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Badminton superstar Lin Dan calls time on glorious career

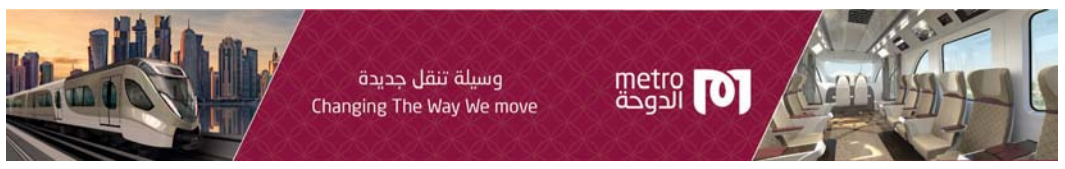
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Moeen and Bairstow miss out on England squad for Windies Test





SUNDAY 5 JULY 2020





Greenwood scores twice at Old Trafford as Solskjaer's men climb into PL top four

Five-star United crush Bournemouth

AFP – MANCHESTER


Manchester United's Marcus Rashford (second right) controls the ball during yesterday's match against AFC Bournemouth at the Old Trafford.

Manchester United continued their charge into the Premier League top four with another devastating attacking display as they thrashed Bournemouth 5-2 yesterday with Mason Greenwood, Anthony Martial, Marcus Rashford and Bruno Fernandes doing the damage.

Another bad day for Bournemouth pushed the Cherries closer to a return to the Championship as they remain rooted in the bottom three despite taking a shock lead at Old Trafford through Junior Stanislas.

Teenage sensation Greenwood, Rashford from the penalty spot and Martial hit back before half-time.

Former United forward Josh King's penalty briefly gave the visitors hope early in the second half, but another thumping finish from Greenwood and a trademark Fernandes free-kick gave United five goals at Old Trafford in a Premier League game for the first time since 2011.

Victory takes Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men a point above Chelsea into fourth as they extended an unbeaten run stretching back to January to 16 games.

United had kept 11 clean sheets in their previous 15 matches without defeat, but defensive lapses were the only blight on another satisfying afternoon for Solskjaer.

Harry Maguire and David de Gea were at fault for the only points the Red Devils have dropped since the Premier League's restart in a 1-1 draw at Tottenham.

Both were culpable as Stanislas nutmegged the world's most expensive defender and then fired in at De Gea's near post completely against the run of play on 16 minutes.

Those errors were not as costly this time as the blossoming front three of Greenwood, Martial and Rashford quickly turned the game around.

Greenwood's star is rising fast and the 18-year-old blasted home from Fernandes's pass to get United back on track.

The hosts were then gifted a second by Adam Smith's handball inside the area and Fernandes stepped aside to let Rashford net for the first time since January.

Martial completed the set with a stunning strike from outside the box to reach 20 goals in a season for the first time in his career.

The game appeared to be over at the break, but a sloppy start from United presented Bournemouth with a route back into the game.

Eric Bailly replaced Victor Lindelof at half-time and the Ivorian handled as he tried to control a loose pass from Nemanja Matic.

King, who was a United target in January as Solskjaer desperately looked for cover for the then-injured Rashford, dispatched the penalty and moments later Bournemouth had the ball in the net again only for Arnaut Danjuma to be flagged offside.

As in the first half, United's response was quick and emphatic. Greenwood smashed home his 15th goal of the season on his supposedly weaker right foot to restore a two-goal lead.

The signing of Fernandes has been the catalyst to United's turnaround before and after a three-month stoppage due to the coronavirus lockdown and the Portuguese midfielder took his tally to seven goals in 14 games by hooking a free-kick in at Aaron Ramsdale's near post.

Rashford also had another goal ruled out for offside, but United were happy to settle for five as they moved into the top four for the first time since September.

