

DIARY OF A

Rugby Champ

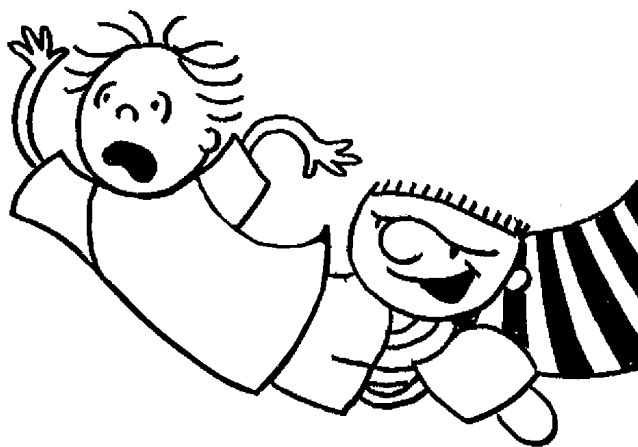


SHAMINI FLINT

ILLUSTRATED BY SALLY HEINRICH

DIARY OF A

Rugby Champ



Shamini Flint

Illustrated by Sally Heinrich


ALLEN & UNWIN
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For Sasha and Spencer, my two champs

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MY RUGBY DIARY

Okay - I get it.

I really do.

I'm not a
complete idiot.



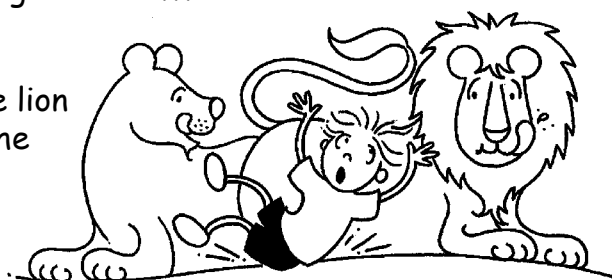
Sport is dangerous.

VERY DANGEROUS!

VERY, VERY DANGEROUS!!!

Sport is as dangerous as ...

falling into the lion
enclosure at the
zoo ...

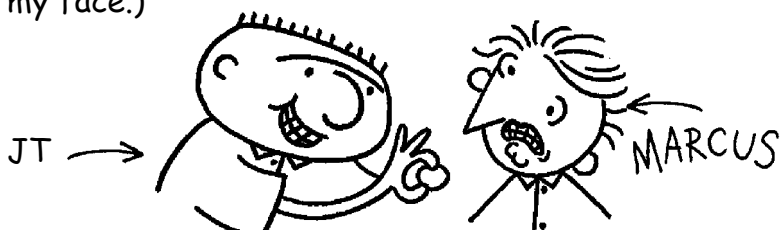


OR

not looking left, right and left again when crossing
the road ...



OR stealing JT's lunch! (JT is the school bully. The thing he wants to do most in the world is rearrange my face.)



Anyway, sport is dangerous.

YOU could get injured.



In fact, I get injured
OFTEN!!!

I remember when
Dad made me
play soccer ...

I was kicked.

I was tripped.

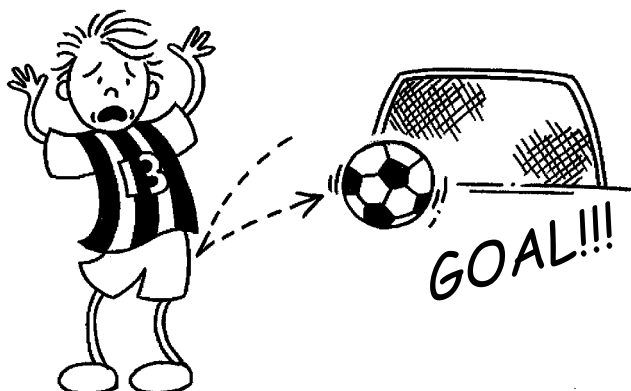




I was hit.



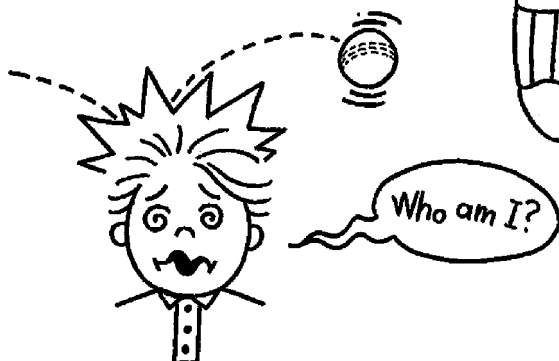
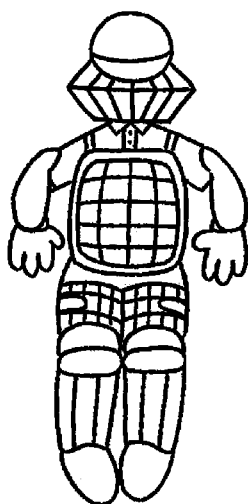
And that doesn't even include getting embarrassed (when I scored that goal with my you-know-what).



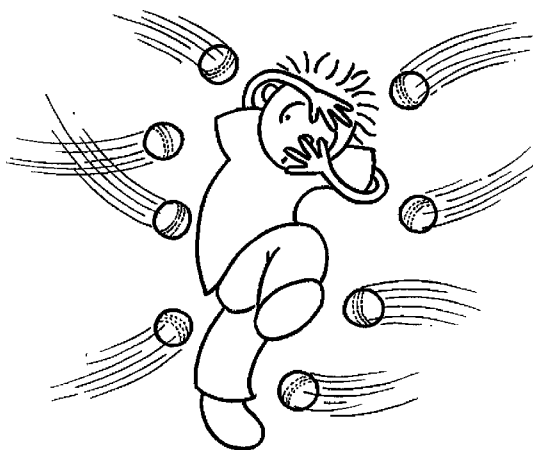
And what about that time Dad
made me play cricket?

I wore body armour!

And I still got hurt.
I was hit.



That was it - I got hit by the ball ...

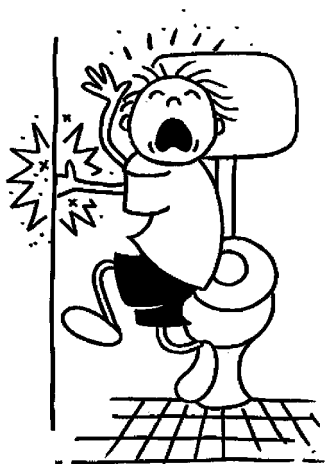


BUT LET ME COUNT THE WAYS!!!

At least with cricket and soccer you're not supposed to get hit (or hurt).

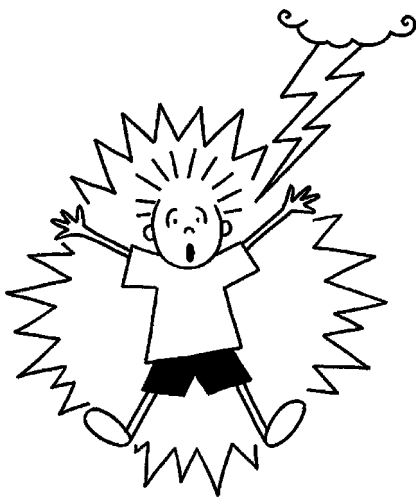
If you get injured it's an ACCIDENT.

Like tripping over the carpet ...

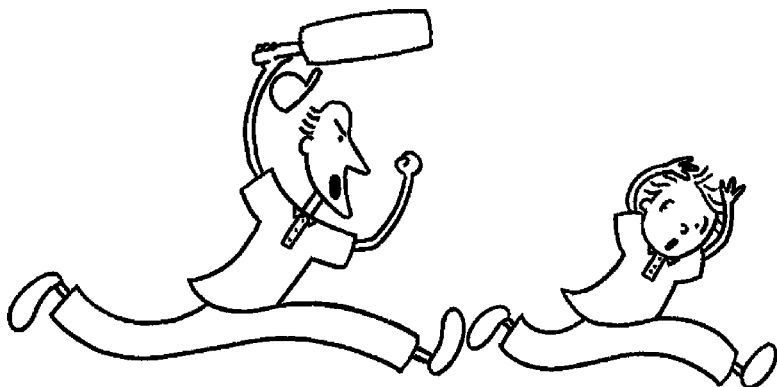


Or slamming your fingers in the bathroom door ...

Or being struck by lightning ...



Well, getting injured in soccer or cricket is an accident unless it's the coach who's after you because you messed up ...



But usually, it's an ACCIDENT.

But now ...

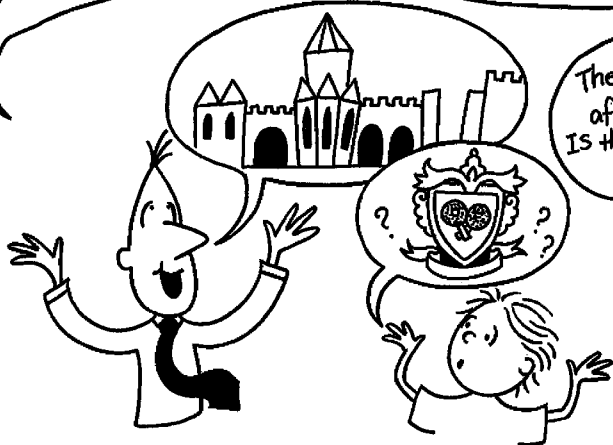
Dad wants me to play rugby!

RUGBY!!

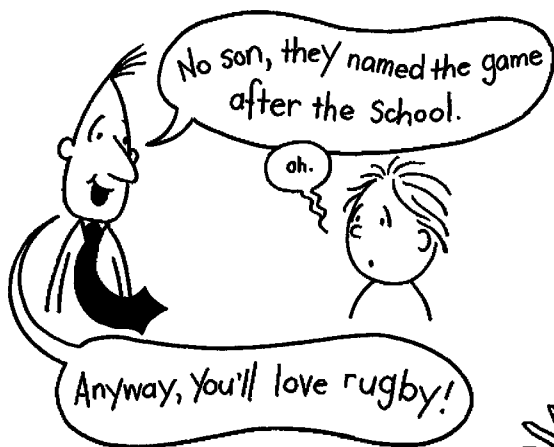
RUGBY!!!

My name is Marcus Atkinson and there is one thing I know for a fact: I DON'T WANT TO PLAY RUGBY!

It's a great game - first played at Rugby. You know, the school!



They named a school after a game?
Is there a Ping Pong school?



Anyway, you'll love rugby!

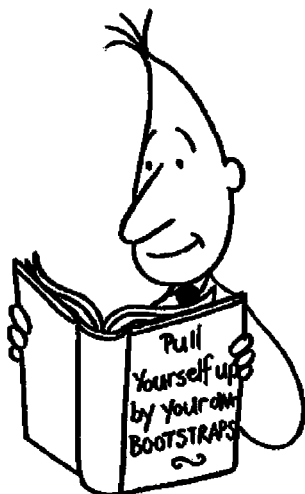
Is he completely bonkers?



Does he secretly hate me?



Has he been reading his own book??

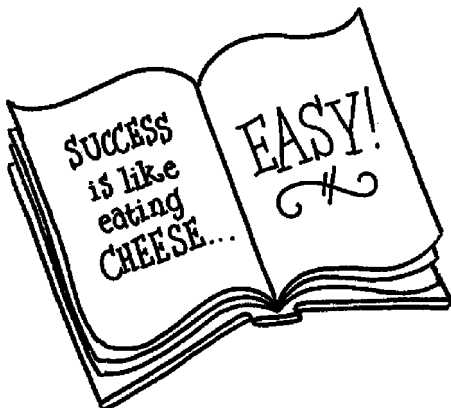


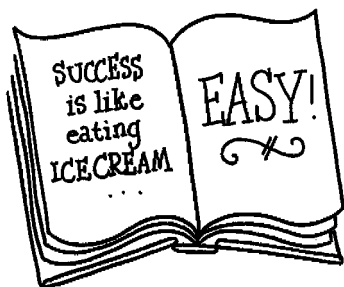
Dad's written a book called
*Pull Yourself Up by Your
Own Bootstraps!*

It's really DUMB!

There's stuff in it like 'SUCCESS is like eating
CHEESE ... EASY!'

What if you don't
like cheese?

