

# Welcome to United!

## Football

AFP, Manchester

Alex Ferguson has moved quickly to put a protective shield around teenage striker Wayne Rooney - and Manchester United's new record signing insists he is mature enough to evade the pitfalls that could derail his emerging career.

Rooney's move from Everton to Old Trafford was for a fee that could rise to 30 million pounds, a new mark for a teenager and surpassing the 19 million pounds that AS Roma paid Bari for Antonio Cassano three years ago, and the weight of expectation on the forward is already intense.

A broken foot will sideline the England international for at least two weeks, but it is Rooney's life away from the pitch that has hit the front pages since the striker emerged from Euro 2004 with a reputation as the continent's most exciting young prospect.

Lurid tales about Rooney's social life has provided ammunition to observers who fear the player could follow the path trodden previously by the likes of Paul Gascoigne and fail to fulfil his undoubted potential.

And Rooney's decision to seek a move from the club he supported as a boy has transformed him from local hero to villain on Merseyside.

But Ferguson, who has a formidable reputation as a disciplinarian, has no fears for his new acquisition.

"We have a good reputation for looking after young players here,"

said the Scot, whose occasional fiery temper has been the stuff of legend at Old Trafford where he once famously kicked a football boot which hit his intended target David Beckham in the face.

"We are professional and I don't see that as a problem. For me, dealing with players has always been a black and white issue. Whenever you have to speak to a player about an issue, he is either doing the right thing or doing the wrong thing.

"We have to look after all the players and Wayne will get the same advice and protection as anyone else. But the most important thing is that dressing room of ours which is a security in itself, people like Roy Keane, Paul Scholes, the Nevilles and Ryan Giggs are all mature stable professionals and that's the best of all.

"Wayne will see these players and see how they have grown into what they are today and it's not by accident."

Rooney responded: "The manager hasn't had to say anything to me about how I should behave off the pitch. As a professional footballer I should know, and I do know how to handle myself.

"No one has to tell me how to behave on and off the pitch because I know.

"Over the last year I think I have matured a lot on and off the pitch which I think you have to really because there are a lot of people trying to bring you down, but you just have to ignore it and get on with things.

"Obviously the spotlight is

going to be on me a bit more because I have signed for one of, if not the, biggest clubs in the world and I think I am big enough and strong enough to handle that."

Ferguson views the signing of Rooney as the latest, and most significant, step in his efforts to finally overhaul the side that claimed a historic treble of Premiership, FA Cup and Champions League in 1999.

With Cristiano Ronaldo, the Portugal winger, already established in the team and Darren Fletcher and Liam Miller challenging for a regular starting place, the average age of his side is rapidly reducing but Ferguson has warned Rooney not to expect to walk straight into the side.

"Last year I said we had to start rebuilding Manchester United because we had had some great success with a group of players who were reaching 29 or 30 and we never let a team get too old," Ferguson added.

"Wayne understands, like Ryan Giggs did and like Ronaldo does, that he is a young lad and we won't be asking him to climb a mountain tomorrow. The important thing is that he is a major player in five years time and not tomorrow.

"There is always big danger with young players that we ask too much from them too early. We want them to mature as easily as they can and it didn't do Ryan Giggs any harm or the rest of our young players to take each step slowly and then by the time they are in their mid-20's they are top players."



HIS WISH WAS GRANTED! Manchester United's new signing Wayne Rooney (R) poses with a young fan Joe Ruane during a press conference following his signing at Old Trafford on September 1.

# Barthez available for World Cup

AFP, Paris



France's talismanic 1998 World Cup and Euro 2000 winning goalkeeper Fabien Barthez has pledged himself to his country till

after the 2006 World Cup finals he revealed on Thursday.

The 33-year-old 71-times capped 'keeper admitted to L'Equipe that he had thought about retiring after several of his friends like Zinedine Zidane called it a day following the Euro 2004 quarter-final defeat by eventual winners Greece.

"When I went up to Brittany for the friendly match with Bosnia (a 1-1 draw in new coach Raymond Domenech's debut) I was not in a good frame of mind at all," said the Marseille star, who has been ruled out of the 1998 World Cup winners opening two qualifiers with Israel and the Faroe Islands.

"I went there to observe and the changes were brutal.

"I wasn't in my element and for three days there was nothing but new things happening.

