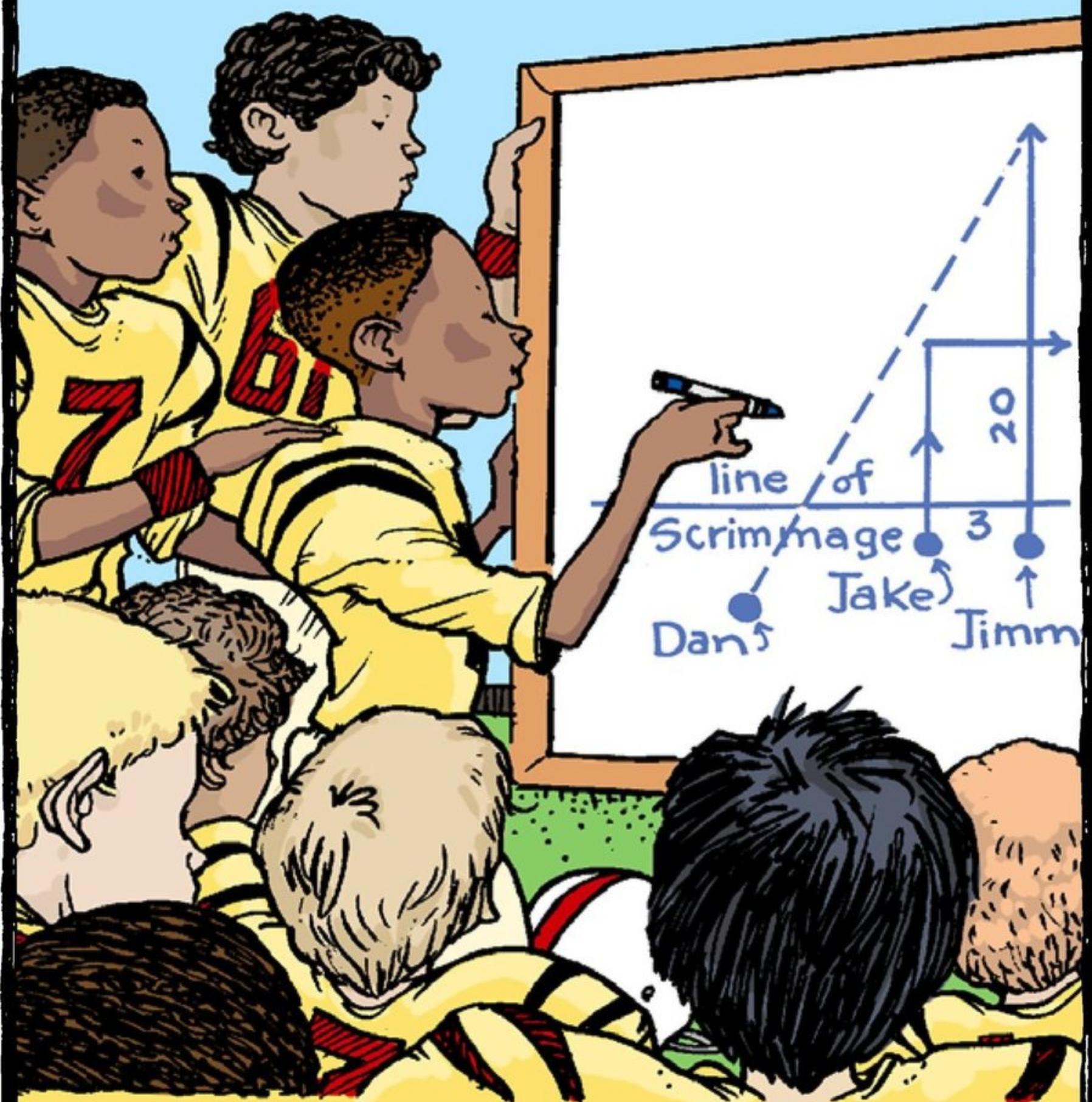


LEVELED BOOK • Y

Miltie Math-head: Football Hero?



