ALEX FERGUSON

WITH MICHAEL MORITZ

LEADING

Learning from Life and My Years at Manchester United

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AND MICHAEL MORITZ

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For my family

I have had a privileged life after being brought up in Govan, a working-class area of Glasgow, where my parents Alex and Lizzie gave me a foundation that has stayed with me to this day. My brother Martin has always been a loyal and great friend, following the same path that was laid out by our parents.

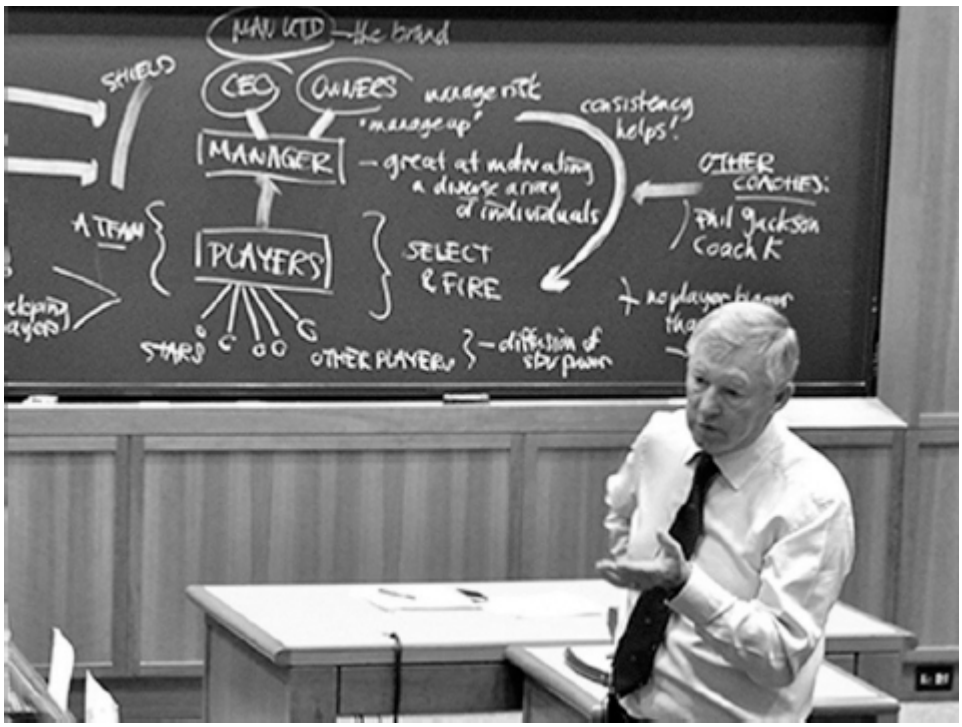
I had the good fortune to meet a wonderful girl who has been my rock for almost 50 years. Cathy has presented me with three great sons who have inherited our work ethic and are a credit to both of us. Those three sons have given us more joy than we could ever have imagined, 11 grandchildren ranging in age from five to 21.

It has been an interesting journey as we have watched their development through the years and it is amazing to see the traits I expect from our family within them. I hope that their futures are lined with the same success that I have been fortunate enough to enjoy. Good luck to all of them.

Alex Ferguson

For the winning teams of Sequoia Capital–with thanks.

Michael Moritz


MAN UTD — the brand
SHIELD
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manage risk
'manage up'
consistency helps!
MANAGER
– great at motivating a diverse array of individuals
OTHER COACHES:
Phil Jackson
Coach K
A TEAM
PLAYERS
SELECT & FIRE
STARS
OTHER PLAYERS
– diffusion of star power

INTRODUCTION

When I left Govan High School in Glasgow at the age of 16 to begin my apprenticeship as a tool-maker at Remington Rand and start my life in football at Queen's Park, I could never have imagined that, 55 years later, I would be standing at the front of a lecture theatre at the Harvard Business School, talking to a class of MBA students about myself.

