

The Boy with the Golden Boot

They called him Monkey. Because that's what he was; a two-foot toy monkey with goo-goo eyes which jiggled about when you shook him. Nobody knew who owned him. He just sort of belonged to them all really.

Monkey used to sit in goal back in the days when goal was just a couple of jerseys and teams were barely six-boys-strong; shirts versus skins. Monkey was good for blocking the odd shot.

Since then, the council had put in nice white posts and one of the mums had run up a bunch of arm-bands on her old Singer. Now it was arm-bands versus shirts on Saturday mornings. Semi-pro.

Monkey still appeared at these matches, but only ever as a spectator. Monkey was getting old and manky yet someone would always remember to bring him along and prop him up on the sidelines. He'd become a sort of mascot – an integral part of the Tamworth Road mythology. There he'd sit, haemorrhaging stuffing, one goo-goo eye on the game, the other on the grey skies.

Geoff Stiles removed the piebald spectacles and rubbed his own goo-goo eye; the left one, the lazy one. He gazed down at the horrible glasses. His mum said the black patch over the lens was dashing; it put one in mind of Blofeld or Errol Flynn. Cyclops, more like. Today though, the boggy lens didn't bother him. Today he was finally going to get picked because he knew something no one else did. Geoff smiled a secret little smile.

The other boys shoved each other, jostling to catch the eye of the captains. Geoff hung back, he didn't need to push. He was going to be picked. It just needed a little patience.

‘Terry Hodges,’ barked Miller, the tall ginger haired skipper. Terry Hodges was always picked first. He had the best left foot in Tamworth Road and surrounding areas.

The other captain, Steve Blaiklock, rubbed his chin and considered his options. ‘I’ll have Darren Ashton...’

‘I’ll have John Wilkinson.’

‘Gilbert Travis...’

And so it went on, the Saturday morning selection. The two captains always picked the same players anyway. It was part of the ritual. But today would be different. In a moment one of those lads would have to pick him, Geoff Stiles. And they wouldn’t regret it. He’d been secretly training over the winter - every evening without fail -three hours, booting the old leather ball at chalk targets on his garage wall. The trick had been to work with his monocular perspective, not against it. And now he had the hang of it, he was Roy of the Rovers; bloody dead-eye Dick - the Boy with the Golden Boot...and the Blofeld glasses.

There was only him and Ormsby left now, and Ormsby was rubbish.

Blaiklock eyed the two of them without enthusiasm. ‘Where's the the Barker twins then?’

Geoff almost hugged himself with glee. The Barker twins lived next-door. And he had information; a nugget of pure gold in exchange for a game. ‘They’re not coming. Clive’s got measles. Their mum says they can’t go out. Either of them.’

Blaiklock’s shoulders slumped. He didn’t even bother to hide his disappointment, simply crooked a finger at Ormsby.

Now there was only Geoff Stiles left. One boy; one blue arm-band in Miller's hand.

Geoff grinned up at the ginger-haired captain. The sun elbowed its way through leaden clouds, a stray beam reflecting off his single, unblackened lens.

Miller stared long and hard, sucking his teeth. He had no choice really. 'All right,' he sighed, 'I'll have Monkey...'