

England finds a new hero

Wayne's world is far removed from the lifestyle of pop stars and the glitterati

Despite their team's disappointing game against Switzerland, England fans do have something to be excited about - the chance to watch the coming-of-age of a young man who might just become a star in the football firmament. On Thursday, Wayne Rooney became the youngest-ever player to score in the European Championship, and ironically it was thanks to a perfect cross from England's last Next Big Thing, Michael Owen, whose form has been poor for the last two years, and who will no doubt be glad that Rooney will now be attracting more of the media attention that has so far been devoted to himself and Beckham - England's two most media-friendly stars.

But if and when Rooney does become a star, he will not be of the same ilk as the other two. He has too much of the pitbull about him for him to ever have a Beckham-style pop star image, while his barely-contained aggression on the pitch (like the vicious elbow jab he gave that French defender in the face) means that he will never be the Owen-style "nice boy next door", either. No, Rooney's legend, which is just starting to blossom, is of an entirely different sort, and harks back to bygone days when the game was the domain of the working class, before Nike and Reebok had manufactured their first pair of shoes.

One revealing anecdote I heard the other day tells of when the twelve-year-old Rooney (who plays for Everton, who he has always supported) was given a trial for Liverpool F.C., the city's other main club. Though most English twelve-year-olds would kill their granny to get such a chance, Rooney - who was dragged along unwillingly by a talent scout - made it clear what he felt



Wayne Rooney, the 18-year-old who has captured everyone's attention at Euro 2004

about the occasion. He turned up at Anfield with a scowl on his face and an Everton shirt on his back. I don't know if this why the Reds never signed him, but it does give an inkling of his personality - stubborn, proud, utterly fearless (going into

Anfield wearing an Everton shirt is not to be recommended) and fiercely loyal. These are the kind of qualities that we associate with the old days of football, when money was simply not an issue and players felt a loyalty to their team. As late as the

70's, it was not uncommon for a player to stay at the same team all his life, rather than skip from club to club enticed by increasingly lucrative contracts.

That Rooney is a great player, there is no doubt, but his place in English hearts is also due to his retro-image of a footballer from the old days, a simple working-class boy who lives for the game and not for the chance to appear in MTV videos and rub shoulders with the glitterati. Let's hope so, anyway - we always need a hero.

ENGLAND LABOUR TO VICTORY

3-0 scoreline belies a patchy performance

Being an England fan is never a painless occupation - if your national team is Brazil or France, you can watch a match knowing that you are probably going to enjoy the game (and win) while English fans invariably have to experience terrible anguish and upset digestions every time they see their team play.

After watching the match against Switzerland with English friends, we agreed that unless England improve pretty quickly, then we will not last long in Portugal. Though Rooney's first goal was a beauty, it barely calmed England's nerves, and it was not until Haas was sent off that England began to assert themselves.

Three goals they scored, but they never really dominated the game, and after having seen the following game that day, in which Croatia - England's next opponent - gave France a terrible fright, my English friends and I went back to what we normally do during international competitions - fretting and worrying.



Quaresma has had a stormy relationship with Rijkaard, the Barça coach

Quaresma: if Rijkaard stays, I'm going

The Barcelona player Ricardo Quaresma, who is about to be loaned to another, as-yet undecided club for next year, said on Thursday that his stormy relationship with the coach Frank Rijkaard has not improved, and that if Rijkaard is still in charge the year after next, then he will not be returning to Nou Camp.

"If Rijkaard goes", he said, "and another coach comes in who is prepared to discuss things with me and he gives me confidence, then I'll come back, but if he stays here for

another year, then I won't".

He went on to say "Rijkaard and I just don't get along. I don't want to have problems in the dressing room, it's nothing to do with my team-mates, it's just between me and him".

The Portuguese winger said that last season was one that he simply wants to forget about, as he hardly played in the first team and at the end of the season he received an injury that put an end to his hopes of playing in Euro 2004.

UEFA BAN

Totti to miss three games

A UEFA spokesman confirmed that last night that Francesco Totti, Italy's star striker, has been awarded a three-match ban by the UEFA disciplinary board for spitting at the Danish player Christian Poulsen during last Monday's match. This means that Totti will not be available for the remaining two games of the first stage and, should Italy qualify (which is by no means a foregone conclusion), he will also miss the quarter finals. Apparently the ban could have been even more drastic, but the board took into consideration the fact that the player has said that he deeply regrets his behaviour. However, his lawyer will be appealing against the ban.

EURO 2004 TICKET SCAM

Britons caught faking tickets

Lisbon police have apprehended two British men who were running a network for the resale of tickets to Euro 2004 games. Most of the tickets that were seized by police were fakes, and were for resale at prices of up to 400 Euro apiece. The police also seized 11,000 Euro and 1,000 Pounds Sterling in cash, five mobile phones and a range of different computer software and hardware. A third British man was also detained for buying some of the fake tickets.

RAGING THIRST IN PORTUGAL

2.5 million litres of beer sold

During the last six days, since the start of the Euro 2004 championship, bars and restaurants and Portugal have sold almost two and a half million litres of beer. According to Centralcer, the firm which distributes 90% of the beer in Portugal. The greatest amount that has been sold during one single day was last Tuesday in Porto, where the match between Holland and Germany took place.

FIREMAN SENT DOWN

English fireman imprisoned

During the last three days, Portuguese police have arrested over 55 people for violent incidents in Albufeira. On Wednesday night, Gary Norman, a 46-year-old British fireman, was sentenced to two years in prison after undergoing a trial that lasted over ten hours. He was found guilty of having been the ringleader of the mob who drunkenly ran amok in the resort town of Albufeira last Tuesday night. The same court also ordered the immediate expulsion of seven other English fans, one of whom was given a nine-month suspended sentence. The other six men were given suspended sentences of six months each. Meanwhile, thirty-four other men who were arrested during the same riot on Tuesday have agreed to return home immediately in return for all of the charges against them being dropped.