

CHAPTER I

September 25, 2006

There they were, our post-Katrina New Orleans Saints, perennial NFL losers, but beloved by their fans. It was Monday Night Football, and ESPN's all-time record television audience was poised to watch the Saints do battle against the Atlanta Falcons in our spectacular, back-from-the-dead Louisiana Superdome. Never has there been such a football moment anywhere!

Amazingly, our Saints were an impressive 2 and 0 after road victories over the Cleveland Browns and the Green Bay Packers. The Falcons also were 2 and 0, including a big road win over the 2006 Super Bowl preseason favorite Carolina Panthers. A perfect setting!

Wonder of wonders, our Saints took control immediately, winning handily! The more secure our win, the more we beat-up Saints fans worked ourselves into an ever wilder frenzy. Never have I seen a happier, more joyous crowd than that magnificent Monday night!

I remember thinking that a story for the ages was being played out before our eyes. A true epic. By the time that Monday night game ended, I had elevated it in my mind to one of the great moments of history. "My God," I said to myself, "We Katrina-exhausted New Orleanians are living testimony to the indomitability of the human spirit!"

My beautiful Mary Dixon, a native of Memphis, whose ardor for everything New Orleans knows no bounds, said to me when I decided to make "September 25" this book's opening chapter: "Sweetheart, your readers are football fans, not historians. Tell them what you told me when that game was over."

Overcome by the moment, I had told my wife, "Tonight,

sweetheart, September 25, 2006, our New Orleans Saints became a New England-type franchise, solid contenders from now on with Sean Payton as the head coach and Mickey Loomis as the general manager. At long last our Saints showed the world that they will be a good football team for years to come.” If that isn’t an epic moment for New Orleanians, what is?

But let’s go way back in time and see how I, a New Orleans native, stumbled into creating our New Orleans Saints and then our Louisiana Superdome, a perfect combination of New Orleans and Louisiana.