

When Fabio Capello watches a club match his gaze must be fixed on people who are not there. During the tedium at Eastlands that was only halted with Paul Scholes's winner 20 seconds from the close, the England manager would have noticed the absentees from the Manchester United ranks. Michael Carrick, on the bench, may still have been serving his sentence for the mistake that tipped the Champions League tie towards Bayern Munich, and Capello must have been more concerned by the absence of Rio Ferdinand and Wes Brown. With the World Cup in sight, the circumstances of such men are unsettling in different ways.

The right-back Brown could show soon that his broken metatarsal has healed. Ferdinand, the England captain, causes far more concern as the current groin strain reinforces the perception that he is vulnerable now. The centre-half has appeared in just 11 of United's 35 Premier League games to date. If Capello's ambitions were to be realised, Ferdinand and the rest of the national team would need to take part in seven matches over 30 days this summer, culminating in the World Cup final.

England, by common consent, do not have great depth to their squad. With Shaun Wright-Phillips initially on the bench for the match against United, there was hope of impact from the uncapped Adam Johnson. Capello, beforehand, had made a point of highlighting the midfielder's promise and implying that his international debut would come soon. Johnson, pitted against the formidable Patrice Evra, turned out to be the first City player to be replaced.

It is very late for the England manager to embark on experiments, when the friendlies against Mexico and Japan are in late May and may be little more than fitness exercises. Capello's main decisions will be taken in the final days of the Premier League programme, and they concern every area of the side.

Goalkeeper

Capello's disquiet with more seasoned candidates was visible when he opted to give Ben Foster consecutive starts in the autumn, but the project had to be abandoned when the 27-year-old was dropped by Manchester United. Joe Hart has made a good impression on loan at Birmingham from Manchester City and Robert Green is kept fully occupied at West Ham, but the experience of David James has taken on some attractiveness now that he is fit to play regularly for Portsmouth and impressed, for instance, with the penalty save against Aston Villa on Sunday.

Defence

The England manager is not the sort to harbour regrets, but taking the captaincy from

Fabio Capello has plenty to ponder as key players fall by the wayside

The England manager has cause for concern in every area of the squad he intended to take to the World Cup

John Terry seems to have been an element in the decline of a centre-half who was vulnerable and out of control when Chelsea lost at Tottenham on Saturday. Ferdinand can no longer be counted on to stay fit. Brown is yet to return and a comeback by Ashley Cole is also awaited. Joleon Lescott is running out of time to recover before the end of Manchester City's campaign. Capello, as a precautionary measure, will have to weigh up alternatives, such as the forceful if uncapped Michael Dawson at Tottenham, and it will be a relief that Phil Jagielka, who could slot in at full-back or centre-half, is turning out regularly for Everton once more.

Midfield

It is a blessing that someone such as Steven Gerrard is afflicted by nothing more than non-descript form at toiling Liverpool. Escaping to

the World Cup might galvanise him. Frank Lampard has come through some flat spells but is now scoring again. The wide positions are a concern, with Aaron Lennon still sidelined at Tottenham and Theo Walcott, despite a sharp goal at Wigan, yet to be a principal figure at Arsenal. Stewart Downing has not been to the fore at Villa, where James Milner has shown the versatility that makes him an option for Capello on either flank. In the centre Tom Huddlestone, who has been important to the rise of Tottenham, interested Capello enough for the defensive midfielder to make his debut from the bench against Brazil in November.

Attack

Nobody expects an abundance of top-class strikers, but the degree to which hopes rest on Wayne Rooney is disquieting and Capello must

need all his self-discipline to look impassive whenever United send the striker out in half-fit condition. Indeed Emile Heskey, despite being demoted to the bench at Aston Villa, looks indispensable as a catalyst to Rooney. The other England attackers scarcely register by comparison. Goals from Peter Crouch and even Jermain Defoe have tapered off a little at Tottenham in the past few weeks, but fluctuations are natural for any forward. While Darren Bent did start in the loss to Brazil it does look as if time is running out for Bobby Zamora's credentials to be examined. The latter has been potent for Fulham, but his one goal in this campaign against Chelsea or Manchester United came when the latter's central defence was composed of Carrick and Darren Fletcher.

CAPELLO

Harry Redknapp exposes folly of fad for foreign managers

Footballer of the Year is easy this time: Wayne Rooney.

Manager of the Season is a bit more difficult. Carlo Ancelotti would have a claim, particularly if Chelsea win the Double for the first time.

Sir Alex Ferguson would have backers, too, if Manchester United win the title again and make it four in a row.

And there's Roy Hodgson for leading Fulham to the semi-finals of the Europa League and beating Juventus along the way.

But my vote would go to Harry Redknapp for the job he's done at Spurs and for what he represents.

Redknapp is four games away from loosening the stranglehold on the Champions League places.

His team is fresh from back-to-back wins over Arsenal and Chelsea as they prepare to head north to take on United at Old Trafford on Saturday.

And they are two points ahead of Manchester City and five ahead of Liverpool with a game in hand in the race for fourth. Spurs, let's not forget, were bottom of the Premier League when Redknapp took over from Juande Ramos at the end of October 2008.

And the transformation, both in confidence and style, in the 18 months since has been startling.

But there is a wider point to what Redknapp has achieved at White Hart Lane as well.

Because he's a British boss, he's a rebuke to the continuing fashion for entrusting foreign managers with our top clubs.

He's proof that even though many foreign managers win their jobs in English football on merit, their British counterparts are too often denied the chance to show what they can do.

Manchester City won the prize for that kind of snobbery this season

with the premature sacking of Mark Hughes and the decision to replace him with Roberto Mancini, who has done no better.

Redknapp recognises the problem and the fact the odds are stacked against British bosses.

"I like Carlo Ancelotti," Redknapp said yesterday. "He is a smashing bloke and he seems like a top manager."

"But with the same players and the same resources, David Moyes could have done the job at Chelsea. Moyes served his apprenticeship at Preston and he has done an outstanding job at Everton. There is no reason why he couldn't have led Chelsea to the top of the table."

"But I still think when the big jobs come up, the leading clubs will look for foreign managers."

"Why? Well, we are getting more foreign owners. They read about big names, great European players from the past and they are attracted by

their reputation.

"I know people have been talking about who's in the frame for the United job when Alex decides to call it a day and it's the same thing."

"It's Capello, it's Guardiola, it's Mourinho, it's Wenger, it's Hiddink. Why isn't Moyes considered a candidate?"

"Steve Bruce should be in there, too. He's done a good job at Sunderland. He knows United, he's been a player there."

"People just need a chance. Look at Chris Hughton at Newcastle. People said he couldn't do it, that he'd always be a No.2. Look at the job he's done."

Redknapp, like Moyes, Bruce, Martin O'Neill at Aston Villa and Tony Pulis at Stoke, has proved he can manage big-name players from different backgrounds and nations. Luka Modric has thrived under him. He has begun to get the best out of Heurleho Gomes. Even Roman Pavly-

uchenko has turned into a goal machine under Redknapp.

And he's married their talents with the best of British: Gareth Bale, Jermain Defoe, Peter Crouch and Michael Dawson. And, until Aaron Lennon was injured, Redknapp had conjured the best performances of his career from him.

There are some who patronise Redknapp as a cheeky chappie, a Cockney gabbler who can't mix with the sophisticates from abroad.

But those critics are very much in the minority now. Most recognise that because there is so much snobbery against British coaches, the game here didn't give Redknapp his shot at the big time until he was 61.

Now we know the big time suits him. Same as it would suit Moyes, Bruce and the rest of the ignored British bosses.

It's time to give them their chance, too.