

New Year Blues – Day 2

Then Michael handed Freddy a note.

'Sorry', he murmured.

Freddy had kept the note for a few days, not daring to open it. Fearing what it might contain. Worried about the future of the team. Worried for his single best player.

Eventually, when the old year had passed into 2007, he had sat down to look at the contents of Michael's letter. It was much as he expected.

Dear Freddy

My Mum thinks football's to ruff. She says I always come home muddy. She wants me to start darnsing lessons on Saterdays.

Sorry, love Michael

Well...! Well well...! Not well...! Freddy felt sick. True, football is rough. True, in the winter there's lots of mud. But DANCING! No! It would be funny if it wasn't so serious. Freddy sat with his head in his hands, running through the implications of the letter. An image ran through his head of Michael wearing tights and a tutu. Ughh!

So I could move up front, Hardy could come into defence, JoJo in goal...

'Hey Bro, what's up?' said Wil, strolling casually into the room.

'Michael's out of the team. He's going to be a ballet dancer!'

'What? A dancer?' Wil chassayed across the floor as he imagined Michael in his new Saturday-morning occupation.

'It's serious, Wil, he's our best player!' Freddy replied.

'Well, he kind of dances down the wing and skips past players, maybe he'll be a really good dancer one day!'

'I don't care. We need him. We must get him back! If it's the last thing we do!'

On Wednesday afternoon, Wil, Freddy, Hardy and Clara had gone up to the field for a kickabout. Freddy had told the others about Michael's letter, and they had agreed that the best way to beat the New Year blues was to get out, in the fresh air, with a football. And without Michael, they would need all the practice they could get. Freddy had also told Mr Andrews what had happened. As usual Mr Andrews had scratched his head, and as usual he had made Freddy feel better,

'Don't worry, Freddy lad, there's always a solution to every problem. You have a think about it, and so will I. He'll be back.'

Up at the field, they really let off some steam.

By coincidence, Clara and Hardy were both wearing Arsenal away shirts, on top of several layers of vests and t-shirts to keep out the biting wind.

By even more coincidence, Wil and Freddy both had on their bright red Liverpool shirts.

They warmed up a bit, then started playing a two v. two match.

Talk about two different styles of play!

Wil and Freddy, the cultured midfielders from Lancaster Road, played the attractive passing game of Liverpool at their best. Clara and Hardy played a more direct style of football, relying on physical strength and complete commitment.

The game ended up as one of their highest scoring matches ever, with Arsenal (in spite of the away strip) defeating Liverpool by six goals to three! Hardy had taken on the role of Julio Baptista and scored four of the goals, with Clara knocking in the other two. Wil and Freddy, who had perhaps taken the game too easily, each scored in the second half.

At the end of the game they sat down and had a drink, then started talking about the next league game this weekend.

Until...

At one end of the ground, a small figure. Hooded top. Head bowed.

It was Michael, just looking on from a distance. Freddy waved at him, wondering how long he had been there. Michael just waved a sad and lonely wave before turning away and trudging off down the hill. Freddy looked at Wil.

'I don't think he wants to do the dancing, do you?'

At the other end of the ground, a much more worrying sight, although in the far distance.

A tall man, dressed in a suit and carrying a briefcase. Striding towards them. Distant, but getting closer all the time. Freddy looked at Wil again, raising an eyebrow in consternation. Hardy stepped back. His Dad was approaching.

As he got closer, Freddy thought to himself,

Why does this man always look so angry? What have we done to him? What has his son done to him? Why...

Before he could think any more, the man was there. He must have eaten up the ground to get there so quickly. Without thinking, the four of them had formed a little defensive huddle as he approached, and they were now cowering slightly as he stood in front of them. After a short period of silence, when Hardy's Dad had seemed, unusually, to be short of something to say, he opened his mouth,

'Freddy, I just wanted to apologise for what happened on Boxing Day. It was wrong of me, and I am very sorry for leaving like that. We were having a good game, and I was enjoying it, so I'm sorry'.

Freddy was so surprised that he really couldn't say anything. He just managed to squeeze out an almost silent 'OK' before Hardy's Dad turned his back on them and marched back in the direction from which he had come. A few metres away from them, he turned back, smiling now, and said,

'Good luck against the M&Ms at the weekend!'

'The M&Ms? Eh?'
