MANCHESTER UNITED MUSEUM & Tour

PRE-VISIT LEARNING ACTIVITIES KEY STAGE 2



RECENT HISTORY 1960S: GEORGE BEST.

GEORGE BEST

Born in Belfast on 22nd May 1946, George Best grew up on the Cregagh estate and played football for both Cregagh Boys Club and Lisnasharragh Intermediate School. He joined Manchester United's ground staff and signed amateur forms in August 1961 after being spotted by Bob Bishop, one of United's top scouts. This was after he had been rejected by some local Belfast sides and Leeds United, as they thought him too small and skinny. Despite a spell of homesickness he remained at Manchester United and took a position at the Manchester Ship Canal Company as a clerk. He turned professional on his 17th birthday in May 1963. Best's League debut was against West Bromwich Albion on 14th September 1963 and he scored his first goal in only his second appearance, a 5–1 victory over Burnley on the 28th December 1963. He won his first Northern Ireland cap in a 3–2 victory over Wales, after only 15 League matches.

He won an FA Youth Cup winners' plaque in 1964, scoring one of United's goals in their 5–2 aggregate victory over Swindon Town. In 1965 he won a Championship medal adding a second in 1967. Best gave United an extra-time lead in the European Champions Cup Final in 1968, United eventually defeating Benfica 4–1. He was already well known to Benfica having been instrumental in inflicting their first ever home defeat in European competition back in 1965 at the quarter-final stage of the European Champions Cup. United had won 5–1 with Best scoring two goals and being christened 'El Beatle'. It was the start of a spectacular rise to superstardom for George Best. He also scored 28 League goals in 41 matches in the 1967–68 season as United finished as runners-up in the League. These 28 goals made him United's top scorer that season, a position he held for the following 4 seasons as well.

His performances in the 1967–68 season won him both the Footballer of the Year and the European Player of the Year trophies. George Best made 474 appearances for Manchester United scoring 181 goals. He also holds the record for the most goals by a United player in a single match (not including wartime), six versus Northampton Town, FA Cup fifth round on the 8th February 1970. United won the match 8–2.

Together with Mike Summerbee of Manchester City, George Best opened a number of fashion boutiques in Manchester in 1966 and 1967. He also opened a travel agency and a couple of nightclubs, Slack Alice's and Oscar's. Unfortunately these business enterprises were not commercial successes. George Best's United career deteriorated during the 1970s. A rift developed between the Club and player as off-field problems

and the pressures of superstardom took their toll. During the late 1960s Best had been receiving 10,000 fan-mail letters every week, and employed three full-time staff to answer the letters. Best walked out on the Club on a number of occasions, notably in 1972 when he announced his retirement and flew off to Marbella, Spain. He returned to Manchester United in September 1973 but finally broke both Tommy Docherty's and Manchester United's patience when he failed to turn up for training in January 1974. His final League match for United had been in a disappointing 0-3 defeat against Queens Park Rangers on New Year's Day 1974.

After leaving Old Trafford Best played for many different clubs including amongst others Dunstable Town (1974), Stockport County (1975), Cork Celtic (1975), Fulham (1976–77), Hibernian (1979–80), Bournemouth (1983) and Brisbane Lions of Australia (1983). He played in the short lived North American Soccer League for LA Aztecs (1976–78), Fort Lauderdale Strikers (1978–79) and San Jose Earthquakes (1980–81). He also made numerous guest appearances for teams in friendly, charity and testimonial matches.

George Best, at his peak, was probably the most natural and greatest talent the British Isles have ever produced. He had speed, balance, vision, superb close control and the ability to create chances and score from seemingly impossible situations. The Brazilian legend, Pele, remarked that George Best was 'The best player in the world'.

Best won a total of 37 Northern Ireland caps, 32 of which whilst at United. In November 1972 the 'troubles' in Northern Ireland forced him to withdraw from a Northern Ireland versus Spain match after he received IRA death threats. On the 3rd October 1981 George Best was called up to play for Northern Ireland against Scotland at the age of 35.

After retiring from playing Best continued to attract headlines about his private life. Since the 1970's tabloid newspapers had fallen over each other to get 'exclusive' stories on Best's drinking, gambling and womanising. Well-publicised alcohol problems led to a spell on an alcohol rehabilitation course, but tax problems also haunted him in the 1980s. Despite the problems he carved out successful careers in after-dinner speaking, radio and television commentating and football coaching. However, the years of heavy drinking eventually led to chronic liver disease and a liver transplant operation in July 2002. Unfortunately, Best was unable to overcome his alcohol addiction and continued to drink. He was admitted to hospital on the 1st October 2005 with a flu-like bug, but deteriorated rapidly after developing a kidney infection. He was thought to be improving until he developed a lung infection and was put on a ventilator in the intensive care unit of Cromwell Hospital. George Best finally passed away at 12.55pm on Friday 25th November 2005 with his family at his bedside.

Did You Know?

- In February 1965 George Best was kidnapped as part of Manchester College of Commerce students' rag stunt.
- On 9th March 1969 George Best opened the 'George Best' boutique. Three years later the 'George Best' Rogue boutique opened.
- George Best went out with two 'Miss Worlds'.

FACT FILE

Name George Best

Date of Birth 22nd May 1946

Place Belfast, Northern Ireland

Date of Death 25th November 2005

Position Forward

Signed Amateur, August 1961

Professional, May 1963

League Debut 14th September 1963, MUFC v West Bromwich Albion (at

Old Trafford)

International Debut 15th April 1964, Wales v Northern Ireland

Playing Career Belfast Schoolboys, Cregagh Youth Club, Manchester

United, Dunstable Town, Stockport County, Cork Celtic, Los Angeles Aztecs, Fulham, Los Angeles Aztecs, Fort Lauderdale Strikers, Hibernian, San Jose Earthquakes,

AFC Bournemouth, Brisbane Lions

	Appearances	Goals
Football League Div 1	361	137
FA Cup	46	21
Football League Cup	25	9
Charity/Community Shield	2	1
European Cup	21	9
Inter Cities Fairs Cup/UEFA Cup	11	2
European Cup Winners Cup	2	0
European-South American Cup	2	0
TOTAL	470	179