

Travel the four corners of the globe and languages will change, cultures will differ and customs will vary. Yet, whether you're in a poverty stricken ghetto or a high rolling retreat, there's one unerring constant – you can guarantee you'll see someone in a Manchester United shirt.

Having won 18 major honours in the past 20 years, it's no surprise that the Red Devils are so popular across the globe. Founded in 1878 the club's most glorious period in history has unquestionably been under the reign of red-faced dictator Sir Alex Ferguson. The controversial Scot helped celebrate the history of the club when United teamed up with Qatar

Airways to launch the ultimate collection of memorabilia in a 800-page limited edition book charting the fortunes of the premiership club. The exclusive collectable contains never before seen images and interviews with the greats including Sir Bobby Charlton and Sir Alex himself.

Approaching his 22nd year at Old Trafford, Fergie's remarkable managerial success came after a distinctly unremarkable start in the game. In 1974, the frustrated Glaswegian striker had an average career as a player, his only notable period being between 1967-1969 at Glasgow Rangers. Attempting to forge a new life, he bought a pub, Fergie's, in his hometown, christening the downstairs lounge

the Elbow Room, in honour of his technique on the pitch of unsettling defenders. But football was in his blood so he returned to the game as a manager for East Stirlingshire, before taking control of St Mirren where he was sacked following disagreements with the chairman. Luckily, he was given a second chance with the small and unfashionable Aberdeen.

Suffering in the Glaswegian shadow cast by Rangers and Celtic, Aberdeen hadn't won the league since 1955. Things soon changed. "When I was at Aberdeen I lost a final and on the Monday I told the players it was the last final we'd ever lose – and it was," says Ferguson. His tough mentality earned him the nickname 'Furious'.

united front

This obstinate Scot's legendary, heated half-time rants has transformed his players from under achievers into champions. The career of the UK's most successful manager has undoubtedly been a fiery one





FULL TIME

Fergie', but the team went on to win three league championships and, in 1983, the European Cup Winners' Cup. Fergie's phenomenal success with the club caught the eye of faltering English giants Manchester United, who, having not won a league title since 1967, lured him south of the border to Old Trafford.

Despite high expectations, the club's 1988-89 season was a disappointment and they finished 11th. The future looked

unpromising with rumours emanating from the Old Trafford corridors that the board wanted Ferguson out. "Expectations can be too high. There's no evidence that continual changing of coaches brings success," counters Ferguson. "It's not healthy that a coach can lose four games and be out of a job. I wish club presidents and supporters would have the same patience as coaches. But we're asking miracles because football is so emotional."

He managed to escape "the darkest period he ever suffered in the game" by signing two new midfielders – Neil Webb and Paul Ince – and winning the 1990 FA Cup. The elusive win saved his job and set his side onto a path of success. Notorious for ruling his players with an iron fist, the gruff Scot has scant regard for big reputations. He noted from the outset that too many players were unfit and partied too much. Drastic changes were made and two of the team's genuine stars, Paul McGrath and Norman Whiteside – who

■ An ecstatic Fergie watches Ryan Giggs and Gary Neville hoist the Premiership cup

1957 - At a mere 16 years-old Alex Ferguson makes his amateur debut appearance at Queen's Park. Despite scoring Queen's Park goal in a 2-1 defeat against Stranraer he described his first match as a "nightmare".

1967 - After 10 years moving between three different Scottish clubs he joins Rangers, his favourite team, for a then record \$135,797.

1969 - He is dropped from Rangers' first team after being blamed for a goal they conceded in the Scottish Cup Final.

1974 - At a comparatively young 32 years of age, he is appointed manager of East Stirlingshire. After three months he gained himself a reputation as a disciplinary and moves to manage St.Mirren.

1978 - Fergie is sacked and replaces Billy McNeill – who moved to manage Celtic – as Aberdeen's manager.

1978-85 - Under Fergie's control Aberdeen wins two Scottish League titles and three Scottish Cups culminating in 1983 with the European Cup Winners' Cup. Fergie's achievements see him receive an OBE.

1985-86 - Following Jock Stein's death Ferguson becomes Scotland's manager. They reach the 1986 World Cup but do not advance beyond the first stage.

1986-87 - Replaces Ron Atkinson as Manchester United's manager. They reach 11th place in his first season.

1987-88 - Following several major signings, Man United finishes second in the Premiership.

1988-89 - Despite the return of Red Devils legend Mark Hughes, the team drop back down to 11th place. Ferguson's career in the club is threatened.

1989-90 - Fergie's Old Trafford career is saved after United win the FA Cup, although the team still only finish in 13th place in the League and the 'Fergie Out' campaign begins.

1990-91 - United wins the Cup Winner's Cup and move up to sixth place in the League.

1993-94 - With the trophies snowballing, United become the sixth club ever to win League Championship/FA Cup double.

