

SIR ALEX FERGUSON

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- **Record-Breaking Coach Lauded as the Most Successful Manager in the History of Professional Sport**



Topics

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Like so many of football's top managers, Alexander Chapman Ferguson emerged from humble beginnings. Born in Govan, the shipbuilding district of Glasgow, his working-class roots played a role in becoming the most successful manager in Premier League history and, after a near 27-year reign at Manchester United, he has won the respect of everyone in the game.

Ferguson took the plunge into management with East Stirling in July 1974 then moved to First Division side St Mirren in October of the same year. He promptly guided the Paisley club to the championship in 1976-77 and, despite doing so on limited resources, Ferguson was sacked three years into his tenure after a disagreement with the club's chairman.

He eventually joined Aberdeen in August 1978 and transformed an average side into the form team of the 1980s, breaking Rangers and Celtic's stranglehold on Scottish football, and led the Granite City club to three league titles, four Scottish Cups and a League Cup in eight seasons. His greatest achievement, though, came in 1983, when he led Aberdeen to a 2-1 victory over the mighty Real Madrid in the European Cup Winners' Cup.

He rejected lucrative offers from Barcelona, Arsenal, Rangers and Tottenham to take control of Manchester United in November 1986, and his initial years, when he had to contend with a drinking culture at the club, were a struggle.

However, the club showed patience as Ferguson rebuilt the club in minute detail and revamped the youth system, shipping out many crowd favourites.

It has often been contended, although just as often denied, that his job was on the line early in 1990, when – despite heavy investment the previous summer – a dismal run of form saw United plummet down the table. It was suggested that a poor result against Nottingham Forest in the FA Cup third round would have been the final straw, but Mark Robins scored the goal said to have saved his job. The club kept faith, and were rewarded with FA Cup glory that summer, and their first trophy of the Ferguson era. A year later, United lifted the European Cup Winners' Cup.

In the newly founded 'Premier League', Ferguson found more success; the arrival of enigmatic Frenchman Eric Cantona proved to be the final piece of the jigsaw and United finally won the league title in 1992-93, ending a 26-year drought. Then the 1993-94 season saw United stamp their authority on English football as Ferguson claimed his first Double – beating Blackburn Rovers to the league title and crushing Chelsea 4-0 in the FA Cup final.

Another Double came two years later, and with "Fergie's Fledglings" – David Beckham, the Neville Brothers, Paul Scholes, Nicky Butt and Ryan Giggs – in full flight, they went one better in 1998-99 by claiming an historic Treble with a 2-1 win over Bayern Munich in the Champions League. The manager was subsequently

knighted – becoming Sir Alex Ferguson – in the Queen’s birthday honours list as a reward for his services to British football.

The 2000-01 season saw United cruise to another title, this time wrapping it up in mid-April, as Ferguson became the first manager to win three English League titles in a row to become the most successful manager in the history of English football. In 2001-02, Ferguson announced his retirement, hoping for a glorious farewell with the Champions League final due to take place at Hampden Park, Glasgow, but United ended the season empty-handed, and the Scot reversed his decision, vowing that he would never again foreshadow his retirement.

The following season brought another league title, but with the challenge of Arsenal and then Chelsea came a fallow period. In 2005-06, there were serious questions raised as to Ferguson’s future, with many believing that the below-par United side, which exited the Champions League at the group stage, was evidence of a manager whose time had passed.

Yet he defied the doubters, building his third team at Old Trafford, this time around the youthful brilliance of Cristiano Ronaldo and Wayne Rooney. United won three back-to-back titles from 2007 to 2009, and also claimed a further Champions League title, beating Chelsea on penalties in Moscow in 2008.

In 2009, United equalled Liverpool’s record 18 league titles, and overtook that haul in 2011. The following year saw United denied as they lost the title to rivals Manchester City on goal difference in the cruellest of circumstances but, in 2013, the Red Devils ruled again, with Robin van Persie, signed from Arsenal the previous summer, leading the charge. In May, with the title sealed, Ferguson announced his retirement at the age of 71, after spending over a quarter of a century in charge of one of the world’s biggest clubs.