



CHAPTER ONE

“Well, boys, it seems you’re famous,” said Mrs Earls, the no-nonsense landlady for Stanford academy players.

She held up the back page of her daily newspaper. *KO Kids!* the headline shouted, followed by the byline: *Stanford’s young players see off Milan.*

“There’s loads of reporters and photographers outside on the street, desperate to interview you,” the landlady continued. “It’s like I’ve got Georgie Best in the house.”

She shook her head at the young players’ blank faces, sighing, “The greatest player ever, God bless his soul.”



Eighteen-year-old Jackson Mbemba walked over to the window and pulled back the net curtain. Mrs Earls was right!

“Crazy,” he muttered.

The day before, Premier League side Stanford FC had beaten AC Milan on penalties to reach the final of the Cathay Cup.

After a nightmare first half, holding midfielder, Jackson, had helped set up Stanford’s equalising goal and scored the winner in the penalty shootout.

His fellow lodgers, Callum Cooper and Angelo Walker, had played their parts too. Angelo had sent a brilliant cross to Callum, who headed in the first goal, and they had both scored their penalties.

“Jorge says we should get ourselves agents,” said Angelo. “He was surprised we didn’t have them already.”

Jorge Alvarez was a club legend and record goal scorer.

“My dad doesn’t really approve of agents,” said Jackson. “He thinks that they’re leeches, only interested in money.”

Jackson’s parents had come to the UK as refugees, because his dad had spoken out against his country’s government. Jackson was a young child at the time and his sister, Marissa, who played for the Stanford women’s team, was just a baby.

“As long as an agent gets me some money, I don’t care,” said Angelo.

His confidence had grown since being promoted to the First Team.

“What do you think, Callum?” asked Jackson.

“I don’t know,” said Callum. “I think I’ll wait to see if I get a pro contract.”

Callum’s dad used to be a promising player, but injuries had ended his career while he was still in his teens. He said he’d been dropped by his agent ‘like a hot potato’. He never got over it.