

Beginning of the end?

Football

AFP, London

David Beckham might have had enough of Alex Ferguson after the Manchester United manager refused to apologise for the dressing room bust-up that left the England captain with a cut eye.

Ferguson accused Beckham of 'cocking-up as a footballer' during a four-letter tirade that sparked a bust-up following Saturday's 2-0 FA Cup defeat by Arsenal.

A red-faced Ferguson swore at the top of his voice before finally kicking a boot across the dressing room. It struck Beckham above the left eye and caused a cut requiring two stitches.

The bust-up, reported by the Sun newspaper, was later confirmed by Ferguson.

"That happens in a dressing room. It's one of those freak acts of nature that happens and it's over," said the volatile United boss.

"I mean it's a freak it will never happen again."

Before Ferguson's confirmation Manchester United had been keeping studiously quiet about the affair.

"Whatever happens in the dressing room remains private," a club spokesman had said.

A grim-looking Beckham was seen driving his car to training Monday morning with the damage clearly visible to his left eye.

Beckham reportedly went wild with anger and the pair had to be separated by two team-mates to prevent a fight after Beckham spat at Ferguson.

It now threatens Beckham's entire future at Old Trafford and could undermine United's whole season, as they bid for a treble of Premiership, League Cup and Champions League.

A source said 27-year-old Beckham had to hold his Posh Spice wife Victoria back from confronting the 61-year-old Ferguson.

"This will run and run and we fear it could prompt David to leave United for good," the source said.

Already AC Milan and Real Madrid have alerted agents to seek possible talks with the superstar, who still has two and half years left on his 90,000 pounds (150,000 dollar) a week contract, the Sun



PHOTO: INTERNET
THAT'S FOR REAL! English soccer star David Beckham at training yesterday with the cut above his eye.

reported.

The showdown brought to head a simmering unease between Ferguson and Beckham, which stretches back nearly four years.

While Beckham refers to the Scot as a father-figure and the manager respects the player's professionalism, there are still problems.

Ferguson has always been irritated by Beckham's celebrity status and has grown tired of the circus surrounding him. Far from blaming the media for the attention Beckham is given, he believes the player is at fault for bringing the pressure on himself. Last November, Ferguson said nobody should feel sorry for the player having to put up with being under such a spotlight.

Beckham is paid 1.4 million pounds (2.5 million dollars) a year by Adidas to wear their Predator boots. They supply him with boots bearing the names of his sons, Brooklyn and Romeo. It was not sure if it was one of his own boots that struck him in the face.

"He has a lifestyle he enjoys and I don't know how he does it. I don't know how he can live that life, because of the attention he gets all the time. David enjoys it. He realises he has a star status and a lot of it is by his own design," Ferguson said.

"He has cultivated it himself. He likes to dress in a certain way, changes his hairstyle and is not aware how that is portrayed by a lot of people. I say that to him time and again."

The first real cracks in their relationship came back in September 1999.

Ferguson fined Beckham for appearing at a fashion show wearing a bandana on his head the night before the team flew out for a

Champions League match.

The boss thought the image was absurd and Beckham in turn was at being torn off a strip for it.

What Ferguson hates most of all is what he feels is lack of professionalism.

So when, in February 2000, Beckham failed to turn up for training, claiming his son Brooklyn was ill, the boss was left raging on learning later that the player's wife, Victoria, had been pictured out shopping.

When Beckham returned to training the next day, Ferguson went mad in front of the other players and sent him home.

Beckham was subsequently dropped for the following game against Leeds.

And Ferguson was expected to use the excuse of a leg injury to drop Beckham for Wednesday's Champions League game against Italian giants Juventus at Old Trafford.

Beckham trained Monday with the cut clearly visible.

That cut is now set to become as infamous as 'The Foot' which was the centre of national attention after Beckham fractured it and almost missed going to South Korea and Japan for last year's World Cup.

Ferguson's ballistic temper was criticised by management consultants.

"What we could be looking at here is a case of bullying. But the real difficulties arise when the bullying has been going on for some time," Tony Mellish, a Trades Union Congress health and safety expert, said.

Gareth Hughes, a clinical psychologist, said there was nothing wrong with anger but Ferguson was wrong to have let himself get carried away.

"Management by fear is not a great idea," he said.

