



PHOTO: AFP

Manchester United forward Wayne Rooney (R) skips past the tackle from Benfica's Ricardo Rocha during their Champions League encounter at Old Trafford on Wednesday.

United exact Benfica revenge

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United survived a jittery start to advance to the Champions League knockout stages as winners of Group F after a 3-1 win over Benfica here on Wednesday.

Perhaps mindful of the Lisbon side's role in eliminating them at this stage last season, United were hesitant and uncharacteristically lacklustre in an opening half-hour that saw them fall behind to a stunning 25-yard strike by Benfica fullback Nelson.

But an equaliser in first-half stoppage time from Nemanja Vidic settled the nerves and the Premiership leaders ultimately came home with something to spare after second-half headers from Ryan Giggs and Louis Saha.

United manager Alex Ferguson admitted he had been perplexed by his side's slow start.

"The Benfica goal was maybe the thing that lifted us off," he acknowledged. "The support went off, the players got angry and we played like Manchester United. By the end we got better and better."

"I think maybe we have too many young players to play a patient game. When they play the cut-throat way they are a good side."

Benfica coach Fernando Santos felt Vidic's goal just before the break had determined the outcome.

"We had been controlling the game but the equaliser made things much more difficult for us and in the second half United were too good."

Needing only a draw against opponents who had to win to progress, United took to the field in a 4-5-1 line-up rarely seen at Old Trafford. Wayne Rooney switched from his normal role just behind Saha to a deep-lying midfield slot.

Whatever the thinking behind that reshuffle, it was not a conspic-

uous success.

By the time Benfica had taken the lead, United had managed just two attempts on goal: a long-range effort from Ronaldo which flew comfortably wide and a shot from Rio Ferdinand which Quim, the Benfica goalkeeper, blocked comfortably enough.

Despite their lack of penetration, United had been given little cause for concern from their Portuguese guests until Nelson put them ahead in spectacular style.

Sabrosa Simao, the Benfica captain, was the architect, twisting and turning Patrice Evra on the right of the box before laying the ball back to his team-mate, who beat Edwin van der Sar with a superb, angled drive that flew into the opposite top corner.

United's response was to emerge from the torpor that had characterised their efforts up to that point.

Within minutes of the goal, Ronaldo had had a dipping free-kick tipped over acrobatically by Quim, a Giggs corner generated panic in the Benfica goalmouth and Saha had got in front of his marker to strike. Gary Neville's astute low cross wide of the target from 12 yards out.

The greater urgency from the home side finally produced an equaliser with the last touch of the first-half, Vidic rising to flick Giggs's deep free-kick past Quim after Rooney had been brought down close to the left touchline.

When the two sides emerged for the second half, Rooney had been restored to his usual position and Benfica immediately found themselves on the back foot.

Luisao was fortunate to see his attempted interception of a Giggs cross skid narrowly beyond the far post of his own goal before Ronaldo's trickery on the right generated another good chance for Saha, who blasted over from 14 yards.

On another night that could have proved an extremely expensive miss but the added security

United were looking for was not long in coming.

Afforded time on the right by the Benfica left-back Leo, Ronaldo had time to pick out an unmarked Giggs on the edge of the six-yard box and, with Quim rooted to his line, the 33-year-old had the most comfortable of headed finishes.

The lively Simao continued to give Evra a torrid time on the right flank but the Benfica captain's hopes of sparking a comeback were crushed within a minute of Giggs being replaced by Darren Fletcher with quarter of an hour left.

The Scotland international's first

contribution was to combine neatly with Ronaldo in a flowing move that ended with United winning a corner. Scholes delivered it and Saha peeled off his marker at the near post to head past Quim.

Another British club, already-qualified Celtic went down 3-1 to FC Copenhagen, thanks to two early goals at Parken Stadium as they maintained their unbeaten home record in Group F.

Atiba Hutchinson opened the scoring for the Danes, who had already been eliminated from the

