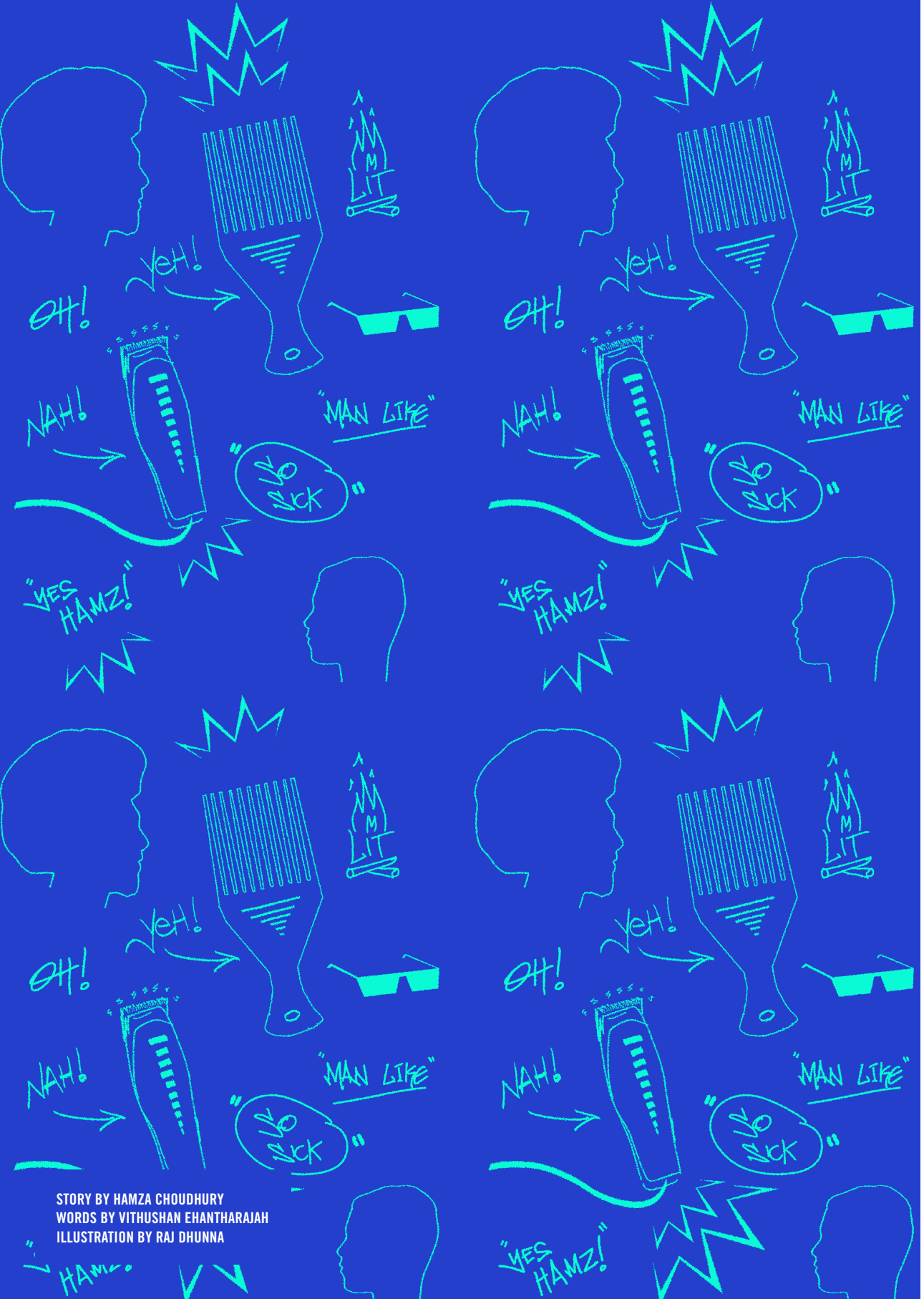
HAMZA

MY STORY





STORY BY HAMZA CHOUDHURY
WORDS BY VITHUSHAN EHANTHARAJAH
ILLUSTRATION BY RAJ DHUNNA

BEING YOURSELF IS IMPORTANT IN LIFE AND FOOTBALL. IT WAS A LESSON TAUGHT TO ME GROWING UP: TO LOVE WHO YOU ARE AND WHAT YOU DO. WITHOUT EMBRACING MY HERITAGE, MY SKIN AND EVEN MY HAIR, I WOULD NOT BE THE PERSON OR THE FOOTBALLER I AM TODAY. THIS IS MY STORY SO FAR.

