

the must read

Information from **MUST** - the independent manchester **united supporters'** trust

issue 9

MUST appeals to OFT for a fair deal

On November 19th MUST sent documents to the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) requesting them to investigate three complaints about MUFC ticketing policy relating to the Compulsory Automatic Cup Scheme (ACS) and the recent huge ticket price rises.

If successful, we could see the ACS returned to an optional scheme and the huge ticket price rises rolled back with a requirement for reasonable prices in future.

MUST has taken expert legal advice on Contract, Consumer and Competition Law, which indicates that MUFC is in breach of both the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999 and the Competition Act 1998 and that there is a high probability of the Complaint being successfully upheld.

The full Complaint and supporting documents, along with some of the media coverage, can be viewed at: www.joinmust.org/oft

In addition to the complaints that United's rocketing ticket prices break the law, we have also reminded the Government of the specific assurances the Glazers gave in face-to-face meetings with

Ministers following their takeover in May 2005 that prices would not rise.

MUST will be putting the case to Parliament on December 10th, at a meeting hosted by MUST Patron and Manchester MP Tony Lloyd, as well as at meetings with officials from the OFT and the Department for Culture Media & Sport - so, clearly, our arguments are being taken seriously in the corridors of power.

Other fans, too, are backing our cause, with the Football Supporters Federation saying: "The FSF is fully supportive of the action being taken by MUST to respond to such unfair practices. If this action is successful it could have positive benefits for supporters at many clubs."

What's more, the recent victory for Tottenham supporters (where the OFT ruled against their club's unfair terms and conditions in relation to refunds for rearranged fixtures) has clear parallels with our ACS complaint and is hugely encouraging.

We believe we have a strong case combined with significant political and media

In this issue...

- 2 MUST news
- 4 Dear Malcolm..
- 5 Sub-prime Glazers
- 6 Turning belief into ownership
- 8 One night in Moscow (M17)
- 10 An evening with m'learned friends
- 11 Book review

backing. The single missing ingredient is mass action by supporters.

Visit www.joinmust.org/oft where you can sign up for e-mail alerts about all the latest updates and events, and find out what you can do to help the campaign - including signing-up fellow Reds to MUST, writing to the OFT and your MPs, and making donations to help fund our ongoing efforts to secure a Fair Deal for Fans.

EARN £££ COMMISSION FROM MUST

If you have a contact who'd like to pay to advertise in our newsletter, emails or website then you could earn a **25% commission** for introducing them to us. Perhaps you have your own company who'd like to support MUST? No reasonable offer refused, so you could bag yourself some bargain advertising and a commission to boot.

Alternatively if you have a new idea for raising funds, that we take up, you could benefit from a commission. The amount would vary (up to 25%) depending on whether it is just an idea or a fully working proposal delivered ready to go.

These commission opportunities are available to any member as an incentive to help raise extra funds for MUST. Commission will be determined by the board, is at the board's discretion and their decision is final. Any commission will be paid direct into your WSC account. Please contact us by post MUST, PO Box 146, MANCHESTER M16 8XW or through the website www.joinmust.org/members or ring our office on 0161 872 3300



United front: MUST CEO Duncan Drasdo (right) with (from left) DCMS advisor, Phil French, Andy Burnham MP, Baron Chris Smith and Dave Boyle, CEO of Supporters' Direct.

the **must** read **comment**

MUST moves to gilts to protect funds

In early October MUST received a communication from our stockbroker, Brewin Dolphin Securities, that their current advice to clients with deposits of more than £50,000 was to take the ultra-cautious approach during the period of banking uncertainty and on that basis in this market the safest option is Bank of England gilt-edged securities (Treasury Stock). They have a guaranteed redemption date and interest rate.

Although the risk of leaving funds on deposit was not viewed as high, because we are trustees of the members' funds we had a duty to take the professional advice we were given.

Therefore on 7th October MUST bought more than £2.5m of Treasury Stock 4%. As it turns out that now looks a very prudent investment as interest rates have dropped significantly since then. However the main aim was to provide maximum protection for funds during the period of banking uncertainty.

We will review this situation in the New Year and take further professional advice as to what action, if any, we should take.

Get 'em when they're young!

This, from MUST member Jason Calder:

Hi, just found out we might be having a baby next summer! Problem is, all of her family are Everton fans (could be worse I suppose).

I want to get in and make sure bump is a Red before one of her family beat me to it and scar him/her as an Evertonian.

Can I register a bump once I know the due date (won't know til around Jan) or do I have to wait until they are born? I could really use some quick advice on this!!

Cheers.
Jason Calder, MUST member, Liverpool

A lot of things have happened at MUST since the last issue, nearly all of them positive for our organisation.

