

Terry warns against Sheva

SOCCERNET

England captain John Terry has warned his international colleagues not to underestimate former Chelsea teammate Andriy Shevchenko in Wednesday night's World Cup qualifier as the Ukraine striker will be hungry to prove people wrong.

Shevchenko endured a miserable two years at Stamford Bridge before returning to AC Milan, where he had scored 127 goals in 208 matches, but Terry is wary of the 32-year-old undermining England's perfect start in qualifiers on the road to South Africa next year.

"Things didn't go too well for him at Chelsea but he is a quality player, a great finisher and, when you forget about him, he pops up with a goal," Terry said. "He has a first-class touch and a great finish. We need to be very aware of him. He is a big player over there so, when he plays there, he says the pressure is on him and he always wants to do well."

"He'll be coming here for two reasons: to prove Chelsea (wrong) and to prove himself."

Shevchenko is still Ukraine's most famous footballer, with an international strike rate of roughly a goal every two games, and coach Olexiy Mykhaylychenko is hoping the striker can shake off his poor form to lead his side to victory.

"Shevchenko has played very little this year - he had lots of injuries, some poor matches, but his experience and desire are priceless for us," Mykhaylychenko said. "Young players will progress faster with him nearby."

The striker himself is grateful to Mykhaylychenko for showing faith in his abilities and said: "The national team gives me an opportunity to do what I love doing, which is to play football. But for the national team coach it is not easy to put a player on the pitch who isn't playing."

Shevchenko added: "I dream of scoring at Wembley because it would be my 40th goal with the national team. I dream especially of scoring a goal that allows us to qualify."

McGeady boost for Ireland

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Republic of Ireland winger Aiden McGeady handed manager Giovanni Trapattoni a boost when he was able to complete light training ahead of Wednesday's World Cup qualifying clash with holders Italy.

The Celtic midfielder suffered a knock to his knee during Saturday's 1-1 draw with Bulgaria at Croke Park and was immediately listed as a doubt for the game in Bari.

However, although he did not join in with his teammates as they trained at Malahide's Gannon Park home on Monday morning before jetting off to Italy, he was able to get some work under his belt to preserve hopes of making it for the vital game in Group Eight.

Goalkeeper Shay Given, defender Richard Dunne and striker Robbie Keane were also missing, although all three were simply rested as a precaution and are expected to be available at the San Nicola Stadium.



Brazil forward Julio Baptista (L) is ecstatic after scoring against Ecuador during their 2010 World Cup qualifier at the Atahualpa Stadium in Quito on Sunday.

Work to do for Brazil

AFP, Montevideo



Brazil have work to do after the five-times world champions could only draw 1-1 in Ecuador in Sunday's World Cup qualifier.

Julio Baptista drew first blood for the auriverde with 17 minutes remaining but Noboa's equaliser a minute from time for the hosts left the Brazilians fourth in the continental group - the final guaranteed qualifying slot for next year's finals in South Africa.

Brazil, who have never failed to qualify for the finals, have 18 points having won just four of their 11 games to date - five points less than group leaders Paraguay, who saw their lead over Argentina reined in Saturday with a 2-0 loss to improving Uruguay.

The Uruguayans, whose current fifth spot would be enough only to earn a crack at a playoff with a North, Central America and Caribbean zone side, are now at Brazil's shoulder with 16 points.

Baptista, brought on just moments earlier for Ronaldinho, fired a low effort past Ecuador keeper Jose Francisco Cevallos but Noboa levelled matters on the rebound after Cristian Benitez saw an effort blocked.

The star-studded visitors only held onto a point thanks to a series of fine saves by their Inter Milan goalkeeper Julio Cesar.

"We didn't play our best football - and they never stopped running," the shot-stopper admitted on Brazilian television after Brazil stretched their winless run in Quito to more than a quarter of a century, their last success coming in the Copa America in 1983.

Brazil, without the injured Kaka, had

gambled in arriving just hours before the game at energy-sapping altitude in Quito in the Andes.

