



Julia Lawrinson

CHESS

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*'Don't go too fast,' Jackson called
as he ran past Anna.*

*'You can only go so fast because there's nothing
between your ears!'* Anna yelled back.

Jackson is sporty and popular.

He's not the type to join the chess squad,
and Anna doesn't want him there.

But the game is set to change.



To Andrew Forbes-Macphail

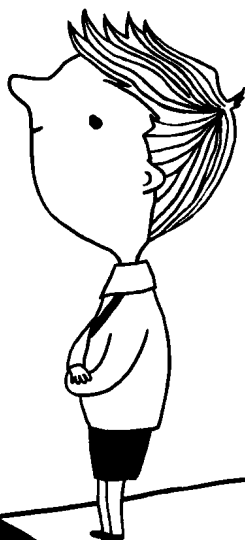
Chess Nut extraordinaire

John Farrell

Chess Coach extraordinaire

And Rob and Enno

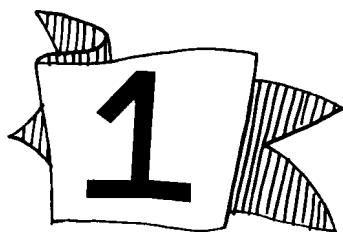
My worthy opponents



Chess is everything: art, science and sport.

Anatoly Karpov





Jackson was running.

It was his third time around, and he could hear the voices at the finish line, cheering and calling.

‘Jackson, Jackson.’

Jackson didn’t have to look to know how far ahead of Flash Buckley he was – he felt the blood and breath rushing in his ears and the soar between each step, and he knew.

Flash was fast, and plenty of times they had been neck-and-neck in a race, but Jackson had always managed to edge Flash out. If Jackson won the cross-country today, he’d be one step closer to Outstanding Athlete of the Year for the third time in a row. And it really mattered, because it was

their last year of primary school. Flash wouldn't get another chance.

'Jackson! Jackson!'

They were chanting for him, like they did in soccer, when he was running down the flank, or in cricket, when he leapt towards a ball that nobody thought he could catch, or hit the winning six for their side.

'Jackson, Jackson.'

The finishing line was in sight. All the kids in his house were going mad, and even some of the kids in the other houses were barracking for him.

He slowed down.

'Come on, Jackson! Come on!'

Jackson shrugged, and kept up the jog.

He was fifty paces from the line when he looked around. It took him a startled moment to realise that Flash was right there, approaching fast, his face puffed and red and angry.

In a blink, Jackson sprang from jogging to sprinting, almost losing balance as he did. Flash was in his ear now, breathing harsh and hard. It sounded like he was saying, 'Gotcha, gotcha,' and

then they were running, their legs moving at the exact same time, feet thumping the ground. Jackson ran harder than ever before, but he could see Flash's feet stretching in front of his.

Right, Jackson thought.

He found strength he didn't know he had; he willed himself to go even faster, to hit the ground hard and push it away harder.

When he crossed the line, the crowd exploded. Jackson stopped and leaned his hands on his knees to catch his breath. Once he'd straightened up he looked around at all the kids from all the houses waving their flags, yelling words he didn't understand.

He couldn't work out whether he'd won or lost. Flash Buckley was sitting on the ground, his head between his knees, shoulders heaving. Chelsea T, who came in after them, looked like she'd got her breath back already.

Ms S, the head of sports, approached them and said, 'We'll wait for everyone to finish, and then we'll announce the winner and the runners-up.'

'He won, didn't he?' Jackson said, nodding towards Flash, who was getting to his feet.

‘As I said,’ Ms S looked from Jackson to Flash and back again, ‘we’ll make the announcement soon. You three go up to the podium when you’re ready.’

Oh great, Jackson thought. With all the little kids who were racing, that was going to take forever.

There was a commotion among the spectators.

‘Jackson!’ yelled Jackson’s house, Macquarie.

‘Flash Buckley!’ yelled Flash’s house, Cook.

‘Jackson!’

‘Flash Buckley!’

The chants between the houses were getting louder and louder. Obviously nobody could tell who had won.

Jackson watched the other kids staggering over the finish line. The faster kids had already come in, and now there was a parade of young kids, kids who liked running but couldn’t hack long distance, and kids who’d run because they’d been made to.

A group of year six girls came up and said, ‘So, Jackson, did you win?’

Jackson shrugged. ‘Dunno.’

‘We hope you did,’ one of them said.

‘Yeah,’ another added. ‘We want you to beat Flash.’

‘We’ll see.’

‘Bye, Jackson!’ they said, and then walked over to their houses, giggling.

The very last person to finish was Anna. Anna was a chess geek, and she must have been forced to race, because her face was sulkier than it normally was, and she hadn’t run a step. On his last lap, Jackson had called over his shoulder, ‘Don’t go too fast!’ as a joke, but Anna had taken offence and yelled one of her insults back at him. He felt bad, because he secretly liked the way Anna didn’t care less about anything. Even when the whole school made noises at her when she crossed the line, she ignored them.

