

# Manchester City 3 Salzburg 0



BEST FOOT FORWARD ... Mario Balotelli slots his second

MARIO BALOTELLI is clearly going to give Roberto Mancini joy and frustration in equal measure.

The Manchester City boss claims he knows how to handle the controversial 20-year-old striker. Having said that, since he joined City Balotelli has:

- Driven into a women's prison in Italy simply because the door was open and he wanted a look around.

- Dined with the chief executive of AC Milan and stated his desire to play alongside their main striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

- Scored a dazzling double.

- Got himself sent off in the same game against West Brom.

Then, last night, he produced more entries for the plus and minus column. Two goals to make it five in six appearances, and one outrageous dive.

Mancini persuaded owner Sheikh Mansour to hand Inter Milan £23million for Balotelli. And he is more than happy to focus on the striker's plus points.

He said: "Mario can play better. He scored the goals and I am happy but he can do more.

"He didn't smile or celebrate, but he's always like this. I think it's because it's normal for him to score - he does it every day.

"Maybe if he'd been fit for the season he could have got us an extra couple of points."

Mancini knew from his time as Inter boss how good Balotelli was as he saw the young talent develop. The City coaching staff believe he is a genius and a truly naturally gifted goalscorer.

City fans have only had a few glimpses to make their minds up due to an early ankle injury and that sending-off at West Brom.

But to see his opening goal on 19 minutes in this Europa League tie against Salzburg backs up the talk the Eastland outfit have something special.

Pablo Zabaleta whipped a cross into the centre of the area and Balotelli stretched out a leg to give him an advantage over his marker Martin Hinteregger. He connected to send a volley flying past Gerhard Tremmel.

Watch it again and you will see that there is hardly any effort in the attempt yet the ball flies off his boot into the net.

Before that, we saw the pace that can leave opponents trailing. After just five minutes Balotelli appeared to be dawdling before cutting inside from the left with an electrifying burst, only to fire just over.

He then switched wings, flew into the box but shot rather than crossed to the unmarked Jo and the keeper saved.

Quite what Jo would have done with it had it fallen to him, however, is anyone's guess.

Just before the break Balotelli was at it again latching on to a through ball from James Milner.

He looped the ball over the keeper only for it to start going wide. Still he had the presence of mind to catch up with it and backheel it back into play. That attempted chip and another soon after showed a player not content with doing things simply.

He wants to make football spectacular. Now for the big minus point which came after 32 minutes. Balotelli looked to be away from Joaquin Boghossian.

But rather than go on and shoot he tried to con the ref by claiming the Salzburg player had clipped him and went down.

But he redeemed himself on 65 minutes. Adam Johnson found Patrick Vieira who angled the ball across for Balotelli to poke in.

His virtuoso performance helped City qualify for the next stage of this competition with a game to spare - and was rounded off with the goal of the night from Johnson.

He cut in, beat three players before firing home on 78 minutes. This just after he had left the field to relieve himself.

As Mancini tactfully put it: "You might call it a bathroom break. They say in Italy better in the bathroom than on the pitch."

Indeed. And there were none better on the pitch than Johnson and the brilliant Balotelli.

### **SUN STAR MAN - MARIO BALOTELLI (MAN CITY)**

**Man City:** Given 6, Boateng 6, Toure 7 (Richards 5), Lescott 6, Zabaleta 7, Wright-Phillips 7, Vieira 6, Milner 7, A Johnson 7, Balotelli 8 (Adebayor 5), Jo 6. **Subs Not Used:** Hart, Kolarov, Barry, Silva, De Jong.

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