

# Fabio Capello

## Living a childhood dream as England's coach

The current coach of the England National Team, Fabio Capello was a very good player before moving into management. He has the distinction of winning the domestic title with every team he has managed in his career. He also has an exemplary record in Champions League play. From 1972 to 1976 he managed the Italian National Team. The following interview is a compilation of interviews by FIFA and UEFA. As a special addition, this interview is followed by an interview with one of Capello's former players – Franco Baresi.

### How would you sum up your first 12 months as England coach?

It's all been very positive. The team has started its 2010 World Cup qualifying campaign in fine form, mainly because of the five warm-up matches against Switzerland, France, the USA, Trinidad and Tobago and the Czech Republic. Those games were vital for me to get to know my players and their strengths and weaknesses, and for me to teach them my football philosophy and my views on attitude and conduct. We are bonding as a group, but there is still room for improvement.

### In which areas?

We have to rediscover the fighting spirit that English football always has been famous for. More important, though, we have to get over this absurd fear of playing at Wembley, where criticism from the crowd often has paralyzed the team in recent years. I can remember the "lion's roar" of Wembley, but recently that roar has turned into boos and moans because of the team's disappointing performances and results. Our aim now is to continue our run of victories. That will restore not only the players' belief in their own abilities, but also the fans' faith in the team. We will play more attractive football when we have more confidence.

### Many fans already are demanding that England reach the semi-finals, at the very least, of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa.

I have never set myself targets like that because I am not someone who is happy with half-measures. I always play to win, as I proved at AC Milan, Real Madrid, Roma and Juventus. I want my players to have the same ambition. I always want to achieve as much as possible, and the English have to get back to that mentality, too.

### So where have you identified problems?

Unfortunately, only 40 percent of the players in the Premier League are English. By way of comparison, 64 percent of the players in Serie A are Italian; 63 percent of the players in the Primera Division are Spanish; 53 percent of the players in the Bundesliga are German, and 57 percent of the players in France's Ligue 1 are French. That means that I have a smaller pool of players at my disposal. But, fortunately, they are of excellent quality. It is just a shame that players like Jamie Carragher and Paul Scholes have retired from international duty – I certainly could have used their experience.

### Yet on the other hand, you seem to be ready to do without David Beckham and Michael Owen, two of England's leading lights in recent years.

I only ever call up the best players, or at least the players who are the most suited to the way I wish to play. Both Beckham, who I worked with for a year at Real Madrid, and Owen are wonderful professionals who still could play vital roles for England. I never will close the door to the national team on anyone, but you also have to remember that in modern football, only players who are in peak physical condition can make the most of their technical abilities.

### It also wasn't easy for you to pick a captain, apparently.

I have chosen John Terry for that position, but Rio Ferdinand, his deputy, also would have been worthy of the honor. They play alongside each other in

central defense, they are both leaders at their clubs – Chelsea and Manchester United respectively – they both have international experience, and they both are born winners. I have always had captains with similar traits at center-half, whether it was Franco Baresi, Paolo Maldini, Fernando Hierro, Walter Samuel or Fabio Cannavaro – defenders who can always read the game, influence their teammates and set an example both on and off the pitch.

### What difference have you noticed between Italian, Spanish and English football?

In Italy, it is all about tactics and playing for a result, whereas in Spain, the focus is on technique and pace. In England, the game is based on aggression and non-stop action. You can see the biggest differences in the stands, though. In England, you will find passion and safety. In Spain, it's a huge family party. But in Italy, the Ultras terrorize everyone and everything, and sometimes they even tell the politicians and club bosses what to do. The "organized tifosi" have far too much power. It's only an Italian phenomenon. In Italy, crowds try to stop away teams from getting to the stadiums, so instead, they have to be driven straight to the dressing rooms in their team buses while being verbally abused and pelted with whatever people can lay their hands on.

