



Manchester United forward Dimitar Berbatov (2nd from L) strikes an acrobatic scissor kick to score a sensational goal in their Premier League match against Sunderland at Old Trafford on Saturday. PHOTO: AFP

Sven fancies England

Football

AFP, London

Former manager Sven-Goran Eriksson has tipped England for World Cup victory in South Africa next summer, but only if they succeed in ignoring the "ludicrous" pre-tournament pressure and hype.

Eriksson, now director of football at League Two club Notts County, led England to the quarter-finals of Euro 2004 and the 2006 World Cup in Germany. But the Swede believes current manager Fabio Capello, who said Saturday that places are up for grabs in his World Cup squad, can end England's wait for a first triumph since their maiden win in 1966.

"The expectation is going to be huge. But I really think they can do a great World Cup, (get to the) semi-finals or

final," Eriksson told the Observer.

"England has a good chance and I hope they reach the final and win it. They can do it, for sure."

"But the pressure on Brazil and England is bigger than any of the other countries."

"There is pressure on the Italians. But not like here. The pressure is from a combination of the media and the public. On one hand it's ludicrous. But it's dangerous."

"I wished when I had the job that I could calm it down. Not a chance. When you are going to the big tournaments it's absolutely fantastic, beautiful. But really a little bit crazy, too."

England are already qualified for next year's football showpiece and Capello is set to use the final two qualifiers - away to Ukraine on October 10 then at home to Belarus 10

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MU pull off escape

INTERNET, undated



Manchester United scored in injury time to scrape a 2-2 draw with Sunderland at Old Trafford on Saturday, sending them a point clear at the top of the English Premier League.

Kenwyne Jones's second-half header looked to have given Sunderland a stunning win but a Patrice Evra shot was deflected in off Anton Ferdinand to give United a share of the points.

Sir Alex Ferguson's side are now one point clear of Chelsea, who host Liverpool on Sunday.

Cash-strapped Portsmouth earned their first points of the season with a fine 1-0 win at Wolverhampton Wanderers on Saturday.

But their victory was overshadowed by events at Old Trafford, where United were well off the pace and nearly paid the price

of defeat thanks to a bold display from Sunderland.

United manager Sir Alex Ferguson made a host of changes and they backfired as his side were sloppy on the ball throughout.

Sunderland were far from overawed and they were ahead on seven minutes thanks to a superb finish from Darren Bent.

United could not string more than two passes together but the deficit remained just one to half-time, at which Ferguson brought on Anderson to replace the ineffective Paul Scholes.

United were better in the second half and equalized six minutes into the second half thanks to a superb volley from Dimitar Berbatov.

But Sunderland went ahead again seven minutes later when Jones outjumped Ben Foster to head into an empty net.

Sunderland looked like they would hold on but after Kieran Richardson was sent off for a second yellow card, they

were under huge pressure and Evra's shot was deflected past Craig Gordon to salvage a draw.

At Wolves, Hassan Yebda, on loan from Benfica, headed the only goal of the game for Portsmouth after 19 minutes and Paul Hart's men hung on for a crucial win, with goalkeeper David James making several superb saves.

The result was not quite enough to lift them off the bottom of the table though as they remain one point behind West Ham United, who take on Fulham on Sunday.

But the points were a massive relief for Hart, whose side went into the game having not been paid for last week amid uncertainty surrounding the new ownership of the club.

Hart said the payments would be honoured on Monday and that new owner Sulaiman Al-Fahim plans to put 150 million pounds (238 million dollars) into the club.

"It was a great win," Hart said. "We

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Grafite upset at being subbed

AFP, Berlin

Wolfsburg's Brazil striker Grafite hit out at coach Armin Veh on Sunday for repeatedly substituting him while the defending Bundesliga champions struggle for form.

The 30-year-old was the league's top scorer last season when he scored 28 goals in 25 league games.

But recently Grafite has had to get used to being a second-half substitute.

Already taken off in the second-half of the last three German league games and two Champions League matches, Grafite was left unimpressed after being taken off after 52 minutes of Saturday's 1-1 draw with Bochum.

"I am having a difficult time at the moment," the striker, who won a single cap for Brazil in 2005, told Bild on Sunday.

"That was the fifth game I've been replaced."

"Against Bochum, I was taken off after just 52 minutes, I had barely five minutes in the second half and it's not enough."

"I am not a little boy, I have a history at this club."

Between them Grafite and striker partner Edin Dzeko scored 54 goals for Wolfsburg last season.

While Dzeko is still scoring on a regular basis, Grafite is struggling for form. Wolfsburg are sixth in the table and Veh is not impressed with the forward's comments.

"It does not interest me whether or not he is in a good mood," Veh told Bild.

"I am also not in a good mood and he did not play well."

