



TOUGH TESTS: Javier Hernandez of Manchester United shoots on Manuel Neuer of Schalke (R) during the UEFA Champions League semifinal first leg match between FC Schalke 04 and Manchester United. CHRISTOF KOEPEL/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES



ALMOST SAVED SCHALKE: Manuel Neuer of Schalke (C) saves the ball against Nemanja Vidic of Manchester United (L) and Chicharito of Manchester United (2R) during the UEFA Champions League semi final first leg match between FC Schalke 04 and Manchester United. CHRISTOF KOEPEL/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

Wembley Beckons for Manchester United After Impressive Win Away to Schalke

By DENIS CHARLTON
Epoch Times Staff

Manchester United has defeated FC Schalke 04 0-2 away from home in the first leg of their European Champions League semifinal, and the English club now looks odds-on favorites to go through to the final at Wembley, the scene of their first triumph in the competition in 1968.

Schalke would have been encouraged by United's indifferent record against German opposition at this stage of the competition, the English club having lost to Bayer Leverkusen in 2002 and put out by Bayern in last year's campaign on the away-goals rule.

In fact the Germans started brightly and Edwin van der Sar, though not particularly troubled, had a couple of early touches before the game was two minutes old. Both van der Sar and Ryan Giggs were playing their 141st match in Europe.

Schalke central defender Benedikt Howedes, who was so impressive against Inter Milan in the previous round, failed a fitness test prior to the game. It quickly became apparent that United was not here for a scoreless draw and would seek to exploit any vulnerability in the Germans' defense. The first time United went forward, Wayne Rooney tried his luck from the left corner of the penalty area and his right-footed curler would have found the top corner but for the fingertips of Manuel Neuer.

Next it was Ji-sung Park trying his luck, but a powerful drive was also well saved by the 24-year-old keeper who some have described as currently the best in the world.

Antonio Valencia crossed for Javier "Chicharito" Hernandez but the Mexican didn't make the contact he would have liked and this one was relatively easy for Neuer. But on 14 minutes Neuer had to be both alert and brave to foil Hernandez from close range.

United was totally dominant now and in the 21st minute Hernandez made another opportunity for himself by using the run of



SCORE: Ryan Giggs of Manchester United (L) scores the first goal against Manuel Neuer of Schalke (R) during the UEFA Champions League semi final first leg match between FC Schalke 04 and Manchester United at Veltins Arena on April 26, 2011 in Gelsenkirchen, Germany. CHRISTOF KOEPEL/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

Valencia as a decoy, turning smartly, only to see his left-footer go just wide of the upright. Just five minutes later the Mexican was again in the thick of it and from a tight angle just failed to direct the ball in at the far post—Manuel Neuer having stood up big yet again, denied him the necessary space to get off an accurate shot. On another day Chicharito would have already had a hat trick

to his name.

With United's pressure relentless, Neuer was called upon to push a Ryan Giggs header over the bar. This was possibly Neuer's finest save so far. The German goalkeeper was running a regular master-class. On the stroke of halftime Giggs was played through and again it was Neuer to the rescue. Thanks to their goalkeeper Schalke went in at halftime

miraculously still on level terms. United had enjoyed a 64-36 percent superiority in possession over the course of the half.

With the second period underway, Sir Alex Ferguson's charges continued pretty much where they had left off before the break. In fact they had already created and squandered three more chances before the half was five minutes old. Chicharito did finally have the

ball in the net in the 50th minute but the offside flag had been raised.

At the other end Van der Sar was tested for the first time by a swerving shot from Edu but the veteran was up to the task and held on so there would be no rebound for the likes of Raul Gonzalez to pounce upon. It was a night of very lean pickings indeed for the veteran Spanish goal-poacher who had scored four in his last three European outings against United—all for real Madrid of course.

But if Schalke fans thought this might be one of those nights where a team is under the cosh for 89 minutes and then nicks it with a last-minute breakaway, they were to be disappointed. In the 67th minute United finally found a way through, courtesy of a glorious defense-splitting pass that put Ryan Giggs through one-on-one with the keeper, and this time it was Giggs that prevailed. A couple of minutes later Hernandez and Rooney combined for a second that was dispatched clinically by the English international.

A long-range effort from substitute Sergio Escudero was all Schalke could muster in reply and, while it was a good enough strike, van der Sar never looked like being beaten. In fact United could have had a third just before the end but Patrice Evra directed his shot just wide of Neuer's left-hand post.