1995-96 - Ferguson becomes the first ever manager to win the double twice.

1998-99 - United win the European Cup, Premiership and FA Cup treble, which had never been done before.

1999-2007 - Thanks to Fergie, Man U win the FA Carling Cup four times as well as the 2005 League Cup and 2003-04 FA Cup. In 2000 Sir Alex releases his autobiography *Managing My Life*. The Independent Newspaper calls it the "richest and most enthralling story in post-war British sport".





along with captain, Bryan Robson, formed two-thirds of 'The Wild Bunch' – were sold.

At one point PFA Young Player of the Year and notorious heavy drinker Paul Gascoigne was given the option to leave Newcastle for Manchester United or Tottenham Hotspur. He moved to the latter for a cool \$4million, but it's often been said that had he joined the Red Devils, Ferguson's tight control could have kept him on the straight and narrow. Recruiting a newer and younger team, Ferguson acted as a surrogate father, giving players little leeway in their personal lives, even turning up at parties to march the mortified players back home.

This restraint ultimately led to some extraordinary results. Of his decision to hire a young team, he said, "When we signed Ronaldo and Rooney we were talking about the future years ahead. Sometimes you have to wait because they don't bring consistency. But what they do bring you is hope and dreams and those two have come good."

Under Sir Alex's guidance the players have grown in confidence. "They understand what it means to be a Man U player," he says. "They're not afraid to express themselves, there's no manacle on them. We've always gone out to play football and we always will."

With a blueprint made by Busby – famed for his young team nicknamed the Busby Babes – and followed by Ferguson, the future of the club is in good hands thanks to the Manchester United Soccer Schools (MUSS). Now with the net spread as widely as possible, the major onus is on unearthing

potential talent as early as possible.

Providing opportunities for aspiring seven to 18 year-old players, the MUSS coach them to excel in the game and the programmes have been such a success that they've been introduced across the globe including Japan and Dubai. Ferguson explained, "We believe that through our soccer schools we can take our football philosophy around the world. The launch of the MUSS concept in the Arab world proved to be bigger than we thought... Dubai Sports City is one of the most exciting and ambitious sporting projects in the world today and we hope to have a long and successful association with it – I would like nothing more than Manchester United Soccer Schools to help develop the Arab football champions of tomorrow."

Announcing a continuing partnership with MUSS at Dubai Sports City, he enthused "At Man U we place great emphasis on developing young players. I'm proud to continue to play a part in this."

Some of today's footballing stars including Ryan Giggs, Paul Scholes and David Beckham are themselves products of the youth system. Ferguson believes that a player's performance also depends on the skills of the coach. He explains, "Too much talk is dangerous. You see training sessions where the coach is talking all the time and the words get lost in the wind. I remember when I was a player wanting to get on with it and the coach was rambling on. You have to keep it simple, be brief but decisive, otherwise the message is lost." ■

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His words on match day aren't always as succinct; a whole galaxy of stars having experienced his famed hair-dryer treatment – his half-time ranting technique. Beckham was literally left scarred following United's defeat at the hands of Arsenal in the fifth round of the 2003 FA Cup, when an enraged Fergie kicked a football boot in the air, which crashed down and cut Beckham's left eyebrow. Despite his anger issues, the 66 year-old claims United has a good reputation of doing things correctly. "It's what we are all about – we try and do things right," he explains. "There are all the things that we address with community and charity that don't get proper attention. And on the football side we deal with an academy that embraces hundreds of boys."

His legendary commitment to the team and passion for the game has seen Fergie's fledglings at the top of the Premiership year after year. With United and Chelsea – now

▶ The infamous raging Scotsman has ensured Man Utd Premier league success



minus Fergie's old rival Mourinho – battling it out for the title next season, Ferguson is confident his team will succeed. "We need to recreate the level of last season as that would put us in the ballpark again. I'm looking forward to it."

After nearly 22 years in the managerial hot seat some find it difficult to imagine the club without the Scotsman, but with Fergie sparking rumours of an impending

retirement the Man United board is desperately seeking a successor. Ferguson's time with the team makes him their second longest serving manager after Sir Busby, although Sir Alex has contested the most games as manager.

Currently, talks suggest Black Burn Rangers manager Mark Hughes, a former Man U favourite could follow in Fergie's large shoes. Roy Keane is another ex Old Trafford great touted as a candidate.

Whoever takes over from the gum grinding Ferguson, one thing's for sure, his time in power will remain the stuff of legends, never to be forgotten by the fans or indeed himself. "I am proud of my time here because it's been a fantastic period for me," he enthuses. "I've had help particularly from Sir Bobby Charlton who has been a great supporter since the first day I arrived. I've had some fantastic memories here as well – Premierships, FA Cups, Champions Leagues – it's a wonderful club." ▶