



NEWSLETTER

A 2020 Round-Up



THE MANCHESTER UNITED SUPPORTERS' TRUST

A word from our CEO, Duncan Drasdo



Some of you may remember the occasion, back in 1992, when the Queen famously described the preceding 12 months as an *annus horribilis*. It seems that 2020 looked back on its '92 forefather, rolled up its sleeves and said "Hold my beer". This is a year that few will be sorry to see behind us.

It's hard to imagine how we'd have reacted to a prediction that 2020 would see the season suspended and then games resume behind closed doors with fans excluded from stadia. Worse still Liverpool seized the chance to break a 30-year drought with their first league title* since 1990. (*Historians with Red Mancunian sympathies will delight in applying an asterisk to this entry in the record books).

More seriously though, the impact of Covid on people's lives has been immense - millions have been impacted financially and many thousands have died. Sadly, when we finally do return, there will be numerous seats at Old Trafford permanently deprived of their previous occupants. That is quite a sobering thought.

It's no exaggeration to say that Covid has dominated everything and that includes MUST's own activities - whether they be discussions with the Club, representing our supporters, or working to support our local community through our Foodbank initiative.

It's often said that adversity brings out the best in people and that's certainly been true of so many in this pandemic. Manchester United itself has been no exception in that respect with tremendous support for the local community, and indeed our own Foodbank Appeal with a £50,000 donation the eye-catching headline, but many more activities going on behind the scenes. It's fair to say that supporters have recognised the efforts the club has gone to as well, and we see the evidence for this in the early results of our United Voice 2020 survey.

And we couldn't touch on this without referring to the extraordinary efforts of our very own Marcus Rashford who has made every single one of us feel so very proud.

Of course, we started our MUFC Fans' Foodbank long before all this happened but we always give credit here to the Supporters Trusts just down the East Lincs at Liverpool and Everton who truly led the way on this. As Dave Kelly of Everton's Blue Union would often say "Hunger doesn't wear club colours". Words of a wise man who was also the proud recipient of a regional fans award on the very same BBC Sports Personality of the Year show that saw Marcus honoured. So, we send our congratulations to Dave too!

We've seen tremendous progress on safe standing with confirmation that we'll finally see rail seats installed inside Old Trafford. On a personal level that's the culmination of a 25-year campaign and literally what got me involved in IMUSA and subsequently MUST, when predecessor Shareholders United Against Murdoch first formed back in 1998. I can't help but recall how many times over the years I was told we were "*wasting our time with safe standing as it will never come back*". Always great to prove the doubters wrong - even if it has taken 25 years - but a lesson in persistence.

I hope we'll see similar green shoots of progress in the next 12 months on the other object of my obsession - fan share ownership. Of course, we don't anticipate any imminent change in ownership but we do believe there may be the best opportunity yet to establish the structures that will start progress

along a journey. We'll leave that one tantalisingly hanging in the air for now but suffice to say we feel more optimistic about this than at any time since 2005.

If we are to progress in our core objectives, we'll need greater resources in terms of volunteers and new committee and board members. We've seen an encouraging response to a recent appeal and we'll be following up with all those who've already dropped us an email to getstuckin@joinmust.org but we'll need a wide pool of people and skills so please get in touch if you'd like to get involved.

In terms of the board this year we saw David Nixon and Chris Baker join, bringing additional and most welcome professional expertise to complement other recent recruits Dave Kidman and Chris Egan. There was a sideways move for one of our great servants in Ian Stirling who stepped down from the board to concentrate on the ISLO role which now takes up so much of his time.

We've also seen a significant broadening of our representation by welcoming co-opted committee members "Eric" Najib Armanazi, Natalie Burrell and Rick Clement representing Rainbow Devils, MUFC Women's supporters and MUDSA respectively.

