



Queens Park Rangers winger Shaun Wright-Phillips (R) chips the ball over Newcastle goalkeeper Tim Krul only to see his effort cleared off the line during their Premier League match at Loftus Road on Monday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

No spark from QPR

AFP, London



Colourful midfielder Joey Barton was handed the captain's armband by QPR manager Neil Warnock on his debut against his former club Newcastle United here on Monday but was unable to

deliver their victory in a 0-0 draw.

The 29-year-old Englishman - capped once for his country - signed for QPR on a free transfer last month after falling out with the Newcastle management and board.

However, while he along with gifted Moroccan Adel Taraabt produced sparkling performances in a match that the hosts largely dominated they were unable to find the finishing touch to give them the three points but it at least ended a run of three home defeats.

The draw also allowed Newcastle to maintain their unbeaten start to the season - it sees them go to fourth in the table - which is their best since the 1995-96 season when they ended up finishing second.

QPR had some great chances to put their opponents away with another of Warnock's astute transfer window signings Shaun Wright-Phillips going closest with a chip on 39 minutes but Steven Taylor did brilliantly to hook the ball away off the line.

Indeed Taylor had had to do that earlier in the half this time from as he nicked the ball off Alejandro Faurin when he was sizing up knocking the ball home from close range.

However, other missed chances from Jay Bothroyd and veteran midfielder Shaun Derry, whose two missed headers illustrated why he hasn't found the net in the past five years, could have been costly against a more ambitious team.

Ferdinand out of Man Utd opener

REUTERS, London

Manchester United defender Rio Ferdinand will miss the Premier League champions' opening Champions League Group C match against Benfica in Lisbon on Wednesday, the club said on Tuesday.

A statement on the club's website (www.manutd.com) said Ferdinand was not part of the 19-man squad who flew from Manchester airport on Wednesday morning.

Ferdinand missed matches against Tottenham Hotspur and Arsenal because of a hamstring injury but played against Bolton Wanderers three days ago.

"Ferdinand's regular centre-back partner Nemanja Vidic will also miss the trip (Calf), as expected, along with Tom Cleverley (foot), Danny Welbeck (hamstring) and Rafael (shoulder)," the statement said

The M factor

AFP, Paris



Madrid, Manchester, Milan, Munich. The "M" factor has been a feature of the recent history of Europe's premier club competition - but there is a new kid on the block this season with the arrival on the Champions League stage of big-spenders Manchester City.

The arrival of owner Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahya at City has transformed the "other" Manchester club and with his millions bankrolling the side it is now a case of dial M for money - even if Wednesday will see United take on Benfica in a nod to history, those two sides having contested the 1968 final.

Having finally gatecrashed the top four in the English Premier League to qualify for the first time, City have been drawn in Group A alongside former champions Bayern Munich, Italy's Napoli and Spain's Villarreal.

But Roberto Mancini's men know

all too well from the experience of the sheikh's fellow billionaire Roman Abramovich that money may buy you entry to the tournament - but it still cannot guarantee you the trophy.

Abramovich has been unable to buy the biggest prize in the European club game despite hiring and firing a succession of top coaches and Mancini, who knows the size of the task awaiting him from his time in Italy, is astute enough to know it will take more than unparalleled cash flow to land the Cup.

City keeper Joe Hart says his club may be Champions League virgins but points out

that many of his teammates have experience of the tournament - Carlos Tevez lifted the trophy with Manchester United in 2008 and Yaya Toure was also a winner with Barcelona. Mancini's men, having amassed a squad with strength in depth in spades - Tevez remains while would-be replacement Sergio Aguero has hit the ground running, as witnessed by his six league goals to date - are expected to get out of the group at the very least even if their group appears one of the toughest.

"It's vital we have got players who have been there and even done it in the Champions League," said Hart.

"There's no doubt it's going to be a step up in class, but the fact many of the squad have proven themselves at this standard helps. It gives us great confidence.

Mancini's own experience of this stage shows a loss as a player in the 1992 final to Barcelona at Wembley - extra incentive, surely, to ensure the Catalan club do not this

FIXTURES

Group A
Manchester City (ENG) v Napoli (ITA)
Villarreal (ESP) v Bayern Munich (GER)
Group B
Inter Milan (ITA) v Trabzonspor (TUR)
Lille (FRA) v CSKA Moscow (RUS)
Group C
Benfica (POR) v Manchester United (ENG)
Basel (SWI) v Otelul Galati (ROM)
Group D
Ajax (NED) v Lyon (FRA)
Dinamo Zagreb (CZE) v Real Madrid (CRO)

season become the first club to retain the Champions League and put to bed failed assaults as a coach with Lazio and Inter Milan.

