

Sports

European football giants to take two billion euro COVID hit: KPMG report

Compared to 500 million euros lost in 2019/20

LONDON: Matchday revenues across the five major European football leagues took a nearly 2 billion euro hit last season (\$2.35 billion) after spectators were largely barred from attending matches due to the pandemic, a report by consultancy KPMG said yesterday. The projected revenue losses dwarf the 500 million euros that clubs in the leagues suffered in the 2019/20 season, when the virus first affected Europe and led to sport being suspended in March 2020, only resuming months later without spectators.

The continent's top five leagues are England's Premier League, Italy's Serie A, Spain's La Liga, Germany's Bundesliga and the French Ligue 1. "It is expected that clubs in the big five leagues will make little-to-no income from this source in 2020/21, potentially losing out on over 2 billion euros of matchday revenues combined," the report said.

For the 2019/20 season the Bundesliga, which has the average highest attendance, was the most impacted (an estimated 157 million euros drop in revenues) while Ligue 1 suffered the least (48 million euros). The report stated that of five big clubs, Barcelona saw the biggest dip, registering a 39-million euros contraction in matchday revenues.

The Premier League was the exception amongst

the five leagues during the 2020/21 season, as it permitted some fans to attend during parts of the campaign. The financial impact is also set to continue in the present season. The Premier League and Ligue 1 are the only ones among the big five leagues to have allowed full capacity stadia this season.

Temporary guidelines are in place for La Liga until August 29, with a re-evaluation of the situation in September, only 40 percent of stadia capacity set to be used and fans obligated to wear masks, the report noted. Italy's Serie A currently allows grounds to be half full, with fans required to show a COVID-19 passes proving that they have either been vaccinated against the virus or recovered from infection, it added.

"Similarly, half of the stadiums can be filled in the German Bundesliga, but only up to the limit of 25,000 fans in total," the

report said. The analysis added this summer's delayed Euro 2020 tournament had laid the groundwork for the return of fans but that it had also had a negative side effect.

"With regard to players' health, UEFA measures were considered rather successful, as only few incidents occurred," it stated. "However, there were also loud voices that condemned the tournament for some increases of new corona(virus) cas-



LONDON: A fire display and 'Welcome Home' signs greet West Ham fans as they take their seats ahead of the English Premier League football match between West Ham United and Leicester City at The London Stadium, in east London on Monday. —AFP

es in the general population.

"The World Health Organization (WHO) blamed Euro 2020 for a rise of 10 percent in COVID-19

cases across Europe, mainly driven by the mixing of crowds in host cities, as well as travelling and the easing of social restrictions." —AFP

News in brief

Egypt without Salah

CAIRO: Egypt's football association (EFA) said on Monday Liverpool had refused to release Mohamed Salah for the Pharaohs' upcoming World Cup qualifiers against Angola and Gabon due to UK quarantine regulations. British media reported earlier that the Reds were also refusing to release Fabinho, Roberto Firmino and Alisson Becker for Brazil's three upcoming World Cup qualifiers. Both Egypt and Brazil are on the UK Government's 'red list'. Egypt's governing body said the decision by Liverpool was prompted by "mandatory isolation for 10 days" for travellers returning from those countries. In the summer, Liverpool refused to allow star striker Salah to play in the Olympics, where Egypt reached the quarter-finals before losing to eventual gold medalists Brazil. —AFP

Lyon complete signing

LYON: Lyon have completed the signing of Swiss international midfielder Xherdan Shaqiri from Liverpool, the two clubs announced on Monday. The 29-year-old moves for an initial fee of six million euros, rising to a potential total of 11 million euros (\$12.9m) with bonuses, Lyon said, and has signed a contract until 2024. Capped 96 times by Switzerland, Shaqiri played for Basel, Bayern Munich and Inter Milan before moving to England in 2015 when he signed for Stoke City. He then joined Liverpool in 2018 and made 63 appearances for the Anfield club over the last three seasons, leaving with winners medals in the Premier League, Champions League, Club World Cup and UEFA Super Cup. —AFP

Williams loaned to Norwich

LONDON: Manchester United defender Brandon Williams joined Premier League side Norwich on a season-long loan on Monday. England Under-21 international Williams made his United debut in September 2019 after coming through the youth ranks at Old Trafford. The 20-year-old left-back has been unable to hold down a regular place in Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's team due to the fine form of Luke Shaw. Promoted Norwich have lost their first two games of the season against Liverpool and Manchester City, conceding eight goals and scoring none. Canaries boss Daniel Farke hopes Williams can help steady the ship. —AFP

Green opts for England

SAINT-ETIENNE: Saint-Etienne goalkeeper Etienne Green has chosen to represent England rather than France, he announced on Instagram on Monday. In a post written in French, the 21-year-old who was born in England but moved to France as a child, wrote: "If the English FA are interested and decide to call me up, I'll go with pride and commit to it 200 per cent." Green has been at Saint-Etienne since he was nine and made his Ligue 1 debut for Les Verts last April. He was selected for France's under-21s in the age-grade Euro in the Hungary this summer as the third goalkeeper. He did not play a single minute as France reached the quarter-finals. —AFP

Antonio stars as West Ham crush 10-man Leicester

LONDON: West Ham extended their perfect start to the season as Michail Antonio became the club's record Premier League goalscorer with a double in their 4-1 win against 10-man Leicester on Monday. David Moyes' side took the lead through Pablo Fornals' first half goal at the London Stadium.

Leicester's Ayoze Perez was sent off for a dangerous stamp on Fornals just before half-time. Said Benrahma bagged West Ham's second after the break before Yuri Tielemans got one back for Leicester.

