

Premiership News & Gossip

NEWCASTLE QUARTET SENT HOME FROM SPAIN SCHOLERS IN TROUBLE WITH UNITED

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With international matches scheduled for the week-end including England's friendly at Old Trafford against Sweden and the first-leg of the Republic of Ireland's World Cup qualifying play-off against Iran attention switched from Premiership cut and thrust to international selection.

Roy Keane, Manchester United's inspirational captain, will lead Ireland against Iran despite having missed United's last five games through injury. Liverpool's Steven Gerrard misses the England game with a groin strain but Michael Owen should overcome a sore hamstring to start. Ugo Ehiogu (Middlesbrough), Danny Murphy (Liverpool), Frank Lampard (Chelsea), Darren Anderton (Tottenham Hotspur) and Kevin Phillips (Sunderland) were all called into Sven Goran Eriksson's squad. For Murphy, Anderton and Phillips in particular it is an opportunity to impress and convince the coach that they are worth taking to Japan and Korea next May.

Arsenal goalkeeper David Seaman, however, needs surgery on his injured shoulder and will be out for three months. He resumed light training two weeks ago but the injury did not respond to treatment, making an operation inevitable and casting a doubt over his availability for the World Cup finals. His problems have created opportunities for Leeds goalkeeper Nigel Martyn and Arsenal club-mate Richard Wright, and also allowed Leicester's Ian Walker to force his way back into Eriksson's squad.

Some Premiership clubs are taking advantage of the two-week break for internationals by training overseas. However, Newcastle United's trip to Spain went sour when four of their stars – Kieron Dyer, Craig Bellamy, Carl Cort and Andy Griffin – were sent home in disgrace and fined two weeks wages. The quartet were disciplined for failing to attend a dinner in honour of Sir John Hall, Newcastle's president. They were allegedly out on the town of Marbella drinking at the time.

For Dyer the implications could be serious. A shin injury has prevented the England international from playing since February, but in the summer of 2000 Newcastle manager Bobby Robson disciplined Dyer for his part in an embarrassing incident also involving Frank Lampard and Rio Ferdinand

while they were on holiday in Cyprus. England coach Eriksson was understandably disappointed to learn of Dyer's latest transgression, having made a point of saying that the injured player was still part of his World Cup thinking when he announced his squad for the Sweden friendly.

Eriksson will also be concerned at a surprising turn of events involving Manchester United and England star Paul Scholes. The arrival of Juan Sebastian Veron has altered the make-up of United's midfield, and Scholes has been asked by Sir Alex Ferguson to play between midfield and the front as a support to main striker Ruud van Nistelrooy. It is a role that Scholes has looked uncomfortable with, and his club form has suffered.

Ferguson left the player out of the starting line-up that lost 3-1 to rivals Liverpool last Sunday, but Scholes then refused to play for his club in Monday night's League (Worthington) Cup tie at Arsenal. The Gunners emphatically beat a United team composed largely of youth and reserve players by four goals to nil, but Scholes's unwillingness to play reportedly cost him a £100,000 fine. Amazingly, the player has now been linked with a transfer to Italian giants Juventus, although United team-mate David Beckham, speaking to the press at England's training camp, thought that the issue would be resolved satisfactorily and that Scholes would never leave Old Trafford. The player has been assured he will start for England against Sweden.

Leeds United's club captain Lucas Radebe may have to quit football because of a persistent knee injury. The South African international has not played for the Premiership leaders so far this season, and manager David O'Leary fears for Radebe's career. O'Leary is convinced that the unreasonable demands of the South African FA, who insisted on calling up Radebe for international matches despite his club's warnings about aggravating the injury, are responsible for the player's predicament. O'Leary added that because of this experience, he would not sign any more South African players.

Manchester United's continuing defensive problems (they have now conceded 20 goals in 11 games) have prompted Ferguson to make a bid for Malaga's centre back Fernando Sanz. The 27-year-old has a £12 million buy-out clause in his contract, but Sanz might not be able to move to Old Trafford until the January transfer window in the Spanish football season. Sanz is the son of former Real Madrid president Lorenzo Sanz and joined Malaga from Real Madrid after six seasons at the Bernabeu where he made only 35 appearances for the first team.

Around 90 per cent of the Professional Footballers Association 3,500 members have indicated on ballot papers that are prepared to strike in support of their trade union s dispute with the Premier League over the allocation of money from TV. The PFA wants about £15 million more than the Premiership has offered, and is threatening to withdraw its members services from televised matches. Further negotiations are expected.

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