



Onerous task: BCCI president Sourav Ganguly and secretary Jay Shah arrive for a crucial meeting in Mumbai on Saturday. • VIVEK BENDRE

It could be a truncated IPL: Ganguly

BCCI will keep 'reviewing the situation every week'

AMOL KARHADKAR
MUMBAI

After a day of frantic activity at Cricket Centre – the BCCI headquarters – where the Board's office-bearers met with the owners of all the eight Indian Premier League (IPL) franchises, followed by the IPL Governing Council discussing the way forward after suspending the event till April 15, BCCI president Sourav Ganguly hinted that "truncated IPL" is the only way forward but that's the last possible option that the BCCI is considering.

Anxious wait

Once the BCCI adhered to the government advisories on Friday and suspended IPL's 13th edition till April 15 in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, the franchise owners were anxiously waiting to be briefed by the BCCI bosses on Saturday.

No wonder then that the meeting saw virtually all the high-profile owners – including Kolkata Knight Riders' Shahrukh Khan, Mumbai Indians' Akash Ambani, Ness Wadia of Kings XI Punjab and Parth Jindal of Delhi Capitals – in attendance, along with

their chief executives.

While the BCCI secretary Jay Shah, in a statement, stressed that "the BCCI and all its stakeholders are committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for everyone involved in our great sport and the nation" after the meeting, Jindal and Wadia, while speaking to reporters, also stressed on the "safety" aspect, without spelling out the details.

After the Governing Council meeting, however, Ganguly admitted that truncated IPL is definitely being considered. "It (truncated IPL) will happen because if it is (starting by) April 15, then in any case 15 days are gone, so it has to be truncated. How truncated, how many games, I can't say at the moment. Till April 15, (there are) no visas," Ganguly said.

Various options

However, multiple franchise officials confirmed to *The Hindu* that the BCCI office-bearers and IPL executives tabled various options to the teams. Possible start dates that were mentioned were April 15, April 20, April 25, April 30 and May 1.

"We were told that with multiple double-headers, a full IPL season will require 37 days, so considering the IPL can be stretched till May 31, if the season can start on or before April 25, there's a bright chance of playing the full season," said a franchise official.

"There are a couple of options for a truncated IPL: Eight teams playing each other just once instead of home and away in the league (32 games, including 4 playoffs) or the teams being divided into two groups of four each and playing home and away basis (28 games, including playoffs) can be considered should the need arise," an IPL official said.

He corroborated that the two possibilities of a truncated IPL will arise only if the Union Government gives a go-ahead and clears visas of overseas players and support staff members for a start at the end of April or early May.

However, all these possibilities will arise if and when the COVID-19 pandemic subsides in India. Till then, as Ganguly admitted, BCCI will keep "reviewing the situation every week".

All domestic games put on hold

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

A day after suspending the Indian Premier League and India's two ODIs against South Africa, the Board of Control for Cricket in India has put the whole domestic season "on hold" on Saturday.

"In view of the ongoing novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, the BCCI on Saturday announced that all matches of the Paytm Irani Cup, Senior Women's One-Day knockout, Vizzy Trophy, Senior Women's One-Day Challenger, Women's Under-19 One-Day knockout, Women's Under-19 T20 League, Super League and knockout, Women's Under-19 T20 Challenger Trophy, Women's Under-23 knockout, Women's Under-23 One-Day Challenger have been put on hold till further notice," Jay Shah, BCCI secretary, said in a statement.

It will mean that the Irani Cup tie – between Ranji Trophy champion Saurashtra and Rest of India – will most probably be played as a precursor to the next season while the renovated Motera stadium in Ahmedabad, with a record capacity of 1.11 lakh which was scheduled to host the Senior Women's Challenger from March 26, will have to wait longer for hosting its first competitive game.

Surprise decision

The decision came as a surprise to many since Gujarat is yet to have any positive COVID-19 case.

In fact, the national selection panel had even finalised the Rest of India squad, with Hanuma Vihari as captain. However, considering the rapidly perpetrating coronavirus cases in various regions of India, the BCCI decided to suspend all official cricket tournaments.

IN BRIEF

Kiwis abandon tour of Australia

SYDNEY
New Zealand abandoned its one-day cricket tour of Australia on Saturday after Wellington tightened border restrictions to combat the spread of coronavirus. The Blacks Caps lost the opening game of the three-match series and were due to play the second here on Sunday, but will fly home after New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced everyone entering the country from midnight on Sunday would have to self-isolate for 14 days.

All England: Axelsen in final

SPORTS BUREAU
LONDON
Viktor Axelsen of Denmark entered the final of the All England badminton championships here on Saturday after rallying to get past Malaysia's Lee Zii Jia 17-21, 21-13, 21-19.

He will now meet Chou Tien Chen of Chinese Taipei, who had an easy passage to the final after Anders Antonsen, his opponent from Denmark retired midway through the first game. Chen was leading 17-14 at that time.

In the women's semifinal, Nozomi Okuhara, the conquerer of P.V. Sindhu, fell rather tamely to the Chinese top seed Chen Yu Fei 21-14, 23-21.

