



Jubilant Inter Milan players hold aloft the Italian Super Cup trophy after beating AS Roma at San Siro on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

ITALIAN SUPER CUP

Incredible Inter tear down Roma

Football

INTERNET, undated

Inter fought back from 3-0 down to beat Roma 4-3 in extra time with Luis Figo's sublime free-kick in a truly spectacular Italian Super Cup clash.

The Nerazzurri were originally set to play this match as the Coppa Italia victors, but Calciopoli handed them the Scudetto title as well, so Roma stepped in as Coppa Finalists to contest this Italian version of the Charity Shield in front of 40,000 fans at San Siro.

David Pizarro was not even on the bench against the club he left last week due to a transfer problem, but Inter fielded new signings Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Fabio Grosso and Patrick Vieira from the start. Individuals played an important part right from the start, as Amantino Mancini's solo run was deflected for a corner, then at the other end Luis Figo got away from three defenders only for Dejan Stankovic to waste his assist.

Mancini again found himself in a great scoring position on Simone Perrotta's pass, but the Brazilian miss-kicked horribly with only Francesco Toldo to beat.

He made up for his error

moments later thanks to an absolute howler in the Inter defence. Christian Panucci's looping pass was missed by both Javier Zanetti and Toldo until Mancini managed to nod into an empty net, despite being hauled back by the desperate goalkeeper.

It was almost 2-0 soon after, as Roma stepped up a gear with some smart one-touch football, calling Toldo into a decisive save on Alberto Aquilani's strike.

Once again, Inter did not learn from this warning and fell for the same type of move. The Nerazzurri defence was sliced open like butter by Totti and Aquilani, the young Italian midfielder side-footing home past a helpless Toldo.

Roma were running rings around the Inter defenders and made it 3-0 on 34 minutes with another well-worked move. A Rodrigo Taddei slide-rule pass cut through the back line thanks to Totti's dummy for Aquilani to tap in undisputed from six yards.

Taddei turned a free header over the bar, but Inter got back into the game on the stroke of half-time when Vieira's glancing header turned a Figo free-kick into the far top corner.

The Nerazzurri started the second half brightly with Figo drilling over, but Roma again split the defence with Aquilani and

Taddei combining, forcing Toldo to rush out and acrobatically clear from the ex-Siena man.

Roberto Mancini introduced Brazilian right-back Maicon for Grosso, switching Zanetti to the left, and Hernan Crespo for a visibly irritated Adriano. L'Imperatore left the field shaking his head at the decision.

However, Mancini had his choice supported when the former Chelsea and Milan forward nodded in a Stankovic cross at the near post to make it 3-2 and game on with 25 minutes to go.

Roma reacted by throwing on full-back Marco Cassetti for Taddei and ex-Spurs striker Ahmed Mido for a tired Totti, but Ibrahimovic wasted a good chance to level the scores by depositing the ball into Alexander Doni's arms.

The Roma goalkeeper had his palms stung by a Stankovic screamer and Daniele De Rossi flung himself into the path of Vieira's side-foot finish before Doni used his feet to keep out Figo's angled drive. The Brazilian shot-stopper impressed by plucking Figo's looping assist for Crespo out of the air with one strong hand.

The pressure was growing and Inter managed the incredible feat of recovering from 3-0 down to equalise 3-3. Ibrahimovic completely miss-kicked his shot into the

ground, but it fell into the path of Vieira for a tap-in.

The final stages were tense with both teams capable of winning, as De Rossi blasted over from 30 metres, penalty appeals for Marco Materazzi's push on Mancini and a Max Tonetto volley wide.

Inter really should've won it in the last minute of normal time, but Crespo set up a perfect pass for Ibrahimovic, only for the former Juventus man to side-foot it wide from eight yards. With a 3-3 scoreline, the Italian Super Cup went to extra time.

Crespo nearly took advantage of a Cristian Chivu error, but four minutes into extra time Inter took the lead for the first time with a magnificent Figo free-kick. The Portuguese legend curled a right-foot shot into the far corner past a surprised Doni.

Roma were hit hard by the turnaround and soon after Chivu was foolishly shown a straight red card for sarcastically applauding the referee after bringing down Figo. Former Giallorossi midfielder Olivier Dacourt replaced Stankovic for the final stages.

In 10 men, Luciano Spalletti's side couldn't claw a way back, even though Mido scared Toldo on the counter-attack, and Inter lifted the Italian Super Cup for the second year running.

