



The Referee: Zaya Chakma

Zaya Chakma plays like a girl, and is proud of it. Read about how she became a fantastic footballer, coach and Bangladesh's first female FIFA referee.



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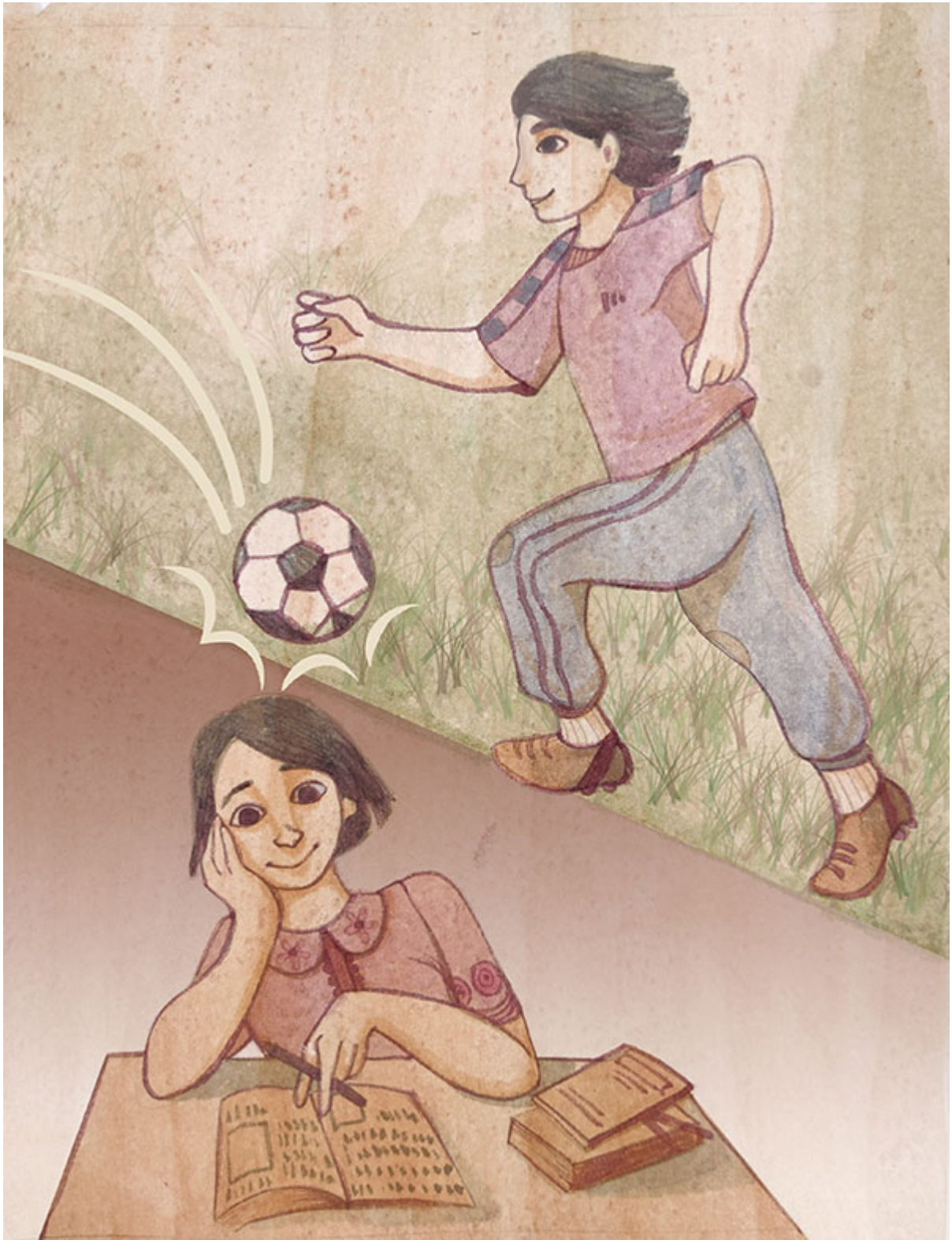
This Supergirl has been chasing her dream ever since she was a young girl in Rangamati. Zaya Chakma is the first Bangladeshi woman to become a FIFA football referee! A referee is a judge of football games and makes sure players follow the rules. This is a very hard job—the referee has to keep running the whole game, and it is risky when

footballers get angry and disagree, but Zaya knows how to keep things under control.



When Zaya was a little girl, sports was her big secret—her parents had no idea that she was an excellent athlete. Then one day, while reading the newspaper, her father saw her photo and read about her scoring the winning goal in a football game. She had a lot of explaining to do! Eventually, her parents agreed to let her play, as long as she was good

in school.



