

Zalayeta dumps Real

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

REUTERS, Turin

A dramatic strike from Juventus forward Marcelo Zalayeta four minutes from the end of extra time gave the Italians a 2-0 win over Real Madrid and a place in the Champions League quarter-finals on Wednesday.

The goal followed red cards for Real striker Ronaldo who gave a retaliatory kick to Alessio Tacchinardi after the Juventus defender appeared to grab the Brazilian round the neck as he bore down on the Italian goal.

"It was a piece of stupidity on my part," Ronaldo told reporters. "I got annoyed because Tacchinardi grabbed me round the neck and I kicked out at him - I shouldn't have done it."

Juve had forced the match into the extra period when substitute striker David Trezeguet pulled them level at 1-1 on aggregate 15 minutes from the end of normal time with an acrobatic strike from six metres.

Real's best effort came from Ronaldo, who hit the post in the 50th minute, but two years after they eliminated Real at the semi-final stage Juve triumphed again with a determined display at home after their narrow 1-0 defeat at the Bernabeu.

start with forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic forcing Real goalkeeper Iker Casillas into action with a close range shot in the sixth minute and then the Spaniard nervously fumbled an Alessandro Del Piero effort.

Five minutes before the break, Ronaldo, jeered throughout at the stadium where he was once involved in a controversial game with his former Italian club Inter Milan, produced the first threatening move from Real.

Picking the ball up on the left flank he raced goalwards, cutting inside before firing a dangerous shot just wide of the far post with Juve goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon beaten.

The Brazilian was enjoying one of his better nights and five minutes after the restart a powerful burst of acceleration sent him past two defenders and his low cross-shot was just about diverted against the post by the diving Buffon.

Juventus coach Fabio Capello replaced Del Piero with Frenchman Trezeguet in the 57th minute, leaving the Italian side with plenty of height and power in a three-pronged attack.

One of those forwards, lanky Swede Ibrahimovic, wasted a good chance in the 66th minute and with Juve frenetically searching for the goal to get them back into the tie, Real coach Vanderlei Luxemburgo replaced Zinedine Zidane with Guti.

Moments after the substitution Juventus went ahead on the night to level the tie on aggregate.

Ibrahimovic headed down a cross from Mauro Camoranesi at the back post and Trezeguet cleverly twisted to fire past Casillas.

Real responded with a thundering 25-metre Roberto Carlos free kick that Buffon punched out one-handed and then Ronaldo had the ball in the net from close range after a Luis Figo cross but German referee Markus Merk ruled it out for offside.

With just over a minute of normal time remaining Ibrahimovic failed to find the target again from a good position when he blasted over after a clever step-over from Trezeguet.

The game went into extra time and after six minutes Real replaced Raul with England striker Michael Owen but it was Juve who continued to create more dangerous openings with Zalayeta going close with a sharp volley from a Camoranesi free kick.

In the second period of extra time the teams were reduced to 10 men after the clash between Ronaldo and Tacchinardi but with the game heading towards penalties the decisive blow was struck.

Real defender Raul Bravo could only clear a Camoranesi cross as far as Zalayeta and the Uruguayan unleashed a first-time shot that flew past Casillas to fire Juve into the quarter-finals and end another campaign for the nine-time European champions.



Juventus' Uruguayan international Marcelo Zalayeta starts celebrating while teammate David Trezeguet runs after him after the winner against Real Madrid at the Delle Alpi Stadium in Turin on March 9.

Honeymoon days over?

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

THE GUARDIAN

If Manchester United operated by the same principles as clubs in Italy and Spain, or even those of the modern-day Chelsea, Sir Alex Ferguson would almost certainly be summoned at the end of the season and politely informed he was being ushered into retirement. That his side have twice beaten Arsenal this season and occasionally produced enthralling football would be irrelevant. Not even winning the FA Cup would guarantee saving him.

