

FRED BOWEN
SPORTS STORY

*Soccer Team
Upset*

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Summary: Tyler's hope that his soccer team will be undefeated is dashed when his friend Zack, the team's star midfielder, and two more of the Cougars' best players accept an offer to play for an elite travel team.

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Chapter

Back pass!” Tyler Davis called out to his teammate Zack Bell. They had been playing on the same soccer teams since they were little kids. Now they were in seventh grade, playing for the Cougars and battling the Sharks in a scoreless game.

Zack sent the ball spinning right to Tyler’s feet. *Zack knows exactly where to pass it*, Tyler thought. He quickly controlled the ball with a foot tap and checked the action on the field. A Sharks defender was charging toward him. Tyler managed to nudge the ball away as his opponent tried to kick it. The defender’s foot caught nothing but air and he fell with a thud.

Tyler spotted another teammate, Mario Cruz, racing down the right wing. Tyler set up the ball with a slight tap of his left foot, kicked it with his right, and sent the ball curving downfield.

Mario trapped the ball after one bounce and looked up to see Zack, the Cougars attacking midfielder, angle past a Sharks defender and race to the goal. Mario centered a pass, low and hard, straight to Zack.

The Sharks defense charged toward Zack to block his shot on goal. But it was too late. In a flash Zack rocketed the ball past the goalkeeper.

“Goooooaaal!” Tyler shouted, stretching the word to the breaking point. *What a shot!* he thought as he raced toward his teammates.

The Cougars crowded around Zack, trading high fives and slapping him on the back.

“Nice pass,” Zack said, nodding to Mario.

Mario smiled. “Don’t thank me,” he said. “Tyler started the play with that pass down the wing.”

The Cougars celebration didn’t last long. Ms. Murray, their coach, kept them focused

on the game. She paced the sidelines, clapping and shouting encouragement as they headed back to their positions. “Good work, guys. Great passes, Tyler and Mario. Don’t let up. We’re only up by one. Remember to help on defense.”

Coach Murray didn’t have to worry. The Cougars controlled the rest of the first half, playing with a cool, quiet confidence. Justin Sheridan, the Cougars striker, scored on a header just before the half to increase the Cougars lead to 2–0.

At halftime, the team sprawled on the soft grass under the warm September sunshine and sucked on orange slices.

“Good job, guys,” Coach Murray said as she looked around the small circle of players. “I like the passing. Move the ball from side to side. Play possession, like you’re playing keep-away. We have a two-goal lead.”

“Are we going with the same lineup in the second half?” Tyler asked.

“Tyler’s looking to score a goal,” Zack whispered to the other Cougars in a teasing voice.

“Same starters for the second half,” Coach Murray said, nodding. “I know this is a preseason game, but I want you to play like it’s for the championship.”

The referee blew his whistle and signaled the teams to get ready.

Coach Murray looked out toward the field. “All right now, let’s keep playing hard. Everybody hustle,” she said. “We’re only up by two goals. The Sharks can come back.”

Tyler traded sly smiles with Zack and Mario. *That’s what Coach thinks*, he told himself. The Cougars knew they had this game won.

Sure enough, the Cougars controlled the second half, too. From his position on the wing, Tyler watched Zack in awe. His friend kept the ball close to his feet as he dodged defenders and let the clock run down. Then, suddenly, Zack flew toward the goal, dribbling hard and fast to escape the Sharks defense. Glancing to his right, Zack spied Mario slicing toward the goal. But the Sharks goalie saw Mario, too.

Zack fired the ball to the left, past the

Sharks defense. Cougars midfielder Nate Tanzi raced in and blasted the ball into the net.

“Gooooaaal!” Tyler shouted again, with a big, happy grin. *Man, Zack has moves!* he thought.

“All right, Nate!” Coach Murray shouted, jumping in the air. “Nice ball, Zack.”

After the game, as Tyler, Mario, and Zack gathered up their things, Coach Murray walked over and said, “Good game, guys. You were awesome today. We’ll definitely be ready for the regular season.”

“When’s our first game, again, Coach?” Tyler asked.

“Right here, next Saturday—a week from today—at two o’clock. I’ll give out schedules at Wednesday’s practice. Team rosters will be posted on the league’s website tomorrow. See you Wednesday.” She headed off to the parking lot with a bag of soccer balls slung over her shoulder.

Tyler and his friends stayed at the edge of the field, reliving the game.

“That first goal was sweet,” Tyler said.

Zack shrugged. "I could have scored *five* goals against those guys. The Sharks aren't very good."

Tyler smiled to himself. *Just like Zack. Always thinking he's the best*, he thought.

"The Sharks weren't so bad," Mario said.

"What do you mean?" Zack said. "I hardly broke a sweat playing them."

