

Jol challenges Defoe

TIMES ONLINE

Martin Jol, the Tottenham Hotspur manager, has urged Jermain Defoe to seize his chance to impress if he is given an opportunity against Anorthosis Famagusta in the Uefa Cup.

Defoe was upset after failing to make the bench against Arsenal at the weekend but is likely to be in the squad on Thursday against Famagusta at White Hart Lane.

Daniel Levy, the Tottenham chairman, wants the England striker to sign a new deal to avoid a repeat of the situation the club faced when Sol Campbell ran down his contract and left for nothing, although Defoe is not currently getting a game for Tottenham. "What I said to Jermain was that they have to push each other and when he gets his chance he has to take it," Jol said. "It is very healthy for the squad. I don't expect him to be happy about it, but I am not here to make people happy as I have to make tough choices."

"I have named two strikers on the bench in the past, but it makes your job harder because you have to name a midfield player who can cover both wide and central positions."

"There are other players who will be disappointed, but the main advantage of this situation is that everybody must be on their toes for when they come back into the reckoning - which could be at any time."

Defoe could only watch as the strikers higher than him in the pecking order squandered chances against Arsenal. Dimitar Berbatov missed a one-on-one opportunity after rounding the goalkeeper.

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Repka fined for hitting cameraman

AFP, Prague

Former West Ham defender Tomas Repka has been fined 150,000 koruna (7,580 dollars) by his club Sparta Prague for lashing out at a cameraman after being sent off during a league game.

The Sparta Prague captain attacked the Czech Television cameraman on his way off the field as his club lost for the first time this season against northern rivals Teplice on Sunday.

The game ended in controversy as Sparta midfielder Martin Abraham, who was also red-carded, was fined 150,000 koruna for verbally abusing the referee and assistant coach Horst Siegl 50,000 koruna for his comments from the sidelines.

"At the end of the game I was under great stress and under the impression of suffering a great injustice," Repka explained in a statement.

Sparta play a UEFA Cup clash with Denmark's Odense on Thursday, the same day the Czech football disciplinary commission is due to discuss the incident.

Ramos ready for debut

AFP, London



Arsenal and Sevilla will be hoping to continue their sparkling early season form when they kick-off their Champions League group stage campaigns at Emirates Stadium on Wednesday.

However, the Spanish club could not face a sterner test in their Champions League proper debut, visiting an Arsenal team who have not lost a home fixture in the competition since April 2004.

Both teams will be high on confidence following explosive starts to their respective league campaigns.

Arsenal are top of the English Premier League following a 3-1 win at arch rivals Tottenham on Saturday whilst Sevilla continued their 100 percent record in La Liga with a 4-1 win over Recreativo Huelva at the weekend.

Sevilla coach Juande Ramos, who is reportedly being courted by Arsenal's north London rivals Tottenham, urged his team to draw on their European successes of the past two years, which saw them emerge with two UEFA Cups and a European Super Cup.

He said: "I hope we are ready -- in theory we should be having won the UEFA Cup twice. We have had two great seasons and now we have a new challenge in the Champions League, hopefully we can have similar success."

"I think we can make up for any lack of experience through sheer enthusiasm. Although we haven't played at this level

before, we have great desire," he added.

The former Malaga coach acknowledged his players were lacking big match know-how, going into Group H, which also includes Steaua Bucharest and Slavia Prague.

"We are going in with a lack of experience but with tremendous excitement," he said.

"There are no easy opponents in Europe and we will be up against prestigious clubs, particularly Arsenal and Steaua. Unlike those two, us and Slavia are new to the tournament yet I think ours is an attractive group and a competitive one," he added. Ramos will take encouragement from the prolific start to the season by former Tottenham striker Frederic Kanoute and the recent displays of defender Daniel Alves.

The Brazilian appears to have reconciled with Ramos following the tragic death of defender Antonio Puerta, who suffered heart failure after Sevilla's first league game of the season.

Despite the Spaniard's lack of experience, Gunners' man-

FIXTURES

AFP, Paris

(all times 18:45 GMT):

Group E

Barcelona (ESP) v Lyon (FRA)

Rangers (SCO) v VfB Stuttgart (GER)

Group F

Roma (ITA) v Dynamo Kiev (UKR)

Sporting Lisbon (POR) v Man Utd (ENG)

Group G

Fenerbahce (TUR) v Inter Milan (ITA)

PSV (NED) v CSKA Moscow (RUS)

Group H

Arsenal (ENG) v Sevilla (ESP)

Slavia Prague (CZE) v Steaua Bucharest (ROM)

ager Arsene Wenger is not expecting an easy game.

"I know Sevilla very well and I think that they are one of the best sides in Europe," he told the UEFA website.