To many, that might sound preposterous but, football being the impatient business it is, which of the top clubs in Serie A or La Liga would stick by a manager who has missed out on the Champions League quarter-finals in successive seasons? Or, put another way, which of United's associates in the elite G14 group would accept a record of only one success at a knockout stage in the European Cup since 1999?

Anybody dancing on Ferguson's grave should always make sure the coffin lid is firmly nailed down and Sky was certainly risking one of his intermittent bans by conducting a vox pop yesterday asking whether United's manager has passed his shelf-life.

United's fans usually take pride in being one of the few sets of supporters in the country who never turn on their own club. Not in public, anyway. Since Tuesday's defeat against Milan, internet chatrooms have seen Ferguson derided for his methods and transfer policies. Interestingly, however, the Ferguson who often gets the worst abuse is Martin, the manager's brother and United's chief scout. In other words, the man responsible for finding Eric Djemba-Djemba, David Bellion and Diego Forlan.

Criticisms of the manager were generally limited to the odd rant, such as: "Cringeworthy, shocking, predictable, sterile, bland and boring - thanks for everything but please go." But mainly supporters seem to be confident Ferguson is

building an improving team, albeit one eight points behind Chelsea in the Premiership.

Few will take up the odds of one bookmaker offering 100-30 against Ferguson being in charge at the start of next season, with Martin O'Neill favourite to succeed him at 5-2. Yet even Ferguson's most ardent sympathisers would have to acknowledge his team is basically flawed and that, contrary to his post-Milan analysis, it may need more than just fine-tuning before they are capable of winning the European Cup again.

Everyone knows Ferguson will concentrate this summer on recruiting a new goalkeeper so United,

breath and delve into their 2006-07 kitty or does Ferguson join Sam Allardyce in searching for free transfers?

Keane, apparently destined never to play in a European Cup final, looked the most crestfallen player on the flight home. "We could have done better and we are out," he said. "We all have to look at ourselves. Going out in the last 16 is no good to anybody, is it? The expectations here are so high; and the manager, staff and players know that."

Keane does not go in for clichéd claptrap and needs no reminding that United's supposedly indomitable spirit is in danger of becoming



SIR ALEX FERGUSON

post-Schmeichel, are no longer in the ludicrous situation where the position goes to whoever makes the least high-profile mistakes.

There are other concerns. At San Siro, Wayne Rooney and Cristiano Ronaldo looked as bewildered as tourists trying to negotiate one of Milan's zebra crossings. Ferguson spoke about them not fully adjusting to this level until 2008, but that will not placate anyone. Roy Keane, Ryan Giggs, Paul Scholes will all be gone by then, and possibly Gary Neville too.

Replacements will have to be located. Yet Ferguson has already spent next year's transfer budget on Rooney. So do United take a deep

the stuff of myth. It was evident in 1999 but since then it is difficult to state a case for them being unlucky in any of their eliminations.

"We aren't far away," argued Ruud van Nistelrooy, who was so rusty Ferguson should surely have played Alan Smith. "We have a younger side than Milan and their experience was an advantage to them. In the decisive moments it showed."

Ferguson has emphasised United "have no divine right" to win trophies but for a club with United's bloated resources people are entitled to more than excuses. The question is: when do they stop saying "next year"?

Road ends for Gunners

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, London

A superb Thierry Henry goal was not enough to spare Arsenal from another year of under achievement in Europe as Bayern Munich held out to squeeze into the Champions League quarter-finals 3-2 on aggregate.

Henry's opportunistic strike mid-way through the second half earned the Gunners a 1-0 win on the night and ensured there was suspense right to the final whistle at Highbury.

But the Gunners ultimately pulled up a goal short of what was required after a 3-1 defeat in Munich in the first leg.

Arsene Wenger had branded that display as the worst in Europe of his eight years in Highbury and the Arsenal manager admitted his side had been left with too much to do.

"I was proud of my players tonight because they have given everything and it was very close in the end," Wenger said.

