

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Hard Tackles and Dirty Baths

George Best

CONTENTS

Cover

Title Page

Foreword

Introduction

1 1960 - 64

2 1964 - 65

3 1965 - 66

4 1966 - 67

5 1967 - 68

6 1968 - 69

7 1969 - 70

8 1970 - 71

9 1971 - 72

10 1972 - 73

11 1973 - 74

Epilogue

Select Bibliography

Index

Picture Section

Acknowledgements

Copyright

Hard Tackles and Dirty Baths

The Inside Story of Football's Golden Era

George Best

with Harry Harris



FOREWORD

On 25 November, 2005 my best friend George died. It was the end of an extraordinary life, a fantastic career and a harrowing battle with the disease of alcoholism. Much has been written and said since George's death, and undoubtedly this will continue. While the vast majority of commentators paid handsome tribute and there was a genuine public outpouring of emotion, some of the media comments were more negative. It was my anticipation of this, perhaps, that prompted me to say, minutes after he had passed away, that he had gone "somewhere where nobody can hurt him".

I can only speak as I find. I was George's friend and manager (in that order) for years. I knew and loved a kind, decent and honest man. I know what I saw and recall countless incidents of stunning generosity. He gave his time and more to all kinds of charities, causes and to his public in general. If George had permitted me I would have asked the newspapers to run stories about this side of his life, but something tells me they wouldn't have been interested.

Hard Tackles and Dirty Baths is George's third book with Ebury Press and I can vouch for how much he enjoyed writing them, for football was his love and passion. Effectively, from the age of 17 he no longer owned his life, as he was sucked up into a whirlwind that finally laid him down last year. Writing *Blessed*, *Scoring at Half-Time* and this book allowed George to reflect on his life, times and sport like he never had before. He told me that he would like to be remembered for the football and nothing else, and although that may not be possible, this trilogy of books, I

believe, does a great deal to put an accurate perspective on George Best's life and times.

Phil Hughes, 2006

INTRODUCTION

As far as I am concerned, everything about the game of football during these golden years of the 60s and 70s had a different feel to it, a different attitude. That extra man in the dressing room, the so-called team spirit, really did exist in my playing days. Just look at the photograph on the cover of the book you are holding. There are two survivors from the Manchester United Munich air crash, three European Footballers of the Year and two World Cup winners, and there we all are, happy as can be, in a filthy, muddy tub, a couple raising their bottles of Brown Ale as we celebrate winning the league in 1967. Nowadays, of course, when they come in from training or after a game, there's a separate bath and shower unit for each star, no doubt with Armani dressing gowns and Gucci flip-flops, before leaving the ground in their six-figure cars to head home to their security-gated seven-figure mansions.

It might not sound too hygienic, steaming hot bodies all converging together in one huge tiled bath, the water quickly turning a murky shade of grey-black with the mud and dirt of a hard afternoon's toil on the field, but those communal baths of yesteryear were all meant to be about harmony and bonding. In fact, we prized the tiled bath at Old Trafford. The bath at the Cliff training ground was concrete, and water was either ice cold or so boiling hot you couldn't even get in. All of the facilities were basic, but as players we put up with them. We didn't know any better, didn't expect anything grander, so it was accepted without complaint.

We threw our shirts into the centre of the dressing room, and they would be taken away to the wash room and returned to us for the next training session. There were no names on the back, no advertising logos, no fancy fabrics. These days, all the kit, boots and accessories are waiting for the players when they arrive for training. We would make sure we weren't late for training because all the gear was piled up in the middle of the dressing-room floor, and if you were unfortunate enough to be the last one in, you would have to put up with the left-overs, and that meant socks with holes in them, and plimsolls, or dabs as we called them for some unknown reason, instead of boots. And if your luck was really out, the dabs would be completely the wrong size.

The elevation of players from mere sportsmen to celebrity status was due to two major milestones in the history of the game, both of which began during the 60s: the advent of television coverage, and the removal of the maximum wage cap for players.

As Britain's population emerged from the impoverished post-war 50s into the brighter, optimistic 60s, with more cash in their pockets as disposable income soared, so the sport moved from being a source of local pride to becoming a global business with its money-making base firmly embedded in the new phenomena of television.

Television raised the public's awareness of the game. Committed fans already knew all about their local team, but suddenly a whole new generation – the newly coined teenage generation in particular – became hooked on the sport and its emerging personalities via programmes such as *Match of the Day*.

Kenneth Wolstenholme introduced the first-ever edition of *Match of the Day* on 22 August, 1964 with an audience of 20,000 viewers (less than half the attendance at the ground) tuning in to BBC2 to see Liverpool beat Arsenal 3-2.

It was initially only broadcast in the London area, extending to the Birmingham area in December.

Less than two years later – on 30 July, 1966 – 32.3 million people (more than half of the entire population) watched the dramatic World Cup final. The surprising popularity of the television World Cup coverage ensured that by the 1966–67 season *Match of the Day* had a new slot on BBC1, and by the following year ITV had *The Big Match* on screen each Sunday afternoon. By the mid-70s, *Match of the Day* viewing figures averaged twelve million and by the end of the decade, the FA Cup Final could expect an audience of twenty million.

