



FOOTBALL DURING A PANDEMIC – THE LAST HOLDOUTS AGAINST CORONAVIRUS

As the global game and world at large has come to an effective standstill during the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, the current coronavirus football situation has led the football community to slowly come to terms with dealing with the effects of it. From closed door games, to cancellations, to dealing with the financial impact to clubs and players... day by day, measures are updated to best manage the situation for all involved.

However, in a limited number of countries, not all has come to a stop. It is a situation that is ever changing, but game of football has not come to a complete stop, with the flame of the game been kept lit in it's last remaining outposts. Some such as **Western Sahara football** are always under trying times, in the current coronavirus football landscape, some as Turkey and Australia held on until cancellations were unavoidable, while in other corners or the globe, the games continue.

Current Leagues

Belarus

The most consistent of these has been the Belorussian league, maintaining a full schedule behind closed doors from their March season start, including Champions League regulars BATA Borisov.

However as the **BBC reports** there is growing pressure from supporter groups to boycott games, in spite of president Lukashenko's resistance to disruption at this time, though no cancellations seem to be on the horizon in Belarus. Despite this, Fifpro and it's general secretary Jonas Baer-Hoffmann have condemned the continuation of the league, saying,

"It is frankly not comprehensible how this could be going on"

On the field however, the surprise of the early stages has been two defeats from two for BATE. This leaves BATE to sit level bottom of the table. At the top 4 teams have made perfect starts with Minsk and Energetyk-BGU level on top on goal difference as the early pacemakers.

Slavia Mazyr v BATE

Minsk Derby

Neman v Vitebsk

☐☐ Belarus League Table

#	Team	MP	W	D	L	F	A	G	P
1	Shakhtyor	17	9	6	2	29	9	20	33
2	BATE	17	9	4	4	30	18	12	31

#	Team	MPWD	L	F	A	G	P
3	Neman Grodno	16934	22	13	+9	30	
4	Energetyk-BGU	17926	24	23	+1	29	
5	Dinamo Brest	16826	31	20	+11	26	
6	Dinamo Minsk	17827	21	13	+8	26	
7	Torpedo BelAZ	17755	21	20	+1	26	
8	Ruh Brest	17674	23	14	+9	25	
9	Isloch	17728	19	23	-4	23	
10	Vitebsk	17584	17	18	-1	23	
11	Slavia	17647	21	29	-8	22	
12	Slutsk	16538	19	26	-7	18	
13	Gorodeya	17449	15	28	-13	16	
14	Minsk	15438	17	28	-11	15	
15	Smolevichy-STI	16358	20	26	-6	14	
16	Belshina	17241	11	43	-21	10	

Nicaragua

The sole league continuing in the Americas is that of Nicaragua, currently in its Apertura phase of the 2019/20 season. However with case of Corona virus being confirmed in the county, [The Guardian](#) has reported 3rd placed Diriangén has expressed a wish to suspend the league, with fears among there players and staff of the current situation. However with government pressure to fulfill fixtures, and with their funding influence among a majority of teams in the league, no stoppage seems imminent.

In contrast there are opposers of the current situation. The league running as usual is seen as a platform for president Daniel Ortega's domestic display of stability and normality. In this environment, he is unlikely to accept dissenting voices from clubs. Clubs have raised occasional concerns by some such as Real Madriz, but such comments are quickly retracted. On the field Managua from the capital sit two points clear at the top of the table. They lead from Real Estelí, who defeated them after extra time in the 2nd of a two legged Apertura final in December.

Real Madriz FC v CD Ocotol

CD Ocotol v Real Estelí FC

JuventusFC v CD Walter Ferretti

☐☐Nicaragua Campeonato Nacional

#TeamMPWDLFAGP

Burundi


In contrast to other countries which continue, there is a great appreciation for the scale of the Coronavirus pandemic. With just now the first two officially confirmed cases in the country, no reason has been found to cancel regular events such as church mass, or football games, though it is now in question. Also, on what current coronavirus football measures can be taken. For instance, they refused to select European based players for national duty. This whilst international fixtures were still possible and were among the first calling on CAF to suspend such fixtures.

As such, the league, as the country as a whole runs in isolation to the outside footballing community. Therefore, Aigle Noir are now certain to cede their title won last season, the first in the clubs history. With only four game weeks remaining, Le Messenger have played one game extra, to sit 4 points clear from

Musongati. The league now looks set to go down to the wire.

