

# **LOU**

**MY WONDERFUL LIFE**

Front cover: The greatest moment in football. Being carried from the MCG by adoring fans after captaining Collingwood to the 1953 premiership win over Geelong.

Back cover: Coming up 90 years and still as proud as ever to wear the most famous football jumper in the land.

The Slattery Media Group  
1 Albert Street, Richmond  
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visit [slatterymedia.com](http://slatterymedia.com)

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**LOU**

**MY WONDERFUL LIFE**

**FOREWORD BY EDDIE McGUIRE AM**

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# CONTENTS

## FOREWORD

The Face of the Game ..... 6

## INTRODUCTION

The Legend Lives On..... 9

## CHAPTER 1

A Black-and-White  
Dynasty..... 13

## CHAPTER 2

Steeled for the Fray..... 30

## CHAPTER 3

A Star is Born..... 41

## CHAPTER 4

Dancing, Prancing and  
Romancing..... 64

## CHAPTER 5

Strife and Success..... 78

## CHAPTER 6

The End and the  
Beginning..... 98

## CHAPTER 7

Radio Days..... III

## CHAPTER 8

The Travelling Circus..... 122

## CHAPTER 9

A Bird of Another  
Feather..... 134

## CHAPTER 10

Organised Chaos..... 153

## CHAPTER 11

A Red-hot 'Tripewriter' ... 173

## CHAPTER 12

The Kiss of Death..... 188

## CHAPTER 13

When Lips Collide ..... 199

## CHAPTER 14

Calling the Shots..... 210

## CHAPTER 15

Three Wise Old  
Monkeys..... 222

## CHAPTER 16

My Mates Bob..... 233

## CHAPTER 17

Switching Channels..... 239

## CHAPTER 18

Still Kissing..... 253

## FOREWORD

By Eddie McGuire AM

# THE FACE OF THE GAME

There is no doubt: Lou Richards is one of the greatest names in the history of Australian sport and the media.

Walk into a pub in the bush, stroll into a footy club on the Murray or chat with folks in Alice Springs, along the beachfront on the Gold Coast or anywhere in the world where you find an Aussie, drop the name Lou Richards and you'll get a response. Everyone loves Lou.

For 50 years he has been the face of our game. A super rover who made the transition from premiership captain of Collingwood in 1953 into self-proclaimed multimedia megastar. He wasn't exaggerating.

He single-handedly took Collingwood and football, and gave it glitz and glamour. He turned average, everyday knockabouts into household names. Think of the Richards lexicon. Think of the Doormat and Slammin' Sam, Lethal Leigh, Fabulous Phil, the Macedonian Marvel and Rotten Ronnie, Bustling Billy and the Cowboy. If you didn't get a nickname from Louie you hadn't made it.

In a time when football journalism was one-dimensional, one man stood out. The *Sun News-Pictorial* became a marketing masterpiece on the crystal ball of the 'Kiss of Death'. The signs outside newsagents said it all: "Lou's Tips." That was enough.

At Collingwood he is revered. Not just because he is part of the famous Pannam that stretches back a hundred years to his grandfather Charlie. It is because at Collingwood we cherish our own.

From the backstreets he rose to become first a cheeky but super-talented rover and then a mighty leader. He is one of four living premiership captains who hold pride of place in the Collingwood family. The fact that he is the oldest living VFL premiership captain just adds a little lustre.

Sometimes we don't do enough to honour those who have gone before. At Collingwood we have made a legitimate effort to make our heritage come alive for the kids of today and for their kids and those to follow. Outside the Westpac Centre is a statue of Bobby Rose, a man regarded as the epitome of Collingwood's great heritage. In the months ahead we will be unveiling another statue. It will be of Lou Richards. It is Collingwood's way of saying thank you for a life dedicated to our club and the game.

Has any man in football history done more for the game? Through millions of words in the pages of *The Sun*, on air for a quarter of a century on radio and for half a century on television, Lou Richards has been the face of the game. More than that he gave it life and a sense of humour. He invented football as entertainment.

Generations grew up watching him deliver his verdict on the *World of Sport* panel, waited for their favourite player's name to be read out and, of course, for Lou's recipe of the week on Thursday night on *League Teams* with his great partners 'Captain Blood' Jack

Dyer and Bob 'Woofa' Davis. Others will remember listening to his commentary on so many Grand Final broadcasts and memorable highlights that were the soundtrack of our football lives.

For another two decades he was at Nine—the news-breaker, the newsmaker and a man we felt so deeply about that *The Footy Show* named its medal after him.

The football world loves Lou Richards. They love his outlook on life. They love the way he embraces our great game.

Louie—a legend, I salute you.

Eddie McGuire AM, President of Collingwood  
September, 2012

## INTRODUCTION

By Stephen Phillips

# THE LEGEND LIVES ON...

When it was suggested that *The Kiss of Death, Memoirs of a Sporting Legend* should be updated and reprinted, the central figure was delighted.

While not in the first bloom of youth, Lou Richards had to be dragged kicking and screaming into retirement. He frequently pointed out that his great inspiration in all things humorous was the American comedian George Burns.

The fact that they looked almost identical was one thing, they had been blessed with magnificent wives and both ambled through their 70s and 80s.

