PROLOGUE

I was sitting in the changing-room at Wembley after our play-off final. The wild celebrations were going on all around – champagne, cheering, singing, bouncing, the usual. Queens Park Rangers were going up. We hadn't deserved it, I knew that. Derby County had been the better side, but we had won the game, in the last minute and with 10 men. That's what happens sometimes. My telephone rang. It was Harry Gregg, the old Manchester United legend – one of the Busby Babes. He had been watching the game. He knew the mixed emotions I would have been feeling. 'Harry, I want you to hear a quick story,' he said. And he told me about the time Northern Ireland beat England 3–2 at Wembley in 1957. Harry was in goal that day, against an England team that included his Manchester United team-mates Duncan Edwards, Tommy Taylor and Roger Byrne, plus Billy Wright as captain and Johnny Haynes at inside-forward. Some great players there. After the game, Walter Winterbottom, England's manager, said he thought Northern Ireland had been lucky. This was put to their captain, Danny Blanchflower. 'Ah yes,' he said, with a smile, 'but sometimes it's better to be lucky than good.' And I believe that. I can hear Danny, a clever man, saying it now. Every manager will know what he means. We have all had good days that have not been lucky, and lucky days when we've not been good – and I know what days I prefer. It was a good story to hear just then.

I don't know why I was feeling so ambivalent about the way we'd won against Derby. Maybe, in my head, when Gary O'Neil

got sent off I was mentally preparing myself for my last game in football. I would have retired had we lost, I'm pretty sure of that. I don't even know if the owners would have wanted me to stay on; it's quite likely they would have desired a change, too, and I understand that. Yet in my heart I knew I couldn't go another season in the Championship with the limitations to our squad. I knew the calibre of players we could buy would drop considerably and there was enough dead wood around as it was. I had done my best in my first full season there and it hadn't been good enough. It would have been time to let someone else have a go, to see if a fresh eye on the place could bring it back to life. I'm not saying this was going through my mind as I stood on the Wembley touchline – I was completely focused and absorbed by the game – but it was something I had considered in previous weeks. I knew the likely consequence of failure would be that I was managing my last match in professional football.

When we went down to 10 men, I couldn't really see any way out of it, to be honest. I'd be a liar if I said I still thought we could win in open play. My hope was that we would survive and get to penalties. And even that was going to be difficult. We played with two strikers, which, looking back, was a mistake. There wasn't a lot in the game but they had more possession and that comes from having an extra man in midfield. Once O'Neil went off it was just backs to the wall. I thought we might struggle through 90 minutes, but I wasn't confident about the additional 30 minutes' extra time, with everyone exhausted. We weren't a young team and a few looked like they were running on empty already. I had my best striker Charlie Austin playing on the left wing, where he looked as if he didn't have a clue, but my only option was to play two banks of four with Bobby Zamora

up on his own. I couldn't have asked Bobby to do Charlie's defensive shift. It was a mess.

And then, suddenly, it was a miracle. With seconds on the clock, the ball dropped to Bobby, and he stuck it right in the corner. It was too late for Derby to do anything about it. They knew they were done.

It was a strange feeling after the game, really. Sandra had come up with our grandchildren, so she had to go home to the South coast, Jamie was away at the Champions League final and I felt too emotionally drained to do much celebrating. I knew they would all be back at Loftus Road getting drunk, but I didn't fancy that at all. I had to stay in London because we had a parade at the ground the following morning, so I planned a quiet night. I showed my face at the party, then sneaked out the back door and went back to the Grosvenor House hotel for a late dinner and the Champions League final. Club sandwich, plate of chips, cup of tea, lovely. And then, watching the football, I got a phone call from Don Shanks, the old Rangers player. He's a good lad, Don, and I'd got him a ticket for the game. He was with a friend of his and they were about to arrive at Aspinall's club in Curzon Street for a glass of wine. So I watched extra time and joined them. I'm not sure I was great company. The reality of it all was beginning to dawn on me.

I woke up in the hotel the following morning still feeling a bit guilty about our win. I felt for Steve McClaren, Derby's manager, I felt for their players and the people at the club. I was still uncomfortable about the way we had made it back to the Premier League. But then another thought hit me. Two years ago I had flown to Munich to watch Chelsea play in the Champions League final. I was manager of Tottenham Hotspur and we had finished fourth, qualifying for the Champions League. Chelsea

had come sixth. And like the sixth best team in the Premier League, they got completely outplayed by Bayern Munich on the night, just as they were by Barcelona in the semi-final. Yet somehow they won. Bayern smashed them to pieces, Chelsea equalised with two minutes to go; Bayern missed a penalty in extra time, Chelsea won the shoot-out. And because they did, they took our Champions League place. Twenty-five days later, I was sacked by Tottenham. Had we reached the Champions League that wouldn't have happened. And at that moment I thought – and pardon the language – fuck it. What am I beating myself up for? It's football. Stuff happens. So we didn't deserve to win? What about the times when we merited victory and didn't get it? What about me getting the sack because Chelsea by some miracle ended up with our Champions League place? I walked down to breakfast, feeling better at last, and who should be standing there but Roberto Di Matteo, the Chelsea manager in Munich. He looked happy enough. Why was I agonising over a football match we had won? Yes, it was rough on Derby – but there are a lot of good people at Rangers, too. Let them be happy for a change, I thought. And I never looked back.

