

## Best, George

by Lawrence William White

Best, George (1946–2005), professional footballer, was born 22 May 1946 in the Royal Maternity Hospital, Belfast, eldest child among two sons and four daughters of Richard 'Dickie' Best (1919–2008), a shipyard iron turner with Harland and Wolff, and his wife Ann Mary 'Annie' Best (née Withers; 1922–78), a factory worker. Moving when George was aged three to 16 Burren Way in the newly built Cregagh council estate in east Belfast, the family were Free Presbyterian in religion; Best's father and grandfather both served as master of the local Orange lodge, which Best joined in his teens. (In adulthood he deplored sectarianism and the political violence afflicting his native city, and described Orange marches as 'provocation' (Best (2001), 28).) Attending Nettlefield primary school, Best was a bright and attentive student, particularly able at English and mathematics. After passing the 11-plus examination (the only pupil in his class to do so), he won a scholarship to Grosvenor High School, a grammar school which he disliked, owing to its social elitism and preference for rugby over soccer. Frequently truant, he transferred after one year to Lisnasharragh intermediate school (a secondary modern), where he remained till age 15, taking a printing course in his last year.

**The prodigy** Though his father was a keen amateur footballer, Best's athletic talent derived primarily from his mother, who was an excellent hockey player. From early childhood, Best demonstrated an exceptional natural ability, especially for dribbling and other ball-control skills. He played for the Lisnasharragh school team and for Cregagh Boys' Club, but was rejected for the Northern Ireland schoolboys' squad because of his small and slight build. The Cregagh coach, Bud McFarlane, perceiving Best's potential, recommended him to Bob Bishop (chief Northern Ireland scout for Manchester United), who after seeing him in action telegraphed Matt Busby, United's manager, with words that have entered soccer mythology: 'I think I have found a genius' (Tyrrell and Meek, 55).

In July 1961, one week after qualifying as a printer's apprentice, Best crossed the Irish Sea for a two-week trial with Manchester United. Overawed by the experience, the homesick fifteen-year-old returned home after one night. Assured by the United coaching staff that he would be welcome back, a fortnight later he returned to Manchester, passed the trial, and remained with United informally as a putative amateur (1961–3), playing first on the B and then on the youth teams. A diligent and enthusiastic trainer, he often worked alone to perfect his skills. Though he cut an unimposing figure – at age 15, he stood a shade over 5 ft and weighed a mere 8 stone – his ability and potential were evident even in training sessions with first-team veterans. Busby assured that he was not overly coached, but allowed his talent to blossom freely.

On his seventeenth birthday (22 May 1963) Best signed a professional contract for wages of £17 per week. Throughout autumn 1963 he played on the youth and A sides, but Busby unexpectedly blooded him on 14 September 1963 in a home Division One game v. West Bromwich Albion; switching between left and right wings, Best deftly evaded repeated efforts at intimidating tackles, helping United to a 1–0 win. Fifteen weeks passed before his next first-team appearance, against Burnley at Old Trafford (28 December); he enthralled the home crowd with a dazzling display and scored the first goal in United's 5–1 victory. He was deployed regularly for the remainder of the 1963/4 season, making 17 league (scoring 4 goals) and 7 FA Cup (2 goals) appearances, and playing in both legs of the European Cup-winners' Cup quarter-finals. United were league runners-up, four points behind Liverpool, their best league finish in five years. On 15 April 1964 Best made his international debut for Northern Ireland in a 3–2 away victory v. Wales. He continued to play on the Manchester United youth team, which won the FA Youth Cup.

**The complete footballer** Over the next four seasons, Best emerged as the best all-round player in a United team that won two Football League championships (1964/5 and 1966/7) and one European Cup (1967/8). Along with Bobby Charlton and Denis Law, he formed one apex of United's 'golden trinity' of supremely talented players, remarkable for their complementary skills and contrasting on-the-pitch personas. Best's cardinal physical traits were an extraordinary sense of balance and an elastic flexibility of movement; combined with speed and acceleration, these were the bases of an uncanny capacity to retain possession of the ball, and a bewildering variety of manoeuvres to evade tackles and beat defenders. Gracefully agile, and boasting a limitless repertoire of swerves, swivels and feints, and sudden spurts of pace, he would dance through tackles and snake through a defence, leaving defenders, in the words of teammate Pat Crerand, with 'twisted blood' (White, 151). Brave and resilient, he could ride a challenge, and disdained diving to gain a free kick. Notwithstanding his slender frame, Best's was a perfectly proportioned physique (by his maturity he had grown to 5 ft 7 in (1.75 m) and 10 st. 3 lb. (65 kg)). Possessing great heading ability despite his short stature, he routinely beat taller players in the air with the timing and power of his leaps. An excellent ball winner – a feature of his game often unremarked in his day and largely forgotten – he avoided contact with his opponent with the quickness and timing of his tackles. While usually lining out as a winger, he roved at will into the middle seeking to win possession or to exploit attacking opportunities.