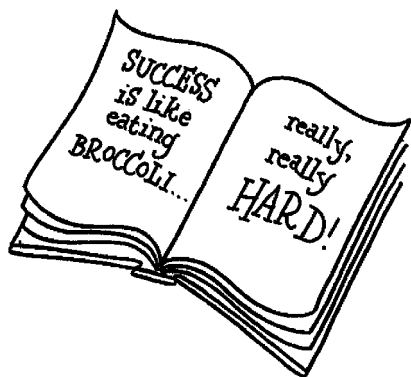
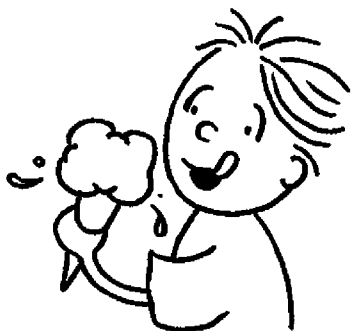




When I write a book,
I'll say 'SUCCESS is like
eating ICE CREAM ...
EASY!'

More people like ice cream
than cheese.

I like ice cream more than
cheese.

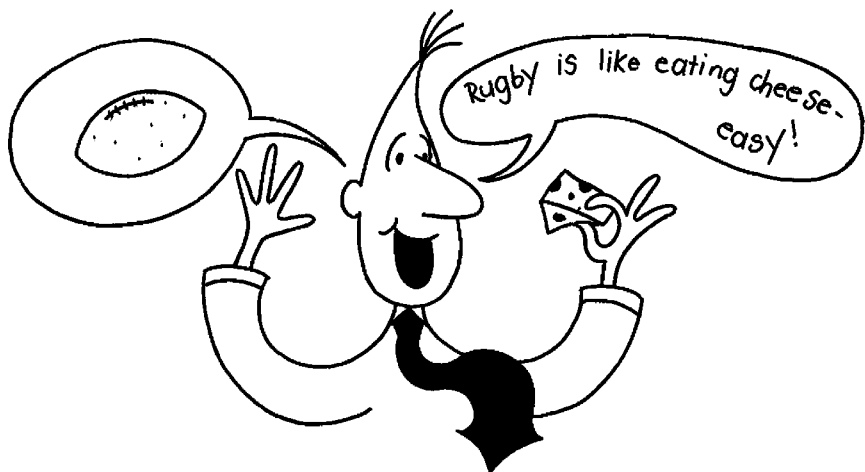


Or I'll write
'SUCCESS is like
eating BROCCOLI ...
really, really HARD!'

At least that
would be TRUE!



Anyway, Dad's lost it. He wants me to play rugby.



Rugby is different from soccer and cricket.

In soccer and cricket, you get hurt by accident.

In rugby, they hurt you on purpose!

On purpose!!

ON PURPOSE!!

ON PURPOSE!!!



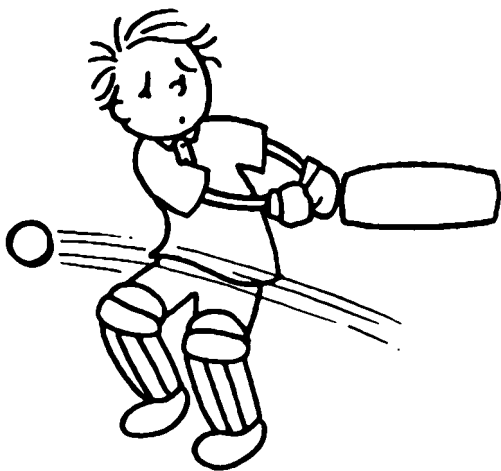
What's the matter with these people?

You see, Dad is convinced that I'm good at sport. He thinks the problem is that we haven't found the right game ... YET.



So far, we've tried soccer (details in my *Diary of a Soccer Star*)

and cricket (details in my *Diary of a Cricket God*).

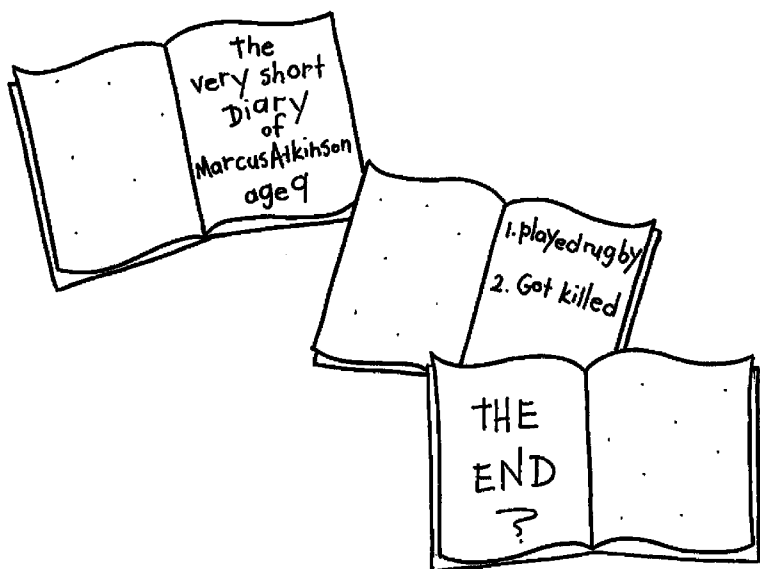


And now he's certain rugby is my game.

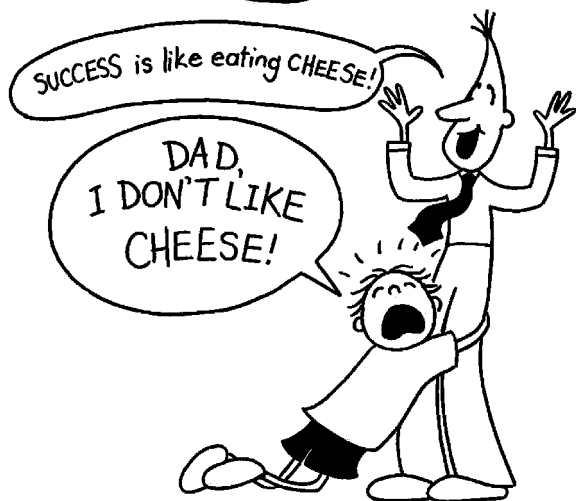
Time to start another diary.

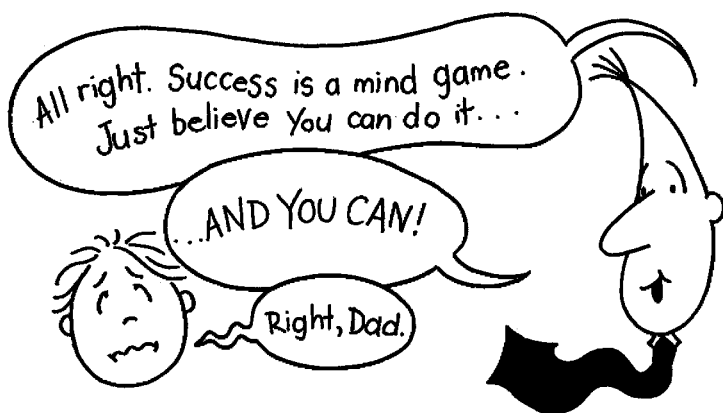


I expect this diary will be very short.

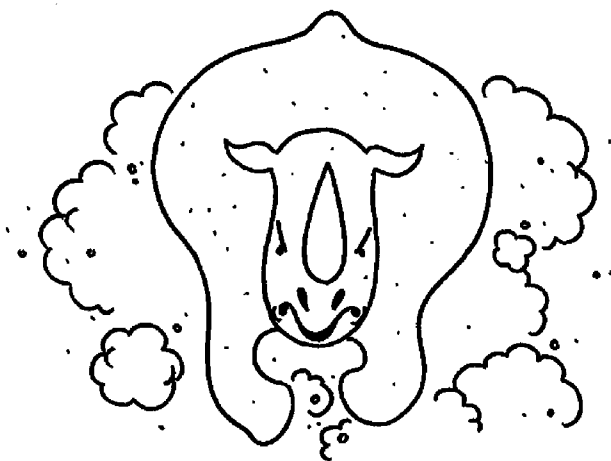


I tried talking to Dad.



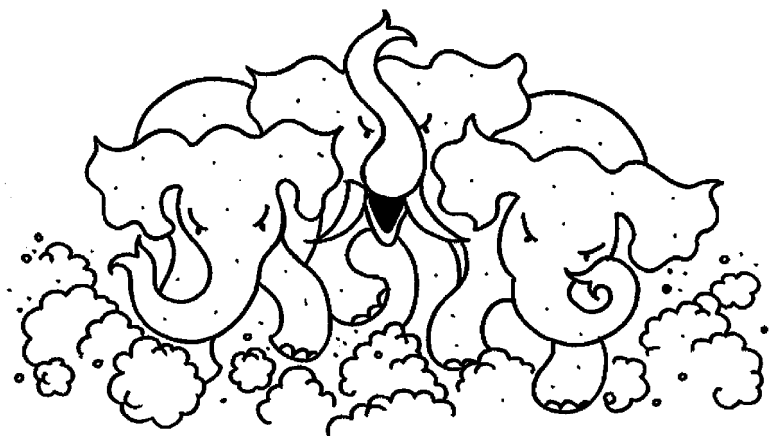


I BELIEVE ...

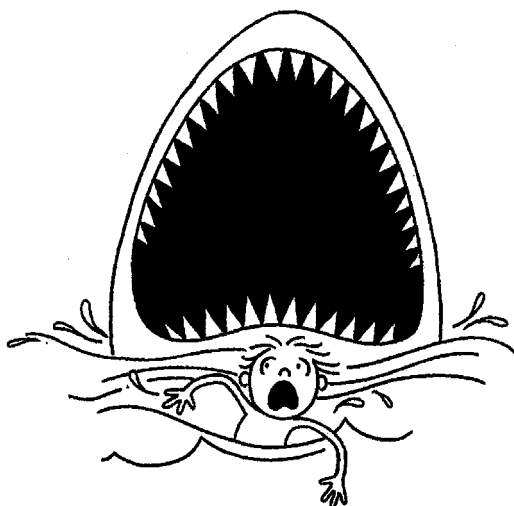


I can stop a charging rhino ... WITH MY MIND!

Or a herd of stampeding elephants ... WITH MY MIND!



Or a great white shark ...WITH MY MIND!!!



I'm dead meat.

My sister Gemma likes to write post-it notes in my diaries. I used to try hiding the diary.

But it's no use.

She's too good at finding it ...



DIARY ENTRY:

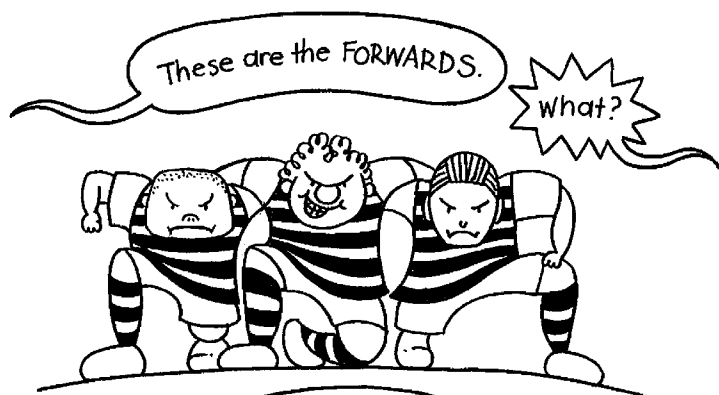


Well - that didn't work.

Now what?

Rugby training, that's what!

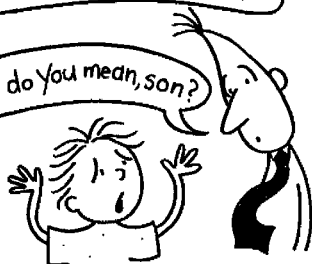
RUGBY LESSON NO. 1



WHERE ARE THE HUMANS??

Dad, where are the humans?

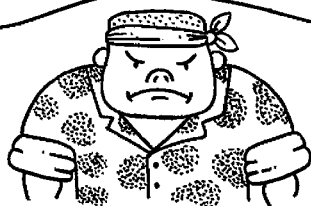
What do you mean, son?



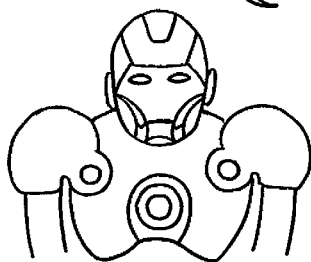
Where are the humans?

The normal kids??

