

PCB reschedules PSL 2020, final to be played on 18th



KARACHI: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Friday rescheduled the remaining matches of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) 2020. The final of the league has been moved up to March 18, 2020 from March 22, 2020. The playoffs have been replaced with the semi-finals on 17 March and the final on 18 March. The decision means the PSL 2020 has been reduced by four days and there will now be 33 matches as opposed to 34.

According to the revised schedule, the 17 March semi-finals will be double-headers and will be held at the Gaddafi Stadium with the table-toppers going head to head with the fourth-placed side at 2pm. This match will be followed by the second semi-final, which will begin at 7pm, between the second and third-placed sides. The final will be played on 18 March and will start at 7:00pm. All these changes

have been made with the consultation of the team owners. The PCB said it was in close contact with the Punjab Government and, as is always the case, will receive guidance from them in regard to allowing spectators to watch the last four matches at the Gaddafi Stadium. An announcement on this will be made in due course.

A number of foreign players in Pakistan for the fifth edition of the Pakistan Super League are set to fly back to their home countries as fears over the coronavirus pandemic spread across the globe. According to the PCB, Peshawar Zalmi's Tom Banton, Liam Livingstone, Lewis Gregory, Liam Dawson and Carlos Brathwaite, as well as Multan Sultans' James Vince and Rilee Rossouw, as well as Karachi Kings' Alex Hales, and Jason Roy and Tymal Mills from Quetta Gladiators, are among the players to confirm their departures.

Revised schedule: 13 March – Peshawar Zalmi v Multan Sultans, National Stadium (8pm-11.15pm). Rashid Riaz and Michael Gough (on-field), Ahsan Raza (third umpire), Faisal Khan Afridi (fourth umpire), Roshan Mahanama (match referee)

14 March – Karachi Kings v Islamabad United, National Stadium (7pm-5.15pm). Ahsan Raza and Michael Gough (on-field), Rashid Riaz (third umpire), Faisal Khan Afridi (fourth umpire), Roshan Mahanama (match referee).

15 March – Multan Sultans v Lahore Qalandars, Gaddafi Stadium (2pm-5.15pm); Shozab Raza and Aleem Dar (on-field), Asif Yaqoob (third umpire), Nasir Hussain (fourth umpire), Mohammad Anees (match referee); Quetta Gladiators v Karachi Kings, National Stadium (7pm-10.15pm). Rashid Riaz and Michael Gough (on-field), Ahsan Raza (third umpire), Faisal Khan Afridi (fourth umpire), Roshan Mahanama (match referee).

17 March – 1st semi-final (1 v 4) (2pm-5.15pm); 2nd semi-final (2 v 3) (7pm-10.15pm) (both matches at Gaddafi Stadium).

18 March – Final, Gaddafi Stadium (7pm-10.15pm)

Any player can withdraw from PSL: PCB

Earlier on Friday, the Pakistan Cricket Board had said that any international player that wishes to withdraw from the ongoing Pakistan Super League may do so at their own will. "All players have the right to leave the league," said the PCB.

It added that players from England had put forward a withdrawal request. The franchise teams have also limited their ac-

tivities in the ongoing PSL.

The PCB on Friday afternoon announced that the HBL Pakistan Super League 2020 will proceed as planned, including tonight's Multan Sultans versus Peshawar Zalmi match, which will commence at the National Stadium at 8pm. However, the board said that the match will be played behind closed doors and only event accredited personnel will be allowed to enter the venue. "All players and players support personnel have been given the option to withdraw from the HBL PSL 2020 should they wish to do so," the PCB added.

'Evolving and unprecedented situation'

"This remains an evolving and unprecedented situation with a number of moving parts that require constant and regular monitoring," PCB Chief Executive Wasim Khan said in a statement following the announcement. "Today, the PCB and the team owners, as part of their duty of care, have decided to give all the players the option to decide if they wish to return home. Ensuring that the players feel comfortable remains paramount to the PCB," he said.

"As of now, it is important to emphasise and clarify that the main concern of many of the 10 players and a coach, who have chosen to return home, revolves around avoiding a potential situation where they might become stranded either due to flight cancellations or border closures in their own countries," he added. "The PCB will facilitate their safe return and will ensure the same for all of the players and support staff personnel who decide to withdraw from HBL PSL 2020," he noted.

