

Comprehension and Discussion Activities for the Movie

# Bend it Like Beckham

This module is designed to accompany the award-winning 2002 British film Bend it Like Beckham.

Bend it like Beckham is about football, race, gender and culture. Jesminder (Jess) is an 18 year old British Indian girl from a family with traditional ideas. Jess loves football and her favorite football star, David Beckham. But her parents are unhappy that their daughter runs around in shorts chasing a ball. They want her to study to become a lawyer, learn to cook Indian food and marry a nice Indian boy. Will Jess follow her dream of becoming a professional footballer?

The module consists of teacher's notes and three handouts with background information and exercises that you can copy and give to your students. If you don't have access to a copier, you can write these on the board.



# 1. Before You Watch

## 1.1: What's the film about?

Give students copies of **Worksheet 1: Scenes from the film**. Ask students what they think the film is about, and what will happen in the film. Write their ideas on the board.

## 1.2: Women's football

Discuss students' opinion of women playing football. Ask the women in the class if they ever play or have ever played football. If not, why not? Ask the men in the class if they have ever played football with women or girls. If not, why not? Do they know of any women football players?

Give copies of **Worksheet 2: Characters in the film** to your students. Explain anything they don't understand.

# 2. While You Watch

## 2.1: The Hounslow Harriers 00:00 – 39:30

Give copies of **Worksheet 3: While You Watch** to your students.

Play the film to 39:30.

### **Answers to 2.1**

**Exercise A:** 4, 2, 6, 5, 1, 3

**Exercise B:**

1. Jess' mother
2. Jules' father
3. Jess' father
4. Jules' mother

**Exercise C: Possible answers:**

Both Jess and Jules are expected to

- *Not play sports*
- *Not have big muscles or be athletic*
- *Enjoy shopping*
- *Try to look nice to impress boys*
- *Be focused on finding a boyfriend or husband*

Jess is also expected to

- *Get married to an Indian man*
- *Cook well*
- *Not go outside, so her skin doesn't get dark*

## 2.2: Will Pinky Get Married? 30:00 – 1:10:10

Play the film to 1.10.00.

### Answers to 2.2

*Exercise A:* 4, 8, 3, 5, 7, 1, 2, 6

#### *Exercise B: Possible answers:*

1. Pinky blames Jess because her wedding is cancelled. She tells her parents that Jess is playing football. They are very angry and tell her she must stop playing.
2. Jules likes Joe. In Germany, Joe and Jess almost kiss. Jules sees this and is upset and jealous. Jess visits Jules' house and they have an argument.
3. Pinky is very unhappy that her wedding is cancelled. She persuades Teetu, her boyfriend, to talk to his parents. Teetu's parents and the Bhamras arrange for the wedding to continue. Unfortunately, the wedding date is the same day as Jess' final football match.

*Exercise C:* He is saying that she should be doing the things that make her happy – not giving up the thing that she loves to make her parents happy. He feels that it is her life, and she should be able to make her own decisions.

## 2.3: The final match 1:10:10 – end

Play the film to 1.32.00 (the end).

### Answers to 2.3

#### *Exercise A:*

1. She is praying that Jess has passed her A level (final secondary school) examinations.
2. She is unhappy, because she has to stop playing football and is missing the final football match.
3. To try to persuade Jess' father to allow her to play in the match.
4. He doesn't want her to be unhappy at her sister's wedding.
5. A scholarship and a place on the university football team.
6. To coach the women's football team so they can become professional.

#### *Exercise B:*

1. Jess and Jules are going to America to become professional football players.
2. Jules' mother is proud of her daughter, and encourages her football career.
3. Jess and Joe kiss, and plan to tell her parents about their relationship next Christmas when she comes home.
4. Pinky is pregnant, and has a friendly relationship with her mother in law.
5. Joe and Mr Bhamra are friends, and play cricket together.

*Exercise C:* She wants to be more than "a proper woman." She wants more than a wedding and a husband. She wants to achieve her dreams.

### 3. After You Watch

#### 3.1: Overcoming problems

Students work in groups. Explain that Jess has to overcome many problems to achieve her dream of playing football. Draw the table with the examples on the board. Each group makes two lists:

**List 1:** the problems she faces.

**List 2:** the ways that she overcomes these challenges.

| The problems she faces  | The ways that she overcomes her problems                                |
|---|---|
| - Her mother sees her wearing shorts and playing with boys in the park, and tells her she must stop playing football. | - She continues to play, telling her parents that she has a summer job. |

**Possible Answers:**

**Problems:**

- Her sister tells her parents that she has been playing football secretly.
- Her parents find out that she went to Germany to participate in a tournament. They become even more strict and angry.
- Jess' dad sees her hugging Joe. He becomes even more disappointed in her for being interested in a non-Indian man.
- Her sister's wedding is rescheduled for the day of the final match.
- She is accepted into a university to study law. It seems that her life will involve studies rather than sports.

