

Bend it like Beckham

Characterisation

The narrator – Jess, or Jesminda – is a 17 year old Indian girl who lives with her parents, and her sister ‘Pinky’, in Hounslow, near Heathrow Airport, London. Unknown to her parents, she has been indulging in her real passion, football, by playing with a local girls’ football team, the Hounslow Harriers. Her best friend is a white girl, Jules, who introduced her to the football team. The team’s coach, Joe, comes round to Jesminda’s house for the first time.....

I sat down on a corner of the sofa, stealing a glance at him. It was great to see him again. My heart was thumping and my insides were flipping every time he looked at me. But I had to be careful. Pinky could spot a romance a mile away. If Mum and Dad suspected that I was crazy about my coach, my chances of playing for the team again would be even more microscopic than they were right now.

1. A glance is a rapid look at something. What do you think it means when she says ‘stealing a glance’? (*Think of the context*)
2. What does she think about ‘him’ (Joe)?
3. How good are her chances of playing for the team? How good will they be if her parents suspect her feelings for Joe?

Joe cleared his throat. 'I'm sorry to barge in on you, Mr and Mrs Bhamra,' he said, 'but I wanted to talk to you in person. I only found out today that you didn't know Jess was playing for our team.'

'No, we didn't,' Mum snapped.

'I apologise.' Joe looked straight at Mum, and I loved him for it. Jules must've told him, so he'd known when he decided to come round here that it was going to be tough. He'd still come though. Oh, I knew it was just because he wanted me back on the team, but it made me feel good. 'If I'd known, I would've encouraged Jess to tell you -' he paused, then went on' - because I believe she's got tremendous potential'.

We all sat there in silence for a few seconds.

'I think we know best our daughter's potential,' Dad said quietly. 'Jess has no time for games. She'll be starting university soon.'



4. How do Jesminda’s parents feel about her playing football?
5. Why did Jess say that she ‘loved him for it’?

Dad looked at Joe. 'Young man, when I was a teenager in Nairobi, I was the best fast bowler in my school', he said curtly. 'Our team even won the East African cup. But when I came to this country, nothing. I wasn't allowed to play in any team. These bloody *goreh* in their clubhouses laughed at my turban and sent me packing.'

I looked down at the floor. I knew about this because Mum had told me, but Dad had never talked about it before.

fast bowler: reference to a cricket player
goreh: Hindi word for white Europeans

6. What do you think dad was feeling when he made this little speech?
7. Why did Jess look down at the floor?

'OK, you know what to do, yeah?' Pinky said impatiently, as she scorched down the road towards the club.

'Yeah, call them twice a day,' I replied, picking up her mobile. 'They won't be able to tell I'm in Germany, will they?'

Pinky shook her head. 'Trust me, I'm an expert at this.' She swung the car into the club car park. 'Look, there's your team.'

The girls were all sitting in the minibus, and Joe was just climbing inside. He was pulling the door shut when he spotted the car.

I jumped out, grabbing my bag. 'My sister's covering for me,' I said breathlessly. 'We're supposed to be staying at our cousin's in Croydon.'

8. What was Pinky, Jess's sister, encouraging her to do?
9. What was Pinky an expert in, according to herself?
10. Describe the relationship, as far as you know it, between the two sisters.

'Come on, Jess.' Jules whipped her camera out of her bag. 'Say "cheese"!"

'What do you want a picture of *me* for?' I laughed, doing a mock-sexy pout. I was playing to the camera a bit because I knew that Joe was looking at me. But it was liberating to know that no-one was going to see me and rush to tell Mum and Dad that I wasn't behaving myself properly.

11. Why did Jules ask her to 'Say 'Cheese''?
12. What does Jess mean when she says she was 'playing to the camera'?
13. Why did Jess feel liberated?

Summary:

- Describe what you know about the relationship between Jess and Joe
- What kind of family background does Jess come from?
- What does football mean to Jess?

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