RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

Manchester's Finest

David Hall

About the Book

On 6 February 1958, British European Airways flight 609 crashed in a blizzard on its third attempt to take off from an icy runway in Munich. On board were the Manchester United football team, the Busby Babes. Seven of their players were killed instantly in the crash, the great Duncan Edwards died three weeks later, and two other players were so severely injured that they were never able to play again.

News of the tragedy sent shockwaves around the world. *Manchester's Finest* tells of this terrible air crash, but it is also the story of the immediate aftermath of the disaster and its effect on the city of Manchester. David Hall's poignant and very personal memoir remembers a season long gone when a patched-up team, carried along on a great wave of emotion, came to embody the heart and soul of a great city.

'Not only the best book on Munich, but one of the very best books on the United…a totally refreshing account'
Michael Crick, author of *The Boss: The Many Sides of Alex Ferguson*

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MANCHESTER'S FINEST

How the Munich air disaster broke
the heart of a great city

DAVID HALL

To my children,
Kathryn and Thomas

In memory of my Dad,
Eddie

Three generations of Reds

Acknowledgements

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cutting my many repetitions; and Sheila Lee for finding so many pictures that give a feel for what it was like at the time. Finally, I would like to thank my wife Fran for putting up with all the years of living with a family of Reds even though she says she’s a City fan.

Oh, England's finest football team its record truly great,
Its proud successes mocked by a cruel twist of fate.
Eight men will never play again who met destruction there,
The flowers of English football, the flowers of Manchester.

Prologue
The Flowers of Manchester

ne cold and bitter Thursday in Munich, Germany,
ight great football stalwarts conceded victory.
ight men will never play again who met destruction there,
he flowers of English football, the flowers of Manchester.

Matt Busby's boys were flying, returning from Belgrade,
his great United family, all masters of their trade;
he pilot of the aircraft, the skipper Captain Thain,
hree times he tried to take off and twice turned back again.

he third time down the runway disaster followed close:
here was a slush upon the runway and the aircraft never rose.
t ploughed into the marshy ground, it broke, it overturned,
nd eight of the team were killed as the blazing wreckage burned.

oger Byrne and Tommy Taylor, who played for England's side,
nd Ireland's Billy Whelan and England's Geoff Bent died.
Mark Jones and Eddie Colman, and David Pegg also,
hey all lost their lives as it ploughed on through the snow.

ig Duncan he went too, with an injury to his frame,

nd Ireland's Jackie Blanchflower will never play again.
he great Matt Busby lay there, the father of his team;
hree long months passed by before he saw his team again.

he trainer, coach and secretary, and a member of the crew,
lso eight sporting journalists who with United flew.
nd one of them was Big Swifty, who we will ne'er forget,
he finest English keeper that ever graced their net.

h, England's finest football team its record truly great,
s proud successes mocked by a cruel twist of fate.
ight men will never play again who met destruction there,
he flowers of English football, the flowers of Manchester.

Anon.

On 6 February 1958 a BEA Elizabethan class Airspeed Ambassador charter aircraft carrying the Manchester United football team back to England from a European Cup tie in Belgrade needed to stop at Munich to refuel. When Flight 609 touched down at Munich's Riem Airport the United party were met by blizzard conditions. Snow and slush covered the runway. Conditions for flying were difficult and hazardous, and once the aircraft was refuelled there were two attempts to take off, both of which were aborted due to engine problems. When a third attempt was made, at 3.04 p.m., the aircraft failed to get airborne. It overshot the runway, went through a fence and crossed a road before one of the wings struck a house. Seven of the players – Geoff Bent, Roger Byrne, Eddie Colman, Mark Jones, David Pegg, Tommy Taylor and Billy Whelan – were killed instantly, along with the club secretary, the first team trainer, the first team coach, eight sportswriters, one of the aircrew and two other passengers. Two weeks later the aircraft's co-pilot and Duncan Edwards, one of the most promising young players ever to come out of England, lost

their battle for life, bringing the final death toll to twenty-three. Two other United players, Johnny Berry and Jackie Blanchflower, were so severely injured that they were never able to play again.