### Why did Spain win EURO 2008?

In the past, Spain used to play on their *furia*, their fury, but they have now rediscovered the beautiful game. The national team has benefited from the fact that virtually every club in Spain uses the same system, one that is based on possession, technique and quick passing movements. The Spanish now play quick passes to each other along the ground because they do not conform to the stereotype of the modern footballer. Carles Puyol, Xavi Hernandez, Andres Iniesta, David Silva and David Villa are not what you would call "supermen." Winning the European Championship will give this young team of players, who have many years ahead of them, even more self-confidence, and this new generation no longer is divided by ancient regional rivalries and conflicts. Before, the team was full of Castilians, Catalans and Basques, but now the players all feel Spanish. I'd just like to say one final thing, though: the only game in which Spain didn't score in 120 minutes was their quarterfinal clash with Italy...who were, let us not forget, without Cannavaro, Gattuso and Pirlo.

### What did EURO 2008 teach us in terms of tactics?

There's hardly anything new to discover in football, but certain aspects can be reviewed and adapted to meet current trends. Every team, no matter what formation they use, actually has a system that I call the "9-1" formation. By that, I mean that nine players primarily have defensive duties, and up front, there is one lone striker who is supported by his teammates rushing up to join him in attack. The crucial difference often lies in the quality of the goalkeeper and the striker. Spain's Iker Casillas and Fernando Torres or Italy's Gianluigi Buffon and Luca Toni are fine examples. England also has good goalkeepers, but they always seem to have bad luck when they play for the national team and make mistakes in important matches.

### So do you want to help England make progress in those areas?

Football always has to be a reflection of a country's culture. I don't want to change the characteristics and traits of English footballers. I just want to instill more discipline and teach them to work better as a team. Having said that, I do allow each player the room to develop his own style within the role that I assign to him. I want to give England a little taste of Latin football from France, Italy, Greece and Spain, and even from Portugal and Croatia. All of these countries have dominated the European Championship and World

Cup in the last 10 years, with the notable exception of the 2002 World Cup, when Brazil came out on top. English football has not just been about "kick and rush" or "put the ball in the box" for many years now. I want a compact English team. Whether we win or lose, the most important thing is that we have a team on the pitch and not just a group of players.

#### **So that's why The Football Association decided to employ a foreign coach?**

Foreigners don't just make up 60 percent of the players in the Premier League, the managers of the four leading clubs also are foreign: Brazil's Luiz Felipe Scolari at Chelsea, France's Arsene Wenger at Arsenal, Spain's Rafael Benitez at Liverpool, and also, if you like, Scotland's Sir Alex Ferguson at Manchester United. All four clubs have huge honors lists, but England hasn't won anything for nearly 50 years now. Nevertheless, it was important for me to have Ray Clemence and Stuart Pearce on my backroom staff, and I often have long discussions with Sir Trevor Brooking, The FA's technical director.

#### **Why did you choose England?**

It was a childhood dream of mine. For me, the English have always been the teachers of our sport, the ones who took the game to the rest of the world. In 2000, Howard Wilkinson, who at the time was England's interim coach, asked me whether I would be interested in taking over, but in the end The FA chose Sven Goran Eriksson. It wouldn't have been the right time for me anyway, but now I am eager and determined to help England rediscover the spirit that they once had as the teachers of football. I simply cannot understand how England can drop as low, as we speak, as 15<sup>th</sup> in the FIFA World Ranking.

#### **How is your English coming along? When you took over, the media said that you used only swear words when talking to the players.**

To be able to train a team, you have to know the football jargon of that particular country. My English is good now, and I'll soon be fluent. Apart from Italian, I also speak Spanish well and I have a working knowledge of both French and German. Anyway, I am used to being criticized by the media and to doing my own thing, and it helps that I don't read any newspapers whatsoever, regardless of whether my team wins or loses. I talk on a daily basis only to my colleagues, and not to the press or the TV, but I know that I have the respect of the English media. I do not believe that being England coach is the "mission impossible" that it is always made out to be.

#### **You also have ordered the English players to change their eating habits and some other routines.**

That's true. I have, for example, impressed upon them the advantages of a Mediterranean diet over ketchup and chips. I also have put some rules of conduct in place for when the national team meets up, from eating breakfast together to the use of mobile phones, which must be switched off from time to time. The players have been very cooperative, and that is a clear indication of professionalism at their clubs. Arsenal's academy, for example, is the perfect example of how young players should be brought along at all European clubs.

