

# We Want to Make the Finals! (Vol. 1)

## Noah's Big Dream

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by Thilo

### Chapter 1: The Oath

Crash! Hiss! Bang! Noah looked at his phone. December 31, 2013. Exactly thirty-seven minutes until midnight. But some hooligans had been lighting fireworks for days, as if they couldn't wait for the New Year.

Like me, thought Noah. He quickened his steps. The snow crunched under his boots. Finally, he reached his destination: two goals, four corner flags, and a construction trailer. Their soccer field, their pride and joy.

Noah unlocked the trailer and flipped a switch. On the roof, four lights came on – their floodlights.

Noah pulled off his boots and slipped into his soccer cleats. Now he felt invincible. He had already scored a thousand goals wearing these shoes.

Noah threw his jacket on the bench and grabbed the ball. With a feline leap he took the stairs. Then he was standing on the playing field. It was invisible under the white blanket of snow, but he knew every square centimeter of it.

Elegantly, he dribbled the ball around three snowmen. He focused his full attention on the goal before he made his move. Full throttle. No goalie in the world would be able to stop this shot. Like a rocket the ball flew toward the goal.

But then a shadow peeled itself out of the darkness, threw itself in front of the goal line, dove, and punched the ball out of bounds.

“Throw in!” called the shadow. He stood up and dusted the snow off himself. Hardy, the best goalie you could get without money.

“Cool that you could come right away!” Noah said happily. They exchanged a high-five.

Hardy grinned. “What do you mean? I'm not here at all, I'm a good boy lying in my bed at home, asleep.”

Noah couldn't believe it. Sure, normally he wasn't allowed to stay up this late either, and certainly not to be outside at night. But today was New Year's Eve! His mother had made an exception there.

Hardy's parents were unfortunately not so cool. That's why they had given their son the name Reinhard, too, in memory of some dead great great uncle.

*Squeal!* An orange-red wheelie bike stopped a centimeter in front of Hardy's foot. Snow sprayed in every direction. Owl dismounted, took the thick glasses off of his face and wiped the lenses. These coke-bottle glasses were to thank for his nickname. They made his eyes look huge. Besides that, he squinted.

"Climbed out the window," he explained, running a hand through his straw-like hair. "You know already, my sister is throwing a party. And my parents are playing chaperone."

He took the ball with his foot and juggled it in the air. Whack, whack, whack. Owl could do that for hours.

Noah stared into the darkness. Not a soul, near and wide. "Matti is late, as always."

"As if!" sounded from behind the trailer, and a head of tousled brown hair could already be seen. "I got your text and ran out right away. What's so urgent, anyway?"

Despite the icy cold, Matti wore his jersey and shorts. He wore them to school, too. He was soccer fanatic, like all of them. And a master of the long pass.

"I brought you something." Matti held out a small box. When Noah opened it, confetti, streamers and a fake spider flew out at him. He dropped the box in surprise. Matti, Owl and Hardy bent over double laughing.

"Gather 'round," said Noah, brushing the confetti out of his hair. Like they did before any game, the four boys stood in a circle, leaned in and placed their arms on each other's shoulders.

"Men!" Noah began enthusiastically. "In a few minutes the year 2014 will begin. Our year. The year of the World Cup in Brazil."

He looked sharply at his friends. "I want to go there. I want to go to Rio de Janeiro, to my father. And you are coming with me!"

Owl, Matti and Hardy stared at him in surprise. Noah's father was Brazilian. Two years ago he had left the small family and had moved back to his homeland.

"And how are we supposed to do that, cap'n?" Owl stuttered. "The plane tickets would cost at least ten thousand euros!"

Noah narrowed his eyes conspiratorially. "Dreams come true, if you believe in them enough."

He let go of his friends and fished a note out of his pocket. On it were the words:

*I swear to do everything to meet my goal: to be at the Soccer World Cup in Brazil.*

*Noah*

“Sign it!” he said in a tone that left no room for argument.

Hardy was the second to put his name on the paper.

Then Matti. And finally Owl.

Noah ran to the trailer with a bottle and a rocket.

He jammed the bottle into the arm of one of the snowmen. Then he rolled up the note, attached it to the narrow wooden rod of the rocket, and placed the rocket in the bottle.

He looked at his phone. Fifteen more seconds.

“This will be our year,” he said again. “We’re going to the World Cup.”

Together they counted down: “ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one...”

At zero, the rocket shot up into the sky. And then the four friends played soccer, while above them the lights of the fireworks lit up the night.

## Chapter 2: Trouble

Noah dreamed about Brazil all night long. About amazing soccer players, beautiful beaches, hot music and dancing, the kind his father loved. And he, Noah, was in the middle of it all, dancing the samba in his cleats.

Beep! Beep!

What was that? Noah was startled out of his dream.

It was pitch black in the room. Only his cell phone glowed. A new message.

The clock read 6:36.

“What idiot is sending me something at this time on New Year’s!?” Noah quietly swore to himself. Then he felt a tug in his stomach, of joy. This must be a text from his father!

He pressed ‘read’.

**Happy New Year! Hope you celebrated. I’m dancing samba all night and thinking of you. I’m proud to have you as my son! Greetings to Mom. Kisses, Dad**

Noah's heart skipped a beat. But at the same time, he felt a thorn in his chest. The thorn was dipped in poison and burned like fire. He loved his father Luiz more than anything. Why couldn't they be together?

Noah wrote back. In Brazil, it was just a little past three thirty now.

