

Sports

Telles penalty edges Porto past Roma in extra time

PORTO: Alex Telles converted a VAR-awarded penalty deep into extra time as Porto defeated Roma 3-1 on Wednesday to reach the Champions League quarter-finals following a tense 4-3 win on aggregate. Francisco Soares nudged Porto ahead with a simple tap-in on 26 minutes, but Daniele De Rossi equalised from the spot before half-time after Eder Militao chopped down Diego Perotti.

Moussa Marega restored the lead on the night for Porto early in the second half to level the tie as he struck in his sixth successive appearance in Europe. An additional half-hour was required to settle an encounter that looked to be heading for a shootout before Telles tucked home from the spot on 117 minutes after a tug on Fernando by Alessandro Florenzi was spotted upon review.

"It was not just me that scored the penalty, it was the whole team. The Dragao, the full stadium, made me feel at ease. It was a very good energy," said Telles. "We've got to accept it, even if the way it happened is terrible to accept." Roma captain De Rossi told Sky Sport Italia. Porto coach Sergio Conceicao, a former player at Roma's city rivals Lazio, had expressed the need for patience as his side set about attempting to retrieve a 2-1 deficit.

Yet they threatened twice inside the opening 10 minutes at the Estadio do Dragao as Jesus Corona hammered a volley narrowly over, with Telles lashing into the side-netting from a tough angle. Corona again tried his luck from range, his shot again dipping over the top, and the Mexico winger was once more involved as

Soares poked in the opening goal.

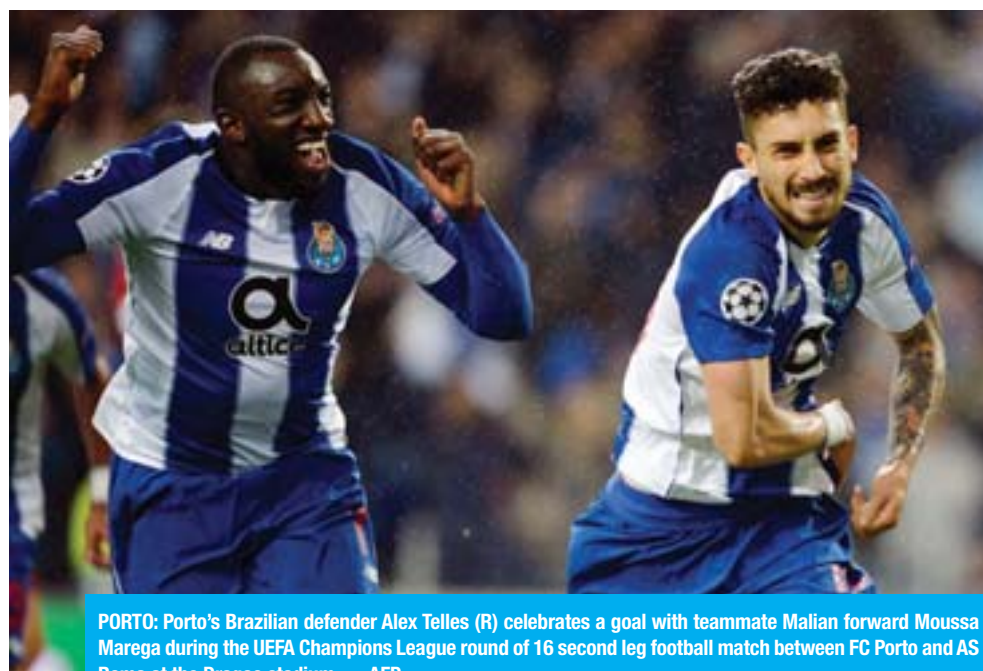
Marega, back in the side after missing the first leg with a thigh injury, pinched the ball from Kostas Manolas and was then picked out by Corona on the overlap to square for Soares to slot home. Porto's lead lasted barely 10 minutes as Militao lunged in on Argentine Perotti, with De Rossi coolly rolling his penalty past three-time Champions League winner Iker Casillas.

Marega catches Messi

Porto captain Hector Herrera, who was booked and will miss the quarter-final first leg, tested Robin Olsen with a bending effort just before the break when Roma lost skipper De Rossi following a crunching tackle by Danilo. Soares should have netted a second when his downward header skipped off the ground and flashed over the bar, while Olsen produced a superb fingertip save to claw out a Marega strike.

Olsen was powerless to stop France-born Mali international moments later though as Marega timed his run perfectly to volley Corona's curling cross into the roof of the net. Marega is now level with Lionel Messi and Dusan Tadic with six goals in this season's tournament — and trails only Robert Lewandowski (eight). Pepe and Edin Dzeko were both booked following a theatrical clash near midfield, a caution that also rules the Portuguese defender out of his side's next match in the competition.