"But we lost against a very good side and we wish them well for the rest of the competition. Overall they had good technical control of the game and it was difficult to get them out of the position. 1-0 is a good result at home - it is the goals we gave away in the first leg that have cost us."

Arsenal never seriously looked like claiming the 2-0 win that would have put them through on the away goals rule.

Bayern had scarcely broken sweat by the time Henry's goal made things interesting and despite a few jittery moments late on, certainly deserved to progress over the two legs.

The way the tie was poised, Arsenal knew they had to balance attacking intent with caution not to concede a goal.

They got the caution bit right but such was the lacklustre quality of their offensive play that it was not until the mid-way point in the first half that they managed a shot on goal.

Even then, Patrick Vieira's

volley from the edge of the area did not require a save from Oliver Kahn as it skidded a yard right of the target.

That represented a rare sortie out of their own half for the Gunners, who were relieved to see an unmarked Michael Ballack shank his shot wide from 14 yards in the 26th minute.

Kahn finally had a shot to make five minutes before the break, when Henry cut into the box from the left and attempted to beat the Germany goalkeeper from a tight angle. Kahn spread himself and smothered the danger but Arsenal had at least finally given an indication of where a goal might come from.

With the Germans looking comfortable, Wenger introduced Robert Pires and Cesc Fabregas just over the hour mark in the hope of improving the service to Henry and Dennis Bergkamp from midfield.

It was to be left-back Ashley Cole however who set up Henry for the 66th-minute goal that transformed the match.

From deep inside his own half, the England international launched a long ball over the top of Bayern's centrebacks. Henry's first touch, with his right foot, brought it under control at the corner of the six-yard box. The second, with his left, swept the ball into the opposite corner of the net, leaving Kahn with no chance.

Having apparently been cruising, Bayern suddenly found themselves treading a high wire.

The frustration was evident as Ballack clattered into Vieira, earning himself a yellow card for his trouble.

But the Germans quickly regained their composure and their was a more positive contribution from Ballack with quarter of an hour left, when he jinked his way to the edge of the box and drew a fine save from Jens Lehmann.

The closest Arsenal came to snatching a decisive second was with Kolo Toure's header, which was acrobatically turned over by Kahn although it looked to be going over the bar in any case.

Liverpool like old times

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, Leverkusen

Four-time European champions Liverpool secured a quarter-final place in the Champions League after a brace from Spain international Luis Garcia started off a 3-1 win over Bayer Leverkusen.

Rafael Benitez's side held a 3-1 first leg cushion from Anfield and cruised into the last eight by a 6-2 aggregate scoreline thanks to two first half goals from Garcia and a 67th minute effort from Czech international Milan Baros.

It was sweet revenge for Liverpool who crashed out of the quarter-finals to Leverkusen after a 4-2 defeat at the BayArena in 2002.

"It was a great first half for us," enthused Benitez. "We scored two goals and maintained a high tempo."

"To stay in the Champions League means a lot to me, the fans and the board."

Liverpool welcomed back inspirational captain Steven Gerrard from suspension and the England international spearheaded a five-man midfield anchored by German international Dietmar Hamann.

Baros was a lone target man with Fernando Morientes Cup-tied, but the Czech's greyhound pace wreaked havoc in a fragile Leverkusen rear-

guard. With just five minutes gone Baros sped past Jan-Ingwer Callsen-Brackner and appeared to be fouled in the penalty area by the 20-year-old German.

Referee Alain Sars waved play on, leaving Baros and the rest of the Liverpool players furious at the French official.

Bayer pushed forward in numbers and forced two corners in the first 15 minutes that Liverpool dealt with unconvincedly.

In the 25th minute Brazilian striker Franca, a surprise starter for the hosts, missed a glorious chance scuffing a volley after the ball rebounded to him kindly in the box.

"Franca and (London) Donovan missed good chances and Liverpool then scored which killed us off," said Bayer handler Klaus Augenthaler.