Vardy nets 100th PL goal in Leicester win

REUTERS – LONDON

Jamie Vardy netted his 100th Premier League goal as Leicester City notched their first victory since the league resumed, beating Crystal Palace 3-0 on Saturday to keep up their drive for Champions League football next season.

Leicester swarmed all over Palace from the first whistle as defender James Justin hit the crossbar early on, but it took until the fourth minute of the second half for Kelechi Iheanacho to finally put his side ahead with a close-range effort.

Despite the return of striker Christian Benteke, visitors Palace struggled to create much in front of goal, with their best efforts coming from set pieces. Any chances they did manage were easily dealt with by goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel.

Vardy cut a frustrated figure as he sought to become the 29th player to score a century in the English top flight, getting the ball caught under his feet and snatching at some decent opportunities as he chased the milestone.

Having slammed the ground in frustration at another missed chance moments earlier, Vardy made no mistake when Harvey Barnes set him up for a tap-in in the 77th minute. The 33-year-old striker looked relieved as he celebrated in an empty King Power Stadium.

Leicester continued to concede corners and free kicks in dangerous positions, but all too often the ball flew harmlessly over the massed ranks in the penalty area on a disappointing afternoon for Palace.

Vardy added a superb solo second in stoppage time to make it 3-0, breaking from the halfway line before calmly slotting the ball past Vicente Guaita.

Qatar team concludes training camp ahead of Asian qualifiers

QNA – DOHA

The Qatari national team yesterday concluded its training camp that began on June 12. This follows the suspension of football witnessed all around the world as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The camp took place in coordination with league teams. Players underwent training that remained in line with the health protocols required by the Ministry of Public Health and the designated authorities to contain the virus.

The coaching staff led by Felix Sanchez worked on improving the players' fitness level. They were divided into separate group to maintain safe distancing, which is one of the precautionary measures required by the Ministry of Public Health. There will also tactical sessions in addition to group training.

The training camp was the first of its kind in the world for an international team. A total of 34 players took part in the training in preparation for the 2023 Asia Cup qualifiers. Qatar will meet in Group E with India, and Bangladesh on October 8 and 13, in addition to meeting with Oman on November 12.

President of Qatar Football Association (QFA), Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Thani thanked the coaching staff and the players for their discipline during the training camp.



Al Duhail's star striker Almoez Ali (centre) and his team-mates in action during a training session held yesterday. QNB Stars League (QSL) points leaders Al Duhail will meet Al Sailiya in a friendly match on Wednesday at the Al Sailiya Stadium as they gear up for the upcoming QSL Round-18 fixture against Umm Salal which will be played at the brand new Education City Stadium on July 25. BOTTOM LEFT: Al Rayyan players in action during a training session yesterday. BOTTOM RIGHT: Al Sadd's Qatari international Akram Afif trains with team-mates.





Ex-Al Gharafa captain Sneijder looks to come out of retirement

AFP – THE HAGUE

Dutch midfielder Wesley Sneijder is considering coming out of retirement to play for his hometown club Utrecht, local media have reported.

Sneijder won a national record of 134 caps and was key to the Netherlands' march to the World Cup final in 2010, the same year he led Inter Milan to glory in the Champions League.

But he retired in 2018 at Al Gharafa in Qatar and hasn't played for two seasons.

The return appears to have been evoked by Utrecht fans putting out a video asking him to join their club, possibly in reaction to seeing Arjen Robben promise a return at his hometown club Groningen.

"I'll give it a think through, I have already spoken to Jordy (Zuidam, the Utrech boss)," the 36-year-old Sneijder told local television.

Zuidam told the press he was also open to the idea.

"The ball is in his court, a fit and motivated Wesley Sneijder would interest us," he said.

Sneijder came through the youth system at Ajax before his big break with Real Madrid and Inter Milan, and more modestly at Galatasaray and Nice at the tail end of his career.

Badminton superstar Lin Dan calls time on glorious career

AFP – SHANGHAI

China's two-time Olympic champion Lin Dan, arguably the greatest badminton player of all time, announced his retirement yesterday aged 36.

