



Juventus's legendary goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon lost his cool when it mattered most, barging into referee Michael Oliver numerous times before he was finally shown a red card in the aftermath of a debatable penalty decision when the Italians were up 3-0 and tied on aggregate. While it is unlikely that anyone could have stopped Cristiano Ronaldo's perfect spot-kick in the 97th minute of the Champions League quarterfinal encounter, Buffon's dismissal tainted what was one of the Champions League's most exciting matches and denied him perhaps a final chance at the only major trophy missing from his cabinet.

PHOTO: AFP

BALLISTIC Buffon

AFP, Turin



Gianluigi Buffon's Champions League career came to a bitter end on a crazy night with the Juventus legend sent off in Madrid and then accusing the referee of having "a rubbish bin instead of a heart".

The veteran goalkeeper's frustration spilled over at the Santiago Bernabeu after Juventus beat Real Madrid 3-1 on the night, but were eliminated 4-3 on aggregate in the quarterfinal after English referee Michael Oliver awarded the Spaniards a contested 97th-minute penalty.

"In place of a heart he has a rubbish bin," raged 40-year-old Buffon after Oliver pointed to the spot for Mehdi Benatia's challenge on Lucas Vazquez in the dying minutes.

Buffon was given his first ever red card in 117 Champions League games and after Wojciech Szczesny had taken his place in goal, Cristiano Ronaldo slotted home the spot kick to put defending champions Real Madrid through to the semifinals.

"You have to be a murderer to make the last two decisions the referee made," Buffon said later. "You cannot ruin the dreams of a team. I could've told the referee anything at that moment, but he had to understand the degree of the disaster he was creating. If you can't handle the pressure and have the courage to make a decision, then you should sit in the stands and eat your crisps."

It was another blow for the charismatic goalkeeper who was reduced to tears after Italy dramatically failed to qualify for the global showpiece in November's playoffs. Juventus have finished runners-up twice in the Champions League in the past three years and Wednesday's defeat was probably Buffon's last chance to get the only major title missing from his collection.

"I'm not here to judge what the referee saw, because it was a borderline incident," he said, continuing his diatribe.

"All I'll say is that you can't be that cynical in the 93rd minute, to shatter the dreams of a team that had given everything it had to give. I've always found it an honour to go up against this team and this club in front of this crowd, but tonight we deserved extra time at the very least."

THE DEBATE RAGES ON

The penalty decision from referee Michael Oliver in the second leg of the Champions League quarterfinal has dominated headlines across Europe since Wednesday night, but the debate is far from over. Former referees, players and the press have all chimed in with their arguments but the fiercest exchange has been between the players. Although Cristiano Ronaldo shared a warm embrace with Gianluigi Buffon in the mixed area after the game, he believes the penalty was correct. Below are the opinions of the involved parties:



MEHDI BENATIA

Honestly I've seen and played in matches — you can never whistle for a penalty like that in the 93rd minute. If there is contact it is with my thigh and that is part of football. There is never the intention to foul him or to push him. Last year they f**** Bayern Munich on two or three goals that were offside if I'm not mistaken. It's always the same story that repeats itself. It's a very big team Real, it's not for nothing that they have won so much, I don't think they need any extra help. Everyone knows that this match had to go into extra-time and the best team would have won.

CRISTIANO RONALDO

I do not understand why they protest against the penalty. If he did not commit the foul, Lucas would have scored. The pulse increased, but I calmed down, and I knew I'd be decisive. During the game, Benatia and the rest of them had already been kicking us from behind. But we are happy and we are in the semifinals. This was a game where we have suffered tremendously, it has to be a lesson to learn that in football, nothing is ever guaranteed and you have to fight to the end. Step by step, now we're into the semifinals.



GIORGIO CHIELLINI

It shouldn't be surprising, Bayern Munich went through it last year and this was Juve's turn. Between the first leg and this one, just about everything happened. It's laughable that the Italian refereeing designator said things are going well in the Champions League. Nobody thought we could turn it around, but we believed and it'll help us for the next Champions League campaigns. It'll be an objective for the future.

MASSIMILIANO ALLEGRI

If there is a feeling which prevails, it's pride. The lads were marvellous and it was moving; we start again from here, with our heads high, very high. Games like these are great moments against the biggest clubs in the world. We want to be the best. Sometimes things go for you, and other times they don't. We need to get over this hard moment and move forwards. We showed that Juve as a side and club have grown a lot in the last years. It's a pity because we proved that the result in Turin was not fair, but unfortunately it was not enough.



Righteous or robbery?

Press, like everyone else, divided



While Italy's press, led by Corriere dello Sport and its headline 'What a Scam', were universal in their condemnation of the penalty, Spain was split. Marca headlined their story 'It's a penalty', while Sport proclaimed it the 'Robbery of the Century'.

AGENCIES, Madrid



They did not see the same match. What Italian newspaper Corriere dello Sport on Wednesday morning titled 'What a scam', Madrid daily

Marca replied to with 'There was penalty'. The spot-kick, awarded by referee Michael Oliver to Real Madrid in stoppage time in the second leg of the Champions League quarterfinal against Juventus, allowed Real Madrid to qualify by the skin of their teeth.