The first class I taught in October 2012 was jammed to the rafters. From my position in the pit at the front of the lecture hall, I could see the students waiting patiently in their tiered rows of seats–each with their own name card in front of them–and yet more crammed in the aisles. It was an intimidating scene, but also a tribute to the fascination exerted by Manchester United. Our club was in very good company, because among the organisations studied during the Strategic Marketing in Creative Industries course at the Business School are Burberry, the fashion retailer; Comcast, the giant American cable television operator; Marvel Enterprises, the Hollywood studio behind the *Spider-Man* and *Iron Man* comic and film franchises; and, of all things, the business activities of the music superstars Beyoncé and Lady Gaga.

When I looked at the students gathered in one of Aldrich Hall's lecture rooms, I was struck by their cosmopolitan nature, age and intelligence. There were as many nationalities represented in the room as there are on the books of any Premier League squad. The students were all extremely well schooled, and would either work, or had already worked, for some of the most successful companies in the world. All were at the point where they could look forward to the best years of their lives. I could not help but think that the quieter ones, who seemed to be absorbing everything, were the people who would become the most successful.

I found myself on the campus of Harvard University in October of 2012 thanks to a collision of circumstances. A year or so previously I had received an approach from Anita Elberse, a professor at Harvard Business School. She had been curious about the way I managed United and the success that the club had enjoyed, and this resulted in a Harvard case study,

Sir Alex Ferguson: Managing Manchester United, which was written following Anita spending a few days shadowing me at our training ground in the mornings and interviewing me in the afternoons. Around the same time, she invited me to come and speak to her class at their campus in Boston. I was intrigued, if a little daunted, and accepted the invitation.

Looking back, it's easy to see that this lecture marked the start of a transitional phase in my career. Although I didn't know it at the time, we were just a few weeks into what would turn out to be my final season in charge at Old Trafford, and there was a lot on my mind. We had lost the title in the previous season on goal difference to our local rivals, Manchester City, but were determined to bounce back. And we had started the new season strongly. Two days before I flew to Boston, we had come away from St James' Park with a 3–0 win over Newcastle United. It was our fifth victory in seven games and took us to second place in the Premier League, four points behind Chelsea. We had also made a 100 per cent start to our Champions League campaign, UEFA's premier club competition, formerly known as the European Cup.

But for the time being, as I stood at the front of the classroom in Harvard, I put the Premier League and Champions League campaigns to one side and focused on sharing some of the secrets behind Manchester United's recent success.

The class began with Professor Elberse providing an overview of the different constituents I dealt with as manager of Manchester United–the players and the staff, the fans and the media, the board and our owners. I followed this by giving the students my thoughts on the principal elements of leadership. I then took questions from the students. This was the most enjoyable part of the day and it raised topics that I found myself thinking about in the days that followed. The students were all curious about how I became a leader, the individuals who had a major influence on my approach to life, the way I dealt with absurdly gifted and highly paid young men, the manner in which United maintained a thirst for excellence–and a raft of other topics. Understandably they also wanted to know about the daily habits of household names like Cristiano Ronaldo and David Beckham.

It took me a bit of time to adjust to standing in front of a blackboard rather than sitting in a football dugout, but I gradually began to realise that teaching bears some similarities to football management. Perhaps the most

important element of each activity is to inspire a group of people to perform at their very best. The best teachers are the unsung heroes and heroines of any society, and in that classroom I could not help but think of Elizabeth Thomson, a teacher at Broomloan Road Primary School, who encouraged me to take my school work seriously and who helped me gain admission to Govan High School.

I have spent much of my life trying to coax the best out of young people and the Harvard classroom presented another such opportunity. As the years have gone by, I have found that my appetite for, and appreciation of, youthful enthusiasm has only grown. Young people will always manage to achieve the impossible–whether that is on the football field or inside a company or other big organisation. If I were running a company, I would always want to listen to the thoughts of its most talented youngsters, because they are the people most in touch with the realities of today and the prospects for tomorrow.

The books I have previously written about my addiction to football are full of details about competitions, games and the composition of teams that I played in and managed. The first, *A Light in the North: Seven Years with Aberdeen*, appeared in 1985, two years after Aberdeen's European Cup Winners' Cup victory. In 1999, after Manchester United won the Treble–the Premier League, the FA Cup and the UEFA Champions League–I published *Managing My Life*, and a few months after my retirement in 2013, *My Autobiography* was released.

