

SPORTS  
sports

## Benzema deepens France rift by ridiculing 'go-kart' Giroud

AFP | Madrid

Real Madrid's Karim Benzema has mocked France striker Olivier Giroud by likening himself to a Formula One car and Giroud a go-kart.

Benzema has not played for France since 2015 and watched from afar as Giroud spearheaded the team's World Cup triumph in Russia two years ago.

With over 500 appearances for Real Madrid and in his 11th season with the Spanish giants, no questions remain over Benzema's playing skills.

Asked about the Chelsea forward during a question and answer session on Instagram on Sunday night, Benzema said: "You can't confuse a Formula One car with a go-kart, and I'm being kind. I know I'm a Formula One car..."

"It works because he's there, that's it. It's not going to be spectacular. (Antoine) Griezmann and

(Kylian) Mbappe get seen more while he rolls his sleeves up and does the dirty work.

"But does everyone like his game? I don't know."

During the 2016 and 2017 seasons ahead of up Russia 2018, Giroud scored 16 goals for France in 24 games.

He also played every match at the World Cup and although he failed to find the target in Russia, his team came home with the trophy.

France coach Didier Deschamps has sidelined Benzema since a legal case in 2015.

The case involving Benzema allegedly trying to facilitate a scheme to blackmail fellow France international Mathieu Valbuena over a compromising private film on a stolen mobile phone.

The investigation is ongoing and Benzema is now waiting to hear if he will face a criminal trial.

Benzema has scored 19 goals in 32 appearances for Real Madrid this season while Giroud has largely been a backup player for Chelsea, despite a decent run of form in February.

Karim Benzema



## Cancel season if it's not over by June, says Kane

Kane said extending Premier League would have a knock-on effect, impacting Euros, World Cup

AFP | London

England captain Harry Kane said on Sunday the Premier League season should be cancelled if it cannot be completed by the end of June because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The English top-flight is currently suspended until at least April 30 due to the COVID-19 outbreak, with a likely further delay to be announced soon.

There is no clear idea about when or if football will be able to resume, but Euro 2020 has been cancelled, which opens a window to bring domestic seasons to a conclusion in the summer.

But Tottenham striker Kane does not want Premier League chiefs to let the current campaign go past June or even the

start of what would be the 2020-21 season in August, as has been suggested in some quarters.

"I know the Premier League will do everything they can to finish the season, and that they are looking at every option possible," Kane said in an Instagram Live conversation with former Liverpool star Jamie Redknapp.

"I think, for me, we do need to try to finish the season. But there needs to be a point where enough is enough.

"Playing into July or August and pushing next season back I don't see too much

benefit in that. But obviously I don't know too much about behind the scenes and financially.

"Probably the limit for me is the end of June. If the season's not completed by the end of June we need to look at the options and just look forward to next season."

Premier League matches could potentially be staged behind closed doors in a bid to complete

this campaign once the current lockdown in Britain is over.

Kane does not think dragging out the season will help anyone though, especially if it delays the next term.

"The further this season is pushed on, it would have such a big knock-on effect for next season, with the Euros in 2021, and even World Cup 2022. But that's just my opinion," he said.

"Football is secondary at the moment. I know there still have to be plans in place, and I'm sure everyone is trying to do that.

"All that is out of my hands though, there's nothing I can do personally, so from my point of view we've just got to wait and see what happens. Hopefully this clears up as soon as possible, and we can try to get back to normal."



Harry Kane

## Mourinho to take Spurs training via video amid coronavirus lockdown

Reuters | London

Tottenham Hotspur manager Jose Mourinho and his coaching staff will put players through their paces from home starting this week as the club holds live video training sessions amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Spurs' players are in self-isolation with Britain in lockdown and the Premier League suspended until at least April 30.

The players so far have been working through their own individual training programmes designed by the coaching and sports science teams, and England midfielder Harry Winks said they were still adjusting to the new routine.

"It's a bit strange for all of us, but I've got my head around it," Winks told the club's website.

"We've all been given a schedule, but it's flexible, we can do it in our own time.