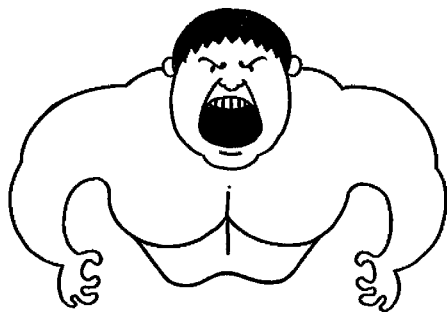
The kids that don't look like marines...



Or Iron Man...



Or the Incredible Hulk!!!

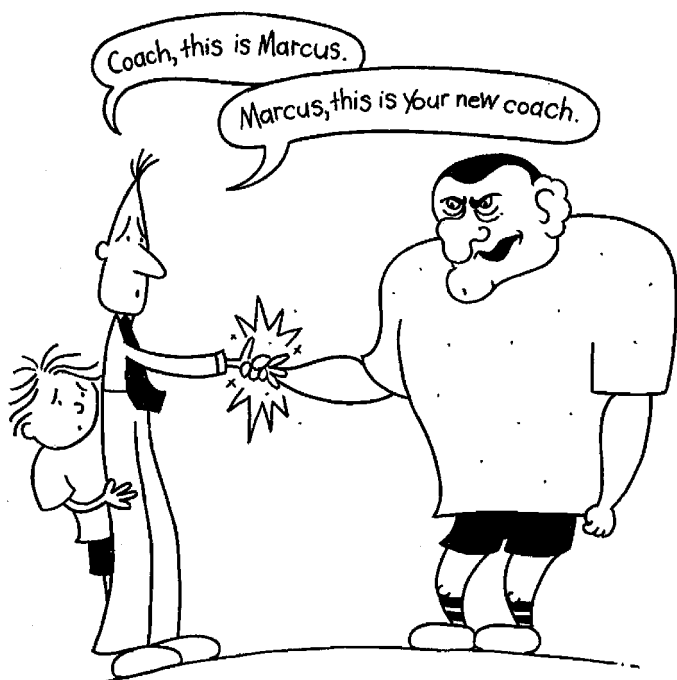


What sort of father asks his nine-year-old son to risk DEATH playing with these guys?

Even Spot doesn't like them.
GRRRR!

He's probably worried Dad is going to make him play dog rugby with a bunch of very big dogs.





Has this guy been chasing parked cars?

Why has he had his ears replaced with cauliflowers?

He doesn't need a costume for Halloween!

Does his nose turn corners before he does?

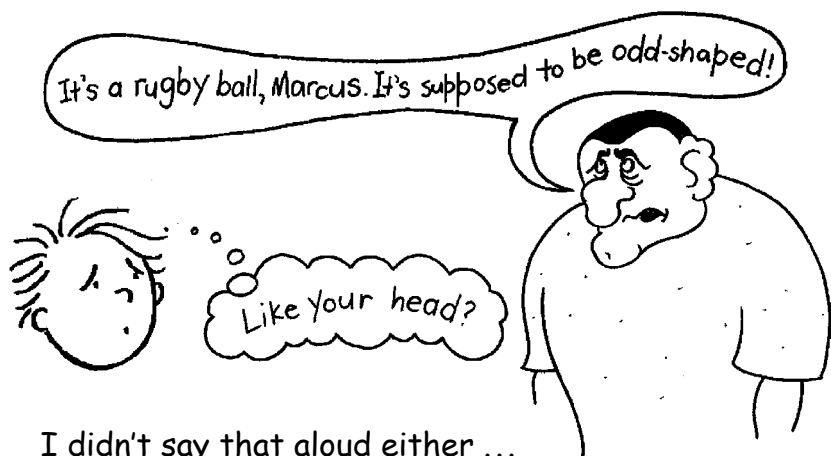
Hey, what are you going to do for a face when JT needs his bottom back?

Obviously, I didn't say any of that aloud.
I'm not dumb.



How much is Dad paying this guy?

You'd think the coach would know that balls are ROUND! Duh.



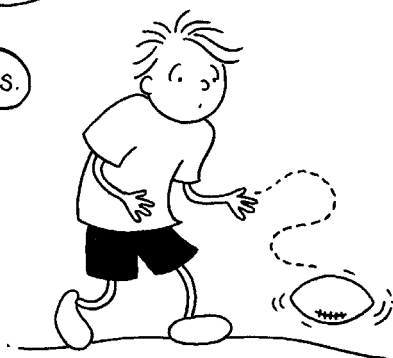
I didn't say that aloud either ...

RUGBY LESSON NO. 2

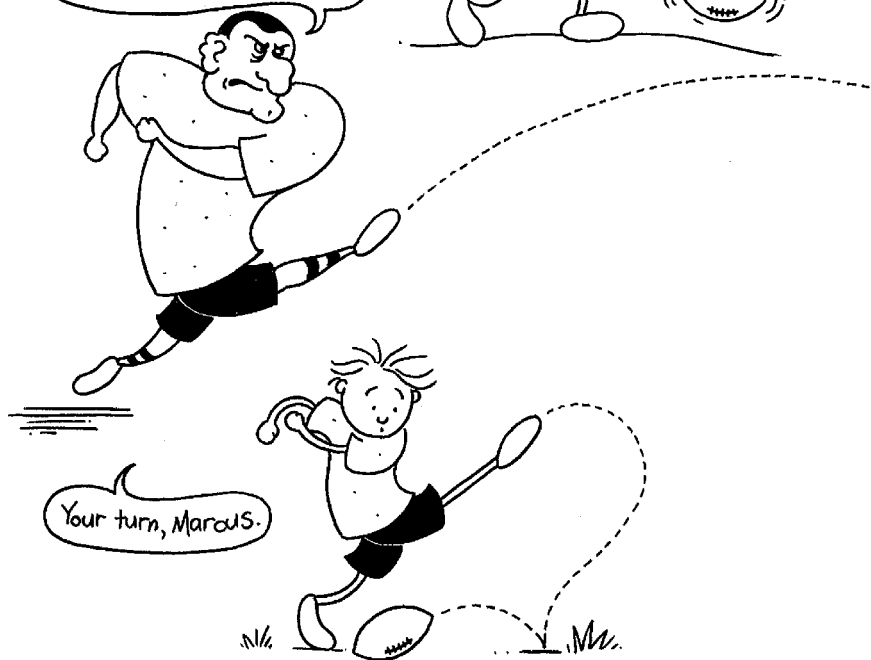
You throw the ball straight and spinning like this...

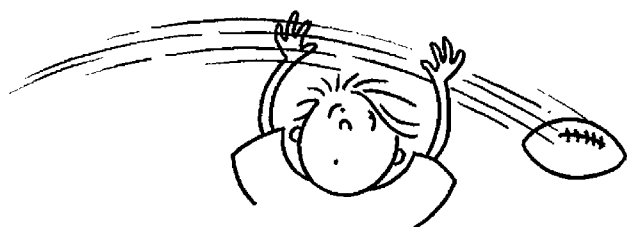
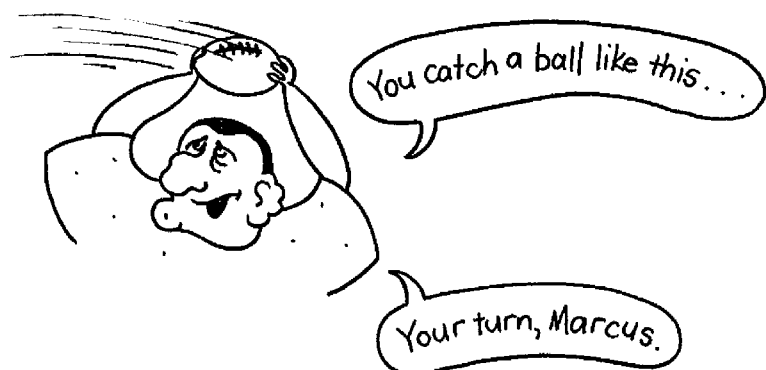


Your turn, Marcus.

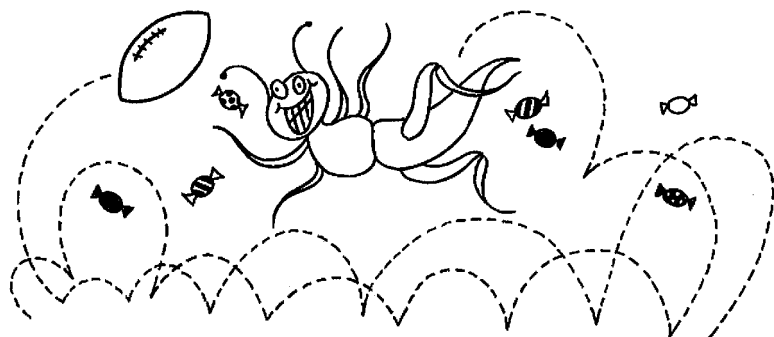


You kick the ball like this...





It's like trying to catch a grasshopper.
A grasshopper who has had too much coffee.
And too many sweets. And likes discos.



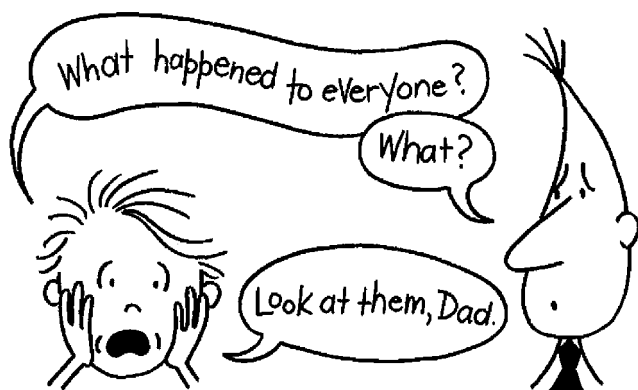


FAMOUS LAST WORDS!

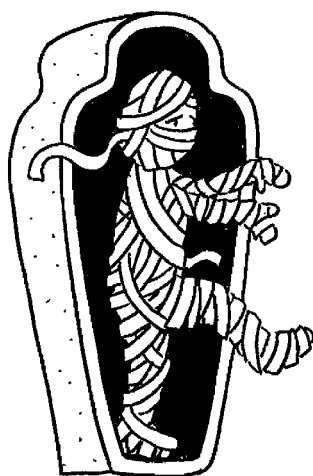


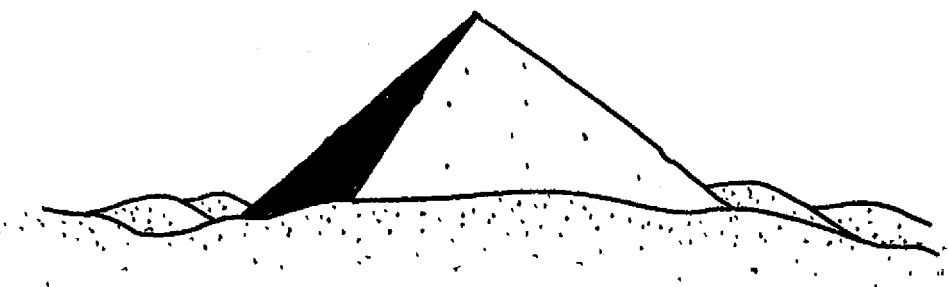
For once, even Dad didn't argue with Coach.

I met some of the rugby players ...



Maybe they're from
Ancient Egypt?



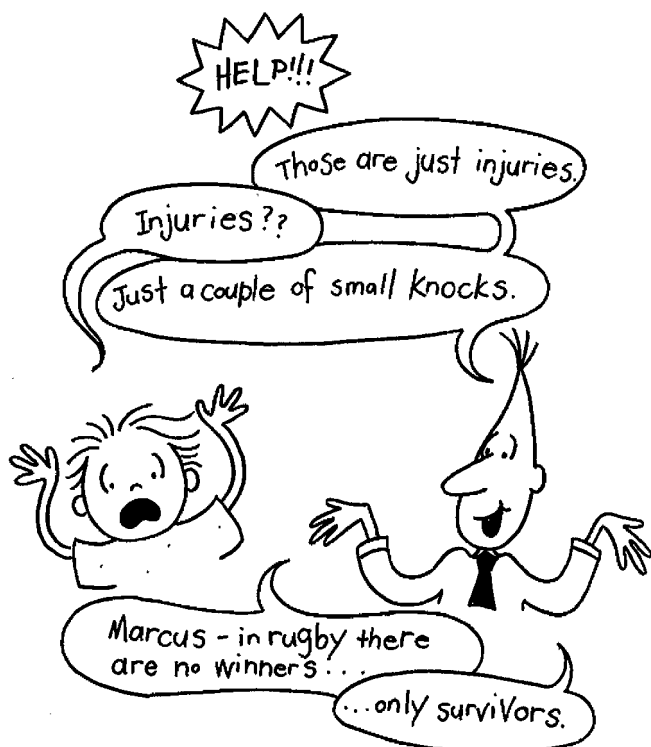


Maybe they usually live in pyramids?