Written by Jeffrey B. Fuerst
Illustrated by Joel Snyder

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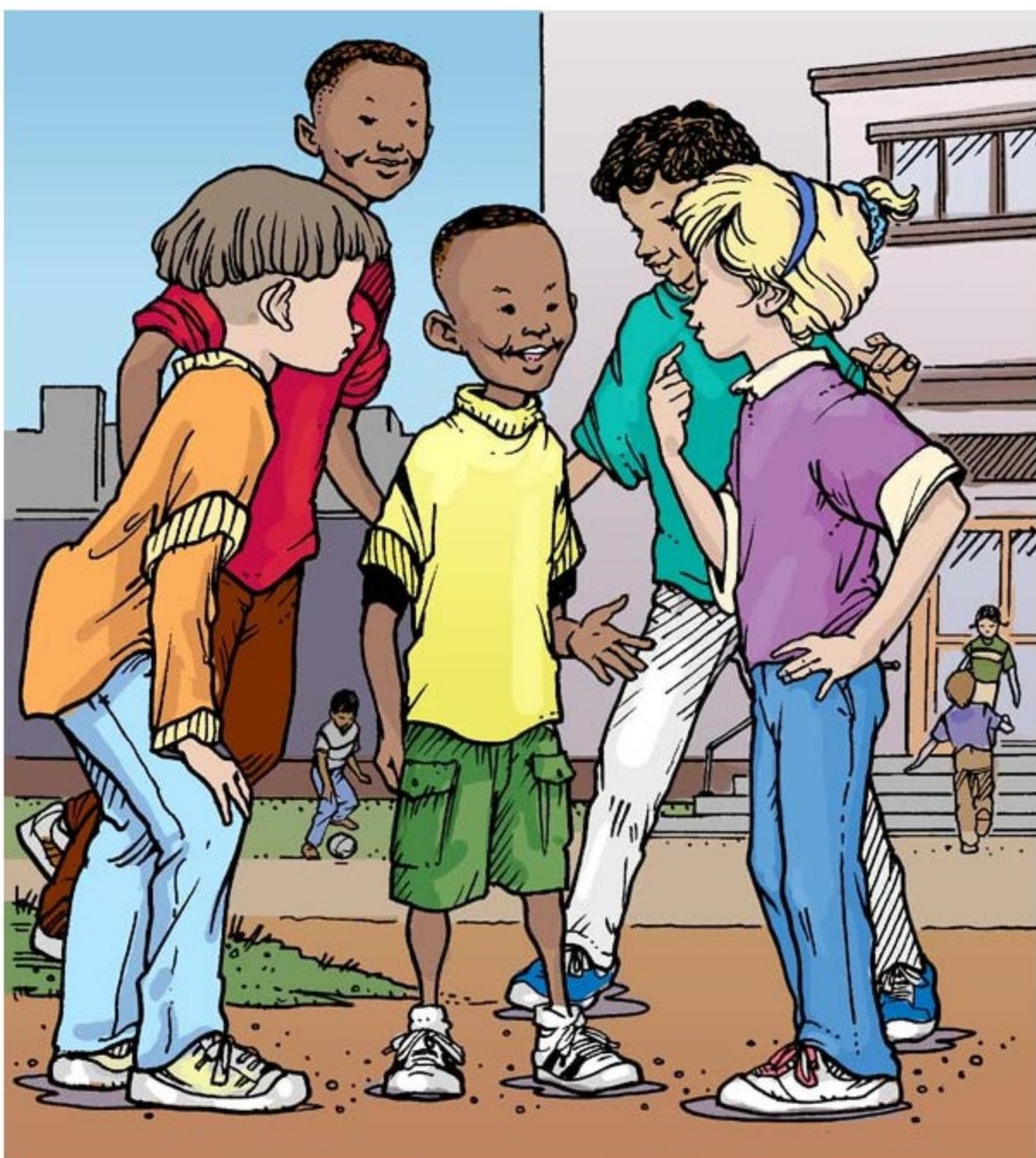


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Being on the Team

At first look, you wouldn't think Milton Meyers, also known as Miltie Math-head, would turn out to be one of the best **quarterbacks** in the history of Cobb County Pee Wee Football. At age 12, he stood just 4 feet, 5.5 inches, which he, of course, rounded to 4 feet, 6 inches. After eating lunch, he weighed 70 pounds—fully dressed, in hiking boots, with a roll of quarters in his pocket.





It's true that some not-so-big kids are fast runners, such as Jimmy "Don't-Blink-Now" Gordon, but not Miltie. He was slower than ketchup dribbling out of a new bottle. At tryouts, Coach Jersinski clocked Miltie running the 40-yard dash in 7.4 seconds. Jimmy, of course, had the best time: 5.2 seconds. He also had one of his usual wise-guy lines.

"Hey, Miltie," he called out, "This is the 40-yard dash, not the 40-yard dawdle."

"Maybe Turtle Boy thought it was a nature walk," said Billy Beffalini, whom we called "Beefalo" because everything about him was big and strong, even his breath.

