



Disabled
Supporters
Association



Foreword by David Gill

I was honoured when MUDSA asked me to contribute to a book to celebrate their first 25 years. It is a remarkable story of an organisation that has worked tirelessly to benefit its members and deliver some of the best facilities and programmes for disabled supporters anywhere in sport.

For my part, I first came across MUDSA when I started at United as Finance Director in 1997. Since then, I have watched in admiration as the organisation has gone from strength to strength, both in terms of numbers and the role it plays to help disabled fans have an excellent experience on their visits to Old Trafford.

In 2003, we created the Ability Suite which remains at the leading edge of facilities for disabled supporters anywhere in sport. In my time as CEO at United, I received hundreds of letters from fans of many clubs, praising the facility. It is something we can be proud of and something that stands testament to MUDSA's enduring partnership with the Club.

As a club, we campaigned hard to get a fair allocation for MUDSA at the Champions League finals in Barcelona, Moscow and Rome and helped them to organise the trips to those games. I know that, despite the result in Rome, those matches were unforgettable experiences for those who were fortunate enough to attend.

MUDSA has its home in the offices of the Manchester United ticket office and is heavily involved in organising the facilities for disabled fans on matchdays. The tireless work put in by Phil Downs, Chas and the Committee doesn't go unnoticed and the annual dinner is one of the key events on the club calendar. I know that Sir Alex and successive managers have all given great support and I am sure that will continue for many years to come.

Congratulations to all at MUDSA. Here's to the next 25 years, David Gill.

Produced by
Mark Metcalf, Mark Harvey
and Jamie Leeming



David Gill



Manchester United's first ever squad when they were called Newton Heath in 1878 (above) and Derek Heyes (below)

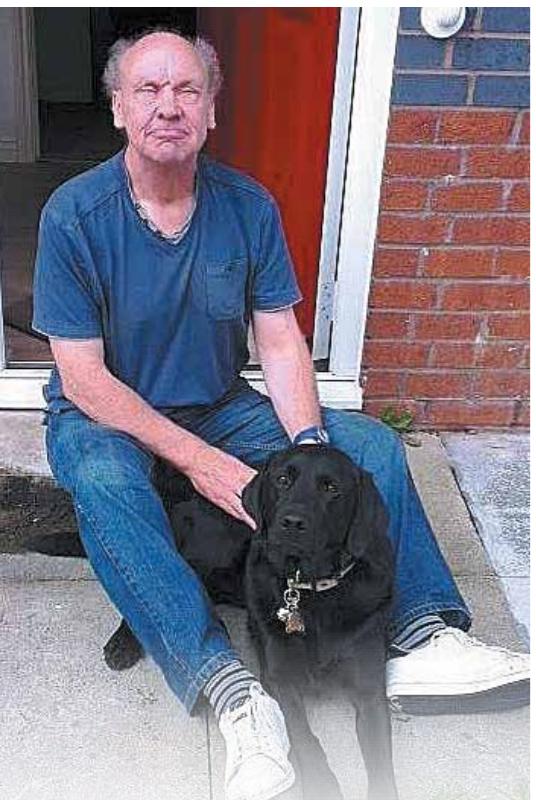
Although official records do not exist, it seems likely that disabled fans have been watching Manchester United since the club's foundation as Newton Heath, way back in 1878. When the club moved to the Old Trafford area in 1910 it would almost certainly have attracted followers from Henshaw's School for the Blind, which supported hundreds of blind and visually impaired people and their families. Factoring in the casualties of the developing factory system and the survivors of the carnage of World War One then it seems reasonable to assume that some of the disabled would seek refuge from their everyday concerns by getting along to support the club.

This may have been especially so when Matt Busby took charge of the club after the Second World War and cultural attitudes towards disabled people began to improve. In addition, the Munich tragedy of 1958 resulted in a number of players suffering debilitating injuries. These included Johnny Berry and Jackie Blanchflower who, four years earlier, had played in a high profile City-United friendly at Maine Road the proceeds of which went to Henshaw's.

Derek was accompanied to matches by his dad who provided a running commentary

MUDSA member Derek Heyes became registered blind in 1956. From 1957 to 1969 the lack of local adequate educational facilities meant he lived in a boarding school for primary children in Liverpool before attending the College of the Blind in Worcester.

This meant he only managed to see United at the start of the season, his first game being on 12 September



1962 as United beat Bolton 3-0, then during the school holidays at Christmas and Easter. He did though 'bunk off' in May 1968 to attend what is his joint favourite game — the other being when Steve Bruce netted twice late on against Sheffield Wednesday in 1993/94 — the

I love coming to the games at Old Trafford because of the atmosphere, camaraderie and the belief that you can alter the result

atmosphere, the camaraderie and the belief, no matter how small, that by being present you can alter the result. So in part it is a psychological involvement and you can feel the people around you".

Another disabled person who has been regularly following Manchester United for more than half a century is Nigel Taylor, who is also visually impaired. His favourite game is the 1963 FA Cup final where United beat Gordon Banks' Leicester City 3-1 at Wembley. When he first went to Old Trafford he stood in the Stretford and Scoreboard Ends. Later, so as to be able to listen to the local hospital match commentary, he graduated to the disabled section. Such was his passion that many years later he was told by the Manchester



Nigel Taylor



Julie and Jack Hall (above) and Phil Downs (below)



Evening News journalist David Meek that he was the loudest person he had ever heard!

Fellow MUDSA member Julie Hall was desperate to accompany her sister Jackie and their parents to Old Trafford. This led to the family writing to United club secretary Les Olive in 1978 to request a spot in the disabled platform. The positive response meant that Julie, who was born with cerebral palsy, was able to attend her first match on the opening day of the 1978-79 campaign when Manchester United beat Birmingham City 1-0 with a goal from Joe Jordan. Julie was accompanied by her sister. As the pair became regulars they were joined by their parents who, after paying to go into the Stretford End, were allowed by the police to stand next to them on the disabled platform.

The police also played a big role in Phil Downs finally being able to return to Old Trafford. The local lad had first enjoyed coming to Old Trafford, where he squeezed into the Stretford End, to watch Best, Charlton and Law tear defences apart in the 1960s.

During his training to become a Metropolitan Police Officer, Phil suffered a tragic accident whilst practising for the police gymnastic team. He was the first person to be kept alive with the severe injuries he had sustained to the nerves in his neck which had left him paralysed from the shoulders down. He spent two years at the spinal injuries unit at the Oswestry and Shropshire hospital before arriving back in Manchester in 1976.

Phil was the first person to be kept alive with the severe injuries he sustained

There was little Phil could do and no chance of finding a job. "There was not the technology available like today. I can't use my arms or fingers and I just sat around in my wheelchair waiting to be taken out."

Like most people, Phil's only recollection of disabled fans at football matches was from watching Match of the Day coverage of football games and seeing the little blue aluminium Invacars from which disabled drivers could watch the action from the side of the pitch. Better known as 'Noddy' cars these were advertised as 'Freedom for the disabled.'

Disabled fans would watch the match from their Invacars parked at the side of the pitch

being alerted about his return to Manchester by his London colleagues. He wrote to Manchester United and within a short while three postcards arrived back inviting Phil to the final three games of the Dave Sexton era that ended on 30 April 1981. Sexton was out and Phil was in, joining Julie, Nigel and others on the disabled platform.

As United's new manager at the start of the 1981-82 season Ron Atkinson would have been accustomed to seeing disabled fans on match days. As would the players because, if wheelchair users could time it right,



A disabled football fan watches from pitchside through the window of their Invacar

they could actually come out alongside the team in the minutes before kick-off!

Wheelchair users came into the ground through the staff entrance and travelled along the tunnel that went by the players dressing rooms before emerging in front of the spot where Louis Van Gaal now sits. They then went to the specially concreted platform which held 15-20 wheelchairs – helpers stood throughout the match. The Old Trafford pitch then had a crown. This meant that those in wheelchairs could not see the touchline or even the ball if it was below the player's knees on what is now the Sir Alex Ferguson Stand side of the pitch.

Refreshments were virtually nonexistent so people brought their own. Toilet facilities consisted of the use of a toilet in a tiny room used as storage space for cleaning materials. Such facilities were not conducive to creating lasting friendships. According to Phil: "People seemed to know each other and were friendly without really chatting to one another. It was a small crowd that dispersed quickly once the game ended and fans would only see one another at the following match. Everyone though was happy to be able to watch United."

Disabled fans watched the game from a concreted platform which held 15-20 wheelchairs – helpers stood throughout the match



The original disabled platform with a view that was impaired by the crown of the pitch

Under Atkinson, Manchester United won the FA Cup in 1983 and 1985. There was also a thrilling start to the 1985-86 season with thirteen victories and two draws in the first fifteen matches. Red-hot favourites for their first title since 1967, United stuttered badly and fell away to finish fourth. Atkinson was dismissed when his side started the 1986-87 season badly.

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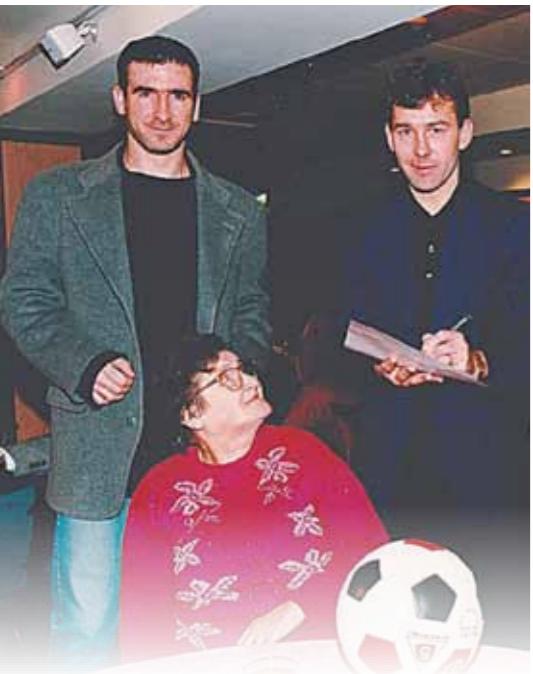
in 1987-88. The following season proved to be less successful and United finished in eleventh place.

