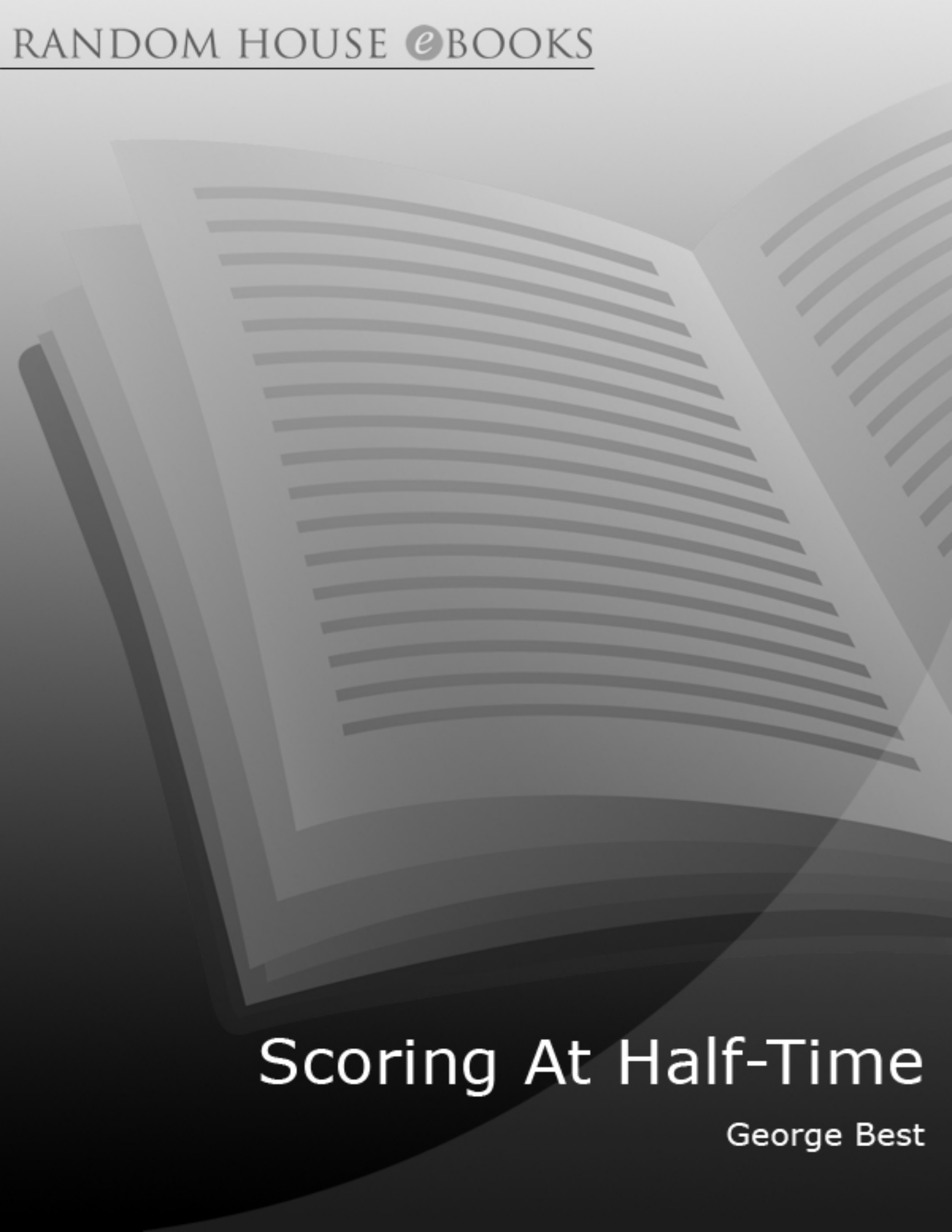


RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Scoring At Half-Time

George Best

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G E O R G E
B E S T

WITH MARTIN KNIGHT

SCORING AT HALF-TIME

ADVENTURES ON AND OFF THE PITCH



EBURY
PRESS

*To Professor Roger Williams for his faith in me,
Mr Nigel Heaton for his amazing skills as a
surgeon and the family of the donor who made
my new life possible. And lastly to Shay Brennan
the friend who I remembered so fondly while
writing this book - gone but not forgotten.*

INTRODUCTION

I AM TRULY blessed. I am. Once I had the world at my feet and then I almost had nothing. No wife, no home, no money, no self-respect, and more or less no liver. Then I met Alex and slowly and painfully we began rebuilding me. It's been a long haul and the story has been told in my autobiography *Blessed* but as at 30 July 2002 a new chapter has begun. For on that day I went into the Cromwell Hospital, London, and received a new liver. A new liver that I hope and believe will allow me the opportunity to enjoy the rest of my life.

