

***EVEN
HESKEY
SCORED***

EMILE

HESKEY

MY STORY

WITH DEAN ELDREDGE

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CHAPTER ONE

Five-One, Even Heskey Scored ...

I SAW Paul Scholes bursting through. I just thought, 'I'm off'. I knew I needed to run; to get towards the goal. He played me through. For a moment, the world seemed to stop. I just needed to get a good touch, to get the ball out of my feet and I'd be in on goal. If I'm honest, I didn't actually get the best of first touches. It was good enough, not perfect, but it didn't take me out of my stride.

If you can get your shot away early, it can be difficult for goalkeepers to get down to the ball. My mind was focused on striking the ball hard and low. The defender, Marko Rehmer, was closing in on me, and the goalkeeper, Oliver Kahn, was advancing. There was no space to go around him.

Keep it down, don't blaze it over. Hard, true, hit the net. I'd done it time after time in training, in games, but never

on a night like this. And then it hit me 5-1 – I'd just scored in the Olympic Stadium in Munich to put England 5-1 up against Germany. FIVE-ONE. This doesn't happen. To put it into context, Germany had only lost one qualification game in their last 60 and hadn't lost at the Olympic Stadium since 1973.

I gave an interview not too long ago. I was asked questions about what I'd said in previous interviews in my career. One of the questions was, 'What did you say about your goal in Germany after the game?' I guessed and said I'd described it as amazing. Wrong. Apparently I'd described it as 'good'. Good? What was I thinking? I should have been on top of the world.

That's football though. When you're living day after day in that environment, the bubble, you take things with a pinch of salt. You're already thinking of the next game, the next challenge. It's not until you finish playing, when you look back on your career, that you take stock of those moments and your achievements. It's totally different to supporters, who will all remember where they were on the evening of the 1 September 2001; the night we put five in the Germans' net.

When I get stopped today by people in the street, it's the one thing that gets mentioned more often than not.

'Emile, 5-1, amazing mate!' they'll shout. I'll put my hand up, smile and then take another look and think, 'How old would you have been that night?' They'd have been in nappies, or at school, but it's just one of those games, one of those

nights that transcend the generations. Something your mum and dad will tell you about, even if you weren't old enough to see it or remember it for yourself.

One guy once told me that he walked out of the pub the moment Germany went ahead. His son managed to get hold of him after the game and told him it had finished 5-1. He thought we'd lost 5-1. Everyone remembers where they were.

We didn't win anything that night. No trophies. We didn't even qualify for the World Cup that night, that was still to come, but we won the hearts of the public. We gave English football some pride.

Watching my goal back on YouTube, I'm shaking my head. I can't believe I had the nerve to tell Scholesy to wait, to let me do my celebration. Who does that? After the quality of his through-ball, I should have been carrying him on my shoulders.

I started to do my DJ celebration and then remembered I'd agreed to change it. DJ Spooky was the inspiration for it. He asked me to mix up my celebration and to do a golf-putting one. I didn't even play golf. I was in autopilot, about to do my DJ spinning and then you can see the moment when my brain kicks in and I'm holding Scholesy away, running off towards the corner flag. It was all a bit of a blur. I couldn't tell you what Scholesy or David Beckham said, even though they were the first over to congratulate me.

They played with each other. They had such an understanding. At that time, Becks was just amazing. It was weird

to watch, really. Observing football through the years, it's generally controlled through the centre of midfield. Becks was controlling games from the wing. He was a phenomenon, almost untouchable at that point in his career.

Scholes, because he was so quiet, no one really noticed him, but he was arguably better than anyone. He was like the opposite of Becks. Almost unknown outside of the game, whereas Becks was known worldwide.

These guys could pass a ball to you perfectly. Not just at you, but on to the specific patch of grass that you were running on to. If you were running, they would find you. It was a dream to play alongside them.

That night, we all thought back to the defeat to Germany in October 2000; the last England game at the old Wembley Stadium. No one wanted to lose that game and it hurt everyone.

I have a frame up on the wall of my house now. It includes my shirt, Carsten Jancker's shirt and it has the teams and score listed on there. I look at it as I walk past and smile. For all the cup finals with Leicester and Liverpool, the relegation decider with Wigan, and all the other big games I was fortunate enough to play in, this is the one that I'll always be remembered for. That night, that goal; five-one, even Heskey scored ...