Fine was too high, says Adebayor

SOCCERNET

Despite escaping without a ban for his goal celebration against Arsenal last month, Manchester City's Emmanuel Adebayor claims the punishment handed down by the Football Association was "excessive".

The striker was handed a two-match suspended ban and also fined £25,000 after running the full length of the pitch towards the Arsenal fans after scoring against his old club. He feels that fine was over the top.

He told The People: "They have punished me for celebrating a goal and I accept it but I think it is excessive. But now I have to forget it and just think about scoring goals without any problems."

"If I play in the Emirates and score I will celebrate of course, but I will do it with my fans."

Bayer go top

AFP, Berlin



Bayer Leverkusen took over at the top of the Bundesliga on Saturday as they hammered struggling Nuremberg 4-0 while both Bayern Munich and defending champions Wolfsburg drew.

With leaders Hamburg playing bottom side Hertha Berlin - who have announced Friedhelm Funkel as their new coach - on Sunday, Leverkusen blitzed Nuremberg with three first-half goals.

Bayer got a dream start when Toni Kroos netted from a direct free-kick after just two minutes and then Germany midfielder Simon Rolfes netted with a spot-kick on 28 minutes.

Leverkusen striker Eren Derdiyok added to Nuremberg's misery when he scored in the 34th minute before his partner up front Steffen Kiessling headed home the fourth goal on 68 minutes to give Bayer's goal difference a boost.

Leverkusen will stay top unless Hamburg win by three or more goals on Sunday, while

Bayern were held to a 0-0 draw at home to Cologne which leaves them seventh.

Wolfsburg's erratic form continues as the defending champions drew 1-1 at Bochum.

The hosts went ahead when Iran striker Vahid Hashemian netted just after the break, but Edin Dzeko scored to level for the Wolves and the point leaves them sixth in the table.

Mainz picked up their fourth win in six games with a convincing 2-1 win over Hoffenheim as midfielder Andreas Ivanschitz hit an early goal before Arisde Bance scored with a header on 11 minutes.

Hoffenheim grabbed a consolation goal through defender Andreas Ibertsberger but the defeat leaves them fourth.

Hanover ran riot with a 5-2 win over Freiburg after bolting out to a 2-0 lead as they beat Freiburg with two goals in the opening ten minutes.

Freiburg pulled a goal back, but Hanover's Tunisia defender Karim Haggui scored on the stroke of half-time to make it 3-1 at the break before Hanover made sure of the win in the second half.

Headlines for Pedro

AFP, Madrid



A terrific strike from Pedro Rodriguez helped Barcelona equal their best ever start to a league season with a nervy 1-0 home victory over Almeria on Saturday.

Barcelona's sixth successive win, matching a club record set in 1991 and 1998, also sees the defending champions replace Real Madrid at the summit of La Liga.

Pedro, the latest Barcelona youth player to make the breakthrough, turned sharply before rifling home an unstoppable 31st minute shot to follow up his goal against Dinamo Kiev in midweek.

"It is always nice to score and win, however, the coach won't be happy because we misplaced a lot of passes in our build-up play and didn't create as many chances as in other games," said Pedro.

It was a special day for Barcelona captain Carles Puyol, 31, who celebrated a decade at the club having made his league debut against Valladolid back on October 2, 1999.

Coach Pep Guardiola handed Andres Iniesta his first league start this season and the Spanish international found Lionel Messi with a fine pass after 10 minutes but the Argentine's shot did not have enough curl to creep into the net.

Almeria were breaking the game up with a

string of fouls and referee Velasco Carballo was jeered by the home fans for failing to dish out yellow cards to the perpetrators.

With 31 minutes gone Pedro scored a goal from nowhere receiving a pass with his left foot before turning swiftly and unleashing a fierce curling shot into the corner with his right foot.

It was a superb strike from the 22-year-old and the home fans sung his name to show their appreciation.

Almeria coach Hugo Sanchez was an exciting striker for Real Madrid but his side packed men behind the ball in the second half as if they were the ones defending a 1-0 lead.

"It is a real shame that teams just come here to shut up shop and stop us playing but we will have to get used to it," said Barcelona midfielder Xavi.

Zlatan Ibrahimovic, celebrating his 28th birthday, almost continued his record of scoring in every Barcelona league game but his 80th-minute drive was saved by Diego Alves to deny him a sixth goal of the season.

Atletico Madrid finally won their first league game of the campaign defeating Real Zaragoza 2-1 at home to lift the pressure on coach Abel Resino.

Midfielder Jose Jurado, back at the club after a season on loan at Real Mallorca, gave Atletico the lead after just two minutes.

But the capital side were indebted to 18-year-old goalkeeper David de Gea for saving a 20th minute penalty from Jorge Lopez.

