

Is Carrick quietly winning the United job?

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

Michael Carrick is rapidly shifting the conversation around Manchester United's long-term managerial plans. A 1-0 win over Chelsea has not only strengthened United's push for Champions League qualification, but also raised an uncomfortable question inside the club: is the interim manager doing enough to keep the job permanently?

Appointed on an interim basis following a turbulent managerial change, the Englishman inherited a squad lacking cohesion, confidence, and tactical identity. While United's hierarchy are still believed to be assessing more experienced candidates, his early results have forced internal discussions about whether continuity might now be the smarter option.

Controlled win at Stamford Bridge

Saturday's victory over Chelsea was not a statement of dominance, but it was a clear demonstration of control under pressure.

Liam Rosenior's side created the clearer chances and even struck the woodwork three times, yet United's defensive organisation and game management allowed them to absorb pressure. That ability to stay controlled without dominating possession ultimately shaped the outcome, as they took their opportunity when it arrived.

The decisive moment came when Matheus Cunha finished first time from a Bruno Fer-

5
matches remain for Manchester United as Carrick pushes for Champions League qualification

nandes cut-back. In that sense, the Blues were punished for failing to convert their dominance into goals.

What stood out most was not attacking fluency, but structure without the ball. This was something United had frequently lacked earlier in the season, and its return has been significant.

Tactical discipline

Carrick's most noticeable impact has been defensive stability. United looked compact in a mid-block, with improved spacing between midfield and defence. As a result, the transitional chaos that had previously exposed them against top sides was significantly reduced.

This improvement came under difficult circumstances. Forced changes before kick-off increased the challenge, with Matthijs de Ligt absent, Lisandro Martínez and Harry Maguire suspended, and Leny Yoro also unavailable late on. Carrick was therefore forced to improvise a back line featuring Nonsair Mazraoui and 19-year-old Ayden Heaven.

Even so, the response was encouraging. Heaven impressed on debut, showing composure in



Michael Carrick and Nonsair Mazraoui share post-match celebrations

aerial duels and strong positional awareness. This also reflects Carrick's willingness to trust younger players in high-pressure situations rather than defaulting to caution.

The case in Carrick's favour

The strongest argument for Carrick is United's improved results in big matches. They have remained unbeaten in fixtures against "Big Six" opposition under his interim tenure, which represents a clear shift from ear-

lier inconsistency.

He has also simplified United's structure. Instead of complexity, the emphasis is now on clarity. There are fewer risky build-up patterns, more direct progression, and improved game-state management.

In short, United look harder to beat, even when they are not at their most fluent.

The case against him

However, there are still important questions about sustainabil-

ity and long-term ceiling.

United's performances under Carrick have often lacked attacking control. Even when results improve, dominance is not always present. Against Chelsea, they were second-best for long periods and relied heavily on defensive resilience rather than sustained control.

There is also the issue of sample size. A short-term uplift after a managerial change is not unusual, and elite clubs often see "new manager bounce" effects



Michael Carrick is undefeated against the "Big Six" teams. His side will face Liverpool in 2 weeks.

that fade over time.

Most importantly, the club is still reportedly considering more experienced managers. These candidates bring proven long-term records at the highest level, something Carrick does not yet have.

Verdict: a genuine debate emerging

With five matches remaining, United are in control of their Champions League qualification hopes. Carrick has stabilised the team during a volatile period, and that stability should not be underestimated.

However, whether that is enough for a permanent appointment depends on what the club values more. The choice is between short-term stability in the dressing room or long-term certainty under an elite-level manager.

Right now, Michael Carrick has not fully won the job, but he has done enough to make this a far less straightforward decision for Sir Jim Ratcliffe and his INEOS team.

Messi scores winner as Miami down Colorado on coach debut



Lionel Messi in action

AFP | Miami

Lionel Messi gifted Inter Miami's new coach a 3-2 victory over the Colorado Rapids with a brace including a spectacular late winner in front of 75,000 Major League Soccer fans on Saturday.

Shifted to Denver's giant NFL stadium to accommodate the huge demand to see Argentina's World Cup-winning icon, the game appeared to be drifting Colorado's way after a spirited home team fightback from 2-0 down.

But Messi, having already converted a penalty, had other ideas. With just over 10 minutes remaining, the Argentine sprinted onto a through ball sent down the right by Rodrigo De Paul.

He dribbled into the box and somehow threaded a shot through three defenders and past the keeper into the corner.

It handed Messi's longtime friend Guillermo Hoyos a win on his debut as Miami coach, after Javier Mascherano departed the club for "personal reasons" Tuesday, just four months after guiding the club to its first MLS Cup title.

"We have the greatest player in history, someone who completely shifts the momentum of matches," said a delighted Hoyos.

Hoyos, 62, made few changes to the lineup, notably bringing in German Berterame to replace Tadeo Allende, who continues to recover from a muscle injury.

Portuguese Magnifico

Bruno Fernandes closing in on Premier League assist history

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Bruno Fernandes is on the verge of etching his name into Premier League history. Despite missing three matches this season, the Manchester United captain has surged into contention for the single-season assist record — one of the most prestigious creative milestones in English football.

Fernandes registered his 18th assist of the 2025-26 campaign in United's latest outing, continuing a remarkable run of form that has seen him deliver six assists in his last six appearances. With five matches still to play, the Portuguese playmaker stands just two assists away from matching the all-time record of 20.

That benchmark is currently shared by two legends of the game. Thierry Henry first set the mark during Arsenal's 2002-03 season, reflecting the elegance and efficiency that defined his career. Nearly two decades later, Kevin De Bruyne matched the feat in Manchester City's 2019-20 campaign, underlining his status as one of the league's greatest midfield creators.

Fernandes' pursuit is made even more impressive by the



Bruno Fernandes celebrates passionately during Manchester United's victory over Chelsea

context. Missing matches typically derails record chases, yet he has maintained relentless consistency. His vision, passing range, and ability to unlock defenses have made him the focal point of Manchester United's attack throughout the season.

Reaching 18 assists already places Fernandes among an elite group. Only a handful of players have ever reached or surpassed the 15-assist mark in a single Premier League season. Notable names such as Mesut Özil, Cesc Fàbregas, Frank Lampard, and Mohamed Salah have all hit 18,

20
the Premier League single-season assist record, and Fernandes is two away

but none managed to surpass the 20-assist ceiling set by Henry and De Bruyne.

What sets Fernandes apart is

his versatility. He is not just a provider but also a goal threat, a leader, and a player who thrives under pressure. His recent performances suggest that he is peaking at precisely the right moment, with momentum firmly on his side heading into the final stretch of the season.

The remaining fixtures will determine whether Fernandes can make history outright or join the record holders at the top. Either way, his 2025-26 campaign is already one of the finest creative seasons the league has ever witnessed.