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Trebles all round

Alex Ferguson's dream of guiding Manchester United to an historic treble was secured in the most sensational fashion tonight as injury-time goals from substitutes Teddy Sheringham and Ole Gunnar Solksjaer beat



Ole Gunner Solskjaer celebrates his winning goal with team-mates Stam, Sheringham, Johnsen and Butt. (AP)

Bayern Munich 2-1 in the European Cup Final.

Until their late charge the English champions had been unable to overcome a disastrous start when, after just five minutes, Bayern's Mario Basler curled a right-footed free-kick beyond goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel. Deprived of the suspended Roy Keane, their captain and talisman, United had rarely found the pace and width to trouble Bayern, but once again their manager's replacements did the trick.

The Germans, denied twice in the second half by the goal-frame, were left shattered by the indomitable

Top News

Thursday, May 27, 1999,
12:07am London Time

European Cup Final:

EUROPEAN CUP FINAL
LIVE AUDIO)))**Wed 26th, 7:45 pm BST**

Audio provided by Talk Sport.
Requires [Windows Media Player](#).

[Man Utd 2-1 Bayern Munich: Super subs seal treble triumph](#)

[Treble triumph only start of great era, says old boy Hughes](#)

[United reward deafening Nou Camp roar](#)

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spirit of Ferguson's men, and left to ponder as he and skipper Schmeichel lifted the Champions' Cup together to crown the finest hour in the history of the world's biggest club.

Highlights

THE EUROPEAN CUP FINAL

Soccernet will bring you [live ball-by-ball coverage](#) of the European Cup Final as Manchester United aim to complete a unique treble. Join **Sean Smith** and **Andy Hooper** at 7.45pm tonight.

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The [pick of the pics](#) from the Nou Camp Stadium.

[United must fly flag for England](#)

15 years after an English club last lifted the European Cup, Soccernet columnist **James Foulerton** says that United must win on Wednesday for the good of English football.



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Jeff Powell believes Alex Ferguson must surpass Matt Busby's tactical genius if Man Utd are to have a chance against Hitzfeld's shrewd operators.

[Roll up for the Greatest Show on](#)

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Soccernet journalist **Mike With** explains why tonight's game is the Greatest Show on Earth, but believes it is really all about money and the big clubs making themselves even bigger.

[Nation ready to cheer Beckham](#)

Michael Hart reveals how the villain can turn hero and earn the praise of a nation once again.

[One final starring role for Matthaus](#)

Ian Chadband talks to the veteran defender who is looking to finally win the medal which has eluded him for so long - a European Cup winners' medal.

[An attack of the Denis Laws should be too hot](#)

Looking back to 1968, **Ian Chadband** explains why there could be a sense of deja vu in Manchester United's build-up to the big European Cup Final clash with Bayern

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As kick-off in the Champions' League Final draws nearer, **Mick Dennis** accepts responsibility for a mistake he's made - and cheers on United.

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Colin Shindler, author of the acclaimed book 'Manchester United Ruined My Life', explains.

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The climax of the European football season will be a clash of two great teams, says **Trevor Brooking**.

[So, where are the United glory boys of '68 now?](#)

We take a look back at the team which lifted the European Cup for Manchester United 31 years ago - and find out what they're up to now.

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Man Utd 2-1 Bayern Munich: Super subs seal treble triumph

Thursday, May 27, 1999

The European Cup has never, ever seen anything like this. Manchester United seemed to have lost the only thing they truly cared about. The game really was over.

The huge clocks at both ends of this magnificent stadium had both just clicked on to 45:00. Time was up, Bayern were winning and Alex Ferguson's team just had not performed.

Teddy Sheringham's young son was looking forlornly up at the clock. Then his father scored and everything went crazy.

Just as United had done so many, many times this season, they were back ... somehow.

Then, amazingly, they had won. It all happened so fast that even Ole Gunnar Solskjaer probably doesn't know how he did it, but he did.

The evening had started so differently, though. In a cauldron like this and with the May sunshine making Barcelona a steamy host city, the last thing you would have expected was that United would freeze. But they did in the first half-hour.

This fine team has made enjoyment of big occasions their trademark - fear of failure has been absent from their vocabulary.

Yet, before Mario Basler placed his sixth-minute free kick beyond a badly organised wall, and then repeatedly once Bayern were ahead, players like Ronny Johnsen, Jesper Blomqvist, Nicky Butt and even the laid back Dwight Yorke just seemed overwhelmed. Certainly, they fought and were not found wanting in attitude, aggression and even flair intermittently.

Still, the fact remained, it was for desperately long periods a lame imitation of how United normally play.

Bayern started precisely as it had been predicted they would, with a blizzard of energy

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and threat just like Borussia Dortmund did in defeating Juventus two seasons ago.

Not for Ottmar Hitzfeld's teams the conservative approach to major Finals, he likes to see his players start like streetfighters, grip the game like a vice once ahead and then go for the killer blow when opponents think they are back in the contest.

And, in Basler, the Bayern manager found such an eager disciple.

It will nag at Ferguson and his players that referee Pierluigi Collina seemed to share their big-match nerves. When Johnsen's attempt to deal with the mammoth Carsten Jancker ended with the German centre forward on the ground, the Italian official seemed deeply unsure of his decision.

To anyone familiar with the mental procedures of top-grade referees, it was quite evident that when he set off at a sprint to reach the spot where the incident took place, he was using the running time to make up his mind.

Was it a penalty? Was it outside the box? Was it even a foul?

When his decision was shared with the 22 players, the crowd and the TV-watching millions, it seemed like nothing more and nothing less than a fudge.

Whatever anger United felt about Collina's ruling, it was not enough to jag them out of their torpor. The defensive wall was bedraggled, Jens Jeremies stood at the extreme right-hand end of it and the man known only as 'Super Mario' to Bayern's fans really had no problem in slotting in his goal.

In fact, he looked as if he might have had more trouble lacing up his boots or pulling on his grey jersey, so simple was the strike.

Poor old Nicky Butt, the man who had to step into Roy Keane's boots, was most exposed by the devastating moment. Jeremies was jostling him, Collina was not interested in interceding and as the midfielder tried to get behind his opponent, Jeremies rolled with him, exposed a vast gap and Basler scored. Simple as that.

It was the same goalmouth into which United had conceded a much more thrilling, much better crafted free kick to the Brazilian Rivaldo against Barcelona but this time, again, Peter Schmeichel was left rooted to the spot.

When the United players traipsed off the pitch at half-time, United were at their lowest ebb for many, many months.

Shoulders were low, body language was sending out messages nobody in red wanted to see and only Ferguson had the key to building something inspirational from the rubble which surrounded him.

Somebody in the Nou Camp clearly either had United's cause at heart, or a malicious sense of humour, when they pumped out the strains of Chumbawumba's hit record Tubthumping as the play-ers wandered off.

'I get knocked down, but I get up again' go the lyrics. That has been so true of this mighty season for United, but it just didn't look feasible at that time last night.

The initial efforts to claw back parity - and pride - had been too stodgy to upset the authoritative Germans.

David Beckham produced surge after surge, but either his thigh strain was telling on him or he should have been used on the right wing where he excels, because nothing he did could galvanise his team-mates in the customary manner.

He might well have been United's most prominent and brave player of the first half, but the game was crying out for his return to the flank and those explosive, dangerous crosses.

When Beckham did revert to type, in the 20th minute, his deflected cross left Yorke defying geometry to put a flick on the ball which had Oliver Kahn scrambling furiously to paw it off the line.

Beckham also struck two fabulous corners in that first half-hour but, typically on the night, the chances fizzled out. Conversely, Munich were causing havoc at the other end.

Johnsen and Schmeichel just could not get their act together and for some reason the Danish goalkeeper ended up kicking clear in three panicky situations in that woeful first half.

Even when Beckham struck a free kick, it floated harmlessly past the woodwork instead of putting fear into the opposition.

Then, as United's conviction returned and they desperately fought off the tiredness of their ravaging season, their luck appeared to run out.

Little dummies between Ryan Giggs, Yorke and Cole which have unlocked defences all season suddenly went awry. Blomqvist started giving the ball away, just as he did with such terrible consequences in Milan when he caused Keane to make his bookable tackle which led to suspension from the Final.

When the Swede went off for Sheringham with 25 minutes left, it looked overdue. He had missed United's best chance to that point when Giggs' penetrating cross dropped for Blomqvist to score, but he somehow managed to scoop the ball over the crossbar.

Even when the usually impeccable Kahn bumped into his two defenders, Markus Babel and Michael Tarnat, the ball sat up invitingly for Yorke or Cole, but the ball would not go in.

There were some chances at both ends. Jaap Stam headed over in the 67th minute and Effenberg smashed a long drive just past soon after. Munich then created some spectacular efforts.

Schmeichel saved superbly from Effenberg's lofted effort on his last night in United colours, Scholl's lob came back off a post and Jancker again hit the woodwork.

The game was a minute into injury-time when Schmeichel ran the length of the field for a corner and in the confusion as Bayern failed to clear, Sheringham side-footed the ball into the corner following a shot by Giggs.

Incredibly, the game was won within seconds when from another Beckham corner, Sheringham flicked on and Solskjaer stabbed home from close range.