Best was fortunate in having as his manager Busby, who allowed him to play naturally. In the new era of tight defences, hard-tackling enforcers, and pre-conceived and practised game plans, Busby stood by the traditional football verities of spontaneity, creativity, and virtuosity. With his genius for the game, and his immense array of skills, Best was the ideal Busby player. In Best, Busby had found the player he most wanted, and in Busby, Best had the manager he most needed. For several illustrious seasons they were a manager and player in a near-perfect fit.

**The glory years** In Best's first full season (1964/5) United won their first football league championship in eight years. Best played 41 league matches, scoring 10 goals, with 55 total matches and 14 goals, answering lingering doubts about his capacity to withstand the physical rigours of senior football.

His centrality to Manchester United's success was dramatically underlined in 1965/6. With Best off form, the club's first eight matches yielded only two wins and eight points. For the first time in his career, he was confronted by Busby about his late-night socialising, and dropped for three matches. After a brilliant performance for Northern Ireland in a 3–2 victory over Scotland (2 October 1965), he was recalled for a European Cup match v. HJK Helsinki; running the Finnish side ragged, he scored twice in a 6–0 romp, and then scored in his return to league football in a 2–0 victory over Liverpool.

The European Cup competition afforded Best his most prominent platform of the season. The quarter-final home leg against Benfica yielded United a precarious 3–2 advantage. In the second leg, in Lisbon's Estadio de Luz (9 March 1966), Best gave one of the greatest individual displays ever seen in European football, scoring twice within twelve minutes: for the second goal, he beat two defenders before rounding the goalkeeper and slipping the ball nonchalantly across the line (one of his own favourite goals). Continuing to run the Benfica defence ragged, Best led the way to a 5–1 victory. The performance catapulted him from brilliant young footballer to pop celebrity. A Portuguese newspaper christened him 'El Beagle', and British newspapers carried a photo of Best disembarking from the team airplane at Heathrow sporting a giant sombrero, the first occasion that he was featured on newspaper front pages.

After such euphoria, the season ended sourly. Two weeks later, Best suffered a knee injury and was absent for most of the remaining season. United fizzled out in all competitions, eliminated from both the European and FA cups at semi-final stage, and finishing fourth in the league. Best played 31 league matches in 1965/6, scoring 9 goals; in 42 matches overall, he had 16 goals.

In 1966/7, United won their second league championship in three seasons. Best appeared in all 42 league matches – the only season in which he did not miss a single league match – and scored 10 goals. The 1967/8 season marked the apotheosis of his greatness. With Law injured, Best assumed the mantle of the side's chief goal scorer. He scored 28 goals in 41 league appearances, and 32 goals in all matches; both totals were personal bests. Although he scored in eight of the club's last ten league games, United could not retain the championship, and finished second, two points behind Manchester City. United did win the European Cup, the quest of which had been the club's holy grail since the tragedy of the 1958 Munich air disaster. Best was prominent in the semi-final tie v. Real Madrid, scoring the lone goal in the home leg, and setting up the game-tying goal late in the away leg with a precisely directed cross, for a 4–3 aggregate victory. The final against Benfica was

contested at London's Wembley Stadium on 29 May 1968. With the score 1–1 after ninety minutes, Best was moved to centre-forward at the start of extra time; three minutes later, he received a headed pass, beat his marker, outfoxed the keeper, and kicked the decisive goal into the open net. United eventually won 4–1, becoming the first English club to win the European Cup.

Best was named Footballer of the Year in England for the 1967/8 season, and European Footballer of the Year for 1968. He was the third Manchester United player in five years to win the European award (Law in 1964, Charlton in 1966), and the youngest person to win either award.

