

THE MAD FOOTBALLER

3 Gary watched as Matt gave the ball a powerful kick. It rose high into the air. A tall blond-haired boy from the Manning High team ran across the football pitch. He took control of the ball as it landed, but Gary was already there beside him. He raced past the blond player and caught the ball with his feet. There was a cry from the crowd.

'Gary! Gary! Gary!' they chanted.

The score was nil nil. There were just five minutes to go before the end of the match. Gary knew that every second counted.

From the edge of the pitch, Karen screamed, 'Come on, Gary. Come on!'

'We'll never do it,' said Joe. He was standing next to Karen in the middle of the shouting crowd of schoolchildren. 'Manning High has the best players. Gary can't beat Rick. Rick's much stronger.'

Rick was running alongside Gary. He intercepted the ball and kicked it in the opposite direction. The crowd gave another roar.

'See!' said Joe. 'Manning High has got the ball now. We'll never win.'

A girl with long dark hair pushed through the crowd to join Karen and Joe.

'Hurry up, Laura, you're late,' said Karen.

'Sorry,' said Laura, 'I ran all the way from college. What's happening?'

Before Karen could answer, Mr Hussain the referee blew the whistle.

Glossary

- **alongside:** next to
- **chanted:** sang or shouted
- **crowd:** large group of people
- **intercepted:** stopped; caught
- **nil:** zero
- **pitch:** place where people play football or other sports
- **powerful:** strong
- **referee:** person who makes sure the players follow the rules



'Is that it? Is the match finished?' said Laura.
 'No, there's a free kick for us,' said Joe.
 'What's that?' said Laura.
 Joe rolled his eyes and looked at Karen.
 'It's our last chance to get a goal,' said Karen.
 'But it isn't going to happen,' said Joe.
 'What a pessimist!' said Karen.

PESSIMISTS

How is Joe a pessimist?
 What do pessimists usually say and do?
 The opposite of a pessimist is an optimist.
 What are you? A pessimist or an optimist?



Out on the pitch, Matt had control of the ball. He passed it to Gary. Gary manoeuvred the ball up the field, but Rick was in his way. Gary kicked the ball to Matt, and Matt passed the ball back to Gary. Gary shot across the field.

'Look at him!' said Laura. 'How can he move so fast?'

'Because he's got big feet,' said Karen laughing.

Gary moved like lightning. Everything happened in an instant. He kicked the ball. The ball flew into the net. The goalkeeper was on the ground. The spectators were shouting and screaming and jumping up and down.

Glossary

- **flew:** went quickly
- **in his way:** obstructing him
- **like lightning:** very fast
- **manoeuvred:** moved
- **pessimist:** person with negative opinions
- **rolled his eyes:** showed he was annoyed
- **shot:** ran quickly
- **spectators:** people who watch sports



'Goal!' screamed Joe and Karen together.

'I can't believe it,' said Karen.

'One-nil,' shouted Joe. 'He did it. Gary did it!'

'Did we win?' said Laura who had no idea what was going on.

'Did we win?' said Joe. 'Where have you been, Laura? Yes, of course we won! We just beat Manning High – the best junior team in the league!'

In the distance they could hear someone chanting, 'I got the goal! I got the goal!' It was Gary. He was running in circles, waving his arms above his head.

- **beat:** defeated
- **league:** group of teams
- **waving:** moving from side to side

'Look at him,' said Karen in disgust. 'He's mad! Joe and the girls waited for Gary and Matt by the main gates. When the two boys arrived, they were smiling all over their faces.