Of course, there was a downside to the explosion of TV coverage. The football authorities had been wary of the influence of the armchair fan, fearing that match attendance – and gate receipts – would fall rapidly. While there were huge gates at glamorous games from Old Trafford to White Hart Lane, there were serious concerns about less attractive fixtures lower down the divisions. As late as 1960, negotiations between the Football League and the Independent Television Authority had fallen through over fears that broadcasting a live game might have an adverse effect on people actually going to the games.

There was a highly cautious initial approach to the introduction of live games, but the broadcasting companies eventually did persuade the Football League that a highlights package would not be detrimental to gates up and down the country, and might even generate more interest in the game and attract a new generation of football followers.

Before television coverage, most teams' fan base was largely local. Seeing new teams, and new stars, quickly created a change of allegiance, often not connected with the area in which the fans lived. The glamour clubs attracted an even wider audience of fans; eventually, the fan base broadened from local to national, from national to

international, as clubs began playing more in Europe. Manchester United know more about that than most. The club are still reaping the benefits of a worldwide renown that was borne out of the legendary, pioneering exploits of the Busby Babes in Europe. Today, we can watch virtually every game everywhere, at every level. I watch all the top football, particularly the Premiership, though I also love the football from Italy and Spain.

The lifting of the player's maximum wage was as big an influence on the game as the arrival of television, but it had a very different effect, swinging the balance of power away from the club towards the players.

Before 1960, some of the legends of the game ended their career impoverished. Tommy Lawton and Hughie Gallagher ended up on the dole, and Gallagher committed suicide by throwing himself under a train in 1957. In that year the Professional Footballers' Association (the players' union) had a new chairman in Jimmy Hill, who led the campaign to remove the maximum wage cap, which stood at £20 a week, £17 during the close season. As player, manager and expert pundit, Hill has been involved in every area of the game. He is perhaps still most famous for the size of his chin, but it was where he stuck his nose that was more important to the game.

Hill became involved in football only because of the Army. When he was called up for national service he was a clerk in the Stock Exchange. But he played for the Army football team which, apart from Hill and one other player, consisted of professionals on an enforced sabbatical. After he was discharged from the Army, he was taken on at Brentford where he became the union rep. When he transferred to Fulham, he became the union man there and, eventually, the union's national chairman.

For years the Football League hardly condescended to meet with the players' representatives to discuss the wage cap, but in January 1961 the threat of a players' strike made

the League take notice and in July the maximum wage was abolished. England captain Johnny Haynes became the first £100-a-week footballer and his Fulham chairman Tommy Trinder publicly declared that he was delighted to be able to properly reward his star.

The irony of this achievement by Jimmy Hill was that he never personally benefited from his campaign to end the £20-a-week maximum wage. While his team-mate Haynes saw his salary increase five-fold, Hill was forced by injury into premature retirement at the age of thirty-one, before his contract was updated.

Some figures in the game have recently suggested there should be a wage cap for today's footballers. I doubt you would ever persuade players to accept a situation that previous generations fought so hard to end. But I do wonder if the Football League would have capitulated, had it been able to foresee not just the astronomical sums now paid out to players but also the power this gave individual players.

1

1960 – 64

I WAS ALWAYS determined to make my mark in this wonderful yet often so weird game of football. I had started my career at Manchester United in the ranks, the A and B teams, and thought I was lucky to be making such rapid progress when I graduated to the reserve side. But then not long after my seventeenth birthday, after only nine central league appearances, I became a full professional and stepped into the first team. I played against West Bromwich Albion at Old Trafford on 14 September, 1963 and I shall never forget it. I was at outside right and we won 1-0 with a goal from David Sadler. I dropped back into the reserves but just over three months later, on 28 December, I was brought in to play outside left, with another youngster, Willie Anderson, making his debut on the other wing.

Willie was even younger than me; he was just sixteen. Yet this was how the conveyor belt of talent operated at Old Trafford under manager Matt Busby. I managed to score in a 5-1 win over Burnley. Everyone was pretty pleased as the win was revenge for a 6-1 beating we'd received at Burnley just two days previously. Both Willie and I stayed in the side for our next game – an FA Cup debut in the third round at Southampton. Everyone keep asking me if I was nervous, particularly as our regular match-winner, Denis Law, wasn't playing. But I never seemed to suffer any nerves. We won 3-2 after a terrific fight back and I stayed in the side until the

end of the season, contributing four goals in the league. Things just got better and better and after only twenty-one first-team games, I was honoured by Northern Ireland and won my first cap playing at outside right against Wales at Swansea.

I had travelled to Wembley the previous May with my father to watch United in the 1963 Cup Final. What an atmosphere. What an occasion. I instantly fell in love with the Cup Final and wanted to be part of it.

Manchester United were the outsiders against Leicester City, having finished a poor nineteenth in the First Division, while our opponents had finished fourth. But the excitement was gripping right from the start as United took control and reversed the odds. Within thirty minutes United took the lead when Denis Law cracked an unstoppable shot past Gordon Banks. Minutes later he almost made it two from an individual run that left three defenders trailing, and when he beat Banks his shot was cleared off the line. Fifteen minutes after the break United extended their lead when Banks could only parry a shot from Bobby Charlton and David Herd pounced on the loose ball to score. With ten minutes left, Ken Keyworth scored for Leicester with a diving header. That seemed only to sharpen United's appetite, and a header from Law rebounded off the post. Then Banks fumbled a shot from Quixall and Herd was there once again to complete the scoring. How could so much exhilarating football fail to inspire?

My dad was there to check everything was okay with Matt Busby as I signed my professional forms for Manchester United. I had spent two years as an "amateur" when, in reality, I was an apprentice, but because of the rules of the day involving the Irish and Scottish Leagues, the club had to find me a regular job and I could train as an amateur only on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Of course, my "job" just happened to coincide with working at the training ground from 9am, where I was able to conveniently combine my

duties with a touch of er . . . training. There had been a big debate about the draining of talent from Scotland and Northern Ireland and they tried to make it more difficult for the English clubs to take the boys as apprentices, but there was always going to be a way round it. Before the club worked the fiddle with my job I did some actual work for the Manchester Ship Canal Company - making the tea and running messages.

Back then every young boy's head was turned by the glamour and thrill of football. Never mind playing; you dreamed of just being in the big grounds to watch your heroes. Growing up in Belfast, my grandfather lived just fifty yards from the main entrance to the Glentoran ground. In those days the local club would attract big crowds, and he or my dad would take me along. Children went in free if they were accompanied by an adult. Those who didn't have an adult to take them would wait at the turnstiles and ask a stranger to take them in. You'd be lifted over the turnstiles as the adult paid. Once you were in you would ask the other people in the packed stand to lift you up and you'd be carried above their heads down to the front so you could see the game.

After the match on a Saturday evening it would be a thrill waiting for the *Belfast Telegraph* to publish its football special, the Pink. It came out around an hour after the match had finished and you could buy it on the street corner. I would take it home, cut out the Glentoran match report and paste it into my scrapbook. Then, I would flip the paper over, and on the back were reports of the best of the English football, and of course at this time, the headlines belonged to my favourite team, Wolves. Even then kids liked to follow the successful team: they always appear more glamorous for that reason. I must have filled up half a dozen scrapbooks, and I wish I still had them. It was reading those reports of the Wolves games that got me hooked. I became

aware of the great traditions of the Wolves team and their exploits domestically and internationally.

For me as a lad in Belfast, I was able to watch the glamour players in English football because one of my near neighbours possessed a television, a rarity in our street. Certainly my family were too poor to afford one. The neighbour was just a couple of doors away. I was just a kid at the time but I was around his house whenever there was a game on. I didn't care who was playing, I just loved watching. In those days it was in fact rare to see any football on television. *Match of the Day* hadn't started yet, and most matches broadcast were international football. I was originally inspired by Wolves, because of the glamorous international ties they were involved in; playing a team from Moscow at that time was like playing a team from another planet. Wolves were one of the first to play under floodlights, and there was just an extra-special feeling about a game being played in the evening. It was sheer theatre.

I learned that it was on Monday, 13 December, 1954 under the floodlights at Molineux, home of the champions of England, that the idea of a European Cup, the most glamorous tournament in club football, was first conceived. It was on that foul, wintry night in the Black Country that Wolves defeated Honved, the dazzling Hungarian club side that included many players of the national team that had comprehensively thrashed England twice in the previous twelve months. Interest in the European game had reached new heights in Britain as a result of two humiliations suffered by the English side: 6-3 at Wembley in November 1953 and 7-1 in Budapest in the spring of 1954. Those results, and the manner in which they were achieved, had shattered once and for all the idea that the nation that gave the game to the world was still the dominant force. Under the inspirational management of Stan Cullis, Wolves staged a legendary fightback to win the match 3-2. And it was in response to the post-match euphoria that Gabriel Hanot,

editor of the French sports paper *L'Equipe*, set about organising the first European club tournament. I had little clue then just how central this would be to my own footballing future.

Hanot had long campaigned for European competition at club level. When the British press proclaimed Wolves "champions of the world" following their victory over Honved, prefaced by the thrashing of Spartak Moscow – both friendlies – Hanot acted. The former France international wrote in *L'Equipe*: "Before we declare that Wolverhampton Wanderers is invincible, let them go to Moscow and Budapest. And there are other internationally renowned clubs: Milan and Real Madrid. The idea of a club World Championship, or at least a European one – larger, more meaningful than the Mitropa Cup and more original than a competition for national teams – should start. Let us take such a risk."

In September 1953 Cullis supervised the installation of floodlights at Molineux and arranged a series of high-profile friendly matches against continental opponents, who brought with them extravagant, exotic ball skills. Cullis ordered a special set of Wolves' famous old-gold shirts to be worn for floodlit matches. Manufactured in a satin material, they seemed to make the players glow in the dark. The matches provoked enormous interest through '53 and into the '54 season, mostly centred on the games scheduled for the end of the year against Spartak Moscow and Honved. Spartak arrived in November and were level at 0-0 after eighty evenly matched minutes before being steamrollered by the supremely fit Wolves forwards, who scored four times in the final ten minutes. That was impressive, but everyone knew that Honved represented the ultimate test.