HAMZA CHOUDHURY



THIS IS HAMZA CHOUDHURY.

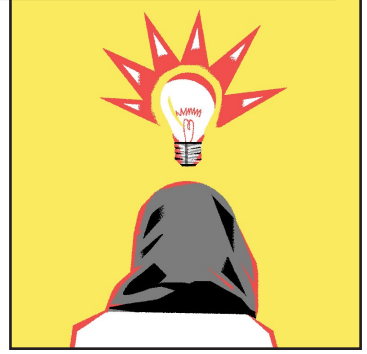


HAMZA GREW UP IN LOUGHBOROUGH, ENGLAND, IN A BIG HOUSE WITH HIS BROTHERS, SISTERS AND COUSINS. HIS CHILDHOOD WAS FULL OF MEMORIES AND LOVE.



HIS DAD WAS FROM GRENADA AND HIS MUM WAS FROM BANGLADESH. HAMZA LIVED WITH HIS MUM AND GROWING UP SHE TAUGHT HIM TO SPEAK BOTH BENGALI AND ENGLISH.

HAMZA'S MUM REALISED FOOTBALL WAS A GREAT WAY OF CHANNELLING HIS ENERGY.

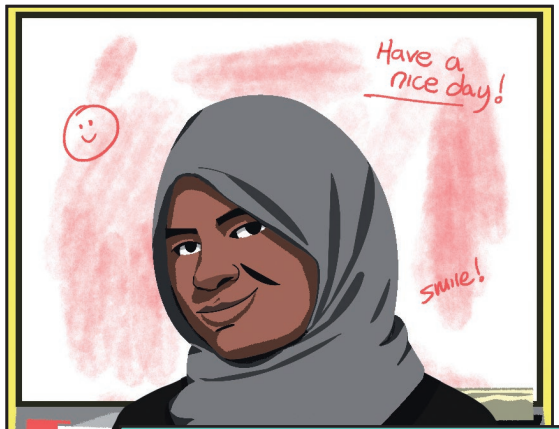


HE LOVED THE BEAUTIFUL GAME AND WOKE UP EVERY SUNDAY AT 7:30AM TO WATCH MATCH OF THE DAY WITH HIS COUSIN AND UNCLE BECAUSE HE WAS NOT ALLOWED TO STAY UP LATE ON SATURDAYS.



HAVING A BIG FAMILY MEANT HAVING A LOT OF FRIENDS. GAME NIGHTS WERE A REGULAR EVENT, AND WHEN THE FAMILY GOT A GAMES CONSOLE, THINGS GOT VERY COMPETITIVE...





HIS MUM, RAFIA, WAS STRAIGHT-TALKING, POLITE AND FUN. A STRONG WOMAN WHO WAS ALSO A TEACHER AT HAMZA'S SCHOOL.

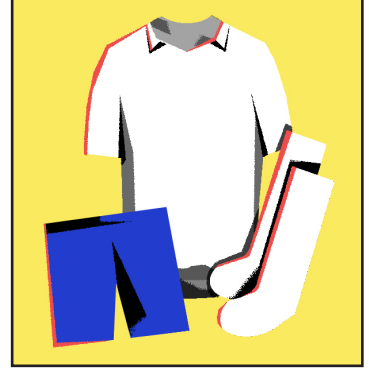
HAMZA'S UNCLE WAS A BIG FOOTBALL FAN. THOUGH HIS FAMILY DID NOT HAVE SKY, THEY HAD ACCESS TO REAL MADRID TV, WHICH MEANT A LOT OF GALACTICOS ON HIS TV SCREEN...



HAMZA'S MUM ENCOURAGED HER CHILDREN TO DO WHAT THEY WANTED AND TO DO IT IN THE RIGHT WAY.



