

SPORTS  
sports

# At least I can be champion for two years, says Halep

Reuters | London

Simon Halep is trying to look on the bright side regarding the suspension of the tennis season due to the coronavirus pandemic, which means at least she will be referred to as reigning Wimbledon champion for two years.

The Romanian former world number one produced a flawless performance to beat Serena Williams in last year's final but this week's cancellation of the grasscourt Grand Slam means she will not get to defend her title this summer.

Halep, 28, is currently back in her native Romania where she has been locked down at home for 22 days, only popping out briefly to jog around the grounds of her residence.

Asked about the Wimbledon cancellation, announced on Wednesday, Halep told Eurosport's Tennis Legends podcast: "I take it positively, because I am now the defending champion for two years. So, I have to live with that for one more year so that's a good thing again."

"I am excited that I will be able to play the first match on (the) Tuesday I think on Centre



Simona Halep (ROU) poses with her trophy after defeating Serena Williams (USA) in Wimbledon women's singles final (file photo)

Court. So, I really want to make this experience. It's going to be great for sure."

The WTA Tour and ATP Tour have been shut down until the middle of July, at least, but Halep is geared up for a longer suspension of the season, possibly the whole year.

"I know that the worst scenario in my head is that this year is going to be canceled and, yeah, I'm sure we're going to overcome this period if we listen and stay home safely," she said.

I haven't touched a racket. Not the ball, the racket -- since Dubai," she said. "And I want to keep it that way for one more month."

"I just kept it very safe because I am a little bit scared about it. And I just want to stay chilled. I wake up at around 10 or 11. It's very good to have a lot of sleep."

"No alarm clock, no schedule, so I just wake up. I have a late breakfast and then I do some running here in the complex. Because we are allowed to do it, it's a private residence."

"In the house I work on my core and my other exercises. So, every day I am working and I feel fit yes."

Halep said that while she missed her job, it was right that sport had faded into the background at a time of global crisis.

"It's just a world problem and I just want to say that it's safer that everything got canceled. It's not a small problem, it's a huge problem. And we just have to listen to what they say, to stay home and being very safe," she said.

"For the moment, I think it's going to be longer than July. We hope for the U.S. Open (scheduled for Aug. 31 to Sept. 13) but it's not sure because New York is struggling now."

#### Lots of sleep

After so many years jet-setting around the globe, Halep said the enforced time off from the Tour had been welcome in some respects, even if the circumstances were dreadful. "It's the longest period that

## Neymar donates \$1M to fight coronavirus

AFP | Rio de Janeiro

Neymar has donated \$1 million to fight the impact of the new coronavirus in his native Brazil, according to TV network SBT.

The Paris Saint-Germain star, the world's third-highest-paid footballer, donated part of the money to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the rest to a charitable fund launched by his friend Luciano Huck, a Brazilian TV presenter, the report said.

The striker's press office declined to comment, saying: "We never talk about donations or amounts."

Neymar, 28, followed the example of PSG teammate Kylian Mbappe, who last month made what was

described as a major donation -- amount undisclosed -- to a French charity helping

fight the impact of COVID-19.

Huck, who has been touted as a possible can-

didate in Brazil's 2022 presidential election, launched his fund to help poor Rio de Janeiro neighbourhoods particularly vulnerable to coronavirus.

The donations come as high-paid footballers face pressure to forego some of their salaries amid the crisis, which has ground the sporting world to a halt and left some clubs struggling to pay their staff.

Neymar is riding out the pandemic at his luxury villa in Mangaratiba, a resort town outside Rio.

He faced criticism last week after he was photographed relaxing with a group of friends on a beach volleyball court, even as half the world's population -- including most of Brazil -- is in confinement to slow the virus' spread.



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## Xavi donates 1 mn euros to Barcelona hospital

AFP | Madrid

Former Barcelona and Spain star Xavi Hernandez and his wife have donated one million euros (\$1.08 million) to the city's Hospital Clinic to help the fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

"Xavi Hernandez and Nuria Cunillera have made a donation of one million euros to the clinic to face up to COVID-19. Thanks a lot for your help and support... All together, we will get there," the hospital tweeted yesterday.