Arsenal took the title, whilst off the pitch there had been the terrible tragedy at Hillsborough in which the loss of control by police officers had led to the death of 96 Liverpool fans. As a consequence, the Taylor Report would shortly recommend that all major stadia convert to an all-seater model.

All grounds would need to offer improved facilities for their fans and Manchester United Football Club began the 1989-90 season by building new facilities for their disabled fans. As it happened they were worse, but ultimately they laid down a marker for facilities that were a big improvement! Keen to demonstrate what had been constructed, the club invited disabled fans to view them on the day when the preseason team photograph was being taken. Everyone was delighted to get so close to the players and have them sign programmes,



Ron Atkinson



Collecting autographs at the Christmas party

autograph books and other memorabilia. No-one could have realised it, but this was to become a regular feature at MUDSA events.

What was much less satisfactory, even downright scary, was the new platform for disabled fans. It was much more extensive and therefore more fans would be able to attend matches. It was also situated to the side of the players' tunnel on the home bench side and the view from it was an improved one. However, there was a major problem getting on to it.

There was a ramp going down in three stages. Two were straight but the third was so steep with a 90 degree turning at the bottom, that it was necessary to have a steward standing there to help ensure a wheelchair user escaped serious injury.

Phil Downs recalls that the architect who had designed the structure was very proud of his 'achievement'. Phil's dad — an architect himself — was less impressed. When Phil, like everyone, was asked his views he expressed his disappointment and recalls "the architect was stunned."

In addition to "dicing with death" says Phil "I pointed out that whereas those in wheelchairs would be sitting up front, their helper's seat was three yards



The second wheelchair platform with its 'perilous' access ramps

No-one could have realised it, but this was to become a regular feature at MUDSA events

behind." For Phil and others whose disability means they cannot turn round, this made it impossible to communicate with their helpers. To the disappointed disabled fans it was apparent that improving facilities in the future would depend upon them improving their own communication channels with the club.

Soon after a golden opportunity arose when Alex Ferguson's personal assistant Lyn Laffin, who was also the club link to disabled fans, suggested to Phil the idea of organising a 1989 Christmas Party. Grasping the opportunity to bring people together, Phil had some leaflets printed and handed them out at matches leading up to the party, which was held in a café on the corner of what later became the Ability Suite.

Fans had the opportunity to meet their heroes and couldn't stop talking about it for weeks. Lyn asked... what next?

Sandwiches and drinks were ordered and Lyn and Kath Phipps, who is the training ground receptionist at Carrington today, arranged for some of the players to attend. Everyone present had a great time and those fans given an opportunity to meet their heroes couldn't stop talking about it for weeks afterwards. Lyn asked what next? A small group assembled in February 1990 with the intention of repeating the events of the two previous years and raising funds to organise others. The name 'Manchester United Disabled Supporters Association' followed automatically. Kevin Peek was persuaded to become the chairman, Rose Cullum became treasurer and Phil secretary, a role he has fulfilled since.



Lyn Laffin moved to tears as Kevin Peek presents her with a thankyou gift for helping to arrange travel to the European Cup Winners Cup final in Rotterdam, 1991



Starting with just three posts, the committee has expanded to the current total of eight

Clockwise from top: Ann Marie Lewis (Social Events), Chas Banks (Social Events), Des Turner (Rollin' Reds), Sue Rocca (Treasurer), Phil Downs (Secretary), Liz Edwards (Quadrant Rep), Jamie Leeming (Rollin' Reds and Website), John Simister (VI Rep and Merchandise).



The MUDSA Committee

Phil Downs was awarded an MBE in 2004 for his role in the struggle to achieve improved facilities for disabled football fans. Phil and MUDSA played a major role in the establishment, in 1998, of the National Association of Disabled Supporters that is today known as Level Playing Field. Phil and MUDSA also played a major role in the Accessible Stadia Guide produced by Football Licensing Authority and The Football Stadia Improvement Fund.

Success on the field, combined with the larger number of disabled fans spaces available, increased the numbers of disabled fans who wanted to and could come to the match. However, it meant that Phil, as secretary,

found it difficult to cope with an increased workload. Especially as Lyn Laffin was considerably busier following Alex Ferguson's winning of the 1990 FA Cup and his planning for future successes. Lyn approached the United club secretary, Ken Merrett and responsibility for the organising of the wheelchair platform was given to Phil Downs, who became the Disability Liaison Officer.

It was agreed to draw up a constitution and formalise the committee. Every MUDSA member was asked to come to the first Annual General Meeting (AGM) at which people effectively nominated themselves for committee posts. It was arranged that the dozen appointees must include representatives of the different sorts of disabilities, as



Phil with Her Majesty



Paul Rocca

well as people with specific skills such as an events organiser, someone used to handling finances and someone good with words. It was also agreed to include a carer/helpers representative on the committee, as practical help in getting to the match is required by many MUDSA members. The changes meant that the MUDSA committee became professional in its outlook.

A massive United fan, Sue Rocca is a carer with a professional finance career. She is currently a practice manager with Manchester based Glaisyers Solicitors with 80 staff under her direction.

Sue first started going to Old Trafford with her dad in 1967. She stopped going after she married Paul and they started a family. After a long illness, Paul was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) in 1991 and although his attitude is positive – “I’ve got MS but it hasn’t got me!” – it meant he has been unable to work ever since. Sue returned to work as a legal cashier and has now made a successful career for herself.

She was delighted when Paul suggested they go to watch Manchester United. They were able to enrol on the rota system and began going to games around the start of the Millennium. They also started attending MUDSA social events. “I knew that they would be well organised and that the venues would be perfectly accessible with sufficient disabled loos,” says Sue.

In 2003 Sue and Paul were at the MUDSA AGM when Rose Cullum announced that she was stepping down as treasurer. This was a bit of a blow and so after discussing it overnight, Paul rang up about the post and was told

**“I’ve got MS but MS hasn’t got me”,
Paul Rocca**

by Phil that the committee didn’t want an enthusiastic amateur! When Paul explained he wasn’t applying but his wife was then it wasn’t long before, after submitting her CV, Sue was in post.

“I manage all funds relating to MUDSA including the major events we organise and the membership funds the club sends us. Much of my work is naturally at the start of each season. I do reconciliations each month and keep ledgers of each financial category. Professionalism

and accountability is important and I produce annual accounts for the auditor and a report for the AGM. I am happy to be able to use my skills on behalf of MUDSA. My daughter was with me on a MUDSA day at Carrington training ground and there was a young United fan in his wheelchair who is a big goalkeeping fan. He had his photograph taken with all the ‘keepers and he was delighted. My daughter, a nurse, summed up my feelings when she said: ‘You are privileged to be able to bring such happiness to people.’ Of course, also by being an active member of MUDSA I get to go the matches with my husband.”

Nigel Taylor, who is now retired after working for many years as a rehabilitation officer with visually impaired people, believes: “The committee has always had a good eclectic mix of people and it’s a pleasure to know them. But there are responsibilities to be undertaken



Sue Rocca

and people are given tasks and expected to complete them. As the visually impaired committee member between 2006 and 2011, I was the first point of contact for visually impaired fans and I encouraged them to bring their problems to me. Often I had to explain why someone did not get a ticket for a particular game".

After attending the January 1997 AGM, Chas Banks joined the MUDSA committee. Like most people, Chas never considered the possibility he might become disabled. His first game was on Christmas Day 1957 when, only weeks before the Munich tragedy, the Busby Babes beat Luton Town 3-0 — after this he became a regular follower.

Chas was active in the trade union and labour movement. He then became a successful pop group manager. However the absence of a properly funded NHS left his illness undiagnosed for too long and he was struck down in September 1996 with a scar on his spinal cord. It took him some considerable time to come to terms with knowing he would need a wheelchair for the rest of his life. It helped that he was blessed with a loving family but although he was able to continue in his job he was eventually forced to quit in 2001.

MUDSA's keenness to expand its range of activities coincided with Chas's desire to use his professional skills for the benefit of its members. At the initial meeting that was held in early 1997 to establish a Social Committee he



Chas Banks



went along with a well thought out proposal for a quiz night, which were becoming increasingly popular at the time.

"I proposed the concept of a celebrity quiz night theme for the event and when I was given the go-ahead, I used my contacts to organise the event in November 1997. Journalist David Meek did the sports questions, Manchester City fans Mark and Lard from BBC Radio

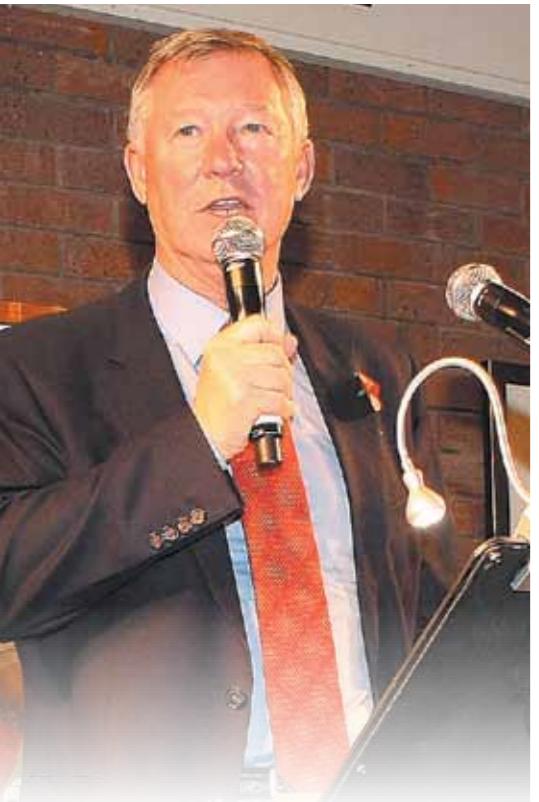
1 did the music questions and Gordon Burns from the Krypton Factor did the general knowledge. My good friend Tony Wilson, a big United fan, asked the entertainment questions and Denis Law came down and did the raffle. An old friend and experienced comic Dudley Doolittle was the MC for the evening. It was held at the George Carnell Leisure Centre, it was big success. People had a great evening and we raised a good bit of money."

