



CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF THE ABILITY SUITE  
**2003—2013**

# We WILL follow United



Dedicated to everybody who has supported MDSA over the years, with special thanks to Manchester United and Vodafone who jointly funded the entire project



**DISABLED  
SUPPORTERS  
ASSOCIATION**



**This commemorative publication  
celebrates the tenth anniversary  
of the opening of the Ability Suite  
match day lounge which was  
established for disabled fans in April  
2003 at Old Trafford.**

The foundations of this unique facility lie in the formation of the Manchester United Disabled Supporters Association in December 1989. The association is supported both financially and spiritually by the football club and is the first of its kind in the world.

In recent years, Manchester United has become the most successful club in English football. This on-field success has been mirrored by the achievements of the club's disabled supporters who, working closely with the club, have built a supportive environment for



all disabled fans including facilities which are regarded as second to none.

As a result of this success, disabled fans of other clubs have been inspired to press for improved facilities at their own clubs.

Enjoy the read.



**Mark Metcalf**  
Author, historian and  
freelance journalist.

## Suite dreams

**The Ability Suite was opened by Sir Alex Ferguson on 5 April 2003 and it has been a huge success.**

This unique facility is a dedicated match day lounge for disabled supporters and is located in the South East quadrant of Old Trafford — the same area of the stadium which provides the bulk of the accessible viewing facilities. It has an adapted kiosk with a low level counter, accessible toilets and large TV screens. Warm and comfortable is the only way to describe the environment that it 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 is suitable for all sizes of manual and powered wheelchairs, the users of which are automatically granted a free parking place in the nearby large E2 car park.

The opportunity to create a match day lounge was made possible by United's on-field success. Sir Alex Ferguson's side had become the first since Arsenal in the 1930s to win the top-flight title in three consecutive seasons with successes in 1998-99, 1999-2000 and 2000-2001.

In 2002, with match tickets at a premium, the Club



Phil Downs was determined to get the former ticket office space put to use by Manchester United's disabled supporters...

decided to move the ticket office to a new purpose-built facility on the north-west part of the ground. An empty space on the south-east quadrant thus became available for alternative use and just happened to be directly behind the main disabled supporters viewing area.

With the support of the MDSA committee, Secretary



*The Ability Suite provides MDSA members and their carers with a cosy environment in which to meet up, chat, have a drink and even watch live match-day action and replays on the wall-mounted TVs*



The Ability Suite was opened by Sir Alex Ferguson on April 5, 2003. It has an accessible level cafe bar, space for approximately 80 wheelchairs and carers, two large TVs showing live action, and seven accessible toilets. On non-match days it is used as an education facility.



**“**I asked Building Services Manager, George Johnson about this. I could see that there may be potential for the idea to get off the ground because the concourse area leading into the viewing area directly above was always very congested before the match, especially in bad weather.

The area, which includes a small police station, is where the emergency services are located. It meant that disabled fans might get in the way and be in danger if there was an emergency. So as well as providing a great facility for our members I felt it would be an advantage in an operational context of the club.

**“**MUDSA has grown to an unbelievable size over the years but the opening of the Ability Suite was probably the most significant milestone because it is a statement about how the club and the Manager support our disabled fans.

**Lyn Laffin**, Sir Alex's PA, even in retirement

Lyn looked after the disabled supporters when she first joined the club but the success under Sir Alex meant that she had other pressures to deal with. Organising and developing the growth of MUDSA into what it is today was handed over to Phil and almost 4 years later the bond between the club and MUDSA is stronger than ever!

**“**The Ability Suite provides a service by being able to pull together a group of people with various different kinds of disability and encouraging them to interact. This is a marvellous feeling and to see what has been created is a dream for disabled fans who, as a result, can experience the same level and enjoyment of the beautiful game as everyone else.

# Like an extended family

## Professional



*Every detail and issue has been covered with health and safety a priority, a space so people can talk football and social matters, discuss previous matches, share great moments, find out about away match travel and access arrangements. Nothing has been missed and it is all carried out in a professional manner.*



**Simon Smith**, a Manchester United supporter since 1970 and who, following an injury, became an amputee in 1985 and has since suffered with a serious back injury.



