



Italy striker Luca Toni celebrates after his brace against Scotland during the Euro 2008 qualifier at the San Nicola Stadium in Bari on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

# GERRARD RESCUES ENGLAND Toni brace lifts Italy

AFP, Paris



Steven Gerrard saved England's blushes with a brilliant double to see off plucky Andorra 3-0 in

Barcelona.

And in Bari world champions Italy moved themselves back into contention in Group B with a 2-0 victory over previous leaders Scotland in Bari while Northern Ireland are the new shock leaders in Group F after David Healy's double sunk Sweden in Belfast.

England coach Steve McClaren must have been fearing the worst as his lacklustre side turned around at the break at 0-0, just four days after their dismal Group E stalemate in Israel.

But Gerrard took the bulls by the horns in the second period, volleying home from Wayne Rooney's deft flick after 54 minutes before finishing off his own move following a pair of one-tuos with Stewart Downing and Jermain Defoe.

The Liverpool captain also played the crucial through ball that set up the third goal, poked over the line by debutant Preston forward David Nugent after Defoe's initial shot squirmed under goalkeeper

Koldo Alvarez's body.

Gerrard was the only bright spark for England but after the game he stuck up for his under-fire teammates.

"The fans were expecting us to win 4/5/6-0 but it's not as easy as that - they got a lot of men behind the ball," he said.

"We had to show a lot of character when it was 0-0 at half time but in the second half we showed character and moved the ball quicker.

"They weren't as fit as us and eventually we wore them down."

But despite his assertions, the fans in Espanyol's stadium, where Andorra chose to stage this match as their own grounds are not up to UEFA standards, were not convinced and jeered the team at half-time and at the final whistle. There were also chants of 'McClaren out' during the second period.

The embattled England manager reflected: "You're not going to please everybody - but what matters is what happens in the dressing room and on the pitch. The players gave everything, they kept going, and showed guts and eventually got the reward."

"I can understand the fans' frustration after the disappointment against Israel.

"We came here to win and we've

done that. We're still in a good position but still have a lot to do."

Despite the fairly lop-sided victory, England are fourth in their group, two points off leaders Croatia but behind Israel, who thrashed Estonia 4-0 in Tel Aviv, and Russia on goal difference. Croatia and Russia also have a game in hand.

Fiorentina striker Luca Toni scored both goals as Italy moved to within two points of the Scots and France, who had the day off from qualification duty.

It means the Italians have successfully bounced back from their difficult start to their qualification quest when they picked up just one point from their first two games.

Italy coach Roberto Donadoni said: "These great players gave the reply that was required. All the rest is just useless chit-chat. I'm thinking now of the next game against Lithuania, a game we have to win."

Italy are now just two points behind Scotland, France and Ukraine, who beat Lithuania 1-0 in Odessa.

In Belfast Johan Elmander gave Sweden the lead after a lightning counter-attack by the visitors but Lawrie Sanchez's rapidly improving side hit back just four minutes after the opener.

And Healy scored the winner in

the second half as the Irish moved a point above their visitors at the top of the group.

It has been a remarkable turnaround for Sanchez who was under pressure to resign or be sacked during his side's dreadful World Cup qualification campaign. A shock win over England saved him then and he is reaping the benefits now having also guided his outfit to victory over Spain in this campaign.

Andres Iniesta struck nine minutes from time as Spain pulled themselves to within four points of top spot in the group with a 1-0 win at home to Iceland.

Spain dominated from start to finish but Luis Aragones's men were relieved to finally break the deadlock with time running out.

The Netherlands maintained their grip on Group G with a 1-0 win at Slovenia courtesy of Barcelona full-back Giovanni van Bronckhurst's strike four minutes from time.

Romania leap-frogged Bulgaria into second spot in the group with a 3-0 win over Luxembourg while their Balkan neighbours could only draw 0-0 at home to Albania.

## Kahn hearing set for Monday

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich captain Oliver Kahn will have his appeal against a one-match suspension handed out by FIFA for improper conduct heard on Monday.