CHAPTER TWO

From Highfields to Rod and Emu

I WAS a very quiet child. To the point where I'm sure my parents thought there was something wrong with me. I was shy. There are kids who go in to rooms and speak straight away, but I would sit underneath my mum's legs, looking around, observing. I came out of my shell through sports. I became myself. That and playing in the playground, any activities, but otherwise I wouldn't say a word. I was shy with everyone, even my own family.

I'm one of four children, to my mum and dad. My dad had two children before he met my mum. One of them, I didn't meet until towards the end of my playing career. It turns out he was a huge Liverpool fan! He might have been giving me some stick, without knowing he was related to me. We were three boys and one girl, a fairly big family, with

six of us in one house. My dad's name is Tyrone, my mum was Albertine Newton until she married my dad; my eldest brother is Santana, then there's me, then my younger brother Revelino, who probably got the name I should have had given the football connection, and then my sister is Cora-Lee.

My grandad on my dad's side was the first to come over to the UK, with his brother, and they worked on the railways in Birmingham. From what I understand he found Birmingham too cold, so moved to ... Leicester. Work that one out. But Leicester had a big Caribbean community, especially Antiguan, who were congregated in one area. On my mother's side, they are Barbudan and one of the biggest ex-pat communities outside of the country itself is based in Leicester. My mum and dad both came over at the age of ten, although there was a little age difference between them, so they didn't arrive at the same time.

I can imagine that it must have been tough for them both back then. That was a time where, for example, there were signs up reading, 'No Black, No Irish, No Dogs allowed'. That would have been very difficult to deal with, but I think in the long run they are probably stronger people for the experience, however unpleasant it was. Leicester wasn't always the multicultural place it is now, and they would have been some of the first people to come over, perhaps as part of the Windrush Generation, planting the seeds for us all to be here.

Our family settled in Highfields, an area right on the eastern edge of Leicester city centre. Highfields was the area

for the black community and it was great. In essence, I didn't feel as if we had any problems. As I grew up there, we mixed with other black people, Asians and white people, but the majority were black.

I look back now and I was wandering off to the shop at the age of five, and to be honest, there's no way I'd let my kids go down to the shop at that age today. Everyone knew each other in the area. It was the norm. The guy in the local shop knew exactly what I wanted, before I'd even opened my mouth. There was a real community spirit about the place.

We used the community centre on Melbourne Road and there were a few shops there, which was all we needed: a groceries shop, a chip shop on the end which I loved, a video store and another groceries shop at the other end. My primary school was right opposite, Uplands Infant School, my first school. My grandmother lived just around the corner on Derwent Street, and there's a newsagents and a library there now.

My dad went to school at Moat Community College, and we lived in Pegasus Close, just off Maidstone Road and almost opposite his old school, right next to the main railway line that connects Leicester with the rest of the country. We lived on the top floor in a maisonette and I would knock for everyone on the way to school in the morning, and we'd all walk in to Uplands together. It was a very easy life for me then. Families all knew each other, and everything we wanted was around us. People went to the same pub, The Burlington, and my dad played for the Leicester Caribbean Cricket Club at

Crown Hills School on summer weekends, or we'd all travel to London to play against equivalent teams down there.

My dad worked for Rover in Rearsby, around ten miles from our home, north of Leicester and near the main road towards Melton Mowbray. My mum was in a hosiery factory in Glen Parva, in the opposite direction south of the city. They worked hard to provide for us kids, and that was the only way they knew how. They put food on the table for us. We definitely weren't rich, but I can never remember feeling that we were struggling.

There must have been some tough times and the 1980s were difficult for a lot of people, so my dad had a second job, as a doorman, working for a company called Starlight on the weekends and evenings. He worked a lot of parties and weddings in the Asian community. He would have found that hard. I can't claim to have taken that from him necessarily, but I always had a strong work ethic when it came to sport, particularly football, and from a young age I can remember never wanting to lose. At infant school, I would race a kid, and then challenge the next one, until I'd been through the whole school, through all the ages and beaten everyone. I hated losing. I was quick, very quick and I think that's when I realised I could compete in a competitive sports scenario.

I was taken out of my comfort zone around the age of seven or eight, when we moved out of Highfields to a nearby suburb, Evington. It was an upgrade but we were away from people we knew and people we loved, to a welcome that wasn't,

at first, the same. Evington was totally different to Highfields. It was a predominantly white area, with a sprinkling of Asian and black people and it was tough to begin with. I'd come from an area that was perceived as tough, and on my first day at Linden Primary School, I walked in to the classroom, sat down and everyone was staring at me. This went on for what seemed like a minute or two, so I stared back at one of the kids and said, 'What you looking at?'

