

'Fitness first for Rooney'

AFP, London

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson has voiced fears over Wayne Rooney being fit for next season...

Rooney was on Monday named in Sven-Goran Eriksson's 23-man England squad for the World Cup finals despite having a broken bone in his foot.

David Beckham suffered a similar injury prior to the 2002 World Cup, and the midfield icon appeared to be a long way off full fitness.

England management are pulling out all the stops to get Rooney back in time, including using an oxygen chamber which is supposed to speed up recovery.

However despite Rooney making some progress, Ferguson feels it could be a big mistake taking an unfit Rooney to Germany.

Ferguson told MUTV: "You cannot take anyone half-fit to a World Cup, I think that happened with David Beckham."

"We have assisted Wayne. He didn't enjoy the oxygen chamber but tried it."

He added: "A lot of people might think I am selfish but Wayne is the most important player in the team at Manchester United."

"We have to ensure the boy is going to be fit at the start of the season for us, so we all become selfish in that respect."

"England are selfish and Manchester United are selfish because they want the best for their operation."

Ferguson also mocked claims that using an oxygen chamber would do the job.

"They have not got conclusive evidence the oxygen chamber actually works but there is nothing against it."

"Everything is worth trying and that is what we are doing with Wayne."

"He is in good hands. He has got the boot off and he is walking normally now, which is good news."

"So you never know, but I certainly think it is very important for the boy not to go half-fit, or even three-quarters fit, and not do himself or England justice."

"Shevchenko move will be difficult"

AFP, London

Chelsea is interested in signing AC Milan's Ukraine international Andriy Shevchenko but it will be very difficult to reach a deal...

"I can't say that Shevchenko doesn't interest me but AC Milan is a powerful team, it doesn't need to sell to buy good players."

Shevchenko has been constantly linked with a move to English champions Chelsea ever since the acquisition of the club by Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich.

A move to Stamford Bridge appeared more likely after the 29-year-old player announced last week he wanted to leave Milan.

But Chelsea chief executive Peter Kenyon said Sunday that while the two clubs have spoken about the player, there was a long way to go before any negotiations could be concluded.

Mourinho, who was in Portugal to receive an award for best Portuguese football coach abroad, added Chelsea was looking for a third keeper.

"I have two great goalkeepers but I need another one," he said, adding he was including Portugal in his search for a third goalkeeper.

Asked if Benfica's keeper Quim was an option for Chelsea, Mourinho said: "We'll see. I need a goalkeeper who is experienced, tranquil, a team player and who is ready to have before him Petr Cech and Carlo Cudicini, who are the two best keepers in the Premiership."

"It is possible that I will find someone with this profile in Portuguese football," Mourinho added.

