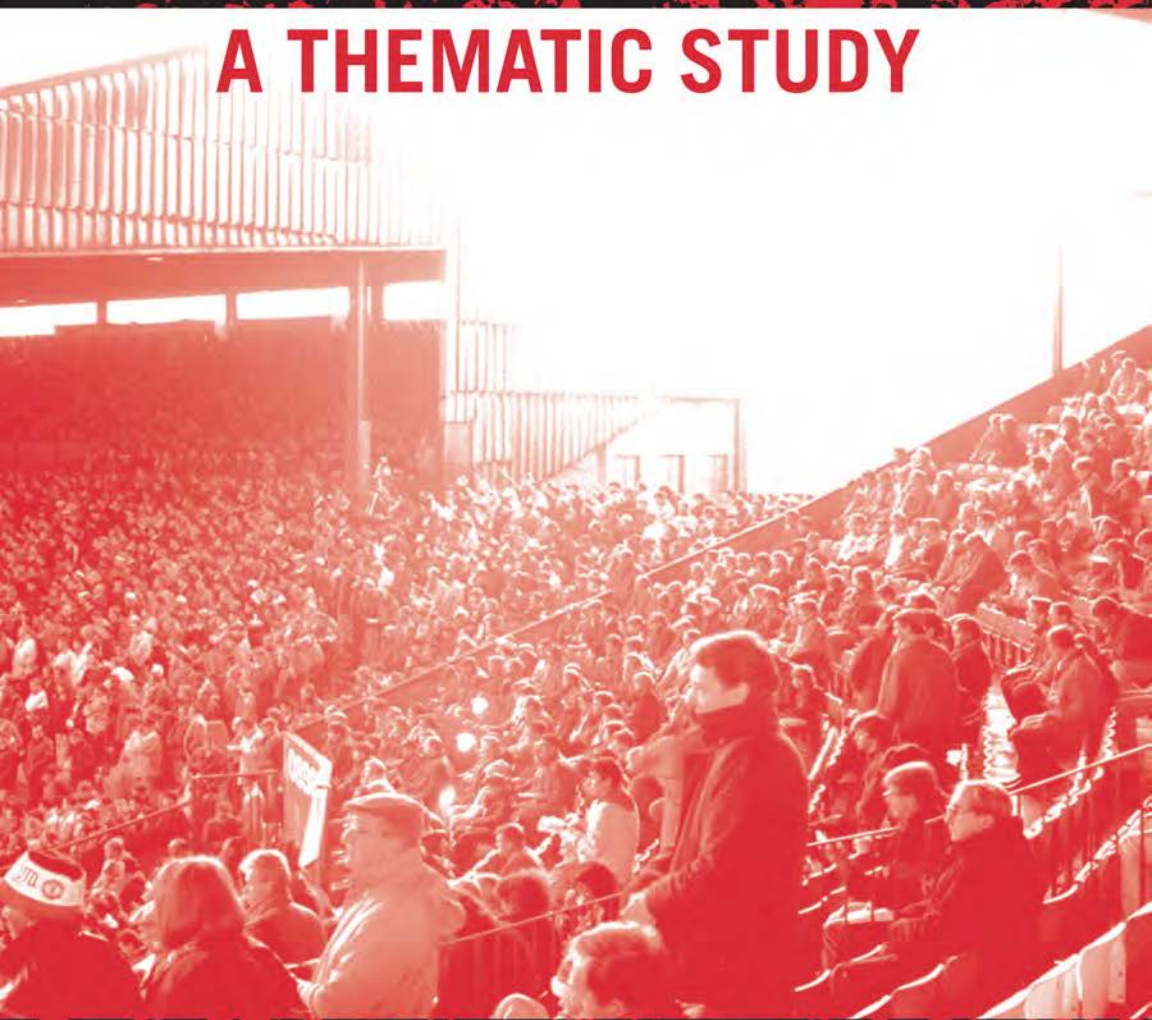


MANCHESTER UNITED

A THEMATIC STUDY



EDITED BY
DAVID L. ANDREWS

Manchester United

Despite a myriad of popular and journalistic expositions, up to this point there have been virtually no academic discussions of the Manchester United phenomenon. This anthology represents the first concerted academic examination of Manchester United F.C. in its contemporary guise as a both widely followed, and highly emblematic, sporting institution.

Bringing together respected academics from an array of disciplinary backgrounds including Cultural Studies, Sociology, English, History, Media Studies, Sports Management, Gender Studies and Economics, the essays gathered within this anthology each interrogate various interrelated dimensions of the Manchester United universe.

The primary aim of this collection is to illustrate how the structure and experience of Manchester United is implicated in broader social shifts, within which the boundary between cultural and commercial concerns have become increasingly indivisible. The chapters are presented within five thematic sections – 1. *Becoming United*, 2. *Economy United*, 3. *Embodied United*, 4. *Local United*, 5. *Global United* – each focused on specific elements of the Manchester United condition. It is hoped that readers will engage in chapters as individual entities, as part of a thematic section, and as a contribution to the project as a whole.

