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INTRODUCTION

Not long after stepping down from my role as chairman of Manchester United in 2003, I was approached to write about my experiences running the world's most famous football club. I resisted such overtures. I didn't think the time was right. The events and emotions were still too raw for me. I needed distance to lend them more perspective.

In 2015 I turned seventy, a good age to begin to look back on what you have made of your life and to weigh up your achievements. This is what I've attempted to do in this book.

It is not an autobiography in the strictest sense, as it deals with just one aspect of my life, albeit a significant one: my long association with Manchester United, both as a fan growing up and then as chairman and chief executive. In some ways you could call Manchester United a family business since, between us, my father and I were in charge of the club for just short of four decades.

I am very proud of what I managed to achieve at Manchester United, building upon the stewardship of my father, and leading a club that hadn't won a league title or a European trophy for years into the most successful era of its history. It was a journey of highs and lows, with its share of controversy, from which I sometimes emerged bruised and battered. But those bruises were worth it, because those years were the happiest

of my life. Every decision made, every choice, was for the wellbeing of the institution I both cherished and revered: Manchester United. This is the story of my time there.

1 CHAMPAGNE LOUIS

I was twelve when I was told the news about the Munich air disaster of 1958 and of how close my father Louis came to being on that fateful trip. I was away at boarding school at the time. The matron, who knew of my father's friendship with Matt Busby and his connection with Manchester United, came into the dormitory to tell me that the plane carrying the team back from a match had crashed and a lot of them had been killed and that Busby was very seriously ill. I've never forgotten it.

Father had booked his seat to go out with the team but changed his mind at the last minute. It was a decision that probably saved his life. Father had cause to be grateful to a man called George Whittaker, though it didn't seem so at the time. Busby wanted my father to join the board of directors at United and in the last week of January 1958, a couple of days before the team were due in London to play Arsenal, my father was put up for election. Whittaker, a local businessman, was the only board member to oppose it. At the end of the meeting the club chairman, Harold Hardman, who also wanted Father on the board, made the position clear: 'I don't want to bring Louis on unless it's totally unanimous.' Then, speaking directly to Whittaker, Hardman said, 'I'm going to put Louis