"For us, it is important that we do well in the group and go to the second stage. (But) you don't just need a good team, you also need luck. People are looking at Manchester City now and are saying we have spent a lot of money.

"But in the summer there was a minimum of six or seven teams in Europe who spent more money than us," said Mancini, who will know all

SEE PAGE 17 COL 8

Malaga hits back with win

AFP, Madrid



Bigspending Malaga rebounded from an opening defeat to hand newboys Granada a resounding 4-0 defeat on Monday in the Spanish championship.

Two goals apiece for Spanish international duo Santi Cazorla and Joaquin Sanchez gave the ambitious South coast club their first points of the season in this Andalusian derby.

Malaga spent over 60 million of owner Qatari Sheikh Al-Thani's fortune this summer, so defeat in the first game away to Sevilla was disappointing, but on Monday two of those big name signings showed that they could well be worth the outlay.

Cazorla, recruited for 20 million euros from Villarreal, opened the scoring after four minutes of his home debut with a left footed drive from 20 yards.

Joaquin, who also arrived in August from Valencia, then neatly directed home a Jesus Gamez centre with his head after 25 minutes.

Veteran goalscorer Ruud van Nistelrooy nearly added a third after 34 minutes, shooting just wide after great team play put him clear on goal.

Cazorla added to his tally on 47 minutes with a free kick that squeezed through a loose defensive wall to find the left hand corner of the goal.

And it was left to Joaquin to complete the rout on 72 minutes, coolly converting Cazorla's pinpoint pass from the left channel.

For Granada it was a steep learning curve throughout, on their first away day back in Spain's top division, but they showed enough to give hope for future success.

In other games this weekend, Real Madrid beat Getafe 4-2 on Saturday to take an early two point advantage over Barcelona at the top of the league, after the Catalan side dropped points letting a 2-0 lead slip to draw 2-2 away to Real Sociedad.

Valencia beat Atletico Madrid 1-0 to join Real Madrid at the top with two victories from two games, and on Sunday Real Betis beat Real Mallorca 1-0 to do the same.



Benfica defender Luisao is seen during a training session in Seixal on Tuesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Wenger fears financial elites

Football

THE GUARDIAN

Arsene Wenger has spoken of his fear that Arsenal are being left behind by a financially elite cartel led by Barcelona and Real Madrid. Arsenal's manager also name-checked Chelsea and Manchester City as part of a group of clubs whose spending power has separated them from the rest of Europe's sides.

The Frenchman foresees an economic meltdown across Europe and he said that it may be the only thing to rein in Barcelona and Real, who have benefited greatly from being able to negotiate individual television rights contracts in Spain. The Premier League has always had a collective agreement.

"I believe that this season, I see two teams that are above the rest - Real Madrid and Barcelona - and the rest have to catch up during the season," Wenger said. "So for us, it's a new start because we are a new squad. What is at stake during the group stage for us is to show that we can go through."

"We are in our 14th season in the Champions League group phase and what has changed is that the competition inside England has become bigger among the top teams."

"It is as difficult to win the Champions League because a team that wins the Premier League is in the Champions League final almost every year."

"Outside the country, Barca and Real Madrid have much more financial power than they had 14 years ago because they have individualised their TV rights. So they, at the moment, with teams like Man City and Chelsea can take who they want."

Wenger was asked directly about the emergence of a clutch of clubs with financial might that outstrips the rest, and the attendant difficulties for a club such as Arsenal. "You know about it, I don't need to explain that," he replied. "We have seen the first signs of some resistance in Spain, where everybody complains."

"I believe that Europe overall, as a unit, is going towards a massive crisis, which nobody really expects now. I am convinced that Europe will go into a huge financial crisis within the next three weeks or three months and maybe that will put everything into perspective again."

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

Should Sachin Tendulkar quit ODI cricket?

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What to WATCH

TEN Cricket

Zimbabwe v Pakistan

Third ODI

Live from 1:30pm

TEN Action+

UEFA Champions League

Benfica v Man United

Live from 12:45am (Thursday)

TEN Sports

UEFA Champions League

Man City v Napoli

Live from 12:45am (Thursday)

ESPN

Sportscentre India

Sports News

Live at 8:30pm



DAY'S EVENT

BCB Cup

Bangladesh A v GP-BCB NCA

One-Day Match

Time: 9:00am

Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Mirpur