

WAYNE ROONEY MAKING HISTORY

“ I THINK YOU PLAY FOOTBALL TO WIN THINGS, TO MAKE PEOPLE HAPPY AND TO MAKE HISTORY ”



Wayne Rooney was in the form of his life before an unfortunate ankle injury gave Premier League defenders a few weeks of respite. Their peace won't last long. The young striker chatted to *Sport* about goals, guitars and his 'disgraceful' red leather jacket

It is three weeks before Wayne Rooney injured his ankle and *Sport* is plonked on a sofa at the snazzy, glass-fronted Lowry Hotel in Manchester, awaiting his arrival. These are halcyon days for the boy wonder: he just can't stop scoring goals and his displays have had the pundits purring like kittens. Rooney has just helped Manchester United dismantle Middlesbrough 4-1 at the weekend, and today is his day off. But, instead of popping round to Cristiano Ronaldo's for a brew and a chinwag, he has kindly agreed to talk football – and other assorted oddities – with *Sport*.

We're expecting the big man's arrival, but the guests chatting downstairs and the businessmen thumbing BlackBerries and slurping cappuccinos in the corner have no idea who is about to enter the building. Then it happens. A figure dressed casually in a grey tracksuit and black beanie slips quietly through the glass doors. With his head bowed, he strolls across reception to the lift – he steps inside, and the doors close behind him.

Guests are still chatting, BlackBerries are still being thumbed and cappuccinos are still being slurped. Thirty-one million pounds worth of footballing super-talent has just ghosted through the room, and nobody has the foggiest.

Inconspicuous? Discreet? From what we've heard about Wayne Rooney – lion-hearted winner on the pitch, bashful and quiet off it – this young man wouldn't want it any other way. And all it took was a good woolly hat.

A few minutes later, and we're summoned up to Room 325. A quick knock on the door, and we're ushered into an impressive suite stocked with a handful of Rooney's 'people', a large TV showing a rerun of the previous day's Spurs-Blackburn game and a mouthwatering trolley of sandwiches and Diet

Coke for collective munching. It looks, all in all, like good fun. But something is missing. Ah, yes. Rooney. As *Sport* sits twiddling our thumbs, a now hatless Rooney walks into the room. He's slightly smaller than we imagined, but built like a panzer. It turns out he has just been posing in a darkened back room for our cover photo this week.

Rooney clocks us looking slightly lemon-like on the sofa and marches over, smiling, to shake hands. He then, oddly, takes off his shirt. We're a bit confused. Is this some sort of greeting? Are we supposed to do the same? Ah, no – he's just getting changed after the shoot. Sporting a fresh T-shirt, he sits back down and we're ready to begin – starting with this critical weekend for England...

So, Wayne, it's crunch time for England's Euro 2008 qualification campaign. Did you have mixed emotions after the game against Russia – scoring a great goal but then conceding the penalty?

"It wasn't a great result for us and all the lads were disappointed, obviously, but we still have a chance to qualify. Israel have a decent record at home, so I think that'll be a tough game for Russia."

Given that you need Israel to get a result for England to be able to qualify, will you be watching that game from behind the sofa?

"I'm not sure I'll have a chance to watch it, to be honest – but if I'm in and it's on, I'll watch it. I love watching pretty much any football, particularly when the game means something."

Does this type of game make you nervous – when there's so much at stake but nothing you can do to influence the result?

"Not so much nervous, no. It's frustrating when

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FAST FACTS

WAYNE ROONEY

Born October 24 1985**Birthplace** Liverpool**Height** 5ft 10ins**Position** Striker**Teams** Man Utd and England**Previous club** Everton**Man Utd debut**September 28 2004 v Fenerbahce
(Champions League)**League appearances** 107**League goals** 45**England debut** February 12

2003 v Australia (Friendly)

International caps 40**International goals** 14

'One day, I'd love to be United captain'



Rooney's been in great goalscoring touch, both for club and country

a game as important as this is out of your hands, but I like the games where you need a team to drop points – it makes it more interesting to watch. Like the Arsenal-Chelsea game at the end of last season – Chelsea had to win otherwise we'd won the league. Arsenal were winning and then Chelsea got an equaliser and probably should have snatched a winner in the end, so I was quite nervous watching that one. But it was great to watch."

We see there's a rerun of Spurs-Blackburn on the TV in here. Would you say you're slightly obsessed by the game?

"Yeah, maybe. Whenever a game's on, I always watch it. Whenever I'm in the house, I just love watching football games on the television. I'm not sure I'm obsessed, though – I just love the game."