First off, we have moved into new offices at Trafford House close to Old Trafford. This gives us a lot more space than in Ducie House, as well as proximity to our spiritual home - plus we have landlord's approval to hold matchday events and promotional activities outside the offices and in the car park close by, so watch this space.

Second, the MUST Chubb Club has taken off in a big way since the inaugural event(s) in May for the Champions League final. There are regular match screenings of high-profile away games, both Premier League and Champions League, at Walkabout and other venues in the city centre. These events have been almost always sold out and prove that there is a demand for a social 'headquarters' where members can meet up and have a good time (even when we lose or draw!).

The MUST clubhouse idea has not gone away, but the original venue idea appears to be a non-runner due to the hefty increase in rent that the landlords are demanding. This could well make our business plan unviable and we are not prepared to risk members' funds on that basis. It is a strange thing for licensed premises landlords to do in these tough economic times, but our gaze has turned to other potential venues which we will continue to monitor and bring forward to members as and when the plans become more concrete.

The other significant recent event was the submission of the MUST complaint to the Office of Fair Trading over United's ticket prices and in particular, the bundling through the compulsory ACS of league games with all cup games, making the cost of watching the Reds more than double since the takeover in 2005. The Glazers told the then Sports Minister that ticket prices would not rise - well MUST members always knew better, I'm sorry to say. So far, the reaction in the media and in Parliament, not to mention from fans organisations and others in football, has been very positive and we are very hopeful that we can get a result for our members and for fans when the investigation is completed.

Talking of the credit crunch and the Glazers, members may be interested to hear what we have been hearing about the effects on our club's owners. The word recently on the (Wall) Street is that, had the merger between Citigroup and Wachovia Bank gone through, the Glazers would have been in deep doo-doo as they have a pile of debt with both banks and there would inevitably have been a need for the merged group to reduce outstanding exposure to the leveraged Floridians. Rumour from a trusted source also had it that the Glazers put the Bucs up for sale in response. The market for ready buyers for an NFL franchise is much better than for United, believe it or not, so we don't expect our club to come up for sale immediately, although if things get worse for much longer, we should be ready for action. The MUST Board is in regular contact with various noted City contacts and we are formulating plans for that event.

In the meantime, we will see the effects that the credit crunch is having on the club's finances - it seems pretty clear that, despite Fergie's optimistic statements earlier this year, we cannot afford to buy Carlos Tevez at the sort of sum being touted (GBP30-35m). Yes there has been relatively high expenditure on players in the last year or so, but bear in mind that without the GBP750m debts hanging over the club, there would have been no problems buying several Tevez's. And I am not sure the Glazers can afford not to raise ticket prices overall again next season, given that attendances at OT are dropping, executive boxes are not all full and this situation will deteriorate well into next year.

We live in interesting times, but here at MUST towers, we think that things are definitely going our way across a range of fronts. In the meantime, Season's Greetings to all our members.

Nick Towle, Chairman

MUST site gets a facelift

If you haven't been to our website in a while, stop by and check it out. We've done a number of things to try to bring in new members and make it easier for you to keep up-to-date.

New Content

It's been a while since we really added anything new in terms of the articles and pages on our site. And much of the stuff that was up there was still largely focused on the takeover. All in all it made for a stale and dated site that talked a lot about the past and not nearly enough about the present and future. That's changed. We've gone through the site with a fine-toothed comb, stripping out a lot of the old and putting in some things that were distinctly lacking. We've done this with an eye toward the three different types of people who usually visit our site.

For prospective members, we've made it very simple and clear what our ambition is and why we believe supporter ownership is the right path. We spent a lot of time think-



Easier access for members...

ing about why people join MUST and have tried to put those points forward in a new streamlined joining process (read the article about our new push for e-membership elsewhere in this newsletter). Our site is typically the first interaction people have with us and we want them to feel an affinity both in terms of our large community and our purpose. To learn more about this go to www.joinmust.org/free.

For current members, we've tried to make it easier to access your member

information and get involved with the organisation. Our goal for all of you is to ask you to simply help the organisation grow. If you go to joinmust.org/refer you'll learn more about how to do this.

Finally, for many of the journalists and third parties (a great many of whom are supporters of other clubs looking for ways to duplicate our solid foundation), we make it easy for the "generally interested" to find out more about us and our 34,000+ members.

We are a very big and very motivated organization and we are quite happy to share what we've done with everyone from the media to other supporters' trusts.

In the end though, it all comes down to you. If there's one thing we would ask, it is that you set your own goal to bring in new members. Imagine if - for example - we all brought in FIVE new members. Make that your pledge for the remainder of the 2008-2009 season. Do your best to bring in just FIVE new people and we're well on our way.

Close to home...

