

NINETY YEARS OF YOUTH

Manchester United's Academy is an institution with an unrivalled record, but the 90th anniversary of the formation of its first competitive youth team is an opportunity to celebrate our youth system for more than just statistics...

Youth at Manchester United is more than a tradition; it's the club's heartbeat and a well-established blueprint for success. Sir Matt Busby and Jimmy Murphy's Babes and Sir Alex Ferguson and Eric Harrison's Class of '92 group are the two teams to most famously define the Academy.

They are the outrageous anomalies to a brilliant norm which has seen 243 graduates play for the United first team, amassing a remarkable total of 19,308 appearances prior to today's game. Thousands of people in these 90 years have been touched by the Academy's influence, and the names of young boys whose talent was honed at The Cliff and Carrington

Busby's Babes toast a remarkable era of success, helped in no small part by the influence of the Academy



have become known far and wide: Duncan Edwards, Sir Bobby Charlton, George Best, Ryan Giggs, David Beckham, Paul Scholes, Marcus Rashford and countless others went on to achieve world renown.

Manchester United's Academy this season proudly celebrates this anniversary, which dates back to 1932, when – at the instruction of recent financial saviour James W. Gibson – diligent club secretary Walter Crickmer was tasked with creating an 'A' Team. The values and ethos forged in that moment and those that followed have been carried forward over nine decades to the present day, as demonstrated by last season's FA Youth Cup triumph and the young talents who featured in Erik ten Hag's first pre-season.

In the beginning

The demise of Manchester United as a club could have been a mere footnote to the 1929 Wall Street Crash. Thanks to the toil of Crickmer and a fortunate meeting with clothing magnate James W. Gibson, the Great Depression instead acted as the trigger for an era which laid the foundation of the modern United.

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Today's United first-team squad continues to uphold the values of the Academy – set up as an 'A' Team in 1932 (below right) – allowing young talent to shape the future of the club



How the 'A' Team began

Manchester United Board of Directors' Minutes

29 March 1932

"The chairman spoke on the advisability of running a colts team or nursery as from next season."

5 April 1932

"The secretary was instructed to make formal application to the Manchester League for membership [of an A team]."

26 April 1932

"An offer of £5 per week was made to CG Hilditch to manage the colts team in the Manchester League at Altrincham next season."

5 July 1932

"Agreement with Altrincham FC was submitted in respect of the use of their ground for the purpose of playing the Manchester League matches."

27 September 1932

"Agreements were then submitted and approved in respect of three players namely J Hall (goal) Jack Coode (right half) and George Vose (centre half) whom had been signed as professionals following promising displays with the A team."

"By running a team in the Manchester League, we shall be able to give all likely juniors a chance of showing their paces, and United hope to discover from their number more than average finds"

– Scott Duncan

Gibson was a visionary businessman who stepped in to save the club from bankruptcy during Christmas 1931. After being convinced of the club's meaning to Manchester and its supporters, and of its potential for restoring greatness, he wasted little time committing for the long-term and adapting his expertise to football. At a board meeting on 29 March 1932, "the chairman spoke on the advisability of running a colts team or nursery as from next season." Crickmer applied for membership of the amateur Manchester League, completed a contract with player Lal Hilditch to manage the side and secured an agreement with Altrincham FC for use of their ground. First-team manager Scott Duncan provided insight in the *Manchester Evening Chronicle*.

"By running a team in the Manchester League, we shall be able to give all likely juniors a chance of showing their paces, and United hope to discover from their number more than average finds."

Duncan explained that young players would be

Manchester League Fixtures		"A" TEAM		Goals	
				F.	A.
1932					
Aug. 27	Ashfield.....	Home	4	5	
Sept. 3	Newton Heath.....	Away	1	0	
10	McMahons.....	Away	1	4	
17	Denton.....	Away	1	0	
24	Stockport County "A".....	Home	6	0	
	(Gilgryst Cup, First Round)				
Oct. 8	Chapel-en-le-Frith.....	Away	3	5	
15	Denton.....	Home			
29	I.C.I.....	Away	3	7	
Nov. 5	Stockport County "A".....	Home	4	1	
12	New Mills.....	Away	0	2	
19	Newton Heath.....	Home	1	2	
Dec. 3	Droylsden.....	Home			
17	I.C.I.....	Home			
26	Pendlebury.....	Away			
Feb. 31	Barnton.....	Away			
1933					
Jan. 2	Manchester City "A".....	Away			
7	Glossop.....	Home			
14				
21				
Feb. 4	New Mills.....	Home			
18	McMahons.....	Home			
25	Glossop.....	Away			
Mar. 11	Pendlebury.....	Home			
18	Droylsden.....	Away			
25	Chapel-en-le-Frith.....	Home			
April 1	Stockport County "A".....	Away			
8				
14	Ashfield.....	Away			
17	Manchester City "A".....	Home			
22	Baruton.....	Home			

'held in reserve' to "develop their talents, develop their muscles and build up their frame so that in time they could step in [to the first team] and do themselves justice. To hurry along a youngster is a big mistake, but the junior must be assured that his time will come."

'His' time came quickly. The 'A' Team first played on 27 August 1932, losing 5-4 at home to Ashfield. Already by the end of September, a mere month into the season, George Vose and Jack Hall had impressed

enough with their 'A' Team performances to earn professional contracts. Vose was a 20-year-old St. Helens-born centre-half who went on to make 209 first-team appearances. Nineteen-year-old Failsworth-born goalkeeper Hall played 73 times. Neither are considered to be the club's first Academy graduates, as they joined after their 18th birthday, but they were the immediate beneficiaries of the A team, and so was Scott Duncan.

