

# REDPRINT

OVERCOMING  
MANCHESTER  
UNITED'S  
IDENTITY CRISIS

Wayne Barton



**"Insightful, highly readable and full of detail."**

Ian Herbert, *Daily Mail*

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# The blood drained from my face

Shortly after 8am on Wednesday, 8 May 2013, following almost 48 hours of speculation, Manchester United announced that Sir Alex Ferguson would be retiring from his role as manager at the end of the season.

‘The decision to retire is one that I have thought a great deal about and one that I have not taken lightly,’ Ferguson said in an officially released statement. ‘It is the right time. It was important to me to leave an organisation in the strongest possible shape and I believe I have done so. The quality of this league-winning squad, and the balance of ages within it, bodes well for continued success at the highest level, whilst the structure of the youth set-up will ensure that the long-term future of the club remains a bright one. Our training facilities are amongst the finest in global sport and our home Old Trafford is rightfully regarded as one of the leading venues in the world. Going forward, I am delighted to take on the roles of both director and ambassador for the club. With these activities, along with my many other interests, I am looking forward to the future. I must pay tribute to my family; their love and support has been

essential. My wife Cathy has been the key figure throughout my career, providing a bedrock of both stability and encouragement. Words are not enough to express what this has meant to me. As for my players and staff, past and present, I would like to thank them all for a staggering level of professional conduct and dedication that has helped to deliver so many memorable triumphs. Without their contribution, the history of this great club would not be as rich. In my early years, the backing of the board, and Sir Bobby Charlton in particular, gave me the confidence and time to build a football club, rather than just a football team. Over the past decade, the Glazer family have provided me with the platform to manage Manchester United to the best of my ability and I have been extremely fortunate to have worked with a talented and trustworthy chief executive in David Gill. I am truly grateful to all of them. To the fans, thank you. The support you have provided over the years has been truly humbling. It has been an honour and an enormous privilege to have had the opportunity to lead your club and I have treasured my time as manager of Manchester United.'

Journalists were torn between writing plaudits and speculating as to who would be Ferguson's successor. Of the names suggested, Jose Mourinho and David Moyes quickly became the bookies' favourites from a list that included Pep Guardiola, Jurgen Klopp and Carlo Ancelotti. Most of the speculation as to who and why, and why not, turned out to be retrospective, as it quickly became apparent that it was Everton manager Moyes who would become 'The Chosen One'.

On 9 May, at 3.53pm, the club announced on their official website that the 'Manchester United Board unanimously approves the recommendation of Sir Alex Ferguson' in the appointment of David Moyes as the next manager. 'David Moyes will take over as the Manager of Manchester United from the 2013/14 season,' the club's statement to the Stock Exchange read. 'David, 50, has been the Everton manager since 2002, joining after a successful spell as manager of Preston North End.'

The statement included a number of endorsements from high-ranking officials at the club, beginning with the outgoing boss. 'When we discussed the candidates that we felt had the right attributes, we unanimously agreed on David Moyes,' Ferguson said. 'David is a man of great integrity with a strong work ethic. I've admired his work

for a long time and approached him as far back as 1998 to discuss the position of assistant manager here. He was a young man then at the start of his career and has since gone on to do a magnificent job at Everton. There is no question he has all the qualities we expect of a manager at this club.'

Sir Bobby Charlton was quoted next. 'I have always said that we wanted the next manager to be a genuine Manchester United man,' he said. 'In David Moyes, we have someone who understands the things that make this such a special club. We have secured a man who is committed to the long term and will build teams for the future as well as now. Stability breeds success. David has tremendous strength of character and recognises the importance of bringing young players through and developing them alongside world-class talent. At United, I think David will be able to express himself. I'm delighted he has accepted and I'm looking forward to working with him.'

CEO Ed Woodward said, 'In David Moyes, we have secured the services of an outstanding manager who has all the skills to build on the phenomenal legacy in place today. I have no doubt that he will bring an energy and commitment to deliver winning football that is part of the fabric of this club. In this respect, he is cut from the same cloth as the Old Trafford greats who go before him. I have been very impressed by David's personal and managerial traits, which reflect the Manchester United values. I have no doubt that he will embrace, and soon become an integral part of, United's unique culture and heritage.'