MUST moved into new offices on 1st November. We're now located right next to the ground in Trafford House - the big office block next to the Bishop Blaize pub.
MUST, Trafford House,
Chester Road,
Stretford,
MANCHESTER
M32 0RS
Tel: 0161 872 3300



View from the office window - Old Trafford - Eyes on the Prize?



The workers under SAF's watchful eye (...United, will never be defeated ...) If you'd like to drop into the office please call the number above first to ensure there is someone in!

Those fans' bodies in full...

The Football Supporters' Federation has over 140,000 members and campaigns on issues of interest to fans of all clubs such as safes- tanding, governance and Gam£ 39 etc. The FSF also provides 'Fans' Embassies', information and assistance points run by ordinary fans, for all international away matches and the last Champions League final. The FSF has the first fans representative on the FA Council in more than 140 years. Individual membership is £15 per year and with that you get the bi-monthly "Football Supporter" magazine (usual- ly sells for £3), regular e-newsletters and the chance to attend the annual Fans' Parliament. This year's meeting was held in the Emirates Stadium, with former Minister for Sport Richard Caborn and new FA Chair David Triesman both being there to speak. The FSF is part of an international network of fans' organisations known as the Football Supporters' International. www.fsf.org.uk

The Independent Manchester United Supporters' Association is one of the oldest independent fans' organisation in the country. It was central to the fight against Murdoch and worked closely with MUST during the battles against Glazer. Since the takeover IMUSA has maintained its campaigning tradition, concentrating on issues such as ticket prices/ticket rip-offs, atmosphere, safes- tanding and United fans being used as guinea pigs for new crowd control measures, such as happened at Reading last season. IMUSA also gives help and advice to fans on an individual basis, offering access to a panel of lawyers expert in football related matters for those unfortunate enough to find they need them and acting on our members' behalf where they are in dispute with the club over season ticket confiscation etc. You can become a member until the end of the 09/10 season for just £5, which also gives you affiliate membership of the Football Supporters' Federation. An e-newsletter is sent out 3-4 times a year. To join just follow the link in our website www.imusa.org

An open letter to Malcolm Glazer from MUST

Dear Malcolm Glazer,

Re: Global Financial Crisis and the Possible Sale of Manchester United

The Manchester United Supporters Trust (an independent, not-for-profit organisation with 35,000 members) is gravely concerned about the possible effects the current global financial crisis might have on the future stability and sustainability of Manchester United Football Club.

As you know, we campaigned vigorously against the takeover of Manchester United plc throughout the 2004-05 football Season. However, our only concern now is for the future health and well-being of the club and we have no interest whatsoever in continuing to fight the battles of the past.

Our chief concern about the bid - one that was publicly shared at the time by the MUplc board and its chief executive David Gill - was the unprecedented levels of debt that would be placed upon the club and the fact that not only would ticket prices have to rise significantly in order to service these debts, but that the club could be at risk should the economic climate take a turn for the worse.

Whilst we do not know precisely the current state of the finances of either the club or the other companies in which you are invested (e.g the Tampa Bay Buccaneers), we have noted recent press reports that institutions to which you and the club have been linked are currently encountering significant difficulties - namely the Royal Bank of Scotland, Wachovia, Citigroup and AIG.

Should you or the club come under pressure from creditors, we understand that the need may well arise to sell Manchester United. It is in no-one's interest to see the club repossessed by the banks and off-loaded at a bargain basement price to asset-strippers, so we fully appreciate why you may well prefer to arrange a smooth and quick sale before the wolves are actually through the door.

Given the enormous media profile of the club and the highly emotional response many people have to issues surrounding its welfare, we trust you'll agree that it's vital that any potential transfer of ownership be conducted in a calm and responsible manner. The club's creditors and any potential buyers - not to mention the players, staff, fans and local community - doubtless feel the same.

Therefore, we are offering an open hand of partnership in these trying times. Should any would-be buyers have concerns about the reaction of the media or supporters to their ownership of the club, we are very willing to meet with them and discuss their plans. Similarly, should you require assistance in seeking a worthy purchaser for Manchester United, we stand ready to play our part.

We very much hope you will join us in this pact of openness and understanding, in order to safeguard the heritage and traditions of our great club.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

The Directors of MUST - the independent Manchester United Supporters Trust.

From SD to PM in 15 years.....

There has probably never been a more 'fan-friendly' Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport than the present holder of the post, Andy Burnham MP.

The Everton fan previously worked for the Football Task Force, and went on to serve as chair of Supporters Direct, the umbrella organisation for the country's supporters trusts, before becoming an MP. His current Special Adviser at the DCMS is Phil French, who himself also served as head of SD.

So, whilst it cannot be guaranteed that the Government will always come down on the side of the ordinary supporter on every issue, we can be confident that we are likely to at least be granted a fair hearing by those who know where we're coming from and who appreciate the crucial role fans can play in the decision-making process of our national game.