 **Vitol'0 Fc v Musongati**

 **Athletico Academy v Aigle Noir**

 **Inter Star Vs Buja City**

🇧🇮 Burundi Premier League

#TeamMPWDLFAGP

 **Turkmenistan**

The Turkmenistan football league calendar kicked off as usual on March 6th. While Köpetdag Ashgabat were the dominant force post independence, recent seasons have seen success be in the hands of city rivals Altyn Asyr, winning all titles from 2014-2019. Most often runners up in this time is Ahal, based in Anau, outside the main and some 15km from the Ashgabat Stadium which they share. However yet again in 2020, it seems these two will be those fighting once again for the title.

***Update 1-6-20** – Thanks to the work of the people of the Russian “**Other Football**” news site, match footage was been captured, including full games, so be sure to check their site for the very latest updates on the 2020 Ýokary Liga.

🇹🇲 Turkmenistan League Fixtures

August 25, 2020

Köpetdag Aşgabat 10:00 Energetik

August 26, 2020

Ahal 10:00 Nebitçi

Şagadam 10:00 Aşgabat

August 27, 2020

Altyn Asyr 10:00 Merw

September 4, 2020

Aşgabat 10:00 Köpetdag Aşgabat

September 5, 2020

Altyn Asyr 10:00 Ahal

Nebitçi 10:00 Şagadam

Merw 10:00 Energetik

September 9, 2020

Köpetdag Aşgabat 10:00 Nebitçi

Energetik 10:00 Aşgabat

September 10, 2020

Şagadam 10:00 Altyn Asyr

Ahal 10:00 Merw

September 14, 2020

Ahal 10:00 Şagadam

Merw 10:00 Aşgabat

Nebitçi 10:00 Energetik

September 15, 2020

Altyn Asyr 10:00 Köpetdag Aşgabat

September 24, 2020

Şagadam 10:00 Merw

Energetik 10:00 Altyn Asyr

Aşgabat 10:00 Nebitçi

September 25, 2020

Köpetdag Aşgabat 10:00 Ahal

Leagues To Come

Tajikistan

A new contender to this list though will be that of Tajikistan which has confirmed it plans to play it's season curtain raising Super Cup as planned, albeit behind closed doors. With zero local confirmed cases of Coronavirus, it has been deemed there is no coronavirus football schedule changes. On March 31st Istaravshan heavily defeated league rivals Isfara 6-0 in a pre-season friendly, signalling their intent for the campaign. This gives good preparation for their season opener against Khatlon on Sunday April 5th. However Sunday's opening round of league fixtures will be pre-empted by the curtain raising Tajik Super Cup on Saturday with defending league/cup champions Istiqlol, playing the league runners up Hujand



Istaravshan 6-0

Isfara –@rasulovjr23

☐☐Tajikistan League Fixtures

Taiwan

The 2020 Taiwan football season will commence on April 12th. Current champions Tatung FC will look to regain their title from the 2019 season. In contrast to it's Asian neighbours, Taiwan has been largely unaffected by the spread of Coronavirus, with life continuing as usual for locals. For the league participants, it will be the same 8 teams from the 2019 campaign. This includes Red Lions and Ming Chuan survived relegation playoffs to retain their top flight status

2020 Participants

- 1 Hang Yuen
- 2 Taipei City Tatung
- 3 Taichung Futuro
- 4 Taiwan Power Company
- 5 Tainan Steel
- 6 Hasus Taiwan Sports University
- 7 Taipei Red Lions
- 8 Ming Chuan University

Ming Chuan win playoff

☐☐Taiwan League Table

#	Team	MP	W	D	L	F	A	G	P
1	Taipower	14	11	2	1	34	6	+28	35
2	Tatung	14	11	2	1	29	6	+23	35
3	NTCPE	14	10	4	0	32	8	+24	30
4	I Shou University	14	6	17	1	21	31	-10	19
5	Hun Sing	14	4	6	13	20	7	-16	16
6	NSTC	14	3	29	7	21	-14	-11	11
7	Ming Chuan Uni...	14	3	0	11	11	34	-23	9
8	Fubon Financial	14	2	11	11	10	31	-21	7

The time we now live in with coronavirus football 'chaos' now being the norm, is a tough adjustment. While many clubs and associations adjust for financial realities without the game, others persevere. Though it presents difficult times, the game has gone largely quiet. Some remain, but at what cost, time will tell.



UZBEK CLASSICO : PAKHTAKOR SIX STUNS NEFTCHI

Pakhtakor Tashkent have given their season a much needed boost following a thoroughly impressive 6-0 victory against major rivals **Neftchi Fergana** in week 17 of the Uzbek top flight season. A record result in this fixture.