And to round up board and committee changes we want to place our immense gratitude on record to two of our longest serving volunteers. This year Barry Dunnnett stepped down from the board after many years' service as Company Secretary and also his more visible role running the matchday stall. It's not the same without him! And lastly but by no means least, news reached us this week that Tanya Taylor is finally retiring from her MUST travails. Tanya has been involved since the very beginning (Shareholders United Against Murdoch 1998) after Michael Crick recruited her as our first membership secretary and "web mistress". She's fulfilled many other roles since but perhaps most notably as the primary contact on the helpdesk for many years and thousands of queries! We'll miss their input hugely but I'm sure they'll both still chip in here and there. As many others have learned, MUST is like Hotel California, - "You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave!"

In closing, on behalf of all at MUST, I would like to thank all of you who continue to value and support us and we wish you all the best for 2021.

United Voice - Your Opinion Counts



In recent years we have developed the use of surveys to canvass the opinion of supporters, in particular to inform our discussions with the club on match-going issues so that we can better represent your opinions.

Our main annual survey last year received almost 10,000 responses expressing a range of personal views, needs and preferences. The results are available on our website. Earlier this year we ran targeted surveys to evaluate interest in a trial of safe standing, and to identify the key concerns of season ticket holders whose circumstances may have been impacted by Covid, enabling us to put forward some specific proposals on season ticket renewals that took account of them.

We delayed and then tailored our main annual survey this year because Covid's impact on the 2020-21 season. We launched it a couple of weeks ago and you will probably have had an email inviting you to participate. If you haven't yet seen it you can complete it here and add your voice:

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/UV20NWSLTTTR>

An Introduction from The Rainbow Devils

Rainbow Devils is Manchester United's LGBTQ+ supporters club and were founded with the help of MUFC in February 2019.

We provide a platform for LGBTQ+ United fans and allies to meet up before matches, discuss all things United, challenge the club on all issues of diversity, and are proud to be part of the club's ALL RED ALL EQUAL campaign.

We want Old Trafford to be a safe space for all United fans regardless of gender, race, colour, religion and sexual orientation.

Since our inception, we have worked hard to make relationships with similar fan groups at other clubs as well as growing our membership and visibility.

We actively work with the club on projects such as the Rainbow Laces campaign and we were delighted this year that the two managers, Casey and Ole, as well as the two captains spoke out in support of the campaign.

There is more that needs to be done. Our aims include having a banner at Old Trafford, much like most other PL clubs do and the club seem to be quite receptive to this.

We also want to increase our membership and reach out to as many United fans who may not be aware of our existence or may not be confident enough to contact us.

We want ALL United fans to feel equally welcome.



We feel that MUST can facilitate us reaching out to many more fans and help us to get an accurate demographic of how many match-going (and non-match going) United fans identify as LGBTQ+ as well as giving us the extra publicity we need to keep growing as a supporter's club.

We also feel that we can assist MUST in how MUST deals with issues of diversity both in terms of actions and appropriate language. We can provide a platform for any United fan that feels they have been discriminated against, not just for being LGBTQ+ but for any discrimination.

LGBTQ+ fans are fans like everyone else so the wider issues that MUST addresses also applies to many of our members.

Anyone who is interested in finding out more about Rainbow Devils or wants to join can tweet us on: @rainbowdevils or email us on: rainbowdevilsmuftc@gmail.com

An Introduction to MUDSA

The Manchester United Disabled Supporters Association (MUDSA) started in 1989 and is managed by a committee elected by the membership at the AGM. It was formed to give a voice to all our disabled fans and there are some fantastic examples of that.



We have a great line of communication with the club and have successfully negotiated for Season Tickets in the disabled sections. This along with large input into the new disabled facilities being built are just two of many examples of the hard work that is put in and sometimes goes unseen. The Club has been fantastic in adding facilities such as Dedicated Stewards, Accessible toilets, Lowered Kiosks and much more.

MUDSA launched a new membership scheme in April 2017 and now have well over 1000 members and this number is continually growing.

The club is very supportive of MUDSA social events (Christmas Party; trips to the Aon training centre, Annual Dinner, etc.) and provides us with signed shirts and balls to help raise funds. They even assist with travel arrangements for

example to the recent Europa League Final.

