



## A Game of Soccer

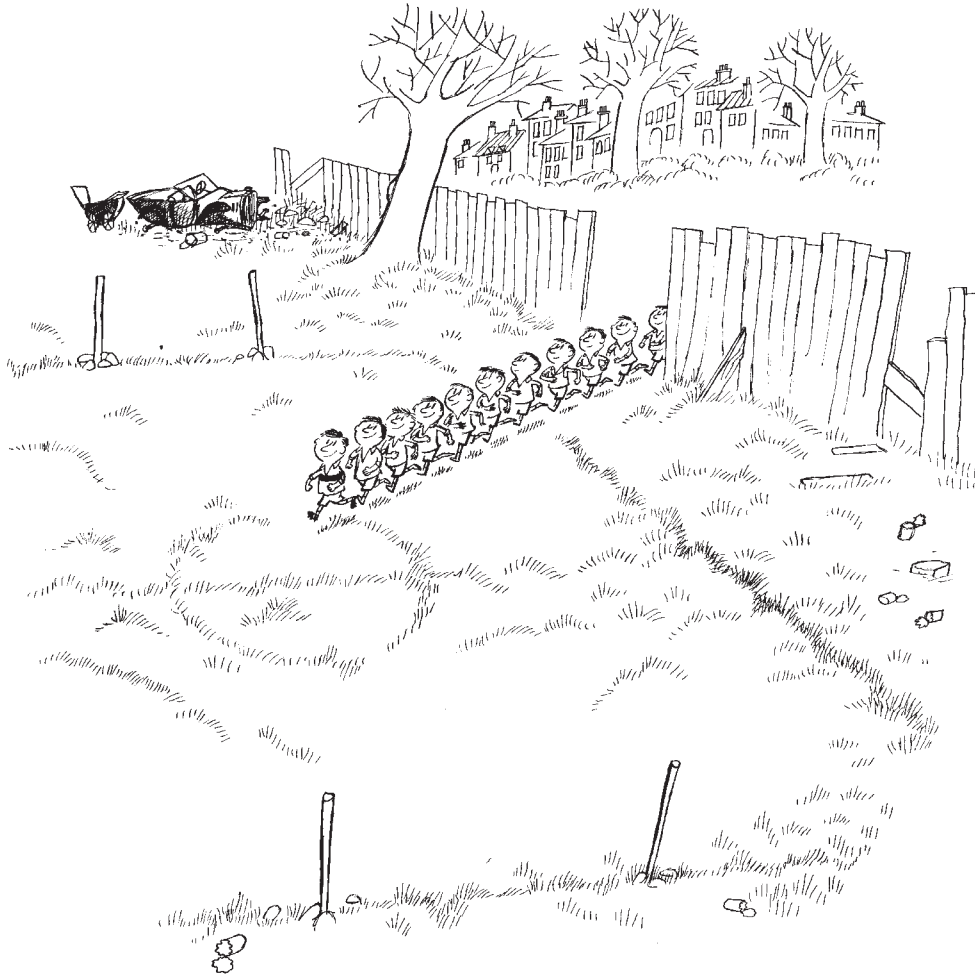
Alec asked a whole lot of our gang from school to meet him this afternoon at the vacant lot not far from where we live. Alec is my friend who is fat and he likes eating, and the reason he was fixing up a soccer game was because his dad had given him a brand new soccer ball and we were going to have a really great game. Alec is OK.

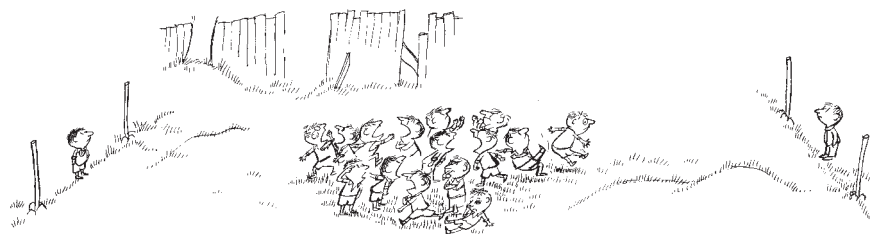
We met at the vacant lot at three o'clock, eighteen of us. First we had to pick two teams.

Choosing the referee was easy enough: we all picked Cuthbert. Cuthbert is top of the class and we're not crazy about him, but we can't hit him because he wears glasses, and all that is a pretty good combination for a referee. Anyway no one wanted Cuthbert on their team because he's not much good at sports and he cries so easily. However, we ran into a spot of difficulty when Cuthbert said he needed a whistle, and the only person who had a whistle was Rufus, whose dad is a policeman.

"I'm not lending him my whistle. It's a family heirloom," said Rufus, and that was that. Finally we decided that Cuthbert would tell Rufus when he wanted the whistle blown and then Rufus would blow it for him.

"Well, are we going to start or not? I'm getting really hungry," said Alec.





