

PREVIEW

Chance to make a mark

AFP, Rustenburg

England have been urged to lay down a World Cup marker when they take on the United States in their opening Group C match here on Saturday.

Steven Gerrard, who will captain the side in the absence of the injured Rio Ferdinand, believes Fabio Capello's squad are ready to make a major impression on the tournament and the Liverpool midfielder underlined the importance of a positive start.

"The first game is always important," he said. "It is important to stamp your mark on the tournament and let everyone know what you are about."

Well-organised and resilient, the Americans represent England's toughest opponents in a group that also includes Slovenia and Algeria.

"They are a good side but if we can get off to a good start and take maximum points I think everyone will take note," Gerrard added.

"As a team the USA are very hard-working, very fit and physical. They will be trying to deny us time and space on the ball."

An impressive run of nine wins from ten qualifiers, during which they scored 34 goals, had raised hopes that, with the benefit of Capello's winning pedigree, England will be able to go beyond the quarterfinal barrier at which they fell in



the last two World Cups. Recent weeks however have not been encouraging for

the tens of thousands of England fans who have flown into South Africa.

The performances in friendly wins over Mexico and Japan have been some way short of convincing, the loss of Ferdinand is a significant one and Gareth Barry, a pivotal

THE KNOWLEDGE

England has the 2nd tallest and the shortest player and both play for Spurs: Crouch (2m, 1cm) and Lennon (1.65).

In nine previous meetings between England and USA there have been an impressive 43 goals including one 10-0 win.

Fabio Capello scored with his one and only shot in the World Cup for Italy (1-2 v Poland in 1974).

player under Capello, will not be risked on Saturday, having only just recovered from an ankle injury.

The United States' quality was underlined by their run to the final of last year's Confederations Cup in South Africa and AC Milan defender Oguchi Onyewu dismissed

suggestions that Bob Bradley's squad would happily settle for a draw.

"Our results last summer gained us a little more respect around the world and it gives you confidence you can compete with the best."

"The World Cup is a different monster of course and England are a good team but our expectation will still be to get a win."

Barry's absence will force England to field a reshuffled midfield in which Gerrard will be asked to play in a deeper role than he has been accustomed to of late, reprising a central partnership with Frank Lampard that has previously always added up to less than the sum of the two individuals' talents.

That will mean Joe Cole coming in on the left with a brief to get forward and link with Wayne Rooney.

Four years on, England's hopes are in the hands of essentially the same group, but -- older and possibly wiser -- Gerrard and his teammates appear confident that, under Capello's guidance, this time could be different.

"This squad has got the experience of being in tournaments before, it's got a fit Wayne Rooney, a fit Steven Gerrard and everyone is coming to that right age," said Joe Cole. "If we can have that bit of luck that you are going to need, then we can go all the way."

That theme was echoed by Gerrard. "Everyone is desperate to do well, he said. "We want to deliver at this tournament. We feel as if we've under-achieved over the years with the players we have got."

"I look around the squad and that gives me confidence."

"But it is easy to talk the talk. The difficult thing is to go out there and walk the walk."



PHOTO: AFP

GOING TRIBAL: Colombian diva Shakira performs on stage during the World Cup concert at the Orlando stadium in Soweto, Johannesburg on Thursday night.

World comes to Soweto

AP, Johannesburg

The world came to Soweto on Thursday for a celebration of soccer, music and unity on the eve of Africa's first World Cup, with a concert featuring international headliners Shakira, the Black Eyed Peas and Alicia Keys.

Warm-up acts played for hours before the internationally televised portion of the concert at Orlando Stadium began at 8 p.m. with a frenzy of flag waving, drumming and African-inspired dancing.

Veteran South African trumpeter Hugh Masekela took the stage with "Grazin' in the Grass" a No. 1 international hit in 1968. He was quickly joined by a new South African star, Lira, who covered the late Miriam Makeba's "Pata Pata", another worldwide hit that originated in South Africa.

The Black Eyed Peas were next with a slick medley of their hits, then it was back to Africa, with the blind duo Amadou & Mariam of Mali and their sinuous, driving sound.