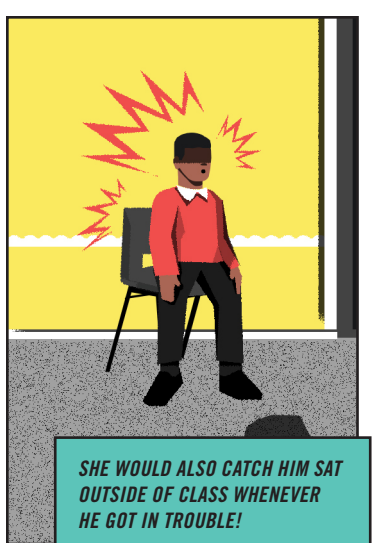
WHEN HAMZA WAS SIX, HIS MUM BOUGHT HIM A FULL ENGLAND KIT AND A PAIR OF BOOTS AND TOOK HIM TO HIS FIRST FOOTBALL SESSION AT LOUGHBOROUGH UNIVERSITY.



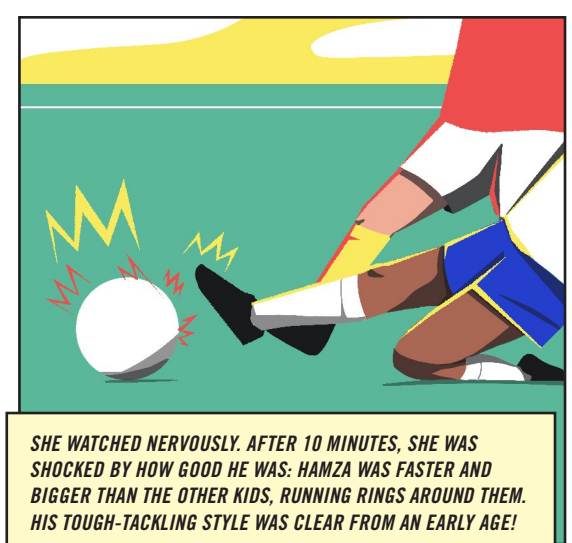
BUT SHE WAS ONE OF THE COOL TEACHERS. SO COOL IN FACT THAT SHE WOULD EVEN GO IN GOAL DURING FOOTBALL AT BREAK TIMES!



HOWEVER, IT WASN'T ALL GREAT FOR HAMZA...



SHE WOULD ALSO CATCH HIM SAT OUTSIDE OF CLASS WHENEVER HE GOT IN TROUBLE!



SHE WATCHED NERVOUSLY. AFTER 10 MINUTES, SHE WAS SHOCKED BY HOW GOOD HE WAS: HAMZA WAS FASTER AND BIGGER THAN THE OTHER KIDS, RUNNING RINGS AROUND THEM. HIS TOUGH-TACKLING STYLE WAS CLEAR FROM AN EARLY AGE!

SOON, THE COACH TOOK HAMZA OVER TO HIS MUM:



FROM THAT POINT ON, FOOTBALL WENT EVERYWHERE WITH HAMZA. EVEN ON HIS TRIPS TO BANGLADESH WHERE HE PLAYED OUT IN THE STREETS WITH THE LOCAL KIDS FROM THE VILLAGE IN THE HABIGANJ DISTRICT OF SYLHET.

HAMZA LOVED THE FREEDOM OF VILLAGE LIFE. HE ENJOYED EATING LOCAL FRUIT WITH HIS FRIENDS, SUCH AS MANGOES, LYCHEES AND GUAVAS.

YUM!

WHENEVER THE ELECTRICITY CUT OUT RANDOMLY, HIS FRIENDS WOULD HUDDLE AROUND TO TELL GHOST STORIES.

AS PART OF LEARNING ABOUT HIS FAMILY, CULTURE AND RELIGION, HE STUDIED THE QURAN AND WAS TAUGHT A PRAYER HE WOULD GO ON TO RECITE BEFORE MATCHES.

HAMZA STARTED TO BECOME HIS OWN PERSON. HIS MUM ENCOURAGED HIM ALONG THE WAY.

MAKE SURE YOU ARE THE BEST VERSION OF YOURSELF.

TRUE TO HER WORD, SHE FINALLY LET HIM HAVE A SAY ON HIS HAIR.

