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Part 1

1. Time to Shine

Thursday May 28 – The Day of the Youth Cup Final

Jamie Johnson picked up his gleaming new football boot and kissed it for good luck. Then he slipped it his left foot into it.

There were just ten minutes to go until the kick-off of the Youth Cup Final and Foxborough's Academy Coach, Steve Brooker, had his young team gathered around him in the dressing room.

'Ok, lads, I'm going to keep this brief,' he said, looking each one of the players in the eye as he talked.

'You know why we've brought you to this club. We believe that you have something about you – as a footballer and a person – that marks you out as different…that means you have the credentials to play for Foxborough.

'Now the question is: can you bring those attributes, that talent, to the table when it matters most? It's all very well turning it on in training or beating a team in a behind-closed-doors friendly. But can you do it in a game like tonight – with a full stadium, live on TV, with a proper trophy at stake?

‘The truth is that probably only one or two of you will make it into the Foxborough First Team. That’s just the way football is. But don’t forget all the other clubs will be watching tonight. This is the biggest advertisement your talent will ever have…

‘And I’m not going to lie to you either. We all know that Foxborough is a rich club. The manager can go out any time he wants and buy a fully paid-up superstar. So why would he pick *any* of you to go into his first team?

‘Why? I’ll tell you why: because you are all special footballers.

Steve was pacing back and forth along the dressing room floor in front on his players. Then he turned and stood perfectly still, his eyes glistening with intent.

‘There are three types of people in life,’ he said. ‘There are those who, for whatever reason, do not or cannot recognise an opportunity when it arises. There are those who *do* recognise an opportunity but find themselves unable to take it. And then there are those who see the opportunity and seize it with both hands.’

‘Tonight, it’s time for you to go and show the world who you are and everything we have been working on…Now go and win that trophy!’

Good evening everyone and welcome to our live and exclusive coverage of the Youth Cup Final between Foxborough and Harrington Rovers.

This competition is the showcase for the finest young talent in the country and it's their chance to announce themselves on the football stage, their opportunity to show that they are ready for *the big time*.

So, sit back, enjoy the game and pick out the players that you think will be stars of the future. In a couple of years time, these young talents could be gracing the Premier League, the Champions League or even a World Cup Final. But which ones? Now is their time to shine...

Out on the pristine Foxborough pitch, the bright beam of the floodlights focused their glare on Jamie Johnson – at 15 the youngest player on either side. He felt a sudden pinch of nerves shiver up his spine towards his skull.

There were lots of good reasons for him to be nervous tonight. This was the first live TV match that he had ever played in. It was also the first game he had ever played at The Lair, Foxborough's home ground, the biggest stadium in the country. And the referee had his whistle in his mouth and was about to get this crucial game underway and second now...

But the real reason why Jamie could feel his body had become stiff with tension was that the big electronic screens inside the stadium had just shown that the entire Foxborough First Team Squad, including their captain Dave Lewington, were all in the ground tonight. They had got a huge cheer from the crowd when they had come up on the screen.

And, as if the players being there wasn't enough, Brian Robertson, manager of Foxborough and one of the most successful managers in the history of football, was also in the crowd.

Tonight, he would be watching Jamie Johnson…and judging him.