

# This is Ed Woodward



By Laurie Whitwell, Adam Crafton, Matt Slater and Oliver Kay (/author/laurie-whitwell-adam-crafton-matt-slater-and-oliver-kay/) 4h ago



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In the boardroom at Manchester United’s Mayfair office, where executive vice-chairman Ed Woodward conducts a significant amount of his business, there is an oak honours board on which gold writing details each trophy won by the club.

As much as it might impress potential commercial partners, it is primarily there to remind people of United’s ultimate ambition. Prospective signings have been known to engage in negotiations around the grand mahogany table and sources say it is an “impressive” environment, where the aspiration for silverware is pronounced.

On the far wall is a large framed photograph taken from the match between United and Manchester City on the 50th anniversary of the Munich air disaster. The scene portrays the silence that fell before kick-off, with red and white scarves raised aloft by those in the stands.

The corridors outside are wooden panelled, replicating those found at Old Trafford, with offices left and right. “It feels very similar to the stadium,” said a source. There are mannequins wearing United shirts, plus a patch of artificial grass, and a cabinet holding replica trophies including the jug-eared European Cup.

On the entrance to the building, which is a short walk from Buckingham Palace, there is a list of residents etched on gold-plate — but United’s name is absent. The secrecy guards against people buzzing up for pranks and, when times get tough, supporters finding an outlet for any anger.

We are in such a period. United are 12th, two points above the relegation places, and have scored only 19 goals in 23 matches. A sequence of two wins from eight Premier League games is their worst start to a league season in three decades and a fourth year without Champions League football since Sir Alex Ferguson retired beckons. Under Ferguson, United won 38 trophies in 27 years, including 13 Premier League titles.

Woodward, now 47, has been at the helm throughout the past six years and at Amsterdam’s Schiphol airport, after the 0-0 draw away to AZ Alkmaar, he was accosted by a group of United fans irate at his running of the club. United’s executive vice-chairman is said to have remained calm during the brief verbal attack but it was an indication of the febrile atmosphere that has started to stalk matches.

At St James’ Park, away fans chanted against the ruling Glazer family for the first time this season and Woodward, as the banker who pulled off their leveraged buyout of the club in 2005, is a lightning rod for grievances. He is also the man who oversees how their club is run and is paid about £4 million a year for doing so, according to the club’s latest published accounts.

Solskjaer is responsible for results on the pitch but Woodward, as the executive vice-chairman, bears accountability for the state of the club. He has been the consistent presence since United last challenged for the title.

Speaking to those who have dealt with him during his tenure, right up to the present, is to understand the modern Manchester United and piece together a picture of the man at the top regarded as “highly intelligent and personable”, but who has nevertheless overseen a period of decline on the pitch.

So just how did Woodward rise to a position of such influence? Almost overnight he became the most powerful person at an institution that had been governed by the man from Govan for nearly three decades. Ferguson had spent his life in the game, as a player and manager, but Woodward's path has been different.

Born in Chelmsford, he went to Brentwood, a £20,000-a-year independent school in a well-to-do Essex suburb, between 1983 and 1989. The Chelsea manager Frank Lampard and the former Millwall manager Neil Harris also went to Brentwood around that time.

Woodward's brother played a little football with Lampard for the school team but it is believed the first time the United executive met the England international was after the 4-0 win over Chelsea at Old Trafford in August. Those who overheard the conversation say Woodward revealed his childhood Derby County allegiance to Lampard, who had previously managed at Pride Park. It has been reported that Woodward was once a Liverpool fan, which he denies, though he has said that he followed Chelmsford City in his youth, the team nearest to where he was born.

Woodward's grandfather had worked at a cotton mill, while Woodward's father is originally from Belper in Derbyshire, before he moved the family south for a job at Ford. There is a story that the interview panel told Woodward Senior he would hear their decision in a week, to which he replied he would wait 30 minutes at a pub across the road. He was given the job when he returned from his pint.