Yet looking back is what this book is about. It's a look back on my 60 or so years in and around the British game, from the earliest memories of going to Millwall and Arsenal with my dad, to my thoughts on thankfully not having to face up to Luis Suárez again as a Premier League manager this season. For each decade, I've picked a best XI, too, and told as many stories as I can remember about the characters involved. I hope you enjoy it. And, don't forget: if you can't be good, be lucky.

Chapter One

THE FIFTIES

We used to go to Arsenal a lot, me and my dad, but football wasn't as tribal then as it is now, so Highbury wasn't our only destination. Millwall's ground, The Den, was another haunt, and coming from East London we would wait at the entrance of the Rotherhithe Tunnel for a lift across the river. A lot of Millwall punters did the same. Eventually a car would stop and in we'd jump. It didn't take too long. I bet you would wait there for hours now, but in those days people were friendlier and more trusting. They were going to football, we were going to football, so we all went together. My dad might give them two bob for the petrol and we'd set off.

It was all part of the tradition of watching Millwall. They were the dockers' club really, and a lot of the men on our estate worked on the docks. I would have been about seven when I first started going there – it was certainly before I went to Arsenal – with my dad and his brother George. Arsenal was my dad's club, but football was cheaper then and fans didn't think twice about going to watch another team play. Millwall were in the

Third Division (South) but it was always a tasty atmosphere. On Saturdays they used to come out of the docks, go into the pub, and out of the pub and into The Den. Football hooliganism was unheard of, but once I began travelling around, even as a kid I knew Millwall felt different. Then there was the time my dad got his jaw broken.

I don't know what happened exactly, I wasn't there, but he went over to Millwall with his mate Johnny Wood, who was a bit of a rogue and spent most of his life in prison. Johnny lived in Poplar when he wasn't inside and was known for being a bit cheeky. My mum blamed him every time there was trouble. Well, he must have picked on the wrong bloke that day, because someone took offence and my old man ended up getting a clump. It was just before Christmas and he ended up with his jaw wired all over the holiday; he couldn't even eat his turkey dinner.

He didn't have much luck with Christmas dinner, my dad. Another year, he knocked off on Christmas Eve and went straight to the pub, as the dockers always did. He had one job that day – to pick up the capon chicken for tomorrow's dinner from Coppins butchers. Unfortunately, he got a bit side-tracked. By night time, with all the shops closed, he still hadn't come home. I was sitting indoors with my mum and I could tell that she'd gone a bit quiet. Suddenly, she sprung out of her chair. 'Right,' she said, 'we're going out to find your father.' And off we went, around every pub in Poplar looking for him. Mum was lifting me up at the windows and I was looking in. At the Earl of Ellesmere pub in Ellesmere Road, we found him. The Far Famed Cake Company was in Rifle Street nearby, and all the girls from the factory were having a Christmas knees-up, too. Dad was there,

with Johnny Wood and a crowd of his mates, all dancing with the girls and having a right laugh. 'There he is, Mum,' I said. 'I can see him.' 'Right,' she said, 'call him out, get him out here.' So I went to the door and got his attention. 'Hello, Harry,' he said, all merry from the party. 'Here's my Harry boy. What do you want, Ha –' and, bosh, she'd got him. Claimed hold of his collar and kicked his backside all the way home to our flats. Every 10 paces she'd kick him again. 'Where's our chicken?' Wallop. 'What do you mean you ain't got no chicken?' Boot. 'How can you forget the chicken?' Bash. Crack of dawn the next morning Dad and I were down Petticoat Lane, around the old Jewish stallholders, who were the only ones that traded on Christmas Day, trying to buy a chicken. My dad didn't even know what he was looking for, really. He didn't have a clue what was good or bad. He came home with a boiling chicken, not the lovely big roaster that mum had ordered from Coppins. It was the chicken they use to make stews and soups. So he got hit round the head with that and all. It ate like string. Tough as anything.

He didn't have a clue about the niceties, my dad. All he cared about was football. Most of my earliest memories of watching games in the fifties involve my dad. On the odd occasion I'd go with a mate. I had a friend called Johnnie Jennings whose dad was a big West Ham fan and occasionally I'd go over to Upton Park with them – but even though we lived in the East End it wasn't all Hammers fans on our estate.

