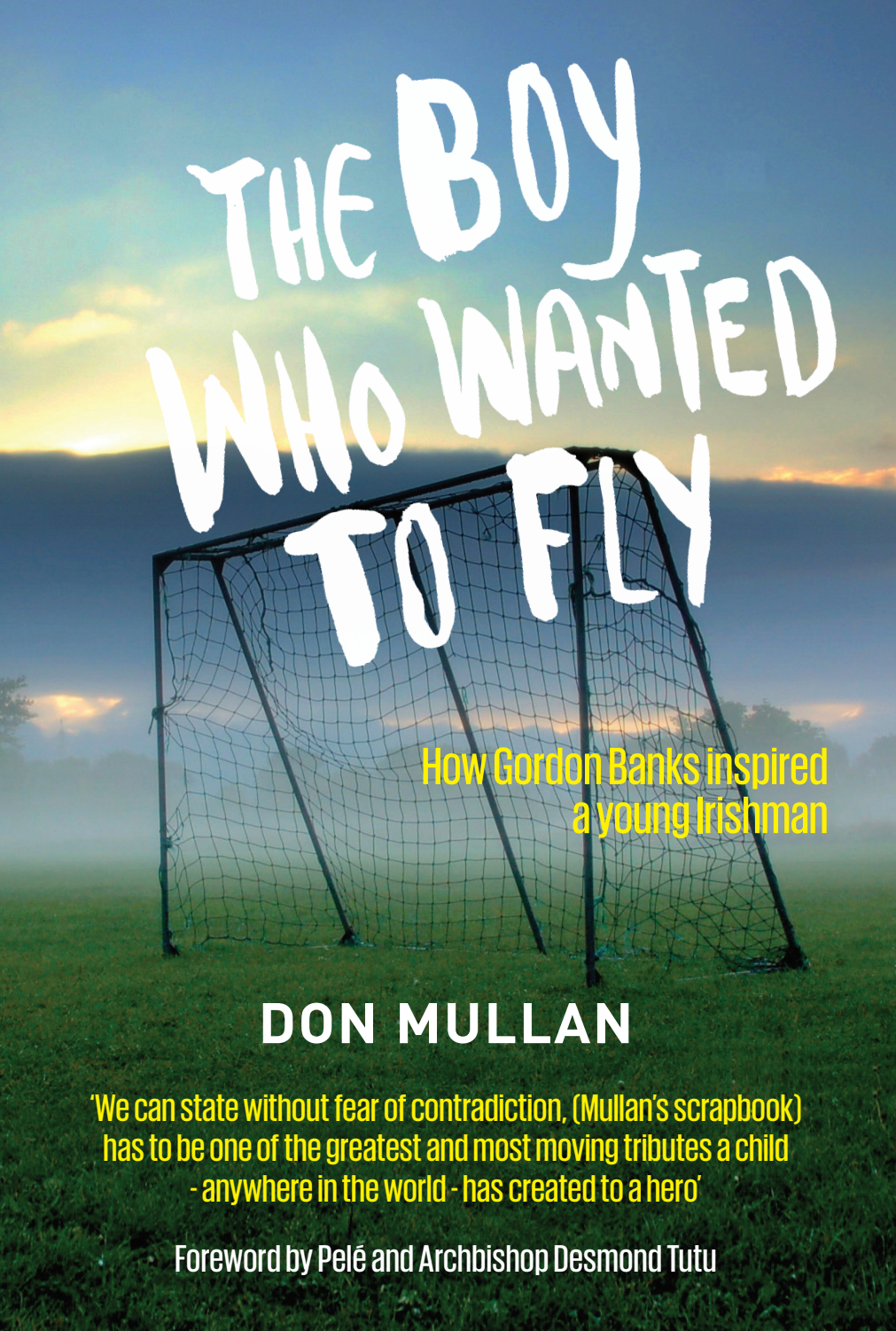
THE BOY WHO WANTED TO FLY
How Gordon Banks inspired a young Irishman
DON MULLAN
'We can state without fear of contradiction, (Mullan's scrapbook) has to be one of the greatest and most moving tributes a child - anywhere in the world - has created to a hero'
Foreword by Pelé and Archbishop Desmond Tutu

The Boy Who Wanted to Fly

Don Mullan

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Don Mullan

Don Mullan was born in Derry in 1956. As a schoolboy, his boyhood hero was the great England goalkeeper, Gordon Banks.

