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# **Happy 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday**

## **Sir Bobby Charlton**

**A 1000 – word article**

**By**

**Hannah Lawrence**

Some may say the word 'legend' is overused and misused in the modern era of football, but if there is one man who deserves the title and most definitely is everything the word signifies and more, then it is Sir Bobby Charlton. Turning 80 years old today, the gentleman, the wonderful footballer he was, the great ambassador for football he is, and of course, now a Manchester United fan, we pay tribute to one of football's iconic and greatest players who merits every honour and accolade awarded to him on this special occasion. Have a wonderful Birthday Bobby; world football, England and Manchester United *legend*...

Ever present at United home games alongside his wife Nora, Sir Bobby loves Manchester United and the club and the fans love him. His football journey and story is quite incredible as was his talent on the pitch, from Northumberland to Manchester, the Munich tragedy to European champion and World Cup glory, this extraordinary man has experienced the highs and lows of life and football yet he has stayed a humble gentleman who, when all is said and done, just wanted to play football - and play football he did like no other.

Playing 758 first team matches for Manchester United during a twenty year stay with the club, he was The Red Devil's all time top scorer with 249 goals until Wayne Rooney recently overtook him at the top of the standings. It was an incredible feat, not only did Charlton score so many goals as a midfield player, but to play on muddy rough pitches, nothing like the tended carpet like grounds today's footballers are used to, and with a heavy tough football, makes his wonderous goal tally even more outstanding. But way before record goal totals and success on the pitch, it was Bobby's headmaster, a Mr Hamilton, who handed his star pupil and school team player his first home-made football jersey and who made a young Bobby his captain. It was the start of something special and a long, wonderful journey and career through football.

As a boy, following and regularly reading up on the latest news coming out of Old Trafford, Charlton said 'I felt a surge of excitement' when he read of the Manchester United revolution and the talented youngsters breaking into the first team. Incredibly, Bobby questioned himself as to if he could really be a part of the great Busby team and if he could play alongside such phenomenon's like Duncan Edwards. However, he soon realised it was his destiny to play for United and it was a challenge he was hungry to accept. So, as if written in the stars, a man who would symbolise everything Manchester United are about signed for Sir Matt Busby on June 1<sup>st</sup> 1953. Despite a sprained ankle and desperate to make his Man United debut, Bobby told Busby he was fit and his Old Trafford bow came against Charlton Athletic

League title glory and the European cup were the targets for Charlton and the Busby babes. The first of which was won at the end of the 1956/57 season, Bobby scoring 10 goals to help his team finish top. Now a regular in the first United eleven, his elegant style of play, attacking from midfield and an array of super goals was fast making Bobby Charlton an Old Trafford favourite. On the back of his title win, Charlton now had the chance to put his talents to the test against Europe's best teams. It was an exciting challenge for the shy, unassuming man from the North East but it would end in tragedy and set Charlton with a whole new challenge – the biggest of his life.

To lose some of your closest friends and young fellow team mates in an air disaster is devastating beyond words, but sadly Bobby Charlton endured this tragedy after a European match in which the aeroplane carrying the United players and staff crashed after stopping to refuel in Munich. Still hurt by the terrible event to this day, Bobby carried on the United fight only weeks after the accident, keeping some hope alive for everyone associated with the Old

Trafford club. He was grieving but carried the load of bitter sadness and the will to carry on for his perished team mates quite magnificently and admirably.

Two months after Munich, Charlton earned his first England cap, while at United the rebuilding process began. Bobby was central to Busby creating a team, after losing his beloved babes, that could challenge again. Five years after Bobby's shattering day in Munich, he lifted the FA Cup, with the league championship following two years later. Of course, winning the World Cup with England could be perceived as the pinnacle of Charlton's achievements in football, but there was another trophy he was desperate to get his hands on for himself, his club and, for his team mates who lost their lives in Munich – ten years after that tragic event, Bobby Charlton would captain United to one of the most significant and greatest moments in his career, winning the European Cup.

Two goals from Charlton, a 4-1 victory over Benfica and United were European Champions, but for Bobby it was also a win dedicated to his friends who died ten years earlier.

Embracing Sir Matt Busby, or 'the old man' as Bobby would affectionately refer to his boss as, at the final whistle, signified the emotion between them and how much winning the European cup meant. It had been a long hard ten years for Charlton but he had come through it quite beautifully, he will never forget that fateful day on that snowy runway, the emotion still present to this day when talking of his lost friends.

Hanging up his Old Trafford boots in 1973, Bobby Charlton will be forever installed in the club's hall of fame and as one of their greatest players. He really is 'Mr United', holding such affection for the club and never missing a match, he became a director at Old Trafford in 1984. A stand named after him at Old Trafford, an England training pitch unveiled in his

name, the accolades keep coming, and rightly so for this gentleman, figurehead, iconic legend, there is no better ambassador and role model in the game, there was no better player.

Happy 80th Birthday Sir Bobby Charlton.