After my transplant and when I had been able to return home permanently, it was obvious that I was incredibly weak and my recuperation therefore was going to take longer than the optimistic estimates. While I was happy to savour being alive and in the bosom of my family, I needed to keep mentally active while my body was busily engaged in adapting to its new organ. I knew this, but the doctors also advised it. I loved working on *Blessed* and writing my newspaper column and started to toy with the idea of taking a stab at a novel. But my mind kept coming back to all the humorous stories and experiences that have happened to me or which I have heard about during my years in the game and beyond. I decided it would be good therapy to start writing them down and, maybe, at some later date put them into a book. Here we are now at that later date and here is that book.

If any one thing defined for me what football was about when I was playing it was the fun. Great fun. Of course there was the buzz, the adulation, the money, the satisfaction, the glory ... I could go on all night, but the one thing that was consistent was that we always had a laugh. Talk to any old retired footballer now and they will tell you, if they think about it for a minute, it is the fun they miss most of all. The game was full of larger than life characters, whether they were players, managers, chairmen or supporters, and we all enjoyed a camaraderie and rapport that bred a wealth of pranks, incidents, escapades and fun. I'm not sure any other sport or walk of life can claim such a culture; a culture that has spawned, for example, a whole industry of after-dinner speaking where many of us have been able to make a living recounting these tales to appreciative audiences up and down the country and beyond.

Many of the stories and anecdotes collected in this book are from my direct experience, the rest have been told to me, or I have read of them or they have entered my consciousness in some other way. I apologise in advance if I have got any stories or memories slightly wrong, or, even worse, if I have pinched anyone's after-dinner material. But plenty pinch mine and let's remember - it's fun!

PART I

ON THE
PITCH

1

PLAYERS

KICK-OFF

RODNEY MARSH DIDN'T WIN many England caps during his career, nine in fact, but neither did many of the flair players of his period. Managers Sir Alf Ramsey and Don Revie after him seemed to have largely had a mental block about the more creative and flamboyant characters of the period, preferring their solid, dependable but not always multi-skilled peers. When Ramsey did play Rodney, he was a touch nervous about how he might perform. Just before kick-off in an important international Sir Alf gave his team-talk in the dressing room. He turned to Marsh and said, 'Rodney, if you're not playing well I will have to pull you off at half-time.'

Rodney Marsh grinned impishly, 'That sounds interesting, boss. At Manchester City we just get some oranges and a cup of tea.'

HEROES

As a boy I didn't get to see any of the footballing greats in the flesh. Visits to Belfast by top teams were few and far between and I can't recall watching much football on the television; a mod con that didn't arrive in our household until only a couple of years before I was whisked over to England. Wolverhampton Wanderers, however, were my team as a small boy because I *did* get to see them on the television set of a neighbour when they played a series of friendlies against European sides. Billy Wright was the Wolves captain and at the time the most famous footballer in Britain. With the passage of time it is easy to forget just how idolised he was. He really was the David Beckham of his day; even marrying a member of the 1950s Spice Girls equivalent - one of the Beverley Sisters. I always thought they were identical twins until someone pointed out there were three of them. As I recall, he advertised hair products and household soaps in the same way that Becks (and myself come to that) has endorsed various products. I don't know if Billy went as far as wearing a sarong and a bandana but who knows what he and the Beverley sister got up to in the privacy of their own home.

Recently I came across Billy's autobiography *The World's My Football Pitch*, written in 1954. One small extract illustrates just how much football and indeed the world has changed over the near fifty years that have passed since its publication.

'I said to Neil Franklin, as we lay in bed that evening talking over our humiliating defeat by the Irish League ...' writes Billy.

Imagine the furore now if David Beckham said, 'As Paul Scholes and I lay in bed the other night ...'

Billy collected 105 caps for England, many as captain, a record that most believed would never be surpassed, but Bobby Moore did just pip him. He finally ended up with 108. Only when I arrived in Manchester as a spotty under-developed kid did I see the likes of Billy Wright, Denis Law, Johnny Haynes, Bobby Charlton and the other greats in the flesh. And I was actually playing on the same pitch as them, not watching from the terraces, which made it all the more surreal.

AS A REALLY small boy I used to take the *Dandy* comic featuring Korky the Cat on the cover and Desperate Dan on the inside cover. All boys took the *Dandy* or the *Beano* or both; a handful of the more studious kids bought the *Eagle*. Every week my comic featured a footballer from the past and it was this page I devoured eagerly. One of the earliest footballing 'true' stories I remember reading was in there. It was illustrated with lifelike pictures and concerned the great Dixie Dean of Everton and England. Dixie scored sixty League goals in one season (1927/28) - these days entire teams struggle to get this many. At the time, as a young boy, I believed every word of the legendary centre forward's anecdote in my favourite comic and only now as I recall this can I see that it was obviously not true. I wish it were though.

