

# THE FOOTBALL DIARIES

## Expendable Chapters

By Ahilan Ratnamohan and Lux Ratnamohan

:: 21-19 ::

Matt Parsons was my greatest footballing rival in my teenage years. Coincidentally we were also best friends. Matt had been the one who came to school with the seemingly unbeatable juggling record of 507, which had left me - on a measly 352 - so disheartened and resulted in a long juggling hiatus. I could even tell that my mum preferred watching him play. Matt played reps, while I was still working my way through club soccer. Our one-on-one battles were somewhat of a highlight of our friendship, at least for Matt, that is. I was always nervous.

It was just one match of many, but I think we'll always remember that match. It was epic. What started as a late Saturday afternoon game in the sun, turned into a floodlit battle on a rain-soaked Saturday night. Matt's younger sister planted herself in the sheltered area and made us both green cordial. Though she cheered the game on in general, she made no secret of the fact that she was going for me. I don't remember the match as well as I remember many. But I can recall (a) my feeling of futility throughout the match and (b) my sense of disbelief when I was still in with a shout as we neared the first-to-twenty target.

It must be said that just existing in that moment was no mean feat. The goals were barely a metre wide, made from rocks, and there was no such thing as easy goals in this game, not when you were playing Matt Parsons. We may have been in a backyard in the middle of nowhere, but I think we pictured something greater. We hacked each other, we fouled, we helped the other up off the ground, we disagreed about goals or fouls, we celebrated and we hung our heads. (at the end of the day we always played fair). I would always get these images of different players in my head when I scored, transporting myself into their bodies as I slotted the ball into the goal and then picturing myself running towards the crowd under the floodlights.

I was Faustino Asprilla, in the shirt of Palmeiras, I'd just jinked my way through the 18-yard box and stroking the ball home. I was running, screaming, towards my fans, I'd just scored the winning goal. I was down, possibly 15-18, and Matt seemed to be heading to 20, when a tight piece of skill and a slice of fortune gave me a rallying cry. By the time the match hit 19-19, we both knew it was now a case of having to win by two goals. I was now up 20-19 and, in my disbelief, playing with a smile since reaching 16-18. I jinked past Matt smoothly, but ending up quite close to the by-line, I chanced myself slotting the ball from a tight angle and that was it. With an incredulous smile, I set off towards my solitary fan, rain-soaked and energy-drained. We'd just played a 40-goal match and it must have lasted the best part of 2 hours. (a.r)

### :: Burundi ::

What is Burundi? What does he know of Burundi? For a place to be a place he must be able to picture playing soccer there.

There is a boy standing a few metres from him, joking with Ohjo and Julius, from Burundi. Ohjo is from Angola, a winger with red boots and a hoodie. All last summer Ohjo would not drop his hood. Angola. He thinks of capoeira scissor kicks. Julius is from Nigeria, a defender. Julius says he works at the bank, but others say he is just a security guard there. Nigeria. He thinks of voodoo ghosts crossing juju balls.

Further away Hashim is working his English with the local kids. Hashim works his English as he plays too. One for you, one for me, when he strips a man of the ball; here you go mate, when he passes. Afghanistan. He thinks of bearded goalkeepers with Kalashnikovs.

It is Sunday afternoon, Parramatta Park. The men talk of their women from last night, of their headaches from this morning. Some of their headaches are here with them now, standing off to the side. In the distance, blue and yellow supporters stream into the stadium across the road for the Eels game.

For six months he has been coming here to play with men. He can play. Of this they know. Ohjo and Julius always make sure he is on their team.

Last Sunday it rained hard, flooded the field. Today they are hungry. He plays behind the strikers. The game is quick. Men are reckless. Men are joyous. Men are unafraid. Men are men. Often he is matched up against the boy from Burundi.

Of the boy from Burundi: he is quick and strong. With his right foot he can turn a man inside out. But the boy is a gambler, making promises he cannot keep, defending with his fingers crossed.

When he strips the boy for a third time, they sneer at the boy, why you don't play proper? Moving freely, in space gifted to him by the boy he curls the ball to the goal, to the spot where only Ohjo can be in three steps. He never sees if the pass connects. The boy from Burundi comes sliding from behind. Studs meet tibia. He buckles. Blood is born.

Julius is the first there, - That is not how we play.

The boy from Burundi looks away unsure. The knot of men is tightening. Men from strange nations that he doesn't care to think of right now. The older men go back and forth, - It is only a friendly match. - This game is for men. - Since when do men attack from behind? - If she is on heat I will attack from behind. - This game is for dogs. - Dog is god backwards!

Hashim has had enough. At no one in particular and everyone in general - Go back to your own country.

- What the fuck did he just say? Are you talking to me? Protestations are no match for laughter though. Now the circle is whooping, jeering, hee-hawing, sneering at no-one in particular and everyone in general. A hand helps him to his feet.

The rest of the game is uneventful. The older men drift off for six packs. The younger men talk about next week's women. Someone says he should go to the hospital for antibiotics, that if it gets infected he will be a forever man with a limp.

The next morning, in the school library, he googles Burundi. He slides his fingers beneath the crepe bandaging. The doctor said the stitches could come out in seven days.

Burundi. He thinks of child soldiers with long scars. (l.r)

### :: Kids of Andalucía ::

I was tired as hell. I was supposed to be in Andalucía to spend a good couple weeks training, like the montages one sees in a movie. I had envisaged my skinny legs ploughing through the sand, each step pushing the veins towards the skin, on the verge of popping through, living on the beach with my small pack. But my first 24 hours in Cadiz had turned out to be something quite different.

The first night was horrific. Two kids from a couple of families, who were having a late-night fish and barbecue, decided to come and get acquainted, which was fine. I began conversing with them in my very, very poor Spanish. It was quite tough and the kids were quite demanding. At some point, I either said something completely incorrect or they just decided they didn't like me, and they became very aggressive. I ceased conversing with them at this point and just kept to myself, writing and reading myself to sleep, the family

barbecue playing itself out in the background.

I awoke unbeknown to the hour, one of my shoes was missing, and the barbecue was still in full swing. And then I was alerted to the events as I heard the kids spitting out a paragraph of swearwords - ¡hijo de puta! ¡ostea puta! ¡cabron! most of which I understood - that left me quite shocked. I trudged over and picked my shoe up and sat back down, not knowing what action to take. Their parents were clearly quite happy that they were out of their hair, and I couldn't fathom the Spanish words in which to express my anger to them. So I was forced in to a half-sleep, half-vigil for the rest of the night.

The next day, my training didn't live up to expectations. There's something gratingly hard about performing sprint training on a beach filled with beautiful Spanish families, enjoying summer vacation. I'd also been resigned to a hostel, the death of my beach-shack-dream. Late that afternoon I was back on the beach - sleep needed to be recovered - juggling my soccer-ball, minding my own business, when some kid started saying something to me. Scarred from the night before, I just kept focusing on the ball and my feet. By now quite a crowd of kids had gathered, but I stayed focused until the crowd began to disperse. But after 5 minutes or so there was one kid still there. I finally stopped. It was that kid who had said something right at the start. He seemed friendly and so I cautiously passed him the ball, despite being utterly terrified that he would steal my ball and then run off, teasing: ¡hijo de puta! ¡ostea puta! ¡cabron! But we started to converse, Antonio not one bit deterred by my low level of Spanish. He introduced me to his brother Paco and we played. Then as it was time for them to go, we agreed to meet up the next day at the same time at the beach.

The next day I met his sister as well and we all played soccer and went swimming. My Spanish began to improve, with Antonio teaching me words like *mira* and *piedra*. To this day I always mean to scroll through the Real Betis website in search of Antonio and /or Paco, there would be something very special about hearing that they rose to success with their childhood club. (a.r)

### :: Streetlamp Jazz ::

Before longnecks, before condoms, before burnt textbooks / burnt poetry, there is this:

one. two. three. four.

ball. boot. juggle.

Nikolic, Colgan, Riordan, Parsons, Marcelo -

Of his universe, these are the syllables. Today one of them announced a new record.

Parsons, who is a shyster, he does not think much of. Yet a number is still a number. So now he, like the rest of them, must juggle, towards a new record.

sixty-seven. sixty-eight. sixty-nine.

A forgotten crispness cuts the air. Daylight saving will abandon / has abandoned the falling sun. It can only be late March.

Trials for the school team are tomorrow, but he knows how coach thinks / but he knows coach. The boy is weak, too small, is how coach thinks. You played well, is how coach says. A spot on the bench is how coach crushes. Waterboy.

Later, his shoulders will emerge. Later, he will swerve, jink, deliver, weave, interpret the ball through games. Later, before big games, coach will ask him in terse tones what formation he thinks they should play with (he prefers the 4-3-3).

one hundred and eighty-three. one hundred and eighty-four. one hundred and eighty-five.

Juggling is routine. Sometimes he will kick the ball just a little higher and close his eyes for split seconds. Micro-dares. What is vision anyway? Yesterday morning, before school, he spent thirty minutes at the park, dribbling blindfolded. One month ago he couldn't go thirty seconds, sneaking peeks under the creases, convinced there were holes in the ground.

Later he will defer, drift, destroy for the ball. Eventually he will / may / might end up in Europe for the ball. E-mails to Marcelo, Colgan, Nikolic, Leung, Cherry, McGuid will be of the ball; of attacking ball, of total ball, of short passing ball, of Catenacci ball, of African street kids on the ball, of that ball he played to the striker from 1860 Munich. He will trial for the ball, get picked for the ball, get injured for the ball, keep on playing for the ball, but never get questioned of his balls (he is apparently Australian after all). For the glorious ball he may even sacrifice his left anterior cruciate ligament if the moment feels / is right.

three hundred and forty. three hundred and forty-one. three hundred and forty-two.

Today, at recess, when no one else was around, Nikolic showed him the rep jacket. It was neatly folded under a lunchbox, waiting for a cold change. Colgan, Riordan, Parsons, they too have been selected. Representative football: names like Granville Rage, oversized jackets that snarl. His friends had asked him to trial with them but he thought better of it.

Even later he will return to Sydney, ostensibly for the injuries; usable excuses, excusable uses, thinking plenty, playing scarcely. Maybe he will even make theatre about the ball, he thinks. By then the universe of Nikolic, Colgan, Riordan, Parsons, Marcelo, McGuid, Cherry, Leung, Dittmar, Medagoda, boot, ball, juggle, four, three, two, one will have dissolved; will reform only for reunions, engagements, farewells; will salute, relive, revive

stories that never happened (*that* game / ball, won glares, girls of ambiguous sexuality); will disguise, revise, repel stories that did (crushes on the same girl / that game / ball, lost fights, girls of sexual ambiguity).

Glares that never became fights. Fights that should never have been glares.

But for now it is late March. The air is crisp, the sun is dying, the mother is coming home from work, the textbook is impending; headlights in the distance.

For the first two hundred touches he was compact. Now his quadriceps are tiring, his mind scant, the numbers blurring. He is using the whole lawn straying, lunging, saving.

five hundred and twenty eight, five hundred and twenty nine, five hundred and thirty.

A car horn; the ball bounces on the driveway. He slams his fist on the bonnet. He flies off with obscenities not learnt in this house. The mother, who was preparing to unleash some / those / her own barrage of obscenities not learnt in this country, is taken aback. The older brother, who is learning to drive and has already almost encountered one accident this outing, gets out, collects the ball and directs it at his head. Steam released, they move on.

He finds the ball in the bushes.

Today Parsons, a shyster and his best friend, recorded five hundred and eighty three consecutive juggles of a soccer ball.

It is streetlamp dark. Later he may do many things, but for now there is only one.

two. three. four. (l.r)

**::the tropical footballer I::**

temperate journalists will riddle him for stories of brutality gardens:

coconut trees for goalposts, kalashnikovs for goalkeepers.

he tells them his footwork is sublime

from years of playing on landmines

chkaaah, a soccer ball explodes into rainbow hexagons.

temperate academics search for the correct term,

futbolista tropica? futbolista exotica?

finger to lips he motions, and proceeds to tell them a parable  
of listening to miles davis with his father, the cannibal.  
chkaaah, the word to consummate the coloured lexicon.  
temperate fans will invoke and revoke posters on the wall,  
so you are a cannibal? a tricky-dixie animal?  
an athletic heretic?  
this is all supercalifatalisticexpialadocious,  
what? all this theory is hocus pocus.  
his therapist tells him to focus.  
his father was a noble savage, (apparently)  
his coach wanted an idiot savant, (with a significant transfer fee)  
but he is a global savant.  
rich and terrified, unstuck in time,  
with an army of dark children ready to drop their books and walk his line.  
chkaaah... teeth meet ideas; the tropical decepticon. (l.r)

### :: Own Goal Fortunes ::

Every footballer scores an own-goal at some point. Even strikers - maybe not in an official match - but somewhere along the line, on a training ground, in a park-game, every footballer knows what it's like to put the ball through their own net. The player watches the ball float from his foot or head or hip, curiously at first, almost pleased because they have at least achieved part of their goal, some sort of intervention in the path of the ball. And then they see the ball slowly - because it always becomes slow motion at this point - sail past the grid of the net, their pleased, curious face turning confused. And then they see the ball crash into the grass. At this point their confused face quickly turns to realisation before settling into despair, which they quickly cover with two hands.

