

# No Pi ss Tekkers Allowed

ANDY  
ANSAH

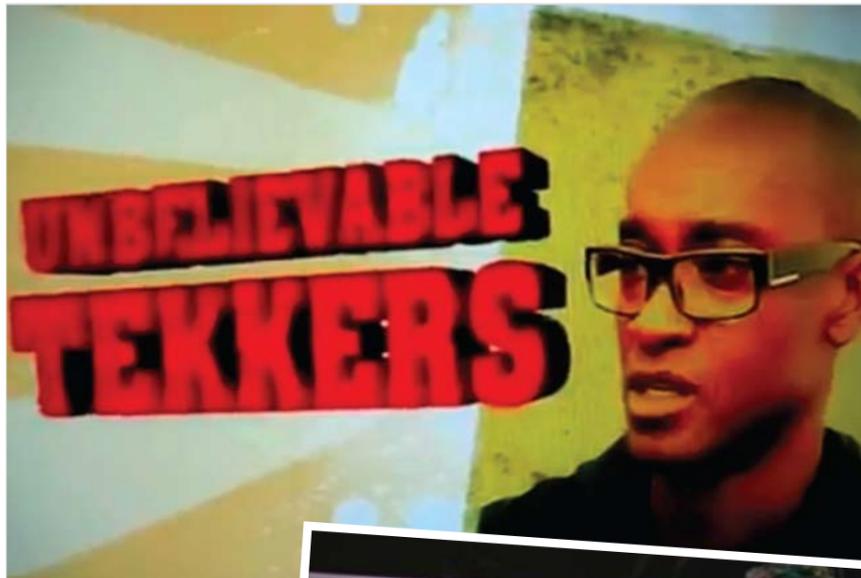
**Not many people are famous for just two words, but footy choreographer Andy Ansah is, thanks to his 'unbelievable tekkers'...**

**F**orget Andy Murray winning the US Open, Mo Farah snatching two Olympic golds or Bradley Wiggins cruising to Britain's first ever Tour de France victory – the greatest moment of our sporting summer came months earlier. Crammed into a pub in East London, team *loaded* watched in horror as yellow-wearing-pansies Sweden somehow looked on the brink of beating England in Euro 2012. Despite a power header from Andy Carroll, the Swedes spanked in two during a ten-minute spell to put the

Three Lions on the brink of an early championship exit. But then came the comeback: out of nothing, Theo Walcott delicately hit an outside-the-box swerving finish to drag the scoreline back to 2-2 before the Arsenal winger again darted into the area, this time to deliver a pinpoint 

cross to Danny Welbeck who – somehow – turned his body 180 degrees in mid-air before *back-flicking* the ball into the Swedes' net. Back in the pub, *loaded's* pissed art director turned around, wiped the beer from his mouth and shouted, "That was *unbelievable* tekkers."

Because whether it's good tekkers, bad tekkers or the most unbelievably unbelievable (*is that even a word?* – Ed) tekkers, the phrase has gone from being a bizarre *Soccer AM*-launched novelty to a fully fledged part of football's vocabulary, used everywhere from soggy Sunday league matches to a lunchtime sesh on *Fifa*. Meanwhile, its creator, Andy Ansah, has become an unlikely cult hero off the back of first uttering these immortal words on camera. But to write him off as a mere one-trick pony would be unfair. He played professionally for six different clubs before blagging a part on Sky's cult series *Dream Team*, originally as an extra. Yet rather than simply accept this easy



role, he cannily trained himself to be a football choreographer, using his expertise as a player to make professional sportsmen look good on screen – a position that led to him going on to work with Wayne Rooney, Cristiano Ronaldo, David Beckham and Lionel Messi.

Not bad for a man that grew up on the mean streets of Lewisham, South London.

### a tough upbringing

It's an area where gang culture, youth unemployment and even murders are commonplace, and Andy was touched by the latter one night shortly after he signed his first pro contract.

"I was born and bred in England but my parents are from Ghana," explains Andy. "I grew up in Lewisham, and it wasn't easy.

My parents separated when I was 11 and my mum couldn't read or write English so I had to become a grown-up early. I made ends meet and drove myself forward. But football was my passion. When I got to 17 I stayed on at sixth form and when I left I signed pro for Palace."

Incredibly though, his dedication to the game may well have saved his life, when

he bailed out early from a night on the town to get a good night's sleep before a game.

"At 17, one of my friends, Richard, got stabbed to death. I was out with him in the pub and I wasn't drinking because I had a game the next day, and I left them at about 10. They were saying 'let's go clubbing', but I said I needed to get home. That was the night he got killed.

"That was part of the lifestyle in South East London. In those days there were posses. I didn't have my two parents around, so they became my family."

And while the football may have given him some light relief and protection, it wasn't always a sanctuary. He attended Catford Boys' School in Lewisham, but was initially barred from playing for them because of the scraps his brother got himself into. Andy recalls times where police vans would hurtle on to the pitch as officers arrested his older sibling.

