

The Weird, Wonderful—and Sometimes

By Justin Kavanagh

I'll tell you this for nothing—Wayne Rooney is the future of English football. I'm just not sure that's a good thing for the Manchester United teenager—or for English football.

The world and his wife are calling him the new Paul Gascoigne. Like Gazza after his World Cup heroics in 1990, Rooney has now left his local club for the bright lights. But the fact that it's Manchester—and not London—may be his saving grace. Rooney's new boss, Sir Alex Ferguson, will probably hunt him down in the first nightclub he enters. In contrast, Gascoigne's boss at Spurs, Terry Venables, probably owned Gazza's favorite London haunts.

But one thing Ferguson can't control is the media hype. Everyone knows the Scotsman's reputation for "wrapping players in cotton wool." Under Ferguson's watchful eye, Ryan Giggs became one of the game's most successful professionals. The United boss may ultimately have lost the battle for David Beckham's ego, but Beckham at least fulfilled his talent; unlike Gascoigne, who pissed his away. Gascoigne's autobiography (reviewed on page 39) is the frightening tale of life in a mask. As "Gazza," he lost his identity and his self-respect, and currently talks about changing his name to bury his past.

"We want him to lead as normal a life as possible," says Ferguson of Rooney. Ferguson will provide the arm around the shoulder. Roy Keane will provide the bollocking. "Tough Love, whatever you want to call it," said the United captain.

"Tough Love" was also the expression D.C. United's captain Ryan Nelsen used when I asked about his role in Freddy Adu's development. Freddy, at 15, faces the same unrealistic expectations as Rooney. Next month, *90 Minutes* takes an extensive look at how Freddy and D.C. have handled the challenges of his first year in MLS.

On The Volley

RED ROONEY LIFTS THE BLUES IN LIBERIA



Every club faces the problem sooner or later: your star striker—the stud who sold all the shirts—is transferred and the club shop is left with a load of replica stock with the traitor's name all over it. Such was the media-contrived sense of betrayal felt by Everton fans when Wayne Rooney joined Manchester United this summer... that the club knew their No. 18 shirt overstocks would have had more chance of being sold with "Judas Iscariot" printed on them.

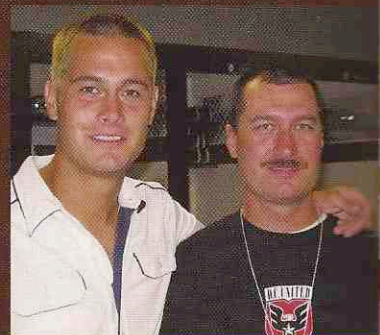
So the entire useless stock was sent to the Catholic aid agency CAFOD, who will distribute them to former child soldiers in war-torn Liberia. About 15,000 children fought in the country's civil war and the agency is now trying to rehabilitate them. Many became fans after seeing Rooney's Euro 2004 goals for England.

9/11 Remembered at Grounds Throughout MLS

D.C. United and MetroStars were among the MLS clubs marking the third anniversary of September 11th. The Capital club held a "Hometown Heroes" day when they hosted the Dallas Burn.

Representatives from area police and fire departments participated in the unfurling of the American flag. Among the participants was Ed Petke, brother of D.C. United defender Mike Petke. Ed is an officer in the Prince William County Police Department who lost two close friends in the World Trade Center, and, like every other policeman who has worked the New York beat, scores of colleagues. The brothers are originally from Long Island.

Meanwhile, fans of the MetroStars attending the 3-2 win against the New England Revolution at Giants Stadium were encouraged to send cards with personalized messages of appreciation to families of U.S. military personnel. The club adapted the scheme as part of a nationwide campaign called "HomeFront Cards."



Hometown Heroes remembered at RFK Stadium. Mike and Ed Petke.

Sometimes Beautiful—World Game.



TWO YELLOW CARDS... NEVERMIND!

Blackburn Rovers' Barry Ferguson must have felt he was back playing Sunday League football. We've all been there—the referee (maybe officiating his third match of the day), takes your name and number for the second time and reaches for the inevitable red. But wait, what he's showing you is not red, it's yellow, and he's warning you that "once more and you're off," as you try not to laugh and weigh up the chances of him (or anyone else), realizing his mistake if you don't set him straight.

But, the FA and the TV cameras were quick to let referee Andy D'Urso know the score. Ferguson, who collected his second card for arguing against a last-minute penalty, was suspended, while D'Urso was charged by the Football Association with "less than proficiently applying the laws of the game."

Photo: Action Images / WireImage.com

SOUNESS STEAMS IN AS SIR BOBBY LEAVES THE NEWCASTLE HOTHOUSE



Farewell to "Mad uncle" Bobby Robson, the victim of months of unrest at Newcastle United. Player power, and petulance, led to Chairman Freddy Shepherd's decision to finally let Robson go. First came Captain Alan Shearer's warning that he expected to start every game of this, his final season. He hasn't. Next, Craig Bellamy threatened to quit should Wayne Rooney join from Everton. Then, the "King of Bling" Kieron Dyer threw his rattle out of his pram and refused to play on the right.

If any manager can sort out a bunch of millionaires stamping their feet, it's Graeme Souness. But on the new boss' first day, he learned that party animal Patrick Kluivert had refused to play in a reserve game against Wolves. On £65,000 a week, the Dutch international felt the fixture was beneath him. It's going to be a very interesting year in the Toon locker room.



Photo: Action Images / WireImage.com



Athletic Bilbao: Cool shirts... eh... hombre!

Premiershirts.net

Shirt of the Season...

This year will surely go to Athletic Bilbao who have opted for this weird and groovy psychedelic number for their European campaign.

UEFA BURY THE PRESENT TO CELEBRATE THEIR PAST

Geneva: UEFA, European soccer's governing body, have marked their centenary year by burying a capsule filled with soccer memorabilia, a mobile telephone and a CD, to be opened in 2054.

The capsule includes a football, goalkeeper's gloves, cleats, a match program, and a CD by Nelly Furtado. Outside the Box could not confirm rumors that footage of David Beckham's last successful penalty kick for England was included for posterity!



Photo: Action Images / WireImage.com

GAZZA: "I'm still fit and slim and still able to play if anyone wants me." And she's still getting back to him on that.

"It was a dream," said Robbie Keane after he had broken the Republic of Ireland's goal-scoring record of 21 with two strikes against the Faroe Islands recently.



Ireland's record scorer Robbie Keane and girlfriend Claudine Palmer at Miss Ireland.



Photo: Tom O'Donnell / WireImage.com

FOOTER TRIVIA

Where will the UEFA Cup Final be held in 2005? (Answer Page 45)