This book is different. It's my attempt to sum up what I learned from my life in general and my time as a manager–first in Scotland for 12 years with East Stirlingshire, St Mirren and Aberdeen, and then, south of the border, for 26 years with Manchester United. I have also included some interesting data covering my time in management and some archival material that has not been seen before as a way to illustrate a few of the topics being addressed. The data and archive material can be found at the back of the book.

Figuring out what it takes to win trophies with a round ball differs from the challenges facing the leaders of companies like BP, Marks & Spencer, Vodafone, Toyota or Apple, or the people who run large hospitals,

universities or global charities. Yet there are traits that apply to all winners, and to organisations whose leaders aspire to win. This is my attempt to explain how I built, led and managed the organisation at Manchester United, and the sorts of things that worked for me. I don't pretend for a moment that they can be easily transplanted elsewhere, but I hope that readers will find some ideas or suggestions that can be emulated or modified for their own use.

I am not a management expert or business guru, and have little interest in pounding the lecture circuit repeating a canned pitch. So don't expect any academic jargon or formulaic prose. Don't ask me to explain double-entry book-keeping, how to hire 500 people in six months, the challenges of matrix management, the way to get a manufacturing line to churn out 100,000 smartphones a day, or the best approach to developing software. I don't have a clue. That expertise belongs to others because my whole life has revolved around football. This book contains the lessons and observations about how I pursued excellence on and off the football pitch.

Unlike the great American basketball coach John Wooden, whose 'Pyramid of Success' accompanied him throughout most of his career from 1928 to 1975, I never employed a one-page diagram or a massive guide that would be handed out to players at the start of each season and viewed as gospel. Nor did I favour minute instructions written on 3- x 5-inch cards, or copious notes compiled over the years. My approach to leadership and management evolved as the seasons went by. This is my attempt to sum up what I learned and distil it on paper.

This book came to life after I was approached by Michael Moritz, Chairman of Sequoia Capital, the US headquartered private investment firm best known for helping to shape and organise companies such as Apple, Cisco Systems, Google, PayPal and YouTube and, more recently, WhatsApp and Airbnb. We had first talked about collaborating on a book several years before my retirement, but the timing was not right for either of us. Happily, in the past couple of years, we both had the time to devote our energy towards putting words on paper. It turned out that Michael, who led Sequoia Capital between the mid-1990s and 2012, had always wondered how Manchester United had maintained a high level of performance over several decades. As we talked, it was obvious that Michael's interest stemmed from his desire to ensure that Sequoia Capital did the same. As

you might know, Sequoia Capital has been able to collect more than its fair share of silverware. Michael has contributed an epilogue to the book which, though it makes me blush from time to time, explains more fully why and how our paths came to cross.

Leading is the result of many conversations between Michael and me that cover a range of topics–some of which I hadn't pondered previously. The conversations allowed me to collect my thoughts about issues that confront any leader but which, because of the pressure of their daily obligations, I never had time to gather. I hope you find some of them useful.

Alex Ferguson Manchester
August 2015

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BECOMING YOURSELF

Listening

How does someone become their true self? When I was young I never gave the topic much thought but, as a player and particularly as a manager, I became increasingly interested in the subject. If you are leading people, it helps to have a sense of who they are–the circumstances in which they were raised, the actions that will draw out the best in them, and the remarks that will cause them to be spooked. The only way to figure this out is by two underrated activities: listening and watching.

Most people don't use their eyes and ears effectively. They aren't very observant and they fail to listen intently. As a result, they miss half of what is going on around them. I can think of some managers who could talk under water. I don't think it helps them. There's a reason that God gave us two ears, two eyes and one mouth. It's so you can listen and watch twice as much as you talk. Best of all, listening costs you nothing.

Two of the best listeners I have met were television interviewers. Before his death in 2013, David Frost had spent nearly five decades interviewing people, including, most famously, the former US president Richard Nixon. I first met Frost in 2005 when we were both investors in a property fund manager. A few years later, after he'd left the BBC, he interviewed me for Sky Sports.