A school friend from Brentwood, who is still close to Woodward, described him as a "brilliant swimmer" who "loved all sport, rugby as much as football" and is a "loyal, family-orientated guy, with a tight circle of close friends".

He said Woodward is "witty, sharp, very hard-working and hugely resilient" and "one of the most competitive people I know." He added: "Privacy matters to Ed and it always has done, so it doesn't surprise me not to see him quoted in the press or giving interviews."

Occasionally Woodward can be spotted at Twickenham, although his swimming days are behind him. He was said to be good enough for his county, but a case of arthritis aged 11 hampered his abilities.

Woodward studied physics at Bristol University, before gaining entry to the graduate scheme at PricewaterhouseCoopers and then joining JP Morgan's international mergers and acquisitions team in 1999.

It was in the role that he met the Glazer family and gained their trust through the highly-leveraged £790 million takeover of United in 2005.

Sources familiar with the deal say that several banks had turned down the Glazers' initial approaches, conscious of the risks involved, but it was JP Morgan and Woodward who eventually ran with the controversial plans and executed them.

Thousands of fans protested and in 2004 David Gill said “debt is the road to ruin” — only for United's then chief executive to alter that stance once the writing was on the wall.

One source says: “Woodward was actually a mid-level banker at the time, rather than the highest flyer, but this gave him the benefit of having the regular day-to-day contact with the client, the Glazers.”

At the age of 34, he was rapidly appointed as the late Malcolm Glazer's “chief of staff” and in 2007 he took charge of United's commercial operations, growing a stream of revenue which stood at £48.7 million in 2005 to £117.6 million in 2012.

There is an argument that United's commercial boom did, in truth, precede the Glazers' takeover in 2005, however. Manchester City's chief executive Ferran Soriano notes in his book how United's revenue rose from €62m in the 1995-96 season to €251m by the 2002-03 season. Barcelona's growth only saw a rise from €58 million to €123 million in the same time. As such, United's momentum was firmly established.

Woodward has not given many media interviews since arriving at the club 14 years ago but he does have to answer questions from one group of United watchers every three months: the club's major institutional shareholders.

The quarterly conference call is almost the only time Woodward is quoted these days, apart from in-club press releases to announce a sacking, signing or sponsor.

Last year, he told an investor who was concerned about results on the pitch that he need not worry as “playing performance doesn't really have a meaningful impact on what we do on the commercial side”.

There was no follow-up question — there never is — and the conversation moved on to how many followers United have on Facebook. But by answering “simply and candidly”, Woodward had opened a window into his tenure at Old Trafford that was seized on by his critics.

In September last year, United supporters disgruntled by two defeats in their opening three games paid for a plane to fly a banner that read “Ed Woodward specialist in failure” over Turf Moor. But those close to Woodward are adamant his “ultimate ambition” is to see United become Premier League champions again.

Last month United announced record annual revenues of £627 million, another year of sell-out crowds, and a list of financial, global, media and regional sponsors that number more than 70. “Noodle partners in Japan” have been a stick to beat Woodward with, but he has been known to tell people he couldn’t say where United have such deals, insisting it is not his domain. Instead, he has been football-focused since becoming chief executive in 2013.

People who met Woodward in his first weeks in charge were impressed by his single-mindedness, particularly regarding Wayne Rooney.

Chelsea and Jose Mourinho were knocking hard at the door and, when Rooney was seen pictured playing golf at a course 10 miles from the Blues’ training ground in Cobham, it seemed a departure was imminent. “Everyone thought Rooney was going to Chelsea,” said a source familiar with the talks. Rooney’s relationship with Ferguson had become immeasurably strained and, even though his former Everton boss David Moyes had taken over, a move to Stamford Bridge appealed greatly. Chelsea made two bids, the second worth £25 million, and Rooney went with his agent Paul Stretford to see Woodward and ask to leave.