I understand it now. They were kids and they weren't used to seeing someone who looked like me. I had to come out of my shell very quickly. My early days in Highfields, around some tough people, had rubbed off on me and I had to show I was strong too. Even though I was shy, I knew how to stand up for myself. Our new home was 99 Evington Lane, and now we had a back garden, something we didn't have in our old place. We went from a two-bed maisonette to a three-bed semi. Mum and dad were in one room, Cora-Lee had her own room and then the three boys were in the third room. It was good fun. It was the norm and was never a problem. I'm not sure my kids today would understand sharing with two of their siblings.

I enjoyed my time at Linden. I was never any trouble for anyone, really. The school had its own small swimming pool, which was something you would never have imagined at Uplands, with all due respect to them. I can only really remember one teacher at Linden, and you couldn't forget him. Mr Turnbull was a tall Yorkshireman who had these huge thick-rimmed glasses,

as he suffered from visual impairment. He would hold sheets of paper right up to his face, touching his nose.

He was fantastic when it came to sports. I don't really remember playing football until I went to Linden. Up until then I did athletics, played a bit of cricket but that was it. At the age of two or three, my dad took me to see the former West Indies and Leicestershire County Cricket Club player Andy Roberts and there's a photo of me with the great man. My dad loved cricket, but I didn't really enjoy all the standing around in the field and waiting to bat. I wanted to be involved and be active. I wasn't bad at it, but I preferred running. I looked up to people like Linford Christie. In terms of school facilities, I went from concrete to huge fields to run around on when the weather was okay.

Aside from my running, I still played a bit of cricket, tennis, football, basketball, hockey, anything. You name it, we did it at Linden. I can remember standing on one side, trying to hit the basketball board with a tennis ball, and we just did that over and over, for a certain amount of points. It was always Mr Turnbull who was there for sport. He even made us take cross-country running during our lunch break if we wanted to be part of the football team. We'd eat after, but before that we'd run around the main football pitch, down to the lower training field and back around again. It was only once a week, and people dreaded it, but I think it helped not just physically, but also in terms of building a mental toughness.

Linden's football team in my year wasn't very good. In fact we were terrible. We'd win a few games, but we certainly didn't win any trophies. There were probably two or three decent players in our team and that was it. In the year above there was a lad named Marc Joseph who went on to play as a professional for Cambridge United, Peterborough United, Hull City, Blackpool and Rotherham United, and was capped by Antigua and Barbuda. I played in his team a few times for the year above, but his side wasn't particularly successful either, so he was in a similar position to me. I guess that, mentally, it was good for us both as we'd have a lot of the ball, but we weren't guaranteed to win games.

I managed to score a lot of goals for Linden and used my pace to my advantage. Off the back of this, at the age of nine, I was asked to go down to train at Leicester City's Centre of Excellence. The best kids at that age were all put in the training dome at Belvoir Drive. The coaches would show us a few skills and then see who could pick up the demonstration well, and then we'd play little games. We'd do that twice a week. I honestly don't know how I got down there as my mum and dad didn't drive. There was a scout called Len Mawby who had spotted me and he maybe took me down a few times, given I was too young to get the bus on my own, or to walk that distance.

School was all about sport for me. I enjoyed my time in education, but I wasn't particularly good at anything. I didn't really focus in class as my mind was just on PE. I would

count down the time; I couldn't wait to get out there and play. Along with the football team, I also represented the school in athletics meetings at the main stadium in the city, Saffron Lane. I held a lot of records, but I'd be surprised if I still held any of them now, especially with how people have evolved to be quicker and stronger.

I did the 40 and 60 metre sprints, along with the long jump, but I hated losing to a lad called Keith Garner, who was a couple of years above me. Marc Joseph beat me and that pissed me off too. I was never beaten in the sprints, but in the long jump I lost a few times. I beat one lad, Nathan Morgan, through the years and then he beat me at the end, on our last jump, and went on to represent Great Britain, winning gold in the Commonwealth Games in 2002. I still wasn't happy that I'd lost though.

Athletics was a major interest for me, as I didn't really play Sunday league football until I was around 11 years old. I know a lot of kids play from the age of eight or nine, but I just played for the school. Sundays in the black community was all about church and that's why I didn't play. I went every Sunday as a kid. Melbourne Church was near to my nan's house, and we'd all go to her house on a Friday night and stay for most of the weekend. If we didn't go to Melbourne Church, we'd go to the Pentecostal church in the town centre, which was my nan's church. If we weren't there we'd go to the church on Bodnant Avenue.