In his heyday Dixie Dean's greatest rival was, naturally, the Liverpool goalkeeper of the time, one Elisha Cook. The two men locked horns in the great Merseyside derbies for many years and it has to be said that Elisha, while a great keeper was punished by the unfailing accuracy of Dixie's head and left foot many times. He feared his encounters with Dixie Dean more than any other centre forward of the time.

One day Dixie was out shopping in Liverpool city centre with his wife and he spotted Elisha on the other side of the road, also leisurely shopping with his own wife. A look of

mild fear spread across Elisha's face as he registered his rival. As Dixie nodded to greet him, Elisha unlocked himself from his wife's arm and dived instinctively and acrobatically into the road ...

I have a photographic memory of the illustration that accompanied this story - Dixie Dean standing by the kerb with his trademark centre parting and a bewildered look on his face as Elisha Cook, in a suit, is prostrate in the road, arm outstretched with cans of beans and the rest of the contents of his wife's shopping bag scattered around him.

AS I WRITE, Evertonians think they have a hero worthy of inheriting Dixie Dean's crown - Wayne Rooney. I hope he is. It is hard for me to judge because the boy has only played a handful of senior games and I have not seen them all. What I have seen though is promising and I can understand the excitement. But, I fear for Wayne, because the fanfare surrounding him is totally out of proportion and the press has already placed the footballing aspirations and frustrations of a nation firmly on his shoulders. Be sure that as soon as he falters he will be pilloried and abused. All this before he has put down his Gameboy.

That is the problem nowadays. Brilliant players are few and far between and when one comes along they are pounced upon, lauded and sucked dry. It happened to Michael Owen to an extent. The media perception of him today is now one of almost any other England international. Yet here is a player who is still only in his early twenties and has yet to reach his peak and whose arrival on the scene mirrored the welcome Rooney is now receiving.

When I played, every First Division club had at least one brilliant player to spread the focus of attention. Arsenal had Charlie George; Birmingham had Trevor Francis; Chelsea had Osgood; West Ham had Bobby Moore; Liverpool had Keegan; Manchester City had Colin Bell; Queens Park Rangers had Rodney Marsh; Sheffield United had Tony

Currie; Stoke had Gordon Banks and Spurs had Jimmy Greaves. I can't think of one at Leeds because I don't want to. In 2003 one turns up at Everton and the country wets itself.

BERT TRAUTMANN WAS ANOTHER player I had huge admiration for during my childhood. He was a German prisoner of war in England during the Second World War and stayed around when peace was restored, becoming the first team goalkeeper for Manchester City. He is now best remembered for playing part of the 1956 FA Cup Final against Birmingham with what was later discovered to be a broken neck. Apparently he never looked back after that. By the time one of my old adversaries, the tough defender Mike Doyle, started as an apprentice at Maine Road, Bert's days at the club were coming to a close. Mike was never shy in coming forward and while cleaning the great man's boots he quipped, 'How's your back today, Mr Trautmann?'

Doyle was mischievously referring to the previous match when City had been thrashed 6-0 and Bert had spent some considerable time bending down picking the ball out of the net. Trautmann looked at the impertinent young boy and promptly smacked him around the head.

One of the other reasons I admired Bert was a story I read about him regarding something that happened in the dying embers of his playing career. He was past his best and in this particular game a forward scored against him but Bert felt that the player had unfairly barged or impeded him. The referee was not listening to Bert's protests and turned and trotted back to the halfway line. Bert followed, still clasping the ball he had picked out of the net and in sheer frustration and anger kicked the ball as hard as he could at the referee's back. He got into a lot of trouble over that and I think his career more or less stopped there. This appealed to the rebel in me. I never really emulated his

action but I did get suspended once for knocking the ball out of the referee's hands. Stupid, but fun at the time.

Derek Dooley was another name that resounded around football when I was a lad because he represented everything good and courageous about the game. He was a brave centre forward for Sheffield Wednesday and England who suffered a bad leg-break and then tragically gangrene set in and his leg was subsequently amputated. Instead of crumbling as most of us would Derek was determined to stay in the game and indeed he did as a writer, a manager and a chairman. The comment he made when he first came out of hospital after losing his leg has stayed with me ever since I first read it as a boy. It's sad but it also epitomises the footballing sense of humour in the face of adversity. Derek said, 'They can stick me in the ground and use me as a corner flag just as long as I can stay in football.'

STAN THE MAN

When I first began to get noticed as a young boy at Manchester United I was often compared to Stanley Matthews. The media called us both the Wizard of the Dribble for a while. (I was called it again by some when my drinking took hold years later.) I never saw Stanley in his prime, although I did play against him at the end of his career. Like everyone though I was familiar with the newsreels of the so-called Stanley Matthews Cup Final in 1953 when the other Stanley (Mortensen) scored a hat-trick for Blackpool when the Seaside beat Bolton Wanderers 4-3. This, together with other footage from England matches, was interspersed with Flash Gordon, Abbott and Costello and the cartoons we religiously watched at the cinema every Saturday morning. Stan Mortensen, probably justifiably, lamented years later that he must be the only player to score a hat-trick in the FA Cup Final only to see the game remembered and named after another player. He worried that when he died his burial would be called the Stanley Matthews Funeral.

