

Terry's tearful miss

Goes from hero to villain

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE
THE TELEGRAPH

Anyone but John Terry. Anyone but the man with this club truly in his blood. Deep wounds like this take years to heal. Sometimes, you know, they never fully disappear. May 21, 2008: a date Chelsea's captain will never forget.

So happy when Ashley Cole tucked away the fourth penalty (knowing his side couldn't be beaten in the initial shoot-out), so inconsolable when his own effort flew wide. This inspirational defender couldn't have imagined for one moment this Champions League final would be decided like this -- a fatal slip of his planted left foot from 12 yards out. A mistake in his own penalty area, perhaps, but not up the other end, surely? That certainly wasn't how the biggest night of his club career was supposed to end.

And as is always the case in these circumstances, nothing anyone said could make the slightest difference. Burying his face in the chest of his manager, Avram Grant, the tears flowed as freely as the pouring Moscow rain. Steve Clarke, the assistant manager, came across for a consoling word. So did several teammates in

obvious sympathy.

They don't come more popular than Terry. His worst enemy wouldn't have wished for this cruel end.

More pertinently, Didier Drogba's stupid dismissal just before the end of extra-time suddenly looked incredibly costly. If still on the pitch, would the striker have taken the fifth penalty instead of his skipper? We'll never know now. Nor, I don't suppose, will Nicolas Anelka ever explain how it came to be that he took the seventh and final penalty instead of the fifth.

It wouldn't have done any good, of course, if the end result was the same. Anelka's tame effort, saved by Edwin van der Sar, signalled the start of Manchester United's wild celebrations. Terry was left to rue the consequences of his miss. Chelsea had lost the momentum and ultimately the European Cup.

All that talk of the rivalry with Rio Ferdinand for the England captaincy didn't matter one bit. Terry was convinced he had let his beloved Chelsea down.

Ironic, then, that during the course of extra-time he had actually kept his side alive with an incredible clearance to deny Ryan Giggs. Twisting his head at an unlikely angle, he diverted the ball

away from goal.

Typical of the man. An out-and-out defender in the old-fashioned mould, one who'll take a hit for the team without a second thought. One who had also done a pretty good job in handling the combined threat of Wayne Rooney and Carlos Tevez.

Terry stood firm, heading and hacking anything that came near before the cramp that had afflicted so many others on the night caught up with him. Unfortunately for Terry, though, he still retained the legs, not to mention the bottle, to step up for a penalty that might ultimately define his career.

In explaining his decision to volunteer, I can only say he must have felt confident. Perhaps he remembered the one he tucked away for England against Portugal in Euro 2004. Perhaps that's why Anelka didn't need much convincing that Terry was the right man for the job. Nor Salomon Kalou -- two orthodox strikers who should, in theory, be better equipped.

That's what made the final twist on this incredible night all the more appalling. Forget about the England captaincy. That didn't matter. Terry's only concern was that he had let everyone down.



Chelsea captain John Terry is in agony after missing the crucial penalty against Manchester United during the tie-breaker of the Champions League final at the Luzhniki Stadium in Moscow on Wednesday.

C'Ron gives mixed signals

Football

AFP, Moscow

The one cloud on Manchester United's horizon after their Champions League triumph here is the continuing uncertainty over the future of their most valuable asset, Cristiano Ronaldo.

As he has done consistently for the last year, the 23-year-old winger issued mixed messages about his future plans in the aftermath of what was a rollercoaster night for him in the Luzhniki Stadium.

Within minutes of having declared, "I am going to stay -- there is no way I'm leaving after this," Ronaldo was qualifying that commitment with a reminder that, "the future... no one knows."

Having headed United into the lead with his first goal against Chelsea, Ronaldo went on to have his penalty in the decisive shoot-out saved by Petr Cech.

With Chelsea having converted their first four spot-kicks, Ronaldo's miss gave John Terry the chance to win the trophy for his club.