Next, it was the turn of the Glazer family. 'I am very pleased David has agreed to lead Manchester United into the future,' said Joel Glazer. 'His hard-working style and steely determination are characteristics we value at the club. He has impressed as a coach for many years now and we strongly believe he will be able to take up from where Alex is leaving off by continuing this club's tradition of flair football played by exciting, world-class players.' Finally, Avram Glazer gave his opinion. 'The search for a new manager has been very short,' his statement read. 'Alex was very clear with his recommendation and we are delighted that David has agreed to accept the job. He comes to us with excellent credentials and a strong track record. I know he is keen to get started and Ed will be sitting

down with him as soon as the season is over to discuss plans for the summer and beyond.’

All that was left was to hear from the man himself. Moyes’s statement read, ‘It’s a great honour to be asked to be the next manager of Manchester United. I am delighted that Sir Alex saw fit to recommend me for the job. I have great respect for everything he has done and for the Football Club. I know how hard it will be to follow the best manager ever, but the opportunity to manage Manchester United isn’t something that comes around very often and I’m really looking forward to taking up the post next season. I have had a terrific job at Everton, with a tremendous chairman and board of directors and a great set of players. Between now and the end of the season, I will do everything in my power to make sure we finish as high as possible in the table. Everton’s fantastic fans have played a big part in making my years at Goodison so enjoyable and I thank them wholeheartedly for the support they have given me and the players. Everton will be close to me for the rest of my life.’

So far, so normal. With the benefit of nit-picking hindsight, one might look at the ‘as high as possible’ comment and think Moyes had made his first faux pas, but at the time nobody picked up on it. There were reservations, of course there were.

On 12 May, United defeated Swansea City 2-1 in Ferguson’s final home game, fittingly enough, a victory delivered with a late goal. Afterwards, the club were awarded the Premier League trophy after a 13th successful league campaign under their retiring coach, and the man himself took centre stage to address the crowd. ‘We’ve got a winner, that is really important for this club. To get a winner is the most important thing,’ he said, before later telling the fans that ‘their job now was to stand by the new manager.’

Moyes, of course, had never won a trophy in his career as a manager. The closest he’d come was in the 2009 FA Cup Final when his Everton team, who had defeated Ferguson’s United side on penalties in the semi-final, came up short against Chelsea. Earlier in the year, Guardiola had announced that he would take over as Bayern Munich boss in the summer, following a short sabbatical after he had resigned as Barcelona manager. Some United supporters were unhappy, feeling that Ferguson and the also-outgoing chief executive David Gill might have been more proactive in sounding

out the Spaniard. By far the most outstanding candidate, though, was Mourinho.

Having succeeded with Porto, Chelsea and Inter Milan (with European successes at the first and last of those clubs), Mourinho had spent three years at Real Madrid. In the 2011/12 season, Real enjoyed an incredible year, winning La Liga, scoring 121 goals and notching up 100 points in the process. The next season was not quite so outstanding; Mourinho described it as ‘the worst of my career’. He had spent much of it battling with *Madridistas*, who did not agree with his treatment of goalkeeper Iker Casillas and his difficult relationship with defender Sergio Ramos. Mourinho also didn’t cover himself with glory in an *El Clásico* where he poked Tito Vilanova in the eyes. It was obvious that his time in Spain was coming to an end, and 11 days after United’s appointment of Moyes, it was announced that Mourinho was leaving Madrid by that old favourite ‘mutual consent’. On the 3 June Mourinho was appointed by Chelsea for the second time.

Despite Moyes not officially starting in the role until early July, transfer speculation continued to rage, with most journalists suggesting similar names — Cesc Fabregas, Thiago and Mauroane Fellaini were all mentioned as potential midfielders, with Leighton Baines a possible addition at left-back. Tottenham Hotspur’s Gareth Bale, who was destined to leave White Hart Lane, was the biggest name linked to United, if one is to accept and discount the yearly link of Cristiano Ronaldo. Meanwhile, the future of Wayne Rooney was the one pressing issue Moyes would have to deal with. Sir Alex had dropped a bombshell by revealing that Rooney had asked to leave the club — ‘He came into my office the day after we won the League and asked away,’ Ferguson said in his second autobiography, *My Autobiography*.

