

Spring Holidays – Day 1

For the last match before the spring holidays, Mr Andrews had gathered them together early for some pre-match training. The game was against Derby Road, and although there were no easy games any more, this was one they felt they could win.

'Now, lads, we've got an hour before kick-off. We're going to start with some serious warming up. Let's start by jogging slowly, once round the pitch.'

'Easy for him to say', muttered Clara, as they set off on a little jog, 'he doesn't have to run anywhere. Lads, pah! Let's start...pah!'

'Come on,' said Freddy, jogging backwards at the head of his team, 'you know how important it is to warm up properly...now, swing those arms'.

Eight young footballers swung their arms obediently (well, with only a few little grumbles), and followed the lead of their captain. They completed their lap of the pitch and returned to Mr Andrews, who was also out of breath (because he always was).

Suddenly Hardy, breathing heavily, picked up his water bottle, pointed it to the sky, and shouted,

'Mr Andrews, look out, bandits, one o'clock, coming out of the sun!'

Mr Andrews, whose distinguished service in the army was often overlooked, flung himself instinctively to the ground, imagining enemy planes circling overhead.

'Haha, April Fool!' cried Hardy as Mr Andrews picked himself wearily up from the ground, his nose and right cheek streaked with mud. Mr Andrews, although he looked a bit like an April fool, did not look like he appreciated the joke.

'Do I look like I appreciated that joke?' he said.

'No, sorry', said Hardy, who immediately realised that the joke was not appropriate, and on top of Mr Andrews's disgust when they played wearing red noses two weeks previously, was not sensible either.

'Right, let's get on with it', said Mr Andrews, *'Michael here has been practicing some new routines. Show them what you know, Michael'.*

They all knew what Michael could do. He had scored six goals already this season, but he had contributed so much more to the team. Where Hardy and Alex were the muscles of the team, where Freddy and Jaz were the brains, Michael was the beating heart, the inspiration, the provoker of most of the good things they did.

Although he didn't need the practice, he had obviously been busy. In his quiet way, he started to show them some of his new routines.

'So, for this one, you have the ball just behind your feet, then you kind of roll it up your left leg with your right foot, then you chip it up over your head with your heel, and trap it the other side'.

His explanations clearly made sense to him, although the others had some trouble.

Freddy got it rolling up his leg, but could not master the chip over the head.

Jaz sat down staring at his football, staring at Michael performing the trick, wondering how on earth it could be done.

Hardy rolled the ball up his leg with his hand, dragged it up over his left shoulder, then tried to trap it as it fell. Instead he stood on the ball, and fell over.

Alex managed the trick once, stood with one foot on the ball, and stopped trying.

Wil was laughing so much at the idea of a ball rolling up his leg that he couldn't do anything at all.

'OK, now try this one. It was on Match of the Day. Ronaldo did it.'

They watched again, as Michael dribbled the ball forward, did one stepover, did another stepover, then stopped with the ball just by his right foot. He dipped his shoulder as if to go to the left, but then knocked the ball against his standing left leg. The ball, which seemed to be going left, in fact bounced into space to his right, and he set off on another run.

'I saw that one, I saw it!' said Wil, before adding, *'and I've been trying it...'* more quietly.

'Go on then, let's see. It's great for fooling defenders!' said Michael.

Well, this one was beyond all of them.

Predictably, Hardy could not work out which leg to stand on, and ended up standing on neither of them. Alex tried once, slipped, and did not try again. Wil was sure he had got it, but also ended up on the floor. Freddy and Jaz didn't try at all, but challenged Michael to go past them using one of the moves he had shown them. Predictably, he did. Easily.

Michael was also on top form during the game, scoring a hat-trick. He kept most of his skills hidden, *'I'm saving them for the big games'*, he had said, but he still inspired the victory.

At the end of the game, with a satisfactory three-nil scoreline, Mr Andrews again gathered the team together.

Brian and Ron from the *Springhurst Daily Press* newspaper were on the sidelines as he spoke.

'Well played, guys, you gave a hundred percent, and we deserved the victory', and then, nodding in the direction of the reporters, he added, *'you can write what you like gentlemen'*, before turning quickly and setting off across the field back to his car. The Lancaster Road players looked at their inspirational

coach with the usual mix of admiration and complete bemusement.

'Well, see you all tomorrow, then!', said Hardy, looking at Freddy and Michael.

'For what?', said Wil, in his usual state of high excitement.

'Sleepover, my place, tomorrow, wanna come?'

Without hesitation, Wil replied,

'Sure do – see you then!'

But Wil had never done a sleepover before.