

Manchester United, a club synonymous with grandeur, glory, and the beautiful game at its finest, has for years been a spectacle to behold. Yet, especially since Sir Alex Ferguson's retirement in 2013, many fans and analysts alike have noticed a perplexing trend: even when the actual football on display is, frankly, ordinary or below-par, United matches somehow manage to spiral into episodes of drama, tension, and narrative overload. What's behind this bizarre dichotomy?

In this post, we'll unpack the phenomenon through the lenses of **Post-2013 identity crisis**, **Managerial churn and mismatched squads**, **Carrick's coaching impact versus PR hype**, and **Emotional volatility coupled with media pressure cycles**. Along the way, we'll analyse key themes like *media narrative cycle*, *crowd tension*, and *game state management*—because these underrated facets feed directly into the drama that explodes around United fixtures.



Post-2013 Identity Crisis: The Missing DNA

When Ferguson bowed out in 2013, he left behind a club with a storied identity, built on attacking flair, youth development, and a sense of resilient pride. Fast forward to today, and United resembles a ship struggling with its rudder. The **identity crisis** is palpable.

In many post-Fergie seasons, the club has questioned what style it should stand for:

- Possession-based football?
- Counter-attacking pragmatism?
- A rebuilding project invested in youth or a short-term patchwork?

This uncertainty seeps beyond the dressing room and onto the pitch. The effect? Matches often lack coherence, leading to lacklustre performances. But paradoxically, this uncertainty also feeds a volatile environment—an anxious fanbase, uncertain players, and overbearing media narratives.

Because the style is so unsettled, every game feels like a test of identity itself rather than footballing fluidity. When you watch, for instance, a slog of a 0-0 where neither side creates much, the tension in the stands is often

disproportionately high. It's as if supporters are waiting for the other shoe to drop: a freak error, a late penalty, a squabble—all boiling down to a collective nervous energy.

The “Airport Runway” Midfield Problem

One way this identity crisis manifests itself is through the infamous “airport runway” midfield setup—thin, overly stretched, and lacking defensive solidity. When United midfield lines are exposed by mispositions or poor transitions, it invites opposition pressure, further feeding crowd tension. The football may be ordinary, but the perceived fragility of the system ratchets up the drama.

Managerial Churn and Mismatched Squads: The Chicken-and-Egg of Disarray

Since 2013, United has seen a revolving door of managers—Moyes, Van Gaal, Mourinho, Solskjær, Rangnick, and now Ten Hag. Such churn destabilises any club, but here it compounds issues:

1. **Mismatched squads:** Players signed under one regime rarely fit the next manager’s tactical blueprint, creating a patchwork squad with limited coherence.
2. **Disillusioned players:** Individuals never fully certain of their role or system buy-in.
3. **Fan confusion:** One season’s “project” becomes the next’s “failure”.

Each managerial change resets hope and hype, but tactical shifts create inconsistencies on the pitch. This lack of clear direction breeds inconsistency in performances and match outcomes.



Left with such squad chaos, the **game state management**—how the team handles leading, drawing, or trailing situations—often looks nerve-wracking. United frequently overcommit in attack when ahead, or nervously crumble when defending. Matches turn dramatic because, while genuine quality is absent, the team increasingly plays like one teetering on a knife-edge.

When Systems Don’t Fit Transfers

Related to my pet peeve with transfer talk is the failure to consider “system fit.” United has signed many marquee players who wouldn’t thrive in the evolving tactical needs of their manager. The consequence? Individual talent

doesn't translate to team success or consistency, with the midfield often resembling an "airport runway"—wide open and vulnerable.

Carrick's Coaching Impact vs PR Hype

Michael Carrick's transition from player to coach brought optimism. His deep understanding of United's DNA and footballing ethos promised a stabilising influence during managerial flux.

Yet, this also introduced an element of PR hype that at times overshadows reality:

- **Fan expectations skyrocketed** during his interim reign—many presumed a return to the "Class of 92" sensibilities.
- **The media narrative cycle** amplified Carrick as a unifying figure, creating a feedback loop where press coverage heightened crowd expectations, increasing game tension.

In truth, Carrick's impact, while stabilising in some coaching aspects, wasn't a panacea. Old structural problems such as recruitment errors and tactical misalignments remained. When performances dipped, the emotional volatility around the team increased because fans and press alike felt the heightened emotional investment the PR hype generated.

Coaching Influence vs On-Pitch Realities

The disconnect here is stark. Coaching credentials and potential don't instantly mend problems built across seasons of imbalance. But the media, chasing stories, often paints such appointments as revolutions. When the football remains patchy, fans' frustration escalates—not just at the players but at the narrative rollercoaster itself.

Emotional Volatility and Media Pressure Cycles

The most compelling reason why ordinary football turns into drama lies in the intricate interplay of emotional volatility and relentless media pressure around Manchester United.

Matchdays become elongated emotional experiences for all involved:

- Supporters arrive already primed by news cycles loaded with opinion pieces and social media speculation.
- Any in-game incident—an error, a referee decision, a heated exchange—becomes magnified.
- Commentators and pundits dissect tactical flaws and mistakes with hysterical language.
- Players' visible emotional responses fuel further speculation and narratives about "culture" or "mentality".

Repeatedly we see the **media narrative cycle** drive up the pressure. It starts with hope or criticism in previews, peaks with drama on the pitch, then spills over into post-match content saturated with [11v11.com](https://www.11v11.com) blame, praise, and wild theories. This cycle inflames crowd tension, turning routine moments into flashpoints.

Game State Management Under the Spotlight

Tensions escalate particularly during fragile game states: protecting a narrow lead, chasing a late equaliser, or defending a draw. Due to tactical deficiencies, United often mismanage these moments—fumbling possession, committing risky fouls, or losing shape. The consequence is an emotional crescendo from the crowd and media alike.

This pressure cooker environment explains why even matches with average footballing quality become spectacles of heightened drama, with tempers flaring both on and off the pitch.

Conclusion: Beyond the Drama, a Search for Stability

In summary, the drama around Manchester United's matches, despite ordinary football, is no accident. It stems from:

- A post-2013 identity crisis causing unsettled styles and confused transitional phases.
- Managerial churn and poorly fitting squads creating patchy performances and fragile structure.
- Coaching figures like Carrick carrying both stabilising potential and PR-driven expectations.
- The potent mix of emotional volatility and relentless media narrative cycles that amplify tensions.

Until United can rediscover tactical coherence, improve game state management, and escape this cyclical hype-and-blame spiral, ordinary performances are bound to feel like high-drama affairs. For fans and observers alike, the challenge is to cut through the noise and recognise the deeper structural and systemic issues behind the occasional fireworks.

Because in the end, great football and great drama don't have to be mutually exclusive—but right now at Old Trafford, the latter too often overshadows the former.