Ferguson’s boast that he had left a squad in good shape was somewhat true, but it was a statement that came loaded with a million and one caveats. Moyes was, after all, inheriting the Premier League champions. Cynics had suggested that the most recent league successes in 2011 and 2013 owed more to the manager than the strength of the squad. There was undoubted quality within it, but it was clever management that optimised its capabilities. Here was a manager familiar with everything about his players. Most of them

were young men he'd known for years — some, six or seven, others, ten or 11, or in the case of the likes of Ryan Giggs and Paul Scholes, over 20. He knew the condition of his veteran players, he knew the physical make-up of his squad, he knew the games they would be suitable for — in short, he knew everything you would expect a man who had been in charge for more than a quarter of a century to know.

When he was unveiled at a press conference at Manchester United's Carrington training ground on 5 July, David Moyes looked just as much the wide-eyed new boy as Sir Alex Ferguson had looked the relaxed and confident landlord of the joint in his pressers of recent years. The following is the transcript of Moyes's first press conference.

### **As you sit here as Manchester United manager, how proud do you feel?**

'I am incredibly privileged to be given the opportunity to manage Manchester United and grateful to Sir Alex and the board for making it happen. It was a really strange situation for me. I had no idea whatsoever. I knew nothing until Sir Alex gave me a call and asked me to come to his house. I was expecting him to say "I'm going to take one of your players" or something along those lines. I went in and the first thing he said to me was "I'm retiring". I said when because he was never retiring, and he said next week. And his next words were "you're the next Manchester United manager". So I didn't get the chance to say yes or no. I was told that I was the next Manchester United manager and that was enough. As you can imagine, the blood drained from my face. I was really shocked. More shocked that Sir Alex had chosen to retire. But inside I was incredibly thrilled that I was going to be given the chance to manage Manchester United.'

### **Did you ever think that you had a chance at replacing Sir Alex as manager?**

'For any football manager or coach who wants to manage, this is the place to be. I hoped when Sir Alex's days were up, I would be a consideration. I also think it's a plus for English coaches. You might have to work through the lower leagues, which I did at Preston, and if it goes well for you, you get an opportunity. From that point of view, people will think if I can do it, they can do it too.'

### **How daunting is it to take over from one of the most successful managers the world has seen?**

‘Whoever was going to take over this job knows what the manager did before. The manager before was incredible. His achievements, well there are no better. All I can do is what David Moyes has done before. I will definitely continue the traditions of Manchester United, but I have to put my own stamp on the club. I’m very fortunate I’m taking over the champions of England, so that gives me a great start, better than most would get. Sir Bobby Charlton came to see me and I was as thrilled about that as anything. He came in and saw me at the training centre and that was amazing for me.’

### **You have been given a long-term, six-year contract — how much confidence does that give you?**

‘I have found the people at the club fantastic. They want continuity and longevity — the Glazers and Ed Woodward see it as a long-term thing. I need to say a big thank you to Bill Kenwright and Everton. I’m sure he understands I had to make this move. The Glazers and Ed Woodward have been excellent. The players have too. You can imagine the size of the job. I need to say a big thank you to the former manager’s old staff — Rene Meulenstein, Mike Phelan and Eric Steele, who have left the club. I asked Rene to stay but he felt it most fair that he moved on and let me stamp my own authority on the team.’

### **Can you replicate Sir Alex’s success?**

‘Sir Alex will always be here — his stand and his statue are here — the supporters need to realise that it was Sir Alex Ferguson’s time to go and someone needs to come in. To manage at this level for 25 years, I don’t think another manager will ever do that at a club at this level.’

