

Feeling Different

Its not supposed to be like this, well some of it anyway. I thought quietly to myself, reflecting back on my first couple of weeks at St Georges Comp in Middlesborough. I'd just moved from Birmingham a couple of weeks ago when my Dad became district manager for he North East at the bank, at which he worked.

I could tell I was going to be in for a rough ride when we drove past the school the way to our house. The buildings looked ugly and half of the windows were smashed. But worst of all was the racist graffiti all over the walls of the school and the surrounding area. It looked like the heart of BNP territory. The area seemed to be poverty stricken and a haven for criminals as all the houses that were not occupied had their windows boarded up.

Fortunately we lived in quite a prosperous area-we had a four bedroom detached house on the end of a cul-de-sac. I could sense there was going to be problems on the first day because when I went to the cornershop, the owner was rude and started staring at me.

However the worst was yet to come. My first day at school was disastrous. It started when I walked through the gates. One of the boys called me 'bin Laden' when I asked him where the headteacher's office was. He gave me directions but in the end they turned out to be wrong. I then asked a teacher and I eventually found the office.

My first lesson was okay because we had maths, my favourite subject, and also because we had a very strict teacher who didn't let anyone talk. But thereafter it turned out into a nightmare. When we had art, nobody seemed to do any work. Instead they turned their attention on me. The whole class made fun of me. It started with little things like my appearance but then they started to call me things like 'Paki'. I told them I was Indian but it didn't make a difference to them. In the end I gave up, resigned to the fact that because I was different they weren't going to stop.

That first day was terrible and I thought I was going to be alone until a boy called Adam came up to me. We started talking and it turned out that he played for the local football team. Before I moved to Middlesborough I used to play for the Birmingham City under15 team. Adam said he felt sorry for me. That gave me some comfort but not much. He said he knew what I felt like but I very much doubted it.

I was dreading the P.E. lesson because I would be alone in the changing rooms with everyone else for the first time. I thought they might

try to pick a fight with me. In P.E. we played football. I was the best player in the group and because everyone couldn't tackle me fairly they started to foul me. I tried to keep my cool. But in the last five minutes, someone fouled me so outrageously, that I cracked. I hit the guy, but that was what everyone wanted me to do. I could tell they wanted an excuse to hit me and that was it. They all jumped on me and they ended up dislocating my jaw.

I spent a night in hospital and while talking to my parents they both said that I shouldn't give in to them because that is what they wanted. At that moment it was the low point of my life. I just wanted to get out of Middlesbrough and go back to my friends in Birmingham.

When I went back to school, I didn't get into much trouble. As the P.E. teacher vouched for me and said that I was provoked into hitting the boy. However what dismayed me was the fact that nothing happened to the people that hit me. The P.E. teacher also told me to go along to the local team's training session that evening with Adam.

I went with Adam and I trained with the boys. After a while the manager told me I could play for the team, to the disgust of some of the other players. The next match was on Sunday and I couldn't wait.

When I went to school the taunts weren't as bad as the first couple of days, but they still hurt me. Because I came from a multicultural society in Birmingham I had never really experienced racism, at first hand, before.

When Sunday came I looked forward to the prospect of playing for my local team. I had a decent match, scoring two goals, but most importantly I earned the respect of my fellow players. Some of who taunted me at school.

After the match, a man called me over. He said that I was a good player and I had potential. It turned out that he was a scout from Middlesbrough Football Club. When he asked me come for trials at the Riverside Stadium on Friday, I was ecstatic.

It was this and the fact that some of the boys had stopped teasing me that got me through the taunts and abuse of the following week.

On Thursday night I couldn't sleep because I was so excited about the trials the next day. Nor could I concentrate on my schoolwork. I kept some of the people that taunted me quiet by telling them that I had trials for Middlesbrough that afternoon. They couldn't believe it and I think they were jealous of me.

That afternoon was like a dream for me, as I met some great players like Gareth Southgate and Geremi. I also played some of the best football of my life.

I couldn't believe that I had got through the trials and I'd earned a place at the Middlesbrough Academy of Football. I had finally got my way out of the hellhole that was St Georges Comp.

Now at the Academy we have school during the day and then for three hours in the evening we play football. Then every Saturday we have a match. We play matches against other academies all around the country, so we get to travel a lot.

I am glad that I listened to my parents when they told me to be strong and not give in to the racist thugs. I am much happier at the Academy because I get along with everyone, there is no racism and most importantly I get to do what I love-PLAY FOOTBALL!