

Terry will lead England

Football

AFP, London

John Terry has been restored as England captain for Wednesday's friendly against the United States at Wembley.

England coach Fabio Capello confirmed Terry will lead the team for the first time since the Italian took charge.

Rio Ferdinand captained England in their last match against France in Paris and Steven Gerrard skipped the side in Capello's first match with Switzerland when Terry was injured.

Now Terry, who was captain under Steve McClaren, finally has the chance to earn the armband on a permanent basis ahead of next season's World Cup qualifiers.

Capello wouldn't confirm if Terry will also lead his country in Sunday's friendly against Trinidad and Tobago in Port of Spain.

But it is a much-needed boost for Terry, whose missed penalty cost Chelsea the chance to win the Champions League against Manchester United last week.

The captain is John Terry. I decided before the Champions League final. We have had Steven Gerrard, Rio Ferdinand and now John as captain," Capello said.

"At this moment it is a good decision for John after a not nice experience on Wednesday.

"I told him he would be the captain and he was very happy. It is very important to be a leader and John is a leader."

After the agony of losing the Champions League to United on penalties, Terry, Ashley Cole, Frank Lampard, Joe Cole and Wayne Bridge arrived at England's training camp in Hertfordshire at a low ebb.

Capello will try to lift the spirits of the Chelsea stars and is keen to use Lampard for the first time after the midfielder missed England's last two matches through injury.

"It is very important that the Chelsea players play with the national team so they can forget the last game in Moscow. I plan to use all the Chelsea players in these two games," he said.

Los Angeles Galaxy star David Beckham is also in the squad after winning his 100th cap against France and Capello praised the midfielder's fitness following the start of the Major League Soccer season.

"He's very fresh, like USA's players," Capello said. "They've just started the season. The future is good for him, there's no problem. He's very fit."

However Capello, who was speaking to the media in English for the first time at his pre-match briefing, has no intention of taking it easy on his troops, even at the end of a draining campaign.

He has been working them hard with double training sessions and

insisted there have been no complaints, despite reports that some players were privately unhappy with such a gruelling regime.

"We want to recover their minds and bodies after 10 days holidays but the players have worked very well," Capello said.

While players and fans maybe planning their holidays, Capello sees the 10-day get-together as an invaluable chance to get his message across to the squad.

After these games the Italian believes he will have a good idea of the team he will use to start next season's first World Cup qualifier against Andorra.

"The two friendlies are very important because I will know what I think about every position after these games," he said.

"It will be a strong game. I saw their three games and the United States scored seven goals, with only two conceded.

"They have good organisation and are very fast on the counter-attack. They are scored a lot of goals from free-kicks and corners because they jump very well."

"I think it is a very important test for us. They are very fresh. For us it will be important to play at a high level.

"I am happy and afraid because nine players were not with me at the start of the camp because they played in the Champions League final. I was happy for the players but not for me.

Sweden edge Slovenia

AFP, Stockholm

Tobias Linderoth's first goal in more than seven years for Sweden saw the Euro 2008 finalists beat Slovenia 1-0 in a warm-up match for the finals on Monday, though, worryingly star striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic sat out the match with his knee bandaged.

Linderoth, who was winning his 74th cap but his first since suffering a hip injury in November, scored the game's only goal in the 41st minute to show coach Lars Lagerback that he is fit enough to make the final squad.

Linderoth seized on the ball and forced his way first past a Slovenian defender and then shot it fiercely past goalkeeper Samir Handanovic.

Slovenia dominated the match in the second half and had at least two good chances to equalize -- in particular when the ball hit the arm of Swedish midfielder Daniel Andersson in the 70th minute but referee William Collum chose not to award a penalty kick -- but the team remained goalless.

Ibrahimovic, who recently helped inspire Inter Milan to a third successive Serie A title and is expected to be one of Sweden's top stars at Euro, sat on the bench with his knee bandaged after a tendon injury diagnosed in February.

Deschamps on Blues shortlist

INTERNET, undated

Former Chelsea midfielder Didier Deschamps claims he is on the shortlist to become the new Blues manager following the sacking of Avram Grant.

The 39-year-old played for the club for the 1999/2000 season when they won the FA Cup and was part of the France team that claimed both the World Cup and the European Championship.

As a manager he then led Monaco to the 2004 Champions League final before guiding Juventus back to Serie A after they had been relegated following the match-fixing scandal.

However, he resigned in May 2007 and has been out of management since but now he believes he is in the frame to become the new boss at Stamford Bridge.

Deschamps told Monaco-based radio station RMC: "Three or four managers are on the list and I am one of them."