Mullan witnessed Bloody Sunday at the age of fifteen. His involvement with the Northern Ireland Civil Rights movement led to work on civil and human rights issues around the world. In 1980, he became Director of AFrI (Action From Ireland), a Dublin-based justice, peace and human rights organisation. Later, he worked as a volunteer in Brazil, and spent two years with Concern Worldwide.

In 1993 Mullan learnt that he is dyslexic but pursued a career as writer and investigative journalist. His book *Eyewitness Bloody Sunday* was a catalyst for re-opening the public inquiry in 1998, and inspired the award-winning movie, *Bloody Sunday*. In 2002, he received the 'Defenders of Human Dignity Award' from the International League for Human Rights at the United Nations.

Mullan is currently creating a number of projects related to the theme of Sport for Development and Peace. This includes the creation of a Flanders Peace Field, inspired by the remarkable 1914 Christmas Truce on the Western Front during which German and British soldiers played a game of football.

Also by the Author

Eyewitness Bloody Sunday – The Truth (Wolfhound Press, 1997, Roberts Rinehart Publishers Inc, USA 1997; 2nd Ed. Merlin Books, 2002)

The Dublin and Monaghan Bombings – The Truth, The Questions and the Victims' Stories (Wolfhound Press, 2000)

A Gift of Roses (Wolfhound Press, 2001)

Contacted with co-author Audrey Healy (Mercier Press, 2005)

Speaking Truth to Power: The Donal De Roiste Affair (Currach Books, 2006)

The 'Little Book' Series (Columba Press, Dublin): 12 titles to-date including:
A Little Book of St. Francis of Assisi (2002)
A Little Book of Mother Teresa of Calcutta (2003)
A Little Book of St. Patrick (2004)

To
The Memory of My Father
and
John ('Our Jack') Banks
and to
Todd Allen, an American friend, whose support, generosity and trust made it possible for us to launch the Gordon Banks Monument Project.

Foreword

By Pelé and Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Gordon Banks and Don Mullan were the reason we met for the first time in 2008 in England.

Banks, one of the greatest goalkeepers in the history of football, and Mullan, who, as an Irish boy, found inspiration and hope in his English hero.

Don Mullan's boyhood memoir is a heart-warming and moving story. The first ten years of his life are filled with a great deal of confusion and doubt because of undiagnosed dyslexia that many adults, including teachers, believed was due to a low IQ.

The gift of life, however, is laced with moments of serendipity that have the ability to change our course in profound and dynamic ways. And that's what happened the day Don saw Gordon Banks play for England in the 1966 World Cup Final.

Saturday 30 July, 1966 was not only a momentous day for the English and their eleven heroes who lifted the Jules Rimet trophy at Wembley. Unexpectedly, it also proved to be for a

young Irish boy living in a working class area of Northern Ireland that was soon to be plunged into turbulence and war. It was as though a door opened in his mind, allowing fresh air and light to dispel the fog of confusion and doubt that had nestled there from his first day at school. Suddenly the Irish boy had a hero – an English hero – who inspired him to excel and who motivated him to become a respected schoolboy goalkeeper.

Like millions of boys around the globe, Don's ambition was to become a professional footballer like Banks and, one day, play for his country. And, like millions of such boys, that never happened for various reasons. But the friendships he made and the discipline he learned from the game ultimately helped to form Don's character and make him a better person. And that is the greatest result sport can hope to achieve. At all levels, sport should not be about winning at any cost. Its primary goal should be about helping young people to become better, more healthy and caring citizens. That goal is far more important than winning medals, even World Cup and Olympic medals.

