

Man U on the comeback trail

You just can't keep a good team down. Man Utd may have had a November slump, but December saw a revitalisation of the team's fortunes. A wondrous month for Sir Alex Ferguson's men will have done much to alleviate the manager's choleric mood.

After months of in-fighting, with players such as the usually reliable Paul Scholes venting his spleen over the new formation Ferguson believes will deliver Utd another Champions' League victory, calm prevailed and the team began winning again. Vodafone has benefited from the phoenix-like rejuvenation of Manchester's finest: another Premiership title cannot be discounted.

Besides technical excellence, success at the top level of sport depends upon the ability to soak up and dish out pressure. Man Utd possesses this priceless quality: December's comparatively poor showing by the likes of Liverpool indicates that the pretenders to Utd's long reign have their work cut out in this department. O'Leary's Leeds appear to be made of stern stuff: perhaps they will push their rivals from across the Pennines the closest come season's end.

December also saw Nasser Hussein's England play India in three Test matches on the sub-continent. After the Ashes setback, the team had a point to prove: however, weakened by the opt-outs by key players such as Stewart, Gough and Caddick, few pundits gave the team much of a price to succeed on this most difficult of tours. Waugh's Australian champions had been humbled there the previous March – what chance did England have with such an inexperienced team?

After the first Test in Mohali, which India won at a canter, Hussein's men (and boys) put up a very strong performance in the final two matches: indeed, had

Sports Marketing has measured the pictorial coverage that sport sponsors have achieved throughout the whole of December in the sports pages of five national newspapers: *The Times*, *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail*. 'A' grades have been awarded for the best coverage, 'C' grades are still readable but are less noticeable.

Sponsor	Club/Event	Sport	A	B	C
Vodafone	Man Utd	Football	31	4	1
Carlsberg	Liverpool	Football	22	3	1
Dreamcast	Arsenal	Football	21	3	
Vodafone	England	Cricket	20	2	
Strongbow	Leeds Utd	Football	13	1	
Nationwide	England	Football	12	2	
ntl	Newcastle Utd	Football	11	1	
Umbro	England	Football	11		
Fly Emirates	Chelsea	Football	10	3	
Dr Martens	West Ham	Football	9	1	
Admiral	England	Cricket	9	1	
Orange	Australia	Cricket	7	1	
ntl	Celtic	Football	7		
Nike	Arsenal	Football	7		
Nike	Lleyton Hewitt	Tennis	6		
Reg Vardy	Sunderland	Football	5		
Holsten	Tottenham				
	Hotspur	Football	4		
Nike	Tiger Woods	Golf	3		
LG	Leicester City	Football	2		
adidas	Tottenham				
	Hotspur	Football	2		
TXU Energi	Ipswich Town	Football	1		
ntl	Celtic	Football	1		
BT Cellnet	Middlesbrough	Football	1		
BT Cellnet	England	Rugby			
		Union	1		
Siemens	Lazio	Football	1		

weather not intervened at Bangalore, a tied series would have been the likely result. The team had exceeded expectations, with a stronger squad the enviable outcome.

Vodafone's continued support of a team on the up has again won the company a double place on the table, another indication of the success of its many-pronged approach to the business of shirt-sponsorship.

Waugh's Australian team also makes it into *Papertrack* this month, with the broadsheets' cricket writers eagerly covering the Aussies' series with the South Africans. The first half of home and away series to decide the World Champions of Cricket, the series in December failed to live up to expectations.

Shaun Pollock's team were overwhelmed in the first two

Tests by a side eager to build on its burgeoning reputation. New team sponsors Orange has backed a winner with Waugh's men: the gap between the Australians and the rest seems to be lengthening.

So, 2001 drew to a close, with the apocalyptic predictions of 'the clash of civilisations' following September 11 failing to pass. Much went on as it did before, with people turning back to the sports pages.

2002 promises much in terms of the cultural microcosm of sport: the World Cup awaits in Korea and Japan, with England on board. Though football as a commercial proposition may be in trouble, media and public interest remains entrenched. Football is the number one sport in the UK and shows no signs of declining. ■

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