

Domenech doesn't impress Dunne

AFP, Dublin

Republic of Ireland defender Richard Dunne has added to the pressure on France coach Raymond Domenech ahead of Saturday's World Cup play-off by claiming the under-fire boss is messing up his team.

Domenech has become increasingly unpopular in recent months as France failed to claim an automatic qualification place for next year's World Cup finals.

They finished behind Serbia and now have to face a daunting two-leg play-off against Ireland, who went through their own qualifying campaign without defeat, with the first leg in Dublin on Saturday and the return in France next week.

Dunne believes a team with players like Thierry Henry, William Gallas, Nicolas Anelka and Patrice Evra should easily

qualify for major tournaments and insists Domenech is at fault.

"Every time a tournament comes round, France have all these world-class players and then a man who seems intent on messing them up," Dunne said in the Guardian.

"Over the last World Cups and European Championships, things have not run smoothly for France; they've always got through but maybe it's time that we put a stop to that.

"And we know that if we can get in front, they probably have not got the man at the top to pull them back around.

"It (Domenech's management) could be a weakness or it could be a big smokescreen; France have played really well in their last few games. But if we can get on top of them and try to turn the game into a battle, we feel we have the stronger personalities." Domenech's often odd behaviour, not least when he famously proposed to his girlfriend on

national television after a France defeat, has hardly helped his case with the French fans.

That was borne out this week when he took his players to the Paris Masters tennis tournament, and was booed by the crowd once recognised.

"You can see the reaction of the people at the tennis, when they put his face on the big screen," Dunne added. "The whole place just booed him and his own players laughed at him."

In Paris Domenech insisted his players would be ready for the two games against Ireland adding that there was no need to put extra pressure on them ahead of the game in Dublin.

"There are some games for which do not need any extra pressure. The players want to play in the World Cup and if they are not motivated enough by that ... then I'm sorry, there's nothing else you can do. They are ready and there is no point piling more pressure on them," he said.



A dejected Real Madrid midfielder Kaka stares at the ground during their Spanish Cup encounter against Alcorcon at Santiago Bernabeu on Wednesday.

Real crash out of Spanish Cup

Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid crashed out of the Spanish Cup on Tuesday as they could only manage a 1-0 victory at the Bernabeu over third division Alcorcon, who went through to the last 16 with a 4-1 aggregate score.

The loss extended 17-time winners' Real's drought in the competition dating back to 1993.

The Real supporters had booed the players off at half-time while there were cries of 'Pellegri resign' at the coach Manuel Pellegrini, especially when the 56-year-old Chilean replaced Real's most impressive player on the night Frenchman Lassana Diarra with over 20 minutes remaining.

Pellegrini, who took over in

the close season after an impressive spell in charge of Villarreal, had started with four strikers including Kaka, Real icon Raul and former Manchester United star Ruud van Nistelrooy.

However, they failed to have the impact he wished and it wasn't until the 81st minute they scored, through Dutch attacking midfielder Rafael van der Vaart.

Pellegrini tried to justify his substitution of Diarra.

"I could have been selfish because I knew that changing 'Lass' wasn't going to please," said Pellegrini.

"But it was important that the player didn't injure himself. I think about the player and the team before myself," said Pellegrini who admitted they weren't up to the task on the night.

"We did what seemed necessary but the away result was heavy," he added.

C'Ron ruled out

AFP, Lisbon

Real Madrid's Portuguese star Cristiano Ronaldo was ruled out on Tuesday of his country's crucial World Cup play-off matches after undergoing medical tests on a troublesome ankle injury.

Portugal coach Carlos Queiroz had insisted he intended to call up the world's most expensive player for the matches against Bosnia-Herzegovina on November 14 and 18 despite opposition from Real but in the end the Portuguese Football Federation admitted that Ronaldo would not be fit enough.

"The player is not in good enough physical condition to train with the squad ahead of the play-offs," read a statement by the federation.

Both Portugal - World Cup semifinalists in 2006 - and Real had been locked in a battle over Ronaldo with the club insisting that he was not fit enough to travel.

Real Madrid doctors last week estimated that Ronaldo would be out of action for at least two more weeks as he recovers from an ankle injury.

Ronaldo said he was really disappointed not to be able to play.

"It's really frustrating not to be able to help Portugal particularly at such a key moment like the play-off against Bosnia," he said.

But the Portuguese captain promised to return to Lisbon on Saturday for the match.