Unlike most television interviewers, David did not feel the need to prove he was smarter than his guest. He did not keep snapping at their heels, or interrupting, but he was definitely no pushover–as he demonstrated with the 28 hours and 45 minutes of conversations he taped with Richard Nixon in 1977. Some of this was because of the format of his shows. He was not doing post-match, 90-second interviews with a producer yelling into his earpiece demanding a sound-bite. And he wasn't swivelling his head, mid-interview, as he tried to catch the eye of his next unsuspecting target. David would look you in the eyes, lock out the rest of the world and demonstrate

great interest. He had time on his side–30 or 60 minutes (an eternity in today's world of instant messaging and Twitter) to gradually make his guest feel at ease. David's greatest gift was his ability to get a guest to relax, and that always seemed to allow him to extract more from an interview. It's little wonder that his nickname was 'The Grand Inquisitor'.

Charlie Rose, the American television interviewer, is similar. I don't know Charlie as well as I knew David, but a couple of years ago I was invited to appear on his show. I was a little apprehensive about appearing on American television, which isn't as familiar to me as all the British talk shows. The day before I went on Charlie's show, he invited me for a drink at Harry Cipriani, an Italian restaurant on Fifth Avenue in New York. Charlie is a big man and has hands the size of dinner plates, so I wondered whether he was going to clamp me in a vice. His opening line was, 'You know I'm half Scottish', and after that, I knew all would be well. Charlie had cleverly put me at my ease and given us something familiar to talk about. On the following day the taping went fine, with Charlie listening just as intently as David, even though I suspect his producer was wondering about whether she would have to use subtitles to make my Scottish accent comprehensible to viewers in Mississippi and Kansas.

I have never been a television host but I've always valued listening. This doesn't mean I was in the habit of phoning people to ask them what I should do in a particular situation. On the whole I liked to work things out for myself. But I do remember seeking help when, in 1984, I was offered the manager's position at Glasgow Rangers by John Paton, who was one of the club's largest shareholders. It was the second time that there had been overtures from Rangers, so I called Scot Symon, who had managed the club for 13 years, and sought his advice. I already had my doubts about going to Rangers. If I was going to leave Aberdeen I was unsure about going to another Scottish club. When Scot discovered that I had not talked to the ultimate authority at Rangers, vice-chairman Willie Waddell, he urged me to decline the offer, since he felt it was more of a fishing expedition and probably hadn't been officially sanctioned by the board. I did, and I've never regretted that decision.

Many people cannot stop long enough to listen–especially when they become successful and all the people around them are being obsequious and pretending to hang on their every word. They launch into monologues as if

suddenly they know everything. Putting these megalomaniacs to one side, it always pays to listen to others. It's like enrolling in a continuous, lifelong free education, with the added benefit that there are no examinations and you can always discard useless comments. A few examples come to mind:

Years ago somebody gave me a set of tapes containing conversations with Bill Shankly, the Liverpool manager between 1959 and 1974. They were reminiscences, and were not designed for broadcast, but I listened to them several times while driving. They contained all sorts of anecdotes, but the inescapable truth of those tapes was the degree of Shankly's complete obsession with football, which must have been in his bone marrow. Even if Shankly verged on the extreme, it reinforced to me the dedication required to succeed.

On another occasion, after a game against Leeds United in 1992, I was in the team bath with the players–which was highly unusual for me–listening to their analysis of the match. Steve Bruce and Gary Pallister were raving about Eric Cantona, the French striker Leeds had signed from Nîmes. Steve Bruce, who was then United's captain, was particularly complimentary about Cantona's abilities. Somehow, those comments planted a seed, which soon afterwards led to us buying Cantona.

Even as we signed Eric Cantona, I sought advice from people I trusted. I chatted with both Gérard Houllier, the French manager, and the French sports journalist, Erik Bielderman, in an attempt to better understand the player I was buying. I also spoke to Michel Platini who said, 'You should sign him, his character is underestimated, he just needs a bit of understanding.' They all provided tips about the best way to handle Eric, who arrived at United with a reputation–which was unfair–for being unmanageable. It proved to be a pivotal decision for United that season–arguably for the whole decade. In the six games we played before Eric arrived we had scored four goals. In the six games following his arrival, we scored 14.

