

## Sport Football

## England plan South America tour en route to World Cup

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The FA will step up attempts to organise a South American tour in the summer of 2013 after securing a significant boost when the fixtures for England's 2014 World Cup qualifying campaign were agreed in Warsaw yesterday.

England will have no competitive fixtures in June 2013, paving the way for a potentially lucrative tour that could also prove invaluable to their World Cup preparations, assuming they qualify for the next year's tournament in Brazil.

The FA is already involved in discussions regarding friendly matches in Brazil and Uruguay at the end of the 2012-13 season, which will be accelerated after they were given a rare free period in the densely packed calendar.

While some Barclays Premier League clubs may be unhappy at the prospect of their leading players being whisked away at the end of a long season, the FA views the opportunity to gain experience of playing in South America as too good to be missed.

Given that the leading Premier League clubs routinely undertake longer overseas tours in July, they can have few complaints. In addition, it is likely that England will not take their strongest team. Fabio Capello opted to rest several senior players for a friendly international against Trinidad & Tobago in June 2008. Capello will be long

### Qualifying fixtures for 2014

#### 2012

Sept 7 Moldova (a)  
Sept 11 Ukraine (h)  
Oct 12 San Marino (h)  
Oct 16 Poland (a)

#### 2013

March 22 San Marino (a)  
March 26 Montenegro (a)  
Sept 6 Moldova (h)  
Sept 10 Ukraine (a)  
Oct 11 Montenegro (h)  
Oct 15 Poland (h)

gone by the time of the proposed tour because he is due to step down after next summer's European Championship finals in Poland and Ukraine, but his successor will be pleased with the hand he has been dealt at the start of his reign.

England will begin their qualifying campaign with an away match against Moldova next September before welcoming Ukraine to Wembley four days later. Two of their next three fixtures are against San Marino, with a return to Poland in between.

England will be confident of qualifying from group H with something to spare, but if they encounter difficulties, they at least have the safety net of finishing their campaign with home matches against Montenegro and Poland.

David Bernstein, the FA chairman, is adamant that Capello's successor will not be appointed until after the European Championship, meaning he will have no influence over his opening fixtures. England will have one friendly between Euro 2012 and the start of their World Cup programme in Chisinau, although opponents for that game next August have still to be agreed.

England's next match is a friendly against Holland in February, which will be followed by two warm-up matches in May.

# Kean's relative rise may prove prelude only to greater fall

Blackburn's main sponsor criticises running of struggling club

Gary Jacob

Steve Kean has received a modest pay rise but, far from being a show of support for his achievements, his revised contract is believed to make it cheaper for him to be dismissed as manager of Blackburn Rovers.

The Scot, who has faced regular protests from supporters wanting him sacked, is thought to be paid about £800,000 a year, but his compensation for being dismissed is likely to have been cut in half to about six months' money in his deal, which expires at the end of next season.

"Following recent media speculation, Blackburn Rovers FC can confirm a revision to manager Steve Kean's existing contract has been completed," the club said in a statement. "An agreement made in the summer has now been formalised.

"Contrary to some reports, there is no change to the length of the contract. The club respects that all contracts are private and confidential, and no further comment will be made."

