



GETTING THE BEARINGS

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Nathalie dreamed of being on the club team that would compete at the National Orienteering* Meeting. She knew that being a new orienteer in a new school clouded her chances to be chosen.

Five girls and Coach Smith stood at the first control of the trail of a white course.

"Girls, let's welcome, Nathalie. She comes from Minnesota and will train with us."

"Hi," said the girls.

Deborah gazed at Nathalie from head to toe. "How long have you been an orienteer, dear?"

"About a year ago," explained Nathalie, "I started training in white courses as this is the right course for kids who have already learnt the basic skills of orienteering."

"Wow, you impressed me," said Deborah.

"Enough," said Coach Smith, "time to start working. Nathalie, please navigate to the next control." Her mouth got dry.

"All right, Coach," answered Nathalie. Her heart pounded. She looked at the map to figure out how to locate the second control.

"I'm sure she can't do it. She's stupid,"

Nathalie overheard Deborah whispering.

"Take it easy," said Coach Smith. "Orient the map and walk down the trail."

Nathalie made two attempts but couldn't read the contours. Her hands shook. I want to be on the team, she thought.

"How long will we be here, Coach?" demanded Deborah.

"As long as necessary, Deborah," answered Coach, "Everybody deserves a chance."

Nathalie concentrated on her work and set the bearings to reach the second control.

"Let's sit down and wait for our orienteer to find the way." Deborah giggled.

Coach helped Nathalie use the compass and she navigated to the second checkpoint slowly.

"Good job, Nathalie," said Coach, "but you have to be quicker. On a white course, you have to visit the five controls scattered in the woods, as fast as possible."

"Yes," answered Nathalie in a flat voice.

"Now, you, Deborah," instructed Coach Smith. "To the next control."

"No problem, Coach. You know I started orienteering when I was eight, so I know all the tricks."

She oriented the map, thought for a moment, and pointed the way with her right forefinger.

"Run quickly," she commanded. In a short time, everybody was at the third control.

"Congratulations," said Coach Smith. "You're really good at this."

Carlie led the group successfully to the fourth control. Laura guided them to the fifth, and then everybody walked to the final ribbon-marked control.

"The Regional Meet at Wally Forest will take place soon," Coach explained. "We'll train four days a week. Only three people from each club can enter the National Meet, so the regional meet will be your test. Only those who turn in the best time will take part in the National Meet."

Silence was in the air.

"Nathalie, if you train yourself every day, you'll have a chance," said Coach.

"Okay," said Nathalie. Her spirit rose.

Nathalie trained herself in the white course every day and bore in mind that a good orienteer had to read the map's contours, set the compass, develop a strategy and find the checkpoints as soon as possible.



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