

STREETSKILLZ I

GOLDEN GOAL

By Charlie Human • Published 2010

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STORY TEASER

Nkosinathi is a soccer-crazy sixteen-year-old from Du Noon township in Cape Town. He wants only two things – to play soccer and to win the heart of Rose, a beautiful tomboy in his soccer team.

When he's dropped from his team and harassed by the neighbourhood bully Khaya, he loses hope of achieving his goals. That is until he enlists the help of a crazy old soccer pro named The Professor...

CHARACTERS

These are the main characters in Streetskillz:

Nkosinathi, 16

Nkosinathi, or Nathi as his friends call him, wants to play soccer and to have people give him a soccer nickname, like a pro, but he would be happy if his major crush Rose would call him anything, as long as she calls him.

Nathi's father died when he was young, and he lives with his mother and his younger sister.

Rose, 15

Rose is a pretty tomboy who plays soccer and takes no nonsense from anyone. Especially boys. She's really clever and good at schoolwork.

The Professor, 60

The Professor is an ex-professional soccer player who watches all the games in the neighbourhood. Some of the kids say he's crazy, but he might just be the person that can help Nathi get back on the team.

Khaya, 17

Khaya is the captain of a rival team and the neighbourhood bully. His father owns a big taxi business and Khaya lets everybody know about it. The really bad news? He doesn't like Nathi.

CHAPTER 1

My team squares off against our opposition for the start of the second half of the game. We're playing on a stretch of dusty road and I can smell the salty tang of the sea and the bitter scent of the oil refinery on Koeberg Road. It's the smell of my hometown, Du Noon township in Cape Town.

I wipe the sweat from my brow and push my short dreadlocks out of my face. My eyes, are totally focused on the action that's about to begin. The holidays are here – there's no more school for the whole of the World Cup – but relaxation is the last thing on my mind right now. With the holidays have come Streetskillz, the greatest thing to happen to Du Noon since Ma Lettie hooked up satellite TV in her shebeen.

Streetskillz is a street soccer tournament like no other. A local businessman has sponsored the event, creating a street pitch outside the local shebeen. At each end, the goal posts are wrapped in the flags of the countries participating in the World Cup, and the neighbourhood kids have taken to writing messages on them in marker pen.

There is even talk of soccer talent scouts being here for the final game! The rules are simple: four neighbourhood teams play games against each other throughout the duration of the World Cup, with the top two competing for the title of Streetskillz Champions.

Right now the only skill my team – The Dynamites – is showing, is in being beaten. The score is 2-0 to our opponents, The Leopards.

Khaya, the tall and muscular Leopard's captain is a lethal striker. He has his hair pulled back into cornrows and shiny earrings gleam in both ears. He grins at me menacingly. Khaya knows his team is going to win.

The whistle blows and Khaya comes racing down the pitch. I'm standing ready to tackle, but Khaya is too quick and sidesteps me easily. He blasts his shot in. 3-0 to The Leopards.

"Hey Benni McCarthy," Khaya shouts at me, "you must stop eating all that chicken your mother sells or you're going to be dropped from your team too, Big Mac."

I feel my face flush with anger. I was a bit chubby as a younger boy and even though my body has since slimmed down as I've grown taller Khaya never lets me forget it.

Rose, a team mate I secretly have a huge crush on, takes the kick off and dazzles The Leopards midfielders taking a long shot on goal, but the goalie punches it over the bar for a corner kick.

Khaya grins at Rose. She's a tomboy, but is very pretty with curly brown hair, light brown eyes and an explosion of freckles across the bridge of her nose.

"Are you called Rose because you smell so nice?" he says standing close behind her.

"How nice of you to think so," Rose says smiling, "but no, it's not because of that."

"Then why is it?" Khaya asks as the corner kick sails over the box.

"It's because I have thorns," Rose says, elbowing him hard in the stomach as she jumps to head the ball to me.

I stop the ball with my chest. Finally here is my chance. The ball drops to the ground and I kick.

Reader comments

Here are some comments left by readers at www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

Its nice to dream big. My dream is to become the world famous authoress. **Heart+of+fire**

I have lot of plans nd i doubt my self i dnt knw if i cn achiev them i want to be an actor nd i want to be a lawyer bt i dnt thnk i cn everytym wen i thnk am in the right track smethng comes up

Playing 4 bafana bafana is a dream cum true 4 any young soccer player.things jst dnt happen u gt 2 make it happen if nathi cn keep hz head up wit determination,hardwork nd discipline no 1 cn stop hm bt hz gt 2 do da ryt thngs in order 2 gt da gal of hz dreams if he stays focused she wil realize dat they mearnt 2 b.

What do you think?

Nathi dreams of playing soccer for Bafana Bafana. What are your big dreams for the future?

To answer this question, or to leave your own comment, go to www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

CHAPTER 2

The ball misses the goal by a mile. The Leopards laugh so hard they can barely stand.

"I hope you don't try score like that with girls," Khaya shouts.

I feel so humiliated I can barely move. My little dog, Ronaldo, barks on the sidelines.

"Shut that mutt of yours up," Khaya shouts.

I barely notice as the game restarts. The Dynamites best defender stops the Leopard's play, but he hits the ground hard as Khaya takes him down with a crushing tackle.

"Get up," says Khaya, "this isn't Uruguay and you aren't Suarez. You can't just roll around on the ground and hope for a free kick."

I can see our defender isn't faking. His ankle is already swollen as my teammates help him off the pitch. One of the ladies who sells cooldrinks at the nearby taxi rank gives him some ice from her bucket to help bring down the swelling.

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Rose's younger brother is brought on as a substitute and the game continues. Eventually the final whistle blows with the result at 5-0.

I look over to where an old man is standing leaning against a lamppost watching. He's dressed smartly with an old-fashioned hat perched on top of his grey hair. His face is craggy and lined, but his mouth is curled in a smile as he hums along to the music that is playing from the small radio that he carries in one hand.

I groan out loud. If there's one person I wish hadn't seen me miss, it's the Professor. Rumour has it that he'd played for the *Amakhosi* when he was younger. He always watches when the kids play soccer, but he never says anything. Khaya says it's because he missed a big penalty when he was younger and had gone crazy.

"I can't believe we lost our first game" Chippa says, slumping to the ground.

"We'd better improve or we're not going to make the final," snaps Rose, kicking a cooldrink tin.

"Well, I'm the captain and I say we have to drop the players that can't play," Chippa announces.

He turns to look at me.

"Sorry, but you're just not good enough. We have to drop you."

Reader comments

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What doesn't kill makes you strong,maybe the decision taken by the captain is the best.

Heart of fire

Kerrie+de+chandler says

He shuldn't loose hope.he shuld jst practice a lot & learn all da soccer skills from proffesionals on tv & aniwwhere.he should jst focus & b a hardworker,then he'll show them wat he's made of. **Kerrie de chandler**

Nathi must nt give up.Following ur dreams n percerverance leads 2 success.Lyf is full of challenges and this is one of them.All he can do is move on and find other ways to reach his dreams. **Milley**

What do you think?

For Nathi, being dropped from the team is the worst thing that could have happened to him. Do you have any advice for him?

To answer this question, or to leave your own comment, go to www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

CHAPTER 3

I look up at the large scoreboard that has been erected next to the street-soccer pitch outside Ma Lettie's shebeen for the Streetskillz tournament. I'm still giving myself a hard time for missing that easy goal in the opening game and the scoreboard makes me feel even worse. It shows the four teams and their points, plus the top goal scorers for the tournament. Unsurprisingly Khaya 'Young Star' is at the top.

I sigh. I would love to be a real soccer player and have a nickname. Khaya is called "Young Star" because he started playing when he was really little and his natural talent shone through from the beginning. Chippa is called "Masterpiece" because he's an artist with a soccer ball. But I don't have one. Sometimes I wonder whether anybody even knows my real name.

I trudge home along the litter-strewn edges of Potsdam road with Ronaldo running happily along next to me. Trucks carrying equipment for farms trundle past and large military vehicles rumble through on their way to their base at Ysterplaat.

I reach the corner of Dumasani Road where Mr. Isaac sells appliances out of a large shipping container. Right now he's sitting on an old lawn chair smoking his tobacco pipe.

"Hey Nathi," he shouts, "Portugal is giving North Korea a hiding, come and watch."

Mr. Isaac has balanced an old TV on a broken washing machine. He adjusts the TV aerial and the picture flickers to reveal Ronaldo passing the Korean defense and touching in an easy goal.

"Look, it's you, Ronaldo. Although you're much better looking than he is."

