

## Sven out to prove his worth

By Mike Walters



Sven Goran Eriksson's hairdryer still wouldn't blow out a lighted match, and so far there have been no confirmed sightings of the blessed Nancy at Eastlands.

And as Eriksson becomes the latest former England coach to reinvent himself as a club manager, Premier League sidewalks will be lined by Swede-bashers waiting for Sven to fail.

From Sir Alf Ramsey to Graham Taylor, Terry Venables, Glenn Hoddle and Kevin Keegan, the descent from international orbit to domestic altitude has

In just 48 hours, Eriksson's post-England incarnation - if Hoddle will excuse the karma reference - will begin at Upton Park, and eight days later the more gilded neighbours from up the Chester Road will attend the housewarming known locally as the Manchester derby.

New City boss Eriksson's early-season collision with Sir Alex Ferguson will give seasoned Svennis-baiters a chance to compare the most feared hairdryer of them all with the Scandic coolness which was adjudged to be a liability at the World Cup 14 months ago.

Michael Ball was included in Eriksson's first England squad against Spain at Villa Park in February 2001, and was introduced as a half-time substitute in the 3-0 win.

And Ball, out of contract and in limbo over the summer, was Eriksson's first 'signing' at the City of Manchester Stadium after the Swede's £3.5million pay-off from Soho Square had finally run the course of its terms.

Supportive, rather than gushing, in his enthusiasm for Eriksson's appointment, the former Everton and Rangers defender admitted: "You can understand why there might be people waiting for Sven, and the record of England managers going back into club football hasn't been the best, but I don't think he'll fail.

"Sven knows what is expected of him, but he has very high standards and he won't be going into this job light-heartedly - he wants to prove people wrong and show what a good manager he really is. Deep down, he's more passionate than people think. He doesn't show his emotions much, but he always said he wanted to be judged on the results of football matches - and that's what he's getting paid for here.

"Sven has a great record in club football and he's bringing in players to help him sustain it and fulfil his ambitions for Manchester City.

"There's a real buzz about the place - he's had the money to spend and the new owner wants success. It may not happen overnight, but we are going about it in the right way." To date, City's new owner Thaksin Shinawatra has bankrolled Eriksson's continental shopping excursions to the tune of around £30million, with £8.8m Italian striker Rolando Bianchi the most expensive.

Eriksson's supermarket sweep abroad suggests he will refuse to subscribe to English football's inflated transfer fees and wages, and Ball admits the influx of new faces has turned City's squad into an identity parade.

"Obviously you know who they are, the main guys," he said. "But there's a few young boys Sven's brought in from abroad I don't know much about - except they've looked good in training.

"I think he recognised me among all the new lads because I was in Sven's first England squad - and I wasn't signed up when he came to City because I didn't have a contract and no money could go out of the club until the takeover was completed.

"But he asked me to come in and train for a few days, he was happy enough with what he saw and it was a big confidence boost when he offered me a new contract.

"There is obviously going to be a lot more competition for places, and he said it was up to me to stamp my claims.

"So far he's been fantastic to work with and everyone has been made up with him.

"He has an international reputation, of course, and a lot of the players were intrigued to see what he was all about.

"But you can see, in his face, that he's happy to be back at work. Sven didn't like being out of football, and you can see how enthusiastic he is in training how much he is looking forward to the season. As for showing passion and seeing if he's got a hairdryer temper... I think we could test him!"

Before a ball has been kicked in anger, it is already clear that City will be a soap opera worth following under Eriksson - even without Nancy flouncing into reception to eyeball the secretarial staff.

But it may be harder for Sven to shake off the shadow that stalks former England managers in the Premier League.

None has ever won a trophy after turning in his Three Lions badge.



LAMPARD

# Use our pain to win back title

By Ian McGarry



ROONEY

FRANK LAMPARD has dismissed Manchester United's £50million bid to hang on to their Premier League crown and roared: "We want our title back."

Alex Ferguson's champs have dug deep into their bank account to add the attacking flair of Carlos Tevez, Anderson and Nani to their team.

On top of that, Old Trafford chief Fergie has bolstered his line-up by finally prising England ace Owen Hargreaves away from Bayern Munich.

But Lampard insisted that the Red Devils' new signings have not even raised an eyebrow in the Blues camp — because they are just too focused on winning back the title.

Midfielder Lamps, 29, said: "People say that United will strike fear into the heart of any side they play this season — but I can't say that we feel that way at Chelsea.

"They have spent a lot of money and bought some great players but none of us are sitting around talking about it after training.

"I think if you do that then it shows a lack of belief in yourself and your ability to win major honours.

"The fact of the matter is that — at Chelsea — we have the experience of winning two championships in the past three seasons as well as a few cups.

"We have strengthened our squad and Florent Malouda has already shown a glimpse of what he's capable of against United in the Community Shield.

"We have big players at the club and, if you ask me who do we fear this season, I would tell you that we fear no one. It's not how we look at things at Chelsea."

Lampard will captain the Blues against Birmingham on Sunday as they try to overtake Liverpool's record of 63 home matches without defeat.

The England ace is nursing a broken

toe and a ruptured tendon — which means he is unable to wear shoes in Civvy Street.

But he will defy the pain barrier to deliver a rallying call to the players and staff which, he hopes, will become a theme for the season.

He explained: "My message to everyone will be very clear. I will get everyone together and I will tell them that we are going to win the league this year.

"That is our aim and we don't hide it.

"We were hurt by losing the title to United last season. Very hurt.

"But we will use that pain to motivate ourselves.

"And the message I throw out to the team on Sunday before we get going will be repeated through the season at every game.

"No one is kidding themselves about how hard this will be. Liverpool have spent a lot of money as well as United.

"And Arsenal have some new players — and their younger ones are improving.

"I think this will be the most exciting and competitive campaign that I will have played in — but we are ready for it."

There is a huge challenge ahead for Chelsea but also for England and Lampard is relishing the prospect of rounding off the season at the Euro 2008 finals.

Second-best has never been good enough for the Three Lions midfielder and he is aiming high in what could be a pivotal season in his glittering career.

He added: "I have had a few big challenges over the past few seasons and this one won't be any different.

"It's exciting to think that, hopefully, there will be a tournament at the end of the domestic campaign — and I can't wait.

"At Chelsea, we want to win the Premiership.

"And we definitely want to go one bet-

ter than the semi-final of the Champions League — where we have been stuck for the past three years.

"To win a major tournament with England is a serious piece of history, though, and obviously that's something which we are aiming for as well."

Chelsea begin the season without captain John Terry and Didier Drogba, who have both been hit by knee problems.

In fact, the Stamford Bridge injury list looks more like a scene from Casualty than a football squad.

Boss Jose Mourinho has already said that he is concerned only with the players who ARE available and Lamps promised that there will be no crying from their camp.

He added: "There's no excuses from us.

"That's not what we are about. We have a good squad and some of the players who have been out are coming back.

"Malouda, Glen Johnson, Salomon Kalou and Ashley Cole are, hopefully, going to be OK and we are not looking to just survive for the first few weeks because we have a few knocks.

"Hopefully, big players like JT and Drogba will be back sooner than people might think and the only thing we are concerned with is that we win matches."

Lamps admitted he is disappointed that Arjen Robben is on his way out to Real Madrid.

However, he insisted the winger's departure would not harm the Blues' glory bid.

He said: "Arjen is a great player and good lad.

"He was a big part of the teams which won the title twice — but no one player leaving can be said to damage us enough that we don't believe we can win another title without him.

"As for now, we know how important it is to get off to a good start and that is the only thing on our minds."