**I'm proud of the facilities that we have worked with the club to create. I like the chance to relax in the Ability Suite and have a chat and make friends with people. Because the suite is so close to the viewing platform I can keep warm until close to kick-off.**

**Ann-Marie Lewis**, a MUDSA committee member



Her husband and carer, Terry, occasionally accompanies **Gladys Wood** to matches. As a wheelchair user she joined MUDSA before the Ability Suite was opened and she can recall how members were overjoyed when it was first opened:

*It was not only great to have somewhere to shelter and keep warm, but I got to know people much better and, as a result, built a number of important friendships.*

Terry has seen the difference in his wife, saying: "As a result of being able to come to the football, Gladys is a different person. She is much more cheerful and light hearted and that means she does not let her arthritis get her down, which can sometimes be the case in the summer when there is no football to watch.



**Paul Rocca** is a regular at Old Trafford and at Manchester United away games. He appreciates the facilities at the newly built stadium of a north London club but, even so, he says:

*They aren't quite as good as United's. There is nothing in English football to rival the Ability Suite which is packed at every match with people with many different kinds of injuries and ailments. We don't spend hours talking about them but we do share ideas on how to overcome them, how to work round them and how to live as active a life as possible.*

*Throw in the enjoyment of watching Manchester United then there is a great atmosphere amongst those who use the Ability Suite. It is like an extended family.*

Paul's wife, Sue, is the MUDSA treasurer and is also a regular at matches.

# Overwhelmed

**Shahid Iqbal** was overwhelmed when he first came to a game. He was badly injured by an electric shock as a young boy but has refused to allow becoming a paraplegic amputee get in the way of building a successful career as a graphic and web designer. His belief in God helped him through some dark moments and he states:

*I am a prisoner in my own body and I have to deal with it. If I do not then I will become bitter and twisted. I have seen the world as able-bodied and have to live it as a disabled man. Going to the match has helped me to increase my self-confidence and belief. I'd give the Ability Suite 10 out of 10. I also think that, because the club shows disabled fans respect by providing them with facilities as least as good as able-bodied fans, this impacts on the attitudes and actions of the latter. I have not made lots of friends at the football as I have my own circle of mates outside of the sport but you can sit in the suite and lap up the atmosphere and excitement of fans meeting their friends before what we all hope is a great match.*



# Secure

**Faye Clarke** is an ambulatory disabled MUDSA member. As a baby, Faye was photographed in the FA Cup that Manchester United had won in 1990 by beating Crystal Palace in the replayed final. Faye has followed in her dad, Roy's, footsteps by becoming a United fanatic. Asked to describe the Ability Suite, and facilities that surround it, she was brief and to the point:

*They empower independence by removing barriers and creating a level playing field. I would not be able to attend if that was not the case. The stewards at the matches are also just as good as the actual facilities and they are careful and considerate if you need their support.*



# Empower

*The Ability Suite is a winner with me. You can get a drink, sit down and relax and chat to friends and fans of the opposing team. **Chris Grethe**, a visually impaired MUDSA member.*



*I would enjoy coming to the matches even without the Ability Suite, but it does make the experience even better as it's warm and secure. It has helped expand my circle of friends considerably and I now often arrange meet fellow fans outside of coming to see United play. I'd be frightened of losing their companionship if was unable to come to Old Trafford. **Dallas Chase***

# Winner



Sixteen year-old **Sam Whitworth** from Stockport has cerebral palsy and hydrocephalus and as a result he has to walk very slowly. He is studying for eight GCSEs and hopes to be able to drive with the aid of adaptations to the car. He would like to be a chef when he starts work. He was told about MUDSA by a friend and he thanks the organisation:

*“For helping me to watch my favourite team by providing facilities that turn each visit to Old Trafford into a social occasion. This has had the added advantage of bringing me into contact with other disabled people whose own experiences have taught me a lot and helped me appreciate how important good, accessible facilities are for all disabled people.*



At just 13, **Owen Clements** is one of the youngest MUDSA members. He travels regularly with his dad, Paul, to matches at Old Trafford from his home in Mansfield.