"Yes I was shocked and yes I arrived there with a negative attitude.

"It has to be said there was nothing but bad news this summer with the retirements of Zizou (Zidane) and Tutu (Lilian Thuram) also the press conference where I was captain for the evening while Patrick Vieira was the real skipper wearing the armband wasn't my cup of tea either.

"However while most people thought I would retire after the match, indeed I did think about it, I decided to spend a bit more time to reflect on it," added Barthez, who won the 1993 European Cup in his first spell with Marseille.

Barthez, who rejoined Marseille

from Manchester United last season and ended up reaching the UEFA Cup final where he was sent off, said a piece of advice from his father paid off.

"My father always said the night brings better counsel.

"I thought about it long and hard and I decided that why



FABIEN BARTHEZ

should I ruin the forthcoming years when at 33 I felt in great form.

"Once I rediscovered my little room at Clairefontaine (the team's training camp) with all my little things that gave me such joy that it convinced me I should stay on.

"My attachment to the French team rises above anything else."

Aside from Barthez the only remaining members of the World Cup winning side still in contention for selection are David Trezeguet, Thierry Henry, Robert Pires and Vieira.

# Something's missing



AP, London

France has said farewell to Zinedine Zidane and Marcel Desailly, while England is missing injured teenage star Wayne Rooney.

The powerhouse European nations begin their quest for World Cup 2006 qualifying places on Saturday, and France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands have new coaches and have lost some old faces.

Zidane, Desailly, Lilian Thuram and Bixente Lizarazu announced their retirement from international soccer a month ago after France lost its European

when they go to the Faeroe Islands. If they win both, then French fans will hope for a repeat of their team's European Championship qualifying streak, in which they won all eight matches.

Italy, which now has Marcello Lippi in charge, kicks off with a home game against Norway at Palermo, Sicily, before traveling to Moldova on Wednesday.

Parma's young striker Alberto Gilardino, who scored four goals as Italy's Olympic team won the bronze medal last Friday, will lead the attack.

Francesco Totti is serving the last of a three-game ban imposed for spitting at an opponent during Euro 2004.

After early elimination from 2002 World Cup and the European Championship, the Italians need a boost.

"We have no excuse in the coming matches," said former Juventus coach Lippi. "We must regain the love of the fans, self-confidence and results."

Goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon says the Italians badly need to start with a victory.

the same lineup on Saturday in its opening game against neighbor Albania. Rehhagel's men then have a far tougher game against World Cup 2002 semifinalist Turkey on Wednesday.

Saturday's matches don't have any eye-catching meetings, although there are several in the second round on Wednesday.

As well as Greece-Turkey, there's a rematch of the most exciting game of Euro 2004 -- the Netherlands vs. the Czech Republic.

That game ended in a 3-2 victory for the Czechs after the Dutch led 2-0. But it had so many thrills and chances, it could have wound up 10-9.

The Dutch now have Marco van Basten in charge and hope the former AC Milan great will inspire the team to a first major title since his wonder goal in Munich captured the European Championship title in 1988.

England starts its campaign with two away games -- at Austria on Saturday and Poland on Wednesday.

Rooney, who completed a 27

## Owen has been warned

REUTERS, Madrid

England striker Michael Owen will have to play out of his skin if he is to oust Real Madrid captain Raul from the starting line-up, according to team mate Guti.

"Owen has only just arrived and has to adapt to the club," the midfielder was quoted as saying in sports daily Marca on Thursday. "It remains to be seen whether he can score the same number of goals with Real as he did with Liverpool.

"He's a great player and a natural goal scorer, but he will have to be in top form if he is going to play at Real and leave Raul on the bench. Raul is the captain, the symbol and the soul of the team."

Owen made his debut for his new club in the first league match of the season at Real Mallorca last Sunday, replacing Raul after just 25 minutes when the Spanish international hobbled off after a blow to his hip.

He went on to set up the only goal of the match for strike partner Ronaldo, but also missed two good chances himself.

Raul's future in the Real first team has been the subject of constant speculation in the Spanish media following his disappointing scoring record in the last year.

He has scored just three league goals since January and ended the last campaign with 11, his lowest total since the 1997-98 season.