But United’s chief executive told them Rooney would be going nowhere. He viewed the sale of a 27-year-old capable of scoring 20 goals a season to a direct rival as a sign of weakness that could not be tolerated in the summer of Ferguson’s retirement. It was a calculated risk and a strong stance as his first act, yet also a continuation of the banker who said yes when several others said no to the leveraged buyout of United by the Glazer family.

Woodward said of Rooney and Stretford: “I don’t want to be their friend. We think Wayne loves football so much he won’t sulk, he’ll go on the pitch and give his all.” As predicted, Rooney stayed, and he played four more campaigns, breaking Sir Bobby Charlton’s United scoring record.



There was though, a curious footnote that somewhat undermined Woodward’s claims to want a purely professional relationship with United’s players. After Louis van Gaal’s side had beaten Everton in an FA Cup semi-final in 2016, Woodward, who had watched on from holiday in Dubai, sent Rooney a text. “Hi Wazza,” it began. “Loved the game.” Rooney had played well in a new midfield role but, suffice to say, he was not impressed at efforts to be “matey”.

Others tell a different story. One player who left the club in recent years after his contract expired received only a perfunctory letter in the post, rather than any personal touch.

There have been occasions when Woodward’s messages have gone down better. One player with links to United got a ping on his phone after suffering a bad injury. It was Woodward wishing him a smooth recovery and was certainly well received.

On this theme there is a suspicion among some agents that Woodward, for all his supposed intentions to appoint a “head of football”, enjoys the glamour of the game too much to ever truly relinquish involvement in transfers.

“When it comes to knowing football, knowing players and getting deals done, it isn’t his game,” says one respected intermediary. “It’s a power thing in my opinion. Woodward — or Judge (head of corporate finance Matt Judge, the club’s chief negotiator) — could do a deal with Chevrolet, for example, and it comes and goes without anybody really saying much about it. But when you land a big player you get the plaudits, that’s what they’re chasing. They’ve made mistakes and yet they’re still in charge.”

Woodward undoubtedly gave an impression of liking the lustre of a major catch when he spoke in a 2015 interview about the “shivers down the spine” caused by Bastian Schweinsteiger’s name being seen on United’s teamsheet.

There was little heard from Woodward when Fellaini signed for United in September 2013 in a deal in which they paid £4 million more than the buyout clause – sources say Moyes felt Everton would accept less – but he was keen to portray his role in Juan Mata’s £37.1 million signing the following January. He let it be known he celebrated by “throwing a couple of logs on the fire” at his farmhouse home in Cheshire. By this point, he had moved north from Barnes, where he counted Gary Lineker as a next-door neighbour.

But two signings in two windows hardly deserved a round of applause and Moyes had been concerned early on. As names such as Thiago Alcantara, Cesc Fabregas, Toni Kroos, Ander Herrera and Gareth Bale flew around Carrington, without any signing, Moyes wondered aloud about the legitimacy of those pursuits. “I don’t know if this man is a genius or a clown,” Moyes said of Woodward. There was little laughter when none of that stellar wish-list arrived.

The recruitment system without Ferguson’s alchemy was flawed. A scout’s recommendation for Atletico Madrid’s Saul Niguez, available then for £8 million, fell through the gaps, while Moyes rejected the one signing lined up, Thiago, because he was not personally familiar with the player.

Woodward has tried to prevent history repeating itself by now sanctioning the pursuit of multiple signings per position, before confirming a main target. An analogy he uses has become known in agent circles. “He says he hits three or four off the tee, two up the fairway, and sinks one on the green,” says a source. At times a player’s personal terms have even been agreed, and contracts drawn up, only for lines of communication to go cold as United instead close in on a different target. Woodward has been known to place a courtesy call after the event to explain and assuage.

Discussions usually start with Judge calling up the relevant agent from an unknown number, before progressing via emails. Rarely does Woodward get involved at that level.

