

Chapter 5 - Sunday 28/4/19

Sarah

They'd lost. They'd lost against SLS United. After they'd been so dominant. How had it happened? It now meant that SLS United were ahead of them. Yes, Lingerfield F.C. still had their game in hand, but they had to play two matches on the same day. It would be tough to get the full six points from them.

Owen had been livid when he'd heard the league's plan for the double fixtures. 'They're kids. How are they supposed to play two, full-length matches in one day?'

That's what Sarah and the rest of the team had overheard Owen shouting down the phone after mid-week training. He wasn't happy. They didn't normally train midweek, but Owen had decided with two games in the same day that a double session in the build-up was needed.

Sarah had enjoyed the session, but something wasn't right still with her leg. The doctor had said it was only bruised, and she'd managed to get through the match last week, but there was something off.

'It's just a bit stiff still probably that's all,' Tara had told her when Sarah talked to her after training.

'Yeah, but it still hurts when I run and is even worse when I kick a ball.'

'You'll be fine. Just go home and take a bath. Ice it a bit'

'Tara, I've tried all that, but we have two matches on Sunday, and I don't know how I'm going to get through them. If I'm not up to playing what are we going to do?'

'Well, if that's the case I'm sure Abdul will be more than capable to fill—'

'Don't you dare say Abdul can fill in for me.' Sarah interrupted forcefully.

'Easy Sarah,' replied Tara defensively. 'We're a team remember?'

'We are. But we're a much better team when I'm playing.'

Tara looked wide-eyed at Sarah for a moment.

'WOW. When did you become so big-headed?'

'I'm not big-headed. It's the truth!'

'Sarah, Owen taught us to be a team, and that no one is bigger than the team. Don't lose sight of that just because you've not been at your very best recently.'

Now it was Sarah's turn to be wide-eyed.

'Not been at my best? What's that supposed to mean? I scored last week didn't I?'

Tara paused before she replied. 'Yes, I know. But it's just you seem to have lost sight of why we're playing. You're so worked up about winning the league and the golden-boot. When really none of that is really important. Sarah, I play because I love football—'

'I love football too!' Sarah interrupted again.

'I know you do,' Tara sighed. 'But just remember it's not the be-all and end-all. You know that goalkeeper from SLS United last week? I read his dad was in the hospital with like a heart attack or something. He played with such a big smile on his face against us Sunday though. That's what it's all about.'

Sarah knew Tara was right, but she just felt herself getting angry. Why wasn't Tara more worried about winning the league? There were three games to go, and the title was still in their hands. Why didn't Tara care more?

'I think you need to worry about our team and what we are going to do on the pitch on Sunday. We're going to win, and that's all that we should be worried about! CAPTAIN!' she added sarcastically before storming off leaving Tara slightly gobsmacked.

She was meant to be going to Tara's that evening to watch Man City play United. It was their game in hand. But she didn't. She made up an excuse to dad about not feeling well and watched Man City win their crucial match 2-0 at home in her room. What was wrong with her? Why was she trying to push her best friend away?

As she watched the post-match analysis, her leg was throbbing, but she chose to ignore the pain. No one would be taking her place. No one was going to stop her winning the league or the golden-boot this season.

On Sunday, Lingerfield F.C. were relentless. They smashed AFC Farnham 4-0 in the morning, before demolishing FC Scriven 5-2 in the afternoon. Sarah scored four of the nine goals and was absolutely on fire. With one game to go in the chase for the championship, Sarah knew Lingerfield only had to win their next match, and the title was theirs. She also knew she'd wrapped up the golden-boot with her bag-full of goals over the two matches. Her leg was also much better. She'd iced it all week and dad had bought her some deep cooling gel to help with the throbbing.

However, there was one small blot on the whole day – Sarah still hadn't spoken properly to Tara after the mid-week training. At Saturday training, Tara had partnered with Abdul, leaving Sarah to go with Adam and even after their wins she hadn't come over for their trademark hug after a victory. Was Tara that angry at her? Sarah had thought everything would be fine after the matches, but Tara seemed to be ignoring her completely.

Sarah was sure that she and Tara would get back to normal before next week and that they'd be united again for the final match. Or if not then, they'd make up when they lifted the title. Wouldn't they? Sarah hoped this anyway.

On the way home though she couldn't help but feel an overwhelming sadness sweeping over her.

'Title is yours, Sarah. I'm so proud of you,' her dad told her from the front seat.

'Yeah, great,' Sarah replied.

'Come on darling; you've played so hard for this all season. You can be a bit cheerier,' her mum had added.

'I am mum. It's just... I... never mind.' Sarah sighed as she looked out of the window.

Her parents didn't press her anymore, but all of a sudden Sarah suddenly found herself thinking about the SLS United goalkeeper and what he must be going through with his dad in the hospital. She couldn't get it out of her head all day. Even when she watched Man City win a hard-thought match against Burnley later on Sunday afternoon. She'd been fretting over a bruised leg, over winning an under-elven title and winning the golden-boot when that boy's dad had nearly died. She'd been getting all worked up over nothing. It now seemed so small in comparison.

Yonis

Yonis hadn't even watched Liverpool thrash Huddersfield 5-0 Friday night. He'd been at the hospital with his dad. Every night since he'd been taken in Yonis had been up there. He wasn't complaining. There was nowhere he'd rather be, and it seemed that dad was going to make a full recovery; they were only keeping him in to monitor him.

