

ROONEY SALVAGES TIE

Slick Roma outdo United

AFP, Rome



Champions League quarterfinal, first leg here on Wednesday.

United were reduced to 10 men in the 34th minute when Scholes picked up a second yellow card, the first one having already ruled him out of the second leg at Old Trafford.

Roma exploited their numerical advantage a minute before the break when Rodrigo Taddei's deflected shot beat Edwin van der Sar.

The goal sparked ugly scenes as United fans - reacting to spiteful provocation from the home supporters - were baton-charged by Italian police.

United coach Sir Alex Ferguson had said an away goal would be vital if his side were to reach the semis.

And he got his wish on the hour as Wayne Rooney netted his first Champions League goal for two-and-a-half years with a cool finish after a swift United counter-attack.

"To be fair I wasn't really thinking about it being a millstone around my neck more that it was the quarterfinals of the Champions League," said Rooney.

"It was a good goal and being down to 10 men we needed one and this is not a bad result."

But Roma refused to let their heads drop and substitute Mirko Vucinic restored their lead in the 66th minute, hammering home the loose ball after van der Sar had only half cleared Mancini's venomous strike with his fists.

Ferguson seemed satisfied with the result, though, he was far from happy with the referee.

"Being against 10 possibly 12 men for at least an hour it was a good result," said Ferguson.

"The referee didn't give a deci-

sion for us tonight, but I can't complain about the sending off.

"However the referee said before the match that he would book anyone asking for someone to be booked and yet a Roma player demanded the booking for Scholes and was not punished and that is not acceptable."

His Roma counterpart Luciano Spalletti said that he thought they could have won more convincingly.

"With more luck we could have won by more," he said.

"When they were unable to score we had our hands on the scruff of the neck of the match and I thought we would make it 2-0.

"A draw next week won't be good enough but we can still be confident of going through."

While Rooney ended his goal drought the other player desperately waiting for a Champions League goal Cristiano Ronaldo drew greater praise from Roma veteran defender Christian Panucci.

"If he takes off with the ball you will never catch him," said the former Italy international.

"You could compare him to motorcycling world champion Valentino Rossi. If I was given the same engine as him then perhaps I could catch him."

Roma's joy at defeating the English Premiership leaders was tempered slightly by a booking for midfielder Simone Perrotta, who like Scholes will miss next week's return match.

The home side made an aggressive start with Taddei screwing a shot wide and Christian Chivu curling a free-kick the wrong side of the post.

United were slow to get into their stride, but they gave their hosts a warning of their attacking threat when Ronaldo left Daniele De Rossi for dead only to see his low cross towards Rooney intercepted.

Francesco Totti drove a free-kick straight into the arms of van Der Sar before Scholes picked up

his first yellow card for clattering into Christian Wilhelmsson.

After Totti had tested van der Sar with an angled shot, Scholes went for an early bath for bringing Totti's robust run to an end with another crude challenge.

"The way numbers are at the moment we have a few players out and we could do without that," said Ferguson.

"Sure we can cope. We have the options I think. Nevertheless Scholes is a loss as he is a world class player."

Perrotta was booked for diving to even the score in suspensions for the return leg before Roma went ahead.

Mancini cut the ball back intelligently after a quickly-taken corner and Taddei's shot hit Wes Brown before finding the net.

Ronaldo had a great chance to level the score two minutes after the restart, but his lob lacked the height to get above Roma's Brazilian keeper Doni.

Totti blazed over from a good position before United caught Roma out with a lightning break in the 60th minute.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer found himself in acres of space down the right, and his pin-point cross found Rooney with time and space.

The England striker took the ball down cleverly and placed a low shot past Doni.

"One would probably not see a better goal all night," purred Ferguson.

"He showed good composure and produced a great finish."

Spalletti too was left in awe of the England star.

"Rooney was excellent. We put several men on him but he was too strong for them when he was given his one chance."

Roma reacted positively and Vucinic equalised after van der Sar had failed to deal with Mancini's blistering drive.

Totti might have given Roma a two-goal cushion but his 20-yard screamer whistled wide.



