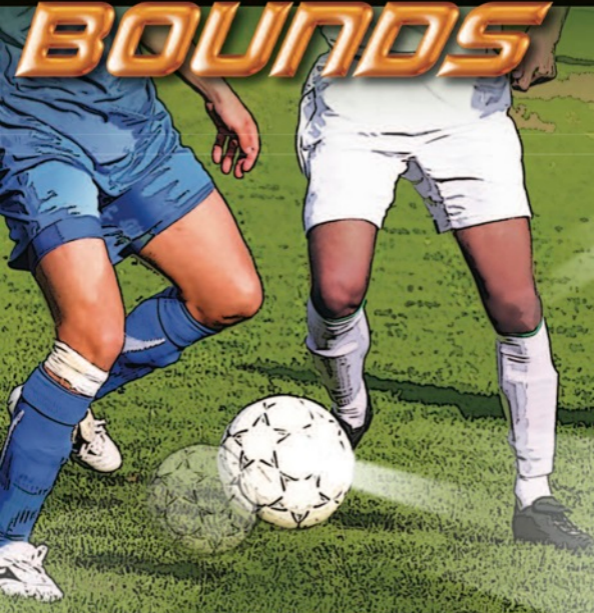


Fred Bowen

OUT OF BOUNDS



FRED BOWEN
SPORTS STORY



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**THE BOWENS
SPORTS STORY**



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Summary: Eighth-grade soccer forward Nate Osborne and his teammates are highly competitive but, with help from his soccer-playing aunt, Nate begins to see that good sportsmanship is more important than winning. Includes a recipe for oatmeal chocolate chip cookies and the real story behind the novel.

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For Peggy, again and always





Chapter

1

Racing down the sideline, Nate Osborne glanced over his shoulder at the soccer ball soaring through the crisp, clear September air. The ball bounced once at his side. With a quick touch, Nate brought it under control with his right foot.

A defender stepped up to challenge him. Nate had to make a quick decision. He could either dribble the ball deeper into the corner or cut toward the center of the field and the goal.

Be aggressive, he thought. Take it to the middle.

Nate crossed the ball to his left foot and cut sharply to the goal. His quick feet put the defender off balance and a step behind.

Another defender raced over to cut off Nate's path to the goal.

Nate slipped the ball past the charging defender and stepped over his flying tackle. Out of the corner of his eye, he spied the goalkeeper coming out to cut down the angle. With a quick stutter step, Nate caught up with the ball and set up a right-footed shot.

Boom! The ball curved around the diving keeper and rocketed toward the near post.

Thunk! The ball hit the silver metal post and skittered across the front of the goal. A defender blasted the ball away from the net and over the sideline.

Twееееееet!

Coach Lyn's whistle brought the action to a halt. "Great play, Nate!" he shouted. "That's how we stay aggressive! Attack the goal. That's what we want our forwards to do." The coach turned to the defenders. "Remember, don't challenge someone with Nate's speed too much. Play the angles. You can't let him get behind you."

Coach Lyn waved his arms toward the

sidelines. “That’s enough for today. Good practice. Let’s get some water.”

The Strikers gathered around a big orange plastic bucket and dipped paper cups into the ice-cold water.

“Hey, at least take your gloves off!” yelled Sergio Hernandez, the Strikers midfielder and Nate’s best friend. He was pointing at Cameron Wallace, the team’s goalkeeper. “They’re filthy.”

Nate gulped the water so fast that some ran down his chin and splashed onto his shirt. The cold water felt good. The September heat had turned Nate’s uniform into a sweaty second skin. Summer was still hanging on.

“Man, Nate totally faked Cam out with that awesome move,” Sergio said, still teasing the goalie.

Cam grinned. “You’re so wrong. I had it all the way.”

Sergio wasn’t having any of that. “Oh, so you knew the ball was going to hit the post?”

“Absolutely,” Cam insisted. “Don’t you

know the goalposts are a keeper's best friends?"