Mr. Isaac pats Ronaldo, who rolls over and lies waiting to be tickled.

"Just like his namesake," Mr. Isaac says, "always looking for attention. Oh yes, how did your game go Nathi?"

I sigh and shake my head.

"Ag, never mind, you must be like Bafana and keep on trying."

I watch until the end of the game, with Portugal hammering home an amazing seven goals, and then make my way home.

"Did you see their pro boots?" I ask Ronaldo. The little dog barks and I laugh.

"It's ok, I've got the new Barefoot Pro's," I say, picking up a stone with my toes and kicking it into the bushes, "so comfortable you feel like you're hardly wearing anything."

"Talking to yourself now?" a voice says from behind me.

I turn to see Rose cycling up behind me.

"No, I..." I start, but she cycles past before I can say anything to redeem myself.

Dropped from the team and caught talking to myself on the same day. Could it get any worse?

Reader comments

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Portugal simply because he had already named his dog ronaldo.it means ronaldo is his favourite player and he would like to play with/like him. **Glamour+gal**

He is lo0kin for wayz to improve and see's al the big starz like ronaldo. Bt he doesnt even hav bootz 2 start wit and al da ada guys hav nicknames bt even wit al da difficulties, he stil loves s0ccer

Feeling sorry for himself wont help him in anyway.he must start to pull himself together for the next games.he must know that it takes a hard worker to a job well done and a little faith in himself can help him to achieve his goals and must stop listen to criticism from other people cause that would make him a louse lose. **Nikon**

What do you think?

Who do you think Nathi would most like to see play? *Our readers recommend this: Bafana. Sure they might not be the best team in the world, but he's South African: 48%, Portugal. C'mon, he has a dog named Ronaldo: 38%, Spain. Villa is a goal-scoring machine: 9%, Argentina. If only because he wants to see Maradona shouting on the sidelines: 3%.*

To answer this question, or to leave your own comment, go to www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

CHAPTER 4

I'm still feeling upset about being dropped from Streetskillz when I reach home, a small corrugated iron house that I share with my mother. I pour Ronaldo some water, and leave the little dog sitting happily in his fruit crate kennel.

I stop speechless as I step into the house – there inside is the Professor.

"And this is my eldest," my mother says. "Look my boy, an old friend of your father's has come to visit."

I'm so surprised I still can't get a word out.

"Well aren't you going to say hello?" she asks me. She turns to the Professor. "I'm sorry my boy has no manners."

The Professor smiles. "Young men often prefer to do rather than to talk."

"Well then he can 'do' something and put the kettle on," mom says shaking her head.

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I walk over to the kettle, fill it with water and light the small gas stove. My mind is buzzing with questions. The Professor was a friend of my father's? Why had Ma never told me? She didn't like to talk much about dad since he'd died, but surely she could have told me that my father knew the Professor?

A knock at the door interrupts my thoughts.

"That must be Ma Lettie wanting chickens for the shebeen tonight," mom says, "You'll have to excuse me. You'll look after our guest Nathi?"

"Yes ma."

As she bustles out the door we can hear the squawk of the chickens as they're unceremoniously pulled from their coop.

"I knew your father when I coached a team he played on in Johannesburg," says the Professor.

"My father played soccer?!"

"Oh yes, he worked on the mines and played for a local side." the Professor says, helping himself to some sugar. "He was a great player. We called him "Silver" because he was so valuable to the team. Well...until he decided to leave the game."

"But why did he stop playing, wasn't he good enough?"

The Professor frowns.

"It's a sad story, young man. He was undoubtedly good enough, but people said he missed a goal in a big game on purpose because he'd been bribed."

Reader comments

Here are some comments left by readers at www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

haha I'm known as "The Dictionary", because I know tons of words and how to spell them... sorry to boast. **Maskalanna**

They call me Noise because they say that im loud and talkative. **Milley**

My nickname is Lollipop because they say that i'm sweet,my mom, sisters and aunts like to lick my cheeks and i get very irritated when they do that.but anyway,that's my nickname and i cannot change it. **Zamani**

What do you think?

Do you have a special nickname that people call you? Let us know what it is and why do people call you that?

To answer this question, or to leave your own comment, go to www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

CHAPTER 5

"That's not true, it can't be."

The Professor shakes his head.

"I don't blame him. He was a young man and your mother was pregnant with you. He was earning so little on the mines to send back home to her. She could barely make ends meet."

"But he still cheated."

My anger turns quickly to sadness at this realization.

"So they said," says the Professor, "but it was never proven. What I do know for sure is that while he played, he was a great soccer player – and I see some of his talent in you."

The Professor looks at me as if he's examining me.

"I've come to offer to coach you, but I need to know you're serious about soccer before we take this any further."

I can't stop myself laughing out loud. I don't know how much more serious about soccer I could possibly be!

"I'm going to ask you one question and if you give me a good answer I'd like to offer my time to help to train you up to a higher standard."

I feel my heart quicken and nerves tighten my tummy. This is like an exam at school!

"So," says the Professor, "who do you think should be dropped from the South African soccer team?"

I know exactly what it feels like to be dropped and right now I don't even want to think about doing that to someone else, but the Professor is my only chance of getting back on the team.

"It's a hard one," I say slowly, "but I think Teko hasn't done enough to justify his position."

The Professor looks at me for a long while and then nods, "That's a good answer. We have a deal."

He holds out his hand and as I shake it I feel my heart lift. With an ex-professional player as my coach I might be able to win back my place in the team!

The Professor and I agree on a time to meet the next day. Our practice ground will be the patch of open land that borders the fence that marks the edge of Du Noon. The government has been promising to build houses there for years, but so far the only sign of habitation there is a family of stray cats.

My mom walks back in as the Professor is leaving.

STREETSKILLZ: GOLDEN GOAL

"I couldn't help but overhear," she says after the old man has shuffled out the door, "that's fantastic news, Nathi!"

I'm grinning like a Cheshire cat. Despite the bad news earlier today, I'm actually feeling happy.

"And I've got even better news," she says, "you know you said you wanted a job to earn some extra money in the holidays?"

"Yes?!"

"Well I've found you one for the World Cup!"

Being dropped and Rose laughing at me today are suddenly completely forgotten. Things are looking up.

"Where, ma, where's this job?"

"At Ma Lettie's," my mom says, "and her daughter Rose works there too, so you'll have company."

My soaring heart crashes. Having a job at the shebeen would be great. I'll be able to watch all the Streetskillz games right outside. But Rose working there too? I've never worked in a restaurant before – I'll probably be so nervous I'll drop plates and make a total fool of myself!

Reader comments

Here are some comments left by readers at www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

I wud drop Aaron Mokoena, hz work as captain n a memba of da squad z nasty. Uyiflop nje yangempela. Modise ddnt play well nge wrld cup bt hz a gud playa. **MRS GAXA**

Dey all suck we need a new team

Yes! I think nathi made a good decission.teko was a very best player in bafana bafana but since he realised that everybody is talking of him,that very company want to make advertisement with him and that he is a good player.i think he thought that because he earn a lot of money,the is no need to be a good player again and that is effecting the team. **Gadafi**

What do you think?

Did Nathi make the right team player decision for Bafana Bafana? If you were in his position whom would you drop?

To answer this question, or to leave your own comment, go to www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

CHAPTER 6

"Ma Lettie is expecting you in half an hour. Give it your best shot and try and make a good impression please."

I'm thrilled at the chance to earn some money of my own, but the thought of working with Rose terrifies me. What if I make a mistake? Anyway, I can't avoid it.

I feed Ronaldo earlier than usual, wash myself in the large tin basin in the corner of the room and then put on my best clothes.

"Now go," mom says, smiling her approval at seeing me so smartly dressed, "you don't want to be late."

The shebeen is on the other side of Du Noon, alongside the street soccer pitch. The sun is setting as I walk and in the distance I can see the sea shimmering.

A bunch of men are sitting outside the shebeen drinking beer and eating samp, beans and chicken while watching soccer on the big screen above the Streetskillz pitch. The Colts and the Aces are warming up for their first game of the street tournament. The Streetskillz games are happening at the same time as the World Cup games, so the organiser has had a big screen erected on the street so that people can watch both games at the same time.

As I spot Rose I hold my breath. Even in an apron she looks beautiful.

"I hope you can carry plates better than you can kick," Rose says, glancing towards the Streetskillz scoreboard, but then she smiles and hands me an apron. "Come on, I'll show you the ropes."

