IN BRIEF

Yuvraj pledges ₹50 lakh for PM-CARES Fund

NEW DELHI

Former India cricketer Yuvraj Singh on Sunday pledged to donate ₹50 lakh to the PM-CARES Fund to help fight the COVID-19 pandemic. The all-rounder also appealed to the people to stay united in the fight against the pandemic. PTI

Contributions raised by IOA crosses ₹1 crore

NEW DELHI

The Indian Olympic Association said in a statement that ₹1,02,56,003 has been raised by the NSFs, State Olympic associations, non-members (who have applied for recognition) and others for combating the pandemic. The IOA will transfer the donations to PM-CARES Fund. PTI

Harbhajan to feed 5000 families

NEW DELHI

Harbhajan Singh has pledged to feed 5000 families in Jalandhar affected by the lockdown. The 39-year-old said he would continue to feed those who are homeless and jobless until normalcy returns. PTI

Badminton Worlds to be rescheduled

LONDON

The Badminton World Championships next year is set to be rescheduled because it clashes with the new dates for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. The Badminton World Federation (BWF) said it was working with the organisers in Spain's Huelva to find a new time slot. IANS

Stephen O'Keefe quits First Class cricket

SYDNEY

Former Australia Test spinner Stephen O'Keefe retired from First Class cricket after being omitted from New South Wales' list of contracted players for the next domestic season. The 35-year-old left-armer took 35 wickets in nine Tests, including 12 in a match against India at Pune in 2017. AP

Cancel F1 this season, says Ecclestone

LONDON

Former Formula One boss Bernie Ecclestone feels that the 2020/21 Championship should be cancelled. "I can't see it's going to be possible to get the right amount of races in that count for a championship," he said. IANS

Olympic Games ban for Thailand, Malaysia lifters

BUDAPEST

Thailand and Malaysia have been banned from sending weightlifters to the Tokyo Olympics. The International Weightlifting Federation said in a statement on Saturday that the Thai Amateur Weightlifting Association (TAWA) has been suspended for three years, while the Malaysian Weightlifting Federation (MWF) has been given a one-year ban. IANS

East Bengal signs Iranian Omid

KOLKATA

East Bengal on Sunday signed Indian-origin Iranian midfielder Omid Singh on a two-year deal. "Omid has signed with us for two years. He will join us once the next season starts," East Bengal top official Debabrata Sarkar said here.

The 29-year-old left-winger, who originally hails from Punjab and holds an Indian passport, plies his trade for Naft Masjed Soleyman FC in the Persian Gulf Pro League. The I-League has been suspended with four rounds left. East Bengal is second in the table. PTI

Chirag-Satwik looking for coach

The ace doubles team planning to maximise the Olympics postponement

BADMINTON

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The crack men's doubles pair of Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy is now hoping to avail the services of a new foreign coach to help in their Olympic preparation after the sudden exit of Indonesian Flandy Limpele.

Limpele, appointed till the Tokyo Olympics, stepped down as doubles coach last month, becoming the fourth foreign coach to resign without completing his tenure.

Chirag said the postponement will now give them more time to deal with the departure of Limpele, who was specifically hired to prepare them for Tokyo.

Dynamic duo: Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy believe that an experienced coach will make a big difference to their chances at the Olympics next year. ▪FILE PHOTO: AFP

More time to prepare

"We will definitely get more time to prepare now. Since it is more than a year to go, I believe we will get a new foreign coach. If the Olympics had happened this year, we wouldn't have got a coach for 3-4 months. But now, BAI might get one to help us," said Chirag.

"Now we have a year... hopefully, we will get a new coach and adjust to the new regime. So in a way, we got lucky with this postponement. If an experienced coach comes on board, it will make a big difference."

"We are almost there, it is a matter of 2-3 points. We are 90% there and a good coach like Rexy Mainaky (head coach of Thailand) would give us that extra 10%. A high-calibre coach can help us get into world's top three."

Satwik said: "We also have coaches like Dwi Kristiawan and Namrih Suroto who can make a programme for us."

Bergamasco has not lost hope

Women's coach wants to visit family after travel ban ends

BOXING

Y.B. SARANGI
KOLKATA

Despite being caught between a rock and a hard place, Raffaele Bergamasco has not lost hope.

Even as Bergamasco, the foreign coach for Indian women boxers, is leading a solitary life on the campus of the Indira Gandhi Stadium in New Delhi, his heart is with his ailing wife and daughters in Italy.

Raffaele Bergamasco. ▪SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

No other choice

With the coronavirus outbreak hitting Italy hard and spreading dangerously in India, Bergamasco has no choice but to wait for the situation to improve.