It means that Lin, who won gold at the Beijing 2008 and London 2012 Games, will not compete at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, which have been pushed back to next summer because of coronavirus.

The end of Lin's glorious career comes just over a year after the retirement of his great rival and friend, the Malaysian star Lee Chong Wei.

The duo reigned over badminton for more than a decade and have only relinquished that hold in recent years as their powers waned.

Lin, who had something of a "bad boy" reputation during his younger days and has several tattoos -- unusual for Chinese athletes -- ends with 666 singles wins and a glut of medals.

"My family, coaches, team-mates and fans have accompanied me through many peaks and difficult troughs," he said in a post on China's Twitter-like Weibo that quickly went viral.

"Every forceful jump was a desire for victory.

"I have dedicated everything to this sport I love." Lee called his nemesis Lin "my greatest opponent".

"Please believe that the laughter, tears and all the promises are unforgettable diary entries," the 37-year-old Lee wrote on Weibo.

"Proud of you," he added.

As well as the Olympic golds, Lin was also a five-time world champion and long-time world number one.

He earned the nickname "Super Dan" at the peak of his career.

However, the left-hander's career has tailed off in recent years as age and injuries took their toll.

Just last year he rebuffed claims that he was about to retire following a series of first-round exits at tournaments.

Lin always said he was determined to reach the Tokyo Olympics, but his ranking of 19 in the world and the postponement of the Games made that dream unlikely.

At Rio 2016 Lin lost in the semi-finals to Lee in what was a rare victory for the Malaysian on the biggest stage of all.

Lin said yesterday his body would not allow him to plough on in the unlikely pursuit of a third Games gold.

"'Persevere', I said to myself in every moment of suffering, so that my sporting career could be prolonged," he wrote on Weibo.

"Rather than simply pursuing rankings as I did when I was younger, in these years, I have been wanting to challenge the physical limits of an 'old' athlete and practise the sporting spirit that I will never give up.

"(But) my physical abilities and pain no longer allow me to fight alongside my team-mates." - Praise - As of Saturday afternoon, a hashtag on Weibo about Lin's retirement had been read at least 51 million times and praise for him poured in.

Bao Chunlai, who formerly represented China in badminton, said Lin's retirement took him by surprise.

"It's somewhat sudden, but understandable," he wrote on Weibo.

"The last person of that generation who persevered has also walked to the 'end'.

"My feelings are mixed. All the best, brother. The future will be better." Lin's wife Xie Xingfang, also a former badminton world champion, wrote online: "The 20 years we have walked with each other.... will continue.

"Let us work hard together." Lin's reputation was badly tainted in China in 2016 after it emerged he had an affair while Xie was pregnant. He apologised.



This file photo taken on August 1, 2018 shows Lin Dan of China reacting after defeating Sameer Verma of India in their men's singles match during the badminton World Championships in Nanjing.

LIN DAN

Nickname: Super Dan **Country:** China
Born: October 14, 1983 (Age 36) in Longyan, Fujian, China
Height: 178 cm **Weight:** 70 kg
Years active: 2000-2020

MEN'S SINGLES
Career record: 666 wins, 128 losses
Career titles: 66

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

OLYMPIC GAMES		
Gold:	2008 Beijing	Men's singles
Gold:	2012 London	Men's singles
WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS		
Gold:	2006 Madrid	Men's singles
Gold:	2007 Kuala Lumpur	Men's singles
Gold:	2009 Hyderabad	Men's singles
Gold:	2011 London	Men's singles
Gold:	2013 Guangzhou	Men's singles
WORLD CUP		
Gold:	2005 Yiyang	Men's singles
Gold:	2006 Yiyang	Men's singles
ASIAN GAMES		
Gold:	2006 Doha	Men's team
Gold:	2010 Guangzhou	Men's singles
Gold:	2010 Guangzhou	Men's team
Gold :	2014 Incheon	Men's singles
Gold:	2018 Jakarta-Palembang	Men's team
ASIAN CHAMPIONSHIPS		
Gold:	2010 New Delhi	Men's singles
Gold:	2011 Chengdu	Men's singles
Gold:	2014 Gimcheon	Men's singles
Gold:	2015 Wuhan	Men's singles
WORLD JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIPS		
Gold:	2000 Guangzhou	Mixed team

