

Enke apologised in suicide note

Football

AFP, Berlin

Germany goalkeeper Robert Enke left a suicide note apologising for the desperate suicide plan he had made in the hours before taking his own life, it was revealed Thursday.

His broken-hearted widow gave a press conference on Wednesday explaining how her husband had been treated for depression since 2003 and had an acute fear of failure.

After losing his place in the Germany team in September after suffering from a stomach infection, Enke sought treatment six weeks ago and his psychologist, Dr Valentin Marksel, revealed details of the goalkeeper's last desperate note.

"In the letter, he apologised for his deliberate concealment of his state of mind over recent days that was necessary in order to be able to put his suicide plan into action," Marksel said.

On the day of Enke's suicide, Marksel revealed the Germany star had telephoned his local hospital to cancel a counselling appointment.

"He called off all therapy appointments for the next few weeks, until further notice, because he said he was feeling better."

Admitting he was still in shock at the news, Marksel said he had seen no indication Enke was planning his own death.

"Unfortunately, we did not succeed in protecting him from suicide," said an emotional Marksel.

"In my opinion, he was not suicidal and there

was no indication that he needed to be hospitalised."

A public memorial service will be held at 11:00 am (1000 GMT) in Hanover 96's stadium, which the entire Germany squad will attend, before Enke is buried in private in his home town of Neustadt am Rubeberge, near Hanover.

Enke leaves behind his wife Teresa and 18-month-old daughter Leila, whom the couple adopted in May -- three years after their two-year-old daughter Lara died from a heart infection.

Enke had feared authorities might intervene and take their adopted daughter into care if he went public about his depression.

"He was afraid they would take Leila away from us if he admitted he had bouts of depression," said Teresa after it emerged nobody at Enke's club Hanover knew about his personal problem.

A spokesman for Hanover 96 said the team had not decided yet whether to play their next Bundesliga game at Schalke 04's Gelsenkirchen stadium with many of Enke's team-mates still distraught at the news of his suicide.

"We will look and see how the squad are early next week, whether we can get back into regular training again," said Hanover spokesman Andreas Kuhnt.

"We need to see if our players are in the correct mental state to prepare for a Bundesliga game."

"We don't know if we will be able to play against Schalke, I think our colleagues there will understand."

Hanover's next home game is against German giants Bayern Munich on November 29.

IN BRIEF

England lose Lampard

AFP, Doha

Frank Lampard picked up a training injury here Thursday forcing him out of England's friendly against Brazil on Saturday.

The Chelsea midfielder misses the game in Doha after suffering a strain to his left thigh and was due to fly back to London later.

A spokesman for the English Football Association said head coach Fabio Capello would not be calling up any replacements.

Gattuso's car found in Tirana

AFP, Tirana

A luxury vehicle stolen from AC Milan midfielder Gennaro Gattuso in 2006 has been found in Tirana, Albania police said Thursday.

The Range Rover was impounded from an Albanian citizen who told police he had bought the vehicle from an Italian citizen.

An investigation was underway to determine how the jeep - sporting Albanian plates - had entered the country.

Luxury vehicles stolen from Western Europe often end up on Albania's streets after their plates are changed. They are later sold on with falsified documents and changed serial numbers of engine and other parts.

In 2005, Macedonian border authorities seized a BMW vehicle belonging to British star David Beckham, stolen in Spain and en route to Albania.

Bosingwa out for 3 months

AFP, London

Chelsea's Portuguese defender Jose Bosingwa will be out for about three months after he underwent surgery on his left knee this week, a statement issued by the Premier League leaders on Wednesday said.

The 27-year-old has been out since mid-October with the problem and is not expected back until the New Year.

"Chelsea Football Club can confirm that Jose Bosingwa underwent arthroscopic surgery on his left knee this week. His recovery time will be approximately three months," the London side's statement said.

But there was better news for the Blues, five points clear of Arsenal and champions Manchester United at the top of the table, in the announcement that their England left-back Ashley Cole does not need surgery for a shin injury.

"Ashley Cole is suffering from an aggravation of a depressed fracture of the tibia, originally picked up against Atletico Madrid at Stamford Bridge," Chelsea's statement said. "The injury will not require surgery."



Brazil players Maicon (L), Lucio (C) and Gilberto Silva arrive at Doha airport on Wednesday. Brazil will play England in a friendly match on Saturday.

Rooney relishes Brazil tie

Football

AFP, Doha

Wayne Rooney believes a glamour friendly with Brazil here on Saturday will provide a measure of how much work England have to do if they are to lift the World Cup next year.

Rooney, who became a father for the first time last week, insists Fabio Capello's much-improved squad have earned the right to be considered serious contenders in South Africa after an impressive qualifying campaign.

But the Manchester United forward's optimism is tempered by realism about how tough it will be to come out on top in a tournament featuring the European champions Spain and the five-times winners that England will take on at the Khalifa International Stadium on Saturday evening.

"Of course we are in with a chance," Rooney said. "But there is a lot of hard work to do yet and there is a lot of improving that we have to do if we are going to win it."