Mortensen obviously possessed a good sense of humour. He used to tell the story about when he was playing in a match for Blackpool against Arsenal. He was running down the wing and a man in the crowd was roaring at him, 'Give it to Taylor. Give it to Taylor, for Christ's sake.'

He looked up and Taylor was well placed so he tapped it to him with the side of his foot. The defender scooted after Taylor and he passed the ball back to Stan. Stan held it close for a few seconds as he liked to do. The man in the crowd was in his ear again.

'Pass it to Matthews. Matthews!' he screamed. The other Stanley was screaming up on his inside and Mortensen

released the ball to him. Matthews kept running and played a lovely ball down the line back to Mortensen. This time two Arsenal defenders were bang on him. Options were limited. Mortensen looked over and searched the crowd for the vocal spectator. This time he wasn't shouting but when Stan did alight on his face he said casually, 'Use your own discretion.'

Matthews was just packing up as I started, at the unbelievable age of fifty, but he was absolutely revered. Beckham is appreciated, Moore was respected, but Stanley was revered by those who played and by those who watched. It was like a member of the Royal Family was out there on the pitch. For the benefit of our younger readers the Royal Family were generally loved and treated like gods in those days. I don't think there has been a player since who I could describe in that way.

I HEARD THE great man speak once and he told a nice story about when he guested for Arsenal in a match against Moscow Dynamo just after the Second World War ended. Although the match was a friendly, the Russians were not treating it as such and the crowd at a packed White Hart Lane (Highbury had been closed during the war) were shocked at some of the dirty play and time-wasting tactics on display. The Arsenal right half (Stan was too much of a gentleman to name him fifty years on) got particularly annoyed by the Dynamo goalkeeper, who insisted on holding and bouncing the ball for an inordinately long time to allow the minutes to tick away. His team were in front and he wanted to keep it that way. At the same time a fog was beginning to descend and this was making visibility poor.

The right half told his team-mates at half-time that he was going to hammer the goalie in the second half if he persisted in time-wasting. Despite the Arsenal captain, Bernard Joy (in my day a respected journalist), warning

against any such action the player went out there and did just that, clattering the Russian to the ground within minutes of the kick-off. The referee had no hesitation in sending the Arsenal player straight off. Joy asked Stanley to drop back into the right half position as they were now down to ten men. Meanwhile the fog thickened. Some ten minutes later and with twenty minutes still remaining Stan heard someone behind him hiss, 'Get back on the wing, I'm back!' The errant right half had used the cover of the fog to creep back on to the field and complete the game. The referee never noticed.

STAN PLAYED IN what must have been the most awesome forward line for England ever: Stanley Matthews; Wilf Mannion; Tommy Lawton; Stan Mortensen; Tom Finney. I was never lucky enough to see them play in their prime but I met with enough people that did: men whose opinions I respected and many of whom did not give praise easily. Each one of them was considered a genius. Sadly only Tom Finney survives. I read a poignant story about Wilf Mannion. It was after the 1973 dumping of England by underdogs Poland in the World Cup qualifiers and a group of workers at the ICI factory on Teeside were lamenting their national team's failure. Their tea-boy, who was in fact a man in late middle age and pushing retirement, hesitantly joined in the conversation.

'It can be daunting playing at Wembley,' he volunteered in defence of the defeated players.

'Oh really?' chuckled one of the young workers. 'And what would you know about it?'

'I played there a few times.'

One of the older chaps nudged the young worker and said that the 'tea-boy' was Wilf Mannion, the former Middlesbrough and England icon. There was no question that the young man would not know who Mannion was. In those parts he was (and is) still revered. It just defied logic

that he would be performing such a menial job in such reduced circumstances.

Tommy Lawton suffered similar indignity in his post-playing life. He had problems finding work and along the way fell foul of courts, debt-collectors and bailiffs. Times became so hard that at one time he seriously contemplated suicide. Hughie Gallacher, a Scottish contemporary of Tommy's, did exactly that by walking on a crossing in front of a train when he was beset by personal problems when his career was over. Situations like these were sad to see and it is a stain on our national game that we have been unable to provide a safety net for our footballing idols who have fallen on hard times and were unlucky enough to play in the days of a maximum footballing wage.

BACK OF THE NET

Ferenc Puskas was the biggest overseas footballing name when I was a youngster. His Hungarian side had historically beaten England at Wembley by six goals to three, becoming the first international side to inflict defeat on England at Wembley Stadium. He scored a staggering eighty-three goals in eighty-four internationals and figured prominently in various European Cups for Real Madrid after he left humble Honved. He had an unlikely build for a forward being barrel-like to the point of being fat, but for a time nobody could deny that he was the best player in the world. I only knew of his reputation and witnessed his performances in grainy black and white newsreels so it was a great honour to meet him years later when Denis Law and myself were doing a spot of kids' coaching out in Australia.

