

## Getting the Team Together...Day 4

Freddy and Wil had worked all evening on the advertisement. It was after dark when it was finally ready and they had braved the rain, angry dogs, and nosy neighbours, to deliver it to most of the houses in the street. The only alarm had come when the lady at number twenty-three had emerged with a broom and tried to shoo them away. She had cackled madly at them and muttered rather strangely,

*'See you in November, ha ha ha ha haaagh!'*

This statement meant nothing to them, and they had hurried off, crossing another address off their list of potential players. In fact, they had not expected much from this house, and although they had never spoken to her, they had always been worried about her, just because she was bad-tempered, and was rarely seen without that broom.

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The advertisement had been their very best effort.

They had started off by saying that they were forming the best team in the world and they wanted people to join, but had decided that this might put people off. The second version was too far the other way, inviting people to join the Lancaster Road Football Club. They felt this was too simple as it was directed only to the road they lived in. In the end they had decided on something more basic,

*Can you play football?*

*Want to be part of a football team?*

*Players needed for junior team*

*Playing games in October*

*Apply to 12 Lancaster Road tomorrow.*

Originally they had written '*playing in lo-cal compitativ leegs*', but they had not been sure the spelling was right, so they had simplified it to '*games*'. Wil had decorated the advertisement by drawing pictures of famous footballers on the front, and Freddy had added the words. They had ended up posting thirty copies.

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In the history of leaflets, this turned out to be one of the most unsuccessful postings ever. Four people turned up on that windy November day.

Well, you might say that four out of thirty is not bad, but wait until you hear who came.

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The first knock at the door came soon after ten o'clock in the morning. Although he lived in a different street, Hardy had come over for breakfast to wait with Freddy and Wil, and the three of them had already been waiting for nearly two hours since breakfast for the players to flood in.

Hardy went to the door.

Jaz was standing there, in the rain, looking miserable.

*'Um....er....I, er got your leaflet. Can I play with you?'*

Hardy looked uncertain. Having been a part of the visit to Jaz's house the previous day, he wasn't sure at all about this guy.

*'Oh, please, I'm not bad'.*

*'You'd better come in'.*

*'Jaz, how're you doing?'*, shouted Freddy from the other room, *'come in!'*.

So Jaz came into the room and looked around. They had put up posters of their favourite footballers on the walls of the room. Jaz, who was dressed in a red England shirt, sat down, took out his portable games machine, and disappeared into another world.

*'We'll wait for the others, then we'll go to the park for a training session'*, said Freddy.

*'Hmmm?'*, said Jaz, distractedly. They left him to it.

They waited for another hour or so before the next knock at the door. This time it was an urgent, loud, impatient knock. They could hear singing outside. Wil went this time.

*'What took you so long? NO WAY was I going to stand outside this door for a moment longer'*

Wil had hardly time to open the door before Clara was through it. As she came through the door, she kicked the football that was lying in the hallway so hard that it shot up the stairs, bounced off the wall of the landing area, and lobbed into one of the bedrooms. There was a moment's silence, then a crash and a tinkle of glass. Clara looked defiantly at Hardy. She glanced around and stuck her nose in the air.

*'Where's the football team then?'*

Wil gently fingered the spot on his leg where Clara had hit him yesterday, and wondered what she would be like. He soon found out. She marched into the room where they were sitting, grabbed Wil round the shoulders in an enormous bear-hug, and planted a huge wet kiss on his left cheek.

*'I like you!'* she said, grinning madly. Wil instinctively pulled back. The others were laughing, nervously.

*'I like you too...'* she said threateningly, looking over at the others.

There was another firm knock at the door. *This is going well*, thought Freddy to himself, although in truth the leaflet had only produced two players, and both of those had been recruited the previous day, so in fact their total of new players was a round zero. But the new knock at the door presented them with renewed hope that they could add to their current total of five players. Freddy went this time, whilst Hardy tried to stop Clara from kissing Jaz.

Freddy opened the door. Standing on the mat was a small figure wearing a faded white shirt, long black shorts down to his knees, and brown football boots with very bright white laces. On his head was a flat brown cap. He was wheezing slightly at the effort of getting up the few steps to the doorstep.

*'NO! Mr Andrews, I'm sorry, you can't...'*

Freddy had half expected this, after Mr Andrews's outbursts yesterday, but he didn't quite know how to explain himself. After all, the advertisement had not been very specific. It certainly had not said what age the players should be, or that the elderly, the deaf, and the slightly mad, might not be welcome. Or in Mr Andrews's case, all three.

*'What's that lad? I saw your advert. Looked out my old stuff. I've still got it y'know...'*

With that he attempted to demonstrate a right-footed volley but succeeded only in volleying one of the pot plants next to the door, and almost swinging himself off his feet.

*'Mr Andrews, please, we're looking for a kid's team'*

*'Cooking up some ice-cream? What d'you want to cook it for? Anyway, I've come about the football, I don't know, young people nowadays...'*

*'I said, we want to enter a league for children. You would be too old to play.'*

*'Too cold today? I'd agree with you there lad. But so what, I didn't come to talk about the weather. Now, let's get on with it. I remember it well, '52 was it, when Sir Matthew Stanleys came out at Wembley. Or was it Anfield?'*

This went on for another ten minutes or so until Clara appeared at the door, ran out and gave her granddad a big hug, and pulled him inside. Freddy just looked on unhappily. This was not going according to plan. He went inside and sat down again, staring at his near-blank team list. Himself, Wil, Hardy. Then Jaz (although they were not sure he could ever be persuaded to actually go outside), Clara (who they had never even seen play football, but who they were a bit scared of, so she could play if she wanted), and Mr Andrews, sitting breathless in the chair, still fully dressed in his kit.

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After lunch, and no more callers, they decided to go out for their first training session. Freddy hoped that they might be able to lose their eldest player on the way up to the park. The hill was quite steep and his house was on the way, so he might just have to wait there whilst they carried on up.

Hardy was the first out of the door.

As he went through into the front garden, he noticed a small figure sitting on the wall, his back to the door. He had a large hooded top on, and was bouncing a football on the ground in front of him. He didn't turn round as Hardy approached.

*'Hi, who are you?'* Hardy said, loudly and clearly.

*'Hi, Michael'*, said the boy, softly and faintly.

'Sorry', said Hardy.

'*My name is Michael*'. He looked down at the ground, still facing away from them. '*I want to join your team*', he said, softer than ever.

'*What did you say?*', said Hardy again failing to hear.

'*I want to join your football team, please*'. By now, Wil had approached the pair.

'*Is that your ball there?*' Freddy asked.

'*It is*'.

'*Right, you're in. We're going training. Now*'. And the whole group set off up the hill to the park.

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