"Andy's in clover with the job he's doing at the moment," says former Home Secretary, and supporter of Sheffield Wednesday's Owls Trust, David Blunkett. "I would put my money on Andy Burnham being Prime Minister in 15 years' time. He is thoughtful, has energy and is a great communicator. Above all, he connects with working people while being able to communicate progressive ideas. You don't need much more than that."

His brother is still a regular at Goodison Park, while Burnham himself admits to invading the pitch as a 14-year-old after Everton's FA Cup semi-final win against Southampton in 1984. Probably no fan of Norman Whiteside, he does however confess a passion for the 80s Manchester music scene.

In Labour's fabled 'Demon Eyes' football team he was regarded as a no-nonsense, old-fashioned English centre-forward, all grit and strength, and he comes from a background that puts its faith in strong family ties, a commitment to community and a belief in helping the poorest. "Your roots and your family are everything," he says. "I'm totally tribal about my politics and my football."

Subprime Glazers?

The Glazers are no different to any other overstretched mortgage payer, and the signs aren't great, says Solomon Teague

By now even those holidaying on Mars will have heard about the credit crunch. There has been much coverage over the implications for the broader economy, but what is less obvious has been the implications for football clubs. In everyday terms, Manchester United effectively has a huge mortgage, and the club is facing the possibility of significant negative equity.

The worst off are those that need to borrow money. That is not Manchester United. But those with significant debt are still in a grievous situation. The cost of financing the debt will be higher than the Glazers anticipated and is unlikely to come down anytime soon. When Glazer took over Manchester United, many people warned the leveraged nature of the deal left the club very vulnerable. Repaying the debt depended on many variables being favourable: the most obvious was probably the need to keep qualifying for, and doing well in, the Champions League, football's biggest cash cow.

The team has exceeded any assumptions the Glazers could possibly have made - though it remains imperative the club maintains this success. Yet, in the credit crunch, the club has been faced with an obstacle of biblical proportions. If the club can get through these problems intact, it will be hard not to conclude that Glazer had more financial savvy than many gave him credit for, though this is not to say fans will suddenly accept his ownership.

On the other hand, if the next published accounts reveal the club has not made a decent profit and cannot easily service the debt, it will bode very badly for the business



Even JP Morgan won't want to offer new loan terms

plan. If the club is struggling after winning the double, when will the situation be manageable?

In the meantime, many will be worrying that a seemingly inevitable deep and protracted recession and broken financial markets will hurt Manchester United. Football has traditionally been viewed as reasonably immune to recessions, but things look different now. There is little doubt that football has been a bubble in its own right, as inflated as the housing market or technology stocks at the turn of the century ever were. Player transfers and wages could all be exposed to the financial problems.

With many homeowners out of their depth with debt, in negative equity, facing rising

If the next published accounts reveal the club cannot easily service the debt, it will bode very badly for the business plan...

inflation and potentially losing their jobs, ticket price rises could be beyond the means of many football fans, who in the past have been loathe to sacrifice their season tickets, no matter how bad their own financial circumstances were.

Put another way, fans have watched football being treated as a business for so long now that they might start treating it like one. The difference between fans and consumers is loyalty. If things carry on as they are, fans might start to wonder if they shouldn't shop around for a better deal.

If these factors do take a toll on the club's ability to repay the debts, arranging a favourable refinancing will be nigh on impossible. The last restructuring occurred when getting financing was as easy as running up a large credit card bill. The banks didn't want to say no: the advent of covenant lite - loans made with fewer strings attached - was an expression of financial institutions' desperation to lend, seemingly regardless of the terms.

Covenants are now very much full-fat again - and then some. JP Morgan might be one of the healthiest financial institutions around at the moment, but it will have no more appetite than anyone else to offer new terms for the loan. If Red Football can't service the debt now, it will probably never manage it.

If Red Football can't make the repayments, there may be interest from other prospective buyers, but they will be faced with the same problems. Unfortunately, this includes MUST, if the money cannot be raised from members.

With the equity markets currently being hammered, another bid may not provide an attractive alternative. Another commodity-rich sugar daddy might join the international chess game between billionaire tycoons, in which Premiership football clubs comprise the pieces. This would put an interesting new slant on United's rivalry with City, Liverpool and other clubs, one that those clubs' hard pressed fans - sorry, consumers - might find themselves less and less inclined to participate in.

That is assuming those commodities barons are interested in pursuing their football hobbies. The price of oil has dipped close to \$45 recently - way off the highs that now seem normal. Abramovich's net worth has been hit hard. Who is to say people in his position will have the appetite to commit their cash to frivolities like football?