Jimmy Greaves, football commentator and former England player, said: "If anyone thought Fergie was calming down after turning 60, they are very wrong. He will need to make up with the player before the situation starts to overshadow their season."

Former United striker Mark Hughes described the manager's "hairdryer" treatment.

"He would stand nose-to-nose with you and just shout and bawl, and you would end up with your hair behind your head."

Leicester manager Micky Adams said: "Ferguson's confrontational style was out of place in modern soccer."

"We've seen now with Arsene Wenger and Gerard Houllier that the more mild mannered approach is better with the modern day player," he said.

"What Manchester United will be disappointed about is the fact that it has got out into the wider world."

With nearly every paper in Britain carrying front page pictures of Beckham's split eye, Manchester United said Tuesday Ferguson would hold a press conference later in the day.

Ferguson, 16 years with Manchester, is currently negotiating a new contract.

It was a year ago that Fergie declared a U-turn on his retirement plans. He had been set to quit Old Trafford last summer but chose to stay on.

He was immediately set up with a new three-year contract that extended his tenure until the summer of 2005.

"You need passion to survive in this job. You can't just switch that on and off and sometimes you do suffer a gut reaction. I have never yet met a manager who doesn't care. The biggest problem is handling the disappointment and, of course, you get frustrated when you lose."

"The important thing in football is to realise that when a game is over, it's over. You start to think about the next match straight away."

Hot-headed managers

AFP, London

Manchester United boss Alex Ferguson's alleged bust-up with England captain David Beckham is only one of the many tales of managers involved in bust-ups with players.

Probably the most extreme reaction by a club boss came when Grimsby manager Brian Laws broke Ivano Bonetti's cheekbone in 1996 after the Italian threw food at him during a dressing-room confrontation.

Trevor Francis was fined 1,000 pounds (1,600 dollars) last year for cuffing his Crystal Palace goalkeeper Alex Kolinko around the ear. Francis was upset when he saw the Latvian laughing after Palace conceded a goal.

Steve Claridge punched Cambridge manager John Beck in the face after disagreeing with Beck's tactics which included cold showers before games and hypnosis.

Southampton's Lawrie McMenemy once threw a fully-clothed Mark Wright into the bath when the England defender questioned his authority.

Advice from 'cool' Wenger

AFP, London

Arsenal's French manager Arsene Wenger has told Manchester United's fiery Scottish boss Alex Ferguson to stay cool.

Ferguson is in trouble for a dressing-room bust-up that left England captain David Beckham with a cut eye.

And Wenger admits it is difficult for soccer managers to keep emotions in check.

"The bigger the animal is inside you, the more you have to keep it under control," he told The Sun said Tuesday.

"There is a big animal inside me but you learn to control your emotions most of the time."

"It is not difficult to lose it and everybody has a different way of keeping themselves in check."

"There is no right or wrong way for managerial success. We're all different, we all have strong points and weaknesses."

"You need passion to survive in this job. You can't just switch that on and off and sometimes you do suffer a gut reaction. I have never yet met a manager who doesn't care. The biggest problem is handling the disappointment and, of course, you get frustrated when you lose."

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For a can

FROM PAGE 16

and assault is a sad turn."

The CWC organising committee, in an effort to protect the interests of official sponsors that include Pepsi, has placed arch rival Coca Cola on the CWC Security Directorate's list of items that are banned at World Cup matches.

Branded clothing, hats and bags are also banned from games.

CWC executive director Dr Ali Bacher announced last week that the restriction on umbrellas had been lifted because of the prevailing weather patterns around the country, provided spectators took shelter from the sun and rain beneath unbranded cover.

Williamson, who attended the match with his wife and 13 year old son, said that he was "totally flabbergasted" when he was approached by security staff who insisted that they hand over the offending umbrella.

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Chelsea's players would have also preferred to have played Arsenal in the final again.

"If we could have avoided Arsenal until the Final then that would have been great," said Graeme Le Saux. "But we will approach the game positively."

Jesper Gronkjaer added: "We would have preferred not to have been drawn against Arsenal at this stage."

Chelsea have not beaten Arsenal in the FA Cup since 1947, and manager Arsene Wenger is confident of extending that record next month.

"The draw surprised us all," he said.

In the aftermath of the statement, a leading sports physiologist suggested that the dedication had the potential to split the side.