"It would be hard to refuse Chelsea. I want to return to coaching. I needed to rest, but I feel capable of achieving good things now."

"Breaking back into management is complicated because there are not always the opportunities, but the Chelsea position is now free."

"I am flattered to be considered a possible candidate for the role."

"They sacked their manager not because of the results they achieved, but because of their wish to play a more attacking, attractive style of football in the next few years."

"They are a very big club, that I know well."

"We will see over the next few days how it goes but any big-name manager who is available would interest them."

Macedonia hold Poland

AFP, Reutigen

Poland's dreams of making an impression at their first ever appearance at a European championship finals looked anything but likely after a 1-1 draw with Macedonia in a warm-up match on Monday.

While coach Leo Beenhakker will point to the fact that he played mostly a second string side, those players will have done little to ease their nerves ahead of the veteran Dutchman cutting his squad back to the obligatory 23 on Wednesday.

The Macedonians had shocked their opponents when Goran Maznov gave them the lead from a freekick on the stroke of half-time after a chaotic and dull first-half.

The Poles, who have another chance to impress Beenhakker in Tuesday's clash with Albania, had little fluency or speed on or off the ball and had to wait till seven minutes from the end to level the match and that only through a penalty by Radoslaw Matusiak.

Poland -- who will co-host Euro 2012 with Ukraine -- start their Group B campaign at Euro 2008 against Germany on June 8 in Klagenfurt and then have matches against co-hosts Austria and finally with Croatia.

UAE to host Club WC

AFP, Sydney

The United Arab Emirates will host the Club World Cup in 2009 and 2010, world governing body FIFA announced here on Tuesday.

FIFA president Sepp Blatter said the Club World Cup would return to Japan, which has hosted the revamped tournament since 2005, for 2011 and 2012.



Sweden's veteran striker Henrik Larsson (L) faces a slide tackle from Slovenia's Mitja Morec during their international friendly at the Ullevi Stadium in Gothenburg on Monday.

Swedes look to Zlatan

AFP, Stockholm



Swedish striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic could be just as well called an 'enigma' than his nickname 'genius' given his inconsistent displays for club and country.

Going into Euro 2008 Swedish fans will be hoping that the Ibrahimovic that turns up is the one that came off the bench to score a brace and secure Inter Milan's third successive Serie A title on Sunday than the one who failed to score in their qualifiers and sneak in as the second placed team behind Spain, who they will oppose again in their first round group.

The 26-year-old -- son of Bosnian immigrants -- has consistently starred for his respective clubs Ajax, Juventus and Inter but intermittently for his country despite rave reviews before major tournaments.

"He (Ibrahimovic) knows everything and is impossible to mark," gaped Mihajlovic, who starred for the former Yugoslavia and for Sampdoria and AS Roma in Serie A.

Despite such plaudits Ibrahimovic has not always gelled well with the placid and stable Swedish people even if he was

named 2007 sports person of the year ahead of hurdler Susanna Kallur.

One particular incident irked them especially, deemed by the Swedes to be emblematic of his arrogance and star status, was when he returned to the poor neighbourhood of the town of Malmo where he was brought up driving a Ferrari.

Ibrahimovic insists though that he is a different person from those days after having had two sons Maximilian and Vincent.

For as many people who don't admire him there are also many diehard fans who cite his genius, highlighted by a goal he scored for Ajax in a Dutch league match against NAC Breda in August 2004 in which he picked the ball up 40 metres out dribbled round several opposing players and scored.

Love him or hate him Ibrahimovic is never dull but Sweden awaits the time that he really replicates in a major finals what he has shown he can do at club level -- should he do so then the 'enigma' will really have become the 'genius'.

Marin likely to play

AFP, Berlin



The old adage of sink or swim could well be the term to be applied to German teenager Marko Marin as he looks likely to be one of the surprise selections for Euro 2008 after sparkling in a training camp.

The 19-year-old Bosnian-born midfielder looks like being as surprising a selection as that of then England manager Sven-Goran Eriksson of the untied teenager Theo Walcott for the 2006 World Cup finals -- he didn't get to play one minute.

However, all the indications are that Marin will be given his head among the battle-hardened veterans such as Michael Ballack and Bastian Schweinsteiger, who has accrued nearly 50 caps at the young age of 23.

Quite remarkable really given that Marin has not yet played one Bundesliga match, though he played a significant role in Borussia

Monchengladbach finishing top of the Second Division, scoring four times and creating 13 goals.

