

Can Michael Owen Restore Himself As England's Top Man?

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By Steven Cronin

Michael Owen's twisted knee and subsequent World Cup exit, coming only weeks after recuperating from a previous injury was not only a personal set-back, but also ultimately a fatal blow to England's World Cup hopes.

Sven-Goran Eriksson's nonsensical squad selections for the World Cup left England not only light in the striker department, but also seriously comprised our chances of a successful tournament.

With only four strikers to choose from Eriksson always knew he was playing a dangerous game. This was compounded by the fact Rooney and Owen were returning from injury and Theo Walcott had never played a first team game for Arsenal.

But Owen's injury will have hurt Eriksson. He took an unnecessary risk, overloading his squad with midfielders, assuming the goals would be shared amongst the team.

Michael Owen became an overnight sensation one humid evening in St Etienne during the France World Cup of 1998.

As a young eighteen-year-old, Owen scored a sensational solo goal against Argentina in the second round only for England to lose once again on penalties.

But he returned to Liverpool Football Club a national hero and England had found a striker whose presence on the field could spark fear into the heart of the opposition.

The arrival of Raphael Benitez as new Liverpool FC manager triggered a move to Spanish giants Real Madrid and a linkup with England colleague David Beckham.

Despite a relatively successful season he was sold to Newcastle United where his appearances have been blighted by injury.

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England fans everywhere will be wishing Owen a speedy and successful recovery. England aren't blessed with many quality forwards at the moment and Owen's restoration is vital for their assault on the European Championships in 2008.

Only time will tell if Michael Owen can return to top form and fulfil the potential he showed as a young lad. England fans everywhere will be keeping their fingers crossed.

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England's World Cup Foundation For Failure

By Steven Cronin

I suspect few tears were shed as head coach Sven–Goran Eriksson left his post with the England football team.

Well, except maybe for big Phil Scholari who had just masterminded his third successive tournament victory against the laid–back Swede.

Eriksson has had his critics during his five–year reign with England, time and again engineering some baffling decisions to confuse not only the fans but also the players themselves.

England's latest failure can be traced back to the day Eriksson first announced his World Cup squad to a bewildered nation.

Hindsight is a wonderful thing but even back then eyebrows were being raised at the choice of only four strikers for our assault on world glory.

The incredulity was compounded by the fact two of the strikers (Wayne Rooney and Michael Owen) were returning from injury and not yet match fit.

Having told Chelsea's Shaun Wright–Phillips he wasn't in the squad due to his limited number of Premiership appearances, Sven then incredibly proceeded to pick Arsenal's Theo Walcott, a player of such inexperience he hadn't made a single first team appearance for the Gunners.

Fourth and final choice was Peter Crouch, a player of such prolific goal scoring ability it was nearly Christmas before he broke his season's duck for Liverpool.

Following Michael Owen's injury and subsequent World Cup exit, Eriksson decided England's best offensive option was to play Wayne Rooney as a lone striker.

As our one genuine world class footballer, Rooney was wasted in a role that expected him to run around like a lunatic chasing long balls all game in the heat and humidity.

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A lack of support inevitably led to Rooney's frustration, concluding with his red card and England's exit.

Rooney is at his frightening best playing off a front man and running at defences with the ball. England supporters can only hope and pray that new boss Steve McClaren appreciates this and plays to our strengths.

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