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Man United 1 Man City 6: Rocket man Mario fires derby double to humiliate 10-man Reds

By MATT LAWTON

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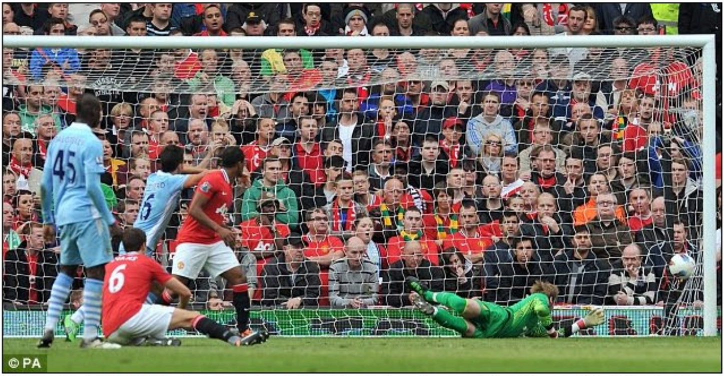
Now that, Mario Balotelli would no doubt agree, is what you call a display - Manchester City not just winning this astonishing derby but doing so by a tennis score.

It is not game, set and match. Not in October and not when this, remember, is a Manchester United side who know a thing or two about winning title races.

But this felt like a momentous result, something that might well take on greater significance as time passes, and Sir Alex Ferguson was in no mood to argue.

'It was a bad one,' said United's manager. 'I can't believe it.'

Lighting the fuse: Mario Balotelli strikes the ball towards the bottom corner of United's goal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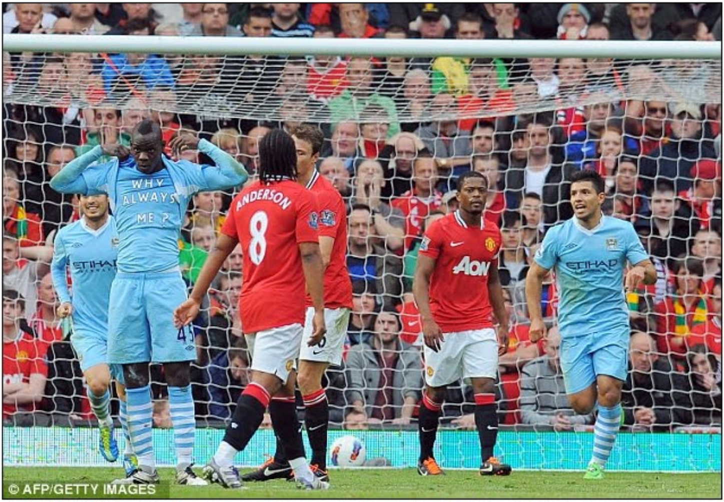
No stopping that: United goalkeeper David De Gea attempts to get across but can't prevent the shot going in



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Read all about it: Balotelli (left) celebrates by revealing a t-shirt that read 'why always me?'

WHY
ALWAYS
ME
KUN AGÜERO
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ETIHAD

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Smells like team spirit: The Italian striker's City team-mates mob him after his opening goal

Nobody here at Old Trafford could, the three goals in those final few minutes turning what was already a hugely impressive victory into the heaviest defeat Ferguson has suffered in his 25 years in charge of United and creating a host of other landmarks.

A goal from Balotelli did arrive with a sense of inevitability. Having been quite the noisy neighbour and incurred the wrath of the Cheshire Fire Service in the early hours of Saturday morning with his bathroom pyrotechnic show, there were bound to be more fireworks here, and the Italian striker duly delivered with a brilliant 22nd-minute finish.

He even had a T-shirt prepared in advance for the moment.

'Why always me?' came the mischievous message from the man who, let's face it, is as mad as a Catherine wheel. He received a booking for his stunt.

That the next five City goals came only after the dismissal of Jonny Evans at the start of the second half should not be ignored.

'The red card killed us,' said Ferguson, and the fact United were very much on top prior to Balotelli's opening goal will also offer him encouragement.

MATCH FACTS

Manchester United: De Gea, Smalling, Ferdinand, Evans, Evra, Nani (Hernandez 65), Fletcher, Anderson (Jones 66), Young, Rooney, Welbeck.

Substitutes: Lindegaard, Berbatov, Park, Fabio Da Silva, Valencia.

Booked: Evra, Anderson, Smalling, Welbeck

Sent off: Evans

Goals: Fletcher 81

Manchester City: Hart, Richards, Kompany, Lescott, Clichy, Toure Yaya, Barry, Milner (Kolarov 89), Silva, Balotelli (Dzeko 70), Aguero.

Substitutes: Pantilimon, Zabaleta, Nasri, Toure, De Jong.

Goals: Balotelli 22, 60, Aguero 68, Dzeko 90, 90+3, Silva 90+1

Booked: Kompany, Balotelli, Richards

Referee: Mark Clattenburg (Tyne & Wear)

Attendance: 75,487

FLETCHER
24

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Seeing red: United defender Jonny Evans (right) is sent off by Mark Clattenburg after fouling Balotelli

EVRA
3
FERDINAND
5
18

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Protest: United players surround referee Clattenburg after he sent off Evans in the second half

But there were so many aspects of this absorbing clash that will leave Ferguson feeling uncomfortable, and not just because City are now so much more than a local nuisance.

'They call us noisy neighbours,' said City full back Micah Richards. 'Well, here we are!'

