



Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo (R) celebrates his opening goal with teammates during their Champions League quarterfinal first leg against Galatasaray at Bernabeu on Wednesday.

PHOTO:
AFP

Jose delighted

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid manager Jose Mourinho was delighted with his side's professionalism as they all but secured their place in the Champions League semifinals with a 3-0 win over Galatasaray on Wednesday.

Cristiano Ronaldo, Karim Benzema and Gonzalo Higuain got the goals for the hosts, but Mourinho was just as happy with the defensive side of their performance in the first leg of their quarterfinal.

"The team played a serious and well-balanced game," he said.

"We defended well and counter-attacked with danger. The players knew at this stage of the competition small details can define the games but we played very well.

"Higuain and Benzema scored a goal and this is good for their confidence."

Indeed, with such a comfortable lead to take to Istanbul next week, the Portuguese admitted his biggest task will be to ensure his troops are not complacent.

"They need a miracle but there are miracles in football. So why can't they dream of a miracle?"

"I have enough experience to know we have a very good result and will try everything to convince my players that it is not over and try to play with the same mentality as tonight."

Sergio Ramos and Xabi Alonso both picked up yellow cards in the second half that will see them miss the second leg, but Mourinho denied they had been pre-planned to ensure they would be free to play in the semifinals and claimed their presence will be missed.

"They are important absences for the next game. Xabi and Ramos will play on Saturday when they weren't going to do so, but it has complicated my plans for Istanbul."

Galatasaray boss Fatih Terim meanwhile accepted there was a gulf in class between the sides, but claimed the Turkish champions had been very harshly treated when Norwegian referee Svein Oddvar Moen showed Burak Yilmaz a yellow card for diving rather than awarding a penalty when he was clipped by Ramos in the second half.

"Maybe the Real Madrid name affected Galatasaray and the referee didn't have the courage to show a card when he had to," he said.

City-Chelsea USA friendly sold out

AFP, London

Manchester City said Wednesday their end-of-season friendly against Chelsea in the United States has sold out.

City said the May 23 match in St Louis sold out inside just 20 minutes after tickets went on sale.

The English Premier League giants will meet at the home of St Louis Cardinals, Busch Stadium, which has a capacity of 46,861.

City's chief commercial and operating officer said Tom Glick said: "We believe in US soccer and we know how much passion the fans in North America have for the beautiful game.

"The club is committed to giving fans across the world the opportunity to get close to Manchester City FC."

Tymoshchuk set to quit Bayern

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich and Ukraine midfielder Anatoliy Tymoshchuk look set to go their separate ways at the end of the season, according to the 34-year-old.

"I think I'll go," he told German magazine Kicker with his contract set to expire in June having started only three games in 17 appearances this season and been used as a substitute 13 times.

"Every time, I think I will play and then it comes to nothing. That's annoying. I can't talk to the club about a new contract when I'm not playing. No one has spoken to me."



SET Max
Indian Premier League
Hyderabad v Pune
Live from 8:30pm

TEN Action
Family Circle Cup
Quarterfinals
Live from 11:00pm

Real crush Galatasaray

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid took a huge step towards reaching the Champions League semifinals for the third consecutive year as they beat Galatasaray 3-0 at the

Santiago Bernabeu.

Cristiano Ronaldo got the hosts off to the perfect start as he calmly chipped home from Mesut Ozil's wonderful through ball after just nine minutes.

Karim Benzema then doubled Madrid's lead on 29 minutes with a simple finish at the back post from Michael Essien's cross and Gonzalo Higuain headed home the third 17 minutes from time to seal a highly satisfactory evening for the hosts.

Galatasaray manager Fatih Terim had signalled his intent to attack by naming the trio of Wesley Sneijder, Didier Drogba and Burak Yilmaz in his starting line-up.

However, as a result the Turkish champions gifted way too much for Madrid to create in midfield, with Ozil in particular shining in the first-half.

The German international set-up the opener as he received Xabi Alonso's pass before turning and feeding Ronaldo to dink the ball over the advancing Fernando Muslera for his ninth Champions League goal of the campaign.

Drogba nearly produced an immediate reply for the visitors as he spun Raphael Varane on the edge of the box, but with a clear sight of goal the Ivorian lashed wildly

wide of the target.

Sneijder also fired wide from 20 yards as Galatasaray went in search of the away goal.

However, that was opening up gaps that Madrid love to exploit on the counter-attack and from another sprightly break Ozil forced Muslera into a good low save.

Drogba did hit the target with another long-range strike that Diego Lopez could only turn behind for a corner and Galatasaray had a good claim for a penalty turned down when Sami Khedira appeared to handle inside his own area.

Yet, they were still struggling to cope at the back and went further behind when Essien's cross just evaded Ronaldo but fell perfectly for Benzema to slot in off the near post.

Emmanuel Eboué had a great chance to give Terim's men a lifeline just before half-time as he broke through on goal after a neat exchange of passes with Drogba, but the former Arsenal defender fired his shot too close to Lopez, who made a comfortable save. Perhaps recognising the error of his ways to start the game, Terim replaced Sneijder with Gokhan Zan at the break.

