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## IS HE ENGLAND'S GIFT FROM GOD?

Wayne Rooney

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**The wonder boy from Liverpool is such a phenomenal talent that England football fans are dreaming of the impossible next year - their team's first World Cup victory in forty years.**

England's manager, Sven-Goran Eriksson, once said he was the greatest teenage talent to emerge since Pele. The Brazilian legend commented that he's the best player he's seen since, well, himself. As his 20th birthday fast approaches, Wayne Rooney has the world at his feet. Across England, crowded stadiums and pubs speak in hushed tones about Germany 2006 being the end of 40 years of dashed dreams. The hope is that the wonder kid from Croxteth will bring the World Cup home.

At a muscular 1.76 meters, Rooney is an intimidating presence. Physical similarities have been made with Maradonna and Paul Gascoigne - both prodigious talents who, when on the pitch, had the world gasping in disbelief at their ability to turn moments of dull nothingness into bursts of sublime magic.

The Liverpool local began his Premiership career for nearby Everton in August 2002 at the age of 16. Rooney grabbed the sports headlines again two months later after he destroyed Arsenal's 30-match unbeaten run with a 23-meter wonder goal. Legend has it that he left Goodison Park that afternoon riding his BMX bike to meet his mates for a kick-about. Euro 2004 marked Rooney's moment of ascendancy to the world stage - his two goals against Switzerland had the fans and pundits slavering and only a cruel foot injury prevented him from dominating the tournament.

Like all well-rounded superheroes, Rooney has his own Achilles heel - a fiery temper. FIFA president Sepp Blatter once said that the United striker needs 'a clip around the ear'. The crux of the matter is that Rooney doesn't like to lose. He can always be guaranteed to be playing like a condemned man - and because of his youth, more experienced players often play on this weakness. Sir Alex Ferguson, Manchester United's legendary manager, has vowed to curb his player's volatile ways without diluting his competitive edge.

At the beginning of the new 2005-06 season, Rooney is desperate for success - he's still yet to win a major trophy - and the sports writers are climbing over each other to proclaim next year to be the one. After scoring BBC Match of the Day's Goal of the Season against Middlesbrough, he recently sent the football world into a frenzy with a goal of such majesty against Japan's Urawa Reds that his Manchester United teammates were left with looks of complete astonishment on their faces.

Other star players have also been given the same accolades at a similar age but have failed to live up to almost impossibly high expectations. Brazil are still the team to watch at the World Cup - they have about three or four Rooneys in their squad - but if the number 9 can keep his cool when all others around him are losing theirs, then maybe the unimaginable might just happen.

- Ben Lupton  
October 2005

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