

# Sporting Clube de Portugal - Manchester United FC MATCH PREVIEW

José Alvalade, Lisbon

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Group F - Matchday 1



Sporting Clube de Portugal coach Paulo Bento says his side will not be intimidated by Manchester United FC when they kick off their UEFA Champions League Group F campaign against the English champions on Wednesday.

## 'No fear'

Sporting have won their last two games in the Portuguese Liga and Bento believes the time is right to face United. "Sporting are doing well and we're going through a good period," he said. "We respect Manchester United but we don't fear them. Sporting will not be bystanders; I'm confident we'll battle to win. Maybe they'll control the game for spells but we'll try to take the initiative. We have to be very good collectively because they're very strong one-on-one, but United have their flaws and Sporting must take advantage."

## Sporting connection

Sporting finished bottom of their group-stage section last season despite beginning with a victory over FC Internazionale Milano. Expectations are high that they can improve on that, and with United having won just two of their last 14 away matches in the competition, Sporting could spring a surprise. To do so, they will have to get the better of old boys Cristiano Ronaldo and Nani, as well as United assistant coach Carlos Queiroz, who was in charge of the Lisbon outfit between 1994 and 1996. "Ronaldo has developed well at Manchester United and is now a better player," Bento said. "I think he deserves a good reception as does Nani. However, when the match starts they become opponents and not enemies. I hope they swap shirts with Sporting players afterwards, but that they don't collect any points here."

## Rooney return

Sporting are without Brazilians Pedro Silva and Derlei, who both have long-term knee injuries, while United are still missing Owen Hargreaves and Gary Neville, who failed to recover from thigh strains in time to travel. United manager Sir Alex Ferguson does have Wayne Rooney available, however, yet faces a dilemma up front with neither Rooney, Louis Saha or Carlos Tévez fully fit. With United still to score twice in a game this term, it is a cause for concern, although Rooney is raring to go. "I've been dying to play," said the 21-year-old, who broke a bone in his foot on the opening day of the campaign. "Hopefully, I can get a run-out on Wednesday and get back playing."

## Hargreaves blow

Sir Alex, whose charges won 1-0 at Everton FC on Saturday, is disappointed not to have Hargreaves ready but still anticipates a strong showing from his side – considering them better than the team that was knocked out in the semi-finals by AC Milan last April. "Hargreaves did not recover in time, which is a big blow because he is an experienced player in Europe," said Sir Alex, who is also shorn of Mikaël Silvestre, Darren Fletcher, John O'Shea, Ji-Sung Park and Ben Foster. "We were close last year. We do not have our full squad at the moment but we will have all our players in the second half of the season and I believe we can do even better."

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## Ronaldo enjoys Sporting homecoming



## MATCH PREVIEW

Cristiano Ronaldo is hoping for a warm reception when he steps out at the Estádio José Alvalade in the red of Manchester United FC in the UEFA Champions League.

### 'Second home'

Ronaldo joined United for €17.5m in August 2003 after coming up through the Sporting youth system and is looking forward to playing against the team where he made his name. "It's always good to come back to my second home," he said. "I have lots of friends and colleagues here. I like Sporting a lot but my primary colour now is red. To be honest I think the people like me here and the reception will be different than the last season in Estádio da Luz [when United played SL Benfica]. They are different people. I was booed but that's in the past. I think the reception will be good here."

### Emotional return

Ronaldo admits it will be an emotional return, but he is focused on one thing alone; going one better than last season when United reached the semi-finals. "I will have to wait until tomorrow to see what my feelings are but I have been expecting to play against Sporting, a club where I spent so much time, for a while now. I expect a normal match, very emotional, but I believe we can win it because we're better than Sporting in every respect."

### 'Great game'

The 22-year-old has fond memories of this fixture. The two teams met in a friendly here four years ago and the home side ran out 3-1 winners – with Ronaldo impressing in the green and white of Sporting. "I have watched that match many times," he said. "It was a great game for me. I felt extra motivation back then because it was the very first match in the new Estádio José Alvalade and I was facing the team I always dreamed of playing for."

### Dazzling

United manager Sir Alex Ferguson would make that dream a reality soon after and his decision to sign the winger has been vindicated many times over. Ronaldo, now 22, has gone on to score 50 goals in 194 appearances for United, his dazzling performances last season helping the club to their first Premier League title since 2003. "I think it's difficult for an 18-year-old boy to settle at a new club in a new country as well as Cristiano did," Sir Alex said. "Young boys have to grow to develop and it is the speed of his development was surprising. He is a more mature player now."