

RONALDO'S magnum opus

Cristiano Ronaldo versus Zlatan Ibrahimovic, they called it. It could have been Ronaldo versus the rest of the world and he would still have won. On a frosty Tuesday night in Sweden, he was just that good.

He scored three dramatic goals, punched his ticket to the World Cup, silenced his critics and cemented his position as the best player on the planet, all in the space of 90 extraordinary minutes.

Three times Ronaldo was given space to surge forward and three times he delivered a devastating punch to a Swedish team that was given little choice but to try to attack.

His first goal of the night came after 50 minutes and was a prime example of his finest attributes. Ronaldo used his smarts to briefly hold back as Portugal broke downfield, allowing him to sneak behind defender Martin Olsson and collect the ball mid-stride. From there his pace took him clear before a calm and cool-headed finish saw him slide the ball past goalkeeper Andreas Isaksson.

At that stage Sweden looked doomed, needing three goals to book its place in Brazil. But then the other global star in the contest stepped forward.

Striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic nodded home a header to start Sweden's revival, then drilled home a ferocious free kick to put the home side tantalizingly close to completing a thrilling comeback. Ronaldo quickly ended those hopes.

With Sweden left with no choice but to attack, Ronaldo made the most of the open turf in front of him, charging forward on another counterattack and firing past Isaksson for Portugal's second goal with 13 minutes left. Two minutes later, he added a third, this time with his right foot, and the replay footage showed Ibrahimovic applauding in the aftermath of Ronaldo's emphatically finished goal, which killed the home side's challenge once and for all.

It was one of the best hat-tricks you could wish to see, delivered on the biggest night in Portuguese football for a year and a half. When they needed a big-game player with a big-game attitude, the biggest of them all delivered.

And if Portugal decide to record a song to accompany their passage to Brazil, maybe they will consider borrowing something from the Millwall pantheon in honour of their captain.

So was this his greatest performance for Portugal? "If you take it on the level of the goals then yes," Ronaldo said with a coy arch of the eyebrow, "but I've put in other great performances before, even without scoring. I made my contribution, at the very highest level. We deserved to win, and now it's about enjoying the moment."

His team-mate Miguel Veloso, like Ronaldo a Sporting Clube de Portugal product, summed it up succinctly. "The quantity of games he plays," he said, "the goals he scores, the situations he resolves ... Ronaldo is a machine." Johan Elmander was similarly convinced. "[Ibrahimovic] did everything he could," said the Norwich striker, "but Ronaldo was just that little bit better."

Ronaldo's last hat-trick, against Northern Ireland in Belfast, hauled Portugal out of a hole and took him past Eusebio's Portugal goal record. This one took him level with Pauleta, the national team's all-time leading scorer, on 47. It was another historic night for a historic player. His goal tally for the season is 32 from 22 matches, including five hat-tricks.

If the Ballon d'Or voting is reopened as has been reported, Ronaldo could well win the award on the strength of one night alone, so good was he against Sweden. As it is Franck Ribery who remains the favourite to carry it home, there is no doubting who the world's most in-form player is as we approach the 200-day countdown to the World Cup finals.



Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo celebrates after scoring the hat-trick goal against Sweden at Stockholm on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Ibra cancels World Cup

INTERNET

Sweden's Zlatan Ibrahimovic says the World Cup finals will not be worth watching without him in Brazil. The PSG forward scored twice in the second leg against Portugal, but Cristiano Ronaldo's hat-trick sealed a dramatic 3-2 victory, 4-2 on aggregate.

"It was probably [my] last attempt to reach the World Cup with the national team for me," said Ibrahimovic. "One thing is for sure, a World Cup without me is nothing to watch. Congratulations to Portugal, but both teams deserved to get to the World Cup."

Ballon d'Or time extended

INTERNET

On the evening Cristiano Ronaldo scored a brilliant hat-trick to seal Portugal's passage to the World Cup next summer, FIFA extended the voting period for this year's Ballon d'Or winner.