The strategy backfired as they were unable to clinch a win which would have vaulted them into second place.

Instead, that status belongs to Argentina after Diego Maradona's side thumped makeweights Venezuela 4-0 with goals from Barcelona playmaker Lionel Messi, Manchester United's Carlos Tevez, Maxi Rodriguez and Sergio Aguero, the father of Maradona's grandson.

Maradona described the outcome as "better than expected" after his first official match in charge following friendly wins away to France and Scotland.

Long-time pacesetter Paraguay suffered a jolt after Diego Forlan and Diego Lugano netted for Uruguay at Montevideo's Centenario stadium to inflict only the second defeat of the series on the visitors, who nonetheless have a four-point cushion at the top. Paraguay coach Gerardo Martino said his men had to buckle under if they are to book their passage to the finals for the eighth time and fourth in a row.

"We know full well we have not qualified yet. We'll keep on trying."

"We played enough good football to earn a draw," he insisted.

Chile moved into third spot after a 3-1 away win in Peru, who remain glued to the bottom of the table.

Colombia have hopes of clinching at least a playoff berth after a 2-0 win over second-bottom Bolivia saw them move to within two points of Uruguay.

The top four teams qualify for the finals and the fifth-placed team enters a home-and-away playoff with the fourth-placed team from the North, Central America and Caribbean zone.

Schweini fit for Wales tie

AFP, Berlin

Germany midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger is fit to face Wales for Wednesday's World Cup qualifier at Cardiff's Millennium Stadium, despite picking up a groin strain last weekend.

Bayern Munich's Schweinsteiger scored Germany's third goal in the 4-0 win over minnows Liechtenstein in Leipzig on Saturday, but missed Monday's training session as a precautionary measure to help his groin recover.

"Bastian has a slight groin strain, but there is no danger of him missing the Wales game," said Germany team manager Oliver Bierhoff.

"The fact he missed training was just a precautionary measure, he just needs another half day of rest."

And Hamburg winger Piotr Trochowski, who scored the winner against the Welsh in Germany's 1-0 World Cup qualifier win last October, is fit for selection having missed the Liechtenstein win with a knee injury.

FIFA asks for report

Football

AP, Zurich

FIFA on Monday asked for a full report into what caused a soccer stadium tragedy that killed at least 19 people in the Ivory Coast.

In addition to the deaths, 132 people were wounded on Sunday when the crowd stampeded before a World Cup qualifying match against Malawi in the capital Abidjan.

FIFA president Sepp Blatter sent a message of sympathy to the victims, and asked for a report from the Ivorian soccer association and city authorities.

"I wish to express extreme sorrow and extend our condolences to the Ivorian football community and, most importantly, to family, friends and loved ones following the tragic deaths in Abidjan yesterday," Blatter said in a statement.

FIFA, soccer's global governing body which organizes the World Cup, said it had asked for the reports "to establish the sequence of events that happened outside the stadium before the match."

Ivory Coast state television reported that prime minister Guillaume Soro has convened an emergency cabinet meeting later Monday to discuss the incident.

The stadium was packed with spectators,

many drawn to see star striker Didier Drogba return from England to play for his home country.

The crush set off a panic 40 minutes before kickoff. Witnesses said fans at the Felix Houphouet-Boigny stadium rushed toward the field, causing a wall to come down and setting off a stampede.

The match went ahead as scheduled. Ivory Coast won 5-0 with Chelsea striker Drogba scoring twice.

"It was the first match in the final stage of African qualifying for the 2010 World Cup being played in South Africa. It also counted toward qualifying for the 2010 African Cup of Nations hosted by Angola next January.

Danny Jordaan, who heads the 2010 World Cup organizing committee, pledged on Monday that the problems which too often lead to stadium stampedes on the continent would not be an issue during the tournament. Jordaan said fans without tickets would be "stopped kilometres away."

In June last year, 10 people died in an overcrowded stadium before a World Cup qualifying match between Liberia and Gambia.