Shakira, wearing an animal print, waka waka-ed the anthem and dance of the World Cup. The turbaned Tinariwen brought the sounds of Mali's desert nomads to the mix. The crowd swayed to Keys, and did the toyi-toyi the protest dance of the apartheid era to hometown favorites BLK JKS. Colombian rocker Juanes, in a multicolored warm-up jacket,

debuted his newest single, "Yerbatero" to cheers from the crowd.

No multistarred stadium show would be complete without everyone on stage for a rousing, closing anthem. Thursday, it was Sly and the Family Stone's "Everyday People," punctuated by fireworks.

An exuberant Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in full South African green-and-yellow fan regalia, was treated like a rock star as he led the crowd in cheers for Nelson Mandela, who is credited with sealing South Africa's bid to host the World Cup.

Tutu also acknowledged the fans from around the world who have come to South Africa for soccer's premier event.

"We welcome you all. For Africa is the cradle of humanity, so we welcome you home," he said.

About a third of the seats at Soweto's 40,000-seat Orlando stadium were blocked off for the stage and backstage. Most of what was left were filled, as was a dance floor on the pitch.

In true Rainbow Nation style, fans braved the winter chill to show their support for the country and the long-awaited event.

The stadium was awash with flags, most of them South African, and the green and gold of the national football team Bafana Bafana.

PREVIEW

Glamour-less intrigue

AFP, Port Elizabeth

South Korea and Greece dip their toes into the World Cup water at this Eastern Cape port on Saturday anxious to get precious points on board with Argentina and Nigeria facing off later up in Ellis Park.

While by no means one of the first round glamour games an intriguing clash of styles is nevertheless in store at the brand new Nelson Mandela Bay stadium overlooking the Indian Ocean for this early 1130 GMT kick-off.

Speed and astute tactical awareness are the calling cards of a Korean side that tore up the World Cup formbook when making it through to the semifinals in 2002.

THE KNOWLEDGE

Otto Rehhagel will be oldest WC coach when Greece play S Korea. At 71 years, 300 days, 169 days older than Cesare Maldini.

qualify for the group stage and then who knows, we could maybe go onto the quarterfinal."

Greece's build-up was marred on Tuesday when the players were robbed of around 1500 euros in cash at their team hotel in Umhlanga north of Durban, a police spokesman reported.

Greece's fortunes plum-

Patsatzoglou echoed that, saying: "We know we have a key game against South Korea. If we win, we are in a position to try to qualify for the next round."

The Cyprus-based Patsatzoglou identified Manchester United midfielder Park Ji-Sung as the Koreans' main threat.

He said: "We've seen lots of DVDs of South Korea, Park is definitely their top player."

Former Middlesbrough striker Lee Dong-Gook will likely be joining Park in attack after recovering from a hamstring injury quicker than expected.

Greece will be without Vangelis Moras, the Bologna defender.

The Greek team can expect to feel at home in Port Elizabeth where a vociferous 1,000-strong expat community is preparing a warm welcome.

If Bayer Leverkusen forward Theo Gekas, top scorer in European qualifying, set piece specialist Giorgios Karagounis and this pair's towering teammate and star of Euro 2004 Angelos Charisteas are on form, South Korea are likely to find the going tough.

Altidore sure Terry will be up for it

AFP, Irene

US striker Jozy Altidore expects the best from scandal-hit former England captain John Terry in Saturday's World Cup match.

Chelsea defender Terry lost the captaincy after allegations of an extra-marital affair with lingerie model Vanessa Perroncel, the mother of fellow England international Wayne Bridge's child, was revealed.

With Rio Ferdinand, his replacement at captain, out of the tournament with an injury, Terry will be critical in shutting down US attackers such as Altidore, the 20-year-old who led US qualifying scorers.

"He's a great player and he reads the game well," Altidore said of Terry. "It's going to be tough for whoever is going against him for sure."

Rooney time

AFP, Rustenburg

Steven Gerrard believes Wayne Rooney can be the player who defines Africa's first World Cup.

"Unbelievable" was the adjective Gerrard opted for in assessing Rooney's form and fitness ahead of a tournament which offers the 24-year-old the perfect opportunity to banish painful memories from the last World Cup.

Rooney departed Germany goalless and in disgrace, his involvement ended by a red card issued for stamping on Ricardo Carvalho in the quarterfinal against Portugal, which England ultimately lost on penalties.