Lancs stay at Old Trafford

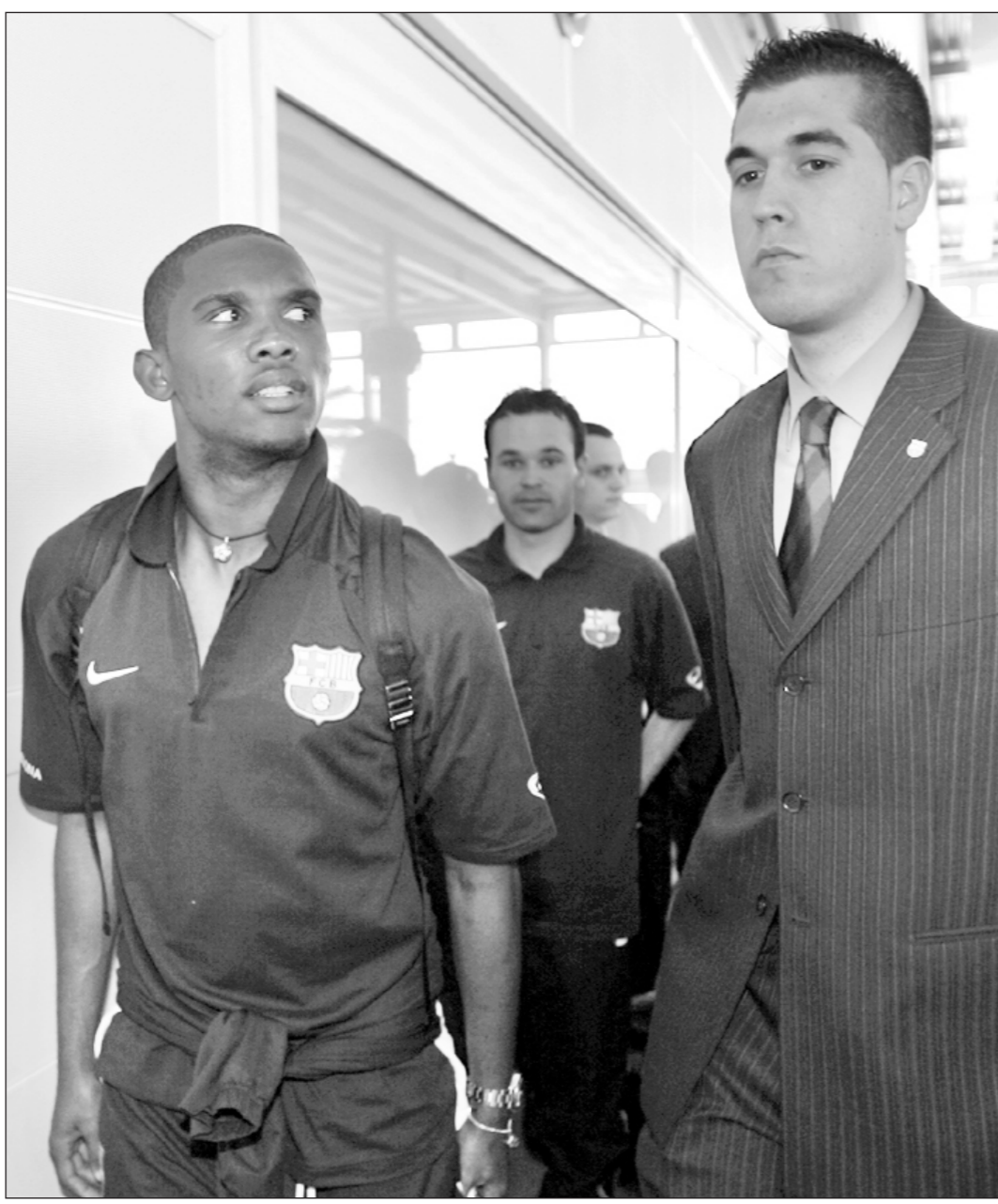
AFP, Manchester

Lancashire have confirmed they have no intention of leaving Old Trafford and have revealed plans for a multi-million pound redevelopment of their Test match ground.

The county were considering possible moves to either Eastlands in east Manchester or Wigan, but today's announcement means all their hopes for the future are once again founded in their traditional home base.

"No-one is more pleased to be staying here than me. Today's news is fabulous," Lancashire chairman Jack Simmons said.

One person who could dispute that proud claim, though, is Lancashire's England all-rounder Andrew Flintoff - a fact acknowledged by Simmons.



Barcelon's Samuel Eto'o (L) and Iniesta (C) arrive at the Charles-de-Gaulle airport in Paris on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Hostages for tickets

AFP, Paris

Two masked gunmen burst into a late-night meeting in a town hall north of Paris, taking 13 people hostage and demanding tickets for Wednesday's Champions League football final...

"As grotesque as it may seem, it appears that these people came with the intention of getting hold of places for the Champions League," the police department confirmed Tuesday.

The attackers broke into the premises in the Paris suburb of Saint Denis -- site of the giant Stade de France where the match is taking place -- at around 10:00 pm (2000 GMT) Monday.

"Two masked and armed men burst in and told us to lie under the table," said deputy mayor for health Stephane Prive, who was at the meeting along with five town councillors and seven Socialist Party activists.

"They said they were going to shoot us. We did as we were told. They were asking for 'stadium tickets' and looking for the mayor."

Tickets for Wednesday's final, in which Spain's Barcelona and England's Arsenal will contest European football's top club prize, are selling for 500 to 2,000 euros (650 to 2,500 dollars) on the black market.

For major encounters at the Stade de France, a batch of complimentary tickets is usually allocated to town authorities in Saint Denis.

The assailants mistook a town councillor for the mayor and threatened to shoot him before realising their error and fleeing the building.

Offence vs defence in final

INTERNET, undated

Barcelona striker Samuel Eto'o is not losing any sleep worrying about how to beat Arsenal goalkeeper Jens Lehmann in Wednesday's Champions League final.

Lehmann's late penalty save against Villarreal in the semi-finals helped preserve Arsenal's remarkable record in Europe which has seen them stack up 10 successive clean sheets en route to the final.

However, the Germany number one will be up against one of the most potent attacks in Europe when he faces Barca at the Stade de France.