"So how come your shirt is so wet?" Tyler asked, pulling at Zack's damp soccer shirt. "And smelly, too. Oooo-weeee!"

Mario laughed, but Zack flicked Tyler's hand off his shirt. "Cut it out," he said.

Just then Zack's dad walked up. "Good game, guys. Hey, Zack, Mr. Wexler wants to talk to you."

"Where is he?" Zack asked, looking around.

"Back on the field, near the far goal."

"Okay." Zack headed back toward the field with his father. "I'll see you tomorrow," he called back to Tyler and Mario.

"See ya." Tyler waved.

The two boys trudged slowly toward the parking lot. "Who's Mr. Wexler?" Tyler asked Mario.

“He’s the coach of the Putty Hill Panthers,” Mario said. “You know, that travel team with all the hotshot players?”

“Oh yeah.” Tyler nodded. He knew they played on the high school field and wore uniforms that looked like the ones the pros wear. “I wonder what he wants with Zack.”

“What do you *think* he wants?” Mario said. “He’s been bugging Zack to play for the Panthers for years.”

Tyler looked off toward the field and spotted Zack and his dad talking to Mr. Wexler. “Zack wouldn’t leave the Cougars for the Panthers,” he said. “We’ve got the perfect team.”



The Real Story

The 1950 World Cup: United States vs. England

**United States–1
England–0**

The 1950 soccer match between the United States and England was the biggest upset in World Cup history. The game was played in Brazil, and when people back in England heard the final score, they thought it was a mistake. They had expected England to crush the United States 10–0.

Soccer was not a very popular sport in the United States in 1950. It's hard to believe, but back then, soccer was played mostly by

kids at private schools or immigrants who had learned the game back in their home countries. Few people in America knew or cared about their soccer team. About four hundred reporters traveled to Brazil to cover the World Cup, but only one of them was from the United States.

Most of the members of the 1950 United States World Cup team had other jobs and played soccer on the weekends to have fun and to pick up some extra money. Joe Gaetjens, who scored the game's only goal, was an accounting student and part-time dishwasher. Frank Borghi, the team's sure-handed goalkeeper, was a former minor league *baseball* player who drove a hearse for his family's funeral business.

No one had high expectations for the American team. In previous international matches, American teams, with many of the same players, had already been trounced by Italy (9–0), Norway (11–0), and Scotland (4–0).

The English team, on the other hand, was loaded with top players from the best

teams in their country—stars from Manchester United, Arsenal, Blackpool, and Liverpool. The English team's record in international matches stood at 23–4–3.

The game against England started as if it would lead to still another American defeat. The English pros dominated play with short, crisp passes. The American amateurs tried hard just to keep up.

The English blasted six shots at the American goal in the first twelve minutes, including two that bounced off the goalposts. The United States team didn't manage its first, weak shot on the English goal until the twenty-five minute mark.

But the second American shot, twelve minutes later, changed everything. Walter Bahr, the team's captain, who would later coach the Penn State University soccer team, sent a hard, shoulder-high shot to the right of the English goal. The ball spun across the field, about 12 yards in front of the goal. The shot seemed harmless until the American center forward, Joe Gaetjens, dove flat out to head the ball. Teammate

Harry Keough later remembered that Gaetjens leaped “as though he thought he could fly or something.” Gaetjens fell belly-first to the ground, but his head nicked the ball just enough to send it into the net!

At halftime the United States led 1–0, despite being outshot 14–2 during the first half. England continued to dominate play during the second half. But they still couldn’t score. Some shots sailed wide of the net, but many were knocked away by Borghi, the American goalkeeper.

The Americans almost scored again on a header by Gaetjens. But as the game wore on, the Americans began to get tired. With eight minutes remaining, England’s star forward, Stanley Mortensen, broke free and dashed toward the American goal with the ball dancing at his feet. Charley Columbo, the center halfback for the United States and the toughest player on a team of tough players, chased after Mortensen. Just outside the penalty area, Columbo dragged Mortensen down with a flying American football-style tackle. The play wasn’t very fair, but it probably saved a goal.

On the free kick following the Columbo penalty, an English forward headed the ball toward the American goal. Borghi leaped backwards and slapped the sure score away just inches from the goal line.

The United States held on to win the game 1–0. Thirty thousand happy Brazilian soccer fans flooded the field and carried Gaetjens and Borghi away on their shoulders. The Brazilians were thrilled that someone had beaten one of their biggest rivals.

The United States team, however, could not keep up their World Cup magic. They played Chile two days later and lost 5–2. The next day they boarded planes for the long trip home. Their country barely knew of the team's big upset. There were no television or radio reports of the game.

But every one of the eleven players on the team knew. They knew that on one amazing day, they had beaten the finest soccer team in the world. The American team had bested the mighty English pros because they knew what Tyler and his teammates learned: In soccer, sometimes it takes just one play to win.