

Dejan the difference

Football

AFP, Rome

Dejan Stankovic added another wonder strike to his growing collection of goal of the season contenders as Inter Milan won 1-0 at Roma in the Italian Cup semifinal, first leg on Tuesday.

The holders are in pole position to progress following the second leg at the San Siro in three weeks time.

And it was all thanks to the veteran midfielder Stankovic, who hit a shot to rival his volley from the halfway line against Schalke 04 earlier this month.

Inter had the ball in the net early doors but it was rightly chalked off for a foul.

Stankovic ran onto a lofted ball forward which both Roma centre-back Juan and goalkeeper Doni also went for.

Stankovic gave Juan the slightest of nudges, resulting in the defender and keeper colliding and allowing the Serbian to stroke home the loose ball, but despite his protests he hadn't fooled the referee.

Roma should have been in front on nine minutes as the recalled Marco Borriello, earning a rare start under Montella with Francesco Totti suspended, teed up Vucinic but the Montenegro forward somehow failed to hit the target from inside the six yard box.

Inter were producing the more effective work and Doni had to be alert to save a Lucio header.

Roma also survived a penalty appeal when Stankovic's pass clipped Daniele De Rossi's hand, but nothing was given.

However, the midfielder then struck on the stroke of half-time with a stunning half-volley from almost 30 yards with the outside of his right boot that curled around Doni and into the top corner.

Roma failed to muster much of a fightback after the break, particularly after Borriello was forced off with an injury, leaving them without a natural number nine.

Inter comfortably controlled the second period with Wesley Sneijder twice seeing shots blocked.



Inter Milan midfielder Dejan Stankovic (R) celebrates his stunning strike with teammate Maicon during their Coppa Italia semifinal against Roma at the Olympic Stadium on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

'I'm coach not Di Stefano' Nasri not happy

REUTERS, Valencia

LFP Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho has responded to criticism of his tactics from honorary club president Alfredo Di Stefano by pointing out he is the one who makes the decisions about the way the team plays.

The 84-year-old Di Stefano, who won five consecutive European Cups with Real between 1956 and 1960, made scathing remarks about Mourinho's strategy of instructing his players to sit back against Barcelona in Saturday's 1-1 La Liga draw at the Bernabeu and try to catch the league leaders on the break.

"He is one of the most significant people in the history of Real Madrid and I am nothing in the history of Real Madrid," Mourinho told a news conference at Valencia's Mestalla stadium, where Wednesday's Kings Cup final with Barca will be played.

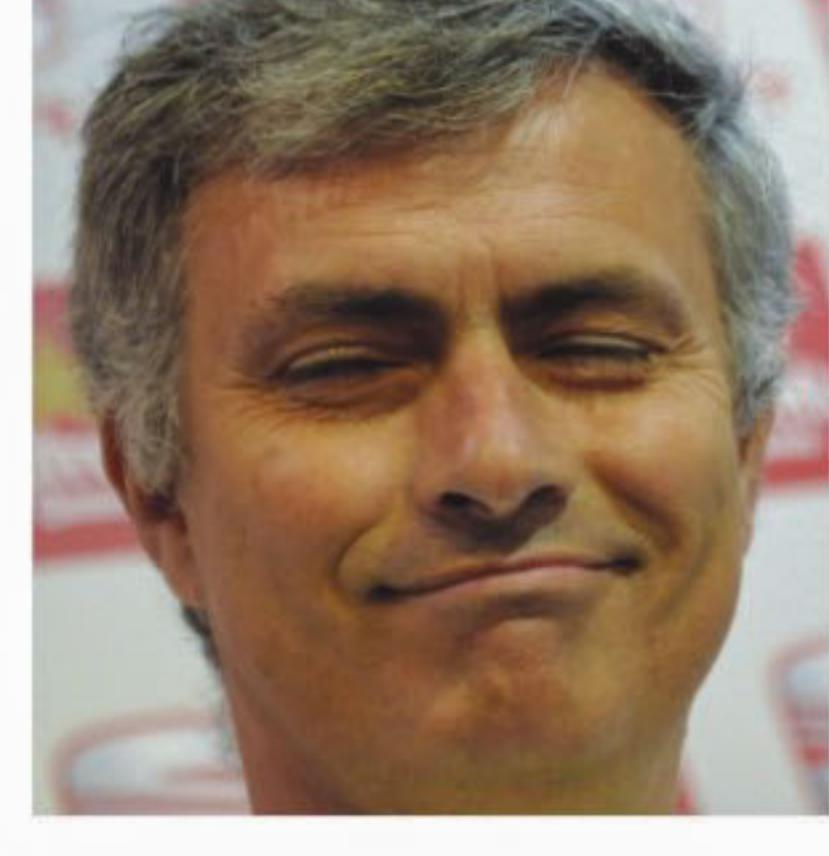
"But I am the coach and the coach is the one who decides."

"I am the coach," he repeated.

"What do you want to do? It's me. The

decisions are mine."

In his Monday newspaper column, Di Stefano described Barca as a lion toying with a mouse and called for different tactics in Wednesday's final, the second game in a four-match sequence of "Clasico" confrontations to be played over 18 days.



JOSE MOURINHO

"Saturday's game should give pause for thought on how to face up to the next because trying to play Barcelona on the break clearly isn't the most adequate," Di Stefano wrote.

"Barca treat the ball with respect,

adoration, they almost pamper it. To watch this team in action is a delight.

"Barca play football and dance, Real just dashed from here to there constantly. It's clear that Barcelona are superior. Real were a team without personality."