"I would like to travel back home and spend some time with my family as and when the situation improves. However, my commitment is towards Indian boxing and the boxers and till the time there is no clarity on the status of travel I would like to stay put here.

"As per the current government guidelines, if I return to Rome my visa will stand cancelled. With Olympics postponed, there is time for preparation and I hope I can visit my family once travel bans are relaxed," Bergamasco told *The Hindu*.

Glad that family is safe

The Italian is happy that his family is safe. "My family is fine as they live far away from the areas of major outbreak in Italy. Fortunately, today we have social media and video-call facility. I talk to them often and we also have family video chats."

Bergamasco is worried for his wife, though. "Unfortunately, she is unwell and has been on therapy for the ast two years. I am concerned about her well-being.

"I try to talk to her often over phone and my daughters are there with her and keep me updated.

"I had promised to my wife that I will be there with her every month, even for a day or two, during the therapy. But she understands. She is a brave lady."

Bergamasco, who had a tough time during self-quarantine when he returned with the Indian side from the Asia/Oceania Olympic qualifier in Jordan, wants to continue with his current job and has been guiding the women boxers despite being in isolation.

"I am connected to all the boxers and my team through video conference on a daily basis. I provide them with what they are supposed to train at home.

"The aim is to keep them fit so that once we resume we can take things further for our Olympic preparation," said Bergamasco.

Premier League players reject pay cut

ASSOCIATED PRESS
LONDON

The English Premier League players rejected a move on Saturday by clubs to cut their wages by 30% during the coronavirus pandemic, escalating a bitter row as their union claimed the government would lose out on more than £200 million in tax.

"This would be detrimental to our NHS (National Health Service) and other government-funded services," the Professional Footballers' Association said in a statement.

Taking on the Premier League as a whole, the PFA said the £20 million pounds being given to the NHS by the world's richest soccer competition was "welcome, but we believe it could be far bigger."

The union's strident stance came after further talks on Saturday involving clubs and the league.

No-win situation

Former England captain Wayne Rooney said the move would have placed footballers in a "no-win situation".

"If the government approached me to help support nurses financially or buy ventilators I'd be proud to do so – as long as I knew where the money was going," said Rooney. "I'm in a place where I could give something up. Not every footballer is in the same position."

Young Rohit reminded me of Inzamam, says Yuvraj

CRICKET

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Former India cricketer Yuvraj Singh said that Rohit Sharma reminded him of Pakistan batting legend Inzamam-ul-Haq in his early days.

The flamboyant India vice-captain made his ODI debut in June 2007 while his maiden T20 game came during the World Cup later that year against England, where unfortunately Rohit didn't get a chance to bat.

Asked about his first impression of Rohit, the left-hander said the swashbuckling batsman looked like somebody who had a lot of time to play his strokes.

"I think when he came into the Indian team, he looked like somebody who had a lot of time," Yuvraj said during a YouTube chat show.

Admiration: Yuvraj Singh, right, says Rohit Sharma is someone who has a lot of time to play his strokes. ▪FILE PHOTO: VIVEK BENDRE

"He reminded me of Inzamam, because, when he batted, Inzi had a lot of time (to play the bowlers)."

Inzamam, a veteran of 120 Tests and over 300 ODIs, is known to remain calm under pressure situations. He captained Pakistan from 2003-07.

Could have handled KP better, admits Strauss

They fell out over ECB's IPL policy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON

Former England captain Andrew Strauss admits he may not have handled Kevin Pietersen well during his time at the helm. The flamboyant batsman should have been given some space despite not exactly adhering to the team ethos, Strauss said on a Sky Sports podcast.

However, Strauss maintained that while he understood why the cash-rich Indian Premier League (IPL) is necessary for players, he still does not agree that it should get precedence over Test cricket.

Strauss and Pietersen had a major fallout due to their difference of opinion on ECB's IPL policy. "I always had sympathy with KP over the IPL. I understood what a big event it was with all the best players playing there and huge amounts of money on the table as well," he said.

It must be mentioned that when Strauss became ECB's Director of Cricket he created a window for England players to play in the IPL, something Pietersen had always advocated. "But I thought it was incredibly dangerous to allow players to miss Test cricket to play in the IPL. The message you'd be sending and the precedent you'd be setting was the IPL is more important than Test cricket," he said.

Strauss said he repeatedly tried to make Pietersen aware why Test cricket is more important.

After being dropped for good in 2014-15, Pietersen had hit out at some of his teammates like Matt Prior and Stuart Broad in his autobiography, which also included criticism of Strauss for not supporting him.

In hindsight, Strauss feels he should have cut Pietersen a little slack. "I think instead I just let KP be KP. In retrospect that was a mistake and might have sowed the seeds for what was to come down the track," Strauss admitted.