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Champions League					December 5 and 6 matches						
GROUP A Tuesday, December 5					GROUP E Wednesday, December 6						
Chelsea v Levski Sofia	0	0	0	0	Dynamo Kiev v Real Madrid	2	0	0	0		
Barcelona v Werder Bremen	0	0	0	0	Lyon v S. Bucharest	1	0	0	0		
STANDINGS	P	W	D	L	Pts	STANDINGS	P	W	D	L	Pts
Chelsea (ENG)	6	4	1	1	13	Lyon (FRA)	6	4	2	0	14
FC Barcelona (ESP)	6	3	2	1	11	Real Madrid (ESP)	6	3	2	1	11
Werder Bremen (GER)	6	3	1	2	10	Steaua Bucharest (ROM)	6	1	2	3	5
Levski Sofia (BUL)	6	0	0	6	0	Dynamo Kiev (UKR)	6	0	2	4	2
GROUP B Tuesday, December 5					GROUP F Wednesday, December 6						
S. Lisbon v S. Moscow	0	0	0	0	0	Man. U v Benfica Lisbon	1	0	0	0	0
Bayern Munich v Inter Milan	0	0	0	0	0	Copenhagen v Celtic	0	0	0	0	0
STANDINGS	P	W	D	L	Pts	STANDINGS	P	W	D	L	Pts
Bayern Munich (GER)	6	3	3	0	12	Manchester United (ENG)	6	4	0	2	12
Inter Milan (ITA)	6	3	1	2	10	Celtic Glasgow (SCO)	6	3	0	3	9
Spartak Moscow (RUS)	6	1	2	3	5	Benfica Lisbon (POR)	6	2	1	3	7
Sporting Lisbon (POR)	6	1	2	3	5	FC Copenhagen (DEN)	6	2	1	3	7
GROUP C Tuesday, December 5					GROUP G Wednesday, December 6						
Galatasaray v Liverpool	0	0	0	0	0	FC Porto v Arsenal	0	0	0	0	0
PSV Eindhoven v Bordeaux	0	0	0	0	0	Hamburg v CSKA Moscow	0	0	0	0	0
STANDINGS	P	W	D	L	Pts	STANDINGS	P	W	D	L	Pts
Liverpool (ENG)	6	4	1	1	13	Arsenal (ENG)	6	3	2	1	11
PSV Eindhoven (NED)	6	3	1	2	10	FC Porto (POR)	6	3	2	1	11
Bordeaux (FRA)	6	2	1	3	7	CSKA Moscow (RUS)	6	2	2	2	8
Galatasaray (TUR)	6	1	1	4	4	Hamburg (GER)	6	1	0	5	3
GROUP D Tuesday, December 5					GROUP H Wednesday, December 6						
Olympiakos v S. Donetsk	0	0	0	0	0	Anderlecht v AEK Athens	0	0	0	0	0
AS Roma v Valencia	0	0	0	0	0	AC Milan v Lille	0	0	0	0	0
STANDINGS	P	W	D	L	Pts	STANDINGS	P	W	D	L	Pts
Valencia (ESP)	6	4	1	1	13	AC Milan (ITA)	6	3	1	2	10
AS Roma (ITA)	6	3	1	2	10	Lille (FRA)	6	2	3	1	9
Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR)	6	1	3	2	6	AEK Athens (GRE)	6	2	2	2	8
Olympiakos (GRE)	6	0	3	3	3	Anderlecht (BEL)	6	0	4	2	4

(STANDINGS: played, won, drawn, lost, points) 071206 AFP

FIFA sets WC date

AFP, Zurich

FIFA announced Wednesday that the next World Cup will take place between June 11 and July 11 2010, and granted South Africa an automatic berth as host nation.

FIFA's executive committee decided to maintain the qualifying set-up used at this year's World Cup in Germany, with a berth for the host country plus five other Africa teams, five European region qualifiers, five Asian and Oceania teams, and a total of eight for South America and the Central American region.

"We didn't change anything," FIFA president Sepp Blatter told journalists, adding that only two members of the committee had voiced objections.

The decision effectively gives Africa one extra team in 2010 and Europe one less, although that regional balance is likely to change again in subsequent World Cups, officials said.

Africa, minus South Africa, will again combine qualifying for the African Nations Cup from October 2007 with World Cup qualifiers.

Asia's fifth nation in the qualifiers will play off against Oceania's strongest for the final joint berth, SEE PAGE 22 COL 2

Sheva wants Italy return

AFP, London

Chelsea's Ukrainian striker Shevchenko has given a strong hint he may leave the English champions, saying his style of play does not suit manager Jose Mourinho.

Just on Tuesday, Shevchenko scored his first European goal for Chelsea as his side clinched top spot in Champions League Group A with a 2-0 win against Levski Sofia at Stamford Bridge.

However it seems Shevchenko is out of favour. "I feel at home and it's not like my team for a long time but unfortunately my game doesn't suit Mourinho," he told the British press. "Roman Abramovich (Chelsea chairman) is my friend but all he could do was insist on a loan deal instead of me being sold."

"But if it happens, I am ready to pack my bags," he added. "I'm a completely self-confident person. If I don't suit somebody then I'll go back to Italy and prove how good I can still be."

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Inter want Messi

INTERNET, undated

Inter are planning a blockbuster move for Barcelona ace Lionel Messi, according to reports in Italy. Nerazzurri patron Massimo Moratti has made no secret of the fact that he would like to see the 19-year-old Argentine at the San Siro.