The retirement means Lin, who won gold at the Beijing 2008 and London 2012 Games, will not compete at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

The end of Lin's glorious career comes just over a year after the retirement of his great rival and friend, the Malaysian star Lee Chong Wei.

Early results reveal 31 MLB players tested positive for COVID-19

AFP – LOS ANGELES

A total of 31 players tested positive for the coronavirus in Major League Baseball's first round of mass testing to prepare for the start of the delayed season.

The 31 players, and seven additional staff members, make up 1.2 percent of the 3,185 samples collected in the first set of results. The players came from 19 of the 30 clubs.

The league and the players' union announced the results Friday as teams resumed training for the first time since the global pandemic shutdown spring training on March 12.

The season is now scheduled to start on July 23, making it the latest opening in American baseball history.

The 1.2 percent positive rate compares favorably to the NBA which saw 5.3 percent (16 of 302) of its people test positive in announced results on June 26. The MLS had a positive rate of 2.7 percent (18 of 668).

MLB is not officially identifying individual players who test positive but the Cleveland Indians said Friday that American outfielder Delino DeShields tested positive.

Several other teams have raised suspicions by placing players on injury lists without announcing the ailment.

The Philadelphia Inquirer reported Friday that the Philadelphia Phillies placed four players on their COVID-19 injured list, comprising US second baseman Scott Kingery, US pitcher Tommy Hunter, pitcher Hector Neris, of the Dominican, and pitcher Ranger Suarez of Venezuela.

All Blacks legend Carter happy with club hitout in return to NZ rugby

REUTERS – WELLINGTON

Former All Blacks flyhalf Dan Carter gave himself a pass mark after his first game of rugby in New Zealand since 2015 but was not expecting to make a marketers' dream debut for the Auckland Blues next week against the Canterbury Crusaders.

Carter surprisingly joined the Blues last month for Super Rugby Aotearoa but said he would need a few weeks to get up to speed and took his first tentative steps back on Saturday, playing for boyhood club Southbridge in a Canterbury club match.

"If anyone saw that game today, I'd say myself that I'm a bit rusty," Carter told reporters after he kicked six conversions and had a hand in two tries in Southbridge's 54-14 victory over West Melton.

"It's good to make the first step in to potentially playing again. I'm not sure if I could play at Super Rugby level just yet. You leave those kinds of decisions up to the coaches."

A three-times World Player of the Year and World Cup winner in 2011 and 2015, Carter spent his entire professional career in New Zealand playing for the Christchurch-based Crusaders.

He joined the Blues after stints in France and Japan, but has not played since February after Japan's Top League was shut down due to the coronavirus pandemic.



Mack Hansen (left) of the ACT Brumbies runs with the ball during the Super Rugby match against Melbourne Rebels in Canberra, yesterday. The ACT Brumbies survived a gritty fightback to pick up where they left off before the coronavirus shutdown with a battling 31-23 win over the Melbourne Rebels. Australia welcomed the return of professional rugby union on Friday as the launch of 'Super Rugby AU' brings to an end a tumultuous shutdown triggered by COVID-19.

NFL: Redskins to review name after sponsor threat

AFP – WASHINGTON

The Washington Redskins have launched a "thorough review" of the team's name, the NFL franchise said Friday, as sponsors stepped up pressure to scrap the moniker long criticized as racist.