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Treble triumph only start of great era, says old boy Hughes

By Ken Lawrence
Thursday, May 27, 1999

Manchester United became kings of Europe last night as Alex Ferguson grasped his Holy Grail. And even before his players had sunk their first glass of champagne, it was predicted they would turn victory over Bayern Munich into a stranglehold on the continent.

Ferguson and his players danced for joy following the drama of the Nou Camp to celebrate the club's first triumph in Europe's premier competition since the heady days of 1968, when Sir Matt Busby's side became England's first winners.

But the modern United are also the first club to collect the Treble of Champions League, Premiership and FA Cup. As more than 30,000 United fans sang their tunes of glory in Barcelona, two of the players who shared in Ferguson's first European success with the club when they won the Cup Winners' Cup in 1991 insisted their former club had only just begun their domination of the continent.

Mark Hughes, the striker whose two goals ensured victory over Barcelona eight years ago, declared: 'This really is the start of something big. This is only the start.

'My old mates were magnificent against Bayern but they will get better still. Alex Ferguson has the formula for long-term success in Europe.

'His players are young and they will not lose their hunger or determination. This win has surely made them the best club side ever from England. They will stick together and they will keep winning together.

'I'm intensely proud that I played a part in helping United resurrect themselves as a major force. But even when we started winning trophies you could never envisage what it would lead to. I'm simply delighted for Alex and all concerned.'

Bryan Robson, who captained United towards the domestic domination that has now transformed itself to such fantastic triumph, joined the red-clad hordes in celebration of Ferguson's triumph before heading off to share a few bottles of bubbly himself.

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He said: 'I'm hugely pleased for what the manager and the lads have achieved. Winning three Doubles was fantastic but to turn this season into such a Treble triumph is almost unbelievable.

'Yet this is not only about United, delighted as I am. This is also a brilliant result for English football. This win has put our game back on the map and perhaps the best aspect of all is that the majority of the side are home-grown.

'Their win over Bayern was wonderful and I always believed that one day United would do it in the Champions League. They are now rightly known as the best team in Europe.'

Frank Stapleton, one of the players who tried long and hard to change United's fortunes during the Eighties, said: 'I'm on Cloud Nine. Never in my wildest dreams did I believe at the start of the season that United would win the Champions League to clinch the Treble.

'Maybe I'm no longer a United player but when you have played at Old Trafford you always leave a little of your heart behind.

'Alex Ferguson has spent a long, long time chasing that dream of his. Now he has achieved it. He and his players are simply marvellous and have taken English football into a new dimension because they have won this thing by playing football in the right way.

'No matter whether they had won or not tonight, they must be congratulated for showing Europe this season how to win in style.'

Former United manager Tommy Docherty believes that fear has played a key role in the success of Ferguson as it did with Sir Matt.

Busby, who would have been 90 yesterday, won the European Cup in 1968 with a team built around outstanding young talent such as George Best and Ferguson completed his historic Treble with a team of mainly youngsters.

But Docherty thinks both men used the emotion in very different ways to motivate their young sides.

Docherty said: 'Busby built a side at a time when you could get young players for nothing.

'They wanted to join a great club like United even though wages obviously weren't as good as they are today.

'To a certain extent, he could frighten players because they were only too happy to be kept on for another year. But now, it is all massive salaries and, unless you are at a really big club like United, players will move about quite frequently.

'But if they come to United, they don't want to leave. The hardest job is getting players to leave United.

'I know players don't help with their pop star status and they do things which the Press cannot ignore. But you never see the Nevilles, Scholes or Beckham involved in incidents.'

Docherty has been especially impressed with the manner in which David Beckham has controlled his emotions under Ferguson after the furore caused by his World Cup dismissal last summer.

But Docherty claims that stoic resistance to abuse around the country is down to his manager's ruthless ability to keep his players focused.

'David Beckham got murdered last year and all he did was get sent off in a football match,' said Docherty. 'He got dismissed for damn all and I thought he had committed murder judging by the reaction.

'Alex manages some of the young players with fear. When some of the older players get a bit strong, like Paul McGrath and Norman Whiteside, he gets rid of them.

'But he can frighten the youngsters, as nobody would want to leave United because they are the best club in the country.

'It's down to the company you keep. Alex knows that if youngsters are surrounded by good professionals, they will respond to that. But if not, that can turn you.'

But despite Ferguson's phenomenal success at Old Trafford, Docherty refused to be drawn on which man was the better manager.

He said: 'The question of who the better manager was is a hard one. Success wise, they are on a par.

'The people who played for Matt will say he was the best, while those under Alex will say he is. But they managed in different eras.'

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United reward deafening Nou Camp roar

By Jeff Powell
Thursday, May 27, 1999

If noise really can awaken the dead then Sir Matt Busby will have been here last night, at least in spirit, as Manchester came to the ultimate celebration of what would have been the great man's 90th birthday.

Certainly, George Best and the rest of the legends of 1968 will have been roused from their reverie by the tumult which filled the vast Nou Camp to overflowing.

If the roaring will of the people were enough in itself to lift the team to glory then Alex Ferguson's contemporary United would have had only to turn up in order to add the Holy Grail of European football to their epic trilogy of domestic Doubles.

Audibly, this pilgrimage of what seemed to be the entire population of our northern capital city made the massed bands from Bavaria sound like whispering fans by comparison.

The only snag, at least to begin with, was that the cool, strong and massively experienced footballers of Bayern Munich turned deaf ears to the cacophony.

Where a team of lesser nerve might have succumbed to the electrifying atmosphere, the Germans promptly took the early lead which has proved crucial on so many of these huge occasions.

Not that the faithful were subdued or their heroes daunted.

For United, in this season of amazing feats, Mario Basler's sixth-minute free kick served only to confront United with yet another opportunity to produce a miracle.

If, this time, they had to strive for the supposedly impossible with a team redesigned through unwanted force of circumstance, then so be it.

Those who were surprised by Ferguson's late decision to fill the void left by his captain Roy Keane's suspension by moving David Beckham to the fast-beating heart of his mid-field had forgotten that the outstanding British manager of the Nineties, like Busby before him, is a gambler by nature.

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Both the godfathers of Old Trafford have liked a flutter at the bookmakers. That is a characteristic which lends itself to the willingness to take calculated risks with the team.

Ferguson has staked almost everything on attack this season and seen that courage bear the richest of fruits. If he had to change his formation for the biggest match of all, then he certainly was not going to vary from his winning principle.

Without a tremor, he offered Beckham the grandest stage in club football upon which to make the final transition from wonderfully accomplished footballer into fully matured greatness.

Much had been said about the importance of a United victory to the international perception of the English game but the transplanting of Beckham brought direct relevance to that equation.

Where United required a dominant and creative force on the night, England, in the wake of Gazza's self-destruction, are in a vital need of just such a general in the World Cup long-term.

As a potential coronation for Beckham, it could not have been a sterner examination. Bayern are not only among the most cleverly-coached and intensely-organised teams in the world but are physically among the most powerful.

To complicate the issue further for Beckham, his immediate opponent Jens Jeremies, is as super-fit and nimble-footed as he is himself. Consequently, the Spice Boy of English football found space hard to come by in which to set United into attacking motion.

Ottmar Hitzfeld, the Bayern coach who was bidding to become only the second manager ever to win Europe's biggest prize with two different clubs, had demanded an early goal and for getting the better of his early exchanges with Beckham, Jeremies provided the momentum from which that wish became reality.

As Beckham found his feet and his form in his less familiar role so United came forward but, as ever, the German defending was solid, resolute and liable to be broken only by a moment of sublime inspiration.

Hitzfeld, not surprisingly, had done his homework well. Bayern seemed happier for Nicky Butt rather than Beckham to have a majority of United's midfield possession.

So, even as the gaps widened on this sizeable playing surface, the moment of genius seemed a long time coming.

For sure, fame was here for the taking with 90,000 ticket holders in the stadium and 200 million watching every move on television.

United's proportion of that audience stayed vocally with the team in adversity. The noise, in tune with United's attacks, continued unabated but Bayern were not willing to surrender lightly to Ferguson's desire to claim the 28th and greatest trophy of his career.

As time ebbed away the question for the manager was whether to make changes. He decided to bring on Teddy Sheringham, the hero of Wembley against Newcastle United on Saturday, and later Ole Gunnar Solskjaer for a final assault.

And amazingly, they were the men who made the most dramatic of all European Cup history by scoring in those last heart-stopping moments.

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The Germans were getting flashy. It gave me the hump

By Ian Chadband
Thursday, May 27, 1999

Teddy Sheringham today revealed how German cockiness and showboating inspired him to play the starring role in Manchester United's miraculous European Cup triumph in Barcelona.

As United's heroes flew back home after one of the most extraordinary comeback victories in sport, Sheringham was bathing in 'the most amazing roller-coaster ride' of his life after his second match-winning performance in five days following his decisive strike in Saturday's FA Cup Final.

This time, he came off the bench to score the injury-time equaliser with Bayern Munich leading 1-0 and United seemingly beaten and seconds later was celebrating United's historic treble as Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, the other 'super sub', netted the winner in a disbelieving Nou Camp stadium.

