

## Viva la Vida!

Nemanja Vidic saved the day for United and made sure they were still in the title race with a 91st minute winner after Carrick's shot deflected onto the post. It was all one-way traffic throughout the match with Sunderland's ambitions limited to defending their goal.

Nemanja Vidic broke Sunderland hearts with a last-gasp winner for Manchester United at Old Trafford.

Three days after Roy Keane's shock exit as manager, it seemed the Black Cats would record a suitable epitaph for his time in charge as they mounted a brave rearguard action.

With Marton Fulop and Dean Whitehead outstanding, Sunderland reached the final minute with their goal still intact.

But, as they have done so often, and as Sunderland have found to their cost before, United still came up with a killer blow.

With virtually their final attack, Carrick went for goal. His long-range effort struck Carlos Edwards and smashed onto a post.

Finally, Fulop was helpless and as the ball rolled across his penalty area, up stepped Vidic, who tapped into an empty net.

If ever there was a 0-0 hammering, the first-half was it.

In opting to name Dwight Yorke in front of the Sunderland back four, acting manager Ricky Sbragia hinted at a safety-first attitude. And he was not wrong.

Sunderland did not spend the entire opening period scrambling the ball away from their own penalty area, but it felt like it and United attacked in waves throughout those opening 45 minutes.

Yet, with skipper Whitehead heroic, Danny Collins and Anton

Ferdinand, recalled and desperate to show he is the equal of brother Rio, stoic and Fulop inspired, somehow the Black Cats survived.

The first serious threat to the visitors' goal came after 12 minutes when Ballon d'Or winner Cristiano Ronaldo flicked a pass through to Dimitar Berbatov which caught Sunderland on their heels.

Thankfully for the visitors Fulop was alive to the danger, dashing out to save with his legs.

It was not the last time Fulop kept United at bay in such fashion as the Hungarian rose to the challenge presented by the absence of first-choice Craig Gordon.

If Keane was watching the clash of his two old clubs, he would have been proud of the way the team he assembled manfully stuck to their task.

Ronaldo fooled almost everyone when he played a free-kick square to Rooney after lining up a shot himself. Fulop's save was not convincing but this time Collins charged in to punt clear as Berbatov moved in for the kill.

Rooney turned provider to thread a pass through to Park Ji-sung shortly afterwards. Again Fulop charged out feet-first, again he made the save and Ronaldo's follow-up header dropped wide.

It was hard to grumble at United's dominance and the feeling persisted once they got one, the dam would burst.

And, in Carlos Tevez, Sir Alex Ferguson, watching on from the directors box as he completed his touchline ban, could call on someone fresh from a midweek four-timer.

The United boss initially kept faith with his starting line-up but when Darren Fletcher fired wide after latching onto Rafael Da Silva's low cross and Michael Carrick drove another shot at Fulop, the Argentina star was introduced.

United immediately stepped up a gear, with Berbatov setting up Ronaldo. The winger's shot sailed wide as he was clattered into by Andy Reid, taking a bang on the hip that required treatment and ultimately, his substitution.

The departure itself was bizarre. Clearly in pain, the 23-year-old signalled he could not continue. But instead of waiting for a suitable break in play, Ronaldo merely headed to the touchline, then the tunnel, leaving his team-mates to continue with 10 men for a couple of minutes until Ryan Giggs could get ready.

Rafael found the veteran Welshman with a far-post cross but Giggs could only volley wide. Rooney met similar disappointment from an acute angle on United's next attack.

Berbatov should have scored with a close range header and so should Nemanja Vidic. Then substitute Anderson had his effort brilliantly blocked by Teemu Tainio after Giggs thought he had provided the young Brazilian with a tap-in.

It seemed United's chance had gone on their title challenge would suffer a major blow. Sunderland were about to suffer the ultimate heartbreak.

## Teams

Man Utd Van der Sar, Rafael Da Silva, Ferdinand, Vidic, Evra, Park (Tevez 57), Fletcher (Anderson 68), Carrick, Ronaldo (Giggs 68), Berbatov, Rooney.

Subs Not Used: Kuszczak, Neville, Nani, Evans.

Booked: Rooney.

Goals: Vidic 90.

Sunderland Fulop, Chimbonda, Ferdinand, Collins,  
Bardsley, Yorke (Tainio 60), Malbranque, Whitehead (Edwards 76),  
Reid, Diouf, Cisse (Jones 69).

Subs Not Used: Colgan, Nosworthy, Murphy, Leadbitter.

Att: 75,400

Ref: Mark Halsey (Lancashire).

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