

Jonathan Agnew



Manchester United play host to Queens Park Rangers at Old Trafford this weekend with their new manager, Louis Van Gaal, still searching for his first win. With only two points in the bank so far, United are 14th in the Premier League table and were blown out of the Capital One Cup 4-0 by Milton

Keynes Dons. While it is often the case that the arrival of a new manager brings new zest and an instant improvement, as far as Manchester United's frustrated fans are concerned, Van Gaal is proving equally as disappointing as David Moyes.

I remember Phil Neville telling me this summer that Van Gaal would have a better chance than Moyes because he was not burdened by being Sir Alex Ferguson's successor, but not only is the Dutchman making heavy weather of it, he is also gambling with a change in strategy.

Ferguson was renowned for his development of young players, which he preferred to attempting to buy instant success on the transfer market. His famous Class of '92 included names such as Beckham, Scholes, Giggs, Butt and the Neville brothers. The Academy produced 23-year-old Danny Welbeck who was sold last week to Arsenal for £16 million to pave the way for the Colombian striker, Radamel Falcao who will earn £265,000 per week while on loan. In all, Van Gaal has splashed out £150 million on new talent, which is the highest gross spend by any Pre-

mier League Club in the summer transfer window.

This prompted Eric Harrison, the man responsible for coaching the Class of '92, to say: 'Losing players (like Welbeck) who have been part of the club since they were kids means you are losing the heart and soul of the club.'

There is another point here. Neville also told me that he is worried about England's future with so few

'Not only is the Dutchman making heavy weather of it, he's gambling with strategy'

home-grown players appearing in the Premier League. In fact, he more or less wrote off any prospect of England winning the World Cup while managers prefer to spend huge sums of money on proven overseas players. The

impact of the dreadful World Cup campaign was evident last week when the smallest crowd ever for an England fixture at the new Wembley turned up for the Norway match, and almost double the television audience of five million chose to watch *The Great British Bake Off* instead. Never has the club-versus-country argument been more relevant.

jonathanagnew.com
@Aggerscricket