At first I'm very nervous, but I gradually settle in, catching glimpses of the street soccer and the USA vs. Ghana game on the big screen as I help to clear plates and take drinks to the customers.

"Ghana is Africa's last hope," Rose says as she piles a stack of plates into my hands.

I grin. I love talking soccer and I've never met a girl like Rose who loves it as much as I do. We talk tactics and about players in both the World Cup and in Streetskillz as we work. I'm surprised at how nice Rose is when you get to know her. She isn't nearly as tough as she makes out to be.

I'm about to say something about Kaka's red card against the Ivory Coast when one of the customers stumbles backwards and knocks into me. I'm carrying a huge pile of plates and they wobble as I struggle to keep control of them. If I drop them, I might well be fired on my first night. That would be almost as bad as being dropped from the team!

Reader comments

Here are some comments left by readers at www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

STREETSKILLZ: GOLDEN GOAL

Dear rose. My heart bounces like a soccer ball when i think of u. Your smile is stuck in my head like glue. Wish we could be a team, me and u. I like u very much, hope u like me
2. Nyathi. **Latino**

Dear Rose, i've been meaning to tell u this for quite some time now. Truth be told i've got a mind boggling, sense numbing, heart pounding, stomach flipping, take my breath away, head over heels, knee shaking, day dreaming, butterfly fluttering crush on, my heart beats so loudly its like an orchestra of vuvuzelas in my ears. Thats how i feel about u.
Noah

May the beauty of life touch your heart today, turn your hope into reality and your desire as well as your dreams into a day of magnificent joy. may your heart beat the same note to mine, i can prove all the caring, loving and take you where we both belong to... to be with you will not just wasting time but is my passion and i promise if you be with me, i wil not hurt you because not to hurt you is my prayer because i love you... come closer and closer and closer to give it a try. **Gadafi**

What do you think?

Help Nathi win Rose's heart. Write a love message to Rose from him?

To answer this question, or to leave your own comment, go to www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

CHAPTER 7

I desperately try to stop the plates from cascading to the floor, using my leg to balance myself against the wall as I duck back and forth. The plates teeter wildly in my hands and two topple from top of the pile and hurtle toward the floor. I shoot out a hand and catch both plates between my fingers. I can't believe I just pulled that off! Call me ninja-waiter!

"Wow, great catch!" Rose says.

I put the plates down with a grin.

"Maybe I should be a goalie," I smile.

The rest of the night flies by smoothly, but I'm exhausted as we finish up.

"The Aces beat the Colts," Rose says, "and we're playing the Colts tomorrow."

As she looks at me I can see her realize her mistake.

"Well I mean, you could still come and watch," she says awkwardly.

"I'll be practicing with a pro," I smile, "but good luck."

Rose gives me a puzzled look, but I'm not ready to tell her about the Professor yet. That's my secret for now.

STREETSKILLZ: GOLDEN GOAL

"Well maybe we can work on our geometry project together," Rose says nonchalantly.

I shrug coolly and nod.

I manage to keep up the act until I'm out the door and then I break into a huge smile.

I'd planned to leave the geometry project to the last day of holidays, but if it means spending time with Rose then I'll definitely give doing a project early a try. OK so it isn't a proper date, its just homework, but still!

I wake up early the next morning for my first training session with the Professor. The chickens are scratching and clucking in their coop as I make my way out the door and toward the empty field at the edge of Du Noon. The field borders on the swampy, marshland in front of Du Noon. It's not ideal for soccer training as it's muddy and full of ditches, but other than the dirt roads, it's the only place to practice.

"I'm going to be training with a real pro, Ronaldo," I shout to Ronaldo as we race down toward where the Professor is waiting for us. Ronaldo barks his encouragement.

The Professor is dressed in a long red overcoat and is sporting a hat with a feather in it. His little radio is tucked under his arm.

"What's the first rule of success at any sport?" the Professor asks me straight away.

"Win?" I guess.

The Professor shakes his head. "Fitness, fitness, fitness! Ten times around the field. I'm timing you."

I run through the mud quickly at first, but gradually slow my pace. After my tenth round I stop and hunch down breathing heavily – a dirty but happy Ronaldo runs over and jumps into my lap.

"I thought you were going to teach me how to play?" I gasp once I almost have my breath back, "how about you teach me how to do a bicycle kick instead of how to run around a field?"

The Professor takes off his hat and frowns down at me.

"Soccer is one of the most physical sports in the world," he says "if you can't commit to improving your fitness, I can't be your coach."

Reader comments

Here are some comments left by readers at www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

Well firstly. .stretching would be best to kick off his exercising session as he needs to stretch his muscles to avoid cramps secondly. .jogging around helps with pace stamina and lastly push ups sit ups as well as stomach exercises as they also help with stamina.

Maiz

STREETSKILLZ: GOLDEN GOAL

Nathi is ambitious ,hardworking , kind but sometimes he is lazy.He always go for what he believes is right and he has a dream i just want to say to "NATHI" follow it and it will come true!

Why daznt pro teach nathi hw 2 ply?coz tym iz runin nd if he daznt teach hw wil he eva get bck at de team? **Young**

What do you think?

Help Nathi get fitter. Name three other exercises that he could do to help him with his training?

To answer this question, or to leave your own comment, go to www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

CHAPTER 8

I can feel a terrible stitch cutting into my left side. The fitness training the Professor is asking me to do feels like some kind of horrible torture. Quitting now might be much easier. But I know I'll regret it if I do.

"Ok, Prof, I'll do any exercises you want me to do."

"Good," says the Professor smiling, "now run around the field another ten times."

I grit my teeth and lumber around the field again.

For the rest of the week, between watching the World Cup and cheering as the Dynamites beat the Colts in the Streetskillz tournament, I follow the Professors training regime.

There are no Streetskillz games to watch on Friday, so I use the time before my shift at the shebeen to go for a run through Du Noon and up Potsdam road. On my way back home I spy Rose walking purposefully through Du Noon carrying a pile of books.

I jog up behind her and hear her muttering, "If x is 50 and y is 90 degrees..."

"Talking to yourself?" I laugh.

She jumps and spins around, then grins when she sees it's me.

"I guess you're not the only one," she smiles.

"Want to practice some passing and shooting?"

Rose shakes her head.

"I've got to do my geometry project."

"Aww, c'mon, homework during the holidays?"

STREETSKILLZ: GOLDEN GOAL

"Well, I need to do well this year if I'm going to get a scholarship to university," Rose says matter-of-factly.

"I don't get that geometry stuff," I confess, "besides, when am I ever going to need to use angles, I'm not going to be a scientist or anything."

"So what are you going to do then?" Rose asks, reaching down to pat Ronaldo.

The little dog rolls onto his back and closes his eyes with delight.

"A pro soccer player. First I'll get back into the Dynamites, then Bafana Bafana!"

Rose laughs, "OK, superstar, well maybe angles can help you."

I raise my eyebrows. "Uh, I don't think so."

Rose sighs and shakes her head, "OK well tell me this – how does the offside rule work?"

"Oh that's easy."

Rose flips open the notebook she's holding.

"So, this is your opponent's defender," she says drawing a circle. "And this is one of your midfielders."

She draws another circle on the other side of the pad.

"Now where does your striker have to be in order to be onside when your midfielder passes to him?"

"He has to be behind or in line with the defender."

"Right," says Rose, "so let's put him here."

She draws another circle below the defenders and then joins the circles up to make a triangle.

"This angle is ninety degrees, what's this one?"

I think hard, imagining the positions of the players clearly in my mind.

"Um, I dunno, 30 degrees?"

"Right!" Rose says.

"Sho, you're like a soccer Einstein," I grin.

"You better believe it," Rose says.

We go through different soccer tactics and scenarios using angles before we realize its time to get to the shebeen.

As we walk down Dumasani Road we see Khaya standing in the street. We have to get to work and there's no other route to take. There's no option – we have to walk past him.

Reader comments

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Nathi is taking after his father against all oddz he will achieve his golden goal because he has set his mind upto it and when one had that kind passion and determination he or she moves the boardar of the earth.you gotta dream to be someone and that exactly what Nathi is doing dispite the criticism and hardship he still goes strong.you just gotta remember that education is the key to success.you have what its takes Nathi,go for it!
Gadafi

His gona b a brilliant soca player. **Ethnik**

I think Maths for knowing angles & where to shoot,English for helping him to communicate with team mates and referees.And mostly Life Orientation to help him wt his fitness and health. **Cleverz11**

What do you think?

