongoing outbreak, Swiss news agency ATS claimed. Sion’s president Christian Constantin has decided to rip up the deals immediately after the players rejected his measures including less training and a salary cap.

Ex-Switzerland international Djourou and former Cameroon midfielder Song are joined by Pajtim Kasami, Ermir Lenjani, Xavier Kouassi, Seydou Doumbia, Mickael Facchinetti, Christian Zock, Birama Ndoye in leaving the two-time Swiss champions. Switzerland has registered some 3,800 cases of coronavirus, including 33 deaths making the small Alpine country of 8.5m people one of the hardest-hit by the pandemic compared to its population size. **MAN UNITED GUARANTEE PAY FOR CASUAL WORKERS** Manchester United have vowed to pay 3,000 casual staff even for the remainder of the season even if matches are forced behind closed doors or cancelled due to the Covid-19 crisis. The shutdown of English football was extended until April 30 with mass gatherings banned to try and halt the spread of the virus. Old Trafford is still due to host four Premier League matches this season, while United could still have three more home games in the Europa League. Last week United announced they were paying £350 (\$415) towards the travel and accommodation of each supporter that bought a ticket for the trip to LASK after Austria’s Covid-19 measures saw the Europa League last 16, first leg forced behind closed doors. **GLADBACH PLAYERS GIVE UP WAGES TO HELP CLUB** Borussia Moenchengladbach’s squad

have offered to give up their wages to help the club’s financial situation during the coronavirus pandemic, sporting director Max Eberl said. Gladbach are set to lose income from broadcasting, sponsorships and ticket sales during the COVID-19 outbreak with all Bundesliga matches suspended until at least April 2. Coaching staff and boss Marco Rose have also said they would go without their salaries. According to media reports in Germany, the decision by the players and staff will allow the side sitting fourth in the table to save one million euros (\$1.07m). **HIGUAIN LEAVES QUARANTINE TO RETURN TO ARGENTINA** Juventus striker Gonzalo Higuain has left the team’s quarantine and returned home to Argentina, according to multiple reports in Italy. The 32-year-old international had been in isolation along with the rest of Serie A leaders’ squad following teammate Daniele Rugani’s positive test a week ago, with France’s Blaise Matuidi also catching the virus in recent days. Higuain had reportedly asked Juve for permission to visit his sick mother, and had a test confirming he was negative for Covid-19. The recommended quarantine period is two weeks. As flights to Argentina are all blocked, Higuain organised a transfer by private jet with his family first to France late on Wednesday, then Spain and from there fly to South America, according to reports.

Germany’s Sami Khedira and Bosnian Miralem Pjanic have also left Turin to join their families. Star attacker Cristiano Ronaldo had remained in Portugal to self-isolate after his mother suffered a stroke. Italy has been hard-hit by the coronavirus pandemic with over 3,000 deaths and more than 13,000 positive cases. **BAYERN TAKE TRAINING ONLINE TO REDUCE VIRUS RISK** Keen to avoid unnecessary travel while maintaining social contact, Bayern Munich have set up ‘cyber-training’ sessions where players work out together online by following exercises streamed from the club’s headquarters. “We all have to try to deal with the situation in a positive way,” Bayern coach Hansi Flick told the club’s website. “Yesterday (Wednesday) at 11 am, we had our first ‘Cyber Training’, where the team were coached remotely. Everyone was motivated, everyone did very well.” Germany has not yet introduced mandatory confinement measures, but Bundesliga leaders Bayern have decided to keep their players at home in order to best respect the instructions from health authorities. “The guys are equipped with the fitness recording clocks. That means we get all relevant data of each player, such as the heart rate, on our monitors,” said Holger Broich, the club’s head fitness coach. Flick contends that keeping players in touch on a regular basis is just as essential as the training itself.