"Nuria and I, we support the Hospital Clinic of Barcelona's fight against the coronavirus. Thanks to the donations they are receiving, the hospital has acquired equipment for patients and healthcare professionals," Xavi said in a video posted on his Twitter account.

The former World Cup winner and two-time European champion with Spain is currently in charge of Al-Sadd in Qatar and turned down an approach from Barcelona in January after the club sacked Ernesto Valverde.

Lionel Messi, Pep Guardiola, Rafael Nadal and Pau Gasol are among several Spanish sports stars to have donated or led fundraising campaigns to help combat the deadly virus.



Xavi Hernandez

## De Bruyne recommends voided season amid injury fears

Omnisport | London

Kevin De Bruyne believes Premier League teams would be hit by an instant injury crisis if the 2019-20 campaign is swiftly resumed and feels cancelling the season might be a better option.

Football in England is suspended until April 30 due to the coronavirus pandemic, with the Football Association committed to extending the season indefinitely beyond its normal cut-off point of June 1.

De Bruyne has been in sparkling form for Pep Guardiola's

men this term, racking up eight goals and 16 assists in the Premier League before inspiring a 2-1 first-leg win for City in their now on-hold Champions League last-16 tie against Real Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu.

And yet, the Belgium midfielder would accept those impressive returns being torn from the record books due to bigger

picture concerns.

"I have no idea when we will be playing again. We haven't played for six weeks," De Bruyne, who missed City's last two games before the shutdown due to a shoulder injury sustained during the EFL Cup final win over Aston Villa, told HLN. "Normally you'd need a preparation of three to four weeks. If we restart immediately then everybody will be injured after a few games."

"I know that there's lots of money involved. But I think that waiting so long to make a decision can cause issues next season."

"There won't be a long summer break and you can just post-

pone everything.

"I would feel sad if the season is stopped after such a good year, but if it avoids issues for next season, it must be done."

City were due to host Liverpool this weekend, with Jurgen Klopp's side on the cusp of taking the Premier League title out of the possession of Guardiola's team. They boast a 25-point lead after 29 matches, with City having played a game less.

De Bruyne's impressive returns this season come after an injury-plagued 2018-19 where, having returned to action after helping Belgium to the semi-finals of the 2018 World Cup, he suffered two separate instances lateral knee ligament damage.



Kevin De Bruyne

## Lukaku questions why Serie A only stopped after player contracted COVID-19

Omnisport | Milan

Inter striker Romelu Lukaku hit out at officials for allowing Serie A to continue until a player tested positive for coronavirus, insisting health is paramount.

The 2019-20 Serie A season has been suspended amid the COVID-19 pandemic, which has killed more than 53,100 people worldwide. Juventus defend-

er Daniele Rugani was listed as the first Serie A player to contract coronavirus following the club's 2-0 win over Inter behind closed doors on March 8.

With Italy hit hardest by the virus -- more than 13,910 deaths -- Belgium star Lukaku questioned why the league was not postponed sooner.

"Health comes first. Why should we play if there are people in the world who are risking their lives?" Lukaku said in an interview with Thierry Henry via Puma's Instagram.



Romelu Lukaku

## Berbatov says Liverpool fully deserve title

Reuters | London

Former Manchester United striker Dimitar Berbatov said their traditional foes Liverpool deserve to be crowned Premier League champions and it would be unfair on the Anfield side if the season cannot be completed due to the coronavirus outbreak.

The campaign has been suspended with the league saying it was keeping the restart date

under "constant review".

Liverpool, who have a 25-point advantage over reigning champions Manchester City and nine games left, need six more points to guarantee lifting their first title in 30 years.

"People are suggesting to give the title to Liverpool, and honestly they deserve it the way they had been playing, nobody was going to catch them," Berbatov said.

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