**The pop star** With their attacking style and outstanding players, Manchester United in the latter 1960s were the most popular side in England, attracting huge crowds both home and away. The club's prowess coincided with the launch by BBC in 1964 of *Match of the day*, the first regular weekly television broadcast of English league football, and England's World Cup win in 1966, which greatly increased public interest in the sport. In these years, football broke out of its male working-class ghetto, and appealed to a broader social mixture, including far more women.

As United's most gifted and charismatic player, Best became the first modern superstar of British football, if not of British sport generally. He was an icon of the new Britain of the swinging '60s, a decade of loud, brightly-hued and hedonistic optimism. Hyped as the 'fifth Beatle', and surrounded by a comparable 'Bestiomania', he was linked to the musical group by his youth, social class, long hair and image of playfully exuberant rebellion.

Remarkably handsome, with dark brown hair and large, bright and alert blue eyes, Best exerted a great appeal on women of all ages, from screaming schoolgirls to grey-headed grandmothers. Clean-cut, well-groomed, and fashionably attired, he was well-spoken, with refined and gentle manners, and an air of shy vulnerability. Exploiting this appeal, Best had a long string of sexual dalliances, and was associated with some of the celebrated young women of the period, dating fashion models, beauty queens (including two Miss Worlds), and actresses.

Because of the novelty of the phenomenon, the Manchester United management had no idea how to handle Best's celebrity, and largely left him to his own devices. Employing a commercial agent, and three secretaries to handle his fan mail, he modelled clothes, advertised products, and opened a chain of men's fashion boutiques; his by-line appeared above ghost-written newspaper and magazine columns. His income from such activities dwarfed his footballing wages (which by 1960s' standards were considerable: £1,000 per week including bonuses in 1966). Intellectually curious, he socialised with writers, journalists, and broadcasters; Michael Parkinson (his first biographer) was a personal friend.

**The problem years** During the glory years, Best's indiscretions were largely overlooked by Busby, but after the 1967/8 season, the hard partying and heavy drinking became a problem, and coincided with a general decline of the United team. In the second leg of the unruly Intercontinental Cup tie against Estudiantes of Argentina at Old Trafford in October 1968, Best was sent off for the first time in his career, for striking his marker. Thereafter, he often incurred repercussions for infractions of discipline, both from the club (for missed training sessions, curfew violations, and the like) and from the Football Association for offences on the pitch (especially outbursts of temper directed at referees for failing to penalise aggressive challenges against him). He became a divisive figure within the club; many teammates were exasperated by his antics, and thought him indulged by a management overawed by his stardom.

Best's decline as a footballer was not as precipitous as folk memory would have it; till the end of 1971 he remained the best player on the United team. For five straight seasons he led United in league goals scored (1967/8 to 1971/2). It was during 1970 that Best's off-pitch lifestyle became physically and psychologically unsustainable, and began to affect his on-pitch performances. Alcohol had become an escape from the pressures and absurdities of his celebrity, and had come to dominate his life. From childhood Best had exhibited a pattern of running away from crises; alcohol was now a way to run and hide emotionally when he could not do so physically. There was a Peter Pan aspect to his personality, a boy who refused to grow up; failing to adjust to the post-1968 changes in team personnel and management, and to the team's declining fortunes, he pined for the exuberant dressing-room atmosphere of the winning years. He wished, as it were, that it could be 1968 forever.

During the 1968/9 season Best was drinking heavily, but still playing marvellous football. Now carrying the team (the availability and effectiveness of both Charlton and Law reduced by injuries), he felt excruciating pressure to produce an extraordinary performance in every match. United dropped to an eleventh-place league finish, and the defence of the European Cup ended in semi-final elimination to AC Milan. Best appeared in 41 league matches, with 19 goals, and scored 22 goals in 53 matches in all competitions.

Busby retired as manager at the end of the season, and Wilf McGuinness, formerly reserve team trainer, became the new 'chief coach', but his authority was ill defined, as Busby remained with the club as 'general manager'. Best began the 1969/70 season in brilliant form, but his drinking was out of control, and he was increasingly disenchanted with the club, and with the caution and negativity of British football generally. For the first time in his career he found it difficult to motivate himself and began to miss training sessions.