The comment that led us to Cantona was unusual but I made it a practice to listen intently to how the players would predict the probable line-up of our opponents. It was always a guessing game until we got handed the team-sheet and our opponents' line-up could have a big influence on our tactics. During the week before a game, players often talk to their pals around the League, particularly their former team-mates, so they sometimes

pick up clues about which players they would be facing in the tunnel. We used to have little competitions to see whether we could guess the line-up. No matter how hard I listened, I could never fully anticipate the 11 characters we would be up against. As the squads expanded, it became even harder to do. Inevitably, after we eventually had the information, the line-up would differ from what I had expected and the players would rib me by saying, 'You're right again, Boss.'

After United got beaten at Norwich in November 2012, out of courtesy I had to show my face in their manager's room. Chris Hughton was gracious enough, but the room was packed with people celebrating their win. I did not want to show any weakness, so I put on a good face and listened to what they had to say–particularly about the players they were singling out for praise. I just remembered all their names and made a mental note to put everyone on our radar screen.

Looking back further, I remember another critical piece of advice. In 1983, when Aberdeen–the team I managed between 1978 and 1986–were due to play Real Madrid in the final of the European Cup Winners' Cup in Gothenburg, I invited Jock Stein to accompany us. Jock was one of my heroes and was the first British manager to win the European Cup in 1967, when Celtic beat Inter Milan. Jock said two things that I have never forgotten. First, he told me, 'Make sure you are the second team on the ground for training on the day before the game because then your opponents will think you are watching them while they work.' He also advised me to take along a bottle of Macallan whisky for Real Madrid's manager, the great Alfredo Di Stéfano. When I gave Di Stéfano that bottle, he was really taken aback. It made him think that we were in awe of him–that he was the big guy and that little Aberdeen felt they were beaten already. I'm glad I listened to Jock because both his tips helped.

Later, when I worked for Jock as assistant manager of Scotland, I used to pepper him with questions about tactics and dealing with management issues. He was as close to a managerial mentor as I ever had, and I would soak up almost everything he had to say. Jock used to advise me never to lose my temper with players straight after the game. He kept saying, 'Wait till Monday, when things have calmed down.' It was sound advice; it just didn't happen to suit my style. Nonetheless, it is no coincidence that in my office in Wilmslow the largest photograph on the wall is of Jock Stein and

me, before the Wales v Scotland game on 10 September 1985–the night he died.

There is one final example that comes to mind: Jimmy Sirrel, who was manager of Notts County and an instructor on a coaching course I attended in 1973 at Lilleshall, one of the United Kingdom's National Sports Centres, taught me a crucial lesson. He told me never to let all the players' contracts expire around the same time because it allows them to collude against the manager and the club. I'd never thought about that before Jimmy mentioned it to me but, afterwards, I paid very close attention to making sure we staggered the contracts. I bet Jimmy's advice took him less than a minute to convey, but the benefit of listening to him lasted me a lifetime. It just shows that advice often comes when you least expect it, and listening, which costs nothing, is one of the most valuable things you can do.

Watching

Watching is the other underrated activity, and again, it costs nothing. For me there are two forms of observation: the first is on the detail and the second is on the big picture. Until I was managing Aberdeen and hired Archie Knox as my assistant manager, I had not appreciated the difference between watching for the tiny particulars while also trying to understand the broader landscape. Shortly after he arrived at Aberdeen, Archie sat me down and asked me why I had hired him. The question perplexed me, until he explained that he had nothing to do since I insisted on doing everything. He was very insistent, and was egged on by Teddy Scott, Aberdeen's general factotum, who agreed with him. Archie told me that I shouldn't be conducting the training sessions but, instead, should be on the sidelines watching and supervising. I wasn't sure that I should follow this advice because I thought it would hamper my control of the sessions. But when I told Archie I wanted to mull over his advice, he was insistent. So, somewhat reluctantly, I bowed to his wishes and, though it took me a bit of time to understand you can see a lot more when you are not in the thick of things, it was the most important decision I ever made about the way I managed and led. When you are a step removed from the fray, you see

things that come as surprises–and it is important to allow yourself to be surprised. If you are in the middle of a training session with a whistle in your mouth, your entire focus is on the ball. When I stepped back and watched from the sidelines, my field of view was widened and I could absorb the whole session, as well as pick up on players' moods, energy and habits. This was one of the most valuable lessons of my career and I'm glad that I received it more than 30 years ago. Archie's observation was the making of me.