And, thankfully, that's what sport did for Don Mullan.

The outbreak of the Northern Ireland 'Troubles' in 1968 posed new challenges to Don's development as a teenager. He was a close witness to many seminal events in the Northern Ireland conflict, including, in 1972, the tragedy of Bloody Sunday. That event alone was to fuel national bitterness and hatred for more than a quarter of a century.

Yet Don credits a meeting with Gordon Banks, just 18 months earlier, as a calming influence that helped him choose the way of peace over violence.

Gordon Banks, of course, was oblivious to all of this until

an evening in March 2005 when the boy he met in 1970 met him again as an adult. Don brought with him his treasured boyhood scrapbook that we ourselves have had the joy of seeing and signing. The word 'scrapbook' diminishes what it actually is. It is a giant 500-page wallpaper book into which a young dyslexic boy lovingly gathered every picture and piece of written information he could find on his hero. We can state without fear of contradiction, it has to be one of the greatest and most moving tributes a child – anywhere in the world – has created to a hero. The time, the dedication, the focus, determination and absolute love that went into every page is evident with each turning.

And it was that love, expressed as gratitude, that motivated the boy to create a statue to Gordon Banks in 2008, which we were to have the honour of unveiling.

We both travelled across the globe to be part of a wonderful day of celebration that was as much about the ten-year-old boy as it was about his English football hero.

And Don Mullan's choice of a hero was well made. Gordon Banks is not just a sporting legend; he is first and foremost a generous, caring and humble human being with a beautiful family. It was, indeed, our great privilege to unveil a monument that will immortalise his memory for generations to come.

We are reminded of Antoine de Saint-Exupòry's *The Little Prince* and the core nugget of wisdom his novel contains:

… it is only with the heart that one can see rightly, what is essential is invisible to the eye.

This is a book to be encountered by the heart.

We hope the readers of this boyhood memoir find the same joy and inspiration we too found in it. For sport is not just about what happens on the field of play. It is also what happens beyond and through it. And an integral part of all sport is its fans.

This book is written by a fan who has retained a lifelong love for sport and a growing realisation of its positive role in his journey from schoolboy goalkeeper to a global citizen with friends in Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas. That realisation is primarily focused on his boyhood hero – and now friend – Gordon Banks. This book is written with gratitude for all that Gordon Banks inspired within him as a boy and a youth, often in difficult and challenging circumstances. And the day we all met in Stoke-on-Trent in 2008 for the unveiling of the first-phase of a monument to Gordon Banks, was the culmination of the Irish boy's gratitude for his English hero. It is a project not yet completed, as Don describes in his postscript. But we are certain that many people of goodwill and generosity, who see the beauty of this story with their hearts, will help *The Boy Who Wanted To Fly* complete his dream.

Given the history of Ireland and England, this is a story and a friendship that all sport, and football in particular, should celebrate. Enjoy!

+ Desmond M Tutu
Archbishop Emeritus
South Africa

Edson Arantes do Nascimento
Pelé
Brazil

Foreword by Gabriel Byrne

From the original edition

1970. It is a moment made immortal. A confluence of instinct, skill, luck, daring. A frozen moment of poetry, Gordon Banks in mid-air, impossibly flicking that perfect header from Pelé over the bar – the greatest save he'd ever seen, said the Brazilian. And in a crowded pub in Dublin, as we watched on a black and white Bush TV, breath stilled, we knew we'd never forget…

This story is about Gordon Banks and another hero – Don Mullan's working class father, a warehouseman, who could never have known the powerful influence the meeting he arranged with Banksy would have on his awestruck dyslexic youngest son. Whether we believe in destiny or not, that fateful moment changed a boy forever, inspiring him – with hope and imagination. Don's work as an investigative journalist and humanitarian stands in its own way as a guiding light and inspiration for those who would aspire to a better world.