The word is that Manuel Neuer will sign for Bayern, Munich in the summer. With van der Sar due to retire, United may well be now devising a strategy to try and lure the impressive young German to Old Trafford.

Sir Alex Ferguson described Neuer's performance on the Manchester United website after the game: "He was fantastic. It was one of the best performances I've seen against Manchester United."

Sir Alex also paid tribute to his own players saying: "Our concentration, the intensity of our play, and the speed of our passing were all excellent tonight. It was a top performance. I'm really pleased with the players, every one of them has done fantastically well tonight."

Audi R18 Quickest at Le Mans Test Day

By JAMES FISH
Epoch Times Staff

The margin was tiny, but Audi's new R18 TDI proved to be the fastest car on the track at the Le Mans Test Day on April 24, with two Audis lapping Le Mans faster than their quickest rival, the Peugeot 908.

Eight-time Le Mans winner Tom Kristensen piloted the No. 3 R18 around the famed French circuit in 3 minutes, 27.867 seconds, .128 seconds faster than teammate Mike Rockenfeller, who co-drove the 2010 winner. The fastest Peugeot, driven by Stephane Sarrazin, was six-hundredths slower, at 3 minutes, 27.876 seconds.

Top speed and fast laps don't matter much in testing—or in the race, as Peugeot proved in 2010, when its four cars were the fastest, but all expired, giving Audi the win.

Test Day is about gathering information, finding the best set-ups under varying conditions, and finding any possible weaknesses in the car or crew. Audi and Peugeot both ran

almost continuously for eight hours on Sunday, preparing for the race, June 11-12.

"We have prepared a comprehensive test program for all three cars," Audi Motorsport chief Dr. Wolfgang Ullrich said in a company press release. "We have achieved very good results. I think that we can put that to very good use in the Le Mans race. It was important to do a lot of kilometers here with the all-new car before the race weekend in June comes up."

Audi is returning to defend its title with three cars and ten drivers—three per car plus an alternate. The new R18 has a much smaller motor (3.7 vs. 5.5 liters), a new six-speed gearbox, and all new aerodynamics. The team must also adjust to the R18's closed cockpit; this is the first coupe Audi has run since 2003.

"For me it was the first time since 2003 that I've sat in a coupe," said driver Tom Kristensen. "The efficiency and the work of Audi have really impressed me. You can really feel the aerodynamics and the car is very



QUICKEST PEUGEOT: The 8 Peugeot piloted by Stephane Sarrazin turned in the fastest time of all the Peugeots, just .187 off the lead Audi's pace. COURTESY PEUGEOT SPORT

comfortable. As a driver, I very much appreciate the six-speed gearbox. It fits well to the engine with its down-sized cubic capacity."

According to Romain Dumas, co-driver in the second-fastest No. 1 Audi, "The car was really easy to drive. Our performance was also very positive. We've got to know our new mechanics even better. We've also practiced driver changes today. I think that come qualifying day at Le Mans, we will be much better sorted-out than last year."

PEUGEOT PLEASED WITH LE MANS TEST

Peugeot, still stinging from its total defeat in the 2010 24 Hours of Le Mans, is back in 2011 with a three-car, ten-driver assault on the world's most prestigious endurance race.

The No. 7 Peugeot 908 covered 117 laps of the 8.5-mile Le Mans circuit. This was the car designated for the endurance portion of the test.

"Our goal was to work on endurance," explained driver Nicolas Minassian in a Peugeot press release.



FASTEST: The 1 Audi R18 TDI leads the 3 Audi around the track during the Le Mans Test Day on April 24. JEAN-FRANCOIS MONIER/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

"We successfully completed our program. We have now spent a lot of time on the track and everything has gone as planned, which is perfect for recording the data we need for the race. Without particularly adjusting the set-up, we had a very efficient car, which bodes well."

The No. 8 Peugeot tested various set-ups and eventually turned in the fastest lap of the three. Driver Anthony Davidson said, "The car is comfortable to drive. We made a few minor adjustments to the

set-up but overall we are all very happy with the balance of the Peugeot 908 on this track. It was very positive."

As it has been in the past, this year again the diesels ruled Le Mans. The fastest gasoline-powered car, a Pescarolo-Judd, was nearly nine seconds off the pace. So one more time, the fight will be between Audi and Peugeot. Audi has the history and the record of endurance, Peugeot is traditionally faster. Maybe this year that will change?