

Champs League 1

It was the first meeting ever between Roma and Manchester United in the quarterfinals of the Champion's League at the Olympic Stadium in the eternal city. Roma came into the game boasting the stingiest defense in the tournament having only allowed four goals thus far and Manchester United was not too far behind them in that category. The game was also billed as a showcase for two of the world's best attacking players in a head-to-head matchup, Man U's Cristiano Ronaldo and Roma's Francesco Totti. Anyone who took a look at the draw was looking forward to this game.

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The line-ups themselves revealed the further sub-plots, two of the world's most tactical coaches. Sir Alex Ferguson had to deal with key injuries in his back line that saw Vidic and Neville out. Luciano Spalletti has created the most confusing and successful system of play since the Ajax system developed. It's very hard to tell where his guys are playing and he allows tremendous fluidity of movement to his top triangle: Totti, Mancini, and Taddei.

The Romans came out on a tear in front of their home crowd and put the Red Devils on their heels from the start. Totti, Wilhemsson, and Mancini were finding the ball at their feet often and you'd have to say that that control of the middle added to Paul Scholes frustration when he got his yellow in minute 25. He chopped Totti down ten minutes later for his second yellow and the red that came with it and the whole game changed.

Every time Cristiano Ronaldo touched the ball someone was in hard either to tackle or foul. Solksjaer and Rooney got no service. Giggs looked old and cranky.

Taddei got a good look from the top of the box, hit it well, and earned a corner in the 38th minute. Roma took the corner short and quick, Totti slipped Mancini in the box, whose hesitation move lost Solksjaer and allowed him to cut a cross into Taddei's path at the spot. Taddei didn't hit it well, but the deflection helped see the ball through and it was 1-0, 11-10, and looking dark for Man U.

At half time the Man U boyos battled the Italian polizei and got their heads cracked. The fans were informed they would have an extra 90 mins. of time in the stadium after the game as a result, so they could ponder their misery it appeared.

The start of the second half was a series of half-chances from both sides, Taddei and Ronaldo missing at either end. Ronaldo was starting to find space off of counters and get himself into the game. It was turning into a wide open and I have to say very polite game considering the circumstances.

In the 59th minute Totti wasted a free kick from the wing. Van Der Saar caught it and threw to C. Ronaldo, who wasted two defenders and went streaking into the Italian half. He managed to slip the ball to Solksjaer overlapping. This is something he wouldn't have executed last year and what makes him the world's most dangerous player this year. Solksjaer controlled and bent a nice early cross over the defense to find Rooner far post. Rooney could have tried to power a header from eight yards, and it looked like he would. But he chested coolly, let the defender by him, watched the ball bounce, and rifled a volley into the top corner to set the game on its ear. 1-1, 10-11, 2-1 in aggregate on the away goal and the math was all confused again. It was Rooney's first Champion's League goal since September of 2004 and it looked very like his recent goals in England. Cool, calm, collected.

Roma's pace and urgency faded some. They had been attacking in interpretive waves that made it very hard for the

makeshift Man U back four to find their guys. Now they were walking it up and playing in front of the defenders. Cristiano Ronaldo found his magic and kept finding space wide. He had no margin for error but he didn't seem to need any.

Spalletti subbed Vucinic for Wilhelmsson, and the Montenegrin striker had not been in two minutes before he and Totti combined for a beautiful run and he forced a good save from Van Der Saar with a low screamer. Ronaldo, back at the other end, made space with a double step-over and unleashed a rocket himself that forced Doni to dive and save. It had turned into a title fight.

Three minutes later and Mancini got the ball thirty yards out and cut inside. It seemed harmless enough, but he ripped a shot that knuckled at Van Der Saar's head. The Dutch keeper couldn't hold it and parried it straight back out. Vucinic pounced on it and buried it. 2-1 Romans and order restored.

There wasn't too much more to tell after that. Cristiano Ronaldo had one more sick run out of the back, found Giggs, who stunk up a cross when he should have taken on the last guy.

Perrotta had a couple half-chances for Roma. Saha came in for Giggs in the 76th minute. Man U was happy to stop the game up. Fletcher entered for Solksjaer to that purpose. The game ended 2-1 Roma, but the away goal makes the game a pretty even fight as play shifts back to Old Trafford.

If you look back to the opening game hype where Totti demanded Ferguson's respect, who eventually gave it with gentility, and then Totti called out Cristiano Ronaldo, who said he'd be there for the fight, it was really a pushed bet, a good game, and the next leg will be a humdinger.

Scholes is out for his red card. Perotta is out. Vidic and Neville are probably out. But let's see what happens.

In other news, surging Liverpool absolutely shelled PSV Eindhoven 3-0 on a set of great goals, Riise's blast from the top of the area the pick of the litter but the two headers from Gerrard and Crouch none too shabby.

That's the Champs League news for today. Tune in for next leg match reports.