

## **Chapter 2 - Sunday 7/4/19**

*Yonis*

The match between Southampton and Liverpool on Friday had been a close call. Liverpool had gone a goal down but managed to come back, thanks to the sensational Salah re-finding his goal-scoring boots.

Unfortunately, Man City had cruised to a 2-0 victory over Cardiff on Wednesday evening, so although Liverpool were back top at the end of Friday night by two points. Man City still had a game-in-hand and would topple Liverpool if they won it. Yonis didn't even bother watching the match against Cardiff as he knew that Man City would walk it.

In fact, Yonis wasn't even particularly animated during Liverpool's game Friday. All he could think about, and all he had thought about all week, was what his dad and Mussef had chatted about. Dad had gone out to talk to Yonis' manager on Monday evening, but when he came home he told Yonis he'd have to wait until Saturday's training to find about what they'd decided. He dreaded to think what that was. His greatest fear was that he might be dropped.

All the rest of the week, Yonis had tried to get an idea of what dad and Mussef had discussed, but every time he brought up SLS United, his dad merely said.

'We'll talk on Saturday, at training.'

It was agony for Yonis, and he'd spent all week thinking of nothing else. Much to the frustration of his teacher, who said Yonis seemed like he'd been leaving his brain in bed each morning.

Friday night he didn't sleep. He couldn't. SLS United were now second in the table, and Lingerfield F.C. still had a game in hand. Surely Mussef couldn't drop Yonis to the bench with the stakes high. Yonis prayed this was right. Although he knew that Mussef took respect in the game very seriously. Whatever happened, he had only himself to blame, and he knew it. It couldn't really happen though, could it? It was Yonis' first ever offence as he was usually very respectful.

When the alarm rang Saturday morning for training, Yonis could barely get out of bed, he barely touched his breakfast, and he could barely look his dad in the eyes as they went to training to find out what would happen. They arrived fifteen minutes earlier than usual, and Mussef was already there waiting.

'Your dad and I have spoken Yonis,' this was it - Yonis could barely look at Mussef as he started, 'we're both extremely disappointed by your actions last week. You let yourself down, your team down and both of us down.' Yonis lowered his head further.

'Look up Yonis and listen to what you're being told.' Dad snapped.

'Most of all though Yonis, you've let the spirit of the game down, and that's what we're all about as a team'. Yonis was going to be dropped. He knew it. 'Your dad and I have decided that you will train alone today. This was the first time

you've ever done anything like this, but I have to set an example to the rest of the team.'

'You-you mean I'm not dropped?' Yonis said softly.

'Not this time.' Mussef replied plainly.

Yonis beamed.

'You have to take this seriously Yonis.' Dad said upon seeing his smiling son.

'It was a moment of madness Yonis,' started Mussef again, 'so training alone today is enough of a punishment. But if it happened again, you would leave me with no choice but to drop you. Do you understand?'

Yonis nodded seriously. 'I'm sorry. I don't know what came over me. It's just all the pressure of our league, and Liverpool going for the title, I...'

Mussef and dad both shook their heads.

'You'll learn one-day Yonis that there's more to worry about than football.' Dad said as he ruffled Yonis' hair. 'Now come on, I'm training you, and I want you to take this as seriously as you would a session with the rest of the team.'

Yonis never trained so hard in his life. Mussef and dad were both delighted and said he'd made amends. At the end of training, the rest of the team patted Yonis on the back and said all was forgiven. It was a dark moment in Yonis' season, but he'd learn from it.

Their match on Sunday was as routine as could be. They were away at FC Scriven, another team near the bottom of the table, and they strolled to a 4-1 victory. Yonis had a blinder and only conceded from a shot that took an outrageous deflection which completely wrong-footed him. He could do nothing about it though.

As Yonis celebrated with his teammates at the end of the victory, he realised how different he could've all been if he had been dropped. The result might not have changed, but he wouldn't have this feeling. That feeling of winning a football match with your team. There's nothing quite like it.

Sarah

Man City were on for the quadruple. They cruised past Cardiff in the league Wednesday to go back top (well until Friday when Liverpool played and won). They then beat Brighton in a hard-fought victory in the FA Cup on Saturday. Their manager, Pep Guardiola, was trying to talk down their chances of winning four trophies, but Sarah believed they really might do it. It would be out-of-this-world if they did.

Her own team, Lingerfield F.C., were also well on track to win their own league. They were top, had a game in hand over their nearest rivals, and they were training and playing as well as Sarah could remember. Their manager Owen told them so after training Saturday.

‘You’re on a different level at the moment. Whatever it is your eating, drinking or doing when you’re not playing football. DO NOT change it.’ He said with a light chuckle to them all. Sarah looked at Tara who gave her a wink. They didn’t need to change anything for Sunday. They had AFC Farnham, a team near the bottom of the league, at home. It was surely going to be three points in the bag thought Sarah.

‘I don’t want any of you going away thinking that Sunday is going to be an easy game though.’ Owen continued. Had he been reading Sarah’s mind and sensed her overconfidence. ‘They may be near the bottom, but every game between now and the end of the season is going to be difficult, and we have to treat every opponent with the respect they deserve.’ He then looked directly at Tara and Sarah. ‘Got it?’ They nodded.

The match turned out to be tighter than Sarah had anticipated.

Last week, they’d scored after fifteen seconds; this week they were lucky not to concede. AFC Farnham kicked off and immediately lumped the ball forward to their big, stocky striker. He wasn’t particularly skilful, but he shrugged Mark off like he was a piece of dust. If he’d had more composure, he could’ve buried the ball, but he panicked and let off a terrible shot which Noah didn’t even bother diving for.