Kahn was fined 10,000 Swiss francs (6,171 euros) and suspended by UEFA's disciplinary committee for arguing with officials over a routine doping test and is set to miss the German giants Champions League quarterfinal first leg tie against AC Milan on Wednesday.

The appeal will be heard at UEFA's head-quarters in Nyon at 9am on Monday, according to German newspaper Bild in an advance for its Thursday edition.

Following Bayern's 2-1 Champions League win over Real Madrid earlier this month, Kahn argued with the doctor supervising his doping tests after he was asked to produce a second urine sample, because the official had not seen the first sample produced.

If Kahn's ban is upheld his 22-year-old under-study, Michael Rensing, said it would be his dream come true to face the Italian giants at the San Siro stadium.

"It would be the absolute highlight of my career so far," Rensing told the Bayern website.

"I've made a few appearances in the Bundesliga and for the Germany U-21s, but in terms of significance, Milan would be very special."

## Real ready to splash cash

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid are prepared to splash out 100 million euros on new players to recapture past glories, according to Spanish newspaper Marca on Thursday.

And top of the nine-time European champions' shopping list is still Manchester United's Portuguese winger Cristiano Ronaldo, although not at the reported 80 million euros banded around in the Spanish press.

Real president Ramon Calderon has put 100 million euros on the table, according to Marca, despite seeing little return from the 106 million euros he recently invested in Ruud van Nistelrooy, Fabio Cannavaro, Mahamoud Diarra, Emerson, Fernando Gago and Gonzalo Higuain.

However, he recently confirmed that he is not willing to break the world record of 75 million euros his club paid Juventus for former world player of the year Zinedine Zidane in 2001.

"We like Cristiano, but right now he is a Manchester United player. But if the English team want to sell him, we would be first in line for him," Calderon told Atena 3 television channel.

"But we will not pay crazy money. A footballer is not worth 80 million euros."

Other players interesting the Real chief are AC Milan's Brazilian playmaker Kaka, Borussia Dortmund's Germany defender Christoph Metzelder, Porto's Brazilian defender Pepe and AS Roma's Romanian defender Cristian Chivu.

Marseille's France winger Franck Ribery, currently injured, has also been mentioned as a potential target.

According to Marca, Real are on course to surpass the single season record of 122 million euros that previously president Florentino Perez spent in 2000/01.

They have not won a single trophy in more than three and a half seasons and are desperate to end that barren run.

## 'Arsenal not for sale'

AFP, London

Arsenal chiefs insist reports of a takeover by American sports tycoon Stan Kroenke are premature.

It had been suggested that Kroenke, whose Sports Enterprises company owns the Colorado Rapids football team, the Denver Nuggets basketball team and the Colorado Avalanche ice hockey squad, was in talks to buy the north London side.

Manchester United, Liverpool and Aston Villa are all under American ownership, fuelling speculation that the Gunners would be next in line for a takeover by a US investor. Kroenke already has links with Arsenal after signing a marketing partnership with the club last month.

But, while Arsenal managing director Keith Edelman confirmed that television company Granada/ITV are keen to cash-in their 9.9percent stake in the club, he is adamant the board have no plans to sell up at present.

"As everyone knows the Granada/ITV stake has been for sale for the last 12 months," Edelman said. "They have announced that owning football clubs was not part of their strategy."

"That started a lot of media speculation but, as a board, we want to step back from that. The directors are committed to the club and love the club. That is all we want to say on the matter at the moment."

# Maradona in hospital again



Football

AFP, Buenos Aires

Football legend Diego Maradona was hospitalized against his will in Buenos Aires after falling ill from over-indulging in food, alcohol and cigars, his personal doctor said Thursday.

The life of the 46-year-old former Barcelona and Napoli star was not in danger, doctor Alfredo Cahe told reporters, but Maradona will stay in a shared room at Guemes Hospital where he was taken late Wednesday for "several days."

"He didn't have a very consistent lifestyle, in his eating habits, his drinking and the amount of cigars he smoked," Cahe said, adding that Maradona had not gone back to using cocaine.

"He is smoking three or four Habanos (Cuban cigars) a day. For him, who didn't smoke, it's too much," he said.