The event set MUDSA up for even bigger, better events over the following years. Chas's proposal for a dinner in the autumn was backed.

"I wanted to turn it the Annual Dinner into a flagship event both for MUDSA and the club. In 1998, I managed to persuade Alex Ferguson and Wilf McGuinness to come along and speak whilst a comic friend of mine called Barnaby kept the audience of around 140 entertained in between their talks. People paid just £15 and had



Tony Wilson



Sir Alex speaking at the 2010 Annual Dinner

such a great time that they were asking what date the following years would be on.

"I did a mail out and people started booking tables. The numbers attending have grown to more than 500 and we have had some well-known stars speaking including, just weeks before he died, George Best. No-one has ever charged us full-price and most people have done it for nothing.

"Sir Alex Ferguson always came down and said a few words. The club brings along any trophies that have been won in the previous season and fans can have their photographs taken with them and the speakers plus any past or present United players who attend.

"Early on, we began inviting people such as David Gill and Group Property Services staff. It became a vehicle to thank people who supported us whilst also reaching out to people within the club who might not often get any recognition. We have always made money from the event which we use to help finance other MUDSA activities and facilities. The MUDSA Annual Dinner is now one of the premier events in the club's calendar."

The list of guest speakers over the years from 1997 includes Sir Alex Ferguson, Alex Stepney, George Best, Denis Law, Nobby Stiles, Norman Whiteside, Sir Bobby Charlton, Denis Irwin, Martin Buchan, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, Paddy Crerand, Andrew

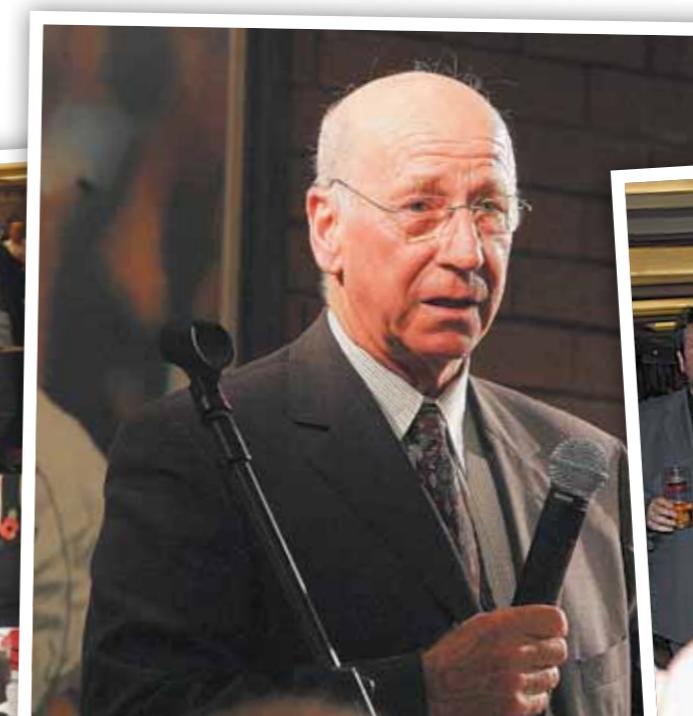
Sir Alex Ferguson always came down and said a few words



Cole, Gary Neville, David May, David Moyes, Gordon McQueen and Bryan Robson.

With Chas and Ann-Marie's production and organisational skills the MUDSA Christmas Party has also grown over the years. Today, unless they are injured and required to undertake treatment, all the players attend an event held in the International Suite at Old Trafford. The event is an opportunity for MUDSA to present the trophy to the winner of MUDSA player of the year. In return, the attendance by the players demonstrates how highly they and the club appreciate MUDSA and its members.

As a result of these successful social activities, MUDSA has added to its funds allowing improvements to facilities like installing TVs in the Ability Suite, publishing the Rollin' Reds magazine, subsidising travel to Wembley finals by coach and providing the funds needed to organise trips to four Champions League Finals.





Ann Marie Lewis

Ann Marie joined MUDSA in the 1996/7 season. She says "It was great to get to matches and meet people who were just like me.

I soon made new friends and later I joined the MUDSA committee. Initially I helped sell the badges with Richard Higgins and when he emigrated to Australia I was given the opportunity to take over arranging the Christmas party, which was a bit daunting but Chas helped and everyone had a great time. As their heroes walked into the room it was lovely seeing members faces and they took home memories that they could treasure forever.

A few years later Marian Calland had to step down from the committee due to ill health and I was given the chance to arrange more family events. Over the years these events have become more and more successful. Everyone loves the trip to Carrington or the annual Q&A session with a pair of first team players but it was also decided we should arrange events members could bring family and friends to.

MUDSA now has a yearly annual bowling challenge where between 60 and 80 members and their friends and family compete against each other to be crowned MUDSA bowling champion. We give out a trophy to the adult and junior winner and runner up. A few years ago I introduced a medal for all the children taking part, they love coming up at the end of the day to receive their medals. One member

***It was great
to get to
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Gladys Wood brings about 20 members of her family and Gladys and her husband Terry and their granddaughter Liz have become very good friends of mine.

Another popular annual event is the evening at Belle Vue dog races, which we organise for the last Friday in July. In 2015, 60 members enjoyed a three-course meal and for the first time we had our own function room there, whilst a few members went down to present a trophy to the winning trainer of one of the races.

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Although a lot of time goes into organising these events it's worth every minute when you see all the smiles. Some MUDSA members do not have many relatives and so it's good that they get to know other members when they attend MUDSA events.

It's like one big football family and it's lovely on a match day when members approach me with a hug or a smile. It makes what I do worthwhile. And after the events I organise I receive lovely letters from members thanking me and the committee. It's great knowing people enjoyed their day out.

I've met a lot of people at Old Trafford. Over the years I often have a phone call at home from someone who just wants a chat and I'm always happy to listen. I am very proud to be a member of MUDSA and very proud of Manchester United.





Liz and Alison Edwards

Liz Edwards has been attending Old Trafford as a MUDSA member with her daughter Alison since the 1998/99 season. Alison has Cerebral Palsy and was introduced to Old Trafford as a birthday treat.

Since joining MUDSA they have enjoyed many memorable occasions – who could forget that night in Moscow? They are actively involved in the social aspect of MUDSA, attending the annual dinner each year and other events and they cherish the lifelong friends they have made.

When the quads were built, Liz and Alison were among the first members to try them and loved it so much they decided to stay up there! They soon realised they were missing out on the halftime draw and there was no contact with the main platform. Liz voiced her concerns and eventually she became involved with the committee as the Quad Rep and has been in the position since 2009, her role is to make sure those in the quads are kept up to date and as involved as other members, this includes distributing Rollin' Reds Magazines, collecting money for half time draw, selling memorabilia.

"I love my role and I feel very privileged and proud to be a part of MUDSA."

Des Turner has been a wheelchair user since 1984 and involved with MUDSA since 1997 when Phil invited members at that year's AGM to put their names forward with a view to forming a 'Social Sub-Committee'. He was accepted and has been with MUDSA ever since, firstly designing the MUDSA badges and selling merchandise before becoming editor of Rollin' Reds.

Who could forget that night in Moscow?

"Following my spinal injury I had no idea that facilities for disabled people at sporting venues existed. Having been a United fan for more than thirty years I made some enquiries about watching the Reds. My first game was the FA Cup semi final against Oldham in 1994 at Wembley. I'll always remember Sir Alex shaking hands with every disabled United fan prior to kick off which was wonderful, a gesture that was typical of the man. I was hooked and contacted Phil afterwards to find out more.

"Twenty years on and so much has happened. Under the stewardship of Phil, MUDSA has evolved into a great organisation that has worked alongside Manchester United to provide the finest match-day experience for people with disabilities anywhere in the country. I have made many life long friends during my time with MUDSA and am proud to be a part of it."

MUDSA has always had a VI (visually impaired) Rep and John Simister, father of Emma, currently holds the position. Emma was born ten weeks premature which resulted in her having a lot of medical problems including visual impairment.

They have been going to Old Trafford since 2005 when she first became a MUDSA member. John was elected as Visually Impaired representative in June 2014 and together, he and Emma also sell MUDSA merchandise on match days in the Ability Suite.

"Both Emma and I enjoy meeting all members and away fans and knowing that what we do is helping to raise much needed funds for MUDSA. But being able to go to a football match and listen to the commentary (which is provided by MUTV) and feel the atmosphere is amazing and she feels no different to any other fan."

John and Emma Simister



Des Turner

Ground redevelopment helps to improve facilities

Manchester United's resurgence in the 1990s sent its popularity rocketing. In 1995 a new North Stand was constructed in time to host three group games, a quarter and semi-final at the 1996 European Championships. A capacity of 55,000 was still not big enough to accommodate those who wanted to watch United though.

A second tier was added to the Scoreboard/East Stand and opened in January 2000. Capacity rose to 61,000. The extra numbers included more disabled fans as the section used to accommodate them was moved from the South Stand to a newly elevated platform in the East Stand.

During these major ground changes, MUDSA members held regular dialogue with Manchester United who were keen to know their aspirations

"The perceived wisdom at the time was that wheelchair places should be spread out across grounds. But when we talked to MUDSA members it was abundantly clear that they wanted to see their current platform in the East Stand extended and by doing so stay together as one larger block", says George Johnstone, Group Property Services Manager, 1998-2013.