United set the pace

AFP, London



Manchester United continued their perfect start to the season on Saturday as potential English Premiership title rivals Arsenal flopped again.

United top the table with three straight wins after beating Watford 2-1 but Arsenal were left floundering fourth from bottom after losing 1-0 at Manchester City.

Liverpool got back to winning ways on a special occasion at Anfield, defeating West Ham 2-1 on the centenary of their legendary Kop stand.

United now have a potential psychological edge over champions Chelsea, who travel to Blackburn on Sunday keen to put their shock defeat at Middlesbrough on Wednesday behind them.

Jose Mourinho's side will be determined not to find themselves trailing in United's wake so early into their attempt to win a third straight title.

Elsewhere Saturday, 10-man visitors Everton beat Tottenham 2-1, Charlton got their first win of the season at home to Bolton and Fulham did likewise with a win over Sheffield United.

Manchester United taught newly-promoted Watford a lesson in winning Premiership points.

England midfielder Michael Carrick made his first competitive

Metzelder out with injury

REUTERS, Berlin

Germany coach Joachim Loew will be without all four of his World Cup central defenders for the start of their Euro 2008 qualifying campaign on Sept. 2 against Ireland after Christoph Metzelder was ruled out on Sunday.

The Borussia Dortmund defender was expected to be back this week but a knee injury turned out to be more serious than first thought and the 25-year-old will face surgery on Thursday.

Loew already had to contend with injuries to Per Mertesacker, Robert Huth and Jens Nowotny. Loew will nominate a replacement for Metzelder on Monday to his 20-man squad.

Berlin's Arne Friedrich, normally a right back, was shifted to central defence for Germany's friendly against Sweden 11 days ago and did a solid job in the 3-0 victory in Gelsenkirchen.

Because of the injuries to Mertesacker and Huth, Loew had nominated Manuel Friedrich from Mainz and Hertha Berlin's Malik Fathi for the Sweden match and they both played the second half.

Both Manuel Friedrich and Fathi are in the squad for the Group D match against Ireland in Stuttgart. Germany then play on Sept. 6 in Serravalle against San Marino in their next qualifier.

start for United following his pre-season switch from Tottenham.

France defender Mikael Silvestre scored United's opener in the 12th minute at Vicarage Road and Hornets midfielder Damien Francis equalised with a 34th-minute tap-in.

But United veteran Ryan Giggs's 52nd-minute goal maintained their 100 percent record.

"They make it really difficult," said United boss Sir Alex Ferguson.

"We came to a difficult place, showed our mettle and got our reward from it."

Arsenal had the chance to kick-start their season at Eastlands but were beaten thanks to a 41st-minute Joey Barton penalty.

The Gunners were unconvincing in their first Premiership match, salvaging a draw at home to Aston Villa last weekend.

An upset Arsenal captain Thierry Henry vented his frustration after Saturday's setback.

"We should have won that game easy," he told Sky Sports television.

"We are the first ones to blame. The lads were pretty down in the dressing room but if we keep on playing like that I don't think we're going to lose a lot of games."

At Anfield, Liverpool celebrated the Kop's centenary by scoring both their goals at that end.

Bobby Zamora put the visitors in front in the 12th minute but Denmark defender Daniel Agger lashed in a curling equaliser in the 42nd minute and England striker Peter Crouch scored the winner three minutes later.

Netherlands striker Dirk Kuyt impressed on his Liverpool debut.

"It was wonderful to make my debut at Anfield. It feels great but the win is the most important thing," the substitute said.

"We have a wonderful squad, not 11 good players but 20. We are getting better and better, but we're not at the 100 percent level yet and you have to work hard to beat teams like Chelsea."

Liverpool's cross-city rivals Everton made it seven points from three games when they beat hosts Tottenham Hotspur 2-0 at White Hart Lane.

Everton midfielder Kevin Kilbane was sent off in the first half for two bookable offences before Spurs conceded a 53rd-minute Calum Davenport own goal.

Everton's main pre-season signing, Andy Johnson, scored his second goal of the season in the 66th minute to make his week

complete after being recalled to the England squad.

"If England are looking for anybody to score goals at the moment, I'd put my money on Andy Johnson," Everton boss David Moyes said.

"Today's performance has probably given me as much pleasure as any of them, coming to Tottenham, who we know have spent big, brought in some tremendous players and are also a really good team."

