

The fight for Manchester United

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15 May, 2005

THE ARTICLE

The fight for Manchester United

BNE: An acrimonious battle has been launched by fans of Manchester United Football Club against the takeover bid by US business magnate Malcolm Glazer. A reputed ninety per cent of the club's fans are bitterly opposed to the American taking over the reigns at their beloved club. Many supporters believe their favorite team being sold is akin to their grandparents being traded. Rather disturbingly, perhaps many fans, if push came to shove, would choose their club in preference to their grandparents. The club's huge global following is being asked to boycott merchandise from team sponsors Nike and Vodafone. Manchester United is the biggest brand in world football and has the largest fan club.

At the heart of this fray is whether Mr Glazer knows or cares about football. Fans fear he is only interested in milking the club for profits and that the success of the team on the pitch will suffer. They have already scoffed at Mr Glazer's statement saying he is an avid Manchester United fan, reminding the tycoon he has never once set foot in their hallowed stadium to watch a game. Mr Glazer's two sisters have added fuel to the fire by claiming their brother is only interested in money. They believe he will immediately raise ticket prices and then squeeze every last cent there is to be made from the club. Mr Glazer is a fraction short of the 75 per cent he needs for total control of the club.

WARM-UPS

1. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics you are interested in, which do not look interesting and which look really boring:

football (soccer) / Manchester United / David Beckham / favourite sports teams / grandparents / Nike / Vodafone / milk / profits / tycoons / ticket prices

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

2. FOOTBALL: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with football (soccer). Share your words with your partner / group and talk about them.

3. ALIEN INTEREST: Many Manchester United fans resent a football "outsider" buying their beloved club. What do you think of "outsiders", or foreigners, taking control of the following positions in your country?

- a. A foreigner becoming president or prime minister.
- b. A foreigner becoming monarch.
- c. A foreigner becoming head of your country's secret services.
- d. A foreigner becoming your national soccer team's coach.
- e. A foreigner named as chief of your country's armed forces.
- f. A foreigner becoming boss of your country's department of immigration.

What nationalities would be acceptable in the above positions and which would be totally abhorrent?

4. SELLING YOUR GRANDMOTHER: In English there is an expression "(to) sell one's grandmother". It means you will do anything to get something you want. What would you sell if you REALLY wanted something? Put the following in order. Which would you sell first, second ... last? Talk about your decisions with your partner.

- a. Grandmother
- b. Cousin
- c. Car
- d. All of the hair on your head
- e. A kidney
- f. Your collection of music and photographs
- g. House
- h. Pet

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|---|-------|
| a. A famous football team has to fight to win a big tournament. | T / F |
| b. A football team's fans are rejecting a takeover bid for their club. | T / F |
| c. Some fans would rather sell their grandparents than their team. | T / F |
| d. Fans worldwide are being asked to boycott Nike and Vodafone. | T / F |
| e. The love for football is at the heart of this matter. | T / F |
| f. Fans believe the buyer of their club has a passion for their team. | T / F |
| g. The two sisters of the team's buyer tried to set him on fire. | T / F |
| h. The buyer is still a long way from assuring total control of the club. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| a. acrimonious | controlling |
| b. magnate | melee |
| c. taking over the reigns | worsened an already bad situation |
| d. akin | sacred |
| e. if push came to shove | mogul |
| f. fray | ardent |
| g. scoffed at | rancorous |
| h. avid | derided |
| i. hallowed | comparable |
| j. added fuel to the fire | if a choice had to be made |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. An acrimonious battle | this fray |
| b. takeover | merchandise |
| c. bitterly | every last cent |
| d. if push came | bid |
| e. boycott | for profits |
| f. At the heart of | has been launched |
| g. milking the club | to the fire |
| h. an avid | to shove |
| i. added fuel | Manchester United fan |
| j. squeeze | opposed to |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the correct spaces in the text.

BNE: An _____ battle has been launched by fans of Manchester United Football Club against the takeover bid by US business _____ Malcolm Glazer. A _____ ninety per cent of the club's fans are bitterly opposed to the American taking over the reigns at their _____ club. Many supporters believe their favorite team being sold is _____ to their grandparents being traded. Rather disturbingly, perhaps many fans, if push came to _____, would choose their club in preference to their grandparents. The club's huge global following is being asked to _____ merchandise from team sponsors Nike and Vodafone. Manchester United is the biggest _____ in world football and has the largest fan club.

boycott
reputed
acrimonious
brand
beloved
shove
magnate
akin

At the heart of this _____ is whether Mr Glazer knows or cares about football. Fans _____ he is only interested in _____ the club for profits and that the success of the team on the pitch will suffer. They have already _____ at Mr Glazer's statement saying he is an _____ Manchester United fan, reminding the tycoon he has never once set foot in their _____ stadium to watch a game. Mr Glazer's two sisters have added fuel to the fire by claiming their brother is only interested in money. They believe he will immediately raise ticket prices and then _____ every last cent there is to be made from the club. Mr Glazer is a _____ short of the 75 per cent he needs for total control of the club.

scoffed
fear
fraction
hallowed
fray
squeeze
milking
avid

AFTER READING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... of the words '**football**' and '**club**'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare and talk about your answers to this exercise. After you agree, check your answers against the text.

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT FOOTBALL SURVEY: In pairs / groups write down questions about football (soccer).

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make a mini-presentation to another group / the class on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| • launched | • heart |
| • 90 per cent | • profits |
| • grandparents | • pitch |
| • shove | • hallowed |
| • Nike | • fuel |
| • brand | • squeeze |

LANGUAGE

FROM THE ARTICLE: In pairs / groups, complete the following sentence starters using your own words, about your own story. Forget about the Manchester United news item.