The current wheelchair platform when it was first build, with only two tiers

During these major ground changes, members held regular dialogue with the Club who were keen to know their aspirations

George Payne

"I was always fit and healthy. So it came as major shock when I became disabled and had to spend a number of weeks in hospital between January and March 2007. I feared I would have to stop coming to games. As a steward at the club for many years I had looked after the disabled in the old stand near the Stretford End when it was people in wheelchairs staring through railings.

"I never thought about MUDSA being able to help after I had my stroke. Phil bumped into my son, David, and when he found I had been forced to stop going he said to make contact. I came to the match versus Chelsea in October 2007. I was very nervous about coming as it was the first time I had been out in my wheelchair. But it was great sitting on the platform as it is a marvellous view. I've been coming regularly since."

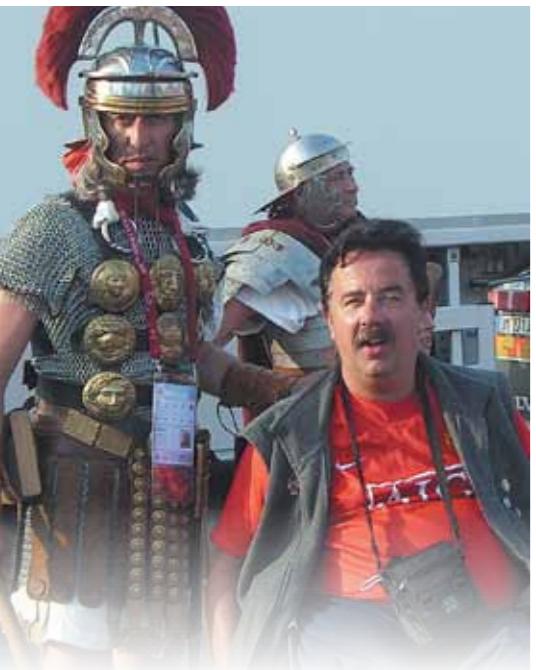
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The area in the Scoreboard/East Stand for disabled fans accommodates 120 wheelchair users plus their carers, 42 seats with additional leg room for ambulant fans who have significant mobility issues but do not yet need to use a wheelchair and 36 pairs of tickets for those who require easy access seating due to moderate mobility difficulties.



George Payne

Chris Smith



Chris Smith

“Being fit and healthy has always been important to me so it came as a massive blow when I had to pack in work. I had never considered I might become disabled – you don’t, do you.

“I had no idea about MUDSA until an employee of the club told me about it during a phone conversation I was having with them. My ‘debut’ – I first started going in the 60s – was the night Rooney notched three on his debut against Fenerbahce in 2004. Living in the West Midlands I have been to quite a few Manchester United away games and the facilities for disabled fans at these grounds is, with the exception of Villa Park, much inferior to those at Old Trafford.

I had never considered I might become disabled – you don’t, do you

“Going to the games is a real lifeline, it raises your mood when you know you are going to the games. I will always prefer to come to the match and it is not the same watching the game on the television as being at a game there is the atmosphere. I live for it in many ways and it makes life a lot easier both for me and my wife Pauline, who gets a break when I am at the game. Statistics show that most marriages don’t survive when someone becomes disabled but ours has now lasted since 1981. “

Chris Smith is a former police officer who as a result of a number of severe beatings was forced to retire early on medical grounds in 2000 with fibrosis of the spinal cord

John Kirk

“I was forced to retire early from work due to MS in 2005. Although I am generally a happy go lucky person the loss of my job was a major blow as it brought a massive drop in income especially as my wife, who worked in personnel, had to stop work to look after me.

“I thought I would have to pay out £40 a game to continue watching Manchester United. So when I found that

It gives my wife a break from having to care for me and it’s a great day out

was not the case through MUDSA I was overjoyed and began coming to the matches again around five years back. It gives my wife a break from having to care for me and it is a great day out.

Having a car parking spot so close to the ground is excellent and for 90 minutes when the game is on I am not disabled. When I was able to bring some WBA fans with me on one occasion they were taken aback. ”



John Kirk

Peter Cunane



Peter Cunane

“I use a wheelchair due to cerebral palsy and usually get to the game two hours before kick-off. It's great to sit on the platform to soak up the atmosphere, watch the players warming up and to chat with fellow fans and stewards, who are second to none in their helpful approach.

“I like being on the platform surrounded by fellow fans and also being so close to the away fans as then there is lots of singing by both sets of surrounding supporters. The view is also very good, which is not always the case at the away games I have attended. I think the facilities for disabled fans at Old Trafford are amongst the best anywhere especially if my visits to Milan, Barcelona and Amsterdam are anything to go by.”

Peter Cunane, aged 29, has been watching Manchester United since he was seven. He attends the games with his dad, Peter senior, whose own dad was a big United fan.

I like being on the platform surrounded by fellow fans

Penny Macey

“It is a great struggle because I have, despite the initial diagnosis that I had just weeks to live, now lived with a rare brain tumour for over a decade. Although treatment has reduced its size you are living with something that can kill you in an instant. You never really forget.

“Going to the games is a great release. It is my main thing and I can shout as much as anyone.

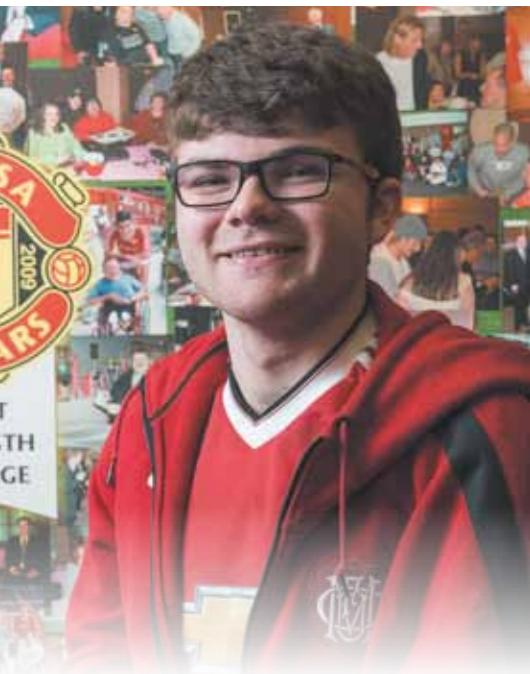
“I also watch Sky Sports 2, read Rollin Reds magazine and access the MUDSA Facebook site. I attend as many games as I can. Despite my disability I am always struck that other people also have different forms of disabilities and despite the problems they face they do so with big smiles on their faces when they are at the game. After I became disabled it really did feel like the end of the world and so coming to the matches is brilliant. It has opened up many avenues for Kevin, my husband, a former police officer, and I. We have built many friendships as a result. Also the fact that there is no charge except for an initial membership fee simply cannot be beaten. I would describe MUDSA as a large family.”

Sadly, former hairdresser Penny Macey from Macclesfield died (in July 2015) after this interview was conducted. She had been watching Manchester United since the 1970s. She first got to hear about MUDSA when sitting next to Chas Banks at a Bruce Springsteen concert. Kevin Macey is still a regular at Old Trafford and retains strong contacts with MUDSA.



Penny and Kevin Macey – sadly, Penny died in July 2015

Johnny Leeming



Johnny Leeming

“I have spina bifida but I can walk a few steps and so can go into the ambulant section at Old Trafford. I am not worried about coming to the matches as I can self-propel although I am more pushed by friends on match days as it is just easiest and safest. Old Trafford's accessibility factor makes it easier to come to matches.

“I have made a number of friends by coming including Anne-Marie and I also try to attend any social events if I am fortunate enough to get a place. I am on the rota and so get to a minimum of 1 in 3 games but I also try and see if there has been any cancellations and so it is around 12 games a season.

“The membership fee for a season is just £32 and after that it is free entry for me and a carer. The view where I sit is very good and I also read Rollin Reds and the programme and keep up to date with MUDSA developments via the Facebook page and twitter.”

Johnny Leeming, aged 20

Old Trafford's accessibility factor makes it easier to come to matches

Nathaniel Yates

“You want to come to the games because it is an amazing team, anything can happen and there are some unbelievable experiences at some games.

I really like the Ability Suite because it gives fans a lot of comfort and warmth in the winter months

“The view at Old Trafford is pretty good, you can see if there is going to be a goal although sometimes people stand up in front and that makes it difficult to view the action.”

Nathaniel Yates, aged 22



Nathaniel Yates

“I have had cerebral palsy from birth that mainly affects my left side but I can walk here and thus go in the ambulant section near the away fans.

“I really like the Ability Suite because it gives disabled fans a lot of comfort and warmth in the winter months.



Joe Major

In 2005 Old Trafford was further extended with the addition of second tiers to both the northeast and northwest quadrants of the ground, creating an additional sixteen wheelchair users spaces in the process. A record attendance of 76,098 was recorded when United beat Blackburn Rovers 4-1 on 31 March 2007.

