



(L) England players David Beckham (L) and Michael Owen jog during a training session in London Colney while (R) Germany coach Joachim Low (C) oversees his strikers Kevin Kuranyi (L) and Stefan Kiessling during training in Frankfurt on Monday.

## ENGLAND V GERMANY

# A shadow contest

## Football

AFP, London

One of the most keenly contested rivalries in international football kicks off again Wednesday as England take on Germany at Wembley.

But the so-called friendly clash between the age-old foes could be remembered more for who did not take part than who did, as a spate of injuries continue to take their toll on both teams.

Germany will be seeking revenge after the last clash in 2001 produced one of England's greatest away performances - a 5-1 romp in Munich.

Germany were the last team to beat England at Wembley, winning the last match at the old stadium 1-0 in October 2000.

And they would love to be the first to beat them at the new Wembley in

England's second game at the rebuilt national stadium.

"England versus Germany is a true football classic, comparable to Wimbledon in tennis or Monaco in Formula One," Germany coach Joachim Loew said.

The game is being used as a warm-up match for the round of 2008 European Championship qualifiers in September.

Struggling England, fourth in Group E, face Israel on September 8 and Russia on September 12, both at Wembley.

Germany lead Group D and play away to Wales on September 8.

Some commentators have blasted the game as a farce, given it comes just two weeks into the season and will be played without many first team players.

However England manager Steve McClaren insists it can only be good to take on challenging teams like Germany, which also happen to bring a bit of rivalry.

"It's a great friendly. Is there ever a friendly against Germany? I think for anyone who puts on an England shirt it's not a friendly," he said.

The game will be England's second match at the new Wembley. While the June 1-1 friendly draw with Brazil was a sell-out, the second game will prove a test of the gleaming 90,000-seater venue's pulling power.

But the fact remains the match will be short of star names.

Manchester United striker Wayne Rooney is out with a fractured left foot.

Liverpool midfielder Steven Gerrard is resting a fractured toe, while Tottenham striker Darren Bent, suffering a thigh injury, also misses out.

Owen Hargreaves, who made his name with Bayern Munich, is still suffering knee trouble and England veteran Sol Campbell, called up by McClaren for the first time, will not feature due to a groin injury.

McClaren failed to convince Liverpool's Jamie Carragher to reverse his decision to retire from international football. The versatile defender is fed up of being a fringe player.

Tottenham defender Ledley King and winger Aaron Lennon are also out, as is Manchester United right-back Gary Neville and Middlesbrough centre-half Jonathan Woodgate.

Striker Michael Owen is probably not fit enough to play a full part.

Only 13 out of 22 England players and the three goalkeepers took part in Monday's training session.

They included David Beckham, the superstar of Major League Soccer in the United States, who could play his second full game since moving to Los Angeles Galaxy in mid-July.

McClaren insisted the former

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## Schuster wants a striker

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's new coach Bernd Schuster has demanded that the club splash out on another striker to back up prolific Dutch goal scorer Ruud van Nistelrooy, Spanish media reported Tuesday.

Schuster made the request at a meeting with Real president Ramon Calderon and sporting director Predrag Mijatovic on Monday called to discuss the club's 5-3 loss at home the day before against Sevilla in the Spanish Super Cup final.

At the meeting, Calderon renewed his confidence in Schuster before the start of the Spanish league on Saturday but asked the German coach to explain Real's string of losses in the pre-season, the daily newspaper ABC reported.

Schuster, who replaced Italy's Fabio Capello after Real won the league title last season, demanded

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# Geovanni comes full-circle

## Football

TIM VICKERY

If Sven-Goran Eriksson's eight-day transformation from laughing stock to leader seems remarkable, it pales in comparison with the story of the man whose goal won the Manchester derby.

The last time I saw Geovanni was on 12 May in a Brazilian Championship match at the Maracana, his Cruzeiro side visiting Fluminense.

Just 12,132 were drawn to watch it - and they saw very little of the stony little striker.

He started the game on the bench and came on for just the last few minutes as his side let a two-goal lead slip.

To put this into perspective, domestic Brazilian football has basically become an export industry.

There are very few top class

players to be found between the ages of 23 and 30 - they have all been sold to Europe or Asia.