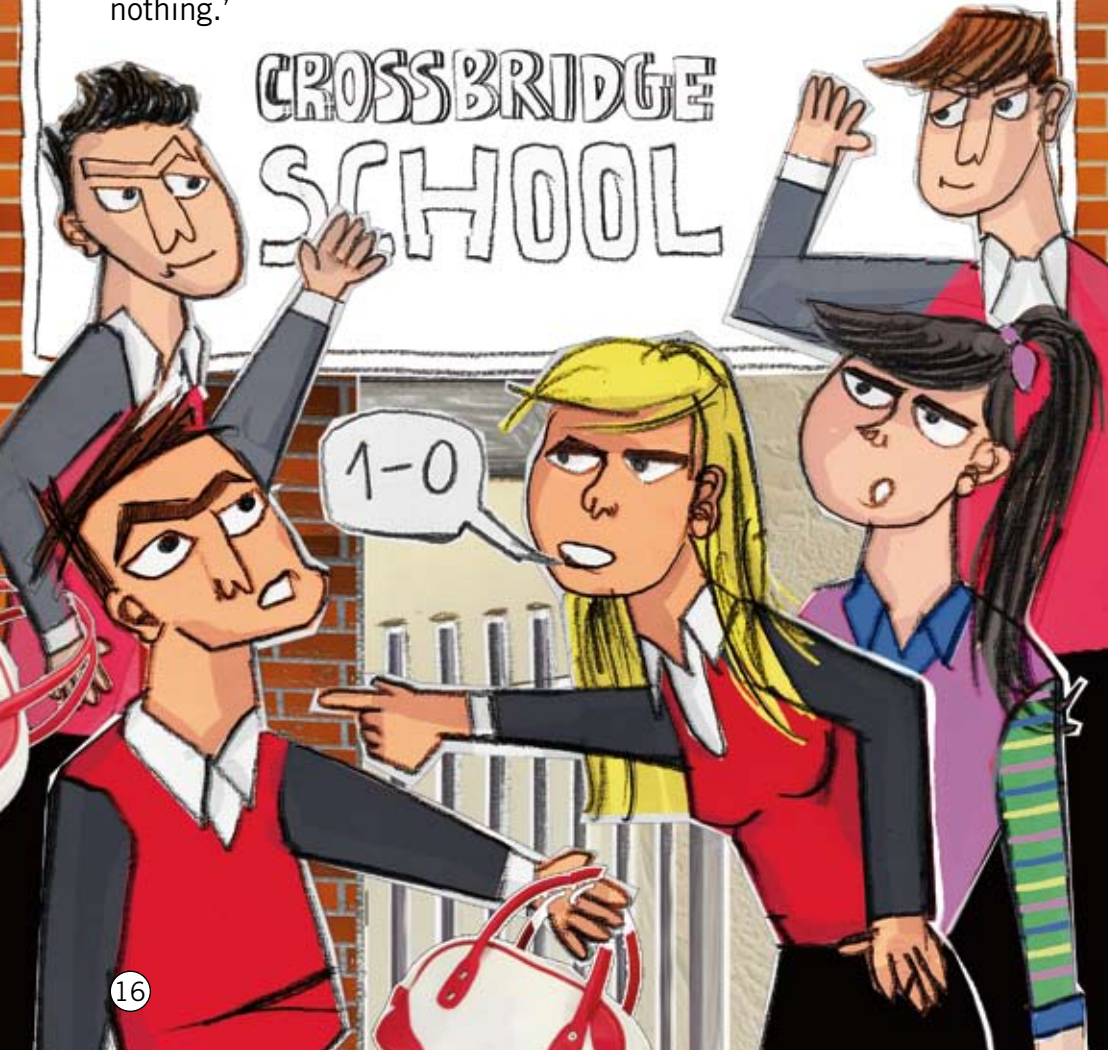
'I got the goal,' said Gary. 'I hope you all saw that!'

'Only one goal,' said Karen, 'and you were lucky. You missed some good opportunities.'

'No, I didn't,' said Gary.

'I was watching,' said Karen, 'I saw the shots you missed.'

Gary went very red in the face. 'You think you're so smart!' he said. 'You think you know everything about football and you know nothing.'



'Your problem, Gary,' said Karen, 'is that you think you know everything about the game, but you don't. In fact...' Karen stepped forward and prodded Gary in the chest with her finger. 'In fact, Gary, you think that you know everything about everything, but you don't.'

'Oh yes?' said Gary. He pushed Karen's hand away and moved forward. Matt and Joe watched the scene, uncertain about what to do.

'Oh yes!' said Karen.

'Stop it!' said Laura. 'No more arguing. I don't know what's wrong with the two of you. You should be celebrating, not fighting.'

'She started it,' said Gary.

'That's quite enough,' said Laura. 'We're all going for a pizza and I don't want to hear another word from either of you!'

ARGUMENTS

Have you ever had an argument with anyone, or have you ever seen two people arguing?

What was the argument about? How did you feel during the argument?

Who won the argument? Did anyone help to end the disagreement?

Glossary

- **in disgust:** showing she does not approve
- **opportunities:** chances
- **missed:** (here) didn't get a goal
- **prodded:** pushed
- **smart:** clever; intelligent