



The city of Barcelona erupted in celebration yesterday (L) after their beloved Catalan side won the Champions League by beating Manchester United in the final in Rome. (R) Barca's victory was the icing on the cake of a fabulous season under new coach Josep Guardiola, as they completed a historic treble by winning the domestic league and cup and the Champions League.

## Fergie blasts defending

AFP, Rome



Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson blasted his own team's

defending for their convincing 2-0 defeat at the hands of Barcelona in Wednesday's Champions League final in Rome's Stadio Olimpico.

United had been the reigning champions and were attempting to become the first team to retain the title since the European Cup became the Champions League in 1993.

They were also hoping to complete a remarkable quadruple having already won the English Premier League, League Cup and Club World Cup this season.

And with the experience of knocking Barcelona out of this competition at the semifinal stage last season with a rock solid defensive display that saw their rearguard unbreached over two legs, he was expecting better from his team here.

But they were stunned by a 10th-minute opener from Samuel Eto'o having dominated until that point and then the diminutive Lionel Messi got between towering giants Rio Ferdinand and John O'Shea to head home 20 minutes from time.

"It was the first goal which didn't help, for sure. It gave

them the opportunity to keep possession and do really well," said Ferguson.

"We didn't plan to lose a goal as early as that. We didn't deal with it well enough, that really was the story.

"It was a disappointing performance and some individuals will feel it themselves. It's very difficult to put a finger on every part of the game.

"I thought that at the start of the game we did very well and to lose a goal from a situation like that was bad.

"If you look at our best performances this season we defended really well, tonight our defending was shoddy.

"The first goal gave them a great boost and after that their ball possession with Messi dropping into midfield made it very difficult to get the ball back.

"But credit to them, the better team won and there's nothing we can do about that now."

Although United started brightly with Cristiano Ronaldo going close on three occasions in the first nine minutes, they then failed to play the kind of bristling attacking football they are capable of.

Ferguson had picked a seemingly less attacking line-up than he might have done, leaving Dimitar Berbatov and Carlos Tevez on the bench and playing Ryan Giggs in the hole behind lone striker Ronaldo.

Wayne Rooney and Park Ji-

Sung played disciplined roles on the flanks but the England man was far from his best and the Korean had a poor game.

Even so, Ferguson defended his team selection against a club who are known for their mesmeric midfield passing game with conductors Xavi and Andres Iniesta leading a footballing opera.

Asked why he hadn't picked a more attacking line-up, Ferguson was defiant.

"It's a simple reason, we recognised the strength of Barcelona's three central midfielders (Sergio Busquets being the third on Wednesday) and we tried to use Ryan Giggs as a player who can play towards the front but can also drop into midfield, and he's better at that (than another forward) because he's a natural midfield player," he said.

The 67-year-old Scot also said the absence of suspended countryman Darren Fletcher had hurt the team as Anderson had an inglorious game before he was substituted at half-time to make way for Tevez.

"I thought before the game that maybe he could be important for us because he's a big game player," said Ferguson.

"Of course it was a loss but they had losses as well (Eric Abidal, Dani Alves and Rafael Marquez).

"It's difficult to measure against Barcelona's losses but it showed itself tonight as a loss."

"This team ... is a work of art" and "the whole planet bows before the best team in the world," said sports daily Marca.

Another sports paper, AS, described it as a "fabulous victory" and said Spanish football "confirms its supremacy."

The nation's top-selling paper, El País, said Barcelona now has "a legendary triple crown" and is "at the top of the world."

El Mundo said the "Barcelona empire" had "buried the dreams of Manchester United."

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## 'Immortal' Barcelona

AFP, Madrid

The Spanish press Thursday hailed Barcelona as a "legend" and "immortal" after it won the Champions League and completed a unique treble for the season.

"Champions! (three times)", headlined the Barcelona-based newspaper La Vanguardia.

Barca and their supporters have experienced "the greatest night in their history by winning the Champions League," it said.

Barcelona "has become a legend" and its name "will remain in history forever," said another newspaper from the semi-autonomous Catalonia region, of which Barcelona is the capital.

Goals from star forwards Samuel Eto'o and Lionel Messi gave the Catalans a deserved victory over Manchester United in Rome on Wednesday night. They also achieved an historic triple, having already won their domestic league and cup.

Papers in the Spanish capital, home to Barca's arch-

ing Real Madrid, also acclaimed the victory.

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