MUDSA is always consulted by the club before any significant changes are made and our voice is always heard when we have an issue we wish to raise with the club. Chas our Secretary also regularly attends the Fan's Forum as the official representative of the club's disabled supporters. We have also recently linked up with the Manchester United Supporters Trust as we work together to make sure all different types of fans have their voice.

I feel the best way to tell you about MUDSA is to tell you what it means to me personally.

I first became aware of MUDSA in 2010. It was just a few short months after I'd been severely injured whilst serving as a Platoon Sergeant in Afghanistan with the Duke of Lancaster Regiment. I'd spent 3 months in hospital after having my legs amputated and had recently been moved straight to the Military Rehabilitation Centre Headley Court. It was here that as I was nearing better health a surprise trip was arranged for me through MUDSA to go to the Manchester United training ground and meet up with members to watch a training session and meet the players along with Sir Alex Ferguson.

I can't overstate what this did for my recovery, mentally it was a huge boost and something that gave me the hope that I could recover and go on to have a happy future. Not only was I seeing the outside of a medical facility for the first time, but I was also going to meet my football heroes and of course footballing GOD himself Sir Alex. I turned up and was greeted by Ann Marie, a long serving committee member, and instantly felt welcome. I had time to chat and meet the other members and it was easy to see this felt like a family bonded over the love of football. As we waited in reception, I felt a hand on my shoulder and to turn around and see Edwin Van Der Sar was still one of the most amazing things I've experienced. I spent the most amazing day both there and then a tour round Old Trafford. After such a difficult few months, it was the first day I felt normal again and MUDSA was a massive part of that. It led me to where I am today and to be part of the Committee is an absolute honour.

MUDSA is family.

If anyone would like more information, please visit <https://mudsa.org.uk>. Here you can read about our fantastic work and it's free to join if you have a disability or are a carer for someone with a disability

By Rick Clement
MUDSA Committee member

Introducing the Barmy Army (Manchester United Women's Team Supporters)

The Barmy Army formed in 2018 when the women's team was re-formed by Manchester United. Many of us were previously regulars at Old Trafford and we have transferred our passion and commitment to Leigh Sports Village (LSV) where the Women's Team play their home matches. Some of us are also committed away match goers.



Barmy Army is just about getting behind the team for the whole 90 minutes. The majority of our members, in a non covid world, are at the back of the stand singing classics from Old Trafford but also every single player has their own songs and even some women specific songs. We travel home and away and everyone is always welcome to travel with us (when we are back in a covid free world).

If you don't follow the Women's Game you may not know that our season was ended early in April with the league settled by average points (we finished a creditable fourth in our first season in the Super League).

While we have been watching games behind closed doors this season, we have had watch-alongs and social gatherings on Zoom and Skype, and have put increased content on our Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. We were even able to get our flags and banners back into LSV for those matches, but it's not the same as being there.



We have been working hard, with MUST's support, to establish a relationship with the club on supporters needs, and have been supported in issues with away travel, ensuring our flags have been present during the behind closed-door games and MUST have also assisted in pursuing refunds for women's season ticket holders.

Joining the M.U.S.T Committee will help build a stronger relationship for communication between fans to ensure we have the same dialogue between club and fans of both teams

If anyone ever wants to join us or wants to learn more do not hesitate to contact either myself or the Barmy Army You can reach me on any social media and everyone, myself included, will be happy to answer any questions and have you alongside us supporting the girls.

Natalie Burrell Twitter: @natalie_17

Barmy Army Twitter: @BarmyArmymuwfc

Instagram: BarmyArmymuwfc

YouTube: barmyarmymuwfc

Football without Fans - Our efforts to get fans back into Old Trafford



The expectation of Manchester being downgraded to Tier 2 restrictions meant Old Trafford would have been able to accommodate 2000 fans for the match vs Leeds - our first against them in the premier league for 16 years - the news we would remain in Tier 3, meaning no fans would be allowed to attend, was met with disappointment.

Thankfully the result - a 6-2 win and a great performance - was celebrated with a tinge of sadness due to not being there to support the team in the ground. It would have been the last match before Christmas at home and, with no Boxing Day fixture at Old

Trafford, a day to meet friends and share a drink or two and of course celebrate after the match.