By the time I was 11, I was being scouted by professional clubs, so we used to get offered a lot of tickets. Then we could take our pick of matches: Arsenal, Tottenham Hotspur, West Ham United, even Chelsea, which was a bit far afield for

us on public transport. We would go if one of our favourites was playing, though. My dad had a few players he really liked, but top of the pile was probably Tom Finney. If Finney was in town with Preston North End he would always want to go. I remember one night at Arsenal when Tommy Docherty played centre-half and Finney was the striker. You could tell The Doc was in awe of Finney because he barely kicked him. Usually he took no prisoners as a defender, but on this day he let Finney walk all over him. Preston won 3–0.

It was a real thrill seeing the big players in those days, it was something you looked forward to and talked about at school all week long. The only match that was on television was the FA Cup final, and that was so special the streets would be deserted when the game was on. Everybody would find somebody they knew with a television and watch the game – and then afterwards all the doors would be flung open and the kids would come roaring out to play football and pretend to be their heroes.

Few people wore colours in those days. I remember my mum knitted me a red and white scarf for when I went to Arsenal, but there were no replica shirts or club merchandise. We had a wooden rattle, like everybody else, but that was about it. These days the police would confiscate it at the turnstile, they would think you were going to club somebody over the head with it – but crowds then were not even segregated. You see old film of the fans in their caps sharing cups of tea – my dad even used to put a collar and tie on to go to some games. That was just the way people dressed.

Everyone went by bus, including the players. Peter Sillett was the captain of Chelsea – Stanley Matthews rated him as his

most difficult opponent at full-back – and he used to tell a story about going out to the bus stop to get home after one game. Chelsea had lost and there were still a few fans hanging about. Players weren't recognisable figures in those days – we didn't see them being interviewed on television every week – so they didn't know that they had a Chelsea player standing beside them. The fans were going through the team, slaughtering them all one by one, and finally it was Peter's turn. As they tore him to shreds, Peter says he sunk deeper and deeper into his overcoat in case they spotted him. 'Finally,' he said, 'just to be on the safe side, I joined in.'

I was lucky growing up in London because there was so much good football on my doorstep. We could afford to be picky. There was always a game a bus ride away – we rarely needed to get the train. Fulham, too far. Wembley, too far. We didn't go to the England games. The only ground I can remember visiting by train was Tottenham, once they were interested in signing me. They would send two tickets to every home game for us, and they had some great players in that era, like Danny Blanchflower, who were worth the trip. That meant a 106 bus to Stoke Newington, a train to Seven Sisters, and then a bloody long walk.

The most memorable games of the time involved foreign teams – clubs from Moscow coming over to play Arsenal, or Honved of Hungary against Wolverhampton Wanderers. Even the programmes felt different for those games, glossier and thicker as if to say: this is important. We didn't see foreign teams or foreign footballers in those days: with one exception. I'm going to start my team of the 1950s with this individual, because his story really is quite remarkable.

BERT TRAUTMANN
(MANCHESTER CITY)

Bert was the first foreign star in English football, and a really strange one because he came here as a German prisoner of war, and stayed. I'm not sure that could happen now, with all the media attention and the way supporters are. I think it would be too horrible for him. Trautmann was a typical German. As kids, he was what we all imagined Germans to be – blond hair, blue eyes, tall, imposing. He'd been a member of the Hitler youth, a Luftwaffe paratrooper, and had fought on the Eastern front in Russia. It seems amazing to me even now just thinking about it. He was captured and sent to a prisoner-of-war camp in Lancashire, and when the war was over he ended up playing for St Helens Town, who were an amateur team in the Lancashire Combination league. Frank Swift, who was Manchester City's goalkeeper, contracted TB and they went in for Trautmann. There were huge protests at first, particularly among the Jewish community, but the chief rabbi of Manchester came out in his defence and it calmed down.

Back then you went to matches just to watch certain individuals, and Trautmann definitely came into that category. He was exotic, he was different. The media wasn't as sensationalist back then, but we all knew his background, all knew whose side he was on in the war. I suppose it is testament to what he was like as a player and a person that he won the crowds over. He would smile and applaud them if they were nice to him and, in the end, he became one of us. Incredible, really, when you think what people had gone through with the bombing and losing loved

ones – for him to be accepted like that, it shows how good we can be as a country when we put our minds to it.

Back then, people just got on with life. They loved their football, they loved their team, but they didn't have the hatred you see now. It sounds sentimental and nostalgic but I won't make apologies for that; fans were different towards each other, and it was better without that nastiness towards the opposition at games. A player who went back to his old club would be applauded. Nowadays they spit at him in the street. It would be the same for Trautmann. Now, he would be targeted, slagged off the whole game. Back then, it didn't happen. We saw him for what he was: a goalkeeper who had endured a unique set of circumstances. There was no question of verbal abuse the times I saw him. Fans weren't segregated then, anyway. Over at Arsenal, you could find yourself next to some Manchester City fans and you'd end up having a cup of tea together. So you couldn't then start calling their goalkeeper every name under the sun. It must still have been very, very difficult for Trautmann, though, because of his background, and that's why he makes my team ahead of, say, Ted Ditchburn at Tottenham Hotspur or Sam Bartram of Charlton Athletic. I just look at where he came from and think, 'If we all ended up liking a bloke who had fought for the Nazis, he must have been good.' And in 1956 he was the first foreign player to win the Footballer of the Year Award – it was the year he also won the FA Cup, playing with a broken neck.