Injuries forced Resino to hand a league debut to third choice de Gea and he came up

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IN BRIEF

Becks close to Milan deal

AFP, London

David Beckham admitted on Saturday he is close to agreeing a return to AC Milan as he steps up his bid to feature in Fabio Capello's England World Cup squad.

Beckham is hoping to repeat his switch from Los Angeles Galaxy to the San Siro when the transfer window reopens in January.

"There are other options available, but none that will stop me going to Milan," Beckham told the Mail on Sunday newspaper. "It is close to being finalised."

Babbel warns Lehmann

AFP, Stuttgart

Ex-Germany goalkeeper Jens Lehmann was on Sunday warned to watch his future conduct by his Stuttgart coach Markus Babel.

The 39-year-old, who turns 40 next month, landed himself in hot water a fortnight ago when he failed to get permission from his club to attend Munich's Oktoberfest beer festival which earned him a one-match suspension.

"Jens must know that he is constantly in the media's spotlight because he is a well-known name," Babel told Bild on Sunday.

"He must refrain from quick-tempered and rash actions and concentrate on doing the essentials well."

"Jens needs to enjoy the last years of his career, it is a farewell tour for him even if he is not yet conscious of it."

But Babel, 37, said Lehmann is still a model professional both in training and matches.

"Jens is actually very professional and I wonder sometimes if he is compensating, subconsciously, for the fact he doesn't always have good publicity."

"I treat him just the same at 39 as I would a 19-year-old."

But Babel does not rule out any future indiscretions from Lehmann.

"He is still learning, even at 39 years old."

Sneijder fires Inter



Inter Milan midfielder Wesley Sneijder (R) surges past the challenge of Udinese midfielder Gaetano D'Agostino during their Serie A clash at the San Siro on Saturday. PHOTO: AFP

AFP, Rome



Dutch midfielder Wesley Sneijder scored in the dying moments to send Italian champions Inter Milan to the top of the Serie A on Saturday with a 2-1 win at Udinese.

Inter have 16 points, one ahead of Sampdoria and two in front of Juventus.

However, positions could switch on Sunday when Sampdoria welcome Parma while Juve travel to Palermo.

Victory on Saturday was a welcome boost for Jose Mourinho's side who had lost 1-0 at Sampdoria last weekend before struggling to secure a 1-1 Champions League draw at Kazan in Russia in midweek.

"Sneijder's goal was what the team deserved," said Mourinho.

"The team played well. We had lots of chances in the match especially since we had the injury to Diego Milito (replaced in the 25th minute) who is such an important player for us."

"Tonight I am doubly happy because we have the three points and recovered from an error by the referee

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Bordeaux slump again

AFP, Paris



Defending champions Bordeaux slumped to a shock first loss of the season on Saturday when Saint Etienne handed Laurent Blanc's weary side a 3-1 defeat.

Missing their influential midfielder Yoann Gourcuff, who suffered a thigh injury in the midweek 1-0 Champions League win over Maccabi Haifa, it was also Bordeaux's first defeat since a 3-0 reverse against Toulouse on March 7.

Blanc, desperate to keep his stars fresh for the domestic and European campaigns, also left Morocco striker Maroune Chamakh and Brazilian midfielder Wendel on the bench for Saturday's trip.

Saint Etienne, buoyed by a 2-1 win at Monaco last weekend which lifted them into mid-table, were ahead after just eight minutes with a headed goal from Augusto Fernandez.

Araujo Ilan made it 2-0 on the half-hour mark with Bordeaux's Brazilian import Jussie pulling a goal back from the penalty spot in the second half.

But Saint Etienne wrapped up the three points in stoppage time when Dimitri Payet unleashed a 35-metre screamer.

Bordeaux stay top of the table with 19 points, but they will slip to second place later Saturday if Lyon beat Lens.

Montpellier are third after a 3-2 win at rock-bottom Grenoble who have lost all of their eight league matches.

Victor Montano and Nenad Dzodic gave Montpellier a 2-0 lead after just 13 minutes before Daniel Ljuboja reduced the deficit early in the second half.

Dzodic extended Montpellier's lead in the 49th minute with Nicolas Dieuze's injury-time strike coming too late to halt Grenoble's miserable run.

Paris St Germain are fifth, six points behind Bordeaux, after a 1-1 draw at the Parc des Princes against Nancy.

Youssef Hadji put Nancy into a 13th minute lead before Stephane Sessegnon levelled five minutes later.

The result meant PSG, who harbour hopes of the title, have now collected three points in their last four league games.



Barcelona players run after Pedro (L) after the young forward scored a stunning goal in their Primera Liga match against Almeria at the Nou Camp on Saturday. PHOTO: AFP