

Book of dreams

Thanks to devoted Red Nick Sharples, Duncan Edwards' long-lost coaching manual is available again – and it's a must-have read

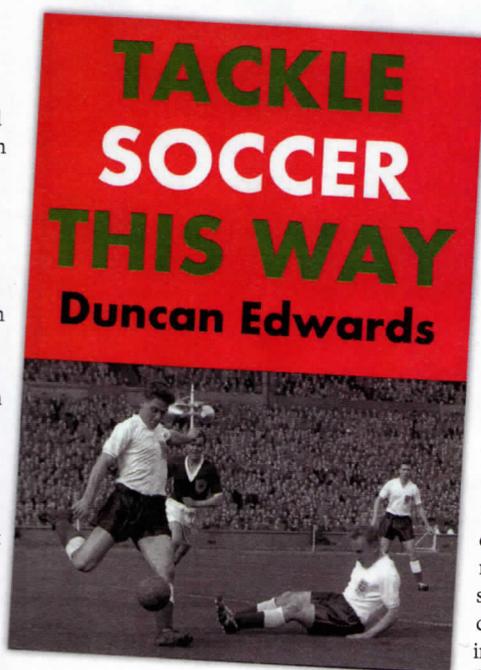
The chasing of seemingly lost causes – that desire to have a go in the face of the odds – isn't just confined to those who play in red shirts. Take the case of United fan Nick Sharples, whose labour of love has helped us rediscover the footballing ethos of Duncan Edwards.

Though Edwards left a treasure trove of memories, via recollections from his peers and those lucky enough to have seen him in the flesh, grainy black-and-white footage is the closest modern Reds have ever got to the man himself. Until now, that is.

Sharples had long been curious about *Tackle Soccer This Way*, the coaching book Edwards had finished just days before the Munich crash that claimed his life. The manuscript was printed in June of that fateful 1958, a decision apparently taken with no small amount of deliberation by publishers Stanley Paul, sensitive to the notion that it might seem ghoulish to go ahead.

Having tracked down a pristine copy of the book on eBay but found the price prohibitive, Sharples chanced across a dog-eared edition with a missing cover for a more manageable £15. And he was bowled over with the force of a trademark Edwards challenge.

"It was just a delight to read," he enthuses. "The clarity of thought was what really struck me. Obviously, there are bits that aren't relevant anymore – like shoulder-barging the goalie [something Edwards was no fan of, incidentally, even before the 1957 FA



Cup final – 'but don't imagine that I believe that goalkeepers should be treated as the Little Lord Fauntleroy of the game']. Comments about the laces on the ball are also not too useful, but so much of it would still work if you gave it to a little lad starting out."

Keen that others should be able to share this forgotten slice of history, Sharples embarked on some detective work over ownership of copyright and photographs. As a result of his 'toing and froing', and encouragement from publishers Random House, who now owned the rights, he has lovingly organised a reproduction of the book,

albeit with a new cover image, in an initial run of 250 copies. More eagle-eyed, road-hardened Reds may have spotted him outside Craven Cottage the week before Christmas trying to shift a few.

"I was bringing some for mates I was meeting at the game who didn't trust the post," he laughs.

"I brought a bag to try to sell a few extra – but swiftly discovered I'm no Del Boy, that's for sure!"

Sharples is not exaggerating about the book being a delight, either. It's a charming and remarkable read, a light brightly shone into a dim and dusty corner. It's no leap of imagination to equate the footage of Edwards with the words here, that boyish

enthusiasm, exuberance and desire to learn fair leaps off every page.

Neither is it lacking in autobiographical anecdotes which paint a picture of a thoughtful young man. Perhaps the most impressive thing of all is that Edwards wrote it himself. Though Sharples suggests the echoes of Jimmy Murphy's coaching and, naturally, the ethos of Matt Busby stud the pages, he has unearthed no evidence to suggest he had any help.

All the more reason, then, to lament his passing at such a tender age, but no less to rejoice in everything for which he stood. "It just represents all that's best about Manchester United," Sharples concludes. And 52 years after his death, Edwards would surely have been proud of that tribute.

■ *Tackle Soccer This Way* is published by New Kelmescott Press and costs £10. Copies of the book can be ordered via website www.tstw.co.uk (for copyright reasons, the book is not available in China, Canada or the United States).

Duncan Edwards, in his own words

On playing

"On the field, you have one duty only and that is to your team. You, as an essential part of it, are bearing a heavy load of responsibility and it is your job to see that you accept it wholeheartedly."

"Once you don't want to play, once you only go through the motions of a game regarding it as a labour, then football and you are at the parting of the ways. In the end, everything will come right, for football is a game that rewards those who show courage."

On support

"If ever you stand on the terraces on a Saturday afternoon and your favourite player balloons the ball higher than anybody else has done in the match, weep for him..."

"Don't cheer, like those others around you. Your hero has just plunged into the depths of the game. Above all, however the game is going for your side – enjoy your football."

On his team-mates

"Boys in a football team are automatically bound by a strong bond of friendship. All the school teams I ever played in were bubbling over with it. Yet the peculiar thing is that not until I came to Manchester United, and saw it among men, did I realise what a great factor it was in this football business."

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The late, great Duncan Edwards, whose 1958 soccer skills book has been reissued

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