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Opening extract from

Football Crazy

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For Oscar, my favourite footballer!



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Chapter 1
Not Much Fun

‘What a great day to play football,’ Danny Lee thought as he ran out of the old shed where the teams got changed. There had been some rain earlier, but it had stopped now, and the pitch was perfect – not too damp, but not too hard either.

“Hey Danny, your ball!” his friend Jamil called out.

Danny looked up and saw the ball dropping towards him out of the sky. He took it on his chest, let it fall to his thigh, then hit it back on the volley. Jamil stuck a foot out to stop it, but the ball flew into the goal behind him.

"He shoots – he scores!" Danny laughed.

"Pretty cool," said Lewis, his other friend. The three of them had been best mates since Infant School, and they had joined Redpath Rovers together. "It's just a shame you don't do that in matches," Lewis teased. "We might win a few if you did."

"It's not just down to me, is it?" said Danny, as he collected the ball from the back of the net. "You should shoot a bit more often yourself – here you go!"

Danny tapped the ball out to Lewis, who tried a shot and totally fluffed it. Danny and Jamil fell about laughing, and they laughed a lot more over the next few minutes. They were all



football crazy. They always had a kick-about before a game, when they tried tricks with the ball and pretended they were superstars. Danny sometimes thought this was the part of being in a team he enjoyed the most.

It's a shame the real games weren't as much fun. Last season they had lost every game they played, usually by at least four or five goals. This season looked like it was going the same way. So far they had played three games, and lost 3–0, 4–0 and 6–0. Last week they hadn't even got close to scoring, and their coach Mr Perkins said they were lucky not to have let in a lot more goals from the other team.

At last Mr Perkins came out onto the pitch. "Right lads, gather round!" he shouted. Mr Perkins was well into his 60s, and the truth was that he didn't know an awful lot about football. But nobody else had wanted to coach the team. "He's mad," Danny's dad had said. "He's a retired teacher. You'd think he'd suffered enough."

Danny ran over with Lewis and Jamil to join the rest of the team. They formed a circle round Mr Perkins as they waited for his usual pre-match pep-talk. Danny looked them over. They were definitely a very mixed bunch of boys – a whole range of sizes and shapes. At least their kit wasn't too bad. The team was sponsored by Jamil's dad, who had his own small IT company.

A few diehard parents stood round the pitch, which was one of three in their local park. None of the parents seemed too keen. The away team were also in a huddle round their coach. Both groups of boys were checking the other team out, taking crafty peeks instead of listening. Danny wasn't impressed, but you could never tell just from looking.

Mr Perkins's pep-talk was the same as ever. "Remember what we practised in training" (that would be difficult as most of them didn't go to training). "Keep your shape" (that would

be a lot easier if they had any idea what it meant). And “make every ball count” (which would be fine if only they got possession of the ball from time to time).

At last the ref blew his whistle for the teams to get ready to start the game. Mr Perkins gave a deep sigh and trudged over to his usual place.

Rovers won the toss, and they chose to kick off. Danny stood next to Jamil. The ball was on the centre spot between them, and everyone was waiting.

“I don’t know about you,” said Jamil. “But I think we’re going to win.”

They lost …

15–0.