The victims at the Samuel K. Doe Stadium in Monrovia suffocated when dozens of people fell from upper-level seats onto spectators below after a metal barrier gave way.

That match also went ahead after the tragedy.

VDV denies Chelsea link

INTERNET, undated

Rafael van der Vaart has denied reports suggesting he wanted to join Chelsea.

Reports in England last week attributed quotes to van der Vaart saying he would be interested in leaving Real Madrid to move to Stamford Bridge.

Van der Vaart's future at the Bernabeu has been the subject of speculation with him failing to hold down a regular place in the Real side this term.

The Dutchman has moved to clear up the confusion and insists he will make a decision on his future in the summer once the situation at Madrid is clear.

"I hear there are rumours about me wanting to go to Chelsea. But I have never said that," Van der Vaart told his official website fobazo.com.

"I have not yet decided on my future. I don't know anything about it."

"At Real Madrid a lot of things are gonna happen in the summer. A new president and maybe a new coach. So far I'll just wait and see."

Jose backs '6+5 rule'

Football

SOCCERNET

Inter Milan boss Jose Mourinho has thrown his backing behind FIFA's controversial "6+5" rule, designed to limit the number of foreign players in domestic leagues, and insists that focusing on home-grown players is the right path to take.

Sepp Blatter's contentious proposal, which has the backing of 155 of FIFA's 208 member nations, states that at the start of a game a club must field at least six players who would be eligible for the national team of the country of the club.

In an interview with ESPN Mourinho said: "The sentiment I think is correct. I'm not concerned about the exact number, 3+3 or 4+4 or 5+5, that's not the point. But the philosophy of teams to look to youth policy and youth development, I think the philosophy is correct, yes."

Serie A side Internazionale famously has very few Italians at the club and this is something that Mourinho has started to address. The Portuguese had too many non-Italian players for his European squad at the start of the season and had to leave five players out of the Champions League list.

As a consequence he brought through two of the club's Italian youngsters, Davide Santon and Mario Balotelli, and Mourinho points out it is important for the fans to have local idols to identify with.

"You know, the world is global, football is global, we cannot be too much concerned about nationalities, but I think the clubs, they must invest in their formation, in players made in the club, made in the country," Mourinho said. "I think this is also about the empathy between the team and the fans."

"In this moment you can see San Siro full of people with Santon shirts. Four months ago they didn't even know Santon was at Inter Milan. In this moment they go to the stadium and wear his shirts - why?"

"Because he's Italian, because he's made at Inter, because he's a young boy, because he's a boy who can play at Inter for the next 10, 15 years. So people can create a better relation with the team when they feel the nationality is there."

But despite openly backing FIFA's idea of promoting local talent, Mourinho believes it is not something that can be imposed right away.

"We cannot do it with a finger click," the former Chelsea boss said. "I think most of the teams, they are not ready to give an immediate answer to this kind of demands, it must be step by step."

"The clubs, they cannot feel a little bit of pressure to change direction and approach this philosophy, but it is completely possible to do this in the next years."

The "6+5" rule proposed by FIFA last month has met with some tough resistance, not least from the European Commission, who argue that it would amount to discrimination in the workplace and a restriction on the free movement of workers.



The Houphouet Boigny Stadium in the aftermath of the stampede that killed at least 19 people and injured more than 130 when hundreds of fans tried to force their way into the ground in Abidjan on Monday.

Iran appoint Rutemoeller

AFP, Berlin

German coach Erich Rutemoeller has been appointed interim coach of the Iranian team after head coach Ali Daei was sacked at the weekend.

Rutemoeller, 64, who spent 10 years as assistant coach of the Germany team, joined the Iran side in January as advisor, but took over as head coach from Daei after Iran lost a World Cup qualifier 2-1 to Saudi Arabia on Saturday.

Iran, seeking a fourth appearance in the World Cup finals, are fourth in their qualifying group with six points from five games, managing only a win and three consecutive draws.

"They need to finish at least in second place to have any chance of reaching South Africa next year."