David L. Andrews is Associate Professor and member of the Physical Cultural Studies Research Group in the Sport, Commerce and Culture Program, Dept. of Kinesiology, and an Affiliate Faculty in the Department of American Studies, University of Maryland, USA. His research is concerned with crafting a sociology of late capitalist sport. He has been guest editor of the *Sociology of Sport Journal*, and is on the editorial board of the *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* and the *Sociology of Sport Journal*.

Manchester United

A thematic study

Edited by David L. Andrews

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Introduction

Situating Manchester United plc

David L. Andrews

The choice of Manchester United as the empirical locus of this project was based on a number of factors, not least of which was the prominent place occupied by the club within the everyday lives of the English populace. Whether one loves, hates, or is indifferent toward the club, some semblance of its material, symbolic and/or commercial presence is difficult to avoid when traversing England's high streets, out-of-town shopping centres, school playgrounds, myriad newspapers or television channels. Within the context of contemporary consumer society, perhaps the most tangible criteria through which it is possible to evaluate Manchester United's cultural significance are economic in nature. As testament to its broad-based appeal, and unlike most other football clubs within what is a recession-hit culture industry, in recent years Manchester United has generated increased rates of profit, with earnings per share doubling between 2001 and 2003. Moreover, in 2003 profits reached £50 million, from turnover of £173 million, resulting in a market valuation approaching £610 million. Also, unlike many clubs whose reliance upon television broadcast rights fees necessarily places them in a perilous financial position, a breakdown of United's 2003 turnover reveals a much healthier, balanced fiscal landscape derived from match day (41 per cent of turnover), media (32 per cent) and commercial (27 per cent) revenue sectors.

Not that Manchester United should be considered a fundamentally parochial phenomenon, as evidenced by its growing presence and aspirations within overseas markets. As the club's 2003 annual report effused:

Manchester United is one of the leading clubs in world football, with a global brand and following that embodies the passion and excitement of the world's most popular sport. Our goal is, through innovation, commitment and evolution, to protect and develop the brand by sustaining the playing success on the field and growing the business to enhance the financial strength of the Group.

(Anon., 2003: 2)

Manchester United's rising status within the global cultural economy of sport can be attributed to its position at the vanguard of the commercialising processes

that commanded English football over the past two decades. This financialisation (Martin, 2002) of the game was wrought from the introduction of new sources, and previously unimaginable scales, of capital investment from, amongst other media, marketing and commercial innovations: 'satellite and pay-per-view television networks, Internet and telecommunications corporations, transnational sports equipment manufacturers, public relations companies, and the major stock markets through the sale of club equity' (Giulianotti, 2002: 29). The latest phase in this process merely speaks to the growth strategies demanded by any successful corporate entity confronted with a saturation of their home market. For this reason, the Manchester United administration readily acknowledges the need to 'leverage the global brand' with the aim of 'converting more' global 'fans into customers' (Anon, 2003: 9).

The emergence of the emblematic Manchester United plc illustrates broader societal shifts within which the boundaries between cultural and commercial spheres have become increasingly indivisible. As such, the complex web of institutional forces and relations through which Manchester United is presently constituted speaks to Jameson's (1991; 1998) suggestive characterization of the late capitalist condition as being marked by the *collapsing* of the cultural and the economic 'back into one another' (Jameson, 1991: xxi), otherwise referred to as a 'dedifferentiation of fields, such that economics has come to overlap with culture: that everything, including commodity production and high and speculative finance, has become cultural; and culture has equally become economic or commodity oriented' (Jameson, 1998: 73). Certainly, contemporary sport culture can be considered an outgrowth of late capitalism's propensity for sectoral and institutional convergence (Andrews, 2001; Giulianotti, 1999; Goldman and Papsion, 1998; Miller *et al.*, 2001; Rinehart, 1998; Roche, 2000; Whitson, 1998). In this regard, Manchester United represents a popular cultural institution that occupies the space between – and therefore shapes its very being in relation to – contemporaneous social forces and conditions. This, of course, has always been the case. For instance, the origination of the club in 1878 with the founding of Newton Heath (a name which endured until 1902), by the male workers of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway, spoke to the manner in which accelerating urbanising and industrialising processes contributed to the corporeal, spatial and temporal regulation of working-class leisure at that juncture. The relatively recent, yet rapid, transformation of Manchester United into an 'American-style, branded media business' (Maidment, 2002), exhibits the extent to which sport, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, has become inextricably entangled with the values and directives of an increasingly dominant global corporate capitalist order (Maguire, Jarvie, Mansfield and Bradley, 2002). In McKay and Miller's (1991: 87) terms, Manchester United plc thus represents a prototypical 'corporate sport' institution.