Geometry might help Nathi with his soccer. What other school subjects do you think can help him in his life? *Our readers recommend this: English – maybe studying Shakespeare can help him write a love poem to Rose: 20%, Science – if Maths can help his soccer, science definitely can too: 56%, History –knowing more about the past might help him deal better with the present: 22%*

To answer this question, or to leave your own comment, go to www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

CHAPTER 9

"Hey, Benni McCarthy," Khaya shouts, "are you playing with girls now that you've been dropped?"

Khaya seems determined to block our way.

"You're just jealous," Rose says.

"My dad owns the biggest taxi business around," Khaya says, "and I'm top scorer in the Streetskillz so far, what do I have to be jealous about?"

"Maybe because girls don't walk with you – they run away from you."

I know it's a stupid thing to say, but I can't help myself.

"Hayi, voetsek" Khaya swears, walking up and sticking his face right in front of mine.

STREETSKILLZ: GOLDEN GOAL

"You're a tough guy now that you have this little piece of tomboy trash next to you?"

"Talk about her like that again and I'll show you how tough I am," I growl, pushing Khaya in the chest.

Khaya is solid, muscular and is much bigger than me – and he's looking for a fight. As I push him I know I've made a big mistake.

Khaya grabs me roughly by the shirt.

"Now let me show you how I really play soccer," he says, "but this time you're the ball."

"Two little boys fighting," a voice says from behind us.

We all turn to see the Professor, wearing an old velvet jacket and a French beret and looking serene.

"Who are you calling a little boy, old man?" Khaya snarls.

"Well I just think that only little boys fight in the dirt, real men have other ways to sort out their differences."

Khaya lets go of my shirt. I can see he feels embarrassed by the professor's words.

"So how do real men sort things out then?" Khaya demands viciously.

"How about a soccer skills challenge between the two of you?" the Professor says. "Unless of course you're scared you'll lose?"

Khaya laughs. "Lose to this little boy?" he says pushing me again, "I don't think so. You name the time and the place and I'll be there."

"Tomorrow at four on the field," the Professor says.

I'm grateful that I'm not about to get beaten up, but now I have a terrifying new challenge – a soccer skills challenge against the Leopards' best player! What is the Professor thinking?

Reader comments

Here are some comments left by readers at www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

I to avoid noise",so that's exactly what nathi should do. Heart of fire

Violence will not going to help you Nathi achieve your goal.all you had to do was that you should had let him go and do not fight him.and i think you should have talk smothly cause you eldult alrieady,act your age. Gadafi

Nathi needs to start standing up for himself and n0t d0ubt his talents. If he doesnt let khaya's c0mments or his intimidati0n tactics get to him, khaya wont have a hold on him. Khaya only picks on him because he sees nathi's insecurity. Nathi, believe in yourself, dont let what other people think stop you from getting to where you wana go! Goodluck

What do you think?

Nathi is often bullied by Khaya. What advice can you give him to help him deal with it in a constructive way?

To answer this question, or to leave your own comment, go to www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

CHAPTER 10

The sky is grey and there's a cold wind blowing plastic packets across the open expanse of land in front of Du Noon. Ayanda, a girl from school, has put down rows of flattened cardboard boxes to protect her from the mud, and is practicing gymnastics on the field where I train. She moves them across to practice on the sidelines when our group approaches – she can see something serious is about to happen.

I'm feeling so tired. I've hardly slept thinking about the soccer skills challenge against Khaya. Even Ronaldo is quiet as he watches us square off.

My hands feel sweaty and I have a feeling in my chest like I'm about to get into a fight – which, in a way, I am. I guess I'm fighting for the right to hold my head up when I walk down the street – and to prove to Khaya that I'm not inferior to him. It may just be a soccer skills challenge, but for me it's a vital contest.

"The first exercise," the Professor says, "is sprinting."

Khaya glances towards me and laughs derisively, "This is going to be easy."

The two of us make our way through the mud to one side of the field. The Professor raises his hand and when he drops it Khaya and I rocket down the field. To my surprise Khaya isn't as fast as he thinks and we get to the end at the same time, both of us slipping, then sprawling to the muddy ground in our attempt to reach the end first.

"I'm just warming up," Khaya says, wiping the mud off his hands and staring daggers at me.

The Professor puts us through progressively harder soccer training and each time I manage to keep pace with Khaya. The fitness that I've built up is really helping! Khaya is getting tired. I know Khaya is a talented player but I can tell that he's been too lazy to spend time doing fitness training.

"This next test is to see how well you play in the box," the Professor announces.

He places two bricks on the ground to make goals.

"Rose will take a corner kick, and if you get the last touch into the goal, the point is yours. We'll play best out of five."

Rose neatly chips the ball in and in an instant Khaya is on it, pushing me out of the way and heading the ball into the goal.

STREETSKILLZ: GOLDEN GOAL

"Ladummma," Khaya shouts.

He holds out his hand to help me up. As I take it, Khaya pushes me back down to the ground.

"I don't help losers," he sneers.

Rose fetches the ball and prepares herself for another kick, while Khaya jostles me as we wait for the ball.

I find myself thinking about the angles in my geometry textbook. I can see where Rose is angled and where Khaya will jump. As soon as the ball comes in I sidestep him and volley the ball between the bricks for a goal.

Khaya is angry now, and at the next corner kick he trips me as the ball comes in, then dribbles the ball into the goal.

"Face it," Khaya says, "you're not good enough."

The next corner kick comes in and Khaya slams into me hard, then falls to the ground clutching his face. I take the opportunity to chip the ball between the bricks.

"Foul!" Khaya shouts.

"You dive almost as convincingly as Suarez," I retort.

Khaya gets up and glares at me.

"You're going to pay for that," he says.

The score is two all. The next goal will decide the challenge.

Reader comments

Here are some comments left by readers at www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

Err i thnk its...eh m inspired by hm ma slf...its VILLA ke skhokho die maan he's 1 of da bst strykr in da wrld he fyts nd scrambls 4 da bal nd eventually he alwys gts wths his "da bal nd a goal" so nathi mst do da sme...fyt 4 whts his!! **Q-RIOUS**

Nathi u c now that exercise do help, prof is helping you with fitness and Rose helped with geometry, now you are competing with talented Khaya. Nathi keep working hard on the field and use tactics that u get from Rose. **Jobs**

Instead of nathi worrying about any competition that he may be facing, he needs to look inside himself and find the confidence that he needs. He needs to be self motivated.

SASHA

What do you think?

Which soccer player do you think Nathi is most inspired by? *Our readers recommend this:*

Tshabalala – he did score the first goal of the World Cup: 36%, Forlan – when he gets the ball you know Uruguay’s opponents are in trouble, 21% Villa – he’s one of the best strikers in the world: 31%, Sneijder – without him Holland wouldn’t be nearly as dangerous: 10%.

To answer this question, or to leave your own comment, go to www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

CHAPTER 11

Rose positions the ball for another corner kick. The cross sails in and Khaya and I struggle so fiercely with each other that we both miss the ball. It rolls past the goal and into a mud-filled ditch. Khaya goes to fetch it and I’m shocked to see him pick up a rusty nail and stick it into the ball, puncturing it.

"The ball's flat," Khaya says, throwing the deflated ball at the Professor's feet, "and anyway this is stupid. I could beat him in my sleep."

"You could have won," Rose says as I squat down on the muddy ground breathing heavily.

I nod, but I’m not so sure about that. Khaya is very strong and hates to lose. A few of the neighbourhood kids have been watching and Chippa comes over.

"You played really well," he says, "better than you ever did with The Dynamites."

I shrug, bitterly disappointed that I hadn't been able to beat Khaya.

"You can come back to the team as a substitute against the Aces," says Chippa, "you really proved yourself out there."

My spirits instantly soar. I’m back in with a chance!

The Professor smiles. "Well done, Nathi, you did well."

"Thanks Prof. I’m exhausted, I think I need to go and chill now."

The Professor shakes his head. "We have training remember?"

"But..."

The Professor cuts me off.

"Just because you get into fights, doesn't mean you can skip practice."

I watch Ayanda practice yet another flick-flack on the sidelines and I sigh ruefully.

"Ok, ok. Let's practice."

I cheerfully wave goodbye to Chippa and Rose. It’s a good feeling to be part of the Dynamites again. And then I drag myself to my feet.

STREETSKILLZ: GOLDEN GOAL

"Now your major problem is that you're too stiff." the Professor says. "You're so worried that you're going to make a mistake that you're not flowing with the ball."

"But how do I do that?" I ask wearily.

"Pretend you're dancing," says the Professor. "There's a reason they call the Brazilians 'the Samba Boys', you know."

