

Notes from Roy Keane Book

I never forget how fine the line between success and failure when you're chasing the greatest prizes in the game. The closer you come to the Dream (of winning) the closer you are to the Nightmare (blowing a season's work)

Every time I pull on a red shirt I am conscious of the responsibility of being a United player.

On Ferguson, the manager, the Man: 'Remember who you are, remember that you are a Manchester United player. Remember what you did to get here, now go and do it one more time. And you'll win.'

Ability was not enough – to succeed you needed strength of body, and strength of mind.

The physical training took care of itself if you put in the work. The mind was different, a more challenging proposition. On cold winter mornings, on a muddy surface, with a cutting wind, not everyone is up for it. There's no atmosphere on the training ground unless you create it yourself. You don't win any prizes on Monday morning, except the most important one: self-satisfaction. There's no glory here. You must push through the mental barriers that others balk at. When the day's done, I would feel good that I was able to push through to the other side of the barrier.

Kamikaze Keane was transformed into a footballer who understood the ebb and flow of a contest. In control of my emotions, I could exert control over the rhythm of the game.

On Manchester's Bryan Robson: His tackling, goal scoring and box to box presence were proof that you could be a great player without doing tricks. He wasn't brilliant, but he was awesome.

I'd learned the trick of creating atmosphere in my head. I'd discovered the knack of generating your own passion.

The season hadn't even started and players were whining. Looking for excuses to fail. I didn't say much, but I took it all in and vowed never to become a whiner.

I never felt anyone owed me anything – in fact, I felt the exact opposite.

It became a test of character. As soon as we upped the tempo they started ducking and diving. We passed and tackled them to death, you could feel it, smell the scent of blood.

The world was full of bluffers, con men, and whiners – in this case guys who were content to wear the badge of professionals without meeting the standard required to justify the status.

Very early in the game I understood the difference between calling yourself a pro and earning the right to be respected by established pros.

This game taught me an important lesson. Willpower and desire mattered. Indeed, the mental strength to out battle the opposition was more important than mere technical ability.

Cup semi finals are traditionally tense. The prospect of reaching the final usually causes teams to be tense. Fear of failure is palpable, nobody wants to make the mistake that ends the dream. The combination of the coach's cunning and the captain's determination ensured that we took the field in the right frame of mind. The senior pros were actually looking forward to the game, far from being afraid. "Come on, let's go, enjoy it, these big games are what all the hard work is for" was their message.

I learned 2 lessons from Cup final day. Football is first and foremost a team game. The other thing I learned was how destructive off-field distractions can be.

As I became better known as a player, more attention was focused on me. I was learning all the time. How to lose a marker, how to pace the game, how to time my runs into the opposition's penalty area: most of all, I learned that in every game you had to win the individual battle with your immediate opponent.

Every soccer game consist of a thousand little things which, added together, amount to the final score.

The most important lesson I learned was that foot ball didn't owe anyone a living. Well if you dropped your guard, dropped your standard even 5 percent, started to believe that because you had talent you were too good to go down, you could find yourself outside of the squad.

The training was interesting, the routine varied from day to day. There was always a sense of purpose to the work, a good footballing reason for the little games and drills. The 5 a sides at the end of practice were always serious stuff.

I could see why Manchester United were Champions: a team of top players, immaculate preparation on the training grounds, inspirational presence of Alex Ferguson, and everyone seemed to be happy. Whining was not an option.

(Playing against a hungry, lesser team) -- Class (quality) doesn't matter if you don't win the physical battles first. First, start winning the tackles, matching them for effort in every individual battle. Then your class will kick in. Match them for effort, score the first goal and it's a different game. Win the second half.

"I'm a winner" – anyone can utter the words, but the real pros actually prove it.

The victory was the product of any number of things, the single most important factor being the combined experience of the manager and the senior pros in the side, who knew exactly how to approach the task we faced at half time.

Every training session was a challenge and an opportunity to learn. Learning, for example, what real attitude was as opposed to mouthing off and posing.

On Bryan Robson: on the pitch he was a fantastic warrior, tackling, scoring, defending, great in the air, comfortable on the ball. His courage in the face of injury or any other adversity was bottomless.

