



Italy under 21 striker Gianpaolo Pazzini (C) celebrates the first of his three strikes at the newly completed Wembley Stadium against England under 21 on Saturday.

Pazzini lights up new Wembley

Football

INTERNET, undated

England Under 21s played out a thrilling 3-3 draw with Italy Under 21s in the first match at a resplendent new Wembley Stadium.

The five-year construction of the stadium may have been dogged by setbacks best forgotten, but the official curtain-raiser for the rebuilt ground was an occasion to remember as a near sell-out crowd of 55,000 packed in to watch the best attracted Under 21 match in history.

Fate decreed that the clouds rolled in just before kick-off, but a huge cheer erupted as Nigel Reo-Coker led England out to the sound of Baddiel, Skinner and The Lightning Seeds' "Three Lions".

If the England team was too

captivated by their surroundings to fully focus in the early stages, Italy striker Giampaolo Pazzini was inspired as he scored the fastest ever goal at Wembley.

There seemed to be little danger as Pazzini picked up the ball in the centre circle and ran at Anton Ferdinand, but he slammed a powerful shot past Lee Camp from 25 yards via a slight deflection off the West Ham defender.

Italy continued to impress for the remainder of the first half with some fluent passing moves, but they did not have it all their own way as England quickly became competitive.

Andrea Mantovani had to resort to foul play to bring down Leroy Lita on the edge of the box, before Reo-Coker fired wide from distance.

David Bentley was England's star performer and he drew the

score level at 1-1 in the 30th minute with a delightful free-kick that dipped over the defensive wall from 20 yards and flew into the left-hand corner of Gianluca Curci's goal.

Stuart Pearce was unable to take charge of England due to his Manchester City commitments, so it was left to stand-in boss Nigel Pearson to make the changes as the second half got underway, and Matt Derbyshire, Justin Hoyte and James Milner were all given their chance to impress.

The pitch, slightly narrower in size than the old Wembley, started to cut up in places but the state of the surface did not detract from the entertainment as Wayne Routledge beat Curci at his near post with a fine finish after 52 minutes to put England ahead.

Their lead lasted just one minute as Pazzini turned home Antonio

Nocerino's pass from close range after England had failed to clear a corner.

England's advantage was restored on 58 minutes when Milner played Bentley's cross back into the centre and Derbyshire reacted quickly to slot the ball home off the post.

Pazzini grabbed his third in the 68th minute as he darted down the right wing and sent a low shot past Camp, and he later missed a glorious opportunity to score a fourth before being substituted with ten minutes remaining.

Italy dominated possession in the closing stages but neither side could force a winner in a dress rehearsal for their European Under 21 Championship group game this summer.

Calderon hints at Capello exit

INTERNET, undated

Ramon Calderon has hinted Fabio Capello will leave Real Madrid in the summer, but refused to confirm Bernd Schuster would be the replacement.

Capello has endured a fraught tenure since returning to the Bernabeu last year and is being tipped to move on after just one season.

Former Real midfielder Schuster, currently in charge of Getafe, has been strongly tipped to take over, while Premiership duo Rafa Benitez and Jose Mourinho have also been linked with the post.

Real president Calderon admits Capello's stint at the helm has not gone as planned and commented on the potential replacements.

"It is true that we have coaches on the list because I already spoke about Schuster when I was (a presidential) candidate, but also Rafa Benitez and Jose Mourinho," Calderon told Mexican newspaper Reforma.

"People are not very happy since we have not had some good matches.

"Fabio Capello had to manage a club that has gone three years without winning anything and that is not easy either.

"We have had very bad luck."

Calderon also revealed that ex-Real striker, and current Mexico national team coach, Hugo Sanchez could one day take over at the Bernabeu.

He added: "I wanted to incorporate him into my candidacy to be on the technical staff of the second team -- that is the springboard to arrive in the first team.

"He has many possibilities of one day arriving in Madrid."

