

A Bad Week for Jimi – Day 1

The sun was high in the sky as they trotted out onto the pitch. Patches of wispy clouds broke up an otherwise perfect summer's day. Song thrushes sang, and skylarks...well...larked about. Starlings did...star jumps. Freddy had let Clara lead the team out – as it was her tenth appearance for the team since she had joined last year. She wore her blue and red colours proudly, and waved to the small crowd on the touchline, smiling. There was a short pause before the opposition emerged from a huddle on the sidelines. Jimi, who was sitting cross-legged on the touchline, guitar in hand, muttered out the words to a song ('Sisters... are doing it... for themselves'), perhaps suggesting that this match would not be so easy as they had thought.*****Almost imperceptibly, a few more clouds gathered up and momentarily blocked out the sun. Michael squinted upwards. 'Don't look at the sun', said Wil. 'Well, I'm not', replied Michael, 'because it's gone'. Although not exactly true, the sun had been obscured by a huge cloud which was rapidly turning from white, to light grey, to a deep shade of dark grey. Other clouds appeared from nowhere. It became a bit colder, and a breeze got up. Was that a rumble of thunder in the distance? Mockingbirds mocked, crows crowed, and robins...starting robbin'... Well, you get the idea. As the opposition ran onto the pitch, things started to turn nasty.*****Freddy and Mr Andrews had spent some time planning for this match, after the last time, when the girls had changed the referee at half time, and Wil had discovered the original referee lying in a ditch at the side of the field, groaning pathetically. This time, they had pulled Michael back into defence, where his speed would be able to outrun the most dastardly attacker, and put Clara up front (as a one-woman strike force). With Alec, Wil, and Freddy forming a three-man midfield, and Jaz supporting Michael at the back, they looked a formidable unit. Hardy, in goal as usual,

had taken precautions, and was wearing shin pads, knee pads, elbow pads, a chest protector, three pairs of gloves, a cycle helmet, and sunglasses.*****They were lined up for what seemed like hours, but was only a few minutes. The opposition girls (now in a little huddle in the centre circle) were singing their own song, to the tune that Jimi was playing on the guitar. 'Hey, what're you doing?' called Freddy to Jimi on the sideline. 'Cool it, man, I'm only playing. I didn't know they would sing my song!' Jimi replied indignantly. 'Yeh, well, don't encourage them, right?' said Freddy. 'I'll play what I like', muttered Jimi, who got up and walked away. Freddy was going to go after him, but then thought better of it. I really need to talk to him, he thought.*****The match started, and Lancaster Road were soon two goals up, the first thanks to Clara's close control in the box, and the second courtesy of a penalty, which was awarded when Clara herself had been up-ended by two of the girls grabbing her ankles at the same time and dumping her face down in the goalmouth. The dirty tricks were coming thick and fast – sly little digs in the ribs, quick little taps on the ankles, shifty little shots to the shins, and testing trip-tackles. But nothing could prepare them for what was to come.*****Michael, dazzling as usual in defence, had brought the ball out down the left wing. From far on the right, the tallest of the Hags defenders had sprinted after him, and had crudely slide-tackled him from behind, crumpling him into a miserable heap on the ground. Michael had seemed motionless, but was perhaps counting to make sure he still had the right number of arms and legs. Although moving, he was obviously in a bad way. The Lancaster Road supporters looked on quietly as their star player lay stricken on the floor. Just then, another tall figure emerged from the side of the pitch, carrying a bucket in her left hand, and a sponge in her right. Thank goodness. First Aid. The Magic Sponge! Michael sat up groggily.

'Here love, have a bit of this', sneered the First Aid Lady, dipping the sponge into the bucket, and offering it to Michael. Offering it? Wasn't the magic sponge supposed to go on the injury? Michael, still shaken from the tackle, took the sponge in his hand, and soaked his face with the cool liquid. His face brightened, and a little steam rose from the bucket. 'I said have a bit of it!', said the lady, sounding quite cross. She grabbed the sponge from Michael, then picked up the bucket and poured some of the liquid into his mouth. From a distance, Michael heard Hardy yell, 'No!' On the side of the bucket was a small

label. Freddy peered down at the label, and just caught sight of the writing before the First Aid Lady was off again to her post at the side of the pitch, where some of her colleagues stood laughing and pointing... at Michael. The label said LaughCryFlyJuice.*****Michael got up and flexed his injured leg. It moved in all the right ways, so he jogged up and down on it. He looked fine. He even smiled a bit. Then he smirked. Then he giggled. Then he grinned, and beamed. Then he started laughing. Michael was a serious boy. But he laughed and laughed and laughed, holding the sides of his stomach as he guffawed. Suddenly, his face went rather serious. He looked down at the pitch, the smile disappearing from his face. A huge tear splashed onto the hard ground. Then another, and another. He sobbed. He snivelled a little. He started to moan and weep. Bawling his eyes out. After a minute or so of uncontrollable howling, Michael looked up, smiled again, and gazed into the far distance. He lifted his arms, and spread them out wide. Then he started to run, waving his arms up and down like an albatross., running faster and faster as he tried to get off the ground. He ran, trying to fly, over to the far side of the pitch, where Jimi was now playing a tender version of 'Fly Me to the Moon'. Despite Michael's departure, the match ended with a five-nil victory, and a hat-trick for Clara.

Freddy's thoughts turned now to the Champions League final on Wednesday, and of course, how to get Jimi and Michael back.*****