

Perish St-Germain

Man United make history by coming back from 2-0 first-leg loss as Rashford's injury-time penalty, awarded after a lengthy video review, eliminates PSG from the Champions League

Mitch Phillips

Manchester United pulled off one of the greatest comebacks in Champions League history as Marcus Rashford's last-gasp VAR penalty sealed a 3-1 win at Paris St Germain on Wednesday and sent the English side into the quarter-finals on away goals.



Marcus Rashford (centre) celebrates after scoring the winner for Manchester United

The result came 20 years after Solskjaer wrote his name into the club's folklore by scoring the injury-time winner in the final victory over Bayern Munich to complete the treble of Champions League, Premier League and FA Cup.

Now back as caretaker manager after the dismissal of Jose Mourinho, the Norwegian has overseen a remarkable turnaround as United have won 14 of 17 games in all competitions and hauled themselves back into the top four battle in the Premier League.

Progress in Europe looked a step too far, though, after United were outplayed by PSG at Old Trafford and arrived in Paris short of a host of key players through suspension and injury.

However, with Alex Ferguson watching proudly from the stands, Solskjaer's team achieved what no other has managed in the competition—as well as making himself the shortest of odds to fill the biggest seat in English football on a permanent basis at the end of the season. “It's this club. It's what we do,

that's Man United, that's the Champions League, it's what it does,” said Solskjaer, who was managing Norwegian club Molde before getting the call to replace Mourinho in December.

“It's a typical Manchester United night. We had a game plan and the belief in the boys was what we hoped for. Everyone shares a huge pride.”

While United march on, PSG are left to wonder how, yet again, they have failed in Europe despite spending millions to put together a team that crushes all domestic opposition.

They had lost only two of their last 50 European games at the Parc des Princes but have still yet to reach even the semi-finals of the Champions League.

“The plan was to get the first goal,” Solskjaer said and he couldn't have

scripted it any better as Romelu Lukaku intercepted a weak pass from Thilo Kehrer, rounded Gianluigi Buffon and slid the ball into the empty net after two minutes.

NO SURPRISE

PSG dominated possession, though, and with United's defence all over the place, it was no surprise when Juan Bernat knocked in Kylian Mbappe's cross to level after 12 minutes.

The hosts continued to control the game but United took the advantage again with their next chance when Buffon failed to deal with a fierce, low Rashford shot and Lukaku poked home the rebound late in the first half.

PSG, with injured Brazil striker Neymar watching from the stands, had all the ball in the second half without ever looking very threatening and seemingly settling for their 3-2 aggregate lead, while United were disciplined and tireless in defence.

The visitors started to press forward in the final 10 minutes, with little joy until Diogo Dalot fired in a speculative long-range shot that was blocked by the leaping Presnel Kimpembe.

Nobody except Dalot seemed to notice the handball but the referee called for a review and pictures showed that the ball hit the back of Kimpembe's arm as he jumped. After a lengthy wait, the penalty was awarded.

England striker Rashford, who had never taken a penalty in a competitive game for United, kept his nerve during the long delay to smash it past Buffon.

“There is a huge gap between international and domestic cricket. That gap needs to be lessened,” Mandhana continued.

REUTERS

Did VAR Get Big Calls Right?

Debate rages on after Champions League drama

Neymar called the decision that led to Paris Saint-Germain being dumped out of the Champions League a “disgrace”, while elsewhere on Wednesday Roma were left raging – both clubs are out of Europe and both feel cheated by controversial VAR calls.

“It's a disgrace. They get four guys who don't understand football to watch a slow-motion replay in front of the TV,” the injured Neymar wrote on Instagram after watching PSG's shock elimination against Manchester United.

PSG were wobbling and trailing 2-1 at the Parc des Princes when Slovenian referee Damir Skomina gave a penalty after reviewing the images when Presnel Kimpembe blocked an apparently wayward Diogo Dalot shot with his arm.

Marcus Rashford duly scored the penalty that dumped PSG out on away goals. But should such a crucial decision have been given?

“I am a big supporter of VAR and I stay a big supporter of VAR,” said PSG coach Thomas Tuchel, before admitting: “It was a big decision, a cruel decision.”

In England, amid euphoria about the manner in which a depleted United side had gone through, even former players of the Old Trafford club said the penalty shouldn't have been given.

“I don't care what any referee tells me, that just isn't handball,” ex-United defender Rio Ferdinand said on BT Sport. Michael Owen, another ex-United player, said: “There'll be people who will say it's a penalty but for me it's not one in a million years.”

UEFA bowed to pressure by bringing forward the introduction of Video Assistant Referees into the Champions League from this season's knockout rounds.

However, at the very least there remain teething problems when it comes to the interpretation of handball – only last weekend changes were announced to the law from next season, saying it'll no longer have to be “deliberate”. In the meantime, there remained widespread disagreement over Wednesday's crucial calls.

