Ursel Scheffler

Paula likes football

First reading with the MAGIC LANTERN



Pictures by Dagmar Henze

Translated by David Henry Wilson

The telephone rings.

It’s Lothar. He’s ill.

“What rotten luck!”

moans Titus.

“Today of all days!

Our coach is going to take us

to the national league match.

We’ve already got tickets.”

“Can I go with you?” asks Paula.

“Not long ago you said

you thought football was stupid!”

says Titus.

“I like football,”

Paula cries quickly.

“I just find boys stupid

when they watch football

for hours on television!”

“Football’s not for girls!”

growls Titus.

 “Idiot,

our women’s team has even

won the world championship!”

protests Paula.

“I play for the infants.

And I’m not bad at all!

Would you rather

waste the ticket?”

“Oh, all right,” sighs Titus.

Then he rings the coach.

He has no objections

to Paula coming.

 “Will you be ready to leave

in ten minutes?” asks Titus.

“In nine minutes!” shouts Paula

and dashes off.

She fetches the baseball cap

which Aunt Elfie gave her.

She fills her little bottle.

She packs some fruit and nibbles

in her little rucksack.

Then she quickly goes

to the loo again.

Max is already ringing

at the doorbell.

“I’m ready!” cries Paula.

The coach drives the children

in the minibus

to the stadium car park.

Then they push their way

through the crowds of people.

HSV versus FC Bayern.

No football fan would want

to miss that.

When Paula sits down

on her seat,

she can’t see a thing

because a tall man

with broad shoulders

is blocking her view.

“Would you mind

changing places

with the little girl?”

asks Titus’s coach.

The man changes places.

Sometimes it’s actually an advantage

if you’re ‘the little girl’,

thinks Paula.

Now she’s sitting right at the front

and can see everything very clearly.

They don’t have to wait long

for the first goal.

A great pass

across to the left wing.

The left-winger centres the ball.

The centre-forward passes it on

to the right-winger

who heads it, and …

“Goooal!” shouts Paula,

and leaps into the air

like Titus, Max and the others.

The game continues excitingly.

“Look out! Offside trap!” cries Titus.

“Go on, shoot!” shouts Max.

A defender kicks the ball

over the line next to the goal.

“Corner!” yells Paula.

She has known the rules of football for a long time now.

At half-time the score is 2-0.

“Obviously HSV are going to win!”

Max says to Titus.

Paula shares out the food

from her rucksack.

“Have you got something to drink

as well?” asks Titus.

“My throat’s quite dry

from shouting!”

“Of course I have,” says Paula

and gives him the bottle.

“Sometimes little sisters

are really useful,” Max reckons.

In the second half

the home team is unlucky:

a few missed chances,

and two corners given away.

Bayern score three goals.

The game ends 2-3.

Max and Titus

pull gloomy faces.

 “They’ll learn

from their defeat,”

says Paula.

“Next time

we’re sure to win!

Today, after going 2-0 up,

they simply felt overconfident.”

The boys look at each other

in amazement.

Where did little Paula learn

all these pearls of football wisdom?

Paula has learned

these pearls of football wisdom

from her coach.

Her name is Ines,

and she really knows her stuff.

After all, she herself has played

in the women’s national league.

Every Tuesday and Thursday

Paula and Sarah cycle

to training.

At first, Paula

soon got out of breath.

But now she’s become

quite fit.

 “You’ve all got

a good feel for the ball.

And you’re a great team,”

says coach Ines today.

“And that’s why I’ve entered you

for the town championships!”

“Have you really?”

cries Sarah, shocked.

“But the other teams are

a lot better than us!

Titus and Max’s team,

for example.”

“We’ll see about that!”

says Ines, and laughs.

“Besides, they play

in the Under-11s.

We’re playing for the Infants Cup.

Now, off you go for a training run!”

The girls follow Ines

to the keep-fit trail in the forest.

“Our training centre

is the forest!” Ines always says.

“We don’t need

expensive equipment.”

After running, they practise

on the sports ground in the forest,

passing, dribbling

and feinting,

one-twos and headers,

swerving centres

and backheels.

When they take a breather

under a tree, Ines says,

“It’s all going very well!

Cheer up! We’re sure

to be among the top four!”

Titus has no idea

about his little sister’s

great plans.

“Our team is playing

at 3 o’clock on Friday,”

he says to Paula and Sarah

on the day

before the tournament.

“We could do with a fan club

to cheer us on.”

 “3 o’clock on Friday? Sorry!

We can’t come then!”

says Paula, winking at Sarah.

 “You twits!”

says Titus, sneering.

“A little while ago you said

you liked football!”

In the town championships,

teams representing

schools and clubs

play one another

in the small stadium.

At the same time

the infants

play on the nearby

training ground.

It feels like the World Cup!

thinks Titus,

and his heart beats wildly

as he runs out onto the pitch

with his team,

behind Lothar and Max.

Titus’s team

has been unlucky in the draw.

In the very first round

they have to play

against a strong side.

It was the winning team last year.

They lose 0-1.

As this is a knock-out

competition,

their team is eliminated

from the tournament.

All the same,

the coach praises them:

”You played really well, boys!

Next year we’ll beat them!”

“We’ll learn

from our defeat!”

murmurs Titus.

“Now where have I heard

that pearl of wisdom before?”

says Max with a grin.

There’s something exciting

happening

on the sports ground next door.

They can hear loud cheering.

“What’s going on there?” asks Titus,

as they go into the changing rooms.

“The infants are playing there,”

says the coach.

“And it seems that

your little sister’s team is winning,”

says someone from the Under-9s,

coming towards them.

“We have to see that!

Come on, Max!” cries Titus.

They reach the ground

just at the moment

when Paula is putting the ball

down on the penalty spot.

 “It’s bound to go wide,”

Titus says to Max.

But Paula feints to the right

and then kicks the ball

into the top left-hand corner.

The whole team cheers,

and they fling their arms

round Paula’s neck.

4-2 to Paula’s team!

“Come on, Paula,

give us another goal!”

shout the others from her class.

But that’s not even necessary,

because shortly afterwards

comes the final whistle.

Paula’s team has won

the Infants Cup.

“You could knock me down

with a feather!” says Titus,

when Paula and her team

stand on the winners’ platform.

And he never again says

that girls don’t know

anything about football.