Afterwards, Sheringham explained how he had become infuriated while sitting on the bench and watching Mario Basler, Bayern's goalscorer, waving to the German fans as if the game was already won. 'The Germans were getting flashy and it gave me the hump,' he said. 'I watched Basler showboating and waving and it wasn't good to see.'

'It was very un-German, not the sort of thing you expect to see and as I was sitting there it just geed me up. So to go out there and score and help us win just made it all the sweeter for me.'

Alex Ferguson had told Sheringham at half-time that he would bring him on after another 20 minutes if Bayern were still leading. When ushering him on to the field, the United manager had told him: 'Go out there and get us that goal.'

After injecting fresh life into United's ailing challenge, Sheringham answered the call in the 91st minute, completing an amazing reversal of fortunes at the end of a season where, through injuries and acting as a third-string to Andy Cole and Dwight Yorke he had been almost a forgotten bit-part player at Old Trafford.

'But I don't want to be labelled as a super-sub like David Fairclough,' he said, while

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refusing to be drawn on speculation that, with one year of his United contract still left to run, he is still unsettled enough to want to leave Old Trafford.

'Let's not get into that,' he said. 'I'm enjoying the moment, I'm involved again and I'm a contented man.'

He could be even more contented tomorrow if, as widely predicted, Kevin Keegan drafts him into the squad for England's two crucial European Championship qualifiers.

Meanwhile, Ryan Giggs was offering no comfort to United's domestic pursuers as he hailed Ferguson's team as now being able to stand comparison with the greatest in the history of English football.

'We are only going to get better,' he warned. 'We won't lose our appetite just because we have won the treble. The great teams keep on winning. Juventus reached three successive finals and we want to emulate that.'

'It won't be a two-horse race at home - Arsenal are still there, Liverpool will rebuild this summer and Chelsea will keep getting better - but though it won't get any easier, I think we have the spirit and the quality to go on and dominate like the Liverpool of the mid-eighties. I think we have to be ranked alongside them.'

United's victory also gave a boost to Chelsea, who because of last night's victory go straight through to next season's Champions' League proper, rather than the qualifying rounds.

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Schmeichel departs and fulfils a great promise

Thursday, May 27, 1999

Peter Schmeichel kept his promise to leave Manchester United with the parting present of the European Cup.

Schmeichel vowed last November when he announced that he would be leaving Old Trafford in the summer that he would help them conquer Europe before he departed - and he did just that last night.

Even better, United's sensational 2-1 victory over Bayern Munich has clinched the Treble. Schmeichel's last official act for the Reds was to receive the European Cup and he admitted he could not have wished for a better climax.

'This is a fantastic finish for me and everything feels really good right now,' he said.

'When I announced that I would leave United at the end of the season I promised I would do all I could to finish with United being at the top. It's difficult to get any higher than this.

'It's been an amazing thing being part of a team like Manchester United.'

United won with goals in stoppage time from substitutes Teddy Sheringham and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer and Schmeichel admitted this exemplified the team's never-say-die spirit.

'One thing I have learned throughout all my time at United is that they are a team that never gives up,' he said.

'Therefore I got the feeling towards the end of the match that we would score.'

Schmeichel, who came up for the corner from which Sheringham equalised for United, admitted: 'With time running out I was only concentrating on getting forward at set pieces.

'It was a fantastic feeling when we scored.'

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Schmeichel, today linked with moves to French clubs Bordeaux and Monaco, refused to be drawn on where he is going.

'I don't want to discuss my future - now is a time for champagne, not thinking about the future,' he said.

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Franz: Cruel but best team won

Thursday, May 27, 1999

Franz Beckenbauer today admitted Manchester United deserved their dramatic victory over Bayern Munich in the European Cup Final.

Beckenbauer, who played for Bayern in their three European Cup victories from 1974 to 1976 and is now their president, said the nature of the 2-1 defeat in Barcelona was a 'cruel' experience but added that the best team had won.

'That was the cruellest defeat possible because victory was so close. We already had victory in the bag and there were only a few seconds to go.

'But those few seconds were enough for Manchester to get back into the game. We were playing well in the last 20 minutes and should have been able to hold on to victory. But in the end, Manchester deservedly won.'

Bayern's Brazilian striker Giovane Elber, who missed the Final through injury, said: 'This defeat really hurts. We tried so hard and did not deserve to lose in such a way.'

Goalscorer Mario Basler, whose sixth-minute strike looked to have sealed the match for the Germans before Teddy Sheringham and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's injury-time heroics, was devastated at losing out on a winner's medal.

'Three minutes brought our downfall and it's a clear example of how bad football can be,' he said. 'The whole team should have played more coolly during the final minutes.'

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What the German papers said

Thursday, May 27, 1999

The shocked and disbelieving headlines in the German newspapers said it all today after Manchester United came back deep into injury time to beat Bayern Munich 2-1 in last night's European Cup Final.

A simple 'Oh No!' - in English - from Germany's most popular daily, Bild Zeitung, characterised the German reaction after late goals from Manchester United substitutes Teddy Sheringham and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer.

'We were only 13 seconds away. Isn't that bitter. Simply inconceivable. Football can be so cruel,' Bild continued, with a picture of dejected Bayern Munich midfielder Stefan Effenberg.

The German side, leaders from the sixth minute through a direct free-kick from Mario Basler, were on the verge of winning the European Cup for the fourth time.

'Bayern thought all their dreams had come true,' the Bonn local newspaper General Anzeiger said. Its rival, the Bonn Express, said the result was 'terrible, absolutely terrible.

'Bavaria is in mourning and so are we.'

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Manchester set for massive United victory parade

Thursday, May 27, 1999

MANCHESTER, England, May 27 (Reuters) - The city of Manchester braced itself for a 700,000-strong victory parade on Thursday to welcome home its European Cup-winning side.

Wednesday's all-night revelling in the centre of the city was expected to follow through well into Friday as Manchester United supporters celebrated the team's 2-1 victory over Bayern Munich in Barcelona to take the cup for only the second time in their history.

One local Manchester DJ tore off his clothes to go on air in the nude in celebration, living up to a vow to bare all if the team won.

In the city, thousands of Manchester United fans chanted slogans through to the early hours after the club's treble-clinching win and convoys of cars circled around, sounding their horns. Other supporters climbed monuments, waving banners and singing.

Some 4,000 people gathered around the club's empty Old Trafford Stadium. 'This city is absolutely buzzing,' said Paul Horrocks, a local journalist. 'It has never seen anything like this euphoria.'

The United squad travel a seven-mile route through the centre of Manchester later on Thursday in an open-topped double-decker bus.

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Proud Ferguson scales new heights

By Timothy Collings
Thursday, May 27, 1999

BARCELONA, May 27 (Reuters) - It was typical of Alex Ferguson that in the hour of his greatest and most emotional triumph his first thoughts turned to his family, his friends and his predecessors.

He has always turned to them for inspiration and support. 'They are the people I am thinking of. I am so proud - of my heritage, the club, my players and my family and all that they have given me.

'This is the greatest night of my life,' he said after Manchester United's tumultuous European Cup win over Bayern Munich.

'Tonight it is Matt Busby's birthday and I am thinking of him,' Ferguson said, reflecting on his late predecessor who lifted the same cup in 1968. 'He will be doing a lot of kicking up there.'

The 57-year-old Scot danced with his players, hugged and kissed each member of his squad and waved to the crowds, revelling in the fulfilment of his fervent ambitions on a warm Catalan night.

And he made sure suspended captain Roy Keane was not left out, bringing him on to the pitch to join the team's celebrations after lifting the giant trophy.

'I felt for him,' Ferguson said. 'I watched him and it was tough for him. To play in a night like that is something very, very special.'

Manchester United's heart-stopping, last-gasp 2-1 victory over Bayern put Ferguson alongside the legendary Busby, architect of the club's only previous win the competition, and confirmed his status as the outstanding - and luckiest - manager in European and world club soccer.

Yet Ferguson was not ready even to consider his own position in soccer's hall of fame. Instead he wanted to reflect on the others who meant so much to him: the family that raised him and gave him his fiercely-protected sense of values, his humility in deference to Busby's inheritance at Old Trafford and his ferocious sense of loyalty to his players, friends and staff at Manchester United.

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Proud, single-minded almost to the point of rudeness, ruthlessly ambitious, yet charming and mild-mannered away from his desk or the training ground, Ferguson is the archetypal successful manager - a combination of humble family man, driven perfectionist, team orchestrator and benevolent dictator - who has now collected 28 major trophies as a coach since he began his career with Aberdeen in 1978.

With Aberdeen, a club he transformed from mediocrity to Champions, he won three Scottish League titles, four Scottish FA Cups, one League Cup, one European Cup Winners' Cup and one European Super Cup.

Since arriving at Old Trafford to revitalise an ailing Manchester United in 1986, he endured four unsuccessful seasons before breaking through in 1990.

Five league titles have followed, four FA Cup triumphs, one League Cup win, five domestic Charity Shield successes, one European Cup Winners' Cup win and one European Super Cup win before Wednesday's tumult in the Nou Camp.

Proud as he is of his achievements, he carries his wealth and success lightly - apart from a passion for horse-racing - along with the gritty determination inherent in his Glaswegian nature.

'My inner drive has always been to stay in the game I love and to try and succeed in the proper manner. I have been so lucky to work in something I love so much,' he said.

