

Premiership Profiles: ERIKSSON S ENGLAND SQUAD

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England captain David Beckham in training for the Finland match.

For his second and third matches in charge of England – and his first two competitive fixtures – Sven Goran Eriksson named a 26-man squad that looked well balanced, promised a degree of flair and was largely based on youthful vigour.

Arsenal's David Seaman (despite carrying an injured back), Nigel Martyn of Leeds United, David James of Aston Villa and Ipswich Town's Richard Wright make up the four goalkeepers in the squad. Seaman remains the probable first-choice, with little to choose in ability between James and Martyn, and Wright representing the future.

At full-back, Manchester United's Neville brothers, Gary and Phil, are joined by Charlton Athletic's Chris Powell – given a belated international career by Eriksson – and Arsenal's promising left-back Ashley Cole, who has made the leap to international contention after just 20 first-team appearances for the Gunners.

Jamie Carragher of Liverpool can play at full-back or in the centre of defence, but the impressive central defensive trio of Rio Ferdinand (Leeds), Sol Campbell (Tottenham Hotspur – the vice-captain), and Manchester United's Wes Brown probably means Carragher will be deployed at full-back or as cover. Ferdinand has grown in stature since moving from West Ham, and looks increasingly assured at both international level and in the Champions League, while Brown has formed a formidable partnership with Jaap Stam at the heart of Manchester United's Premiership-topping defence. Campbell's qualities, meanwhile, make him a target for a host of clubs English and foreign – including Spurs, who are desperate to keep him.

Eriksson's midfield options bristle with creative potential. They include the United trio of skipper David Beckham, Paul Scholes and Nicky Butt. Beckham's credentials are well-known, although the debate continues over whether his best position is wide right – where his crossing ability has few equals – or in the centre, where he would probably see more of the ball and have more scope to influence the play. Scholes has become the complete midfielder, complementing his tackling, passing and well-timed runs with predatory goalscoring instincts.

The more defensive-minded Butt is not an automatic choice for United but has had more opportunities this season and consistently justifies his selection. Nevertheless, he is seen largely as cover for the injury-prone Steven Gerrard in the England midfield. Gerrard is one of the most gifted and promising midfielders in the Premiership, but he and England have consistently been frustrated by injuries, so his best will probably not be seen until his long-term fitness is assured.

Gerrard's ex-club-mate Steve McManaman is the only non-England-based player in the squad. Since moving to Real Madrid he has added maturity and self-belief to his game, getting more involved and imposing himself more on matches. Less experienced at international level are the three young West Ham midfielders Frank Lampard, Joe Cole and Michael Carrick, plus Sunderland's Gavin McCann. A lot is expected of each of them, and it will be interesting to see how – and how often – Eriksson chooses to deploy their talents.

For his five striker positions, Eriksson has concentrated on the considerable resources of Liverpool and Manchester United. From United come Andy Cole and Teddy Sheringham. Ironically, the pair have not spoken to one another for a couple of years because of a difference of opinion at Old Trafford; but on the pitch they work well together. Sheringham, one of the shrewdest football brains in the Premiership, has earned a recall to the England set-up and his guile and experience offer Eriksson a potent

attacking force to introduce off the bench when the situation demands it. Cole has waited a long time to break his goalscoring duck at this level but worked tirelessly and effectively for England against Spain and appears to have secured his place.

With Eriksson favouring as split striker formation, Liverpool's Michael Owen was used in the hole between midfield and attack against Spain, and is flexible enough to operate in that role again, using his great pace to burst forward. Striking cover is provided by his Anfield team-mates, Robbie Fowler and Emile Heskey. Both are full of goals, and given the right service from midfield both they and the other three strikers are capable of getting on the score-sheet for England.

A combination of injuries and the need to keep the size of the squad down to manageable proportions meant there was disappointment for a number of players at least for these two World Cup qualifying games against Finland and Albania.

Kevin Phillips, Kieron Dyer, Michael Ball, Nick Barmby, Ray Parlour and Ugo Ehiogu were all omitted from this squad, but the manager has made it clear that the door is not closed to anyone. There is healthy competition for places in all positions now, and a mood of optimism in the camp. If the right results can be achieved on the pitch, England's poor start in their World Cup qualifying group can be overcome and Eriksson can become the most popular Swede in England.



Manchester United's Paul Scholes – a key member of the England midfield.

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