### **Have you managed to talk to Wayne Rooney about his future?**

‘I’ve had opportunities to speak with him, yes. It’s interesting to think that Wayne is only 40 or 50 goals behind Sir Bobby Charlton and I think 40 behind Denis Law. I’ve had a chance to speak to Wayne. I’m sure it’s a question on all of your lips, but the fact of the matter is Wayne is not for sale. He is a Manchester United player and will

remain a Manchester United player. I've known Wayne since he was 16. I've had several meetings with Wayne. He's training brilliantly well. He's come back in good shape and I'm really looking forward to working with him. What we're looking to do is see how we can get Wayne Rooney scoring those goals, which will challenge the likes of Bobby Charlton and Denis Law's numbers. We are working and trying everything to get Wayne to the level where we think he should be. Not only that, this country will have a World Cup to play in next year, so for everybody's benefit, we are trying to get him back to the Wayne Rooney we all know.'

**Has Rooney said that he wants to remain at the club?**

'We have spoken several times. As far as I've seen it, whatever happened before is gone. We're working together now. I see a glint in his eye. He looks happy and he looks like he is going to knuckle down and get himself right.'

**But has Rooney made it clear that he would like to stay at the club?**

'I am looking forward to working with him and, as the club have reiterated, he won't be for sale.'

**Sir Alex Ferguson said the player has asked to leave. Will the club have to go back on that?**

'There was a private meeting between two people and I was not privy to that so whatever happened in that meeting was said. I don't know what those two gentlemen said. That conversation was private between them both. As far as I'm concerned, I'm really looking forward to having a go with Wayne.'

**David, has Wayne Rooney categorically said that he wants to remain a Manchester United player?**

'I can tell you categorically that Wayne Rooney is training fantastically well. That's all I can categorically tell you. I think if I was Wayne, I would look at the legends who have played at this club. You can see their pictures at the training ground — George Best, Bobby Charlton, Roy Keane, I could go on. And I thought to myself, Wayne is not too far away from that. It isn't too difficult to

get the goals to reach the goalscoring record, and if he could do that he would be seen in the same light as those people. Wayne will not be sold by Manchester United.'

### **Are you intimidated by the presence of Sir Alex Ferguson watching on?**

'I hope he is sitting in the directors' box because he has been so good. I have already called him two or three times for some advice. He's not there to pressure me. He said, "You were the name that I've told the board should be the next Manchester United manager." The big thing for me has been the players and they have responded well.'

### **Can you continue his success?**

'I've come to a club where success is tattooed across its badge. This club is about winning trophies and I've come to continue that. It's something I'm looking forward to doing. It will not change me; I'm determined to try to get the first ones on the board this season.'

### **Are you inexperienced compared to other managers linked with the job like Pep Guardiola and Jose Mourinho?**

'I'm inexperienced in a lot of things and there were some brilliant managers who could have quite easily taken this role, but the biggest confidence I got was that Sir Alex Ferguson said to me "you're the next Manchester United manager".'

### **Are you planning to strengthen the squad and, if so, where?**

'They had a great season in the Premier League last year and it is something we will do everything we can to add to the squad. This club has done it, will always go after the best players and will always be interested in them and we will do everything we can to make sure we remain at the top.'

### **Have you identified particular players, Cristiano Ronaldo maybe?**

'I would never speak about players at other football clubs because I think it's wrong and not my style. When people are in contract at

other clubs I think it's wrong to talk about them. This club had a great season last year. I am taking over the champions and Manchester United are always interested in the best players available.'

**Are you pleased to have Phil Neville and Ryan Giggs on your backroom staff?**

'I wanted to make sure I had connections who know what the club is about. I spoke to Paul Scholes as well and he wanted to have some time off with his family. I spoke with Rene Meulenstein but he decided to go, so I thought the obvious person was Ryan and he's been great. I've only worked with him for two days but he's an incredible footballer and sometimes until you get really close you don't realise that. He's been on his Pro Licence course and taking steps forward, and with him and Phil Neville I wanted to make sure I had some young members behind me as well.'

**What have been your first impressions of the squad?**

'I've not got all of [the players] back yet as a lot of are coming back from different tournaments. But the biggest thing I've been really impressed with is their attitude and the way they have gone about their work. Total professionals.'

**What are your thoughts about the start you face to the season?**

'It's a tough start and I'm not convinced that's the way the balls have come out of the hat when that was being done. But you have to play everybody twice and I look back over the last five years and I've never seen Man Utd get a tougher start in any season.'