'I always tell my players to enjoy every minute of it as if it will not last. That is how it is. I have grown up to be that way. To work and to graft for everything, but to do it all in the right way.'

As a player Ferguson was no more than ordinary. He was a striker for eight Scottish clubs, including Glasgow Rangers, but never enjoyed the success that has come since he hung up his boots.

But that sense of unfulfilled ambition has fired him since and been transferred into the bellies of his players, as they demonstrated on Wednesday night.

'When I left Aberdeen and came to Manchester United I didn't really change myself. I wanted to work hard, to win, to do well and to stay in the game and enjoy some success. That feeling has never changed,' he said.

'It's not down to me, it's down to the players. They have been fantastic this season. And it is the whole club, all the staff, who do the work, not just me.

'But now we have come this far, we are prepared to go on and do the rest.'

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Sports minister says Ferguson deserves a knighthood

Thursday, May 27, 1999

LONDON, May 27 (Reuters) - Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson deserves a knighthood after the English club's triumphant treble-winning season, British sports minister Tony Banks said on Thursday.

'If anyone asks my opinion...yes, he most certainly should,' Banks told BBC radio when asked whether Ferguson should be awarded a knighthood for winning the European Cup like one of his predecessors at the club, Sir Matt Busby.

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United set the standards

By Mike Collett
Thursday, May 27, 1999

BARCELONA, May 27 (Reuters) - Manchester United have set glittering new standards that few clubs could ever hope to equal by clinching the European Cup and winning an incredible treble of honours.

And no team, surely, will ever match the style of United's success with two goals securing victory in the final minute of the last match of the season.

Their 2-1 win over Bayern Munich in Wednesday's astonishing European Cup final in the Nou Camp stadium meant they became only the fourth side in history to win both their domestic league and cup competitions and Europe's premier club tournament in the same season.

Only Celtic (1967), Ajax Amsterdam (1972) and PSV Eindhoven (1988) have ever done that, but the English league is far, far tougher to win than the Scottish or Dutch.

In England, United are now in a league of their own having won three cup and league doubles in six seasons since 1994. A measure of the achievement is to remember that until 1994, the feat had only been achieved five times in 105 years of league soccer - and only three times this century, by Tottenham Hotspur (1961), Arsenal (1971) and Liverpool (1986).

Now that United have finally lifted the burden of a 31-year wait to emulate Sir Matt Busby's 1968 European Cup winning side, there is no telling how far they can go.

Of 62 competitive games this season, United won 36, drew 22 and lost only four - three matches in the league to Arsenal, Sheffield Wednesday and Middlesbrough, and one in the English League Cup when they fielded a largely reserve team and lost to Spurs.

In all matches they scored 128 goals, conceding 60. Wednesday's victory was their 33rd game without defeat - a run that began after they lost 3-2 at Old Trafford to Middlesbrough on December 19 - their only home setback of the season.

They remained unbeaten in all 13 European matches, winning six and drawing seven and their 31 European goals put them joint-level second in the all-time scoring list in a

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season, behind AC Milan who notched 33 in 1962-63.

The soccer that produced those startling figures has at times been glorious to watch and although some questions still remain about the way the defence works and the profligacy of the attack, there can be no arguments over their will-to-win, self-belief and team spirit.

Wednesday's last-gasp win was not the first time this season they have scored late goals to save what appeared to hopeless situations.

On January 24 they were losing 1-0 at home to Liverpool in an FA Cup fourth round tie with two minutes to go. Two goals in the last two minutes from Dwight Yorke and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer gave them a 2-1 win and kept them on the path to Wembley.

On April 7 they were losing 1-0 at home to Juventus in the first leg of the European Cup semifinal, when, with a minute to go, Ryan Giggs equalised to give them hope in the return in Turin.

That second leg match started terribly for United who were 2-0 down after only 11 minutes and facing certain elimination. But they won 3-2 to clinch a place in the final.

It was that same determination that brought them victory against Arsenal in England's match of the season - the FA Cup Semi Final replay - at Villa Park on April 14. Despite having skipper Roy Keane sent off, United overcame that with an outstanding winning goal from Giggs in extra time - and a Peter Schmeichel penalty save from Dennis Bergkamp with almost the last kick of normal time.

There have been great English teams in the past who have re-written the record books and set new standards of excellence - Wolves in the 1950s, Tottenham in the early 1960s, Liverpool in the 1970s and early 1980s.

But, without doubt, United are the team of the century - in the last year of the century. Perfect timing - just as it has been all season for Alex Ferguson's all-conquering heroes.

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Ferguson carries the torch of dynasty

By Timothy Collings
Thursday, May 27, 1999

BARCELONA, May 27 (Reuters) -- Their triumphs may be separated by three decades and a professional revolution in the sport but Matt Busby and Alex Ferguson are now entwined by far more than the thread of European Cup successes which they brought to Manchester United.

Both were born in Scotland, moved to England to gain worldwide international recognition, spoke with honesty and freedom when they wanted, set ferocious levels of commitment and desire and never wavered from a shared dream of bringing the most treasured trophy in European club soccer back to Old Trafford.

And both, according to a man who was part of the two tumultuous and victorious occasions in 1968 and 1999, understood the sense of style and destiny which drove their teams to hard-earned and dramatic successes.

In short, according to Jim Ryan, both Busby and Ferguson have embodied the values of a dynasty started in the 1950s when Busby embarked with the first United team into Europe, always placing the onus on attacking play, flair and heart.

Ryan was George Best's deputy, played in the Quarter Finals of United's run to the 1968 Final, was a member of their Wembley Final squad against Benfica and is now a senior coach on the United staff.

He said Wednesday's 2-1 win over Bayern Munich was the culmination, for Ferguson, of years of Busby-like toil and dedication. Ryan, 54, a Scot like the two managers, has shared dressing-rooms with both men - as a player under Busby and as a coach under Ferguson.

He was also the only man in Barcelona on the United staff, apart from director and 1968 hero Bobby Charlton, to have won a European Cup medal with the club 31 years before.

'I think the one thing that you could really say that they have in common is that they could both see a big picture, a big goal, and that they were single-minded in aiming for it.

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'Busby took the European Cup without the English FA's blessing in the first place and eventually, having come through the Munich air tragedy in 1958, came out and won it.

'I think there is a real parallel with our manager now, in as much as he looked at that prize when he came here and he has worked to get it. He has had his own setbacks and problems along the way too but he has done it.

'He never wavered. In the end he did the same thing. He refused to give up. And they have played the same kind of way, the same kind of football. The only thing, perhaps, that you could say is that the game now is far more tactical than it was then - in my day or Matt Busby's day...

'Matt was very quiet, spoke quietly and softly, but underneath he had the same drive. They both had it. They had the same vision too...

'Alex is not quiet like Matt was but they had the same objective and the same sense of style in mind. Both wanted to see the team playing really nice football but also working very hard.

'You could tell, we on the staff here could tell, that Fergie wanted to win it. He wanted to win the first thing, then the next. He was on the road. He wanted to go up the ladder and do it all. The world club championship will be next.

'It took him a long time to win the title, you remember, and it was not easy in those early years for Alex at Old Trafford. But he has worked through it all, just like Matt Busby did. They both had the same ideals and the same ambitions for the club.'

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Astonishing finale gives United European Cup

By Mike Collett (Reuters)
Thursday, May 27, 1999

Manchester United staged one of the most remarkable escape acts in soccer history with two goals deep into injury time to beat Bayern Munich 2-1 in Wednesday's European Cup final.

The German side, leaders from the sixth minute through a direct free-kick from Mario Basler, were only seconds away from winning the cup for the fourth time and the first time since 1976, when substitute Teddy Sheringham equalised with a right-foot shot after Bayern failed to clear a corner.

Even United's stand-in skipper, goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel, playing his last match for the club, came up for that corner to add to the turbulence that finally crashed through an awesome Bayern defence which had handled almost 25 minutes of unrelenting United pressure.

Then, with Italian referee Pierluigi Collina looking at his watch to herald extra time, substitute Ole Gunnar Solskjaer swept in the winner from close range after a David Beckham corner had been headed on by Sheringham.

The victory meant that United, who completed an English cup and league double on Saturday became only the third team in European history to complete the treble. Only Celtic (1967) and Ajax Amsterdam (1972) had reached such giddy heights before.

Bayern's players were devastated at the end of a final that could hardly have started better for them, but gradually tilted United's way after coach Alex Ferguson abandoned his unsuccessful ploy of playing Beckham, Ryan Giggs and Jesper Blomqvist in unfamiliar positions in midfield.

Ferguson belatedly brought on Sheringham and Solskjaer in place of Blomqvist and Andy Cole and United suddenly found their spark.

Even so, Bayern still had two golden chances to wrap up the final when their substitute Mehmet Scholl hit the post after 78 minutes and Carsten Jancker hit the bar with an overhead scissor kick six minutes later.

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Instead of being 3-0 down United were still in with a chance -- and they grabbed it with both hands to record the most dramatic end to a European final since Bayern themselves lost to two late goals in the last 10 minutes of the 1987 final against Porto in Vienna. Even so, that ending pales into insignificance compared with the nature of this victory.

