

SPORTS
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Juventus players, coach agree pay cut

Reuters | Turin

Juventus players and coach Maurizio Sarri have reached an agreement over a wage reduction that will save the Italian champions 90 million euros (\$100.26 million), the Serie A club announced on Saturday.

Sarri and the first-team players have agreed what amounts to a four-month pay reduction to help Italy's most successful club during the coronavirus crisis.

The effective one-third cut to the players' annual salaries will mean a huge drop in wages for a squad headed by marquee Portuguese player Cristiano Ronaldo, the best-paid footballer in Italy who is reported to earn 31 million euros a year.

The agreement comes at a time when many clubs around Europe have had to cut wage bills because of the dramatic impact of matches having had to be postponed or played behind closed doors due to the spread of the virus.

"The economic and financial effects of the understanding reached are positive for about 90 million euros for the 2019/2020 financial year", Juventus said in a statement.

"The understanding provides for the reduction of the compensation for an amount equal to the monthly payments of March, April, May and June 2020", it added, saying personal agreements with Sarri and the players will be finalised in the coming weeks.



Juventus' Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo (C) talks with Juventus' Italian coach Maurizio Sarri (R) as Juventus' French midfielder Blaise Matuidi looks on

The Turin-based club, in one of the regions hit hardest by the crisis, have suffered in recent weeks with three of their players having tested positive for the virus -- forward Paulo Dybala, defender Daniele Rugani and midfielder Blaise Matuidi.

Soccer around the world has been brought to a standstill by the pandemic with Italy having suffered more than 10,000 deaths from the virus, the highest number in any country.

Italy's top-flight Serie A league has been suspended since March 9 with Juventus, seeking a ninth successive title, leading the league by one point from Lazio

with 12 games each remaining.

Health emergency

"Juventus Football Club S.p.A. announces that, due to the current global health emergency (which) is preventing the performance of the sporting activity, it has reached an understanding with the players and the coach of the First Team regarding their compensation for the residual portion of the current sport season," the club statement said.

"The understanding provides for the reduction of the compensation for an amount equal to the monthly wages of March, April,

May and June 2020.

"In the coming weeks, personal agreements with the players and the coach will be finalised, as required by the current regulations.

"Should the current season's matches be rescheduled, the Club will negotiate in good faith with the players and the coach conditional increases of compensation according to the actual resumption and finalisation of official competitions.

"Juventus would like to thank the players and the coach for their commitment at a difficult time for everyone." Long-standing defender Gior-



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gio Chiellini led the players' negotiations amid reports in the Italian media that Ronaldo had agreed to sacrifice 3.8 million euros of his yearly wage to ease the financial burden on the club while Italy is in lockdown.

The agreement comes the day after leading Spanish club Atletico Madrid took the decision to cut the wages of their staff, including the players, to ease the financial burden on the club.

Atletico joined La Liga rivals Barcelona, who imposed a compulsory wage reduction on their players during the period of lockdown after Spain became the second-most affected country by the coronavirus in Europe behind Italy.

German Bundesliga clubs Borussia Moenchengladbach and Borussia Dortmund have also said their players would forego some of their salary.

Lampard discusses difficulty of preparing players for return after crisis

The Independent | London

Chelsea boss Frank Lampard accepts clubs cannot expect players to "push and push" themselves during the coronavirus pandemic with no concrete timetable as to when football will return.

The Blues squad continues to train at home during the lockdown initiated by the government, with an optimistic return date for the Premier League set for 30 April.

Lampard feels there is little else everyone at the club can do but try to stay focused on the bigger picture.

"It is very difficult at the moment, because we have got nothing concrete in front of us," Lampard said in a FaceTime interview with Chelsea's official club app.

"We have seen that things can change very quickly, so we can only go by the dates we have been given, at the moment it looks like 1 May or the end of April.

"But daily or probably weekly we are looking at it, saying: 'Well, how do we train? What does it look like?'"

Bruno Fernandes admits regret over Guardiola argument

The Independent | London

Bruno Fernandes has suggested that he regrets his touchline spat with Pep Guardiola during Manchester United's recent derby win.