HAMZA USED TO HATE THE BARBERS WHEN HE WAS YOUNGER BECAUSE THEY WOULD CHOP IT ALL OFF. NOW, THE CHOICE WAS HIS!

FINALLY, HAMZA WAS ALLOWED TO GROW IT OUT!

HIS NOW FAMOUS AFRO HELPED HIM GET IN TOUCH WITH HIS FATHER'S CARIBBEAN HERITAGE. ANOTHER STEP TOWARDS EMBRACING HIS IDENTITY.

IT WAS ALSO IN KEEPING WITH OTHER VALUABLE LESSONS FROM HIS MUM THAT HAMZA CARRIES TO THIS DAY.

LOVE YOURSELF AND ACCEPT EVERYONE. ALWAYS EMBRACE OTHER PEOPLE AND OTHER CULTURES.

NAH!

"YES HAMZ!"

"YO SICK"

YEH!

LIT

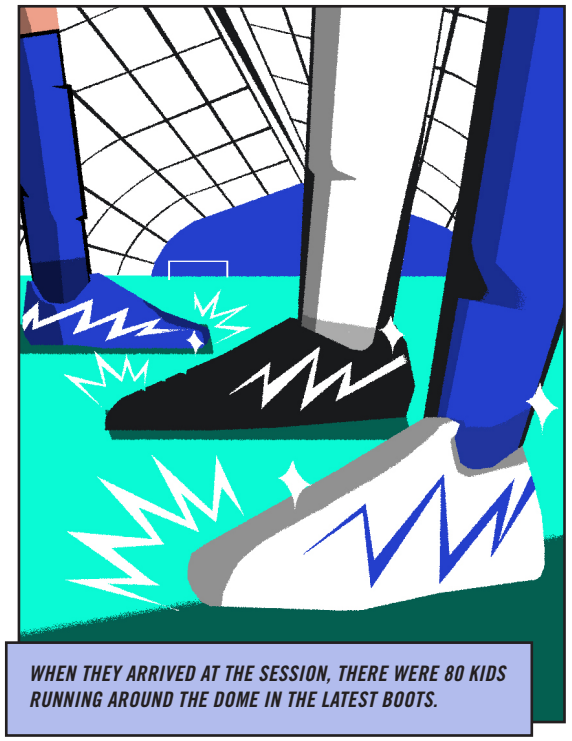
"MAN LIKE"



HAMZA PLAYED A SEASON FOR LOUGHBOROUGH FC. HIS FAMILY ALSO CAME TO SUPPORT HIM, OFTEN AS MANY AS 15 ON THE SIDELINES CHEERING HIM ON.

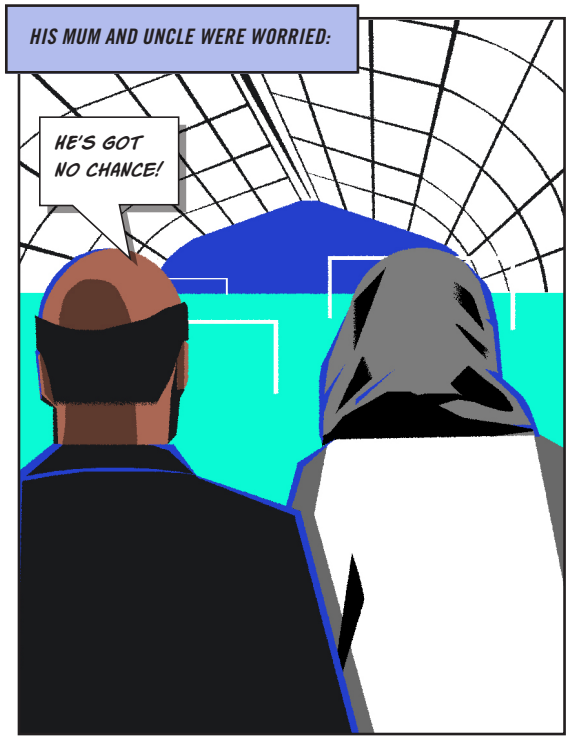


HE WAS EVENTUALLY ASKED TO ATTEND AN OPEN DAY IN LEICESTER, NOT TOO FAR FROM HOME.



WHEN THEY ARRIVED AT THE SESSION, THERE WERE 80 KIDS RUNNING AROUND THE DOME IN THE LATEST BOOTS.

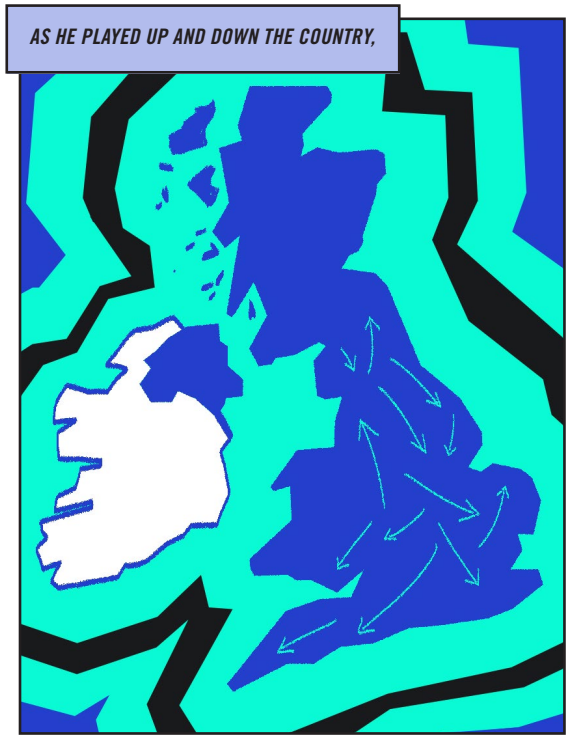
HIS MUM AND UNCLE WERE WORRIED:



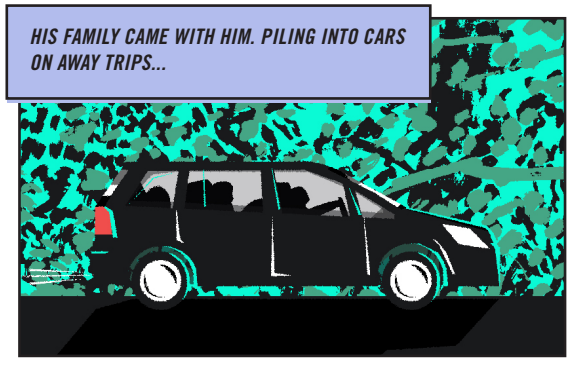
BUT HAMZA DID HAVE A CHANCE. WHAT HE LACKED IN FLASHY KIT HE MADE UP FOR IN TALENT AND BELIEF.



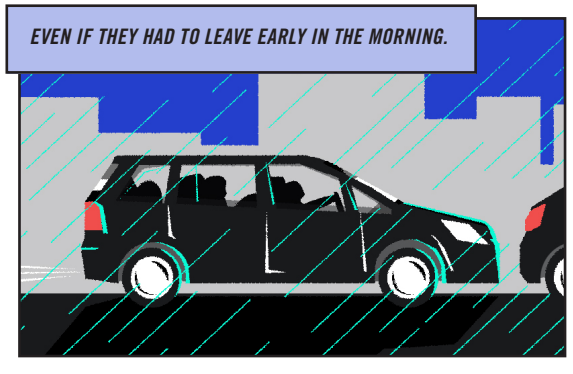
AS HE PLAYED UP AND DOWN THE COUNTRY,



HIS FAMILY CAME WITH HIM. PILING INTO CARS ON AWAY TRIPS...



EVEN IF THEY HAD TO LEAVE EARLY IN THE MORNING.



IT WAS DURING ONE OF THESE AWAY TRIPS THAT HAMZA FIRST EXPERIENCED RACISM.

LOOK AT HIM, HE'S A *!$%+?!!!!

A PARENT ON THE OPPOSITION HECKLED HAMZA FROM THE SIDELINES.

IT SHOCKED HIM.

DID THAT REALLY JUST LEAVE HIS MOUTH?

WHAT ON EARTH IS GOING ON?

PEEEEP!

THAT IS UNSPORTING BEHAVIOUR AND UNACCEPTABLE. THIS WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.

HAMZA WAS UPSET BUT HIS STEPDAD, MUM AND ALL OF HIS FAMILY RALLIED AROUND TO SUPPORT HIM.

DO NOT LET OTHER PEOPLE'S ACTIONS AND WORDS AFFECT YOU. ALWAYS BE PROUD OF WHO YOU ARE AND WHERE YOU COME FROM.

THOUGH THE INCIDENT CUT HAMZA DEEP, HE WAS LIFTED BY THE REACTION OF OTHER PARENTS, HIS COACHES AND TEAMMATES WHO STOOD UP FOR HIM.

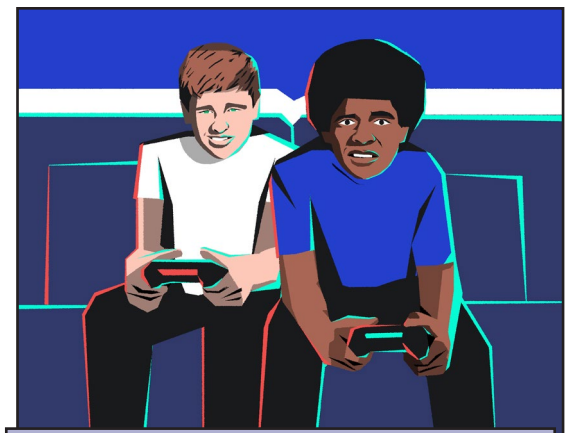
MANY OF THOSE TEAMMATES ARE STILL WITH HIM TO THIS DAY...



...SUCH AS LONG-TIME FRIEND HARVEY BARNES.

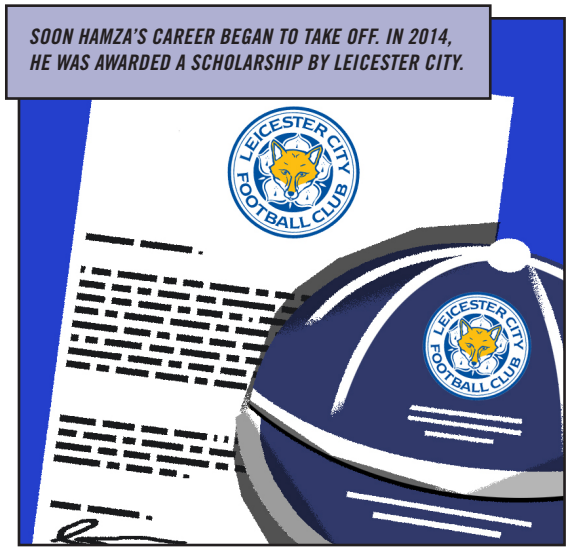
HAMZA AND HARVEY FIRST MET IN THE ACADEMY AT THE AGE OF NINE AND STRUCK UP AN IMMEDIATE FRIENDSHIP.





THEY WERE GREAT FRIENDS, BUT THAT DIDN'T STOP THEM BEING COMPETITIVE! WHETHER IT WAS IN TRAINING OR PLAYING ON HAMZA'S PLAYSTATION. THEY ALWAYS HAD A GREAT TIME.

SOON HAMZA'S CAREER BEGAN TO TAKE OFF. IN 2014, HE WAS AWARDED A SCHOLARSHIP BY LEICESTER CITY.



THAT SEASON HE WAS PART OF THE UNDER 18'S SIDE THAT REACHED THE SEMI-FINAL OF THE FA YOUTH CUP FOR ONLY THE SECOND TIME.



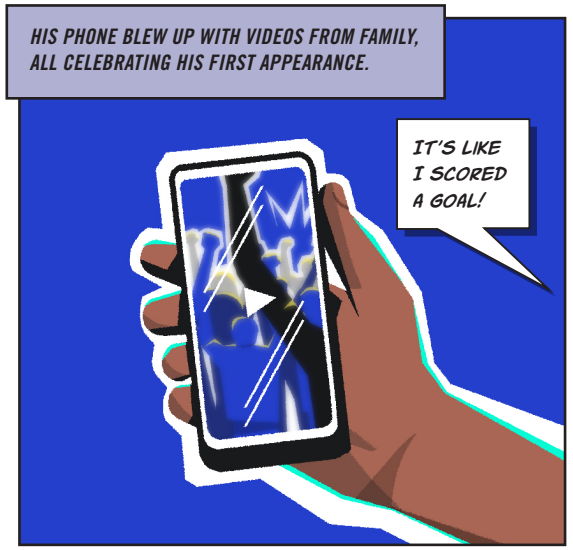
AS HAMZA'S CAREER PROGRESSED, HIS FAMILY CHEERED HIM ALONG ALL THE WAY. ON 19 SEPTEMBER 2017, THEY WATCHED ON AS HE CAME OFF THE BENCH FOR HIS FIRST TEAM DEBUT.



AT THE END OF THE GAME, HE GOT CHANGED AND WENT STRAIGHT TO SEE HIS MUM IN THE PLAYERS LOUNGE TO GIVE HER THE BIGGEST HUG.



HIS PHONE BLEW UP WITH VIDEOS FROM FAMILY, ALL CELEBRATING HIS FIRST APPEARANCE.



THAT NIGHT, HE WENT HOME AND CELEBRATED HIS DEBUT WITH 20 FAMILY MEMBERS IN HIS HOUSE.



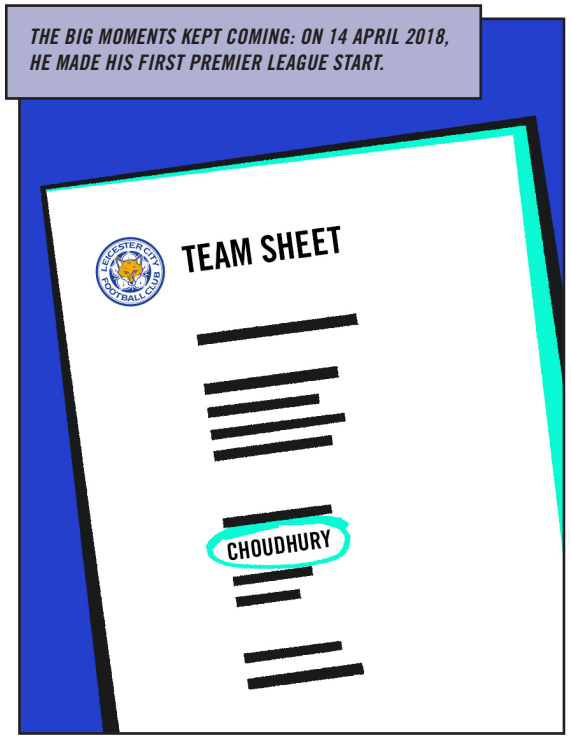
HIS STEPDAD WAS JUMPING FOR JOY.

NOVEMBER 2017 SAW HAMZA'S DREAM COME TRUE AS HE CAME ON FOR HIS PREMIER LEAGUE DEBUT. HE MADE SURE TO LOOK FOR HIS MUM. THE SIGHT OF HER IN THE STANDS MADE HIM FEEL AT EASE IMMEDIATELY.

YOU CAN SEE HER SMILE FROM A MILE AWAY.



THE BIG MOMENTS KEPT COMING: ON 14 APRIL 2018, HE MADE HIS FIRST PREMIER LEAGUE START.





