

Celtic surprise for Milan

AFP, Glasgow



Celtic striker Scott McDonald gave his side a sweet taste of Champions League revenge as his last-minute goal clinched a 2-1 win against AC Milan on Wednesday.

Goalkeeper Strachan's side looked set to be denied a famous victory over the European champions when Kaka converted a controversial penalty just minutes after Stephen McManus had scrambled Celtic into the lead at Parkhead.

But McDonald ensured the Scottish champions exacted a measure of retribution for their exit from the competition against the Italians last season when he pounced on a mistake by Milan goalkeeper Dida to seal a priceless Group D victory in dramatic fashion.

The drama wasn't finished there as a Celtic fan ran on to celebrate the goal and appeared to brush into Dida, who responded by chasing the supporter before falling over and being carried off in a farcical end in Glasgow.

Strachan claimed Celtic's sense of injustice at Markus Merk's decision to hand Milan such a soft penalty for Lee Naylor's challenge on Massimo Ambrosini had spurred them on.

"I don't think the ball was anywhere near the lad, it was up high," Strachan said. "We were aggrieved

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at that and I think the lads were shocked for a couple of minutes.

"Then the anger came into their play and it gave them the energy to go on."

"It could only happen here. But it's excellent, we have beaten the European champions."

Celtic will launch a full investigation into the Dida incident, but Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti played it down, saying: "I didn't see it at the time, I just saw Dida on the pitch."

"I don't think the game should be played again. I don't know if we will complain but I don't think so. This has nothing to do with the final result anyway."

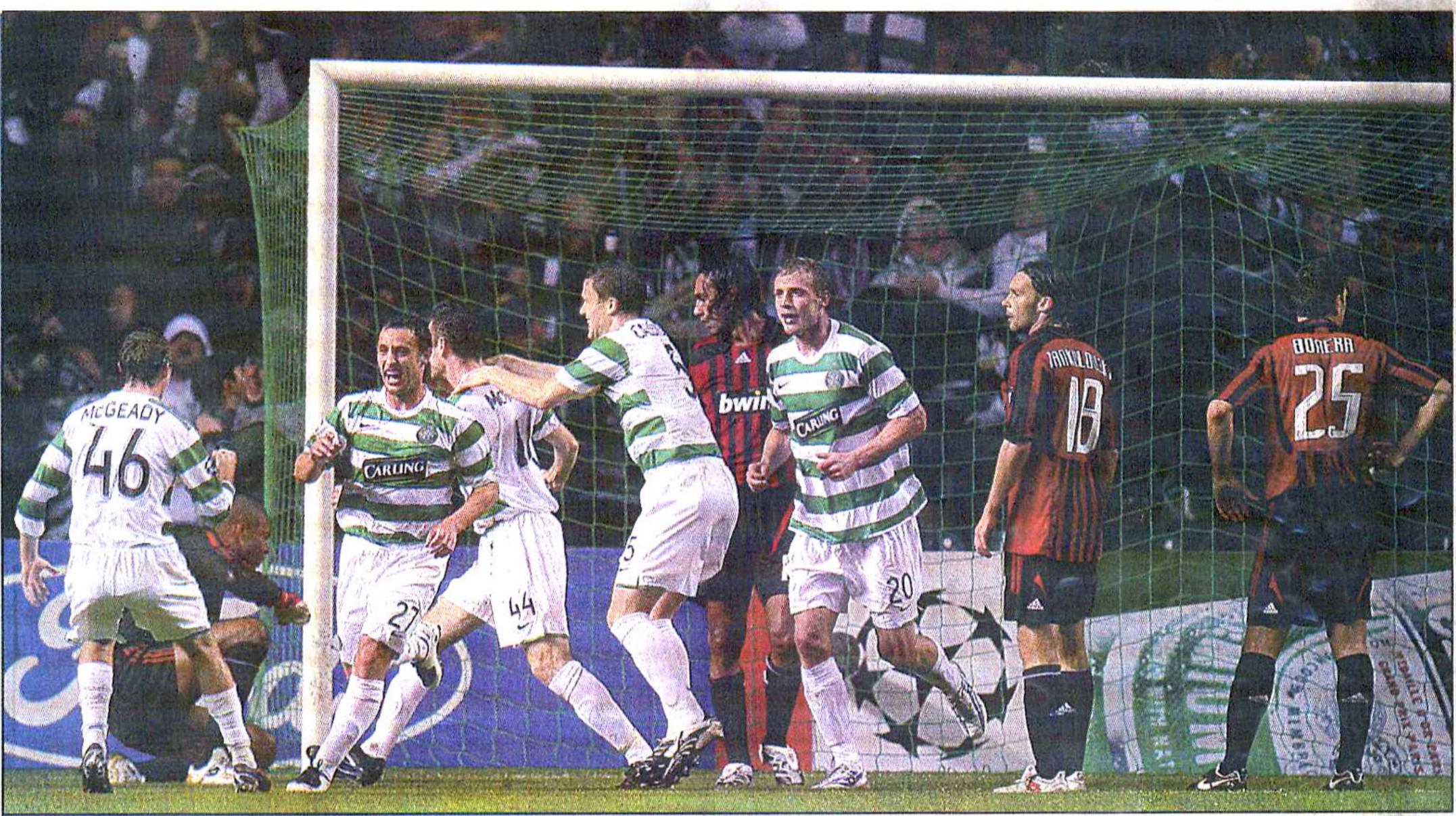
The thrilling climax was in total contrast to a match that was stuck in a midfield war of attrition for long periods. With Shunsuke Nakamura only fit enough to make the bench, Celtic were missing the one genuine playmaker.