However, Guti said it was unthinkable to doubt the ability of the 27-year-old striker, who has been one of the most prolific scorers in the history of the club.

"When he scored 20 goals and was top scorer in the league no one said anything, but now he is having trouble scoring everyone seems to want to criticise him," he said.

## Mourinho reveals death threat

AFP, Lisbon

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho has given new details of the death threats which he says he received on the eve of his former club FC Porto's Champions League final win against Monaco in May.

"On the other line the guy said 'We won't do anything now because you have that final to play. But once it is over, you're dead. We are going to get you. As soon as you arrive in Porto your bed will be laid, you don't have a chance,'" he said during an interview with private television TVI late Wednesday.

After the Portuguese club were crowned European champions following their 3-0 defeat of Monaco in the German city of Gelsenkirchen, Mourinho declined to celebrate with his players and instead joined his young children on the bench.

He was heavily criticised in the Portuguese press for flying to Lisbon after the match instead of Porto and missing the massive street celebrations which swept the city following the team's European win.

# Solano's theory, Bielsa's rage



REUTERS, Lima

Peru captain Nolberto Solano said on Wednesday that World Cup qualifying opponents Argentina were not unbeatable.

Argentina have beaten Peru twice in the last two months and could field up to seven members of the Olympic team which took the gold medal in Athens by winning all six games without conceding a goal.

Marcelo Bielsa's team also reached the final of the Copa America in Peru in July, knocking the hosts out in the quarter-finals, and only lost to Brazil on penalties after a 2-2 draw.

Peru face them again in Lima on Saturday.

"They're a team who always want to win. Their players are never satisfied," Solano told reporters.

"But we have our strong points and with a lot of optimism and determination, we can do it (beat them). Argentina are second in the

South American World Cup qualifying group with 12 points from seven games while Peru are seventh with nine points.

"We have to play with intelligence and try to stop them getting the ball," Solano said.

"If we get caught out of position and leaving spaces, they're going to make things complicated."

Meanwhile, Bielsa angrily hit out at Spanish champions Valencia on Wednesday after their midfielder Pablo Aimar failed to arrive for training with the South Americans.

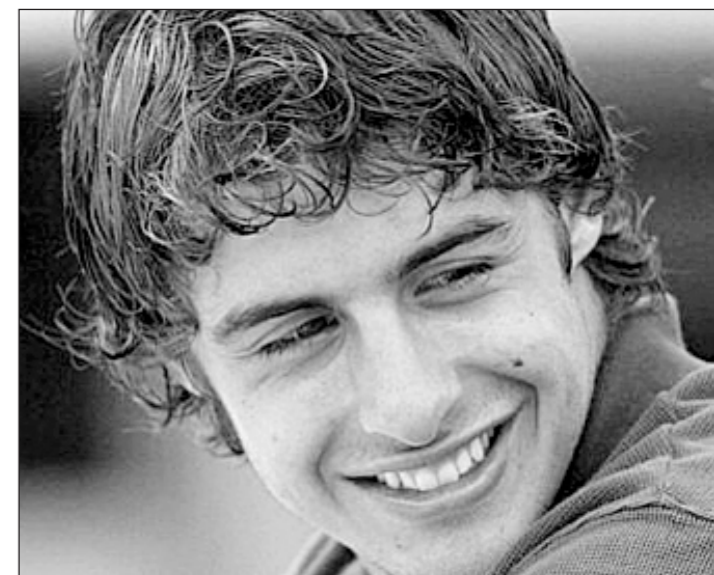
Aimar was due to begin training with his country on Tuesday for Saturday's qualifier away to Peru.

"There's been a clear alteration of the rules on Valencia's part," said the normally placid Bielsa. "He played (in a league match) against Villarreal on Monday when he shouldn't have done. He should be here with us."

His absence appeared to be a tit-for-tat reprisal after central defender Roberto Ayala, another Argentine international who plays for Valencia, was injured while playing at the Olympic Games.

Valencia said on Monday that Ayala would be out for up to two months after suffering knee ligament damage in the Olympic final against Paraguay in Athens on Saturday.

The injury came after Ayala had spent three months with Argentina, playing two World Cup qualifiers in Brazil and Argentina, the Copa America in Peru and Olympic Games in Greece as an over-age



PABLO AIMAR

player -- all within FIFA rules.