For people who lived in Manchester at that time, and for football fans throughout Britain, it was one of those moments like Kennedy's assassination or 9/11 when everybody remembers exactly where they were and how they heard that terrible news. I was an eleven-year-old schoolboy and I'd been going to Old Trafford to watch United with my dad for two years. I'm over sixty now, but tears still come to my eyes whenever I think of the moment I first heard the news, or when I think of the words of 'The Flowers of Manchester', the ballad that was written anonymously within weeks of the disaster.

According to a report in the *Manchester Guardian* on 3 March 1958, the song was first heard in an upper room of the Princess Louise pub on High Holborn in London, where a group of people who called themselves the Ballads and Blues movement met every Sunday night to listen to a collection of new and traditional songs. 'The Flowers of Manchester', the report said, was one of three songs that had appeared in the Ballads and Blues programme, all of them dealing with the tragic events of 6 February. Each was different in mood and character, but the late fifties was the beginning of the folk revival, and they all fell within what was defined as the folk tradition. All three ballads were being sung at the Ballads and Blues club before the end of February, and each of them evoked a deep emotional response from the audiences.

In the case of two of them, this, the *Manchester Guardian* writer said, had less to do with the quality of the songs themselves than the tragic nature of the accident. The first, 'Manchester Mourns', by Dominic Behan, the brother of Irish playwright Brendan Behan, was in the heroic Irish tradition; Behan sang of 'gallant and brave

boys; footballers great and true'. The second song, 'The Munich Tragedy' by Joe Moss, was written to an American tune with words predominantly in the American idiom. It had an air of the hillbilly about it which was about as remote from the world of Manchester football as it was possible to get. The third song, however, was right in the mainstream of the ballad tradition. It was emotional too, but it was free from bogus sentiment; it was the eloquence of the words that brought the tragedy vividly to life.

The words of 'The Flowers of Manchester' appeared in a folk magazine, *Sing*, in October 1958, but no music accompanied it. According to the magazine the lyrics had been sent in anonymously with a note saying it should be sung to the tune of 'High Germany'. The song was first sung for wider public consumption by Mick Groves of the Liverpool-based folk group The Spinners. Mick was a United fan from Salford and he sang it unaccompanied on The Spinners' first album *Quayside Songs Old and New*, released in 1962. I first heard it being sung by Terry Whelan at the Pack Horse on Bridge Street, Manchester, in 1964. Terry was one of the resident singers at the Wayfarers Club, a folk club at the pub a crowd of us used to go to on a Saturday night. I got the words of the song from The Spinners album, and when I set up a folk club myself when I was at university in Dundee I used to sing it regularly. I particularly remember doing it at a concert when I shared the bill with The Spinners and the American folk singer Tom Paxton. During the holidays a whole crowd of us used to hitch-hike around Ireland, often singing for our bed and breakfast on the way; a rendition of 'Flowers' would always bring tears to the eyes of those present, not to mention fond memories of the Irishman Billy Whelan, who lost his life in the crash.

Nobody knows for certain who wrote the song, or who first sang it at Ballads and Blues. It is often attributed to Ewan MacColl, but that is not correct. At the time it first

appeared MacColl was a regular at Ballad and Blues and he probably knew as much about it as anyone in Britain. He said he had seen several texts on the Munich disaster but 'The Flowers of Manchester' was certainly the best. McColl also collaborated with The Spinners on their version, which may go some way to explaining why for so many years he was rumoured to be its writer.

Since 2001, before the home match that is closest to the anniversary of the disaster, fans have gathered under the Munich Memorial at Old Trafford to sing 'The Flowers of Manchester'. This is now a regular event. The number of people attending increases every year and it is recognized by the club, which fixes temporary boards on the wall under the memorial for fans to leave floral tributes. With its re-emergence, the mystery of the authorship of the song was, for many, cleared up. Tony Davis of The Spinners told a contributor to the United fanzine *Red News* that it had been written by Eric Winter, the Mancunian editor of *Sing* magazine. He'd published it anonymously in the magazine because it was the custom of folk singers to write anonymously at that time; they believed it gave the material more credence. This claim was backed up in Winter's obituary in the *Guardian*: 'his song, The Flowers of Manchester, prompted by the Munich Air Disaster, was recorded by The Spinners'. The only doubt in my mind about this is the fact that the writer of the *Manchester Guardian* article that was published just over three weeks after the disaster was none other than Eric Winter. Would he have praised his own song so highly while dismissing the other two that had been written in the wake of the disaster?

