

SPORT

Dance classes resume, but sports clubs remain in limbo

Latest plan makes for uncomfortable reading

A LACK of updates and 'mixed information' on possible return-dates for Island sport is causing increased concern for coaches and athletes, as the threat of another cancelled season grows.

Following an apparent alteration to the Government of Jersey's 're-connection' schedule for outdoor sport, events exceeding ten people will not be permitted to resume until at least 17 February, while those involved in indoor sports continue to wait for guidance relating to their return.

The government had previously stated that outdoor fixtures for sports with 'fleeting contact', including football and hockey, would be eligible for resumption under Stage 2 of its latest Covid-19 recovery framework, but they were subsequently omitted from Stage 2 relaxation measures announced on Thursday evening.

Among those with ongoing feelings of uncertainty is Regent Gymnastics Club coach Julia Falle,

■ Covid-19

by Paul Lees and Jason Fox

who has concerns over the mental health of her juniors.

'It's getting very frustrating because we're getting mixed information all of the time,' said Falle.

'It's terrible for the mental wellbeing of the children. We've not been able to do anything for two months since December and last year we lost four months in the gym. The last competition the kids were in was in March 2020 and so many competitions for this year have been cancelled already as well.

'The kids have gone from doing 14 hours a week down to nothing, and their fitness levels are way off what they should be.

'It's going to take months to get them back to where they should be. It's such a shame.

'I feel for the kids. It must be very hard for them - they're missing out on the social side of life and that can

take a toll on their mental wellbeing.'

Meanwhile, confirmation that non-sporting institutions were able to resume indoor activity this week has fuelled further confusion.

'What I am hearing is that dance schools will be able to reopen, but we're not,' Falle added. 'It's crazy.'

'It's so frustrating. We've not received any guidelines, so even when we can come back I won't know how to prepare for it because we don't know how many numbers we are allowed, how many coaches I am going to need, how many different classes I need to put on. I've got 300, 400 children doing gymnastics throughout the week. It's going to be really difficult.

'It's our 40th anniversary this year, so we were hoping to do big things but it's not looking like anything will happen.'

The Government of Jersey was approached for clarification on the status of outdoor events, including sport, but had not responded by the time of going to press.



■ Regents Gymnastics Club coach Julia Falle is calling for greater clarity so she can better support her juniors

Picture: DAVID FERGUSON (30073419)

WORLD SPORT: Comment

England blessed with rise of young playmakers

■ Football

by Paul Lees



IN an otherwise weighty history of football's great playmakers, trequartistas and number 10s, the chapter on the English and other home nations' contribution to the role would be a particularly short one.

While the position has been highly prized around the rest of the world, such a luxury has long been treated with a curious mistrust on these shores. Despite the obvious failings of the nation's persistence without one, it is not so much that such players get overlooked, rather that none are ever produced for consideration in the first place.

Now though, due in no small part to the continentalisation of the domestic game that began the mid-90s, we are starting to witness an emergent generation of sophisticated-creators operating between Premier League lines that have Made in Britain branded on their lean shoulders. Jack Grealish, James Maddison, Phil Foden and Emile Smith Rowe have all come to the fore as high-class lock pickers for their clubs.

It should all bode quite well for England, who have forever been bereft of such talent, but it remains to be seen who will be given the confidence to showcase their talents on the highest national stage. For all the positivity in providing a platform for the many promising young players in his ranks to perform, manager Gareth Southgate appears to have inherited a deep-rooted suspicion of dedicated playmakers from his predecessors. Even in 'meaningless' friendlies, Southgate has been reluctant in the past to use either Grealish and Maddison in any shape or form, with only the former forcing the gaffer to reassess his preconceptions with a mini-series of confident displays.

English managers and coaches have always preferred a more systematic, rigid approach to player selection. Any flair was typically the reserve of touchline-hugging wingers to work their way out of the limited dimensions ahead of them, which they invariably struggled

to replicate on the international stage. Southgate, it appears, prefers the direct scuttling of Chelsea's Mason Mount, an admittedly talented young player with an eye for a pass too but more comparable to deep runners like Dele Alli and David Platt or the souped up edge-of-the-box bombing of his boss, Frank Lampard, and Steven Gerrard.

Both Lampard and Gerrard were elite-level players capable of producing a hyper-real brand of powerball but a true playmaker takes the glory in a team's goal he never scored, as a quarterback does in gridiron. What Grealish, Maddison, Foden and Smith Rowe offer is subtlety and nuance, qualities misunderstood by many English coaches and a trait absent from our stars of the past who preferred to trade on instinct.

Of the four, Grealish is currently the people's favourite, having started this season in great form. The Aston Villa man has an impish folk hero charm about him that can work for and against him but he has made the most of the opportunities that Southgate reluctantly afforded him. It is mutually benefiting that Grealish's starting position is on the inside-left but with a licence to roam.

Leicester City's Maddison offers a different versatility, often adept at playing as an 8 as he is as a 10, tending to assist the assist. He has lit up the Premier League since joining the Foxes from Norwich in 2019 and displays an intelligence and thoughtfulness to his game but so far he has been overlooked by Southgate. Quite why is anyone's guess.

Phil Foden, on the other hand, certainly has Southgate's favour. Pedestalled as

a Great White Hope, the Manchester City dynamo is the most multi-dimensional of the new breed of playmakers, who can play in any number of attacking roles, out wide or central, inasmuch as he might not be considered a playmaker at all. Foden has all the right ingredients but still requires a little more seasoning before he can be relied upon to carry the hopes of the nation, though there is little doubt he will one day fulfil his superstar credentials.

With even less experience, Smith Rowe, just two months younger than Foden, is the new kid on the block and the saviour of Arsenal's mid-season slump. Just 20 years old, the boy from Croydon has only just broken into the first team and with only five league games under his belt it is a little premature to see him as a current contender for a place in the England team. Nevertheless, he has been transformative to the Gunners' form, showing huge potential and a maturity that belies his tender years in linking midfield and attack.

Generally, there is only ever room for one playmaker in a squad, let alone a team. With Southgate there might not even be room for that many. He is blessed

with creative talent in other areas too, in particular the talismanic Harry Kane, a number 9 who is comfortable in dropping deeper to effect the play, and Borussia Dortmund's exceptionally talented wideman, Jadon Sancho. But if he wants to take England from perennial also-rans to genuine contenders, he could do well to place his trust in those who take a little more care and creativity with the ball, as it's not something England have ever been blessed with before.

Pro boxing move for former Red

(Cont from page 60)

the right positions and when he does I've got to perform.

'The general rule of thumb is the first ten fights are your learning fights, but it's heavyweight boxing, so you never know what [title] opportunities will come up. Something might come up soon, it might be later, but whenever it comes I'll be ready.'

And the current Scottish super-heavyweight champion will certainly not be ruling out potential bouts on adopted-home soil.

'It would be amazing to fight in Jersey,' he said. 'I love the Island and I feel as though I'm a part of the community in Jersey now. I've got a lot of great friends and there are great people everywhere, so fighting in front of them would be quite a spectacle.'

Dunlop, who has working relationships with world-renowned promoters Frank Warren and Eddie Hearn, said: 'I've been a fan and friend of Nick for a long time and I'm delighted he has chosen me to guide him on this part of his journey. He has been a top-level athlete for most of his life and his short but impressive amateur boxing career has been to a very high standard. With a dynamite punch, granite chin, stamina in abundance and a huge fan base he has the attributes to take him to the top. I'm excited.'



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