

# Why Man Utd manager Sir Alex should be BBC Sports Personality of the Year



Ferguson

The BBC, I imagine, would regard the prospect with undiluted horror.

Worse than reuniting Russell Brand and Jonathan Ross for a Christmas special.

And getting the Satanic Sluts to do a guest spot.

Worse than showing reruns of the Blue Peter episode where they stifled the kids with a fake competition winner.

And worse than Paxo saying he wanted to build on his interview with Dizzee Rascal by moving on to an audience with Snoop Dogg.

Well, I'm sorry, but I still think Sir Alex Ferguson should win the BBC Sports Personality of the Year award for 2008.

I know the BBC has already got a Coach of the Year award as part of its annual show.

In fact, they practically invented it so they could give it to Fergie back in the Treble year of 1999.

And I know that a coach has never won the main award, which has always gone to a competitor. It would make the presentation interesting, too, because Ferguson doesn't speak to the BBC and hasn't done for four years.

But don't tell me Fergie's not a competitor. Don't tell me he doesn't have just as much influence on a United result as any of the players out there on the pitch.

And where does it say in the title that a manager can't win? It's the Sports Personality of the Year, not the Sportsman or Sportswoman of the Year.

So I still don't understand why the Manchester United manager hasn't been mentioned yet as one of the favourites after everything he has achieved in the last 12 months. Plenty of people, myself included, wrote him off after United went three seasons without winning the Premier League and almost a decade without repeating their Champions League triumph of 1999.

Ferguson also became embroiled in a damaging controversy over the racehorse, Rock of Gibraltar, which threatened his position at Old Trafford and posed questions about his character.

All of which makes the fact that he led United to another stunning Champions League-Premier League double in May even more remarkable.

When Ferguson won the European Cup with United's

penalty shoot-out victory over Chelsea in Moscow, he became only the third manager in British history to win the competition twice. It's a momentous achievement, shared only by Brian Clough and the great Bob Paisley among British bosses.

It was the way Ferguson did it, too.

The way that he won the trophy playing fantastic attacking football.

The way he built a side of flair and fluidity around the beauty of the creative talents of Cristiano Ronaldo and Wayne Rooney.

And the flawless way he combined the youth of those stars with the experience of loyal club servants like Ryan Giggs and Paul Scholes.

I know there are plenty of strong contenders this year. I understand why Lewis Hamilton, Chris Hoy and Rebecca Adlington are supposed to be the front-runners.

I haven't got anything to say against any of them, nor against all the other sportsmen and women who should be in with a chance.

Nicole Cooke, Joe Calzaghe, Andy Murray, Ben Ainslie, Sarah Webb, Sarah Ayton, Rebecca Romero and Eleanor Simmonds.

They've all had an amaz-

ing 2008. They all deserve lavish praise. They've all made us proud of British sport. But in the midst of a spell where our national sport has fallen into disrepute and dishonour, where the Premier League has become a byword for greed and disloyalty, Ferguson reminded us that we could still be proud of football.

My top three would be Ferguson, Hamilton and Ainslie even though I realise the BBC won't even put Fergie on the short-list.

They'll cite precedent. They'll gloss it over and let Sue Barker get on with telling lewd jokes about the sex lives of rugby players.

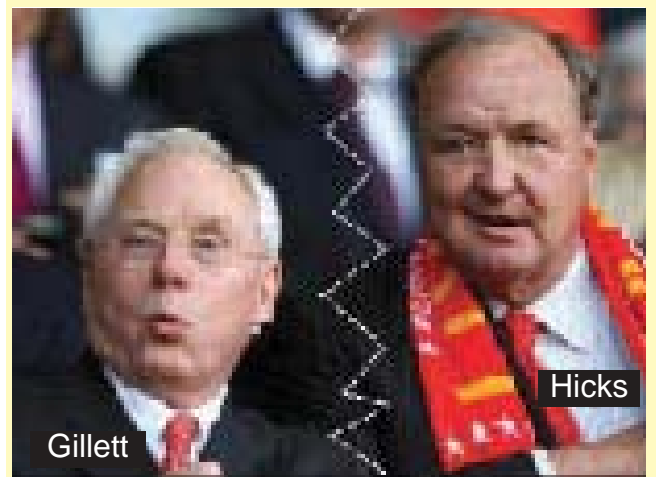
But giving it to Ferguson, or at least putting him on the short-list so the public can make up their own minds, would represent a welcome admission that coaches ought to be considered as well.

The BBC would be bound to get something out of it, too.

Either, they'd have the first person in the award's history who refused to accept it, or Ferguson might start talking to them again.

## Liverpool owners Tom Hicks and George Gillett hit out at cash crisis rumours

*Liverpool's American owners have firmly rejected suggestions that they are facing serious problems with debt amid the pressure of the global credit crunch.*



Gillett

Hicks

Although both Tom Hicks and George Gillett have not directly commented, they are understood to be infuriated by the intervention of Keith Harris, one of English football's main power brokers, who has publicly expressed his concern over developments on Merseyside. "Keith has an agenda here and is making mischief – the truth is our debt is lower than people think and manageable given the club's profitability," said a source close to Liverpool's owners.

"All the top clubs have debt, and Liverpool's is in fact lower than Arsenal and Manchester United."

The Americans are also adamant that the actual serviceable level of debt to the Royal Bank of Scotland and Wachovia is around £200 million rather than the £350 million loan figure that is regularly reported.

Harris was in Zurich with other leading figures in football at the International Football Arena on Tuesday.

"The one that worries me is Liverpool," he said. "The banks are two of those that have suffered, so whether they want to lend it again or not, they may not be able to. What normally happens in business is, if the banks won't finance, you have to raise equity."

Sources close to the Americans, however, launched a defence of their business plan. They put the actual drawn debt at £265 million, with the remaining balance of the loan made up of an available overdraft facility of £50 million and an undrawn figure of £30 million that will go towards the new stadium.

Hicks and Gillett also had £60 million of cash collateralisation pledged towards the banks, leaving a net debt figure of £205 million. That would be only just over five times the serviceable profitability of £35-40 million, a figure that is argued to provide sustainability and be similar to other competitors, such as Manchester United and Arsenal. Hicks and Gillett plan to use Liverpool's profits to pay the interest on the loans.

The Americans financed their initial purchase of the club with a £298 million loan that was replaced in January by a £350.5 million facility with the same banks. They also remain confident that a six-month extension to their loan is available and can be triggered at any time.

That would take them to July next year and would avert any danger of needing to raise equity by selling players in the January transfer window. Pressure, though, has been mounting in Liverpool on politicians to lobby the banks into refusing to extend the loan beyond January.

Share Liverpool FC, the supporters' group, are also attempting to organise the fan base into collectively raising the funds to bid either independently or with another investor for the club.

A bid for the club of £500 million has been on the table since earlier this year, but it is believed that the potential Dubai investors might be reluctant to maintain that offer as the deadline on the loan nears.