Roma striker Mirko Vucinic (2nd L) celebrates with teammates after scoring the winning goal in their first leg Champions League quarterfinal against Manchester United at the Stadio Olimpico in Rome on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

A cricket missionary evoked

AFP, Cape Town



The late Pakistan cricket coach Bob Woolmer was remembered Wednesday at a memorial service in his adopted South African homeland as a passionate man who lived and died for the sport he loved.

An ongoing murder inquiry has so far prevented the 58-year-old's body from being flown back from Jamaica to Cape Town for a private funeral service but friends and colleagues gathered at Wynberg high school were able to give him a public send-off.

"He lived for the game and he succumbed to the game," said legendary South African fast bowler Allan Donald told the mourners.

Donald, South Africa's leading Test wicket taker of all-time, credited his close friend and mentor with much of his success.

"But the one thing he could never coach me was to run between the wickets," he quipped in reference to South Africa's exit from the 1999 World Cup in England when Donald was run-out in the last ball against Australia.

Woolmer was found dead, presumed strangled, in his Jamaican hotel room on March 18, one day after former champions Pakistan were dramatically ousted from the cricket World Cup in a shock defeat to minnows Ireland.

Detectives are exploring the possibility that Woolmer was murdered with the cyanide-like poison aconite, which causes internal organ failure and forces the victim's breath to slow until it finally stops.

His death on March 18 has

sparked one of the most complex murder investigations in Jamaican history and has triggered speculation about possible links to match-fixing and illegal betting in cricket.

Tim Noakes, who co-authored a book with Woolmer on the art and science of cricket, rejected suggestions the coach was about to expose any match-fixing scandals, saying the book "does not include the word match fixing."

Fighting back tears, Noakes described Woolmer as a "cricket missionary", adding that the global community of cricketers and all who loved the game now had to face the possibility that cricket "may have lost its moral compass."

He praised Woolmer, who was in charge of the South African national team between 1994 and 1999, as a man who had shaken hands with the queen of England and dined with presidents, but at the same

time coached children in Cape Town's Langa township.

Donald read a statement on behalf of Woolmer's widow Gill and sons Dale and Russell, thanking well-wishers from around the world for their condolences.

"To Inzamam (al-Haq, Pakistan's outgoing captain) and the Pakistan cricket team, Bob loved you."

Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Naseem Ashraf conveyed the sadness of his government and people at Woolmer's death, telling his family: "I can tell you, we in Pakistan loved Bob."

He said he had received an email from Woolmer on the day of his death, as the shock of the exit at the hands of Ireland was still reverberating.

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Hopes on standby

AFP, Brisbane

Australian all-rounder James Hopes said Thursday that replacing the injured Shane Watson in a World Cup semifinal would be daunting but that he would relish the challenge.

Reigning champions Australia placed Hopes on standby Wednesday to cover for Queensland team-mate Watson, whose place is in doubt after he sustained a left calf muscle strain in the 10-wicket win against Bangladesh in Antigua last week.

Hopes told reporters in Brisbane he has been training in secret to prove his fitness since being told on Monday he was in line to go to the World Cup if needed.

The 28-year-old Hopes, a medium-pace all-rounder like Watson, has played nine one-day internationals for Australia, but has

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'Bob's death forces Greg'

AFP, Mumbai



Pakistan coach Bob Woolmer's murder at the World Cup may have hastened Greg Chappell's decision to quit as India's coach, elder brother Ian Chappell said on Thursday.

The younger Chappell had on Wednesday declined to extend his two-year tenure as India's coach due to "family and personal" reasons after the national team was knocked out of the ongoing World Cup in the first round.

"If there was any chance of Greg continuing as coach of India, it probably disappeared when Bob Woolmer was murdered during the World Cup," Ian Chappell wrote in the Mumbai-based Mid-day news-

paper.

"Such an ugly incident is sure to focus your concentration on life's priorities. Greg is probably better off without all the angst that comes with one of the most demanding jobs in cricket."

Woolmer was found dead in his hotel room in Kingston, Jamaica, on March 18, a day after Pakistan were defeated by minnows Ireland to bow out of the tournament.

Jamaican police said Woolmer was strangled to death but have yet to identify the killers.

The World Cup humiliation caused shock and anger among cricket-mad fans in India and Pakistan, forcing police in both countries to tighten security around the players.

