

# The Big Match



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from the **The Big Match Teaching Pack**

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## CHAPTER ONE

Mrs Cross rushed into the kitchen. ‘I have some wonderful news,’ she said. ‘Aunt Sharon is getting married. I’m so happy for her.’

Matthew was eating his breakfast. He put some more bread in his mouth. He did not look up from his football magazine.

‘The wedding is on the second Saturday in May,’ said Mrs Cross. ‘That’s in two weeks time.’

Now Matthew looked up from his magazine. ‘When did you say?’ he asked

‘On May 12th,’ said Mrs Cross. ‘They want to marry quickly because Sam is a sailor. He’s going back to sea at the end of May.’

Matthew suddenly felt very nervous. ‘It can’t be May 12th,’ he said. ‘There must be some mistake. That’s the day of the FA Cup Final.’

‘The football match?’ said Mrs Cross. ‘Oh that’s a pity! You wanted to go to that, didn’t you?’

Matthew jumped to his feet. ‘I am going!’ he shouted. ‘City are playing in the final for the first time. I’m not missing it for some stupid wedding!’

Mrs Cross shook her head slowly. ‘I’m sorry, Matthew. Sharon is my only sister! It will be the happiest day of her life. We all have to go.’

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That afternoon Matthew played for his school football team. He told the other players about the wedding and the FA Cup Final.

‘They are at the same time,’ said Matthew. ‘And my mother wants me to go to wedding. I’ll have to watch it on the television.’

‘You can’t even do that,’ said another of the boys. ‘There’s going to be a television strike. They’re not showing the game. They are only showing the goals after.’

Matthew’s team lost 2-0. After the game, Matthew stayed on to play on his own. Suddenly he heard a girl’s voice behind him.

‘Hello, Matthew,’

He turned around to see Gina Tinti. Gina was from the island of Sardinia in Italy but now she lived in the next street to Matthew.

‘Oh, it’s you,’ said Matthew.

Gina looked very pleased to see Matthew. ‘How was your game, Matthew?’ she asked. Gina spoke excellent English with a soft Italian accent.

‘Terrible,’ said Matthew.

‘Oh, I’m sorry. But what about City getting to the FA Cup Final?’ she said. ‘Isn’t it wonderful?’

Matthew nodded. He felt embarrassed talking to a girl about football.

‘Can I practise my penalties with you?’ Gina asked. ‘Our team is playing in the final next week.’

Matthew looked around. He did not want his friends see him playing with Gina. But there was nobody around. And it was boring playing alone.

‘All right,’ he said. ‘But I think we should start at 3-0 to you.’

### **Penalties**

‘No, it’s okay,’ said Gina. ‘It’s just for fun. It doesn’t matter who wins.’

Gina took only three steps to take her penalty. Matthew laughed to himself. ‘This will be easy to save!’ he thought.

But the ball went straight into the top right hand corner of the goal.

Matthew picked the ball out of the net. ‘You were lucky there,’ he called out.

Matthew walked up to take his penalty. He tried to put the ball into the bottom left hand corner. But it went straight at the goalkeeper. Gina caught the ball in her arms.

Matthew was very angry with himself. ‘That’s 1-0 to you,’ he said through his teeth.

Gina went up to take her second penalty. She swung her foot to the right. Matthew dived to his right. Then Gina’s foot suddenly changed direction. The ball went into the bottom left-hand corner.



Gina laughed and clapped her hands. ‘I saw them do that in the World Cup,’ she said,

‘I think it was a bit lucky,’ said Matthew.

Matthew hit his second penalty as hard as he could. It went straight up in the air. Matthew watched it fly over the bar.

‘I think there’s something wrong with the ball,’ he said.

Gina scored all five of her penalties. Matthew could only score two. He kicked the ball away. ‘I don’t want to play anymore!’ he said.

## CHAPTER TWO

Gina came and sat down next to Matthew. She was shorter than he was and her skin was darker. She had a kind,

open face and big brown eyes. Her long brown hair tied up.

‘Are you all right, Matthew? You seem very sad.’ said Gina.

Matthew did not answer for a few seconds. ‘I’m going to miss the FA Cup Final,’ he said finally.

Gina put her hand to her mouth. ‘Oh no!’ she cried, ‘Why? What’s happened?’