"In light of recent events around our country and feedback from our community, the Washington Redskins are announcing the team will undergo a thorough review of the team's name," the team said in a statement just 24 hours after stadium sponsor FedEx demanded a name change.

"This review formalizes the initial discussions the team has been having with the league in recent weeks." Redskins owner Dan Snyder had long been resistant to changing the team's name -- a term for Native Americans that is seen as a slur.

"We'll never change the name," Snyder said in 2018. "It's that simple. NEVER -- you can use caps." However, nationwide protests over racial injustice -- sparked by the death of unarmed black man George Floyd at the hands of police on May 25 -- have brought the Redskins tag under renewed scrutiny.

On Thursday, US delivery giant FedEx Corp -- which paid $205m to the Redskins in 1998 for the naming rights to the team's suburban stadium -- confirmed it had sought a change.

Reports this week said that FedEx, Nike and PepsiCo all received letters from 87 investment firms asking the companies and others to sever ties with the Redskins over the name.

Food and beverage corporation PepsiCo said in a statement on Friday the company had been in conversation with the league and Washington management "for a few weeks" about the issue.

Sprinter Thomas cleared by AIU

REUTERS – LONDON

American sprinter Gabrielle Thomas's **(pictured)** provisional suspension for allegedly failing to make herself available for anti-doping tests has been lifted, the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) said yesterday.

Thomas, twice a 200 metres winner at the Lausanne Diamond League, had been banned in May by the AIU for allegedly missing three tests in a 12-month period, a violation of anti-doping rules.

But according to the AIU's *Twitter* account, Thomas provided new evidence in June and as a result one of the missed tests cannot be established and so no anti-doping rule violation has been committed.



When the suspension was announced, Thomas said in a statement made available to *Reuters* that one of the missed tests was not valid and that she expected to be cleared of charges.

"Phone tracking data and multiple witnesses will conclusively show that I was at the exact location I established in my whereabouts and that the doping control officer simply failed to locate me and failed to follow proper protocol," Thomas said in the statement.

Pacers star Oladipo won't play in restarted season

AGENCIES – INDIANA

Indiana Pacers star guard Victor Oladipo will skip the restarted season in the Orlando area, according to multiple media reports yesterday.

Oladipo played in just 13 games before the season was interrupted by the coronavirus, missing the first 47 games due to a torn right quad tendon sustained in January 2019. He is concerned about re-injury and also cited a lack of comfort with the restart situation.

"I really want to play, and as a competitor and teammate this is tearing me apart," Oladipo told The Athletic. "I feel like I'm at a great place in my rehab and getting closer and closer to 100 percent. With all the variables, from how I have to build my five-on-five workload back up, to the increased risk of a soft tissue injury which could delay my rehab, and the unknown exact setup of the bubble, I just can't get my mind to being fully comfortable in playing.

"I have to be smart and this decision hasn't been easy, but I truly believe continuing on the course I'm on and getting fully healthy for the 2020-21 season is the right decision for me." Oladipo recently increased his workout activity to get a better gauge on where he stood health-wise.

Moeen and Bairstow miss out on England squad for Windies Test

AFP - LONDON

Moeen Ali and Jonny Bairstow were both left out of England's 13-man squad announced yesterday for next week's first Test against the West Indies, with neither experienced player even among a list of nine reserves.

Off-spinner Moeen had made himself available for Test cricket again after taking a break from the red-ball game.

But although Moeen was included in England's 30-strong training squad, England went with incumbent off-spinner Dom Bess, who impressed during a victorious tour of South Africa, as their specialist slow bowler for the behind closed doors series-opener at Southampton starting on July 8.

It was a similar story with wicketkeeper-batsman Bairstow, who like Moeen may be set for more of a white-ball role as England try to cram in a full international fixture despite losing several months of their home season to the coronavirus pandemic.