Some of the words that are sung now, in what has come to be accepted as the official version, are different to the words of the original that I used to sing, notably the line 'There was ice upon the wings and the aircraft never rose', which has been changed to 'There was a slush upon the

runway and the aircraft never rose'. At the inquiry just after the disaster the German authorities contended that ice on the wings had caused the crash and that the pilot, Captain James Thain, who survived the crash, was at fault because he had not had them de-iced before take-off. When the song was written, therefore, ice on the wings was accepted as the cause of the crash. But Thain's position was that what little ice there was on the wings was thawing, and de-icing was not necessary. For years he lived under the cloud of blame and he fought to clear his name, maintaining that it was a build-up of slush on the runway causing deceleration of the aircraft and preventing safe flying speed from being attained that was the cause of the disaster. The German authorities, who were legally responsible for the state of the runways, would not accept this, and the British Government did not want to embarrass the West German Government so soon after the war. In the end it took eleven years and four inquiries, two British and two German, to clear the name of Captain Thain by establishing that slush on the runway was the sole cause of the crash.

There is, I believe, one other small but important change that should be made to correct a major omission in the song. In the foreword to his book *Johnny the Forgotten Babe*, Neil Berry, the son of Johnny Berry, points out that the lyricist of 'The Flowers of Manchester' is not the only anonymous person in this story: 'My father was a member of the Manchester United team and was on the plane that day. The injuries he sustained prevented him from playing football again.' Of the eight players who died and the two who were never able to play again, right-winger Johnny Berry is the only one who is not mentioned in the song. As we marked the fiftieth anniversary of the disaster in 2008, it would have been appropriate to make sure that along with the others Johnny is not forgotten by changing the line 'And Ireland's Jackie Blanchflower will never play again' to

‘And Johnny Berry ’n’ Jackie Blanchflower will never play again’.

Flying is a lot safer now, probably the safest form of travel. I fly thousands of miles every year on business and for pleasure and I have no fear of it. But to this day I cannot board an aeroplane without at least a thought of Munich flashing through my mind. In that mad scramble for seats on one of the budget airlines, I’m always reminded that Bobby Charlton, Bill Foulkes and Harry Gregg, the survivors of the crash, were sitting near the front of the aircraft; those who died were all sitting at the back. At that moment before take-off, just before the wheels leave the ground, I think of the aircraft that ‘never rose’. Until we’re safely up in the air and beyond the perimeter fence of the airport the image remains of the broken aircraft lying in the snow at the end of the Munich runway. ‘It ploughed into the marshy ground, it broke, it overturned …’

In the course of writing this book I’ve spoken to many older United fans who were supporting the team at the time of the disaster, and for them, like me, the word ‘Munich’ means only one thing: that cold and bitter Thursday when the football team we followed was destroyed. Munich is a great city; I’ve visited it many times, landed at its airport, made a television travel programme there. But whenever I hear its name the first thing that comes into my head are the words of ‘The Flowers of Manchester’. The song takes me straight back to that time in the middle of the 1950s when Manchester was still a great manufacturing city and one of its teams won the affection of the entire British nation with their displays of footballing skill. In 1958, when disaster struck, Manchester United were going for the same fabulous Treble of league championship, FA Cup and European Cup that saw Alex Ferguson knighted forty-one years later.

Football then was a very different game to the one we know today, and the lives of the players were more in touch with the mainly working-class support that football enjoyed. Pay during the season was only £20 per week, with a £4 bonus for a win, and £17 a week in the summer months. It wasn't a great deal more than a lot of the supporters earned. The players lived in modest semi-detached club houses or in lodgings close to Old Trafford. A lot of them didn't have cars, and many travelled in for matches and for training on public transport, shoulder to shoulder with the fans. The club was very much part of the community, and when tragedy struck, the whole city – Red, Blue and uncommitted – went into mourning. The film and television script writer Colin Shindler is a lifelong Manchester City supporter, and in his book *Manchester United Ruined My Life* he expresses the feelings of everybody who was in Manchester at that time: 'I was devastated by the news of the crash. Everybody in Manchester was. I am informed that the nation wept – possibly wherever football was played tears were shed – but not like they were in Manchester. It was a death in the immediate family … There was no City/United divide on this. The great City and England goalkeeper Frank Swift died at Munich, but our tears were shed for us – the city of Manchester.'

