

## **George Best**

December 2005

Honestly, I never heard of George Best - my provincial sports horizon, no doubt - until I read about his funeral and his own view of his life. Upwards of a 100,000 people attended his state funeral in Belfast - this for a sports icon who "retired" from football more than 20 years ago and died an alcoholic, bankrupt and after two failed marriages. In his own words George says that he spent his millions on booze, birds, and fast cars, and the balance he squandered.

I think about all the homeless men in Sacramento I have known (and respected) who died as alcoholics and penniless and who were buried in an unmarked pauper's grave with no one attending their funeral except me and a couple of others I brought with me. Oh, how different it would have been had they been able to hit homeruns or throw touchdowns or dunked the ball. Hundreds, if not thousands, would have stood by me at the gravesite, extolling the deceased.

I think of my own father - and perhaps your father, too - who worked long lives to provide for the future of their children, were faithful husbands, and whose word was their bond, and are now dead, with only a handful of family members and some older relatives in attendance at their funeral. Oh, how different the public perception might have been had they been sports icons of one sort or another.

Life is not fair, funerals are not fair, and media life after death is not fair. There will be no sports hall of fame awaiting those indigents who shivered to death on the streets of Sacramento nor will there be any sports media redemption for these unfortunates - only the harsh judgment that they "made bad choices." Yes, I know, the same kinds of bad choices that George Best made - but THAT'S different, I'm told.