Manchester United presently occupies a relational and dynamic space, positioned in relation to external social fields (Kay and Laberge, 2002) many of which are dominated and defined by commercial dictates. Thus, the club's major shareholders, the organizational and representative bodies of the game (FA

Premier League, UEFA, Professional Football Players Association, G-14 European Football Clubs Association), primary corporate sponsors (Nike, Vodafone), and broadcast media interests (Sky Sports, ITV), all contribute toward shaping the club's corporatist demeanour, in ways which may, or indeed may not, accommodate the wishes and ambitions of its supporters (not infrequently a football club's most overlooked constituency). Within the relational space created by these intersecting commercial forces and relations, the late capitalist Manchester United has become actualised as much by the workings of the previously distinct advertising, marketing, promotion, public relations and mass media sectors, as by its own internal mechanisms. As such, Manchester United plc exemplifies the type of horizontally integrated and flexible organizational network, indicative of the post-Fordist structures that have come to dominate and define the late capitalist cultural economy (c.f. Castells, 1996; Harvey, 1989; Murray, 1990). Indeed, in Jameson's (1991; 1998) terms, Manchester United's structure, goals and objectives can no longer be easily differentiated from those of the core institutional elements and relations through which it has come to exist in its present form. Moreover, such is the degree to which they have been seamlessly sutured into the very essence of the Manchester United experience – and such is the hegemonic influence of the club – that its various commercially based institutional interdependencies have come to be viewed by many as 'naturalized and indispensable' (Rowe, 1995) elements of the contemporary football club.

At the behest of the commercialising, mass-mediating, and globalising forces that simultaneously compel and propel many of its core constituents, Manchester United plc has effectively become a highly diversified (both in its structure and focus) platform for the delivery of mass entertainment. Hence the club, its history, stadium, players and playing exploits are mobilised as the centrepiece of an array of branded experiences and commodities designed to stimulate public interest (match attendance, television viewership, books and magazines, video games, video documentaries and season reviews, replica team shirts and other licensed merchandise, stadium tours, theme restaurants *et al.*) with the aim of generating – as the normative expectations of the stock market dictate to any public corporation – ever-increasing rates of investment return. While Manchester United may have taken the lead in English football's newly found preoccupation with markets and consumers (King, 1997), the football public's engagement with the club does not necessarily foreground commercially inspired relations; they are, however, almost unavoidably present in some capacity. Put another way, hypercommercial football clubs such as Manchester United still command the same type of obsessive and, at times, irrational loyalty identified as being characteristic of the traditional football supporter (Giulianotti, 2002). The difference within the present football context is that the cleverly crafted normative expectations of behaviour, which can compel (however unwillingly) the aforementioned traditional *supporter* to invest in what are not inconsiderable commercial exchanges (such as those demanded by season ticket, satellite television and pay-per-view subscription and replica team shirt purchases), in order to both publicly and privately announce a Manchester United subjectivity

beyond reproach. That having been said, the hypercommercialism of the new football economy has stimulated the emergence of new categories of spectators. For, as the ‘commodity-centered mediation of football qua entertainment intensifies’, so the presence of spectators with more celebrity-driven (fans) and ephemeral (flaneurs) relations to specific clubs becomes more evident (Giulianotti, 2002: 38). The changing experience of football spectatorship is also linked to the expanded spatial reach of mega-clubs. No longer reliant solely upon the locally grounded, near mythical, working-class communities with which football club support has been traditionally associated, major clubs represent a point of coalescence for a transnational, televisually based neo-tribalism (Maffesoli, 1995), substantiated through the establishment of truly global, satellite distribution networks (for further explication of the changing relations between football and its communities, see Brown *et al.*, N.D.). Thus, Manchester United operates, at one and the same time, in a manner that accommodates its local and national spectator bases, while it looks to colonise the rest of the acknowledged football world and beyond (i.e. the United States).

From a number of vantage points, Manchester United clearly represents a prescient and illuminating problematic. Somewhat surprisingly, therefore, up to this juncture there have been remarkably few considered academic analyses of even the more discrete aspects of the Manchester United question, let alone a fully comprehensive study. The most notable contributions in this regard are Brown and Walsh’s (1999) thoughtful and rigorous analysis of the political machinations surrounding Rupert Murdoch’s unsuccessful bid to purchase the club, and Cashmore’s (2002) lively deconstruction of one-time United icon, David Beckham. Indeed, while it cannot be considered in the same vein as a considered scholarly work, Bose’s (2000) mildly sensationalist exposé of the commercial reinvention of the club is arguably the most comprehensive analysis of Manchester United to date. Dropping down (or is it up?) the publishing food chain, there is of course a flourishing Manchester United sub-industry consisting of descriptive popular histories, player (auto)biographies, fan narratives, annual reflections and even national curriculum related workbooks (c.f. Broadbent, 2000; Connor, 2004; Gregg, 2002; Hughes, 2003; Kelly, 2003; Shindler, 1999). However, in order to address the relative disregard shown by the academic community toward Manchester United as the focus for serious study, this anthology seeks to situate and excavate the Manchester United phenomenon in a manner which renders intelligible its social, cultural, economic, and political significance.