"I'll go to the stadium to

support my teammates. I'm sure that the quality of our football will surmount everything and afterwards I'll be in the locker room to celebrate the first of two steps towards the World Cup."

Ronaldo initially injured his right ankle in Real's 3-0 Champions League victory over Marseille at the end of

September and aggravated the problem while playing for Portugal on October 10.

"It's impossible for Ronaldo to play with Portugal," Real coach Manuel Pellegrini said on Friday. "I feel sorry for the Portugal squad and for the player, but he hasn't trained for a long time now and he is still in pain."



Portuguese star Cristiano Ronaldo (R) is having his right ankle checked by the team's doctor Henrique Jones at an undisclosed location in Lisbon on Tuesday.

Young snubs England

Football

AFP, Birmingham

Aston Villa defender Luke Young admitted on Wednesday that he has retired from international duty after snubbing a call-up for England's friendly against Brazil.

England coach Fabio Capello asked Young to replace injured Liverpool right-back Glen Johnson in his squad for the trip to Doha ahead of Saturday's clash.

Young had informed the English FA in February that he wanted to concentrate on club football after earning just seven caps in four years, but didn't make the decision public.

It is thought an enquiry was made over whether Young was still unavailable after Johnson pulled out and the former Tottenham

full-back confirmed his international retirement.

The 30-year-old has played just twice for Villa this season as he struggles to come to terms with the death of his half-brother, Andre, who was found dead at a Greek holiday resort in August after suffering serious head injuries following a night out with friends.

Young told AVTV: "I came back in pre-season looking forward to the new campaign. I felt I could improve on my performances of the previous season. I had the bit between my teeth - a real determination to succeed.

"I then picked up niggling thigh injuries that I couldn't get rid of and then obviously the family bereavement which was difficult to get over.

"But I am ready to concentrate on football now and I'm looking forward to playing. In the first few weeks after what happened I didn't really want to do anything. It was really tough early on."

Spurs biggest spenders

AFP, London

Tottenham Hotspur's latest financial results published Tuesday showed the club had spent nearly 150 million pounds (251 million dollars) on transfers in the last 16 months, surpassing the English Premier League's 'Big Four'.

Spurs' spending topped that of English champions Manchester United, Chelsea, Arsenal and Liverpool in the same period and was only bettered by cash-rich Premier League rivals Manchester City.

Yet Tottenham were still able to announce record pre-

tax profits for the year ending June 2009, helped by the sale of Dimitar Berbatov to United and Robbie Keane to Liverpool.

Spurs spent 119.3 million pounds in the financial year, with nearly 30 million pounds invested since on bringing several other players, including former Portsmouth duo Peter Crouch and Niko Kranjcar, to White Hart Lane.

Tottenham are currently fourth in the table, a position that will qualify them for next term's lucrative Champions League if they are still there at the end of this season.

And Spurs chairman Daniel Levy, who recently outlined plans for a new ground and training complex, said: "We

have made significant progress in delivering on our long-term vision for the club.

"We have always had three key priorities and you will have heard them oft repeated - investment in the first team, a new training centre and an increased capacity, state-of-the-art new stadium.

"We have assembled what we believe to be one of the most talented squads we have had during our time in the Premier League, the ground is being turned and pitches laid for the new training centre at Bulls Cross in Enfield and we have submitted a planning application for a stunning new stadium on a site next to our existing stadium."

'Ngog is no diver'

AFP, London

Liverpool striker David Ngog's agent has hit back at claims the French player dived to win a controversial penalty against Birmingham.

Ngog was branded a cheat by Birmingham midfielder Lee Carsley after the 21-year-old tumbled under his challenge to earn the spot-kick that Steven Gerrard converted to rescue a 2-2 draw at Anfield on Monday.

The incident prompted a deluge of criticism for Ngog but his agent Bruno Satin is adamant the player would not cheat.

"He wouldn't try and con the ref," Satin told The Sun. "He's a lad with very good education, correct and polite. He doesn't look for these things. He's never had a problem of this type before in his career.

"Maybe he fell down because he was worried about being injured. At times players make very hard challenges in England. They allow a lot of things to defenders in the Premier League. At times it's really on the limit.

"Sometimes there are challenges that can assassinate you. A defender could get five matches for throwing his shirt and the player who broke the leg of Eduardo only had a three-game suspension.

"Did the defender put the safety of the player in danger? You have to look at things in a more reasonable proportion."

