Football MAD

Four books in one!
Mark’s Dream Team

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The trouble with Kenny is that he’s got too much imagination. Take football, for instance. Kenny imagines he’s a brilliant footballer, he really does. To hear Kenny talk you’d think it’s only a matter of time before he gets picked for England. Yet the truth is you wouldn’t pick Kenny for your team unless everybody else had died of bubonic plague. It’s not that he doesn’t try hard, he does, it’s just that he lacks basic things—like skill. Kenny’s always telling me he’s a midfielder, but that’s only because he can’t score goals and he couldn’t tackle a flea. What he does most of the time is to run up and down the pitch, screaming ‘Pass! Pass!’ to anyone who will listen. And if you do pass, you won’t see
the ball again because he dribbles around in circles until he loses it.

Don’t get me wrong, Kenny is my best friend and I’d stick up for him against anyone. But when it came to picking my team for the tournament I should have told him straight out he wasn’t in it. That way I would have saved myself all the trouble that came later.

It all started with Robbie Kidd’s autograph. You might think getting an autograph is a daft reason to enter a football tournament but that’s why I did it. Robbie Kidd is City’s five-million-pound striker and he’s my all time favourite player. Last season he scored twenty-one goals
for City. Almost every replica City shirt you see round our way has a number nine and the name ‘KIDD’ on the back. I’ve got one myself. That’s why I was desperate to get his autograph to complete my collection.

I already had the autographs of every other player in City’s first team. I got most of them at an open day at the City ground to meet the players; but somehow I never managed to get near Robbie Kidd that day. Whenever I looked there was a vast sea of people milling round him. I queued for ages but, just when I got near the front, Robbie announced he had to go. After that, getting Robbie Kidd’s autograph became my personal mission in life. It was almost an obsession with me. In fact Kenny had taken to snoring every time I mentioned the subject.

Not long after, I had the chance to get Robbie Kidd’s autograph. Kenny spotted him going into a hairdresser’s and, once he’d convinced me he wasn’t joking, we followed.

As soon as we walked through the door I knew we’d made a mistake. It was nothing like the barber’s where I go to get my hair cut.
Everything about the place said ‘expensive’ in big letters. Behind a desk sat a man with a ponytail who was staring at us as if we’d just brought in a nasty smell from the street.

‘Can I help you?’ he asked.

Kenny looked at me. His face plainly said, ‘Run. Let’s get out of here.’

But I wanted that autograph badly.

‘Um . . . yes . . .’ I said hesitantly. Then, with a sudden inspiration, ‘My friend needs a haircut.’

Kenny shot me a look of total horror. ‘I don’t think I do,’ he muttered.

‘Yes you do, Kenny,’ I replied. ‘Remember?’

Kenny glared back at me. Well, what else could I have said? My hair’s short while Kenny’s sticks up all over the place like a loo brush. It was obvious he was the one who needed a haircut.

A moment later we were sitting on one of the enormous sofas. I pretended to read a magazine, while scanning the room for Robbie Kidd.

‘What are you playing at?’ Kenny whispered furiously.
'Relax. Just playing for time,’ I said. ‘Look, he’s over there.’ 

I’d spotted Robbie Kidd in the chair furthest from the door. He was leaning his head back over a sink having his hair washed by an assistant. 

‘Let’s get this straight,’ hissed Kenny. ‘I am NOT having my hair cut.’ 

‘OK, OK.’ 

‘Have you seen the prices?’ 

I had. They started at twenty pounds and climbed steeply upwards. Twenty pounds—that was two months pocket money!

‘As soon as I’ve got his autograph, we’ll go,’ I told Kenny. 

‘How?’ he said. ‘You told them I’m having my hair cut.’

I shrugged. ‘We just say we changed our minds.’

‘I’m going to get you for this,’ muttered Kenny bitterly.

We waited. At last Robbie Kidd was having his hair dried with a towel. He must have made some joke because the girl drying his hair was laughing.
‘Now!’ whispered Kenny urgently. ‘Get over there.’

But before I could move, a girl with short red hair came over to us.

‘I’m Judy,’ she said in a bored voice. ‘Which one’s for the chop then?’

‘Pardon?’ I said.

‘Which of you wants his hair cut?’

I pointed dumbly at Kenny. Without a word he got up and followed Judy over to an empty black chair like a condemned man approaching the firing squad. All the time he kept looking back at me, imploring me to do something. He was about to have the most expensive haircut of his life. I felt in my pockets and quickly counted my change. It came to 75p—which I was saving for my bus fare home. It was all the money I had. Kenny must have had the same thought. As Judy picked up her scissors, he suddenly sprang out of the chair as if he’d been stung by a bee.

‘I’m sorry, I’ve changed my mind,’ he blurted out.

‘What’s the matter?’ said Judy. But Kenny
didn’t stick around for explanations. Before I could stop him, he’d bolted out of the door, slamming it so hard behind him that I half expected the glass to shatter. Everyone in the room abruptly stopped talking and looked over to see what the commotion was about. As I got awkwardly to my feet, they turned their gaze on me. ‘Sorry about that,’ I said. ‘He’s um . . . he’s got nits.’

This got a bigger reaction than I’d expected. Several people gasped and recoiled from me in
horror, clearly believing I was crawling with bugs too. The ponytailed assistant flattened himself against the wall to let me get to the door. Out of the corner of my eye I could see Robbie Kidd watching all this and grinning hugely.

‘He’s having treatment but he gets embarrassed,’ I bumbled on. ‘So, well, thanks anyway for the . . . um . . .’

At last I’d reached the door. I fumbled for the handle, got it open, and stumbled blindly out of the shop.

Outside, Kenny was waiting for me.

‘Well? Did you get his autograph?’ he asked.

I gave him a withering look. ‘Thanks,’ I said. ‘You were a real help.’

The whole episode was a fiasco. Even now I cringe with embarrassment when I think about it. And it might have been the end of the story; there would have been no Endsley Eagles, no football tournament, and no autograph. But it didn’t end there—a few weeks later I saw the report in the newspaper. It had to be Fate, I told
myself. Fate stepped in to give me one last chance to get Robbie Kidd’s autograph. Of course, at the time I hadn’t a clue what I was letting myself in for—otherwise I might have told Fate to mind its own business.