The Professor does a few old-fashioned dance steps.

"Soccer is like dancing, it takes rhythm and grace. The Brazilians play like a Samba and the Germans play like a well-timed waltz."

"And now it's your chance," says the Professor as he points to the muddy field, "I want you to dance to get into the rhythm."

I gulp. I hate dancing and I know I'm going to make a complete fool of myself.

Reader comments

Here are some comments left by readers at www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

Well boy hear th prof out and get your body shakin what have you got loose?. .dancing is all about rhythm and and its good for your soccer skillz as well.just a few steps and youre already in it plus if you can dance you might be able to win rose's heart too . .by just askin her to dance with you its amazing how far that might take you . . .so look at the bigger picture boy.

Nathi wasnt much of a soccer player as i recall. But with the time and effort his put into his fitness, he has improved drastically. Therefore if Nathi just gives the dancing a try the long term benefits will be endless. Ultimately, he will loosen up abit, impress the Prof and Rose, and show all those who doubted him, what his made of. My main point is, try different things, it might just help 1 reach 1s potential. **Noddy**

Nathi,u mst pretend as if u are alone in yo room infront of a mirror dancing in yo private. I always do that and i knw um perfect u should try dat wt da profesor he wil b impressed n u wil b a gud sustitud 2, gugluk Nathi. **Mrs Zwide**

What do you think?

Nathi is not much of a dancer. What advice can you give him to stop him from making a fool of himself?

To answer this question, or to leave your own comment, go to www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

CHAPTER 12

I close my eyes and pretend I'm on the dance floor. I really try to get into it, throwing my arms about and stamping my feet. Ronaldo yaps at my heels, convinced I'm playing a game with him.

"This is crazy," I mutter to myself.

But then again, the Professor has a reputation for being a bit nuts.

"What exactly is that?" he asks me, with raised brows.

"I'm dancing."

"That's dancing?" the Professor says, "I thought you were having some kind of fit!"

I grin at him. It's true – I'm not much of a dancer.

"Hang on a second," the Professor says.

He turns on his little radio and tunes it.

"Germany's comprehensive defeat of Argentina has made them the favourite for the 2010 World Cup," a voice says on the radio.

"Leave that on!" I say, but the Professor carries on tuning. Eventually he finds the station he wants.

"African jazz – now that's real music," the Professor says with satisfaction as the sound of trumpets and saxophones fills the air.

I think the music sounds really old-fashioned but the Professor's advice has worked so far, so I'll go with it.

"You can't dance by yourself to this kind of music," the Professor says.

"Well I'm not dancing with you if that's what you're suggesting" I laugh.

"Young lady," The Professor calls to Ayanda, who is doing a handstand on the side of the field, "would you help us?"

Ayanda flips back to her feet, shrugs and nods.

"Meet your new dance partner," the Professor says.

I feel a wave of nervousness roll over me. I've never danced like this before. Ayanda will tell everybody what a pathetic dancer I am! But I know the Professor won't take no for an answer.

At first I keep on stepping on Ayanda's feet. But after a while I realise that if I listen to the Professor calling out the beat – "one, two, three, four" – and move my feet in time, it all comes together.

STREETSKILLZ: GOLDEN GOAL

“Ok, good,” The Professor says after a while, “now I bet you’re wondering what this has to do with soccer?”

I grin. I’ve been so busy concentrating on the dance steps I’ve forgotten all about soccer.

"One, two, three, four...just like you're dancing," the Professor says, passing the ball to me, and I stop it, dribble it forward, line it up and strike it neatly home.

Aha. Rhythm.

"Now carry on dancing with Ayanda, you're doing well," the Professor says.

As I take Ayanda's hand I spot Rose walking past carrying a stack of textbooks. I wave but she doesn't wave back, she just turns and walks away.

I stop dancing. Rose and I have been getting on so well. What is she so angry about?

Reader comments

Here are some comments left by readers at www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

Nathi brother, GO FOR GOLD...! Rose is totally JEALOUS. At least you now know that she has a crush on you! That is as clear as day judging by her reaction. You GO BOY! **noddy**

I reali lyk nathi!! Hs so ambitious n cool!! Ncoh shame rose is jealous!!! N we all knw dat she lyks nathi!!! Go talk 2 ha nathi n see wats up! Dan u wl knw dat she also has feelings 4 u dan yol cn start dating OK!!!! **Miss POPULARITY**

Its most probably because rose has a crush on nathi. seeing him dance with another girl has made her jealous. nathi ,maybe you should talk to her and assure her that she's the only one you like

What do you think?

Help Nathi out. What do you think Rose is angry about? *Our readers recommend this:*
*She doesn't like jazz music: 1%, She's cross because she wants to do more homework: 1%,
Wake up Nathi! She's jealous because you're dancing with another girl: 96%.*

To answer this question, or to leave your own comment, go to www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

CHAPTER 13

Tricksta flicks the ball up with his feet, catches it on the back of his neck and then rolls it down an arm and back to his feet. On my way to visit my friend Stanton to get some Internet access, I’ve bumped into Tricksta, and as usual am awed by his skills. I clap and Ronaldo barks in appreciation.

STREETSKILLZ: GOLDEN GOAL

Tricksta's real name is Denver, but everyone uses his nickname because he's constantly showing off with a soccer ball. Despite his skill he doesn't actually play soccer, saying that he prefers to keep the ball to himself.

"I'm going to win the tricks championships," Tricksta says. In all the excitement, I'd forgotten that a tricks competition was part of the Streetskillz tournament.

Tricksta flicks the ball onto his knees and stands juggling it from knee to knee.

"Rose has entered," says Tricksta, "tell her that she doesn't stand a chance."

"Rose doesn't seem to want to talk to me," I mutter to myself as I walk toward the building where Stanton works.

Stanton is a guard for one of the industrial business parks along Potsdam road. I met him in a taxi – we got talking about soccer and he's promised to teach me to surf when summer comes.

When I reach the gate and knock on the glass of the guardhouse, a shaggy blonde-haired head wearing a cap that says "Security" sticks out of the window.

"Howzit, bru," Stanton says and holds out his hand for our usual handshake, gripping my hand before we click thumbs. He opens the door of the guardhouse and lets me in. The walls are plastered with surfing posters and rock music blasts out from the speakers on his small hi-fi.

"Can I use the 'Net?" I ask.

Stanton has a computer hooked up to the Internet in his guardhouse.

"Sure, but not too long if my boss catches you here I'm in big trouble."

Cool, now I can check in to my favourite online soccer forum and discuss last night's game with my friends. People from all over the world log onto the forum every day to talk about soccer and I've got friends in England, Nigeria and even from Slovakia. It's pretty cool.

I'm about to respond to a comment about what tactics Germany should use in the semi-final against Spain when I hear an unfamiliar voice behind me.

"Stanton what's going on here, why is this boy on my property?"

I whip round to see a man standing in the doorway of the guardhouse. He's big with a dark beard peppered with grey.

"Mr. Khumalo..." Stanton stutters, "he umm..."

Mr. Khumalo holds a hand up for silence. He looks angry. I freeze. What kind of trouble am I in?

Reader comments

Here are some comments left by readers at www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

Facebook, evryday.

M always on jobsites caus m lukn 4wrk.n it gets dficult by d day.bt helps kip me updated about posts availbl. **Brown eyez**

Supersport cause its easily accessible n free at mxit unfortunately you dnt gt 2 post any comment in the website but keeps me freshly informed an entertained. **Da unusual**

What do you think?

Nathi likes looking on the Internet for soccer news. What Internet sites do you go to most often?

To answer this question, or to leave your own comment, go to www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

CHAPTER 14

"I'm using the Internet," I explain to the large angry-looking man.

"Correction, you're using MY Internet," the man says.

"I'm sorry. I was just using it to check out soccer news, I wasn't on for long."

The man's scowl softens a little.

"Are you playing in the Streetskillz tournament, young man?"

I nod, "For the Dynamites, only as a substitute, but that's not for long!"

The man smiles.

"Ah, the Dynamites – you have a lot of work to do if you want to make the finals."

"You've been following the tournament?" I ask in surprise.

"Young man, I'm the organizer of the tournament."

The pieces click into place. Mr. Khumalo is the businessman that has sponsored the Streetskillz tournament!

Mr. Khumalo smiles again. "Never mind about the Internet, I want to show you something."

He leads Ronaldo and I outside.

"Try to actually guard something for a change, Stanton," he says to the shaggy-haired security guard.

"Yes bru, umm, I mean, sir," Stanton says.

