

# Smartie Pants



'Good on you, Landy! Now you're good enough to play in the football team,' his teacher nodded and smiled at him.

Landy felt excited. A wide grin spread slowly across his face. He couldn't wait to tell Tim.

Ever since they'd heard about the football match against Laverton School the boys had talked about it. They all wanted to play. They could think of nothing else. Every spare minute was spent kicking the football.

Landy was good at sport, but until he could speak English well enough to understand the

rules of football he couldn't join the team. Now, his teacher had said he was good enough! He had been asked to play! He wanted to jump and shout and punch the air. He wanted to tell everyone.

Landy had often daydreamed about kicking



goals from a tricky angle or taking the highest mark of the game.

*Thana ngayunha nhagugu*, (Then everyone will notice me) he'd think. Now at last he'd have a chance to make that dream come true.

The Mount Margaret boys practised every day. Landy would jump and mark the ball above

the others' heads. He would try to trick his friends with sneaky handballs. They all wanted to kick goals.

Whenever Landy got a chance he would practise kicking drop-punts through the goalposts.

'**Nhanganha garbinha,**' (This is a good game) he said to Tim one day.

But, there was one thing he couldn't do. As much as he tried, Landy could never snap the ball over his shoulder. Two of his mates were champions at it and Landy wanted to be like them. Whenever he could get a ball by himself he would practise that trick.

'You'll have to do better than that,' teased Tim when he caught Landy practising one day. Landy grinned. He knew his kick was getting much better.

At last the day of the football match arrived! As he jumped out of bed that morning Landy felt more excited than ever before.



He knew he had to be quiet in the dormitory, but he couldn't stop humming softly as he put on his clothes.

*This is my first game,* he thought again and again. *I'll never forget this day.*

The boys were too excited to eat. Breakfast seemed to take forever.

At last they were outside waiting for the truck. As soon as it arrived they all jumped on to get the best seats.

The thirty-two kilometre drive to Laverton seemed as if it would never end. Landy thought they'd never get there. It was over an hour later that the truck stopped at the Laverton School.

The boys pushed and shoved trying to get off first and into the change room. Landy couldn't wait to put on his number six blue and gold guernsey.

The team looked good as they jogged on to the football ground. The oval was hard and dusty like the one at Mount Margaret.

**'Barna nhanganha widu-widu. Ngaliba**

**ngula murdi birrilgu,'** (This ground is so hard. I bet we'll take lots of skin off our knees today) said Landy to his teammate. His mate nodded and kept jogging.

Landy wanted to play in the centre where he was free to move around, but the coach had told him to play at full-forward.

*I don't care where I play, he thought. I'm just glad I'm in the team.*

The players bunched together as the two captains met the umpire for the toss. The Mount Margaret team cheered as their captain pointed towards the end they would kick to first.

The boys jogged to their positions and the umpire took the ball. Everyone waited.



As Tim got to the sidelines he looked across to his friend at full-forward. Although he was starting on the bench he was glad that Landy was on the ground now. He wanted him to kick a lot of goals. But more than anything else, he hoped that his friend would win the 'player of the match' award.

Tim watched Landy closely as he waited for the game to start. Was he feeling nervous too?

The ball was raised and the whistle blew. The umpire bounced the ball. The players were off. As the crowd yelled to their teams, Landy's whole body tingled with excitement.

The play went to the other end. Landy and his opponent jostled each other as they kept their eyes on the game.

*I wish someone would kick the ball this way,* Landy kept thinking.

Suddenly the ball was coming towards him.

Landy shot forward. His opponent tagged him closely. They jostled. Sideways,

backwards, forwards, they bumped each other trying hard to get the front position. All the time Landy kept his eye on the ball.

With a burst of speed he left his opponent behind and took the mark on his chest.

