



Manchester United midfielder Anderson (2nd from L) shoots home from close range past Schalke goalkeeper Manuel Neuer during their 4-1 win at home in the Champions League semifinals on Wednesday.

PHOTO:  
AFP

## City won't let Boateng go

SOCCERNET

Roberto Mancini is adamant defender Jerome Boateng will remain at Manchester City next season despite interest from Bayern Munich.

Boateng, 22, signed from Hamburg last summer amid high expectations after he starred for Germany at the 2010 World Cup, but he has struggled with injuries.

Bayern director of football Christian Nerlinger said this week that the Bundesliga side were "keeping tabs" on Boateng, but Mancini insists the player is not for sale.

"I am happy Bayern have said this because it proves we signed a big player," Mancini said. "Jerome has had many problems this year, including three or four injuries, but he will be staying here."

"He is a big part of our future. If he doesn't have any problems next year, Jerome can be one of the best defenders in Europe."

## Red Devils coast to final

AFP, Manchester



A second-string Manchester United cruised into a dream Champions League final against Barcelona on Wednesday with a 4-1 victory over German side Schalke 04.

Leading 2-0 after the first leg, United manager Sir Alex Ferguson could afford to make nine changes to his starting line-up and still see his team qualify for the May 28 final at Wembley with something to spare.

The unlikely hero was United's much-maligned Irish international Darron Gibson, who set up Antonio Valencia with a magnificent pass for the first goal on 26 minutes before hammering in the second on 31 minutes.

Jose Manuel Jurado pulled a goal back for Schalke but there was only ever going to be one outcome and two second-half goals from Anderson completed a crushing 6-1 aggregate victory for the English giants.

The result put United into their third Champions League final in four years, and gives Ferguson's side the chance to avenge their loss to Barcelona in the 2009 final in Rome.

Ferguson admitted his thinking over the team line-up had cost him a good night's sleep.

"I didn't sleep last night thinking about it - I woke up four times - but they did me proud," he told ITV.

"The fact it was a Champions League semi-final meant I questioned whether I had done the right thing but glad I was vindicated."

"This team can win the cup - we have got a great team full of ability. Barca are without doubt the team of the moment - they play fantastic football and are a pleasure to watch."

Delighted United keeper Edwin van der Sar said United would relish the opportunity to have another crack at Barcelona.

"We have to make sure we learned out lessons and that we're better prepared this time than we were last time," van der Sar told ITV.

The win also handed Ferguson the perfect fillip ahead of this weekend's Premier League battle with Chelsea, a high-stakes encounter that may well settle the outcome of the title race.

Schalke boss Ralf Rangnick said his side had been deservedly beaten. "I have to congratulate Manchester United -- over the two games they were the better side," Rangnick said. "As soon as we went behind it was difficult for us."

"If you look at the comparison of their so-called second string the quality of their players stands out. Berbatov, Anderson performed well -- they're the sort of players that most Bundesliga teams would be happy with."

"We have to admit we could have gone out in the quarter-final against Inter -- tonight we found out our level."

A slow start saw Schalke have the first half-chance of the night after only seven minutes, Jefferson Farfan sending a low shot fizzing just wide of the upright after seven minutes.

But once United settled into their rhythm, the writing was on the wall as Schalke's defence found themselves struggling to cope with the movement and speed of the home team's wide players, Valencia and Nani.

United broke the deadlock in the 26th minute, Gibson threading an exquisite ball through to release Valencia, who calmly finished past Schalke goalkeeper Manuel Neuer.

It got better for Gibson five minutes later when his thunderous low shot from the edge of the area beat Neuer, who should have done better, and flew in off the post to make it 2-0 and effectively kill the tie.

It was a personal triumph for Gibson, who last week closed his account on micro-blogging site Twitter after only two hours after being subjected to a torrent of disparaging abuse from United fans.

Schalke were given a glimmer of hope on 35 minutes when Smalling conceded possession cheaply and the ball ended up at the feet of Jurado, who lashed a fierce shot beyond van der Sar.

But even then United might have stretched their lead by half-time, Valencia ghosting past his marker and Neuer only for his goal-bound shot to be cleared off the line by Howedes.

A fractious finish to the half saw United concede three yellow cards in quick succession, Gibson, Scholes and Anderson all picking up cautions for rash challenges.