Maybe they're the UNDEAD!!!



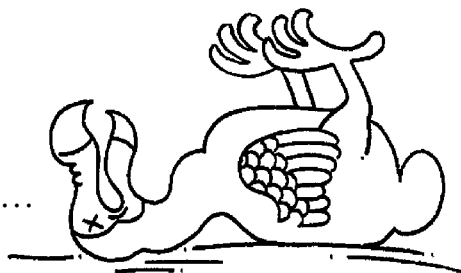


I'm DEAD!!!



Deader than a bug on a
windscreen ...

Deader than a dodo ...



Deader than a mummy from Ancient Egypt.

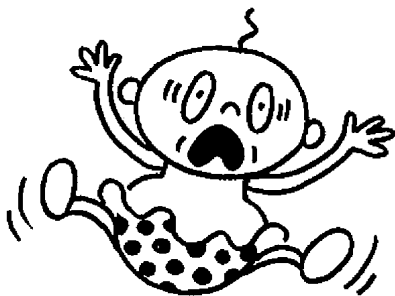
This is what I'm going to look like!

I wonder whether Mum will recognise me?



Gemma will think it's funny ...

Harriet will probably have nightmares.





I need whatever he's taking ...

RUGBY LESSON NO. 3

The aim of the game in rugby is to score a try.

Do you mean TRY to SCORE, Coach?

Grrrrr!

I'm happy to TRY, Coach, as long as you don't expect me to SCORE!

Are you trying to be funny?

No, Coach!

PSSST!



One of the large fellows without a neck actually tried to help me out. I think his name is Tank.

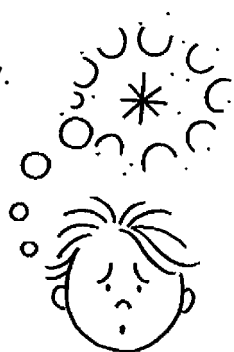


Well, that was as clear as mud.
Anyway, it doesn't really matter because I won't
be TRYING or SCORING, will I?

Apparently, it's five points for a try.

And two points for a conversion.

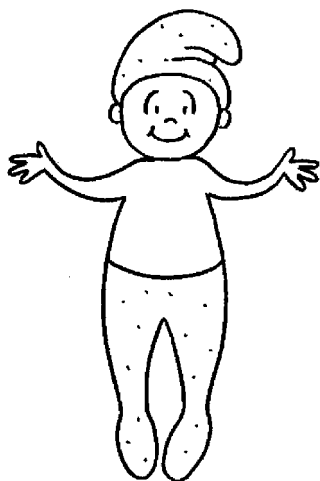
Conversion to what?



A superhero?

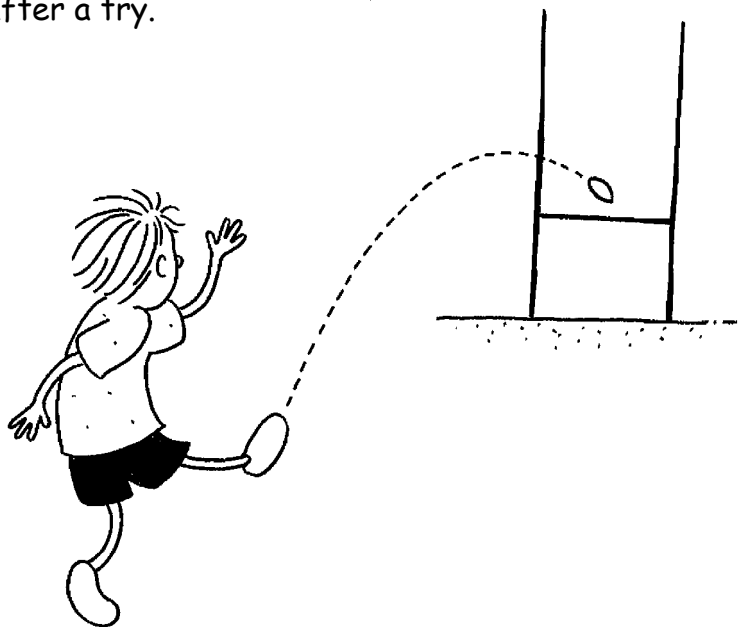


A villain??



A smurf???

Later, Dad told me a conversion meant kicking the ball between the uprights and over the cross bar after a try.



I'm not going to score a conversion either, am I?

RUGBY LESSON NO. 4

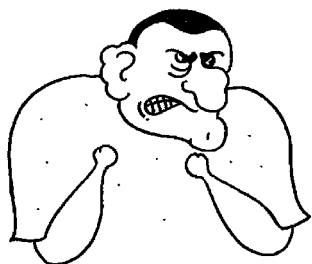
Marcus, when someone passes the ball to you, kick it down field.

okay, Coach.



Marcus, when you get the ball, pass it to a team mate.

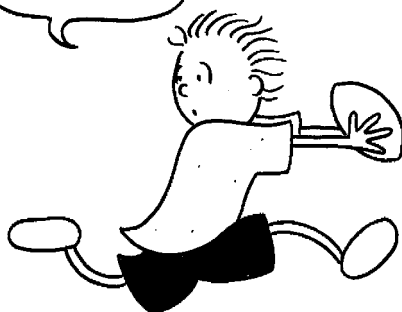
OKay, Coach.



BEFORE YOU GET TACKLED!!

Marcus, when you get the ball, run with it.

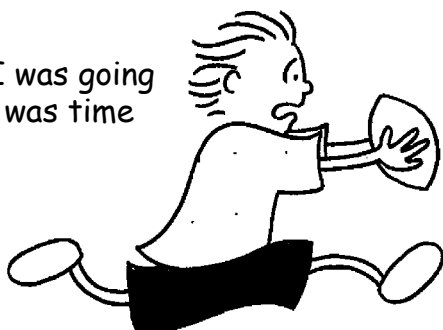
OKay, Coach.



There was no way I was going to get hit again. It was time to run.

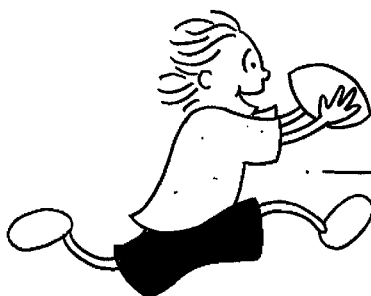
And run!

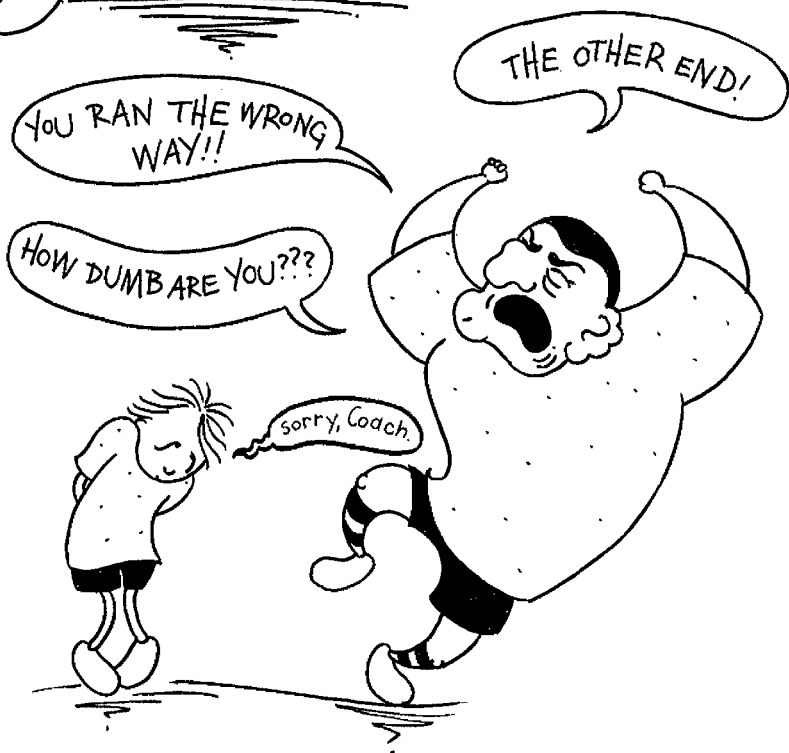
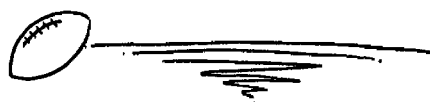
AND RUN!!!



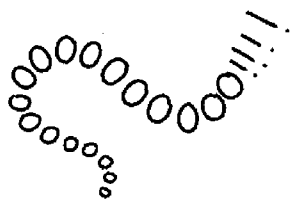
I remembered what Tank had said. Run to the end and put the ball down and it's a GOAL! I mean TRY!

EASY! As easy as eating ice cream!!





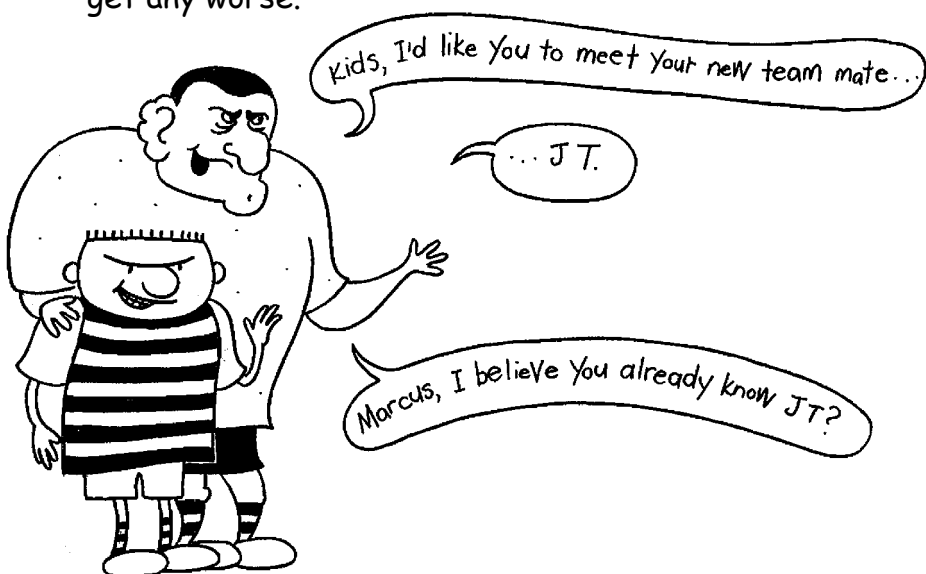
This time when you get the ball...



Spot really doesn't like it when
I get tackled.

That makes two of us.

Well, I suppose the good thing is that things can't get any worse.



JT?

JT is in the team?

JT IS IN THE TEAM???

I'm finished.

JT is the SCHOOL BULLY!!!

The rugby injuries will be nothing compared to what he does to me.

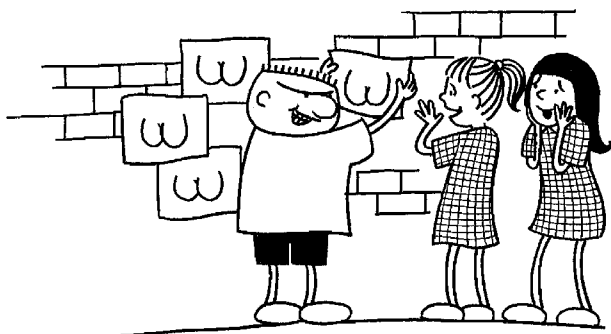


JT has spent his entire school life picking on me.

Like the time he tied my shoelaces together during basketball practice.



Or when he glued my bottom to the photocopier in the school office ...

