

THERE's only one Garry Birtles, sang Nottingham Forest's Trent End - and they certainly don't make footballers like him anymore!

Clutched from Long Eaton United for £2,000 – on the unsure recommendation that the Bovril was better value – Birtles became the ultimate rags-to-riches hero under legendary manager Brian Clough.

In no time at all, the former carpet fitter was sporting two European Cup winners' medals – the second after a sterling physical effort as the lone forward in Forest's unlikely 1-0 success over Kevin Keegan's Hamburg – as well as scoring twice in a 3-2 League Cup final success over Southampton at Wembley.

It didn't quite take off for Birtles at England level and his £1m transfer to Manchester United became the stuff of folklore for all the wrong reasons (see next article) but the likeable journeyman-turned-superstar returned to Forest before finishing his career with Notts County and Grimsby Town.

A popular co-commentator with Sky Sports and a regular columnist with the Nottingham Evening Post, Birtles still communicates with the same honesty and passion that characterised his playing career.

There's no hiding his allegiance to the club he graced as a player and his banter with fellow Legends Alan Birchenall and Roger Davies – with whom he will be sharing the stage at Loughborough College's Futures Restaurant on Thursday, October 6 – varies from a near love-in to boiling point.

SIGNING for Manchester United was the stuff of dreams for former Non League footballer GARRY BIRTLES when he made the move from Nottingham Forest in 1980 for a then club record fee of £1.25m.

But the chapter in his autobiography on his United career is titled 'The Theatre of Nightmares' for very good reason.

For, if you think it took Fernando Torres a long time to score his first goal for Chelsea, he had nothing on our Gazza.

It was September 19 1981 before Birtles began repaying that huge fee with his first league goal for United – ironically a blockbuster that almost lifted the roof off the Stretford End against Swansea.

The England striker started promisingly enough having a shot cleared off the line on his debut and hitting the post in his second game but it then went so wrong – it all but cost him his life.

In *My Magic Carpet Ride*, he recalls a car crash on a country road across the Derbyshire Hills when his barren spell was playing on his mind.

Birtles may not have made it at Old Trafford but he'd be a leading contender for any Forest Hall of Fame.

And you won't want to miss him at our next Legends Reunited night at Loughborough College's Futures Restaurant on Thursday, October 6.