

## “If we’d had that extra firepower against Italy, we could have gone a long way.”

In the space of five minutes, his World Cup goals changed Australian football forever. **TIM CAHILL** talks cars, Beckham and playing in the A-League

➔ **“FOOTBALL, EH? BLOODY HELL,”** said Alex Ferguson after Manchester United won the Champions

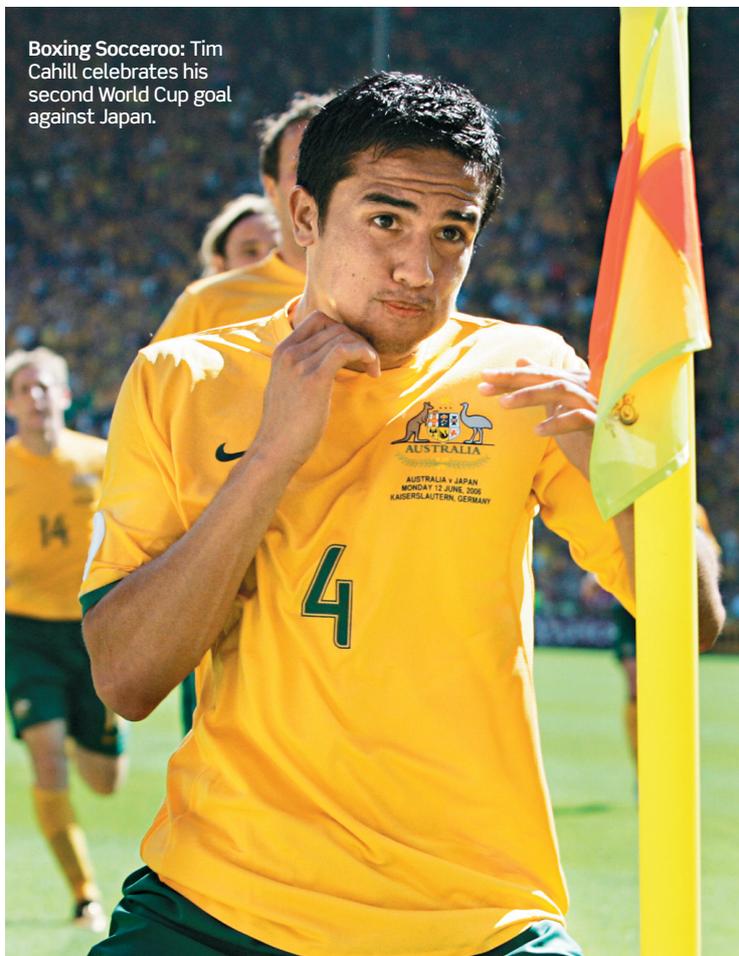
League in the last two minutes of time in 1999. For Australia, the “bloody hell” moments came courtesy of Tim Cahill. His late equaliser against Japan at the World Cup drenched Australia with relief. The next, swept home from the edge of the area, blew the roof right off. Cahill, 27, is Australia’s best player, a skilful yet combative midfielder with an excellent goalscoring record. He is such an important member of Everton’s Premiership side, that when *Alpha* speaks to him, he’s still recovering from being thrown straight back into the fray, having barely recovered from a serious knee injury.

### How did the comeback go?

Good. It’s been a long eight-10 weeks. It’s been quite a smooth recovery, but to get back playing as soon as I have – and I haven’t played any reserve games. I was thrown straight back in, so it was nice for the gaffer (Everton manager David Moyes) to have so much trust in me. **You must have been dog tired after the game.**

Definitely. I had a slight groin problem and my left hamstring. But that’s to be expected because I’d only trained four days, and to play high-level football you have to be at your peak. I’ve prepared right, training three times a day for the last eight weeks – long days and long evenings. But if you want to be professional, that’s the sacrifice you’ve got to make.

Boxing Socceroo: Tim Cahill celebrates his second World Cup goal against Japan.



### How does it feel to be that valued by Everton?

Fantastic. I take great pleasure from that – it’s a massive compliment. I’m at a massive football club that prides itself on players putting everything into it. Whether I’m playing for my country or my club, I’m the kind of person who likes to repay people’s

faith. The proof’s in the pudding when you play football. Thirty-five thousand Evertonians every week turn out and want to see you play. **Do you feel the pressure to perform?** It’s mixed, really. Playing at this level, you have to step up to the plate week in and week out, and every year you have to keep improving

yourself. Yes, there’s pressure, but there’s enjoyment as well. I’ve been in the situation numerous times, playing in the Australian team and playing [for] Everton – I just love football, love the buzz of it.

### Did you feel nervous about testing the knee?

No chance. If you saw the way I played at the weekend, I threw myself into enough challenges. I wanted to test it, and I ended up getting another yellow card, which I didn’t want to do. One more yellow and I’m suspended again.

### Do you feel like you really belong in the Premiership now?

I always felt like I deserved to be there, but when there’s all the press and so much going on, you’re constantly under the spotlight – you have to impress. One season you’re star-struck, the next season you’re the boy to do it. My stats speak for themselves: every year I’ve played and every year I score goals. It happened at Millwall and it’s happening now at Everton.

### What was it like to go the World Cup and step up another level?

People ask whether I was nervous, but this was my chance to play with the best footballers in the world. You only get one chance and my chance was coming on against Japan. I’d been injured before the World Cup and had a massive recovery to get fit. Two surgeons ruled me out and one ruled me OK, and that was enough for me to get there. The chance to get to play in a world cup doesn’t happen that often, especially for an Australian – [after] 35 years. It was the best thing ever.