

TRACKING THE VIRUS

Iran's Olympic star Hadadi tests positive

Ehsan Hadadi, Iran's first Olympic track and field medallist, has tested positive for coronavirus, World Athletics reported on Saturday. Hadadi, the Asian discus champion who became a national hero when he won silver at the 2012 Olympics in London, has an athletics base in the U.S. but was at home in Tehran when he contracted the virus. "We've received word that Iranian discus thrower @EhsanHadadi has tested positive for Coronavirus. We wish him a full and swift recovery," World Athletics, the sport's global governing body, said on Twitter. Hadadi, a six-times Asian Championship winner and Asian discus record holder, had been among the favourites to win gold at this year's Tokyo Games before the announcement of their postponement on Tuesday.

I struggled to breathe: Dybala on his battle

Juventus star Paulo Dybala revealed how he "struggled to breathe" after contracting coronavirus which has killed over 9,000 people in Italy. The Argentine international announced last Saturday he was one of three Juventus players to catch the virus along with Daniele Rugani and Blaise Matuidi, who both had no symptoms. "I feel better now after some strong symptoms," the 26-year-old Dybala told JTV channel. "A couple of days ago I was not well, I felt heavy and after five minutes of movement I had to stop because I was struggling to breathe." Now I can move and walk to start trying to train, because when I tried in the past few days I started to shake too much. "I gasped for air and as a result I couldn't do anything, after five minutes I was already very tired, I felt the body heavy and my muscles hurt. "Now I'm fine. My fiancée Oriana (Sabatini) has also overcome the symptoms."

A-League pays the price for carrying on

A player from A-League side Newcastle Jets on Saturday became Australia's first professional footballer to test positive for coronavirus. The man was not named but reports said he was involved in the team's Monday night 2-1 home win over Melbourne City behind closed doors — the last game before the season was suspended due to the pandemic. A member of staff at Wellington Phoenix was also confirmed as having COVID-19. "Newcastle Jets can confirm that a player in its A-League squad has returned a positive test," the club said in a statement. "The player and his family are in good health, and currently in quarantine in accordance with New South Wales Health protocols." It added that the squad were monitoring their health and anyone showing symptoms would self-isolate. The A-League was one of the last football competitions in the world still running until the plug was finally pulled on the 11-team domestic league this week.

'8 West Ham players have virus symptoms'

West Ham have eight players in self-isolation after showing mild symptoms of the coronavirus, according to the club's vice-chairwoman Karren Brady. The Hammers are the latest Premier League club to be hit by the pandemic. Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta, Chelsea winger Callum Hudson-Odoi — both now recovered — and several unnamed Leicester players tested positive for the virus. "I am relieved to say they are all showing mild symptoms and, along with their families, seem to be well," Brady told The Sun newspaper on Saturday. "But it is no more than a handshake, sneeze or cough away from any of us, so no one should be complacent." West Ham's players are training at home and the club hopes to resume regular sessions when Britain's lockdown period ends on April 13. **AGENCIES**

Playing with fire

IOC let an Olympic qualifier happen despite virus warnings; 7 tested positive after taking part in the event

TARIQPANJA
MARCH 28

AT LEAST seven people tested positive for the coronavirus earlier this month after taking part in a London boxing tournament to qualify for the Tokyo Games, an event that was allowed to begin by the International Olympic Committee despite widespread cancellations and warnings about the pandemic.

Turkey's boxing federation believes three of its boxers and a coach caught the coronavirus while attending the European qualifying tournament that started March 14. Croatian officials say two coaches and one boxer were infected at the same event, which was canceled after three days of competition — two with spectators present.

The tournament began even as the virus was already present in Britain and major sporting events like Premier League soccer and N.B.A. games were abruptly put on hold worldwide.

The boxing tournament was held by an I.O.C. task force at a time when the organization's president, Thomas Bach, and Tokyo officials were clinging to the idea of holding the Games as scheduled in July. The Olympics were postponed earlier this week until 2021, and Prime Minister Boris Johnson of Britain said Friday that he had the coronavirus and was suffering from mild symptoms.

