

Bellamy sleeping in altitude tent

Wales captain Craig Bellamy is sleeping in an altitude tent in a bid to save his career.

The injury-prone West Ham striker is to make his first start for a year when Wales host Liechtenstein on Saturday.

"I have got my own altitude tent and I sleep in it every night because it speeds up recovery and improves overall fitness," Bellamy admits.

"This is a critical stage of my career and if I cut corners it would have been tough for me to come back."

The 29-year-old has not started a Wales game since their 2-1 win in San Marino last October due to a succession of abdominal, groin and now hamstring problems.

His tent simulates high altitude by maintaining a lower oxygen concentration. One of the benefits is to increase red blood cells and enzymes to speed recovery.

Bellamy has a history of muscle problems and serious knee injuries, including a knee reconstruction and career-saving from renowned knee specialist Dr Richard Steadman.

Bellamy will have needed all the help he could get, having played just 73 minutes of first-team action this season as he recovered from a hamstring tear sustained during pre-season.

But he is in John Toshack's team in Wales' World Cup qualifier with Liechtenstein at Cardiff's Millennium Stadium on Saturday.

"My rehabilitation has been quite extraordinary," Bellamy told BBC Sport.

"And I want to really attack the last years of my career in a positive manner.

"The altitude tent improves endurance, helps speed and makes you a fitter athlete.

"I'm ready to play 90 minutes and play two games in five days because I feel good and I've done all of the groundwork."

Bellamy missed Wales' opening World Cup qualifiers against Azerbaijan and Russia and insisted it was his choice to withdraw from Toshack's squad.

But the former Liverpool, Newcastle United and Celtic and forward also accused some, unnamed, Premier League bosses of being more sympathetic to English internationals than Welsh.

Bellamy said his current club West Ham would allow him on international duty "in seconds" unlike other managers.

Bellamy has been at the centre of numerous club versus country conflicts over his fitness,



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Wales captain Craig Bellamy

or lack of it.

"I'm glad to be back with Wales as it has been a while," said Bellamy.

"I missed the September qualifiers with Azerbaijan and Russia because I knew my hamstring was a problem, it was very sore.

"The last thing I wanted to do is come back too soon and pull up, that wouldn't have been fair to Wales or West Ham.

"And I know my body well because I pulled up in training with West Ham a few days later.

"I have moved heaven and earth to play for Wales in the past and booked flights myself to make it happen because I'm proud to be Welsh and international games mean a lot to me.

"The biggest problem I have had in the past was with my clubs, I have picked up injuries in my career and it is a little different playing for Wales.

"With England I've seen boys get told: 'off you go and do the club proud' but with Wales it's like 'do you really need to go we could really do with staying here to continue your rehab?'

"I have really had to fight my corner for Wales over the years."

Bellamy isn't the only Hammer returning to Wales for their World Cup qualifying double-header with Liechtenstein on Saturday and Germany on Wednesday.

Centre-back James Collins has not played a competitive match since West Ham's Premier League defeat to Everton on 15 January after surgery to repair a cruciate knee ligament injury.

He has played in West Ham's reserve team and the 25-year-old is set to win his 25th cap against Liechtenstein.

"He has had a tough couple of months," Bellamy admitted.

"He is a great lad and I know what he has gone through."

Quelle: BBC Sport, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/football/internationals/7657640.stm>,

Stand: 22.01.2009