



Mourinho, who agreed a contract extension with Ed Woodward, the executive vice-chairman, yesterday, inset, will likely give Sánchez his United debut at Yeovil

# Khan's devastating cup ban shows why rules must change

Alyson Rudd

This evening's FA Cup fourth-round tie between Yeovil Town and Manchester United has been robbed of its central narrative. It could have been a classic tale of football revenge — of how the discarded can fight back — but Otis Khan, arguably Yeovil's best player, is suspended.

The rules need to change. The underdogs' best chance of causing an upset evaporated when Khan was sent off in a League Two match on Saturday.

Khan, who was a member of the United youth team for ten years until being rejected in 2012, cannot feature in the game at Huish Park because he shoved the referee after Chesterfield scored the winner in a 2-1 home defeat and was sent off. Khan felt he was fouled in the build-up to the goal.

His club appealed against the three-game suspension but on Tuesday the FA Independent Regulatory Commission increased his ban to five matches. This means that, should his team-mates somehow hold United to a draw, he would miss the replay at Old Trafford.

It is devastating for the 22-year-old, but there will be plenty who believe that he is the architect of his own misfortune, that sympathy for the attacking midfielder is misplaced, that if he so wanted to prove that United were wrong to reject him, he should have kept his anger in check.

Khan — named after Otis Redding, the late American musician — joined United aged six. It was his life. "They told me themselves I was going to get a contract," he said last week. He admits to bursting into tears, thinking that his world had ended when they changed their minds, but he

Khan spent a decade in the youth set-up at Old Trafford

rebuilt his career slowly. What made it tougher was that he was a United fan, going to every match he could.

"It was my team, my whole life was based around United," he said. And then they ended a beautiful relationship. He immediately stopped going to games. "Every time I watched them on telly I didn't want them to win."

Tonight, the BBC cameras would have been trained on him. The FA Cup needs stories such as Khan's, which is just one reason why he should have been allowed to play. Ever since the draw was made, he has been wrapped up in the drama of it all.

His behaviour in the game on Saturday was part of that. The cup draw effectively altered his mindset. The underdogs are being penalised because, to them, the FA Cup matters.

You can be sure that none among José Mourinho's side were trembling in anticipation of a trip to Somerset, but it has been all they have talked about in Yeovil. Tensions were running high and now much that was intriguing about the tie has been denied us.

All this pain could have been averted if suspensions in the league were applied only to league matches. After all, you can be sent off for violent conduct in the Premier League but be eligible to play in the Champions League a few days later. The FA Cup should be afforded the same sense of separateness, especially for clubs outside the top tier. The underdogs need to be as strong as possible for the competition to have any integrity. Instead, what we have now is a system that penalises the clubs and the players who have most to gain and most to prove.

Yeovil cannot appeal against the five-match ban handed to Khan, and they were penalised for trying to change the original decision when there was no prospect of it being overturned except on grounds of sentiment. No player should get away with pushing the referee but the consequences of his behaviour should be felt among his peers — not by United, who hardly need a helping hand to progress in the cup.