Here they are indeed, with players who simply outclassed United in what many feel was the biggest Manchester derby in history; the first meeting between the two teams when they were first and second in the Premier League.

David Silva was the best player on the pitch, demonstrating why Roberto Mancini considers him among the finest in the world. But there were others who excelled. Richards and James Milner were marvellous, as were Balotelli, Joleon Lescott and Vincent Kompany.

Super Mario: Balotelli (right) pops up at the far post to score City's second goal

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Three is the magic number: Sergio Aguero (left) followed Balotelli onto the scoresheet for the third goal

© Getty Images

Having a ball: Argentina striker Aguero celebrates his strike in front of a stunned Old Trafford crowd

Silva exposed a weakness in United we have seen before, most memorably in those two Champions League final meetings against Barcelona; a crucial lack of quality in central midfield and someone capable of providing proper protection to the back four against a player of Silva's kind.

Not for the first time, Darren Fletcher and Anderson struggled in the face of strength, power and finesse superior to their own. Their passing was poor, as was their discipline in dealing with the threat being posed by City's forwards. Ferguson condemned it as a lack of 'common sense'.

In defence, too, United struggled. While Lescott and Kompany were terrific for City, repelling United's often Wayne Rooney-inspired attacks with courage and commitment, Rio Ferdinand looked out of sorts and Evans out of his depth.

As Ferguson said, there were a number of 'embarrassed' players in his dressing room and his centre halves would have been among them.

© Reuters

Kneesy does it: Edin Dzeko (left) bundles in his side's fourth goal from close range

© Getty Images

Still scoring: Spanish midfielder Silva slots his finish under De Gea (not seen) in injury time

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Silva service: David Silva celebrates after scoring City's fifth goal to cap another outstanding show

Mancini's decision to leave Samir Nasri on the bench and start instead with Milner looked like a cautious one. Apparently it was made with Rooney's liking for drifting out wide to the left in mind. But it turned out to be a tactical masterstroke, the Englishman performing an important role in the first three goals.

Initially, it seemed unlikely he would get too many chances to make such an impression. United dominated possession for the first 20 minutes with Ashley Young and Nani both bright.
Then came that opening goal - and what a wonderful one it was, starting from a throw-in from Milner and ending with a superb first-time shot from Balotelli via three perfectly executed passes from Yaya Toure, Silva and Milner.

While there was little David de Gea could have done to stop Balotelli's shot squeezing between him and his left-hand post, United players should have picked up Silva, spotted Milner's run and closed down Balotelli.

United did then test City goalkeeper Joe Hart with a couple of decent efforts and Evans should have scored when Rooney found him with a neat drag-back.

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That does it: Dzeko rounds off the scoring with a cool finish for City's sixth goal

ETIHAD AIRWAYS
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Six appeal: Dzeko shows the crowd the score and defender Aleksandar Kolarov celebrates

But, when Silva put Balotelli through in the 47th minute and Evans responded by dragging the Italian down recklessly, United found themselves a man down and in serious trouble - particularly as they were forced to switch Fletcher to right back and Rooney into midfield behind Danny Welbeck.

A second goal duly arrived on the hour, with Balotelli again the scorer - this time from close range - and the build-up play again sensational. Silva and Richards started the move before a delightful one-two between Silva and Milner ended with Milner crossing to his colleague at the far post.
Nine minutes later, Milner provided the final ball for Richards to cross for Sergio Aguero to net City's third, enabling Mancini to start making changes. Off went Balotelli for Edin Dzeko, as did Aguero for Nasri.

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Let's all do the Poznan: City fans celebrate their stunning win at the home of their rivals

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Plenty to ponder: Sir Alex Ferguson was left to reflect on a devastating defeat

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Game for a laugh: City manager Roberto Mancini enjoys his side's thrilling performance

United responded with a nice goal from Fletcher in the 81st minute as he played a one-two with Javier Hernandez before an excellent right-foot finish.

But then, as the match reached the 90th minute, came the complete collapse.

Dzeko's first goal wasn't exactly a classic, Lescott directing Gareth Barry's flick-on against the towering striker before the ball's momentum did the rest.

No sooner had the game restarted, seemingly, than Silva was scoring, accelerating on to a ball from Dzeko before guiding his shot through the legs of the advancing De Gea.
But Silva saved his best until last. The ball that split the United defence and invited Dzeko to make it six was just magical.

'This city is ours,' cried City's fans. After this and City scoring 33 goals in just nine league games, United will fear the country could soon be too.

CLICHY
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AON

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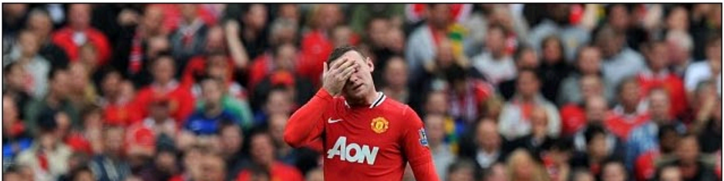
Outnumbered: Wayne Rooney is crowded out by the City defence at Old Trafford

© Getty Images

At full stretch: United midfielder Darren Fletcher is challenged by Micah Richards



I can't watch: Wayne Rooney reflects on a humiliating afternoon for the reigning Premier League champions

IN FOCUS

James Milner

City boss Roberto Mancini made a big call in leaving out Samir Nasri. How ironic that the 'defensive' Milner was instrumental in setting up City's first three goals.

Jonny Evans

With the score at 1-0, Evans's air shot when Wayne Rooney served him a chance on a plate in the first half was almost as crucial as his subsequent sending-off.