



THE SECOND HE heard the final whistle Roy Race slumped to the ground and closed his eyes.

He had nothing left.

All of the adrenaline and effort he had put into ninety minutes of FA Cup third round football was spent. Above the sound of the blood thumping through his brain, Roy could hear the noise of the home crowd cheering and chanting a name.

‘HUGO! HUGO! HUGO!’

Tynecaster United’s goal machine, Hugo, the most expensive footballer in the world,

had scored the winning goal with the last kick of the game, consigning Roy and his Melchester Rovers teammates to defeat.

How, Roy wondered, would it feel to have scored the winner himself?

He had been so close.

It could have happened.

It *should* have happened.



There had been a minute to go, the score one-all. Melchester Rovers, from lowly League Two, had given it everything. Roy had scored his team's goal, a spectacular left foot volley. But they needed another to win.

Tynecaster had conceded possession. Now a long ball from the Melchester keeper Gordon Stewart was arching through the evening sky. It bounced hard, spinning freakishly over the head of the Tynecaster and England centre back James Campbell to land at the feet of Roy Race.

Roy was onto it, a flash of short blond hair, using all of his outrageous sixteen-year-old pace to beat the panic-striker defender.

First touch to take Campbell out of the game.

Second touch to control the ball.

Then Roy hit it. But, not before he'd begun to lose his balance. Stumbling to the

ground he watched the ball cannon off the foot of the post and bounce to the feet of another Tynecaster defender.

The rest was history.

The rest would be read about on the backs of millions of newspapers and watched on a billion electronic devices around the world.

Campbell taking the ball out of the Tynecaster penalty area and into the Melchester Rovers half. The pass to the feet of Hugo. And Hugo's devastating goal that snuffed out what would have been one of the biggest cup shocks in football history.

Roy shuddered, still on the ground, eyes screwed tight. *What if?* he thought. *What if I'd scored and not hit the post? What if we'd won 2-1? What if...*

'The striker for Melchester Rovers?'

Someone was standing next to Roy. He opened his eyes and looked up.

‘Swap?’ the man asked, standing over Roy, holding out a Tynecaster United shirt.

It was Hugo. Medium height, short dark hair, muscular.

‘I would like to own the shirt of the man who scored that goal,’ the world’s most expensive player said.

Roy stood up. Overwhelmed, he automatically pulled off his shirt, still hearing the man’s name being chanted.

*HUGO! HUGO! HUGO!*

Then Roy remembered his dad. Danny Race, who was never out of a Rovers shirt, and too ill to watch Roy make his full debut. This shirt was for his dad.

‘Uh... no offence,’ Roy said. ‘I’m going to get this framed for my dad. Thank you, though.’

Roy felt terrible, turning down his footballing hero.



‘I understand,’ Hugo said, putting a thumb up, smiling broadly. ‘I will see you again, Roy Race. Be lucky.’

Roy was stunned. Had that really just happened? Hugo knowing his name. Hugo asking him for his shirt because of the goal he’d scored. What weird world was he living in for that to happen? And to him?

‘Oi! Race! All of you! Over here. Now.’

Roy turned to see the colossal figure of the Rovers first team coach, Johnny Dexter, herding the Melchester Rovers players to the far end of the pitch, where one stand was full of fans wearing red and yellow, the rest of the stadium deserted. Roy grinned as a wave of noise from the Rovers fans hit him. Applause. Chanting. Whistling.

‘I’m an idiot,’ Roy said to himself. ‘This isn’t about me: it’s about Melchester Rovers, the club, the fans...’

Roy jogged with the other players, Johnny Dexter and the club manager, Kevin ‘Mighty’ Mouse, down to where the Rovers faithful packed out the away end, and were doing their best to drown out the sound of Hugo’s name – which was somehow still being chanted.

‘HUGO. HUGO. HUGO.’

Lofty Peak, Melchester’s giant central defender, put his arm round Roy as they walked to thank the away fans.

‘It’s recorded,’ Lofty told Roy.

‘What?’

‘All that Hugo-Hugo-Hugo. Look, there’s no Tynecaster fans left in the ground. That noise: it’s coming from the speakers.’

Roy stared around himself and knew that Lofty was right. Dozens of speakers were booming out the name of Hugo, even though all the Tynecaster supporters were in the car park or already on the ring road home.

Roy couldn't stop himself laughing as he and his team mates went to shake the hands of some of the fans who'd come to support them. He felt good. He knew that – even though they had lost today – he and his Melchester Rovers teammates were at the start of a very exciting journey.