Manchester's Finest is about the people of Manchester and their lives, and about the place of a football team in the heart of a city. It's about a time when that city was paralysed as the news of the deaths of its football heroes came through; a time when, in the weeks immediately after the disaster, a patched-up team came to embody the heart and soul of the city as, carried along on a great wave of emotion, it reached the FA Cup Final. It was a time when memories of the Second World War were still fresh in many people's minds and Germany was still regarded as the enemy; when the care given to the crash victims by the

German doctors changed these views and helped the reconciliation process. *Manchester's Finest* is about family and community and the links that bind them together through shared allegiance to a football team, and about the creation of a legend that was built into an international brand which gradually, in the eyes of many people, became distanced from the very community it was part of.


FEB 6th 1958
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MUNICH

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One Cold and Bitter Thursday

IT WAS GETTING dark as I walked down our road on my way back from school and the street lights were already on. Heavy black clouds filled the sky. ‘Good,’ I thought, ‘snow’s on its way.’ It was certainly cold enough. I was looking forward to snowball fights, to making snowmen and big long icy slides down the middle of the road. But then I thought, ‘Oh no! What’ll happen to United’s game against Wolves at Old Trafford on Saturday?’ My dad had promised me that we’d go to the match against the league leaders but it would surely be called off if there was too much snow.

At the top of the road, just after the telephone box on the corner of Greenbrow Road, there was a row of four neat little redbrick houses followed by a pair of semis. The trouble was there was a big Alsatian dog at one of the semis. I didn’t like Alsatians; I’d heard too many stories about them turning on people and biting them, and there were quite a lot of them on our part of the estate. I walked slowly to see if it was around, because I wasn’t going to walk past it if it was. Better to take a detour than risk being attacked by it. But no, the coast was clear. Maybe it was too cold for the dog to be out. I quickened my pace, almost breaking into a run to get past the dreaded house.

After the houses there was a stretch of grass that had a long row of three-storey flats backing on to it. I used to go

to some of them on a Saturday morning to collect the football pools bags for church. On the other side of the road open fields stretched all the way to the Newall Green pub and to Shenton's Farm about half a mile away. Beyond that, country lanes weaved their way into the Cheshire countryside. After years of living in inner-city Manchester, Wythenshawe was like living out in the country. It was the garden suburb that everybody in the slums of Hulme, Ancoats and Ardwick wanted to move to.

By February 1958 we'd been living in Wythenshawe for a couple of years. We'd moved from a terraced house on Grey Mare Lane not far from Bradford Pit, three doors away from my Gran Kearney's. Apart from the green fields and the open spaces all around us in place of the chimneys and the gasometers and the pithead winding gear I'd grown up with, the biggest change for me was the smell. We'd still get the thick pea-souper fogs out here – Wythenshawe might have been on the edge of the countryside but it wasn't far enough away from the old industrial areas with their chimneys belching out black smoke to be clear of the smog – but the air was much fresher and there were none of the foul odours of industry. Where we'd lived in Bradford was bad some days when the wind was in the wrong direction and the stink of Clayton Aniline came drifting across our back yard. On Wastdale Road, where we now lived, the smells came from Shenton's cows when he let them out on our field and they wandered on to our road, or from the fertilizer they used on the market garden at the end of the road.

In the summer holidays we'd play all day in the fields, making dens, slinging a rope over one of the top branches of a tree to make a swing, or playing football on the pitch that had been trampled down near the scout hut. The fields were carpeted with flowers, a blaze of shining yellow buttercups and bright white daisies, and kids would go home with great armfuls of flowers for their mams. But in

the winter all that open space made it feel a lot colder than it had been when we'd lived among the tightly packed terraces and factories of Bradford and Beswick.

Wearing short trousers didn't help. A year earlier I'd passed my eleven plus and got a place at St Bede's, one of Manchester's Catholic grammar schools. It was the junior seminary for the Salford Diocese, run by priests with a Monsignor as the head, and the rules were strict. In the Upper Third you were not allowed to wear long trousers. Whatever the weather you had to wear shorts, which meant chapped legs for most of the winter. How was it that the cold and the rain always seemed to get up inside your trouser legs to make your legs red raw?

On the field just opposite the flats was the pond where we used to go to catch frog spawn and fish for newts in the early summer, but that day it was frozen over. There was a jagged crack and a hole near the middle where some kid must have gone through when he'd tried sliding across it. Probably got a battering from his mother for his pains when he got home, wet and muddy and shivering.

