

The Big Goal

by Elizabeth Trach

Sam loved soccer. Ever since he could remember, his family spent Saturday mornings at the town soccer fields watching his big brother and sister play. It always looked like great fun, with kids running up and down over the grass, chasing the black and white ball as fast as they could.

Now that Sam was finally old enough to join the beginner team, he was feeling nervous. Sure, he had *watched* a lot of soccer games, but that didn't mean he was good at kicking the ball. He practiced with his teammates and had fun doing drills, but it was easy to kick the ball into the big white net when there was no one trying to stop him.

Now the morning of Sam's first game was here, and there was another player standing in front of him on the field. She was very tall, with long, blond braids. The whistle blew, and she ran past Sam toward the ball.

Sam blinked. She was already gone, dribbling the ball toward the net. He had let her get past him! Sam ran after her, but it was hard to keep up.

The ball kept whizzing by, back and forth. Sam was tired. A real game felt so much longer than practice.

Sam was about to stop running and take a short rest. He put his hand on his knees and panted. Suddenly, the ball rolled to a stop right in front of him. He was wide open!

Sam knew what he had to do. He gave the ball short kicks all the way down the field. He set up just in front of the net and gave one last, hard kick. The ball sailed into the net for a goal. Sam scored his first point!

Sam turned around to see that kids were jumping up and down in excitement. But they were wearing red jerseys, not blue ones like Sam's. Sam blinked and looked at the goalie in the net. It was his teammate Briana.

Sam felt his face turn very hot and red. He had kicked the ball into the wrong net! Now the other team was winning the game.

Briana threw the ball back out onto the field and the players all ran after it. Sam didn't move. He thought he might cry. He wanted to quit soccer forever.

Briana ran over to Sam and put her arm around him. "Great kick!" she said.

Sam looked at her face to see if she was joking, but Briana smiled. "Now run down there and kick another one just like it so we can tie!"

Sam laughed. He felt better. Briana was a good friend.

"Go!" Briana called. And Sam ran toward the ball.

Questions

1. How does Sam feel about playing soccer?
2. What happens when Sam kicks his first goal?
3. How does Sam feel about his mistake? How can you tell?
4. How does Briana help Sam feel better?