

Football Daft

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Contents

Cover

About the Book

Title Page

Dedication

1. Shooting Practice
2. Running Commentary
3. Want to Play?
4. From Bad to Worse
5. Swap!
6. In and Out
7. Debut Drama
8. Foggy Fools
9. Cameo Role

About the Author

Also by Rob Childs

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About the Book

'The equalizer! You've done it, Brain!'

Brian Draper - known as Brain - plays on the left wing for Luke Crawford's Sunday league team, the Swillsby Swifts. A talented player, he is their top goal-scorer and Luke thinks he should try out for the school team - especially as 'Frosty' Winter, their grouchy sports teacher, has just lost his top players.

But Brain - the butt of many jokes at school about his difficulties with reading - isn't so sure. Can Luke persuade his friend to pluck up his confidence and show everyone his skill on the pitch? For the team needs goal-scorers and there's an important Cup match coming up . . .

ROB CHILDS
FOOTBALL
DAFT

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AIDAN POTTS

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1

Shooting Practice

'NO, NO, NO!' screamed the sports teacher. 'Go and fetch it - run!'

'Frosty' Winter struggled to keep hold of his temper - especially when the boy went and fell over the ball as he tried to dribble it back.

'Look, how many times have I told you, lad?' Frosty ranted. 'It's no good shooting from outside the area like that. You can't even get your shots on target from three metres, never mind thirty!'

Luke Crawford put on his best pained expression. He thought Frosty's criticism was a mite exaggerated. He'd been no more than twenty-five metres out at the most. 'But, you see, sir . . .' he began.

'I haven't got time for any of your rambling excuses,' the teacher cut in. 'Just leave the shooting to people who *can* shoot, OK? Like your cousin over there, for example.'

They both watched as Jon Crawford took his turn in another practice group. Jon controlled the ball in his stride with one elegant touch, glanced up and then stroked it into the net.

'That's how to do it! But you can't - so don't even try!' snapped Frosty. The teacher slouched away to find another

hapless victim, leaving Luke to grin somewhat sheepishly at the other players in his group.

'Bit cruel, that,' said Gregg. 'Over the top, I'd say.'

'Yeah, but that's where Luke's effort went, too,' sniggered Gregg's identical twin, Gary. 'Right over the top of the goal!'

'I don't know how you put up with Frosty's sarcasm, Luke,' said Gregg. 'Why do you keep coming when it's obvious he doesn't want you here?'

'Simple. I want to play in the school team.'

'But he never picks you.'

'He does sometimes - when he has no other choice!'

'You're football daft, you are, Luke!' laughed Gary. 'I'd have thought being skipper, player-manager and coach of the Swifts would be enough for anybody, but you still want to play for the Comp as well!'

'Somebody has to. And I've got an even better chance now, haven't I?'

That was true. Frosty was facing a rebellion. Three boys had already dropped out of Swillsby Comprehensive's small Year 8 soccer squad, fed up of Frosty's black moods. Now he was in danger of losing his captain.

Matthew Clarke had failed to attend the last two training sessions, giving flimsy excuses, and this time had not bothered to tell the teacher at all. As Frosty fished the practice balls out of the sports store, he overheard the twins gossiping outside.

'Has Matt gone straight home?' asked Gregg.

'Yep,' replied Gary. 'Said he was only going to play Sunday football for the Panthers. Reckoned the Comp's got even worse than the Swifts!'

'Oh, come on, the school team isn't *that* bad yet.'



Gary grinned. 'And we should know - we play for both!'

Frosty was incensed. 'Right, if Clarke's not interested, then neither am I!' he seethed. 'No individual is bigger than the team. We'll just have to do without him.'

Luke's group had their attention refocused on the matter in hand by the demands of their goalkeeper. 'C'mon, you lot!' cried Sanjay. 'Whose go is it? I'm freezing standing here while you're all rabbiting on.'

'I'll warm old Dracula up,' Gregg smiled, using their pet nickname for the eccentric Sanjay Mistry who kept goal for Swillsby Swifts and the Comp. If his bizarre behaviour between the posts didn't startle the opposition, it certainly scared the life out of his teammates!

Gregg tapped the ball a little way ahead of him and let fly from the edge of the penalty area. The shot had pace but, sadly, not the accuracy Gregg had intended, and Sanjay mocked him unmercifully.

'Looks like you getting warmed up, junior,' Gary chuckled, rubbing in his big brother status, being ten minutes older. 'Go on, chase after it!'