I guess Puskas was in his early fifties by this time and the years hadn't been particularly kind. His pot belly was now even more pronounced. He was working on one pitch with a bunch of students and we were on an adjacent pitch with our group of boys. I noticed that our lads were nudging each other and giggling as they looked at this late middle-aged, portly fellow trotting among them in his kit. On first glances, I have to confess, Brian Glover, playing the schoolmaster dreaming he was Bobby Charlton in the film *Kes*, sprang to mind.

'That guy you're taking the piss out of was the greatest footballer in the world,' I rebuked them.

'Yeah, and I'm the Fonz,' drawled one of the bigger lads. I asked Ferenc if he would join us for a few minutes and then encouraged him to take ten shots against the mouthy lad, who I told to stand in goal, from the eighteen-yard line.

Ten times the 'old man' had the lad diving this way and that, and each time the ball thundered into the back of the net. He then proceeded to shoot and deliberately hit the bar successively and demonstrated his still magical ball-juggling skills. It really was a case of mouths hanging open. Including mine. The skill, ball control and precision were a pleasure to behold and I knew those boys then realised they were in the presence of greatness. I am sure none of them has ever forgotten it.

It was when Denis and I were out in Oz that we bumped into Frank Haffey. Frank who? I hear you ask. Frank Haffey was the Celtic goalkeeper who conceded nine goals against England when playing for Scotland in a home international tie at Wembley in April 1961. This was an absolute embarrassment for the Scottish team, and the Scottish race generally, losing like this to the auld enemy and the blame was put squarely on poor Haffey's broad shoulders. 'Slap Haffey', the press dubbed him. I know from Denis how much this drubbing hurt because he played in the game. Denis was the only man I knew personally who was willing England to lose against West Germany, three years later in the 1966 World Cup Final. Haffey didn't help his cause when he refused to let the defeat get him down and even wisecracked in the dressing room after the game. 'That's not the first time I've had one over the eight,' he is reputed to have said. The vitriol against him was such that, not so long afterwards, he emigrated to the other side of the world where nobody knew him.

It was nearly twenty years later when Denis and I met Haffey in the car park of a hotel in Sydney. He and Denis exchanged a bit of small talk until, as we were parting, Frank looked at Denis intently and said, 'Denis, tell me straight, is it safe for me to go home yet?'

'Not yet, Frank,' said Denis solemnly.

UNITED WE STOOD

Harry Gregg was a massive hero to all us football-loving kids in Belfast and to be cleaning his boots when I arrived at United in 1961 really was an honour. Only three years before he had been part of the Irish side that had battled to the last eight of the 1958 World Cup Finals and made our little country so proud. You have to be Irish to really appreciate what a massive achievement this was. He was a big man and the bravest goalkeeper I ever saw or played with and, believe me, in those days goalies were knocked around something terrible. But Harry had been through much more having not only survived the Munich air disaster but selflessly dragging some of his colleagues to safety from the burning aircraft and saving the lives of a pregnant lady and her child. Thinking about it, all these players I have talked about who impacted upon me as a boy were idols. Harry alone was the hero.

Harry went on to become a manager before eventually retiring to Ireland where he still keeps tabs on my dad, which is typical of his thoughtfulness. I nearly played for him once when he was in charge at Swansea but that was at the height of my unreliability. Sorry Harry. Alex Stepney was the keeper I played with the most during my golden years at Manchester United. He was a fine goalkeeper who unluckily for him played at a time when there was a feast of brilliant English goalkeepers (Gordon Banks, Peter Shilton and Peter Bonetti to name just three) who prevented him from enjoying a spell between the sticks for his country. I saw him make the most fantastic save ever in a match against Leeds United.

Peter Lorimer, their Scottish target man, who was feared for his cannonball shot up and down the country, let

rip with a sizzling drive that nigh on smashed the crossbar. It came so fast and with such velocity that before I registered the shot it had rebounded back off the bar and back into his path for Lorimer to volley again, this time towards the left-hand corner of the net. Alex somehow managed to arch his body backwards and to tip the ball over the bar. As I ran to congratulate him I checked for fingers on his hand.

‘Alex, that was brilliant. Absolutely brilliant.’

Alex didn’t look at me as he was concentrating on Eddie Gray, preparing to take the corner, but from the side of his mouth he hissed, ‘Piss off, Bestie, I was still going for the first shot.’

A few years later when I was depressed over Manchester United’s decline in fortunes Alex made me feel even worse. Unusually for a goalie he took a couple of penalties in the second season of Tommy Docherty’s tenure and scored them both. After twelve games he was still the club’s joint leading marksman. What hope was there? Ian Storey-Moore was signed eight months earlier from Nottingham Forest amid great fanfare but he never reproduced the goal-scoring potential he had shown at the County Ground. To be fair he was dogged by injury; it was that bad he’d pull a hamstring if he appeared on *A Question of Sport*, and injury in the end would cut his career sadly short.