Scolari calls for respect

AFP, Lisbon

Portugal coach Luiz Felipe Scolari pleaded with supporters on Friday to welcome the Belgium team with respect despite contentious remarks made by the visiting goalkeeper about Cristiano Ronaldo.

Portugal played host to group A rivals Belgium on Saturday in what could turn out to be a crucial Euro 2008 qualification match.

In the build-up to the game however 26-year-old Belgium keeper Stijn Stijnen on Thursday was quoted in a regional newspaper, Gazet Van Antwerpen, as saying: "After two minutes we'll bring him down so hard he'll get carried off on a stretcher."

The comments caused fury among the Portuguese Football Association who immediately filed a complaint to European football's governing body. UEFA are set to investigate the allegations.

Belgium's Brazilian coach Scolari has attempted to calm the waters before the game by recalling the atmosphere around the stands four years ago.

"I want to see 55,000 supporters to go crazy for Portugal but with respect for Belgium.

"Can you remember how we welcomed the teams that came here (Portugal) for Euro 2004? I want Belgium to get the same kind of reception," said Scolari.

Bolivian boy in Chelsea link

REUTERS, La Paz

A Bolivian 14-year-old who does not earn enough to pay for his bus fares to go training says he is stunned by rumours that English premier league Chelsea are interested in him.

The Bolivian media has been awash with reports midfielder Diego Suarez, who became the youngest player in Libertadores Cup history when he turned out for Blooming against Santos in January, could be given a trial by Chelsea.

However, the player, his agent and Blooming technical director Oswaldo Paz all deny any contact has been made.

"I found out that Chelsea were after me when I was watching TV," Suarez told Reuters in a telephone interview.

The teenager, who lives in a poor town around 50 km from Santa Cruz, Bolivia's largest city, does not earn enough to pay for the transport costs to travel to practice.

"He has a contract with Blooming, but it's a deal with many disadvantages... he does not even earn the minimum salary," said his agent Modesto Molina.

"He's been earning 400 Bolivianos a month, that's not even \$50, not enough to pay the transport costs to go to the place where he trains."

Despite the denial, Suarez, who marked Brazil's World Cup midfielder Ze Roberto in the games against Santos, said his hopes had been raised.

"If it happens, it's going to be an amazing opportunity, and I've got to make the best of it," he said.

"I hope to earn more if I play for Chelsea."

Stand up and deliver, urges McClaren

AFP, Tel Aviv

Steve McClaren has warned his England stars that they cannot afford another below-par performance as they seek to put their Euro 2008 qualifying campaign back on track against Israel here on Saturday.

A goalless draw against Macedonia and defeat in Croatia in October have left England languishing in third place in Group E and defeat at the Ramat Gan stadium here on Saturday would seriously compromise their chances of qualifying for next year's finals in Austria and Switzerland.

Wins here and against group minnows Andorra in Barcelona on Wednesday would however significantly alleviate such fears and McClaren insisted he was confident of flying home on Wednesday night with six points in the bag.

In a pre-match press conference liberally punctuated by the phrase "time to deliver" McClaren acknowledged anything less than that would be difficult to explain to the supporters who booed England off the pitch in Croatia and after last month's friendly defeat by Spain.

"We all realise what is expected of us," McClaren said. "We have spoken often recently and now the talking has to stop. We have to deliver on the pitch and we have to do it tomorrow.

"These are qualifiers. We are playing for points. The pressure is on, the atmosphere will be intense and this is where we have to perform.

"The players know the expectations from the fans. We have to produce a performance they can be proud of."

McClaren's overblown rhetoric was, if anything, exceeded by his captain, John Terry, who suggested a bit more "f-ing and blinding" by himself and his teammates might inject a bit more urgency into the side's display.

The Chelsea centreback went on to admit that England's defeat and shambolic performance in Croatia had eaten away at him over the last five months.

"When you play an England game and lose it is so frustrating because you can't go out straight away and put it right," he said. "Now it is down to us to get out there and show what we can do. It can't come round quick enough as far as I'm concerned. "There can't be any excuses about players being tired or about this being a tough place to come -- it's completely no excuses, that is the way we are feeling."