Gabriel Byrne,
New York , March 2006

1

My Father

After the 1966 World Cup Final – the first live game of soccer I watched on TV – Gordon Banks became my hero and the sole subject of my first book, a giant 500-page scrapbook that I cherish to this day. In 1970, two months after 'That Save' against Pelé in Mexico, Gordon Banks met my father and together they brought magic into my life.

My father died on 12 August 1987, aged sixty-nine. Our family had been keeping vigil with him for several days at Altnagelvin Hospital, Derry. At around 11 o'clock that morning I had just relieved my mother and eldest sister, Moya, and was sitting alone with him in a small, single room. He was drifting in and out of consciousness, occasionally muttering to himself.

At one point I thought I heard him say, "I let yous down." (Yous being a Derry colloquialism that pluralized the word 'you' to include his wife and five children.)

I was shocked and puzzled by the statement and I asked him to repeat it. When he did, I asked him what he meant.

"I never had a good job or home for your mother or yous."

My father was a good man. He had, like many of his generation, only an elementary education. Despite this, I seldom recall him being unemployed and, if he was, he was always busy haggling for work. He spent most of his working life as a labourer and storekeeper. In later years he served alongside his younger brother Paul, an electrician, as a sparks mate and finally worked in my brother Liam's 'Automotive Supplies' shop. He had worked hard to ensure we were never hungry and without.

Our home, a terraced house at 41 Leenan Gardens on the sprawling Creggan Estate, Derry, was generally a happy and loving abode. He and my mother, believing that a trade or a good education would provide their children with the opportunity to escape the poverty trap, made many sacrifices so that we might advance.

On hearing his comments, I immediately left his bedside and went to my four siblings gathered outside: Moya, Liam, Cathal and Deirdre. I told them what he had just uttered. We gathered around his bed and, one by one, affirmed our old man, thanking him for all that he was – and that he meant to us.

Far from being a failure, he was a dedicated father and, like many 'ordinary' working class folk, he was unassuming and humble. We are proud to be his offspring.

To this day I thank God I heard those lamentable words uttered with less than half a day of his life remaining. It would indeed have been a tragedy if my father had died feeling he had failed us; simply because we didn't own our family home or because he didn't have a 'respectable' blue-collar job.

A few days earlier, I had sat through the night with him

in that same room. He awoke during that long hour when the earth seems to have stopped rotating. We began to reminisce. I asked what his happiest memory of me was. I was surprised when he told me it was the night he took me to the local cinema to see *The Magnificent Seven*. I remembered that night vividly, a boy of about six, sitting beside him in the now demolished City Cinema, William Street, my eyes agog at this new wonderland of giant Technicolor cowboy heroes and villains. He recalled my innocent excitement and how I appeared to live every moment.

Then, in this beautiful intimate moment that working-class fathers and sons seldom have, he asked me what mine was of him. There were many to choose from. But one outshone all others.

"The day you brought me to meet Gordon Banks." I told him.

"Yes," he replied, a big smile dawning on his memory of it. "That was a great day. He was a very nice young man. Wasn't he?"

"He sure was," I replied. "He was my boyhood hero."

"I know!" he responded. "Wasn't he amazing? That man could fly. If anyone deserved to meet him, it was you."

I walked to the window to hide my tears. "That man could fly!" What an apt and inspiring description, I thought. And because of Gordon Banks, I was the boy who wanted to fly.

Dawn was breaking over the patchwork quilt of fields and hedgerows that blanketed the hushed foothills of the Sperrin Mountains.

We had made it through another long night.

2

How it all began: The 1966 World Cup

I could never have had a better sporting idol than Gordon Banks. As a boy I modelled my game on him, even the unique way he tossed the ball from his hands and volleyed it with great accuracy into the opposition half.

