

OLD TRAFFORD V THE BERNABEAU **By Peter Jack**

WHAT'S the match day experience like at two of the world's most famous football stadia, Old Trafford in Manchester and the Bernabéu in Madrid?

By a strange quirk of fate, I attended both recently on two separate weekends – am I a lucky boy or what?! The first trip was a Christmas present from my boys, Patrick and Mark and the second was a birthday treat from me to me. So I thought I would compare and contrast the whole experience and grade it along the following 10 criteria:-

Following on from last week, this week I analyse the second half of my list:

6. Cost of travel to each city.
7. Tourist things to do in the city other than attend the match.
8. Cost of basic drink and food at the ground.
9. Safety in the ground.
10. Speed of exit.

6. Cost of Travel to the city

(a) Manchester.

This was with Easy Jet and the flights cost me £100. Both Easyjet and Ryanair make a killing out of Man. United, City, Liverpool and Everton fans every week. My flight was packed with United fans. A week later, it would be full of City fans who were then playing at home – Score 5/10

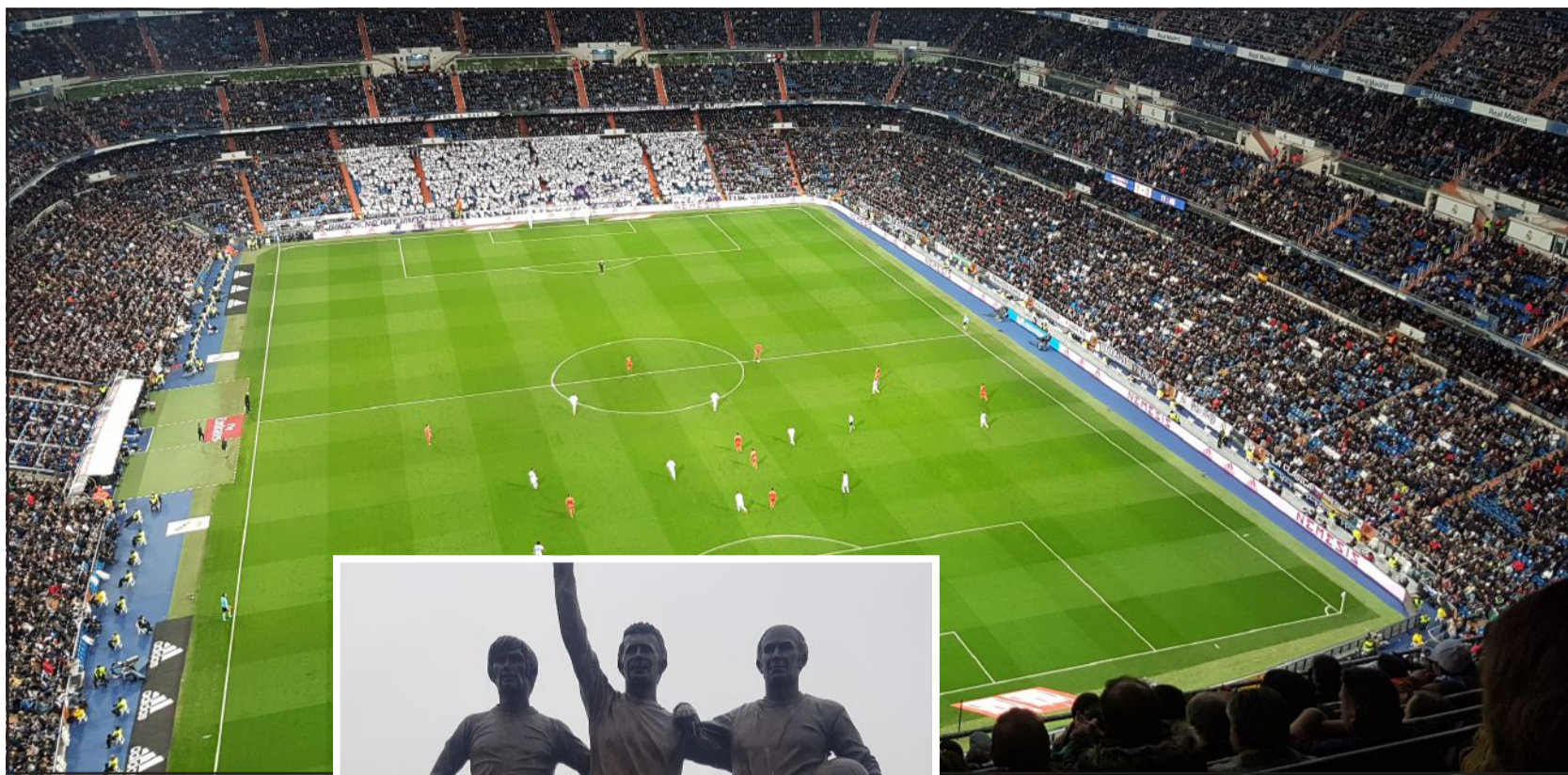
(b) Madrid

This was with Ryanair from Dublin and it cost me less than €100 ie four times as far to fly and it cost left – go figure! – Score 9/10.

7. Tourist attractions in the City

(a) Manchester

On the Saturday before the game, we had time to go into the fabulous Imperial War Museum and on the Sunday we walked past the Manchester Ship canal. We were lucky and saw a boat navigating and nudging its way through the locks. The boat was 80 years old and the crew of volunteers were taking it to Ashton to carry out some repairs. There were a lot of locks but the crew were enjoying the hard work as they winched the gates open and shut every time. We then had a tour of the fabulous John Rylands Library which has an amazing range of centuries of old books. John Rylands was the Bill Gates of his age and a major benefactor to charity. Both made their money in cutting edge technology, Gates with Microsoft and Rylands with the satanic cotton mills in what was once a red hot power house of the Industrial revolution. There was a great display in the library about the Reformation and in particular the contributions of Martin Luther, William Tyndale and William Caxton. The library is spell binding with quirky and exotic cloisters and very much of the Victorian era – it would have been a great back drop for the Harry Potter films! Manchester has improved a lot since I was there 40 years ago. It has many great galleries and museums – and all free, thanks to Tony Blair who has received a lot of justified criticism in his time as Premier but opening up