FIFA to hold Maradona hearing

AFP, Geneva

FIFA said that it will hold a disciplinary hearing on Diego Maradona on Sunday over the Argentinian coach's sexually-explicit rant after his team's World Cup qualification.

"The FIFA Disciplinary Committee, chaired by Marcel Mathier, will grant the head coach of Argentina a hearing, which will take place the day after the international friendly match between Spain and Argentina in Madrid," said football's world ruling body in a statement on Tuesday.

Maradona rounded on his critics after Argentina's 1-0 win over Uruguay in October, a victory which saw the two-time world champions squeeze nervously into next year's finals in South Africa.

The 48-year-old, a sporting icon in Argentina after skipping the 1986 World Cup winning team, told journalists to "suck it and keep sucking it".

World football governing body's head Sepp Blatter said Maradona may have flouted regulations which could result in a fine of up to 29,400 dollars and/or suspension.

"According to article 58.a anyone who harms the dignity of a person through acts or words can be punished," he had said, reacting to Maradona's rant.

Crouch vows to fight on

Football

AFP, London

England forward Peter Crouch has vowed to avoid any more nightclub high jinx as he tries to keep his World Cup dream alive.

Crouch was photographed on a wild evening out with Tottenham team-mate Jonathan Woodgate and model girlfriend Abbey Clancy at London's trendy Movida bar after his club's Premier League win over Portsmouth last month.

The former Liverpool striker was snapped on the dance floor reviving the 'robot' goal celebration which made him a cult hero with England fans and sticking his head out of a taxi as he was driven home from the club.

Those kind of antics will hardly sit well with notoriously strict England coach Fabio Capello, who has been known to punish players for being late for dinner, let alone letting their hair down in such spectacular fashion.

Crouch revealed that Tottenham manager Harry Redknapp reacted to the incident with a typically brusque put-down, but Capello is less likely to take such an understanding attitude, especially if there are any repeats before next year's finals in South Africa.

With competition for places in Capello's squad hotting up now the qualifying campaign is over, Crouch knows he must keep out of trouble.

"Yes, of course I think about how Capello will react. He's not said anything to

me. Harry said 'You're an idiot, move on. Quite straight forward,' said Crouch before flying off to Doha with the England squad for Saturday's friendly against Brazil.

"It was eight days before the next game. I've not covered myself in glory, but I haven't killed anyone, although I feel like I have.

"I'm human at the end of the day but it won't happen again. We were going out with all the lads, as a team. It probably escalated a bit more than I would have planned.

"After a game you want to relax and unwind. If you don't have a game until the following weekend, you can go out and relax. It can't be football, football, football.

"Nothing like that would happen if there was a midweek game. Being a World Cup year, we want to concentrate on football matters. We want to be as focused as we possibly can."

Although Crouch has scored an impressive 16 goals in 17 starts for England, he has spent most of Capello's reign on the bench because the Italian opted to pick Emile Heskey alongside Wayne Rooney.

Heskey will miss the trip to Qatar through injury however, giving Crouch another chance to impress Capello after scoring twice in the 3-0 win over Belarus that finished off England's qualifying campaign.

The 28-year-old admits he has yet to receive a compliment from Capello but he remains confident he can do a job for England whenever called upon.

"I don't believe I've had a compliment no. Collectively, he doesn't like to single

out players. But he has done well to the group after we've won games," Crouch said.

"He's had little words with me, here or there, on the training pitch. I've not knocked on his door. As long as I'm playing well and scoring goals, I'll be considered. I was given an opportunity against Belarus, scored a couple of goals, and hopefully that's pushed my case.

"I'm obviously very proud of the goals I've scored for England and my record. I don't think 'what more can I do'. I just want to continue, really. I always feel confident I will get chances and, when I'm given those chances, I'll take them."

Crouch's desire to please Capello doesn't extend to completely agreeing with the manager's views on diving.

Capello recently admitted he would be unhappy if one of his players won a penalty through deception, but Crouch claimed the nation would have no problem if an England player copied Liverpool striker David Ngog's theatrical tumble that earned a spot-kick against Birmingham on Monday.

"He wouldn't be happy if players dived. I've taken that on board," Crouch said.

"It happens so quick, doesn't it. It's difficult. If the tackle comes in and he stays on his feet, doesn't get anything and the team lose - it's a difficult balance.

"I'm not saying you should cheat. But it's the difference between winning or losing a game. In a World Cup, if someone took a dive and we went through, would the nation be slaughtering him?"

