



IMAGINE THIS.

You're playing up front for the team you've supported all your life. The striker alongside you is your best friend from school. If you win this game your team will be through to the play-offs, with the chance of promotion and a trip to the National Stadium.

It's the stuff of dreams.

And it happened to Roy Race.

MINUTES INTO THE game – the home fans making so much noise the players couldn't

hear each other's calls – a long ball came upfield from the Melchester Rovers keeper, Gordon Stewart.

Blackie Gray – Roy Race's best friend – took the ball and knocked it on to Roy.

Roy read the fall of the ball right and powered into the D on the edge of the penalty area. The ball bounced once, twice, then Roy hit it low and hard. A half-second later it thumped off the post and span out for a goal kick to Holverton Wanderers.

Close.

But not close enough.

Even so, Roy grinned. He stretched his ankle out, put some weight on it. It felt okay. In fact, it felt good. He knew that he had recovered from the ankle injury that had kept him out for weeks. Now, he just had to get over that nagging fear he had every time he ran with the ball. Fear of

being fouled. Fear of being injured.

Coach had told him this might happen.

But Roy Race was back all the same.

And just in time. Because there was more to this game than first met the eye. If Melchester beat Holverton Wanderers they would be in the play-off semi-finals vying for promotion to League One. If they didn't, then the football club Roy loved, his local team, might stop playing in Melchester altogether and be moved to another town. And then what would happen to Roy's dream of playing professionally for his beloved Rovers?

Holverton had already been promoted after finishing second in League Two and were playing showboat football now, looking forward to a summer of rest.

Their goal came from nothing.

A quick one-two in the centre circle and

the Holverton winger, Martin Millar, was powering between Melchester's two central defenders, Lofty Peak and Dan Paconowski. Suddenly, Millar was in.

He needed one touch to control the bounce.

Then one shot.

Goal.

Melchester Rovers 0-1 Holverton Wanderers.

The goal was met with a stunned silence inside Mel Park. Now Melchester needed *two* goals against League Two's meanest defence.

Roy caught the ball that Gordon Stewart had angrily hoofed out of his net, then tossed it to Blackie Gray for kick-off. They looked into each other's eyes.

'Right then,' Roy said. 'We score two.'

'Yeah,' Blackie agreed.

But by half time – and with no more goals – Roy and his teammates trooped off. Losing. They had just forty-five minutes to win the game, salvage their season, and save their club.

