JOHN HICKMAN



THE FOOTBALL TRIALS

# KICK OFF

BLOOMSBURY

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JOHN HICKMAN

Illustrated by NEIL EVANS

BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION

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## The Scout

"Who is that old geezer watching us?" asks Wheeler.

I look to where Wheeler is pointing and I see an old man standing there, with a little dog. He has white hair and a fat Father Christmas belly.

"Come on, let's just play on," I say.

The four of us are having a kick about in the park. Wheeler, me, Taylor and Harj. Two on two. We've put our coats down to mark the goals. We come here most days after school to play football.

"RIGHT," I shout. "NEXT GOAL WINNER!"

Taylor comes at me with the ball, with his Arsenal shirt on. He's the only one who supports Arsenal. Muppet. The rest of us are United through and through. He tries to pop the ball through my legs.

"As if!" I say. I take the ball away from his feet and nutmeg him instead.

I want to try something different. The Rabona. I've seen it online.



Instead of just shooting with my right, like I normally do, I flick my right foot around the back of my left and hit the ball hard. I almost tie myself up in a knot doing it. The ball flies straight between the coats.

"LOVELY GOAL!" shouts the old man.

Wheeler grabs the ball and we all go over.

"Why are you watching us?" asks Wheeler.

"I wasn't watching you," says the old man. "I was watching him." He points at me.

"What... what you watching me for?" I ask.

"I'm a scout," says the old man.

"Bit old to be a scout aren't you?" says Wheeler. "And shouldn't you have lots of badges on your shirt?"

"I'm not that sort of scout," says the old man.

"I'm a football scout. For United." He pulls out a business card and hands it to me. It says "Arthur Logan: Football scout". There's a phone number and email address, and United's logo printed in the corner.

"I'm Arthur," he says. He holds out his hand.

I shake it. The others do the same.

"I heard there was a kid with some skill – a little rough around the edges – but a real player," he says.

"Who told you that?" I ask.

"A little bird," he says and taps his nose.

"You think Jax has got what it takes?" asks Harj.

"He's got something," says Arthur. "If you want a trial, I can make that happen for you. What was your name again?"

"Jackson," I tell him. "Jackson Law."

"If I were you, I'd sign him now. Fifty K a week," says Taylor.

Arthur laughs. "If you want that trial, give me a call," he says. He nods at me, then walks away with his little dog.

"You could play in the Premier League," says Wheeler. "How awesome is that?"

I take a breath. I feel a bit dizzy and sick. It's a joke. Has to be. But what if it isn't? Could I really get signed by United?

Man, this is PROPER crazy!

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