I remember watching that game, too. Manchester City beat Birmingham City 3–1 and Don Revie was brilliant playing as a deep centre-forward, quite a radical position for the time. He was the man of the match, but what everyone remembers now

is that Trautmann broke his neck and played on, although we didn't have a clue he was so badly injured at the time. There were about 15 minutes to go and Peter Murphy was chasing the ball into the penalty area. Trautmann came out, as brave as anything, and dived head first at his feet. Murphy's knee hit his neck and broke it, although that only showed up in the X-ray later. I can guarantee one thing: the trainer wouldn't have had any idea. In my imagination, I can hear him now. 'Come on, Bert, give it a twist, lad, you'll be all right.' Drop of water down his jumper with a sponge and off he'd go again – there were no substitutes then, so all the trainer was interested in was keeping 11 on the field. 'That's better, Bert. You'll be fine now, son.' It seemed every FA Cup final some poor soul broke something. There was no sports science in those days, no proper physiotherapy or qualified medical staff.

The money aside, in many ways it was a great time to be a footballer. Trautmann was a draw and very famous, but there was no media swirl around him as there would be now. I remember watching Mesut Ozil miss a penalty for Arsenal last season, and the next morning everyone was on at him for being German and missing a penalty. Germans don't miss penalties, you see. Now you think of the baggage that Trautmann had with him so soon after the war ended, but he was allowed to be what he was. If anything, it may even have worked in his favour, because to me as a kid he seemed more imposing, bigger and athletic because of his background.

The English goalkeepers? Bartram at Charlton was a local hero. He kept goal for the club either side of the war. London used to have thick smogs and one day he was playing for Charlton

at Chelsea when the fog came in and the game was stopped. It cleared a little and the match restarted with Charlton now on top. Then the fog got worse than ever. Sam noticed the crowd had got quieter but thought it was because they couldn't see and Charlton were playing so well. Then a figure appeared out of the gloom before him. Sam got ready to dash out and make a save. It turned out to be a copper. 'What are you doing out here?' he said. 'They all went inside 10 minutes ago.' As I say, different days.

Sam went on to be a journalist for the *Sunday People*. He used to pay me for tips when I was a player at West Ham United, so when I went to Bournemouth I thought I'd have a bit of fun. The night before my debut in 1972, I phoned Mel Machin, one of the other players. I put on a Northern accent and said I was Sam Bartram and was looking for inside information on Bournemouth. I said I'd pay £50 upfront, with a £25 weekly retainer. Mel was right up for it. He said he was in the same card school as our manager, John Bond, so always heard the latest gossip. He said Bobby Kellard at Portsmouth was a current target. 'That's lovely, Mel,' I told him. 'The cheque's in the post and I'll call next week.'

The following day Mel rocked up in a new suit. He was sitting next to Ted MacDougall, telling him all about this great deal he had. I couldn't contain myself. I leaned into the conversation. 'Hello, Mel,' I said, in my best Sam Bartram voice. 'Er, hello, Harry,' Mel replied, a little unsure of what was going on. I carried it on for a little while. 'What are you talking like that for?' he said. 'I'm Sam,' I told him, 'Sam Bartram.' Mel went spare, but John Bond loved it. 'Harry's going to run rings around you lot,' he predicted. Then in the afternoon we lost 3–2 to Watford.

Later when he was going through all the players individually he turned on me. ‘And if you think you can come down here taking the piss out of everybody …’

As a goalkeeper Sam was more the traditional type, whereas Trautmann seemed to have more flair; he was almost acrobatic, and we hadn’t seen that before. He still had to look after himself, mind you, because every goalkeeper took a physical battering. That never seemed to bother him, though. I suppose when you’ve thought you were about to be taken off by the Russians and shot, it wouldn’t.

ALF RAMSEY
(TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR)

We all know what Alf is remembered for, but at first he was the right-back in the great Tottenham Hotspur team of the 1950s, the ‘push and run’ team. It is hard to explain their significance to a younger generation, but I would compare them to the modern Barcelona, the way their game was all about short passing and movement. It wasn’t quite as sophisticated, obviously, but when Tottenham started playing that way they won the Second Division title and the next season won the league by four points (the equivalent of six today). That 1950–51 team was special, with Arthur Rowe coaching and Eddie Baily pulling the strings at inside-forward. Eddie went on to be Bill Nicholson’s assistant at Tottenham in the 1960s and a scout at Chelsea and West Ham. He was a brilliant footballer, a fantastic, intelligent quick passer, but as a scout nothing much impressed Eddie. ‘Players? Fucking players?’ he’d say. ‘They get you the fucking sack.’ He’s not wrong, by the way.

