

= Duncan Edwards =

Duncan Edwards ( 1 October 1936 ? 21 February 1958 ) was an English footballer who played for Manchester United and the England national team . He was one of the Busby Babes , the young United team formed under manager Matt Busby in the mid @-@ 1950s , and one of eight players who died as a result of the Munich air disaster .

Born in Woodside , Dudley , Worcestershire , Edwards signed for Manchester United as a teenager and went on to become the youngest player to play in the Football League First Division and the then youngest England player since the Second World War . In a professional career of less than five years he helped United to win two Football League championships and reach the semi @-@ finals of the European Cup .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early years = = =

Edwards was born on 1 October 1936 at 23 Malvern Crescent in the Woodside district of Dudley , which at the time was part of the county of Worcestershire . He was the first child of Gladstone and Sarah Anne Edwards and their only child to survive to adulthood , his younger sister Carol Anne dying in 1947 at the age of 14 weeks . His cousin , three years his elder , was Dennis Stevens , who also went on to become a professional footballer .

The Edwards family later moved to 31 Elm Road on the Priory Estate , also in Dudley . Edwards attended Priory Primary School from 1941 to 1948 , and Wolverhampton Street Secondary School from 1948 to 1952 . He played football for his school as well as for Dudley Schools , Worcestershire and Birmingham and District teams , and also represented his school at morris dancing . He was selected to compete in the National Morris and Sword Dancing Festival , but was also offered a trial for the English Schools Football Association 's under @-@ 14 team , which fell on the same day , and opted to attend the latter .

Edwards impressed the selectors and was chosen to play for the English Schools XI , making his debut against the equivalent team from Wales at Wembley Stadium on 1 April 1950 . He was soon appointed captain of the team , a position he held for two seasons . By this stage , he had already attracted the attention of major clubs , with Manchester United scout Jack O 'Brien reporting back to manager Matt Busby in 1948 that he had " today seen a 12 @-@ year @-@ old schoolboy who merits special watching . His name is Duncan Edwards , of Dudley " .

Joe Mercer , who was then coaching the England schools team , urged Busby to sign Edwards , who was also attracting interest from Wolverhampton Wanderers and Aston Villa . Edwards signed for United as an amateur on 2 June 1952 , but accounts of when he signed his first professional contract vary . Some reports state that it occurred on his 17th birthday in October 1953 , but others contend that it took place a year earlier . Those accounts that favour the earlier date usually state that a club official , either Busby himself or coach Bert Whalley , arrived at the Edwards family home soon after midnight to secure the youngster 's signature as early as possible , but other reports claim that this occurred when he signed his amateur contract . Wolves manager Stan Cullis was indignant at missing out on a highly touted local youngster and accused United of improperly offering financial inducements to Edwards or his family , but Edwards maintained that he had always wanted to play for the Lancashire team . To guard against the possibility that he might not make a success of his football career , he also began an apprenticeship as a carpenter .

= = = Football career = = =

Edwards began his Manchester United career in the youth team and made several appearances for the team that won the first ever FA Youth Cup in 1953 , but by the time of the final had already made his debut for the first team . On 4 April 1953 , he played in a Football League First Division

match against Cardiff City , which United lost 4 ? 1 , aged just 16 years and 185 days , making him the youngest player ever to play in the top division . Mindful of the fact that his team contained a large number of relatively old players , Busby was keen to bring new young players through the ranks , and Edwards , along with the likes of Dennis Viollet and Jackie Blanchflower , was among a number of youngsters introduced to the team during 1953 , who came to be known collectively as the Busby Babes . Reviewing his performance on his first team debut the Manchester Guardian newspaper commented that " he showed promise of fine ability in passing and shooting , but will have to move faster as a wing half " .

The 1953 ? 54 season saw Edwards emerge as a regular in the United first team . After impressing in a friendly against Kilmarnock he replaced the injured Henry Cockburn for the away match against Huddersfield Town on 31 October 1953 , and went on to appear in 24 league matches as well as United 's FA Cup defeat to Burnley . Nonetheless he was also still an active part of the youth team and played in the team which won the Youth Cup for the second consecutive season . He made his first appearance for the national under @-@ 23 team on 20 January 1954 in Italy , and was considered for inclusion in the full England team , but on the day when the selection committee watched him in action , against Arsenal on 27 March , he gave a poor performance and was not called up .

