

This extract is from the beginning of a novel. It was published in 2015. It is set at a football ground where the narrator describes their feelings about the game and the sport.

This cavern of echoes means everything to you. It's where you came with your dad every weekend with thousands of others just like you: ordinary families, ordinary lives, ordinary houses and mundane days of schooling, working, being a dad, a mum, a brother or sister. But this isn't an ordinary day or an ordinary place, this is where hopes and dreams are built, where
5 anxious murmurs mix with raucous roars of delight in a cacophony of passion, doubt and ecstasy.

Amongst the masses you find your seat – *your seat* – the one your father's blood and toil bought for you, the one green plastic folding mass-produced product that is just like the tens of thousands that surround it in a sea of regularity. But it's *yours*. It's the place where you sat with
10 your hands over your pallid face as the eternal doom of relegation threatened, the place where you leapt as close to the sun as you could when that tiny sparkle of silver reflected onto the faces of wide smiles and piercing evocations of a glorious past rekindled. A symbol of your ancestors, your people, your future.

You're here again. It's January and it's cold, to the point where scarves, gloves, padded coats and scalding coffee desperately battle with the elements that hit and kick and thump you for hours. That's irrelevant though, all you care about is those 23 people on the pitch – 11 heroes,
15 11 enemies and the judge who chooses your fate.

"We'll do it today, son, I know we will." That's what my father said to me on that fateful day ten years ago. Before his coughing and spluttering, when he wasn't pierced with medical serpent
20 wires, when the nurse looked at me with those pitiful blue eyes that had done the same thing countless times before. Different people, different rooms, same fate.

And as you turn to the seat next to you and you see the ghost of your father, who carried out his rituals, who wore the crest proudly above his heart and switched his gaze between the game and you, holding you as tight as he could when the ball shuddered into the back of their net,
25 precious tears dripping along the crags of his ageing cheeks – the only time you'd seen him cry – you see he is still there as you look down to your own child. Just a boy, but his heart and soul is with you, with him, with all of us.

All roads of the town twist and turn towards the turrets and the colossal walls of your colosseum. That morning the town had moved en masse: little doors opened in synchronicity as
30 the soldiers of fortune said goodbye to those they left behind and marched towards another day, another battle, another victory, stalemate or defeat.

You did the same with James, named after your father, holding his hand as his journey through the vicissitudes of life was just beginning. Just as you had done years ago, just as your father and his father had done the same. The same people, the same place, the same destiny.

Now the referee has initiated the match and the ball is kicked for the first time. The swaying songs switch to an almighty cheer and you watch. Watch and wait. Fingers clutching plastic cups, wrapped around mighty flags that fight the chilly breeze, and fingers that nervously twitch and flick as you stare at every pass, every movement, every tackle.
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Ten minutes in and your striker is in the box. He's going to score! He's going to do it! The crowds crescendo into an unbelievable wall of sound. But he's felled. He's taken down. The roars of
40 anticipation instantly transform into intense anger, expectant judgement. Referee!



He agrees. There is a penalty. He steps up to the spot. Their keeper bounces and bounds like a jester in a court desperate for approval. The whistle goes. Your striker runs up and down briefly, all the eyes are on him. Every single one of them.

- 45 He moves towards the ball. You turn to the seat next to you. There is your child, your father, his father and an endless line of spectres of time past and present. You turn back to the field, the sphere moves towards the rectangle that makes or breaks you that day.