In mid season, Best rapidly unravelled. After flipping the ball out of the referee's hands at the end of a match, he was fined and suspended for four weeks. In the first

match on his return, he scored six goals in an 8–2 thrashing of Northampton Town in the FA Cup fifth round (7 February 1970). In another notorious incident, he was sent off in a Northern Ireland v. Scotland match after spitting and throwing mud at the referee (18 April 1970). Amid crippling internal dissension, much of it centred on Best's behaviour, United finished eighth in the league; Best scored 15 league goals in 37 matches, with 23 goals in all competitions.

Best's indiscipline and the team's internal chaos continued through the first half of the 1970/71 season. Summoned to an FA disciplinary hearing (4 January 1971), he arrived three hours late and received a suspended six-week ban and a £250 fine. Four days later, he failed to report to Stamford Bridge for a tie v. Chelsea (receiving a two-week club suspension), but kept a weekend date with actress Sinéad Cusack, in whose London flat he was besieged by media for the next three days. However, Busby's return as United manager later that month shook Best into applying himself. He scored twelve league goals over the second half of the season, for a season's total of eighteen; the club finished eighth in the league.

In June 1971, Frank O'Farrell, a former Ireland international, became United's new manager, and, appreciative of the waywardness of genius, handled Best with a kindly indulgence. In autumn Best continued his fabulous form of spring; the calendar year 1971 would be the last great period of his career, comprising two superb half-seasons. United topped the league table at year's end, inspired by a sober and hardworking Best, who scored fourteen league goals, including two hat tricks. He came third in voting for the European Footballer of the Year in 1971, scoring 26 league goals in the calendar year.

By January 1972, however, Best had fallen off the wagon, and missed training for a week. He played poorly for the remainder of the season (scoring only four league goals) and United finished eighth for the third straight season. For all his problems, Best played forty league matches in both 1970/71 and 1971/2.

In May 1972 Best failed to report to the Northern Ireland team for the home championships. Discovered by media in a hotel in Marbella, he announced his retirement from football, claiming that he was drinking a bottle of spirits a day. By summer's end, however, bored by the pointless hedonism of his daily routine, he had reconciled with United, and was training hard. His dedication was short-lived. In the early months of the 1972/3 season, he laboured through nineteen league appearances, scoring four goals, playing every match till the end of November (and none thereafter). United were eighteenth in the table and, frustrated by his and the team's poor form, Best drifted back into bad behaviour. On 18 October he was sent off in a Northern Ireland v. Bulgaria match for kicking an opponent, and was banned by FIFA for three matches. In November he was dropped by United for missing training, and in December was placed on the transfer list. Completely off the rails, he haunted the Brown Bull, his favourite Manchester pub, sleeping on a mattress in an upstairs room. Amid divisions within the United management regarding how

to handle the 'Best problem', culminating in the sacking of Farrell, on 19 December 1972 Best submitted his resignation to the club's board.

Stricken with thrombosis while on a Marbella holiday in May 1973, Best was hospitalised on returning to Manchester. While recovering that summer, he was persuaded by Busby and the new United manager, Tommy Docherty, to return to the club. He played twelve matches in the 1973/4 season (all in the league), scoring two goals. Drinking heavily, he was a parody of his past self: off pace, bloated in physique and obviously struggling. His last match was 1 January 1974, a 0–3 away defeat to Queen's Park Rangers. After a row with Docherty on 5 January, an infuriated Best vowed never again to play for the club. His departure spared him the ignominy of United's relegation at the end of 1973/4, finishing twenty-first in the league.

Never again did Best play in top-flight English football. Playing in all or part of eleven seasons for Manchester United, Best appeared in 361 league matches, scoring 137 goals; in all competitions with the club, he made 470 appearances, with 179 goals.

Best's greatest international performance was in a 1–0 home victory v. Scotland (21 October 1967); though he failed to score, he mesmerised the Windsor Park crowd with a dazzling virtuoso display. His only international hat trick came in a 5–0 home victory over Cyprus (21 April 1971). Best's attitude toward playing for his country was ambiguous, as suggested by the double import of his description of his Northern Ireland experience as 'recreational football'; the phrase can be read as a patronising dismissal of the team's capacity, but also as indicating a welcome and relaxed respite from the excruciating pressures he constantly faced at United. After departing English top-flight football, Best did not appear for Northern Ireland for three years, but returned for five matches in 1976–7. He was capped 37 times, scoring 9 goals.