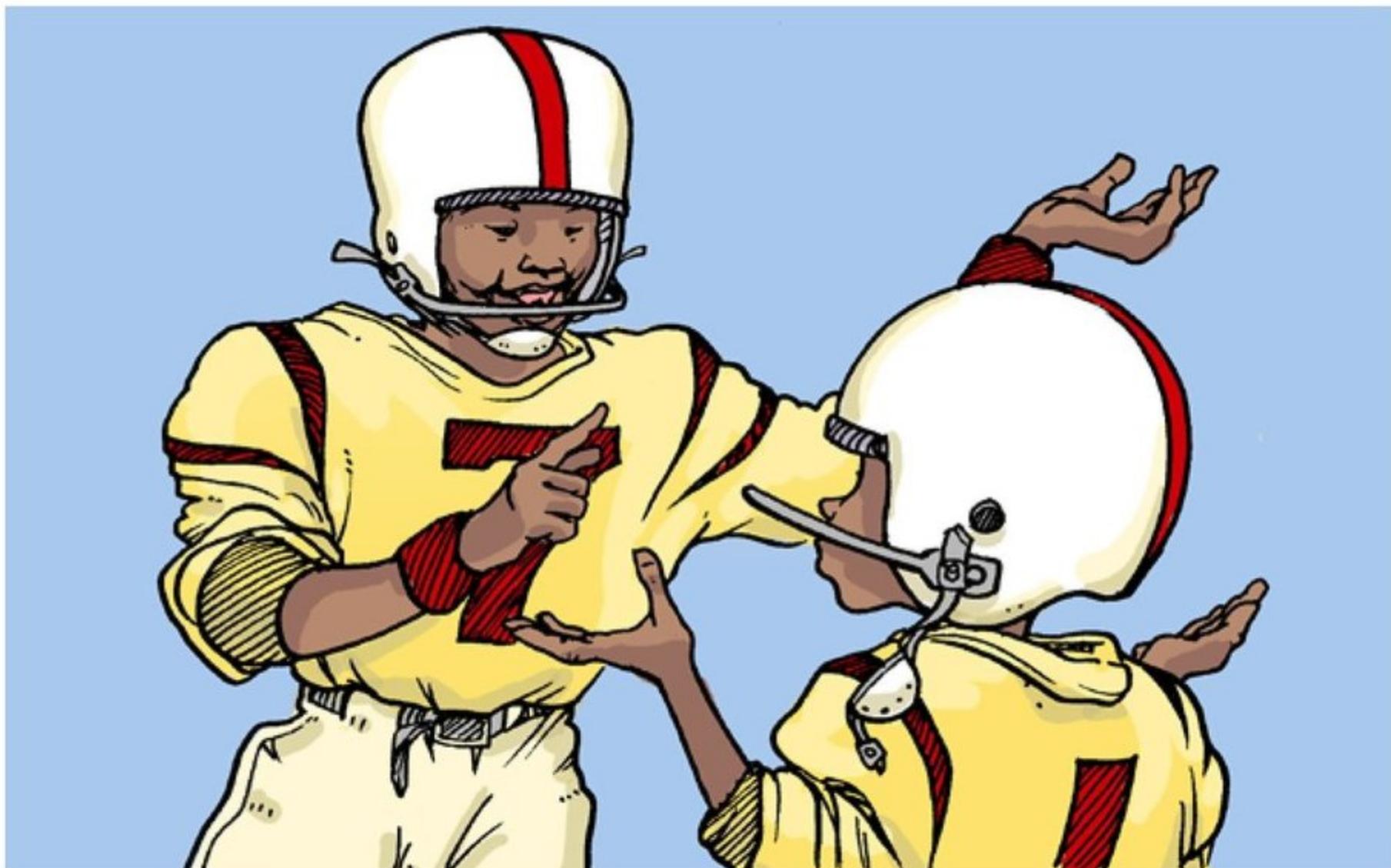
The teasing had the guys rolling on the ground with laughter. I knew it wasn't right to make fun of Miltie. He tried his best. Besides, he only came to tryouts because I asked.

The guys call me Dan-the-Man Dugan. I was the starting quarterback last year, but I've been Miltie's best friend a lot longer. We became pals in second grade when we both brought ant farms to school on Share Day—the same day Ms. Rayshap's class had a picnic.

You don't have to be a math-head to do the math here. Picnic plus ants equals disaster.

Miltie and I tease sometimes by calling each other "Ant Boy." Mary Beth Brady, who brought the brownies our ants crawled into, hates it when we tease, but she's been our friend ever since.





"I don't know about being on the team, Danny," Miltie said. "When it comes to sports, I've got two left feet, two left hands, and ten left thumbs. The rest of your friends think I'm a loser."

"That can't be," I said, "because I'm a winner, and I wouldn't hang out with anyone who wasn't also a winner."