"Athlete health was absolutely not considered first — that's the whole reason for our frustration," said Eyup Gozgec, the Turkish Boxing Federation president, in an interview through an interpreter. "Why did they let this event take place when the world was already on edge with this global outbreak for the past three months?"

The three boxers, Necat Ekinci, Serhat Guler and Busenaz Surmeneli, as well as the head coach Seyfullah Dumlupinar, tested positive after they traveled home to Turkey from London, Gozgec said. The entire traveling party was immediately placed in quarantine upon arrival, and was still waiting on the results of some tests, he added.

The BBC, citing an official from the Croatian Boxing Federation, reported that two coaches and an athlete from Croatia were "stable" and had been quarantined after contracting the virus. The team's epidemiologist believed they contracted the virus in London.

Tomo Kadic, a coach on the team, posted a video on Facebook to confirm he had tested positive. Boxer Toni Filipi later told a local radio station that he, too, was infected, but was already feeling better.

For the I.O.C., the episode comes at a bruising time. It was heavily criticized by athletes who thought it took too much time to make an inevitable move to postpone the Tokyo Games. In a statement it sent on behalf of its boxing task force — a group it set up after suspending boxing's global federation over governance failures last year — the I.O.C. said it found no evidence that the athletes contracted the virus at the qualifying tournament.

"Many participants were in independently



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organized training camps in Italy, Great Britain and in their home countries before the competition started on 14 March 2020 and have returned home a while ago so it is not possible to know the source of infection," the I.O.C. said.

On Friday, the I.O.C.'s sports director, Kit McConnell, sent a letter to the participants of the tournament that acknowledged the coronavirus cases, though it said one athlete's results was a "false positive."

In the letter reviewed by The New York Times, McConnell did not confirm that anyone contracted the virus at the event, but said anyone who may have been in contact with those infected should take the appropriate measures. "The risk of infection from them is low thanks to the daily health checks and hygiene measures as well as other precautionary measures taken before, during and in the follow-up of the event," McConnell wrote, without specifying what those measures

were. "These individuals would not have become infectious until the day before developing symptoms, and none have reported being ill at the event or on the day after competition concluded in London."

Gozgec is convinced his countrymen fell ill at the tournament. He said he has written to other federations to see if their athletes who were at the event are displaying symptoms of the virus. Even before the Boxing Road to Tokyo event was called off, competitors complained about the risk of infection. The first two days of the event were held with spectators present, then the event was moved behind closed doors for the third day, on March 16. That was the final day of action for a tournament that was originally scheduled to run through March 24.

Britain was one of the last European countries to put up restrictions against mass gatherings, including sporting events. On March 11, the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus threat a pandemic, and on March 12, Johnson called for a "delay phase" in Britain but did not officially ban mass gatherings.

Football leaders in the country called a halt to matches before a government ban, after players and coaching staff started to test positive for Covid-19. The I.O.C. said its qualifying tournament had followed the guidelines in place at the time, and that it took precautions to minimize risks.

"Safeguarding the well-being of the ath-

letes, officials and all other participants has always been a top priority," the I.O.C. said.

Another boxing qualifier was moved from Wuhan, China, in February to Jordan in early March by the same task force.

Gozgec painted a much different picture. He said the teams participating in the event were housed in the same hotel, where at times they needed to jam together into one elevator because a second one had broken down. All the delegations dined together and at no point, Gozgec said, were products like hand sanitizers made available — even though at the time, the British government had been pushing a national message focusing on hand hygiene.

"The problems started from the airport, once we landed on U.K. soil," Gozgec said. "At the hotel, the training facilities, why didn't they take the necessary measures to meet hygienic standards so that none of the people, athletes, coaches, officials involved would not catch coronavirus?"

Once the event was called off, the Turkish delegation scrambled to get home, with Turkey banning flights from the U.K. on the same day. Gozgec said the government added an extra Turkish Airlines flight from London to get them home and into quarantine. Some of Turkey's contingent, Gozgec said, started to show symptoms after three or four days.