Owen has become something of a 'minor celebrity' amongst older members for his often frank engagement with the travelling away fans situated behind the viewing platform. He was born 13 weeks early and has subsequently had numerous operations in a battle that has seen him win the BBC Radio Nottingham Child of Courage Award. He is a wheelchair user and he's hoping to be a football commentator when he leaves school. Owen says:

*“I am pleased United and MUDSA have worked together so that disabled fans can watch matches at Old Trafford. The Ability Suite is great place to come into after sitting in the car for a few hours. Coming here makes me feel independent and I love watching United.*



**Sean Jeffrey** is eighteen and is often one of the first to arrive in the Ability Suite before a match. His dad, Tony, who is a Manchester United fanatic, accompanies him.

Sean, who has learning difficulties, is a keen photographer and once the players come out to warm up he is quickly out of the Ability Suite to the nearby disabled supporters viewing platform to take photographs. He also takes snaps of the scoreboard each time United score and at half time and full-time. He keeps a folder for each game and Tony has witnessed how his son's IT skills have improved immeasurably as a result. Sean's confidence and independence has also shot up. When the pair first visited Old Trafford together, Tony was reluctant to leave Sean unaccompanied at any time. That's no longer the case and Sean says:

*“I like the Ability Suite and the facilities at Old Trafford. As a result of being able to watch United I have more friends, including Martin and Kevin. I have been able to go to some away matches, but the facilities are never as good as at United.*



**Daniel Evans** is 17 years old and has moderate learning 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 game live on the large televisions.*



Daniel's mum, **Juli**, says:

*“Daniel struggles in large crowds and therefore he appreciates the chance to sit and wait before going up to watch a match. He also appreciates how helpful the security wardens are in making his visits so enjoyable. When you have a 'hidden disability' it is often the case that people do not understand why you might be acting a bit strangely, which is why good sympathetic behaviour is so important in making my son feel safe.*

Daniel is a member of the Manchester United disabled team for 6 to 25-year-olds and also enjoys training at the Cliff training ground each week.



# Fantastic view

**“** I appreciate the fantastic view of the match, which combined with meeting so many other United fans makes for a great day. None of which would be possible for me if the club did not provide such great facilities for disabled people and their carers. The psychological benefits of being able to come to the game are enormous and my wife also benefits as it gives her a break from being my full-time carer.

**Mick Lee** — a wheelchair user in the North Stand Quadrant area at Old Trafford.



As a youngster with no health problems, I was at Wembley in 1986 to see Manchester United win the European Cup and thanks to MDSA I was also present when they won the Champions League in 1999 and 2008. It was a shock to hear MDSA were chartering a plane to go to Barcelona in 1999 but the organisation has always been outward looking and prepared to take on new challenges in order to widen members experiences. I can't see the match but I listen to the sounds of the crowd and the match commentary at Old Trafford is very good as it always keeps you informed where the ball is.

**Gary McCoriston** — a wheelchair user who is also registered blind.

It is marvellous that he gets to come to the football as it takes away his worries and as he goes with our son then it gives me an opportunity to relax.

**Ann** — Gary's wife and full-time carer.



# Amazed



# Pleasure

**Annette Struthers'** first visit to Old Trafford for the Ole Gunnar Solskjaer testimonial as a MDSA wheelchair user saw her bypass the Ability Suite...

**“** I didn't know it existed so I went straight to the concourse. I now use the Suite before and after matches. I enjoy the football but I also appreciate that coming to Old Trafford has widened my circle of friends and activities. I've picked up new recipes, found out about new services for disabled people and places to visit and also shared problems with other disabled people.

The club have also done an excellent job in creating facilities which are affordable to disabled people. I also know how much pleasure my husband and carer, Cameron, gets from coming to the games with me.