If not, the banks will have to find another way of getting their money out. And that doesn't bear thinking about. 🐱

Feature

Turning belief into ownership

MUST Committee member JD Deitch documents the history of our membership and presents a powerful case for our ultimate success.

The graph below shows the numerical history of our membership. It is a picture that tells two sides of the same story.

One thing it plainly illustrates is the challenge we currently face. The discouragingly shallow segment of the line from June 2005 epitomises the post-takeover struggle. Simply put we're barely growing. Those who are cynical of our success see this graph as evidence of an organisation struggling to find its *raison d'être*.

The other thing it very clearly articulates, however, is our incredible potential. The steep segment of the line from about August 2004 through May 2005 shows an organisation that, in a mere nine months, driven only by a small but dedicated group of volun-

teers, added 30,000 new members. Those of us who were active during this extraordinary period still (fondly, even) remember the late nights processing endless registrations and answering thousands of member questions. The volume of new members and share purchases was so huge that, on more than one occasion, our online payments provider's automatic fraud prevention mechanisms kicked in and shut us down.

The reason we're showing you this graph isn't to warm your cockles with nostalgic sentiment. We're showing it to you because it is the very same picture and story we're now presenting to investment bankers and other prominent Reds in industries we see as pivotal to our ultimate success.

The key to success is growth

The conventional wisdom behind our inability to stop the Glazers' takeover was that we didn't have enough money. Detractors and cynics alike believed there was no way a group of football fans was ever going to challenge a billionaire backed by several of the world's biggest investment houses. There's certainly no disputing the fact that we lacked enough of a shareholding to block the Glazer bid. But this was a symptom - not the cause itself.

The true cause of our defeat in 2005 is that we didn't have enough *people*. Even with our incredible growth we could not muster enough numbers to be a threat. Was 30,000 supporters a monumental statement?

Definitely. But it wasn't anywhere close to being pivotal. There's a point at which the threat of collective action becomes real and in the final analysis we didn't hit that tipping point. While 30,000 was a good start, we needed more. At that time "more" would have meant more supporters not just owning shares, but being active, building belief, and then recruiting other supporters.

Growth gives us the ability to do many things. First, it is unquestionably correlated with impact and credibility. We are a large and mobilised group. If we have enough numbers to either initiate a bid ourselves or participate in a bid with others, then our involvement at even higher levels of membership (100,000 and higher) could turn the tide, either by pushing us over the edge or providing opposition to a non-fan-friendly investor on even a grander scale. Second, it is self-accelerating. Our main source of new members comes from referrals from existing members. When we're growing, we grow at a faster rate.

When we look at the growth in that chart and think about the circumstances surrounding the takeover, it's tempting to think if we weren't successful then, when the club was publicly quoted and we had all that momentum, there's no way we can do it now.

We disagree. It won't be easy, but we can do it if we can build the belief that was there during 2004-5. To do that, we need a credible plan that shows the path to ownership.

Putting together the plan

The most compelling facet of our growth and near-success during the Glazer takeover is that we were operating on little more than the belief that we might succeed. It was not a foregone conclusion that the small shareholders would act in concert and oppose the bid. It would have taken a good amount of coordination to make that happen - and this would have been over and above the steep hill we had to climb to build our shareholding. And yet people still joined and we grew by leaps and bounds.

While our potential is undeniable, this time round we're going to need more than just vague belief. We're going to need a plan constructed and backed by investment professionals. In order to grow and be able to influence the sale of the club, we need a credible financial plan that gets us to ownership. We're engaged in conversations with these people about this subject right now.

E-Membership: making it easier to grow

We also need to do whatever we can to spur new growth. During our days as Shareholders

We hope you'll do your part by referring new e-members through our website. All you'll need to do is provide their name and email address and we'll take care of the rest.

United the tenner we paid for membership got us, among other things, one share in Manchester United. We'd have paid two to three times that amount in fees had we gone the usual route of buying through a brokerage! The roughly seven quid remaining stayed with MUST to pay postage on newsletters and other operational expenses (and never any salaries).

The situation is obviously different these days. With no more shares, some find full membership less desirable despite the newsletter, smart badges, certificate and vote in the organisation. Things have changed for us operationally as well. We're more self-sustaining these days and there's less of a need to cover our costs. So we've decided to make a change. We're going to let members join for free.

Beginning on a trial basis about a year ago, we started allowing members to join by merely providing their name and email address. It's a simple idea really. The full paid membership is still the way to go if the individual wants to support MUST or to have a vote in our organisation, or wants one of the little perks (the certificate or the badge or this newsletter). But if they just want to say "I believe in what this organisation stands for", then by all means come on in. They don't get all the benefits of full membership, but it's a far better thing for our group to have them on-board as "E-Members" so that we're bringing together as many Reds as we can. Of course they can always upgrade their membership at any time. The response to this trial has been extremely promising. With virtually no promotion we've had 3,000 new E-Members join. We think that's just the tip of the iceberg. As you'll read elsewhere in the newsletter, we're about to start significantly promoting e-membership.