As a player I had tried to do both–paying attention to the ball at my feet whilst being aware of what was happening elsewhere on the field. But until Archie gave me a finger wagging, I had not really understood that, as a manager, I was in danger of losing myself to the details. It only took me a handful of days to understand the merit of Archie's point, and from that moment I was always in a position to be able to zoom in to see the detail and zoom out to see the whole picture.

As a manager you are always watching out for particular things. You might be monitoring a player in training to see if he has shaken off a thigh injury; appraising a promising 12 year old in the youth academy; looking at a hot prospect in a night game at some stadium in Germany; examining the demeanour of a player or coach at the lunch table. You could also be searching for patterns and clues in a video analysis reel, the body language during a negotiation, or the length of the grass on a pitch. Then, on Saturday afternoons or Wednesday evenings, there would be the need for the other, wider lens–the one capable of taking in the whole picture.

It sounds simple to say you should believe what your eyes tell you, but it is very hard to do. It is astonishing how many biases and preconceived notions we carry around, and these influence what we see, or, more precisely, what we think we see. If I was told by a scout that a player had a good left foot, it would be hard for me to forget that observation when I went to watch him in action–and in doing so it would be easy to overlook another quality or, much more painfully, ignore a major fault. I was certainly interested in what other people had to say, but I always wanted to watch with my own eyes without having my judgement swayed by the filters of others.

Here is one observation from which I benefited for decades. In 1969 West Germany were training at Rugby Park in Kilmarnock and I asked

Karl-Heinz Heddergot, of the German FA, for permission to watch the practice. The only people in the ground were the German players and staff, a few groundsmen, and me. I watched the training for around an hour and a half. The German squad played without goalkeepers, and just concentrated on possession of the ball, which was unusual during a period when coaches used to emphasise training sessions composed of long-distance running. That one encounter made an enormous impression on me, and thereafter I started to emphasise the importance of possession. As soon as I became a coach at St Mirren, I started doing 'boxes'–where we'd pit four players against two in a confined amount of space. We started with boxes that were 25 yards by 25 yards, which forced the players to perform in a confined space and improve their ball skills. As players' skills improved, we tightened the boxes. It helped with everything: awareness, angles, touch on the ball, and eventually it led to being able to play one-touch football. It was a coaching technique I used right up until my last training session at United on 18 May 2013. Watching that practice for 90 minutes in Kilmarnock back in 1969 furnished me with a lesson I used for half a century.

Observation–sizing up others and measuring situations–is an essential part of preparation, and, at United, we made it a habit to carefully watch opponents before going up against them in big games. This was even more important in the era prior to sophisticated video analysis, when the best we could do was fast forward or rewind through a videotape. One example of this paying off was in United's 1991 European Cup Winners' Cup final against Barcelona. It was the first European final to be played by an English team following the ban from European competition after the Heysel disaster of 1985. I had attended Barcelona's semi-final first leg against Juventus with Steve Archibald, a former Aberdeen player, during which their main striker, Hristo Stoichkov, was hugely impressive and scored two goals. In the second leg in Turin he suffered a hamstring injury that ruled him out of the final. It played havoc with their normal formation. During the final they relied on Michael Laudrup to be their chief offensive weapon, driving forward from midfield which, thanks to watching Barcelona previously, we had anticipated. We had already adjusted our tactics, steadfastly refused to be lured too far forward by Laudrup, and eventually won 2–1.

There were also plenty of times when I saw a player out of the corner of

my eye who came as a complete, but pleasant, surprise. In 2003 I had gone to watch a young Petr Čech play in France. Didier Drogba, whom I had not heard of, was playing in the same game. He was a dynamo–a strong, explosive striker with a true instinct for goal–though he ultimately slipped through our fingers. That didn't happen with Ji-sung Park. I had gone to get the measure of Lyon's Michael Essien in the Champions League in 2005 during their quarter-final ties with PSV Eindhoven, and saw this ceaseless bundle of energy buzz about the field like a cocker spaniel. It was Ji-sung Park. The following week I sent my brother, Martin, who was a scout for United, to watch him, to see what his eyes told him. They told him the same thing and we signed him. Ji-sung was one of those rare players who could always create space for himself.