Suitetalk

# New challenges

No-one can be certain what the future may hold but figures show one in four of today's 20-year-olds will become disabled before they retire. **Chas Banks** was an extremely fit successful pop group manager when a car on his signal cord struck him down in September 1986. It took him a long time to come to terms with knowing he would need a wheelchair for the rest of his life. What helped was visiting Old Trafford as a MDSA member.

**“** I was amazed and inspired by seeing so many disabled people refusing to allow their disabilities to prevent them doing things. I saw Kevin Pele, who has brittle bone disease, lifted into the seat of his car and driven away. That was brilliant. There are many MDSA members who come to the matches who have to overcome great pain. But once we are here as a group of disabled people we can forget any concern and passionately support our team.

# Travelling fans praise the Ability Suite

# Just wanted to say impressed

# I am with the Ability Suite

Dear Sirs,

I'm an Everton fan and I attended the recent game at Old Trafford. I want to commend MUDSA and the Club for providing a first-class match day experience.

A wheelchair user myself, I have been to Old Trafford many times to watch rugby union and Super League Grand Finals and I cannot fault the facilities for disabled supporters. The organisation is exemplary.

From the moment I enter the ground the stewarding is friendly and helpful. My first visit to the Ability Suite was a real eye-opener — such a wonderful facility to have. TV, refreshments, warmth — everything you could wish for pre match.

The viewing platforms are excellent. So spacious and well laid out. Plus having toilet facilities aplenty is a real bonus too. All in all, a truly hassle free match day experience and MUDSA must take great credit and personal satisfaction for the efforts you have made.

A shame about the result, but I don't think anyone expected a repeat of last season's 4-4 epic!

Kind regards, Chris Smith

Phil,

Thanks for the tickets for last week's game. I thought that United were so good in the second half it gave us Golden Boys no chance.

Also, I have been to many grounds around the country and I think I can safely say that Wednesday night was one of the best



Everton

organised and run disabled sections I have ever been in. All the staff were great, loads of toilets, the Ability Suite with access to a bar without being jumped all over is fantastic. Please pass my thanks on to all the staff.

All the best Pete.

treated as well as at Old Trafford so many thanks to all the people involved.

Regards, Tony Penn.

To Whom It May Concern,

I recently attended the Manchester United Vs Hull City match at Old Trafford as a visiting disabled supporter.

I am 15 years old, wheelchair bound and have attended many Hull City games home and away. I have visited many poor stadiums over the years but I have to admit that Old Trafford is one of the best venues I have been to. I have been to Old Trafford before to watch a couple of England matches

but this was the first time I have watched Hull City play there and there are many positives I found in terms of disabled facilities within the ground.

I think we sang well at the match but have certainly sung your praises since we got home!

Enjoy the rest of the season.

Best wishes, Chris Cheshire & Barb Robinson.



Hi,

Just wanted to say how impressed I am with the Ability Suite and all the other disabled facilities at Manchester United.

I am a disabled Aston Villa supporter and was at the game last Sunday.

I travel to most of the away games and have never been

toilets and refreshments were. It's always nice to be greeted by someone kind and helpful at the ground.

Furthermore, once inside the ground and in our seats I found the view of the pitch to be excellent and had no problems watching the game.

I had easy access to and from the refreshment kiosk (Ability Suite) and I also noticed that the disabled supporters on the lower levels had TV screens in front of

them so if any had missed the action whilst the able-bodied fans in front of them stood up, they could watch replays on the little screens. I think it's amazing that the club has taken people's abilities into consideration.

Finally, another thing that is of a high standard is the Manchester United Vs Hull City match at Old Trafford as a visiting disabled area to access refreshments and toilets. It's warm in this area and with many TV screens it's a good place to stay comfortable pre-match. Also, there are many toilets which cause fewer queues throughout the match.

Probably though, the biggest plus for me is the allocated

them so if any had missed the action whilst the able-bodied fans in front of them stood up, they could watch replays on the little screens. I think it's amazing that the club has taken people's abilities into consideration.

