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(There's no "i" in …)

DREAM TEAM

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Chapter 1
No “i” in defeat

Red Star 4–East End United 1

Cairo kicked his water bottle down the touchline. His eyes were hard and angry.

Ayo picked up the bottle and handed it back. “Calm down,” he said.

Cairo gave Ayo his best dead-eyed look.

“What if I don’t want to calm down?” he snapped. “Nobody’s giving me the ball. How am I supposed to score if I don’t get the ball?”

“I’m the coach,” Ayo told him, “and if you don’t stop shouting, I’ll have to sub you.”

Cairo threw his arms in the air. “You can’t do that!” he shouted. “I’m the best player you’ve got. I’m the captain.”

Hamza was their number 5. He looked across at Cairo and shook his head. “There’s no ‘i’ in team,” he said.

“Oh yeah?” Cairo said, taking a step forward. “Well, there’s no ‘i’ in butt out either, so butt out, butt face.”

Hamza squared up to Cairo. He was bigger than him and his shoulders were wide.

“Who’s going to make me?” Hamza said, his voice cold.

Ayo stepped between them before the argument turned into a fight. They were two

of his best players, but they both had tempers that caught fire far too fast.

"Just calm it, will you?" Ayo said. "We're only three–one down."

"Only?" Cairo yelled. He turned his fury on Ayo. "Red Star are two places above us in the table. We've got to beat them or we'll fall even further behind."

Some of the boys from Red Star were listening to the argument and they began to laugh.

"Who are you laughing at?" Cairo snarled.

Ayo turned to the Red Star coach. "I'm sorry about this," he said. "I'll sort it."

The Red Star coach just shrugged.

"What are you saying sorry to him for?" Cairo demanded.



"Because," Ayo said, "you are letting yourself down."

"Ayo's right," John-Joe said. "Stop throwing a wobbly. We need to sort ourselves out before the second half starts."

At last, Cairo started to listen. John-Joe was his best mate. Ayo smiled and the boys gathered round him.

“Listen,” Ayo said, “you played some good stuff, but you’re not working together as a team.”

Hamza gave Cairo a look.

Cairo ignored him and stared hard at Ayo. “I’ve scored most of our goals this season,” he said. “You need to get me on the ball.”

Hamza went to say something, but Ayo frowned. It was his way of telling Hamza it would only start another fight. He turned back to face Cairo.

“Cairo,” Ayo said. “You can’t just hang around up front waiting for the ball to come to you. Red Star’s midfield is working really hard. Our lads are under pressure. You need to come back a bit and help them out.”

“But I’m a striker,” Cairo moaned. He twisted round to point to the number 9 on his shirt. “How can I score if I’m back in midfield?”

Ayo took Cairo to one side.

"Will you listen to me," he said. "I don't mean stay there all the time. Just drop back when Red Star are all over us like a rash. Give us an outlet. If all we do is hammer it forward, Red Star will keep coming back at us. Can you give it a go?"

Cairo looked down at the grass. "Maybe."

And so, when the second half kicked off, Cairo dropped back a couple of times and put in a few tackles. But he wanted to be up front. He hated defence. He hated midfield. His heart wasn't in it. He saw Ayo on the touchline, trying to catch his eye, but he looked away. At last, John-Joe picked up the ball and got away from the Red Star midfield players.

Cairo made his run. "Pass. Pass!"

Cairo was in the area with his arm up.

"John-Joe. Pass!" he yelled.

Before John-Joe could put his foot through the ball, one of the Red Star boys flicked the ball away. United's chance had gone. Cairo ran after John-Joe.

"You've got to pass it faster," he shouted. "Didn't you hear me?"

Hamza was walking past. "Everybody heard you," he said.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Cairo said.

"Work it out for yourself," Hamza said.

That was the last chance the boys got. Red Star scored again five minutes later.

Red Star four. East End United one.

United trooped off the pitch with their heads down.

“I need the ball to score,” Cairo said again.

“Zip it, will you,” Hamza said.

The boys squared up again.

“Stop,” Ayo said. “Just stop.” He got the boys to sit down. “Look,” he said, “we lost a game. The season isn’t over. But it’s time you learned some lessons.”

“Like what?” John-Joe asked, as he joined them.

Ayo looked at each player in turn.

“OK,” he said. “I tried telling you what to do. Maybe you need to find out for yourselves.”

“How do you mean?” Hamza asked.

“Who are your favourite players?” Ayo asked.

“Messi,” Cairo said. “Ronaldo.”

“Pogba,” Hamza said. “Kanté.”

John-Joe added some more. “Suárez, Sánchez, Ibrahimović.”

“There are plenty of good names there,” Ayo said, “but they are all modern. Find out about the history of the beautiful game. Learn about players from the past.”

“How do we do that?” Cairo asked.

“Try the library,” Ayo told him.

“Library?” Cairo snorted. “What are we, geeks?”

The other boys laughed. Ayo smiled.

“Let’s talk about it at the next training session.”

TODAY'S STARS

Many people think that **Cristiano Ronaldo** and **Lionel Messi** are the world's best footballers. When **Ronaldo** signed for Manchester United in 2003, he was the most expensive teenage footballer ever. He fulfilled his promise ... and more. Fast, strong and with an amazing range of skills, Ronaldo is also a great header of the ball.

He won the Premier League three times with Manchester United. He won the Champions League, FA Cup and FIFA Club World Cup.

With Real Madrid, Ronaldo went on to win La Liga, the Copa Del Rey three times, the Champions League twice and the FIFA Club World Cup Twice.

With his country, Portugal, Ronaldo won the UEFA European Championship.

Lionel Messi is Ronaldo's rival for the title of world's greatest player. He plays for Real Madrid's bitter rivals, FC Barcelona. Messi, like Ronaldo, comes from a working-class background. When he was a



child, Messi had a condition which meant he grew more slowly than other kids. Maybe that's why as a player, he hugs the ground and the ball, and goes off on weaving runs, skipping over tackles. Messi scores with his feet and his head.

With FC Barcelona Messi has won La Liga an astonishing eight times, the Copa Del Rey four times, the UEFA Champions League four times and the FIFA Club World Cup three times.

With his international team, Argentina, Messi has won the FIFA Under-20 World Cup and an Olympic Gold Medal.

Eden Hazard is one of the most exciting players in the world. He comes from a footballing family in Belgium and plays as an attacking midfielder or winger. Many people think he could one day become the best player in the world.

With his club, Chelsea, Hazard has won the Premier League, the Football League Cup and the FIFA Europa League.

Zlatan Ibrahimović is one of the world's best strikers. Tall, strong, powerful and skilful, Ibrahimović has won titles with many clubs. He is from Sweden, but has won the Dutch League twice with Ajax, then the Italian Serie A three times with Inter Milan and one other time with AC Milan. Ibrahimović has also won the Spanish League with FC Barcelona, and the French League four times with Paris Saint-Germain.

In his first season with Manchester United, Ibrahimović won the Football League Cup. Ibrahimović was injured at the time, but the team also won the Europa League.

Manuel Neuer is thought by most to be the greatest goalkeeper of our time. (His only rival is David De Gea.) Neuer is tall and powerful and has great reflexes. He passes the ball brilliantly to outfield players.

With Bayern Munich, Neuer has won the Bundesliga four times. He has won the UEFA Champions League and the FIFA Club World Cup. Neuer has also won the FIFA World Cup with Germany.