What other, non-footballing stuff do you like to watch on television?

"24, *The Sopranos*, *Prison Break*... we're always booked in to hotels when we're away, so you get a lot of time to watch television. And I like Harry Potter – all those films, too."

What's your most-watched DVD at the moment?

"24, but I'm coming towards the end! I've now only got 10 episodes left of the whole thing, so I don't want to watch it all yet or it'll be over."

Great show. Anyway, back to the football, and you've been scoring loads of goals recently. Have you been pleased with your form?

"Yeah, it's definitely been a good time for me, goals-wise. I've been scoring regularly, but you have to make sure that you keep doing what you're doing when you're on a good run – you have to keep working hard."

It's a bright new era at Man Utd these days, with youngsters like Nani and Anderson coming through to challenge the older guard for places. At the ripe old age of 22, do you feel – strangely – like one of the more senior lads now?

"A little bit, but not too much! Obviously, I know how they all feel from when I was in their situation, because I've always been the youngest in the team. Now there are a few more younger than me at United, and I know it's sometimes difficult because you want to play every game, especially when you are that age. In a way, I do feel a bit older as I've played for a few years now – but I still feel more a part of the younger ones, really."

When you signed for Manchester United, did you have a special initiation ceremony? Did they cut up your clothes or beat you up or anything?

"No, at United you just have to give a speech when you arrive. Every player who joins the club does it, so it is okay. I knew a few of the lads already from England, so it was a bit easier for me I suppose. If you're a foreign lad coming in, though, I guess it could be quite nerve-racking."

You grew up as an Everton fan, but are you familiar with United's history and how important it is to leave your own mark on it?

"I think you play football to win things, to make people happy and to make history. If I can have half of the success that the Busby Babes did at United, then I'd be delighted with that. You definitely want to be remembered and not forgotten, so I suppose everybody wants to be a part of history."

You're now wearing the famous number 10 shirt at United, just like Mark Hughes and Denis Law did before you. Is that a big honour for you?

"I've always said that number 10 is my favourite number, and especially to wear the same shirt as the likes of Denis Law and Mark Hughes is great. But number 10 has always been my favourite number – when it became available, I went in straight away to make them aware that I wanted to have it."

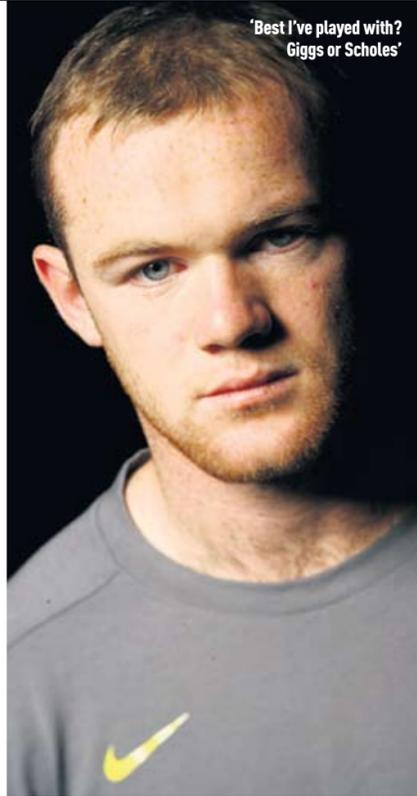
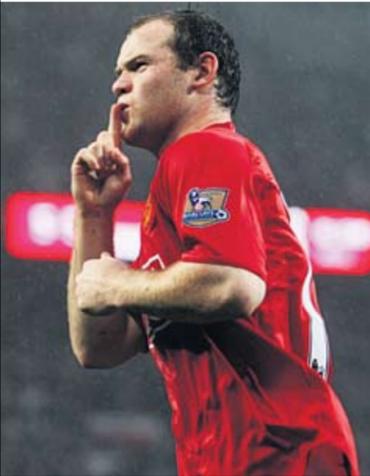
Sir Alex Ferguson has said you've talked about being Manchester United captain one day, too. Still the plan?

"Yeah, of course. I love playing at United and, you know, hopefully one day, if I got chosen to be captain, then it would be a great honour. But, as I say, there are still a few people there now who would probably be likely captains, so you never know. If I got the chance to be captain of United, then I would be delighted with that."

You're a hero up here. Does it feel odd to see people walking around with your name on their back?