What they called push and run back then is now known as the one-two and every team does it. But at the time it was revolutionary. A player would find his team-mate with a short pass and then carry on his run to receive another short pass in return. Newcastle United came fourth and won the FA Cup in 1950–51, but Tottenham beat them 7–0 playing push and run that season. And Ramsey was a master at it. He had come to prominence playing for his army division during the war, and went to Portsmouth and then Southampton, before Tottenham got him.

He wasn't fast, so there is no way he could play right-back now, but Alf excelled at the intricate passing that made Rowe's Tottenham tick. He was good on the ball, very cultured for the time, and an outstanding penalty taker. They used to call him 'The General' at Tottenham because he was always in charge, so it is no surprise that he went on to be such a successful manager.

Alf's use of the ball was always first class. And I think people forget how hard it was to play good football with the equipment they had in those days. Look at the boots with the big hard toe-caps. How could you have had any feel for a football with a set of those on? Clearing out the garage the other day, I found a pair of my dad's old boots. Forget push and run, it's a wonder they could run at all. Metal toecaps, studs banged in the bottom with the nails coming through the sole. And the ball was so heavy that when it got wet it as good as filled with water. Modern players really feel the ball; they have light boots and moulded soles. Even the ball is lightweight. Those boys didn't even have rubber studs – by late in the season when it had dried out, or in the middle of winter when it was frozen, the only thing harder than the studs was the pitch. Apart from August and September

there were two kinds of surface, rock hard or mud heap. So it was unbelievable, really, to show the skill that the Tottenham team demonstrated in that gear. I'd love to organise a game one day, get 22 top players together, the stars of the Premier League, put them in the old equipment and see how they coped. Now that would be interesting.

I remember Bryan Robson telling me that when Juninho first came over to Middlesbrough in the 1995–6 season, he couldn't believe the quality of our pitches. In the FA Cup that year they played against Notts County, who were a third-tier team, and Juninho thought Bryan was lying to him about the division they were in. He looked at the neat little stadium and the nice pitch, and decided they were in a higher division than Bryan was saying. A team at that level in Brazil would have been playing on dirt, he said. Notts County were too posh. That is how far we have come, but in Alf's day they just had to overcome those disadvantages.

I never got to know Alf as a manager, which was a shame. He came from that pre-war generation, very old school, very aloof. He was born in Dagenham in East London, but had elocution lessons, which was strange for the time. Maybe he thought it would help him keep his distance from the players. I know Terry Venables came from the same area and when he got called into the England team, his dad thought it might help him with the manager to mention some old names from the past. He knew this bloke that was friends with Ramsey, so he told Terry to say that Charlie – or whoever – sent his regards. After the first training sessions, Terry thought it would be the right moment. Catching up with him as they left the field he

seized his chance. 'Mr Ramsey, my dad told me to say hello to you from Charlie, in Dagenham.' Ramsey looked at him very coldly. He had done everything to cover his old accent and now pronounced Argentina with an H. The last thing he wanted was to be reminded of his past. Finally, he spoke in the most cultured accent he could muster. 'Fuck off, son,' he said. I think Terry only played for him twice.

When you think how much Ramsey and Bobby Moore achieved together for England, it's surprising how seldom Alf's name comes up in conversation. I think he was a quiet man, not given to great shows of emotion. And in those days managers were still distant figures, who took their lead from the managers that they had worked with as players. Tommy Lawton played in the same era as Ramsey, certainly throughout the early 1950s, and I remember watching a fascinating interview with him about his time at Everton before the war. He went in to see the committee – Everton was run by a committee in those days – because his contract was up. Players only signed for a year back then. Tommy said he knocked on the door and walked in, and the head of the committee, Theo Kelly, looked up as he entered. 'Lawton,' he said, 'go outside the door, knock again and when I say enter, come in and stand over there by the door. When I say come over, you can come over to my desk and when I say sit down, you can sit down at my desk.' So Tommy said he went outside and did the whole thing exactly as Kelly said. He was the leading goalscorer in England that year, but by the time he left Kelly's office he felt he would be lucky to get a game at Tranmere Rovers. No surprise that it was Kelly who failed to persuade Lawton to stay at Everton after the war.

Yet that was the football culture that Alf Ramsey came from, so it is any wonder he stayed aloof from his players?

BILLY WRIGHT
(WOLVERHAMPTON WANDERERS)

Looking at the photographs of that great Wolves team, the first thing that strikes you about Billy Wright is his size. These days, the centre-halves are giants, but Billy actually looks slightly smaller than many of his team-mates. There really was nothing of him. '10 stones in weight, but 10 tons in the tackle' was one phrase I heard about him, and he was only 5 ft 8 in. The best central defenders of that time didn't have to be tall. Joe Shaw at Sheffield United was another one. He might have been even smaller than Billy.

