



## Fans banned from Barcelona v Napoli Champions League tie over coronavirus

### Agencies

MADRID: Barcelona's Champions League round of 16 return match against Napoli scheduled for March 18 has been ordered to be played behind closed doors because of the coronavirus outbreak, both clubs announced Tuesday.

"The Champions League match between FC Barcelona and

Princes was forced behind closed doors after the French government announced a ban on all gatherings of more than 1,000 people in a country where 1,412 cases of COVID-19 infections have been recorded and 25 deaths.

The announcement was closely followed by the postponement of the Six Nations rugby match between France and Ireland scheduled for Saturday in Paris.



Napoli will be played at Camp Nou behind closed doors," the Spanish giants said on Twitter.

Two other Champions League matches -- Tuesday's tie between Valencia and Atalanta in Spain, and Wednesday's Paris Saint-Germain v Atletico Madrid match -- are scheduled to be played in empty stadiums in efforts to curb the spread of the killer virus.

PSG's match at the Parc des

Spanish club Valencia's match against Atalanta was considered high risk and ordered behind closed doors because the Italian side come from Bergamo in the Lombardy region, one of the areas of Italy most affected by the virus.

Italy, Europe's worst-hit country with 9,172 cases and 463 deaths, on Monday banned all sporting events until April 3, suspending all Serie A football fixtures.

## Serie A, all sport in Italy halted due to coronavirus crisis

### Agencies

ROME: Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte announced the suspension until April 3 of all sporting events in the country, including the top-flight Serie A football league, as Italy grapples with the coronavirus crisis.

The final Serie A game before government announcement saw Sassuolo beat Brescia 3-0 behind closed doors in Reggio Emilia on Monday. After scoring his opening goal Sassuolo striker Francesco Caputo held up a handwritten message on piece of paper, urging fans: "Everything will be fine. Stay at home."



A few hours later the Prime Minister used similar words as he announced a nationwide lockdown. "I am going to sign a decree that can be summarised as follows: I stay at home," Conte announced in a dramatic evening television address.

The unprecedented measures limiting travel and banning public gatherings across the country of more than 60 million people came after 97 more deaths took Italy's toll to 463.

The measures include closure of schools, universities and suspension of sports competitions.

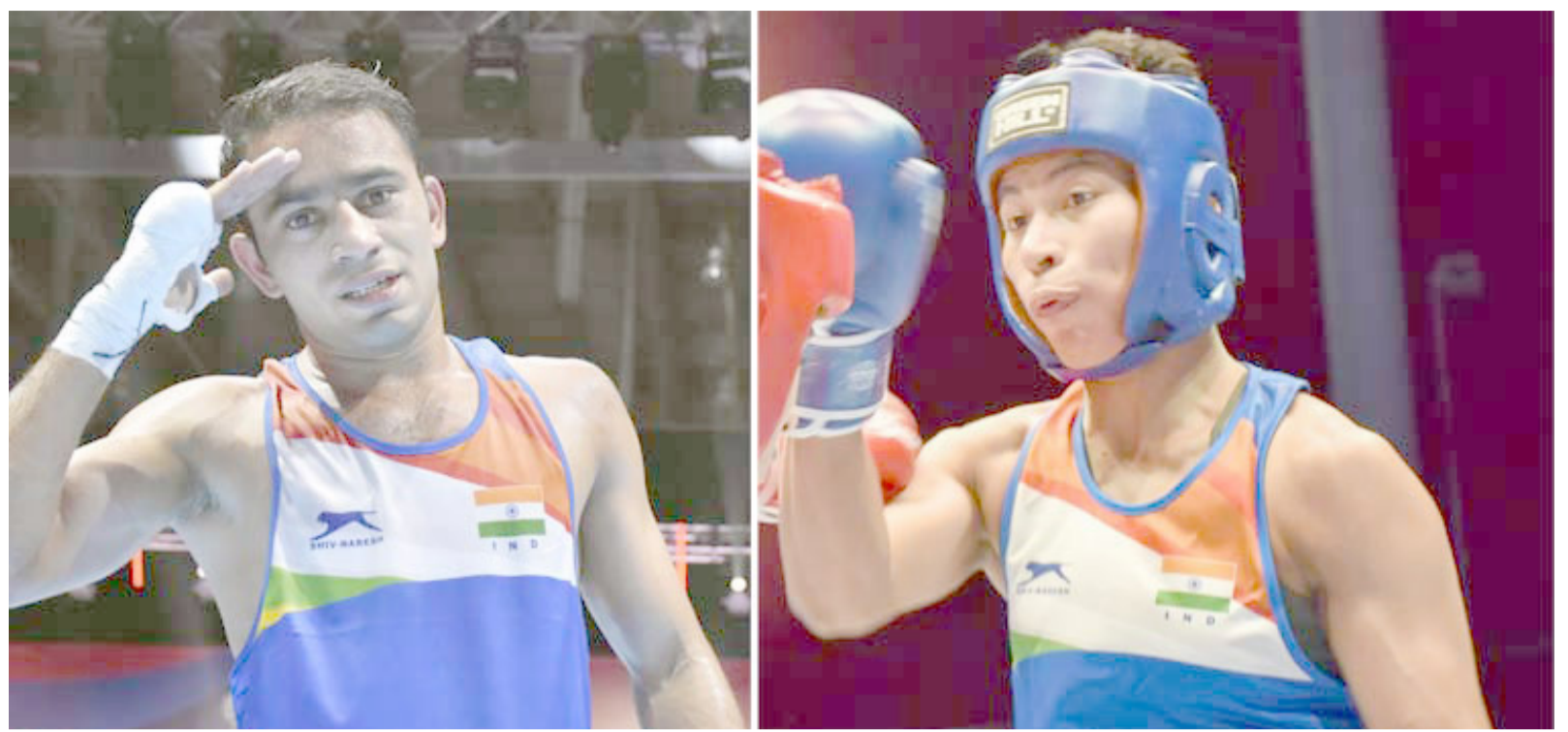
"There is no reason why matches and sporting events should continue and I am thinking of the football championship," said Conte.