Inside the world famous Santiago Bernabeau, Madrid. NCL09-09s

galleries and museums free of charge to us punters was one of his greatest legacies. The famous Piccadilly Record store in the middle of Manchester is also worth a browse – Score a surprisingly high 8/10.

(b) Madrid

I know Manchester has improved in the last 40 years since I have been going to Old Trafford but it would find it hard to live with Madrid. Founded in 852AD, it boasts world class art galleries and museums such as the Prado (€15.00 where we saw a Botticelli, a Titian and a lot by Goya) the Reina Sofia including a lot by Salvador Dali and Picasso's famous "Guernica" (described as the 20th century's most important painting) – we got in there free on the Sunday afternoon; a fantastic park called El Retiro (Mark and I walked for a good hour on all three mornings before brekkie as the park had a lot of fabulous statues and a lovely lake and rowing boats which we were to try out later on; the Paleo Real (the residence of the monarch although he spends most of his time somewhere a lot quieter). The Plaza Mayor – a square with impressive equestrian statue and a lots of restaurants all reasonably priced; in addition there was El Rasto, Europe's largest flea market, which we visited on Sunday morning there was also a huge shopping street called Grand Via which I'm fairly sure I have seen on the telly for the last stage of the Vuelta (Spain's equivalent of the TDF) in September. The architecture was stunning, the place was packed with galleries and second hand book stalls and most places were walkable – we chalked up nearly 30 thousand steps each day! We were also entertained by three protest marches on three consecutive days, we even joined one. We felt like Father Dougal with a placard declaring, "Down with this sort of thing"! Score 9/10.

8. Cost of drink and food



The United Trinity of Best, Charlton and Law at Old Trafford. NCL09-07s

(a) Manchester

We didn't actually partake of either at the ground because the security was so tight and took so long to get in that we literally didn't have the time. The price was the usual exorbitant £5.00 for a beer and equally outrageous what was purported to be a pork pie – Score; 5/10.

(b)Madrid

Not Bodingtons here – it was Cervezas and tapas all the way! You could get a beer for €4.00 and unlike Old Trafford you could take it back to your seat with you as they trusted you to behave responsibly. The food was fairly good value to. Score 7/10

9. Safety

(a) Manchester.