If you look at what he achieved, it seems impossible. He played 70 consecutive games for England, captained them 90 times and won 105 caps – the first player to reach the century in world football. And this was a time when England did not have a huge amount of games, and Billy lost seven seasons to the Second World War. Imagine the records he could have set.

He got his break at Wolves because they were advertising for trialists in the local newspaper. With modern scouting networks, that would never happen now. Wolves thought he was too small at first, but Major Frank Buckley, the manager, relented and took him on as an apprentice for eight months. He was a centre-forward, then a wing-half and eventually a centre-half.

One of the things those of us who grew up in the fifties most remember about the game at that time was the first matches

under lights against international opposition. Wolves installed floodlights at Molineux in 1953 and played a succession of matches against foreign teams: Racing Club of Buenos Aires, Moscow Dynamo, Spartak Moscow, and in 1954 they played Honved, the Champions of Hungary. It was a year after Hungary had beaten England 6–3 at Wembley, and then 7–1 in Budapest, and Wright was the captain of that humiliated England team. I cannot emphasise enough what an effect those matches had on us, because these players were our heroes and to see them taken apart like that – well, we couldn't believe it.

Billy Wright, in particular, was as much a celebrity as a footballer. He didn't live life like David Beckham, or George Best, and I don't think he had that personal charisma, but he was good looking with really blond hair, and had married one of the Beverley Sisters. Everyone knew him, as kids we all looked up to him, and suddenly we were seeing him getting pulled all over the Wembley pitch by Ferenc Puskás. Destroyed, really. So why is he still in this team? He was the best of his generation in Britain. There was no shame in getting beaten by the Hungarians. They were the best of their generation in Europe.

Hungary were the first to play a deep-lying centre-forward, and their wingers would withdraw to midfield to help with defence. Puskás called them the first total-football team, because everybody attacked and everybody fell back. I suppose the formation would be 2–3–3–2, although that is hard to picture for anyone brought up on the modern game. Wright ended up following Puskás as he dropped nearer to midfield and was left completely exposed when Hungary broke. It wasn't his fault. We had never seen anything like it. There were 105,000 at Wembley for the first game and

Hungary were a goal up in a minute and 4–1 up after 27 minutes. We thought we would get revenge in Budapest, but they put seven past us, which was just stunning.

Hungary should have won the 1954 World Cup but suffered a series of brutal matches on the way to the final, meaning they lost to West Germany, although they'd beaten them 8–3 in the group stage. That was one of only two games they lost between 1949 and the Hungarian Uprising in 1956, and in that time they revolutionised football. The system and ideas of their coach Gusztáv Sebes, evolved into 3–2–3–2, then 4–2–4 with high wingers and eventually the 4–4–2 pressing game. He started the policy of picking a team, rather than just the best players, thinking that if he selected from a handful of clubs rather than just a wide collection of individuals, there would be more unity. Finally, his idea that any player should be capable of playing anywhere pre-dated Holland and total football.

So this was the background when Honved came to Wolves in 1954, with Billy up against five of the Hungarian players that had won 7–1. It was more than a friendly. It really felt as if the future of English football was at stake. The game was so big that it was shown on television, with Wolves wearing special old-gold shirts made out of satin, and when Honved went 2–0 up after 14 minutes we all feared the worst. Yet Wolves fought back to win 3–2 and Billy was fantastic in the rest of that game. Wolves were a great team at the time and Billy was a real footballing centre-half, so much more than a tackler. Even at 2–0 down, and with all that had happened before, he was a great competitor, and you can see why he was England's captain for so long. You would have to be a special player to get through that, and he did.

ROGER BYRNE
(MANCHESTER UNITED)

A few years back I watched a television drama called *United* about the Busby Babes and the Munich air disaster. According to the programme, the team's captain was Mark Jones, the big centre-half. I was horrified and still cannot understand why nobody corrected that mistake when the script was being looked over. Left-back Roger Byrne was the captain of the Babes. He wasn't the greatest footballer in that team by any means, but he was a magnificent leader and one of the finest full-backs of his time, a huge part of Manchester United history.

Byrne broke into the United team in 1951 and was captain by 1953, through to his death at Munich less than five years later. In that time he also made 33 England appearances and once he got into the team was never out of it, an achievement that remains a record. He wasn't the greatest tackler, nor the best header of the ball, and he had no left foot despite playing on the left, but Byrne played full-back like a sweeper with tremendous intelligence and reading of the game. And when he had the chance he went on great forward runs, which was unusual in fifties football, when the full-back positions were often given to the least athletic members of the team. He was ahead of his time, and those who saw him regularly tell me that, among the wingers, only Peter Harris at Portsmouth was faster.