We hope you'll do your part by referring new e-members through our website. All you'll need to do is provide their name and

email address and we'll take care of the rest. They'll be able to confirm their e-membership with a single click, or opt out if they wish. (MUST is registered under the Data Protection Act as well so we will never disclose personal information to any third parties.)

Still working for supporter ownership

We hope this discussion has given you some insight into what we've been doing and thinking over the past year and where we're trying to go. It does seem daunting at times. There's no escaping the chicken-and-egg nature of our task: supporters need reasons to believe we'll be successful in order for us to grow in large numbers, and the financial people want to see large numbers before they will make any commitments. But we continue to make inroads as we work behind the scenes toward the same goal we've always had.

On a personal note, while it's been a hard slog at times I remain completely convinced of our ultimate success. I guess I'm pretty fortunate in that I've had the time and opportunity to be involved (which, as any of you who've ever helped out know requires nothing more than your willingness to lend a hand) but I see reason every day to continue our quest. This is an extraordinary group of people and we have a history of picking ourselves up by our bootstraps and doing unprecedented things.

If you're wondering what you can do, try going online to the Members section of our newly streamlined site (www.joinmust.org/refer) and referring some new e-members. And as ever we thank you for your continued support. At the AGM we got loads of new people involved and they continue to do great things, as evidenced by the huge success of the Chubb Club - which is something we hope to roll out worldwide.

On behalf of the Board and the Committee, best wishes for the remainder of the year and let's look forward to some promising developments in 2009.

If we have enough numbers to initiate a bid, or participate in a bid with others, then our involvement at even higher levels of membership (100,000 and higher) could turn the tide...



One night in Moscow (M 17)



I remembered the loneliness I felt in '99. I'd watched the Final at home on my own and having turned a full cart-wheel, almost smashing the TV with a couple of uncontrollable size elevens when Ole scored the winner, I ran outside looking for someone to hug and share my ecstasy with. The street was empty and silent. I vowed then that the next time we made it to the European Final I would not watch it alone again.

Thank heavens for MUST. I could never have afforded the trip to Moscow so the next best thing was to find a place where other like minded Reds were watching the game.

MUST arranged a screening at Sam Platts pub which sold out within hours of the tickets going on sale (one of a total of 5 venues where a MUST 'Moscow Live' event was screened).

The tension of the penalty shoot-out was immense and I found myself in a line of reds, arms around each other's shoulders hardly daring to look. The feeling when Ed saved Anelka's spot kick was incredible and the place erupted. One look at these photographs will tell you what words cannot describe. And I haven't hugged so many strangers in my life! Football, Bloody Hell! To coin a phrase!

Paul Brooks



All photos copyright Fabrizio Filippini, Fill Factor Photography, T: 0161 870 6181

Special report

An evening with m'learned friends

Wanna-be sports lawyers and agents as well as a fair few Red undergrads turned out to see Maurice Watkins speak at the Oxford Union. He was upstaged by a scouser who oiled the wheels of the Glazer deal says Rory Campbell.

Maurice Watkins may not be a household name, yet in the world of football, which plays such a central role in the life of the nation, he is as influential a figure as many of the top players, managers and chairmen. This is of course, largely due to the fact that he is, among other things, United's lawyer.

Given the club's dominance as a global sporting brand in an increasingly complex and competitive global sporting marketplace, it is a position that carries weight and influence, and Watkins is active in advising the FA, the PL and overseas football leagues including those in South Africa and Nigeria.

Watkins, having once been voted off the board by Glazer, infamously had his Jag repainted by the Manchester Education Committee in 2004 when he sold a million United shares to the Glazers precipitating their takeover of the club. Watkins remains on the board as well as the club's solicitor. An opportunity to hear him speak at the Oxford Union was too good to miss.

The audience was mainly lawyers and would-be lawyers with an eye for sports law post graduation, but to football fans it would be interesting simply to hear what he had to say about the way United, and football, have changed.

There were definitely more football fans present than for most Oxford talks, and not surprisingly, most of them were Reds.

But this was never going to be an off the record briefing for a bunch of student United fans. Also, the platform was not his alone, but shared with Ed Barnett, a partner at Allen and Overy, *Shareholders United's* bête noir as the company that oversaw the Glazer deal.

Barnett was someone who would evoke instant distaste among United fans and, not surprisingly, any insights he gave into the Glazer deal were largely about legal process, a fairly dry account of the deal, how it came into being, how it worked, what it meant. Colourful is was not.

