

BRIEF: One kick. The whole world watching. The ball is already on the penalty spot. The stadium is roaring ... or maybe it has fallen strangely silent. The referee steps back. The goalkeeper waits. The penalty taker breathes. Both of them have a hundred swirling thoughts.

And for one tiny moment, time almost stops...

Your challenge is to write the story of this moment. You are NOT writing the whole match. You are explaining every play that led to the penalty. You are writing the final seconds before the kick — and the few seconds after it.

YEAR 6 WINNER: Sophia L



It was just one kick. To me it was so much more. One shot to turn my life around. One chance to let the world know my name. It was a once in a lifetime occurrence, just below my feet.

The objective was rather straightforward. Kick the ball. Still, I hesitated, as my eyes darted across the masses of cheering fans, my shaking hands gripped my jersey. The silky, lightweight top suddenly felt heavy. The instantly harsh fabric scraped across my skin, over and over again.

A billion thoughts paraded through my mind. A series of images flashed in my head. Getting up at the crack of dawn to train, holes in my shoes and cuts on my hands from running and catching the ball endless times, and the weird sight of the empty field in the evening when everyone else already left to go home. Suddenly, the one thought that stuck in the back of my mind struck me mercilessly. This wasn't some fun game, I could lose something I trained so hard for in a matter of seconds. My confidence started to deteriorate. My coach gave me a comforting, reassuring nod, but instead, I was met with even more worries. The breaths I took quickly turned into short panicked gasps.

The endless complaints and urging for me to kick the ball got worse and worse. Time was slipping away, and I had to do something - anything. Quick!

Then something finally snapped me out of my daze. A sweet melodic voice cut through the loud roaring of the fans. Someone was cheering for me! The voice I heard instantly rang a bell in my head. No... it couldn't be. Then my eyes met hers.

My own sister was sitting twenty feet away. Someone I'd never thought my eyes would lay on again. It seemed as if the whole world had gone still. Tears welled up in my eyes. On the presentation table, there was a pristine case cradling the gold, dazzling trophy, practically seeking attention by catching the stadium lights. Both of those things now seemed in my reach.

The fake, worn out grass beneath my feet crunched softly against my soccer cleats. I backed up. The ball was in place, and the goalkeeper looked hungry for it, waiting impatiently for another glorious win. Everything was set up, it was just up to me. A surge of adrenaline through my body. I pushed off the ground and raced across the sea of people on the sidelines.

Would I aim right? No... the goalkeeper seemed too close to that angle. I got closer to the ball with each step. Left? No. I never really practiced at that spot. Too late, I had to pick. The ball was already in front of me. I kicked it as hard as I could, all the energy rushing into that one kick. There was a moment of silence. Then out of the blue, confetti. Bright lights. Screams.

I didn't even realize my knees gave in and I was lying on the floor as my teammates dashed towards me. I peered at the big, towering screen. We had won! Before I knew it I was engulfed in a warm hug as everyone congratulated me. I peered over at my sister. She was smiling. I felt like all the years we spent apart had melted in minutes. I didn't just win the soccer match, I won with her in it. I smiled back warmly, brighter than I had in years.

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YEAR 5 WINNER: Talia H



I squeezed my eyes shut. I blocked out the intense stare of thousands, begging me to score, or miss. Opening my eyes back up, I gaze around at my faithful team mates, all facing me with confident smiles, their arms around each other. They chose me. They're counting on me. So much pressure, bearing down on my shoulders. Taking a shaky breath to calm my nerves, I steady myself. This is what my training was all for. My mind takes me back to an early memory.

Dribble, dodge, run. Bu-bum. Bu-Bum. Bu-Bum. I got into the rhythm, kicking the ball along with me as I moved across wet grass. My leg pulled back, ready for the strike, then... FWEET! "Time!" Coach Marco yelled. "Too slow. Again!" Ugh. I silently complained. When am I going to be good enough for him?

Now here I was. On the pitch, ready to take the shot. I was good enough now. Or was I? I shook the thought off. Okay, Focus. I told myself. I had multiple options, as always. Which one? Right? The goal keeper slid right. Nope. Left? Maybe. Left top corner? Possibly... JUST PICK ONE!, The impatient devil in my head screamed. The goalie rocked up on his toes and flexed his fingers, giving me a hard stare. Come on, I told myself. Just kick. One step back, two steps. Three. Four. I stole a glance at my mum in the crowd. She cupped her hands around her mouth and silently shouted, Believe!, Our favourite saying. Her confident smile gave me confidence, too. She believed in me. But did I believe in myself? I didn't give myself a chance to worry, because just then, I bolted.

Time slowed down as I sprinted down the pitch. Wind raced past my ears, freezing them 'till they were numb. The sound of silence gathered around me as I pulled back my leg, once again, just like I did all those years ago, just before the coach blew the whistle. My muscles tightened as I gathered all the strength and accuracy I had in me. Toe, then side, then.... FOOOOSH! The ball sped through the air, like a comet, soaring through the sky. The crowd sat on the edge of their seats. The goal keeper launched. The referee's eyes widened. My pulse loudened. Everybody held their breath. Please, please, please... I urged. Prove that I'm good enough...

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YEAR 4 WINNER: Ashling M



One chance. One kick. This could change everything. The referee is talking to my coach. I can see through the glass. They exchange grim expressions and words that I could not understand. There's the ball. A referee is carrying it. It looks more menacing than I have ever seen a soccer ball before. Even the one on my first game. One kick. Snap out of it, I thought. Thinking won't do anything to help me shoot a goal. The keeper, with a gigantic smirk on his face, stretched his arms out and touched both sides of the goal. I felt a ball squeeze down my throat. Seeming pleased with himself, the keeper relaxed his arms.

I stare at the bright haze of colours surrounding me. Shouts and screams fill my ears. My eyes adjust to the sight. A small boy with his head in his hands, looking stressed. He reminds me of myself at my first soccer game. My eyes move around the crowd. An older soccer fan, phone in his hand videoing the game. Finally, my eyes glide over to my parents. My mother's head buried in my dad's jumper, refusing to look at the ball. My little brother, wearing headphones and my old, dirty soccer shoes I got when I was 4 years old sucking his thumb. I smiled at the thought that he had no idea that I might be able to win the FIFA world cup at any second. I tear my eyes away from my family to refocus.

Remember, that keeper has long arms so aim for the bottom left corner. No, right. No, left. UGH. You can't do this. You are not good enough. I know! Through the legs. They won't be expecting that. Or will they? The keeper It is just one kick.

The referee brings the whistle to his mouth. The sound echoes through the oddly silent stadium. My chest is louder than ever. The goalkeeper bends his arms to cover the goal and smiles at me. One kick. I shuffle back slowly, one step at a time. This was the first time where the shuffles felt like I had just stepped back a mile. I try to move but my feet are rooted to the spot. Then my foot swings backwards into a shot. My heart feels like it is trying to crawl out of my body. I angle my foot towards the middle of the goal. I kick. The crowd stares at the ball, seeming mesmerized by the movement of its patterns as it flies through the air. The goal looks like it is shrinking by the second. I watch on. The keeper jumps. My mind fills with a bright light. A small four-year-old boy, in muddy soccer boots. His hands trembling, face a light shade of white. Two people stood out in the crowd, cheering in the rain. The boy steps back and swings his foot, face still frightened. The goal keeper jumps. The goalie becomes a blur as I hear his last words form a cheer of triumph in both worlds.