"It is important for us to play well as we are at home and we will need to be very focused both to prove that we are good enough at this level and, more importantly, to put us in a good position to qualify," he added.

The Frenchman, who has recently signed a contract extension to keep him at Arsenal until 2011, told of his enthusiasm for the competition.

"It's exciting, an adventure which, unfortunately, can often lead to disappointment because you can't reach the final every year but it's always a huge pleasure to be involved," he said.

"Our first expectation is to qualify from the group stage. Then you hope for a draw that will allow you to go as far as possible," he added.

The pre-season departure of France striker Thierry Henry to Barcelona led critics to predict a difficult season for the 2006 Champions League runners-up, especially in the attacking department.

However, many players have chipped in with goals to propel the Gunners to the Premier League summit.

Key to Arsenal's European hopes will be Spain midfielder Francesc Fabregas, who has already claimed five goals this season, and Togo striker Emmanuel Adebayor, who will be looking to add to his season's tally of three goals.



PHOTO: AFP

Arsenal midfielder Cesc Fabregas plays a pass during a training session at London Colney on Tuesday ahead of tonight's Champions League clash against Sevilla in London.

'It only gets harder'

INTERNET, undated



AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti believes the Champions League will be harder to win this year than it was last season.

The European Champions begin the defence of their title against Benfica on Tuesday night and the manager knows that retaining their crown presents a difficult challenge.

"To repeat yourself is difficult," he said. "Especially in a competition like this one, where everything must go the right way, especially in the period from March onwards. However it remains a motivation, not a worry."

"The Champions League represents an important objective, this year we also have the World Club Cup which is equally

important.

"When this competition starts we always feel something particular. We start as European champions, trying to reach the objective which is making the final."

Ancelotti will have virtually a full squad to choose from with Andrea Pirlo the only doubt due to a calf injury.

The Rossoneri will be favourites to beat Benfica despite a slow start to their domestic campaign which has seen them pick up just five points from their opening three games.

The manager anticipates, however, that the Portuguese outfit will provide a stern test and with the added spice of Manuel Rui Costa returning to the San Siro he knows the visitors will be up for the challenge.

"Benfica is a team which has maintained its tradition like all Portuguese sides," he said.

"It has excellent offensive qualities, we saw them during the qualification for the Champions

League and the start of the Portuguese league.

"With regards to Rui Costa, he's a great protagonist of the past years and we have a great memory of him and we have a lot of affection for him."

"He's a player who despite his age still manages to play at this levels. I have a lot of respect for him and his professionalism proven by his great performances with Benfica."

Benfica boss Jose Antonio Camacho has a host of injury problems going into the match with influential defensive midfielder Armando Petit missing out after injuring knee ligaments at the weekend.

He joins goalkeeper Moreira (knee) and defenders Luisao (knee), Andre Luiz (foot), and Marc Zoro (thigh) on the sidelines while summer signing Freddy Adu - who has yet to make his debut for the club - is not expected to make the squad.

Meira wants winning start

INTERNET, undated

Stuttgart captain Fernando Meira believes it is vital his side get their Champions League campaign off to a winning start against Rangers.

With Barcelona and Lyon for Group E rivals, Meira claims Stuttgart will need to get the better of Rangers to stand any chance of reaching the last 16.

"We must win in Glasgow to go any further," said the 29-year-old Portuguese defender. "Lyon and Barcelona are the favourites."

Meira's view was not shared by head coach Armin Veh, however.

"A victory would be the ideal result," Veh said. "But I could live with a draw."

Stuttgart midfielder Thomas Hitzlsperger has been ruled out of Wednesday's clash.

The injury to his right foot has been specified as inflammation of a toe which has left the former Aston Villa player in pain.

The 25-year-old Germany star had hoped to play in the opening Group E game at Ibrox, but now faces a battle to be fit for the weekend match against Werder Bremen in the Bundesliga.

Easy going for Kirilenko

AFP, Kolkata

Russian fourth seed Maria Kirilenko breezed through to the second round with a 6-2, 6-2 win over India's Neha Uberoi at the WTA Sunfeast Open here on Monday.

The on-field action was however overshadowed by the last-minute pull-out by local favourite Sania Mirza with a right wrist injury.

Third seeded Mirza, one of the biggest attractions at this 175,000-dollar Tier III event, will also miss out on the Korean Open next week in Seoul and is a doubtful starter in Tokyo the week after.

"I was looking forward to this meet and am very upset that this injury is keeping me away from the courts," Mirza said in a statement.

"My fans here have always been very supportive and I was keen to perform well in Kolkata. I wish all the players, especially my Indian compatriots, a great and exciting tournament," she said.