From the beginning of the Covid crisis back in March MUST has worked closely with the club on the safe return of fans. Things were difficult due to the ever-changing picture and we were constantly revisiting arrangements when it looked likely that restrictions would be relaxed. Initially, with the 2019-20 season restarting with no fans allowed in the stadium, it was important for all games to be available for fans to watch.

Our position was for these games to be accessible for all Season Ticket Holders. Codes were sent out to all STH to ensure they could access games without additional cost. With some fans facing financial difficulty we ensured clear communication from the club on refunds for matches where fans were unable to attend.

As the 2020 renewals process had already started in March, before the lockdown began, it was a concern to many as they found themselves unable to commit financially in uncertain times. Many supporters made contact to express their concerns. Some were shielding due to being in a vulnerable group and felt unable to commit with so much uncertainty about Covid. We were able to discuss with the club the concerns of fans and put measures in place to help.

As it stands now, renewals remain suspended. As soon as there are plans to recommence the season with Old Trafford at full capacity an announcement will be made. Renewals will only reopen if there's enough of the season left. With the current situation looking bleak and talk of another national lockdown in January it's doubtful this will now even happen. For those who had already renewed the cost of their 'missed matches' are being refunded in batches as the season progresses. Full refunds for all remaining games are available on request.

We have also ensured anyone who does not renew this season will not be adversely affected. They will be able to defer their renewal to the 2020-21 season and keep hold of their current seat without any loss of current status or credits. This also includes those in the Away Loyalty Pot. Our discussions with the club will continue as the situation changes in the hope that we can all return to the stadium safely.

Supporting our Local Community

MUST has been running a matchday foodbank drop-off outside our HQ on Sir Matt Busby Way for the last four seasons as part of the Fans Supporting Foodbanks programme. Donated food is passed onto the Manchester South Central Foodbank. When football was suspended in March that valuable supply source dried up just at the time when community needs were increasing.

Fans Supporting Foodbanks' strapline is *Hunger doesn't wear Club Colours*, and in that spirit, MUST's foodbank coordinator Ian Patterson and his City counterpart Alex Timperley immediately got together to launch a joint supporters appeal. We also approached the clubs for their support and their generous joint donation of £100,000 was warmly welcomed.



The Supporters Appeal has now raised over £35,000 in direct donations and MUST has also run raffles for signed shirts raising a further £7,000 and counting. We should also acknowledge the club's support for the community throughout the pandemic that has included paying contract staff, retaining permanent staff, food parcels and support for the NHS.

One Night in Bruges

When 1500 United supporters travelled to Bruges in February, in what has since turned out to be the last time we were able to follow United in Europe, we didn't expect it to be a hospitable venue. Poor local organisation and over-zealous policing marred our last visit in 2016 and supporters from many other clubs have had similar experiences. Torrential rain in an away section with no roof were the least of our problems. Insufficient transport, and being forced to walk to the stadium to find access routes blocked by barbed wire barricades and a water cannon led to many missing most of the first half. Inside the concourses were crowded with gates locked, completely contrary to UEFA safety regulations, they were genuinely dangerous. Even appeals by United club officials who were present were ignored.



MUST has worked effectively with the Club to improve supporter safety at these UEFA away matches. We first raised our concerns with a public letter to the local mayor which seemed to touch a nerve. We liaised with the Club and they raised these issues as well. We subsequently shared our observations and concerns and agreed to submit separate but aligned formal complaints to UEFA. Covid subsequently put this on hold, but we will be following up to ensure the case is heard and necessary lessons are learned and applied for when away fans are able to return in the future.

Safe Standing – A 25 Year Journey

In April the club announced that Trafford Council have given approval for a section of 'safe standing' to be installed into Old Trafford, initially as a trial in advance of anticipated government reform to allow safe standing areas to be permitted in all football stadiums. This was a massive step forward in a quest that MUST and its predecessor supporter organisations have been pursuing for over 20 years. Many younger supporters will never have experienced a football match before all seater stadiums were mandated back in 1994, and will know little of the long campaign to bring standing back in a safe environment since that time.