Launching an 'A' Team was not revolutionary – Manchester City and Stockport County already had teams in the Manchester League – but it was the crucial first step towards the Academy as we know it today. After six years of 'A' Team success, Crickmer launched the Manchester United Junior Athletic Club (MUJAC), which added a fourth and fifth team to United's roster, leading football journalist Alf Clarke to state that "no club in the country is better served with junior players than Manchester United." The same could be said today.

Back to the future

Crucial to the ethos of these early youth teams was respect and a genuine passion for helping young players flourish. This was not a factory line or a machine. James Gibson's nephew, Alan Embling, explains that "if anybody was good enough to become a professional, the only stipulation he put on them was that they would consider, and the word is consider, playing for United. He didn't put you've got to play. Consider."



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– Nick Cox, head of Academy

From the FA Cup-winning teams of the '50s and early '90s, through to last season's trophy winners, the rich tapestry of Academy football has been a cornerstone of United's success



The exact contracts and expectations of players have of course changed, but the same ethos – of respect and passion – prevails. This manifests itself in the Academy of today with a strong focus on more than just football, on education and experiences.

“Our track record of putting players in our own first team is unrivalled,” Nick Cox, head of Academy, explains. “We're the best. Over many, many years. And we're really, really proud of it. But we're acutely aware that that is the exception. Only a small number of boys will go and play in our first team. What we're equally proud of is the fact that in terms of boys who are having careers away from this football club, we're the best at that as well.

“What I say to parents when a boy arrives full-time to us is: 'look, this is an amazing opportunity. I don't know where this heads, but what I do know is if you exhaust it for everything, you're going to set yourself up with an amazing platform for adult life.' So make the most of all the people you meet, the countries you're going to go to, the fact you're recognised with a world-famous organisation. If you really invest and commit to your education and to your football, if you're curious and inquisitive about everything going on around you, you'll be successful, whether it's on the football pitch or in another walk of life. This place is about more than just football. It's about young people learning, developing and hopefully going on to be successful.”

Modern day Academy players are accustomed to overseas experiences. Tournaments abroad are a key

time for learning, and a chance for young Reds to test themselves against high-quality and different opposition. The U17s play in Dallas, Texas, in spring, the U16s in Ballymena, Northern Ireland, in summer, and the U19s this pre-season spent time in Munich, Germany. For some of the players who travel, it is a once-in-a-lifetime, forever memorable experience. For others, such as Zidane Iqbal and Charlie Savage, it is preparation for a career in elite, senior football. The midfield pair have played together in the Academy since they were nine. Their performances in Erik ten Hag's first team on this summer's tour of Thailand and Australia demanded attention.

A shared vision

When ten Hag was unveiled as the new United manager in spring, football director John Murtough explained that he was the candidate “most closely aligned with the identity and aims of Manchester United.” The Dutch coach arrives from Ajax, one of a select few clubs whose own glittering history of youth can sit alongside United's. The club of Cruyff, Rijkaard, Bergkamp, the de Boers, Davids, Seedorf, Kluivert and Sneijder. Ten Hag himself gave 23 Academy players debuts in his time in Amsterdam, including two in his last game as manager, after which he said: “Players don't get chances, they have to earn them. They deserved it.”

That message has been consistently stated in his first few weeks in M16, from Ten Hag and from his assistant Mitchell van der Gaag, former coach of Jong Ajax, the Dutch club's U21s team. Chances are there for young players who impress, with Iqbal and Savage two of the beneficiaries in recent weeks.

“It's fantastic that we've recruited a new manager in Erik ten Hag who has a proven commitment to developing young player,” Cox says.

This 90th anniversary affords us the chance to celebrate the Academy not only for its numbers and statistics, but for its impact on people. This institution has enriched the lives of thousands of young people since 1932. Nine decades on, youth is more deeply ingrained than ever in this club, thanks to the dedication of passionate people who have believed in helping young people flourish.

“The Academy is front and central in a way that I've not witnessed elsewhere,” continues Cox. “Tony Whelan [Academy programme advisor] talks about the fact that we are just carrying the baton. Jimmy Murphy gave us the baton in terms of youth development; we're still carrying it and it is my job to carry it for as long as I can to the levels that we need to.

“Reaching that 4,000 landmark [consecutive games with an Academy graduate in the first-team matchday squad] happened organically because it's what this place does, and it's what the fans expect. That will be true when we hit 250 graduates into



Will Fish, Charlie Savage and Zidane Iqbal are just some of the modern-day beneficiaries of the United Academy

“Jimmy Murphy gave us the baton in terms of youth development; we're still carrying it and it is my job to carry it for as long as I can to the levels that we need to” – Cox (below)



the first team soon as well. These are the organic consequences of brilliance and passion from so many people here over the last 90 years.”

Stretching from Crickmer and Gibson in 1932 to the brilliant staff of 2022, youth remains the unalterable lifeblood of Manchester United.

Going global

A total of 135 Manchester United Academy graduates have gone on to play senior international football for 30 different countries – here are the stats...

- 37 England internationals
- 20 Northern Ireland internationals
- 20 Ireland internationals
- 11 Wales internationals
- 7 Scotland internationals
- 4 USA internationals
- 3 Australia internationals
- 3 Norway internationals
- 2 Italy internationals
- 2 Jamaica internationals
- 2 Sweden internationals
- 1 Angola international
- 1 Belgium international
- 1 Brazil international
- 1 Cayman Islands international
- 1 Canada international
- 1 Curacao international
- 1 Cyprus international
- 1 France international
- 1 Germany international
- 1 Gibraltar international
- 1 Holland international
- 1 Iraq international
- 1 Malta international
- 1 Mauritius international
- 1 Monserrat international
- 1 South Africa international
- 1 Spain international
- 1 St Kitts/Nevis international
- 1 Tunisia international