

= 2007 UEFA Champions League Final =

The 2007 UEFA Champions League Final was an association football match between A.C. Milan of Italy and Liverpool F.C. of England on 23 May 2007 at the Olympic Stadium, Athens, Greece. The showpiece event was the final match of the 2006–07 season of Europe's premier cup competition, the UEFA Champions League. The teams were appearing in the final, two years after facing each other in the 2005 final which Liverpool won 3–2 in a penalty shootout after the match finished 3–3.

Both teams had to pass through five rounds before they reached the final. They both entered in the third qualifying round and won their respective groups before they reached the knockout stage, where matches were contested over two legs, with a match at each team's home ground. Milan's victories varied from close affairs to comfortable victories. They defeated Celtic by a single goal over two legs, while they beat Manchester United 5–3 on aggregate in the semi-final. Liverpool's matches were mainly all close affairs; they beat defending champions Barcelona on the away goals rule in the first knockout round and beat Chelsea in a penalty shootout in the semi-finals, although they did record a 4–0 aggregate win over PSV Eindhoven in the quarter-finals.

Before the match there were ticketing problems because a large number of fans gained entry to the stadium without valid tickets. After the match, a UEFA spokesman accused Liverpool of having the worst fans in Europe, a claim later denied by UEFA president Michel Platini. Watched by a crowd of 74,000, Milan took the lead when Andrea Pirlo's free kick deflected off Filippo Inzaghi in the first half. Milan extended their lead in the second half when Inzaghi scored a second goal. Liverpool scored a late goal through Dirk Kuyt, but were unable to equalise before the end of the match. Milan won the match 2–1 to win their seventh Champions League.

= = Route to the final = =

= = = Milan = = =

Milan gained entry to the competition by finishing third in the 2005–06 Serie A. Milan had originally finished second in Serie A, but were docked 30 points for their part in a match-fixing scandal. The original punishment, reduced on appeal, would have barred them from the Champions League altogether. Their opponents in the third qualifying round were Serbian team Red Star Belgrade. Two victories, 1–0 at home and 2–1 away, ensured Milan's passage to the group stage of the Champions League. They were drawn in Group H alongside AEK Athens of Greece, Anderlecht of Belgium and French team Lille. Milan won three matches, drew one and lost two to finish top of the group with 10 points and progress to the knockout stage.

They were drawn against Scottish team Celtic. The first leg at Celtic's home ground Celtic Park finished 0–0. The return leg at Milan's home ground the San Siro also finished 0–0 after 90 minutes with Celtic managing to limit the goalscoring opportunities Milan had. However, three minutes into extra time Milan scored when Kaká curled a shot past Celtic goalkeeper Artur Boruc. Celtic were unable to score the away goal they needed to beat Milan, ensuring the Italians progressed to the quarter finals after a 1–0 aggregate victory.

Milan were drawn against German team Bayern Munich in the quarter-finals. The first leg at the San Siro ended in a 2–2 draw after Bayern had scored an equaliser three minutes into stoppage time. The second leg at Bayern's home ground the Allianz Arena was more comfortable for Milan, as they scored two first half goals to win the match 2–0 and win the tie 4–2 on aggregate. Milan were drawn against English team Manchester United in the semi-finals. The first leg at United's home ground Old Trafford, Kaka scored twice to give Milan a 2–1 lead after Cristiano Ronaldo had scored an early goal. However, two goals from Wayne Rooney in the second half meant United won the first leg 3–2. The second leg at the San Siro saw Milan win 3–0 to progress to the final after a 5–3 aggregate victory.

== Liverpool ==

Liverpool gained entry to the competition after finishing third in the 2005 ? 06 FA Premier League . As a result of that league position , Liverpool entered the Champions League in the third qualifying round , where their opponents were Maccabi Haifa of Israel . Liverpool won the first leg 2 ? 1 at their home ground Anfield and a 1 ? 1 draw in the away leg in Israel ensured Liverpool progressed to the group stage of the competition . Liverpool were drawn in Group C alongside French team Bordeaux , Dutch team PSV Eindhoven and Galatasaray of Turkey . After six games including four wins , one draw and one defeat , Liverpool finished top of the group with 13 points to qualify for the knockout stage .

Liverpool were drawn against defending champions Barcelona in the first knockout round . Before the first leg in Barcelona , there had been a training ground fracas between Craig Bellamy and John Arne Riise . Coincidentally , it was Bellamy and Riise who secured a 2 ? 1 victory for Liverpool , completing a comeback after Deco had given Barcelona the lead . The second leg at Anfield was won 1 ? 0 by Barcelona , however Liverpool progressed to the quarter @-@ finals on the away goals rule , having scored more goals away from home than their opponents .