That afternoon of Thursday, 6 February 1958 it was bitterly cold, but apart from that, it was just like any other afternoon. School had been boring as usual and we'd got some of that dreaded algebra to do for homework. We'd started doing it just after Christmas and I couldn't make head or tail of it. Neither could my mam and dad. They'd stay up for hours with me at night trying to help me with it and make sense of it, but how could you add up and multiply letters? It didn't make sense. We were in for another long night of scratching our heads. But who cared about algebra? These were exciting times. One of Manchester's football teams was winning the affection of the entire British nation with their skilful displays on the pitch; Manchester United was the team. In the second half of the 1950s they were the top team in Britain, and they

were my team and my dad's team, and his dad's team before that.

The 1950s was a time when United captured the imagination of the footballing world with the fruits of their youth policy. Every other club in the country decided they wanted to get in on the act. No longer was it necessary to live by the chequebook and the transfer system when there was so much talent to be tapped in Britain's schools. United's manager Matt Busby was the man behind it all. In the 1930s he'd played for Liverpool and Manchester City. After the war, their ground having been wrecked in a wartime bombing raid, United needed a young manager to try to rebuild the club, and the man they appointed was Matt Busby. Within two seasons he'd won the FA Cup, beating Blackpool 4–2 in a match that is regarded as one of the greatest ever Cup Finals. Four years later, in 1952, Busby's first United team won the league title after finishing runners-up in all but one of the previous five seasons.

But by this time the team was getting old and new faces and younger legs were needed. Busby dismantled his championship-winning side to give youth its head, and he was handsomely rewarded with back-to-back titles in 1956 and 1957. The average age of the side that won the championship in 1955/56 was just twenty-two – a feat that had never been achieved before. The following season United entered an exciting new competition pitching the champions of the national leagues from all over Europe against one another for the prize of the European Cup, and at their very first attempt United reached the semi-final. The young team Matt Busby had built seemed destined to dominate football for many years.

On Wednesday, 5 February 1958 the team had drawn 3–3 with Red Star in Belgrade, a result that took the Reds through to the European Cup semi-final for the second season on the run. Despite the efforts of that night and the

long journey home from Belgrade, it looked on form as if on Saturday against Wolves the Reds would close the four-point gap at the top of the table, putting them just one victory behind Billy Wright's side, and ready to increase their efforts for a third successive league title. For me there was no problem. Matt Busby's Babes were invincible. I hadn't seen them lose a match at Old Trafford since I'd started watching them two years earlier, in the 1955/56 season. I couldn't wait for Saturday to come, and I couldn't wait to read Tom Jackson's report on the Red Star match in that night's *Manchester Evening News* when I got home.

Along with Alf Clarke, his opposite number on the *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, Tom Jackson was particularly close to Matt Busby and the whole of the United team. Both of them had a column in the United programme and both were Red through and through. There was never any pretence at objective reporting, so for me their reports were great. We were an *Evening News* house so my main source of information about United was Tom Jackson. It was good and it was reliable, because it was very much in United's interest to keep the reporters on the two local papers happy and make sure they had all the latest news as well as regular access to the players.

Wastdale Road was a dead end, and our house was near the end of it. Just beyond it there was a wooden fence across the end of the road, fencing off the big market garden. Beyond that on the other side of Clay Lane was the very fine-looking redbrick chimney and boiler house of Baguley Sanatorium. My dad said it was where they burned all the bits they took out of people in operations there and at Wythenshawe Hospital, which adjoined it. Over the road from our house were the white-painted old people's bungalows and community centre of Johannesburg Gardens. In the middle was a beautifully kept lawn with a rose garden at the top of it. Our front windows were slap bang in the middle of the gardens on the other side of the

road, and my dad always said there was nowhere you could live that would have a better view than we had. We'd been lucky to get a house in Wythenshawe, and even luckier to get this particular one. My mam and dad had fancied this part of Wythenshawe, and when they were on the council waiting list they'd come out to look around here and seen this one when it was being built. As soon as they saw it they decided it was the one they wanted, and they went down to the town hall to put their name down for it.