Ken Jennings added that the pair might even have been expressing their concern about the current leadership of the side.

Kirsten also came to the defence of Allan Donald, who has been fingered more than any other bowler for South Africa's woeful bowling display.

"It's a difficult situation for Allan who has been one of South Africa's best bowlers. I still trust him though to do the job and I back him all the way."

"If we had a major game tomorrow, I'd back him to do the business for us," said Kirsten who admitted that their battle for World Cup survival was frustrating.

"You'd expect to beat these sides nine times out of ten but you have to perform on the day and we just haven't been able to do that."

"As both an individual and as a team, we have to look in the mirror. As a team, the mirror would probably show that in this tournament we have not been clinical enough. We haven't been able to finish the game off."

James Anderson took 4-25, the best figures by an Englishman in one-day international cricket since spinner Vic Marks' 5-39 against Canada 20 years ago.

"James did well considering he hasn't bowled for a couple of weeks," Hussain said.

Sunday's match also saw pace bowler Amla's 5-39 against South Africa's 10 overs despite a recent recurrence of the side strain injury that cut short his Ashes tour of Australia.

However, an England spokesman told AFP on Monday that White was fit and available for selection, their only concern being a slight bout of tonsillitis suffered by left-arm spinner Ashley Giles.

But as the Warwickshire bowler lost his place in the side against the Netherlands to Ian Blackwell, who is a better batsman, Giles' absence is unlikely to worry England at this stage.

As for Namibia, coached by

MU's toughest test yet

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, Paris

Manchester United's resilience under pressure, a feature of their 1999 treble-winning season, has a huge test on Wednesday at home to Italian giants Juventus in the Champions League.

Saturday's FA Cup defeat to Arsenal at Old Trafford, further Roy Keane's revelations on his ongoing hip problems and David Beckham's bizarre dressing room eye injury, means the Red Devils will need all the mental strength they can muster in midweek.

In other matches Wednesday

under-pressure titleholders Real Madrid host Borussia Dortmund, Lokomotiv Moscow travel to AC Milan and FC Basel greet Deportivo La Coruna.

United's Ruud van Nistelrooy had a poor game in the 2-0 FA Cup fifth round defeat against Arsenal and Juventus might be thankful when they are facing him and not Gunners' striker Thierry Henry.

France central defender Mikael Silvestre had perhaps one of his poorest performances this season and United's backline will need more steel in facing the resurgent Old Lady of Turin in Juventus.

The 31-year-old, tough-tackling midfielder had a hip operation by specialist Richard Villar on September 3 last year.

Beckham meanwhile has a serious fitness doubt after receiving a nasty gash above his left eye which required two stitches.

The damage was done by a flying boot kicked by manager Alex Ferguson in the Old Trafford dressing room after the Arsenal defeat.

Ferguson, nicknamed The Hairdryer because of the ferocity of his verbal blasts, admitted his part in what he called "a freak accident".

Italian league leaders Juve are out to end United's 100 percent record from their opening two second-round phase games and increase their own chances of making the last eight.

United famously went on to win the trophy, with Ole Gunnar Solskjaer grabbing the last-gasp winner which sealed a stunning 2-1 triumph over Bayern Munich at the Nou Camp stadium.

Roy Keane, suspended for the 1999 final, told the Manchester Evening News that despite the loss to Arsenal there was all to play for in silverware.

"It was a big match for both clubs on Saturday but there are still a lot of prizes out there to be won."

"We still have the European Cup, we still have a chance in the championship and we have the League Cup final against Liverpool. It is not all doom and gloom."

"It is dangerous for us to be looking beyond Juventus on Wednesday. They will probably have had someone here on Saturday and will be thinking they

can probably come here and get something.

"But we will get on with it. This is where the season really kicks into overdrive. People say it is another critical six days for us in the Champions League but is there a week at Manchester United when it is not critical?

However Keane revealed he may need a hip-replacement opera-

tion.

FC Basel host Deportivo La

Coruna of Spain in the pool's other

game with both sides up against it if

they want to qualify for the quarter-

finals which only the top two teams

will reach.

The Spaniards hit the road

without injured Brazilian midfiel-

der Mauro Silva.

In Group C, AC Milan defend

their 100 percent record so far

against second-placed Borussia