

Pictures: GRAHAM CHADWICK

DAVID MOYES **EXCLUSIVE** THE ONEMATT LAWTON
CHIEF SPORTS REPORTER

IN A distant corner of Manchester United's training ground a lone figure is running. It is 4am, pitch-black, the silence broken only by the sound of his breathing and his footsteps on the perfectly tended grass.

David Moyes is in the dark but he knows what is coming. Nobody from what is supposed to be the world's greatest football club has told him. But he knows, as he circles Carrington's pitches one last time, that it is over; knows that in a few hours his players will be training here but he will be gone, no longer their manager.

He knows because the story broke on a number of websites the day before. He didn't believe it at first. Indeed, when I spoke to him within an hour of the story appearing, he was incredulous. 'There's no way you guys would know before me,' he said in the first of two conversations we had that day. 'This is Manchester United we're talking about.'

Moyes was not being naive. Nobody could ever accuse this streetwise Glaswegian of that. But even after a crushing defeat at Everton two days earlier, he was struggling to come to terms with the fact it was ending like this; struggling to believe, having given up the stability he had enjoyed for 11 successful years at Goodison Park, that within barely 10 months his new employers would allow him to be utterly humiliated.

By the time he went to bed on that Easter Monday, he knew he had been. For a start people had not been answering their phones, and when he finally did make contact with Ed Woodward, the club's executive vice-chairman would only say that he would meet him at Carrington at 8am.

Moyes had no intention of driving in at that time — not when the cameras would be waiting. So he got there four hours early, went for a run, took a shower and then, alone in an empty, eerie building, began to clear his desk. 'I hadn't slept a wink,' he says. 'But the run gave me a chance to clear my head. A bit of time to think before I started to pack up my stuff.'

HE HAS done an awful lot of thinking since April 22, and now he is reflecting on his brief but difficult tenure in the first interview he has given since his brutal dismissal. Foremost in his mind is a desire to communicate how determined he is to return to work. His powers have not been diminished, he insists. On the contrary, he feels the next club to employ him will be hiring a David Moyes more focused and determined than ever.

But he will be choosing his next job very carefully, and understandably so. 'I would never have left a job,' he says before pausing. 'The job at Everton was so good. I worked for a great chairman, great people at the club.'

'It was not easy to begin with at Everton either. We had a couple of tough years before we had the club the way we wanted it. But the reason I went to United was because I thought I was joining a club that would give me time. That was the big thing. I didn't want to change anything immediately. I wanted to take my time working out what I thought was needed.'

'I saw what I thought were important similarities between United and Everton. Like the focus on developing young players. Look at the players we brought through at Everton. As well as the ones we brought in. You go back to Wayne Rooney and all the other lads. Ross Barkley, Pienaar, Coleman, Jagielka, Baines and Lescott. We signed John Stones. We

**TOWER OF STRENGTH:**
Moyes and his wife Pamela

had a really good club at Everton who gave me the opportunity to do the job the way I felt it needed to be done.'

By accident I met Moyes in London the night he got the United job. He had travelled down to complete the formalities with Bill Kenwright, the Everton chairman he admired so much. Moyes was with his brother and adviser, Kenny, and was clearly excited by the prospect of succeeding Sir Alex Ferguson. It was the job he had always craved.

Now, however, he accepts that following the finest British manager in history was no easy task. 'It was a step into the unknown and, looking back now, it was near enough the impossible job,' he says. 'But it was the right job for me. I'd been at Everton for more than 11 years. We'd qualified for the Champions

League, got to an FA Cup final, I'd been voted manager of the season three times. I was among the most experienced managers in the Premier League. United had always had British managers.'

'I was devastated to lose the job because it was something I felt I could make a real success of. We knew it was going to take time to make the necessary changes. It was going to take time to evolve. But we were in the process of making other important changes. In the end, I don't feel I was given time to succeed or fail.'

That final remark is one he repeats more than once over a three-hour lunch in a charming Italian restaurant in Hale, Cheshire, but there are plenty of other subjects he wants to tackle in a conversation in which he concedes that he might have approached the job differently, answers some of the accusations that have been levelled at him and reveals that he too would have made Rooney his captain this season.

What still troubles him is the nature of his departure, though. He has to be careful because he is bound by a confidentiality agreement in his severance deal. But

plenty have already expressed their view. Ferguson told dinner guests in Manchester that week that it was 'upsetting the way it came out'. Roy Keane blamed Woodward, saying Moyes deserved more time and that the club's executive vice chairman needed to take 'a long hard look at himself'. The League Managers Association said the dismissal of Moyes had been 'handled in an unprofessional manner'.

UNITED contested that accusation but there is no escaping the facts. Moyes was among the last to know and the impact it had on his family still distresses him. His father was seriously ill at the time, and deeply upset by the humiliation his son suffered.

