

Eng face clear-out

Football

AFP, London

England manager Fabio Capello is preparing a clear-out of senior players after becoming convinced that too many of his squad have been "scarred" by previous failures, reports said Thursday.

Several newspapers speculated that the axe was hovering over Frank Lampard, James Milner, Rio Ferdinand and Gareth Barry as Capello attempts to freshen up his team with next year's Euro 2012 finals in mind.

England moved to within a point of qualification for Euro 2012 on Tuesday after an unconvincing 1-0 victory over Wales at Wembley that raised fresh questions about the resilience of Capello's men.

Capello was quoted as saying in several newspapers that he had expected England would perform poorly after studying players' body language during their pre-match warm-up at Wembley.

"When I go to the pitch before the game, I like to see the warm-up. During my career I have sometimes understood a lot of things because of what happened in the warm-up," Capello said.

Capello said he had attempted to gee up his players after they returned to the dressing room before kick-off but to no avail.

"I tried. I spoke with the players but it was impossible to change the things that I saw. Impossible," he said.

Asked if it was because not enough time

remained to change the mood in the dressing room, Capello said the problem was mental.

"The problem was here," Capello added, pointing to his head.

Capello said he struggled to comprehend why England could not sustain a given level of performance through 90 minutes.

"Sometimes it is incredible to understand why," he said.

"I have said before, as a manager, as a player, there are times when I never understood what really happened.

"We played well for 20 minutes. Why can't we play the same (for the whole game)? I don't understand.

"The result was really good. The most important thing. But we need to speak about some things."

Although Capello did not identify players who may be at risk, several newspapers on Thursday reported that Manchester City duo Barry and Milner along with Lampard and possibly Ferdinand were most at threat.

Capello was likely to fast-track the development of Manchester United trio Phil Jones, Tom Cleverley and Danny Welbeck as he attempts to accelerate a steady overhaul which has been under way since the disastrous 2010 World Cup.

Tuesday's squad at Wembley contained only eight members of the 23-man party which travelled to South Africa two years ago, although Steven Gerrard and Glen Johnson would have been included to face Wales if fit.



Senegal forward Mamadou Niang (L) shakes hands with Qatar's al-Sadd club manager Mohammed Ghanem al-Ali (R) after signing a two-year contract during an official presentation in Doha on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Bayern set to rest Robben

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich are set to leave Arjen Robben out of Saturday's German league match with Freiburg to give the Dutch winger more time to recover from a groin injury ahead of their Champions League campaign.

Robben is recovering from back and groin injuries and resumed training with the Bayern squad on Monday, but still needs more time.

After four league games, Bayern are top of the league and host Freiburg at Munich's Allianz Arena, but Robben is expected to sit it out as the Bavarians face Villarreal away in the Champions League next Wednesday.

"Arjen Robben is on the mend, although I don't know if he will be fit to face Freiburg," said Bayern sporting director Christian Nerlinger.

"The main thing in his case is that it won't be a long-term problem. This groin inflammation has caused trouble in the past, but it's looking good for him now."

Having missed out on Germany's recent win over Austria and draw with Poland with a thigh strain, striker Mario Gomez will be back in action after returning to training on Tuesday.

"The leg is giving me no more problems," said Gomez. Nerlinger said it is crucial Bayern get off to a good start in their Champions League campaign in Spain, when Munich will certainly need Robben's playmaking skills and Gomez's finishing.

"It's a game we can't afford to lose, because otherwise we'll immediately feel the pressure, but I'm confident we'll avoid defeat," said Nerlinger.

Bayern then welcome Manchester City to Munich on September 27, but Nerlinger said he felt no trepidation about the impending visit of the big-spending Premier League powerhouses.

"There's no fear, just a real sense of anticipation," he said. "The players want to show what they can do at this level."

SERIE A STARTS TODAY

Milan host Lazio

AFP, Rome



Champions AC Milan will kick off the new Serie A season on Friday following the resolution of the player strike which caused the postponement of the first weekend of the new campaign.

Milan host Lazio at the San Siro in an early test of both sides' potential to challenge for the title.

The hosts, alongside neighbours Inter Milan, are the favourites to retain their crown while Lazio are hoping to go one better than last season and secure a Champions League finish.

The resumption of domestic football will be a relief to fans who have had to wait three and a half months to see their teams in league action.

On Monday the Players Union and Football League finally came to an agreement on a temporary one-year solution to the ongoing problem, allowing the season to begin this weekend.

Milan have strengthened moderately in the off season, bringing in defensive recruits Philippe Mexes and Taye Taiwo while also adding Liverpool flop Alberto Aquilani to a midfield that lost 2006 World Cup winner Andrea Pirlo.

The trick for coach Massimiliano Allegri will be to continue to keep his attacking players happy as Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Robinho, Antonio Cassano and Pato cannot all play at the same time - Ibrahimovic and Cassano are especially hard to please when they are on the sidelines.

In fact, it will be interesting to see who are

his first choice strikers for the big kick-off as that will give a clear indication as to who he will be counting on most in the coming season.

Milan should still be defensively secure this season and can always rely on the most talented forwards in the league to decide games.