‘My aunt is getting married the same afternoon,’ said Matthew. ‘And Mum says I have to go.’

‘But that’s terrible,’ said Gina. ‘Your aunt could get married any day.’

‘Of course she could,’ said Matthew. ‘But my aunt thinks her little wedding is more important than the FA Cup Final.’

‘Perhaps they’ll let you leave the wedding early,’ said Gina.

Matthew shook his head. ‘That’s not the big problem,’ he said. ‘I could escape from the wedding. They’d not let me out for the rest of my life, but I could do it. But where would I get the money for a ticket?’

Gina looked at Matthew for a moment. Then she said: ‘I can get you a ticket.’

### **A Kind Offer**

‘What do you mean?’ said Matthew. ‘Have you got a spare one?’

‘No, but I’ve got the money to buy one. It was my birthday last week,’

Matthew blushed. He had forgotten about Gina’s birthday. And Gina always sent him a card. ‘But tickets are

really expensive and I haven't got any money,' he said. 'I don't know when I could pay you back.'

Gina smiled. 'It doesn't matter,' she said. 'I don't care about money.'

Matthew looked down at his shoes. He did not know what to say. Gina was always so kind to him. He was usually horrible to her. Why did she do this? What did she want from him?

'All right, get me a ticket,' he said finally. 'I'll find some way of getting away from this wedding. But I'll pay you back -'

'Matthew -'

Matthew held up his hand. 'No, you'll get your money back,' he said. 'You can take my watch as a deposit.'

He took off his watch and placed it in Gina's hand. Gina looked at the watch. Then she looked at Matthew. Matthew saw that she was upset.

'Don't be silly, Matthew,' she said.

She handed back his watch and walked away.

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It was a week before the FA Cup Final. Matthew was in the park with his friends. Everyone was talking about the cup final. Some of the boys were City fans. Some supported United. They argued about who was going to win. Then they decided to play a game.

The United team had one more player than the City team. The only other person around was Gina. She was playing by herself on the next pitch.

'Come and play for us, Gina,' called one of the boys.

Gina came onto the pitch. Matthew did not look pleased.

He pointed towards the goal. 'You can be our goalkeeper,' he ordered.

Nobody ever wanted to be goalkeeper. 'But I'm a terrible goalkeeper,' said Gina.

'It's all right, Matthew,' said one of the other boys. 'I'll stay in goal for a while.'

Matthew shook his head angrily. 'I'm the captain of this team,' he said. 'And I want her to be goalkeeper.'

The other players looked at him in surprise. They all liked Gina. Why was Matthew so rude to her?

Only Matthew knew about the Cup Final ticket. It made him feel very bad.

### **Mistake**

Matthew was a very good footballer. But early in the game he made a mistake. The ball came to him in the air and he tried to head it. But the ball bounced over him. Suddenly one of the United players was running towards the goal with the ball.

Gina ran out to try and stop the United player. Matthew raced back. Gina dived down and almost got the ball. But at that moment Matthew tackled the forward from behind.

The ball changed direction and went past Gina. The United player ran on and kicked it into an empty net.

Matthew was very angry with himself. But he shouted at Gina. 'You idiot! Why did you come out?'

Nobody said anything. Gina went to pick the ball out of the net. One of the other players ran to her.

Then in the last minute of the game the City team got a

penalty. Matthew ran forward to take it. Gina ran after him.

‘Put it to his left, Matthew.’ she whispered. ‘That goalkeeper always dives to his right. I’ve watched him.’

This made Matthew angry. ‘Are you trying to tell me how to play football?’ he said.

Matthew took the penalty. He hit it to the right. The goalkeeper dived and saved it. They had lost the game.

‘Bad luck, Matthew,’ said Gina, as they came off the pitch. ‘You nearly scored.’

Matthew turned round. ‘You lost us that match,’ he said angrily.

### **Tears**

Matthew immediately felt sorry. Gina was very upset. There were tears in her eyes. She began walking away. After a few yards she stopped and called back.

‘I’ll get the ticket for you on Saturday, Matthew.’ she said. ‘But I know you hate me! So I don’t expect you to sit with me at the game. You don’t ever have to see me again.’

Matthew called after her. ‘Gina, I’m sorry! I didn’t mean it.’

But Gina was already running out of the park.

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