'I think Burnley might nick a point against City on Sunday,' he'd said to Yonis after the Liverpool game. 'And with you guys beating Lingerfield last week you've still got a shot at the title.'

It was also dawning on Yonis now how unimportant all the football stuff was in comparison to his dad. He'd let City and Lingerfield win the title if it meant his dad getting back to one hundred per cent fit and healthy. Since he'd been in hospital Yonis had been staying with his uncle. He was nice, but he wasn't dad. Yonis had gone back to school all of last week after having a bit of time off, and his teacher seemed to be treating Yonis nicer than ever and wasn't even calling him out when he drifted off into a daydream. Before his fantasies were always about football; now they were only about dad.

Still, he was looking forward to the match on Sunday. It was going to be tough — Ripley Albion at home. Lingerfield F.C. were playing two games that day to catch up on their game in hand. SLS United had to beat Ripley Albion to ensure they still had a chance at the title going into the last week.

As Yonis strapped up his goalkeeper gloves pre-kickoff, he just wished his dad was there to watch him. He didn't even care how the game went really. He just wanted it to be back to normal with his dad cheering him from the sidelines. Fortunately, it seemed the game was going to go SLS United's way as they soon found themselves 2-0 within the first fifteen minutes. Jonas scoring two superb finishes with both assists coming from Patrick. Since the thing with Yonis' dad

the team seemed to be playing even more together and with big smiles on their faces. Last week, even with all the barrage of Lingerfield F.C. they'd stuck together and got the crucial win. Yonis wondered whether Mussef had spoken to the team about what had happened, but no one had mentioned anything to Yonis. Honestly, he preferred that as when he was at football he found it easier to only think about football.

At half-time, SLS United were cruising, and Mussef kept his talk short and sweet. 'Keep doing what you're doing but remember the game isn't over yet. Let's not do anything silly.' The team all nodded. Took their drinks and went back to the match.

The second half SLS United did exactly what their manager had asked and produced a professional, calm performance which saw them run out 2-0 winners easily. Yonis didn't have anything to do the whole match which was surprising because of who they were playing – Ripley Albion were still looking for a top-three finish.

Going home in the car with his uncle, Yonis felt satisfied with the match.

'Lingerfield won their morning match I heard,' he suddenly told Yonis.

'Oh, well maybe that means they'll be tired for this afternoon's one,' replied Yonis.

It turned out Lingerfield F.C. weren't as they won that too going onto forty points with SLS United on thirty-nine. It was all going to come down to the last week then. That wasn't for two weeks though as there was a break next week for the bank holiday. Maybe in two weeks dad would be well enough to come and watch Yonis play.

Back home, the afternoon got slightly gloomier too given the Man City result who scraped past Burnley 1-0 to leave them top by a point with two games to go. SLS United and Liverpool looked like they were going to miss out on the title by the smallest of margins.

'Yonis get the door will you?' his uncle suddenly shouted, snapping him from his thoughts.

'Ok, I'm going,' Yonis replied with a sigh as he slightly slumped to the door.

Opening it, he didn't even register the figure that stood in front of him.

'Hello son, I'm here to take you home.'

Stood there was his dad. Yonis had no idea he was getting out today, but a wave of emotion suddenly overtook him, and he leapt into his father's arms. No matter what happened in both chases for the championship, Yonis felt like he'd already won: his dad was out, and he was taking him home.

Follow-up questions

1. Why did Sarah get angry at Tara?
2. Do you think Tara is right in what she said?
3. Will Tara and Sarah make up?
4. Sarah says her leg was 'throbbing'. What does this mean?
5. Why does Sarah think about Yonis and what happened to his dad?
6. How has Yonis' attitude to football changed since the start of the story?
7. It describes how Yonis 'slumped' to the door. Why has this word been used?
8. What do you predict will happen in the final chapter?

The final Chapter of Chase for the Championship will be published in two weeks time after the conclusion of the premier league.

If you have any comments, questions or suggestions, please email hello@jamesseptowe.com or tweet me [@jamesseptowe](https://twitter.com/jamesseptowe)

You can also visit my website: jamesseptowe.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.

Results Sunday 28/4/19

SLS United 2-0 Ripley Albion

AFC Farnham 0 - 4 Lingerfield F.C (morning kick-off)

Lingerfield F.C. 5 - 2 FC Scriven (afternoon kick-off)

South Stainley F.C. 1-1 AFC Farnham (afternoon kick-off)

Nidd Rangers 3-0 Ripley United

Killinghall United 2-2 Brearton Town

Table standing after weekend of 28/4/19 fixtures:

Position	Teams	Played	Wins	Draws	Losses	Goal Difference	Points
1.	Lingerfield F.C.	17	13	1	3	+41	40
2.	SLS United	17	12	3	2	+32	39
3.	Nidd Rangers	17	8	6	3	+20	30
4.	Ripley Albion	17	8	4	5	+15	28
5.	Killinghall United	17	6	8	3	+1	26
6.	Brearton Town	17	8	2	7	+3	25
7.	AFC Farnham	17	7	2	8	-15	23
8.	FC Scriven	17	5	6	6	-10	21
9.	South Stainley F.C.	17	4	8	5	-15	20
10.	Ripley United	17	4	6	7	-18	18

Final fixtures Sunday 19/5/19

SLS United v Killinghall United

Brearton Town v Nidd Rangers

Ripley Albion v Lingerfield F.C

FC Scriven v AFC Farnham

Ripley United v South Stainley F.C.