"Yeah, it's always strange to see kids – and even grown men – walking around with my name and number on the backs of their shirts. It's weird! →

I WENT FOR SOMETHING TO EAT AND SAW A LAD WALK PAST THE RESTAURANT IN A SHIRT WITH MY NAME ON IT... IT'S ALL A BIT WEIRD FOR ME



'Best I've played with? Giggs or Scholes'

ROONEY THE SILVERWARE

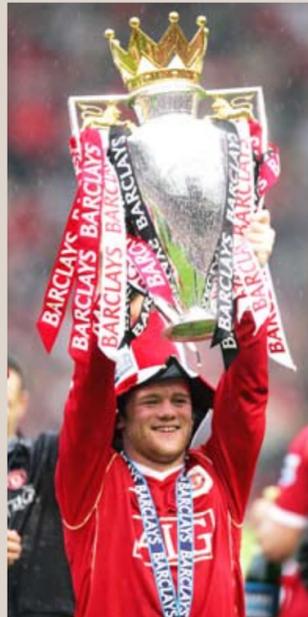
NATURAL BORN WINNER

Skill. Strength. Speed. Wayne Rooney isn't short of any of these qualities. But, to be invited to join a team managed by Sir Alex Ferguson, you need something more. You need to be a winner.

"It's one of those things – I just love winning and hate losing," Rooney told *Sport*. "It's not just the fans who get hurt, it's the players as well. If you could see us travelling home after games if we haven't won... [shakes his head]... well, it's just silent. Everyone is thinking about the game – they're all just so disappointed."

With Premier League, Carling Cup and Community Shield winner's medals, two PFA Young Player of the Year awards and a FIFPro World Young Player of the Year going to his name, Rooney has already amassed a sizeable booty of silverware.

"I've got a little room built in my house with stuff in," he says. "I keep shirts and balls and all the stuff from football in there."



I went for something to eat the other day – it was about 10pm when I left and I saw a lad of about 15 walking past the restaurant in a shirt with my name on it. It's just... it's all a bit weird for me, yeah."

Did you receive any advice on how to handle the limelight – interviews, fan attention and stuff like that?

"Not really, no. I think, just when I first got through at Everton, I'd never really done no interviews. Since I joined United, though, I've done more and more. You get better as you go on, more used to it. It was just that once I started doing them more often, I got used to it all a bit more."

You must have your own heroes. Who's the best player you have ever played with and against?

"The best player I've ever played with? Scholesy or Giggsy. They're brilliant players and they've been brilliant players for years – that is what makes them so good. To play in the same team as Scholesy and Giggsy is a great honour for me. And against? Zidane. I played against France in the Euros in 2004, and he was unbelievable. He was one of the best players ever – to play against someone like that was great."

If Sport could get an English passport for any player in the world, who should we give it to?

"At the minute, it would be Lionel Messi. He is unbelievable. I was watching some Barcelona games and he has just been brilliant for them – and Argentina, too. He'd do very well, I think."

Who's your biggest sporting hero outside football?

"Erm... [long pause]... probably... I'm not sure! I've always loved Mike Tyson, just because of what he has done for boxing and how good he was at his

sport. Obviously, he's made some mistakes in his life – but, when he was at his best, he could have beaten anyone."

Speaking of boxing, is it true you had an arm wrestle with Ricky Hatton before his last fight?

[Laughs] "No, I honestly haven't got a clue where that came from! Never! I don't know where that's from, no!"

Darn tabloids. Still, it was a nice enough story because they said you beat him!

"Yeah, I probably would beat him to be honest. [Laughs] He's only scrawny, isn't he?"

Well, he'd definitely beat us. So who's your best friend in football?

"I've always been close to Alan Stubbs from my time at Everton. We always talk on the phone about football games and stuff."

What about at United – whose house do you pop round to after training?

"At United, it's probably Wes Brown. He lives right next to me, so it's quite easy and we speak a lot. We just chill out. Sometimes we just play computer games, watch television together or just lounge around for a bit."

Sounds good. If you could play for any team in history, who would it be?

"Erm... [even longer pause]... probably... erm... I don't know! I mean, Liverpool in the 1980s were brilliant and the 1999 Man Utd team was brilliant too. It's difficult to decide. If I had the choice, I'd like it to have been for a team playing fast, attacking football. So I'll probably say I'd like to have played for Man Utd in 1999."

Of them all, which is your favourite goal and why?

"I think me volley against Newcastle is the best goal I've ever scored – and it was quite important, too, because we were losing 1-0 and we had to score quite quickly to get back in the game. I think I was about to come off as well! I saw the subs warming up because I had a bit of a dead leg – but then when I scored they kept me on."