Bairstow's fate for this match was effectively sealed when fellow wicket-keeper and World Cup winner Jos Buttler, the current Test gloveman, was named as vice-captain to Ben Stokes after it was confirmed regular skipper Joe Root would miss the first Test to attend the birth of his second child. And there was no place for Bairstow among the reserves, with Ben Foakes the back-up wicket-keeper. Rory Burns, Dom Sibley, Zak Crawley and Joe Denly are set to provide England with their top four in Root's absence as Stokes, the longtime vice-captain, leads the side for the first time.

Denly, however, averages a modest 30 in his 14 Tests to date and he may need a significant score at Hampshire's headquarters if he is to keep his place, with Root set to return for the final two matches of the series at Old Trafford.

Veteran new-ball bowlers James Anderson and Stuart Broad are among a group of five seamers in the 13, along with Barbados-born Jofra Archer, Mark Wood and Chris Woakes.

But only three are likely to play given Stokes is himself a seam-bowling all-rounder.

Uncapped batsman Dan Lawrence is among a standby list that also includes Surrey left-arm paceman Sam Curran, who tested negative for COVID-19 after illness on Wednesday ruled him out of the last two days of England's lone three-day intra-squad warm-up match at Southampton this week.

Next week's Test will be a landmark occasion given it is set to mark the return of international cricket from lockdown.



ENGLAND SQUAD:

Ben Stokes (Durham, captain), James Anderson (Lancashire), Jofra Archer (Sussex), Dominic Bess (Somerset), Stuart Broad (Nottinghamshire), Rory Burns (Surrey), Jos Buttler (Lancashire, wkt), Zak Crawley (Kent), Joe Denly (Kent), Ollie Pope (Surrey), Dom Sibley (Warwickshire), Chris Woakes (Warwickshire), Mark Wood (Durham)

TEST RESERVES:

James Bracey (Gloucestershire), Sam Curran (Surrey), Ben Foakes (Surrey), Dan Lawrence (Essex), Jack Leach (Somerset), Saqib Mahmood (Lancashire), Craig Overton (Somerset), Ollie Robinson (Sussex), Olly Stone (Warwickshire)

ENGLAND V WEST INDIES FIXTURES

July 08-12: 1st Test, Ageas Bowl, Southampton
July 16-20: 2nd Test, Emirates Old Trafford, Manchester
July 24-28: 3rd Test, Emirates Old Trafford, Manchester

World No.3 Thiem expects US Open decision next week

AFP - VIENNA

World number three Dominic Thiem **(pictured)** said in an Austrian media interview published yesterday that he was keen to play the US Open if it can go ahead.

The United States has seen an alarming resurgence of new coronavirus cases. On Friday a record 57,000 new infections were confirmed.

The ATP and WTA tours are due to return next month, with the US Open starting on August 31 and the French Open beginning a month later.

Thiem said he trusted the US authorities to make the right decision.

"I think in the next five to seven days there will be a decision," Thiem said.

"Of course I hope it (the US Open) will go ahead, but safety comes first of course. We have to follow countries' governments -- if they see any danger, they won't allow a tournament, especially such a big one as the US Open," the Austrian told public broadcaster ORF.

The 26-year-old plans to play in Kitzbuehel in western Austria in an exhibition event he is co-organising next and then in Berlin, after which he said he would do "intensive training" to prepare for Cincinnati and the US Open if those go ahead.

He played in the Adria Tour exhibition tournament organised by Novak Djokovic last month after which the world number one and three other participants all tested positive for the new coronavirus.

Thiem, who has tested negative for the new coronavirus since Belgrade, reiterated in the ORF interview the "huge mistake by us all".

"We all acted much too euphoric. The most important is that we learn from our mistakes," he said.

Thiem also said he will donate the prize money that he won in Belgrade during the ill-fated Adria Tour.

Thiem took part in the Belgrade leg of the exhibition event organised by Djokovic, where social distancing was minimal and matches were played in front of thousands of fans, earning a storm of criticism.