Forgotten England forward Emile Heskey had only scored once in his previous 27 games, but he scored the only goal of the game on his 500th career appearance as Wigan beat Reading 1-0 at the JJB Stadium.

Heskey, a pre-season recruit from Birmingham, scored with ease in a 38th-minute one-on-one with the visitors' goalkeeper Marcus Hahnemann.

Sheffield United's tough start to life in the Premiership continued at Craven Cottage where they were beaten 1-0 by Fulham due to a 40th-minute Jimmy Bullard free kick.

At The Valley, Charlton got their first win of the season, beating visitors Bolton 2-0 thanks to two goals by Darren Bent.



PHOTO: AFP

Watford Manager Adrian Boothroyd (L) looks over at his Manchester United counterpart Alex Ferguson during their Premiership clash at Vicarage Road in Watford on Saturday.



PHOTO: AFP

Valencia's new signing, former Spanish international Fernando Morientes celebrates his strike against Real Betis during their Primera Liga match at The Mestalla on Saturday.

Morientes powers Valencia

AFP, Madrid



Fernando Morientes consigned his ill-fated move to Liverpool to the history books on Saturday when he made a goal-scoring return to the Spanish League in Valencia's 2-1 win against Real Betis.

Morientes joined Liverpool in January 2005 for 6.3 million pounds from Real Madrid but struggled to adapt to the Premiership and hit just 12 goals in 61 matches.

His slump was so pronounced that he missed out on Spain's World Cup squad.

But back on home turf, he again showed his deadly finishing instincts when he gave Valencia the lead after 33 minutes in the opening game of the new 2006/2007 season.

He scored with a fine volley after a pinpoint cross from Edu to score his second goal of the week after also finding the net in the Champions League win over Salzburg in midweek.

Real Betis were level, however,

in the 53rd minute when Munoz Xisco nipped in between two defenders to score from an Enrique Romero left-wing cross.

Valencia hit back with the winner just eight minutes later when Raul Albiol scored with a half-volley.

Meanwhile, Real Madrid and Barcelona, bitter rivals across the 77 years the Spanish league has been in existence, enter the new season on the back of recent campaigns which have brought widely differing fortunes.

Barca have been untouchable for the past two seasons, running away with the title and last May adding their second Champions League title, though they still trail Real historically by 29 domestic titles to 18.

They have again been relatively prudent in upgrading their squad with former Chelsea forward Eidur Gudjohnsen, Italian World Cup winner Gianluca Zambrotta and French veteran defender Lilian Thuram.

Real have slightly toned down the number of new faces, buying Ruud Van Nistelrooy from Manchester United to link up once more with David Beckham, Italian World Cup-winning skipper Fabio Cannavaro and Brazilian midfielder Emerson.

Kuranyi makes his mark

AFP, Gelsenkirchen



Just over a year ago German international forward Kevin Kuranyi was one of the first names on the team sheet for club and country but now he is trying to revive his flagging career at the age of just 24.

Brazilian-born Kuranyi was omitted from Germany's World Cup squad after a woeful season with Schalke 04 last season but took the first step on the recovery trail with a goal in Schalke's 2-0 win over Werder Bremen on Friday.

Kuranyi powered in a header after just seven minutes for his first goal in 677 minutes with his last strike coming at the end of March.

It was that sort of form that persuaded Juergen Klinsmann to drop him from the World Cup squad and Kuranyi is determined to get a recall under new coach Joachim Loew.

"I was under a lot of pressure and the goal was a major relief," Kuranyi said.

"There has been a lot written about me. I didn't score in my first game and then in my second match I didn't play well and all of a sudden it was a case of he belongs on the substitutes bench."

"But if my club plays well and continues to win matches then I can start thinking of the national team."

Kuranyi, scorer of 13 goals in 35 internationals, admitted he had not spoken with Loew, who took over from Klinsmann after the World Cup, and did not expect to be called into the squad for the Euro 2008 qualifier against the Republic of Ireland on September 2.

"No I was not surprised (at not being called up) as I saw how well the boys played in the 3-0 friendly win over Sweden and it was obvious that there would be no changes," Kuranyi admitted.

"I have not spoken with Joachim Low. Of course I want to be in the national set-up but I do not want to talk my way in. I want to put myself forward through my performances."

"But I have experienced so much over the past six months that I don't expect things any more."