Kaka wants Ronnie at Milan

Football

INTERNET, undated

Ronaldinho has spoken publicly about his hopes of joining Milan to play alongside Brazil teammate Kaka.

"I am happy at Barcelona, but in the future you never know what will happen," said the 2005 Ballon D'Or winner.

The Rossoneri have made absolutely no secret of their intention to make a huge summer bid for Ronaldinho, with vice-President Adriano Galliani assuring they are "in super pole position should he leave Barca."

Fellow Seleccion stars Ronaldo and Kaka have also confirmed they rang up the player to recommend a move to the San Siro.

"It was a nice gesture," he smiled. "Playing with Kaka is absolute pure joy."

The two players are currently together for international duty in a

tour of Sweden and it is the perfect opportunity to file away the final doubts.

"We have spoken about Milan and will do so again during this tour. But do not ask me for miracles," confessed Kaka.

"I have many wonderful things to tell him, but after that it is down to the club to enter the fray."

Milan are stepping up their bid for Ronaldinho after rumours that Inter were trying to intervene and snatch away the superstar.

Reports suggest that Nerazzurri director Marco Branca called up agent Roberto Assis -- Ronaldinho's brother and also agent of Milan striker Ricardo Oliveira -- to discuss the possibility of their own proposal.

These claims were given credence by Rossoneri President Silvio Berlusconi. "If Ronaldinho leaves Barcelona, then we are taking him. The buy-out clause in his contract is not a problem. The important thing is to snatch him away from Inter."

It's believed that Ronaldinho's

buy-out clause for his contract that expires in 2010 is a staggering 84million pounds.

Barcelona for life: Giuly

INTERNET, undated

Barcelona winger Ludovic Giuly has stated that he wants to stay at the club until the end of his career amid reported interest from Juve.

"I would like to continue at Barcelona because I am happy," the Frenchman said. "I have no intention of leaving the club right now and I would like to play here until I retire."

The 30-year-old former Lyon and Monaco wide-man went on to refute rumours that he was set to sign for Serie B club Juventus on their expected promotion to Serie A in the summer, saying "I do not know about this subject. I have a contract running until the summer of 2008 and am looking to extend it further."

Laughter is the best medicine

AFP, Rome

Struggling Italian first division side Parma signed a 52-year-old comedian on Friday.

Italian comic and television presenter Gene Gnocchi made an appeal in November asking for a top flight club to help him fulfil his dream of playing in Serie A.

His plea won the backing of many leading footballers including Juventus and Italy striker Alessandro Del Piero, and Gnocchi trained with Atalanta, Siena and Torino without securing a deal.

But on Friday Parma gave him a two-month contract and registered him as their player with the Italian Football League (Lega-Calcio).

Parma president Tommaso Ghiradi said he hoped Gnocchi would bring them luck.

"If we manage to avoid relegation, it will mean Gnocchi has been our lucky charm," he said.

"It will also secure him a contract for next season!"

Asked why he took Gnocchi on, Ghiradi replied: "We need to laugh a little.

"The players are a bit tense and he will know how to lift the spirit in the dressing room."

Hitzfeld astonished by Kahn ban

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich coach Ottmar Hitzfeld expressed his astonishment on Friday after the German giants' veteran goalkeeper Oliver Kahn was hit with a one-match suspension by UEFA for 'improper conduct'.

Kahn was also fined 20,000 Swiss francs (12,346 euros) on Thursday for his part in a heated argument with doping control officials following Bayern's 2-1 win over Real Madrid in Munich two weeks ago.

The ban keeps the veteran out of his club's Champions League quarterfinal first leg away to AC Milan on April 3, but the German giants are waiting for UEFA's written explanation before deciding whether to appeal.

"I have never heard of a player being hit with such a heavy penalty for such an offence," said Hitzfeld.

Donadoni unfazed by pressure

AFP, Rome

Italy coach Roberto Donadoni said on Friday he was unconcerned by media speculation that he will be sacked if the world champions fail to qualify for the 2008 European Championships.