**Overcoming problems:**

- She and her sister tell their parents that they are staying with cousins, so she can go to Germany with the team.
- She pretends to be sick so that she can continue to play.
- She leaves the wedding to play in the final match.
- She persuades her parents to let her go to America on a football scholarship.

#### 3.2: What happens in the film?

Students look at their copies of **Worksheet 1: Scenes from the film.**

**Answers to 3.2**

**Exercise A:** d, b, e, f, c, g, a

**Exercise B:**

- a. Jess is telling Joe that her parents allow her to go to America
- b. Pinky's engagement party.
- c. The Hounslow Harriers have just won the final match.
- d. Jess is in her room, talking to a poster of David Beckham
- e. Jess, Tony and his friends are playing football in the park, just after she joins the Hounslow Harriers.
- f. The Hounslow Harriers are in Germany.
- g. The final match is finished, and the team is helping Jess get dressed so she can go back to the wedding.

### 3.3: Women's role in society

Explain to the class that Jess in *Bend It like Beckham* challenges common ideas and beliefs about women and their roles in society.

**Exercise A:** Students look back at their lists of expectations in section 2.1. Then in pairs or groups, they make another list of the expectations that their own society has for girls. How are they similar? How are they different?

**Exercise B:** In groups or as a class, students discuss:

Do you think that these expectations are fair? Are there any things that you would change about these? Why or why not? What would you *not* change?

### 3.4: Challenging expectations

Explain to the class that there are many characters in the film who do things that challenge other people's expectations of them. For example, Jess:

- People (like Tony's friends) think that women are no good at football.
- Some people in the Indian community think that girls should not show their legs in public by wearing shorts.
- Some women on the football team are surprised that an Indian woman plays football.
- Her mother is annoyed that she is not interested in learning to cook Indian food.

What expectations do other characters challenge? Discuss this as a class.

- Jules
- Joe
- Tony
- Jess' father
- Jules' mother

**Possible answers:**

**Jules** – Teenage girls are supposed to be interested in clothes and boys. Jules is mostly interested in football.

**Joe** – When he was given the opportunity to coach the men's team, he decided to continue coaching the women's team.

**Tony** – Some people in the Indian community think that Indian men can't be gay.

**Jess' father** – He eventually allows Jess to go to the football match, and then go to America, although people expect him to forbid this.

**Jules' mother** – She tries to understand the rules of football so she can encourage her daughter's choice of career.

# Worksheet 1: Scenes from the Film



## Worksheet 2: Characters in the Film

**Jesminder (Jess)** wants to be a professional footballer. Unfortunately, her parents have more traditional ideas about her future.



**Juliette (Jules)** also wants to be a professional footballer. She plays for a women's football team, the **Hounslow Harriers**.



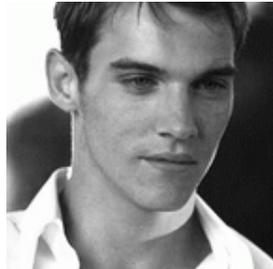
**Jess'** parents, **Mr and Mrs Bhamra**, immigrated to Britain before their children were born. They want their daughters to be proper Indian girls. They don't like Jess playing football.



**Jules'** father **Alan** supports his daughter's football career. He practices with her and goes to watch her matches. Her mother, **Paula**, doesn't like it. She wants her daughter to be more feminine.



**Pinky** is **Jess'** older sister. She is busy planning her wedding to her boyfriend, **Teetu**.



**Joe** is the coach of the **Hounslow Harriers**. He used to play football, but a knee injury forced him to stop playing.



**Tony** is Jess' best friend. He plays football with her in the park. Tony has a secret.



**David Beckham** is an international football star.

# Worksheet 3: While You Watch

## 2.1: The Hounslow Harriers 00:00 – 39:30

**Exercise A:** Put these events in the correct order.

1. Jess and Jules go shopping for football shoes.
2. Jules sees Jess playing football in the park, and asks her to join the Hounslow Harriers.
3. Pinky's boyfriend's relatives see Jess and Jules laughing and hugging, and think she is kissing a man.
4. Pinky has her engagement party.
5. Jess lies to her parents that she has a part-time job, so she can go out and play football.
6. Jess' mother sees her wearing shorts and playing football with Tony's friends, and tells her she's not allowed to play football.

**Exercise B:** Who said what? Match the statement with the person who said it.

|   |
|---|
| <i>Jess' mother</i> <i>Jules' mother</i> <i>Jess' father</i> <i>Jules' father</i> |
|---|

1. 'I was married at your age.'
2. 'If she's more interested in playing football than chasing boys, well quite frankly I'm over the moon about that.'
3. 'Your mother's right. It's not nice. You must start behaving like a proper woman.'
4. 'No boy's going to want to go out with a girl who's got bigger muscles than him.'

**Exercise C:** Think about the expectations that Jess' and Jules' families have of them. Make lists of the things that their families and society expect girls to do. Make one list for both girls, and another list for Jess.

| Both Jess and Jules                      | Jess                                     |
|--|--|
| <br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br> | <br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br> |

## 2.2: Will Pinky Get Married? 30:00 – 1:10:10

**Exercise A:** This section starts with Pinky's wedding being cancelled, because her future in-laws think that Jess was kissing a white man at the bus-stop. Her parents then forbid her from playing football. Put the following events in order.