So if a 27-year-old, ex-international, former Barcelona player cannot walk in to a fairly moderate Brazilian club side then something looks very strange.

Geovanni's inability to tear up any trees on his second spell with Cruzeiro appeared to indicate that this was a career that had gone hopelessly off the rails, an abject failure to fulfil the potential that seemed so apparent when he burst onto the scene with the same club seven years ago.

Strong on the ball, with a lovely change of pace and a fierce shot in both feet, Geovanni looked to have global stardom in his grasp.

But the warning lights were flashing as far back as 2001.

First, he got himself sent off in Cruzeiro's biggest game of the year in the Copa Libertadores, South America's Champions League.

Then his club coach, Luiz Felipe

Scolari, stepped up to take charge of the national team.

Scolari took Geovanni with him and threw him straight into the side for the Copa America opener against Mexico.

Scolari then hauled him off and hurled him into the international wilderness after just 45 minutes.

Geovanni failed to make his mark in Spain with Barcelona

Suddenly a question mark had been raised - could Geovanni cope with the big occasion?

The doubts were confirmed by his experience at Barcelona, where he made very little impact.

He fared a little better at Benfica, drifting back to Brazil and what looked like a dead end of stultifying mediocrities on the Cruzeiro substitutes bench.

But perhaps the moral of the Sven story is that everyone deserves a second chance.

Geovanni, perhaps to his own surprise, has been offered another

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# Qualifiers resume

AFP, Paris

Serbia, Portugal and Northern Ireland will be hoping to close the gap on their respective group rivals when qualifying for the 2008 European Championships resumes this Wednesday.

Six fixtures are scheduled and half of those matches involve teams in group A, which has so far been dominated by Poland.

Poland have been beaten only once in nine games, but have played two games more than Serbia and Portugal, who will be looking to close their five-point gap in away matches against Belgium and Armenia respectively.

"Players and staff have been left heartbroken by this terrible tragedy."

Walsall is in the Birmingham conurbation, England's second city located in the West Midlands.

As a mark of respect, Tuesday's reserve league fixture against nearby Wolverhampton Wanderers have been postponed and flags at the Banks's Stadium are flying at half-mast.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with Anton's parents, family and friends at this very sad time," the Saddlers said.

defeats apiece so far.

Northern Ireland meanwhile will be expecting a positive result when they host another footballing minnow in Liechtenstein, having romped to a 4-1 win in the Principality earlier in the campaign.

However the match at Windsor Park in Belfast will take on special significance for Nigel Worthington, who will take charge for the first time since replacing Lawrie Sanchez after his decision to join Fulham.

Northern Ireland have played only six games, and have a chance to jump back into contention alongside with group F leaders Sweden and second-placed Spain, both of whom have played seven games.

Sweden top the group on 18 points ahead of Spain (15) and Northern Ireland, who have 13.

The only dilemma Worthington appears to have is which of his two keepers to play.

Both Maik Taylor and Roy Carroll have failed to play competitively for their clubs this season, Taylor losing his place at Birmingham City to Colin Doyle and Carroll still waiting for his chance behind Allan McGregor at Rangers.

Worthington said he is not worried about their relative lack of action.

"Both will have had a good pre-season and will have played games

during that time," said Worthington. "They are both experienced and talented goalkeepers, and I have no worries about them."

Serbia travel to Belgium for a potentially tricky encounter - they beat Belgium at home by a single goal in their last encounter - without striker Nikola Zigic, who has pulled out because of an ankle injury.

The Valencia front man has struggled to recover from the injury for the past fortnight but Serbia coach Javier Clemente has ruled out naming a replacement.

Bulgaria can ill afford another home defeat, having succumbed to Portugal and Finland in June.

Portugal are in a similar position to Serbia, but trail the Balkan giants on goals difference.

On paper Luiz Felipe Scolari's side should come away with all three points from Armenia, although the team run by Scott and former Raith Rovers man Ian Porterfield has recently shown its giant-killing capacities.

Armenia beat Leo Beenhakker's Poland side 1-0 in June, to add to their respectable 0-0 draw at home to Finland earlier in the campaign.



Czech Republic and Chelsea goalkeeper Petr Cech poses with his wife Martina while holding the Golden Ball trophy awarded to the Czech player of the year in Prague on Monday.