

Holiday TV – Ferguson and Dalglish – polite rivals

They were the greatest of rivals, two legendary Scots vying for trophies at the pinnacle of English football.

Now Sir Kenny Dalglish has told a documentary how he and Sir Alex Ferguson always exchanged congratulatory letters on each other's managerial successes, even when they came at the other's expense.

Dalglish twice led Liverpool to the Football League First Division title when up against Ferguson's Manchester United.

Then, as manager of Blackburn Rovers, he famously pipped his fellow Scot to the Premier League title on the final day of the 1994-95 season.

That triumph for Dalglish came at a time when Ferguson's Red Devils were beginning to dominate the game south of the Border, having already knocked Liverpool "off their perch" as the country's most successful club.

Speaking on Sir Alex, a two part BBC documentary on Ferguson's life, Dalglish reveals the respect the pair had for each other.

He said: "Never a year went by when one of the two of us had success, was there not a letter sent from the other, with 'congratulations', signed.

"And it's a great satisfaction when you get them when you've

beaten him.”

Sir Alex chronicles the incredible life and career of the most decorated manager in British football history.

Ferguson, now 82, led United to the English League Championship a record 13 times between 1993 and 2013, and won Europe’s most coveted trophy, the Champions League, twice in the most dramatic of fashions.

A host of former players including Wayne Rooney, Rio Ferdinand, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, Andy Cole and Denis Irwin reveal what it was like to play for Sir Alex’s all-conquering United.

The two, hour long episodes also explore the Scot’s origins and where his legendary will to win came from.

It sheds light on his playing career with Queen’s Park, St Johnstone, Dunfermline Athletic, Rangers, Falkirk and Ayr, and his remarkable rise to success as a manager.

After leading minnows St Mirren to the Scottish First Division title in 1977, Ferguson transformed Aberdeen FC from nearly men of Scottish football into one of the best teams in the whole of Europe.

In a trophy-laden spell as manager, the historic highpoint came in 1983 when the team won the European Cup Winners Cup on a rainy night in Gothenburg, Sweden.

Over 40 years on, that Aberdeen team remains the last to beat Real Madrid in any major European final.

Dalglish, 73, tells the programme: “For Aberdeen to win a European trophy surpasses I think anything he’s done.”

Ferguson’s former players provide an insight into how the manager then transformed the culture at Manchester United and – eventually – brought unprecedented success to the club over

a period of over 20 years.

His unwavering belief in young players enabled him to develop the famous "Class of '92" cohort including David Beckham, Ryan Giggs, Paul Scholes, Nicky Butt and brothers Phil and Gary Neville into European champions in 1999.

While Ferguson may have been a tactical genius, he was equally famous for his terrifying reprimands for those who failed to live up to his standards, with blasts dubbed "the hairdryer"

Former Aberdeen defender Stuart Kennedy recalls how it was known as the "blast furnace" in Ferguson's early days in the dugout.

He said: "The English press invented 'the hairdryer'. When he was a young manager in his 30s we had a thing called the 'blast furnace'.

"If you get the 'blast furnace', make sure you get it at half time because the referee is going to come up and save your life.

"If he pats you on the rump, you're safe, and believe me it's like getting knighted. He's not going to tell you you're brilliant, he just pats you on the rump and you know 'I'm safe'."

Mark McGhee, who set up the winning goal in Gothenburg, recalls: "I described it as a pyroclastic blast – that volcano when the heatwave of Pompeii incinerates people.

"I missed a chance once and he came in at the end and his face was (centimetres from mine) – 'that's the worst f-ing miss I've ever seen in my f-ing life' – the heat melting my face."

Ferguson's temper would also boil over in an infamous incident at Old Trafford in 2003, when he kicked a football boot and it struck Beckham's head in the dressing room following a cup defeat to Arsenal.

The incident, which left Beckham with a cut above his left eye, occurred shortly before the England star was transferred to Real Madrid.

Speaking in the second episode, former striker Ole Gunnar Solskjaer reveals it was his boot – and Beckham still has it.

Solskjaer, who later managed the club, says: “We could see there was a tension there.

“It was my boot. There was a bit of an argument about one of the goals they scored and Becks says ‘no’... the gaffer says ‘it’s your fault’... ‘it’s not my fault’... ‘let’s look at the video’... ‘I don’t need a video, I’ve got my eyes’... and he kicks whatever is in front of him.

“It goes (over and over in the air) and it hits Becks.

“Becks has actually got that boot now.”

Former midfielder Nicky Butt adds: “It’s all gone off.

“He (Ferguson) couldn’t say in front of everybody ‘I’m sorry about that, it was such an accident’. He couldn’t say that because you lose your control in the dressing room, you lose your strength and power in there.

“He tapped him on the leg and walked out and said ‘sorry about that’ and you knew he was gutted about it.”

Mike Phelan, who was a coach at the club at the time, says: “He’s actually connected absolutely centre forward style – it’s going top corner.”

He adds: “He had this way about him, Sir Alex, where you could be the best player at the football club but there comes a time when you’re moving on.

“Ferguson was the boss and Beckham ended up in Madrid.”

United legend Rio Ferdinand tells the programme: “That

coldness and that calmness with which he would do that sent a sign to the changing room, 'do not mess around with this guy' because nobody is above him or this football club or can get above their station because you will be tossed out of this place quick."

Ferguson's legacy – in taking not only a giant like Manchester United, but also a relatively small club like Aberdeen to the very top in the game – is unlikely ever to be matched.

Gordon Strachan, who played under Ferguson for Aberdeen, Manchester United and Scotland, says: "In 100 years time, they're still going to be talking about this fella."

Wayne Rooney adds: "He's the greatest manager and I don't think we'll ever see anything like him again."

* [Sir Alex is available now on the BBC iPlayer.](#) Both episodes will also be available to watch on January 1 and 2 on BBC Scotland and on BBC One later in the month.

