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Duncan Edwards – Boy Wonder

A 600 – word article

By

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Recently celebrated was what would have been the 80th Birthday of deceased Busby Babe Duncan Edwards. Once described as one of the most gifted players to ever grace a football pitch, sadly we didn't get to see Edwards fulfil his potential and, the majority of football fans, only have video footage on which to witness the fantastic football brain and ability of the man they called 'Big Dunc' – just a local lad from Dudley who could have become the greatest footballer ever.

Having been poached from under the nose of Edward's local side Wolverhampton Wanderers, Sir Matt Busby knew he had signed a special young player. It was presumed Duncan would join the team his father supported, but his heart was set on Manchester United after reading how much Busby believed in giving youth a chance. He was also drawn to the type of football the Scot liked his teams to play – fast and attacking.

On the 2nd of June 1952, all of Duncan Edwards dreams came true. He signed for Manchester United for the price of a washing machine which was bought by the club as a thank you to Mrs. Edwards for letting them sign her son. Starting out in the youth team, Edwards won the first ever FA Youth Cup final. He was given his Manchester United first team debut on the 4th of April 1953 at the age of 16. He was such a gifted player that Busby declared 'he gave up looking for flaws in Duncan's game' – he was so dedicated to his football, that Edwards would practice solely with his left foot until he could play comfortably on his weaker side.

During the 1953/54 season, Duncan Edwards became an established player in the Manchester United first team. Despite being called up for national service, Edwards would travel back to Manchester on Fridays from the barracks, ready for United matches on a Saturday. It was a gruelling schedule but Duncan always played to the best of his ability on the pitch, and that

ability mesmerised spectators as well as the Manchester United manager who pronounced Duncan as ‘the most complete footballer in Britain – possibly the world.’

His power and tackling was described as ‘Trojan’ like, his array of shots, goals and drive were defined as ‘sensational’ – Duncan Edwards was so good he could play anywhere on the pitch. Despite predominantly playing in the position of left-back, Duncan could control the match and perform at the highest level wherever he played. Midfield or striker – Duncan Edwards was as versatile as he was world-class.

Incredibly, at only the age of 19, Edwards made his 100th appearance for United - it was the 22nd September 1956 in a 2-0 victory over Manchester City. His performance was applauded, *The Times* praised Duncan for his domination in defence and for his aerial power as well as his 30-yard passing which he accomplished with precision.

Even though Duncan had achieved star status in the footballing world and was one of the best and most talked about players, he was a shy person who always maintained he was just a local lad from Dudley who loved to play football. He didn’t like being in the limelight and away from the game he enjoyed family life and regularly played football with the boys in his street as if he were any ordinary neighbour. Duncan Edwards may have been a Manchester United player but deep down he was just the boy next door.

After an astounding performance against Arsenal in the league, Duncan and Manchester United headed to Belgrade for the second leg of their quarter-final European cup match. The team won the game on aggregate, but after stopping for refuelling in Munich on their way home, the aeroplane carrying the team crashed on take-off. Duncan was seriously injured, and despite battling for his life for two weeks in hospital, he tragically died on 21st February 1958

at the age of 21. Bobby Charlton said of his death it was ‘the biggest single tragedy that has ever happened to Manchester United and English football - he was the only player that ever made me feel inferior.’

Taken from the world far too soon, it is an injustice that Duncan Edwards was killed at such a young age and when his incredible football career had only just begun. We will never know what would have become of the man who scored 21 goals for Manchester United and made 177 appearances, but one fact is for sure; Duncan Edwards, who enthralled and drew so many plaudits from everyone involved in football, would have been one of the best footballers the world had even seen.