"That's because you know the real me, and they don't."

That's exactly why I wanted Miltie to be on the team. So everyone else—and maybe even Miltie—could see the Miltie I saw.

"Give them a chance to know the real you, Miltie," I said.

The new season started fine with four wins and one loss. Then Coach J. hurt his back in a fishing accident, or playing golf. He kept changing the story. Either way, we needed a new coach. The only one who would step in at midseason was Old Man McGruder, who played football back in the days of leather helmets.

Mr. McGruder meant well. He gave us pep talks about teamwork and fighting spirit. He taught us neat, old-fashioned football plays like the "Statue of Liberty." But mostly, Mr. McGruder napped during our games.





Without a coach who was awake to call the plays, we ended up losing two games in a row. The rest of the season did not look good—until Miltie stepped in.

Now, of course, it all makes sense. But at first, most of the players would have said the **odds** of Miltie leading our team to victory were one in a million. On the plus side, he was already our official team benchwarmer and water boy.

Miltie's Math Pays Off

Miltie's feet may not have been quick, but his brain sure was, especially with math. He could multiply four-digit numbers in his head faster than a calculator.

Jimmy, who almost failed math, snorted when I bragged about Miltie's math smarts. So, he challenged Miltie one day during recess.

"Okay, Math-head, let's see how fast you really are." Jimmy pulled out a calculator. Beefalo called out the numbers.

"What's 1,234 times 5,678?"

"7,006,652," said Miltie.

"Unfair!" said Jimmy.
"My finger slipped."

"Better not blink when Miltie is doing a math problem," I said.



"Ah, go back to that school for smart kids and let us regular kids play football," said Jimmy.

Miltie went to a math class at the community college one afternoon a week. It wasn't his fault he was great at math, but some of the guys wouldn't give him a break. We walked over to the skateboard ramp to get away from the others.

"They're just jealous," said Mary Beth. She saw the whole thing from the top of the skateboard ramp. "You know, you might win a few games if those guys knew as much about math as Miltie."

"Math?" I said.

"Math," said Mary Beth.

"Math!" exclaimed Miltie.

"Math?" I said, again.

"Miltie can use his math genius to design new plays," explained Mary Beth. "Football is all about math: **angles, arcs, distance**—"

"And the relationship between two points on a **grid**," added Miltie. From the gleam in his eyes I could tell Miltie knew exactly what Mary Beth was talking about, even if I didn't. "Thanks for the idea, Mary Beth," he said. "But I don't think I can do it."

"Of course you can do it!" she said, giving his hand a squeeze. "You're Miltie Math-head! Just let me know if I can help."

"*Help!*" I thought. But Mary Beth was right. Overnight, Miltie worked up a bunch of cool, new plays. The only one who would need help from us would be our **competitors**, if we could only get our teammates to go along with Miltie's plan.

Miltie was nervous about showing the guys his plays, so I gave him a pep talk and that gave him some **self-confidence**.