"I'm sorry but all the fans must take note of it, we will not even allow gyms to be used for sports activities," he added.

The decree allows the possibility of organising matches under international jurisdiction behind closed doors, such as ties in UEFA's Champions League and Europa League.

Juventus are due to host Lyon in the second leg of their Champions

League last-16 tie in Turin next week. Inter Milan are due to host Spain's Getafe in the Europa League on Thursday while Roma welcome Sevilla a week later. Earlier Monday, Italy's National Olympic Committee (CONI), which has authority over all national sports federations, had recommended "sporting activities at all levels" be suspended until April 3 to help contain the virus outbreak and called for a government decree to enforce the request.



## Olympic-bound Vikas Enters Final Of Asian Qualifiers; Amit, Lovlina End With Bronze Medals

### Press Trust of India

AMMAN, JORDAN: One Amit Panghal (52kg) and Lovlina Borgohain (69kg) signed off with bronze medals at the Asian Olympic Qualifiers here on Tuesday.

All three boxers have already secured their tickets to the Olympic Games by making the semifinals but Krishan

will come back with at least a silver after entering the final. He fought with a cut sustained just below his left eyebrow before claiming a split decision victory over second seed Ablai-khan Zhussupov of Kazakhstan, a two-time world bronze-medallist. The 28-year-old Indian will face feisty Jordanian Eishaih Hussein, who sent Asian gold-medallist and top seed

Bobo-Usmon Baturlov packing in a split decision. Krishan, a former world bronze-winner and a Commonwealth Games gold-medallist, was the busier of the two boxers despite the injury he picked in the second round and his right jabs were particularly effective through the bout.

However, in a major disappointment for India, world silver-medallist and top seed

Panghal went down to Jianguan Hu of China in a split 3-2 decision. It was revenge for Hu, an Olympic and world bronze-medallist who lost to Panghal in the Asian semifinals last year. Panghal had endured exhausting contests in the run-up to the semifinals and he could not outpace the determined Chinese in Tuesday's clash. Earlier, two-time world bronze-medallist

and second seed Borgohain lost to third seed and 2018 world silver-medallist Hong Gu of China in a unanimous 5-0 verdict after struggling to find her range against the experienced 30-year-old. Gu will next be up against reigning world champion and top seed Chen Nien-Chin of Taiwan who outpunched Thailand's Baisorn Manikon in her semifinal bout.



## Sindhu, Saina chase glory as All England to go ahead amid coronavirus fears

### Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI: Undeterred by the coronavirus outbreak, Indian shuttlers will continue to chase glory at the All England Championships beginning in Birmingham on Wednesday, with reigning world champion P.V. Sindhu spearheading the campaign.

The season's first Super 1000 event witnessed a dramatic build-up in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, which has claimed over 4,000 lives and infected more than 1,00,000 people globally.