For those readers in particular this **personal insight from MUST's Ian Stirling**, first written for and published in the United We Stand fanzine earlier this year, is a fascinating read and a fitting end to this bulletin as we all turn the page on 2020 and look forward to returning to a full and vibrant stadium some time in 2021.

It was a rite of passage as a kid to make your way up to the crowd after sitting at the front of the Stretford End, legs dangling through the metal fence. It had its benefits in winter with a hot water pipe to sit on keeping you warm and easy access to the food vendors walking pitchside in their fluorescent jackets selling crisps, pies and a plastic tasting cordial drink. Where you really wanted to be was in the crowd, standing with your mates, being part of the songs, laughs, and jokes - just as other kids had done for many decades.

The Stretford End had a life of its own, it was the heartbeat of Old Trafford. That's where you'd grow and learn what it was to support your club and receive an education on how to be a United fan. The culture being passed down through the generations. A sense of belonging. More than just football. It was an apprenticeship. The experience wasn't unique to Old Trafford. It happened all over the country at 3pm on a Saturday afternoon and it's what football fans lived for.



Following the tragic events at Hillsborough in 1989 and the Taylor report that followed, football clubs in the top two tiers in England and Wales had to introduce all-seater stadiums by the 1994-95 season. Taylor declared that standing itself was not 'inherently unsafe', but felt that all major stadiums in England should be converted into all-seater venues and that every person who attended a football match should be given a seat to sit in rather than being allowed to stand. He suggested that the sale of alcohol should also be limited, even though this was not found to be a contributing factor to the events at Hillsborough.

Despite Taylor's statement that standing areas were not necessarily unsafe, the government still decided to ban standing at grounds for football fans. He also said that football clubs should not be allowed to use the fact that stadiums were becoming all-seater to drive prices up and clubs should do their best to ensure that the game remained in touch with its working-class roots – letting people of all ages and social positions enter grounds to watch games. Something else that has been forgotten and ignored over the years.

At the moment we see fans standing in an unsafe environment at practically every match. Thousands of people stand up for the duration of the game with the back of a plastic chair at around knee height. This results in supporters falling forward when we score. They fall forward usually in a moment of celebration with injuries happening on a regular basis. It's not uncommon to find yourself two or three rows away from where you started! Clubs often turn a blind eye to this because it typically happens in areas filled with the most passionate

and vocal fans. Whilst United understood fans wanted to stand, they only had the option of installing traditional seats in the ground.

When all-seater grounds were introduced stewarding was confrontational in efforts to enforce sitting - this often led to ejections and even arrests and bans. Fans felt resentment and wanted to stand to support their team. There was no middle ground for the club or fans. 'Sit down or you will be ejected' was the announcement at Old Trafford in 1995 vs Arsenal. That announcement led to the formation of the Independent Manchester United Supporters Association (IMUSA). The fightback from fans started.

A large majority of football fans have felt an injustice since the choice to stand whilst watching their team was removed when they were forced to sit and this led to fan groups uniting behind The Football Supporters Federation's campaign for the introduction of Safe Standing. The campaign actually started due to a City fan group asking for 'Standing Areas for Eastlands' (SAFE) ahead of their move to a council-built ground funded by Manchester council tax payers for the 2002 commonwealth games.

The Football Supporters Federation (FSF) widened the campaign with backing from all fan groups with continual pressure from supporters on football clubs to come out with backing and a message of support and lobbying political parties. There was limited success at first with no appetite from the government to step in and change legislation, surprising really, as the Labour party were opposed to the introduction of all-seater grounds and they were in Government until 2010.



It was clear the issue was emotional and the events at Hillsborough strongly influenced their thinking. Everyone knew standing wasn't responsible and the rationale behind the introduction of all-seater stadia was built on a lie but no progress could be made before the conclusion of any inquiry.