The episode is the latest in a long history of club-versus-country disputes involving European clubs and South American national teams.

The Argentine sports daily Ole quoted a Valencia spokesman as saying that Aimar would stay in Spain.

"We went through all the necessary procedures, they didn't send him, they ignored the regulations and I don't know what will become of this situation," added Bielsa.

He added that Valencia were justified in being upset about Ayala but

said that no rules had been broken.

"Valencia feel they have lost out because of the recent call-ups for Ayala and, it's true, he's been at the service of the national team for 90 days and this conspires against Valencia's interests," he said.

"But the rules say that I, as coach of the national team, am authorised to select a player for World Cup qualifiers, for the Copa America and the Olympic Games.

"So I selected him in accordance with the aforementioned regulations."



LUIS FIGO



ZINEDINE ZIDANE

title just two years after meekly giving away its World Cup crown. New coach Raymond Domenech has to rebuild quickly if he is to get Les Bleus to Germany 2006.

"Three hundred caps vanished at once, a whole generation that leaves a vacuum behind it," Domenech said.

His team starts with a home game against Israel at the Stade de France. That sounds like three easy points after the French beat the Israelis home and away in Euro 2004 qualifying.

But French fans with long memories will recall the last time they met Israel in a World Cup qualifying game.

That was 11 years ago when their team needed just one point from two home games to reach the '1994 finals in the United States. A late Israel goal in Paris ended in a 3-2 French loss. France then lost at home to Bulgaria and never made it to the finals.

Following the game against Israel, the French hope to capture three points in the second round of games on Wednesday

"Against Norway it's important to win for the coach and show that the leadership of the group is ours," he said. "A victory would be an important signal to the other teams that we are the team to beat and they can only play for the other positions."

Luis Figo and Rui Costa have retired from the Portuguese national team, which is looking to teenager Cristiano Ronaldo as its new hero.

Coach Luis Felipe Scolari won the 2002 World Cup with Brazil and, having taken Portugal to the final of Euro 2004, wants to go one step further. He starts the journey to Germany 2006 with a visit to Latvia followed by a home game against another Baltic nation, Estonia.

While most teams get used to the changes, the country that beat the Portuguese in the European Championship final in Lisbon hopes things stay the same.

Greece was the surprise winner of Euro 2004, having never won a single match at a major championship.

Its German coach, Otto Rehhagel, will send out virtually

million pound (US\$48.3 million) move to Manchester United on Tuesday, remains out of action because of a broken bone in his foot suffered during Euro 2004.

That means either Alan Smith -- another Reds acquisition -- or Tottenham's Jermaine Defoe will partner Real Madrid's recent signing Michael Owen up front.

Like France and Italy, Spain also performed badly at Euro 2004 and now has Luis Aragones in charge. The Spaniards don't have a World Cup game this weekend but begin their qualifying campaign at Bosnia-Herzegovina on Wednesday.

Spanish fans hope that Aragones will start forward Jose Antonio Reyes, who was left off the Euro 2004 squad but is now a key player for English Premier League champion Arsenal.

World Cup host Germany, which now has Juergen Klinsmann in charge after another Euro flop, doesn't have to qualify but has a friendly game against World Cup champion Brazil in Berlin on Wednesday.



ROQUE THE REBEL! Paraguayan striker Roque Santa Cruz (L) takes on teammate Fernando Rodriguez during a practice session in Ypane, near Asuncion on August 31. Paraguay face Venezuela in their next World Cup qualifying match in Asuncion on September 5.

## Santa Cruz revolts!

REUTERS, Asuncion



Bayern Munich striker Roque Santa Cruz on Wednesday accused his club coach Felix Magath of stifling creativity.

"It seems that nice moves, a little dribble or a run forward with the ball under control are not exactly things which please the coach," the Paraguayan international told reporters in his homeland. "But I'm not going to change my attitude."

"I'm not going to start kicking opponents or throwing myself to the ground just to please this person (Magath)."

Santa Cruz, who joined Bayern as a teenager from Olimpia and is now in his fifth season at the club, added he could always leave and join another club if Magath was not satisfied with his performances.

Santa Cruz has been given more chances to start matches for Bayern following an injury to Peruvian Claudio Pizarro.

Paraguay face Venezuela at home in a World Cup qualifier on Sunday.