"He was fighting the whole of the opposition and their schoolteacher – but that's how it was. Fighting was a regular thing."

But when they did allow him to start playing, Andy excelled. Playing everything from cricket

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to taking part in the school high-jump team ("even when I was five-foot nothing"), his obsession with sport kept him away from trouble and kept him fit.

"It was my get-out," he explains. "I left school with no education. I still to this day have never picked up my exam results. I was focused on becoming a footballer. No matter what people said, I knew I was going to do it."

### life as a professional

Starting out at 17, Andy signed his first professional contract for just £75 a week at Palace, and went on to become an old school lower league mercenary of the very best kind. Back in 1988 he spent a season playing as a striker for non-league Dorking before catching the eye of a scout and moving up to the glamorous climes of Brentford and then Southend, for whom he made 141 appearances over six years and scored a none-too-shabby 33 goals. However, by 1995 his form had dipped, and he was farmed out on loan to old club Brentford. His career petered out with spells at Peterborough, Gillingham and Leyton Orient before he finally ended up plying his trade with non-league side Hayes. Thinking his career was over, he dug deep into his tekkers-filled well to spend two years at Brighton & Hove Albion where he dislocated his shoulder, a moment that would help give him a whole new career when he joined Sky 1's *Dream Team* later on. Because when character Jamie Parker, playing for fictional team Harchester United, suffered the very same injury, it was Ansah's character who held the agonised player down and winced convincingly as the errant limb was slotted back into its socket.

The producers had noticed his ability to translate football into film, and offered him a role as football choreographer.

### from the east end to hollywood

"When I retired from football, I was 30 and I wanted to be an actor," says Andy. "As a kid at school I was Joseph in *Joseph And The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, or Charlie in *Charlie And The Chocolate Factory* but I remember thinking 'How am I going to do this when I have a wife and three kids to support?' But I had some friends who were on *Dream Team* so I thought, 'Let's go on there as an extra and play part-time football. My mates on the show were 21 or 22, but they would always ask me things like 'What really happens in the changing room?' or 'How is that done?' so I started to advise them. And then I was invited on set to help with storylining and it took off.

"The executive producer said, 'You'll make more money behind the camera than in front of it, so I want you to become a consultant choreographer. This role doesn't really exist but we think there is a niche for it.' That led to work on *Mike Bassett: England Manager*. I then did *Goal*, going from a studio in East London to Hollywood. It was a crazy journey."

But his biggest break came from working with Wayne Rooney on his *Street Striker* series, where the Manchester United striker tries to find skilful urban players, before getting a gig on a similar series examining the body of Cristiano Ronaldo. But what are the hair-weave moneybags and the slimy winker really like?

"Wayne is second to none. He is honest, generous and warm. People will say, 'Yeah but he's a top footballer', but he's a regular guy and we're friends. It's totally regular. He's the kind of guy who, if he was around, I could call and say 'I'm just having a game in the street, do you fancy it?' and he would turn up.

"Ronaldo is a little bit different. He came from nothing to something but he is a lovely guy too. I have a long-term relationship with him similar to the one I have with Rooney, and I am constantly going over to Madrid to shoot with him.

"It's about trust – he trusts me and our relationship is so tight they know I am not out there to stitch them up. The one key thing with all the best footballers, including Pele who I have worked with, is that their first love is football. No matter what else goes on it is their favourite thing."

### tekkersmania is unleashed

It was while working on *Street Striker* that he first said *those* words, which catapulted him to football cult stardom. It was picked up by *Soccer AM* who were doing a behind-the-scenes video on the programme, and they decided to turn it into their own feature – highlighting the best and worst skills from the week's games.

"The story behind unbelievable tekkers is crazy. My son is a footballer for Arsenal, but when he was five or six playing mini-soccer, we used tekkers as a code for technique. When I needed him to do a trick I said, 'tekkers, tekkers', and since then I have used it everywhere. So when *Soccer AM* came to do an interview behind the scenes of *Street Striker*, I said, 'the guys are coming with unbelievable tekkers.' I remember I was doing a shoot at Crystal Palace, took a break to watch *Soccer AM* and I was like 'Oh my god'. Then it was on again, and again, and now three years later it's still running. People have just jumped on it – I drive and people shout tekkers. I love it, I love saying unbelievable tekkers. So 18 months ago we launched a tekkers clothing range and it's gone down so well. I will get 'unbelievable tekkers' written on my gravestone. I believe it is here to stay. I'm proud of it. It's not often somebody creates a word that everybody uses."

And the best tekkers he's seen? "Ronaldinho. I was shooting with him at Barca, and I said 'What new tricks have you got?' To this day I can't understand how he did it – he takes it, flicks it up over his head and drags it back – you had to be there. He's the original unbelievable tekkers." ■ **loaded**

To view the collection, visit [tekkers.co.uk](http://tekkers.co.uk)