I come from a working class background in what was one of Northern Ireland's most troubled areas, the Creggan Estate, Derry. Unknown then to myself and my parents was the fact that I am dyslexic, something I discovered much later in 1994, at the age of thirty-eight. My memories of a dyslexic childhood are filled with feelings of low self-esteem, crippling self-doubt and poor co-ordination.

The 1966 England World Cup tournament was televised, thus allowing many youngsters to see in action great soccer stars like England's Jimmy Greaves and Bobby Moore, Portugal's Eusebio and Brazil's Pelé. Wanting to imitate them after each game we'd gather by a low wall beside the field that lay between Leenan and Melmore Gardens. The two best players would pick their teams in descending order

of perceived skills. The two boys left sitting on the wall had only one option: goalkeeper. And that's how it all began.

I was ten-years-old. The World Cup Final at Wembley between England and West Germany was on Saturday 30 July 1966. It was the first full game of live soccer I saw on television and I can remember exactly where: at my Uncle Eddie and Auntie Rosaleen's home in the Creggan Estate. I watched it with my cousins Damien and Gerard McLaughlin on their black and white television set. That was the day Gordon Banks began to capture my imagination.

It was a game full of drama and suspense – and controversy. West Germany silenced England's supporters by punishing an early and uncharacteristic defensive error by Ray Wilson, who, off balance, headed a cross to the feet of Helmut Haller. From 15 yards the German midfielder sneaked the ball past Gordon Banks.

BBC commentator, Kenneth Wolstenholm, kept hopes alive with the words, "This is the fourth World Cup Final I've seen and the team that scored first – lost!" Then the stadium was ecstatic six minutes later when Geoff Hurst scored the first of his historic Cup Final hat-trick when he headed a Bobby Moore free kick past the German keeper Hans Tilkowski.

Before the end of the first half Banks pulled off three fine saves. The first was in the 27th minute when Uwe Seller pushed a long ball through the middle to Haller. Spotting the danger Banks was immediately off his line and smothered the ball at his feet. In the 38th minute, Siegfried Held sent in a low driven corner kick which, despite being sandwiched by Bobby Moore and Nobby Stiles on the near edge of the six yard box, Lothar Emmerich directed out to

Wolfgang Overath, who was positioned where the semi-circle meets the 18-yard box. His low powerful volley brought out a spectacular reflex parry from Banks. The ball fell for Emmerich who, under pressure from Martin Peters and George Cohen, managed only to stab the ball goal-wards and Banks comfortably gathered. Wolstenholm exclaimed, "Well done Gordon Banks – the hero of England!" I was captivated.

In the 42nd minute Uwe Seller carried the ball from the halfway line and, 22 yards out, struck a perfect shot that was sailing towards the top left-hand corner of goal before Banks took flight to tip it over the bar.

Through the second half Banks dealt with everything that came his way. His timing on two high punches was superb. The players, with the apparent exception of Alan Ball, began to tire on the Wembley turf, heavy after two days of rain as divots peppered the pitch.

England was coping better and it was Tilkowski who had to make some important saves as the host nation pressed for a winner. Bobby Moore was marshalling his troops and exhorting everyone to keep focused and calm. With twelve minutes to go, Martin Peter's blasted England into the lead from a Geoff Hurst rebound. Gordon Banks ran the length of Wembley to congratulate him. That was the first time Germany had conceded two goals in a World Cup match.

With eight minutes to go Bobby Moore passed the ball back to Ray Wilson, who started a chain reaction back to Jack Charlton and Banks. The fans booed and whistled the time-wasting, then began to chant, "We want three!"

With only a minute to go and the whole of England set to celebrate the ultimate achievement in the game it had

invented, West Germany pulled off a Houdini escape from a free-kick awarded, unfairly, against big Jack Charlton. Lothar Emmerich sent the ball towards the right edge of the England six-yard box, which Cohen only managed to half-stop. The West German defender, Wolfgang Weber, raced onto a Siegfried Held pass and thundered the ball just inside the left upright.