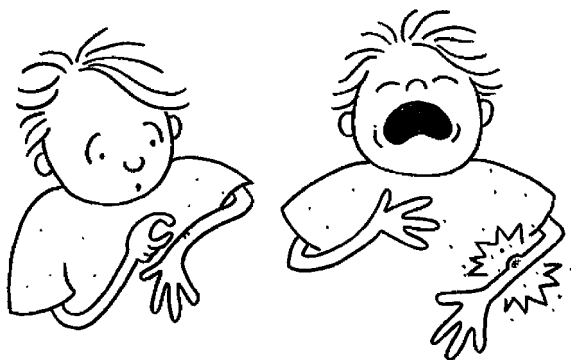


and stuck pictures of my famous bottom all over the school.

Or when he left a note for Lucy (the most popular girl at school) saying that she had nice legs - and signed it with my name!



Maybe if I pinch myself really hard, I'll wake up from this nightmare.

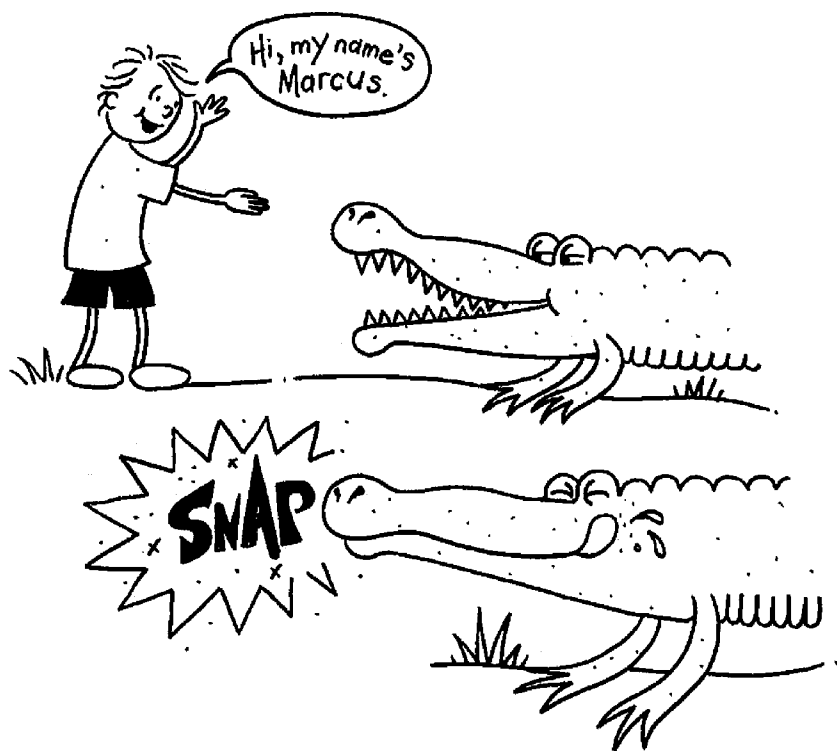


OWWW!

Nope, didn't work.

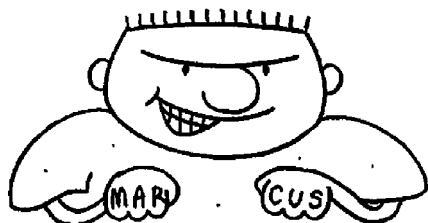


Friendly? I'd rather be friendly to a crocodile.





In his heart?
In his HEART??
IN HIS HEART???



JT doesn't have a heart, Dad.
Just two fists with my name on the knuckles!!!

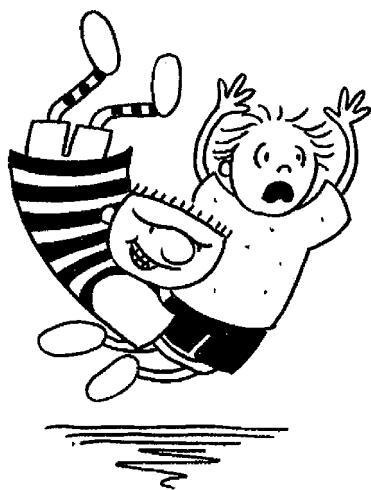
JT is really good at rugby.
He kicks really well ...



He runs really well ...



He tackles really well ...
usually me.



More like a battering
ram if you ask me.

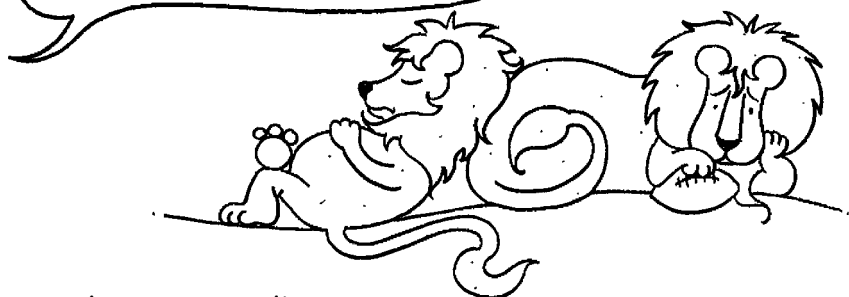


Why can't I be more like JT???

Later, Dad told me that Jonah Lomu, Jonny Wilkinson and Manu Tuilagi were all great rugby players. So?

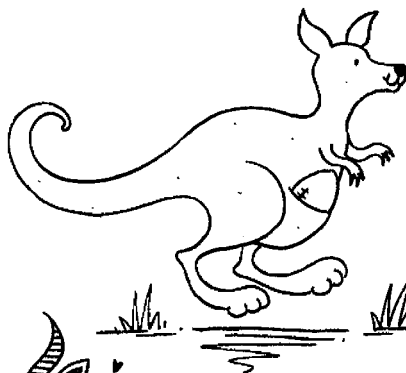
Most of the time during rugby practice, I don't understand what anyone is saying ...

The Lions were rubbish this year!



Why are we talking about lions?

I'm a Wallabies fan.



Isn't that some sort of kangaroo?

I love the Springboks.



Isn't that some sort of deer?

I'm going to be an All Black.



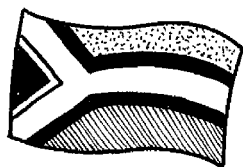
What does that even mean?

Hey Marcus, I guess your team is the All Black and Blues!!



Hey! Just so you know, some of my bruises are yellow and purple as well.

Later, Dad told me that the Wallabies are the Australian rugby team, the Springboks are from South Africa, the Lions are British and the All Blacks are from New Zealand. Go figure.



I think it's fair to say that Coach has taken one too many tackles in his life. Nothing he says makes sense ...

All right, line up alphabetically and by height ...

NOW!

Form a straight line in a circle ...

NOW!!

Pair up in groups of three ...

NOW!!!

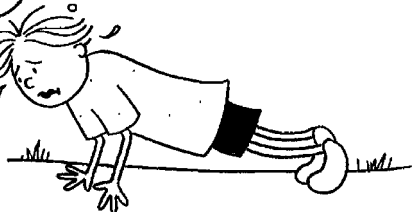
Marcus, 500 push-ups NOW for not doing what you're told.

But Coach, what you're saying doesn't make sense!

You think you're as smart as Johnny Einstein, do you?

I think you mean Albert Einstein.

I didn't say that out loud.
I just did the push-ups.



RUGBY LESSON NO. 5



A scrum?

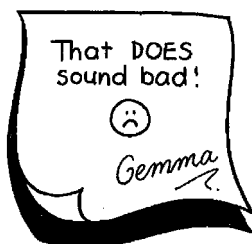
At the back of a scrum?



He wants me to put my head next to all those bottoms?

Is he completely mad?

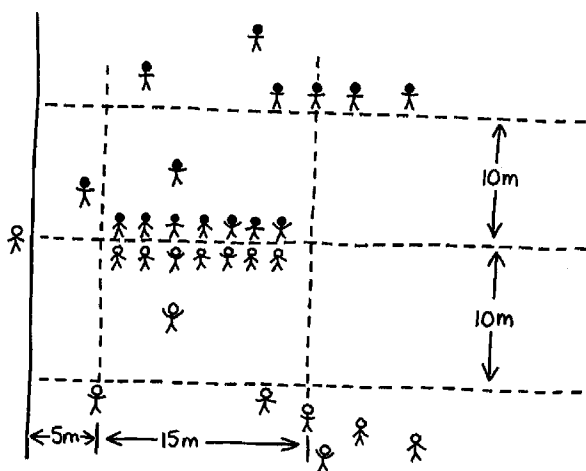
Could things get any worse?
I spent the day with my head
next to JT's bottom.





Let's practice line-outs.

What's that?



The players line up in two rows and someone has to throw the ball in straight.

We need a code so that the other team won't guess who's jumping for the catch.

Errr! How about the first player is 1, the second player is 2...

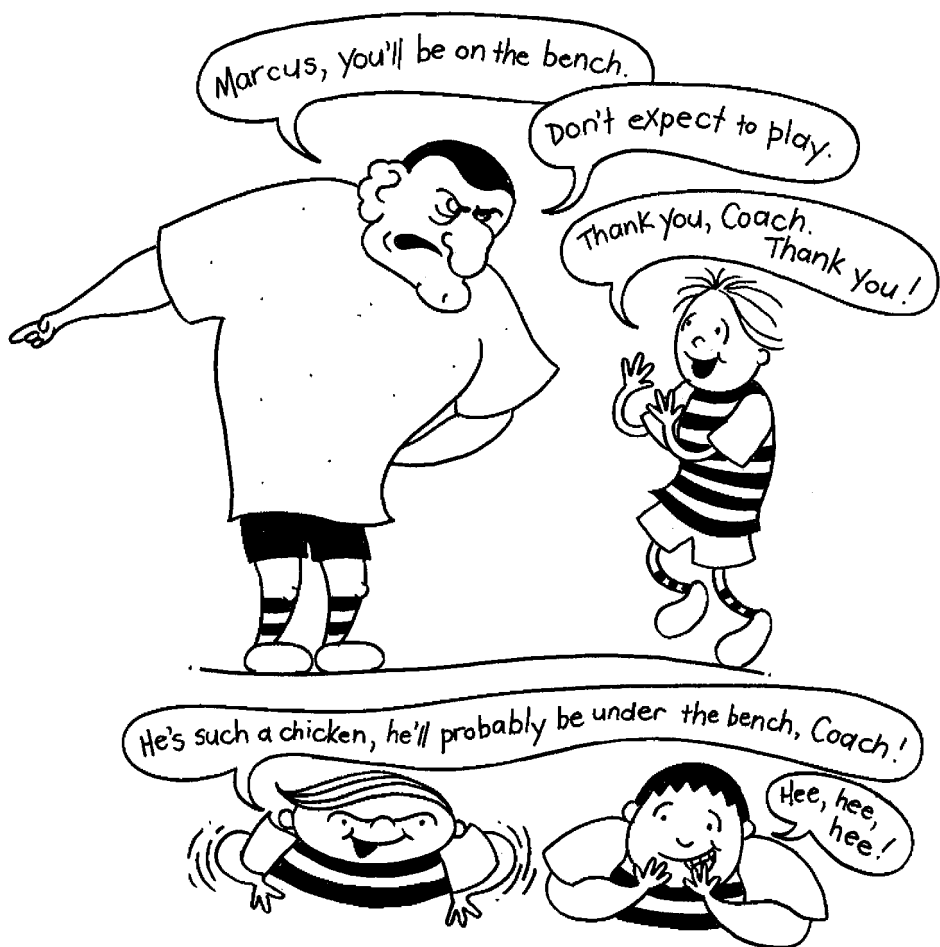


Let me guess, the third player is 3?
That should fool them.

What planet am I on?

Great plan, Tuff.
We'll use it.

We have a game tomorrow!
I'm not worried.
We have sixteen players. We only need fifteen.
Phew!



I'd rather be a chicken than DEAD! So there.

The other team is short of a player.

Can we borrow one of your players for the game?

Disaster!

MEGA DISASTER!!

MEGA MEGA DISASTER!!!

Any volunteers?

Marcus!!

Good idea!

Thanks, team.



I have to play!

I HAVE TO PLAY!!

I HAVE TO PLAY!!!

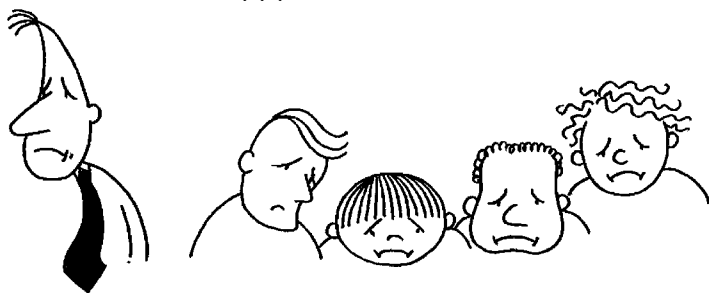


Thank goodness you're not playing for us, Marcus.