Slow Burner

In what was a competitive first half of action, neither side was able to get a foothold in the game and break the deadlock, with Pakhtakor perhaps being most guilty of failing to make the most of their opportunities with some wayward attempts on goal.

Speaking in a **Pakhtakor press conference** after the game, Pakhtakor manager and Georgian legend Shota Arveladze, spoke of the change in how his side approached the second half.

"We played well in the first half and created many dangerous moments, but could not score. In the second half we played faster and more accurately. As a result, we accomplished the plan."



Pakhtakor Coach – Arveladze

Second Half Surge

With added intensity from Pakhtakor in the second half, the goal floodgates opened. Akhmedov opened the scoring after 53 minutes with a brilliant individual effort, beating several defenders before keeping his composure to finish a fine piece of play.

Further goals were not long in coming with Sergeev ('60, '64) and Bezerra ('78, 87) adding quick fire doubles to the score sheet, all the more impressive for Thiago Bezerra on debut. Vladimir Kozak complete the rout in the final minute to leave home fans delighted among a crowd of 6155 at the Pakhtakor Markaziy Stadium. Also of note, Sergeev's first effort was Pakhtakor's 1700th goal in the Uzbek top flight, a national record.

Victory carried extra emotion for those involved with Pakhtakor, coming on the weekend anniversary of the 1979 Dniprodzerzhynsk air disaster which claimed 17 Pakhtakor players and staff among the total 178 victims. This victory is another fine tribute to add to those paid by the club this week to remember those of the 1979 Pakhtakor team.



'79 Team Remembered

Much Work to do for League Progress

This result could prove pivotal for both sides as it moves Pakhtakor closer to the top in fourth, just one point away from third place and only a further point away from second. In contrast Neftchi now solidly occupy the relegation playoff position, now six points away from safety, and with the second half performance against Pakhtakor, it is hard to see cause for optimism for the Fergana based fans.

Next weekend Pakhtakor will look to build on momentum, traveling to face 12th placed Dynamo Samarkand in a crucial game, with only six points separating 2nd to 9th place in the league. For Neftchi, they will be desperate for points, though a home fixture against a Navbahor Namangan side without a win in their last three presents an opportunity for this.

With most places in the league still in the balance, next weeks games could have a serious impact on how this season's Uzbek Oliy League shakes out, but for now the Pakhtakor faithful are sure to be happy following this result. For Neftchi, there is still much to do to save their season.

Next Fixtures-

18/08/17 – Dynamo Samarkand vs. Pakhtakor Tashkent

19/08/17 – Neftchi Fergana vs. Navbahor Namangan

Pakhtakor – Neftchi – 6:0 (0:0)

12 August. Tashkent. Pakhtakor stadium. 6155 spectators.

Referee: Aziz Asimov (Tashkent).

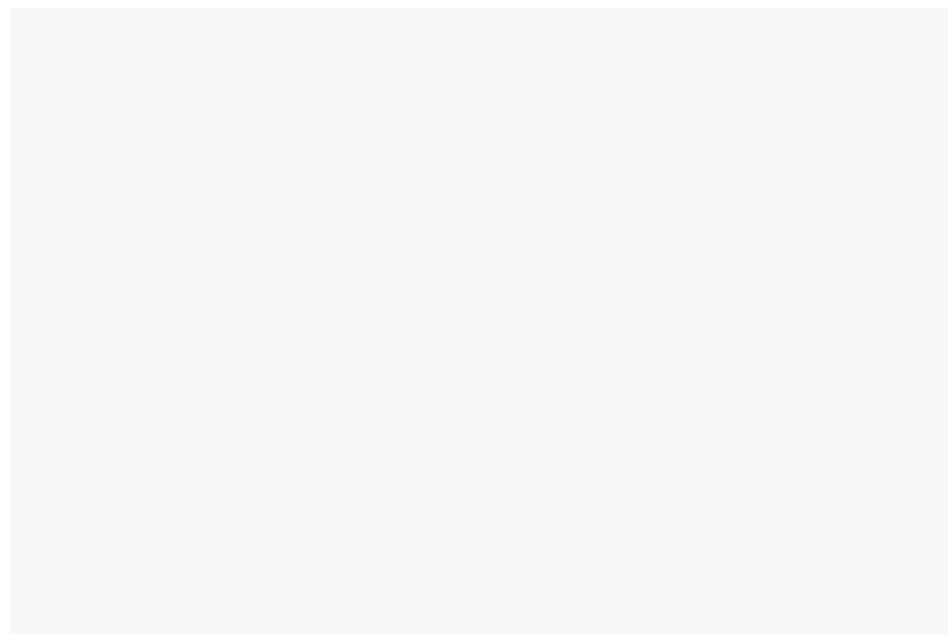
Pakhtakor: Lobanov, Kozak, Simic (c), Azamov, Khoshimov, Akhmedov, Iskanderov (*Ismatullaev, 85*), Bezerra, Nurullaev (*Ibrokhimov, 68*), Karimov (*Kanuk, 80*), Sergeev.