An acrimonious battle _____

Many people, if push came to shove, would _____

People are being asked to boycott _____

At the heart of this fray is _____

People fear he is only interested in _____

They have added fuel to the fire by _____

- After you have completed each sentence, try to develop a story.
- Change partners and compare your sentence endings and tell your stories.
- Write down any unknown vocabulary you hear from your new partners.

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. What did you think when you saw the headline of this article?
- b. Do you like reading about football (soccer)?
- c. Do you read the sports section in a newspaper?
- d. Which word is best, 'football' or 'soccer'?
- e. Do you think there is anything wrong in Malcolm Glazer's attempt to take control of Manchester United?
- f. Do you follow any sports team with avid interest?
- g. Football is the most important thing in the lives of many British people. What do you think of this?
- h. What can someone with no knowledge of football do with a world famous football team?
- i. Would you boycott a company's goods?
- j. Have you ever been bitterly opposed to something?

STUDENT B's questions (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading the article?
- b. Would you ever sell your grandmother?
- c. Do you like football (soccer)?
- d. What do you know about Manchester United?
- e. Can you understand the feelings of the fans in this story?
- f. How would you feel if your favorite team was totally changed?
- g. Is football (soccer) the best game in the world?
- h. What do you think of Malcolm Glazer's sisters' comments?
- i. How would you feel if you were Mr Glazer?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What question would you like to ask about this topic?
- b. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- c. Was there a question you didn't like?
- d. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- e. What did you like talking about?
- f. Do you want to know how anyone else answered the questions?
- g. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

IF PUSH CAME TO SHOVE: Complete the following "If push came to shove questions" then ask them to your partner / group. Make a note of different students' answers below each question.

If push came to shove, would you...

eat _____ or _____ ?

live _____ or _____ ?

marry _____ or _____ ?

sell _____ or _____ ?

work _____ or _____ ?

have _____ or _____ ?

- Ask the questions to four or five other students if you can.
- Return to your original partner and report on how other students answered your questions

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

The fight for Manchester United

BNE: An acrimonious battle _____ by fans of Manchester United Football Club against the takeover bid by US business magnate Malcolm Glazer. _____ of the club's fans are bitterly opposed to the American taking over _____ beloved club. Many supporters believe their favorite team being sold is akin to their grandparents being traded. Rather disturbingly, perhaps many fans, _____, would choose their club in preference to their grandparents. The club's huge global following is being _____ from team sponsors Nike and Vodafone. Manchester United is the biggest brand in world football and has the largest fan club.

At the _____ is whether Mr Glazer knows or cares about football. Fans fear he is only _____ club for profits and that the success of the team on the pitch will suffer. They have already scoffed at Mr Glazer's statement saying _____ Manchester United fan, reminding the tycoon he has never once set foot in their hallowed stadium to watch a game. Mr Glazer's two sisters have _____ by claiming their brother is only interested in money. They believe he will immediately raise ticket prices and then squeeze every last cent there is to be made from the club. Mr Glazer _____ the 75 per cent he needs for total control of the club.

HOMEWORK

- 1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION:** Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.
- 2. INTERNET:** Search the Internet and find information on Manchester United. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson.
- 3. MY TEAM:** Make a poster about your favourite sports team. Show it to your classmates in your next lesson. Ask your classmates what they think of the team.
- 4. LETTER:** Pretend you are an avid, passionate fan of Manchester United. Write a letter to Malcolm Glazer to tell him your thoughts on how the team should be run. Show your letter to the class next lesson. Did your classmates write similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE

- a. F b. T c. T d. T e. T f. F g. F h. F

SYNONYM MATCH

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| a. acrimonious | rancorous |
| b. magnate | mogul |
| c. taking over the reigns | controlling |
| d. akin | comparable |
| e. if push came to shove | if a choice had to be made |
| f. fray | melee |
| g. scoffed at | derided |
| h. avid | ardent |
| i. hallowed | sacred |
| j. added fuel to the fire | worsened an already bad situation |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. An acrimonious battle | has been launched |
| b. takeover | bid |
| c. bitterly | opposed to |
| d. if push came | to shove |
| e. boycott | merchandise |
| f. At the heart of | this fray |
| g. milking the club | for profits |
| h. an avid | Manchester United fan |
| i. added fuel | to the fire |
| j. squeeze | every last cent |

GAP FILL:

BNE: An **acrimonious** battle has been launched by fans of Manchester United Football Club against the takeover bid by US business **magnate** Malcolm Glazer. A **reputed** ninety per cent of the club's fans are bitterly opposed to the American taking over the reigns at their **beloved** club. Many supporters believe their favorite team being sold is **akin** to their grandparents being traded. Rather disturbingly, perhaps many fans, if push came to **shove**, would choose their club in preference to their grandparents. The club's huge global following is being asked to **boycott** merchandise from team sponsors Nike and Vodafone. Manchester United is the biggest **brand** in world football and has the largest fan club.

At the heart of this **fray** is whether Mr Glazer knows or cares about football. Fans **fear** he is only interested in **milking** the club for profits and that the success of the team on the pitch will suffer. They have already **scoffed** at Mr Glazer's statement saying he is an **avid** Manchester United fan, reminding the tycoon he has never once set foot in their **hallowed** stadium to watch a game. Mr Glazer's two sisters have added fuel to the fire by claiming their brother is only interested in money. They believe he will immediately raise ticket prices and then **squeeze** every last cent there is to be made from the club. Mr Glazer is a **fraction** short of the 75 per cent he needs for total control of the club.