Thanks, team.

I won't pretend I played well.

Dad didn't look happy.



The other team didn't look happy.

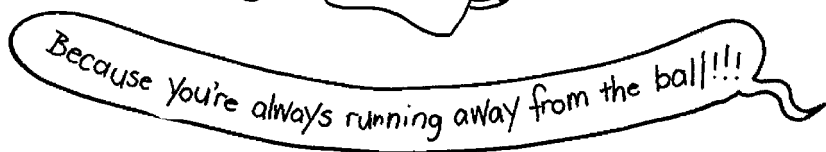
Even Spot looked embarrassed.



The crowd got on my back.

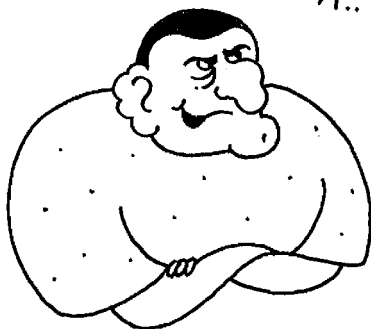


Cinderella?



Only Coach looked happy. I guess because I wasn't playing for his team.

CINDERELLA! CINDERELLA!! CINDERELLA!!!



JT was brilliant.

He scored three tries and kicked two penalties.



He tackled me seventeen times. Usually, he didn't wait to see if I had the ball.



The next day, the school newspaper had a story about Marcus "Cinderella" Atkinson.

They even managed to Photoshop a picture.



Marcus, you're late for the ball!

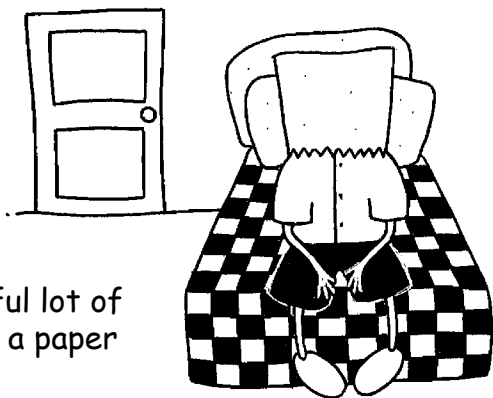
Marcus, is this your glass slipper?

Hee! Hee! Hee!

Marcus, may I be your Prince Charming?



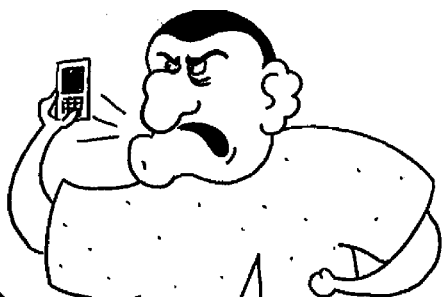
You know the drill.



Time to spend an awful lot of time in my room with a paper bag over my head.

I need to get out of rugby training.

Coach, I can't come in today. I've caught a cold.

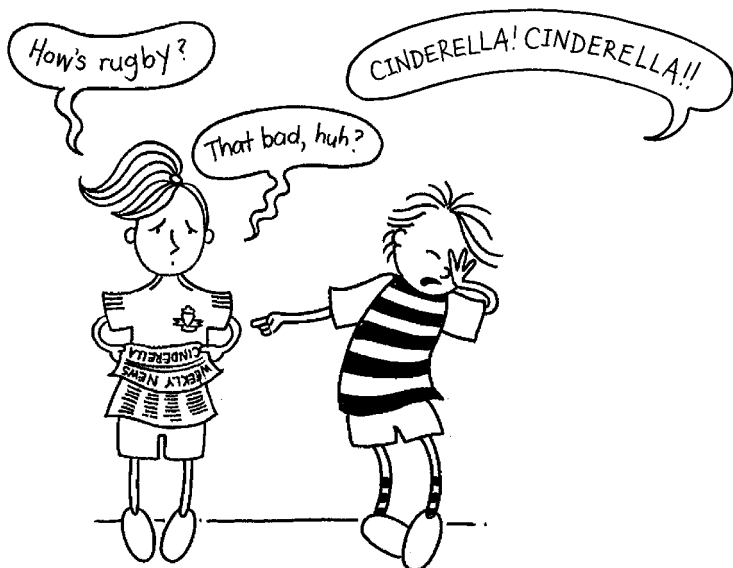


Makes a change when you **CATCH** something, Marcus!

Very funny.

My friends came to visit.

Lizzie is my friend from soccer. She's still wearing her Liverpool shirt. I don't think she ever changes ... unless she has Liverpool pyjamas.



Hari Sreenivasan is my friend from cricket. He's a wizard with the bat.

I showed him my bruises.



How come everyone is good at sport except me?

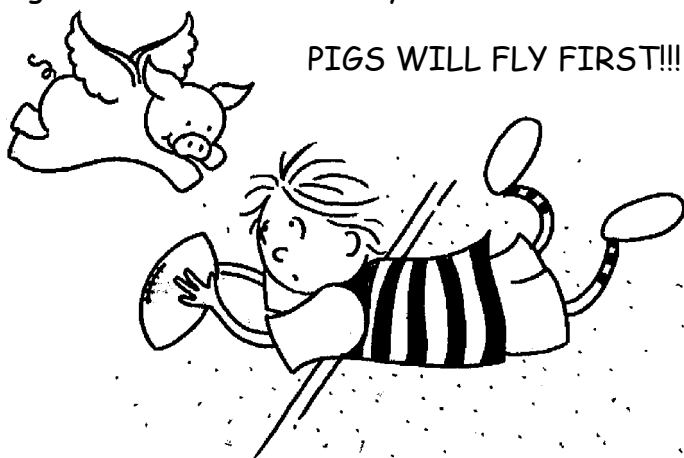
Well, I suppose there's my best friend, James. He's hopeless at sport. So his dad doesn't make him do any.

Instead, he gets to download an app on his iTouch every time he gets an 'A' in Maths.



Dad says he'll let me download some games if I score a TRY in a rugby game.

I guess I shouldn't hold my breath ...

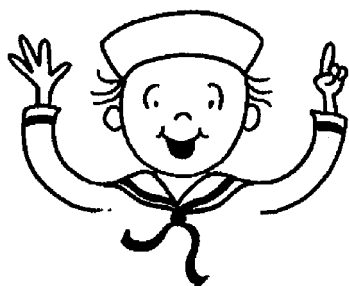


I NEED A PLAN!!!

And I've got one ...

There's only one thing to do.
I'll run away from home.

Maybe I'll become a sailor!



Maybe not.

Maybe I'll become an explorer!



Maybe not.

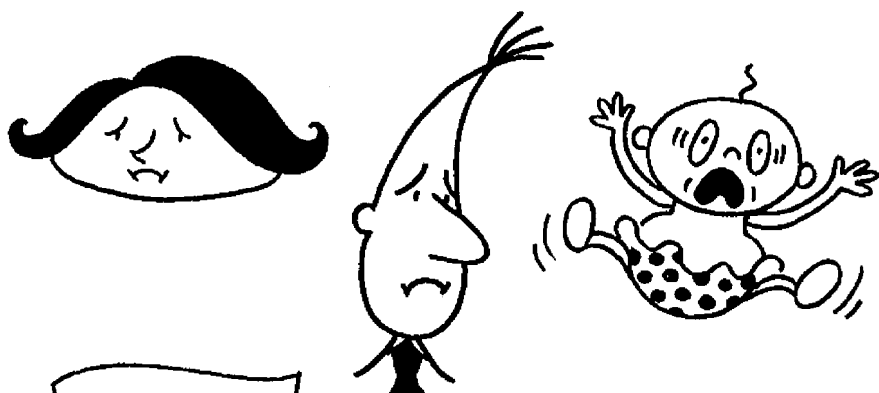
Maybe I'll become a fireman!



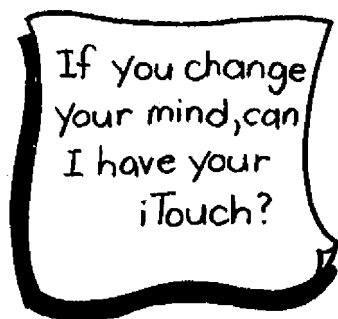
Maybe not.



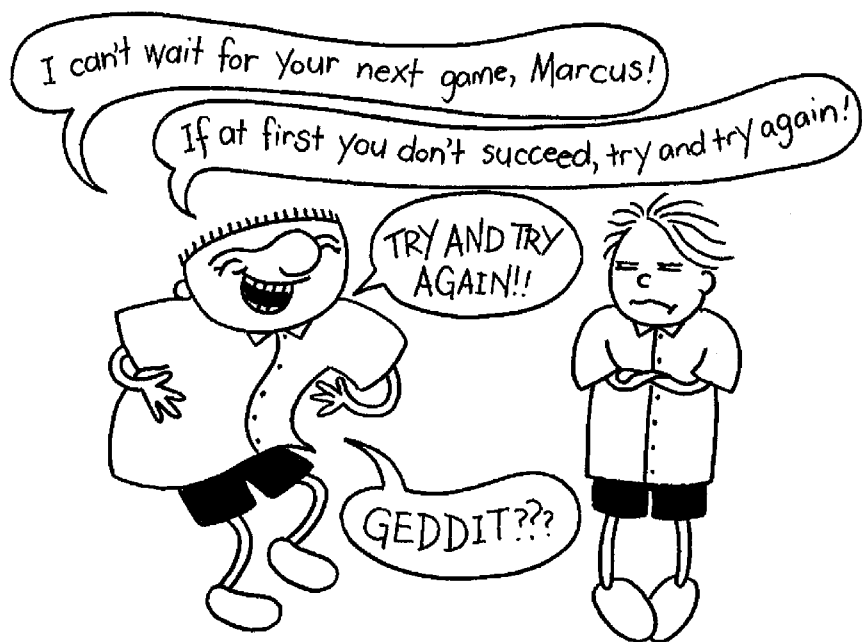
I guess I can't run away. It would upset Dad too much. And Mum. And Harriet.



Thanks, Gemma.



No, Gemma.



I need some of what he's having ...

RUGBY LESSON NO. 1,000,000,000

OK, I haven't had a billion rugby lessons - but it sure feels like it.

I wish Dad would make me play American football instead.
At least those guys wear some padding.



Marcus, throw the ball!

Not forward!

You can't throw it forward!



Right. We're supposed to get the ball to the end to score a try but we're not allowed to pass the ball forward.

How is that even possible?

You can kick it forward or run it forward.

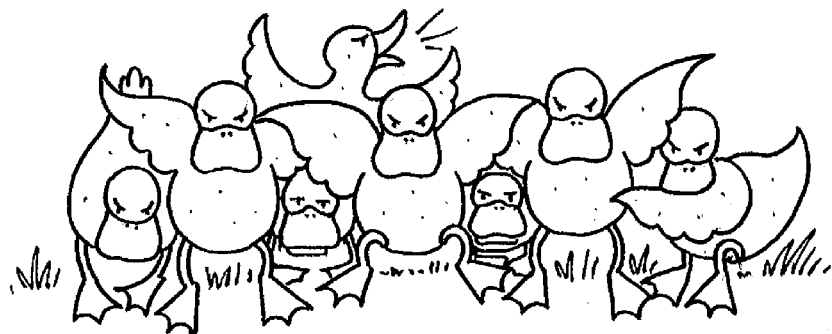


Let's try a ruck.

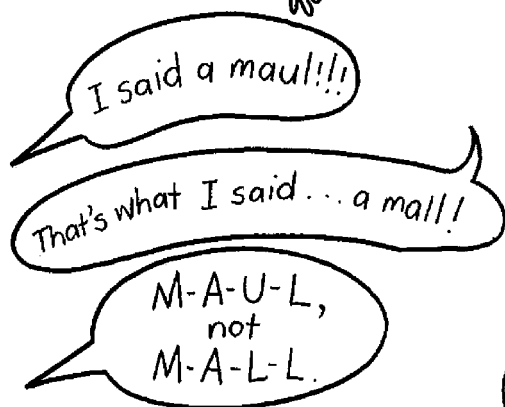
Eh?