Their opponents in the quarter @-@ finals were PSV Eindhoven , who they had played in the group stage . The first leg at PSV 's home ground the Philips Stadion was won 3 ? 0 by Liverpool all but securing their progression to the semi @-@ finals . The second leg at Anfield was not as one @-@ sided , a 1 ? 0 victory for Liverpool ensured they would progress to the semi @-@ finals courtesy of a 4 ? 0 aggregate victory . Their opponents in the semi @-@ finals were fellow English team Chelsea . The first leg at Chelsea 's home ground Stamford Bridge was a close affair with Chelsea winning 1 ? 0 courtesy of a first half Joe Cole goal . The second leg at Anfield was similar , however it was Liverpool who won 1 ? 0 thanks to a Daniel Agger goal . With the teams tied at 1 ? 1 aggregate after 90 minutes and extra time the tie went to a penalty shootout , which Liverpool won 4 ? 1 to progress to the final .

== Match ==

== Background ==

The match was Milan 's eleventh appearance in the final . They had won on six occasions (1963 , 1969 , 1989 , 1990 , 1994 , 2003) , and lost four times (1958 , 1993 , 1995 , 2005) . Liverpool were appearing in their seventh final . They had previously won the competition five times (1977 , 1978 , 1981 , 1984 , 2005) , while they lost the 1985 final to Juventus . The final was a rematch of the 2005 final which Liverpool won 3 ? 2 in a penalty shootout , after recovering from a three @-@ goal deficit at half @-@ time to level the score at 3 ? 3 after full @-@ time and extra time .

The Olympic Stadium in Athens was selected as the venue for the 2007 UEFA Champions League Final at the April 2005 meeting of the UEFA Executive Committee in Tallinn , Estonia . The meeting also determined the venues for the 2006 final and the 2006 and 2007 UEFA Cup finals . Shortly before the final , the UEFA Champions League trophy was returned to UEFA by Ludovic Giuly , representing the 2006 winners , Barcelona . UEFA president Michel Platini then presented the trophy to the Mayor of Athens , Nikitas Kaklamanis , so that it might be put on display in and around the city . The stadium had hosted the showpiece event before . The most recent was the 1994 final . Coincidentally Milan were the winners , beating Barcelona 4 ? 0 . The other final held at the ground was in 1983 , when Hamburg beat Juventus 1 ? 0 . The ground had also played host to the UEFA Cup Winners ' Cup final in 1987 , when Ajax beat Lokomotiv Leipzig 1 ? 0 .

Adidas , the official match ball supplier to all major UEFA , FIFA and IOC tournaments , unveiled the official match ball for the 2007 UEFA Champions League final on 9 March 2007 , presenting the Adidas Finale Athens . The design of the Adidas Finale Athens was based on the widely recognisable UEFA Champions League Starball logo and was blue and white , representing the

colours of the Greek national flag . The final matched two of the top goal @-@ scorers in the competition that season . Milan 's Kaká finished on top of the scoring charts with ten goals , and Liverpool 's Peter Crouch entered the game tied for third with six goals in total .

Despite being drawn as the " home " team for the match , Milan chose to wear their all @-@ white away strip for the final ; they consider that strip to be their " lucky kit " (Italian : *maglia fortunata*) , having won the European Cup five times in those colours . However , Milan had also lost two final wearing all @-@ white , most recently against Liverpool in 2005 . This decision by Milan meant that Liverpool played the final in their traditional home kit of red shirts , red shorts and red socks . Each of Liverpool 's five European Cup titles were won in their all @-@ red strip , and two of these came when they were playing against Italian teams who played in all @-@ white .

Milan fielded the oldest starting eleven ever in a Champions League final , with the average age at 31 years , 34 days , while Paolo Maldini was the oldest outfield player ever to play in the final , in what his eighth final at 38 years and 331 days . Milan manager Carlo Ancelotti opted to start striker Filippo Inzaghi , who had missed the 2005 final ahead of Hernán Crespo . Liverpool manager Rafael Benítez opted to field a five @-@ man midfield with Jermaine Pennant and Boudewijn Zenden on the wings , while Steven Gerrard was deployed behind lone striker Dirk Kuyt . Liverpool fielded five of the players that started the 2005 final : Xabi Alonso , Jamie Carragher , Steve Finnan , Steven Gerrard and John Arne Riise .