The change to a 5-3-2 formation did allow the visitors to stem the tide of Madrid attacks in the second period.

The tie was virtually killed off by a third Madrid goal 17 minutes from time though as substitute Higuain glanced home Alonso's in-swinging free-kick.

Robinson out for season

AFP, London

Former England goalkeeper Paul Robinson is set to be out for the rest of the season and well into the next after developing a blood clot on the lung, his club, English Championship side Blackburn Rovers, said.

"Paul is set for a lengthy spell on the sidelines after suffering serious respiratory complications following a back operation last week," the northwest club said on their website.

"The former England international developed a pulmonary embolism (blood clot in the lung), which will rule him out for the next six months."

The club said the 33-year-old, who won the last of his 41 England caps in 2007, was kept in hospital over the weekend but has now returned home.

Robinson's condition comes after scan results confirmed that fellow goalkeeper Jake Kean had torn cartilage in his left knee in Monday's 3-0 defeat to Cardiff City.

Stalemate in Malaga

AFP, Malaga



Borussia Dortmund were left to rue a host of missed chances as their Champions League quarterfinal first leg against Malaga at La

Rosaleda ended in a 0-0 draw on Wednesday night.

The result means it will be all to play for at the Signal Iduna Park in Dortmund in next Tuesday's second leg, although the Bundesliga side may live to regret not grabbing an away goal.

Borussia do however remain the only unbeaten team in the Champions League this season, while Malaga continued their good home form with a controlled performance, especially in the second period.

Their record of never losing a European tie at home is now extended to a 14th game.

The Spaniards had almost a full squad to choose from and preferred Javier Saviola up front to Roque Santa Cruz while the Germans were missing their influential centre-half Mats Hummels.

Dortmund left-back Marcel Schmelzer, who broke his nose against Stuttgart at the weekend, surprisingly started the game with a mask protecting his injury.

Both sides were understandably cautious in the opening stages but Saviola came close to opening the scoring for the home side on seven minutes after good

play on the right from Jesus Gamez found the Argentinian in space in the box.

However, the little Argentine pulled his shot just wide.

Shortly after, the German side had their first chance of a number in the first period when a long ball out of defence was headed into the path of Mario Goetze by Robert Lewandowski, but Willy Caballero was quick to get down to save well for the hosts.

Caballero was the hero again five minutes later when he made a better save at close range from the same player after slick passing from the Germans had opened up the home defence.

Borussia's neat quick passing game was beginning to dominate proceedings and Caballero had to be sharp again on 25 minutes to deny a Marco Reus drive from outside the area.

Next it was Kevin Grosskreutz who shot wide for the visitors after another quick move caused more problems in the Spanish defence.

On the half-hour mark, Malaga centre half Weligton received a yellow card when all he could do was pull down Lewandowski to stop another attack, with the card meaning the influential Brazilian defender will miss the second leg in Germany.

Malaga midfielder Manuel Iturra will also miss the second leg after picking up a card later in the game.

Palacio on the double

AFP, Milan



Rodrigo Palacio scored a brace as Inter Milan inched closer to Serie A's Champions League qualification places Wednesday with a precious 2-0 win away to Sampdoria.

Four days after a 2-1 defeat at home to leaders Juventus left them in seventh place, Inter were desperate to make amends in a fixture that was originally postponed on March 17 due to adverse weather in Genoa.

However, Andrea Stramaccioni's side were bossed for long periods in the first half before taking the lead through Palacio's 43rd minute header.

Palacio then brightened up an insipid performance from both sides in the second half with a fine individual effort three minutes into injury time to help push Inter up to fifth on 50 points - seven short of third-placed Milan in the final Champions League qualifying spot.

Despite welcoming Juan Jesus back from suspension the Nerazzurri were without Argentine midfielder Esteban Cambiasso after he received a one-game ban following the match at Juve last Saturday.

Sampdoria had the lion's share of goalscoring chances in the first half.

A Gianluca Sansone header in the opening minute went straight to Inter keeper Samir Handanovic while at the other end Sergio Romero did well to fingertip the ball round the post with Palacio threatening.

Handanovic then had to be at full stretch to palm away a header from Inter transfer target Mauro Icardi after the 20-year-old Argentine met Sansone's corner kick.

Sansone's tame shot went straight to Handanovic but the 'keeper had to look livelier to keep Nenad Krsticic's strike from landing in the top corner just after the half hour.

Inter defender Jonathan came close to gifting Sampdoria a goal when he slipped twice inside the penalty area, but despite Icardi's best efforts he failed to capitalise.

Although Sampdoria were dominating, the hosts' defence was found wanting two minutes before the break when Palacio ghosted between both centre-backs to meet Alvaro Pereira's cross and beat Romero with a glancing header.

Sampdoria created chances before the half-time interval through Poli and Marcelo Estigarribia, while a Palacio shot from a tight angle flashed across the face of goal on the stroke of half time.

Sampdoria picked up where they had left off, Sansone's angled drive forcing Handanovic into action minutes after the restart.



Inter Milan forward Rodrigo Palacio jumps for joy after scoring one of his two goals against Sampdoria during their Serie A encounter in Genoa on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP