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Opening extract from

The Number 7 Shirt

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Published by

Barrington Stoke Ltd

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To the Flowers of Manchester, Munich ’58

First published in 2008 in Great Britain by
Barrington Stoke Ltd
18 Walker Street, Edinburgh, EH3 7LP

www.barringtonstoke.co.uk

This edition first published 2012

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ISBN: 978-1-78112-133-7

Printed in China by Leo

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Chapter 1
Jimmy and George

I'm Jimmy Beech. I want to be a footballer. This is my story.

Let me show you my scrap-book. It's got the reports and photos from all my matches. See that photo on the front page? North Park Juniors was my first team. I was playing for them when the scout came from Manchester United. That's me in the number seven shirt.



Don't laugh. I know the haircut is a bit odd. But I was only nine when it was taken. Mum took me to get my hair cut. I'm fourteen now. I get my own hair cut these days.

I scored four times the day the scout came. His name was Mark. We all knew who he was. Everyone wanted to do well. This was Manchester United. Clubs don't come bigger than that.

Man U's always been part of my life. For as long as I can remember. My dad's a fan. So's my mum. Even my sister loves Man U and she's weird. She's a Goth and she looks like a vampire.

There's posters of all the Man U players all over my room. I've even got the ones from the old days. My favourite players are the ones who wore the number seven shirt for United – Georgie Best, Bryan Robson, Eric Cantona, David Beckham, Cristiano Ronaldo. They're my heroes.

You'll think this is stupid, but I talk to them. I'll pretend I can really see them. It's as if they're standing right in front of me. Sometimes it feels as if they're talking back to me. I ask them to give me advice, most of all when things aren't going well.

Things didn't start too well the day Mark came to see me play for the first time. Mark's the scout for Man U – remember? I was so excited I could hardly move. My legs felt like jelly. Every time I got the ball it ran away from me. Every time I tried to shoot it got stuck under my feet and I almost tripped over. Even when I did get a shot on target, it was really soft. It just rolled into the keeper's hands.

I started to lose my temper. I used to do that when things were going badly. I got angry with myself. Then I started to get angry with everyone else. I saw Dad shake his head. If I carried on like this, our coach would take me off.



I had to do something. So, like I just said I pretended one of those old Man U players was right there next to me. So I talked to Georgie. That's Georgie Best.



George told me to forget about the scout. He told me to show what I could do.

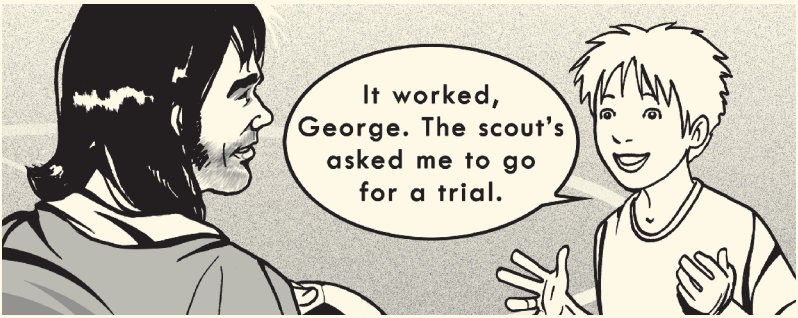
The next time I got the ball, I did what he said. I kept my eye on the ball. I didn't look at Mark. I didn't look at Dad. My mind was on the game and nothing else. I weaved this way. I weaved that way. I made space for myself. When I saw the goal between two defenders, I shot. The ball hit the net. Sweet!

I scored three more times after that. The best one was when my best mate Carl rolled



the ball into the box. I leaned forward and kept my head down. Then I struck the ball with the inside of my foot. It flew past the keeper like a bullet and the net rippled.

Mark went over to Dad at the end of the match. He asked if I wanted to go for a trial.



George Best
The Belfast Boy

⚽ Pele said that George was the greatest footballer in the world. Maradona also thought he was one of the world's greats.

⚽ George was born on May 22nd, 1946 in East Belfast.

⚽ When Bob Bishop, the Manchester United scout in Belfast, saw George he sent the United manager Matt Busby a telegram. It said: "I've found you a genius."

⚽ In six seasons George Best scored 115 goals in 290 games. United won the Championship twice.



⚽ When Man U beat Benfica of Portugal 5–1 away from home in the European Cup, George came back wearing a sombrero hat. The newspapers called him 'El Beatle'. 'El' means 'the' in Spanish and they called him 'El Beatle' because now he was as great as the Beatles, the world's most famous pop group.

⚽ In 1968 Manchester United beat Benfica 4–1 again. George scored one of the goals.

⚽ The same year he was voted European Player of the year.

⚽ Sadly, George started to drink heavily and his career at United ended when he was only 26.

⚽ George said of himself, “When I’m gone people will forget all the rubbish and all they’ll remember will be the football. That’ll do for me.”