

Dublin Super Cup

Mario Balotelli back in favour as Manchester City rout Internazionale

- Internazionale 0-3 Manchester City

David Hytner at Aviva Stadium
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Mario Balotelli of Manchester City skips past Internazionale's Sulley Muntari during his side's Dublin Super Cup win. Photograph: Henry Browne/Action Images

Roberto Mancini has begun to feel the benefits of having a £38m striker in his ranks. And Sergio Agüero did not even play at Dublin's Aviva Stadium, as Manchester City geared up for next Sunday's Community Shield showpiece against their neighbours United with a performance to match an eye-catching result.

With Agüero watching from the stands, the onus was on Mario Balotelli and Edin Dzeko to respond and they duly did, each striker adding the gloss of a goal to fine personal displays.

For Balotelli it felt a little like redemption. Last Sunday in Los Angeles, against the Galaxy, he had been substituted in disgrace after his attempted back-heeled finish went horribly wrong. Mancini's rollicking was public. Balotelli will forever resemble a maverick but, playing off the left flank against his former club, there was plenty to admire about his first-half showing, in which City were collectively superior to Internazionale.

The vaunted Italian team started to play only after an hour or so, when they were 2-0 down, and forced Joe Hart in the City goal into a pair of reflex saves. But City had the last word when Shaun Wright-Phillips crossed for his fellow substitute Adam Johnson to roll home from close range. On the corresponding weekend last year Inter defeated City 3-0 in Baltimore. Mancini's team made the statement this time.

"Mario played well," said Mancini, "and, if he plays with the same concentration as he did today, then we will be happy. I hope he has learned from what happened last week ... I think he has to but I don't really know. I hope he will understand. What I do know is that, if he plays like today, he can be one of the best players."

The crowd had been treated to a glimpse of Agüero before the game, as he worked alone through some fitness drills by the touchline but Mancini, despite pressure from the event organisers, had decided that the Argentinian, who signed last Thursday, was not ready for his City bow. It is worth noting that Agüero's exertions for his country at the Copa América ended on 16 July. He started two of Argentina's ties at the tournament and came on as a substitute once, scoring three goals.

With Carlos Tevez not due back in Manchester until Thursday after his performances at the Copa América – he played marginally more minutes than Agüero but fared less well, missing the decisive penalty in Argentina's quarter-final shoot-out defeat by Uruguay – the stage was cleared for City's other offensive talents.

David Silva, darting from the right, was a menace to Inter and a delight for the crowd with his impish trickery and vision while Dzeko, the centre-forward, looked sharper than he had done in his previous pre-season outings. He had a goal harshly disallowed for offside on 18 minutes and he watched a drive beaten away by Julio Cesar but he got his reward early in the second half. Silva's touch and through-ball took out three Inter players and Dzeko finished coolly. Silva enjoyed a tremendous ovation when he was substituted late on and he deservedly took the sponsor's man-of-match award and plaudits from Mancini.

The show-stealer, though, was Balotelli. It is hard to take one's eyes off the young Italian, and not only because he offers the impression that he could explode at any moment. Whisper it but he also looked to be enjoying himself. There were embraces for

many of his former Inter team-mates before the kick-off, together with a playful clip around the ear for Julio Cesar and, when the goalkeeper denied him with an excellent save on 45 minutes, Balotelli, with a smile, stuck his studs up at him.

Bad Mario might have brought them crashing down but this was not one of those days. From Aleksandar Kolarov's ensuing outswinging corner, Balotelli, from a standing start between two defenders, simply sent a firm header fizzing home. Walking down the tunnel at half-time, he offered to swap shirts with Samuel Eto'o.

Balotelli had the ball in the net on two minutes, only to be correctly pulled back for offside, and he went close on three further occasions before his goal; Julio Cesar denied him brilliantly at point-blank range on 11 minutes. He was less prominent in the second half and there was one break when, with Dzeko and Silva in support, he ought to have gone for goal instead of pulling back for Silva. Dzeko was not happy.

But City could be. When Mancini substituted Balotelli, there was the trace of a smile on the manager's lips as he discussed, in Italian, why he felt the player should have taken a shot. What a difference a week makes.

Manchester City Hart, Richards, Kompany, Lescott, Kolarov (Rekik 88), de Jong, Milner (A Johnson 80), Y Touré (Suarez 89), Silva (Barry 80), Dzeko, Balotelli (Wright-Phillips 75). **Substitutes not used** Taylor, Boyata, McGovern, Guidetti, Roman, Scapuzzi, Razak.

Internazionale Soares, Ranocchia, Chivu, Caldirola, Bianchetti, Stankovic (McDonald 75), Sneijder (Santon 75), Crisetig (Muntari 26), Pandev (Castaños 54) Alvarez (Pazinni 64), Eto'o. **Substitutes not used** Catellazzi, McDonald, Samuel, Fandoni, Natilno, Muntari, Orlandoni.

Referee D McKeon.