



Manchester United striker Carlos Tevez (lying on the ground) looks on as his header beats a fully stretched AS Roma goalkeeper Doni during their Champions League quarterfinal at Old Trafford on Wednesday. United won 1-0.

## Tevez the difference

AFP, Manchester



Carlos Tevez's second-half header sent Manchester United into a Champions League semifinal clash with Barcelona with a record-breaking 1-0 win over Roma but it was a victory that proved far more painful to secure than it ought to have been.

The English champions' 11th consecutive home win in the tournament took them past the record they had previously shared with Juventus, but this was never a performance worthy of a place in the history books.

Having squandered a string of early chances, United repeatedly looked in danger of conceding a goal that would have given Roma hope of overturning the two-goal deficit they had conceded in last week's first leg in the Stadio Olimpico.

United boss Sir Alex Ferguson admitted he had been relieved to see Daniele De Rossi blast a first-half penalty over the bar.

"We had our moments in the first 25 minutes when their goalkeeper made four fantastic saves," said the Scot. "But obviously the penalty would have made a big difference."

"But it is a European quarterfinal and Roma are second in the Italian league. You would expect them to create something."

United will have the advantage of playing the first leg of their semifinal in the Nou Camp and Ferguson promised his side would travel to Catalonia looking to score.

"You have opportunities in life to do something special and I think we have something special in this team."

"Barcelona are a wonderful team but we can't go there and be negative, we have to go there and be positive."

Ferguson's pre-match promises that United would not allow their first-leg lead to affect their approach to the return were somewhat belied by the sight of Cristiano Ronaldo, Wayne Rooney and Paul Scholes taking their place on the bench alongside the hitherto unheard-of Daniel Welbeck.

Ferguson's confidence that he could afford to rest his most valuable assets ahead of Sunday's Premier League meeting with Arsenal was arguably vindicated by the five clear chances his side created inside the first quarter of an hour, although the fact that none of them were taken must have made him pine for the finishing touch that has brought Ronaldo 37 goals already this season.

Park Ji-Sung fired the first opportunity across goal; Carlos Tevez and Wes Brown both failed to find the target with headers from inviting positions and Owen Hargreaves, left with only Doni to beat, saw his shot spin over the bar off the goalkeeper's legs.

Ryan Giggs had been at the origin of most of United's early creativity but the veteran winger was also guilty of the most glaring miss, tamely side-footing straight at Doni from eight yards out after being teed up by the energetic Hargreaves's perfectly judged cross.

Roma may have been struggling at the back but their forwards were still able to ask questions of a

United back four which included both Rio Ferdinand, who passed a late fitness test on his bruised left foot, and Mikael Silvestre, playing for the first time since suffering a serious knee injury in September.

Edwin van der Sar had to get down smartly to keep out shots from Mirko Vucinic and Mancini in quick succession and then enjoyed a kindly bounce of the ball after failing to hold a ferociously struck drive from Simone Perrotta on the half-hour mark.

Moments later, United enjoyed an even bigger let-off, de Rossi blasting his penalty high into the Stretford End after Wes Brown had tripped Mancini.

Unable to rediscover their early zest, United continued to flirt with danger after the interval.

After Silvestre had thrown himself full length to block a shot from Tadei, a collective sigh of relief echoed around the ground as de Rossi's header from the resulting corner found its way into the arms of van der Sar rather than the net.

With just over 20 minutes left however the home supporters were relieved of any lingering tension about the outcome of the evening.

Having again surged down the right flank, Hargreaves sent in a superb cross that Tevez glanced past Doni to earn himself an ovation that was only slightly less enthusiastic than the one accorded to Eric Cantona when the stadium announcer revealed the presence of the United legend at half-time.

The United fans were on their feet again with ten minutes left but that was only to mark club captain Gary Neville's entry to the fray for his first appearance in a United shirt in over a year.

## 'Arsenal should focus on EPL'

AFP, London

Emmanuel Adebayor wants Arsenal to forget about their Champions League misery and focus on getting back into the Premier League title race.

The Gunners slumped out of Europe in agonising fashion against Liverpool on Tuesday, but Adebayor knows there is no time for his teammates to feel sorry for themselves.

Arsene Wenger's side face Manchester United at Old Trafford on Sunday in a make or break clash. Arsenal are six points behind the league leaders and only a win will keep their faint title hopes alive.

"The most important thing now is to stay focused on what we can achieve this season," the Togo striker said.