“What we're finding with VAR is every ex-footballer thinks something is not a penalty but every referee thinks it is. There's a huge disconnect and that is the worrying thing,” added Owen.

“Last year we asked for VAR in the Champions League because we got screwed in the semi-final and tonight, they've got VAR and we still got robbed,” raged Roma president James Pallotta.

“Patrik Schick was clearly clipped in the box, VAR shows it, and nothing is given. I'm tired of this crap. I give up.” Back in Italy, newspaper headlines talked of “a disgrace”, and said Roma had been “robbed”. Contrast that with the view in Portugal, as Porto advanced to the quarter-finals. “Blessed be the VAR that detected a penalty that was barely visible on the field but was very real,” said sports daily A Bola.

How can VAR possibly be a satisfactory solution when interpretations of the rule continue to vary so wildly?

AP

Porto Beat Roma to Reach Quarters

Alex Telles scored a penalty in extra time to send Porto into the Champions League quarter-finals with a 3-1 victory over Roma on Wednesday, overturning a one-goal deficit from the first leg.

Telles converted the spot kick two minutes from time after Alessandro Florenzi had been penalized following a video review for pulling back Fernando.

That sent Porto through 4-3 on aggregate. In the Estadio do Dragao, Porto needed to fight back from a 2-1 loss in Rome and attacked from the start.

It took a deserved lead in the 26th minute when Moussa Marega rolled the ball across the box for Tiago Soares to tap in from close range.

That would've sent Porto through on the away goals rule but Roma levelled 11 minutes later after Diego Perotti was brought down by Eder Militao and Daniele De Rossi converted the resulting penalty, sending fellow veteran Iker Casillas the wrong way following a

stuttering run-up. De Rossi then limped off on the stroke of halftime with a muscular injury and was replaced by Lorenzo Pellegrini.

Porto had ended the first half on top, with Hector Herrera forcing a fine save from Robin Olsen, and it started the second period in the same vein. And the Portuguese champions retook the lead seven minutes after the break when Marega volleyed in Jesus Corona's cross from close range.

Roma had several chances to level and also had a penalty appeal of its own turned down in stoppages of extra time after video review showed Marega had not fouled Patrik Schick.

RESULT
Round of 16, 2nd leg
FC Porto 3
AS Roma 1
De Rossi (37 pen)
AGGREGATE: 4-3

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of IPL, six-seven matches then we can know how we can approach the second half of IPL.

“I am sure they will cooperate with each and every player because WC is a very important thing for us,” he added.

batsmen have looked the part so far. Ambati Rayudu, whose only significant knock was the 90 against New Zealand in the last away series, has also been inconsistent and can be replaced with Rahul.

Rayudu, who has retired from first-class cricket, has found it difficult and his primary problem has been not being able to rotate the strike.

If Dhawan is persisted with, the best way to give Rahul at least three games is to bring him at No. 3 and the skipper coming at No 4 in place of Rayudu.

PTI



For a Perfect Parting Gift

In Dhoni's probably last match in Ranchi, India look to seal the series against Australia

MS Dhoni's final homecoming forms a poignant subplot of a dominant Indian team's quest for an unassailable 3-0 lead in the third ODI against Australia in Ranchi today.

A 3-0 lead in the five-match series will be a perfect parting gift for Ranchi's favourite son, who, in all likelihood, will be seen wearing the India Blues for the last time at his home ground.

There has been a sense of déjà vu every time Dhoni has stepped onto the field in the ongoing series. It reminded many of Tendulkar's penultimate Test series against Australia in 2013, when the cheer from the stands would amplify with each passing match.

Something similar has been happening at every ground in this series, with the fans possibly beginning to realise that the legend may not be around when India next play at home.

Amidst the emotional side story, the Indian team is grappling with a few teething issues regarding its top-order batting, especially senior opener Shikhar Dhawan's poor form, which has affected India's starts of late.

Despite Dhawan having gone off the boil with only two half-centuries in the last 15 ODIs, India are unlikely to tinker with the winning combination of the first two openers.

KL Rahul, who is back in form, may have to wait till India clinch the series, but the team management could well try him out at the No. 3 position.

The two victories – by six wickets and eight runs – weren't exactly convincing but pulling off close matches under pressure will certainly add to the confidence.

The bowling has been superb in both games with Australia failing to reach 250 but save Virat Kohli, who stamped his class with another hundred on a slow Jamtha track, none of the other



MAIDEN OVERS

SNEHAL PRADHAN

Former India Cricketer

The opening game of the 2013 Women's World Cup hosted by India was shifted out of the Wankhede Stadium so that the Mumbai Cricket Association could play the Ranji Trophy final (featuring Sachin Tendulkar) there. Such a move is now unthinkable; Indian women's cricket, which often struggled for identity within the BCCI, is now entrenched in public consciousness, thanks to a stellar run to the final of the 2017 World Cup.