Davies leaves hospital

Football

AFP, Washington

Charlie Davies, severely injured in a car crash last month after helping the United States qualify for the World Cup, was released from hospital on Tuesday after four weeks of treatment and recovery.

The 23-year-old forward was a passenger in a vehicle that crashed on a parkway in suburban Washington, where the US squad stayed ahead of a 2-2 draw with Costa Rica after a qualifying victory in Honduras had secured a Cup berth.

Davies, who plays for French club Sochaux, will

work with the medical staff of the US national team in his rehabilitation after suffering a broken right tibia and femur, lacerated bladder, broken left elbow and facial fractures.

"Charlie faces a long recovery," said James DeBritz, Washington Hospital Center's orthopaedic trauma director. "It will take time and extensive physical therapy for his bones and soft tissue to heal.

"His overall health, age and positive attitude should help him to have a good outcome."

A passenger in the car, Ashley Roberto, 22, was killed in the one-car wreck. The driver, who has not been identified, was also hospitalized in the incident, which is

still under investigation by US Park Police.

Davies, who scored three goals in 13 matches this year as a regular starter, is expected to need between six and 12 months to recover, all but ensuring he will not play in the 2010 World Cup finals next June in South Africa.

"I would like to take the time to thank everyone who has dealt with me for really putting in the time to help me get better as a person and as an athlete," Davies said in a statement.

"I continue to improve every day and I look forward to getting back on my feet and attacking rehabilitation.

"Thank you for everyone's support. It really means a lot to me."

IN BRIEF

Johnson to miss Brazil tie

AFP, London

Liverpool full-back Glen Johnson has withdrawn from the England squad to play Brazil in Qatar this Saturday, the Football Association announced on Tuesday.

Johnson did not train with the rest of the England squad here on Tuesday after playing in Monday's 2-2 Premier League draw against Birmingham City.

He was the only outfield player in Fabio Capello's squad for the Brazil friendly in Doha to play at Anfield, with Reds midfielder Steven Gerrard missing the trip because he is recovering from a groin injury.

During a standard recovery session on Tuesday it was discovered that the 25-year-old Johnson, who played for the full 90 minutes at Anfield, had suffered a slight injury.

Johnson's exit leaves Wes Brown as the only right-back still in the squad, although Shaun Wright-Phillips or James Milner could drop back from midfield.

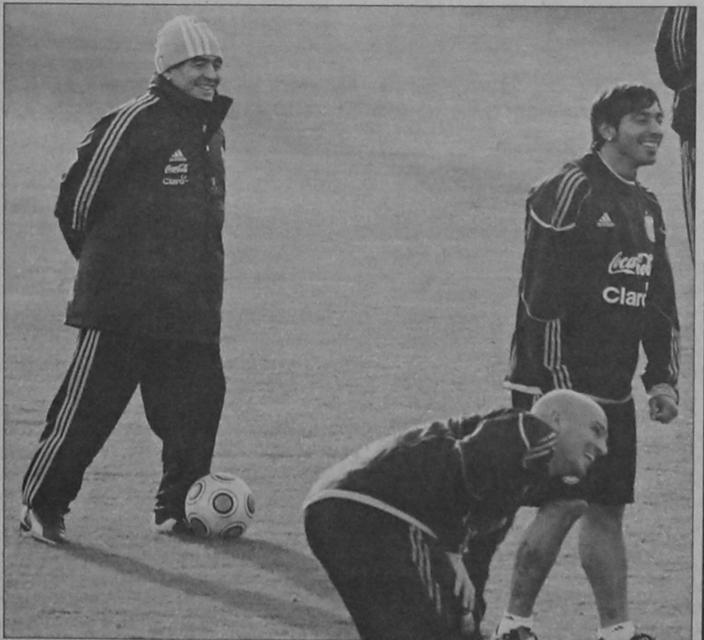
City set for Etisalat deal

AFP, Abu Dhabi

English Premier League club Manchester City are set to secure a three-year sponsorship deal with United Arab Emirates telecoms giant Etisalat, the company said on Tuesday.

The value of the contract was not disclosed at a news conference in the oil-rich Gulf emirate of Abu Dhabi, where the Manchester club is to play a friendly on Thursday with the UAE national team.

Under a memorandum of understanding signed here, Etisalat will be the exclusive telecommunications sponsor of City in all countries where the company has a presence.



Argentine coach Diego Maradona (L) conducts a training session in Madrid on Tuesday. Argentina will play Spain in a friendly match on Saturday.