Broadly speaking, this project can be viewed as an attempt to contextualise Manchester United through a multi-themed, interdisciplinary, interpretive approach, premised on the understanding that ‘An event or practice does not exist apart from the forces of the context that constitute it as what it is’ (Grossberg, 1997a: 255). In a previous discussion (Andrews, 2002), I sought to outline a contextually grounded approach toward developing a comprehensive understanding of sport culture, in all its myriad manifestations. According to this dialectic materialist schema, sport is a fluid, relational and processual entity, whose culturally and historically contingent iterations can only be understood in relation

to the complex matrix of forces with which it is constitutively bound. Differently put, sport 'identities, practices, and effects generally, constitute the very context within which they are practices, identities, or effects' (Slack, 1996: 125), and hence they need to be addressed as such. In light of this, the aim of any contextually driven research is to map the sport entity under scrutiny – in this case Manchester United – within, and through, the precise set of social, cultural, economic and/or political conditions and relations operating at the moment of analysis.

Though generally acknowledged as a legitimate mode of critical intellectual inquiry, there continues to exist a relative scarcity of sport-oriented studies advancing Grossberg's directive to the effect that 'context is everything and everything is context for cultural studies' (1997b: 7–8), for which the notable exceptions merely underscore the greater absence of this approach (c.f. Carrington, 2001; Cole, 1996; Giardina, 2003; Gruneau and Whitson, 1993; Howell and Ingham, 2001; McDonald, 2000; Miller, 1998). Of course this relative dearth of contextual cultural studies of sport is wholly understandable. Put simply, the associated craft of mapping the 'rich aggregate of many determinations and relations' (Marx, 1977: 351) that dialectically link, or articulate, a discrete sporting entity to the broader social context, is indeed a bewildering task for any individual researcher. For this reason, it is by no means surprising that *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (Hall et al., 1979) – generally considered to be a benchmark cultural studies project in terms of empirical depth, political commitment, theoretical sophistication and contextual reconstruction – was a collaborative endeavour in the truest sense of the term. While by no means intended to be, or indeed realised as, as close a research collaboration as that which spawned *Policing the Crisis*, in combination the substantive and disciplinary diversity of the Manchester United analyses incorporated within this anthology seeks to make a similar contribution. Through a collective linking of Manchester United to the 'determinate effects' and 'concrete relations' characteristic of the social context in which it exists and operates (Hall, 1996: 45), the aim of the book is to explicate the complexities of the Manchester United phenomenon, while simultaneously providing some important insights into the forces shaping contemporary society as a whole.

The process of contextualising Manchester United is realised within five thematic sections, each focused on somewhat discrete, yet necessarily interrelated, aspects of inquiry. As befits the study of what is a necessarily complex and multifaceted problematic, the chapter authors speak from a variety of disciplinary vantage points, including Cultural Studies, Sociology, English, History, Media Studies, Sport and Leisure Management, Gender Studies, Economics and the Sociology of Sport. The aim is to encourage readers to engage in their own form of disciplinary boundary crossing (Klein, 1996), and hopefully generate a more holistic and contextual understanding, as they encounter the various elements of the Manchester United phenomenon. Part I, 'Becoming United', provides a historical backdrop to Manchester United's present incarnation, through discussions which, to differing degrees and in differing ways, address the Munich air crash in February 1958 as a pivotal moment in the club's recent evolution.

Focusing on the symbolic influence of the iconic Matt Busby, Stephen Wagg outlines the manner in which the mythology that enveloped the team that perished in Munich was, and continues to be, responsible for anchoring the club firmly in the collective consciousness of the global football public. Acknowledging the importance of the Munich disaster to the self-reflexive understanding of the Manchester United supporter's experience, Gavin Mellor uses archival and oral histories in identifying how this tragic event evolved into an important moment for the supporters of rival teams looking for points of attribution, in justifying their increasing disdain for an ascendant Manchester United. Lastly in Part I, from a strategic management perspective, Kirsten Rosaaen and John Amis examine the intangible resources, particularly in terms of the public interest and empathy, deriving from involvement in the Munich disaster. Albeit emergent from the midst of tragedy, Rosaaen and Amis argue that the club's elevated popular profile and reputation was subsequently capitalised upon through the adoption of corroborative management and branding strategies.

