

Photo of the Day



Janja Gambret climbs in Osp, Slovenia. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Pochettino wants 'fair' quarantine solution as Guardiola vows to ground international stars

Quarantine complicates situation ahead of World Cup qualifiers

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain coach Mauricio Pochettino on Friday called for a "fair and just" solution for players facing quarantine upon their return from international duty, an issue which prompted Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola to threaten to ground his jet-setting stars. French champions PSG risk losing Neymar, Marquinhos and Angel Di Maria for a game against Ligue 1 leaders Lille if they are required to self-isolate after featuring in World Cup qualifiers in South America later this month.

Guardiola said he would join Liverpool counterpart Jurgen Klopp, and several other Premier League managers, in preventing his players travelling worldwide if they would be required to self-isolate on returning. "It's a complicated matter, which involves the federations, the government and FIFA at the same time, in the search for a fair and just agreement for everyone," said Pochettino. "We have to find the best solution so the competitions remain as fair as possible, and so the players receive equal treatment regardless of the country where they play," the Argentine continued. "During this pandemic period, it's a decisive element that is going to have an impact on results. It's also an important international window, with key qualifying matches for the 2022 World Cup."

Neymar, who is working his way back from injury, and Marquinhos are expected to join up with Brazil for their game away to Colombia on March 26. They are due to host Argentina four days later. French government regulations stipulate that anyone entering the country from outside Europe must self-isolate for seven days on arrival and present a negative COVID-19 test at the end of that period.

Even if Brazil's players are given the all clear to play in the qualifiers, Colombia's Health Minister Fernando Ruiz threw a spanner in the works on Friday, pointing out that air travel between Colombia and Brazil is still suspended due to the latest wave of coronavirus infections. "Right now, I think it's difficult to authorize any flight leaving from Brazil and I don't have any justification to authorize such a flight," Ruiz told Blu Radio.

Spinners lead Sri Lanka to win over Windies

ST JOHN'S, ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA: Sri Lanka's spinners bamboozled world champions West Indies to claim a 43-run win in the second Twenty20 International at Coolidge Cricket Ground on Friday. Having lost by four wickets in the opening game on Wednesday, in a game where West Indies skipper Kieron Pollard launched six sixes in an over, the tourists successfully defended 160 on Friday to level the three-match series. West Indies were all out for 117 in the 19th over as Sri Lanka ended an eight-game losing streak in T20. The final match is at the same venue today.

Leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga finished with 3-17, off-break bowler Akila Dananjaya, who was the victim of Pollard's midweek assault but also claimed a hat-trick, had 1-13. Wrist spinner Lakshan Sandakan took 3-10, including Pollard who made just 13. "The wicket was a bit slow. I tried not to give away any boundaries. That's why I was able to bowl well," man-of-the-match Hasaranga told the post-match presentation. West Indies were 45-1 before five wickets fell for just 21 runs.

Chris Gayle, who was out for a first ball duck on Wednesday in his first appearance in two years, made a patchy 16 when he fell to a catch by Ashen Bandara off Hasaranga. Opener Lendl Simmons (21) was next out, lbw failing to pick a Hasaranga googly. Nicholas Pooran, Jason Holder and Dwayne Bravo all followed quickly for single figure scores. Dananjaya had earlier dismissed



BORDEAUX: Mauricio Pochettino gestures during the French L1 football match between Bordeaux (FCGB) and Paris-Saint-Germain (PSG) at the Matmut Atlantique Stadium on March 3, 2021. — AFP

Under current coronavirus guidelines in Britain, players arriving from "red-list" countries, including Brazil and Argentina, are subject to 10 days' hotel confinement. FIFA has given clubs dispensation to prevent players who may be affected by the regulations from joining up with their countries during the upcoming international window.

