

## Juventus Falls to Barcelona in Champions League

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In Berlin. Both teams were champions of their respective leagues and their domestic cups, so the winner of this match would complete the Treble, which is when a team wins three trophies in a single season. The last time an Italian team made it to the Champions League Final, Inter won the Treble in 2010.

Barcelona and Juventus squared off in the UEFA Champions League Final at the Olympiastadion in Berlin. The atmosphere in Berlin was fantastic and it also was in New York City. On 6 West 33rd Street at the Football Factory at Legends Pub NYC, a large crowd of Juventus fans arrived hours before kickoff, most dressed in the traditional black-and-white jerseys of La Vecchia Signora. Juventus Club NYC member Mara Gerety said "Confidence is high . . . this is going to be one amazing game of football."

Many thought it would be a walk in the park for Barcelona and after scoring in the 4th minute it looked like it might be just that. But Barça had to battle hard until the very end. The Spanish champions completed 15 passes in the build up to the first goal as the Brazilian Neymar played a ball to Andres Iniesta who sprinted into the box and then played a square pass to Ivan Rakitic, who scored with a tap in. It was a brilliant start for the Blaugrana and it looked like a blowout could have been in the cards. In the 13th minute, Luis Suarez cut the ball back to Dani Alves from about 15 yards out and Juventus goalie Gianluigi Buffon made a great one-handed save. Barcelona continued to control the possession of the ball and much of the match. La Vecchia Signora lost possession of the ball in the middle of the field too easily and too often in the first 45 minutes. As the first half wore on, Juventus had a couple of half chances but couldn't find the back of the net. Barcelona could have certainly scored 2 or 3 goals before halftime but Juventus managed to weather the storm. At



the Football Factory and around New York City, Juventini were visibly nervous. The general sense was that Juventus was not playing at their full potential.

The Italian team started the second half on a more attacking note, earning a corner kick in the 48th minute. After Barcelona cleared the corner, Rakitic led a 5v3 counter attack and then passed the ball to Suarez. The Uruguayan striker hit a shot with the outside of his right foot but Gigi Buffon made a great save at the near post, keeping Juventus in the game. The Italian champions found their breakthrough in the 55th minute. Claudio Marchisio played a brilliant back heel pass to the Swiss rightback Stephan Lichtsteiner who found Carlos Tevez inside the box. The Argentinian striker turned and hit a first time left-footed shot, which was saved by Barcelona's goalie, Marc-André Ter Stegen, and Alvaro Morata pounced on the rebound. The goal brought life back to the Bianconeri, who then began possessing the ball more and creating more chances. The game opened up with more end-to-end action. There was a 10-15 minute stretch in the second half when Juventus had the better of the play and looked the team more likely to score. Paul Pogba appealed for a penalty in the 67th minute when he controlled a cross in Barcelona's box and Dani Alves appeared to pull the Frenchman down to the ground. A minute later, Lionel Messi picked up the ball at midfield, dribbled to the top of the Juventus penalty box and hit a low left-footed shot, which Buffon managed to save but Luis Suarez was there to tap in the rebound. 2-1 Barcelona. At the Football factory, Juve fans moaned and cursed at the television screen.

Barcelona kept the pressure on when Neymar found the back of the net in the 71st minute, but the officiating crew did a fine job in disallowing the goal. The Brazilian headed the ball into the net but replays clearly showed it hit off his hand. Xavi Hernandez came on as a substitute to earn his 151th appearance in the Champions League, which is an all-time record. Juventus created a few half chances in the last 10 minutes but couldn't find a clear-cut opportunity. As the Bianconeri pushed forward during stoppage time, searching for an equalizer, Barça capitalized on a 3v2 counterattack as Neymar found the back of the net with a left footed strike to the far post. That put the game to bed and Barcelona won their 5th Champions League Title and sealed the coveted Treble.

Despite the end result, it was a fantastic and entertaining match. It was great to see an Italian side in the biggest match of the season. Napoli and Fiorentina both made it to the Europa League semi-finals this year and hopefully Serie A teams can continue their impressive play in Europe. Despite giving up 3 goals, 37-year-old goalkeeper Buffon had a fantastic match and helped keep Juventus in the game until the final whistle. Most soccer fans and journalists around the world gave Juventus no chance against what is surely going to be a legendary Barcelona side. Juventus can hold their heads high, playing a spirited match and they made Italian calcio proud. But Mara from Juve Club NY and Juventus fans will long remember Andrea Pirlo's poignant tears as the game ended.

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