Despite this, I wouldn't really say we were that religious a family. My nan was, and she would be there all weekend, but

for us I think it was to get rid of the kids for a few hours, to give our parents a break. It was like a Sunday school thing and then we'd walk back to my nan's, have some food and then walk around 30 minutes or so back to Evington. A parent of another kid at the Centre of Excellence nagged my parents to get me to play on Sunday, so eventually I joined Ratby Groby Juniors.

I knew nothing about Sunday league football. It must have taken around an hour to get there and one lad didn't live too far from me, Dean Blankley, so I'd either stay at his or they would pick me up in the morning and take me to the games. I'd never even been to Ratby before. They were the best side around, before I got there, and had some very good players in their team. Many of the players were part of what we would now call the academy at Leicester City, and we were managed by a guy called Pete Quincy. Pete would spot the odd player at the Centre of Excellence and would bring them to Ratby and strengthen the team.

I was so focused on playing football that I never really had time for girls. My first kiss was with a girl named Katherine Hill at Linden. We were friends in class and she used to help me with my school work. She was so intelligent and ended up being a lawyer, I think. I didn't have a clue what I was writing down half the time and she took the time to explain everything to me. Maybe if there was a different way of learning, it might have helped me. I hated having to stand up in front of the class to read something out loud, or having to stand up and answer questions in front of people. It was just

a kiss with Katherine though, nothing serious as we were still at primary school, and then she went to Judgemeadow School and I went to The City of Leicester. She was cool and I always remembered how kind and helpful she had been to me.

As soon as the school day finished, all the lads would head down to the private Leicestershire Golf Club, sneak over the fence and play football. We'd round up so many of us on the way that it would almost always end up as an 11-a-side game, but before long we'd be chased off the grounds. We would play far away from the clubhouse, in a corner of the fairway, and the pitch was incredible. The best we'd ever played on. Then, when we were chased off, we'd climb the gates of Linden, from the Wakerley Road entrance, and play on the pitch there. With the goals still up it was much better than putting our coats and bags down as goalposts. Evington Park was free and available, but we wanted either a perfect pitch or the proper-sized goalposts, and no matter how many times we were chased off, we'd always come back and try again another day. We'd play full games, headers and volleys, knockout, all sorts, and we'd be on there until it was dark. On the golf course we'd tear the fairway up as we were all wearing football boots. They must have grown sick of us.

Santana was already at The City of Leicester, so it was natural that I would go there after Linden and it made sense for our family. Ian Thompson, who was a big name in local football at the time, also went to the same school. Ian's family are big friends with my family; my dad is Ian's godfather and

his mum is my godmother, so we grew up together in the same area and he was three school years above me. He played for England under-16s and under-18s and was on Leicester's books, but tailed off a little.

Even today, people talk about what an incredibly gifted player Ian was. I can remember watching him score for England schoolboys at Filbert Street and he was unplayable. Then, of course, there was Gary Lineker who went to the same school as me, so that gave me some reassurance and inspiration. I was a little daunted by going to City of Leicester. I guess that stemmed from the fear of the unknown. Some friends went from Linden with me, so that helped. Again, I wasn't the best in class, but I did enjoy maths by the end of my time there. Like at primary school, I just never focused on classes, as my mind was always on my football, which I guess turned out to be the right decision. I mean, I made my Leicester City under-18s debut at the age of 15, when I was still at school. It was hard to focus on lessons when my pathway already seemed to be set out.

We were lucky enough to spend holidays in the Caribbean, in Antigua and Barbuda, sometimes for up to six weeks. We'd live out there with family and those trips have become great memories for me. I'd get to meet people I had never met and while the culture was similar to our community back home, the amenities certainly weren't. We had running water, toilets and showers in the UK, and they had a hole in the ground. We'd go off and fill a bucket with water in the

street to wash, and the toilets, in the hole, were in a hut, out in the back yard.

I'd play 'kick the can' with my cousins. All we needed was a can, or a ball, and we'd be outside for hours. My mum's cousin must have hated having all of us there, with my great auntie next door, as we were in and out of every room. On one occasion in Antigua there were no amenities at the place we stayed, but we didn't care, we just made the best of it. I was a year old when I first went out there, but obviously I don't remember any of that trip. I met my great-grandfather and great-grandmother out there too, so they are special memories.

