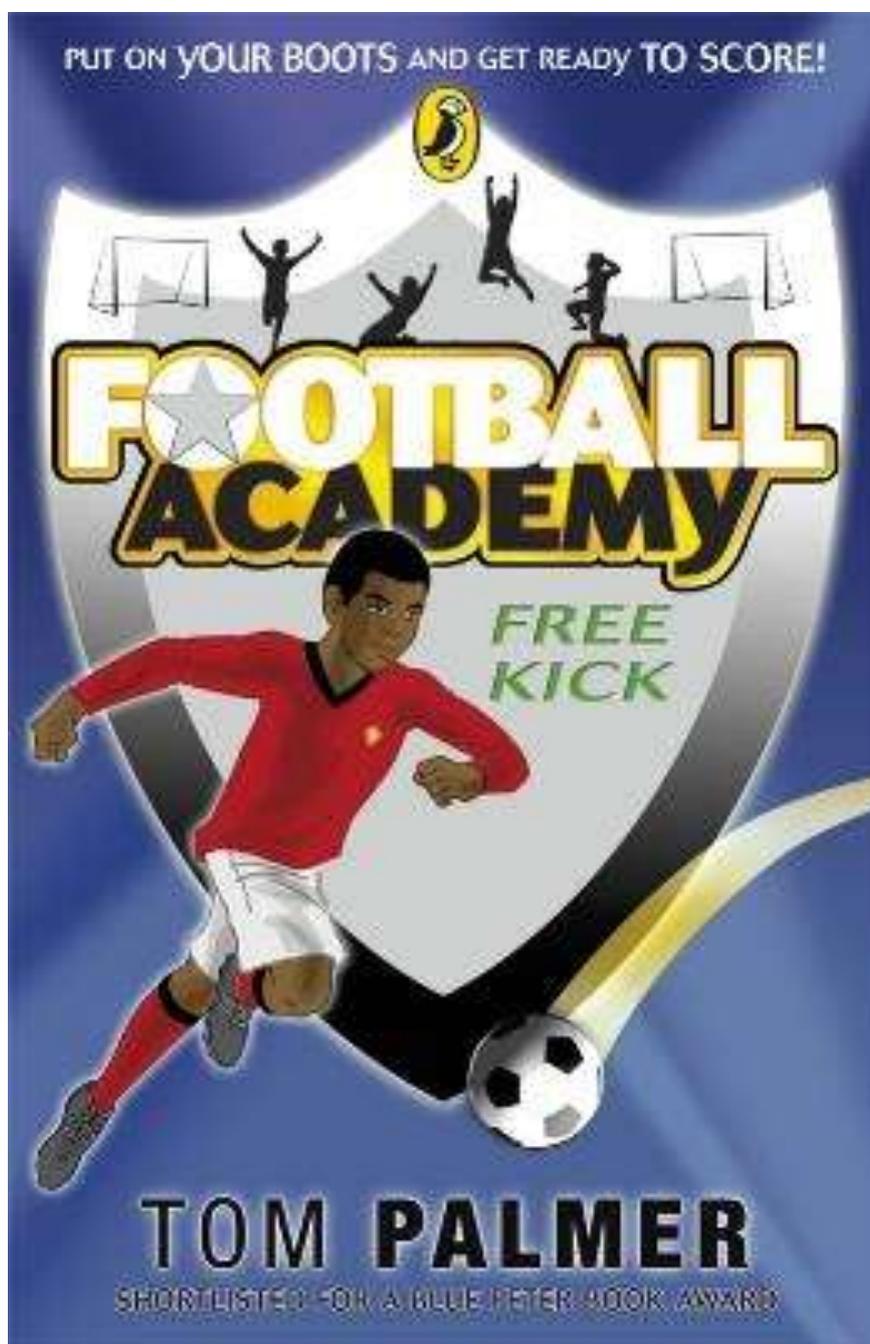


**TOM PALMER**

**FOOTBALL ACADEMY 5: FREE KICK**



**Put on your boots  
and get ready to score!**



## Snow

James sat staring out of his bedroom window - desperate for it to snow.

The weather forecast had been full of warnings all day: twenty centimetres of snow on its way to northern England. But, although the clouds were heavy - and the light strange - there was still nothing.

'Are you packed, James?' a loud voice came up the stairs. Dad's voice.

James looked at his bag. It *was* packed, his pair of shin pads sticking out of one of the side pockets. Three days' clothes. His football boots. A towel. Everything they were told to bring by Steve, the team manager, for a three-day tournament in London.

They were meeting at the United stadium that morning.

'Yeah, Dad. I'm packed,' James shouted back.

'Okay. We'll head off to the stadium in half an hour.'

'Alright,' James said. Then he frowned.

James Cunningham had schoolboy terms at United. He was one of the most promising under-twelve central defenders playing for a Premier League club.

His dad had played football for England in the 1980s. He'd scored the winner in a cup final. Then collected the trophy, because he was captain. And most people were sure that James had a spectacular career as a professional footballer ahead of him.

Like father like son.

Only *one* person wasn't so sure about that.

And that person was James.

Over the last few weeks he'd been questioning everything. And he'd come up with a terrifying answer: he wasn't sure that he really *wanted* to be a professional footballer.

James lay on his bed and tried to remember the last month. He'd had two bad games for United. And for one game he'd pretended to his dad that he was ill. So he hadn't even played.

It couldn't go on like this. And James knew it.

*Something* had to happen.

James sat up and stared at his wall. Posters of his favourite footballers. Posters of his favourite bands.

He sighed.

He wasn't thinking about giving up football because he didn't like it. He did. He loved football. It was just that there was something else James wanted to do even more.

James glanced at the football-shaped clock on his bedside table. A present from his dad last Christmas. It said ten past ten. He had twenty minutes before they needed to leave.

He looked outside again. And his heart leapt.

It was *snowing*!

It was really snowing. Snowing so hard that he couldn't see the full sized goal his dad had had built at end of their garden.

James left his bedroom and ran downstairs.

'It's snowing,' he shouted. 'Look at it.'

Mum came out of the front room. Then Dad from the kitchen with a tea towel in his massive hands.

Mum shook her head, smiling. 'So it is.'

'Don't be so happy about it, James,' Dad said. 'This could threaten the trip. We have to get down the motorway. Two hundred miles to London. I knew we should have set off first thing.'

'Do you think it'll be cancelled?' James added, aware he'd said it too excitedly. Like he *wanted* it to be cancelled.

Dad frowned, as if sensing James' real mood. 'Maybe... No, not if we leave now. Let's get going. Make sure no-one's for pulling out. I've been looking forward to this trip for weeks.'

Dad grabbed his jacket from the hooks in the hallway. Then he picked up his bag and snatched the car keys from the telephone table.

James realised that his mum was watching him as his dad was getting ready. She was leaning in the doorway looking at him. Her face was half asking a question, half looking worried.

'Are you ready to go, James?' she said.

'Yeah,' James said, trying to make his voice sound excited.

'Come on then,' Dad said. 'Before we get snowed in.'

James followed his dad out onto the driveway.

**James is a brilliant central defender. The best player at United. And he has a great pedigree: his dad used to play for England. When the team go to play West Ham United, his dad's ex-club, everyone is telling James he is going to be an England player too. But *James* doesn't want to be a footballer. He wants to be something else. And before he tells that to his dad, he has to admit it to himself.**

**Read on to follow James's footballing adventures and live the dream in *Free Kick* by Tom Palmer available at bookshops and libraries. ISBN 978014132471**

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