The bigger interest will be in seeing how Lazio have changed after their busy summer of activity.

They brought in experienced forwards Djibril Cisse and Miroslav Klose and it would be difficult to imagine that they won't improve on last season's shot-shy showings.

Klose is a proven goalscorer and Cisse has pace and power while he has always knocked in the goals wherever he's been.

With Brazilian Hernanes pulling the strings behind Klose and Cisse, they should at least give Milan's defence a tough test.

The other major change has been at goalkeeper where Uruguay number one Fernando Muslera has left for Galatasaray while Federico Marchetti, who kept goal for Italy at last year's World Cup, comes in from the cold after a year-long stand-off with Cagliari.

They will also have to make do without talented Albanian midfielder Lorik Cana, a signing from Galatasaray who will sit out Friday's match injured.

Lazio may have a slight advantage as they have already played a pair of competitive games this season, thumping Macedonia's Rabotnicki 9-1 on aggregate in the Europa League, demonstrating that they may have not the firepower they lacked last

Health comes first: Abidal

Football

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona defender Eric Abidal said Thursday he is stalling on a new contract offer from the Spanish giants because he is focusing fully on his health six months after undergoing surgery to remove a liver tumour.

The France international, who is in the middle of contract negotiations before it expires in June 2012, admitted he has yet to recover his old form and does not want to mislead anyone about his health.

"I am thinking about my health first and then the contract," he told reporters after a Barcelona training session.

"Yesterday I was in Paris undergoing tests again. This tumour has affected me. Life can change. I am undergoing treatment and I don't know how my body will react," Abidal said.

"I am taking pills every day. Today I am fine, I don't know how I will be tomorrow. If it happens to me again, do I carry on playing or not?" the Frenchman said.

The 32-year-old said he had received an offer from Barca and had spoken to sports director Andoni Zubizarreta.

"The first thing I told him is that I don't want to mislead anyone. I have had some difficult moments since the operation and I want to think about it because for me health is the most important thing."

The left-back was in the form of his life last season before a tumour was discovered on his liver in March.

After undergoing surgery he made a rapid recovery, and made a symbolic return May 3 in the final minutes of Barca's return 1-1 Champions League semi-final tie with Real Madrid, who were eliminated.

According to the Spanish press Barcelona are offering a one-year extension while Abidal would prefer two years.

"Health comes first, I want to return to play at my level," he said. "Once I get to my level I want to speak to the club again."

"It is complicated because we are not machines, but I hope to recover the level I was at before."

Cole to learn French

AFP, London



Joe Cole on Thursday ruled out trying to commute between London and France as he prepares to relaunch his career with reigning Ligue 1 champions Lille.

Cole's loan move to Lille from Liverpool was one of the most eye-catching deals of the transfer window, with the 29-year-old midfielder choosing to broaden his horizons overseas rather than opt for a deal with an English club.

English press reports speculated Cole may have been tempted into the deal by Lille's good transport links with London -- less than two hours by train -- which would allow him to reside in the British capital.

However the former West Ham and Chelsea star has dismissed suggestions he would be anything less than 100 per cent committed to his move overseas.

"My friends were telling me that had been in the press back home," Cole told Talksport radio on Thursday when asked if he planned to commute to France.

"But there's no way you can do that as a professional footballer these days. It's nice if I've got a couple of days to be able to pop back to London."

Although several of the Londoner's new teammates speak English, Cole said he plans to learn French as swiftly as possible.

"There's a few who speak perfect English but I'm going to try and throw myself into it and try and learn the language," he said.

"I did French for five years at school and came out with just 'Bonjour' and 'Au Revoir' at the end of it. I didn't expect to be playing in France one day!"

"But I'm going to throw myself into it with my wife and my daughter as well; it will be great to have another language."

Kenny backs Andy

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool manager Kenny Dalglish said he was satisfied with Andy Carroll's fitness on Thursday following criticism of the striker's lifestyle by England manager Fabio Capello.

Capello raised eyebrows earlier this week after telling reporters Carroll needed to "drink less" if he wanted to be a successful footballer.

However Dalglish shrugged off Capello's comments on Thursday, saying he was satisfied with the fitness of Carroll, who became the most expensive English player in history when he joined the club for £35 million in January.

"As we've said before Andy was not properly fit last season because of a knee injury but we have been pleased with his level of fitness this season because he has lost that injury," Dalglish told reporters.

"I think Andy is very appreciative of advice from anyone who has a good standing in football."

"I think he appreciates Capello's advice because he has great respect for Fabio and Fabio has great respect for Andy."

Capello is a keen admirer of Carroll but restricted him to only a few minutes as a substitute in Tuesday's Euro 2012 qualifier against Wales. The 22-year-old failed to make the bench for last Friday's win over Bulgaria.

Capello said Carroll needed to be "careful" with his fitness after a summer where he was pictured partying in Barbados and at an English music festival.

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

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TEN Cricket

Sri Lanka v Australia
Second Test, Day 2
Live from 10:30am

US Open
Men's Qtrs & Mixed Doubles Final
Live from 9:00pm

ESPN & STAR Cricket
England v India
Third ODI
Live from 6:00pm

