

## Semi-Finals Week – Day 1

It was presentation time, after the match against Wanderers.

The Lancaster Road players were sitting in the warm April sunshine. Mr Andrews walked down the group of players, making sure they were quiet and in a straight line.

On their right was the team they had just played, the Wanderers. The Wanderers often referred to themselves as *'The Mighty Wanderers'*, and indeed they had that name printed onto their shirts, alongside the name of their sponsors, a local Springhurst travel agency.

*'Oi, get off!'* said one of the Wanderers players as his friend Barry tugged at his hair from behind. Mr Andrews, and the Wanderers coach, glared at him. He just pulled harder. Barry was well known to the Lancaster Road players, being one of the dirtiest players in the league, and also being the notorious one they called *'Barry Bully'* at school. The one who seemed to always be bugging someone. Always. Every minute of every day.

*'Owww!'* cried one of the Derby Road players from one of the lines of players further away from them.

*'Shut up!'* screamed their coach.

*'Hee-heee!'* cackled one of the girls from the Hags United team.

*'Cackle cackle!'* went their coach.

The Butterfield team were the last to join the presentation party. Their coach had been giving them a last-minute post-match pre-training full-on tactical talk. They sauntered gloomily to their place and sat down in a row. Wil turned to Freddy, and was about to say something when he saw Mr Andrews still glaring at them. He decided not to speak.

The league organiser called for quiet.

*'QUIETTTT!'* he screamed noisily. Everyone shut up.

*'One brief announcement...'* he continued, *'next week is the last game of the season...'*

*'Yessss!'* said several players from among the teams.

*'QUIIIII-EEEEEE-TTTT!'* he shrieked at the top of his voice. Several players covered their ears.

*'...next week is the last game of the season. I am pleased to say that there is a magnificent prize for the winners of the league...'*

Everyone, in every team, went completely silent. Even the parents, standing idly chatting in the sunshine, went silent.

*'...yes, the prize, as announced a few weeks ago, for the winning team, is a trip to the Champions League final itself.'*

*'Yessss!'* went everyone, in every team.

'Woo-hoo!' went all the parents.

'QUUUUUUU-EEEEEEEE-TTTTTTT!' bawled the League Organiser.

*'...now as you know, there are only two teams that can possibly win the league from here.'*

Players from five teams looked down at the ground disconsolately. Players from Butterfield and Lancaster Road looked at each other triumphantly.

The League Organiser looked at everyone, threateningly, and then said,

*'OK, managers, over to you. Let's start with Wanderers'.*

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*'Well, yes, er, erm...thanks to Lancaster Road for a great game today. You really have got some great players there...little lad on the wing...what was his name again, was it Michael...yes, you've got a good future, son, well played. To my lads, you gave everything, well done, couldn't quite get the equaliser. But today, my player of the day award goes to...Fred.'*

There were murmurs of appreciation from the crowd. A lone high voice whooped 'Yo Freddy!'. Presumably Fred's Mum.

*'OK, let's move on to Lancaster Road. And keep it brief please managers'.*

Mr Andrews took a deep breath, drew his shoulders back, and cleared his throat.

*'I would like to start by thanking my opposite number from Wanderers, for a thoroughly entertaining and hard-fought game'.* He turned to the Wanderers coach,

*'Thank you for a thoroughly entertaining and hard-fought game',* he said. The Wanderers coach smiled and nodded.

*'..and well played you Wanderers players'.*

A few of them smiled. Knowing smiles from a few Wanderers parents noted the compliment.

Turning to his own team, Mr Andrews continued,

*'Lancaster Road, once again you have proved your ability, your class, and your pedigree at this level. You have passed, headed and kicked your way to victory. I salute you. (he saluted). I must mention one or two players in particular. In goal, Hardy, you were magnificent today, I couldn't believe the save you made in the second half was possible...congratulations. In defence, Clara, my dear, your tenacity and strength was of the highest order...'*

The League Organiser looked at his watch. Mr Andrews continued,

*'...and Freddy, not only did you fulfil your defensive duties, but your organisation of your team was just top class.'*

Freddy smiled at the comment, but looked with concern at the League Organiser, who seemed to be moving from foot to foot in some consternation.

*‘... Wil and Jaz in midfield, let me deal with you together...’* continued Mr Andrews as the crowd of parents started murmuring amongst themselves,

*‘...you both had a huge part to play in this victory, which leaves us on the verge of the Champions League...’*

The League Organiser coughed loudly.

*‘...and my strikers, Alex, you were superb, and ladies and gentlemen...’* Mr Andrews looked across at the assembled crowd, most of whom were talking to each other, playing keepy-uppy with their infants, or starting to walk away.

*‘...Ladies and Gentlemen, I’d like to tell you about...’*

*‘Please...!’* said the League Organiser, *‘we have to move on!’* There was a ripple of applause from the parents.

*‘Alright, let me just say that at training this week our striker Michael here showed some incredible tricks and today, in the pressure of a game situation, repeated them, scored two goals, and laid on the other two for Alex. Now, let me tell you a little bit about Michael...’*

*‘NO!’* yelled the League Organiser moving threateningly towards the still-talking Mr Andrews,

*‘Er... OK....OK...my man of the match this week is our substitute JoJo!’*

A confused JoJo made her way up to collect the trophy. The rest of the team smiled knowingly at Mr Andrews’s continuing, unpredictable, yet vaguely charming behaviour.

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As they made their way across the field to the car park, Wil saw his mother talking to another lady. There was much nodding of heads, and both ladies were writing something in their diaries. Wil overheard a bit of the conversation.

*‘Yes, OK, tomorrow then, I’ll drop him off. Thanks darling! Bye!’*

Wil looked at his mother, and then at her departing friend. His jaw dropped. His heart missed a beat. His eyes widened. His brain throbbed. His nose sniffed and his liver did whatever livers do when they are amazed and frightened. *‘What was that about Mum?’* said Wil suspiciously.

*‘Oh nothing really, I’ve just invited Barry round for tea tomorrow’*