

JUAN PABLO ANGEL & DOMINIC MATTEO: Premiership Players of the Week

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Juan Pablo Angel endured a nightmare start to his Premiership career last season but now that he has settled into English football he is beginning to show the form that prompted Aston Villa manager John Gregory to make him the most expensive player in the club's history.

Angel's two goals in last week's 3-2 home win over Bolton Wanderers helped take Villa to the top of the Premiership for the first time since December 1998. Last season, the Colombian made just seven starts and scored a solitary goal. This season he has started on a regular basis and already has eight goals to his name.

It is a name that is now chanted by an adoring Villa Park crowd – the same crowd that groaned in embarrassment as the £9.5 million misfit struggled to find any sort of form or touch in the unfamiliar surroundings of an English Spring.

Gregory had taken a huge gamble on Angel, who had scored 45 goals in 91 League games for River Plate in the Argentine league. It is a gamble that is now beginning to look shrewd as the quick-thinking Colombian's intelligent forward play creates chances for himself and his exciting strike partner, Darius Vassell. Angel's two goals against Bolton came from a header from six yards and a penalty; he also flicked the ball on for Vassell to apply the finish for Villa's second. He was only denied a hat-trick by Bolton goalkeeper Steve Banks.

Another player enjoying a great start to the season is Dominic Matteo of Leeds United. The ex-Liverpool centre-back has starred alongside Rio Ferdinand in a Leeds defence that has conceded just four goals in 10 Premiership games. The pair were again outstanding against Manchester United last Saturday at Old Trafford, Matteo producing another commanding performance and adding to his growing reputation.

Born in Dumfries, Scotland, but brought up in Liverpool, whose distinctive accent he retains, Matteo was a reliable but largely unheralded defender for the Merseyside club, scoring a solitary goal in 127 Premiership appearances but impressive enough to gain England Youth, Under-21 and B

international caps. He then chose to represent Scotland, the country of his birth, and has now added full Scottish international caps to his collection.

But it was his unexpected transfer from Anfield to Elland Road in the early weeks of last season for £4.25 million that has pushed his career onto a higher level. Matteo's versatility means he has been used in a variety of positions by both Liverpool and Leeds – left-back, left-sided midfielder and, latterly, central defensive partner for Ferdinand.

It is in the latter position that he has flourished, keeping out the likes of club captain Lucas Radebe and rising star Jonathan Woodgate. Matteo adds strength, aerial power, cool positional play and tenacity in the tackle to David O'Leary's back-four, and looks well-placed to cap the best phase of his career to date with a medal as Leeds challenge hard for a major trophy.

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