

## **PREMIERSHIP NEWS, GOSSIP & RUMOURS**

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Against a background of excitement and high expectation about the start of the new Premiership season, the five-match unbeaten run of the England national team under Sven Goran Eriksson was ended by Holland in a friendly match at Tottenham's White Hart Lane stadium.

It was the first time England had played an international during August, and the squad's lack of competitive match practice was clearly evident as the stylish Dutch ruthlessly exposed England's rustiness during a dazzling first-half display.

Misplaced passes and a failure to press their opponents effectively were the main features of England's opening 45 minutes. And they were punished with two well-taken goals by the Dutch. Mark van Bommel picked up possession in the 38<sup>th</sup> minute 25 yards out and sent an unstoppable shot swerving between Jamie Carragher and Wes Brown into the roof of the net. Within 60 seconds Patrick Kluivert found Boudewijn Zenden, whose shot was parried by Nigel Martyn only for Ruud van Nistelrooy to react quicker than Brown and steer the ball home left-footed. Van Nistelrooy soon deserved another when his exquisite chip came back off the crossbar.

The second half saw both sides make extensive use of their substitutes, disrupting the rhythm of the game without altering the score. Apart from providing the squad with a useful get-together ahead of their crucial World Cup qualifying tie with Germany in Munich on 1<sup>st</sup> September, the evening offered few positives for Eriksson. But the Swede was as cool and philosophical in defeat as he had been in victory, insisting there was no need to panic and urging supporters to remain optimistic about qualification for

and did not pass well, and if you can't do a simple thing like pass a ball to each other then you are going to struggle with everything else," said the Liverpool striker.

Captain David Beckham—who suffered from the absence, through injury, of Steven Gerrard—said, "Our confidence has not been knocked too much. We would have liked a better result, but Germany is the big one."

If there was little for England to be pleased about on the night, Premiership managers with players in the Dutch squad had much to enjoy. A string of agile saves by Edwin van der Saar confirmed that Fulham have bought one of the world's best goalkeepers, while Arsenal's Giovanni van Bronckhorst looked comfortable in an unfamiliar full-back role. New Chelsea signing Zenden caused England's defenders persistent problems, and in attack van Nistelrooy showed once again that Manchester United have bought one of the most exciting strikers in Europe.

However, criticism of the timing of the friendly—immediately before the big Premiership kick-off on Saturday—intensified following knee injuries to Martin Keown and David James. Keown was ruled out of Arsenal's opening fixture at Middlesbrough while goalkeeper James, recently recruited by West Ham, could be out for several months.

There was better news for West Ham on the previous evening, when their promising young striker Jermain Defoe scored twice for England's Under-21 team in a 4-0 victory over Holland. Also on the score-sheet were Derby County's Malcolm Christie and Darius Vassell of Aston Villa.

Vassell's Villa club-mate David Ginola has initiated legal action against the club following what he considers were defamatory, personal and vindictive remarks about his physique by manager John Gregory. Ginola is being supported by the Professional Footballers' Association, and has also sought the advice of UK Prime Minister's wife Cherie Blair, a prominent lawyer.

Real, who in successive years agreed fees of £37 million for Luis Figo and £45 million for Zinedine Zidane, are known to be heavily in debt, but insist that there is no problem with the arrangements to pay Arsenal what they owe.

The Gunners vice-captain, Patrick Vieira, a summer target for both Real and Manchester United, has committed himself to Arsenal for at least another season and said that disparaging remarks about the club attributed to him in the media were fabricated and came from an unknown source. His team-mate Kanu has been linked with a possible move to Fulham for £10 million, but the player and his agent have dismissed the speculation.

Everton's unsettled Ghanaian midfielder, Alex Nyarko, looks likely to join French club Monaco on a year's loan, while Leicester City captain Matt Elliott has agreed a new four-year deal with the club, despite interest from Celtic.

Teddy Sheringham has been named as the new captain of Tottenham Hotspur following the departure of Sol Campbell to Arsenal. Spurs manager Glenn Hoddle has, however, again upset Southampton. Hoddle infuriated the Saints when he walked out on them last season to take charge of his beloved Spurs, and now he has incensed the south-coast club by trying to lure away Dean Richards, their central defender. Richards, who recently signed a new contract with Southampton, is seen as an ideal replacement for Campbell, but Saints' chairman Rupert Lowe has rejected Tottenham's advances and claims Spurs have not gone about it in the right way.

Hoddle has, however, succeeded in bringing USA international goalkeeper Kasey Keller, once of Leicester, to White Hart Lane from Rayo Vallecano of Spain. Keller will put pressure on Neil Sullivan for the goalkeeper's jersey. Also arriving from Spain is Nigerian international Finidi George, who has joined Ipswich Town for £3.5 million from Mallorca.