I can honestly and proudly say, however, that I have never experienced that universal feeling. Sure I've come close, I've had deflections, I've breathed sighs of relief as balls I tried to save rolled inches to the right side of the post, against the TSV 1860 Munich

second team, the best team I ever had the chance to play against, I cleared a cross at the far post, which cannoned against the framework of our goal and out for a corner. The look on my face; of shock, then masked relief and then {what is that word, like self-justification, pepping up, belief?} summed it all up. But I think the joy with which I exclaim my untainted record is easily diminished when I think about that day.

At Baulkham Hills High School we didn't have any soccer goals and the only grass we could play on was usually off bounds. Forced to re-appropriate the basketball courts, lunch times became invigorated by a game we dubbed, 'Poles'. It was aptly named so, because the aim of the game was to hit the pole of the basketball ring. One may think that the scores would be limited, but games - which pushed the boundaries of the lunch-time bell - would frequently exceed 10 goals a side. Because picking teams was always impossible we would play blacks -vs- whites, or ethnics -vs-... or colours -vs-... As controversial as this may sound. It wasn't. Apart from the exchange of silly, toilet humour revolving around stereotypes, there was no real bad blood. The racial battle was born out of practicality. Still, that didn't stop me from taking it to heart. Every match I played for pride, and I was possibly more committed to that team than any other of the club teams I've played for, with the possible exception of my club in Germany.

The whites had a solid lineup led by professional aspirants Matt Parsons and -more often than not - Slaven Nikolic, with the likes of Brenton Cherry, Michael Fitzpatrick and James Bardwell. I don't know if it was just an effect of stereotypes, but it seemed that those guys had such a good strike-rate. On the other hand, though we won as much as the whites did, the coloureds never seemed to boast much of a squad, with only myself, Eran Medagoda, Ryan Leung and the skillful, but unfit Ozzie Marcelo the only seasoned soccer players. I saw myself as the black prince that had to deliver and not only outplay my greatest adversary Matt Parsons, but also be here, there and everywhere else on that basketball court.

It had been dubbed the last ever Poles game. The end-of-lunch bell had already gone, which meant that the game was now into sudden-death, with both teams already around the 15 mark. This was tricky because our sudden-death incorporated own-goals, should a player kick the ball over the fence. The whites were on a counter-attack and of course I was back there to snuff out the danger, I had managed to block a shot from Brenton when Fitz connected with the rebound, the ball heading straight for the pole, completely off-balance, I managed to swing round desperately and intervene. I watched happily as the ball sailed away from the pole, it drifted slowly past the grid formed by the metal, wire fence, my face curious, yet still relieved. And then I saw the ball crash into the grass and I heard screams of all types of emotions. At which point my face turned quickly through realisation to despair before being covered by two hands. (a.r)

## ::tropical footballer II::

In Uzbekistan there is a shortage of water. This is of importance to the president; immersion in boiling water is his preferred method of communication with dissenters.

The president is also a fan of football. On gas and oil money, he is building a superclub to compete with the European giants. The name of the club is Bunyudkor. Bunyudkor means "creator" in Uzbek. The common man - intimate with the poverty line - will soon be able to adorn his daydreams with scarred nobodies in well cut Bunyudkor jerseys.

Barcelona FC is the sister club of Bunyudkor. Players for loan, technical instruction, moral support; these things they supply. Barcelona is also the sponsor of United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. UNICEF adorns the players' breasts when they run on to the field.

One such player is Samuel Eto'o, striker for Barcelona FC. When he visits opposition stadia, La Liga fans spit monkey chants and hurl peanuts in his direction. Samuel Eto'o happens to be from Cameroon.

Jean-Pierre is also from Cameroon. He sells fake watches in the tourist quarters of Madrid. Once upon a time a talent scout told him he was Samuel Eto'o. This was in Yaoundé. With illegal papers he boarded an illegal boat for a trial with a European club that never existed. He got off the boat in his soccer boots; for three weeks he clunked around the detention center. When Samuel Eto'o scores his third goal against Real Madrid, he thinks to himself that peanuts might be a smart entrepreneurial move.

