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Background Summary

Soccer is the most popular sport in the world. More people watched the 1994 World Cup than any other sports event in history. Hundreds of thousands of people and kids play soccer in dozens of countries. Millions more are excited fans.

Whole countries almost shut down for the World Cup games. Almost everyone watches his or her country play soccer. Fans go crazy. They parade down city streets. Traffic stops. Soccer is all that matters for that day!

The United States hosted the World Cup in 1994. Millions of people found soccer a great game to watch.

1

Blast Away!

Renny glanced at Alonzo's soccer ball under his desk. He frowned.

'Hey, man, gonna play with us after school today?'
Alonzo whispered across the row of desks.

'Sí. Of course', Enrique said.

SOCCKER BLASTER

Renny slid down in his desk. They had ignored him again. No wonder. They knew he wasn't any good at soccer. The first—and only—time he played with them after school, he had made a fool of himself. It was hard enough being at a new school. Not being a good soccer player didn't make it any easier!

'Pack up your books, class', Mr Monroe said.

Renny shoved his books into his backpack. He was sure he could play better soccer. It was just that ... Renny sighed. All right. He hated to admit it. But his life would be a lot different if his dad was around.

The bell rang. He got up with the rest of the kids but he hung back. Everyone got into little groups. But he was too new. There was no group for him. All the guys seemed to want to do was play soccer. That left him out. He watched Alonzo and his friends as they walked ahead of him.

'You better watch yourself today', Alonzo elbowed Rydell.

'Nah! *You* better watch it', Rydell said. He grinned.

'Who's keeper?' Howard asked.

'I'm the *man* in goal today', Markus said. He puffed out his chest.

They laughed and hooted at each other all the way down the street.

Renny crossed to the other side of the street. Things could be different. He could be one of the guys, if only he were a better soccer player. And Renny knew his game would be a lot better if his dad were working with him.