He warned that others may have contracted the virus: "We are waiting for the test results." **NYT**

Former Liga winger dons white coat to take on virus

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
CORUNNA (SPAIN), MARCH 28

JOURNEYMAN FOOTBALLER Toni Dovale put his football boots to one side and slipped into a pharmacist's white coat in the front line struggle against coronavirus in Spain. The 29-year-old pharmacy graduate and former top-level sportsman had been playing football for a Thai club, but was visiting his family in Spain when the COVID-19 pandemic took hold.

So he decided to pitch in his 'grain of sand' against the virus using the studies which he had yet to put into practice due to his passion for football. "I really was packing my bags to go back when things got complicated," Dovale told AFP. Travel restrictions trapped Dovale in his native La Coruna in the Atlantic coast region of Galicia, where he started his football career with nearby Celta Vigo. Although Dovale also completed his university studies in pharmacy four years ago, he had never actually worked in the field. Now with the world of sport in limbo the footballer realised the time was ripe to use his studies to help his homeland.

Different ball game

"I was playing in Asia then; pharmacy is different there and I was never in Spain long enough to work," he says. "With football stopped and travel banned I said to myself 'get some practical experience and do your bit'."

The coronavirus is ravaging Spain with a death toll of over 4,800 and some 64,000 registered cases of infection.

There is hope of course with around 10,000 people already cured of the virus in Spain for multimedia clients "We're in a really frightening situation. Those of us working with the public are afraid, and the people who come to us for advice are afraid too," says Dovale, who is working in a pharmacy run by his family.

He has gloves but no mask, and does not appear ready to lose his smile any time soon. "We all know we are exposed, that this is a pandemic and a complicated situation," he says.

"But we all know too that our behaviour in complicated situations defines who we are, and for me I need to put fears for my own safety to one side and help in any way that I can. "There are shortages of many things and we are struggling to get enough of the simple things like thermometers, paracetamol, gloves and hand gels."

With football stopped and travel banned I said to myself 'get some practical experience and do your bit'

TONI DOVALE
FORMER BARCA YOUTH PLAYER

Pay cuts and pink slips: Sports on austerity drive

The virus outbreak has spared no one. From the richest leagues in the world to national federations, everyone is taking 'tough' calls to 'survive' the unforeseen crisis.

URUGUAY FOOTBALL LAYS OFF 400
The Uruguayan Football Association (AUF) announced that almost all of its staff, including coach Oscar Tabarez, have been laid off due to the coronavirus pandemic that has frozen sport worldwide. "The executive committee informs that, due to the current health crisis which has brought to a halt all its activities, it is obliged to take a series of tough decisions in order to protect the future functioning of the institution," the AUF said in a statement on Friday. The main measure was to "send all its staff to collect unemployment insurance" including Tabarez, 73, who has been the coach of the Uruguayan national team since 2006, leading them to a World Cup semi-final and a Copa America title. As well as full time staff, the AUF said it is also suspending

"all outside contracts in all categories" and was maintaining only "essential" services for the "basic needs of the institution."

ATLETICO JOIN THE LINE
Atletico Madrid became the latest La Liga club to request labour authorities to allow them to cut player and staff salaries while football is suspended in Spain due to the coronavirus pandemic. In a statement on Friday, club CEO Miguel Angel Gil said that they were "obliged" to propose a partial unemployment plan "for the employees who, due to the state of emergency in our country, can no longer carry their work". Atleti are among a raft of clubs set to take a huge financial hit due to the indefinite suspension of football in Spain, one of the countries worst hit by COVID-19.



ALL BLACKS COACH IAN FOSTER LEADS BY EXAMPLE

All Blacks coach Ian Foster says he will take a pay cut and players will follow suit as New Zealand Rugby cuts expenses while professional competitions are shuttered. Foster confirmed he and other coaches had agreed to pay cuts as long as NZ Rugby's revenues are affected. He did not give a percentage figure. "Our coaching group has definitely taken a big cut," Foster told radio Newstalk ZB. "It's already been agreed to... It's a different sort of process for players but I know that they're willing to go into that space too," he said.

