

JONATHAN AGNEW



The biggest match of the new football season is being held this weekend when Manchester City play host to their great rival Manchester United. Derbies like this can sometimes disappoint because it can be impossible for players to match the hype, and there is extra interest this week with both teams under new management.

I have spoken to key figures from

both sides during the summer. Joe Hart, who before becoming the City and England goalkeeper used to bowl at 85mph for Shrewsbury, admitted that this is the first fixture he looks out for – and he knows the fans do, too.

Meanwhile, Gary Neville, one of United's longest serving players and now an outstanding television pundit, spoke brilliantly on *Test Match Special* about the siege mentality at Old Trafford that was deliberately created by Sir Alex Ferguson. Neville described the atmosphere as 'like being on a boat with sharks circling around you.' Neville also credited his experience of playing cricket as a youngster in the tough and un-

compromising Lancashire League for much of his football success – he said cricket made him stand up for himself in those combative situations 'in which you can't give an inch and the opposition are playing mind games with you'.

So much of every sport is played in the mind and David Moyes must know all about the pressure of replacing the irreplaceable. Little won-

der that he has been criticised for being tentative both during the transfer window – when he missed out on key midfield targets such as Cesc Fábregas and Thiago Alcántara – and in his team's early outings, because everything he does is compared to Ferguson. Would those players who declined the move to Old Trafford have done so had it meant the op-

portunity to play under Sir Alex? Possibly not – and that is the level of respect that Moyes now has to earn.

So can this famous derby deliver this year? Certainly there have been a couple of recent classics – in October 2011 City travelled to Old Trafford, won 6-1

and went on to lift the Premiership title. Last season United won 3-2 away from home to take control of the Premiership. The title race is only just beginning, but for Moyes and City's new manager Manuel Pellegrini, it represents a perfect opportunity to lay an early marker.

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