Despite not speaking Iranian, Rutemoeller will oversee the friendly game against Senegal on Wednesday in Tehran and told German tabloid Bild he has no idea how long he will remain as interim coach.

Socceroos on the brink

AFP, Singapore



Australia can clinch their place at the World Cup finals on Wednesday while the two Koreans face-off in a politically-charged clash in Seoul.

The Soccerroos take on Uzbekistan in Sydney knowing that if they win and Bahrain and Qatar draw later that night they will be winging their way to South Africa next year.

As it stands, Japan leads Asian Group A on 11 points after five games with Australia a point adrift, having played only four matches.

The Uzbeks, Qatar and Bahrain all have four points from five games.

Australia go into their match having watched Uzbekistan demolish Qatar 4-0 on Saturday and they are wary of the Central Asian heavyweights, particularly hat-trick hero Farhod Tadjiev.

"Even when we played them over there (a 1-0 win last September), we knew they were a decent team and they've got fantastic players," Soccerroos midfielder Brett Holman said of Uzbekistan.

"That was just proved by them winning 4-0 against a decent Qatar team."

"They were fantastic, they looked really sharp... and we'll have to be very sharp on Wednesday."

Captain Lucas Neill stressed that grinding out a narrow win was more important than trying to entertain.

The central defender wants Australia to build on their "mini success" at the last World Cup where they made the round of 16 and feels they should aim for a top 20 ranking.

"Now it's about consistency so we can take anyone on and be in those top 20 in the world," he said.

While the top two automatically qualify for South Africa, the third placed teams will play off

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Becks happy with role

Football

AFP, London

David Beckham insists he is happy to play a bit-part role for England despite becoming his country's most capped outfield player.

Beckham passed Bobby Moore's previous record of 108 caps when he came on as a half-time substitute in Saturday's 4-0 friendly win over Slovakia.

On his 109th appearance in an England shirt, Beckham proved his continued worth to the side, setting up Wayne Rooney with a cross for England's second goal.

Beckham's impressive cameo will have given coach Fabio Capello food for thought as the Italian prepares to pick his team to face Ukraine in Wednesday's World Cup qualifier.

A win for England would cement their

position on top of European qualifying group six and keep Capello's team firmly on course to qualify for next year's World Cup.

Capello started the Slovakia match with Tottenham winger Aaron Lennon on the right flank and his pace caused Slovakia problems at times.

Beckham admits Lennon offers a different kind of threat and he is prepared to start on the bench if it helps England get a crucial victory.

"Aaron went past players like they weren't there," Beckham said. "With the pace he's got, he's in exceptional form for Tottenham, he deserved to start."

"Everyone wants to start for England, but at the end of the day, everyone also wants to play for England."

"Substitutes can be very important. We saw that at Manchester United in the 1999 Champions League final with Teddy Sheringham and Ole Gunnar Solskjær."

"Sometimes substitutes come on and

can help secure a game, or change a game. I was happy with getting on and happy with the assist."

"It is what I have done for my whole career, and if I get a chance there are players like Wayne Rooney, Emile Heskey or Peter Crouch to get on the end of it."

"If I start, then I start. If I don't, then I am part of the team - a good team which is going forwards."

Although Beckham is now behind only goalkeeper Peter Shilton - who has 125 caps - in the all-time England appearance list, the former Manchester United star refuses to dwell on his own achievement because he is focused on Ukraine.

"I just got asked to do a picture with a shirt with 109 on the back but I did that for 100 and obviously it's a big thing for me but I don't think we should focus too much on that," he said. "But of course I just couldn't wait to get

Abbiati has knee op

AFP, Rome

AC Milan goalkeeper Christian Abbiati will be out of action for five to six months following surgery on his cruciate knee ligament, the club said on Monday.

Abbiati injured his knee two weeks ago in Milan's 5-1 victory at Siena, after which he was replaced by Brazilian Dida.

Milan said on their official website that the operation had been a complete success but not only is Abbiati's season over,



Portugal star Cristiano Ronaldo (2nd from L) plays with the ball during a training session in Lausanne on Monday.

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