These were very special moments. I always enjoyed stumbling across a new talent when I was least expecting it. Very rarely do you see something so astonishing that you sense it arrived from another world (though Eric Cantona, at his very best, could have done so). These moments–and players–are the reward for a lifetime of careful watching. None of them suddenly dropped into our lap; they were the result of keeping our radar operating 24 hours a day.

Reading

I have picked up a lot from reading books over the years. As a boy I disappointed my parents by not working hard enough at school (largely because I was already besotted by football), so my formal education ended when I was 16. But I've always liked reading. In fact I was in the library in Glasgow on 6 February 1958 when I heard about the Munich air disaster. I've subscribed for many years to the *Daily Express* during the week and the Scottish *Sunday Mail* and *Sunday Post*, the *Sunday Express* and *Independent* on the weekends. I've also been partial to the *Racing Post*, which keeps me up to date on horse racing. But, more importantly, I've always liked books.

My interest in books stretches far beyond football. One of the coaches I read about came from a sport about which I know nothing. He was the great

UCLA basketball coach John Wooden, who led his team to ten national championship titles in 12 seasons. He was probably stronger as an inspirational coach than as a master of tactics, but there was no misunderstanding about who was boss. He would not tolerate any waywardness or people straying from the path he mapped out. I also read up on Vince Lombardi, who was a household name in the United States during the time he was the coach of the Green Bay Packers. He was as obsessed about American football as I was about English football. I found him easy to identify with and love his quote, 'We didn't lose the game; we just ran out of time.'

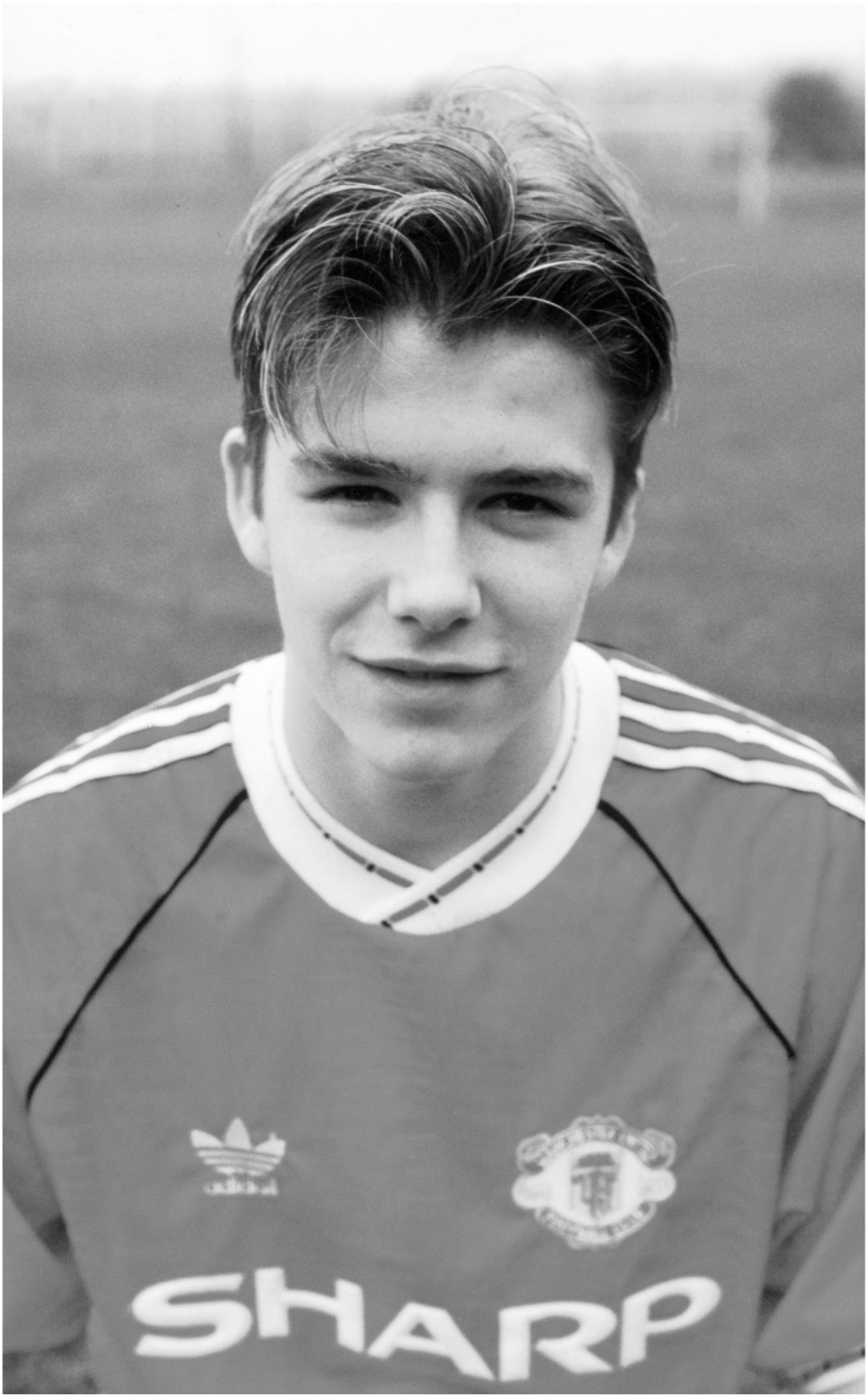
I have dipped into other books about management and leadership but, maybe because I was always so preoccupied with my own job, I never found one that spoke to me. The same goes for sports books and players' biographies. For the most part, a United player's autobiography was an account, albeit from a different angle, of something I had already lived through. I just found I preferred reading books that had little to do with my daily work. From time to time I tripped across other football books such as David Peace's novel, *The Damned Utd*, a fictionalised account of Brian Clough's 44-day spell as manager of Leeds United in 1974, but cannot say I found it captivating. However, I was taken by *Farewell but not Goodbye*, the autobiography of Bobby Robson, a man whom I admired greatly, who started his life down a coal-mine and who, after being fired as England manager after being one step short of the 1990 World Cup final, showed great courage by picking himself up and going to the Netherlands to manage PSV Eindhoven before later heading to Porto and Barcelona and, eventually returning to his hometown, Newcastle. Of the players' autobiographies, the one I would single out is Gary Neville's *Red*, which was published in 2011. It's a thoughtful book and helps the reader understand the pressure on players and their need to succeed.