Eto'o is the top scorer in the Primera Liga with 25 goals - he has also struck five times in the Champions League - and he is confident he or one of his teammates can find a breakthrough.

"Arsenal have the best defence in the Champions League? Well, we have the best strikeforce in this competition," he said.

"We will try to find solutions to score, you don't lose anything by trying, and that's what we are going to do."

Linesman is Barca fan!

REUTERS, Oslo

Assistant referee Ole Hermann Borgan admits he was stupid to pose for newspaper pictures in a Barcelona shirt the day before officiating the Champions League final between the Spanish club and Arsenal.

Borgan, 41, posed in Barcelona's red and blue striped shirt for Tuesday's edition of Norwegian newspaper Drammens Tidende.

"It was both thoughtless and stupid of me," Borgan said afterwards on the newspaper's website.

"I didn't think the situation and consequences through when I was asked to put on the shirt."

He added that posing for pictures in the shirt would not influence his judgement in Wednesday's final in Paris.

The referee for the final, Terje Haug of Norway, was criticised by Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho in February for sending off Asier del Horno during a 2-1 Champions League defeat against Barcelona.

Hauge has refereed 95 international matches, including at the 2002 World Cup in Japan and South Korea. He was not selected for the 2006 World Cup in Germany.

Tevez flattered by Chelsea's 'affection'

INTERNET, undated

Carlos Tevez has claimed 'Chelsea intend to take me' and admits to being flattered by the attention he has received from the Premiership champions.

Chelsea chief executive Peter Kenyon confirmed over the weekend that the London club had looked at the forward but brushed aside speculation they were about to sign the 22-year-old.

However, Tevez, whose dynamic displays for Brazilian giants Corinthians have earned him a place in Argentina's World Cup squad, said: 'Chelsea intend to take me.'

"It's difficult to distance myself from them because they have shown a lot of affection towards me and my family."

Asked about Jose Mourinho's recent visit to Brazil to watch Tevez play for Corinthians against River Plate in the Copa Libertadores, he said: "The chances are there."

"He's (Mourinho) looking at what's there. There must have been a reason to come to see me play."

Kenyon said of the player on Sunday: "We have looked at him and he is a good player and does a good job but all the reports of him being linked with us are not right."

"I would be surprised to see him in a Chelsea shirt next season."

Berbatov set for Spurs switch

INTERNET, undated

Tottenham look set to complete the signing of Dimitar Berbatov in the next 24 hours.

Bayer Leverkusen claimed over the weekend that Spurs had agreed to match their valuation of the Bulgarian striker, thought to be in excess of £10million, with director of football Rudi Voller saying "the decision lies with Dimitar".

There had been reports Manchester United boss Sir Alex Ferguson could be considering a move for the 25-year-old given his apparently frosty relationship with Ruid van Nistelrooy, but it appears Berbatov is now bound for White Hart Lane.

He is thought to have arrived in England to undergo a medical and sign for Martin Jol's men and assuming there are no last-minute hitches, he should be presented to the media by Wednesday afternoon.

Emergency administrator for FIGC

AFP, Rome

Former stock market regulator Guido Rossi was named Tuesday as the emergency administrator of the crisis-ridden Italian football federation (FIGC).

Rossi, 75, has been given the task of cleaning up the sport in the aftermath of the match-fixing scandal that has rocked Italian football.

He was appointed by CONI, the Italian Olympic Committee, after an emergency meeting.

"I have an important task as football plays such a big part in people's lives in this country," Rossi said after his appointment was confirmed.

"Looking at it from the outside, the world of football is full of conflicts of interest and what is needed is more transparency."

Last week FIGC president Franco Carraro and vice-president Innocenzo Mazzini both resigned as the scandal unfolded, leaving the Federation in turmoil.

The presidents of the teams in Serie A and Serie B will eventually elect a new FIGC president, but that is likely to take time.

Juventus and their former general manager Luciano Moggi are at the centre of the match-fixing scandal.

Moggi, one of the most powerful figures in Italian football, is suspected of intimidating referees and trying to influence the outcome of Serie A matches last season.

The furore began when Italian newspapers published intercepted telephone conversations in which Moggi tries to handpick referees for Juventus matches.

If the club are found guilty of match-fixing, they could be stripped of last season's title and the title they won Sunday, the 29th in their history.

Worse still, they could even be relegated to the second division.

Last week Naples magistrates placed 41 people, including Moggi and Carraro, under investigation for sporting fraud.

AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti and Italian Football League president Adriano Galliani spoke to investigators on Tuesday, but neither is under investigation.

Top ten goals of the season



INTERNET, undated

The UEFA Champions League has been lit up by a succession of memorable goals this season. Any other year Simao's curling strike to knock out champions Liverpool FC, Altintop's dipping screamer against AC Milan, or Klaas Jan Huntelaar's thumping header against FC Internazionale Milano might have made the highlight reel.

Not this time. From the spectacular to the sublime, uefa.com takes its pick of some of the best goals scored in the UEFA Champions League - so far.

Kaká AC Milan 3-1 Fenerbahce SK, Matchday 1 AC Milan were crawling towards a draw against Fenerbahce SK on their return to the competition.

Kaká had given Milan an early lead but Rossoneri joy turned to resignation when Alex equalised. Kaká, however, brought the home fans back to their feet with three minutes remaining, his jinking, graceful run from the half-way line cut through Fenerbahce before he fired low into the net.

Milan were back, Istanbul consigned to history.

Alex Fenerbahce SK 3-0 PSV Eindhoven, Matchday 2 The finish may not have been spectacular, but you won't see another goal like it.

Alex controlled a high pass with his head on the half-way line then, before the ball hit the ground, hooked it over his shoulder into space down the left for Nicolas Anelka to run on to.

The Frenchman slowed as he entered the area, looking up to see Alex haring forward to complete an incredible one-two which spanned half the length of the pitch.

Anelka's cross was perfect, Alex's header spot on, the Brazilian's 50-metre dash had been rewarded.

Manuel Fernandes Villarreal CF 1-1 Benfica SL, Matchday 3 Benfica's run the quarter-finals was in no small part due to the brilliance of 19-year-old midfielder Manuel Fernandes.

The teenager's rugged, hard-working displays gave the Portuguese champions an edge in midfield, but against Villarreal the Under-21 international proved he has an exquisite touch as well.

He took a pass on his chest then sent a beautifully weighted, dipping shot over Sebastián Viera and into the net.

Thierry Henry AC Sparta Praha 0-2 Arsenal FC, First knockout round, first leg

Matchday 3 Within six minutes of being introduced as a substitute Henry cushioned a long pass with his back to goal on the right side of the area.

In one movement he swivelled round and curled the ball with the outside of his foot into the far corner of the Sparta goal. It was his 185th goal for the club - a beautiful way to equal Arsenal's scoring record.

Hugo Almeida FC Internazionale Milano 2-1 FC Porto, Matchday 4 Of this season's many breathtaking free-kicks, none was finer than Hugo Almeida's powerful 30-metre blast at the San Siro.

The ball clipped the underside of the crossbar but was still rising as it flew into the back of the net; the highlight of a disappointing campaign for the 2004 champions.

Samuel Eto'o FC Barcelona 5-0 Panathinaikos FC, Matchday 4 Eto'o's third goal of the night was the pick against Panathinaikos.

Lionel Messi played a reverse pass to the Cameroon striker on the left of the area. Eto'o had a clear path to goal but chose instead to shoot first time, curling the ball magnificently into the far corner of the post.

Thierry Henry Real Madrid CF 0-1 Arsenal FC, First knockout round, first leg

With the pressure on, Henry delivered. The Arsenal FC captain collected a pass from Cesc Fàbregas near the halfway line then set off on a mesmerizing run that left four Madrid players in his wake.

Iker Casillas had no chance as Henry burst into the area Arsenal's unexpected run to the final had begun.

Michael Ballack FC Bayern München 1-1 AC Milan, First knockout round, first leg

Milan gave Ballack too much time on the edge of the area and paid the price. The Germany midfielder picked his spot from 25 metres out and made no mistake, his dipping volley flew across goal, curling into the far corner beyond the outstretched dive of Dida.

Fred Olympique Lyonnais 4-0 PSV Eindhoven, quarter-final, second leg

The Brazilian striker used his right foot to roll the ball past Ismail Aissati then, with minimum back-lift, his left to smash a shot into the roof of the net.

The celebrations involving a child's dummy to mark the birth of his daughter were almost as memorable as the goal itself.

Ludovic Giuly AC Milan 0-1 FC Barcelona, semi-final first leg

Ronaldinho provided four telling passes this season but none better than the one against Milan.

He had the ball ten metres outside the Rossoneri area and looked to have nowhere to go as Gennaro Gattuso harried and pressed.