There is now new ground to break; more matches, equal pay, and most urgently, a Women's IPL. And there

Women's IPL is no longer a matter of good optics, or gender equality. It is necessary...

TO WIN GAMES

is a sense, as there was before, that a strong showing by the team in T20s will precipitate it. Mithali Raj said as much, ahead of the 2016 World T20.

But India don't need to win a T20 World Cup for women's IPL to start, that is a classic case of cart before horse. On the contrary, India need a women's IPL because they will not win a T20 World Cup without it.

India's semi-final appearance in the 2018 World T20 surprised many; they were not favourites to make the last four. But since then, India have lost their next six T20s in a row. They are now staring at their second consecutive whitewash in T20s. Besides Mandhana, and sometimes, Jemimah Rodrigues, no other batter has made

an impression, a fact that on closer inspection, is hardly surprising.

“If you look at the batters from domestic cricket, they face a very different bowling and fielding attack as compared to international cricket,” said Mandhana after Thursday's loss.

The BCCI women's domestic system grew to 36 teams this year, spread over five tiers, stretching India's talent thin. An increase in the number of games saw the inter-zonal scrapped; India's domestic players played more cricket, but not always of the best quality. The Challenger Trophy remained the highest tournament in the country, but it only provided each player four matches, at most.

“There is a huge gap between inter-

Smriti Mandhana bats during 2nd T20I against England



national and domestic cricket. That gap needs to be lessened,” Mandhana continued.

Typically, Mandhana put the onus of bridging that gap on herself and other international cricketers.

“If you look at our domestic scores in T20s, it is generally around 110, 120. I think we all need to go back, step up and strengthen our domestic circuit, take those scores to 140-150.”

Noble, but unrealistic. It is not Mandhana's job to raise the standard of domestic cricket, it is the BCCI's. And, like England have shown, a pre-

INDIA LOSE 2ND T20, SERIES
India suffered a five-wicket defeat to England in the second T20I, surrendering the series with a sixth straight loss in the shortest format.
SCORECARD
INDIA 111/8 (Mithali 20; Brunt 3/17, Smith 2/11) lost to ENGLAND 114/5 (Wyatt 64*, Winfield 29; Bisht 2/23) by 5 wickets

ALL ENGLAND CHAMPIONSHIP

Saina Nehwal, Kidambi Srikanth Advance to Quarterfinals

Saina Nehwal and Kidambi Srikanth had to toil hard to seal their places in the quarterfinals of the \$1 million All England Championships on Thursday. While Saina rallied her way to a 8-21, 21-16, 21-13 win over Denmark's Line Højmark Kjaersfeldt in a 51-minute contest, seventh seed Srikanth recovered from a mid-game slump to register a 21-17, 11-21, 21-12 win over Asian Games champion Jonatan Christie, his first victory over the Indonesian in the last three meetings. Eighth seeded Saina is expected to take on her nemesis and two-time champion Tai Tzu Ying of Chinese Taipei, an opponent who defeated her in last 12 outings, while the 26-year-old Srikanth will face world no 1 Kento Momota of Japan, who has beaten the Indian five times last season. In other matches, former Singapore Open champion B Sai Praneeth's fight lasted just 35 minutes as he went down 12-21, 17-21 to 24-year-old Ng Ka Long Angus in the second round. It was his third loss to the World no 15 from Hong Kong.

I never said nothing too negative about Nick, even if he took it more personally. I understand this part of the game and I think it's a good show for the game, but there's other stuff in my opinion he can do better. Everybody is free to do whatever they want, but at end of the day, in my opinion, he has an impact on the new generations. He's young, he's a famous player and in my opinion we need to show good values for the kids
RAFAEL NADAL on Nick Kyrgios

PUBLISHED FOR THE PROPRIETORS, Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd. by Rajeev Yadav at Times House, 7, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi-110 002, Phone: 011-23320000, Fax: 011-23323346 and printed by him at Times of India Press, 13 & 15/1, Site IV, Industrial Area, Sahibabad (UP).
REGD. OFFICE: Dr Dada Bhai Naoroji Road, Mumbai-400 001. **EDITOR (DELHI MARKET):** Javed Sayed (Responsible for selection of news under PRB Act). © Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of the publisher is prohibited. All rights reserved.
RNI NO. 26749/74 | MADE IN NEW DELHI | VOLUME 47 NO. 49
AIR CHARGE Raipur, Ahmedabad, Srinagar, Leh & via 2.00 | **PRICE IN NEPAL:** NRP 15.00 except Saturday & Sunday: NRP 25.00



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