English players, including Banks, protested, claiming that Karl-Heinz Schnellinger had handled the ball on its way to Held, but Swiss referee Gottfried Dienst brushed aside their remonstrations, and a few seconds later the final was to go into extra time. Banks famously likened the West German equaliser to "… being pushed off Everest with just a stride to go to the top."

Then most controversial goal of the game and, unquestionably, in World Cup history – Geoff Hurst's second goal, and England's third, ten minutes into extra time. Alan Ball sent in a cross from the right wing, which Hurst thundered against the underside of the German crossbar. The ball lunged earthwards and to this day the awarded goal is disputed. Did it cross the line or not? Referee Dienst, after consulting his Russian linesman, Tofik Bakhramov decided. It was a goal! The score: 3-2.

Confusion reigned in the dying minute as some England fans began to invade the pitch. Wolstenholm's commentary told it all: "And here comes Hurst, he's got... [seeing the invading fans] ... some people are on the pitch, they think it's all over. [Hurst shoots – and scores his hat-trick] … It is now! And it's four"!

Everest was conquered and England collected the Jules Rimet trophy from the Royal Box.

In an interview in Dortmund for this book, the 1966 West German goalkeeper, Hans Tilkowski, was adamant that the Swiss referee and Russian linesman had robbed his team. During the interview I was explaining 'hat-trick' to my German-English translator, Annegret Kopp, as she was unfamiliar with the term. When I said Geoff Hurst was the first and only player to have scored three goals in a World Cup Final, Tilkowski firmly corrected me, "No! One goal." He raised his right index finger to emphasise the point and then proceed to laugh heartily.

Tilkowski said that he touched Geoff Hurst's shot on its way to the underside of the crossbar. "I then saw it bounce on the goal line and I am certain it never crossed the line!" He was critical of the Russian linesman, sketching for me the acute angle the linesman was standing at – thus making it impossible to see clearly. "To make a sound determination," Tilkowski argued, "the linesman would have had to be standing on the back line, at the corner post. He wasn't!"

He also said there was confusion at the end of the game when the referee blew his whistle, causing fans to invade the pitch. He says that the referee should have stopped the game at that moment to remove the fans but he didn't, and it was then that Hurst scored his third.

I liked Hans Tilkowski. He came across as a kind and caring man. He told me that the style of goalkeeping he admired most was best found in Lev Yashin, Bert Trautmann and Gordon Banks. He told me he remains very friendly with Banks and many of the 1966 England team. He now works as a goodwill ambassador for a humanitarian organisation and spends much of his time helping charities dealing with cystic fibrosis, multiple

sclerosis and children suffering from cancer.

"Naturally, the 1966 World Cup Final was a disappointment to me personally," he told me, "but it was only a game. It is more important that as footballers we try to use our influence to create a better world. I hope that during the 40th anniversary, the England and German teams of 1966 are brought together to celebrate friendship and sportsmanship as an example of the kind of values the game of soccer and the world needs today."

With the final whistle deserted English streets thronged with jubilant fans and a national carnival ensued. The eleven English heroes were destined for immortality in the eyes of the people.

Response to their victory was more subdued back in Derry, but I don't remember resentment. My older cousin Damien, a football enthusiast, was very pleased. I knew that something special had just happened for the English. Soon after, when I started my Gordon Banks scrapbook, I sellotaped into its opening pages an account of England's victorious 1966 campaign, neatly copied in my 10-year-old handwriting.

Neither history nor politics impinged on me then. I wore a yellow goalkeeper's jersey and found a crest with three lions, which my mother sewed on. Thus, when I turned out for my street soccer team, I was the England goalkeeper!

I practised, practised, practised. My game began to improve and eventually the boys in the street realised that a good goalkeeper was equal to a good striker. From being a very timid child, through goalkeeping, I discovered a talent and an identity.