I don't want to overplay this, but I found some observations in books about military history relevant to football. Every general has to learn the best time to attack and when it is better to be conservative. Oddly, this was reiterated by a training course I attended with the SAS, who explained how they mounted attacks by outflanking and diverting the enemy on either side and then launching a deadly assault down the middle. One year we took the whole United squad to the SAS training grounds in Herefordshire for a

couple of days during a break in the season. They gave us a taste of everything–winching descents from helicopters, the shooting range, and simulated break-ups of hostage situations. The players loved it. One lesson I took from the SAS was the effectiveness of a battle formation, where troops attacking on the flanks create softness in the central defences. I took that lesson right to the training pitch where we worked on it for a week before a Liverpool game. I had players attacking the back post and the front post and then Gary Pallister came from right outside the centre of the box to score. In fact Pallister scored twice using precisely the same ploy. It could have been a re-enactment of a battle plan–except none of the TV commentators picked up on that.

I've always been interested in American history–both military and political–and I've read a fair amount about Abraham Lincoln and JFK, especially the value of taking your time before making decisions. I found Doris Kearns Goodwin's book *Team of Rivals: the Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* absorbing, while JFK's careful approach during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 is as fine an example of deliberate decision-making as you will find. I certainly found more virtue in patiently working towards the right decision as I got older. In my early days as a manager I could be impetuous–always in a hurry to get things done and stamp my authority on a situation. It takes courage to say, 'Let me think about it.' When you're young you want to fly to the moon and you want to get there quickly. I think it's usually enthusiasm that causes this. As you get older you temper your enthusiasm with experience.

I realise that we're shaped by lots of other forces beyond just watching, listening and reading. We're all accidental victims of our parents' DNA; we are shaped by the luck of the draw, the circumstances in which we grew up and the education we received. But we all have two sets of very powerful tools that we completely control: our eyes and our ears. Watching others, listening to their advice and reading about people are three of the best things I ever did.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