

## SATURDAY 5 INTERNATIONAL HEADLINE MAKERS

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England's Steven Gerrard (Liverpool) takes the ball past Finland's Harri Ylonen.

England scored their first goals and secured a first win in their World Cup qualifying group on Saturday. A 2-1 victory over Finland at Anfield maintained Sven Goran Eriksson's 100 per cent start as England's head coach.

But it was never easy against a hard-working and physical Finnish side, marshalled in defence by Sami Hyypia and inspired going forward by his Liverpool club-mate Jari Litmanen. Indeed, Finland's movement had England on the back-foot for most of the first-half, and it was no great surprise when they took the lead.

The goal, from a corner exposed slack marking at the heart of England's defence, Aki Riihilahti escaping his marker, Rio Ferdinand, to get in a header which was deflected by Gary Neville beyond David Seaman.

To their credit, England's response showed a lot of character, and goals either side of the half-time interval turned a 0-1 deficit into a 2-1 winning margin.

The first goal bore the mark of Manchester United but was swept home by Liverpool's Michael Owen. Man-of-the-match David Beckham showed quick feet in the middle of the pitch to keep possession, before playing an astute pass into the path of his galloping team-mate Gary Neville on the right wing. Neville cleverly skipped past a lunging tackle before cutting back

a dangerous low cross into the Finnish penalty area. Andy Cole took one touch to control the ball and a second to lay it off to Michael Owen, whose first-time shot took a slight deflection before finding the net at the far post.

It was an excellently-worked goal that filled England with new confidence., Within four minutes of the re-start they were ahead. This time Beckham, who had previously had two good efforts on goal, turned scorer. Steve McManaman ran at the heart of the Finnish defence and slipped the ball to Paul Scholes, who pushed with one touch pushed it wide into the path of Beckham. The captain's shot, from an awkward angle, flew into the net.

It was only Beckham's second goal for his country, his first from open play, and his first in England.

Shortly afterwards Michael Owen saw his header come back off the inside of a post, and later Andy Cole had a great chance to increase England's advantage when put through by Scholes. Unfortunately, Cole's snap shot flew wide.

Despite the excellent contributions of Beckham, McManaman and Steven Gerrard in the England midfield, the lead never looked very comfortable, and Finland were always a threat on the counter-attack.

In the 88<sup>th</sup> minute, Jari Litmanen had a wonderful opportunity to equalise, but his first shot was superbly saved by David Seaman, and his second, from the rebound, was cleared by Ferdinand.

So England moved ahead of Finland into second place in the group, and travel to face Albania on Wednesday in good heart. It was not a great performance, but the team showed character to come from behind, and there were a number of encouraging displays for Eriksson to enjoy.

- In other World cup qualifiers involving British teams, Scotland let a two goal lead disappear against Belgium. Billy Dodds put the Scots two up at Hampden Park, but a last minute header from Daniel Van Buyten salvaged a point for 10-man Belgium.
- Manchester United's Roy Keane scored twice in Nicosia for the Republic of Ireland, who defeated Cyprus 4-0. The Leeds United full-backs Ian Harte and Gary Kelly netted Ireland's two other goals.

- Coventry City s striker John Hartson was on target twice for Wales, who gained a point with a 2-2 draw against Armenia.
- Northern Ireland hit the post twice against the Czech Republic, but were beaten 1-0 in Belfast when Pavel Nevded scored a second-half goal.



England captain David Beckham (Manchester United) celebrates scoring the second and winning goal against Finland at Anfield.

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