

I'M OUT TO KILL THE 'BAD BOY' IMAGE



says
JOHN FITZPATRICK
Manchester United

NO matter how long I go on playing football — November 28, 1969, is one date that I shall never forget! For it was then I started an eight-week suspension for my misdemeanours on the field.

If you have never played professionally—if you have never suffered in this way—you can have no idea of my feelings at that time. Even now, the mere thought of it hurts like mad.

For several reasons. The loss of money for one, then the frustrating inactivity, allied to the ever-present fear that once reinstated, I might, at the very least, have difficulty in regaining my place in the Manchester United side.

Additionally there was also (on my part) a keen sense of injustice. Not that I have ever made claims to being a lilly-white. Like most humans, I have a temper; I've been known to flare-up in the heat of the moment; I may have been guilty of opening my mouth too wide and too often.

But please believe me when I say very sincerely that never have I deliberately set out to maim an opponent, nor have I wilfully disregarded the rules. Unintentionally perhaps, but never with malicious intent.

I am by nature *aggressive*. It is one of the characteristics that have made me the player that I am. I have always been a 100% enthusiastic trier—I play it hard. But never, I hope, deliberately dirty.

But rightly or wrongly, I have on more than one occasion crossed referees—and I've paid for it dearly. But you can take it from me that this is all in the past.

I bear no malice—I've learned the hard way but learned I certainly have. To such a degree that nowadays, I take the field with no worries at all so far as my possible behaviour is concerned. I am convinced in my own mind that never again am I going to land myself in serious trouble.

There are several reasons for this. First of all I suppose that I've matured. I now have a wife and a year-old child to support. They require feeding and clothing—I can't afford to be deprived of my pay. And there is also the matter of personal pride. It is my most fervent wish that never again will I suffer the indignity of a suspension.

And there is, too, another important reason. I don't suppose that it has occurred to

many, but John Fitzpatrick is the only regular member of the present Manchester United first-team squad *who has never been capped!*

This fact adds fire to my ambition to play for Scotland—and to achieve this I just have to kill the "bad-boy" image. Only the future will prove it—but I'm sure I have at last done just this.

And no one helped me more than Sir Matt Busby. I am well aware that one of my failings was late tackling which got me into a lot of trouble. He took great pains with this problem and had me back at the training ground day after day to iron out the faults.

And the Boss (as he was at the

time) showed great faith in me when, at his suggestion, I converted from midfield to my present position at full-back. There was a time when I disliked this position but now, having adjusted to the special requirements, I am thoroughly enjoying my game.

At primary school in my home town of Aberdeen I was usually to be found on the left-wing. Moving on to secondary school I played chiefly at wing-half or inside-forward.

Archie Beatty, who originally discovered Denis Law for Huddersfield Town, spotted me at school and first brought me to Old Trafford to look around before I was 15.

I was impressed, they appeared to like me, but of course I was too young to sign, and went back home to continue playing for Aberdeen Lads Club Thistle, and almost immediately I broke a leg in a cup-tie.

Nine months went by before I was able to kick a ball again—but United hadn't forgotten me. As soon as I was fit I returned to Manchester, and after a two-week trial signed apprentice forms.

I made my Central League debut at 17, and at 18 played my first League game—at left-half in place of Nobby Stiles, who was on Under-23 duty. This was in mid-season, and I played one or two further games before the break.

In the following season I was called upon to deputise not only for Nobby, but for Paddy Crerand and David Sadler, and even appeared in the number seven, nine and ten shirts—but always played a midfield role.

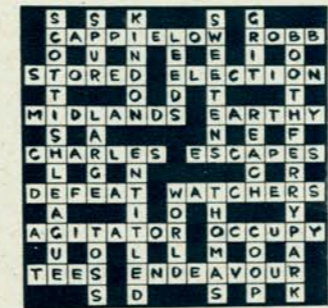
It was after we had played a cup-tie against Watford in January, 1969, that Sir Matt asked me to take the right-back position. I had played at right-half in this game; he told me that he wanted to bring Paddy Crerand back—but wanted to keep me in the side, expressing the opinion that I would do well at the back.

And apart from a few isolated games I have remained there ever since, being lucky enough to regain the position after my lengthy suspension.

Now it is my intention to continue working like mad to hold my position with United—and perhaps one day play for Scotland.

And if I do make it I shall never forget the encouragement and advice given to me by Sir Matt (especially in the troubled times) and by many of my fellow United players, particularly Nobby Stiles, Paddy Crerand, and Denis Law.

Last month's crossword solution



WILLIE MORGAN
Manchester Utd