This is now a sanitised corridor, fairly sterile, there is more danger of a heart attack in the 200 steps up to the back row of the stand than getting into a fist fan with the opposing fans. I was at a Spurs v Arsenal game in the 70's where the contest on the pitch was incidental to the fights on the terraces – Score 10/10.

(b) Madrid.

This place was as safe as the Bank of England but a lot more fun! You could take your one

(a) Manchester

If Man United is keen to get you into the ground and take your money off you, they are even keener to get you out. The turnstiles are opened immediately so you descend with the masses either into the Mega Store or various local watering holes. Inside thirty minutes, we were back at Patrick's flat to watch a much more meaningful and dramatic sporting spectacle, Ireland -v- France, as Mr. Cool, aka Johnny Sexton, launched his now legendary drop kick to kick France into touch and spark scenes of huge celebration – and that was just in a sitting room in West Manchester!

(b) Madrid.

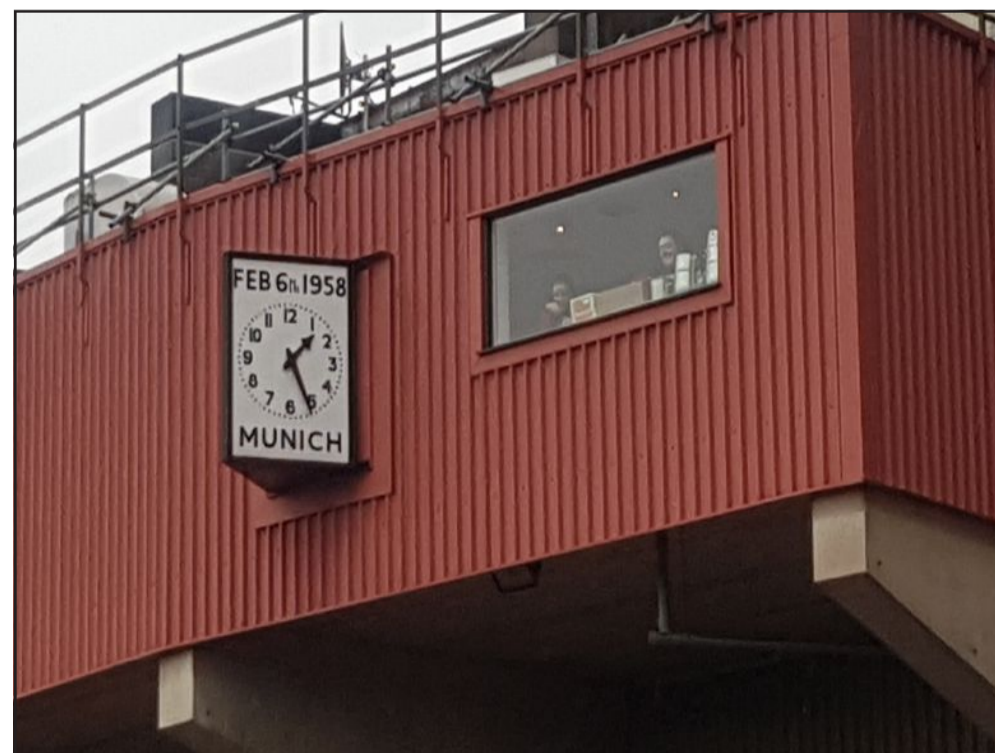
We took a last photo and wandered down the staircases before emerging from the stadium. We were able to dash across the road before police horses cleared the crowd for the cars of the players who were soon emerging – don't they shower after a match?! We saw

the car of Toni Kroos. We found ourselves at a bar in the complex beside the stadium where we assuaged our thirst. We left ten minutes later walked down in the underground and were straight onto a tube with no crowds and no waiting. We were back at the flat 15 minutes later. Score 10/10.

So what do the scores on the doors reveal? Old Trafford scores 67 and the Bernabéu scores 89. Maybe it's down to the grass always seeming greener on the other side?

I would heartily recommend a trip to Madrid to see Real. If you plan ahead and stay in an airbnb and get a cheap flight out of Dublin, it doesn't have to cost very much in fact it probably costs about the same a trip to Manchester. Real Madrid seems to win this particular contest.

Having said that, if Manchester United and Real Madrid get through to the Champions League final there will only be one team I am cheering – come on United!



The Munich Clock at Old Trafford. NCL09-08s