That angered South America's football governing body CONMEBOL, which said following a virtual meeting on Friday that "FIFA has committed to keep looking for a solution." CONMEBOL is due to hold another meeting on Saturday with FIFA president Gianni Infantino.

opener Evin Lewis for six. His impressive figures of 1-13 were in stark contrast to his 3-62 on Wednesday. Hasaranga, just 23, added Fabian Allan to his list of victims with the West Indies then struggling on 89-7 in the 16th over. With more than 22 an over required, Sandakan then got the big prize of Pollard, caught in the deep for just 13 having surprisingly opted to bat at number seven. Sandakan then halted Obed McCoy's late cameo of 23 from seven deliveries with the tail-ender proving to be his team's top scorer.

Earlier, veteran all-rounder Bravo slammed the brakes on Sri Lanka with two wickets and a run-out. Sri Lanka got off to a flying start after winning the toss and deciding to bat. Openers Danusha Gunathilaka and Pathum

'Makes no sense'

Guardiola said he never wanted to stop players from representing their country, but would make an exception as his side closed in on the Premier League title. "I think it makes no sense if the players go to the national team and then have to isolate for 10 days when they come back," he said. "We've worked incredibly tough for seven, eight or nine months and after the international break comes the real part of the season, and (if) important players, maybe six, seven, eight, nine players cannot play for 10 days, it makes no sense. They are not going to fly. That's for sure. If they can fly, play with the national team and come straight back to training, they'll fly." Some nations have moved fixtures to try to avoid travel restrictions. Portugal have announced they will play their "home" World Cup qualifier against Azerbaijan in Turin, while Norway will face Turkey in Malaga. Without an exemption from the French government, PSG's South American contingent would be unavailable for the visit of Lille, who lead the league from Pochettino's team by two points. "We need a decision so that neither the federations nor the clubs suffer any loss from a problem that cannot be resolved," said Pochettino.

"I'm saying that between the government, at global level, and FIFA, who can intervene, we need to take a measure that is fair for all clubs," he added. "We're in a situation where we need the protection and help from an organization like FIFA who can get people together and have the means to guarantee a fair set-up."

Infantino said it was right to go ahead with international matches if protocols were respected. "Many of the players from around the world play in clubs in Europe, but their countries are suffering as well from the pandemic," Infantino said at Friday's IFAB annual general meeting. "So if it is possible... then these players, taking all the necessary precautions and protocols, should be allowed to travel safely, as safely as possible, respecting all the protocols, because it is important that the same as for club football, national team football remains alive." — AFP

Nissanka put on a blistering 94 off the first 10 overs. But then 37-year-old Bravo was called into action and he responded by running out Nissanka for 37. Gunathilaka followed just four balls later in the 11th over, caught by Kevin Sinclair off Bravo at mid-off.

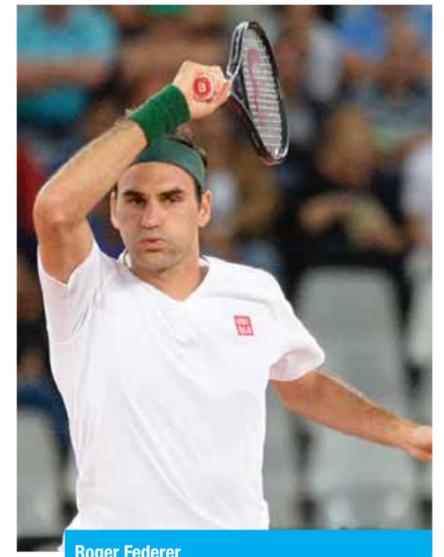
The Sri Lankan opener went for a top score of 56 which featured four boundaries and two sixes. Bravo also claimed the third wicket to fall when Simmons caught the experienced Dinesh Chandimal for just three. The runs then dried up for Sri Lanka. Having hit eight fours and three sixes in the first 10 overs, they managed just three more fours and one six in the second half of the innings. That included an eight-over stretch where the ball never crossed the boundary ropes. — AFP



ST JOHN'S, ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA: Kevin Sinclair (left) of West Indies congratulate Angelo Mathews (2nd L) as Dinesh Chandimal (second right) and Lakshan Sandakan (right) of Sri Lanka celebrate winning the 2nd T20i match between Sri Lanka and West Indies at Coolidge Cricket Ground on Friday in Osbourn, Antigua and Barbuda. — AFP