**The burn-out** George Best's life after 1971 was that of a man dominated by his problematic relationship with alcohol, and marked by a series of attendant issues: episodes of erratic, outrageous, irrational, and sometimes violent behaviour; severe disruption to his professional and personal lives; problems with his finances (including periods of near destitution); instances of trickery or outright theft to access drink; motoring offences and accidents; brushes with the law; sporadic efforts at rehabilitation, occasioning periods of total or relative sobriety, but always ending in a slide or a tumble back into heavy drinking; a psychology of guilt, self-justification, and denial, but with moments (especially late in his life) of lucid insight and self-understanding; at least one period of suicidal depression; deterioration in physical health and appearance; and finally, serious alcohol-related illness and premature death. Above all, there was the superficial sociability but intense inner loneliness of the lounge-bar alcoholic. What made Best's experience exceptional to that of most alcoholics was its transpiration in the glare of a British and international media motivated by tabloid exploitation and sensationalism, which only intensified the

psychological pressures he encountered, and the suffering endured by him and those close to him. From being Britain's first soccer superstar, he became Britain's first self-destructive celebrity addict.

Best opened two Manchester nightclubs in 1973–4; both were initially successful, Best's frequent presence in the venues drawing the crowds. However, he was now gripped by a new addiction: gambling. Perhaps as a substitute for the thrill of athletic competition, he became a compulsive high-stakes gambler, betting on horses by day, and hitting the casinos by night.

For the next decade his footballing career sputtered on, as he appeared, with widely varying levels of effectiveness, for some fourteen clubs on five continents. For the first two years after his departure from Manchester United, he signed short-term contracts to earn quick money. He played five matches for £11,000 with Jewish Guild of Johannesburg, South Africa (May–June 1974). In August 1974 and October 1975 he played three friendlies for Dunstable Town of the Southern League (the first a 3–2 victory before a sell-out crowd against Manchester United reserves). The 1975/6 season saw him in the English League Division Four for three matches with Stockport County (November–December 1975), and in the League of Ireland with Cork Celtic (December 1975–January 1976), where he played three matches before being sacked for lacking enthusiasm.

The most sustained football of Best's latter career was in the North American Soccer League (NASL), where he competed for six summer seasons (1976–81), playing for Los Angeles Aztecs (1976–8), Fort Lauderdale Strikers (1978–9), and San Jose Earthquakes (1980–81), and also with San Jose in the NASL winter indoor season of 1980/81. At first Best flourished both personally and athletically, as he relished in the fresh start, removed from the goldfish bowl of his life in Britain. He played credibly in his first two seasons with Los Angeles Aztecs, scoring 15 goals and credited with 7 assists in 23 league games in 1976, and scoring 11 goals with 18 assists in 20 league appearances in 1977; in the latter season, he had 2 goals and 4 assists in a five-match playoff run. After three erratic, drink-sodden seasons, in his last NASL season (1981) he performed decently on a poor San Jose team, and scored one of the finest goals of his career against Fort Lauderdale (22 July 1981). In six NASL seasons, he played in 150 total matches (regular season and playoffs), scoring 57 goals.

Best combined his NASL career with several winter seasons with British clubs. In a recurring pattern, his arrival at a new club would produce good early gates, but the novelty would soon wear off both for Best and the supporters. His interest in football rekindled by the satisfying experience of his first American season, he signed with Fulham (1976–7) of the English second division, where his teammates included Bobby Moore and Rodney Marsh. In his Fulham debut v. Bristol Rovers at home, Best scored after seventy-one seconds before a crowd of 20,000. He made 37 total Fulham appearances in 1976/7, but, after playing ten games in autumn 1977, lost



interest and returned to his sybaritic life in southern California. He had a desultory tenure over portions of two seasons with Hibernian in the Scottish League premier and first divisions (1979–80) (22 games and 3 goals). Speculation that he might be selected for Northern Ireland in the 1982 World Cup finals failed to materialise. After playing five matches for AFC Bournemouth of the English third division (March–May 1983), he briefly played for two clubs in Hong Kong, and for Brisbane Lions and Osborne Park Galeb in Australia (July 1983). His last competitive match was for Tobermore United of the Irish League B Division v. Ballymena United in the Irish Cup (28 January 1984; his only appearance with a Northern Ireland club). He later described such appearances as a 'freak show' in which he engaged purely because he needed the money.