I LOVE NOBBY Stiles dearly. When I heard while doing this book that he was quite ill I was on the telephone immediately. It turned out to be one of those occasions when I was pleased that the press had exaggerated – he was okay. His reputation was that of a hard man, and he was, but he wasn’t an executioner like some of them and his cry of ‘I was going for the ball, ref’ wasn’t as cynical as it was with the others. For Nobby, as most people know, was almost blind – and his contact lenses on the field didn’t improve

things much either – most of the time he *really was* going for the ball. He wasn't called Inspector Clouseau for nothing. He had tried glasses but his poor eyesight must have contributed to his choice because he plumped on the biggest pair of spectacles I have ever seen. Only Deirdre Barlow of *Coronation Street* circa 1980 came close. His other nickname among the boys was Happy for obvious reasons.

After the historic European Cup final win in 1968 we had a celebratory dinner back in Manchester at a top hotel. The European Cup itself stood gleaming imperiously and bedecked with ribbons at the top of the dinner table. Nobby was sitting opposite me and at one point in the meal I registered that he had got up and gone off to the toilet. After about fifteen minutes I began to wonder why he had not returned to his seat so I went out to the lavatories to look for him. All the doors were open and there was no one washing their hands or standing around the area. I checked back in our dining room to see if he had returned meanwhile but his chair remained empty. I wondered if for some reason he had decided to go home. I couldn't imagine why but Nobby could be unpredictable. I went to the reception desk to see whether anyone had noticed him leaving the building. No one had. On the way back, thoroughly baffled, I noticed that the dining room next to ours had a sign up saying it was a Rotary Club dinner and the door was slightly ajar. Something made me peep in. There he was, Nobby, not only sitting among the Rotarians but eating someone else's dinner. The gentleman opposite him, looking somewhat puzzled, bore no resemblance to me either.

He is one of those men who are accident-prone and even if you dressed him in the best Savile Row gear he'd still look like someone on his first day of being released from Strangeways Prison. I remember one evening when we were playing away for United in a hotel in Hamburg and we

were all getting ready to go out for a drink. We went to Nobby's room to collect him. He was walking around the room in his pants, the buttons on his shirt were done up out of synch and his face was peppered with small bits of paper where he had butchered himself shaving. At one point he pulled on a cord to lower the window blind and the whole thing fell off, then he couldn't find where he had put his trousers and so on. By the time he was ready we properly needed a drink.

At dinner, woe betide those who are sat next to Nobby. He cuts the meat and the gravy splashes over him (or worse still, over you), the top falls off the salt pot and he drinks from your glass. This was Nobby.

MAURICE SETTERS WAS ANOTHER so-called 'hard man' but he too was a good footballer and nobody's fool. He enjoyed further success when he teamed up managerially with Jackie Charlton and did wonders for the Irish national side long after his playing days were over. One day he and Denis Law had decided to go and see the boss about their wages. Maurice said to Denis they must stick together and be honest with each other over what they had negotiated. In those days there were two rates of pay - one for the season and one for the close season. Denis and Matt Busby finally struck a deal at £150 per week during the season and £95 off-season. Denis told Maurice before he went in to the office what he and the gaffer had agreed. Matt offered Maurice £125 during the season and £75 off.

'With all due respect, boss, I don't think that is fair,' Maurice reasoned. 'You have just agreed with Denis a much higher figure.'

Matt pondered a little but finally said rather bluntly, 'He's better than you, Maurice.'

Sharp as a razor Maurice retorted, 'Not in the close season he isn't, boss.'

That story reminds of a time when a chap – and I really do not remember his name – was trying to get me to play for his club in America. ‘George, we’ll pay you \$20,000 this year and \$30,000 next year,’ he drawled.

‘Okay, I’ll sign next year then,’ I replied.

I don’t know if the following recollection says more about the negotiating skills of Matt Busby or Denis Law’s lack of them. It happened before my arrival but I heard the boys tease Denis over it enough times. They were generally unhappy about their wages and, having just won an FA Cup, felt they should be entitled to a meaningful salary increase. This time they decided it would be more effective to negotiate as a team and Denis was nominated (knowing him he probably volunteered) to go and hammer out a deal with Matt. An hour later he left the boss’s office smiling. The boys thought he must have got a result. Denis thought he had. Matt had wanted to reduce wages by a £1 a week but Denis had limited it to ten bob.

I STILL THINK of Shay Brennan every day although he has now been dead a couple of years. It was a real thrill for me when his wife Liz flew in for my recent *This Is Your Life* tribute. He was a wonderful, wonderful, kind and decent man and one of the funniest people I have known in or out of the game. He didn’t always mean to be comical – he just was. I remember once sitting with him on a coach coming back from a game. He was engrossed in filling out a form for a credit card or a mortgage, if I remember rightly.

