

CHAPTER THREE


TEAM TRYOUT



At the end of the first week, the notice went up about the football tryout:

Football Tryout
⚽ **Tuesday 4-6pm** ⚽

Wear your outdoor PE kit and bring a water bottle.



TRAINING

Tuesdays and Thursdays 4-6pm
Venue: Marypuddle playing fields
See you there!
Mr Penalty

“This is going to be fun,” said Trevor.

“My dad always says that when we have to do something that isn’t,” said Ravi.

“But we’re all going, aren’t we?” said Trevor, looking crestfallen.



“Yes,” said Nancy, shooting Ravi a warning glare, “we’re all going.”



The FAB club was surprised to see a good dozen or so other kids at the football team tryout.

“Look,” said Toby, “even Alisha is here.” He couldn’t resist waving at her, but she was looking down at her phone and didn’t notice.

“Woop-deee-do,” said Nancy, winking at Ruth. Ruth was watching Trevor closely.

Ravi said, “I guess whatever’s on that phone is a lot more interesting than us.”

Trevor saw Ruth looking at him and she quickly looked away. “Uh-huh,” he said.

The coach blew his whistle to get everyone’s attention. He smiled broadly. “Hello, everyone. I’m Mr Penalty and I’m the coach of the Marypuddle football team. Since there are so many of you this year, I’ll select two teams. Team A will play in the big match and Team B will be the substitutes. There will be five of you in each team, so let’s see who has got what it takes, eh?”



Ravi grumbled to the rest of the FAB club. “Why doesn’t he train everyone and then pick the team at the end?”

“I don’t know,” said Trevor, “but I guess he knows what he is doing.”

Mr Penalty then pointed at Trevor and Jake. “You two take turns to pick players for your teams this afternoon.”

“Toby,” said Trevor, who knew Toby hated being picked last.

Jake smiled at Trevor. “Nancy.”

“Ravi.”

“Ruth.”

They then picked the rest of the teams at random.

“Well done, boys,” said the coach. He threw a football at Jake. “Now play!”

Jake looked confused. “I’ve never played proper football before, sir.”

Some of the other kids murmured in agreement.



Mr Penalty rolled his eyes to the sky and tutted. “Does anyone know how to play?”

Half of the kids put up their hands, including Trevor and Ruth. Mr Penalty looked at them expectantly.

Ruth began, “Obviously, the aim of the game is to get the ball into the net of the other team’s goal, by kicking it.”

“Or heading it,” said Trevor. “You can’t use your hands.”

“Unless you’re the goalie,” said Ruth.

Mr Penalty filled in a few more of the game’s rules before ushering the kids onto the pitch. Then he blew the whistle.

There was pandemonium. A scrum of kids followed the ball up and down the pitch.



Mr Penalty blew the whistle again.

“You can’t all be on the ball at once. You need to spread out and create space so that

your teammates can pass to you. Look at Alisha. She was the only one who was standing in free space. Why did no one pass to her?”

“I was going to kick it to her,” said one of the short but speedy girls, “but she wasn’t looking at the ball. She was looking at her phone.”



“Okay,” said Mr Penalty, “Alisha, put away your phone and pay attention. That goes for the rest of you too. I’ll give you all your positions and you need to mark the players in the opposite team.” Then he paired up all the players on the field.

Trevor was put in midfield and had to do a lot of running. After twenty minutes he was exhausted. The others were doing okay, all except Toby.

Toby was at the back. He kept being tackled, or tripping over,



and he kept losing the ball. Mr Penalty noticed this and told him to go in goal, where he didn't have to move very far. This was even worse.



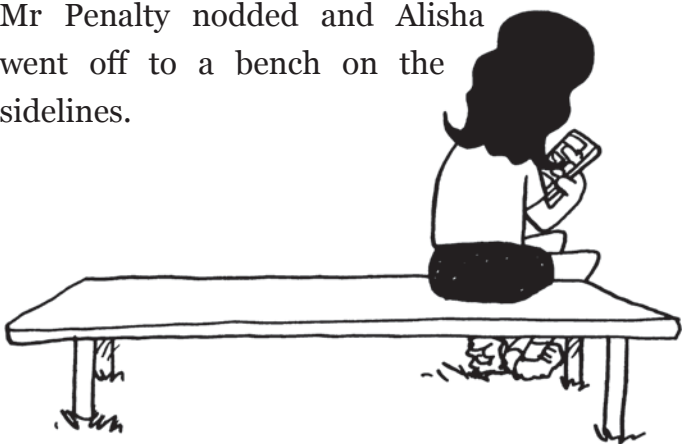
Toby could never work out where the ball was going and always seem to jump the wrong way. He let in eleven goals. A very puffed-out Trevor asked if he could go in goal instead.

“You’re doing fine, lad,” said Mr Penalty. “You just need to get into shape. And that goes for all of you!” he shouted. “Stop the game! We’re going to spend the last ten minutes running up and down.”

“Oh no,” said Trevor.

“Sir, I’ve ever so slightly sprained my ankle,” said Alisha. “I’m sure it will get better if I go and have a little sit down.”

Mr Penalty nodded and Alisha went off to a bench on the sidelines.



“Okay, everyone, let’s run as fast as you can up to the end of the pitch and back. And keep on going!” said the coach.

By the time the ten minutes were over, Trevor couldn’t speak. He collapsed by the sideline. Jake brought him his water bottle, and when he got his breath back Trevor gulped it all down. “That was terrible,” he said.

“Didn’t you find it fun?” asked Ravi, smiling. “I actually enjoyed myself.”

“It would’ve been better if you were in goal, Trevor,” said Jake.

“I don’t ever want to go in goal again,” said Toby.

Mr Penalty overheard that, and said, “Don’t worry, boy, you won’t.” Then he turned to the rest of the kids and said, “Thanks, everyone. I’ll be posting the team names tomorrow, and then we’ve got a lot of training to do, eh?”

The FAB club walked off the field, grabbed their bags and started to walk home.

“Hey, Ravi,” said Ruth, “you can kick the ball really well.”

“I’m glad,” he said. “I got out every last book on football from the library and have been studying them for days.”

“You played really well as well, Nancy,” said Jake.

“I’ve been watching football skills videos so much it gave me a nosebleed,” said Nancy.



“It’s a thing she has,” said Ravi. “Whenever she gets bored she has a nosebleed.”

“Hey,” said Trevor, “football isn’t boring.”

“It is when you are running up and down for ten minutes,” said Jake. “I am surprised you didn’t get a nosebleed doing that.”

“That was okay,” said Nancy. “You should try watching training videos for five hours straight.”

“You’re a nutcase, Nancy,” said Trevor. “Even I would find that boring!”

“Let’s hope the training sessions are more interesting,” said Ruth.

“Let’s hope we all get on the team,” said Ravi.

“Well, I won’t play unless you’re all playing too,” said Toby.

And the rest of them agreed.