Their team contained six of the players who had beaten England, including the fabulously talented Ferenc Puskas. The appalling winter weather had left the Molineux pitch sodden. Cunningly, Cullis, on the day of the match,

summoned three apprentices to his office and ordered them to water the pitch, then to use the groundsman's heaviest roller to press the moisture into the surface. One of the teenage hopefuls who carried out his instructions was Ron Atkinson. Cullis's plan was certainly not immediately obvious when the game began at a heaving, expectant Molineux. Passing the ball silkily over the glistening surface, the Hungarians left Wolves looking bewildered and it was little surprise when Puskas aimed a free kick towards the head of Sandor Kocsis, who converted the chance. It was 2-0 after fourteen minutes when Kocsis sent Mathos clear to beat Bert Williams. Wolves trailed at the break and Cullis urged the team to believe that the game was salvageable. Wolves got the goal that they needed four minutes into the second half when Reg Leafe, the referee, rather harshly punished Kovaks for a foul on Hancocks and the same player converted the penalty. As Wolves swept forward, Honved's passing game was rendered impotent by the churning morass under their feet and the mud wore the Hungarians out. The equaliser that had begun to look inevitable came in the seventy-sixth minute when Roy Swinbourne, the centre forward, headed home a cross from Dennis Wilshaw. Two minutes later the pair combined again and Swinbourne provoked scenes of near hysteria with a thumping shot that put Wolves ahead. "There they are," Cullis said, gesturing at his mud-streaked, worn-out players, "the champions of the world". In the *News Chronicle*, Charles Buchan wrote: "Wolves struck another decisive blow for English football with as wonderful a second-half rally as I have seen in forty years." The *Daily Mirror's* star columnist, Peter Wilson, began his account on the front page: "I have never seen a greater thriller than this. And if I see many more as thrilling I may not live much longer anyway." I was just eight years old, but stories like these fired my mind.

Like many of the clubs that were big when I was growing up, Wolves are no longer a major player. These days the

clubs that you'd expect to win the trophies can be counted on three fingers. One of the great things about the era I played in was the diversity of interest. You just never knew who, at the beginning of each season, would be in the ascendancy. There were teams which kept their form over time - Leeds, Liverpool, Everton, Chelsea and ourselves, certainly. But winners could come from almost anywhere - think of West Brom, Ipswich, Sunderland and Derby. You could be beaten 4-0 in one game and then beat the same team in the return fixture 5-0. I just don't think that happens today.

So who were the big teams of the eras in which I first pulled on my boots? The first great side of the 60s were undoubtedly Bill Nicholson's Tottenham Hotspur. Nicholson was a Yorkshireman with true grit and the original one-club man; Tottenham man and boy. He had played for Spurs in the 50s under the legendary Arthur Rowe and taken up Rowe's "push and run" philosophy as a manager, adapting it to his own style. For the uninitiated, "push and run" was the terminology used for a simple, yet highly effective, system of pass and move. The player releasing the ball did not stop, but kept going in order to find space to receive the ball, either from the player to whom he released it or from another team-mate in the passing move. The technique might appear simplicity itself, but it required speed of thought, and the ability to make a pass on the move and to receive the pass with a near-perfect first touch. It didn't work unless virtually the entire attacking area of the team possessed such skills. Nicholson was a perfectionist. In football that is never quite attained, but he wanted to come as near to it as humanly possible. Though Nicholson had assembled a formidable array of naturally skilful players at White Hart Lane, he further demanded an exceptional work-rate, bravery and commitment from each of them. Nicholson, starting in 1958, lifted Spurs from eighteenth in the First Division to the first league and cup double of the

century in 1961. He did so by creating a team, as had Busby, that truly played the beautiful game. A man of unlavish lifestyle, living a conveniently short walk from the ground in a semi-detached house, he spent the club's money extravagantly but shrewdly: initially, Dave Mackay, Bill Brown in goal, John White, Cliff Jones and Jimmy Greaves, subsequently Mike England, Pat Jennings, Alan Mullery, Alan Gilzean, Terry Venables, Martin Chivers and Martin Peters.

Years later Martin Chivers recalled winning the UEFA Cup under Nicholson in 1972 and having to wait to open the champagne while his manager went to commiserate with the opposition, Wolves, for having been the better team. This was typical of the man. Bill Nicholson was always strict but fair, dogmatic but analytical, austere but honest, and always modest. Nicholson, who died aged eighty-five a few years ago, was also a man with a conviction.

He devoted a literal lifetime to Tottenham Hotspur: as £2-a-week apprentice painting the grandstand, as meticulous wing half denied more than a single England cap by the ever-present Billy Wright, as trophy-winning manager and, finally, as president. Just as with Matt Busby at Manchester United, Bill Shankly at Liverpool or Jock Stein at Celtic, Nicholson was the embryo of Spurs' greatness. First to arrive each day, last to leave, without Nicholson's nod no stone turned at White Hart Lane. With passing time, some players became uneasy with Nicholson's unswerving discipline and rigorous demands. He would respond: "The time to start worrying is when I'm no longer concerned." Nicholson earned universal affection because, during sixteen years as manager, he was devoid of self-acclaim in his pursuit of excellence and entertainment.