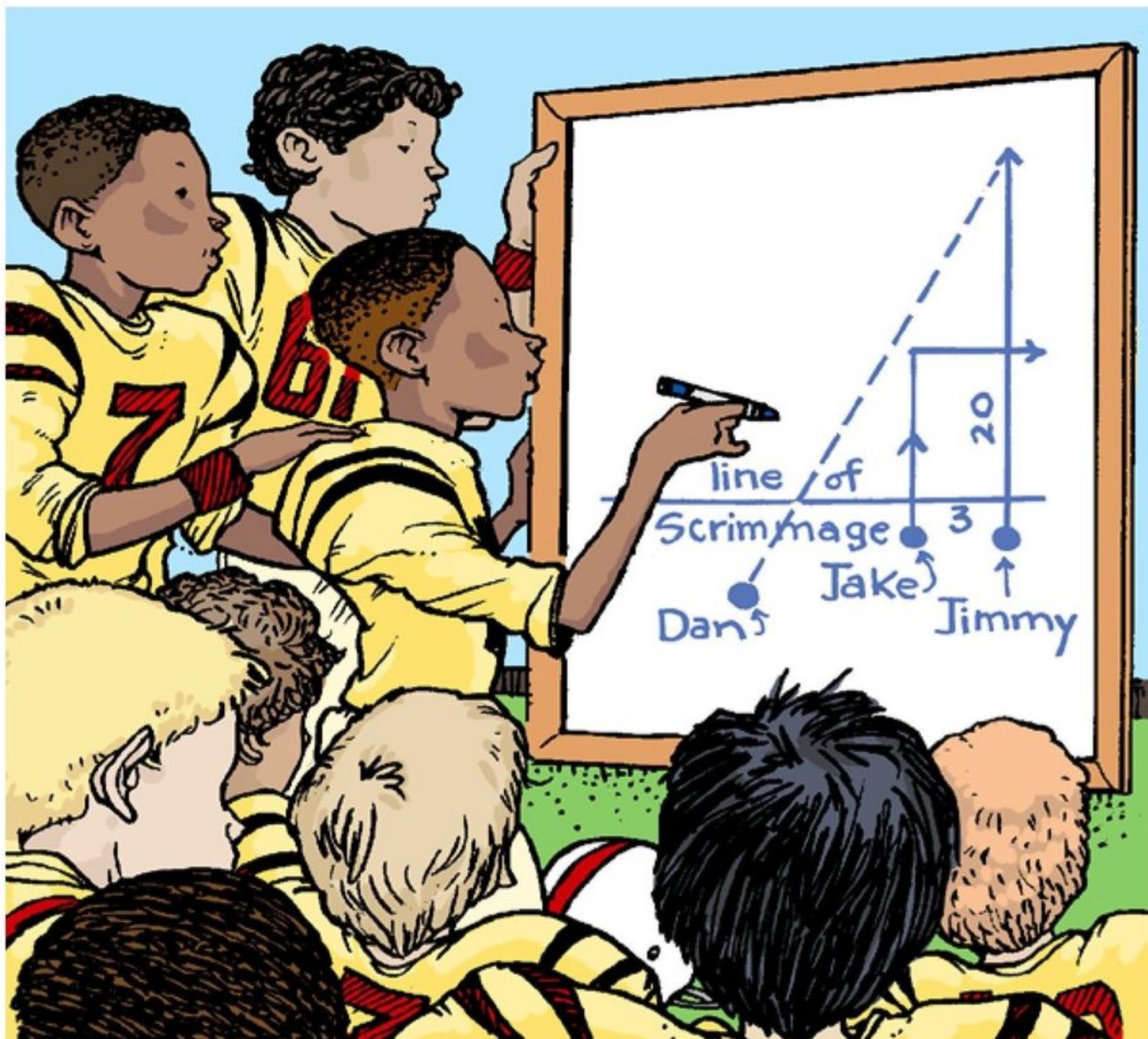
"A football field is just a big rectangle that is 100 yards long and 53.3 yards wide," Miltie began.

"Boring!" yelled Jimmy.

"I'm snoring!" said Beefalo.

"We know the size of the field, Milton," Jakey-boy, our tight end chimed in. "Just tell us the plays."

"Okay. According to my statistics, Dan here can throw a pass up to 33 yards—that's one-third of the field—about 82 percent of the time." Miltie drew on the chalkboard to explain.



"In this play, we take advantage of Dan's strong arm and Jimmy's speed. Jimmy starts on the **line of scrimmage** exactly three yards to the right of Jakey-boy. They both run straight down the field, together, but not touching, like two **parallel** lines—

"Para-what?" asked Jimmy.

"Parallel," said Miltie. "Next to each other, like the lines on a piece of notebook paper."

"Or the ten-yard lines that go across the football field," added Jakey-boy.

"You'll run parallel for 20 yards, and then Jakey-boy will make a 90-degree turn to the right to cut across the **perpendicular**."

"Huh?"