Last year Gulnara Karimova - model, fashion designer and daughter of the Uzbek president - offered Samuel Eto'o 25 million euros to wear the Bunyudkor colours for a season. For reasons unclear he declined.

In the parallel universe where absurdity is allowed its full course, Samuel Eto'o does accept the transfer to Bunyudkor C.C. He has become a 21st century poet and sailor into the Heart of Darkness. Joseph Conrad turns happily in his grave, eagerly awaiting the sequel. (l.r)

## :: Visceral ::

The street courts of Amsterdam inject me with a sense of culture, and it's as if every match and skillful player that has played on the court before you inspire your creativity

Sliding across a the luscious grass in a German stadium, with the ball nicely nestled between your foot and shin, the crowd's appraisal seems only to add to your momentum

and you get up wanting just wanting to see every individual that cheers you on, but you hide the smile, covering it with a focus appropriate to the important game

Compacted snow on the artificial-turf training surfaces in Europe makes a strong crunch every time your studs pierce it. The crunch sends a shiver of continental football up my spine. Am I really over here playing under these floodlights? A stuttered slide through the snow as you're fouled reminds you that there's no time to think about that shit while you're here.

Sand's disgusting to play in, the only thing that consoles the fact that no-one can completely read the path of the ball is the fact that you are on a beach and that fresh salt water is no more than a soccer-field's length away from you.

Bare-foot on some nice fat grass, nothing beats it. It makes you wonder why bare-foot football never evolved as a sport. You feel quicker than everyone else in the match. The dimensions and texture of your liberated feet allow you to perform tricks you'd never used before.

A crowded basketball court is perfect for football. If you can keep the ball glued to your feet, you're unbeatable. The space is so tight that the opposition don't chase you down, so a player beaten is a player beaten. It's so tight that a Zidane-spin, less than a metre from you're goal, is the perfect move. The sound of the ball making contact with the pole *tinggg!* is simply beautiful. (a.r)

### :: Toe-Bash ::

Kicking a soccer-ball is an art unto itself. There are so many different facets to master, the weight of a pass, the curl or lack-of, the power, the height, the dip; the accuracy. Add to this the fact that you can kick a ball with so many different parts of the foot. Each attains a different result. The in-step, the out-step, the inside (of the foot), the laces (of the boots), the toe, the back-heel and then there's even the side of the back-heel. The other day I witnessed the most outrageous finish I've ever seen, when Brazilian-born Croatian Eduardo scored for Arsenal from a volley with the outside of his heel. Johan Cruyff was famous for favouring the usually, less-preferred outside of the boot. In general players use the inside of the foot for short passes and the in-step or laces for shooting, depending on the desire for curl, top-spin or power. However as a an Under-8s player I had the mis-fortune of having Mr Williamson as my coach. Not that I had anything against Mr Williamson, but in hindsight, he clearly was not a football coach, as was probably the case all over Australia back then. A strict disciplinarian, he had the beautiful idea of taking a position from AFL and introducing it to soccer, when he announced Thomas Hack was playing Rover one Saturday morning. I guess he was unaware that football has long

had the simple term 'free-role'.

From Mr Williamson, I didn't learn all of the various techniques for kicking a soccer-ball. But I did learn one; the toe-bash. The toe-bash, a quite handy technique for certain situations in football, involves kicking the ball with the toe of the boot, right in the middle of the ball, however as the only tool in one's kicking repertoire it leaves a *lot* to be desired. Mr Williamson also taught us that one must look where they want the ball to go, leaving a group of 7-year-olds amazed at the idea of kicking a ball to the moon if they just focused on it well enough. I wonder if it was our team's limitation to toe-bashes that led us to struggle every match that year.

When I was in the fourth grade, my best-friend and star-player of the school soccer team, Brenton, taught me how to kick properly, about four years too late. To this day he still chuckles at the idea that he taught me how to kick and that it was only in year 4. Still learning how to kick wasn't that easy. It still didn't mean I could hit a ball in the air as I desired. Brenton always recalls one of his neighbours asking if his friend (me) needed a cup to help him kick the ball in the air. It also didn't mean I could kick as far as other kids, maybe that's why my dribbling developed from a young age.