To some in the audience, it was doubtless of interest to hear of the legal process of the deal from the stage it became known that the Glazers were buying up shares, even on the smallest scale, but I would not include myself among them.

Football, and football ownership, arouse strong passions. There was little of it in this presentation. But as he continued, I became less concerned at his lack of real insight as irritated at his smugness and arrogance in the way he talked about the deal. It was as though the real central characters - the club itself, and the family seeking to purchase it - were bit parts in the Ed Barnett story.

He tried to persuade Joel Glazer to communicate with the press whilst they were pursuing the deal.

Someone needs to invent a new word to describe someone who is up himself. The current vocabulary does not do justice. Lest you think I'm a little harsh on the man, he introduced himself as a Liverpool fan and in turn made no secret of his distaste for the club he helped sell to the Glazers. And whilst healthy banter is part and parcel of football, he did not have the charm needed to engage in it.

Barnett also seemed to take an unnecessary and unappealing pleasure in setting out how he removed Watkins from the board on the Glazers' instructions, even though he was sitting right in front of him. Equally irritating were his constant references to how kind and nice the Glazers were, and how disgusting were those supporters who campaigned against their takeover.

In comparison, Watkins was charm incarnate. He told some reasonably good anecdotes and at least communicated an understanding that football is about emotion and passion, not just legality and dealmaking. He had also brought along some fabulous United videos. But annoyingly there was no attempt

to hit back at the bilge that came out from Barnett.

In the ensuing Q&A, one of the questioners effectively tried to accuse Watkins of breaking the law over the signing of Dimitar Berbatov from Spurs. He was shot down fairly quickly. Then Ed Barnett further lowered himself in the eyes of the United fans present when he admitted to taking a Glazer ticket to the United-Liverpool game at OT in 2006. I took some consolation in reflecting how much he would have enjoyed Rio's second half humdinger.

He went a little philosophical on us at one point, saying 'capitalism in football has to run its course' in response to the worry about so many clubs now being taken over.


After the talk I was able to speak one on one with Barnett and ask him a few of the things that had always bothered me about the Glazers. Firstly, in response to my question about their minimal communication with the fans regarding the ideas and plans for the club, he said he always tried to persuade Joel Glazer, the main deal broker, to communicate with the press whilst they were pursuing the deal.

However, in line with his whole heartedly supporting everything the Glazers had ever done, he thought they'd been proved right - and Barnett himself proved wrong - by what

has happened to Gillett and Hicks; both of whom took the opposite approach.

He firmly believed that Joel Glazer was right when he said they'll eat us alive anyway so why should we bother?

However, the most contentious area of conversation to get him on was ticket prices. Barnett simply couldn't see the justification behind the complaints. He churned out the usual spiel about it still being undervalued and how it's a myth that there isn't money in the North West. He just couldn't understand my response that surely it was against the ethos of the club and what it stands for, as well as against the ethos of football 'the working man's game,' to price certain people (those who have always been loyal fans) out of being able to go. He seemed to think that as long as the stadium is full, that's all that matters.

As the event came to a close, I couldn't help thinking it had been an opportunity wasted. I sensed that without Barnett there, Watkins could have been interesting and revelatory. The trouble was Barnett certainly loved stealing the show. 

Book review

Football 'Hooliganism'; Policing and the war on the 'English Disease'
Dr Clifford Stott and Dr Geoff Pearson

Anyone expecting another typical book on the 'antics' of the football hooligan (or as it's called in this book 'hoolie porn') will be disappointed. Instead you'll find a serious attempt to understand how and why acts of disorder happen around football matches, and the way policing, the media and government have affected it, and tried to prevent it from happening.

The book looks at various high profile events, including the Roma v. Utd game in 2007, Liverpool in Athens for the Champions League final, the World Cups of Italia90, France98 and Germany2006 and European Championships of 2000 and 2004.

The thing that struck me when reading the book was the wealth of studies into crowd dynamics (not just at football). As a former sociology student, I hadn't realised how much work had been done in this area. Clifford and Geoff attempt to compare and contrast these various studies and use them to back up their own research, both as observers at the various championships listed above, and from interviewing others present.

The book highlights the attempts to legislate against football related disorder, sadly seemingly driven by hysterical (and often totally inaccurate) media reporting. The high profile banning of known trouble makers is contrasted with the fact that those arrested abroad generally have no history of being in trouble with police at all, and the book explores the way people's behaviour in a large crowd can differ greatly than if they were alone or in a small group. You may have a different opinion on 'the English disease' after reading accounts of those present, although the book never suggests that English fans are innocents abroad.

But the interesting thing is the various methods used by police to prevent disorder in the first place, and controlling it as it kicks off. The baffling thing is that, even when presented with firm evidence of what works well and what doesn't, there seems little enthusiasm to implement the good methods uniformly across borders.

