

# Manchester United's future is bright with Sir Alex's focus on youth players

*Football has changed so much in the last decade with millions of pounds being spent on buying foreign players from the world's top teams.*

By Sandy Macaskill

**A**t Manchester United, however, the development of talent has always been a priority ever since Sir Matt Busby introduced the concept with the 'Busby Babes' in the 1950s.

"The real story started after Munich when Sir Matt rebuilt the club and led them to the European Cup ten years later" says Sir Alex Ferguson.

"People were captivated by the courage of United and its manager, as well as the number of young players that he brought through into the team; that's never left us.

"Bringing young players through to the first team has given me the most satisfaction and it's great to see the likes of John O'Shea, Darren Fletcher, Kieran Richardson and Wes Brown who have all since come through the system as well.

"We've always driven forward at this club no matter what success we've enjoyed. This club has proved in the past that any young kid coming through the ranks will get an opportunity."

So who are the latest players to follow in the footsteps of Ryan Giggs, Paul Scholes and David Beckham?

## 1 Danny Welbeck

Despite Sir Alex Ferguson's announcement in January that Manchester-born Welbeck would feature in his first-team plans, it was not until September, against Middlesbrough in the League Cup, that the 17-year-old made his competitive debut. Having overcome a recent knee injury, Welbeck scored his first goal against Stoke at the weekend.

Welbeck signed his first trainee contract in 2007, starting the 2007-08 season in the Under-18 side. He scored nine goals in 14 starts for the academy in 2007/08, before being promoted to the reserve team where he scored seven goals in 11 starts.

A central figure in the Under-19 England squad, Welbeck's pace and strength has led to Ferguson to compare him with former Arsenal forward Nwankwo Kanu.

"He's no doubt a Manchester United player, but he's only young," Ferguson has said of Welbeck. "He needs time, but he's got a lot of marvellous things about him. He's a local boy, which is nice too."

## 2. Frazier Campbell

21-year-old striker Campbell is currently on at Tottenham, a makeweight in the deal which saw Dimitar Berbatov sign for United in the summer. Although he was not given many opportunities to shine at White Hart Lane under Juande Ramos, Campbell has made the most of his time on the pitch since Harry Redknapp's arrival, especially against Liverpool in the League Cup last week, where he scored two goals. He scored his first Premier League finish at the weekend, a consolation goal in Spurs' 2-1 defeat to Fulham.

Campbell signed for the Manchester United Academy in 2004, and made an immediate impact, scoring 14 goals in 22 starts for the Under-18s. He was sent on

loan to Royal Antwerp in 2006, and then Hull City in 2007. Hull Chairman Paul Duffen described Campbell as "too good for the Championship", and bid a club record fee of £7m for the striker on their promotion to the Premier League this season. United were unwilling to permanently release their player, however.

## 3. Rafael Silva

One half of the "Brazilian Nevilles", Rafael is a Brazilian youth international right-back who made his first start for Manchester United against Peterborough in Barry Fry's testimonial in August. Sir Alex Ferguson described the 18-year-old's performance as "a sensation", even though he had not played for over a year. Having signed from Fluminense, Rafael had been prevented from playing competitively in England until he had turned 18 and secured a Portuguese passport. Rafael began his career as a striker, but was converted to wingback at Fluminense. Seen as Gary Neville's long-term replacement, Rafael came on for the 33-year-old against Arsenal, and scored his first goal at the club.

## 4. Fabio Silva

Rafael's brother Fabio is expected to make as big an impact on the Manchester United first team as his twin brother, although the left-back's progress has so far been hamstrung by a shoulder operation. "I have absolutely no doubt at all that he will do the same for us as Rafael," said Sir Alex Ferguson recently. "They remind me of two little whippets," added Les Kershaw, United's former academy manager who can be credited with spotting the Da Silvas playing for Fluminense at the 2005 Nike Premier Cup in Tokyo. "These two stood out straight away. What impressed me most was the way that, when they got knocked down, they just got straight back up again and got on with it. You didn't have to be a special scout to notice them. I rang the manager and said, 'There are twins here who are just unbelievable.'"

## 5. Jonny Evans

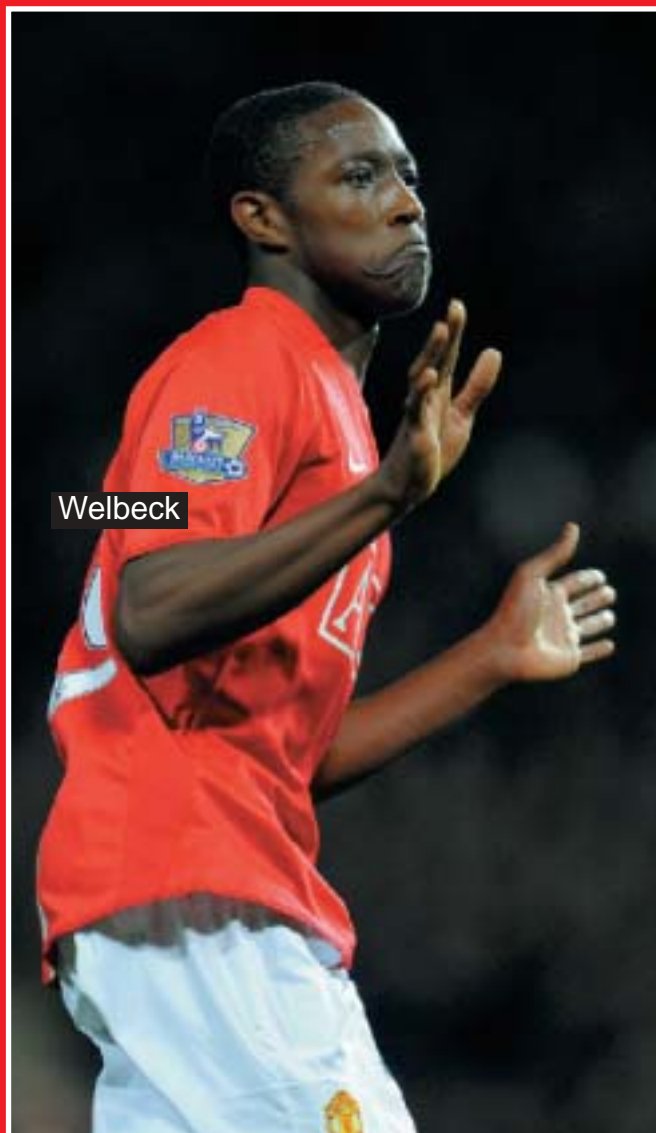
Evans, a 20-year-old Northern Irish central defender, was spotted by United scouts whilst playing for Greenisland FC.

He was signed to United's Academy in 2006, from where, like Campbell, he was sent on loan first to United's Belgian affiliate club Royal Antwerp and then Sunderland before returning to United in the summer, 2007.

Evans made his United first team debut in the 2007-08 League Cup and has since made appearances in the Champions League. Evans made headlines last December when he was arrested for alleged rape after the United Christmas party, although it was announced in March that no charges would be brought.



Silva



Welbeck