"We are still playing for the title and we still believe we can win something at the end of the season. Sunday will be another big game for us and we will see what we can do."

Wenger has praised his side's mental strength time and again this season but he faces a massive task to rebuild their shattered confidence.

Adebayor is convinced the French coach will be able to find a way to lift the squad.

"We have learned a lot of things this year, but the boss has more experience than anyone here," he said.

"He knows the words he will use so that we can come back on the pitch to be more successful and want it more."

The one bright spot from Arsenal's defeat at Anfield was Theo Walcott's second half cameo. The England winger set up Arsenal's second goal for Adebayor with a breath-taking run from deep in his own half and looks set to finally fulfil his potential.

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## Garay eyes big move

AFP, Santander

Racing Santander's highly touted Argentine international defender Ezequiel Garay confirmed here on Wednesday that he will be looking to move to one of Europe's big teams this summer.

In recent months, Manchester United and Real Madrid have not denied their interest in the 21-year-old player, who made his full debut for Argentina last August after being part of their team that won the 2003 South American under-17 title.

"It is normal that I wish to progress in my career. If a big offer finally arrives then I do not have a preference about a concrete destination," Garay told reporters here on Wednesday.

Garay has decided to leave Racing despite the fact that they lie fifth in the Spanish first division and on the verge of playing in Europe for the first time.

He has a contract with Racing until 2011 but is known to have various 'escape clauses'.

## Fergie hails special MU

REUTERS, Manchester



Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson said on Wednesday he saw something special in his team and wanted them to prove it in their mouth-watering Champions League semifinal against Barcelona.

United reached the last four for the second successive season by beating AS Roma 1-0 at Old Trafford to complete a 3-0 aggregate win and now face the Spanish giants with the first leg at the Nou Camp where they won the 1999 Champions League final.

Ferguson told a news conference: "We are delighted to be in the semifinals and the fact that it's Barcelona makes it an attractive semifinal. We are looking forward to it."

"You have opportunities in life when you have got something really special in your club and I think we've got something special in this team."

"We want to go there and show what a good team we are. Barcelona have a fantastic history and is a very good club but we can't go there and be negative."

"We have to go there and be really positive and if we do that

we have a marvellous chance."

United failed to reach the final last season when they lost to eventual winners AC Milan.

"But Ferguson believes his side will be better prepared to face Barcelona if Nemanja Vidic, Nani and Louis Saha complete their recovery from injuries and everyone else stays fit."

He added: "If we get a full squad for the Barcelona game I think we've got a very, very good chance."

Ferguson rested Cristiano Ronaldo, Paul Scholes and Wayne Rooney, who came on in the second half, against Roma but his side still collected a record 11th straight home win in the competition thanks to a 70th-minute goal from Carlos Tevez.

He left the trio out of his lineup to keep them fresh for Sunday's Premier League clash with Arsenal. United are top six points clear of third-placed Arsenal and three in front of Chelsea with five games left.

"We can trust in all of our squad and quite rightly because they are good players and this tells me that these players can play in any type of game," said Ferguson who especially praised the contributions of Tevez, Park Ji-Sung and Owen Hargreaves.

United had chances to win more comfortably and could have been made to pay had

Daniele De Rossi not missed a penalty, awarded for a foul by Wes Brown on Mancini after half an hour.

"That would have made a big difference to the game and would have made it a little bit nervous for us," Ferguson said.

Roma coach Luciano Spalletti rued the penalty miss and other chances squandered but said United deserved to go through.

"We put in a good performance and can be proud of that," he said. "We knew we'd have to take risks and make chances and the important thing was to exploit them. Unfortunately, we did not capitalise on them."

"Had we done so it would have changed the face of the game but we have to be realistic and over the two legs Manchester United did a bit more than us and deserved their victory."

Spalletti believes United now have a decent chance of winning the competition for the first time in nine years.

He added: "They are certainly well equipped as a team and a group of players to go all the way. They have huge potential in the team itself and in individual players."

United defender Rio Ferdinand required three stitches in an injury to his right foot but is expected to be fit to face Arsenal on Sunday.

## Milan confident of landing Ronnie, Sheva

AFP, Rome

AC Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani said Thursday he was confident of landing both Ronaldinho and Andrei Shevchenko during the close season.

Both players are out of favour at their respective clubs, Barcelona and Chelsea, and speculation has been rife that the under-performing Milanese giants will try to lure both in the summer.