In Part II, 'Economy United', the discussion turns to contrasting readings of Manchester United's commercial being. Utilising a method of quantitative benchmarking, Bill Gerrard highlights the sources of Manchester United's competitive advantage, which he identifies as deriving from the mobilising of key strategic resources in a superior fashion to its leading Premier League rivals. Andrew Ross provides a more critical interpretation of football's new business model, of which Manchester United is the leading exemplar, through an examination of commercial relations, and political contestations, responsible for the instantiation of the United megabrand. Furthermore, his explication of the exploitative labour relations engaged through the club's commercial relationship with Nike – the producer of team apparel – represents an ironic updating of the unequal economic interdependencies that have, for centuries, linked Manchester with South East Asia. Focusing on the politics of replica shirt consumption, Carlton Brick highlights how Manchester United fan cultures have scorned the consumption of licensed merchandise as being a soulless, commodified expression of club loyalty. In doing so, Brick, following Žižek, identifies a core paradox within late capitalism, namely, that devotional anti-consumptuary resistance, or non-consumption, actually mirrors the commodified excesses of that which it purportedly abhors. Lastly within Part II, John Sugden provides a rich ethnographic reading of an illegitimate commercial subculture centred on the provision of counterfeit clothing, merchandise and independent ticket and travel *et al.* to Manchester United supporters. Ironically, this urban underground economy effectively uses the club's popularity as a mechanism for enabling its workers to immerse themselves within the ideology and excess of Britain's mainstream enterprise culture.

Part III, 'Embodied United', turns the attention to the players, the embodied representatives of Manchester United. Alan Bairner uses George Best as a suggestive vehicle through which to examine the complex relationship between Manchester United and the Northern Ireland population. Specifically, he identifies how Best's iconic status as player and personality, in combination with

his understated Protestantism, allowed support for Manchester United to – however superficially and ephemerally – transcend the religious and cultural divides within Northern Ireland. Through a variety of theoretical lenses, Eileen Kennedy discusses how different representational modes influence the manner in which footballers' bodies become visible. In doing so, she illuminates the shifting gender and class politics of late capitalist sport. Pirkko Markula continues the focus on the gendered nature of the Manchester United spectacle. Through a Deleuzian informed feminist interrogation, Markula challenges the popular disdain for Victoria Beckham (wife of former Manchester United icon, David Beckham) and offers an alternative reading of her as a progressive female subject.

Turning to issues of football, community and identity, Part IV, 'Local United', illustrates the various local rivalries with which Manchester United, and most pertinently its Mancunian supporters, are implicated. Adam Brown discusses Manchester's contested footballscape within the context of a period of significant urban investment and regeneration. This leads to a focus on the relations between rival clubs, Manchester United and Manchester City, their fans and the city itself. Evidencing Manchester's football-based divisions, David Hand outlines the common perceptions held by Manchester City supporters concerning their domineering local rivals. He graphically illustrates how these antagonistic United imaginings play an important role in the discursive constitution of antithetical City identities. Alan Tomlinson broadens the issue of rivalry with Manchester United to include its Lancastrian neighbours, specifically Burnley. Through a detailed socio-historical analysis, Tomlinson outlines the contrasting evolutions of Manchester United and Burnley, as expressed through changing relations between administrators, players and supporters. Finally in Part IV, Grant Farred provides an illuminating window into Liverpool fans' haughty disregard for Manchester United's position of ascendancy within English football, due to its failure to emulate Liverpool's onetime dominance of the European sphere. As Farred acknowledges, this disdain is as much a mechanism for coping with Liverpool's relative decline, as it is a critique of Manchester United's corporatised sensibility.

Lastly, Part V, 'Global United', focuses on Manchester United's aspirations and presence within the broader football universe. Toby Miller provides an insightful overview of the contextual forces and conditions operating in contradistinction to Manchester United's market expansionist ambitions, as it seeks to penetrate the United States' sporting landscape. From a more discrete US perspective – that of Memphis, Tennessee – Silk and Chumley offer an ethnographically based understanding of the hierarchies and complexities operating within the consumption communities, which have coalesced around the televisual globalisation of the Manchester United spectacle. Focusing specifically on particular Manchester United supporter groups, Bo Reimer underscores the fact that Scandinavian interest in British football has to be understood as part of broader social and historical relations between these contrasting parts of Northern Europe. Reimer identifies how the complexities and contradictions within contemporary English football culture, wrought by the mass-mediated hyper-

commercialisation of the game, has similarly affected the constitution and experience of Scandinavian Manchester United supporter groups. Finally in Part V, Jim Denison inverts the focus of the previous discussions by focusing on an immigrant's seemingly unavoidable compulsion to become a Manchester United fan. In pinpointing the centrality of Manchester United within English culture, and its increasing international presence, Denison suggests how the newly landed immigrant can derive a sense – however superficial – of belonging, through exposure to the globally familiar.

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Part I

Becoming United

1 The team that wouldn't die

On the mystique of Matt Busby and Manchester United

Stephen Wagg

Ransom Stoddard: 'You're not going to use the story, Mr Scott?'

Maxwell Scott: 'This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.'

From: *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (Directed by John Ford, 1962)¹

Many English football people of a certain age – born, that is, before or just after the Second World War – have long since wearied of the growing global preoccupation with Manchester United and its personnel. If the much-feted David Beckham were to be holding a photo shoot in their back garden, or the graceless, gum-chewing Sir Alex Ferguson were to be conducting a press conference there, they would probably prefer to draw the curtains. But the United teams of 1948 or the mid-1950s might be a different matter; these sides would now very likely inspire the same feelings of warmth and identification beyond the immediate Manchester conurbation as they did then.