The following season he made 36 first team appearances and scored his first senior goals , finishing the season with six to his name . His performances revived calls for him to be selected for the senior England team , and a member of the selection committee was despatched to watch him play against Huddersfield Town on 18 September 1954 , but nothing came of it in the short term , although he was selected for a Football League XI which played an exhibition match against a Scottish League team . In March , he played for England B against an equivalent team from Germany and , despite being criticised in the press for his " poor showing " , was called up for the full national team a week later . He made his debut in a match against Scotland on 2 April 1955 in the British Home Championship aged 18 years and 183 days , making him England 's youngest debutant since the Second World War , a record which stood , until Michael Owen made his England debut in 1998 . Three weeks later , United took advantage of the fact that he was still eligible for the youth team to select him for the club 's third consecutive FA Youth Cup final . The decision to field an England international player in the youth team was heavily criticised , and Matt Busby was forced to pen a newspaper article defending Edwards ' selection , which paid off for United as the player was instrumental in a third Youth Cup win .

In May 1955 , Edwards was selected for the England squad which travelled to mainland Europe for matches against France , Portugal and Spain , starting all three matches . Upon returning from the tour , he began a two @-@ year stint in the British Army with the Royal Army Ordnance Corps . Army service was compulsory at the time for all men of his age under the National Service scheme . He was stationed at Nesscliffe near Shrewsbury along with team @-@ mate Bobby Charlton , but was allowed leave to play for United . He also took part in army matches , and in one season played nearly one hundred matches in total . In the 1955 ? 56 season , despite missing nearly two months of action due to a severe bout of influenza , Edwards played 33 times as United won the championship of the Football League by a margin of 11 points from Blackpool . The following season he made 34 league appearances , taking his total past the 100 mark , as United won a second consecutive league title , and was also in the team that contested the 1957 FA Cup Final , in which United missed out on the Double after a 2 ? 1 defeat to Aston Villa . He also made seven appearances during United 's first ever foray into the European Cup , including a 10 ? 0 win over Anderlecht which remains the club 's biggest ever margin of victory . By now he was also a regular in the England team , featuring in all four of England 's qualifying matches for the 1958 World Cup and scoring two goals in the 5 ? 2 win over Denmark on 5 December 1956 . He was expected to be a key player for England in the World Cup finals , and was seen as a likely candidate to replace the veteran Billy Wright as national team captain .

Edwards began the 1957 ? 58 season in good form and rumours abounded that top Italian clubs were seeking to sign him . His final match in England took place on 1 February 1958 , when he scored the opening goal to help United defeat Arsenal 5 ? 4 . The press were critical of his

performance , with the Sunday Pictorial 's correspondent writing that he did not " think [ Edwards ' ] display in this thrilling game would impress England team manager Walter Winterbottom , who was watching . He was clearly at fault for Arsenal 's fourth goal when , instead of clearing , he dallied on the ball " . Five days later , he played his last ever match as United drew 3 ? 3 away to Red Star Belgrade to progress to the semi @-@ finals of the European Cup by an aggregate score of 5 ? 4 .

= = = Death = = =

Returning home from Belgrade , the aeroplane carrying Edwards and his team mates crashed on takeoff after a refuelling stop in Munich , Germany . Seven players and 14 other passengers died at the scene , and Edwards was taken to the Rechts der Isar Hospital with multiple leg fractures , fractured ribs and severely damaged kidneys . The doctors treating him were confident that he stood some chance of recovery , but were doubtful that he would ever be able to play football again .

Doctors had an artificial kidney rushed to the hospital for him , but the artificial organ reduced his blood 's ability to clot and he began to bleed internally . Despite this it is said that he asked assistant manager Jimmy Murphy " What time is the kick off against Wolves , Jimmy ? I mustn 't miss that match " . By 14 February , his condition was reported to have " dramatically improved " . However , on 19 February it was reported that he was " sinking rapidly " , with use of the artificial kidney machine developing into a " vicious circle , gradually sapping his strength " . Doctors were " amazed " at his fight for life , and the next day a " very slight improvement " in his condition was reported , but he died at 2 : 15 a.m. on 21 February 1958 . Hours before his death , by coincidence , a new issue of Charles Buchan 's Football Monthly was published in the United Kingdom , with a photograph of a smiling Edwards on the cover .

Edwards was buried at Dudley Cemetery five days later , alongside his sister Carol Anne . More than 5 @,@ 000 people lined the streets of Dudley for his funeral . His tombstone reads : " A day of memory , Sad to recall , Without farewell , He left us all " , and his grave is regularly visited by fans .