STREETSKILLZ: GOLDEN GOAL

Mr. Khumalo leads me through the office park and into a large office. Through the window I can see the sea glinting in the distance, but I'm not really interested in the view. What's grabbing my attention is the soccer memorabilia that lines the walls. There are soccer shirts in glass cases, Premiere League team scarves and a pair of old, worn boots.

"Aaron Mokoena's," Mr. Khumalo says with a satisfied grin.

"So do you think you can beat the Aces?" Mr. Khumalo says seriously, "because if you don't the Dynamites are out."

"I think we can, we just have to keep possession. Their forwards are strong, but their defense is weak."

Mr. Khumalo and I talk for ages about Streetskillz and about what's been happening in the World Cup. We agree that Ghana had been unlucky, that Holland has a definite chance to win the title and that Diego Forlan is the most dangerous striker of the tournament so far.

It's only when I glance at the clock in the office that I realize that the Dynamites game against the Aces starts in ten minutes! Thankfully Mr. Khumalo is headed there too and offers to give me a lift.

We make it there with a few minutes to spare. I thank Mr. Khumalo, jump out of the car with Ronaldo, and run over to where my team is warming up. Chippa looks at me with raised eyebrows, but doesn't say anything about my being late. Instead he says something entirely surprising.

"Dino has pulled a muscle. You're on Nathi."

Reader comments

Here are some comments left by readers at www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

If you have the opportunity, grab it by both hands and perform very well. He got the chance to be in the starting eleven, he have to work hard to help the dynamites. Good things come to those who work hard, so Nathi show them what you learn from Pro, Rose's geometry and internet, go for it. Bang them goals! **Jobs**

Creative thinking. Creativity theories indicate tht the human brain is divided into 2 hemispheres,rite nd left.whch supprt 2 dfferemt kinds of behaviour. Th rite syd of brain deals wit th whole pic. The left side deals wit wrds, specific part nd analysis. Just be creative! **Gadafi**

never ever let go of your dreams,as they take u to greater heights!! **Ru Ru**

What do you think?

Nathi was very nearly late for the game. What do you use to make sure you don't forget things? *Our readers recommend this: I have a diary: 8%, I put reminders on my cellphone: 31%, I just have a really good memory: 60%.*

To answer this question, or to leave your own comment, go to www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

CHAPTER 15

My heart is pounding like a house beat as I run onto the street pitch as the substitute for the injured Dynamites player. I know that this is my big chance to show everybody I'm good enough to play in the rest of the Streetskillz tournament.

"Loosen up," I whisper to myself as the game starts and Chippa plays the ball up field, "just pretend you're dancing to jazz."

Rose takes a pass from Chippa and crosses it into the box.

"One, two, three, four..." I whisper, remembering the rhythm of the dance the Professor had taught me.

I make it into the box in time, but my header goes wide of the goal.

"Ha!" a voice shouts, "and you thought he could beat me in a skills challenge?"

I turn to see Khaya jeering from the sidelines.

"This kid couldn't even beat me at dominoes, let alone soccer," Khaya shouts.

My confidence leaves me like air from a punctured tyre. The game continues and I have a few more good shots on goal, but they keep going just wide. Why isn't the Professor's advice working?

I'm about to give up when I hear familiar music playing from the sidelines. It's the Professor's jazz. I look across and see the old man holding his radio and smiling. He nods to me and does a few dance steps. I grin back. Ronaldo barks madly from the sidelines, spurring me on.

"Why's that old fool playing his ancient music here?" Khaya asks.

The Leopards' players jeer and laugh at the Professor, but he just smiles serenely.

From then on, everything just seems to go right for me. Chippa taps a short ball into the box and I'm right there to follow through – I strike it confidently into the goal!

Soon after the restart, Rose takes a corner kick and I head it easily past the keeper for another goal! I'm ecstatic! Not only have I scored my first ever goal in a match, but I'm onto a possible hat trick!

A third ball goes home just in time! The whistle blows and the Dynamites players crowd around, cheering and hugging me. Beating the Aces means we're through to the final against the Leopards!

STREETSKILLZ: GOLDEN GOAL

I look on as the scoreboard is updated. There, tied for top place with Khaya "Young Star" and Chippa "Masterpiece", is my name. I still don't have a nickname, but for the first time I don't really mind that much.

"Don't cry too much when I beat you," Khaya hisses as he and the other Leopards players leave the street soccer arena.

But I'm way too busy thinking about something else to let Khaya bother me. I know I've played better than ever before, but was one good performance enough for Chippa to give me back a permanent place on the team?

Reader comments

Here are some comments left by readers at www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

If i was nathi then,i would tell chippa about how hard i have been training to succeed in soccer and that every minute my body is thinking soccer and if chippa gives me the oppurtunity to play then i would never let him down and will always do my best for the team

You are cool and laid back. You are balanced, patient and accept what you are given in life. You are easy to get along with, a good listener. You avoid disagreements and are a peacemaker. You like to make decisions as you go along and try and find easy solutions. Nathi my boy, keep on doing good work! **Gadafi**

"Hey chippa dat was just the first slice of what i have to offer. There is another unseen loaf of my offerings . Just give me a few munites of game time and u'l see rest of the loaf. So the decision is up to u whether you want to see the team win or loose . The team's future lies in your decision." **LLoyd**

What do you think?

If you were Nathi, what would you say to Chippa to convince him that this wasn't just a once-off performance?

To answer this question, or to leave your own comment, go to www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

CHAPTER 16

The next day I head down to the Streetskillz pitch to watch the trick-shot championships – not least of all because Rose is competing. I'm in a good mood. I'm in the top three for the Streestkillz scoring competition, and Chippa has given me a place on the team for the final against the Leopards! Woohooh!

Tricksta and some of the other players show amazing tricking skills, but when Rose's turn comes around, things get off to a rocky start.

STREETSKILLZ: GOLDEN GOAL

"Chippa," Rose says, "you said you'd help me!"

"Hayi, no ways," Chippa says, "you're not kicking a ball off the top of my head."

Rose's main trick is difficult and a maybe just a little bit crazy. She wants Chippa to balance a ball on top of his head, which she'll then bicycle kick off into the goal. But Chippa isn't having any of it.

"I'll do it," I say, stepping out from the crowd and standing next to Rose.

"Be my guest," Chippa says handing me the ball.

I balance the ball on the top of my head and stand waiting for the kick, praying that it will hit the ball, rather than my face! Rose smiles fiercely, steps back, aims and thunders a perfect kick into the goal! The crowd goes wild and I breathe a sigh of relief.

We've barely celebrated when one of the large cooks from the shebeen sticks her head out of a window and gestures towards us.

"You two!" she bellows, "You're late for your shift at the shebeen and Ma Lettie is on the warpath! *Khawulezisa!* Hurry!"

We both know what Rose's mother's like when she gets cross, so we quickly walk across to the shebeen to start our shift.

"Sorry you didn't win," I console Rose as we tie on our aprons.

Rose shrugs, "Tricksta deserved it. It's really cool that you helped me though."

"No problem." I wish I could tell her that I'd do pretty much anything for her.

Rose brushes her curly hair out of her eyes. "So, how are things going with Ayanda?"

I'm totally puzzled. I haven't seen Ayanda since that one practice on the field.

"What do you mean?"

"She's pretty cool," Rose says, "you guys make a good couple."

"A couple?" I almost drop the plates I'm carrying. "We're not a couple!"

"Oh, but I saw you dancing with her?" Rose says, "I thought..."

"That was part of my practice with the Professor," I laugh, "and I'm a terrible dancer!"

"You're right," says Rose, "you're probably the worst dancer I've ever seen in my life."

"I know. And I don't like Ayanda. I like someone else."

"Oh, who?" says Rose, suddenly quiet and looking at me intently.

"You," I say quietly.

Rose moves towards me.

"Really?" she says.

I nod and then suddenly, without knowing how it's happened Rose is in my arms and we're kissing.

"*What's* going on here?" a voice booms behind us. Rose's mother is glaring furiously at us, hands on her hips.

"I'm not paying you to take advantage of my daughter," she scolds, pointing a thick finger at me.

"Get into the kitchen," she says harshly to Rose. She turns to me, "And you – you're fired!"

Reader comments

Here are some comments left by readers at www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

Nathi i understand your situation and i know how its feels to you but i think if that you realy want your job, then tell Mma Rose the truth. Tell her how its happend then apologies. For sho maybe she will understand and maybe you might get your job back. **Gadafi**

Whats more perfect than kissin the girl of ur dreams .im proud of nathi even though he got fired.it was worth it

Jst whn sumthng starts 2 happn it al blows on their faces!!!! Di is reali sad! Wat a way 2 start a relationshp!!!! Sowi nathi n rose!!!! **Miss POPULARITY**

What do you think?