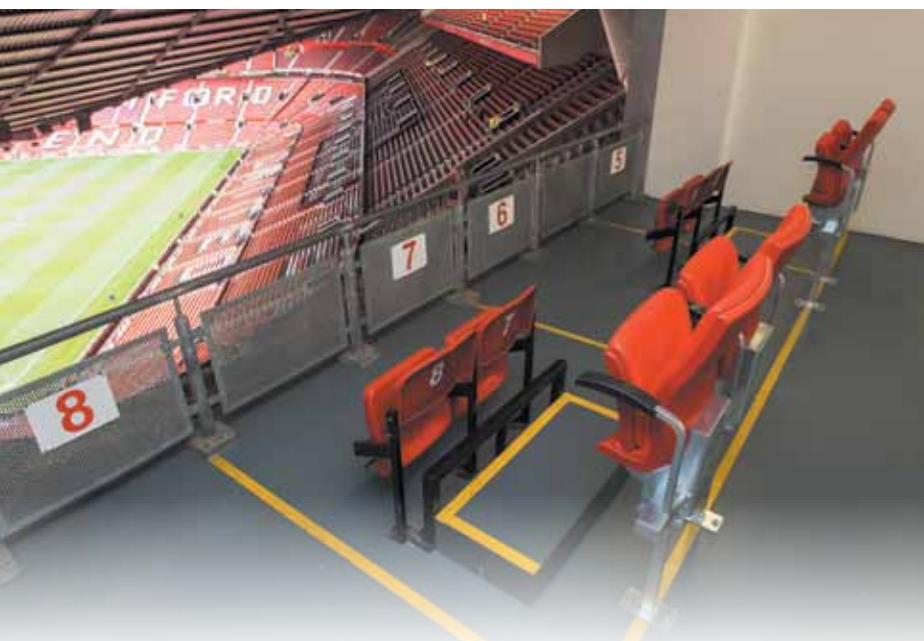
Alan and Joe Major...

“I sit in the quadrant section with my dad, Alan, who has been a regular at the ground since 1974.

“I have cerebral palsy. We are able to park our van near to the ground entrance and I appreciate that when the stewards see us coming up to the doorway they then hold back the queue to let us in first so we can then use the lift. You feel like a VIP.

“I enjoy the atmosphere and the buzz of the games and have particularly enjoyed the European games against Greek and Turkish sides as their fans are so boisterous with their drums and horns.”

Joe Major, aged 27.



The new family and friends seating in the Quadrants

We'll keep the Red flag flying high...

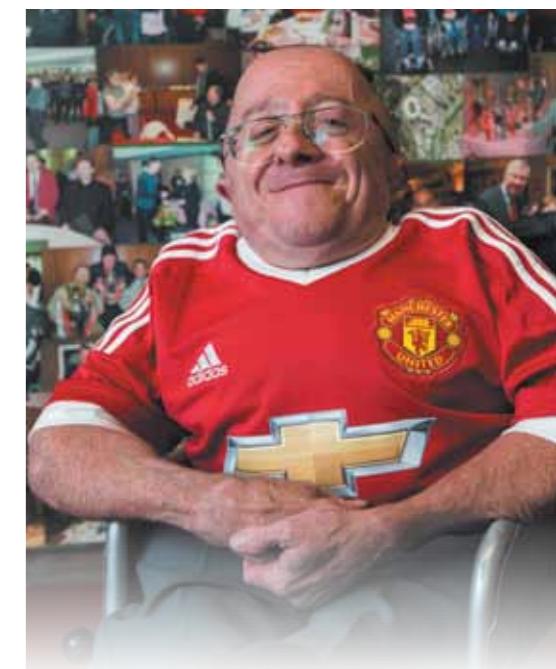
After United beat Juventus in the semi-final of the 1999 UEFA Champions League there was a surge in demand for tickets for the final against Bayern Munchen in Barcelona.

The last time that United had made it to a European final was eight years previously when they beat Barcelona 2-1 in the European Cup Winners Cup Final in Rotterdam.

Although there was no official MUDSA trip, a number of its members including Phil Downs attended the match after obtaining tickets through the club's membership scheme. Julie Ward was amongst a party of six – Derek Matthews, Dave Thompson, Ray Gaynor, Kevin Peek and Stan Fisher were the other five – that Lyn Laffin ensured could travel and sit together in the Dutch Stadium. This ensured they could watch the English FA Cup holders battle it out with the Spanish

FA Cup holders to collect a trophy that was competed for in Europe by domestic cup winners between 1960 and 1999.

“On touching down in Holland, the six of us were carried on and off the coach which took us to and from the ground. The Stadium owners put us behind the railings near the corner flag with United fans stretched along the terraces and police dogs barking. The whole stadium rocked quite badly especially during key moments in the game. Nevertheless, it was a good night but I did fear



Kevin Peek



Julie and Jackie Hall on the plane to Rotterdam

the whole place might collapse and we got soaked as it rained heavily throughout. We didn't see any disabled Barca fans present." Julie Hall.

Eight years on and with United seeking to win their third European final many MUDSA members wanted to be in Spain to see them do it! Former band manager Chas Banks had regularly organised overseas trips and he was 'volunteered' to try and sort out transport and tickets for the Nou Camp, where the facilities were not especially ideal.

Chas reserved a plane. However the delay in knowing exactly how many match tickets would be given to MUDSA meant that when Chas went back to confirm that the plane was still wanted it was no longer available. Getting another one was not going to be easy as hundreds of planes were booked to take fans to Barcelona. Thus when the travel agent rang back a few hours later and said another one had been found then Chas was overjoyed. The sting in the tail was that the cost had risen by £5,000 to £25,000. This was money MUDSA did not have.

Chas was at his wits end and was advised to send a fax to David Gill making him aware of the situation but not asking directly for the money.

"Ninety minutes later there was a ring at the doorbell and when my wife Shirley went to the door



The view from the disabled platform at the 1991 European Cup Winners Cup final in Rotterdam

When the travel agent phoned to say another plane was available, Chas was overjoyed

there was a courier there with an envelope containing a £5,000 cheque," said Chas, who even telling this tale nearly sixteen years later was tearful. Sadly, this great tale was lost on the newspapers who had been covering the MUDSA trip and had got to know about the financial doubts. The papers intended covering the story if United had not donated the money but were not interested when they did!

"UEFA had started out by allotting MUDSA 13 match tickets and even then when the envelope arrived

We wanted 54 wheelchair spaces but UEFA had only allocated 13

five had mysteriously disappeared. We wanted spaces for 54 wheelchair users plus helpers.

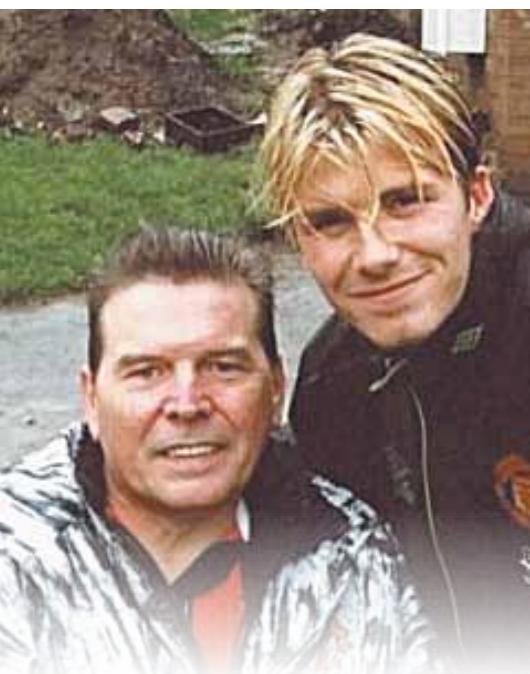
"The Spanish and UEFA could not understand the concept of so many disabled people wanting to go to the match. MUDSA tried to make UEFA understand that the ticket offer was totally

disgraceful for a stadium that held 105,000 spectators. After the Minister of Sport, Tony Banks, supported by Alistair Campbell, the Prime Minister's Director of Communications and Strategy, intervened UEFA did eventually concede and gave us the tickets we needed. They accommodated us by putting up some scaffolding that went over the bits of the terracing at the back. It was rubbish," says Chas.

In the week leading up to the flight from Manchester airport, Chas had heated discussions with management there who wanted the MUDSA flight to go out last. They seemed to have unfounded

MUDSA members queue to board the flight to Barcelona for the 1999 Champions League Final





Steve Crompton – one of the original members of the formal MUDSA Committee who sadly died in 2012. Steve built the first ever disabled supporters website – the original MUDSA website.

fears that something might go wrong and delay the many other flights going to Barcelona that day. Chas won the argument and the plane set off on time. However, 10 minutes into the flight, poor Steve Crompton had a heart attack and the plane had to be diverted to Stansted airport where everyone wanted Steve to get the best possible treatment but for him to get off the plane as quickly as possible!

After an hour's delay the plane was again up and away to Spain. The delay, though, meant it had lost its slot at Barcelona airport, sited around 30km north of the city, and would now be diverted to Reus, 40km south of Barcelona. Chas was able to use a rare item in 1999 – a mobile phone – to call his wife, Shirley. She made contact with Javier, the waiting bus company representative who Chas had known for many years through work, to let him know what was happening. Shirley also faxed Barcelona to let them know the group, which still needed to pick up eight tickets, would be a few minutes late arriving.

When the party arrived at Reus airport, Javier was there to greet everyone as they disembarked and be transported to the Nou Camp in a beautiful brand new Mercedes Bus which was equipped with a wheelchair lift. There was just time for a quick chat with a United fan in a wheelchair who had made her own way to Barcelona from Ireland. Clearly distressed, she was now detained, along with numerous other able-bodied fans, at the airport by the Spanish Police after it transpired

10 minutes into the flight, poor Steve Crompton had a heart attack and the plane had to be diverted

the company who had flown them to Spain had ripped them off and had not arranged the match tickets they had paid for.

Although eight tickets were still to be collected, she was offered Steve Crompton's. This offer was accepted leaving her free to exit the airport which had few facilities to cater for her needs.

When everyone had taken their place on the bus there was general agreement 'we should have one of these' as it sped off in a desperate attempt to get to the match as near as possible to kick off time. As the Stadium came into view there was general excitement but unfortunately the bus broke down around a mile from the ground! The journey was completed through wheelchairs being pushed to the stadium.

Unfortunately, the bus broke down about one mile from the stadium

Chas, Phil and three others had to wait for a working bus to arrive and when they finally made it to the ground, United were one down. There was now the obstacle of having no tickets to overcome. No-one knows what Javier said but after a few minutes chatting to the steward on the gate we were along with some able-bodied fans who didn't have tickets themselves! "I turned round to speak to my mate Terry and found someone else shoving me, I asked who he was and he just told me to shut up!" Laughs Chas.

