

18 New location set as Red Bull Car Park
Drift returns to Kuwait later this year



19 Coronavirus shutdown has exposed
'inequities' of tennis: King



19 Rugby's Kirwan tackles
COVID-19 mental health



Football secondary during crisis: Iniesta



TOKYO: File photo shows Andres Iniesta of Vissel Kobe poses with the winners trophy after the 99th Emperor's Cup final between Vissel Kobe and Kashima Antlers at the National Stadium in Tokyo, Japan. — AFP

TOKYO: With Spain one of the country's hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, Barcelona great Andres Iniesta says he is finding it tough to watch events unfold in Europe from his new home in Japan.

Iniesta, who joined Vissel Kobe in 2018 after a trophy laden career at Barcelona, told Reuters in an interview yesterday that while the importance of football was secondary during the health crisis it was frustrating not to be able to play.

Japan's domestic soccer season has been put on hold during the crisis, with Iniesta remaining in Kobe with his wife and three children. The 35-year-old, one of the most technically gifted midfielders to play the game, said it was difficult to be away from his wider family and friends back in Spain.

"It is a very difficult situation because you are not there with them, with your loved ones," he said through a translator. "You can't see what is happening on a daily life level so that is difficult but we keep talking on a daily basis, checking in with them and just

hoping that the situation gets better."

The new coronavirus has infected more than 200,000 people in Spain and killed over 20,000. Japan has confirmed more than 11,000 infections of the virus with over 250 deaths. Having to stay home and being unable to train properly has been a challenge but he is savouring being able to spend more time with his family.

"Right now, I think football becomes a secondary thing," added Iniesta, who scored the winning goal for Spain in the 2010 World Cup final. "What is important right now is people's lives, people's jobs, trying to move society forward to get out of this situation."

"Having said that, of course as a professional footballer it is difficult to not be able to play football, to

not be able to share time with my fans, my team mates. "I try to focus on the positive things - staying at home I get to spend much more time with my family and with my kids, which normally it is not that easy to do."

After a 16-year spell at Barcelona that saw him win nine La Liga and four Champions Leagues titles, Iniesta decided to take up a new challenge in the J.League. His storied career and that move to Japan are the subject of a documentary about his life: 'Andres Iniesta - The unexpected hero', which is to be released on Thursday.

Despite winning virtually everything there is to win in Europe, Iniesta has not come to Japan to slide quietly into retirement. He led Vissel Kobe to their first piece of silverware when they won the Emperors' Cup in January and is hungry for more success here.

After his playing days are over he says he wants to move into coaching but will take things one step at a time. "I feel I want to pursue being a coach but we will see what happens, things change on a daily basis so in a few years we don't know what will happen," he said.

"For now, I am focusing on what I have in front of me." When football is given the green light to resume Iniesta wants to pick up where he left off, imparting his wisdom to Kobe's younger players and aiming for a first J.League championship.

The J.League have said it would be May at the earliest when matches can return. "I want to share my experience with the young players. I think it is my responsibility too and it forms part of the big project I came here for," said Iniesta.

"I like to talk with them, share things with them and I also like the feeling that they can ask me questions and they are learning stuff." — Reuters

Japan will continue to cover the costs it would have done under the terms of the existing agreement for 2020, and the IOC will continue to be responsible for its share of the costs," read the IOC's answers.

"For the IOC, it is already clear that this amounts to several hundred millions of dollars of additional costs." Yesterday, Tokyo 2020 spokesman Masa Takaya said it was "not appropriate for the PM's name to be quoted in this manner" and said a request had been made for the IOC to remove the offending comment from their website.

"What we are requesting to the IOC team is that the name of the Japanese Prime Minister should not be quoted, plus the IOC's website should not express beyond what was agreed between the IOC and Tokyo 2020," said Takaya.

The IOC have yet to respond to Tokyo 2020. Reuters have also reached out to the IOC for comment. Tokyo 2020 also said that the breakdown of who will pay the additional costs had not been discussed between Abe and IOC President Thomas Bach when the pair made the decision to postpone the Games.

Earlier, Kyodo news agency reported that Abe had agreed that Japan would shoulder the cost, which Kyodo said amounted to around \$3 billion.

Japan's top government spokesman, Yoshihide Suga, said yesterday Abe had not agreed to any additional costs. — Reuters

Chadwick stays hopeful with W Series on hold

LONDON: Jamie Chadwick raced McLaren's Lando Norris in the virtual world at the weekend but COVID-19 could put the brakes on hopes of her joining the Formula One driver on track at a real grand prix this season.

Back in February the 21-year-old had spoken of defending her W Series title and then pushing for a Friday first practice slot with the Williams F1 team, where she is a development driver.

The plan was to move up the motorsport ladder in 2021, with whoever wins the all-female series barred from returning after this year.

Now the Briton, who lost 2-1 to Norris in the head-to-head event organised by Veloce Esports, can only guess at when she might be back on track with the pandemic putting racing worldwide on hold.

A return to W Series next year is also looking more of a possibility. "I think realistically no-one knows what's going to happen this year," Chadwick told Reuters in a telephone interview from home.

"So next year is in the back of my mind and planning

ahead for that just in case is always going to be something that we would do.

"We're not due to start until the end of May so hopefully with that in mind and the progress that's being made by everyone, we still might get a season this year."

The original W Series calendar featured six European rounds from May 29 to Sept 5 with two further races supporting Formula One in Mexico and the United States in October, but that has been ripped up. The German Touring Car (DTM) championship that W Series hooks up with in Europe has revised its calendar to a tentative start at Germany's Norisring in July and a finale at Italy's Monza circuit on Nov 15.

Germany has since extended a ban on major events until the end of August, however, while Italy has the world's second highest COVID-19 death rate after the United States and remains in lockdown.

Formula One's season has yet to get going, with nine races called off so far.

"The difficulty, and where W Series is doing absolutely the right thing, is no-one really knows when this is going to end so the focus is on basically going by guidelines advised by the government and then making decisions as and when," said Chadwick.

"With W Series we are a bit reliant on DTM and F1 so that's a lot of the guidance. "I don't know how many different countries the girls are from, and obviously every country is in a different situation with regards the virus at the moment, so it's not going to be easy when things do start to get back to normality." — Reuters



Technically gifted midfielder

umentary about his life: 'Andres Iniesta - The unexpected hero', which is to be released on Thursday.

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Tokyo 2020 asks IOC to remove Abe comment

TOKYO: The Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Organising Committee yesterday requested that the IOC remove a comment from their website that referred to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe when discussing the financial impact of postponing the Games. The International Olympic Committee and the Japanese government agreed last month to postpone the Games because of the global coronavirus outbreak. The costs of rearranging the Games and who will pay them have yet to be clarified by either the IOC or the Japanese government.

However, on Monday the IOC published a Q&A on their website about the postponement and answered the question 'what will be the financial impact of postponing the Games?'

Part of their answer referred to Abe and has become the bone of contention between the Olympic organising partners.

"Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo agreed that