I was a normal kid in lots of ways. I loved watching *He-Man* and everyone said I was massively into *The A-Team* and I'd never be out of my Mr T jumper, but I can't remember that. There was normally calypso or reggae music on in our house growing up. Bob Marley or Beres Hammond would be on and I liked it. It was pretty special getting to hear that genre of music live out in the Caribbean too.

I still like that kind of music today. I have a pretty wide-ranging taste, apart from probably heavy metal, that kind of thing. I loved R&B from the 1990s to early 2000s as that was a really big part of my life. Television was so different back when I was a kid too. We just had the four channels and at my grandma's house I can remember putting 50p in the back of the TV and turning the dial to switch it on. We ate English food, but only if we went out to a pub really, like a Sunday roast, so it was Caribbean food most of the time. I'd eat pretty

much anything, but Sundays at home were my favourite. It would be rice and peas, chicken, vegetables and dumplings.

It was even better when I went to my nan's. I don't know why, but it always seemed to taste better. I hated eating stuff like liver or corned beef, but you had to eat what was put on your plate, or you didn't eat at all. The amount of times I would nearly barf just looking at the liver and then just force it down me. I can still remember that feeling now. My kids are asked what they'd like to eat. It still surprises me when I go to see my mum and she asks what I want to eat. I just expect her to put it in front of me.

I didn't get the chance to watch much football on television as a kid, and it would depend upon whether anyone wanted to put the 50p in or not. I can remember having to sit and watch the horse racing, probably on the BBC, with my grandad. I could have pretty much fallen asleep every time and the same for Formula 1, but I do enjoy watching it now. I would probably be asking to see *Sesame Street* anyway.

I don't remember my interest in watching football developing until I started playing for Ratby Groby Juniors and at school. My parents didn't really have the money to buy tickets to watch Leicester City play, so the first games I saw at Filbert Street were as a ballboy, as part of the Centre of Excellence. I loved that, until the winter and then you'd sit there, freezing your arse off, soaking wet, sometimes in the snow. That was the worst.

I went to Luton Town to watch Leicester, with a friend and his family, and saw us play on the infamous plastic pitch, and

can remember Alan Paris playing as well as Steve Walsh, who I went on to play alongside of course, years later. I loved John Barnes though. You tend to gravitate towards people who look like you and there weren't many black players around in the English game, but I loved him. I would pretend I could play with my left foot, which must have helped to improve my weaker foot a little, so I owe him a thank you for that as I did play on the left wing at times in my career. I admired Chris Waddle for his incredible skills, and later on I liked Ian Wright. I also loved watching Andrew Cole banging goals in for fun. I was a youth-team player when Andrew came to Filbert Street with Newcastle United. My job was to clean the dressing room, make the teas, pump up the balls, whatever I was told to do. Me and a friend forced our way on to working in the away dressing room, just so we could get close to him. I didn't dare speak to him, but I gave him a nod as I walked past. Being that close to a professional was like seeing someone from another world.

I never looked at doing anything but being an athlete, and then that desire became focused even more on becoming a footballer. There was never a chance of me becoming a teacher or anything like that. My childhood shaped me as the person I am today. It was tough and those experiences helped me cope with the tough environment football is. It's completely unforgiving and you have to have the thickest of thick skins.

Football can be a very isolated place. I was subjected to lots of racism as a kid and that developed my mentality. I've

written a chapter at the end of the book discussing racism in the game and in society in more detail. I'd walk down the street and be shouted at. There were a lot of incidents within football and away from it and maybe that gave me the strength to succeed, I don't know. My childhood was an incredible experience though. I couldn't believe how lucky I was to live my life. I can still picture running out at Filbert Street as a 12-year-old for Ratby Groby Juniors in a cup final and pinching myself that I'd made it that far. We couldn't even kick the ball past the halfway line, but I was there at Filbert Street and no one could take that away from me.

Not many people know this but in 1989 I took part in the 'Emu Challenge', as part of *The Rod and Emu Show* on TV. You can find the video on YouTube if you really want to. My media agent, Ade Danes, tells anyone who will listen to watch it. Cheers, Ade. I'm there on the screen in a pink shirt, doing an assault course for the 8th Leicester Boys Brigade, along with two other lads, Darren and Ryan. We were on Rod Hull's team and I was introduced as Emily, which Rod apologised for, before later calling me Emily himself. From the look on my face, I don't seem best pleased. We beat the other team from Nottingham, who were in Grotbags's team and won £100 for charity. People still struggle with my name. If I go to Starbucks or Costa and order a green tea, I don't even bother trying with Emile and give them one of my middle names, William, instead. I've been called Emily way too often.