But while they might have lacked the guile of the Italians, Strachan's side have such a ferocious work ethic that they are never overruled by any opponent.

Milan had found it impossible to breach Celtic's tenacious defence on their previous two visits to Glasgow and the hosts were determined not to let them find any rhythm again.

McManus had the first sight of goal when he controlled Paul Hartley's free-kick at the far post, but the Celtic captain's scuffed effort drifted harmlessly wide.

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Celtic match-winner Scott McDonald (2nd L) celebrates along with teammates after scoring the winning goal against champions Milan during their Champions League group game at Celtic Park on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Night of upsets

AFP, Paris



Celtic beat reigning champions AC Milan 2-1 in Wednesday night's Champions League action to complete a Glasgow double while downcast Chelsea gained some cheerless victory at Valencia.

Aussie striker Scott McDonald scored in the last minute to earn Celtic victory at Parkhead to add to city rivals Rangers' emphatic 3-0 win at six-time French champions Lyon on Tuesday.

On a poor night for last season's finalists however Liverpool were upstaged 1-0 by Marseille at Anfield giving them a major task to qualify from Group A.

Chelsea produced their best football since Avram Grant took over from Jose Mourinho two weeks ago in their 2-1 fight back victory at Valencia to throw the Champions League Group B wide open.

The best of the action was in Glasgow however.

Celtic captain Stephen McManus gave the home side the lead in the 63rd minute but five minutes later referee Markus Merk adjudged Lee Naylor to have grappled too enthusiastically with Milan skipper Massimo Ambrosini

"It was a magnificent feeling,"

inside the penalty area and Kaka stroked home the spot-kick.

But with seconds remaining, McDonald pounced when Milan keeper Dida had saved a Gary Caldwell drive from the edge of the box and the three points were secure.

"It's been a good night," Strachan told Sky Sports. "Our footballers won the game for us, but not through football. Because they are playing the European champions, they cannot play exactly as they would like to."

"What they did when they gave the ball away and it didn't come off for them was they became good defenders. That gave us the platform to go on and win the game. I thought the players deserved a lot of credit."

Strachan picked out McDonald for particular praise as the Australian finally got his reward for a tireless performance in front of the Parkhead crowd.

"He had to play against two fantastic central defenders," Strachan said. "He held the ball up well and when he gave it away, he was chasing."