He did personally engage in Harry Maguire's transfer this summer, because of a good relationship with the Leicester chief executive Susan Whelan, but the protracted nature of the talks tested the patience of others involved. There were a number of meetings where little progressed before Woodward pushed the button on an £80 million bid a week before the deadline. Solskjaer had wished to get the central defender in for the start of pre-season.

Woodward instead prioritised Aaron Wan-Bissaka, with negotiations hitting "a bit of a stand-off" for two weeks before Crystal Palace accepted £50 million at the end of June.

The last transfer window closed with United making three signings and a familiar lament over recruitment, this time regarding quantity rather than quality. Maguire, Wan-Bissaka and Daniel James have made good impressions, but with Romelu Lukaku, Alexis Sanchez, Ander Herrera, Chris Smalling, Matteo Darmian and Marouane Fellaini out the door, there was a strong argument for a more aggressive recruitment drive.

Ryan Giggs, who Ole Gunnar Solskjaer consulted about James, said last week that United need another "four or five" players. There appears little reason why, for a club with United's financial muscle, a couple more couldn't already be in the building.

The sale of Lukaku dragged and had a knock-on effect. *The Athletic* has been told that Solskjaer wanted the Belgian striker sold early in pre-season so he could take a look at his attack and know the budget for a replacement. Solskjaer even let associates know at the League Managers' Association dinner in May that Lukaku was on the way out.

Lukaku felt confused during the summer as to whether he was wanted by the club or not and was at times given the impression he might still be part of their plans. But it was not until the third week of July that Inter Milan bid €60 million (about £54 million).

Unsurprisingly, it was rejected. Then on August 8, deadline day in the Premier League, United accepted €80 million (£72 million) after Woodward had, in the fortnight previous, used discussions over Paulo Dybala and Mario Mandzukic to bring Juventus in as a rival to Inter and drive up the fee.

It seems greater speed could have landed Mandzukic, however. "Towards the end the right one, we just didn't get him over the line," Solskjaer said on Sunday, alluding to the Juventus striker.



Fears over squad depth were realised in dramatic fashion in the loss at Newcastle, where Solskjaer had to send on two raw teenagers in Mason Greenwood and Tahith Chong when searching for a goal.

Undoubtedly Ferguson's fingerprints were on the decision to appoint Solskjaer and Mike Phelan when the time came to dismiss Mourinho. Woodward's demeanour was said to have become increasingly fraught during those final weeks of Mourinho's reign, with expletive-laden phone conversations becoming a soundtrack to working days.

One source is adamant that the idea to solve the problem of a mid-season sacking by bringing in the Norwegian on a caretaker basis, supplemented by Phelan, originated from Ferguson. It was not the first time he had been involved in the selection of a new manager, of course.

Previously Ferguson guided United towards Moyes as his successor, prompting the "Chosen One" moniker — but his plan was not followed entirely. Ferguson is thought to have believed United would be best served by his coaching team of Phelan, Rene Meulensteen and Eric Steele staying on for at least one more campaign. However, once in position, Moyes decided to go his own way and, with Woodward's ultimate authority, the trio left, taking their title-winning knowledge with them. Sources believe a more established chief executive may have insisted on the continuity blueprint.

It is said Woodward has not been on Ferguson's wavelength ever since, and some observers have claimed the pair don't speak when together in the directors' suite at Old Trafford. "They can be ten yards from each other and not shake hands," said one. United sources dispute this characterisation and insist the pair do talk.

Moyes, of course, lasted only 10 months, beginning the string of managers who have left dissatisfied at Woodward. Perhaps it is rare for an employee to remain cordial with a boss delivering a P45 but it is notable how Van Gaal and Mourinho also carry particular grievances with him.

Van Gaal said he felt "betrayed" at getting sacked effectively the day he won the FA Cup — as with Moyes, news seeped out in the media before he himself had been told by the club — and the Dutchman also made salient points about transfer strategy. "I didn't always

get the players that I wanted,” he told the Guardian in June. “You are always dependent on Woodward and Judge.”