Quick Read

Lin Dan saves two match points in All England thriller

LONDON: Six-time champion Lin Dan staved off two match points as he won his first-round match at this year's All England badminton championships. In what could be the 36-year-old Chinese star's last All England, the double Olympic gold medalist and five-time world champion defeated Thailand's Kunlavut Vitidsarn, a player half his age, 13-21, 22-20, 21-10 in just over an hour in Birmingham. Vitidsarn, a three-time world junior champion, was well in command at 16-10 and 18-3 up in the second game after taking the first but could not close the match out, with Lin going on to complete a fine comeback in decisive fashion in the third. Lin will now face a familiar foe when he next plays Chen Long, the reigning Olympic champion and himself a two-time All England winner. Chen had an easier passage into the second round, beating India's Kidambi Srikanth 21-15, 21-16. Meanwhile, England's Marcus Ellis had a day to remember as he made it into doubles quarter-finals. Ellis and Lauren Smith beat Japanese fourth seeds Yuta Watanabe and Arisa Higashino 21-15, 21-10 in the mixed. Later on, Ellis and his Olympic bronze medal partner Chris Langridge saw off Indonesian fifth seeds Fajar Alfian and Muhammad Rian Ardianto 21-14, 21-15 in the men's doubles. But women's top seeds Chen Qing Chen and Jia Yi Fan of China put an end to England's day of doubles delight with a 21-16, 22-20 victory over Smith and Chloe Birch. —AFP



English Premier League suspended due to virus

LONDON: All elite football matches in England, including the Premier League, were suspended until Apr 4 due to the coronavirus pandemic, English football's governing bodies said in a joint statement. The "unanimous" decision was made in a meeting on Friday, after Arsenal coach Mikel Arteta and Chelsea player Callum Hudson-Odoi were diagnosed with the coronavirus. "In this unprecedented situation, we are working closely with our clubs, government, the FA and EFL and can reassure everyone the health and welfare of players, staff and supporters are our priority," said Premier League chief executive Richard Masters. "Above all, we wish Mikel Arteta and Callum Hudson-Odoi speedy recoveries, and everyone else affected by COVID-19." In a statement posted on its website, the Premier League added: "Despite the challenges, it is the Premier League's aim is to reschedule the displaced fixtures, including those played by Academy sides, when it is safe to do so." "In this fast-moving environment, further updates will be provided when appropriate." —AFP



Trump issues first call for postponing Olympics

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump came out as the first foreign leader to suggest delaying the Tokyo Olympics because of coronavirus, dropping a bombshell on his "good friend" Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. "Maybe they postpone it for a year," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office, 19 weeks before the opening ceremony in Tokyo's Olympic Stadium. With that, Trump threw cold water on the 2020 Games the same day as actresses dressed as ancient Greek priestesses held the ceremonial flame lighting at a ruined temple in the original Olympia, Greece. It was all the more surprising given Trump's repeated declarations of close friendship with Abe and his reluctance previously to give advice on the situation. Trump said that another alternative - holding competitions in empty stadiums - would be even worse than forcing a delay. "I would say maybe they postpone it for a year," he said. "You know, I like that better than I like having empty stadiums all over the place. I think if you cancel it, make it a year later, that's a better alternative than doing it with no crowd," he said. Japanese organisers insist that the coronavirus pandemic will not derail the Games scheduled to run from Jul 24 to Aug 8, even if major sporting events, travel and financial markets are already seeing massive disruption worldwide.



The International Olympic Committee also says there has not been any talk of cancellation or postponement. "With the lighting of the Olympic flame in Olympia today, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) confirms its full commitment to the success of the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020," the IOC said in a statement. "We remain absolutely in line with our Japanese hosts in our commitment to delivering safe Olympic Games in July this year." Despite those assurances, fear of the easily transmitted virus forced the torch lighting ceremony to take place without spectators in Greece's Peloponnese region. Trump said he admired Japan's preparations for hosting the Olympics for the first time since 1964, although characteristically he also praised his own record as a real estate developer. "It's a shame," he said. "I used to be in the real estate business as you probably heard. They built some - and I built beautiful buildings - and they built some really beautiful buildings." He said would not be advising Abe on the problem. "They're very smart. They're going to make their own" decision, he said. "He's a great friend of mine, Prime Minister Abe, and I wish him luck," he said. "They did such a perfect job. The venues are incredible. He was proudly showing me pictures of what they'd done the last time I was with him." —Reuters

IPL postponed due to coronavirus outbreak

MUMBAI: The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Friday announced to postpone the Indian Premier League until April 15 as a precautionary measure against the spread of the coronavirus. It had been scheduled to begin on March 29.

The Indian government said late on Wednesday it would cancel almost all visas issued for travel to India until April 15 to try to prevent the spread of the virus, and the country's sports secretary said on Thursday the national cricket team's coming matches should be played in empty stadiums. "The Board of Control for Cricket in India has decided to suspend IPL 2020 till 15th April 2020, as a precautionary measure against the ongoing Novel Corona Virus (COVID-19) situation," the board said in a statement.

"The BCCI is concerned and sensitive about all its stakeholders, and public health in general, and it is taking all necessary steps to ensure that, all people related to IPL including fans have a safe cricketing experience." Read more: Several foreign players to leave PSL 2020 amid coronavirus fears.

More than 134,500 people have been infected globally and more than 4,900 have died because of the flu-like virus, according to a Reuters tally of government announcements. Sport events have been either cancelled or postponed globally in recent weeks. India's national cricket team is locked in a three-match one-day international series against South Africa, the first of which was washed out due to rain in the northern Indian city of Dharamsala on Thursday. The BCCI said the remaining two matches - at Lucknow and Kolkata - would be played without the presence of crowd.