Blackburn are four points from

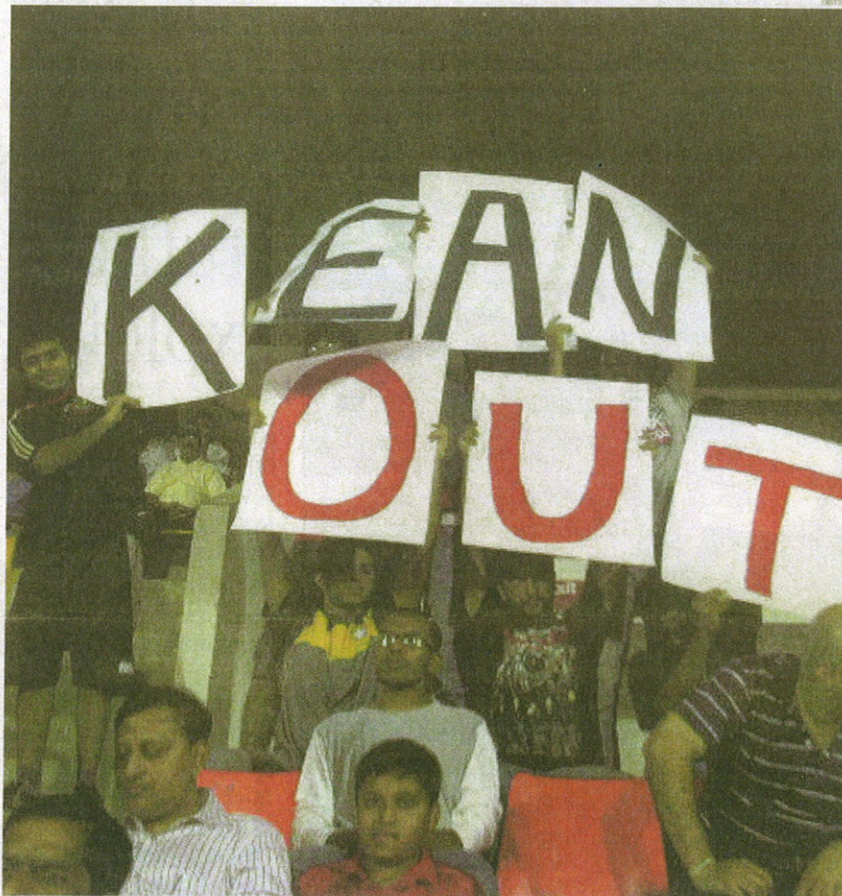


Kean has had his contract improved despite poor results

safety in the Barclays Premier League after a 3-3 draw away to Wigan Athletic, the only club below them, on Saturday. Some fans hired a plane to trail a banner with the message "Steve Kean Out" during the first half of the match against Chelsea this month. His side play away to Stoke City on Saturday and have games against Swansea City, Sunderland, West Bromwich Albion and Bolton Wanderers before meeting Liverpool and Manchester United immediately after Christmas.

Venkatesh and Balaji Rao, the brothers who co-own the club, have continued to give Kean backing since appointing him in December.

The Indian owners have come under fierce criticism for their management and running of the club. WEC Group, the main sponsor, has accused Venky's Group of causing a growing rift with supporters and reducing the value of their deal. WEC sponsors the Darwin End stand and has a private box and other corporate facilities. "We feel not valued," Wayne Wild, the group director of WEC Group, said. "I have offered to mediate between the fans



Spelling it out: Kean even suffered calls for his dismissal when Blackburn were in India during an international break

and the owners. I feel there is a growing gap between the two. Maybe if they could talk to me, I could relay that message to the fans. I don't think they understand the issues it is causing."

Venky's bought Blackburn for £53 million a year ago. Phil Jones was sold to Manchester United for £16.5 million in the summer but the money received was used to reduce the club's overdraft, after coming under pressure

from their bank. Wild criticised a change in management structure, with some directors leaving.

"Blackburn was a model of how to run a football club," Wild said. "The model was worked on over a number of years and that has systematically been wiped out over a short period. If they are not interested in talking to anyone, the gulf will get wider. We need them to agree to say when they are going to

put a solid management team here in Blackburn. It is not about the position of the team. It is the whole structure of the club. There is no leadership from the top down and fans are turning on fans. I have no one to contact.

"Steve Kean is reporting direct to the owners. It should be going through a board of directors. In terms of the running of the club on a day-to-day basis, there is nobody there."

## Fortuné and Zenden to join Doncaster recruitment drive

Peter Lansley

Doncaster Rovers' ambitious assault on the short-term transfer market looks set to continue, with Dean Saunders aiming to bring in Marc Antoine Fortuné, on loan from West Bromwich Albion, and Boudewijn Zenden, who was released by Sunderland last summer.

The duo could become the latest high-profile players to join the upstart Championship club, after Pascal Chimbonda, El-Hadji Diouf and Habib Beye moved to the Keepmoat Stadium as part of a distinctive transfer

strategy fronted by Willie McKay, the agent.

Fortuné is likely to sign today, before the emergency loan deadline, once Roy Hodgson, the West Brom manager, has received the all-clear on Shane Long's fitness. The Ireland striker returned to Barclays Premier League duty only on Saturday after a month out with a knee problem and collected a knock in training this week.

McKay said: "We're waiting for Shane Long to come through training on Thursday and if he's OK, West Brom will allow Marco to come and join us. It would be until January 4."

Zenden is also on Doncaster's radar. He has been without a club since his release by Sunderland at the end of last season and failed to win a contract at Celtic, but his time in Glasgow brought him to the attention of McKay.

"We've spoken to Bolo," the agent commissioned to bring players in to the South Yorkshire club said. "He played for Celtic in a friendly against St Johnstone. I'm a Celtic fan myself and I was told he was outstanding. But he couldn't agree anything there."

Doncaster are also signing Hérolf Goulon, subject to paperwork being completed, on a two-month loan deal

from Blackburn Rovers after Beye arrived on a three-month temporary deal from Aston Villa. Goulon, the 6ft 5in former France Under-21 midfielder player, was likened to the young Patrick Vieira when he first joined Middlesbrough from Lyons in 2008.

Saunders, the manager, said: "It's another good signing for us and there could be more things happening with a bit of luck before the end of the week."

Diouf scored twice in a 3-2 victory away to Ipswich Town this month in a game in which Chimbonda picked up a hip injury, which is expected to rule him out for a month.