The Ability Suite is not matched at any other stadium I have been to and by far exceeds the experience we had just one or two weeks later, when we were told we could not get a cup of tea until half time as the only facilities near the disabled fans area were for home fans only! (The club shall remain nameless!)

Finally, another thing that is of a high standard is

Dear Phil,

What can I say — a simple 'thank you' doesn't cover the gratitude I owe to you and your staff, as well as all Manchester United!

The whole match day experience was perfect from the moment we parked up right next to the stadium until we left after the game.

The disabled facilities available at your ground are better than any venue I've ever been to — and I'm talking about everywhere from the fanciest of restaurants to major shopping centres, sports and tourist venues around the world — and I've travelled!

Your Ability Suite is the perfect place to relax with a pie and a brew and I only wish we had similar at St James' Park for half time during those cold winter months.

It is with the utmost sincerity that I offer my thanks and congratulations in organising such facilities and staffing them with such kind, friendly people.

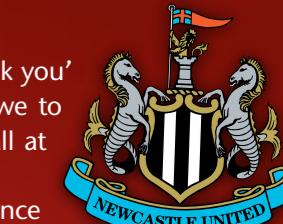
Yours sincerely, James Allerton.

Dear MUDSA,

I am just writing on behalf of my disabled mother to offer my thanks for use of your facilities at Old Trafford.

After a long drive from London it's great for her to be able to relax in the comfortable facilities of the Ability Suite before the game and to safely get a hot drink away from the crowds before we set off home.

Many thanks to all involved, Rob and Felicity Hayes.



The whole match day experience was perfect from the moment we parked up right next to the stadium until we left after the game.

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Yours sincerely, James Allerton.



# All our supporters are important to us but we have a special relationship with members of MUDSA

*“All our supporters are important to us but we have a special relationship with members of MUDSA*

**David Gill** — Former Manchester United Chief Executive

**A**s Finance Director for three years and then Chief Executive at Manchester United from 2000 onwards, David Gill has built up a professional and personal relationship with MUDSA and its members. He left his post in the summer of 2013, but in his new role as a non-executive director he has stated his intention to continue his commitment to improving facilities for the club's disabled fans.

David says: "It has been a constant part of my roles at the club to work with MUDSA. We have developed a very good working relationship with experienced and committed MUDSA committee members. The organisation has space in the Manchester United Foundation Offices on Sir Matt Busby Way. There are funds for a paid worker as well as



David Gill at the MUDSA 2011 Annual Dinner with Chas Banks, Mark Jones, Gary Neville, Gary Marshall and Phil Downs

support to pay for a carer for the MUDSA secretary, Phil Downs, enabling a representative of the club to play a role in improving facilities and attitudes elsewhere at other locations and grounds.

"We were glad to be able to part-fund MUDSA trips

to Barcelona, Moscow and Rome for Champions League finals in 1999, 2008 and 2009.

"Sir Alex Ferguson is a big fan of MUDSA and has, like myself, welcomed the chance to attend the Annual Dinner and Christmas Party. Many of the players have also said

how they have enjoyed being at these and other events organised by MUDSA.

"It was great to be able to find the space for the Ability Suite inside Old Trafford and to get support 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. The tenth anniversary of the opening of the Ability Suite is worth commemorating and it will be a special occasion when MUDSA celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2014.

"The club remains committed to continuing its healthy, working relationship with MUDSA in order to improve facilities for disabled fans in the future."

David Gill was interviewed by Mark Metcalf in March 2013.



# The good old days

**The opening of the Ability Suite was the product of many years of joint work between MUDSA and MUFC. This work has continued since then and in 2014 the relationship will be 25 years old. A special brochure will be published to mark the occasion but in this section we take a very brief look at how the two organisations have worked closely together to improve facilities for United's disabled fans.**

## LETTER IN THE POST

When Phil Downs was forced to return home after breaking his neck, aged 18, during training to become a Metropolitan Police Officer, he longed to be able to take up again his passion of following the Reds.