Once the stragglers had made it into the ground they were directed to the place where the rest of United's disabled supporters were grouped at the back of the lower tier in the United section behind the goal.



The most amazing, most accessible coach we've ever seen collected us from the airport... and broke down a mile from the ground!

The problem was "It was like watching the game through a letterbox. I spent the whole game trying to bob up and down using my arms as our supporters were standing up and there were flags hanging down from above. The game seemed to last around eight minutes and then there was the miracle at the end.

"One of my personal highlights was seeing the joy on the face of a young lad from South Africa who had leukaemia and died a few weeks later. He had wanted to go to the 1999 FA Cup final but there were no spare tickets. So following a request from Johannesburg Rotary Club we managed to obtain a Barca ticket for him. He, like everyone, was absolutely delighted to see United win the European Champions League."

Sitting on the bus afterwards the MUDSA party was joined by Paddy Crerand and Wilf McGuinness but attempts to get Arsene Wenger to join us failed. He just walked on by after the admitting he couldn't quite get over the Ryan Giggs winner in the FA Cup semi-final at Villa Park earlier in the season.

**On the bus
we were
joined by
Paddy
Crerand
and Wilf
McGuinness
but Arsene
Wenger just
strolled on...**



Thankfully Steve Crompton recovered from his heart attack and, following the trip to Barcelona, MUDSA went on to organise trips to Moscow for the 2008 UEFA Champions League final against

The Treble is ours!

Chelsea in 2008 and to Rome the following year for the final against Barcelona.

Moscow, 2008

72 MUDSA members and their helpers travelled to Russia. They included Rosie Elmore, who, after being diagnosed with MS in 1978, continued to work as a teacher of young people with special needs until 1994

72 MUDSA members and their helpers travelled to Moscow for the 2008 final

when she became too tired and needed to use a wheelchair. Rosie, who is accompanied to home games by her husband Peter, began supporting United after the Munich tragedy in 1958 as the team returned from their European Cup tie in Belgrade.

"The Moscow game and visit was brilliant. The chartering of the plane, the organisation when we got there, being met by a fleet of vehicles that took us round Moscow and the seating we had in the match was first rate. We were brilliantly looked after and I even enjoyed drinking champagne coming home. Nothing was done by Chelsea for their disabled fans. I believe we have got the best disabled supporters association in the world."

Rome, 2009

The numbers of MUDSA members who took in the match against Chelsea the previous year was superseded by the 165 members and carers who travelled the following year to Italy and were

MUDSA took a record-breaking 165 disabled fans to Rome for the Champions League final in 2009



Rosie Elmore



Steph Bisceglia in Rome



Disabled fans boarding an adapted bus to go to Wembley in 2007

accompanied by doctors as they were taken to and from the match on accessible transport. The total number who travelled makes this the largest number of disabled fans ever to travel to a European away game.

"I went to Rome for the European Champions League final. No other club has been able to organise something that big for their disabled fans.

"It was a proud moment and I believe that David Gill had a big input and I know that Sir Alex Ferguson was always very supportive of the facilities for disabled fans."

Stephanie Bisceglia, who travels regularly from Waltham Forest to see Manchester United play and who is a Human Resources clerk for Sainsburys.

The trip to Italy came two years after MUDSA was able to book an adapted bus to take members to Wembley to witness the 2007 FA Cup final against Chelsea. MUDSA had approached the club about making sure their official travel partner provided accessible transport and this had been agreed. The notable aspect of this coach was the fact it was unique – the first of its kind with four wheelchair space options as an off-the-peg solution for any other operator who wanted to solve the emerging accessibility demands.

No other club has been able to organise something that big for their disabled fans

The Ability Suite

With match tickets at a premium, Manchester United decided in 2002 to move the ticket office to a new purpose-built facility on the north-west part of the ground. The empty space left behind in the south-east quadrant was directly behind the main disabled supporters viewing platform. Everyone on the MUDSA committee agreed it would be perfect for a dedicated match day lounge for disabled supporters.

Everyone agreed it would be perfect for a dedicated matchday lounge for disabled supporters

"My team was heavily involved and we discussed this over many months. We could see how the space would be ideal as a refuge on cold, windy days. Vodafone then agreed to co-fund the facility with the club. Initially it was only going to be a simple development. But as it progressed we put in some new features such as a large screen TV, a number of accessible toilets, a low rolling resistance carpet and a kiosk at a suitable height for wheelchair users. Vodafone installed some new assistive technology computer equipment that allowed for the facility to be used by everyone for educational courses on non-matchdays," explains George Johnstone, former Group Property Manager at Manchester United.

The Ability Suite was opened on 5 April 2003 by Sir Alex Ferguson, who only weeks earlier had supported MUDSA's boycott of



The entrance to the Ability Suite



Sir Alex Ferguson opens the Ability Suite in 2003

the Worthington Cup final against Liverpool at the Millennium Stadium, Cardiff. Facilities there for disabled fans were deplorable with virtually no view of the action from parts of the wheelchair platform.

The stand by MUDSA failed to force the football authorities into immediately improving facilities at the ground and despite the Football League halving ticket prices there were few takers amongst disabled followers of Manchester United. The overall result, though, was positive as improvements to the Stadium were made and the boycott ensured that facilities at the new Wembley were first rate.

The warm and comfortable environment within the Ability Suite provides for pre, mid and post-match relaxation and analysis. Access to the suite is at the B3 entrance which has a red disabled persons sign above it. Once inside, the generously wide corridor leading to the Ability Suite is suitable for all sizes of manual and electric wheelchair, the users of which are automatically granted a free parking space in the nearby E2 car park.

Directly outside the entrances to the Ability Suite are display boards packed with photographs of MUDSA members, some no longer with us but fondly remembered, and activities. The strong photographic theme continues inside the Suite itself but this time it is the players,

Fans enjoying the early kick-off match on the Ability Suite TVs



The entrance to the Ability Suite



present and past who are on the walls next to the large TV screens. There is no other 'Ability Suite' in existence at any other football ground.

Sean Jeffrey (top) is twenty-one and is often one of the first to arrive at the Ability Suite before a match. His dad,

Tony, who is a Manchester United fanatic, accompanies him.

I feel safe in The Ability Suite

including Martin and Kevin. I have been able to go to some away games, but the facilities are never as good as at United."

Daniel Evans (middle) is 20 years old and has moderate leaning difficulties. Coming to Old Trafford is the biggest thing in his week and he says: "I feel safe in the Ability Suite and I like having some sweets and a drink in there while watching the earlier live games on the large televisions."

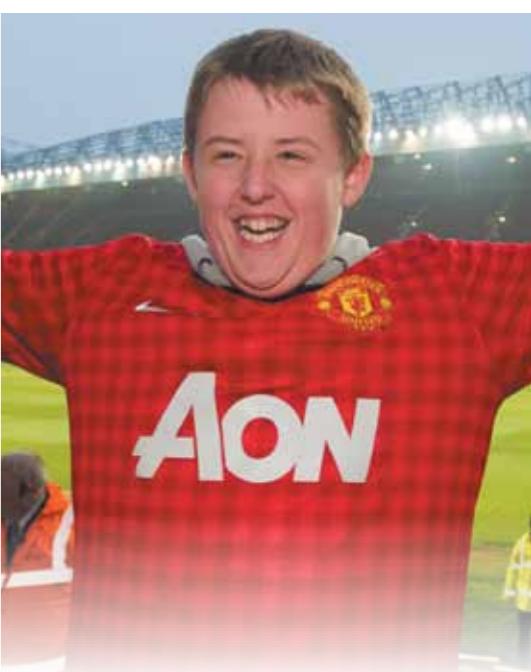
Alex Nield (bottom) is aged 8 and saw his first United game against WBA in October 2010. Father Jonathan is a United fanatic. "I like doing all the singing. My favourite players are Luke Shaw and Danny Blind."

The Ability Suite does not just accommodate home fans but also away fans who are as one in wishing their own clubs provided such facilities.

Away fans' comments...