1. Jess gets into a fight with another football player.
2. Jess' father sees Joe and Jess hugging.
3. Joe and Jess almost kiss. Jules sees this and becomes jealous.
4. The Hounslow Harriers go to Germany.
5. The Bhamras find out Jess went to Germany, and try to make her quit the team.
6. The wedding is back on again.
7. Tony tells Jess that he is gay.
8. Joe goes to the Bhamra's house to try to persuade them to allow Jess to play football.

**Exercise B:** Rewrite these paragraphs so they are true. There are three mistakes in each paragraph.

1. Pinky blames her parents because her wedding is cancelled. She tells her parents that Jess has stopped playing football. They are very angry and tell her she can continue to play.
2. Jules doesn't like Joe. In Germany, Joe and Jess fight. Jules sees this and is upset and jealous. Jules visits Jess' house and they have an argument.
3. Pinky is very happy that her wedding is cancelled. She persuades Teetu, her boyfriend, to talk to his friends. Teetu's parents and the Bhamras arrange for the wedding to continue. Unfortunately, the wedding date is the same day as Jess' university exams.

**Exercise C:** Joe tries to encourage Jess not to give up. When Jess says that her parents want to protect her by not letting her play football, Joe asks her "Whose life are you living?" What does he mean?

## **2.3: The final match** 1:10:10 – end

**Exercise A:** Answer the questions.

1. Why does Jess' mother pray to the picture of Babaji?
2. How does Jess feel at the start of her sister's wedding?
3. Why does Joe go to Jess' house during the wedding?
4. Why does Mr Bhamra allow Jess to go to the football match?
5. What does the American offer Jules and Jess?
6. What job does Joe take in the end?

**Exercise B:** What happens to these people at the end of the movie?

1. Jess and Jules
2. Jules' mother
3. Jess and Joe
4. Pinky and her mother-in-law
5. Joe and Mr Bhamra

**Exercise C:** At the end of the wedding celebration, Jess is sitting in the car with her sister when her sister says "Don't you want all of this?" (a wedding, a husband, etc.). What does Jess mean when she says "I want more than this?"

## Plot Summary

18-year-old Jesminder "Jess" is a British Indian girl living in the western suburbs of London. Her love of football, and the famous football star David Beckham, play a huge role in her life. Jess' parents have big dreams for her. They want her to become successful and "a proper Indian girl." They want her to go to university and become a lawyer, and marry an Indian man. Jess, however, wants to become a professional football player. She plays football in the park with her best friend, Tony, and his friends.

Her older sister, Pinky, on the other hand, is more interested in shopping and her future wedding. She is making her parents proud by planning to marry an Indian man. Jess' parents believe that she should not be playing football. She should be helping to prepare for the wedding. One day while playing in the park, Jess is spotted by Jules, who plays for a women's football team, the Hounslow Harriers. Like Jess' mother, Jules' mother does not understand her daughter's love for football. However, Jules' father encourages her to play football and is happy that her daughter enjoys a sport that he loves as well.

Jess happily accepts Jules' invitation to join the club, even though she knows her parents will disagree. She becomes one of the best players on the team and becomes very close to the team's coach, Joe. Joe had to quit playing football when he became injured, so he became a coach. Although both Jules and Jess are secretly in love with him, Joe cannot date them because he is their coach. However, the relationship between Jess and Joe grows, and when he begins to show Jess more attention, Jules becomes jealous.

After being told that she must stop playing football, Jess' parents discover that she has been lying to them and secretly playing with the team. Jess is forced to quit the team. Her parents also discourage a relationship with Joe, because he is not an Indian man. Jess is very disappointed because the final game of the season will be on the same day as her sister's wedding.

At the wedding Jess is very unhappy. Her father sees this, and allows Jess to play in the match. During the game, an American scout is watching Jess and Jules play. He is impressed with their talent and offers them the opportunity to play on the Santa Clara University soccer team in the United States. Jess returns to the end of her sister's wedding party and tells Tony that she has the opportunity to play in America. She does not know how to tell her parents. Although Tony is gay (which only Jess knows), he asks her family if he can marry her. He offers to do this so that she can go to Santa Clara University to play football. Jess doesn't want to lie any more, and tells her family that she has been given the chance to play football in the United States. While her mother is horrified, her father supports the decision. He talks about the prejudice he faced as a young man who wanted to play cricket. He gives permission to go.

At the airport, Jess and Jules' families say goodbye. Joe arrives to say goodbye and to tell Jess that he was offered a job coaching the men's team, but turned it down to help the women's team turn professional. Joe and Jess kiss, but they are interrupted by the sudden appearance of David Beckham. Jess tells Joe that she will be back at Christmas and will try to explain her relationship with Joe to her parents at that time. The final scene of the film shows Jess' father teaching Joe how to play cricket and the friendly relationship that has grown between them.