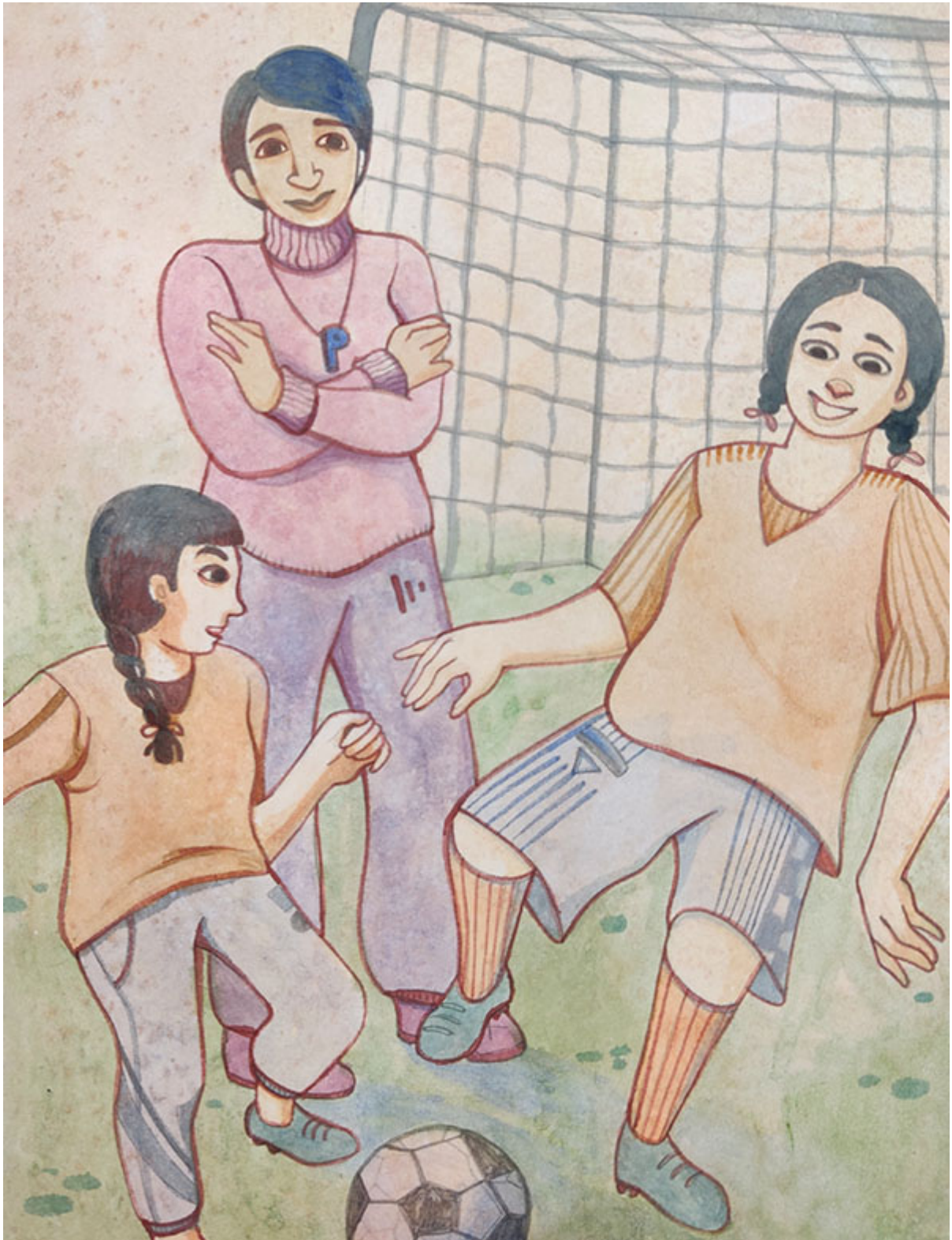
The life of an athlete is very disciplined. Imagine waking up before sunrise to run laps and then rushing straight to class for a whole day of studies followed by just a quick snack before hours of football practice. Zaya has been doing this same routine everyday for many years. Focused and energetic, Zaya worked hard and played hard. She shone

on the field, and in 20 08 ,was chosen for the National Women's Football Team as a midfielder.



But then her dream disappeared in a split second—Zaya injured her knee and could not play for months. She understood that just one wrong move could end her whole career. And so, she decided to have a Plan B and studied History. After graduating, Zaya joined the Bangladesh Football Federation as a referee and became a coach for a

girls' football team at the Bangladesh Kira Shikkha Protishtan (BKSP). She became Bangladesh's first international female referee. In 2013, she judged her first international match in Sri Lanka, blowing the whistle in the final between India and Iran.



In 2019, Zaya passed the hardest referee exam in the world: the FIFA certification. This is a very difficult fitness and theory test at which only the best of the best succeed. You might see her refereeing a match in the next World Cup! She is also training her girls' football team. She does not believe that there is such a thing as playing "like a girl" or "like

a boy"; there are good and bad players. Zaya Chakma's advice to all young footballers is to be very dedicated to the dream every single day and to study. And, of course, to always play by the rules!



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