

33 One of the team

As you know, Billy loves football! He loves watching Driptown United and he loves going over to the park for a good kick-about with his friend Mickey. You may remember that Billy once won a competition and played for Driptown in a match against Oldcastle. Jimmy Johnson, the manager, was so impressed with Billy's playing that he asked him to play again when some of the Driptown players were injured. Both times Driptown won and Billy thought that they were the greatest days of his life.

But I have to say that not everyone appreciated Billy's football skills as much as Jimmy Johnson did. Sometimes, when Billy and Mickey went to the park there were some other boys from school there. They were Tom Tallboy, Richard Richer, Malcolm Mainman, William Winner, Clive Cleverly, and Darren Dapper. These were the six most popular boys at Driptown Primary School. They seemed to be good at everything, popular with everyone and, more to the point for Billy, brilliant at football. So brilliant that, along with a few other boys from class six, they were the Driptown Primary School football team.

Whenever they were at the park they would shout comments at Billy and Mickey. Things like: "I'll just go and get my Granny to give you a few tips!" and, "My hamster can kick it harder than that!" and, "When did you swop your legs for that pair of matchsticks?"

Billy and Mickey tried hard to ignore them all. But on the way home from the park they often dreamt about all the things that they would do one day to get their own back.

"We could let their bike tires down!" said Mickey.

"We could put super glue on their bike saddles!" said Billy.

"We could put itching powder inside their tracksuit tops!" said Mickey.

"We could put worms in their lunch boxes at school!" said Billy.

But they never did anything, because it just didn't seem worth it.

"I'm glad I'm not in the school team," said Billy, "I wouldn't want to play on the same side as that lot if you paid me!"

One Friday afternoon at playtime, Billy and Mickey were kicking their ball to each other in the playground when Mr. Yellit, Billy's teacher, came running up to them: "Billy!" he said.

Billy swallowed hard, "What have I done this time?" he thought.

"Oh Billy," continued Mr. Yellit, "there's a school football match next week against Canal Street Primary. I've just put the team up on the board, I think you might find it interesting reading."

Billy was puzzled, so he and Mickey went off to look. They read down the team list. All the usual names were there: Tom Tallboy, Richard Richer, Malcolm Mainman, William Winner, Clive Cleverly, and Darren Dapper. But suddenly Billy's heart nearly missed a beat. He could hardly believe his eyes because right at the bottom of the list was his name, Billy. He had been chosen to play in the school team with all the others.

Suddenly Tom, Richard, Malcolm, William, Clive, and Daren, came rushing along the corridor. "Ah.. Billy Boy!" said Tom, as they all slapped Billy on the back, "you're one of the team now! Come on, we're off to training!" Without thinking, Billy hurried off with them, leaving Mickey all alone still standing by the noticeboard. Mickey watched Billy go. In his mind he could hear Billy's words as clear as if he was saying them himself: "I'm glad I'm not in the school team! I wouldn't play with that lot if you paid me."

On Saturday morning, Mickey called for Billy as usual, but he was out. Mickey wandered slowly down to the park. Tom Tallboy, Richard Richer, Malcolm Mainman, William Winner, Clive Cleverly, and Darren Dapper were all there playing football. But to Mickey's dismay there was an extra person playing with them this time as well. It was Billy!

"Ah... its Mickey!" shouted Clive.

"Mickey Mouse!" shouted Tom.

"We don't like mice!" shouted Darren.

"We chase them away and hit them with a broom!" shouted Malcolm.

They all roared with laughter.

"Clear off mouse, before we set the cat on you!" shouted Richard.

They all laughed again, and the one who laughed the loudest was none other than Billy. Mickey looked him straight in the eye. Then turned around and left.

As he went through the park gates he distinctly heard Billy's voice as it was caught by the wind: "Matchstick Mickey!" Billy had shouted as he joined in with all the others.

"That's right Billy!" said Clive. "Forget about losers like Mickey. You're one of the team now! Come on lets play FOOTBALL!"

Billy and Mickey didn't see each other all that week. Billy walked to school with 'The Team.' He ate his lunch with 'The Team.' He spent all of playtime with 'The Team,' and he walked home with 'The Team.'

Eventually it came to Friday afternoon and the match against Canal Street Primary. Billy was playing on the wing. The match started. Clive passed to Billy and Billy started to dribble the ball. He passed two of the Canal Street team and went to put in his cross to his teammates. But poor Billy completely miss-kicked the ball! It spun off toward the Canal Street forward, who quickly dribbled up the pitch and hammered the ball into the back of the Driptown goal. It was 1 – 0 to Canal Street.

Later in the first half, Billy tackled one of the Canal Street forwards and was about to pass the ball back to the Driptown goalkeeper. But suddenly he slipped on a muddy patch and went crashing to the ground! The Canal Street forward was quickly on the ball which was soon bouncing around in the back of the Driptown goal. It was 2 – 0 to Canal Street!

In the second half, there was a corner to Canal Street. The ball came over and Billy jumped for a header. Tom Tallboy got the ball first but, as he headed it away, poor Billy's head got in the way! The ball bounced off Billy and straight into the Driptown goal. The referee awarded an own goal. It was 3 – 0 to Canal Street!

The final whistle blew and the match was over. The other Driptown Primary players gathered round Billy, he could tell that they weren't very pleased.

Billy walked home on his own that day. But when he got to the top of Bridge Street there was suddenly a terrible commotion all around him. Tom Tallboy, Richard Richer, Malcolm Mainman, William Winner, Clive Cleverly, and Darren Dapper suddenly came running out from behind the bus shelter. They pelted Billy with mud and grass. They squashed worms down the back of his shirt and they said some things that weren't very nice. In fact they were so nasty that I don't think I can repeat them. Eventually, they left Billy slumped against the bus shelter. He was covered in mud and muck. His shirt was torn and all the contents of his school bag were thrown across the ground. Billy just sat there for a while. He felt like he couldn't get up.

Suddenly though someone walked around the corner and nearly fell over him. It was Mickey. Billy and Mickey looked at each other for a moment; then Mickey walked on. He took six paces and then he stopped again. He bent down and picked up Billy's ruler that was by his feet. Then he turned around and said: "Would you like a hand to pick the rest up?"

They packed Billy's bag and brushed off most of the mud. Then they made up a quick story for Billy's Mum about how his shirt got torn so that she wouldn't make a fuss. Then they walked off together.

"We could let their bike tires down, or put worms in their lunch boxes!" said Mickey.

"No," said Billy, "no they're not worth it!"

They stopped at the shop and Billy bought Mickey a sherbet fountain.

I have to say that Billy has never been picked for the school team again, but Billy doesn't mind. He knows he's got something much, much better than a place on the team. And that of course is his friend, his good friend, no, his BEST FRIEND, Mickey.