"Our results have been better in qualification than they have in friendlies."

"We did beat Germany (2-1 in November 2008) but Brazil are number one in the world and this is a massive game for us. We need to play some good football if we are going to win."

Rooney's son, Kai Wayne, was born on November 2nd but the striker never considered exercising his right to paternity leave, revealing that he had pleaded with United boss Sir Alex Ferguson to be allowed to start United's Champions League clash with CSKA Moscow 24 hours after the birth.

"I don't feel any different to be honest," he said. "I just want to play. Before the CSKA match I went to see the manager and asked if I could play. To be honest, I thought he was going to play me and I only found out I was sub just before the match."

England will be significantly below full-strength against Brazil with first-choice full-backs, Glen Johnson and Ashley Cole, Rooney's United team-mate Rio Ferdinand, Liverpool midfielder Steven Gerrard and goalkeeper David James all ruled out by injury.

The absence of Gerrard in particular will increase the pressure on Rooney to create openings for whoever plays up

front alongside him.

Capello has generally sought to pair Rooney with a powerful centre-forward with Aston Villa's Emile Heskey -- who is also injured at the moment -- his first choice for the role.

But Saturday's match could see Jermain Defoe given an opportunity to prove his guile, pace and finishing ability can make him just as effective a foil for England's leading striker, despite his smaller stature.

The Tottenham forward missed England's last two qualifiers, against the Ukraine and Belarus, with a hand injury and has yet to start a game for his country in 2009.

"It was frustrating to miss out through injury last time and when you get an opportunity, you have got to take it," Defoe said. "You have to make an impact."

"I don't want to have the title of super-sub but when you don't start it is important you try and make an impression when you come off the bench."

"I haven't started a game for England in 2009 and if the first one was against Brazil it would be special because they are the side that everyone wants to play against."

Tardelli plots an upset

AFP, Dublin



Republic of Ireland assistant manager Marco Tardelli has warned France that his side are confident of stopping the former World Cup winners reaching next year's finals.

Ireland host Raymond Domenech's team at Croke Park on Saturday in the first leg of a play-off that will decide which country makes it to South Africa.

Although France have the advantage of playing the decisive second leg at the Stade de France in Paris next week, Tardelli - assistant to head coach Giovanni Trapattoni - claimed on Wednesday that the positive atmosphere in the Ireland squad suggests the players believe they can pull off a shock.

"The team believes it is possible to win - anything is possible in football," Tardelli said. "Now we are a good team and we believe we can qualify."

Ireland can take heart from an unbeaten qualifying campaign that saw them hold world champions Italy to two draws. In contrast, France - the 1998 World Cup winners - will travel to Dublin on Friday with Domenech under intense pressure amid suggestions of disunity within the camp.

Yet Tardelli acknowledges that France remain a formidable outfit, with potential match winners in the likes of Thierry Henry, Nicolas Anelka and Karim Benzema.

"The French team is very good in midfield, the defence and the strikers, there are no problems," he said.

"They are a very good team and we will need much passion, much character because we need to play a very big match to beat France."

"For us, it's very important to begin with big pressure because it's our weapon."

"It's very important for us because we can't give the French players space on the pitch, because they are very strong."

"You know the names - they play with Real Madrid, with Barcelona, with Chelsea. They are very good players."

Trapattoni has admitted that a clean sheet on Saturday could prove crucial to his side's hopes of completing the job in Paris, although Tardelli insists Ireland will not settle for a 0-0 draw.

"No, we would prefer to win. I would not be happy," he said. "Nil-nil might not be a bad result and it is very important not to concede a goal, but I would prefer to win."

Having managed his national team and claimed league titles in four different countries, Trapattoni has vast experience of pressure matches and Tardelli insists he will not be fazed by this latest challenge.

"Giovanni has been involved in many, many big matches and this is nothing new for him," he said. "Will he enjoy this more than most? If he wins, yes; if he loses, no."

Fergie gets 4-game ban

AFP, London



Sir Alex Ferguson was given a four-match touchline ban for improper conduct by the Football Association (FA) here on Thursday following an outspoken attack on referee Alan Wiley.

The Manchester United manager, who admitted an FA charge of improper conduct, publicly labelled Wiley as "unfit" after his Premier League champions were held to a 2-2 draw by Sunderland at Old Trafford on October 3.

But on Thursday he was banned for four games, of which two are suspended until the end of the 2010/11 season, fined 20,000 pounds (33,148 dollars) and warned as to his future conduct following his "grossly improper and wholly inappropriate" comments about Wiley.

Peter Griffiths, chairman of the regulatory commission which decided Ferguson's pun-

ishment, said after Thursday's hearing: "Each member of the commission recognised Sir Alex Ferguson's achievements and stature within the game."

"Having said that, it was made clear to Sir Alex that with such stature comes increased responsibilities."

"The commission considered his admitted remarks, in the context in which they were made, were not just improper but were grossly improper and wholly inappropriate. He should never have said what he did say."

The commission said the suspended sanction would be automatically activated should Ferguson be found guilty of a similar charge before the end of the 2010/11 season on top of any sanction imposed for that offence.

