

BEING THE BEST

Lisa Ramsden talks to the Newcastle man with an uncanny resemblance to one of the world's greatest ever footballers

COULD you imagine enjoying a drink in the company of David Beckham, Mick Hucknall, Wayne Rooney, Bradley Wiggins, Peter Kay, Liam and Noel Gallagher AND Gary Barlow?

Well, that's exactly where one Newcastle man recently found himself.

For Mark O'Hare is the UK's only George Best lookalike and earlier this month he and a host of other doppelgangers met up in Manchester for a Virgin Media PR stunt.

The 29-year-old has had a hectic last six months.

Since winning a competition last November, where he was crowned the footballing legend's lookalike, Mark has even enjoyed socialising with George's son, Callum, in addition to forging ties with other members of the Best family, including the icon's brother Ian.

Mark, who works as a concierge at the Slieve Donard Hotel, even admits to having a passion for United – albeit Dundee United.

And he hopes that he will be able to work in the future with the George Best Foundation, set up in the wake of the star's death.

It has been an incredible few years for Mark, years which have all been inextricably linked to the footballing legend.

Firstly, he was spotted at work by playwrights Marie Jones and Martin Lynch as they wrote the musical based on Best's life, *Dancing Shoes*.

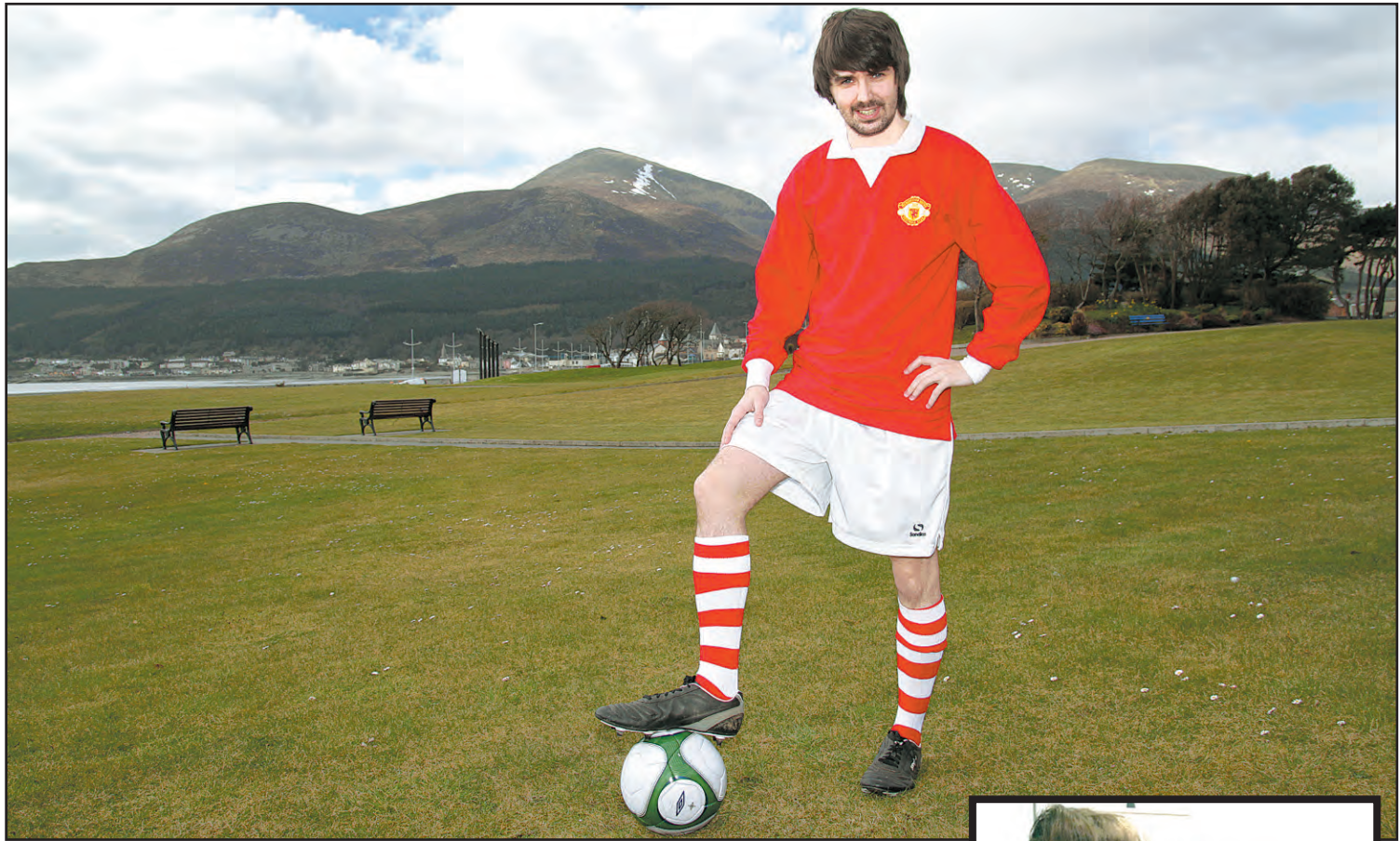
On noticing his uncanny resemblance, Lynch then approached Mark to audition for the stage show and although he did not get the part he ended up sitting with Angie and Callum Best at the premiere.

Three years on and Mark beat off stiff competition to win the Aer Lingus sponsored competition to find a modern-day lookalike for the legendary Northern Ireland and Manchester United footballer.

And since then he has been networking with other leading UK lookalikes.

During the recent shoot in Manchester, Mark admitted that many passers-by were doing 'double takes' at the line-up of celebrities – both past and present – and that many people were left open-mouthed when the cameras stopped rolling and the doubles went for a walk through a shopping centre.

Several of them ended the night off by enjoying a few pints and then heading to a chip



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- Mark O'Hare

shop – with 'David Beckham' in tow – to grab something to eat.

"It was surreal, the poor men in the chip shop thought it was the real Beckham, the look on their faces was priceless," Mark explained.

"The whole experience was amazing, and to meet so many other people who have years of experience in the industry was a real eye-opener."

Keen to keep his feet on the ground, Mark admits that he does not know where this new-found career will lead to, although he has signed with several agents, including Andy Harmer, the official David Beckham lookalike, who also stars in the Virgin Media advert.

His new role as George has also already seen

him socialising with FAI boss John Delaney, whom Mark has known for several years through his stays at the hotel.

Mr Delaney met George at the height of his Manchester United career, and was a close friend of Best's team-mate Shay Brennan.

"Mark's a great young lad and I really hope that his resemblance to George leads to big things for him," he said.

Mr Delaney, who along with Belfast businessman Peter Lavery, Mark describes as his mentors, added that he hopes to introduce him to some Manchester United officials in coming weeks.

"He's certainly got the look of George," he added.

Continued Mark: "The whole thing is totally mad, but I just take every day as it comes, but I do believe this was, in some way, destined to happen. I used to get a bit of banter from some people who said I look like George, but never in my wildest expectations did I think things would turn out like this."

"Even Alex Best has said George would have found it an honour and very amusing to have a lookalike, and that's all the praise I need," he added.



Mark with his agent, and official David Beckham lookalike, Andy Harmer.



Mark and the host of other lookalikes who participated in the recent Virgin Media PR stunt in Manchester.



Mark and his nephew Peter (10) enjoyed watching the Republic of Ireland side take on Poland from the FAI's box at the Aviva Stadium earlier this year. After the home team's 2-0 win Mark and Callum Best enjoyed a night out with the team. Mark was a guest of FAI boss John Delaney.