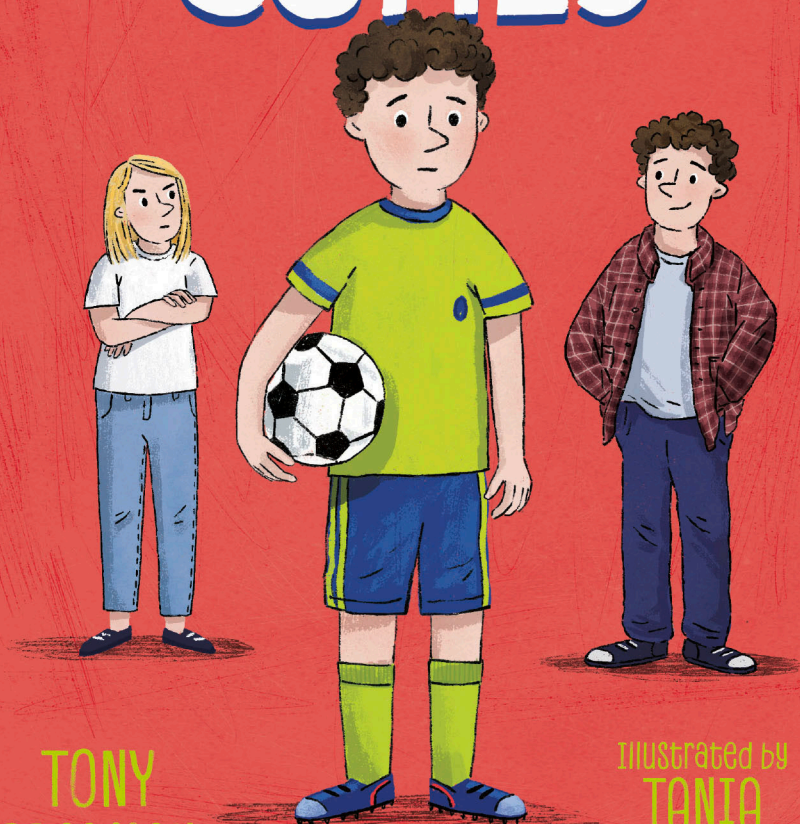


# WHEN SATURDAY COMES



TONY  
BRADMAN

Illustrated by  
TANIA  
REX



**WHEN  
SATURDAY  
COMES**



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TONY BRADMAN

Illustrated by  
TANIA REX

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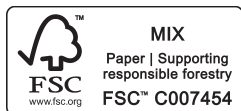
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For Mum and Dad, again –  
*“Too much too young”*





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# CHAPTER 1

## **A GREAT GOAL**

The referee blew three loud blasts on his whistle for the end of the match, and Daniel punched the air. It had been a really difficult game, but in the end his team had won by three goals to two – and he had scored the winning goal.

“It doesn’t get any better than this, does it?” said Ethan as he ran over. Ethan was the team captain and a terrific midfielder. He was also Daniel’s friend. People sometimes thought they were brothers, but Daniel didn’t know why.

They were the same height right enough, but his hair was curly and Ethan's was straight.

“Oh, I don't know,” said Daniel with a grin as they walked off the pitch together. “Winning the Premier League or the World Cup would be way cooler.”

“I suppose so,” said Ethan. “I'd just be happy winning the Area Under-11s Championship. I think we've got a chance if we keep playing like this ...”

It was a chilly day in late October, and there were thick grey clouds in the sky above the pitch and the clubhouse. Some of the other boys' parents had come to watch the game. They clapped and cheered on the touchline as the teams shook hands.

The team Daniel and Ethan played for was the Haybrook Rockets. Their coach was Mr Jenkins, who was Ethan's dad. He always talked

to the boys after a game, telling them if they'd done well or badly, as a team or on their own.

That was fine with Daniel, and with the rest of the team too. Mr Jenkins knew loads about football. He was nearly forty, but he looked younger, and he still played for a top Sunday League team – in midfield like Ethan.

“Gather round, lads,” he said now. “Good performance today, although you did let in two soft goals. Which means we’ll be doing plenty of defensive drills at training this week. Man of the Match has to be Daniel – that was a great goal, son.”

Everyone cheered – Ethan the loudest. Daniel grinned and felt himself blush. He was very happy – Mr Jenkins didn't often give out praise like that. And whenever he did, it always made Daniel want to play even better and score more goals.

Both teams went inside the clubhouse, and soon everyone was laughing and chatting as they got changed. Daniel didn't join in. He quickly pulled a tracksuit over his muddy kit and swapped his boots for trainers. Then he headed to the door.

“Hey, Daniel,” Ethan said. He was sitting on the bench that ran round the room. “Aren't



you staying for a bit? We could hang out together afterwards.”

Daniel stopped for a second. He'd really like that. Maybe he could text Mum to tell her ... Then he thought of Mum all alone in their little flat.

“Sorry, Ethan. I can't,” he said. “I promised my mum I'd go straight home.”

“Oh, OK then,” said Ethan. “See you at school on Monday.”

Ethan was disappointed, Daniel could tell, but there was nothing he could do about that. So he just nodded and left the clubhouse, then ran over to the bus stop in the street outside the ground. The bus was a bit late, and it was crowded. At last, Daniel found a seat at the back, next to a window.

He looked out of the bus window, but he didn't see the traffic or the shops and houses

outside. His mind was full of his goal – a beautiful half-volley from the edge of the box. He had hit the ball perfectly, driving it past the keeper’s hands and into the net.

There was no doubt about it – playing football had made a big difference to Daniel. His parents had split up two years ago, and that had made him so miserable. They had argued sometimes, but then suddenly it had all got a lot worse, and Dad left. Mum and Daniel had also moved – to a smaller flat. Mum had to get a new job, and Daniel had to leave his school and start at another.

To begin with, he had hated it. Then he made friends with Ethan, who sat next to him in class, and things changed. Daniel had never played proper football before or watched it on TV. But Ethan got him to come along to a Rockets training session, and Daniel had enjoyed playing football from the moment he stepped onto the pitch. He soon found out



he was good at it too, even though he had to borrow some kit, and some boots that were too big for him.

Ethan's dad had picked Daniel for the team, and he'd been in it ever since. Mum had found the money to buy him his own kit and a decent pair of boots. The team trained after school on Wednesdays, and the matches were on Saturday mornings.

Daniel couldn't wait for Saturday to come – it was the best bit of every week. He liked Ethan and got on well with the other boys, and he loved playing the game.

Daniel still worried about Mum, of course. He knew she was fed up, even if she tried not to show it. And he didn't understand why Dad never got in touch.

Dad had gone to work in another country and had only texted him a few times since then. He hadn't remembered Daniel's birthday this

year, which had made Mum very cross. But Daniel didn't want to think about that.

The bus reached Daniel's stop, and he got off. Their flat was in a small block on the corner. Daniel went in and up the stairs to the third floor. He let himself in with his key and dumped his sports bag in the hall. Mum was sitting in the front room.

One look at her face and Daniel knew something was wrong.

