



HAPPY AGAIN! Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo is ecstatic after scoring the winning goal against Manchester City during their Champions League encounter at Bernabeu on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

C'Ron at the death

AFP, Madrid



Cristiano Ronaldo struck a last-minute winner as Real Madrid beat Manchester City 3-2 in a thrilling Champions League clash that saw all the goals come in a nerve-wracking final 22 minutes.

Real came back twice through Marcelo and Karim Benzema to level the game after substitutes Edin Dzeko and Aleksandar Kolarov had put City ahead.

And then up stepped Ronaldo to give the home side a deserved three points to kick start their Champions League Group D campaign.

Mancini announced a surprise in his line up, starting with 19 year-old Matija Nastasic at centre-half, making his debut after a summer move from Fiorentina.

Real took the initiative from the start as City took their time to adjust to their surroundings.

A blistering counter-attack by Real after eight minutes saw Gonzalo Higuain pick out Ronaldo who drew the first save of the evening from English international Joe Hart.

Four minutes later and Hart denied

Higuain, this time with an acrobatic dive after the Argentine striker glanced a Ronaldo cross goalbound.

Next it was Alvaro Arbeloa cutting in from the left who tried his luck and it was all the home side.

Hart was then out quick to block Higuain and Sami Khedira shot over in the ensuing chaos as the Premier League side struggled to hold on.

On 32 minutes Hart got down well to save a Marcelo drive and the home crowd, strangely subdued at kick-off, for a fleeting moment smelt blood and upped the volume.

Yet the visitors gradually began to dispute more possession and but for a half chance for Higuain and an Angel Di Maria curled shot the interval arrived goalless.

City had yet to trouble the home defence and had also lost Sami Nasri who limped from the pitch on 35 minutes to be replaced by Kolarov.

A speculative shot from Yaya Toure earned City a corner on 53 minutes and the first action for their noisy travelling support to cheer, while Marcelo saw a thunderous drive go just at the other end.

On the hour the Spanish World Cup winner David Silva received a standing ovation from the home crowd on leaving the field as Mancini shuffled his pack and brought on Dzeko.

Mourinho, immediately reacted bringing on Ozil to replace Essien and Marcelo saw another shot drift high.

It looked like the match would drift to a

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Armadillo 2014 WC mascot

AFP, Paris

Brazil has chosen an armadillo as the mascot for the 2014 World Cup, football's world governing body FIFA has revealed, although the cartoon creature has yet to be named.

"I'm delighted to welcome such an important member to the 2014 team," said legendary Brazil striker Ronaldo, who is now on the local organising committee for the competition.

"The mascot will play a key ambassadorial role in the next two years. I'm sure he will inspire many young football fans in Brazil and all over the world with the great passion which he has for the sport and for his country."

The three-banded armadillo, which is indigenous to Brazil and known as the "tatu-bola", is an endangered species. Its cartoon likeness wears a white "Brazil 2014" t-shirt and green shorts and has its own official song.

FIFA said in a statement on its website fifa.com that they and organisers analysed 47 different designs from six different Brazilian agencies and researched how they were received by the main target audience of children aged five to 12.

The governing body's secretary-general, Jerome Valcke, said the choice of the endangered armadillo was "very fitting", as one of the tournament's main aims was to raise awareness about the environment and ecology.

The armadillo mascot currently does not have a name but Brazilians will get a chance to vote on one of three possibilities: Amijubi, Fuleco or Zuzeco.

What to WATCH

BTV & STAR Cricket

ICC World T20
South Africa v Zimbabwe
Live from 8:00pm

ESPN
Sportscenter India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm

TEN Sports
UEFA Europa League
Maritimo v Newcastle
Live from 11:00pm
Inter Milan v Rubin Kazan
Live from 1:05am (Friday)

TEN Action
UEFA Europa League
BSC Young v Liverpool
Live from 11:00pm
Tottenham v Lazio

Joy for PSG, Malaga

REUTERS, London



Real Madrid fashioned a stunning comeback to beat Manchester City 3-2 in a classic Champions League match with a last-gasp Cristiano Ronaldo strike in their Group D opener on Tuesday.

There were also wins for Paris St Germain, who beat Dynamo Kiev 4-1 on their return to the competition after eight years, newcomers Malaga, who beat Zenit St Petersburg 3-0 and former Champions League holders Porto who won 2-0 at Dinamo Zagreb.

Arsenal rode their luck to beat French champions Montpellier 2-1 away after conceding an early penalty.

PSG, outside contenders for the title after spending more than 200 million euros (\$261.11 million) on players since being taken over by Qatari investors a year ago, played superbly and were the biggest scorers on the night, thumping Kiev in Group A.

PSG striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic, who opened the scoring with a first-half penalty, became the first player to score in the Champions League for six different clubs having also netted for Ajax Amsterdam, Juventus, Inter Milan, Barcelona and AC Milan.

It was a dream start to the campaign for PSG with Thiago Silva netting on his debut, Alex making it 3-0 and Javier Pastore wrapping up the victory with a fourth in stoppage time.

Malaga, playing in the competition for the first time, put their financial worries to one side with a 3-0 home win over Zenit St Petersburg in Group C with two goals from midfielder Isco and one from forward Javier Saviola.