Mourinho’s opinions on Woodward evidently ran along similar lines, particularly in the summer of 2018. He had been awarded an extended contract in January but a few months later his requests for a new centre-half were rebuffed. United offered minimal flexibility as Mourinho — becoming increasingly divisive — had changed his mind from when targets were drawn up around April.

In the end Mourinho got Diogo Dalot, Lee Grant, and Fred. There are claims Mourinho only acceded to the Brazilian midfielder, who came at a cost of £52 million, because he felt the alternative was no midfielder at all.

There has been greater harmony with Solskjaer and Phelan, who both take an active part in deciding transfer targets. Chief scouts Jim Lawlor and Mick Court, who served Ferguson, also contribute with the assistance of a team of analysts. John Murtough, the youth development chief, and Marcel Bout, the head of global scouting, are influential as well.

Woodward has overseen a streamlining of United’s scouting system. As well as Wyscout and typical information-gathering tools, United use a bespoke database to produce 800 players per position before the pool is whittled down by first-hand views. Either the management team or the recruitment department has the power of veto, although in the latter case it is rare. When this does happen, Woodward is the one to inform the manager, as was the case with Mourinho for Jerome Boateng and Toby Alderweireld last summer.

“You don’t really get near Woodward, he delegates a lot of work to Murtough and Judge,” said one leading agent. “Judge is like an acting director of football, really. But what experience has he got in the football industry?”

The question of what United’s hierarchy know of the football industry is not limited to Judge. Woodward, Judge and Richard Arnold, the group managing director, were all undergraduates at Bristol University in the early ’90s before going on to work in close proximity at either JP Morgan or PricewaterhouseCoopers and then being employed at United.

It has led to accusations of cronyism but United would strongly reject the allegation.

Judge and Arnold were friends at university but Judge and Woodward did not meet until they had corresponding spells at PwC and JP Morgan. Woodward appointed Judge to a role at United in 2012 and then promoted him to assisting with transfer negotiations in early 2016. Mourinho mentioned Judge during the pursuit of Sanchez.

Arnold, United's group managing director since March 2013, is close to Woodward too. While they were both Bristol undergraduates, they did not meet until their first day together at PwC in 1993. They both left in 1999. Primarily responsible for United's huge commercial growth through tailored sponsorship deals across the globe, Arnold "has a rugby background". "That's why he's built like he is," says a source. "Commercially he is 'wow'. Major power. But he is not a football man."

Woodward would undoubtedly insist that each man is absolutely the best person for the job. United's commercial potential has been realised by Arnold, who is now launching a Chinese-language United app. Woodward could also argue how Judge's career in finance — where he would be required to pick through the fact and fiction of those on the opposite side of the table to complete multi-million-pound deals — aligns with his responsibilities at United.

There was one early incident that exposed the differences between working in the city and football, though. Judge held a positive early meeting with a representative of Edinson Cavani but then saw the move derailed when the brother of the player became involved and made different demands. Judge now often asks for prospective details to be outlined in an email.

United's chief financial officer Cliff Baty, appointed in October 2015, is a genuine football fanatic who has followed Newcastle United home and away, but Woodward has acknowledged the benefit that could be added to the senior structure by searching for a "head of football". The process has been going for more than a year, though, and it does not appear an appointment will be arriving any time soon.

Woodward spoke with Rio Ferdinand, Patrice Evra, and Darren Fletcher among others about the role but those conversations have yet to lead to anywhere definitive. A committee of former players offering formal advice on signings was proposed but fairly quickly parked.

Woodward is still on friendly terms with Ferdinand and the pair sometimes enjoy cups of tea together, while Evra has been in at Carrington studying for his coaching badges and Fletcher has been in the directors' box at Old Trafford.

One powerful agent believes the players were spoken to as a means of gleaning information without a realistic prospect of an appointment. Another United source questioned whether Gary Neville's robust public argument that the position required an individual of specific proficiency put Woodward off the old guard. "It is a specialist role," the source said.