Ferguson accused Wiley of not being "fit enough for a game of that standard" and of "walking up the pitch for the second goal needing a rest".

The 67-year-old Scot has since apologised to Wiley.

Do or die for New Zealand, Bahrain

AFP, Wellington



For once in rugby-mad New Zealand the round ball is hogging the headlines ahead of Saturday's crunch tie here against Bahrain for a place in next year's football World Cup.

The All Whites only ever appearance in football's showcase event was in 1982 and Bahrain is gunning for its first ever World Cup spot, with the rivals evenly poised following the 0-0 first leg clash in Manama last month.

Bahrain showed them why it is ranked 22 places above New Zealand at 61 in the world rankings, making most of the running in the home tie but failing to find the back of the net. New Zealand is hoping they will be carried to victory by the Wellington stadium -- affectionately known as the Cake Tin -- filled to capacity with 35,500 screaming All Whites fans.

Skipper Ryan Nelsen has questioned Bahrain's decision to delay its arrival in New Zealand's capital until Thursday evening after a camp in Sydney.

"I was very surprised because there's a two-hour difference from Australia and the weather's going to be completely different," the Blackburn Rovers defender said.

Wellington's spring is often chilly and stormy, in contrast with balmy conditions in Sydney and Bahrain.

Nelsen is hoping Wellington turns on its worst weather for the tie.

"A good, dirty southerly, some beautiful Wellington wind, and a nice bit of sleet," he said.

The 32-year-old captain of the English Premiership side says nothing he has experienced compares with the prospect of a place in the World Cup.

"I think most people understand that it's fairly big, but in terms of playing or coaching in this, it's absolutely the pinnacle of sport, there's nothing bigger," he said.

"When you're kicking the ball round with your mates when you're 10 years old, you

dream about this situation."

Coach Ricki Herbert was there as a team member of the All Whites side that made the 1982 World Cup. After 27 years, he knows a repeat is almost within grasp.

"To go to the World Cup would be an incredible feat," Herbert said.

"We've come through some difficult times. Four years ago there wasn't the interest in the team and where it could get to, but we've hung tight and delivered an opportunity for the game that's fantastic."

Bahrain coach Milan Macala told Australian television broadcaster SBS this week that his team was confident after having the better of the first leg.

"We had many chances in the first game and this will give us enough motivation. The players know their responsibilities well," Macala said.

"We will not be afraid of our opponents. Our main aim is to score early in order to put pressure on our opponents, who will be playing at home in front of their own fans."

Bahrain came tantalisingly close to qualifying for the 2006 World Cup, falling at the final hurdle in a two-leg qualifier against Trinidad and Tobago.

"I am living this dream like any other Bahraini who wants to qualify for the World Cup for the first time," said Macala, a native of the Czech Republic.

Both squads are relatively injury free, although veteran Bahrain defender Mohamed Husain was reportedly still recovering from a back muscle injury this week.

For New Zealand, midfielder Simon Elliott appeared to be in doubt due to a hip strain.

Herbert will be placing his faith in strikers Shane Smeltz -- the top scorer this year in Australia's A-League, Rory Fallon and Chris Killen, with teenager Chris Wood of West Bromwich Albion likely to be on the bench.

New Zealand needs to win to realise their 27-year dream because a scoring draw would see Bahrain go through on the away goals rule.

A scoreless draw would take the tie into extra time and a penalty shoot out if needed.

Players back Pellegrini

AFP, Madrid

The players of Real Madrid, ridiculed by the press after their elimination from the Spanish Cup by a third division club accepted the blame for the defeat and defended under-fire coach Manuel Pellegrini.

"It was a hard blow, the team didn't put on the display that we hoped for," said Real's iconic striker Raul.

Big-spending Real crashed out of the Spanish Cup on Tuesday night when they could only manage a 1-0 home victory over minnows Alcorcon, a team from the Madrid suburbs, who went through to the last 16 with a 4-1 aggregate score.

The team was booed by fans at the Bernabeu stadium, who called for Pellegrini's resignation.

"We always have faith in the coach and his work," said Raul. Real is "a team that is progressing, with a lot of new players who are perhaps taking a long time to adapt."

"It is our fault, us the players, we must make ourselves responsible," said goalkeeper Iker Casillas, who did not play on Tuesday.

Defender Sergio Ramos said "Pellegrini plays a good role in the group and takes decisions that are sometimes good and sometimes less good."

Spanish sports newspapers mocked the "historic ridicule" of Real's elimination which had left a "deep wound and an open crisis" within the club.

Spanish commentators said Pellegrini has failed to put together a coherent team with stars such as 94-million-euro signing Cristiano Ronaldo, Kaka and Karim Benzema, all bought by chairman Florentino Perez in the pre-season.

Perez has so far remained silent over the elimination of the club, which has a budget of 400 million euros, by a team with barely one million.



Argentina star Lionel Messi (C) poses with football legend Alfredo Di Stefano (L) and national team coach Diego Maradona after receiving the Di Stefano award for best player of the 2008-2009 season in Madrid on Wednesday.