

# Chelsea's winner brought Rikki back from the cold

A vital goal for his beloved team seemed to give him the will to defy medical odds

**O**n the night before his ninth birthday, Rikki Brazier was so excited about his dad coming home from work that he slipped out of the front door to meet him — and tragedy struck.

The Braziers — Rikki, dad Russell, 38, mum Tracey, 32, and Charlotte, four — lived in a third floor flat in Kew, west London. And when Tracey went to find Rikki she was met by an horrific sight. Seeing his father's van, Rikki had run to him and fallen 35ft off a landing.

Walking into the building, **"We'd never felt so helpless"**

Russell heard his wife's screams and saw his son's crumpled and bleeding body.

"I thought he was dead," he says. "But then I saw he was still breathing and that gave me hope."

An ambulance crew worked on Rikki, now 10, for almost two hours. By then he had lost four pints of blood. He was taken to St George's Hospital in Tooting, south London. There was little hope of him surviving the night.

At 2.30am Rikki underwent surgery and was placed on a life support machine for eight days. Surgeons told Tracey and Russell that it would be a miracle if he pulled through.

"When we saw him we'd never felt so helpless," says Tracey. For two weeks Tracey and

Russell kept a bedside vigil. But with Rikki still in a deep coma, their boy's future continued to look bleak.

The accident happened in December 2003 and it was weeks before his parents were given a glimmer of hope when suddenly Rikki's eyes flickered.

Progress was slow but by March 2004, he was able to sit in a wheelchair and was moved into rehab. It was still thought unlikely that he would ever walk or speak again.

Tracey spent most of her time at the hospital, hoping. "I would wheel him around the hospital grounds," she recalls.

"Russell and I would throw a small sponge ball towards his hands to encourage him to move. Sometimes he would react. At other times he would just sit there in what we would affectionately call 'Rikki's world', with a vacant look on his face."

He was subsequently transferred to The Children's

Trust Rehabilitation Centre, Tadworth, Surrey. He was still unable to walk or speak.

In April Russell took his son to the TV room to watch his favourite team, Chelsea, play Arsenal.

When Wayne Bridge scored for Chelsea, Rikki suddenly shook in his wheelchair.

The next day Tracey was at home when Rikki's nurse called and told her that Rikki



**Rikki Brazier survived a 35ft fall from a third-floor landing.**

Miracle boy... Rikki with dad Russell, mum Tracey and Charlotte.

wanted to speak to her. "I couldn't believe my ears," she declares. "I heard my little boy say, 'I love you mummy'. It was a miracle.

"We can't be sure that it was the football match but something spurred him on to speak."

By July, Rikki had more of his speech back. In addition he was able to crawl and pull himself onto a climbing frame. In October, he was discharged from hospital to live at the family's new home in Twickenham. A few weeks later, Tracey took him to his old school, Darrell Primary.

"You would have thought a pop star had arrived," she says, laughing. "The children were so excited to have him back."

In November Russell and Rikki went to see Chelsea play Blackburn — and the excitement seemed to bring about further improvement.

Today Rikki is still receiving regular physiotherapy. His eye remains damaged but doctors are hopeful that it will fully recover.

In the meantime Rikki and his dad continue to go and watch Chelsea, convinced that it's the best therapy the lad can get.

**By Steven Smith**

