

Premiership Profile: PAUL SCHOLES

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The heartbeat of Manchester United's successful team is its dynamic midfield quartet. David Beckham and Ryan Giggs offer a combination of speed, guile and invention – and in the case of Beckham, pinpoint crosses while captain Roy Keane provides the driving force that motivates the whole team. Then there is Paul Scholes.

Although enjoying a much lower profile than any of the other three – which suits him fine as a fairly, quiet if not shy individual – Scholes's contribution as a tackler, passer and goalscorer is second to none in the Premiership.

His qualities have also become indispensable to the England team, with new coach Sven Goran Eriksson delighted to have such a talent at his disposal.

Scholes, a local lad born 26 years ago in Salford, just a mile or two from Old Trafford, won England Youth honours before breaking into the United first team in the 1994/95 season. He has now made nearly 190 Premiership appearances for the Red Devils, scoring 45 goals, plus numerous Cup and European games in which he's scored a further 25 goals – including six so far in this season's UEFA Champions League.

For England, Scholes has now scored 11 goals from midfield in 33 appearances, the last of these coming against Albania on Wednesday, when he also slipped ball into Michael Owen's path for England's first on the night. Underlining his all-round value, Scholes emerged as England's man-of-the-match in Tirana, energetically pressurising opponents into errors, winning the ball and bringing it forward while always looking to play a perceptive pass to an opponent in space, or to get into a goal-threatening position himself.

His club manager Sir Alex Ferguson has rarely been in any doubt about the qualities of the little midfielder whom he refers to as his little diamond. Nor is Eriksson now.

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