Thiem's father, Wolfgang, who also trains the 26-year-old, defended Djokovic, telling Austria's Presse daily that the world number one had not broken any of Serbia's and Croatia's coronavirus rules and the tour had aimed to collect money for charity.

"Of course the dancing in the nightclub (during the tour) was not ideal, but Djokovic did nothing bad in principle," he was quoted as saying.

"....a few thousand euros (dollars) are collected for a clinic treating children with cancer."

He did not say to who Thiem would donate his prize money.

The 33-year-old Djokovic donated more than €40,000 ($45,000) to the Serbian town of Novi Pazar, badly affected by the pandemic to help it fight a growing outbreak of the disease, Serbian media reported Wednesday.



Australian cricketers reach compromise on pay row

AFP - SYDNEY

A potential pay dispute between Cricket Australia (CA) and players was averted yesterday after the governing body withdrew a contentious projection of financial losses from the coronavirus pandemic.

The decision to "reset" negotiations follows the resignation last month of CA chief executive Kevin Roberts, with his interim replacement Nick Hockley vowing to repair relations between the two sides.

The body in June forecast revenues would fall by nearly 50 percent in the 2020-21 financial year despite the pandemic hitting in the off-season and India's lucrative Test tour this year still set to go ahead.

Australian players, both men and women, operate under a revenue-sharing arrangement and faced a significant knock-on effect in the amount of money distributed to their payment pool, which is a fixed percentage. The Australian Cricketers Association (ACA), which represents players, rejected the forecasts as hasty and issued the governing body with a notice of dispute, which could have led to a court standoff.

But CA yesterday agreed to postpone its projections until it had a clearer idea of the financial impact of the pandemic. In turn, the ACA withdraw its notice of dispute.

"Today's agreement is a significant step forward in cricket's response to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and should provide our stakeholders with renewed clarity and confidence about the summer ahead," CA said in a statement.

"Calculating revenue projections 12 months ahead during a once-in-a-century pandemic has not been without its challenges, but we believe we have arrived at a position that provides all parties with greater certainty about how to navigate the next year."

ACA chief executive Alistair Nicholson said the "'reset' is both welcome and sensible".

The move is seen as a common-sense approach from both sides, given the picture for the cricketing summer ahead remains unclear.

So far, only two tours involving Australia have been impacted by coronavirus -- a two-Test tour of Bangladesh and a limited overs visit from Zimbabwe that have both been cancelled.

There is also doubt over whether Australia will be able to host the Twenty20 World Cup in October and November, but its four-Test series against India scheduled to start in December is still expected to go ahead.

Officials also remain hopeful of having crowds for the popular T20 Big Bash League.

Minister offers ICC evidence 2011 WC was fixed

AFP - COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's former sports minister said yesterday he has offered more evidence to cricket's world governing body that he says shows the 2011 World Cup was fixed.

Mahindananda Aluthgamage's remarks come a day after local police dropped an investigation into the claims, citing a lack of evidence that Sri Lanka deliberately lost the final to hosts India.

Police had grilled former chief selector Aravinda de Silva, opening batsman Upul Tharanga and the 2011 captain Kumar Sangakkara -- the latter for nearly 10 hours.

But Aluthgamage, who was sports minister at the time and is now state minister for energy, said there were "powerful people who are spending huge sums of money to hush up the investigation". He said that he has informed Alex Marshall, anti-corruption chief at the International Cricket Council (ICC), that he was ready to provide more evidence showing the match was thrown.

Aluthgamage said police had failed to probe the claims properly and urged Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to intervene and pressure the ICC to reopen an investigation. Marshall had said in a statement on Friday that "at this time" the ICC has "not been presented with any evidence that supports the claims made or which would merit launching an investigation".

But he said that the ICC takes "allegations of this nature extremely seriously and should we receive any evidence to corroborate the claims, we will review our current position."