He said to me, ‘It’s asking me for *Company*. What do I put?’

‘Put Manchester United, Shay,’ I said. ‘They employ you.’

He nodded and continued to fill out the form quietly and when he finished he handed it to me to check over. I collapsed into convulsive laughter when I read through it, for under *Position* he had written Full Back.

Another time years after we had retired from playing football we appeared on TV AM together to be interviewed by Anne Diamond. On driving to the studios we passed a road sign – BOROUGH OF LAMBETH – NUCLEAR-FREE ZONE – it announced almost triumphantly.

‘Lucky bastards – I think I should live here, at least it’s safe,’ muttered Shay. He had a thing about road signs and reading them out. One time he pointed at one that said CAUTION – LOW-FLYING AIRCRAFT as we passed alongside some airbases in East Anglia.

‘What are we meant to do – duck?’ asked Shay.

And another that was funny the first time he said it to me (maybe not on the next twenty occasions) was when he saw a POLICE SLOW sign and commented, ‘That goes without saying.’

That morning at TV AM Anne Diamond had the singer Julio Iglesias on a video link. What the tenuous connection was between him and us I’m not sure, although apparently he had been the reserve team goalkeeper at Real Madrid when he was a younger man. Julio mentioned the word *mañana* and Anne asked him to explain what it meant.

‘In Spain the word *mañana* means the job will get done tomorrow, maybe the next day, maybe next month or even next year.’

Anne saw this an opportunity to bring Shay and me into the conversation. ‘Do the Irish have an equivalent to the word *mañana*?’

It was early in the morning and my brain wasn’t at its sharpest. Shay leant back on the settee trying to look as laid-back as Julio himself.

‘In Ireland, Anne, we don’t have a word that describes that degree of urgency.’

PADDY CRERAND LOOKED AFTER me on the field at Old Trafford and off it. As soon as I became known defenders came looking for me and he started looking out for them. Paddy was my

minder. And he was a fearsome prospect I can tell you. He had a temper on him that opponents and team-mates alike would think twice about stoking. He also spoke his mind and had no time for all the niceties and false politeness that underpins much social interaction. He was a great pundit after his playing career was over and was one of the first 'experts' to sit alongside Brian Moore and talk about the game. If I remember correctly Bob McNab, Derek Dougan and Malcolm Allison also sat on that first television 'panel'. How entertaining and refreshing they were compared to most of the TV pundits around today (and I include myself in that sweeping statement).

Brian Moore told me a great tale about that panel. It was during the 1970 World Cup and they were on live straight after *Police 5*; ITV's forerunner to *Crimewatch* presented by Shaw Taylor. The main felony that police wanted help with was the hijacking of a lorryload of fashionable flowery shirts. That makes you feel all warm and nostalgic, doesn't it? Thirty years ago we sat in our armchairs and shook our heads and tutted over appeals for help to nail Ben Sherman thieves when now it's accounts of Uzi-toting crack-cocaine addicts wreaking havoc across our cities. Shaw Taylor even had a mannequin model the shirts in the studio and walked around it pointing out their distinctive features - the button-down collar, the double-button sleeves and the discreet anchor motif on the pocket. Shaw ended the programme in customary style by looking straight into the camera and asking the public to come forward if they knew anything about the robbery or had been offered one of these shirts. The commercial break followed and then the TV cut straight to the World Cup studio in London where Bob McNab, always a dedicated follower of fashion, was introduced wearing a very loud shirt (for those with the new-fangled colour TVs), sporting a very familiar-looking anchor motif.

Back to Paddy. His abrasive personality made him murder to travel with. One time we were in Berlin, crossing from the West to the East at Checkpoint Charlie. We all had to disembark the coach and stand around in the pissing rain, in the dark, as heavily armed soldiers checked our passports. The passports were handed to the guards all together and they waved us through to board the coach on the other side of the gate, but as Paddy squeezed past they blocked his way and motioned him to stand to one side. Paddy had an Irish passport (even though he was a Scottish international) but so did some of the other lads so it wasn't clear what the guards didn't like about him. They fished his passport out from the bunch and looked him up and down and then did it again and again. We could see Paddy's cheeks reddening and started to worry a little. Then Paddy snatched the passport from the soldier's hand and shoved him, gun as well, to the ground, stepped over his prostrate body and boarded the coach. For some inexplicable reason the guard did not put Paddy up against the wall and shoot him.

It was on another of these cross-border trips with United that an Eastern European immigration official stepped on to our coach and worked through the bag of passports asking us to raise our hands as he called our names.

'Anthony Dunne ... Robert Charlton ...' His English was good but perhaps the writing in one of the passports was not too clear because the coach erupted when he looked up and asked next for 'Penis Law'.