It was United's first European Cup success since their only previous win in 1968 and coincidentally came on the 90th anniversary of the late Sir Matt Busby's birth -- their manager in 1968 and the man who created the modern dynasty which has seen United finally prove they are the greatest club side in the world -- both financially off the pitch -- and now on it too.

It was United's 33rd match without defeat and also secured England's first European Cup success since Liverpool in 1984.

Ferguson now takes his place in the pantheon of British managers to win the trophy and completes his lifelong ambition which he stated when he arrived at Old Trafford 13 years ago.

The night was full of emotion for the fans of both sides and there was an added poignancy to the occasion as United's obsession with the European Cup really started on the night that eight Busby Babes were among 23 players killed in the snows of Munich after a refuelling stop on the way back to England after a European Cup quarter-final in Belgrade in 1958.

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United fans paint Barcelona red

By Deborah Charles (Reuters)
Thursday, May 27, 1999

Hordes of ecstatic Manchester United fans poured on to the streets of Barcelona to celebrate their side's dramatic last-minute victory in the European Cup final.

Spanish police stood by and watched as thousands of jubilant United supporters, dressed in the team's famous red shirts, crammed on to the city's tree-lined Las Ramblas boulevard in a spontaneous explosion of song and beer.

The United fans took control of Las Ramblas, a pedestrian street packed with popular restaurants and bars, filling it with the sound of English cheer after their team's 2-1 triumph over Bayern Munich.

Dancing fans screamed and sang, jumped up and down and hugged everyone in sight - some even embraced their German rivals.

Most of the stunned Bayern fans trudged away, trying to come to terms with the two late goals that had suddenly turned the German team's 1-0 lead into defeat in one of the most astonishing finales in more than 40 years of Europe's top soccer contest.

"It's the most exciting thing that has ever happened in my whole life," said United supporter Stephen Lord, from Wales, clutching a large plastic cup filled with beer. "It's the biggest thing to happen to Manchester in my lifetime."

"He cried," said Lord's friend Gareth Humphries, who was wearing a stove-pipe hat. "This is just phenomenal - we thought we were going to lose."

Like the Nou Camp stadium, Las Ramblas erupted into cheers in the dying minutes of the game when United equalised then scored the winning goal.

Once the partying began, police who were already stationed in the downtown area put on their helmets and positioned themselves around the subway exits and along the sides of the pedestrian street.

Officials in Barcelona had deployed more than 5,000 police in the city to prevent any outbreak of hooliganism at what had been billed as the highest-risk soccer match in Europe in the last decade due to the high number of English and German fans

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travelling to Spain for the game.

But a police spokeswoman said not one arrest was made during the game, neither among the 90,000 fans in the Nou Camp nor among the thousands of others who watched the game on television in bars throughout the city.

Police said there had been some minor altercations when some fans tried to get into the stadium without tickets at the entrance used by United supporters.

"They tried to 'avalanche' us and get in but we were able to push them back," said the officer in charge of the police who waved batons and formed a wedge into the crowd to keep control.

Local newspapers said police had been given the order to exercise a "strong hand" in dealing with possible fan violence in order to prevent a replay of scenes like the disastrous 1985 European Cup final when 39 people died at the Heysel Stadium in Brussels.

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Ferguson's last-chance gamble hits the jackpot

By Mike Collett (Reuters)
Thursday, May 27, 1999

Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson's final throw of the dice won the jackpot when his late substitutes scored to give his side a 2-1 victory in the European Cup final over Bayern Munich.

Ferguson looked like the gambler in a Las Vegas casino who had lost everything but his last dollar as the seconds ticked away to the end of the match with Bayern winning 1-0 and playing out time.

But just after the match official held up the board showing three minutes of injury time left, Teddy Sheringham equalised and 90 seconds later Ole Gunnar Solskjaer scored the winner to bring United one of the most astonishing victories ever seen in a match of this stature.

If it had taken place in a Sunday morning league match in a local park it would have ranked as quite some achievement.

That it should happen in front of 90,000 incredulous fans in the Nou Camp stadium and an estimated 500 million television viewers around the world lifts the game into the realms of folklore.

Possibly the goals did not come earlier because, for the first 70 minutes of the match, Ferguson appeared to have got his tactics wrong.

Deprived of his driving force and skipper Roy Keane and enterprising midfield creator and poacher Paul Scholes through suspension, Ferguson's options in midfield were restricted.

Knowing that Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld planned to man mark his creative wide men David Beckham and Ryan Giggs, Ferguson shuffled his side -- initially to little effect.

He switched Giggs from his usual position wide on the left to wide right and moved Beckham into a central role alongside Nicky Butt. Jesper Blomqvist started wide on

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the left -- but the side was unbalanced.

Beckham -- the best passer of the ball in the club according to Ferguson -- failed to make his forward passes count, Giggs turned Michael Tarnat inside out with his trickery but failed to find any accuracy with his crosses, while Blomqvist spent most of his time on the pitch running into blind alleys.

After 67 minutes Sheringham, who came on as a substitute in the F.A. Cup final against Newcastle United on Saturday, scoring one goal and making another, replaced the ineffective Blomqvist and joined Andy Cole in attack.

That allowed Dwight Yorke to drop into the midfield role Beckham had been in -- with Beckham moving wide on the right.

Almost immediately Manchester United began to look and play like Manchester United.

Suddenly their territorial advantage began to give them the opportunity to exploit the Bayern back-line.

Sheringham's little linking passes and Beckham's more effective crosses began to unsettle the Germans and although no goals came immediately, United clearly held the upper hand going into the final minutes.

With 10 minutes to go Solskjaer replaced Cole and Bayern had even more problems to counter.

Then, with only seconds remaining Sheringham struck home the equaliser from close range after Bayern failed to clear a Beckham corner.

Less than two minutes later Solskjaer stabbed the ball past Oliver Kahn for the winner after Sheringham had nodded on another Beckham corner.

Before the match Ferguson said whoever was going to win it would need some luck to go with whatever other qualities his team might possess.

Lady Luck certainly smiled on him at the end, though she took her time.

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Beckham: Zero to hero

By Christopher Evans
Friday, May 28, 1999

For drama and sheer unpredictability, it's a comeback which mirrors Manchester United's incredible victory in the European Cup Final.

Just a few months ago, David Beckham was a pariah. The mob hatred to which he was subjected was of an intensity normally reserved for murdering paedophiles.

But Beckham's only crime was to be sent off in England's World Cup game against Argentina for retaliating after he was fouled by an opponent.

When England went on to lose that match on penalties, a heartbroken nation found an easy scapegoat in the rash 23-year-old, who had trudged off the park at St Etienne with tears of remorse swelling in his eyes.

In the days following that desperate night of June 30, Beckham was without doubt the most hated man in the country. When an effigy of the player swinging from a noose appeared outside a pub, it even seemed as if his life might be in danger.

In a bid to lighten the gloom, a football-mad minister erected the sign 'God forgives even David Beckham' outside his church.

Who then would have imagined that within a year this same villain would be feted as a national hero? Probably about as many as imagined, in the dying moments of Wednesday's game, that United would emerge victorious.

With his matinee idol good looks, pop star girlfriend, designer clothes and reedy voice (which has been compared to Michael Crawford playing Frank Spencer), it has been easy to dismiss Beckham as a lightweight character.

But what all those who wrote him off last year failed to appreciate is that he is, at heart, rather a serious young man.

His unbridled delight in fatherhood - his son Brooklyn by his Spice Girl fiancée Victoria Adams was born on March 4 - has afforded Beckham a golden opportunity to demonstrate his new-found maturity to the public.

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But for the most part it has been on the pitch that the player has shown himself to be a fundamentally sensible, strong-hearted chap.

He has endured obscene taunts from rival fans about his fiancée. Since that World Cup game, he has also had to contend with supporters who branded him 'Beck-scum'.

But such adversity has made him stronger, both mentally and as a player. This season he has been a pillar of his club's phenomenal success, and - incredibly - he is being hailed as a role model as much for his temperament as for his skills.

Guzzling Gazza would have gone on a binge after the World Cup. And so, in fact, did Beckham, in the New York boutiques where he embarked on binge buying. For the record, Beckham rarely drinks alcohol.

Shopping is a passion for him and Victoria, and his unusual dress sense is famous - string vests, strange woolly hats and the unforgettable sarong.

It may well be no coincidence that the eye-popping spending spree on a fleet of luxury cars - a £70,000 Range Rover, a Bentley, Jaguar XK8, Porsche and £220,000 silver Ferrari 550 Maranello - began last August after the World Cup.

He recently told the Mail: 'I'd be lying if I said I didn't like nice clothes. We both like nice clothes and we like to go shopping. But we're not in there 24 hours a day - we go only now and again. There's nothing wrong with that.

'I've never looked at a car and thought: 'That's too much money, I can't spend that.' I love cars. But I haven't lost the value of money,' added the player who, thanks to a huge wage and even bigger sponsorship deals, earned £2.9 million last year.

While his Manchester United team-mates enjoy a break from the glare of publicity, we shall be hearing much more of Beckham and his Spice Girl this summer.

They are to marry in Ireland in July - Manchester United teammate Gary Neville will be best man - and in scale and opulence (albeit sometimes in questionable taste) it is set to dwarf the wedding of Edward and Sophie.