PERHAPS HIS MOST crucial signing in the double-winning years was, like me, a mercurial, dribbling goalscorer. For a winger, Cliff Jones was brave in the air; you would have thought he

had taken flight at the far post. Though not very big, he was able to outleap the tallest of centre halves. Jones was exceptional, above all, for his scoring potential, especially with his head. In eleven seasons with Tottenham he scored 134 goals in 309 matches; including a six-season spell – 1960–65 – of ninety-seven goals in 220 matches. For Wales, he scored thirteen in forty-one. Amere 5ft 8in, and built like a greyhound, he could truly be described as poetry in motion. What full backs mostly saw were his disappearing heels, though Bill Nicholson was once moved to say during Jones's early days at Tottenham, "The ball's round, it rolls: why don't you try passing it occasionally?" This was typical of Nicholson's bluff Yorkshire attitude, but he used such remarks as a challenge to his players to improve. Son of Ivor (West Bromwich) and nephew of Bryn (Wolves and Arsenal), both of them inside forwards, Cliff came from Swansea, an area that seemed to breed many footballers, in a similar way to the other coal-mining areas of the north-east and central Scotland.

Jones's passion and commitment were first imbibed from someone that I myself was indebted to: Jimmy Murphy, assistant to Matt Busby at Manchester United, who was also the Wales team manager at the time. His first cap, in 1954 aged nineteen, came against the Austrian 'Wunder Team'. The experience with Murphy was character-forming. "He was a motivator," Jones says. "His style was fixed bayonets, over-the-top, give them plenty of welly. He impressed on you that the greatest honour you could have was to play for Wales." Jones was also a modest man who never forgot his working-class roots. While a Swansea apprentice, on the insistence of his father, he also worked as a sheet-metal apprentice. Chaired off for his winning goal against England, he was back at the docks at 7.30 next morning. "Well done, lad," the foreman said, "and now there's your proper work."

Nicholson maintained the reality when Jones was transferred to Spurs for £25,000 in 1958, the then-highest

figure for a winger. His first game was against Arsenal at Highbury. Arriving unrecognised from his national service depot in west London, he was refused entry by the commissionaire. Nicholson was summoned. "That's him," he said, pointing, and as an aside to Jones, "and by the way, you're late." Jones recounts his other favourite Nicholson idiosyncrasy: after one particular pat on the back from Nicholson, he received the immediate rebuke, "Remember a pat on the back is only two feet away from a kick up the arse."

The immovable rock at the back was Dave Mackay; the strong, silent type. Mackay was a legendary hard man among hard men. He never flinched from a tackle: believe me, I know. Bought in 1959 from Heart of Midlothian, Mackay signed on the spot for Nicholson, despite being a committed Hearts man because, as he explained, "I was impressed by his understatement, his modesty and his honesty."

After securing the league in 1961, Spurs met Leicester in the showpiece FA Cup Final. They won 2-0 against a Leicester side down to ten men, but it was a scrappy affair. Mackay recalled Nicholson's disappointment at his side's display: "We weren't thinking about how entertaining we could be," he said. "We knew it was for the double so we played a bit safe. I decided, like the others, to just sit back and let our forwards press on. But Bill wasn't happy. That was typical of the man. He always wanted to see a game of football and never liked to see his team winning if we played badly. He always wanted us to entertain."

Spurs should have actually won the "double double". The first team to achieve the double in successive seasons came thirty years later when Manchester United managed it in the 1990s. But Nicholson failed to win the league again because of just one team, an Ipswich side managed by one of the north London club's old boys, Alf Ramsey. Spurs lost 3-2 at Portman Road and later in the season lost by the same

score, playing the same way. As Nicholson pointed out, had they picked up just a couple of points against Ipswich, with a far superior goal difference, the title would have stayed at White Hart Lane.

Spurs did retain the FA Cup with a 3–1 win in the Wembley final over Burnley, with goals from Jimmy Greaves, Bobby Smith and a Danny Blanchflower penalty. The club fielded the same side that played in the previous final, with the exception of Greaves, who replaced Les Allen, and Terry Medwin, who was selected ahead of Terry Dyson.

Spurs fans had hoped to see such a fabulous side become the first British team to win the European Cup. But after a gallant effort, Spurs' European adventure was ended in controversial circumstances in the semi-final against Benfica. Even with the magnificent Eusebio in such phenomenal form, Spurs were convinced that refereeing decisions robbed the club of its rightful place in the final.

The north London club did, however, qualify the following year for the European Cup-Winners' Cup, which had only just been launched in 1960. And by this time it had a potent new weapon, which was to ensure, if it failed to become the first British club to land the biggest European prize, it would still make history as the first to land a European trophy.

