



11 of the best football reads for children

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Ten of the Best

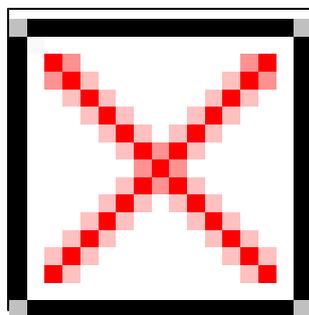
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Ten of the Best: the best football books chosen by **Jim Sells** of the **National Literacy Trust**

With the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia fast approaching, there's no better time to tap into the excitement around the beautiful game to help boost children's love of reading. **Jim Sells, Sport and Literacy Programme Manager at the National Literacy Trust**, shares his favourite football books for children of all ages.

I've got over 20 years' experience at the **National Literacy Trust**, using football to improve children's and young people's literacy. I know the power that football has to grab children's attention and get them into reading because I've seen it first-hand! Our **Premier League Reading Stars** programme has turned kids who would refuse to even consider picking up a book into avid readers who'll devour any reading material about football they can get their hands on.

There are so many amazing books about football out there, it was very hard to narrow it down ? but I've chosen my starting 11 for this year's World Cup:



The Match

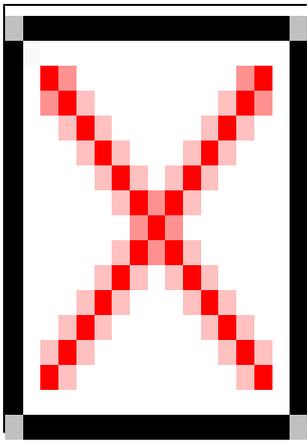
Russell Ayto, Bloomsbury Publishing, 9781408893456, £7.99, 5-7 years

This is a beautifully illustrated comic book which lays out the ritual of every fan who follows a team: dealing with the highs of victory and the lows of defeat ? but this time it's alongside your best friend who happens to be a dog! This book has lots of discussion opportunities for parent and a child, which is what I really love about it.

Willy the Wizard

Anthony Browne, Penguin Books, 9780552549356, £6.99, 5-7 years

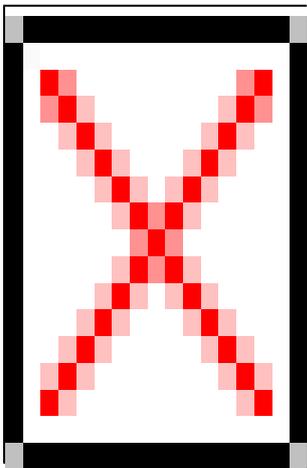
A heart-warming picture book about a young chimp finding his footballing confidence. It has great themes of resilience, standing up for yourself and growth. The illustrations are amazing and this book is made to be shared. You'll find something new to talk about in each reading. Look out for Willy in other Anthony Browne books too!



Gus the Famous Football Cat

Tom Palmer, Egmont, 9781405290944, £4.99, 5-8 years

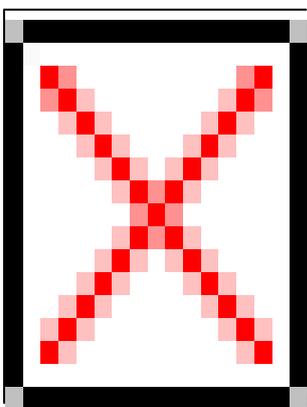
Remember Paul the game-predicting octopus? This is a take on that story for emerging readers, following a young refugee and her mysterious cat who seems to always know the score. It's a terrific little story which shows - rather than tells - this girl and her dad fitting into their community through a love of football. Great stuff.



Football School: Where Football Explains the World

Alex Bellos & Ben Lyttleton, illus Spike Gerrell, Walker Books, 9781406367249, £8.99, 7-11

Imagine a school where everything is taught and explained through football examples. This book (and its sequel) is funny, compelling and informative. A touch of the **Horrible Histories** humour doesn't hurt - you'll learn about footballers' poo in biology, blowing up a pig's bladder to use as a football in history... it's loads of fun, making school hardly feel like learning at all!



2018 FIFA World Cup Russia: Kids' Handbook

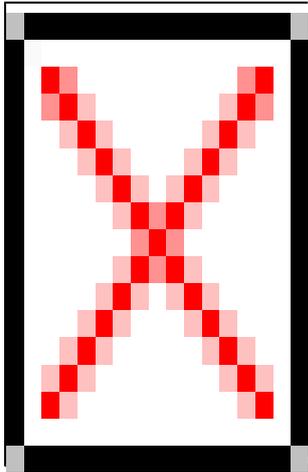
Kevin Pettman, Carlton Kids, 9781783123384, £6.99, 8-12 years

I couldn't write a list of books for the World Cup without including at least one handbook, and this is an excellent choice. It's got all the facts, figures and stickers that you could wish for relating to this year's tournament ? and it's even got a chart for noting down the scores as they come in.