Did Coach say 'duck'?

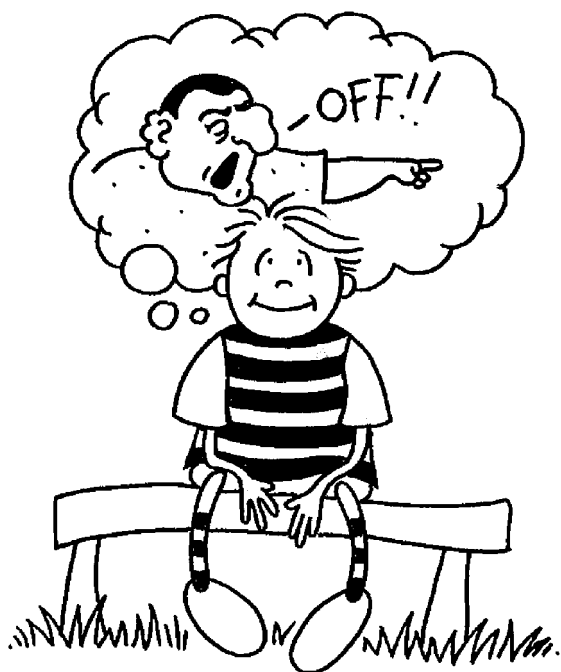


Probably a duck would be better at rugby than me.

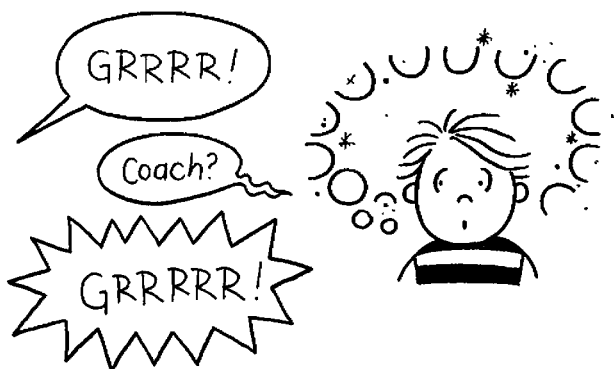


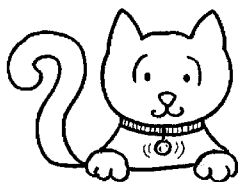
Coach sent me off for being cheeky.

I sat on the bench trying to think of other cheeky things I could say that would get me sent off more often.

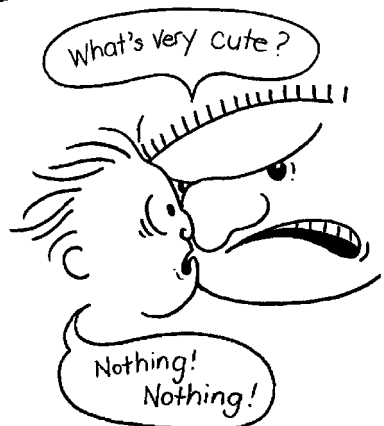


How was I supposed to know that a ruck and a maul are just different ways of fighting for the ball?









That JT is very scary.



Maybe Spot is right. How bad can he be if he has a pet kitten?



I wonder whether I dare tell the others.

Nope - I'd end up next to the mashed potatoes on his lunch plate.

I guess he might be a bit nicer to me now that I know his secret?

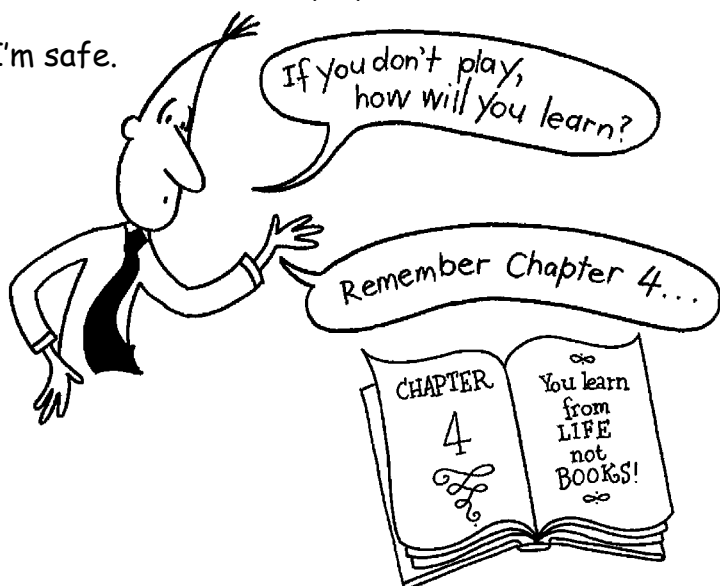
We have a lot in common.
We play rugby.
We have pets.

I guess not!



There's another game tomorrow.
We still have sixteen players.

I'm safe.



Didn't Dad see what happened last week?
I'm not worried. I'm sure the other team will bring
enough players. Everyone has heard about Marcus
'Cinderella' Atkinson.

I'm a rhinestone cowboy...!

Hello?

Oh! That's a terrible shame.



Yes, yes. Marcus will be so excited!

That was Coach!

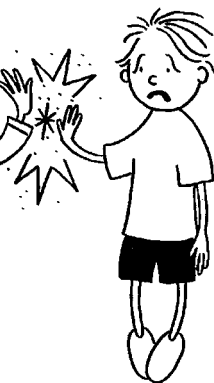


Tank has detention
for not doing his homework.
He can't play.



High five!

YOU'RE IN THE TEAM!



Just for once, I'd like to play a game where everyone speaks English.



Just for once, I'd like to play a computer game.

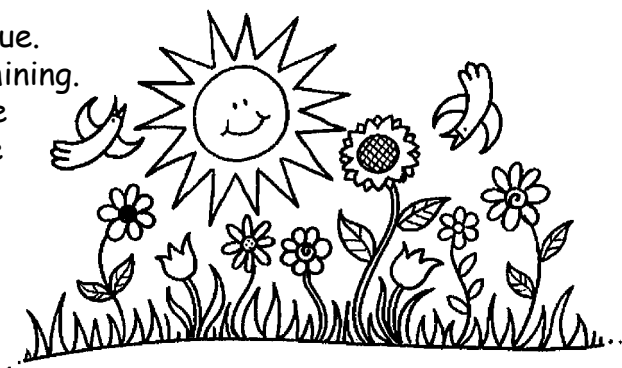


Just for once, I'd like to play with Harriet and her dolls.

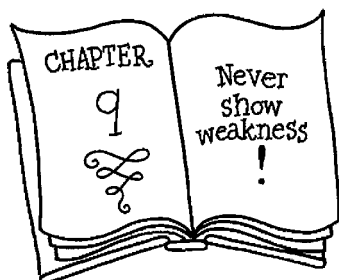


But there I was - going to a rugby game.

The sky was blue.
The sun was shining.
The birds were
singing and the
flowers were
dancing.



So, why did I feel like I was going to PUKE???
I hurried around behind the gym. There was no
way I was going to be sick in front of all the other
players.



I leaned on the wall and closed my eyes.
Maybe I could just hide?

Maybe I could
pretend my leg
was broken?



Maybe I could send Harriet in to play for me?



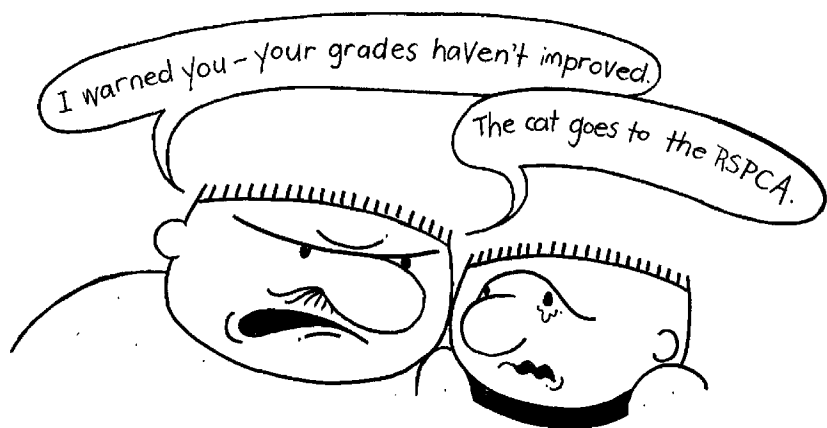
Suddenly, I heard voices. Angry voices!

I thought Coach had found me.

I peeked around the corner ...



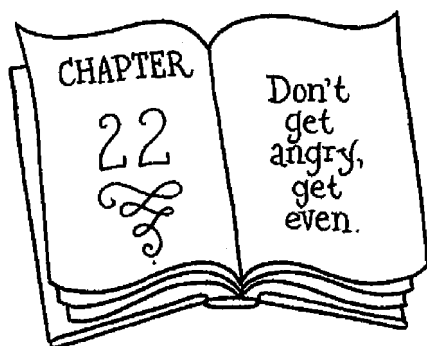
Fluffy? JT named his kitten Fluffy?



How awful! How can
he send Fluffy
(Fluffy??) to the
RSPCA?



What if someone
tried to send Spot away?
How would that make me
feel?
Sad, that's how!
And angry ...



Poor Fluffy!!
And poor JT.
I could hear him sobbing.
I just hugged Spot and tried not to listen.







He said it - but I didn't believe him. I knew JT was really upset.

It was a good thing that JT and I were on the same team. Otherwise, I'd be in the history books.



I've just discovered that a really good player can get you mashed even when he's in your team.

Every time JT got the ball, he'd run really close to me ... and then slow down.

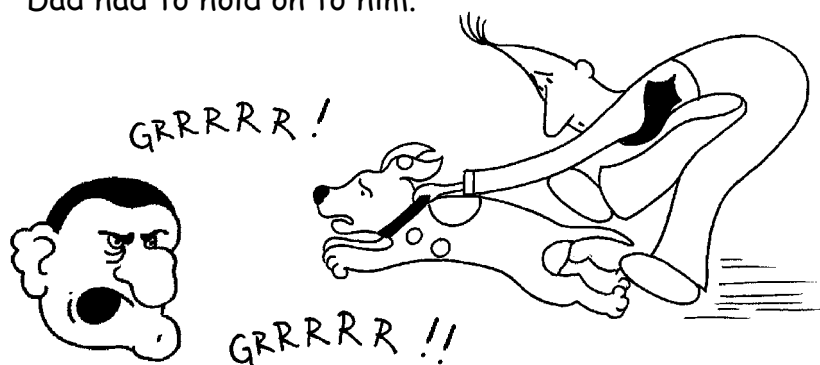
Just as the other team got close, he'd pass the ball to me.



You can guess what happened next. YUP. I got mashed.



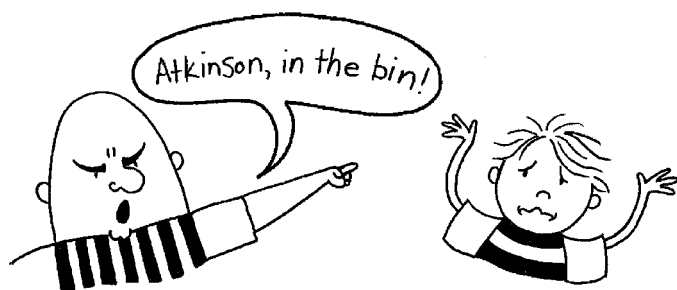
Spot was so worried he tried to invade the pitch. Dad had to hold on to him.



Coach was furious because JT wasn't scoring his usual number of tries.

I guess that's what happens when someone takes your kitten away.

Did I mention that in rugby people injure you on purpose??? I got a cut on my forehead.



The referee wanted me in a bin?

I know I'm rubbish at rugby, but there's no reason for the referee to be so unpleasant about it.



Apparently, you're not allowed on the pitch if you're bleeding. If I'd known that I would have stolen a bottle of tomato sauce from the fridge before the game.



I sat on the bench. Spot licked my hand.

The nurse stuck some
Elastoplast on my head.
I wriggled a lot to make
it difficult. I SO did not
want to get back
on the field.

The whistle blew
for half time.
Thank goodness.



I saw JT's dad walking to the car. He was holding
Fluffy. JT rugby-tackled him. Well, JT clung to
his ankles.



His dad opened the door and put Fluffy in the car.

He turned around to deal with JT.