"If there is a savage and sadistic way to be eliminated, then this is it," wrote Fabrizio Bocca in La Repubblica. "Better, much better, to go to the Bernabeu, lose the match and amen. See you again next year. Like this, no, like this everything stays open and everything feels

unfinished, like a door slammed in your face."

The focus of most reports were understandably on referee Michael Oliver, although none outright denied a penalty. Francesco Geniti in Gazzetta dello Sport wrote: "To concede a debatable penalty that decides access to the semifinal of the Champions League, on a refereeing level, qualifies a mistake. We need to start with this premise before analysing the incident which rightly infuriated Juve. Because every referee knows well that there are moments in which your whistle has a different weight and so you only punish obvious fouls."

Spanish daily AS wrote that Madrid went "from panic to the semifinals". "Juventus climbed towards their impossible dream and for half an hour walked over a confused, dazed and cowardly Madrid. But Madrid came back. Madrid always come back."

School football from May

Sports Reporter



After a six-year hiatus, the National School Football Championship is all set to return as

Pran Milk Dairy came forward to sponsor the championship, which begins next month with the participation of 56 schools from across the country.

The participating schools will be split into seven zones, with two groups in each zone, and play round-robin matches to decide the zonal champions, who will advance to the eight-team final round in Dhaka.

Despite the country-wide demands to begin grassroots and youth development following the national team's shock defeat to lightweights Bhutan and the dearth of quality footballers, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) still seemed negligent about the school tournament, which was originally scheduled for February last year.

But now, with financial help and goods from Pran Milk Dairy and Good Luck, the game's local

governing body has come forward to reinstate the competition from the first week of May. Apparently though, the BFF could have done this earlier as Tk 90 lakh was approved for the tournament under the FIFA Forward project.

Regardless of the generous grant at their disposal, the BFF only seem interested in involving district schools in the tournament even though the last edition in 2012 saw many upazila level schools participate.



BFF senior vice-president Abdus Salam Murshedy shakes hands with Pran Dairy Milk GM Rajib Ibne Islam (R) at the BFF House yesterday.

"If we can hold the school football regularly, the district league will get players from school tournaments and one day, those footballers will get places in the national football team," said school committee chairman Bijon Barua at a press conference yesterday.

The BFF did not reveal how much they already received from Pran Dairy Milk and Good Luck for this edition but did disclose that there is an estimated budget of Tk 60 lakh.

Refs also split on vital call

AGENCIES, Madrid



While they may never agree among themselves, one thing football fans seek from referees is consistency and it is clear that officials from around the world

cannot come to one conclusion on the penalty that sent Real Madrid to the Champions League semifinal.

Michael Oliver was the man entrusted with making the call on the pitch, but many of his professional colleagues don't agree with the Englishman's decision that Mehdi Benatia had fouled Lucas Vazquez in stoppage time during a high-octane Champions League quarterfinal between Real Madrid and Juventus.

"There is not enough contact to give a penalty," said former LaLiga referee Andujar Oliver. "[Mehdi] Benatia even touches the ball."

Eduardo Iturralde Gonzalez, who once gave a very controversial handball to help knock Armenia out of Euro 2012 qualifying, also felt that the contact was 'not enough' when speaking on La Ser.

However, the view across Spain is far from united as Ansuategui Roca backed Oliver's call.

It's a penalty," noted the 61-year-old. "Penalties in injury time that change the

result are always very controversial. There is a push. The defender jumps on the attacker and knocks him down."

Rafa Guerrero, who officiated at Euro 2004, also cited the nature of the incident as one that would always divide opinion.

"I can understand that the moment in which it occurs is painful for fans outside of Real Madrid, but the truth is that it is a penalty," he declared.

Elsewhere, Mexican referees Felipe Ramos Rizo and Gilberto Alcala Pineda also find themselves in disagreement, the latter stating that it wasn't a penalty.

"I don't see controversy," wrote 2002 World Cup official Rizo on Twitter. "Simply, the referee applied the rules. It was a well sanctioned penalty in favour of Real Madrid."

Another retired referee with his own controversial decisions to draw experience from, Graham Poll, gave credit to countryman Oliver for making the call in such a fierce environment.

"Oliver was courageous enough to award a penalty," Poll wrote in Daily Mail. "Surrounded and disgracefully harassed by half a dozen or so menacing Juventus players, led by their talismanic captain, Oliver stayed calm and correctly dismissed Gianluigi Buffon for his aggressive protests."

WHAT THEY SAID

He [Buffon] did not deserve that. But we cannot change it. It will not take away everything he has done, even if it's a shame to end his Champions League career this way."

-- ZINEDINE ZIDANE

When Gigi spoke about the referee I couldn't understand him, honestly. I don't understand why he talked about the previous fixture. In football you analyse the present. I understand it's a frustrating situation but I think he will think about what he said and possibly say different words in a few days.

-- ALESSANDRO DEL PIERO

We gave everything we had tonight and showed a great fight... But football is not always fair. We have to accept that. Nevertheless we can leave the Champions League with our heads held high. Proud to be part of this team. Forza Juve!

-- SAMI KHEDIRA

We have stood up and we have given everything to win. The penalty is very clear. It wasn't going to happen to us like it happened to Barcelona because we are Real Madrid... that was a good one, huh?

-- MARCELO

Segio Ramos said the penalty was 'claro' [clear] and I told him: "Not so claro, let's say grey".

-- MASSIMILIANO ALLEGRI.