

My Goal Under the Lights  
by Justin McGonigle

I was both nervous and scared. My Father drove me to Soccer Tryouts at my new High School in the big city. Half of me wanted to crawl into a hole and hide. However, my love of soccer was too great. I had played it ever since I could remember and I did very well on the soccer field. When I was in the 3rd or 4th grade, a group of kids would chase me around on the playground and try to take the ball away from me. None of them could. Eventually, none of them wanted to play with me, so I'd tell them I wouldn't try so hard. Sometimes it worked.

Today was different. I had no idea what to expect. Maybe my country ways wouldn't be up to snuff in the big city? There were nearly 4,000 kids in my new School. During my tenure there, I saw a new face everyday. My old High School had only 900 kids, 7-12 and everybody knew everybody.

My Father dropped me off and he went and talked to the Coach for a minute letting him know that I'd be trying out. At the same time, I put my cleats on, sizing up the other players out of the corner of my eye, wondering how well I'd do. I was beyond excited.

I said hi to the Coach and to the rest of the players and then we began to play. I did what I'd always done, played a game that I loved to the best of my ability. I did well too. I did well enough to impress, and I became the new starting Right Wing for J.V., Division I Soccer for a big city High School. It was my Sophomore year, I was 15 and I was on top of the world!

My new High School was big enough to have lights on the field. Their stadium was shaped like an oval with bleachers on both sides, one side for the Home Team and one side for the Visiting Team. When the lights were on, it was like standing inside of a dream. I couldn't wait to play.

My night game finally arrived. I would be under the lights! I took to the field as I had done so many times before with butterflies in my stomach, feeling like I had to pee.

The game progressed and then suddenly I found myself alone with the ball facing the Goalie. It's a feeling I won't ever forget. It feels like I'd rather be some place else but no where else but here, right now. Knowing that I could either blow it or taste the glory is over whelming. All of this decision making is within less than a second of time and experience is usually the key for success.

I had found myself alone many times before in front of the Goalie hoping to score. I decided to do what I had always done in this situation. I kicked it as hard as I could on the ground to the Keeper's left, requiring him to twist, bend his knees and bend down, all at the same time. It's difficult for any athlete, but done correctly, knowing that the grass is also slick from the evening dew, it can be quite effective. It went in. I had scored!

A feeling of pure ecstasy came over me catapulting me to the top of Soccer Mountain. Gym show, plim show, I was now a soccer star!

My soccer success continued on that season in full throttle. I scored 19 goals and I was invited to play States at the end of the regular season with the Varsity players. I substituted into every game and I even had 2 assists!

The following year, my luck would soon turn when I was savagely attacked and stabbed, essentially ending my soccer career. I would quit that big High School and go to a much

smaller High School in the next town over, where my Mother taught English. She was also an English Teacher back at my old country High School. I couldn't play soccer though, because I had quit High School (a rule states that you can't play the following semester if you quit) and I had to repeat the 11th grade. I wanted to graduate in 1987 (that was my graduation year), so I took Night School for my Senior year and at the same time I went to School during the day for my Junior year. It was double the work but worth it. I barely graduated.

I got worse from there. I partied way too much, stole money for drugs, ended up in rehab and was going to AA meetings with peers twice my age. I was 18 and lost. I tried to recapture that glory that I felt that night under the lights but failed. I wound up capturing a different kind of glory. A glory just as sweet. I would discover the world and my place in it.