I confess I'm one of those people (b. 1947) and this essay is about the legend of Manchester United which formed in those years and which provided the basis for, but is importantly in some ways distinct from, the current international fascination for the club. In trying to suggest the appeal of Manchester United outside its own locality during this period the essay is necessarily speculative. It treats United, inevitably, as a text, but it also considers key recent texts on the mythology of Manchester United and of their most celebrated manager Matt Busby. Three are especially important – *A Strange Kind of Glory: Sir Matt Busby and Manchester United* by the Irish writer Eamon Dunphy (Dunphy, 1991); a three-part *Arena* documentary made by the leading sports journalist Hugh McIlvanney about three football managers born on the same Scottish coalfield: *Busby, Stein, Shankly: The Football Men*, broadcast on BBC in 1997 (McIlvanney, 1997); and *Matt Busby: The Boss*, another TV documentary, this time for BBC2's *Reputations* series, put out in May of 1999. There are others.

My main purpose is to outline the legend and to suggest its seductiveness at certain times and in certain social places. The legend is clearly what counts and I'm not concerned to 'debunk' popular myths about the club or their famous manager, although I will, where I feel it's appropriate, seek to unpack important

notions about post-war Manchester United. I'm using the word 'myth', therefore, not so much in its everyday usage which refers to a popular but mistaken view, as in the meaning given to it by Roland Barthes of 'depoliticized speech' (Barthes, 1973: 142)

My argument, in summary, is this: Manchester United became one of the most loved and admired football teams in the world because they represented, variously, a tantalising balance between vitally opposed ideas – between tradition and modernity, between the local and the global (or, at least, the continental), between Anglo Saxon sobriety and Celtic romance, between freedom and constraint, between the individual and the collective. The Manchester United team which appeared most successfully to embody the tensions between these ideas came together in the mid-1950s, under the charismatic manager Matt Busby, and was broken up in what has arguably become world sport's most remembered catastrophe: the Munich air crash of February 1958. This disaster froze an important and attractive young team in the act of becoming. Although a number of its members survived, this team – the so-called 'Busby Babes' – remains, in perpetuity, what it might have been, and public interest in the tragedy has not, apparently, abated.

A meeting of myths: Matt Busby and Manchester United

Manchester United, as is well known, began life as Newton Heath, a football club formed by workers on the Lancashire–Yorkshire railway in the late 1870s. In 1978 Geoffrey Green, the languid football correspondent of the London *Times*, published the official history of Manchester United at the club's first centenary. It begins, however, in 1945. This strategy for the book's organisation is explained by the author by the fact that before the 1940s United had been 'just another provincial club with a minimal national following', which had accomplished little of note since the early 1900s. 'Only those living in Lancashire and the environs of Manchester knew or cared much about United ...', wrote Green. Indeed they weren't even the best team in these environs, Manchester City being by common consent the more prestigious side in the 1920s and 1930s (Green, 1979: 25–6). All this changed, according to virtually every popular account, with the arrival of Matt Busby as team manager in 1945. Busby, it's said, was the principal instrument in the transformation of Manchester United, the second best football club in Manchester, into the Manchester United of popular myth. There are several important elements to the Busby mythology, which I'd like to discuss.

Busby as manager

In the mythology of Matt Busby as a football manager, there is a strong hint of the modern. He typifies a process I have previously described whereby managers at English football clubs during the 1940s and 1950s became progressively more identified with their team's performance. This was not an entirely new phenomenon – Herbert Chapman, for example, at Huddersfield Town (1921–

5) and then at Arsenal (1925–34) and Boer War veteran Major Frank Buckley (Wolverhampton Wanderers 1927–44) had both been regarded as strategists who planned their players' performances and who wished to be in sole charge of team matters. But this notion of managerial responsibility was amplified after the Second World War, so that, as I observed in 1984, by the late 1960s 'most people knew who, say, Matt Busby was, or Bill Shankly or Don Revie or Jimmy Hill ... But practically none of them, outside of the respective communities, would have known who had managed Manchester United before Busby, Liverpool before Shankly ...' (Wagg, 1984: 162).

Busby happily embraced this notion of manager as sole arbiter of team affairs. He is said, when asked to become Manchester United manager in 1945, to have informed the club that he would only accept the job on these terms (Dunphy, 1991: 100). Later, in an autobiography published in the early 1970s, he told of how he resisted repeated attempts by the United chairman Jimmy Gibson to dictate team policy to him (Busby, 1973: 13 and 17).