Galliani admitted as much, although he acknowledged that both are still under contract and nothing can be taken for granted.

Barcelona's progress to the Champions League semifinals on Wednesday, without Ronaldinho playing, has led many to believe the Catalans will be more than willing sellers at the end of the season.

A month from the end of the season, the Brazilian has hit the back of the net just nine times for his club, compared with 24 and 23 goals in his previous two seasons.

"I don't know if Barcelona's progress will help matters, but I think this deal will be done," said Galliani of the proposed transfer of the former two-time world player of the year.

Galliani also revealed that Milan president Silvio Berlusconi has convinced coach Carlo Ancelotti of the merits of re-signing Shevchenko, who left for London two seasons ago in a record fee paid by an English team of 30 million pounds (\$9 million dollars).

He has had a miserable season, starting just 10 games, coming on as a substitute eight times and scoring a paltry five goals and would cost a fraction of that to be

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## Ruud returns to training

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's Dutch international striker Ruud van Nistelrooy returned to training on Wednesday for the first time since undergoing surgery on his injured right ankle last month.

"The joy at being able to step on the pitch after many weeks of not being able to do so was evident on the face of the striker," the defending Spanish champions and current La Liga leaders said in a statement.

Van Nistelrooy, the Spanish first division's top scorer last season with 25 goals, trained on his own, mainly running and without kicking a ball in anger.

"He has the hope of being able to take part in the last and crucial matches of the league," added the Spanish giants.

The 31-year-old striker himself said on Tuesday that he wants to be back playing in time for the historic derby match against bitter rivals Barcelona on May 7, when Real could clinch the championship with two games to go.

Real are at the top of the Spanish first division with 66 points from 31

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## Barcelona ride on Toure

AFP, Barcelona



Yaya Toure picked the perfect time to get his first Champions League goal, his 43rd minute strike giving 2006 winners Barcelona a 1-0 win over Schalke 04 here on Wednesday.

After their Champions League quarterfinal first leg win by the same score in Germany last week, the Catalans progressed to a mouth-watering semifinal clash with English giants Manchester United with a 2-0 aggregate victory.

Toure got the only goal of an entertaining if error-strewn game two minutes before half time, side-footing a loose ball home from the edge of the six yard box.

"After the first leg result, they had nothing to lose and were out to spring a surprise. They were playing well and I think that made us a bit nervous as we tried to wrap things up," reflected Barca coach Frank Rijkaard.

"However, my team put in a lot of effort and we deserve to be in the

semifinals. It'll be two matches at a very high level and I wouldn't make United the favourites," added Rijkaard.

Toure was the man who found the net but the credit for creating it has to go to their 17-year-old striker Bojan Krkic, Barca's scorer in the first leg, who broke away clear down the right wing.

Barca's teenage prodigy out-sprinted his markers before providing a tricky cross which two Schalke defenders failed to clear properly and the Ivory Coast international midfielder was on hand and unmarked to easily find the target.

There was joy for Barca after their recent dismal displays in La Liga, with only one win in their last seven outings, but both they and Schalke should have found the net on many more occasions.

"We were not always on the target but at least we played better than in some of our other games," admitted Barca's Spanish international midfielder Xavi Hernandez.

The first half before Toure's goal saw thrilling end-to-end action in which only poor finishing was to blame for neither side scoring.

A host of Barca players failed to capitalise on their opportunities while Schalke target man Kevin Kuranyi squandered no less than four good chances in the first 20 minutes.

After the break matters followed in similar fashion although Barca were by far the better side in the second half.

Samuel Eto'o and Thierry Henry mis-hit almost every ball that came their way while Halil Altintop and Kuranyi were equally inept for Schalke 04.

"We pressed hard and we created opportunities but in the end we couldn't do much with them," conceded Schalke coach Mirko Slomka.

By contrast to Barca's below-par better-known names, Bojan was a constant threat to Schalke with his darting runs and dribbling.

Deservedly, his name rang around the Nou Camp when Rijkaard substituted the exhausted teenager after 73 minutes.

One disappointing note for Rijkaard was that his captain Carles Puyol was among the four men booked, after a wild challenge on Gerald Asamoah, and the Spanish

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Barcelona starlet Bojan Krkic (R) is challenged by Schalke striker Kevin Kuranyi during their Champions League quarterfinal at Nou Camp on Wednesday. Barcelona won 1-0.

PHOTO: AFP