Football is very different game today. I believe that the disciplines we now follow – diet and drink – have lead to significant improvement in our fitness levels and general performance.

Our style of play was geared to the English game, where the pace was manic from start to finish, and lacked the subtlety and tactical fluency we commonly encountered in Europe. The European game was much more sophisticated and punishing than the Premier League. In domestic League games you could afford to be sloppy in attack – where if you gave possession away, you'd quickly regain it – and in defense, where mistakes were not, as in Europe, severely punished.

Bad habits began to dominate domestic competitions. At Old Trafford, most visiting teams would throw in the towel at the first smell of defeat. **Relatively easy success breeds bad habits**, and they are punished when you step up to meet other countries' champions.

Football at the highest level was not a game of running, tackling and bursting guts. Not always. The games versus Arsenal, Liverpool and others descended into trench warfare, where it was do or die, and you were pushed to the limit, physically and emotionally. I had basically learned to play within myself, reading situations, influencing the contest with the kind of pass, challenge or interception required in any given circumstances.

Essentially, I tried to do whatever we had to do as a team. Defend when necessary, push forward when that was called for. My real job was to dominate midfield, to break opponents' hearts and minds, by denying them possession of the ball and blocking the route forward. Get it and pass it.

Protect and support might be a fair description of my role.

My job was to anchor midfield, to deny Liverpool time and space, to break up their rhythm, basically to destroy any notion they might have had about passing us to defeat. My message was this is going to be hard work boys, bloody hard work.

One of the great things about the United team was that most of the players saw through the 'glory' that accompanied achievement. We'd won the Cup, nobody really cared who picked it up.

(Lee Sharpe) He just wasn't hard enough, mentally, for what was becoming a much harder business.

Southampton was a good example of our team going through the motions, thinking our ability gave us a divine right to win the game. These lapses into the comfort zone drove me crazy.

Knowing that you couldn't switch from on and off like a light bulb caused me intense frustration in league games.

Any top class player can get himself 'up' for Anfield or Highbury. Being ready for battle against the Southamptons of the Premier league was a different matter. Mentally you've awarded yourself 3 points when you first look at the fixture list.

Europe was a different game, far more demanding. Even the more modest of the teams we met in Europe were champions in their own territory. That's a head thing. They were used to winning, to getting results away from home.

The last thing footballers will do is look at themselves. Yet sometimes - no, always - that's where the answer lies. If you're good enough, and here in terms of ability we were, defeat is usually down to yourself. Not the referee, or luck, or a deflection, or comforting through all those excuses are. This is where the real pros are invaluable. They know where to look for answers.

You can't win a game in the dressing room, but you can certainly lose it if you walk out with the wrong attitude.

The essence of the game over the course of the season is to wear down the opposition. Winning the psychological battles - man on man - from the moment the ref blows the whistle for kick off. First tackle, first pass, first touch, everything counts. The Law of Cumulation. A lot of little things add up to the things that matter: Breaking the opposition's heart - but first their minds, their collective mind.

Once down in a game that was going the wrong way, it was time to step it up. Again, its detail. No mad rush, just move into a new rhythm. Do the right things, pass the ball, move them around, make them work, wear them down.

We were beginning to lose concentration. Again, it's the little things that start to go wrong. Allowing them an extra half a yard. A little too cautious with our passes. Less inclined to push forward into their territory in support of the ball. The instinct to protect what what you have at work. A dangerous instinct/

Happiness is not being afraid.

We know how to intensify the rhythm of a game. Pass the ball, move, support the player on the ball: fight to win it back if you lose it, the deeper in their half the better.

A number of features of Real Madrid's play struck me. The incredible first touch. The economy of movement, no daft running, every move purposeful. Raul's cunning, waiting like a panther to pounce on any half-chance. And burying it when it came. So much poise, even when we tried to get amongst them; they were so technically adroit we were chasing shadows. They were fit and physically strong as well. I watch a lot of Spanish football on television. They set the standard we should be aiming for, going forward and defending.

My contribution to the team is by establishing dominance in the midfield, protecting the back four, making sure that the goals we will always score matter. The new Roy Keane may be as visible but I hope, and believe, he will be more valuable to the team.