Two things are important about this notion of Busby-as-His-Own-Man: first, the stark contrast he provided to a previous kind of discredited football management and, second, the ambiguity surrounding the kind of new management he actually represented. In English football discourse after the 1970s, there was a favoured way of recalling football management in the 1940s and 1950s. This held that during the post-war period a generation of desk-bound, time-serving men in waistcoats and watch chains were elbowed aside in favour of a new kind of 'boss' – a 'hands-on' coach in muddy boots, anxious to work with his players to 'organise victory' (Chapman's preferred phrase) the following Saturday (Wagg, 1984: 73–100). Thus, histories of United refer routinely to the fact that Scott Duncan, Busby's predecessor at Old Trafford, invariably wore spats and a flower in his buttonhole, while Matt, having taken the United job, was soon out on the training ground, kicking a ball about with the lads (see, for example, Glanvill, 1994: 51; Meek and Tyrell, 2001: 13). This is the classic marker of political cultural change. Effete traditionalism had to step aside and watch egalitarian modernity take over.

More importantly, in this new popular discourse about football, the manager now becomes the paradigm for the popular understanding of football. However, Busby was a text more open than most: traditionalists might regard him as the keeper of the true faith, while modernisers could perceive him to be a new broom. For example, Charlie Mitten and Johnny Morris, both of whom played for United under Busby in the 1940s, recently challenged the idea of Busby as the great team maker. 'I never saw him coaching anybody at all,' said Mitten. 'He never said once to me anything about improving my play at outside left.' Morris spoke, importantly, as a man who'd played before the invention of the Great Football Manager: 'All managers get a bit stronger if you're top t'League. Win something. And that's what you've got to do to keep your job. So, we kept his job for him' (*Reputations* 'Matt Busby: The Boss', BBC2, 17 May 1999). Later, when the discourse of English football became more technocratic, this became the yardstick against which Busby was judged. In this context, he was either efficient, or he

wasn't. Noel Cantwell, for instance, who went to Old Trafford in 1960 and captained United's FA (Football Association) Cup winning side in 1963, recalled asking Busby 'How do we play?' and receiving the reply: 'We play football'. This story appears in different places, with subtly different inflections. In *Reputations* it's seen as evidence of Busby's sloppiness, while in the club's official biography of Busby it affirms his charisma (Glanvill, 1994: 144-5). Others were equally adamant that Busby *was* a tactician and that he had a plan. His biographer Rick Glanvill suggests that 'the 1955-8 team gives the lie to the idea that Matt was no tactician. Throughout this period, United employed a 4-2-4 formation ... before world champions Brazil made it fashionable.' His close friend Paddy McGrath, who ran the Cromford, Manchester's first nightclub, confirms this: 'He used to say "There's only one way to play football ... and that's four at the back, two in midfield and four up front"' (Glanvill, 1994: 102, 110).

But most devotees and exponents of the Busby myth preferred to believe that Busby intervened only to set his players free to do what they did best. In this he was said to reconcile the art and the science of the game - combining nature and nurture, spontaneity and artifice, tradition with modernity. He took what he inherited - his first United team was a collection of established players returning to the club after the war - and creatively nurtured them, soon arranging for two established attacking players, Johnny Carey and John Aston, to move into defensive positions. From then on, the implication within the discourse was that Busby's team now embraced new, exciting, audacious ideas, with the intention to 'play football from the back' (Dunphy 1991: 109). As Dunphy points out, it was this team which crowds flocked to see in the late 1940s. In the season 1946-7 well over a million people came to watch them play at Maine Road, Manchester (their temporary home while bomb damage at Old Trafford was repaired), and the following year they won the FA Cup in what many observers 30 years later still considered to be the best post-war final (Dunphy, 1991: 109, 131-8; Green, 1979: 38-40). It's at this point that Manchester United first became a phenomenon of interest to football-minded people outside the club's own backyard.

In the late 1940s, Matt Busby became a popular manifestation of the football-manager-as-arbiter-of-team-performance and he was invited to manage the Great Britain football team at the London Olympics of 1948. He was often asked how he produced the exciting performances of his teams and he liked to respond with a story likely only to enhance his mystique. A sculptor he knew had, similarly, been asked how he sculpted an elephant, and had replied that he'd take a block of stone and knock off all the bits that didn't look like an elephant (Green, 1979: 53; Glanvill, 1994: 83). This allowed the romantics to claim him as their own, and the technocrats equally to suppose that he had a closely guarded stock of expertise. The former liked to cite his frequent pre-match advice - 'Give it to a red shirt' (Dunphy, 1991: 133) - and the latter to argue that there was, necessarily, much more to it than that. 'People say about Matt that all he used to tell us was to "just go out and play", remembers Wilf McGuinness, a United player in the late 1950s and Busby's successor as the club's manager. 'He did tell you that, but

we used to have a team talk on the Friday. He'd go through the opposition individually and we were always amazed how much he knew about them' (Glanvill, 1994: 90).