= = Problems before the match = =

Out of 63 @, @ 800 tickets , only 9 @, @ 000 tickets for the final went on general sale ; the remainder were shared between the two teams , who got 17 @, @ 000 each , and the UEFA family and sponsors , who received 20 @, @ 800 tickets . This led to some of the problems before the match . While fans were still queuing to gain entry to the stadium , the Greek police informed them that the stadium was full and denied entry to a number of fans who had genuine tickets . UEFA sources said that as many as 5 @, @ 000 fans either without tickets or brandishing fakes had entered the 74 @, @ 000 @-@ capacity Olympic Stadium . Simultaneously , thousands of fans with genuine tickets were refused entry as police closed the entrance to the ground amid fears that allowing any more to enter could have led to a disaster . The resulting situation became disorderly , with some Liverpool fans attempting to break through checkpoints , set up by the Greek police . Greek riot police used tear gas and batons to disperse the crowd . UEFA spokesman William Gaillard blamed Liverpool fans for causing the problems , stating , " Milan supporters didn 't face the same problems because they didn 't behave in the same way " .

A UEFA report released soon after the final branded Liverpool supporters " the worst fans in Europe " , with Gaillard stating : " What other set of fans steal tickets from their fellow supporters or out of the hands of children ? " However , UEFA President Michel Platini later denied that Liverpool fans were the worst behaved in Europe . UEFA was itself criticised for poor ticket @-@ checking procedures and for implementing insufficient measures to deal with the large number of fans . Simon Gass , the British ambassador to Greece , said , " Clearly there was some element of breakdown where those fake tickets appeared to be legitimate ? that 's something UEFA must look at . " Meanwhile , Liverpool co @-@ owner Tom Hicks described UEFA 's allocation of 17 @, @ 000 tickets to each team , knowing that Liverpool would be bringing 40 @, @ 000 supporters , as " insane " and accused Gaillard of blaming Liverpool fans in order to cover up for his own mistakes . UEFA was further criticised by Milan and Liverpool for their lack of provision for the clubs ' disabled fans , providing the clubs with only sixteen disabled tickets each .

= = First half = =

Milan won the toss and Liverpool kicked off . Playing in a 4 ? 2 ? 3 ? 1 formation , they had the first attack of the match , but Jermaine Pennant could not reach Steven Gerrard 's cross @-@ field pass . Milan responded with two low attempts on the Liverpool goal , but Jamie Carragher was able to clear them both . The second clearance led to a corner , from which Milan failed to score . Liverpool

had the first chance of the match in the ninth minute . A slip from Milan defender Marek Jankulovski allowed Pennant to run into space , he passed the ball to Dirk Kuyt who passed it back to him , Pennant 's subsequent shot was saved by Milan goalkeeper Dida . Minutes later Gerrard won a header which found Pennant , however Gerrard was unable to make decent contact with the ball following Pennant 's pass . Milan had their first shot of the match a few minutes later . Kaká received the ball outside the area and moved to his right before shooting , however Liverpool goalkeeper Pepe Reina saved the shot . Liverpool continued to exert pressure leading Milan defender Massimo Oddo to mis @-@ read a cross from Pennant , the ball reached Gerrard whose shot went over the goal .

Liverpool had another chance in the 27th minute . Frantic defending from Milan to deny the Liverpool forwards a scoring opportunity , led to the ball being passed to Xabi Alonso , whose shot went wide of the Milan goal . A mistake from Jankulovski allowed Gerrard to pass the ball to Kuyt in the penalty area , however Kuyt 's shot was blocked by Milan defender Alessandro Nesta . Milan midfielder Gennaro Gattuso was the first player to receive a yellow card , when he was cautioned in the 40th minute for a foul on Alonso . Minutes later , Alonso fouled Kaká on the edge of the Liverpool penalty area , giving away a free @-@ kick . The subsequent free @-@ kick taken by Andrea Pirlo deflected off the shoulder of Milan striker Filippo Inzaghi , and into the Liverpool goal . The deflection resulted in the ball being diverted past Liverpool goalkeeper Pepe Reina , who had dived the other way in anticipation of the ball 's original trajectory . Replays showed that the ball struck Inzaghi 's upper arm on its way to the goal , but the referee did not judge this to have been a handball . Inzaghi later said that while the deflection was intended , he did not intend for the ball to hit his arm . With no further action in the first half , Milan went into half @-@ time leading 1 ? 0 .

= = = Second half = = =

Milan kicked @-@ off the second half . Two minutes into the half , Liverpool had the first attack but Nesta tackled Gerrard before he could reach Kuyt 's pass . Jankuloski received a yellow card in the 54th minute when he brought Pennant down . Immediately afterwards , Milan had an attack . Pirlo received the ball from a header by Clarence Seedorf , Pirlo played a high pass to Kaká who was ruled to be offside by the assistant referee , despite being behind the defence when the ball was played . Milan had another attack straight after the offside , but Liverpool defender Daniel Agger tackled Inzaghi before he could shoot . Liverpool had their first yellow card in the 59th minute when Javier Mascherano received one for bringing down Pirlo . After the yellow card , Liverpool decided to replace Boudewijn Zenden with Harry Kewell . Liverpool 's best goalscoring chance of the match occurred minutes later . Gerrard capitalised on an error by Gattuso to be one @-@ on @-@ one with Dida , but his shot did not possess enough power to beat the Milan goalkeeper .