Federer ready for return after 'long, hard road'

PARIS: Roger Federer said Friday it had "been a long hard road" but he was "pumped up" to return to tennis next week, having been sidelined for over a year to recover from two knee surgeries. The 39-year-old hasn't played a match since a semi-final defeat to Novak Djokovic at the Australian Open in January 2020. However, the 20-time Grand Slam title winner will be back in action at the Qatar Open in Doha next week. "I'd like to thank all the people involved who made this possible," the Swiss star said in a video message as he prepared to fly to the Gulf. "It's been a long and hard road, I'm not at the finish line yet but I feel I am in a good place. I've been practicing very well and feel just really pumped up. I am in a good place and progressing really well." Federer, who will slip out of the top five next week, will have an extra motivation on his return. Tomorrow will see Djokovic surpass Federer's record of 310 weeks in the world number one ranking. After Doha, Federer could play again in neighboring Dubai but he will not travel to the United States for the Miami Masters. Federer has also said he intends to play the European clay court swing this year ahead of Roland Garros which he won in 2009. — AFP



Roger Federer

Jazz's Conley finally an NBA all-star

LOS ANGELES: Mike Conley became one of the oldest first-time all stars in NBA history on Friday, the 33-year-old Utah Jazz player replacing Devin Booker in tonight's annual showcase event. For the past several years, the Jazz guard has been considered one of the NBA's best players to have never been chosen to play in an all-star game. He was added to Team LeBron as an replacement for Phoenix Suns Booker, who has an injured left knee.

Conley joins teammates Donovan Mitchell and Rudy Gobert as the Jazz's third player in the game. Conley will also take Booker's spot in tonight's three-point shooting contest. The Brooklyn Nets also have three all-stars — James Harden, Kyrie Irving and Kevin Durant. But Durant is injured and won't play. Like Conley, Booker was a replacement. He was to fill in for Los Angeles Lakers center Anthony Davis. Conley is in his second year with the Jazz after 12 seasons with the Memphis Grizzlies. He is averaging 16.1 points, 5.7 assists, while shooting over 42 percent from three-point range.

Gobert, Mitchell fined

Meanwhile, Gobert and Mitchell, who have helped their club to the NBA's best record, were each fined Friday by the league for criticism of officiating. Frenchman Gobert was fined \$20,000 for his comments after Utah's 131-123 overtime loss at Philadelphia on Wednesday in a matchup of conference leaders. Mitchell was fined \$25,000 for his comments as well as conduct leaving the court after being ejected for two technical fouls with 30.8 seconds remaining, knocking over a water cooler as he departed.

The fine came hours after Mitchell and Gobert were the last players taken by LeBron James and Kevin Durant in filling out their rosters for tonight's NBA All-Star Game in Atlanta. Mitchell will be a reserve on Durant's squad with Gobert on the James bench by default as the last man available. "No slander to the Utah Jazz," James said of the NBA's winningest club at 27-9. Utah coach Quin Snyder will be coaching the James team.

Mitchell was fined Friday after appearing to accuse officials of treating Utah unfairly, slamming the "ridiculous" officiating in games involving the Jazz. "It's tough to go out there and see how we fight and compete and to have a game like that taken away from us," he said. "I'm sick of it, man. We all are. It's really getting out of hand... and the league needs to do something about it."

The 76ers went 27-of-35 at the free throw line while the Jazz were for 14-for-19, showing a disparity that upset Gobert. "Our guys are not able to get calls everybody else in the ... league gets," Gobert said. "We know we are the Utah Jazz and maybe some people don't want to see us go as far as we can go, but it's disappointing. Three times in a row, Mike Conley is going to the rim and they are grabbing him right in front of the officials and there are no calls. And on the other end there are calls that are invisible that are being made."

Gobert called it "disrespectful" to the sport and the Jazz and said he hoped officials felt "ashamed" when they watched the game on video. The Frenchman said Utah being a small market club was a reason the team was treated, in his eyes, unfairly. "I don't want to say it, but I really believe it," Gobert said. "It's very disappointing to be disrespected like that." — AFP