Not a bad strike considering you had a dead leg! How involved is Sir Alex Ferguson during the half-time chat?

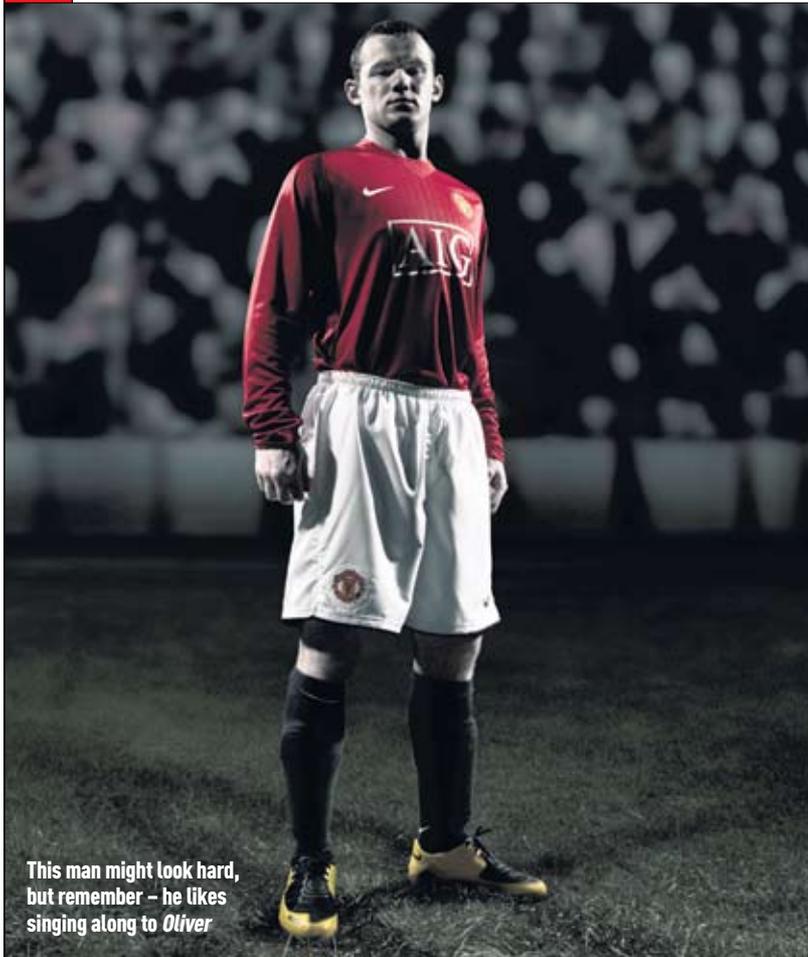
"Oh, he speaks to the team and he speaks to individuals as well. He tells you what you're doing right and where you're going wrong. He tells you what to keep doing and how to win the game. All the players listen to him and take it in – we all do what he tells us to do."

Have you ever been on the receiving end of his 'hairdryer' treatment?

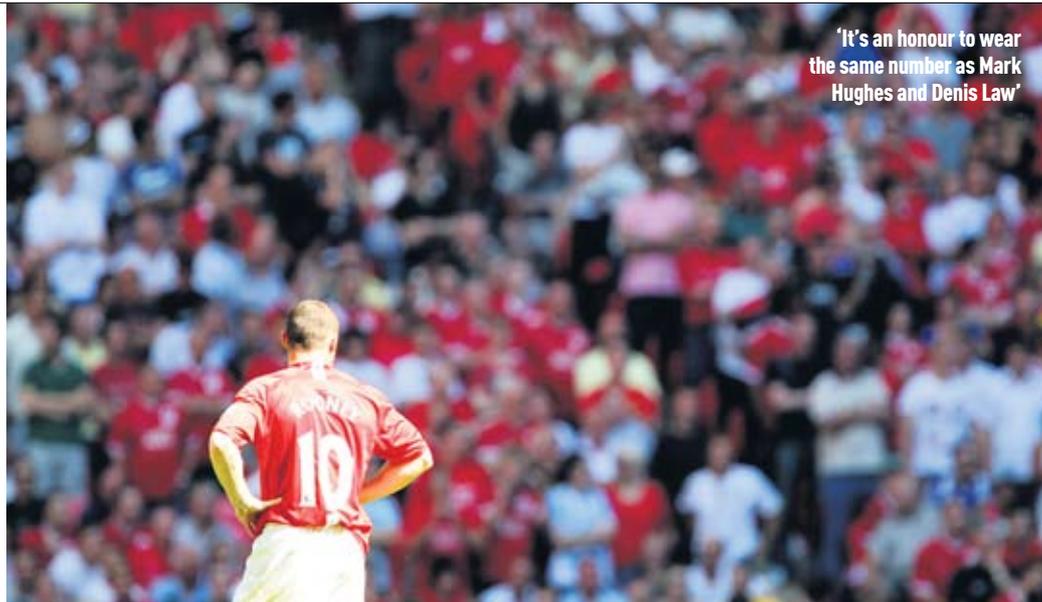
"Yeah, a few times! I think every player has! If you're not playing your best and you're not doing what you should be doing, he'll have a go at you, yeah [smiles]."