**NEVILLE SAYS HIS HOTELS FREE FOR NHS STAFF** Gary Neville has said that the two hotels he co-owns with former Manchester United team mate Ryan Giggs will be made available to National Health Service (NHS) staff at no cost as they fight the coronavirus pandemic. Premier League side Chelsea have also made the Millennium Hotel at their Stamford Bridge stadium in London available to NHS staff. Through their GG Hospitality group, Neville and Giggs co-own Hotel Football and The Stock Exchange in Manchester. “Our 176 beds will be occupied by NHS workers and medical professionals from Friday,” Neville said in a video posted on Twitter. **SECOND TEST NEGATIVE FOR FLAMENGO’S JESUS** Brazilian soccer club Flamengo said their coach Jorge Jesus has tested negative for the coronavirus, contradicting the Portuguese manager’s own message a day earlier. “The new exam done on coach Jorge Jesus has come back negative for COVID-19,” the Rio de Janeiro club said in a statement. Jesus posted an Instagram message on Tuesday declaring he had tested positive for the virus. The club said at the time the result was “weak positive or inconclusive” and a second test was required. Jesus last weekend criticised the Rio state football Federation for allowing games to go on, saying footballers and backroom staff were “not superhuman” and deserved more care.

## SPOTLIGHT

# English football extends shutdown till April 30

No date, even provisional, was given by the leagues for the season to be concluded

By David Conn  
The Guardian

The provisional date of the first weekend in April for the resumption of professional football in England has been pushed almost a month further on until “no earlier than 30 April”, the Premier League, Football Association, EFL and women’s professional game have said in a joint statement.

The announcement, which emphasises that public health is the overriding priority in the coronavirus crisis, was made after an emergency conference call with the 20 Premier League clubs. The FA said it had “extended indefinitely” the date for the season to conclude after its board sanctioned a relaxation of the standard 1 June finish date given the unprecedented circumstances caused by the pandemic.

No date, even provisional, was given by the leagues for the season to be concluded, as there is a recognition the whole of society is in terribly uncertain times and any resumption, most probably behind closed doors, is dependent on government health advice and policies.

UEFA this week did state a hoped-for finish date of 30 June for the conclusion of European club football seasons when it postponed this summer’s European Championship, due to be held from 11 June to 11 July, to allow more time. FIFA, though, said on Wednesday it had set up a working group with UEFA and the other continental federations to examine how to relax normal player registration rules if the season, and players’ contracts, need to be extended beyond 30 June.

“The FA, Premier League, EFL and women’s professional game, together with the Professional Footballers’ Association and League Managers Association, understand we are in unprecedented times and our thoughts are with everyone affected by Covid-19,” the statement said.

“We are united in our commitment to finding ways of resuming the 2019-20 football season and ensuring all domestic and European club league and cup matches are played as soon as it is safe and possible to do so. We have collectively supported UEFA in postponing Euro 2020 to create space in the calendar to ensure domestic and European club league and cup



A driver pulls a trailer past Arsenal's Emirates Stadium in London in this March 13 file photo. The shutdown of English football was extended until at least April 30 yesterday. (AFP)

matches have an increased opportunity to be played and, in doing so, maintain the integrity of each competition.

“The FA’s rules and regulations state ‘the season shall terminate not later than 1 June’ and ‘each competition shall, within the limit laid down by the FA, determine the length of its own playing season’. However, the FA’s board has agreed for this limit to be extended indefinitely for the 2019-20 season in relation to professional football. Additionally, we have collectively agreed that the professional game in England will be further postponed until no earlier than 30 April.

“The progress of Covid-19 remains unclear and we can reassure everyone the health and welfare of players, staff and

supporters are our priority. We will continue to follow government advice and work collaboratively to keep the situation under review and explore all options available to find ways of resuming the season when the conditions allow. We would all like to re-emphasise that our thoughts are with everyone affected by Covid-19.”

One option could see the end of the 2019/20 and beginning of the 2020/21 come together with no time for an off-season break. “Players may need to get their summer break in now before we finish what was the 19/20 season and roll it right into the 20/21 season without a break,” Brighton striker Glenn Murray told AFP.