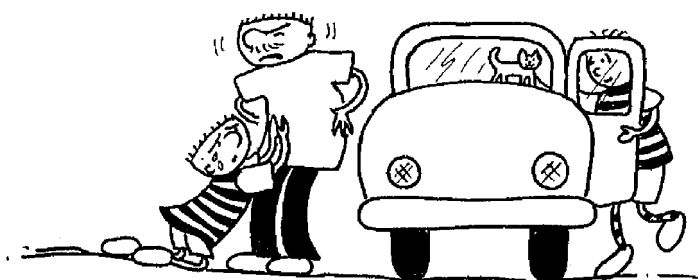
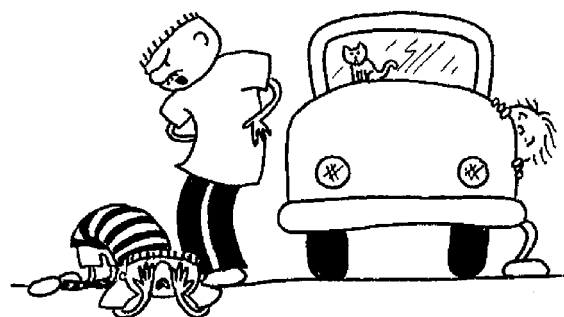
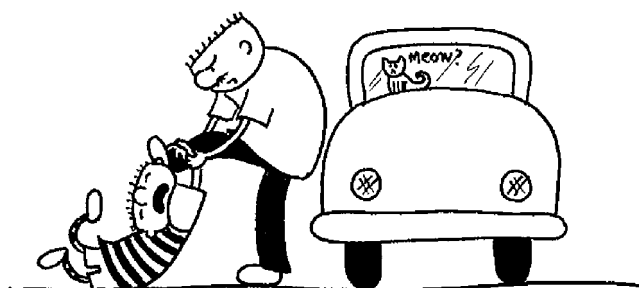
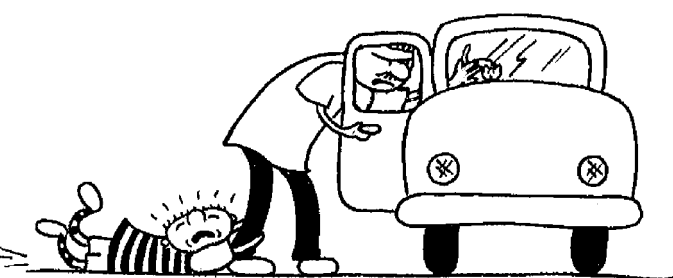
And that's when I had my brilliant idea.

BRILLIANT!

JUST BRILLIANT!!

JUST REALLY, REALLY BRILLIANT!!!





JT's dad spotted me!



I ran.

Me and the cat ran.

We didn't stop running till we got back
to the pitch.

I hid Fluffy in my bag. JT came over.



I'll look after him for you!

He'll be company for Spot.

I'll bring him to rugby practice...

All right...



And maybe I'll try and improve my grades
so Dad lets me keep him.

Good idea!

The whistle blew for the start of the second half.



I looked at the score.
Fat chance.

HOME	0
AWAY	26

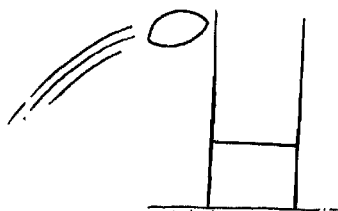
But I'd forgotten how good JT was ...



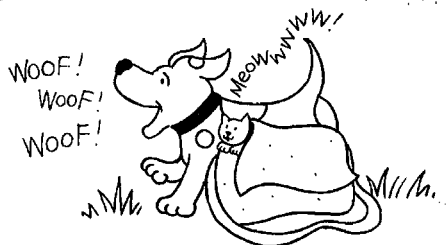
He caught the ball from a lineout, ran down the wing and scored a try.



Then he kicked the conversion.



HOME	7
AWAY	26



The ball was coming at me out of the sky.



Right.
I'd have better luck catching an eel.

The ball hit me on the head ...

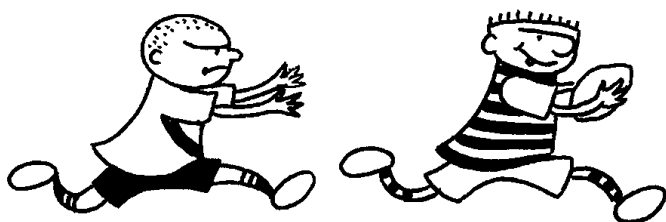


... and bounced to JT.

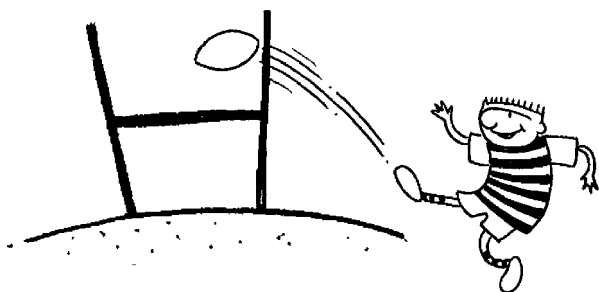
He caught it!

He avoided all the battering rams!!

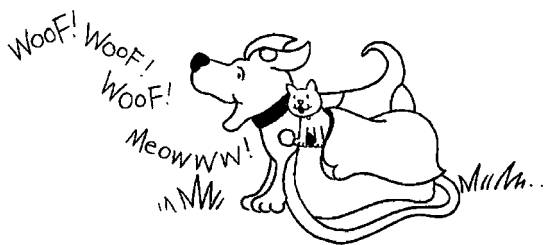
He scored!!!



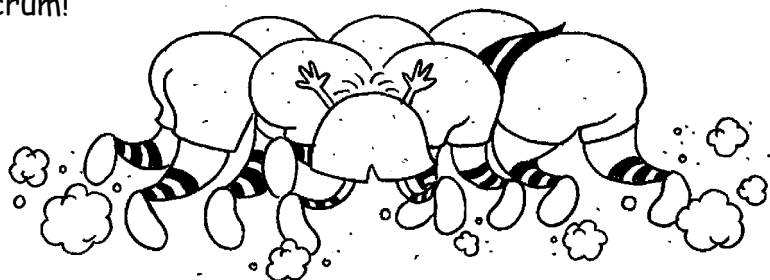
He kicked the conversion!



HOME	14
AWAY	26

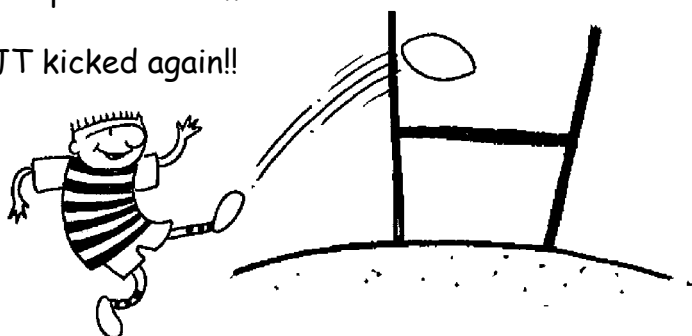


Scrum!



We pushed them over the line!

JT kicked again!!



HOME	21
AWAY	26

One try left to level the match ...

One try left to level the match!!!

ONE TRY!!



JT got the ball. He
ran for the line.

We were going to score.
We were going to SCORE!
WE WERE GOING TO SCORE!!!

Suddenly, he stopped.

The battering rams were
heading for him.



Coach was red.
Big surprise.

I ran towards JT!

JT! What are you doing? Score! Level the match!

As I got close to him, he threw the ball at me.
I juggled it like a hot potato.

If you drop it, I'll fly you from the school flagpole!



I gripped the ball as if my life depended on it (it probably did). I flung myself across the line.



Unfortunately,
JT missed the kick.



Level scores.

HOME	26
AWAY	26

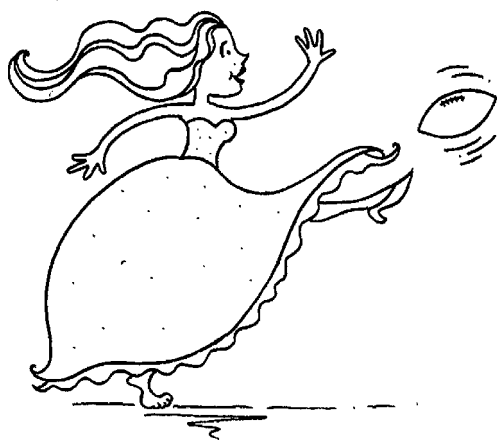
Two minutes left.
What now?



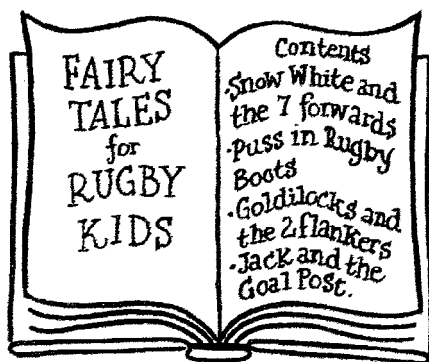
Tank drew a diagram
in the sand.



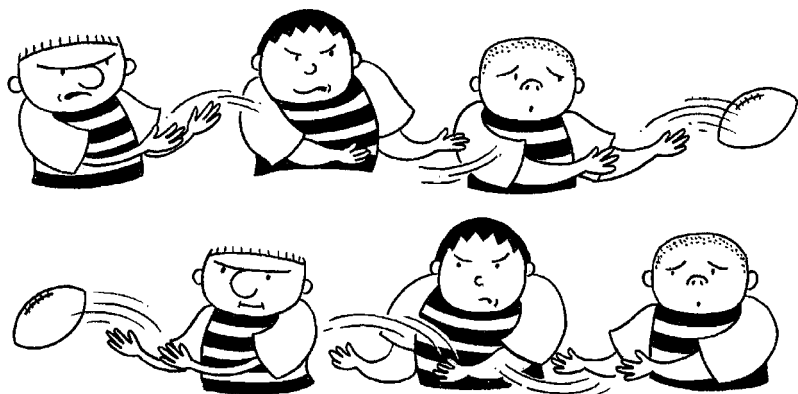
Really? I don't remember that.



Maybe rugby kids have different fairytales.

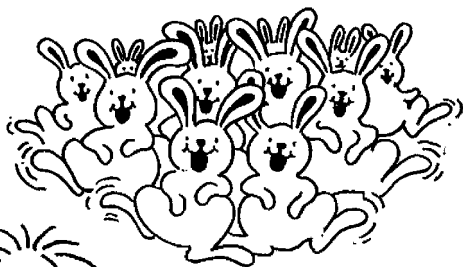


JT got the ball. He passed it to Tuff.
Tuff passed to Tank. All the way down the line.



Then they passed it back the other way ...

My heart was
thumping so loud
it sounded like a
warren of rabbits.



I got the ball.

But it was too close
to one of their
players.

He charged at me.

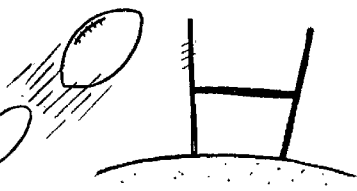


I shut my eyes.
Put out a hand to hold him
off ... dropped the ball.



I swung my foot ...

It went over!
It went over!!
IT WENT OVER!!!



HOME	29
AWAY	26

The whistle blew!



WE WON!



I SCORED A GOAL!!



THE WINNING GOAL!!!

Were your eyes shut?



I guess it doesn't really matter...



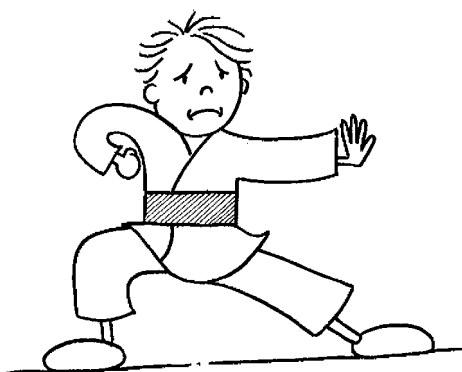
Is this your new pet?

No, it belongs to my friend, JT. We're just looking after him for a while...





*COMING SOON:
DIARY OF A TAEKWONDO MASTER*



The End

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About the Author

Shamini Flint lives in Singapore with her husband and two children. She is an ex-lawyer, ex-lecturer, stay-at-home mum and writer. She loves cricket!

www.shaminiflint.com

Have you read my
Soccer Diary?