Letters were sent to Old Trafford and he waited and waited and waited. Five years, in fact, before he was invited to the final three games of the Dave Sexton era that ended on April 30 1981. Sexton was out and Phil was in!

Wheelchair users at this time came into the ground through the staff entrance. They then journeyed along the tunnel that passed the players dressing rooms before emerging in front of the current dugout where Sir Alex Ferguson sat for many years. They then took a spot on a specially concreted platform onto which 15-20 wheelchairs were squeezed along with their helpers who stood throughout the match. As the Old Trafford pitch had a crown back then, it meant that those in wheelchairs could not see the touchline on the North/Sir Alex Ferguson Stand side of the pitch, nor the ball if it was below the player's knees on that side of the pitch.

Refreshment facilities were nonexistent and any chance of having a brew meant bringing it yourself! Toilet facilities consisted of the use of a toilet in a tiny room used as storage space for cleaning materials. Such facilities were

not especially conducive to creating lasting friendships between disabled fans.

## IMPROVEMENTS

In the wake of the Hillsborough tragedy, in which 96 Liverpool fans lost their lives, the Taylor Report recommended that major football stadia should become all seater. All grounds would need to offer improved facilities and MUFC began the 1989-90 season by building new platform facilities for



*I have been a regular at Old Trafford for a very long time and the facilities for disabled fans were initially very poor and by being level with the pitch you could see very little. The toilets provided back then were a token gesture.*

**Ian Falla**

their disabled fans. Sadly these proved to be downright scary with a 90-degree turn at the bottom of the ramp meaning that a steward was strategically positioned

there to literally prevent serious injury being caused by someone losing control of their wheelchair. The dangers inherent in this system were illustrated by the bruises suffered by these unfortunates!

The message was that the key to improving facilities depended upon better communication between the club and its disabled supporters. Soon after, in 1989, a golden opportunity arose when Alex Ferguson's personal assistant and MUFC's link to disabled fans, Lyn Laffin, suggested to Phil a

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, curiously, later became the Ability Suite. Sandwiches and refreshments were ordered by Lyn while Kath Phipps, who nowadays, is the Receptionist at the Aon Training Complex, arranged for some of the players to attend. Everyone present had a great time and

those disabled fans given a chance to meet their heroes couldn't stop talking about it afterwards.

When Lyn posed the question about 'what next', a small group got together in February 1990 to discuss setting up a permanent organisation. The name – Manchester United Disabled Supporters Association – followed automatically. Kevin Peacock was appointed to become the first Chairman, Rose Cummins became Treasurer and Phil the Secretary, a role he has fulfilled ever since.

An agreement was made to draw up a constitution and formalise the existing committee. Every member

of the committee was asked to come to the Annual General Meeting at which people effectively nominated themselves. It was arranged that the dozen appointees would include a representative from each of the different categories of disabilities as well as people with specific skills such as an events organiser, a bookkeeper 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 essential for the vast majority of MUDSA members. The changes meant that the MUDSA committee became much more professional in its approach.

## CURRENT (2013) MUDSA COMMITTEE MEMBERS:



**Phil Downs, MBE**  
Secretary



**Sue Rocca**  
Treasurer, Chair



**Chas Banks**  
Social events organiser



**Des Turner**  
Rollin' Reds Editor



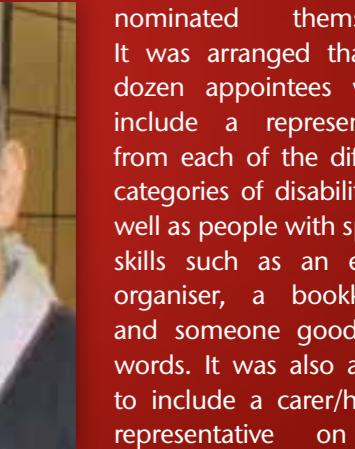
**Nigel Taylor**  
Visually Impaired Rep



**Anne-Marie Lewis**  
Social Events/Memorabilia



**Andy Wild**  
Memorabilia



**Liz Edwards**

Quadrant Rep



**Jamie Leeming**  
MUDSA Publications

MUDSA has always tried to shy away from being elitist and has taken the decision that a rotating Chair is best. This effectively means the Chair is passed around existing Committee members on an annual basis to include everyone except the Secretary.