But, to the intense relief of Ronaldo, the England defender struck his shot wide. After Edwin van der Sar's save from Nicolas Anelka finally gave United their win, United's biggest star appeared

overcome by emotion, collapsing to the sodden turf in tears. Ronaldo has been a consistent target for Real Madrid and strategic leaks to the Spanish media over the last week have resulted in headlines claiming that they are close to winning their battle to persuade the Portuguese star to quit United.

United manager Sir Alex Ferguson dismissed those claims as "stupid" earlier this week and declared himself willing to wager very large amounts of money on Ronaldo doing his steps over at Old Trafford next season.

As he is only one year into a five-year contract, it would take a combination of a world record transfer fee and a clear demand from Ronaldo himself to persuade United to give up the player. Real reportedly would not balk at a fee of up to 100 million pounds (120 million euros), despite his protestations of being happy in the north of England. Ronaldo did not exactly rule out a change of heart.

"I don't promise anything, I don't promise nothing to my mum, I don't promise nothing to the supporters," he said. "I want to stay, but the future... no one knows. I want to stay. We are going to see in the next two weeks, I don't say I make a decision."

United are reported to be preparing a new contract for Ronaldo that will ensure his brilliant form

this season is recognised by him becoming the club's best-paid player.

His first-half header on Wednesday was his 42nd strike of a season which has seen him take George Best's mantle as the most prolific winger/midfielder player in the club's history.

Given that record of achievement over ten months, it would have been cruel if Ronaldo had ended up being dubbed the man who cost United the chance of a second Champions League trophy.

"Sometimes life is unfair and that would have been so unfair on the boy, given his contribution the whole season for us," reflected United boss Sir Alex Ferguson.

Ronaldo also missed a penalty in the first leg of United's semifinal win over Barcelona, but Ferguson was quick to remind any potential critics that the winger had also held his nerve on plenty of occasions this season.

"You have to remember the courage he showed when he was made to retake the penalty against Arsenal and scored again," Ferguson said, rejecting a suggestion that Ronaldo had not produced his best form in the final.

"I felt he was fantastic for us against Chelsea. When he had the ball I always felt something was going to happen for us."

Kaka may need knee surgery

REUTERS, Milan

World Player of the Year Kaka will meet a specialist in Brazil to determine whether he needs surgery on his knee, AC Milan confirmed on Thursday.

Brazil's Globo television reported on Wednesday that he would be examined by Brazil team doctor Jose Luis Runco in Rio de Janeiro.

"AC Milan communicates that Kaka will undergo a specialist examination in Brazil to verify the condition of his left knee," the club said in a statement on its Web site (www.acmilan.com).

"The examination will be performed by the medical staff of the Brazilian national team in the presence of club doctor Massimiliano Sala."

The surgery would put Kaka out of action for about 15 days, ruling him out of friendlies against Canada and Venezuela, the report said. He could also miss next month's World Cup qualifiers away to Paraguay and at home to Argentina.

On Sunday, AC Milan said they would not allow him to take part in the Olympic Games tournament as an over-age player. The 26-year-old has been troubled this season by fitness problems.

Fergie savours success

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE
AFP, Moscow

Sir Alex Ferguson will savour a Champions League triumph over Chelsea that has cemented his standing as one of the greatest coaches in European football.

But the driven Glaswegian will not spend too long reflecting on a penalty shoot-out victory that secured the fourth European trophy of his managerial career, 25 years after he led Aberdeen to the most unlikely of Cup Winners Cup wins over Real Madrid.

"I feel proud, I feel, very, very proud," Ferguson admitted in the aftermath of what was a nerve-shredding evening in Moscow. "But I think the great asset I have got is that I don't get carried away. Tomorrow I will be thinking about next season. It all drains away quickly for me, the euphoria evaporates very quickly."

