



SHORTS

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Goal Mining

First there is fear. It rushes through me when I realize the result of the game hinges on my abilities.

If I mess up, I lose for the team. If I succeed, I send the game into overtime. Next, my mind wanders. The B on that social studies midterm exam. The high score on Rambo. The squished peanut butter and jelly I had for lunch. The last game in which I made two great saves to increase the JV soccer team record to 6 and 1.

Fear comes back. What if the ball slides through my hands? The game would be like the ball, slipping through my fingers. I'd get it from Coach, and from the team. "Why didn't you just knock the ball? Why didya have to hotshot it and try to catch it? All we needed was a save."

In comes eager anticipation. "Hey, great save!" I get swamped by teammates. "How about starting in my next game?" Coach will praise. The thought of that raises my spirits.

Next, concentration. *Stop the ball*, I say to myself. *Start on the left, and lean to the right. Wait a minute, he's lining up on the right of the ball. That could mean two things. One, he could be a lefty. Forget about two, it's too complicated.* I assume he will pull his leg across his body and shoot to my left. If he doesn't do this, my prayer is for a wide shot to the other side. I line up a little to the right, and lean to the left. If I'm lucky, a good jump and a weak kick will produce an opportunity to block the shot.

Then more fear. I am the only thing in the way of the ball, just ten feet away. Any stiffness will hurt my chance of blocking the shot. Any nervousness will slow my reflexes. Any miscalculation loses the game.

The staring game starts. Their penalty kicker—a lanky center halfback—tries to stare me down. I try to resist, but the pressure is on me. I have to block the shot just to keep the tie and save the game. If he misses the shot, he *still* has a tie and is still in the game. I stare into his eyes. He glances briefly at me. He searches for a weakness. His massive left leg is the only thing that shocks me. I try to concentrate, but the leg is the only thing I can think of. Given the power that must lie in that limb, I do not see any way out of this mess.

A rush of anxiety. *I have to do well; I will stop the shot.* He starts his run-up. I lean further to my left. His knee is inches from the ball. I forget everything. The foot and ball make contact. Here it comes, here I go!

I leap toward the left into the air, my eyes fixed on the flash of black and white. My hands are stretched to their limit.

I miss the ball. It sails a few inches past my hands, and I land with a plop on the soft mud. Lying there, face all cruddy, body chilled, I think about how I could have saved it. I wonder, is this it for me as a starter? Was the pressure too great? Oh, how the other team will celebrate! What excuse will I use? *What's the use?* I say to myself. *No one will ever talk to me again.*

I turn over to see where in the goal the ball landed. After all, it won't be so bad if I was only a few inches off. My stiff neck protests, but finally turns my head around. What do I see? The little harmless ball lying off to the side of the goalpost and back about twenty yards. I'm into the air in a flash letting out a yell.

My team members rejoice, but I realize that I will have to think of some way to refill my energy for another five minutes in overtime.

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