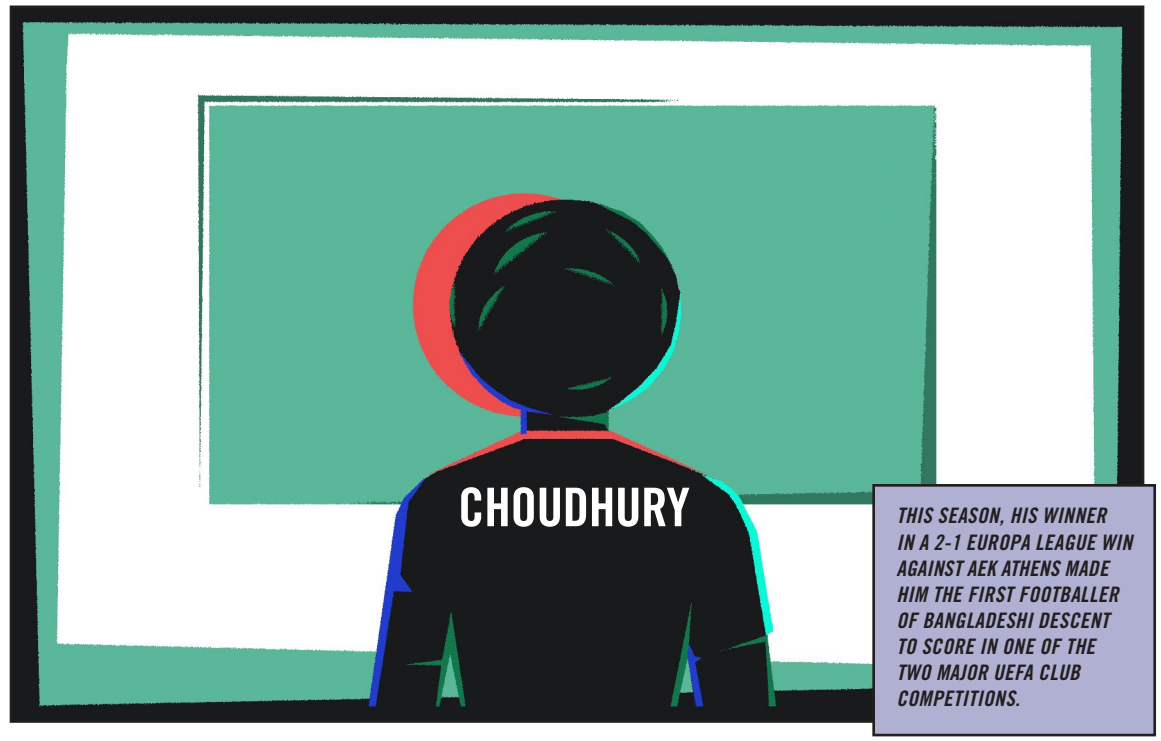
THAT SUMMER, HE MADE HIS DEBUT FOR ENGLAND UNDER 21'S IN THE 2018 TOULON TOURNAMENT. ANOTHER ENGLAND SHIRT TO ADD TO HIS COLLECTION.

ON 1 JANUARY 2020, HE SCORED HIS FIRST GOAL: A CURLING EFFORT FROM OUTSIDE THE BOX THAT WENT IN OFF THE BAR!





MEANWHILE AT HOME, HIS FAMILY WERE CELEBRATING HAMZA'S STRIKE WHICH ROUNDED OFF A 3-0 VICTORY.



THIS SEASON, HIS WINNER IN A 2-1 EUROPA LEAGUE WIN AGAINST AEK ATHENS MADE HIM THE FIRST FOOTBALLER OF BANGLADESHI DESCENT TO SCORE IN ONE OF THE TWO MAJOR UEFA CLUB COMPETITIONS.



WE CAN ALL MAKE A DIFFERENCE

TELL US WHAT YOUR DREAMS ARE AND HOW YOU'RE GOING TO FULFIL THEM.

TELL US WHO YOUR ROLE MODEL IS AND WHY.

WRITE A DIARY ENTRY IMAGINING THAT YOU ARE HAMZA ON THE DAY HE MADE HIS PREMIER LEAGUE DEBUT. HOW DO YOU THINK HE FELT BEFORE THE MATCH?

SMALL THINGS THAT MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

- [ ] TALK TO SOMEONE TODAY THAT YOU'VE NEVER SPOKEN TO BEFORE AND BE NICE TO THEM
- [ ] DRAW A PICTURE OF YOU AND THE MEMBERS OF YOUR FAMILY. FOR EACH PERSON WRITE HOW THEY SUPPORT YOU AND HELP YOU ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS
- [ ] GIVE A MEMBER OF YOUR FAMILY A BIG HUG AND TELL THEM THAT YOU LOVE THEM!
- [ ] TRY A NEW GAME TODAY THAT YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED BEFORE
- [ ] GET OUT IN THE PLAYGROUND AND PLAY FOOTBALL!



FOOTBALL IS FOR EVERYONE.

ON THE PITCH, THE TOUCHLINE, THE CONSOLE AND IN THE STANDS. EVERYONE SHOULD BE WELCOME IN THE GAME.

RACISM IS UNACCEPTABLE AND TOGETHER, WE STAND AGAINST IT.



No room for racism

EA SPORTS

SHOW RACISM THE RED CARD