Though Jimmy Greaves is most often associated with these glory years at Spurs, he was first a star with Chelsea. He joined the team straight from school, and he always makes a point of stressing that Chelsea was just as much a part of his life as Tottenham. Greaves had seven years at Chelsea and nine years at Tottenham. Greaves The Goal, as he was soon known, rose through the Chelsea ranks and commanded press attention even before his debut in 1957. In his first full season in the youth side he scored 114 goals. Chelsea had just won the league title for the first time in 1955, but the following season slumped to sixteenth. Then Greaves came along to help lessen the sense of frustration,

scoring on his debut against Spurs on the opening day of the 1957–58 season, at the age of seventeen.

By the time he was twenty-one, Greaves had already collected a century of league goals, the youngest ever to do so. Greaves scored five goals in a game on three occasions, including all five at Preston in a 5–4 win in December 1959. He collected thirteen hat-tricks in all. He didn't stop scoring for the Blues until his final game at home to Nottingham Forest in 1961, when he scored four times. As the club knew he was leaving, he was made captain for the day and he was carried from the pitch on supporters' shoulders. He finally scored 127 goals in 167 games for the west London club. In his final season Greaves created a record of forty-one league goals which, of course, still stands today. He played only forty games.

Though he scored regularly for his new club, AC Milan, he did not like the move and despite Chelsea's attempts to buy him back, he arrived at Spurs to strengthen the double-winning side and become part of the club that made European history. Nicholson paid £99,999 to bring Greaves back from his one season in Italy, refusing to become the first manager to break the six-figure fee barrier. Nicholson didn't like the escalating fees and salaries, but more important, he didn't want Greaves burdened with the tag of being the first £100,000 player. Even for a mere £1 Nicholson was determined to make a point.

Greaves and Denis Law (who had an equally unhappy time in Italy after leaving Manchester City to join Torino) were the phenomenal goalscorers of their generation. Greaves was the foremost goal poacher, slightly built with lightning-quick reflexes and rapid speed off the mark. Greaves remains the third highest goalscorer for the national side, behind Bobby Charlton with forty-nine goals and Gary Lineker's forty-eight. Greaves achieved forty-four, but he achieved this total with far fewer games than Lineker or Charlton. Greaves was a

class act at international level, and was outstanding in European club football.

Spurs put out Rangers, Slovan Bratislava and OFK Belgrade en route to the Cup Winners' Cup final, where they met Atletico Madrid, beating them 5-1 with Greaves scoring two. A truly golden night.

The other great inspiration that night was the club captain and my fellow Ulsterman Danny Blanchflower. Who could fail to be inspired by a player and a man such as Danny Blanchflower? When Danny finally hung up his boots, on 5 April, 1964, at the age of thirty-eight, he'd played 382 games for Spurs and scored twenty-one goals. Bill Nicholson wanted the former skipper to succeed him after he quit in 1974, but the board had other ideas and, surprisingly, went for former Arsenal defender Terry Neill. Danny did finally become a manager in June 1976 when he took over Northern Ireland. He also took over as boss of Chelsea in December 1978, but there were severe financial troubles at the Bridge at that time and he failed to keep them in the First Division, so after nine months he resigned; that was Danny for you.

The Tottenham captain was also capped fifty-six times by Northern Ireland. And for me it was such a thrill to watch Blanchflower star for Northern Ireland as well. My last game for Northern Ireland was during the spell that Danny was manager, and we drew 2-2 with Holland. He was certainly different. I often just didn't have a clue what he was talking about. I can recall that he once gave a team talk to tell us the five different ways you can take a penalty. I didn't know then there were five different ways, and I don't know even now that there are five ways to take a penalty. But, again, that was Danny for you. I lost interest after he explained method number three. Whatever one of the five ways I used, I seemed to have been pretty successful with it. But I really liked Danny because he was such a crazy Irishman.

My first live encounter with Nicholson's team was when, in their defence of the Cup-Winners' Cup, Spurs came to Old Trafford on 10 December, 1963. Though I was only watching from the stand that night, we beat them 4-1, winning the overall tie 4-3. Worse for Spurs was that Dave Mackay was carried off to hospital with a broken leg after only eight minutes. They battled bravely with ten men and remained ahead on aggregate until the last thirteen minutes. It was a night of high emotions, a game of tremendous action, yet despite the intensity was played sportingly throughout. Spurs, with a 2-0 lead from White Hart Lane, almost made it three when Smith put his point-blank header straight at Gaskell from Mackay's early cross. This was, in retrospect, the turning point - a minute later, David Herd pulled the all-important early goal back for United, flying in with a diving header. So when Mackay was carried off, Spurs' lead had been reduced to just one goal and, soon after the interval, Herd scored again to level the scores. This should have spelled the end for Spurs, but they immediately went on the attack as only a team under the charge of Nicholson could do. They broke through on the left with John White, who floated a perfect cross for Jimmy Greaves to score with a rare header. Spurs were back in front again. The team held out until Charlton latched on to a floated Crerand pass and smashed a volley home, and then, with only two minutes left, Bobby cracked in the winner.

