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TX: 17.02.03 MANCHESTER UNITED'S DISABLED SUPPORTERS BOYCOTT THE MILLENNIUM STADIUM

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MADILL

The Manchester United boss, Sir Alex Ferguson, has told You and Yours he's supporting the boycott by members of Manchester United Disabled Supporters Association who are refusing to buy seats for the Worthington Cup Final against Liverpool on March 2nd at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff. They claim the positions allocated to wheelchair users in the three tiers are unsuitable with poor sight lines, because other fans in front of them stand up and block their view of the pitch. The Football League and the Millennium Stadium have been in correspondence about the issue and are due to have a meeting with Manchester United this afternoon. These disabled fans say unless their wheelchair positions are raised up they will continue the boycott.

VOX POPS - MANCHESTER UNITED FANS

I saw my first cup final when I was 12 years old, I've seen every single final that United have been involved in and this will be the first final that I've missed in my life.

FOOTBALL COMMENTARY

I was actually here for that game and everybody was on their feet at that match.

FOOTBALL COMMENTARY

There's absolutely no chance of seeing that kind of action at the Millennium Stadium if you're in a wheelchair.

The only way it would work would be if you can nail people to the seats and it doesn't work. We're not just prepared to boycott the final - we're not going to go away, we have a voice and we are using it, we will not go away.

MADILL

Well our disability issues reporter, Carolyn Atkinson, asked Alex Ferguson why he's backing the boycott.

FERGUSON

I have to say we have a fantastic relationship with our own Disabled Supporters Association - MUDSA - which has just under a thousand members. And the relationship has been built up over many years and the contribution they make to the club's operation is fantastic - they're good people, they're fanatical football people - and they want to see a game of football with is a privilege of everyone.

ATKINSON

So what have you seen Sir Alex to make you think that this boycott is worth supporting?

FERGUSON

Yeah well I've just looked at the photographs and they've given positions in behind groups of supporters where there's absolutely no way they can possibly see the match. Now in most cases, as we all know, particularly if you go back to Wembley where all the disabled fans were all placed at the very front of the terrace and on the track, just beside the track, it was a vantage point, unobstructed, able to see the game of football which they dearly want to see.

ATKINSON

I mean when you were at Wembley you made a point of going and meeting as many of the fans as you could, do you think something like that should be done at the Millennium Stadium?

FERGUSON

Well the point I make is in a modern stadium there should have been a facility for them there at the front in an appropriate position where they can get the advantage of seeing the game unobstructed and I think that's a key issue. And obviously maybe this was a - in hindsight - it should have been done, maybe they didn't think of it at the time, whoever constructed the stadium, and that's very unfortunate but the stadium has now been open a few years and they should be making grounds and making inroads to ensure they can get disabled fans in.

ATKINSON

The Football League and the Millennium Stadium both say they're trying to do all they can. What do you think should be altered because some of the fans are saying the decision to put in an eight inch platform to raise where the wheelchair users are is not enough - do you agree with them?

FERGUSON

No I think it's straightforward as far as I'm concerned, I think they should be at the front.

ATKINSON

Now training is still going on at Carrington Road, Diego Forlan is out on the training field at the moment but he is supporting this boycott as well, what is he and the other players saying to you about this?

FERGUSON

Well Diego has the experience of his sister being disabled, so it is very much a personal feeling from him. But I think if you would ask anyone associated with football they'd want to see disabled fans getting a proper view of the game.

ATKINSON

There is a meeting this afternoon between the Millennium Stadium, the Football League and Manchester United, do you think that some agreement can be come to?

FERGUSON

I'm sure they're going to try. I think they'll realise the importance of this and I'm sure they'll get something and hopefully they do.

ATKINSON

But the supporters are saying that perhaps somebody from the League or the stadium should actually spend time in a wheelchair during a game to get the view that disabled supporters get - do you think that's a practical solution to this?

FERGUSON

I don't think it's necessary. I think any normal person and any supporter would know the disadvantage of being disabled, I don't think you need to have the experience of sitting in a wheelchair to understand the problem.

MADILL

Sir Alex Ferguson. And any developments we'll keep you up-to-date as well.