"But congratulations to Liverpool over the two legs, they were the better team."

The Franca miss proved costly as Liverpool counter attacked with purpose in the 28th minute.

Gerrard curled an exquisite cross into the danger area and the alert Garcia produced a deft header to deceive goalkeeper Jorg Butt.

Leverkusen needed to score three times to take the game into extra-time but any thoughts of a comeback were dashed four minutes later.

Gerrard delivered a fantastic corner from the right and Garcia was again on hand to flick the ball in for his second of the match.

Bayer required five goals to progress affording Liverpool a comfortable second half they could scarcely have anticipated before arriving.

With Bulgarian international striker Dimitar Berbatov hobbling off at the end of the first half Leverkusen could have waved the white flag, but their vocal supporters kept them going forward.

Andrej Voronin and Franca both missed chances, mirroring the first leg when Bayer should have netted more than one away goal.

But the night belonged to Liverpool, and Baros slotted home in the 67th minute to make it 3-0 and send hundreds of Bayer fans flooding through the turnstiles.

Jack Krzynowek struck a consolation goal for Bayer two minutes from time but Liverpool knew they were already in the last eight.

While Liverpool are rank outsiders for the Champions League the unpredictability of Benitez's side makes them a dangerous opponent in the hat for Friday's draw.

"I am not going to say we can win the Champions League," added Benitez. "We will just wait and see who we get."

Maradona in great health!

AFP, Buenos Aires

Former world soccer champion Diego Maradona is in "perfect health" after undergoing gastric bypass surgery in order to help him reduce weight, one of his surgeons said.

The 1986 World Cup winner is "in a perfect state of health" after Saturday's operation, Eduardo Bolanos told Argentinian radio station Mitre.

"He is a perfect patient. He has an excellent temperament and he collaborates fully" with medical staff, Bolanos said.

Bolanos said Maradona would remain in hospital in the Colombian city of Cartagena for two weeks and be fed a liquids-only diet.

"He should return to his ideal weight" of around 80 kilos, Bolanos said.

Maradona, 44, who has had a succession of health problems, is said to have weighed 120 kilograms (264 pounds) when admitted to hospital.

"Diego is the type of person who can return with a minimum of effort to 80 kilos," Bolanos said. "He will be able to find a normal rhythm of life."

During the gastric bypass procedure, the upper stomach is stapled to reduce food intake and thus help the patient lose weight.

Australia want AFC status

AFP, Sydney

Australia are pressing ahead with efforts to join the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) in a switch from the Oceania Football Confederation (OFC), the Football Federation Australia (FFA) said.

Japan Football Association vice-president Junji Ogura, a member of FIFA's executive committee, said Wednesday the world governing body had received a request from the Australian federation for permission to switch to the AFC.

PSV see off Monaco

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

REUTERS, Monaco

PSV Eindhoven cruised into the quarter-finals of the Champions League for the first time on Wednesday with a solid 2-0 victory in Monaco.

Striker Jan Vennegoor of Hesselink headed the Dutch league leaders in front from Mark van Bommel's corner after 27 minutes and substitute DaMarcus Beasley wrapped up a 3-0 aggregate win from close range with 20 minutes remaining.

Monaco, beaten by Porto in last year's final, tried to respond through lively Uruguayan Ernest Chevanton, but the principality side

were largely subdued against Guus Hiddink's well-organised outfit.

Their bad night was complete when after 76 minutes when defender Gael Givet was shown a straight red card for a wild lunge on PSV's Peruvian striker Jefferson Farfan.

This season was the first time PSV have progressed through the group phase of the Champions League.

Dutch international Van Bommel said the feat was extra special as the club sold three key players before the start of the season.

"When you think we lost (Mateja) Kezman, (Arjen) Robben and (Dennis) Rommedahl, all to English clubs, we have done very well," said the influential midfielder. "We might not have big stars, but everybody works very hard for the team."