“Everyone loves sport, loves watching football but I really think the right decision was made in bringing it to a halt. At this moment in time it’s pretty irrelevant, people’s health is first and foremost. Once we get over this crisis we can look at sport and getting the Premier League and Football Leagues back in action.”

Having set the space of six weeks before even considering playing again, football’s authorities are holding urgent talks with Sky, other broadcasters and sponsors about maintaining the game’s financial stability. On Wednesday the EFL announced a £50m package, in effect bringing forward the distribution of TV money, to help clubs with immediate cash flow crises.

## FOCUS

## Turkish leagues finally suspended after players complain

Reuters  
Ankara

Turkish football, basketball and volleyball leagues, which were among the last to continue playing matches, were suspended indefinitely yesterday due to the widening coronavirus outbreak. “Within the framework of measures taken against the coronavirus, all matches of soccer, basketball, volleyball and handball have been postponed,” Sports Minister Muharrem Kasapoglu said after meeting the heads of sports federations in Ankara. Turkey has confirmed 191 cases and three deaths from coronavirus. Authorities had taken steps to contain the spread, including ordering sports events to be played without spectators, but had stopped short of halting matches.

Turkey had come under international pressure to postpone its competitions after the overwhelming majority of European football leagues, and several others globally, shut down. Yesterday, football’s global players union FIFPRO said it had written to the Turkish league asking it to “urgently reconsider” its decision to continue matches and training. “Numerous foreign players have contacted us to say they are uncomfortable continuing as #COVID19 spreads,” FIFPRO said on Twitter.

Galatasaray’s Colombian

striker Radamel Falcao joined the chorus of footballers criticising the decision to continue playing. “People are dying around the world and we are talking to play football,” he said on Twitter.

Kayserispor’s Bernard Mensah also took to social media to express his frustration. “Life is the most important thing on earth... this is (a) serious thing happening and they still insist to continue do they really care about us?” the 25-year-old Ghanaian posted on Twitter.

Galatasaray’s basketball players issued a joint statement saying they found it “quite bizarre” to continue playing. John Obi Mikel left Turkish side Trabzonspor days after the former Chelsea midfielder said he did not feel comfortable with top-flight games in the country being played.

The chairman of league leaders Trabzonspor, however, said any delay to Super League matches would lead to an increase in the number of divorces. “Football is the one thing in Turkey that allows people to get rid of their stress, to entertain themselves and to occupy their minds,” chairman Ahmet Agooglu said, wearing a protective mask as he spoke to the media.

“If they suspend the league for a long time, in a month from now there won’t be enough judges to rule on all the divorce cases,” he added. “We are the leaders right now. Trabzonspor should be declared champions.”



Galatasaray’s Colombian striker Radamel Falcao had joined the chorus of footballers criticising the decision to continue playing.

## PREMIER LEAGUE

## Klopp’s human touch fosters winning mentality at Liverpool

AFP  
London

Jürgen Klopp says his ability to build close relationships with his Liverpool players has been the secret to their success during his reign. Although the Premier League season is currently delayed until at least April 30 due to the coronavirus, Reds boss Klopp is in constant contact with his squad via the players’ WhatsApp group.

That personal touch is part of a hands-on approach Klopp believes is essential to understanding what makes his players tick. The German obsesses over every detail of their lives so he can get the best out of them on the pitch, joking he probably even thinks about them in his sleep.

“Apart from sleeping, I think the whole day – in fact probably when I am sleeping – about these boys. I don’t want to, it just happens because there is so much information you have,” Klopp, speaking before the current suspension was enforced, told *JD’s In The Duffle Bag* podcast series. “For me the most important thing is for the player to be in his best shape in the moment when it counts and we try to do that with nutrition, training and tactics. But then there is a time when they go home and there is still a situation. That is normal life but it all influences performance. I don’t pretend I’m interested.

