



No discount': Van der Sar adamant Ajax won't be bullied in transfer market

Ajax Amsterdam are not immune to the financial strain caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, but they will not be strong-armed into cut-price deals for their players in the upcoming transfer window, chief executive Edwin van der Sar said.

The Dutch club have built a reputation as the 'talent factory' of European football over the last two decades and earned about 150 million euros (\$161.7 million) last summer as Frenkie de Jong and Matthijs de Ligt secured high-profile moves to Barcelona and Juventus, respectively.

"In January last year, people said we were going to lose seven or eight players but we lost only two key members," Van der Sar told Reuters.

"The big clubs such as Bayern Munich have said the benchmark fee will go down in the next few transfer windows. But it's easier for them to say because they are the buyers. "Of course, the 150 million-200 million euros transfers are gone. But I think there is still a lot of value for players who come from Ajax. Well educated, experienced in winning and playing European football."

Ajax have agreed to sell playmaker Hakim Ziyech to Chelsea in a deal worth 40 million euros, while mid-field dynamo Donny van de Beek, left back Nicolas Tagliafico and goalkeeper Andre Onana are on the radar of clubs in England, Germany and Spain.

Van der Sar said there would be no fire sale this year. "Last year, we made verbal agreements with Onana, Tagliafico, Van de Beek to stay another season and then we look to help each other and find the

next step in their careers. Nothing has changed," he added.

"There won't be a 50% discount. The clubs can forget about that."

FINANCIAL HIT

The Dutch FA (KNVB) ended the 2019-20 top-flight campaign last month after the government extended a ban on public events to Sept. 1 to limit the spread of the coronavirus.

League leaders Ajax missed out on a record-extending 35th title as a result, but were awarded qualification for next season's Champions League.

Van der Sar said missing out on gate receipts from games that had been cancelled and the prospect of playing without fans when football resumes, meant Ajax would have a bumpy ride in the coming months. "We'll be taking a big hit financially when it comes to ticketing revenue and the corporate market," he added. "Right now it's about making projections. It can be half a season without fans or the whole of next season. We'll then have to talk to the players and staff once we have a full understanding of the financial situation at the club."

Meanwhile, domestic leagues in England, Spain, Germany and Italy are still grappling with the ongoing crisis as they look for ways to complete the current campaign.

All eyes will be on the German Bundesliga, which has announced that it will restart the season on May 16.



Advocaat has more time to ponder future

La Liga return date revealed by Leganes boss Leganes manager Javier Aguirre has revealed La Liga plans to resume the season on June 20 and finish on July 26.

While no official statement has been made by the league, the Mexican boss claimed the information had been communicated to him by La Liga authorities. Spanish football authorities have been working with the government to try and find a way to get matches back underway in order to finish the campaign. "We already have a start date for the league," Aguirre told Marca Claro MVS. "On June 20, we will start La Liga and in five weeks we will be officially finished, on July 26. "It will be played on Saturday-Sunday and Wednesday-Thursday, over 11 dates.

"La Liga has just informed me officially and I am very happy about this, because we already have training scheduled. "We start tomorrow. Luckily we have passed the tests." Spanish clubs have this week been returning to their training bases in order to undergo medical testing, in order for players to be allowed to return to training. Players will initially move on to individual training in order to regain fitness, before group sessions can be-

gin again at a later date - providing all goes to plan. The Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) has already confirmed plans to introduce five substitutions for each side per game in order to help ease the physical strain on players who haven't been able to properly train for so long. Aguirre has welcomed this decision, which is currently pending approval from the Independent Football Association Board (IFAB), the international body which governs the rules of the game.

"The federation has just authorized five changes per game," Aguirre confirmed.

"It seems to me like the most sensible thing because how can you demand 90 minutes from the players when they have been stuck at home, between four walls for 80 days? "To avoid injuries, get them in shape."

If these plans are confirmed, La Liga would be the latest division to formalise its return from coronavirus lockdown. While Ligue 1 and the Eredivisie have seen their seasons cancelled, the Bundesliga and the Turkish Super Lig have both revealed their plans to return to action in the near future. The Bundesliga is set to kick off again on May 16th, with the Super Lig following in June.



Italian soccer league should 'finish properly,' says Alessandro Del Piero

From playing without fans in attendance to completing seasons in different countries, organizers are searching for ways to get soccer back underway.

Creative measures have been hypothesized to hasten the return of the professional game across the world following its suspension because of the coronavirus pandemic. And former Juventus and Italy international Alessandro Del Piero says he would prefer Italy's Serie A "finish properly" rather than be canceled or voided, like leagues in France and the Netherlands.

"This is a big thing, a big, unpredictable thing. The priority should be the health of the people, not only players," Del Piero told CNN Sport's Amanda Davies over Instagram Live.

"I really hope there will be a way to finish the league properly. Players need to be aware they might have to play longer ... to July and August."

With reigning champions Juventus - with whom Del Piero won six Serie A titles - just one point ahead of second-placed Lazio, the Serie A title race is one of the most tightly contested in Europe.

And if a viable solution to the end of the 2019-20 season cannot be found, Lazio owner Claudio Lotito told

Italian newspaper La Repubblica that he would accept a one-off match with Juventus to decide the Serie A title. But Del Piero doesn't think that would be a fair conclusion. "We should not have one game count as ten."

As Italy begins to ease some of its lockdown measures, Serie A teams have begun to return to training. The Italian government confirmed that professional athletes in both individual and team sports could start training.

Juventus, who Del Piero played for between 1993 and 2012, returned to practice on Tuesday, and the 45-year-old acknowledged how difficult a time this must be for the players.

"We're facing something completely unknown. It's not easy to manage the situation. To go to football training, go back to you family and hope you're OK," he said.

"We are living something really new. In unusual situations you have unusual consequences. As a fan I hope it will restart. I miss it in every way."

He owns an Italian restaurant in Los Angeles - where he lives - and while restaurants are closed, his restaurant has been cooking and delivering food to those medical staff working in hospitals.