

# Manchester United FC - AS Roma

## MATCH PREVIEW

### Old Trafford, Manchester

### Tuesday 2 October 2007 - 20.45CET

### Group F - Matchday 2



Luciano Spalletti played down talk of revenge as he warned his AS Roma players to keep cool heads on their return to Old Trafford, the scene of their heaviest defeat in Europe.

#### **Focus needed**

Roma's visit to Manchester United FC for the sides' Group F encounter offers an early opportunity to exorcise the ghosts of last April's 7-1 UEFA Champions League quarter-final humbling. Yet while Spalletti spoke of a determination to "show that it was just a blip in our development and draw a line under it", he also said it was vital not to get carried away by a desire to make amends.

#### **'Remember what we suffered'**

"If we talk about a vendetta, this could mean a lack of calm and balance in our play and at this level, it is not something we can do. We have to remember what we suffered last time, where we went wrong and go out in the kind of condition that will enable us to play against a team as strong as Manchester United."

#### **Elusive form**

United manager Sir Alex Ferguson acknowledged that the reunion represented "a big occasion" for Roma and was quick to rule out a repeat performance from his team. "It was a one-off, it won't happen again – European football is just not that way nowadays. It was an exceptional performance on the night." A reprise seems particularly far-fetched given United's present struggle for goals, Sir Alex himself remarking in his programme notes how Roma's return was a "reminder of the elusive form that we are still searching for". The English champions may sit second in the Premier League but only bottom club Derby County FC have scored fewer than their seven goals in eight outings.

#### **Defensive doubts**

Sir Alex, who will likely persist with Wayne Rooney and Carlos Tévez in attack, said he was confident his forwards would come good. "We are using Wayne as the more advanced player and Carlos dropping in. They've got a bit of understanding," he said, adding: "They're good players and the ability they've got will soon gel." Yet given United's present dependence on their defence – Saturday's victory at Birmingham City FC was their sixth 1-0 in eight games – it will concern the United manager that two of his back four, Nemanja Vidić and Wes Brown, are "doubts" having missed training on the eve of the match because of knocks. The loss of the in-form Vidić would be a notable setback, particularly with goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar already sidelined by a damaged toe, opening the door for a first European start for Tomasz Kuszczak.

#### **Reaction**

Roma landed in Manchester without Christian Panucci, who has a back problem, and with Spalletti expected to recall the fit-again Alberto Aquilani in midfield in place of David Pizarro. Like United, Roma collected three points on Matchday 1 but they have not won in three outings since and endured a first loss of the campaign on Saturday, 4-1 at home to FC Internazionale Milano. "We have to put these results behind us and react," said Spalletti. It is their reaction to another result that holds the real fascination.



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## **Frustration enhances Rooney desire**

Wayne Rooney scored four times against Italian opposition last season but it was the memory of Manchester United FC's ultimate failure, rather than famous home victories against AS Roma and AC Milan, that occupied his mind as he looked forward to Roma's return to Old Trafford.

### **'Desperate to win'**

The England forward said at the pre-match press conference that the frustration of United's UEFA Champions League semi-final loss to Milan had only enhanced his desire for European success. "I know one thing – I am desperate to win the Champions League having got so close last year," he said. "We didn't play the way we can and it cost us in the away leg against Milan. Hopefully we can get to the final this year and try to win it from there."

### **Yet to score**

According to Rooney, United are better equipped for a strong finish this term – "that little bit more experience we have brought in will add that extra freshness towards the end of the season" – but the most pertinent question right now concerns United's start to the campaign. They have recorded just nine goals in eleven games with Rooney himself yet to score after breaking a metatarsal in their opening Premier League fixture.

### **Different role**

"I've played three games now and hopefully I can start scoring again and help the team win games," said Rooney, who as well as recovering sharpness, is also getting used to his new partnership with Carlos Tévez. "Obviously when I play with Carlos it's a different role for myself," he explained. "I try and play on the shoulder a lot more and let him be the link between the midfield and the forwards which, of course, I am happy to do." While some have disputed his suitability as the attacking spearhead, Rooney argued: "Towards the end of last season, I was playing on the shoulder and got a few goals from doing that."

### **'Fired up'**

He will be hoping for more of the same against Roma but knows the Italian side will be "fired up" to avenge April's 7-1 humbling at Old Trafford. Asked how he would feel were he in the shoes of the Roma players, the 21-year-old's face broke out into a grin. "I'd be delighted as soon as I saw the draw," he said. "If it was me I'd be sitting there rubbing my hands and wouldn't be able to wait for the game."

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## **Perrotta fulfills father's dream**

Whatever the outcome of AS Roma's rematch with Manchester United FC, at least one member of the Italian club's travelling entourage is guaranteed a night to remember.

### **Dream come true**

For Simone Perrotta's father Francesco, the sight of his son running out at Old Trafford will be a dream come true, as the Roma midfielder explained on the eve of the game. Perrotta - who spent the first six years of his life in Ashton-under-Lyme, a short distance from Manchester – said: "My father was a big fan of this club and came to watch matches at this stadium for more than 20 years. It was a great wish of his to see his son play here. Last year I couldn't do that, tomorrow night I am delighted to be able to play here and to make him very happy as well."

### **Destiny**

While fate has taken the Perrotta family back to the corner of England they once called home, it has also, in the words of the Roma No20, afforded Luciano Spalletti's team a sooner-than-expected opportunity to make amends for their 7-1 rout at Old Trafford in last season's UEFA Champions League quarter-finals. Perrotta, who was suspended from that match, said: "We have to hope it will be different. It is a different match and it is not a question of us getting revenge - what we want to show more than anything else is there are not six goals between the teams. After the defeat last time, we said there weren't six goals and destiny has given us the chance to show that."

### **'Good performances'**

Roma travelled to Manchester on the back of three matches without victory, a promising sequence of four straight wins halted by draws with Juventus and ACF Fiorentina and Saturday's 4-1 home defeat against FC Internazionale Milano. Perrotta defended their efforts, saying: "Perhaps with the exception of the second half against Inter we've put in good performances and deserved to win. The whole team feel that we've played well and on occasions been a bit unfortunate." The immediate hope is for a change of fortune on English soil, where the Giallorossi have won just once in nine visits. Recalling April's meltdown in Manchester, he said: "It was a combination of a whole set of circumstances that went against us last time around. Tomorrow is a different match, with different players on each team - I imagine it will be a great match between two teams with an attacking approach."