

Cool sub Cole

Football

AFP, Leicester

Sven-Goran Eriksson declared England's Euro 2004 campaign to be firmly on track after watching Joe Cole's late winner earn his side a 2-1 friendly victory over Serbia and Montenegro here on Tuesday.

Every bit as important as the result, England came through their warm-up for next week's crucial qualifier against Slovakia without any aggravation of the injury crisis which has deprived Eriksson of half his first choice line-up.

"It is always good to win, even if it is only a friendly and it looks good for the match next week," the Swede said, playing up the positive aspects of what was not an altogether convincing display by England.

"Phil Neville did a good job as a sitting midfielder, (Wayne) Rooney did well and I'm very happy to see Joe Cole score. It's nice to see those youngsters coming on. They can play football and that is very important for England's future."

Eriksson substituted every outfield player and admitted he had been concerned about the prospect of any more of his regulars picking up knocks having already lost the likes of Gary Neville, Rio Ferdinand and Sol Campbell to injury.

Centre-half Matthew Upson was forced off near the end with a dead leg but Eriksson expressed confidence that the Birmingham defender would be ready for next week's match.

Cole did his utmost to press his case for a starting place against Slovakia with a lively display that was capped by a superbly struck free-kick for the winning goal seven minutes from the end.

Cole for his part made no secret of his frustration at failing to register a regular place in the starting line-up which has also included several returns to the Under-21 set-up.

"I have played 10 times for England but never started the really big games and I find that really frustrating," said the West Ham star.

"I never want to play for the Under-21's again and I hope I have earned the chance to start next Wednesday's match."

Prior to Cole's arrival just after the hour mark, England appeared to have lost their way after Steven Gerrard had put them ahead with a well worked goal ten minutes before the interval.

Poor defending allowed Anderlecht striker Nenad Jestrovic to equalise on the stroke of half-time and, prior to Cole's late show, it was the visitors who enjoyed the better of a second half which saw both coaches change virtually their entire line ups. England had comfortably



Joe Cole of England is ecstatic as he celebrates scoring the winning goal against Serbia and Montenegro at Leicester on June 3.

dominated without creating any clear chances before Gerrard decided to inject some urgency into the proceedings in the 35th minute.

Picking up Paul Scholes pass just inside the visitors' half, the Liverpool midfielder accelerated and combined neatly with Frank Lampard to advance to the edge of the area.

After slipping the ball to Michael Owen to his left, Gerrard continued his run to finish off for Cole by return pass from eight yards out.

Given England's territorial dominance, the home crowd could reasonably have expected them to go on and establish a stranglehold on the match.

But England were made to pay for some sloppy defending seconds before the interval.

As Zvonimir Vukic's corner was swung over from the left, stand-in centrebacks Gareth Southgate and Upson appeared to collide with each other as they both attacked the ball.

The result was a free header for Jestrovic from eight yards out. David James managed to get a hand to the ball but neither he nor Ashley Cole could prevent the ball spinning over the line.

England were distinctly flat at the start of the second half but Cole's entry quickly raised the tempo.

The West Ham midfielder's direct running repeatedly unsettled the Serbian defence and it was a foul on Cole by Nemanja Vidic that resulted in the match-winning free-kick.

Apparently expecting the ball to be lifted over his wall, Dragan Zilic moved to his right only for Cole to blast the ball into his left hand corner.

The goalkeeper partially redeemed himself in stoppage time when his fingertips save prevented Wayne Rooney from becoming the first 17-year-old to score for England.

Beckham talks on?

AFP, London

Talks between Manchester United and Barcelona over the sale of David Beckham have begun, British press reported on Wednesday.

Sandro Rosell, a representative of Barcelona-presidential candidate Joan Laporta, has been having talks in London with United chief executive Peter Kenyon, the Daily Mail reported.

Though the exact nature of the talks are unclear, it is widely believed that a possible move by Beckham to Barcelona is a major topic of conversation, the paper added.

Two years ago, Florentino Perez became Real Madrid club president after promising to sign Portuguese midfield maestro Luis Figo - which he duly did.

No formal bid can be put down in writing however until Barcelona's new president is elected on June 15.

Barca are among a host of clubs including European Champions AC Milan reportedly keen to secure the services of the 28-year-old England captain. Beckham's contract at United expires in 2005.

Beckham insisted while on holiday in the United States however that he wanted to stay at Old Trafford.



THE IDOL IS HERE! England superstar David Beckham autographing footballs for a group of 14-16-year olds of youth soccer league at Home Depot Centre in Carson, California on June 3. Beckham took a break from a vacation trip to California and joined some 80 kids from all over Southern California as he trained with them but mostly spent his time signing autographs and posing for photos, at the soccer clinic sponsored by an athletic equipment company.