'In the end it was difficult for my family, the way we discovered — via the media — that I'd lost my job,' he says. 'We have always tried to do things the correct way. I know it comes with the territory and I know if you lose matches you risk being sacked. But how it affected my family made it hard. My dad



■ The way we found out I'd gone hit my family hard. My dad, who is 79, wasn't well

■ Sir Alex was in a tough position... we've talked and I accept that

INTERVIEW YOU HAVE TO READ

Everton but I thought that'd give me time

■ I want to keep working and whoever it is will get an even better manager now

is a great football man [he was a coach at the much respected Drumchapel Amateur Football Club where both Moyes and Ferguson had started out]. He lives near us [in the house adjacent to the family home near Preston] and he has always followed my career. I always take him to the games and I hope when I'm his age — he's 79 now — my son takes me to the football, too.

'But he wasn't well for a while after that. We don't think what happened to me was the cause, but that made it tough. He's fine now, I'm pleased to say. In my mind I have moved on, but the way I lost my job is something I won't forget.'

His wife Pamela, he says, is a strong lady. 'She understands that if you lose games, you expect criticism,' he says. 'That's the game we're in. She was incredibly supportive. Many times when there were members of the press at the end of the drive she'd make them a cup of tea. She was also getting to find her way around Old Trafford as the manager's wife. She's really good in company. I think it was hard when we walked into paparazzi at Miami airport, after I'd been

sacked. But even then we managed to laugh about it. She said to me, "I hope they don't get us on the beach!"

'What upset her, though, was the fact that I was being told by members of the press that day that I was out. I just never expected that to happen.'

It would be wrong to imagine this is a bitter and twisted David Moyes talking here. He is calm and considered, and he looks tanned and well compared to the slightly greying, chastened individual we saw fighting for survival in those final few months at United.

After climbing from his car — a sleek, black sporty number — he jokes that it is the first he has had to buy in he can't remember how long. Never one for blowing his cash on flash motors, he had always been happy to drive whatever vehicle had come with the job.

But now he is out of work. Now, for the first time in 35 years, he is not preparing for a new football season. And it hurts, even if he does seem in good spirits when he talks about how much he

enjoys walking his dogs and raves about the 'brilliant new Donald Trump golf course near Aberdeen'.

Inside, however, he is suffering. Not least because it is not in the nature of a proud, working-class Scotsman to be idle. He wants to work. He needs to work, and a few days before the start of a new Premier League season he is seriously missing work.

'This is the first time I've missed a pre-season since I was 16,' he says. 'I'm 51 now so that's a long time. I've missed it because pre-season is quite an enjoyable time. As a manager it's a bit more relaxed. I've also enjoyed having a bit more spare time than normal.'

'It's going to hurt this weekend that I'm not managing Manchester United, because that's obviously what I'd have liked to have been doing. But I'll watch the games. I won't be running away from it. Football is something I've been involved in since I was a boy.'

I ask him if his passion for football has in any way been diminished. 'I still love the game,' he says. 'At times I found it difficult. But I love being around football people and I also accept that you are going to have bad times as well as good times. And I've still had an awful lot of good times.'

In the statement issued through the LMA on his behalf after his dismissal, much was made of an apparent snub to the players. He had mentioned his 'staff' but not his squad. Sitting here now, however, he wants to clarify something.

'On the day I lost my job I spoke to every player at the training ground,' he says. 'I called the players into the dressing room at 10am that morning and told them how disappointed I was; how surprised I was that it had ended so soon. But I told them that they were playing for a great club. I told them that they should all embrace it and realise how fortunate they are.'

'The players were how you would expect them to be. Quiet but respectful. If you're a Manchester United player you have to have a lot of respect. It was the first time I'd ever had to give a speech like that. Never before in my career. But I felt it was the right thing to do, to address them before I left.'

It was a dignified exit but it has not been the only example of such dignity these past few months. He has endured a fair bit of criticism on the sports pages of the national press but still had dinner with a number of football writers in Miami during the week England spent there prior to the World Cup. Indeed he picked up the tab, even after discovering the numbers had swelled to more than he expected.

When he agreed to this interview, he asked only that any fee this newspaper might wish to pay — he does not specify a figure — be donated to Darren Fletcher's 'United For Colitis' charity. 'When a plane flew over Old Trafford that day towing that banner [it said 'Moyes Out'] I turned to someone next to me and said they would have been better giving the money to Darren's charity,' he says.

In reports that emerged in the days that followed his dismissal, it was suggested his attempts to contact Ferguson on that Easter Monday had proved unsuccessful. 'I've met Alex on several occasions since I left,' he says. 'And I spoke to him about the days surrounding my departure. He explained it to me and I totally accepted what he said. He was in a difficult position, and I understood that.'

'At no time did I ever have anything other than 100 per cent support from him. He was always incredibly good to me. We had several meetings over the course of my time at the club. We spoke regularly. And I saw him being around me only as a positive.'

He is candid enough to admit that, in hindsight, he might have done certain things differently at United. 'If there was one thing I would have changed I



Wayne would have been captain under me, because of where he is at now as a player

LEADING MAN: Rooney sometimes looked lost last year but can thrive as captain