A message to the rest of Europe

AFP, Paris



Zlatan Ibrahimovic said Paris Saint-Germain had sent out a message to the rest of the continent after their 4-1 thumping of Dynamo Kiev in their opening Champions League group game on Tuesday.

Ibrahimovic's early penalty set PSG on their way to the three points against the Ukrainians, with Thiago Silva, Alex and Javier Pastore also on target for the hosts and Miguel Veloso grabbing a consolation for Dynamo.

Yuri Semin's side were poor, and PSG will undoubtedly face stiffer tests if they are to progress in Europe this season, but Ibrahimovic insisted the Ligue 1 club deserved all the credit for winning in such fashion.

"To win 4-1 looks easy but it wasn't easy," said the Swede, who was in a relaxed mood after the game, having scored his 29th goal in the competition with a sixth different club, despite not having produced his best performance, in his own eyes.

"After the game people look at it and say the opponents were not good, but I think we made them look bad. It doesn't mean they are a bad team.

"We will take this confi-

'We fought like animals'

REUTERS, Madrid



Real Madrid showed the fighting spirit that had been lacking in recent games and had caused him to

question their commitment, a relieved Jose Mourinho roared after his side battled back to beat Manchester City 3-2 on Tuesday.

Cristiano Ronaldo scored a 90th-minute winner to give Real a winning start in Champions League Group D, after they had twice fallen behind on a nervy night at the Bernabeu.

"The most important thing for me is to be proud of the team regardless of the result," a pumped-up Mourinho told a news conference, having slid to the ground on his knees while punching the air in celebration at Ronaldo's winner.

"I keep saying the same thing to the players. We can lose matches like tonight, it is not a problem, but fighting like animals like we did to the very end."

Real have made a stuttering start to the defence of their La Liga title, earning only four points from a possible 12 so far.

Their most recent defeat, a 1-0

reverse at Sevilla, prompted a scathing attack by Mourinho on the commitment of some of his players which was still causing reverberations in the Spanish capital ahead of Tuesday's game.

"We cannot lose the way we did in Getafe or Sevilla," said the former Chelsea and Inter Milan boss, who dismissed talk of internal problems in the squad.

"Today we were more aggressive, more physical, we dominated, and we eventually won. We conceded two goals but we kept fighting. We equalised but we kept on going."

"I am no-one in the history of Real Madrid but I have the right to say Madrid fans want to see this. We can play better football, but it was difficult today."

"We were low on confidence, lacking self-belief, but the important thing was the commitment of the players. This is the DNA of last year's team. It is an important step in a difficult group."

Edin Dzeko and Aleksandar Kolarov had put visiting City within touching distance of a famous victory before Karim Benzema and Ronaldo struck late on for Real.

"It's difficult, not because we lost but because we were beating a team like

"We were low on confidence, lacking self-belief, but the important thing was the commitment of the players. This is the DNA of last year's team. It is an important step in a difficult group."

Real Madrid 2-1 with four minutes to go," City coach Roberto Mancini said.

Mancini vented his anger on Joe Hart after the England goalkeeper criticised his Manchester City team-mates for letting slip a 2-1 lead over Real Madrid at the end of a frantic opening Champions League group game.

All five goals in Real's 3-2 win were scored in the final 21 minutes

as City twice took the lead before Cristiano Ronaldo grabbed the late winner. Hart, who will be disappointed he did not save the winger's shot, said: "It's not on. You can't go 2-1 up and lose the game. We can only blame ourselves. They are a very good team and so are we. We dug deep, got a lead twice and threw away. It's hard to come off the field after losing 3-2 and be positive."

Mancini retorted: "Joe Hart should stay in goal and make saves. If anyone should criticise the team it should be me, not Joe Hart. I am the judge, not Joe Hart."

"We must improve because we go too deep sometimes. We allow opponents to play to the edge of our area. We made this mistake."

Mancini bristled when asked if the English champions, who are competing for only the second season in the Champions League, had perhaps been guilty of naivety in the closing stages of the game.

"We can't continue to talk about experience. We have players who play at international level. We need to improve and should be disappointed with this result," he said.

"We scored two goals which was good, our only mistake was going too deep."



Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho celebrates his team's third goal during their Champions League clash against Manchester City at Bernabeu on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Allegri puts on a brave face

REUTERS, Milan

AC Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri tried to put a brave face on the disappointing 0-0 Champions League Group C draw with Anderlecht on Tuesday by saying at least they did not concede a goal.

Allegri's side have now gone three home games without scoring following 1-0 defeats by Sampdoria and Atalanta in Serie A.

"We haven't conceded a goal and that is a step forward," he told reporters in his usual monotone style.

"In the first half we made a lot of technical mistakes. It's not an easy phase we're going through as we're using up a lot of mental energy."

"We found more courage in the second half but we need to keep working."

Allegri is in his third campaign in charge of Milan, having surpassed expectations by leading them to the Serie A title in 2010-11 and then claiming the runners-up spot last season.

This term Milan have been significantly weakened by the departure of numerous players including strikers Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Antonio Cassano and defender Thiago Silva.