

READING GRADE 5

A. Story

The Flying V

by
Sue Corbett

Conor's soccer team needed help. The Falcons had lost every game this season except one, which they'd tied—zero to zero.

No one on the team had even scored a goal yet. Conor wanted to fix that.

"It's not about winning," Coach Jenkins always said. "It's about learning a skill and having fun."

Today was the last game of the season. Chloe had brought homemade cupcakes. The frosting was purple—the color of the Falcons' jerseys—and each cupcake was decorated with a letter *F* made of white icing.

"*F*," Wade said gloomily. "*F* for failure."

"Is *that* what the *F* stands for?" Miranda asked, her eyes wide with horror.

"No! *F* stands for Falcons," said Chloe.

If they lost today, the Falcons would go zero-for-the-season. Conor didn't mind losing. He minded *never even coming close*.

So Conor had thought up a plan. He called it "The Flying V." At home before the game, he'd drawn it on a piece of paper.

Now, Conor patted his sock, where the plan was folded up and tucked away. He was waiting for the right moment to share it.

"OK, team, warm-up time!" Coach Jenkins shouted. "And be careful—the field is still wet from last night's rain."

The Falcons lined up for a kicking drill. Conor ran to the back, behind Wade.

"I have a plan that'll help us score a goal," Conor whispered.

"Yeah? What is it?" Wade asked.

Conor took the paper out of his sock, but by the time he unfolded it, it was Wade's turn to kick. Conor put the paper back. He waited his turn, kicked, then saw Coach Jenkins waving the team to the sideline.

"Coach—," Conor began. But Coach Jenkins launched right into his pep talk.

"You look good out there," he said. "You've all been doing well at practice, and I think this will be our game. Is everybody having fun?"

"Yes," the Falcons said weakly. "Until we start losing," Wade mumbled.

The Falcons were playing the Comets. The field was swampy.

By halftime, everyone had fallen except Wade, the goalie. Mud had freckled both teams' jerseys and turned white socks brown. Neither team had come close to scoring yet.

As the Falcons ate their orange slices, Conor stood up. "I have a plan," he said, looking at Coach Jenkins hopefully. "It's called The Flying V."

"Let's hear it," Coach said.

"Jeremy, you're our best kicker. You take the front. Shaquille and Miranda, you two run behind Jeremy—Shaquille on the right, Miranda on the left.



"Chloe and Liam, you're in the next row, a little wider apart. Either Krista or I will bring the ball to midfield. We'll line up behind Chloe and Liam." Conor showed them the paper.

The Falcons studied Conor's diagram.

"How is this going to help us score a goal?" Chloe asked.

"We'll pass the ball up the V until it gets to Jeremy," Conor said. "Then he'll smack it in."

"Oh, so my goal is Shaquille because he's in front of me," said Chloe.

"Right," Conor said.

"I like it!" said Coach Jenkins.

Wade shrugged. "Nothing else is working."

In the second half, the Falcons found their chance.

Krista got the ball at midfield. She passed it to Liam. Liam dribbled it toward Miranda, but two Comets had her covered. Liam crossed the ball to Chloe, who passed it to Shaquille.

Everything was going perfectly.

Shaquille faked out a defender and passed the ball to Jeremy.

Then disaster struck.

Jeremy pulled his right leg back to strike. His left leg slipped on the wet grass. Instead of going in to the net, the ball went up and backward.

Conor watched the ball arc slowly through the air. *Rats!* He thought. *We were so close.*

The ball came down on Liam, who didn't see it coming. It bounced off his head toward Miranda, who slopped through the muddy grass to a spot right in front of the net. By the time the ball came down, Miranda was under it. She bonked it forward with her head.

GOAL!

Shaquille and Jeremy got to Miranda first and lifted her into the air. Then the whole team buried her in a hog pile.

Nobody looked happier than Coach Jenkins. Conor saw him do a little victory dance, hopping up and down with his arms pumping the air.

The Falcons' 1-0 lead held up. When the whistle sounded to end the game, Coach ran onto the field. He tried to pick up the whole team in his arms. "Good going, team! And Miranda—you really used your head!"

"It was Conor who used his head," said Miranda. She put up her hand, and Conor high-fived it.

The Falcons were one-for-the-season, and Conor couldn't wait until next year. A new idea was already forming in his brain...

The Flying W.