The ballot had closed on November 15, but captains, managers and media voters can deliberate for a further nine days if they have not already submitted their top three players.

The turnout of voters for the flagship players' trophy was said to be poor, forcing FIFA to extend the period to the end of the month.

It just so happens this was announced on Tuesday night, after Ronaldo single-handedly helped Portugal qualify for the World Cup.

Les Bleus did exactly what they needed to

REUTERS, London

France produced one of soccer's most famous comebacks on Tuesday to scrape into next year's World Cup finals via the playoffs after Portugal blazed through after Cristiano Ronaldo conjured up a sensational hat-trick.

The two European heavyweights will be joined in next June's finals by Croatia, Greece, Ghana and Algeria after they prevailed in their second leg playoffs.

France had to overturn a 2-0 deficit at home to Ukraine and did so with aplomb, Mamadou Sakho, an offside Karim Benzema and an Oleg Gusev own goal after 72 minutes sending the Stade de France wild as the fans celebrated a 3-2 aggregate triumph.

The 1998 winners had not missed a major tournament since 1994 when coach Didier Deschamps was on the field and he was determined not to let it happen again as France became the first side to fight back from 2-0 down in European World Cup playoffs.

He brought Benzema back into the team and although the striker's goal looked well offside, he had an earlier effort wrongly ruled out by a linesman's flag.

Defender Sakho, another player who did not start Friday's limp showing in the first leg in Kiev, grabbed the opener with his first international goal.

"It was a great, great game. It was important for French football to be in Brazil next year - when we've got all the ingredients, we can do great things," Deschamps told TF1 TV.

Ronaldo's stunning treble took

Portugal to the finals after three break-away goals in a 3-2 win in Sweden completed a 4-2 aggregate success as rival Zlatan Ibrahimovic came to life with his own second-half double for the hosts.

Both forwards have been accused of not stepping up when it really matters on the biggest stage but Ronaldo shot down any doubters with a virtuoso display, using his rampant pace to net three goals that rival Lionel Messi would have been proud of.

"I know Portugal needed me in these matches and I showed I am here," Ronaldo told Portuguese TV.

Croatia won 2-0 on aggregate and on the night despite playing most of their home leg against tiny Iceland with 10 men after Mario Mandzukic opened the scoring midway through the first half only to be sent off for a studs up tackle soon after.

Kostas Mitroglou again shone to help Greece, European champions in 2004, reach soccer's greatest showpiece after his composed early finish in a 1-1 draw in Romania set up a 4-2 aggregate victory following his two goals in the first leg.

Ghana, who had a five-goal lead going into their second leg, secured a third straight World Cup finals appearance despite a 2-1 defeat by Egypt in an African playoff in strife-torn Cairo.

The Ghanaians went through 7-3 on aggregate after strikes by Egypt followed up by a late reply from Kevin-Prince Boateng.

Egypt have now failed to reach the World Cup since their last appearance in 1990 despite winning an unmatched four African Nations Cup

RESULTS

EUROPEAN ZONE

Romania 1 (Torosidis 55-og); Greece 1 (Mitroglou 23)

Greece qualify 4-2 on aggregate

Croatia 2 (Mandzukic 27, Srna 47); Iceland 0

Croatia qualify 2-0 on aggregate

Sweden 2 (Ibrahimovic 68, 72); Portugal 3 (Ronaldo 50, 77, 79)

Portugal qualify 4-2 on aggregate

France 3 (Sakho 22, Benzema 34, Gusev 72-og); Ukraine 0

France qualify 3-2 on aggregate

INTERCONTINENTAL

New Zealand 2 (Smith 80-PEN, Fallon 82);

Mexico 4 (Peralta 13,29,33, Pena 87)

Mexico win 9-3 on aggregate and qualify

AFRICAN ZONE

Egypt 2 (Zaki 25, Gedo 84); Ghana 1 (Boateng 89)

Ghana qualify 7-3 on aggregate

titles during that time.