Culmination of a rich cricketing history

I ensured that players were picked purely on basis of performance: Jaydev Shah

RANJI REVIEW

Y.B. SARANGI
RAJKOT

Carrying on a long legacy from the time of the British rule, the friendly and hospitable Saurashtrians finally experienced a dream come true when Jaydev Unadkat lifted the Ranji Trophy for the first time by beating Bengal at home here on Friday.

After the erstwhile Nawanganar (the previous version of Saurashtra) won the Ranji Trophy – which was named after the legendary Ranjitsinhji of Jamnagar – way back in 1936-37, incidentally beating Bengal, its cricket administration went through a lot of changes before the Saurashtra Cricket Association (SCA) came into being in the 1950s.

Renowned cricketers

Over the years, the region has produced several renowned cricketers – including Duleepsinhji, L. Amar-sinh, L. Ranji, Vinoo Mankad, Salim Durrani, Dhiraaj Parsana, Karsan Ghavri, Ravindra Jadeja, Unadkat and Cheteshwar Pujara – and takes pride in its rich cricketing history.

Pujara, who was part of the winning squad, said,

"This victory means a lot to me. For the entire team and the region, this is special. It means a lot to my father, who has played the Ranji

Ranji Trophy's shining stars

Batting

Name	Inn	Runs	HS	Avg.	50/100s
Rahul Dalal (Arunachal Pradesh)	17	1340	267*	95.71	5/4
Taruwar Kohli (Mizoram)	16	998	307*	71.28	5/3
Puneet Bisht (Meghalaya)	15	976	250	69.71	6/2
Paras Dogra (Pondicherry)	13	967	200	80.58	3/4



Bowling

Name	Inn	Wkts	BBI	BBM	Avg.	5/10W
Jaydev Unadkat (Saurashtra)	16	67	7/56	12/106	13.23	7/3
Sanjay Yadav (Meghalaya)	15	55	9/52	13/112	12.65	5/3
Harshal Patel (Haryana)	17	52	7/29	12/53	14.48	4/1
Diwesh Pathania (Services)	17	50	5/36	8/63	15.82	4/0



Trophy. For generations to follow, it will give them belief," said Pujara.

For former Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) secretary Niranjan Shah and his son Jaydev, the Ranji Trophy triumph was a lifetime achievement.

"Earlier, our players used to migrate to other States. During Jaydev's captaincy (for 12 years), he held back the players to build a team.

"Our effort to groom talented under-19 players for Ranji Trophy also helped," said Niranjan.

Jaydev, the current SCA president, elaborated how

he built a solid unit. "Once, we were No. 28 among 30 teams. Then we became the Plate division champion, came to Elite, qualified for knockouts and ultimately became a Ranji champion.

Purely on performance

"I ensured that players were picked purely on the basis of performance without any discrimination and showed faith in them. That's how we got an experienced side. You need experience to win Ranji Trophy.

"I kept some senior players in the leadership group before deciding to

hand over captaincy to Unadkat. The transition was smooth. Every small thing was taken care of. Getting such top class infrastructure (at the SCA) also helped," said Jaydev.

Former captain and coach Sitanshu Kotaka, who spent 27 years with the side, said, "A good unit, which was developed over the years, has made this possible. It's a proud moment for all of us," said Kotak.

Coach Karsan Ghavri said, "Except Unadkat and Pujara, it is a team of normal Ranji Trophy players. For five-six of them it was like religion."

Gopi welcomes BWF's decision

BADMINTON

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM
HYDERABAD

India's chief national coach P. Gopi Chand welcomed the Badminton World Federation's (BWF) decision to suspend till April 12, all events from March 16 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"It is a good decision and one cannot ignore the health risk of players, officials and spectators.

"When the whole world is witnessing so many restrictions, it was not the ideal scenario to go ahead with the BWF events," Gopi told *The Hindu* on the way back to Hyderabad from London.

'Element of concern'

"I don't say the players are scared but there was a serious element of concern which I feel was pretty genuine, given the kind of alarming reports that have been emanating from different parts of the world," Gopi said.

"This is more so with those players who have been travelling around the world in search of winning important points to qualify for the Tokyo Olympics.

"I cannot straight away comment on the likely impact of the fresh guidelines to be issued for the qualification for Olympics. We



Gopi Chand. • FILE PHOTO

need to know the cut-off date and the number of tournaments the players, especially those aspiring from India, can play to make the cut for the Games," the former All England champion said.

"Unless, there is a clear message detailing the qualification norms, what sort of impact they will have on the players, especially those aspiring to make it from India," the former All England champion said.

The tournaments which will be affected by the BWF directive on Saturday include Swiss Open, India Open 2020, Orleans Masters, Malaysia Open and Singapore Open and other International Grade III tournaments.

Significantly, Gopi also revealed that most of the national campers at two of his academies in Hyderabad are in 'isolation' if not quarantined.

Adjah helps Neroca hold CCFC

I-LEAGUE

IANS
IMPHAL

Host Neroca FC played out a 2-2 draw with Chennai City FC (CCFC) in the I-League here on Saturday. Khangam Horam found the net for the host just 21 seconds after kick-off – the quickest goal of this season.