Like George, who passed away in 1996 at the age of 100, Lou always felt that the century was within his grasp, too.

To have watched and remember Lou on the football field you would need to be approaching 70. To have seen him and remembered him on *World of Sport* you'd be approaching middle age.

Yet the legend lives on...

The following pages are how I introduced him back in 1989 as yet another chapter in his remarkable life was to unfold:

*The Kiss of Death: Introduction, 1989*

Not many people can claim to have been crowned ‘King’, honoured by the Queen and classified as a living treasure by the National Trust, all in the space of a year. Pretty heady stuff for a knockabout kid reared in the back streets of one of Melbourne’s toughest working-class suburbs. Those three honours emphasise just how important Lou Richards has become to the people of Melbourne.

In 1981 Lou was appointed King of Moomba, following such dignitaries as the Russian clown Oleg Popov, British actor Robert Morley, Australia’s Frank Thring and an American rodent named Mickey Mouse. Lou had been court jester to John Farnham back in 1972 but few argued that Lou’s crowning as representative of the city in 1981 was undeserved.

Louie the Fifteenth immediately issued his royal edict: “There will be sunshine for 10 days. I want everyone to have fun.” He appointed ‘Captain Blood’ Jack Dyer as his court jester and announced that his four-year-old grand-daughter, Lucy Morrison, would accompany him in the yellow 1927 Rolls Royce for the Moomba parade. Mrs King, as his wife Edna was quickly dubbed, was relegated to the crowd. For Lou the 27th Moomba parade lived up to all his wishes—with just one major exception. For the first time in the history of Moomba it rained. The skies opened over Melbourne and none of its inhabitants was spared. The ‘Kiss of Death’ had struck again. Hurried research showed that it was indeed fine for the first 10 days of Moomba 1981. The problem was that Lou hadn’t done his homework: the parade was on the 11th day!

The Queen was obviously impressed with his mock regal bearing and in her New Year’s Honours in 1982 she appointed the one-time toothpaste tube-maker a Member of the British Empire. Former Australian Test vice-captain Neil Harvey, an old boy of Lou’s *alma mater*, Collingwood Tech., and Ron Casey, the man who guided

Lou’s radio and television career from the earliest days, were also honoured but Lou grabbed the front-page spotlight.

One reader of the *Sun* wrote:

We wondered how Liz  
 Could choose for our Lou  
 A gong to which he could really aspire.  
 We were all in a tizz  
 Till we finally knew  
 He’s the Mouth of the British Empire.

It was little wonder that Rodney Davidson, the chairman of the National Trust, launched Heritage Week in 1982 with the announcement that Lou had been classified. There were those at *World of Sport* who had been urging the same thing for years. Mr Davidson did point out that Lou was now a person “of national importance”.

Now in his 67th year, Lou Richards has come to mean a lot to many people. To the kids he’s a television personality who comperes *Wide World of Sports* on Sunday mornings with a former tangle-footed fast bowler with a big grin named Max Walker.

To their parents he’s the witty TV clown who called football for close to 30 years and dominated the world’s longest running sports show, *World of Sport*, and hammed it up on *League Teams*.

To their grandparents he was a talented, cheeky and tough little rover who captained Collingwood to a VFL premiership, highlighting a football career which stretched from 1941 to 1955 and spanned 250 games.

To those of us who work with him day in and day out he’s lots of fun. He’s a bloke with a great sense of humour who plans to work

into the next century and occasionally threatens beyond. As a friend and a workmate I have lived some 20 years of the story of this book with 'Louie the Lip'.

On my first day of work as a cadet reporter on the *Sun* in 1970, my chief of staff Peter Livingstone suggested that I join my new workmates over the road at Lou's pub. The man himself was there, pulling beers, cracking gags and making us feel at home. We would work together for seven years at *World of Sport* on Channel Seven and then start all over again at Nine in 1987 on *Wide World of Sports*. To me he is the consummate professional, with an unquenchable desire to make his show and his station number one. It is an end he has achieved in his 33 years at the *Sun* and in his long career at Seven.

One morning Lou was in at Bendigo Street talking to the kids in *Wide World of Sports*. He was going on about what a great footballer he was when one girl said, "Oh, you played did you?" This set Lou back a pace or two and resulted in the birth of this book. Though enriched by some of Lou's tall tales, this autobiography is a mostly true story of a genuinely unique character in Australian sport and television.

Stephen Phillips

## CHAPTER I

# A BLACK-AND-WHITE DYNASTY

**A**s a kid kicking a paper footy around the backstreets of Collingwood and Abbotsford in the dark years of the depression, my future had been predestined. My blood lines on my father's side would see me go into the hotel trade. On my mother's side the black-and-white of Collingwood and its feared football team ran deep and true.

Just as I would attend Lithgow Street state school, my father and his twin brother had before me. Dad had been small but very fast. He was a champion schoolboy swimmer and runner and a pretty handy footballer and cricketer as well. He came from good hotel stock, his father being publican at the Morning Star, which stands to this day in Hoddle Street, Collingwood. They called my grandfather 'Chow Bill' because of his love of strong dark Chinese tea which he bought from a Chinese travelling salesman every week. His wife Polly was a superb tailoress and people talked of 'Chow Bill' as a very smartly dressed man about town—a bloke who would wear magnificent