What should Nathi say to Rose's mother? *Our readers recommend this: This isn't what it looks like – I tripped and my lips landed on hers: 11%, Rose was hurt and I was giving her mouth-to-mouth resuscitation: 3%, I'm sorry, but I really like your daughter and I'd like to take her out on a date: 85%.*

To answer this question, or to leave your own comment, go to www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

CHAPTER 17

"I'm sorry my mother fired you," Rose says the next morning, as we're walking down the road together.

She pulls her hoodie over her head against the cold wind and I hug her close to me.

"It's OK. It was all worth it," I reply.

She smiles and my heart leaps at how beautiful she is. I still can't believe I've kissed her!

STREETSKILLZ: GOLDEN GOAL

"I've got to meet the Professor," I tell her.

I don't want to leave Rose, but it's my last training session before the final against the Leopards. I need all the professional help I can get!

I make my way down to the field. The Professor smiles when he sees me, but his eyes look sad.

"What's up Prof? Don't worry – I know I've got to run. No complaints from me today."

"Ah, Nathi," the Professor says, "watching you play against the Aces made me wish for my younger years. Coaching is wonderful but nothing beats the thrill of playing."

He drags a flattened cardboard box towards us, sits down and gestures for me to join him.

"No running today," the Professor says, "and no dancing. Just talking."

I feel a little nervous.

"Don't worry, I'm not dying," chuckles the Professor as he notices my worried face, "I'm old, but I'm not that old yet."

He gestures to the muddy field. "You've trained hard physically," he says, "but that can only get you so far."

I'm listening intently. I can tell the Professor wants to tell me something really important.

"You've heard what people say about me?" the Professor asks

I try to choose my words very carefully.

"Well they say that you missed a penalty and went..."

I stop. This is coming out all wrong.

The Professor smiles, "It's true that I missed a big penalty. But I'm not mad. Well, not madder than most people. But after that I couldn't play. I lost my confidence. I know what it's like when you make a mistake, so when I saw you miss that shot against the Leopards I knew that I couldn't let you give up like I gave up."

The Professor taps his heart as he speaks. "If you want to be a truly great player you have to want it so much that you don't let fear, pain or temptation to quit get in your way."

The old man's eyes are like laser beams as he looks at me.

"So, my boy, my question to you is this. Do you want to be a great player enough to make it?"

Reader comments

Here are some comments left by readers at www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

STREETSKILLZ: GOLDEN GOAL

Nathi always believe in your self, you can do anything you put your mind to, at all times think about what the professor taught you and always be your self in the field don't let your enermies distrust you. Everyone fails at times if u fail to do something don't give up "never give up untill u bust a nut" there's always a next time. Dont be afraid to take risks, the greatest regret is to fail to try rather try 'n fail, when your in the field be active.

To deal with tough times im lucky 2 have the support of my friends,family and my belief in God..talking to someone about your problems can lighten the burdens on your heart.
sweetchic

A man 2 man talk. Reveal true spirit of an individual.and push ur heart with m0tivati0n. Nd the c0urage 2 go 0n. U myt b str0ng bt if u dnt hv the brain 2 use ur strength u just like a lost soul in the centre of a rock

What do you think?

To get to where he wants to be, Nathi needs to learn to overcome difficulties. What helps you deal with tough times?

To answer this question, or to leave your own comment, go to www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

CHAPTER 18

My mind is absolutely clear as I steadily return the Professor's gaze.

"I want to be a great player."

"Then the only thing I can do is wish you good luck," the Professor says, "I know your father would have been proud."

I smile at my mentor. The Prof has already given me more than I could ever have asked for. I'm going to repay him by being the best player that I can possibly be.

Later, when I'm walking back home Khaya's father, Mr. Thobela, pulls up next to me in his Mercedes.

"I hear you're becoming quite dangerous with the ball," Mr.Thobela says.

I smile at the praise, "I've been practicing."

"You know who you remind me of?" Mr. Thobela says, "Luis Suarez."

I stop walking. Suarez had committed a horrible professional foul against Ghana. What is Mr. Thobela trying to say?

"You remind me of Suarez, because he did what he needed to do," Mr. Thobela says.

"He intentionally cheated," I retort.

STREETSKILLZ: GOLDEN GOAL

Mr. Thobela shrugs. "Sometimes you've got to do the clever thing, even if it's not right."

I'm starting to feel uncomfortable. Mr. Thobela usually ignores everybody, why is he bothering to stop and talk today?

"You've got to ask yourself if trying to win against the Leopards is the clever thing to do," Mr. Thobela says slyly.

I stare back at Khaya's dad. What is he talking about?

Mr. Thobela reaches into his car and pulls out a shiny ticket. "This is for the World Cup semi-final."

He hands the gleaming ticket to me, and I take it and look at it closely. It's for the Holland-Uruguay semi-final!

"Why are you giving this to me?" I ask suspiciously.

Mr. Thobela is well known as a ruthless businessman, he doesn't just give things away.

"I'm encouraging you to do what's best for you. Everybody knows there are going to be talent scouts at your game against the Leopards. If I have anything to do with it it's going to be Khaya who wins the top-scorer award. All you have to do is make sure that you don't score a goal and that the Dynamites don't win."

He smiles at me. "You just have to be clever like Suarez. You're not ever going to make it as a pro and you'll forget all about this game. But watching a World Cup semi-final? That's something you'll remember for your whole life."

Reader comments

Here are some comments left by readers at www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

Nathi has become a great player so far and he shouldn't turn his back on his team when they need him the most. so nathi dont be a fool, the minute u walk on to the stadium you'll lose respect and trust from other players and this might be a setback to your career. .remember prof's words. . . "dont let temptation to quit get to you" be a man and take the right decision and going to the semi's is not the ideal one. . .

If i wer in Nathi's shoes, I would not accept that ticket...playin soccer 4 bafana z his dream so he shuld follow dat dream and play so hard 2 win da game dt instead of goin 2 world cup watchn pple wu dnt evn u nd may neva wl...h must nt take d ticket en b bribed lyk wat pple say happend 2hz dad, h shuld jus practis so hz team may win nd myk hm nd othrz who reali care about hm proud. **Cam**

It is all about morals and priorityies, he should forget about the ticket and remember what he had to do to be part of the team, for mr Thobela he does not believe his son is too good he should let boys bring their A game and Nathi does not want to end up like his father or the prof if he had been listening to the prof now it is all about honour and dignity for Nathi.

Danger

What do you think?

Nathi is a good guy, but he's tempted. What do you think he should do?

To answer this question, or to leave your own comment, go to www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

CHAPTER 19

To be at the Holland-Uruguay clash at Cape Town Stadium all I have to do is make sure that the Dynamites lose the upcoming Streetskillz final against the Leopards. It would be simple. I could just mess up a few passes and take a few wild shots at goal. The Leopards are a great team and would definitely capitalize on mistakes like that.

I find myself thinking about my father, whose teammates had called him Silver – he'd taken money to lose a game for his team. If that had been good enough for my father, surely it could be good enough for me?

I smile at Khaya's father, my mind made up.

"You're right," I say, "I do have to think about myself and how I'll feel once the game's over. Cheating would be like giving up on everything."

I hand the ticket back.

"I'll see Khaya on the pitch," I say as I turn and walk away from the shiny silver Mercedes.

That evening I watch Holland beat Uruguay on Mr. Isaac's small TV. For a second I imagine what it would have been like to actually be at the match, but I know in my heart that I've made the right choice.

"So your street soccer final is on Sunday?" Mr. Isaac says, smoke drifting up from his pipe.

I nod. In fact there are TWO finals on Sunday.

"Are you coming to watch?" I ask him. "The World Cup final and the Streetskillz final are on at the same time – it's like a two-for-one special!"

Mr. Isaac shakes his head, "No man, those vuvuzelas drive me *mal*. I'll watch the World Cup on my TV and you can come tell what happened with your match."

That afternoon Chippa rounds up the Dynamites on the field to talk about the upcoming final.

"We know how the Leopards play," Chippa says meaningfully, "and it's not going to be easy...but we can't let them intimidate us."

Just then Khaya strolls up to the field with a ball in his hand.

"Sho, look at the losers practicing," Khaya shouts. "It's not going to help, but if it makes you feel better..."