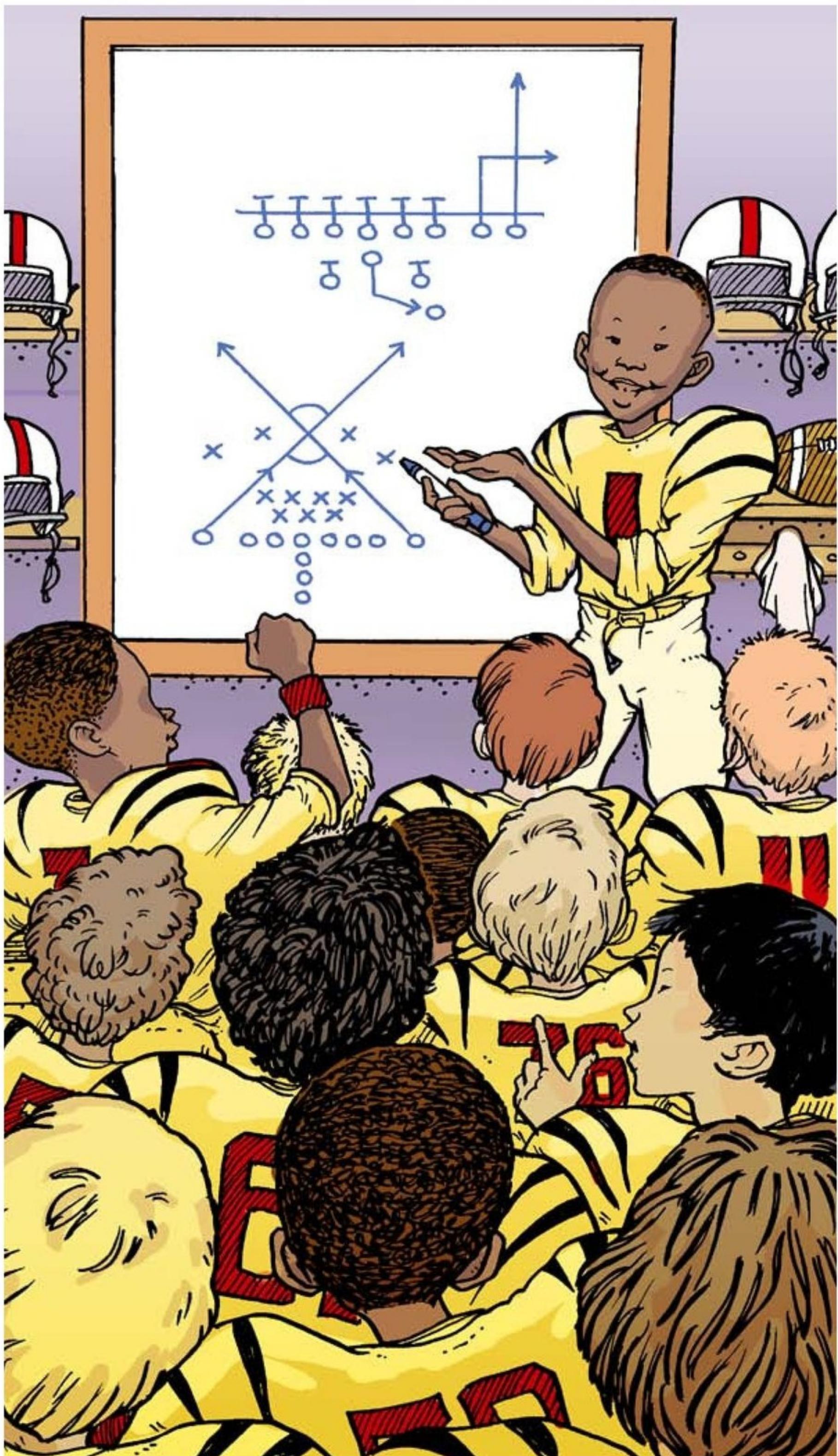
"Perpendicular, Jakey-boy. At a right angle to the direction Jimmy is running," I said.

The guys murmured my name, as if I was to blame for Miltie's math lessons. But it all made sense when Miltie added lots of X's and arrows to his picture, like real pro coaches do.

"You cut straight to the sideline, right behind Jimmy, taking the attention of his defender with you. That's when Jimmy goes into overdrive and Danny lofts a pass into his outstretched arms."

The grumbling quieted down as Miltie went on to explain other plays. My favorite was called "Angles to the End Zone."

Jimmy and Jakey-boy were to line up on opposite sides of the **offensive line**. Each would run toward the opposite corner of the end zone. But at the point where they would crisscross, or **intersect**, they would change direction and run to the corner of the end zone on their side of the field. The defense would be confused; I'd find the open man and throw the ball for a touchdown. Bam!



Football Hero

Thanks to Miltie's plays we won three games in a row and finished the season 7–3, tied with our rivals, the Mudflat Maulers. A playoff game would decide the championship.

The Maulers were led by a huge linebacker named Maurice, but no one dared call him that. He went by the name "618." Some guys said that was his weight, but it was short for his nickname, "The 618 Express." When he charged, it was like a train barreling down the tracks. Whenever he tackled the ball-carrier he shouted, "The 618 is right on time."

Fortunately, Beefalo kept 618 out of my way long enough to set Miltie's plays in motion. Jimmy gained twenty-five yards in one play, and then ran another twenty-five for a touchdown.

"I covered one quarter of the field on each run," Jimmy proudly said to Miltie. Jimmy's math grade had improved since Miltie started calling our plays. "Add them together, and that's half the field."

We scored again on the "Angles to the End Zone" play. Meanwhile, we held the Maulers to a field goal.

At the start of the fourth quarter, we were still ahead 14–3, but they scored right away on the kickoff. Then came the big blow.

We had the ball on the Mauler 20-yard line and were set up for a field goal. It would be an easy kick for Beefalo, even with The 618 Express coming in full speed.