“I am interested. It’s important to know who you are working with and it’s important to know



A banner of Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp is seen outside a house in Liverpool yesterday. (Reuters)

why somebody is determined and motivated. I think I need to know them. That’s what creates a relationship. They can talk to me and it’s always important.”

Klopp is liked by his players because of that empathetic side to his personality and his methods have created a united mentality at Anfield. His honest approach is a bid to foster accountability among his players.

The results have been impressive, with Liverpool establishing a 25-point lead in the Premier League that had taken them to the brink of a first English title for 30 years prior to the virus suspension.

They also won last season’s Champions League and reached the final of Europe’s elite club

competition the season before that.

“I’m always 100 per cent honest, I don’t tell always the truth, but that’s different...that means I don’t speak. If you ask me, I would be one hundred per cent honest,” Klopp said.

“I never lied to a player, that doesn’t work. If I say ‘You have a chance if you do this and that’, then you have a chance if you do this and that. But I have to remind myself these are the moments when you can lose a player or lose a team if you say something and don’t stick to it. It is really possible you lose the whole dressing room but it’s never happened to me because I don’t do that. I try to not do things which make me feel better.”

## BOTTOMLINE

## QSL holds workshop for club coaches

The Qatar Stars League (QSL) yesterday held a workshop for first and second division club coaches to discuss resumption of training for players after the ongoing stoppage of activities, in view of precautionary measures taken to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

The QSL underlined its main goal to maintain the readiness and fitness of players ahead of the start of competitions.

The workshop was attended by QSL CEO

Hani Taleb Ballan, Executive Director of Competitions and Football Development Ahmed Khellil Abbassi, coaches from first and second division side, besides Dr Salam Sharab, a doctor in the Ministry of Public Health, and Dr Khaled Hassoun, Medical Director of National Sports Medicine Programme at Aspetar Hospital.

The mechanisms for resumption of training were discussed, and the coaches presented their views, ideas and proposals for

the coming period, with the aim of maintaining the fitness of players while away from competitions.

It was agreed at the meeting, after listening to all points of view and proposals, to give coaches the freedom to set training programmes, implement them in the proper manner and supervise their implementation, provided that the players are continuously monitored by technical and administrative bodies.

## ROUND-UP

## Arsenal say manager Arteta recovering well as club reopen training facilities

By Nick Ames  
The Guardian

Mikel Arteta is well on the road to recovery after being diagnosed with coronavirus a week ago and Arsenal’s training facilities have reopened for everyday maintenance after a deep clean.

Around 100 Arsenal personnel, including the first-team squad and coaching staff, have been self-isolating since Arteta’s positive test.

They are set to return to training next Tuesday but that looks far from certain now the Premier League will not resume before 30 April. The club are working through the implications of that decision for their day-to-day schedule, a process made difficult by the fast-moving wider situation dictating events.

Arteta is communicating from home with colleagues. “We’re pleased to say Mikel is feeling much better,” read part of a lengthy open letter to Arsenal supporters in the name of directors, players and staff. “He’s in good spirits, doing detailed plan-

ning with the coaches and speaking to the players regularly.”

A small workforce is maintaining the London Colney and Hale End training centres’ pitches and facilities for whenever training gets the go-ahead. The Arsenal women’s and academy teams are also staying at home. Arsenal pledged their support to the local community, in Islington, during the coronavirus outbreak. Discussions about ways to support the area’s more vulnerable groups have included the potential for online coaching and teaching, and staff volunteering to have regular phone contact with elderly people who feel isolated. The club is also looking at ways to support its many casual workers.

The Premier League’s decision about the season’s immediate future has Arsenal’s full support. Their managing director, Vinai Venkatesham, and head of football, Raul Sanllehi, participated in yesterday’s conference call between the league and its 20 clubs. Arsenal face a backlog of at least six top-flight games, plus an FA Cup quarter-final with Sheffield United, when some semblance of normality returns.