Strauss said Pietersen had not exactly been a team-man but the England dressing room should have been more accepting.

"I've always felt a good team environment embraces difference and finds a space for everyone.

"I think we did that for large periods of time but possibly through neglect, KP became increasingly isolated," Strauss said.

Avoidable friction: Andrew Strauss feels, in hindsight, he should have cut the maverick Kevin Pietersen some slack. ▪FILE PHOTO

Lockdown triggers novel online competition

About 60 participants involved in the exercise initiated by Ved Prakash

SHOOTING

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
NEW DELHI

Amidst the global health crisis, Indian shooting is staying robust.

An online competition for rifle and pistol shooters across the country, conducted over the weekend, has opened a new avenue for efficient training.

Ved Prakash Sharma, A qualified coach and an ISSF-approved official, who got the idea from the Chinese, conducted the competitions from his base in New Delhi. About 60 shooters connected via the internet for the competition.

The shooters shot at electronic targets in their homes and computers, connected through two applications, provided live video and scores to the central module. The SIUS-Ascor scoring system gave complete details, while the live video checked on the shooters, making the whole exercise transparent and lively.

Ved Prakash Sharma. ▪SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Firing away: A young shooter showing her prowess during the online contest. ▪SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

"I got this idea after reading about the criticism about the training camp for the National team at the Dr. Karni Singh Range. I decided that we should also try it. There was a good response to our effort, and we didn't charge any entry fee," said Ved Prakash, who invited Asian Games gold medallist Jitu Rai to inaugurate the competition from his army base in Mhow.

"We will do it bigger in the future. State competitions can be done this way, so that shooters don't have to travel. Most of the shooters have invested in electronic targets. I am also trying to develop a software so that we have a good system," said Ved Prakash.

"Shooters have known me for many years. I announced the competition through social media. Jitu has said that he will join the competition in future," observed Ved Prakash.

India submits bid to host AFC Asian Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

India has submitted its bid documents for hosting the AFC Asian Cup in 2027, a top official of the national federation confirmed on Sunday.

If India wins the bid, it will be the first time the country will host the continental showpiece. "We have already submitted our expression of interest to the AFC (Asian Football Confederation). That is what's required as of now," said AIFF general-secretary Kushal Das.

The AFC is expected to announce the host early next year. Saudi Arabia, which has never hosted the tournament, had already announced its bid. South Korea is likely to join the race. China will host the 2023 tournament.

No squash till July

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

The Professional Squash Association (PSA) announced in a release recently that the suspension of the PSA Tour due to COVID-19 has been extended and all World Tour, Challenger Tour and WSF & PSA Satellite Tour events, scheduled for May and June, have been postponed.

On March 13, the PSA initially suspended both the PSA World Tour and PSA Challenger Tour until the end of April, but following regular communication with players and organisers, the suspension will continue till July.

Two PSA Challenger Tour events in July – Victoria Open and the Noida Leg of the HCL SRFI Indian Tour – are expected to go ahead as planned (the Thiruvananthapuram and Pune legs have been affected), while the PSA World Tour is expected to resume in August.

Speaking to *The Hindu* on Sunday, Cyrus Poncha, secretary of Squash Rackets Federation of India (SRFI), said "the Thiruvananthapuram and Pune legs will be held at a later date. Fortunately, no big events were planned by SRFI at this time."

Fast bowlers have biggest challenge to remain fit: Nehra

Says lack of running time is an issue for them

Word of caution: Ashish Nehra, seen with Umesh Yadav, wants fast bowlers to refrain from shuttle runs on hard surfaces. ▪FILE PHOTO: K. MURALI KUMAR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

A batsman can make do with yoga and weight training. But for merchants of speed, former India pacer Ashish Nehra felt the absence of running for more than three months at a stretch could affect fitness levels.

According to him, the fast bowlers will have to start running sooner or later.

With sporting activities coming to a standstill, elite athletes are confined to their homes, trying to remain fit.

"Let's consider a few situations. Even if the lockdown ends on April 15, it will take a lot of time for life to become normal.

Long break

"I am not expecting any cricketing activity before July. So this is a long break but once action starts, fast bowlers have the biggest challenge to remain fit," Nehra said.

"Lack of running time for fast bowlers is an issue. So whoever has a garden with say 15 metres or 20 metres space, they should do shuttle run thrice a week," said Nehra.

He had a word of advice for those who had sprawling terraces with soil and grass cover.

"It's fine if you are doing 'Surya Namaskar' on the terrace, but if you start doing shuttle run, you will end up damaging your knees and ankles because of the hard surface."

Nehra also had a word of caution for the fast bowlers. "Zaheer Khan and Nehra can afford to come back from the lockdown with a paunch, not active players. So a break from sport doesn't mean you will have biryani."