A pivotal moment was Andy Burnham, now Greater Manchester Mayor but then Minister for Culture, Media and Sport in 2009 being heckled at the 20th anniversary of the Hillsborough disaster. Burnham used the next day's cabinet meeting in Downing Street to ask then Prime Minister Gordon Brown if he could raise the issue of Hillsborough in Parliament. The eventual result was the second Hillsborough inquiry.

The FSF increased the profile by starting a campaign of education not only aimed at fans but of clubs, press, media, and politicians with the introduction in 2012 of Safe Standing roadshows. These events, along with Jon Darch demonstrated how safe seats could be and how supporters could stand safely. It toured the country visiting clubs and played a big part in changing people's minds. But it was never football fans who needed convincing.

From Manchester United Supporters' Trust (MUST) very first meeting following the Glazer family purchase of United standing at football has been on the agenda. From the first meeting in 2013 with the newly appointed Ed Woodward there was a commitment from the club to at least 'investigate the viability of introducing safe standing at Old Trafford'.

Not much but it was progress from the previous position of the club of being against any introduction of standing in any form. We pressed on with new enthusiasm.

There were visits to the BayArena, Bayer Leverkusen in 2013 not only to witness a 5-0 away win in Europe under Moyes but to also show invited United officials and press what a rail seat section looked like and how it operated.



It was all part of a strategy to overcome objections and gain support as much as it was a no brainer for us there were still employees, MPs, and officials with careers who were still risk-averse and didn't want to stick their neck out too early.

Another opportunity to inspect a ground with safe standing was in 2015 as we played Wolfsburg (notable also for LvG bringing on Nick Powell for Juan Mata when we were 2-1 down). This time we invited club officials and the visit went well. We wanted the very public picture of United's support but with the legislation remaining in place, it was always a long shot.

All the noises from the club were supportive. Whenever asked, a desire to introduce safe standing areas was expressed but nothing would change until the Sports Ground Safety Authority (SGSA) guidance or legislation

changed. We continued by holding a safe standing roadshow at Old Trafford with the clubs backing again, just a public demonstration of support and to build up a bit more public pressure.

A petition was presented to the government in 2018 that had more than 100,000 signatures from UK voters. This led to the then Sports Minister Tracey Crouch commissioning a review into Safe Standing. It also led to political parties coming out publicly to back Safe Standing by including it in their manifestos for the upcoming election. Years of political lobbying was finally paying off due to the mounting public pressure from football fans.

The real surprise was the change of advice given by the SGSA. They produce a 'Green Guide' which gives guidance for all sports grounds on safety. The guide says now that clubs may only look to "install seats incorporating barriers or independent rails in areas where persistent standing continues to take place... only once all other measures have been tried." They have at United, over many, many years.

United were ready to take the lead at installing rail seats last August ahead of the change to the Green Guide. There had been many meetings where MUST argued that rail seats were still seats and conformed with current legislation and licensing conditions. It was a bold move and could have put them on a collision course with Trafford Borough Council who give them their safety certificate but the change in the Green Guide made the decision easier.

An application from United to install up to 1500 rail seats in J Stand was accepted by the council in March, only to be immediately put on ice by the Covid lockdown! Why J Stand? As a trial area it's the ideal place. Sightlines were the main concern for the club and J Stand is best suited. The vast majority of fans stand already so rail seats will be welcomed.

The political lobbying continues and we now hope for confirmation from government that trials including at Old Trafford can go ahead from the start of next season, when we all hope that grounds will be full again. That's the next major step. Obviously, United wants to be part of the trial and will be ahead of the game with rail seats already in place.

It's not really about a piece of metal and plastic though, is it? It's what it means for fans. Safety of supporters in football grounds should be the first consideration and rail seats give that along with so much more. We desperately want the trial in J Stand to be a success. We are working hard to ensure that happens. What we then want to see, when the government finally gives the full go ahead, is rail seats installed where the demand is in the ground. The estimate is about 20%, 15,000 seats. The real satisfaction will be when the Stretford End is once again the place to be for those kids coming to Old Trafford. A vibrant, vocal end and a return for the heartbeat of Old Trafford.