

Tale of two Manchesters: United, City's ever-changing rivalry



MANCHESTER, England -- The gray clouds hover above the autumn morning in the northwest of England. I am outside Manchester's busy city center, an area of council homes on one side and a chain of shops across the road. Then I turn to Bank street, off Ashton New Road, which is a few steps from Manchester City's facilities, close to the National Cycling Center.

"This site right here used to be Manchester United's ground before Old Trafford," says Manchester football historian Gary James, who's also my walking tour guide for today. James points to a plaque on a house, stating the original location of Bank Street Ground, the birth home of Manchester United, which was Newton Heath F.C. between 1893 and 1910. "This territory, if you like, was very much Manchester United's -- probably around World War II -- and then it became more Citified ... and nowadays it's totally blue."

History never escapes you. It's imprinted on everything, and despite the differences between both clubs in the present day, it's important to remember that both sides originally come from the same thread and naturally, the same people. "Traditionally, both clubs are similar, working-class," James says as we continue to walk around the area, one that is historically known as an epicenter of the industrial revolution formerly surrounded by chemical plants, iron and steel foundries, and textile miles where industrial capitalism and the West African slave trade drove the city's growth and labor force. Immigrants from all over lived and commuted in these areas and so, in time, came their two football clubs." Both teams [were born] from east Manchester. A strong, working-class area. James explains how United eventually headed west in 1910 after Old Trafford was built and therefore creating more support on the West Side of Manchester, traditionally a wealthier side of the city. City, meanwhile, left Hyde Road and headed to Maine Road and Moss Side in 1923, a ground shared by both clubs between 1941 and 1948 after the second World War damaged Old Trafford.

The similarities are not just shared in geography but also the ups and downs of their dominance. Man City were actually the best supported club in the entire league right up to the first World War, while Man United came close to going bankrupt in the 1930's. But that changed after Sir Matt Busby's arrival as a manager in 1945 and began the journey on creating a legacy with the Busby Babes.

As we conclude our walk in this part of town, James takes me through a beautifully complex, historical journey of Manchester City and Manchester United. Through his encyclopedic knowledge, I understand better the significance of these two clubs and how their history also tells the story of the working class Mancunian. The industrial revolution was born here alongside football, intertwining the two.

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