

Beguiling Bulgarian leaves Tevez to rue reversal of fortune

It appears that Dimitar Berbatov's arrival at Manchester United has made Carlos Tevez the odd man out

In the end, it will be remembered as the night Old Trafford fell for the charms of Dimitar Berbatov while the forward whose place he has taken was left to wonder what it all means for the future. Spare a thought for Carlos Tevez amid all the acclaim for Berbatov because there cannot be many things more galling for a footballer than to establish himself as one of his team's more accomplished players and then find his manager had headhunted someone else for exactly the same position.

How, you wonder, did Tevez feel, sitting among the substitutes, hunched up against the cold, as Berbatov scored the goals to instigate this victory and waved those black gloves in the direction of the Stretford End? Tevez did at least come off the bench, an hour into the game, and the crowd was quick to remind him that he still has a place in their affections.

But this, indisputably, was Berbatov's night, incorporating the fourth and fifth goals of his seven weeks as a United player and another poke in the eye for all those knee-jerk commentators who rushed blindly into judging him on the basis of a couple of ordinary performances directly after signing from Tottenham Hotspur.

Celtic, in fairness, did not completely embarrass themselves and it was a bit much for the home crowd to gloat about it being so "effing easy". Nobody, however, should be surprised about the margin of victory given the disparity between the squads. To put it into perspective, the most expensive player on Celtic's side was Scott Brown, at £4m. Ferguson's biggest call, meanwhile, is how to keep a £30m striker happy when he is not in the team.

This was United's ninth game since Berbatov's arrival and the harsh reality for Tevez is that his name has been in Ferguson's starting line-up on only three occasions. It will not console him, either, that one of those was in the Carling Cup.

When it comes to the games

that truly matter there is now an established order. Ferguson has made it clear that Berbatov should be thought of as his first-choice striker, while Rooney's own form has accelerated so much since the arrival of the £30.75m Bulgarian that it was almost surprising he kept us waiting until the 76th minute before firing in his ninth goal in seven games.

Earlier, when he had sized up a scissor kick and flung himself into the air, Old Trafford had held its breath and waited expectantly for the ball to arrow into the net. It might well have done had a defender, Mark Wilson, not got in the way.

There are still times when Berbatov is not quite on the same wavelength as his new team-mates. He is, however, capable of some of the most exquisite touches. The little flick that took the ball past Artur Boruc for the opening goal was the most damaging for Celtic, but the one that really oozed quality arrived four minutes later when he nonchalantly jabbed out his right boot to bring down a goal-kick as it dropped from the sky. It is in those moments that you can forgive him for occasionally looking like he does not understand why everyone else is running around so much.

Berbatov is clearly the type who will decorate matches rather than dominate them. Rooney, on the other hand, can always be guaranteed to put in a lung-splitting stint and, just as pleasingly for United's supporters, Ronaldo's directness and penetrative running was another theme of the evening.

This is a strange time for Ronaldo. He spent so long over the summer pining for his "dream" move to Real Madrid and acting the part of Violet Elizabeth Bott - "I'll thcream and thcream till I'm thick" - every sup-

porter is now studying his body language for signs of discontent. Nobody, however, could argue

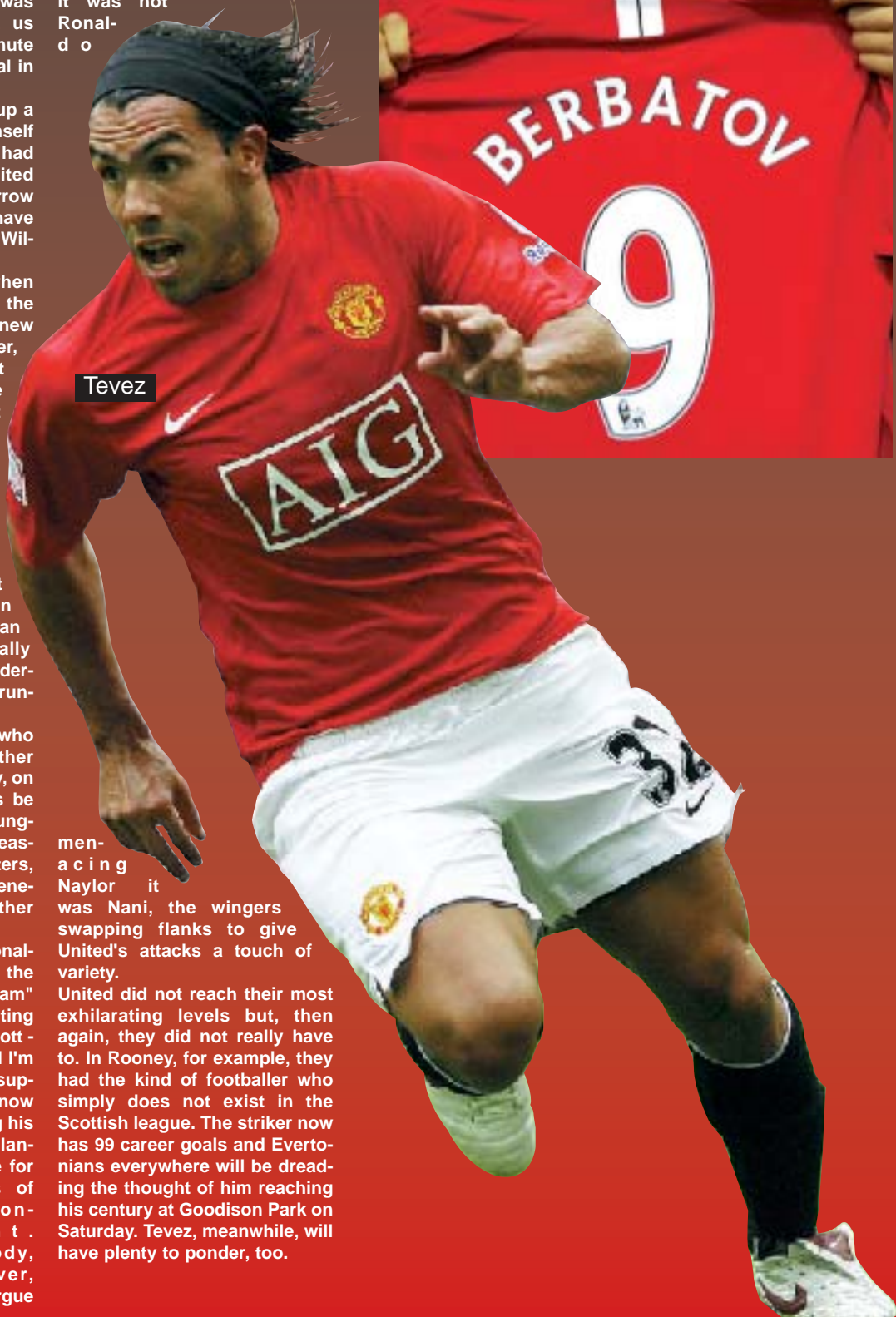
that his effort is no longer what it was. His trickery and penetrative running made it a breathless night for Lee Naylor, a left-back best known in England for his time in a moderate Wolverhampton Wanderers side. When it was not Ronaldo

menacing it was Naylor, the wingers swapping flanks to give United's attacks a touch of variety.

United did not reach their most exhilarating levels but, then again, they did not really have to. In Rooney, for example, they had the kind of footballer who simply does not exist in the Scottish league. The striker now has 99 career goals and Evertonians everywhere will be dreading the thought of him reaching his century at Goodison Park on Saturday. Tevez, meanwhile, will have plenty to ponder, too.



Berbatov



Tevez

