

Comfort's Story

Background

I recently had a touring singing group come to the school to work with some singers. The problem was that on arrival, they announced they only wanted to work with boys. Their intentions were good: they wanted to raise the profile of singing with children less likely to sing. But you should have seen the faces of the girls when they were told they weren't to be involved. We almost had a mutiny. Football is often a point of contention for girls in the school: some feel like they are overlooked in favour of the boys.

General theme

Do we assume that some pastimes are better suited to either boys or girls? Is this reasonable?

What do Christians believe?

Christians believe that we are all given gifts and talents that we should use to bring glory to God and for the good of others.

Prayer

Loving Lord, we thank you for giving us all different talents and skills. Help us to recognise that we are all different but all valuable in your sight. May we use our skills and talents to help others and to bring you glory.

The story

Comfort has a passion for football. She encounters some opposition when she tries to show that girls can enjoy the game as much as boys. Her ultimate aim is not for a separate team for each but a mixed team of equals. How likely do the children think it is that her dream will come true?

PSMC links

- ☛ Can the children think of some activities that are associated with boys rather than girls – and vice-versa?
- ☛ Have the girls ever wanted to do something that is more closely associated with boys? How about the boys – have they been in the position of wanting to do something that is associated with girls?
- ☛ If the boys hesitated to try a particular activity, what was stopping them? Are they confident enough to share their thoughts or is there a stony silence? Peer pressure is a strong force.

Comfort's Story

Comfort loved her football, and she was fond of her teacher Mr Albert, who in turn, liked her. However, one autumn, pupil and teacher found themselves on a collision course and the focal point of the clash was the beautiful game itself.

Mr Albert organised the football team. The boys were drawn from Years 5 and 6. That September, Comfort had become a member of the School Council. At her first meeting, the usual themes were explored: could there be a school disco and that perennial favourite, could they have more non-uniform days? But Comfort had other ideas. She was waiting for her moment and then all at once it came. 'Comfort, what would you like to say?' asked Miss Simpson.

Comfort took a deep breath, 'I think we should have a girls' football team!' Miss Simpson looked uncomfortable. Comfort had practically shouted. And she had always seemed such a sensible girl too.

The boys on the council hung their heads and began to grumble. A girls' football team? What a silly idea. But the girls sitting round the table had other thoughts. 'What a great idea!' exclaimed Chantelle from Year 4. The meeting broke up with children talking ten to the dozen; the boys against the idea, the girls for it.

It wasn't long before Mr Albert got wind of the suggestion. Miss Simpson told him all about it over tea break. Mr Albert was shaken. There was a boys' team, yes; but girls? Why, he didn't know the first thing about girls' football. No, no, no, they couldn't agree to that! But Comfort had other ideas. 'Why not?' she said to Mr Albert, when she encountered him in the corridor.

'Because at St Limes, we only have a boys' football team. It has always been like that and

it will always be the same. At least, as long as I am the teacher in charge of football!'

At that point, Comfort knew that she had glimpsed the future: Mr Albert may be the teacher in charge of boys' football but the children needed someone new to lead girls' football in the school. Comfort thought about the teachers who were available. Her preference was Miss Lilywhite, who coached the girls' athletics team. If there could be girl runners, why not girl footballers?

Miss Lilywhite was excited, Comfort could tell. She wanted to talk team selection and tactics. Comfort thought the conversation was running away with them. Surely the first step was to ask the girls who might be interested in joining a team? It might be that none would. Miss Lilywhite put a sign on the PE notice board, asking all girls who were keen to come



to the Hall at break time on Tuesday. Comfort could hardly sleep that night. Would the idea have caught on? Some girls had expressed an interest in what was going on but still, a team, who would have thought it?

The next day dawned bright and Comfort felt nervous over her cornflakes. Would a crowd show? Comfort needn't have worried. There were girls from every year group, all looking excited. Miss Lilywhite announced that there would be trials the following day on the field at 12.30. Comfort was excited. Miss Lilywhite was excited.

The trials were fun, Miss Lilywhite saw to that. You had to dribble with a ball the full length of the field and then shoot into a goal that was protected by Suzanne Jenkins, from Year 6. The girls shrieked with excitement. The boys who had gathered round, groaned.

'The only problem,' says Miss Lilywhite, 'is that we don't have any teams to play against. Which other schools in Dipson have a girls' football team?'

The next day Miss Lilywhite made some calls and organised a match for 1st October against St Cuthbert's.

On the day of the game, the girls were nervous. They were playing away from home and it was difficult to relax. If you weren't relaxed, said Miss Lilywhite, you wouldn't play your best. The ball came to Comfort and she miskicked, so nervous was she. The ball flew to the feet of one of the St Cuthbert girls who ran with it and took a shot on goal: 1-0.

After that, things got worse. The match seemed to be racing by and the girls could not find their rhythm. By half-time, they were 3-0 down. At the interval, they handed round oranges and Miss Lilywhite gave them a pep talk. You need to keep possession, she said. As soon as you get the ball, you give it away. The opposition can't score if they haven't got the ball. The second half was better. The girls tried to slow things down and to keep hold of the ball

like their teacher had said. They didn't score but neither did St Cuthbert's, who ended the second-half in the same position as the first – 3-0 up.

'Well done girls,' said Miss Lilywhite.

'But we lost,' said Comfort.

'Yes, but let's look for the positives.'

'The positives,' said Comfort, 'were there any?' She felt deflated.

'Yes,' said Miss Lilywhite. 'Lots. It was a game of two halves – yes, you lost the first half – but you were unbeaten in the second.'

It seemed a funny way of looking at things but Comfort could see the point Miss Lilywhite was making. So did the other girls, who began to look forward to their next match. It was a home fixture against St Peter's.

'Now remember,' said Miss Lilywhite, 'relax and keep hold of the ball. You win football matches through having lots of possession.' The first half was tight. No goals were scored. Then in the second half, the girls seemed to relax into their stride. Comfort kept pushing forward and with ten minutes to go the ball landed at her feet just outside the area. She took aim and struck the ball with all her might. Goal!

The girls held out and were the victors. Comfort was delighted. Things had gone well, even better than expected. Mr Albert, who had been watching from the sideline, made his way over. 'Comfort,' he proclaimed, 'that was tremendous. Well done. You saw things through and have won the day. St Limes now has a girls' football team and one that can win games. You've done spectacularly well. I'm proud of you.'

'No, sir,' relied Comfort, with a cheeky grin. 'I won't have won until we have a 'mixed' team – boys and girls.' Mr Albert groaned, it was going to be a long year