He is keen to take advantage of the player's discontent over his current 2-million-pound per year contract, as reported by La Gazzetta dello Sport.

Messi is tied to the Blaugrana outfit until 2014 and has a 107-million-pound release clause, but the Inter President seems willing to make a sacrifice in order to lure the talent away from Barcelona.

It will be quite some present for the centenary of the Nerazzurri club, which will be celebrated in March 2008.

The player's father and agent Jorge was in Milan in the past few days and met the club's officials in order to understand what the situation was.

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Ronaldo saves Real

REUTERS, Kiev



Ronaldo scored two goals in the last four minutes to earn Real Madrid a 2-2 draw against Dynamo Kiev in their final Champions League Group E match on Wednesday.

The Ukrainians were cruising to their first Champions League victory following a first-half double by Uzbek striker Maxim Shatskikh before Ronaldo fired the first from close range off a David Beckham corner in the 86th minute, then added the second with an 88th-minute penalty.

The match, played in a nearly empty 83,000-seat Olympic stadium, lacked the usual Champions League intensity with both teams already assured of their finishing places in the group.

The Spaniards finished second behind group winners Olympique Lyon on 11 points to qualify for the knockout phase, while Dynamo ended bottom with two points.

With a place in the last 16 already

secured, Real coach Fabio Capello rested several first-choice players, including captain Raul, centre back Fabio Cannavaro and midfielder Emerson while leaving number one goalkeeper Iker Casillas and strikers Robinho and Ruud van Nistelrooy on the bench.

Despite playing only for pride, Capello said he was determined to get the result.

"No coach in the world wants to lose and I would never go into a match looking to lose," the Italian told Reuters.

"That's why I had a big talk at halftime to fire up the team as we were lacking some intensity in the first half."

Shatskikh fired Dynamo ahead in the 13th minute, beating Real's second-choice keeper Diego Lopez with a crisp volley after a Valentin Belkevich cross from the right.

He doubled the lead by slotting home past the onrushing Lopez after a great through ball by Artem Milevsky 14 minutes later.

The visitors also had their chances in the opening half, but first striker Antonio Cassano wasted a great chance after going one-on-

one with Dynamo keeper Olexander Shovkovsky, then full back Michel Salgado missed another opportunity by shooting just wide of the post.

Shatskikh missed a good chance for a hat-trick shortly after the break when he failed to finish another fine pass from the right.

At the other end, Beckham was unlucky not to find the target midway through the second half when his crisp shot hit the post, while Shovkovsky stopped Roberto Carlos's powerful drive several minutes later, setting the stage for Ronaldo's heroics.

Capello praised the Brazilian, saying: "He is a world-class striker, that's why you can never count him out."

"It is very important for us that Ronaldo is getting back into his top form after a long injury break."

Capello, however, declined to say if Ronaldo would play in Real's next league match, against Sevilla on Saturday.

"We'll just have to wait and see," he said.

Dynamo coach Anatoly SEE PAGE 22 COL 5

Rider Kim dies at Asiad

AFP, Doha



Tragedy struck the Asian Games Thursday when an experienced South Korean equestrian rider

died after his horse threw him from the saddle then crushed him, sparking calls for a full inquiry.

The horse, Bundaberg Black, hit a fence and stumbled, tossing Kim Hyung-Chil to the ground during the individual cross-country competition. The mare fell on top of him and the Seoul resident, 47, never regained consciousness.

"But if it happens, I am ready to pack my bags," he added. "I'm a completely self-confident person. If I don't suit somebody then I'll go back to Italy and prove how good I can still be."

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He was rushed to hospital but pronounced dead soon after. The horse survived with no noticeable injury.

South Korean Olympic chiefs demanded a probe to find out whether or not the competition, held in pouring rain, was mismanaged.

"We want to know if it was the rain or mismanagement of the competition. We talked to the Korean equestrian federation representative at the course and he said that the horse mistimed its jump and slipped," said South Korea National Olympic Committee president Kim Jung Kil.

"We have doubts over the schedule being too tight and the fatigue of

the horses. The Games organising committee and the Asian equestrian federation should look into this matter."

Kim was also furious that the competition resumed despite the death of his compatriot.

"We believe that the event was resumed a little too quickly," said Kim.

The International Equestrian Federation said a full inquiry had been launched.

"We have opened a formal inquiry into this tragic accident. I don't want to speculate on the results of that inquiry until it is completed," said federation vice-president

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PHOTO: AFP

A combo of video pictures shows South Korean rider Kim Hyung-Chil falling off his horse after hitting a fence during the equestrian cross country competition at the Asiad on Thursday. The 47-year-old rider from Seoul died before being taken to the hospital.