United's dominance continued after the break, and Schalke had Neuer to thank once again for preventing a third goal, the German international diving at full stretch to tip an Anderson shot wide.

Anderson made it 3-1 on the night after 72 minutes, capitalising on a surging run from Nani before netting his second four minutes later, tapping in from close range after good work from Valencia and Berbatov.

## Rooney, Evra fit for Chelsea

AFP, Manchester



Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson is confident both Wayne Rooney and Patrice Evra will be fit for the crunch match with Premier League title rivals Chelsea at Old Trafford on Sunday.

England striker Rooney missed training on Tuesday with a hamstring problem and was not even on the bench for Wednesday's 4-1 Champions League semi-final win against Schalke, which gave United a 6-1 aggregate success after a 2-0 first leg win in Germany.

Evra came on as a second half substitute on Wednesday but suffered a blow that at one stage looked as if the defender himself would need to be replaced.

"Patrice got a kick," Ferguson told MUTV, the club's in-house television station, on Thursday. "I was ready to substitute him but he said he was OK."

As for Rooney's absence, Ferguson added: "Wayne will be all right. I wasn't prepared to take a risk."

Premier League leaders United are currently three points ahead of Chelsea, with both clubs still having three games of the domestic season left to play.

United will face a star-studded Barcelona, who beat fierce Spanish rivals Real Madrid in their semi-final, in the Champions League final at London's Wembley Stadium on May 28.

The match is a repeat of the 2009 final, which Barcelona won 2-0 in Rome, and victory for either side at Wembley would give them a fourth European Cup triumph -- level with Germany's Bayern Munich and Dutch club Ajax but still well short of Real's record nine titles.

## Sahin, Callejon set for Real

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid are poised to sign Turkish international Nuri Sahin from Borussia Dortmund, a Spanish sports daily reported Thursday.

A deal to transfer the 22-year-old midfielder "is well underway," the daily Marca said.

"This weekend I will speak with the managers of Borussia and we will make a decision," Sahin said on his Facebook page, Marca reported.

Another sports daily, AS, said Dortmund values the German-born player at 20 million euros.

Marca also reported that Real are close to signing Spanish striker Jose Maria Callejon from Espanol of Barcelona for five million euros.

The transfer of the 24-year-old is "practically done" and will be confirmed by the two clubs at the end of the season.

Callejon played for Real Madrid's B side before joining Espanol in 2008.

## Kagawa back to training

AFP, Berlin

Japan midfielder Shinji Kagawa is back in training with German league champions Borussia Dortmund -- 99 days after breaking his foot in the Asian Cup.

The last time the 22-year-old Japan star played was in the Asian Cup semi-final against South Korea on January 25 when he broke a metatarsal bone in his foot.

The attacking midfielder impressed in Germany after joining from Cerezo Osaka last July as he scored eight goals in 17 league games for the new champions and became a crowd-favourite before injury struck.

He ran out with the Dortmund team on Wednesday in front of 1,000 fans at the Ruhr valley club trained for the first time since beating mid-table Nuremberg 2-0 on Saturday to be crowned German champions for the seventh time.

## Porto dismiss Hulk to Milan claims

SOCCERNET

Porto president Pinto Da Costa has laughed off claims AC Milan could sign Hulk this summer and warned the striker will not be allowed to leave for less than €100 million.

Hulk, 24, has been a key part of Porto's success this season, with the team having already clinched the league title and seemingly certain to secure a place in the Europa League final.

A number of top clubs around Europe are said to have shown interest in Hulk and Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani recently said: "Our transfer campaign will run from May 30, but I do like Hulk a lot."

However, Milan pulled out of a deal to sign Aly Cissokho from Porto in 2009 as they claimed the France left-back had a problem with his teeth during the medical and Da Costa has rubbished suggestions they could afford Hulk.

"Hulk to Milan must be a joke," Da Costa told Record. "They previously wanted Cissokho and they could not do it. They got that story about his teeth as an excuse, when in fact Cissokho has better teeth than I do. It is ridiculous."

"We've not had any offers for any players at the moment, but whoever wants to sign them will have to meet their release clauses. Hulk's is set at €100 million and I won't let him go even if someone offered me €99 million. You either pay that figure or nothing."



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