

## Wimbledon chief fears 'no more tennis this year'

AFP | London

Wimbledon chief Richard Lewis admitted on Thursday that he feared the remainder of the 2020 tennis season could be wiped out.

Tennis has been in lockdown since early last month and is not scheduled to return until July 13 at the earliest following the cancellation of Wimbledon for the first time since World War II on Wednesday.

The decision to axe the sport's oldest and most prestigious Grand Slam event due to the coronavirus pandemic followed the French Open's unilateral switch from its traditional May-June slot to September-October.

The double body blow resulted in the entire clay-court and grass-court seasons being abandoned.

"I don't think it's unrealistic to say that there may be no more tennis this year," said All England Club chief executive Lewis.

"But I would like to think that things will settle down so that tournaments can be



The logo of Wimbledon at the All England Club

played sooner rather than later. Who knows what will happen?"

Lewis told the Guardian that, despite his fears, he hoped that the season's next Grand Slam, the US Open in August-September could take place.

**“**I would like to think that things will settle down so that tournaments can be played sooner rather than later. Who knows what will happen?**”**

RICHARD LEWIS

"Let's hope the US Open and Roland Garros (rescheduled to start in Paris a week after the final of the US Open in New York) can take place," he added. "The optimist in me – and I am often not optimistic – still hopes the American hard-court season, the big tournaments, the Masters and the Premiers, will take place: Montreal, Toronto and then Cincinnati."

## Townsend hits out at UK health minister for 'blaming' footballers

AFP | London

Crystal Palace's Andros Townsend has accused the British government's Health Secretary of "deflecting blame" onto footballers after Matt Hancock said they should take a pay cut during the coronavirus crisis.

Tottenham, Newcastle, Norwich and Bournemouth have said they will use a government scheme to guarantee 80 percent of salaries for non-playing staff up to a maximum of £2,500 (\$3,100, 2,850 euros) per month.

Such moves have prompted angry responses from politicians given no cuts have so far been agreed for high-earning players.

Citing the "ultimate sacrifice" made by staff in Britain's National Health Service who had died from the coronavirus while treating patients, Hancock called for players, in some cases earning hundreds of thousands of pounds a week, to take a pay cut.

He said: "I think the first thing that Premier League footballers can do is make a contribution, take a pay cut

and play their part."

### 'Easy target'

Talks between the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) and clubs over pay cuts are ongoing, with the PFA insisting Thursday they are aware their members "must share the financial burden".

But Townsend said footballers, many of whom have already made significant charitable donations during the crisis, were an "easy target" for ministers.

"Football is trying to do a lot of good," he told Talksport radio yesterday.

"To wake up yesterday and see footballers being painted as villains was a bit of a surprise.

"The Health Secretary, deflecting blame onto footballers. I don't think that is right. His job is the responsibility for NHS workers.

"NHS workers have been underpaid for years. Only 2,000 of them have been able to be tested for coronavirus.

"He (Hancock) is coming out and deflecting onto the easy targets, the footballers, and that doesn't sit right with me."

Andros Townsend



# Bad blood between Cleiton and Luan continues

TDT | Manama

Cleiton 'Predator' and Luan 'Miau' rivalry has generated quite a buzz for MMA fans of BRAVE Combat Federation; the largest MMA promotion company in the Middle East.

Even though the duo were supposed to fight for the Lightweight championship in March 2020; the rivalry between the two roots back to the BRAVE CF 25 event in August of 2019.

Prior to their encounter, Cleiton 'Predator' and Luan 'Miau' were verbally locking horns with each other during the weeks leading up to their decisive fight at BRAVE CF 25's main event held at Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

The MMA world was shocked at how the fierce rivalry was brought to a quick end in an unexpected 32 second submission.

Being the more experienced mixed martial artist, Cleiton 'Predator' chose to submit his opponent before going blow for blow with his opponent: a



Cleiton 'Predator' and Luan 'Miau' in action (file photo)

knockout artist. So, when Luan 'Miau' went for a single-leg takedown, he ended up having his back taken and forced to tap out, relinquishing his world title to his biggest rival. Cleiton 'Predator' was then crowned the BRAVE CF World Champion by dethroning his foe.

Right after his loss, Luan went

back to work testing the waters of Super Lightweight. However, he stated that his endgame would be claiming back the lightweight championship from his nemesis with the statement.