Roma honour Aldair

AFP, Rome

AS Roma have retired the number six shirt in honour of Brazilian defender Aldair, who ended his 13-year stay at the Serie A club at the weekend.

Affectionately known as Pluto, the 36-year-old Aldair said farewell on Sunday in a testimonial match at the Olympic stadium between a Roma side featuring players past and present, and a Brazil XI.

Real Madrid striker Ronaldo lent his morale support but could not play for Brazil as the domestic season in Spain is still not over.

A thrilling game in which Aldair, a member of the Brazil team that won the 1994 World Cup, converted a penalty, ended in a 3-3 draw.

After the match Roma coach Fabio Capello admitted it would be hard to find a replacement for Aldair, who is expected to continue playing football in his homeland for at least one more season.

"He is one of the most complete players I have ever worked with," Capello said.

Brazil full of new faces



REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

World champions Brazil, hit by club commitments, injuries and the need to rest the likes of Ronaldo and Rivaldo, on Tuesday named 11 uncapped players in their squad for this month's Confederations Cup.

Coach Carlos Alberto Parreira said he had gone through enormous difficulties putting together a squad for the controversial competition being hosted by France in the second half of June.

The same squad will travel to Nigeria for a friendly against the Super Eagles in Abuja on June 11, minus Flamengo goalkeeper Julio Cesar and Cruzeiro defenders Maurinho and Edu Dracena and midfielder Alex who are all involved in the Copa Brasil final.

Parreira completed his squad on Tuesday as he named the home-based players, having chosen members of the foreign legion the week before.

The newcomers were goalkeepers Fabio (Vasco da Gama) and Julio Cesar (Flamengo), defenders Maurinho (Cruzeiro), Fabio Luciano (Corinthians) and Edu Dracena (Cruzeiro), midfielders Dudu Cearense (Vitoria) and Adriano

(Atletico Paranaense) and strikers Luis Fabiano (Sao Paulo), Gil (Corinthians) and Ilan (Atletico Paranaense) plus Fabio Aurelio of Spanish club Valencia.

"We knew before that it would be very difficult to put together this team in the face of all these restrictions," said Parreira. "Injuries got in the way as well and other players needed a rest."

The Confederations Cup will be played at a time when the Brazilian championship is in full swing and also coincides with the finals of the Libertadores Cup, the South American equivalent of Europe's Champions League.

As a result, Parreira decided not to pick any players from Brazilian champions Santos, who have reached the Libertadores semi-finals.

He also decided not to pick any more than two players from any given Brazilian club, although he made exceptions in the cases of Atletico Paranaense and Cruzeiro after consulting both teams.

Last week, Parreira said he would also rest players such as Ronaldo, Rivaldo, Gilberto Silva and Roberto Carlos to give them time to recharge their batteries for the South American World Cup qualifiers, which start in September.

But the coach, who is still looking for the first victory of his third stint in the job after draws with China and Mexico and a defeat by Portugal, refused to be downhearted.

"This team may lack experience but it's technically strong," he said. "We're not going just to fulfil the fixture list."

Hero's welcome for Sheva



AFP, Kiev

AC Milan striker Andrei Shevchenko received a rapturous welcome from hundreds of fans at Kiev airport on Tuesday when he touched down with the European Champions Cup which his shoot-out penalty won last week.

Shevchenko, 27, who dedicated Milan's victory over Juventus to his homeland, went on to the stadium of his former club Dynamo Kiev and the grave of legendary coach Valery Lobanovsky, who died in 2002.

The player placed the Cup and a wreath at the site to honour the man who nurtured him as a young player over four seasons at Dynamo before he joined Milan in a 25-million-dollar move in 1999.



PRIDE OF UKRAINE: AC Milan striker Andrei Shevchenko shows the European Champions League trophy on arrival at Kiev airport on June 3.

SQUAD
Goalkeeper: Dida (AC Milan/ITA), Fabio (Vasco da Gama), Julio Cesar (Flamengo)
Defenders: Belletti (Villarreal/SPA), Fabio Aurelio (Valencia/SPA), Juan (Bayer Leverkusen/GER), Lucio (Bayer Leverkusen/GER), Fabio Luciano (Corinthians), Edu Dracena (Cruzeiro), Maurinho (Cruzeiro), Kleber (Corinthians)
Midfielders: Eduardo Costa (Bordeaux/FRA), Emerson (AS Roma/ITA), Adriano (Atletico Paranaense), Alex (Cruzeiro), Dudu (Vitoria), Kleber (Atletico Paranaense), Ricardinho (Sao Paulo)
Strikers: Ronaldinho (Paris Saint Germain/FRA), Adriano (Parma/ITA), Gil (Corinthians), Luiz Fabiano (Sao Paulo), Ilan (Atletico Paranaense)

Milan calling Cafu

Football

REUTERS, Rome

AS Roma's Brazilian defender Cafu is ready to move to European champions AC Milan, Italian sports daily La Gazzetta dello Sport reported on Wednesday.