Certainly first choice German international striker Miroslav Klose has no doubts about his ability to handle the biggest stages after seeing him in action over the past week at the training camp in Majorca.

"He (Marin) is very good technically, very adept at dribbling, but what has impressed me the most is that he is not afraid to talk and to put his point across," said the 74-times capped Klose, who with 38 goals is Germany's leading scorer still playing.

Marin, who has even drawn comparisons with Barcelona's Argentinian youngster Lionel Messi, has also drawn eulogies from German coach Joachim Loew.

"I knew after having just watched him for 10 minutes that it was imperative to have him in the squad," said Loew, who admitted to only having watched him once for Monchengladbach.

"He has such a cheekiness, such a carefreeness when he is on the

pitch."

Marin, who has been capped five times by the Germans at Under-21 level, is hoping that his decision back in January to turn his back on Bosnia and declare his loyalty to Germany will pay off at the first go in respect of the senior side.

"My dream is to play at Euro, and I am going to do everything possible to persuade the coach to keep me, even if when one is a novice, it is always more difficult," said 'the little magician'.

Ironically Marin's extraordinary rise could prove painful for David Odonkor, who was then coach Jurgen Klinsmann's surprise pick for the 2006 World Cup finals, which proved a masterstroke as his speed and crossing ability played a role in them finishing third.

Now he looks like being dispensed with when Loew names his definitive 23-man squad on Wednesday -- a salutary lesson for Marin of the highs and lows in football.

The Beautiful Game can also be the Cruel Game.

Guus unveils Euro squad

AFP, Moscow

Russia coach Guus Hiddink on Tuesday unveiled his final selection of 23 players to play in the Euro 2008 finals.

Hiddink said he had to exclude midfielders Oleg Ivanov of Samara and Spartak Moscow's Alexander Pavlenko from the team's line-up.

"I was satisfied with all of my 25 players attitude to our preparations," Hiddink said. "They all worked hard and productively."

"But I could select only 23, of them to play in Austria and Switzerland. We decided that Ivanov and Pavlenko would not be included in our squad. However, we asked Ivanov to stay with the team until the end of the championship."

"We will also ask Spartak management for a permission to leave Pavlenko in the team."

Russia open their Euro 2008 campaign against Spain on June 10 followed by holders Greece (June 14) and Sweden (June 18) in the group stage.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Igor Akinfeyev (CSKA Moscow), Vladimir Gabulov (Perm), Vyacheslav Malafayev (Zenit St Petersburg)

Defenders: Alexander Anyukov (Zenit St Petersburg), Alexei Berezutsky, Vasily Berezutsky, Sergei Ignashevich (all CSKA Moscow), Denis Kolodin (Dynamo Moscow), Renat Yanyayev (Lokomotiv Moscow)

Midfielders: Diniyar Bilyaletdinov, Dmitry Torbiniy (both Lokomotiv Moscow), Vladimir Bystrov (Spartak Moscow), Yuri Zhirkov (CSKA Moscow), Konstantin Zyryanov, Roman Shirokov (both Zenit St Petersburg), Igor Semshov (Dynamo Moscow), Sergei Semak (Kazan)

Strikers: Roman Adamov (FC Moscow), Roman Pavlyuchenko (Spartak Moscow), Pavel Pogrebnyak, Andrei Arshavin (both Zenit St Petersburg), Dmitry Sychev (Lokomotiv Moscow), Ivan Saenko (Nuremberg)

FIFA shelves altitude ban

AFP, Sydney

World governing body FIFA has shelved its controversial ban on international football matches played at high altitude, its president Sepp Blatter said Tuesday.

Blatter said FIFA's executive committee had decided provisionally to suspend the measure, which particularly incensed Bolivia, at a meeting ahead of this week's Congress here.

"Let us reopen the discussion," Blatter told a press conference here Tuesday.

The Confederation of South American Football has been demanding that FIFA push back the ban on playing matches above 2,500 metres (8,200 feet) until after the 2010 World Cup qualifying campaign.

Bolivia's football federation claimed it was discriminated against by the FIFA ban. The capital La Paz's Hernando Siles stadium is 3,577m above sea-level.

Ecuador was another affected South American nation with its capital, Quito, at 2,830m.

Furious Bolivian president Evo Morales had condemned Blatter as a 'dictator' and was planning on taking his battle to the United Nations.

Blatter has proposed replacing the altitude ban with a package of laws regulating 'Football Under Extreme Conditions' -- including heat, humidity and cold as well as pollution.