Sergio laughed. "And I guess you *wanted* the ball to be bouncing around in front of the net?"

Stevie Greenwald, the Strikers' top defender, stepped forward. "No worries, I had Cam's back."

Nate decided to get in on the fun. "By the way, Sergio. Where were you on that play? I thought a midfielder like you would be right on the spot to pick up an easy goal."

"Yeah," Stevie agreed. "You should have been on that ball."

Sergio paused. He didn't have a quick answer for that one. "Maybe I didn't want to run up the score and embarrass my teammates," he said finally.

All the Strikers laughed.

"Seriously," Sergio said. "I was trying to be a good sport."

"Yeah, right," Nate said, still chuckling. Sergio was a terrific midfielder and probably the most competitive player on a team full of competitors.

“Listen up, Strikers!” Coach Lyn strode toward the circle of players with a stack of papers in his hand. “Good practice. We’ve got one more before our first game.”

“Are those the schedules?” Sergio asked.

Coach nodded and started handing out sheets of paper. “Yeah. All the games are on Saturdays at the SoccerPlex. Make sure you get there twenty minutes early to warm up. *At least* twenty minutes early.”

Nate grabbed a schedule and looked down the list of teams and games. He was looking for only one thing.

Date	Opponent	Time
September 12	Sharks	Noon
September 19	Vipers	1:30 p.m.
September 26	United	3:00 p.m.
October 3	Devils	9:00 a.m.
October 10	Sabres	10:30 a.m.
October 17	Rapids	3:00 p.m.
October 24	Monarchs	1:30 p.m.
October 31	Rush	10:30 a.m.
November 7	Barracudas	Noon
November 14	Championship game	TBA

All games will be played at the SoccerPlex.

The first- and second-place team in the standings after the regular season will play in the championship game.

Sergio looked over Nate's shoulder. "When do we play the Monarchs?" he asked, reading Nate's mind.

"October twenty-fourth," Nate said, his eyes resting on a single line in the schedule. "The seventh week of the season."

Sergio was studying his own schedule sheet now. "It's good we play them later in the season," he said. "It'll probably be for the championship...again."

"The two top teams from the regular season play a separate game for the championship," Nate said, pointing at the last line of the schedule. "You know that."

"But anytime the Strikers play the Monarchs it's a big game," Sergio said. "A championship game."

"Right," Nate agreed.

The two friends started walking home. They lived on the same street not far from the soccer practice field. As always, they talked about soccer and the Strikers.

"I'm still mad we lost to the Monarchs in overtime last year," Sergio said. "That cost us the U-13 league championship."

“But we were the U-12 champs,” Nate reminded him.

“So I guess we’re tied.”

“And this year we’ll break the tie.”

“Yeah.” Sergio smiled. “I’m already looking forward to the twenty-fourth.”

The boys turned on to their street. “Don’t forget the other games,” Nate cautioned his friend. “The Devils and the Sabres are good too. So’s the United.”

“No worries.”

Nate paused. “We may need you to score more goals if we’re gonna beat those guys,” he said. “Like the easy one in front of the net today.”

“I’m telling you—”

Nate cut his friend off. “Oh yeah, I forgot. You were trying to be a good sport.”

Even Sergio had to laugh this time.

“See you tomorrow!” Nate waved and turned up the walk to his front door. He turned the key and went in. The house was quiet. The family dog, Matty, was sleeping in the corner. The West Highland White Terrier was older than Nate and always seemed to be asleep.

Nate found a note from his mother on the kitchen counter.

Nate—

I will be home from work about 6:30 pm. Help yourself to some healthy snacks until then. We will have roasted chicken from Whole Foods for dinner.

Love you.

Mom

He reached into his backpack and pulled out the Strikers season schedule. He placed it at eye level on the refrigerator door under a large magnet for a local pizza place, then plucked a blue marker from a tall coffee mug on the counter filled with pens, pencils, and pairs of scissors.

He circled “Monarchs” and the October twenty-fourth date. “I can’t wait,” he whispered softly to himself.