Mashoor Sheriff equalised in the 21st minute before Adolfo Miranda made it 2-1 for CCFC before the break.

Philip Adjah saved the day for Neroca, converting a penalty in the added time to give a vital point for his side.

Chances had been abundant on either end and not surprisingly so. The linesman flagged seven offside in the first forty five minutes and with both teams playing a high line at the back, the statistic seems to suggest that both managers may have considered throwing caution to the winds to an extent.

The hosts climb to ninth with 19 points while Chennai remains at seventh.

The results: Neroca 2 (Horam 1, Adjah 90-P) drew with CCFC 2 (Sheriff 21, 45+2).

At Srinagar: Real Kashmir vs. TRAU FC – Match cancelled.

ATK has the last laugh, picks up a record third title

Javier Hernandez's brace leaves Chennaiyin FC ruing its missed chances

ISL

AMITABHA DAS SHARMA
FATORDA

Javier Hernandez's brace helped ATK defeat Chennaiyin FC in the final and create Indian Super League history, at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here on Saturday.

A handful of lucky people – mainly friends and family of the team owners who were given special access – were witness to the interesting action which was held behind closed doors because of the Coronavirus scare.

In guiding ATK to its record third title, Antonio Lopez Habas became the most successful coach of the ISL as the Spaniard picked his second crown while returning to the side after a break of three seasons. The ATK centre-half Hernandez, who had never scored before the final, stepped up as the finisher scoring the first and the third goals while Spainard Edu Garcia scored one in between. Nerijus Valskis pulled one back for Chennaiyin FC



Cup of joy: The victorious ATK team with the trophy. • PRASHANT NAKWE

late in the second half.

Missed chances

The final could have easily gone the other way had Chennaiyin FC managed to avail two opportunities in the first four minutes.

Chennaiyin FC pressed the attack mode right from the start and had Andre Schembri running up the right to cut the ball back to winger Rafael

Crivellaro in the box.

The latter's attempt took a deflection off an ATK defender and was headed into the goal but Pritam Kotal made a timely goalmouth clearance to save ATK. Keeping up the pressure, Chennaiyin made another inroad in the fourth minute but this time it was the crosspiece that blocked Valskis' attempt.

ATK released the pressure

by getting the goal in the 10th minute. It was the result of a fantastic combination in the attack which saw Roy Krishna moving up on the left to collect a long floater from the centre.

The Fijian forward essayed a nice cross upfront to his colleague David Williams, who played a dummy letting Hernandez move from the centre and finish with a spectacular

scissors kick. ATK could have doubled the lead in the 23rd minute when Krishna set up another cross which was partially cleared by Vishal Kaith.

Schembri had the chance to draw level for Chennaiyin FC in the 31st minute but the ATK goalkeeper Arindam Bhattacharya put up a fantastic effort to clear the former's header. The ATK suffered a big blow when Roy Krishna walked off the pitch in tears after suffering in injury in the 40th minute. The setback, however, did not appear to hurt ATK much as it came back after the break to double the lead in the 48th minute.

Edu Garcia did the finishing act to set ATK on the victory path. Valskis made it 2-1 in the 69th minute but that appeared to come a bit late as ATK effectively sealed its back-line. Hernandez made it 3-1 in the injury-time to complete a fantastic win for ATK.

The result: Final: ATK 3 (Javier Hernandez 10, 90+3, Edu Garcia 48) bt Chennaiyin FC 1 (Nerijus Valskis 69).

In football goals matter: Habas

AMITABHA DAS SHARMA
FATORDA

The ATK head coach Antonio Lopez Habas, who earned a record two ISL titles helming the same franchise, said the second crown was more precious as it came in a more competitive atmosphere.

"There is a big difference between the two. In the first season the league was just settling down to a professional format but this season the league has grown really big with better players, coaches and had more competition. So this one is more special to me," Habas said after ATK's triumph.

Most important aspect

Habas said his team succeeded in realising the most important aspect in football – that is scoring goals.

"In the first half we were better while Chennaiyin played a better second half. You see in football the goals matter and that's where we did better than our opponents," Habas said. "Our strength this season was the cohesion in the team and it was really the great mix of



Well done! Nerijus Valskis of Chennaiyin... winner of the Golden Boot award. • PRASHANT NAKWE

- Golden Glove award: Gurpreet Sandhu (BFC)
- Golden Boot award: Nerijus Valskis (CFC)
- Emerging Player of the league: Sumit Rathi (ATK)
- Hero of the match: Arindam Bhattacharya (ATK)
- Hero of the League award: Hugo Boumous (FC Goa)

the Indian and the foreign players that brought success to us," ATK's Spanish head coach added.

Chennaiyin FC head coach Owen Coyle said his side was

not clinical enough in converting chances. "When we look at the match tonight our team failed in two areas. One was that we were not clinical enough to convert the chances and secondly, we also let the opponent get away with their chances.

"As a whole we could have played lot better and ATK should be lot happy to be going back with the title," Coyle said. "Goals changes matches and see how ATK made the most of the first chance coming their way. We had two easier chances and not getting a goal from them became crucial in the end," Coyle added.