**Personal life; last years** Best married firstly (January 1978) in Las Vegas, Nevada, Angela MacDonald ('Angie') Janes (b. 1952), from Essex, England, a fashion model, fitness trainer, and sometime personal assistant to pop singer Cher. Upon meeting two years previously, they had begun a chaotic, on-again, off-again relationship. They had one son, Calum Best (b. 1981), a fashion model and minor celebrity. (Best also fathered a daughter in 1969, but never met her.) Motivated by the birth of his son, in March 1981 Best checked into a rehabilitation clinic, and stayed sober for nine months (coinciding with his last NASL season), the first of many stays in rehab clinics and health farms. After he began a year-long relationship with Mary Stavin, an actress and former Miss World, Best and his wife separated definitively in 1982 (they divorced in 1986).

In the mid 1980s, his footballing career over, Best hit rock bottom, engaging in lengthy periods of binge drinking, accompanied by desperate behaviour. He had the first of several operations in which anti-alcohol pellets were sewn into his stomach. He served eight weeks of a three-month prison sentence (November 1984–February 1985) for assaulting a policeman while being arrested after failing to appear at a court hearing regarding a drink-driving offence.

Having lived for a decade between London and southern California, from the mid 1980s Best lived in Chelsea, London, apart from a year in Portavogie, Co. Down (2001). For eight years (1987–95) Best's partner was Mary Shatila; with a calm temperament and a business background, she sorted out his business affairs and personal finances (Best had been declared bankrupt in November 1982), and acted as his agent for personal appearances. He worked as an after-dinner speaker, in stage and pub shows, and as a television football pundit, and made the round of television talk shows; when sober, he could be an engaging guest, but a drunken appearance on BBC's *Wogan* in September 1990 was deeply embarrassing. He produced several ghost-written autobiographies and memoirs. Too often, however, the income from such sources merely funded his drinking and gambling. He married secondly (July 1995) Alexandra Jane ('Alex') Pursey (b. 1972), an airline cabin attendant less than half his age; they divorced in 2004.

After spending five weeks in hospital with a severe liver condition (March–April 2000), Best had a liver transplant in July 2002. Hospitalised with a kidney infection, after seven weeks in intensive care, and having developed a lung infection and suffering internal bleeding, he died 25 November 2005 in Cromwell Hospital, London. His funeral service in the Grand Hall at Stormont castle (attended by unionist, nationalist, and republican politicians) was relayed to 25,000 mourners in the castle grounds, and broadcast on live television; some 100,000 persons lined the route of the funeral cortege to Belfast's Roselawn cemetery.

**Honours; legacy; assessment** Best received an honorary degree from QUB (2001). His life and career were depicted in the feature film *Best* (2000; dir. Mary McGuckian), starring John Lynch. He was the subject of a documentary film, *Fußball wie noch nie* (*Football like never before*; 1971) by German director Hellmuth Costard, and a stage musical, 'Dancing shoes: the George Best story' (2011) by Marie Johns and Martin Lynch, directed by Peter Sheridan. The Belfast harbour airport was renamed the George Best Belfast City Airport in 2006. A group statue of Best, Law, and Charlton was unveiled outside Old Trafford in 2008. Best has been depicted widely in mural art in Belfast and elsewhere in Northern Ireland. The depth of affection he attracted throughout Ireland represents a confluence of two archetypes that allure the Irish psyche: the warm-hearted rogue and the blighted genius.

In a poll of experts to determine the FIFA player of the century, Best came sixteenth, eleventh among European footballers, and third among players from Britain or Ireland, after Charlton and Stanley Matthews (the only other Irish players on the European list were Liam Brady (73rd) and Jackie Carey (qv) (96th)).

With his precocity, his virtuosity, his creative attacking style; his disdain for systems, for the careful and conservative and cautious; Best was the great romantic of British football. Akin to many of the great Romantics of literature and the arts, the productivity of his genius was fleeting, cut short at an early age, not in his case by early death, but by early demise. He was an athlete declining young: though the name did not die before the man (the harpies of modern celebrity saw to that), the gift did.

In assessing his career, many have bewailed the wasted years, the unrealised potential, the failure to achieve full athletic maturity. Yet for several glorious seasons, Best was the greatest, most rounded talent ever to grace British football, and one of the greatest ever in the world. In adjudging his legacy, posterity would be well guided by the assessment of Matt Busby: 'We had our problems with the wee fella, but I prefer to remember his genius' (Meek, 58).

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