

Getting the Team Together...Day 6

Getting to the end of November, and still only half a team.

But the latest training session had gone well.

With Mr Andrews shouting encouragement from his position on the bench, they had all had a good run-out, practicing dribbling and shooting and, at Mr Andrews's insistence, warming down after the session with more stretching and jogging.

But mostly they had watched Michael.

'He hasn't spoken since we got here', whispered Wil as they took a breather on the touchline.

'I know, but look what he can do', replied Freddy as they admired the incredible Michael,

'Look! Stepovers, a quick dribble, then a left foot shot. Now, more stepovers, did you see that? That one was right-footed, top corner!'

'He just ran from one goal to the other, and the ball didn't touch the ground'.

'Did you see that!', Hardy raced over. No whispering for him, he almost shouted in admiration.

Michael was unperturbed. He was lost in a world of his own, sprinting here, jogging, walking backwards, all the while the ball at his feet. When Jaz decided to go in for a tackle, Michael pulled the ball back and away with the toe of his right foot, flicked it up with the heel of his left, and caught it on the back of his neck where it stayed, tantalisingly balanced, whilst Jaz picked himself up off the floor where he had slid in. Michael then flicked the ball over his head and volleyed it low into the goal. Jaz clasped his forehead in exasperation and admiration.

Wil strolled over to where they had left their kit. His golden forehead was glistening in the weak sunshine and sweat shone through his closely cropped hair. His formerly immaculate black and white striped kit was streaked with mud, and his socks were down at his ankles. He sat down. He listened wearily as Mr Andrews's husky voice continued to encourage the others with stories of *'come on lads'*, and *'in my day'*.

'Wil... Wil...'

'Eh, what?', Wil muttered.

'Wil...'

Wil turned to where the soft voice was coming from.

Nobody there. Slightly more urgently, the voice again.

'Wil, ear!'

'Wil...ear?', Wil repeated, getting slowly to his feet, and making his way to the bushes where the sound was coming from, a smile breaking across his face as he realised who was there.

'JoJo! You're back! Come out of there!'

JoJo stepped out of the clearing where she had been hiding and looked nervously over to where the others were now gathered in a circle round the bench where Mr Andrews was perched.

'Beeg 'ug, Wil'. She stretched out her arms and Wil stepped forward to hug her.

'I've really missed you', he said, before stepping quickly back and glancing over to the group about ten metres away. No-one had seen. He smiled again.

'You look formidable! You are still wearing your New Cassel stripes! O, but you are 'ot, let me wap your leetle fore'ed a beet!'

'Er, no, it's OK thanks, I'm fine', replied Wil, looking over again at the others, and self-consciously straightening his Newcastle shirt. He looked down at the ground.

JoJo was dressed like any other girl her age in a bright t-shirt and jeans, but from the time she had spent with them the previous summer, they remembered she usually wore something slightly unusual as well. Today, round her neck, she had a beautiful silk scarf with a vibrant coloured pattern on it. She fingered the scarf nervously as the group finished their session and came over.

'Yo yo, JoJo JoJo!', said Hardy jovially as he bounded over to greet her.

'Ah, good morning, Hardy, 'ow are you?', she replied coolly. Hardy covered his mouth with his hand and smirked. They had never really got on since Hardy had teased her about trying to get his name pronounced right. She had tried very hard, but it almost always came out as very French! He still smiled when she said it.

Freddy came over and introduced the rest of the team. JoJo shook hands politely with each player, except Clara, who she tried to kiss on both cheeks.

'Ugh, no way!', Clara screamed, almost jumping back out of the way. They all laughed. Except JoJo, who pursed her lips and fiddled with her scarf.

'We're putting together a football team', said Freddy, *'we're going to play against other teams and everything'*.

'We're putting together a football team', said Mr Andrews unnecessarily, wheezing over towards them. *'You want to join? Damn good players, you Frenchies!'*

Freddy gave Mr Andrews a withering look, whilst JoJo shuffled nervously to a spot behind Wil. Mr Andrews smiled, reached over, and pulled Freddy a couple of metres away from the group.

'Look, lad, I think my playing days might be numbered. What with my back now, and this leg. Shot off in Sudan it was. Why don't you let me be your manager? I've been watching football for sixty years, I can help you become great.'

'I'll think about it', said Freddy after a moment's reflection, relieved at the thought that Mr Andrews might not be playing with them after all.

As they walked back down the road, JoJo tugged at Wil's arm, and unexpectedly whispered,

'Wil, I think I want to join your team...'

He turned towards her face, to see her deep brown eyes pleading longingly towards him.

'Oh dear... oh dear', he thought to himself.