"So, for instance, I might have a lie in one day, but then I'll



Jose Mourinho, Manager of Tottenham Hotspur looks on as his team train during a training session (file photo)

work later. The important thing is to get it done."

On Sunday, the club said it gave Steven Bergwijn and Son Heung-min permission to return to their home countries.

Son flew to South Korea for personal reasons, while Bergwijn returned to the Netherlands ahead of the birth of his child.

Tottenham said both forwards will continue their individual rehabilitation and training programmes during their time away.

Bergwijn is recovering from an ankle injury picked up against Burnley earlier this month, while Son sustained a broken arm last month.

## Xavi wants 'total harmony' to return to Barcelona as coach

AFP | Madrid

Xavi Hernandez has reiterated his desire to coach Barcelona in the future but suggests he will not return until a different board brings a new sense of direction to the club.

Hernandez is in charge of Al-Sadd in Qatar and turned down an approach in January after Barca sacked Ernesto Valverde, which led to the surprise appointment of Quique Setien.



Al-Sadd's coach Xavi is thrown into the air by players as they celebrate a win

In an interview with Spanish newspaper La Vanguardia published on Sunday, Xavi said

Neymar would be a "spectacular signing", and singled out former Spain defender Carles Puyol and the one-time Dutch winger Jordi Cruyff as people he would like to work with.

Yet the relationship between Barcelona's board, led by president Josep Maria Bartomeu, and the players has remained tense, with Lionel Messi's public criticism of technical secretary Eric Abidal among a number of off-field controversies.

"I am clear that I want to return to Barca, I am very excited," said Xavi, who was asked if a change of board would be needed for it to happen. "Obviously I would like to be in tune with everyone," he said. "In the dressing room there can't be a negative or toxic atmosphere."

"Everything has to fit," Xavi added. "I would like to come in with people from my environment that could form a good team."

## Rashford helps feed children during virus shutdown

AFP | London

Manchester United forward Marcus Rashford is working to get food to children who rely on free school meals after the coronavirus shutdown.

The 22-year-old England international has teamed up with charity FareShare to help children in the Manchester area after schools were closed.

And he revealed that his own childhood had inspired him to want to make a difference to the next generation.

"In the past I have done a lot of work in regards to children and when I heard about the schools shutting down, I knew that meant free meals for some kids that they are not getting at school," Rashford told the BBC.

"I remember when I was at school I was on free meals and my mum wouldn't get home until around six o'clock so my next meal would have been about 8 o'clock. I was fortunate, and there are kids in much more difficult situations that don't get their meals at homes."

Rashford said fundraising had gone well.

"We have got to the £100,000 (\$124,000) mark, which means we get to feed 400,000 children so it's been very

**"I think when times are tough it is important that two clubs who have a huge social following that we do come together and make a difference when things which are bigger than football happen. So credit to both clubs,**

MARCUS RASHFORD

positive." Manchester United and Manchester City have joined forces to donate to food banks in the area.

"I think when times are tough it is important that two clubs who have a huge social following that we do come together and make a difference when things which are bigger than football happen. So credit to both clubs," Rashford said.

Rashford was sidelined with a back injury when the Premier League season was suspended earlier this month.

The forward said he was making good progress but admitted he was missing football.

"It's just about patience," he said. "I have been working hard on the bikes and following the programme that I have been given from the club."

Marcus Rashford



## Serie A hits back at Italy sports minister over 'bubble' remark

Reuters | Rome

Italy's Serie A league has hit back at the country's sports minister Vincenzo Spadafora after he said the country's top clubs were living in a bubble and criticised the millionaire salaries of some players.

The exchange came with Serie A, like football around the rest of the world, at a standstill because of the coronavirus pandemic. Italy is Europe's worst-affected country with 10,779 deaths and a total of 97,689 confirmed cases.

In an interview with the Rome-based newspaper La Repubblica on Sunday, Spadafora said that sport was not just about football and that he would propose spending 400 million euros (\$443 million) to develop grass roots sport around the country.