"It was an easy night for them to play because they were physically stronger than us. It was raining which made the pitch heavy at times but they did their best and they saved us."

Midfielder Mathieu Valbuena settled the contest with a superb

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France miss Vieira, Trezeguet

AFP, Paris

McDonald told Sky Sports afterwards. "Right from the first go we were in their faces and it was a tremendous result."

Chelsea manager Grant said he was delighted with his players' approach in their victory at Valencia.

Valencia's David Villa opened the scoring after just nine minutes but an own goal midway through the first half by Emilio Moretti and a second half strike by the prolific Didier Drogba gave Chelsea a memorable win.

Grant said: "You saw the attitude in the last two weeks, it has been difficult, but it was good. I keep telling you I'm very happy with the attitude."

Victory took the Blues to the top of Group B and Grant continued: "Very good, it's nice to be at the top. We came here to win the game, I think we wanted to do it in the right way. To come back from 1-0, the second half we dominated, I'm happy."

Marseille coach Erik Gerets paid tribute to the players who made his first match in charge such a memorable one with victory at Liverpool.

"It is my players who wrote the history, I was just on the touchline. But I'm very proud of them -- they made a few small mistakes technically but none tactically."

Midfielder Mathieu Valbuena settled the contest with a superb

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SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Mickael Landreau (Paris SG), Sébastien Frey (Fiorentina/ITA), Ulrich Ramé (Bordeaux)

Defenders: Eric Abidal (FC Barcelona/ESP), Julien Escudé (Sevilla/ESP), Patrice Evra (Manchester United/ENG), William Gallas (Arsenal/ENG), Philippe Mexès (AS Roma/ITA), Bakary Sagna (Arsenal/ENG), Lillian Thuram (FC Barcelona/ESP)

Midfielders: Abou Diaby (Arsenal), Lassana Diarra (Arsenal), Mathieu Flamini (Arsenal), Claude Makelele (Chelsea/ENG), Jerome Rothen (Paris SG), Jeremy Toulalan (Lyon)

Strikers: Nicolas Anelka (Bolton/ENG), Karim Benzema (Lyon), Sidney Govou (Lyon), Thierry Henry (FC Barcelona/ESP), Florent Malouda (Chelsea/ENG), Franck Ribéry (Bayern Munich/GER), Louis Saha (Manchester United/ENG)

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Marseille breach Anfield

AFP, Liverpool

Rafael Benitez has described Liverpool's Champions League defeat by Marseille as one of the club's worst performances at Anfield since he took charge just over three years ago.

Defender Gallas has been sidelined with a groin injury since August 19 and missed France's last three games, including their 1-0 loss to Scotland which leaves them facing a worrying campaign to reach the finals.

But Patrick Vieira and David Trezeguet have both been left out of the 23-man squad named for October 13 and to host Lithuania in Nantes four days later.

Midfielder Mathieu Valbuena ensured Marseille became the first French club to win at Anfield with a superb 25-yard strike with quarter of an hour left.

But the troubled French side might easily have wrapped up their win much sooner on a night that leaves Liverpool battling for survival in group A with just one point from their opening two games.

"It was a poor game," a despondent Benitez admitted. "That is clear -- we did not do the right things from the beginning, we were giving the ball away and we could not create a chance."

"At the end we had some chances from corners but we really did not play well."

Asked if it was the worst performance he had witnessed in his time in charge, Benitez admitted: "It could be. We did not create too much and, especially to be at home, it was a very bad game."

Marseille coach Erik Gerets paid tribute to the players who made his

first match in charge of France's best-supported club such a memorable one.

"It is my players who wrote the history, I was just on the touchline," he said. "But I'm very proud of them -- they made a few small mistakes technically but none tactically."

Benitez had named a side in which Sebastian Leto was making his second start of the season as part of a new combination with Fabio Aurelio down the left while Peter Crouch was starting for only the third time in a new-look strike partnership with Fernando Torres.

"You can talk about selection but we were talking yesterday about big players and today we have some big names not playing well from the beginning," Benitez said.