I took the snap. Beefalo booted the ball into the air. Then I heard a snap. This time, it was my wrist.

“The 618 is right on time!” cried out the Mauler as he ran right over me. “Even if it jumped the track,” he laughed under his breath. The guy had steamrolled me on purpose.

I was out of the game. The field goal was good, which made me feel a little better, but not for long. The Maulers scored again to tie the game, then they kicked a field goal to go ahead 20–17.



With me out, our backup quarterback Philly Stone took over, and he was plainly nervous. He fumbled on his first play, but luckily Beefalo recovered the ball. Then he threw an interception on the third play. Finally, in the last minute, with Miltie calling the plays, Philly put together a drive to the Mauler 15-yard line.

It was fourth down with three seconds on the clock. A field goal would send the game to sudden-death overtime—the first team to score wins.

Miltie called a time-out. The team gathered around.

“I say we kick the field goal, then get them in overtime,” said Beefalo.

“What if you miss?” asked Philly.

“I won’t,” said Beefalo. “We’re at the 15-yard line. That’s only fifteen-hundredths of the field—a cinch for me.”

“But what if I mess up?” said Philly. “You saw what 618 did to Dan. That’s not helping my nerves.”

He had a point.

“Forget the field goal,” said Miltie. “Let’s go for it.” A hush replaced the usual huddle hubbub. “I’ve got a plan.”

"A plan?" scoffed Beefalo. "Why should we let a math-head decide what happens to this team?"

"Because Miltie got us here with his plans," said Jimmy. "I, for one, want to know what Miltie has to say."

"Miltie, Miltie, Miltie," sang out the team.

Miltie looked around at his cheering teammates. The deer-in-the-headlights look in his eyes was gone, and in its place was a fiery glint.

"We set up to kick the field goal," said Miltie. "But we don't."



A trick play! That Miltie wasn't just a math genius; he had a head for football.

"Remember the old triple reverse that Mr. McGruder showed us? Instead of the snap coming to me, holding the ball for the place-kicker, it goes directly to Beefalo."

"Whoa," I said. "I get the triple reverse part. But don't you mean *Philly* doesn't get the snap?"

"Normally, that would be the situation with you out, Dan. But I'm going in, not Philly."

Miltie Meyers at quarterback?

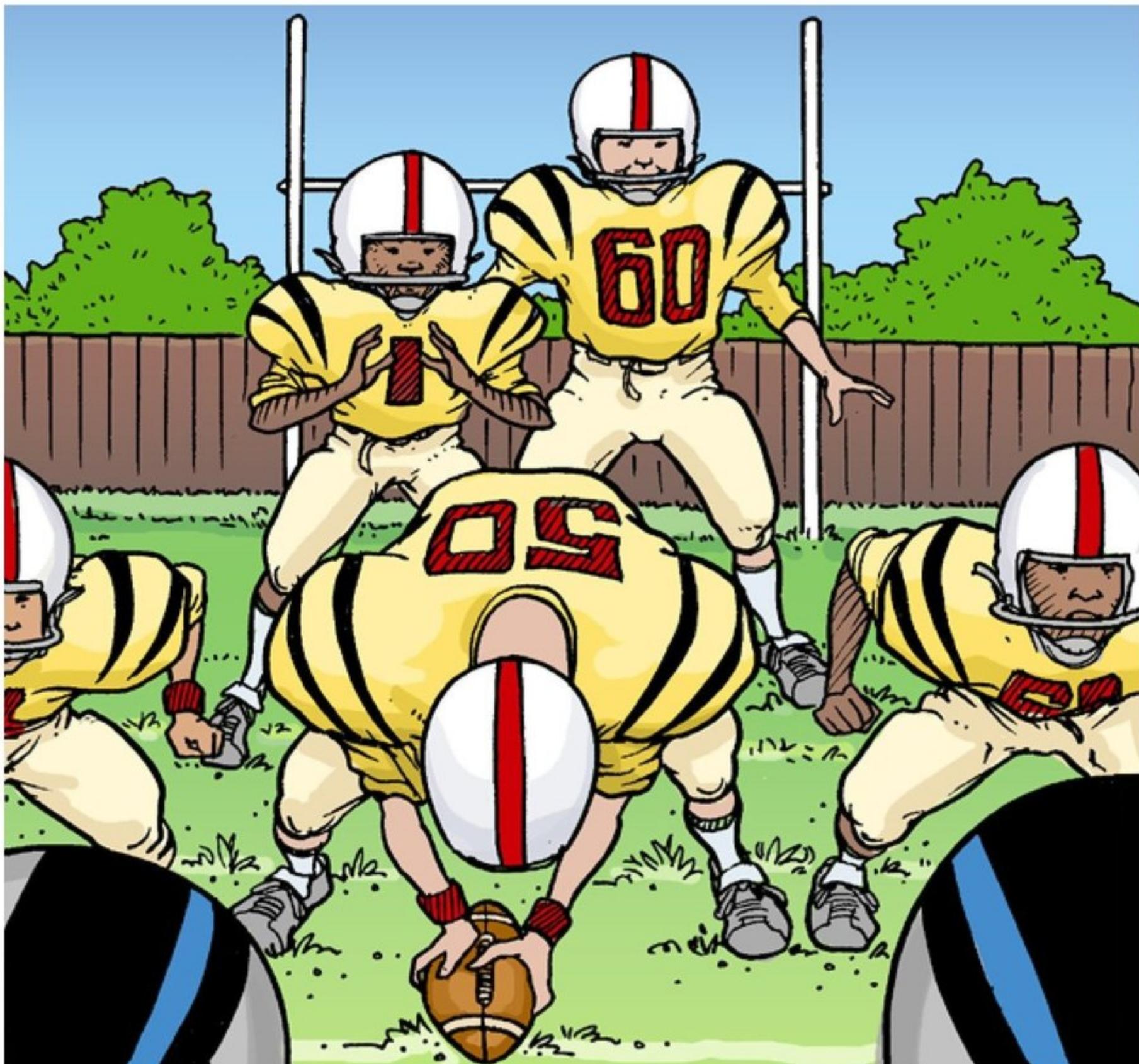
"You'll be right in the path of The 618 Express," said Philly.