Finally, over the PA, Jackson heard Ms S say, ‘And now, Phoenix School, the result you’ve been waiting for. Cook, can you hear me?’

The kids from the blue house waved and cheered.

Then Ms S yelled, ‘And what about you, Macquarie?’

The yellow house yelled even louder than Cook.

‘It gives me great delight to announce the winner of the cross-country.’

The entire school went quiet. Jackson could feel everyone’s eyes on him.

Come on, Jackson thought. Put me out of my misery.

‘It’s a tie between Jackson and Flash Buckley!’

Every kid in the school started yelling then, some in indignation, some in delight. Cook and Macquarie started up their victory chants.

Jackson was relieved, but only for a second. He could have won. Easy. But he hadn’t.

Ms S announced that Chelsea had come third, and congratulated everyone who took part. Then she told everyone to collect their rubbish, go to the undercover area, and wait for the final siren.

Flash Buckley came up and shook Jackson’s hand like he wanted to break it.

‘What sort of a race was that?’ He scowled.

‘You almost won.’

‘You almost let me.’

Jackson shrugged.

‘What’d you pike for?’

‘Dunno.’

‘Next time,’ Flash growled, ‘you’re road kill.’

‘As if,’ Jackson said.

Ms S cleared her throat, and Flash and Jackson stopped talking.

‘Well, boys,’ she said, ‘this has never happened before. But I suppose as long as there’s not a draw for the swimming, we’ll still be able to have a clear result.’

‘What about another race?’ Flash said, looking sideways at Jackson.

Ms S raised her eyebrows. ‘I don’t think that’ll be necessary, Mr Buckley. Anyway, well done to both of you for today.’

Flash gave Jackson one last glare, then went off with Adam and Ben. Ben slapped Flash’s shoulder, and then ran a few staggering steps with his hands flapping and his knees knocking together. Jackson knew they were mocking him, and he wanted to go and whack Ben, but Ms S was still standing there.

‘What happened, Jackson?’ Ms S said. ‘You’d just about won.’

Jackson looked away and mumbled, 'Dunno, miss.'

She sighed. 'Oh well. I'm sure you did your best. See you tomorrow.'

Jackson waited until she'd jogged back towards the undercover area before he turned and ran home.

'Shhh,' his mother said as he came in. 'Your father's sleeping.'

Jackson shrugged. His father was always sleeping these days.

'How'd you go?'

'I drew,' Jackson said, 'with Flash Buckley.'

'Flash?' said his mother. 'I thought you could beat him any day of the week. That's what you said this morning.'

'I know,' Jackson said. 'I just . . . didn't.'

'Do you want something to eat? Your father's lunch is there, if you want it.'

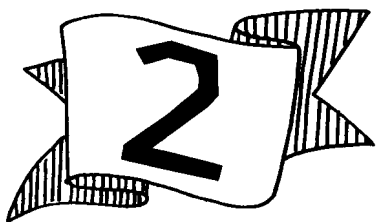
'I don't want anything,' Jackson snapped, and headed for his room.

'There's no need to be rude,' his mother hissed, trying to keep her voice low. Jackson closed the

door to his room. He wanted to slam it, but he didn't dare wake his dad.

He sat on his bed, going over the end of the race in his head. He thought about it until he felt like his brain was going to burst.

Then, when he got sick of thinking, he pulled his Nintendo DS out of its case, turned it on, and started a game of chess.



‘Don’t go too fast,’ Jackson called as he ran past Anna.

‘You can only go so fast because there’s nothing between your ears!’ Anna yelled back. She was so angry she found herself walking faster for a moment.

Jackson wasn’t the only one who’d overtaken her, or made comments. Not that Anna cared. She was only doing the cross-country because Ms S had made her.

‘Come on, Anna,’ Ms S had started off saying. ‘At least give it a go.’

But Anna wouldn’t. Ms S offered this and that, but finally she got hardline and said, ‘If you don’t participate, I’m going to have a word to

Mr F about whether you can take part in the Chess Championships.'

Bang.

Cross-country it was.

Cross-country was a dumb name for it, as far as Anna was concerned – it wasn't cross-anything, except the teachers' car park, the parents' car park, the outside of the junior and senior ovals, and then through a thicket of trees that lined the perimeter of the school's south side. Why would anyone want to run around that, especially in the freezing winter air? Why would anyone want to run, full stop? Last time she ran, in the D-grade netball competition, Flash Buckley had called her a retard. A teacher overheard him, and he got kept after school, plus he had to apologise to Anna in front of the class. She'd decided then and there she was never going to run in front of anyone at school again. Ever.

So Anna decided that if she had to do cross-country, she would do it, all right – walking all the way.

'Pick up the pace, Anna!' Ms S called as Anna sauntered by.