= = = Legacy = = =

Edwards is commemorated in a number of ways in his home town of Dudley . A stained @-@ glass window depicting the player , designed by Francis Skeat , was unveiled in St Francis 's Church , the parish church for the Priory Estate , by Matt Busby in 1961 , and a statue in the town centre was dedicated by his mother and Bobby Charlton in 1999 . In 1993 , a cul @-@ de @-@ sac of housing association homes near to the cemetery in which he is buried was named " Duncan Edwards Close " . The Wren 's Nest pub on the Priory Estate , near where he grew up , was renamed " The Duncan Edwards " in honour of him in 2001 , but it closed within five years and was subsequently destroyed by arsonists . In 2006 , a £ 100 @,@ 000 games facility was opened in Priory Park , where Edwards often played as a boy , in his memory . In 2008 , Dudley 's southern bypass was renamed ' Duncan Edwards Way ' in his memory . Dudley Museum and Art Gallery hosts an exhibition of memorabilia devoted to his career , including his England caps . A housing complex called Duncan Edwards Court exists in Manchester , among a network of streets , named after his fellow Munich victims , including Eddie Colman , Roger Byrne and Tommy Taylor . On 8 July 2011 a Blue Plaque was unveiled by Bobby Charlton at the site of Edwards ' former digs in Stretford , and in 2016 local dignitaries in Dudley launched a fundraising drive with the aim of placing a similar plaque in the town .

In 1996 , Edwards was one of five players chosen to appear on British stamps issued as part of a " Football Legends " set issued to commemorate the UEFA Euro 1996 tournament . He was portrayed by Sam Claflin in the 2011 British TV film United based on the Munich disaster .

Contemporaries of Edwards have been unstinting in their praise of his abilities . Bobby Charlton described him as " the only player that made me feel inferior " and said his death was " the biggest single tragedy ever to happen to Manchester United and English football " . Terry Venables claimed that , had he lived , it would have been Edwards , not Bobby Moore , who lifted the World Cup trophy as England captain in 1966 . Tommy Docherty stated that " there is no doubt in my mind that

Duncan would have become the greatest player ever . Not just in British football , with United and England , but the best in the world . George Best was something special , as was Pelé and Maradona , but in my mind Duncan was much better in terms of all @-@ round ability and skill . " In recognition of his talents Edwards was made an inaugural inductee to the English Football Hall of Fame in 2002 .

= = Style of play = =

Although he is primarily remembered as a defensive midfielder , Edwards is said to have been able to operate in any outfield position on the field of play . His versatility was such that on one occasion he started the match playing as an emergency striker in place of one injured player before being switched to central defence in place of another . His greatest assets were his physical strength and his level of authority on the pitch , which was said to be remarkable for such a young player , and he was particularly noted for his high level of stamina . Stanley Matthews described him as being " like a rock in a raging sea " , and Bobby Moore likened him to the Rock of Gibraltar when defending but also noted that he was " dynamic coming forward " . His imposing physique earned him the nicknames " Big Dunc " and " The Tank " , and he has been ranked amongst the toughest players of all time .

Edwards was noted for the power and timing of his tackles and for his ability to pass and shoot equally well with both feet . He was known for his surging runs up the pitch and was equally skilled at heading the ball and at striking fierce long @-@ range shots . After scoring a goal on 26 May 1956 , in a 3 ? 1 friendly win against West Germany , he was given the nickname " Boom Boom " by the local press because of " the Big Bertha shot in his boots " .

= = Career statistics = =

= = = International goals = = =

Scores and results list England 's goal tally first .

= = Honours = =

= = = Club = = =

Manchester United

First Division : 1955 ? 56 , 1956 ? 57

= = = Individual = = =

Football League 100 Legends : 1958

Inducted into the inaugural English Football Hall of Fame in 2002

PFA Team of the Century ( 1907 @-@ 1976 ) : 2007

= = Outside football = =

Edwards was a teetotaller and outside football was known as a very private individual , whose interests included fishing , playing cards and visiting the cinema . Although he attended dances with his team @-@ mates he was never confident in social surroundings . He was described by Jimmy Murphy as an " unspoilt boy " and retained a strong Black Country accent which his team @-@ mates would impersonate . He was once stopped by the police for riding his bicycle without lights and fined five shillings by the authorities and two weeks ' wages by his club .

At the time of his death Edwards was living in lodgings in Gorse Avenue , Stretford . He was engaged to be married to Molly Leech , who was 22 years old and worked in the offices of a textile machine manufacturer in Altrincham . The couple met at a function at a hotel at Manchester Airport , dated for a year before becoming engaged , and were godparents to the daughter of Leech 's friend Josephine Stott .

Edwards appeared in advertisements for Dextrosol glucose tablets and had written a book entitled " Tackle Soccer This Way " , commercial endeavours which supplemented his wage of £ 15 per week during the season and £ 12 per week during the summer . The book was published shortly after his death with the approval of his family and , after being out of print for many years , was re @-@ published in November 2009 .