Antonio went into the game tied with Paolo Di Canio on a joint-record 47 goals for West Ham in the Premier League era. The 31-year-old took sole possession of the record with a brace in the closing stages as West Ham followed up last weekend's 4-2 win at Newcastle with another four-goal blitz.

"I'm really pleased for him. I was disappointed with the way he played in the first half but he did enough to shut the manager up after what I said to him at half-time," Moyes said of Antonio. Despite a quiet summer in the transfer market, West Ham sit top of the table and look capable of emu-

lating last season's sixth place finish.

The Hammers have won their opening two fixtures of a Premier League campaign for only the second time. "It's a super night for us. The team played really well. The sending-off changes the game a little bit but we did a lot of good things," Moyes said. "I've challenged the players to find that extra few points that could have been enough to get us in the Champions League. I could be asking far too much but what else am I going to do? Stand here and say we want to avoid relegation!"

Memorable moment

West Ham were the only team to beat Leicester twice in the league last season and they maintained that hold over Brendan Rodgers' men as the FA Cup holders slumped to their first defeat of the new campaign.

Allowed a capacity crowd for the first time since February 2020 after the easing of coronavirus restrictions, West Ham fed off the fans' energy in a fast start that saw Benrahma's 20-yard curler saved by Kasper Schmeichel.

Containing Leicester effectively and launching counter-attacks at will, West Ham's confident display was rewarded in the 26th minute. A sweeping move ended with Fornals finding Benrahma wide on the left before racing into the area to meet the cross with a clipped finish into the far corner from 12 yards.

between the goalposts, with Mike Maignan, recruited from French champions Lille to try to fill the outsize boots of Italy's Euro 2020 winner Gianluigi Donnarumma, now with Paris Saint-Germain. Looking assured in his new surroundings it was Maignan's long pass that set up the only goal of the game, Davide Calabria then providing the assist with Sampdoria keeper Emil Audero unable to cope with Brahim Diaz's low shot. The Spanish midfielder joined on loan from Real Madrid last season and that has been extended for two more years.

With Sampdoria marking Giroud out of the game, the French forward was given little chance to open his Milan account. Towards the end Piolo blooded another of his summer intake, Alessandro Florenzi, who completed his season-long loan move from Roma at the weekend.

Earlier, former Paris Saint-Germain midfielder Thiago Motta had hopes of opening his second stint as a Serie A manager with victory, when Spezia led Cagliari 2-0 with an hour played. The



LONDON: West Ham United's English midfielder Michail Antonio (second right) celebrates with teammates after scoring their fourth goal against Leicester City at The London Stadium in east London on Monday. —AFP

Leicester suffered a self-inflicted wound in the 40th minute when Michael Oliver sent off Perez after consulting the pitchside monitor to review the forward's reckless stamp on Fornals' ankle.

In the 56th minute, Caglar Soyuncu played a woeful backpass towards Schmeichel without looking and Antonio intercepted. Antonio slipped the ball to the unmarked Benrahma and the Algerian smashed in his first goal at the London Stadium since signing from Brentford last season.

Against the run of play, Tielemans

stabbed home from close-range after West Ham failed to clear James Maddison's 69th minute cross. But Antonio wrapped up the points with 10 minutes remaining when he took Declan Rice's cross, held off Soyuncu and swiveled to blast past Schmeichel.

After celebrating his goal by holding up a large cardboard cut-out of himself on the touchline, Antonio produced another memorable moment in the 84th minute. Cleverly flicking the ball over his head, Antonio got between two defenders before poking home from close-range. —AFP



GENOA: AC Milan's French forward Olivier Giroud gestures at supporters at the end of the Italian Serie A football match between Sampdoria and AC Milan at the Luigi Ferraris stadium in Genoa on Monday. —AFP

ex-Italy international, a successor to Vincenzo Italiano, was back in the dugout for the first time in 18 months after his first managerial role at Genoa ended after 10 games in the sack.

Emmanuel Gyasi put his new club

into an early lead, with Simone Bastoni doubling up on 58 minutes. But home side Cagliari were back in it when Joao Pedro scored in the 62nd minute, and leveled from the penalty spot four minutes later. —AFP

Bale's Real form ticks all the boxes for Wales coach Page

LONDON: Gareth Bale is "ticking all the boxes" since returning to Real Madrid which is a boost for Wales ahead of their forthcoming 2022 World Cup qualifiers said Welsh manager Robert Page. Bale is back in favor at Real under new coach Carlo Ancelotti — having been sent on loan to Tottenham Hotspur by his predecessor Zinedine Zidane — and scored in their 3-3 draw with

Levante last Sunday.

It was his first La Liga goal for the club since September 2019. His form augurs well for Wales' friendly with Finland followed by qualifiers against Belarus and Estonia next month. Wales resume their World Cup qualifying campaign having opened with a 3-1 away defeat to group favorites Belgium and a 1-0 home victory over Czech Republic in March.

"You've got to give it your best and play for your club," said Page. "There's no argument there, he's (Bale) ticking all the boxes. He's got a manager now who's been impressed in what he's done in pre-season and watched him through the Euros. That's all he can influence. Give his best in training

and show what he's all about and he's going to start playing games."

"Thankfully he's had a positive impact on the manager and started the season in good form. He's scoring goals, which is great for us," added Page who has taken temporary charge of the team while full-time boss Ryan Giggs prepares to go on trial in January next year, accused of assault and coercive behavior towards his ex-girlfriend.

Page is delighted too to have Bale and his other star player Aaron Ramsey both fit and in form. They have not played together in a qualifier since Wales beat Hungary to qualify for the Euros in November 2019, largely due to the Juventus midfielder's injury problems. —AFP