The house itself was quite funny-looking really. For a start it was in the middle of a terrace – quite unusual for a newly built house in Wythenshawe at that time – but it also had two front doors right next to each other. The proper front door had glass in it, but then there was one next to it that we called the side door. It was in a little porch which housed the dustbin and the coal hole. It was the door we always used; the front door was for visitors. I went in through the side room, where we kept the Hoover and bikes and things like my dad's tools.

The side room led into the kitchen, at this time of the year the warmest room in the house, because as well as my mam doing the cooking we had an electric fire in there as well. One bar of the electric fire was on; two would have been a bit extravagant, a bit too expensive, and it wasn't cold enough for that. My younger sister, Joan, was sitting at the kitchen table, crayoning. My mam was cutting potatoes up into small pieces and putting them in a big pan. Good, tater ash for tea. My favourite. As she worked she sang:

> *I'll take you home again, Kathleen,*
> *Across the ocean far and wide*
> *To where the fields are fresh and green.*
> *I will take you home again, Kathleen.*

She stopped singing and looked at me. 'You look perished, David,' she said. 'The kettle's on. You stand in

front of the fire while I make you a cup of tea.' But all I wanted to know was had the paper boy been round to deliver the *News* yet. As Mam poured the tea, she asked me about school and about what homework I'd got. Had I found out how to do that algebra yet? 'But before you start on your homework,' she said, 'can you light the fire in the front room in time for your dad getting back from work? It's already set. All you need to do is put a match to it and then make sure it doesn't go out.'

I took the matches into the front room. It was freezing in there; no central heating in those days. It was so cold that there were bits of ice on the inside of the windows, and when you breathed you could see your breath freezing in front of you. I was glad my mam had already done most of the work, laying the fire. I lit the firelighters and small flames soon started to lick around them and the coal. But it was going to need a bit of a boost. I wasn't supposed to, but I got a sheet of newspaper from under one of the cushions and held it in front of the fire to make it draw. My dad used to light the fire like this. Sometimes it would catch fire, then there would be panic to get the paper into the fire before it fell on to the rug in front of it, so I was very careful, pulling it away at the first sign of scorching.

I sat there watching the flames licking around the coal, yellow and red with purple and blue in the middle, until I heard the paper boy. As soon as the *Manchester Evening News* was delivered I made a beeline for it and turned to the sports pages at the back to read Tom Jackson's report on the match in Belgrade the day before. Under the headline 'It May Be The Spaniards Next, But United Will Never Have A Tougher Fight Than This!' he began with: 'Now I'm ready to wage my last Yugoslav dinar that even though it may be the strutting Spaniards of Real Madrid who Manchester United will be set to face in the semi-final of the European Cup, they will never have a tougher fight on their hands than the one they survived here against the

challenge of Red Star. Believe me.' The report went on, 'this match that ended with the rivals gaining three goals each and United through to the last-four stage by the barest possible goal margin on aggregate had everything to send the blood running fast through the veins'.

What a great match it must have been, and what an adventure to fly what seemed to me like halfway across the world to play a football match. Some of the players themselves, it had been reported before they left for Belgrade, felt they were taking a step into the unknown by venturing beyond the Iron Curtain. I'd read one report that said right-half Eddie Colman's mum had been so concerned that she'd made up a food parcel for him containing fruit, biscuits and a packet of tea. I tried to imagine what it would be like to travel all that way to play football, or even just to watch it. For a lad who'd never been any further from Manchester than North Wales it all sounded very distant and exotic. But that was the thing about supporting United. It wasn't like any other football team. In those early days of the European Cup it was all a huge romantic adventure, and I followed every episode avidly. Tom Jackson's words really conveyed the spirit of that adventure.

> How else but by sheer, at times almost desperate, determination and drive, the deafening roars of 50,000 people ringing in their ears – and some remarkably strange decisions by the Austrian referee – could Red Star have pulled back three goals and got within sight of forcing a replay? It wasn't that the United defence cracked. It wasn't that the forwards, brilliant in the first half, faded out of the game. To my mind the pendulum swung in Red Star's favour directly they took full toll from a penalty kick which I'm sure nine out of ten referees wouldn't have given.

‘Here we go again,’ I thought. ‘That’s the trouble with this European Cup. To win it you’ve not just got to beat these clever foreigners with all their tricks, you’ve got the foreign referees to contend with as well.’ From what I’d read about them they sometimes seemed to have a different rule book from the one we had. Tom Jackson confirmed this view. ‘How ironic,’ he continued, ‘that big Bill Foulkes, who had an outstanding game at right-back, should have conceded the penalty when he made what seemed to me a perfectly legitimate tackle on Red Star centre-forward Tasic. From that moment onwards the Yugoslavs were able to come back into the game with a chance of saving the match because the United players seemed dubious about going hard into the tackle in case they might be penalised further.’