But now things were tricky, because if Cuthbert was ref there were only seventeen players for the teams and that meant odd numbers. Then we found the answer: someone would be linesman and wave a little flag every time the ball went out of play. We chose Max. One linesman isn't much to keep an eye on the whole pitch, but Max can run very fast because he's got long thin legs with big dirty knees. Max didn't want to be linesman, he wanted to play, and he said anyway he didn't have a flag. All the same, he finally agreed to be linesman for the first half and wave his hankie for a flag, though it wasn't a clean hankie, but of course when he came out he didn't know it was going to be a flag.

"Right, let's get on with it!" said Alec.

It was easier now, because there were only sixteen players. We needed two captains, one for each team. The only thing was, everyone wanted to be captain, except for Alec who wanted to be in goal because he doesn't like running. That was OK, because Alec is a good goalie. There's so much of him he covers a lot of the goal mouth. However, that still left us with fifteen captains, which was several too many.

"I'm the strongest, so I ought to be captain!" shouted Eddie. "And if anyone says no I'm going to punch his nose!"

"I've got the best soccer uniform, so I'm going to be captain!" shouted Geoffrey, so Eddie punched his nose.

Geoffrey was quite right, though, he did have the best uniform; his rich dad had bought him a complete soccer player's outfit, with a red, white, and blue striped shirt.

"I'm going to be captain!" shouted Rufus. "If I'm not captain I will get my dad and he'll put you all in jail!"

I had the idea of tossing a coin for it. Well, tossing two coins, because the first one got lost in the grass and we couldn't find it. Jeremy had lent the coin and he wasn't too pleased about losing it; he went on searching, even though Geoffrey promised that his dad would send him a check for the same amount. Finally two captains were chosen: Geoffrey and me.

"Listen, I don't want to be late for dinner!" yelled Alec. "Are we starting or aren't we?"

Next we had to form our teams. That went off all right except for Eddie. Geoffrey and I both wanted Eddie, because when he's got the ball no one ever tackles him. Not that he plays all that well, but everyone is afraid of him. Jeremy suddenly found his coin and cheered up, so we asked him if we could borrow it again to toss up for Eddie, and we lost it again.

Jeremy was really annoyed this time and he went back to searching while we drew straws with blades of grass. Geoffrey got Eddie. Geoffrey said Eddie could be goalie, because he thought no one would dare come anywhere near the goal then, let alone put the ball in. Eddie loses his temper very easily. Alec was sitting down in between the sticks which





marked out his goal, not looking too pleased. “Well, *now* what about it?” he shouted.

So we got into position. It wasn’t all that easy, because we were only seven a side, not counting the goalies, and there was a lot of arguing on both sides. Most people wanted to be center-forwards. Jeremy wanted to

be right back, but that was because his coin had dropped somewhere around there and he wanted to carry on looking for it while he played.

Geoffrey soon got his side straightened out, because Eddie punched a lot of people and then they got into position without any more trouble, rubbing their noses. Eddie punches pretty hard!

We couldn’t get my team to settle things, though, till Eddie said he’d come and punch our noses too. So then we got into position.

“Whistle!” Cuthbert told Rufus, and Rufus, who was on my team, blew the whistle for kick-off.

But Geoffrey still wasn’t happy. “Here, we’ve been tricked!” he said. “The sun’s in our eyes. I don’t see why my team has to have the worst end!”

I told him if he didn’t like the sun all he had to do was close his eyes and very likely he’d play better that way, so then we had a fight. Rufus started blowing his whistle.

“I never told you to whistle!” shouted Cuthbert. “I’m the ref!” Rufus got cross and said he didn’t need Cuthbert’s

permission to blow his whistle, he’d blow his whistle when and if he felt like it, so there! And he started whistling like crazy.

“You’re naughty, you’re *really* naughty!” shouted Cuthbert, beginning to cry.

“Oh, for goodness’ sake!” said Alec, in his goal.

But no one took any notice. I was still fighting Geoffrey, and I’d torn his nice red, white, and blue shirt, and he was saying, “Yah, yah, yah! Doesn’t matter! My dad will buy me lots more!” and he was kicking my shins. Rufus was chasing Cuthbert, who was shouting, “I’ve got glasses! I’ve got glasses!” Jeremy wasn’t doing anything to anyone, he was looking for his coin, but he still couldn’t find it. Eddie, who’d been waiting patiently in his own goal, got fed up and started punching the noses closest to him, which happened to belong to his own side. We were all shouting and running around and we were having a really fabulous time!

“Stop it, will you?” Alec shouted again.

Eddie lost his temper with Alec. “You were in such a hurry to play, weren’t you?” he said. “Right, so we’re playing! If you’ve got anything to say, save it for half-time!”

“What do you mean, half-time?” asked Alec. “I’ve only just noticed – we haven’t got a ball! I left it at home by mistake.”