Di Stefano's criticism of Real's playing style and his florid praise for their arch rivals carries extra weight given his celebrated status within the club.

However, Mourinho gave no indication he was about to change tack and deploy a more attacking formation on Wednesday.

Gone were the days when Real had six players doing all the work at the back and four forwards who were not expected to muck in and help defend, the Portuguese said.

"I know that this will be a problem for many of you," he said. "But I think that the fans, although they are not professionals, are opening their eyes little by little and that's why they'll be behind their team tomorrow."

Barca and Real also meet in the semifinals of the Champions League, with the first leg at the Bernabeu in Madrid on April 27 and the second leg at the Nou Camp in Barcelona on May 3.

APP, Paris



Samir Nasri heads a group of five high-profile French players who are considering their futures with Premier League giants Arsenal, French sport daily L'Equipe claimed on Wednesday.

Nasri, who was nominated for this season's PFA Player of the Year award, will reportedly think about leaving if the central playmaking position he covets is not vacated by the departure of Cesc Fabregas this summer.

Nasri enjoyed a stunning first half to the season, scoring 12 goals in 23 games, but Fabregas's return to fitness after injury problems saw the Frenchman moved to a wide position and his influence has since diminished.

Spain international Fabregas has long been linked with a return to formative club Barcelona and he was critical of Arsenal's lack of winning mentality in an interview with Spanish magazine Don Balon published this week.

L'Equipe claims that Inter Milan are tracking Nasri.

The paper does not cite any sources for their claims, apart from an unnamed club insider, who is quoted as saying that some of Arsenal's players "are frustrated and have

understood that they might have a better chance of winning trophies elsewhere."

L'Equipe says that Abou Diaby, who has endured another injured-plagued season, is "frustrated" by the club's failure to win trophies and lists Chelsea, Manchester City, Inter and Juventus as possible destinations for him.

Full-backs Bacary Sagna and Gael Clichy and centre-back Sebastien Squillaci are also reported to be considering their positions at the London side, who have not won anything since the 2005 FA Cup.

Sagna's advisor, Christophe Mongai, is quoted as saying: "He (Sagna) is happy at Arsenal. But you never know what could happen."

Of Arsenal's six-strong French contingent in the senior squad, L'Equipe claims that only centre-back Laurent Koscielny, who joined from Lorient last summer, is certain to stay.

Arsenal are currently seven points behind Manchester United in the Premier League title race, but have a game in hand at north London rivals Tottenham on Wednesday evening.

Arsene Wenger's side lost 2-1 to Birmingham in the League Cup final, were knocked out of the FA Cup in the quarter-finals by United and went out of the Champions League at the hands of Barcelona in the last 16.

Lille's Cup of cheer

APP, Paris

French league leaders Lille cast aside their stuttering league form of late to book a place in the French Cup final on Tuesday with a 2-0 win at Nice.

Goals either side of half-time by budding Belgian Eden Hazard with a fine angled drive and Gervinho, who beat the offside trap to net with a cool finish at the Stade de Reymond, saw Lille reach the trophy match for the first time since 1955, when the northern outfit lifted the Cup for the fifth time.

Nice were hoping to reach a first major final since the 2006 League Cup but they ended well beaten as Lille dug deep to show why they are heading for a renewed acquaintance with the Champions League.

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

Are you happy to see Shakib Al Hasan play in IPL and County cricket?

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What to WATCH

BTV

Independence Cup

FIRST SEMIFINAL

Sk Jamal Dhanmondi Club v Farashganj
Live from 4:45pm

SET Max

Indian Premier League

Punjab v Rajasthan

Live from 8:30pm

ESPN

Sportscentre India

Sports News

DAY'S EVENT

Independence Cup

FIRST SEMIFINAL

Sk Jamal Dhanmondi Club v Farashganj
Live from 4:45pm

Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

Bangladesh A v South Africa A

Second ODI (D/N)



Manchester United striker Javier Hernandez (R) tussles for the ball with Newcastle United defender Mike Williamson during their Premier League clash at St James' Park on Tuesday.

MU fire blank

APP, Newcastle



Manchester United failed to score at St James' Park for the first time in 11 seasons as a goalless draw with Newcastle United kept alive the race for the Barclays Premier League title.

The Red Devils had the chance to move nine points clear of second-placed Arsenal with victory over Alan Pardew's mid-table side.

But, with Sir Alex Ferguson serving the penultimate game of his five-match touchline ban, the visitors failed to bounce back from the disappointment of their weekend FA Cup semifinal defeat against rivals Manchester City.

Wayne Rooney was back from his two-match suspension for swearing down the lens of a TV camera, but it was another frustrating night for the England forward.

Kick off was delayed for a few seconds as Rooney's strike partner, Javier Hernandez, knelt on the halfway line and completed his pre-match prayer routine. If the Mexican was praying for an early chance then he certainly got his wish.

After just 90 seconds Rooney broke down the left wing and delivered for what looked like a routine tap-in for Hernandez.

But Dutch goalkeeper Tim Krul, in for the injured Steve Harper, read the unfolding danger and slid from his goal-line to smother at the feet of the frontman, much to the relief of the home crowd.

That relief, though, soon turned to excitement as the black and whites enjoyed a prolonged spell of attacking pressure.

It wasn't the start the league leaders had planned but they soon began to settle and Rooney broke free of marker Mike Williamson on the edge of the area only to lift his shot over both Krul and the crossbar on 19 minutes.

The second period began in much the same vein as the first and Ryan Giggs, like Lovenkrands just before the break, should have done better when heading wide of goal from an identical, close-range position.