

Inter siege holds off Barca

AFP, Barcelona



Inter Milan reached the Champions League final on Wednesday, beating Barcelona 3-2 on aggregate in their semifinal despite losing the second leg 1-0 and playing an hour of the game with 10 men.

Jose Mourinho's Inter, who won the first game 3-1 last week, will face Bayern Munich in the final on May 22 in Madrid.

Despite Gerard Pique's 84th-minute goal, defending champions Barcelona were unable to find the crucial second goal as 10-man Inter held on, breathing a sigh of relief when Bojan Krkic had a stoppage-time effort chalked off for handball.

Inter will be playing in their first European Cup final since 1972 while Mourinho will attempt to lead the Italian giants to Europe's most presti-

BARCELONA 1 0 INTER MILAN
PIQUE 84'
INTER MILAN WIN 3-2 ON AGGREGATE

Barcelona (4-3-3): Victor Valdes, Daniel Alves, Gerard Pique, Gabriel Milito (Maxwell, 46), Xavi, Seydou Keita, Sergio Busquets (Suarez Jeffren, 63), Yaya Toure, Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Krkic Bojan, 63), Lionel Messi, Pedro Rodriguez

Inter Milan (4-4-2): Julio Cesar, Lucio, Maicon, Walter Samuel, Cristian Chivu, Javier Zanetti, Thiago Motta, Wesley Sneijder (Sulley Muntari, 67), Esteban Cambiasso, Samuel Eto'o (McDonald Mariga, 85), Diego Alberto Milito (Ivan Cordoba, 81)

Red Card: Motta 28'

Attendance: 95,000

survive an hour one player down following the first half dismissal of Thiago Motta.

Guardiola made two changes to his side from the first-leg, with Yaya Toure and Gabriel Milito replacing Maxwell and suspended captain Carles Puyol.

Gabriel's selection on the

leg 3-1 last week.

Inter showed their game plan from the start as they sat back, an ominous task against a top side and particularly so with the attacking flair at Barca's disposal.

After just three minutes Pedro came inside Maicon on the left wing but sent a wayward shot past the far post.

The Italians were doing their utmost to take the intensity out of the match delaying at set-plays and keeper Julio Cesar was shown a yellow card for repeatedly taking his time with goal kicks, but this only served to further raise the already electric atmosphere with the 90,000 Catalan fans whistling in frustration.

Zlatan Ibrahimovic had a shot from just six yards out but he was denied by a last ditch tackle from Walter Samuel and then Pedro drove a ball just past the post with Barca encamped on the edge of the Inter area.

The explosive atmosphere finally boiled over when Motta already with a yellow card for an earlier challenge swung an arm at Sergio Busquets, who was tugging at his shirt.

While Motta was furious with Busquets for what he saw as an over-reaction, the referee reached straight for the



Inter Milan players Diego Milito (R) and Walter Samuel celebrate at the end of their Champions League semifinal against Barcelona at Nou Camp on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

KEY STATS

	Barca	Inter
Shots (on target)	15(4)	1(0)
Corners	9	2
Possession	86%	14%
Yellow Cards	1	6

red card and Inter were left to battle with ten-men for

rest of the game. The sending off did little to

change the match as Inter continued to doggedly defy Barca and it was a telling statistic that at half time Inter had not had a single shot at goal.

Although not pleasing on the eye Inter were excelling at cutting out the threat from Barca.

Messi and Ibrahimovic were largely anonymous with

the latter replaced by Bojan Krkic with half an hour to go.

Inter were growing into their job while Barca were resorting to shots from distance.

Dani Alves and Toure both tried their luck without going close and then the best chance fell to Bojan who headed wide from just a few yards.

The game appeared to be in control for Inter until Pique, now playing as an emergency centre-forward, turned in the box and tucked the ball into the corner leading to a grand stand finish.

Bojan thought he had won it but his superb finish in the third minute of injury time was ruled out for handball against Toure.



The front page of Italian newspaper Gazzetta dello Sport shows a picture of Inter Milan players Chrisitan Chivu and Walter Samuel celebrating. The mass circulated daily lauded Inter's progress, reserving special praise for their 'wall of glory.'

gious prize for the first time since 1965.

Mourinho once again out-thought his counterpart Pep Guardiola in a tense tactical battle which went to the wire with the Italians having to

opposing side to Diego Milito meant brothers were playing in the same Champions League match for the first time.

