

Two Birds, One Stone

As ruthless as football can be sometimes, it's never considered pleasant to kick a team when they're down. With fans, and be honest with yourselves here, there's only so much misery you'd like heaped upon your rivals, right?

Watching them lose heavily on Match of the Day to anyone lower down the league can raise a smile every time, much like managers being dismissed to the stands, or that loud-mouth badge-kissing midfielder air-kicking an audacious attempt on goal. Even higher up the scathing scale, relegation can be hilarious in the right circumstances, but then a season without derby day just isn't as good. Like Christmas without decorations. 'I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue' without Humph. Sex without, well, you get the gist.

For every reassuring arm around your pals shoulder, every "it'll be alright, chuck", and every consoling pint you buy them, that nagging feeling at the back of your mind is that it could very well happen to you, soon. So you're magnanimous hoping that should the shoe be on the other foot, they'd be the same to you.

This is all very well for the instances where your friend has seen his side trounced 3-0 by a dogged relegation candidate, but what should you do in a situation where both parties have known it was just a matter of time before the biggest bragging rights of a generation could come crashing down at one's boots?

With some air of pessimism rather than actual fact, I doubt there are Liverpool or Arsenal fans over the country who'd openly admit to having a best friend who supported Manchester United, and vice versa. Regrettably, should events at the end of the season go the way of Sir Alex, it could be about to diminish any existing relationships further.

All down to two numbers: nineteen, and thirty-eight.

Admittedly, United fans haven't had the most impressive of seasons to brag about. The squad haven't been firing on all proverbial cylinders this campaign, highlighted by individual questions marks over players: Rooney is not the Rooney of last winter, Fletcher and Carrick have gone into their shells, Whilst Nani and Berbatov, great as they have been in a handful of matches, are lacking consistency in their games for them to be considered in the same breath as Vidic for player of the season.

It has not been a struggle, nor has it been a walk in the park. Think proficient, instead of dominant.

Performances aside, United are unbeaten, and top of the league. Should it remain that way come May, Sir Alex would have achieved two lots of bragging rights in one fell swoop; not only would he have finally knocked Liverpool off "that fucking perch", but he would have rattled Arsene Wenger's birdcage as well.

There's no secret that there's no love lost between the North-West sides, and it certainly doesn't need detailing again. However, there's meeting twice a season, sucking up all of Sky's hyperbole and finding out how is 'on top' for that weekend, and then there's having nineteen league titles written into the history books, whilst the overtaken team are limp, lifeless and altogether drowning lower down the league table.

There are no arms comforting enough for that body blow. There are no consoling pints deep enough to drown the feeling of being ousted for a badge of honour you can no longer rightly hold. Yes, it's still an impressive feat, but for your rivals to go one better? That's the bitterest pill in sport.

Then, as if one extraordinary feat is not enough one other could also be achieved: An unbeaten 38-game season. Arguably, (and I stress arguably, because it's odds on to be contested) one of Arsene Wenger's greatest achievements as manager of Arsenal is going undefeated throughout a whole season. The

Frenchman, recently named 'Coach of the Decade', brashly said it was possible, and was proven to be correct in what many Arsenal fans would call their best season, with their best team, in a long time.

In a season where, once again, the need for a trophy to be won in North London is immense, a rival manager taking the club's greatest achievement from the last decade and matching it without so much as a by your leave isn't just brash, its tantamount to burglary.

As with Liverpool, it'll take more than a few heartfelt words to make it all better. Roll your eyes at "All good things must come to an end, mate".

But with those words comes a warning; with these two grand achievements secured, who would deny Fergie a long overdue retirement?

Then, misery may have to find a new home.