Ultimate Football Heroes: Ronaldo

Matt and Tom Oldfield, Dino Books, 9781786064059, £5.99, 9-13

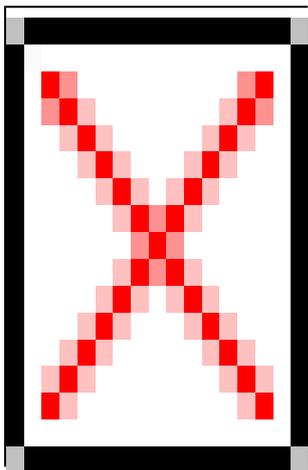
This is a gripping life story of the boy who rose from the streets of Madeira to become one of the greatest football players the world has ever known. Matt and Tom Oldfield have written a brilliant series taking on some of the world's more established players (Rooney, Gerrard) and many more precocious talents (Messi, Pogba). I've been aching for a series of biographies about footballers aimed at children and these titles do it brilliantly. Get hold of all of them.



Girls FC 1: Do Goalkeepers Wear Tiaras?

Helena Pielichaty, Walker Books, 9781406383324, £5.99, 9+

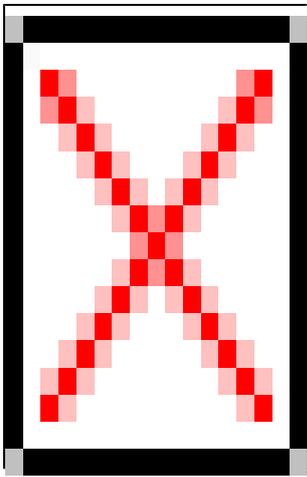
Another 'thank goodness' - I'm thrilled that Walker have republished this series, because I think the world needs to encourage girls who love football much more. As a father of daughters, I hear about boys not letting them through on goal, or even to play - we need to champion the game for everyone like never before. Don't be put off by the titles as these are gripping and at times gritty, dealing with the interactions of a girls' football team and taking on the challenges of beating stereotypes and winning tournaments!



Kick

Mitch Johnson, Usborne Children's, 9781474928151, £6.99, 11+

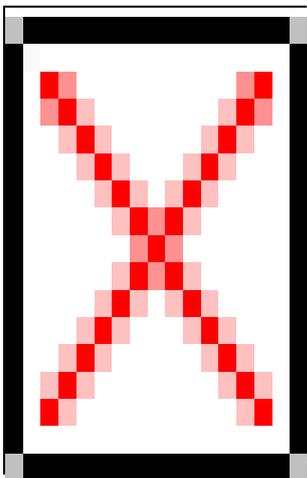
Quite a humbling story, this one. Budi is a boy from the streets of Jakarta whose family does everything they can to just survive. I love that it makes you think about the gulf that exists between a boy like Budi and a high earning professional from the world of sport. You might think twice about 'needing' the latest boots every season once you have read this, as well as what you really need to make you happy. I'd also like to shout out to other great football authors here like Dan Freedman and Jonny Zucker. They would be on this list (and should be read) but I'm trying out a younger squad this time (while keeping a couple of experienced players)!



Booked

Kwame Alexander, Penguin Books, 9780544570986, £7.99, 12+

An energetic novel told in verse, which captures all the thrills, setbacks, action and emotion of a World Cup match through the eyes of a teenage boy. It looks brilliantly and amusingly at family life and the relationships therein - strained, tense and joyous too. Be warned - it contains the odd word you wouldn't read out in a primary school.



The Silent Striker

Pete Kalu, Hope Road, 9781908446411, £6.99, 13+

A story about football, friendship and family, and how teenage Marcus, who has just found out he is deaf, deals with disability and his love of football. You can really empathise with the awkwardness of being a teenager, and the insight into Marcus's world of losing his hearing is brilliantly told. This is a young adult novel which deftly tackles important themes including racism, disability and mental health. Like **Booked**, there are a few swearwords sprinkled among the text.

And last but not least?

All the reading that isn't in a book! Use magazines like [Match of the Day](#) [3], [Four Four Two](#) [4] and [Kickaround](#) [5], news articles, club websites and any other sources you can get your hands on to find out all you need to know about the world's greatest game. Reading doesn't always have to mean books!

Jim Sells is Manager, [Premier League Reading Stars](#) [6] at **National Literacy Trust**.

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