Mourinho kept faith with the team which won the first

Agnelli back at Juve helm

AFP, Rome

Andrea Agnelli is to become the new president of Juventus, replacing Frenchman Jean-Claude Blanc, his cousin John Elkann said in an interview to be published on Thursday.

Elkann, the chairman of Fiat and Exor, Juve's parent company, announced the new move in an interview with La Stampa, which Exor also owns.

The move means a return to the president's post for the Agnelli family as Andrea's father Umberto was Juventus president from 1956-62 while his uncle Gianni was also honorary president from 1947-54.

Blanc will continue in his other role with the club as administrative delegator.

The Agnelli family are the owners of the Fiat group and are one of the most famous families in Italy.

The 34-year-old Andrea Agnelli is an Oxford graduate.

More misery for Bordeaux

AFP, Paris

Out-of-sorts Bordeaux's woes were compounded on Wednesday when Laurent Blanc's reigning French champions were defeated 2-0 at Valenciennes.

This latest loss left Bordeaux's prospects of qualifying for the Champions League almost non-existent, even the Europa League could be a struggle as they remained in sixth place, on 57 points, 15 adrift of leaders Marseille.

They have mustered only one point from a possible 18 this month.

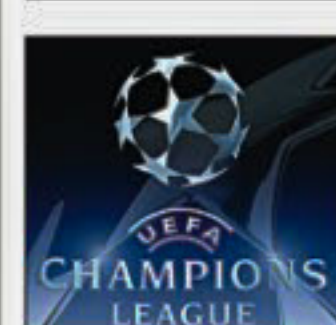
Valenciennes' reward was to move up a rung into 10th with 48 points, their best tally since rejoining the top flight in 2006.

Gregory Pujol lobbed an advancing Ulrick Rame with a header in the 11th minute with Algeria international Foued Kadir sealing the three points 18 minutes from time.

Pujol had two other attempts disallowed for off-side in the second half.

Italy falls for Mourinho

AFP, Rome



The Italian press was unequivocal in its praise for Inter Milan coach Jose Mourinho on Thursday after his team ousted holders Barcelona to reach the Champions League final.

So often the local media's favourite pantomime villain, Mourinho finally found himself lauded from all corners after his team's rearguard resistance saw them progress 3-2 on aggregate despite a 1-0 defeat in the Camp Nou on Wednesday.

"Inter wall of glory," screamed La Gazzetta dello Sport. "Epic Inter. They resisted Barca with 10 men. The magician Mou is flying to Madrid."

Thiago Motta's sending off after just 28 minutes for raising an arm to Sergio Busquets's face put Inter on the back foot for the rest of the match and Gazzetta hailed the players as: "Mourinho's heroic lions."

Corriere della Sera waxed lyrical over Mourinho's coaching skills and compared him to the Colonel Kilgore from Francis Ford Coppola's Vietnam War epic Apocalypse Now, while also likening the Inter defensive wall to the French Maginot Line, constructed during the 1920s and 1930s to protect the country from a German invasion.

"The Colonel Mourinho/Kilgore tactically stifled (Barca coach Pep) Guardiola ... The match was managed with 10 men with the same lucidity (as with 11), the sign of a team that follows its guru, who is looking to enter into the closed club of coaches who have won the Champions League with two different clubs."

Corriere credits Mourinho with Inter's qualification while curiously praising the former Chelsea boss's attacking instincts in a game in which his side finished with just 24 percent of possession.

Corriere were notably impressed with the fact that Mourinho left his attacking players on the field until the last 10 minutes when finally he decided he would not need them any more and threw on defensive players.

"Barcelona are predictable like all geniuses. Michael Angelo does Michael Angelo, Picasso does Picasso," it said.

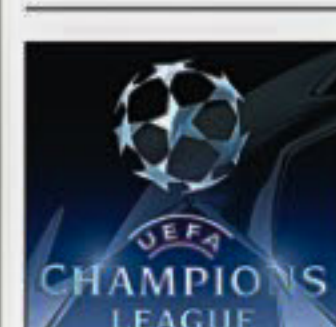
"The difference comes from he who needs to save his life. Mourinho left his forwards on right to the end. He showed his respect for football."

It was down to La Repubblica to point out Inter's return to their traditional catenaccio roots.