"Exactly," said Miltie. "That's where I want to be."

"But Miltie, that runaway train must be a foot taller than you and weigh three times as much," I said. "And I can tell you from personal experience, you don't want to get in his way."

"I wasn't planning to," he said. "In fact, my size will be to my advantage WHEN I TAKE HIM OUT."

"Miltie, Miltie, Miltie!" cheered the guys again, clapping each other on the back.



"Besides, nobody messes with my old pal, Dan-the-Man," Miltie said.

Miltie put on his helmet, which for the first time, seemed to fit just right. He led the team back onto the field and took his spot about five yards behind our center.

"Hike!" Miltie called. The ball was snapped, as planned, past Miltie to Beefalo. In came the charging 618 just as Jakey-boy came around for a handoff. Jimmy swung around from the other end for his handoff.

The rushing 618 stayed right on track, not fooled by the play. Miltie stood up to block him. Above the roar of the crowd, I heard Mary Beth cry, "Watch out, Miltie!" Then, just as 618 about ran over Miltie to demolish Jimmy, Miltie dropped to his knees and braced himself on the ground. The 618 Express, expecting to flatten someone a few feet higher up, tripped over Miltie's backside and went flying high. When the Mauler finally landed, Jimmy and the football were safe in the end zone.





Miltie Math-head had derailed The 618 Express and led our team to victory. The team raised Miltie on their shoulders and carried him around the field.

"Miltie, Miltie, Miltie," they cheered.

"I knew you could do it," I said. "Football is all about math."

"Actually, Dan," he said smiling, "for this play, I used **physics**—but I'll tell you all about that later."

Glossary

| | |
|--|--|
| angles (<i>n.</i>) | the corners formed by two lines meeting at a point (p. 11) |
| arcs (<i>n.</i>) | segments of a circle (p. 11) |
| competitors (<i>n.</i>) | people who compete against, or oppose each other; rivals (p. 12) |
| grid (<i>n.</i>) | a group of crossing horizontal and perpendicular lines (p. 11) |
| intersect (<i>v.</i>) | to cut or pass through (p. 14) |
| line of scrimmage (<i>n.</i>) | an imaginary line parallel to the goal lines that runs across the football field, separating the teams (p. 13) |
| odds (<i>n.</i>) | the chance of one thing happening over another (p. 9) |
| offensive line (<i>n.</i>) | part of a football team that blocks the defense so the ball carrier can score (p. 14) |
| parallel (<i>adj.</i>) | lying or moving in the same direction an equal distance apart (p. 13) |
| perpendicular (<i>adj.</i>) | at a right angle to something (p. 14) |
| physics (<i>n.</i>) | the science of motion and matter (p. 23) |
| plays (<i>n.</i>) | the planned actions of the players in a game (p. 8) |
| quarterbacks (<i>n.</i>) | football players who signal plays (p. 4) |
| self-confidence (<i>n.</i>) | belief or trust in yourself (p. 12) |

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Level Y Leveled Book

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