A dreadful Pepe error presented Perotti with an opportunity he failed to exploit as Roma searched for a late goal, while Otavio tested



PORTO: Porto's Brazilian defender Alex Telles (R) celebrates a goal with teammate Malian forward Moussa Marega during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 second leg football match between FC Porto and AS Roma at the Dragao stadium. — AFP

Olsen from distance towards the end of the 90 minutes. Marega went agonisingly close to scoring again early in extra time, while Dzeko dinked the ball over Casillas only for Pepe to race back and clear off the line in desperation.

With penalties seemingly on the horizon, Porto grabbed a dramatic winner after Turkish referee Cuneyt Cakir pointed to the spot upon

reviewing an incident in which Florenzi hauled back Fernando as the substitute stretched to reach a driven low cross. Telles sent Olsen the wrong way to fire Porto into their first quarter-final since 2014-15, although the hosts faced an anxious wait after Patrik Schick tumbled to the ground in the area before Cakir ruled there was no foul. — AFP

Did VAR get it right? Debate rages on after UCL drama

PARIS: Neymar called the decision that led to Paris Saint-Germain being dumped out of the Champions League a "disgrace", while elsewhere on Wednesday Roma were left raging — both clubs are out of Europe and both feel cheated by controversial VAR calls.

"It's a disgrace. They get four guys who don't understand football to watch a slow-motion replay in front of the TV," the injured Neymar wrote on Instagram after watching PSG's shock elimination against Manchester United. PSG were wobbling and trailing 2-1 at the Parc des Princes when Slovenian referee Damir Skomina gave a penalty after reviewing the images when Presnel Kimpembe blocked an apparently wayward Diogo Dalot shot with his arm. Marcus Rashford duly scored the penalty that dumped PSG out on away goals. But should such a crucial decision have been given? "I am a big supporter of VAR and I stay a big supporter of VAR," said PSG coach Thomas Tuchel, before admitting: "It was a big decision, a cruel decision."

In England, amid euphoria about the manner in which a depleted United side had gone through, even former players of the Old Trafford club said the penalty should not have been given. "I don't care what any referee tells me, that just isn't handball," ex-United defender Rio Ferdinand said on BT Sport. "I love it that it is handball but I don't get it. The law is wrong."

On the same channel, Michael Owen, another ex-United player, said: "I know there'll be people who will say it's a penalty but for me it's not one in a million years." UEFA bowed to pres-

sure by bringing forward the introduction of Video Assistant Referees into the Champions League from this season's knockout rounds. Back in September, they had announced it would come in from next season, but it was widely a success at the World Cup and is now used in many domestic leagues, including the top flights in Spain, Italy, Germany and France. However, at the very least there remain teething problems when it comes to the interpretation of handball — only last weekend changes were announced to the law from next season, saying it will no longer have to be "deliberate".

Roma denounce 'robbery'

In the meantime, there remained widespread disagreement over Wednesday's crucial calls. "What we're finding with VAR is every ex-footballer thinks something is not a penalty but every referee thinks it is. There's a huge disconnect and that is the worrying thing," added Owen. A year ago, Gianluigi Buffon was in goal for Juventus when they were knocked out by Real Madrid after a debatable, late penalty.

The Italians demanded the introduction of VAR on the back of that, but Buffon, now at PSG, will wish it had not been in place as he was beaten by Rashford's kick. Meanwhile, Roma were left with the same bitter taste as they went out in extra time to Porto, losing 3-1 on the night, and 4-3 on aggregate. The tie hinged on a decision by Turkish referee Cuneyt Cakir to point to the spot late in extra time upon reviewing an incident in which Alessandro Florenzi hauled back the Porto player Fernando.

Alex Telles converted the spot-kick, and Roma were then denied a penalty at the other end following a review, after Patrik Schick tumbled to the ground. "Last year we asked for VAR in the Champions League because we got screwed in the semi-final and tonight, they've got VAR and we still get robbed," raged Roma president James Pallotta. "Patrik Schick was clearly clipped in the box, VAR shows it, and nothing is given. I'm tired of this crap. I give up." —AFP

Tense Juve prepare for Atletico battle with Udinese warm up

MILAN: Tensions are running high in Turin as Juventus get ready to take on lowly Udinese in Serie A on Friday just days ahead of their must-win Champions League clash against Atletico Madrid. Massimiliano Allegri's unbeaten champions put one hand on an eighth consecutive Serie A title last weekend by seeing off Scudetto rivals Napoli 2-1 to open up a huge 16-point lead in the Italian league.

But the pressure is on the Juventus coach amid reports of a falling out with club chairman Andrea Agnelli after the club's first-leg 2-0 defeat in Spain two weeks ago. "We have to win to prepare for the match on Tuesday, regardless of the advantage that we have (in the league)," Allegri told a pre-match press conference yesterday. "We still need six victories (to win the title). "The Madrid match has left us with motivation that has helped us in these 15 days. We will be ready on Tuesday and we will have a great game."

The Juventus coach confirmed he had also met with Agnelli to discuss his future. "I met with the chairman yesterday for dinner, we are two intelligent people who have built something important in these five years together," said Allegri. "We decided to talk about the renewal of the contract after the season." —AFP