Showing the strength he had used to plow past John Terry to score in the first knockout round against Chelsea FC, Ronaldinho shrugged off Gattuso and as the Italian slipped, cut a deft pass into the path of Giuly breaking into the area.

The finish was superb, a rising shot past Dida, but it was the pass that made the difference.

Roeder takes over Newcastle

INTERNET, undated

Glenn Roeder has been confirmed as full-time manager of Newcastle as a two-year contract.

The club decided to appoint Roeder after a successful spell in charge as caretaker boss following the departure of Graeme Souness.

Roeder does not have the required UEFA Pro Licence but a vote of Premier League chairmen cleared the way for his appointment.

Roeder told the club's official website, www.nufc.co.uk: "It's hard to describe how I feel at the moment."

"I know all about this club, having played here for almost six years and having captained the club."

"I'm an extremely lucky person to have been given this opportunity, and it is an opportunity I want to take."

Chairman Freddy Shepherd also confirmed today that striker Alan Shearer, who retired at the end of the season, will act as sporting ambassador for the club.

The 50-year-old, who had been the Academy coach at St James' Park, took charge in February and lifted the club from the bottom half of the table to seventh place in the Barclays Premiership.

Roeder will now take the UEFA course to ensure he has the necessary qualifications to manage in the top flight this time next year. His appointment has been strongly opposed by the League Managers' Association.

The physics of free-kicks



FP, Paris

Physicists are not known for donning replica shirts and face paint, yet they are among the millions who marvel at David Beckham, Roberto Carlos and other masters of the banana kick.

Backed by wind tunnels, high-speed cameras and computer simulation, scientists have been keen to understand the complex physics that go into one of those dazzling curving kicks from outside the box.

Three big variables combine to determine where the ball will go, according to researchers at Britain's University of Sheffield.

They are the VELOCITY of the ball, determined by the force at which it is struck; the SPIN of the ball, which imparts the curve; and the DRAG, or the braking effect of the air.

The key factor in all this is something called the Magnus Effect, named after a 19th-century German physicist, Gustav Magnus, who was curious to understand why spinning artillery shells deflected to one side.

Magnus found that a spinning ball or cylinder swirls the air around it, causing vortices on both sides of its surface.

Thus, one side of a spinning football experiences lift, while the other side is slowed. It is this imbalance of local air pressures that causes the sideways movement -- the curve.

But the real masters of the banana kick can also get the ball to change angle during its flight.

One of the most memorable place kicks in football history was a 30-metre stunner made by Roberto Carlos in a Brazil-France match in 1997.

The kick was initially so wide that a ballboy, standing to the right of the French goal, instinctively ducked, thinking that he was going to get whacked.

But then the ball suddenly dipped leftwards into the net, delighting Brazilian fans and leaving French keeper Fabien Barthez open-mouthed.

How did Carlos work this magic? The answer lies in airflow.

Just after a kick, a spinning ball is moving forward at relatively high velocity, and the air flows irregularly over it.

But when the ball slows down -- specifically, when it reaches between eight metres and 10 metres per second (18-23 miles per hour), depending on its surface structure and texture -- the airflow becomes smooth, or "laminar," which instantly increases the drag.

The change is dramatic. In a fraction of a second, drag can be increased by 150 percent. This drastically brakes the forward movement of the ball and thus enhances the curving movement derived by the Magnus Effect.

The British journal Physics World estimates that Carlos kicked the ball at 30 metres per second (70 mph) with the outside of his left foot, impelling an anticlockwise spin of more than 10 revolutions per second.

The force of the kick initially caused the ball to take a relatively straight line, bringing it a metre (yard) to the right of the French defensive wall.

The ball then slowed, causing the laminar airflow to kick in and suddenly boosting the leftward curve, with the outcome that poor Barthez will no doubt remember all his life.

As any footballer will know, bending kicks also have other variables: the angle at which the foot hits the ball, the part of the foot that connects with the ball's surface, the humidity of the air and the ball.

High-speed cameras have shown that you will get maximum spin by kicking the ball with the front of your foot and with the angle between your leg and foot at 90 degrees, and if the ball, the boot and the air are all dry.

What the cameras don't say -- but which everyone knows -- is that it also helps if you are Brazilian.

Crossword puzzle by Eugene Sheffer with clues for Across and Down.

Cryptogram puzzle with solution: CRYPTOQUIP L R E R S J S V R J Q M R I H Q I T E Z B K A K R G Z L R J H K M U I M Q I Z I U T K C C R S I R B J Q Q K G M Z I R I Z C Q C K V J Q Y