Ian Chappell, who, like Greg, is a former Australian captain, said his brother must have thought hard before deciding not to seek an extension to his 300,000-dollar-a-

year job with India.

"I doubt Greg will feel completely fulfilled," wrote Ian. "A perfectionist, even one who has mellowed, is never going to be happy with under-achieving on his expectations."

"Greg's only rationale for playing cricket was to win. His approach in his latest role would have been exactly the same - to do everything he could to help India win."

"Greg is a respectful person but there is no point in trying to be like an Indian when you've been employed because of your knowledge and experience as an Australian cricketer."

Greg Chappell will submit his report on the World Cup debacle to Indian cricket chiefs on Friday, the first day of a two-day meeting to take stock of the team's poor performance in the Caribbean.

India, who are due to tour Bangladesh in May, have yet to name Chappell's successor.



PHOTO: AFP

FLOORED: Sri Lanka spin king Muttiah Muralidaran celebrates his crucial caught and bowled dismissal of England batsman Kevin Pietersen during their World Cup Super Eights clash at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in St John's on Wednesday.

Cricket losing out to NBA

AFP, Bridgetown



Thirty years ago, they would have taken their place on the conveyor belt, the raw materials for the all-

conquering West Indies cricket machine. Now young Caribbean men are more likely to be dreaming of making vast amounts of money in America's NBA than making Test centuries at the Kensington Oval here.

Cricket authorities in the region try to play down the significance of a sporting exodus but the West Indies' almost certain World Cup elimination has brought the problem back into sharp focus.

A look at the figures is worrying. It's estimated that an Australian Test player will take home around 500,000 dollars a year; a West Indies player can earn around 8,000 dollars a Test and 3,000 dollars for every one-dayer.

In Grenada, where six Super Eights matches take place from next week, many young men are desperate to leave an island still recovering from the effects of Hurricane Ivan in 2005.

Basketball has provided scholarships for several Grenadian players -- East Central University in Oklahoma recruited Ian Adams, Orson Thomas, Lyndon Daniels and Gary James.

All are expected to make it to the NBA.

That's a relief for the young men of an island where over 12 percent of the working population is unemployed and where poverty and drug use are rife.

Washington Wizards centre Etan Thomas, whose roots are Grenadian, recently donated 40,000 dollars to fund repairs to basketball courts devastated by Ivan.

He persuaded other NBA players to chip in with another 100,000 dollars.

"I'm concerned that the court gets utilised in the way that it is supposed to be, for young people to have a place where they can play and take them off the streets," said Thomas.

In Guyana, meanwhile, one of the poorest nations in the region and reeling from the collapse in demand for sugar, the situation is just as worrying.

"Guyana has more Guyanese in the North American diaspora than in Guyana itself," said an editorial in www.hardbeatnews.com, a website of Caribbean news aimed at expats in the United States.

"The hegemony of the United States is all-persuasive. Young West Indians grow up on a diet of the NFL and NBA. They aspire not to be Garry Sobers but Michael Jordan."

The author claims that it's impossible to find cricket pitches in Georgetown, which once went hand in hand with the sugar estates, yet

basketball courts are everywhere.

"The riches to be made in the NBA are far in excess of even the inflated fees paid to those currently masquerading as West Indies cricket stars," added the editorial.

"The choice for a young athlete is a no-brainer. The US every time." Golden State Warriors' Adonal Foyle was born in St Vincent but has just become a US citizen.

The 6ft 10in player didn't touch a basketball until he was 16 after trying cricket.

"I played cricket, and I was pretty bad at it. And when I played soccer, they stuck me in as goalkeeper," said Foyle.

"If I hadn't found basketball, I don't know what I would have done."

The list goes on.

Arnold Henry, who grew up in St Lucia, now plays at the University of North Florida after becoming converted to basketball by watching Michael Jordan.

"I watched the 1998 NBA finals and the way MJ played, it inspired me. I found a court near my home and I played every day. I even played in the rain."

Even before Jordan, there was a NBA role model in Jamaican-born Patrick Ewing who made his name with the New York Knicks and went on to win two Olympic gold medals.

But West Indies great Sir Vivian Richards isn't convinced that all Caribbean talent will end up in the USA.

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