When you look back on those days, with two full-backs and one centre-half, I always wonder what would have happened if teams had started playing two up, because every club set up the same way at the back. The full-backs could not have covered

because they had the wingers to deal with – but tactics weren't as big a part of the game. Byrne was ahead of his time the way he played, because of his attacking instincts. The special qualities of the lesser known members of the Babes are lost now because we tend to focus on Duncan Edwards and some of the other individuals. Players like Byrne get forgotten – but they were an extraordinary team, a magical team, and going to see them always felt like an event.

Byrne was 28 when he died, so he was more experienced than many of the boys around him, and it is a tribute to his ability, his tenacity and the way he could inspire by example that Sir Matt Busby trusted him with the leadership of the group. He was their father figure, a player with a lot of class and charisma that outweighed his technical shortcomings. I suppose only in retrospect, with the knowledge that this was one of the greatest club teams in history, do we realise how good Byrne was. At the time, of course, people weren't going to see Manchester United for the performance of the solid left-back. They wanted to watch Duncan. It seems a shame Byrne is still getting pushed into the background even now. He really deserves more credit.

DUNCAN EDWARDS (MANCHESTER UNITED)

People always ask whether Duncan Edwards was as good as everybody says. Absolutely, he was. Bobby Charlton was a fantastic player, but he said watching Duncan made him feel inadequate. The day he died the *Daily Mirror* headline read, 'A boy who played like a man', and I think that's right. He was so

young, but you would never have known it because he was the driving force of that great Manchester United team. He had it all: left foot, right foot, phenomenal balance and poise; he could dribble, he could tackle; there was 14 stone of him, strong as an ox. When he got on a run he couldn't be stopped.

He had a saying before games, apparently: 'We haven't come here for nothing.' Bobby said to me that if United were ever in trouble, the players would be thinking, 'Come on, Duncan, get us out of this.' And he'd go up and smash one in from 30 yards, straight in the corner. We'll never know what he might have achieved had he lived; he could have been England's captain in 1966, instead of Bobby Moore. He would only have been 29 then, and it is hard to see him not being in that England team.

I saw the last game the Busby Babes played in this country, a 5–4 win at Arsenal on 1 February 1958, and that would have stuck in my mind even without Munich. It was a fantastic game, such incredible quality, and the next I heard was a radio bulletin saying Manchester United's plane had crashed on the way back from Belgrade. It wasn't like today with 24-hour news stations; you had to wait until the morning paper or until it was time for the news on the radio to find out what was going on. I would have been a 10-year-old schoolboy, listening to the radio in our flat on the estate with my mum and dad. Mum always had the radio on: *The Billy Cotton Band Show*, *The Archers* and the news, and that's where I heard about Manchester United and Duncan Edwards. I remember going into school and we said prayers for them all. Everyone was very, very upset, even the teachers, and as kids it really affected us. I think we were in shock, particularly when he died, because for so long the bulletins had been positive.

Matt Busby and Duncan Edwards were recovering, they said. I kept a scrapbook and I'm sure there is a picture from a newspaper in it of Duncan sitting up in his hospital bed: he was going to be all right. Sadly, his condition worsened due to severe kidney damage, and he died. I was devastated. He was my idol.

Those early European games were an ordeal for English clubs. I have spoken to a number of players who were involved in them and they have said it could get really scary, particularly behind the Iron Curtain. The plane would be joined by MiG jets, which would escort them, often keeping them deliberately low so the flight would be skirting the top of the clouds and really bumpy. Obviously, that wasn't what caused the Munich disaster, but flying was a pretty unnerving experience in those days.

So what made Duncan special? In modern terms he was probably a defensive midfield player, but he had so much more to his game. His shot was tremendous, so much power. I remember reading that in youth tournaments for United he was so exceptional, so much better than any player on the pitch, he'd start up front, get a couple of goals and then move back to centre-half and defend the lead. He was only 18 when he made his debut for England against Scotland, yet even with so many great players around him he didn't look out of place. England won 7–2 and the age of his team-mates shows how exceptional Edwards was. Stanley Matthews played at the age of 40, Bert Williams the goalkeeper was 35, Billy Wright the captain was 31, Nat Lofthouse was 29. And there was Duncan Edwards – 18 years, 183 days, and probably better than any of them.

And it was all natural ability. Not coaching. Natural ability. Like all the best players of that time in England, Edwards worked

off his instincts. There wasn't teaching as we know it now. Maybe you would get some advice from your dad or you'd go to watch your favourite players and see how they did it, but we all learnt our football the same way, on the streets, and Duncan Edwards would have been no different. There was nothing else to do but play outside, nothing for kids on TV even if you had one, so we lived our whole life playing football, and that was where you developed your skills. It was better than sitting indoors watching the potter's wheel or test card, waiting for the next programme to come on.

