

## **THE WEEK'S NEWS & GOSSIP FROM THE PREMIERSHIP**

**By Graham Lister, Chief Football Correspondent,  
China Monitor (UK) Sports Division**

Glenn Hoddle resigned as Southampton manager on Tuesday night, just five hours after his chairman, Rupert Lowe, had reluctantly granted permission for Tottenham Hotspur to open talks with their former star player.

Lowe was unhappy at the speed with which Hoddle turned his back on Southampton, who had offered him the opportunity to rehabilitate his managerial career in 2000 following his sacking as England manager in December 1999.

Implying that ENIC, Tottenham's new owners, might have approached Hoddle before permission was officially given, Lowe said he would ask the FA Premier League to investigate the circumstances surrounding the manager's resignation. He also insisted that he would not release Hoddle's registration until an adequate compensation payment for Southampton's loss had been agreed by Spurs.

Negotiations about such compensation seemed to be the major reason why Hoddle was not formally unveiled to the press as Tottenham's new manager until Friday evening – too late for him to take charge of the team for Saturday's showdown with arch-rivals Arsenal at Highbury. The two North London giants clash again at Old Trafford next week-end in the semi-final of the FA Cup – which will be Hoddle's first game in control.

John Gorman also left Southampton's staff and becomes Hoddle's number two at White Hart Lane. Stewart Houston, Graham's assistant, has been sacked. David Pleat, Tottenham's director of football, whom ENIC said a week ago would be caretaker manager until the end of the season, remained in charge for the League game against the Gunners. His future may be uncertain: Hoddle and he did not always see eye to eye when Pleat was his manager in the 1986/87 season.

Meanwhile Stuart Gray was appointed caretaker manager of Southampton for the remainder of the season, with Denis Rofe his assistant. While Hoddle hopes to reap the reward of his predecessor George Graham's work by taking Tottenham into the FA Cup Final, the new managerial pair at

Southampton are hoping to build on Hoddle's foundations and secure a European place by finishing strongly in the Premiership.

However, with Southampton due to move in the summer into the brand new, purpose-built Friends Provident St Mary's Stadium, whose capacity of 30,000 is double that of the Dell, the club's fans feel that a high profile managerial appointment will be essential to take the club further forward. Their overwhelming favourite is former Saints player Kevin Keegan. If Lowe succeeds in luring Keegan back into football – which at this stage is by no means certain – then Keegan will have followed Hoddle as both England and Southampton manager.

Another ex-England manager, Graham Taylor, announced that he would be retiring at the end of this season – even if his Watford team gain promotion back to the Premiership (via the First Division play-offs). Taylor, 56, has been a manager for 29 years, spanning more than 1000 League games.

Other managers in the news last week include Gordon Strachan, in charge at beleaguered Coventry City, who insisted that he would never resign from the job, even if the Sky Blues are relegated. Should they fail to escape the drop, however, the board may feel forced (by pressure from unhappy fans) to replace him.

Arsene Wenger has rejected Barcelona's attempts to make him their next coach. Wenger insists that he wishes to remain loyal to Arsenal by honouring his existing contract with the club. His decision may have a bearing on the immediate future of Emmanuel Petit. The French midfielder who left Arsenal for Barca last summer has endured a frustrating time in Catalonia, rarely getting any first-team football. But he was thought likely to stay at Barcelona if Wenger, his mentor at Monaco and Highbury, joined. Now earlier rumours linking him with a move back to London with Chelsea, Arsenal or Spurs are likely to resurface.

Sven Goran Eriksson maintained his perfect start as England manager when his team recorded a 3-1 win over Albania in Tirana last Wednesday. The victory confirmed England in second place behind Germany in their World Cup qualifying group, and was achieved through three late goals from Michael Owen, Paul Scholes and Andy Cole. For Cole, whose misses against Finland on the previous Saturday had provoked a lot of largely undeserved criticism, scoring was especially sweet. It was his first ever England goal, and had taken 13 games to arrive.

The whole team shared his delight when he finally found the back of the net, but in the midst of the celebrations Cole's namesake Ashley, the Arsenal

left-back who was enjoying an impressive debut, was struck on the head by a woman's lipstick thrown from the crowd. He needed treatment for a cut above the eye, prompting FIFA – already disturbed by racist abuse from some Albanian fans towards black English players – to consider sanctions against the Albanian FA.

By the final whistle, there were seven Manchester United players on the pitch for England, underlining Eriksson's strategy of playing to his strengths. However, he may have to do without the considerable coaching services of Steve McLaren in future internationals. The Manchester United assistant manager had been given permission by his club to work with England until the end of the season. The FA were anxious to extend the agreement, but Sir Alex Ferguson has said he now wants McLaren to give his full attention to United. Coincidentally, McLaren is tipped by many as the ideal successor to Ferguson as United's boss when Sir Alex retires in summer 2002.

[www.chinamonitor.com](http://www.chinamonitor.com)