Having batted away a suggestion that he might be tempted, at the age of 66, to retire on an unmatchable high, Ferguson went on to express his belief that fate had helped United to secure what was a poignant victory in the year that has seen the club mark the 50th anniversary of the Munich air disaster.

Edwin van der Sar's save from Nicolas Anelka proved decisive but United were also fortunate that Chelsea captain John Terry slipped before missing their fifth penalty, which would have given them the trophy.

"I said we would not let the memory of the Busby babes down," Ferguson said. "If fate has played its hand, then with John Terry slipping, it has certainly been on our side, as it seems to have been all season."

"We had a cause to fight for and people with causes are very hard to battle with." Ferguson added. "It was my first victory on penalties. I lost three with Aberdeen and three at United, so it is seven times lucky and I'm delighted with that."

At the end of a gruelling season, the evening's conclusion was hard on a Chelsea side that hit the woodwork in both regulation and extra-time. It was particularly painful for Terry, who might not have been taking the fifth penalty had Didier Drogba not been sent off shortly before the end of extra-time for tapping Nemanja Vidic on the face as several players on either side squared up to each other.

United's early domination had yielded a deserved opener in the form of Ronaldo's 26th-minute

header, the Portuguese winger's 42nd goal of an extraordinary season.

Ferguson's men then had the chance to kill the contest before the break but Frank Lampard's equaliser on the stroke of half-time levelled things up and Chelsea, dominant after the restart, almost claimed a winner when Drogba's 78th-minute shot came back off the post with van der Sar beaten.

Chelsea struck the woodwork again in the opening period of extra-time, Lampard's cute shot on the turn bouncing off the bar with United's goalkeeper once more struggling.

Substitute Ryan Giggs then had a glorious chance to mark his record-breaking 759th appearance for United in style but the veteran winger never really connected with Patrice Evra's cutback and Terry was able to head the ball to safety.

Ferguson added: "We should have been three or four up and they got a lucky break with the equaliser. It gave them an impetus and they were the better team in the second half and I was quite glad to get to extra-time."

Chelsea boss Avram Grant, whose future will inevitably be subjected to more intense speculation after another near-miss at securing silverware, insisted his side had done enough to lift the

trophy. "It is very hard to lose on penalties. I don't know what to say, especially after -- except for the first 30 minutes -- we dominated the game," Grant said.

"We hit the post, we hit the bar, we shot much more than them. Even in the penalties we came to the last one and it was in our hands -- but we lost."

Chelsea would have won if Terry had not missed his side's fifth penalty and Grant admitted his captain had been left distraught.

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John did not say anything. He was very sad he cried but he is the main reason we are here.

"It has not been a normal season for us. There have been many difficulties, Manchester United were always ahead in the league. But he was always there for us as a captain and he took the responsibility to take the trophy."

Grant refused to answer questions about his future, widely believed to be on the line after a season which has also seen Chelsea lose the League Cup final to Tottenham and finish second to United in the league.

"This is the last thing I am thinking about just now," he said.

EURO 2008 BRIEFS

AFP, Vienna

Briefs for Euro 2008 finals which are being co-hosted by Austria and Switzerland and run from June 7-29:

HELP FROM ABOVE

Joerg Haider, the notorious far-right governor of Carinthia in southern Austria, has invited the Swiss Guards' football team to visit his province during the Euro. "That way the Vatican state will take part in a European football championship for the first time, at least indirectly," he said on a recent trip to Rome, during which he met with the Pope. Perhaps he was hoping to garner a little heavenly support for the Austrian team?

EXPENSIVE GIFTS

VIPs, beware! Austrian tax officials will be taking a close look at top Euro 2008 seats offered to employees and clients. For every 8,000-euro VIP ticket for the final, 1,200

euros will be owed to the Austrian revenue service.

HARD DAY'S WORK

The European championship will be all work and no play for the Swiss government in June. Ministers will each have to attend at least one match, whether they like it or not. Their mission: to meet with their counterparts from various countries in the stands. Swiss President Pascal Couchepin has already announced he will attend four games, starting with the opening match on June 7 in Basel. It's hard being a politician.