For me, this Spurs team was a great side. As Nicholson said, prior to completing the double at Wembley against Leicester: "We've found the blend. With one or two stars a team should be good. With four or five, it should be something special." The following year Tottenham retained the FA Cup and its 1963 triumph in the Cup-Winners' Cup was followed by a third FA Cup triumph in 1967, the League Cup in 1971 and the UEFA Cup in 1972. Nicholson's last trophy, and his eighth as a manager, came with a second

League Cup victory in 1973 before his departure a year later.

WHEN ENGLAND WERE beaten by Brazil 3-1 and failed to make the quarter-final of the 1962 World Cup finals in Chile, it marked the end of Walter Winterbottom's sixteen-year reign as England manager. His replacement was Alf Ramsey, fresh from working wonders at Ipswich. The East Anglia club had risen from the Third Division South to replace Spurs as English champions in just five years. Ramsey's team won the Division Two and Division One titles in successive seasons, only the fourth club to record that particular achievement. Ironically Ramsey had been schooled in the very same Spurs traditions, the Arthur Rowe "push and run" team where he played alongside Nicholson in the previous decade.

The Tractor Boys is a relatively new label for a club renowned for its friendly, humble environment in East Anglia. "Wonderful little Ipswich Town, the miracle team of all time" is how the *Football Post* described the club in April 1962 after a 2-0 home victory over Aston Villa confirmed Ramsey's team of unknowns as league champions. When Ramsey took over Ipswich in 1955 it was the youngest and probably financially poorest team in the league. Ramsey moulded Ted Phillips and John Elsworthy, already members of the team, into his key men and built round them. With no money for big signings, Ramsey had to spot cast-offs and make them believe in themselves. John Compton was an erratic left half with Chelsea, and Ramsey transformed him into a successful left back. Roy Stephenson was an inconsistent inside forward with Burnley, but at Ipswich he became a reliable outside right, thanks to Ramsey, who had actually played against him in the old days. Chelsea fans remembered Jimmy Leadbetter as a somewhat plodding inside left, but Ipswich followers know him as an outside left who kept defences constantly occupied. Ramsey converted

Andy Nelson from an orthodox left half with West Ham to a tower of strength at centre half. I was intrigued by the Ramsey methods and what he had to say at the time: "I never ask a man to do more than he has in him. My job is to get the best out of him. I had a plan, and I persevered with it. It was simply this – I picked the best team available and never asked the players to attempt anything beyond their powers. I concentrated on getting the maximum out of each man."

While Ramsey paid tribute to the players, the players owed so much to Ramsey. A typical example was Ray Crawford, the first Ipswich player ever to win an England cap, who expressed his eternal gratitude: "Mr Ramsey gave me confidence in myself. He understood my problems and provided the answer. I owe all my success to him." A tribute from a player discarded by Portsmouth and reluctant to join Ipswich in 1958. Crawford, a former office boy and building worker, earned the title of "Jungle Boy" on the strength of his service with the Royal Hampshires in Malaya, but Crawford modestly pooh-poohs the nickname: "I only did two patrols in the jungle and nothing happened." When Crawford joined Ipswich, Ramsey worked hard on his weak left foot until it became almost as deadly as his right, as his goals tally indicates.

The transformation was complete when he became known as "Thunderboots" Crawford. Ray was honoured to play for the Football League against the Irish in 1961. "I'm certainly glad I went to Ipswich," observed Crawford, by then the proud owner of a car, and worth four times the £6,000 Ipswich paid Portsmouth for him in 1958.

Ramsey believed his first job was with the players; office work was downgraded. Most days he would be out on the pitch in his tracksuit quietly coaching, giving the lads individual attention, and showing them that he believed in them. During Second Division days, everyone told Ramsey he needed a goalscorer. "I've got one, but he's injured. I'll

wait till he's fit again," said Ramsey, referring to Ted Phillips. Phillips, possessor of perhaps the most powerful shot in football, came back and scored the goals that won promotion. Another very bright Ipswich character was Bill Baxter, a Scottish right half with a starry future although he cost only £400 plus £100 if he made good. He made good all right. He was only twenty-three, but had the coolness and confidence of an old-timer. Baxter said he owed it to his father, an engine driver from Granton, near Edinburgh. "He always said, 'Keep calm, keep playing and everything will come all right,' and I've always remembered his advice," said Baxter. "Keeping calm is a great asset. I see players who worry all the time. You can tell from the way they jump high into the air every time you tackle them."

Ramsey had no favourites but he was inclined to believe his left winger, thirty-three-year-old Jimmy Leadbetter, was a vital ingredient of the side. "I hope he plays as long as Stanley Matthews," said Ramsey hopefully. "He puts in more work, especially in tackles, than any other forward in the side. I think Crawford and Phillips will agree he is responsible for many of their goals." Promotion to the First Division in 1961 did not panic Ramsey even though cash was scarce and signings were few. There was only one signing of note – Scottish inside forward Douglas Moran for £12,000, an Ipswich record. When the club gained promotion a dazzling new concrete stand costing £35,000 was erected behind one of the goals and the supporters club said they would foot the bill. Their secretary, John Jacobs, noted the club only had £18,000 so he made an appeal to the town to show their appreciation of Ipswich by donating the rest. The appeal was directed mainly at the shops, hotels and restaurants who would benefit from the trade the club would bring to Ipswich. It should have been a huge success yet the appeal raised a miserly few hundred pounds.