Fernandes appeared to 'shush' Guardiola towards the end of the 2-0 victory over Manchester City earlier this month.

United's latest signing, who has had a transformational impact since arriving in January, later said that Guardiola did not deserve his "respect".

"I have respect for Pep and what he wins and what he did for football, because he changed some mentalities in football," Fernandes told Sky Sports.

"But I think in that moment, he didn't respect me, so he didn't deserve my respect at that moment on the pitch."

In an interview with Canal 11, Fernandes has now rowed back on those comments and "condemned" himself for his reaction to Guardiola.

"As everything in life, nothing is defined by what a person has had and won," he said.

"I condemn myself because the best response would have been to remain silent and he would have been left to speak alone."

Gundogan 'would be OK' with Liverpool being handed title

Goal | London

Manchester City midfielder Ilkay Gundogan says he "would be okay" with Liverpool being awarded the Premier League title due to the coronavirus pandemic, which has called a halt to all major leagues across Europe.

Liverpool boast a 25-point lead over reigning champions City in England's top-flight standings at the moment, having won 27 of their 29 fixtures.

Jürgen Klopp's men are now just six points away from glory, but it has been suggested that their achievements over the past eight months could be chalked off amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Premier League has been scheduled to return on April 30, but with the United Kingdom currently in a state of emergency, there is a chance football's hiatus

will continue through to the summer.

Some experts have called for the season to be voided, while others believe Liverpool have already earned the Premier League crown after establishing an unassailable advantage at the summit.

Gundogan falls into the latter camp, despite his allegiance to City, as he told German broadcaster ZDF: "It would be okay for me [If Liverpool are handed the title], you have to be sporting."

When asked if he would be in favour of top players in England sacrificing their salaries in order to help clubs in the lower leagues survive, Gundogan responded: "Of course I would find that okay, of course."

"But the lower league clubs do not have it so easy."

Gundogan added on how he is coping in self-isolation at his

"It would be okay for me [If Liverpool are handed the title], you have to be sporting"

ILKAY GUNDOGAN

home in Manchester: "I have to admit that it is not that easy to deal with. It is an exceptional situation that cannot be fully grasped.

"You are sometimes afraid to go for a walk for 10 to 15 minutes outside.

"Even though it was oddly and ironically extremely beautiful from the weather here in Manchester."

The 29-year-old also expressed doubts over the season resuming next month, with the option to play out remaining fixtures behind closed doors reportedly under discussion.

"Honestly, I can't imagine that and I don't know how realistic it is," said Gundogan.

UEFA officials have insisted that it is their priority to make sure that club football is concluded, which is why the decision was taken to postpone Euro 2020 by a year.

Klopp says coronavirus impacted preparation ahead of Atletico loss

Goal | London

Liverpool manager Jürgen Klopp has admitted that the confusion and concern surrounding the coronavirus pandemic affected his preparations for the Champions League defeat against Atletico Madrid.

More than two weeks ago, Atletico arrived on Merseyside holding a slender one-goal advantage over the Premier League leaders.

The game went to extra time level at 1-1 on aggregate, but three goals for the visitors in the additional 30 minutes cancelled out Roberto Firmino's 94th minute goal.

The result saw Atletico progress to the quarter-finals of Europe's elite competition at the expense of the 2019 winners.

The match, however, proved to be the last major game in England, with all football suspended in the top four leagues just two days later due to the coronavirus.

On the day Atletico landed in England, all education facilities in Madrid were closed with immediate effect, as Spain rapidly tried to get to grips with the pandemic that has since led to the country being in a strict national lockdown that enters its third week today.



Jurgen Klopp, Manager of Liverpool argues with the Assistant Referee during the match against Atletico Madrid (file photo)

Speaking to Liverpool's official website, Klopp admitted that Covid-19 fears impacted on his mindset ahead of the crunch game. "It is two weeks ago, but it feels like it is ages ago that we played Atletico," he said.

"I remember that we all knew about the situation with coronavirus around the world but we were still 'in our tunnel', if you want, and until then it didn't really arrive in our mind in England.

"We played the Bournemouth game on Saturday, we won it, and Sunday [Man] City lost, so the information for us was 'two wins to go'."