Victoria and David even commissioned a family crest to adorn the invitations and were forced to weather the embarrassment after it was pointed out that their linked initials spelled 'VD'.

The wedding is sure to be an orgy of celebrities, combining her friends from showbusiness and his friends from that sub-strata of showbusiness which football

Naturally, the happy day will be faithfully recorded by a glossy magazine, which has paid a reported £1 million for the privilege of being wedding photographer. But for all their sparkling associates, the couple seem content with only each other for company.

As Victoria said: 'David and I haven't got that many friends. We could have our wedding in a postbox if we wanted.' Such self-sufficiency bodes well for their marriage. It may well derive from the fact that both come from close families.

Victoria spends time with her family in Hertfordshire whenever she can, and Beckham, who was born in London's East End, is exceedingly close to his parents.

His father, Ted, is a kitchen equipment fitter, and his mother, Sandra, is a hair-dresser. Ted once had aspirations to play the beautiful game professionally but concentrated instead on cultivating his son's talents.

A devoted Manchester United fan, Ted bought his son a replica kit every Christmas.

When Beckham signed for the club on his 14th birthday, he burst into tears.

No-one would bet against Brooklyn (named after the New York district where he was conceived) following in his father's footsteps.

'Being a father is just how I expected. Totally as I expected. I knew I would enjoy it,' said Beckham.

'It's just unbelievable that someone comes out of a person who you love so much, like I love Victoria. You know, it's just amazing really.'

Last summer, the depth of hatred against Beckham was such that the Prime Minister intervened. 'I should think no-one feels worse about it than David Beckham does. He is obviously going to have to learn from that,' said Tony Blair.

And learn, he has. 'I think after the World Cup I have grown up a lot, because I had to,' says Beckham. 'You learn certain things about the game and outside the game. I think I learned about my personality, and about stress.'

After all, any Briton who puts one over on the Germans is bound to be popular. But there is more to Beckham's rehabilitation than one game. It's the product of a year of hard work, level-headedness and success.

Just a few months ago it seemed that, at the tender age of 23, Beckham had already written his own epitaph. 'David Beckham - the player who lost England the World Cup,' it would say.

No matter what he did subsequently, it seemed, that is how he would be remembered. But now the slate has been wiped clean.

What his epitaph will say is up to him...and his right foot.

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Did a kiss win the game?

By Ray Massey
Friday, May 28, 1999

I spent the most incredible of nights in seat 08, row 3, block 3 of the Nou Camp stadium in Barcelona - so close to the turf, I could smell it.

Manchester were a goal down, official time was up and injury time was ticking away when the ball came spinning into the crowd in our direction - just yards from the penalty area outside the Bayern Munich goalmouth.

It fell into the hands of a Manchester United fan who, I learned later, was a Hungarian called Birka Tibi, who had made the trek to Barcelona from his native Budapest.

Call me superstitious, but just seconds after he kissed the match football, Manchester United's fortune changed. Dark, tanned and bulky, this young man, wearing a loose green vest, looked like a cross between the Incredible Hulk and the Jolly Green Giant.

Holding the ball aloft, like a holy icon, he bellowed something totally unintelligible - except for the words 'Mencheester Yoo-nited' - and planted his thick lips, in a kiss, on the hallowed leather.

It was like an invocation to the gods. Only the incredulous expression on Ryan Giggs' astonished face broke the spell. Sprinting to the touchline as the deadly seconds ticked by, he yelled: 'Give us the ball,' adding a touch of Anglo-Saxon exasperation to his urgent message.

The throw-in was taken, there was a brief flurry around the goalmouth and - miracle of miracles - Teddy Sheringham deposited the blessed ball into the back of the net. The stadium erupted. Hands and arms went flailing upwards.

Ecstatic, Birka Tibi was on the pitch before being firmly, but good-naturedly, led back to the stand by Spanish police. Barely had the frenzy subsided than the second goal was in. I swear, I saw it all in slow motion.

The Bayern Munich team were horizontal and in despair. What an ending to a balmy Barcelona night. Just minutes before it had seemed so different. Yet I never heard one Manchester fan give up hope.

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Behind, a little boy with his mum - his face painted in United's colours - took a picture and gave a thumbs up. Afterwards, I spotted model Yasmin Le Bon, her Duran Duran pop-star husband Simon and newsreader Anna Ford among the celebrating celebrities.

But the night belonged to the masses of red-and-white bedecked fans.

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The seconds that made European history

By Jonathan Margolis
Friday, May 28, 1999

Even if you only saw it on TV, you don't like football much and you can't even stand Manchester United, it was a two-minute miracle you will tell your grandchildren about.

The final 120 seconds of the 1999 European Cup Final in Barcelona were simply the most breathtaking in sporting history. The two minutes transcended sport. It demeans the occasion to describe it merely as 'dramatic'. 'Sensational' similarly sounds hollow.

No, this was politics, it was history, it was art, it was destiny. It was an object lesson in life.

I was one among the 200 million people worldwide watching it at home. We all, doubtless, have our own stories. Mine was that I had had an indescribably awful day.

Everything had gone wrong. It seemed like nothing would ever go right again. Despite having looked forward to the game all week - I occasionally go to home games at Old Trafford - I almost couldn't be bothered to watch. And I will always be grateful that I did.

What the late goal scorers, Sheringham and Solskjaer (and 11 other players I've never met, probably never will, but will always love in a way), achieved in those moments inspired me.

I am confident millions of you lucky enough to have watched the game will still have the same warm, refreshed feeling of hope it gave.

Because of those two minutes, I will always know that if you keep trying, you *can* succeed. And that if you become complacent, as those poor German guys did, life has a habit of biting back. For those unlucky enough to have missed it, this was the story so far at 9.34pm on Wednesday.

For 90 minutes, the men in scary grey from Munich fulfilled every sporting cliché the English have come to fear from Germany. They looked stronger, fitter, more skilful and more athletic than a United team depleted by injury and suspensions.

Bayern Munchen - even the name is as frightening as Panzer or Wehrmacht - were

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not only holding steadfastly on to a one-goal lead, they were nearly three up, having narrowly missed scoring twice.

In the last four minutes of normal time, United had that raggedy heroic look we in Britain simultaneously admire and despair of. They bombarded the awesomely efficient-looking German goalie with shots and headers; but they were tired, beaten, English, Dunkirk-spirit attempts.

The German were going to win the most important trophy in club football. It was so bloody inevitable; our best, still no match for theirs.

89m 30s: With 30 seconds to go before time-added- on, ITV commentator Clive Tyldesley remarks ruefully that what we need now is for the fourth official to hold up a board announcing an extra 20 minutes of play.

Ron Atkinson deflates that dream, pointing out there have been hardly any injuries and there is little time to add.

89m 48s: Solskjaer wins a throw-in to the left of the Bayern goal, having harried a German defender who was trying to deal with a loose back pass from a colleague. The throw, Tyldesley says, is 'the base camp for a final assault on the Bayern lead'.

89m 57s: The Norwegian, less than two minutes from becoming United's ultimate hero, is perfunctorily relieved of the ball by Gary Neville, who wants to take a long throw.

90m 00s: As Neville throws the ball into the centre of the Bayern penalty area, the fourth official holds up the electronic board indicating three minutes of overtime.

90m 02s: A defender clears the ball, but it is picked up by David Beckham in the unaccustomed Bobby Moore-like role he has had to take up for the night, controlling the attack from the rear, distributing the ball about with a precision and maturity which has impressed everyone all evening.

90m 15s: Beckham heads, controls, swings around to the left of the goal, then flicks on to Neville on his right.

90m 20s: Neville's reasonable cross is deflected by Effenberg for a corner.

90m 26s: 'Can Manchester United score?' asks the excellent Tyldesley rhetorically, adding - oddly perhaps - 'They always score.' Ron Atkinson notices Manchester goalie Peter Schmeichel has abandoned his goal and come up for the kick.

90m 28s: Beckham's corner reaches Schmeichel, who with his back to goal heads to Yorke on the right. Yorke heads back into the central melee, and a Bayern player boots the ball out of the area. But Giggs volleys it back to the left of goal.

It's not the world's greatest volley, but Sheringham, the frontmost striker, is there to redirect it into the left corner at 90m 36s.

Bayern goalkeeper Kahn is claiming offside. Sheringham looks to the linesman for an instant, but there's no flag. Miracle Part 1 is achieved.

91m 26s: Amid the celebrations on field, it has taken almost a minute for Bayern to kick off again. They have 84 seconds to save the game before it goes into extra time.

91m 39s: Bayern launch an attack straight from the kick, but United's defenders are solid.

91m 54s: The ball is lobbed upfield to Solskjaer, now 39 seconds from his destiny. Keen as a terrier, he spars with Bayern's Kuffour to the left of the Bayern goal, where he had fashioned the attack which led to the first United goal.

92m 02s: Kuffour defends well, holding Solskjaer off, but is forced to give away the corner. If Bayern can hold on for 58 seconds, they at least have extra time to re-establish their dominance of the game.

92m 05s: Atkinson, as Beckham tees up the corner, notes that Schmeichel is staying back in his goal this time. Suddenly, United have something worth keeping. 'Is this their moment?' asks Tyldesley.