These days I love to play centre-mid, I spray balls over and across every inch of the field. Quick, one-touch, short passes, long raking balls, beautiful balls which curl onto the run of the left-mid, chips which land at the feet of the striker, 35-metre drives which swerve and dip. I use the in-step or the out-step, I back-heel, pass with the inside of the foot and send the ball with my laces. (If I get to play 'rover' then I'm happiest.) (a.r)

### ::tropical footballer III::

In the trans-global landscape that is modern football, the tropical footballer becomes an ironic figure. He is at once hero of his people and peddler of hollow dreams. He has become a subversive double agent, employed by bosses he cannot recognise. Long gone are the liberation songs of Fela Kuti, Marley, Mayfield. The term 'tropical' is euphemism, employed to hint at the inherent ambiguities that surround him. (l.r)

### :: Smelly Boy ::

Summer had well and truly arrived and the intensity of lunchtime soccer matches was at an all time high. The matches had pushed sandwiches out of the lunchtime spot and into class-time snacks and were often finishing beyond the final bell. That gave us all precious time to get back to our next class where I, if lucky enough, would plonk myself under a fan

and melt into the floor. I have always sweated profusely, regardless of my fitness level, people get shocked when they see me after playing, it's as if I've taken a shower with clothes on. So it was natural that as the day wore on, past the initial taster match at recess and through the big blockbuster at lunch, so too did my appearance. I accepted this as a repercussion of football. But what I wasn't prepared for was the news I was to receive.

In the car home one day from school I was questioned in a very concerned manner as to whether I use deodorant by my good friend Alex. Of course I used it, unfortunately every high school boy used it seeing as it probably did more harm than good.

"It's just that, someone mentioned that you had BO the other day," he said matter-of-factly. I was devastated, I did not want to be the stinky kid. And I definitely wasn't, it was only natural that I would smell a bit after such intense battles. Did the person who smelt me know the context? Wait, who was the one who said it?

"Ehhh I forget, I honestly can't remember," he replied with an excruciating diplomacy. Though I tried in vain to squeeze it out of him, I quickly resigned myself to the more pressing issue at hand. It was such a tricky situation, no way in the world would I be the stinky kid at school, but soccer was my love, I'd never give that up.

From that car-trip on, a rigid system of under-shirt removal, body wiping and deodorizing was put into place and the matter never arose again. To this day I'll never know who that uneducated snob was that thought I had BO. (a.r)

### :: Secluded Alley ::

The secluded back alley was a training ground farfetched from the previous training grounds on which he's spent hours on. But the game was adaptability; and being able to use any strange space, and integrate its idiosyncrasies into a training regime, which would ultimately attain an improvement in an aspect of the game, un-trainable for most, was the beauty of it all. The secluded back alley was like a traffic-stripped T-junction, parts were rocky, parts were smooth, parts were sunny, parts were shaded, parts were covered with smashed glass from a group of drunk dickheads from the night before who had parked their car in the back-streets of Newtown but had then gotten lost. There was a wall.

He would train there almost each day. Starting slowly in a hoodie, but often ending half naked because of the drenching nature of the sweat. Many people would pass by him and he'd usually just try to ignore them as if embarrassed by the skill he was producing. The routine was usually similar almost each day. There was one lady that passed by, on the way to drop her daughter off, who he talked to on an almost regular basis. The techniques

were practiced in 20s. Often cars would begin to drive into the secluded back alley - the secluded back alley couldn't accommodate both him and a car - and he would meander effortlessly into whatever crevice he could find, allowing the car to pass without giving it a look, but all the while wondering if the people within were particularly impressed by the last technique he'd produced. The lady would walk past after picking up her child from day-care.

One windy day in the secluded back alley he wasn't feeling well. He was thinking too much. Past mistakes flooded his mind, as the notion of confidence began to overwhelm him. Das Selbstvertrauen. And he started to think horrible thoughts. But they felt so real. Maybe he should just give up. Just quit the game now. He'd had some nice moments, he'd had so many bad ones as well. And sometimes, especially after the last year or so, he just felt like the bad ones were starting to take over in a malignant spiral which would lead to a putrid hate and eventual bitterness. Maybe quitting now was just the best thing to do, he could go out, not on a high, but at least not too far off the back of something that maybe he hadn't pictured as being his high, but could nonetheless suffice. The ball bounced away from him and into the gutter. He walked over to it, picked it up and stopped training.

The next day he walked outside with a hoodie on. It wasn't long before he was warm and just in a t-shirt. He felt good and he liked the way he played, his technique, he thought »Who else can do this?« and began to believe in a sense of arrogance that he had hyped; an arrogance that was so necessary to believe in. (a.r)

:: glossary ::

reps	representatives
chopping	to hack someone down in a tackle, maliciously.
BO	Australian colloquial for "body odour"

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