A-LEAGUE CLUB SIDELINES PLAYERS
Australia's footballers' union Saturday threatened legal action against A-League club Perth Glory after players were stood down without pay as the coronavirus shutdown takes its toll. Despite holding

out to be one of the last competitions in the world still going, the plug was finally pulled on the 11-team domestic soccer league this week. Football Federation Australia plans to review the suspension on April 22 and

most clubs appear to be waiting until then to decide what to do. But with no revenue from ticket sales, Perth Glory owner Tony Sage made the "heartbreaking" decision to stand down the squad, effectively keeping them on the books but without pay.

HUNTER READY TO SACRIFICE
England women's captain Sarah Hunter has said she is willing to take a pay cut to ensure staff at the country's governing body do not lose their jobs due to the coronavirus crisis. England's Rugby Football Union (RFU) faces losses of up to 50 million pounds (\$62.3 million) over the next year-and-a-half with global sport coming to a virtual standstill due to the pandemic. The RFU's Executive Team have agreed to take a pay cut in excess of 25% and England men's coach Eddie Jones has also accepted a salary reduction to help ease the financial burden. "That little sacrifice and selflessness can go a long way," Hunter, 28, told BBC Sport. "I'd be willing to do that to make sure there's still an RFU and people aren't having to lose their jobs." **AGENCIES**

Meet the country's first all-transgender football team

match. Formed three years ago, Ya-All is a non-profit youth-led network for the LGBT community to fight stigmatisation and discrimination. "I am overwhelmed with excitement to be part of a team of our own kind and also for the fact that we are the first transgender football team in the country," said 22-year old Chaki Huidrom, vice-captain and main striker of the side.

Finding their calling

Chaki is pursuing his Masters degree in physical education at Dhanamanjuri University, Imphal. "I love sports, particularly football. But I have never felt comfortable being part of a women's team just because I was born as a girl. Thanks to Ya-All, I'm living my dream." Sadam Hanjabam, founder and CEO of Ya-All, said that it took his organisation almost three years to put together the football team. It was formed with the objective to create a platform, to break the stereotypes surrounding the queer community, and



The team was formed on March 8, the start of the Yaoshang festival.

spread awareness. He said that the first attempt in this direction was made in March 2018, during the Yaoshang festival. A six-a-side exhibition match was played in the presence of a substantial number of supporters, including transwomen. However, there was resistance to the idea of a team of transwomen due to social factors, said Hanjabam.

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"It was not an easy task to put together the team because society is still finding it hard to accept the third gender. But the Supreme Court ruling that decriminalised homosexuality was a big help."

He said that the team has received many invitations and even played an exhibition match outside the state. Hanjabam felt that with people's support, the transgender football team can do even better.

"Despite the difficulty we are facing, we will continue our work to bring together the LGBT community. We have plans to organise a state-level tourney for the queer", said the Ya-All CEO.

Football stars, musicians mull online fest for raising funds

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FOOTBALL PLAYERS and celebrities will take part in a global music festival on Saturday organized by the Spanish league in order to raise funds for the fight against the coronavirus.

Barcelona's Gerard Pique, Real Madrid's Sergio Ramos and Sevilla's Jesus Navas will be among the players involved in the charity event organized to raise money "for the purchase of medical supplies in the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic and to also support fans confined to their homes during the current period of quarantine," the league said.

Celebrities in the festival will include singers Aitana, Alejandro Sanz, Beret and Luis Fonsi, actress Danna Paola, music bands Morat and Taburete, and tennis star Rafael Nadal. The football players and celebrities

will all participate from their homes. The concert is to be shown live through the league's international broadcasters and streamed via YouTube and Facebook.

"Together we'll succeed in convincing people about the importance of staying at home at this time, whilst raising money to buy medical supplies, which are in such high demand at times like these," league president Javier Tebas said.

Spain, where stay-at-home restrictions have been in place for nearly two weeks, reported 832 more deaths on Saturday, its highest daily count yet, bringing the total to 5,690. Another 8,000 confirmed infections pushed that count above 72,000.

The league said more than 11,400 euros (\$12,600) had been raised ahead of Saturday's event.

The "music extravaganza" will be broadcast in more than 180 countries simultaneously, starting at 10:30 pm.