

Semi-Finals Week – Day 3

'Chelsea at home? Stamford Bridge? Definitely 2-1 to Chelsea. Vital away goal to Liverpool.'

'We'll see!' said Wil.

Michael always seemed to be right, so Wil and Freddy were surprised to be able to tease him about being wrong. They were gathered on Thursday afternoon for a vital training session before their own big match on Saturday.

'No I was right actually', Michael said, clearly ignoring the facts.

'How could you possibly be right, you said one-nil!' squeaked Wil.

'I was talking about goal difference, you see, you wouldn't understand...' replied Michael.

'You said two-one and an away goal to Liverpool. You were wrong!' Wil started a chorus of *'Michael got it wrong, ner, ner, na-ner, ner'* until Freddy kicked him.

'Ow, what was that for?'

A mischievous smile came over Michael's facial features.

'OK, I was wrong, but if Reina hadn't made that save from Lampard, and Cech hadn't tipped that Gerrard shot round the post, I would have been right!'

'Yeh, yeh, yeh...whatever' said Wil. Michael started juggling a football with his feet, and talking at the same time.

'But what a game! D'you think it was a penalty, Mourinho said it was?'

Jaz was listening to the conversation as they warmed up.

'No way! And did you see Mourinho afterwards as they showed him the replay? He always thinks someone's out to get him!'

'OK, everyone, gather round please!' said Coach Azalea, bringing his young team around him. He had clearly been watching the match as well.

'Now, Butterfield on Saturday, lads and lass. A good team. And a good manager, although they always seem get the best of the refereeing decisions.'

He really has been watching too much football, thought Freddy. Mr Andrews continued,

'Now, Baz here...'

'Er...Jaz', said Jaz.

'Yes, sorry, Naz here has been looking at the league statistics, haven't you, Maz?'

Jaz threw up his arms in mock resignation at Mr Andrews's inability to get his name right, but he carried on, standing by a board Mr Andrews had put up at the side of the pitch.

'Yes, so, the Butterfield game. It's a must win game for us. At the moment, as you know, we have played 11, lost 1, drawn 1, won 9. I've calculated the win percentage which comes in at 82%, and our goal difference is currently 21, resulting from our for/against ratio of 3.33. That's an average of 2.73 goals per game.'

'How can you score 2.73 goals?' moaned Hardy after Jaz had finished his statistical marathon.

'What are you talking about?' said Wil.

'What he's trying to say,' said Freddy patiently, *'is that we've done well, but that it all comes down to the last match'.*

'And over the last ten years, only 4.7% of teams who have lost their first game have gone on to win the league', added Jaz unnecessarily.

'Yes, OK, but what do we have to do?' said Hardy in his straight-talking way.

'Well, Butterfield have a much better goal difference than us, and we're on the same points'.

'Well, that makes it simple, doesn't it?' said Freddy, *'we just have to win the game tomorrow. A draw is not good enough'.*

'You got it!' said Jaz.

'Right, OK then' said Hardy.

'Right, we can do it!' chirped Wil.

'No problem' said Alex.

'Hmmm...' said Clara.

'Ooh la la!' said JoJo.

Michael said nothing, but flicked the ball at his feet onto his knee, where it remained perched for a moment before he volleyed it into the goal some fifteen metres away.

'Let's win it for Bally!' said Mr Andrews.

Everyone giggled a bit.

'No, I mean it,' said Mr Andrews firmly, *'yesterday saw the passing of one of the great England players, a man who was a star of England's only World Cup win in the glorious summer of 1966. So let us stand here for a moment and remember the genius of Alan Ball. Show your appreciation please'.*

Mr Andrews started clapping slowly to himself. Freddy beckoned to the others to join in. A strange sight perhaps, nine people clapping to themselves in the middle of a football pitch, but their own tribute to a great player from the past.

Mr Andrews started drawing markings onto his board, which had some basic football pitch lines marked on it.

'Did you see the ground Cole made up to score last night?' he said, scrawling an arrow from the half-way line indicating JoJo Cole's amazing run into the box from his own half.

'He could see Drogha here (he drew another scrawl heading down the right wing) and knew that there was a good chance of the cross coming over here (he drew a large circle on the penalty spot) or here (he drew a circle on the six-metre line) or even here (he drew a circle in row Z of the crowd), but what in fact happened was the ball came from here, to here, over there and then to here...'

By this time the diagram looked like a bad day at Spaghetti Junction, but the point was well made,

'...you are playing for each other, you have to look for space, you have to anticipate what each other is going to do. Freddy I expect you to play the JoJo Cole role, and Michael, you will be playing down the right wing today, supplying the crosses like Drogha and Robben do for Chelsea.'

The two players swelled with pride at the comparisons, and listened whilst Mr Andrews set out his other plans for the rest of the team. He finished with one of his rousing speeches, topped off with a flourish,

'...and then, my friends, you can call yourself Champions, and take your places at the Champions League final on May 23rd!'

'It'll be Chelsea v Milan', whispered Michael, *'I'm sure of it!'*