"On the left, we needed the quality of Fabio and we gave Leto the opportunity because he was playing well and working really hard. We need to analyse it but you cannot talk about one player -- the whole team had a really bad game."

The "directors out" banners brandished by the noisy contingent of travelling visiting supporters reflected the fact that Marseille are currently hovering just above the relegation zone in their own league, having won once in their first nine matches.

That run cost Albert Emon his job as head coach last week. But in their first match under former Belgian defender Gerets they looked anything but a club in turmoil.

"The club needed a success like

Carrick breaks elbow

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United have been left with veteran Paul Scholes as their only fit central midfielder after Michael Carrick joined Owen Hargreaves and Darren Fletcher on the sidelines with a fractured elbow.

England international Carrick, 26, will be out for up to six weeks after suffering the injury in the latter stages of United's 1-0 Champions League win over Roma here on Tuesday.

United boss Sir Alex Ferguson revealed after that match that Hargreaves would not be available for another month after having an injection to treat tendinitis in his right knee.

Fletcher is still some way from a comeback following the knee injury he suffered playing for Scotland in France last month.

The loss of Carrick is not as serious as it might have been for Ferguson because his period of national break and a free midweek at the end of this month, caused by the Red Devils' early League Cup exit.

Ferguson is hoping Hargreaves will be ready for his side's trip to Premier League leaders Arsenal at the start of November.

In the meantime, Ferguson will have to decide between drafting defender John O'Shea or Ryan Giggs into central midfield or giving summer signing Anderson a run in the side.

Carrick's injury means he will miss England's Euro 2008 qualifiers against Estonia and Russia this month and he is almost certainly out of the friendly in Austria on November 16 and the final Euro 2008 qualifier against Croatia five days later.

Terry-fic show

AFP, Valencia



Chelsea and England captain John Terry may have had better games in his career but his brave contribution to the London side's 2-1 win over Valencia was hailed by even his rivals on Thursday.

The defender played the full 90 minutes in the Champions League Group B clash on Wednesday night wearing a protective face mask only three days after being operated upon for a fractured cheekbone.

"Terry is a symbol of Chelsea and would sacrifice his cheek for his club. They should raise a statue of him when he retires and very few would object," commented the Spanish sports daily Marca on Thursday.

"He may have been playing with a protective mask but that didn't stop him getting involved and even committing fouls," added another Spanish newspaper.

Chelsea manager Avram Grant was also quick to praise the contribution of Terry after the faltering former English champions played some of its best football of the season.

"When you see John Terry you see a player who plays with all his heart. I don't know how many players can play with this injury but John Terry's very special," said the Israeli, who took over at the Chelsea helm two weeks ago.

"He's a player with a big heart and I think that big players need to be an example to the other, and you cannot ask for a better example than this," added Grant.

Grant is still trying to establish

Nervous wait for Celtic

AFP, Glasgow

Celtic were Thursday sweating over the prospect of heavy sanctions from UEFA as a supporter who attacked AC Milan goalkeeper Dida and then fled the stadium gave himself up to police.

Brazilian Dida was carried off during the final minutes of Wednesday's Champions League clash following his brush with the supporter, who slapped him in the face while celebrating Scott McDonald's last minute winner.

Celtic could be punished by having their Parkhead stadium closed for several European matches. There is a precedent for such action after Inter Milan had to play four matches at the San Siro behind closed doors after Dida was struck by a flare during a Champions League semi-final in 2005.

Denmark were also ordered to play four Euro 2008 qualifiers away from Copenhagen and fined 41,000 pounds after a fan assaulted German referee Herbert Fandel during a match against Sweden in June.

UEFA match delegate Andreas Akkelides confirmed he had seen the incident and would include it in his report. The organisation's communications director William Gaillard said they expect to receive that report by the end of this week.

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Chelsea striker Didier Drogba points to the fans after his winning goal in their Champions League clash against Valencia at the Mestalla on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

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Liverpool goalkeeper Pepe Reina (L) saves from Marseille striker Mamadou Niang (R) during their Champions League tie at Anfield on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP