

For most football fans, visiting their team's training ground, meeting various team-mates and getting to interview one of the most famous players in the UK would be something of a dream come true. Earlier this year, 15-year-old Aaron Hall from Stoke on Trent, who has CF and has been a lifelong Manchester United fan, did just that when he visited Carrington – training ground of possibly the most famous football club in the world – and got the chance to grill Manchester United midfielder, England ace and all round canny lad (well, he is a Geordie!) Michael Carrick. Here's what happened when the two met one drizzly morning in January...

Seeing Red

Aaron Hall interviews Michael Carrick



A: Before Manchester United chose the Cystic Fibrosis Trust as one of their charity partners, were you familiar with them and the work they do?

M: I wasn't to be honest, no. I'd never met anyone with CF. But its brilliant if we can have a good impact and make everyone aware of what's required to help the Trust. We want everyone to know of the problems that people with CF face. The more people that get to know about Cystic Fibrosis the better.

A: My personal thoughts are that everyone should support charities – but those with large pay packets and especially those in the public eye, should donate a percentage of their wages to charity. What are your thoughts and feelings about this?

M: Obviously helping different charities out is a huge part of what the Club does – the boys are in a fortunate enough position where we can help to give, whether it's shirts, whether its boots, appearing at different things to raise funds. We're definitely up for doing all we can to help. Good question by the way!

A: As a child, what team did you support?

M: I supported Newcastle (*Michael is from Wallsend in Tyneside*) – especially when Kevin Keegan was manager the first time round. There was a good team then – Ginola, Asprilla, Shearer, Ferdinand... Beardsley... you had some really top Forwards. It was a good time – we nearly won the league, but United pipped us to the title! Once you start playing football it's different though. I always look out for Newcastle, but I'm not a fan like I used to be. I'm really more of a United fan than anything else!

A: How old were you when you started playing?

M: I must have been about four and a half... there was a boys' club where I lived in Newcastle and we had an indoor five a side pitch (*the famous Wallsend Boys club which has produced other footballing greats such as Alan Shearer and Peter Beardsley!*). My dad would take me along – I used to be striker, until I moved to West Ham when I was 15 or 16 – then I got moved to midfield. Probably for not scoring enough goals!

A: Did you always know that you would play for a big, successful club?

M: I always hoped I would! When I was younger, I had dreams like every other young lad. I was desperate to play football, and to play in the Premier League was unbelievable. To then come to United was something else really.

A: What has been your career highlight?

M: Making the debut for England is always pretty special for any player. There aren't many people who get to do that – play for their country and represent their country in the World Cup. I'm well aware that I'm very lucky. I was only 18 or 19 at the time, so that was pretty amazing – it's like all your dreams to play in the World Cup for England. I was fortunate enough to play against Ecuador and we won, so I was pretty made up after that!



A: I'm at the stage in my life where I have to start thinking about career decisions. Did you always want to be a footballer, and if not, what did you want to be?

M: As long as I can remember, I've always wanted to be a football player. If I didn't make it as a football player, I would have been involved in some sort of sport, maybe coaching or teaching. I've always loved football but whether it was golf, cricket, rugby or tennis, I would have a go at any sport.

A: How important is it having an inspirational figurehead, such as Alex Ferguson, for Manchester United to achieve their collective goals?

M: I think it's essential. He (*Alex*) has been here so long now, he has the club exactly how he wants it and knows exactly what is going on. You can't get away with anything – as soon as you step out of line he knows where you are and what to do about it. It's one of the reasons players sign for Manchester United. He gives a lot of people a lot to shout about!



A: Exercise is very important for people with CF – it acts as a form of physiotherapy, and helps to clear the mucus from the lungs. However it can sometimes be difficult to find the motivation to exercise. Do you have any tips for people who perhaps aren't that sporty to get involved in exercise?

M: You need to do something that you enjoy, as that makes it easier to do. If you aren't a fan, it's obviously harder... it sounds silly, but instead of getting public transport, why not walk? Some people like walks in the country, others just like walking around the shops, but it's all exercise. Better than sitting indoors playing on the computer all day! I know we all like computer games... I play them as much as anyone! But exercise is vital, and the littlest of things can help. And as long as you enjoy what you're doing, you don't have to be the very best at it.

A: I don't play as much football as I would like anymore, but I enjoy racket sports such as badminton and tennis (*it helps clear my lungs!*). Do you do have time for any other sports?

M: I enjoy a game of golf, although not when it's weather like this (*the interview took place on a particularly grey and rainy day in January*). It's a good way of getting out in the fresh air. After

training all day you can't really be bothered to do anything too active, but walking around hitting a ball isn't too bad! In terms of other sports though, it can be difficult to get involved. We work so hard and train so much we don't have time.

A: People with CF can have to spend a fair amount of time in hospital, which can get very tedious at times. What have your hospital experiences been like?

M: I had a few operations when I was younger, plus a few times when I was at West Ham. Obviously they aren't everyone's favourite places to be, but I find you always get looked after really well – I'm sure you find the same thing – everyone is really nice.

A: I get waited on hand and foot!

M: The staff always have a smile on their face and keep you upbeat. They should be earning more money than anyone else for the work they do. Sometimes it goes unnoticed, but when you're in there, you really appreciate what they do for you.

A: Everyone goes through difficult periods in their lives – people with CF maybe more than most. How do you cope with setbacks, such as injuries, bad press etc?

Aaron's quickfire questions

A: Which team member spends longest doing their hair?

M: Chris Eagles spends forever doing his hair, by far!

A: And who has the best dress sense?

M: (*Without hesitating*) Me! I cannot say anyone else really.

A: What's the best car parked in the players' car park?

M: Wayne (*Rooney*) has a Lamborghini that's nice. There's a lot of nice cars though, to be honest! I drive a Mercedes.

A: If you could have a celebrity come and watch you in a big game, who would it be?

M: I'm a big big fan of Michael Jordan, the (*ex*) basketball player. He's one of my idols, probably up there as one of the greatest sportsman of all time.





M: I try not to get too down when I'm injured. It's part of the game – you'll always get some sort of injury, whether it's for one week, a month or even longer. It's not nice, obviously you don't want to be injured and have to miss games – it can be very disappointing. Fortunately I haven't had any really bad injuries so far, touch wood (*Michael taps his head!*).

A: Hopefully it will stay that way! Do you train six days a week?

M: A lot of the time it can be seven days a week! When we're in the Champions' League we play on a Wednesday night, and in the Premier League you play on a Saturday. It keeps rolling on, so when we do get days off, it's doubly important that we rest.

A: Some people with CF may need a lung transplant, some even when they are in their teens. Are you in favour of organ donation?

M: I think it's crucial. I'm not on the register myself, but speaking to you has certainly made me think about it. Organ donors are needed, and we are in a position to help.

A: If you had the power to change anything in the world what would it be?

M: (*Without hesitating*) Health, I think. To keep everyone healthy, 100%. There's a lot going on in the world... to pick one thing is pretty tough... but sitting here now, I would say for everyone to have good health and enjoy their lives.

A: Finally, do you have any questions you'd like to ask me?

M: (*Grins*) Do you think we'll win the Champions League this year?

A: (*Thinks for a moment*) You've got tough competition... but if you put your minds to it, you can get through.

Wise words indeed Aaron!

In 2007, the Cystic Fibrosis Trust was announced as one of Manchester United's charity partners until 2010.

Look out for more exclusive interviews with the team and exciting fundraising ventures over the coming months!