RICKY HATTON IN AN ARM WRESTLE? YEAH, I'D PROBABLY BEAT HIM – HE'S ONLY SCRAWNY, ISN'T HE?

DARREN STABLES (PRETIERS); ACTION IMAGES; JASON CARROLL (OFF); ACTION IMAGES; MICHAEL HEWITT (ACTION IMAGES)



This man might look hard, but remember – he likes singing along to *Oliver*



'It's an honour to wear the same number as Mark Hughes and Denis Law'



Is it quite frightening?

"Yeah, of course! *[Big smile]* It's just one of those things, though. You can't really say nothing back to the manager – you've just got to take it in and get on with it."

Important question, this – what's your record for keepy-uppies?

[Smiles] "I don't really do it anymore, to be honest. I used to do keepy-uppies when I was younger – me uncle used to take me out and we used to do kick-ups and count. I remember that whenever I got to 100 he used to always stop me. I don't really know why."

He probably thought you were going to go on forever. So, no more keepy-uppies...

"Well, I think that is probably the last time I counted them, when I was younger."

Who's the best at keepy-uppies at Old Trafford?

"Cristiano Ronaldo. Some of the things he does in the dressing room are just incredible... and he does them without his boots on as well. He just gets in the changing room and does all these tricks bare-footed."

Juggling the old bar of soap and stuff like that?

"Yeah, he's unbelievable. *[Shakes his head]* His feet are just so fast – it's good to watch."

Where do you like to go on holiday?

"We've been on holiday to the south of France for the past two years, and it's been really nice. Nice cities down there, and a nice place – we enjoy it out there, so I'd go again. I really want to go to Australia one day, though. I've always wanted to go there ever since I was a kid, so hopefully one day I'll get the chance to go on holiday there."

We read on your website that your least favourite television personality is Jonathan Ross. Why don't you like him?

"I just don't like him."

Fair enough, us neither. And it also says you sing along to the soundtrack from *Oliver* – is that serious, or is your website chap stitching you up?

"No, I just love musicals and I'm always watching all the ones that have been made into films. We were over in Euro 2004 and we were always going for massages after training. It gets a bit boring when you've been lying there for a while, so I got a few films to bring in and put on when I was having a massage. I brought *Oliver* in and had a really good singalong. It was good! Something different, I guess..."

Would you like to play a musical instrument? The piano or guitar, maybe?

"Yeah, I would like to play a musical instrument. I've been trying to play the guitar, actually."

How are you getting on?

"It is just doing me head in. *[Laughs]* It's hard. But yeah, I'd like to learn to play the guitar well."

What's the most regrettable item you've ever left the house wearing?

"I've got this red leather jacket. When I was in the shop trying it on, the fella was like talking me into buying it, so I got it. I left the house in it and I looked back and thought it was disgraceful. Yeah, it was really bad."

And how about your best investment... a fancy car or something?

"*The Sopranos* DVD. I was going to say the 24 DVD, but you bought me that didn't you?"

Us? No, we've never... er...

"Yeah, I bought you that," *nods Rooney's agent, Paul Stretford, smiling.*

And is there anything you really regret spending your money on?

"Oh, buying and then swapping cars. You lose a lot of money doing that, every time you sell them. When you buy some cars and then you don't really need them and you lose money – that can be pretty annoying."

And, finally, it's 2020 and you've won every trophy on the planet and they're making *Wayne Rooney: The Movie*. Who would you like to play you?

[Laughs] "Erm... I don't know... erm... me?"

No, that's cheating – somebody else.

"I don't know... er... Brad Pitt is my favourite actor, so I'd probably say him!"

MARK BAILEY

I WOULD LIKE TO PLAY AN INSTRUMENT. I'VE BEEN TRYING TO PLAY THE GUITAR, BUT IT'S DOING ME HEAD IN