There was no special gear, no special boots. The young Duncan would have got home and put his slippers on – plimsolls, like you wore for gym – and gone out and played until it was time for dinner, or bed. I would say until it got dark, but even that didn't matter some days. In the winter we just ran around in the dark for as long as we could. So there was no one to tell you to play on the half-turn or how to kill a ball in mid-air. You just worked it out. My Sunday football team was taken by a couple of lovely old dockers. They wouldn't have thought to coach us or known how, really. We just played.

Even when you went to a professional club it was no different. At West Ham we trained on the forecourt, where the main entrance was. Tuesday and Thursday nights, with a few old floodlights. You never saw a pitch. If we couldn't get outside we'd go into the little gym they had under the main stand. There was just enough room to do some short passing or have a small game. And every player would be wearing slippers, just the same. It was not greatly different at Tottenham, except they had a proper big gymnasium, so had a tiny advantage over the other

clubs. But the most sophisticated training we did was playing three against four; there still wasn't room for much else. Seven or eight of you would have a little game, then make way for the next group. That was it. No proper technical work. Nobody taught you how to play a position or where to run. What Duncan Edwards did would have been all his own instinct or reasoning.

Take dribbling. Running with the ball was a big part of Edwards's game, but he would have had to learn that control without coaching. No different to George Best in the 1960s, no different to all the other wingers, including me. You learnt on the streets. There might be 14 on each team, so you didn't see much of the ball. When it arrived you wanted a few touches, so you tried to keep it as long as you could by learning to run with it and beat people. Scotland had a great tradition of producing players like that – Jimmy Johnstone and Willie Henderson had a famous rivalry in the 1960s with Celtic and Rangers – and I still think nothing beats seeing a winger going on a run, just surging past people. There is a Scottish phrase – the tanner-ball player – and people now think it was a compliment, but that isn't true. The Scots used to refer to tanner-ball players because rubber balls cost a tanner and there were thousands of kids who could do anything with them. When it came to the big pitch, and a big game, with a real ball and the need for tackling, heading and intelligent positional play, they couldn't convert those skills. That's all they were – tanner-ball players. Johnstone and Henderson were a lot more than that. But every kid knew how to dribble. These days it is all passing – that's what makes players like Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo stand out – but great dribblers were 10 a penny in Duncan

Edwards's day. The ones who made it had something more. They were clever, like Duncan.

The greatest players have all got that innate, natural feel for the game. Even Messi. Yes, he came through the academy at Barcelona, but when they brought him over he was already a fantastic little dribbler who had learnt in street football in Argentina. They took one look at him, and offered him a contract written on a napkin because they had no paper to hand; but he wouldn't have been able to get a trial had he not been extra special, and that initial talent was all natural. Diego Maradona was the same. See some of the early video footage and the pitches he's playing on are horrendous, but then this little figure comes into view, playing with the ball, juggling the ball – he's tiny but the stuff he is doing is incredible. The player that I remember as a manager was Joe Cole. At the age of 11 he was like that too. He could do everything with the ball. His dad, George, had no interest, never kicked a ball in his life, never played football. So that was all Joe.

In the fifties, though, all the clubs did was assess those kids. They would organise a few sessions, a bit of passing, back and forward, side-foot, nothing too difficult, then put on a game to see who was best. Duncan Edwards took his skills to Manchester United, really – he gave them more than they gave him. I'm not saying Sir Matt Busby did not coach, but Duncan wouldn't have anywhere near the work going into him that went into Messi at La Masia. Imagine a young Edwards at Barcelona today. His talent would have been amazing. In those days, even the professional clubs had very unsophisticated regimes. A few times around the cinder track, or up and down the steps of the terraces for fitness.

I remember jogging down the Epping New Road with the West Ham team along a path with no pavement and giant lorries thundering past. If you slipped, you were dead. You'd have great players like Eddie Baily advertising cigarettes. I saw an old copy of *Charlie Buchan's Football Monthly* that said Leyton Orient had introduced a great new fitness regime involving cross-country running, and first prize for coming top at the end of the week was a set of golf balls. I've known players who would give up a £20,000 fine to get out of a hard running session.

What we know now and what we knew then, it's like two different worlds. Imagine the players now if they were sent running through the forest. Muddy and wet, slipping down hills, tripping over the roots of trees. How people didn't injure themselves, I don't know. But we all just ploughed on. Now, in a typical week you might play on Sunday because of a television commitment, so on Monday the players have a little stretch and a rub down, and the fitness coach advises you to keep it light on Tuesday because you are still getting over the game. Wednesday is a day off, so you train properly on Thursday and do fuck all again on Friday, because it's the day before you play again on Saturday. So that's one day training all week. The boys from Duncan Edwards's era wouldn't believe it. They used to play on Saturday, day off Sunday, and the manager would run the bollocks off them on Monday because he would know half of them had been out on the beer all weekend. They ran those boys like there was no tomorrow. You couldn't do that now. Players ask: 'Why are we running? What good is this going to do?' They think they are such perfect specimens. Yet none of them could live with Duncan Edward