

## Getting the Team Together...Day 5

Freddy led the way up the hill. He had on his favourite England football kit – the white shirt, blue shorts, and white socks. He looked immaculate in his new blue boots, with the white tick on them. He subconsciously smoothed his hair down at the front. He turned back to his group of footballers, and thought to himself.

*My team. My very own team. Me... captain ... coach...manager. We'll play like England. Or Brazil. We'll all skill people – like me. I'll be Messi. Wil can be Jadon Sancho! Hardy's Harry Maguire. We'll win the league the first time we enter it...*

His daydream was interrupted by a yell from new boy Michael. He had obviously lent his football to Mr Andrews, who had tried an elaborate move involving chipping the ball up onto his knee then onto his head. The result was that the ball was now running down the steep hill, with Michael in hot pursuit, and Mr Andrews bent double in agony. Hardy was laughing and shouting,

*'Go, Michael, go!'*

Michael, who was normally very serious anyway, was not laughing, but he caught up with the ball just outside number twenty-three, and only narrowly escaped it ending up in the garden where the old woman lived. He sprinted back up to join the group, who had just reached the park. They were standing in a big circle, facing each other.

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*'We've got to warm up lads'*, said Mr Andrews, planting his feet firmly apart and beginning an elaborate stretch down to the ground with his hands.

*'Yes, warm up, lots of stretching'*, echoed Freddy, looking across at Mr Andrews. He also stretched down and touched the ground beneath his feet. The others followed his lead, and soon there was a collective groaning as they all started exercising the muscles they had not used all summer.

Collective groaning turned to a piercing yell, as one of the group stretched over just a little too far.

*'Mr Andrews, are you alright?'* said Freddy, jogging over to where his oldest player was bent double in pain, moaning softly to himself. He had obviously stretched too far for his geriatric body to take, his arms had collapsed and he was now shaped like a little old triangle, his head propping him up one end, his boots rooted to the ground, and his little old bony bottom sticking high up in the air.

*'Alright, alright...I'm alright...don't you worry about me...I've had worse...my leg, sucked up by an industrial vacuum cleaner it was...back in '52, I think it was...'*

Mr Andrews was hardly making any sense as Hardy and Freddy tried to turn him the right way up. By pushing him over, to the sound of more groans and incomprehensible complaints, they managed to have him lying on the ground, still in the L-shape.

*'Ah, yes, lads...very important to stretch properly before the game...ow...aaghh...what are you doing?'*

They managed to get him the right way up, sitting on the grass, and then with four of them (Freddy, Hardy, Wil and Jaz) they lifted the completely rigid Mr Andrews to the nearest bench. Luckily, the

angle he got stuck in was exactly the angle of the bench, so he fitted perfectly, and actually looked quite comfortable sitting there.

*'Be right as rain in a couple of days, don't you worry. Carry on'.*

'Carry on?', thought Freddy to himself, *'Carry on?' Who's he telling to carry on?'*

They carried on. First some passing to each other, then some dribbling, then some practice turns.

They moved towards the main pitch. A woman was walking her dog close to the goal. Her dog was a large black hairy variety, and the woman was wearing a large black hairy fur coat, which from behind made her look remarkably similar to the dog.

*'Excuse me...'*, said Freddy politely.

*'Woof!'*, said one of the black hairy objects in front of him.

*'What?'*, said the other, in a screechy, high-pitched voice.

*'We'd like to play football here please, could you move please?'*, Freddy insisted.

*'Well, that's preposterous! I was here first! My darling Ronnie always likes to have a sniff around the goalposts! I'm not moving!'*

On closer inspection, the woman was about sixty-five years old, expensively dressed, although very fat under the fur coat, and with an enormous beehive of hair, fixed in position, despite the windy day. She stood, her arms crossed defiantly, staring at the expectant group of would-be footballers. Her dog Ronnie stood obediently beside her, shaking his head slightly as if to say *'here she goes again'*.

The stand-off lasted a few minutes when suddenly the woman spotted a similarly-dressed woman at the other end of the pitch, this one in a brown fur coat, a hat with fruit on the top, and with a very small cat on a lead.

*'Oh, yoo hoo, Mrs Turvey-Teapot! Over here!'*. And with that she waddled extravagantly over to the other end of the field. They were free to play.

Hardy had been watching Michael. For the whole of the training session, Michael had been playing with his football, chipping it here, lobbing it there, all the while keeping it under perfect control close to him. At times it looked as if the ball was attached to his feet, especially when he had sat down and kept the ball bouncing on the end of his toes for the time Freddy had been arguing with the woman. Hardy had started counting, but had lost count past two hundred. As they moved over towards the goalmouth, Michael got up, flicked the ball ten metres above his head, caught it on the back of his neck, rolled it down his back, back-heeled it up over his head, and caught it nonchalantly in one hand. Hardy grabbed Freddy and pointed to Michael. Freddy nodded and smiled knowingly.

*This boy had something.*