Phelan held lengthy talks about becoming a technical director of sorts, with oversight on the culture at Carrington, but Solskjaer wanted him by his side on matchdays, so he remained assistant manager.

One candidate discovered the proposed role had the potential to be more about carrying messages than making decisions. When it emerged any appointment could work from the club's Mayfair offices, the sense grew United did not carry serious intentions for significant change.

"Being disconnected from the training ground, you don't see the reactions to decisions first-hand," said one executive of another club. "Up close you can build that trust." Solskjaer has actually invited Woodward to watch training to help build rapport and the pair have been seen in deep conversation during sessions.

Ultimately, a sporting or technical director should be the person to guide the vision of the club so that decisions are thought through and, while managers may come and go, the strategy of the club continues.

"A technical director's role is always best described as looking after the interests of the club in the medium to long term," said Dan Ashworth recently. Ashworth is now at Brighton having previously worked at the FA and West Bromwich Albion. "My view is that if you keep changing the head coach every 14 months or so, which is the average lifespan of a manager nowadays, and then go from one philosophy to another, you have no chance of joining up your loans, academy, development and player recruitment."

Since Ferguson, United have lurched from one mode of thinking to another, with Solskjaer adopting a drastically different course to Mourinho. Out have gone the robust ready-made stars, in have come the promising quick players.

The Sanchez signing, trumpeted at the time, created ripple effects still being felt now due to the scale of his wages, which could reach £560,000 per week with add-ons. Woodward felt compelled to get Mourinho the player who could transform the 2017-18 title race, only for the move to backfire, mainly due to two unforeseen issues. Each might have been flagged by a "head of football" in advance.

The first is that other players begin to feel devalued by comparison. “Such a large gap in salary causes a problem for the manager and the rest of the team,” said an administrator who, to maintain squad accord at his Football League club, has turned down a request for a pay-rise from the agent of one well-performing player who is already the club’s top earner.

At United the knock-on effect meant Ander Herrera left this past summer after the club were slow to offer a new deal. Solskjaer would have liked him to stay.

David de Gea also used Sanchez as a guide in his talks, even if he ultimately wanted to commit to pay back the supporters and Solskjaer, who stuck by him during his poor form. De Gea, whose negotiations only concluded on September 16, has previously told friends of his concerns around the club’s long-term trajectory and fears that the mish-mash of signings in the transfer market have not provided managers with the requisite tools to succeed. The emotion in De Gea’s post-match interview on Sunday was the public airing of an internal frustration that has been bubbling up for several years.

The second issue over Sanchez was that a look into his Arsenal time would have yielded a picture of someone who wasn’t universally popular. A former United figure told *The Athletic*: “However good a player he is, if he’s potentially going to be unpopular, then forget it. It’s what a proper sporting director would do. I just can’t see Woodward or Judge doing that.”

It is understood systems at United have now been altered to rigorously check the characters of all potential signings.

After years working his way up in the financial world, Woodward had to learn on the job when it came to football. He had little experience of agents, Premier League executive meetings, and UEFA politicking.

An early story reveals the gap that required bridging. When Everton wanted to sign Tom Cleverley, their manager Roberto Martinez told his board to offer no more than £5.5 million as the midfielder’s contract was up at the end of the season. Woodward confidently turned down the advances, arguing he could get up to £10 million elsewhere. As it turned out, Aston Villa took him on loan, very late on deadline day, United paid the majority of his wages and then Everton signed him for nothing when his contract was up.

A source told *The Athletic*: “Nobody who knows Woodward hates him. Rather, what grates is the impression that he has been learning on the job’.”

Colleagues describe a “charming and affable” boss, and more than one agent says he is “very personable”. He is said to be a good conversationalist — showing genuine interest in those in his company — particularly if fuelled by his favourite coffee: a double espresso. He sometimes dresses casually, with jeans, open-necked shirt, and jumper.