STREETSKILLZ: GOLDEN GOAL

I feel anger rise in me again – I've been pushed around by Khaya for as long as I can remember, and I've had enough.

"Your father was so worried The Dynamites might beat you that he tried to bribe me to throw the game," I say loudly and coldly, "Isn't the real loser the one whose daddy tries to make his little boy win?"

Khaya stalks over and stands menacingly in front of me. I brace myself – I know I'm about to be beaten up. But to my amazement the Dynamites close in on Khaya.

"You better leave," Chippa says to him.

"Ja, you soek trouble with him, you soek trouble with us," Rose says in a voice that sounds just like Ma Lettie.

Khaya looks around at the Dynamites angry faces. Khaya is big, but Chippa is almost as big, and the lone Leopard is outnumbered. The team stand by me as Khaya backs away slowly, his face set in a snarl.

Khaya draws a finger across his throat and points at me.

"I'll sort you out on the pitch," he sneers, then turns and walks away from the field.

Reader comments

Here are some comments left by readers at www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

Play normal,khaya wont do anything. He is just an empty vessel making alot of noise. **Heart of fire**

Luk.. Ths guy is already a champion.. I prefer nathi to play his game.. He mustnt hold the ball. The tectic they must use is to play rose as a goal score 4 the 1st half. Nath mustnt b in the frnt. Nathi wil b marked careful so he must gv rose a ball and second half the ada team wil b lost then nath cn finish them of 'supeb style' ;) **Konvict**

He must keep on watch that includes knowing which opponnent is on his way. **Prophet of reggae**

What do you think?

Khaya looks like he's going to play dirty. What tactics should Nathi use to make sure that Khaya's physical play doesn't get the better of him?

To answer this question, or to leave your own comment, go to www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

CHAPTER 20

The days leading up to the big games go quickly, and soon it's time to play! On the day of the finals, everybody in Du Noon, whether South African, Zimbabwean, Congolese or Somalian dress up in their supporting gear. It's orange for the Netherlands, red for Spain – and a spotted leopard-print headband for the Leopards, or a green headband for the Dynamites.

"Sorry Ronaldo, you can't come," I say to my little dog as I open the door to leave the house. "There are going to be too many people at the final. I don't want to lose you in the crowd."

The little dog whines, struggling against his leash.

"I'll let you know who wins," I say as I hand him a bone.

Ronaldo whines as he takes the bone and sits chewing forlornly as I leave.

As I pass I wave to Mr. Isaac whose sitting serenely on his lawn chair smoking a pipe, the Spanish flag wrapped around his shoulders and a green Dynamites band around his head.

The street-soccer pitch is already throbbing with excitement and sounds of vuvuzelas. The rich smell of food wafts from the shebeen. I weave my way through the throng of people and to the pitch where the Dynamites are sitting. I take the place next to Rose, who quickly slips her hand into mine.

"Think you can ask the Professor to give us a pep talk?" Rose asks, "Everyone is really nervous."

I search the crowd for the old, craggy face of my mentor. Eventually I spot him, wearing a green band around his hat. I jog over to ask him this favour.

The Professor shuffles over to address the team.

"The only advice I have for you is to focus on the game. Mediocre teams are the ones that have to use amateur dramatics like diving to make their way through. Focus on the soccer, not on what your opponents are doing," the old man advises.

The Dynamites nod in unison. The fact that the Professor has spoken to us at all has made us feel better! As Streetskillz games are shorter than normal soccer matches, the street soccer final kicks off at the beginning of the second half of the World Cup final. The Spain-Holland game has been goalless in the first half, and the crowd is eager to see some goals in the street tournament.

All of us players make our way to the centre of the pitch. I look at Khaya swaggering and know this isn't going to be easy.

The Dynamites keep good possession, like the Spanish, but The Leopards have clearly embraced the hard physical play of the Dutch. Within minutes, Khaya slams into me and pushes me to the ground. I feel my ankle twist and red-hot pain explodes in my leg.

Reader comments

Here are some comments left by readers at www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

Nathi's team should play tactically, never hold the ball 4 a long time especially Nathi as they know he is in great danger, hence Khanya wants 2 hurt him. They should also take chances they get because that goal in the 1st minutes might be the only goal of the game. Nathi should be arlet at all times by also stay focused. They might also try playing 1-2 balls. The most important is they should NEVER give up until the game is over. Gudluck Nathi,Rose ((F)) n the rest of the team. **Demolixn P**

I tink dat khaya is a fool and he feels pressured by nathi . He is not fair and does not know how to play a fair game . If khaya believes that he is better then he should act so immature . Life is all about overcoming difficult challenges.hang in there nathi god is by your side.

I bliv in u Nathi u cn do it jst chek at hw khaya playz nd try 2 dodge his rough play focus on playin a gud game nd hit da net. **Manana**

What do you think?

Khaya has taken down Nathi with a hard challenge. What should Nathi do? *Our readers recommend this: Roll around on the ground and demand a free kick: 9%, Leave the field; this kind of abuse isn't worth it: 0%, Get up and walk it off. Remember what the Professor said: 90%.*

To answer this question, or to leave your own comment, go to www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

CHAPTER 21

I look up to see the ref on the screen giving one of the Dutch players a yellow card. I get back up on to my feet and test my ankle. It's painful but I think back to what the Professor had said to me – that I have to want success enough to overcome any obstacles.

"Nice try," I shout to the crowd, "but township players are tougher than the Spanish!"

The crowd laughs and applauds as I walk off the pain.

The Dutch player gets booked but Khaya, unfortunately, gets away with conceding a free kick.

I take the kick, playing it long to Rose who powers a volley past The Leopards' goalie.

The game restarts and brutal play by the Leopards gets them a clear shot on goal, which Khaya chips into the corner of the net making it 1-1.

I look up at the scoreboard. Khaya and I are tying as top-scorers. On the big screen Heittinga is getting a red card. I suspect that it's the beginning of the end for the Dutch. I wish the English World Cup ref could be judging our street game too – Khaya would have been sent off for sure. If Khaya scores again he'll be the top-scorer and the Leopards will win.

STREETSKILLZ: GOLDEN GOAL

The game continues like the Spanish-Holland clash – lots of tactical work but no more goals. Soon there's only a minute left to play. Unlike professional soccer, there's no extra time – a draw now will mean a penalty shoot-out. I really don't like the odds of winning a shootout against the Leopards. I decide to make one last run for it!

I make it past the Leopards midfield, but Khaya has me marked and I'm brought down by another crushing tackle in the box. The ref blows his whistle. It's a penalty!

My heart is racing as I line up to take it. The Leopards' goalie flexes his fingers and stands ready.

"One, two, three, four ...," I whisper to myself, "Just listen to the beat."

I run up and fire it into the top left hand corner. The goalie dives and his fingers touch the ball but it isn't enough. Laduuuuma!

The whistle blows for the end of the game. 2-1 to the Dynamites with me as the top-scorer! My teammates gather round and start chanting and the crowd joins in. I can't make out what they're saying at first, but then I realize what they're shouting – "Gold, Gold, Gold!"

"It's your nickname," the Professor hollers to me from the sidelines.

I run over to hug him.

"But why 'Gold'?" I ask, confused.

"You're as good a player as your father was, but you're even more valuable. That's why I suggested they call you gold," he says, "Your team know about Mr. Thobela trying to bribe you. Now they know that you're with them no matter what."

The crowd blows their vuvuzelas as 'Nathi "Gold"' is written at the top of the scoreboard. Then we all turn to watch the rest of the World Cup final.

We all cheer together as Iniesta receives a pass and strikes the ball in to win it for the Spanish.

We're celebrating as Mr. Khumalo comes over to shake my hand.

"Nathi," Mr. Khumalo says, "this is Mr. Naidoo. He's a talent scout for a professional street-soccer league, and he's interested in having you on his team..."

Reader comments

Here are some comments left by readers at www.yoza.mobi/stories/9/

Frm me i say the story plays an important role in today living of encouragement keep up the gud work YOZA nd thanx for u gud stories. **Rose mola**

It was realy rocking.seing a young man fighting n win against all the obstacles n comes up tops,it realy encouraging.Nathi face alot of tempting obstacles which are even faced by the young boys of today.they range from love,bribe,and bullying to mention but a

STREETSKILLZ: GOLDEN GOAL

few. keep on guys in realising these world class stories. i can not wait to read yo next edition. **Christinme**

This story teaches us that sports is not only about winning the game, it's also about dedication, making the right choices and teaches us that to succeed doesn't mean you don't feel fear. It means you have the courage to act despite fear! **Ninga**