**Let it ring! 2014 will be awesome, I promise! And I'll see you this summer. I'm sure of it. Noah**

Noah would have gladly added something in Portuguese. Luiz would have been ecstatic about that. But "good day" and "thank you" were all he could manage.

Noah was often annoyed that his parents hadn't raised him to be bilingual. If they had, surely he would be able to speak his dad's language perfectly by now.

One day, he swore to himself, he would make up for everything. Every child should understand his parents' mother tongue – even if there were two of them.

Noah was wide awake, but lay in bed a while longer. He leafed through his favorite book: *The Greatest Soccer Players of All Time*.

Many of them were German: Beckenbauer, Breitner, Fritz Walter, Matthäus, Klinsmann, Sammer, Völler. Or Brazilian: Pelé, Ronaldo, Roberto Carlos, Ronaldinho.

And within him, the strengths of all these soccer stars were united. Noah could feel it. The work ethic and discipline of the Germans. The cunning and acrobatics of the Brazilians.

"So I'll become a national player!" he yelled. He jumped out of bed and kicked his old teddy through the air. Balls were strictly forbidden in his room.

Then Noah ran around the chair, rushed past his Jedi knight, picked up the teddy again and aimed toward the closet door.

Whoosh! The teddy brushed over the desk and pulled a cup along with it. Juice poured out over Noah's math notebook.

He huffed. "Doesn't matter. I can count goals without a notebook."

Suddenly the door to his room flew open. Before him stood his mother in her nightgown, with her hair a mess and narrowed eyes.

"Have you gone entirely mad!" she yelled. "It's just after seven! And you're not supposed to be kicking balls around in your room!"

Noah grinned. "But I'm not doing that. I'm kicking my teddy bear."

His mother shook her head. "Not allowed either. What are you doing up this early, anyway?"

Noah pointed at his phone. "Dad woke me up. He says hello to you."

His mother nodded.

“I want to go see him this summer,” Noah blurted out, “and preferably to the World Cup. Hardy, Matti and Owl are coming, too.”

His mother leaned against the doorframe. “Of course, and I’m supposed to pay for all of this, right?” She went to Noah and took him in her arms. “I would really love to send you to see your father. We didn’t separate on bad terms, you know that. But I don’t have the money for the expensive flight. And Luiz doesn’t either.”

She kissed Noah’s hair. “I’m sorry,” she whispered in his ear. “And you’ll have to watch the World Cup on TV, like millions of others.”

Noah saw the rocket hissing up into the sky again, with the note and their promise tied to it.

Determined, he looked at his mother. “No, mom,” he answered calmly. “I’m going to the World Cup and to see my father.”

She smiled sadly. “Yeah, that would be nice. But sadly, that will probably remain a dream.”

## Chapter 7: Killing Time

Never before had Owl, Noah, Mattie and Hardy longed for the end of a vacation like they did now. Enduring the span of time before the first practice brought all of them to the edge of madness. Each second on the clock seemed to drag out for five minutes. To them it seemed like the church tower bells only rang every ten hours. And the time between waking up and dinner felt like three years. At least.

And to make things worse for everyone, the German Bundesliga didn’t play soccer during winter break either, so they couldn’t spend half of their Saturdays in front of the television cheering on their favorite teams. And they had watched all the episodes of the highlights of the 2013 season at least five times each.

The days went by fastest while they were playing soccer. Of course. But somehow they were only playing half-heartedly.

Hardy didn’t want to keep throwing himself into the snow, and let too many goals through his guard. Owl often took his time. He didn’t chase the ball, but instead waited until it came to him. Matti only rarely showed off his sweet passes.

And Noah barely hit the goalposts. Too much was going through his head. He was incredibly excited to start training with the Rohrbach soccer club. In a real club! Tomorrow, Monday, it would finally be time.

“Two against two doesn’t work anymore,” Owl stated and put his foot on the ball. “The game against the older guys was the bomb, at least something was happening there.”

Matti nodded. “I felt like a real soccer player. Like in the finals of the Champion’s League!”

Noah walked toward his two opponents. “Soon we will be playing real games every Saturday. Lifting trophies in the air. Winning tournaments.”

Noah focused on the ball under Owl’s foot. He had to have it. There was no other way. After all, the score was 6:7. He and Hardy had to catch up. Without hesitation he kicked the ball.

Owl almost fell over, but regained his balance quickly.

Noah had already run around him, but Owl cut him off with his body.

Owl against Noah. Defense versus offense. Noah nudged the ball to the side.

Owl went for a hook, but didn’t reach it. Noah took the ball with the outside of his foot, gave it just enough momentum to mimic a turn of the body.

Promptly, Owl ran in the wrong direction.

Noah made a cross and shot the leather in the direction of the goal.

But it all had taken too long. Matti had run back into position long ago. As the last man, he was allowed to take the ball in his hands. With a flashy grab, he steered the ball around the posts.

Noah was stunned for a moment. Then he clapped in applause. “Respect! If it doesn’t work out with midfield, you’re just going to be goalie.”

Hardy grumbled from the other goal. “Don’t put me out of work!”

When Owl had to head home, Noah turned on the floodlights.

He, Matti and Hardy practiced free shooting for a while. Then Hardy had to go, too. His parents had called him three times already.

Finally it was just Noah alone on the field. His mother was a caretaker in a nursing home. Often on Sundays, too, like today. It would be more than an hour before she came home.

Time for Noah’s favorite game. He placed the ball down twenty meters from the goal. When he scored, he took a step backwards before taking the next shot. When he missed, he stayed where he was, for as long as it took until he was able to get the ball into the goal from that position.

Noah had the feeling that this training could be useful to him sometime.