But another intermediary who experienced tense negotiations is less complimentary. “Woodward can be arrogant,” he claims. “If you ever say something that pushes his buttons he will be like, ‘Do you know who I am?’ His job is impossible really isn’t it, but I don’t think he covers himself in glory.”

There is, perhaps, a misconception that Gill would have coped better than Woodward in the aftermath of Ferguson’s retirement. Gill’s background was not in football when he joined from the travel firm First Choice Holidays in 1997. He built up knowledge and gravitas over time. Working with the world’s most respected and hands-on manager was inevitably a huge help.

Gill did not need to sack or appoint a manager or construct a vision for the club. He commanded respect in the market from a position of strength, with United champions, and even then negotiations could be tortured. Ferguson is said to have disliked dealing with Daniel Levy, so Gill took control of talks over Dimitar Berbatov. As a memento he keeps a photograph his wife took on holiday of his foot on a fire hydrant during one phone call with the Tottenham chairman.

United did try to bring in an established striker this summer too. *The Athletic* understands they made another check on Antoine Griezmann in the spring before Barcelona secured a deal. Players also privately discussed the option of Fernando Llorente on a free transfer as a last resort.

While team-mates recognised the limitations of Herrera, Fellaini and Lukaku, there was an appreciation by senior players that the trio possessed qualities that could earn United points even on days when the team had performed poorly. The failure to replace these players raised eyebrows.

The Glazer's faith in a sole figure such as Woodward is not replicated at NFL side Tampa Bay Buccaneers. The Bucs do not have a traditional team president but instead have a clearly defined structure. The general manager Jason Licht handles on-field matters and aided the search for a coach last January, while they have a chief operating officer in Brian Ford who is the public affairs figure handling the business and marketing elements.

The Glazers will likely drop into United's London offices over the next week as the Bucs are due to play in London at the new White Hart Lane.

One source this week suggested that the Glazers are more hands-on than we are often led to believe. "They are involved in the decision-making processes far more than you would think," said one agent close to the club. "Maybe it suits them and shields them to have the world think Ed does it all."

Under-performance has also been tolerated by the Glazers in Tampa. Licht is now in his sixth year despite the team failing to make the play-offs and having a record of 27 wins and 53 defeats during his first five years. At both organisations, the valuations continue to rise. The Bucs, bought for \$192 million in 1995, were valued by Forbes in September at \$2.2 billion. This is a 10 per cent increase in value from the previous year, despite failing to make the play-offs since 2007.

The six Glazer children have differing levels of interest in the two sports. Joel and Bryan are the pair most heavily involved in Tampa, while Darcie runs the community and foundation work and has also promoted outreach work with female supporters. Avram, rarely seen in Tampa, is most often in contact with Woodward, along with siblings Joel and Edward. The sixth child Kevin has rarely been involved on either side.

The Glazers did sit in on head coach interviews in Tampa and they do also have a say when the team considers any playing additions who could cause off-field reputational damage. Before appointing Solskjaer on a full-time basis, members of the Glazer family were in the stands and in the dressing room after wins over Fulham and Paris Saint-Germain.

They will be studying these latest results acutely, but Solskjaer's position is not under threat. There is an acceptance the "cultural reset" will require patience and injuries have badly affected performances.

For Mourinho, it was different. He won the Europa League and League Cup and was sacked less than a year after signing a new contract because he was lighting fires at Carrington.

The Spanish contingent of De Gea, Herrera and even Mourinho's old foe Mata, did not expect United's problems to disappear there though. They knew issues lay deeper and warned friends to that effect.

Speaking to those around the dressing room this week, there is no desire to see Solskjaer forced out of the club, sensing that repeated managerial changes have done little to steady a curve of regression. "They like the manager," said one source. "He gets on with them, he says the same things they say, he knows what needs to be done. But will be allowed the time and investment to do it?"

United are adamant the answer to that is yes. But once again Woodward, as he looks to that honours board in his Mayfair office, will be key to the call.