"This, in addition to stress, was a logical reason to hospitalize him, and against his will," Cahe said, adding that Maradona was not suffering heart or brain ailments.

Results of a medical examination will be ready later Thursday, he said.

In April 2000 Maradona had a heart attack in Uruguay following a cocaine overdose. Four years later, another heart attack followed another overdose. After spending weeks in intensive care, his weight ballooned to alarming levels, prompting him to

undergo gastric bypass surgery in 2005.

Late Wednesday, Guemes Hospital said in a statement the former Argentina star was taken by ambulance to the hospital "to undergo an examination after having suffered a decompensation."

It gave no details, but said "it does not have any relation to the consumption of dangerous drugs."

Maradona, who led Argentina to a 1986 World Cup trophy, was taken to the hospital after feeling ill at his parents' house, Argentine television said.

His ex-wife Claudia Villafane, his daughters Dalma and Giannina, and Cahe, arrived at the facility later.

Outside a team of police guards lined up and dozens of fans stood around anxiously waiting for news about the former football star's health.

Maradona shares the FIFA title of the 20th century's best player with Brazil's Pele after a sparkling career with Boca Juniors, Barcelona and Napoli.

Born October 30, 1960 just outside Buenos Aires, Maradona amassed a fortune during 21 years in football, scoring 50 goals in 115 games for his national side.

He proved his genius in the crucible of the 1986 World Cup finals in Mexico, with a series of brilliant displays that led Argentina to the title.

But his career was dogged by controversy over misbehavior on and off the field, including several suspensions for drug use.

His life on and off the pitch has

been checkered by embarrassing episodes, which only worsened since his retirement at 37.

The scandals have run the gamut of marital infidelity, cocaine use and tax evasion.

Since he stopped playing he has undergone treatment for substance abuse and also for weight gain.

In 2005, he found a new and successful career in television hosting a widely watched show called "The Night of 10," referring to his iconic Argentina jersey number.

But his hospitalization and a possible new legal woe are adding to Maradona's checkered life.

Newspaper photographs early this month appeared to show he had regained many of the 50 kilograms (110 pounds) lost in his crash weight-loss treatment. Another showed him in a Buenos Aires nightclub with an injured nose after a fall off his chair.

On Saturday Cahe told reporters that Maradona was considering going to Switzerland to deal with a new surge in his weight, following his stomach reduction surgery in Colombia.

Also, early this month, tax authorities instructed the Argentine central bank to collect information about Maradona's bank accounts, suggesting he was under investigation for financial irregularities.

# McClaren feels the strain

AFP, Barcelona



Steve McClaren showed the strain of England's recent slump in form when he stormed out of a

press conference after less than two minutes following his side's laboured 3-0 win over Group E minnows Andorra here on Wednesday.

The under-pressure England boss answered just two questions before emotionally telling his critics in the press to "write what you like" and marching off.

The brief time he did spend in the press room, McClaren used to pay tribute to his players for the grit they had displayed in grinding out a 3-0 win in difficult conditions against a back-drop of almost non-stop abuse from more than 10,000 of their own supporters.

"We came here to win the game, it was important to do that," McClaren said. "The lads got the job done. In difficult conditions on and off pitch,

they came through."

England looked to be heading for what would have been the most embarrassing result in the country's history before Andorra's resistance was finally pierced nine minutes after the interval by the first of two Steven Gerrard goals.

A last minute effort by substitute David Nugent put a more positive gloss on the final scoreline and McClaren said he remained confident that his side could go on to reach next year's finals in Austria and Switzerland.

"I said to them at half-time they had to show real guts and character to go through all that and I think they did that, each and every one of them," McClaren added.

"I'm proud of the players. I think Stevie G really stepped forward and we have won the game and we move on."

"It puts us in a better position in the group. We have got to make sure we beat Estonia (in June) and next season it is down to us. It is in our hands."

Unprompted, McClaren then

began to talk about his own position, widely seen as being under threat as a result of a run of results which have left England in serious danger of failing to qualify for a major tournament for the first time since the 1994 World Cup.

