

Jonathan Agnew



What ever happens on the final day of the Premier League season, this will be remembered as one of the most dramatic there has ever been. Up to six teams have been in with a chance of winning the division – and that does not include the defending

champions Manchester United. While the majority of the leagues across Europe tend to be dominated by just a few, it is possible that we are entering a much more open era in the Premier League, in which predictability is a thing of the past.

It is a stark contrast to last season when United wrapped up the title with four games still remaining, and the irony is that their sudden fall from grace has been the catalyst for this year's excitement. But whichever team lifts the trophy the outcome will be both a triumph and a relief for the Premier League chief executive, Richard Scudamore, who had earlier expressed his concern at Manchester United's poor form. He noted the negative impact this was having on the global audience, but he must reflect now on the benefit of real competition.

The sacking of David Moyes is probably the most dramatic event of the season. I remember writing here about the pressures of extreme expectation, particularly when following such a legendary figure as Sir Alex Ferguson. Who, out of Moyes and Andy Flower, the England cricket coach during the Ashes, would survive their team's

poor performances, I wondered? In fact, neither did. The return of José Mourinho's colourful public statements have kept the football correspondents busy while the most impressive managerial performance has not necessarily come from one of the bigger names, but Tony Pulis. When he took over at Crystal Palace halfway through the season, the club was bottom with four points from 11 matches. Not only has he saved Palace from relegation, but they will finish mid-

table to ensure the club will play consecutive seasons in the Premier League for the first time.

For an impartial observer, I cannot help but hope that Liverpool hold on, although they are up against it. The inquest into the Hillsborough

disaster, which is coinciding with the closing stages of the season, is a necessary reminder that the fans should come first and the poignancy in this being the 25th anniversary of the tragedy is palpable. But we must wait to see if this brilliant and competitive season really is the start of a new era for the Premier League.

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