**What style of play do you hope to implement?**

'I hope we play the same way, with the same traditions and entertaining, exciting football. I've always said the biggest thing in football is to win, the job here is to win. I would always put winning at the top of the list. Sir Alex would as well. If you had a great entertaining team but didn't win the games, it doesn't quite get you anywhere. You have to get the balance right and hopefully I can.'

**United had a great tradition of late goals under Fergie, the fans will expect that to continue. Can you do that?**

‘The players who can come on and win the games has been incredible and hopefully that won’t change. Hopefully I will have that same magic touch Sir Alex used to have at times when he made remarkable decisions that got him results from nowhere at times. I hope I am able to do that.’

**What did you immediately say to the players when you got them together?**

‘Not everybody’s here and it wasn’t as if I was able to go in there and say this is what we are doing. That will come in time. I had a word with the players the other day and said I was surprised that Sir Alex had chosen to retire. But I explained that when he had he had given me the opportunity to take the job and hope they respect that and we work together and try to be successful together.’

**What advice have you had from Sir Alex?**

‘It was incredible when I met him. Within half an hour he was talking about the squad and the players and the staff and it was a period for me I couldn’t believe it. At that time I was sworn to secrecy because Sir Alex wanted to keep his retirement private until the right moment. I only knew a couple of days before we played Liverpool when I got the call. He said a lot of things to me about the club and how great it was, the people who worked for it and felt I could take it on. He told me things that could be improved on as well so he was very honest.’

**It must be strange — one minute you’re targeting players for Everton — now bigger names for United?**

‘I’ve only been the manager since 1 July, but before that there was the month of June where I have had a chance to look at things, and yes it does change because it was a different window we would have been shopping in at Everton. That’s why I said earlier, this club will always go for the best players, but it will always look to buy the best young players. And a big part of my job is to bring through the young players from the academy. I think we tried to do that as well as we possibly could at Everton, introduce young players to the

team. And it is sort of in the DNA here, looking to bring through the young players.'

### **Who do you see as your biggest threat?**

'I think there will be improvements from all of the clubs. I am really pleased to see Jose (Mourinho) back, he is someone who everyone will enjoy working in this country. He has been very successful and I think we will enjoy having Jose back in the Premier League again. I have come across Manuel Pellegrini a couple of times at Villarreal and Malaga, so it will be new to him as well. Probably for the first time there has been quite a big shake-up in the Premier League and because of that I think there are a lot of things unknown, how things will pan out. I don't think it's just at this club, I think there are a few other clubs where it is similar.'

### **What would be success for you in your first season in charge at Old Trafford?**

'I actually think it is doing well in all the competitions, not just the Premier League. When you are at Manchester United, my thinking is that you have to go for everything, you attempt to win everything. Maybe you miss out sometimes, but you have to attempt to win all the trophies. I have done it everywhere else I've been, and I will certainly do it here because I have a bigger squad, quality players and a club with the tradition of being used to winning things.'

### **Will you look to get Paul Scholes involved at a later date?**

'He has been fantastic, he wanted to give me so much help and direction on things. We spent over an hour on the phone, but he wants to give his family some time now after retirement. But there will be a place for him, we will look to bring him back in when he is ready.'

### **Could you have a new signing before United go on tour?**

'I will try, but I couldn't turn round and say yes to that, but I will try if possible. The time is closing in a little bit just now. Always with a new manager, the players want to show they care. The players are

working hard. To play for Manchester United, whether you are young or old, there is always a great pressure.'

### **Will transfers go down to the wire in this window?**

'I think things might be done a little bit later this year, partly because there are quite a few new managers in so not everything will be done right away, but if you had the ideal position you would try to get the players in as soon as you could.'

### **Do you have an agreement with Everton and Bill Kenwright that you will not return to sign former players — Leighton Baines, for example?**

'I don't think that is the case. Bill has been fantastic to me, they have got a great staff, a very good team and very good players. I've brought some of my staff with me as well, all I could ever say is thanks for what Everton did for me.'