Busby as Celt

Busby's Manchester United was extraordinary in inspiring loyalty across a range of British ethnicities, whether based on religion, national identity and/or relationship to England and the English. Busby was born on the Lanarkshire coalfield to a Catholic family. His grandfather had been an Irish immigrant. He was, according to Paddy McGrath, 'a bloody good Christian' (Glanvill, 1994: 62) – a devout Catholic who received a papal knighthood in 1967. But he was equally devout in his anti-sectarianism and the corresponding (and modern) belief that religion was a private matter (Dunphy, 1991: 14). He similarly discouraged any thought that United might be a Catholic club (McIlvanney, 1997: Programme 2) and, although his assistant Jimmy Murphy was also a practising Catholic, other members of his training staff were not: trainer Tom Curry was an Anglican, and coach Bert Whalley a Methodist lay preacher (Roberts, 1988: 59; Dunphy, 1991: 127). Moreover, there was no perceptible religious pattern to United's recruitment policy under Busby. Indeed, the only teams in the British Isles thought to practise religious discrimination in their selection were Glasgow Rangers and the Scottish national side: Busby had only played once for the latter and this, according to United player Paddy Crerand, was widely thought to be because he was a Catholic (Glanvill, 1994: 28-9).

Busby's Scottishness was important in the globalising of Manchester United's popularity. For one thing, as Stuart Cosgrove has observed, '[m]ore than any other nation, including Brazil, the Scots elevate football to its proper status' (1986: 99). Scottish football, traditionally, was widely perceived to be 'a confused blend of Calvinist and Celtic elements', the former represented as doggedness and hard work, the latter as daring and virtuosity, placing style above safety (Holt, 1994: 66). North of the border Busby was seen as introducing a brand of football that expressed the poetry of the Celtic soul. He was doing it, moreover, not only in the northwest of England where English professional football had been forged, but mostly with English players, in a city that was historically the fortress of Liberalism, Protestant nonconformism and free trade.

Manchester also had a long history of Irish Catholic migration, and Irish descended families were a strong feature of the city's working class (Herbert, 2001: 9-18; Messinger, 1985: 177-9). A part of Manchester was known as 'Little Ireland' and there had been periodic ill feeling between Protestants and Catholics in the nineteenth century (Herbert, 2001: 33-41). Sectarianism, however, was never on the scale of other British cities such as Liverpool and Glasgow. Irishmen had played for Manchester United since its formation as Newton Heath (Scally, 1998: 45). But, although the board of the latter had voted to rename the club 'Manchester United' instead of 'Manchester Celtic' by only three votes to two (Green, 1979: 280), there was no discernable link from then on between the

club and the Manchester Irish. Busby, however, noted the Celtic connection. The captain of United's popular team of the late 1940s was Johnny Carey, another Irish Catholic who had played both Gaelic and association football for the Republic before coming to United. He was selected to captain the Rest of Europe in 1947 against Great Britain and Dunphy suggests that a similar legend began to form around Carey as the one that formed around Busby (1991: 137-8). Busby established a scout in the south of Ireland around this time, but made sure to have one in the north too.

A decade later enthusiasm for Manchester United among the southern Irish seemed as strong as ever. In 1957, Manchester United were drawn to begin their European Cup campaign against Shamrock Rovers at Dalymount Park in Dublin. When the draw was made in Zurich, Matt Busby turned to the Rovers chairman and said: 'You've just got a licence to print money'. United attracted a sell-out crowd of 40,000 people (Scally, 1998: 60-1, 71). Busby was conscious of the importance of foreign markets, and of United's advantageous relationship to them. From early in his managership he took the team abroad where they could be seen - notably to the United States in 1950 and again in 1952. The USA, of course, was an important place of settlement for Irish migrants and, as in the Republic of Ireland itself, its association football culture had been partially submerged by nationalist elements (Wagg, 1995; Sugden and Bairner, 1993). They played to big crowds.

So Busby's early United sides were enormously engaging both to communities identifying themselves in some way as Celtic - which, given the global reach of the Irish diaspora (Coogan, 2000), might be a huge constituency - and to football people in different countries likely to be discomfited if United had carried any specific ethnic or sectarian affiliation. As Dunphy observes, Busby's vision of football travelled across national and cultural boundaries and had a special appeal to the wretched of the earth: 'Football's properties - imagination, courage, grace and wit - were God's gifts, belonging to the humblest person, be he in Orbiston [Busby's birthplace], Manchester, urban ghetto, mining village, the slums of Naples or the *barrios* of South America' (Dunphy, 1991: 292).

Moreover, United's attractiveness and Busby's status as bold, Celtic outsider were enhanced by the club's entry into European competition. As is well known, Manchester United, at Busby's instigation, defied the English Football League authorities to take part in the European Cup in 1956. The League's obstructive stance might be read as imperialist disdain or Little Englandism, producing Busby's defiance as representative of the Other, subject peoples. The crowds that subsequently flocked to various European airports and hotels to see the United players and seek their autographs no doubt did so partly in homage to a Britishness more humble and open to the outside world than English football authorities had hitherto expressed. If they went to see United play it's likely that they experienced United as not typically English, since their game was not based on the traditionally English virtues of hard tackling and the long ball. Significantly, the other leading English team prepared to take on European opposition, Wolverhampton Wanderers, had done so in the apparent belief that other countries could be shown the superiority of the English style. However, following England's landmark