"I'm calm and not particularly stressed," said the 43-year-old former AC Milan midfielder ahead of next Wednesday's delicate Group B qualifying match against Scotland in Bari, southern Italy.

"To tell you the truth the people around me are more stressed. My

only concern is to make sure the squad is hungry and determined.

"I'm not interested about anything else -- including talk about my job."

Italy are third in Group B on seven points, two behind France -- whom they beat in a penalty shootout in the World Cup final -- and Scotland, after four matches played.

While Italy have a free weekend, France and Scotland play on Saturday against Lithuania and Georgia respectively, and victories for the top two will leave the Azzurri five points adrift come Wednesday, heaping more pressure on them and Donadoni.

The top two in the group will qualify for next year's tournament

in Austria and Switzerland.

Donadoni, who replaced Marcello Lippi as Italy coach shortly after their triumphant World Cup campaign last year, trimmed his squad for the Scotland match from 25 to 21 on Friday.

Goalkeeper Marco Amelia, defenders Manuel Pasqual and Daniele Bonera, and midfielder Franco Semioli were sent home from Italy's training camp in Coverciano, Florence.

Roma midfielder Simone Perrotta sat out training due to a right leg injury, but Donadoni said it was not serious.

Arsenal shares hit record high

Football

AFP, London

Arsenal shares hit a record high on Thursday amid rumours that the English Premiership club will be the subject of a takeover bid.

Arsenal were the only one of four English sides in the Champions League this season not to be under foreign ownership.

But as rumours of an imminent takeover abound, Arsenal Holdings PLC shares closed at a record high of 6,275 pounds (12,300 dollars) on Thursday evening.

It pushed the value of the club on the Ofex stock exchange up to 388.87 million pounds (763 million dollars).

Rumours suggest that foreign investors such as Dubai International Capital or Russian aluminium magnate and oligarch Oleg Deripaska

are eyeing a bid for the Londoners, who this season moved to a new 60,000-seat stadium.

"It is only speculation, although in September of last year, when there was similar speculation, the board issued a statement to say they were not in talks with anyone. And at this stage, this time around, they haven't said anything," a member of the Arsenal Supporters' Trust told AFP.

The largest single shareholder Daniel Fiszman, a non-executive director who holds a 24.11 per cent stake, sold one per cent of the club's capital on March 15, triggering suspicions that a sale could be in the offing.

"With no known reason as to why he's done this at this time and in the absence of any information over who the buyer is, naturally one tries to draw some conclusions," added the supporters' trust source.

Alongside Fiszman, the

club's other major shareholders are non executive director Lady Nina Bracewell-Smith (15.90 per cent), vice-president David Dein (14.6 per cent) and non-executive director Richard Carr (4.38 per cent).

Between the four of them they hold a 60 per cent stake in the club while television channel ITV holds almost 10 per cent.

"The ITV share is definitely for sale but they're holding it for the right price," added the source.

Of England's other big four clubs, Manchester United were bought in 2005 by American billionaire Malcolm Glazer for 790 million pounds, Liverpool were bought by Americans Tom Hicks and George Gillett in February for 174 million pounds and Chelsea were bought by Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich in July 2003 for 60 million pounds.

CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

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8 Geeky

12 Vicinity

13 Through

14 Valhalla

15 Three-

17 Scoop

18 Solidify

19 Make an

21 Con

24 Graceful

25 Land-

26 Enter-

30 Chemical

31 Swim-

32 Stout

33 AAA

35 Despot

DOWN

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8 Museum

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CRYPTOQUIP

UL RHGN MHADHON-MBAPDUQX

RAELL UR AHRNRI UQ WHEY

LBPNI U UGBXUQN WHE'OO

XNA BOO ABYYW-NWNI.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: DO YOU SUPPOSE THE

BRAINS OF MR. CHARLES AND MR. BRADBURY

CONSIST CHIEFLY OF RAY MATTER?

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: W equals Y