Paddy was at it again years later when he and I were among a group of ex-players invited to attend a Liverpool versus Celtic exhibition match in Dubai. As we were leaving the country Paddy was stopped and the officials began to question him about his dreaded Irish passport. Paddy went nuts - shouting, swearing and throwing things around. Before we knew it he was surrounded by armed guards and was being led away. Denis Law and myself looked on in

horror. As he was being frog-marched across the tarmac we could hear Paddy screaming for the sheik who had arranged our visit and had looked after us so well, but nobody was listening. We had to board the plane and our hearts sunk lower as we looked out of the window and saw them unloading Paddy's luggage from the hold beneath us. When we landed back in London I immediately phoned Paddy's wife, Noreen.

'Do you want the good news or the bad news?' I asked.

'You best give me the bad news,' said a worried Noreen and I then explained about Paddy's predicament. She wasn't too alarmed. I suspected that she must have had similar experiences with him.

'And what's the good news then?' she said resignedly.

'He's got you a really lovely chain from the souk.'

PADDY WAS NOT entirely blameless for the problems he encountered overseas. He had no patience for the amount of form-filling that was part and parcel of crossing borders. One time he was asked to leave the coach we were travelling on and when he came back an hour later, looking a bit sheepish rather than angry, it transpired that he had filled out the entry form that was tucked into his passport for review by the border guards like so: *Name*: James Bond; *Occupation*: Spy.

On one of these tours we played an exhibition match in Saudi Arabia. It was our first of the tour and we had been ferried from air-conditioned plane to air-conditioned car to air-conditioned hotel. Then from air-conditioned car again to the air-conditioned changing rooms of a large football stadium. Paddy decided to take a walk out on to the pitch still dressed in his suit. Out there it was 110 degrees and after a couple of minutes he re-entered the changing room breathless. The sweat was literally pouring off him and a puddle began to form around his feet. 'Turned out nice again,' he said.

Early in his career Paddy was introduced to the Duke of Edinburgh after a function. 'Your Highness, this is our wing half, Pat Crerand,' said Noel Cantwell.

'How you doing, Jimmy,' grinned Paddy. He then went on to engage the bemused Duke about when he was stationed in Derry during the war, claiming to have met some girls Prince Philip had taken out. Noel Cantwell, Bobby Charlton, Sir Matt and the rest stood there wincing and praying Paddy would shut up.

ALBERT QUIXALL WAS MATT BUSBY'S first big signing for United after the Munich air disaster and in that period until I came along (when he moved on) he made a big impact at Old Trafford. He managed to score 56 goals in his 183 matches and helped the club take the FA Cup in 1963. By all accounts he was a joker and the players still recounted some of his japes long after he had left. One winter's night United were to play Tottenham Hotspur at White Hart Lane but at the last minute, and when the players were already on the pitch, the referee decided that the fog was too thick and abandoned the match. As both sides traipsed off some of the lads spotted Albert through the fog, standing with his legs apart and steam rising from the ground as he urinated on to the centre spot.

'What did you do that for?' asked David Herd when they were back in the changing rooms.

'Well, we don't often get a chance to piss all over Spurs,' replied a grinning Albert Quixall.

There was another Albert at the club when I joined and he too had a reputation as a character. Albert Scanlon was a local boy who had survived the Munich air disaster. Wherever United travelled in the world he'd like to sample the local delights and the thing I heard about him that really amused me was what he would do when the lads first arrived in a foreign city. He'd get hold of the local phone directory in the hotel and thumb through it until he found

an English name. Then he'd ring the person and tell them who we were and would they like to come out for a drink with him and the United lads? Naturally these expatriates were normally up for it. They got to share a night with the United stars and Albert could tap straight into local knowledge of nightspots and other delights without wasting any time.

ONCE I WAS in the public eye any other player who grew his hair over his ears or showed the slightest sign of keeping up with the fashions of the day was labelled the new George Best or the George Best of wherever. I can understand that this could be rather annoying for the players concerned but it wasn't me saying it. Willie Morgan, a winger making waves at Burnley and later to be signed by Manchester United, suffered this but I couldn't believe it when I came off the pitch at Turf Moor one afternoon and was accosted by a lady who, I was later told, was one of his relatives.

'Our Willie is a better player than you are and he had long hair before you, too,' she spat. I'm glad I didn't bump into his dad.

DENIS LAW IS MY great mate. We have probably become closer since our days at Old Trafford came to an end. Denis was only a few years older but he was well established by the time I arrived as a boy from Belfast and he was a married man. The guys in their mid and late twenties didn't really mix socially with the teenagers and the teenagers regarded the players in their thirties as from their father's generation. Now, age differences are irrelevant. We're all old. Full stop. We are not in each other's pockets (no one gets in Denis's pockets, especially Denis) but I would say we are really great, great mates.

We sometimes meet up in Portugal when my wife Alex and I go out there and Denis is there with his family. One