Sri Lankan police have not publicly responded to Aluthgamage's claims.

The questioning of the nation's cricketing heroes triggered criticism against the government on social media ahead of elections on August 5 when Rajapaksa's party is hoping to secure a two-thirds majority in parliament.

Simmons says Windies must draw on Headingley spirit

REUTERS - LONDON



West Indies coach Phil Simmons says his side cannot afford the batting debacles that have often undermined their tours of England when the series starts behind closed doors next week.

The first of three Tests begins at the Ageas Bowl in Southampton next Wednesday and Simmons says making sure they are mentally ready is the most important task.

Three years ago they suffered a dreadful start when England won the first Test by 209 runs inside three days.

While a bowling attack featuring the likes of Kemar Roach, Alzarri Joseph and Shannon Gabriel, together with Bajan right-armer Chemar Holder and Jamaican quick Oshane Thomas, looks dangerous, the batting order is a concern.

"I think the batters have worked hard on getting to a mental stage of where they need to be because most of them have scored runs here," Simmons told the "Cricket, on the Inside" webinar in conjunction with the Lord's Taverners and Black Opal, on Friday. "(Shay) Hope has got back-to-back hundreds here. It's about getting to the mental stage where you are prepared for a Test match in England, because it's different to many other places.

"The next three days of practice is about sharpening up the skills. But mentality is the big thing."

Simmons said West Indies are drawing strength from the way they hit back from that first Test thrashing at Edgbaston in 2017 to claim a stunning victory in the second test at Headingley when they chased down 322.

"We are drawing on that. The Test match before Headingley we were horrible and that seems to be like that most times we go on tour. We are trying to make sure that bad match is taken out of the equation and we start properly.

"We are playing against one of the best test teams in the world and we need to start on the front foot. We're trying to bring back memories of Headingley and get the psychology right."

Next week's Test, and the two after, will be played in empty stadiums with strict health protocols because of the coronavirus pandemic that shut down cricket across the world.

But Simmons says it might not worry his players.

"I think maybe... the senior guys it might affect a few of them because they are used to sold out matches in England," he said.

"But in the Caribbean there's not much crowds for Test so we are kind of accustomed to that."

Tiafoe tests positive for COVID-19, withdraws from Atlanta event

REUTERS - ATLANTA

Frances Tiafoe has tested positive for COVID-19 and been forced to withdraw from the All-American Team Cup exhibition tournament in Atlanta, the American said on Saturday.

Tiafoe played in the first session on Friday and beat Sam Querrey in straight sets at the event in which the top eight American players are participating.

The 22-year-old Tiafoe had said after the match that he struggled to play in the heat and felt dizzy.

"Unfortunately, I tested positive late Friday for Covid-19 and have to withdraw from the All-American Team Cup special event in Atlanta this weekend," Tiafoe said on ***Twitter***.

"Over the past two months, I have been training in Florida and tested negative there as recently as a week ago.

"I am scheduled to have a second test early next week, but have already begun the quarantine protocol as advised by the medical staff here in Atlanta."

Event director Eddie Gonzalez said Tiafoe was tested on arrival in Atlanta and that the American had passed daily temperature tests.

"Following his match, he was showing symptoms and was re-tested and tested positive," Gonzalez said in a statement. "Tiafoe has left the event site and will not participate in the remainder of the event.

"Upon learning this information, we immediately began deep cleaning and sanitizing the event site, and enacted protocols in place for contact tracing and alerting individuals who may have been exposed."

Christopher Eubanks will take Tiafoe's place for the final two days.

Although the number of spectators allowed was limited due to social distancing protocols, hundreds were in attendance on Friday.

Novak Djokovic was criticised last month for hosting the Adria Tour in Serbia and Croatia after the world number one and three other players -- Grigor Dimitrov, Borna Coric and Viktor Troicki -- tested positive.

Djokovic and his wife Jelena have since tested negative for COVID-19.