Kahn's final appearance

Football

AFP, Kolkata

Some 100,000 Indians came together to bid legendary German goalkeeper Oliver Kahn a fond farewell when he began his last match as a professional for Bayern Munich on Tuesday.

Fans in this football-mad city packed the Salt Lake stadium to watch Kahn's Bundesliga champions side play the local Mohun Bagan club in a friendly match that began at 6.15 pm (1245 GMT).

It is the last leg of Bayern Munich's nine-day tour of Asia that also had stop-overs in Jakarta and

Bali in Indonesia.

The 38-year-old Kahn, a three-time world goalkeeper of the year, will retire to become a television expert after claiming a record eight Bundesliga titles and featuring in a league record 557 matches.

Kahn, who also played 86 matches for Germany during his sparkling 20-year career, was adjudged the best player of the 2002 World Cup held in Japan and South Korea when he led them to the final.

Tuesday's friendly also marks the last game for Bayern's coach Ottmar Hitzfeld, who is due to take over the Switzerland national team in July.

Former German captain Jurgen Klinsmann will replace Hitzfeld at Bayern.

"The chance to play for the last time in front of so many people is certainly out of the ordinary," Kahn told local reporters ahead of his maiden appearance on Indian soil.

"I want to say thanks for the enthusiastic welcome."

"Seeing players of Oliver Kahn's calibre is a rare privilege," said Indian Football Association official Utpal Ganguli. "I don't believe we will stage another such game in the foreseeable future."

India, a nation better known for its mass following for cricket, is ranked 151st in football. But there is great interest in European football, which is beamed live to television screens across the country every week.

'It is up to C'Ron'

Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid is awaiting a decision by Manchester United's Cristiano Ronaldo on his possible transfer to the Spanish champions, but are hopeful of signing him, Spanish newspapers said Tuesday.

Real president Ramon Calderon told a meeting of the club's board on Monday that "it is up to the player to commit himself publicly," the newspaper Marca said.

Real is ready to pay at least 80 million euros (126 million dollars) for Ronaldo and has offered him a

five-year contract worth nine million euros a year, Spanish media said.

Coach Bernd Schuster told the AS newspaper that Ronaldo is "big priority" for the club and that the Portuguese striker will blend in well at the team.

"If he comes here and he scores 30 goals, we can be assured of at least another title," he said.

Since Manchester United beat Chelsea in Moscow last week to claim their third European Champions League title, media in England and Spain have been constantly linking the 23-year star player, who scored 42 times for Manchester in all competitions last

season, with Real.

Spanish newspapers said Real is hopeful of landing Ronaldo as he has not ruled out a transfer to the Spanish champions, even if Manchester United wants to keep him.

Ronaldo, who has now joined up with the rest of the Portugal squad at their training camp where they are preparing for Euro 2008, has said there will be news on any move "in two or three weeks."

The newspaper El Mundo said however that some directors at the club are concerned about the price they would have to pay for Ronaldo, as Real already has debts of 250 million euros.

Ballack fired up

AFP, Berlin



German captain Michael Ballack shrugged off his disappointment at losing out to Manchester United in last Wednesday's Champions League by saying on Monday he couldn't wait for Euro 2008 to begin.

The 31-year-old Chelsea playmaker had watched unbelievably as first club captain John Terry missed what would have been the winning penalty and then Nicolas Anelka -- who had refused to take one of the first five penalties -- have his sudden death effort saved by Edwin van der Sar to give United victory.

However, Ballack insisted on Monday after joining up with his national teammates as they prepare for a pre Euro friendly against Belarus on Tuesday that four days with his family had allowed him to relax and dull somewhat the disappointing result.

"I am delighted to be back among the squad, I am really impatient for the tournament to begin," said Ballack, who has scored 35 goals in 79 matches for Germany.

"I have had several days to get it (the Champions League defeat) out of my system."

"But now, I begin again and its full steam ahead," added Ballack.

Ballack is expected to play for between half-an-hour and 45 minutes against Belarus, the penultimate warm-up match for the Germans ahead of the beginning of Euro, which is being co-hosted by Austria and Switzerland and runs

from June 7-29.

Six players, though, will take no part in the match in Kaiserslautern having stayed behind at the Germans training camp in Mallorca.

They include the injury-plagued Tim Borowski, who is suffering

from 'flu, Mario Gomez has a calf worry, Rene Adler has a bruised hip and Kevin Kuranyi has been rested.

Germany are in Group B along with Austria, Croatia and debutants Poland, who begin their campaign against the Germans in Klagenfurt on June 8.



Germany captain Michael Ballack (L) jokes with teammate Oliver Neuville during a training session in Homburg on Monday.