92m15s: Beckham, with a cool glance to his left into a straggle of photographers and fans - a nervous habit, perhaps - floats over his corner kick, the most important of his career, which seemed to have collapsed less than a year ago, after the sending-off debacle for England against Argentina.

92m16s: Beckham's corner lands more or less sweetly for Sheringham, who nods the ball fiercely down to his right. This may have been a slightly off-target shot, but it doesn't matter, because lurking a little to the right, his shirt being pulled by Kuffour, is Solskjaer.

He breaks away from the maul, and his right boot, at an awkward angle but perfectly directed, is there at 92m 17s, 43 seconds from time, to win the match. Kahn could not have stopped it had he been the greatest goalkeeper in the world.

Disconsolate isn't the word to describe him and the two other defenders in the Bayern goal as Solskjaer skids off to be mobbed by Yorke, Sheringham, Butt and Stam. The Germans are shocked, almost bereaved. It's the look you see seconds after people have witnessed a car crash.

92m 25s: At the other end of the pitch, Schmeichel turns a somersault.

93m 26s: The statutory minute of delirious celebration on the pitch is being given back in part by the referee to Bayern to give them an implausible last stab. They kick off and rush at Schmeichel's goal.

93m 33s: Butt makes a hefty clearance from the middle of the United defence.

93m 34s: A Bayern player on the centre spot heads the clearance back, but it's the last action of the game.

93m 36s: The final whistle is blown.

Some minutes afterwards - who knows, who's counting now? - Alex Ferguson is collared by ITV. His glasses have disappeared somewhere. He grins and holds his head as if to try to compact into his brain the enormity of what happened in those fateful 149 seconds, from Solskjaer winning the throw which led to Goal One to the same man, with that odd baby face, scoring the goal of his career.

'I can't believe it. I can't believe it,' Ferguson says. 'Football. 'Bloody hell.'

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Revealed: 11 heroes who denied United

Friday, May 28, 1999

The date Wednesday, December 2, 1998, may not seem immediately relevant. But all of a sudden it has taken on a new dimension to all non-Manchester United supporters and in years to come sons may well ask their fathers, were you there the night United were knocked out of the Worthington Cup?

Could the rest of English football really have put up with the Quadruple? It's difficult enough to say the word or spell it, but, because of 11 Tottenham heroes, we won't have to.

Their names will trip off the tongue, recorded forever in the annals of football folklore thanks to an historic 3-1 win. David Ginola was at his marauding best and Chris Armstrong scored twice.

United were better than Arsenal in the League. They were the conquerors of Newcastle and Bayern Munich in Cups. But Spurs stood firm.

So, here they are, the 11 men who stopped United winning everything: Walker, Carr, Young, Campbell, Sinton, Anderton, Nielsen, Calderwood, Ginola, Armstrong and Iversen.

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Mellor: 'Why don't you just give up, ITV?'

By Lisa O'Carroll
Friday, May 28, 1999

Television bosses last night faced a backlash from armchair fans furious with the interrupted coverage of Manchester United's finest hour.

Football Task Force chairman David Mellor said ITV's coverage of the Champions League Final was so bad they should hand all their sport over to Sky or the BBC.

He said: 'For what will go down as one of the greatest events in sporting history, ITV's coverage was cackhanded and flimsy.'

'If ITV can't do the occasion justice, they might as well get out of the game completely and go back to the films they intended showing when they scrapped News at Ten.'

Some 18.8 million tuned in for United's last-gasp 2-1 victory over Bayern Munich but fans were angry that they couldn't soak up every second of the celebrations because of poor camerawork and the disruption caused by commercial breaks.

Dozens of fans registered their anger with TV watchdogs and ITV companies after coverage was interrupted for a tyre advert just as stand-in captain Peter Schmeichel and manager Alex Ferguson were lifting the trophy to complete their Treble.

Businessman and United fan Les Billingham said: 'The one disappointing thing about it was when the Cup was being lifted, ITV cut to a break.'

'I was watching with about 250 others and everybody was so bitterly disappointed. That was the team's crowning glory and we couldn't see it.'

There were also complaints that the cameras switched away from United legend Sir Bobby Charlton just as he went to wipe away a tear.

ITV bosses defended their coverage, with Head of Football Jeff Farmer saying: 'What fans have to remember is that they saw this match for free - there was no licence fee or subscription and the only reason for that is that the game is paid for by advertisers.'

He admitted there was 'never a perfect time' for a commercial break but said they had done their best to minimise the disruption. 'It is a very difficult call,' he said.

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An average of 15.5m - six in 10 viewers - watched the full coverage. But millions more had tuned in by the time Terry Sheringham equalised, taking the audience to 18.8m.

An ITV spokeswoman said: 'It was by far the highest viewing figures for a sporting event this year.'

The record for a football match belongs to England's World Cup second-round game last year against Argentina, which was seen by 23m people.

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Half-a-million welcome United home

By Will Hardie
Friday, May 28, 1999

Half-a-million ecstatic fans packed the streets of Manchester on Thursday to welcome back Manchester United from their spectacular European Cup victory in Barcelona.

Jubilant supporters converged on the city centre to reinforce the faithful handful who had been there since Wednesday night's epic injury time victory over Bayern Munich.

Along the team's seven miles parade route on an open-topped bus, thousands upon thousands of red-shirted fans sang terrace anthems above an orchestra of whistles and klaxons.

A handful of amused businessmen and women struggled through the throng - others better prepared swigged bottles of beer from office windows or waved scarves from high-rise balconies.

Rows of baton-wielding police seemed unsure whether to hold the crowd back or join in the party. Several lost their uniform caps and a couple briefly sported felt top hats in red and white team colours.

A little blonde girl in a red dress, face crumpled with the effort, blew a whistle with all her might, perched on the shoulders of her shirtless father as he chanted United...United...pint in hand.

Across the street six schoolboys soaked up the atmosphere on top of a bus shelter waving three silver trophy-shaped balloons.

Further down the road another bus shelter collapsed under the weight of three fully-grown supporters trying to dance on its roof arm in arm.

The bus carrying the United squad was preceded by ten minutes of stupendous roaring from the crowd. The European Cup was perched on the front above the route number plate of the vehicle which showed 2-1, the result of the final.

The squad, wearing dark blazers, held their fists in the air as armfuls of office paper fluttered down from windows high above.

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Players and manager Alex Ferguson took turns holding the cup - departing goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel seemed reluctant to release it.

The team went on to join 17,500 fans at a ticket-only party in an indoor arena in central Manchester. The vast crowd left outside looked set to see in the dawn in recognition of United's first European Cup victory for 31 years. (REUTERS)

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Even King Fergie makes the odd howler

Friday, May 28, 1999

All hail Sir Alex, Lord of Old Trafford, King of England and now Emperor of Europe as well. He has been rightly elevated to legend status, hailed as a tactical genius and, in an echo of the phrase he used about his beloved players, can lay claim to the title of footballing god.

Except, of course, he is only human - and, for that, rival managers everywhere will give thanks.

Alex Ferguson deserves to be lionised for his achievements in 13 years at Old Trafford. By instilling in his players a competitive spirit which knows no earthly bounds, he has made Manchester United the most fiercely aggressive and determined team on the planet.

That ethos, force-fed to trainees with their isotonic training drinks and written into the contract of every new signing, is what produced those two amazing late goals in the Nou Camp on Wednesday night.

It had also kept United digging away in the Premiership race, eventually pip-ping Arsenal with a come-from-behind win over Tottenham on the final day.

Then there is Ferguson's tactical nous, which has won many a day for the boys in red. Witness, for example, the way he completely outfoxed Ruud Gullit in the FA Cup Final just days before that Champions League triumph.

And, of course, he has the gift of spotting players. Guys like Ryan Giggs, David Beck-ham, Gary Neville, Jesper Blomqvist...

Spot the odd one out? Maybe it's being a touch cruel on Blomqvist but it must be reassuring to all who will tilt at the Ferguson legend next season to see such a glaring error of judgment in the manager's finest hour.

The fact that he got away with it doesn't mean it wasn't a howler. Sending the Swedish winger out to face Bayern Munich's ravenous defence was like throwing a toddler into the tiger pit at the zoo.

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He was lucky to get out alive, replaced after 66 minutes by match-winning substitute Teddy Sheringham.

As the pair passed on the sidelines, we saw the good and bad side of Ferguson the talent spotter. Sheringham, signed from Spurs two years ago for £3.5million to a howl of derision from critics crying that he was too old at 31, has been a remarkable servant to United.

And Blomqvist? Well, he joins a list of signings who might best be filed under F for flippin' murder. Remember, Ferguson let his board of directors pay Parma £5m for him last summer, fending off competition from Liverpool.

When Blomqvist ripped through a demoralised United team in November 1994, guiding Gothenburg to a 3-1 Champions League win, Ferguson was hooked and he made four unsuccessful bids before finally getting his man, who arrived via a forgettable spell in Italy.

He turned up with grand ambitions of making the left-wing spot his own but has failed to impress beyond the odd spurt against domestic opposition. One goal from 38 appearances, including nine as a substitute, tells the story.

While there were others who didn't exactly shine on Wednesday - Nicky Butt was outclassed, Beckham battled manfully without reward in a strange position and Giggs suffered the same fate - none flopped quite so spectacularly as Blomqvist.