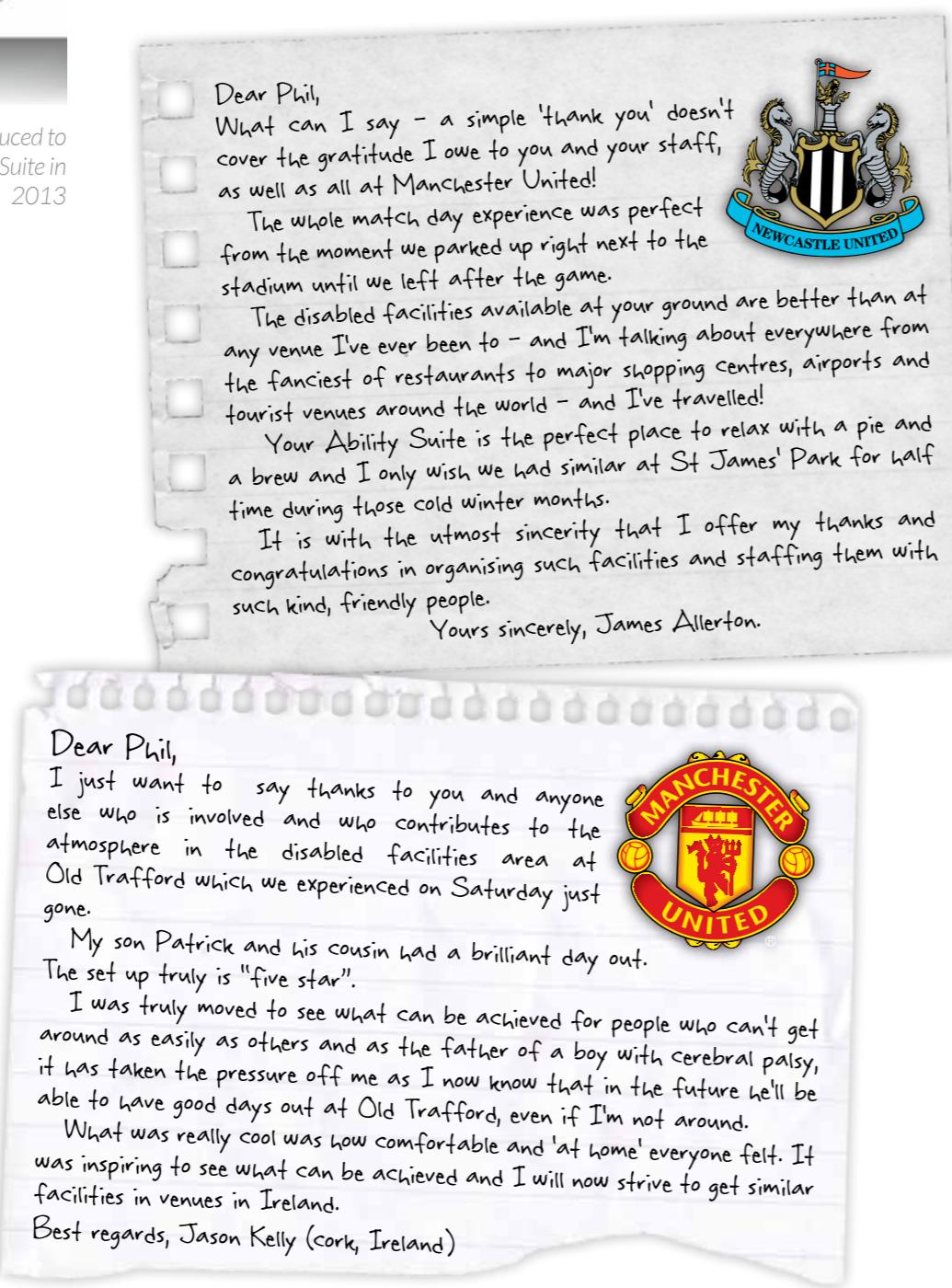
"It was great to be able to find the space for the Ability Suite inside Old Trafford and to get support

Top to bottom: Sean Jeffrey, Daniel Evans and Alex Nield





The commemorative booklet produced to celebrate 10 years of the Ability Suite in 2013



from Vodafone to install up-to-date technology. The number of letters I have seen from fans of visiting clubs that praise the facility is a key indicator that it has been a success." Former Manchester United chief executive David Gill, speaking in March 2013 when interviewed for MUDSA 36 page booklet 'CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF THE ABILITY SUITE 2003-2013', (left).

Visually impaired supporters' facilities

Manchester United provides visually impaired supporters with radio headsets in the main viewing area as well as in other parts of the stadium if the need arises. This is their means of receiving the match commentary direct from MUTV which these days is called a 'Simulcast' as it goes out over the Manchester United website and through the visually impaired sound systems simultaneously.

Additional information for visually impaired fans comes by way of a free match day programme on CD.

The visually impaired section also has a unique facility which allows individual VI supporters to bring along their hand-held LCD monitors which can be connected beneath each seat.

VI supporters get live commentary from MUTV via headsets provided

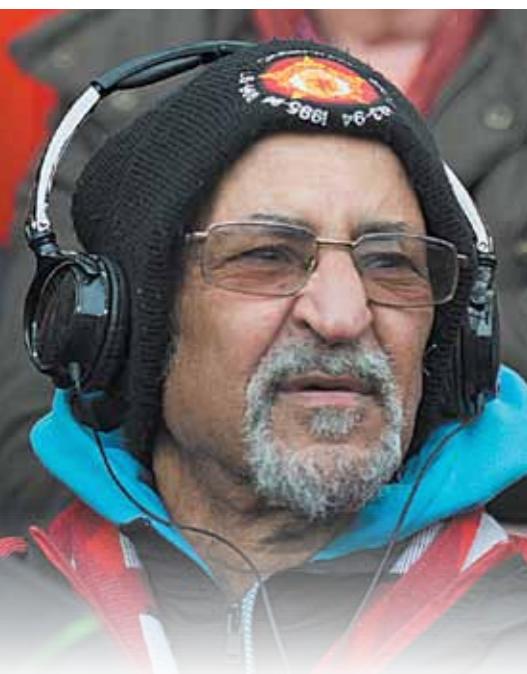
"I have listened on the headsets to the match day commentary for many years and it has improved immensely. It is very good nowadays and really does provide a verbal picture of the action on the pitch. I also bring a radio to the games with me in order to keep up with the action at other games. I love coming to Old Trafford as the atmosphere particularly at the big games is very special.

Visually impaired MUDSA members enjoying the live match commentary using a headset provided



Visually impaired supporters can plug their own LCD monitors into connections beneath each seat – this is unique to Old Trafford





A visually impaired MUDSA member enjoying the match using a headset provided

"Friends ask me about MUDSA and I always tell them about how good it is and that it costs the helpers nothing to attend and the same for members once they've paid their membership fee."

"When I was asked to read the tenth anniversary Ability Suite booklet in advance of an interview for this booklet I emailed Ashleigh Davison to ask if there was an electronic version. By return of email it was sent to me in a PDF document that I could read. Likewise having the Rollin' Reds magazine in digital format is greatly appreciated, It wasn't in the earlier days. That is the kind of organisation I want to belong to, the ability to read it on my own is excellent and it shows how MUDSA reaches out to people with different types of disabilities in the organisation."

MUDSA connections...

MUDSA has a tradition of connecting with its members away from Old Trafford and this continues to evolve as new technologies and media become available.

Rollin' Reds was launched as a homemade, stapled-together newsletter at the start of the 1997-98 season – eighteen years later it is a 28-page glossy magazine with a print run of 500 copies per edition. It is free and keeps MUDSA members up to date with activities on and off the field with each edition carrying an interview with a current player and summary of recent matches and MUDSA events. Rollin' Reds was the first ever magazine published by a disabled football supporters' organisation.

That is the kind of organisation I want to be part of

Current Rollin' Reds editor, Jamie Leeming (below), became disabled in 2006 in a surfing accident in Costa Rica – he hit his head on the sea bed and broke his neck. He's paralysed from the chest down and got involved with MUDSA, working on Rollin' Reds magazine after being made redundant from his job as a designer and editor on The Sunday Sport.

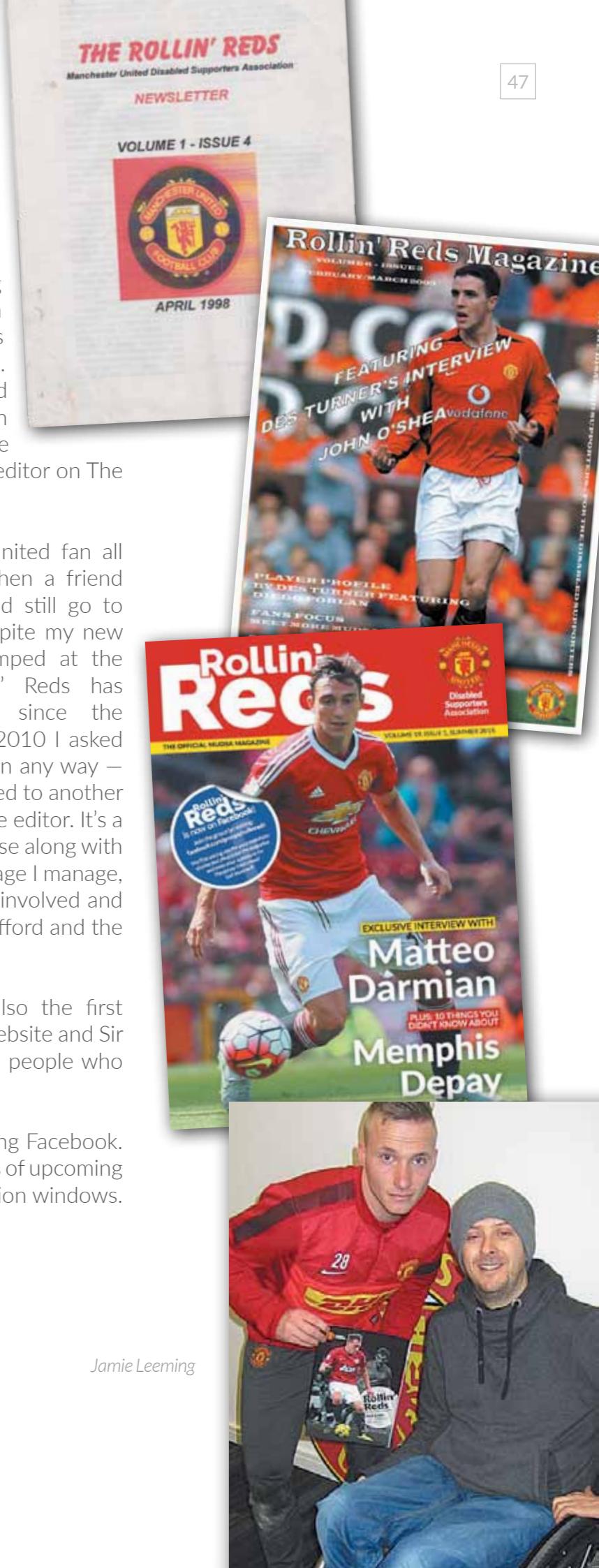
Members get to be involved and share their experiences

It's a lot of hard work but it's well worth it because along with the website I produce and the Facebook page I manage, MUDSA members get their chance to be involved and share their experiences of visits to Old Trafford and the events organised by MUDSA."

On November 1 2002, MUDSA was also the first organisation of its kind to set up its own website and Sir Alex Ferguson was amongst the 400 plus people who came along to mark the occasion.