I never missed reading Tom Jackson’s reports in the *Evening News*. It was a bit like having your mate or your mate’s dad telling you about the matches you hadn’t been to. A real Red telling you what he’d seen, and what he thought of the match. What a job it must have been, getting paid to travel all over the place to watch United and to be so well in with the club that you were almost part of it. Even better than being a train driver, and that was saying something, because that was what I really wanted to do when I grew up.

Further down the page in that night’s *Evening News* there was a selection of comments from the match reports that had appeared in that morning’s national newspapers. Praise for the spirit of the United players and for their performance along with criticism of the referee were the main points made by most of the football writers who’d gone with the team to report on the match. The *Daily Mail* said that ‘Manchester United were nearly scared into a replay by Austrian referee Karl Kainer – pronounced mud in Manchester touring circles … He would have been howled off an English ground for his niggling anti-tackling phobia.’

The *Manchester Guardian* described it as ‘a battle of wits and guts and rugged tackling … the Austrian referee’s performance on the whistle assumed the proportions of a flute obbligato due to the frequency with which fouls were committed by both sides’. Other papers, the *Evening News* said, had reported on the unbearable tension of the second half when every ounce of spirit had been wrung from United’s brave hearts and the match was described as a rough, tough tale of tempers and crazy decisions.

The Yugoslavian press had seen things very differently. ‘United were unsportsmanlike and often unscrupulous,’ *Politika* reported. ‘In the second half the British felled opponents in an impermissible manner. Many times we asked ourselves where was the renowned British fair play? That is only a legend. There was not a single professional trick they did not use to bring themselves out of difficult positions and were often unscrupulous when they tackled and pushed and tripped.’ I couldn’t believe those words. To me United were everything that was good about football. Attack-minded, flowing football, hard but fair – all that was best about the British game. Clearly they played football differently in other parts of the world.

We’d got used to seeing United going forward, but in this game they’d obviously been up against it in the second half. Like all true fans, though, Tom Jackson concentrated on all that had been positive about the display. ‘The real story of this full-blooded cup tie,’ he wrote, ‘is not so much how United had their backs to the wall in the second half, but how they virtually made sure of victory by an inspired forward display in the opening half. Here was the United attack in their greatest and most polished mood of the season, with Tommy Taylor the architect in chief, and the young Bobby Charlton – the best forward on the field – and Dennis Viollet the goal-snatching spearheads.’

And the defence? It was good to read in the report that they’d played brilliantly as well. ‘Those three goals against

might suggest they panicked under the weight of Red Star's heavy pressure. Not a bit of it. Gregg, Foulkes, Mark Jones and Roger Byrne never lost their heads in matching the Yugoslav forwards, who put much more bite into their play than they did in the first leg at Old Trafford. Foulkes takes top marks because he was the coolest and surest United defender all through the game.' It was good to see Bill Foulkes getting star billing. It was usually Duncan Edwards, Roger Byrne, little Eddie Colman or one of the forwards who took the plaudits. Foulkes was as hard and solid and dependable as you'd expect of a former coal-miner, but he'd faced competition for the right-back spot and had only recently re-established himself in the team after a spell of being kept out by Ian Greaves.

Clearly it had been a good all-round team performance, another job well done in Europe. Tom Jackson summarized his report with the words, 'That's the story at Belgrade – a battle which will be long remembered in this European Cup which has produced so many tense and dramatic struggles for United.'

The journalists who covered United's matches were close to the team. They flew with them to their European away matches and stayed with the team party. None were closer than Tom Jackson and Alf Clarke, and alongside his piece in the *Evening News* was Jackson's interview with the captain Roger Byrne in which he gave his impressions of the match. 'Fouls galore, but not dirty' was his summary.

> But I am confident that the way we played in Belgrade, especially in the first half, we are capable of giving the best teams left in the Cup a very good run for their money. All the United players set themselves out to win the match with Red Star. I'm sure we would have done so had not our luck been out as far as the referee was concerned, especially when he gave that penalty against us. I'm told there