"This is a great chance for me to fight once again in my second home of Bahrain, against a very tough opponent. But things re-

main the same. My mindset is that I need to go out there and get back in the game. I want to show everyone I'm still the champion and I want to fight Cleiton again", said Miau, who beat a tough Gadzhimusa Gaziev before coming back to Lightweight for a second shot at his arch-rival.

Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic has caused worldwide disruption to the economy, lifestyle, entertainment and events across the globe.

In the wake of the health risks caused by large gatherings of people, BRAVE CF officials postponed the event which was planned to be held on March 28 in Balneario Camboriu, Brazil. While the new date for the fight is still under review, the official statement released by BRAVE CF read:

"We intend to get back to event planning as soon as the situation is stabilized and we have clearance from governments and health organizations, we will get back to the organization of the events."

## New Zealand tours in doubt, office avoids sackings

Reuters | Wellington

New Zealand's winter tours to Netherlands, Scotland, Ireland and West Indies are in "serious doubt" due to the coronavirus and there are "obvious question marks" looming over the tour to Bangladesh in August, the national cricket board said yesterday.

"Clearly, this situation is extremely disappointing for everyone involved in sport but, given the bigger picture, and the terrible toll COVID-19 is taking worldwide, we need to look after not only our own people but the greater community good," New Zealand Cricket boss David White told reporters in Auckland.

"Cricket in New Zealand has been fortunate in that we were very much at the end of our home summer programme when this crisis struck.

"However, with the lockdown now in full force, we're mindful of the difficulties facing our cricket community."

New Zealand has reported over 800 infections and one death from the virus.

As in other countries, virtually all sport in New Zealand has been shut down as part of containment efforts, triggering job losses and pay-cuts. White said the board had not yet needed to resort to staff cuts but had switched to four-day working weeks and applied to a government scheme which subsidises wages at organisations affected by the coronavirus.

## England pay cuts still an option - Woakes

AFP | London

England all-rounder Chris Woakes indicated Thursday pay cuts for the country's leading cricketers could yet happen as the sport tries to keep financially afloat amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Wednesday saw England and Wales Cricket Board chief executive Tom Harrison announce he was taking a 25 percent pay cut, with other officials at Lord's reducing their salaries as well.

That followed his announcement on Tuesday of the ECB's £61 million (\$76 million) aid package in response to the "once in a generation" challenge of COVID-19.

Harrison said Tuesday there were no plans to enforce a pay cut on leading England players, with cricket worldwide suspended.

But the ESPNcricinfo website reported Harrison had written to the chief executive of England's Professional Cricketers Association to suggest centrally contracted stars such



Chris Woakes reacts during a match (file photo)

as Test captain Joe Root and all-rounder Ben Stokes volunteer to accept a cut of some 20 percent.

The players, however, do not yet appear to have been contacted directly.

"It's a tricky one, talking about finances and people's wages, it can be a delicate subject," World Cup-winner Woakes told BBC Radio.

"The PCA is our governing

body (union) as players and they do a fantastic job for us. They're looking after us as well as they can and trying to help the ECB through this."

The 31-year-old Warwickshire star added: "Those discussions are ongoing between the ECB and the PCA and there's every chance that might happen but at the minute we haven't been asked to take a pay cut."

## Vuelta to stick to start date and route, says director

AFP | Madrid

This year's Vuelta a Espana is still set to go ahead as planned with all 21 stages despite the coronavirus pandemic's devastating impact on Spain, the race's director said on Thursday.

"As it stands today the Vuelta's dates stay as they are and we not considering a race of less than the scheduled 21 stages," Javier Guillen told sports daily AS.

It had been rumoured that the Vuelta, one of cycling's



Cyclists compete in Vuelta cycling race (file photo)

three Grand Tours and is scheduled to start on August 14 in the Netherlands, could reduce the number of stages if the Tour de France is delayed, in order to make room for the postponed

Giro d'Italia which as yet has no new start date.

"All this is mere speculation that has come out of Italy ... we know that it's difficult to combine races with established dates with others that need to be reorganised, so should know that we will have to be flexible should a change of dates materialise," Guillen added.

However Guillen insisted that the priority was ensuring that the Tour de France, which is still scheduled to start on June 27, is run as "it's an indispensable event for our sport".