Nigel Taylor, who is now retired after working for many organisations as a rehabilitation officer with visually impaired people, believes:

*The committee is a good eclectic mix of people and it's a pleasure to know them. But there are responsibilities to be undertaken and people are given tasks and expected to complete them.*



# The Christmas party

We wish it could be Christmas every day!

The first event organised by what became MUDSA was the 1989 Christmas Party, an idea first proposed by Sir Alex Ferguson's personal assistant Lyn Laffin.

The event has grown in size and stature and the 2012 Party witnessed the largest turnout ever by the players.

The 2014 party will be extra special as it will be the 25th such occasion.



*It's the least we can do by attending this party as the people here must face additional difficulties getting to the games and so can be counted amongst our most passionate fans.*

**Paul Scholes**



We wish it could be Christmas every day!

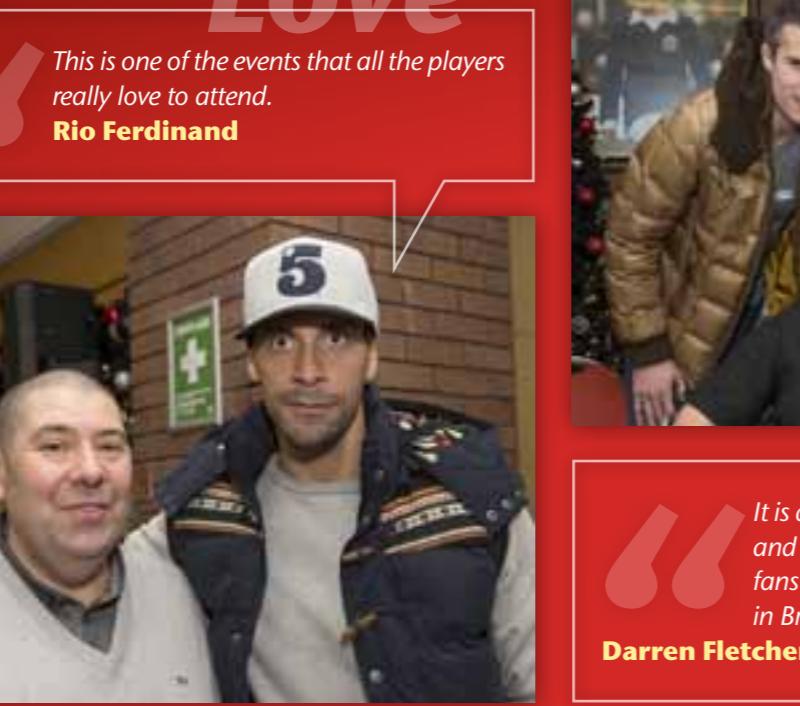


## Tradition

**M**UDSA's Ann-Marie Lewis and William Camden presented Wayne Rooney with the MUDSA player of the year.

He adds his name to an illustrious list including Darren Fletcher, Chicharito, Nemanja Vidic, Gary Neville, David Beckham, Cristiano Ronaldo, Andrew Cole, Ruud Van Nistelrooy and all the way back to Paul Ince plus, of course, the entire squad in 1999 as tribute to their winning the Treble.

**“**It is a player's tradition that we come to this event.  
**Nemanja Vidic**



## Love

**“**This is one of the events that all the players really love to attend.  
**Rio Ferdinand**



## Pleasure

**“**It is a pleasure to meet some familiar faces and to hear that the facilities for disabled fans at Old Trafford are possibly the best in Britain.  
**Darren Fletcher**



## Tradition

# The Christmas party

**“**It's great to see people enjoying themselves and it's an honour to sign the memorabilia they bring along. I am aware of the facilities for disabled people as the box where my family watches the game is near the concourse area. My wife's sister is a wheelchair user and so it's great to see facilities for wheelchair users being widely available at Old Trafford.

