

Ten Hag has the wheels in motion as Manchester United are on the way back to the top.

As Manchester United's players headed for the tunnel with beaming smiles on their faces, it was their manager, so often a figure of assurance, who took it upon himself to whip up the crowd into a frenzied roar. Seemingly, signalling his knowledge of the fact he and his players were gearing up for what some would label as a season-defining week. Thursday sees the Old Trafford club resume their heavyweight Europa League knockout tie with Barcelona after a swash-buckling draw in the first leg. Swiftly followed by a visit to Wembley for a shot at ending their six-year wait for a piece of silverware as they go head-to-head with Newcastle United in the Carabao Cup Final. These are the kind of weeks that Manchester United managers should live and are measured upon. However, the evidence so far points to Erik Ten Hag taking it all in his stride.

Over 26 glorious years at the helm, Sir Alex Ferguson became the master emperor at managing weeks of this magnitude. He developed the ability to build squads he could completely trust, where regular rotation was flawless and uncontroversial, and he relieved pressure on his players and heated it upon his opponents with clever manipulation in his press conferences. An expensive rabble of managers have since tried to repeat those successes, including managerial greats like Jose Mourinho and Louis Van Gaal. Yet despite not possessing the same burgeoning CV as those predecessors, Erik Ten Hag has been able to galvanise an entire fanbase, elevate the performance levels of his squad and finally ignite the pride and belief of Manchester United supporters that they can compete manfully among England's and perhaps Europe's elite again.

Sunday afternoon saw the reds secure yet another victory on home soil, their 17th in all competitions this season, as they swept aside Leicester City with some slick and unerring attacking play. The 3-0 scoreline seems convincing yet the first was sloppy and the hosts were indebted to some goalkeeping heroics from David De Gea to reach the break with a one-goal lead. In response to what he described later as a "rubbish first half", Ten Hag made a couple of inspired half-time alterations. Jadon Sancho was introduced from the bench and deployed as a roaming number ten. The Englishman is a prime example of a lengthy list of issues Erik Ten Hag has had to address. Sancho was removed from the limelight and given time off to re-focus and improve his fitness to the required standard and his transition back into the fold has been seamless. On Sunday he exuded flair, confidence and dynamism, all familiar traits of Manchester United attackers of old, in a display that suggests he could play a defining role in the closing months of the season.

It is impossible to talk about the Red Devils without hailing their chief marksman. Everything Marcus Rashford touches at the moment is turning to gold and Leicester were the latest to fall victim to his devastating form. His 69 minutes yesterday produced yet another two goals, bumping up his tally for the current season to 24 in all competitions, and in the meantime surpassing his previous best from three years ago. Since the World Cup nobody has netted more times than him but it's becoming more than just a hot streak. At 25 years of age, he is entering his peak years, and his frightening pace, physicality and deadly finishing is pushing United ever so close to the title race discussion.

Ten Hag would likely bat away these whispers as his team is contently going about its business in an unruffled manner that has seemed alien to the soap opera seen at Carrington in recent years. They are still competing in all three cup competitions and Manchester City and Arsenal are seemingly reluctant in wanting to assume command of the Premier League. All of a sudden, what was accepted as a season of rebuild could yet yield silverware and glory. We will certainly know much more by full-time at Wembley next weekend.