They know that their chances are entwined with

Rooney's capacity to perform at his best and claim the goals they will need to carry them deep into the knockout stages.

Gerrard believes Rooney is already worthy of comparison with the world's current best players, Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo.

"The stage is set for Wayne. He is a fantastic age, he is in great shape and he is coming off the back of an unbelievable season, probably his best. He is in the category of those players like Ronaldo and Messi."

"I'm just delighted he is English and he is going to be leading us out there. Hopefully he can be our main goalscorer and score the goals that spur us on to victory."

ELIA SPARKS TWITTER BAN

Netherlands' World Cup squad has been banned from using Twitter after Eljero Elia sparked a racism row with comments on a live streaming video. There was an angry response when Elia appeared to insult Moroccans, forcing him into an apology and coach Bert van Marwijk took immediate action by imposing the ban.

The stream showed Elia and teammate Ryan Babel playing a computer game in front of a webcam, with several other team members in the room.

"I want to apologise to the Moroccan community but I am not a racist," a chastened Elia said. "I grew up in The Hague in a neighbourhood with 75% Moroccans and have a lot of friends among them. What I said was meant for a friend of mine, Reduan, who always calls me 'negro' ... it sounds odd, but it is some slang."

England and Spain had already barred their players from using Twitter.

ROBBERS CRASH GREEK HOTEL

The robbers broke into the rooms of Angelos Charisteas, Sotirios Ninis and Georgios Samaras at the Beverly Hills Hotel in Umhlanga Rocks near Durban on Tuesday evening. Greek officials decided not to press charges, a police spokesman said.

Greece meets South Korea in their opening Group B encounter at Port Elizabeth on Saturday.

NO BENDTNER FOR DANES

Denmark are prepared to launch their World Cup campaign without Nicklas Bendtner as coach Morten Olsen conceded on Friday it was a dream to think the striker will be fit to play their opener.

Bothered by a nagging groin injury Bendtner has not played since May but had shown signs of returning to match fitness this week when he began training again with the squad.

"We'd love to have him back of course but I think I would be dreaming to have him back," Olsen told Reuters. "I don't think he will play."

"Surely we hope to have him back (sometime during the World Cup), he is good player, a talented player and we hope."

17,500 MILES TO JOHANNESBURG

England fan Dave Barrett has made possibly the longest and most expensive detour



ELJERO ELIA



HUMBERTO SUAZO

of some 17,500 miles (28,160km) to support his team at the World Cup finals.

Dave, 33, a pharmaceutical salesman, originally from Bristol in southwest England but now living in New Zealand, began his trip when he went to Auckland last Saturday (June 5) with his girlfriend and checked in for his flight to Johannesburg.

Instead of boarding a plane to South Africa, however, he found himself cancelling his ticket, buying a new one and that evening taking a different flight -- to London -- because he did not have a blank page in his passport.

Told that without a spare page, he would not be allowed into South Africa and then informed by the British Embassy in Wellington that it would take four weeks to process a new one, he weighed up his options.

"I thought about going to Hong Kong," he said. "But in the end decided the best thing to do was to cancel my original flight and go to London for a new passport."

He flew to London, transferred to Peterborough where the United Kingdom's main passport office is located, and after three hours queuing up for a new passport, returned to Heathrow airport and flew to Johannesburg, South Africa the same day.

CHILE LIFTED BY SUAZO RECOVERY

Chile defender Pablo Contreras believes it is "great news" striker Humberto Suazo is on course to be fit for next week's World Cup opener against Honduras.

Contreras said of his teammate's potential return to action: "It's great news, as much for the squad as for Humberto. The truth is that we are surprised that he has made such a fast recovery."

Thieves broke into the Greek team hotel and stole the equivalent 2,000 dollars from three of the squad, South African police said Thursday.

FOOTBALL BOSS ARRESTED FOR INSUBORDINATION

The Rwandan army arrested the president of the national football federation (FERWAFU), General Jean Bosco Kazura, on charges of travelling to South Africa for the World Cup without prior permission, a spokesman said Friday.

"He had gone to South Africa for the World Cup without the authority of the military hierarchy... This is an act of insubordination," army spokesman Jill Rutaremara said on Radio Rwanda.