



## On your mark

There hardly seems to be a month go by these days when football isn't a national obsession. Whether it is the regular league matches with all their drama and tension or international games such as the European Cup this summer, football seems to play a huge part in many people's lives and of course especially for children. Why not pick up on this enthusiasm with ideas from the following outline that links football themes with the Bible and in particular the idea that we need rules to live by, just as football needs rules to make a fair game possible. Selections from this Getting Going could form part of a midweek or after-school club with children, particularly during a time when a major football competition is in the headlines.

## Get set

Bring along a football to introduce this topic and toss it back and forth between different members of the group as you introduce the theme.

## Go!

1. Explore which are the group's favourite teams, taking care however to avoid any outbreak of violence between them! Move on to ask them what they know about the rules of the game. Put up some of these rules on a flip chart as they mention them.
2. Talk about why we need rules for games like football. What would happen without these rules?
3. Introduce some ideas from the following selection of odd facts about football in a question and answer style. You might be surprised to discover how much the children already know!
  - In 1314 Edward the second of England banned football (soccer) because it was interfering with his archery practice in London. Now it is the most widespread sport played in the world today.
  - Football has its supporters and fans all over the world. When international matches are on television they normally displace even the unmovable soap operas from their usual slots and their top ratings. Fans can go crazy especially when they feel their national honour is at stake.
  - If 100,000 fans in a stadium cheer at the top of their voices at the same time, it produces enough energy to boil three pints of water!
  - The highest scoring match in football, according to the record books, was the 1885 Scottish cup-tie between Arbroath and Bon Accord, where the final score was 36-Nil.
  - The smallest soccer crowd ever recorded was at a match between Leicester City and Stockport County in 1921. Only 13 turned up!
  - The quickest goal scored was in just three seconds in a match between Corinthians and Rio Preto at the Bahia Stadium in Brazil. From the kick-off the ball was passed to Roberto Rivelino who scored instantly with a left-foot drive from the halfway line. What about the goalkeeper? Well, the goalie didn't save it because at the time he was on his knees finishing off his pre-match prayers in the goalmouth and had his eyes closed! Maybe he was saved but the goal wasn't!

- Talking of footballers and prayers, did you know that a number of football players are committed Christians and behind the scenes they sometimes get together at the big tournaments to pray and read the Bible together. In our own leagues we have people like Gilberto Silva and Edu from Arsenal both of whom have a strong Christian faith.
4. Whether teams win or lose in football, what is really important is the way that teams win or lose. Maybe some lessons about living could be drawn from the game of football!? Using some of the words on the flip chart linked to the rules, here are some suggested ways they could turn into *goals for living the football way*.
- Tackle each day cleanly
  - Try to get ahead, find some space and push forward but don't go it alone, as we need each other's support
  - Keep onside and avoid foul language
  - Remember that you are not just in life for kicks but to pass... your time for the good of the team
  - Don't spend your life worrying over old scores
  - Remember that you are a marked person because God is watching how you play today
  - When you find yourself cornered, don't forget it is the cross that can save the day
  - Play in such a way that when it comes to the final whistle you won't need to be sent off in disgrace
5. God knows we need rules to live by, so that's why he gave us the 10 Commandments. These rules help us live safely with each other and become the best we can be. What commandments can children remember? Introduce the story of how Moses was given the commandments in Exodus Chapter 20.
6. Christians know however that even with the 10 Commandments we still get in a mess and our lives can become a poor game. This is why God himself got involved in the game of life so that He could give each one of us the example, the inspiration and the power to play according to the rules. Christians believe that God did this when he came as Jesus for us.
7. In chapter three of John's story about Jesus, there's a verse that sums this up and it is well known among Christians. You sometimes even see John 3:16 written up around football grounds! In its original version it says: *God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life*. Perhaps put into football language it might sound like this:

*God is such an amazing fan of you and me that he transferred his own Son to play for the world's team against the team of sin and evil. In the dying minutes of that game the Son took the penalty and won so that you and I could become lifelong supporters of God's team, which will always be the winning side and take us safely through to the final whistle.*

John 3: 16