Just kicking a ball!

by

Tony White

Some people think football is just kicking a ball. Wrong! There's a lot you have to do before that. There's finding the players, begging for a kit and finding another team to play against - and I mean just one. And don't think persuading a teacher - any teacher - to have a girls' football team has been easy. It hasn't.

But then Miss Temple turned up at Easter when Mr Winterton was too ill to carry on. I liked him but he had a blind spot about girls and football. Miss Temple listened. Miss Temple was sympathetic. She didn't know anything about football, though. She said she was 'clueless'. I didn't believe her until she said, "What happens at a freekick?" Then I knew she meant it. Welcome to 1970.

In 1970 your TV is in black and white and you have just three channels to choose from : BBC 1, BBC 2 and ITV. And if you miss a programme - tough. There's no way to record it. And for reasons I have never understood, hot water is a very precious

thing. If you use too much of it you will be in big trouble. One bath a week is your ration. This is normal though, so nobody will hold their nose when they get close.

A lot of your clothes are made by grandmas who still wear the same hat they bought when the queen got married. And that was years ago! They happily unpick the wool from old cardigans and rework it into something bigger with an orange stripe around the middle to make it 'more modern' for you. And if it's not home-made then it is going to be made from nylon. This is a new material that clings to you like a second skin and makes you sweat like a distance runner.

But at least I have a 'Yes' from Miss Temple. Yes, we can have a girl's football team because the world is going to change. Yes, she will try to find one other school who will get a team together so we can play them. Play them and absolutely thrash them because I am not going to have anyone play for Greengate Primary who thinks that just turning up is enough. I want the opposition in tears! Miss Temple said, "Well, Julia Wilson, I hope you can find players good enough to do that." So do I. I can't stand all that 'It's the taking part that matters'.

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On sports afternoon, while the boys were all at the other end of our tiny field snorting with laughter while the girls tried to kick a ball, I began to see why creating this football team would be a hard job.

1) Greengate Primary is a very small school. Our top class has thirty four children in it aged ten and eleven. Take eighteen boys away and I have just sixteen girls to choose from.

2) Sixteen girls does not tell the whole story. Half of them turn sideways when the ball comes to them and make that girly scream that is really annoying.

3) So that leaves eight to choose from to put even a five-a-side team together. That isn't much choice. I need five players and a reserve because someone is bound to get hurt or throw a wobbly or have a mother who says they didn't know it was going to be proper football and her little girl is hardly getting any sleep for worrying about it all.

You get the idea. But at least I've made a start. If we can get going I want to play our first game in the same week as the quarter finals of the World Cup in Mexico. That won't be much of a competition, though. Brazil are beyond brilliant and

it won’t matter how hard everyone tries - they are going to be the champions. Trust me. They’ve already beaten Czechoslovakia 4 - 1, England 1 - 0 (I watched that one on the telly because it was on early enough at 7 pm - and I have to admit I wasn’t upset when Brazil won) and finally Romania 3 - 2. My favourite player, Pele, scored twice in that one. It meant they were top of their qualifying group. It’s no good thinking of them as a football team - they’re a machine!

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After games, when all the others went into the hall for assembly, I wrote down the six names I’d chosen for the team. I picked Alice as the goalkeeper. She plays in goal against her brother in their drive and it’s her job to stop the ball banging against the garage door because it annoys Mrs Earl next door. She knows you have to keep your eyes on the ball and do something to stop it. This is an improvement on the other girls who closed their eyes and relied on an extra sense to stop the ball like it was science-fiction. Except they didn’t have the extra sense.

Then came the defence. I asked one of the boys who could stop giggling at us for two minutes to

dribble the ball at the girls who thought they could be defenders. I picked three of the girls who could either put their foot on the ball or at least trip him up. The best defender was Marion who made George shout 'OW!' as she tackled him. And she didn't apologise. So she was straight in. Then I chose Emma because she is left sided and can run well. We'll just have to work on her ball skills. Right back went to Christine who usually spends her playtime drawing flowers on the yard at the front of school with chalks. But she was really good at getting in the boys' way and annoying them. Annoying the opposition is a very useful skill. And she might be able to design a Greengate School badge for our shirts. Those are the shirts we don't have yet.

Then there's me. Our lone striker. But that's not a problem. If any one of this team can feed that ball through to me I'll be through any defence and have the ball in the net before the other team can say 'Julia Wilson!'. I'm what you'd call a confident person!

And our reserve is Marcia who has just come from Ghana and hasn't said a word to anybody yet. But when she kicks the ball it becomes a dangerous weapon. She just has to learn when to shoot and when to pass.

So that’s it. I’ve picked my players. I stuck the team sheet up by the door of our classroom so everyone could see it on their way out. And above all the players’ names I wrote the name of our team. We are Greengate Rangers. And we are going to win football games.

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I apply maths to football

I didn’t expect our maths lessons to help with our football, but this morning has been a big surprise. A nice one.

Miss Temple does not spend all our maths time teaching us adding up and taking away. She said she is going to mix things up. So we all had to draw big triangles onto faded paper she found at the back of the supplies cupboard. It’s the sort of paper where the edges have curled and there really ought to be a burnt hole in the middle near an X that marks where treasure is buried. But she said that didn’t matter.

Next we cut the triangles out and tore off the three angles carefully. “Put the three angles

together," she told us, "angles all pointing in one direction."
So we did.
"What have you got?" she asked us.
Apart from a triangle that looked like a mouse had chewed at it and three loose bits of ancient paper, we didn't know.
"Don't the angles make a straight line," she suggested.
They did. We admired the straight lines we had all made from our pieces of paper but remained clueless.
"And what do you know about straight lines?" she asked. I think our answer - complete silence - disappointed her. "Ah," she said. "Let's take a step back." She chalked a straight line on the board and held up a giant wooden protractor along its edge.
"Looks like 180 degrees to me," she told us.

We looked at the board and then at our straight lines and got it. The angles in all our triangles - and I mean all of them - made 180 degrees. It was brilliant. We stuck our work in our books and wrote down the rule about triangles. And it was then I realised how I could turn our three girl defence into a counter-attacking unit. Always pay attention in maths!

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