"It was a deserved success. You could say a victory for old school Italian football. It seems moreover that it is a heavy, hard defeat for football as played by Barcelona."

'I'll never coach Barca'

INTERNET, undated



Jose Mourinho has admitted he could never coach Barcelona after crushing their Champions League dream last night.

Inter Milan boss Mourinho oversaw a 3-2 aggregate win following a 1-0 second-leg defeat at the Nou Camp after being almost constantly jeered by the home crowd.

Mourinho is disparagingly known among some Barca fans as 'the translator', having begun his journey in football management in that role alongside Bobby Robson at the Nou Camp in the 1990s, before working as a coach under Louis van Gaal for three seasons.

The Portuguese, who will now face his old mentor Van Gaal as Inter prepare to take on Bayern Munich in the final in Madrid on May 22, knows the chances of him ever landing the top job with the Catalan giants are now virtually non-existent.

Mourinho, who also crossed swords with Barca while in charge at Chelsea, did little to endear himself again to the club on Tuesday by claiming they were "obsessed" with reaching the Champions League final on the home turf of their bitter rivals Real Madrid, and the crowd reacted badly when he raced onto the pitch to celebrate

Inter's aggregate success at the final whistle.

"I'm not stupid enough to think that this hate can be turned into love," he said.

"I respect Barca and I'll never forget what the club gave me in the four years I was here, but something has been created around me that is hard to make positive," he said.

"It is clear that I will end my career without having coached Barca."

Last night's match was the 10th between Mourinho and Barcelona in the last six years, with the Catalans having faced Chelsea on six occasions and Inter four times.

Six of those matches have come in knockout ties, with Mourinho having now eliminated the Catalans from Europe on two occasions.

"If I never beat them, they wouldn't hate me," Mourinho said.

And the Inter coach believes he is now more unpopular even than former Barca winger Luis Figo, who left the club as a player to join Madrid and was never forgiven by the Catalan faithful.

"Figo (who returned to the Nou Camp last night as an ambassador for Inter) told me he was calm and relaxed because I was the one they hate now, because I was their new enemy," he said.

Bizarrely, Mourinho claimed the key to beating Barcelona was relinquishing possession at the Nou Camp.

IN BRIEF

Van Gaal happy to face Inter

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich coach Louis van Gaal admitted Thursday he is relieved his team will be facing Italy's Inter Milan, rather than Barcelona, in the Champions League final on May 22 in Madrid.

"Against Inter, our chances are much better than they would be against Barca," said van Gaal, who is chasing the treble of Bundesliga, German Cup and Champions League titles in only his first season in charge.

"Inter do not play as offensively as Barcelona."

The Champions League final will pit tough disciplinary van Gaal against Inter's flamboyant coach Mourinho and the pair worked together when the Dutchman coached Spanish giants Barcelona.

"He is a friend and an extraordinary coach," said van Gaal.

Bocelli, Adams to sing at WC finale

AFP, Johannesburg

Italian opera star Andrea Bocelli and Canadian rocker Bryan Adams have been lined up to perform in a swansong concert for the football World Cup in South Africa, organisers said on Thursday.

Bocelli, a tenor who has sold more than 65 million discs worldwide, will be joined onstage in Johannesburg by the flautist and his compatriot Andrea Griminelli as well as a local 60-strong choir, the ticket vendor Computicket said on its website.

The concert is being staged on July 9, two days before the final of the month-long competition.

Stars including Alicia Keys, Shakira and the Black Eyed Peas are all scheduled to perform at the opening ceremony for the tournament which has been criticised for not featuring more local talent in the line-up.

Leonardo leaving Milan

Football

SOCCERNET

AC Milan president Silvio Berlusconi has confirmed coach Leonardo will leave the club at the end of the season.

Milan have again struggled to keep pace with city rivals Inter this season and there had been frequent speculation about Leonardo's future.

Leonardo refused to discuss his future this week after a defeat to Palermo left Milan unable to clinch the title, but Berlusconi has now announced that the search for a replacement is underway.

"Leonardo will leave," Berlusconi said. "We are working on a new coach."

Asked who would arrive in his place,



LEONARDO

Berlusconi said: "There are talks in place with others. Leonardo has been too tough-headed and the team has played badly this season."

