



PHOTO: AFP/INTERNET

(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 outfield 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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'Quartet can play together'

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard believes the club's four-star strikers - Samuel Eto'o, Lionel Messi, Ronaldinho and new signing Thierry Henry - can play together in the Spanish side's line-up.

"Good footballers can always play together," he told daily newspaper El Mundo when asked about the possibility of fielding together the quartet, dubbed the "Fantastic Four" by the press.

"It depends on the moment, the circumstances, the balance, if players are in shape or not, on the availability, on the opponent, on what you need," he added.

Rijkaard faces a tactical challenge in trying to accommodate the abundant talent in his squad, made up mostly of internationals, but the Dutch coach said he does everything he can to ensure his players are happy with the time

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Teenager dies in training

AFP, Walsall

Walsall's apprentice Anton Reid, 16, collapsed and died Monday during a training session, the third-tier English club said.

"It is with great sadness that we announce the loss of one of our young apprentice players, Anton Reid," the League One club said in a statement.

"The 16-year-old first-year youth team player collapsed and died during a training session Monday morning at the University of Aston training ground.

"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.

Styles apologises for blunder

Football

AFP, London

Rob Styles has apologised to Liverpool after admitting Monday that he made a mistake in awarding a penalty to Chelsea during their 1-1 draw at Anfield at the weekend.

Styles also caused confusion by appearing to issue a second yellow card to the Blues' Michael Essien.

The match official has accepted he made a mistake in penalising Steve Finnan and as a result he will not be given a match to referee this weekend.

"All referees enter into matches hoping not to make any mistakes but understanding that they may happen, what none of us want is for any mistake to potentially affect the result of the match," said Styles.

"Yesterday, in mistakenly awarding a penalty, I accept that I may have affected the result of the match and for that I apologise."

Styles awarded Chelsea a penalty which enabled them to

equalise even though Finnan appeared to make no contact with Florent Malouda.

Referees' chief Keith Hackett said officials had to be accountable for mistakes.

"We have in place systems that will analyse each decision a referee makes. Referees are aware of the accountability that exists, as are the managers and players, and we expect referees to get big decisions correct," said Hackett.

"On this occasion it was wrong and therefore Rob will not be officiating next weekend.

"I spoke to Rob this morning and obviously he is extremely disappointed with the decision and admitted he got it wrong. I have left a message with Rafael Benitez to apologise."

Hackett also revealed assistant referee Ian Gosling will be given next weekend off, after he denied Fulham a late equaliser at home to Middlesbrough when striker David Healy clearly forced the ball over the line.

The Cottagers lost 2-1 to Boro at

Craven Cottage.

"Clearly the assistant referee has made an error, so he won't be operating next week for us either."

The Premier League are to press ahead with trials on goal-line technology being developed by the company HawkEye.

Hackett said: "It is still in its testing stage but we hope when it is judged to be fail-safe then it will be used."

"Everyone in football recognises that goal-line systems can provide help for the referee to make his decision."

Meanwhile, Hackett will also ensure there is no repeat of the confusion when Styles appeared to book Essien when instead he was still showing the card to John Terry.

Hackett added: "I'm informed by both the fourth official and Rob he retained the card shown to John Terry then held the card to indicate a direct free-kick, and failed to put the card away. So it was a basic, if you like, admin error as against an error in application of law."

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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 stocky/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 mediocrity 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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Cech named Czech's best

AFP, Prague

Chelsea goalkeeper Peter Cech was named Czech footballer of the year here on Monday for the third successive year.

The Golden Ball award is voted for by sports journalists and presented to the best Czech player over the previous season.

The 25-year-old goalkeeper, who has won 52 caps for his national team, took top spot ahead of Arsenal's Tomas Rosicky and Marek Jankulovski of Juventus.

He was presented with his award at a gala evening in Prague on the eve of the national team's departure for a friendly match against Austria in Vienna.

Jol under pressure

AFP, London



Speculation mounted Tuesday that Tottenham boss Martin Jol would be the first English Premier League manager to get the sack amid reports Spurs have sounded out Sevilla boss Juande Ramos.

After spending heavily on players in the pre-season, Spurs lost their opening two games, piling the pressure on Jol.

But despite Saturday's 4-0 thrashing of Derby County, the Dutch coach is now odds on with bookmakers to lose his job amid British newspaper reports that he is being lined up for the chop.

The Daily Mail said Spurs have agreed a three-man short-list to replace Jol while The Sun said he was on the verge of getting the sack.

"We are a club that is aiming for the top four so we have to accept that there will be speculation if it appears that things are not going to plan," the newspapers quoted a Spurs spokesman as saying.

"But we are not at this point in time negotiating with any manager to replace Martin Jol."

Whether or not the wording of that statement brings any comfort to Jol, The Independent and London's Evening Standard said Spurs officials had held talks with Ramos, though both parties deny such a meeting took place.

Bookmakers are hardly optimistic about Jol's position.

Coral suspended betting after two very large bets were placed Friday on him being the next top-flight boss to get the sack.

Before the season started, Blue Square quoted him as being 50/1 to be the first Premier League manager dismissed, the second safest in the Premier League after Manchester United's Alex Ferguson. However, they are now offering odds of 8/15.

Jol has remained tight-lipped about the speculation as he faces the task of Sunday's trip to the stuttering champions.

"It won't be easy going to Manchester United for our next fixture," he told the club's website.

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PHOTO: AFP

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.



PHOTO: AFP

Portugal winger Cristiano Ronaldo is mobbed by enthusiastic fans on his arrival at the Yerevan airport in Armenia on Monday.

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 both Serbia and Portugal, who will be looking to close their five-point gap in away matches against Belgium and Armenia respectively.

Also with 14 points, Finland are on a par with Serbia and Portugal but have played one more game than the pair. The Finns host Kazakhstan in the hope of staying in contention.

In group D San Marino host Cyprus hoping to claim their first point in seven games. Cyprus have four points from six games so far, but are out of the running for any of the two automatic qualifying places.

Estonia and Andorra are in an even more precarious position, both European minnows still searching a point having succumbed to seven

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 goalkeepers 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.

Belgium 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 Scot 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.