**Wayne Rooney**

Not long after Wayne was interviewed, his wife, Coleen, lost her sister. Rosie McLaughlin, 14, who had Rett syndrome, died in Liverpool on January 5 2013.

MUDSA extends its condolences to all Rosie's family and friends.







## Stadium development improves facilities

**M**anchester United's resurgence in the 1990s sent United's popularity rocketing.

In 1995 the North Stand (renamed the Sir Alex Ferguson stand in 2013) was reconstructed but the increase in



capacity to 50,000 was still not enough. As a condition was added to the scoreboard end (East Stand) and opened in January 2000, raising the capacity to 61,000.

The extra numbers included more disabled fans when the section that previously accommodated them was

## Stadium development improves facilities

moved from the South Stand to a newly elevated platform in the East Stand. Only Huddersfield Town at their ground, the John Smith's Stadium which was opened in 1994, had previously provided an elevated spot for those in wheelchair users to follow the action.

The area 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 simply require easy access seating due to moderate mobility difficulties.

In 2005 Manchester United began a further expansion at Old Trafford with the addition of second tiers to both the



northeast and northwest quadrants of the ground, creating an additional sixteen wheelchair spaces in the process.

A record attendance of 76,098 was recorded when United beat Blackburn Rovers 4-1 on 31 March 2007.



The 2005 stadium expansion in the north-east and north-west quadrants took Old Trafford's capacity to more than 76,000 and created 16 additional wheelchair spaces with some of the best view in world football

## Visually impaired supporters' facilities

**Manchester United provides visually impaired supporters with radio headsets in the main viewing area and also other parts of the stadium if need be.**

This is their means of receiving MUTV's match commentary which these days is called a 'Simulcast' because it goes out over the Manchester United website and through the VI sound systems simultaneously.

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

The VI section also has unique facility which allows individual



VI supporters to bring along their own hand-held LCD monitors which can be connected to the inputs beneath each seat.

# The headsets bring all the action alive



Emma Simister is 22 and visually impaired. Diagnosed as a child with cerebral palsy it was on the suggestion of her physiotherapist that she first considered joining MDSA and going to games at Old Trafford.

*I listen to the game on the headsets and it brings the action alive. You have a visual expectation and you can get to sense when the ball is close to the opposition goal. I love the atmosphere at Old Trafford and being at the matches makes you forget ordinary, everyday problems. That's the case for all fans, disabled and able-bodied.*



# MUDSA connecting with its members

MUDSA has a long 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 in the 1997-98 season and sixteen years later it has evolved into a 28-page glossy magazine with a print run of 500 copies per edition. It is distributed freely and continues to keep MUDSA members up to date with activities on and off the field with each edition carrying an interview with a current player and a summary of recent matches and MUDSA events.

*Rollin' Reds* was the first ever magazine published by a disabled football supporters' organisation.

On November 1 2002, MUDSA was also the first organisation of its kind to set up its own website: [www.mudsa.org](http://www.mudsa.org) and Sir Alex Ferguson was amongst more than 400 people who came along to mark the occasion.

Nowadays, 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: [www.facebook.com/MUDSA.official](http://www.facebook.com/MUDSA.official)

MUDSA can be contacted via the following channels:

Telephone: **0845 230 1989**

Email: [disability@manutd.co.uk](mailto:disability@manutd.co.uk)



**Manchester United Disabled Supporters' Association Promoting Inclusion**

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MUDSA Committee member, Steve Crompton, put together the first MUDSA website back in the mid 1990s when people accessed the web using 56K dial-up modems. It was always accompanied by that unforgettable weird buzzing noise but in the 21st century we now have an updated MUDSA website which simply grows and grows. One of the founding members of MUDSA, Steve Crompton sadly died in 2012.

**facebook** 1 year 10 months, 2 days ago



**DISABLED  
SUPPORTERS  
ASSOCIATION**