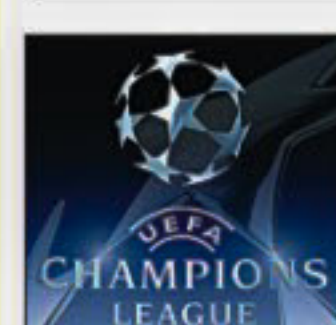
Brazilian club Flamengo revealed earlier this week that Leonardo could join the club in a non-managerial role.

Following the dismissal of coach Andrade, president Patricia Amorim said: "The first person I thought of was Zico. I think he is everything that is right for this club. We talked about it, but at this moment he is not ready to return, although he knows that for him the doors are always open."

"What is another very interesting name is Leonardo. Not to coach - I'd have him as director general. He has the experience and ability to fulfil this role. Let's see what happens."

Final pits pupil v master

INTERNET, undated



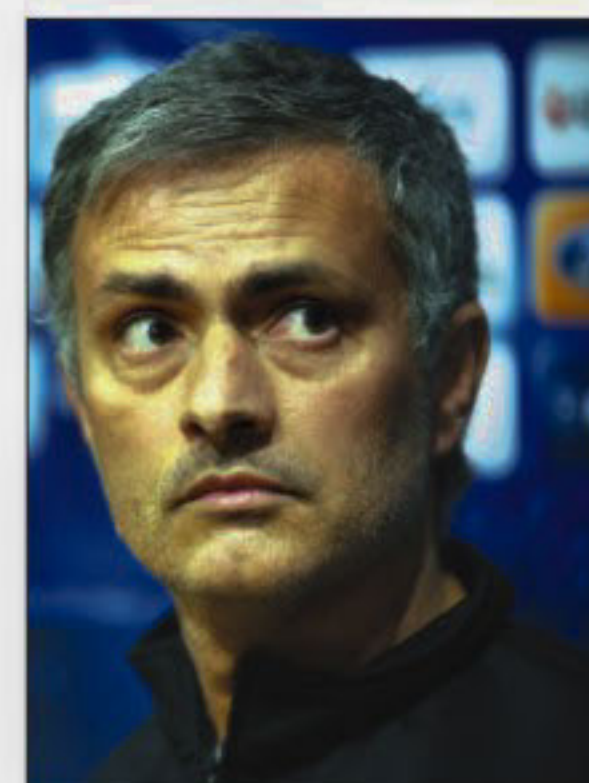
Jose Mourinho knows all about outwitting Bayern Munich. As Chelsea manager he had been banned from the touchline but there were suspicions he was still managing somehow to get messages through to his team as they put Bayern out of the Champions League.

Five years later he will come up against the Germans in the final in Madrid, taking his place this time on the Inter Milan coaching bench not far from Bayern's Louis van Gaal.

Mourinho never managed to take Chelsea to a Champions League final, but now - like van Gaal - he could become only the third manager to win European football's most coveted prize with two different clubs.

Van Gaal did so with Ajax in 1995 and Mourinho nine years later with Porto, and now either of the two will join Ernst Happel (Feyenoord and SV Hamburg) and Ottmar Hitzfeld (Borussia Dortmund and Bayern Munich) as just the third coach to do so in charge of two different clubs.

For both Mourinho and van



JOSE MOURINHO



LOUIS VAN GAAL

Gaal the meeting at the Bernabeu on May 22 will be one of former pupil and master.

Mourinho was van Gaal's translator and then assistant when the Dutchman followed Bobby Robson as Barcelona manager in 1997.

"It is the opportunity to see a friend. Perhaps we will give a joint news conference," said the Bayern boss who has now seen his hopes of a meeting with Inter rather than Barcelona fulfilled.

"Barcelona is the best team in the world I think. We have better chances against Inter who are not such an attacking side," he had said.

Van Gaal has been the architect of Bayern's resurgence in his first season at the club who are - as are Inter -

seeking a treble of league, cup and Champions League titles.

Meanwhile Mourinho, who took over at Inter in the summer of 2008 and is believed to be the world's highest paid coach with a salary of 9.5 million euros, is being hailed in Italy for steering Inter into their first European Cup or Champions League final since 1972.

The last of Inter's two European Cup triumphs came in 1965, and before Mourinho's appointment 28 coaches had tried in vain since Heleno Herrera to lead Inter to European glory.

Mourinho will have every reason to be wary of Bayern in a final in which neither side will start as favourites.