



FRANKIE AND THE WORLD CUP CARNIVAL

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SCHOLASTIC INC.

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40

*To my mom, Pat, who encouraged
me to do my homework in
between kicking a ball all around
the house, and is still with me
every step of the way.*



*Welcome to a fantastic
fantasy league—the greatest
soccer competition ever held
in this world or any other!*

*You'll need four on a team,
so choose carefully. This is a lot
more serious than a game in the
park. You'll never know who your
next opponents will be, or
where you'll face them.*

*So lace up your cleats, players,
and good luck! The whistle's
about to blow!*

The Ref

PART ONE





CHAPTER 1

"Move over!" said Louise as she came into the living room, carrying a bowl of chips. Frankie shifted along the couch, pressing right up against Charlie.

"I can't go any farther," grumbled Charlie, pointing with his goalie gloves to Max, Frankie's pet dog.

He was curled up at the end of the sofa, asleep. "I thought dogs slept in baskets, anyway."

Max opened one eye and growled softly.

"Not *that* dog," said Frankie, laughing. "He just wants to watch the game with the rest of us."

"He's asleep!" said Charlie.

It was halftime in the World Cup Semifinal, and England was one-all with Argentina. At stake was a place in the Final against Brazil, where the tournament was taking place. Frankie had to pinch himself—no one had thought England would get this far. Especially not his dad. He'd

booked a table at a fancy restaurant for himself and Frankie's mom on the night of the semifinal. He'd never thought he might actually miss an England game!

Which meant there was more room on the sofa for Frankie and his friends.

Charlie was trying to get a chip from the bowl, but he was struggling to pick one up.

"Why not take your gloves off?" said Frankie, knowing what the answer would be.

"No can do," said Charlie. "A goalkeeper's always got to be ready."

Frankie and Louise shared a

smile. Sometimes Charlie took things too far.

The TV was showing a replay of the other semifinal between Brazil and Germany. The game had been won when Ricardo, the nineteen-year-old Brazilian striker, had scored an incredible overhead kick in the last minute of the game. The fans were already calling it a "Ricardo." The TV showed the kick from several angles, normal speed and in slow motion. Frankie could only shake his head in amazement. The commentator was talking about how Ricardo had grown up very poor, living in a single room with his four sisters.

"I wish I could score a goal like that," said Frankie.

"I bet you could," said Louise.

Frankie shrugged. It was all very well scoring a great goal, but to do it in a game as important as a semifinal was another thing entirely.

"Imagine the pressure he was under!" said Charlie.

Frankie heard footsteps pounding down the stairs and his brother, Kevin, burst into the room wearing a new Brazil jersey. The only downside to his parents being out was that Kevin had to stay in to babysit.

"What's the score, babies?" he said.

He shoved Max onto the floor, then flopped on the sofa. Louise's bowl of chips spilled all over Charlie. Max grabbed a few from the carpet, then scampered back to his basket.

"It's one-all," said Frankie, trying not to get irritated. *Kevin's not much of a fan if he hasn't even watched the first half*, he thought.

Kevin snatched the remaining chips from Louise's lap and stuffed a handful into his mouth. "I bet England loses," he said. "They always lose."

Louise glared at him. "Come on, Frankie," she said. "Let's go kick the ball around out in the yard. There's

still five minutes until the second half starts.”

Charlie followed Louise through the French doors and into the yard, but first Frankie went to the back of the kitchen. In the cabinet under the sink were two balls. One was a few weeks old, and the other was a battered peeling wreck that barely bounced. Only a few people knew its secret. He grinned to himself, recalling all of the adventures they’d had, thanks to his magic soccer ball. Well, tonight he didn’t want an adventure—he just wanted a quick game with his friends, then to get back for the second half. He took

the good ball and closed the cabinet door.

It was a warm evening with clear blue skies. The neighborhood was quiet, with everyone indoors watching the game. Frankie bounced the ball a couple of times on his foot, then kicked it to Louise. She controlled it under her foot.

“Why not try that kick, Frankie?” she said. “I’ll kick it up for you.”

Frankie smiled. “Okay. You ready, Charlie?”

His friend had taken up position by the fence. The gap between two fence-posts was the goal they normally used.

"Always ready," said Charlie,
spreading his gloves.

Louise chipped the ball into the
air, and Frankie watched it sail
toward him over his shoulder. At
the last moment, he flicked his body
backward.

"Loser!" shouted a voice.

Frankie's foot skimmed the ball
and he landed in a heap on his back.