POWER HUNGRY

The array of spotlights, giant screens and loudspeakers installed in the stadium and public viewing areas around Vienna during the Euro will consume a total four gigawatt hours of electricity... the equivalent of a small town of 2,500 people over an entire year. Pity those who have to pay the bill.

SURPRISE, SURPRISE

Sweden's veteran player Henrik Larsson, 37, will be back in service for the Euro in June, and he was as surprised as anyone to learn he had made the cut. "Of course, I was hoping they'd call me. But since (Swedish coach Lars) Lagerback and Roland (Andersson, assistant coach) hadn't called, I didn't call them either." Keeping mum paid off.

DOING IT RIGHT

Faced with a growing number of lexica and language classes offering less-than-serious, if not plain comical, explanations of football rules, the European football association UEFA has decided to strike back. It is now releasing its own official trilingual football dictionary, with over 1,800 football terms explained in French, English and German. Spaniards and Italians were apparently born with that knowledge and need no dictionary.

Grant gutted by defeat

AFP, Moscow

Chelsea boss Avram Grant insisted his side had done enough to lift the Champions League trophy after losing out to Manchester United in a final decided on penalties here on Wednesday.

"It is very hard to lose on penalties. I don't know what to say, especially after -- except for the first 30 minutes -- we dominated the game," said Grant.

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Giggs wants more

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE
AFP, Moscow

Ryan Giggs insisted nothing will ever quench his thirst for success as the Manchester United midfielder celebrated his second Champions League victory.

Giggs, 34, could have been forgiven for thinking his illustrious 18-year career reached its peak with Wednesday's emotional penalty shoot-out triumph over Chelsea in Moscow.

The Welshman, who also won the competition with United in 1999, came off the bench to break Sir Bobby Charlton's all-time United appearance record with his 759th outing.

Then he scored a penalty in the shoot-out as United held their nerve to win a third European Cup. Fittingly Giggs, who has often captained United this season, lifted the trophy with stand-in skipper

Rio Ferdinand.

Giggs admitted even Wednesday's dramatic victory couldn't top the 2-1 win over Bayern Munich that gave him his first taste of victory in Europe's elite club competition.

But as he raised the famous cup into the torrential Moscow rain, he was already dreaming of more success.

"I want nights like this again. We deserved it, we've been the best team," he said.

"It is a proud achievement for myself and my family. But, in the end, it's all about winning trophies."

"The Champions League is the number one competition. It is where you get tested as an individual and as a team."

"You are up against the best players in Europe and the best teams in Europe. Having tasted success in 1999, you want to go back and get that feeling again."

"Nothing could beat 1999 for drama. But it has been nine years, so our success has been overdue,

which is why I am very happy."

While John Terry, the symbol of the modern Chelsea, left the Luzhniki Stadium in tears after missing the penalty that would have given his side the cup, Giggs, his Manchester United equivalent, was soaking up the plaudits from his teammates.

Ferdinand led the tributes and claimed Giggs will only be truly appreciated when he has retired.

"Ryan Giggs is Manchester United. He is phenomenal. The thing is he has come on as a substitute and made an impact. He could have scored but John Terry cleared his shot off the line," Ferdinand said.

"He is not thought of as highly as he should be in my opinion. When he has retired, people will appreciate him much more."

"It is a shame really because he has been a fantastic servant to United and to football."

"To play so many games for one club is unheard of really, especially in today's game."

Van der Sar hailed

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE
AFP, Moscow

Sir Alex Ferguson hailed Edwin van der Sar's penalty shoot-out heroics as "no accident" after the Manchester United goalkeeper clinched the Champions League trophy with his stop from Chelsea's Nicolas Anelka.

Ferguson also acknowledged that the Dutchman had been one of the cornerstones of the club's revival over the last couple of seasons.

