

Manchester United overwhelm Roma

Contributed by Ashley Knott
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Manchester United's Cristiano Ronaldo put in a performance against one of Europe's big boys to finally silence the critics.

Alex Ferguson's men all but booked their place in the Semi Finals of this year's Champions League with a magnificent team display full of evidently maturing stars.

Recent visits to the Stadio Olimpico have been frequent for United and have been marred by rioting fans and overzealous policing, but this time it will be remembered, quite rightly, for the football.

United started the game largely in control, choosing neat and probing passes more suited to the European game, they kept a lacklustre Roma at bay who did not get a shot on target.

Captain for the night Rio Ferdinand was winning everything but had some cause for concern on the half hour as his central defensive partner Nemanja Vidic landed awkwardly on his knee and was replaced by John O'Shea who filled in admirably.

United wonder boy, Ronaldo had been lively but largely kept on his backside by the Roma defence. But his class soon told. On 39 minutes, Rooney slipped a ball out wide to Paul Scholes who chipped an inviting ball into the area and out of camera shot Ronaldo ran 100 yards to rise and power home a magnificent header, dazing himself in the process.

It really did prove he is the complete player, it was a truly superb headed goal, one that has to be seen to be fully appreciated.

With United taking the lead Roma also looked dazed and went in at half time with their heads down. It was the first 15 minutes of the 2nd half which really asked the questions of United's credentials for this year's prestigious European crown. Roma boss Luciano Spalletti had clearly rallied his troops who came out with much more purpose and dedicated more men forward.

They were causing problems down United's right hand side and a chance was coming. It fell to the last man they would've wanted it to, their veteran defender Christian Panucci who volleyed over unmarked from eight yards.

The home side's only shot on target came just a few moments later as a swinging corner was met from striker, Mirko Vucinic and forced a world class reaction save from United's keeper Edwin Van Der Sar, proving again the need for a goalkeeper's concentration to be spot on at this level, this was the only save the Dutchman would have to make.

United rode the storm and with Roma committing more and more men forward the gaps were increasing for United to exploit them on the break.

The second goal came on the 66th minute as Wes Brown's deep cross was met by Ji Sung Park who headed back across goal for Rooney to squeeze between two defenders and poke the ball home.

Things didn't improve for Roma as their heads again dropped and United in truth could have scored more with chances falling to Rooney and late substitute Carlos Tevez, perhaps telling of the strength in depth of the United squad.

The striking thing was the true quality all over from United, Ronaldo and Rooney were brilliant, Captain Marvel - Rio Ferdinand was awesome at the back, Ji Sung Park effective down the right and Paul Scholes solid in the middle, not forgetting the magnificent save from Van Der Sar.

It is going to take a special side to stop them. Manchester United versus Barcelona, this year's Champions League Semi Final? Almost certainly and what a mouth watering prospect that is.

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