Moyes was sitting alongside Nemanja Vidic, the club captain, who answered a couple of questions, and answered diplomatically. The new boss seemed quite insistent over his Rooney stance, but it seemed more in hope than expectation; his attempt at being convincing was never, well, convincing. As far as United supporters go, the majority just wanted that issue put to bed. There was talk of renewed interest from Manchester City and even a suggestion that Arsenal had made an inquiry, but the major link for Rooney was with Chelsea. On 15 July Chelsea made an offer for Rooney, believed to be around £20m, which was dismissed out of hand. When it was suggested that Blues playmaker Juan Mata and/or David Luiz may be part of the deal, Chelsea issued a statement. 'Chelsea Football Club can confirm that, yesterday, it made a written offer to Manchester United for the transfer of Wayne Rooney,' said a spokesman. 'Although the terms of that offer are confidential, for the avoidance of doubt and contrary to what is apparently being briefed to the press in Sydney, the proposed purchase does not include the transfer or loan of any players from Chelsea to Manchester United.'

By that point United had already kicked off their pre-season tour of Australasia; getting their preparation underway with the most underwhelming of starts, a 1-0 defeat to a Singha All Star

XI, marking the first time that a United team had been defeated by one of its sponsors. In fact, underwhelming was the perfect summary of the entire tour — the most memorable part of it being an announcement on 17 July that Ed Woodward had left the tour ahead of schedule to attend to, as described by the club on social media, ‘urgent transfer business’. No explanation was ever forthcoming for what that business involved, but considering United did not make a signing in this transfer window for another month it seemed unlikely Woodward was jetting back to the north west of England to battle it out with Everton for the signing of Marouane Fellaini. If he had, perhaps United fans might have taken the Belgian’s signing a little better; the pointless hesitation on this front meant that the club ended up paying far more than they might have earlier in the summer when Fellaini’s release clause was considerably lower than the eventual fee. If only the United boss had some way of knowing the expiry date of said clause?

While it was much too early for genuine concern, eyebrows were raised at the club’s persistence with offers for Barcelona’s Cesc Fabregas. Fabregas had spent just two years back at Barcelona after seemingly spending twice as long pining for a move back there from Arsenal. The protracted nature of this potential deal meant United missed out on a £17m deal for Thiago, who did leave Barcelona, to join Bayern Munich. United were not presenting the impression of a club who knew how to do business and the new combination of Woodward and Moyes was not getting off to the best start in the eyes of fans, who were growing restless.

This was not helped by the fact that the channels of communication were seemingly more open than ever before; almost as soon as Ferguson retired, the club created an official Twitter account, and updates about the CEO’s whereabouts presented the impression to supporters that activity was imminent. Instead, it all looked a little bit *Carry On*, particularly whilst the club were on their tour, with Moyes unable to provide any clarification on activity back in Manchester and thus presenting the impression of a person who did not have complete control and understanding of what was going on.

This period is looked back upon as almost humorous — in the way that if you don’t laugh, you’ll cry — but, the appointment of

Moyes aside (if we are to describe that as a mistake), the first public sign of United's slipping off the track was already evident. With the bids for Fabregas having been made public, the club were entering into uncharted territory — only once before had Sir Alex Ferguson openly coveted a player who had no intention of signing for United, and that was Alan Shearer. Then, though, United didn't quite have as much at stake. It was important for the club to make a statement in this immediate period of transition, whether that be bringing in a blockbuster name, or making a point of keeping the squad as it was. The tactic from the club was clearly to go with the former and so they had put themselves under pressure to deliver, armed with the reputation of the club and not the manager to attract players. If they had been more discreet, well, perhaps it would have been more forgivable. The damning thing was that Fabregas was obviously a 'gettable' player; United's pursuit of Gareth Bale later in the summer would end with the Welsh winger opting to sign for Real Madrid, which wasn't by itself a stick to beat Moyes and Woodward with, but on the back of the Fabregas and Fellaini sagas it was ammunition for more than just one or two to be worried.

Therein lay the first problem United faced — the club had moved with the times, it had even led and pioneered the evolution of the game, but in appointing someone who did not have a track record for success and did not even have a good track record for entertaining football, the club had only its, admittedly considerable, reputation to attract players.