"I've got fantastic support this week from players, staff, from everybody involved with the squad," he said. "There is a great determination to go and do the job."

"There was no concern for me, for myself. I thought it was very, very difficult for the players. I said at half-time this is when we have to stick together, this is when we have to step forward and show real guts and character. And the players did that. Quite a few of them have grown up a lot tonight."

"Nothing concerns me outside. What you write, what people say. It matters inside. There is a great determination now to prove a lot of people wrong."

"Gentleman, if you want to write whatever you want to write, you can write it because that is all I have got to say."



PHOTO: AFP

Portugal winger Cristiano Ronaldo (C) skips over the tackle of Serbia defender Miladen Krstajic during their Euro 2008 qualifier in Belgrade on Wednesday.

## 'England job the worst'

AFP, London

England coach Steve McClaren has "the worst job in football", according to Sheffield United manager Neil Warnock.

McClaren has been subjected to a torrent of criticism and abuse from English fans and media in the last week as his side struggled during Euro 2008 qualifiers against Israel and Andorra.

He was jeered by supporters throughout England's unconvincing 3-0 win over part-timers Andorra on Wednesday and there were calls for the former Middlesbrough manager to be sacked before and after the match in Barcelona.

Warnock believes that kind of scrutiny makes the England coach's job an unpalatable prospect for all but the most thick-skinned managers.

"It's a sad situation when you see the kind of criticism that Steve is getting at the moment," Warnock said.

"I know that it is par for the course but it's one of the reasons I would never, ever recommend the England job to anyone. Why anyone would ever dream of wanting it I don't know."

"I think it's the worst job in football, unless you go in thinking 'to hell with it'."

"All managers appreciate what others go through. Steve's not daft, he knows they are not playing well and the fans aren't happy, and it's a lonely place when things are like that."

"You don't like abuse and I felt a little bit sick last night listening to the fans. It's not nice for any manager - and Steve got four points out of the two games."

"Watching some of the contortions on the faces of the fans is quite frightening and shows the nasty side of the game of football."



Football

AFP, Paris

France coach Raymond Domenech hit out at the fans who constantly jeered Marseille forward Djibril Cisse during France's 1-0 friendly win over Austria on Wednesday night.

Cisse, who is on a year's loan at the Stade Velodrome from English Premiership outfit Liverpool, has become something of a pantomime villain at Paris's Stade de France, where the game was played.

The striker was involved in an ugly clash with Paris St Germain's

Mario Yepes in February, breaking the Uruguayan defender's jaw. Three days later he was jeered incessantly at the Stade de France during France's 1-0 friendly defeat against Argentina.

And the Parisian crowd continued that treatment against Austria, with the jeers increasing in volume following Cisse's first shot at goal, which went wide of the mark in the 23rd minute.

"They have no right to whistle. He misses chances but he gives his all," said Domenech, who substituted Cisse at half-time, replacing him with match-winner Karim Benzema - a move that had been decided on before the game

began.

"I even considered not taking him off so as not to let the fans feel they had got their way. But that would have punished Benzema who I had intended to bring on."

Domenech also turned his ire on journalists for their treatment of the misfiring Cisse.

"You are too harsh with Djib, he's coming back from a long injury break. We know how the curve works: in the first month the player is over the moon and runs everywhere. But then the curve dips and the player hits a trough. Djib is in a trough."



PHOTO: AFP

Ivory Coast's star striker Didier Drogba (L) displays his 2006 African Golden Ball trophy as he sits alongside rebel leader Guillaume Soro (R) in Bouake on Wednesday. Drogba visited Bouake to show off his 2006 African Golden Ball to his supporters in the north of the country.

## CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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## CRYPTOQUIP

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DCVY J DJLVCESF XVLFI,  
HFCMIHQ BVT GVTIP GEXP  
TH GESM CFJPC'Q PENFQS.  
Saturday's Cryptoquip: BECAUSE HE'S EMPLOYED IN A FACTORY MAKING TOY BEARS, PEOPLE NOW SAY HE'S FOUND TEDDY WORK.  
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: B equals Y