4 Striker

Background

Due to the glory associated with scoring a goal, most of the world’s most famous players are strikers, and most of the names on the backs of children’s replica shirts similarly belong to strikers. A striker’s job is to score goals and to help create goals for their team-mates. The rewards for top strikers are enormous although the pressure to stay at the top is immense, as a run of games without a goal can spell the end for a striker at a top club.

Many times over the course of a football season, a striker will walk off the pitch after a game and be presented with a bottle of champagne for being named the game’s ‘man of the match’. In some cases, the striker may have spurned several good opportunities during the game and may not, in fact, have played that well. But he may have scored a goal to win the game and, in the eyes of many fans and journalists, that’s all that matters.

A coach may, however, be more pleased by the performance of his defensive midfielder who made a lot of crucial tackles and passed the ball well for 90 minutes. The coach may well call into question parts of the striker’s performance: was he aware of his team-mates when he was in possession? Did he help his side defensively? Did he give the ball away a lot? But the next day’s headlines will usually focus only on the goal-scorer and there’s no escaping the fact that, across the world, the striker is the hero of the team.

Jargon buster

**back-heel** *v* to kick the ball behind you, using your heel (also *n*)

**close-range shot** *n* an attempt to score from a short distance away from the opposing team’s goal

**concede** *v* to allow the opposing team to score a goal; other expressions include: **concede a penalty, concede a free-kick, concede a throw-in, concede possession**

**disallowed goal** *n* goal that is ruled out by the referee, for example when an attacking player is deemed to be in an off-side position, or when the referee sees some other infringement
**diving header** *n* attempt at directing the ball with the head when the body is, to a greater or lesser degree, parallel to the ground in a forward lunge

**draw** *v* to score the same number of goals as the opposing team, and therefore share the points in a league game or group stage of a competition (also *n*)

**hat-trick** *n* three goals scored by the same player for the same team in a single game

**hold the ball up** *v* to protect the ball from an opposing player, often by putting your body between the ball and opponent, usually in order to give your team-mates time to get into better positions in which to receive a pass

**long-range shot** *n* attempt on goal from distance, usually from outside the penalty area

**movement** *n* player’s ability to find space in which to receive the ball during attacks

**overhead kick** *n* strike of the ball in which one leg is high above the head (standing head height) in order to reach the ball, which is kicked over the head

**pace** *n* fast players have pace

**volley** *v* to strike the ball in the air without first letting it bounce on the pitch (also *n*)

**Activity assistant**

1) Give each student a newspaper match report from a recent game. Ask them to underline all of the verbs that are in the past simple tense. Ask them to note all of the irregular verbs in the article on a separate page.

2) Find some recent football results online or in the newspaper and use these results for speaking practice of the past simple tense: *United lost against Tottenham. Rooney scored two goals.* It’s interesting to note that all of the possible outcomes of a football game are irregular: *win/won, lose/lost, draw/drew.*

3) Ask the students about their favourite memories of past World Cups. The teacher can start by choosing the year of the most recent World Cup. Then simply ask: *What happened in this World Cup?* This is effective for either speaking or writing practice but ideally, use it for both. After the students have written some thoughts, get them to speak about what they’ve written and compare memories with other students.

4) Ask a student to think of a very famous player but keep the identity of the player to him/herself. Then practise question words by getting the other students to ask questions about this mystery player: *Where is he from? Which position does he play?* etc.

5) Ask the students to think of their favourite goals (they can use the same goal chosen in Unit 2’s teacher’s notes.) They need to describe the goal using the past simple tense. Ask them follow-up questions using the past simple tense.