

When Donny van de Beek joined Manchester United in the summer of 2020, the narrative was clear: here was a technically gifted, intelligent midfielder who could solve some of United's long-standing midfield headaches. Yet, what followed was a baffling saga of limited minutes, questionable role deployment, and mounting frustration from fans and pundits alike. The shorthand explanation often boils down to Van de Beek being "ignored" — a player left on the bench despite apparent quality. But is this a fair assessment? To understand why Van de Beek appeared underutilised, we need to dig deeper into Manchester United's post-2013 identity crisis, the managerial merry-go-round, squad planning slip-ups, and the complex media-driven emotional cycles surrounding player usage.

Post-2013: United's Identity Crisis and Its Lingering Effects

The 2013 retirement of Sir Alex Ferguson marked a seismic shift for Manchester United — not just on the pitch, but in club culture, recruitment, and playing philosophy. The club's Sixth Manager since 2013, a revolving door of personalities, each brought their own blueprint, but none fully restored the consistency Ferguson built over decades.

This turbulence at the helm severely impacted squad planning:

- **Mismatched recruitment:** Players were signed without a coherent long-term tactical vision, resulting in a patchwork squad.
- **Role confusion:** The evolving expectations for midfield roles led to players being shoehorned into ill-fitting positions.
- **'Legacy hangover':** Residual comparisons to the Ferguson era overshadowed new signings, amplifying scrutiny.

Van de Beek's arrival came at the tail end of this identity crisis, where the club still struggled between the old guard's pragmatism and new school attacking ideals. His midfield role — often described as a link between defence and attack — never seemed to line up neatly with the managers' preferred systems.



Managerial Churn and Squad Planning: The Perfect Storm

From Ole Gunnar Solskjær to Ralf Rangnick and briefly Erik ten Hag’s pre-appointment phase, the managerial changes at Old Trafford during Van de Beek’s tenure were relentless. This churn disrupted squad stability and compounded the issue of minutes and role fit for players like Van de Beek.

1. **Solskjær’s Up-Tempo Counterattacking**

Solskjær’s United leaned heavily on pacey wide players and a classic number 6/fixing holding midfielder like Fred or Nemanja Matić. Although Van de Beek’s technical quality was suited to linking play, his lack of explosive pace and defensive rigidity made him a tough fit in frequently high-tempo counterattacks. Solskjær rarely trusted him to deliver the defensive balance required in the less settled centre midfield roles.

2. **Rangnick’s ‘Modern Pressing’ System**

Rangnick’s appointment was supposed to signal a fresh, systematic overhaul focusing on pressing and high-energy transitions. Yet the squad was not built for it; Van de Beek’s measured style and positional intelligence often clashed with the physical demands of that system, leading to confusion over his role. Additionally, Rangnick’s interim short-term outlook made thorough player integration less feasible.

3. **Pre-Ten Hag and Beyond**

Erik ten Hag is respected for coherent squad building and exacting tactical roles. However, Van de Beek’s role remained marginal even under this new regime, underscoring deeper questions about the player’s system fit and the club’s longer-term planning.

Table: Overview of Van de Beek’s Appearances and Minutes Under Different Managers

Manager	Season(s)	Appearances	Minutes Played	Role Fit	Commentary
Ole Gunnar Solskjær	2020-21, 2021-22 (partial)	29 (all competitions)	~1200	Peripheral role; mostly substitute;	defensive balance concerns.
Ralf Rangnick	2021-22 (half season)	15 (all competitions)	~750	Some starts;	struggled with pressing demands.
Interim under Ten Hag	2022-23 (early season)	Minimal	<500	Tactical mismatch;	limited minutes; squad surplus.

Carrick’s Coaching Impact Vs PR Hype

Michael Carrick’s ascent from United’s midfield mainstay to first-team coach was widely viewed as a positive stabilising influence. His intimate knowledge of the club’s culture and midfield nuances seemingly positioned him to unlock Van de Beek’s potential. In practice, however, the impact was less pronounced.



Carrick reportedly encouraged Van de Beek to be more assertive and defensively engaged, but this came with limited game time to truly [11v11.com](https://www.11v11.com) develop consistency. The media often spun the story as a mentorship “game-changer” for Van de Beek. Yet, the player’s minutes and role flexibility remained stubbornly minimal.

We must be wary of PR-flavored narratives when coaching impacts are measured primarily by waxing lyrical soundbites rather than actual starting XI inclusions and evident footballing progression. Carrick’s coaching stint coincided with wider systemic issues:

- He was operating within a transitional and uncertain tactical framework.
- Squad depth and competition for midfield places limited opportunities.
- Press and fans’ impatience didn’t help fine-tuning a player with a subtle skillset.

Emotional Volatility and Media Pressure Cycles

Manchester United’s global stature and voracious media ecosystem create a pressure cooker environment where perceptions rapidly oscillate — from hero worship to wholesale dismissal — often within weeks.

Van de Beek’s experience is a symptom of this volatility:

- **Initial hype:** English-language media heralded his signing as a masterstroke, invoking comparisons to club legends.
- **Periods of silence:** Long phases of benching were interpreted as ‘cold-shouldering’ or “being ignored,” reinforcing negative narratives.
- **Spotlight appearances:** A handful of cameo performances prompted premature ‘redemption arc’ stories, only to be followed by renewed absenteeism.
- **Transfer speculation cycles:** Each summer transfer window saw new rumours of departure, fuelling unrest among supporters questioning “what went wrong.”

This emotional seesaw oversimplifies the core issue — squad planning and system fit. Pinning blame on “Van de Beek being ignored” reduces a multi-layered football and club strategy problem to a catchy soundbite.

Squad Planning Issues: The Elephant in the Room

Let's be frank: Van de Beek's plight at Manchester United mainly stems from fundamental squad planning issues. Years of recruitment not aligned with a clear tactical identity made it difficult for players requiring specific roles to thrive.

United's midfield selection often resembled an *airport runway* — long, wide, and lacking depth and clarity. Players like Paul Pogba, Bruno Fernandes, Fred, Scott McTominay, and Van de Beek all demanded distinct roles, but no manager truly resolved how to deploy them harmoniously.

Essentially, Van de Beek was signed for a role United didn't effectively create or nurture. Whether it was defensive solidity, creative link-up, or tactical flexibility, his numbers and role fit suffered as a result.

Conclusion: More Than Just Being 'Ignored'

Was Donny van de Beek merely ignored at Manchester United? No — the reality is far more nuanced and tied deeply to the club's post-Ferguson pains. His limited minutes were a symptom of:

- The club's ongoing identity crisis post-2013
- Managerial churn and conflicting tactical philosophies
- Squad planning that failed to design a suitable midfield environment
- Coaching impacts muddled by media hype and limited game time
- The emotional volatility and rapid media pressure cycles fueling simplistic narratives

Van de Beek wasn't simply dialled down or forgotten out of spite but rather caught in the crossfire of a club still figuring out its future and tactical DNA. This case remains a cautionary tale: signing a talented player without a clear role and supporting system is not just poor squad planning — it also wastes potential and frustrates fans who expect more than "project" pressers and one-dimensional explanations.

For clubs and fans alike, the lesson is clear — evaluate midfielders in the context of system fit, role clarity, and managerial stability before rushing to label them as "ignored" or "failures." Van de Beek's story deserves better nuance than the lazy narratives often served up after one bad press conference or benching.