Liverpool began to exert more pressure , although all their play was in front of the Milan penalty area , while Milan were unable to keep possession of the ball . In an attempt to bring about an equalising goal , Liverpool manager Rafael Benítez substituted Mascherano for striker Peter Crouch . Milan had an attack minutes later , but Inzaghi was unable to control the ball . Inzaghi made amends minutes later when he scored Milan 's second goal . With Mascherano substituted , Kaká had the space to pick out a pass to Inzaghi , who took the ball to the side of the Liverpool goalkeeper Reina and rolled it into the net to make the score 2 ? 0 to Milan . Liverpool managed to pull one goal back in the 88th minute when Kuyt scored after Agger had flicked on Pennant 's corner . However , they were unable to find a second goal , and around 20 seconds before added time was up , the referee blew for full @-@ time with the score 2 ? 1 to Milan .

= = = Details = = =

= = = Statistics = = =

= = Post @-@ match = =

The trophy was presented to Milan captain Paolo Maldini in the Guest of Honour 's box , as UEFA President Michel Platini favoured a return to the past tradition of the winning captain receiving the trophy among the fans . It had become customary in recent years to have the presentation on a hastily constructed podium in the centre of the pitch . This was the first time that the trophy was presented to a winning captain by a UEFA president who had actually played against him in the past ; during Michel Platini 's final seasons with Juventus , the then @-@ teenager Paolo Maldini was making his professional début with Milan .

Milan manager Carlo Ancelotti was delighted with his team after their success . Ancelotti 's job had been under threat after a run of poor results in December , therefore the victory had extra significance for Ancelotti : " When I think back to December , we had to overcome so many hurdles so that makes it a very special victory . " Milan midfielder Clarence Seedorf , who had his fourth victory in the competition following Milan 's triumph was equally proud in the team 's achievement : " I am so proud to be part of this team . We worked hard this year , a very difficult year . "

A number of Milan players who had played in the 2005 final were delighted with the victory after they lost two years previous . Kaká claimed victory was all the sweeter as a result : " What happened then was strange , just six minutes when we played not so good and we paid for that . " Milan midfielder Gennaro Gattuso echoed his team @-@ mates sentiments : " The defeat two years ago will stay me for a lifetime , but this is a different story . It 's our turn to celebrate now . " Striker Filippo Inzaghi , who missed the final in 2005 , was delighted to have scored the goals that won the final for Milan : " I 've scored quite a few times in Europe , but scoring in the Champions League final is something special . " Milan President and owner Silvio Berlusconi was equally delighted about the success , adding that " the fortune we lacked in Istanbul we had with us tonight . "

Liverpool manager Rafael Benítez was disappointed that his team were unable to match their exploits of 2005 , when they beat Milan in a penalty shootout . Despite this he was still proud of his players efforts : " Thank you to our supporters , my staff and players who worked really hard and deserved a bit more . " Benítez was already thinking of making transfers in the aftermath of the match , hinting that his team lacked the same calibre of players that Milan had : " You could see the quality they had , and we need to start thinking how we can improve our team . "

Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard was adamant that despite the defeat Liverpool would come back stronger next season : " We 've got to pick ourselves up , have a good rest in the summer and then go again next season . " Gerrard thought that although Liverpool controlled the first half , they did not control the match as much in the second half as they would have liked . Gerrard echoed his manager 's sentiments in regards to new players joining the club : " We need to strengthen and bring some quality into the club . The manager and the people in charge of the club know that and it will be an interesting summer . "

Winning the Champions League entitled Milan to compete in the 2007 UEFA Super Cup against UEFA Cup winners Sevilla . The match was overshadowed by the death of Sevilla player Antonio Puerta , which raised the possibility that the Super Cup might not go ahead . It did however , Milan beat Sevilla 3 ? 1 to secure their fifth Super Cup victory . Milan 's success also entitled them to compete in the 2007 FIFA Club World Cup . They entered the competition in the semi @-@ finals , defeating Japanese team Urawa Red Diamonds 1 ? 0 to progress to the final where they faced Argentine team Boca Juniors . Milan won the match 4 ? 2 to secure their first FIFA Club World Cup triumph .