Neftchi: Yusupov, Tursunov, Kapadze, Muzaffarov, Tuychiboev, Rakhimov, Namozov (*Abdulkhoqov, 46*), Ismoilov, Saidov (*Khakimov, 29*), Shogulomov, Khaydarov (*Mamazulunov, 78*).

Goals: Akhmedov, 53 – 1:0. Sergeev, 60 – 2:0. Sergeev, 64 – 3:0. Bezerra, 78 – 4:0. Bezerra, 87 – 5:0. Kozak, 89 – 6:0.

Yellow Cards: ♦Khakimov, 51. ♦Ibrokhimov, 67. ♦Kanuk, 86.

Red Cards –



A post shared by Pakhtakor Football club (@pakhtakor_fc)

on Aug 15, 2017 at 3:34am PDT



VIDEO REFEREEING – TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

History has been made this week in the annual FIFA World Club Cup championship with video referee trials featuring alongside Real Madrid's success in overcoming Kashima Antlers after extra time to claim the second world title in the competition.

Speaking in 2008, as [reported by CBC](#), after initial test of a video refereeing system, FIFA's ex President Sepp Blatter came out strongly against using such a system, stating "Let it be as it is and let's leave (soccer) with errors". However, his controversial departure seems to have opened the door to potential future uses of such systems. They have been trialled on occasion, firstly with France hosting Italy in a friendly in Paris this September, with [The Telegraph reporting](#) UEFA President Gianni Infantino speaking positively of the new system. "We turned a new page in football's history book," though cautiously suggesting "We must use it in a way that does not have a negative impact on the flow of the game and the game itself." Referee that evening, Bjorn Kuipers also spoke positively of the new system stating

"The players again accepted (the decisions) immediately. This trust by the players gave me a lot of confidence."

However since September, the systems use has not been without controversy. The [Guardian reported](#) on it's first major impact during it's first use during a competitive top-tier match in a Dutch Cup fixture between Ajax and Willem II. Willem II's Anouar Kali was sent off after 60 minutes when his on field yellow card was overturned into a red card on review by the video referee, helping to turn the tide to an 5-0 Ajax win. Though the decision was accepted by players, it left the crowd confused as to proceedings as explained by referee of the evening Pol van Boekel. "We do hope that there will be some communication for the public in the future, they have a right to it,".

A photo posted by AXIWI (@axiwi_international) on Sep 22, 2016 at 10:32am PDT

**Trial in the Dutch Cup.*

The systems use in it's first FIFA sanctioned tournament this week, has turned out to be a catalyst for controversy around the system. As [reported by Sky Sports](#), the semi-final between Atletico Nacional (COL) and Kashima Antlers (JAP) featured the system being tested as a trip by Orlando Berrio on Daigo Nishi in the penalty area was not spotted by referee Viktor Kassai on the field. Following a delay of some three minutes during a throw-in, the referee was alerted to the incident by the video referee and pulled play back to award the spot-kick causing confusion, particularly among Atletico Nacional players and their captain Alexis Henriquez saying "I don't understand it because Kashima's players didn't argue and carried on playing." Henriquez continued,

**Kassai awards landmark penalty*

"That's what surprised me the most. The decision killed us, it was a huge blow. It took the referee two minutes to come to that conclusion." going on to say "I don't know if this system will work. It's going to be a complicated issue in the future. The technology takes away the essence of football."

Things went a little more smoothly in the Final between Real Madrid and Kashima Antlers, notably the video referee confirming a disallowed Ronaldo goal for offside, FIFA president still admitted that there were 'teething problems' to overcome, [according to Goal.com](#).

"Of course there are learnings, of course there are a few topics that we have to look into and discuss in more detail, but the result is extremely positive,"

So despite it's rocky start to life as a tool for referees, it seems as though only time will tell if be a welcomed addition to the game, much like referee

marking spray, or be a continued source for debate as has been the case for the "Additional Assistant Referee". As for video referees, the debate is sure to grow as the system becomes more widespread in the game into the future.