MUDSA also reaches out to members using Facebook. It's a convenient way of informing members of upcoming events as well as the match ticket application windows.

Jamie Leeming



The MUDSA Office



Ashleigh Davison

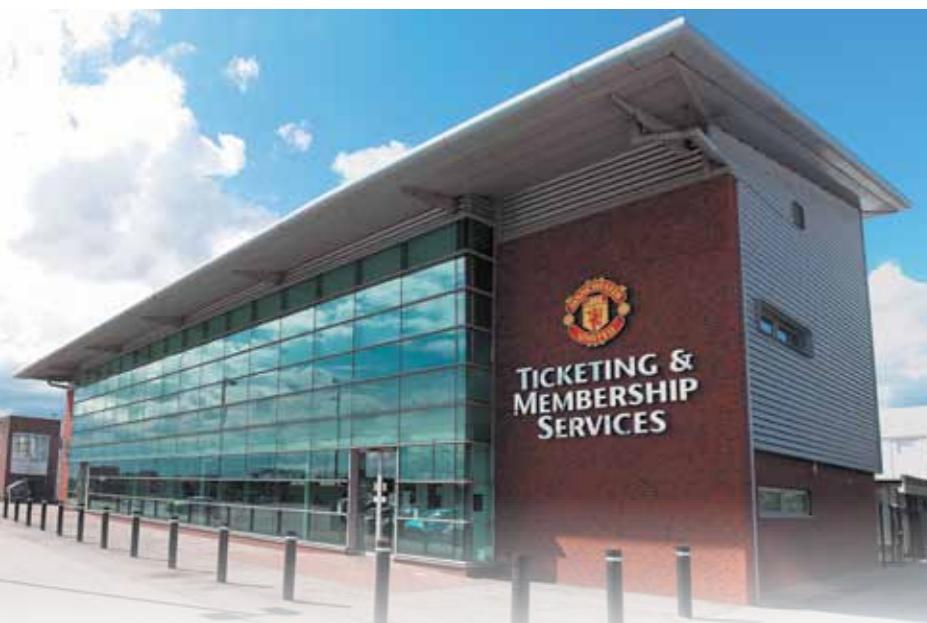
This is based in the ticket office at Old Trafford. As of October 2015 it is staffed by Ashleigh Davison (left), Customer Relations Executive and MUDSA Secretary/ Disability Liaison Officer Phil Downs, who is supported by a club employee who is Phil's 'arms and legs.'

The office works to meet the needs of disabled fans who attend both home and away matches. Maintaining

There is in excess of 12,000 emails sent by MUDSA annually

the MUDSA member data base is essential as being on it provides an opportunity to get tickets for games. The office is like a mini-call centre and there are regular phone calls from people wanting to become MUDSA members and others applying for match tickets, car parking permits, lift passes and so on. There are calls about visitors from Iceland and Sierra Leone and photographs emailed in from right around the world that can be added to the MUDSA Facebook pages. Phil often refers the MUDSA operation as the 'intensive care' part of the club.

There is in excess of 12,000 emails sent by MUDSA annually, all of which have to be dealt with. In an instant world some people expect an instant response but that is sometimes simply not possible.



Manchester United Ticketing and Membership building – also MUDSA HQ

What next for MUDSA?

"MUDSA needs younger people to think about getting involved with the workings of their Association. How do we ensure that we can build-in continuity to the array of activities MUDSA delivers each year? That's part of our future development as an organisation, it's likely to be a challenge but that's what we're facing and it needs to be our next step and the step after that.

"Disabled fans in general are asking whether football is accessible enough and that's also true of our members.

In a way, improving facilities for disabled people is an increasing demand of the twenty-first century as the combination of disabled and older people provides a larger group with significantly higher spending power by comparison to just disabled people alone.

"Clearly we cannot stand still because that's the same as going backwards; such is the rate of change these days. We are in discussions with the Club over extending and improving the facilities we have at Old Trafford. In line with this, at the start of this season (2015-16) the Club

introduced an additional Friends and Family facility in each of the two quadrant areas giving our members the option of going to a game as a family group or with close friends. This is only the beginning and by August 2017 the list of improvements will be much longer than the Friends and Family option already mentioned." Phil Downs MBE.



Chas and Phil with David Gill

What the players say...



Steve Bruce

“I was the Manchester United captain for five years and the role included representing the club at many meetings and social occasions. I attended many events organised by MUDSA.

“They were always happy, pleasant occasions at which disabled fans, who like all Manchester United fans are incredibly passionate about the club, always made me very welcome and in return if my presence made someone happy then I am delighted. I know and I am very pleased that the Association is celebrating its 25th anniversary. It deserves to celebrate as I saw it get bigger and bigger over the years and clearly provided the impetus both for improved facilities for disabled fans everywhere and for similar disabled fans' groups at other clubs.

The were always happy, pleasant occasions

Gary Neville

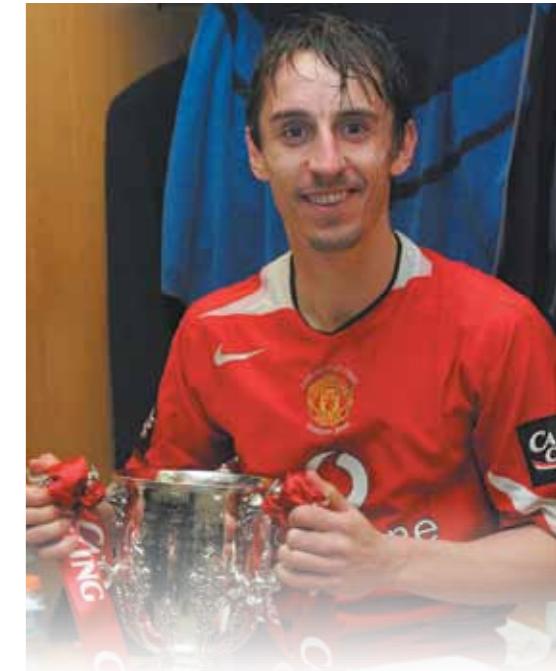
“From the very beginning when I got involved at Manchester United it was bred into you that MUDSA was a key part of the club. As a fan, we all look back at the Busby Babes and you see them in the club blazer with the badge and it has become part of the fabric of Manchester United, something passed down through the ages. Manchester United gets thousands of request invitations and can only respond positively to a small minority. However, attending the MUDSA Christmas Party was expected, it was part of the fabric of the club and the tone was set by Sir Alex Ferguson who never lost touch with his roots.

“In truth once you'd been to one MUDSA Christmas Party it was a pleasure to go again the following year as they are well run and everyone present always seemed to be having a great time. We wanted to be there. As club captain I would let the players know well in advance about the date of the party and we would then organise our own Christmas Party around the MUDSA one.”

“The MUDSA party is similar in some ways to when the players do a visit to a children's hospital – you feel humbled by the strength and courage of those you meet and you also realise just how privileged you are to play football for a living.

I've just gone with a young United fan to collect the results of his GCSEs, which he studied for despite being in constant pain and undergoing corrective surgery around his spine. He got amazing results. That is inspiring to me and that is what you feel when you attend a MUDSA do.

“I was always aware as a player at United that MUDSA worked with the club to improve facilities for disabled fans. It is great to see a large, dedicated section for MUDSA members at Old Trafford and you should be proud of your achievements. Congratulations on your 25th anniversary.”



Headley Court

Since it started in 1989, MUDSA has developed working relationships with many organisations. One of the most enduring has been with the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre at Headley Court, Surrey.

The red-brick stately home has housed the defence rehabilitation services since the Second World War. In recent years it has seen a significant rise in injured servicemen and women due to personnel experiencing life-changing injuries on the battlefields of Iraq and, more recently, Afghanistan. This is in addition to casualties from road traffic accidents, as well as those suffering complex injuries from military training as well as sporting injuries.

After emergency operations and intensive treatment at hospitals in Birmingham, the injured servicemen and women arrive at Headley Court as part of the next stage of their recovery from physical and, just as importantly, psychological injuries. Military Liaison Officers work alongside bespoke medical teams to support individual casualties and provide a robust, holistic support network to enhance their long term recovery. A big part of the rehabilitation process is recreational therapy, including social inclusion.

"It can be an ordinary activity like going for a meal in public. This may sound like a simple task, however it

could be the first time since getting injured that someone has undertaken this and it is all part of confidently reintegrating into society following an injury. There are also invitations to sporting events which provide

***It's all part of
reintegration
into society***



Warrant Officer Class 1, Faye Allen



Soldiers from the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre – Headley Court, at the MUDSA Annual Dinner

a psychological boost and that is where the link to MUDSA and Manchester United originated," said Warrant Officer Class 2 Cliff Johnson, who works, along with Warrant Officer Class 1 Faye Allen (far left), as a Military Liaison Officer at Headley Court.

"Phil Downs MBE rang Headley Court in the summer of 2009 asking how United and MUDSA could help our injured servicemen and women. As a result, the

first event we attended with injured soldiers, who were accompanied by some nurses, was the 2009 MUDSA dinner and it was here that everyone met Sir Alex Ferguson and club legend Andy Cole. The fact that some soldiers still talk about this fantastic occasion

demonstrates the impact that this support made to individuals rehabilitation. The value of any invitations, especially from a club of Man United's stature cannot be underestimated within a soldier's overall recovery.

"We've been privileged to receive two tickets for home games from MUDSA ever since, and these tickets provide support which makes a visible difference. In addition, we've also been invited to all the club's major events. Being able to attend such prestigious events has a huge a positive effect and the difference this makes to the well-being of a soldier is probably immeasurable," explained Cliff.

"Congratulations to MUDSA on your 25th anniversary. We look forward to many more years of working together," said Cliff (above, right).



Warrant Officer Class 2, Cliff Johnson

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