#### **You also discovered Theo Walcott, who caused a sensation by scoring a hat trick in England's 4-1 away win over Croatia in the FIFA World Cup qualifiers.**

Eriksson had told me only good things about Walcott. He had taken him to the World Cup in 2006, don't forget, even though he didn't play, so I called him up to the squad and I was immediately impressed with his dribbling skills, his pace and his range of passes. At Arsenal, he has a manager, Arsene Wenger, who can help him get even better. I also have seen a lot of good players in the England U-21 side, and that fills me with great hope for the future.

#### **Who are the best players you have ever played with or coached?**

With Italy, it was Gigi Riva and Dino Zoff. As a coach, I particularly admired Marco van Basten and Paolo Maldini for their talent, their professional attitude and their will to win.

#### **Which coach influenced you most as a player?**

I had a coach in youth football, Giovan Battista Fabbri—he influenced me a lot; then Heleno Herrera more than others. He taught me not to be scared of my opponents, to be determined and to have confidence to win.

#### **When did you know you wanted to become a coach?**

When I quit playing. People were already saying I had the right qualities to be a coach, and I started with youth football immediately. It was

something I really liked because I'm a man from the country, so I like to be on the pitch. I was eager to teach the young kids how to improve in this world, both technically and as a person.

#### **Can you describe an exercise you did in training that helped a player improve?**

In order to improve you have to first find your player's weak points, but you can improve a person or a player only if he understands that everything you do is with the purpose of improving him and not just to expose his weaknesses. The best thing that happened to me, I think it's worth telling, is when I was coaching Clarence Seedorf at Real Madrid. After two months with him I asked him, "Do you think you can shoot?" He said: "Yes, very well." I told him he could shoot only in one way. In football you shoot in several ways, with the outside of your foot, with the inside, and I gave him a small lesson. He is a lad with great character and determination, and he started to work hard and improved a lot.

#### **If you hadn't played the game, you probably would not have been able to explain things like that to a player.**

Yes. In fact, this is the discussion among coaches who have played and those who haven't. Coaches who haven't played work more on tactics than technique because correcting a champion is not always easy.

#### **What three pieces of advice would you give to a young coach?**

They need to be humble, have a strong personality, and they must be respected by their players. They need to speak with their players, but not become their friend. If you become a player's friend, the others are immediately jealous and then start to think someone is playing just because he or she is a friend of yours. You have to find a way to play according to the players you have in the squad. Never stick to only one system. I think that is the biggest mistake you can make. Many people think there is only one good system, but I think there are many.

#### **The UEFA Champions League is a marathon, not a sprint. How do you change the approach between the group stage and the knockout rounds?**

The group stage is fair because not all teams start the season at the same time, so it allows you to recover from a slip. In the knockout stage we go back to the old days and it is much tougher, more stressful. All Champions League games are like that because there is a lot of pressure, but do-or-die ties are something different. You cannot afford any mistakes. You also need luck.

#### **As a coach do you prepare differently?**

Preparation for the last two games of the group stage is like in the knockout stage, but you rarely fight as much as you do against a team you have to eliminate. Preparations for a knockout tie are different. The away goals rule is a key factor, and there are more things to evaluate. It's not just a matter of one point or three. Everything is more difficult.



*And what do players think of Capello? The following interview was conducted with Franco Baresi by Sports Media Solutions and published by soccerlens.com. Baresi played many years at AC Milan, winning six Serie A titles and three European Cups. He also featured for the Italian National Team in the 1990 and 1994 World Cups, taking his team to the semifinals (third place) and finals respectively. The club retired his No. 6 jersey in his honor when he ended his glittering career in 1997. After retirement Baresi got involved in coaching, and he now coaches the Milan Under-19 squad. In this interview, he discusses what fans and players can expect from Capello's England.*

#### **Was Capello a better choice than Lippi? Has England got the right man?**

I do not know Lippi as well as Fabio, because he was not my manager, so I can't answer who is a better choice as England National Team manager. But Lippi is World Cup defending champion, so I guess he would have been the right man, too. I do not know if Fabio is worth 6 million a year, but I do know that he was born to win. He has always been a high-salary manager, and rightly so because he is good. If he wins the 2010 World Cup, I think the FA will be very happy to have overpaid him.

#### **How does Capello treat his captains?**

I was already captain before the Sacchi era, and I was captain after that when Capello arrived, but nothing changed too much for me. I think Fa-

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