The European Championships in the Netherlands and Belgium highlights this, with the Dutch-based games being relatively peaceful, compared with the infamous plastic chair throwing and water canons competition in Belgium. Guess


Effective treatment...

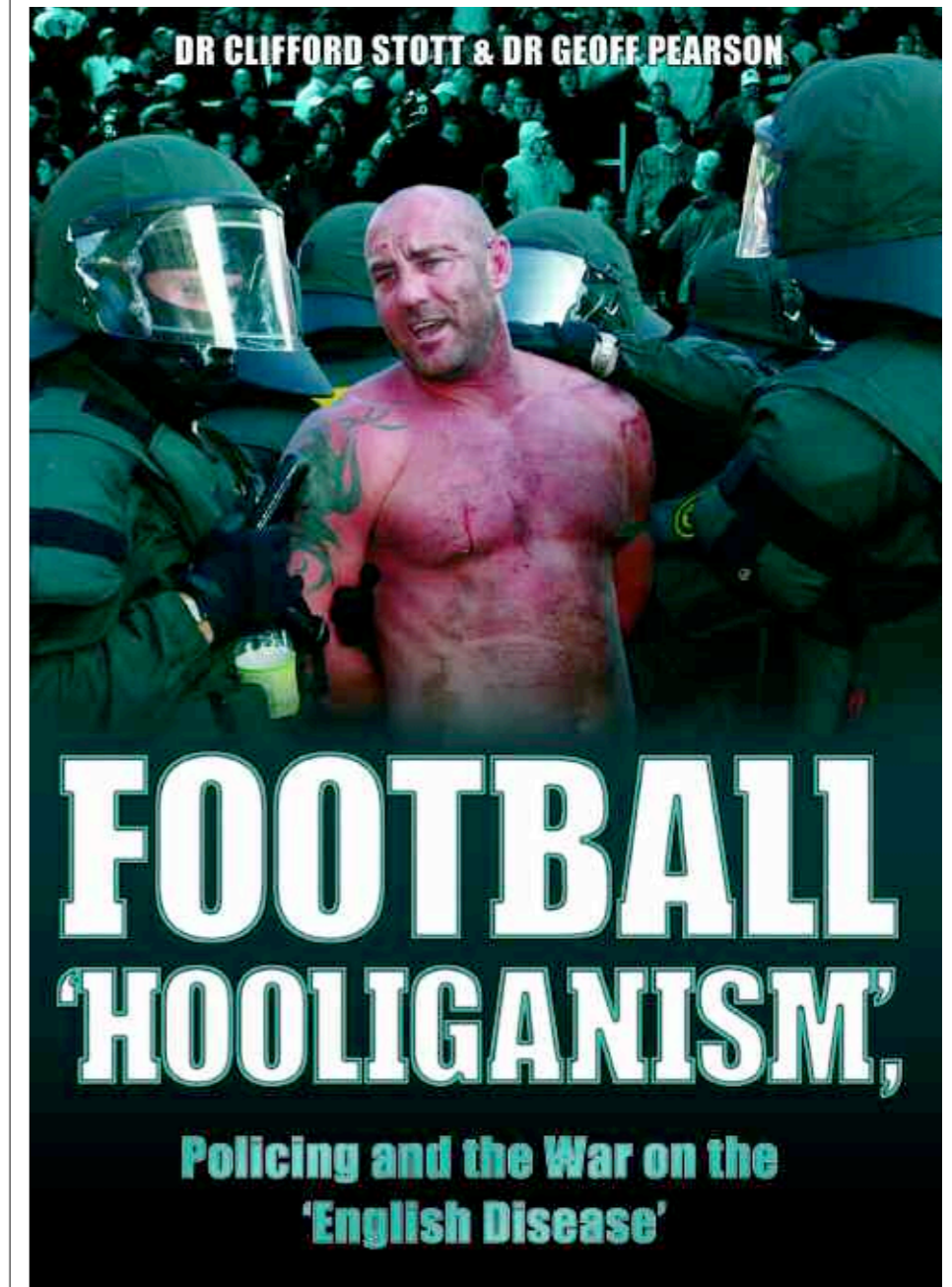
where the good methods were employed?

A parallel is drawn with the poll tax riots (at which Clifford was present). Again, police handling is seen as helping create the tension that resulted in the mass disorder that day, again turning people in a large crowd into something completely at odds to their normal, individual behaviour.

The book doesn't try and suggest solu-

tions, but lets the evidence speak for itself. They by no means suggest that the hooligan has disappeared, but have produced a book that tries to explain why some games experience trouble and some don't, and the contributory factors that breed the problems.

Should be recommended reading for every police chief, home secretary and newspaper editor. 



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