



CHAPTER ONE

BE BOLD.

Callum Cooper stared at the two words on the wall behind manager Ron Grant's desk. He had never been in this office before and he didn't feel bold. He felt scared.

Callum looked at the row of clocks on the shelf by the window. Time was ticking away. Was this the moment that his football career at Premier League Stanford FC would come to an end? But, hold on, Jackson was here. Angelo, Yuri and Rav too. They were all top players. The Under-21 team coach Jason Smith was in the room as well, and he was smiling. So maybe it wasn't bad news...

Grant coughed.

"Now, lads," he began, "you're probably wondering why I asked you to come today."



The five teenage footballers stayed silent. Callum could hardly bear the tension.

“Well, I have a challenge for you,” Grant stated.

A challenge? Callum breathed a small sigh of relief. He wasn’t getting the push.

“Jason here,” Grant continued, nodding at the Under-21 coach, “tells me that you young men can play a bit — and I don’t mean FIFA on your Xbox.”

The teenagers laughed nervously. What was this all about?

Grant sat up a little in his chair.

“Stanford is a club that has a tradition of putting faith in young players,” he said. “We like to encourage young talent and, let’s face it, we don’t have the money that some of our rivals have. We need to invest in youth. We’re very proud of our academy. We think it’s one of the top training programmes in the country.”

Grant paused and his eyes narrowed.

"This is your chance to prove yourselves."

Callum felt a shiver in his chest. He knew Ron Grant's reputation. His players liked him, but step out of line and he'd be down on you like a tonne of bricks. He was tough.

"I'm giving you five lads the chance to train with the First Team for a week," said Grant. "Impress me and you'll be part of the squad for our pre-season tournament."

Grant's words were met with more silence. Callum could sense that the others were in shock, just like him.

"Well, are you happy? You don't seem it!" Grant grunted.

"We're happy, boss," said Jackson, who was the Under-21 captain. "Aren't we, boys?"

There was a mumble of agreement.

The manager waved his hand. "Right then, off you go," he smiled, "You've got training to get to and I've got contracts to sign."