

EXCERPT: "Unmasked: The Final Years of Michael Jackson," by Ian Halperin

Before long, however, 10 concerts had turned into 50 and the potential revenues had skyrocketed. But those who knew Jackson best knew he was in no shape to perform 10 shows, let alone 50. "We knew it was a disaster waiting to happen," said one aide. "I don't think anybody predicted it would actually kill him but literally nobody believed he would end up performing." Their doubts were underscored when Jackson collapsed during only his second rehearsal. "Collapse might be overstating it," said the aide. "He needed medical attention and couldn't go on. Not sure what caused it."

Meanwhile, everybody around him noticed that Jackson had lost an astonishing amount of weight in the months leading up to the London concerts. His medical team even believed he had become anorexic. "He goes days at a time hardly eating a thing and at one point his doctor was asking people around him if he had been throwing up after meals," one staff member told me in May. "He suspected bulimia but when we said he hardly eats any meals, the doc thought it's probably anorexia nervosa. He seemed alarmed and at one point said, 'People die from that all the time. You've got to get him to eat.'"

For the first time, those in Jackson's inner circle began to urge him to cancel the shows, but their pleas fell on deaf ears.

"There was just too much money at stake," recalls one aide. "The people who had his ear told him he would be a laughingstock if he cancelled. They had to have known he was in no shape to go on, he was so frail, he kept cancelling rehearsals. We wondered if somebody was going to cash in whether or not he performed. It just didn't make any sense. I know his family was concerned, especially his brother Jermaine, but Michael was kept very isolated during those last weeks."

*From "Unmasked: The Final Years of Michael Jackson," by Ian Halperin.
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