Coronavirus: How do I get tested in Pakistan? The 13th season of the eight-team IPL had been scheduled to start with a match between defending champions Mumbai Indians and Chennai Super Kings. —Reuters

Australian GP scrapped as COVID-19 causes havoc with world sport

MELBOURNE: Formula One's season-opening Australian Grand Prix was scrapped early while Spain's La Liga and the ATP tennis tour paused their seasons and the NBA halted games indefinitely as the coronavirus pandemic rocked world sport.

Sunday's race in Melbourne had already been thrown into chaos on Thursday when McLaren pulled out after one of its team members tested positive for the virus.

The Australian Grand Prix Corporation said in a statement it was advised by F1 of their intention to not hold the race, and therefore cancelled the race "immediately".

Before the race world champion Lewis Hamilton had criticised the initial decision to hold the GP, telling reporters that he didn't

"think it's great that we have race".

US President Donald Trump said on Thursday that the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo could be postponed for a year, although organisers insist the Games will go ahead.

Trump said that he liked the idea of a postponement "better than I like having empty stadiums" on the day the lighting of the Olympic flame went ahead in Greece in a ceremony closed to the public.

The football season took another hit on Thursday when La Liga decided to suspend matches in Spain's top two divisions for at least two weeks after Real Madrid confirmed its senior football team was in quarantine following a positive test for one of the club's basketball players. The teams share facilities.

Real Madrid said "it has been decided to close the facilities at our training ground and it is also recommended that all Real Madrid personnel who work there remain in quarantine". Meanwhile the Premier League revealed late on Thursday that it would be holding an emergency meeting on Friday morning on the fate of the division's "future fixtures" after Arsenal announced that their manager Mikel Arteta had tested positive for the virus. Serie A in Italy, the European country worst hit by the virus, has already suspended its matches until Apr 3 while France's Ligue 1 will continue its season but without spectators. The ATP tour said men's tennis tournaments would be halted for the next six weeks. —Reuters



MELBOURNE: Melbourne Grand Prix Circuit, Melbourne, Australia - March 25, 2018 Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel in action at the start of the race.

Everton player self-isolates after coronavirus symptoms

LIVERPOOL: An Everton player is self-isolating after reporting symptoms of COVID-19, the Premier League club said.

"Everton Football Club can confirm that one member of the Everton first-team squad reported a high temperature last night and is now undertaking a period of self-isolation for seven days," the club said in a statement. The development follows Arsenal's decision to isolate their squad and staff after manager Mikel Arteta tested positive for the coronavirus. Chelsea forward Callum Hudson-Odoi has also tested positive.

Everton did not name the player who reported symptoms. The club initially said that its entire first-team squad and coaching staff were to self-isolate following medical advice, but later clarified otherwise.

"In line with government guidelines no other players are self-isolating at this stage," the club said, adding that its USM training facility has been closed as a precaution and that its staff, including players, have been advised to stay away from all its sites until further notice. Explore: Real-time interactive map of all the confirmed cases reported around the world. All elite football matches in England, including the Premier League, were suspended until Apr 4 on Friday due to the coronavirus pandemic, English football's governing bodies said in a joint statement.

The "unanimous" decision was made in a meeting on Friday. "In this unprecedented situation, we are working closely with our clubs, government, the FA and EFL and can reassure everyone the health." —AFP



English football season in doubt



LONDON: The English Premier League (EPL) looks set to suspend their season when they hold emergency talks over the new coronavirus pandemic later. But jump racing's showpiece, the Cheltenham Gold Cup, will go ahead with 70,000 spectators expected to attend. Tens of thousands are also expected in Cardiff this weekend for Saturday's Six Nations match between Wales and Scotland, even although the other two games were postponed.

The Premier League was thrown into chaos late on Thursday as Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta and Chelsea winger Callum Hudson-Odoi both contracted the new coronavirus, leaving at least one game postponed and other fixtures in doubt.

Leicester City manager Brendan Rodgers - who has three players in self-isolation - has called for the season to be suspended on "health and ethical" grounds. Chelsea and runaway

leaders Liverpool - who are due to meet Merseyside rivals Everton on Monday - subsequently cancelled their pre-match press conferences. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson had said the government was "considering the question of banning major public events such as sporting fixtures", but was not ready to do so yet.

The EPL had originally stuck to the expert advice which had led the Prime Minister to hold fire, but once Arteta revealed he

had the virus they announced they would be holding a meeting. The English Football League (EFL) - responsible for the three tiers below the Premier League - said they would be pushing ahead with this weekend's fixtures.

However, the EFL are thought likely to follow the lead of the Premier League should the latter, like many of their continental counterparts, suspend their league programme. Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta has tested posi-

itive for the coronavirus.

UEFA, European football's governing body, will consider whether to postpone the ongoing Champions League and Euro 2020 at a meeting next week. Rodgers made no bones about what he thought should happen when he spoke to the press on Thursday even before Arteta's and Hudson-Odoi's positive tests became public. "Players could be going into games unsure of their team-mates or the opposition." —AFP