Consider an alternate reality where Jose Mourinho had been sounded out for the job instead of David Moyes. With his future at Madrid more than uncertain, it would still have looked like a major coup on United's part — to hire the Real Madrid manager four years after they bought United's best player — and one suspects that Mourinho would have played every bit the showman.

In 2016 former Chelsea defender Marcel Desailly claimed Mourinho had long coveted the Old Trafford job. 'I was in Mexico with him at a FIFA conference,' Desailly told ESPN. 'Remember, when he left Inter Milan to go to Real Madrid [in 2010]? At the time, he said he would come back to England. But his plan was to go to Manchester United, not Chelsea. This was his main target. He respected the club. The worldwide exposure is through Manchester United.'

Had Mourinho left Madrid direct for Manchester instead of taking a detour to London, well, you can only imagine that it would have been the perfect case of promotion, and, with United being so keen on that aspect of the industry, it makes you wonder what on earth they were thinking when hiring Moyes, and that is said with absolutely no disrespect intended to the former Everton boss. Mourinho would have made it look like his decision, and in doing so he would have made Manchester United look like the desirable choice ahead of Real Madrid; this would have been a critical and pivotal moment in the club's history, as even if most in the media would have found those comments disingenuous they would have at least presented a far more convincing impression. And, as Mourinho showed when he eventually did end up at United, his transfer dealings are more direct. What do you have if you have a manager who left one of the biggest clubs in the world for another, a manager with a track record of winning things, who tells you he wants to play for his club, who had just won their domestic championship? You listen with a lot more attention than you do to a manager who hasn't won anything and doesn't seem that convinced that he actually wants you. Whatever the ifs and buts, United paid the price for the decisions made that summer for the following three years, and it was only when Mourinho arrived at Old Trafford and promptly convinced Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Paul Pogba to spend a year outside of the Champions League (with both players at ages where you would think they would flat refuse it) that the pulling power of the manager was truly recognised, and United had the same sort of allure as they had enjoyed under Sir Alex Ferguson. The lost opportunity to laud it over Madrid as the most desirable club in the world might not be something that the money-men at Old Trafford lose much sleep over, probably because it wasn't a thought that ever crossed their minds (although, *come on* — Mourinho would surely have made it look like a step up), but considering how close they were to a seamless transition in comparison to the shambles that summer became, the mind truly does boggle.

If the club did have a success that summer it was the retention of Wayne Rooney. The definition of success, however, must be explained in this instance. United rejected all further offers from Chelsea before the end of August, and so, true to his word, David Moyes did not sell

Wayne Rooney. This was a victory of conviction but not as emphatic as the manager would have liked; for, by now, there was not exactly the shock and upset about the possibility of a Rooney exit as there had been back in October 2010. Rooney didn't start in any of the last three games of the 2012/13 season and his place in the United first team had been under question since he was dropped for the second leg of the Champions League second-round tie with Real Madrid. There were in fact many supporters who believed Fergie had delivered a nice welcome present for the new manager — the opportunity to accept an offer for Rooney and start a new era. The forward's drop in form over the second half of that last season under Ferguson had been notable; in a game at Swansea three days before Christmas, Rooney put in arguably his most disappointing performance in a red shirt, and never picked up again for the rest of the campaign. However, with a frustrating transfer window drawing to a close, it is easy and understandable to see why David Moyes would have felt a move to Chelsea of all teams would have been perceived as a very poor move from United. They would have theoretically strengthened a rival, and United would look as if they were forced into selling. So Moyes stood firm; the following February, however, when Rooney was awarded a new five-and-a-half-year contract worth a reported £300,000 a week, eyes were watering throughout M16. By then, Moyes's reign was close to untenable anyway, and the deal was seen by most supporters as a financial nightmare for the club. Rooney's stock had fallen sharply to the point where the club would have been lucky to receive an offer of £15m for him — so in what scenario did it make sense to make a commitment to pay him that sum each year for the next six? The Rooney Conundrum was one that would dog the following management set-ups; by February, as stated, time was all but up for Moyes.