"As I said before one of the most difficult jobs we have had at this club was replacing Peter Schmeichel," Ferguson said.

Van der Sar admitted he had spent much of his long career

hoping to be at the centre of such a dramatic finale to a crucial match.

"It is one of the benefits of having a long career that I've been through a certain amount of things," said the 37-year-old, who will head off after a short break to join up with the Dutch squad as they prepare for the Euro 2008 finals and bid to add to the one won by the 1988 team.

"I won a final with Ajax in 1995 then we lost one on penalties. It is always nice to win the first one but to win it yourself -- that is something I've strived for my whole career."

"To get a decisive moment, to get that final moment when you win the game, that is fantastic and I am very grateful that I got the opportunity to come to United."

Van der Sar went on to tease Ferguson over why he had taken so

long to sign a goalkeeper -- he bought him from Premiership rivals Fulham for a reported fee of 2 million pounds -- he had long admired.

"I sometimes ask why it did not happen sooner, but never mind. I've got two (Premier League) titles, the Champions League tonight and we are not finished yet."

Van der Sar -- who has won over 120 caps for his country -- admitted Manchester United had enjoyed a massive slice of luck when Terry, needing to convert his side's fifth penalty to claim the trophy, slipped and sent his shot wide.

"We were lucky he slipped, otherwise someone else would be sitting here tonight," the goalkeeper admitted.

"But when it came to the final penalty I knew where he (Anelka) was going, I felt it."

Lampard ready for talks

Football
AFP, London

Frank Lampard has told Chelsea chiefs he is ready to discuss a new contract after playing in England's forthcoming friendly internationals.

Lampard put contract talks on hold earlier this season because he wanted to concentrate on his form on the pitch. But the England midfielder's current deal expires at the end of next season and he was strongly linked with a move to Inter Milan before Wednesday's Champions League final defeat

against Manchester United.

Now Lampard, whose mother died of pneumonia recently, has to turn his attentions to international duty after being named in Fabio Capello's squad to take on USA at Wembley on May 28 and then Trinidad and Tobago on June 1.

Once that is out of the way he is confident a new contract can be thrashed out to keep him at Stamford Bridge.

"I have got to talk to the club. My contract has obviously been the last thing on my mind in the last six weeks, but I will sit down and talk with them after the England games," Lampard said.

"I hope we can come to a conclusion. I am pretty confident we can. I have said that many times before."

Lampard isn't phased by reports that Chelsea manager Avram Grant will be replaced during a close-season cut that could also see several star players leaving the Premier League club.

"At the end of the day what is important is that the club moves forward whatever happens with the personnel," Lampard said. "We've given it everything this year and it wasn't quite to be."

"But the strength of a club is how you return when you have that little knock back."

Milan target Drogba, Eto'o

REUTERS, Milan

AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti has targeted Chelsea striker Didier Drogba, Barcelona's Samuel Eto'o or Arsenal's Emmanuel Adebayor as potential close-season signings.

Palermo striker Amauri is also an option, although the Brazilian appears close to signing for Serie A rivals Juventus.

"One of the four. They are all perfect," Ancelotti told Thursday's La Gazzetta dello Sport when asked about his plans to strengthen his attack before next season.

"They are centre forwards with the characteristics needed to solve our problems. We need flexible forwards who can help the squad in defence too."

Milan will be desperate to improve next season after finishing fifth in Serie A this term and failing to qualify for the Champions League.

Ancelotti indicated he would bring six or seven new signings to the San Siro.

"That's how things will be because some players will quit and there is a need for replacements," he said. "But it won't be a revolution. The foundation is solid and we'll build the Milan of the future on it."

Ancelotti refused to comment on whether Brazilian Ronaldo had remained a target following stop-start negotiations with the Barcelona forward.

"He's a great champion and Milan always looks at champions," he said. "But whether he's coming is not a question to ask me."