

1

‘Catch it, Kyle, you big blob!’

The Bad Boyz keeper turned and glared at the shouting figure on the touch-line. He’d just palmed a fierce shot round the post and he reckoned it had been a pretty good save.

‘Don’t take any notice,’ said Jordan. She clapped a hand on Kyle’s broad shoulder. ‘That was wicked.’

‘Who is that geezer, anyway?’ growled Sadiq, waving a clenched fist towards the touch-line.

‘Yeah, who’s he calling a big blob?’ said Max. ‘Great ugly gorilla.’ He put his hands in his armpits, pulled a face and started making gorilla noises. Next to him Bloomer squeaked with laughter and joined in. They were still monkeying around when the corner came over. Luckily Dareth, the captain, was paying attention to the game and booted the ball clear.

‘Come on, Bad Boyz! Concentrate!’ called Mr Davies. He was both the Bad Boyz manager and

a teacher at their school. He glanced along the touch-line. He was used to being his team's only supporter and he wondered who the man was who'd shouted at Kyle.

Mr Davies had never seen him before, but he was obviously someone who knew Kyle well. All his comments had been directed at the keeper – and none had been complimentary. Fortunately, Kyle was in a pretty good mood. The match was almost over and he hadn't let in a goal. At the other end, Bad Boyz had struck three times and were well set for a comfortable win.

It was the first round of the Appleton Little League Cup. Bad Boyz' opponents were X Club 7. In his pre-match team talk, Mr Davies had called them 'the most improved team in the league'.

'Yeah,' Dareth had agreed. 'But they're still pants.'

They'd looked anything but pants in the first half, though. The game had been very even and Kyle had had to make a number of fine saves – though none of them good enough for the man on the touch-line, it seemed. When Kyle parried the ball, he should have caught it; when

he saved with his feet, he should have used his hands; when he booted the ball clear, he should have picked it up....

By half-time, only one goal had separated the teams – and that had been a fluke. A corner from Jordan had rebounded off the post, hit a defender on the heel and bounced back over the line.

In the second half, though, Bad Boyz had been well on top. Sung-Woo, their main striker, had scored twice and could have got three or four more. Jordan had hit the post with a scorching shot and Dareth had had a header cleared off the line.

To their credit, X Club 7 carried on battling to the end, even though they were obviously very tired. It was due to this tiredness that they gave away a penalty in the last minute. A weary defender stumbled and tripped Sung-Woo as the striker chased a long kick from Kyle. It was a clear penalty.

Dareth offered the ball to Sung-Woo. 'You take it,' he said. 'Get your hat-trick.'

But Sung-Woo shook his head with a

characteristic frown. 'You the penalty taker,' he insisted. 'I have two goals already. You score.'

Dareth shrugged. 'All right. Cheers!' he said.

He placed the ball on the spot and took a couple of steps backwards. Then he trotted forward and blasted it into the top right-hand corner of the net. At once he wheeled round and began his latest celebration. This involved cupping one hand round his ear and flapping the other like a wing. He was well into this before he noticed that no one else was joining in. They were all just standing looking at him.

Dareth's hands dropped and so did his smile. 'Wassup?' he said, puzzled.

Jordan nodded towards the goal. 'Look,' she said.

Dareth turned. The referee was still standing by the penalty spot with his arms folded. 'Take it again,' he ordered. 'And this time, wait till I blow my whistle.'

'I thought you did blow,' said Dareth.

The referee shook his head.

Dareth grinned. 'Must have been Bloomer, then,' he said.

Once more he placed the ball on the penalty spot.

Once more he took a couple of steps back.

He waited.

The referee blew his whistle.

Once more, Dareth ran forward and blasted the ball ... but this time into the top left-hand corner.

He raised his hands and started to turn, but before he could, Bloomer and Max had jumped him. A moment later, Kyle tumbled on top and all four fell in a screeching heap.

The mystery man on the touch-line was not amused. 'Get back in goal, Kyle, you idiot!' he barked. 'The game's not over!' But he was wrong. For at that instant the referee blew the final whistle.

Bad Boyz had beaten X Club 7 by 4-0 – the same score as in the league. They were through to the next round of the cup.

2

'Who was that bloke?' asked Jordan when Bad Boyz were back in the changing room.

'What a pain in the butt,' said Max. 'Kyle, get back in goal,' he mimicked in a ridiculous husky voice. 'Pick the ball up, catch that cross, stop scratching your nuts.'

'Yeah, what was his problem anyway?' Sadiq added.

'Is he a relative or sumfing?' Dareth asked.

Kyle's small eyes narrowed to tiny dots.

'Yeah,' he huffed. 'He's me dad, ain't 'e.'

The others all stared at Kyle. But no one said anything. They'd heard about Kyle's dad.

'I thought he was in prison,' Dareth muttered finally.

'They let him out, didn't they,' said Kyle resentfully. 'Now he's come back round here to cause trouble.'

'Can't your mum do anything about it?' Jordan suggested.

Kyle shook his large head with resignation. 'She can't do nuffing. She's scared of him, ain't she. Everyone is.'

'I'm not,' said Sadiq defiantly.

'Yeah, well, that's cos you're a wally,' said Kyle. 'My dad 'ud rip yer 'ead off.' He punched his goalie top into his kit-bag.

The door opened and Mr Davies came in.

'Well played, everyone,' he said. His cheeriness died away at the sight of the gloomy faces before him. 'What's up?' he asked.

'It's him out there,' said Jordan.

'Yeah, who is he?' Mr Davies enquired. 'It's the first time I've seen him round here.'

'He's Kyle's dad,' said Jordan.

'They let him out of prison,' said Max.

' 'e's 'ard,' piped Bloomer.

'Well, he was certainly hard on you, Kyle,' said Mr Davies consolingly. 'I thought you had a brilliant match.'

'He don't think I'm no good at nuffing,' Kyle grumbled. 'He never has. Not that he can talk. The only fing he's any good at is makin' trouble.'

'Well, maybe you should stay away from

him,' said Mr Davies. 'Unless you *want* to see him, of course,' he continued quickly. 'He is your dad after all.'

'I don't want to have nuffing to do with him,' Kyle huffed. He tugged the zip on his bag and walked towards the door. 'I hate his guts.'

Mr Davies looked after his keeper anxiously. Trouble was never far away from Bad Boyz and he had a feeling it was about to pay them another visit.