

Nov 2003

## **200 Issues – How the future might look when RN has sold its next 100 issues.**

It seems like only moments since Red News was celebrating its 100th issue and here we are celebrating the 200th edition at the end of the 2019-20 season. If someone had told you back in 2003 what would happen to United you'd have called them mad. But before we go on to review the last 17 years of United's history something's bothering me. Ever since people started referring to this year as 'twenty-twenty' it reminds me of that twat Wenger who used to manage Arsenal. Remember his famous 20-20 vision that meant he could see every infringement against his team but never saw it when his thugs were decapitating the opposition.

The worst case of Wenger-vision was in his last game as Arsenal manager. It's coincidental that around the time of RN's 100th issue there was a freak result in the European Cup with Deportivo La Coruna being beaten 8-3 at Monaco. That record score should have lasted for years, but it lasted barely one when Arsenal got knocked out by 10-2. Wenger didn't see the 2 blatant dives for the penalties to put Arsenal 2 up, nor did he see the horrific fouls that led to red cards for Vieira and Keown or the punch Henry threw at the ref for the 3rd dismissal. He must surely have seen some of the 10 goals his 8 remaining fools conceded and he certainly saw his own cards the next day. How we've enjoyed the demise of the Arse since with the hapless Tony Adams drinking himself silly as he manages a yo-yo team between divisions 1 and 2. They don't even play his old club Wycombe who took the millions Arsenal paid for poaching Adams and built a Premiership team.

The highlight of United in the last 17 years is easy - 2006 could it ever get better? That's what we thought after the treble in 1999 and for a few years we spoilt bastards jogged along barely registering excitement at each championship win. The run in to our greatest triumph started the season before RN's 100th birthday when we fought so hard to win the league in 2003. Another scrappy win followed in 2004 but most match-going Reds enjoyed the Easyjet Cup win more (or Carling Cup as it was called then). In 2005 we achieved another 3 in a row championship win, but that was easily overshadowed as we won the European Cup for the third time and Captain Keano got a real medal.

Lord Fergie was all powerful by then having bought the majority shareholding from his mates who'd been buying into the club. He installed his sons at the club as Chief Executive (Jason) Finance Director (Mark) and Chief Scout (Darren) and Keano took over as manager while Fergie relaxed as Director of Football. Nothing Fergie had achieved could rival Keano's first season as manager. Despite our usual poor start and the Autumn blips against Southampton and newly promoted Wigan, we were still in contention as 2006 began. It was after our 3rd round FA cup win against Charlton that I first heard someone mention the Q word but never expected that by May we would complete the quadruple - Premiership, FA Cup, League Cup and European Cup. Not only the fantastic 4 trophies, but it was 4 in a row of championship wins which had never been achieved and we equalled Liverpool's record 18 league and 4 European Cup wins.

After the quadruple anything was going to be a comedown and many had that 1999 anticlimax feeling, but we didn't know how bad it would get. 2007 was a mid-table finish, but we thought it was just a post-euphoria glitch and Keano would sort out the latest

bunch of Rolex wearers. No one expected a relegation dogfight in 2008, followed by actual relegation the following year.

Those of us old enough to remember 1974 were shocked only by the speed of the decline. It had taken us six years after the 1968 European Cup, but this time we managed to implode within 3 years. We were reduced to small comforts like knowing that Liverpool and City were still mid-table nonentities and hadn't won anything for years. We hadn't got as bad as Arsenal who in 2009 were in Division 2 having only just staved off liquidation and Leeds had gone out of business in 2004 after they got relegated. The best thing for most of us was losing the prawn sandwich brigade. The atmosphere in Old Trafford was better in that relegation year than it had been in 15 years of dominance. Average crowds dropped a bit, but at 60,000 were still higher than any other team and never dropped further in all those seasons in the wilderness.

Poor Keano got the board's vote of confidence at Christmas the season we got relegated and was sacked by the Ferguson clan in the first week of January when we got knocked out of the FA cup by AFC Wimbledon (who were still non-league then). When Mark Hughes took over we were delighted but worried that another United hero would bite the dust. It was scary watching Fergie let his offspring turn into the Edwards family, but in his seventies he seemed to rely on them totally. When Sparky failed to get United out of Division 1 at the first go, he too was unceremoniously sacked. At least Cantona sneered down his Gallic nose and said he loved Alex, but would never work for Jason, so we were spared our greatest hero being destroyed.

We spent a full decade in Division 1 with only a couple of losing play offs and one Skoda Cup win (embarrassing eh?!). We suffered a revolving door of under-achieving continental managers we'd rather forget and a cohort of youngsters grew up with City being the top team in Manchester, though the bitters never had our class. At least there are now some Manc youths coming through the gates. We lost a whole generation at our peak and you can see the crowd is mostly oldies then a big gap to the new youngsters. Those who are school age have never known what it was like to see United win things. Many of today's crowd are too young to remember the quadruple.

At last in 2020 – "Hello, hello, United are back". Getting promotion in 2019 was fantastic, but even better we did a strange double by winning the FA cup too. Since the recent change in rules the FA Cup win got us into the early-qualifying round of the Champions League with another 5 rounds before joining the big boys of Real Mallorca, Verona and Norwich. Nobody expected us to get through those hurdles, but then no one expected us to win the Premiership in our first season back. It was great to prove those doubters wrong and win both the League and the European Cup, neatly taking away Liverpool's last bit of dignity as we finally hit 19 Leagues and 5 European Cups – one better than both their records that we'd equalised so famously with our Quadruple. Liverpool are now 30 years without a league title and the numbers on the City banner rolled over to 44 this season.

Who do we have to thank for this sudden turnaround in fortunes? Not many would expect me to single out Graham Stuart, former blue Scouser who finished up at Charlton. Not many would even remember him, but you may remember Stuart's disgusting two-footed lunge in that 3<sup>rd</sup> round FA cup tie on our way to the Quadruple. We should have been pre-warned after his comments about deliberately clogging Cristiano Ronaldo (now Captain Cool) in one of his first games when only 18 years old.

Instead Stuart went unpunished so he could later end the career of our sub-striker. Who would have thought our misfiring misfit would quietly work away behind the scenes at Old Trafford through all the dark years until Bryan Robson's consortium finally got rid of the junior Fergusons and saved our club. As we emerge from the depths, Diego Forlan might be an unlikely managerial genius, but we wouldn't have it any other way now, would we?