Algeria beat Burkina Faso on away goals after a 3-3 aggregate draw and 1-0 home win in the second leg, Madjid Bougherra scoring with a fluke goal when the ball deflected in off his head following Bakary Kone's attempted clearance.

Ghana and Algeria join fellow Africans Nigeria, Cameroon and Ivory Coast in the finals after they qualified at the weekend. The two remaining spots in Brazil will be decided on Wednesday when Mexico visit New Zealand with a 5-1 advantage from the first leg of their intercontinental playoff and Uruguay host Jordan 5-0 up from the Amman encounter.



PHOTO: AFP

France footballers rejoice their qualification for the World Cup beating Ukraine 3-2 on aggregate at Saint-Denis outside Paris on Tuesday.

'He is the best'

REUTERS, Stockholm

It was billed as a clash of the titans with Ronaldo and Zlatan Ibrahimovic in the starring roles but at the end of the night Portugal's captain took the plaudits as his stunning hat-trick clinched a World Cup spot.

The drama took a long time coming but it was worth waiting for the second act with Ronaldo putting the visitors ahead after the break only for Sweden skipper Ibrahimovic to score twice before the Portuguese had the last word with two more goals.

Ronaldo's heroics secured a 3-2 win on the night and, after his goal in Lisbon, a 4-2 aggregate playoff victory to secure a place at next year's finals in Brazil. Ronaldo also equalled Portugal's all-time goalscoring record of 47 held by Pauleta.

"I know Portugal needed me in these matches and I showed that I am here," he told Portuguese TV after the game.

Portugal coach Paolo Bento had spent the week playing down the notion that he presided over a one-man team but Ronaldo's four goals over the two legs tell a different story.

Despite indifferent performances by both captains in the first leg, it was Ronaldo who dived among the flying boots late on in the first leg to give his country a precious 1-0 lead.

With the return being played at a stadium dubbed 'the Zlatan Arena', Ibrahimovic had it all to prove and he did his best, sending a corner flying into the net with a glancing header before smashing home a free kick from the edge of the box.

But, in the end, Ronaldo was the difference. "He gets three chances on counter-attacks, and he scores three goals," Ibrahimovic said. "It's what he's best at."

When the Portugal skipper netted his third goal, even Ibrahimovic was applauding and Ronaldo later complimented his great rival, saying: "Zlatan is a fantastic player, and when you feel great support from your team, it's great."

Almost every player from both sides was asked for their opinion of Ronaldo after the game. Moutinho's answer was echoed by most of those who spoke into the waiting microphones: "What is there to say? He's the best in the

WALTON

আমাদের পণ্য

দুর্বীর গতি ও নিরাপদ ভ্রমণের আনন্দ বাড়িয়ে দিতে ওয়ালটনে সংযোজিত হলো সর্বাধুনিক প্রযুক্তি ও ডিজাইনসমৃদ্ধ মোটরসাইকেল



উৎপাদন বৃদ্ধি পাওয়ায় ওয়ালটন মোটরসাইকেলে ৩৫০০০ টাকা পর্যন্ত মূল্য কমলো!

আপনার পছন্দের Color এবং Model এর জন্য আজই নিকটস্থ ওয়ালটন শো-রুমে যোগাযোগ করুন

Call Center
09612316267



শক্তিশালী হেড লাইট



লো-মেইনটেন্যান্স ও ডিউরেবল ইঞ্জিন



হাইড্রোলিক ব্রেক



এ্যাডভান্সড রিয়ার শক এ্যাবসরবার



গোয়রাস থাফিং



ফুল ফিচারড ডিজিটাল মিটার কন্সোল



জাপানিজ কার্বুরেটর



Cruze



Stylex



Leo

www.waltonbd.com