‘Wake up!’ Owen said calmly from the sidelines. They needed to wake up quick. They couldn’t avoid to drop any points today.

The match was a real slog. The day was brightening, and as the sun came out, Lingerfield had the added disadvantage of Noah being slightly blinded as the ball flew high in the air. AFC Farnham continued to play long-ball to their stocky striker and the Lingerfield players were becoming frustrated.

For Sarah, it was a particularly exasperating first half where she continued to struggle to keep the ball, and where she didn’t have any clear-cut chances. She’d had a half-volley which the keeper of AFC Farnham comfortably caught, but other than that she felt very much on the fringes of the match.

Half time.

‘We need to stop thinking we’ve won this game before we’ve even scored the first goal.’ Owen said calmly, but seriously at half-time. ‘Nareem, get the ball out to the wings and let’s start getting some crosses into the box. Let’s start putting them under some pressure, rather than knocking the ball around like we think we’re Barcelona. Every time they get it, they’re direct and lump it forward. If it continues, they’re going to score.’ Nareem was nodding his head in agreement.

‘You’re right Owen, they’ll stand off us all day if we just knock it about slowly. And wait to counter with that long ball. We have to play quicker and get the ball in the box.’ Nareem added.

Owen nodded in agreement. ‘Sarah,’ Owen said directly to her, ‘take a breath. The chance will come.’

Sarah looked at Owen and smiled to show she understood. But there was still something off with her today. She couldn't quite put her finger on it. All she knew was that she wanted to get this game won and over as soon as possible.

The second half Lingerfield F.C. did start to play with more pace, and Adam and Pavel were able to put in a couple of delightful crosses early on. AFC Farnham were still using their long ball game, but Mark and Tara had worked out how to deal with their stocky striker, and it had become very ineffective.

'It's coming guys, keep going!' Shouted Nareem as he scooped the ball up to take a corner they'd just won. Sarah hoped he was right. There could only be a couple of minutes left, and it was still 0-0. This might be their last chance.

Nareem whipped in a fizzing cross, and Sarah saw that the ball was coming right for her. This was it. The chance she'd been waiting for. Time to turn this terrible match into a terrific one. She geared herself up to hit it on the half volley. She could see the AFC Farnham goalkeeper strangling forward to try and claim the ball which was a country mile away from him.

Sarah set herself. She was going to smash this home.

Just as the ball bounced in front of her though she felt a Farnham defender come through the back of her to try and reach the ball first. Sarah hit the ground before she knew what had happened. She looked over at the goal and saw that the ball had flown into the back of the net, past the stretching AFC Farnham goalkeeper. Had Sarah made contact with the ball? She didn't think so.

The referee blew hard on his whistle.

'It would've been a penalty for a tackle from behind, but I'm going to give the goal instead.' He stated firmly. The AFC Farnham players dropped their heads while the Lingerfield F.C. players celebrated wildly. Pavel came to lift Sarah up from the floor, but as he did so, she cried out in pain.

'OW! Please don't move me, Pavel!' Sarah stated weakly. She couldn't move her right leg properly...

## Follow-up questions

Yonis

1. Why was Yonis worried about training on Saturday?
2. Yonis' teacher was annoyed with him all week. Why?
3. Do you think the punishment that Yonis received was fair? Support your idea.
4. Their match is described as 'routine'. What does this mean?
5. Does Yonis play well in the match? How do you know?

Sarah

1. Who were Sarah's team playing?
2. Why did their manager not want them to think they'd already won the match before playing?
3. The match is described as a 'real slog'. What does this mean?
4. How do Lingerfield F.C. score?
5. What could the end of the chapter mean for Sarah?

**Chapter Three of Chase for the Championship** will be published **next week**.

If you have any comments, questions or suggestions, please email **hello@jamessteptowe.com** or tweet me **@jamessteptowe**

You can also visit my website: **jamessteptowe.com** for more updates on **Chase for the Championship**, and my **debut full-length children's book: Raid of the Ratskull Rodents coming May 2019**.

Thanks for reading - see the updated table, results and next week's fixtures on the next page.

Result list Sunday 7/4/19

Lingerfield F.C. 1-0 AFC Farnham  
Ripley United 2-1 Brearton Town  
FC Scriven 1-4 SLS United  
Killinghall United 1-1 South Stainley F.C.  
Nidd Rangers 1-1 Ripley Albion

Table standings after weekend of 7/4/19 fixtures:

Position	Teams	Played	Wins	Draws	Losses	Goal Difference	Points
1.	Lingerfield F.C.	13	10	1	2	+32	31
2.	SLS United	14	9	3	2	+27	30
3.	Ripley Albion	14	7	4	3	+14	25
4.	Nidd Rangers	14	6	5	3	+15	23
5.	Brearton Town	14	8	0	6	+5	23
6.	Killinghall United	14	5	7	2	+1	22
7.	FC Scriven	14	5	5	4	-5	20
8.	AFC Farnham	13	6	1	6	-10	19
9.	South Stainley F.C.	14	4	6	4	-11	18
10.	Ripley United	14	3	6	5	-14	15

Fixture list Sunday 14/4/19

AFC Farnham V Killinghall United  
SLS United V Brearton Town  
Lingerfield F.C. V Ripley United  
Ripley Albion V South Stainley F.C.  
Nidd Rangers V FC Scriven