Chairman Captain John Cobbold explained the apparent apathy: "Suffolk has no long tradition of soccer so the local people do not regard it with the passion and intensity you find in other towns. It takes a Suffolk man a long time to accept anything new because he is very reserved and conventional in his approach to life. You'll seldom find him roaring his head off during a goalscoring move, for instance, although he may appreciate it all right. It takes a long time for him to let his hair down."

John Elsworthy, the Ipswich town midfield mainstay, was dubbed "The greatest Welsh player never to be capped by his country". The cultured midfielder from Nantyderry played for Ipswich Town from 1949 until 1964, after signing as a seventeen-year-old for the princely sum of £25 on a contract paying him £7 per week during the playing season. Elsworthy's first taste of success came when Ipswich won the Third Division South title at the end of the 1953-54 season. The Town were only to survive one season in the higher division before finding themselves back in the Third. With relegation came change. Scott Duncan, who had managed Ipswich since 1937, stepped aside and was replaced by the thirty-five-year-old former Southampton, Spurs and England full back, Alf Ramsey. This appointment was the turning point for John.

Even now, at the age of seventy-three, the genial Welshman becomes excited when he talks about his former boss. "He was an incredible man. In those days we used to travel to away matches by train. The conversation among the players covered anything and everything. Alf would bury his head in his newspaper. When the conversation turned to football Alf would lower his paper and join in. He was only interested in football. During practice matches, if someone made a mistake, Alf would stop the game and explain the error in detail before allowing the players to continue. He was a marvellous man and it came as no surprise to us at Ipswich when, in later years, we heard the England players

such as Bobby Charlton and Bobby Moore say how great he was."

He has no hesitation in naming the greatest game he ever played in. "January 1958, FA Cup fourth round versus Manchester United at Old Trafford. The conditions that day were absolutely awful and we fell behind to a goal from Bobby Charlton. We played brilliantly and Jimmy Leadbetter came close to equalising when his shot hit the post. Bobby got a second five minutes from time and that was that. There was a crowd of over 53,000 that day and they gave us a tremendous ovation as we left the field. That was the last time the Busby Babes played at Old Trafford. Less than two weeks later there was that terrible crash at Munich Airport and so many of their great players were killed. It was tragic and all of us at Ipswich were shattered. Duncan Edwards, Tommy Taylor, Roger Byrne, Eddie Coleman and Mark Jones had all played against us and they all perished - it was so difficult to take in."

Ramsey had, by then, converted John into a left half, part of the strategy that, later on, the football world was to label "Ramsey's Wingless Wonders" on a far grander stage. Having won the Second Division title at the end of the 1960-61 season, Ipswich found itself, for the first time in its history, among the elite in the First Division. John recalled that the experts tipped them for relegation. "We started off with a draw at Bolton, followed by two defeats at the hands of Burnley and Manchester City but then Burnley came to Portman Road and we beat them 6-2," he recalls. "A large part of our success that season was down to the fact that we had very few injuries. We only used sixteen players and five of those played in five or less games. Ray Crawford scored thirty-three goals and Ted Phillips was only just behind with twenty-eight. We won the championship on the last day of the season at Portman Road when we beat Aston Villa 2-0."

Ipswich won successive championships in the two top divisions and even now, forty years on, the feat has yet to be repeated. Alf Ramsey left to manage England in 1963 and at the beginning of the 1965-66 season, after 435 games for Ipswich, John decided to hang up his boots. John continues to live in Ipswich. He and his wife Ann are still avid Town supporters and can be seen in the directors' box at every home game. "When the blue of Ipswich is in your blood it never leaves it," he says.

The first Town player to be capped by England, joint top scorer in the First Division in the championship-winning season of 1962, was the club's record scorer, Ray Crawford. He recalled: "Me and big Ted Phillips just hit it off and the goals flowed. We were lucky in that we had great service from the likes of Jimmy Leadbetter and Roy Stephenson and we just seemed to have the knack of popping up in the right place at the right time. Scoring goals is what the game is all about in the end and if you have a couple of guys banging them in regularly, you have always got a chance of doing something."

Crawford's best goal was reserved for that final Aston Villa game. "I got the ball at the halfway line, beat the defender marking me and raced through to score," he said. "The keeper saved it, but I beat him to the rebound and scored from the six-yard line. I only ever scored from that range."

Ipswich found itself in the European Cup and beating AC Milan 2-1 at home when Crawford flicked the ball through the keeper's legs to score, although they had lost 3-0 away and went out. Crawford has no doubts about the influence of Ramsey: "Alf just had the ability to get the best out of players. He would call you aside and point out things on how to improve your game and nearly always he was proved right."

John Cobbold, then in his thirties, was the youngest chairman in the league, yet was also one of the nicest and wisest. He and his directors met rarely to discuss the club