In the United Kingdom itself, the number of infected people has gone past 300 with five deaths so far.

A number of tournaments, including the German Open, was postponed since the deadly disease first broke out in Wuhan, China, affecting the preparation of the shuttlers for the Tokyo Olympics.

Concerned about their health, seven Indian shuttlers, including former top 10 player H.S. Prannoy and world No. 10 men's doubles pair of Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy have withdrawn from the All England. The USD 1,100,000 BWF world tour event offers 12,000 ranking points to the winner and with the Olympic qualification on the line, most of the top players will be seen in action at the Arena Birmingham.

World No. 6 Sindhu, who had reached the semifinal in 2018, will need to cut down on unforced errors and strengthen her defence as she opens against USA's Beiwen Zhang. The 24-year-old is expected to take on Korea's Sung Ji Hyun if she crosses the opening hurdle.

Saina, who had made it to the finals in 2015, is in dire need of some ranking points to qualify for the Olympics and she will face a stern test against third seeded Japanese Akane Yamaguchi in the opening round. Former world No. 1 Srikanth, who had reached the quarters in 2019, will have to get across Olympic champion and third seed Chen Long to have any chance of going deep in the draw and retain his ranking points.

Chief national coach P. Gopichand was the last Indian to win the cham-

ampionship, in 2001. Sindhu will look to overturn a run of recent poor finishes and emulate her mentor with the top medal.

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## Justin Langer in search of 'white-ball finisher' like Dhoni for Australia

### Press Trust of India

MELBOURNE: Australia head coach Justin Langer says his team is desperately looking for a finisher in the mould of Mahendra Singh Dhoni or Michael Bevan in limited overs cricket. Their three-match ODI series against New Zealand, beginning on March 13, provides Australia an opportunity to test the depth in their middle order, and potentially hone in on batsmen who could fill the 'finisher' role.

"We've been fortunate in the past with a Mike Hussey or a Michael Bevan who are masters at it. MS Dhoni is a master of it. Jos Buttler has been brilliant at it for England," Langer was quoted as saying by ICC.

"What I've learned is everyone in the world is looking for it," he added.

Dhoni has won India innumerable matches from seemingly hopeless positions, and so did the likes of Bevan and Hussey. South Africa crushed Australia 3-0 in the recently-concluded ODI series where Mitchell Marsh played at number 6 in the second and third games and scored 32 and 36 runs respectively.

Langer feels it is the right time for the potential candidates to seal the spot. The challenge starts with the upcoming



ODIs against New Zealand. "So it's a role that's there for someone to grab hold of," said Langer.

"No one at this stage has absolutely secured it, have they? But there are good opportunities there for someone to do that," he added.

Over the last year, as many as 13 batsmen have occupied positions 4-7 for Australia in ODIs, with nine different batsmen tried out at No.6.

Glenn Maxwell and Marcus Stoinis occupied the spot in five matches each, but Stoinis, particularly, misfired in the role, scoring just 27 runs in four innings.

## Kevin O'Brien's last-ball six helps Ireland clinch super-over win

### Agencies

GREATER NOIDA: Kevin O'Brien hit a last-ball six as Ireland clinched a consolation super-over win against Afghanistan in the third Twenty20 international in India on Tuesday. With three runs needed for victory off the final ball of the super-over, O'Brien cleared the long-off fence to end his team's 12-match losing streak in T20s against the Afghans.

O'Brien made 26 off 21 balls in

Ireland's 142 for eight after electing to bat first.

Afghanistan, who won the series 2-1, replied with 142 for seven.

"Lucky that last hit came off," a relieved O'Brien said after receiving the man of the match award.

"We have learnt from game one to game three, about specific plans for each player. You have to adjust quickly and I think we did." Afghanistan needed 16 to win

off the final six deliveries of normal play, and paceman Craig Young claimed Asghar Afghan for 32 before Rashid hit a boundary off the last ball, taking the game into a deciding over.

Young then bowled a disciplined line and length to keep Afghanistan to just eight runs in six balls.

Gareth Delany also played a key part in Ireland's win after top-scoring with 37 and then taking two wickets with his leg-spin.

Off-spinner Simi Singh hurt Afghanistan's middle-order with two wickets off successive balls to send back Mohammad Nabi, for four, and Najibullah Zadran, for nought.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Rahamanullah Gurbaz top-scored with 42 and was named player of the series for amassing 105 runs in the three matches.

Bowlers Naveen-ul-Haq and Qais Ahmad took three wickets each in the Ireland innings.

