

SPORTS

sports

Suarez 'hurt' by criticism of Barca players' pay cut delay

AFP | Barcelona

Uruguay star Luis Suarez complained that he has been "hurt" by criticism of him and fellow millionaire Barcelona players for the time it took to agree to pay cuts to help out other club employees.

Argentine superstar Lionel Messi announced on Monday that Barca's players had agreed to a 70 percent pay cut and to make contributions to ensure the club's non-playing staff could be paid in full during the state of alarm in Spain caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Footballers across Europe's top leagues have come under fire as some clubs have made cuts to their non-playing staff or their salaries while many wealthy players have yet to see their incomings affected.

"It hurts because we were the first to want to reach an agreement," Suarez told Uruguayan radio station Sport890.

"We know the situation the club is in, the situation the world is in right now and it was



Barcelona's Argentine forward Lionel Messi (L) and Barcelona's Uruguayan forward Luis Suarez leave the Camp Nou Stadium in Barcelona (file photo)

a minimal detail (holding up the agreement).

"But people have said things like us players didn't want to give in; that the basketball and handball players came to an agreement and we didn't."

"We hadn't come to an agreement because we were waiting to find the best solution for the club, and to our benefit and trying to help the employees."

In announcing the agreement, Messi had directed a thinly veiled swipe at the Barca board, led by president Josep Maria Bartomeu, whom he accused of undermining the players during recent negotiations.

His lengthy Instagram post was shared by a slew of teammates, including Suarez.

Striker Suarez, who has remained in Spain unlike some

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LUIS SUAREZ

of his European-based international teammates such as Edinson Cavani and Diego Godin, called on Uruguay to impose a strict lockdown.

"It's the best solution for everyone. I know it's difficult in Uruguay where many people live day to day ... but if we don't all come together and go in the same direction, it's going to be difficult to come out of this situation," he said.

Uruguay has partially closed its borders, shut schools and shopping malls and advised people to social distance and stay at home, but hasn't imposed a lockdown.

Calm Ancelotti wants fair play on season restart date



Everton manager Carlo Ancelotti looks on during a match (file photo)

AFP | Paris

Before the Premier League starts up it must ensure all clubs resume training on the same day, Everton manager Carlo Ancelotti told French newspaper L'Equipe in an interview published yesterday.

The Premier League is on hold because of the coronavirus pandemic. It was scheduled to resume on April 30, but club chairmen were meeting by videoconference yesterday and were expected to push that the date back.

"One of the important things is that all the clubs resume training at the same time, that there are no disparities, that no one has an advantage over the others," the 60-year-old Italian told L'Equipe. "Players nowadays are capable of being physically ready within a fortnight."

Ancelotti, who took over at Everton in December, has won the Champions League as a player and coach and has led teams to league titles in Italy, Germany, France and England.

After more than 45 years in a world without football, preoccupied by the terrible toll the coronavirus pandemic is taking, particularly in his native Italy. Unsure of what is going to happen next, he is calm in the face of the uncertainty.

Confined to his home in Liverpool and with no players to coach or matches to watch, he is in no rush to return to the managerial treadmill.

"It's a little strange for me. It's something I've never done," he said.

The whole Everton squad stayed in England and none have tested positive for Covid-19, he said.

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CARLO ANCELOTTI

"I keep in touch with the players. I don't call them regularly but, with the staff, we send them a training programme that we update to keep them in good physical condition. Even though I know they are."

Painful

Even if the league does resume on April 30, players will have gone seven weeks without collective training.

"It's a lot, but a player has no problem taking part in a match after a seven or eight week break. Of course, they won't be at 100 per cent when he resumes, but they have the ability to do it, there's no doubt about that," he said. "You train while you play."

He says he is talking to friends and relatives in Italy by phone.

"It's very painful to hear that so many of my compatriots are dying every day."

While he said the pandemic was "like a war," Ancelotti remained optimistic about the future.

Chelsea to help Refuge tackle domestic abuse

Reuters | London

English soccer club Chelsea have teamed up with domestic abuse charity Refuge to help raise funds for women and children left in vulnerable situations because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Some experts have warned that self-isolation directives during the coronavirus lockdown could lead to further cases of domestic abuse and make it more difficult to find support.

Chelsea said the manager of its women's team Emma Hayes, and male and female players would take part in a digital cam-

paign to raise funds for the charity, with the club saying it would match all donations received in the next six weeks.

"I am proud to lead the club's support of this worthy cause during such a difficult time for so many," Hayes told the club's website.

"There are many things for people to deal with in the present climate but it is important we support the vulnerable and those who may feel alone or without a voice.

"I hope this campaign can do that and make a difference to those who need support."

Chelsea have already opened the hotel on their Stamford



General view outside Stamford Bridge stadium home of Chelsea

Bridge stadium site to National Health Service staff in London, while the men's squad have

donated money to the Chelsea Foundation to help support those in need during the crisis.

UEFA warn of European bans if leagues end seasons prematurely

AFP | Paris

UEFA and Europe's top clubs have stated their determination that the current football season should be played to a conclusion and threatened that teams may be excluded from the next Champions League if their domestic competitions are ended prematurely.

In a joint letter released late on Thursday, UEFA, the European Club Association (ECA), and the European Leagues body representing nearly a thousand clubs in 29 countries, said that they were working on the possibility of playing on into July and August if need be.

The Champions League and Europa League -- both of which are frozen in the last-16 stage -- could be completed once the domestic seasons are finished, and "stopping competitions



UEFA's logo is seen at its headquarters

should really be the last resort after acknowledging that no calendar alternative would allow to conclude the season."

The joint response came after the Belgian Pro League announced on Thursday that it recommended declaring the season over with the present table accepted as final.

It is the first European league to take such a measure, although more could follow.

That means Club Brugge



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would in theory go straight into the next Champions League group stage, but UEFA, the ECA and the European Leagues indicated that they may be barred from continental competition if the Belgian league decision is

finalised.

"It is of paramount importance that even a disruptive event like this epidemic does not prevent our competitions from being decided on the field, in accordance with their rules and that all sporting titles are awarded on the basis of results," the joint letter said.

"We are confident that football can restart in the months to come -- with conditions that will be dictated by public authorities -- and believe that any decision of abandoning domestic competitions is, at this stage, premature and not justified.

"Since participation in UEFA club competitions is determined by the sporting result achieved at the end of a full domestic competition, a premature termination would cast doubts about the fulfilment of such condition."

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