



What Makes You So Special?

Tuesday 29 April

“Jamie Johnson!” Mr Pratley shouted, his hot, smelly coffee breath roaring like a dirty hurricane into Jamie’s face.

He had grabbed Jamie’s scribbled formation of a Hawkstone United team with all his favourite players and, of course, *J Johnson* as number 11, the left-winger.

This was far from the first time that Jamie had been caught playing fantasy football instead of listening. When it came to football, Jamie’s brain was like a powerful computer, working out teams, angles, shots and passes ... but when it came to listening to Pratley,

well, Jamie just seemed to switch off as soon as the man started talking. It drove Pratley wild with rage.

“Have you any idea how many boys have been through this school and claimed that they were going to be a footballer when they grew up? Hundreds ... thousands!”

Mr Pratley was now tearing up Jamie’s sheet into as many little pieces as possible. The more he ripped the page into smaller and smaller sections, the redder his face became and the wider his eyes bulged.

Jamie did not respond. He couldn’t. It was taking every ounce of his power not to burst into laughter. All he could do was stare at the big green bogey that was hovering, tantalizingly loose, from the end of Mr Pratley’s nostril. It was a beauty: wet and sticky yet still hard enough to be absolutely ripe for the picking.

“And of those thousands of boys,” Pratley continued, the redness now rising from his face into his big, shiny, balding head, “... who ALL thought they were going to be a professional football player ... who ALL thought they were God’s gift to the game – just like you no doubt do – have you any idea how many of them did it? How many of them became footballers?”

Jamie shook his head. He’d noticed that the more Pratley was getting worked up and the louder he shouted, the more the bogey had begun to wobble. It

was as though it was dancing to the beat of Pratley's anger.

Pratley walked to the front of the classroom and chucked the remnants of Jamie's sheet into the bin. Then he turned and marched back towards Jamie.

The closer he got, the better the view Jamie had of the bogey. It was now doing something amazing. When Pratley breathed out, the bogey poked further out of his nose, as if it were waving to the world. And when he breathed in, it returned slightly further back up his nostril. It appeared to be on some kind of invisible string.

"None!!" barked Pratley. "Not one of those boys became professional footballers! So, I would like you to tell me why you think you are any different."

Jamie looked at his best friend, Jacqueline – or, Jack, as everyone knew her – for help. She shook her head. *Don't talk back*. That's what she was saying to him with her eyes. And she was right. This was a regular occurrence between Jamie and Mr Pratley. For some reason, Jamie had the ability to wind up Pratley more than any other kid in the whole school. The kids found it hysterical but right now, they had reached the danger zone; one more word from Jamie and Pratley might just explode.

Of course there were plenty of things Jamie could

have said; lots of arguments he could have put forward to explain why he believed that, one day, he would become a professional footballer: that he was by far the best player in the school ... that he got all his talent from his granddad, who, had it not been for the injury, would easily have been one of Hawkstone's greatest-ever players ... that he trained and practised every single day because he wanted to become not *just* a professional footballer but one of the best players in the world...

But he didn't say anything. Jack was right. They both knew that whenever Jamie answered back, it only made Pratley even angrier. The best course of action Jamie could take now would be to say nothing. Nothing at all.

And so Jamie just shrugged his shoulders and stayed quiet.

"Answer me, Johnson!" yelled Pratley. "Or I'll keep you in here for the whole of lunchtime by yourself. What makes you think you're so special? What makes you think you've got something that all the other boys didn't?"

Pratley's face was now just an inch from Jamie's. The bogey was smack bang in front of Jamie's eyes. It was moving in and out of the teacher's nose, perfectly in time with Pratley's pants of fury.

Out of the corner of his eye, Jamie saw Jack turn

away. Her body was chugging. She had seen it too and had started laughing without making any noise.

Jamie could feel it coming inside him too. It was rising up through his body like an unstoppable river from his lungs, into his throat and now it was at his mouth. The laughter could not be controlled for very much longer.

“For the very last time, Johnson! Why do you think you are better than any of them?”

“I don’t know...” Jamie finally stuttered. The laughter was already leaking out. He knew he was going to get into trouble anyway, so he thought he might as well make it worth it. “**Snot** really for me to say!”



The Day of Destiny

"We'll know tomorrow!" shouted Jack, grabbing Jamie by his shirt and dragging him out of lunch.

"Know what?" he asked, laughing as she tugged him all the way to the Assembly Hall.

"TOMORROW!" she repeated, pushing him face to face with the sheet of paper that announced their day of destiny.

Teachers v Pupils

Football Match

The date for this game
has been confirmed!

All details will be
announced in assembly tomorrow

Jamie stared at the notice.

It concerned the football match that he had been looking forward to all year. The match between the teachers of Wheatlands School and the pupils of Year 6. The match that was going to be the biggest of Jamie's life.

Jamie and Jack gazed at the Wheatlands School Football Trophy. Gleaming like treasure, it stood, as always, in its special cabinet in the Assembly Hall. It remained there for the whole year until, on the day of the game itself, the head teacher, Mr Karenza, removed the prize from the cabinet and handed it to the winning captain to lift into the air.

Since they had joined the school, Jamie and Jack had been forced to watch, helpless from the sidelines, as the previous Year 6 pupils' teams had suffered embarrassing losses at the hands of the teachers.

But this year Jamie and Jack were in Year 6. Now it was their chance to play and put things right ... to finally put one over on the teachers.

They had promised themselves that, in this game, things would be different ... that this would be *their* year.

However, just one look at the wooden board – upon which was engraved the results of all the previous

matches – spelled out the difficulty of the task that lay ahead.

And it also named the teacher who would be standing in their way.

Teachers V Pupils The Results

Teachers 11 – 8 Pupils	Winning Captain: C Pratley
Teachers 6 – 4 Pupils	Winning Captain: C Pratley
Teachers 4 – 4 Pupils	Match abandoned
Teachers 8 – 1 Pupils	Winning Captain: C Pratley
Teachers 7 – 3 Pupils	Winning Captain: C Pratley
Teachers 5 – 2 Pupils	Winning Captain: C Pratley
Teachers 9 – 6 Pupils	Winning Captain: C Pratley
Teachers 5 – 3 Pupils	Winning Captain: C Pratley
Teachers 7 – 6 Pupils	Winning Captain: C Pratley
Teachers 6 – 4 Pupils	Winning Captain: C Pratley
Teachers – Pupils	Winning Captain:



10,000 Hours

“Come on then,” said Jack. “Spit it out.”

She and Jamie were walking back home from school together, as they did every day, kicking an old drink can between them along the street.

Jamie shook his head. Sometimes, he didn’t like to talk. Even to Jack.

“Look,” she said. “You always tell me eventually, so why don’t we just skip past the silent bit and get to the talking bit?”

Jamie stared at her. Jack constantly surprised and impressed him. It had been the same since the day he’d met her. They had played football and he had thought that, because she was a girl, she might not be that

good. Instead she had proved to be one of the best goalkeepers he had ever seen! Since that day, they had been pretty much inseparable, and sometimes Jamie felt that Jack knew him better than he knew himself.

"It's that stuff Pratley was saying today," he began. "That I'm no different to all the other kids that wanted to be footballers and didn't make it... I know I was laughing and stuff, but I can't get it out of my head."

"You're not still worried about Pratley, are you?" she said. "Just because he's a teacher doesn't mean he knows everything. My dad always says that the people that make the rules aren't any better than the rest of us."

"Yeah," said Jamie. "But what if Pratley's actually right? What if I am no better than the others?"

"OK. So what are you going to do about it?" Jack responded immediately.

"What?" said Jamie. He was shocked by her abruptness and missed his kick of the can.

"Well, you can either keep worrying about it, thinking you're no better than everyone else, or you can start making it happen ... doing something to give yourself that extra edge."

Jamie smiled at her. Jack was the cleverest person he knew but he had no idea what she was going on about.

"How many hours did your granddad Mike say you'd

have to practise if you wanted to become a professional footballer?" she asked.

"Ten thousand," said Jamie. It was one of the many pieces of advice Mike had given him about football. He'd said that the top players only looked so good because they had practised so long and from a very young age.

Ten thousand hours seemed a huge amount to reach but, for Jamie, every second playing football was pure joy.

"Cool," said Jack, flicking the can into the air. "So let's get to the park and get practising!"

And with that she volleyed the can all the way over to the other side of the street, where it looped perfectly into a nearby skip.

Jamie breathed a little more easily. He still felt hurt and worried by Pratley's comments but, at the same time, having Jack's support always gave him a lift.

Jamie was an electrifyingly quick left winger and Jack was a brave and athletic goalkeeper. Together they made a pretty good pair, which was lucky because they both knew that, if they were going to stand any chance of beating the teachers and claiming that gleaming trophy at the end of the year, they would need to be part of the best pupils' team in the history of Wheatlands School.