

Sanchez deal is Mourinho's show of intent

THERE ARE plenty of reasons for Jose Mourinho to be cheerful right now.

Barring a major upset, he should celebrate his 55th birthday and his 100th game in charge of Manchester United with an FA Cup win at Yeovil tonight, on the back of extending his contract and pulling off one of the season's biggest transfer coups.

Mourinho can boast the best win percentage over his first century of games than any other post-war United manager – including Sir Matt Busby and Sir Alex Ferguson – and with Alexis Sanchez now in his ranks that rate should only improve over the second half of the season.

It is unlikely United will catch their neighbours City in the Premier League title race but Mourinho, who has extended his deal to 2020 with the option for a further year, made it clear he regards signing the Chile striker as a statement of intent.

Over the years he has coveted Sanchez's attacking versatility and admired his ability to adapt to whatever any of his managers have asked of him, claiming he is "more than one player". And after three-and-a-half seasons with Arsenal, Mourinho expects him to hit the ground running – starting in the less than salubrious surrounds of Hush Park this evening.

"What is his best position? Everywhere in the attacking positions," said Mourinho.

"I have known him for many, many years. I was in Italy with Inter Milan when he was at Udinese; in Spain I was with Real Madrid when he was at Barcelona; and in England I was with Chelsea and



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Manchester United when he was at Arsenal. So our careers are almost made in the same countries simultaneously.

"I know him very well. I have seen him play on the right, on the left, as a striker and behind the striker – these are all Alexis's positions.

"I saw him play different tactical positions, I saw him play in the different philosophies of different managers, I saw him being successful in every country, with every manager, every system and with every position. He becomes more than a player because of that versatility – he can play in four different positions in attack.

"Everybody knows the quality he has got because he's been in

REAL THREAT: Sanchez enjoyed success with Barca against Mourinho's Madrid

England for quite a long time now. We have got one of the best attacking players in the world and he's very important for us because we want the best possible players."

Mourinho hopes Sanchez's arrival will have the added bonus of lifting rather than dispiriting his other attacking players – Romelu Lukaku, Anthony Martial, Marcus Rashford, Jesse Lingard and Juan Mata – by intensifying competition for places. Despite the inevitable speculation about who will make way for the new boy, he insists he wants and needs them all if United are to land the big prizes and will be only too happy if they are unhappy on the bench. He wants more creative tension. "This is life in big

clubs," he said. "In big clubs you have big players, you have competition, you have responsibilities, you have to perform always, you have to treat every competition in a serious way. And you cannot do that with 11 players – it is impossible.

"So the players in big clubs know that the squad is 20 – something players where everybody wants to play. What we cannot do is play 12 at the same time, we cannot start with 12 in a certain match, but there is space for everybody and everybody is needed.

"Competition is absolutely fundamental. We want to improve all the time, we want to achieve big things and will not stop until we do that.

"The evolution of the players is important. I'm really happy and have to talk with some pride about the evolution of

He can play in any attacking position



Darren's hoping for classic and cider with Jose

DARREN WAY would love to toast an FA Cup shock at Hush Park tonight by sharing a glass of cider with Jose Mourinho.

The Glovers are the lowest ranked side left in the competition, currently sitting fourth bottom of League Two.

Bristol City boss Lee Johnson had bought a £450 bottle of Barca Velha red wine to share with the Portuguese manager when they met in the quarter-finals of the Carabao Cup in December. Way accepts it is probably a tall order to

By **Tony Paskin**

expect Manchester United to crash out of the FA Cup as well, but will offer their boss something different should they get a chance to share a drink afterwards.

"I want to make sure that we can offer him a good Somerset cider of Thatchers, because he's coming down to Somerset, so it's important that he is actually privy to what we drink down here," said Way.

Midfielder Otis Khan will start a five-match ban tonight