*(Top photo: Simon Stacpoole/Offside/Getty Images))*

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MEH



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AWESOME



22 COMMENTS

Add a comment...

**Wilfred B.** 3h ago

Missing out on thiago because Moyes was not 'personally familiar' with the player is such a damning indictment of him as manager. Imagine the team with pogba and thiago playing together now





**Ryan M.** 1h ago

@Wilfred B. absolutely right - but the 'Pep Confidential' book suggests that Thiago was always going to Bayern, what with Pep's brother being his agent.



**Conor G.** 3h ago

Great article, great detail. The kind worth paying for



**Tisini F.** 3h ago

Very insightful article!



**Alex B.** 3h ago

'Last year, he told an investor who was concerned about results on the pitch that he need not worry as "playing performance doesn't really have a meaningful impact on what we do on the commercial side"'

Pretty much sums it up right there. Worrying about the commercial side more than results.

It's amazing how downhill United have gone since Alex left.

Now they are left with bad owners, and bad directors.

The worst part for them is they are now in panic buy mode, and everyone knows it. They better hope the youth movement pays dividends.



**Chris W.** 2h ago

Great read



**James M.** 2h ago

This is so depressing and yet so insightful

 7 

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**Jonathan T.** 2h ago

Really hope Ole is given time!

 3 

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**Ryan C.** 1h ago

Great Read



 3 

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**Jonathan L.** 1h ago

This is an incredibly good article. It really comes across that as is noted in the story, Woodward is learning on the job and that's just ridiculous in this day and age for a club like Manchester United.

The Tampa Bay issues of failing on the pitch but increasing in value are a horrible insight into what the future looks like unless something is done to improve the structure.

 10 

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**Chris O.** 1h ago

Fascinating read.

 3 

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**Daniel O.** 1h ago

This is top journalism, fantastic read.

 5 

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**Jamal M.** 1h ago

Excellent work to all of you



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**Ben L.** 1h ago

Great article Laurie



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**Ryan M.** 1h ago

"...he has been football-focused since becoming chief executive in 2013" is all we need to know.

If he isn't the man bringing in the noodle sponsorships, then he absolutely should be removed.

Great article.



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**Josh H.** 1h ago

For this of us that revel in Man United's downturn, this kind of stuff is gold. Can't see them turning it around whilst he's still there. Long may he reign.



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**David O.** 1h ago

As a United fan this was a thoroughly depressing read. A very well-written and researched article, but I was hoping each paragraph was the last as I was getting increasingly depressed.

I've been an NFL fan a long time now and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers are a shadow of the Super Bowl champions that they were 17 years ago. If they won the Super Bowl it would be as surprising as Leicester's Premier League win. The Glazers have proven that they are happy with mediocrity as long as money keeps coming in the door.

It comes across that Woodward's ego is the clearest and most obvious stumbling block to progress, surely if he were the "shrewd and cunning businessman" that he seems to think he is then he would rectify the problem here.

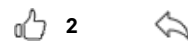
Reading this on my my way to work and now genuinely sad, it's only uphill from here. Hopefully.



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**Dan D.** 55m ago

Excellent piece built on impressive reporting. It's piece like this that are why I pay the subscription fee



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**John R.** 39m ago

Hats off to Ed. Not all heroes wear capes.



---

**John M.** 22m ago

Very insightful. Great read.



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**James G.** 21m ago

Fantastic article, most detailed and clear account of the club since 2013 (and excellent points regarding Gill learning on the job too). If Woodward is as smart and personable etc as is portrayed, AND delegates to Judge regarding negotiations, then surely he can see the need to have football expertise that he can delegate to as well? With the club where it is compared to City and Liverpool especially he doesn't have the luxury of indulging his own desire for power or fame re: transfers; he needs to spend the money from the commercial side to make sure the football expertise outside of the manager is world class. (Though a few coaches with some ideas about how to attack as the dominant team would be no harm)



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**Ed P.** 14m ago

Fantastic read.



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