And, before you start writing letters complaining that this has been Ferguson's single mistake on the recruitment front, there are a few other names to be thrown into the mix.

Names like Jordi Cruyff, who ended the season on loan to Valencia, having failed to make the grade since his arrival in 1996.

Or Karel Poborsky, the Czech who lit up Euro 96 but didn't exactly illuminate Old Trafford when he arrived in a £3.5m deal a year later.

Three attackers, three foreigners, all flops. Other managers have found themselves out of work for such errors.

But, of course, Ferguson is also the man who picked up Peter Schmeichel for half a million, while his spending spree to capture Jaap Stam and Dwight Yorke has paid huge dividends.

So he has a record which stands up to the closest scrutiny, even allowing for the odd blip.

All the same, it must be nice for rival fans and managers to be reminded, in the aftermath of the greatest footballing achievement in English history, that even the architect behind that triumph is capable of putting a foot wrong here and there.

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Why are Ole and Teddy happy bridesmaids?

By Graham Hunter
Friday, May 28, 1999

The most telling insight into Teddy Sheringham's extraordinary European Cup winning performance was provided several weeks ago at one of London's most fashionable eating spots.

He and a fellow England international were out for a few quiet drinks and the talk turned to their careers. Neither was in his club's first team and Sheringham, without rancour or bitterness, simply could not believe that he did not merit a game at Manchester United.

Even though his move to Old Trafford seemed to be turning him into something of a forgotten man, Sheringham remained totally confident in his talent, convinced that he is still one of the best footballers in England.

Sitting on the bench at 23 is bad enough, but the youngsters who chafe and strain at that discomfort should try finding out what it feels like at 33 when you can almost feel the rust spreading through your joints.

Even though Sheringham remains an independent spirit, a man who does not greatly enjoy the traditional manager-player relationship which paints one as a benign dictator and the other as a serf, he decided not to rant and rave in the media or break down the door to Alex Ferguson's office.

Three medals, two cup-winning goals and a place in history later, his decision has been proved correct.

But in an age when the balance of power has swung irrevocably from the clubs to the players thanks to their millionaire status, it is remarkable that Sheringham and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer were even available to United for Wednesday's encounter with Bayern Munich.

David Fairclough made the supersub role his own with Liverpool in the 1970s. But the days of such loyal Sancho Panza types have long gone, along with the terraces at football grounds, bubble perms and managers in sheepskin coats.

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At any club other than Manchester United - and under any manager other than Ferguson - Sheringham and Solskjaer would have been long gone, trailing 'kiss and tell' stories behind them.

Nwankwo Kanu has been the revelation of the season with Arsenal, yet people around him and the High-bury board know that he was considering his future when Arsene Wenger left him out of the FA Cup semi-final replay on April 14. That kind of wafer-thin patience is the norm these days.

In comparison, Solskjaer and Sheringham have put their international careers at risk, each has been the subject of transfer offers and they must have lost a lot of sleep worrying about their futures in the last few months.

To increase their uncertainty, there is the slight problem of a 53-goal partnership between Andy Cole and Dwight Yorke.

Yet there they were on Wednesday, coming off the bench to provide the most dramatic finish in the competition's history.

Sheringham said: 'The Germans were getting flashy and it gave me the hump. Mario Basler was showboating and waving to the crowd and it wasn't something I enjoyed watching.

'It was very un- German, not the sort of thing you expect to see, and as I was sitting there it just geed me up. So to go out there and score and help us win just made it all the sweeter for me.'

That feeling, their medals - and presumably a hefty bonus - were all the rewards Sheringham and Solskjaer had dreamed of when they remained loyal to a club which had decided that they were no more than auxiliaries.

In the same way that Ferguson gambled on their introduction to the match and won, the players had gambled with their professional futures and hit the jackpot.

But why, apart from financial gain, have these two talented strikers - who would play week in, week out in 95 per cent of the other Premiership teams - opted to stay at Old Trafford?

There is a team spirit - that is crystal clear. But there is a special kind of family spirit as well.

For example, when the trophy was put on to the podium it would have been normal for the winning captain, Peter Schmeichel, to lift it euphorically as soon as he possibly could.

But not one United player actually reached for the cup until every medal had been handed to each member of the squad - starters, substitutes and those who never changed out of their club suits.

All for one, one for all. That family spirit extends to the fans, who idolise Solskjaer for his remarkable strike rate as a substitute - particularly since it was his goal with seconds remaining which knocked Liverpool out of the FA Cup.

Loyalty is everything to the extended United family. And the patriarch of that family is able to inspire men to do extraordinary things.

In fact, Ferguson has done all this to Bayern Munich before, in virtually identical fashion, when he was manager of Aberdeen. In 1983, the year the Scottish club won the Cup-winners' Cup, they were losing 2-1 on aggregate to Bayern with around 15

minutes left. But they turned it round thanks to the arrival of another supersub , John Hewitt, who eventually scored the winner just as he did a month later to win the final against Real Madrid in extra time.

The temptation, once a player starts scoring as a substitute, is to keep him on the bench and pray that he will always be there to do the same thing for you.

So perhaps success will give United even more problems than did waiting for success. Given that both Solskjaer and Sheringham believed themselves to be worthy first-team starters before their historic achievements in the Nou Camp, what will their feelings be now?

'I expect all of my players to want to reach for the moon all the time,' Ferguson said yesterday.

Now, after all United have won in the last three weeks, it is a guaranteed place in the first team which represents the moon for Sheringham and Solskjaer.

Sheringham has no doubts. 'I don't want to be labelled as a supersub like David Fairclough,' he said. Asked about his future, he added: 'Let's not get into that. I'm enjoying the moment, I'm involved again and I'm contented.'

Next season is sure to be the most demanding in United's history, however. So, if anything, there will be even more expectant faces added to the squad photo when August comes around.

Ferguson not only faces his domestic treble of competitions but an even more extended Champions League, the Super Cup, the World Club Cup and FIFA's new tournament of champions next January.

Toss in the demands of his players' various international teams, the delayed effects of this season plus the odd injury, and the size of the task seems daunting.

Some day soon, the law of averages dictates that Ferguson will fail when he reaches into his top hat to pull out a white rabbit in the shape of a goal from one of his substitutes.

But it doesn't look as if he can afford that to happen next season, or the one after that...or the one after that.

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Bayern defeated by team that never dies

By Ken Lawrence
Friday, May 28, 1999

As the Bayern Munich players lay dazed and confused on the Nou Camp turf after being mugged by Manchester United, they should not have been surprised at the astonishing way the Champions League Cup was snatched from them.

Alex Ferguson's players have proved repeatedly that they have the strength of mind and stamina to rescue almost any lost cause that confronts them.

The Germans had become the latest team to believe they were home and dry before slapping their pockets and realising they were empty.

Yet, no matter what Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld told his team before Wednesday evening's drama, his priority should have been to brainwash them into believing that although United are sometimes down, they are rarely out.

As Gary Neville insisted: 'We are the team that never dies. We keep going right to the end and that is something that matches the manager's spirit.

'It is something the manager has put into all of us. The guts are there and everyone at this club, right the way through, proves they have what it takes.

'In a way I still don't understand what happened in those final couple of minutes against Bayern. It was baffling - supernatural almost.

'It brought on the kind of feeling I have never had before. Explaining it is probably impossible, except to put what happened down to our spirit.

'We didn't play that well but on bad days or in bad situations there is always that extra ingredient to rely on.'

United's sensational triumph when Teddy Sheringham and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer devastated Bayern provided the most dramatic finish ever to a European Cup Final.

The German side's misery was summed up by defender Samuel Kuffour who was inconsolable at the end after having done so well to subdue Dwight Yorke.

But on several other occasions United have flown by the seat of their pants and

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survived. In January they were one down to Liverpool who thought they were on the point of a famous FA Cup victory at Old Trafford.

Yorke equalised on the stroke of full time then Solskjaer, on as a desperate late substitute, provided the injury-time winner that broke Anfield hearts.

At the San Siro stadium in March, Inter Milan were a goal ahead and looked capable of reclaiming United's first leg 2-0 advantage in the Champions League quarter-finals. They reckoned without Paul Scholes' late equaliser.

In the Champions League semi-final, first leg Juventus were within seconds of securing the victory that might have demoralised United. Not so.

Sheringham, having had a strike disallowed as a late entrant into the game, flicked on for Ryan Giggs to equalise. Seven days later Arsenal were sure they would triumph in the FA Cup semi-final replay until Peter Schmeichel saved a last-minute penalty.

Roy Keane had been sent off and Arsene Wenger's men had extra time to subdue United's 10. Instead, Giggs shattered them with a wonderful solo goal.

Afterwards Ferguson insisted that the forthcoming second meeting with Juventus in the Stadio Delle Alpi would prove that the Italians could run forever but never beat his team. He was right.

Juventus were 2-0 up within 10 minutes and certain it was enough to take them into a fourth successive Champions League Final. Wrong.

Keane's header gave United a lifeline. Yorke equalised and Andy Cole completed what was then his side's greatest fightback in continental football.

But Wednesday night eclipsed even that brilliant act of brinkmanship when United won for the first time on Italian soil. The party is still going on.

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