The paper said Cafu, who celebrates his 33rd birthday this week, had undergone medical tests and Milan's doctors had cleared him.

The Brazilian World Cup captain joined Roma in 1997 but had a disappointing season with the club this year as they limped to eighth in Serie A and failed to reach the quarter-finals of the Champions League.

Milan by contrast won the Champions League and on Sunday soundly beat Roma 6-3 on aggregate in the final of the Italian Cup.

"It's no secret that we are interested in Cafu... But we have already told him that before he discusses contracts with Milan, he has to sort out his Japanese commitments," Adriano Galliani, Milan's vice-



CAFU

president told Gazzetta.

Cafu was set to move to Yokohama F-Marinos this July for \$3.5 million but a Japanese newspaper reported last month that the right back was "undecided" despite reaching an agreement with the J-League club at the start of the year.

Cafu's agent Ivano Antonelli said the player had not made a decision on his future yet.

"At the moment he just wants to have a break, spend at least 10 days on Brazil with his family and then he'll make a decision about his future," Antonelli told Gazzetta.

"Milan is a concrete option, but there are others. Cafu has interest from Barcelona in Spain and Chelsea in England. But if (he) makes a move within Italy, it will only be to go to Milan."

Cafu led Brazil to their fifth World Cup triumph in Japan and South Korea last year.

Italy just too good

Football

AFP, Campobasso

Italy warmed up nicely for next week's crunch Euro qualifier away to Finland by defeating Northern Ireland 2-0 in an international friendly here on Tuesday.

An experimental Azzurri team still proved too strong for the visitors, who have failed to score for almost 18 months and rarely looked like ending their dismal goal drought in balmy southern Italy.

A goal in each half by Lazio striker Bernardo Corradi and substitute Marco Delvecchio wrapped up a comfortable victory for Giovanni Trapattoni's men, eager to make up for their ignominious early exit from last summer's World Cup.

Proceeds from the 22,500 sell-out match were donated to the remote city near Puglia which was struck by a devastating earthquake last year. Twenty seven people were killed, most of them children, while many others lost their homes.

Trapattoni was happy to see many of his second string players impress to give him several selection headaches ahead of the Helsinki clash a week on Wednesday.

"It's always good to get a proper look at some of the players on the fringes and many of them did well," said the Italy coach.

"We didn't make the most of our possession, but overall I have to be satisfied."

"It's been a long season and for them to put so much effort in was very pleasing."

Corradi, who may not even make the substitutes' bench against the Finns, was delighted to add to his debut goal scored against Portugal in February.

"We were solid throughout and played some nice football, so we are happy with the win," said the former Inter Milan marksman, who failed to hold down a regular place at the San Siro while Ronaldo was there.

Seaman goes to City

Football

AFP, Manchester

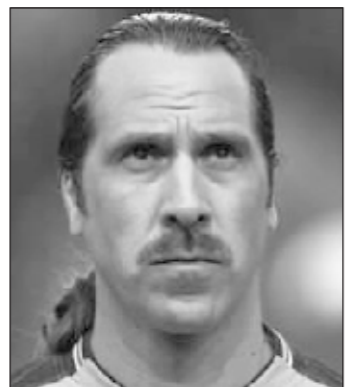
Veteran England goalkeeper David Seaman has signed a one-year deal with Manchester City, the club said on Wednesday, bringing down the curtain on a 13-year-long career at Arsenal.

The move had been expected with Arsenal willing to sell out-of-contract Seaman, 39, and Manchester City manager Kevin Keegan on the lookout for a new goalkeeper to replace Peter Schmeichel.

Keegan worked with Seaman when he was coach of the England team.

City chairman John Wardle told www.mfc.co.uk: "I am over the moon that David has signed for City."

Apart from keeping Seaman in the Premiership, he will also remain in European football, City having qualified for next season's UEFA Cup through England topping the Fair Play league.



DAVID SEAMAN

current England goalkeeper David James. But with finances limited, he opted instead for Seaman.

Seaman had already been told by manager Arsene Wenger he would no longer be first choice at Highbury next season and the club have been actively looking to buy a top-notch replacement.

Such was the uncertainty over his future plans, manager Sven-Goran Eriksson felt compelled to leave him out of his England squad for the build-up to next Wednesday's Euro 2004 qualifier

with Slovakia.

But with a one-year contract in the bag at City, Seaman could yet make a dramatic return for next summer's finals in Portugal - giving him the chance of adding to his 75 international caps, some of which were won under Keegan.

"With his vast experience, he could not be a better replacement in goal for Manchester City following Peter Schmeichel's retirement at the end of last season," added Wardle.

"We are looking forward to working with David, because he is one of football's true professionals."