Another Russian in fray, Ekaterina Ivanova, also made it to the next round with a 6-3, 2-6, 6-2 win over Britain's Naomi Cavaday, while Australian Casey Dellacqua defeated Canadian Aleksandra Wozniak 6-2, 6-3.

In other matches of the day, Indian wild card Kyra Shroff was blown away by eighth seed Yung-Jan Chan 6-0, 6-0 while Slovakia's Jarmila Gajdosova got the better of Yulia Fedosova of France 6-3, 6-4.

Rooney's timely return

AFP, Lisbon



Sir Alex Ferguson will let Wayne Rooney off the leash as Manchester United start their Champions League challenge at Sporting Lisbon on Wednesday.

Rooney has been sidelined since breaking a metatarsal bone in United's first match of the season against Reading, but he is set to feature at the Jose Alvalade Stadium.

The England striker returned to training last week and was keen to play against Everton on Saturday, but Ferguson wasn't prepared to risk him until he was fully fit.

With United strangely lacklustre in attack so far this season, Rooney's return is perfectly timed.

The Premier League champions haven't scored more than once

in any of their seven matches this season. Successive 1-0 wins over Tottenham, Sunderland and Everton have been more notable for United's lack of fluency than the results.

But having Rooney fit and desperate to make up for lost time should go a long way to solving the problem.

The last time Rooney broke a toe was before the 2006 World Cup. Just weeks after suffering the injury he announced his return to action by walking into the England team's hotel and proclaiming 'the big man is back'. Unfortunately he was far from match fit and made little impact in the tournament.

This time Ferguson believes Rooney's rehabilitation has been managed to ensure he come back with a bang. Rooney won't be the only prodigal son returning to the fold on Wednesday.

United wingers Cristiano Ronaldo and Nani left Sporting for

Old Trafford, the former in 2003 and the latter this close-season, while Ferguson's assistant Carlos Queiroz coached the club in the mid-1990s.

Ronaldo's impact in England has been immense and he was United's driving force as they won the Premier League title for the first time in four years last season.

Nani has already showed signs of emulating Ronaldo since his 15 million pounds transfer.

He has played a decisive role in each of United's last three wins. His deflected long-range strike earned a 1-0 win over Tottenham, while his crosses were responsible for Louis Saha's winner against Sunderland and Nemanja Vidic's late goal at Everton on Saturday.

If Rooney, Ronaldo and Nani are to enjoy triumphant returns, United, beaten in the semi-finals by AC Milan last season, will have to find a way to improve on their

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No omelette without eggs!



AFP, London

Jose Mourinho gave an insight into how he tends an injury-hit squad after revealing both Didier Drogba and Frank Lampard would not play in Tuesday's Champions League match against Rosenborg.

Chelsea seem certain to start the Champions League Group B match at Stamford Bridge with Andriy Shevchenko and Saloman Kalou in the forward positions, though neither player have made electrifying starts to their Premier League campaigns as Mourinho's side struggled for goals.

Mourinho should not be unduly troubled by the Norwegian club, but perhaps a more pressing concern for him will be the forthcoming league fixture against Manchester United on Sunday.

In the meantime, the Portuguese coach must juggle his squad further after receiving news that Peruvian striker Claudio Pizarro will also miss the game with a calf injury.

"If you have no eggs, you have no omelette," said Mourinho. "And it also depends on the quality of the eggs. In the supermarket you have class one eggs, and you also have class two and class three."

"Some are more expensive than others and they give you better omelettes. Sometimes the class one eggs are not in Waitrose (an English supermarket) so you don't go there."

"How equipped is my squad to deal with the competitions? It depends on the players. For me the problem is not to have three or four

players injured. For me the problem is which three or four are injured."

"When you have Drogba, Lampard, Ballack and Carvalho out you are speaking about 40 per cent of the team, and the spine of the team. That is, one defender, two midfielders and one striker."

"After that we go for Pizarro, he is the second target man on the team, and the obvious replacement for Drogba, and he is out with a calf injury."

"Then you have Wayne Bridge injured and so you have Ashley Cole playing every minute of every game, for club and for his national team. With these players out then you are probably talking about

taking away 50 per cent of the goals that the team has scored. That's the reality."

This season promises to be the most pressurized yet for Mourinho, who was appointed as successor to Claudio Ranieri on the back of winning the Champions League with Porto in 2004.

He won the Premier League title in each of his first two seasons, as well as enjoying two League Cup triumphs and more success in the FA Cup last season.

He cannot ignore, however, the insistence of his chief executive Peter Kenyon, who says Chelsea must win the Champions League in the near future, even if the edgy

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PHOTO: AFP

India legend Sachin Tendulkar plays a forehand return while swapping his bat for a tennis racquet during an exhibition match at the Sunfeast Open in Kolkata on Tuesday.



JOSE MOURINHO